

INKLINGS AND IDLINGS

The Newsletter of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association

313 East Third Street • P.O. Box 585 • Galesburg, Illinois 61402 • (309) 342-2361 • www.sandburg.org

Winter 2014-2015

FROM SITE SUP'T. MARTHA DOWNEY

The year is winding down. The final Songbag Concert of the 2014 season was held November 29. It was a wonderful evening as 53 people enjoyed "Small Potatoes." John Heasley and the Songbag Committee have done a wonderful job this year. The Site will continue to have public hours throughout the winter. Those hours are Thursday, Friday, and Saturday 9 am to 5 pm and Sunday noon to 4 pm. As you are doing your holiday shopping, remember the Association's book store has a large selection of Sandburg books plus mugs, book marks, and other items.

Annually, Illinois' Historic Sites decorate trees at the Illinois Governor's Mansion. For the past 5 years the CSHSA has decorated the tree in the Mansion's library. Patti Christianson is the volunteer who has designed our trees and made all the ornaments. As we were gathering the decorations following the 2013 holiday season, the Mansion's horticulturalist Harry Lewis suggested to Patti that she decorate the Library telling the story of Carl's life. Patti more than met the challenge in representing Carl's life in holiday fashion.

The Sandburg Site is featured on the fireplace mantel—the Cottage, Remembrance Rock, board walks, picket fence, and, of course, greens and wintery trees. From the chandelier hangs mistletoe and snowflakes. Each snowflake has printed on it an excerpt from Carl and Lillian's love letters. The tree is decorated with Swedish flags, paper guitars, and ornaments depicting the various awards and honorary degrees Sandburg received during his life. Placed underneath the tree is a train. Patti also added an orange crate with vintage typewriter by a chair and a green visor.

As if that weren't enough, Patti believed the Mansion's visitors needed to hear Carl Sandburg's voice, so there is a phonograph with a record of Carl reading some of his works. Visitors can start the player, position the needle, and listen. Young

visitors no doubt will experience that technology for the first time. It is festive, fun, and educational.

It is also time for gratitude. Thank you to the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association for your constant support of the Site and its programs. The Association's Board members work hard to assure the success of the organization and the Site. To all I say thank you and Happy Holidays!

BARRY SWANSON'S TRIBUTE POEM FOR PENELOPE NIVEN

On August 28, 2014 noted Sandburg biographer Penelope Niven passed away in Winston-Salem, NC. She left many friends in Galesburg. Her memoir is entitled *Swimming Lessons*. Here is CSHSA President Barry Swanson's tribute poem for her.

For Penny

SWIMMING THROUGH SHADOWS

"Poetry is an echo, asking a shadow to dance."

--Carl Sandburg

*Swimming in the lake
You so enjoyed,
Lost in motion,
Strokes, breath,*

*The sun
Dipped behind the trees that lined the coast.
The late afternoon shadows
Reminded me you were gone.*

*Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow,
Wrote another poet.*

*You had, after all,
Emerg'd from the shadows
Years ago
And moved on.*

*Your essence
Was never concerned
With descent (unless it was from a diving board
into deep water),
But rather ascent.*

*That was the gift you gave
To those of us
You mentored
And loved.*

*You encouraged us
To soar,
To tell our own stories,
To be truthful to ourselves.*

*You were the finest type of teacher;
Encouraging mentor,
Constructive critic.
You refreshed our souls*

*With your authenticity,
Your kindness,
Your honesty,
Your compassion.*

*You made everyone comfortable.
Authors, actors, sculptors, rock musicians,
Aspiring writers, even awkward youth;
All succumbed to your Southern charm.*

*Ceaselessly you demonstrated how to be
grateful
For family,
For friends,
And esteemed colleagues.*

*We trusted you
With our stories,
Our lives
And the stories and lives of those we loved.*

*From Sandburg and Wilder,
To Steichen and Jones
You exposed us to greatness,
Even as your own swimming lessons inspired
and challenged us.*

*A shadow has fallen upon us
A pall descended over us,
But your spirit won't allow it.
You will have none of that.*

*The poem of your life
Dances with the shadow.
It echoes throughout our lives
With no regret.*

*Your essence
Neglected the notion of being even remotely
hollow.
It was full.
You trusted the power whose center is
everywhere.*

*That was how
You taught us to live,
That is how you would
Want us to emerge from the shadow of our
grief—*

*Full of promise and bliss,
Loving each moment
Just like the saints and poets
And you.*

--Barry Swanson (September 3, 2014)



Penelope Niven & Helga Sandburg Crile in Galesburg in 2001.
Photo courtesy of Tom Foley.

(Ed. Note: This is the first in a series of stories by CSHSA members about why they are drawn to Sandburg.)

WHAT APPEALS TO ME ABOUT CARL SANDBURG

--By Dr. Barry Swanson, CSHSA President



I suppose my earliest exposure to Carl Sandburg was when we first read the poem "Fog" in grade school. I am certain that at the time I was more interested in going out for recess on the Silas Willard playground where I could climb the jungle gym or show off by kicking, throwing, catching, or shooting a ball.

When I was in the sixth grade I became a paperboy for the Galesburg *Register-Mail* newspaper. The last stop on my route was the home of a lovely, elderly lady by the name of Mrs. Nell Townsend Hinchliff. Years later I discovered that she was the mother of one of my favorite high school English teachers, Miss Virginia Hinchliff.

I vividly recall ascending Mrs. Hinchliff's snow covered cement steps one Friday night and knocking on her front door to make my weekly collection of 35 cents. On this particular evening she took pity on my poor, bedraggled soul. I must have been quite a pitiful sight bundled in a bulky winter coat, stocking cap, mittens, and a wool scarf, all sprinkled with a light dusting of December snow.

She invited me into her living room for a cup of hot cocoa. We sat. I took my place on her comfortable couch and she plopped down in what I suppose was her favorite rocker. As we sipped the steaming chocolate concoction, she began to regale

me with stories of one of her classmates and friends, the author and Galesburg native, Carl Sandburg.

She told me about the poems he had written (I learned that he had written quite a few poems, not just the short one we had read in class). She beamed as she told me how his biography of Lincoln was thought to be the best ever penned. She mentioned that he also wrote some wonderful children's stories (although I had no idea what a Rootabaga was).

I was aware of Mr. Sandburg. If you lived in Galesburg during that time (late 50's, early 60's) you had to live under a rock to not know that he was quite famous and had even won some awards for his writing. I also had the opportunity to visit his birthplace as a young boy. I thought it was exceedingly small for such a prominent person.

What impressed me the most that evening was how Mrs. Hinchliff spoke so fondly and personally of her friend. She said that Mr. Sandburg was as smart as a whip (which I didn't understand was a simile referring to the sharp crack of said whip). She related to me that he was also kind and had a wonderful sense of humor.

There were times, however, when he would arrive at the train station and give her a call to come and take him over to his suite at the Hotel Custer. Her presence was apparently requested due to the fact that the celebrated author had partaken of a few too many spirits while frequenting the Club Car during his trip from Chicago. She would say that although her friend enjoyed a beverage or two, he never over indulged.

Maybe he called her because he didn't want to chance having his reputation compromised or maybe he just wanted to spend some time with one of his dearest personal friends. I never received an explanation, and she was not in the least bit judgmental of her childhood chum. She simply found Mr. Sandburg's foibles rather charming and amusing.

Regardless, Mrs. Hinchliff cherished Mr. Sandburg's friendship, and she smiled as she told tales of their time together as young children and a relationship that had lasted for nearly eight decades.

Hearing about Mr. Sandburg, the person, stirred my interest in this most famous son of Galesburg. I began to read his poetry, the Lincoln biography (all six volumes), and his autobiography *Always the Young Strangers*. It was in that book that I discovered we shared a common Swedish heritage.

I continued to read and learn about Mr. Sandburg during my study of English literature in college, and when I returned to teach in Galesburg I made it my mission to become even more familiar with his extensive works and to share them with my students. For the past few years it has been my great honor to serve on the Board of Directors of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association and most recently to have been elected president for a second term. It is a privilege to serve with such a group of dedicated individuals committed to keeping the legacy of Carl Sandburg alive.

I never met Carl Sandburg, but I did meet and become acquainted with his daughter, Helga. She was a wonderful spirit whose unbridled enthusiasm for writing and creativity were inspirational to all of us who had the pleasure of attending her writing workshops. Mr. Sandburg's definitive biographer, Dr. Penelope Niven was my mentor and dear friend. We lost both of these wonderful artists too soon.

I continue to write and much of my interest in the craft, in the art, is due to my exposure to Carl Sandburg. He set the standard high for those of us from his hometown who aspire to create, to put the "black marks on the white paper" in hopes of discovering meaning for our own existence and sharing something of worth with others who might read what we have written.

I am most grateful to Mrs. Hinchliff. She took the time to not only offer me a cup of hot chocolate, but also to expose me to a literary giant whose legacy deserves preservation. It is to that end that all of us on the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association Board of Directors are dedicated. We hope you will continue to join us in that effort. Happy Holidays to all.

MUSEUMS IMPACT EVERY COMMUNITY IN ILLINOIS

--From the *Illinois Associations of Museums*



Sandburg Birthplace Cottage, July 27, 2014

(Photo by Mary E. Phillips with permission)

Do you know?

- There are over 1,500 museums in Illinois.
- They employ 6,800 Illinoisians.
- Museums spend over \$483,836,766 in goods and services annually.
- Museums serve over 22,317,385 visitors annually—more than all Chicago's professional sports teams combined.
- Visitors to museums spend over \$1,807,708,185, according to the Illinois Office of Tourism, every visitor to museums in Illinois spends \$81 generating millions to local economies.
- Museums teach 2,383,404 school children each year.
- Museums empower 255,125 teachers annually in Illinois providing trustworthy resources found nowhere else.
- Nationwide, 78% of vacationers participate in cultural or heritage activities, contributing \$21 billion to the U.S. economy annually.
- Governments that support arts and cultural institutions see a return of \$7 in taxes for every \$1 appropriated.

Museums tell important stories by collecting, preserving, researching, and interpreting objects, both manmade and natural. They collect and preserve historic records so that we may learn from the past. Museums help us to better understand and appreciate our complex, culturally diverse world.

Debs and Sandburg

--By Barbara Schock

In 1895, for the first time, Carl Sandburg heard Eugene Debs speak. Debs had been brought to Galesburg by the Socialists of the city. He spoke at the Auditorium Theater on North Broad Street. The theater was filled to capacity, and the audience included both supporters and skeptics.

Sandburg described Debs as tall and broad-shouldered. He was attired in a long, gray swallow-tail coat. His facial features were sharp, and the intensity of his eyes was impressive. He spoke in a passionate voice and delivered his words in the style of evangelical oratory. Sandburg remembered one sentence in particular, "You can no more regulate corporations by law than you can stop an elephant with cobwebs."

A number of years later, in 1908, Sandburg met Debs during the presidential campaign. It was the third time Debs ran for president on the Socialist Party ticket. Sandburg was working in Wisconsin as an organizer for the Social Democratic Party. Debs campaigned from a chartered train, called the Red Special, in which he crossed the country. Carl was able to ride the train from Green Bay to Manitowoc, at a cost of two cents per mile.

He wrote to his wife, Paula, about the experience, "Debs is superb. His face and voice are with me yet. A lover of humanity. Such a light as shines from him—and such a fire as burns in him—he is of a poet breed, hardened for war."

As an organizer in Wisconsin, Sandburg was in the thick of Social Democratic Party politics. He went from town to town drumming up membership in the party. He used stereopticon slides with photographs of Debs and a phonograph with his recorded speeches. The technology of the time was very impressive to working men and helped to encourage them to join the Social Democratic Party.

The appeal of the Socialist Party at that time was strong. The average pay for a worker was \$1.44 per day. Sandburg and his wife, both with extraordinary minds, weren't able to earn even that lowly income. There was a real need for change from their perspective.

Newspapers and other periodicals dismissed Socialists as dangerous radicals, irresponsible

leaders, and anarchists who wanted to do away with government. Because so many immigrants had arrived in the United States at that time, it was claimed they had brought foreign ideas, such as socialism, with them.

Manufacturers and industrialists were determined to stamp out socialism with all the means available. During World War I Debs was accused of sedition because he spoke against compulsory military service. He spoke in his own defense at the trial. The speech became a classic of political oratory. He was convicted and sentenced to the federal penitentiary in Atlanta.

Debs ran for president, for the fifth time, in the election of 1920 from his jail cell in Atlanta. The Sandburgs voted for him as a mark of respect. Debs received the largest vote total of his career—more than 919,000 votes.

President Warren G. Harding commuted Debs' sentence in 1921. With his health failing, Debs entered the Lindlahr Sanitarium in Elmhurst, Illinois. It was only three blocks from the Sandburg home. Carl occasionally took his guitar there and sang for Debs and the other patients. On two occasions Debs visited the Sandburg home. He enjoyed meeting with the three little daughters. When he received a copy of *Rootabaga Pigeons* from the author, Debs was quite taken with the story. Sandburg also gave a copy of the first volume of his Lincoln biography to Debs.

Sandburg wanted to write a biographical article about Debs, but the old Socialist's response was "not enough of me to warrant any such venture."

SANDBURG'S FRIEND, EUGENE V. DEBS

--By Mike Hobbs

On October 25 CSHSA board member Gary Wagle and I attended The Eugene V. Debs Foundation Annual Awards Banquet on the campus of Indiana State University in Terra Haute, IN. Labor activist Sara Horowitz was the recipient of the 2014 Debs Award. Past recipients have included John L. Lewis, A. Philip Randolph, Walter Reuther, Dorothy Day, Pete Seeger, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Coretta Scott King, Studs Terkel, Edward Asner, Jim Hightower, Julian Bond, and Molly Ivins.

On October 26 Debs Foundation Secretary Charles King gave Gary and me a tour of the Debs home which is now a museum, a National Historic Landmark, the preservation of which is monitored by the National Park Service. In the museum are priceless American labor history items, including the charter of the American Railway Union which Debs helped form in 1893. The ARU was a major player in the 1893 Great Northern Railway Strike and the 1894 Pullman Strike.

Other items in the museum which caught Gary's and my eyes had to do with Sandburg, including these two photographs—one of Debs and Helga Sandburg and another of Debs, Sandburg, Margaret, Janet, and Helga. The photos were taken by Paula Sandburg at the family's residence in Elmhurst, IL in 1924. The photographs were donated to the Debs Museum by Helga Sandburg Crile in 1981. Also displayed is Helga's book *A Great & Glorious Romance, The Story of Carl Sandburg and Lilian Steichen*. With the book is a handwritten note from Helga that reads:

To the Home of the Great Eugene V. Debs at Terra Haute, Indiana. With special attention to pages 158-160, and then 304 and 305. With regard and admiration.

Helga Sandburg.



On page 159 of the aforementioned book Helga writes about Debs' run as Social Democratic Party candidate for president in 1908. Debs had run as Socialist Party candidate for the presidency in 1900, as Social Democratic Party candidate in 1904, and would run again as a Social Democrat in 1912 and 1920. During the 1908 campaign the Social Democrats ran on a platform of public ownership of railroads, municipal ownership of public utilities, progressive income and inheritance taxes, and universal suffrage.

During the 1908 campaign Debs and his staff rode the Red Special train, a locomotive and coach, sleeper, and baggage cars on a whistle-stop tour of the United States. In these days when Sandburg was afire with Social Democratic Party enthusiasm he rode the Red Special for two days in Wisconsin, and Helga speculates that he may have introduced Debs at some whistle-stops where he spoke to crowds. In a letter to Paula, Sandburg wrote, "Debs is superb....all kinds of enthusiasm. Will sleep on the train tonight—not very restful, but hell, the revolution tingles and whirls around here."

On page 304 of *A Great & Glorious Romance* Helga quotes Debs' description of the Sandburg's Elmhurst home as "that delightfully hospitable home." She writes of Debs', Sinclair Lewis', and Sandburg's relationship, "Debs and Sinclair Lewis [a visitor at the Sandburg home at this time] and my father are close. Debs says 'Lewis and Sandburg are fit companions, genial, fun-loving, whole-hearted, and generous, as well as princes of the pen and masters of the literary art.'"



Regarding the photo of her and Debs, Helga writes, "Debs is holding a rose I have given him. He pushes me in the swing. He lets me pat his bald head. And later he will write down a beatitude for my father, inscribing it 'with boundless love and admiration,'

*Blessed are they who
expect nothing, for they shall
not be disappointed.*

Eugene V. Debs
Elmhurst, September 4th 1924

In a note to Paula about the photograph of him and Helga Debs wrote, "Carl shows his usual discriminating taste in expressing preference for the very happy little picture of [Helga] and myself on the bench. That particular picture is a gem. How my emotions are quickened and thrill within me as I recall this happy scene...." Debs was an intense man. You might assume that he would have little patience with small children, but Helga captivated him.

Two type-written notes on *The Chicago Daily News* Editorial Room stationery from Sandburg to Debs are displayed. One is dated November 28, 1922, "Dear Gene: You will always be close to us. The only way we can decently remember you and what you left with us here will be a certain way of living it, maybe dying it. And some day I hope to get the strong truth of those hands of yours into a poem. It's only a hope but I'll try for it and learn something. My signature goes for the whole bunch under our roof. As you went away out the front gate one of them said, 'He's a big rough flower.' With you it isn't really a good-bye because you are still here."

The other note is dated October 18, 1924, "Dear Gene: If you hadn't stayed so long you wouldn't have left such a big lonesome spot. We can nearly see a ghost in the doorways where you came in and went out. Take all care of yourself.... And sometime I hope to see you in Terre Haute again. Faithfully yours, Carl."

On October 20, 1926 Eugene Debs died of heart failure in the Lindlahr Sanitarium in Elmhurst. He was seventy years old.

TWO CHRISTMAS BABIES

--By Mike Hobbs

Sandburg dedicated *Rootabaga Stories Part II* (1923) to "Three Illinois Pigeons." The Sandburg family lived in Elmhurst, IL at this time. In the book is the story "How Googler and Gaggler, the Two Christmas Babies, Came Home with Monkey Wrenches." The doctor "came to a tar paper shack on a cinder patch next to the railroad yards on the edge of the Village of Liver-and-Onions" to examine the expectant mother. He announced that she would deliver twins.

The twins Googler and Gaggler were born on Christmas Eve. Their mother placed two lit two-for-a-nickel candles in each window of the shack. "[T]he mother handed the father the twins and said, 'Here are your Christmas presents.' The father took the two baby boys and laughed, 'Twice times twice is twice.'" The doctor got them through childhood illnesses, watched them grow strong, and predicted, "They will go far and see much, and they will never be any good for sitting with the sitters and knitting with the knitters."

When they were big boys, the twins went out to enjoy an evening of boyish escapades. They fell asleep. When they awakened, they returned home carrying heavy gunnysacks. They told their parents they had visited Thimble Country where they "saw a war, the left-handed people against the right-handed. And the smokestacks did all the fighting [with monkey wrenches]."

From their gunny sacks the twins showed their parents a left-handed monkey wrench and a right-handed monkey wrench. As time went on, the mother and the father wondered how their boys would turn out, and the father repeated what he said when they were born on Christmas Eve, "Twice times twice is twice."



Happy Holidays to All!

**PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN THE CARL
SANDBURG HISTORIC SITE ASSOCIATION BY
MARCH 1, 2015**

The Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association promotes awareness of the historical and cultural significance of Carl Sandburg and the Carl Sandburg State Historical Site in Galesburg. We support a variety of educational programs and the collection, preservation, and display of materials which demonstrate the life, times, and achievements of Carl Sandburg.

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