

# 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](http://www.sandburg.org)

## WINTER 2025

### Winter at the Site

By Thomas Wallenfeldt,  
Site Interpretive Coordinator

Hello everyone with hopes that 2025 will be a great year at the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site! 2024 was a successful year and we have a couple of highlights to share. In early May, we had the Osher Life Learning Institute (OLLI) from Bradley University make a day trip to visit the Site where many of the guests took a Carl Sandburg class. Many were eager to share their thoughts out loud. As a surprise, Barry Cloyd from Peoria, Illinois portrayed Carl with a live performance. It was a special day!

Speaking of music, the Songbag Concert Series was a tremendous hit in 2024 where the total guests were 376 and in August, we had an all-time high of 89 in attendance. In September, the weather was appropriate enough to have our concert outside. We have even higher hopes in 2025 as our new sound system can be utilized with better mobility and quality sound.

In other good news, the Visitor Center will have necessary funds to fix the front porch and the entrance door this year. As usual, the Master Gardeners keep the confines beautiful and even the Garden Station in Galesburg donated two bouquets in front of Remembrance Rock last year. This may be a new tradition during the warmer months. As winter melts away, please take some time to see the Site when our concerts come back in March and check out the flower arrangements. Stay warm!

### 2025 CSHSA MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Thanks to all for your continuing support! If you have not renewed in 2025, find a form with membership options for paying dues on page 8 of this newsletter.

### Sandburg in Neponset: Plaque Dedication Ceremony, Oct. 3, 2024.

By Ed Safiran

*Note: Ed Safiran resides in Neponset and is a former IDNR staff member serving the Bishop Hill & Carl Sandburg State Historic Site..*



One of Carl Sandburg's many jobs while growing up in Galesburg was selling stereoscopic views for the Underwood and Underwood Company. His Lombard College friend Fred Dickinson introduced Carl to an Underwood representative, and in the summer of 1900, his territory for sales was all of Bureau County, Illinois. Sandburg wrote a chapter about his experiences selling "views" in the second volume of his autobiography *Ever the Winds of Chance* (University of Illinois Press, 1983). In it he spends several pages describing his trip on his bicycle to Neponset in western Bureau County. He describes the hotel he stayed in and how he canvased the main street and outlying families selling his wares.



Some years later, Sandburg wrote a poem about Neponset while he was traveling by train at night through towns along the CB&Q line. He described the Village of Neponset as “Clinging to the Burlington Main Line, like pea pods cling to stems.” The poem, which he called “Pods”, was published in 1920 in *Smoke and Steel* (Harcourt Brace & Co.,1920).

The Neponset Historical Society recently dedicated a historic marker from the Illinois State Historical Society about Sandburg’s time there. The marker is located on the site of the hotel where Sandburg stayed. The marker summarizes his time there and includes the poem “Pods.” The event took place on October 3, 2024, National Poetry Day, on Commercial Street in Neponset and drew a large crowd that included students and the Junior High



Band from Neponset Grade School. Speakers at the event included Willam Furry, Executive Director of the Illinois State Historical Society, Lex Poppens, Director of the Bureau County Historical Society, and Jim Eichler of RWE Clean Energy LLC who funded the project. Second and third grade students recited the poem “Pods” after the marker was unveiled.

The tiny town of Neponset definitely made an impression on young Sandburg. Penelope Niven, in her 1991 biography of Sandburg noted that he “liked the stereograph business, and he got much more out of it than money. He liked the freedom of the open road, liked living here and there, seeing new towns and people. He liked bringing the world to the people in the isolated villages and on the prairie farms.”



The historical marker from the Illinois State Historical Society will raise awareness about a unique moment in Neponset history and will help keep the memory of Carl Sandburg’s time there alive for generations to come.

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## CSHSA FY 2024 (Jul 2023-Jun 2024): Selected Highlights by J. Richard Sayre, CSHSA Treasurer

1. **Visit from Illinois State Senator Mike Halpin in February 2024.** Prior to the February meeting Illinois State Senator Mike Halpin joined the Directors for a visit to the Site. After giving Halpin a tour of the Site, President Pat Kane led a discussion & presentation highlighting some of the activities of the Association. In our May 2024 meeting Vice-President Don Moffitt announced that following a request from Senator Halpin’s office, President Pat Kane provided a list of needed capital improvements with estimated costs. We are hopeful that we may see some much-needed state funding directed to the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site in the near future.
2. **CSHSA Endowment Balance - June 30, 2024. Total \$42,447.16.** Our fiscal year-end total on June 30, 2024, reflected an increase in value of 5,172.69 this past fiscal year. We received designated donations totaling \$800 to the endowment during FY2024. Our Endowment funds with the Galesburg Community Foundation showed an estimated +11.7% return on investment in FY2024! Our current Spendable Balance: \$10, 149.06.



3. **Barbara Schock's Sandburg Hometown: A Selected Anthology published March 2024!** In May 2021 CSHSA submitted a successful GCF Turnout 2021 Grant proposal for funds to support the publication of a selected anthology of Barbara Schock's "Sandburg's Hometown" original 401 articles published 2013-2022. We hoped that a print edition would inspire students of all ages to read and explore the Galesburg of Sandburg's youth, the last quarter of the nineteenth century.



4. **Over the course of the past three years, Rick Sayre & the late Mike Hobbs worked closely with Barbara Schock to select 145 articles within 10 chapters, along with 143 images to illustrate most of the articles.** We are grateful to our layout artist, **Ami Jontz** (Knox College), who patiently worked with us through several revisions. Knox College librarian, **Laurie Sauer**, created the index for our book. Printing was contracted to Lightning Press from New Jersey. Three hundred copies were printed.

Forty-five (45) of the 300 copies of Sandburg's Hometown were distributed to 34 schools and libraries in Galesburg, Monmouth & Knox County by Andrew Chernin and Rick Sayre. A letter signed by President Pat Kane was included for each of these institutions.

5. **Sandburg's Hometown's April 27, 2024 Book Signing Event at the Site was a success.**

On Saturday, April 27, 1-3pm, we had a steady stream of visitors for the *Sandburg's Hometown* Book Signing for Barbara Schock, author, and Rick Sayre, editor. We had 29 visitors and sold 16 copies of *Sandburg's Hometown* in the two-hour period.

*Sandburg's Hometown* & our Book Signing event were further promoted by a radio interview with Barbara and Rick with WGIL-News arranged by Jay Redfern & conducted by Will Stevenson on Thursday, April 25, 2024 between 8-9am. Listen Online: [New book features essays](#)

[on Galesburg, Carl Sandburg – WGIL 93.7 FM – 1400 AM](#)

6. **Local Business Contributions in 2024**

- a. **Sandburg Sangria – Hidden Hills Vineyard and Winery donation to CSHSA.**

In June 2024 CSHSA received its second generous donation of \$847 from a newly crafted Sangria named for the Carl Sandburg Birthplace with \$1 for each bottle sold to be contributed to CSHSA. We thank the Hidden Hills Vineyards & Winery owners for their continuing support for the site through their Sandburg Sangria sales!

- b. **Hometown Hundreds – F&M Bank – \$200 received in FY2024 drawings.**

We thank our local F&M Bank's support for local nonprofit organizations through their Hometown Hundreds program.

7. **Tuscarora Club of Galesburg, April 2024.** President Pat Kane made a presentation on Carl Sandburg and the Association to appreciative members of the Tuscarora Club of Galesburg in April 2024.

8. **Bradley University's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute group visits Site, June 6, 2024.** Board Members joined Tommy Wallenfeldt to welcome a group of 20+ "students" participating in Bradley University's OLLI course on Carl Sandburg. Illinois folk musician Barry Cloyd graciously entertained the group in the Barn as well!

9. **Continuing Support from our local Master Gardeners!** We are extremely grateful for the dedication of our local chapter of the University of Illinois Master Gardeners who work the Site AND are CSHSA members...Jamie Yemm, Sylvianne Stites, Gail Coffman, and Pat Kane. We continue to support the Master Gardeners annually with a donation of \$300 for landscaping supplies.

10. **CSHSA continues its pledge to support the construction of Galesburg's new public library building.** The CSHSA Board has now donated \$3,000 of its pledged \$5,000 over five years towards the construction of the new public library on East Main Street in Galesburg. And it is grand!

Members of the Board attended the festive April 11, 2024 donors' reception prior to the official opening on May 11, 2024. We are honored to be a small part of this wonderful new public library in our community.

of *Letters from a Sandburg Docent*. John Quinley is the author of *Discovering Carl Sandburg: The Eclectic Life of an American Icon* and is a former docent at the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site in Flat Rock, North Carolina.

**11. Kailey Villanueva awarded CSHSA's Annual Sandburg Prize Scholarship for the 2023-2024 Academic Year at Carl Sandburg College.**

Villanueva is a freshman from Monmouth at Carl Sandburg College studying to be a journalist. She earned a spot on the Dean's List this past Spring 2024 semester. The CSHSA Board has sponsored a \$500 scholarship to the Carl Sandburg College student scholarship fund to be awarded to a deserving student. The CSC Financial Aid staff identifies and awards a student who would benefit from our annual scholarship.

**12. CSHSA Acquisition of Adjoining Property at 345 E. Third St!**

In July 2023 the CSHSA board completed the acquisition of the adjoining property to the east of the Birthplace Cottage. Discussions as to the future use of the property are still ongoing. We have applied for and received a property tax exemption for the property beginning with 2023 property taxes that would have been paid in 2024.

**13. Site Fence Replaced (Sept-Oct 2023).** Through the efforts of **Tom Simkins** and his group of local volunteers, the Site fence along the east border of the Site was completely reconstructed. The Historic Site's fence was inadvertently removed by the demolition contractor of the 345 E. Third Street property. The fence was in poor condition and needed to be replaced anyway.

The Board agreed to its replacement as part of the property acquisition.



**14. "Letters from a Sandburg Docent" by Dr. John W. Quinley on CSHSA's Facebook Page.**

We are very pleased that retired historian, Dr. John Quinley of Hendersonville, North Carolina, has been providing monthly articles on Sandburg exclusively for our website under the series title

**15. Museum Store Sales & Expenses FY2024.** We saw a 13% decrease in FY2024 sales (\$4,162) vs. FY2023 (\$4,781). We also showed a net loss of -\$226 for our FY2024 Museum Store operations vs FY2023 (+\$1,689). Museum Store Expenses were higher in FY2024 (\$4,387) vs FY2023 (\$3,089). At present the Museum Store hours are dependent upon our sole staff member, Tommy Wallenfeldt with no back-up staff options since Bryan Englebrecht accepted a new position in October 2013. As a result, the Site has had to close more often than in recent years

**16. Museum Store transitions from Elavon to Square!**

In January 2024 we replaced our long-time Elavon credit card processing agreement with Square due to the rising cost of Elavon's monthly fees. We can report that in 2024, following our implementation of Square, our total Square fees ran about 10% of the annual cost of credit card transactions in 2023 with Elavon.

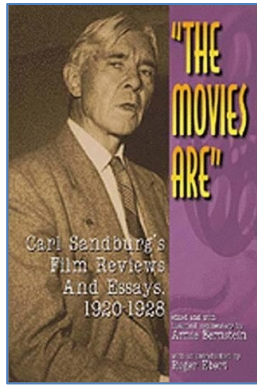
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**Carl Sandburg and the Cinema:  
Part I - Carl Sandburg, Pioneer Reviewer of  
the Movies, by Rex Cherrington**

In 1922, Sandburg wrote, "Culturally speaking, there are arguments to be made that Hollywood—for real or woe—is more important than Harvard, Yale or Princeton, singly and collectively. In 1926 he stated: "The cold, real, upstanding fact holds—the movies are. They come so close to pre-empting some functions hitherto held exclusively by the school and the university systems that the philosopher of civilization who doesn't take them into consideration with broad, sympathetic measurement is in danger of being in the place of the drum major of the band who marched up a side street while the band went straight along on the main stem—without leadership."

It is somewhat shadowy as I try to recall the first time that I learned that Carl Sandburg had reviewed movies in the 1920s. It is, as well, the memory of when I first heard that George Stevens had hired

Sandburg as a story consultant in the production of *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. It was more recently, likely in the last twenty years, when I learned of the existence of a book, *The Movies Are*, that compiled Sandburg's movie reviews from 1920 to 1928. It was also in that time period I learned more about Sandburg's work for George Stevens and how he became acquainted with Marilyn Monroe. Carl Sandburg's movie reviews were part of his job at *The Chicago Daily News*. His work could be described as a social justice reporter exposing the injustices he found. His newspaper work is likely best remembered, at this time, for his coverage of *The Chicago Race Riots*, also available in book form. It is also found his earlier writings foretold these race riots in 1919.



For some perspective on where Carl Sandburg fits into the chronological order of the history of cinematography, let us look at the background. Edward Muybridge was apparently the first photographer to take an interest in shooting consecutive frames of images that could be assembled in order to view *The Horse in Motion* which was the title of his book. Leland Stanford, the former Governor of California and Union Pacific Railroad President suspected that a galloping horse had all four hooves in the air at one time, but it was for such a brief fraction of a second it was hard to say for sure. So, in 1872 Muybridge agreed to photograph Stanford's horse "Sallie" to see if she had all four hooves in the air. Muybridge's pioneering in motion pictures was delayed in 1874 when he murdered his wife's lover, but it was only a delay. As Muybridge explained he had a severe head injury in 1860; the murder was thought justifiable, so he was acquitted.

The early experiments were made using 24 glass plate film cameras. Celluloid film was not yet strong enough nor flexible enough for photographic images. He did resume his work and in 1878 had a moving picture product, a hand cranked device called the zoopraxiscope. It was in 1888 that Muybridge went to New Jersey to meet with Thomas Edison, who possibly had expressed interest in the idea of "moving pictures" a few years earlier. In 1889 a form of nitrocellulose celluloid was developed that was thin enough, strong enough and flexible enough to be

used for a foundation for photographic images. Charles Eastman of Kodak was one of the persons involved in the development of celluloid for photography. Edison's movie camera weighed about 1,000 pounds and was mostly used for scientific documentation. The Lumiere Brothers of France made a lighter weight, more portable camera in 1895. Storytelling movies came a bit later. *The Great Train Robbery*, was released in 1903. Movies were first shown in theaters designed for stage but in 1905 a motion picture theater opened in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and it was called *The Nickelodeon*. The point of this history is to show that, relative to where we are now, Carl Sandburg was a movie reviewer while the motion picture industry was still in its pioneering years.

Penelope Nivens observed, "Sandburg was one of the first critics to see the educational promise of film," In Sandburg's words, "The value of the celluloid reel and the white screen as a silent teacher". Groucho Marx went with Carl Sandburg to watch the movies, but he admitted later to it being a joke that Sandburg fell asleep, and he woke him up and told him about the movie. In 1972 Groucho admitted that Sandburg was "an attentive and observant critic." This brings me to a question about Carl Sandburg that was personal for me: Was Carl Sandburg a movie critic, a movie reviewer or both? While Groucho Marx mentioned the word "critic" in 1972 that could be because that title had become part of the culture of the times.

Roger Ebert mentions Sandburg as a film critic, but lightly and more positively mentions him as a film reviewer. I have decided that he was more of a reviewer as he did not hold the movies, he reviewed to a standard of cinema but told his readers enough about the movie to decide if they would enjoy it. The Academy for Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was formed in 1928 and gave its first awards that year, the same year that Sandburg was retiring from newspaper work, including the movie reviews. No doubt after the formation of the "Academy" there was more emphasis on the "critical" in critical reviews of the movies, as they worked toward developing some standards from which movies, actors, producers, directors, costume designers, writers and all the people involved could be evaluated.

Sandburg's reviews were reviews; Sandburg had a way that brought to mind Walt Whitman or Henry

David Thoreau's way of getting "at the marrow of life" and a Mark Twain way of laughing at ourselves. Sandburg also reminds us of one of his contemporaries, Will Rogers. What do all these men have in common? Getting to an understanding of the self and at the same time, the American people; something that was deeper than what we see and experience on the surface.

The Midwestern vernacular is evident in Sandburg's 1923 review of the movie starring Pola Negri, entitled *Bella Donna*. It is a one sentence paragraph that summarizes the whole movie, "Y'see there was a rich man and she was his wife and they lived in Venice and she was so beautiful that he was jealous of what other men might do to her and so one night when she was telling another man to keep his hands off her what does her husband do but come in, throw the other man off the balcony, killing him, so while the wife goes free, the husband is hanged, though the murder is kept out of the picture."

It is worthy to make the effort, at this point in time, to reconstruct what Illinois contributed to the history of the cinema. Prior to 1920 Essanay Films of Chicago was the leading maker of films and the first to develop a 3-D camera for motion pictures. Ben Hampton was once owner of the *Galesburg Daily Mail* and became interested in motion pictures; eventually he owned four motion picture businesses in California. Hampton later wrote a history of early cinema. Vachel Lindsay of Springfield had studied at Chicago Art Institute before choosing writing as his main profession; he utilized what he learned about aesthetics at the Art Institute and wrote the world's first book about movie reviewing. Carl Sandburg as pioneer movie reviewer is the subject of this article. Even after Hollywood began to develop many stars, producers and directors rode the Super Chief on the Santa Fe to come back to Chicago and promote their films. It's fun to think of all the people from Hollywood who stopped here, or simply, those who passed through Galesburg on the Santa Fe. The cinema flourished in Hollywood but there were many roots in Illinois.

We are fortunate that Arnie Bernstein compiled the movie reviews of Carl Sandburg in book form. We are further fortunate that the movie reviewer extraordinaire, Roger Ebert, wrote an introduction. We are further fortunate that we have copies of *The Movies Are* for sale at the Carl Sandburg Historic Site

Museum Store in Galesburg, Illinois for \$17.99 plus the tax per copy, if picked up at the store. It runs about 400 pages in length, including an unpagged appendix after the index.

To give a brief, not complete, list of actors mentioned would be Rudolph Valentino, Lillian Gish, Gary Cooper, Gloria Swanson, Tom Mix, Greta Garbo, Charlie Chaplin, Groucho Marx, Harpo Marx, Chico Marx, Gummo Marx, Buster Keaton, Joan Crawford, Theda Barrett, Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, John Barrymore, Lionel Barrymore, Buck Jones, Mary Pickford, Clara Bow and W. C. Fields; some of whom survived the changes from silent movies to the "talkies".



*Charlie Chaplin & Merna Kennedy in THE CIRCUS (1928)*

Carl Sandburg reviewed a movie that was based upon the heavyweight championship boxing match between Jack Dempsey and Luis Firpo. In addition to the fight, it showed the training regimen for each of these heavyweights.

The era after World War I was noted by breaking down traditional social values. Women were bobbing their hair, wearing clothes more like men, prohibition of alcohol made breaking the law not so terrible. The speakeasies frequented by men and women; before, the saloons were places for men. People were more open about discussions of sexual behavior, but still a bit reserved and done in an educated way. The moralists were also pushing back about movies that indulged in these social changes and Sandburg didn't try to hit them head-on, but made remarks in his reviews which revealed his opposition to such moralism.



It took great creativity to cover these stories in silent films. Subtitles were used by the best producers who wanted to keep these to a minimum as they distracted attention away from the action and body language of the movie that told the story. It still baffles me how there would have been the interest and the ability to make this movie Sandburg reviewed, *Einstein's Theory of Relativity*.

Some of the movies reviewed by Sandburg had titles that would associate with Post WWI social changes, and some had rather tantalizing titles: *Children of Divorce*, *London After Midnight*, *Three Jumps Ahead*, *Why Scenarios Go Wrong*, *The Lotus Eaters*, *The Taxi Dancer*, *Just Tony*, *Greed*, *The Wildness of Youth* and *Night Life in Hollywood*.

Some movies were based upon classics: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Wizard of Oz* (1925 version), *Oliver Twist*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Scarlet Letter*.

This is but a partial list of movie titles and all this in addition to all he was writing at the time: everything about Sandburg and his workload is amazing and not to be equaled by most mortals.

I am sure this movie was reviewed by Sandburg with great interest, *Abraham Lincoln*. Carl Sandburg became a movie reviewer in 1921, just as Chicago was losing its position as the film capital of the USA, giving way to Hollywood, California. Chicagoans still had a great appetite for cinema. I recently prepared for a talk on the history of the Santa Fe Railway, and it was mentioned how many actors, actresses and movie producers traveled by that line's luxury trains and the comment was made that when these people wanted to reach out to America that it was to Chicago where they headed.

Fifty years after Carl Sandburg left *The Chicago Daily News*, it folded.

## **Part II - Carl Sandburg and the cinema beyond movie reviewing:**

Carl Sandburg wrote his last review in 1928, the year that is often considered the end of silent movies. This was not the end of Carl Sandburg's association with the cinema. In 1939, he completed his six-volume biography of Abraham Lincoln, which

provided rich material used by various artists who were interested in doing more with the topic of Lincoln. One of these was Robert Sherwood's Pulitzer Prize-winning play of 1938, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, which was transformed into a screenplay and a movie was made with the same title.

Carl Sandburg was approached by MGM about writing an epic work, fictional but historical, about the history of the U.S.A. The scope seemed like an overreach for the writer, producer and the enjoyment of the viewer. This was in 1943 and 1944. MGM did lose interest, but his work became his novel, *Remembrance Rock*.

In mid-1960, George Stevens was starting the production of his film about Jesus, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. Stevens had asked Sandburg to be a story consultant for this large undertaking. Stevens was a great admirer of Sandburg. Church was a major component in the life of the Sandburg family in Galesburg and he was no doubt taught much of the Bible at an early age. Sandburg had further exposure to the Universalist religion at Lombard College and this Universality seemed to have a lasting effect. Sandburg was open to the religions without embracing any one of them. He wrote a poem about Billy Sunday that showed his lack of admiration.

How much of the *Greatest Story ever Told* was Sandburg's seems indeterminable at this point. However, the big takeaway from that movie production was how he met Marilyn Monroe. Legend, or fact, or a mixture of the two says that Carl Sandburg was given a trailer on the movie set where he could go to rest, write, re-write and think during the production of the movie. As the story goes, Marilyn Monroe had used this trailer in a previous movie but had not yet completely moved out. So, as Sandburg went to his trailer for the first time, he found it occupied by the screen star, Marilyn Monroe. Each had a "what are you doing in my trailer?" approach but apparently, they soon saw the humor in the mix-up, and they formed a friendship. Some famous photos were taken by Arnold Newman of Monroe and Sandburg together in a casual setting.

Each time I write anything about Carl Sandburg it adds to my admiration for a great man who was able to do so much that it seems like the story of more than one person and more than one lifetime.

## 2025 CSHSA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership Categories (Check one)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$10.00	Student / Senior (62+)
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$20.00	Individual
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$40.00	Family
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