The Carl Sandburg Centenary
January 6, 1878 -1978

Editor's note: Joan Dilts Neumiller was the Carl Sandburg Centenary project coordinator, a job with so many details to keep track of it sometimes must have seemed like herding lemmings away from the sea. It was a large undertaking and she did it very well as the success of the Centenary attests.

There are a few hundred of the Centenary souvenir programs left. If you would like one, send your name and address to the Public Information Office at the College. The programs were produced by David Amor, editor, and Christie Ferguson Cirone, ‘75, designer, and printed by Phil Lass, ‘38, who has also printed volume 64 of this magazine.

By Joan Dilts Neumiller

The College community kept its mind off the cold and snows of January by hosting a month-long Carl Sandburg Centenary celebration to honor its long-time friend and adopted son (Lombard ’04) on what would have been the Pulitzer Prize poet’s 100th birthday, January 6. Centenary events to follow ranged from scholarly considerations to light-hearted folk-song. January 6 was proclaimed “Carl Sandburg Day” in the State of Illinois by Governor James Thompson. Birthday activities in Galesburg were shared by Knox, Carl Sandburg Community College, the Sandburg Birthplace, the Historical Society, the Philatelic Society, and other community groups. Opening ceremonies for the Centenary were scheduled at Knox at 11 in the morning. The day was mild, and even the bit of fog seemed appropriate, as the long line of notables we were to see during the month began to arrive: scholars, poets, journalists, TV personalities, folksingers, politicians - along with bus loads of school children, the old who once knew him and the young, ready to become acquainted. From the campus, the community, and from across the nation they came, to pay homage to Galesburg’s native son.

Newsman Howard K. Smith, a long-time friend of Carl Sandburg, was keynote speaker at the ceremonies, held before a near-capacity crowd in the Knox Memorial Gymnasium. Sharing the platform was Gwendolyn Brooks who succeeded Carl Sandburg as Illinois poet-laureate and has also earned a Pulitzer Prize for poetry. President Fox presided along with Douglas Wilson, director for the Centenary.

Howard K. Smith had been on the Knox campus with Sandburg in 1961, when they worked together on a CBS documentary...
 film, “Lincoln’s Prairie Years.” His address was warm and personal, full of fond memories and with anecdotes. Both he and Gwendolyn Brooks set the stage appropriately for the four Saturday symposia to come, dealing with various aspects of Sandburg’s life and work. It was to be the purpose of these symposia not only to re-evaluate Sandburg and his work, but also to explore the broader subject of the contributing role of the artist—poet, biographer, journalist—in a democratic society. Smith acknowledged the effect Sandburg’s massive, 6-volume biography on Abraham Lincoln had had on him in his younger days when he took precocious savings to buy the set, then proceeded to “read through it five times.”

Gwendolyn Brooks noted the social concern of much of his poetry and how it appeared to many in his day as “ear-splitting advocacy, as radical as modern art.” Many then were suspicious of the colloquial, the “common.” She chided gently that too few of us today have the faith, the hope, the courage, to speak out as Sandburg did when he wrote in “The People, Yes!”

The panders and the liars have violated and smurted it. Yet this reaching is alive yet for lights and keepsakes...
Margaret Thompson, history, brought to life the love, hatred, bitterness, imagina-
tions, perception, sarcasm and humor found in Carl Sandburg. The broad cross-
section of poems and songs selected ranged from those about children to those about
death, and concluded with a very
moving passage from the Lincoln biogra-
phy, A Hundred Years.

English professors and poets made up the panel for the Saturday symposium
chaired by Howard Wilson of Knox. Louis D. Rubin, from the University of North Car-
olina, used the poem "Limited," among others, to illustrate Sandburg's craftsman-
ship as a poet and explain the symbolism
of his work. He emphasized the importance
of sound in Sandburg's poetry and the need to read it aloud. Duke Univer-
sity's Bernard Duffey tendered a theory on
Sandburg's one-volume edition of
University of Massachusetts history pro-
fessor, concentrated on the subject of
"myth" and its significance for the citizen-
ship of a democracy—though he stressed
the importance of being able to separate
the fact from the fiction. Biographer John
Kaplan of Cambridge, Mass, drew some
very interesting parallels between Walt
Whitman (on whom he is currently doing
a biography) and Carl Sandburg. Both, he
delighted in "myth," and he extolled
the importance of myths in stirring
aspirations, reminding us of the old proverb:
"where there is no vision, the people per-
tah." Kaplan felt Sandburg was trying to
give us "a real man," the Lincoln which he
came to know and love.

No doubt about it, the opening session was set
for quite a discussion that afternoon when the
panelists were joined by Roger Bridges
from the State Historical Library, Victor
Hicken from Western Illinois University,
Maciejewski from the University of Illinois,
Chicago. When it was all over, those generally agreed that the opening panel was a
statement of how and "why" Carl Sandburg
was a "mythic" figure that left his mark on
Lincoln, and they were left with the feeling
that the "poetry and deep music" and the
imperial qualities of Lincoln's repu-
tation seem to inscribe a permanent place in
the annals of American Literature.

On the evening of January 21, a very un-
usual and delightful program of 19th-cen-
tury music was presented in Lincoln Song
book was staged in the new theatre at
Carl Sandburg College. The singing in the songs, minstrel songs, and war songs Lin-
cols knew and loved were presented by
candelight, concert-style in the fashion of the
1860s by "The New Hutchinson Fam-
ily Singers," a group of faculty and
students from the University of Illinois, Urb-
ana-Champaign. The group was led by
English professor James Hurst, who inter-
spersed the music with historical accounts
contemporary to Lincoln. Jeffrey Sand-
burg, '78, was a member of the cast.

14 - Knox Now

He celebrated ... the wonder of the human species.


donated by Don Kuntz, '51.

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