

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN MAGAZINE

*Canada Iceland Foundation Inc.*

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*An organization funded by Canadians  
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to the preservation of their  
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# The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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*Cover: Islendingar set of the largest replica Viking ship*

## THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

North America's quarterly magazine in celebration of the Icelandic Heritage published by Canada Icelandic Heritage, Inc., Winnipeg, Canada.

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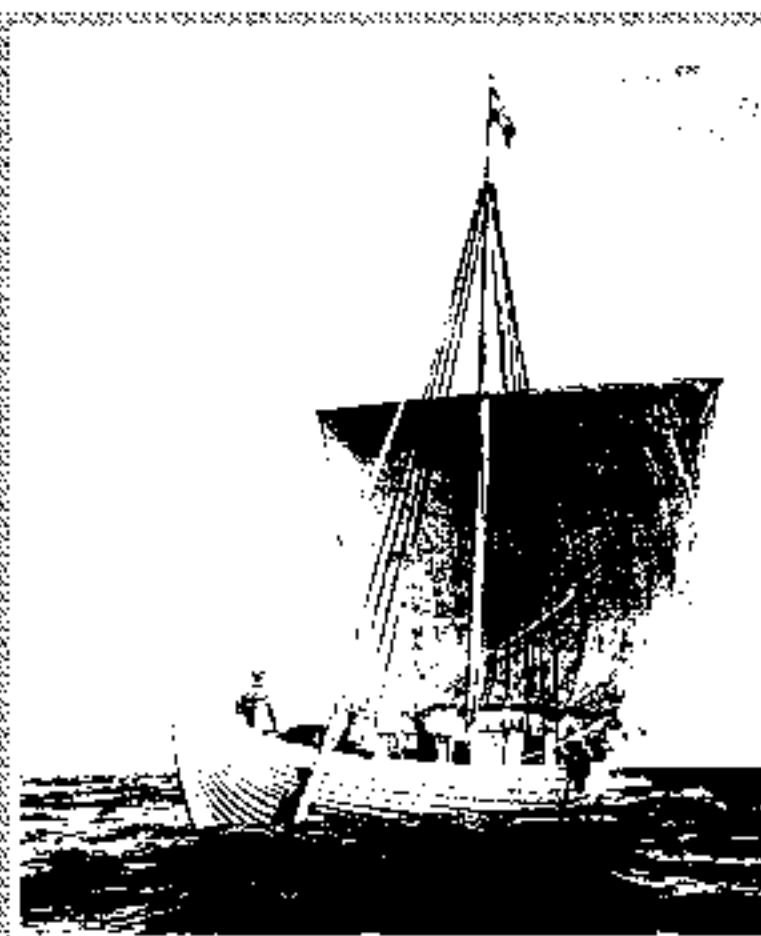
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## On the Cover



*The Íslendinga, one of the largest replica Viking ships sailed from Iceland to Greenland during the summer of 2022, for a historic voyage imitating Leif Erikson's discovery of the New World, 1000 years ago. Then it sailed across the Atlantic to New Brunswick, retracing the voyage of Leif Erikson. The Captain, Gunnar Marí Eggertsson, is the grandson of 1961, a direct descendant of Erikson, who was born circa 980 A.D.*

*In Canada, the Íslendinga led a fleet of replica Viking ships that were shipwrecked at Cap-Alexandre, New Brunswick, the only authenticated Viking settlement in North America for a good example of Viking technology. In the past, the ship sailed from the east coast of Canada and the United States in commemoration of Erikson's original discovery of North America in 1000 A.D.*

# Editorial

by Vigfusur Gudnason

Our stay here in Canada during the last two years has truly been a personal experience and an adventure from beginning to the end, for my wife Guðrún Ágústisdóttir and I, as well as providing invaluable experience for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iceland.

Today Iceland is definitely on the radar screens of many Canadians after the magnificent Millennium Year, 2002. Now when we leave we are grateful for many things: for friendships made which we can embrace and keep with us for the rest of our lives.

Saying farewell to you all, I want to mention three important foreign policy decisions that have been made, which completely change the relations between Iceland and Canada:

1) The Foreign Minister of Iceland and the Icelandic Parliament have decided to maintain a presence in Canada by opening an Icelandic Embassy in Ottawa. Hjalmar W. Hannesson is the Icelandic Ambassador to Canada and Helga Bertelsen, who has been working with me as consular agent in Winnipeg, will become the secretary in the Icelandic Embassy.

2) The Government of Iceland has also decided to keep a high profile presence in Manitoba. My successor has already been appointed. His name is Einar Guðnason, a longtime diplomat, politician and reporter in Iceland, and his wife is Eyglu Haraldsdóttir, who is a music teacher. Einar is an Ambassador by rank and will serve in Winnipeg as Consul General with Western Canada as his area of main concern.

3) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Canada has decided to open a Canadian Embassy in Iceland.

The cornerstones have been laid and now we will be going on the road that has already been marked by the Icelandic and Canadian governments, and has been developed in the last two years. Thanks to all those who came to those decisions. I will especially mention four individuals: two Icelandic Ministers: Prime Minister David Oddsson, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Halldór Ásgrímsson, and two Canadians: Lloyd Axworthy former Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Neil Bardal. These men deserve recognition for their contribution to these decisions.

Guðrún and I are going to miss you all, Canadians of Icelandic descent. In addition to the wonderful friendships we have made here in Canada, we rejoice over the decisions which were made, and which will bear fruit in the future here in the Icelandic community. I just mention the Icelandic Collection and the Icelandic Department at the University of Manitoba. And I also want to mention the New Iceland Heritage Museum at the monumental Watertown Centre Building in Gimli. I could go on and on and on—but I am not going to.

Guðrún and I are now leaving for Sweden where I have been appointed the Icelandic Ambassador to that great country. We both look very much forward to working in Sweden.

But at this time I would like to leave with you some thoughts for the near future. I would like to touch upon three things:

1) Number one is the INL convention in Minneapolis in the year 2002. The first time such a convention will take place in the USA. That is a sign of the new times of broadening the cooperation of the Icelanders and people of Icelandic descent in Canada and in the USA. This promises to be an important opportunity to enhance

the profile of the Icelandic Community in the eyes of people all over North America.

2) Secondly, I want to mention *Lögberg Heimskringla*. The paper has now seen an increase of about 500 subscribers in a year or so. The activity in the Icelandic community has produced a stream of new subscribers. This means that it is more than possible to expect thousands of people of Icelandic descent to become interested in Iceland and Icelandic affairs through *Lögberg Heimskringla*. This must be one of the major goals of the Icelandic community in the next years.

3) And thirdly, there is the base of the Icelandic community in Winnipeg. Winnipeg is the second largest community

of people of Icelandic descent in the world. The biggest outside Iceland—by far. This should be seen in the community participation in Winnipeg, but that is not the case today. I see this as an important task for the future to strengthen considerably the base of the Winnipeg community for the good of the Icelandic community in Canada and North America as a whole.

Thank you for allowing me to send these final remarks to you all through the Icelandic Canadian. Although we are leaving now we will definitely be seeing you again.

Verið þið öll blessuð og sæl.

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Are you harbouring your own little modern-day saga and need somewhere to share it? Do you have a story, poem, biography, or favourite memory just waiting to be expressed? The Icelandic Canadian welcomes all original articles of interest to our readers and would like to hear from you!

Our editorial staff will consider all submissions, and are willing to assist you to prepare your work for print. In addition to your article, we also welcome accompanying photographs, and a brief autobiography.

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## Heritage Gift from People of Iceland

By Sigrid Johnson

The first European voyage to North America was made in the year 1000 by Leifur Eiríksson and described in detail in the Sagas of the Icelanders.

Nearly 900 years later, large numbers of Icelanders emigrated to North America settling in various parts of Canada and the United States. Among the few possessions these emigrants took with them was invariably a collection of books. Their love of books enabled the Western Icelanders (as the emigrants came to be referred to) to preserve their heritage while establishing themselves as good citizens in their new countries.

In 1997, Leifur Eiríksson Publishing of Reykjavik published the five volume work, *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, containing the first co-ordinated English translation of all forty Sagas of Icelanders, and thereby providing the English speaking world with the opportunity to experience these literary treasures in their entirety. The Sagas describing the first voyages to North America feature prominently in the first volume.

To commemorate the millennium of Leifur Eiríksson's discovery of North America, the People of Iceland have given 500 sets of *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* to their Canadian cousins in the hope that they will be proud to introduce their fellow countrymen to the literary roots of the written history of the North American continent. Eighty one Icelandic businesses, organizations, government bodies and individuals have contributed to this Heritage Gift. The Gift was organized by The Icelandic National League, the Leifur Eiríksson Millennium Commission and Leifur Eiríksson Publishing.

The Saga sets are being presented to universities and colleges, public schools, Department of Education, and legislative libraries across Canada.

The distribution is being co-ordinated by The Icelandic National League of North America and its chapters, together with the Consulate General of Iceland in Winnipeg and the Embassy of Iceland in Ottawa. Icelandic National League chapters have also each been given a set to be placed either in their chapter library or presented to a local library.



Neil Barstad and Sigrid Johnson  
In the background, Kristín Jónsson, Laura Sigurðsson, Laurinur Johnson  
and Elfi Guðmundsson



President of Iceland, Steinar Gunnarsson and  
Manóla Þórunn, Gray Dorr at the Manitoba  
Legislative building during the presentation of  
*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* to the leg-  
islative library.



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*Len and Karen Vespatalov with a group of Bosnian students who are Muslim, Serb, and Croat. They get along great and are proud of the fact!*

## Letters from Bosnia

*by Len and Karen Vespatalov*



*Dobra Dan* to you all! (Bosnian for Good Day)

Len and I are starting to pick up some words here in Tuzla Bosnia, we found a phrase book which should help if we can wrap our minds around some of the new sounds. They have some extra letters which we find even more confusing. I told our 24 year old translator, Alina, who spent two weeks with us in Victoria, that I probably won't leave here speaking Bosnian, but I will no doubt speak English with a Bosnian accent. Communicating here is pretty much in sign language when we are on our own as just about no one speaks English. So it is somewhat of a challenge. There appears to be two prices for everything that doesn't have a price tag on it. One price for the locals and another for foreigners. It seems strange to be referred to as a "foreigner," and we are gaining a new respect and understanding for newcomers to Canada. When we are with our driver and translator and wish to make a purchase, they ask us to stand back and they handle the transaction. In this way we save about half of the cost. They are taking good care of us.

We hear about the dangers of depleted uranium here but every one says, "Well that

happened over there, not here." So I guess, there is no problem here, at least none that we can get information about. Basically we get all our news from CNN, so you are probably just as informed as we are. When over 250,000 people were killed in the war, a million became homeless refugees, a quarter of a million were wounded and something like a third of the population suffered from post traumatic stress disorder, a little "depleted uranium" isn't something to write home about.

We see the homeless refugees trying to sell old clothes and household goods beside the market area. Small fires are lit to keep them warm. They lay out a blanket on the mud by the side of the road with their stuff on top. They call out "Marka, Marka," meaning Deutchmarks. Some of them are housed in an old hotel on the outskirts of town. Others, we don't know where they sleep. There is a major heating shortage here. Building homes and apartments is a top priority. Most people build their own homes, adding on as they can afford to. The building material is mostly red square bricks which get a coat of white plaster and the roofs are red tile. Although there are forests all around they choose not to make houses of wood. Someone translated a statement that "A wood house will last for 25 years, a brick house will last for 150."

Little refugee children come up to us on the street begging and we have been told not to give them anything as it would be a case of being spoiled by other kids. The worst I've seen for little kids, and I mean around age three and up, is when they are out in the middle of the road with traffic on both sides. When cars stop for a light they run up to the window. Frequently, there will be a big sister, maybe seven or eight years of age with a baby in tow trying to beg like this. It is winter and they are poorly dressed.

We certainly have a new perspective on life — our problems seem pretty minuscule.

Tuzla means salt and they have a lot of it. For several hundred years, they have dug the salt out from under the city. Unfortunately, to day this is now causing the buildings to sink, and the downtown core is in big trouble. They also have a lot of coal. Their electricity is produced by huge coal burning generators. They look like nuclear reactors in shape and they belch acrid smoke which fills the valley. On some days the smell and smog is so bad that people have to leave their doors and windows closed. Last weekend our driver took us up into the mountains surrounding Tuzla and as we looked down there was this horrible smog below. We took lots of deep breaths of fresh air while we were there.

However, we do have electricity, unlike Serbia. We hear that in Belgrade they are sharing all the electricity for four to eight hours each day. Alma went to visit her grandmother whom she had not been able to visit for 12 years. She lives in the Republic of Serbia. Before the war this family was well to do and now Alma says they are poor and have few prospects. She gave them some of the money she earns from the Canadian Urban Institute so that they can purchase medicine and other essentials. Alma's mother, who is deceased, was a Serb and her father is a Muslim. These mixed families were not unusual in Tuzla, which prides itself in being what they refer to as an "open city."

We were given an autobiographical book written by the Mayor in which he describes what happened from the beginning of the war to the end. It is a real eye opener as it took a long time for help to come. It includes actual letters he wrote requesting help as well as information about terrible atrocities that took place here. He was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. There is a general hope that The Hague will take care of many of the people responsible, but they feel that it will take a long time and not every criminal will be punished. We heard on CNN that President Bush will consider removing some of the SFOR troops from the

Balkans. If that happens, European countries will have to step in. The soldiers that we see here in Tuzla are mostly American. They drive around in full combat gear in Hummers, with machine guns on the roofs. We are getting used to seeing rifles and handguns on the soldiers, but it doesn't feel good being too close to them. We have seen militia from Sweden and Denmark here too. We are told that their assignment here includes instructing the local police in proper police procedures.

Len and I are just getting our feet wet so to speak, so far as setting up our office and contacts. We will be bringing over some Canadian experts in a variety of fields. Our first order of business is working with the Tuzla Urban Institute on a major spatial plan. Because of the changes in population and infrastructure, an amazing amount of information must be ascertained before planning can start. Our first expert will have knowledge of Geographical Information System (GIS).

We will be putting on a workshop, which will include the Mayor of Budapest, Hungary. They did a similar plan within the past 15 years, so their input will be valuable. Len, Alma and I will take the Director of the Tuzla Institute to Budapest in a couple of weeks to have a first hand look at the area that they planned. Then Len and I will go to Slovakia to meet with the Mayor there. We will be working with them as well.

Another area that I would really like to get involved in is solid waste management. Everywhere you look, there is garbage piled up. The infrastructure is still in a state of disrepair and they are having difficulties deciding where to put the stuff. Equipment was damaged during the war and it takes a lot of money to replace. Funds are limited the choices for a garbage site as they have been told to obstruct the use and reconstruction of infrastructure. There is a river here that flows through the city on a cement base. We had some heavy rains and the river was flowing with plastic bottles that had been lying on the banks of the cement. I have never seen so many plastic bottles and the thought of them ending up in a lake is mind-boggling. I have been told

that the river flows into a lake which eventually will be used for their drinking water. Because the system for collection and transportation of solid waste was not maintained during the war, there are many wild disposal sites. A study has been done recently which I will look into.

We have been kept pretty busy so I still have not gone over to Tuzla Kanton Television. The Director of Tuzla Institute received a call requesting that we come over to do an interview about the work that the Canadian Urban Institute is doing here.

So that will be a good time to meet the people there and to have a tour of their studios.

We have been walking everywhere, which, in many ways has been good. However, carrying a laptop and a couple of backpacks on our half hour walk to and from work is getting a little hard. We have to purchase water to drink plus groceries so it gets a bit heavy. Also, relying on a driver all the time is not convenient.

Until next time,  
Karen and Len



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## History of Pioneers and Pioneer Communities—A continual process

Final in a two part series

by Frank Sigurdson

### Benediktsson Document Revision to Family History

My next revision will have to deal with material that is recorded in this 1917 article. There is much information that is completely new compared to anything that I had previously discovered. I will deal with these items by relating to them in general terms.

We are familiar with the plight of most immigrants as they arrived in Winnipeg. The situation of the Sigurdur Bjornsson family was typical as they arrived with very little more than the clothes they were wearing. They could not speak English, but they were willing to learn, to work and to exert themselves. Benediktsson confirms this state of affairs saying that this couple were very poor when they arrived in New Iceland. Wilhelm Kristmann, in his book, *The Icelandic People in Manitoba*, quotes a report about the settlers arriving in 1883, the year Jon Sigurdson and family arrived, which stated, "A great many of these people, including nearly all the children, arrived in a sick and exhausted condition, requiring unceasing attention for some time . . ."

One of the first items not known is that Sigurdur Bjornsson and his family lived the first year, 1883-1884, on a farm in Hnansa, which was named, Adalfol. It is well known that they settled a farm in the Hnansa area named at Efra. It is interesting to learn that Sigurdur's brother Jon helped them acquire this first place to live and Bjorn, another brother, helped by giving his money to buy a cow. Jon and Bjorn had emigrated in 1876. Jon settled in Grund near Sandy Bar and Bjorn lived in Winnipeg, but later moved to North

Dakota. The fact that Sigurdur sold the livestock in 1892 in order to return to Iceland must have been devastating to his family. It was then that Jon had to take over the farm and build a new herd of cattle.

This document provides some significant information about Jon's life in Iceland. It includes data that tells us that he learned his Catechism at age nine and was confirmed at age thirteen and worked for a farmer as a shepherd at age ten where the farmer's daughter spent her time teaching him to write.

Benediktsson provides details that enlighten our knowledge about Jon's experience after coming to New Iceland. In 1884, when he was only fourteen, he had to work for strangers. Especially noteworthy is that he went to work in Winnipeg where he attended school on his own time. There is no doubt that his education was greatly enhanced by going to North Dakota with his paternal uncle Bjorn Bjornsson whose son, Gunnar became the editor of the Minnesota Mawout and was the father of Vadmar Bjornsson, who became involved in newspaper work and in politics in Minnesota.

The account about Jon's work for the Canadian Pacific Railroad in the Rocky Mountains, at age eighteen, is memorable as it reinforces the qualities that were later attributed to him such as his thoughtfulness, strength, endurance and leadership.

The information that he went back to Efra, at age twenty, to take over the farm and also his work in fishing and freighting fish to Selkirk was known. The detailed description of the hardships of Jon and his family, typical to most Icelandic immigrants, detailed in Chapter four is illumi-



Jon and Agnes Sigurdson



salag. Even with these hardships, Benediktsson states that Jon probably lived better under these circumstances than many others. It is interesting to know that he farmed in Geysir, then went back to Ekra and also owned a farm named, Flugstaðir before moving to Vidir.

Benediktsson mentions that around 1922, farmers from North Dakota began settling the area along the Icelandic River naming it Árdalshyggð. He then writes an historical account of the settlement of Vidir, an area northwest of Árdal (Arborg) which was settled by farmers from communities in New Iceland. This information is corroborated by Wilhelm Kristjánsson, in *The Icelandic People of Manitoba* as he explains that Árdal was settled by an influx of people from North Dakota. He writes, "Nearly seventy people from the Icelandic settlements in North Dakota arrived in Manitoba in 1921 and the majority of these went to the new settlements on the Icelandic River and there were more to come." He explains that Árdal, Framnes and Geysir were the communities formed and later the region became known as the Arborg district. Kristjánsson's observation that, "In the same decade settlement extended north to Vidir and Selvan. A fair proportion of these later settlers were of the second generation in New Iceland."

According to Benediktsson, Jon Sigurdsson was one of the first to survey and look for land in the area that later became Vidir. He writes that this area was unfamiliar, that Jon surveyed a large area and that

four men followed Jon into that wilderness. Benediktsson provides an important historical account of this new settlement. He described the land as unfamiliar to both Icelanders and people of other nationalities and that it was low lying with poor drainage and that no roads had been built. However, there was plenty of wood for fence posts and firewood and there were many animals such as deer, moose, elk, black bear, wolves, fox and smaller animals. Jon liked the land especially for cattle as it had good pasture. It may be noted here that this land has proved to be among the best land in Manitoba and Vidir is now a prosperous farming community.

Some of the settlers from New Iceland began moving to this new area as early as 1922, however, Jon did not move his family there until 1925. *Beyond the Marsh* mentions pioneers such as Sigurdur Lyolfson who took a homestead in 1922, the Sigvaldason brothers who came in 1925, Lars Solvason who took a homestead in Vidir in 1922, Arnur Magnússon, who homesteaded in Vidir in 1924, the Þjerrsson and Þjerrsson families who came to Vidir in 1924.

The fact that Jon brought 32 animals with him and built a timber house and a barn from logs was interesting in that only thirteen years before, his father had sold all the cattle in order to pay for his trip back to Iceland. The discussion about the need for leadership to deal with the problem of floods, to facilitate the building of drainage

ditches, to get the Provincial Government involved and to travel to Winnipeg to discuss the problems with Government officials relates directly to Jon's involvement in all these matters. It was of interest to read about the pioneer people developing a new community and the need for leadership in setting up required facilities such as a post office and a school. Finally, the interpretation as to how the new community was named, Vidir, provides an historical point of interest.

Also unknown was that Jon had been involved with politics as early as age twenty and that it was Baldvin L. Baldvinsson who motivated Jon to become interested in these matters.

The document written by Kristján Ásgæir Benediktsson led me to do research in order to find information, first of all about the writer Kristján Ásgæir Benediktsson, and then about the life of Baldvin L. Baldvinsson, mentioned as an important motivator in getting Jon involved in politics.

Information about Benediktsson is available in *Vísir: Íslenskar Frásagnir IV*. Kristján Ásgæir Benediktsson was born in Kelduhverfi, Iceland in 1861. He emigrated to Canada in 1895 with his wife, Guðbjörg Jónsdóttir and one son. They settled in Winnipeg where he, at first, worked as a labourer and then he worked for *Hæmskruggla* for many years writing miscellaneous articles. He also wrote genealogy and historical articles about a few noteworthy Icelanders such as Gestur Óðleifsson and Jon Sigurdsson at Vidir, Manitoba. The quotation in the book is, "É annig skrifaði hann greinir um lýtur, fólk og sagnafelli af cirastökum norrænna vestra eina og til dæmis, sögur af Geysi Óðleifssyni og Joni Sigurðsseni á við Mán." He wrote some short stories under the pen name, Svær Snæland and translated *My Parents by Texas* (Winnipeg, 1903). Other genealogy writing listed at the Icelandic collection, University of Manitoba Libraries are for Steinn Jónsdóttir, 1922, Stefan Ólafsson, 1919, Stephen Sigmundsson, Jon Þjerrsson, 1919.

*Nýja Ísland Saga of the Journey to New Iceland* by Guðjón Arngrímsson has four

teen pages dealing with historical details written by Benediktsson. The author writes, "A native of the Kelduhverfi district, Northeastern Iceland, Kristján Ásgæir Benediktsson, later emigrated to Canada where he became an author and journalist. As well as providing the best surviving account of life in Iceland as it was, he also wrote fiction under the pseudonym Svær Snæland." Arngrímsson notes that Benediktsson writing for the *Hæmskruggla* in 1907 offered the most vivid of many contemporary descriptions of the Iceland of the time.

Benediktsson wrote about the Norður Mulasla area in Northeast Iceland where Jon Sigurdsson's family lived. This writing is immensely interesting as it provides information that makes it possible to recreate the kind of life our ancestors had before emigrating. Benediktsson notes that education before 1872 barely existed, but schools were springing up after 1875. Formal education was patchy, but most men and women over the age of continuation could at least read prayers and most loved books.



Jon and Sigurd's son, Baldvin, return from Arborg with the mail.

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and learning. Children were taught to read and form letters but few were taught to write in the accepted sense.

As a descendant of Jon, it is amazing to learn that he was, as Benediktsson relates, involved with sheep farming, having and cutting grass with a primitive type of scythe. Benediktsson explains the hardships of daily life by describing the type of tools available, the weather conditions such as waiting in driving rain and sleet and the difficult work that had to be done. He explains the arduous task of rounding up sheep in the autumn with several trips up mountains being required to recover all sheep. There was constant onslaught of flies and midges. The autumn ritual of slaughtering lambs was likely not welcome. The shortened days of winter brought daily chores of gathering fuel, usually dried manure, fetching water and ensuring that the sheep and other animals were fed and watered. Inside the house he would be watching or helping the women with wool, spinning, knitting, combing, carding and cleaning. More pleasant would be the time to listen to his parents read or recite old rhymes until bedtime even though using lamps fueled by whale, shark or seal oil was time-consuming. There would be no sleep until midnight.

He would be living in a *squidli* poor's wattle-and-daub house made of turf and other material which usually leaked. The bed room was over the stable so stretch prevailed. Washing and sanitation was difficult and generally neglected. There was no toilet except outside mounds close to the house. Religion was important, but they

had a close feeling about ghosts, Beirar in them as well as apparitions and hidden folk was strong.

His food would be skyr, buttermilk, meat, smoked lamb, kidneys, sausage and porridge. The midday meal was rye gruel with a bit of meat, beans and bread. Other food would include dried fish, shark, sheep head, black pudding and sometimes coffee with cube sugar. On special occasions they could have other choices such as rice pudding, roast meat, porridge with butter, smoked lamb, sausage, fish, cured shark, pancakes, doughnuts (*kleina*), butter cakes and other pastry.

Imagine the feeling of these people when they heard the news about the opportunities of a fresh start in the New World. By 1883, when Jon Sigurdsson's family emigrated they had heard about the Icelanders who had already settled in New Iceland and other places and that they were prospering. No wonder they wanted to emigrate to America which offered work, where there was no shortage of land to own, cultivate and they could become rich. The stories that Baldvin Baldvinsson had to tell about the new land had been heard.

My quest for information about Baldvin L. Baldvinsson was important because in Kristján Ásgen Benediktsson's 1917 article about Jon Sigurdsson, he writes, "From the time Jon was about twenty he has been involved with parliamentary elections in politics in New Iceland. It was Baldvin L. Baldvinsson who best influenced him towards those matters. Jon was a constant and faithful follower of the Conservative Party. He has been a standard bearer for

this party at home and in other parts of Gurb and Bristost districts after he moved to Vidin. Jon was involved with the school board before he moved from the Lake to Vidin, among other things."

In the *Icelandic River Saga*, Nelson S. Gerrard provides a history of settlers from Iceland in the area of the mouth of the Icelandic River. In doing that Gerrard also provides information about relative and other people connected to these settlers. Therefore, it is often possible to discover historical accounts about those who have links with these Icelandic settlers.

Nelson Gerrard provides a brief background about Baldvinsson, not because he was a settler in New Iceland, but because he married Helga Sigurdardottir, a woman who was a daughter of one of the Icelandic River settlers, Sigurdur Gudmundsson and Gudrun Helgadóttir. Helga had come to New Iceland in 1883 with her foster parents, Stefan Jonsson and his wife, Ingöborg, who also were settlers in the Icelandic River area. Nelson Gerrard states that, "On the voyage to America she became acquainted with Baldvin L. Baldvinsson of Winnipeg, who was the

immigrant agent in charge of the contingent, and on Sep. 24, 1886 she married him."

This information provides the clue as to how Baldvinsson got acquainted with Jon Sigurdsson. Jon was on this same voyage to America and, no doubt, would also meet Baldvinsson. This voyage was important in that it brought 1,375 immigrants to New Iceland, one of the largest for any year. The exodus from 1878 to 1883, resulting from hardships, the smallpox epidemic, quarrels over religion and the persuasion that better land existed elsewhere had depleted the population of New Iceland from approximately 1,522 to about 250. Jon Sigurdsson at the age of 13, was part of an historic moment for New Iceland. Each year thereafter more immigrants came and by 1894 the population had reached the number before the exodus. It is believed that Baldvinsson brought approximately 7000 immigrants to Manitoba.

An article in the Reykjavik newspaper, *Þjóðræki*, March 14, 1998, details some of the work done by Baldvinsson as the Icelandic Immigration agent. For instance, the article discusses that in 1892, he came to Iceland to advertise and give out informa-

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*Aquilonson enlarged home, with an addition built onto the side, to the post office.*

tion about New Iceland. His theme was that New Iceland was much better than old Iceland. All necessities of life were less expensive in Canada. It required less effort to make a living, money was worth more than Icelandic money, food was less expensive, the pay was much higher and people in Iceland had to work four times more than in Canada to buy the same amount of food and other goods.

The article then deals with the opposition from the Icelandic statesmen to this type of enticing Icelanders to immigrate and that they even made laws to ban men from persuading people to leave the country. *Með logumum var bannað að esa menn til að flytja af landi þurr með gráandi torgólum, eða með því að halda túbir úg tyrflestur í þá an, að kora meán óánagða með þetta laud, en gylltu þu þent manni.*

The opponents to emigration stated that it was like throwing salt in a wound when Western Icelanders in the Canadian Government sent out men with the intention to boost emigration from Iceland. A report about a meeting held in Reykjavik, at which Baldvinsson and other agents planned to present a lecture on Canada, states that the speakers were drowned out by the pandemonium caused by a mob whistling and shouting.

Baldvinsson was born in Akureyri in 1856 and came to Canada in 1873, spending about eight years in Toronto before settling in Winnipeg. He owned and published

*Hvamskringla* for several years. He bought the newspaper in 1898 and was editor until 1914. There is an article about him in the December 22, 1917 issue of *Hvamskringla*.

He served in the Manitoba Legislature as a Conservative from 1899 to 1907 and 1910 to 1913. In *The Icelandic People of Manitoba*, Wilhelm Kristjanson wrote, "Much of the growing strength of the Conservative Party in the Interlake Communities was unquestionably due to personal influence and political skill of Baldvinsson himself. He was instrumental in getting the railroad built to Arborg in 1912.

There is also detailed information about him in *New Iceland: Saga of the Journey to New Iceland*. In this book, the idea that although the common reasons for emigration are well known, all were, "backed up by the persuasive power of the salesman and agents." Baldvinsson, employed by the Canadian Government, was one of those persuasive agents who played a leading role. Kristjanson states that, "As an emigrant agent, he had brought over some seven thousand settlers, and he was at all times solicitous for the welfare of the people on their journey across, and he was ever prompt in his attention to the needs of the many who over a period of many years sought his aid for one purpose or another. Baldvinsson had, at first, worked on his cousin's, Sigtryggur Jonasson's, boat on Lake Winnipeg. He later set up a shoe store and *Skóertakeri* business in Winnipeg and was involved in business and real estate investments. He taught in a school set up for Icelandic immigrants and was one of the first to stress the idea that it would be desirable to

have an Icelandic school. However, it was not until 1913, that such a school, the Jun Bjarnason Academy was opened.

It would appear that Jon Sigurdsson was fortunate to have known and to be able to obtain advice from a person of such high stature and quality.

Part Three

Jon Sigurdsson, A Pioneer Leader

This paper will now sketch Jon's many endeavours that were not dealt with in Kristinn Ásger Benediktsson's 1917 document. Whether Jon's achievements were due to his good intelligence, qualities for leadership, his knowledge of Icelandic and English, his energy and friendly, helpful manner as related in an article in Ólafur Thorgeirsson's Almanak in 1933 or to the influence of Baldvinsson who gave him the motivation to use his leadership qualities for political purposes, as Benediktsson wrote, or all of these, there is no doubt that Jon's accomplishments were extensive.

In Hnauka, John had engaged in farming, fishing and freighting. It was while living at the family farm, Ekra, that we find the first reference to his leadership qualities. It appeared in a story in *Fogberg Hvamskringla* a few years ago in the reprinted article, "The First Icelandic Day in New Iceland," which had originally been published in *Hvamskringla* on August 18, 1894. This article informs readers about how the first *Íslendingagátunin* in New Iceland was held. It states that instruction in cheese and butter making was to be held in Hnauka on August 2. The instructor did

not show up and since the weather was good and a sizeable crowd had gathered someone suggested that since there was an Icelandic celebration being held in Winnipeg on that very day they could also have one. A committee was formed and its members made plans for a day of celebrations. Jon Sigurdsson who was only 23 years old was one of the six committee members chosen. The celebration was a success and people in New Iceland enjoyed an annual Icelandic celebration in Hnauka for many years, extending to the mid 1950's.

In 1925, his pioneer spirit led him to develop a homestead in the new community, to be named Vidir, north of Arborg. On this farm, the Northwest quarter of section 32, township 23, range 2P, he built a large two story house. Jon soon became one of the most prominent community leaders, taking a part in almost all aspects of community events. In 1926, the contract to establish a Post Office was given to Jon. The Post Office was built as an attachment to the house and began operation on November 1, 1926.

He chose the name "Vidir" for the post office and his homestead. At a meeting of settlers, Jon's choice of the name "Vidir," meaning Willow, was ratified as the name of the community.

As postmaster, Jon traveled to Geyser to pick up the mail. This distance was shortened somewhat in 1910 when the railroad to Arborg was constructed. His job meant two trips to Arborg each week in order to get the Vidir and Selkirk mail. The mail was sorted in the Vidir Post Office where it was available to be picked up by the residents.



Some of the Sigurdson children ready for the walk to school from left: Helga, Þóra, Sigríður, John, Inga and Gudrun.

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Each Saturday, he delivered the mail to the Sylvan Post Office.

Jon served as one of the *umboðstjóri* (representatives) for *Höfnskringla*. The Sigurdson homestead became the focal point in the community. It was a stopping place for travelers and freighters. People gathered at the Post Office on mail days to socialize and more importantly to discuss community events and needs. The farm was used for official meetings, social gatherings and parties. It was fitting that the community hall was erected on the Vidir farm. It was built in 1916 by the road just north of the house. A large barn was built across from the hall. It was needed to shelter the horses when people attended events at the hall. Jon donated space on his land for the Vidir Cemetery. It is located on the northwest corner of the homestead.

Jon took an active part in all aspects of community events. This included taking part in community presented plays and acting as a master of ceremonies for events held in the hall.

The first meeting for the Vidir School District was held at the home of Jon Sigurdson on June 25, 1908. Jon was the chairman and Thorleifur Sveinsson was the secretary. The election for a School Board took place and Jon Sigurdson, Sigurdur Finnsson and Magnús Jonasson were elected. Jon Sigurdson was elected to the Board at each election for 27 years and during all that time also served as secretary-treasurer. The new Board proceeded to have a school built and classes began on September 15, 1909.

The Vidir Lutheran congregation was formed in 1914. Jon and Sigura were active member and he served as chairman from

1922 until his death. Services and Sunday school were held in the school until the hall was completed.

Another community venture was the Vidir Grain Growers' Association organized in 1914. Jon was one of the staunch proponents of this venture. He was an active member and was the chairman at the organizing meeting held on May 8, 1914, in the Vidir Hall. In the new membership, he served as a director.

Jon's keen interest in community progress was not only centered in Vidir, but also in Arborg and the entire Municipality of Bifrost. The establishment of the North Star Creamery Association in Arborg in 1907 was a significant success for the farming community of Vidir. Jon was one of the farmers in Vidir advocating that a creamery be built. The charter for the Creamery was issued in 1907 with 44 members from Vidir, Geysir and Ardal. He was one of the directors of the North Star Creamery and served as chairman for many years.

The Arborg Farmers Co-operative Association Limited originated with people from Vidir involved in the Grain Growers Association. Jon was one of the members instrumental in establishing the farmers Co-operative Store in Arborg. He was one of the three representatives from Vidir on the committee which was struck to explore the idea of establishing a co-operative store. A committee of nine men were appointed with Jon Sigurdson as chairman, to apply for a charter. The committee was successful in obtaining a charter on April 22, 1919 and the Arborg Farmers Co-operative Association Limited opened on October 1, 1919. Jon was the first pres-

ident and held that position guiding the Co-op through its formative years until 1935. The Association purchased the existing Sigurdson and Thorvaldson Store and in October, 1919, the Arborg Farmers Co-operative Store was opened for business. This store was a significant and exceptional success for the Arborg community. According to the article in *A Century Unfolds* the Arborg Co-ops financial statement for 1984, shows annual sales of almost six million dollars and saving of \$50,000.00. For sixty two years of operation total sales were over 64 million with savings of 1.5 million.

The Arborg Agricultural Society was established in 1924. Several farmers from Vidir were active directors. Jon Sigurdson was one of the directors and he served for several years. One of the main functions of the Society was to hold an annual fair. This has, from the beginnings, served an important community purpose.

Jon's skill as a speaker in both Icelandic and English and his organizational abilities led him to politics where he felt he could serve the community more effectively. The new area of Vidir as well as the entire area of New Iceland was in the Municipality of Geir. In 1908, it was divided into two municipalities, the Northern part comprising the area of Hnaua to Vidir, including Arborg and Reyerton, became the Municipality of Bifrost. Jon was elected councillor for 1913 to 1914. He served as the Reeve of the Municipality of Bifrost from 1915 to 1920 and again in 1921 to 1922. He again served as councillor from 1928 to 1932 and in 1935. He had a significant influence in the development of the Municipality.

Researching, discovering and writing life stories, not only provides information about one's own background, but clearly enunciates the formidable task facing immigrants who had to face the hardships of a new land. They were pioneers in developing the needs of a community such as Vidir, by building roads, drainage ditches, schools, post offices, community halls, churches, cemeteries and numerous other needs. It is with great pride that I discovered that my father was one of these pio-



Jon Sigurdson

neer leaders.

As I strive to write, I constantly keep in mind the quotation that I have heard and read many times, "Everyone has a story to tell." The almost two hundred descendants of Jon Sigurdson, his first wife, Kristin Jonsdottir and his second wife, Sigura Sigvaldadottir, and everyone interested in the history of pioneers and the development of pioneer communities will have this story to read.

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*A Thousand Rainy Days*



*Drawings by David Jon Fuller*

## A Thousand Rainy Days

by David Jon Fuller

For all that people say that the autumn air is crisp, refreshing, brisk, et cetera, the fact is that when the weather is wet, it is miserable. It doesn't lift you up the way the first spring shower does, nor make you feel alive like a summer thundershower. It just makes you sullen and cold, and see the point in central heating. There was one such day that stood out for me. It was September, and raining. I bitterly wished that the underground concourse at Portage and Main extended all the way to my apartment. I was walking home after class—my notes were getting wet—when I saw a woman walking barefoot in a puddle. It was right in the middle of a back lane, where the two halves sloped and met in the middle. I suppose she liked the depth.

She had a long, black skirt, biked up to about her knees, and the puddle water was just above her ankles. I started to edge around the puddle. If got wet anyway; I had to squeeze past a maple growing next to somebody's garage. She had great legs (it a little on the pale side) . . . and that I was looking, of course. She also wore a loose white sweater, the sleeves rolled up to her elbows. The tendons in her arms rippled as she adjusted her grip on her dress. She casually flipped her long, dark hair out of her face and looked at me.

"What are you staring at?" she asked.

"Me? Nothing," I said.

"Haven't you ever seen somebody walking in a puddle before?"

"Well," I said, edging past the tree. "I suppose . . ."

Suddenly, one of the tree's branches sprang out from behind my back and whipped my notebook out of my grasp. Before I could say, "Doo-!" she sprang forward and caught it. I began to thank her when I realized how much the action had cost her. Her skirt had hit the puddle, and the edges were soaked.

"Oh, I'm sorry—er, well, thanks, though, I . . . yeah." There was a long pause. "Would you like some tea?"

She blinked twice. She had brown eyes. "Sure," she said.

She sat wrenchily in an old kitchen chair, wearing a pair of sweats I'd dug out of my dresser. Her skirt was suspended from the ceiling, drying above the radiator. She wrapped her fingers around a mug as I filled it with Earl Grey.

"I like your place," she said. "You can see a lot from this window."

"Yeah, I specially when the sun sets."

"That must be nice," she said, sipping her tea.

"It is," I said.

She poured some milk into her mug and cocked an eyebrow at me, altering the carton.

"No, thanks," I said, taking the sugar. "I drink it black. Or, I mean, brown, I guess." She smiled. I did too. "Do you always walk in puddles when it rains?"

"No," she said. "Sometimes I wait 'til it stops."

"Oh."

"I'm from Toronto."

"I see," I said, nodding conversationally.

"That's why."

"Oh."

The conversation stumbled to a halt.

She leaned forward conspiratorially. "Actually," she said, "the real reason is, I'm part mermaid."

I blinked. "But you don't have a tail," I argued.

"Is that so?" she said, raising her chin.

"You wouldn't have legs, you'd be part fish."

"Ah, but I'm only part mermaid."

"There's no such thing. Mermaids are aquatic women, each with a tail instead of legs, and they don't wear . . . ah, bathing suits." She said nothing. "I've got a beard."

about it," I said.

"So you study mermaids?"

"No, law, actually."

She smirked. "What a surprise. Is it interesting?"

"Well, yes, I think so, but it's hard to explain to somebody else. Most people don't really want to know."

She thought for a moment. "If you could put what you love about it into one sentence, what would you say?"

Nobody had ever asked me that before. I considered it. "With laws shall our land be built up but with lawlessness laid waste." That about hits it on the head.

"You're really passionate about it, aren't you?" she said. My ears grew hot. She didn't seem to notice.

"Yes, I am," I said.

"Were you quoting something just now?"

"The introduction to one of my textbooks. I don't remember what it was quoting, though." We were silent for a moment. Then I said, "So what do you do?"

"Me? I write," she said, smiling.

"Really?" I said. "What do you write?"

"Oh . . . Words, words, words."

I licked my lips. "I see."

She laughed. "Sorry. That's Shakespeare. From Hamlet. I write everything I can . . . the only thing it all has in common is words. But if you really want to know, I write more short stories than anything else."

"What do you like about them?"

"Well . . . sometimes I can understand something better by working it into a story. Sometimes when I'm up against something I can't handle, I try to write a way out of it."

"Hmm. Does it work?"

She sighed. "Occasionally."

"What does Shakespeare say about lawyers?"

She smirked. "Actually, Bill addresses us to kill them all first."

"Nice."

"Don't take it personally," she said, putting her hand on mine. That startled me, for some reason. "You know what, Neil?" she said, after a pause.

"What, Robyn?" I said.

"You're really . . . real."

I laughed uncomfortably. "I was about to say the same thing about you." There was another pause.

"Could I see that book?" she asked.

"My . . . why do you want to see a law book?"

"No," she smiled. "The one about the mermaids."

"Oh, yeah, right. Ha. Would you like to borrow it?" Her smile widened, exposing her teeth. At that moment, I would have given it to her.

Her skirt was dry by seven o'clock, but it wasn't until nine that she said, "Well, I'd better get going."

"Do you live far? I could walk you home."

"Only if you have a leash," she said, putting on her shoes.

"Sorry."

"It's all right. I just hate that phrase."

I couldn't think of anything to say.

She finished tying up her laces and stood up. "But . . . if you'd like to walk with me to where I live . . . let's go."

The streetlights shone through the leaves in the trees, then stark, pale light illuminating patches of yellow and orange over our heads. The wind sent rustling waves through the upper branches. Down where we were, it scuttled papers past our feet and invited us to take in its wild, dry, autumn swirl. We talked all the way there, as if we'd known each other for years. She nestled her arm around mine . . . and it felt like the most natural thing in the world.

It had cooled off quickly: the clouds were gone and the stars were out, and I felt a nip in the air. I think she did, too.

"That's my building," she said, pointing to an old brick building.

"Well, that's not too far," I said out loud, without meaning to.

She turned to me. "No . . . it's nearby."

We stopped as she pulled her keys from her purse.

"Well, thanks for the tea, Neil," she said.

"You're welcome." We stood there. "It was nice to meet you, Robyn." She nodded. Neither of us moved. I realized that our arms weren't touching any more, so I guess I put my hand on her bicep, and then

she put her arms around me and kissed me and that was pretty hard to expect but it felt great, and I lost track of time, thinking, this is silly, but you know, not caring, and anyway that's what she did and then we said goodnight and I walked home.

We spent a lot of time together. We went to movies, a couple of plays, and for walks down by the river. Winter came knocking. We were strolling down the riverwalk one night when we were assaulted by a frigid gust of wind.

"Does it always get this cold in October?" she asked, shivering against me.

"No, sometimes it's colder," I said. "It usually snows at least once before Halloween."

She was silent a moment. Then she said, "You know, I used to go sailing on Lake Ontario a lot. Last year, my cousins and I went out at night. We went way out, away from the city; it was just a swarm of lights on the shore. There was just enough wind to keep us going. It can get really cold out there at night, so we had blankets. And the sky . . . it was so vast, no clouds at all, just stars—millions and millions of stars. More than I'd ever seen before; more than I ever knew were there. And then, they started falling. First one, then another, then a whole group of them . . . it was so beautiful I couldn't believe it was really happening. One of my cousins said we should each make a wish . . ." She lapsed into silence.

"What did you wish for?" I said.

She narrowed her eyes. "If I told you, it wouldn't come true."

We kept walking.

"Do you miss Toronto?" I asked.

"Yeah, I do," she said. "I had my reasons for leaving, but it's where I come from, it'll always be a part of me . . . even if I'm apart from it."

"Do you have a lot of friends there?"

"You've got a lot of questions tonight," she said. I felt a bit embarrassed, but then she smiled. "Most of them live there. There's my family, too . . . but it was just time for me to move out. I have some relatives here I hadn't seen for a long time, and they helped me get settled. Once I had a job and a place to live, I felt a lot better. I knew

I could make a go of it."

We walked for a few more minutes without speaking.

"I hope you stay here for awhile," I said.

She pressed up against me. "I think I will," she said.

"Do you like Winnipeg?" I asked.

"So far, Do you?"

"Well, yeah . . . I live here."

"But you could live anywhere. What makes you stay here?"

I thought for a bit. "Well, I've been other places, you know. Nice places. But what you said about sailing reminds me of what I like about this place, the sky. I don't think any other place in the world, maybe in Africa somewhere, has a sky like ours. It's so overwhelmingly huge that you just have to look at it . . . but that's not all; it changes so quickly that one look isn't enough. I look at the sky a lot. There was one time, just last August, when I was around here actually, and the sun was going down behind that bridge. The sunsets are always amazing, but this was some-



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thing else again. The clouds were like these big . . . ripples in the sky, and they were huge, and pink, and it looked as if the sky were on fire. I just had to stop and look at it. I felt like I was a part of that fire some how . . . that I was burning up and fading away. And then the sky turned to a deep purple, and then, gradually, one by one, the stars came out. It was as if they were shy and were only coming out because they thought no-one was watching. But I was. I watched the whole thing."

We kept walking. Robyn looked at me. "You know what, Neil?" she said, tugging my arm.

"What?"

"You were practically made for me."

"Yeah? How do you know?" I said.

"Oh, I just do."

We said goodbye outside her apartment building. The streetlight above suddenly flickered out and we were enveloped in shadow. The cold wind whipped her hair around my face; it was soft, and smelled like apples. She nuzzled in close to my ear and whispered, "Neil, I wished for you." She kissed me. Her breath was warm against my cheek, and we held each other tight. You may kiss a lot of people in your life, but not like . . . well, it was. I'll never

forget what it felt like her fingers in my hair, the breath flowing from her mouth into mine, giving me life, or something like it. Her hair, tickling down my neck; her breasts against my chest, her heart beating next to mine—one kiss. That's all it was. And I'll never forget it.

Robyn was the most amazing woman I'd ever met. I loved her more than anything. In fact, we loved each other so much that we spent all our time together. We eventually got married and lived happily ever after. Everything was perfect.

Who am I kidding. This is just a story. There's nobody named Neil. It never happened. No relationship ever works out like that. Never in a thousand rainy days. I only wrote about it because I'm lonely and I hate it here. I don't know why I even bothered. I wish I had a fireplace.

Robyn threw down her pen and crumpled up the paper she had been writing on. She lurched it at the wastebasket as tears welled in her eyes. She threw on her coat and shoes and went out for a long walk, looking for puddles, but her search was in vain; it hadn't been raining. She wondered whether she shouldn't have just stayed in Toronto, after all.

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## A Toast to Sólskin

### On the occasion of their 75th Anniversary

by Robert Anderson



**Sólskin 1940 Charter Members**

*Front Row: L-R Anna Halvors, Paul Jackson, Kristine Sæviols, Lucy Thompson  
Back Row: L-R Filippa Vindís, Margaret Johnson, Mathildis Þorvaldsson, Þóra Ott, Alex  
L. Morrison, Laura Johnson, Gudrun McManis, Ingrid Sigurdson*

Volunteer organizations have contributed greatly to our quality of life in Canada. It can be said that volunteer organizations are not a burden on the taxpayer; in fact, they help to lighten the load by providing needed services to the community that would otherwise have to be paid for by taxes.

To all willing and generous volunteers we extend our sincere gratitude.

One of these remarkable volunteer organizations started up in Vancouver in the year 1917. It consisted of a group of women who were of Icelandic descent and who had abundant energy. They called their association, "Sólskin," meaning "Sunshine."

Many of these first members had just moved to the Vancouver area and felt a need to be in touch with other Icelandic women. The times were not easy and in banding together these women received mutual support from each other. But their purposes were larger than their immediate personal needs.

Sólskin took on a great many charitable tasks, both in the Icelandic Canadian community and in the community at large. The reader of their 75th Anniversary book entitled "Sólskin Memories" will be astounded at the scope of their work over these many decades.

Of the many admirable qualities shared by the ladies of Sólskin, the one that seems to distinguish them, in my opinion, is their wholesome sense of 'motherhood.' That characteristic encompasses their sense of caring, nurturing and selfless giving. They are 'mothers' whose sense of care extends beyond their own immediate families, and to them we are very grateful.

In the earlier days of Sólskin, attention was focused on sending relief to soldiers of Icelandic origin in both World Wars.

Among other charitable activities they also sent donations of food and clothing to both the Russian Relief Fund and the Hungarian Relief Fund.

They have not worked in isolation. In these past 75 years, the ladies of Sólskin have also worked with other Icelandic Canadian organizations that have included The Icelandic Care Home, Höfn and The Icelandic Canadian Club of British Columbia. Each of these organizations is extremely grateful for the help extended to them.

In their quiet and gentle ways the members of Sólskin have proven themselves to be a foundation pillar of our Icelandic community. Their efforts are a shining example for us all to follow and I think it is safe to say that the 'Icelandic spirit of community' is alive and well in Sólskin.

I ask you now to join me in a toast to Sólskin, and to all its members, both past and present. We thank you for all the work and kind deeds that you have done, and it is our sincere hope that Sólskin will continue to flourish for at least another 75 years.

#### Sólskin Special Birthday Poem

Meztli en er þitt  
Ástíjara "Sólskin" mat,  
Eit þitt og lot ma ei dýma,  
Þakskert þer w'tjóð  
Þu tyrir ráð og ráð  
Fr' læt meín oft ljóst þitt skara.

At allug og unni þer  
Fyrir allt sem að varstu mer  
Nærveru er nokkið ljókk þímar,  
Minnng þin munakarsíð  
Man þu eg veru þar  
A larkórnun torsþjatarinnar



Litði svo leingi og var,  
Lans við eil hulka þe!  
Flamingu sólar við helli  
Fæst þér dæd og drög,  
Drengskap svo þessu byggð  
Þromundar með þitt í fylki.

#### First stanza translated:

Once again a special birthday we recall  
For our Sólskin – beloved by all,  
May her promise of light ne'er decline,  
But honored by truth and by time  
For her steadfast endeavour and will  
Which bears a shining pathway still.

by Gudrun Tipping  
for Sólskin's 50th birthday – 1992

#### From Sólskin Memoirs:

The first Sólskin meeting was held at the home of Gudrun Tipping, November 2, 1917.

In 1918 the Sólskin Charter was formed under bylaws set up by Mary K. Anderson, Anna Harvey and Emily Thorson. These Charter Bylaws, which have been Sólskin's constitutional guidelines since 1918, are listed below in the English version and the Icelandic version.

#### Charter Members:

Gudrun Tipping, Valgerður Josepsson, Emily J. Anderson, Thorson, Hanna (Johnson) Pearson, Mrs. Fan Johannson, Mrs. Ingibjörg Thorson, Mrs. Lily Johnson, Mrs. Clinton, Mrs. Anna Harvey, Thorbjörg Anderson, Anna Guðjónsen, Emma Þrátt Jackson, Mrs. R. Finkson, Mrs. Kristine (Sina) Sanders, Mrs. Thordís Einar Guðmundsdóttir

#### Charter rules for Sólskin:

The Sólskin Charter was formed in 1918, and the rules were as follows:

1. The name of the club is Sólskin.
2. The objective of Sólskin is to be an active and charitable club, as well as to pro-

vide Icelandic Social Life.

3. The Executive shall consist of 5 women: President, Vice President, Secretary, Vice Secretary, and Treasurer.

4. The Executive shall have authority to hold special sessions on matters relating to Sólskin.

5. The Executive shall be elected by voting.

6. The Executive shall be elected for one year, with Annual Meetings to be held in November.

7. Meetings shall be held the last Thursday in each month, at 8:20 p.m.

8. Membership fee shall be 50 cents, to be paid when joining, then annually at the Annual meeting.

9. It shall be the duty of each member to attend meetings regularly, and to participate in all club activities.

10. The laws of this Charter shall not be changed, except by means of voting with a 2/3 majority. At a meeting in 1919 a motion was passed by the Charter that laws be read to every new member when joining Sólskin.

Later, this law was amended to read that the Charter be read once every year, at the February meetings.

November 28, 1918

Þeirdu var settur á heimili Mrs. Guðjónsen's Fundargöngu íri síðasta fundi var lesin og samþykkt. Netnið hafði verið kosin til að setja nýja lög fyrir félagið og voru þæg og lesin upp og elur fæjarar afhuga sendur og þrotteigar voru eldur ljúfjandi lög samþykkt. Þí þessari nefnið voru Mrs. Harvey, Mrs. Thorson og Mary K. Anderson.

#### Lög

1. Kvenfélagið heitir "Sólskin".
2. Þetta skil vera einandi félag - hjálparfélag og félag til að viðhalda Íslenskum félagskap.
3. Stjórnarnefnd félagsins sáð samantvöld af þeim kvenum - forseta, varaforseta, skrifara, vara-skrifara og galdkera.
4. Netnið þessi hefur allar framkvæmdir

á hendi milli funda samkvæmt þessum lögum og fundar samþykktum sem gjörðar kunna að verða.

5. Netnið verða kosnar með atkvæðum.

6. Embættismenn eru kosnar til eins árs, á aðalfundi félagsins sem haldinn er í nóvember.

7. Fundir skulu haldast seinasta fimfundagskvöld í mánuði hverjum og þyrja

klukkan átta.

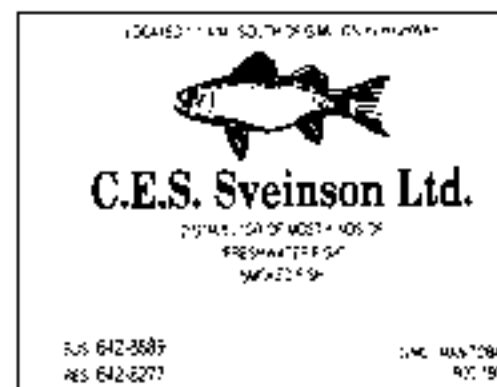
8. Ársgjald meðlimanna er \$5.00 og skal borgast valfrjálga í félagið og á aðal fundi ársins.

9. Það skal vera skuldbýrtes meðlims að sækja fundi stundvíslega og taka þátt í öllum störfum félagsins.

10. Þessum lögum verður ekki breytt nema með tveim þriðju atkvæða.



The United Nations  
International Year of  
Volunteers 2001



#### Sólskin 1992

Back Row: L-R Kristina Magnúsdóttir, Guðrun Þorvaldsson, Dóra Ólafsdóttir, Olga Halda Inga Kóðia, Sarah Penney, Anna Þorvaldsson, Einar Ólafsson, Einar Jóhannsson, Einar Einarsson, Dísun Níelsdóttir, Thelma Friðriksson, Elín Árnadóttir, Elínur Einarsson, Helga Howardson, Þórunn Sveinsson.

Middle Row: L-R Bertha Christopfersson, Thora Ott, Liljan Þorvaldsson, Francis Isaksson, Margaret Harrison, Thordis Wilson, Geraldine Thordisson, Stefania Maria, Carol Newman, Guðrun Guðbjörnsdóttir, Guðrun Halldóttir.

Front Row: L-R Sigrún Wetton, Carin Hammond, Maria McKel, Rada Einarsson, Sigrún Isfeld, Lil Anderson, Margaret Silverman.



*Members of the delegation at the harbor. A beautiful calm morning to begin the trip.*

## When I Was the Twelfth Warrior

*by Þórir Björnsson*

I can remember watching the opening scenes of Michael Crichton's *The Thirteenth Warrior* and being insanely jealous of Antonio Banderas' character, Almiral Ibn Fadlan, as he audited in a sheepskin facing the driving winds and cold ocean spray aboard a longboat. Despite the obviously uncomfortable conditions, I would have given anything to have had the opportunity afforded this actor to experience the sea aboard a Viking ship. I had no idea that being elected to Town Council, participating in a Municipal Exchange, and having a chance meeting with the mayor of our partnering municipality would add up to such a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Thus begins my saga. The Town of Gimli participated in a Municipal Exchange in August 2002 when six delegates from Lockport, Nova Scotia arrived to partake in the Icelandic Festival. Lockport is the site of the longest continuous Icelandic settlement in North America. By chance I was one of the first town representatives to meet Lockport's mayor Sarah Huskisson. After the introductions and informal pleasantries we discussed the itineraries planned for our exchange. She mentioned the arrival of the *Islandingur* as part of their celebration and that she would be on board from Halifax to Lockport. When I remarked that it would be an incredible experience, she immediately suggested that she could arrange for me to be on the ship.

On the afternoon of August 25, the Town of Gimli delegation arrived in Halifax. Mayor William Barlow (CAO), DJ Sigmundsson (Chamber of Commerce President), Darcy Bejard (Past president), Kristine Sigurdson (Gimli Museum representative), Rick Lair and myself — with four vinarettis in tow. The *Islandingur* was to have arrived in Halifax that very morning,

however inclement weather presented this. Thus we were able to see the *Islandingur* under full sail triumphantly entering Halifax harbour the next morning. This was a magnificent sight to behold. The crew, in full Viking regalia, enthusiastically acknowledged the crowd of approximately five hundred who were on hand to greet them. A souvenir kiosk and a concession stand with traditional Scandinavian fare greeted the crowds that arrived over the next few hours to take a closer look at the *Islandingur*. At 4:00 p.m., Mayor Huskisson had negotiated my participation in the overnight voyage to Lockport. I was quite relieved at this point as the rest of my delegation had already departed for a ceremony in Markland, over an hour's drive away, and I would have been stranded in Halifax otherwise. The eight crew members, Mayor Huskisson, Avraham (a reporter for the US National Public Radio Service), Bill (an "old salt" Nova Scotian, 42 years at sea) and I, the twelfth warrior, were ready to depart. By the mid-afternoon there were more than 200 on hand to bid us farewell. The sail was raised — we were on our way.

Leaving Halifax harbour I marveled at the sight of the huge ocean freighters and a visiting U.S. warship as these vessels dwarfed the 72 ft long Viking ship. The calm waters of the harbour provided me with the peace and reassurance I needed that the trip would not be that difficult. After all, I have been on several ocean craft on four oceans, how difficult could it be? My question was soon answered as we left the harbour mouth and faced a steady southerly wind, with three metre swells. I was assured by all aboard with years of experience at sea that these impressive waves were mere humps compared to the violent ocean storms. I later was quite glad that I chose to rent *The Perfect Storm* see

eral weeks after this excursion. The shallow draught of the Viking ship made it feel as if we were skimming the crests of the wave. I went to the bow where I could get the full effect of the crests crashing against the ship. This experience was analogous to my first experience in an amusement park aboard the most daunting of roller coasters. The big difference, of course, was the fact that this ride would be over fifteen hours. Crewman Palmi Magnússon was at the rudder and was apparently quite bemused by my antics as I braced myself for each crest. I could not contain my excitement and probably had the crew shaking their heads. If I were a neo-Viking, I would definitely have been a good candidate to be a Berserker.

After a brief respite lying on the deck in the afternoon sun, I continually studied the confines of the deck and sat in chat briefly with the reporter from the National Public Radio Service. Abraham was fairing quite well but the steady undulation of the three metre swells was raking us to l. The Boston lad had even less experience than I at sea. When his colour worsened I started to suggest he look overboard at when he got sick. Without missing a beat, crewman Stefan Gunnarson had the deck quickly in order and sought assistance from the rest of the crew to address Av's misery. He was wrapped in a sleeping bag, given gasol and "something to calm his nerves." He slept for the next ten hours.

I, in the meantime, purposefully

remained somewhat aloof from the crew as I had taken note of the traveler Ahmad Ibn Fadlan. He had just observed the Vikings at *The Tenth Century Warrior* much the same way a cultural anthropologist would observe a new found tribe.

I chose to imagine myself having been thrust back 1200 years. As a history teacher, this was the most amazing, surreal experience. I try to get my students to experience history, to live it and, I was living it. By mid-voyage I was overcome by the inexplicable urge to sack Lunenburg. Cooler heads prevailed and I settled in the galley for a fantastic carried lamb on a bed of rice, some "aleinu-langur." I had picked up for the crew at Tim Horton's and of course, the bottomless Kaldísopi. So much for the true Viking.

At this time I got to know the crew. I did not ask them the standard questions about the size of the ship, etc. as they had been asked several times in Halifax. I suspect they had been asked the same question a thousand times over. I had some knowledge of the vessel as I had frequently visited the website in anticipation of the trip and was up early to watch the arrival at L'Anse Aux Meadows on Newsworld. I wanted to know what inspired them to undertake such a grueling voyage. What would make someone give up the luxury of home for the spartan conditions aboard the ship? How hard was it to be away from the family for such a long period of time? What were some of the most terrifying moments

of the journey? My short time on board at this point was sufficient to determine that three modern day Vikings were no less the adventurers than our ancestors of a thousand years. Encountering sea flows off Labrador's coast and tearing for their lives in a violent storm the very night before my leg of the journey were but some of their varied experiences. Captain Gunnar Eggertson spoke of this voyage as his duty to pay homage to his ancestor Leifur Eriksson. The crew's dogged determination manning the ruc-

der against the ocean spray and winds and the enthusiastic reception invoking the crew's emotional response in Halifax put it all in perspective. The Viking spirit had survived the test of time.

To truly understand the accomplishment of the crew of the *Islandigut*, it took a modern disaster to put it in perspective. Mavur Huskisson pointed out when we were at the approximate location of the Swiss Air disaster. Where twentieth century technology had failed, the *Islandigut* persevered. I could not begin to imagine what it would have been like in Leifur Eriksson's time.

I could not sleep that night. The crew graciously offered me a bunk but the claustrophobic conditions made the deck an attractive option. I huddled up on top of the engine cover. The steady hum of the engine and the warmth from its efforts were a mild comfort. Wearing a fleece pullover, shorts and sandals didn't lend well to sleep as the cold ocean mist, the occasional rude splash of salt water, coupled with a bone chilling breeze did not allow for R.F.M. to be achieved. I resigned to look up at the stars, observing a meteor shower and the distant lightning to the east. Once again, I imagined the crew telling of great adventures and praying to the Norse gods for guidance as they spoke in Icelandic. I have often joked that I know only enough Icelandic to get into trouble and this was one instance where my limited knowledge of the language was advantageous as I vicariously continued my journey back in time.

The morning sun was a welcome sight as the temperature was soon more befitting my attire. I ate yet more donut and enjoyed a morning coffee when the engine was shut down. We drifted quietly for two hours as our arrival six nautical miles from Lockeport was well ahead of schedule. The crew unpacked their Viking costumes and prepared for yet another reception. They were leaving forward to a five-day shore leave before heading to the United States and yet another five weeks of travel before their final destination—New York City.

Under full sail, we entered Lockeport harbour to the sounds of huggies and the

cheers of approximately 1200 people. The crew once again acknowledged the cheering crowd the way they had at several ports of call before. It was going to be back on land. My sea legs would later atone to this during an awkward moment when I was introduced to a large crowd and I stumbled somewhat as I rose. Reflecting on the experience, it was one I will never forget and am eternally grateful to the captain and crew for allowing me this opportunity to rediscover my Viking roots. D.J. Sigmundson was on the deck receiving the ship and summed up my experience quite succinctly. When he was interviewed in the *Halifax Spectator* he said I looked very tired but I was smiling from ear to ear. Considering the length of the voyage, this prairie boy will have a lifetime of memories. I will never forget the splendors of nature; the curious sea lion checking our progress; the score of sea birds in our wake or the meteor shower. Nor will I likely have such an opportunity to experience such a profound and personal awakening of my Viking heritage. I was extremely fortunate to be the Tenth Warrior and celebrate 1200 years of Leifur Eriksson's Voyage of Discovery in a manner many can only dream of—reliving our history.



An estimated 1,200 people cheered our arrival at Lockeport.



My colleagues suggested I looked tired, but was smiling from ear to ear.

## Poetry

### The Beauty of the World

by Sean Bonser

Beauty is seen

In the clouds that move ever so slowly,  
The splashing of Salmon swimming up stream,  
The sight of the trees swaying in the breeze,  
Or the ocean shimmering in the sunlight

Beauty is heard

In the sound of the rain falling, falling, falling,  
and hitting the leaves,  
The sound of a baby bird calling to its mother,  
The rushing of the white water as scary as the night,  
Or the clinking of the wild deer antlers in a fight.

Beauty is in yourself

Your generosity and humour,  
In your dreams and sensitivity,  
In your strengths and weaknesses,  
And in your loving soul, and in your friendship.

*Age 11, grandson of M. A. Heida Bonser  
Lake Park, IL*

## Book Reviews



### The Complete Sagas of Icelanders

*VIKING AGE CLASSICS  
Five volume set, #9979929328  
Loftur Einarsson Publishing*

*Reviewed by Allan A. Vasson*

At last, the truth about the original discovery of the New World and earliest Viking explorations has been told in plain English. All 42 Viking Sagas and 49 tales, *The Complete Sagas of the Icelanders*, has been published in a coordinated translation as Viking Age classics for this new millennium. They are a welcome contribution to getting the truth verified about Leif Eiriksson, his epic voyage and many other aspects of Viking history, exploration and important contributions to civilization over the eons. The 5 volume set is a publishing landmark.

For sheer narrative artistry and skill of characterization, the finest Sagas rank with

the world's greatest literary treasures, as epic as Homer, as deep in tragedy as Sophocles, as humanly engaging as Shakespeare. For years, only a few had been translated and published in English. Despite their traditional origins, the Sagas are works of consciously created literary art. They are also a form of frontier literature, in which descendants of settlers reflect on their origins, identity, legends and the troublesome contemporary realities of that period.

For those earliest scribes, the world exploration and settlement period was something of a Golden Age, the era of a unique commonwealth of free chieftains with no king, dominated by Viking traditions of honour and blood vengeance. Unlike typical heroic literature, the Sagas are stories of fest and blood murders, swely blinded men and domineering women in search of worldly wealth, power, fame and love.

Modern readers will find dramatic psychological intensity and depth of characters, a strong focus on codes of honour and ethics and human frailty too. The horizons of Saga writers extended to the limits of the Viking world, westward to Greenland and Vinland, east to Russia and Constantinople.

Icelanders and other Vikings sailed the high seas to the shores of Ireland, upriver to the cities of London and Rouen, all along the Baltic Coast. We see in these Sagas that the world lies at the feet of Saga heroes: witty poets who are companions of kings and eals, fierce fighters who never lack the attentions of noble ladies.

Although these champions reign victorious on foreign shores, as they did in that era, they almost always return home to their farms nestled under mountains in lovely fjords and valleys. Often, clever and beautiful women are depicted, manipula-

ing the men and courses of events behind the scenes, and frequently outspoken in their opinions too.

*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* have been grouped on broad thematic principles and divided among the five volumes of the set.

The Biographies tell of exceptional individuals: poets, outlaws and champions, and the stories spotlight these men as they pit their strength against a society they stand out from and defy.

At the heart of the *Sagas of Feuds* are wealth, power, regional status and the inevitable conflicts that result from life in a singular society which sets its own laws and metes out a hard justice. Each of the volumes is thematically self-contained and offers a particular angle of approach for exploring the vast and fascinating Saga world.

Women play a large, important part in the Sagas. Far from being blushing damsels waiting for their knights, as were medieval narratives, women in the Sagas often are pivotal characters. Mothers instill their sons with ancient heroic values and incite them to noble deeds, young women encourage battles over them, others of steely character rebel against male power and refuse to accept the limitations imposed on them by custom and law.

Two of the Sagas provide basic information about Leif Eriksson's voyage of discovery and the earliest settlement by Vikings in Canada. *Leif the Red's Saga* and *The Saga of the Greenlanders* are the key stories that document the discovery of the New World, and those people involved. Both are now confirmed by the archaeological digs in Canada and carbon dating of artifacts to 1000 AD. Truth will be out at last!

At the turn of the millennium, Erik's son began a mission to Christianize the Greenlanders. Hearing of land to the west, he set sail and discovered North America, nearly 500 years before Columbus was born.

*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* begins with the two sagas known as *The Vinland Sagas*. These tell of the voyages of discovery, the attempts at colonization and the

first encounters between Europeans and native Americans.

Against this historical background a colourful cast of characters takes the stage. These include the troublemaker, Firk the Red, banished from Iceland for killing men. The sagas tell of the pioneering explorer Leif the Lucky, one of Erik the Red's sons, and his brutal daughter, Freydis. Another remarkable woman is featured, Gudrid Thorbjarnardottir, the first transatlantic woman traveler. She sailed with her second husband, Thorunn Karlsefni to begin the first Viking settlement in North America. She also bore the first European child born in the New World, circa 1000 AD, her son Snorri, before abandoning the settlement and returning to Greenland and eventually Iceland.

Gudrid was the world's most remarkable woman of her era. She was equal to the men who crossed the seas in their swift Viking ships. Born in Iceland, married in Greenland, she eventually traveled to Norway, landed in Iceland, made a pilgrimage on foot to Rome before ending her days as a nun and anchoress in Iceland. Gudrid was a formidable, independent-minded woman who fashioned her fate with her own hands and has taken her place among the great female heroes of history.

For generations Scandinavians knew that Leif Eriksson had been born in Iceland, grew up in Greenland and embarked on his epic voyage of discovery from their home in Brattahlíð.

That rich history was preserved in the Icelandic Sagas, which were first written down in the 13th and 14th centuries. The Viking Age is usually considered from the

800s to 1066 AD, when the Battle of Hastings marked the end of that period.

Discovery of Viking artifacts at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland that were carbon-dated to 1000 AD, verify the Icelandic Sagas. The proof of those ancient writings had been dug up by renowned archeologist Anne Stine Ingstad and her discoveries of ancient homes and iron artifacts verifies what the two Vinland Sagas had recorded, many centuries earlier. The site is considered so important that in 1978 it was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

These ancient Sagas preserved oral history and knowledge about Vikings, but mainly center on the unique society founded in Iceland, departing men and women who sailed there and their descendants.

In the Middle Ages, the Icelanders were the historiographers of the North. Their manuscripts preserve most of what we know today about North European history during this era. They also sketch the outlines of Nordic identity of the original settlers and families that led explorations and settlements beyond Norway and Denmark.

These principal manuscripts are preserved in the Arni Magnússon Manuscript Institute in Reykjavik, where they are on display as national treasures. Individual Sagas have been translated into English and other languages in the past. *The Penguin Press Sagas of Icelanders* was the best resource, until now.

For the Leif Eriksson Millennium, celebrating that remarkable voyage and Leif Eriksson's discovery of North America 1000 years ago, an innovative Icelandic envisioned and produced this publishing landmark.

Johann Sigurdsson had begun exploring the idea in the early nineties. Based on a farm in north Iceland, he read the Sagas as a child and formed a lasting attachment to the stories and his favorite heroes. In 1993, he founded Leifur Eiríksson Publishing, in partnership with the late Sigurdur Vidar Sigurdsson, for the sole purpose of translating all the Sagas into English. An Editorial Board was appointed, comprising Robert Cook, Terry Gunnell, Keneva

Kunz and Bernard Scudder. It quickly became clear that their project was headed toward epic proportions.

In 1994, Vidar Heimsdóttir, also farm-raised and a Saga scholar, was appointed General Editor. Under his inspired direction, the entire corpus of the *Sagas of Iceland* were translated to English. For that awesome task, a talented team of 30 translators was carefully selected. It included leading international scholars and university teachers from seven countries who had studied and written on Nordic medieval literature and culture. All were native English speakers and writers.

Methodical editorial planning ensured that all translators followed the same translation policy to produce a consistent high level of accuracy and readability. Coordination ensured use of consistent English terms for key words and concepts, proverbs and phrases and other cultural aspects.

To ensure readability, spelling conventions for personal and place names were normalized as were nickname translations that occurred in more than one Saga. In the process, 11 Icelandic medieval specialists carefully checked translations against original Icelandic texts for accurate renderings. Finally, 14 native English speaking scholars read the translations before the final editorial review and publication.

A comprehensive introduction by Dr. Robert Kellogg depicts the world of the Sagas, their subject material, location and society where they take place.

In addition, Dr. Kellogg focuses on their artistry, their characters and assesses their place in world literature. These five volumes describe the dramatic life, explorations and civilization of that amazing era. Praise for the memorable publishing landmark came from leading scholars, historians and noted world authors.

"The English is wonderfully accessible to this modern reader," says U.S. novelist Kurt Vonnegut. "Only now can I fully appreciate my own deep debt as a story teller to Icelandic writers of long ago."

Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney added his tribute. "The publication of these vol-

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ness is a reminder that the Icelandic sagas can hold their own with the literature of the Mediterranean. Here is the poetry of the North Atlantic, a working out of the primary laws of our nature, a testimony to the human spirit's ability not only to endure what fate may send it but to be renewed by the experience."

UK Poet Laureate Ted Hughes adds his praise: "All my literate life I have been looking for more English translations of the Sagas. To have them all in this superb five volume edition, is a dream come true."

Dr. Jenny Jochens also lauded the Sagas as literary treasures, now available to all English speaking people.

"Critics have often considered the Sagas of Icelanders as the single range of mountains in the literary landscape that intervenes between the slopes of Greek drama and those of Shakespeare whereas others regard them as forerunners of the realistic novels of the 18th and 19th centuries in England and France. Regardless of their position, it is obvious that the Icelandic stories must be counted among the treasures of Western literature.

"Outside the small nation of Iceland and the even smaller number of Old Norse specialists, access to and appreciation of these narratives have been limited by the availability of translations until now.

"Bringing together for the first time and in a coordinated fashion the entire corpus in a readable and idiomatic English, devoid of archaism, this handsome set of five volumes is good news for all interested in the Western tradition. The set belongs in every library in this country."

Czech novelist Milan Kundera added his noteworthy praise. "You will never fully comprehend the significance of the fact that the best grand, numerous body of prose composed in a European national language sprung from the genius of a very small nation, perhaps the smallest in Europe."

"Although the glory of the Sagas is indisputable, their literary influence would have been much greater if they had been written in the language of one of the major nations, and we would have regarded the Sagas as an anticipation or even as the foundation of the European novel."

Dr. Carolyn Farrington saluted the translations in the Times Literary Supplement: "The translations are generally excellent; accurate and readable, they are sure to become the standard versions. There is an overall consistency of tone which come with the standardized translation of set phrases, yet in many sagas a noticeably individual voice comes through."

"The translators have mostly avoided the twin perils of archaism and of raciness, while the verses which punctuate many of the sagas are skillfully and often wittily rendered. At the end of Volume Five the reader leaves an intensely imagined world, comparable in realistic effect with Hardy or Dickens."

Norwegian writer Jostein Gaarder added: "The Sagas are the literature not only of the island where they were written, but of the whole Western world of their day, undoubtedly one of the greatest contributions made by Nordic culture to world literature. Even today they provide the modern reader with fascinating insights, they are stories which reveal an immense variety of human conduct and conditions."

Doris Palmer, writing in The Library Association Record noted, "These volumes should be on the shelves of any library covering the history of Western Europe, and indeed, of America, and any library which covers the writing of folklore."

Special features make the collection a valuable Viking Age and world history reference. The editors have carefully selected

supporting material to guide readers as they explore this fascinating world and learn the secrets of the Sagas.

There is a cross-referenced index of characters. All told, the Sagas of Icelanders have a cast of thousands of men, women and children. The index lists 700 persons who appear in two or more Sagas. To enhance understanding, a glossary is included. A large number of key concepts have been translated consistently from one saga to the next.

As an aid to understanding, they are given in italics in the first instance they occur in each saga and comprehensive explanations are given in the glossary. These reading aids are included in such a way that they do not interfere with reading pleasure.

There are exceptional, meticulously rendered illustrations and diagrams. These explanatory diagrams show details of ships, houses, buildings together with a survey of saga society.

Maps and tables are included that indicate the reigns of the principal Norwegian monarchs of the period, plus historical events taking place in Iceland and the terms of the leaders of the Icelandic commonwealth, the Lawspeakers. Others follow the course of events, such as the voyages of discovery to Vinland, or locating the scene of a conflict on the detailed maps, which puts the Sagas into perspective.

One of the key features of many Sagas are the verses, often recited by principal characters in the stories. This is a linguistically complex poetry, full of imagery and energy. These often include diverse references to Norse mythology. Explanations are provided alongside the translations for the word-puzzles known as *kenningar*.

Sagas told the truth about the settlement of Iceland by leading families, mainly from Norway, who were fleeing from the oppression of King Harold Fair Hair when that powerful monarch was forcefully uniting Norway under his iron-fisted rule and converting all to Christianity, in death.

In that period, many of the foremost leaders and families left Norway rather than submit to the dictates of a powerful king. As founders of Iceland, they vowed

to be equals and not to allow a king or kingdom.

The settlement of Iceland was one step in the westward expansion of the Vikings. Icelanders, led by Erik the Red, settled in Greenland beginning around 870 AD. That was part of the general expansion of the Viking world. Most settlers came from west Norway but a considerable number were from Viking settlements in the British Isles. Iceland was probably fully settled in the space of around 67 years.

Its inhabitants had to adjust to a different climate and environment, that included volcanoes and hot springs. They were independent-minded people. In 930, more than half a century after settlement of Iceland began, representatives of leading families established a national assembly, the Althing, on the plains at Thingvellir. With no king and none wanted, this was a unique political structure in the Middle Ages.

It is the oldest government of its kind in the world. Meeting for two weeks in high summer each year, the assembly attracted men and women from all around Iceland. Its main role was to pass laws and settle disputes. With no executive power or king, the legal and moral obligation to implement sentences was left to individuals. Carrying out this obligation is one of the main themes of the Sagas.

During July 2022, colorful Viking history, heritage, traditions and contributions to civilization come gloriously alive in the 1st Finnsven Millennium ceremonies in Greenland. As the only nationally-published American journalist to attend those landmark events, I have written many articles about the sites, ceremonies and Norse leaders who participated. In all articles, I purposely included full, verbatim texts of speeches by Her Majesty, Queen Margrethe II of Denmark, President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson of Iceland, Premier Jonathan Marshall of Greenland and other dignitaries.

My goal was to put all of their noteworthy and historic comments on the record for readers today and Viking scholars who will be researching these millennium events in future years. Several Norse American media have graciously published all these



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articles so their publications have indeed documented the key Viking Millennium events for posterity.

The first English language editions of the classic Icelandic Sagas have been published at a most appropriate time, the Tenth Eiriksson Millennium. They now make this long overlooked period of world history, the Viking Age, much clearer to all. Now available at the Millennium Special price of \$299 U.S. Details are available at the new website: [www.sagas.ca](http://www.sagas.ca). For air shipment, add \$53 or for surface shipment, \$39 U.S. dollars.

The handsome, hardcover First Edition is available from the publisher, Leifur Eiríksson Publishing Ltd. Flokagötu 65, IS 125 Reykjavík, Iceland. The company phone is (354) 562 7950, the FAX is (354) 562 7970 and email is [vinland@centrum.is](mailto:vinland@centrum.is).

Although just a small company in a small country of 257,000 people, the Sagas is an impressive, gigantic literary leap to spread Viking knowledge throughout the English speaking world in this new millennium. They deserve hearty thanks from all of Viking heritage for this far sighted

and noteworthy publication landmark.

In my opinion, as a Norse American writer, a nationally syndicated newspaper columnist for 25+ years, the author of 50 published books and national magazine feature writer, *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* are a timely, welcome, worthwhile addition to every home of families with Nordic roots and Norse heritage.

In this new millennium when diversity is making news, it is even more important that all of us of Nordic background learn more about our own history, heritage and traditions. Vikings made a remarkable and important contribution to civilization through the centuries.

The Sagas of the Icelanders capture that vital era, eons ago, and bring it vividly to life today. It is a celebration of an age of history that now can be shared around the English speaking world. We can celebrate this publishing landmark as it salutes our shared Norse heritage.

*Editor's note: The 5 volume sets are also sold by local Icelandic National League Chapters.*

## Contributors

**ROBERT ASGEIRSSON** now retired from film and television production, is pursuing interests in publishing and database development in White Rock, B.C.

**PETER BJORNSSON** is a History teacher at Gimli High School and he is also an elected councillor for the Town of Gimli. He was nominated for the Governor-General's Award of Excellence for Teaching in the year 2000. Peter and his wife have two young sons.

**SEAN BONSER** was born in Oakville Ontario and now resides in Lake Forest IL. Sean has been published once before nationally, not for his writing but for discovery. He discovered a rare pink katydid and an article was published in the Chicago's Museum of Natural Science magazine. His interests, hobbies and activities are: science, comedy, hiking, skiing, scuba diving, surfing and Boy Scouts.

**DAVID JÓN FULLER** is a writer based in Winnipeg. He studied theatre at the University of Winnipeg, and Icelandic at the University of Iceland in Reykjavík. Currently, he works for Blizzard Publishing and Eðgberg-Heimskringla, and serves on the boards of both the Manitoba Writers' Guild and Saccato Publishing.

**SVAVAR GESTSSON** served as Consul General for Iceland to Canada from 1999 to 2001. Svavar and his wife, Gudrun Agústsdotiir, have taken up residence in Sweden, where he will be the Ambassador. The Canadian Icelandic community will miss Svavar and Gudrun very much.

**SIGRID JOHNSON** is the Librarian of the Icelandic Collection at the Elizabeth Dufour Library on the University of Manitoba Campus. She is the President of the Icelandic National League. In 2000, she received the Order of the Falcon, for her work in the community.

**FRANK SIGURDSON** is a son of Jon Sigurdsson and Sigrun Sigvaldadóttir of Vidir, Manitoba. He has a B.A., M.Ed. and a M.A. in History, from the University of Manitoba. He is a retired School Principal from the Winnipeg School Division No. 1.

**ALLAN SWENSON** is a Norse American writer, newspaper columnist with 25-plus years experience and the author of 50 published books. He is also a national magazine feature writer.

**LEN AND KAREN VOPNEFJORD** left from Victoria, although they have deep Manitoba roots. Both Len & Karen enjoy singing and have entertained the Icelandic community often.

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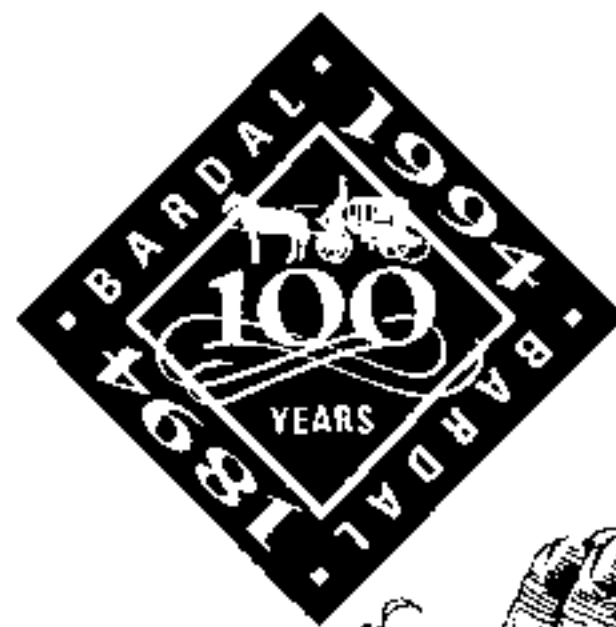
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*Joan Hibbert was born in Victoria, B.C. She became a part of the Iskut Valley community when she married Don (Donnie) Victor Hibbert of Victor, Manitoba. In 1958, Steve and Joan bought the property known as 'Julia' (N76) on the west shore of Lake Wampana. This land once owned by Johannes Jonasson and Halia Jonasson, became the Hibbert's summer home. The place where Joan spent her life time interests in paddling, the Ptarmigan, the waters of the land and the dream of the lake inspired her handicrafts, while the old home made reminders of the songs that are such an inherent part of the Iskut Valley culture.*

*The hand for water colours is a gentle way to express the spirit of the land and the people who have grown to know and appreciate it.*

*The back page*



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