

# Carl Sandburg Home

National Historic Site  
North Carolina

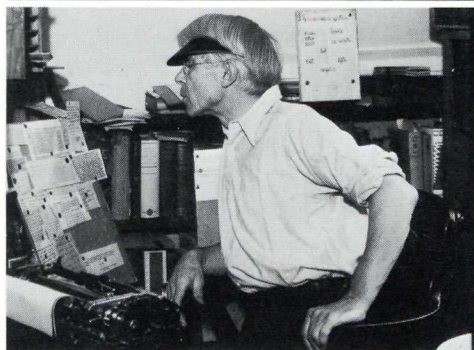


June Glenn, Jr.

## A Place to Write—and to Raise Goats

When Carl Sandburg first came to the mountains of Western North Carolina in 1945 and stood on the porch of the main house of Connemara, he knew that the place truly suited him. And this poet, author, lecturer, minstrel, onetime political activist, and social thinker settled down and spent the last 22 years of his long, productive life on this Flat Rock farm. Mrs. Sandburg had discovered the Western North Carolina mountain area for the family and had become enchanted by the beautiful environment and gentle climate. She looked at several places, but Connemara, the old Smyth place, captured her imagination. The farm had everything the family wanted, including ample pasture for the goats and seclusion for writing. The house and farm had a long history—an ironic history, in fact, for the biographer for Abraham Lincoln. The property originally had been the summer home of Christopher Gustavus Memminger of Charleston, S.C. He

built the main residence around 1838 and enjoyed the balmy summers away from Charleston's heat and humidity. He later became the first Secretary of the Confederate Treasury and served in that capacity from 1861 to 1864. After his death the property passed to the Gregg family and then to Capt. Ellison Smyth, a textile tycoon. His heirs sold it to the Sandburgs in 1945. The Sandburgs then moved from Michigan to the 97-hectare (240-acre) farm with their three daughters and two grandchildren, their library of more than 10,000 volumes, all their personal belongings, and the Chikaming goat herd. On October 17, 1968, Congress established the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site to be administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The buildings, beautiful rolling pastures, and mountain woods now belong to the people Carl Sandburg wrote about for so many years.



California Museum of Photography



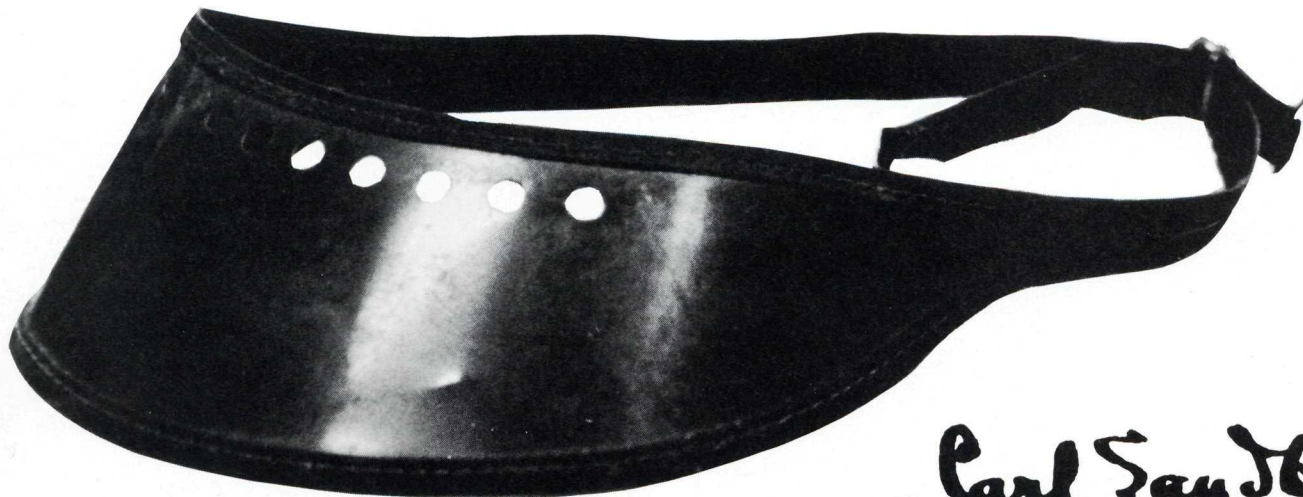
Tom Walters



Like most of us, Carl Sandburg was shaped by his environment. He was born January 6, 1878, in Galesburg, Ill., the son of Swedish immigrants, and the small town, the prairie, the plain life of the Midwest, and the austerity and hard work of his youth all reappeared later in his writing. Further molded by several years of odd jobs, by travels west and east as hobo and Spanish-American War soldier, and by active political and social reform work, Sandburg was to emerge as one of the great 20th-century voices of the evolving American experience. This "poet laureate" of the people sang of pioneers, cowboys, lumberjacks, railroad section gangs, and steamboat crews. He observed and commemorated the American people, their folk wisdom, heroes, ballads, hopes, and worth.

Sandburg left school after the eighth grade to work and to travel. In 1898, however, he returned home to study at Lombard College. It was there that he seriously began writing. His first poems appeared in print in 1904, but he did not achieve any real success until 1914, when nine poems, including "Chicago," were published. In 1916, at age 38, his first book of poetry, *Chicago Poems*, was published. During his work with the Socialist Reform Movement in the early 1900s Sandburg married Lilian "Paula" Steichen, who shared his interests and became a strong and positive force in his work and life. To support his growing family, Sandburg wrote for several newspapers and spent the longest time, 13 years, with the *Chicago Daily News*. But he continued to write in more and more

fields. His two-volume biography, *Abraham Lincoln: the Prairie Years*, appeared in 1926 and established Sandburg as a biographer. In 1932, he left full-time newspaper work to pursue his literary interests: poetry, biography, autobiography, history, children's literature, books on American folk music, and a novel. The Sandburgs spent the next few years at a lakeside home in Harbert, Mich., and he produced, among other things, *Abraham Lincoln: the War Years*, the four-volume set for which he won the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1940. While he was writing, his wife and daughter Helga began raising dairy goats, and their herd became one of the finest in the country. Because of this ever-expanding goat activity and Michigan's rigorous climate, the Sandburgs moved to North Carolina.



Carl Sandburg



# Life at Connemara

The Sandburg years at Connemara were productive ones for the man of letters. Among other things, in 1948 he published his only novel, *Remembrance Rock*, which traced the American epic from Plymouth Rock to World War II. In 1953 his autobiography, *Always the Young Strangers*, was published. This book centered on his youth in the small town of Galesburg, Ill. Add to that several volumes of history and poetry, including the *Complete Poems*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1951, and one can see that Sandburg remained a prolific writer in his last years. Life at Connemara was busy, too, for the other family members. Mrs. Sandburg continued to breed and care for her large, prize-winning goat herd, which numbered 200 at one time, and she ran the farm business, leaving her husband free to write. Margaret helped her father, tended the library, painted, and worked in her flower garden. Janet helped care for the farm, which was especially active during the years of Helga's residence and also included a large vegetable garden, an orchard, cows, chickens, hogs, and cheese and butter making. Grandchildren played endlessly in woods and pastures and rode horses. It was an idyllic but busy life for an active family, and together they enjoyed Connemara for 22 years.

Sandburg kept late hours. He usually began working, cigar in hand, in his cluttered, upstairs work room late in the evening and continued until the wee hours of the morning. He would sleep until late morning. After a light lunch, he would spend the afternoons reading and answering correspondence in the dining room, in a downstairs study, on the front porch overlooking the mountains, or on the lawn. There were frequent guests at Connemara—daughter Helga and the grandchildren; Mrs. Sandburg's famous brother, photographer Edward Steichen; well known personalities; unknown passers-by; or just admirers. With or without guests, dinner was a social gathering of the family. Afterwards Sandburg would read to those present or sing with them. In the afternoon or late at night, Sandburg could be found alone, with Paula, or with daughters or friends walking along the winding entrance drive or on one of the paths through the woods. Sandburg's life ended here on July 22, 1967, as it had begun, in an agrarian setting. In its eulogy, *The New York Post* said: "Carl Sandburg was the poet of the American dream and the American reality. His poetry has the freedom of prose, his prose the quality of poetry, and through it all ran what has been called the sense of being American."

## Visiting the Park

Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site is located in Flat Rock, N.C., 42 kilometers (26 miles) south of Asheville and 4.8 kilometers (3 miles) south of Hendersonville. Turn off U.S. 25 onto Little River Road at the Flat Rock Playhouse and go to the park's Visitor Information Center on your left. After viewing the orientation exhibits there, walk to the main house for a guided tour. Access assistance for the handicapped is provided.

We suggest that after you tour the house you stroll about the farm at your leisure and refresh yourself as Sandburg used to do not too many years ago. Use the guide below or simply wander about the paths wherever you wish.

As you tour the grounds, please be cautious around ponds and lakes and when standing on the rock



face atop Big Glassy Mountain. Be wary of farm animals that can bite or kick. For your safety, stay on established walks and paths, do not climb fences, and be alert for snakes and poison ivy. If you have a question, ask a ranger.

The park is open daily except for Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. For more information about the park, write to the superintendent, whose address is Flat Rock, NC 28731.

National Park Handbook 117, *Carl Sandburg Home*, provides a biographical essay about Sandburg by his granddaughter, Paula Steichen, and detailed guide and travel information. Copies may be obtained from the park or by writing to the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

☆ GPO: 1983-381-578/258

## Touring the Grounds

- 1 **Main House** Visit the information center in the basement and take a guided tour of the house, which became the Sandburg family home in 1945.
- 2 **Family Garage**
- 3 **Chickenhouse**
- 4 **Pumphouse**
- 5 **Springhouse** Mrs. Sandburg and Helga used this old springhouse for curing goat cheese.
- 6 **Woodshed**
- 7 **Swedish House** Sandburg stored magazines, books, and other research materials here.
- 8 **Tenant House**
- 9 **Gazebo**
- 10 **Goat or Donkey House** This building provided shelter for goats or the pet Sicilian donkey often kept in this "front pasture."
- 11 **Icehouse Site**
- 12 **Farm Manager's House**
- 13 **Greenhouse**
- 14 **Barn Pumphouse**
- 15 **Isolation Quarters** This structure and adjoining two lots quartered sick goats.
- 16 **Barn Garage** Farm equipment was stored here.
- 17 **Vegetable Garden** Mrs. Sandburg raised vegetables for her family and the herdsman's family.
- 18 **Barnyard and Corncrib** Milking does were kept in the barn with access to the barnyard at night and when the pastures were out of season.
- 19 **Buck Kid Quarters** Buck kids were housed here until they were shipped to new homes.
- 20 **Main Goat Barn** Does were housed, fed, and milked regularly in this barn, which also had quarters for doe kids.
- 21 **Horse Barn**
- 22 **Cowshed**
- 23 **Storage Shed**
- 24 **Silo** The Sandburgs left the silo standing even though they did not use it.
- 25 **Milkhouse** Milk was separated and bottled and butter churned in this building.

