

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

Summer 2016

FROM SITE SUPERINTENDENT MARTHA DOWNEY

Throughout April the life and legacy of Carl Sandburg was celebrated. Nova Singers presented in song some of his poems. The Galesburg Public Arts' Commission dedicated the Sandburg statue in Central Park. Historian John Hallwas spoke and led a writers' workshop. For the tenth year the Rootabaga Poetry Slam was led by Marc K. Smith. Some of the April 29th Carl Sandburg Festival activities at the Site were cancelled due to rain, but over 70 people attended the April Songbag concert that evening.

Thank you to the over 40 volunteers that helped with the spring clean-up at the Site in April. Led by Master Gardeners Sylviane Stites and Jamie Yemm, much was accomplished. The grounds looked wonderful for the annual Carl Sandburg Festival. The hard-working volunteers that day included many Master Gardeners, CSHSA Board members, and students from Chicago's St. Benedict Preparatory School. Following their clean-up work those students were guided through the Site by Matt Swanson, and Rex Cherrington gave them a tour of Sandburg's Galesburg.

The Site's grounds continue to look exceptional thanks to all those volunteers and the weekly efforts of Matt Swanson. Master Gardeners come on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month through August, 9 am to noon. If you have some time one of those Wednesday mornings, come and help.

The Carl Sandburg State Historic Site is open Thursdays through Sundays 9 am to 5 pm. Remember, the grounds are open even if the Visitors' Center and Cottage are not open, so take some time to stop by to enjoy the flowers. Perhaps reacquaint yourself with some of Sandburg's words that are part of Quotation Walk.

The fireflies and summer have arrived. Time to sit outdoors and savor the long evenings. Stay outside a bit longer and take in the glory of summer's night sky. Sandburg certainly did.

SUMMER STARS

Bend low again, night of summer stars.
So near you are, sky of summer stars,
So near, a long arm man can pick off stars,
Pick off what he wants in the sky bowl,
So near you are, summer stars,
So near, strumming, strumming,
So lazy and hum-strumming.

ANNUAL CSHSA MEMBERSHIP MEETING SEPT. 13

The Annual Meeting of the membership for the election of five members of the Board of Directors and for the transaction of such other business as may properly come before the Association shall be held on September 13, 2016 at 7 pm at the State Historic Site.

WHAT CARL SANDBURG MEANS TO ME

By Barbara Schock

(Ed. Note: This is part of a series of stories by CSHSA members about why they like Sandburg. Barbara Schock is a past CSHSA board member and past editor of *Inklings and Idlings*.)

My family moved to Pittsfield, IL in November 1945. After working in the Prairie Shipyard at Seneca, IL as an electrician during World War II, my father opened a radio repair shop a half block from the Pittsfield Courthouse Square. He conducted the business for the next thirty years or more, eventually adding television repair to his service.

My sister and I started school in the East School. It had been designed by John Van Osdel, the first architect to practice in Chicago in the 1830s. He also designed the Executive Mansion in Springfield. Our school building was built of brick in 1856. Across the street was the pioneer cabin of John Shastid, a friend of Abraham Lincoln.

In fact, Lincoln had been a frequent visitor in Pittsfield. He handled many court cases at the Pike County Courthouse. He picked two men from Pittsfield to be his secretaries while he was president, John Nicolay and John Hay. There were a number of residences which everyone knew had welcomed Lincoln more than once.

There seemed to be an essence of Lincoln in the atmosphere of the town.

My senior high school English literature textbook (copyright 1949) contained several pages of Carl Sandburg's poems. He was described as being "fitted to become poet laureate at the "College of Hard Work." The authors went on to say that he may have received more education from the jobs he held in his youth than from the years he spent at Lombard College.

Certainly it seems to me that Sandburg appreciated the dome of blue sky over the rolling landscape of the prairie in Western Illinois. He never forgot the

hardworking people of his hometown. He never forgot the unfairness of life that industrialization brought to the millions of immigrants who came to America seeking a chance to do better in their lives.

The book contains a poem which I have always remembered because of its imagery. Next year will be the centennial of the United States' entry into World War I. "Buttons" is a particularly evocative description of that conflict.

BUTTONS

*I have been watching the war map slammed up for advertising in front of the newspaper office.
Buttons—red and yellow buttons—blue and black buttons—are shoved back and forth across the map.*

*A laughing young man, sunny with freckles,
Climbs a ladder, yells a joke to somebody in the crowd,
And then fixes a yellow button one inch west
And follows the yellow button with a black button one inch west.*

*(Ten thousand men and boys twist on their bodies in a red
soak along a river edge,
Gasping of wounds, calling for water, some rattling death in
their throats.)
Who would guess what it cost to move two buttons one
inch on the war map here in
front of the newspaper office where the freckle-faced young
man is laughing to us?"*

Perhaps the Korean Conflict which coincided with my high school years also had an effect on my thinking. There were several boys attending Pittsfield High School who went off to the war. At least one was seriously injured. I had a distant cousin who was killed in Korea.

While attending the University of Illinois I saw Carl Sandburg perform in Fohlinger Auditorium. Two of my friends went with me. My enthusiasm for the poet must have been apparent to my friends, because when I graduated, they gave me a signed copy of *The Sandburg Range* which was published in 1957.

Many years later my husband Christian and I moved to Galesburg. Our friend Margaret Krueger was president of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association. She immediately asked Christian to serve on the board of directors, because she was familiar with his work with the Elgin Area Historical Society. In 1999 I became editor of *Inklings and Idlings*, the newsletter of the Association.

I began by reading *Always the Young Strangers*, Sandburg's autobiography. The description of the town and its people became very clear to me. By reviewing the microfilm of the daily newspapers at the Galesburg Public Library I was able to fill in some of the personalities and events which occurred during the years Sandburg was growing from an infant to a man. Both gave me many ideas for articles to be published in the newsletter.

After editing *Inklings and Idlings* for nine years I switched to providing articles for The Galesburg Planet edited by the late Mike Kroll. Then I was asked to serve on the CSHSA Board of Directors and began writing weekly articles for the Association web site. There are more than 160 of them now on display at sandburg.org. The stories also appear on the Facebook page of the Galesburg *Register-Mail*.

It is very gratifying to know that the articles can be read around the world, sometimes by the hundreds and occasionally by the thousands. It had been my hope that writing articles about Carl Sandburg and Galesburg in the nineteenth century would be a tiny drop, like a stone skipped across a pond, that would radiate in larger and larger circles. As might be guessed, I believe everybody should know about Carl Sandburg and Galesburg!

CARL SANDBURG, MY AMERICA, OR SING, THE BELOVED COUNTRY (PART II)

By Pierre Brackman

*(Ed. Note: Pierre Brackman lives in Lille, France. He is an English teacher with a "passion for American literature and even more particularly American poetry." He studied for a year at Amherst College, Amherst, MA and received a Master of Arts Degree in American Literature and Civilization. In Part I, which appeared in the Spring, 2016 issue of *I&I*, he discussed why is moved by Sandburg and stated, "[Sandburg] is the voice of the America I love."*

Carl Sandburg is also a perfect example of a true great American story. When we focus on his life, we learn where he came from and what he reached. When he was young, he drove a milk wagon, was a bricklayer, and worked on farms, and received two Pulitzer Prizes years later. His parents were immigrants from Sweden. He became the voice of America. He even became America, in President Johnson's words. His youth and what he went through was of paramount importance to shape his ideas and to make him responsive to the social disarray he witnessed. He believed, as he wrote in poems, that since heroes such as Abraham Lincoln were gifts given by the people, the people must be loved and taken care of. Didn't he write in the introduction to "A Message to Garcia," "No day passes but I meet a man in whose eyes are the shadow and flash of heroism."? Indeed, I am deeply convinced that this strong belief in the human race was of paramount importance in his political choice to side with the underdog, and, in Isaiah's words, to seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Why? Because he loved the "family of man." Every part of the human race was part of his family, of our family. In that sense, he did not speak only to American people. His audience went far beyond the borders of the United States.

Sandburg was beyond dispute very attached to the ideals of justice and equality. That's why he became a Socialist. Why Socialist? There is a wide range of different manners to be one. Some claim to be so because they are keen Karl Marx readers. Some are

waiting for and getting prepared for a revolution. There are those who are willing to build a better society for all, and this is certainly the way Sandburg was a Socialist. In one of his books, Emile Durkheim writes that Socialism is "not a science, or a small sociology; it is a cry of pain, and sometimes of anger, let out by the men who the most vividly feel our collective malaise." Perhaps that's why Sandburg was a Socialist. He could see that all was not fair, and he wanted to correct it. Therefore, being Socialist was the best way he could find to be a real patriot. In Helen Suzman's words, being a patriot means to keep your country right when it is right, and to put it right when it is wrong. With so much injustice around him, Sandburg could not be indifferent.

Injustice was very strong in the beginning of the 20th century, as the Walsh Report explained. The wealth distribution was nowhere near just. The richest 2% owned 60% of the wealth while the poorest 65% owned only 5% of the wealth. America, which was a modern Promised Land for all those who were seeking a better life, failed in its promise to make life better for everyone. It did not fulfil its promise when it accepted child labor. Sandburg, the poet and the man, could not remain insensitive to that. That is why his choice was the furthest he could push the ideal of the American Dream.

As Penelope Niven puts it, "Sandburg's socialism encompassed both the welfare of society as a whole and the value of the individual life.... In the platform of the Wisconsin Social-Democratic Party he found a design for the kind of society he envisioned: reformed government; the elimination of corrupted power; the prohibition of child labor; protection of rights of women in the labor force; the right of literate women to vote; tax reform, including graduated income and property tax; urban renewal; free medical care and school textbooks; public works projects to improve the environment and provide work for the unemployed; state farm insurance; pensions; workmen's compensation; municipal ownership of utilities; higher wages and shorter hours for working people; better living and working conditions for everyone." This is what America should be about, according to Sandburg. Some of these programs have been achieved. The rest of it is still to be achieved.

With Sandburg we can understand that fighting for a better life for everyone is worth the effort. As the dream of medical care would have seemed crazy in the early 20th century, I wonder what he would have thought of the 2010 Affordable Care Act. As a matter of fact, Sandburg would perhaps be looked upon as a Social-Democrat nowadays, which makes some sense as he has Swedish roots and Sweden is very often mentioned as an example of successful Social-Democracy. Interestingly enough, the Gini coefficient, used to measure inequality in each country, shows that Sandburg's political intuition was right. For those who hate injustice more than anything else the Scandinavian Social-Democracies are examples

to be studied. When you have a look at this ranking according to the Gini coefficient and thus according to income inequality, countries such as Sweden and Denmark have historically been at the top of equality. What I have read about Sandburg has made it clear to me that he did not want any revolution to happen. All he wanted was strong political reforms so that people do not die while working in their factories, and so that every child could go to school in order to succeed, not being hampered by his parents' social condition. His poetry is tinged with politics. Depicting working-class people struggling with the harsh conditions of their lives, his art expressed his political convictions.

Today I read an article that had just been written about a very moving discovery in the state of Oklahoma. During renovation work in Emerson High School boards were uncovered and what was written back then, that is, in 1917, according to the article, is intact. On one of them, it is quite moving to read the handwriting of a child with this part of the Pledge of Allegiance, "I give my head and my life to my Lord and One nation indivisible with justice for all." If I am not mistaken, that is not exactly what the Pledge of Allegiance says, but that is what is written on the board. I suspect this is why Sandburg had that kind of political conviction--because he believed in his country and believed in justice for all. Yes, Carl Sandburg is America.

RIGHT OR WRONG: MY HUMANITY

In one of her articles on Sandburg, Penelope Niven quotes what Archibald MacLeish said about the poet at the Carl Sandburg Memorial Ceremony on September 17, 1967, "Sandburg had a subject--and the subject was belief in man." I cannot think of a subject that could be more noble, and more necessary, particularly nowadays, as we certainly need to focus on what draws us together much more than on what pulls us apart, contrary to what hate-mongers would like us to believe.

He was not only writing for Americans. Sandburg wrote for men in general, whoever they were and whoever they are. He was very attached to universalism. There is a transcendentalist tinge in the following lines, "The people is Everyman, everybody. Everybody is you and me and all others. What everybody says is what we all say." I read that he had refused to join fraternities when he was at Lombard College, undoubtedly on behalf of his thirst for universalism. Indeed, we can understand why he refused to join any exclusive fraternity or association, because they reject the others. I tried to check that fact as regards Sandburg, and the fact was confirmed by an archive assistant who kindly and swiftly wrote back to me. I am grateful for that. Indeed, he never joined any fraternity but organized the Poor Writers' Club with Dr. Philip Green Wright and the Erosophian Society. It was a club devoted to speeches and debates. It claimed he had been a member of that society. This thirst

for universalism was also translated into choices and decisions. Thanks to Penelope Niven, I could read that he had collaborated with his brother-in-law Edward Steichen on a photographic exhibition entitled "The Family of Man." There were 503 pictures aimed at being the "mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world." That is putting perfectly what I can find in Sandburg's writings. Reading him, we are invited to treat our fellow humans as equals, as the most sacred things on earth and not as a threat or a danger.

This was also one of the reasons why he was a Socialist. He cared for others. He cared for workers. A few weeks ago I watched a horrendous report on the French parliamentary TV channel about the Rana Plaza collapse (also known as the Savar building collapse) in Bangladesh. In that catastrophe more than one thousand people were reported to have died, and more than two thousand were injured. People in that building were working for famous companies selling products everywhere in the world. They died because of short production deadlines, because of unsafe working conditions. In that report people had faces, faces covered with tears. They had names. And watching this report, I wondered what Sandburg would have written about that catastrophe, and I was convinced that Sandburg's sensibility and his anger were still relevant today. More than relevant, they are certainly our duty. Feeling that is certainly one of the best tributes we can pay to him.

THE PLACE

I was in the United States for a year. That was seven years ago already. And when I read poems such as "Broadway," Sandburg's words strike a chord, "I shall never forget you, Broadway/ Your golden and calling lights./ I'll remember you long,/ Tall-walled river of rush and play." This geography of the United States that we find in Sandburg's poetry is very appealing as I am longing for the day when I will see the place where the poet was born, to see for myself the landscapes he describes and the places he loved.

I think that we can say that Carl Sandburg is a landmark for the American Midwest, and I consider him a Midwestern writer just as Alice Munro's writings are deeply rooted in Ontario, as Sherwood Anderson is rooted in Ohio, as Robert Frost is marked by New England, or Faulkner by the South. Unfortunately, I did not spend enough time in the American Midwest to meet people living there and to let the atmosphere infuse in my mind. But I believe that to understand and to deeply feel what Sandburg felt writing in verse, one has to spend some time there. That would be a wonderful pilgrimage to do. Besides, it quite struck me to see on a picture how much Remembrance Rock behind Sandburg's birthplace cottage looked similar to the famous Plymouth Rock that can be seen in Massachusetts. Maybe the similar look can remind us that Sandburg was America.

His free verse, his political commitment, his love for the Midwest, and his belief in mankind are all the reasons why I have become a keen Sandburg reader. Although I have started to read him only recently, I can feel this is the beginning of a lifelong passion. In my eyes he ideally represents America. When I will be asked why I love the USA, from now on, I will answer with "The People, Yes." I definitely understand why he was described as the voice of America and as truly representative of the American identity. He exactly described the best America has to offer. To be the voice of the people and of America, he managed to keep, as he put it, "this boy heart of [his] with tears for the tragic, love for the beautiful, laughter at folly, and silent, reverent contemplation of the common and everyday mysteries." I like his freedom in writing, describing wonderful landscapes, and focusing on people, wishing the best for the people and also for his country. He was an idealist, exposing suffering and exploitation, longing for equality and freedom. He was a poet. This kaleidoscopic identity of his, born of immigrant parents, worker, traveler, musician, poet, politically committed, is what makes him a truly and deeply American poet, epitomizing America itself.

YOUTH AND PIONEERS: AN ODE BY CARL SANDBURG

By Mike Hobbs

At our June 14 CSHSA board meeting Bill Morris read the talk "Youth and Pioneers" given by Sandburg in 1937 on the occasion of the rededication of Old Main at Knox College. Built in 1857, the site of an 1858 Lincoln-Douglas Debate, venerable Old Main was in bad shape structurally by the 1920's. In a story about Old Main by Dr. R. Lance Factor, George Appleton Lawrence Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Knox, that appeared on the college's website, he wrote that by 1927, "The [Knox] Trustees faced a major dilemma. Old Main must be renovated or destroyed." Janet Greig Post, Knox 1894, the college's first woman Trustee, chaired a Restoration Committee that established an Alumni Fund to pay for renovation. According to a story that appeared in the Summer 2010 issue of *I&I*, "Economic conditions in 1930 made fund-raising next to impossible. The Trustees suspended the campaign, but Mrs. Post determinedly pursued funding on her own. By 1932 she had miraculously raised the needed money and renovation began. Old Main was rededicated on June 15, 1937."

Sandburg began his talk imagining Old Main as an observer of the passage of time and young people with eternal questions about the purposes of life:

Old and tarnished is the saying, "Time is a great teacher."



Old Main, Knox College, Galesburg, IL

Many here today feel that if Old Main of Knox as a living structure could speak for itself it might say: 'I am a child of time. I celebrate the dignity, importance, and pathos of time.

'Time used me with snow and rain, wind and frost, rust and rot, till I was falling away. Unless loving and thoughtful hands had come to help me I would have prepared to vanish and become dust in the wind, a shattered form and a forgotten melody, a house melted into thin shadows.

'Here to my doors have come the feet, faces, and voices of the young.

'Here from my windows generations of the young have gazed out on the world, gazed in on themselves, some asking questions. 'How and why do we live? And while we live what is worth looking at, what is worth listening to? What might be worth dying for?'

'Shoes have worn my doorsills, sleeves smoothed and softened my banisters, cries and laughter tumbled along my hallways, human associations making me across the years into a breathing instrument.'

Sandburg marveled at the challenges and changes in the preceding hundred years and what Americans had accomplished:

Those Knox pioneers of 1837, the year Abraham Lincoln moved from the village of New Salem to begin law practice in the city of Springfield, how could either they or young Lincoln read the fog, the mist, the faint cross lights of the future?

How could they know they were a fated bridge generation?

Who could tell them they were moving from a society of farmers and land culture into a machine age where the claims of a new system of industry,

transportation, finance, and its owners and controllers, would bring a changed national picture?

The shrewdest fore-teller among them, in the somber chaos of nearly twenty years later, in his House Divided speech, was to say, 'If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it.'

In the sciences of chemistry and physics then were pioneers restless as any on the western prairies, beginning to perform the impossible things that until done they were told couldn't be done.

Whether you pressed inward to the American mind or outward on the flow of the huge, diverse American landscape, you found personal ambition mixed with love and sacrifice, interwoven with the tantalizing and indefinable American dream.

Was a humanity older than Shakespeare, older than the Bible, trying to arrange a new human scheme for the Old World to look at and be glad over?

Would a pioneer spirit be needed in the next hundred years, he asked:

Because the frontier and the free land is gone are we to lose the word 'pioneer,' had as the wood of an old ox yoke, homely as a one-room log cabin, fierce as famine, flies and vermin, tough and stubborn as men and plows breaking unbroken sod, mystic as rainbow lights on horizons not yet reached by man?

Frontiers would remain, but they would be different. They would tend more to improving human relationships and the human condition:

Scholarly engineers and inventors harnessing invisible brute forces to do the heavy and backbreaking work formerly done by man -- are they not pioneers?

Shall we say across the next hundred years there will be more pioneers making headway favoring human solidarity as against war and strife among nations and men, making headway on the conditions to exist between ownership, management and labor, winning changes toward better terms on which human beings shall live?

Yes, there will be generations taking hold as though loneliness and the genius of struggle have always dwelt in the hearts of true pioneers, as though the restless and venturing human spirit shall perform again tomorrow with exploits today declared visionary and impossible.

What young people want and dream across the next hundred years will shape history more than any other

motivation to be named. Youth now living and youth as yet unborn hold the deeds and the secrets of the folds to be unfolded in the shapes to come.

None shall look at this hour and say we did not have hope and faith in them. The mystery of justice between man and man, nation and nation, shall take on new phases. Dreamers of deep sacred dreams, finders and welders, sons and daughters of burning quests, shall come.

In plain work done with honesty, in actions of courage and endurance lighted with inner humility, lighted sometimes with a fine balance of motives as between freedom and discipline, they shall clothe human dignity with new and wider meanings.

Sandburg imagined Old Main having the confidence and optimism, as he had the confidence and optimism, that the pioneer spirit with the young as its vanguard would continue:

Old Main as a living instrument today might be saying:

'One thing I know deep out of my time - youth when lighted and alive and given a sporting chance is strong for struggle and not afraid of any toils or punishments or dangers or deaths.

'What shall be the course of society and civilization across the next hundred years?

'For the answers read if you can the strange and baffling eyes of youth. Yes, for the answers, read, if you can, the strange and baffling eyes of youth.'

SANDBURG BIRTHPLACE & THE SULLIVAN FAMILY

By Mike Hobbs

In early March Michigan resident Kenneth A. Willis placed a message on our CSHSA website sandburg.org that he had seen the Winter 2012 issue of *I&I* which contained a story about Tom O'Brien who in the 1930's had lived at 313 E. Third St., the building which is now the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site's Visitor Center. O'Brien's maternal grandparents, Thomas J. and Ellen Sullivan, had owned the homes at both 313 E. Third and 331 E. Third, Sandburg's birthplace, since the early 1900's. The *I&I* story showed a photograph of young Tom O'Brien and his grandmother Sullivan standing in front of the home at 313 E. Third in the mid-1920's. Mr. Willis wrote that Ellen Sullivan was his great grandmother. He e-mailed this photograph of the Sullivan family, including his great grandmother, in front of the cottage in 1908 where Sandburg had been born thirty years earlier.



Sullivan Family in Front of 331 E. Third St., Galesburg, IL, 1908.

Courtesy of Kenneth A. Willis.

REV. ALAN JENKINS & SANDBURG

By Mike Hobbs

Rev. Alan Jenkins (1903-1971) was pastor of Galesburg's Central Congregational Church in early January 1953 when Sandburg appeared there on the occasions of his 75th birthday and release of his autobiography *Always the Young Strangers*. Rev. Jenkins was Central's pastor from 1943 to 1953. He graduated from Amherst College in 1924. He had formed a friendship with Sandburg, corresponded with him, wrote about him, and served on the board of the Carl Sandburg Association in Galesburg. In April CSHSA Treasurer Rick Sayre shared two of Rev. Jenkins' Sandburg stories, part of a collection of Sandburg-related items recently donated to Monmouth College's Hewes Library by Jeanne Robeson, daughter of Clarence Gittings.

One of those Jenkins' stories is entitled "Dinner With Carl Sandburg." It appeared in the periodical *Advance* in October 1946. *Advance* was published by the General Council of the Congregational and Christian Churches of the United States from 1934-1958. The story provides some interesting insights into Sandburg's character. Here are portions of Rev. Jenkins' story about his encounter with Sandburg at Connemara:

I have long admired Carl Sandburg. He has been for me a kind of secular psalmist, celebrating the marvel and mystery of the common-place. 'There is poetry in neckties,' and likewise in deserted brickyards, fogs, skyscrapers. Also I have found in Sandburg a first-class prophet. There is a moral interpretation of history involved in such lines as 'the earth is strewn with the burst bladders of the puffed up.' From a formal theological standpoint, Sandburg might be called an agnostic with overtones. Certainly he is no theist. But for me he has always illustrated the basic religious attitude of non-attachment to things and institutions and deep attachment to people. And he has a homely, helpful faith:

*'It's going to come out all right—do you know?
The sun, the birds, the grass, they know
They get along—and we'll get along.'*

Recently my wife, my daughter, and I had dinner with the poet and family in their new home in the North Carolina hills. I want to share some of my memories of that visit.

Mrs. Sandburg, smiling, welcomed us. She made us feel like old friends, meeting again after a space of years. She had white hair, eyes that were youthful and kind, a soft clear voice. She introduced us to her three daughters, two grandchildren, and a young man who was doing secretarial work for her husband.

The poet appeared. There was nothing about him to suggest the 'Lord of the Manor'—no hint of swagger, no proprietary air. He was dressed simply with his shirt open at the neck. His face was rugged and alive with thought. The gray hair that flops around in some of his pictures had been neatly combed and parted. He greeted us, and we felt that the whole man was in the greeting.

We sat down to a well-prepared meal of vegetable soup, mutton, goats' milk, brown bread spread with goat-butter, watermelon, and coffee.

Our table-talk ran from the personal to the philosophical, had now to do with the nation and now with Galesburg, Illinois (where the poet was born and where I now live). Some of our conversation centered about the writing done that day—the poet reading to us from his manuscript. What he shared with us was part of a fictional treatment of American history—a scene dramatizing the tensions of 1860 via a conversation between two young people in Pike County, Illinois. Our talk lasted for two hours and a quarter—which, by a somewhat Swedish coincidence, was precisely the length of time our coffee held out!

Let me note here some characteristics of Carl Sandburg as these were suggested at the dinner table.

I was struck by the poet's mental and emotional balance as reflected, for example, in his modesty. He takes his success as a kind of tentative ovation. 'There's no way,' he said, pondering his Galesburg birthplace which friends are turning into a memorial, 'of guessing posterity's opinion. They haven't yet got around to polling the unborn!' He expressed concern lest he 'let down' his memorializing friends. 'I might do something rash,' he said, adding solemnly as a simple statement of fact, 'I have done rash things.' The wide welcome given 'The War Years' had come, he said, as a surprise—he had expected a very limited appreciation. Referring to friends who would

like to do his biography, the poet laughingly dismissed the thought with a cryptic 'Biographies and birthplaces!' Sandburg the artist is aware of work well done and of an audience over many lands, but another Sandburg keeps saying 'The last word is not with the living.' The philosopher in Sandburg keeps the artist modest.

Over our goats' milk and coffee I was aware of another phase of the poet's balance—his humor, especially self-humor. Sandburg can smile at himself. Once, having almost used the wrong case for a pronoun, he stopped and chuckled 'We verged on the ungrammatical that time!' Apropos, again, the restoration of his birthplace, he recalled a story about an ancient Greek. When friends announced that they were planning a statue of him, this worthy replied 'Maybe you'd better wait and see if anyone asks 'Why haven't they put up a statue of that fellow?' Our host often laughed in an explosive, whole-hearted 'Ho! Ho!' way.

Spontaneity is another Sandburg characteristic. Unpremeditated, I am sure, was his remark over a chunk of watermelon—'Let's quit mistering each other. I'm Carl and you're Alan.' Then he extended his hand. As spontaneous was his singing at the table of Hood's 'Song of the Shirt.' Sandburg had been speaking of the exclusive concern of some abolitionists with the evil of slavery. Reformers like Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Lloyd Garrison were blind, he said, to industrial evils such as the exploitation of mill-workers in New England. The Stowes and the Garrisons did not hear the cry in their midst:--

*'O God! That bread should be so dear,
And flesh and blood so cheap!'*

Sandburg sang Hood's moving lyric with much feeling, and the tune was beautiful.

Sandburg's intense concern over what happens to people was in that song, too. In the pastoral setting of Connemara Farms he carries about with him, as once on the hard noisy streets of Chicago, the troubles and dreams of men everywhere. Currently he is distressed over the rift in our relations with Russia. He deplores atomic-bomb politics and the incitements to a 'Holy War' coming from certain church groups. He remarks upon the irony of a Secretary of State who, hailing from a poll-tax state, is displeased over the lack of democratic procedures in Bulgaria. More than once Sandburg referred to Churchill's Missouri speech [Sir Winston Churchill's famous "Iron Curtain" speech given at Westminster College, Fulton, MO on March 5, 1946] as a tragic blast. Over the quiet horizons of Flat Rock, North Carolina, this lover of the Family of Man sees hints of

the dark clouds of atomic war—and he is deeply disturbed.

What else can we say about our dinner-host? Said our seven-year old after our visit, 'I liked Carl Sandburg.' 'Why?' 'Because he was kind to me.' He had given her the keepsakes of a smile, a handshake, and a little joke.

The three of us will remember a white house with stately columns and wide porch overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains. We shall remember a winsome little lady and her tasty dinner with its goats' milk and butter. And, when these memories grow dim, still vivid for us, I venture to say, will be a strong face made out of steel and sunlight—a firm mouth speaking measured words—a basically religious spirit, free of conceit, who is as much at home in the Carolina hills as he once was in the hubbub of Chicago.

GOT A SANDBURG STORY?

Do you have a story about Carl Sandburg that you would like to submit for publication in *Inklings and Idlings*? If you do, please e-mail it to editor Mike Hobbs at mhobbs@grics.net.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

Go to sandburg.org to visit our CSHSA website where you can take a virtual tour of the Site, read about upcoming Songbag concerts, see some items and

Sandburg DVD's available in our gift shop, read Barbara Schock's "Sandburg's Hometown" stories, see past issues of *I&I*, and more. "Like" our Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association Facebook page. Go to friendsofcardsandburg.org to find a nice new video by Richard Labunski about Sandburg, Connemara, and the good work done by the Friends of Carl Sandburg at Connemara.

NATIVE SON, NATIONAL TREASURE

With all the challenges facing museums and historic sites in Illinois it is time to redouble our efforts to protect the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site and the legacy of our native son and national treasure. To accomplish this goal the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association (CSHSA) was chosen by the Galesburg Community Foundation (GCF) to participate in an Endowment Match Program. Prior to the June 30, 2016 deadline the CSHSA has raised \$12,000 toward an endowment to support the Historic Site, and the GCF has matched our efforts with a \$10,000 matching grant. In the next phase of our endowment campaign we hope to accumulate enough money to generate interest that will enable us to finance needed Site repairs and maintenance and keep a Site interpreter on duty year round.

Endowment Donations may be mailed to:

The Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association
P.O. Box 585
Galesburg, IL 61402-0585

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Carl Sandburg
Historic Site Association
P.O. Box 585
Galesburg, IL 61402-0585