

SPRING [MARCH], 1986

# THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN



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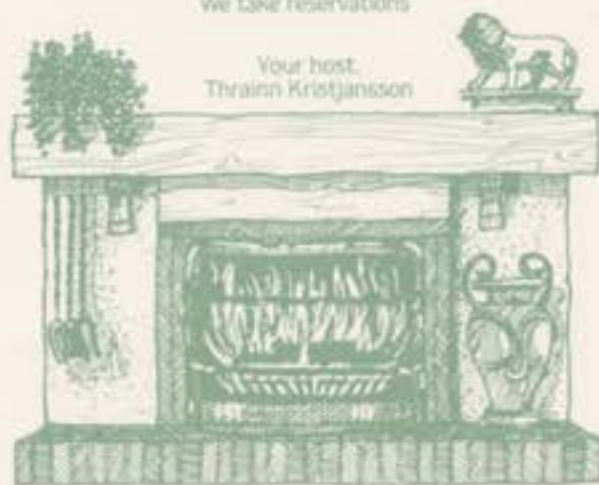
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A North American quarterly published in Winnipeg, Canada,  
dedicated to the preservation of the Icelandic heritage.

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Second Class Mail — Registration No. 1909

Printed at 358 Ross Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3A 0L4

## Guest Editorial

### THE FORKS: AN HISTORIC STAGE RE-OPENS

by Len Vopnfjord

Not far from the geographic heart of the North American Continent, waters from the west in Saskatchewan join with waters from the south in the Dakotas and flow a short distance to feed Lake Winnipeg at its southernmost point. Near by, waters from the east in Ontario make their contribution to that magnificent lake which, in turn, swells northward and spills through a great northern channel to Hudson Bay. The common point, the crossroads of this immense watershed, is the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. Geography, as is her wont, pre-ordained the role of the forks of these rivers. "Thou shalt be a stage upon which man may make history".

When man finally came to "The Forks", she was prepared and for thousands of years played the hospitable hostess. Her banks received travellers from the east, the north, the west and the south — gave them a place to rest and a place to exchange their knowledge and thoughts. Suddenly, one hundred years ago, the curtain closed and the stage darkened... a railway had moved the theatre. Today, the stage is about to re-open "The Forks", the junction of the Red and Assiniboine, is about to reassume her place in history.

Prior to the arrival of the European, the Forks of the Red and Assiniboine had long been a stage where varied groups of native peoples assembled. From time to time, throughout pre-contact history, the Assiniboine, the Western Cree, the Ojibwa and the Sioux claimed the territory around The Forks as their own. These tribes vied vigorously for domin-

ance over the site and its surrounding region. By the time the Governor and Company of Adventurers Trading Into Hudson Bay had established a fur trade in what is now Northern Manitoba in 1670, the Assiniboine tribe had settled at The Forks and had allied itself with its Cree neighbours to the north. Their alliance was in effort to stave off continual war parties from the Sioux nation from the south who sought control over the site.

From the waters to the east into this early 18th century milieu, came Sieur de La Verendrye, commandant of New France's interests in the interior of North America. In order to help them solidify their hold on "The Forks", the Assiniboine tribe insisted that he establish a fort at the junction of the Red and the Assiniboine rivers. The erection of Fort Rouge on the south point of The Forks in 1738 may now, at least symbolically, be regarded as the beginning of the City of Winnipeg. From this stage, the crossroads of the watershed, La Verendrye was the first European to explore the Dakotas and Western Canada as far as the Rocky Mountains.

There followed, over the next century, on the stage at The Forks, a parade of history that involved rivalries between native peoples between fur traders and between fur traders and European settlers.

The Hudson Bay Company, the oldest company in North America, headquartered its operation at The Forks some 150 years after its inception at a newly built Fort Garry. During the early 1800's as the

Hudson Bay Company was establishing its dominance, at The Forks arrived the first Europeans to settle the West — the Selkirk settlers. For the following several decades, tensions prevailed between the interests of the fur trade and the Red River settlement. But The Forks had played host to an historical imperative. By 1870, near The Forks lay the embryonic city of Winnipeg.

During the 1870's, Winnipeg accepted a wave of European immigrants, almost all of whom arrived by river boat at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine. These early immigrants were comprised mainly of Mennonites, Icelanders and Russian Jews. Their first accommodation in the New World consisted of crowded and squalid immigration sheds constructed at The Forks by the Government.

Then, having constituted the stage for the birthplace of a major metropolis, The Forks was banished from the consciousness of history. The railway came to Winnipeg in the 1880's and the rivers lost their importance. The land surrounding The Forks was sold to the Northern Pacific and Manitoba Railway in 1888. A curtain of steel was drawn around her and she was buried under trackage and cinder. Thus, forgotten, she has remained in this state for a century. It is safe to say that only a handful of Winnipeg's 600,000 citizens have ever stood at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine.

A dramatic transformation is in the offing in the very near future. Recently, the Honourable Jake Epp, Minister of National Health and Welfare, announced his intention, on behalf of the Government of Canada, to undertake efforts to ensure the early repatriation of The Forks and the appropriate development of the surrounding land. Negotiations to secure the land from the railway are nearing a successful conclusion and the necessary millions of dollars to undertake the

project will be forthcoming from the Government of Canada, the Province of Manitoba, the City of Winnipeg and the private sector. A specially constituted "Forks Corporation" will be established to implement the scheme likely beginning in 1987.

The scheme involves the creation of a festival waterfront development, the focus of which will be a national historic park at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine. Here, the rich history of The Forks will be told to the citizens at Winnipeg and the many thousands of visitors who will seek the site as a major tourist destination. The scheme also contemplates a marina, a tourism pavilion, a rail museum, a farmer's market and a multi-cultural facility with attendant restaurant, retail and performing arts space. On adjacent land, a major new housing development will rise and stand in sharp contrast to the memory of the squalor of the immigration sheds those first Icelanders in Winnipeg found in the 1870's.

History survives, but it really lives when left on its own stage. One hundred years ago the curtain closed on The Forks. That historical stage is now being prepared for its grand re-opening.

*Len Vopnfjord is the Chief Planner for the City of Winnipeg.*

Winter is on my head,  
But Spring is in my heart.  
Victor Hugo

Hail beautiful May, that doth inspire  
Mirth, and youth, and warm desire.  
John Milton

Peace cannot be kept by force  
It can be achieved only by understanding.  
Albert Einstein

## AT THE EDITOR'S DESK

### MILDRED STORSATER

In every organization there are people who perform their duties so quietly, so unobtrusively, so efficiently that their colleagues are scarcely aware of the importance of their performance. Only when for some reason they are unable to perform their duties, do their associates realize that their absence results in the collapse of the effectiveness of the function of their organization.

Such a person is Mildred Storsater. When she was hospitalized at a critical period in the circulation of the winter issue, 1985, of *The Icelandic Canadian*, our activities came to a standstill. But for Eric Jonasson's operation of our computer, our subscribers would not have received that issue — shall we say — until March, 1986. As it was the distribution of that issue was delayed for over a month.

Every member of our Magazine Board wishes Mildred a complete and speedy recovery.

### The Return of a Former Member.

We welcome John Matthiasson back to our Magazine Board.

### Donation to the Icelandic Canadian

February, 1986, Barbara and Dave Vopnfjord, Blair Nebraska ... (Am.)\$100

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*Our Magazine Board hereby expresses its deep appreciation of these generous donations. They will be of great help in ensuring the continued publication of THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN.*

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The Betel Home Foundation began in 1915 when it established its first home for the elderly in Winnipeg. That home closed after only two years and subsequently Betel established a personal care home in Gimli and, more recently, one in Selkirk.

Presently, the prospect of an elderly persons' housing project to be attached at a future date to a personal care home is being seriously examined by Betel for Winnipeg.

A site has been chosen in the City's West End, the traditional Icelandic neighbourhood, and initial results of a survey to determine potential resident interest has been very encouraging. Although obtaining financing for the \$5 million, 85 unit project will prove to be most challenging, if all goes well, construction could begin later this year.

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## PEOPLE

## CONTRACTOR ON THE JOB FOR 60 YEARS



*Jörundur "Jerry" Eyford as a young man*

It was the winter of 1925 when 15-year-old Jorundur (Jerry) Eyford first helped his father deliver mail to rural route customers in the Vogar-Mulvihill area of Manitoba's Interlake region.

Today, 60 years later, Jerry is still delivering mail three days a week in the area and loving it.

The Eyford family is synonymous with the post office in the area. Jerry was born in Siglunes, the first town in the area with a post office. He is the third of four generations involved with the mails. His grandfather started the mail delivery business in the area in 1899. Jerry's father, Framar took it over 25 years later. Today oldest son Arnold is postmaster in Vogar, operating the office out of a small room in Jerry's house. The other son, Allan, helps Jerry out with his work.

The job has changed considerably over the years, Jerry says. "For one thing,

things were more strict in the old days," he said, "when we had to fill out time sheets and there were inspectors checking up on you."

Another difference, he says, is the methods used in getting the mail to customers along his route. Over the years he's taken the mail on foot, by horse-drawn buggy, dog sled and by car. "Over the years I've gone through about 20 Fords and one Chevy," he says with a laugh. The Chevy gave me nothing but problems."

It wasn't until the mid-40s that there was a highway linking Vogar and Mulvihill. Prior to that, Jerry had to find his way around the marsh and muskeg on dirt trails.

Located on the eastern shore of Lake Manitoba, the area has some of Manitoba's most severe weather and topographical conditions. Winters are marred by severe biting winds which frequently create white-out conditions.

Although the weather is often less than ideal, Jerry says he's only had to turn around twice, unable to complete his route. "But there have been many times when I've had to improvise," he says. "Once I ran into a snowstorm and it took me two days to get home."

Winter brought with it many incidents, he says, such as the times he tried using the frozen lake as a highway but didn't notice the cracks in the ice. "There's been more than one occasion when I've submerged a car," he laughs. Or the times when his dog teams wouldn't go where he wanted them to: "For the most part, I enjoyed using the dog teams. The dogs were quick, always anxious to get home."

On another occasion, Jerry's Model T would up stuck and sinking in the mus-

keg. Horses wouldn't pull it out because they became nervous while sinking as well. Eventually the car had to be lifted up and carried out by a group of men.

Other times Jerry says he's had to put a canvass over the front of the car and plow through waist-deep water with the car. "No mail ever got wet, though," he added.

Another time he tipped his truck. Jerry walked away from the accident, the only damage being a broken mirror.

In spite of these inconveniences, Jerry insists being a rural route contractor "is a good job to have. I was very fortunate to have that job during the depression. It was a sure source of income, which was needed because I came from a family of 10."



*Long-time rural route contractor Jorundur (Jerry) Eyford and sons Allan (left) and Arnold. Jerry has delivered the mail in Manitoba's Interlake region for over 60 years. Allan assists Jerry with his work and Arnold is postmaster in Vogar, Manitoba.*

## The Marquis Who's Who Publications Board

*Verður ákveðið*

Johannes Sveinsson

*er áskildur í biografískan útgáfu*

Who's Who in the West  
Twentieth Edition  
1986/1987

*inclusion in which is limited to those individuals who have demonstrated outstanding achievement in their own fields of endeavor and who have, thereby, contributed significantly to the betterment of contemporary society.*

*Johannes Sveinsson*



*Johannes Sveinsson*

*Johannes (Joe) Sveinsson, formerly of Winnipeg, has been Mayor of the City of Gonzales, California for a number of years. The Magazine Board of The Icelandic Canadian congratulates him for the honour that deservedly has been bestowed on him.*

## RIVER NAMED AFTER GIMLI MAN KILLED IN ACTION

by Dorothy Torfason



*Sgt. Julius Bjorn Johnson*

The Manitoba Government has named a river in northern Manitoba after a former Gimli resident, who was killed in action, June 24, 1943.

Sgt. Julius Bjorn (Barney) Johnson received the posthumous honour for a river that flows from Sproutt Lake east 450 miles northeast to North Seal River that empties into Hudson Bay.

Barney was born in Gimli January 4, 1916 to the late Mr. and Mrs. J.B. Johnson. He joined the airforce in 1940 as an air-frame mechanic and went overseas November 1941. In September 1942 he went from air-frame mechanic to flight engineer.

He was in 1st class of flight engineer that trained in St. Athan Wales. He was posted to a squadron within bomber command and flew Halifax 1's, 2's, 3's and 5's and on his 20th flight, was shot down. He was buried in Holland.

He was one of the few Canadian flight engineers at the time and was a graduate

of Cambridge University for Engineering.

He was a member of the Selkirk Masonic Lodge.

Owen Harper of Gimli served with Barney overseas and he along with Gerry Holms, Natural Resources, John Bucklaschuk (Gimli M.L.A.) and Terry Sergeant were instrumental in having this river named after Sgt. Johnson.

This was approved on September 19th, 1985 and a commemorative name certificate will be sent to Mrs. Gudrun Stevens of Gimli, the eldest next of kin.

## SHELLEY STEVENS ALLSTAR



*Shelley Stevens*

Shelley Stevens of Gimli is making her name as a U.S. college volleyball star. In 1982, Shelley graduated from Gimli Composite High School, where she played for the Gimli Lakers. That year, the Lakers won the provincial AA title, and Shelley was named to the provincial AA allstar team.

At this point, Shelley was approached by the coach of Bottineu College, North Dakota. It offered a two year academic program and once completed there she had several offers from larger state colleges. She selected Valley City State College, as it offered the best scholarship

money. "The Canadian dollar being so low doesn't help when you go to school here." Physical education is her major. Just recently she was named as an allstar volleyball player in the Women's Athletic Conference of N.D.

At Valley City, there are only three other Canadians on the 1,500 student campus including teammate Lee Finnson also of Gimli.

Shelley is 21 years of age. She has always been very active with the Icelandic Culture and Language Camps at Gimli. Beginning as a camper, then a junior leader and now as the sports leader. She is the daughter of Linda Stevens and Winston Stevens, the grandchild of Laura Holm and the late Juli Holm and the late Helgi and Gudrun Stevens.

## New Boss Heads San Francisco Ballet

### Back To Tradition

## TOMASSON'S TURNABOUT

by Paul Hertelendy



*Helgi Tomasson*

The San Francisco Ballet opens its home repertory season Saturday under new artistic director Helgi Tomasson, who appears to be moving it in the direction of the traditionalist American Ballet Theatre.

It's a move that, if carried out in toto — or, to be precise, in tutu — requires major surgery.

Tomasson's repertory emphasis is on traditional European story ballets, mixed

in with works of that long-standing New York tandem, Jerome Robbins and George Balanchine. Performing them will be the newly recruited dancers from the Soviet Union (Ludmila Lopukhova), France (Jean Charles Gil) and Australia (Simon Dow). (For Gil, it's a mere two-program stand, starting with Robbins' "Opus 19" Jan. 28 - Feb. 4. His guest-star stint breaks a San Francisco taboo nearly two decades old.)

The cool Icелander Tomasson is making changes, moving the troupe well away from the modish, stylish innovations of his predecessor, Michael Smuin. His ideas and ideals are making national news, since by length of season (currently 44 weeks) the San Francisco Ballet is unsurpassed in America. Now in its 53rd season, the 48-member company has been one of the most distinctive and eye-catching ensembles in American dance.

Smuin appealed to a young, upwardly mobile crowd that you might find at the disco but rarely at the symphony. He accentuated dazzle, young love, film, video techniques, popular music, even frankly experimental on-stage boogieing (or have you forgotten "Pigs and Fishes" already?)

*Courtesy of San Jose Mercury News*

## READER'S FORUM

*From Doris Hill, Dauphin, Manitoba.*  
I am interested in furthering my knowledge on Icelandic history and culture. For fifteen years I was married to an Ice-lander and lived in a community which had quite a number of families covering quite a large area in eastern Saskatchewan. I became widowed and with my two children, settled in Dauphin, Man., later re-marrying. I am English having been born over there, but my son, especially, will be interested in the magazine. Our name was Halldorsson.

Enclosed please find my cheque for fifteen dollars for which I would like to

obtain The Icelandic Canadian (quarterly).

\* \* \*

*From Garth A. Buchholz, Winnipeg, Man.* I was wondering if you'd be so kind as to provide me with details re subscription to The Icelandic Canadian. I have read various back issues, and though I'm but a quarter Goolie (my Amma, Steina Jonsson), I like to keep in touch with my heritage.

\* \* \*

*From Jona Thorlacius, Denmin Island, B.C.* Your magazine is great. Look forward to each issue. Good luck.

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Otto Jelinek

Standing Committee on Multiculturalism, November 26, 1985

The Minister of State for Multiculturalism, Honourable Otto Jelinek, will host a Multiculturalism and Business Conference at the Metro Convention Centre in Toronto on April 11 and 12.

Conference topics include:

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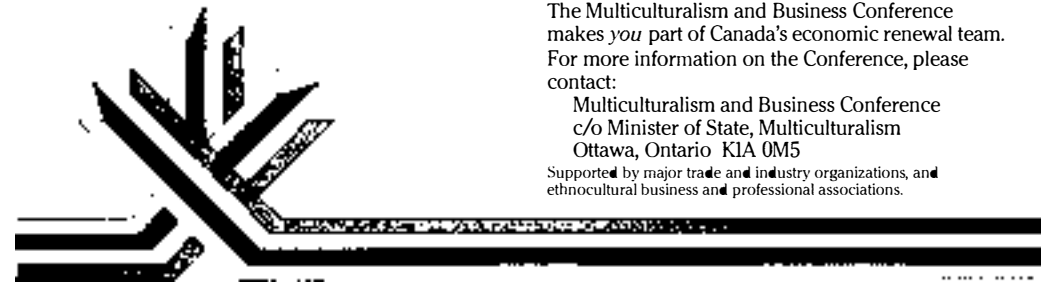
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## ICELAND & JAPAN SIMILARITIES & CONTRASTS

by Joe Martin

During the summer of 1985, I had the great good fortune to visit two very different islands — one in the Atlantic, one in the Pacific — both with unique, distinct cultures — Iceland and Japan. These are my impressions.

Let me begin on a personal note. Although both were a combination of business and pleasure, the trip to Japan was predominately business while the trip to Iceland was predominately pleasure.

In terms of business, the Tokyo trip was attended by people from four continents and the focus of attention was the huge Asia/Pacific market. The Icelandic trip was predominately Nordic Europe both in terms of attendance and focus.

The trip to Japan was my first to Asia, although I had been to Australia. And I was accompanied by my wife. It was new and different.

The trip to Iceland was my first to a Nordic country. I was accompanied not only by my wife but also by my four children and my mother. Although it was our first trip (other than for my mother), it was also a return — a return to ancestral roots because 96 years ago my grandparents had left Northern Iceland to settle in North America — for a year in the Dakota Territory and then to the Canadian Northwest Territories (now Saskatchewan) where they helped found the Logberg settlement.

One final personal point — weather. Most readers of the Icelandic Canadian know that Iceland is much cooler than Canada in late August. And most Canadians think of Toronto as being hot and humid in late July. Toronto is delightfully cool and dry compared to Tokyo where the low temperature was 25°C. The weather in Iceland was decidedly cool —

like Spring or Fall with highs of 10° or 12°C. What surprised me was not how cool it was but to realize how cold the Icelandic settlers would have found the Canadian Prairies. Although it never gets warm in Iceland, it never gets really cold either — at least by Canadian standards.

### Similarities

The most obvious similarity is that both countries are island nations. However, Japan is spread over four large islands, the largest being Honshu. Iceland is located primarily on one island although there are other very small ones such as Vestmannaeyjar and Grimsey. In terms of size, Japan is 3-2/3 times the size of Iceland. The countries share the fact that much of their land mass is not habitable.

Both countries were isolated from intercourse with other nations for many centuries — in the case of Japan by decision — in the case of Iceland by the nature of their location. Both countries opened up to the outside world at roughly the same time. In 1853 Admiral Perry made his famous journey and ordered the opening up to trade of Japan. At roughly the same time, the first trickle of out-migration from Iceland began to Spanish Fork, Utah and to Brazil.

In Canadian terms the first Icelandic permanent immigrant (other than Leif Ericsson and his\* colony), Sigtryggur Jonasson, arrived in 1872. Five years later, 1877, the first permanent Japanese immigrant (as distinct from the three ship wrecked missions in 1833), Manco Nagano, arrived.

In two important areas Japan and Iceland are very similar to each other and somewhat different from much of the rest of the world. The Japanese literacy rate is 99%, Iceland's is 100% (Canada's is

98.5%). In addition to being literate, both are well off. My most recent comparable data shows Iceland with a per capita income 20% higher than Japan's. However that figure may no longer be valid because of currency fluctuations and differing rates of inflation. It is safe to say that in world terms, both have high standards of living.

Finally both are dependent on fish not only for diet, but also for economic purposes. And while Iceland is far more dependent on fish than is Japan, fish are a fundamental cornerstone of the Japanese economy. One of the first persons I met in Iceland was a Japanese businessman from Osaka who was in Iceland buying fish. I asked him: "Why Iceland?" He answered because of the high standards of quality control.

### Contrasts

The list of contrasts is of course greater than the list of similarities so I will restrict my comments to a few.

Historically speaking while Iceland is an old country by Western Hemisphere standards, it is young by any other measurement. Japan, on the other hand, has a truly ancient civilization. It's recorded history dates back to 440 A.D. — over four hundred years before Iceland was settled — and its civilization has been traced back to 660 B.C. One clearly has a far greater sense of history around one in Tokyo than in Reykjavik.

But the major contrast relates to the interconnected factors of space, population and pollution. Iceland, even more so than Canada, is a spacious country. In Canada and in Iceland we take space for granted. In Japan, and especially in Tokyo, no one takes space for granted. People "pretend" there are walls and barriers where there are none in order to preserve their own private space.

This, of course, relates to the relative population size and the relationship to

geography. In a country which is less than four times the size of Iceland, there are five hundred times more people.

Turning to pollution, Iceland has to have one of the most pollution free environments in the world. The air is a joy to breathe. While Tokyo is getting better, it is still impossible to see Mount Fuji from the Mount Fuji rooms in the University Club of Tokyo on most days. That relates to air pollution. It was my observation that in terms of street litter, Tokyo was cleaner than Reykjavik. Iceland seems to fit the almost universal Caucasian pattern of littering — especially the young people. Here a lesson can be learned from Japan.

### Conclusion

My first conclusion is that I am very fortunate to be able to visit either one of these countries — never mind two in one summer. I plan to visit both again in the not too distant future.

And in looking to the future as a Caucasian, I cannot help but be worried that what I saw in Iceland this past summer was history and that what I saw in Japan was the future. Iceland (as distinct from some other Nordic countries) and Canada have good work standards but the work ethic is much more alive and well in Japan.

And in the interdependent world in which we live, I believe that those who try

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hardest will be the ones to succeed. Or in the words of Beowulf from the rock opera of the same name by Betty Hane Wylie and Victor Davies:

“Try, try, aim for the sky  
All I can do is try.”

*\*Editor's comment: Shortly after Leif's discovery of North America, the Ice-*

*lander Thorfinn Karlsefni attempted to establish a colony somewhere on the eastern coast of that continent. The colony survived for four or five years, but due to the hostility of the natives, the colonists were forced to return to Iceland. Hence — as far as we know — Icelandic was the first European language spoken in North America.*

## IN MY GREEN VALLEY

by Guðrún Jónsdóttir:

The west coast of Iceland is characterized by two big bays, Faxaflói and Breidafjörður, separated by the Snaefellsnes Peninsula with the glacier Snaefellsjökull made famous by Jules Verne's novel "Voyage au centre de la terre". Breidafjörður is the northernmost of the two bays. It is dotted with islands and its shores are serrated by inlets and fiords, the biggest of which, the Hvammsfjörður, is shaped like a boot, pushing against the shore. A number of valleys go fanwise from the sole and heel like giant cracks made by a vicious kick of the boot. The valleys are surrounded by low mountains with higher ranges farther to the North, East and South. One of these valleys is the Middalir (Middle Valleys), the central part of the Sudurdalir (South Valleys) system. On its southern side the mountain-slope is fairly steep and in the background towers a high mountain, snowclad even in summer. On the northern side the mountains slope gently down to the bottom of the valley where braided rivers flow westward to the sea. On the mountain-slopes farms lie side by side in a single row, encircling the valley, and almost in the middle of the northern slope stands the vicarage with grassfields and farmhouses like its neighbours, distinguished only by a small white church and

an old graveyard. The farms west of the vicarage are all named after woods (Churchwood, Middlewood, etc.), indicating that this district has been a woodland 1100 years ago when the first settlers came here to live. There is no wood on these slopes now, just a few *Betula nana* "trees" can be seen here and there, struggling valiantly against the erosion and the attacks from the much beloved Icelandic sheep.

This was the valley where I spend my childhood. Being the vicar's daughter, I was not supposed to do any farm work, but was instead constantly sent on errands all over the parish. This was pleasant enough for through it I came to know practically everybody in the parish. Also, I could often borrow books from the farmers and at that time I was omnivorous as far as books were concerned.

One day in late November when I was eight years old I was sent on an errand to our nearest neighbour east of the vicarage. The valley was covered with snow which made crunching sounds under my feet as I walked along the path in the foothills. It was after five o'clock in the afternoon and daylight was already gone, but the moon, the stars and the dancing Northern lights lit up the snow-

covered hills where the ptarmigan roosted peacefully, knowing that it would not be molested by anyone.

I came to the farm and knocked the traditional three knocks on the door to show that I was a Christian and neither a ghost nor a ghoul. The farmer's wife came out and, having heard my errand, told me that her husband was not home yet and asked me to follow her to the kitchen as she had just started baking "smallbread" (Icel. *kleinur*, Danish *klejner* from German *klein* = small). This was indeed a treat. At home I was not allowed to enter the kitchen. The maids would be sure to tell me that this was their domain where I had no business to be. As a consequence, my glimpses of the culinary arts were few and far between.

The farm kitchen was old, big and only lit by a small petroleum lamp hanging on the wall. The white-scoured wooden table had been moved from its traditional place at the window and stood beside the kitchen range on which a big, black pot with merrily boiling fat made funny noises. On the table lay some rolled-out dough. The farmer's wife took my coat and asked if I would like to help her to "turn" the smallbread. I was delighted. I washed my hands in a bowl of water, tied a big apron around me and was ready for anything.

Smallbread is a cake, about 3-4 inches long. You cut a hole down its middle, put one end through the hole and "turn" with the result that the cake looks like two parallel coils held together by the end-pieces. The "turned" cakes are boiled in fat.

We cut, turned and boiled with great zest. The golden-brown cakes were taken out of the pot and put on paper to cool and the smell was delicious. We talked about various things and I mentioned the book I had been reading in my father's study when I was sent on this errand, a

collection of Kristján Jónsson's poems (Icel. poet 1842-69), and the particular poem I had just started to memorize.

"Oh", said the farmer's wife, "The Hunter", I know that one by heart. Let us recite it while we work". And so we did. The light from the lamp made a circle around us where we stood between the table and the kitchen range, working and reciting the poem until I had learned it by heart. Far too soon our work was done. The farmer came in and was told of my errand. I washed my hands again, untied the apron and sat down to a repast of fresh smallbread and milk. After a while I put on my coat, said goodbye and went home.

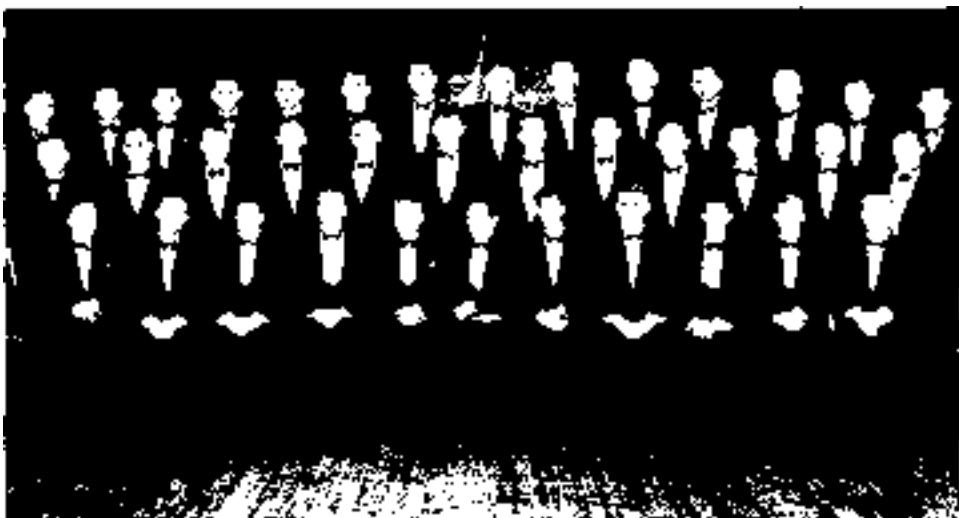
The moon and the stars still illuminated the white snow and the Northern lights danced all over the sky, but I did not notice it. I was far away, down by the great river Mississippi, where the lonely hunter, a French nobleman exiled from his country, sat in the forest and mourned his harsh fate. He had roamed the world mid pleasures and palaces, squandered his inheritance and lost the respect and love of his friends and relatives, as well as his own self-respect. But at last he had found peace in this forest and here he wanted to stay until death called him, hoping that the forest would bury him gently in its yellow leaves of autumn.

I walked as in a dream along the foothills where once a green wood whispered in the moonlight like the forest on the banks of Mississippi. I had never seen a wood, let alone a forest, but that did not matter. When I came home I went quietly into my father's study. There was no light there, but I did not light the lamp. I found the book, sat down at the window in the moonlight and recited the poem softly for myself.

How wonderful it was — so sad, but wonderful just the same. And what a happy day this had been.

## THE ICELANDIC MALE VOICE CHOIR OF WINNIPEG

by Hrund Skulason



*Back row - left to right: Eddi Johnson, J. Bjarnason, Otto Hallson, Gudmundur Jonasson, Steini Jakobson, Gissur Eliasson, Kristjan Sigurdsson, Ragnar Stefanson, Philip Petursson, Gudmundur Stefanson, Valdi Gudmundson, Sigi Sigmur, Valdi Beck, Larus Melsted.*

*Middle row - left to right: Mundi Johnson, David Bjornsson, F. Thompson, S. Halldorson, S. Thorsteinson, O. Kardal, Gordon Paulson, Pall Hallson, Barney Goodman, A. Thorgilsson, Guttormur Finnbogason, B. Metusalemson.*

*Bottom row - left to right: Loftur Matthew, Ben Olafson, Oli Bjornson, Jochum Asgeirson, Gunnar Erlendson, Ragnar H. Ragnar, A. Bardal, Alec Johnson, Valdi Peterson, Herman Melsted, C. Hjalmarson, Frank Halderson (not in the photo), Orn Thorsteinson (not in the photo).*

The Icelandic Male Voice Choir of Winnipeg (hereafter referred to as the Choir) held for many years an honored position as entertainers in the Icelandic communities. Foremost of course in Winnipeg, but they were also much sought after in the Icelandic communities in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and North Dakota.

I was asked to gather information about the Choir and to write an article about its activities over the years. Very few members are still with us and those that were contacted had kept no records. Lögberg and Heimskringla did have some information but not enough. I wrote Ragnar H. Ragnar, their conductor for

a number of years, and he sent me all the records that he had kept. His invaluable information made it possible for me to write this article.

The Choir was founded in the fall of 1929 by the composer Björgvin Gudmundsson, who was also their first conductor, 1929-31.

An article appeared in Heimskringla on March 12, 1930 in Icelandic, the following is a translation:

Every Icelander will be pleased to hear that the men, who sang in Björgvin Gudmundsson's choir this winter, have decided to form a society to be called "The Icelandic Male Voice Choir of Winnipeg." The chief aim of the organization

is to support and propagate Icelandic music by holding at least one or more concerts annually and to sing at special gatherings.

It should be safe to assume that all song-loving Icelanders and other musicians in this city will wish the newly formed society every success in the future.

Most Icelanders on this continent will acknowledge that Björgvin Gudmundsson is an intelligent and able composer and as the Choir appointed him for their leader, we should be assured that their concerts will be of high caliber.

There are few entertainments as popular here as male voice choirs. The forming of this choir should then augment our esteem among the other nationalities in this land of ours."

The founding meeting of the society was held on Wednesday, March 5, 1930 and the following officers chosen:

Conductor	Björgvin Gudmundsson
Chairman	Dr. Baldur H. Olson
Vice-Chairman	Halldór Metusalem Swan
Secretary	Chris Einarson
Vice-secretary	Brandur Erlendson
Treasurer	Gudmundur J. Johnson
Vice-treasurer	Steindor Jakobson
Publicity	Ragnar H. Ragnar
Music committee	Ragnar E. Kvaran Paul Bardal and David Jonasson
House committee	Ludvik Holm Steindor Jakobson, Gudmundur Gislason

The first concert was held in the First Lutheran Church on Victor St., Feb. 24, 1930 and on that program the Choir was called Björgvin Gudmundsson's Male Voice Choir, as this occurred before the founding meeting on March fifth. The ICELANDIC MALE VOICE CHOIR of WINNIPEG sang in N. Dakota June 14, 1930 and also in Gimli on Oct. 16, 1930. On their programs Björgvin Gudmunds-

son was not mentioned as being the conductor. Ragnar H. Ragnar played at both concerts and confirms that Björgvin Gudmundsson was the conductor.

During 1929 and until the spring of 1930 the work of the Choir flourished. The men attended faithfully and there was excellent unity between the conductor and the members. The Choir became well known and a popular form of entertainment in Winnipeg and outlying Icelandic communities. However, during the last months of 1930-31 the work of the Choir diminished. The members lost interest when it became evident that Björgvin had turned his interest to other matters, which now took up most of his time. He had composed a cantata for the Millennium of Iceland. The Icelandic community in Winnipeg became interested in the music and organized a large mixed voice choir to sing the Cantata and asked Björgvin to conduct the choir. He accepted the offer and this of course took up most of his time. His other reason for neglecting his work with the Choir was the fact that he had received an offer from the city of Akureyri for a very good position and intended to move to Iceland in the summer.

To lose Björgvin at the time was a great disappointment to the Choir and the Icelandic communities, especially Winnipeg, where he had worked so diligently for many years. The Winnipeg Icelandic community could not offer Björgvin the same opportunities that he had been offered in Akureyri so there were no ill feelings about his decision to leave and everyone wished him well in his new venture. In his memoirs Björgvin relates how much he had missed his work among the Western Icelanders.

After Björgvin left, the members of the Choir wished to continue as a Choir and began to look around for another conductor. Their choice was Brynjolfur

Thorlakksson, who had come to Canada from Iceland in 1912. He has been teaching music at the High School (Menntaskóli) in Reykjavík and the organist at the Cathedral (Dómkirkja) in Reykjavík, when he left Iceland. When he came to America he studied conducting and piano and within a short time became a popular conductor in many of the Icelandic communities. It was now decided that he should move to Winnipeg to teach and conduct the Icelandic Male Voice Choir and Gunnar Erlendson was to be their pianist.

Brynjólfur was with the Choir for two years, 1932-33. In 1932 the Choir held two concerts in Winnipeg, Feb. 3 and May 26, and one at the Gimli Parish Hall on May 6. In 1933 they sang at five concerts in Winnipeg, one in Arborg and one in Gimli. On August 7, 1933 they sang at the Gimli Icelandic Festival.

On November 1, 1933 they again held a concert to bid farewell to their conductor, Brynjólfur, now sixty-five years of age, had decided to move to Iceland. He had no relatives in Winnipeg, but daughters in Iceland, who had been encouraging him to make the move.

The Choir, now without a leader, chose Paul Bardal as their conductor and Gunnar Erlendson as their pianist. Paul Bardal was highly esteemed in Winnipeg, Director of the Bardal Funeral Home, Winnipeg City Councillor, a well known baritone singer and the conductor of the First Lutheran Church Choir for many years.

The Choir did not sing at the Frón concert in 1934 but held two concerts in Winnipeg, May 15, and June 20, and sang at the Icelandic Festival in Gimli on August 6. The Choir held no concerts in the winter of 1935. On May 21, 1935 they held a concert in Hnausa hall. Paul Bardal conducted and Mrs. B.H. Olson was at the piano. On that same program

Johannes Pálsson had a violin solo accompanied by his sister, Lilja Pálsson, Ludvík Kristjánsson recited humorous poetry and Gunnar Erlendson had a piano solo. The Choir sang at the Icelandic Festival in Gimli, August 6, 1935.

The Choir had no concert during the winter of 1936, but on May 6, the Icelandic Male Voice Choir of Winnipeg and the Icelandic Choral Society of Winnipeg sang the Millennial Cantata of Jón Fridfinnson in the First Lutheran Church, conducted by Paul Bardal. (Program) A repeat performance was held May 20, and at the Icelandic Festival, Aug. 3, 1936 in Gimli Park. This seems to have been the last time Paul Bardal conducted the Choir, likely due to the fact that he had so many other commitments. Whatever the reason, there were no other concerts in 1936.

For a long time the Frón society had suffered a decline in attendance and membership and their Midwinter concerts had been poorly attended. It was common knowledge that few would have come if the president, Zophonias Thorkelsson had not bought most of the tickets and given them to the people he thought would use them. Zophonias was getting tired of the apathy shown by the members and wanted to resign. He encouraged Ragnar H. Ragnar to take over and try to awaken people's interest in the Frón society. Ragnar reluctantly gave his consent, and in the fall of 1935 he was elected president of Frón, a position he ably filled for a number of years.

Frón's Midwinter concert at the I.O.G.T. Hall in 1936 was a huge success with about 700 people in attendance. Ragnar was chairman and the most popular item on the program was a male voice choir of 16-18 men, who had been practicing with Ragnar as leader and conductor and Gunnar Erlendson as their pianist. Many remembered that concert

for years. Ragnar, as chairman, stood by a small table and as the men came forward he jumped on top of the table and conducted from there as they sang numerous songs cheered on by the continuous clapping of the audience. This had been his first attempt to conduct and proved to be a great success. After the concert Paul Guðmundsson composed the following stanza about Ragnar:

“Thakkir geldur múgur manns,  
Miklu kveldi fagnar.  
Glaeddur eldi áhugans  
undrun veldur Ragnar.”

The result of the evenings performance prompted the Icelandic Male Voice Choir of Winnipeg to reunite and offered Ragnar the position of conductor and Gunnar Erlendson to be their pianist. Both men accepted the positions.

The years from the spring of 1937 to the summer of 1941 can rightly be called the “Golden Age” of the Choir. Their first concert with Ragnar as conductor was held in the Good Templar's Hall on Sargent, March 4, 1937. A poem by Gordon Paulson, Q.C. was read at the concert and appeared in *Heimskringla* May 12, 1937.

Their first annual concert was held in the First Lutheran Church on May 11, 1938 and proved so successful that the Choir decided to hold their future annual concerts in the Winnipeg Auditorium and from 1939-1941 this was accomplished.

During these years the Choir held many concerts in the Icelandic communities outside of Winnipeg and sang at numerous charity concerts. One outstanding event being The Finnish Relief Fund Rally at the Civic Auditorium. Ragnar H. Ragnar wrote: “I have never forgotten how beautifully Otto Hallson sang the in “Bí Bí og Blaka”, arranged by Sigfús Einarsson and how well it was received by the audience of the five thousand present.”

Once a year the Choir held a concert for their own benefit to obtain money for music, travel expenses etc. and also just a get-together for friends and relations. In the summer they sang at the Icelandic Festivals in Hnausa and Gimli.

On December 1, 1938 Iceland was celebrating its twentieth anniversary as a sovereign state. A program was broadcast from Canada in honor of the occasion and the Choir took part in the program. The Canadian Film Board made a movie called “Icelanders on the Prairie” and gave it to the Icelandic nation. The film was widely shown and it was noted that it had been made with the assistance of The Icelandic Male Voice Choir of Winnipeg and Ragnar H. Ragnar.

A special radio program was prepared with John W. Dafoe, the editor of the Free Press who delivered a speech about the pioneering of the Icelanders in Canada, especially New Iceland. On that program the Choir sang many songs which were broadcast on all Canadian radio stations. Gunnar Erlendson accompanied some of the numbers, others were sung unaccompanied. The highlight of the singing was a rendition by the Choir of Sveinbjörn Sveinbjörnsson's composition of “Sverrir Konungur” set to music by Ragnar H. Ragnar for a male voice choir and accompanied by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. The Choir was greatly honored by their participation.

The Choir published two music books with songs arranged for male voice choirs, many of the songs were arranged by Ragnar. Gunnar Erlendson was responsible for the manifolds and did an excellent job. Gissur Eliasson illustrated the covers with skill and good taste.

Many great compositions were sung by the Choir such as “Landsýn” by Grieg, the cantata “Bálför Haka Konungs”, “Brennio thio Vitar” by Páll Ísólsson, “Förumanna Flokkar Theysa” and “Nú

Sigla Svörtu Skipin", by Karl Runólfsson. They also sang numerous compositions by Bjorgvin Gudmundsson and other Western Icelandic poets such as Sigurdur Júl. Johannesson, Hjálmar Gislason, Ragnar Stefansson, and others translated many well known works from other languages into Icelandic for the Choir to sing.

Besides arranging many works of music for male voice and children's choirs Ragnar H. Ragnar was also a composer. Four of his compositions are listed in an article written by Gisli Jónsson in the "Thjóðraeknis Tímarit" 1951, "Nokkur Vestur-Íslensk Tónskáld". They are: Víkivaki, the poem by Hulda, Ísland, by Kristján Jónsson, Leidsla, by Grímur Thompsen and Litlu Hjónin, by David Stefánsson. No doubt he has continued to compose in Iceland but he did not mention that when he wrote.

1941 was the last year Ragnar conducted the Choir. On Feb. 8, the Men's Musical Club had a Saturday Night Recital (Under the auspices of the Affiliated Groups of the Men's Musical Club). At that concert the Choir sang in Icelandic seven of their popular numbers. Mrs. Lincoln Johnson, accompanied by Frank Thorolfson, sang six Icelandic songs, and Snjolaug Sigurdson had a piano solo playing Intermezzo, J. Brahms and Polonaise in A flat, Fr. Chopin. That year the Choir held its annual concert in the Civic Auditorium, with Maria Markan as a guest artist. The evening was a great success. The Choir also sang at the Icelandic Festivals in Hnausa & Gimli.

That fall Ragnar decided to move to North Dakota. The Choir sponsored a Farewell Party for him which was held at the St. Charles Hotel on Monday, Nov. 10/41. Zohponias Thorkelsson was the chairman. The Choir sang a number of songs and many speeches were delivered. Jón Jónatansson composed a poem

in honor of R.H.R., and Gudmundur A. Stefansson delivered an address. The last two mentioned appeared in Heimskringla, Nov. 19, 1941. Einar Pall Jonsson wrote about him in an article in Lögberg on Nov. 27.

When Ragnar left, the Choir chose Gunnar Erlendson as their conductor. Gunnar had been the pianist for the Choir for many years. He and Ragnar worked extremely well together and he was well liked by the Choir members and the Winnipeg Icelandic community, so it was natural that they should look to him for leadership.

The Choir sang at the Frón concert in February 1942 and held a concert in the Good Templar's Hall on April 29, with Gunnar conducting and Richard L. Beck at the piano. They also sang in Lundar Hall on May 22, and in the first Lutheran Church on June 2, 1942. Some of the proceeds of that concert went to the I.O.D.E. The Choir also sang that year at the Icelandic Festival in Gimli.

In 1943 the Choir, conducted by Gunnar, is only advertised at singing at Íslendingamót Frón's Feb. 24, and the Gimli Icelandic Festival. No mention is made of a change and no report of an annual meeting of the Choir can be found. It therefore comes as a surprise when the Choir is advertised as singing at the Good Templar's Hall on Feb. 22, 1944, conducted by Sigurbjorn Sigurdson with Gunnar Erlendson at the piano. That year Sigurbjorn Sigurdson conducts a mixed choir, with Agnes and Snjolaug Sigurdson as pianist, at the Icelandic Festival in Gimli. This is advertised as a "Hátíðakór" (Celebration Choir) and was practiced to sing at the celebration of Iceland's Independence Day June 17.

The Choir sang at Íslendingamót Frón's on Feb. 27, 1945. Sigurbjorn Sigurdson conducting and Gunnar Erlendson at the piano. On May 28, the

same year they sang at a Social in Winnipeg and at the Icelandic Festival in Gimli.

They sang at Íslendingamót Frón's on Feb. 26, 1956 and held a concert on May 6. In Heimskringla, May 8, there is a good article about the Choir Written by Páll S. Pálsson. He deplores the fact that so many members had left the Choir, but said that one had to accept the fact that times were changing. That year the Choir sang at the Icelandic Festival in Gimli. In 1947 the schedule for 1946 is repeated except that the Choir sponsored a Social and Dance in aid of the Agnes Sigurdson Fund on Nov. 24, 1947 at the Good Templar's Hall. This was the last concert advertised for the Icelandic Male Voice Choir of Winnipeg.

Valdi Gudmundson, 931 Garfield St., was the last treasurer for the Choir. In his record book there are three lists of members, 1945-46 there are 34 members and in 1946-47 there are 29. No records are for 1948-49 but in 1950 there is a list of 24 members. The last entries in the book are for 1946-47. On page 106, Nov. 7, 1947, Stamps \$1.00 and Nov. 12, Tickets \$56.25 both on the debit side. On page 113, marked "Donations" for 1947 is: C.

Halldorsson, \$20.00, O. Hallson, \$5.00 and S. Sigurdson, \$15.00. These are the last entries in the treasurer's record book. There is a bank book from the Royal Bank of Canada, Sherbrook St. showing a balance of fifty-two cents on Mar. 10, 1948.

At the Frón Midwinter concert the program lists as entertainers a Swedish Male Voice Choir. When the concert was written about in the Icelandic papers, it is stated: "Owing to dwindling membership of all Scandinavian Male Voice Choirs it has been decided that they should all join forces under the able leadership and conducting of Arthur Anderson and call themselves the Swedish Male Voice Choir."

The following 5-6 years they sang at the Frón Midwinter concert, the Icelandic Festival in Gimli and held an annual concert. They also sang annually at the Leif Eirickson's concert at Vasalund.

I find it of interest to the community to conclude this article with a photo of the Swedish Male Voice Choir taken in 1957 which shows that there are still a number of men living, who had once belonged to the Icelandic Male Voice Choir of Winnipeg.

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# VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON: THE "FORTY-DOLLAR" TEACHER

by Eric Jonasson  
June 1985

Anyone who has engaged in biographical or genealogical research will realize that many of the seemingly minor and insignificant events in the life of an individual are found rarely by design and much more by pure accident. These trivial occurrences, especially for the prominent people in our midst, are thought of by their biographers as mere "fillers" to be used to pad out the life story -- which indeed they are! But there are many people today who thrive on such trivia, and who relish every tidbit that surfaces on the lives of the famous and infamous.

Other than the Icelandic-Canadians, who emphasize the accident of his birth in Manitoba, most people's interest in the career of Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1879-1962) does not extend earlier than 1906, after which time he gained his well-earned reputation as an Arctic explorer. Prior to this, his life was merely that of a young man gaining an education. Stefansson attended the typical rural school of his day, following which he entered the preparatory school of the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks in 1897. During the next five years he continued his studies, maintaining himself during this period by a variety of occupations, including some school-teaching. In March 1902, he was suspended from the University of North Dakota because of his erratic behaviour and his "failure to attend to his duties" as a college student. Unruffled by this rebuff, he arranged a transfer to the University of Iowa, and graduated from

there in the spring of 1903. He then went on to study comparative religions at Harvard Divinity School, but transferred to the Harvard Graduate School in the fall of 1904 after concluding that the religious life was not for him. His subsequent achievements as an Arctic explorer and writer tends to underscore the wisdom of his decision at Harvard.

My mother's family, the non-Icelandic side of my heritage, originally settled in Walsh County, North Dakota, of which Grafton is the county seat. In the course of uncovering the trivia on her ancestors in this area, I was informed through the comments of local residents and through several small published items that Vilhjalmur Stefansson had once taught school in the township in which her family had homesteaded. This was quite intriguing to me and I resolved to watch for more substantial proof of Stefansson's presence in the area. My inquisitiveness did not go unrewarded!

Two pieces of documentary evidence on Stefansson surfaced during my investigations. The first was found in the office of the Superintendent of Education for Walsh County at the court house in Grafton, and includes Stefansson's name and particulars on a list of early teachers in the county schools. The second, a "Teacher's Contract" signed by Stefansson, was located among the school documents then in the possession of the owner of the farm on which the school stood. From these it is possible to shed a little light on a small period of Stefansson's college days.

Year	TEACHER	Grade	Certif
1897	John ...	4	July 11, Nov 11 - 28 14 - 26
1898	...	2 1/2	Apr 17 - June 30 37 22 1/2 - 81 1/2
1899	...	4 1/2	July 31 - Dec 1 - 37 17 1/2 - 86
1900	...	3	Apr 2 - June 30 35 25 - 85 1/2
1901	...	2 1/2	July 1 - Oct 26 35 18 - 87 1/2 - 170
1902	...	3	Apr 2 - June 30 37 30 1/2 - 200
1903	...	3	July 1 - Dec 20 31 18 1/2 - 88 1/2 - 200

TEACHER'S CONTRACT.

...

discontinuance

Note: This contract must be made and signed and one copy filed with the Clerk of the District School Board.

Stefansson contracted to teach in a one-room school in the Acton School District No. 15 on 9 April 1900 for a seven month term. The schoolhouse was located on the site of what once had been the town of Acton in Walsh County.

Acton was situated on the Red River (Section 25, Township 157N, Range 51W) about 12 miles east of Grafton, and about 32 miles north of Grand Forks where Stefansson was attending college. During the settlement of Walsh

County in the early 1880s, Acton had been the largest town in the county, a contender for the county seat, and the river port through which many early settlers had passed on their way to their homesteads. By the time Stefansson arrived to take up his teaching post, it contained little more than the school, a store, a post office, and a few derelict buildings.

Stefansson taught at the Acton School until the end of October 1900 at a salary of \$40.00 per month, after which he undoubtedly resumed his studies at Grand Forks. The following April he returned to Acton, this time for \$50.00 per month, for another seven month term. For some reason he left the teaching position at the end of June, and was re-

placed by a "C. Gunnlogson". The following spring, he was suspended from the University of North Dakota, and thereafter continued his education outside of North Dakota.

Although this revelation of Stefansson's teaching sojourn in Acton is not particularly monumental -- and it is highly unlikely that the biographies of his life will need to undergo a revision to include this fact -- it does help to fill in the gaps in his early life for the curious few who crave such information. As well, it does provide documentary proof to those residents of Acton Township whose folklore preserved the memory of Stefansson's short presence in their midst.

## VIKING GRAINFIELDS

by Marlin J. G. Magnússon

Icelanders have a wealth of historical literature. There are the famous Sagas, and later historical analecta (annalar), which tells us that not long after the settlement of Ingolfur Arnarson from Norway in the year 874, they started cultivating grain, but I have not been able to determine where they brought the seeds from, although there may have been small patches of grainfields in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, as well as on the British Isles and areas of mainland Europe in those years.

We know that Vikings made their way to Gardariki and also to the now famous graingrowing area later named the Ukraine. They were not total strangers in these places, but where they got their grain seeds from is a matter of speculation now.

It does not really matter, but we do know the graingrowing was one of the

earliest enterprises in Iceland. Different grains have been experimented with over a long period of time, but the successful crops are clearly named as having been oats (hafrar), and barley (bygg). We may presume that their fields were not large -- nothing similar to graingrowing enterprises today in favorable climes. But grainfields they did have, and harvesting of grain is mentioned.

The descriptive style Icelanders have always had in selecting place names gives a clear indication of where there was major graingrowing in Iceland in past centuries, by their standards. One of these is the city of Akureyri in northern Iceland. The word akur means a cultivated field in the old norraena Icelandic language, and this being in the singular we learn that there was one noteworthy grainfield there, most probably owned by the famous northern Iceland leader of

the Sagas, Helgi Magri, after whom the Helgi Magri club in Winnipeg was named, and that is the club that established the first Thorrablót in North America in 1903. Thorrablót really identify with northern Iceland and the Arctic storms there.

Then, in the southern part there is Akranes, and as the word akra is in the plural we learn that there has been more than one grainfield there in the old days.

There is also mention of an island to which they rowed to cultivate grain. Oh, yes, and they brewed some sort of beer or ale which they called mjöd, and this

had to be brewed during their feasts and then consumed without delay, because it did not keep. They had their problems.

There also was some tall grass with seeds. They thrashed this and used the seeds as an additive to blood sausage (slátur), and also in bread, while the long straw was carefully cleaned and dried and used as mattresses. Happy dreams! Fortunate was the farmer who had such grass to harvest, so it is possible that it was native to Iceland, growing in only certain areas. Some traded this to others who did not have it.

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*"Print is the sarcophagus of a poem, the voice of it's soul"*

*Harry Partch*

## RIMUR

(a musical consideration of Icelandic poetry)

by D.L. Jonsson

Rimur can be generally described as sung-poetry distantly related to the epic singing traditions of ancient Europe. In its musical characteristics it was not effected by what later became the conventions of European vocal music.

When discussing rimur usually it has been in terms of its literary content. Because the melodies within rimur took place inside of such a narrow range, and also because its delicate tones are not neatly defined by classical notation, the music of rimur has been overlooked.

Listening to rimur for its musical content is not for everyone. There was a time though when rimur's poetic and musical qualities combined to have as potent effect as that of any other type of artistic medium. The audience had experienced ears for rimur's subtle rhythms, melodies and complex literary content. They could fully appreciate the lush interweaving of story and sound.

This musical relic, that defies conventional analysis, has the added significance of playing a popular role in Icelandic culture. For over 500 years, and into the present century, a considerable portion of creative energy and public attention was funneled into what was both a sophisticated vocal and poetic art.

In home life rimur was in some ways similar to television and/or radio. After dinner in the evening while people were sewing, knitting, carving, etc. one person would perform (usually from a text) rimur. As some of the works could take ten hours or more to perform, they were often broken into the form of a series, and would be continued in consecutive evenings. It was an entertainment that could be enjoyed while working. Yet it had an ambient visual aspect in that the rimur singers face was illuminated by the best (if not the only) lamp in the house.

Ethno-musicology is the branch of

anthropology that studies and records international music. Although previously those practicing this social science relied heavily on notation for recording and comparing the world's musics. The invention of the tape recorder, and instruments for making sound-graphs have refined the previous techniques.

What can be seen when looking at a graph of Icelandic rimur is that there was definite, although individualized, form that was being sung. These are melodies that required skill and concentration to perform and appreciate.

Rimur as a living art form has virtually disappeared in Iceland today. Most modern Icelandic artists prefer to work with genres and media that are a part of modern western civilization. Rimur was an element to a way of life that no longer exists.

A collection of tapes including rimur, story telling and other forms of poetry and music are now housed in the Icelandic National Archives in Reykjavik. These tapes were recorded earlier this century. The works are of a generation of Icelanders who experienced the traditions as they were before the introduction of radio.

There has yet to be a comprehensive picture drawn of Iceland's musical past. The musical history of this nation was more complex than it appears. First of all there is the comparison of regional variations within the tradition of rimur, sacred, and other forms of music.

Hopefully in the future more attention will be given to the history of Icelandic music. For it played a key role in that poetic tradition many of us take pride in.

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Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians, London: MacMillan, 1981

#### Stability in Musical Improvisation

Svend Neilson

(Forlaget Kragen Press, Birkatinget 6, Copenhagen, Denmark 2300S)

Neilson's ideas about the element of improvisation in rimur are illustrated by interviews, transcriptions, and voice-grams.

#### The Romantic poetry of Iceland

William Craigie

University of Glasgow Press

Discusses the multi-faceted literary content of rimur.

#### Discography

NOTE: The following records listings contain contemporary renderings of rimur. Although the performers are sincere in the sustaining of this tradition, they do not contain the full tonal and melodic sophistication found in older recordings.

Sveinbjorn Beinteinsson: Eddukvaethi (Gramm Records, Laugavegur 17, Reykjavik, Iceland 101) One of Iceland's remaining craftsmen of traditional poetic form performs such texts as; "The Prophecy of the Seeress", "The Sayings of Har" etc. Comes with corresponding translations from the "Poetic Edda", and thorough documentation.

Hundread Kvaethlog

Kvaethamannafelagith Lithunn:

(Falkinn Records, Sutherlandsbraut 8, Reykjavik Iceland)

A variety of current sustainers of the rimur tradition, perform examples of pre-industrial Icelandic song.

Gratitude is extended to Hallfredur Örn Eiríksson (of the Arni Magnusson Institute) and Hrein Steingrímsson for providing access to research materials.

The author is interested in corresponding with anyone currently researching solo voice or epic song traditions.

Please contact:

Darrell Jonsson

Hagamelur 16, 3rd Floor

Reykjavik, Iceland 107

## Developing the perfect dairy cow

by Hilmar Johnson  
Teulon Agriculture Representative



*Vioivöllum, in Óli Narfason's Farmstead*

Oli Narfason has come as close as one can get to perfection in dairy breeding nine times.

A third generation dairy producer from the Minerva district bought his first registered Holstein cow in 1950. Since then he has become well recognized for his achievements in the breeding of Holstein cattle.

In February of 1979, he was awarded a Master Breeder Shield from Holstein Canada, a prestigious award presented only to distinguished members of Holstein Canada who have bred cattle superior for both type and production.

Narfason, who is a partner in Narfa Farms Ltd. with his son, Clifford, has bred nine excellent cows. This is quite a feat when one considers that only .2 per cent of all pedigreed Holstein cows in Canada are rated 'Excellent'. The Excellent rating is in regard to the cow's conformation and not milk production.

While many dairy producers breed for high milk production, Narfasons breed for a combination of type and production. His goal as a dairy breeder is to develop cows which not only have the inherent ability to produce heavily, but the correct conformation and strong constitution to enable her to stand the strain of year after year production.

The use of artificial insemination has been instrumental in the development of the genetic pool in Narfasons' herd during the last 25 years.

Narfason do their own artificial insemination and select bulls from the various A.I. studs that are superior in both type and production (milk and butterfat). Over the years, he developed his ability to select breeding stock for type while utilizing milk recording programs for milk and fat production. Like all other dairy breeders in Canada, a Record-of-Performance program is maintained as an important



management tool. The R.O.P. program offers the purebred dairy producers a report on the productivity of their cows and the Narfasons have been on the R.O.P. program since 1955.

There are about 4,400 dairy herds totaling nearly 231,000 cows currently enrolled in the R.O.P. program in Canada.

Narfasons' dairy herd is visited about ten times a year by a federal government inspector who records each cow's milk production and butterfat content. In addition, the herd is visited every nine months by a Dairy Classifier from Brantford, Ontario, headquarters of Holstein Canada. The Dairy Classifier rates each cow for type or conformation, general appearance, dairy character, capacity, feet and legs, rump and mammary system. Once the scores are tabulated, the cows are rated as excellent, very good, good plus or good.

Narfason stated that the classification report can assist one in culling since it not only gives one the overall picture of the animal, but draws attention to specific weaknesses. Location, like in other business, plays an important role in sales. So true in the pedigreed dairy business where he feels he could achieve twice the income from pedigreed sales if he were located on the "main street" of the dairy business which is near major metropolitan areas such as Toronto, Edmonton, etc.

His location has definitely affected sales because they don't get the traffic like other breeders near more populated areas. Presently they generate more income from milk sales than from purebred stock sales, but he added that sales of his pedigreed stock come close to milk sales.

Narfason says that market development and promotion is a key area for a breeder to launch into.

He sold shares on their last Excellent cow, "Narfa Crystal Mattie", to a number of investors in the State of Minnesota,

but still retain part ownership. As a result of this sale, U.S. dairy breeders have become familiar with their stock which resulted in sales of heifers and cows to U.S. buyers.

Narfason stated that breeders must at all times have their animals priced for sale. A breeder should have a strong foundation and need not worry about selling his best stock.

According to many of the highly respected dairy breeders in Canada, you have done well if you have bred an outstanding dairy sire once in a lifetime. Although he bred three excellent bulls, he is still not satisfied. It's not difficult to develop an excellent bull, but it's extremely hard to develop a bull which is a breed improver on production and type. "That," he says, "is a fantastic challenge."

Oli foresees even greater challenges for the younger generation of farmers trying to establish themselves in the business of farming today. It's unfortunate that large capital expenditures and current interest rates make it virtually impossible for anyone, no matter how much ability or ambition they have, to start farming.

"Farming is a challenge. Farmers must accept the challenge and make the most of every opportunity that comes their way."

Narfason has been very efficient with his time being involved in many organizations on a local, provincial and national basis.

The family company is achieving these goals, as they have won the award for the highest-producing mature cow in Manitoba the last three years in a row. In fact, they have won this award six times in the last ten years.

Narfasons milk 40 to 50 purebred cows. Over the last ten years, their herd has averaged approximately 16,000 lbs. of milk per cow. Narfasons' Herd Breed

Class Average in 1983 was 150 for milk and 160 for butterfat.

In 1983, the R.O.P. herds in Manitoba averaged 14,200 lbs. of milk/cow and 3.63 per cent butterfat, while Narfasons averaged 16,500 lbs. of milk/cow and 4 per cent butterfat. The average age in their herd is seven years with many cows 8-15 years of age. The provincial average would be close to 5.5 years of age. Narfasons' cows average six lactations, while the provincial average is about four lactations.

He was a National Director of the Holstein Friesian Association of Canada from 1972-1981, Past President of the Holstein Association of Manitoba, Past President of the Manitoba Dairy Association and is now an Honorary Life Member. Oli is a member of the Eastern Interlake Holstein Dairy Club and has participated as a judge in dairy shows and clinics locally and all across Canada.

Narfason has also been actively involved in the local community as Past President of the Kinsmen Club of Gimli. A member on the Gimli Lutheran Church Council chairman for several years and the Credit Union Board for 24 years. He is also a member of the Gimli Chapter Icelandic National League, is active in the Viking Masonic Lodge and has spent 12 years as 4-H Dairy Leader yet, he still finds time to sing and play the piano.

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## WHO WROTE BEOWULF?

by Emil Bjarnason

Who wrote Beowulf? Since the 18th Century, the English have claimed it as their oldest literary work. But prior to its discovery in the attic of a mansion during that century, its existence was not known, or if once known had long been forgotten.

It is a strange story to have originated in England, if it did. For it contains no mention of England or of Englishmen. The whole story takes place in Denmark and all of the characters are either Danes or Swedes. The events related are of two kinds, both characteristic of the Icelandic sagas: battles between rival monarchs and encounters with dragons guarding treasure.

There is no record in Icelandic literature of Beowulf or his story. But all of the internal evidence identifies it as being of Scandinavian origin. It can in fact be dated in Norse history by reference to the characters mentioned. In particular, Beowulf relates the story of a battle between Ottar Vendilkraka, together with his son Adils, and the Dane Hygelac. The same events are related in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, and Hygelac at least is identified in a sixth century book by the French monk, Gregory of Tours. If we count back the generations recited by Snorri, counting backwards from descendants whose dates are known beyond dispute (such as Haraldr Hardradi) we would place Ottar and therefore Beowulf in the first half of the sixth century, which agrees with Gregory. Moreover, Snorri stated that Ottar and Adils were buried in burial mounds at Uppsala. Modern archaeologists have identified the mounds and excavated them, finding evidence of royal burials and by carbon-dating, establishing their age as going back to about 525 A.D.

It seems unlikely that an Anglo-Saxon poet of the ninth or tenth century would have been in possession of that much accurate information about sixth century Danes and Swedes. Whoever compiled the version of the Beowulf story contained in the English manuscript, the original has to have been part of the body of saga literature, which has its home nowhere but in Iceland.

But who brought it to England and put it in the form of an epic poem? We know that in the Viking age, many Icelanders served as minstrels or court poets to the kings of Norway, Denmark and England. One of them, Egil Skallagrimsson, spent a few years at the court of King Athelstan, for whom he is known to have written poetry. In Egil's own words:\*

I, whom once all England's  
overlord did honor:  
gold he gave me, list'ning  
gladly to my word-craft

Note that this verse, even in translation, follows the traditional, almost standard Icelandic verse-form with each line containing precisely six syllables, in trochaic metre, and with the alliterative pattern of two in the odd line, one in the even (gg/g). Now compare the following lines from Beowulf, where a similar pattern emerges (again, even in translation):

\*as translated by Lee Hollander

Held he to his high fate  
The hoard is ours to see  
Albeit grimly gotten  
Too strong the destiny

The correspondence is close but not perfect, not surprisingly, in view of the fact that both verses quoted were translated.

It would appear that Beowulf was originally part of the oral saga literature of Iceland which, by a quirk of history came

to be committed to paper perhaps two centuries before the other sagas were written down in Iceland.

But let the English glory in their tradi-

tion. What else have they to show for the centuries before Chaucer? Out of the rich body of Viking lore, we can afford to let them have this one.

## POETRY IN VATNABYG

by Emil Bjarnason

One didn't grow up in Wynyard\* without early and regular exposure to poetry. The town was at various periods the home of S.J. Johanneson ("Siggi Jul"), Stefan Bjarman, Magnus Markusson, T.T. Kalman, Bogi Bjarnason, Paul Bjarnason... but why go on? Don't all Icelanders consider themselves poets in some degree?

From time to time there were visits by poets from distant parts: Stephan G. Jakobina Jonsson, K.N. Julius, and others. Jon Runolfsson was a frequent visitor, of whom my father used to say that if someone would re-translate Jon's version of "Enoch Arden" back into English, it would be a vast improvement on Tennyson's original. Another regular visitor was Siggi Sigvaldason. I'm not sure that he wrote any poetry, but he was forever peddling bibles and other books door to door. If a householder failed to buy from him, he would stand in front of the house, look at the heavens and shout in a voice that could be heard for blocks "Lord, why have you sent me to these unbelievers". I suppose it was an effective sales pitch.

K.N. was the most popular of the poets. Fifty years ago, there were few teenagers who couldn't recite at least one of his famous four-liners. K.N. himself, though, described Wynyard as the place where one lost one's directions, so that east is west and west is east.\*\*

Perhaps the highlight of our exposure to verse was during the terrible winter of 1932 when no one had work and few had anything more profitable to do than write

poetry. That winter T.T. Kalman — better known as Tobbi — compiled a verse census of householders "Islendingatal Husradenda i Wynyard-bae", consisting of 239 verses, one for each householder. Many of them were in the nature of light-hearted teasing. The community responded in kind. A ballot box was set up in Bergman's store, and all residents invited to drop their replies to Tobbi in the box. In the spring, a picnic was held at John Johannsson's farm, where the box was opened and the contributions read. The following are samples:

by Tobbi

Pall med vitid vodalegt  
veit eg líkann Snorra  
strítast vid ad spilla spekt  
spesiu-konga vorra.

(Paul with the fearsome intellect  
I would liken to Snorri  
striving ever to disturb the peace  
of our moneyed men)

The reply (by Pall Bjarnason  
and Halli Axdal)

Hann T T K er skratti skýr  
Og skynsamari en nokkurt dýr  
En thegar hann skakkar brettir brýr  
Th á brosir hann eins og mjólkur-kýr

(TTK's a clever devil  
and more intelligent than any beast  
When he arches one eyebrow  
He grins just like a milking-cow)

\*otherwise known variously as Sleipnir or Vatnabygd.

\*\*"Attavilltur var eg thar, vestrid sneri austur"

## THE CHAIR OF ICELANDIC LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

On the recommendation of Dr. P.H.T. Thorlakson, a Committee has been formed to raise money for the Chair of Icelandic Language and Literature at The University of Manitoba. It is the considered opinion of both the Committee and Dr. Thorlakson, that additional funding for the Chair is urgently required.

The purpose of this article is to introduce the Committee, to explain its objectives and to invite the Icelandic community in North America to help it achieve its objective of raising an additional \$500,000 for the Icelandic Chair.

By way of background, the origins of the Icelandic Chair date back to February 15, 1949, when the University of Manitoba acknowledged that when it received donations of not less than \$150,000 ("the Endowment Fund") it would (a) establish a Chair of Icelandic Language and Literature within the Faculty of Arts and Science, with the object of providing courses of studies and research in the field of Icelandic Language and Literature; and (b) create a Professorship of Icelandic Language and Literature and appoint a qualified specialist in Icelandic Language and Literature to conduct classes and courses of study. The University further agreed to apply the income from the Endowment Fund firstly, in payment of the salary of the Professor and secondly, to the extent that the income might permit, to provide additional teaching assistance and appropriate books, materials and library services.

As a result of the campaign for funds which took place at that time, a sum in excess of \$250,000 was donated. The Icelandic Chair became a reality. Professor Finnbogi Gudmundsson Cand. Mag. of the University of Iceland became the Chair's first incumbent. He arrived in

Winnipeg in 1951 and provided excellent service for five years before returning to Iceland. His successor, Professor Haraldur Bessason Cand. Mag., is still Head of the Department and is doing excellent work.

The names of the organizations and individuals who originally donated so generously to the Endowment Fund are on record at the University. In 1961, the University published a pamphlet honouring these original donors and a copy was published in the July 19th, 1985 issue of Logberg Heimskringla. Specific mention should, however, be made of Dr. P.H.T. Thorlakson who, in 1945, made a personal gift of \$5,000 to the University in memory of his father, the late Reverend N.S. Thorlaksson of Selkirk, Manitoba. This was the first gift of money to the University to establish the Chair. Mr. A.P. Johannson's donation of \$50,000 became the second gift and the funds donated to the University under the Will of the late Mr. M. Hinrikson became the third contribution to the University.

These original donors, all of Icelandic descent and residing throughout North America, whose generous gifts of money made the Icelandic Chair a reality were, without doubt, motivated by their love of education and their pride in the culture and achievements of our ancestors. These motivating factors have earned the Icelandic Community an enviable record of achievement. For this reason, the Committee has named itself, the "H.I.P. Committee", using the initials for Heritage, Image and Pride.

There is no doubt that the Chair of Icelandic Language and Literature has achieved a permanent and prominent place within The University of Manitoba. In the opinion of many, the University

has grown in stature as a result of the addition of the Icelandic Chair. The University also houses one of the best libraries of Icelandic books and manuscripts found anywhere in the world, with the possible exception of Denmark, Scotland and Iceland itself.

While the University of Manitoba is to be commended for its support and maintenance of the Icelandic Chair, the continuing success of the Chair is also due, in part, to the continued support of individual men and women of Icelandic descent in both Canada and the United States. For instance, the gifts of rare and priceless Icelandic books and manuscripts to the University Library have been truly exceptional.

With inflation and the declining buying power of the dollar, it is obvious that the original Endowment Fund has become insufficient in terms of dollar value to enable the Icelandic Chair to continue to be self-sufficient and certainly the lack of funds could cause a decline in the activities of the Chair. The fact that the activities of the Chair have continued at such an excellent rate is due, primarily, to the ability of its present Head, who has done an excellent job, both for The University of Manitoba and the Icelandic community.

It is time for the Icelandic communities of Canada and in the United States to again come forth and provide the additional funding which is needed to permit the Chair to continue to be self-sufficient and to expand its work.

The original sum of \$250,000 contributed by the founders during the campaign which extended from 1948 to 1952, translates in today's dollars to at least \$1,000,000. Therefore, in present day values, the amount which this Committee hopes to now raise, translates to about one-half of the original sum. The Committee is confident that those same factors

which motivated the original donors, are still very much in existence and that they will again work to motivate the present Icelandic community.

Donations can be made to the H.I.P. Committee at the address below and can be in the form of outright payments, memorial gifts, a pledge of a set amount to be paid monthly, quarterly or yearly according to the wishes of the donor, or by the promise of a bequest by Will. All cheques should be made payable to the University of Manitoba, but sent to the Committee. A receipt for tax purposes in Canada or in the United States will be issued to you by the University. All amounts pledged, whether by outright gift, by periodic payments or by the promise of a bequest by Will, will be acknowledged by the Committee upon receipt of your donation.

H.I.P. Committee  
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## AETTARTAL

by Emil Bjarnason

Stephan G is reputed to have remarked that all Icelanders trace their ancestry to Egil Skallagrimsson. Whether he actually said it or not, it is more truth than fiction.

Whenever two Icelanders meet for the first time, they begin exchanging "aettartal", and more often than not find that they are related in one way or another. I recall once being pressed into service as a temporary interpreter at the beach resort of Sochi, on the Black Sea. An Icelandic couple were guests at one of the hotels. They could speak no language except Icelandic, and nobody else there could speak it until I came along. The nearest we came to establishing any connection was that one of their children was married into the family of Reverend

Fridrik Fridrikson of Husavik, whom I had known in Canada when I was a child. A few years later, when Sjera Fridrik was visiting Canada, I mentioned the incident to him. He laughed and said "they are only related to me by marriage, but being descended from Sjera Thorstein a Halsi they are your cousins (Sjera Thorstein was my great grandfather's brother). Incidents of that kind are repeated whenever Icelanders meet.

We are, of a certainty, all descended from Egil Skallagrimsson. How do I know that? Well, simply because it is a mathematical certainty. Therefore it is no great surprise that every time someone pays some genealogist in Reykjavik to research his family tree, Egil's name always turns up, along with the Kings of Norway and Sweden, all the way back to Ottar Vendilkraka. And so it should, because it belongs in the family tree of any bona fide Iclander.

Everyone has two parents and four grandparents. We are likely also to have had eight great grandparents, and if there were no intermarriage of relatives, however remote, the number of our forefathers in each generation would be double the number in the following generation. Since Egil lived forty generations ago, any person's potential number of ancestors in his time is two raised to the fortieth power, that is 1,099,511,600,000 or at least a thousand times as many people as lived on this earth at that time. Obviously intermarriages of relatives, near or remote, were the rule. Nevertheless, if one could correct the theoretical figure for all such intermarriages (and therefore duplications — the same individual, for example, being the great great grandfather of two or more of one's grandparents, and so on) the number of one's ancestors in the tenth century could still be high enough to encompass the entire population of Iceland. Which

means that although Egil was undoubtedly your ancestor and mine, all that tells us is that each of us can claim that, say, one of each 50,000 of his genes came from Egil.

The more recent aspects of the family tree are much more useful. For we may meet relatives with whom we have something in common if we confine it to four or five generations. The further back you go, the more meaningless the relationship becomes, like Alex Haley's descent from Kunta Kinte, or Winston Churchill's descent from Marlborough.

My own genealogy, which has every appearance of authenticity, includes just about everyone named in the sagas — kings, vikings, poets and bishops. But as I have pointed out, it means little. On the other hand when I was going through some parish records in Vopnafjord, and recognized, a few generations back, a man named Evert sa sterki Vium, the fact that he was my great great grandfather, led me to a number of second, third and more distant cousins, who received me with the traditional old country hospitality. There is something to be said for the family tree.

— — —  
*Grow old along with me!  
 The best is yet to be.*

— — —  
*For the good are always the merry  
 Save by an evil chance.*

— — —  
*The rank is but the guinea's stamp:  
 The man's the gowd for a' that*

— — —  
*Full many a flower is born to blush  
 unseen  
 And waste its sweetness on the desert  
 air.*

— — —  
*Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry  
 look. He thinks too much. Such men are  
 dangerous.*

## "RESEARCH NOTES"

ANNO 1712  
ICELANDHALLGILSSTADIR  
(Langanes)

Translated by Donald E. Gislason and Petur H. Armansson.

Legend states that there was a small church standing here in medieval times. To support this probability there is a fenced in outbuilding located on the farmhouse fore-pavement and according to memory this structure was built on an ancient church ruin called Kirkjutoft.<sup>1</sup>

The land value for this estate is 12 *kugildi*<sup>2</sup>. It is consequently assessed or tithed at four 'tinundum' since Tungusel became a separate farm. Before that it was valued at 18 *kugildi*.

The owner is Krístrun Thorsteinsdóttir of Hjaltastad in Utmannasveit or her children. The resident farmer is Gudmundur Thorkelsson.

Six years ago there was an outstanding lean against the property of one *kugildi*. After that the farm was deserted for three years and then reoccupied without debts.

There was a claim this year against the land but it was paid in fish at Vopnafjord. There are no claims now.

The livestock includes two milk cows, one year-old bull, twenty-two sheep, three two-year old rams, twelve lambs, one riding horse and two untrained horses. There is enough fodder hay to support three cows.

Outlying (highland) pasture for migrating animals is somewhat less than previously mentioned for Tungusel. Seasonal grazing on these outlying lands cannot fully support livestock, therefore additional hay must always be supplied.

There is an abundance of cutting-turf and earth for house construction, as well as brushwood for fuel and salix for fodder. There is little trout fishing in the Hafralon River.

According to the lease the farm enjoys access claim to driftwood,<sup>3</sup> for building

purposes, along a 200 *fadma*<sup>4</sup> stretch of beach east of the mouth of the Hafralon River.

The river is eroding and destroying the homefield by causing landslips. The best hay outfield located near the river toward the peninsula has been badly neglected and lies in withered grass and moss. It is, therefore, utilized only in small patches. The grazing meadowlands are good and abundant.

Fresh water supplies are unreliable during the winter and it is a long way to bring it from the river (to the farmhouse).<sup>5</sup>

The distance between here and the church (at Saudanes) is less than has been mentioned before (for Tungusel).

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>church foundations or walls without a roof.

<sup>2</sup>cow value units.

<sup>3</sup>driftwood logs were generally used in the basic structure of houses such as beams and flooring and not as exterior nor interior cladding. Sometimes panelling, utensils and furniture were fashioned from this resource — turf and lava stone were the major building materials for housing, sheds, barns and fencing.

<sup>4</sup>one 'fadma' represents the distance between two outstretched hands.

<sup>5</sup>for domestic and livestock use — taken from wells or springs.

## Source:

JARDABÓK - 1712,  
 Árni Magnusson & Páll Vídalín,  
 Copenhagen, 1913-43  
 Icelandic Collection,  
 University of Manitoba

## THORRABLOT: CHRISTIANITY OR ASATRU?

by Emil Bjarnason

Does it ever occur to us to wonder why, a thousand years after the adoption of Christianity, Icelanders still celebrate the pagan festival, Thorrablot?

For that matter, why is it that, five hundred years after the adoption of Lutheranism, we find among us Unitarians, spiritualists, theosophists, Rosicrucians, Mormons, holy rollers and Christian Scientists. Indeed, I had one extraordinarily devout Sunday School teacher who was simultaneously a Lutheran, a Christian Scientist and Jehovah's witness.

What accounts for this doctrinal agility? It has persisted for a long time, for did not Saemundur Frodi (1056-133) barter his soul to the devil for a free ride home to Iceland from France on the back of a seal?

Everyone doubtless remembers how King Olaf Haraldsson Christianized Norway and earned his sainthood, by travelling about the country carrying a bath and a broadsword, giving each district chief a choice between baptism and beheading. Later he sent emissaries to Iceland to perform the same service. The Althing met this challenge by adopting a resolution that made Christianity the official religion, subject to the following conditions, if we are to believe the Islendingabok:

1. That Icelanders would continue to eat horsemeat.
2. That they would continue the practice of exposing female infants as a means of birth control.
3. That those who wished could continue the worship of the heathen gods. (Hence the persistence of the Thorrablot).

Five hundred years later, the King of Denmark ordered the Icelanders to abandon Roman Catholicism and convert to the teachings of Martin Luther. The majority of Icelandic churchmen bowed to this edict (eventually their loyalty to the king was greater than their loyalty to the church) but the bishop of Holar, Jon Arason, refused to convert. In an incident reminiscent of Saint Olaf's barbarism, Arason and his two sons were beheaded.

What's this? A Roman Catholic archbishops's sons? Moreover, his contemporary, Brynjolfur Sveinsson, bishop of Skalholt, of revered memory, was the father of the famous "virgin of Skalholt". More, many Icelanders, including the undersigned, can trace their ancestry to the twelfth century bishop, Thorlakur Thorhalsson, Iceland's only authentic saint.

It would seem that there was a fourth condition the Islendingabok neglected to mention.

Do you suppose then, that the answer to the question posed in the first sentence above lies in a parallel with the Spanish conversion of Mexico by force to Catholicism? The Mexicans had no choice but to make formal acceptance of the new religion, but their statues of the Christian saints continue to bear the features of the Aztec gods, before whom they genuflect when muttering their Christian prayers.

— .

*Old age has yet his honor and his toil.*

*Sleep that knits up the unravelled sleeve of care.*

— — —

*The year's at the spring  
And day's at the morn.*

## WINGS OF THE WIND

by Albert L. Halldorsson

Who is a dreamer and what is the substance of a dream? Wisdom is often first a dream. Who can deny that our greatest inventions were inspired by a fantastic dream. This is the substance of dreams: — a wounded heart yearns for the Balm of Gilead; we seek security and happiness; we long eternally for a kindred soul. There is Balm in Gilead for the sorrowing; for by dreams they can escape into unreality for a breathless moment of time. Within an equally limited time we dream of a home, pleasant surroundings, the laughter of a happy family. Think not that it must remain a vision; for the joining of kindred souls accelerates achievement.

A kindred soul — we all long for someone truly willing to share misfortune as well as fortune — a kindred soul...

I dreamt a dream —

It seemed I trod a virgin sod;  
That bore the vineyard's noble  
fruits.

The shady trees whose sturdy roots  
Grew strong in Mother Earth.

I saw her then —

My kindred soul — (her face extol).  
Like milk and honey was her skin:  
Her beauty flowing from within;  
Like purest pear — untouched.

My kindred soul!

Oh Dreamer, dream; and it will  
seem

As though the lonely years are gone.  
'Neath shady trees you gaze upon  
That gentle face — those eyes —  
Her flowing form.

But you must wake — this vision  
shake.

Then tread the highways, seek her  
face —

Forget her not — she's worth the  
Race.

She lives — your kindred soul!

And I awoke with the dawn. The lake shimmered in the sun, rippling with the caress of the gentle zephyrs. It was not far to the river's mouth where the two waters became one; so I wandered towards the marriage of the streams.

Copper, silver and gold mingled in the early morning light. Transient colors hovered over the water giving way to new hues under the magic of the sun. Contrastingly the channel markers of man seemed grotesquely out of place — like thorns in Beauty's flesh. But the splendor of the scene nothing could mar.

*This is an excerpt from a booklet 80 pages by Mr. Halldorsson entitled Wings of the Wind.*

\* \* \*

## ON LOVE AND HATE

by Gus Sigurdson

I'll not resist  
The music that I hear  
From every bird  
That sings a song of cheer.

I'll not resist  
The beauty that I see  
In every flower  
That appeals to me.

I'll not resist  
The joy of a smile  
That lingers on the lips  
For but a while.

I'll not resist  
The power of pure love  
I know indeed  
Has come from Heaven Above.

However...  
I will resist  
The essence of all hate  
That springs from Hell  
To mutilate my fate.

1986

## SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED CANADA ICELAND FOUNDATION

### Emilia Palmason Student Aid Fund

Two awards of \$500.00 each to be given annually. The recipients must be of good moral character, Icelandic descent, college calibre and primarily in need of help to continue their studies in high school, college or at the University level. They are asked to sign a pledge that "somewhere along the highway of life" they will try to provide comparable help to another needy student. Closing date for applications **June 30th**.

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### The Canada Iceland Foundation Scholarship

One scholarship of \$500.00 to be awarded annually. Award to be determined by academic standing and leadership qualities. To be offered to a University student studying towards a degree in any Canadian University. Closing date for applications **Sept. 15**.

### The Gunnar Simundson Memorial Scholarship

One scholarship of \$300.00 to be awarded annually. This scholarship will be awarded to a student enrolled in a Canadian University who demonstrates high scholastic ability and financial need. Closing date for applications **Sept. 15**.

Students wishing to apply are asked to submit applications with supporting documents indicating scholarship applied for. Information and application forms are available by telephoning 772-8989 or contacting

Canada Icelandic Foundation  
c/o Mrs. Borga Jakobson, Secretary  
1145 Dominion St.  
Winnipeg, Man., R3E 0P3

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Further information and application forms may be obtained from Mrs. Borga Jakobson, 1145 Dominion St., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3E 2P3. Phone 772-8989.

2. The Wilhelm Kristjansson Memorial Scholarship, \$250.00 in value, is offered by the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba. It is offered to a student who has completed one year of post-secondary studies (University or Community College) in Manitoba and is continuing his/her studies in 1986-87.

Applications must be received no later than August 1, 1986.

Further information and application forms may be obtained from:

Mr. Lee Brandson  
247-99 Dalhousie Dr.,  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 3M2  
Phone 261-6692.

## BOOK REVIEW

### WEIGHT TRAINING FOR EVERYONE

by Paul Bjarnason

Foreword by Doug Hepburn

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Bjarnason is a former Canadian weightlifting champion and Olympian. He won the silver medal at the 1967 Pan-American Games in Winnipeg. During his athletic career, he established more than 30 Canadian and Commonwealth records. Paul has instructed hundreds of weight trainers, from beginners to advanced competitive Olympic weightlifters.

Presently Mr. Bjarnason is a secondary school mathematics teacher in Vancouver, where he lives with his wife Valerie, their daughter Palma, and their menagerie of assorted animal friends. *Weight Training For Everyone* is his first book. He is

currently working on a series of books on the subject of weight training applied to athletics.

#### THIS BOOK CAN HELP YOU TO

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- over 50 answers to common questions about weight training
  - 3 types of program to choose from
  - over 100 illustrations
- ...An ideal introduction to weight training for the beginner.

\* \* \*

Lifting Press is pleased to announce the arrival of *Weight Training For Everyone* - A Complete Guide to Total Fitness for People of All Ages. The first edition is a coil-bound soft cover book of 144 pages, including 120 photos and illustrations. The author is Paul Bjarnason, former Canadian champion and Olympian. The foreword is written by Doug Hepburn, former world champion and World's Strongest Man.

The book differs from others presently on the market in that its focus is the total fitness of the individual rather than merely muscular development, and it appeals to everyone rather than only to those who seek big muscles. We believe the book will be of interest not only to the general public, but to athletes, coaches, educational institutions, and libraries. *Weight Training For Everyone* has the following features:

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We believe that *Weight Training For Everyone* is destined to become the standard introduction to weight training. Doug Hepburn, in his foreword to the book, calls it "an ideal introduction to weight training for the beginner".

*Weight Training For Everyone* may be ordered from local bookstores or purchased directly from Lifting Press by mail order for \$9.95 (plus \$1.50 for postage and handling).

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## THE NIGHT WORKERS OF RAGNAROK

by Kristjana Gunnars

104 pp., Toronto, Press Porcepic  
\$6.95 (paperback)

review by Norman Sigurdson

Kristjana Gunnars is an Icelandic-Canadian poet whose work has been received with a great deal of critical acclaim and who was chosen by Margaret Atwood for inclusion in the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, a signal honour for a young writer. *The Night Workers of Ragnarok* is Ms. Gunnars fifth volume of poetry (she has also produced a book of prose fiction and edited a book of Icelandic folktales for children) and it should go a long way to furthering her already considerable reputation.

The poems in the current collection, which is comprised of eight poetic cycles, were written between 1981 and 1985 and were inspired by the cultural re-orientations which the author underwent as she moved back and forth between Iceland, where she was born and raised, and Canada, where she has spent most of her

adult life. Ms. Gunnars refers to this as "the 'return of the native' theme".

But these re-aculturations provide only a jumping off point for Ms. Gunnars observations. While re-aquainting ourselves with a place in which we had lived but left long ago, or returning home after a year or two in another place, our perceptions sharpen to what we had previously taken for granted, or perhaps were not even consciously aware of before; our sense of place becomes more heightened, more refined. For a poet, more especially than for the rest of us, this reawakened perception can lead to new insights.

Only two of the cycles deal with re-experiencing Canada after brief periods spent in Iceland. "Wild waters" consists of three brief poems written after a canoeing trip on the Lake of the Woods in northern Ontario. The rhythmic beat echoes the serene motion of paddling on a placid lake, and the images reflect the peacefulness and sense of harmony which one realizes is so difficult to maintain in life:

time now for wild waters  
to still, life  
becomes an old  
friend, we take each other  
for granted, learn  
when a stream forks  
to choose one

"Stone bridge poems", a longer cycle of ten poems, was written after a pilgrimage to Markerville, Alberta, which was for years the home of another Icelandic-Canadian poet, Stephan G. Stephansson. The poems in this cycle are beautiful, lyrical and bittersweet, mourning the contrast between the vibrant pioneer optimism expressed in Stephansson's poetry, and the reality of Markerville today, a dying weatherbeaten prairie hamlet:

here lies the displaced stones

the weathered boulders  
perched over a stream of running blood  
that continues in my veins

Faded idealism also forms the backdrop to two poem cycles called "milky way vegetation". They were written during a summer which the author spent in Iceland as a break from her academic career, and they have a slightly melancholy edge to them. They are also a celebration of the subtler beauties of Iceland's nature, not the majestic fjords or volcanic fields, but the low-lying summer vegetation. This small beauty is contrasted in the imagery with the awesome imensity of the universe observable in the night sky. The narrator, somehow divided in her loyalty between these two manifestations of nature, is also torn between a withdrawn contemplativeness and a vaunting ambition.

"Bed of opium" and "north country wake" were also written in Iceland, but these are winter poems. Dark and gloomy, Ms. Gunnars compares these poems to Van Gogh's "Dutch period" of dark brown and green peasant paintings. The poems in these two cycles deal specifically with aspects of rural Icelandic culture which were already beginning to die out during the author's childhood and have since all but disappeared as Iceland has taken on a more modern, urban influenced lifestyle:

earth will not hold  
hay pastures will not green  
the familiar face of our mountain  
knows us no more

(Bed of opium)

The poems in this section are among the most moving and most vivid in the collection. They are, in a sense, also poems about loss and longing — the immigrant experience. But in these poems it is now all of us who are immigrants and exiles, cut off forever from the feeling of connectedness with the natural world that

is rhapsodised in "wild water":  
 there is no blessing left  
 in the work we do, summer  
 arrives with no help from our hands  
 (North country wake)

While most of the poems in this collection are basically personal, two cycles have a more directly political and didactic nature. "The silent hand" continues the theme of "bed of opium" and "north country wake", the loss of old world skills and values, but this time there is more moral ambiguity. This cycle concerns the whaling industry, a traditional occupation for Icelanders, which has now fallen into disrepute in some circles. "The silent hand" meditates on the opposition between the poet's traditional belief in "subsistence" ("to go/**whaling** they said

the way the ancients/went to **viking**") and the Western, liberal ideas about conservation and animal rights which she has attained from living abroad.

"The night workers of ragnarok" is another cycle with a political aspect, which was written during a year that Ms. Gunnars spent in Iceland as a journalist. The focus is one which, she says, "amounts to an obsession in Scandinavia", the fear of nuclear proliferation. While the whaling poems examine the Icelanders' traditionally fatalistic acceptance of death and risk, these poems are a warning that that attitude can no longer suffice in the face of an awesome new technology in a world where we are all exiled from the forces of nature which we pretend to control.

## GENEALOGY IN FOCUS

by Marlin J.G. Magnusson

There is a noticeable increase in interest about all things Icelandic, especially that which derives from the old norraena culture. People are reaching out for knowledge of who they are and what their background is. In essence, this is their desire to know about their cultural heritage, and the study of genealogy is the most direct way to gain such knowledge.

The research of, study and recording of genealogy has been a major interest of Icelandic people throughout history, and continues to be that as a very specialized field. In the Viking age it was unthinkable for any person of status, man or woman, not knowing their ancestry. It was imperative for them to know it.

Problems for those who neglected knowing their ancestry were manifold, but the two major problems they met with are very clear. One was the problem of claiming inheritance, especially from distant relatives, because the genealogy

records were only memorized in those times, before the invention of birth certificates. It was all committed to memory, and could be attested to by others. Our modern society now commits all major information to computer memory banks, so in a way we have progressed back to the age of the Vikings. Even their laws were committed to the memory of their law-speakers at their Althing (parliament) which dealt with all legal problems. They bore the title Lögsögumenn (lawspeakers).

The other major problem arose in making a proposal for marriage (hjónaband, and "band" equates with bond: marriage bond). In our times, if a boy and girl meet, smile or wink at each other, they tend to think they are engaged to be married. Not so in the old days when social order was different. When a young man fell in love (or even some old codger) he did not rush to the girl and propose to

her, because the custom did not allow that. He would contain himself and go speak to her father (or mother or oldest brother depending on demise), or get his father, mother or trusted friend to broach the subject of possible engagement, and if the father, mother or oldest brother, was the least bit interested, then the genealogy of both the man and the lady were frankly revealed. They knew who they were getting married to, as neither was left in the dark about that. So genealogy served more than to satisfy an idle curiosity about family trees for a generation or two back.

A focus on genealogy reveals another interesting feature of the old norraena (Scandinavian) culture, and this is their patronimic system, which still prevails in Iceland, even with their phone books adhering to that system by showing first names first and then whose son or daughter they are. Example: brother and sister and their father is Árni. The son is Jón Árnason and the daughter is Lína Árnadóttir (Árnadaughter). This provides each with an individual self-identity and direct genealogical record throughout their lives, and even marriage does not deprive them of that, because in getting married the bride (brúður) does not take her husband's name for the simple reason that theirs is not a family-name system. The bride never loses her self-identity like brides do under the North American family-name system, where even after complete divorce the woman continues using her divorced husband's name, having lost her self-identity when she married and became only a Mrs. Would that be male chauvinism?

The feature of self-identity provided by the patronimic system also provided each of the couple with legal individual rights of ownership of what they owned. A husband could not seize upon what the wife owned, nor could the wife seize upon and

squander his, but each could share with the other if they pleased. "Love is sharing" and probably most of the time that is what it was, but no one could grab from the other even in divorce. Divorce arbitrators always saw to it that children were provided for, usually on a cash basis as a one-time settlement and this was placed in trust for them, regardless of who got custody.

Now, what about ourselves in relation to all this, and why did this historic system come to a sudden halt here in North America and plunge us into the opposite family-name system? It was not by our choice. It was forced on us in the 1870's and precisely by the birth certificate forms which the Vikings knew nothing about. The forms only provided for the family-name system, so they had to adopt that system when they came to North America.

Example of what happened, using my family background: My grandparents Magnús Guðlaugsson and Hólmfríður Jónsdóttir came from Iceland in 1883 with their son, Gísli, and daughter, Bina, and the children retained the patronimic system and he was Gísli Magnússon, but when he married and had children they had to be recorded on the birth certificates as Magnússon, as a family name. People in Iceland say that I am not Magnússon, but Gíslason, Magnússonar, Guðlaugssonar. Of course they are right. I am not the son of my grandfather Magnús.

This makes a real problem for us now in researching our genealogy because we wallow through family names, many of which are the same, with some of them related and others not, and if we want records back past immigration we find ourselves in the thick of the old patronimic system, which we were made to abandon.

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**IN THE NEWS****FROM THE NEWSLETTER  
OF THE ICELANDIC  
CANADIAN CLUB OF B.C.****April 4,5,6  
Icelandic  
National League  
1986 Convention  
Vancouver B.C.**

Every member in our club can participate and help to chart new directions and goals for the future. This will be a wonderful time to help shape policies and meet others interested in our common heritage.

**CHRISTMAS PARTY:**

Thank you to everyone who helped to make the Club's Christmas Party held on December 8th a great success. As always, the Lutheran Church of Christ lower auditorium was filled to capacity with happy children and adults. Pianist Gertie Eggertson and Bert Clarke led the carol-singing with great enthusiasm while Ragnar Magnus and Linda Rosas organized the Christmas decoration craft. The delicious food was supplied by those attending under the leadership of Margaret Amirault and Gwen Gudbjartson. Santa's visit resulted in lovely gifts for the children, thanks to the efforts of Linda Birch and, of course, Ralph Rasmussen. Jona Thorlacius donated two of her famous "Jona" dolls for a raffle with the other prize being a doll in Icelandic costume donated by Alda Steele. The raffle along with a sale of donated Christmas decorations and items from Iceland, raised several hundred dollars to help

defray the costs of the party. Items for sale were donated by Laura Brandson, Linda Asgeirsson and Alice Finnbogason.

Club President Bob Asgeirsson presented an engraved silver cup to 1985 Club Princess, Laura King, and thanked her for her participation in our Club events. He then introduced this year's Princess, Jennifer Peacock.

**ICELANDER IN SPACE:**

A former B.C. resident who specializes in physics and applied mathematics will be backup to Canada's second astronaut to fly aboard the U.S. space shuttle. Bjarni Tryggvason, who was born in Reykjavik, will fly if laser physicist Steve MacLean is unable for any reason to participate in the seven-day mission scheduled for launch on March 24, 1987. Tryggvason, who now lives in Ottawa, told a Vancouver newspaper that he has mixed feelings about being chosen as backup to MacLean. "I'm kind of disappointed that I'm the backup, but at the same time, Steve, myself and Marc Garneau (the 1st Canadian in space) are working on the project at the National Research Centre. I will work closer with Steve through the summer...then I'll stand back and watch as he takes off." Bjarni's father, Svavar, and his six brothers and sisters all live in the Vancouver area. They, along with many Club members, have followed his space career with much interest.

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Courtesy of the Newsletter of the Icelandic Association of Chicago

**The new executives of the Icelandic Association of Chicago:**

Björg Vacchiano	President
Hrönn Thornton	1st Vice President
Helga Hansen	2nd Vice President
Leifur Björnsson	Secretary
Howard Thornton	Treasurer

**The Icelandic American Society of New York**

Pétur G. Thorsteinsson is the Icelandic Consul General in New York. He is also the president of the Icelandic American Society of New York. Pétur has been in touch with us and is interested in promoting greater cooperation and communication between Icelandic organizations in North America. He has so far identified a total of nineteen. If any reader of this newsletter belongs to another Icelandic club, please write Pétur and give him the name, address, etc. of the organization:

Icelandic American Society of New York

c/o Petur Thorsteinsson, President  
655 Third Avenue, Suite 1810  
New York, NY 10017

**Iceland**

An interesting book titled: Iceland, written by Pamela Sanders, the wife of the former Ambassador of the United States in Reykjavik, has just been published by Salem House. Photographs are by a Canadian photographer. According to Pétur Thorsteinsson's newsletter it has received excellent reviews. It may be a book to consider as a Christmas present for a friend or yourself.

**Radio News From Iceland**

News programs in Icelandic are now broadcast on short wave radio from Reykjavik daily as follows:

7:15 - 7:45 AM CST on 15385 KHZ

5:00 - 5:40 PM CST on 9655 KHZ



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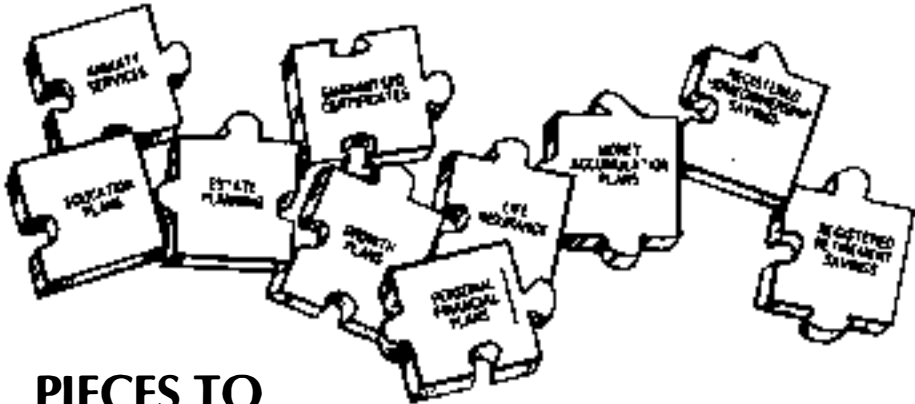
**Greetings**

from

A Friend

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