From Rival Voices to a Shared Legacy
The Story of Lögberg, Heimskringla and the Birth of Canada's Oldest Ethnic Newspaper

KATRÍN NÍELSDÓTTIR
with STEFAN JONASON

Editorial Note: *This article is based on a recorded interview conducted with Stefan Jonason on February 26, 2025, for the Digital Museums Canada project on the History of Icelandic Print in Manitoba. The hour-long conversation provides a uniquely personal and historically significant perspective on the legacy of Icelandic-language journalism in North America.*

Lögberg-Heimskringla, as it exists today, is the result of a vibrant, complex history of Icelandic print culture in North America. With its roots in two competing publications, Lögberg and Heimskringla, the newspaper holds the distinction of being the oldest continuously published ethnic periodical in Canada, according to Library and Archives Canada.

The story of Icelandic newspapers in North America begins with Framfari ("Progress"), the first Icelandic-language newspaper in the region. Published in the Interlake region of Manitoba, Framfari ran for only two or three years before ceasing operations. Its short-lived successor, Leifur, also failed due to financial instability. It was not until 1886 that Heimskringla was established by Freeman Anderson, Eggert Johansson, and Einar Hjörleifsson. Despite suffering interruptions due to financial hardship, it maintained a consistent presence from its founding onward.

Just under two years later, Lögberg was founded by Einar Hjörleifsson (later known as Einar Hjörleifsson Kvaran), a notable writer both in Iceland and North America. From the outset, Lögberg enjoyed greater financial stability due to its solid capitalization and backing from prominent business figures. It eventually surpassed Heimskringla in circulation and influence.

Stefan Jonason is a Unitarian minister and editor of the Icelandic-Canadian newspaper *Lögberg-Heimskringla*.

The two newspapers represented different political and religious ideologies within the Icelandic immigrant community. Lögberg leaned toward the Liberal Party in Canada, strongly supported the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, favored Iceland's Independence Party, and had Republican leanings in the U.S. In contrast, Heimskringla supported the Conservative Party in Canada, aligned with the Unitarian Church and the Winnipeg Tabernacle, favored the Home Rule Party in Iceland, and its American readership leaned Democratic.[1.]

This ideological diversity allowed both newspapers to thrive in their own spheres, serving a politically and religiously fragmented community that had begun assimilating into North American society. Their rivalry, however, spurred journalistic vibrancy and financial viability.

By the 1920s and 1930s, these differences had softened. A shift in community dynamics emphasized unity over division, but this also led to a gradual decline in readership. The onset of radio and later television further reduced reliance on print news. While both papers continued to publish social notes—a treasure trove for genealogists today—their broader relevance began to wane.

Multiple mergers attempted in the 1940s and 1950s failed until the Canada Iceland Foundation declined a request for funding from Lögberg, citing the need for equitable treatment among all Icelandic publications. This refusal triggered serious merger talks, culminating in the unification of Lögberg and Heimskringla in 1959. Key figures in this effort included Dr. P.H.T. Thorlakson, Senator Gunnar Salmonson, Stefan Hansen (VP of Great-West Life), and Rev. Philip Peterson of the Unitarian Church. Notably, Hansen and Peterson had previously clashed publicly, making their cooperation a symbol of broader reconciliation.

The editorial transition was handled with dignity. Stefan Anderson of Heimskringla retired after 32 years, while Einar P. Johnson of Lögberg became the editor of the unified paper. The merger succeeded not only in preserving the paper for another generation—but ultimately for three more.

The paper evolved over time. Originally publishing international and national news in Icelandic for a largely monolingual audience, it shifted toward English-language reporting about Icelandic community events in North America and news from Iceland. This change reflected a generational transition: the first generation read Icelandic exclusively, the second used both languages, and by the third, English had become dominant.

Although the newspaper played a role in preserving the Icelandic language, Stefan Jonason notes that it was more instrumental in facilitating the community's transition into English. The paper printed occasional Icelandic lessons and bilingual content, but its shift to an English-language publication by the 1980s marked a turning point.

[1.] While the Unitarian Church is widely recognized today as one of the most progressive denominations in North America, its alignment with conservative politics in the context of early Icelandic-Canadian history reflected the priorities of that time. Theological liberalism did not necessarily correlate with left-leaning political views, and affiliations were often shaped by community dynamics, immigration politics, and church leadership personalities.

Today, Lögberg-Heimskringla increasingly attracts readers with no Icelandic heritage who are simply curious about Iceland and its culture. The paper's coverage has expanded to include current Icelandic cultural leaders, travel, and history. With support from staff like layout editor Dísa, the paper is transitioning toward a magazine format, and a glossy monthly issue may be in its future.

As Jonason approaches retirement, he reflects on his tenure as the second-longest serving editor since the merger and hopes to return as guest editor for the paper's 140th anniversary. While readership in traditional print continues to decline, the paper has endured by adapting—an unlikely union that continues to thrive in a multicultural landscape.

"It was a good merger." –Stefan Jonason