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On the Cover

Poet Guttormur J. Guttormson of Riverton spoke highly of Chief Ramsay and praised him for kindnesses bestowed upon the Icelandic Immigrants.

Lies My Mother Never Told Me

by Nelson Gerrard

Over the years, various "popular misconceptions", both minor and major, have surfaced in Icelandic Canadian popular culture. Many of us, for example, assume that either Reykjavík or Akureyri was the birthplace of our immigrant ancestors, and almost everyone "knows" that the eruption of Mount Hekla drove Icelandic emigrants from lava-covered farms to the shores of Hecla Island. It is also widely believed that greedy agents and an unscrupulous Canadian Government "lured" unsuspecting Icelanders to Canada - only to change their names arbitrarily and dump them off in uninhabitable wilderness. There are even claims about a "Twelve Year Republic of New Iceland"! Thankfully none of these "lies" was among the stories my mother told me as I was growing up - though the story of our descent from Bishop Jón Vídalín proved not quite accurate and the claim of kinship with Vilhjálmur Stefánsson did turn out to be "a little tenuous".

The imparting of history by one generation to the next is a delicate process, and while human potential for remembrance is truly amazing, equally astonishing is our capacity for forgetting. This seems especially true of our generation. Perhaps not surprisingly, memorization and storytelling skills were developed to a much higher level in centuries past, while in modern, media-focused times we have seemingly become less adept not only at remembering and retelling, but at listening.

One of my favourite illustrations of the degree to which memorization was cultivated by our forebears comes from Emil Bjarnason's The Whole Truth: Sagas from the Quills. In "A Jar of Beans", Emil relates the story of Guðríður Jones, an elderly Icelandic neighbour during his youth in Vancouver. Bedridden but "sharp as a tack", Guðríður enjoyed young Emil's visits, during which she spoke Icelandic and shared lore dating back to her girlhood in Vopnafjörður. Guðríður was 92 when Emil was to leave for university in Ontario, and she had something special for his parting visit, knowing that in all likelihood it would be their last. Producing a jar of 105 beans and a bowl, she explained that the rhyme she was about to recite had 105 verses. If she remembered it intact, there would be no beans left in the jar when she had completed her recitation. Not only did Guðríður empty the jar bean by bean, further investigation revealed that the lengthy rhyme she had learned from her afi some 80 years before (using the same bean technique) dated from the 15th Century! In fact scholars in Iceland had only manuscript fragments - which fit perfectly into Guðríður's version. She had thus accurately preserved a complex body of language and lore that had been passed down by word of mouth in like fashion for five centuries!

At the other end of the scale, a man my parents' age once began relating his family history by stating that his grandfather had been a fisherman in Iceland and had loaded his wife and children into his boat, sailed for Hudson's Bay, and brought the family to Lake Winnipeg via the old York boat route. In actual fact, the family had emigrated with the "Large Group" in 1876 and had travelled to New Iceland via Scotland, Quebec, Duluth, and the Red River. While the Hudson's Bay version made for a great yarn (and the teller swore he had this directly from his father) - it was false. Tempting as it is to assume that his father must indeed have known - after all, he was there (albeit a small child at the time) - somewhere in the telling there had been a major "slip twixt cup and lip". The irrefutable proof was an original Allen Line passenger contract signed by his grandfather in 1876.

This incident illustrates much about human nature. Although we may do so unwittingly, we tend to deal with "truth" as secondary to our emotional and personal agendas - in history as in other things. In this case, facts were no match for a defensive ego. Not even the original document would convince the yarn's owner that it could not be true. Truth, admittedly, is not always this simple as it relates to history and human behaviour, but in this context it was straightforward.

This sort of delicate situation, in which personal feelings and emotions compete with rationality and fact, poses somewhat of a dilemma. When is "discretion the better part of valour" and when is truth important enough to be an issue?

Who hasn't seen a film in which small-town prairie folk hop about in their overalls and plaid shirts to a rendition of something like "Turkey in the Straw"? Having grown up in rural Manitoba at a time when dances in the local hall or country school were still common, and when well-dressed adults glided gracefully around the floor to waltzes or fox trots in perfect time to the orchestra, I find myself resenting this "hokey" portrayal of prairie people. It seems to me an easy enough thing to "get right" - if only filmmakers bothered to do a little checking. In this case the damage done is arguably minimal, perhaps not worth making an issue of, but what this does clearly illustrate is how readily even the simplest things are misunderstood and misrepresented.

Not all popular misconceptions are harmless. Significant historical errors can and do have major ramifications, especially when they find their way into popular media where they are repeated so often they eventually become accepted as truth - a phenomenon we have come to know as the "big lie". Distortions in history can not only defame people no longer here to defend their names, errors can colour public perception of groups and events in the present and future, influencing significant decisions and policies - sometimes even becoming the basis for false memories and unjustified legal or political claims.

A sterling example of the potential hazards of getting history wrong is the often repeated claim that Icelandic settlers on the shores of Lake Winnipeg established the "Republic of New Iceland"! This is not only the most vainglorious and obnoxious "big lie" to emanate from the Icelandic community, it is one of the most misleading and potentially damaging. Not long ago, the New Iceland Heritage Museum at Gimli received overtures from a separatist interest in Quebec that had learned about "the republic" via the museum's website. That organization was seeking a legal precedent for political sovereignty.

Of course New Iceland was never a "republic", in any way, shape, or form. The Icelandic Reserve, one of the cradles of Canadian multiculturalism, was envisioned as a cultural enclave where the Icelandic language and identity could be maintained within Canada, and it did have its own constitution - just as did every Icelandic reading society, ladies aid, etc. Never at any time, however, did the settlement on Lake Winnipeg have anything approaching the status of "republic" - in concept or in effect. It is inconceivable that the Canadian government would facilitate the spawning of a foreign political state (i.e. republic) within its bosom - especially in the wake of armed insurrection in Manitoba just a few years before. In fact the creation of an autonomous political entity by our immigrants forefathers would have been tantamount to treason! Claims of a "republic" ignore not only historical fact, but the spirit and character of our "founding fathers" - who are thus cast in the light of men without honour, prepared to accept what Canada offered but unwilling to acknowledge their new responsibilities. History, of course, shows that the opposite was true of these men.

Why and how, then, do blatant fallacies of this ilk keep rearing their heads? One school of thought forgivingly labels this sort of thing "mythmaking", which apparently excuses any and all variations on the theme of misstating the truth, whether knowingly or out of ignorance. In truth, "mythmaking" in this context is little more than a euphemism for "running off at the mouth". The ad nauseum repetition of fallacies such as this often boils down to what

can only be termed "sloppy research". Getting acquainted with historical fact and assessing the reliability of sources, after all, require some level of skill and commitment, and as often as not, writers for commercially driven cultural projects are engaged without any prior knowledge of a specialized subject area. Unfortunately, this approach to history is invariably coupled with a conspicuous absence of consultation. In this way, for example, a recent popular history of Lake Winnipeg rolled off the press with scores of glaring errors in the few pages on Icelandic settlement.

Apologists for historical pulp of this kind go so far as to claim that "the facts" don't really matter, as "no-one knows the difference" (or presumably cares). Some even voice the opinion that real history is boring. History is simply "whatever you make it". Hence quasi historical works using the names of real people and direct reference to actual events - prefaced with disclaimers that "this is not history", as if to absolve the writers of responsibility! What, then, of the real people whose words, motives, and reputations are misconstrued and misrepresented for posterity?

There is also a growing trend among academics and writers of popular history toward "historical revisionism". While revision in history is often both good and necessary, in the "publish or perish" world this approach, sometimes assumes characteristics of the same witch-hunt mentality and tunnel vision that plagues media journalism. In climbing onto the "revisionist" bandwagon, many writers unfortunately lose their objectivity and become caught up in attempts to make history "sexy" by creating a "hook" or exploiting an "angle".

Historical revisionism is fraught with perils that challenge even the serious researcher. Too often this approach relies on huge assumptions made about complex situations long after the fact, frequently with only shreds of inconclusive information and usually in the absence of anything approaching real perspective or understanding. Without the intimate and extensive knowledge necessary for real insight, and in the interest of promoting a particular agenda, "revisionists" tend to be highly selective in their treatment of sources and their reconstruction of "the truth". As a result, both premise and conclusion are often flawed or altogether specious, reflecting to a greater degree the writer's own inexperience, mindset, and personal/academic agenda than those of the historical figures and events in question. Individuals of long ago, it must be remembered, were shaped by circumstances and beliefs virtually unknown to most people raised in contemporary urban society.

Is history worth getting right? In the context of our own small "community", our long-standing penchant for history, education, and scholarship places a high priority on historical accuracy - notwithstanding our equally well-known love of folklore and storytelling. "Mythology" and other theoretical musings notwithstanding, it is the responsibility of anyone presuming to present, interpret, or revise our history to make the utmost effort to get the facts - and to get them right.

Conversely, sweeping and unsubstantiated presumptions about highly individual and complex aspects of the human psyche - such as values, attitudes, and collective conscience - should be avoided as potentially untrustworthy, prejudicial, and unjust. Readers of this issue would do well to bear this in mind.

In a perfect world, writers of history would steer clear of the pitfalls and temptations that contribute to the proliferation of historical "lies" in our midst - whether under the guise of "mythology", "misconception", "popular history", or "academic treatise". After all, the historical legacy of the Icelandic people in Canada - while not without its dark aspects - is sufficiently rich and blameless that it requires neither embellishment nor apology.

Pencil & ink drawing by Nelson Gerrard from the book, Icelandic Settlers in America by Elva Simundson. Thanks to the Gimli Chapter of the INL for its use.

Dreams and Claims

Icelandic-Aboriginal Interactions in the Manitoba Interlake

by Ann Brydon

"All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives."

- Benedict Anderson (204)

An Aboriginal man named John Ramsay figures prominently in contemporary Icelandic-Canadian accounts of the relationship between Icelanders and Native Peoples during the years immediately after Icelandic settlement in the Manitoba Interlake, which began in October 1875. In the story, Trausti Vigfússon obeys the ghost of John Ramsay after the ghost comes to him in a dream. In 1910, Trausti dreamt that the recently deceased Ramsay requested he attend the neglected grave of his wife, Betsey, who had died with four of their five children[2] during the 1876 smallpox epidemic. The figure of Ramsay emerged from the forest and told Trausti he wanted a fence built around her grave, as is the practice of Aboriginal groups in that region. Trausti, a carpenter, had the ability but lacked the financial means. In the dream he protested to Ramsay that he was poor and the grave distant. Why couldn't Ramsay approach other carpenters who were more established? Ramsay replied that Trausti was the only person with whom he could communicate.

In October 1997 and February 1998, I spoke with Trausti's 97-year-old daughter Tóta (Pórunn) Vigfússon. She recalls the seriousness with which her father, mother and grandmother discussed the responsibility the dream placed on Trausti. He saved the wood piece by piece until he had enough pickets cut for the fence. It took him years to complete the task. In the account written by Icelandic-Canadian journalist Kristine Kristofferson, Trausti had to be reminded a second time by Ramsay's ghost. This makes for a more dramatic narrative but is not accurate: according to his daughter, Trausti recognized immediately the necessity of obedience. He related the story of his dream to anyone who would listen, until his brother told him he was making a fool of himself. But when Gestur Gudmundsson, owner of the land on which the grave lay, heard tell of the dream, he hastened to supply Trausti with the oxen to drag the fencing to the site. Kristofferson says that Trausti's luck changed once he fixed the grave. I asked Tóta if this were true. She replied, with an ironic smile, "I don't know about that, but he certainly felt better."

The story of Trausti's dream has been told and retold, typically with interpretive add-ons and factual errors, as a means of demonstrating the good relations between natives and newcomers. It had been circulating in the Icelandic community for years before Kristofferson wrote it as a Winnipeg Free Press human-interest story in 1967. Its publication prompted Icelandic-Canadians to build a monument at the grave located east of Riverton. In 1989 the grave was again restored and designated a Manitoba Municipal Heritage Site. We do know that an individual's dream gradually transformed into a cultural narrative about the Icelandic-Canadian past. But we cannot know for certain the motivations of those people who cannot now speak for themselves. My goal is make sense of their actions by placing them in a broader social and cultural context. This context is not only Icelandic; it is also Aboriginal, a point Icelandic-Canadian writers have thus far ignored.

Background

When Icelanders immigrated to Canada in the 1870s, they left behind a country gradually advancing in its national independence campaign against Denmark. Most people in the country were still locked in a struggle to survive the poverty and starvation induced by a feudal-like farm economy and an over-exploited Arctic environment. For some, political reforms were too slow in coming. There was an outbreak of sheep pestilence between 1856 and 1860; then the volcano Mount Askja erupted in 1875. There had already been years of poor fodder growth. Optimistic stories of good wages, fertile plains and bountiful rivers and lakes were carried in letters and newspaper articles by Nordic emigrants to North America, and found an increasingly receptive audience in Iceland.

Great Britain had been taking an increased interest in Iceland during the nineteenth century, as one small extension of its colonial reach throughout the world. The trade monopoly imposed by the Danes was loosening, enabling British fishers to land on the coast of Iceland to process their catches. Great Britain was in a better position than Denmark – the latter had been politically paralyzed since its defeat by Prussia and Austria in 1864 – to take advantage of the socio-political and demographic upheavals rupturing Icelandic society (Brydon 1995). Britain's ruling majorities preferred northern Europeans to settle the colonial frontier, and even if Icelanders were few in number – in 1870 the population was 47,000 – it still proved profitable to run a steamship between Scotland and Iceland to transport the men, women and children seeking freedom from debt and the paternalism of the farm household.[3]

Optimistic tales were poor solace when the realities of frontier life brought settlers face to face with destitution and death. Icelanders were ill prepared to make adroit decisions when they landed in Canada, and they had to modify or invent new stories about themselves to sustain their emotional well-being in a foreign and seemingly wild place.

Until recently, popular knowledge about the reserve granted Icelanders by the Canadian government has been based more on a small handful of secondary sources, now decades old, rather than on the plentiful archival documents which largely remain unexamined. The story of the Icelanders' first meeting with John Ramsay, most likely Saulteaux (although others argue he is Cree), has not been reassessed since its inscription 80 years ago by an Icelander writing in Icelandic. Nearly all published histories of Icelandic-Canadians have been written by authors of Icelandic descent; even their more scholarly endeavours typically show the imprint of socialization into a standard and limited historical narrative of community victory over adversity. Many of these accounts are competent and informative, but if we examine their occlusions and exclusions we find intriguing aspects of Icelandic ethnicity that have not been publicly discussed. In private, I have been told contrary versions of the standard historical narrative during the 16 years I have conducted research in the community. This study emerges from the context of public versus private stories and the pervasive discomfort some people show when discussing the celebratory, at times self-congratulatory, official narratives.

Social and ideational forces have shaped and selected the memories on which Icelandic-Canadian histories have been based, and their nostalgic narration at times glosses over less palatable behaviours and events. Interpretation of the past has been shaped by the hardships faced by the new settlement, the experience of nationalist aspirations in the homeland, and a forceful nineteenth-century Icelandic world-view imbued with ghosts, trolls, hidden people and the persuasive power of dreams. The hardships have long since passed, but some stories persist as accepted truth, shutting out other possible understandings of the past.

The narrative account of John Ramsay's ghost as definitive of Icelandic-Aboriginal relations can be fruitfully examined as part of the complex process of making history liveable; the process is a strategy to suppress, displace and transmute

pain. Braid has recently discussed how narratives provide important cognitive tools for making experience meaningful. Theorists of nationalism – Anderson, Bhabha, Giddens, Hobsbawm and Ranger and Lowenthal – have demonstrated how the narration of national histories plays a significant part in creating national and ethnic identities. Hobsbawm convincingly argues that nationalisms come before nations: they arise as self-conscious attempts to privilege the past's interpretation as the inevitable unfolding of an immanent national consciousness. History and memory now carry a heavy burden: they have become the pre-eminent means by which people orient their sense of self towards larger collectivities.

National and ethnic histories are selective. As is evident in the story of Ramsay, a man who gave crucial aid to the Icelanders during the early years of settlement and was deeply admired by them, the stories of other nations and ethnic groups are accessed sporadically, as long as they fit into the myth of the historic unfolding of the new identity, what Hobsbawm and Ranger term an "invented tradition." We learn little from Icelandic written sources about the social and cultural contexts of Ramsay's complex life, nor of the lives of other Saulteaux, Cree and Ojibwa peoples, nor of those Icelanders who married or cohabited with Natives and then met with bigotry. This is neither surprising nor blameworthy. But silences need to be recognized for what they are and how they occur, since they have lingering effects in the present.

National narratives can motivate seemingly ordinary and disparate social practices. Iceland's independence movement provided a means for early settlers to conceptualize their own identity and actions in diaspora, through the continuation in Canada of nationalist political ambitions. In Iceland, leaders of the nationalist independence movement envisioned their goal as the freeing of the repressed heroic spirit that had once found expression in the Icelandic sagas and Eddas, arguably medieval Europe's finest literary achievement. In Canada, the Icelanders quarried literature and folklore for metaphors and tropes to interpret new realities. For example, they continue to compare their arrival on the shores of Lake Winnipeg to Ingólfur Árnason's settlement of Iceland circa 874 or to Leifur Eiríksson's arrival in Newfoundland circa 1000. Place names linked Manitoba's bush to the homeland's unfolding narrative, in what Anderson describes as the creation of synchronic or parallel spaces. The act of naming creates and demarcates; it lays claim to the world and orders it to fit into familiar ways of thinking. The settlers named their reserve New Iceland – the very name speaks volumes – and its first town site was Gimli, named for the heavenly hall reserved for the good and righteous, according to Norse mythology. The delegation that chose the site for the reserve renamed the White Mud River initially as Icelander's River – note the possessive form – which soon became Icelandic River. New Iceland soon had its own constitution; Icelanders in North America are known, still, as West Icelanders, as those living west of Iceland. West Icelanders named their farms after landmarks or places back home. The overall impression left by these actions and narratives is one of a new and virgin territory onto which

Icelanders could freely inscribe their own dreams and desires. The native and non-native presence in the region was silenced, as were everyday interactions Icelanders had with the people already in Canada.

Icelandic-Canadians have extensive written records about themselves. The First Nations peoples of the Manitoba Interlake have had far less opportunity to put their histories into written and published form or to have their stories heard outside their own communities.[4] Most of John Ramsay's band was decimated by the same smallpox epidemic that killed many Icelanders. Survivors were absorbed into bands at Grassy Narrows, Hollow Water and Fisher River along both shores of Lake Winnipeg. Their stories so far remain undocumented in the scholarly literature, although members of the Fisher River band have undertaken an oral history project. Ethno-historians have been actively reconstructing the pre- and post-contact periods of what once was Rupert's Land by means of oral histories and detailed archival research (cf. Brown and Brightman; Carter; McColl; Titley). Such research provides a general background for the events discussed in this paper.

Although their origins are found in more easterly Ojibwa populations in northwestern Ontario, the Saulteaux displaced the Cree around Lake Winnipeg by the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Cree worked the York boats on the lake, transporting trade goods for the Hudson's Bay Company, and lived with and sometimes intermarried with the Saulteaux (Steinbring). The most detailed ethnographic work on the Saulteaux is by Hallowell, who called them Northern Ojibwa (1942; 1955; 1992). Hallowell spent almost 10 years living with the Berens River people, who are located on Lake Winnipeg north of New Iceland. But the ethnographic record is not complete, in part because of the Saulteaux' s migratory movements in the early contact period and their more remote locations. Coupled with confusions over European attempts to categorize groups by origins and language, the character of the White Mud and Sandy Bar people is not entirely clear.

According to Steinbring, the Saulteaux are distinct from another group referred to as "Northern Ojibwa" in the Handbook of North American Indians, because the Saulteaux have traits the Northern Ojibwa lacked, such as the Midewiwin or Grand Medicine Society. These traits relate them to the southern Ojibwa or Chippewa. According to Winona Stevenson, 17 Saulteaux bands could be found on Lake Winnipeg. Sometime during the nineteenth century, the Red River Saulteaux joined with the Ottawa, who were planting corn next to Netley Creek, which was to become the southern boundary of New Iceland. The Netley Creek Saulteaux left the St Peters settlement to the south after it was missionized sometime between the 1830s and 1864. This split the community into traditional and Christian factions. Ramsay was possibly a member of the traditional faction. He was amongst those who left for Netley Creek. The White

Mud-Sandy Bar region was the northernmost hunting and fishing grounds of the Netley Creek people. Just north of the White Mud River, from Grindstone Point to Jackhead River, were Saulteaux from the Lake St. Martin and Berens River areas. Later, the population of Fisher River was comprised of Cree from Norway House and Saulteaux from St Peters and Netley Creek. (The Icelandic Deputation that visited the White Mud area in 1875 referred to "Norway House Indians," which makes it difficult to make a final determination as to this group's origins.)

Icelandic settlement in Canada began with Sigtryggur Jónasson's arrival in 1872. Although it was not his intention, Sigtryggur was destined to become the leader of Icelandic settlement in Canada. His first step in this direction came when the Ontario government asked him to act as their agent and greet 365 Icelanders arriving in Quebec City in September 1874. He helped transport this group to Kinmount, in Ontario's Muskoka District. A smaller group had arrived in Canada in 1873; some moved on to Wisconsin, and 115 settled near Rosseau, also in Muskoka.

The settlements at Rosseau and Kinmount were unsuccessful. The land was too poor for farming. Wage labour was scarce, housing pitiful, and many of the children died during the winter for lack of proper nutrition. During the summer of 1875, five Icelandic men travelled west to Manitoba to find land for an exclusively Icelandic block settlement, or reserve. John Taylor, an unordained pastor working at a Bible Society shantytown, accompanied them and was appointed by the government as their agent. On 20 July, they chose a site on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg, an area approximately 12 miles wide and 48 miles long, extending north from what was then the Manitoba boundary at Selkirk to include Hecla Island. (A few months earlier, a Norwegian delegation, also seeking land to settle, rejected the same land as unfit for habitation.)

The first party of Icelanders arrived at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers in Winnipeg on 11 October 1875, three days after a Dominion Order-in-Council granted the reserve. They learned that Taylor had not made any arrangements for their provisioning, and a debate ensued as to the wisdom of continuing on to Lake Winnipeg via the Red River so close to winter's beginning. A few stayed in the immigration sheds in Winnipeg. The rest wanted to go immediately to Icelandic River, but rough waters forced them to land near present-day Gimli. There they spent the first harsh winter, poorly supplied and lacking appropriate survival skills. When spring came – it was delayed that year, and the ice did not leave the rivers until late May – some returned to Winnipeg. Three families continued on to Icelandic River, where they met John Ramsay and his people.

Narratives of the Past

The most thorough documentation in recent published form of the encounter with John Ramsay and his people is found in Nelson Gerrard's Icelandic River Saga. Writer and poet Kristjana Gunnars has given it a literary interpretation by means of a meditation on ghosts. Other versions of the story told from an Icelandic point of view are to be found in other histories. They appear to draw on the same source as does Gerrard, who translates the reminiscences of Fridrik Sveinsson, which were published in Thorleif Jacksson (Porleifur Jóakimsson), *Frá Austri til Vesturs* (From East to West). Fridrik was 11 years of age when he and his family claimed the land at Icelandic River on which the Sandy Bar-White Mud Saulteaux, including John Ramsay and his family, were living and gardening. It is not clear how long after the fact Fridrik wrote down his memories. If he wrote specifically for publication in 1919, then they are memories of events going back 43 years. No other eyewitness accounts exist to provide corroboration.

Fridrik tells of how Ólafur Ólafsson (who named the site of original settlement "Gimli"), Johannes Sigurdson, Flovent Jónsson and their families came to Icelandic River during the early summer of 1876, after the hard first winter spent near Gimli. Although Fridrik does not mention

this, these families would have known already that the Saulteaux were living at Icelandic River, since a pamphlet about Nyja Ísland distributed to the immigrants included this information. The report made to the Canadian government by the Icelandic Deputation on 5 August 1875 provides evidence that the Icelanders saw signs of Indian habitation on Icelandic River and at Sandy Bar (directly east on Lake Winnipeg). Joseph Monkman, a long-time friend of John Ramsay and a member of the St. Peters band, located south at Netley Creek, had guided the delegation. The deputation reports that:

We had a good guide with us, who had been along with the surveyor of the coast. We had also two other Half-Breeds.... But we did see with our own eyes good potatoes which the Indians had planted in June, and also what is termed Red River corn, both growing at Icelander's river. And at the south end of the Lake Winnipeg good wheat, potatoes, oats, peas and barley, as well as the Red River corn just mentioned were all cultivated with success. The Indians catch fish all summer in their nets, and manage to live on what they catch from day to day, although in our opinion their outfit is rather poor, and apparently they never try anywhere but close to shore.[5]

It seems likely that the Icelanders had contact with Ramsay's people during this visit. Evidence can be found in an extensive letter written to Lieutenant-Governor Morris on 3 August 1875 by the Icelandic delegation. The letter drew Morris's attention to the possibility of conflict over the northern boundary:

We beg to call attention of your Excellency to the fact that a number of Norway-house Indians are at this time contemplating a settlement on White Mud river and on the adjoining coasts. This is the very spot which we have selected as the nucleus of our settlement, and therefore it would be of the very greatest advantage both to these Indians and to ourselves if some very distinct and clearly defined line of division could be adopted and enforced. North of Grindstone Point would be very suitable for them, and they are for the most part content to go there.[6]

The phrase "contemplating a settlement" is curious. By their own account, the Icelanders had seen the gardens already established at the White Mud River. It is possible that they were told more people from Norway House were intending to join with the Sandy Bar-White Mud River band. It certainly would be in the interests of the Icelanders for the Indians to move off the good agricultural land of Icelandic River to make way for Icelandic settlement, but we should not be too hasty to conclude that the Icelanders were accurately reporting the desires of the natives they encountered. Raymond Shirritt-Beaumont (pers. comm.) suggests that the Icelanders were quoting from stories circulating at the time, of a Cree exodus south from Norway House. He refers to an undocumented claim by Nan Shipley in *The James Evans Story* that, as early as the 1840s, some of the Cree at Norway House were thinking of moving to Grassy Narrows in order to take up farming, although an exodus did not begin until after 1875. Nonetheless, the events I relate below indicate that the Saulteaux already established at White Mud River were angered when three Icelandic families moved in summer 1876 onto the land they occupied. Clearly, they were not as willing to relinquish their land as the delegation reports.

The letter of 3 August clearly indicates that during their 1875 visit the Icelanders learned of native interests and attachments to land the Icelanders sought to claim. The deputation noted, "The Government at Ottawa has consented by telegraph to have this tract of land set apart for the exclusive settlement of Icelanders. Its boundaries will be more clearly determined when it has been surveyed and sub-divided into townships." It seems someone in the federal government decided Icelanders could occupy the land before its status had been ascertained.

This is background to Fridrik's account of the summer of 1876. From Fridrik's account we can see that Ramsay and his companions were likely attempting to scare the Icelanders away. Ólafur Ólafsson – Fridrik was his foster son – began to build a cabin on the northwest side of a creek running into Icelandic River, at a location he named Ós. This was next to the location where Ramsay, according to Thompson, lived and had a garden on the northeast side of the creek. Fridrik ambiguously states, "Ramsay soon began to make his presence known" while everyone helped Ólafur build his cabin, but some time passed before an open conflict occurred. One day, Ramsay three times pushed the boat away from shore as the men rowed across from their encampment to commence work. Ólafur finally held his axe above his head and Ramsay angrily left the scene. Later that day the settlers saw two canoes filled with Natives firing their guns in the air and occasionally at birds. The Natives then entered the Icelanders' temporary home without invitation. Later Ramsay arrived with a translator, who informed the Icelanders that the Saulteaux considered the Icelanders' settlement on the river's north shore an infringement of Saulteaux land rights. They believed the boundary lay on the south shore. The Icelanders were uncertain because, as Fridrik points out, the land had yet to be surveyed.

Sometime after 17 August, Ólafur, Jóhannes, and Fridrik decided to head to the Red River, where they expected to meet with Sigtryggur Jónasson, who was arriving with a new group of settlers. They met Sigtryggur and an unidentified Indian agent, who assured the Icelanders that the boundary extended north of the river. (It is unclear on what basis he made this judgement, given that no survey of the reserve had yet been completed.) The Icelanders, however, took his word as definitive. Fridrik states that "the Indians – once informed that they had no right to claim ownership of the land north of the river – made no further attempts to hinder the Icelandic settlers from getting established." Ramsay appears to have eventually established good relations with the Icelanders, and this is the one aspect of the man's life that Icelandic-Canadian histories emphasize. Ramsay's character, physical strength and generosity are celebrated; in Fridrik's account his good looks and cleanliness are contrasted favourably to what the latter terms the "slovenliness" of other Aboriginal Peoples.

Fridrik's account is incomplete. In fact, Ramsay did not give up his quest to retain his land. Correspondence amongst various government representatives indicate that Ramsay attempted at first to regain his land and then, when that appeared impossible, to seek financial restitution. Clearly Ramsay considered the land his, no matter what an anonymous Indian agent said to the contrary. How much did Icelanders know of Ramsay's sense of entitlement? It is difficult to determine, although John Taylor, the Icelandic agent, was clearly aware of it, and it seems unlikely this would be information he would keep to himself.

Smallpox epidemic

The first intimations of Ramsay's anger towards the Icelanders appear in a letter of 12 April 1877, written by Dr J.S. Lynch to the Indian Commissioner J.A.N. Provencher.[7] Lieutenant-Governor Morris had appointed Dr Lynch to tend to the Saulteaux dying from smallpox contracted from the most recent Icelandic arrivals. Kristjanson describes how at first the Icelanders denied the severity of the epidemic that was afflicting their own people. Only after Sigtryggur Jónasson returned on 9 November from a trip to the east was he able to persuade John Taylor to seek help. Lynch left Winnipeg to begin his duties on 17 November, a good two months after the outbreak, and arrived in Gimli on 20 November, a few hours after another physician, Dr. Young, arrived from Lower Fort Garry. Together, the two men tended the sick and dying before Lynch left with Joseph Monkman to travel north to Sandy Bar. There they found the Saulteaux community deserted. They burned the buildings to contain the smallpox; the following year some Icelanders moved onto the land.

The devastation to the Icelanders was immense – of about 1,200 people, 102 died, although many of them had been immunized in Iceland. But the impact on the Saulteaux proved far worse:

Following the trail which led from the houses to the Icelandic Settlement, about three miles distant, on the White Mud River, we found the Indians, – the few that were left of them, encamped in Birch Bark Tents on the South side of the River – a Band of fifty or sixty, reduced to seventeen.[8]

Lynch spent the remainder of the winter visiting other afflicted native communities, guided by John Ramsay. In his lengthy report to Provencher, Lynch puts forward Ramsay's complaint:

On leaving the Settlement I promised Ramsay that I would represent to you what he regards, and what seems to me a case of great hardship.

He has lived on the point at Sandy Bar for twenty-five years, and was born on Big Island (later called Hecla Island, after the famous Icelandic volcano), only a few miles distant. He and his band have been hunters, fishers and farmers. The Bar is the fishing Station where their houses were, in which they lived during the winters.

But Ramsay had a farm, where he had tilled several acres for twenty years, on the North side of the River. There was a good house on it, in which he and his family always lived in summer, returning to their winter house in the wood at the Bar only when the winter was approaching and the fishing season began.

Although he was quite aware that he was not living on an Indian Reserve, he believed that the farm was his, and that it could not be taken from him. I think he understood this to be one of the conditions of his Treaty, but the Icelanders have taken his farm and are living in his house, and to his remonstrances have told him that he has no right to it whatever, that it is an Icelandic Reserve, and he must leave the neighbourhood altogether.

Not knowing how far I might assure him of his being allowed to remain a tenant on what certainly seems to be his land, I have only told him that I would represent the case to you. He has never before had an opportunity of having his case heard. I can vouch for the truth of much of his statement, and believe it to be wholly as stated, in every particular.[9]

Ramsay contracted smallpox. He and his daughter named Mary or Maria, survived the epidemic, but his wife and four other children did not. Although no later accounts repeat his statement, Fridrik Sveinsson states that Betsey was buried with two of her children. She died in September, at the beginning of the epidemic and well before John Taylor notified authorities about its outbreak. Kristjanson (52) glosses Lynch's charges without mention of the Saulteaux, and presents a rebuttal:

The medical officers believed that the people showed apathy in the face of their experiences, but Sigtryggur Jonasson challenges their opinion, stating that the people kept up a remarkably good spirit during their great calamity, "which many who don't know their general disposition nor understand their language call indifference."

Given my own years of living in Iceland and familiarity with their reserved demeanour, I find it believable that the doctors would not perceive the nuances of their concern even when it was felt.

The medical officer Young reported on diarrhoea and scurvy afflicting the settlement, and how the settlers were attempting to clean the "filth and noxious matter" from around their homes. Young suggested that some of the worst houses be burned since cleaning and disinfecting them would be impossible.[10]

Native contexts

By 1875 the Saulteaux, Cree and Ojibwa of Manitoba had generations of experience interacting with Europeans in connection with the fur trade. This region was part of Rupert's Land, granted as sovereign territory to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670. During the eighteenth century, the lake was a major crossroads for the rivers along which the fur trade moved, although the archaeological record indicates that travel along these waterways was frequent before then. Native peoples were aware of the increasing number of settlers entering the west; they were also aware of changes occurring to the ecology as a result of increasing usage. When it came time to sign treaties that would extinguish their land title, the Native peoples were motivated to negotiate reserves and other conditions, since it was clear to them this was their only way to retain any means of livelihood. They wanted to sign treaties not because the treaties were a good deal, but because the people had no alternative. Wild game and fish stocks were declining, increasing steamboat traffic reduced their employment as lake trippers on the York boats, and numbers of white hunters, settlers and surveyors gave indisputable proof of future changes.

When Lieutenant-Governor Morris granted the Icelanders a reserve in 1875 he most likely assumed that the Aboriginal peoples around Lake Winnipeg would soon sign Treaty No. 5. In fact, not all bands signed that year. A number of them were missed during the autumn trip Morris made around the lake for the purpose of collecting signators to the treaty. Morris was unaware of the number and nature of band organizations, including the Sandy Bar-White Mud River band. This was not unusual during the treaty-signing process in Canada. Many groups and bands have been and continue to be excluded intentionally or unintentionally; they are subsequently grouped with other bands for reasons of bureaucratic expediency. Aboriginal self-identity is overlooked. The pressure of incoming settlers made officials move quickly to force land surrender in situations bereft of equality or informed consent. According to Dickason (251), "In the case of Manitoba, the federal government gave surprisingly little thought to the terms of the expected surrenders; officials seem to have regarded the exercise as little more than a formality."

It was too late in the season to open negotiations with the overlooked bands. Instead, a meeting was set up at Dog Head Point for 25 July 1875. The Sandy Bar-White Mud River people, including John Ramsay, went to the meeting, which could not have turned out worse for them. Morris had given very explicit instructions to the two commissioners who met with the Saulteaux. First, the various bands were to be treated as one band, which was to elect one Chief. Amalgamation and election of a single leader went against Aboriginal ideas of social order; they were accustomed to small groups and more informal negotiations of leadership based on personal qualities. Judging from the commissioners' account of the negotiations and the Natives initial objections, the Aboriginal peoples did not want a foreign social order imposed upon them. But in the face of the commissioners' adamant refusal to negotiate and determination to stick to the letter of Morris's instructions, they finally agreed to elect a chief, as long as the commissioners agreed to carry forward each band's request for a separate reserve. The commissioners agreed – except in the case of the Sandy Bar-White Mud Saulteaux. Ramsay's people requested the lands they already occupied at White Mud River-Sandy Bar. The commissioners denied the request for a separate reserve on the grounds they had accepted annuities[11] at the St Peters reserve at Netley Creek. In effect, Ramsay's people were denied any existence as a legal entity despite the questionable criterion.

Contemporary land claims researchers say the place from which individuals take annuities is no indication of their band membership. The St Peters reserve was a prosperous one, and it acted as a magnet over a large region, attracting people from as far away as Norway House (Thompson).

Were the commissioners consistent in their judgements about the annuities? It would appear not. Some 20 of the 22 families of another band at the Dog Head Point meeting that day also collected their annuities at St Peters, but they were not denied a reserve. Given this inconsistency, it stands to reason that the commissioners had other motivations for disenfranchising and dispersing the Sandy Bar-White Mud River band. That reason could very well have been to erase the error Morris and the Department of the Interior had made in granting land to the Icelanders before the extinguishment of its aboriginal title. This interpretation cannot be treated as conclusive, however.

It is difficult to determine the exact timing of events. It would appear that the three Icelandic families arrived at Icelandic River before the Sandy Bar-White Mud River people travelled to Dog Head Point. Given how the negotiations went, one can see the basis for Ramsay's anger. Any power to determine their own future had been denied his people in an arbitrary manner. To make matters worse, within a few months, most of their band, including Ramsay's wife and four of his five children, were dead from smallpox. No wonder, then, that John Ramsay prevailed upon Dr Lynch to tell Provencher, the Indian commissioner, of his grievances.

Ramsay's Land Claim

On 16 April 1877, Provencher forwarded a copy of Dr Lynch's account to the Minister of the Interior in Ottawa. In his cover letter, he comments:

I beg to draw your attention particularly on the hardships that these families settled at Sandy Bar had to suffer from the arrival of the Icelanders among them.

Some reports of the same character had before reached this office, but if not precise enough to allow any special means of redress, though more than sufficient to show the necessity of some general measure of protection.[12]

Provencher refers to a letter he wrote on 9 September 1876 to the Minister, which included a memorandum from Justice McKeagney, then an administrator for the province, concerning complaints and demands from Icelanders on the same land question.

The Deputy of the Minister of the Interior, Meredith, referred Provencher's letter to the Surveyor General for a report on 2 May 1877. In his reply, the Surveyor General begins cautiously, but concludes clearly on the side of Ramsay:

On the reference the undersigned begs to remark that there are no data in his office by which he can throw any light upon the alleged occupation of land on the north side of the river in the vicinity of Sandy Bar on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg by the Indian Ramsay.

Assuming, however, the statement made by Dr. Lynch to be correct, it would appear to the undersigned that by the provisions of the Indian Act, Ramsay has full right to retain possession of his house and of the land tilled by him. It is quite clear that in setting apart lands for the Icelanders to settle on, it was never contemplated to interfere with any rights which Indians or others, under the law may have possessed.

The Icelanders, therefore, have no claim to Ramsay's land or his house, and the undersigned respectfully recommends that Mr Taylor should be requested to turn the present occupants out of it accordingly and restore possession to the complainant.[13]

Meredith must have sought advice from the Deputy Superintendent of the Indian Affairs Department, Lawrence Van Koughnet, since a memorandum dated 18 May 1877 is included in the Public Archives. Van Koughnet writes:

I think Mr Provencher should be requested to place himself in communication with Mr Taylor, the Icelandic agent at Gimli, informing him that by the 70th section (a) of the Indian Act 1876, the Indian Ramsay would appear to be entitled to undisturbed occupation of the land and premises referred to in Dr Lynch's letter, and requesting him to cause the Icelanders who have taken illegal possession to restore the same to the Indians' claimant.[14]

In June 1877, John Ramsay laid before Morris a grievance against the Icelanders about his land. Morris advised him to join the Norway House band, which had been redirected to Fisher River, north of the Icelandic reserve.[15] I have yet to find any evidence that Provencher followed the advice he received from Ottawa, and it would seem from Morris's advice to Ramsay that there was an unofficial policy of putting Ramsay off pursuing his claim.

No further action seems to have occurred after this, since Ramsay officially renewed his complaint two years later (ibid.):

DECLARATION OF
JOHN RAMSAY
St. Peter's Reserve
9th June 1879

County of Lisgar

The declaration of John Ramsay a treaty Indian, taking treaty money from the Government of Canada represents,

1st That I have occupied a certain parcel of land on the bank of the White Mud River in the Territory of Keewatin now included in the Icelandic Reserve during the past fifteen years, or five years before the transfer of this country to the Dominion of Canada.

2nd That the said parcel of land contains nearly as I am tell (sic) about forty acres in a square form,

3rd That I have been prevented from living on and farming the said parcel of land during the last two years by the Icelanders,

4th That the Icelanders took any timber which I had prepared and built two houses on the lot in which they are now living – and I make this declaration Austentiously (sic) believing the same to be true and in vistue (sic) of the Act inlituted (sic) as Act for the suppression and voluntary and extra Judicial oaths, his

(Sgd.) John X Ramsay
mark

Declared before me at St. Peters
this 9th day of June A.D. 1879
first having read out and
interpreted,
(sigd.) L.S. Vaughan
a Commissioner in B.R.K.

Two days later, in Selkirk, Joseph Monkman signed a declaration vouching for the accuracy of Ramsay's word. He also reported on another confrontation between Ramsay and the Icelanders at Icelandic River.[16]

Selkirk, 11th June 1879
County of Lisgar

The declaration of Joseph Monkman since of the Parish of St Peters, Province of Manitoba ðword illegibleþ

1st That I have known the land the subject of a declaration of John Ramsay a Treaty Indian during the past fifteen years

2nd That the land contains about forty acres and lies on the bank of the White Mud River in Keewatin.

3rd That I acted as interpreter for said Ramsay during the present spring when he wished to repossess himself of said land from the Icelanders.

4th that he was prevented for so doing by Icelanders who now have two houses built on said land part of the material of which houses was the property of said Ramsay and was unlawfully taken from him and used by the Icelanders. And I make this declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true and in virtue of the Act for the suppression of voluntary and extra judicial oaths.

(sgd) Joseph Monkman
Declared before me at Selkirk
the 11th day of June 1879
(sgd) L.S. Vaughan
a Commissioner in BR

Details of a second confrontation in 1879 between Ramsay and the Icelanders at Icelandic River do not exist in the published histories of West Icelanders. According to Fridrik Sveinsson's account, "Ramsay and Ólafur (Ólafsson) reached an agreement whereby Ramsay could camp on the land (at Ós) and cultivate his potato plot as long as he wished, and the two lived side by side in harmony from that day forward." That harmonious relationship was shortlived, however, since Ólafur, accompanied by Fridrik, left New Iceland for North Dakota in March 1879 (Gerrard 211). Ólafur lost his wife and one foster

son to the smallpox epidemic and had what Gerrard calls a "stormy" career in politics as the elected president of the colony. The move to North Dakota was the first of several moves he made around that State. He went then to several locations in Alberta and British Columbia before returning to Winnipeg in 1908. His departure from Ós might have appeared to Ramsay as an opportunity to renew his claim to the land and that might have been the context of the unsuccessful attempt at repossession that Monkman reports. Jón Bergvinson took official possession of the land in 1881, and his son Bergvin Jónsson obtained the homestead rights and patent in 1883 (Thompson 35).

Clearly, Ramsay was not satisfied by the lack of response to his complaints. Meanwhile, Provencher was dealing with an accusation of misconduct. In 1878, Provencher was found guilty on sixteen counts of fraud, including supplying inferior implements to the Indians, sending fictitious accounts to Ottawa and supplying poor cattle, wild cattle and unwholesome provisions to the Indians (McColl; Titley). By suggesting that the inquiry might have distracted him I am giving Provencher the benefit of the doubt. The guilty verdict indicates Provencher did not always work on behalf of First Nations peoples.

His successor, James Graham, resumed Ramsay's case after Ramsay made his declaration in 1879. On 22 September 1879, Graham wrote to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs that the Indian Agent Young had reported Ramsay's grievance to him. He states, "one Oloff Olofson, an Icelander took possession of and settled upon the lot, refusing to give it up when requested to do so." Graham does not indicate when this request was made.[17] He also states that Ramsay sought cash compensation in the amount of $250 and notes, "I am enclosing a copy of Ramsay's own declaration and also one from Mr Joseph Monkman. I am informed there are many others who are well acquainted with the facts of the case."

Only a portion of Van Koughnet's letter to Graham on 1 October is included in the file; it refers to land "improperly taken possession of by an Icelander" and instructs Graham to refer to a letter of 30 May 1877, to Provencher, and to communicate with John Taylor "with a view to that gentleman bringing the same under the notice of the Dominion Land Officer...." There the fragment ends. Also missing from the file is the letter Graham wrote to Taylor. It is difficult to determine to what Taylor is reacting.

John Taylor's response of 15 March 1880 to the instructions forwarded by Graham begins by placing responsibility for Ramsay's compensation squarely in the government's hands. He continues in a manner that contradicts and discredits Ramsay's version:

I have received your letter of 26th February last with enclosed copy of a letter from Mr. Provencher to myself dated 9th June 1877, which letter never reached me, and copies of declaration of John Ramsay and Joseph Monkman, with reference to improved land and timber for a house claimed by J. Ramsay and said to have been illegally appropriated by an Icelander and which I am requested to have restored to J. Ramsay.

In reply I have to state for the information of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs that in July 1875 I was instructed by the Lieutenant-Governor Hon. A. Morris that the Indians had no claim whatever to the lands at Sandy Bar and White Mud River on the West Shore of Lake Winnipeg and that they were about signing a Treaty under the terms of which they would remove to a Reserve at Doghead further north.

And I was further instructed by his Honor in October 1875 that said Treaty had been presented (unclear) and that I should locate the Icelanders on said lands which was accordingly done.

And further that in the following year 1876 I laid before Col Provencher the claims of J. Ramsay and other Indians and was informed by him that said Indians had no rights to said lands. (This suggests that Provencher was the anonymous Dominion Indian Agent referred to in Fridrik Sveinsson's account.)

I would therefore submit that having signed the Treaty with Lieut Governor Morris, and previous claims to these lands had such existed (unclear), were extinguished by their own act, with full knowledge and understanding of the same.

And further that having acted under the instructions of the Lieut Governor, the government is responsible for the consequences resulting from such actions and compensation for any damages must be demanded from the Government and not from the Icelander who was (word unintelligible) settled on said lands according to above instructions.

In his letter to me of 9th June 1877, the Acting Indian Superintendent refers to the lands at Sandy Bar but in the declaration made by John Ramsay he claims other lands, 3 or 4 miles distant at White Mud River.

In 1875 when I applied for the lands now contained in the Icelandic Reserve, there were a few small houses at Sandy Bar, say 3, but none were at White Mud River. These must have been created subsequently.

All the houses at White Mud River were purchased and paid for by the Icelanders, John Ramsay himself receiving payment for one. The house timber referred to was lying on the river bank for a long period, and the Icelander who occupied the lot was on the most friendly terms with Ramsay. As this Icelander has sold out his improvements to another very deserving and respectable man and has gone to the States it is difficult to say whether the said timber (if used at all as stated) was illegally taken or arranged for between the parties.

I am sure that no Icelander wishes to defraud John Ramsay and he will be paid whatever he is fairly entitled to for his house timber, which was of little value.

In conclusion I would remark that no resident here knows anything of the said 40 acres of land claimed by Ramsay. A small cultivated plot of less than one acre, not fenced, was formerly used by him before the Treaty.

I have invariably impressed on the settlers here that they should cultivate a good understanding with the Indians, and I feel assured that the best feeling has always existed here. The result of further inquiry will be duly communicated.[18]

It is possible Taylor did not receive Provencher's letter, since New Iceland was under quarantine in the spring of 1877 when the letter was sent, and there were postal disruptions (Kristjanson). Taylor's arguments that the Saulteaux willingly signed away all rights to the land and that responsibility for compensation lay with the government are mutually exclusive, since one assumes the legality of the land transfer while the other implies a breach in need of redress. Further, the arguments are based in moral rather than legal terms. The argument that the land was barely used does not take into consideration the legal provisions of the Indian Act concerning the rights to occupancy of lands already in use by Aboriginal Peoples. As well, another logic prevails: whether occupancy is in a tent or cabin does not change the claim's legal status.

Taylor challenges Ramsay's credibility by contradicting Ramsay's account of his house, the value of the timber and the size of garden plot. He states that Ramsay has already been paid, then says that Ólafur Ólafsson's departure makes it impossible to know the legality of the transaction, then concludes that Ramsay would be compensated, but under what conditions of "fair entitlement" Taylor doesn't say. Taylor first raises doubts about whether Ramsay's timber was used, then casts doubt on its value. If it was usable, it pre-

sumably had some value. But Fridrik Sveinsson makes no mention of payment being made to Ramsay or any other native for a house. As well, Dr Lynch tended the Saulteaux at Icelandic River during the smallpox epidemic. He would know if Ramsay's house existed. Dr Lynch concluded his letter with the statement, "I can vouch for the truth of much of his statement, and believe it to be wholly as stated, in every particular."[19] This suggests Lynch did not see anything to contradict Ramsay's version although the statement does contain the hedge "much of." Taylor's assurances that the Icelanders had good feelings towards the Saulteaux is consistent with Taylor's at-times obsequious style when communicating with the government, and I interpret it as a rhetorical device intended to shift blame for any conflicts onto the Saulteaux.

That aboriginal-built houses existed somewhere at or near the Icelandic River settlement is confirmed by a letter written to his father by Björn Andrésson on 6 March 1877, telling of his initial months at Icelandic River: "Along with several others I stayed in one of the Indian houses until a month before Christmas when I moved into the house Lárus and I built on his lot..." (Gerrard 33). A writer for the newspaper Framfari (in Jóakimsson 30) refers to four or five Native huts (kofar) on the west bank of Icelandic River in which Icelanders lived during the winter of 1876-77. The poet Guttormor Guttormsson, who often expressed his great admiration for Ramsay and was photographed in 1935 beside Betsey's grave, states that Ramsay had a house on the south side of the river and a tent on the north side (Ögmundardóttir). Magnús Stefánsson reports tents and houses (tjöld og hús) at Sandy Bar, and when Jón Björnsson took land near Sandy Bar in 1876 he lived the first 10 months, along with eight others, in a Native-built log cabin measuring 10 feet by 12 feet (Jóakimsson 81). There are references to the Saulteaux living in tents and log cabins (bjálkakofar) in several other Icelandic sources. The only further reference I have found alluding to Aboriginal cultivation concerns Stefán Eyjólfsson, who in 1877 planted a successful crop of wheat on what is described as an "old Indian garden" (gamlan Índíánagard) at Icelandic River (ibid.: 51). The existence of John Ramsay's house, however, is still a matter of dispute for some people who assume the presence or absence of buildings is relevant to determining rights to land.

John Taylor had a divine revelation instructing him to guide the Icelanders in their search for a block of land to settle in western Canada.[20] Helping the Icelanders was his calling, and he laboured hard on their behalf until his death in 1885. It is not surprising, then, that he would strongly rebuff Graham's request that Ramsay's land be returned to him or paid for, if indeed these were Graham's instructions. To what degree Taylor represented accurately the views of Icelanders is in need of further analysis; initial research suggests that Taylor was not always the best judge of a situation, as Houser attests. Many Icelanders were discomfited by his actions, and some by his religiosity (Ögmundardóttir: pers. comm.), or felt called upon to note that, while his intentions were good, his organizational abilities were lacking (cf. Stefán Eyjólfsson in Jóakimsson 12).

Without corroborating evidence, however, we are left with two conflicting reports – those of Taylor and Ramsay – and no means to evaluate the accuracy of either. Further research may turn up more evidence, yet I doubt if it could make the case any less ambiguous. The circumstances around Ramsay's declaration fall into a grey area in Canada's history. The legality of many actions taken during the settlement of the country was dubious at best. Determining the value of the timber or the existence of a wooden house or the size of the potato plot cannot in itself decide the legal validity of Ramsay's claim – if that is one's goal.

Dreams and the Ambiguities of Memory

My interest lies elsewhere, in understanding how history is selectively used to construct present-day identities, both personal and collective. This is not cause for moral judgement: constructing narratives

to place one's sense of self within one's realm of experience is what humans do at individual and social levels. However, sometimes difficulties arise. The narrative can outlive its relevance; it can even become counter-productive to its original function. If, as I argue, the story of Trausti's dream once helped Icelanders to smooth over the emotional turmoil of emigration and pioneering, then we need to consider its continuing relevance to group representation once those social conditions were resolved. The membership of present-day Icelandic-Canadian ethnic organizations is aging. Few young people are motivated to identify actively with an image of Icelandicness largely drained of the rich complexity of human existence. Simple stories of success in adversity and harmonious relations convey none of this complexity to younger generations, who no longer need to justify past actions. I have spoken with a significant number of younger Icelandic-Canadians who find the stories too sanitized and unbelievable to be usable for cultural identification.

Does the exclusive emphasis on Trausti Vigfússon's dream contribute to our limited understanding of the complex and fraught interactions between European settlers and Aboriginal peoples? Arguably, a most significant issue in contemporary Canadian society is finding ways of living equitably with cultural differences in a democratic society, in particular to recognize the effect of colonial thought and action upon Aboriginal peoples. Postcolonial studies have addressed this goal by investigating the plurality of histories and the role power plays in shaping historical knowledge. This has been my goal in this paper. Icelandic immigrants and Native peoples were caught up in the Canadian government's strategies for populating the West. The government's goal was to prevent American incursion and create markets for eastern Canadian manufacturers of farm equipment (my own ancestors were amongst those manufacturers who so benefited). Government policy effectively placed the Icelanders and Aboriginal Peoples into structural positions that were immediately at odds, regardless of what other attitudes they may have had.

According to the philosopher Charles Taylor, the nostalgic search for authenticity and wholeness in a world characterized by uncertainty is symptomatic of modernity's malaise. Nostalgia is predicated upon a desire to retell history only in the most purified forms, to avoid, perhaps, the realization that one's sense of self, shaped as it is by memory and history, is more often than not ambiguous, contextual, decentred and contradictory. Although authenticity is conventionally thought to be opposed to falsity or artificiality (Handler and Linnekin), it is more useful to think of authenticity as an idealization that imposes an unachievable perfection upon lived experience. According to Taylor, the solution to modernity's malaise does not lie in individualized self-reflection; it lies instead in a reflection on the conditions of one's place within one's social and historical milieu. By extension, a social or ethnic group's sense of authenticity is contingent upon fully acknowledging its interconnections with others.

Icelandic-Canadian historiography retains a remarkable insularity. Repetition of the purified story of John Ramsay's help during the early years of settlement continues to silence Native voices. Nostalgic or sentimental acknowledgement of Native assistance, although well intentioned, does not allow for cultural difference. It does not take into account Native understandings and experiences. The Other remains an extension of Icelandic identification with

the victimhood that they, coming from a colonized and disenfranchised land, thought was a link between themselves and Native peoples. At the same time, they were in the position of colonizer, a situation some people found deeply troubling and others found acceptable.

Forgetting is a powerful cognitive tool for self-defence. Forgetting operates at both individual and collective levels; it insulates the subject from shame or culpability and from reliving traumatic events. It is an interim strategy for physical and emotional survival. But if we dismiss the past and its injustices, we fail to recognize the persistent relevance of history and memory in shaping present-day identities. Today, First Nations peoples in Canada struggle against powerful forces of forgetfulness. These forces operate throughout Canadian society, in Canada's judicial, educational and political practices, in the attitudes and behaviours of Euro-Canadians and in First Nations communities. Yet the guarded optimism of the late anthropologist Sally Weaver does not seem out of place. She describes the emergence of a "permanent organic relationship," which recognizes that "cultures change and evolve over time" without leading towards convergence or assimilation (cf. Brydon 1987, 1990a/b, 1991). Initiatives in anthropological and historical research have sought to decolonize the writing of Canadian culture and history, to document the existence of many histories, many narratives told from differing perspectives.

In the first years of Icelandic settlement there was acrimonious debate, triggered by hardships, over whether the choice to come to New Iceland had been the right one. During the next decades, not all Icelanders bought into the myth-making about a more congenial past, which community leaders found conducive to their economic and political interests. But the dissenting voices remain locked in diaries and letters written in Icelandic and hidden in several archives in Canada and Iceland (Ólafsson and Magnússon). A young generation of historians in Iceland is only now turning to these stories. No parallel initiative is emerging in Icelandic-Canadian scholarship, although alternative histories and difficult truths have been told through fiction and poetry. The early short stories by W.D. Valgardson shocked his contemporaries by their frank telling of suffering, alcoholism, poverty and suicide. Gunnars' literary works (1980; 1983), based on her archival research into Icelandic settlement in Canada, evoke the psychic pain that the proximity of death must have caused the early settlers. Her writings evoke a bush of ghosts, the fear of which could only be tamed by recognizing that – unlike Sigtryggur Jónasson's stories of nomadic Indians – the Saulteaux experienced their lives and their sense of identity through a deep attachment to the land being taken from them. Such a potent attachment to place would have resonated with the reality Icelandic settlers had left behind in the homeland, where identities are connected inextricably to farms and landmarks. Gunnars came to Canada from Iceland as a young woman and was not socialized into a standard story of Icelandic-Canadian history; this may help explain her perspective.

Can the Icelandic practice of dream interpretation generate other interpretations of Trausti's dream about John Ramsay and his wife's grave? For Icelanders, as for the Saulteaux, the boundary between human existence and the animate qualities of other orders of being was quite shadowy. Dreams are thought to give access to an external, immanent reality that is difficult to contact in a waking state. Certain features can have direct meanings or can be prophetic: dream of a bear, be wary of meeting a powerful man. Sometimes people dream of the hidden people (huldafólk) who co-habit the island and choose when to make themselves visible to ordinary people, from whom they will typically extract a favour. In dreams, the dead return to let loved ones know of their passing and to say goodbye. Many deaths in pre-modern Iceland occurred at sea, when open boats would capsize and the people fishing from them – mostly men – disappeared forever. These dreams seem to provide a closure or finality to death that the body's absence would have left unfinished.

The topic of dreams and dream interpretation is a favourite one amongst Icelanders and Icelandic-Canadians, and the latter refer to this as evidence that their Icelandicness extends over generations born in Canada. Stories of significant dreams can be found in the medieval saga literature in Iceland, and interpreting dreams is a continuous folkloric practice. In nineteenth-century Iceland, keeping dream diaries was a popular addition to the flourishing practice of diary writing. An already existing practice of dream interpretation was given new cultural force by its merger with a form of self-inscription that, arguably, was part of a new intellectual means for rethinking the self during the early stages of modernization in Iceland.

The Icelandic immigrants brought with them an understanding that dreams are significant. From an Icelandic perspective, Trausti's obedience to Ramsay's request requires no explanation. Trausti's visit from a recently deceased person is not unusual – it concerns someone dead bringing a message from "the other side" that must be taken seriously (Einarsson). The threat of an unhappy ghost exacting revenge was greater than a similar threat from the same person while alive. That the ghost was also Aboriginal and had justifiable reasons to be aggrieved would have added to a sense of danger. The dream requires an act of completion. In Douglas's terms, obeying such a dream acts to restore the moral order by closing and solidifying the boundary between life and death. It is in keeping with this world-view that Trausti's dream should become part of Icelandic-Canadian folklore.

Before their arrival in North America, Icelanders had heard tales of murderous Indians. They knew of violent encounters between their ancestors and Aboriginal peoples – skrælings – from the sagas of Leifur Eiríksson's voyages. The contradictory experience of peaceable Native peoples offering needed help must have been confusing enough. Add to that the psychic pain exacted by the harsh, unfamiliar prairie environment, interactions with various unfamiliar nationalities and languages and acrimonious debates over the future direction of the colony: all of this must have been difficult for early settlers to deal with. Fear and pain can be turned inwards and lead to alcoholism, depression and suicide, all of which did occur. But fear and pain can also be externalized onto the social or natural environment. Ghosts can in some cases be thought of as such externalizations.

The transfer of Trausti's personal dream into a larger cultural realm is significant to the structuring of ethnic myths of identity, which take complex realities and render them safe and simple. In Kristofferson's telling, when Trausti, who was poor, obeys Ramsay and performs an act of restoration, he is rewarded with fish (Trausti's daughter says this is not true). The moral is clear: attend to the wishes of the dead, and order is restored. I suspect that Icelanders at the turn of the century knew of Ramsay's plight, and some were conflicted by the morally ambiguous position in which it placed them. Icelanders interacted and learned from Natives and intermarried with them. Anecdotal evidence indicates a mixed history of reciprocity and prejudice. The dream can be interpreted as a symbolic attempt to offer restitution to Ramsay and to return a sense of order. At a social level, however, the dream also closes the narrative of Icelandic-Saulteaux interactions, giving the mistaken impression that this is all there is to say on the topic. Each generation writes its history anew in order to revitalize cultural meaning. At this historic moment, not to question the myth of harmonious relations between Icelanders and Native peoples is to limit understanding of the present as well as of the past, and to shut down a necessary rethinking of how identities are made.

Endnotes

1. My thanks to Jennifer Brown, Jim Gallo, Nelson Gerrard, Daisy Neijmann, Haraldur Ólafsson, Gísli Pálsson, Raymond Shirritt-Beaumont, Winona Stevenson, Tóta Vigfússon, and Helga Ögmundardóttir. Some of the costs of this

research were paid for by funds provided by the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Social Science, University of Western Ontario. This article is a corrected version of one appearing in the Journal of Canadian Studies (2001; 36(2): 164-190).

2. The number of Ramsay's children varies in different accounts, but those written closest to the time of the events described cite five children, and not two or four.

3. This is a general explanation for why some Icelanders emigrated, but the motivations were more numerous and complex than can be adequately accounted for here.

4. An unpublished exception is Winona Stevenson, "Icelanders and Indians in the Interlake: John Ramsay and the White Mud River" (University of Winnipeg, 1986).

5. Sessional Papers (No. (8), 39 Victoria A1876); published in translation from the original Icelandic.

6. Morris Papers, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG12 B1 1066.

7. Public Archives, Indian Affairs, RG10, Volume 3646, File 8064, Reel C-10113.

8. Public Archives, Indian Affairs, RG10, Volume 3646, File 8064, Reel C-10113.

9. Public Archives, Indian Affairs, RG10, Volume 3646, File 8064, Reel C-10113.

10. Morris Papers, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG12 B1 1458, 1466

11. Annuities were regular sums of cash or cash equivalents (for example housing) paid by the British administration to First Nations peoples in exchange for title to their lands. The practice began in 1817. Annuities were more economical for the British administration than a single cash payment, since the government could use revenues generated by selling parts of the land to settlers and land speculators.

12. RG10, Vol. 3646, File 8064.

13. Public Archives, Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol. 3649, File 8200, Reel C-10113. The Indian Act of 1876 has governed, and in modified form continues to govern, the lives of status Indians. In Brian Titley's words, the Indian Act is "a comprehensive piece of legislation which confirmed the Indians' status as minors and wards of the state, imposed restrictions on their civil liberties and created a mechanism whereby they could cast off these disabilities. It was assumed that the Native peoples would ultimately acquire full citizenship, but that could only take place when they had become 'civilized' – a transformation which would make them culturally indistinguishable from the white populations" (Titley 1997: 35).

14. Ibid.

15. Provincial Archives of Manitoba, LB/M, Morris Papers, Morris to the Minister of the Interior, 29 June 1877.

16. Ibid.

17. Public Archives, RG10, Vol.3649, File 8200, Reel C-10113.

18. Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol. 3649, File 8200, Reel C-10113.

19. Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol. 3649, File 8200, Reel C-10113.

20. The Canadian government appointed William.C. Krieger and Sigtryggur Jónasson as Icelandic immigration agents. Krieger travelled to Iceland in 1875, and in his report from Akureyri of 14 November, he states, "I visited a farm house in this vicinity a few days ago and was shown a letter from one of the Icelanders now in Wisconsin, dated 8 September; in which it said that letters had been received from Messrs Taylor and Johnson; the former acknowledging that he had a divine revelation in which it had been imposed upon him to take the affairs of the Icelanders in his hands.... I shall refrain from arguing the validity of a Divine revelation in regard to Mr. Taylor's proposed general scheme; as I deem it to be of no consequence in reference to the Icelandic emigration...."

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Frederickson honoured

Recipient of prestigious Aboriginal Achievement Award

Taken from the University of Manitoba newsletter

Kristinn Frederickson has won many awards, but none of them hold a candle to the one he received last week.

The University of Manitoba engineering student was announced the youth recipient of a prestigious Aboriginai Achievement Award, a top honour that is conferred on just 14 people each year. Only one youth recipient is named per year.

"It's such an honour; the award is analogous to the Order of Canada for Aboriginal peopie," Frederickson said. "lt's the highest honour the Aboriginal community can give."

An anecdote he's shared more than a few times in the past week, Frederickson learned he had won the award en route to the Pas. A woman from the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation called his cell phone to confirm he had received a fax she had sent earlier in the day. Frederickson hadn't, and the representative from the NAAF wouldn't reveal any details over the phone. She did agree, however, to resend the fax to Frederickson's father.

"I called my dad and he read it out to me. He started to get choked up as he was reading it, and then I started to get a bit choked up too."

Frederickson was given the award in recognition of the significant contributions he's already made to the Aboriginai community, the University of Manitoba and the field of biosystems engineering.

As an honour-roll undergraduate, Frederickson examined the state of wastewater treatment facilities on 61 northern reserves. He found that far too many of them — nearly 75 per cent—didn't meet federal standards for acceptable treatment. As a master's student, he's set to work on fixing the problem.

His work focuses on membrane bioreactors, which he believes have the potential to provide better wastewater treatment for Aboriginal communities in the North. The bioreactors are relatively easy to automate, can be run on a smaller reactor than conventionai treatment systems and potentially be operated at a lower cost.

Frederickson credits the U of M's Engineering Access Program, or ENGAP as it's most commonly called, in helping him reach his goals as an engineer. He points out that of 150,000 registered professional engineers in Canada, just 150 are Aboriginal. Of those 150, approximately one-third have graduated from ENGAP.

UENGAP has been instrumental in all of this," he says. "They provide all the support that Aboriginal students could need. It's the best program in Canada of its kind. It's without peer, really."

Frederickson says for now he plans to continue focusing his efforts on drinking and waste water treatment. Broadly speaking, he's planning a career in social policy development within the environmental sector.

And if past successes are any indication, he'll likely continue to be recognized for his wide-ranging achievements, too. He's already racked up awards or scholarships from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Councii, Xerox

Canada, the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation and others. He's held engineering-related jobs In Canada and Australia, and in spite of a busy academic schedule has been involved in a range of on and off-campus extracurricular activities.

Fredenckson has sat on the university of Manitoba's Board of Governors, the Aboriginal U-Crew that encourages Aboriginal students to pursue postsecondary studies at the U of M as well as the Biosystems Engineering student group. He's also been recognized under the Metis Youth Role Model Program as an ambassador for Metis youth.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PAT EYOLFSON

Halli Vigfusson's home being readied for the move to the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village.

Ballad of John Ramsay

by Kristine Johnson

On the shores of great Mistechesakahegan lived the peaceful,
mighty hunters of old,
Cree Ojibwa, Anishinabe, Assiniboine, Saulteaux. So we are
told.
As they could see, the Icelanders who began to come in eighteen
seventy-five
Were struggling with a strange, harsh land. The hunters helped
them to survive.
They showed the settlers how to use moss to chink up their
drafty wooden homes.
They taught them the use of bow and arrow, often brought veni-
son to the door,
Showed them how to fish the frozen waters,
Brought them native medicine to ease the smallpox.
Without the helpful hunters, many settlers might have perished.

Many there were of the helpful hunters. The names of most have
long been lost,
But the name of one will not be forgotten. John Ramsay helped
all at a very great cost.
Betsey, his wife, succumbed to the smallpox, along with four of
their children so dear.
Yet in spite of such personal tragedy, John Ramsay continued to
bring good cheer.
He hunted and fished to feed the Icelanders.
He helped them to warm their cold wooden houses.

Dear Betsey he buried on the shores of Gitchie gumee
Near the lake sounds she loved. This had been their dear
home.

He dragged a heavy gravestone all the way from Fort Garry,
Built a sturdy fence, grave and stone now within.
With his one surviving daughter, John built a northern home.
The land around the gravesite became someone's farm.
Over many years cattle trampled down the grave.
In his far northern home, John heard of the damage,
But nobody listened when John asked that it be repaired.
And so, John died, his request unheeded.

Yet, strange as it seems, the message is later heard.
A young man named Trausti sees in a dream
Tall and handsome, as he had been in life,
John Ramsay asks Trausti to rebuild the fence.
A promise quickly given in dream, so soon forgotten,
And after many months, John returns in a dream.
"Trausti, Trausti, have you forgotten your promise?"
Ashamed and remorseful, Trausti renews his pledge.
Though very poor, he provides the lumber needed,
Builds a sturdy fence with the pickets he makes.
And from that day, his life becomes richer,
He always has food for his family now.
Throughout his long life, Trausti always found employment as a
master carpenter.
And now Betsey Ramsay's grave is well preserved at Sandy Bar.

Performed in a 4-beat meter, accompanied by a background of a native drum and a chant of minor third.

Letters from Friðjón Friðriksson

Translated by Sigurbjörg Stefansson

Friðjón Friðriksson

Letter # 10 - To Housewife Laura Pjetursdottir
Gimli, May 1, 1876

Dear Friend:

Recently I received your letter written on March the 22nd for which I thank you very much. It is difficult for us "New-Icelanders" to have correspondence with people outside of our vicinity since the post office, which is closest to Gimli, is 30 miles away. Occasionally we get our mail from this post office, depending on who happens to be going there.

We have asked the Government for regular mail delivery to Gimli and we do hope that that request will be granted.

For a while, this winter, I was hoping that your husband would move to this colony, but that hope has come to nothing for the time being. To tell you the truth, I am glad for you that you decided not to come because you would have faced a lot of difficulties - inseparable from pioneer life-- difficulties which I am sure that you do not have now. Presently we are in the process of "breaking the ice" (i.e. overcome the difficulties) and if we go on it will be broken, and then I shall ask you to join us.

You asked me to give you information about our colony and views on it - and I am most glad to do this for you.

You have probably seen the report which the Icelandic committee gave last summer and which the Canadian Government has published. In my opinion, this report is reliable as far as it goes.

The soil is excellent. On top of the clay there is a layer of a very fertile black soil, approximately 1 foot deep. There is enough forest to provide us with sufficient fire wood and sufficient material for log cabin building. There is, however, not too much of 'spruce" for making boards and there is no pine at all. There is also plenty of meadows for livestock to graze. Last fall fishing was good-- as usually is the case, supposedly. At that time we did not, however, have time to do too much fishing, but this winter many of us caught a lot of fish in nets which were lain under the ice, and since early spring a considerable amount of fish has been caught, mostly all of which is edible. Constructions for drying fish--like those in Iceland-- have started to pop up here. It is a pity, though, that the fishing is not very profitable because there is no market for fish outside the colony because there is enough fish in the Red River and all over Lake Manitoba. Thus the nearest market for our fish is no closer than the United States. Fishing is a hazardous business - if the catch fails the fisherman goes bankrupt except if he happened to be very well off before - therefore it is necessary to go about this business with a great amount of carefulness. It is , by the way, a true blessing for us to get this fish because now everyone has enough to eat, and many preserve the fish by salting it or drying it - keeping it for the time to come. At the time when we started to catch the fish we were just about running out of food, just about having to start to eat wheat and beans which we had intended to use as seed, but now I hope that these things don't have to be spent.

Since early April the weather has been calm, usually the sky has been clear and the sun has been shining. It has been warm during the day and there has been slight frost at night. By early spring the snow started to melt, but the soil is now quite dry yet. Soon, however, we shall start to burn wood piles on the newly cleared land and begin sowing in this land in this week and throughout the month. We are going to sow: wheat, beans, and potatoes and various kinds of vegetables.

Red River is clear of ice, but Lake Winnipeg is still covered with ice. Most think that this ice is not going to disappear until late this month.

The cold was often severe here last winter, some days it was even 45 below zero. I found it more tolerable, however, than the cold in Ontario. We had storms only rarely.

In addition to the $10,000 which the Government granted us last summer ($7,500 as a loan, but $2,500 as grants for the journey, not to be payed back) it has now lent us $5,000 in the form of food, seed, and utensils. Most of this loan has reached us by now.

Please, pardon my handwriting. I would love to hear from you or from Rev. Jon - but I suppose that he is constantly busy writing other things. What news can you tell of Jon Olafsson and his Alaska expedition. I wish you and your husband all the best.

Your friend,

Fr. Fridriksson

Letter #11
Gimli, Nov 27, 1876

Dear Friend: (apparently Laura Pjetursdottir)

Finally, I am going to thank you for the letter which you wrote to me last summer, which I received long ago. I have no excuse for not answering you except my carelessness and laziness, neither of which can be regarded as an excuse - but I assumed that H. Briem, Sigtryggur, and Pall would tell you all the news from this colony. But finally I am writing, and unfortunately I have to tell you bad news - namely that the colony has been struck by smallpox. At first we thought that it had been brought here by a young boy who had been ill with smallpox, and who had been hospitalized in Quebec, but later it appeared that the illness had already reached the colony before this boy came. A man here had been ill with smallpox. It is most likely that he became infected on some ship or another on which he was traveling, or he might have become infected by clothing which he bought and which might have been contaminated before he bought it. The disease spread slowly at first, and therefore we had no idea that it could be smallpox, but some 3 weeks ago it began to spread rapidly. Then we sent for a doctor who arrived in a few days. He maintains that this disease is, in fact, smallpox disease and it seems, in fact, pretty obvious. All are not equally hard hit by the illness. Those who have recently been vaccinated only

become slightly ill or not at all. Furthermore, those who have good housing, and clean air, and good sanitary conditions recover very rapidly. Unfortunately, sanitation is insufficient in most households for which many have to pay, and it is a pity that those who are not to blame often suffer.

Approximately 30 have died from the disease and 120 are ill. Most of those who have passed away are children and teenagers. A new warehouse in Gimli is now being turned into a hospital. Tomorrow patients are to be transferred there. The doctor has recommended to the Governor of Manitoba and Keewatin that he immediately isolate the colony - which he most likely will do. Groceries and other necessities are to be brought from Winnipeg to a certain place where we can pick these up, but no other trips are to be allowed from the colony.

There is no end to the Icelanders' troubles here in Canada. Sigtryggur was ill for a few days, but he has recovered, and no one else in his family has become ill. My brother, Arni, who lives in my house, has been ill for a week, but he has recuperated. I and my wife have escaped the disease so far, but I don't expect us to be able to escape it altogether. The doctor thinks that the Icelanders are not as hard hit by this disease as most others because generations of us have been vaccinated. A few Indians in the colony became ill with the smallpox. Most of them died from it, others fled. Most Icelanders who have recovered from the smallpox have many scars. Now vaccination is to take place for prevention purposes.

The government has lent Icelanders food, stoves, and cows. Moreover, it is having a road built crossing the entire length of the colony, spending at least a few thousand dollars on it. This road will help improve our conditions and hopefully it will help prevent Icelanders from starving to death. But those Icelanders who came here last fall are now on their own and most of them seem to manage to make ends meet. Their crop, however, failed - as could be expected - because the soil was not sufficiently prepared for sowing in the spring, and in the summer we had a lot of rain.

In early October the weather was bad, and it was constantly changing, but in late October we had "Indian Summer" which lasted until the middle of November. Around the middle of November the lake froze. The frost was not very severe, usually around zero, but we had a lot of snow.

Rev. Pall Thorlaksson has written and offered his services as a minister for the colony. He asked for a list of the names of those who want him to come. 200 names have been put on that list. He is not asking any specific salary. Even though I am known for minding others' business, I am going to ignore this matter. I do not know the synod personally, but I have only heard bad things about it. However, since we do need a minister, I am going to say this time: "They can do whatever they like."

I and my wife are doing O. K., we are well and we manage financially. Last fall I started a small store, the only one in the colony. Even though it is not very big I hope that both I and those who do business with me profit because it is really difficult for people around here to go all the way to Winnipeg for their necessities.

I only accept cash as a payment. I manage to keep the prices low since I get my merchandise through John Taylor, the Icelandic agent, who in turn buys a lot for the Icelanders using Government money.

I cannot recall anything else to write about this time, but I am going to add to it later.

Please remember me to Rev. Jón. I hope that he does not regret my writing back but not to him this time. After all, he was the one who brought about this state of affairs.

Best wishes to you,
Sincerely yours,

Fr. Fridriksson

CORRECTION: *Letter #7 in the last issue (Volume 58, #2, page 68): this letter was written to Rev. Jon Bjarnason. The date should read Gimli, January 13, 1879.*

Jón Ragnavaldsson bust in Akereryi Botannical Garden.

Iceland Adventure

by Kristin Stefansson

Nearly twelve hundred years ago, Vikings and other Norse settlers ventured through foggy fjords to carve out a home on Iceland's rugged shores. Their exploits were recorded in numerous sagas that survive to this day. Last summer, we sought to re-connect with some of those hardy souls as we hunted for our "roots". Traveling with me on this adventure were my parents, Mary Jane and Irvin (Rick) Stefansson, and my aunt, Lois Martin. Iceland didn't disappoint. Here is a portion of our saga.

My grandfather was born in Iceland and came to Canada at the age of six with his father, step- mother, older brother and sister. All we knew was that he had come from "somewhere near Akureyri."

Hofsós, we were told, was the place to do our research. It is the home of an Icelandic Emigration Centre that links families who left Iceland for North America with those who stayed behind.

Hofsós is a tiny village nestled on a picturesque fjord. Restoration work is taking place on many buildings. They are being painted black so they appear to have been coated by tar. In the past, a thick coat of tar protected the precious wood from damage by the salty spray. Within those walls we found an informative museum, extensive library and an impressive computer research system.

It wasn't long before Wincie Jóhannsdóttir, a researcher at the emigration centre, asked us about the family member we were researching. She entered the name Stefan Petursson, emigrant to Canada in 1887, into the computer. It directed her to a book on the library shelf. She quickly flipped to a page that revealed a copy of a very familiar photo - that of my great-grandfather. The text, written in Icelandic, gave information about Stefan Petursson's life and family. The next page held a surprising photo of my grandfather, Arni Stefansson, as an adult -- he had left Iceland as a child of six years -- and of uncles and cousins. The delight turned to amazement when the next page had my father and his sister staring at photos of themselves. The translation we received had accurate details about our lives: birth dates, home towns, education, even wedding dates, complete with my mother's maiden name, and Wilfred Martin as Aunty Lois's husband. When asked how this was possible, we were told that information was brought from the Gimli Library and put into the Icelandic Emigration Centre database.

Wincie informed us that the Petursson family left a farm named "Sigluvik" which was a short distance across the fjord from the city of Akureyri. Eureka! The trail was getting as hot as geysir water!

Before leaving Hofsós, we had the "diSTINKt" pleasure of sharing some shark meat with the patrons at the Hofsós Inn and its owners, the Thorvaldsson family. The shark meat, which had been aging for 8 weeks, was a gift from our relative in Selfoss, Ólafur Ólafsson. He made us promise to try it. We first had to find a location that didn't mind the strong smell of this delicacy, and would serve us the requisite Brennivin as the perfect aperitif. There was another reason we had to do this in a public place: we needed witnesses. Some Snórris from Canada served us well in this capacity. A "Snórri" is a North American youth of Icelandic descent who spends six weeks nurturing his/her Icelandic heritage. Not only did they watch us indulge, they were invited to partake. Take my hákarl. Please!

The evening was memorable for other reasons. We had the awesome experience of

watching the midnight sun dip to the northern horizon, slide sideways for about an hour in an eastward direction, then slowly begin its ascent into the northern sky. Our vantage point was the edge of a perfectly still lake just north of Hofsós, sky and water sharing shades of pink and dark lavender.

Our quest continued to Akureyri and Sigluvik, my grandfather's birthplace. Akureyri is the second largest city in Iceland, situated on the north-central coast. It has the reputation of providing the warmest and sunniest climate on the island, and it delivered a warm welcome to us.

After checking into our Bed and Breakfast, we crossed the long causeway to arrive on the east coast of Eyjafjordur. A short drive north brought us to a farm with the sign "Sigluvik" at the entrance. The long drive took us to a house nestled above the fjord. We spilled out of the car and approached the house. We stood at the base of the steps as my father, Irvin, went to the door and knocked. A young man appeared at the door, a phone occupying his attention. He signaled to us to wait while he completed his conversation. Dad told him why we were at his doorstep. He was completely delighted when he heard that the offspring of a man born in 1881 on that very yard had found their way back for a visit. He welcomed us in with a universal statement, "Please come in. Excuse house. Wife away.... I baby sitting." With a hearty laugh, we were graciously escorted into his neat bright living room and invited to sit down.

"What was your grandfather's name?" The answer sent him to his library, from which he retrieved a book, about 1-1/4 inches thick. Opening it to the chapter covering the late 19th century, my dad and his sister were once again looking at a photograph of their grandfather. It was our turn for a question. "What does it say 'in English?'" Eric, the current tenant of the farm, tried to interpret with the help of his ten-year-old son who has just begun to study English at school. With a few words and many gestures, the game of charades revealed that my great grandfather had owned the farm, 4 fishing boats, each with a 4 man crew (a large fleet for that era) and served as an administrator in the community. With a great struggle, and the assistance of an Icelandic-English dictionary, 'administrator' was translated as person elected to solve problems among neighbours. If a sheep had done damage to a neighbour's crop, he would be the one to resolve the differences.

Erik explained that this historic book held the records of every family who had lived for at least 2 years at Sigluvik from the year 1100 onward. Entries include information about the families, their occupation, names of children, anecdotes of interest that had happened on the farm, and a vivid description of each dwelling that had existed on the yard. These descriptions were so complete that an artist could draw

At Hofsós, we have Valgeir Thorvaldsson, Lois Martin, Rick and Mary Jane Stefansson, Wincie Jóhannsdóttir and Kristin Stefansson.

an illustration of each home. The farm was named Sigluvik by the first owners, 900 years ago, and will never be changed. The book stays with the property and is continuously updated as required. We were awestruck at this efficient record keeping.

Erik took us on a tour of his home. One room was full of medals and trophies. When asked whom these medals belonged to, Erik admitted with a shy smile that he had been the Icelandic cross-country skiing champion for several years, and had represented his country at the Albertville Olympics. Another unforgettable day in Iceland! It was not to be our last.

Akureyri hugs the steep slope of a magnificent fjord. It was the home of our next search. This time, we were looking for real roots, as in the roots below trees. In the late 1960's, a relative had visited the Stefansson family in Tyndall. His name was Jón Ragnvaldsson. My father and aunt remembered that he had worked at an experimental farm in the city of Akureyri. He went back to Iceland with a variety of Manitoba plants. We know he took poplar, spruce and birch trees from our farm in Tyndall. After my grandfather Arni Stefansson passed away in 1970, we lost touch with him.

We easily located the city's botanical garden. The office directed us to a bronze bust of our relative. The receptionist told us she could bring out a record of all the plants he had gathered, or we could just look for all of the tallest trees, since they were the original ones he planted in the late 60's. Some of those trees were now 20 metres tall. This is truly unusual for this land at the edge of the Arctic Circle. A favourite joke asks "What should you do if you get lost in a forest in Iceland?" The answer.... "Stand up!". Shrubs were the largest plants we had seen in our travels that had taken us nearly three-quarters of the way around the island.

Gazing at the only real forest we had seen on this trip, we imagined how proud Jon would have been to see the progress of the project he had started over 30 years ago. He passed away in 1973, and we were very sorry we didn't have time to search for any of his family who might still be in the area.

When we left Canada, we knew we wanted to visit Klungurbrekka on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. This was where my great-great-grandmother, Karitas Gudmundsdóttir, had lived before emigrating to Canada. The twice-widowed Karitas arrived in Canada with several of her children in 1883, among them the 14-year-old Gudmundur Kristjan Gudlaugsson who later became my great-grandfather. The family changed their name to Breckman. Gudmundur eventually married Jakobina Isleifsdottir, and their first child, Kristin Breckman, born in 1898, was my grandmother. "Amma" died in her 103rd year. She had managed to return to her family's former farm twice in the 1970's. She was the one who had stayed in touch with relatives in Selfoss. We owe much gratitude to Ólafur and his wife Gyda as well as their children who helped us plan our "root-seeking" tour of Iceland. We covered many miles in our short 14-day stay.

The choice of souvenirs from Iceland was quite simple. My parents and aunt decided that each of their children and grandchildren should get a ponnukokur pan. Ponnukokur was a special treat Amma always seemed to have on hand when we would visit. She continued to make them until her death in July 2000. Ólafur, our Selfoss cousin, took on the task of finding two dozen pans for us. When we arrived to pick up the pans from the aluminum factory where they are made, we discovered that we were related to the manufacturer. This was the same style of pan used by our beloved Amma to make her delicious "birthday pancakes." This is the name used by our family for ponnukokur, as no birthday ever passed without them being served.

In July, we made our way back to the Keflavík airport for the flight home, toting 24 ponnukokur pans. Since our return, many of them have begun to produce the crepes that are so important a part of family special occasions. These pans will be passed on, as Amma's has been, from one generation to the next. At these gatherings, as we savour this Icelandic specialty. we carry on the great Icelandic tradition.

Jonas and Johanna Danielson. Photo taken approximately 1915-1917.

Johanna

by Chester Donaldson

Until I was about eight years of age my grandmother, who could not speak English, lived on a farm about eight miles from where my parents and their children lived. It was always a joy to hear that we were going to "Grandma's" for the day. It was about a two hour trip with the horses and wagon, or sleigh, depending on the season. Grandma would meet us at the door with hugs and kisses, and her Icelandic greeting, "Kundu Sael". My sisters and I would return the greeting, and with an added half dozen other words, there wasn't much more verbal communication between kids and grandma. Our mother, on the other hand, could carry on a continuous chatter until time to start the two hour drive home to "get the cows milked". For the first five years of those eight years, my grandfather was confined to his bed; in fact, he spent the last twelve years in bed. I never did see him out of it until he died when I was five. He was in the living room then in a dark wooden box, and my mother answered my questioning look with, "Grandpa is sleeping". That didn't make sense to me, and in time, when I didn't see him anymore, I concluded that grandpa died, whatever that meant.

Grandma was a gracious, kind and loving person, with a slight shake in her almost eighty-year-old hands, and a constant smile on her lips. Those hands, though, could whip up and cook delicious donuts and cookies. We could always count on having piles of both ready when we arrived, if she knew we were coming. Of course, there were no telephones connecting the two farms in those days, and we didn't even have homing pigeons to deliver a message. I still use her recipe to make donuts at Northland Bible Camp, where I still do a bit of cooking. Our guests never did sample grandma's delicacy, and can't compare mine with hers, but the compliments prove that they are enjoyed. I can inwardly smile and thank Grandma.

The two farms mentioned above were situated in the heart of the Swan River Valley, some 320 miles northwest of Winnipeg. This beautiful valley lies between two picturesque mountains, the Porcupine Hills to the west and north, and the Duck Mountains to the south and southeast. The latter straddles the provincial boundary between Manitoba and Saskachewan. Until the latter part of the nineteenth century the valley was covered with a luxurient growth of trees of many kinds. The mountains carried a wealth of trees suitable for lumber, just waiting on men to harvest them. The Swan River ran the length of the valley, and eventually emptied into the Swan Lake some twenty miles north east of the edge of the flat land. A trail known as "The Pelly Trail" also followed the ridges and meadows from the town of the same name inside the Sakachewan border and ended on the shores of the lake. Indians made and used this walkway with its ideal camping spots along the way to the lake. My nephew, Marlin Sercombe, an ardent collector of ancient artifacts, Indian arrowheads, etc. has located many of these not far from the farm where he grew up.

During the 1890s and in the first decade of the 20th century, a prospective farmer could pay a $ 10.00 registration fee and "homestead" a quarter section of land. This offer enticed many people to move from many parts of the world to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity. The years of untold hardships and unimag-

inable heavy work were hidden in the unforeseen future. No railroad or highway came closer than one hundred miles, but undauunted families brought their possessions in a covered wagon, or if no possessions, a packsack on their back would care for the camping gear to survive the trek. Along the river bank, in the centre of the valley, a "Tent City" developed. As the years went on this group of tents became the hub of the valley, and the Town of Swan River.

But the story of "my Icelandic Grandma" starts a long way back in another land, with sorrow and hardship, a long ocean trip, and a sojourn in North Dakota of about thirteen years.

It was to the hopeful "Utopia" in the Swan River Valley that my grandparents, Jonas and Johanna Danielson, brought their family of seven children, and joined the residents of this growing tent city. The year was 1903. My mother, Gudrun, aged ten, was one of the children.

ICELAND

Iceland is sometimes called, "The Land of Fire and Ice." Geysers spurt out hot water, and steam high into the air. Volcanoes spit fire. In and around Reykjavik many homes, greenhouses and industrial plants are heated and powered by the hot water from the underground springs. In contrast to this fire and hot water, about one tenth of the land surface is covered by glaciers, and snow fields. One travel advertisement describes Iceland as, "a land of volcanoes, giant waterfalls, Viking Museums, concerts, art shows, and hot pools". Moon-like lava fields interest tourists. Dusk at midnight in summer, and dusk at noon in winters make for intersting contrasts.

When my grandfather was born in 1839, and grew up on a sheep farm, there was also deep poverty experienced by almost everyone on the isolated Island. Into another poor farm family there was born a baby girl who received the name, Johanna Johannesdottir. When she was about 25 years-old she became the second wife of Jonas Danielson, and they started life together on a characteristically poor farm, with Jonas' children from his first marriage. Raising sheep seems to have provided the principal source of income. Still today, the Icelandic wool is sought after for warm, heavy sweaters. (I have two! One was made from wool raised on my sister's farm in Swan River Valley, and knit by Gudrun, my mother. The second was knit for me, from yarn from Iceland, by my beloved wife, Marion).

The family-record pages of Johanna's beautiful Icelandic Bible clearly indicate the depth of poverty and sorrow that Jonas and Johanna experienced. Twelve names of their children are recorded, three of whom died the same year in which they were born, and another before she was two years old. This last one was Baby Sigurhlif.

The family decided to seek a better life in America. Jonas helped his wife and little

children board a "Tramp Steamer" bound for Scotland. There they tranferred to an ocean liner for Canada.

Accomodation was primitive, crowded, and uncomfortable in every way. Danger from a floating iceburg caused deep concern for a day and night. Following that time of danger, the ship encountered bad weather and rough seas. Sickness was rampant, and Johanna was barely conscious and unable to attend to her little flock of children. As she recovered she realized that baby Sigurhlif was very ill. The sorrowing mother saw her pass into the presence of the Lord from her very arms, and buried at sea.

Life was not that easy in the windswept praries of North Dakota, but evidently there was more wholesome food available and milk for the babies, as beginning with Kristen, born 1889, seven of the family lived into adult life, some to old age. Gudrun, my mother, lived to over 101.

Another one born, Danielia, was born in 1896, but died the following year.

The family as listed in the Bible record, and the Canadian Nicknames of each:

Johanna	Born
1883	Died 1883
Ingibjorg	
1884	1884
Gudbjorg	
1885	1886
SigurhIif	
1887	1888
Sigurhlif the second	
1888	1915
Kristen	Tiny
1889	1967
Ingibjorg	Emma
1891	1935
Haldor	Haldor
1892	1954
Gudrun	Gertie
1893	1995
Johann	Joe
1895	??*
Danielia	
1896	1897
Gudbjorg	Bertha
1902	1980

Note: Uncle Joe would work in various places, and occasionally come to the family farm for a brief stay. The last time he just didn't return.

The fifteen years in North Dakota, on a farm near the town of Upton, must have been difficult, if not as hard as in Iceland, according to some of things we were told by our mother. The open prairie allowed the winds to blow strong and cold. In winter snow would drift over the barn to a degree where the children would slide down the roof on their homemade sleighs and toboggans. Jonas found it necessary to string a rope from the door of the barn to the door of the house to enable him to go from one to the other during blizzards that were fierce and frequent. In a series of fictitious, but factual books about North Dakota, entitled *The Red River of the North,* written by Lauraine Snelling, this practice was mentioned as a necessity for survival. Many men perished in the snow and cold when caught away from home when a blizzard struck.

Apparently the fifteen years of hardship and hard work enabled the family to collect a few cattle, sheep and other possessions, but wanderlust and enticing invitations from relatives in Tent City created a desire to "pack it in" and pack it up. Another long and difficult journey lay ahead of the decision. As we understand the story, the possessions described above were moved one way and another to the big City to the north across the 49th parallel, Winnipeg. There it was all loaded into a boxcar, and booked to the end of the railroad north at Dauphin. Jonas rode with the cattle, and Johanna and the children were put in the passenger section. A recent addition to the "family" had been a wee, affectionate puppy, but puppies were not allowed in the passenger car. Undaunted, Johanna tucked him inside her blouse and cuddled him and coaxed him to silence whenever the conducter approached. Both arrived safely in Dauphin in due time.

Only wagon roads pushed farther north into the frontier, so from there a covered wagon, pulled by a team of horses, would be home for all, and each would take

a turn at urging the cows and sheep along behind. Ten miles per day would seem like a good estimate of accomplishment, so it was no picnic! The first view of Tent City would have brought many sighs of relief.

In the first year the Danielson family lived with a family of relatives in a small house on their farm. We can just imagine the crowded situation with wall to wall people! Later Jonas was able to obtain a farm north-east of the town in what became the Croppertops School area. To that school Gudrun and some of her siblings walked through sloughs, bush and meadows. On occasions, sightings of moose caused a bit of excitement and concern. There Gudrun reached what she called "The third book." Her knowledge and wisdom went far beyond that level! But this story is about Johanna, my Icelandic Grandma", and I mustn't digress too much!

A new town was growing about twelve miles north of Swan River, named Bowsman River, and this became the shopping centre. Roads were but wagon trails, drainage was next to non-existent so shopping was not an easy task. Haldor often carried a 50 pound bag of flour the eight miles from town to home. Flour, tea and sugar were about the only store-bought goodies. The rest was farm or bush produced.

You will notice in the birth record from the Bible, a baby girl was born in 1888, and named for the wee one that died at sea, "Sigurhlif". At Swan River she was married to Jack Skagfjord. They had a boy and a girl, Allie and Asta. When Sigurlif died in 1915, Johanna added them to her household care and kept them to adult life. There was often not much on the table, but a willingness to share was a characteristic, inbred and outpracticed by the Danielsons.

Hard work, poverty, sorrow and lots of love followed them all their days, whether in Iceland, North Dakota or Swan Valley. I revere their memory and profit by their example and heritage.

Jonas died June 6, 1930, in his ninety-second year. Johanna died January 10, 1936, in her eighty-first year.

Among some papers that came from my mother's things recently was a poem that my grandfather, Jonas, wrote for my parents on the occasion of their wedding. Linda Peckover Korte, who spent some time in Iceland, graciously translated it for us. It reveals some things about my grandpa's faith that I didn't know. Also, it gives added meaning to the inscription on my grandparents' tombstone, "Safe in the arms of Jesus". So as a fitting conclusion to my little story, I present the following:

To Gudrun and Hilliard:

Happiness, may you have, and all things.
The couple will stand together,
Putting all in the Lord's care.

I wish with all my heart, and also pray,
Joy in all trials.
Young married couple, the Lord is there.
In valley or dale,
God is there to uplift.

Have God steering the ship;
Have faith in Jesus' Name,
Then you will never be shipwrecked,
Though any problems come,
All will be well."

Poetry

lift off

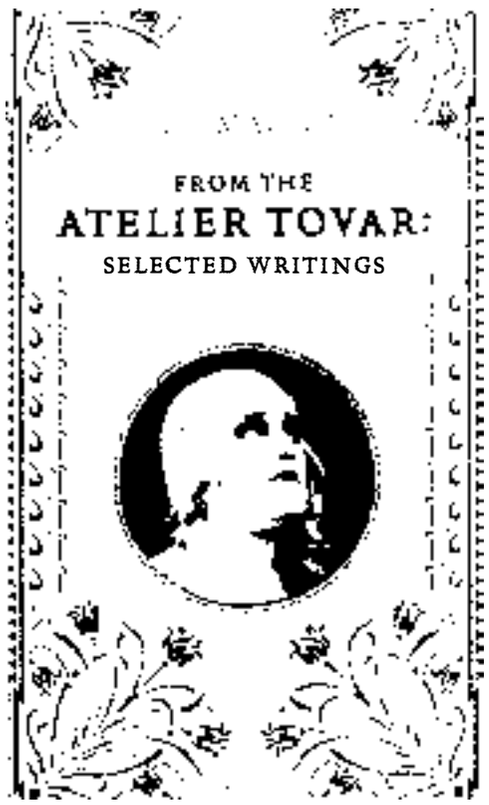
sleet
like rock salt
peppers me
seasons me
for winter
stings in
nicks of time

time . . .
time to
heal the nicks
soothe the stings
transcend seasons
soar above pain
run flush-faced
panting
headlong
into the wind
and frozen rain
like a float plane
spread wings
flaps down
lift off

ascend
in crystalline air
beyond hurts
above noise
into grace
find below
the quiet place
and land on
the unspoiled
nameless lake

- by Fred D. Anderson

Book Reviews



From the Atelier Tovar: Selected Writings

By Guy Maddin
Coach House Books, 240 pages, $24.95

Reviewed by David Jón Fuller

Welcome to the mind of Guy Maddin.

The eccentric filmmaker, known for such movies as Tales From the Gimli Hospital, Careful, and Dracula: Pages From a Virgin's Diary, opens a door to his inner thoughts in *From the Atelier Tovar: Selected Writings*. Included are essays, excerpts from Maddin's diary, and film treatments.

Maddin's films are characterized by melodrama, a quality he espouses (and displays) throughout the book. In one essay, "Bully for Bollywood's Musical Melodramas!", he writes, "Western white folk . . . don't even know what melodrama is, other than it's an invasion on good taste, an easily detected enemy." This is too harsh an attitude, he feels; "These magnifications happen in our nightmares and our movies again and again, not because of lapses in taste, but because they are TRUTH."

Maddin himself has no trouble with hyperbole, particularly when taking himself to task for laziness: "Having turned forty recently, I may as well arbitrarily choose now as the time to assess my life: at least thirty-five years wasted, if not more." He periodically creates "Gatsby lists," itemizing his own faults and prescribing action to change his ways.

Despite lingering guilt over his treatment of loved ones--Maddin seems full of regrets--what emerges from both journals and essays is sardonic wit. Maddin has a keen sense of the absurd, and it seems the best antidote to looming personal debt and a repeatedly diffused focus.

If the journals reveal much of Maddin's personal history, the film treatments, particularly "The Child Without Qualities," reveal, perhaps, his personal mythology. Full of bizarre and surreal images, dreamlike in their logic and tendency to dissolve, the stories that emerge fit with Maddin's private and public writings.

"The Child Without Qualities," as yet unfilmed, is the longest and most cumbersome of the treatments. Based on what the book has already revealed, it is a thinly-veiled autobiography--and this is perhaps the only place where the collection stumbles. Impossible to appreciate without knowing Maddin's roster of iconic memories, it is nevertheless so close to them that it almost seems redundant.

The cumulative effect of *From the Atelier Tovar* is that of seeing through Maddin's lens. At turns bitter, joyous, and often bitingly hilarious, the collection is difficult to put down. But whether the reader has gotten into the mind of Guy Maddin is something perhaps only Maddin himself can say.

Contributors

FRED ANDERSON lives in Edmonton, AB formerly from Andersons Corner, Libau, Manitoba. Fred began writing poetry, painting and sketching about eight years ago to occupy his retirement time. He is the son of Asdis Anderson and the late Thorsteinn Andres Anderson.

ANN BRYDON is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Wilfrid Laurier University, in Waterloo Canada. Her current writing engages with modernity and modernism in Iceland, including the cultural politics of the whaling issue. She also has written about Winnipeg-based artists Eleanor Bond and William Eakin. With Sandra Niessen she co-edited Consuming Fashion: Adorning the Transnational Body (Berg 1998).

CHESTER DONALDSON was born in Bowsman, Manitoba in 1923, the second child of Hilliard and Gudrun (Danielson). After doing eight grades in public school, and one by correspondence, he worked with his father on the farm. In 1944 he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and later transferred to the army, where he earned his paratrooper wings. He, with his wife Marion, moved to northern Ontario and helped some struggling churches. They also founded and built Northland Bible Camp where thousands of children and adults have enjoyed the programme. He describes his life in an autobiography, *A Kernel of Wheat.*

DAVID JÓN FULLER is a Winnipeg-based freelance writer. His work has appeared in Lögberg-Heimskringla, The Icelandic Canadian, and Prairie Books Now, and he is a regular contributor to Uptown magazine and is employed at Lögberg-Heimskringla.

NELSON GERRARD teaches in Arborg, Manitoba, and makes his home at "Eyrarbakki" near Hnausa, on the shores of Lake Winnipeg. Educated in both Manitoba and Iceland, he has a background in history, art, genealogy, and writing, with a special interest in the story of the Icelandic immigrants in North America. He has published *Icelandic River Saga* and *The Icelandic Heritage* and is currently working on *Silent Flashes: Our Photographic Heritage (1870-1910)* and *Gimlunga Saga I-III.*

KRISTINE JOHNSON has always been interested in music. She has worked with or has been teaching musical groups for years. In recent years she has accompanied and helped to direct the Soley Söngmenn from Arborg.

KRISTIN STEFANSSON is a home economicas teacher who enjoys curling, playing volleyball, sewing, cross country skiing, traveling, and creating movies for enjoyment and my education. She have visited many parts of North America, Cuba, several European countries, and has cycle toured in Ireland, Holland, Belgium and France. Genealogy and family connections are important to her.

The Trausti Vigfusson House

by Nelson Gerrard

Trausti Vigfusson was born at Reykjakot in the Biskupstungur distrcit of Southern Iceland on June 19, 1869, the son of Vigfus Gudmundsson and his wife, Audbjorg Thorsteinsdottir. On October 27, 1894 Trausti married in Iceland to Rosa Aldis Oddsdottir, the daughter of Rev. Oddur Gislason who emigrated that same year to become a pastor in New Iceland on the shores of Lake Winnipeg. Trausti worked as a fisherman and carpenter at Akranes and Isafjordur in the West of Iceland for four years, until 1898 when he and Rosa emigrated and joined Rosa's parents in New Iceland.

After living with Rosa's parents for a time, Trausti built a modest log house in the village of Lundi, also know as Icelandic River (now Riverton), and there a daughter, Thorunn, was born on September 15, 1900. Two years later, Trausti dismantled the house, identifying each hewn log with Roman numerals and moved it on a horse-drawn wagon to the homestead (SW of 10-22-3E) he had taken in the Geysir district. On a small rise on this land, which he named Vatnsdalur (Lake Dale), he then reconstructed the house, and there he and Rosa lived with their daughter, "Tota," until 1950. Trausti's mother, Audbjorg, also spent her last years at Vatnsdalur, bringing to this home much old world lore.

Trausti and Rosa Vigfusson were kind, gentle, cultured people who struggled to adapt to this land amidst poverty and hardship. Besides farming on a small scale, Trausti plied his trade in the area, building many homes and at least three local churches, as well as fashioning beautiful furniture with hand tools and his home-made treadle lathe.

Both Trausti and Rosa were steeped in the traditions of their homeland, and their home was a place where supernatural phenomena, such as dreams and visions, were discussed as a matter of fact. In the summer of 1908, Trausti had an unusually vivid dream in whch a tall stranger emerged from the bush and approached him from across the home field. This proud-looking man shook hands with Traust and introduced himself as John Ramsay. Trausti had heard of Ramsay from the old settlers and knew of his helpfulness toward the Icelandic pioneers. He also knew of the tragedy Ramsay had suffered in losing his wife Betsey, and four young children in the smallpox epidemic in 1876. Ramsay had mourned his wife and children deeply, and during the winter after this tragedy, he had brought a fine marble headstone all the way from Fort Garry by sleigh, to the gravesite at Sandy Bar. Ramsay, recently deceased at the time of the dream, had also been buried at Sandy Bar, beside his wife Betsey.

In Trausti's dream, Ramsay recalled trapping beaver nearby and predicted a good fortune for the settlement. He seemed to know Trausti was a carpenter and saddened by the neglected state of Betsey's grave, he asked Trausti to rebuild the old picket fence on the site. Trausti, in spite of a heavy workload and the distance involved, promised he would tend to the matter, and Ramsay and he parted company on good terms. Over coffee the next morning, Trausti told of the dream to his wife, mother and daughter who all agreed that this had been a meaningful visitation. Trausti was a man of his word and despite various unavoidable delays, eventually crafted a beautiful new picket fence with ornate corner posts and transported it to the gravesite at Sandy Bar on an ox-drawn wagon—thus fulfilling the promise he had made to John Ramsay.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PATTY OLTSON

The back page

The Trausti Vigfusson House being moved to its new home at the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village. October 13, 2000.