

Review: *Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom – Icelandic Language Publishing in Manitoba*

Crocker, Christopher W. E. and Katrín Níelsdóttir. *Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom - Icelandic Language Publishing in Manitoba*. Digital Museums Canada, 2025. <https://www.communitystories.ca/projects/preserving-the-most-precious-heirloom-icelandic-language-publishing-in-manitoba/>.

2025 is a milestone year for the Icelandic Canadian community in Manitoba. Specifically, the year marks the 150 year anniversary of the arrival of Icelandic settlers in both Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the Interlake region of what is now Manitoba. During this sesquicentennial year, celebrations and exhibitions have been held, lectures given, and editorials and articles written, many to commemorate the anniversary of the arrival of the settlers and the community's remarkable accomplishments over the past century and a half. The digital exhibition *Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom – Icelandic Language Publishing in Manitoba* stands out, not only within the context of 2025's celebratory mood, but as a unique and important scholarly contribution to discourse about Icelandic identity. The Community Stories platform which hosts the digital exhibition is part of Digital Museums Canada, a program sponsored by the Canadian Museum of History. This national platform is appropriate for the finely curated and expertly composed exhibition.

The creative forces behind the exhibition are Katrín Níelsdóttir and Christopher Crocker. They co-developed the exhibition, a monumental task that involved research, interviews, writing, and much more, not least the digitization of images, audio recordings, and videos, many of which are now available for the first time to a wide viewership on an accessible website, which, notably, can be navigated and read in English, French, or Icelandic.

Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom is divided into seventeen sections or chapters, beginning with "The Icelanders Arrive" and closing with "The Icelandic Collection," followed by sections on "Credits and Acknowledgements" and "Sources and Resources." In the opening chapter, the exhibit delivers an overview of the context for the migration of Icelanders to North America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Included alongside the written text in this opening chapter are two video clips that provide accounts of the migration (one clip is from 1967 and the other from 1976) and four digitized images: an Icelandic emigration contract from 1876 filled in with the details of an emigrant family from Vopnafjörður; an Icelandic-language flyer from 1900 promoting settlement in Canada;

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a hand-drawn map of the Hnaua area of New Iceland from ca. 1880; and an image of the cover for volume nine of Ólafur S. Thorgeirsson's *Almanak* (1903). The chance to view these digitized videos and images is quite significant, as materials such as these are often difficult or time-consuming to access. *Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom* serves the community well by making materials such as these accessible on a single website, imbedded within explanatory text.

Each chapter has much to commend, but the present review turns to the final chapter, "The Icelandic Collection," as it offers history for one of Manitoba's most important heritage spaces and scholarly research centres, which is also one of the Icelandic Canadian community's most significant cultural hubs. In this section of the exhibit, the viewer is likewise presented with text interspersed with images. Three of the images are photographs from within the spaces of the Icelandic Collection itself: one a snapshot of an elegant and bright reading space, another a photo of Guttormur J. Guttormsson's writing desk, and the third a photo of a cabinet containing books that belonged to Stephan G. Stephansson. These two latter items, Guttormur's desk and Stephan G.'s books, are a must-see for any visitor to the Icelandic Collection. For interested viewers who do not have the opportunity to visit the space, these images provide access to important material artifacts relevant to Icelandic, Icelandic Canadian, and Canadian literary history. One of the other images in this chapter is a copy of an article from *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, dated 28 July 2000, which provides details about the recently renovated Icelandic Reading Room and a diagrammatic image of the space. The fifth image included in this chapter is a formal 1931 class photograph of grades 9 and 10 students from the Jón Bjarnason Academy in Winnipeg. The school, according to the photograph's caption, enrolled Icelandic and non-Icelandic students.

The image of the students at the Jón Bjarnason Academy is aptly placed, for it is set beside text that provides important history about the Icelandic Collection itself. According to the exhibit's text: "A large donation of books from Winnipeg's Jón Bjarnason Academy, which closed its doors in 1940, laid the foundation for the Icelandic Collection." Additional organizations are listed as material donors to the Icelandic Collection, including the New Iceland Heritage Museum, the Icelandic National League of North America, and local libraries in Gimli, Arborg, and Riverton, along with many individuals. The number of volumes donated by the Jón Bjarnason Academy is not listed, but the exhibit's text states that the Icelandic Collection's current holdings surpass 35,000 items. The history and context for many of these thousands of items are introduced by the exhibit's preceding chapters.

Readers are encouraged to visit *Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom – Icelandic Language Publishing in Manitoba*. When you do, you will learn about the history of Icelandic language publishing in Manitoba, from early Icelandic newspapers in the Interlake and Winnipeg to religious periodicals and Icelandic content for early readers, and much more. The major Icelandic newspapers *Lögberg* and *Heimskringla*, which amalgamated as *Lögberg-Heimskringla* in 1959, play an important role within the history of Icelandic language publishing in

Manitoba. Notably, the exhibit includes a number of audio clips in several of its chapters, some of which are from interviews with Stefan Jonasson, current editor of *Lögberg-Heimskringla*. These audio clips provide a great amount of information about the history of Icelandic publishing in Manitoba.

In short, Katrín Níelsdóttir and Christopher Crocker have done a fantastic job with this digital exhibit. They present a vast amount of information that pertains not only to the publishing history of Icelandic materials in Manitoba but also to Icelandic identity in Canada and Iceland. Only a small sample of the website has been discussed here, but I encourage readers to quickly find a computing device and type in *Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom – Icelandic Language Publishing in Manitoba*. Viewers will find this website to be a valuable resource for years to come.

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