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• Help Curling in Iceland •

The Canadian/US committee that is working to help curling get started in Iceland is soliciting donations from interested Icelanders to assist with the project. Money is needed to purchase 16 pairs of rocks at a cost of approximately $450.00 per pair (Cdn) plus funds to assist in bringing four Icelandic curling enthusiasts to Canada for curling clinic instruction and also to have a qualified ice maker go to Iceland to instruct the local people in the art of ice making. Our target is to raise $18,000.00.

Donations should be made payable to *Lögberg-Heimskringla* and sent to the paper along with a note specifying that the money is for the curling project. We need your help to make this project fly.

Gimli INL offers *Framfarí*

The English Translation, in book form, of the entire 76 issues of the newspaper *Framfarí*, which was published in New Iceland in the years 1877 to 1880 — $15.00 per copy plus $5.00 mailing costs within Canada, $10.00 mailing outside of Canada.

Contact:
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The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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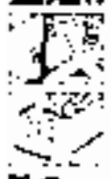
Cover illustration of Ulfhildur the Elf Woman, by Helga Miller, courtesy Queenston House Publishing Co. Ltd.





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EDITORIAL

By Sigrid Johnson, Helga Malis, Kristine Perlmutter & Lorna Tergesen

THE BOARD of *The Icelandic Canadian* apologizes for the delay in getting the most recent issues of the magazine to you. In its endeavour to look to the future and be responsive to the changing circumstances surrounding the magazine's existence, some restructuring of the magazine board has taken place. As a result of this restructuring, with the exception of the printing function, the magazine will now be produced entirely through the work of volunteers. We have begun by giving the magazine a new look. Further improvements are in the offing!

In selecting material to be included in the 50th Anniversary issue of *The Icelandic Canadian* (Summer, 1992), the editorial board came up with many more outstanding selections than could be included in that issue. Many of these outstanding selections contained a theme more suitable for publication in a Winter issue. It is therefore now that the opportunity presents itself to introduce new generations of subscribers to: *The Christmas Bird* by LaDonna Breidfjord Backmeyer (Winter, 1980), *Christmas in Iceland* by Rev. Valdimar J. Eylands (December, 1943), *Fond Memories of a Prairie Christmas* by Elma Gislason (Winter, 1977), *Have you Seen the Jólasveinar?* by Leigh Syms and Stefan Tergesen (Winter, 1981), *Ulfhildur the Elf Woman*, translated from the Icelandic by Helga Miller and George Houser (Winter, 1980, revised and published in *Redhead the Whale and other Icelandic Folk Tales* in 1985, and included in this issue courtesy of the publisher, Queenston House Publishing Co.), *Christmas Past* by John S. Matthiasson (Winter, 1972), and *Night of the New Year* by Stephan G. Stephansson and translated by Paul A. Sigurdson (Winter, 1985).

Also featured in this issue is an interview with Byrdye Beckel, Executive Director of the Christmas Cheer Board of Greater Winnipeg, by Helga Malis, a translation of a short story by Margrjet Benedictsson by Árný Hjaltadóttir, a new poem by John Feldsted and reviews of two recently published books by Icelandic Canadian authors, W.D. Valgardson and David Arnason and his son Vincent. And, we have included a sampler of recipes, decorations and music that are traditional at Christmas in Iceland.

Read, enjoy, and keep this issue of the Icelandic Canadian as a handbook of sorts to be consulted in the years to come as the winter season and its celebration of Christmas approaches.

Byrdye Beckel at work at the Christmas Cheer Board of Greater Winnipeg

INTERVIEW *with* BYRDYE BECKEL

On the 75th Anniversary of the Christmas Cheer Board of Greater Winnipeg, Executive Director Byrdye Beckel is interviewed by Helga Malis

A SPIRIT OF CAMARADERIE and friendliness greeted me as I opened the door of 1741 Wellington Avenue, the home of the Christmas Cheer Board of Greater Winnipeg this year. I had made an appointment to chat with Byrdye Beckel, the Director of the Cheer Board. Telephones were ringing everywhere, and there were several busy people about. A cheerful woman named Maggie shepherded me towards Byrdye's office and suggested that I get in there as soon as Byrdye was off the phone, which I did. This is a busy lady—in the brief time I talked to her, she managed also to order 8,000 packages of soup, 24 cases of macaroni and the same of salmon, cancel an interview with one radio station and confirm her presence at the Santa Claus parade with another. The interview progressed despite the interruptions.

HELGA: Can you tell the readers of THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN a bit about your childhood and family, Byrdye?

BYRDYE: My mother and father lived in Arborg and Gimli, and just before I was born, during the depression, they moved to Winnipeg. So I was born on Alverstone Street. My mother and father were both Icelandic—my mother came directly from Iceland and my father was born in Canada.

HELGA: And what were their names?

BYRDYE: My father was Barney Bjarnason and my mother was Una Torfason.

HELGA: Byrdye is an unusual name. How did you get it?

BYRDYE: I got the name Byrdye in Gimli. I was down there with my cousin Maria Josephson. A bunch of us were out on the old dock and we found a pail of paint; everyone said, "let's paint our names." They started painting their names on the pier and when it came to my name, I said: "Oh, don't put Bernice," which was my given name, so they started in to find a nickname for me. They finally came up with 'Birdie' and I said: "Oh, I like that one. I've got a cousin Bertie and I just love her." So they changed the 'i's to 'y's and put Byrdye on the dock at Gimli and it stuck.

HELGA: I was looking at the spelling and wondering if the origin might perhaps be Welsh.

BYRDYE: No, Maria, who was living with us at the time, got all my friends in Winnipeg calling me Byrdye and it's been Byrdye ever since.

HELGA: So you grew up in Winnipeg in the West end?

BYRDYE: Yes. We never had a lot in our house, so I can relate to some of the people who get hampers. I don't ever remember a hamper being brought to our house, but we never had very much to eat and I think we lived in 17 different rooming houses from the time I was born up until the time I got married. We went from pillar to post.

HELGA: I take it your father didn't own these rooming houses.

BYRDYE: No, no. My father was a barber and he walked all over the city cutting people's hair to support us, and my mother took in dress making. So that was how we lived, but we were comfortable, we were happy. There was a lot of music in our home. My mother loved to play the piano - she played by ear - and I played the piano and my sister was a dancer and a singer.

HELGA: What was your sister's name?

BYRDYE: Diddie Howardson. I call her a sister but she really was a cousin to me. She was brought up in our family from before I was born. So, we were like sisters.

HELGA: How did that come about?

BYRDYE: My mother's sister died and left eight children. Maria and Johnny were brought up by the Josephsons in Gimli, and the others were old enough to get jobs or to go out to work on the lake. Our place was like a home to them, they'd bunk in if they were in the city. We had a nice family, a loving family. I never remember a time when I doubted that my mother and father loved me. So that meant a lot. They weren't rich but they were very good people.

HELGA: You mentioned music and that you played the piano. Did you take lessons or did you play by ear?

BYRDYE: Yes, I took piano lessons. I played by ear for quite a while and then I thought I'd be smart and learn how to read the music. I lost the ability to play by ear. Somebody would want a singsong and I could sit down and play whatever they wanted. I can't do that so well anymore. But I do enjoy my piano and my music.

HELGA: Do you like to sing too?

BYRDYE: Yes, I do. I sang for a number of years with the Sweet Adelines.

HELGA: Oh, I've just been singing with them for a year myself and I'm having a lot of fun.

BYRDYE: Yes, I loved my involvement with the Sweet Adelines. I was also one of the founding members of the Assiniboine Chorus here in Winnipeg. I also sang in a quartet. As a matter of fact, I had to quit because of my job. It was just too much. I couldn't work here all day and then practice at night. But, it was a lot of fun, and I still miss it. I stay in touch and sometimes come out for special occasions.

HELGA: Do you have other interests?

BYRDYE: Yes, I paint. I like to do water colours. Some of my work is on display right now at the Scandinavian Centre.

HELGA: And did you take painting lessons as well?

BYRDYE: Yes, I've been taking lessons for a few years now. I started painting using oils.

HELGA: I often think that I'd like to try painting, but it must be scary to be faced with a blank page.

BYRDYE: Oh, you should try it, it's fun. It is still scary to me I guess, but it comes together eventually.

HELGA: Can you tell me something more of your early life?

BYRDYE: My family attended the First Lutheran Church on Victor Street, and that's where I was married. My daughter was married there, as well. I grew up in the West end, went to school at John M. King, General Wolfe and then to Daniel McIntyre. My first job was with Great West Life, and the next was with General Motors. Then I got married and I had three children, Alan, Janice and Glen.

HELGA: Can you tell me about your work at the Christmas Cheer Board?

BYRDYE: I've been with the Cheer Board now for many years, for a good part of my life.

HELGA: Yes, that's what I understand. And are you kept busy all year long?

BYRDYE: Well, I certainly was when I first began. But, over the last few years I've been trying to delegate more of the work. The job does take over your life—you don't have time for yourself. So, I've learned to delegate more. But I am still busy most of the time no matter how many people are taking on bits and pieces of the job. There are just so many things to do.

HELGA: So this a year round operation, what with all the organizing that needs to be done beforehand?

BYRDYE: We order the toys in February and by April we have most of our toys. We begin ordering the food in August or September. The turkeys are ordered over the summer, as well. Then there are a lot of letters to be answered and inquiries to be answered over the telephone, so it does take up time. But I'm getting smarter with age.

HELGA: It must be a difficult thing to let go of?

BYRDYE: Absolutely. It becomes part of your life, it just drifts from one year to the next and there never seems to be a place where you can stop and just let it all go.

HELGA: So when you are ordering turkeys, toys, and so forth, do you have an estimated number?

BYRDYE: Yes, we take statistics each year after the distribution has been completed, so we know how many families and what size, how many boys and girls, and their ages.

HELGA: So you make a projection for the next year.

BYRDYE: Yes, we make a projection , but we always live on last year's budget. This year we pay with last year's money and any surplus is carried over. It takes about $750,000.00 to purchase everything that we need. The administration cost is only 8-10% of the budget. None of the furniture and equipment you see here belongs to us, it is all on loan. And the building is on loan, so we don't have to pay for that. But we never know how long we'll be in one spot.

HELGA: How long have you been here?

BYRDYE: This is our second year. We won't be here next year, as the lease will be up. At one point we thought of buying a building, but on a closer look, we found it wasn't a good idea. As long as we can have a building for the two months we really need it, it's better than having to maintain our own. So we sometimes don't know just where we'll be from one year to the next.

HELGA: So you just set up shop at Christmas time?

BYRDYE: We move in on November the first and it takes about two weeks to get everything we need out of storage and get ourselves set up. Several companies and individuals lend us things that we need, such as a photocopying machine, and other office equipment. All the applications for Christmas hampers from the previous year are put through a shredder, so we begin each year anew. We always have the telephone installed right away. A few people set up the office and organize the warehouse, and as we need more people we bring them in. Some people just work for the three weeks before Christmas—our busiest time. We are almost operating at full capacity now.

HELGA: Where do you get the names of the people you help?

BYRDYE: We get our names from all the different helping agencies in the city.

HELGA: How do you get in touch, do you contact the people by telephone?

BYRDYE: No, the applicants contact their respective community, health or welfare assistance offices where staff make up the applications and send them to us. The same procedure is followed by the smaller helping agencies such as Klinic, NorthWest Co-op and Mount Carmel as well as the large provincial and city welfare organizations. Then we also have volunteers taking applications over the telephone. We try to assess everyone who calls. If the telephone operators feel they haven't been able to get the right information, or feel that there is some discrepancy, they call one of our two social workers who will visit the individual to do a better evaluation and determine if there is a need there. The telephone operators also take names of people who want to provide for a family. We then match these people up with a family

giving them all the information they'll need so that they can buy the presents and food for the hampers for that family. So that's another big part of our job here in the office. And do you know, there are thousands of ladies all over the city who knit for us? I don't how many thousand balls of wool we ordered that people have already picked up to knit for next year.

HELGA: That's wonderful!

BYRDYE: It is marvellous what people do in this city. We are so fortunate to have citizens such as we do, there are so many caring people. And that's why we are celebrating our 75th year—it's a big year for us. I think Winnipeg has to be very proud; I think it is wonderful that people have felt this way about Christmas and about making sure that everybody in Winnipeg enjoys Christmas, for 75 years. Really, this generosity is what it's all about, and what makes the whole thing work.

HELGA: How did you get involved initially?

BYRDYE: Well, I was ready for a job change after being a Welcome Wagon hostess for ten years. I wanted the summers off, as my husband got six weeks of vacation. A friend at the Volunteer Bureau said this position was available, so I thought I'd try it. On the way down I wondered: "Why am I even doing this? They have a budget to look after and I can't even balance my check book!" But I took the job and I've been here ever since. It's been fun! It's been great, there have been a lot of wonderful people in my life.

HELGA: In your early years did you feel adequate for the job?

BYRDYE: No. I just took things a day at a time. I did whatever I could that day and went on from there. Of course, I had the help of all these great people who worked with me. I managed to obtain the assistance of several of my friends—like Maggie, for instance. I asked her back then if she wanted to do something for Christmas and she is still here. In fact, most of those who started out with me are still here. So that's been my life for 20 years!

HELGA: It has really been a big commitment for you over the years.

BYRDYE: Yes, that's the only difficult part of this job. I'm an amma, I have four grandchildren that I just love and I never see enough of them. I never really missed having Christmas Day at home during the early years because I was getting so much out of Christmas here. But, as I grow older, I'd love to have Christmas dinner at home again. These are the things that I miss. I never have time to do Christmas shopping the way I'd like to—just grab something here and there. My kids say: "Mom, it's time you came home."

HELGA: Yes, I'm certain they want you to. But, they must be very proud of you.

BYRDYE: It is getting to be time to go back to my family. I lost my husband in 1987, so I am by myself now. Thank goodness I had the Cheer Board, it really helped me.

With that we concluded our chat, and I said goodbye to the remarkable woman who has led the Christmas Cheer Board for the last twenty years. The tradition of churches giving hampers to needy families at Christmas began in 1919, just after the soldiers arrived home from the First World War, and eventually became the work of the Christmas Cheer Board of Greater Winnipeg, which, in 1993, assisted 21,327 needy families. But it was now five o'clock; people around had their coats on, anxious to lock up and go home. Another day was over for Byrdye and the crew at the Christmas Cheer Board, and it was another day closer to yet another Christmas.

The CHRISTMAS BIRD

Story by LaDonna Breidfjord Backmeyer

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, before your pappa was born, even before your grandfather was born, a small family journeyed across the stormy seas upon a ship. They travelled from Iceland, their old home, to America, their new home. This family had loved Iceland very much, but the times were very bad there, so bad that the father, Einar, was afraid that his family would surely starve if they were to stay in that old land. So the family sold the sheep, the cattle and the horses (those that had survived the avalanches and the volcanoes). They packed up the books and the spinning wheel, some wool from the sheep and the old coffee grinder, and they sailed to America to find their fields of gold. However, as you and I both know, it takes many, many years of hard work and quite a bit of good luck to become rich in America, so the family remained poor for a very long time.

It so happens that the year in which our story takes place was an uncommonly poor year for that farmer and his family. It had been many years since this small group of people had immigrated to the new land, but although they had worked unusually hard, that bit of good luck had eluded them. All through the spring of that year the rains had fallen heavily. The meadows were undrained and swampy, and Einar, being a determined farmer in spite of bad health, would come home each day after clearing more land, wet to the waist and cold. One of the horses had died from swamp fever; the other went lame from a barbed wire cut and had to be sold. And the lambs were dying, most of them shortly after their birth. So by the time summer finally arrived, the family had only five or six sheep, one milk goat named Rósa, an old cow named Branda, a two-year-old heifer named Krossa, and one yearling whose name cannot be remembered. One would think that all this was bad luck enough, but there was more bad luck to be had. One night the old cow, Branda, fell into the manger and twisted her neck. The next morning the oldest child of the household found that blessed creature dead. "Mamma, Mamma," the child cried out. And the whole family came running to view that dear though wretched old beast, each of them fighting the tears that they shed.

It rained and it kept on raining throughout the season. There was not much sunlight that year. It rained so often that the sod of the roof had no time to dry, so the oldest children, Þura, Willy and Fríða, slept under the bed more often than they slept on its top. One night it rained unusually hard and the rain dripped everywhere through the sod of the roof. Guðný cradled her baby close to the warmth of her own body. She held that baby, who was much too small to crawl under the bed with the older children, and she stood behind the

cookstove, the one dry spot in the house. All through the night she stood in that spot, keeping the rain water off her baby, praying that her children would not get sick from the cold and the damp. And Einar, who kept a smudge pot burning to ward off the mosquitoes, stood by her, prayed with her. Their whispering voices were drowned in the roar of the rain.

To be sure, these times were very bad indeed. Even though the rain continued to fall, and even though there were no horses to help with the work, the farmer had to farm his land. Einar sowed the seed for his crops, scattering the seed by hand that summer. He cut his hay with a scythe, and when the hay had cured — thanks to a short span of relatively good weather — he rolled it into bundles and carried it home on his back. Einar often thought that, when he had a little money in his pocket, he would buy himself a team of oxen. He especially thought about that team of oxen when he walked the fifteen-mile trip to town for groceries — and when he made the trip home from town, lugging the flour in a one-hundred-pound sack on his back. Oxen were good animals, sturdy and strong. It was during the fall of that year that Einar began to use a cane whenever the air was damp.

And so the year passed, until it was nearly Christmas and there was no money to be found on that poor homestead. There would be no bright and shining toys bought from Eaton's catalogue that year. Not even one gift, not even the smallest gift could the couple afford.

"We must make do," the mother said.

"We've not much choice," said the father.

And so they did.

Every weekday morning, after a breakfast of oatmeal and milk-coffee, Guðný would bundle the older children into the mittens and caps she had made

from the wool that Einar had sheared from the sheep. Then, before sending the children off to school through the cold and the snow, she would draw a pair of Einar's great wool socks over each little pair of legs, fastening each sock tight at the top with a piece of string. And, for each child, she had one hug and a kiss and one old and much-used lardpail of lunch. "Go and be blest, little daughters of mine," said the mother each morning as she lifted the latch on the door. "Go and be blest, little son." And for Willy, being the only boy of the household, she had one more extra-tight hug. "Be careful," she would call out to them. And as the snow drifted through the doorway, she would draw her sweater closer to her chest, protecting herself from the draft. "Be careful to watch for the bear and the wolves," the mother would warn as her children entered the Fort Pelly Trail that led through the woods to the school.

Then, after Einar had finished the chores, had chopped the wood and drawn the water, after the baby was asleep for her morning nap, the farmer and his wife would work with scraps of wood and bits of cloth and paper in the small log cabin with its tufted and snow-covered roof, making toys for the young ones for Christmas. And when each gift was finished, it was wrapped in brown paper, tied with a string and stored in the trunk or the shed. Þura, Willy and Fríða never did get much for Christmas, usually only one gift apiece and one not-too-filled stocking from Santa, but that didn't make these three any less curious. Even Gudda and Gunna, Guðný's two little sisters who lived on the farm at the other side of the field, would stop each day on their way home from school to peep and to peer into every corner as they sat on the stools by the table, swinging their brown-stockinged legs and eating kleinur. Only Ásta, the baby, remained unaware, she being too young to have any knowledge of the giving or hiding of gifts.

There was so terribly much work that had to be done, for according to tradition the home would have to be spotlessly cleaned in honour of the birthday of Christ. So while Einar was cleaning the barn or the chicken hut, Guðný would spend her afternoons with a broom and a rag. She swept and dusted, scrubbed and polished, until at long last not one speck of the hateful though normal grime remained in any corner. Even the canning jars, both empty and full, were polished. She cleaned while the bread was rising, and while the rice soup was cooking for the evening meal. She cleaned as the seven layers of the Christmas vínarterta were baking in the wood-fed stove, and as the filling for this Christmas treat popped and bubbled in its heavy black pot. Every day she cleaned once again all of those things which she had cleaned the day before, and she cleaned a little bit more.

And in the evening, after the lamp was lit and the supper had been eaten, Einar would entertain the children with tales of Grýla, the wretched giantess of the mountain, or of the Jólasveinar, Grýla's mischievous Christmas boys. Guðný would sew or she'd weave, making clothes for the family for Christmas. All of God's people, or so Guðný believed, had to have at least one new piece of clothing to wear for Christ's birthday, even the baby. This was a very old and treasured custom. Styles were copied from the pictures in the catalogue, and new dresses were made for the girls from old dresses of a larger size. Guðný made an apron for herself out of an old scrap or two of cloth, and she wove new cloth for Einar's vest and Willy's pants. The baby's white gown had been made months before. Trimmed with embroidery work and handmade lace, the gown

had been carefully wrapped and placed in the rough-cut Icelandic trunk that served as a chair near the home-made and equally crude table. Only Willy's pants were not ready by Christmas. Guðný had run out of thread and there was no money for new thread. The woman wiped away her useless tears and took the stitching out of that part of the pants she had finished. Then, using the thread she had saved, she stitched two neat patches onto Willy's old pants, and that on the day before Christmas.

Then came the eve of Christ's birth. There was no hangikjöt this year, due to the loss of the lambs, but a pot of rice pudding was bubbling gently on the cookstove, ready for the Christmas Eve supper. There were even a few raisins in the pudding, these being gained by Guðný through barter. The table was set with a meagre though tempting Christmas feast, and the family and friends, all of them dressed in their very best, stood quietly with heads bowed while Einar recited the evening prayer. Guðný's father and stepmother, Jónas and Jóhanna, and the youngest of their children, Dóri, Gunna, Jói and Gudda, had joined the family for the festive evening, as did old Kristján Skagfjörð and his son, Alli.

These last were good friends and well thought of as neighbours. Einar recited the prayer with great dignity and humble gratitude, but his voice, as always, cracked a bit as he mentioned the people back home in the motherland. "May God bless all who gather here," the farmer prayed. "And may He also bless all those whom we have left behind." Einar stopped for a moment, then he continued: "We thank Thee, my God, for all of the blessings which You in Your goodness have already bestowed upon us, and we hope that we who have gathered within this humble home can be worthy of the love and the care that

You have given to us. We honour Thy name and the name of Thy son, Jesus, on this — the holiest night of the year." And all of the household repeated in unison, "Amen." Kristján Skagfjörð took a hanky from his pocket and blew his nose as Jóhanna wiped a tear from her cheek with the back of her hand. And the children, who had displayed quite a bit of patience up to this time, grew restless and wanted to eat.

There certainly was no grumbling about any lack of food. Everyone present agreed that the feast was truly festive. Jóhanna had contributed brown bread, slatur and skyr to the table. And Kristján Skagfjörð had trapped two rabbits on the day before. The old man had dressed these rabbits and had baked them in buttermilk. After being warmed in the oven, they too were added to the feast. Guðný's rice pudding had been topped with cinnamon and sugar, and each pönnukaka had been spread with wild cranberry or strawberry jelly before being rolled. The vínarterta, which had mellowed with age, sat at the centre of the table, between the platter of freshly warmed rabbit and a bowl of steaming potato soup. No person left this table hungry. Even Jónas, big though he was, looked very much like a satisfied man. With his hands resting on the plank of the table and the dampness of coffee glistening on the red of his beard, Jónas leaned back after the meal had finished and said, "That meal was fit for the King of Denmark, daughter of mine." To which Einar replied, "Any meal is fit for the King of Denmark. This one was fit for an Icelander, especially an Icelander of Canadian persuasion." And they all laughed before rising from the table.

The living room, which also served as a bedroom, was lit with tallow candles, and the Christmas tree that Einar and the children had brought home from the woods stood tall at one corner of the sparsely furnished room, its trunk placed in a milk-pail of hard-packed sand, its branches draped with paper chains and delicate paper snowflakes, all of which were child-made. An angel rested at the top of the tree, the golden-haired cherub nesting on a cloud of white fluff. Einar stood close by the tree holding the Bible in the palm of one hand as he turned the terribly thin and ancient pages to the book of Luke. The man's voice did not falter as he read the story of Christ's birth to his people. In fact, no teacher at Cropper Tops school had ever read so well. The children were very proud of this farmer who stood so straight and read so beautifully. And after the man had closed the book gently, the children in turn thanked him for his reading. "Thank vou, Pappa," said his own children as thev each gave him a kiss.

"Thank you," said Guðný's little brothers and sisters, and they too kissed the farmer for this was the proper way to show one's appreciation in those davs.

Alli Skagfjörð tuned his violin and the family and friends gathered to sing the carols that told of the blessed birth of the Christchild. Einar was song-master as his voice was true. Even little Ásta seemed to be singing along, though her words were but sounds of soft coos and gurgles. On the other hand, Fríða and Gudda sang with great gusto, especially when they alone sang *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. They sang it in English as they

The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

Material Submission Guidelines

When submitting articles for consideration by the editorial staff of the Icelandic Canadian, please follow these guidelines.

Contributions should be typewritten, double-spaced, and with ample margins. Pages should be numbered, with the author's name in the right top corner of each page. The author's full name and address must appear in the left top corner of the first page. Matter to appear in italics must be underlined.

Notes should be kept to a minimum. Whenever possible the material should be incorporated into the text instead, if necessary in parentheses. Notes should be typed with double spacing at the bottom of the relevant pages or on separate sheets and arranged in one continuous numbered sequence indicated by the Arabic numeral followed by a stop.

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McCracken, Jane. ed., *Stephan G. Stephansson: Selected Translations from Andvökur.* Edmonton: The Stephan G. Stephansson Homestead Restoration Committee, 1982.

Þorsteinn Þ. Þorsteinsson and Tryggvi J. Olesen, *et al. Saga Íslendinga í Vesturheimi.* 5 vols. Reykjavík: Menningarsjoður; Winnipeg: Þjóðræknisfélag Íslendinga í Vesturheimi 1940-1953

Matthiasson, John S. "Adaptation to an Ethnic Structure: The Urban Icelandic Canadians of Winnipeg." In *The Anthropology of Iceland*, ed. Paul Durrenberger and Gíslí Pálsson. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989, pp. 157-175.

Kristjanson, Gustaf. "The Icelanders of Blaine." *The Icelandic Canadian 45:3* (1987), pp. 15-21.

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had been taught it at school. And they sang songs of Iceland and Iceland's seabirds, white birds with silver sun-tipped wings, sailing up, up over Iceland's cliffs and down to the sea again.

It was later that the people of the house opened their gifts, after the children had draped strings of cranberries around one of the trees at the front of the cabin and had put out seeds and grains for the birds and the beasts. It was then that Einar and Jónas began to hand out the gifts that had been placed beneath the tree, one at a time, one to each person. Stilts and blocks, scarfs, treasure-boxes and embroidered handkerchiefs, and picture-books made from scraps of oil cloth and pasted on pictures from Eaton's, all had been opened save one, and that one for Guðný from Einar. This was a special gift and all of those present on the evening of feasting knew that this gift must hold some special quality. Whereas all of the other gifts had been wrapped in brown paper, this last one was wrapped in a tissue of white.

"How?" asked the woman.

"I dug deep," said the man, and his eyes grew bright-like a mischievous child. "…For the paper that is," and he laughed lightly as his eyes grew tender with the look that one has when one loves another. "…Open it," the farmer said to his wife.

And all in the house tried to peek as Guðný pulled back the tissue, some peeking over her shoulder, some standing on tiptoe close by her side. The gift was of wood and in places had silvered. A small hand-carved sea bird sat on the cloud of white paper she held in her hand.

"Oh-h-h," said the family and friends as they studied the masterful work of the bird. "Oh-h-h."

And the farmer was very proud of his work, of the time he had spent in the fields, in the woods, away from the house — whittling in spare moments, in stolen moments. And he was proud of the woman.

"It's like you, konan mín," the farmer said with great tenderness. "The bird is like you… it's home, konan mín… The bird and you… they are home," and he touched her cheek to wipe away the happy tear.

And that is a part of the story of your heritage, little friend of mine. Of such as these are memories made, a Christmas bird and blue knee-patches, and an evening ended with a game of Whist. But there is a secret key to the passage of happy memories, and if you were to look hard enough within these pages, I think that you will find that key. As a man named Ellard Swanson once told me, "Those were hard times… very, very hard times, but we were very happy." And his voice sang.

FOND MEMORIES *of a* PRAIRIE CHRISTMAS

Story by Elma Gislason

We had been on our best behaviour all day. Preparations for attending the Fair Valley school concert that very evening, had been under way since early morning. Hair in rag curls, we kept Mother supplied with threaded needles. We scarcely dared whisper, let it disturb the incredible speed with which she stitched the fourth dress of cream-coloured nun's veiling.

Each year, she made large tallow candles which were placed on a narrow board fitted over the top of the Christmas tree. We were allowed to burn these as often as we wished, others being reserved for Christmas Eve only.

A deeply religious atmosphere was created, when at 4:30 p.m., December 24th, Mother would proclaim in a solemn voice, "the sacred hour has begun." This sent shivers down my spine. The whole household took on an aura of reverence, while she fried doughnuts and served a light meal.

The crowning point was when the little coloured candles, snug in their clip-on holders, were lit on the tree and all other lights put out. Smelling ever so 'Christmassy,' their sparkling flicker held us enthralled as we sat around the tree singing Icelandic hymns and listening to the Christmas story. No one thought of gifts. Indeed, there weren't any.

This December, 1918, all rules were broken. Every candle, both great and small, was set aglow to augment the dim light of coal-oil lamps as Mother plied her skill in the waning day. There was magic in the mingled aroma of burning candles and spicy Christmas baking.

At last, the final stitch was in place. Our hair was now in lovely locks, tied with red ribbons. We shivered with delight as we donned our new dresses, dancing and preening. We thought we looked quite bewitching. Hugs and kisses were Mother's reward, as she quickly dressed baby brother. I was eight years old, and the proud possessor of my first doll. In my excitement, I grabbed her out of the cradle my brother had made for her. Twirling around, I sang the song I would sing to her that night at the concert, when she and I would make our debut. It was time to go.

We were clad in all manner of warm coats and sweaters; only our eyes were visible between scarves and toques. After tending lights and fires in the heaters and stove, Dad bundled us into the pre-heated sleigh lined with pillows and comforters. The horses eagerly responded to his "Click, click" and a tug on the reins with stomping and snorting. We were on our way.

Sounds were clear in the 40-below air. The rattle of the harness, the squeak of sleigh runners and the crisp crunch of hooves on hard snow were magnified. Puffed in huge billows of steam, the horses' breath froze on their coats. Dad soon looked like a Santa Claus, with a

frosted, bushy moustache and snowy eyebrows.

Sleigh bells ringing, we drove east over our field to the road, turning right after a quarter-mile at Carberry Hill. It was steep and slippery, but the horses struggled valiantly to the top at Dad's urging.

A startling phenomenon greeted us as we emerged from the Assiniboine valley. The star-studded sky, a blanket of shimmering diamonds hanging low over the prairie, opened before us. Every late-December constellation was in view, the minutest members distinct. The ice-blue moon shed light no brighter than they. Shooting stars dropped from the pregnant, overflowing heavens. The night sky was a black backdrop. In awe and wonder, we sped across the illuminated prairie under the Creator's magnificent panorama of Christmas lights.

CHRISTMAS *in* ICELAND

By Rev. Valdimar J. Eylands

Certain aspects of the Christmas season are uniform and universal among Christians the world over. Others vary greatly according to historical antecedents, cultural development, traditions, temperament, physical environment, and profession of religious faith. These things mould people in their outlook upon life, and determine the manifestations of their intellectual and emotional habits. The cardinal message of Christmas: "Unto you is born this day a Saviour which Is Christ the Lord," is the same from "Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand." But in the sunny south where the sky is constantly blue, where life is easy and the people lighthearted and highly emotional, their interpretation of this message is apt to be unlike that of people of totally different temperament, living under adverse physical conditions.

The character traits of the Icelander, as well as his physical and mental habits are somewhat akin to the soil of his native land. Iceland, as is well known, is a land of great contrasts, of ice and fire. The majestic mountains and glaciers with their silvery hoods shrouded at times in clouds of gold or grey, the deep blue firths, the rugged and outwardly barren landscape, the lava fields, the lakes, the lean meadows, the occasional volcanic eruptions of fire and mist, the roaring waters tumbling from towering rocks into bottomless ravines, or the steaming water spouting from the bottom of the earth; all these have contributed to the mental outlook and philosophy of the Icelanders. The ice being more frequently and more abundantly in evidence at all times of the year than the fire, the people have through centuries of their associations with this grand and gruesome phenomenon become somewhat cool, aloof, and stoic in their attitude, and rarely betray their emotions.

There are times and seasons however, when the Icelander thaws out, forgets for a while his drudgery and the ardour of his toil on land and sea, and rejoices in the common denominator of man's hopes and aspirations. Christmas is one of these times.

Christianity in Iceland is already more than a thousand years old. One of the unique features of the country's history was its formal acceptance by a parliamentary action in the year 1000 of the Christian faith. Of course the Althing's vote to accept Christianity did not make the land immediately Christian, but it gave the Church a chance, and the religion of Christ did eventually supplant the religion of Odin and Thor. The Christmas festival displaced the Roman *Saturnalia* the alleged birthday of the sun, and the Norse Mid-Winter festival at which oblations were offered to induce Odin to grant a prosperous summer season. Many traits of the old faith were however long retained among the people and these

together with numerous strands of folklore and superstition made themselves felt in the religious and intellectual life of the nation for centuries. Many of these superstitions clustered around the Christmas festival, and appeared, peculiarly enough in the weirdest type of complicated demonology..

Among the earliest reference to the Christmas festival found in the classical literature of Iceland, is that contained in the Saga of Grettir the Strong. (*Grettissaga* chapters 63-64.) Grettir, the hero of the story was killed at Drangey in 1031. Several years prior to that date he was a guest, at Christmas time, in the home of Steinvör of Sandhaugar in Barðardal. On the nearby farm of Eyjadalsá was an old temple which had been converted into a church, served at the time by a priest, named Steinn. The singing of mass at Stein's church had apparently become a fixed custom at the time of Grettir's visit. But Steinvör's farm was haunted by trolls, and two men, including her husband, had been snatched from their beds on two previous Christmas nights, while the lady was away at the Eyjadalsá church attending midnight mass. They had been carried into a cave underneath a nearby waterfall to serve as Christmas dinner for the trolls. The third Christmas night, at which time Grettir was her guest, Steinvör did not dare to leave the house lest the misfortune be repeated. But Grettir volunteered to stay at home, so that she could go. During Christmas eve he tackled the female troll who came to fetch him, dismembered her, and later disposed of her husband by diving through the waterfall into the cave. This story shows two things: the early observance of the festival among the people, and the terrible fear and superstition prevailing at that time.

It is difficult for modern men to appreciate the demonology of these early days. But to the ancient inhabitants of northern Europe nature was animate, and the spirits either assisted man in his struggle of life, or they conspired against him. The idea of the conspiracy of evil spirits was accentuated in the cold and rugged north where danger seemed to lurk at every turn. For a long time Christianity was unable to dispel the gloom of these beliefs. True, the concept of God was clarified. He became a person, but somewhat removed from the affairs of men. The devil on the other hand remained on the earth, it was his domain, and his legions assumed the forms of trolls and fairies whose business is was to harass the people and beguile their souls. The world became a veritable theatre of devils, against which man had to be constantly on guard. This world of evil spirits became particularly annoyed and active at the coming of Christ who had deprived them of their real power. Every recurring celebration of his birth brought them new frenzy in their frustration, and caused them to redouble their efforts to bring mischief and misfortune to men. All this folklore belongs to the ancient past, and is no longer taken seriously by anyone. Nevertheless the old fables are still alive in the consciousness of the nation, and only by knowing this background can we fully understand the peculiar customs attached to Christmas, especially in the remote parts of Iceland.

In Iceland and in all other countries, Christmas is the festival of children. In the monotony of the cold and dreary winter days Christmas is the bright spot in the lives of the children in more ways than one. It is looked forward to long before it comes, and talked about long after it has passed. Special preparations are made for the festival, even in the humblest of homes. Among the first signs of approaching Christmas is the keeping of the Christmas-log. This is a book into which are entered the names

of all guests who come to the house from the first day of Advent until the day before Christmas. On Christmas eve all the names which have been entered in his book are written on narrow strips of paper, and placed in a hat, or a book, out of which the men in the house draw the names of the female guests; and the women the names of the men. The names thus drawn indicated who was to be the Christmas partner of each person (Jólasveinar-Jólameyjar.) This was great fun, but sometimes it could also become a source of considerable disappointment.

Sometime during the Advent season a trip had to be made to town to secure provisions. This was often a long and dangerous trip in all sorts of weather. Sometimes two or more farmers would join an expedition for this purpose. The usual provisions secured were flour, raisins, prunes, coffee, sugar, and frequently also some kind of liquor.

Sigurður Ingjaldson, a former resident of Gimli, Manitoba, tells in his autobiography of an exceedingly hazardous journey which he made as a boy, for this purpose. He was sent on a several days' journey to secure provisions, including a small barrel of brandy. On the way home he encountered severe snowstorms on the mountains, and nearly lost his life. He had to leave most of the liquor in a distant community, and the balance was almost all consumed by his companions before he got all the way home. Excessive drinking at Christmas, however, was rare. Even those who were ardent admirers of Bacchus refused to accept his comforts on Christmas eve or the first Christmas day. Those days were too holy for carousing.

Cleanliness was one of the principal features in the preparations for Christmas. Everything had to be washed and polished. The women of the house would labour with pots and pans, lamps, window panes, and all objects that would respond to rubbing until they were spotless. The week before Christmas great washing could be seen swaying in the winter winds all over the community. The weather did not always lend itself to drying clothes at that time of the year, but there was an ancient belief that God would bring a thaw and dry weather just before Christmas to enable poor people, whose small homes did not provide the space for indoor drying, to get ready for the season (Fátækraþerrir).

Cooking and candle making occupied a great deal Or time in the Christmas preparation. The every day fare of the country people was very simple, but at Christmas something special had to be provided. Sweet cakes and pastry were made in abundance in large households, and enough candles had to be moulded for every member of the house. In my youth the women were relieved of this last duty by the importation of candles made abroad which could be purchased in the stores.

During the busy days of Advent, the old stories of trolls and fairies were told and retold, especially for the benefit of the junior members of the family. The principal Christmas fairy, who was particularly the terror of little children was a female witch named "Grýla." According to some versions of the story she had thirteen sons. They started to come, one at a time, thirteen days before Christmas, and left, one a day, for thirteen days thereafter, the last making his departure on the day of Epiphany. They were big ugly fellows cleft to the neck, with big round feet like pancakes. During the days of their sojourn they grew fat on gossip and profanity, and were reluctant to leave the homes where this food was provided in abundance. Otherwise they were quite harmless but a great nuisance. The following names indicate their nature, and their favourite tricks: Candle Beggar; Candle Licker; Door Peeper; Window Peeper; Gate Smeller; Meat Hooker; Pot Licker; Sheepfold Ghost; Ravine Ghost; Short One; Bowl Licker; Skirt Blower; and Cheese Glutton. Grýla herself was not as harmless as her sons; she carried a great sack into which she would throw naughty children and bring them to her husband for Christmas.

The shepherds strove to have their herds gathered in and fed before darkness fell on Christmas eve. The cows

were milked earlier than usual, and by six o'clock a special feeling of calm, dignity and good will prevailed throughout the home. By this time all the people were assembled indoors, dressed in their best, and thereafter no work wag done unless it was absolutely necessary. Lamps and candles were lit, and placed In every nook and corner, on tables and shelves, and even in the long turflined hallways. The lady of the house, would then 'invite the fairies,' a ceremony in which she walked sunwise around the house, chanting an old rhyme:

Come those who want to come,
Stay those who want to stay.
Go those who want to go
Without harm to me or mine.

This initial duty performed, the 'húsfrú' would return to her quarters, and open a long chest, containing gifts for everyone of her household. These were usually garments, socks, shawls, or shoes. Every one must have something new for Christmas; to be left without a gift was a bad omen, and made the person so neglected an easy prey for the goblins (Jólakötturinn). Following this came a divine service, consisting of two hymns and a Christmas sermon, usually read by the father, or the oldest male member of the family. The service ended with the 'Christmas kiss,' (Jólakossinn) a greeting extended in the manner indicated by the master and mistress of the house to the children, and other members of the household, and then by them to each other in turn, with the familiar "Gleðileg Jól." Then came that feature of the celebration to which the children usually looked with the greatest delight and anticipation: the Christmas dinner, one plate for each person with such an abundance of provisions that they usually lasted for several days. Following the meal, chocolate and coffee were served with 'pönnukökur' and delicious cookies of the most ingenious designs, known as 'laufabrauð.'

In my youth there was no dancing or card playing permitted on Christmas eve, or on Christmas Day. Thereafter both were practised throughout the community. The weather permitting, church services were usually attended on Christmas Day or the Second Christmas Day which was also a legal holiday.

There was something fascinating about these simple Christmas customs, which I heard about or experienced in the days of my youth. Somehow the whole atmosphere was changed, and the surroundings became more congenial in every respect. Christmas came as a ray of light in the dark, dreary and monotonous existence of the people. The entire season was charged with a spirit which challenged men to be noble, and they responded to that challenge the best they could. Even those who ordinarily paid only slight attention to the contents of Christianity seemed to realize that the spirit of good will was also for them, and should be practised by them in their relationship with others. That is what made Christmas in Iceland a delightful season.

Customs have changed a great deal In Iceland during the last quarter century. The seasonal trimmings of Christmas have changed, the folklore probably disappeared, but the spirit remains the same. Instead of following their noisy pagan ancestors in making the season a mere winter festival, and instead of following New World trends in choking the spirit of Christmas in commercialism and superficial celebrations, the modern Icelander observes the season in harmony with its original character — it is a season of rejoicing, a season of light and love.

HAVE YOU SEEN *the* JÓLASVEINAR?

Story by Leigh Syms
Illustrations by Stefan Tergeson

The Icelandic folk heritage is rich in traditions of strange beings such as the following account of the thirteen Jólasveinar (Christmas giants, or sometimes described as little people). The following is for children and the young at heart with imaginative minds. The Jólasveinar were described in various households in North American communities, such as Langruth, in the early years of this century. The re-telling of their activities renews an old Icelandic heritage and adds another dimension to Christmas in addition to the spiritual element and the excitement of Santa Claus.

A great variety of unusual creatures with magical powers has been seen around the world. This was particularly true long ago, but there are still places where some people see 'little folk,' fairies, mischievous imps, dwarfs, witches and giants. Only people who believe in them will see them. It has been said that every time a child says, "I don't believe in fairies!," one of these wee, delicate creatures grows sad and sickly and fades away into a puff of dust.

Iceland has been the home of many strange and magical creatures — little people, giants and ogresses! One group is the Jólasveinar — the thirteen mischievous giants who appear just before Christmas. Have you seen them? When they appear in the countryside of Iceland, they pull many naughty pranks.

If you are awake, very late at night on December 12th, you may see 'Stiff-Legged Sheep Chaser,' the first giant to appear. He loves to chase the sheep and other farm animals in order to make them upset and confused. Because of him the farm animals must be rounded up again.

'George Oaf' appears on the night of December 13th. He sneaks into the milking barns with a sly look and steals the creamy froth from the fresh warm milk. Some of the bubbly magic of the milk is lost, forever.

On the evening of the 14th, rolly-polly 'Shorty' visits the kitchens. He delights in borrowing full kitchen pans and cleaning them in order to fill his ever-empty tummy.

'Spoon Licker' appears on the 15th. He is tall and lean — a skinny stick of a giant! Food left in a deserted kitchen is his goal.

Fifth is 'Pot Scraper' who tries to eat all of the leftovers before the children can. Pieces of cake, bits of pudding, skyr and other delicacies to which the children have been looking forward disappear.

'Pot Licker' arrives on December 17th. He hides under the bed and creeps out to steal food. He even stoops so low as to stealing food from the pets.

On the 18th you are likely to hear 'Door Slammer.' He enjoys disturbing everyone's sleep.

The eighth giant arrives to stuff himself with dairy products. Milk, cheese, butter and skyr are in grave danger of disappearing.

'Sausage Stealer' arrives on the 20th. He tries to finish off all the smoked food that has been prepared for Christmas. Smoked sausages, bacon, rúllupylsa and hangikjöt may disappear in a flash.

On the 21st, 'The Peeper' who is the 10th giant comes to frighten the children and to steal presents. Christmas gifts and toys may disappear if children try to hide under their beds.

'The Sniffer' is number eleven. He arrives on the 22nd and, with his sensitive nose, sniffs out food to fill out his skinny body.

If you listen carefully on the evening of the 23rd you may hear 'Meat Hooker' walking along the roof. He reaches down the chimney with his hook to snag meat that has been left out overnight.

Finallv, on the 24th of December, 'Candle Beggar' arrives to steal children's candles. He cannot resist taking unattended candles that are left burning.

A greedy lot, they are! Their mischievous pranks can do much to spoil Christmas. Food and presents must be, carefully, put away. If children are good and do as they are told, the Jólasveinar can do little harm.

The Jólasveinar are best known in the isolated mountainous area of Iceland. Many of their activities, there may be hidden by the fog. However, they do appear wherever groups of Icelanders live and believe in them. Do they also reside in the low-lying areas of Hecla Island or Riverton in the Manitoba Interlake? Are they to be seen near Langruth, Wynyard, Gimli, Arborg, Minneapolis, Brandon, Seattle, Markerville or other communities?

They will be seen only if you believe in them. Beware, and be good, and they will do no harm.

A SAMPLER *of* ICELANDIC RECIPES, CRAFTS & MUSIC

Smoked lamb, boiled
(*Soðið hangikjöt*)

2 pounds smoked lamb
3 pints water

Rinse or brush meat with tepid water. Bring water to boil, add meat. Boil ¾ of an hour. Let meat cool in stock. Served cold with sugar browned potatoes and green peas in white sauce. Or boiled potatoes, cut small, in white sauce with green peas. Very traditional dish for Christmas day.

Christmas rice-pudding
(*Jólagrautur*)

I cup water
¾ cup rice
3 pints light cream (half-cream, table-cream)
¾ cup raisins
I almond
Cinnamon-sugar

Put the washed rice into the boiling salted water and boil for 10 min. Add the half-cream and boil very slowly for I hour, stirring occasionally. Add raisins 10 min. before end of cooking time. Put in the almond and serve with cinnamon-sugar, cream or diluted fruit syrup. The one who gets the almond wins a prize.

Laufabrauð

1 pound flour
1 tablespoon sugar
1 tablespoon butter
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 cup hot milk

Sift together flour, baking powder and butter. Mix in the sugar and moisten with the hot milk. Knead until smooth. Divide into equal parts, roll out with a rolling pin until very thin and cut with a cake cutting wheel into rounds, using a dessert plate. Keep in a cool place for a while (½ hour). Then cut decoration designs into each cake with a sharp knife and deep-fry until golden brown. Serve with smoked lamb meat (hangikjöt) at Christmas. Especially in north and east Iceland.

Sugar browned potatoes
(*Brúnaðar kartöflur*)

1 pound potatoes ,boiled and peeled
2 tablespoon sugar
I tablespoon butter

Brown the sugar to a light brown colour add butter and potatoes, sauté until evenly browned.

Scandinavian Wish Cookies for Christmas / Ginger Snaps
(*Pepparkakor*)

Place a pepparkakor in the palm of your hand. Then, make a wish. Using the

index finger of your free hand, tap the cookie in the middle. Tradition states that if the pepparkakor breaks into three pieces, your wish will come true. If the pepparkakor does not break into three pieces, you'll just have to enjoy the cookie in smaller pieces!

½ cup sugar
½ cup light molasses
¼ cup shortening
¼ cup butter or margarine
1 beaten egg
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon finely shredded orange peel
½ teaspoon ground allspice
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon cardamom
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
2½ cups all-purpose flour

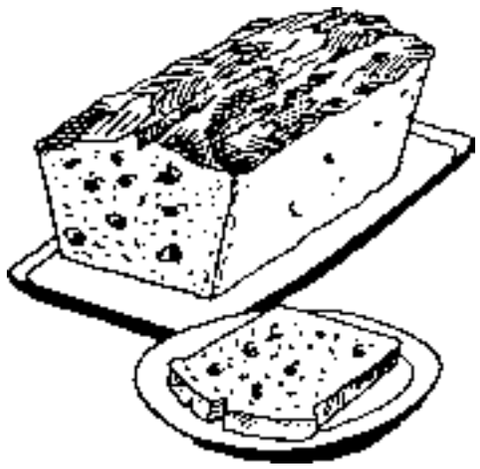
In a 2 quart saucepan, combine sugar, molasses, shortening and butter or margarine. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Cook and stir over low heat till boiling. Cook and stir for about 2 min. more. Remove from heat. Cool for 45 min.

Add egg, cinnamon, orange peel, allspice, nutmeg, salt, baking soda, cardamom and cloves to saucepan, stirring well to mix. Add flour, a third at a time, stirring well after each addition. Divide dough in half. Wrap and chill dough for 2-24 hours or till firm enough to handle.

On a well-floured surface, roll each portion of dough to 1/8 in. thickness. Cut into heart shapes with a 2½ to 3 in. cookie cutter. Arrange on a lightly greased cookie sheet.

Bake in a 375° over for 5-6 min. or until edges are light brown. Transfer cookies to a wire rack to cool. Makes 3-4 dozen (2½-3 in.) cookies.

Hint: for the thinnest possible cookies, you can roll the dough, a bit at a time, directly onto a cool cookie sheet. Then you can cut the cookies out right on the sheet and remove the scraps between the cookies with the point of a sharp knife.



Christmas cake
(*Jólakaka*)

I cup margarine
8 tbsp. sugar
2-3 eggs
4 cups flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
I teaspoon cardamom powder
2 dl. milk
3 tbsp. raisins

Cream the fat and sugar until light and foamy. Add the eggs, one at a time and proceed with the creaming. Mix the flour, cardamom and baking powder and fold into the mixture together with the milk. Add the raisins. Pour the batter into a greased tin. Cover lightly with waxed paper, bake at 175°C (300°F) for one hour. Remove paper, continue baking for another 30 min. until done.

Interwoven Paper Hearts

The interwoven paper heart is unique to Scandinavia. These decorations originated in Denmark and were traditionally white and red, the colours of the Danish flag. Instructions follow:

Fig. 1: You will need two pieces of glazed paper (foil type), each three times as long as it is wide, each a different colour. The folding and cutting instructions are the same for both pieces: fold each piece in half, coloured side out. From the fold upwards, mark off a square (shown as a broken line).

Fig. 2: Taking the top of the square as the diameter, draw a semi circle above the square with a compass or anything circular such as a drinking glass or cup. Cut off triangular portions.

Fig. 3: In the two folded pieces of paper, cut from the exact middle of the fold up to the top edge of the square.

Figs. 4 & 5: Slide the flap marked "x" through the paper doubled at "o".

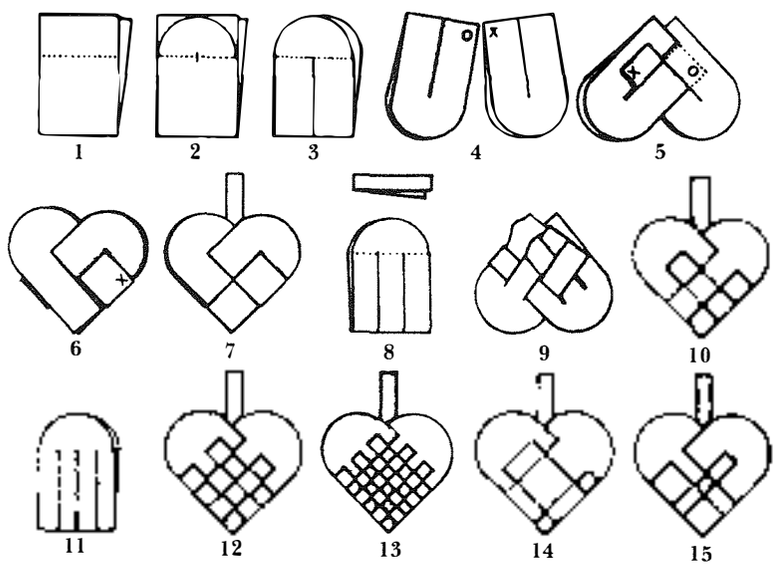
Fig. 6: Pull flap "x" through and — gently — hook it over the unused flap on the left hand half of the heart.

Fig. 7: The heart is now finished and should be fitted with a paper handle.

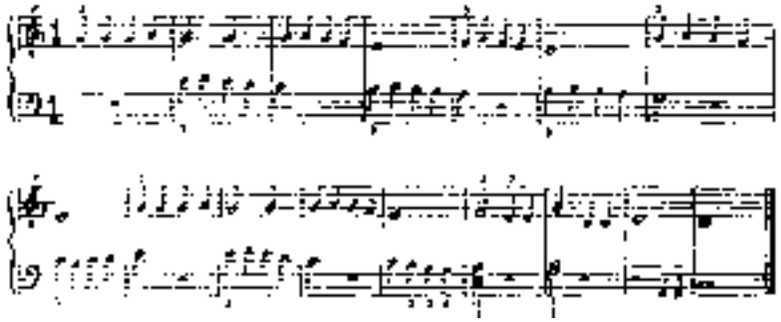
Figs. 8 to 10: A slightly more complicated heart can be made by cutting twice in from the fold, an equal distance apart. First you weave one flap: hook over, then in between, then hook over. For the second: in between, hook over, in between. The third flap is woven in the same way as the first.

Figs. 11 to 15: Vary the appearance by making 4 to 6 flaps or try a wide central flap and two narrow outer flaps.

These instructions are excerpted from the book Delectably Danish: Recipes and Reflections *published by Penfield Press. To order your copy or to inquire about their other Scandinavian publications, write to Penfield Press, 215 Brown St., Iowa City, Iowa, USA. 52240.*



On Christmas Eve in Iceland,
family members join hands
and circlee around
the Christmas tree
singing...



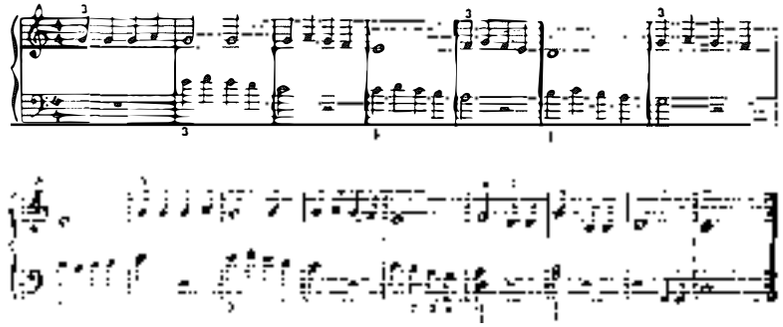
Göngum við í Kringum Einiberjarunn

Göngum við í kringum einiberjarunn, einiberjarunn, einiberjarunn,
Göngum við í kringum einiberjarunn, snemma á mánudagsmorgni.

Svona gerum við, þegar við þvoum okkar þvott,
þvoum okkar þvott, þvoum okkar þvott
Svona gerum við, þegar við þvoum okkar þvott,
snemma á mánudagsmorgni.

Sami fyrri hluti, nema hvað skipt er um vikudag:

þriðjudagsmorgni, vindum okkar þvott,
miðvikudagsmorgni, hengjum okkar þvott,
fimmtudagsmorgni, teygjum okkar þvott,
föstudagsmorgni, strjúkum okkar þvott,
laugardagsmorgni, skúrum okkar gólf,
sunnudagsmorgni, greiðum okkar hár,
sunnudagskvöldi, göngum kirkjugólf.



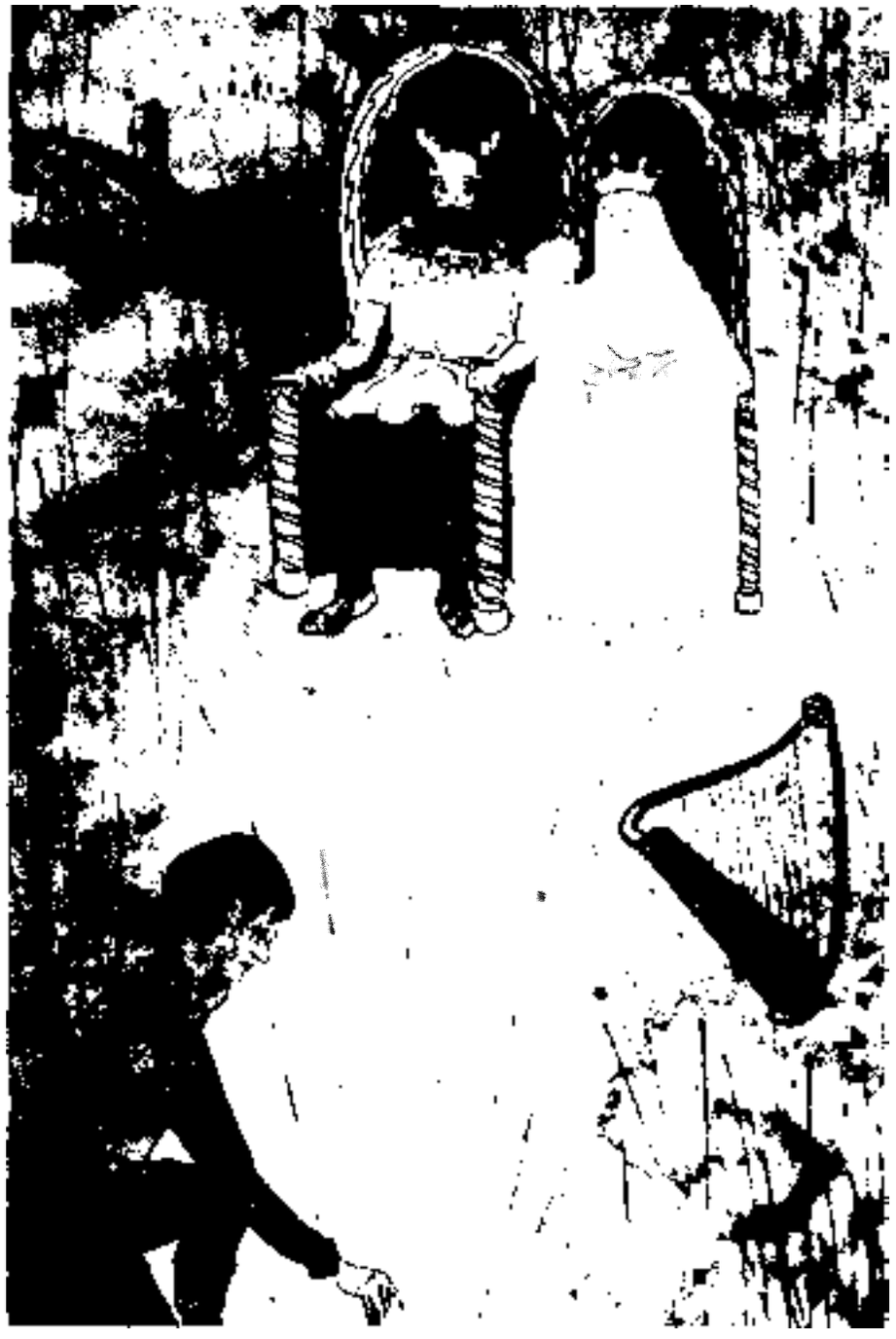
Here we go 'round the Juniper Bush

Here we go 'round the juniper bush, the juniper bush, the juniper bush,
Here we go 'round the juniper bush, early on Monday morning.

This is how we do it, when we do our laundry,
do our laundry, do our laundry,
This is how we do it, when we do our laundry,
early on Monday morning.

Continue with the following changes:

Tuesday morning, wring our laundry,
Wednesday morning, hang our laundry,
Thursday morning, stretch our laundry,
Friday morning, stroke our laundry,
Saturday morning, scrub our floors,
Sunday morning, comb our hair,
Sunday evening, walk the church floor.



ULFHILDUR *the* ELF WOMAN

An Icelandic folk tale, translated from the Icelandic by Helga Miller and George Houser

Once there was a farmer who lived north of Myvatn Lake. The lake is at least forty kilometres in circumference. One dav during the haying season, when everyone was mowing hay in the home field, a strange woman appeared from the direction of the water. She asked the farmer if she could spend the night there and permission was granted. When he asked her name she told him it was Ulfhildur.

In the evening when the hay was ready to be stacked, Ulfhildur asked for a rake. She worked hard, raked as much as two women and made the largest stacks. The following morning she wanted to continue working with the other women but the farmer told her he did not need her and that she could leave. Ulfhildur broke into tears at this and he allowed her to stav for the day. Next morning he bade her depart again and her weeping convinced him to let her remain on the farm for a week. At the end of the week he advised her he could keep her no longer. Her distress made him promise she could stay until the end of summer. That made her extremely happv.

The people on the farm became fond of Ulfhildur. She seemed to them the cleanest and neatest woman and the worthiest person they had ever known. When autumn came she was asked to stav until the end of the year, and after that until the end of the following year.

During her first winter, Ulfhildur was given some cured hide to make shoes for Christmas for herself and the two hired men she looked after. She made shoes for the two workers but neglected to sew anv for herself. On Christmas Day she stayed home when evervone else went to church.

Nothing out of the ordinarv happened again until Christmas of Ulfhildur's second vear at the farm. The mistress brought her hide for shoes as in the previous year, and she sewed a pair for each of the men but none for herself. She staved at home when the household went to church on Christmas Dav as well. One of the hired men noticed this unusual behaviour and was under the impression that Ulfhildur had gone out on Christmas Eve without telling anyone. He decided to observe her more closely the following year should she still be there. As the winter passed people became even fonder of Ulfhildur and manv felt thev had never known her equal.

The third Christmas season approached. As usual the mistress brought the leather for shoes and again Ulfhildur made a pair for each of the men and not for herself. Now the farmer's wife told Ulfhildur she must attend church, for the pastor was blaming the mistress for Ulfhildur's absence. Ulfhildur paid little heed. On Christmas Eve the hired man who had become curious about Ulfhildur's behaviour staved awake when

everyone else went to bed. He noticed that Ulfhildur got up very quietly and slipped out of the house unnoticed. The man followed her. She walked to the lake and picked up a pair of gloves which she found on its banks. These she rubbed together until a din arose and a bridge appeared over the water. When she reached the other side she rubbed the gloves together again and caused the bridge to disappear with a loud crash.

Ulfhildur continued her journey and it seemed to the hired man they were descending below the surface of the earth. It was very dark but he could still see her well enough to follow. They walked for a long time in the darkness until it seemed to grow brighter. Finally they came to a beautiful level plain covered in wildflowers. Blossoms clustered along the path and the grass was fawn-coloured as the sun glinted off the blooms and fruits hanging on the trees. Flocks of sheep grazed on the level ground and nature was clad in her fairest raiment. The hired man had never seen anything so lovely as this strange land.

As they crossed the plain they approached a magnificent palace. Ulfhildur now entered the splendid castle and the man hid himself in an alcove in the wall. A beautiful church stood next to the building. After a while Ulfhildur emerged from the palace again, but she had changed clothes. She wore the robes of a queen and a gold ring on every finger. In her arms she carried a small child and at her side walked a man royally dressed and wearing a crown. They entered the church accompanied by a throng of people, all splendidly dressed and happy. The hired man followed and stood just outside the church door where no one could see him as he followed the service.

Exquisite singing commenced to the accompaniment of harps. While the music went on, Ulfhildur's child became restless and began to wail. Ulfhildur then removed one of her gold rings for the baby to play with, but the baby threw the ring onto the floor where it rolled towards the door. The hired man succeeded in reaching the ring and hiding it in his shirt. At the end of the service everyone emerged from the church with expressions of grief and Ulfhildur and her husband disappeared into the palace.

Shortly thereafter Ulfhildur came running out of the castle wearing her old farm clothes. She hurried back the same way she had come and the man followed her again. They arrived at the lake and crossed it the same way as before. She rubbed the gloves together on the shore and the bridge appeared, and did the same on the other side to make it vanish. They now paced across the fields to the farm and the hired man just managed to get home before her. He was already in bed when Ulfhildur returned at daybreak.

When the people on the farm awoke they prepared themselves for church. The mistress told Ulfhildur that she must accompany them this time, but the hired man interrupted her. He told the mistress that Ulfhildur did not need to go, for she had already been to church the night before. Ulfhildur said, "You are the most fortunate of men if you can prove that." He then related what he had seen and produced the ring in evidence.

Ulfhildur was delighted to hear the hired man's story. She now related how things stood with her. She said she was the daughter of a king in Elfland and had argued with an old crone one time who replied by putting a spell on her. She was doomed to spend the rest of her life among humans unless in her first three years it should happen that a man followed her to the land of Elves on Christmas Eve. She was permitted to visit her husband for three Christmas Eves only. In return Ulfhildur had laid a spell on the old hag to the effect that should she escape her bondage to the human world the crone would die. To the hired man she finally said, "You will from this day be the luckiest man. Tomorrow you will go down to the lake and find two purses. You are to keep the smaller one and give the larger to the farmer here."

After this Ulfhildur prepared to take leave of the household. She had friendly words for everyone, then hastened to the lake where she disappeared. Never was she seen again and everyone missed her. On the following day the hired man went to the lake as he was instructed. There he found two purses. In the smaller one he discovered gold coins, and in the larger one, silver. He is reputed to have been successful in everything he did in life after this. That is the end of this story.

THE MESSENGER *of* PEACE

By Brynhildur
Translated by Árný Hjaltadóttir

He glided on the wings of the quivering northern lights, through the dark blue night among the swarms of twinkling stars and didn't stop until he stepped down onto the earth into the holiness of the Christmas night veiled in dusk. The earth was completely covered with snow, and in the silvery gleam of the moon the ice-pearls glittered as if they were very expensive gems. It was bright everywhere as if it were broad daylight, not only because of the moon, which shone in its fullness in the clear sky, but rather because of thousands of electric lights. Gigantic buildings stretched their towers into the air, as if they were asking God to bless them and their inhabitants. The streets of the city were crowded, and everyone was in a hurry. In the crowd there was a newspaper boy clad in rags, cold and silent from offering his newspapers to anyone whom he met, but few noticed him because he was so small and poor.

"Peace on earth and goodwill to men," now resounded from numerous churches and chapels. The messenger of peace walked into the next church. Far within in it, on the middle of the floor, stood a Christmas tree, adorned with countless, coloured electric lights and glittering silver tinsel and flowers. On its branches hung small brocaded socks and baskets full of all kinds of commodities which gladden the hearts of children. Up on the stage 12 young girls stood singing Christmas songs. They were all clad in white, representing innocence and the festivity of youth. The pastor stood at the altar preaching, "peace on earth and goodwill to men." The messenger of peace looked around; he read the souls of humankind through their facial expressions, and he smiled gently because at this moment most of them were happy. They had left sorrow and anxiety behind for the time being. The happiness many felt at that moment was the truest and holiest which the human soul can experience: the happiness that grows out of the conscious knowledge of making others happy. Nonetheless, in the midst of the holiness of the Christmas night there were a few who harboured revengeful thoughts and took the opportunity to annoy imaginary enemies with ludicrous gifts. The messenger of peace saw this and grieved. But many, many had totally forgotten themselves, when they distributed their small fortunes among their friends and family, and when the gifts were distributed those same ones were the happiest of all, though no one remembered them, and then the heart of the messenger of peace was touched with love toward humankind.

After the service and the distribution of the gifts, the messenger of peace went outside and looked at the people who came out of the churches and saw them vanish until everyone had disappeared,

gone home. Then he walked to a large building, where trumpets sounded, drums were beaten and hymns sung. A large crowd had also gathered there, men and women, children and old people, and most of them poorly dressed. They were the poor and the destitute whom the Salvation Army had gathered at its tables. When the people had eaten, they prayed and thanked God for this one meal, though many of them didn't know when or where they would get the next one. And yet, these people live in a land of plenty, where no one needs to starve?!

At the end of the meal the people stood up, went out and disappeared in small groups as each went to his or her home. But what a homecoming! Many places had no light, little of everything, and nothing of those things which people need. Groups of people huddled together in small and inadequate lodgings, sometimes in one room to save on light and firewood and rent. And yet, empty houses stood here and there all over the city. The people who an hour ago had given thanks to God now shivered from the cold, because the night was cold, much too cold to have no firewood. Pale, lean, shivering women cuddled their babies to their breasts and fed them the only food they had known until now, even though they were nearly one year old or older, because the scraps which society gives to its neglected children isn't suitable for feeding infants. But yet, the world shouts: More children! More children! Give us more people! And still, mothers and children starve, and mad fathers fight over the work and snatch the bread from each others mouths: the crumbs which fall from the tables of the rich.

From this scene the messenger of peace turned in grief and went out to the streets. The words still echoed: "Peace on earth and goodwill to men." Otherwise everything was silent and still and the peace of God wrapped the poor earth in its tragedy. The stars twinkled in the blue heavens, the ice-pearls sparkled in the snow, and the electric lights lit up the empty streets. The messenger of peace glided over the city and viewed the homes of humankind. He saw wealth and extreme poverty, sorrow and happiness. The rich congratulated themselves on being in the land of plenty, where no one needed to starve. Their tables were loaded with costly dishes, At their right hand sat Happiness. They applauded themselves for their prudence and thanked God for "being different from other people," not like those poor wretches, who didn't know how to make a living or whom God refused to bless because of their sins. But behind those men two supernatural beings whom men call Conceit and Greed sat and sneered.

From here he went with sorrow in his heart and entered the houses of the

poor, the widows and the orphans. The people who managed, and the people who were too proud to complain, who couldn't fulfil their vital needs though they tried with all their might, but lived with what little they had. Had the rich remembered them? Why should they do that in the land of plenty, where no one had to starve? The messenger of peace saw the poor newspaper boy warm his half-frozen feet by the fading embers, while his mother with loving hands divided the results of his toil between four hungry mouths. In countless homes he saw extreme poverty, which no one knew about except those who fought against it. In countless homes sorrow abided, which no one felt except those alone who bore it. The poor and the sorrowful retire, but over the groans of sorrow and misery rose the gaiety of the Christmas festivity and in the midst of it sounded the words: "Peace on earth and goodwill to men!"

On the wings of the quivering northern lights, through the swarm of twinkling stars, up to the high seat of Almighty God and His Son glided the messenger of peace, to explain the things he had experienced in the capital city of the land of plenty. Then the Son grieved, bowed his head, and said: "So it isn't perfect, yet!"

Translator's note on Margrjet Benedictsson

Brynhildur is one of several pen names used by Margrjet Benedictsson (1866 1956). She was born at Hrappstadir in Vididalur in Vestur-Húnavatassýsla in Iceland. She emigrated to North Dakota in 1887 and three years later she moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, where she met and married Sigfús Benedictsson in 1892. In 1897 88 they set up a printing press in Selkirk and in February 1898 the first issue of the monthly magazine Freyja *was published. It was the only woman suffrage paper published in Canada and many of the articles, poems, and short were written or translated by Margrjet Benedictsson. All of her short stories and some of her poems were published under pen names.*

While visiting in Iceland, at Christmas in 1992, I decided to do some research on Icelandic-Canadian women writers at the National Library of Iceland. After speaking with the National Librarian, Dr. Finnbogi Gudmundsson, I learned that some of Mrs. Benedictsson's manuscripts were housed in the library: three books of poetry, including some letters and a few stories about childhood memories from Iceland. At the back of one of the books there was a note, which revealed that Mrs. Benedictsson had written under the pen names: Brynhildur, Myrrah, Ragnhildur, and Herold, and there was a list of her short stories published in Freyja. *The short story* Friðboðinn, *or* The Messenger of Peace, *was published in the December, 1907, issue of* Freyja.

At the Christmas table, Hogarths in Minneapolis, 1906
Photo by Bardal Studio, courtesy of Eldred Sigurgeirson

CHRISTMAS PAST

By John S. Matthiasson

It was Christmas then,
As it is now,
But how different, and in so many ways.
Today I heard a CBC announcer tell me
Not to lose any Christmas custom,
For if I did,
I would be losing tradition,
And there is nothing
More difficult to recover.
When tradition is lost,
We must create tradition,
And new traditions
Are so untraditional.
Yet, I see yearly the old traditions
Losing their appeal,
And, (the announcer is right),
It is sometimes hard to live with the new.

On the old Christmas,
The one I remember from my childhood
In the West end of Winnipeg,
We celebrated on the eve before.
We would gather at Afi's home,
And sing carols and eat Icelandic food,
And we, the grandchildren,
Would play great games
Under the feet of our elders.
For elders they were,
And we stood in awe of them.
They were not tolerant of mischief,
As we try to be
With our own children,
But there was concern,
And we felt loved and secure.

My mother was the musician in the family,
And she was given no chance to talk
And take part in the merriment,
For she was kept on the piano stool,
Playing for the singers
Who would come and go,
Joining in carols they remembered
And, at other times,
Renewing their ties
With their brothers and sisters
And, when no one else was watching,
Watching their nieces and nephews,
Comparing them with their own children.

We ate many-layered cakes with rich filling,
divided by sweet cake dough,
And mutton, rolled in spices so varied
That no one who was not Icelandic
Could identify them.
Nor, as children, could we.
We merely enjoyed.
There were cakes and cookies
Made from recipes borrowed from neighbours
Who were new-comers to this
Icelandic section of Winnipeg.
They were all followed by coffee,
Strong and full of body
As our ancestors had made it.

When our stomachs were full,
Our young minds filled with
hidden fears
From playing hide and seek
In the large house that our Afi had built,
Our parents would call for our attention,
And shepherd us to the entry-hall,
Which seemed to be filled with
more coats
And fur hats,
Than could be worn by the entire
population
Of the West end.

In the harsh Manitoba cold
We would rush to poorly heated cars,
And were instantly warmed
By the excitement brought into them,
And, go home for the second,
And for those of us who were
very young,
The most wonderful part of that
wonderful evening.

Mother would turn on the stove
(After someone had shovelled coal
in the furnace),
And make cocoa.
We always put marshmallows into
our cups,
And they were large, soft marshmallows
Such as my children have never seen,
nor tasted.
With steaming cups in hand
We would gather about thc tree
And open presents.
Each gift was carefully handed
to the child
For whom it was intended,
And cries of ecstacy
Accompanied each breaking
of coloured paper,
And the discovery of the riches
within.

On the morning of Christmas day,
My cousins and I
Called one another on awakening,
To report on our bounty,
And to express sadness at what
we had not received.
I remember that I missed the air rifle
That I was certain had been
Hidden in the guest room closet.

Christmas is today
What Christmas has always been.
Yet, it is different.
Like so many of those
Who enjoyed the earlier Christmases,
Mine is different today.
Christmas then was not
as Christmas now.
Traditions change,
And as they do,
We lose them, and along with them,
A part of ourselves, and our history.

My wife is not Icelandic,
Nor are many of the wives of my friends
With whom I found adulthood
In Winnipeg's West end.
She helps me remember the customs
Which are not part of her own past,
And she makes the many-layered cake.
She kindly tolerates my spoken
recollections,
But, by observing my customs,
She is in danger of losing her own.
What will be the remembrances
of my children?
Will they remember the sights
and sounds and smells
Of the West end on
a cold Christmas eve?
The CBC announcer was right.
I remember, but will they?

SPIRITS *of* CHRISTMAS

By John Feldsted

Christmas is coming!
A bleak time for most
Whose money has gone
Like a Halloween ghost

There are desperate looks
On unemployed faces
Who can only afford
A few Christmas traces

The wondering eyes
Of small children behold
Mom lugging the groceries
On foot, in the cold

The car's broken down
No cash for repair
It's hard not to quit
And cry in despair

Yet, Jesus was born
In a stable so poor
With straw for a blanket
And dirt for a floor

He came to the poorest
And taught us of love
We must keep for each other
And the Lord up above

His wrods have helped us
Through two thousand years
Brought joys and laughter
And banished our fears

A king and a commoner
A rich man and thief
Have all stood together
As one in belief

This Christmas just give
Your comfort and love
To all those you care for
And the Lord up above

Give thanks with your children
Your family, your friends
That we have the power
To change how it ends

Take courage in Christmas
And the lessons therein
There's no greater gift
Than a true, happv grin

On the faces of loved ones
A neighbour, a friend
Who just love you back
With no gain as an end!

NIGHT *of the* NEW YEAR

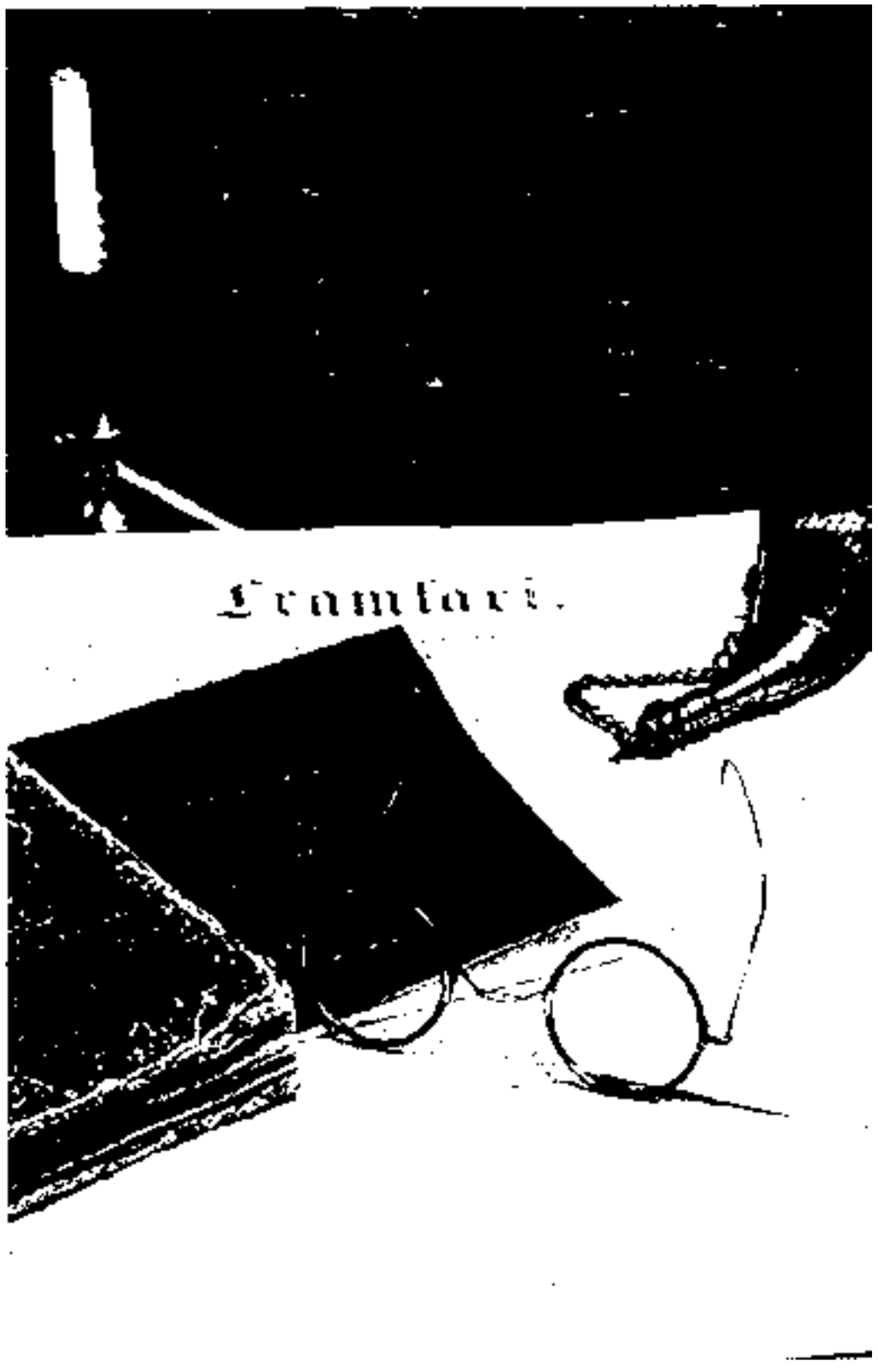
By Stephan G. Stephansson
Translated by Paul A. Sigurdson

Forsake me not, soul of the passing year!
Now let me feel the sanctity of others;
My destiny enweave with all my brothers,
Sharing every joy and every care;
Forgetting those most dark in prophesy,
Sullying that virtue which is golden:
Truth and freedom e'er to be beholden;
Treasure, dearest thing to me.

Let me, when rank with rank contends for gain,
Speak for the weaker men, their worth revealing,
Fight those with hearts of little feeling,
Minds too cold to care for common pain.
Let me defy those groups which ridicule,
Scorning me, themselves the profits taking,
Virtue's bloom and kindliness forsaking,
Making arrogance the rule.

Give me heart to guard, however slight,
The will of others trusting and believing,
Caring hands with worthy fingers weaving
Laurel wreaths to crown the brow of Right;
Rejoicing when the day can tell the tale
Of some new victory the night beginning
Tells that goodness had another winning.
Love right through my help may fail.

Let me forsake the travelled ways, and strong in will
Steer to the deep — all troubles leave behind me:
Weary, but stronger from experience, you'll find me,
Braving the sea of life in gloom and chill.
I've reached the half-mark on life's morning sea;
The heavens shine in spite of stormclouds showing;
I sail, my guide, my inner beacon glowing,
Dark though New Year's night may be.



BOOKS

The New Icelanders

Edited by David Arnason & Vincent Arnason. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1994, Pp. 103. Reviewed by Betty Jane Wylie, who is an Icelandic Canadian, and a writer who reads a lot.

David Arnason is a writer, editor, critic and Professor of Canadian Literature at the University of Manitoba. His son Vincent is a freelance graphic designer and advertising artist. In *The New Icelanders*, the book they have created, they are proud to inform us that they are direct descendants of the original Icelandic settlers in Manitoba. They have a cottage at Willow Point, where their ancestors landed 120 years ago. For the benefit of assimilated but still committed numbers, ever increasing, of Western Icelanders, both Canadian and American who claim the same roots, the Arnasons have amassed a collection of celebrations of our common ethnic background and unique ethnic experiences. Yá, yá!

The New Icelanders is the kind of coffee table book you wish coffee table books were really like. It's a browsing book, with pictures, photographs and recipes and stories and poetry and history and reminiscences and memoirs and legends and myths and a map, in a special envelope at the back, of the Republic of New Iceland, with the original farm and family names.

Once is not enough. You want to reread it and you want to read aloud bits of it and memorize other bits and yes, add to it yourself. You'll be sticking newspaper items and drawings and letters in it, and you'll want to write at least one aging aunt and two cousins and tell them about it or — better yet — give it to them for Christmas and let them see for themselves how precious it is.

The book is so simply itself that it's hard to review. It's like the elephant was to the six blind Indians, each of whom grasped a different part, and all of it is true. Some truths are more factual, accurate, and documented than others, that's the only difference among them.

David Arnason's first *Icelanders* book, with a similar collage format, was limited to Gimli and environs; this one stretches to include the travels to North America, the various types of welcome (from smallpox to Lord Dufferin), the official constitution of New Iceland, and descriptions by Bill Holm of the Minneota (United States) contingent. Other contributors have shared recipes (Icelandic bread, lifrarpylsa, skvr, mysostur, etc., and of course vínarterta) and written brief summaries of Icelandic Canadian literature and drama and memories of growing up in the new world. Kristjana Gunnars and W.D. Valgardson and Bill Holm and David Arnason have slipped in some poetry.

I can't decide which is the most useful: Johann Briem's 1878 hints to Icelandic immigrants following after, or Sigrid Johnson's advice on learning the Icelandic language—though I know by now I'll never learn it. However, I feel as David Arnason does, that "the lilting singsong rhythms of that ancient language are the beat my heart moves to when I am happy," and it doesn't matter if I don't understand it.

The New Icelanders is a document, a scrapbook and a treasure.

Thor

By W.D. Valgardson,
pictures by Ange Zhang.
Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1994.
Reviewed by Maureen Arnason.

The illustrations by Ange Zhang for W.D. Valgardson's *Thor* are quite wonderful. Thor's grandfather, with his wrinkled, weathered face brings back fond memories of my uncle, Humphrey, who spent most of his life fishing on Lake Winnipeg. Although I'd always loved hearing stories of the lake, I didn't realize how special they were until I found them transformed into literature.

Valgardson's new children's book, *Thor*, comes highly recommended by the grades two and three students at Bonnycastle Elementary School in Winnipeg. Valgardson's delightful story about Thor, a little Icelandic couch potato really captured their interest.

Thor arrives at the home of his grandparents where he is to spend the Christmas holidays. His plan to sit around all day in his pyjamas watching other people have adventures on TV is ruined when his grandfather's hired man becomes ill, and he is sent off to help lift nets on frozen Lake Winnipeg. Bundled to the eyebrows and armed with Thermoses of hot cocoa, Thor and his grandfather climb into their Bomardier and set off onto the ice through the crunchy cold of an early winter morning.

Thor learns about the dangers of the ice, about augers, running lines and anchor lines. He learns how to find a gang of nets without being Aquaman. He has an adventure to rival that of any TV superhero when he helps to rescue a snowmobiler who has fallen through the ice.

Children love the fact that although Thor is little, in fact, *because* he is little, he is able to save the day. Stories that give children power appeal to them strongly, and this story acknowledges the possibilities for children. They will also enjoy the warm, caring relationship between Thor and his grandfather.

Any child of Icelandic background will enjoy the familiarity of words like 'rullapilsa,' 'vinaterta' and 'ponnukokur.' Children unfamiliar with the Icelandic culture find these words exotic. The students at Bonnycastle, though few of them were of Icelandic background, were excited to find the recipe for ponnukokur included at the back of the book.

Thor is an excellent read aloud story for young children. If you don't have a child to read it to — find one!

Travelling On into the Light

By Martha Brooks. Vancouver, Toronto: Groundwood Books, 1994. Pp. 146.
Reviewed by Phyllis Webster.

Travelling On into the Light, the latest book by Martha Brooks, is a collection of excellent short stories about teenagers which will engage readers of all ages. From the first story, *The Tiniest Guitar in the World*, about Donald Petrie, a young man who is perpetually in trouble with his principal, to the last, *A Wedding*, about Sidonie who is mourning the passing of her mother, the brief entry into the existence of each character has a feeling of touching a real life.

The recurring theme of loss followed by the struggle towards understanding is captured poignantly by the story after which the anthology is named. In *Travelling on into the Light*, Sammy (Samantha) has rejected her father, who in middle age has left his wife and daughter, for a relationship with a man. Sammy, when picked up at the airport by her father and a young artist, Bernardo, wrongly assumes that Bernardo, who is not much older than herself, is her father's lover. Through the gentle prompting of Bernardo while looking at a picture which depicts an old woman beneath a starlit sky looking towards the second half of the picture where a young woman walks beside a pond with dragonflies floating around her, Sammy understands that she must, "learn about shadow and light," (p. 79) and that what she sees in the painting and in her father's life may not be what is really there. "The eyes play tricks and the mind often lies. It is the heart that's the true way." Reconciliation with her father occurs when she sees him and his lover, Luis, as their heads bend over a light tables in a studio and she is struck by her father's "courage" (p. 80).

The most compelling story of the collection is *Moonlight Sonata* in which Jamie, a bereaved son tries to come to terms with his father's suicide, committed at the family cottage, shortly after playing the sonata on the piano. With the help of Gretchen, his girlfriend, he manages to face what he had forgotten about his father. The story ends with a paragraph which all readers, regardless of age, will recognize as a part of life:

> *The mind can play tricks, show you your life in random shots like a video with a crazed monkey for a camera man. And I guess that's why you sometimes feel confused and out of control... Once in a long while, though, something accidentally gets found again, and you know it for what it is. You recognize it right away. You wonder how it could ever have been lost (p. 110).*

Adults who are often described as cruel, authoritarian and incapable of comprehending teenage problems in other stories, are well treated in *Travelling on into the Light*. Mr. Eastwood, the principal in *The Tiniest Guitar in the World*, has a familiar and amusing stance while speaking to the repeated offender. Petrie says, "It's his I'm-open-to-anything-you-have-to-tell-me-because-I'm-a-reasonable-caring-human-being position." (p.

4). In *The Kindness of Strangers*, a lonely old man rescues Laker, who has run away from home. The tone of the story is so evenly balanced and so deftly controlled, that it is easy to accept Olsen saying:

> *"You can stay... for as long as it takes to get yourself together.*
> *"That might be quite some time," Laker says quietly.*
> *"I'm in no rush, son. Time is something I've got more of than I know what to do with." (p. 29).*

Brooks teaches creative writing to high school students through the Artist in the Schools Program. She obviously has a good sense of what adolescents are thinking and feeling, a wonderful ear for honest dialogue, and a profound sense that pain and loss, with the help of reflection and the aid of family and friends (and total strangers), can be transformed into a sense of hope. In an environment in which teenagers often despair and find little hope to cling to, *Travelling On into the Light* is a beacon sweeping the world. The reviewer recommends this tenderly written, respectful collection to all readers who enjoy honest, clear-headed, and sensitive stories of truly human dilemmas and real people.

EIRIKSDOTTIR

By Joan Clark. Toronto: Macmillan, Canada, 1994. Pp. 371.
Reviewed by Daisy Neijmann.

Eiriksdottir is a novel about one of several Norse expeditions to the North American continent. The author has combined the meagre and often contradictory information of the two so-called Vinland sagas, *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*, with the archeological finds in L'Anse aux Meadows, commonly believed to be the remains of Leifsbudir, the temporary quarters built by Leif Eiriksson and his

crew, and woven an intriguing and fascinating tale around them.

At the centre of the novel stands the powerful figure of Freydis Eiriksdottir, the illegitimate daughter of Eirik the Red, founder of the Norse community in Greenland, and half-sister to Leif Eiriksson. The *Grœnlendinga* saga tells of an expedition to Vinland led by Freydis, who is portrayed as an arrogant, cruel woman. *Eiríks saga rauða*, although much less interested in the character of Freydis, relates a brief episode about Freydis as a brave heroine who saves the Greenlanders from an attack by Skraelings, the native inhabitants. Joan Clark has sought to reconstruct what could have been Freydis's own story. The character who emerges from the novel shows the reader how this spirited and intelligent woman, thwarted by Luck, could indeed have been both the heroine and villain she was made out to be by later writers.

Freydis's story comes to us mainly through third person narration. She is unable to leave her own tale because she refutes Christianity and the new ways and skills it has brought, one of them being the art of writing. Moreover, she is a woman in a man's world. Ulfar, the male Christian thrall who writes his own account of the expedition, distrusts Freydis's proud words and demeanour as much as

she distrusts his scratchings on sheepskin: "From what he had seen of her, Ulfar thought Freydis ambitious and overbold. Her behaviour was unseemly for a woman. On Iona men had been separated from women so they wouldn't be contaminated by women's thoughts" (52). Clark has incorporated Ulfar's writings into the text, as well as oral tales and poems which pass down various experiences of the expedition. The different layers of narrative, which reveal opposing world views and growing tensions in social relationships, allow her to offer a possible explanation for Freydis's eventual downfall as well as for the contradictory tales about her Vinland expedition which have come down to us.

An important part of Freydis's tragedy is the fact that she was an unbending pagan woman in a world that was rapidly taking on Christian faith and values. This tension between the pagan and Christian worlds is reflected in the relationship between Eirik the Red and his Christian wife, Thjodhild. After her conversion, Thjodhild refuses to sleep with her husband until he has become Christian, but Eirik considers the new religion to be for "weaklings and women" (117) and "said he wouldn't kneel for anyone, neither man nor god" (132). Instead, he seeks his pleasure with Bribau, who bears him Freydis. It soon turns out that Freydis has inherited Eirik's temperament. Eirik instills his values into her: "It was her father who taught her to be ambitious, to expect more than what was at hand. He taught her to insist on what was rightfully hers. He also said that she should keep close watch on those who would go out of their way to cheat her then turn on her when she demanded recompense, insisting they had been cheated themselves. 'People always begrudge you having more than they do, ... which is why ambitious folk are often disliked and others look for ways to bring them down'" (41-42).

Freydis, however, grows up in a world different from the one that fostered her father. The social and religious values he espouses are rapidly losing their validity, as Freydis is doomed to discover. Whereas pagan Scandinavia allowed for a certain degree of freedom for women, the emerging Christian society expected its females to be chaste, submissive, and exclusively devoted to wife- and motherhood. Freydis is Eiriksdottir in all ways except those which could help her fulfil her ambitions, and this alienates her from the world around her. After having been brought up with expectations to match her status as Eiriksdottir, her inheritance is taken away from her by a distant step-uncle and she is sent away from Eirik's household after her father's death. She feels compelled to marry the unpretentious Thorvald Einarsson after her passionate love for Thorstein Eiriksson has been rejected because he is her half-brother.

Freydis then finds herself living with a husband for whom she has no love or respect, as his temperament does not match Freydis's ambitions nor her strong and wilful personality. Moreover, their standard of living is far below what Freydis had been taught to be her due. Although Freydis proves herself to be an excellent housekeeper and farmer, this life cannot possibly satisfy Freydis in any way. An expedition to Vinland, the legendary land of bounty and plenty, becomes the focus of her frustrated ambitions and the last possibility she sees to "better her Luck." Freydis clings to this last opportunity with a vengeance. She has no intention of settling in Vinland. Being foremost a practical woman who has spent her life in the outpost of civilization that was Greenland, Freydis has no romantic ideas about discovering new worlds and enduring further hard-

ships. Her goal is profit to raise her status and standard of living with wealth and luxuries from the centres of civilization in northern Europe.

Freydis's agreement to share the use of Leifsbudir with two Icelandic brothers and their crew in return for the services of their shipbuilder, Hauk, poses problems from the very beginning of the expedition. It means that an Icelandic and Greenlandic crew have to spend a winter together in a strange land. Although both Iceland and Greenland were Norse settlements, the Greenlanders had come to look upon themselves as a separate society, and they resent the arrogance and overbearing behaviour of the Icelanders. In addition, Freydis, both woman and Greenlander, keenlv feels her potentially vulnerable position as leader of the expedition, and her overcompensation generates bad feelings.

Once both ships arrive at Leifsbudir, initial troubles are easily brushed aside as everyone is elated with plans and ambitions. Freydis feels free from the social restrictions at home and enjoys working towards the realization of her dreams. When winter sets in, however. the two crews are cooped up in the low and crowded turf huts of Leifsbudir, and ill-feeling grows as several accidents and unfortunate occurrences take place. The tensions finally mount to a gruesome climax, caused by ultimate frustration and despair.

Clark has created a wonderful story of human beings on the edge of civilization, driven by hope and despair to improve the quality of their lives. Ultimately, their dreams are frustrated as they push them too far. Vinland eventually recedes to the realm of memory and survives only in tales and legends. The narrative is infused with the opposing tensions of dreams and fate ("Luck"), Greenlanders and Icelanders, pagans and Christians, women and men, thralls and freemen, written and oral cultures. Freydis is at the centre of all tensions, a woman cursed and unlucky because her talents and temperament do not fit the social role she is expected to fulfil, and being Eiriksdottir, she does not yield or compromise. In the grip of her thwarted ambitions, she resorts to extreme measures that will taint her memory forever. As the spirit of Groa, Freydis's thrall, observes: "Dreams mislead. Thev lead us away from the well-known paths, taking us places we have never been... Some dreams beguile, leading us to islands of warm white sand, passing off fool's gold as riches. They pretend to lead us to Paradise only to leave us stranded without any way back" (211). It is noteworthy that, although Freydis is harshly judged by contemporaries and posterity, those from whom one could never expect the harshest judgements, Thorvard, Ulfar, and Groa, eventually show her the greatest understanding.

Joan Clark is not the first author to write a novel on a medieval Norse topic, although there are surprisingly few. In Canada, the most well-known novel on the subject of Vinland is probably Laura Goodman Salverson's *Lord of the Silver Dragon: A Romance of Lief the Lucky*, published in 1927. Unfortunately, this novel is marred bv the worst of flaws to which medieval Scandinavia has been too often subjected in literature: sentimental romanticization. Clark, however, has succeeded in avoiding any trace of such flaw. All descriptions in *Eiriksdottir* are realistic and bear testimony to thorough research. They provide us with a better idea of what life in all its daily aspects could have been like in those days. All characters are thoroughly human, which is possibly the greatest sign of respect the author could have shown for her subject. This is a captivating, fascinating, and well-written book, which will, hopefully, inspire more of its kind.

Maureen Arnason was born and raised in Gimli, Manitoba. She moved to Winnipeg to attend high school and has made her home there since that time. She is a graduate from the Faculties of Arts and Education at the University of Manitoba and presentlv teaches at an elementary school in Winnipeg.

LaDonna Breidfjord Backmeyer was born in North Dakota, but spent much of her youth in Thief River Falls, Minnesota. Her father was Vilhelm Steinn Breidfjord, born at Swan River, Manitoba. The prairies and the Icelandic pioneers formed a lasting impression on her. North Dakota has formed the root for much of her written work. She resides with her husband, Stephen, in Rock Island, Illinois.

Valdimar Eylands (1901-1983) was born at Laufás in Víðidal, Húnavatnssýsla, Iceland, and emigrated to North America at the age of 21. He graduated from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota with a Bachelor of Arts degree and earned a degree in Theology from Luther Theological Seminarv in St. Paul, Minnesota. Following his graduation from the Seminary, he served several congregations in North Dakota and Washington. In 1938 he became the pastor of the First Lutheran Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, a position he held until his retirement.

Elma Gislason (1910-1987) was a daughter of Ingólfur Árnason and María Frímannsdóttir, both of whom emigrated to Canada from the Eyjafjörður region of Iceland. It was on her parents' homestead, situated along the banks of the Assiniboine River near Glenboro, Manitoba, that she was born. She had a lifelong career in music that began with her graduation from the Toronto Conservatory of Music in 1932. She was soloist and choir director for 21 years at the First Federated Unitarian Church, founder and director of the Festival Opera Group, a member of the Manitoba Registered Music Teacher's Association, and the Winnipeg Philharmonic Choir. As well, Elma was an active member of several Icelandic organizations, and a frequent contributor to *The Icelandic Canadian.*

John B. Feldsted is of Icelandic descent, born to Agnes and Asgeir Fjeldsted at Gimli, Manitoba in 1940. He grew up and attended school in the Arborg district, and after travelling much of Canada, has finally resettled in Gimli.

Árný Hjaltadóttir was born in Reykjavík, Iceland and emigrated to Canada in 1969. *Western Icelandic Short Stories*, which she co-translated and edited, was published by the University of Manitoba Press in 1992. She is presently writing her M.A. Thesis in Icelandic Canadian literature at the University of Manitoba.

George Houser (1916-1988) received his B.A. from Sir George Williams University in Montreal, his M.A. from McGill University in Montreal, and his Ph.D. from the University of Iceland in Reykjavík. He was a part-time lecturer in the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba from 1979 to 1982, and an official translator for the Government of Iceland.

Helga Malis recently moved back to Winnipeg after having lived in Ottawa, Ontario for several years, and soon thereafter joined the board of *The Icelandic Canadian* as fiction editor.

Helga Miller was born in the Interlake district of Manitoba to Sigríður Einarsdóttir Sæmundsen and Guðmundur Árnason. She holds degrees in Art and Education from the University of Manitoba, and has also studied at the Banff School of Fine Arts and Heatherly School of Art in London, England. Exhibitions of her work have been held in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Hamilton.

Daisy Neijmann received her Ph.D. from the Free University of Amsterdam where her dissertation was published under the title *The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters: the Contribution of Icelandic-Canadian Writers to Canadian Literature.* She is currentlv an assistant professor in the Department of Icelandic Language & Literature at the University of Manitoba where she teaches courses in the Icelandic language and in Icelandic Canadian studies.

Paul A. Sigurdson, poet, fiction writer, translator, dramatist and composer passed away in 1991. He had taught English at Morden High School, in Morden, Manitoba until his retirement in 1977. He was a frequent contributor to *The Icelandic Canadian* and Poetry Editor for the quarterlv.

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Betty Jane Wylie was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and spent her childhood summers in Gimli. She received her B.A. and M.A. in English from the University of Manitoba. Since her husband's death in 1973, she has made her living as a writer. Her published works include children's books, cookbooks, plays, a biography and self-help books. She presently lives in MacTier, Ontario.