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THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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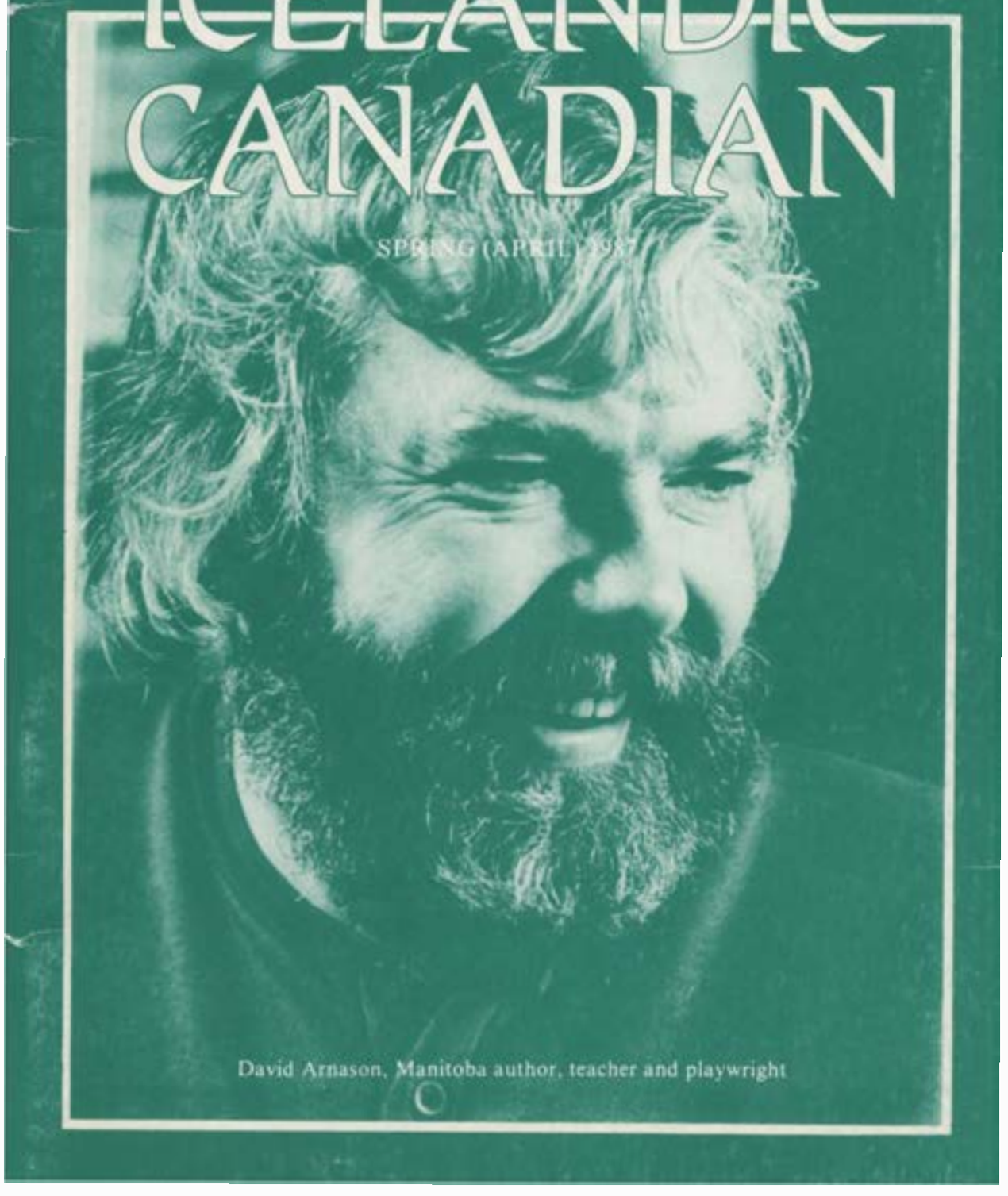

David Arnason, Manitoba author, teacher and playwright

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THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

Effective with the Spring issue, 1987, our new mailing address will be:

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN MAGAZINE
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EDITORIAL

by John S. Matthiasson

Scholarly Essays Editor,
Icelandic Canadian Editorial Board

Our magazine was born in 1942, which means that it is now forty-five years old. Putting that figure in human terms, it is approaching mid-life, and perhaps may be pardoned for experiencing a period of mid-life crisis. Readers will have noted our new format, first revealed in the Winter, 1986, issue, and many will have read the editorial by Eric Jonasson in a recent issue which explains the many changes in the editorial structure of the magazine. A mid-life crisis need not be a matter for concern, if it allows one to stop and review the journey taken thus far, and then to move on with renewed vigor and purpose. In this sense, the biological analogy may not be appropriate, for our magazine is going through changes, but in a self-conscious manner. The hopes of members of the editorial board are that the changes will meet with the approval of the readership. While we are in the process of change, however, we must ask for some forbearance and even a bit of indulgence.

The editorship of the Icelandic-Canadian magazine has always been a large responsibility. We have been fortunate in having had such excellent editors-in-chief as Judge Walter Lindal, Dr. Wilhelm Kristjanson and Axel Vopnfjord to steer us through good and bad times. The members of the editorial board have worked alongside the editors-in-chief, but their contributions have always paled beside those of the leaders. Today, however, in the late 1980's, it has become apparent to the present members of your board that more sharing of responsibilities for the production of the magazine is necessary. The recognition of this fact was behind the structural reorganizations which have taken place over the past year. It is too much to ask any one person, no matter how capable, to bear all of the burden. So, we have given specific tasks to individual board members, and we now have as examples, a fiction editor and a reviews editor. All of the persons in the new positions, of course, continue to be answerable to the editor-in-chief.

It takes time to work out the kinks in any new structure. The difficulties are perhaps particularly acute when members of a board such as our own are all volunteers, who serve the magazine because of a commitment to it, but also have their own personal and professional duties. We ask our readers not to be too quick to judge the first results of the changes. Most responses we have received to the first issue in the new format were favorable, but not all. Some readers missed a poetry section, and others missed the brief news items usually found interspersed between articles. Let us assure those individuals that in later issues they will find the things they missed in the first 'new edition'. We are struggling with the formation of a new format which will have some consistency from one issue to the

next, and will be somewhat innovative, but we are not breaking with traditions completely. We will have poetry as contributors present us with poetry which meets the standards of our poetry editor and his or her reviewers. We will be actively soliciting materials in a way which was not done in the past, because with several sub-field editors we can do so more effectively. We ask, then, for forbearance, as we move into what we hope will be the next forty-five years and more of publication of our magazine. We ask for comments on our efforts, and we promise to do our best to be responsive to suggestions from our readers. In essence, we are trying to do something which is difficult at best — to improve on what is already a first rate product. In one sense, we are trying to rationalize our editorial activities. For example, in the past the members of the editorial board worked with the editor on all matters related to the magazine, from assisting in editorial decisions to soliciting advertisements to proof-reading copy to packaging the magazine for mailing. The last mentioned was usually an occasion for a social gathering as well as a work evening. A new committee has been struck, above and beyond the board itself, to handle the packaging. This frees board members for other duties. I should mention, though, that board members continue to attend the packaging sessions, for they are times when we can talk informally about the directions our magazine has taken, is taking, and should take in the future. But, now that we have to attend more meetings than in the past, we are relieved of the packaging job if we wish to do so.

Our magazine is entering a new stage of growth, but the transition is not without difficulties. Errors will be made, and then hopefully corrected. Please bear with us.

David Arnason, Manitoba author, teacher and playwright

FEATURE

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID ARNASON

by Norman Sigurdson

David Arnason is a big burly bear of a man with a thick dark beard and greyish hair worn unfashionably long. From a distance he resembles one of the popular Icelandic stereotypes, the virile Viking. On a health kick of late (he works out in the gym for an hour every day and has recently lost 30 pounds) he looks as if he would not be out of place brandishing a broadsword at the helm of a longship. But, up close he becomes the embodiment of the other Icelandic stereotype, the gentle scholar. He laughs easily and often and his eyes gleam with enthusiasm as he discusses theories of poetry, sounding for all the world like a professor of English literature, which is, in fact, what he is.

At 46 Professor David Arnason of the University of Manitoba is rapidly becoming a national figure in the world of Canadian literature. Long a force on the Winnipeg literary scene, with three of his plays produced in as many years and two books each of poetry and of short stories, Mr. Arnason's puckish humour and deft social satire are now earning him a national audience. I sat down to talk with him earlier this year, just as a very busy few weeks were about to begin for this multi-faceted writer.

To begin with, his latest play, *Dewline,* was about to premiere, followed a few days later by the launch of his new collection of poems, *Skrag.* Shortly after that, the CBC was to broadcast a half-hour film adaptation of his short story, "The Washing Machine", which Mr. Arnason would have to miss, since he was off to France for four months to do research for his first novel. I began by asking him why writing is important to him.

A: Well, we live our lives by fictions. I firmly believe that. Artists are the creators of fictions for their societies, and I think it is important for Canadians to try and get our own stories told as opposed to American stories. Our difficulty comes in getting those stories across to the audience. So much of our iconography and our mythology is American that we get swamped by it, but we still have to try to get our stories told. That is why I write.

Q: You are known primarily as a comic writer, even though you have a serious message. Why do you find the comic mode so useful?

A: In writing anything the writer's first job is to get the reader to read the next page, or get the audience to stay in their seats and not go. There is no message given to someone who has closed the book or who has not come to the theatre. I believe the writer has a real duty not to be boring, not to insult the audience, not to preach to them. Whatever the message the writer has ought to be generated by the text and not imposed upon it.

Q: I have talked to some writers who have a real writing routine; they get up at five o'clock every day, for example, and write for two or three hours before going to work. Do you have set routines for your writing time?

A: Even though I consider myself a night person I find I work best early in the morning. The brain just works better in the morning, and so I do most of my writing in the morning. I'm not a highly disciplined writer who sits down and gives it this or that many hours every day. I'd like to be, but I just happen not to be. I tend to work in bursts of really fierce work. I'll work for many hours every day for several days and then go away and do something else for a few days. I do most of my writing in the summer at my cottage in Gimli. I get up in the morning and I walk along the beach, then I sit down and work for four hours, then that's it for the day (laughs). I get the rest of the day off!

Here, in the winter, it's very hard with all of the interruptions, teaching classes, committee meetings and so on.

Q.: If you don't do creative writing on a set schedule, do you keep a diary or journal every day to keep the juices flowing?

A.: I tend to keep those mostly when I travel, or when there is a particular set of events I want to keep track of. But again, that takes a certain type of discipline. It drains a lot of psychic energy and I've always thought that given my limited time I'd rather be doing something more formal. I'd sooner be writing a short story than keeping a journal, or even writing letters to my friends for that matter. I'm a terrible letter writer! It seems to me that the energy that goes into writing a letter could just as easily result in a short story. If I write letters they are only five sentences long — "Hello, how's the wife and kids," then I state my business, then "So long, hope to hear from you soon," and that's it. The collected letters of Dave Arnason would be pretty dull reading! (laughs)

Q.: Writing is pretty solitary work; you work away for months by yourself, then sometime down the line, eight months or a year later, you finally see an editor. But you've also been writing plays lately and that process sounds like it's a bit less solitary, more collaborative. How does that work for you?

A.: The way that I work on a play is perhaps different from the way most North American playwrights work on a play. I work with a theatre and with a dramaturge on the European model. I have a commitment that the play is going to be produced, so even before I start writing I know the date that it will go on.

I begin by presenting an idea, after having long talks with the director, in this case Kim McCaw, and the dramaturge, Per Brask. I get the original idea and then we "brainstorm", sometimes for two whole days. I go away, and come back with a draft, and we talk and analyze and discuss it, then I go away and come back with another draft and this time we bring in a group of actors and we do a read through, and we analyze it and then I go away and do another draft (laughs) and we bring in some more actors and I do another draft. Somewhere around the sixth draft we have a rehearsal and then I do some more drafts.

Q.: Do you write on a computer?

A.: Yes, on a computer. I consider anything that has so many changes that I have to reprint the whole thing to be a draft. We've been through nine drafts since June and the tenth draft with the final revisions will be when the play starts. We've been in rehearsals, and a play written in this way, which hasn't been "workshopped" the way most North American plays are, means that a great deal of changes have to be made in the first week of rehearsals because it is only then that you see whether or not things work, whether it comes together or not.

Q.: What is the play about?

A.: The new play is called *Dewline,* and I'm using the Distant Early Warning line (the line of radar stations across the north of Canada) as a metaphor. The DEWline is supposed to warn us of impending doom should the Russian missiles come. I'm talking about a group of people in their late thirties and early forties who are beginning to pick up death on their own personal radars and begin to act a little oddly because of it. They include Billy, who has come from working on the DEWline as an electrician. He comes home after having diagnosed himself as having a brain tumour after working in isolation on the DEWline and decides rather than go home to his wife and kids and buy the new house that he had planned on, he is going to go south, to Dallas, Texas, to die.

Q.: Why Dallas?

A.: Billy is a big fan of John Kennedy. Kennedy was the last man to stand up to the Russians and he represents a sort of vision of manhood that was prevalent in the late 50s and early 60s that Billy thinks is dead now.

First, he goes to his brother's house in Winnipeg. His brother is also afraid of death. He alway thinks that he is about to have a heart attack and constantly has himself checked out. In a comic

Left to Right: Barbara Duncan, Tom Anniko and Karen Barker in a scene from the Prairie Theatre Exchange production of DEWLINE by David Arnason.
photo by Hubert Pantel, courtesy of PTE

misreading, he thinks his wife is having an affair, so the "death" of his marriage is imminent too. His wife's younger sister falls in love with Billy and after Billy takes off for Dallas, one by one they all follow him and the second act finds them all in a field in North Dakota near a missile silo amid American army war games.

Q.: I think most people in Winnipeg are conscious of the fact that North Dakota has one of the biggest collection of nuclear warheads on earth. I've read that if North Dakota were to secede from the United States, it would be the third most powerful nuclear nation in the world.

A.: That's right, 300 Minuteman missile silos, each with three warheads ten times the size of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, 9000 times the power of Hiroshima. It's horrible to think about.

Q.: What is the moral of the story?

A.: If you analyze it, the "argument" of the story is that each of the people in the play has a kind of personal mythology, a kind of personal story that has failed. They are all "living unhappily ever after", because although we all live our lives out of fictions, *their* fictions are centred on death. These are fictions that make them unhappy, that give them no future.

The moral is the way they come to a new story, a new fiction, a communal story where they can live even though the bomb can be dropped at any moment. The real question is, "How do you live until it is dropped?" "What am I going to do with the rest of my life even if I've only got six months to live or six hours?" We are all faced with that existential question.

Q.: Your story "The Washing Machine" also has a character who is faced with a hostile environment and is faced with choices. I understand that that story has been made into a television film.

A.: Yes. "The Washing Machine" is based on a short story of mine (from *50 Stories and a Piece of Advice*) that is set

in New Brunswick, about a man who encounters a rather crazed washing machine repairman. The way that came about is that Gene Walz, a professor in the film department here at the University of Manitoba, used that story as an exercise in his filmwriting course — he thought it had a lot of cinematic possibilities. After a while he figured he could do it himself, so he wrote a script and entered it in a competition held by the Winnipeg Film Group and won. Then he sold it to the CBC and got a grant from Telefilm Canada and wound up with a $200,000 budget for a half hour film. I, however, won't be able to see it when it's shown, because I will be in France by then.

Q.: You are going to France to begin a novel, is that right?

A.: Yes, the novel I want to work on is partly set during World War I and II and I want to visit some battle sites there. The novel I envision, and I really haven't done much work on it yet, encompasses five generations and begins in Iceland in 1870 and goes up to the present day. It follows one family who "suffers from" history, in the same way that other families "suffer from" congenital diseases. They happen to be caught up in all of the pivotal points in Canadian history and are strongly affected by them.

Q.: Is it based at all on your own family history?

A.: I suppose it would obviously come out of elements in their own history. I've been to Iceland, I've seen the places where they come from. Of course, my family grew up in Gimli, where many Icelanders settled, so the story would obviously move through there. I haven't thought of actually basing it on specific members of my family, but it will certainly work itself out of their experience in a composite.

Q.: Were your parents born in Canada?

A.: Yes, my grandparents were born in Canada. My great-great-grandfather came over from Iceland in 1875 when he was 17.

Q.: And you grew up in Gimli?

A.: Yes, near Gimli, on a farm.

Q.: Did you grow up speaking Icelandic?

A.: There was a lot of Icelandic spoken. I spent a lot of time on my grandfather's farm because we lived right next door, literally, in the country. I worked in the hayfields with my grandfather and my uncles and they spoke Icelandic. The result was that I could speak a kind of "barnyard" Icelandic. (laughs) That was not bad on the farm, but if I get into some sort of literary discussion I don't fare too well. I'm embarrassed to speak because it's so clumsy, but I found that when I was in Iceland the few times I met people who spoke no English my Icelandic was good enough for us to hold a conversation.

Q.: Your farm background sounds like it was the inspiration for the title poem in your new collection.

A.: Yes, it's called *Skrag,* and the main poem is a long poem about a farm dog that kind of grew out of my rural background. It's about all of the farm dogs I've ever known in a kind of a composite. It's a tragicomic mock epic about a farm dog who is a kind of fascist, as all farm dogs are, (laughs) regarding their owners as hopelessly incompetent, always bossing them around.

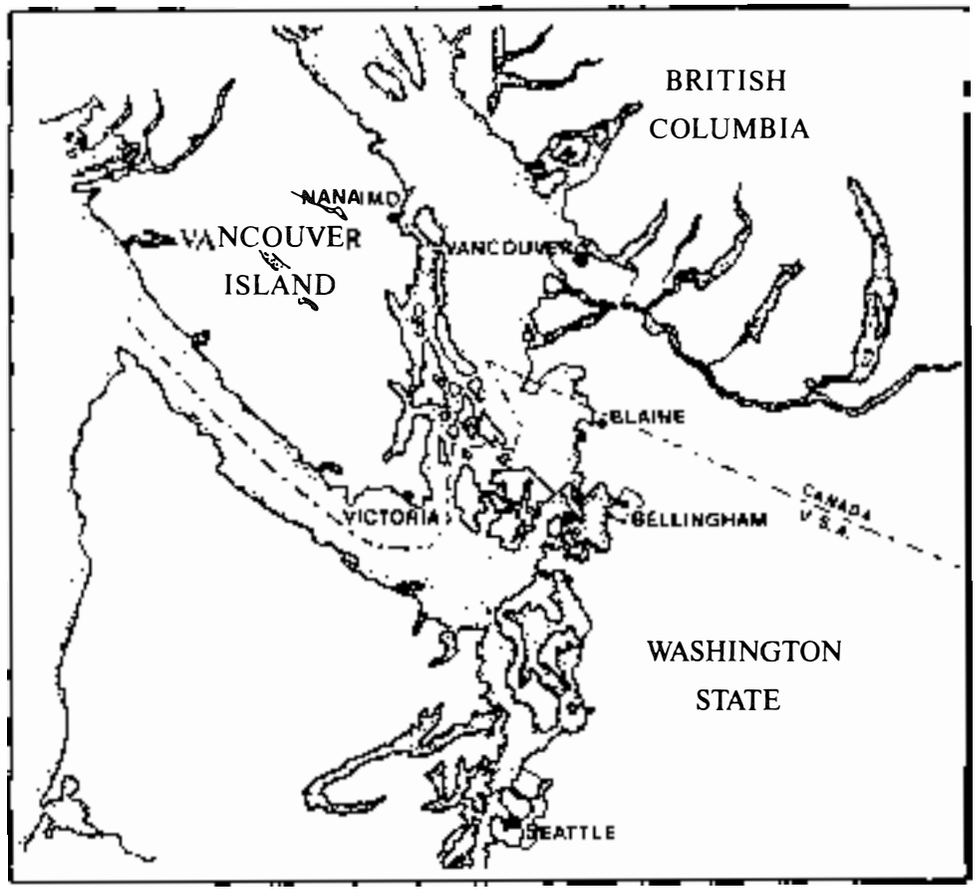
Q.: Well, not only are farm dogs fascists, but clocks are as well, and we are out of time. Thank you very much for doing this.

THE ICELANDERS OF BLAINE

by Gustaf Kristjanson

In the extreme northwest corner of the State of Washington, nestled against the Canadian border, lies Whatcom County. On its eastern edge are the Cascade Mountains, dominated in this area by the snow-clad eminence of Mount Baker. The western edge is washed by the waters of Georgia Strait. To the average American motoring northward, the coastal town of Blaine in Whatcom County may seem little more than the final stop on Interstate Highway 5 before crossing the border into Canada en route to Vancouver. To people of Icelandic descent, however, it has been one of the best known centres of Icelandic pioneer settlement in North America.

Blaine was founded a century ago in an area that was then largely virgin forest. It was later to become a lumber shipping port, with busy shingle mills and salmon canneries. It still serves as a base for fishing boats that harvest the teeming waters of Georgia Strait, but the sawmills and canneries have closed



and tourism is now the major industry. When the first settlers arrived, it was as part of the wave of pioneers looking for new land to till and a fresh start in life.

One of these pioneers was Oli Lee, a man of Norwegian ancestry who had been farming near Grafton, North Dakota. In 1888 he purchased forty acres of land near Birch Bay, a few miles south of Blaine. Oli's wife was Thorunn Halldorsdottir, who had arrived from Iceland in 1876 as part of the first wave of immigrants from that country. Originally her family went to the New Iceland colony in Manitoba, but subsequently Thorunn married the aforementioned Oli Lee and moved to North Dakota. Not long after that another young Icelandic woman, Gudny Thorleifsdottir, joined them in their home as a domestic. Gudny had immigrated from Iceland earlier that year. Some years later she married Petur Lee, a cousin of Oli. A few months after Oli and Thorunn moved to the Pacific Coast they were joined by Petur and Gudny, who purchased forty acres of land in the same locality. It would appear that these two worthy ladies, Thorunn and Gudny Lee, were the first Icelandic settlers in the Blaine-Birch Bay area. The hardships that they experienced were not unlike those of pioneers everywhere — social isolation, infrequency of mail service, difficulty in obtaining supplies, etc.

It is believed that the next settler in the Birch Bay area was Joel Steinsson, who arrived about the turn of the century. Somewhat prior to that, however, Hjorleifur Stefansson, Sveinbjorn Bjornsson, and Benjamin Alexander were probably the first men of Icelandic origin to settle in the town of Blaine itself. That was in 1897. Hjorleifur and his wife, Gudrun, had spent a couple of years in Seattle before moving to Blaine and had originally migrated to Grafton, N.D. after leaving Iceland. Benjamin, also, had spent some time in the Grafton area. Sveinbjorn had travelled widely as well, having lived in Seattle, in Victoria, B.C., and for about eighteen years in Nome, Alaska. It was an age when there was much movement of population to open up the country and "Go west, young man" was the watchword.

Information on these early settlers has been obtained from the biographical sketches prepared by Margret J. Benediktsson and published in the periodical *Almanak* for the years 1926 and 1929.* Margret J. Benediktsson herself was a woman of considerable gifts who was very prominent in the suffragette movement of her day. She chronicled the experiences of dozens of Icelandic settlers in the Blaine area — far too many to describe or even mention in this short account. On reading through these sketches certain facts emerge. Almost without exception the people discussed were born in Iceland and in most cases grew up there. However, there is hardly an instance of any who emigrated directly to the Pacific Northwest. The general pattern seems to have been to go first to Winnipeg or the New Iceland area of Manitoba (or, occasionally, to Selkirk or the Argyle district). Another pattern, almost as frequent, was to emigrate to North Dakota (Mountain, Pembina, Hallson, etc.). All of this is, of course, understandable. They would wish to begin their life in the New World by joining friends or relatives in a settlement where Icelanders were already established. Often they would go to Manitoba first, thence to North Dakota, and finally to the Pacific Coast. Many who came to Blaine had spent some time previously in Seattle or Bellingham, or

Fishing boat, looking west from Blaine *photo by Victor O. Jonasson, Wpg.*

in some cases in Vancouver or Victoria, B.C. For a good many, Blaine represented the end of their wanderings. While every individual case was different, the patterns mentioned were fairly representative of the majority. There was no mass immigration of Icelandic settlers to the area. They came by individual families, often to join relatives or close friends.

Obviously their common Icelandic background and culture helped to sustain them and promoted a sense of community in the early days. There was a bond between adjoining communities as well. Einar Simonarson, who has been practising law in the nearby town of Lynden, Washington, for the past half century, can recall the time (while growing up on his father's farm at Birch Bay) when visitors would cross by boat from the settlement at Point Roberts and stay for several days. Einar's father, Thorgeir, was one of the early settlers in the area, after having spent some time in Winnipeg, Seattle, and other locations.

Since the majority of Icelandic settlers purchased a plot of land when they arrived in the district (homestead land was not available), it would appear that their primary means of livelihood, to begin with, was farming. A few, however, did operate businesses in the town, even in the early years of the century. Doubtless others worked in canneries and on fishing boats, although the boom years of the canneries somewhat predated the arrival of most of the settlers. Mention is made of several who built their own homes, so carpentry was obviously a skill that stood them in good stead.

As in Icelandic settlements in other parts of North America, many of the second and third generations went on to

higher education and have furthered their careers by moving on to other parts of the country. In earlier days, however, some were able to make a notable contribution locally. At one time, for example, there were no fewer than six lawyers of Icelandic descent practising in Whatcom County. Others were involved in government on a local level. Magnus Thordarson (who operated a grocery store) was on the local council for a number of years. So was J. O. Magnusson, another businessman in the town, who not only served on the council but was also police chief for a period of time. Probably the best known in the realm of public service was Andrew Danielsson. Born in Iceland in 1879, he emigrated to North America when he was only nine years of age and spent the first years with his uncle at Poplar Point in Manitoba. Arriving in Blaine in 1902 he worked in a store at first, later owning a store in partnership with O. O. Runolfsson. The business was later sold. Danielsson continued for years in the insurance and real estate business. He served for a while on the local council, and ultimately was elected to the state legislature.

From the beginning, the Icelanders had a lively intellectual and social life. There were really two groups of people, however, those who lived in the country and those who lived in the town. A "Lestrarfelag" or Literary Society was founded as early as 1903. This society bore the name "Harpa." There were about twenty people involved. Among those who are mentioned as having been prominent in the organization were Hjorleifur Stefansson and his wife, Gudrun, who have been mentioned above as having been among the very earliest settlers in Blaine. Another who was active in its affairs was Gudbjartur Karason, whose son, Halldor, now retired, was for many years a professor at Western Washington University in Bellingham. Other organizations followed the founding of Harpa. The local Foresters Lodge was set up in 1904. All of its members were Icelandic. In 1905 the women's society "Likn" was established. This was later to evolve into the ladies' aid society of the Lutheran Church.

It was in 1912 that Rev. Hjortur Leo came out from Winnipeg to organize the Lutheran congregation. The church building was erected in 1914. While Hjortur Leo would return occasionally for brief periods, the first regular minister was Rev. Sigurdur Olafsson. The church proved to be much more than a religious centre. It was also a centre for cultural and social life in the community. Halldor Jonsson was the minister during the 1920s. Toward the end of that decade religious dissension developed (characteristic of so many North American Icelandic communities) and there was a split in the congregation. Halldor went with the more liberal group — the Free Church, as it was called. Up to the mid-thirties Valdimar Eylands served Lutheran congregations in both Bellingham and Blaine. The difficult economic conditions of those years made it more and more difficult to maintain a minister on a regular basis, although the church continued to be served by various preachers on an interim or some kind of temporary basis. Among those who served the congregation in this way were Rev. Harold Sigmar, who had previously been active with congregations in Saskatchewan, North Dakota and Vancouver, B.C., his son, Eric, and Rev. Erling Olafson. Harold Sigmar, incidentally, ultimately settled in Blaine as his last regular pastorate. As the years went on, decrease in

the use of Icelandic as the common mode of speech in the community meant that eventually ministers of non-Icelandic background took over the pastoral duties.

Rev. Ragnar Kvaran came out from Winnipeg in the latter twenties and helped to organize the Icelandic Free Church. Following the departure of Halldor Jonsson (referred to above), Fridrik Fridriksson took over as its minister. He had been serving in the liberal church in Wynyard, Saskatchewan, for a few years prior to that. In 1933 he left for Iceland, whence he had originally come, to minister to a congregation of the state church (Lutheran) in that country. Albert Kristjanson served both the Seattle and Blaine Free Churches from 1933 on. When Rev. Kristjanson retired he settled in Blaine and lived there until his death a few years ago.

As pointed out above, the churches were cultural and social centres as well as religious centres. Lectures, concerts, programs of all kinds, as well as lessons in the Icelandic language, were very much a part of the community's life, especially in the 1920s. The winter festival of Thorrablot was celebrated annually. Tombolas and bazaars helped to liven up social life as well as raise funds that were needed for charitable work. The "Likn" and Harpa societies would put on plays that were much appreciated. Anna Karason, the wife of Halldor referred to earlier, speaks glowingly of those days, the card parties, the dances, and other social functions. People of all ages participated. There was a wealth of musical and dramatic talent that could be called upon. She remembers in particular the staging of the Icelandic drama "Skuggasveinn."

Other aspects of cultural life were not neglected. Magnus Jonsson wrote poems and essays, many of which were printed in the Icelandic language papers. Magnus was a most interesting personage. Born and brought up in Iceland, he and his wife did not migrate to North America until they were well on in their thirties. After spending many years in Icelandic communities in Manitoba, they ended up in Blaine in 1902. Eventually he became completely blind, but his creative talents did not diminish for all that. His son, Jon, was talented in other ways, becoming a gifted musician and choir director.

A prime focus for musical and intellectual activities was the annual picnic or Icelandic Celebration. Various sites were utilized for this occasion in the early years. Residents of Blaine can remember when they were held in Lincoln Park and also in Montfort Park. Finally the permanent site for the annual festival became the Peace Arch State Park on the Canadian border. Here residents of Washington State and lower mainland British Columbia could assemble to celebrate their common Icelandic heritage. The acres of green grass and the majestic Arch itself make a most appropriate spot for the festivities. Here the virtues of our ancestral culture could be extolled, and the strains of The Star Spangled Banner, O Canada, and O Gud Vors Lands helped to remind one of the international nature of the occasion.

The expansion and "internationalizing" of the Icelandic Celebration was promoted by the newly-formed chapter of the Icelandic National League, which called itself "Aldan" (The Wave). This was organized in Blaine in the spring of 1944. As the years went by the fostering of the annual celebration was to become the main concern of this organization. Its president in the early years was Andrew Danielsson and the Secretary

The Peace Arch at the Canada/U.S. border crossing just north of Blaine
photo by Victor O. Jonasson, Wpg.

was Rev. Albert Krisjanson. A featured speaker would be brought in each year, usually from Winnipeg or one of the larger Icelandic settlements. A system was evolved whereby the chairman for the occasion would alternate between Blaine and Vancouver, B.C. Local choirs would usually supply music, with Halfdan Thorlaksson assembling a choir in Vancouver or Elias Breidfjord performing that function in the town of Blaine. Another feature of these celebrations would be the annual tug o' war between rival teams selected from the American and Canadian communities. As the years went by many of these activities diminished and attendance has declined. The committee in charge continued to operate for many years as the Icelandic Celebration Committee. Some of the members of this committee, such as Einar Simonarson and Eddi Johnson (who would often alternate from year to year as chairman) continue to put their efforts into this right down to the present time, working closely with their counterparts, such as Oskar Howardsson, in Vancouver. Nowadays, the celebration has once again assumed the proportions of an annual picnic. But good fellowship and the Icelandic spirit remain.

Another project which greatly occupied the attention of the Icelandic National League chapter in Blaine when it was first formed was the establishing of the Icelandic Old Folks Home. One of the marks of a civilized community is the way it treats those members who have reached their declining years. In this respect the Icelanders of Blaine have merited the highest of praise. In 1949 the Home was opened. It is called "Stafholt" and was named after the childhood home of the Stoneson brothers of San Francisco (formerly of

Blaine) who contributed considerably toward its establishment. Here the elderly were now able to enjoy friendly and comfortable surroundings and to maintain reminders of their cultural heritage, such as Icelandic cooking on special occasions and the conversations of friends with like background and interests. Einar Simonarson served as Chairman of the Board for Stafholt from its founding until it was turned over to Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society in 1985. The Stafholt Women's Auxiliary has always provided needed articles for residents, and faithful volunteers assist the staff in physical therapy sessions, taking residents for walks, writing letters and cards, and in other ways. Support has also been generous from such organizations as "Eining" of Seattle and the Freya Club of Bellingham. As the years have passed since its founding, the number of Icelandic residents in the Home has become fewer and fewer. Now members of all races and creeds are welcomed in. The spirit which motivated it at the beginning, however, remains. Over the main entrance is a bronze plaque depicting the Icelandic falcon, traditional national emblem of that nation. Here is one more symbol of the fact that, in this small corner of North America, the memory of the land of our ancestors is not entirely dead.

This small town has seen its changes. The wheels of "Rjoma" (Cream) Geiri's milk wagon have been stilled for many a year and no more do people stop to visit with Litli Steini in the small dwelling on Dakota Creek. The busy Interstate sweeps by and people hardly stop to take a glance. Still, the memory of slower and simpler days will linger on, when Blaine was the centre of a small, brave Icelandic community starting a new life on the Pacific strand.

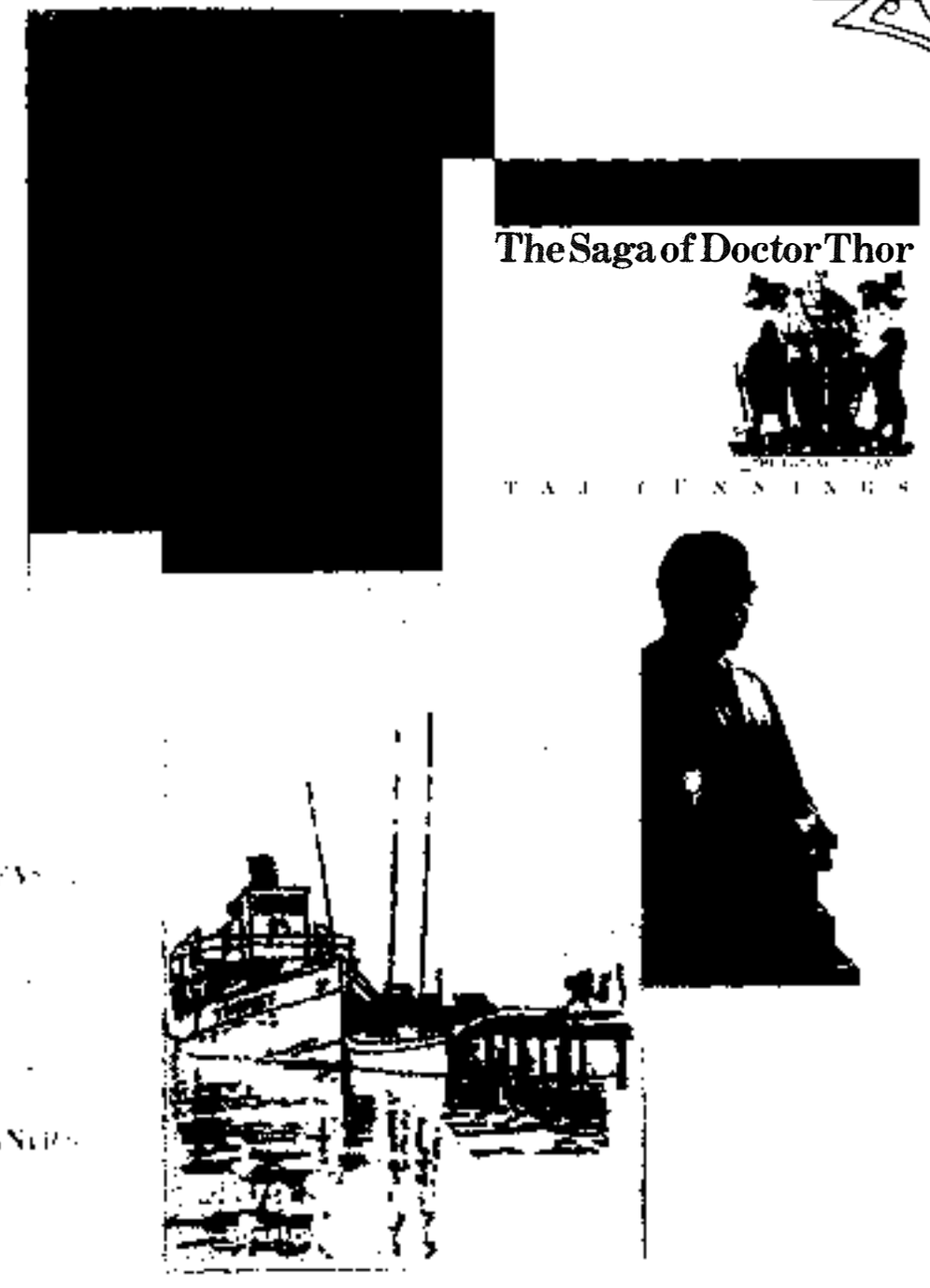
* "Islendingar a Kyrrahafstrondinni—Blaine." *Almanak*, Winnipeg, Olafur S. Thorgeirsson, ed. & pub., 1926 pp. 66-90 and 1929 pp. 36-72.

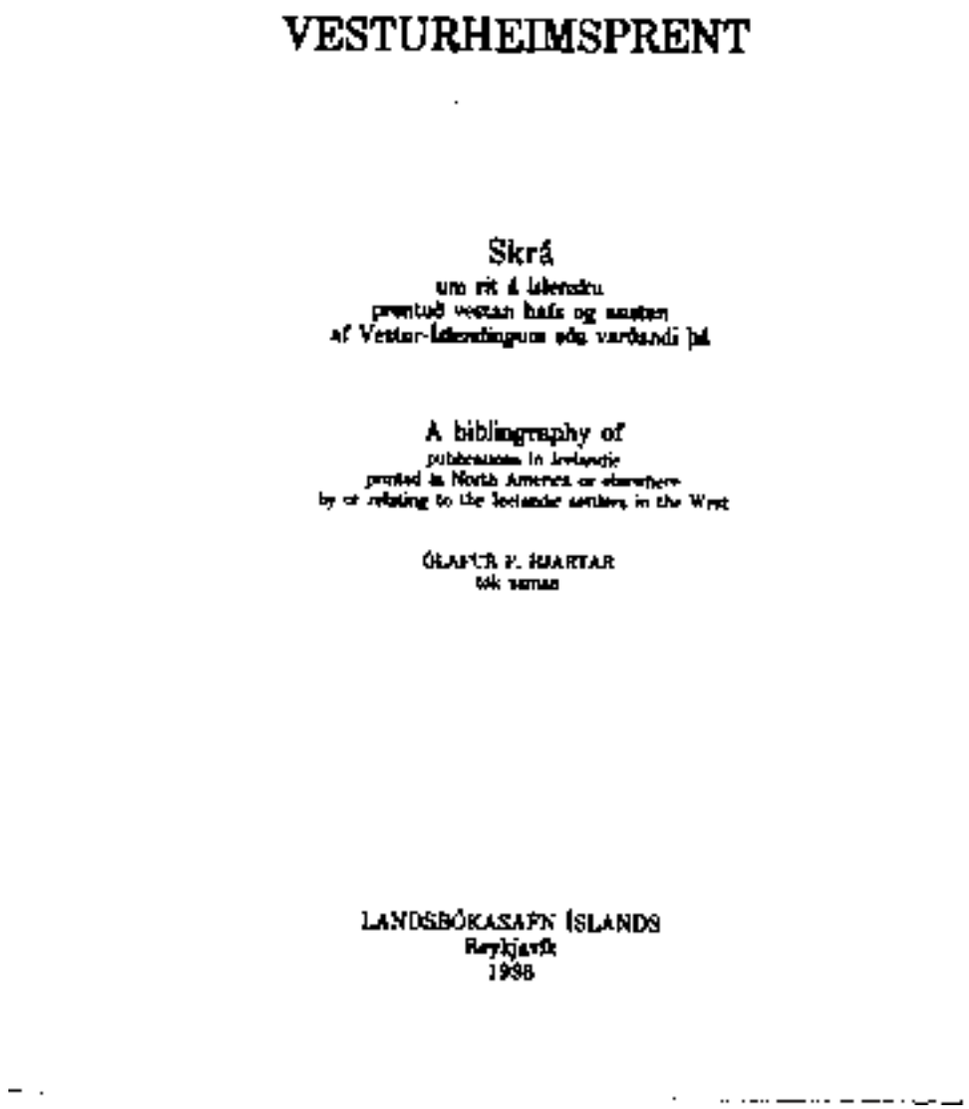
Stafholt Senior Citizens Home, Blaine
photo by Victor O. Jonasson, Wpg.

BOOK NOTES

A continuing selection of information, commentary and reviews of literary works by, about or of special interest to Icelandic Canadians.

Translated by Helga Miller & George Houser
Illustrations by Helga Miller




VESTURHEIMSPRENT

Skrá
um rit á íslenzku
prentuð vestan hafs og austan
af Vestur-Íslendingum eða varðandi þá

A bibliography of
publications in Icelandic
printed in North America or elsewhere
by or relating to the Icelandic settlers in the West

ÓLAFUR F. HJARTAR
tók saman

LANDSBÓKASAFN ÍSLANDS
Reykjavík
1986

BOOK NOTES . . .

by Sigrid Johnson

To commemorate the centenary of the weekly newspaper, *Heimskringla,* which first appeared in Winnipeg on September 9, 1886, the National Library has published **Vesturheimsprent: a bibliography of publications in Icelandic printed in North America or elsewhere by or relating to the Icelandic settlers in the West** (Reykjavik: Landsbokasafn Islands, 1986).

Vesturheimsprent is the result of bibliographical research conducted over the last twenty years by Olafur F. Hjartar, Head of the National Library of Iceland's Department of Foreign Publications. Most of Mr. Hjartar's research was done at the National Library of Iceland. He did, however, travel to Canada in 1977 to examine the holdings of the Icelandic Collection at the University of Manitoba where he discovered some 100 publications that were not held by the National Library of Iceland.

The bibliography is contained in an eighty-eight page soft-cover booklet. Listed are approximately 1,400 books, pamphlets, periodicals and newspapers, written in the Icelandic language, pertaining to Icelanders in North America. The booklet is divided into two sections. The first section lists publications written or translated by Western Icelanders or Icelanders living in Iceland, and published in North America. Publications by Western Icelanders or relating to them, printed in Iceland or elsewhere in Europe are found in the second section. Included is everything from the first Icelandic language publication in North America, *Nya Island i Kanada* (New Iceland in Canada), an immigration pamphlet, published in Ottawa by the Government of Canada in 1875, to Ludvik Kristjansson's *Ljodakorn,* a collection of his poetry, published in Winnipeg by *Lögberg-Heimskringla* in 1983.

Although the bibliography lists only publications written in the Icelandic language, and contains neither annotations nor a subject index, it is valuable in that it provides researchers with a hitherto non-existent, basic access point to writings by and about North American Icelanders.

North American Icelanders have had a rich and varied literary past. Times have changed but today's North American Icelanders continue to add to this literary legacy. The main difference between the past and present being that publications appearing today are primarily in the English language, with but the occasional publication written in Icelandic.

In the last few years numerous publications have been written by and about North American Icelanders. There have been books of poetry and short stories, local histories, genealogical handbooks, biographical works, children's books, and translations of publications from Icelandic into English.

Recent offerings of prose and poetry have included: David Arnason. *The Circus Performers' Bar.* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1984); Gudmundur Oskar Einarsson and Sigursteinn Einarsson. *Braga Blys fra Oxara* (S.l.: s.n., 1986); Kristjana Gunnars. *The Night Workers of Ragnarok.* (Toronto: Victoria: Press

Porcepic, 1985); Bill Holm. *The Music of Failure.* (Minnesota: Plains Press, 1985); Ludvik Kristjansson. *Ljodakorn.* (Winnipeg: Lögberg-Heimskringla, 1983); Gus Sigurdson. . . . *Said the Man from Manitoba.* (Winnipeg: Wheatfield Press, 1986); Stephan G. Stephansson. *Selected Translations from Andvokur.* (Edmonton: Stephan G. Stephansson Restoration Committee, 1982); and W. D. Valgardson. *The Carpenter of Dreams.* (Victoria: Skaldhus Press, 1986).

Icelandic communities throughout Manitoba and Saskatchewan have been hard at work writing their local histories. Among those published recently are: *Come into our heritage.* (Baldur, Manitoba: The Rural Municipality of Argyle, 1981); *Faith and Fortitude: a history of the Geysir District 1880's-1980's.* (Arborg, Manitoba: Geysir Historical Society, 1983); *From Prairie Trails to the Yellowhead.* (Winnipeg: Inter-Collegiate Press, 1984); *Patience Pride and Progress.* (Eddystone, Manitoba: Eddystone and District Historical Society, 1983); *Reflections by the Quills.* (Wynyard, Saskatchewan: Quill Historical Society, 1981); *Wagons to Wings: A History of Lundar and Districts 1872-1980.* (Lundar, Manitoba: Lundar and District Historical Society, 1980); and Nelson S. Gerrard. *Icelandic River Saga.* (Arborg, Manitoba: Saga Publications, 1985). Other historical publications of note include: *The Icelanders* edited by David Arnason and Michael Olito, and *People of the Interlake* by Andrew Blicq and Ken Gigliotti, both published in Winnipeg by Turnstone Press in 1981 and 1986 respectively.

Biography is fast becoming a popular literary format among North American Icelanders as has long been the case in Iceland. T.A.J. Cunnings. *The Saga of Doctor Thor C.C.M.D.,* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1986); William R. Hunt. *Stef: A Biography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson: Canadian Arctic Explorer.* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986); Kristiana Magnusson. *Roots That Bind.* (Langley, B.C.: Trinity Press, 1979); Kristiana Magnusson. *So Well Remembered.* (S.l.: A & K Publications, 1978); V. J. Sigurgeirson. *Sigurgeirson Saga.* (Vancouver, B.C.: V. J. Sigurgeirson, 1979); Edward L. Stephanson. *Identity: the autobiography of Edward L. Stephanson (Sveinsson) and genealogy charts.* (Belleville, Ontario: Books and Publications, 1979); and Skapti O. Thorvaldson. *Sveinn Thorvaldson M B E: A Family Chronicle.* (Winnipeg: Skapti O. Thorvaldson, 1984) are some of these biographies.

Translated from the Icelandic language into English have been: *Framfari,* the first Icelandic newspaper published in North America. Translated by Dr. George Houser. (Gimli, Manitoba: Gimli Chapter of the Icelandic National League, 1986); The Reverend Pall Thorlaksson (1849-1882). *His Pastoral Records 1875-1882.* Edited from the original manuscript and translation by Dr. George Houser. (Winnipeg: Printed by The University of Winnipeg, 1978); Gisli Astthorsson. *Ink and oilskin.* Translated by Lawrence F. Beste. (Winnipeg: Gunnars & Campbell, 1986); and Sigurdur A. Magnusson. *Under a Dead Star.* Translated by May and Hallberg Hallmundsson. (Winnipeg: Gunnars & Campbell, 1986).

Reviews of some of the aforementioned publications have appeared in past issues of *The Icelandic Canadian,* some are reviewed in this issue, and others will be featured in the Reviews section in future issues.

BOOK REVIEWS

Blicq, Andrew and Ken Gigliotti. **People of the Interlake.** (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1986) $14.95

People of the Interlake is an oral-photographic documentary of life in the Interlake — the 10,000 square mile region between Lakes Winnipeg and Manitoba, bordered by the city of Winnipeg to the south and wilderness to the north. Through words and pictures, the authors present a people "living apart from the modern world". The contradictory terms backward-progressive, wild-tame, and special-ordinary are used to describe these people and their area.

For authors Andrew Blicq and Ken Gigliotti the idea for this book was conceived following an assignment from the editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press* where they were employed as reporter and photographer. They were sent to the Interlake to investigate a particular story, but decided that there was a larger story to be told about the area and decided to return and do some extensive research. Today Andrew Blicq is a CBC Television producer. Born in Shrewesbury, England he has spent most of his life in Manitoba. He has written articles that have appeared in *Border Crossings* and *Winnipeg Magazine.* Ken Gigliotti is an award-winning photographer at the *Winnipeg Free Press* having been voted "News

Photographer of the Year" by the Ontario News Photographers Association. He has also contributed to the "Day in the Life of Canada" project, a photography display that has toured Canadian museums.

The cover photograph of Interlaker Michael Bajerowitz with a deadfall over his shoulder immediately captures one's imagination. What follows is four pages of introductory text by Mr. Blicq. Straightforward and fact-filled, these pages provide the informational background for Mr. Gigliotti's intriguing photographs, each of which is also accompanied by a brief commentary. The sensitive photographs and a text that flows well indicate that the authors have developed an insight into a way of life rarely glimpsed by outsiders.

These photographs and profiles depict the region, its people and the rich ethnic diversity of its communities. Here, the descendants of the original Icelandic settlers in Canada live alongside the descendants of Ukrainians, Poles, Hungarians, Germans, Britons, native people and a number of the other ethnic groups that make up Canada's cultural mosaic. Whatever their origins however, these people have shared the common challenges of extreme weather conditions and a rugged terrain. And, "despite the differences" says the authors, "Interlake people seem to have one thing in common: the ability to survive, and thrive, in the face of adversity. The Interlake has produced a special people."

Photographs and profiles of: The Olson Family for whom Lake Winnipeg has provided four generations with a living; Hecla Island, where for many years, the Islanders were isolated from the rest of the world until the provincial government expropriated their land forcing them to move to the mainland ending a unique and independent way of life; Helgi and Helga Tomasson who despite the government expropriations have hung defiantly to their Hecla Island land; and, the larger-than-life Viking Statue, with its back to Lake Winnipeg not far from where the first Icelandic settlers landed over a century ago, looking in on the town of Gimli which today is the centre of the province's vibrant Icelandic community provide glimpses into the way of life of the descendants of the original Icelandic settlers in Canada — Icelanders who live in a world apart but a world that is a part of us.

With **People of the Interlake,** Turnstone Press has produced a companion volume to **The Icelanders,** its tremendously successful Christmas offering in 1981. Not only are both books attractive, with full-page photographs in a coffee-table book vein, but of a size and shape that make for comfortable reading and that call for side-by-side locations on your bookshelf.

reviewed by Sigrid Johnson

Ken Gigliotti, Andrew Blicq
photo: Sherri Gigliotti

Holm, Bill. **The Music of Failure.** Minnesota: Plains Press, 1985.

From Plains Press in Minnesota has come, in 1985, a book of essays and prose poems by Bill Holm; *The Music of Failure.* This is mostly a collection of published essays from journals such as *Minnesota Monthly* and *Spoon River Quarterly.* Bill Holm is the grandson of Icelandic immigrants to Minnesota. Born in 1943 in Minneota, Bill Holm studied at the University of Kansas and then taught literature and writing at Hampton Institute in Virginia; at Lakewood Community College in Minnesota; and at Southwest Minnesota State University. He has been a Fulbright Lecturer in American Literature at the University of Iceland and was the recipient of a Bush Foundation Arts Fellowship in 1983. Presently he is teaching English in China. Other publications of his include three chap-books: *Warm Spell; Minnesota Lutheran Handbook;* and *The Weavers;* and another book of prose, poetry and music, *Boxelder Bug Variations.*

Bill Holm has made himself known over the years as a casual essayist; in Iceland through his writings in *Iceland Review* and in North America through appearances in small journals. *The Music of Failure,* perhaps for the first time, gives his readers a sense of the depths that are there in his reflections and his humor, as well as a fair overview of his concerns, both social and spiritual. As a consequence, Bill Holm is emerging as an important and highly competent essayist by any standards, and his future publications will be received with the high expectations this volume must be generating.

The central essay, around which the collection is built, is the title essay "The Music of Failure: Variations on an Idea." Here the author builds his argument on the architecture of music and a central metaphor: this is an image from a sojourn to Alberta where he sat under an aspen tree. The wind was blowing and he surmised that it was attempting to blow the leaves off the tree, which it failed to do. That failure consisted in the sound of leaves rustling in the breeze: music to the listener. Holm suggests, in extension of this, that our efforts in life are similar. We are likely to fail, but the effort is beautiful. In fact, it is not wise to eschew failure. Success is a hollow myth, borne out by the shallowness of American materialism and disregard for the land. As key figures that exemplify his meaning, the author discusses the fate of an Icelandic-American family that, by American standards, came to nothing and left no heir. These are the Bardals in Minnesota, in whom the young boy Bill saw something transcendent and beautiful, especially an unmarried daughter named Pauline. He focuses on the spiritual dynamism in these people who, in their awkward humanness, could not quite express their inner life or make it visible.

The entire community the author grew up in represents human failure to him. "No one ever arrived in Minnesota after being a success elsewhere," he claims. The community was filled by Northern Europeans who found themselves at a dead end and who again came to a dead end in Minnesota. Out of this context, Holm poses the question that presumably gave rise to the essay in the first place: "What is failure, and what is its use in our lives?" He does

not stop at reflections on American small towns in the Midwest, but seeks out meditations on his theme from literature: the *Gilgamesh* epic; Forster's *A Passage to India;* an essay by Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas;* and the writings of James Agee.

What is remarkable about Bill Holm's essay is the understanding he shows of both the true American Midwest and, more remarkably, the true Icelandic spirit. He surveys the history of Iceland in view of the idea of failure and claims as a difference between East and West that Icelanders insist on taking responsibility for their failures while Americans do not. In this denial there is self-deception, which in turn is further failure. Holm's definition of failure in American thought is clear: "Success involves getting power, money, position, sensual gratification, and the attendant public symbols for these things. Not to acquire them, but to be schooled in a culture that wants you to want them, is our idea of failure." However, true success, as opposed to false success, is, according to Holm, to be fully oneself: "Something succeeds if it is itself."

Other essays in the book elaborate independently on the themes raised in the focal essay. Holm especially explores the transcendent qualities of the land he lives in; the American Midwest. The sense of natural divinity is perhaps most clearly felt in the opening essay "The Grand Tour." He is driving through the prairies at night, noticing all manner of animals going about their business irrespective of the encroachment of civilization. "A sobering thought for humans," he says, is "how much joy goes on without us." More than this, he insists on "thinking of the Minnesota prairies as a natural cathedral with night services. By day money changers occupy the temple, and to them, there is no sacred place." It is this point Holm is attempting to make throughout the collection: the profane is in fact sacred; you just have to be receptive to the sacred in the ordinary around you — ordinary people, ordinary land.

Here Bill Holm sets himself firmly within the tradition of the natural transcendentalists of American essayists; the line of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman. In some ways the arguments presented by Holm are an extension of, or a modern elaboration of, Emerson's notion of the Oversoul. The Oversoul, according to Emerson, is a spiritual body that exists in and around us all: our natural wisdom, which we subvert and defray by our pride, our lust for power and money, and our egocentricity. Submit, let go, Emerson counsels, and the Oversoul will make itself felt. To Bill Holm, there is a transcendent quality in the ordinary man and woman, and in ordinary prairie nature. All that is needed is our vigilance and sensitivity to it.

The prose poems in the book elaborate more poetically on the same themes. In these short pieces, such as the collection of prose poems headed "The Poetry-Out-Loud Troupe Reads in Four Nursing Homes," Holm is able to be more poignant and subtle than in the essays proper. Arguments can be made through suggestion, implication, and by more elaborate and subtle uses of the metaphor. One of the most direct pieces in this section is the opening poem in that chapter, "Poetry-Out-Loud — on Tour in Minnesota," where the poets read in nursing homes and for some reason odd things begin to occur in reality: "roosters laid eggs, cattle organized a barnyard union, snow banks arranged themselves elegantly

into nude women, didn't melt till after April." Folks "never dreamt it could have been those nice young poets they invited into town." We don't know that poetry can do those things, but Bill Holm would have us believe that it is possible — depending on how you look at it. Under the surface of our bland reality lies another, more mysterious and far more wonderful, reality than we ever dreamed of. In this outlook, Bill Holm does *not*, indeed, fail to merge the folk wisdom of his ancestral Iceland with American Transcendentalism.

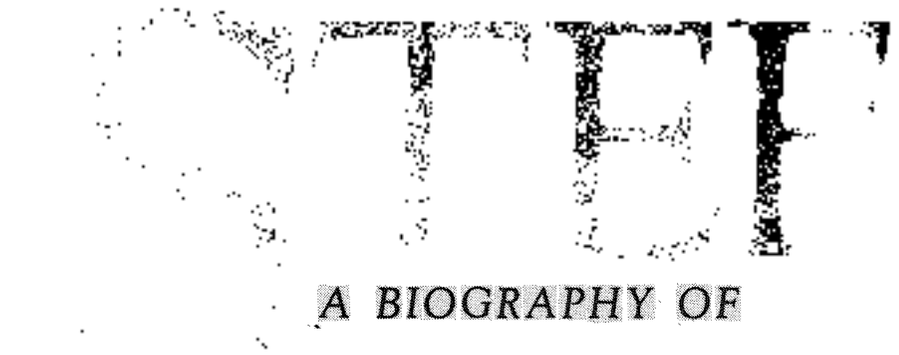
reviewed by Kristjanna Gunnars

William R. Hunt, **Stef: A Biography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Arctic Explorer,** University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1986.

Books have been written about parts of the life of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, such as *Karluk,* and Stefansson publisted his own autobiography, *Discovery*. Now we have a full and detailed biography, written by a man who is obviously a keen admirer of this most well-known of all North Americans of Icelandic descent. One of Stefansson's own books was titled *Unsolved Mysteries of the Arctic,* and I fear that even with all the material which has been published on him and his life, Stefansson remains one of those mysteries himself. Hunt's biography brings us new information on the many controversies which surrounded Stefansson, but for this reviewer, they remain largely unresolved. This is not the fault of Professor Hunt. Stefansson was in many ways larger than life. He was an enigmatic and many-faceted person. I have often wondered to what extent his life was created in a self-conscious way, by Stefansson himself, who then sat back in his twilight years and watched gleefully the debates which continued to storm around that life. One is tempted to ask, "Will the real Vilhjalmur Stefansson please stand up!" In his preface, Hunt states that his objective was not to concentrate on the many controversies, but rather to discover the "singular man" behind them. After reading his well-researched book, I still have some difficulty feeling that I know the man, even though he has been a hero to me since childhood.

One aspect of Stefansson's career which has often puzzled me has been his position, or lack of one, within the profession of anthropology. Hunt's book helps me, a practising anthropologist myself, to understand some of the ambiguities here. Stefansson was often referred to as an anthropologist, and it seems that he considered himself to be one. While a student at Harvard, he changed from the study of theology to that of anthropology, and he would have been awarded a doctorate in time if he had not gone off with Mikkelsen on the Anglo-American Polar Expedition in 1906. Stef was hired as an ethnologist, and his later writings on the Eskimo and "Inuit" he visited on that and later expeditions provide anthropology with some of the best available ethnographic information on those arctic peoples. (Many of the Alaskan Eskimo still refer to themselves as Eskimo, rather than "Inuit." For the southern Alaskan Eskimo, the word "Inuit" was not part of their language.)

As an anthropologist, Stefansson worked within the paradigm of the time



WILLIAM R HUNT

in most respects. He realized the essential importance of learning the language of the people being studied, and he was a staunch advocate of cultural relativism. It was his position on the latter which caused him difficulties with missionaries and others who were not prepared to give credence to the validity of Eskimo traditional cultural patterns. In one respect, at least, he was well ahead of his time, for his childhood interest in dietary patterns was continued in his ethnographic work. It was not until the middle part of this century that anthropologists began to study dietary habits in a serious fashion. He was sometimes wrong, as in his mis-understanding of why Eskimos converted to Christianity would not hunt on Sundays. It seems obvious to me that this was a reflection of the persistence of traditional attitudes towards a taboo-filled religion even after conversion. If the missionaries told them not to hunt on Sunday, they interpreted this as a serious taboo, and one not to be violated. This is a small point, however. Where his position in the history of anthropology may have been most affected is revealed in Hunt's book, I believe, for apparently Stefansson derived great satisfaction from pointing out that Franz Boas had been wrong in claiming that Eskimos did not make pottery. (The central Eskimo with whom Boas worked did not in fact make pottery.) In doing so, Stefansson was challenging the central figure in the history of North American anthropology. By his challenge to Boas, he may have discredited himself within the profession. "Egos" are more important in the history of science than is often recognized. In any event, the Hunt book has helped me understand why Stefansson has largely been ignored by anthropologists. This explanation seems much more creditable to me than the one I had earlier accepted, which related to his claim to have discovered the 'blond Eskimo'.

There is so much detail in this book that I can only address specific issues such as the one just discussed. It is a highly readable volume, although in my opinion, densely written. By that I mean that at times I found myself bogging down in the detail. But, these facts are necessary, if we are to come to grips with the enigmatic figure who was Vilhjalmur Stefansson. I never realized until I read this book that it was Stefansson who first used the expression 'standardization of error'. In fact, it was the title of one of his books. A life such as Stefansson led is the material of legend, and legends often have the qualities of myth. Many aspects of Stefansson's life were mis-interpreted. Errors made about it were standardized. He fought against these standardized errors throughout his life, and much of his writings were responses to them.

Hunt has pulled together a huge amount of factual material which the individual reader can use to try and separate the truth from the errors. This reviewer was left with many unanswered questions. For example, I still do not fully understand what went wrong in the relationship between Stefansson and Rudolph Anderson. What had begun as a friendship became a relationship marked by deep antagonism on both sides. I wonder whether Stefansson himself ever comprehended what went sour.

Whether or not anthropologists have given Stefansson the credit he deserves for his ethnographic writings on the Eskimo, they were a major contribution. As in his recognition of the importance of dietary studies before anyone else did, he was ahead of his time in the forecasts he made for northern devel-

opment. Others of the early arctic explorers may have been irritated by his characterization of *The Friendly Arctic,* the title of perhaps his best-known book, because it minimized the hardships they had experienced themselves on their own expeditions. Having lived with an "Inuit" family for a year while they still practised a traditional hunting way of life, I can personally attest to the reality of those hardships. And yet over time Stefansson has been proven to be right, and the new frontier is opening up as he had predicted it would decades ago. The Eskimo and "Inuit" have known their own land as a 'friendly' place for perhaps a thousand years or more. Stefansson was a self-proclaimed spokesperson for their point of view, and both he and they have been proven correct.

Anyone interested in Vilhjalmur Stefansson, and what individual of Icelandic ancestry is not, must regard Hunt's book as required reading. The man behind the myths is in it, but we must work at finding him. That is not Hunt's fault. He has provided the clues. We must put the puzzle together ourselves.

reviewed by Dr. John S. Matthiasson

POET'S CORNER

These poems are published as a tribute to Snorri Hjartarson, one of Iceland's major poets, who passed away, December 27, 1986.

I DREAM AT A RUINED COUNTRY COT

by Snorri Hjartarson
(Translated by Hallberg Hallmundsson)

I dream at a ruined country cot:
can I hear song through the open door,
a rustle of leaves from the low moor?
One's life streams forward, time does not.

All that was lived and all that passed
is, what will be stays away,
a virgin hemisphere, hidden, vast;
the house of now was built yesterday.

We walk in the dark by a dim light
which does preserve (and ever will)
what is and bides. The bird in flight
that bypassed us is sitting still.

THE PEACE OF THE MOOR

The peace of the moor fills my breast, a fragrant
forenoon calm, birds, and heathery ground,
pale-green marshes amid bush-green inclines,
a man walking, blue mountains all around.

I lie down in grass, my lids closed, hearing
a lone spring; deep below sun and earth
it streams forth humbly, guarding the land and the life of
each little flower and creature to which it gave birth.

RED CRATERS AND GRAY SANDS

Red craters and gray sands,
grasslessness, sheeplessness, lava beds
roadless and grim;
shadowy crags, twisting their hard
hands
in hot, petrified rage about felled game.

Deep out of hidden springs
water purls over gravel, murmurs on
rocks,
chanting of hayfields, nests, and sedges
songs
to excited children floating leaf-green
gigs.

Blue, shining peaks part the clouds,
peer from the clear, still skies of the
mighty gods
over a land buried in blazing tides,
your beautiful own, strange land of
flowering seeds.

ON GNITA HEATH

Never a day so fair
and filled with color: new
snow in green grass, red
and golden leaves in the snow,
the mountain rises out of rusty trees,
ice-
streaked and blue, steel-
glistening and silver-white: song-rune
on a sword-tongue. Dark night crawls
from the hall of glittering gold. Who
goes to kill in its path? Day, O life!

SUMMER EVENING

The northern wind drives dishevelled clouds
and dumps them on the foothills, the keen eyes
of spring and pool are sore, shot with mist,
the sedge-tarn gray, the cattails, drooping low,
hide their unclear images in gleaming
intricate circles; a spider, dark of hue
huddles on an edge by an empty web;
an oystercatcher down the river flies
home to the field, finding a little boy
in the framework of a past summer . . . The dusk
grows denser, the chatter of mowing machines is silenced
and sheets of rain turn waking into dream.
The heart and the river sing the same lay
of sun and flowers, a long happy day.

IN OSLOFJORD

Between wood and field
on its way from the sea
autumn must have lingered
by a lone birch last night
and kindled a red blaze
to warm its hands,
leaving again toward morning
for the mountains through the forest.

NÁIN'S BOATHOUSE

It's dark in my mind, far down
in the dwarf's cliff there is waiting
propped by silence the ship of yore,
soon it will be the hour
to push it forth, though the fury
unabating
of fate in its blind power
is churning up the boiling brine
at the boathouse door.

An Editorial Error in the Winter (December), 1986, Issue.

The feature article by Professor Marian McKenna, "The Icelanders", which appeared in the winter issue of our magazine, was the final part of a larger piece by Professor McKenna. The foot-notes to the article which was published begin at number 83, which was where the foot-notes of this fourth part picked up on the earlier sections. They should have begun with number 1, since this article stands as a separate piece. I apologize to Professor McKenna for this oversight on my part.

John S. Matthiasson
Scholarly Articles Editor.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN MATTHIASSON

John is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba. He spent time in the Canadian Arctic and has published many articles on the Inuit. He contributed the information on Icelanders in *The Canadian Encyclopedia.*

NORMAN SIGURDSON

Norman is a native of Winnipeg and works as a bookseller at a local bookstore. He is a frequent contributor to the book review section of the *Winnipeg Free Press.*

GUSTAF KRISTJANSON

Gus is a long standing member of the Icelandic Canadian Magazine Board. He has, recently, retired from the University of Manitoba where he taught drama in the Education Department. He and his wife, Norah, now make their home in British Columbia.

SIGRID JOHNSON

Sigrid is a native of Arborg, Manitoba and holds her masters degree in Library Science from the University of Alberta in Edmonton. She is, currently, librarian of the Icelandic collection at the Elizabeth Dafoe Library at the University of Manitoba.

KRISTJANA GUNNARS

A native of Iceland, Kristjana is now studying for her PhD in English at the University of Manitoba. She is a poet and a writer and her works have been published widely, in Canada and abroad.

HALLBERG HALLMUNDSSON

Hallberg is a professional translator of several Scandinavian languages, and a resident of New York City.

LINDA LARCOMBE (Previous Issue)

Linda Larcombe is a graduate student at the University of Manitoba currently living in Thunder Bay, Ontario. She wrote the article on the effects of the Little Ice Age on Iceland as a graduate research project. She is currently writing her MA thesis on the ceramics from Upper Fort Garry (in Bonnycastle Park, Winnipeg) and raising a new baby.

Submissions are welcome. Please contact the appropriate editor.