

Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site is a 264-acre property authorized by the National Park Service. The site, affectionately known as “Connemara,” was Carl Sandburg’s home for the last 22 years of his life, from the years 1945-1967. Today the home and the grounds are maintained to preserve Sandburg’s legacy as a social activist, a folk singer, and a Pulitzer prize-winning poet and biographer.

The Greek Revival style house, built in 1838 and filled exclusively with Sandburg’s original belongings, only attracts a fraction of the park’s visitation. The sprawling property also offers over five miles of hiking trails in the Carolina Blue Ridge Mountains, as well as a working goat farm inhabited by the descendants of Lilian Sandburg’s famous herd. The multifaceted nature of the park attracts visitors with diverse interests. This summer, I interned under the park’s Education Coordinator, Ginger Cox, to lead the liveliest demographic at the park: Parkids.

On a weekday morning, the park can expect the arrival of children’s groups ranging from 80 second-graders to entire homeschool family cooperatives. I worked with two other interns to divide the groups into manageable rotations. We would then give the Parkids tours of the house museum, lead them on visits to the goat barn, take them on hikes, and present two interpretive activities that reflect Sandburg’s legacy and the biological surroundings of the park. I spent the first week of my internship preparing my house tour. My supervisor, Ginger, supplied me with research materials about Sandburg’s life and the artifacts in the house so that I could prepare a thematic outline for her review. I began leading adult’s and children’s tours shortly after. For the latter, Ginger gave the children laminated pictures called “Clue Cards” that matched objects in the house. This allowed the children to be interactive with the tour guide. I was tasked with updating the cards, which involved searching through the online inventory for images of artifacts that were still in the house, checking to make sure they were in the identifiable places, and printing, laminating, and stringing the cards.

The interpretive activities we led for the children are especially important to the Parkids program since Sandburg is rarely taught in schools and many of our younger visitors were unfamiliar with his

significance. For my favorite activity, “Sandburg Alive,” I distributed stanzas of Sandburg’s humorous poems among groups of children who gave a dramatic reading and performance of the poem on the amphitheater stage. I loved acting out the poems with the kids. Watching them bring the poems to back to life was a beautiful sight for an English major.

At the beginning of the internship, many of the activity kits needed organizing or restocking, the execution of which occupied many an afternoon. I collaborated with a fellow intern on an activity called “National Park Service: Who Am I?” which explores the interesting career options available with the Park Service. We wrote dozens of scenarios that the kids matched with pictures and job descriptions. As July approached, the words “Summer Festival” became ever-present in our office as we scrambled to make preparations for the biggest visitation day of the year. Ginger asked me to prepare an activity that would serve as a task for kids pursuing Junior Ranger badges. I developed a park-wide scavenger hunt entitled “The Huckabuck Hike” which featured illustrations and excerpts from one of Sandburg’s children’s stories, “The Huckabuck Family.” I wrote clues in the form of rhyming couplets that led the kids to historical structures in the park and taught them about farm life.

My final education task was the completion of a research project on Sandburg’s contemporaries. Since the house museum would be closing for renovations in a year, the interpretive staff needed material to use for future exhibits. I created an outline of Sandburg’s famous colleagues and friends in the fields of literature and social activism during the Progressive Era. I made an enormous chart that listed the names of the contemporaries, their relationship to Sandburg with any useful quotations from letters, and a brief biography of their work. I made a PowerPoint with images and quotations to serve as a visual aid to the program. This material will be used by my supervisor to create future education activities for children or the general public.

My supervisor also gave me opportunities to shadow other divisions of park staff. I spent several days with the curatorial assistant in the archives, learning about museum work and preservation, and I

enjoyed seeing original prints from the famous photographer Edward Steichen, Sandburg's brother-in-law, and original letters that Sandburg wrote. On one occasion, I went out on a trail with the maintenance crew as they demonstrated how they treat the hemlock trees for the woolly adelgid, an aphid-like insect that has decimated the trees across the nation. The natural resources intern, Tim, took me out into the front pasture of the park to demonstrate how school groups and community members use the Citizen Science program to monitor the growth of Monarch butterfly populations.

The entire staff participated in a three-day Climate Friendly Parks Workshop sponsored by the National Park Service and the Environmental Protection Agency that helped us create an Action Plan to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and waste. At this workshop, I met leaders of sustainability organizations across the Southeast.

This internship, with all of its opportunities, was certainly interdisciplinary. I value the interpretive training and public speaking skills I gained as a tour guide. Learning about a famous writer's life through his belongings and his home was a unique privilege that I particularly appreciated. As an English major and a writer, I enjoyed this aspect of the internship the most. The leadership I assumed with the education program exceeded what I had anticipated, and I am very thankful for that as well. I was able to work with a small staff and make decisions.

One drawback to the internship was the living conditions. The park offers low-cost housing on site for summer interns. I lived with a much older graduate student in a 102-year-old farmhouse in a busy area of the park. The graduate student left every weekend, and I found myself completely alone. However, I was not as isolated as I thought. Since I lived in a public park, anyone could walk into my front yard, and they usually did until ten o'clock. This became another concern.

My summer at the Sandburg Home definitely broadened the career options for my English major. I did not seriously consider the National Park Service as a future employer before this summer because I connoted it with natural resources or biology. Now I know that there are jobs with interpretation teams

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that involve writing for these kinds of historic sites. I made strong connections that I hope to revive in future years.