

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

SPRING 2024

“SPRING GRASS”

SPRING grass, there is a dance to be danced
for you.

**Come up, spring grass, if only for young feet.
Come up, spring grass, young feet ask you.**

**Smell of the young spring grass,
You're a mascot riding on the wind horses.
You came to my nose and spiffed me. This is
your lucky year.**

**Young spring grass just after the winter,
Shoots of the big green whisper of the year,
Come up, if only for young feet.
Come up, young feet ask you.**

Carl Sandburg from *Early Moon* (1930)

Spring at the Site

By Thomas Wallenfeldt, Site Interpretive
Coordinator

Spring has sprung, and even a little earlier! Carl Sandburg State Historic Site is warming up with positivity and even tour groups are booking scheduled visits earlier than usual. The Cottage and Visitor Center recently got new heating/cooling systems installed allowing precious artifacts to preserve Carl's legacy. The precise temperature is paramount to our collection. There is even a new fence that was erected late last year. It looks fabulous! In the Visitor Center, the Book Store has been getting restocked so we are ready for tourism season so individuals can have the wonderful chance to take Carl's literature as they depart.

The Songbag Concert Series is kicking off in March and leading all the way up to November looks like another quality line-up making another wonderful year at the Site. Speaking of this year, you may notice that the confines may look different as seven trees were removed. As of now, two more have been planted, but the Master Gardeners have many

options to plant more surprises. I cannot wait to see what they have in store!

Spring is a wonderful time and people from near and far always enjoy their visit here. I hope you can take time for stopping by this year too, and I want to thank the many volunteers who have given their time at the Site. It is appreciated!

Carl Sandburg: Lifelong Activist for Social Justice

By John W. Quinley

The theme of social justice runs throughout the life and career of Carl Sandburg. In his autobiography, *Always the Young Strangers*, which documents his first 20 years, he recalls: the factory worker who died, trapped on the third floor of a rubber factory when a fire broke out; the father of a boyhood friend whose legs were mangled when working as a brakeman on the railroad; and his own family eating meals of bread and lard after his father's meager railroad salary (10 hours per day, six days a week for fourteen cents per hour) was cut in half during the severe boom-and-bust cycle of the 1890s. The economic downturn compelled Sandburg to drop out of school to bolster the family's finances:

....we knew it was a Hard Times Christmas when our father gave us each only a five-cent bag of candy, a large five-cent orange, and a long sad look. We honored the oranges by eating all the insides, pulp and peelings.

Sandburg understood American democracy with its core values of life (equal protection of the law), liberty (full participation in the political life of the nation), and the pursuit of happiness (equal opportunity for socio-economic mobility) as the best path toward expanded social justice for all. He wrote that there exists:

Some sacred seed lurks deep in each human personality, no matter how lowly its arrival on earth. To give any such seed the deepest possible roots

and the highest possible flowering is the vision and hope of those ideas of freedom and discipline that constitute the American Dream.

And for him, “We the People,” meant all the people—women, minorities, immigrants, and the working class included.

Sandburg actively addressed the pivotal events of his time in writings and action. In a 1908 letter to Carl, Paula Sandburg asks: “Do tell me how you contrive to be a moral philosopher and a political agitator at one and the same time...Artist, poet-prophet, on the one hand; man of action, on the other.” He took these words to heart as poet, journalist, orator, folklorist, singer, children’s author, historian, and celebrity.

As an operative for the Social Democratic Party of Wisconsin in the early 1900s, Sandburg traveled from town-to-town, organizing rallies, giving speeches, and writing poems, tracts, and articles. Their platform included an end to child labor, the minimum wage, employment insurance, votes for women, old age pensions, occupational safety standards, free books for high school, farm insurance, and protections for unions. In a speech, “A Labor Day Talk,” he made clarion call for action too long neglected:

Years ago, we asked for old age pensions. But the years went by, we were laughed at as agitators, and it is today as it always was—old age is a time of life to be feared. Years ago, we asked for a minimum wage to apply among all workers. . . . But the years went by, we were ridiculed as impractical, and today millions of wage earners get pay so miserably low that they cannot live decently, cleanly, rightly. . . . We have learned that Labor will have to fight its own battles. From now on, we trust OURSELVES.

A few years later, as a reporter for the Chicago Daily News and in his poetry, Sandburg chronicled the promise and struggles of labor unions and working-class lives:

...the child laborers “little children taken away from the sun and the dew, to eat dust in their throats”; the union ice handler “who broke the noses of two scabs and loosened the nuts so the wheels of the ice wagon came off”; the shovel man on the railroad “who watched the wealthy eat strawberries and cream, eclairs and coffee in club cars as the train went by”; and all Chicago workers who were “Proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.” He used the words of ordinary people “the poetry of the street” to tell their stories. Often, he used slang, which he defined as “a language that rolls up its sleeves, spits on its hands, and goes to work.”

Sandburg saw WWI as an unjust creation of the ruling and economic elite at the fatal expense of the working class—a rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight. In “A Million Young Workmen, 1915,” Sandburg slams the decadence of prowar rulers:

The kings are grinning, the kaiser and the czar— they are alive riding in leather seated motor cars, and they have their women and roses for ease, and they eat fresh poached eggs for breakfast, new butter on toast, sitting in tall water-tight houses reading the news of war.

Sandburg covered the Chicago Race Riot, which occurred after WWI. The riots were sparked by the drowning of a young African American youth at the hands of whites after the youth accidentally drifted into the white side of the beach. Rather than blaming the African American victims, Sandburg used first person interviews and government statistics to explore discrimination in housing, politics, and organized labor that fueled social divides, and lobbied for a level playing field. He would have certainly agreed with an article from this time that said:

The truth is there ain’t no Negro problem any more than there’s an Irish problem or a Russian or a Polish or a Jewish or any other problem. There is only the human problem. All we demand is the open door. You give us that, and we won’t ask nothin’ more of you.

In 1965, at the height of the modern Civil Rights Movement, he received the NAACP Lifetime Membership Award as a prophet of civil rights “who strengthened our vision as we struggle to extend the frontiers of social justice.” He was the first white person to receive the honor.

Sandburg even embeds messages of social justice in many of his stories written for children (and adults who keep a child’s heart). For example, in “Bimbo the Snip” an old widow woman scrounges for kindling wood because she didn’t have money to buy coal after her husband had been killed in a sewer explosion. In the story, Bevo the Hike told her, “You have troubles, so have I. You are carrying a load on your back, people can see. I am carrying a load, and nobody sees it.”

People in the 1920s never saw the Great Depression coming. It created an American landscape spoiled with shuttered factories and businesses, house and farm foreclosures, and soup and bread lines. Many Americans began to think the new realities of their lives during the Great Depression were permanent, and rather than holding a failed economic system accountable, they blamed themselves. Sandburg’s book-long poem, *The*

People, Yes! affirms the American people's determination to survive. He wrote that:

The people will live on The learning and blundering people will live on. They will be tricked and sold and again sold. And go back to the nourishing earth for rootholds, The people so peculiar in renewal and comeback. You can't laugh off their capacity to take it.

Sandburg believed in the promise of American democracy to deliver social justice. In a speech delivered at Madison Square Garden in 1941, he explains why it is the best hope:...because by the very nature of the workings of the democratic system in the long run it gives more people more chance to think, to speak, to decide on their way of life to shape and change their way or life if they want to, than any other system. It has more give and take, more resilience, ductility, and malleability, more crazy foolishness, and more grand wisdom, than any other.

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Sandburg painted a bright future for America, but he wasn't politically naive. In a column penned during WWII, he warned of individuals (both domestic and foreign) and forces (especially intolerance, misinformation, and lies) of his stories and adults who that worked against the democratic system:

These are haters of political freedom for all men, scorners of religious freedom, race-haters, and propagandists. [Individuals who believe that by adding one hate movement to another, they can discredit the democratic system...[and then] people will turn in desperation to something else, anything else. And he writes that "in order to keep our freedoms we must never take them for granted."

There are freedom shouters. There are freedom whisperers. Both may serve. Have I, have you, been too silent? Is there an easy crime of silence? Is there any easy road to freedom?

His words resonate with the issues facing the nation today.

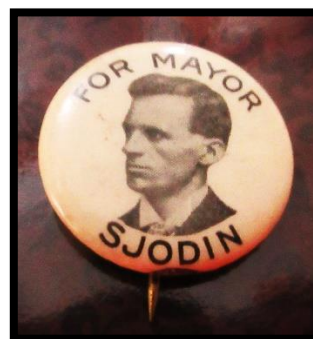
John Quinley is the author of *Discovering Carl Sandburg: The Eclectic Life of an American Icon*.

The Sjodin Family, the Neighbors to the Sandburgs

By Rex Cherrington

Please indulge me. As I get older my articles may wander or meander but it is my feeling that when we get older we earn this license to wander in our thoughts and meander in our writing. Sometimes I go to the Dahinda General Store in Dahinda, Illinois for coffee and sociability on Saturday mornings. Dahinda is where Mary Sandburg, Carl's sister, taught for one academic year at the two-room school and where Carl went to visit her when he returned from duty in the Spanish-American War. So that meandering includes a mention that I attended that school for the first six grades and two teachers did their best, but yet this meandering has a tie, more to the point of the story.

The Dahinda General Store is closed during the month of January and the group of friends gather at the Williamsfield Historical Society Museum in Williamsfield, Illinois. We enjoy coffee and visiting and my friend, Tom Rice. I mentioned that I was on my way to Peoria and he mentioned an antique shop where he has found the kind of memorabilia and ephemera that he and I collect. So, I stopped in and to my amazement did I find, but a campaign button for John Sjodin when he ran for Mayor of Galesburg. I knew that Mike Hobbs and Phil Reyburn had shared some information about him, which aided me in recognizing the importance of this little campaign button.



If you have followed my meandering so far I will go on. I could tell you statistics about this Sjodin family from census records, city directories and other sources but it is Carl Sandburg who can tell you better from his personal closeness to these people.

Going to the autobiography of Carl Sandburg's early years, *Always the Young Strangers*, we can learn about the Sjodins. Carl wrote more about the Sjodins than many others mentioned in his autobiography and did so in an admiring and

appreciative way. We learn that the Sjodin family were Swedish and had lived in Chicago long enough to lose their Swedish ways and when they moved to Galesburg, they took up residence at home on the corner of Berrien and Pearl the Sandburg family would have lived nearby on Berrien Street. Mr. Sjodin, father of John, was described by Carl as a tailor with a strong posture that announced to the world, "I am a free man, and I bow to no masters or overlords." Sandburg interpreted his body language this way, "In his personal carriage, I cringe before no man." From this we know that Albert Sjodin would be thought a radical by the predominantly Republican community of Galesburg and this would surely have caught the attention of young Carl. "He was an anarchist, a populist and a socialist." I saw him many time he seemed to be saying, 'I cringe before no man.' ... he wanted a new society, a new world where no man had to cringe before another."

John Sjodin, from what Carl has related, was very much his father's son. From *Always the Young Strangers* we learn, "He was two or three years older than I and had worked two years in a Milwaukee Avenue department store." Carl and John had both seemed to take full-time jobs at a rather early age. "He (John) had taken three lessons in clog dancing and from him, I (Carl) learned three steps to clog and never forgot them." The interest in clog dancing, a social activity, demonstrates their shared interests outside of the books they read. Both were well-read young fellows. "We lay on the grass next to the ditch on Pearl Street in front of his home on summer nights. He (John) could talk on and on about the exploits of a detective named Macon Moore." We see how Carl had found a good companion, just slightly older and more experienced in the world beyond Galesburg. "John at that time could be jolly, liked jokes and funny stories and had plenty of them" "The big corporations' were running the country, as John saw it, and the time would come when the working people, farmers and laborers, would organize and get the political power and takeover the corporations, beginning with the government ownership of railroads.

In an ironic turn, as is often the case with many of us, we learn that John Sjodin had an entrepreneurial side and started a small neighborhood grocery business. Carl became the junior partner in the mail-order sales publishing business. Sjodin had gotten his hands on a small printing press and Sandburg bought into the enterprise for two or three dollars. The catalog they published was entitled "Not a Cent".

Sandburg recalls they printed one or two issues but couldn't afford the stamps to mail them out; they were distributed among friends, and they kept the rest. Carl wrote, "We are publishers, and this shows what we publish.", and that was his philosophical way of looking at a business failure. It is from Carl Sandburg that we learn that John Sjodin was skeptical of both major political parties due to their ties to corporations and that he was a Populist and then a Socialist who ran for Mayor of Galesburg multiple times. John Sjodin learned the painting and decorating trade and became a union painter who was a leader in Galesburg Trades and Labor Assembly and organized a local chapter of the Socialist Party.

It was in 1892 that Carl Sandburg with his brother Mart, the Sjodin brothers, John and Albert and another boy whose name is not recalled, decided to venture outside of Galesburg. They borrowed some wagons, scraped up a few dollars, and bought a two-dollar horse and a three-dollar horse. This was at a time when those prices reflected considerable money, yet any horse thought to be reliable for any work could sell for twenty or twenty-five dollars. Sandburg describes these horses as "bone rack". The boys ventured over to the Illinois River to a place upstream from Peoria and opposite Spring Green (Sandburg most likely meant Spring Bay and this would have placed them somewhere in the area of what is now Detweiller Park). They camped, fished, swam and had a generally good time except the three-dollar horse died. The boys had to scrape up five dollars to buy another horse to bring the wagons and themselves home. Carl Sandburg gives much attention to this experience. My observation is that the friendship with John Sjodin and this trip whetted Carl Sandburg's appetite to know more about the world outside of Galesburg. We sometimes call this "wanderlust" and Carl had caught it.

Carl Sandburg and his Hobo Experience.

By Rex Cherrington & Bruce Todd with an Introduction by Rex Cherrington

Galesburg is a major railroad hub and as there is with any city or village with a set of tracks there is hobo history. I grew up in a village on the Santa Fe and I remember seeing, from time to time, a person walking along the tracks with their worldly possessions on their person. The Galesburg Historical Society has during some of the Galesburg

Railroad Days set up sort of a re-enactment hobo camp with members and friends pretending to be hobos. The search for authenticity led me to look in many places, which led me to a FaceBook page called "Real Hobos". Through joining the group in 2023 I have become friends with the administrator, Bruce Todd. Bruce is a real hobo. Bruce and I have had extremely different life experiences and yet have, each in our roughly seven decades on earth, come to some shared views about life. So, I introduce Bruce to our Sandburg fans here who read *Inklings & Idlings*. Bruce is a modest man and he had read what I wrote about Sandburg and didn't know why I needed him for this article. I told him the truth and the truth is that Bruce is my "expert witness" when it comes to hobos since he has his life experience to back up what he says. I just have some books.

Carl Sandburg's 19th Century Hobos In Light of Modern Day Hobos.

By Bruce Todd

Carl Sandburg was a product of a late 19th century hobo, and his story is similar to many others in that era.

His journey commenced just three years after the 1893 Economic Depression, the most severe economic downturn the nation had experienced until that point. This period also followed closely on the heels of Jacob Coxey's Army, a gathering of unemployed workers that marched on Washington, D.C. The nation was in a state of upheaval, prompting numerous young men like Carl Sandburg to embark on solitary journeys, compelled by both economic hardships and personal motivations.



Coxey's Army in Washington D.C.
From *Frank Leslie's Magazine* (May 1894)

In this turbulent context, life on the road became a salvation for Carl, as it had been for countless others before and after him. In the late 19th century, hobos primarily traveled in search of work by hopping trains. Work was essential in this era as there were not any programs such as food stamps or SSI.

Today, transportation methods have evolved. Modern day hobos use varying methods of traveling such as hitchhiking, walking, or public transportation. Carl Sandburg's hobos had little technology and limited access to communication and information. What little communication they did have was in the use of hobo signs and other information under water towers, not to mention the sharing of information in the jungles. Today, hobos have smartphones, the internet, and other technology to keep them informed.

Hobos of the late 19th century experienced conditions marked by economic conditions that contributed to widespread unemployment which drove individuals to adopt a transient lifestyle. While economic challenges persist today, the job market and social safety nets have evolved.

The perception of the hobo has changed over the years. In Carl Sandburg's late 19th Century, hobos were viewed with suspicion or overly romanticized in popular culture. But today, homelessness is associated with broader social issues and attitudes. In the late 19th century, hobos faced unjust vagrancy laws aimed at the homeless which often led to hard labor at rockpiles. Today, there are laws regulating panhandling and sleeping in public, but these laws are lax compared to laws of times past.

In the late 19th century, there were few social services for the homeless. But today, there are various organizations and government programs that exist to provide assistance to the homeless. People experiencing homelessness today face different challenges than those in the late 19th century.

Hobos in the late 19th century were transient migratory workers. Today, that is almost nonexistent, but not entirely. Working hobos can still be found, but they were the norm through the 1960s and even into the 1980s. Today, however, the majority of travelers fly signs instead of looking for serious work.

I am the product of a hobo through circumstance not unlike the 19th century hobo. During the economic depression of 1973 which contributed to homelessness and unemployment throughout the

rest of the decade, I hopped my first freight train out of New Orleans in search of something better.

For the next 30 years I hoboed and worked. Some jobs were a few days or weeks. Others lasted six months or more than a year. But all that traveling led to an incurable disease that hobos call wanderlust. I had become accustomed to my freedom of when to work and when to travel. Once that lifestyle gets into your blood, you are hooked to the clackety-clack of the rails.

Though today's hobos are a different breed from those of the 19th century, one thing remains the same—the Call of the Open Road. In the end, the parallel between the 19th-century hobo and the modern-day traveler lies in the shared call of the open road—an enduring and timeless aspect that transcends the changing socio-economic conditions and technologies of different eras.



James Eads How (1874-1930)

James Eads How was four years older than Carl Sandburg and came from a wealthy St. Louis family. His father was a railroad president, and his grandfather was the famous civil engineer who built the Eads Bridge across the Mississippi River in St. Louis. He chose the hobo life, organized a hobo labor union and published the *Hobo News*. He was often referred to as the "Millionaire Hobo".

1922 photo from the National Photo Company Collection (Library of Congress)

Carl Sandburg's Youth Work Experiences prepared him for his "Hoboism"

By Rex Cherrington

In his 1953 biography, *Always the Young Strangers*, Carl Sandburg identified himself as a hobo, a term deeply entrenched in the lexicon of the time. However, during his initial foray into the world of wandering in 1896-1897, "tramp" was the prevalent term, capturing the essence of these peripatetic laborers who were still a relatively novel phenomenon. Contrary to the image of a traditional hobo, Carl's diverse employment history extended beyond farm work, encompassing tasks such as sawing wood, harvesting pears and apples, dishwashing, and contributing to a section railroad gang.

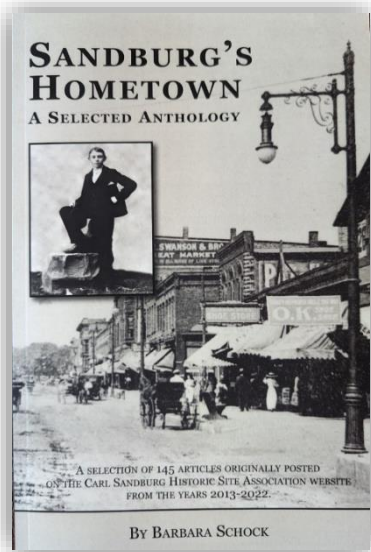
Sandburg's journey commenced just three years after the 1893 Economic Depression, the most severe economic downturn the nation had experienced until that point. This period also followed closely on the heels of Jacob Coxey's Army, a gathering of unemployed workers that marched on Washington, D.C. The nation was in a state of upheaval, prompting numerous young men like Carl Sandburg to embark on solitary journeys, compelled by both economic hardships and personal motivations. In this turbulent context, life on the road became a salvation for Carl, as it had been for countless others before and after him.

Upcoming Sandburg Songbag Concerts Second Sunday of each Month 2:00-4:00pm	
July 14, 2024	King Neptune
July 9, 2024	Sunshine Regiacorte & Casey Foubert
Sept. 8, 2024	Carol Jean & Jera
Oct. 13, 2024	Lojo Russo
Nov. 10, 2024	Triflemore

2024 CSHSA MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS
 Thanks to all for your continuing support! If you have not renewed in 2024, find a form with membership options for paying dues on page 8 of this newsletter.

Just Published!!

Sandburg's Hometown: A Selected Anthology, by Barbara Schock. Ed by J. Richard Sayre



Selection of 145 articles originally posted on the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association website (sandburg.org) from 2013-2022



Barbara Schock, author

Published by the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association (March 15, 2024). Retail Price: \$21.99

The Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association is delighted to announce the print publication of Barbara Schock's *Sandburg's Hometown: A Selected Anthology*. The book was released in mid-March 2024. It includes 145 of Schock's original 401 "Sandburg's Hometown" articles originally posted on our www.sandburg.org

sandburg.org website over a 10-year period from 2013-2022. Schock's articles focus on the people, institutions, events and issues that shaped late 19th-century Galesburg, Illinois, during Carl Sandburg's boyhood. Many articles were inspired by Sandburg's autobiography *Always the Young Strangers* published in 1953. Numerous historical images illustrate Schock's entertaining and informative articles.

The publication of *Sandburg's Hometown* was made possible in part by a grant from the Galesburg Community Foundation, as well as generous support from the late J. Michael Hobbs. The book was edited by J. Richard Sayre. Proceeds from all sales go to support the work of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association.

Complimentary copies of *Sandburg's Hometown* have been donated to 34 area school and public libraries by the Association.

Local availability & order options

Sandburg's Hometown: A Selected Anthology is available for sale (\$21.99+\$1.98 sales tax) from:

- **The Visitor's Center Museum Store at the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site**, 331 E Third St., Galesburg, IL 61401 (309-342-2361). URL: <https://www.sandburg.org>
- **Wordsmith Bookshoppe**, 235 East Main Street, Galesburg, IL 61401 (309-351-7767) | URL: <https://www.wordsmithbookshoppe.com/>
- **Online:** Orders are accepted via the Association's Square Item Payment link: <https://square.link/u/AyuPDqfa>
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- **Mail:** Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association, P.O. Box 585, Galesburg, IL 61401.
Make checks payable to: **Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association.**

For more information or any questions:

- **Email:** sales@sandburg.org
- **Phone:** 309-221-5150 (Rick Sayre, Museum Store Mgr)

Link to the WGIL-Radio Interview with Barbara Schock & Rick Sayre on the publication of *Sandburg's Hometown*. (April 27, 2024). <https://www.wgil.com/episode/new-book-features-essays-on-galesburg-carl-sandburg/>

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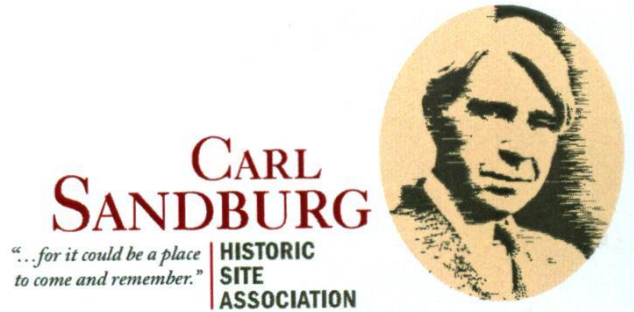
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