

## ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: Carl Sandburg in Elmhurst

Carl Sandburg was born on January 6, 1878 in Galesburg, Illinois. After a variety of jobs, studies at Lombard College in Galesburg, and service in the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of Illinois Volunteers during the Spanish-American War, Sandburg moved to the Chicago area and made a name for himself with his first book, *Chicago Poems*, in 1915. Sandburg started working for the *Chicago Daily News* circa 1918 reviewing movies, covering labor news, and eventually writing a feature column.



331 S. York Street, 1940.  
The Sandburg family home 1919-1928. M2015.1.32

Carl Sandburg and his wife, Lilian Steichen Sandburg (also known as Paula), moved to Elmhurst with their three daughters in 1919 and lived at 331 S. York Street until 1928. During his time in Elmhurst Sandburg wrote his first book for children, *Rootabaga Stories*, based on stories he told his daughters Margaret, Janet and Helga. It was followed by *Rootabaga Pigeons* in 1923. After publishing a two-volume biography, *Abraham Lincoln, the Prairie Years*, in 1926, Sandburg compiled a collection of 280 ballads and folksongs from all regions of the United States in the *American Songbag* in 1927. During his time in Elmhurst, Sandburg wrote several poetry books: *Smoke and Steel*, *Slabs of the Sunburnt West*, *Selected Poems and Good Morning, America*. He also struck up a strong friendship with [Eugene V. Debs](#), the perennial Socialist candidate for U.S. president, who frequented the [Lindlahr Sanitarium](#) just a few blocks away from Sandburg's home.



Carl Sandburg, left, visiting students at Sandburg Jr. High School, 1960. M2011.1.12

Sandburg lectured frequently while living in Elmhurst, and he traveled extensively presenting folksong concerts and reciting his poetry and prose. The Sandburg family left Elmhurst in 1928 and moved to Michigan. Their house at 331 S. York Street is no longer standing, demolished for a parking lot in the 1960s.

Carl Sandburg returned to Elmhurst in May 1960 when Elmhurst Junior High School, located at 345 E. St. Charles Road, was rededicated and renamed Carl Sandburg Junior High School. During Mr. Sandburg's remarks to the students at the dedication he said, "You may become the

*witnesses of the finest and brightest era known to mankind. The nations over the globe shall have music, music instead of murder. It is possible. That is my hope and prayer –for you and for the nation.”*

Sandburg died in North Carolina in 1967. The Elmhurst History Museum presented an exhibit profiling the poet in 2013 entitled “Carl Sandburg in Elmhurst.”

*By Nancy Wilson, Elmhurst History Museum staff, Updated October 2021*