

INKLINGS AND IDLINGS

The Newsletter of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association

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FALL 2020

FROM SITE SVCS. SPEC. BRYAN ENGELBRECHT-- SITE OPEN WITH NEW FEATURES

After closure from March 15 through July 15 due to the COVID-19 pandemic Carl Sandburg State Historic Site reopened on July 16. Our current hours of operation are 1 p.m.-5 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 10:00 a.m.- 5 p.m. Saturdays, and 1 p.m.-5 p.m. Sundays. A mask is required for entry into the Visitors Center and Cottage. Groups are currently limited to ten people or fewer at a time. Due to State of Illinois and Illinois Department of Natural Resources limits on gatherings the remaining Sandburg Songbag Concerts have been cancelled for the rest of the year. Thank you for your patience and support as we navigate these changes.

Visitors to the Site can enjoy some new features. To enhance visitor safety, a new stoop was placed on the front of the Cottage. Mechanical Services Incorporated of Galesburg has replaced spotlights, added wall fixtures, and begun replacing Malibu lighting with permanent fixtures to assist with security and nighttime events. Marilyn Bednar has loaned letters and poems written by Carl Sandburg along with a variety of images of him for a new display in the Visitors Center. We hope you enjoy these new enhancements to the Site as we continue to serve visitors during the pandemic.

NEW DISPLAY OF SANDBURG ITEMS IN VISITORS CENTER By Site Svcs. Spec. Bryan Engelbrecht

Carl Sandburg State Historic Site is pleased to currently host a loan of items from the estate of Charles "Chuck" J. Bednar, Jr. Chuck's interest in Carl Sandburg came from his mother, Juanita. Juanita had first become interested in Carl Sandburg while attending Lombard College. Upon discovery that Sandburg had edited the *Lombard Review*, the same weekly newspaper she became editor of, Juanita wrote an article about his college career. Carl and Juanita corresponded about the article. After meeting in person in 1937 at a luncheon for the rededication of Old Main at Knox College, their friendship continued to grow. When Adda George began efforts to purchase the Sandburg Birthplace Cottage, Juanita became heavily involved in the project. She took on tasks such as letter-writing, public relations, and finding period pieces to furnish the Cottage. In 1959 she succeeded Adda George as president of the Carl Sandburg Association. Under Juanita's leadership the Site continued to expand. The grounds were transformed into Sandburg

Park. The Penny Parade fundraiser, which continues to this day, began under her leadership. Juanita served as president of the Association until 1967.

Due to his family's friendship with the Sandburg's and his mother's work with the Carl Sandburg Association, Chuck had a lifelong interest in Carl Sandburg and his works. This interest spanned both his career in the United States Army Reserve and while he operated his own business, Chuck Bednar Design in Oak Park, IL. Upon retirement and a return to Galesburg Chuck became a board member of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association. He followed in his mother's footsteps by serving as president from 2011-2014. During his tenure, Chuck served as the driving force in getting the statue of Carl Sandburg placed in Galesburg's Public Square. He passed away September 18, 2018.

During Chuck's lifetime he collected a variety of Sandburg books, letters, and materials. Following his death his widow Marilyn Bednar approached staff about displaying a portion of his collection. Eleven pieces from the collection are currently on display at the Site. Verses of poetry in Sandburg's own hand, such as "Fog," "Look at Six Eggs," and "Canticle" among others, are included in the exhibit. Letters between Sandburg and Juanita Bednar are also featured. A signed program and ticket from "An Evening with Carl Sandburg" complement the display. A variety of images of Sandburg are exhibited with these documents. Visitors can view these items lining the wall in the audio-visual room of the Visitors Center. They will be displayed through December 31, 2021. We gratefully thank the Estate of Charles "Chuck" J. Bednar, Jr. for the opportunity to showcase these items to the public.



Part of the Sandburg items on loan from the Estate of Chuck Bednar displayed at the Historic Site.

AND BARBARA SAID, "LET THERE BE LIGHT"

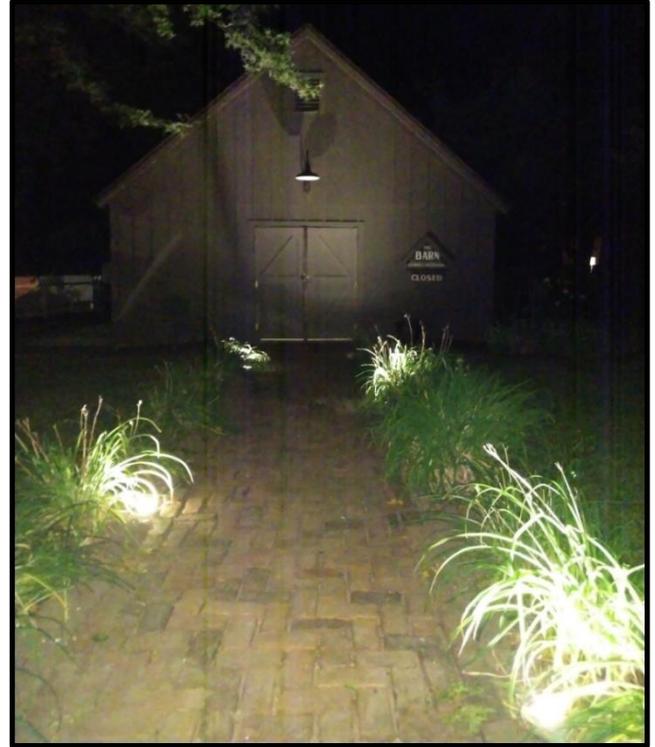
By CSHSA President Pat Kane

The Carl Sandburg Historic Site has suffered from inadequate outdoor lighting for late afternoon and evening events for years. Last year the CSHSA began the process with IDNR to be able to donate funds for a new lighting plan for the Site. Sandburg Songbag Concert times had been changed from evenings to afternoons because of the difficulty of guests navigating dark paths to The Barn performance and meeting venue. CSHSA activities at the Site had been strictly limited to daytime activities only. Through the year-long efforts of IDNR Director CSHS Scott Roman and IDNR Site Services Specialist II CSHS Bryan Engelbrecht, a plan was developed and approved. Bids were solicited, reviewed, and a bid was accepted. CSHSA committed funding for the cost, and work began. It was at that point that former CSHSA board member and esteemed historian and author of "Sandburg's Hometown" Barbara Shock sent a message asking me to give her a call. And I, of course, immediately did.

Barbara had heard that we were finally moving ahead with the Site lighting project. She wanted to know what was involved and what the cost would be for the project. I explained that the Board had voted to cover the cost with the caveat that memorial funds we had received would be used as much as possible for payment. She asked what the uncovered amount once our current memorial funds were used would be. I gave her the news of the considerable amount. Without a single drum beat Barbara said, "I will send you a check for it." I didn't respond, because I was quite frankly dumbfounded. With my silence she said, "Pat, are you still there?" I told her that I could count on one hand the number of times I have been speechless in my life, and this was one of them. She laughed and told me she would send the check immediately. I thanked her on behalf of all of our members and visitors to the Site, and we ended the call. When I later asked her why she had decided to do the donation, she simply replied, "because I care about the future of the Site and want it to be here for future generations. And, Christian (her late husband) would have liked it."

Barbara and Christian Shock moved to Galesburg from Elgin, IL. While living in Elgin and through their friendship with Marge Kreuger they were involved in establishing a physical historic site there becoming stewards of preserving history for future generations. Once in Galesburg they continued their interest, centering on Carl Sandburg. Christian joined the CSHSA Board in 1995, and Barbara was encouraged by her friend Marge Kreuger, who also now lived in Galesburg, to write "little stories" about Sandburg. Those "little stories" ended up under the title of "Sandburg's Hometown." In 1999, Barbara joined the CSHSA Board. At that time Carol Nelson was CSHSA Site Superintendent. Carol asked her to write for CSHSA's newsletter *Inklings and Idlings*. And so it goes...with #328-331 "little stories" posted this August on the CSHSA website sandburg.org. What Barbara describes as a "chatty" style of writing has shed light on Carl Sandburg's life in Galesburg. Her remarkable generosity also now sheds light on the Carl Sandburg

Historic Site as well.



The recently completed outdoor lighting project has greatly improved visibility on the Site's grounds as this photo of the walkway to The Barn shows. Photo courtesy of CSHSA board member Gary Wagle.

BEING A KID

By Barbara Schock

Carl Sandburg was born on a cold winter night in 1878 when the streets of Galesburg were full of ruts made of ice and mud. By the time he was a toddler the streets were still made of dirt. He remembered the feel of warm dust between his toes in the summertime.

As a lad growing up Carl spent a lot of time playing in the streets or on the terrace in front of his home. Mumble-peg was popular for a time. The peg would be driven into the ground, and the loser had to pull it out with his teeth. There were many forms of tag and hide-and-seek to be played in endless rounds of activity.

Then the boys graduated to baseball. They played from eight in the morning until six in the evening. A quick run home for lunch was the only interruption. It was a continuous round of batter up, base hit, and strike-out. The only requirement from their mothers was that they wash the dust off their feet before they came into the house to go to bed.

The bases were marked with bricks or tin cans. The bat was a broom handle. The ball was made of a small rubber ball wrapped in string. On one occasion a neighborhood boy came with a real baseball which had cost \$1.50. It was admired for some time and played with until the leather cover fell off.

When street lights came to East Berrien Street, the boys could play baseball even later in the evening. When one boy hit a base hit or a home run, cheering was in order for the winning side. Of course, the losers had to make competitive noises for their team.

The cheering and yelling became so raucous that one of the exasperated residents called the police. Officer Frank Peterson came and talked to the players. He explained that he didn't want to arrest anyone, but working people needed their sleep. Some of the boys ran away. Others sat on the tree bank afterward and wondered how they could play the game without yelling and cheering.

Knox and Lombard Colleges conducted track and field days which the boys watched through knot holes in the surrounding fence. One of the neighborhood boys had a two dollar watch so similar races could be held on Berrien Street. They also did high jumps and threw a crowbar as a shot-put. They didn't find a long enough pole to vault. They were pleased with themselves that they were almost as fast at running as the college students.

Carl Sandburg imagined himself as a great baseball player. He wanted to qualify for the semi-pro teams that played in towns around western Illinois. He could see himself as a player on a professional team until one day he was practicing catching high fly balls as another boy hit them. While running he stepped into a hole which contained a broken beer bottle. He limped to the nearest doctor's home and bravely withstood four stitches in his foot. The baseball dream faded away that day.

"NEIGHBORS,"

By Rev. Lawrence Webb

[Ed. Note: In July Jonathan Webb, son of the author of this story, emailed an inquiry to the CSHSA website about the location of Sandburg's poem "Neighbors." Site Svcs. Spec. Bryan Engelbrecht and CSHSA Webmaster Rick Sayre researched the location and pinned it down to New York City. Rev. Lawrence Webb is journalism professor emeritus at Anderson University, Anderson, SC and a Baptist minister. He has published seven books, and he expects to have his latest off the press later this year. The working title is *Carl Sandburg: Poet with a Social Conscience* featuring interpretations of some ninety poems, less than ten percent of Sandburg's published poems.]

"Neighbors"
Smoke and Steel, 1920

*On Forty-first Street
near Eighth Avenue
a frame house wobbles.
If houses went on crutches
this house would be
one of the cripples.
A sign on the house:
Church of the Living God
And Rescue Home for Orphan Children.
From a Greek coffee house
Across the street
A cabalistic jargon
Jabbers back.
And men at tables
Spill Peloponnesian syllables*

*And speak of shovels for street work.
And the new embankments of the Erie Railroad
At Painted Post, Horse's Head, Salamanca.*

This poem looks at two buildings in a rundown neighborhood in New York City in 1920—an old, wobbly house and an eatery. The location of "Forty-first Street near Eighth Avenue" points to an area still rich today with ethnic restaurants, 8th and 9th Avenues near the theatre district.

Also, historical records list the Church of the Living God and Orphanage at approximately 41st. Street & 8th. Avenue in New York City just prior to 1920. Sandburg likens the house's feeble condition to a person. If houses could use crutches, this one would qualify, but it was still put to benevolent use as the church and orphanage.

The poet likely stopped in for a bite to eat at the Greek coffee house across from the teetering house-church-children's home. In the restaurant, he heard a language other than English—presumably Greek, in a Greek eating place.

He says the men at tables used "Peloponnesian syllables." The Peloponnese Region is in southern Greece. The Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) was a famous historic event in which power in Greece shifted from Athens to Sparta. So "Peloponnesian syllables" probably means simply Greek words. The men in the coffee shop obviously spoke a brand of English as well, because Sandburg tells us some of their conversation.

They "speak of shovels for street work." So are they men who have worked with shovels on the street? (Sandburg wrote poems about shovel men. See the section "Shovelers' Quartet," in this present book).

Or perhaps they are railroad men. They keep up with recent improvements. New embankments have been built along the Erie Railroad line from Chicago to New York City. They talk about the new work at these towns: Painted Post, Horse's Head, Salamanca. Records also show these cities in New York State, according to Bryan Engelbrecht, Bishop Hill State Historic Site, Carl Sandburg State Historic Site, P.O. Box 104, Bishop Hill, IL 61419, bryan.engelbrecht@illinois.gov and J. Richard Sayre, Treasurer, Bookstore Manager, and Webmaster, Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association, P.O. Box 585, Galesburg, IL 61402-0585, www.sandburg.org).

These same three towns show up in another Sandburg poem, "Crabapple Blossoms." The poet says a sob story could be told about "Somebody's little girl... played once under a crabapple tree in June and the blossoms fell on the dark hair." She started off life in "Salamanca or Painted Post or Horse's Head." But one day she took the train to the big city and became one of "forty little girls of somebodies splashed in red tights forming horseshoes, arches, pyramids--forty little show girls."

So it would be easy to tell "a sob story over who she once was and who she is now."

When the lights of Broadway go out and "taxis hustle the crowds away when the show is over and the street

goes dark...the girls wash off the paint and go for their midnight sandwiches.”

Then they can sleep “late in the morning, long after the morning papers and the milk wagons.” And they can “dream long as they want to of June somewhere on the Erie line and crabapple blossoms.”

“Crabapple Blossoms” can be found in *The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg*.

Here is the text of “Crabapple Blossoms”:

*SOMEBODY'S little girl-how easy to make a sob story
over who she was once and who she is now.
Somebody's little girl-she played once under a crab-apple
tree in June and the blossoms fell on the dark hair.
It was somewhere on the Erie line and the town was
Salamanca or Painted Post or Horse's Head. And out of
her hair she shook the blossoms and went into the house
and her mother washed her face and her mother had an
ache in her heart at a rebel voice, "I don't want to."
Somebody's little girl-forty little girls of somebodys
splashed in red tights forming horseshoes, arches,
pyramids--forty little show girls, ponies, squabs. How
easy a sob story over who she once was and who she is
now--and how the crabapple blossoms fell on her dark
hair in June.
Let the lights of Broadway spangle and splatter--and the
taxis hustle the crowds away when the show is over and
the street goes dark.
Let the girls wash off the paint and go for their midnight
sandwiches--let 'em dream in the morning sun, late in the
morning, long after the morning papers and the milk
wagons--
Let 'em dream long as they want to...of June somewhere
on the Erie line... and crabapple blossoms.*

CARL SANDBURG'S PRIVATE THOUGHTS ON CREEDS & ORGANIZATIONS: C. OCTOBER, 1919

By Rex Cherrington

In this Presidential election year our thoughts turn more to government and political parties than usual. We know that Carl Sandburg associated with the Socialist Party of America, the party of Eugene V. Debs, when he was a young man, and he worked for the Socialist Mayor of Milwaukee. Sandburg differed with the party on the issue of whether the United States should enter World War I. American Socialists opposed the war on the basis that the wealthy instigate these wars while the less affluent people fight the battles and suffer the casualties. American and European socialists alike tended to be internationalists at that time and believed that governments tended to divide workers who would benefit more from unification and without doubt opposed workers killing each other. Carl Sandburg saw what the Kaiser's Germany was doing to Europe and the continued ambitions would do even more harm to Europe and the rest of the world. With that he separated from the Social Democratic Party and supported the American engagement in the Great War to come to the aid of European countries under threat from Germany. Based upon what we know of Sandburg's positions on the

major issues and the political positions of the parties of that day he seemed to be moving toward the progressive wing of the Democratic Party but with the emphasis on moving forward in contradistinction to joining the Democratic Party as we shall see in what follows.

Carl Sandburg was clearly a patriot and demonstrated this through his practice of principles rather than engage in the kind of flag-waving frenzy that some associate with patriotism. After leaving the Socialist Party he took a rather guarded position and refrained from joining organizations of the political, labor, religious, or social types.

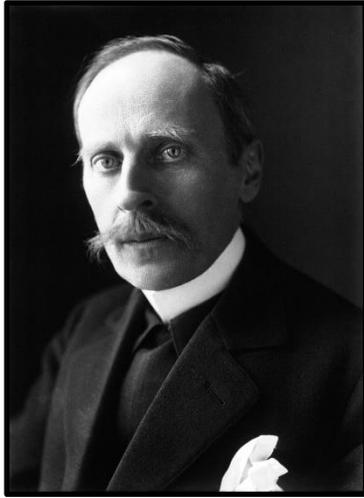
A rare glimpse of Carl Sandburg's inner, personal thoughts on these important topics is revealed in an undated letter he wrote to Romain Rolland circa October 1919. Penelope Nivens wrote, “He (Sandburg) apparently never sent the letter, but used it as a private means of articulating his views.”

Sandburg wasn't to put his name on that list or any other list that might be thought subversive in the wave of laws against radicalism in the United States as we recall the prison experience of Eugene V. Debs. However, he would not send a flat refusal to the great Rolland. Here is the first part of the letter written by Carl Sandburg:

Dear Sir:

You ask me to belong to something. You wish me join a movement or party or church and subscribe to a creed and a program. It would be easy to do this. It is the line of least resistance. If I have a fixed, unchangeable creed then I am saved the trouble every day of forming a new creed dictated by the events of that day. If I have a program and philosophy and a doctrine, crystalized in an organized movement, then the movement is supposed to do for me what I ought to do for myself. I am a socialist but not a member of the party. I am an I. W. W. but I don't carry a red card. I am an anarchist not a member of the organization. I belong to the modernists of the Catholic church but I have not made the sign of the cross with holy water in two decades. I am Francis Heney Republican and a Frank P. Walsh Democrat and a Victor Murdock Progressive but I am free to vote any ticket or back any candidate I pick in the next campaign. I belong to everything and nothing. If I must characterize the element I am most often I would say I am with all rebels everywhere all the time as against all people who are satisfied. I am for any and all immediate measures that will curb the insanity of any person or institution that is cursed with a thirst for more things, utilities and properties than he, she or it is able to use, occupy and employ to the advantage of the race. I am for the single tax, for all the immediate demands of the socialists, for the whole political program of the American Federation of Labor, for the political and economic measures outlined in the Progressive and Democratic party platforms, and the trend of legislation and activity voiced by Woodrow Wilson in 'The New Freedom,' and I believe in proportionate statement in the report of the federal

industrial relations commission. I am for unrest, discontent, revolt and war to whatever extent is necessary to obtain the Russian Bolshevik program which centers on the three needs: bread, peace, land. Until the earth is a free place to free men and women wanting first of all the right to work on a free earth there will be war, poverty, filth, slums, strikes, riots, and the hands of men red with the blood of other men. I am against all laws that the people are against and I respect no decisions of courts and judges which are rejected by the people.



Rex Cherrington tells us, "Romain Rolland was a French dramatist, novelist, essayist, art historian, and mystic who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915. He thought greatly about governments and social issues and was considered an idealist. This quote from Rolland might give us a glimpse as to why Sandburg would have found affinity with him, "Skepticism, ridding the faith of yesterday, prepared the way for the faith of tomorrow." Rolland had communicated with Sandburg through a third party and requested the support of various literary persons in America for an Intellectual Workers of the World movement. Sandburg wrote this autobiographical account with some very private thoughts but didn't send it. We will never know how Rolland might have responded.

This is roughly the first third of the letter and samples the tone and content which is revealing. In many respects it reminds us of the conditions that Lincoln found as he became President and of Sandburg's writing about Lincoln. Sandburg's admiration for Lincoln is clear from the number of years of his life he spent devoted to reading about Lincoln and writing about him. When one person writes about another, he or she reveals much about himself or herself as the writing unfolds. This letter could be said to arguably foreshadow his work *The People, Yes* published in 1936. The letter we consider of 1919 certainly has more hot coals in it than we find in 1936 and later writing. Sandburg's faith was in the people themselves in juxtaposition to the institutions they formed. Lincoln came of age in an era which embraced the malleability of institutions for the betterment of people for which Galesburg's founding can cited as a study. This kind of thinking and action made a deep impression on Sandburg. The following quote comes from Sandburg's epic poem, *The People, Yes*:

Lincoln?

*He was a mystery in smoke and flags
saying yes to the smoke, yes to the flags,
yes to the paradoxes of democracy,
yes to the hopes of government
of the people by the people for the people,
no to debauchery of the public mind,
no to personal malice nursed and fed,
yes to the Constitution when a help,
no to the Constitution when a hindrance,
yes to man as a struggler amid illusions,
each man fated to answer for himself:
Which of the faiths and illusions of mankind
must I choose for my own sustaining light
to bring me beyond the present wilderness?*

Lincoln? was he a poet?
and did he write verses?

*"I have not willingly planted a thorn
in any man's bosom."*

*"I shall do nothing through malice; what
I deal with is too vast for malice."*

*Death was in the air,
So was birth.
What was dying few could say,
What was being born none could know.*

*He took the wheel in a lashing roaring hurricane.
And by what compass did he steer the course of the
ship?*

*"My policy is to have no policy," he said in the early
months,
And three years later, "I have been controlled by
events"*

Let us now transition back to the letter which is our topic. The closing of the unsent letter is an echo of an earlier poem where the mob is mentioned,

*A Polish philosopher has written that humanity
consists of mob at the top and mob at the bottom, at
one extreme an ignorant, idle and incompetent
leisure class, at the other extreme, the wags, bums,
down-and-outs, the rickety, mal-nourished, tubercular
and anemic men, women and children of the slums.
Our Polish philosopher neglected taking account the
vast section of people between these mobs. I have a
theory- with no authenticated facts to support it - that
Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by the lower mob
through a conspiracy organized by the secret
diplomacy of the upper and therefore, the mercy of
the Russian mob toward its former Christ and the ride
of humiliation on the rump of a jackass round- about
the walls of Jerusalem. I wonder if I make myself
clear in propaganda, violence and assassination, or
force and syndicalism, any of them, in the extent and
degree to which it will serve a purpose of the people
at a given time toward the establishment eventually
of the control of the means of life by the people.*

--Carl Sandburg

The theme of the mob echoes a poem that appeared in 1916 in *Chicago Poems*.

"I Am the People, the Mob"

*I am the people—the mob—the crowd—the mass.
Do you know that all the great work of the world is
done through me?
I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the
world's food and clothes.
I am the audience that witnesses history.
The Napoleons come from me and the Lincolns.
They die. And then I send forth more Napoleons and
Lincolns.
I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will stand for
much plowing. Terrible storms pass over me.
I forget.
The best of me is sucked out and wasted.
I forget.
Everything but Death comes to me and makes me
work and give up what I have.
And I forget.
Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few
red drops for history to remember.
Then—I forget.
When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the
People, use the lessons of yesterday and no longer
forget who robbed me last year, who played me for a
fool—then there will be no speaker in all the world
say the name: "The People," with any fleck of a sneer
in his voice or any far-off smile of derision.
The mob—the crowd—the mass—will arrive then.*

So, Sandburg has told us he stays away from membership in organizations and avoids oaths or creeds if it requires him to give up his right to engage in new thinking as conditions arise. We may in behavior and thought still wonder, and we may ask which group it is that Sandburg belongs? It seems the mob would be the answer. Who is the mob? Is this mob our collective soul? Each of us is part of a mob, and each mob is part of the mob. This brings to mind the German sociologist Max Weber as he spoke of "gemeinschaft," the smaller society such as a community and "gesellschaft," the larger society such as a nation, or in the frame of reference here, the lesser mob and the greater mob. It is every man, woman, and child who belongs to this large group and perhaps one or more of the lesser ones. This mob is beautiful for its amorphous chaos and flourishes from its diversity in thought and behavior.

SANDBURG APPEALS TO ILLINOIS PAROLE BOARD FOR LEOPOLD'S CLEMENCY

By Rich Hanson

During a cold February in 1958 Carl Sandburg was in Chicago visiting with a friend, Donna Workman, when she and Ralph Newman, proprietor of the Abraham Lincoln Bookstore and a longtime friend of the Leopold family, both urged him to add his influential voice to those urging parole for the Leopold's son, the convicted murderer, Nathan Leopold.

Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold, two very intelligent young men, had been convicted of the "thrill" killing of fourteen-year old Bobby Franks in 1924. The two had fantasized about committing the "perfect crime," but were quickly viewed as suspects and eventually arrested and confessed after Nathan's glasses had been found near the Franks boy's body and had been traced back to him. Only the eloquence of the attorney Clarence Darrow, a passionate opponent of the death penalty, had spared them from being executed for what was a brutal murder. Loeb had been killed in prison, allegedly by an inmate fending off his sexual advances. Meanwhile, Leopold had become a model inmate. He assisted in revamping the educational system that was in place for the prisoners, he helped to reorganize the prison library, did volunteer work in the prison hospital at Statesville, and even volunteered to help in the research of malaria vaccines by allowing himself to be inoculated with the pathogen, then given experimental cures.

Sandburg agreed to attend the parole hearing. He and Donna Workman braved treacherous roads the morning they left for Joliet. While Donna drove, Sandburg worked on his presentation. Before he delivered it, he, Workman, and Ralph Newman were granted access to and had a long conversation with Leopold who had been in prison for thirty-four years by this time.

Sandburg is pictured in a newspaper photo giving his testimony in support of Leopold's parole. He was just one of many community leaders, friends, and family of Leopold who argued that the middle-aged man now incarcerated bore little resemblance to the teen-ager who was part of the plot to kill Bobby Franks, and that the rehabilitated Leopold would be of service to others if paroled.



Sandburg (standing, far right) addressing the Illinois Parole Board on behalf of Nathan Leopold, 1958.

Photo courtesy of Rich Hanson.

After Carl gave his testimony, Leopold's attorney, Elmer Gertz, said that "everyone wanted to be photographed with Sandburg. He was photographed with every member of the Board, with me, with my son, and with everyone under the sun. The newspaper photographers could not have enough."

Nathan Leopold was paroled in a split vote.

Before he left for Puerto Rico, where The Church of

the Brethren had arranged for Leopold to work as a medical technician under their auspices, Leopold called many of his friends and supporters, including the renowned Illinois poet. Penelope Niven in her definitive biography of Sandburg recounts Terry d'Alessio's account of the call which he overheard Sandburg's part of. "Never before have I caught it {Sandburg's voice} in such a coloration. Reassuringly, calmingly, comfortingly, Carl was talking to Leopold as one just coming out of a nightmare." D'Alessio voiced his misgivings after the call about Sandburg's involvement in the hearing. Carl responded, "You ought'n to get so worked up about it, Boy. It'll come out all right. You wait and see."

Leopold took the job as a hospital technician. He married, earned a Master's degree, taught some classes, and became a researcher in the Island's Department of Health. He did research on leprosy and became internationally famous for his study of birds. His release led him to be able to somewhat atone for his sin by his contributions to society, thus validating Sandburg and so many others who labored to have him set free.

Nathan Leopold's autobiography *Life Plus 99 Years* can still be found among some 12,000 books that comprise the library at Sandburg's home, Connemara. Sandburg once referred to Nathan Leopold's life after 1924 as "a struggle toward light." "I just picture him," he explained later, "as a magnificent struggler."

CARL SANDBURG—THE MAN: THE AUTHOR & PUBLIC EDUCATOR WHO COULD HAVE BEEN PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

By Thomas Junglander

[Ed. Note: This is the sixth installment of a Sandburg biography written by CSHSA member Tomas Junglander of Vadstena, Sweden.]

Abraham Lincoln

Carl Sandburg grew up in a community where the presence of Abraham Lincoln was still felt. Citizens of the town had known or voted for Lincoln, and one of the Lincoln-Douglas debates had taken place at the Knox College campus in Galesburg in 1858. Since boyhood he had admired Lincoln. He had grown up listening to the talk of people who saw Lincoln with their own eyes, and heard him speak. Galesburg was full of Lincoln history.

Abraham Lincoln, who became Sandburg's lifelong obsession, lived in the same area of central Illinois as Sandburg did, and in the early period of his professional life Sandburg presented Lincoln as a man of the people who arose from the poverty of the frontier to great eminence.

At the age of seventeen Sandburg worked ten-hour days to help support his family. On his way to his daily job in his hometown of Galesburg Sandburg walked through the Knox College campus where Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas had debated in October 1858. There on the north front of Old Main he regularly read on a bronze plaque Lincoln's words, and they became etched in his memory. "I remembered them and sometimes I used to

stop to read the words Lincoln had said to twenty thousand people." "He (Douglas) is blowing out the moral lights around us, when he contends that whoever want slaves has a right to hold them." He studied Lincoln's words "in winter sunrise, in broad summer daylight, in falling snow or rain, in all the weathers of the year."

Abraham Lincoln was the nominee for the Republican Party in the election of 1860. Stephen Douglas was a Senator with great influence, and he was the nominee for the Democrats. Lincoln was elected President of the United States, and the southern states left the Union in April 1861, and the Civil War started. The commercial and critical success of the *Rootabaga Stories* encouraged Sandburg to think about another book for young people. There was no good juvenile biography of Abraham Lincoln, and he began to consider writing one.

The Prairie Years

For years Sandburg had been collecting Lincoln material and had enough by 1921. He and his publisher Alfred Harcourt began to talk about a biography four hundred pages long written in simple language for young people. As Sandburg began intensive work on the biography, he realized that a great deal of the material called for more mature treatment, and his proposed one-volume book grew into two volumes. It was already clear that the biography would not be for young people alone. He realized that much of what he writes fits better for an adult audience.

Sandburg's publisher set publication of the book *The Prairie Years* for Lincoln's birthday February 12, 1926, and 10,000 copies were sold in advance. The volume covered Lincoln's years ending with the election and departure for his inauguration as President of the United States.

But before the release a magazine *Pictorial Review* published five installments of the book. Sandburg got \$21,600, an almost unimaginable amount of money for the author. It corresponds approximately to the same amount of money his father earned for more than 30 years as a railroad blacksmith's helper. His father had died already in 1910, but his mother Clara Mathilda Andersdotter from Appuna in Sweden was full of pride in her son's work and his great achievements. She died in December 1926. The Carl Sandburg family now made up of five people, was able to live a much more comfortable life after this economic lift.

The critique of the Lincoln biography was generally very good. Some historians objected to the lack of footnotes and to Sandburg's poetic method of imagining Lincoln's life. Several objected to such an unorthodox writing of history.

Literary critics, however, praised his work. Mark van Doren, who himself had written about Lincoln, wrote in *The Nation*; "It's Sandburg the artist, the epic poet who has attacked this largest and most complicated subject. The subject being, of course, not merely Lincoln himself. Though Lincoln was complicated enough, but in addition the whirlpool of cultures out of which he was flung into fame."

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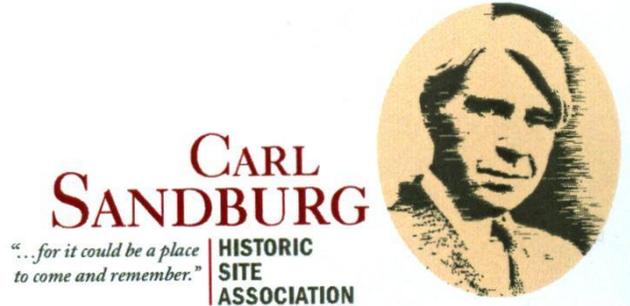
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The **Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association**, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, promotes awareness of the historical and cultural significance of Carl Sandburg and the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site in Galesburg, Illinois. We support a variety 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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