

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, 2012

FROM SITE SUPERINTENDENT MARTHA DOWNEY

Steve Holden, former Site Superintendent of the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site, died October 7, 2011 at his home in Bishop Hill. Steve began working at the Sandburg Site in 1990 as the Site Interpreter. Following Carol Nelson's retirement he assumed the duties of Site Superintendent. With Steve as Site Interpreter Carol Nelson got a remarkable staff member. Steve's talents, intellect, and creative energy sparked a renewal at the Site.

The moving of the Lincoln Room from the north end of the Cottage to the rear of what had been the Site Superintendent's house met a twofold purpose. It returned the Cottage where Sandburg was born to its original configuration and provided needed exhibit space for the development of a Visitors' Center. That room now houses an outstanding exhibit utilizing the themes of Sandburg's Galesburg years and beyond. Steve was key to that exhibit's aesthetics and its intellectual integrity. Steve studied Sandburg and came to understand his life better than most. I have always thought Steve's creativity gave him insight into Sandburg that most of us would not have.

It is easy to imagine Steve and Carol agonizing over the quotes used to surround Remembrance Rock. Both would have wanted that Quotation Walk to reflect Sandburg's work and to be intellectually honest. The result has

become a key component of the Site's interpretation. It is also beautiful.

Steve was unassuming yet there was a showman lurking there. Steve knew exactly how his Site should be presented. The decorative painting on the walls of the Visitors' Center and Barn are testament to this. The layers of paint, sponging techniques, and murals all are evidence of his talent and passion for Sandburg.

Steve was a gourmet chef. He enjoyed entertaining in his home and at his Site. He would plan wonderful refreshments for the Sandburg Days Kick Off concert, and those refreshments were done with flair. There was a brunch done for the crew during the Lincoln-Douglas debate reenactment that impressed all.

Steve's kindnesses have been remarked upon often since his death. Throughout the years I knew him, there were so many thoughtful gestures which I remember—Steve bringing a thermos of coffee to share as we headed to Springfield for a meeting; tooting the horn as he passed his mother's home on his way to work each morning; the hand made cards he sent on special occasions or just to say thank you; and his recommending a Sandburg poem to mark a special occasion.

A few years ago the Site Superintendents from the north half of Illinois were meeting in Bishop Hill. It was a time of grim budget news—little did we know how bad it was going to get in the years ahead. Anyway,

we were all in a gloomy mood. Steve prepared a morning "snack." It was sweet cherries and short bread. He quietly put at each place a slip of paper. As we sat down to begin our meeting, we began to read Steve's paper. There were smiles and laughter. On the paper was, not a Sandburg poem, but the lyrics of George Gershwin's *Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries* beginning with, "Life is just a bowl of cherries. Don't make it serious. Life's too mysterious." In that gesture Steve had brightened our day and lightened the mood of the meeting.

Steve Holden's memorial service was held at the Bishop Hill Colony Church, another historic site with which he was involved. As I lit the candles for his service, thoughts turned to Steve. Early Christmas morning preparing for the Julotta service, I would be lighting the candles. At about 5:30 Steve would arrive to play the organ for Julotta. All those years he was the first person to wish me Merry Christmas.

Steve was the unique combination of talent, creativity, intellect, dignity, wit, and modesty. He was the perfect match for the Sandburg Site. He is missed.

FROM CSHSA PRESIDENT CHUCK BECDAR

On November 15, 2011 the Chicago Writers Association held their second annual induction ceremony into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame. This special event held at the Pritzger Auditorium at the Harold Washington Library Center honored Carl Sandburg along with five other literary greats. The distinguished group joining Sandburg included Cyrus Colter, Theodore Dreiser, Harriet Monroe, Mike Royko, and Ida B. Wells.

The Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association was selected to accept this award on behalf of Mr. Sandburg, because no living relatives were available to represent him. Chuck Bednar Jr. was chosen by the Association to receive the award. He was joined by Mayor

Salvador Garza who represented the City of Galesburg. Mr. Bednar spoke about the values that influenced Sandburg's life that he learned as a youth growing up in Galesburg and the deep appreciation Sandburg had for his hometown. Bednar recognized the vitality of the Sandburg birthplace which has been perpetuated by the early community activists who had the vision, commitment, and resolve to preserve it for future generations. He emphasized the resolve of the Association to continue to foster the life and work of Carl Sandburg. Mayor Garza related the early years of his youth growing up on Third Street not far from the Sandburg birthplace and later realizing the profound influence Sandburg had on American literature and the importance of the Site as a community asset.

CSHSA Board member Tom Foley was liaison for the event. It was through his initial contact with Donald Evans, coordinator for the Chicago Writer Association who planned the event, that the connection was made for us to participate. The award was warmly presented by Marc Smith who created the concept of "Poetry Slams" which are now held as world-wide events. His preliminary introduction included dramatic readings of Sandburg in an on-stage performance to the delight of the audience of over 250 people.



Mayor Garza, Marc Smith, & Chuck Bednar
Photo by Tom Foley

A contingent of CSHSA members attended, including Bert McElroy, Tom Foley, and Gary Wagle. The Association is indeed honored to be selected by the Chicago Writers Association to accept this prestigious award on behalf of Mr. Sandburg.

SANDBURG LETTER TO THEODORE DREISER

On August 9, 1915 Carl Sandburg wrote Theodore Dreiser from Maywood, Illinois. Both men were inducted into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame on November 15, 2011. This letter, taken from *The Letters of Carl Sandburg* edited by Herbert Mitgang, appears below with Mr. Mitgang's comments in italics following.

"My Dear Mr. Dreiser:

Your good letter came today. It is fine to have because I have read *The Titan* well and on various beer-fests [Edgar Lee] Masters has told me of your aversions to throwing the bull. I am writing fast here, just an acknowledgement.

I mailed to Masters at the Hotel Holley some forty or fifty additional poems, which should prove enough for any publisher by way of quantity.

I add one more which is enclosed herewith after its final shaping over.

Carl Sandburg"

Theodore Dreiser had written to Sandburg after Edgar Lee Masters had shown him samples of Sandburg's poetry. "They are beautiful," Dreiser wrote Sandburg on Aug. 6, 1915. "There is a fine, hard, able paganism about them that delights me—and they are tender and wistful as only the lonely, wistful dreaming jargon can be." Dreiser's novel The Titan was published in 1914. Edgar Lee Masters was then practicing law in the Marquette Building, Chicago. In 1914 Masters had written Dreiser that he was "going for a tramp in the sand-dunes with a Swede bard. He is a new find and I think has the right fibre."

SANDBURG LETTER TO HARRIET MONROE

This letter from Sandburg to Harriet Monroe dated August 28, 1932 from Harbert, Michigan also appears in Mitgang's *The*

Letters of Carl Sandburg. Harriet Monroe founded *Poetry: a Magazine of Verse* and helped launch Sandburg's career. She too was inducted into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame last month.

"My dear Harriet, [t]ake any three (3) of these [poems for publication]. They have not had the goings over they should have had and I send them with many dubious and lingering feelings. . . . Out of the whole mess of goddam patriots over the land you are one of five or six who could make me drop all else and go to this.

Carl"

(Mr. Mitgang notes that in the October, 1932 issue of *Poetry* Harriet Monroe published nine Sandburg poems.)

The following two stories were contributed by CSHSA Board Member Barbara Schock:

FREEZE, FROZE, FROZE

The residents of Galesburg were in the grip of a period of very cold weather in December, 1872. The *Galesburg Republican*, a weekly newspaper, had plenty of comments to make about the weather. To make the best of an unpleasant situation, it is sometimes necessary to have a good sense of humor. The "Local Varieties" column began with "Keep Cool" and "Buy a Refrigerator."

The column also reported that "several countrymen came into town Saturday to get warm." It was the custom of farmers to do their shopping on Saturday. Reference was made to "melted snow is the most popular substitute for rain water." It was common practice to do the family laundry in soft water collected from the roof of the home. "Houseplants in all parts of the city have suffered materially from the late cold weather." The heating systems of the day didn't warm every corner of the house. "A fine of \$10 [equal to nearly \$180 in today's money] is the penalty imposed by the city ordinance for the non-removal of snow and ice from the

sidewalk." Let us hope the Galesburgers of yesterday were more diligent than those of today.

The fire department apparatus was in readiness for a first-class fire, according to the chief engineer. All public cisterns were full of water, not frozen. Overheated stoves and chimneys were a hazard to homes and businesses. The proprietors of Crystal Springs Park on West Main Street next to Cedar Fork were in good spirits, because they had plenty of ice to cut. The ice house at the park would soon be filled with sixteen tons of ice. The Union Hotel on the Public Square and others had contracted for 500 tons of ice. After the first of January the park would be open for skating as usual.

Congress had approved postal cards for correspondence. The face of the card would have lines for the address and the back would be ruled for writing a message. Each card cost a penny including the postage. The editor predicted they would be a great convenience. He was correct in his prediction. Post cards became the "e-mail" of the day.

The *Republican* and the *Register* were consolidated on January 1, 1873. The Galesburg Printing Company was incorporated with \$15,000 of stock. George V. Dieterich was president; John D. Devor, vice-president and editor; and S.W. Grubb was secretary/treasurer as well as business manager of the newspaper. The company had up-to-date printing equipment which operated by steam. The steam engine had been manufactured by the Frost Manufacturing Company of Galesburg. Subscriptions for carrier delivery cost \$6 (equal to \$107.89 in today's money) per year.

Job printing was a large part of the operation with all the latest styles of type. In those days it was the custom of the bon ton to call at friends' homes on New Year's Day. Each visitor left a calling card to let the homeowner know of the visit. Of course, the homeowner was out leaving cards at the homes of their

friends. Readers of the newspaper were encouraged to have their calling cards printed by the Discount Printing Company.

FROZEN CLOTHES

For generations Monday was washday. In the home of August and Clara Sandburg it meant a day of hard work. Gallons of water had to be carried in buckets from the cistern in the backyard. It was thought soft water was best for laundering. Almost every home had a cistern which stored rain water. Some cisterns were lined with bricks; others were lined with packed earth.

Two tubs of water were needed to do the washing and rinsing. The tub in which the washing was to be done was filled with warm water which had been heated on the cooking stove. The rinsing tub was filled with cold water. Attached to it was a mangle or wringer with two rollers and a crank handle to squeeze the excess water from the fabric. A wash board was placed in the tub of warm water, and the clothes or linens were rubbed against the ridges of the washboard to remove soil. Soap came in bars and had to be shaved into the water. The freshly laundered clothes were then put in a basket and carried outside to be hung on lines to dry. The dirty laundry water was used to scrub the kitchen floor. If there were items to be ironed to remove wrinkles, then Tuesday was ironing day.

With all the work of doing the family laundry the homemaker had little time for cooking the family's evening meal. In the Sandburg home Monday supper was always boiled herring and potatoes. The Swedes claimed these foods made them stronger than others.

Carl Sandburg helped his mother with laundry as soon as he was old enough to carry a bucket filled with water. He vividly remembered zero temperatures freezing the fabric stiff before he could get the sheets and

towels pinned to the clothes line. Returning the frozen things to the house later in the day was also difficult. But as soon as the laundry was back in the house, it was dry and smelled fresh. We call it "freeze-drying" today.

The following three stories were contributed by CSHSA Board Member and I&I Editor Mike Hobbs.

GALESBURG RESIDENT REMEMBERS THE BIRTHPLACE NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE 1930'S

I've known eighty-nine year old Galesburg resident Tom O'Brien slightly for years. Knew that he was a World War II veteran and past commander of the Galesburg American Legion. Knew him well enough to say hi to him when I saw him around town. Last Labor Day I saw him on Chambers Street among floats, union groups, politicians, and vehicles getting in order to move out in the annual parade. He was in his 1916 Model T Ford which was entered in the antique car competition. (His Model T won first place). As we waited for the parade to start, we visited. I learned from Tom that in the 1930's he lived in the house at 313 East Third Street that is now the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site's Visitors Center and Museum. I had to hear more about that house, and the house next door at 331 East Third in which Sandburg was born, and the neighborhood in the 1930's, but that would have to wait until sometime after the Labor Day parade.

When I was later able to sit down with Tom to hear his recollections of the houses and the neighborhood, he said that his maternal grandparents Thomas J. and Ellen Sullivan had owned the houses at 313 and 331 East Third since the early 1900's. They and their daughter Genevieve, Tom's mother, lived at 313. She attended Douglas School. She and Tom's dad Thomas C. O'Brien lived with her parents in that house for a time after they were married. His parents moved to Detroit in 1920, because

Tom's dad's friends had told him the auto industry was booming there, and jobs were plentiful. He got on at a plant that manufactured auto hardware, such as door handles. In 1929 at the start of the Depression, when Tom was seven years old, his family moved back to Galesburg into the house at 313 that his grandparents had vacated. They lived there for the next nine years. The house was later sold to the Villardo family. Tom said that at the time he lived at 313 the house was painted a light brown. It had three bedrooms and two large closets upstairs. Downstairs was a front room, living room, dining room, kitchen, and bathroom. It was home to four people—Tom, his brother Marcus, and their parents. Behind the house was a garage.



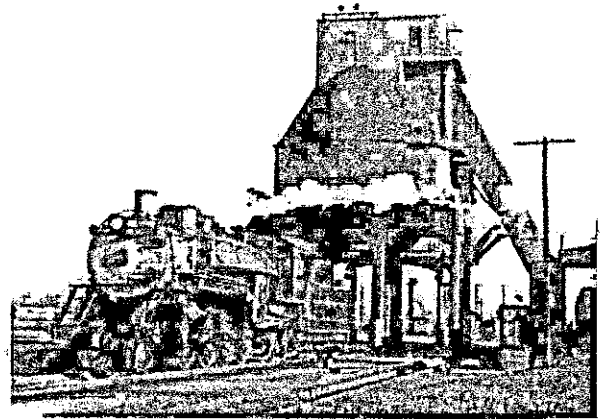
Tom O'Brien and his Grandmother Sullivan in front of the house at 313 East Third Street in mid-1920's

He remembered Mrs. Cheneler, the Sicilian lady whom Adda George later tried to deal with to buy her home, next door at 331. Mrs. Cheneler lived in that house for the nine years that Tom lived at 313. She spoke no English. Her son Joe was a fireman/engineer with the CB&Q Railroad. She was very poor. She begged sugar and flour from Tom's mother. Tom recalled that she broke her leg and walked with a crutch for the rest of her life. She frequently pointed at things with her crutch.

Tom said he remembered Mrs. Cheneler's husband Joseph, known throughout

town as Banana Joe, because he pushed a pushcart from which he sold bananas. He thought Banana Joe, whom Sandburg wrote about in *Always the Young Strangers*, died in the 1930's. In discussing the ethnic composition of his neighborhood in the 1880's and 1890's Sandburg wrote in *ATYS* that in the early 1890's thirty Italians, men, women, and children moved in. Banana Joe was one of them. He observed that "[l]ater he [Banana Joe] had his little fruit store and lived in the house where I was born and had his influence in swinging the Italian vote. I came t know those thirty Italians . . . I carried a milk can to their doorsteps and into their kitchens . . . I saw their bawling bawling strengths, their black-eyed surplus of vitality. They did something to me. They had the color of history. They made me feel I had been to Italy and seen Italians and how Italians live, speak, and bring up children."

When Tom lived at 313 in the 1930's the neighborhood consisted overwhelmingly of railroad families. It was very noisy due to its proximity to the railroad yard. Nearby was the Rip Yard where freight cars were repaired with banging of mauls on hot metal. Eighty-eight year old retired Rip Yard carman Gene Pearson said box cars and flat cars were modified there with loud riveting. Further to the west was the Steel Car Plant where coal hoppers, gondolas, and box cars were built accompanied by more loud riveting. Also near the neighborhood was the coal chute where a lot of noise was created by filling the chute with coal and loading empty tender cars in those steam locomotive days. Retired Roundhouse electrician Dick Zost, whose machinist father Harold Zost once maintained the coal chute, explained that there was a steel link conveyor system with many buckets that scooped coal from a pit in the ground and lifted them to the top of the chute where the coal was loudly dumped. Each bucket contained maybe 300 to 500 pounds of coal. Dispensing the coal from the chute into an empty tender car also created a racket. North of the coal chute was the busy forty-one stall Roundhouse, another source of noise.



CB&Q Coal Chute

Photo from William A. Franckey's *Cathedral of Steel*, 2003

Tom and Marcus attended St. Joseph's Academy on Academy Street while they lived at 313. To get to St. Joseph's they walked across a pedestrian bridge on Third Street which stretched across the railroad yard. Tom reported that sometimes steam locomotives passed under the bridge when students were on it, and the engineers would playfully blow smoke up at them. Some boys would try to drop rocks into locomotives' smoke stacks as the locomotives passed under them. Boom outfits traveled around the yard for construction projects. Sometimes they would forget to lower their booms and would strike the pedestrian bridge. As a result, Tom said the bridge had a wiggly appearance.

GALESBURG MAN PARTICIPATES IN 1967 SANDBURG TRIBUTE

George Swank in his *Carl Sandburg: Galesburg and Beyond* described the scene on September 30, 1967 when Sandburg's ashes were interred beneath Remembrance Rock, "It was eventide on that last day of September when the widow of Carl Sandburg walked beneath the trees bordering the cottage, on to an opening between the shrubbery. She paused for her first view of Remembrance Rock. For Lilian Sandburg, the practical woman, this was a time only for sentiment. She expressed it: 'This is a beautiful setting. Isn't it nice to know that this is the place where his remains will rest for all time?' . . . It was Lilian Steichen Sandburg who [then] committed the ashes to the prairie soil. 'In the loam we sleep, in the

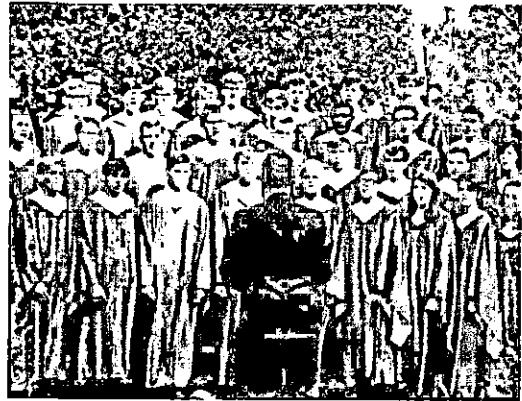
Sandburg who [then] committed the ashes to the prairie soil. 'In the loam we sleep, in the cool, moist loam.'" [*Cornhuskers*]

The next day, Sunday, a huge crowd attended the 2 pm tribute to Sandburg in the park behind his birthplace cottage. Swank estimated there were 3,000 people there. There was a reserved section of chairs, and there were bleachers, but many people had to stand. Speakers for the tribute were Governor Otto Kerner, historian and Lincoln scholar Dr. Paul Angle, Dr. Eltis Henson, president of the new Carl Sandburg College, and Galesburg Mayor Robert Cabeen. Mrs. C.Y. Belknap, daughter of Adda George, read two Sandburg poems. Roland O. Hegg directed music sung by the Galesburg High School Male Chorus, Mixed Ensemble, and A Cappella Choir.



Carl Sandburg College President Dr. Eltis Henson greets Lillian Sandburg. Photo from 1968 GHS Yearbook

Sixty-two year old Galesburg resident Dave Wood was a GHS senior who sang in those groups, which began practicing for the Sandburg tribute at the start of the school year. His future wife Sandy Grimes sang in the Mixed Ensemble and A Cappella Choir that day. Dave remembered the huge crowd. Cars were parked all over the area. It was unusually warm day for the first day of October and was made warmer by wearing a robe standing on risers in the sun for the hour-long ceremony.



GHS A Cappella Choir (Dave Wood second row in front of Mr. Hegg). Photo from 1968 GHS Yearbook

Dave had a good voice. He was first tenor in the A Cappella Choir. But he had a problem. He couldn't read music. He credits Terry Stone, now music professor at Millikin University in Decatur, who stood next to him in the choir with helping him in this regard. Dave was a star basketball player on the '67-'68 GHS team that took second place in the state tournament. He recalled other athletes in the A Cappella Choir—football players Mark Hamman, John Anderson, John Cooke, and Nick Jobe, and trackman Bob Cannon. He noted that Emmy-winning TV documentary-maker Polly Pettit was in the choir. He described music director Roland Hegg, for whom Hegg Auditorium at the high school is named, as a "great guy"

SANDBURG KNEW LITTLE CAT FEET

In a twice-a-day feeding ritual my little six pound eighteen year old cat meets me in the hallway where she has been patiently waiting and follows me silently, inexorably to the room in which I feed her. Her movement is like the fog. Sandburg knew little cat feet.

SONGBAG CONCERT SERIES

The Songbag Concert series resumes on February 25, 2012 in the Barn at 7 pm. "The Wacky Keys" playing a variety of music has

2012 CSHSA DUES

Please pay your 2012 CSHSA dues by January 31, 2012. Mail your check made out to "Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association" and this form to:

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Happy Holidays