

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN MAGAZINE

CANADA

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INC

An organization funded by Canadians of Icelandic Descent, dedicated to the preservation of their Cultural Heritage

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please contact:
William Helgason
1836 Assiniboine Ave.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3J 0A1

Treasurer
Paul D. Olafson, CA
54 Siddall Crescent
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2K 3W6
204-667-1168

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The
ICELANDIC
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VIKING SHIP

Kaor P. Olafson 2003

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SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED

We invite students to apply for the following scholarships which are offered, or administered, by the Canada Iceland Foundation.

Priority may be given to first time applicants.

All applications must be received by Friday, 24 September, 2004.

Information and applications are available electronically by request at Canadalceland@netscape.net (for application requests only)

and in hard copy from *Lögberg-Heimskringla*

The completed applications are forwarded to: Canada Iceland Foundation Inc.,
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In the amount of \$500, will be given annually to the student obtaining the highest academic standing in Icelandic Studies in his/her final year at the University of Manitoba. The award will be made by the Department Head.

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One scholarship of \$500 to be awarded to a student entering the second or a later year of study of architecture, fine arts, design or graphic design, music, dance or voice.

The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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Subscriptions, advertising & editorial correspondence:

The Icelandic Canadian, Box 1156, Gimli, Manitoba R0C 1B0 CANADA
CONTACT: Lorna Tergesen (204) 642-9650 to inquire about the magazine.

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On the Cover



Viking Ship Batik by Karen Johannsson.

Hello, faithful subscribers

by Lorna Tergesen

It is time to bring you, our subscribers, up to date on how our affairs are going.

We have a very small crew of volunteers who do their best to bring you an interesting magazine. We rely heavily on you, the readers, to let us know what is of interest and importance to you.

Articles, stories etc. come from all over. We are not in a position to pay anyone for his or her efforts. Despite this, we seem to be able to acquire enough material to choose from. Keep up the good work of sending us this material or by recommending leads for us to follow up on. It is always a challenge for us to gain access to writing from areas that are not in Manitoba. Remember to keep us in mind when you see something that would be of interest to our readership or if you know of a talent we are overlooking.

Our biggest dilemma has come with the cost of mailing. There are no longer any special Publications rates for International or United States mail from Canada. As you, our American readers may have noticed, the cost to mail each magazine has risen to \$2.80 Canadian as compared to \$1.60 and may go up again. Previous rates were \$3.25 to Iceland and other international destinations, now the cost of mailing the magazine is \$4.20 per issue. Hence, you will understand that we have had to raise our subscription rates just to cover our costs. The United States and International subscription rate is now \$40 US per year.

At present our finished product cost is \$6.08 per magazine. This can always fluctuate slightly but has held in this price range now for over a year. Advertising revenue brings in approximately \$1500 or less. Our advertisers are very loyal which is such a blessing. Other costs we incur are such things as printed envelopes, stationery, our Website and of course, the printing of the magazine itself.

The only paid staff member is our

desktop setter, Karen Emilson. Karen is devoted to the magazine and I know she does not charge us for the many extra costs, which add up. For that we are thankful, Karen. It is a very tight ship that we run and we hope that we will be able to continue to do so.

We wish to appeal to all the various Icelandic National League Clubs and Chapters for assistance in soliciting new subscribers for us. Some of the chapters and groups donate annually to our magazine. Their support and interest helps us to go on. If you are a grandparent or senior member of your family, please think about sending a subscription as a gift to another family member or friend who does not already subscribe. We know that many of the magazines are passed around to family members but we need new subscribers to add to our list and to our coffers. There are usually one or two "Kin Keepers" in each family, and we would like to get in touch with them and introduce ourselves. Family reunion gatherings offer us an opportunity to make the magazine known to potential younger readers, as they are often less informed of our publication. If you know of such an event occurring, we will gladly supply you with application forms, etc. We must stress to them and all readers that the magazine is in ENGLISH. If you feel so inclined, you can have us mail a subscription to a school or library and then in turn you ask them for a tax receipt. We know that the schools that do receive the magazine find that they are used extensively for projects and research.

In the area of board memberships, we lost our scholarly editor with the death of John Matthiasson. This position is still vacant. We would be very happy to invite anyone who may be interested to serve on the Icelandic Canadian magazine board. Our meetings are not many, but we do try get exposure for the magazine by being

present at various cultural events that interest our community such as Islendinadagurinn. We can always use volunteers to man booths or set up our display.

We do have earlier editions of the magazine for sale, so should you be looking for something that has gone missing or was of special interest to you or your family, we can try to get you extra copies.

Thank you for your support, remember that we always enjoy hearing from you. Our email address is: icelandiccanadian@yahoo.ca or fax 204-642-9017. Please put it to our attention and I am always ready to take a call at 204-642-9650.



Karen

Okkar a Millisagt

What is said between us

an interview with Karen Johannsson by Wendy Johnson Brown and Valerie Hoshizaki Nordin

The Viking influence can be seen in the works of artist Karen Johannsson with her batik images that reflect everything from Old Norse Mythology to the sunflowers of her adopted prairie roots. Karen believes that it is perhaps the Huldafolk that guide her 'piece by piece' as she creates her unique hangings, pillows, and hats, but her Icelandic roots go much deeper in her philosophical approach to art and life.

On coming to Canada: "I don't know why my father chose Winnipeg"

Skuli and Erika Johannsson came to Winnipeg in 1955, when Karen was eleven years old. Her father had a cousin here at the time but no other relatives. She was aware of the family's history of moving as her mother's father, Petur Jonsson, was the first Icelander to gain fame as an opera singer, taking her Mother's family to many parts of the world. Her three uncles were all born in Germany in the 30's and her grandmother was originally from Denmark. It is no surprise that Karen is adept at speaking other languages, including French, Danish, German, as well as English and Icelandic. It is ironic that when Karen first came to Canada she was put in an ESL classroom!

On becoming an artist: "I was always drawing and making things...the attitude towards art is different in Iceland with everyone having art in their homes. Art is valued and you can make a living doing it".

In her home economics class in Iceland, Karen excelled in her knitting, crocheting, and needlepoint classes. It was here that Karen was introduced to the art of batik. After coming to Canada her artistic ability did not go unnoticed at Daniel McIntyre Collegiate in Winnipeg. In grade eleven, Karen's life took a bold turn when she received an entrance scholarship to the

Fine Arts Faculty at University of Manitoba. Her thesis was in painting and printmaking. During university Karen worked in Iceland at a fishery and in the airport and after graduation she returned for a year working as a graphic artist for a television station. For the next several years she dabbled in art and did jobs such as window-dressing at Eaton's, fashion shows and doing some sketches for Woman's Wear Daily from New York.

Her entrepreneurial spirit: "Art went on the backburner when my three sons Peter, Shanker, and Shiv came along. I decided to go into the restaurant business. I took over a place called 'Lipton's Lunch & Confectionary' in 1977 and turned it into 'Mrs. Lipton's'. The name? Why of course it was on Lipton Street!"

The restaurant became a social hub of activity, one restaurant by day and another by night with support from the whole community. Karen believes that the Huldafolk played a role there too, with the idea that "you just have to believe and Mrs. Lipton is there." Art called Karen back in 1998, and Mrs. Lipton's was converted into an art studio. Karen gives classes in batik and is kept busy creating pieces for commissions or to sell out of her studio, for gift stores or at festivals. Her latest work of batiks of musicians was recently shown at the Winnipeg Concert Hall mezzanine art gallery. Her work can now be found in many galleries and private collections throughout North America.

Thoughts on Iceland: "When I can't find something I blame it on the little people!"

Karen states that many Icelanders acknowledge and respect 'the others.' They believe it even though they say they don't. It is a spiritual guide in times of dif-



Sveitabaer. An Icelandic farm house.

faculty and also a way to get people to 'lighten up a little' with all the tricks they play. This sense of spirituality, from days of the Pagan, dating back 1000 years before Christianity, is still prominent in Iceland and weaves its way into Karen's artistic creations. Whether it is the final battle of Ragnarok, the warriors who worshiped Odin or Thor, or the dark spirals of the 'underworld,' she is passionate about Norse Mythology and makes it come to life in her soft sculptures.

When asked about her connection to Iceland, Karen excitedly tells us about her dual citizenship status she received a few months ago. She has not been back there since she was in her 20's, but her passion about Iceland remains strong. In her own quiet way, she tells us "if I ever go back there I don't know if I would return..." No doubt her philosophy of "letting life take its natural course" will guide her back to the land of

fire and ice, her birthplace. In the meantime, in the beauty and stillness of her adopted prairie land, she continues to hone her skills and produce her art, like the finely sharpened tools of the old Viking warrior.

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Wynyard Family Gives Dad Viking Burial

by Marilee Johannesson with Darrell Gudmundson

The Johannesson family of Wynyard is proud of their Viking heritage. When their father Rod Johannesson succumbed to heart failure at 59, they set about designing a fitting celebration to mark the end of his life.

Rod married Marilee Goodman in 1963, and they had three strapping sons and one daughter. Eldest son Randy, an Advanced Medical Technician with the local ambulance service, has three children, April, Elesha and Darren. Rick, father of two children, Jacqueline and Jason, is manager of Lilydale Foods, Wynyard's premier employer. Third son Ron lives with wife Julie in Calgary, and has his own company, Techworks Solutions. Daughter Cindy, the youngest, is a career counselor.

Rod made sure that his children appreciated their Icelandic heritage. He enjoyed his role as 'Afi' and spent a lot of time with his grandchildren.

Rod's father Rognvaldur (Reggie) fished in the winter months on Hecla Island, where he met Johanna Grimolfson. They married and moved to a farm north of Wynyard when son Rodney was six. At that time Rod knew no English.

Rod had struggled with heart disease for some years, and he had asked his children and grandchildren to give him a real Viking send-off.

Rick searched for plans for a real Viking ship, and

the preference was for a full Gokstad-style ship (The ship found at Gokstad in Norway was 76.5 feet long, 17.5 feet wide, and had sixteen oars per side). However, plans were found for the Skuldelev, also a Knarr, the original being 54 feet long. It is thought to resemble the type Eric the Red might have used.

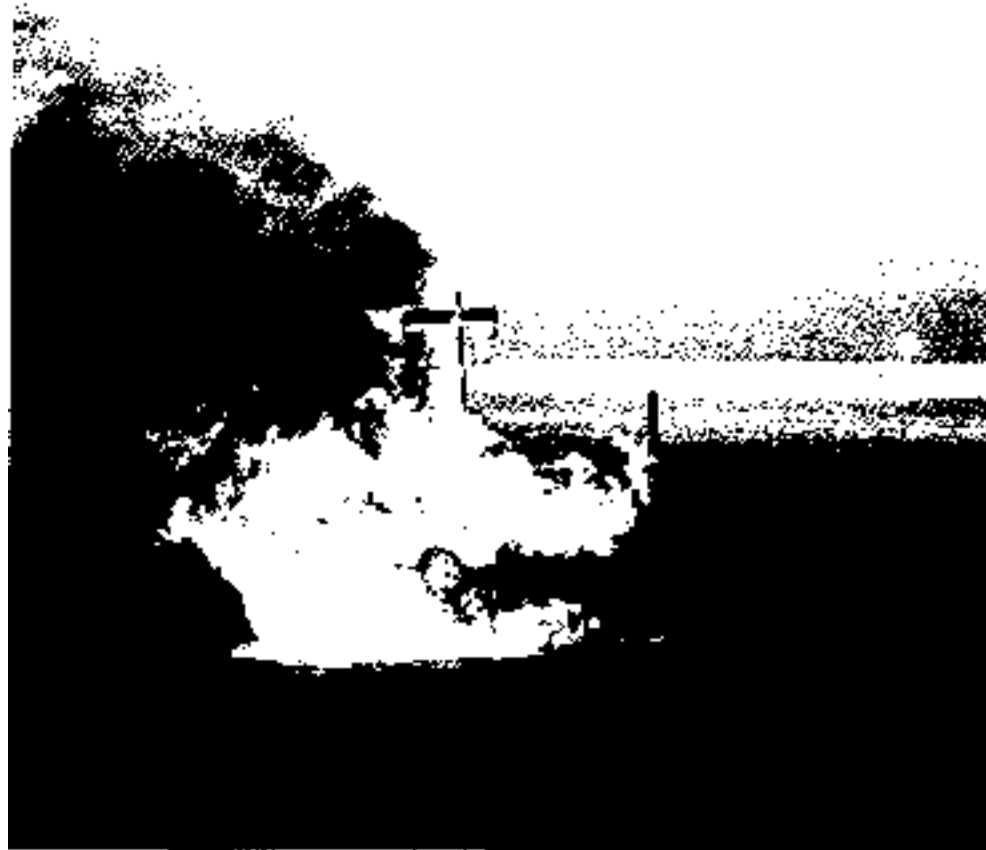
Rick then scaled the blueprints to 1/7 scale, just over 7 feet long, with 4 ribs and a 40-inch beam. Obviously it was not built to sail, but it served very well as a symbol. They did not pick out a bent oak for the keel. The boards were steamed and bent four at a time, using a pot on the stove and a PVC pipe to carry the steam. The grandsons kept the boards wet with a garden hose.

The sons made the comment that their dad would have matched the wood grain with greater care, but for ceremonial purposes, the boat served well.

The boat was carried by truck to the lakeshore, to a spot selected by Randy. The lake was dead calm, and as the August

sun set it glowed red and huge, casting a fiery glow onto the glass-like surface of the water.

At the water's edge, the pine box carrying the ashes of Rodney Johannesson were placed into his Viking ship



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE JOHANNESSEN FAMILY

Rod Johannesson's burial at sea.



The Johannesson family from left to right: Rick, Rod, Marilee, Randy, Ron and Cindy.

(Regardless of size, who shall not call it a ship?), along with letters and pictures from his loving grandchildren, and a bottle of brennivin. To this was added Rod's treasured knife, which he had made, along with another that he and his sons made together (for what is a Viking burial without weapons?).

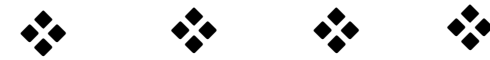
With an ancient Viking prayer, the grandchildren set the miniature ship ablaze, and it sailed out toward Valhalla, as the northern lights came alive and swooped across the sky, the Valkyries coming to claim a fallen warrior, or perhaps Rod's sign of thanks to his children.

This re-enactment of an ancient spectacle is sure to live on in the hearts of the Johannesson family, and the story will be passed on by the grandchildren; a rare modern-day connection with ancient times.



Sons Randy, Rick, Ron and daughter Cindy Johannesson with the boat constructed to honour their father.

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Your support is appreciated!

To Iceland with Afi

by Blair Swanson



PHOTO COURTESY OF BLAIR SWANSON

Afi Oli Gislason and Blair Swanson.

In 1998 – on July 28th, my Afi and I met at the Winnipeg International Airport, all packed and ready for our planned journey together to Iceland. The long anticipated departure date had finally arrived. At the airport, there appeared to be a long, motionless line of people with their luggage. My thoughts looked back to immigrants waiting in readiness to board ships and trains, prepared to go to new lands in search of a better life. My mind played a game of ‘matching faces with people’ as I surveyed the crowd. I saw a “Richard Nixon” – sad eyes and big cheeks; I saw a “Margaret Thatcher” – walking fast, with a great sense of confidence and determined look about her. My mind game was taken back to reality with the gentleman who spoke to me in the Icelandic language. I shrugged my shoulders and explained that I did not understand what he was saying. His reply was “Don’t worry, that’s all the Icelandic I know”. He told me his name was Hólman Olson and that he lived in Selkirk. He said that I would never forget his name because it is not “half-man” – but rather “Hólman”. The line began to move and I finally reached the ticket desk where my luggage was checked for the flight. Now, to find my Afi.

Checking all the coffee shops, I found Afi with our relatives enjoying their company. We all walked to the observation floor and waited for our plane to land. It would be coming from Iceland, loaded with Icelanders that would be visiting Manitoba. Once the arrivals disembarked, the aircraft would be cleaned and serviced in preparation for the return flight to Iceland. At last!

Having said our ‘farewells’ to family that had come to see us off and wish us well, we continued through to the security area with the metal detectors in place. Afi went through the screening and set off the

alarm. An official and stern looking lady began to frisk Afi with some roughness. My Afi looking suspicious? I don’t think so! It was cleared that he was innocent.

All passengers would gather in the waiting room, watching the Icelanders that had just arrived. A wall of glass separated us as they were cleared at customs. One would have thought the “Beatles:” had arrived – the excitement of it all.

We were boarded and ready for take off. My seat was perfect – and one where I could stretch out my legs. Once the aircraft had gained the required altitude, the pilot turned off the seat belt sign. This was the cue that two-thirds of the people had been waiting for. They rushed towards the washrooms – reminding me of young children that had just noticed the ice cream man passing slowly down the street with the bells under his handlebar, playing that familiar jingle.

After a meal of fish was served, almost everyone settled into their seat patiently waiting to land in Keflavik. Just over the half time point, Oli Narfason (Gimli) addressed the passengers over the intercom, wishing them well once they landed in Iceland – and involved everybody in an Icelandic song. Oli and his wife Marj were the major organizers of this charter flight.

Our flight began to land. We had arrived at Keflavik. Afi and I collected our luggage – and looked for the airport bank in order to exchange money. We got 13,800 krónur for \$300.00 (CDN). We checked into the duty free shop for Afi to buy packages of tobacco for one of his many Icelandic friends that we would see. We then went to the exit where Afi sought out the man who would be waiting for us. His name is Gretar Haraldsson. Gretar welcomed us and led us to his truck.

The day was sunny and a pleasant 19C as Gretar sailed along the narrow highway.

He turned his Landrover onto a small road and climbed up a steep hill to his small house that he owns and uses when he visits Reykjavik. We had a quick view of the house and area, then continued on the journey for the two hour ride to his farm which is called "Miðey". Upon arrival, his wife Hallfríður, offered us all breakfast – juice, flatbread, brown bread and very strong coffee. While Afi visited with the couple, I excused myself, being in dire need of sleep, and attempted to adjust to the time change. When I awoke, some hours later, Afi was asleep in another room. Gretar's 15-year-old son Haraldur, who speaks some English, offered me coffee and we enjoyed a conversation. More coffee – pönnukökur and hardfish – followed by a tour of their house and yard. Later, we were served soup and a special Icelandic dish called ábrystir. Apparently, after a cow has a calf, her first milk is taken and made into some kind of pudding. It is very dark yellow in colour, not very appetizing to the eye – but, it tasted wonderful. Gretar toured Afi and I around the surrounding community. We watched Haraldur milk the cows, and then enjoyed a full supper of roast lamb.

The next morning, while Afi still slept, I enjoyed breakfast with Gretar's wife who spoke very little English which made the conversation rather funny at times. She was getting ready to go into the house and motioned me to wake Afi. The rush was on. The plan was to go to the airport and fly to the Westmann Islands. The airport is only 15 minutes from Gretar's farm. The flight costs 3,000 krónur and takes only a few minutes on a small plane. We were

greeted by a taxi driver upon our landing. He was very surprised at how well Afi spoke Icelandic. We were then driven to a marina where we boarded a tour boat that would take us for two hours all around the island, giving us spectacular views. The boat docked and the taxi driver was waiting to drive us all over the island, showing us many interesting spots. He then took us to his home where his wife had prepared a lovely lunch. This taxi driver looked after us for the entire day, and when he dropped us off back at the airport, he refused to take any money. We discovered later that he had paid for our fare on the tour boat as well. This was the first, but certainly not the last, time that Afi's fluency in Icelandic had a positive effect on our trip. Many thought he had been born in Iceland with his perfect command of the language. Once they realized that he was a 'vestur-íslendingar', their friendship became special.

While we were guests at Gretar's farm, we were taken to many places of interest – museums, old buildings containing interesting artifacts, a small church – where the tour guide played a little organ and led the singing for the many tourists that joined in. It was like listening to a professional choir. On the way back to Gretar's, we stopped at another farm where the owner showed us around and explained his pride in owning many tractors as well as the information about how he dried his own grain. The farmer had also started experimenting with growing grapes in his greenhouse and they tasted very good.

On July 31st, we left Gretar's farm, loaded our luggage into the car, took some

pictures and said our goodbyes. On the way, we stopped to meet an Icelandic artist. Afi was the recipient of three of his works. Then, once again, we were in the car on a mission to locate the homestead of Afi's grandparents called Hólmikoti. After driving many miles, Gretar announced that we had arrived. The house was still standing, although abandoned. There was a newer house nearby. Three children were home – the oldest, a girl of 14 years, invited us to explore the old house. The large concrete, two storey house still stood. There was a tiny barn beside it where one had to crouch down low to get through the barn door. The stalls were so small that I surmised it had to be used only for sheep, since no cow would be able to fit. Gretar stood patiently waiting for Afi and I to see as much as we could. Suddenly, Afi was not in view. It became eerily quiet. I climbed the narrow, steep stairs of the old house – and when I got to the top floor, there was Afi. He was sitting in an old rickety wooden chair with his arms crossed and was looking out the broken window towards the river. He was completely silent and I could sense that he was in deep thought. I turned and quickly, but quietly left the house. Eventually Afi came outside. He had his special time while inside his grandparents' house. He had a fresh and renewed look about him. It was as if he had accomplished something and was very satisfied.

Once again, we were on the road and Gretar announced that we would go to a restaurant for some supper. We ordered a hamburger, french fries and water. The cost was 2,000 krónur (\$40 CDN). We continued driving through a tunnel that goes under the sea. There was a tollbooth to allow us to continue for a price of 1,000 krónur. Our next stop would be a farm owned by Arsæll Hannesson named Stóri Hóls.

Saturday, August 1st, we were once again in a four wheel drive vehicle where Arsæll took us about 150 miles over the mountains. The terrain was very rugged and there were people hiking or riding bicycles. We continued on to see the geyser "Strökkur" – and just as the sign reads, it erupts exactly at certain intervals. Onward

to see the very powerful waterfall Gullfoss and to the town of Suðarkrókur. There we made contact with Afi's friend who is the chief of police. His name is Guðmundur-Oli Pálsson. Following a nice visit, we continued on the road to Hofsó, where the first Íslendingadagurinn on Icelandic soil is to be held. Arsæll had rented a cabin there for the night. We purchased tickets for the event for 3,500 krónur (\$70 CDN). We listened to many songs, speeches, and poems and watched some puppet shows.

The next morning, we prepared ourselves for more driving. Since it was now Sunday, Arsæll told us it might be difficult finding a place for breakfast. We eventually pull into a gas station and ate some pre-packaged sandwiches with coffee. After two more hours of driving, we entered a town called Sólvík. We stretched our legs and enjoyed an ice cream cone at a tiny store. We started out again and headed to a farm, not far from Akurýri, owned by Stefán Halldorson who is a cousin of my Amma Jónína Gíslason. We unloaded our luggage and said 'bless bless' to Arsæll and Steini.

The first item on the agenda at Stefán's and his wife Anna's home was more food. salmon, potatoes, bread, sliced tomatoes and cucumbers – followed by a huge piece of chocolate cake drenched in fruit cocktail. Afi conversed with Stefán while I went outside for a walk. Stefán's sons were haying in the field. I wandered around the farmyard going into several buildings before hopping a fence into a pasture full of sheep. I thoroughly enjoyed two hours – just walking and observing. Later, Stefán, Afi and I went for a drive in the countryside and came to a farm called pverá, once occupied by my Amma's grandparents. The people that owned it invited us in for coffee. The lady of the house was Norwegian. She invited us to another building where she made many different kinds of crafts. The small workshop was filled with different items. One in particular caught Afi's eye. It was an unusual hat which the woman made from a bull scrotum. She informed us they were a popular item even with their 10,000 krónur price tag.

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Onward to another farmyard, once owned by Amma's great grandparents. Unfortunately, there was no answer at the door. Stefán stated that the owners had recently abandoned the farm. He said that more and more people were moving to the cities, just walking away from their farms when they were not able to sell them.

It was Monday, August 3rd. Much time had been spent looking at pictures in photo albums lined up in Stefán and Anna's living room. We made a short trip to Akureyri where we visited a museum and shopping centre and then headed back to the farm. Stefán and Afi visited while I decided to go out for another walk. The drizzling rain all day caused me to walk on the gravel road. The pastures were soaked. This was a very mountainous area. However, they became almost invisible due to the thick clouds that had filled the valley. It seemed that you could raise your arm in the air and lose sight of it with the grey haze. It felt as though I could walk

forever in this beautiful environment, tasting the freshest air in the world. When I returned to Hlíðar, I found Afi and Stefán still talking in the same room and sitting in the same chairs. This was a good time for me to page through my dictionary.

Now, Tuesday, August 4th. There is a light mist outside. The temperature is 8C. This day, Guðmundur Óli Pálsson (the Police chief from Suðarkrókur) would be picking us up at 1 PM. The time with Stefán and Anna had been superb.

Again, on the road with Guðmundur Óli in his Landrover, we arrived at his house in the early evening after visiting several museums and an aquarium. Enroute, we pulled over to the side of the road and progressed to a grassy area where an unusual stone was sitting. It was a fairly large dark grey stone with some holes through it. It held a plaque which read "Skeljungs Steinn". Guðmundur Óli told us it was a ghost stone that long ago, the people in the area had apparently caught a ghost. They tied the ghost to this stone with some rope that was run through the holes. Then, they went away to decide what fate they should deal the ghost. The next morning when they went to check, the ghost had disappeared and the stone had mysteriously been moved across the road. This is just one of many interesting ghost stories in Iceland.

We carried on a desolate road to have a look at the sea. The water was very cold, however, just twenty feet away was a water hole, filled with hot water. It looked like a jacuzzi that would accommodate four or five people comfortably. Guðmundur Óli told us the story about the area, when many years ago a man had killed another, and then came to hide out at this out of the way place. After a few months, he had become lonely and decided to walk up to the main road. There, he kidnapped the first woman he saw and brought her to live with him. When he tired of her, he let her go and kidnapped another. The outlaw lived in this fashion until he was eventually caught some twenty years later.

The next morning, we left Guðmundur Óli's house to visit his wife at her business. She owns and operates a dry cleaning store

where we were given a demonstration of the operation. Having said our goodbyes, we were back in the Landrover for another busy day. We arrived at a farm that prompted Afi's interest. The farmyard had many barns. A young man who raised bulls exclusively invited us into the nearest barn. He was interested in meeting the 'vestur íslendingur'. Before we left, we were invited to have coffee – and to meet his wife and two young children.

The next town we arrived at was Dalvík. There we visited with Afi's cousin Bára and her son Elias. Bára was thrilled to see Afi and insisted we look through some photo albums while we enjoyed a lunch of slátur, soup, lots of cheese, bread and oatmeal – and of course, later followed by cinnamon buns, pie and different kinds of cake.

Enroute once more, we stopped at another farm. It was obvious to me that these people knew Afi well and had been expecting us. And, once again, there was no English conversation. The man's name was Þórarinn Þórarinsson. We enjoyed a tasty salmon supper and then continued on our way down a very wet secluded road with large potholes. We saw rows and rows of mountains and streams. There was no sign of life anywhere until suddenly, we came upon a tiny car stopped in the middle of the road. A young girl from Norway sat inside the vehicle waiting for help. Guðmundur Óli told her he would call his police peers to have someone check on her.

After a long drive, we entered Égilss-taðir and stopped at a house owned by Aðalsteinn Aðalsteinsson. It was after midnight when we arrived, but he and his wife were waiting for us. We visited over coffee and desserts before Guðmundur Óli decided to leave for his home. We were sad to say our goodbyes to him.

Following a hearty breakfast the next morning, we were invited to look at yet more photo albums. While the others scanned the photo pages, I checked out the book collection in the room and noticed a copy of the Riverton History book. There, I found the picture of my father's family to show Aðalsteinn. An expression of disbelief filled his face. He called his wife to view

the picture and suggested to me that his wife might be related to my father's family. Soon after, we were invited to drive with Aðalsteinn to the archives building where an employee printed off some information for me about my dad's family.

Following a delicious lunch of smoked trout, flatbrauð and skyr – we were taken for a quick tour of the countryside. Mid afternoon, we returned to the house, picked up our luggage and were driven to a restaurant that looked similar to a teahouse back home. The delicious aroma of coffee and fresh baking filled the air of this small two-story building. We were served by the ever beautiful Icelandic girls who were dressed in black and white outfits, making their inviting figures stand out so well against the backdrop of vertical pine planks that covered the interior walls. We enjoyed the lunch and prepared to drive down the highway to meet a man in a red truck who would be our host for the next two days. The man's name was Arnbjörn Sigurbjörnsson – who had a striking resemblance to the actor James Coburn. He lives at a farm named Höfn. We loaded our luggage into the back of Arnbjörn's small Toyota with bucket seats. It had a tiny storage area between the seats and the back of the cab. I found myself placed in this area. It was necessary to fold the passenger seat down and twist my body in order to fit into the cramped space. Afi and Arnbjörn sat comfortably, enjoying conversation in the front seat. We arrived very late that night at Arnbjörn's farm. It was good to stretch my legs and allow the circulation to continue after sitting like a 'pretzel' for such a long ride.

Arnbjörn was a bachelor. His culinary skills reminded me of my own bachelor days – when the menu was mainly quick and most often came out of a can. We toured the barnyard – many barns and sheds. There was a large dairy barn, however, it seemed that the only animals around were a few chickens. We visited Arnbjörn's daughter Jóhanna – where we enjoyed a delicious chicken stew meal.

Following lunch, Arnbjörn drove us high up into the mountains where we could walk and take pictures of several glaciers.



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We happened upon a group of people riding horseback. We stopped and my Afi talked with them for at least an hour. There were fourteen horses, but just three riders. They informed us that they always take all of their horses with them when they go riding.

Back at the farm, Afi and Arnbjörn went into one of the buildings – while I chose to go for a walk. I watched as people with haying equipment busily worked in the fields. It was well after 9 PM with no sign of any of them stopping for the night.

We realized our trip was quickly coming to an end. It was August 8th and we were going to a small airport where we would fly to Réykjavík. We said our good-byes to Arnbjörn and boarded the flight at 9 AM. After a short stop in Égilsstaðir, we were on our way to Réykjavík where Bjarki Eliasson was waiting for us. He drove us to his daughter's house where we would stay for the remainder of our trip. Her name is Björk, but likes to be called Lóló. She lives with her family in Mossfellsbær, a suburb just minutes north of the city.

Björk invited us on a short tour of Réykjavík. We arrived at the home of Guðfinna Jónsdóttir who had visited Afi's farm at Arborg with her late husband Sigurður in the 1970's. Afi stayed to visit with Guðfinna while I went to the mall with Björk for some groceries. Björk's home is perfectly organized and spotless. A wonderful supper was set before us and soon, Bjarki and his wife arrived. Björk, her husband Kristján and I watched T.V.

until well after midnight. We discussed several items of world news – expressed our opinions on certain matters – ending up with the subject of the phone book! Kristján thought it ridiculous that other societies would print phone books in alphabetical order by surname rather than the way in Iceland, where the Christian name is first and in alphabetical order. He insisted it was so much easier.

In the early afternoon, Afi and I were picked up by Guðfinna's 82 year old brother. We would spend the day at his house. We picked Guðfinna up on the way so she could join in the visit. The lady of the house, Asta, had prepared many plates of Icelandic desserts for us. Later, we were taken to a downtown museum that happened to be showing Canadian photographs. Afi and I recognized several from the Manitoba Interlake region. Back at the house once again, we watched a video tape of the volcanic eruption in the Westmann Islands before dining on another great meal of lamb.

The next morning, August 10th, Afi and I were taken on a full day tour of Réykjavík. Bjarki was our guide. We went to the University. It was evident, by the way people were acknowledging him, that he was very well respected there. We went to the National Library and down to the basement vault that contained actual manuscripts that were printed in the year 1000. I proceeded to adjust my camera to snap some pictures, and, not knowing the rules, was told rather firmly by our university security escort that photographs were not

allowed since the flash of light could cause the written words to further deteriorate. The lights in this vault are only allowed to be activated at certain times of the day and for only a short specific amount of time. We enjoyed a light lunch of lamb sausages in the cafeteria before leaving for more sight seeing. Bjarki parked the car and we proceeded to walk through some of the downtown area looking at some of the stores and talking with people that Afi recognized from back home that were on our charter flight. We walked by some churches, the parliament buildings, through some parks and ended up by the harbour. We entered one of the shipyard buildings where Kristján worked and shared some coffee with him while he was on his break. We made our way back to Bjarki's car and on to his house for yet, another great supper.

It was now the last day of our trip, August 11th. Afi and I had packed. Our luggage was ready at the front door. The phone rang – and it was Arsæll. He was in Réykjavík for a doctor's appointment and said he would like to see us before we left for the airport. He arrived at the door with

Icelandic sweaters under his arm knitted by his daughter Asdís. Afi and I became the proud owners of these beautiful sweaters. Shortly after, Bjarki arrived to take us to the bus depot in Réykjavík where we would be transported to the Keflavik airport. In the meantime, all four of us men, Arsæll, Bjarki, Afi and myself enjoyed one last coffee. Afi, Bjarki and Arsæll are all speaking Icelandic between fits of laughter and head shaking. They reminded me of three college buddies reminiscing after being away from each other for many years.

Once we were boarded on the bus for Keflavik, Afi suggested that he could have easily enjoyed at least another two weeks here. He had a list of people that he wanted to visit, but time did not allow. He did however manage to reach some of these people by telephone from Lóló's house in Réykjavík.

We were at the Keflavik airport. Our luggage was checked at the ticket counter and we were given our boarding passes. We entered the duty free shopping area where we met Uncle Arthur and Aunt Karen from Geysir. We had not seen them since



Inside the police station in Saudarkrokur. Left to right: Arsaell Hannesson who farms near Selfoss, Afi, and Gudmundur Oli Palsson, the police chief in Saudarkrokur.

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we had landed in Iceland. We boarded the flight – and listened to many comments from other people describing their time in Iceland. Soon after, a meal of chicken and shrimp, coffee and tea was served. We were on our way back to Canada.

Oli Narfason greets everyone again and leads the passengers in a 'sing song' Gunnar Thorvaldson then took the intercom and shared a few jokes. The group was reminded of the time change – and to adjust their watches.

Looking back on the previous two weeks, I thought about the demeanour of all the people we met. Having been treated so well when visiting someone else's home was wonderful. However, what amazed me the most was how well the Icelanders treated each other. There were times when I witnessed siblings hugging each other as if they had not seen one another in years. Then, I was stunned to learn that they live just down the road at the next farm and visit often. I am miffed about these actions for two reasons: (1) that in my entire lifetime, I have rarely seen open affection amongst anyone on either side of my family and; (2) because these Icelanders are people who have descended from the Vikings who, in the old sagas, used to chop someone's head, arm or leg off for some miniscule reason. I think about my Afi – and how he seemed to have become younger with each day we were in Iceland. From the


moment he stepped off the plane in Iceland, he did not seem like a visitor, but rather a resident. He now had more energy and had developed an extra jump in his gait that I had not seen before. He would talk to total strangers at a museum, a harbour, a convenience store – just anywhere and introduced himself as Oli Gíslason, bóndi, from Canada. He would continue talking with a wide grin, as these new found friends of his competed for his attention.

Having been in Iceland sparked an interest for me in my heritage that I now wish had been stirred much earlier. It has also made me wonder what life was like in the 1800's that would make people abandon their homes and property in this beautiful country to go on a dangerous voyage to a future of uncertainty. One can read a number of books on the reasons why people left, but it is intriguing to think of what exactly was going through their minds and what hardships they endured before their decision to leave.

Almost back in Canada, I ordered myself a Bailey's, tilted my chair back a couple of notches and continued to think about the wonder of it all – the special time to have shared this trip with my Afi.

Editors Note: Blair Swanson wrote a wonderful story about his 1998 trip to Iceland with his Afi, Oli Gíslason. He wrote with more detail and humour than the edited version you will read here. It is with some regret that all of it could not be published for reasons of space. I have done my best to highlight the message of his trip without too much change in the context. I hope that you enjoy his travel experience where he has captured many special moments and memories. Sadly, Blair's Afi passed away December 8th, 1999. Oli and his wife Jónina operated a dairy farm at the Géysir farm on Highway 68 near Arborg, Manitoba. His Amma Jónina continues to live on the farm and is now 84 years of age.

- Edit by Evelyn Thorvaldson



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Letters from Friðjón Friðriksson

Translated by Sigurbjörg Stefansson



Friðjón Friðriksson

Letter # 12

Gimli, Apr.4, 1877

Dear Friend:

My writing to you is certainly something new, but for a while I have often thought about you and talked about you behind your back - therefore I think that it is high time I write to you revealing some of my views.

I am extremely grateful to you for your interest in and empathy for Icelanders north here. Knowing that the three of you constantly pray for our spiritual as well as physical welfare, certainly makes us glad. I, as well as many others, appreciate your interest especially because I know that the three of you (and I do mean this) are the ones who are the most likely to be able to

help us make it here. I do realize that the best men are too few to be able to do everything that needs to be done. Besides, these men lack sufficient education to be able to put our plans into practice.

You and Halldor, however, have this kind of education in addition to many fine skills. Therefore, I repeat: the three of you are those who can, with the help of God, carry through our hopes. Your wife would have plenty of work to do here, and I am sure that her intelligence and enthusiasm would enable her to reform the women and the teenagers. She could, hopefully, join hands with the most sensible and best women here in order to eliminate uncleanness an ignorance characterizing the majority of the women. They could turn many homes from being abominably filthy - a disgrace to the Icelandic nation as well as being a serious health hazard - into neat and tidy places.

I would like Halldor to edit "Fanfare" (a periodical: "Progress") and teach English and sciences, subjects which many young men want to learn. Besides, a lot of things can come up unexpectedly, making it essential for us to have an educated man among us qualified to take care of these problems. Admittedly, this is a wide range of activities, but I am confident that you are able to take care of all these things, besides serving as a minister. Moreover, I am hoping that you would be able to give sermons in various places throughout the colony, so that the majority of the people would get the opportunity to hear the words of God approximately once a month adding to their spiritual welfare. I am opposed to hiring more than one minister because hiring the minister is easy enough, paying him acceptable salaries (preventing him from suffering from financial difficulties) is the hard art. Presently the colony is unable to support more than one minister. Right

now we are inquiring into how much money people are willing to pay their minister, and I suppose that you will soon receive an official letter concerning the matter. Most people here place you as their first choice. Some, however, have scruples asking you because they had already asked Rev. Pall, but all want you to come if Rev. Pall does not come. Rev. Pall shall not be able to serve here as "Synod" minister (but that is the only possible condition for him.)

By the way, last fall I did not openly oppose Rev. Pall's proposal since I did not know whether or not we had any other choice. Nevertheless, I openly announced that I would help chase the "Synod" away from this colony in case Rev. Pall were to come here, and I am still determined to do so.

Anyway, I do hope that you will come here for a visit in the spring. The trip should be affordable and the visit could prove extremely beneficial--in so far as you would realize that your service would be invaluable to us, resulting in your deciding to settle down here, bringing fruitful results to yourself as well as to us: You can sow that kind of seed which grows to bring about those changes in our minds necessary for us to succeed and without which no one can manage.

The letter carrier is just about leaving, forcing me to stop writing. Please remember me to your wife and Halldor. I owe Halldor a letter, but your wife owes me two letters--both these situations need to be corrected.

Sincerely yours,
Fr. Fridriksson

I suddenly remembered something. As far as I know I am presently the only one from this colony who is a member of the Icelandic Literary Association. Sigtryggur wants to join. Would you please accept him as a member. Please send us 10 - 12 almanacs. How does my account stand? Don't I owe postage? Please, let me know about these things

Gimli, Apr. 30, 1877

Letter #13

Dear Rev. Jon Bjarnaon:

A long time has passed since I wrote to you, but not too long ago I wrote to your wife, and I am hoping to get an answer from her soon.

This morning we received your letter to Sigtryggur and a letter to H. Briem. I thought that these letters might be important, and therefore I had them taken immediately north.

Tonight a letter to you from Sigtryggur is supposed to arrive here, obviously written before he received the above mentioned letter from you.

I shall now describe our conditions here in the colony and surroundings: The weather changed for the better around the 10th of this month. It took the snow only a few days to disappear. Recently the weather has constantly been nice, occasionally, however, the frost has been considerable. Red River is clear of ice all the way to the mouth of the river, but Lake Winnipeg is still covered with ice. Last year it became clear of ice around the 23rd day of May---apparently the ice is going to melt even earlier this year. Fishing was fine all around the lake so that all have enough food. The last 6-7 weeks, none has suffered from the smallpox, but quite a number of people got scurvy. Most of these have recovered and none died from it. There is plenty of work here. The farmers are clearing the woods, putting up fences, building houses, and fishing. Recently, the Government gave us a loan of \$25,000. This money is to be used for tools, cattle, and food. When hearing about this loan many were relieved. Hopefully, this is the last time we need a loan from the Government. Mr. Taylor, the Icelandic agent, is now on his way to Winnipeg to buy necessities for this money.

On the whole, people work hard in this colony even though individual cases of idleness can be found. Social life is still in the state of "childhood." However, I am confident that if we don't give up social

activities will develop. Right now our main interest is getting a minister. If we don't get a minister our religion is likely to fade - where there was any -and eventually disappear. But just getting any minister is no good - maybe a colourless bore unable to awaken any religious feelings. No, we need an enthusiastic and perceptive minister who is keenly aware of his vocation, and who can teach us to love God and to fulfill our spiritual and earthly roles. We are confident that you are the minister most likely to be able to work successfully for us. The question remains whether or not we are able to pay you decently. I, for one, have no doubts about our ability to do this, but not all are equally hopeful. Now meetings are being held throughout the colony in order to promote this matter. The day before yesterday there was a meeting in "Fljotsbyggd" presided over by Johann Briem and Sigtryggur Jonasson was the secretary. The conclusion of this meeting was that the entire colony form a congregation totally independent of all other religious groups and keeping the religious beliefs which we were raised to have (and in accordance with which we were confirmed) in Iceland.

This congregation is to form its own rules and regulations concerning its leaders and church. At this meeting a committee was appointed. This committee is to find a minister, raise money for building a church and oversee the construction of the church. Furthermore, the committee is to write to Rev. Pall and refuse to have him as a minister and turn down his offer to find other ministers for us. There are only a

handful of "Synod" - men in this district (i.e. "Fljotsbyggd"). Their leader is Bjorn Pjetursson from Hallfredarstadir, (in the eastern part of Iceland) a former member of Parliament. I hope that this group fails to make progress. The remaining district meetings will be held next Saturday, May the 5th. When these meetings are over, a letter to you will be written, wherein you will be asked to become our minister this spring. The inhabitants of Fljotsbyggd ("Fljotsbyggd" means: "the community along the river.") find it essential to have two ministers for the colony (both of whom have to do without a second minister, the first year. I prefer to have one minister, even if he has a lot of work to do, than to have two, both of who would have to put us with abominable poverty.

The people of Fljotsbyggd promised to pay their minister \$4.00 a year each. I am afraid that many in the other communities fail to be able to promise this much; many are likely to find \$4.00 too much. But maybe there are others who can pay more, balancing the account.

I am against forcing anyone in this matter. If people like their minister they will hopefully prove themselves worthy of him by providing decently for him. I shall write to you about this matter after the meeting.

I still keep my hope of being allowed to see the three of you here among us this spring. Maybe I will get the opportunity to forward the progress of New Iceland in cooperation with you.

Sigtryggur fights "this way" enthusiastically, but the trouble is that there are so

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few who are willing to assist him.

I would like to hear from you when you have the opportunity to write.

My best wishes, to you and your wife, for a good summer.

Your friend,
Fr. Fridriksson

Letter #14
Gimli, May 22, 1877

Dear Rev. Jon Bjarnason:

I wrote to you the day before yesterday, and last night I got a letter from your wife for which I thank her very much. Along with the letter from you came a great number of letters from Iceland telling about things known to you - namely prosperity and good catch of fish in the northern part of Iceland, but also widespread discontent because of taxation, poor national leadership and general corruption. But let's talk about something else - you are better acquainted with these matters than I am, and, besides, there are other things on my mind right now about which I shall tell you because I know that you are interested in them. As I told you in my latest letter, two meetings were held up in "Fljotsbyggd" dealing with our attempts to get a minister. There was a split, the minority leaders are Bjorn Pjetursson and Jakob Jonsson from Munkathvera (the

minority group is very small). Jakob does everything in his power to gain ground for the "Synod" and increase its influences south of here. Very recently a letter appeared from Jakob to "Icelanders of New Iceland." The aim of this letter is to convince people that the "synod's" religious doctrine is in accordance with those beliefs which we learned in Iceland and therefore there is no need neither to be offended by it nor to fear it. To prove this statement there is a chapter from a Norwegian booklet translated by Jakob (by request from Rev. Pall). This booklet is titled *What are Lutherans?* Decorah, Iowa, 1875. The above mentioned chapter only proves its author's spiritual poverty. Rev. Pall had personally sent a few of these booklets to the colony. If we fail to show a strong resistance the "Synod" is likely to invade our territory. Therefore it is of vital importance that we stand firm against it. I have every intention of doing so here in the southern part of the colony. I regard myself as a leader in this matter (this statement is not intended as a praise of myself), and I am confident that we can overrule the "Synod" followers. We will not be able to succeed, however, unless we get a minister soon, because - rather than being without a minister - people are going to accept Pall - which is understandable. I am strongly hoping that you are willing to help maintain the dignity of Icelanders in America and protect them from the darkness of the "Synod" and other kinds of blindness. I express this hope of mine to anyone. I shall

get an excellent opportunity to present my views next Saturday at a general meeting which is to deal with this matter and which is to try to make the best arrangements possible. Immediately after this meeting a letter will be written to you, asking you to become a minister for the southern part of the colony. In this letter you will also learn about what kind of payment we will be able



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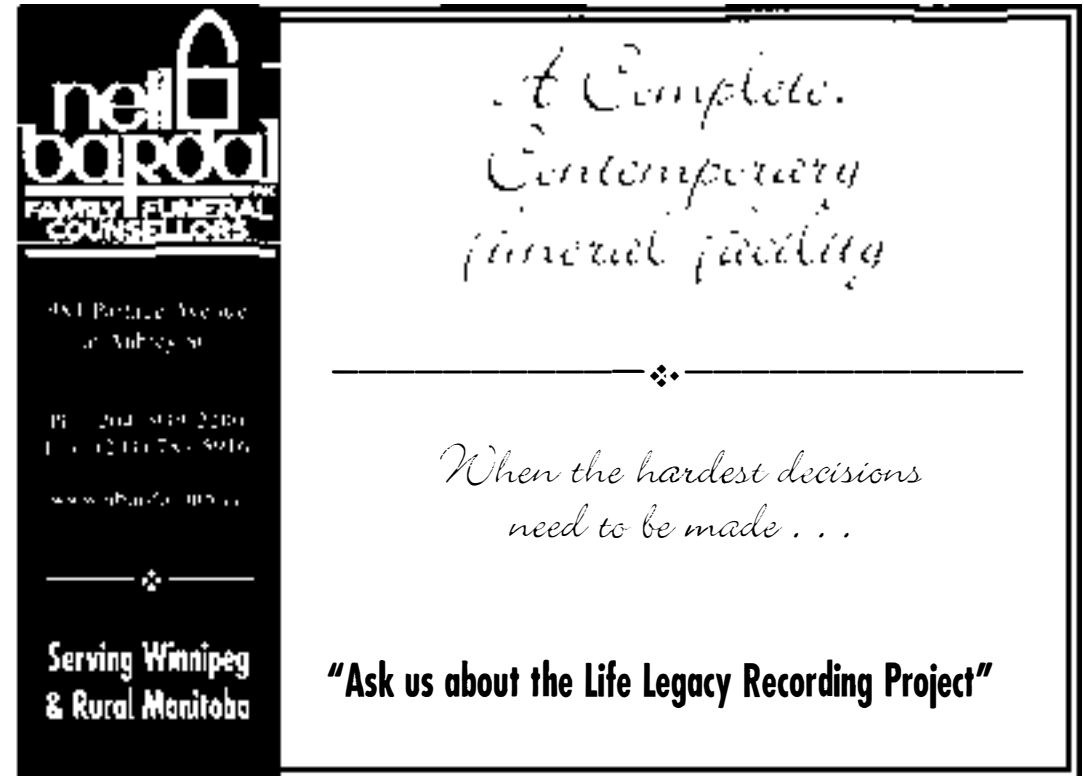
to promise you.

If not - no, It shall not happen - we are bound to sink into a state of spiritual destitution in so far as we will become the "Synod's" dependents and Pall's sheep.

Believe me, you are the first choice of most people, and they would not even give a thought to accepting Rev. Pall if they did not fear the possibility of failing to pay you decently. You can expect a great deal of difficulties if you move here this spring, but you can also expect a great victory.

Best wishes to you and your wife,

Sincerely,
Fridjon Fridriksson



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Report from the Valuing Icelandic Presence (VIP) Fund Committee

by Richard Johnson

On May 22, 2003, Dr. Ken Thorlakson advised the members who had served on the VIP Millennium Campaign Cabinet that a donation recently received had put the total funds, pledged and contributed, over the initial campaign objective of \$1,650,000. While that campaign had formally ended on December 31, 2000 with about 95% of the objective reached, subsequent contacts and donations have now completed that first phase. That is good news indeed!

The Valuing Icelandic Presence (VIP) Fund is a permanent account at the University of Manitoba that was established to receive donations from the Valuing Icelandic Presence (VIP) Millennium Campaign and any continuing and future funds designated to support both the Department of Icelandic and the Icelandic Collection at the University of Manitoba. Power to approve any and all uses of the Capital and Disbursable Income from the Fund's account is vested in a unique committee, the Valuing Icelandic Presence (VIP) Fund Committee. This Committee comprises four members from the University, four from the Icelandic Community and a non-voting Chair. The authority granted to such a group is thought to be unique for the University. At each of its meetings, the Committee has received and discussed reports from the Department, from the Collection and from the VIP Millennium Campaign. While it has not met three times a year as originally anticipated, discussions have been open and informative to both "town" and "gown" representatives, thereby fulfilling the purpose of bringing the two together for the benefit of all.

The Terms of Reference of the VIP Fund require that: After three complete years of disbursements and no later than

within five such years, and subsequently at least once in each five year period, the Committee shall undertake a comprehensive review of the use of the Fund during the initial and subsequent periods, respectively, provide a report on its assessment of how well the use of the Fund has achieved the stated purposes for it and recommend any changes to these Terms of Reference including changes to the purposes of the Fund. The Committee shall give this assessment what it considers appropriate distribution both within the University and in the community.

Although the first disbursement was not made until January of 2001, the VIP Fund Committee is delighted to provide this report on the occasion of Dr. Thorlakson's news.

Use of the initial goal of \$1.65 Million was anticipated to comprise \$500,000 to provide more extensive and appropriate space and equipment for the Icelandic Collection in the Elizabeth Dafoe Library, and two endowment funds of \$650,000 and \$500,000 the earnings on which were to support the second academic position in the Department and acquisitions for the Collection, respectively. Subsequently, the VIP Fund Committee recommended that the libraries' share be divided between \$750,000 for the space project and \$250,000 in endowment for the Collection. This recommendation was approved by the President of the University, Émoke Szathmáry.

As donations are received, the moneys are immediately invested as part of the University's Trust. Earned income is reinvested so that the value of each donation grows and produces even more interest and growth as time goes on. Each year, the University, having reserved a fraction of the year's earning to maintain the buying



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB TALBOT, UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

One corner of the Icelandic Library Department at the University of Manitoba.

power of the Fund, announces the amount of income that may be used that year by the VIP Fund Committee in support of the purposes of the Fund, the so-called "Disbursable Income". Any unused income at year's end is credited to the Fund for continuing investment and growth. The capital of this Fund may also be used (within specified limits) for such expenditures as physical space, and equipment and furnishings. When that occurs, the VIP Fund is credited with "Profit on Capitalization". So the Fund grows with donations, earned interest (which is credited directly to the Fund's capital), and profit on capitalization.

A summary of these and the disbursements approved by the VIP Fund Committee for the period from the outset to March 31, 2003 follows.

Donations: \$1,480,280.68
Interest: \$75,167.52
Profit on Disbursements: \$67,650.90
Capitalization: \$790,901.57

The first of these figures shows that, as at March 31, 2003, there was still some \$170,000 in moneys yet to be received. But more has been received since that date. The disbursements in the last column include \$36,901.57 to the Faculty of Arts towards the support of the second position in the Department (This supplements funds from other sources including the Multiculturalism Fund and the HIP

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Campaign of some years ago.), \$750,000 in capital for the design, construction, furnishing and equipping of the new Iceland Reading Room and its collection, and a further \$4,000 to the Libraries related to donor recognition. The profit on capitalization resulted from the disbursement of the \$750,000 of capital funds.

What then are the results of these impressive figures?

Many of you - the Committee hopes that most of you - have been as delighted as they in the Iceland Reading Room and the expanded space for its collection. The Committee is equally delighted in the use of that space for community-based activities. It really is becoming the meeting place that the Campaign Committee hoped that it would.

And in the Department, contributions from the VIP Fund in 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03 and 2003-2004 have made it possible for the Department to have a second, full-time academic staff member during those fiscal years. We have all very much appreciated the many contributions that its incumbent, Kristin Johannsdottir, has made to both the Department and the community through those years. We will all be sorry to see her depart but wish her every success as she pursues her academic studies at the University of British Columbia in Linguistics.

With the capital in the Fund now producing a significant amount of disbursable income, and with the continuing receipt of additional donations and more of the moneys pledged, the Fund will be able to continue to expand acquisitions for the Icelandic Collection and support the salary of the second position in the Department at a higher level than has been possible through the years during which the Fund's investments have been accumulating and growing.

The VIP Fund Committee is pleased also to note that, apparently because of the VIP Campaign, significant additional donations have been received which are directed towards the support of further, specific initiatives of the Department of Icelandic. Taken together with the VIP Fund itself, these donations bring the total,

pledged and received, to almost \$2 million, which, of course, includes the most generous combined support of \$1 million from the Government of Iceland, Eimskip and the Eimskip University Fund. The total is a remarkable figure and speaks well of the generosity of the community in support of the Icelandic Presence at the University of Manitoba.

At the time of this, its first report on the use of the Fund, the VIP Fund Committee extends its most sincere thanks to the 325 individual donors (to date!) who have donated and pledged support for the Valuing Icelandic Presence campaign. It has reached its initial goal, the proceeds from which it hopes the reader will agree is being put to good use. The Fund remains open for further donations and the Committee hopes that, as the spirit moves you, you will continue to support even further the enterprise of sustaining and expanding the "Icelandic Presence" at the University of Manitoba for the benefit of all Icelanders, hyphenated or not, and other

students and researchers into things Icelandic.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the VIP Fund Committee:

David Arnason
Neil Bardal
Ray Johnson (to 2003)
Sigrid Johnson
Robert O'Kell
Carolynne Presser
Tim Samson
Ken Thorlakson
Paul Westdal (from 2003)
Richard Johnson, Chair

Editor's Note: Reported on June 16, 2004. The following three accounts which belong to the V.I.P. fund contain the following amounts:

Capital: \$902,811.45
Capitalized Revenue: \$8,474.75
Current Revenue: \$38,638.01
Total: \$949,924.21

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Arinbjorn Sigurgeirsson Bardal

by Agnes Bardal Comack and Svava Bardal Kerr



PHOTO COURTESY OF AGNES BARDAL COMACK

Arinbjorn Sigurgeirsson Bardal

My father (1866-1951) was the founder of the funeral home at 843 Sherbrook St in Winnipeg that still bears his name but is no longer owned by a family member.

He was better known, probably, as "A.S." I wrote an article about him, published in Logberg Heimskringla, Jan 17, 1986.

Recently, I came across a character sketch written by my sister, Svava, and it is interesting to realize how different her life had been from mine. She grew up in the family home (which was then at 676 McDermot Ave) surrounded by Icelandic neighbours. Svava and my older siblings, Alla, Emilia, Njall, and Karl all spoke Icelandic when they started in Somerset School on Sherbrook Street.

When I was born in 1921, the family had moved to Kildonan where we were the only Icelandic family. During my childhood, my father was an older, well established undertaker. I was the fifteenth of his sixteen children. Two had been born to his first wife, who had died before the turn of the century along with a young daughter. The second child, Alla, was 5 1/2 years old when he married my mother, Margret Ingibjorg Olafsdottir, in 1900. Three of her fourteen babies also died.

The following are the notes that Svava recorded for the benefit of the younger members of our family describing the father she knew. The words in brackets are mine.

"Pabbi was an extreme extrovert, a happy devout Christian. We always knew when he was home. He spread the joy of being alive to one and all. He was a real showman. He loved playing the clown' especially when he was with "stuffed shirts." I always envied his unconcern with what people thought. He was completely himself at all times, in any company.

Pabbi was a real Taurus, born April 22. He appeared placid but would rip adver-

saries to pieces with plain blunt language. He was tough, sentimental, affectionate but wary of those offering something for nothing. He expected to pay the piper and usually fulfilled this.

Some early memories: Halloween - I well remember shooting off firecrackers from the roof of the funeral home at 843 Sherbrook. He always had a large collection of rockets etc.

The horse and buggy era: Sunday drives from our home at 676 McDermot Ave. were special events. His Icelandic ponies pulled a small cart full of kids. We'd drive all over Winnipeg singing "O Canada" at the top of our lungs. Pabbi did not approve of the census takers calling us "Icelanders." He told us we were "Canadians" but he'd tell every one who would listen that his ponies came from Iceland.

His first motor car: We had to be very quiet because Pabbi was so nervous. Later this changed, as we all knew so well. (His driving habits were hair-raising at times.)

Our schooling: Pabbi wanted us all to be scholars. He had missed out there as he never did attend school. He felt that, being his children, we were all very clever. He always cooperated with the school. However, when there was trouble, he would hear one side of the story. One teacher was very sadistic. I remember Njall (1904-1977) getting the strap. His wrists were all marked. Pabbi went down to the school and told the teacher he had better be more careful in the future. At that time, I remember being so proud of my big, handsome father.

A yearly event was arranged by Pabbi when student nurses from the Winnipeg General Hospital came to our home in North Kildonan to toboggan on the river bank (Svava graduated from nursing in 1927.)

Pabbi the Patriarch: He was a very devoted and loving husband. He always

thanked Mother after every meal. He couldn't understand when Mother tried to be the least bit independent. Women were to be protected. He treated the girls the same way. I remember arguing with him about driving the car. Women just did not drive and that was that! (There were 8 girls and 4 boys in our family.)

Summers at Gimli: Meeting the 7PM train was a big event. Pabbi would arrive with fresh fruit. He always made things so lively. He loved his wee sail boat. (Our cottage was at #2 Lakefront.) One time when he was out on the lake, there was a sudden storm. No Pabbi! He arrived home the next day. He had a real knowledge of survival, probably from his boyhood experiences in Iceland.

The Good Templar: Pabbi had a great compassion for anyone in trouble. Although he never drank, he would help the problem drinker. He sensed the difference between social and compulsive drinking.

His many sayings: "Do not publicize your good works or they will not count." Many times I heard him say, "I have done my best, the rest I leave to God." Other sayings he had were, "Never trouble trouble till trouble troubles you." and "The love of money is the root of all evil."

The Story Teller; Pabbi loved to tell stories about the early days. He'd tell about the "White Slave Traffic" he was aware of when he drove his "Hacks" (taxi.) There

were many stories about Margaret Scott Mission where he took girls that he found in distress. (We were always warned, "Don't take chocolates from strange men.") There was no doubt a great deal of truth to his stories but he loved an audience. He was a real showman and he loved to entertain.

The 1918 Flu Epidemic: Pabbi went day and night. Everyone wanted him when there was a death in the family. Towards the end of that time, Pabbi and I were the only ones at our home who were well. One night he came home very tired and discouraged. The phone rang around 2 AM. I went down to answer it. One of our friends had died and they wanted Pabbi. I remember having to waken him. He said he would go. Then, he started to sob. "When will it end?" I'll never forget this. My strong, beautiful father crying like a child. It took him years to recover from that financial predicament. Everyone had to be buried but few could pay.

Sometimes when I have troubles, instead of giving up, my father's example has carried me through.

Svava Bardal Kerr - 1906 - 1989.

Short Story

GONE FISHIN'

by Avery Simundson

"D'you reckon there's any goldeye down there?" Gary asked lazily, looking up at Jimmy.

"Dunno," Jimmy replied. "But if there is, this here doohickey is sure to catch it," He said smiling happily, motioning to the bright, decorated hook at the end of his fishing pole. He wound up his rod carefully, swung it over his shoulder, and then hurled it into the sparkling stream. Gary watched wistfully as the multicoloured hook hung in the air for a moment, and then fell in a graceful arc and landed with a satisfying plop into the water. His eyes travelled up from the hook, down the string and came to rest on the shiny new fishing pole resting in Jimmy's hand. Gary wished he had a fishing pole like that. He'd had to make do with his bit of string tied to a stick. There wasn't much money for fancies on his small, Saskatchewan, dustbowl farm. Jimmy had gotten his special rod from his uncle. Gary's father said a stick and a piece of string would work just as well as any fancy rod, but so far, Jimmy had two fish swimming in his pail, while Gary's pail was still as empty as it was this morning when he'd come out.

He dug his finger into his ear and twisted it around, trying to rid himself of the dust that constantly manifested him. It had been dry for a couple of years now and there was dust everywhere and on everything. He could feel it on his clothes, hear it in his ears, taste it in his mouth. His teeth felt like they were constantly covered with a thin layer of the dust that plagued his town, and many others. He wriggled his toes in the hot sun, feeling their cracked dryness. The soles of his feet were hard

from callus. He only owned one pair of shoes and they were at least three sizes to big on him. They were his brother's old ones and he needed to wear two pairs of socks to make them stay on. In the summer, that was two pairs too many and he ran across the prairies barefoot, surrendering his feet to the mercy of the hot ground he walked on.

His feet hurt from standing on the burning rock by the stream and he eased into a sitting position, Jimmy following suit. He dabbled his toes in the cool stream, liking the way it tugged gently at his feet. Then he thought better of it, and pulled them out quickly for fear of scaring away the fish. He wound up his rod hopefully, and then frowned when he saw a bare hook on the end of his line. He sighed as he skewered on another worm.

"They took it again," he muttered as Jimmy laughed at him. Gary made a swipe at him, missed, and lost his balance in the process, tumbling over, making Jimmy laugh even harder. Gary grumbled as he sat back up, muttering darkly under his breath. He suddenly thought of something that made him forget the embarrassing episode and looked at his partner. "Say Jimmy,"

"Mmm?" replied Jimmy lazily, still silently chuckling at his companion's misfortune.

"Why do you reckon fish like them worms so much? I mean, they're so slimy and slippery. Why on earth would they want to eat one?"

"Well," Jimmy began, "have you ever tried a worm?"


"No," Gary said slowly, faint suspicions arising in his young mind.

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"Well," said Jimmy, "then how would you know what they taste like? I heard that they's mighty fine if you eat 'em while there still cold." He peeked nonchalantly out of the corner of his eye into the bucket of worms the two of them had dug up fresh this morning. "Those ones in the bucket are pretty cold aren't they?"

"Yeah," Gary said, his suspicions becoming more and more distinct.

"Well," drawled Jimmy, "Why don't you go on ahead and try one?" Gary looked at him, not knowing what to think, his face giving away his feelings of disgust and curiosity.

"I don't think so," Gary stated, his voice rising an octave.

"Aww, c'mon Gary," Jimmy said torpidly. "Fish eat the worms and you eat the fish. What's the difference?" Gary sat thoughtfully for a moment, pondering this new insight.

"Yeah," he said slowly, "I guess your right. Gee Jimmy, I hope someday I get to be as smart as you."

"You'll have to work real hard in school," Jimmy said seriously, pulling his hat down over his eyes. "Now go on and try one o' them worms." Gary eyed the worms in the pail, stomach churning. He swallowed hard, and then reached into the bucket. Jimmy moved his head ever so slightly so he could see out through a small crack under his hat. Gary pulled up a long, pink worm and raised it over his head. He hesitated, and then squeezed his eyes closed, opened his mouth, and lowered the morsel into his gaping jaws. Jimmy sat up

suddenly, his hat tumbling off his head. His eyes were wide with curiosity and disbelief. Gary sat still for a moment, his face a mixture of illegible emotions, smacking his lips loudly. Jimmy watched, fascinated. Suddenly, Gary broke into a wide grin.

"You know Jimmy? You're right. Them worms ain't so bad after all." Jimmy lay back down, resuming his air of indifference.

"I told you so," he said. They sat in silence for a while, both digesting what Gary had just done, Gary digesting it literally. Then the still surface of the water rippled and Jimmy's rod dipped. He sat up straight, eyes bright. The reel clicked and clattered as Jimmy towed in his catch. It was a goldeye. Jimmy whooped and hollered. Gary joined in half-heartedly, disappointed that it wasn't his fish. He began to wind up his string.

"I'm done for today Jimmy. I'm never gonna catch anything with this here twine anyways." Jimmy stopped suddenly, noticing his friend's empty pail. He reached out to the goldeye on the end of his string, the multi-coloured hook jutting out from its mouth.

"Here you go Gary," he tossed the fish into Gary's pail. Gary tried to protest but Jimmy stopped him. "I've already got two in my pail fer supper and I know how much you like goldeye." He winked and cracked a smile. Gary grinned back at his friend and slapped him on the back. They started down the path that led to their small cabins, joking and laughing. When they reached the junction, they both came to a halt, both not wanting to leave the other.

"You're sure you've gotta go?" Gary asked pleadingly.

"Yeah," Jimmy sighed. "Dad says there's no money here for us. He says we've gotta leave tomorrow, real early."

You don't have to go," Gary rushed on. "You could live with us you know. We'd be like brothers."

Jimmy smiled appreciatively at Gary. "I wish I could Gary. Honest I do. But my mum and dad need me. Who's gonna take care of mum when dad goes off to the lumber camps if I'm not there?" He shook his head gently. Gary's eyes were shiny as his

shoulders sagged.

"Yeah, I guess you're right." They stood in silence for a minute, and then Gary let out a dejected sigh. "I should really be going," he said quickly. "I... I'll see you around." He turned and began to pace stiff-legged down the cracked path that led home.

"Wait!" Jimmy called out. Gary stopped and turned slowly back to face Jimmy. Jimmy shuffled his feet nervously. "You know, I don't think I'm gonna be doing much fishing up where we're going and I was kinda thinking that, well, I probably don't need this here ole' fishing pole no more." Gary held his breath, hardly daring to guess what was coming. "So," Jimmy continued. "I was kinda wondering if... if maybe you might have some use for it." Gary stood open mouthed for a minute, and then laughed as he threw his arms around Jimmy.

"Thank you Jimmy! Thank you so much! I'll take real good care of it for you! Promise!"

"I know you will," Jimmy whispered, returning Gary's hug whole-heartedly. They stood in jubilant silence for a while, and then said their good-byes, each heading in their own direction, heading home.

It was about three weeks later when Gary found himself sitting alone on the rock by the stream, looking into the transparent water wending its way down the streambed. He gave a gentle tug on his new fishing rod, tongue protruding from his mouth in an effort of great concentration. He had already caught two fish this morning with Jimmy's old fishing pole. It sure was a swell fishing pole.

Jimmy. Gosh Gary missed him. It wasn't all that much fun fishing by yourself. Come to think of it, it wasn't much fun doing anything by yourself.

"D'you reckon there's any goldeye down there?" Gary turned with a start at the sound of a voice behind him. His eyes opened wide and sparkled with glee as he casually said,

"I dunno. But if there is, this here doohickey is sure to catch it!" Gary stared at the other boy seriously for a moment, and then, unable to keep a straight face, he

began to giggle. The two ran towards each other, arms outstretched. They fell to the ground, wrestling and laughing and insulting each other happily. When they were too tired to continue, they lay down on the hot rock, allowing the sun to bathe their faces gently. They lay side by side, trying to catch their breath.

"What made you come back Jimmy?" Gary asked between gasps.

"It wasn't working out with the lumber camp," Jimmy answered lazily. "Someone offered dad a job back here and he jumped at the chance." Gary beamed, his face positively glowing.

"This is great!" he cried out. "We've still got another two weeks before school starts again. We can go climbing and exploring and fishing and-." Gary stopped in mid-sentence, a thought suddenly pervading his mind. He swallowed and looked at Jimmy with anxious eyes. "Say Jimmy," he asked softly. "Does this mean I have to give you back your fishing pole?" Jimmy just laughed.



Avery Simundson

Rev. Stefan Jonasson

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somehow my feeble
 breathless grip
 on the pole
 was just enough
 to shake my bedside table
 toppling my water bottle

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dissolving my dopamine pill
 fallen on the floor

now trickling pale yellow
 underneath my bedside rug
 there to remain
 with the other sweepings
 and secrets of my life
 hidden, undercover
 waiting for my besieged brain
 to recall an echo of
 some long forgotten pattern of movement
 allowing me to replace
 the precious dopamine
 so I can forget again

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- by Fred D. Anderson

Book Reviews



Feeding the Vikings

By Martin F. Kilmer and Peter J. Scott
 Legas Publishing, Ottawa, 206 pages
 Distributed by Hushion House, Toronto,
 Cloth bound \$60, paper \$40

Reviewed by E. Leigh Syms

Despite the title, this is not a book about the foods or eating habits of the Vikings. It is a field guide of the plants of the North Peninsula of Newfoundland, plus a short photo documentation of a selection of local animal resources including mammals, birds and a few ocean creatures. There is nothing on the food habits of the Vikings including those who lived at L'Anse Aux Meadows nor any discussion on the plants identified in the sagas as being used by the people of L'Anse Aux

Meadows. The only link lies in the fact that most of these local resources were probably available to the Vikings, to First Nations through the millennia and to the early Europeans who inhabited the area.

The bulk of this book is a field guide of local plants. These plants are presented in alphabetical order by taxonomic name. Each species is described briefly, its distribution noted and illustrated with 2 - 4 colour photos, ranging from close-ups of diagnostic traits such as flowers and fruit to the occasional scenic shot to put it in a landscape context. In addition there are a variety of observations and anecdotes scattered haphazardly throughout that includes recipes, plant uses for food, medicinal purposes, dyes, etc by First Nations and Europeans but virtually nothing about the Viking uses. There are also little gems of wisdom scattered throughout, such as not making smudges of juniper when children and pregnant women are present.

Following the section on the flora is a brief section on the fauna. This begins with a brief (one page each) introduction on the physical setting, climate, geological history and vegetation summary, all of which should have been placed at the beginning of the book. The faunal section includes pictures of one butterfly, one dragonfly, several species of birds, one mussel, harp seals, one diving humpback whale (the only species to be illustrated despite several being listed) and several land mammals. This is, essentially, just a photographic section with no descriptive, definitive or taxonomic data.

This book lacks the systematic format for taxonomic identification that is common in field guides, making it impossible to identify most of the plants unless they are in flower or bearing fruit. Although it is a visual feast, it is marred, because most of the photos are slightly out of focus with

some being barely discernible. There is little depth of the field; it appears that the nature photographer (Kilmer) would have benefited from a better quality camera.

The text lacks references. The Bibliography is outdated and is missing most of the few references that are cited throughout the text, e.g. missing four out

of the five references for Abies.

Feeding the Vikings is a beautifully laid out coffee table book and the folksie anecdoted material adds a certain charm. However, it is a frustrating reference for anyone who is seriously into plant identification.



Thor's *Icelanders in North America: The First Settlers* is clearly part of this new wave, although it is unique in that it is the first of the new histories coming out of Iceland to be aimed at an English language audience, and is by an author who has spent significant time living and working in Canada.

In Iceland, Jónas Thor has taught classes on Icelandic migration and settlement in North America, and guided many of his students on tours of Icelandic communities in Canada and the US during the summer months. Thor became acquainted with many of these places over the course of an extended sojourn in Winnipeg as a graduate student and journalist. He completed his Master's degree in history at the University of Manitoba in 1980, and served as editor of *Lögberg-Heimskringla* before returning to Iceland. In recognition of his knowledge and expertise, the Government of Iceland commissioned him to produce a new history of Icelanders in North America as part of its millennium initiatives. The end result of Thor's work must be evaluated from two different perspectives: general readers with little or no background in the subject, and specialized readers familiar with the events described and the sources used. For a general audience, Thor's book may provide an engaging introduction to the history of the Icelanders in North America. However, readers who know what has been written before can hardly help but find it to be a profound disappointment.

Icelanders in North America: The First Settlers

By Jonas Thor
University of Manitoba Press, 2002
088755612 - \$24.95
Reviewed by Ryan Eyford

Over the past number of years, the Icelandic reading public has taken a renewed interest in the history of the Icelanders in North America. This has been apparent in many literary genres, from writer Bödvar Gudmundsson's best-selling historical fiction to journalist Guðjón Arngrímsson's popular histories *Nyja Ísland* and *Annad Ísland*. Icelandic academics have also got in on the act; literary scholar Vidar Hreinsson's two-volume biography of poet Stephan G. Stephansson, and anthropologist Gísli Pálsson's bold new investigation of the controversial career of arctic explorer Vilhjálmur Stefánsson, are two recent examples. Jónas

The book's subtitle—*The First Settlers*—is somewhat misleading. It seems to indicate that the book will be about the 1870s—the decade in which the first large groups of emigrants left Iceland and founded key settlements in Wisconsin, the Canadian North-west, Minnesota, and Dakota. While the bulk of the book is dedicated to this period (roughly ten of fourteen chapters), Thor attempts to cover all the settlements founded across the continent up to the First World War. This is an ambitious task, especially considering the fact that the book runs just over 260 pages.

Thor begins with a very brief background section on Iceland before moving on to describe the first small migrations to

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Icelanders in North America



by Jonas Thor
Using letters, periodicals, newspapers, census reports and archival sources, historian Jonas Thor expands the general view of Icelandic immigration to North America.
\$24.95

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Utah and Brazil in the 1850s and 1860s. He then describes the beginning of migration to the United States, early attempts at settlement in Canada, and the founding of New Iceland on the shores of Lake Winnipeg in 1875. The tragic events of 1875-1880 are then chronicled including the Icelanders' difficult apprenticeship at fishing on the lake, the crippling smallpox epidemic, and finally the flooding, religious discord and widespread dissatisfaction that led to an outpouring of population to Dakota and Argyle by the end of the decade. Along the way we get to know some of the main actors in this part of the story, from the fiery and somewhat deluded nationalist Jón Ólafsson, who dreamed of an all-Icelandic Alaska, to Sigtryggur Jónasson, Canadian government agent and tireless leader of the New Iceland colony. However, the two men Thor tells us the most about are the opposing religious leaders: Jón Bjarnason and Páll Thorlaksson. This is not surprising since Thor's 1980 Master's thesis, "A Religious Controversy among the Icelandic Immigrants in North America, 1874-1880", was largely devoted to these two men. The thesis is the heart of chapter seven, which in terms of original research, quality of analysis and sheer readability, is the strongest part of the book. We are left with a clear sense of the theological spat that drove a wedge between the former friends, and how it was related to their parishioners' struggle for survival in the Canadian Northwest. Thor clearly sympathizes with Páll Thorlaksson, a man who was treated as an outsider—almost a pariah—by many of his own countrymen as a result of his connections to the Norwegian-American Synod and his opposition to the choice of New Iceland as a colony site.

New Iceland is in fact central to Thor's main argument. He believes that even prior to leaving Iceland, the emigrants shared a dream of founding an isolated settlement where they could preserve their national language and culture for all time (p. 16). He argues that this ever-present dream clouded their judgement, and resulted in the leaders, particularly Sigtryggur Jónasson, choosing a poor location. In Thor's view,

the Icelanders only began to succeed as settlers when the dream of 'New Iceland' was crushed by the realities of poverty and disease in the fledgling colony, and the settlers recognized the importance of assimilation to North American norms. Thor returns to this theme throughout the book. The leaders of the New Iceland colony are portrayed as being sadly fixated on isolation, even when they should have realized their plan was doomed to fail.

This portrayal of the New Iceland colony is unfair, particularly if we look at its founding from different perspectives. Government documents in the National Archives of Canada detail how the plan to settle Icelanders in a bloc ethnic colony in the Northwest was initiated by the federal government—not by the immigrants—as part of the overall strategy for settling the west. Government land agents also encouraged the Icelanders to settle by Lake Winnipeg based on the belief that they would succeed best in an area where they could carry out both fishing and farming. In the original handwritten report, one of the reasons the Icelandic deputation cited for agreeing to the site was the fact that it was located on a major waterway and was close to the proposed route of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which at that time was expected to skirt the western boundary of the settlement. Together, the water and the rails would allow the Icelanders easy access to markets for the fish, timber, and agricultural resources they expected to develop. Thor did not consult the relevant primary documents in Ottawa, and conveniently omitted the railway rationale from his list of reasons why the group chose the site (p. 80). He instead argues that the site offered the 'required isolation' for an exclusive Icelandic settlement.

After taking us through New Iceland's difficult beginnings, Thor moves on to cover other Icelandic settlements founded from the 1880 on. His prerogative to devote at least some space to all these places gives the later chapters the character of a whirlwind tour where the bus barely stops long enough for the tourists to get a picture of the place. Usually, our guide tells us the

location of the settlement and the names of the main settlers before going on to describe their pioneer struggles, economic resourcefulness, community spirit, and either their triumph over adversity or move to greener pastures. This journey quickly takes us through such places as Langruth, Manitoba, Foam Lake, Saskatchewan, Markerville, Alberta, and Blaine, Washington. Some readers will be confused by the countless Björns, Gudmundurs, and Jóns, and the occasional Sigríðirs and Guðrúns, that are mentioned along the way, especially since there is little time to distinguish them from one another.

The solution to this problem is not more detail—there is more than enough. What is lacking is a way for the reader to tie all the facts together, and understand why they are relevant to the bigger story of the Icelanders in North America. This could have been easily done, but Thor misses key opportunities. For example, in chapter thirteen (p. 246) he tells us that most of settlers of Point Roberts came from the Myradalur district in Iceland, but does not say why this is important. Migration from one location to another—whether across the country or around the world—often begins with one person who explores a new region and sends favourable accounts to his family and friends back home. These people follow the initial pioneer and themselves inspire others to follow. This is the phenomenon of chain migration, and there is ample evidence to suggest that it was an important characteristic of the Icelandic experience. By making this or some other argument the organizing principle of the latter chapters, all of the detail would have seemed worthwhile.

The descriptive settlement accounts peppered throughout the book are based on printed Icelandic-North American sources, particularly the community and settler narratives in Ólafur S. Thorgeirsson's *Almanak* (1898-1954), Þorsteinn P. Þorsteinsson and Tryggvi Oleson's five-volume opus *Saga Íslendinga í Vesturheimi* (1945-1953). One of the great strengths of the book is that by paraphrasing from these Icelandic language sources and translating direct quotes, Thor has pro-

vided English-language readers with access to information that would otherwise be off-limits.

Paradoxically, Thor's reliance on the *Almanak* and the *Saga Íslendinga í Vesturheimi*, as well as the English-language histories of Wilhelm Kristjanson and Walter Lindal, is also one of the book's greatest weaknesses. Apart from the chapter on the religious controversy, there is very little in the way of original research based on rare manuscript sources such as diaries and letters. Thor does use letters and diaries, but they are generally from the printed sources and are the same ones that appear in the notes of Thor's historian predecessors. Because he does not attempt to find new sources, or use the old ones in a significantly new way, the potential for originality is limited.

Still, Thor's book can be seen as a way for readers—especially people of Icelandic descent—to reconnect with the history of the Icelanders in North America. This is a positive contribution; it may very well spark readers on this side of the Atlantic to ask questions that Thor does not, and inspire a renaissance in Icelandic-North American history-writing similar to what is currently happening in Iceland.

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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.

WENDY JOHNSON BROWN and **VALERIE HOSHIZAKI NORDIN** are members of the board of the Icelandic Canadian magazine. They enjoy researching and writing about their Icelandic heritage and are appreciative of the input from their mothers, Metta (Thorkelson) Johnson and Freda (Thorkelson) Hoshizaki originally from Arnes, Manitoba.

RYAN EYFORD recently completed a Master's degree in history at Carleton University. His thesis *Icelandic Migration to Canada, 1872-75* was based on archival research at the National Archives of Canada, Archives of Ontario, and the University of Manitoba Icelandic Collection.

DARRELL GUDMUNDSON is a Professional Engineer, Planner, Marketer, and Writer. He is owner of GFW Publishers. He lives in Saskatoon, and can be reached by e-mail at this address: jd.gudmundson@sasktel.net

MARILEE JOHANNESSON is daughter of Bjorgvin and Helen Goodman of Wynyard, Saskatchewan. She has worked as a homecare coordinator for the past 24 years and nursed in Golden Acres Seniors Home.

RICHARD A. JOHNSON, P.Eng. (Retired), is senior scholar President's Office at the University of Manitoba and a member of the VIP Millennium Campaign Cabinet.

SVAVA BARDAL KERR (1906 - 1989) was the 3rd daughter of Arinbjorn Sigurgeirsson Bardal and Margret Ingibjorg Olafsdottir. **AGNES BARDAL COMACK** (1921) is the 8th daughter and resides in Winnipeg.

SVERRIR OLAFSSON has written several articles, lectures and essays for schools and universities. He has also been a teacher of art. His art works have been found homes in many locales such as Iceland's National Gallery, Office of the President of Iceland plus several other locales like countries such as England, Sweden, Cuba, Germany, Italy, France and of course, Mexico.

AVERY SIMUNDSON is a fifteen year-old student at Arborg Collegiate. She entered this story in the Winnipeg Free Press fiction contest and won the human spirit award.

BLAIR SWANSON is the son of Floyd Swanson and the late Viola Swanson (nee Gislason) from Geysir. Blair presently resides in Stonewall with his wife Shelley. He has been employed with the Manitoba Telephone System for several years.

DR. LEIGH SYMS is associate curator of archaeology at the Manitoba Museum. He is recently retired but continues to write on archaeology. He and his wife, Shirley, were very active board members of The Icelandic Canadian magazine.

LORNA TERGESEN is acting Editor of The Icelandic Canadian Magazine. She is involved in the Icelandic community, enjoying her cultural heritage, and sharing it with others.

The House of Spirits

by Sverrir Ólafsson

Regarding my sculpture "The House of Spirits" in Isla Mujeres, Mexico, I would like to give you a short version of my idea for it. I work with symbolism in all of my sculptures, and this one is no exception. As there is the old Maya temple at Garrafon, I wanted to further celebrate the women's temple, by building my own, that in a way calls to the old - via the new. Furthermore, I wanted "my temple" to symbolize a sort of a haven for the spirits of the ancient world, therefore the open windows to all four directions. As the Garrafon area is also very rich of wildlife, birds and iguanas in particular, the spirits would through - the animal life form, find their haven (by nesting) inside my House of Spirits. I deliberately placed the sculpture at the "opposite end" of the park, so that it would not interfere with the old temple, but rather "communicate" with it.

As I understood, my hope for birds and other animals to seek shelter inside the sculpture, has worked even better than I could hoped for.

As for the structure itself, the "pyramid" shape sculpture, has its steps, that symbolize the journey towards infinity - the after life or the All Mighty - if you like.

On some of my other sculptures, I have used a "chair" on top of the pyramid shape, to symbolize power - be it good or bad! In the case of The House of Spirits, it is actually a serial piece, that I have worked with in different parts of the world - Mexico, Iceland, Germany, Japan and other places.

It was exceptionally rewarding for me to have the honour and opportunity to build this sculpture in Isla Mujeres, as my tribute to the "women of the world". I am in my heart a strong believer of feminism and try all I can to stand for women's rights, wherever and whenever I can. To be

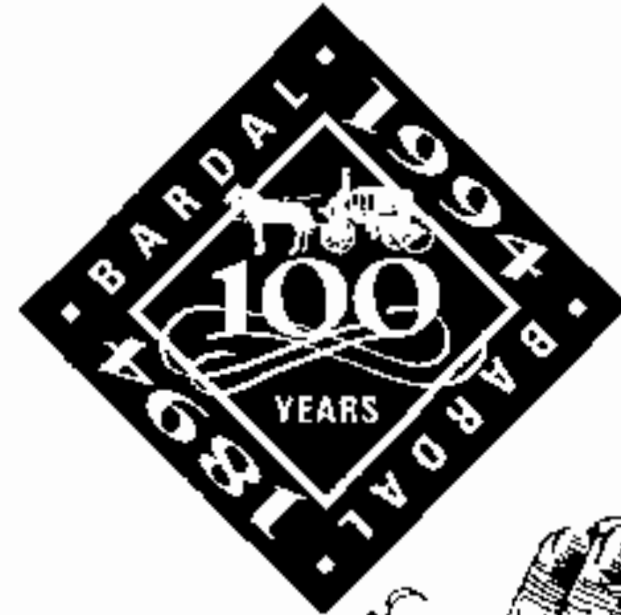
able to honour the women, on the "island of women" - Isla Mujeres, as the ancient Mayas did, was extremely gratifying for me.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KAREN EMILSON

The back page

The "House of Spirits," on Isla Mujeres, Mexico.



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