

HISTORY

Carl Sandburg College is named for Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and Lincoln biographer Carl Sandburg, who was born and raised in Galesburg. The son of Swedish immigrant parents, Sandburg was born Jan. 6, 1878, in a small cottage near the rail yards where his father worked. The cottage, on Galesburg's south side, is preserved today as an Illinois historical site.

Sandburg published numerous volumes, including "Chicago Poems"; "Cornhuskers"; "Rootabaga Stories"; "The People, Yes"; "Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and The War Years"; and "Always the Young Strangers." He received two Pulitzer Prizes – in history, for his "Abraham Lincoln: The War Years" (1939), and in poetry, for his "Collected Poems" (1951). The central theme throughout Sandburg's works is his belief in the essential goodness and drive of the common man and woman. His writing is full of optimism for the future of the human race.

Carl Sandburg and his mentor, Professor Philip Green Wright of Lombard College, also located in Galesburg, envisioned the establishment of "a People's Industrial College, where people of all ages would be taught, in addition to literature, philosophy, sociology, science, music, and art, something about industry and farming, such as agriculture, horticulture, bee culture, cabinet-making, metalworking, pottery, architecture, printing and publishing, and bookbinding." (From Margaret Sandburg's unpublished manuscript Biography of Carl Sandburg.) The two men felt that this "People's College" should be located by a river or on a lake.

Though Sandburg died in 1967, the College's ties with its namesake remain strong. In 1979, the late Helga Sandburg, Carl's youngest daughter, was awarded the College's first honorary associate degree. She returned to the campus in 1987, 1994 and in 2006 as the commencement speaker at graduation exercises. Additionally, Helga was a guest of honor at the annual community celebration, the Sandburg Days Festival, from its inception in 1996 to 2005. Both Helga and Penelope Niven, who was Sandburg's biographer, helped to formulate and develop the annual festival. Sadly, both Helga and Penelope passed away in 2014, leaving the College without two of the people most closely associated with its namesake.

The referendum creating what is now Carl Sandburg College was passed by the voters of Knox and Warren counties on Sept. 24, 1966. The first classes were held the same day the following year, Sept. 24, 1967, in a variety of facilities in downtown Galesburg. Since then the College has expanded considerably, both in the scope of course offerings and in territory, in an effort to meet the educational needs of the residents of west-central Illinois.

In 1969, the College occupied the site on South Lake Storey Road in Galesburg on which the permanent Main Campus would be constructed. The permanent facilities were opened in 1976. In the meantime, the College annexed 16 additional high school districts in 1974, which eventually resulted in the establishment of additional facilities to ensure the delivery of services for all residents of what is officially Illinois Community College District 518.

What is now the Branch Campus in Carthage offered its first classes in the winter of 1974. The Main Campus has also undergone major recent renovations to keep Carl Sandburg College on the cutting edge of the technological revolution.

In 2017, the College for the fourth straight year was named National Champion in the Small Colleges Category of the Digital Community

Colleges Survey by e.Republic's Center for Digital Education, continuing its reputation as one of the leading community colleges in the country for technology.

The College continues to serve its 3,000-square-mile district and fulfill its mission and vision and remain true to its core values for excellence, collaboration, integrity and respect.