

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN MAGAZINE

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CANADA  
ICELAND  
FOUNDATION  
INC

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An organization funded by Canadians of  
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# The ICELANDIC CANADIAN



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# The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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## THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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**Canada**

## On the Cover



Starbong Loga speaking at the Arborg & Deserai Multicultural Heritage Village

# Editorial In Keeping

by Lorna Tergesen

This magazine features much about preserving our past with artifacts, architecture and records. We, of Icelandic heritage come from that long line of great record keepers and so are trying to do our part in preserving our past. There are so many buildings that have been restored and museums set up to do just that. I believe that this all began in the early '70s but it may have even been earlier. We have petitioned our governments to designate certain buildings and sites as Heritage Sites. It is interesting to now note how many pertain to our community and how varied they are. There seem to be endless opportunities for capturing our history in one way or another.

Wally Johannson has spear headed a historical committee in the Gimli district where he catalogues historical buildings. Wally was also foremost in erecting the cemetery monument to commemorate those first pioneers who lost their lives to small pox in the district of New Iceland. Pat Eyolfson has written a complete summary of the events held in late May to open up several new buildings in the Arborg Heritage Village. Her dedication to this endeavour cannot be measured. Kristjana Magnusson Clark has shared with us her thrill at being able to attend the weekend and to relive so many warm memories of her Arborg upbringing in the Sigvaldson house and the community.

Arborg is actively building up their Heritage Village under the leadership and volunteer work of such as Pat Eyolfson. They have managed to acquire some very noteworthy buildings and artifacts. The same can be said for so many other communities such as Markerville, where great efforts were made to restore their hall,

church and creamery. Visiting the Stephan G. Stephansson house gives one a small glimpse into the personalities of not only the poet himself, but also that of his family. Bellingham, Elfros and Kinmount have erected meaningful monuments to honor our forefathers. Many other markers and monuments are scattered all over. Seattle boasts of a wonderful museum which I would love to visit. Icelandic State Park in North Dakota is a showcase of both beautifully restored buildings and an excellent museum in a park setting. Hecla has brought back the vision of its past community. Riverton is working on refurbishing its railway station and all means of transportation used in previous days. Selkirk has the Marine Museum located on the Red River, which this year has suffered great loss both by flood and vandalism.

All of these sites boast of strong volunteers who foresaw the need to keep the story alive.. These are very important legacies that need to be maintained and protected. The opportunity to use these sites for educational purposes are boundless. Encourage your family and friends to take full advantage of these historical and educational sites. So many interesting stories can be told and retold with these visits. My experience in giving our younger generations an opportunity to both visit these sites or just be told the tales of past life are always very well received. Very often, what is obvious to the older generations, is news to them. So go spread the word. Visit the sites that have been erected and are maintained for our benefit. We will all be richer for it.

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## An Arborg weekend to remember

by Kristjana Magnusson Clark



*Sigvaldson House official opening*

It was an unforgettable weekend on May 23rd, 24th & 25th when the Grand Opening of the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village took place at the Heritage Village in Arborg, Manitoba. It was off to a great start on the Friday evening with a barbecue and pig roast, followed by a hootenany under the big tent on the grounds. The evening resounded with music provided by the Fridfinnson Sisters, Drew Kozub and his lively band of musicians, the Sisters' accordionist Colleen Kilbrei and her singing group, jazz music and Fine Country Folk music by Fred Oleson, Wes Wilson and Roy Gudmundson.

It was a weekend of tradition and ceremony when David Gislason emceed the official opening of the heritage site on Saturday May 24th with dignitaries from the surrounding area congratulating the town of Arborg in successfully establishing the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village. Official ribbon cutting ceremonies took place at the Bjarmi Catholic Church, the teepee, the Vigfusson House, the Brandson House and the Sigvaldason House, which was followed by tours of the buildings.

As people gathered at the Bjarmi Catholic Church, the Rev. Michel Bzdel, Archbishop Emeritus of Winnipeg led the group of people around the church, sprinkling the exterior of the church with holy water, with Rev. Harry Chuchry intoning prayers.

This was followed by a walk into the interior of the beautifully restored church, blessing the interior and the priestly vestments with holy water and prayers.

The children were all quite intrigued by the tepee on the village grounds. At noon the Aboriginal Summer Bear Dance Group, led by Clarence and Barbara Nepinka, danced under the large tent. The

captivating performance of the dancers, to the beat of the drummers and chanters, provided the large crowd with an insight into aboriginal history and culture.

It was a weekend of reminiscing as we walked through the Heritage Houses. Olof Sigurdson of White Rock, B.C. expressed her thoughts on entering the Vigfusson log house, the oldest of the three houses: "When I walked in the Vigfusson log house and saw the tiny kitchen with the wood stove, a small table and two chairs, the cream separator in one corner and the narrow staircase winding upstairs into two small bedrooms I thought, 'It's so small.' Three people lived in this house, as well as the teacher who boarded there. How did they manage in this small house? I was completely intrigued by this log house."

The Brandson House was built in the early 1900s, a cottage style home which was bought furnished, for \$1000, by Sigurdur and Disa Brandson, who raised ten children there. As Thordis Wilson of White Rock walked through the Brandson House she was reminded of her long friendship with Jonina Brandson: "I remember often stopping at Brandson's house when I was walking home from school with Jonina. The smell of Disa Brandson's bread baking was always so inviting. It was a place I loved to go to as Mrs. Brandson (Disa) always made me feel so welcome. She and Mother were good friends and there were many friendships amongst the ones who were a similar age in the two families."

When Jonina moved to Ontario to work and later marry there, Thordis said: "We lost touch so we did not see each other for twenty years. When my husband Emil and I moved to the West Coast, our friendship resumed when Jonina and her husband moved to Calgary as we were able to visit them on our way to visit families in



*The Sigvaldson sisters on the porch of the house. Back row, left to right: Margaret, Olof, Valdine. Front row left to right: Thordis, Kristjana, Gudrun, Anna.*

Manitoba.

I was very pleased to see Jonina's youngest sister, Haddie Low at the Heritage Village site at the Grand Opening. She is one of three surviving members of Sigurdur & Disa Brandson's family of ten children. Today the Brandson House contains old pictures, furniture and loving memories of past years and past friendships.

As I walk towards our old home, the Sigvaldason House which was donated and moved to its site at the Heritage Village by David Smolinski, who was the last owner of the house, I am transported back into our world in the 1940s. I see, in my mind's eye, Mother's crisp white cotton curtains that adorn the windows, the large kitchen table, the lovely dining room buffet, table and chairs which were presented to Mother and Dad by the Arborg Community on the occasion of their 25th Wedding Anniversary. I am reminded of the day when we got our piano. No one knew how to play the piano so we girls ran to out

neighbours, the Andersons, whose daughter Sara was a fine pianist and asked her to come and play for us. I am reminded of the excitement of a sunny day in June 1940 when we went to have our family picture taken in Winnipeg.

Now, sixty eight years later, as we walk into our restored house we are greeted by Cherysse Phelps, our great niece, dressed in period costume. As she leads us through the front hall we see a beautiful high-backed chair with a mirror and hooks across the top donated by Pat Eyolfson and her family; in the dining room the buffet, table and chairs have been returned from White Rock by Kristjana, the china cabinet from Wesley in Winnipeg; the original family picture and the mantel clock, as well as dressers, end tables and rocking chair have come back from Margaret's home in Invermere; the dining room set has been beautifully set with sister Gudrun's Royal Doulton dinner set; an old chest, brought over from Iceland when our grandparents moved to Canada has now been brought

back home by Oscar of St. Catherine Ont. and Alda of Calgary; another old chest has been brought home by Valdine of St. Louis, MO and a cedar chest from Inga's home in White Rock, B.C.

As we walk into the living room Lorna Floyd, in period costume, greets us as she sits on the chesterfield, knitting. Above the chesterfield is Mother and Dad's beautiful wedding picture, brought back by Oscar. The piano has been sent back by Lynne Taillefer from St. Adolphe; the beautiful white cotton curtains, replicas of Mother's, made by Thordis Wilson and Olof Sigurdson now adorn the windows; family snapshots have been developed, enlarged, framed, mounted and tastefully displayed by Lorraine and Garnett Betts of Victoria, B.C.

In the kitchen we see the long table which Mother and Dad had brought with them when they moved from Foam Lake, Saskatchewan to Vidir, Manitoba. Tara Barkman, our great-great niece, sits on a chair by the table, hand-churning a small butter churn with the help of her daughter Alysse. She is anxiously wondering if the cream will ever turn to butter. She keeps on turning, then smiles happily when she senses that the cream is gradually beginning to curdle. Later we are able to sample the butter. As we leave the kitchen we see Mother's treadle machine under the sunny windows, the old waffle iron on the stove and the washing machine in one corner of the kitchen.

As we walk upstairs to the bedrooms I am reminded of how we used to crouch in the landing, listening to stories of the huldfolk and trolls of Iceland, as told by an old neighbour of ours. If our parents heard us laughing we would scurry back to bed.

The master bedroom in our house has been furnished with a beautifully restored bedroom set, a gift from Richard Nordal, in memory of his late wife, Jona Nordal who had restored the set.

While we were in the bedroom a group of school children walk in. While walking through the bedroom one of the young boys said: 'What is that big cup doing under the bed?' There were titters of amusement amongst the elders in there as

many of us were reminded only too vividly of the tiresome task of removing those cups, washing them thoroughly, then placing them under the bed again for the next night.

The four bedrooms upstairs have been furnished with our old dressers brought from Invermere by Margaret; others have been donated by people in the community. Patchwork quilts, made by Mother for all her daughters have been returned and spread across the bottom part of each bed upstairs. Dad's small office upstairs has been furnished with his old oak desk, sent by Anna."

Bjorn and Lillo Sigvaldason and family of Bernie, Terry, Gail and Lorne, were the last members of the Sigvaldason family to live in the house. As Gail and Lorne walked through the house they were vividly reminded of the years they lived there when they were growing up. In reminiscing about the house Gail said: "When I was growing up in this house as a child I always thought of it as a big house. Now, forty-four years later, as I walk through the house it seems so much smaller than when I was a child. I remember so many things about this house - the big kitchen, and I remember exactly where all the furniture was placed. Now, the only confusing thing to me is that we never used the front entrance, because our home was a farm home where the back door was always used for entering the house."

It was a weekend for the Sigvaldason clan to gather together on the Sunday for a Family Brunch, organized by Barbara Orbanski and Elma Kozub. After the hearty Brunch there was a time to remember Einar, who had recently passed away, with Margaret and Kristjana sharing their loving memories of Einar with family members.

The afternoon program began with a slide presentation by Wally Johannson, who had travelled to Churchbridge, Mother's birthplace, along with his friend Hal Sigurdson, a former sports reporter. They had photographed numerous pictures of the area where Mother grew up and these slides, along with an interesting pre-

sentation by Wally proved to be very interesting. Singers Gabrielle Barkman and Fabrina Johannson were each accompanied by Wesley Wilson, to loud applause. Elma Kozub with her accordion and Drew Kozub with his violin magic kept musical toes tapping. Drew Kozub told the assembled crowd the story of his violin, which had originally been owned by Frank Wilson, Drew's great, great grandfather. When Frank died the violin was passed on to Wesley. On Drew's thirteenth birthday Wesley Wilson presented the violin to Drew, who was showing promise as a budding and talented musician.

It was a weekend to remember; a weekend where various cultures melded in spirit and thought; where families gathered together, reminisced and remembered old times; where a church was blessed with holy water by the Archbishop; where children saw the past unfolding before them; where dancers performed ritual dances of history and culture; where the Parish Hall was alive with demonstrations and displays; a weekend where volunteers, among them Pat Eylofson and Barb Wachal, could now rejoice in their very successful project and it was a weekend where a gentle peace prevailed over the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village.



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# Arborg Heritage Village Opens

by Pat Eyolfson

*"We are committed to providing an interpretive center dedicated to preserving and showcasing the multicultural history of the area in a working village."*

The Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village in Arborg, Manitoba hosted a Grand Opening weekend May 23 and 24. People from all across Canada and parts of the United States attended these opening ceremonies and weekend events.

The Village thus far consists of six buildings which have been moved on site, plus a storage/workshop which was built (replica of a livery stable which stood on this site), a 1919 railway caboose, a 22 site campground, Ukrainian bake oven, and newest edition two tepees. We have completed extensive restorations on the Poplarfield St. Nickolas Ukrainian Catholic Parish Hall, the St. Demetrius Ukrainian Church, the Trausti Vigfusson Home, the Bjorn and Lara Sigvaldason Home, the Sigrudur and Jodis Brandson Home, and as of April 10/08 have moved in

the Poplar Heights School.

The weekend's events started Friday with 300 school children doing tours of the village. Seniors and volunteers from the area were in the different buildings demonstrating such things as spinning yarn, carding, knitting, making soap, churning butter, quilting, making bannock in the Ukrainian bake oven, Ukrainian egg painting, cross stitching Ukrainian dance shirts and blouses, cross cut sawing demo, beading demos and dream catcher demos. Friday also saw the registration of many of the family of the buildings start arriving.

Three hundred people attended the pig roast Friday evening and all stayed to enjoy a hootenanny which followed at 7:30. The crowd was treated to music by the Fine Country Folk, Freddie Olson, Broken Deuce, the Fridfinnson Sisters, Selena



Ribbon cutting at Vigfusson home.

Stoyanowski, Amber Gulay, and Kaiha Stoyanowski. Saturday's events started at 11am with the dedication and blessing of the St. Demetrius Ukrainian Catholic (Bjarmi) Church service conducted by the past Archbishop his honour Michael Bezdell and Father Harry Chuckry. Following the church service, the crowd was entertained by an aboriginal Dance troop called Summer Bear Dance Troupe which was sponsored by the Riverton & District Friendship Centre.

Then at 1pm the Grand opening ceremonies began complete with entertainment, ribbon cutting ceremonies and building tours. Entertainment included the new Iceland Youth Choir, Brady Colins, Alpine Singers and Björn Thoroddsen, one of Iceland's foremost jazz guitarists and Richard Gillis, renowned Manitoban musician. Seven daughters of the Sigvaldason Home ranging between the ages of 75 to 96 came to take part in the ribbon cutting ceremonies. They were Anna Thorarinsson, Gudrun Johannson, Kristjana Magnusson-Clarke, Thordis Wilson, Margaret

Rasmunssen, Valdine Prentice, and Olaf Sigurdson. Haddie Low along with many grandchildren and great-grandchildren came to cut the ribbon at the Brandson house. The Vigfusson building ribbon cutting was by Greg Palsson, Philip Thorkelson & Ruth Christie. The Bjarmi Church ribbon was held by the elder parishioners of the church and the ribbon was cut by Olga Bobbee. Ethnic food booths were on site, races and games for the kiddies, and Saturn Shows Rides and Midways. The local quilting Club put on a beautiful quilting show in the Heritage hall with over 50 quilts on display. The weekend was topped off with an old time dance, in the Arborg Community Hall music by the Telstars. A good time was had by all. For more information about the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village go to the web site [www.arborgheritagevillage.ca](http://www.arborgheritagevillage.ca) Hours of Operation: Tue., Thur., & Sat, tours at 10 a.m. & 1p.m. A 22 site campground adjacent the Village for travelers. Phone Pat: (204) 376-5079.



Bjarmi Catholic Church in background and tepee.



# Heritage buildings in the R.M. of Gimli

From mansions and churches to sheds and a biffy

by Gail Halldorson



Lake Forest Road summer kitchen

This is the story behind the exhibit, *If These Walls Could Talk*, that opened on Manitoba Day, May 12, 2008, at the New Iceland Heritage Museum (NIHM) in Gimli and closed at the end of May. Gimli by-law no. 07-0016 re-established the Gimli Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee (MHAC) on March 28, 2007.

This was the dream of Wally Johansson and he took on the chairmanship. Wally was born in Arborg in 1936. He was educated at the University of Manitoba and worked first as a high school history teacher, then from 1969 to 1977 as MLA for St. Matthews (west-end Winnipeg), and back to high school teaching in the Evergreen School Division until his retirement in 1999. He is a long-time member of the Rotary Club of Gimli and the Icelandic National League among other voluntary organizations. Presently, he is the driving force behind the MHAC. The entire municipality benefits from his passionate interest and tireless work.

The MHAC started out with a \$1000 budget, granted by the Rural Municipality of Gimli (RM). The first step was to find out what buildings in the RM were built early enough to be of interest as heritage buildings. Wally went to the Assessment Branch in Selkirk and obtained a list of 218 pre-1939 buildings—large and small. All properties were included, not only those with an Icelandic connection. The Assessment Branch also provided the date of construction for most of the priority buildings. The Historic Resources Branch of the Provincial Government helped with

a basic information form. The MHAC set up their “Heritage Building Inventory Form” on which they recorded the following information: building name (if any); building address; owner address, phone, email; description; construction date; original owner; original builder; original function; construction material; stories or features of interest; building condition; building integrity; owner interest in heritage; date of survey and personnel involved. The assessment rolls of the Town of Gimli and the RM of Gimli provided a check on the dates of construction and names of original owners. When a building was put up at an address, the rolls showed it, and the taxes were put up too. The New Icelandic Heritage Museum generously shared their summer students to work with Wally. Angela Sylvester, Alex Specula and Stephanie Sydney provided valuable assistance in interviews, photography and data entry.

Areas designated for coverage in 2007 were Gimli town, Loni Beach, South Beach, Camp Monton, and Berlo. A driving tour was the next step. Buildings were rated on a 1-2-3 priority. One meant “top rated,” two meant “questionable for a variety of reasons,” and three meant “too changed.” Fifty-five buildings got a “1” and the hard work began. Wally, Angela and Alex visited every building taking pictures of the outside and, in some cases, the inside. They interviewed present owners, neighbours, and anyone they heard about that might have more information. The inventory forms were filled out and entered

into the NIHM computer. The pictures were stored on the computer, also.

Many interesting stories were collected. Wally noticed that there were cottage communities of summer residents who kept their summer homes for generations, and became close friends. One of these is in Loni Beach; another in the area around Gimli Park.

We have selected a small number of buildings to highlight. Here they are:



THORSON HOME

Built in 1913/14 by Stefan Thorson, who was the mayor of Gimli in 1914, this is a two-story home with a gable-ended roof.



27 - 1st Ave., in Gimli was used as the home for school principals

The home still has the original fence, windows (except for the addition), woodwork and some original fixtures. Charlie Thorson, the artist and animator, once lived here. Cartoon Charlie worked for Walt Disney Studios and is said to have fashioned Snow White in the image of an Icelandic girl he met in Winnipeg. This is the present residence of Jean Kristjanson.

#### CHISWELL HOUSE

R.W.J. Chiswell built this one-and-one half story house in 1914, a date etched in the sidewalk. The original part of the house still has the old woodwork, plaster walls, doors, fir molding around windows, and bathtub. During one of the renovations, a 1911 coin and a WWI valentine were found in the walls. This was the house of the principals of Gimli Public School. It was later called Solmundson House after Franz Solmundson who was one of the principals. The house is now owned by Frank Pezzola and is used as a summer cottage.

#### CAMP MORTON

Now owned by the Parks Branch of the Province of Manitoba, the driving force



behind the founding of the camp was Monsignor Morton and Archbishop A.A. Sinnott of the Winnipeg Roman Catholic Diocese. The property was purchased in 1919 and the buildings constructed between 1920 and 1940. It was first used as a summer camp for disadvantaged children and families from Winnipeg and St. Benedict's orphanage in Arborg. Now it is a Provincial Recreation Park. The Water Tower and Chapel (now a picnic shelter) are built in the Italianate style with wood frames, exterior mortar and stone facade. Cabins are in stackwall style. The gazebo has people's names carved into it dating

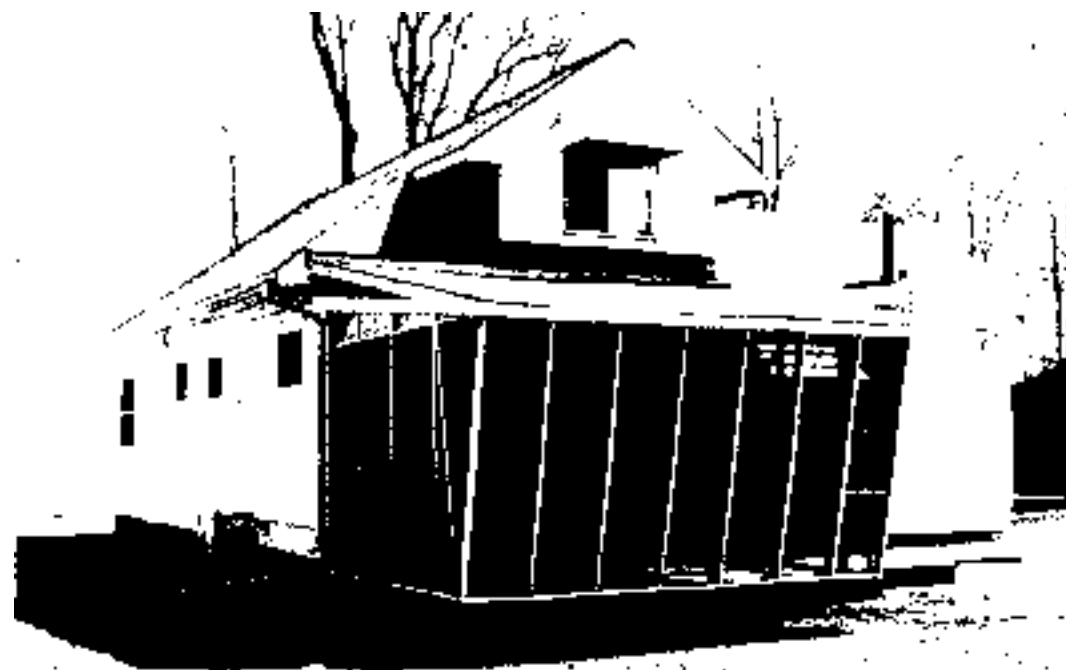
from 1929. The gates were padlocked after the property was sold to the province because people were stealing urns, pictures etc. Someone came by boat and took the stained glass windows from the chapel.

#### MADDEN COTTAGE

The construction date is 1910, and the cottage was purchased in 1955 by Herdis Madden. Two wicker chairs and two iron beds came with it. One day, Herdis visited neighbour Barbara Almasy with baby Guy in her arms saying "Here is our latest adventure." Guy became a film producer and director. The beach and cottage scenes for his internationally famous cult film, *Tales of Gimli Hospital*, were filmed here. Madden family and friends were the actors in the film. It was shown on a bed sheet in Orris's back yard, at the beginning of the Gimli Film Festival. The cottage is still the Madden's summer cottage.

#### SEAFORTH

This cottage sits on land that originally belonged to Gisli Sveinson in 1904. Lt. Col. Hugh Mackenzie ('Old Guts and Gators'),



Madden cottage at Loni Beach



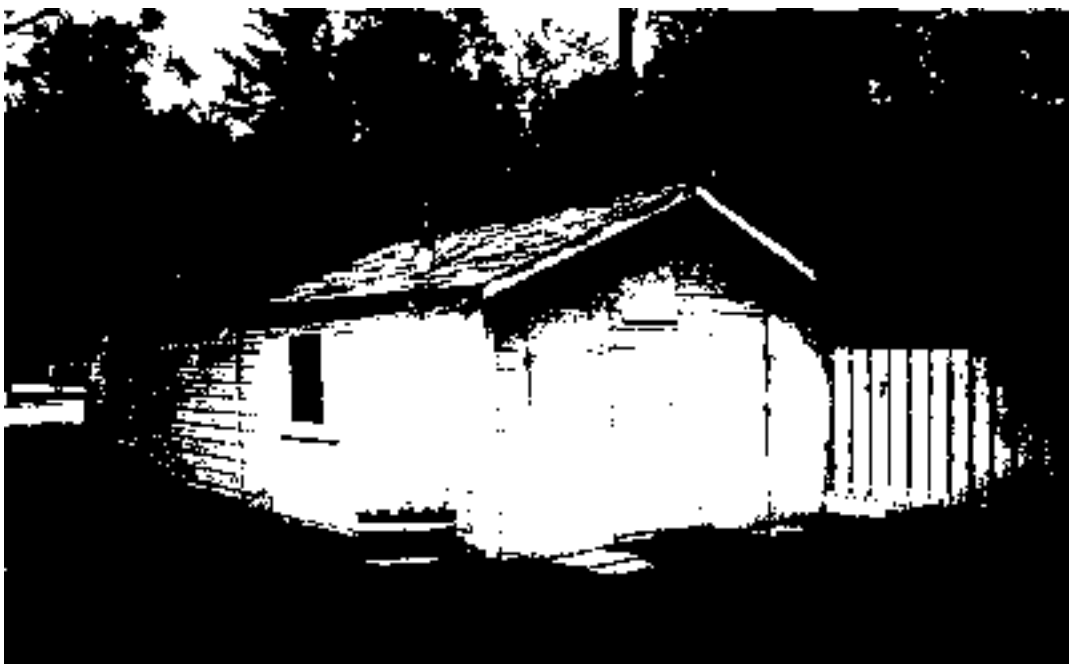
the present owner's father, bought the cottage and two lots. He named it after his regiment from WWI, the Seaforth Highlanders. Originally, there was a rocky shoreline and a big marsh along the lake. The living room and north bedroom are the original part with fireplace, siding, windows and doors intact. It is still used as a cottage.

#### DEVON LODGE

Alfred Whiteway was the original owner. The property is now owned by



Alfred's grandson, John, and his sister, Snjolaug. It has been the Whiteway family cottage since 1922. The interior of Devon Lodge has many interesting features: pictures of great-grandparents from Devon, England; a collection of ribbons from the Icelandic Celebrations of 1933 to 1976 (pictured here); old posters, banners, flags, books, and furniture. Murray, Alfred's son, has his name carved on a wall at the entrance to an addition in the Pavillion. Murray's son, Doug, became a writer. In his novel about the 60s, he writes about



*The old biffy & shed at Loni Beach*

drug deals done at the Falcon restaurant.

#### KARL SCHNERCH LOG SUMMER KITCHEN

Construction date is believed to be between 1905 and 1910. A tin roof was built for the summer kitchen to preserve the logs. The building has a gable-end roof and saddle-notch or dove-tail notch joins in the walls. It is now used as a children's play house. Other buildings on this farm property include a stackwall house, a barn and a cement building. It is now owned by Karl's great grand-daughter and her husband.

#### THE BIFFY

On one of the Seaforth cottage lots is a building that originally had a biffy and a shower. It is said that a certain lady called Mrs. Tweedy died in that biffy. "They took her away in a wicker basket."

The MHAC succeeded in obtaining a grant of \$5000 from the Historic Places Initiative, and a \$1020 grant from the Historic Resources Branch to develop the exhibit. This allowed them to design a first-class presentation of the information they had collected. Starting this year, the exhibit can be transported to other Manitoba heritage associations and to schools. The exhibit includes:

- a 12 minute film/video produced and directed by Matthew Wright of Arnes
- 14 pictorial panels with commentaries (selected sites from the inventory)
- a PowerPoint presentation produced by Ken Krebs of Gimli
- a loose leaf binder containing the photographs and inventory forms of all documented properties
- two cases of display material (artefacts, documents and historical photographs) loaned to the museum by the people who were interviewed
- a model of the original log house of Chris and Rose Reichert in Berlo

In 2007, its inaugural year, the MHAC received \$1000 from the RM of Gimli Council. This generated over 700 hours of volunteer labour, almost 4000 km in volunteer travel, \$8500 in grants, and \$3000 in

donations. And this is only the beginning. Wally and his assistants will be collecting information and photographs of more buildings and local cemeteries\* in the summer of 2008. There are also plans for two Heritage Tour Brochures—one a walking tour of the town, the other a driving tour of the RM. Plans are to have a map on one side of the driving tour brochure, and photos and commentaries on the other. This will greatly enhance the tourist potential of the area.

The Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee is made up of the following volunteers: Wally Johannson (Chairman), Grace Artyshko, Tammy Axelsson, Andy Blicq, Diane Hall, Rick Lair, Ernest Stefanson, and Stefan Tergesen. This talented group generated many of the ideas and policies of the MHAC. For example, Andy Blicq supervised the development of the film, and wrote commentaries on the pictorial panels. He also writes news releases for the MHAC. Tammy Axelsson, director of the NIHM, developed the concept of the museum exhibit for Manitoba Day, and set it up. If These Walls Could Talk was very much a group effort. Congratulations on a job well done. The community looks forward to future accomplishments.

If you would like to donate ideas, information or time to the MHAC, please contact Wally Johannson at johannso@mts.net.

*Editor's Note: The MHAC has collected information and erected a monument to the victims of the 1876-77 smallpox epidemic at the Icelandic Pioneer Cemetery on Highway 9 in Gimli. This story will be included in a future article in The Icelandic Canadian.*

# Aunty Bea and Me

by Sylvia Wetten

with permission from the Icelandic Club of B.C. Newsletter, June 2008



Bea de Keruzec is on the left and Sylvia Wetten is on the right.

Aunty Bea was born as Kristveig Sigurborg Sigurveig Bjornson on the original homestead named Grundahol, a name reminiscent of a certain location in Iceland. Her first name was changed to Bertha, but she has been fondly known as Aunty Bea. Me – I was born on an adjoining farm in the same year, 1920, and was named Kristine Guðlave Sylvia Guðnason. We have often wondered why so many names were necessary. It seems that the custom was to honour parents and grandparents with namesakes.

We grew up in the Rural Municipality of Argyle, Manitoba. My first recollection of Aunty Bea was when, as a small child, she developed pneumonia and was nursed back to health at home. This was a miracle of the ages given the circumstances in the farm homes in those days. As childhood friends, we attended Antonious School, although, our country school was in a different district which was Hola. I often arrived at the Bjornson's a bit early and was promptly seated at the table having a second breakfast of oatmeal porridge and cream, so rich and creamy like no other in the whole wide world! Also sitting at this same table would be Bea's brother, Sigurjón, known as 'Siggi', who usually had a reptile of some sort peering out of his breast pocket. It was often a little garter snake which he likely kept in his pillowcase while he was sleeping – ugh! We then walked south from Bjornson's place across the fields of grain past Section '27' where the Johannessons lived, hence to the road allowance. We never minded the two-mile walk – yes, walking and talking – and talking – and tasting the tall bushes of Saskatoons in the cut in the early morning September sunshine.

Then there were the Sundays when off to Church and Sunday School we would

go, running and walking behind the buggy as Jónas, Bea's father, drove to our beloved Grund Church. It has been designated by the Manitoba Government as a Heritage Site. We attended the church service with the adults and then went to Sunday School afterwards while they gathered to chat about the condition of the crops in this farming community, and otherwise, share the latest happenings. During those years, rural electricity had not come to our area nor had the telephone. News was relayed from our farm to the Bjornson's by means of a 'fence telephone' that the young men had put together. News of the 'outside world' came to us via a crystal set, and later, by a battery radio. The batteries were charged through a windmill in the farmyard.

Time passed and we grew to love the ski hills in the area. Skiing in the moonlight was great. We were safe because Bea's brother and Scotty, the hired man, loved to ski, so they would break the trail for us younger ones. We skied and skated, but also, rolled dry oak leaves into fat cigarettes wrapped in some pages of the T. Eaton Company catalogue which was usually found in the outhouse. If the outhouse could only talk! In a related incident, we once climbed the maple tree in Bea's barnyard where we lit up. I managed to get so dizzy from those puffs of smoke that I fell to the ground. Aunty Bea rescued me. Today, she can practically go into hysterics in recalling this hilarious moment. This may have been the time that we added an old cigarette butt to the rollings from the ashtray in the kitchen. Bea was always a thoughtful caregiver. How well I remember the time that she literally pried a wood tick out of my ear with a piece of rotten stick! She was always so helpful – not to mention the many, many things that she taught me that I shall not be relating in this story!

The sheep pasture was a perfect place to skate when the willow pond froze over. We also knew that the coyotes were lurking among the willows, hoping for a stray sheep to satisfy their hunger. I tried very hard to scare Bea as we skated, saying that I could see eyes gleaming from among the trees. I succeeded in frightening myself and was the first to remove my skates and scurry up through the barnyard and to the house. In the summer, it was in this same pasture that we snared and trapped gophers to sell their tails in Baldur, our local village, for five cents each.

Naturally, we became interested in boys as our teen years rolled around. We gathered in Baldur on a Saturday night when the farmers and their families congregated to buy groceries. We sang all the way into town and all the way home. Boy, those Jimmie Rogers and Wilf Carter songs were popular with us! But we girls took another route – sometimes, sitting on the church steps and hoping that some young lads would come along and talk to us, or ask us to go for a walk. There were also the dances on Friday evenings in the Memorial Hall with the Red River Ramblers for music – and not to forget the beautiful moonlight waltzes. Bea lost her mother and I lost my father within the same year. It seemed that we really grew up during those years. It was also time for us to study our catechism in preparation for confirmation. We sometimes rode horseback to these classes. Bea had her beloved Pal to ride while I was relegated to ride a Bjornson horse by the name of King, but usually referred to as,

Thunderbolt, as he was such a plodder. That's why I rode him - he had one speed - SLOW!

The years when we both lived in Winnipeg saw us working for our keep. After work, we used to ride our bikes to Sargent Pool, where we swam. The Second World War was taking place and taking our young men away. We were of the age when most young people were thinking of marriage. Then the boys began arriving home from overseas. By chance, while I was a hostess at the Eaton Service Centre, I met a very recently returned soldier whom I introduced to Bea. He later became her husband. In turn, I was introduced to their friend who became my husband. Our first dance-date together with these young soldiers was at the twin ballrooms of the Royal Alexander Hotel in Winnipeg – such class! Time went by and we were all close friends together – all four of us. Both Bea and I received our engagement rings in the mail from Vancouver where our men friends had gone to seek their fortune. We had a double-wedding on May 17, 1947 at First Lutheran Church on Victor Street in Winnipeg. We motored together to Vancouver on our honeymoon. Yes – we honeymooned together! Bea presented Al with a son, and I remember so well that I had scheduled my holiday so that I could be there to lend a hand when she came home from the hospital. On the menu was hamburger soup. A few months later, my son was born. Our boys were baptized together.

Today, we are in touch daily by telephone. Our visits together are punctuated with the lovely touch of the Icelandic fare we grew up with. There are the old favourites of rúlpýlsa, skyr, kleinur, vinarterta and coffee, of course. We celebrate our years of friendship in this way. Though the years have not always been kind health wise, Bea has never lost her sense of humour. We laugh nonsensically over the pronunciation of some difficult Icelandic word or expression. For Auntie Bea and Me – we have withstood the passage of time with caring, sharing and loving. Our 'good night' to one another changeth not – "Góða nótt, Elskan."

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## Correction

Dear Sir/Madam,

As the granddaughter of Margret Benedictsson, I am always pleased and proud to read about her. However, your recent article had some glaring errors I cannot let pass.

On page 119: "In 1912, with failing eyesight, she left Manitoba with her three children (son-Ingi, daughter- Helen, and a third child-name and gender unknown) to live first in Seattle and next in Blaine, Washington."

On page 123: "Benedictsson lived in Gimli, Winnipeg, and Selkirk and moved back to Winnipeg"

I would like to set the record straight. She came to Seattle, Washington in 1912 with her

12 year old son Ingersoll. Her other child, Helen, being of age and employed, stayed in Winnipeg. Margret did not have a third child.

On page 111: "Benedictsson lived in Manitoba from 1881 until 1912." The fact is she emigrated from Iceland to Dakota in 1887. She lived in Manitoba from 1891 to 1912.

Sincerely,

Norma Helen Benedictson Thomasson

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# Dancing through Scandinavia

by Christine Richardson (Hjartarson)

What I wouldn't give to live in the most classy, stylish, freethinking country in the world. The hub of civilization as I know it today. Well, perhaps this is an overstatement. It is, I think, just an emotional feeling I get as I reminisce about my recent voyage to Denmark.

On the ride into Copenhagen from the airport I realized right off that this would be an intriguing experience. On a huge wall was a painting billboard like, of a nude woman. Ironically, walking directly beneath were two muslim women covered from head to toe. This is their sign of piety and obedience. It re-affirmed my pride and relief at being born a Scandinavian with a free mind to do as I pleased.

Oh, the shopping! The styles one finds are spellbinding to say the least. People on the streets all looked like fashion models.

Just off the main shopping street we visited an ancient church (Vor Frue Kirke). Life like, yet giant size statues lined the interior. They were the presumed likeness of the twelve disciples. One could only sit in awe at the detail of design. My thoughts were of the amazing artistry involved in creating this place.

We traveled, by ferry, to the Island of Bornholm. Two very helpful tour guides met us and off we were on an adventure of a lifetime, but first we had to eat. Even though I hate herring I did taste it. Scrumptious. I have decided Bornholm is the only place to eat smoked herring.

Seeing the 'Hammerhaus' ruins, erected in the 12th century took me to thoughts of the Vikings battling each other to acquire this beautiful island. Alas, the Danes are the present occupants.

What looked like red marker art was strewn over rocks near an ancient Stonehenge like cemetery, but this was done by the Vikings long ago. The only drawings I understood were the longboats.

What was the purpose? Did they realize it would last a thousand years? How did they get those huge pillars there? Of what importance was this at the time?

Our next stop was at a store that sold glass products. A glass blowing demonstration was in progress. It looked hot and time consuming yet beautiful to behold.

We were taken, by small ferry, to the island of Christianso. It was a military outpost as far back as 1684. The trip there was pretty rough. We, who had strong stomachs, were fine. There were convenient 'bags' if you didn't. One could easily walk the whole island in a couple of hours or so. It has been made into a peaceful place for summer homes.

Back on Bornholm we managed to go to a 'round church.' A 12th century circular church where, at one time, women entered from a different door. Going up the narrow stone stairs was, to say the least, terrifying and then you must come down again.

We spent the night at the home of one of our guides. He, it turned out, is a book-binder. I was so absolutely mesmerized by his work that I purchased craft kits from him before we headed back to Copenhagen.

Our dear Kirsten Svensen, the 'Danish Dancing Queen' invited us to dance with her dance group. They were very graceful and had polite customs. When a dance ended, the man would pat the ladies hand. Isn't that adorable? Kirsten is a cousin of Emma Godfredsen and Jane Meech, our dance instructor, and at 80+ can dance circles around all of us.

Some of us took a canal tour around Copenhagen with Kirsten as our guide. I so enjoyed the unique structures and details on spires. Who did these art pieces and how did they get them on top of buildings?

We started a road trip by stopping at a

Viking museum. It was easier to visualize the past with authentic props. Just being there among the relics made my imagination soar back a thousand years.

Our next stop was by the seashore, at the home of Karl and Marilyn's friends. We enjoyed a swim and a great meal. Karl and Marilyn Sorensen are also part of our dance team. On the road again we stopped to pick berries at Karl's old place. I found thatch roofs nearby. They have a special fascination for me. The way they are created and how it is that they last forever.

Then there was 'Egeskov' castle. Built about 1554. It has been owned and occupied by the same family for hundreds of years.

When we arrived at Karl's sisters house I was able to test out a Danish medical facility. Within less than one half hour I had been to a doctor and had picked up my medication as well. I think that's amazing!

Since we were close to Germany we decided to 'step' across. If it wasn't for the concrete border plaque in the middle of the road we would never have known which country we were in.

After standing on top of a dyke near the German border we drove to a little town that seemed frozen in time. Of course they had thatched roofs. There were the most unique doors and also cobble stone streets. It was so old. What century had they built this place?

As we drove further north we came to the town of Ribe, which has an ancient, gigantic church. There were bodies buried in the floor of the entryway. I felt strange

stepping on graves. There were paintings on the walls, sculptures seemed to be engraved into the walls, rooms for prayer or special people. Even though it was built in the year 1600 it still had its original grandeur.

The next town, Jelling, had an even older church with 'rune writings' on rocks near the entrance of the church. There was a small replica of a Viking ship hanging from the ceiling. This made the place seem even older. I had wished some one in our group could read 'rune', but none of us had attended that class in school.

Ah! 'Lego land!' I've been to Disney world. This is better. Don't take my word for it. See it for yourself.

We were all tired and had nowhere to stay. Fortunately, Marilyn spotted a tiny sign on the side of the road. We stayed at a 'villa' that was nearly empty of people. Oh, what a breakfast, at a reserved table no less. How quaint it all was.

All fresh and new, we made our way up to Skagen where another of Karl's sisters lived. She bought us all a beer and we were entertained by a local country singer. It was a wonderful evening.

We met the rest of our group and went to see the spot where the two waters meet. Kattegat and Skagerrak. It's a sight to behold, but there is also the feeling you get just being there. There is nowhere on earth like it.

While driving through Denmark I had time to reflect on different aspects of this trip. One thing was very clear to me. Denmark smells great; more than great,

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unbelievably great. It's probably the pork capital of the world. Why is there no foul odor? We, in our city, are discussing the problems of pig smell. We are probably spending a lot of money discussing it. Why don't we look to Denmark for advice? They must be doing something right.

I was intrigued with all the windmills. That's one thing we are doing right. Windmills can be seen springing up right here in Manitoba.

Then there were the WWII bunkers. Still there, serving as a grim reminder of the disaster that was, and how bad things could have been today. Peace and freedom are too important to all of us.

I was amazed to see so many Viking burial mounds. Untouched, they made me realize how important respect for the dead is. I hope we give our Aboriginal sacred burial grounds the same respect.

Our trip to Gutenberg, Sweden was first by train, than by ferry. We went on a guided tour of the town, that turned out to be very enlightening.

Since we were among our people and no one could tell the ethnic origin of another person I began to understand more about my own upbringing in an ethnic community. Each ethnic group is different, but share pride in just being Scandinavian. We are progressive, admire our ancestry, yet, we are not stuck in the past. We are not trying to impress the world; we just want to live peacefully in it. There is such a beautiful equality that is shared between women, men and children, unprecedented by any other nation of people. Our equality is so clearly demonstrated in our way of dancing.

We were taught a lot of different types of dances. Most of them I was able to comprehend, but some seemed beyond my capabilities. Wow! Could our European cousins ever dance! I used to think I was a fantastic dancer, but these people changed my opinion on that.

We had two memorable meals while in Sweden. One was a steak, I believe, that was the best I'd ever eaten. The other was the funniest. Jane and Emma each had a fish the size of a whole salmon. Karl's was the size of, well, have you ever had one half of a salmon steak? Watching him eat that thing was priceless. We were laughing so hard no one thought to snap a picture. I believe his was more expensive as well.

After a week of cramming our heads with dozens of dance steps we were on our way back to Denmark. The train ride was amazingly quick.

When we got back to Copenhagen we decided to spend time at Tivoli. You cannot drive either a car or a bike into Tivoli. Outside the front entrance were two or three layers of bikes parked. There are bicycle lanes on every street in Copenhagen and the same is true for all of Scandinavia. Tivoli is entertainment personified. We split up into groups so we could fully enjoy the activities of our choice. Believe me when I say, "There's nothing like this place." A must see.

Ah! Hamlets Castle (Kronborg) was established in the 1400's and had it's own magnificent church. We were taken on a guided tour of the castle, including the underside, where prisoners were kept at one time in history. There is a larger than life sculpture of a brave Viking guarding

the place. The pictures, tapestry, and the furniture were amazingly preserved. One of the costumes, worn when they filmed Hamlet was nearly identical to my daughters wedding dress.

We had joked about using a bungee cord to make sure I didn't get lost Where was that cord when I did get lost? When we went shopping I mistakenly went out the wrong door. After waiting for a while I started walking. After getting myself very lost I managed to find my way back to the hostel. I was not afraid. In Copenhagen, why would you be?

On our last day there I decided to venture out on my own. My first stop was to the museum close to our hostel. I was taken by surprise to see such a collection of artifacts, busts, statues, and mummified remains. Then to add to the ambiance I heard beautiful, yet somewhat eerie music coming from what I thought were speakers, but no, there was a group of singers, seemingly, practicing since they were in casual clothes. Their voices were in perfect a cappella.

The next visit was the National Museum, where they had Danish artifacts. There were religious, royal, and Viking historical pieces on display.

On our plane trip to and from Copenhagen we made a short stop in Keflavik, Iceland. Some of my cousins were gracious enough to meet me at the airport both times. The ones who were able to come were Sigrun and Edda Erlendsdottir, along with their brother Órn Erlendsson and his wife Gigja Friðfinnsdottir. It was truly a joy for me to see them. I will forever be grateful to them for this gesture.

The memory of this journey will linger on in my heart forever. I have, on an earlier trip, seen my beloved Iceland, and now some parts of Scandinavia. I concluded that even though we are very different from one another we are very much the same. Our dances, songs, and foods are enjoyed by all of us whether we are in our Scandinavian Club or overseas. Some of our 'Scandia Fun Folk Dancers' are talking about our next trip, but its good to be home in Canada for now.

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## A legacy for learning

by Elva Simundsson

Each June, three graduates of the senior schools in Evergreen School Division in Manitoba are the scholarship beneficiaries of an amazing legacy left by a very shy and private lady. A graduate in each of the three schools in the division, Arborg, Riverton and Gimli is the recipient of a one thousand dollar scholarship awarded by the Canada-Iceland Foundation in name of the Margrét Bjarnason Memorial Scholarship.

Margrét Bjarnason and her twin brother Björn were born in 1902 and were raised on the family homestead, Bjarkaland. This homestead is in the community of Geysir, in the heart of the New Iceland settlement area of Manitoba. Geysir is a farming area situated between the towns of Riverton and Arborg. Björn and Margrét were the first twins born in the district. They were the children of Bjarni Bjarnason and Aðalbjörg Jónsdóttir. Bjarni was a cobbler by trade. He immigrated from Reykjavík in 1887 and practiced his trade in Winnipeg for several years before homesteading in the Geysir district in 1899. In 1900 Bjarni married Aðalbjörg who had immigrated to the New Iceland area with her foster parents in 1884.

Margrét had only four or five years of schooling. She was thirteen years old when her mother died and she had to quit school to take over managing the household for her father and brother. Neither she nor her twin brother ever married, but continued to live together on their farm for sixty years. When they sold their farm, they moved to a small house in Arborg. In 1970, when her brother died, Magga (as she was known to her friends and neighbours) moved to the Betel Home in Gimli. She died there at the age of 97.

Margrét's brother Björn was a very outgoing and gregarious person and the twins attended social gatherings in the area

whenever possible. Björn was a very good mimic. He took part in many of the theater performances that were staged in the community. He was an avid storyteller and loved to illustrate the narratives by imitating each person involved in the tale. Margrét, on the other hand, was very shy and reserved. She would attend functions with her brother and go visiting with him but she was always in the background. They often went to visit friends and neighbours where they would drink coffee with their hosts and Björn would entertain. When Björn would tell his stories, Margrét would sit at his side and whisper prompts to him if he forgot a line or if he deviated from the stories, as she knew them.

Margrét was an avid reader and spent much of her spare time educating herself. Even though she was reluctant to speak up, she was well read and kept up with current affairs. She would probably have been quite an accomplished scholar had circumstances allowed her to continue her schooling. Margrét and Björn's little house in Arborg was adjacent to the schoolyard of the Arborg Early Years School. Watching and listening to the children playing around the school during their break times must have been a great source of pleasure and inspiration to Margrét. When she took on the task of organizing her affairs, she had the education of the children of the area very much in mind.

Margrét's will stipulated that her entire estate was to go to funding scholarships in the Evergreen School Division. The Canada-Iceland Foundation is charged with administering the scholarship endowment. The Foundation solicits the assistance of the school administrators in each of the three senior schools each year and their scholarship committees choose a worthy high school graduate who is planning



to pursue post-secondary education. Any residual annual growth of the endowment is allocated to scholarships for students already attending a college, technical or university program. The Foundation will include two or more five hundred dollar scholarships in Margrét's name in its list of post-secondary awards. These awards will go to worthy students who specifically meet the criteria of having been Evergreen

School Division graduates. The Canada-Iceland Foundation is pleased to honour Margrét Bjarnason's memory with these annual awards to worthy high school graduates and university students from the New Iceland area. Margrét's legacy lives on and many scholars who never knew this little lady will continue to benefit from her thoughtfulness.

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# The roots lie deep

by Dr. W. Kristjanson  
 Excerpted from *The Icelandic Canadian Spring, 1972*

Mr. Ivan C. Robison of Calgary (formerly of Winnipeg) writes of research he has made into his genealogical background. He finds that far back he is of Norse descent. "The Robison's come of Viking stock—the name was Robisson, and they are a sept of the Gunn (Gunnar) clan!"

The Norwegian settlement in Northern England and Scotland dates back to the ninth century. The first Norse settler on the banks of the Humber was one Grimur, who arrived about 875 A.D., and after whom Grimsby was named. (Grims' is the possessive of Grimur, and baer means a residence or a hamlet). Norwegians established themselves in Western Ireland earlier, about 836 A.D. from there they moved in large numbers to Northwestern England. Sigtryggur, a king of Dublin, fled thence in 926 A.D. and made himself temporarily ruler of Northumbria. Eric Bloodaxe (Eirikur bløðexi), a son of Harold Fairhair of Norway, likewise ruled Northumbria temporarily, but as a vassal of King Athelstan, about the middle of the tenth century. Northmen harried the coasts of Scotland for centuries and at one time ruled a large part of the country, as well as the Western Isles.

Numerous place names of Norse origin have been perpetuated on both sides of the border, some with only a slight change in spelling. Kirggy, in northwest England, obviously stems from "kirkjubaer," the farmstead or the village of the church. In Gil North's Sergeant Cluff mystery stories such names as Egilsby and Gunnarshaw occur. The "haw" may derive from "hau-gur," meaning heap, or barrow. Scottish place names of Norse origin in Scotland include Argyle (argyl—river gully) Bruar (bru-bridge, the possessive of bruar) Dunara (dunar—a husing, thundering

noise; a—river); Inverness (innranes—inner cape or headland); Selkirk (sel kirkja—the Church of the mountain pasture shed).

Some Icelanders and people about to become Icelanders enter into the picture. Audur djupudga—Aud the Wise, or deep-minded was the wife of Olaf the White, king of Dublin, about the mid-ninth century. A son of theirs, Thorsteinn the Red, in the company of Sigurd the Mighty, conquered the northern half of Scotland, Caithness, Rose, Sutherland and Murray. After her husband's demise, Aud lived with her son in Scotland. Thorsteinn was slain by the natives, about 888 A.D. In 890, Aud moved with her retinue to Iceland where her father Ketill Flat Nose, had settled.

Two Icelandic brothers, Thorolf and Egill, sons of Skallagrimur of Borg, in Western Iceland, entered the service of King Athelstan of England. They fought with the king's forces against Scots and Vikings. The two brothers were physically strong and doughty warriors and according to the Icelandic Sagas they contributed in considerable measure to the king's famous victory at Winheath, or Brunanburh, in 937 A.D.

Leif Ericson—Leifr Eiriksson—the Lucky was blown off course at one time and made port in the Hebrides. There he fell in love with a noblewoman of high rank, but with a long delayed favorable wind, he sailed away.

The roots lie deep.

# Icelandic clothing in Canada

by Peggy Barker  
edited and updated by Elva Jonasson

The Icelandic immigration was the second influx of non-French or English into Manitoba. They came for many reasons. There was of course the 800-year-old connection (via Leifur Eiríksson) between Iceland and the New World and possibly the Old Norse wanderlust and desire for adventure. More immediately however, was the stranglehold Icelanders felt Danish rule to be in the areas of economic and political autonomy. To them Canada and the United States appeared to be, as to many others, the lands of opportunity. The tide of immigration from Iceland was certainly affected too by the general worsening, during the 19th century, of climatic conditions and the eruption of volcanoes in Central Iceland in 1876. In some cases the existence of public schools has been cited as a contributory factor important to a people who place high value on education.

Whatever the reasons, between the years 1870 and 1900 about one-third of Iceland's population, between 25,000 and 30,000 people, left Iceland for either Canada or the United States. Today it is estimated that there are approximately 150,000 people of Icelandic origin in North America, of whom 100,000 live in Canada. Winnipeg has the largest urban population of Icelanders outside of Iceland.

The first Icelandic settlement in Canada was in 1873 in Ontario. However, for one reason or another this was largely abandoned, so the first permanent settlement dates from 1875, when the first settlers arrived in Gimli. There were a number of reasons for choosing Gimli. The proximity to Lake Winnipeg was obviously important to a seafaring race. The Icelanders could not conceive of strict grain farming so the gently rolling brush interspersed with hay meadows suitable for mixed farming, was to them a much better

prospect than the prairies to the south of Winnipeg. Finally in 1875, when a committee was in Winnipeg scouting suitable sites for "New Iceland," Winnipeg was struck by a plague of grasshoppers and the area around what is now Gimli was free of them.

This was a pattern that was often repeated in other Icelandic settlements. In general these soils were poorer than the prairies but, in times when the wheat crop or market failed the Icelanders were able to cope better because they were not strictly dependent on one crop. This practice of mixed farming also enabled them, as we shall see later, to maintain some of their traditional clothing patterns.

The settlement at New Iceland, which was initially outside the boundaries of the then "Postage Stamp Province" of Manitoba, was intended to be an Icelandic colony, where the Icelandic people could carry on their own way of life. In fact, for several years they operated the settlement as a republic with loose connections with the province of Manitoba. Eventually this effort was given up and New Iceland was annexed when the province's boundaries were enlarged in 1881. Later settlements were not made on separate tracts of land. Rather a number of Icelandic settlers would choose an area and take up land in the same general vicinity. There would be settlers of other origins in the same districts.

Today the main concentration of Icelanders is still on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg in the Gimli area. However there are sizable groups in: southwest Manitoba around Baldur and Glenboro; on the east shore of Lake Manitoba centered on Ashern and Steep Rock; on the west shore of Lake Manitoba with Langruth and Winnipegosis as centres; in Selkirk; and in



small pockets in or near Brandon, Pipestone, Morden and Piney as well as the large urban community in Winnipeg.

There were sizable settlements made in Saskatchewan, mostly near the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border around towns such as Churchbridge and Bradenbury; the Qu'Appelle Valley and Foam Lake. In Alberta there were groups in Markerville on the Red Deer River and in Edmonton: in British Columbia in Victoria, Point Roberts and Osland on Smith Island.

In order to study the clothing of the Icelandic people in Canada it is necessary to consider first the traditional clothing of Iceland. It should be noted that, in keeping with the democratic ideals of Iceland there was, except in the earliest days, no class structure. This equality meant that there was not a peasant class with a distinctly different dress than upper class. Comments on Icelandic clothing then can be considered to apply to all Icelanders.

In the early days of Iceland the daily clothes of the Vikings were dark homespun woolens, of "vaðmal" similar to what is now called tweed. However, owing to far-flung trading and traveling trips, the Icelanders were able to keep pace with Europe. Their good clothing would be foreign and of fashionable cut and bright colours. Jewellery of silver and gold was worn by both men and women in the form of thick arm-bands and heavy brooches for fastening the cloaks together. Their jewellery was adorned with elaborate patterns especially dragons and serpents biting their own tails.

The generous use of silver and gold in jewellery and costume design has remained in Icelandic costumes even today despite that Iceland has no gold or silver of its own to mine. Delicate gold and silver filigree decorates the women's national costume, sometimes to the tune of \$2,500.00 to \$5,000.00.

The emergence of this particular art form can possibly be explained by the fact that the original settlers of Iceland were rich Norse and Viking families who brought a great deal of gold and silver with them to Iceland. Once in Iceland this gold and silver was surplus as there was, as in

any new settlement, little to be purchased. Some of course was used to procure goods on foreign shores but it is not unreasonable to assume that fashioning the coins into jewellery would while a way many a long winter night.

Through the years the men's clothing would emulate European dress although, at a slower pace, as demand for Iceland's fish, which was one of its main trade items began to slack off. Around the end of the 18th century men commonly wore black homespun with pants that were usually knee breeches. The head covering consisted of a cap that could be turned down in winter or a mottled close fitting tasseled one that was worn even in the home. On festive occasions they might wear white pantaloons of linsey-woolsey and a blue jacket. On these occasions the hat might be a tricorne.

However it seems that the prevailing mode for men was European and there has not been a distinctive Icelandic dress for men for some time. In 1874 at the time of the Millennial Celebration (thousandth anniversary of the first Icelandic Althing or Parliament) in an attempt to revive a national costume, students wore short trousers with tassels, blue stockings and a "húfa" (flat cap with a long tassel). This did not last and the male emigrant to North America of the 1870's, 80's and 90's did not differ perceptibly from the average North European. The early everyday dress for women consisted of a long full black skirt and tight fitting bodice, knitted originally but by mid 19th century was made of homespun or broadcloth. A velvet border on the bodice at the centre front opening was the only decoration. A blouse or shirtwaist showed through. A scarf around the neck was tied to form a bow or a rosette in front. Over the skirt was worn an apron of coloured silk. Outdoors a shawl of silk wool was added. This costume was called the "peysuföt" In a lighter form, which was more comfortable for working it was called the "upphlutur." In the upphlutur the bodice was low cut and sleeveless so that more of the blouse showed and was usually more decorated than the peysuföt.

The most distinctive item of these two

costumes was the "húfa" or "skotthúfa." This was generally a flat black velvet or knitted cap, although one book describes it as a "small round cap with a little turned back brim like a squashed derby." From the centre of the cap hangs a long heavy black silk tassel, which is worn over the shoulder. This tassel is bound together near the top by an etched or engraved cylinder of gold, silver or brass. One writer says, "This singular gold tube, strangely enough seems to be connected with Egypt. When I was in Cairo I bought several face veils, which had cylinders very like the Icelandic ones, except that these were worn over the nose. The similarity between the Egyptian and the Icelandic cylinder is far too striking to be mere coincidence. It occurs to me that Iceland has always been closely associated with the Norse. And Vikings ranged far: at one time they ruled over Sicily and held islands in the eastern Mediterranean. It is known too that the Norse had relations with Egypt."

The same writer advances the theory that the flat circular shape of the húfa was related to the caul, a membrane covering the face with which some children are born. Apparently to be born with a caul was considered in medieval Europe to be a sign of good luck. In Iceland "it was believed that the caul brought good fortune because it contained the child's spirit. This spirit was thought to hover near and help when there was trouble. For this reason the midwife was careful not to injure the caul. She buried it beneath the threshold over which the mother and child had to pass, thus assuring good fortune to them both. Later it was taken up, sewn in a bag and hung around the child's neck or preserved in other ways."

The húfa then in "its size and shape symbolizes the caul and is worn on the head to bring the wearer good fortune." It would seem then that this part of the traditional Icelandic costumes has its roots far back in Icelandic history.

Alternatively, information provided by the Museum of Man and Nature indicates that the húfa was not worn until the end of the 18th century and was an adaptation of the knitted and tasseled toques that

the men wore.

For riding the sturdy little Icelandic horses a woman would wear rubber boots, breeches covered by a skirt with flaps, buttoned in the back and a linen shirtwaist.

The holiday costume of the nineteenth century Icelandic women was designed in 1830 as part of the celebrations of the thousand years of Icelandic settlement. It was adapted from earlier dress and for some reason, Dutch costume. This costume consisted of a blue or black velvet or silk skirt, a black bodice open in front over a coloured blouse and an embroidered silk apron. The front edges of the bodice were decorated with gold or silver filigree embroidery often in an oak or other leaf design. This extends around the neck and is usually found on the cuffs as well. The belt is of silk with gold or silver buckles or composed entirely of silver links or plates. In some cases the silver is gold plated. Metal ornaments are also used for fasteners on the bodice. This costume is called the "skautbúningur."

The headdress in this case is called a "faldur." It is a high headdress of stiffened lawn shaped in a way that is reminiscent of the prow of the Viking ship. This is covered with a sheer veil, which falls well past the shoulders. The shape of the headdress has evolved over the centuries probably from the medieval era. The faldur is trimmed at the front with a gold diadem or ornament. Occasionally this is replaced with a silk band and filigree work.

These costumes were widely adopted in Iceland by 1880 although the women had a strong interest in fashion modes from Europe particularly Copenhagen. By the mid 1900's "adoption of European clothing was more satisfactory to most Icelanders" In fact it was probably more the nationalistic fervor engendered by the two Millennial Celebrations in 1830 and 1874, that helped to retain the national costume in the face of this general interest in "Danish fashion" at a time when trade was once again opening up. At the present time few women wear the national costume on a day-to-day basis. The skautbúningur is worn by dignitaries on special occasions.

The wool industry along with the fish

industry has since the beginning formed the basis of Iceland's economy and her export trade. Initially Iceland exported not just raw wool but homespun, knitted goods and yarn to many countries. However under Norwegian and later Danish rule the export trade was severely curtailed. Only raw wool could be exported, at controlled prices and only to certain countries (usually Denmark). As a corollary, imported fabrics and clothes became very expensive, encouraging the widespread and imaginative use of wool. Fortunately the temperate Icelandic climate made the wearing of wool feasible even in the summer.

At any rate good use was made of the most available textile, wool. From early times women kept the natural wool shades separate and used these natural colours to

weave and to knit attractive patterns. Besides the homespun fabric the wool was used in all manner of clothing and household textiles. Blankets, counterpanes, shawls, scarves, mittens, socks, slippers, headwear, and even underwear and insoles for the homemade shoes came from the busy looms and needles of the Icelandic home.

The Icelandic woman was not only talented at the practical arts of weaving and knitting for clothing but in the decorative crafts as well. Embroidery and crochet were often used to ornament clothing and household textiles. "Embroidery is a traditional art form in the homes, such rich embroidery in wool, silk and gold once decorating the national costumes. The weaving of tweeds and tapestries and blankets and carpets in a wide variety of patterns is an important household art." An older Icelandic woman here in Winnipeg showed me a table centerpiece of white linen heavily embroidered in white and with a white crocheted edging, which had belonged to her mother and had come from Iceland. The embroidery in this case was done in satin, outline and French knot stitches, but Mrs. Finnbogason told me that Hardanger work was also common.

Shoes were handmade as well. Iceland had very few cattle so shoes were made from sheepskin, seal hide or sharkskin. As none of these are particularly durable leather, journeys were measured by how many shoes were worn out. The shoe or "skinnskór" was like a moccasin or slipper. It was made in one piece with no heel. The skin or hide was stretched on a wall to dry, cut to fit the foot, soaked in water and placed on the foot to dry into the correct size and shape. The shoe was then sewn together over the toe and the heel and sometimes secured by a strap over the instep. A pad of moss or a knitted pad was placed inside the shoe to take the place of a heel. For warmth and comfort a knitted lining or insole was also worn.

In 1854, some of the barriers to trade were removed and foreign textiles became cheaper and easier to get. This no doubt contributed to the increased use of silk, linen and cotton in the national costume. It

would also contribute to the Europeanization of Icelandic fashion so that by the turn of the century pictures of groups of Icelandic women show a number of them in "Danish fashion."

The Icelanders who came to Canada and the United States beginning in the 1870's would, especially the men, be unexceptional in appearance. In fact, when the first group arrived in Winnipeg by boat in 1875, many Winnipeggers refused to believe they were Icelanders. They expected to see something much more exotic and more like Eskimos.

It does seem however that at least some of the Icelandic women wore their every day dress, the upphlutur, when they first arrived. One author describes the reaction to her mother's dress shortly after her arrival in the United States in 1851 as "Her Icelandic costume of black wool, with the tight fitting skillfully embroidered bodice and multicoloured apron was greatly admired, but the small tasselled cap under which she turned up her heavy braids did not find favour. In fact she was advised to keep the costume but send the cap back to Iceland."


The first five years in Canada were difficult ones. The first group arriving in Winnipeg in the early fall of 1875 after an already long journey, were faced with a situation in which no preparations had been made for them. By the time transportation by barge was arranged for the rest of the journey down the Red River and up Lake Winnipeg to New Iceland they were only able to throw together a few rough shelters before winter came. Food supplies were minimal and even fishing was not long available to them as they were not familiar with ice fishing. Some work for more established settlers was available, especially to the women who could get domestic work and this brought much needed money for supplies. The second year they were faced with a much larger influx of settlers but conditions might have been better except that the settlement was ravaged by small pox during the winter. The authorities in Winnipeg far from providing adequate help, supplies and medicine, placed the whole settlement under quarantine.

This not only prevented the Icelanders from bringing in extra money by working outside the settlement but because the quarantine was not lifted until July, supplies needed to put in crops could not be purchased. So for the third year in a row the Icelanders faced a bleak winter. When one considers that the second group arrived in Winnipeg with an average of seven dollars per person it is easy to visualize the hardships they had to endure.

In spite of this slow start a photograph of the Icelandic Women's Society taken in Winnipeg in 1885 shows all of the women in very fashionable dress. This was only ten years after the arrival of the first settlers.

Even if the Icelanders had not had a long standing interest in fashionable clothing, certain changes in clothing were inevitable. The most obvious cause was climate. The climate of Iceland is tempered by the Gulf Stream and so the Icelanders were not used to such extremes as Manitoba endures in the course of a year. Winters were colder and summers much hotter. One of the first purchases was often a low priced buffalo robe or coat often offered for sale in the frontier stores. "The recent war that the West had waged on the buffaloes of the prairies made their hides so plentiful that they flooded the market." No doubt the summer heat had the effect of reducing the amount of clothing that was made of wool. For instance suits for boys were soon being made of "strigaföt" a cotton in various weights similar to denim.

Another cause was the relative availability of other clothing and textiles. Even the Icelandic men seemed interested in the clothing available when they landed in the New World. The price and quality of the wearing apparel was the subject matter of a number of letters the four men who had landed in the United States in 1870 sent back to Iceland. In the eyes of the Icelanders coming from a small isolated island just emerging from centuries of controlled and restricted trade, the variety available even in Winnipeg must have been exciting. Even for everyday clothes dry goods were purchased by the yard and although the Icelanders soon acquired sheep and the Icelandic housewife



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remained an expert at spinning and knitting there seems to have been little weaving done among the Icelanders in Canada. One of the first items of clothing purchased were shoes. Even when the *skinnskór* were made they could be made from the more durable cowhide rather than the sheepskin as Icelanders soon acquired cattle as well.

Although New Iceland was conceived as a colony so that the Icelandic way of life could be maintained, there were from the beginning outside influences which helped to change clothing customs. The women, who had the distinctly national clothing were also the ones most subjected to outside influences. It was easier for them to get work outside the colony as there was a demand for domestics. In this work they would be living with English families and it would be natural and perhaps even expected that they conform in clothing styles. Also as settlers moved from the original colony to other sites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan they were living among settlers of many backgrounds.

Another factor in changing the Icelander's clothing was their willingness to adapt to their new home and to become good citizens. Although proud of their homeland, its history and culture, they were sure enough of its importance in their lives to feel that adapting to the Canadian lifestyle did not threaten the extinction of the Icelandic culture. They were quick to learn English while continuing to teach their children Icelandic and maintain the love of Icelandic literature and poetry which characterizes the Icelandic culture. They soon dropped their patrynomic system of nomenclature in which married women retained their own names. However the women still maintained their independence and equality. In this way the superficial aspect of the Icelandic culture in Canada has changed without changing the underlying belief.

In the early years in Canada most clothing was made in the family, including footwear. One writer remembers that the homemade shoes were made of rawhide and in the hot prairie summer the shoes would get hard and stiff and would have to be soaked in water every morning so they

could be worn.

The whole family would participate in the production of the clothing, especially in the preparation and use of the wool. Shearing, washing the wool, carding and knitting were done by various members of the family. Boys as well as girls were taught to knit and one writer recalls her grandfather carding wool in the evenings. Quite often the evenings spent preparing and knitting the wool were filled with older members of the family reciting traditional poetry, *rímur* and sagas of Iceland. In this way the knowledge and love of Iceland and its culture were maintained in succeeding generations.

Knitting was done in a special way that reduced the number of necessary movements and therefore speeded up the process. However, along with spinning, it must have been an unending task for the Icelandic woman. Even when visiting with friends her knitting needles would be busy and one writer recalls that her mother "in the midst of restoring order out of chaos had to realize she was tired. If it was cold we would go upstairs, she would seat herself in her upholstered rocker by the dormer window and set the spinning wheel in motion. After some time mother would feel relaxed enough to continue her interrupted household tasks."

After the garments, which included hats, mitts, wristlets, scarves, underwear, socks and knitted insoles, were knitted the mitts and socks were subjected to another process. They were put into fairly warm water with soap and kept warm and in motion for twenty minutes. This "shrinking" made them thicker and more durable, a fact that was recognized by the pioneer neighbours who often purchased them.

By the end of the 19th century most settlers were well established and the majority of them spoke English. "There was however, no marked change in everyday life of the Icelanders, with the exception of improved living quarters, larger fields, more equipment to work with and greatly increased livestock. On the whole life remained simple and the number of articles purchased from the outside was kept down to a strict minimum." One can

assume then that into the twentieth century the average Icelander made most of his own clothing, purchasing yard goods for sewing the outer clothing, producing knitted wool articles from their own wool and possibly still making some of their own shoes. This would be especially true of the districts that were settled later than the Gimli area as one writer states that it took approximately fifteen years to get established.

Some customs associated with holidays and special occasions were still observed. For instance "while Christmas presents as such were not the order of the day, the Icelandic housewife, in accordance with an old tradition endeavoured to supply every member of the family with something new to wear. The article might be insignificant such as a pair of wristlets, mittens or a scarf. The important thing for every individual was to acquire something new in wearing apparel."

The first account of celebrating August 2, the Icelandic national holiday, in the New World, occurred in 1874 which was a special year as it was the thousandth anniversary of Iceland's nationhood. The Icelanders in Milwaukee at that time commemorated the occasion with a church service, a parade and a picnic. "This parade was led by two men in the costumes of ancient Iceland. Most of the women were in the national costume in vogue in Iceland at that time. All in the group were very nationalistic in character."

Although there were references to early celebrations of August 2nd among the Canadian settlers I could find no reference to the clothing worn on these occasions.

However one can surely assume that a custom established in the first celebration on this continent would be continued at others.

Certainly it is the case today. The striking national costumes are worn by the women for public occasions such as the *Islendingadagurinn* at Gimli in August and for events like *Folklorama*. I was told by a member of the present generation that they were worn in her home at private celebrations, like confirmation, for Christmas and on occasions when for some reason an Icelandic meal is being served. As she grew up in a district that has few other Icelandic families I assumed that this practice would be general among Icelandic families. However, in talking to another Icelandic-Canadian of about the same age from a town that has a good sized Icelandic community, I learned that she had never worn the the national costume.

The version usually worn here in Canada is the *upphlutur*. In many cases it is not possible to acquire all the accoutrements and the costume has to be improvised. For example lace might be used to imitate the embroidery on the bodice. Here in Canada the *faldur* is sometimes worn with the *upphlutur* although traditionally it is only with the *skautbúningur*.

The "kyrtill" dress is the basis of the "Fjallkona" or "Maid of the Mountain" costume worn here. At Icelandic celebrations the "Fjallkona" represents the spirit of Iceland who brings greetings from Iceland to the "children of Iceland." She is a central figure at *Islendingadagurinn* and is usually represented by a mature woman of standing

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The Fjallkona appeared for the first time at the Icelandic Day Celebration in Winnipeg in 1924 and has been part of the festivities ever since. Her appearance is a truly Canadian adaption of the Icelandic costume with no exact parallel in Iceland. She wears the traditional faldur which in shape represents the prow of the Viking ship while the gold ornament symbolizes the volcanic fires. The green robe trimmed with white ermine represents the grass and snow covered mountains. The gown is white or ivory trimmed with gold braid.

It is natural that as the knitted wool-lens played such an important part in Icelandic clothing both in Iceland and among the early settlers here, that this is one area where considerable influence is still felt. Some of the knitted articles are used today in the original form. The slipper socks are still often worn. These were knee length and were knitted of thick wool utilizing the natural colours of the wool. In a traditional pattern the sole would be black, the sides striped in shades of grey and the instep and front of the stocking white,

Double-thumbed mittens are still used by the farmers and fishermen for their winter work, because of their practicality. When the palm becomes icy the mitten is flipped over providing the worker with a dry palm. Knitted insoles traditionally given as signs of affection by young people are still occasionally exchanged.

Of course the most obvious examples of the influence of Icelandic knitting is the popularity of sweaters, usually imported

from Iceland, knitted in the traditional colours and patterns. The pattern knitted around the yoke symbolizes the important aspects of the Icelandic scene – the mountains, the waves and the northern lights. I was told in Iceland (former store selling these sweaters) that the older women in Iceland who knit these sweaters refuse to knit plain sweaters because that was not traditional.

Icelanders have adapted and contributed to the Canadian ways of life in many ways – costume is just one. Although their life styles including clothing have changed drastically over the years, they have managed to retain the essence of the Icelandic culture.

Written by Peggy Barker  
Addendum

The “kyrtill” and “skautbúningur” as we know them today were designed by Sigurdur Gudmundsson known as “the Painter.” The kyrtill is a long sleeved loose flowing dress belted with a gold or silver filigree link belt, trimmed with either gold or silver braid, lace or ribbons in various colours. The kyrtill was sometimes decorated with vibrantly coloured leaf designs embroidered around the skirt and on the bodice. This version was often chosen as a wedding dress in the early 1900’s.

The skautbúningur is a very formal adaptation of the peysuföt. It consists of a long full skirt with a fitted bodice open at the front to show a white blouse and is embroidered on the bodice and hem of the skirt with a leaf design in rich autumn colours or gold thread. The headdress features the faldur shaped like the prow of a Viking ship over which is a veil of white that hangs well below the shoulders. A gold diadem adorns the front of the headdress and makes it possible to wear it in the manner a tiara is worn.

Recent research by Fríður Ólafsdóttir has determined that there was an every day costume referred to as the “dagreyja.” It was usually made of broadcloth in various colours with black, brown or navy blue the more frequent choice for the skirt. The skirt was actually the “undirpils” or petticoat worn with the upphlutur. The bodice, which may have been a patterned fabric,

was sewn in a unique manner that was unchanged for over 400 years. Each part of the garment was fully lined before being assembled and in style resembles the bodice of the peysuföt except that the front of the bodice is closed with seven buttons. An apron is always worn but not of a decorative fabric as would be used with the peysuföt or the upphlutur but of a more practical fabric such as wool, cotton or broadcloth in stripes, plaid or other pattern. The húfa was usually worn.

A contest held in Iceland for a design for a men’s costume produced a formal three-piece suit of black wool featuring a collarless jacket with modest lapels, a vest with a double row of silver buttons, pleated front trousers and an ivory shirt with a stand up collar, self covered buttons and an ascot type tie of the same fabric worn with a silver cuff-shaped tie clasp. This has become very popular in North America as well as in Iceland.

Some of the earlier costumes worn by women included the “faldbúningur” which appears that it may have evolved into the upphlutur because it has the same type of skirt, bodice, blouse and belt over which was a short fitted jacket that allowed the millur of the upphlutur to show. The sleeves of the jacket had upturned cuffs of velvet and bands of velvet interspersed with lace or ribbon decorated either side of the closure of the jacket. Sometimes this decoration was embroidery of silver or gold and often matched the unique stiff round collar also heavily embroidered in silver or gold worn by itself almost as a necklace. The skirt was variously decorated with embroidery or several rows of brightly coloured ribbons or bands of lace. Unique to this costume also was the headdress which featured a faldur or spalding held in place with a brightly coloured scarf. The upphlutur as we know it today does not have the short bolero type jacket nor does it have the unique headdress.



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# Poetry

## Strandarkirkja

by Darhl M. Pedersen

The light that shone on shore that night  
Was beacon blessing in their plight.  
Though they were common to the oar,  
They knew not which way would lead to shore.

Without a guide, their way was lost.  
Engulfing storm their lives would cost  
The sky was darker than the sea  
All looked the same from port to lee.

Each hand was eager for a mighty row,  
But there was no notion where to go.  
The waves were pounding distant shore,  
But they could not hear for ocean's roar.

The craft was pounded, mercilessly.  
It was not enough for open sea.  
Their clothes of skin were soaked within  
As the veil of life was ever thin.

Each man had yielded loved ones to the sea,  
It had taken an unfair share of family.  
Each name had a cherished place in heart.  
What further lists would the sea impart?

Without a miracle, they'd be lost at sea.  
Then, light appeared in their infirmity.  
It was not the way they were want to go.  
They had been moving away in steady row.

It was a magnet to draw them near.  
A feeling of peace now replaced their fear.  
Their silent prayers had united them, there.  
And with force of faith their lots would share.

Skerries and boulders stood in their way,  
But their path was laid as in clearest day.  
The light they saw brought their boat ashore.  
They accounted it to God and nothing more.

When they threw themselves on hallowed ground,  
The light they knew could not be found.  
They did not agree what they had seen.  
For some, 'twas light for others, being.

For men who'd fought both land and sea,  
They had been tamed by adversity.  
In honor of their answered search,  
They build their fabled, little church.

*In Iceland folklore, the Strandarkirkja church was established according to the events described in the poem. It is one of the richest churches in Iceland (though it has a congregation of just a few people) thanks to the contributions of countless seamen who are counting on it to bring them luck at sea.*

# Book Reviews



## Brewing Evil (Trilogy)

### A Witch is Born, Deadly Spells and Dark Forces

by Carol Gardarsson

Reviewed by Susan Claire Johnson

Hignell Book Printing, Winnipeg 2007

Murder, revenge, intrigue, romance, true love, history, are all components of the *Brewing Evil* trilogy cleverly woven together by author Carol Gardarsson. Like a tapestry created by intricate colors the characters created by Gardarsson compel the reader to move deeper and deeper into her stories.

Gardarsson's use of language is simple and straightforward, and the reader can become complacent thinking that they can predict every turn of events in her narrative, but this is not so. Gardarsson is unpredictable with her story so the reader is steadily drawn into the drama of the characters. What is most surprising about her *Brewing Evil* trilogy; *A Witch is Born*, *Dark Forces* and *Deadly Spells* is its appeal

to a broad population. Many readers, from a teenager to the older adult would find something in Gardarsson's stories. The author's choice of wording is descriptive and easily understandable thus assessable to a wide audience, yet her well thought out plots keep the reader truly in suspense and thus reading into the wee hours of the night.

In the first book of Gardarsson's trilogy, *A Witch is Born* the reader is introduced to the main character, Inga, also known as Eliza, and her Icelandic family who immigrates to Canada, with Gimli as the final destination. Not only will readers of Icelandic descent find the story interesting but many Canadians will be swept up by the family's story as people from all backgrounds have heard stories about their ancestors overcoming hardships in order to make the wilderness of Canada their new home. What is unique about Gardarsson's story is her ability to put the reader back in time to actually get an inside glimpse of what life must have been like for these early settlers. In 1895 the journey from Winnipeg to New Iceland (Gimli) took several days versus the 45 minute car ride

of 2008.

The historic details the author provides the reader with a new understanding of the times in the late 1800s. How settlers had to work cooperatively with nature in order to live off the land was imperative. "We'll clean the berries before we go out to pick the next batch later on, when - and if - it cools down. We can't do anything about the hot weather. We'll just have to work around it." (p. 139). Through these vignettes Gardarsson develops a resonance with the reader as she possesses the intuitive ability to connect the reader with the characters of the past and the daily challenges they faced.

More dramatically Gardarsson conveys how precarious life was for the early settlers. The promise of free farms motivated newcomers to come to Canada but none of the immigrants could have predicted the overwhelming hardships the weather would have bestowed upon the newcomers. The characters in the stories faced many losses while attempting to survive in their new homeland. In addition to the geographical obstacles were the limits of the law to address wrong doings. In Eliza's community of Maurice, the unkind character of Steven Fiddler and his transgressions go unaddressed and are a constant threat to the heroine. His greed has devastating consequences for many figures in the story.

In the second book of the trilogy, *Deadly Spells* tragedy strikes Eliza as her parents are killed in a fire. Her grief is aptly described as a "coldness deep down inside her that would not thaw." In spite of the intensity of her emotions of loss Eliza is determined even at her very young age to keep the family farm and work it independently. Again Gardarsson gives the reader the context for the times as we are reminded that land ownership for women was not possible in the early 1900s. The suffrage movement was still in its early beginnings and perhaps the slow birth of feminism was developing. The strong willed character of Eliza illustrates the struggles women had to face during that time. Few rights were allowed and frequently harsh consequence had to be endured by women in order to survive. Accusations of being a witch left

Eliza in a very vulnerable position. To the extreme of her life being in danger when the family of Mr. Charmand believes that Eliza cast a spell on him which resulted in his illness.

At times the reader may find the stories predictable, yet despite knowing how some events may transpire, Gardarsson throws in some surprising twists and offsets the readers balance drawing the reader further and further into the story. Although the author's wording is not complex the variety of characters and her careful building of each person's personality convince the reader to believe the stories which are unfolding in her work.

With each novel Gardarsson adds more layers to the individual characters' stories, so that one is left wondering who are the 'good guys' and who are the 'bad guys.' Even the character of Katla is believable, a sorceress who appears in the second novel. The reader is left questioning who she is and questioning her motives. Is Katla a protector or an adversary of Eliza?

In the final novel of the *Brewing Evil* series, *Dark Forces*, Gardarsson continues to orchestrate the lives of the many characters into a well organized and inventive production. Romance between Eliza and Sam becomes a possibility, a plausible rationale for the actions of many of the characters is laid out and hope for the Eliza's future free from peril seems likely. And yet again the author tosses in events that make resolution of conflict seem impossible. The mysteries of past come to the forefront and a surprising exposure of the characters weaknesses, disloyalties and infidelities are revealed.

The reader may once again be convinced they know how the story will end. However, Gardarsson does not leave us with static characters. Her players have complex family histories and motives. Greed and selfishness, loneliness and heartache and even love, propel characters into making unlikely choices to meet their needs or in an ill-fated attempt to protect their families. Will Eliza's intuitive skills or perhaps her clairvoyant abilities protect her in the end? The reader is continually left guessing.

Throughout the fictional story of all three stories, Gardarsson drops in fascinating details about farm life, geography, weather and the state of the times. This backdrop serves as a grounding for the story which is unique and interesting. Learning how to read the green hues of a tornado cloud was an important skill for the farmer. Discovering whether or not it is true that it can 'rain frogs,' I interviewed a farmer who reported as a young boy he used to hear his grandfather using this phrase often. Using symbol's to protect people from harm was one of the beliefs people held onto during earlier times. Depending upon community, relying on your neighbour for help in the struggle for survival was a value upheld by early settlers. Without which many would not have survived.

The *Brewing Evil* trilogy is most definitely a worthwhile read. The reader may

as well buy all three at once, for as soon as the last page is turned on *Brewing Evil* the reader will want to know what happens next. The heroine, Eliza is a diverse and compelling character and the supporting characters compliment the story in its entirety. It was a delightful surprise to read Carol Gardarsson's first trilogy as she surpassed the expectations of what a reader might predict for an author's first venture into novels. Gardarsson does not weigh the reader down with too much of any ingredient such as hardship or drama or history. She adeptly provides the story with the right amounts of hope, humor and love, so that her characters joy can also be experienced. Carol Gardarsson is an imaginative storyteller who has expertly woven fact into fiction and has carefully produced an unusual and entertaining tale for all.

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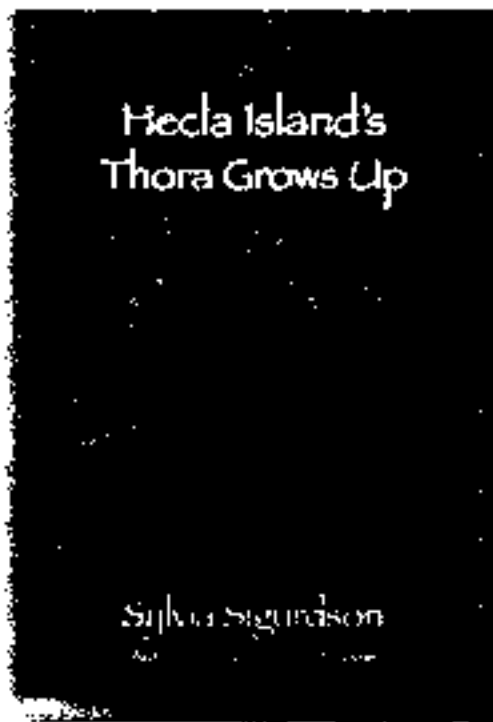
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## Hecla Island's Thora Grows Up

by Sylvia Sigurdson

Reviewed by Margaret Thorarinson

Eyja Publishing, ISBN 9780969908005

Soft Cover

*Thora's Island Home*, Sylvia Sigurdson's previous book, introduces us to Thora, a twelve year-old, who has been sent from Iceland to stay with her aunt and uncle in Hecla. Thora is faced with many challenges including living with a bad-tempered uncle who resents her and an aunt, who is not only bedridden, but depressed and withdrawn. Although experiencing times of loneliness and difficulties, she gradually adjusts to her new life in Canada.

*Hecla Island's Thora Grows Up* continues the story of Thora. From youth to adulthood, we share Thora's experiences while living in a small remote community

to eventually moving to the city of Winnipeg. Having adjusted to life on the Island, Thora begins a new venture when she leaves Hecla to move to the city to continue her education and to build a career. Once again she encounters many challenges as she adjusts to her new environment all the while building new relationships and eventually finding love.

Sylvia Sigurdson's memories and fondness of Hecla Island and its people are evident throughout the book. We get a glimpse of life on Hecla from the two room schoolhouse, to the dangers and triumphs of fishing on Lake Winnipeg. We learn of the isolation of the people during the break-up of the lake in the spring and the freezing of the lake during the fall. We also get a glimpse of the struggles encountered when moving from a small remote close-knit community to the larger fast moving city.

*Hecla Island's Thora Grows Up* would appeal not only to people of Icelandic descent or families of the original settlers, but would also appeal to a wider audience wanting to become familiar with the life of the early settlers. This book is easily read and would be especially appealing to teenagers and young adults.

## Contributors

**PEGGY BARKER** wrote the article on Icelandic Canadian dress while studying Historic Canadian Costumes at University in 1974-75. She took the course to help her with costuming for theatre.

**KRISTJANA MAGNUSSON CLARK** lives in Surrey, B.C. with her husband Alder. She enjoys writing and working on her memories.

**PAT EYOLFSON** is the Co-chairperson of the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village. She is daughter to Pall and the late Sigurros (Vidal) Palsson of Hnausa, Manitoba. She is married to Victor Eyolfson of Arborg, Manitoba.

**GAIL HALLDORSON** is a retired high school librarian who lives in Sandy Hook, MB.

**SUSAN CLAIRE JOHNSON** is a second generation Icelandic Canadian, who was raised in Selkirk, Manitoba and currently resides in Sandy Hook. Her career was in the Human Services Field and she presently is an instructor in the Child and Youth Care Program at Red River College. Susan's father was Dr. Olie Johnson and her mother is Thorey Johnson (nee Hinrikson). She is passionate about anything Icelandic and very keen about the work of Canadian Icelandic artists not only in the Interlake area, but throughout Canada as well.

**ELVA JONASSON** is currently the secretary for the Lögberg-Heimskringla Board of Directors. She is very proud of her Icelandic heritage and is very interested in genealogy, continuing the study of the Icelandic language and passing it on to others.

**DR. DARHL M. PEDERSEN** is an emeritus professor of psychology at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah and is of Icelandic descent. He has published several books and more than one hundred research and theoretical articles in professional journals. He is listed in Who's Who in America and Who's Who in the World. He is a member of the Icelandic Association of Utah and has visited Iceland three times with his son, Clark, since the year 2000, including a visit to the church which is the object of his poem, "Strandarkirkja."

**CHRISTINE RICHARDSON** is the daughter of Hjörtur & Siguros Hjartarson, late, of Lundar. She has four children and six grandchildren. While working as a stylist, she designed and constructed all aspects of her basement alone and designs, knits, sews and embroiders most of her own clothes.

**ELVA SIMUNDSSON** is a resident of Gimli and has taught Icelandic language classes in Winnipeg and Gimli.

**MARGRET THORARINSON** (Tomasson) grew up on Hecla Island. She now resides in Gimli, Manitoba but has always maintained close ties with Hecla and its residents. She and her family spend most of their summer months at the original family home.

**SYLVIA WETTEN** is the daughter of the late Paul Guðnason and Guðny Jónína Jónsson. She has lived at the West Coast since 1947 and is now a resident of Belvedere Assisted Living Residence in Coquitlam to be near her family. Sylvia has recently retired from many years as an active member of Sólskin, auxiliary to Höfn, and the Board of Directors of the Icelandic Care Home Höfn Society, Vancouver.



## The back page

Bettie Johnson Weigl was installed as the Alberta Fjallkona June 14th at the annual Markerville Picnic. She is a descendant of Icelandic pioneers who came to the district via Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Gardar, North Dakota and finally to Pine Hill near Markerville.

Bettie is a wife, mother, teacher and a very strong worker in the Stephan G. Stephansson Society.  
A very worthy candidate for this position.



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