

CONNEMARA, CARL SANDBURG HOME

NORTH CAROLINA

The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings

Carl Sandburg was one of our most versatile American writers. His publications included poetry, history, biography, stories for children, a novel, an autobiography, and a collection of folk songs. He was the only American to receive Pulitzer Prizes in two different fields: one in history for Abraham Lincoln: The War Years published in 1939, and one in poetry for Complete Poems published in 1950. The current critical assessment of him is that he will stand as one of the major poets of the 20th century.

Sandburg lived at Connemara Farm in Flat Rock, North Carolina from 1945 to 1967, longer than at any other place. It was there that he wrote his autobiography, Always the Young Strangers; his only novel, Remembrance Rock; his one-volume Abraham Lincoln; and several books of verse. His Complete Poems, some of which were written at Connemara, earned him the Pulitzer Prize in 1951. The Sandburg house, built in 1838 by Christopher G. Memminger, Secretary of the Treasury for the Confederacy (1861-1864), contains all the Sandburg personal and literary effects. The 241-acre estate is owned by Mrs. Carl Sandburg, who continues to make her home there.

Concessara (Carl Sandburg Farm, 1945 - 1967)

Location: One-fourth mile west of the Post office in Flat Rock,
North Carolina.
Approach is from the south via Little River Road.

Ownership: Mrs. Carl Sandburg

Statement of Significance

Carl Sandburg lived at Concessara Farm in Flat Rock, North Carolina, from 1945 to 1967, longer than at any other place. It was there that he wrote his autobiography Always The Young Strangers, his only novel Remembrance Rock, his one volume Abraham Lincoln, and several books of verse. His Complete Poems, some of which were written at Concessara, earned him the Pulitzer Prize in 1951. The Sandburg house, built in 1838 by Christopher G. Manning, Secretary of the Treasury for the Confederacy (1861 - 1864), contains all the Sandburg personal and literary effects. The 241-acre estate is owned by Mrs. Carl Sandburg, who continues to make her home there.

History

In 1940 the Sandburgs began to consider the possibility of a move. A less severe winter was desirable, and they needed a more suitable place to nurture their expanding goat herd. The outbreak of World War II delayed plans, but in 1943 the time was right. Mrs. Sandburg, her mother Mrs. Steichen, and her daughter Helga constituted the reconnaissance party. The Sandburgs had already limited the possibilities to the area along the Appalachian range between Virginia and Florida, due in part to the fact that the poet's publishing contacts were in the east.

On their trip the three women traveled through Virginia, Tennessee, and the Carolinas. When they came to the mountains in western North Carolina, Paula Sandburg felt immediately at home. A real estate agent showed the party several places, and one of them was the Connemara Farm in Flat Rock. A few miles south of Hendersonville, the property stood 2,300 feet above sea level. Bordering on it was Big Glassy, a smooth upward slope rising 500 feet in almost perpendicular fashion. Beyond it was the Appalachian range of the Great Smokies. Sandburg told his wife that the choice of their new location was hers, but she insisted that her husband visit Connemara before the decision was made. Sandburg loved it too, and Connemara became theirs. They delayed departure to their new home, however, until the end of the war in 1945.

The estate consisted of 241.18 acres, about two-thirds of them covered with trees. Framed in century old pine and oak, the farmhouse was a graceful example of Southern rural architecture of the mid-19th century. Two stories with an attic and a large ground floor, it had been constructed in 1838 by Christopher G. Memminger, who later served as the Secretary of the Treasury for the Confederacy. Memminger called the estate "Rock Hill," but the next owner, Captain Ellington Adger Smythe, changed it to "Connemara," apparently taking the name from a district in Western Ireland.

The Sandburgs were quick to settle in the house and invest it with their own personality. On the ground floor were the parlor, dining room, and the kitchen. Upstairs were four rooms leading off a central hall. In all of the rooms, except the kitchen, were books and more books. On the

main floor were book shelves reaching to the ceiling. While the volumes were not alphabetized or catalogued, there was some form to their arrangement. On the ground floor were novels, essays, biographies, and works on labor and trade unionism. Upstairs were poetry, criticism, and belles-lettres. Scattered throughout were hundreds of books on American history. In his study Sandburg kept all his published works, including foreign translations. Here he also had books on American folk music, which he had used in researching The American Songbag.

Sandburg usually worked late into the night, and, consequently, he was a late riser. He normally came downstairs about noon. Paula and the three girls, however, were up and about much earlier, for there were farm chores to do. The Sandburgs continued to develop their herd of Nubian and Toggenburg goats. The animals furnished the family with ample milk, cheese, and butter. A dairy in nearby Hendersonville purchased excess produce.

Sandburg spent his afternoons greeting callers and answering correspondence, and he often took hikes in the woods or climbed Big Glassy Mountain. Sandburg especially loved the walk in the meadows and on mountain trails. He gave names to physical features he encountered on his trips. The path around Little Glassy Mountain became Menninger Trail. Two great oaks he admired he named after Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee.

Connemara had much to offer in the way of natural beauty. There were many varieties of trees: red oak, white oak, chestnut oak, black oak, hickory, birch, walnut, yellow poplar, maple, gum, cherry, beech, eastern white pine, and pitch pine. Below them grew flowering dogwood, rhododendron, mountain laurel, huckleberry, winterberry, and persimmon.

Around the house some exotic species flourished, including bamboo, chinese elm, chinese maple, pink dogwood, boxwood, and ginkgo. The estate was home to a large number of wild creatures as well. Birds, chipmunks, gray squirrels, raccoons, foxes, and bobcats populated the area. Two small artificial lakes held bass, sunfish, frogs, turtles, watersnakes, and salamanders.

Sandburg continued to write at Commemora until his death in 1967.

In 1943 he authored Rainbow Road, a sprawling novel which tries to capture the American experience from the founding of the Nation to the present. His Complete Poems, which included his earlier poems and others written at Commemora, appeared in 1950 and earned him his second Pulitzer Prize. Always The Young Strangers, his autobiography through his service in the Spanish-American War, was published in 1952 and has been recognized as one of the best of its genre written by an American. Among other works completed at Commemora were A Lincoln Preface (1953), the one volume Abraham Lincoln (1954), The Sandburg Range (1957), Harvest Poems (1960), and Wind Song (1960).

Condition

Commemora is located in an area that, while partially rural, is fast becoming residential. The house has perfect integrity and contains all of Sandburg's personal and literary effects. Mrs. Sandburg lives on the property. She has indicated a desire to donate the estate to the Federal Government, and early in 1968, a master plan study of the area was completed by the National Park Service.

References: Harry Golden, Carl Sandburg (New York, 1961); Richard Crowder, Carl Sandburg (New York, 1964); Gladys Zohn Pfromm, Carl Sandburg, Poet and Patriot (Minneapolis, 1963); Edward Streichen, ed., Sandburg: Photographic View of Carl Sandburg (New York, 1966); Joseph Haas and Gene Levitz, Carl Sandburg: A Pictorial Biography (New York, 1967); Walter Blair, Theodore Fontberger, Randall Stewart, and James E. Miller, Jr., The Literature of the United States, 3rd ed., (Chicago, 1966), 3, p. 941. Sculley Bradley, Richard Crown Beatty, and E. Hudson Long, The American Tradition in Literature, 3rd ed. (New York, 1967); Louis Untermeyer, Lives of the Poets (New York, 1965); Carl Sandburg, Always The Young Strangers (New York, 1952); Letter from Mrs. Sandburg to Representative Roy A. Taylor, September 27, 1967, Commonsense, Survey Files; Adda George, "The Calceburg Birthplace of Carl Sandburg," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (Winter, 1952), pp. 300-05; Interview of Lauren W. Goff by John D. McDermott, Calceburg, January 18, 1968; Mrs. Wilson Henderson, "The Little-Known Mrs. Carl Sandburg," (Printed by the Oliver Wendell Holmes Club, 1962); Telephone interview of Gene Levitz by John D. McDermott, January 18, 1968; Information also supplied by the Michigan Historical Commission, the Illinois State Historical Society, the Chicago Historical Society, the Elmhurst (Illinois) Historical Commission, and the Maywood Public Library, Maywood, Illinois. Letter from Laurence Sizor to Helen Baker, January 27, 1968, Barbert, Michigan, copy in Survey Files; Sheila Wolfe, "Sandburg Home Altered Little," Chicago Tribune, February 4, 1968.