



Caxtonian

A Newsletter of The Caxton Club of Chicago

Volume II, No. 10

October 1994

Helga Sandburg—Always the Young Daughter—Remembers Her Father



Helga Sandburg by Josef Krames

I have always been interested in the creative impulse. What makes the poet want to write his poem? This is the simplest form of fiction, and a brief illumination of a point the poet wants to make. I was born into the house of a poet.

My father had a sort of self-appointed sense of destiny. The household felt it. My mother believed it. She had known it since she first met him. I was brought up with a familiar phrase, "Hush, Daddy's working." Instead of the ordinary excuses that mothers offer children for the strange or unruly behavior of their fathers, my mother said flatly with Junoesque assurance, "He is a genius."

What makes a poet? My father advised me more than once in my adolescent years, when I first began penning verse, to follow Paginini's formula: "Foil, solitude and prayer." He also told me there was nothing wrong with Emily Dickinson's way and I might do well to put them in a drawer for awhile. I said nothing. I was young, and meanwhile I watched the line of his books on the shelf grow longer. I had time. I did not

forget Rilke saying, "I must wait in stillness for the sounding. I know that if I force it it will not come at all. . . ."

My father in those early days had seen much of the country from the underside of boxcars. He was tall and strong and had a way of throwing his coat or sweater about him like a cape, so that Harry Hansen, writing of him in Chicago then said, "Carl stalked forward like another Ibsen in the streets of Christiana."

My memories are most of his voice. The baby hears it. The child. The growing girl. The woman. It lingers in memory. He did what he wished with it, so that in an auditorium of 10,000 the silence held its breath waiting for his next word.

Remembering is a dream that comes in waves. Have I heard the story or do I remember? I was two when Amy Lowell came to Elmhurst to visit my family. It was dusk and an early moon. There were fireflies and crickets about. My sisters and parents were on the porch and a stranger, a large woman, and her driver. Supper was over and everyone was listening to my father playing the guitar, singing the folksongs and spirituals he had garnered in his travels and that would be collected in the *American Songbag*.

After Amy Lowell left and returned to her home in Brookline, Massachusetts, she wrote a poem and sent it to Carl, saying, "I hope you will like it. Remember me to Mrs. Sandburg and my friends, Margaret, Janet and Helga." A part of Miss Lowell's poem goes:

To-night I saw an evening moon
Dodging between tree-branches
Through a singing silence of crickets,
And a man was singing songs
to a black-backed guitar. . . .

The moon stops a moment in a hole between leaves
And tells me a new story,

A story of a man who lives in a house with a pear-tree
before the door. . . .

There is a woman in the house, and children,
And, out beyond, the corn-fields are sleeping and the
trees are whispering to the fire-flies.

So I have seen the man's country, and heard his songs
before there are words to them.

And the moon said to me: "This now I give you," and
went on, stepping through the leaves,

And the man went on singing, picking out his
accompaniment softly on the black-
backed guitar.

My father was then 42 years old, sitting there in the moonlight, waiting for the rain, his wife believing in every word he wrote and said. He called her Paula, a name he had given her. She was Lilian Steichen when they met. Paula had written to him in the early days of their marriage, ". . . when you do arrive, what a company of geniuses you will be—poet, essayist, agitator, orator, organizer, lover of humanity. . . ."

Miss Lowell had known Carl's early books, *Chicago Poems* and *Cornhuskers*. That evening he had read poems from the manuscript of his next, *Smoke and Steel*. But we can leave them there in the moonlight with the guitar and the poetry. Miss Lowell and her driver will be on their way and my father and mother will settle in their chairs on the porch and talk into the night as the rain comes down. His voice will rise and fall in cadence, and there will be a murmuring now and then from my beautiful mother. The year is 1920. . . .

-Helga Sandburg

Editor's note: From a talk by Miss Sandburg, "Living with Poetry," which she gives to introduce her latest book of poetry, The Age of the Flower, published by The Kent State University Press, June 1994. She has graciously consented to permit publication of this excerpt, along with the photo. Miss Sandburg has published three volumes of poetry, four novels, and four works of non-fiction. We are honored and delighted to publish her essay in this month's Caxtonian, which features her father, the great Chicago author, Carl Sandburg.

Caxtonian

The Caxton Club of Chicago
Founded 1895



President - Robert Cotner
Vice-President - Thomas J. Joyce
Secretary - Karen A. Skubbish
Treasurer - Charles L. Miner
Historian - Frank J. Piehl
Archivist - Brother Michael Grace, S. J.
Past President - Hayward R. Blake

Council

Class of '95

Celia Hilliard
Bruce W. Hubbard
Susan F. Rossen
Alice D. Schreyer
Harry L. Stern

Class of '96

Robert L. Brooks
Eugene Hotchkiss III
Gretchen L. Lagana
Kathleen Lamb
Frank J. Piehl

Class of '97

Brother Michael Grace, S. J.
Edward Quattrocchi
Florence Shay
Glen N. Wiche
Robert Williams

First Fridays Program

Chairman - Edward Quattrocchi
Co-Chairman - Leonard Freedman

Secy - Bookkeeper - Jane Smith



Newsletter Staff

Publisher - Robert Cotner
Editor - Michael Braver

The *Caxtonian* is published monthly by The Caxton Club. The Caxton Club office is located in The Newberry Library, at 60 West Walton Street, Chicago, IL 60610. Telephone 312/943-9090, ext. 204. Permission to reprint material from the *Caxtonian* is not necessary if copy of reprint is mailed to The Caxton Club office and credit is given to the *Caxtonian*.

The *Caxtonian* is printed compliments of River Street Press, Aurora, Illinois
Fine Printers & Lithographers

Musings...

Long-time Caxtonian Ralph G. Newman and I attended the Carl Sandburg Memorial Service at Lincoln Memorial 27 years ago, September 17, 1967. Ralph sat on the dais near Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson. I sat on the back row of the audience, next to the street, with Norma and our two children.

My seating had these advantages: We were near the limousine that brought tall, tanned Lyndon Johnson to the event. And we could see the entire gathering, a perfect situation for the amateur photographer that I am. I have, in fact, some fine photos of President Johnson, Archibald MacLeish, Mark VanDoren, and others, taken both during and following the ceremony honoring Chicagoan Carl Sandburg, who had died on July 22.

The Washington Post reported that President Johnson "led tributes attended by 5600 people." The President said of Sandburg, "He was able to communicate the restless energy that has vitalized and stimulated our nation." Ralph Newman had had a hand in creating the President's speech, I recently learned.

In making his own speech the next day at the memorial service for Sandburg in Chicago, Ralph used one sentence which he had contributed to the President's speech, and a Chicago newspaper commented that Newman quoted the President. Ralph chuckled about the matter when we talked of it last month.

I did not know Ralph then. In fact, I did not meet him until the August 1994 Caxton dinner meeting. But we were brought together unawares in 1967 by the determination of mutual commitment, two book lovers for whom Carl Sandburg was—is—a very special human being in the scheme of things, word-wise and book-wise, in the nation.

This Chicagoan who gave the nation and the world its first tart taste of Chicago in his marvelous urban and prairie poems of the 1920s and 1930s: this Illinoisan who wrote history so poetically that we believed we were reading our own national epic and who, through this epic, taught us to love the emerging Lincoln, a man of the land and of the people: this American who, in his wanderings to and fro across the land, gathered and gave back in his own gentle way the music of the earth and her inhabitants: this troubadour for whom language and music so fused in his work that we hardly knew the difference when they came from his lips and pen: This Carl Sandburg, who brought us close to the very soul of the nation as few others—maybe only Lincoln himself—have done.

It was therefore altogether fitting and proper to honor him before the memorial of the Great Emancipator in the nation's capital, with the President there to eulogize him, his friends, MacLeish and VanDoren, to offer their praises, and two Caxtonians—well, one Caxtonian and one future Caxtonian—to celebrate with his family and friends the genuine uncommonality of this truly common man—Carl Sandburg.

Robert Cotner
President

Three Chicagoans Remember Carl Sandburg . . .

Carl Sandburg — Entrance and Exit

In my memoirs, *To Life*, I devote whole chapters to only two persons outside of my family—President Truman and Carl Sandburg. They were much alike in several respects, and my relations with both had unforgettable high points.

I first met Sandburg when I was an eager child in an orphanage. One of the caretakers then decided that I was a poet and took me to meet Sandburg in his office in the rickety old Daily News building. He was then the movie critic of the newspaper, successor to another poet/movie critic, Vachel Lindsay. He did not patronize me then or later.

Thereafter I saw Sandburg often throughout the many years that followed, culminating after his death when I presided at the Chicago memorial meeting for him.

I cherish most his saying of me that “Elmer Gertz . . . fears no dragons.” Indeed, I did not, even challenging Sandburg himself on more than one occasion. He, too, was a dragon slayer, and I am proud that a biography of Sandburg is dedicated to me [Joseph Haas and Gene Lovitz, *Carl Sandburg: A Pictorial Biography* (Putnam, 1967)].

I cherish his appearing as a star witness at one of my most famous cases, the parole hearing of Nathan Leopold one cold and icy day in February, 1958. He gave a kind of historic sweep to the occasion as all felt at the time. He told the members of the Parole Board that they would become great historic figures if they dared to release Leopold.

Carl’s eldest daughter, Margaret, stayed with us for a week, while she, assisted by my wife, was doing research on her famous father, and we augmented her knowledge of him.

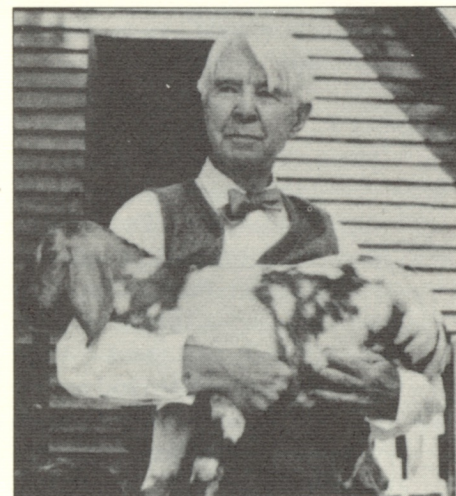
There is much more, as I tell in *To Life*, and it all culminated in the Chicago memorial meeting. Ralph Newman, with whom I had visited Carl on several occasions, made the principal address, capturing the essence of a man he knew so well as a kind of successor to Abraham Lincoln. Fanny Butcher, dean of Chicago’s literary critics, spoke, too. We all talked of a living person, rather than a dead man.

It served to remind us that Carl was an inseparable part of Chicago. He had written the poetic classic that summed up the city. He had been a part of so much that meant so much to all of us. It was possibly epitomized on another occasion when I presided at an informal luncheon when Sandburg and Frank Lloyd Wright both attended and talked. They had the throbbing voices

of great organs. Their sounds still reverberate.

Communities, such as ancient Athens, sometimes get the residents that they deserve. Chicago certainly had such good fortune

—Elmer Gertz



Carl Sandburg - Courtesy The Newberry Library

Incidents in the Life and Times of Carl Sandburg

I first met Carl Sandburg in 1933. We became close friends and remained friends until his death in 1967. I have many fond recollections of him—some comical, some serious, some whimsical.

He was considered “tight with a buck” by many who did not realize that he was almost 50 years old before he was earning more than \$100 a week, and he had a wife and three daughters to support.

On one occasion, I recall our taking a taxi from my office on Chestnut Street to the Civic Opera building. He insisted on paying the fare, which was 95 cents. He handed the driver a dollar and said, “Keep the change.” The driver, who recognized him, said, “You keep the nickel, Mr. Sandburg; I think you need it more than I do.”

On the other side of the ledger, I remember one midnight in New York, Sandburg and I were crossing Fifth Avenue during a light rain. When we reached the traffic island, he stopped and asked about a woman who had done some typing for him. She had a throat affliction which caused her to speak with a perpetual hoarse voice. I said she was getting along, working hard, and not complaining. He reached into his pocket and pulled out two \$50 dollar bills and gave them to me, saying, “Give these to her when you next see her; tell her I was thinking of her and wish her well.”

Life around Carl Sandburg was always interesting, at times funny, but never dull.

—Ralph Geoffrey Newman

... His Friendships and His Legacies

Carl Sandburg Yet Lives through His Books

Carl Sandburg, who died July 22, 1967, is still alive in the way only a writer or an artist can be—in the words of the pages of his books and in the souls of those who have grown by reading them.

Sandburg, 80 years after arriving in the city, remains its most durable, its quintessential author. Even as time wears away at some aspects of his contributions and even his most famous poem, “Chicago,” he hangs in there as a poet, a Lincoln scholar, a children’s storyteller, and a novelist.

The measure of Sandburg today lies, by one accounting, in *Books in Print*. The most recent edition of it shows 18 of his works still in print. These include: Several of his books on Lincoln, a wide variety of his poetry, some of his children’s books, *The American Songbag*, and two of his autobiographical titles, including *Remembrance Rock* and *Ever the Winds of Chance*. In addition *Books in Print* also listed 15 books about Sandburg and his works, most of them biographies. All in all, both are strong lists, and together are an impressive argument that Carl Sandburg is still an American institution.

Sandburg’s books are his testament, an extraordinary one. They fall into several categories:

His books of poetry. These begin with *Chicago Poems*. They also include *Cornhuskers*; *Smoke and Steel*, *Slabs of the Sunburnt West*, *Good Morning, America*, *The People, Yes*; *Complete Poems*, and *Complete Poems: Revised and Expanded*.

East Coast critics were often harsh toward this man whose language and style were so intertwined with the Midwest and Chicago. Especially early

in his career, he was sneered by those critics who saw their mission to be protecting the King’s English and classic poetry. He was neither the purist nor the traditionalist they loved to praise.

The *Boston Transcript*, for example, called his *Chicago Poems*, “ill-regulated speech that has neither verse nor prose rhythms” and said he had “a strong unpleasant imagination.” Other critics claimed Sandburg could not distinguish between prose matter and poetic material and called his writings, “assaults on the English language.”

Sandburg was direct, honest, and reflective. He liked words and used them effectively and could please his audience as a result.

Today, Sandburg is critiqued for being too liberal by some and for not having been radical enough by others. The truth is he went both ways. His book, *Good Morning, America* (1928), was complacent, whereas his *The People, Yes* (1936) has been called one of the great statements on Democracy, radical in its belief in the American people and their dreams. He seemed to be critical of war in many of his poems, yet he served during the Spanish-American War and went out of his way to support his country’s efforts in both World War I and World War II.

Some of his Lincoln books. His six-volume biography of Lincoln is still in print.

In recent years, some who have evaluated his momentous and lengthy life of Abraham Lincoln have been smugly critical of it. Instead of focusing on the extensive research he did and extraordinary way in which he portrayed the growth of Abraham Lincoln as a human

being, critics see the books’ weaknesses. One of these is his often-cited acceptance of various stories and materials about Lincoln considered by other scholars as apocryphal—including some of the stories about Ann Rutledge. His first two volumes of Lincoln biography, *The Prairie Years*, were published in 1926, and the second four books, *The War Years*, in 1939. Lincoln has, since and, to an extent, because of Sandburg’s work, undergone much critical evaluation. His work is still a standard, a benchmark for them all. More important, his portrayal of Lincoln’s growth as a moral force in history remains unique in biography.

Folksongs. The two books, *Songs of America* and *The American Songbag*, played a remarkable role in the preservation of American folksongs and in their introduction into the American mainstream.

Some of his children’s books. *Rootabaga Stories* and *Rootabaga Pigeons* are still considered significant, even classic, American fairytales. Sandburg also published enough children’s poetry, stories, and other materials to fill a book for children entitled *The Sandburg Treasury*.

Carl Sandburg followed his discovery of indigenous peoples of America by using their voices in such forms as folksongs, short and book-length poems, children’s stories, autobiographical materials, and Lincoln stories. He was diverse almost to a fault, but his diversity also proved a strength as it fulfilled a remarkable American genius. Sandburg must be looked at, one poem, one book, one work at a time. It is thus that he lives, an important American artist among us 27 years after his death.

Centennial Goal for Caxtonians: 300 Members in 1995

Tom Joyce issued the challenge at the August dinner meeting: Let's get 20 new members during the centennial year—and be at 280. This will place The Caxton Club as the second largest bibliophilic society in the United States, behind The Grolier Club of New York City, which has 640 members. Currently, The Caxton Club is slightly behind The Rowfant Club of Cleveland, which has 260—all male—members. The Philoblion Club of Philadelphia has 170 members, and the Odd Volumes of Boston has 130 members.

The Council reiterates the challenge: The Caxton Club has the most democratic membership of all of the book societies in the nation. Members are challenged to fill the ranks with others of like-minds from the Greater Chicagoland area—and get the membership to—and beyond—300 during the centennial year.

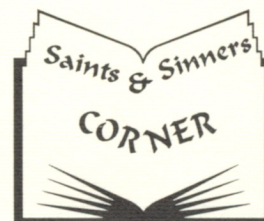
Prospective members are requested to attend two meetings before being nominated by letter to the Council by a Caxtonian. A seconding letter by another Caxtonian is required, and the Council will act immediately on the membership. A prospective member, duly nominated, becomes an official member when the first year's dues are paid.

We Get a Note of Thanks . . .

Dear Bob,

Thank you for the copies of the [August] *Caxtonian*. I like what you said about Father. I'm sending copies to my Sister's three children . . .

Louise Parrington Tucker
(Daughter of Vernon Louis Parrington)



Caxton Books... Andrew Cahan: Bookseller, LTD of Chapel Hill, NC lists the following Caxton Club books (Catalogue 43);, which are provided for information to interested Caxtonians.

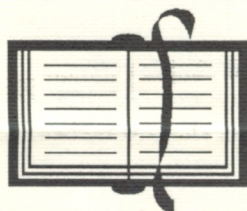
Brown, Lloyd A. and Howard H. Peckham, editors. *Revolutionary War Journals of Henry Dearborn, 1775-1783*. 1939. \$200.

Applegate, Jesse A. *A Day with the Cow Column in 1832. Recollections of My Boyhood*. 1934. \$400.

Lowell, James Russell. *Il Pesceballo: Opera in One Act*. 1899. \$40.

Head, Franklyn H. *Shakespeare's Insomnia & The Causes Thereof*. 1926. \$100.

The Caxton Chronicles



Carl Sandburg was not a member of The Caxton Club, but he did have a definite connection with

the club and wrote one of its publications. The connection was by way of Caxtonian and Lincoln collector, Oliver Barrett.

Oliver Rogers Barrett was born in Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1873. He received his legal training at the University of Michigan, later attended Lincoln Memorial University in Tennessee, and eventually moved his law practice from Peoria to Chicago in 1905.

He became interested in Abraham Lincoln at an early age and assembled one of the best collections of Lincolniana in the 20th century. He joined The Caxton Club in 1921, served on the

Council (1931-48), and was elected president in 1945.

When Sandburg was gathering source material for his biography of Lincoln, he sought out Barrett, who shared unique primary documents with him. They became close friends. When Barrett died in 1950, Sandburg delivered a touching tribute to his friend. It was printed as a broadside by The Caxton Club and distributed free of charge to the members. Sandburg's words are worth recalling.

"For the journey on which he has gone, Oliver R. Barrett was prepared. He wrote a few weeks ago of the summons at the door, how it might be either 'the postman's knock or the sunset call.' This time it was the sunset call.

"As a philosopher and a man of faith he was ready for the departure. Few strong men crowd into their years such a variety

of bright fellowships in the living present and of grave communions with those vanished into the past.

"His intelligent toil and devotion in his favorite pursuit assure him of being long and lovingly remembered beyond our immediate circle who knew his laughter, affection and generosity. His memory will keep green in generations beyond ours. He had austerity and humility, and in the realm he has entered it might not be fantastic to envision him saying, 'Here, oh Lord, is the manuscript of my life—do with it what you will.'

"With reverence today we give our salutations and farewells to the face and form so silent now forever."

Sandburg's eloquent tribute to his friend lives on for Caxtonians as a treasured memory of both outstanding men.

Book Marks

Luncheon Programs

All meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th floor of the First National Bank of Chicago, Madison & Clark, Chicago. Luncheon and discussion, 12:30pm.

October 7.

Caxtonian Dr. Peter Stanlis, Distinguished Professor of Humanities Emeritus, Rockford College, will tell of Robert Frost, a personal friend of 25 years, in a talk entitled, "Robert Frost, Poet and Conversationist."

November 4.

Elmer Gertz, lawyer, author, book collector and fellow Caxtonian, offers a few of his personal relationships with a fascinating and somewhat notorious trio of literary figures, including Frank Harris, Henry Miller and George Sylvester Ziereck, in a presentation entitled, "Three Literary Voyeurs."

*Ed Quattrocchi
Leonard Freedman*

Bindery Issues Catalogue

Caxtonian Rhoda Hertzberg Clark has issued through The Monastery Hill Bindery a stunning new illustrated catalog, featuring—as the preface says—"a wide selection of fine Monastery Hill leather bindings, many with inlaid autograph letters and superbly extra-illustrated, which has been assembled from prominent libraries and collections throughout the United States and Europe." Among the listings are two Caxton Club publications:

Uzanne, Octave. *The French Bookbinders of the Eighteenth Century*. Chicago: The Caxton Club, 1904. \$850.

Kenyon, Frederick G. *Ancient Books and Modern Discoveries*. Chicago: The Caxton Club, 1927. \$500.

There is, as well, a William Caxton listing:

The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints. London: J.M. Dent and Co., Aldine House, 1900. 6 vols bound as 3. \$450.

Monastery Hill is one of Chicago's oldest and finest book binderies, begun in 1868 by Ernst Hertzberg. A detailed story is planned on this Chicago institution for the *Caxtonian*, but until that appears, Caxtonians would do well to look carefully at this splendid publication, recently issued.

Dinner Programs

All meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th floor of the First National Bank of Chicago, Madison & Clark, Chicago. Spirits-5pm; Dinner-6pm; Lecture-7pm

October 19.

Gregory Carlson, SJ, will talk on "My Collections of Aesop's and Other Fables."

November 21.

David Redden, Senior Vice President, Sotheby's, will speak on "Attic Archeology: A Tale of Great Treasures Found in Unlikely Places."

Tom Joyce

Reservations for luncheon programs are requested. Reservations for dinner programs are required. Please make them by calling 312/943-9090, ext. 204, no later than 24 hours prior to the event.

The First National Bank of Chicago's parking garage, 40 South Clark Street, offers a special parking rate after 5pm to guests of the Mid-Day Club. When you leave, please tell the parking attendant you were at the Mid-Day Club and your parking fee will be \$7, or \$5 if validated at meeting..

THE CAXTON CLUB



FOUNDED 1895

The Caxton Club of Chicago
60 West Walton Street
Chicago, IL 60610

