

ICELANDIC CONNECTION



ISSN #1920-423X

Vol. 65 #4 (2013)



Islendingadagurinn

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ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

CANADIAN \$40 CAD yearly, \$80 two years U.S. & INTERNATIONAL \$46 USD yearly
E–JOURNAL \$30 CAD /\$30 USD
SINGLE COPIES \$10 CAD plus postage
WE ACCEPT U.S. & CANADIAN FUNDS, MASTERCARD AND VISA

Typed submissions of articles, book reviews, short stories and poetry are welcome.
Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT www.icecon.ca

The views expressed in all contributions which appear in the Icelandic Connection are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the publisher or editorial committee.

Printed in Winnipeg, Canada by Dycom Direct Mail and Lögberg–Heimskringla

ISSN: 1920–423X

ON THE COVER



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ATLI AND ÞRÚÐUR

Atli Ásmundsson and Þrúður Helgadóttir

Editorial

Atli and Þrúður

by Tammy Axelsson and Helga Malis

The spring of 2013 will mark the end of one journey and the beginning of another for our good friends Atli Ásmundsson and Þrúður Helgadóttir.

At *Ljósanótt*, an evening held in their honour, it was obvious how much the Icelandic-Canadian community loved them, as hundreds turned out to celebrate and honour them, to hug them and start the sad good-byes. There is a

heartfelt appreciation for the work they have done here and it is clear, that for Atli and Þrúður, their time in Canada has been a labour of love. Atli and Þrúður have visited dozens and dozens of communities and have come to know hundreds of people from all walks of life. They have welcomed people with open arms into their home and into their lives, making us love them even more.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ÞRÚÐUR AND ALTI

Þrúður and Atli

Atli and Þrúður have contributed to our Icelandic culture and heritage in Manitoba by being advocates for all that is the best of who we are collectively as a strong and influential presence in Canada. They have encouraged us to look at the unique story of the struggles and accomplishments of Icelandic-Canadians with new appreciation and a deep sense of pride. Þrúður has connected and reunited many families through her interest in genealogy. They have come to know Manitoba and its people more intimately perhaps, than many Manitobans. Listening to Atli and Þrúður talk about the places they have been and to see it through their eyes makes one appreciate anew what we have.

Atli and Þrúður are great advocates for Iceland, for the beauty, strength and integrity of its people, its land and its culture. Atli has managed to cast the spotlight on the best and brightest that Iceland has to offer in the arts, sciences and other walks of life, by bringing many wonderful musicians, choirs, speakers and dignitaries to the New Iceland community, all of whom were first-class. Atli initiated the *Núna* (now) festival which is an exchange of Icelandic and Canadian artists.

We will surely miss Atli and Þrúður, but we know that they will enjoy returning home and having the much deserved opportunity to spend more time with family and friends in Iceland. Their work will continue as they will share their experiences and intimate knowledge of Manitoba and much of Canada with our Icelandic friends and relatives. As they embark on a cross-country tour in Iceland, Þrúður will show her many, many photographs and Atli will speak about their travels to the

Icelandic communities in both Canada and the USA. They will be sharing our story that has now become their story too.

So as one chapter ends and another begins for our dear friends Atli and Þrúður, we say thank you and bid we them a fond farewell. They leave a legacy of good work and lasting friendships. We hope their lives will be filled with much love, good health and happiness and we look forward to meeting them when they come back for a visit. And, we do hope they will return to visit us often! We must cherish the connections they have worked so hard to forge.



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Interview with Atli Ásmundsson and Þrúður Helgadóttir

by Rev. Stefan Jonasson

At Ljósanótt, you talked about the day you arrived in Winnipeg to begin your work here. For those who weren't in the room that evening, I'm sure they'd love to hear the story of your arrival.

Atli: January 8th 2004 was a bitterly cold day in Manitoba. The temperature when I at long last arrived from Iceland was -41.7 degrees; with the windchill it was -55. My flights had been delayed – the long flight from Iceland and then the Northwest flight to Winnipeg – so I arrived around midnight. Exhausted, walking out of the customs offices, to my great surprise there were about twenty to thirty Icelanders there, waiting to receive me. Almost none of them knew me, so what they were doing was showing respect to Iceland and its representative: they wanted him to feel that there was someone here for him. From that moment everything was different for me. Despite the cold temperature, this was the warmest welcome I have ever received. The next morning, at five o'clock, I was sitting in this chair watching the day slowly break. The morning was bitterly cold again but exquisitely beautiful and I knew I would love it here. I knew Þrúður would be happy here with me – and this feeling has never changed. It has been just exquisite ever since.

How long was it before you followed?

Þrúður: I arrived three weeks later. I flew in late at night, as you usually do from Iceland, and the next morning – I also woke up at five! – When it got light outside a

little later, I said, I'd like to go outside and drive around to see Winnipeg in its winter coat, because I'd never seen Winnipeg in winter before.

Atli: So at six o'clock we went for a drive!

Þrúður: As it happened, that morning there was hoarfrost, so it was so beautiful! I said, oh my God, this is like a winter wonderland that I've moved to! Of course, that does not happen every day but that first day received me like that. I had often wondered, why do they make these white Christmas trees? – you know, the artificial ones – and I never thought this was something that looked like nature until I came here. It was a beautiful welcome – really, really beautiful. And the everlasting sunshine here, it always makes you happy.

What positions did you hold before becoming Consul-General? How did they prepare you for your work here?

Atli: In Iceland, like in Canada and specifically Manitoba, you have to do many things while you're growing up, whether you're on a farm or in a fishing community. When I was in my teenaged years, I was a fisherman and I was a truck driver. But on becoming an adult, I started out by teaching – something that I loved to do – and I often wonder if I shouldn't have stuck to that because I enjoyed it greatly. Then I ventured into politics at a young age, where I more or less spent thirty, almost forty years now. At first I worked for the Progressive Party which is somewhat of a farmers' liberal

party and I have never once doubted the righteousness of their agenda and the quality of their people – not once. I mostly ran political campaigns and I also was their international officer for a long time and, through that work, I came to know many politicians. I met with people like Jean Chrétien, Lloyd Axworthy, Bill Graham, Alexander Graham and Lloyd Axworthy to name a few Canadian politicians. I very much doubt they ever noticed me though.

So it was exciting work – not particularly well-paid but very interesting. And, as in teaching, it was in dealing with people, talking to people, getting the message across.

In 1995 I joined the Foreign Service. Luckily, I was put in charge of some matters relating to North America, including the relationship with the Icelandic communities, both in the United States and in Canada. I did not know much about these matters. There were a only few lines in our history

books – very meager – and I was in fact very ignorant about the history here. I then went on a tour of the Icelandic communities with Ambassador Einar Benediktsson, in August 1995, and we went to Utah, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Vancouver, and then finally Winnipeg and Gimli. I was here at the Íslendingadagurinn in Gimli and I was never the same after this. I was absolutely fascinated by this history, that I had never really heard. I was fascinated by the dedication and devotion the people of Icelandic descent showed to Iceland. So I had been working on these issues for eight years before coming here, giving me the opportunity to often visit and work with the leaders of the Icelandic community. As I have recounted many times, I never once thought I would be working here. I was on a completely different track in my work. It was quite unexpected when we were offered to come here and take up this post. I was immediately sure that I would like to do it



PHOTO COURTESY OF PRÚÐUR AND ALTI

Prúður and Atli at a Gimli parade at Íslendingadagurinn

but wise enough to wait with the answer until I had spoken to Þrúður. It took us all of two minutes to make a decision to move to another continent, leave our friends and family behind, and go and take on this task.

I for one, and I'm sure I speak for Þrúður also, have never regretted for one second making the decision to come here. Actually, it has been the happiest time of my life.

Is he right?

Þrúður: Absolutely! Sure! When Atli mentioned going to Manitoba, I thought this was a great opportunity to experience new things.

I had been here before, so I knew what it was about and I found the prospect very exciting. Anyway, I had worked for the woolen industry in Iceland for thirty years at different level of management, including managing the dye house and the sales department. As it happened, two

years before we moved here, I had thought that I'd like to look at some new career opportunities.

I often helped organize trips and holidays for my choir and for the employees. I found that I enjoyed planning trips and was interested in tourism.

So I signed up for the School of Tourism in Iceland and was there for two years, as an evening student. As a part of my education was working in a travel agency for a period of time and also working in a hotel for another period. So, as it happened, the last two months before coming here, I was working in the Nordica Hotel in Reykjavik in the reception to finish my studies. So the move here came at exactly the right time!

Of course, you miss the people you've been working with for many years, and you miss a lot of things – your family! But here we have so many friends and we have had a great time. So I agree with



PHOTO COURTESY OF ÞRÚÐUR AND ALTI

Þrúður and Atli back in Iceland with their granddaughters
left to right; Sóllilja and Hekla Lind

Atli – it has been a wonderful time.

Do you get a lot of people asking you for tourist advice?

Prúður: Here? Well, to go to Iceland, of course! People come here to get advice to go to Iceland.

Atli: Which is of course our job, too!

It's almost like Iceland sent both a consul-general and a tourist board representative at the same time!

Atli: Touristic advice I always refer to Prúður.

Prúður: Anyway, I love to travel and I've been all over Iceland, so I know my country quite well. It has been really enjoyable, when people come here and ask for advice. I always have more for them to do than they have time to do!

Was it a sacrifice to come here? You've talked about the positive things but there were also things that you had to leave behind.

Prúður: I didn't experience it as a sacrifice.

Atli: No! Of course, you are far away from your family and your friends, but with modern technology you can communicate with your people through a computer or a telephone. So basically, it doesn't matter where you are. You can stay in touch, you can show your family that you love them. With modern technology this has been made much easier. We also decided to go home quite often to see our grandchildren and family.

We take our young granddaughters on tours of Iceland to show them historical places and see towns and farms. So it has been quite easy; it's not been difficult. There have been no sacrifices that haven't been compensated for by the pleasure of being here.

This has been a long tenure for the diplomatic world. Diplomats seem to rotate every three years or so. Isn't that right?

Atli: Well, three to five. It is unusually long, yes – but this is a unique post. I think

that, to a greater extent than anywhere else, this is built on personal relationships that are built over time, although they last a lifetime, so it makes more sense to have people here for longer periods than elsewhere.

In conversation with someone a while back, I heard it said that the consul-general's position here in Winnipeg is, from an Icelandic perspective, probably the most important diplomatic positions that is not in a national capital.

Atli: Yes. I have always thought that this post – and this post actually predates Icelandic independence; it was established in 1942 before Iceland became an independent nation – and there has always been a consulate here, although only professional since 1999 – and I think the post is, among other things, a token of respect and recognition for the shared history, the shared heritage. And it is not only for Manitoba, it is for all the Icelanders in North America, although diplomatically and practically it has to be somewhere and to a certain area. But it is that – it is a token of respect and recognition from the people of Iceland to the people of Icelandic descent in North America.

It can never be stressed enough that for Icelanders – history buffs as we are and genealogy buffs as we are – the feelings run high. We have had people come through our office, to talk to Prúður and I, people who are going to Iceland – sometimes they only have a name, one name, of a person that came over on a boat a long, long time ago – and we are able to find where they came from and, with the help of others, pin down whether they have relatives in Iceland. And not once, in nine and a half years, have we heard a negative tone in any of this – always the people in Iceland, as people here too, when we connect relatives, there is pure joy! Having this as a job is really good. [Prúður: It's fun!]

What have you missed most about Iceland while you've been here?

Atli: I think you will get different responses from me and Þrúður. I miss the food! I miss the lamb and I miss the fresh fish. Of course, I miss my friends and my family, but, like I said before, this is easily remedied by touching a button on my computer or giving them a phone call. And I go see them later. So, basically, did we miss Iceland? Well, we are in Iceland in a way. We are surrounded by Icelandic heritage and history, so I guess that compensates for not being literally there. And we are working among Icelanders, we are representing Iceland, and when we fly from here, we go home – and when we fly into here, we're coming home. So it's all good.

Þrúður: Well, as Atli said, of course you miss your family and your friends. And I miss my choir – and other things you do and enjoy.

You however find new and interesting things to do in a new place. There certainly has been no shortage of interesting things to do here.

Now you had a role in the Icelandic choir here, did you not?

Þrúður: Yes! The Solskríkjan choir started later on – in 2009, I think. Absolutely,

I loved that. It brought me joy!
And they sang beautifully at Ljósanótt.

Þrúður: Oh, that was so wonderful! I was very proud of them!

Are you a soprano or an alto?

Þrúður: I'm an alto. They were so good and understanding. They said, I should just come when I was here and was able to. So that's what I have done. It has been fun !

In my own experience of Iceland I have noticed the magnificent choirs that seem to be almost everywhere. And here, on Jón Sigurðsson Day, the choirs that have come from Iceland have been magnificent, too. The tradition of choral music in Iceland seems deeper and a more important part of community than it is elsewhere. I sometimes speculate myself that half the reason churches continue to exist in some communities is that they're a good excuse to have a choir!

Atli: There are some people who say the same thing, like Ingmar Bergmann and Halldór Laxness. They say that everything on earth Man has made, except music, which comes directly from God to people.

Þrúður: The choral tradition in Iceland is amazing. For example In this little community where Álafoss is, where there are about ten thousand people



PHOTO: LINDA SIGURDSON COLLETTE

Solskríkjan choir pictured here in 2009

living - there are nine choirs!

So that just tells you – And then people can have their choice: women’s choir, men’s choir, mixed choirs of all sorts – you name it! It’s all good for your soul!

Laxness also said, “When I die, I want to hear music.”

Who have been some of the key figures you’ve worked with here? And what has been their impact on your work?

Atli: I will give you one name, and one name only. Through our time here we have struck up friendships with a great number of people. We have worked with clubs and associations, individuals in the arts and in many other fora, and it would be unjust of me even to try to remember some names and then leave others out. But without any hesitation, I would tell you that one stands above all as a friend, as a mentor, as a helper, as a generous man, as a kind man, and absolutely a unique Icelander, who spent his whole life on strengthening his heritage, and that is Neil Bardal. I miss him every day. I have had no better friend in life. And I think I do an injustice to no one by mentioning him and him alone.

Looking back, what do you see as having been the major accomplishments of your decade in Manitoba? And don’t be afraid to take credit for things!

Atli: We don’t create. We don’t have achievements. We help the people that have vision to make events happen. I dare say that we have helped, indirectly and directly, scores of artists and scholars to come here. And this is the lifeblood of the Icelandic heritage:

that helped the people stay in touch. What is my heritage about is a question people here often ask themselves. And these questions are best answered by artists and scholars and the choirs and the singers and the musicians. If I had to name one thing, it would be the Núna(now) festival, which is hosted by young people of Icelandic descent. They have all the responsibility for it. I name this because it’s new; it wasn’t here when we came. It was born out of our interaction with these young artists and I think we are both extremely proud of having helped with that. But I would not call it my achievement; it was their achievement – but I helped. Prúður helped. And it may have been even her idea! It came out of something we were discussing and she kept coming back to the young artists, saying we should do an event with young artists on their terms, not ours. We should let them decide, not try to put them into an ethnic straightjacket, but rather give them their whole freedom. And that they did – and like “good children” they went their own way and we’ve always been proud of them.



PHOTO: KENDRA JÓNASSON

Neil Bardal

We have found our work very rewarding and it has made us happy. If we have “succeeded” in our efforts, to some extent, it is because you, the Icelandic community, have inspired us and given us assistance and encouragement at every turn. So it hasn't been hard work – it has been a lot of work but it has been loving work and we don't deserve credit for it because we have been having fun.

Have you experienced any frustrations that you're willing to reveal, or do we have to wait for your memoirs? You came up politically – you were a political activist before becoming a diplomat – and the field of diplomacy is a different kind of career. It has political elements but it is also expected that diplomats will transcend everyday politics in the service of their country.

Atli: My mother always told me that when you're with people be polite and on your best behavior. I have found this to be useful advice in my life especially as a diplomat. ... Always listen to your mother. ... But really, I haven't noticed any frustrations.

Þrúður, what's it like to be the spouse of such

a public figure? On the one hand, you are expected to be visible and supportive yourself – a direct part of the diplomatic mission – while on the other hand, it seems like you're expected to be even more diplomatic than the diplomat.

Þrúður: We have worked very closely together so there often has been no separation in our daily routine with me almost always participating in the agenda, although Atli obviously is the diplomat. But the duties have really kept me busy as well and I am grateful for the tasks that have come my way.

Our home has been a center of activity, with a multitude of visitors. I enjoy meeting people so this was a great blessing

Atli: For us, we made a decision in the beginning that we would do as much together as we possibly could. It basically means that we travel together almost everywhere I need to go. When I have to fly somewhere on the job, Þrúður travels with me at our own cost.

This has made our life so much better. [Þrúður: And more fun.] Yes, and more fun. There is hardly a thing that I know



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRISTIN TERGESEN

Núna(now) festival committee from left: Arne MacPherson, Tristin Tergesen, Freya Olafson, John K. Samson, Erika MacPherson, Caelum Vatnsdal

about the Icelandic community that Þrúður doesn't know also – some things she knows even better. So we have approached this as a team – no truer word can be said of it. So this has worked out well for us.

This question arose because one of the ladies attending Ljósanótt said to me, “We got two for the price of one! In a fair world, they both would have been called the Consul-General.”

Atli: We have turned that around and said I am the consul and she is the general.

Þrúður: I should mention that I'm very grateful and honoured that the Jón Sigurdsson Chapter IODE came forward and invited me to join and made me an honorary patron.

By participating you get to know the people quickly and you make friends, which makes it easier and more enjoyable to live in a new place. So I have had my role, too, as Iceland's representative to some associations.

Turning to culture, who are your favourite authors, Icelandic or others?

Atli: I'm afraid that I must give you a terribly boring answer – the conventional answer. I have found no one to replace Halldór Laxness, who is still my idol. Of the young authors in Iceland, Guðmundur Andri Thorson is my absolute favourite.

I also find Jón Kalman Stefánsson quite brilliant and I still like Ernest Hemingway – although that is an affection I held for him already at fourteen years of age. I do read a lot. I also read bad books-I think I know no one

who has read a greater number of bad books than I have – but somebody has to suffer those who are not brilliant and I'm an avid reader of bad books.

Thrillers and such.

Þrúður: Of course, Laxness is, I think, for most Icelanders the number one figure. But we have so many authors. I've been reading the thrillers by the newer authors like Arnaldur Indriðason and Yrsa Sigurðardóttir and, but I wouldn't say they're my favourite authors. During my stay in Canada I have become fascinated by writers of Icelandic descent, like our friend Bill Valgardsson; David Arnason, Bill Holm; Johann Magnus Bjarnason, Laura Goodman Salvanson and also Andrew Davidson and more. Linda Colette and Lestrarfelagid Gleym-mér-ei has been instrumental in helping me to get to know these masters

Atli: I read my first Lermontov book a while ago and in it I found a gem of a sentence. It goes like this: “Providence



PHOTO COURTESY OF ÞRÚÐUR AND ALTI

Johanna Wilson and Þrúður at an event where Johanna received an award on behalf of Jon Sigurdson IODE

has gone to great lengths to make sure I'm not bored." I like that sentence, It certainly holds true for my life..

What music moves you most?

Atli: Elvis Presley – always! He still is the king and he is my hero. But in later years I've tended to listen to opera more than I do to Elvis, although I have several hundred of his songs on my iPad. (I have an iPad and I have an iThis and iThat and I probably am an iAfi.) I listen to opera a lot now and I'm also a country and western enthusiast. Different things, but mostly opera – and Elvis when I'm blue.

Prúður: I just love music! I could start naming one artist after the other. Of course, I usually like choir music, definitely, because I have been involved in that kind of music. Then I've had my favourites through the years – Bob Dylan was one – I adored Bob Dylan for a while. On it went, Sonny and Cher, the Beatles and many many others. I would get Canadian music, sent from Canada by my sister and brother-in-law in Ottawa, with likes of Gordon Lightfoot and Anne Murray and more. So I would just go through these eras of music and I enjoyed it all. The years here I've listened to quite a bit of classical music and I've really enjoyed that as well. For example, when the Icelandic musicians were here last year – the composers working with the WSO – I really enjoyed all of their work, along with the others who were presented at the New Music Festival. So I really like music a lot.

Atli: She wakes up singing!

Prúður: Yes, I enjoy music. But Atli forgot to mention his newest idol ...

Atli: Which is Iris DeMent. And Tommy Körberg of Sweden. We are going to Sweden to listen to the "old man" next year. *You're an Iris DeMent fan, too? I love her!*

Atli: Yes, have you heard her newest? We went to a concert in Florida with her. It was amazing! She lives in Iowa City, just south of here. Have you heard "Out of the

Fire?" – that is really remarkable. I have bought everything she has made. Her voice is different but it's hauntingly beautiful.

Prúður: Talking about music, I have to mention that I was at the Leonard Cohen concert last week ... and I never thought that I'd be able to go to a Leonard Cohen concert in Canada. But then he came to Winnipeg! I enjoyed it a lot because he has been a favourite all along – since the seventies!

Atli: I'm not as impressed.

Prúður: He was reciting his poetry and that was beautiful. And there's another musician here that I really enjoy and that is John K. Samson. He's amazing! I really, really like his music. I could continue and go on because you're always hearing something new that you really love.

Looking ahead, what do we need to be paying attention to when it comes to relations between Iceland and Manitoba. What are some of the opportunities to be explored? Are there potential pitfalls to avoid?

Atli: I will not be specific – I don't think I can be specific – but I think the time is right to do something more, also to do something different. It does not mean that we should stop doing what we are doing, because that is the foundation for everything, but I have a distinct feeling that the time is right. In Iceland, on January 12th, the Icelandic National League, under the able leadership of Halldór Arnason, who is going to do great things in his chairmanship – before him was Álmur Grímsson, who everybody knows did a great job – they had a program on a sunny Saturday at the Hótel Loftleidur and 350 people came! This number of people coming to an event on the mid-Saturday of a family weekend, against football games and family affairs, is simply unheard of. So it means that there is, in Iceland, great interest for the relationship with the Icelanders in North America and you only have to channel this interest and enthusiasm into something that will bear

fruit down the road.

We are going to go around Iceland in our first seven weeks of retirement. We are going to the eastern part of the country and we are going to give talks about our life and experiences here and show pictures of places and people. We are now in the phase of preparing this and there is great enthusiasm. I have a feeling, also here in Canada and in the U.S., that we are ripe for more things. And while it is not my place to suggest anything specific, I think that if people, if the communities and the clubs, try to do something new and something different, this would be met with enthusiasm and support by people everywhere. So I am very optimistic about the future. I don't see any pitfalls. It goes without saying that, when you try many new things, some of them are going to fail. But that is like everything else in life: you try many things, some of them will fail and you keep on going and do the ones that succeed. And so, as Þrúður and I are leaving the post here, we do so with enthusiasm. We ourselves are going to, despite retirement, continue to work on this relationship. We have discussed this and we feel we owe it to people of Icelandic descent to go around Iceland, give talks – we don't mind if there are a hundred people or ten, we will do it in classrooms or coffee shops, in small towns and bigger towns – but we will go around the country in the coming years and do our bit. We will do it gladly and we feel that this is a continuation of what we have been doing here.

Beyond “evangelizing” for the relationship back in Iceland, how are your

retirement plans shaping up? What do you plan to do in retirement?

Atli: We don't have any long term plans; we only have planned sort of a year ahead. We are going almost directly, from when we land in Reykjavík, to a little village in the east where we will spend seven weeks. Then, there is a new birth in the family (since this interview Hekla has given birth to a healthy boy). Then our two granddaughters are coming for a visit from London, and we have made it our mission, because they mostly see the great city of London and possibly Reykjavík, to drive them around Iceland – the rural areas, the farms and the fishing villages – and show them where Icelandic culture was born and show them what sustains us. They are so enthusiastic! They are at a good age when they really like doing this. Then we will spend a week in Dalasýsla in the west and a week in the north, in Skagafjörður, and we will spend a week with them in the south, going to where Þrúður was born and grew up and also the crown jewels of



PHOTO COURTESY OF ÞRÚÐUR AND ALTI
Atli Ásmundsson and Gunnvör Danielsdóttir, coworkers at the Icelandic Consulate for 10 years

Icelandic nature – the Westman Islands. Then we will probably spend some time in Reykjavík: In the fall we have an idea of going to the schools and giving some talks there. And certainly we are going to travel to Europe somewhat and spend some time there. Now this only the first year!

Prúður: Next winter I will start working on the business plan for my tea and coffee house “17Sortir”. I have had a dream for many years to open up a place with a selection of all the cakes, that Iceland is famous for. The name comes out of a Laxness novel *Under the Glacier* and refers to a lady, Hallþóra, who never served less than 17 sorts of cakes.

That’s what I’m going to use my cups for! I have now probably between three hundred and four hundred cups.

How did your collection start?

Prúður: I came here to Manitoba and I saw all these beautiful, beautiful cups – bone china cups – around in all these stores and markets and garage sales and what not. Also some good friends here have given me cups, I have been writing down some facts about the people who have been so generous and thoughtful and their relation to Iceland. So each cup I have received as a gift will carry a story.

What will you miss most about Manitoba after you return home?

Atli and Prúður both: Friends, friends, friends.

Atli: Good friends we can communicate with, friends can visit us, memories will compensate – so it’s not going to be hard. And also, by continuing to work on the same things that we have been doing, in a different country and a different context, it shouldn’t be so bad. Thank God for Bill Gates, thank God for Steve Jobs – we are all going to be in touch.

Prúður: What I will miss most are my friends. We have made so many friends here – dear, dear friends! I’m also going to

miss the sunshine because there’s a lot more sunshine here than there is in Iceland. And, being interested in traveling and exploring, I’ve explored quite a bit of Manitoba, with friends from southwestern Manitoba and the Interlake, so I will of course miss these trips. But now they can visit me in Iceland and we can go on trips there!

My last question is a little whimsical but not entirely so: What’s the meaning of life? Or more seriously and to the point: where do the two of you draw your strength to do the work you do? At the end of his autobiography, Vilhjálmur Stefánsson wrote, “I know what I have experienced and I know what it has meant to me.” What have your experiences here and elsewhere meant to the two of you?

Prúður: The meaning of life is love. If you love your fellow man and are grateful and respectful for God’s gifts, your friends and family and the good earth and all creatures, you will have a happy and meaningful life. I tend to look at the brighter side of life. When people say, “there’s a fifty percent chance of rain,” I automatically think that means there’s a fifty percent chance of sunshine.” So my energy comes from having a positive attitude.

Atli: I think at the core of life is discovering that happiness is a journey but not a destination. If you think you have it, you’ll lose it. If it is a fixed place, it means you are standing still in stagnation. And people often confuse happiness with contentment. Happiness is in moving forward, meeting new challenges and changing circumstances. And I draw my strength from Prúður. I don’t know where she gets the strength for both of us. I think the meaning of life is to leave this place a better person than you entered it. You are probably born neither good nor bad, so if you leave with some credit to the good, then you’ve done your share. Spread joy.

So I say, be kind, be positive be like Prúður!

Ode To Atli And Þrúður

by David Gislason

During their stay here, Atli and Þrúður have been not only a very effective team in the Consulate at One Wellington, they have become an integral part of the community. Atli has, from the very first, thrown himself into his work here with vision, energy and an amazing ability to garner support and get things done. Þrúður has been an integral part of it all. Together they have brought us closer to Iceland, and Iceland closer to us. That, to me, is the essence of what the position is all

about, and tonight is all about recognizing their contributions, and expressing our appreciation for what they have been doing.

In that spirit I have composed, on behalf of all of us, a poetic tribute to this fine couple. Atli arrived here on the 2nd of January 2004, and Þrúður a couple of weeks later.

My friend, the late Neil Bardal and I were at the airport the evening that Atli arrived.

Hear then, the "Ode to Atli and Þrúður".

Ode To Atli And Þrúður

January 26, 2013

Darkness reigned, that wintery night
And frost was in the air,
So cold that you could feel the bite,
But you did not seem to care.

You cared not that you left behind
The mountains and the streams
Convinced that over here you'd find
The answer to your dreams.

And Þrúður soon dispelled the night
And the sun broke through again,
For she flashed a smile, as well she might,
As she sang a sweet refrain.

'Twas a song that rose from the highland heath
In a haunting lullaby,
Built on the strength of an old belief
And the white swan's haunting cry.

Yet the song was here from the days of old
When our people came to stay,
For they brought along their dreams untold,
And their love of a bygone day-

Where the valleys all were soft and green,
 And the rivers crystal clear-
 And the nation honoured its Mountain Queen-
 All memories they held dear.

Of this love you never questioned why,
 For these people are your own,
 And you've worked to forge a stronger tie
 With the land from which you've grown.

Though the mountain peaks are distant here,
 The horizon never ends,
 And you were given a posting where
 There are countless you know as friends.

Nine years you've served your country well
 In the diplomatic corps,
 Yet it's clear to us that, truth to tell,
 You'd be happy with nine years more!

A labour of love you've fashioned here,
 Where the muddy waters flow,
 And a love returned we truly share,
 We'll be sad to see you go.

But go you must, for time moves on
 As the circle completes its ring,
 For home we know you'll soon be drawn
 by the Sóley and coming spring.

We gather here on a wintry night,
 Though outside the winds may storm,
 To offer our thanks and to share a bite,
 For your place in our hearts is warm.

You'll keep us posted, in tune with the trends,
 Though your presence be far from home-
 But we'll always be more than just Facebook Friends
 This people you call your own!

A Toast

Here with Atli and Þrúður we tarry,
 As we toast our good friends, and make merry,
 Let us rise to our feet,
 for the moment is sweet,
 in the halls of the Hotel Fort Garry!

An Archaeology of the Emigration from Iceland to New Iceland

by Dr. Ágústa Edwald

University of Aberdeen

In June of 2012 the author defended her PhD thesis at the Archaeology Department at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. The thesis is titled: *From Iceland to New Iceland. An Archaeology of Migration, Continuity and Change in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century* and investigates the migration from Iceland to Canada and the settlement of Icelanders on the West Coast of Lake Winnipeg through archaeological methods. At the center of the thesis are two excavations, one at a farm of an emigrant family in Iceland and one at the farm of an Icelandic settler family in New Iceland. The following article is an excerpt from a presentation given at the Gimli Heritage Center on the 3rd of May 2013, while the author was a visiting researcher at the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba.

The Excavations at Hornbrekka

In August 2009 a team of archaeologists led by Ágústa Edwald partially excavated the ruined farmhouse at Hornbrekka in northern Iceland. Two of the six rooms, which were visible on the surface, were opened up and turned out to be the cattle byre and the kitchen. A trench was furthermore dug into the midden, or the rubbish dump, behind the farm ruin itself. The farm was selected because it was the home of a family who emigrated to Canada in 1876; Páll Gunnlaugsson and Nanna Jónsdóttir, who settled with their son in Winnipeg and later at Sunnuhvoll in Víðrnesbyggð, southwest of Gimli.

The excavated material represents the remains of several households who lived at the farm before, during, and after the emigration period. The excavation of the midden behind the farm itself represents a relatively long period from the mid -18th century to ca. 1900, while the excavation of the house spans the period from the middle of the 19th century to the farm's abandonment in the 1930s. The excavation, apart from revealing these two rooms, multiple floor layers and evidence of refurbishments and upkeep, produced a wealth of artefacts, nails, iron scraps, ceramics and glass and the midden held a good quantity of well preserved animal bones.

The Hornbrekka farmers were fishermen along side their farming activities. The zooarchaeological material from the site is made up of 40% mammal bones, mostly sheep but also horse and cows, 31% fish, the majority being cod, followed by haddock, and 28% of the bones were birds, the most common being guillemot. What is perhaps most interesting about the assemblage, apart from this high percentage of sea birds, which is explained by the closeness of the farm to the island of Drangey, a well known bird hunting site, is that the cod bones suggest that the farm was participating in a commercial fish trade. The midden included a substantial amount of cod cranial elements in relation to bones from the body of the fish, suggesting that only the heads were consumed on site while the rest of the fish was dried or salted, and exchanged. Other fish species were present



FIG 1 Artefacts from Hornbrekka, North Iceland

by a more balanced ratio of cranial and post cranial elements. The mammal bones that were recovered at Hornbrekka had been extensively processed, suggesting that they were broken and cooked to maximize protein extraction. Further evidence for this is that in the same deposits that included highly fragmented and burnt mammal bones there were complete specimens of more fragile bird and fish bones.

Ceramics did not become common in Iceland until the mid -19th century before which people primarily used wooden bowls, called *askur*. Of the ceramics from Hornbrekka the majority is whiteware produced in industrial English potteries and decorated in a variety of ways. The variety of patterns and decoration motifs within the assemblage strongly suggests that the households at Hornbrekka did not eat off matching ceramic sets. But rather individuals owned one bowl with a certain pattern, another quite different, and plates with yet a different decoration and so on and so forth. Gavin Lucas (2007) has speculated that the variety of ceramics found at Icelandic 19th century farms suggests that the practice of each person owning their own receptacle may have continued into the period of ceramic use through from the use

of the *askur*. As each person owned their own it was better that they were not the same. This may also be supported by the high percentage of repaired ceramics from Hornbrekka. A significant percentage of the ceramics had repair holes in them, an indication of being tied together with other shards of the same vessel. One can imagine that owning one's own bowl may result in a greater likelihood of repairing it once it breaks.

The excavation at Hornbrekka demonstrates that the households were far from being isolated production or consumption units.

They exchanged farming products and fish for crockery, building materials, coffee and tobacco. These families could be described as poor, as is indicated by the breaking up of mammal bones for marrow extraction and the consumption of sea birds and cod heads. However, it is clear that they were entangled in complex networks of exchange and trade as the archaeological record full of nails, window glass, alcohol and medicine bottles, and kerosene lamp shards, demonstrates. These trade networks suggest that people were not isolated or out of touch with the outside world.

The Excavations at Viðivellir

The farm excavated in Canada is called Viðivellir. It is in the north of the former colony on the banks of the Icelandic River, on the outskirts of the present town of Riverton. Viðivellir was settled by Jón Guttormsson and Pálína Ketilsdóttir in 1877 and the Guttormssons lived at the farm throughout the period that is represented in the excavation. First Jón Guttormsson, who came from Arnheiðarstaðir in the East of Iceland and his wife Pálína lived there along with their sons Vigfús and Guttormur. They built a log house on the farm in two stages. After Pálína passed away Jón lived there

with his second wife Snjólaug. Guttormur took over the farm from Snjólaug and lived there with his wife Jensína Daníelsdóttir and their children Arnheiður, Pálína, Bergljót, Hulda and Gilbert. Gilbert took over the farm after his parents and lived there until he passed away a few years ago. The farm is now owned by Nelson Gerrard.



Edwald dig at Víðivellir 2 June 2010

There was nothing visible on the surface at Víðivellir but Gail Foster, the great granddaughter of the first settler, and Nelson Gerrard pointed to the place where they thought the original log house stood. That is where the main excavation took place and the wooden floor of the old log house was discovered. These deposits were part of the extension to the original part of the house and will have been built around 1890. A small trench into later midden deposits was also excavated. The midden deposits are associated with the household of Guttormur and Jensína who moved out of the original log house in 1914 and into a new house, which was built elsewhere on the property after plans that were ordered from the Eaton's catalogue.

The excavation at Víðivellir spanned the period from ca. 1890s and until the 1930s the later material being represented in the midden. The artefact assemblage was not as large as that one from Hornbrekka but still included a lot of ceramics, glass and iron objects.

The ceramics from Víðivellir are very different from the types discovered at Hornbrekka. The type of ceramics purchased, and the ways cups, saucers, plates and bowls, were used and disposed of by the families, hints towards differences in the daily lives of the two households. The ceramic assemblage from Víðivellir is for instance much more uniform indicating that the family was eating off matching ceramics, most probably at a dining table. It is also significant that only one shard of a total of 533 ceramic shards recovered from Víðivellir had been repaired. It is safe to assume that repairs were no longer done on broken crockery in the same fashion as at Hornbrekka in the early 20th century at Víðivellir. This may be the result of other ways of fixing broken vessels, such as gluing, but it is more likely to reflect the different attitudes to everyday crockery, which could be more easily replaced in Canada, due to increased purchasing power and easier access to markets.

... continued on page 171

S Ó L S K I N

Lögberg's Children's Paper

VOL I.

WINNIPEG. 7. OCTOBER 1915.

No. I

Translator's notes

by Elin Thordarson

Dr. Sigurður Júlíus Jóhannesson (1868-1956) arrived in Canada in 1899 and in his lifetime achieved mythic status in the "pantheon of Icelandic figures in Canada." In the late 1980s Laurence Gillespie conducted a series of interviews with the children of the Icelandic immigrant generation. Then elderly themselves, their recollections of Siggí Júl, as he was known in the Icelandic community, informed my interest in him. He is remembered as "a peach of a man," a translator, and a poet and writer himself. He was a "radical," a supporter of the Labour Movement and a staunch campaigner against conscription. He is remembered as having the habit of interrupting concerts at the Unitarian church in Winnipeg in order to speak to the crowd. He would march right up the aisle of the church and onto the stage, putting a stop to the music in order to deliver a speech on any topic of political importance. This kind of brazenness was said to have gotten him thrown down the steps of the Manitoba Legislative building during a protest against the conscription of Canadian citizens into the First World War.

Siggí Júl was also a practicing physician and was often seen walking down Winnipeg's Ellice and Sargent

Avenues, or the streets of Lundar, Gimli and the other northern Icelandic Manitoba communities, with his stethoscope and his doctor's satchel, which never left his side.

He is remembered as always doing good somewhere for somebody, completely selfless, giving away his talents to his community. He was seldom paid for what he gave and the end of his life was lived in the dormitories of the Jón Bjarnason Academy (an Icelandic language high school on Home Street in Winnipeg) *gratis*.

In the year 1915, Siggí Júl was editor of the left leaning *Lögberg* newspaper in Winnipeg. At that time he started and manned the publication of *Sólskin*, meaning Sunshine, the children's section of the newspaper. *Sólskin* was laid out in such a way that children could cut them out of their parents' copy of *Lögberg*, giving them their own newsprint scaled down. The idea being that children could collect them all and sew or paste them together into a sort of book of *Sólskin*.

What follows is a translation of the Volume One, Number One edition of *Sólskin*, dated October 7, 1915. It is deliberately laid out in *Icelandic Connection* to pay homage to this idea of Siggí Júl's that children be able to pull their newspaper right out of their parents'.

S Ó L S K I N

Lögberg's Children's Paper

VOL I.

WINNIPEG. 7. OCTOBER 1915.

No. I

Sólskin.

Lögberg does not want to merely be a newspaper for grown ups, but also a paper for children and youths. It has often reported on various things for children, but they are so numerous that they prefer to have their own paper; a paper that is only for them and nobody else; a paper that they could call their own.

This is clear to Lögberg and we now plan to begin to publish this kind of paper.

It will be, as a matter of fact, a special part of Lögberg, laid out such that nothing is required but to clip it out each time, and then it becomes a paper of its own. The hope is that children and youths will keep them together and collect them in a book, just like the children in Iceland do with "Æskan." It has brought sunshine into many homes there and here, and given children all sorts of knowledge and learning. Lögberg hopes that this little paper can grow and thrive, so that children embrace it every time like sunshine. This paper will try to not suffocate under its name; it will try to share the sunshine of knowledge and information, the sunshine of learning, the sunshine of love and sympathy. It wants to captivate the children so much that they look forward to when Lögberg comes out and they rush to ask their daddy or mommy to clip out this little paper, and give them "The Sunshine."

Children that are old enough to go to school and know how to write, are asked to send "Sólskin" their stories or poems

or little writings or whatever they may be, whether it is something that they have written all by themselves or learned from others, and they feel it should be in their little paper.

Those children that have homes where Lögberg is not read should ask their daddy to buy a copy for "Sólskin." It will be a paper for all children equally, whatever party they belong to.

"Read 'Sólskin.'"

Think about what you see in "Sólskin."
Tell other children about "Sólskin."

"Sólskin" aspires to become your loyal friend.

A Sunshine Verse

The blessed sun loves us all,
all with her kisses wakes,
Thawing frost and snowy drifts
her affection takes.

H.H.

My Mother

By Jane Taylor

Who fed me from her gentle breast,
And hush'd me in her arms to rest,
And on my cheek sweet kisses prest?
My Mother.

When sleep forsook my open eye,
Who was it sung sweet hushaby,
And rock'd me that I should not cry?
My Mother.

Who sat and watch my infant head,
 When sleeping in my cradle bed,
 And tears of sweet affection shed?
 My Mother.

When pain and sickness made me cry,
 Who gazed upon my heavy eye,
 And wept for fear that I should die?
 My Mother.

Who dress'd my doll in clothes so gay,
 And taught me pretty how to play.
 And minded all I had to say?
 My Mother.

Who taught my infant lips to pray,
 And love God's holy book and day.
 And walk in Wisdom's pleasant way?
 My Mother.

And can I ever cease to be
 Affectionate and kind to thee,
 Who was so very kind to me?
 My Mother.

Ah, no! the thought I cannot bear;
 And if God please my life to spare
 I hope I shall reward thy care,
 My Mother.

Who ran to help me when I fell,
 And would some pretty story tell,
 Or kiss the place to make it well?
 My Mother.

When thou art feeble, old, and gray,
 My healthy arm shall be thy stay,
 And I will soother thy pains away,
 My Mother.

And when I see thee hang thy head,
 'Twill be my turn to watch thy bed.
 And tears of sweet affection shed,
 My Mother.

For could our Father in the skies
 Look down with pleased or loving eyes,

If ever I could dare despise
 My Mother.

[In the original Sólskin a translation on this poem by Sigurður Júlíus appeared].

Dimples And Smiles

Once, a long, long time ago, a little child was playing by itself out in the grass. It became so tired that it fell asleep. This child was especially beautiful; just as angels are said to look. It just so happened that an angel was down on the earth and saw the child there as it slept. He was completely taken aback at how beautiful it was and thought that it couldn't possibly be an earthly creature. He bent down to it and touched it like so: he placed the tip of his thumb on one cheek right by the corner of its mouth and the fingertip of his index finger on the other cheek in the same place. And he saw and felt that this was a sleeping child. And when he rose up to heaven again, he spoke about how beautiful beyond compare this child was. Another angel, who was a bit curious, went down the next morning to earth to see for himself. He came to the house where the child lived. It was just a little turf cottage. He went up to the windowsill and looked in and saw where the child lay sleeping in the bed. He smiled so hard and with so much intensity that the rays of his smile beamed in through the window and into the house.

When the rays from the angel's smile touched the face of the sleeping child, it was as if they tickled it and it smiled. And it is said that this smile was the first smile in the world. And when the child smiled, hollows formed by the corner of its mouth on both sides on the bottom part of its cheek. These hollows were the imprints

left by the fingers of the other angel when he touched the child the day before.

And they say that is how dimples and smiles came to be originally. You have surely noticed how some people with dimples are beautiful when they smile.

Multiplication By 9

It is easy to multiply with some numbers, but difficult with others. You might think that it is hardest to multiply by 9, because it is the highest number, but that is not so. Suppose that we want to multiply 34,875,695 by 9, it is easiest to place a 0 after it and subtract from the outcome the original number:

$$\begin{array}{r} 348,756,950 \\ 34,875,695 \\ - \\ \hline 313,881,255 \end{array}$$

When we place a zero after a number, we are actually multiplying that number by 10. The number 9 is one less than the number 10, as we know. Therefore, multiplying by 10 and then subtracting the number itself once is the same as multiplying by 9.

This method is very quick if, for example, we have to multiply by 99 or 999, or whatever number has all 9s. Suppose that we have to multiply 9,876,543 by 99; it would be like so:

$$\begin{array}{r} 987,654,300 \\ 9,768,543 \\ - \\ \hline \hline 977,777,757 \end{array}$$

The trick is to place one 0 behind the original number for each 9. Placing two 0s is the same as multiplying by one hundred, or increasing the number one hundred

times, and if the number is then subtracted once, then it is increased ninety nine times.

If multiplying by three 9s (999), then we need to place three 0s, etc.

Icelanders Discovered America

An ancient manuscript has been discovered that reveals that Icelanders first discovered Greenland in 877, but Eirík the Red had founded a colony there in 986. This colony existed there for over 400 years and ruins of the buildings there can still be seen there. The Icelanders in Greenland heard from seamen's stories, that a large land was situated further west. In the year 1000 (the same year that Iceland converted to Christianity) Leifur, the son of Eirík the Red, sailed out to find this land. With him were 35 people. The voyage was not long, as we may see if we look at a map.

First Leifur arrived at an island, likely Newfoundland, and he called it Helluland. From there he sailed to Nova Scotia and named it Skógláland, and finally he disembarked somewhere along the shores of the State of Massachusetts; he called it Vínland because it was covered with grapes. He was there a whole winter, then he loaded up his ship with timber and sailed back to Greenland; where he spoke of his discoveries. After that more Icelanders made more trips to America to fetch wood because it was scarce in Greenland.

A rich Icelander, named Þorfinnur Karlsefni, went to America in the year 1007 in three ships and with 160 people and established a colony there. His son, whom he named Snorri, was born there and he was the first white man born in America. Many important Icelanders are descended from him.

The Icelandic colonists were in constant conflict with Indians and abandoned America after three years. Where this settlement was no one knows with certainty, but it is likely, that at some point, that remains or artifacts will be found that show us. Voyages to America to find timber continued for some time after that, but of them there are no stories.

An American who has just recently passed away has given half a million dollars to erect a statue of Þorfinnur Karlsefni in Philadelphia.

If The Moon Stopped Shining

Did you know that every time you smile warmly and every time you are good children, that you are giving those around you great and valuable gifts?

Did you know that the world becomes a better place every time a child smiles, and a worse place every time a child behaves badly? And did you know that you yourself become richer every time that you give others joy with a smile? Have you ever thought about the moon? Have you noticed that it is always smiling, always beaming just like you do when you smile? Suppose that someday the moon would take it upon itself to stop all the wonderful rays that the sun sends it and keep them for itself. You all know what kind of effect this would have. The moon would stop at once being bright and shining and at the same time would lose all its beauty: it would no longer be beautiful. It would be an ugly thing for the moon to do this; and it would be just the same as children do when they are naughty and rude.

Children are like rays or sunshine, when they are good and smiling, but they are like a black cloud when they are naughty.

Riddles

1. George was trying to tease an ape that sat on a barrel; but though he walked all the way around the barrel the ape would turn too so that George always saw his face. Did he succeed in walking around the ape when he walked around the barrel?

2. Maria bought a few apples and got 3 for 4 cents and as many oranges for 1 cent each; she bought everything for 14 cents - How many apples did she get and how many oranges?

3. A bottle and a cork cost 5 cents; if the bottle costs 4 cents more than the cork how much does the cork cost?


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An Archaeology of the Emigration from Iceland to New Iceland ... continued from page 165

The presence of branded, mass-produced objects such as soda pop and medicine bottles, a tooth brush and comb which were both branded, as well as food tins, suggests that the Viðivellir household was participating in competitive production and consumption network, which relied on advertisements and a market sensitive to consumer demands. Branded mass-produced material culture is much more prominent in the midden deposits from the early 20th century than in the earlier deposits from the house. However, it is clear from preserved store accounts that as early as 1881 the family was purchasing a much larger variety of items from different sources than the family at Hornbrekka had access to as late as the early 20th century. These items included a variety of textiles and fabrics as well as preserved and fresh foodstuffs such as fruit and vegetables.

The zooarchaeological specimens from Viðivellir are furthermore very different from those from Hornbrekka. They were predominantly from cattle of prime beef age, which suggests that cattle were kept for meat production rather than primarily for milk. The presence of axial and appendicular skeletal remains suggests that the animals were slaughtered on site. The presence of sheep, pig, and chicken suggest a varied, meat based diet. There were not a lot of fishbone recovered, which is surprising given the farms location but that may possibly be explained by the preservation conditions in the soil.

It is clear that the households at Viðivellir

participated in ideologies of capitalism that centred on individualization and wage economy. The archaeological assemblage bears all the hallmarks of increased consumption of industrially and commercially branded materials: the use of matching ceramic sets, along with formal dining practices and with a wealth of personal artefacts. Some of these trends are also noted in the archaeological assemblage from Hornbrekka but to a much lesser extent. We also know from historical resources that the households in Iceland participated in a series of different seasonal activities and divided their time between animal husbandry and fishing. The households at Viðivellir appear to have been more specialized in their subsistence strategies and will have relied on paid employment off the farm alongside farming. It is evident that in wealth measured in acquired commodities, the Guttormssons' were substantially wealthier than the households at Hornbrekka, however, these changes should not automatically be interpreted as progressive and inevitable



FIG 2 Artefacts from Viðivellir, Manitoba

nor as a rupture from Icelandic traditions.

Continuity and Change

The raising of sheep was the main activity on Icelandic farms in the 19th century and the management of sheep was central to the farming calendar. The sheep were housed during the winter and fed hay and in the spring they were released into the highland communal pasture from where they were gathered in the autumn and sorted in sheep folds. In Þorsteinn Þorsteinsson's account of farming in the first years in New Iceland, Canada, he states that sheep rearing was only done on a very small scale because of dense woodland and predators such as wolves and bears (1945, 136). According to a statistical report on the Icelandic colony for the year 1879, which was published in *Framfari*, there were only 25 sheep in the entire reserve that year (*Framfari*, special issue 10th April 1880). That number had risen to 2468 sheep in 1891 (Baldwinson 1980 [1891-92]). These numbers suggest that as more woodland was cleared many of the Icelandic settlers decided to raise sheep rather than cultivate the land for crops. The keeping of sheep in New Iceland required significant adjustments to the Icelandic system as no communal pasturelands were stipulated in the laying out of homesteads. In his autobiography, Erlendur Guðmundsson, who emigrated from Iceland in 1899, said that he was surprised to see so many sheep in the town site of Gimli when he first arrived. He was later told that the farmers used the area that had been surveyed as a town site as pasture in spring and summer. The town site was the largest tract of land that had been cleared and the sheep were safer there from predators and flies. The sheep were, according to Erlendur, herded in the autumn and separated in sheepfolds like the tradition was in Iceland (Guðmundsson, 2002). A clear indication of the importance of sheep and sheep products to the Icelandic emigrants are requests for various

wool processing implements to be sent to them from friends and relatives in Iceland that are common in letters that were sent to Iceland. Woollen products are, moreover, also mentioned as one of the major aspects of the area's economy, for example in a letter written on the 28th of January in 1900. Stefán Benediktsson at Bakka, a farm by the Icelandic River, wrote to his friend Þorsteinn Magnússon in Iceland:

Back then there was a little bit of knitting but the wool did not fetch a high price, but now each woman owns a knitting machine and knits almost all undergarments and other knitted garments or socks, in some places worth \$100. And from the reserve we sell hundreds of sock pairs and mittens all over to the gold country and to the west coast (Guðmundsson, Böðvar 2002, 484. Author's translation).

Sheep rearing appears to have decreased in the former colony as the 20th century progressed but it is clear that the continued mixed economy of fishing and keeping sheep was an important factor in the settlers' subsistence in the first decades in New Iceland.

Many stories of the emigration from Iceland to Canada have been told before and there are multiple stories to tell. Some previous accounts, however, track the same footsteps on a path marked by the same 'historical posts' and have collectively created and recreated a grand narrative of the emigration period. Many are embedded in notions of national romanticism, cultural determinism and recount a tale of free thinking men who settled empty lands. Much room is given to the leaders of the community who carved out the path which others followed, the story which began by the search for the colony site, punctuated by the landing at Víðines, the small pox epidemic, the religious controversy and an exodus before arriving in the present. An archeological approach to the emigration period can provide an alternative narrative, a

bottom up approach which is not concerned with big men or big events but rather the everyday and the stuff, human and non-human, that forms the building blocks of our lives.

The Icelandic settlers in Canada readily adopted new material culture and practices whilst placing utmost emphasis on preserving their Icelandic ethnic identity. The continuation of activities such as practicing a mixed economy of keeping sheep and fishing afforded the settlers' participation in growing capitalist markets in Canada and shows that carrying up with tradition cannot be interpreted as a failure to modernize. This continuation was not only noted in certain activities or practices but it also materialized in the sharing of tools between old and new Iceland, some new skills and ideas travelled from Canada to Iceland while the reciprocal flow brought spinning wheels and combs.

While the Icelandic settlers debated the issue of mixing with other nationalities at the threat of losing their language and heritage, they participated in various activities with other peoples in their daily lives. As they learned new skills they continued to write to their friends and relatives back home, sharing their experiences. It is this continued participation in each other's tasks that nurtured new skills and secured the continuity through changes in their lives.

Baking traditional Mennonite bread in modern Canadian stoves, combing wool with traditional Icelandic combs to be knitted in modern knitting machines, fishing with Ojibwa fishing techniques to provide fish for growing capitalist markets, harvesting ice on Icelandic ponds and building icehouses by Canadian example on the coast line of Iceland all brought forward the enchanting world that was afforded by the emigration from Iceland to New Iceland.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Megan T.

Hicks for analysing the zooarchaeological material from the two sites. Karen Milek, Véronique Forbes, Liam Lanigan, Nicholas Sepúlveda, Oddgeir Isaksen, Valerie McKinley, Jodie Schmidt, Chris Green and Michael Bumsted for their help with the excavations. Further thanks are due to the landowners Nelson Gerrard at Víðivellir, and Reynir Sveinsson and Anna Jónsdóttir at Hornbrekka and last but not least to Birna Bjarnadóttir and Tammy Axelson who made the presentation in Gimli possible.

The research was funded by a studentship from the College of Physical Sciences, University of Aberdeen, the Government of Canada provided financial assistance for travel and upkeep in Canada during my fieldwork at Víðivellir, Manitoba, and Fornleifasjóður Íslands funded the archaeological excavation at Hornbrekka in Iceland. The fieldwork in Iceland, furthermore, benefitted from generous support from my supervisor Dr. Karen Milek and her own funding from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland.

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Jón Ólafsson: Pioneer, Patriot, and Pen-wielding Alaskan Explorer

by Avery Simundsson

In 1872, the emigration from Iceland to America was the subject of heated debate. Stories from pioneer explorers, such as Sigtryggur Jónasson who dared to travel to Canada to assist Icelandic people in their emigration, circulated the nation, making this once treacherous undertaking seem a realistic opportunity.

Besides deteriorating conditions in Iceland, the reluctance of the Danish government to grant the Icelandic people any of their civil rights and privileges as a sovereign nation was a large factor in people's decision to emigrate. Jón Ólafsson, a poet and editor from Reykjavík fighting for the Independence movement, colourfully criticized the Danish authorities through his prolific pen. He later fled to America (Wisconsin) in the late summer of 1873 to escape from the resulting criminal charges and fines. Although a fugitive, he became very involved in building the Icelandic community in the two years he stayed there while supporters fought his case back at home.

Unlike many Icelanders, Ólafsson did not emigrate to seek a new life or become an American. He was a passionate Icelander through and through and kept a tenacious hold on his heritage. He discouraged people from accepting American ways and warned against influences such as the immigrant Norwegians. He and his colleague Reverend Jón Bjarnason explored the Nebraska and Milwaukee areas for a suitable settlement site with visions of an exclusively Icelandic community. Though a Nebraska site was

eventually settled, three years of misfortune caused by grasshoppers forced people to reconsider their plans. A settlement was planned for Wisconsin, but Jón Ólafsson campaigned that an Icelandic settlement in Wisconsin was out of the question. He began to search for alternatives.

Ólafsson was an active, determined, and politically keen figure and worked furiously to find somewhere an exclusively Icelandic settlement would flourish. After making contact with many notable figures, some who took him seriously and some who did not, he eventually came into contact with Marston Niles, a lawyer in New York. Niles mentioned Alaska, which had recently been bought by America from Russia in 1867, as a promising location and pledged to support them not only in a venture north, but also in their attempts to settle the Midwest. Ólafsson met many times with Niles that summer. Through his research, Ólafsson discovered that Alaska was in many ways, similar to Iceland and agreed that it would be an ideal location. Impressed by Jón, Niles agreed to secure funding for an exploratory trip north.

Jón called a general meeting in early July of 1874 and suggested that three people be chosen to make an excursion to Alaska. Himself, along with Olafur Ólafsson (who gave Gimli its name) and Árni Sigvaldason were selected for the enterprise. Jón spent the rest of July in New York, making plans with Marston Niles and Professor Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, a Norwegian scholar lecturing at Columbia University. The motive for the

involvement of these two figures in this event is unknown.

1874 marked the thousandth anniversary of settlement of Iceland and was, interestingly, also the year in which the King of Denmark agreed to grant the Icelandic people a new constitution. To celebrate both historic events a festival was planned on August 2, the day when the new constitution was to be officially presented to the Icelandic people, at one of the most historic sites in Iceland: Þingvellir. Jón Ólafsson, patriotic as he was, immediately set about organizing a twin festival in Milwaukee. He, along with two other men and three women, were the first Icelandic Festival committee ever established in America and they ran a successful initial gathering with 60-70 attendees. The intent of the festival was to incite pride and patriotism in Icelandic people and provide a venue for community building. The song written by Reverend Matthías Jochumsson for the celebration in Iceland is still the national anthem of Iceland today.

It was at this festival that the Icelandic Association of North America was formed with the aim to preserve and strengthen Icelandic sentiment in North America, maintain strong bonds with the motherland, and to organize a permanent settlement site. Ólafsson presented his dream of an Alaska settlement to the association and produced a petition to the US president, Ulysses Grant, to sponsor the Icelandic expedition north. Forty-three adults present signed the petition. Though this was the only recorded meeting of the Icelandic Association of North America occurred, its causes were later taken up by other Icelandic associations



PHOTO COURTESY OF NELSON GERRARD

Jon in Winnipeg c 1885

such as the Icelandic Festival Committee and Icelandic National League.

The Alaskan expedition planned to explore three areas: The Kodiak Islands, Cooks Bay and the Aleutian Peninsula. Due to circumstance, Árni Sigvaldason had been replaced by Páll Björnsson. They departed from San Francisco via the Plymouth on September 10th, 1874. After thirty-one days at sea, they docked at Fort Nicholas in Cooks Bay. After three weeks of exploration, Jón Ólafsson returned to New York with a glowing report while his compatriots remained behind to overwinter

in Alaska, after which they delivered a much less optimistic report.

After preparing his report for the US government, Jón travelled to Washington to seek listeners in Congress. However, the reception was somewhat less hearty than he had anticipated. The American government had been heavily criticized for “wasting” money on Alaska and were reluctant to invest further. It was against US policy to aid ethnic groups in establishing their own exclusive settlements. After a time spent searching for willing ears and composing poetry conveying his dedication to Iceland, Jón began to realize that his dream would never come to fruition. Most of those who still sought a solely Icelandic community had begun to look north to Canada, and Jón Ólafsson returned to Iceland.

Though happy to return to his homeland, Jón was not finished in America and in 1876, he returned with a group of hopeful settlers on an assignment to examine the conditions of New Iceland in Manitoba. Letters from previous emigrants had expressed varying opinions of the new country and this was the first officially assigned visit from Iceland with the purpose of exploring settlement sites and report back to better prepare potential emigrants for migration. After several weeks, Jón Ólafsson was impressed, particularly with the Icelandic River area. His comments may be one of the reasons that this particular settlement received so many settlers over next number of years.

Upon his return to Iceland, Jón continued to push for emigration to America and the prospects of New Iceland. He provoked a heated literary battle in 1883 with the poet Benedikt Gröndal over opinions on emigration, which ended in a libel suit. But by 1890, Jón had once again returned to Winnipeg and had become the editor of the weekly paper, the *Lögberg*. However, things had changed slightly

since his last visit. Jón expected to find his compatriots struggling to maintain their Icelandic heritage and still infused with passion about the Icelandic Independence movement. What he found, however, were Icelanders more concerned about opening successful business than freeing Iceland from the Danes, intercultural marriages, and the general Icelandic community integrating quite well into Canadian society. In an effort to stir patriotism in his comrades, he used his position as editor of the *Lögberg* to reach out to people in an article entitled “Onward, Onward Icelanders”:

“People of Icelandic background form the largest non-English speaking group in the province yet not one holds an important position in the community. Two or three hundred Swedes run their own immigration office and have demanded the service of a native Swede at the main post office, which has now been granted. We publish two weeklies: they only one monthly. We outnumber other Scandinavian groups in Winnipeg by far yet we accomplish much less. What are the reasons? We should not be so totally dominated by the English majority; it is quality that counts not quantity.

Ten Swedes, Danes, or Norwegians are more noticeable than two or three thousand Icelanders; here in Winnipeg these make sure to have foreign dignitaries at their social and cultural events. Which in turn always results in some coverage by the local press. We make no such efforts. If we want to be recognized in North America as Icelanders, our voices must be heard.”

Ólafsson was one of the driving forces behind the first Icelandic celebration in Winnipeg, along with Eggert Johannson, editor of the other weekly the *Heimskringla*. The day’s itinerary was based heavily on the 1874 Milwaukee celebration, and despite torrential downpours leading to cancellation of some of the events, the 1890 celebration on August 2 received favorable reviews.

Jón stayed in the Winnipeg region for several years, always remaining a prominent figure in the Icelandic community. He went on to also become the editor of the *Heimskringla*, and eventually began to publish a monthly cultural journal called *Öldin*. He could not stay away from home,

however, and eventually returned to Iceland where he became a member of Icelandic parliament. A visionary and an activist, Jón was an influential figure during a crucial time in Icelandic history and remains a tribute to national pride and the tenacity of Icelandic heritage that we still celebrate today.

Green Iceland

by Kevin Jon Johnson

In recent decades, the Nordic region has emerged as a world leader in innovative energy and climate solutions. This region of 25 million inhabitants trades electricity in one of the most integrated international energy grids in the world where, for example, the stable electricity from hydroelectric power in Norway and Sweden balances the fluctuating energy from wind power in other areas. Sweden plans to free itself of oil by 2020, and today two-thirds of all electricity generated in Nordic nations comes from renewable sources. With concerns over the rise in sea levels expected from the melting of Greenland ice sheets caused by global warming, the Nordic nations are fully aware of the intertwined challenges of energy and climate. The region's largest joint research programme, the Top-Level Research Initiative under the aegis of the Nordic Council of Ministers, conducts research on energy and the climate and develops innovative solutions (Ásgrímsson 2010, no pagination).

With 318,000 people inhabiting 103,000 square kilometres - a density that would show Manhattan's population at 224 - Iceland plans to use green energy

to lure foreign investment and rise from the ashes of the collapse of the banks in 2008 and the April 2010 Eyjafjallajökull eruption (Halper 2011, 41 - 42). In June of 2010 their Parliament put a ten-year cap on the 20 per cent corporate tax rate, one of the lowest in the world, and Iceland offers the carrot of clean electricity to lure foreign manufacturing, agriculture, technology and media companies (Halper 2011, 42). "Iceland generates 100% of its energy from renewable hydroelectric and geothermal sources, of which it has plenty" (Halper 2011, 42).

This electricity, amongst the cleanest in the world, has perhaps the more important added benefit - in this era of energy price volatility - of stable rates, often set by utility companies for 20 year periods. The modern grid system is also smart, effective and robust. By 2020 data centres could exceed airlines as CO₂ emission culprits, and in May 2010 the Norwegian browser company Opera moved into a data centre in Hafnarfjörður, ten kilometres south of Reykjavík, and rumours have it that IBM may move into a former NATO base 47 kilometres southwest of the capital. The subarctic Icelandic climate will also

eliminate the huge expense of using electricity to cool computer rooms (Halper 2011, 42).

Several energy intensive aluminum plants already smelt in Iceland, which ties with fishing as the country's leading industry. Aluminum plants pollute even on clean energy, and provide relatively few jobs per megawatt. Less polluting industries like polysilicon and carbon fibre and data centres create more downstream employment, and could create 3,500 new jobs, wiping out a quarter of the current unemployment. Katrin Júlíusdóttir, the Minister of Industry, Energy and Tourism, wants to diversify and avoid the aluminum and fishing dependencies (Halper 2011, 42).

About 75% of Iceland's energy comes from hydroelectric sources, and the rest is geothermal. Geothermal steam does emit CO₂, a dirty little secret, but Icelanders seek to capture it. The emission rate is 5% of what coal powered plants and 11% of what natural gas plants emit. Iceland's National Energy Authority predicts that the current 16 terawatt-hours of production could be tripled (Halper 2011, 43). A terawatt is one trillion watts (Jacobson and Delucchi 2009, 39).

The largest power producer, Landsvirkjun, has green dreams that extend to the lucrative European energy

market. For \$2.6 billion they could extend an undersea high voltage cable to Europe, selling green electricity during the day to Europe, when prices are high, and buying back electricity at lower costs at night to supply round-the-clock smelters. Environmentalists in Iceland and regional interests may dampen this ardent green energy dream but it appears likely to succeed, a success built on a more worthy and stable foundation than the recent financial speculation that had angry Icelanders in October of 2010, concerned about house repossessions, tossing skýr at parliamentarians (Halper 2011, 41 - 43).

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Enough to Break the Ice

by Heiða Simundsson

“Hi, my name is Heiða.”

“Sorry, what was that?”

“Heiða.”

“Heather?”

“Hey – the.”

“Sorry, can you spell that for me?”

It is pretty much a guarantee that when I introduce myself to someone new, they won't catch my name on the first try. My latest challenge, concerning my name, has been living 'down under' and trying to discern what it should like when said by someone with the Australian accent. Some have been pronouncing my name 'Hi-the', some have been saying 'Hey-ther', and my hosts' slightly deaf Grandma has been calling me 'Ann'. She was very much relieved to find out I had an English middle name after failing to catch my name after five or six tries. “Why didn't you just say that in the first place?” she asked when I gave her my middle name, at her request. I have met other people with unique names, many of whom admit to disliking them, choosing instead to go by a more common middle name or an easy nickname. This is a route I don't choose to take.

“Sorry can you spell that for me?”

“It doesn't help: H-E-I-D-A.”

“Hi-da”

“The d is pronounced as a *th*.”

“Where does that come from?”

“Its Icelandic.”

“So, h-e-i-**D**-a?”

“Its not actually a *d*, its supposed to be an *eth*, a letter that is in the Icelandic alphabet. It looks similar to a *d* so my parents wrote it as such.”

“Could you say it for me one more time?”

What serves for a standard ten second introduction for most people, can easily turn into a ten minute conversation for me, including a brief lesson on characters in the Icelandic alphabet, my culture, the area I grew up, and it can go into twenty minute conversations from there - anywhere from Icelandic immigration and settlement to name meanings to Norse mythology to Canadian identity, and who knows where else the conversation may lead, knowing how conversations often stray in very different directions from certain jumping points. I've never asked my parents why they decided to spell my name with a *d* as opposed to a *th*, making it more phonetic. I have a cousin Þóra, whom in English spells her name *Thora*. [Þ is the character in the Icelandic alphabet that makes a hard *th* sound, as opposed to the *ð*, which makes a soft *th* sound.] The letter *P* would be the closest in resemblance, but the *Th*- spelling, undoubtedly, is less hassle and explanation. Spelling my name Hei-th-a, would have assuredly saved me the explanations and corrections; however, that would have denied my classmates the thrilling anticipation of my name during morning roll-call when we had a substitute teacher, and the pure joy of correcting them when they said it wrong.

“Could you say it for me one more time?”

“Hey-the.”

“Hey---the?”

“Yeah, that's it”

“Hey-the, Hey-the”

“If it helps, try to remember it as, ‘Hey, the soup is burning!’ Those first two words together.”

“Oh! Heiða!”

Besides people reading my name, as written, and having utterly no chance of getting it right, people hearing me say it still often have a lot of difficulty with it. Interestingly enough, it is often young children who get it right on the first try when I introduce myself. My guess as to why this is, would be that they haven't yet built up a repertoire of common names that mine needs to fit into, they just listen. It really isn't that hard of a name to pronounce. The two sounds that make up my name are heard together in English, an example being the 'soup burning' phrase above. I have resorted to using phrases such as these when introducing myself, as it seems that

hearing something familiar gets it to click. It is not like my name is Hlíð [HI-eeth], or Bjarkji [be-yer-ki] which my siblings names are, their middle ones luckily. So, with the exception of hard-of-hearing Australian Grandmas, I won't start being 'Ann in the first place'. I will continue to patiently, and with good humour, correct people on the pronunciation of my name. I will also continue to use everyday sentences to help people; even if when my supervisor tries to take a turn teaching my name and uses the phrase, “Hey-the, where's the soup?”... at least he's got my name right. So when people read 'Heida Simundsson' aloud, I understand and forgive the innumerable ways they say my first name incorrectly. What I have yet to figure out is how people mispronounce my last name as 'sig-mundsson'. The *g* is silent, because it **isn't** there. At least I'm not alone in trying to solve that problem.

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Helgi Olsen's Memoirs

Part V of a series of Helgi Olsen's memoirs

Continued from Volume 65 #3

H.O's Memoirs Part 16

Following Father's death, things became rather unsettled in the family. There was a boom on. People were flocking into the country in the thousands. Homesteads were being gobbled up in each of the three western provinces. The cities were getting their full share, also, of immigrants. Business was in full swing wherever one turned.

In the fall of 1902, my two older brothers, Oliver and Fred, planned to go into business. The location they selected was Shoal Lake. The reason this place was chosen was that people were flocking into the district from the Lake Winnipeg area.

For many years, Lake Winnipeg had overflowed its banks, especially in the fall months. The northern gales drove the waters of the lake south; so that certain low lying sections became flooded, so no hay or pasture was available. This created extreme hardship for the settlers living in those areas. The final results were a mass migration to better land conditions. Shoal Lake got its fair share of these new comers. They settled on the outskirts of the old Shoal Lake settlement. The nearest market was then still fifty to seventy-five miles away.

They started up in business in February 1903. Oliver could not get time off from his company to attend to the duties of the store and also his family were opposed to move away from the city, so Fred had to go it alone. He took Mother and the three younger members of the family: Dan, Anna and myself.

This was my second experience of getting a ride out to the country. This time,

only a year later, I felt more mature and recognized the many landmarks along the road. The difference this time was that the trip was made easily in one day, as Fred had a lively team of young horses and not the farm plug that was used on the former trip out. I fell in love with the country right away. I felt so much at home with the open stretches of prairies and the bushes that hid so many creatures, birds, beasts and insects. More particularly did I love the many and the size of the garter snakes that abounded in and around the old barns. The garter snake is considered harmless, as far as their bite was concerned, but to have a four-foot snake crawl up your pant leg, with its cold clammy crawlers sticking to your skin was not so pleasant as one would care to experience too often.

The money for this business was borrowed from Mother's estate. The property on Maryland Street had been sold for a fair price. Then there were the savings and the insurance money. This gave them enough capital to buy land of Kristjan Vigfusson, one mile from the Vestfold Post Office.

For the two and a half years that the store was in operation, the groceries and other store goods had to be transported some time by ox team and some time with horses. At least two trips per month had to be made, each trip taking about six days. This was hard on both man and beast. Brother Dan did most of the travelling, though he was only fourteen years old at that time. Fred went in quite often. This meant that I was left in charge until they got back.

I remember once I was home with Mother and sister Anna, I had just finished

the outside chores. It was getting dark. I noticed the dog getting up and started barking, which was a sure sign that some one was coming. After a while I saw, through the semi-darkness, a man coming around the bush, driving a team of dogs. This was an Indian. I went and spoke to him. He could speak fairly good English. He asked if he could stay over night. No one was turned away from one's door in those days. I told him: "You are welcome to what we have". He asked Mother if she could cook some oatmeal as feed for his dogs. He had four. This was granted and he was fed a substantial meal. Then he noticed that we had a store "If you can supply me with what I need, our people are starving back there in the bush, this will save me a forty mile trip to St. Laurent". St. Laurent was twenty miles south of our place.

After supper I asked to see his list, and as luck would have it, we had most of what he wanted. I filled his order. The total was rather high and I was getting leery about his being able to pay that sum. However my fears were groundless. He produced a large bag of furs with which to pay for the goods.

Now came my test, that of evaluating the furs. I had a catalogue of fur prices. The Indian cache contained: muskrat skins, mink, martin, wolf and lynx. I figured that his total furs would be equal in value for the goods. He went quite satisfied. My test would come later when the furs were taken in and sold. It was nearly three weeks before the next trip was made to the city. When my brother came home, he brought with him a thirty-two-calibre rifle. This is for you, you made a good deal on those furs. I had wanted a rifle for a long time, to get after those over bold wolves that were playing havoc with our sheep.

For two years business was good. Then the railway came as far as to Oak Point. Fred went bankrupt. The farmers started to deal there, and forgetting to pay their due bills. This was a heavy blow; with the consequence that Fred went bankrupt. Fred got married

that fall and left the farm, but not until every outstanding account was paid to the wholesale companies.

H.O.'s Memoir's Part 17

Jimmy was not a common name for a horse, but for lack of a better name to call him the name stayed with him.

On the farm was an old mare that bore this colt, but for some reason, now forgotten, she died and I was told that if I could raise that colt it was mine. My Mother, who was brought up with animals in the old country, gave me ample assistance. She prepared the milk and used an old whiskey bottle and a piece of raw skin for a nipple. The colt thrived wonderfully. He was always around the house and followed me around snooping for some lump sugar or other tidbits. He would come when I called to him, and when he was out in the pasture, with the other horses; I could always depend on him coming to me when I needed him. I broke him to the saddle, which was not a trick at all as I had fooled around him so much that I could climb over him or under him. He was not a bit gun shy. I could fire a gun from his back and he would never lose a stride. I use to chase wolves with him.

Once the sheep came running home. We knew right away that a wolf was chasing them. I grabbed my rifle, but the wolf had stopped and when it saw me it turned around and ran back. We knew that this was a killer wolf. All wolves were not killers, but all did partake in the feast after the sheep had been killed. There had been a great loss of sheep from being killed by wolves. I was determined that I would get this fellow, at all cost. The horses were grazing close at hand, so I ran out and caught Jimmy, and without saddle, or bridle I jumped on his back and away we were off after this coyote. I had noticed where he was lying, in hiding, waiting for another try at the unsuspecting sheep. I flushed him from his hiding place and he started to run around the bush, but when it saw us, it turned to the left

and headed for a big bush about a half a mile away. That was his mistake. We gained on the coyote rapidly and when it was about to reach the bush, we were just forty yards behind it. The wolf had turned slightly to find an easier spot to enter the bush and therefore got the bullet just behind the shoulder. It was dead when I came to where it lay.

In both man and beast there comes a time when they show a streak of contrariness. So it was with this good pony of mine. It was late one afternoon in May, when I was asked to go to a neighbour's farm to pick up a couple of young pigs. It was customary to raise a pig or two for next winter's supply of pork. There was always some spare milk and waste from the house, with a little grain added to bring a pig or two up to 200 lbs., which is considered the right weight for a hog with not too much fat. The distance was just under four miles, so I took the pony and an empty bag to bring the young porkers back to our place.

The farmer was not at home when I arrived, so I put Jimmy in the barn and started to play with the kids. It was quite late when Mr. Johnson came home. He advised me to get started, as it would soon be dark. He went into the pigsty and put two little pigs into the bag, one in each end so that I could carry them over the horse's back. It was just bright enough when we reached the first gate that I could see my way. But by the time we came to the third gate, (there were just five gates altogether), I had to feel my way around. I had just got off while opening the gate, as it was simply two wires strung between two posts that had to be stretched to slip the loop over the post. I led the horse through. The bag with the pigs was still on its back. I was in the act of closing the gate when the bag containing the pigs slipped off and fell to the ground. The pigs let out a squeal that frightened the pony. He jumped back drawing the reins from my hands and away he went. This left me definitely holding the bag. It

was a mile to the fourth gate, and I knew there was no chance to catch Jimmy until at that next gate, so I slung the bag over my shoulder and started to walk. I would be about thirteen years old at the time and had read a lot about wild animals. The fierce wolves of the North Country and in Russia and Africa. These and other tales came to mind as I trudged on. It was so dark that I could not see the trail, but I felt them with my feet. The pigs were continually wiggling, and I had to keep switching them from one shoulder to the other.

The trail now led through a small set of bushes, when all of a sudden, there broke through the stillness of the night, the shrill yap of a coyote and that call was answered by its mate a short distance ahead. Soon the country seemed to be full of howling coyotes. I now became thoroughly frightened. Here I was alone out in the near wilderness, carrying two live pigs in a bag. What would I do if I were attacked? I thought of a story of a man, who was surrounded by a pack of wolves and kept them at bay by lighting small tufts of dry grass. I felt that if I were to throw the pigs to the wolves, I might escape by running while they were eating the little tykes. I tried to whistle, but my lips were too dry, and then, I thought, that by whistling, it would only draw them to me faster. I was really scared. I forgot the time or where I actually was, until a dark shadow appeared before me. This proved to be my false friend Jimmy. He was standing by the second last gate, docile and meek as you please. It was now a matter of a quarter of a mile to our home gate and the end of the nightmarish journey.

A few years later when I left the farm, I had to sell little Jimmy. I was offered a good price for him by a man who had seen me put Jimmy through his paces. He bought him to use him as a polo pony at the St. Charles Country Club. I rode him into town and delivered him to the Country Club stables. I was really sorry to have to part with him.

H.O.'s Memoirs Part 18

*There s an old spinning wheel in the parlour,
Spinning dreams of long ago.
Spinning dreams of an old fashioned garden,
And a maid with her old fashioned beau.
It seems I can see them in the twilight
and the organ playing Old Black Joe.
There s an old spinning wheel in the parlour,
Spinning dreams of long, long ago.*

Those words of that lovely old-fashioned melody come so piquantly to my mind as I think back to the days of my boyhood. I remember so well, and I see so clearly, in my mind, my Mother, as she sat so patiently in her old chair in the corner of the old farm kitchen that did double duty as the living room and parlour. The chair was old and not too comfortable we thought, but to her it was her throne. She had sat in that same old chair for more years than I care to remember, after her household chores were done, to mend our torn clothes and to darn our long gray stockings.

It was in this corner that we all sat around her in the long winter evenings when the outside work was completed and the supper dishes had been washed and put away, that we were all allotted our share of wool to work over. No one was supposed to be idle. Even we kids were given a batch of wool to tease and get rid of all the lumps and clots that clung to the wool even after it had been washed and rinsed twice to get rid of dirt and the lanolin, which is the natural wool fat.

My first experience with the working of wool goods was that of teaser, that is what it is called when one loosens the rough wool into workable condition. Mother was very particular to see the work done right, as that made it so much easier for the one that did the carding. The carding was to loosen up the wool so that the spinner could stretch out the wool and make the yarn of an even thickness. I often sat in dumb admiration,

watching how deftly Mother handled the speed of the spindle to regulate the thickness of the yarn, and how she managed this all just by instinct and touch. It was the same with her knitting. She could sit and talk or walk around, with the ball of yarn under one arm and automatically keep count of the loops to be put onto the needles

The carders were of wood, about four inches by eight, with handles four inches long. The boards were face with bent moveable pins fastened through a leather pad. To card the wool, the carders, or as some call them, combs, were drawn one against the other with the wool in between until the wool strands lay in straight form, thus making it convent for the spinner to manipulate the wool to be spun.

While this work was in progress, one of the household would read aloud, very much like working to music. The reading was from maybe a novel, or it would most likely be from the Icelandic fairy tales, the Sagas or the Eddas. It was so gruesome, when sitting around in the dim light of an oil lamp, to hear the spooky ghost stories that were so common and popular, inspire of their scaring influence. I well remember being so frightened, after hearing these ghost stories that I did not dare to go out side while it was still dark.

Mother kept us six well supplied with woollen stockings, even the girls wore home made stockings, until they grew old enough to select their own, first cotton, then later when the nylon rage came into effect, all clothing became store bought. Now we are considered very old fashioned if we so much as think of the past events and recall what did take place when we were young.

The other old melody comes to mind:

*Remember the days long ago Maggie,
Where we wandered where the daisies sprung,
To me, those were the happy days Maggie,
When you and I were young.*

... *Continued in next issue*

The War Bride: The disappearance of Esther Gavin becomes a family legacy

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Published: Sunday, December 25, 2011, 3:00 PM

Updated: Sunday, September 09, 2012, 7:47 AM

by Anne Saker, *The Oregonian*

Conclusion: continued from Volume 65#3

Chapter Five: Two more letters

In the Icelandic sagas of gods and kings and heroes, Óðin dispatches the Valkyries to sweep the battlefield and bear the noble dead to Valhalla. In America, we give their names to roads. U.S. 30 from St. Helens to Rainier now is Police Chief Ralph Painter Memorial Highway.

Melissa Gavin met with the lawyer defending her nephew, Daniel Butts, against the charge of murdering the Rainier police chief. The nephew's mental illness and any family history would be an issue, so the lawyer ordered Larry Gavin's records from his stay at the Oregon State Hospital, 40 years earlier.

But the lawyer wanted to fill in some gaps, so Melissa started talking – the war bride from Iceland, the husband who beat her, two children surrendered to the Waverly Baby Home, the disappearance of Ragna Esther Sigurðardóttir. Two-and-a-half hours later, that lawyer's mouth was hanging open.

In mid-October, Lilly Valgerður Oddsdóttir discovered that Jeanne and Benson Allen, who had adopted the war

bride's children, had divorced in the early 1960s, and Benson had remarried. Lilly Valgerður, researching the disappearance from her home in Iceland, also found a 2008 obituary in *The Oregonian* for Jeanne Allen. Melissa read it and felt sick.

“During World War II, Benson and Jeanne lived in Victorville, California, and then returned to Portland and lived in Eastmoreland. They adopted three children, Patricia, Robert and Debra. Debra preceded Jeanne in death.”

Melissa cried. Horrible enough that Debra was gone. But the obituary had jarred something else in her memory.

She had known Benson Allen.

Two or three times a week in the late 1970s until his death in 1983, Benson Allen and his second wife dined at Wilfs in Union Station. Melissa frequently served them; they always left huge tips. One night, Benson Allen had asked Melissa whether she had a sister; she looked for all the world like his adopted daughter.

A few computer keystrokes last month located Robert Benson Allen in Oregon City.

Melissa wanted to jump in her car, race down there and throw her arms

around him, but she didn't want to look like someone wanting a handout. If this is Esther's son, she knew he needed time to absorb it all. A letter would be better, warm and welcoming, to counteract the reception Donita had received long ago, that the family wasn't interested.

But she wondered: What if he's like Larry? What if he's psychotic, cruel and mean?

She slept on it. In the light of morning, she decided that what mattered was that Esther's son is alive.

At her computer, she typed 800 words, ending: I know you must have a lot of questions and I feel we have the answers you seek.

Melissa enclosed a letter to Robert from Iceland.

You and your sister have always been in our minds and hearts. You are our family and always will be. Esther was very young when she moved from that little country in the north, Iceland, to America... and became a wife and mother. Esther loved her children very much and it breaks our heart to know that she wasn't able to keep you.

Esther's sister was so extremely happy when we told her the news that we had finally found you. She told me that you will always be welcome to visit your family in Iceland. She was very sad though when I told her that Debra had passed away. Warm regards from Esther's family in Iceland, Herdís Elísabet Kristinsdóttir. I am on Facebook.

Melissa slipped the letters into an envelope and wrote her last name in large letters in the return address. Robert was six when he left the Waverly Baby Home, old enough that nearly 60 years later he would remember Gavin. She dropped it in the mail.

The next afternoon, Melissa answered her phone and heard a man's voice: I believe I am your brother.

Herdís, Esther's niece, called Robert

Benson Allen; even Lilly Valgerður Oddsdóttir called him. Esther's family sent Robert a book and a DVD about Iceland and a box of Icelandic chocolate. And they sent the treasured picture of a proud mother holding her son for the camera outside a Portland house with a brick chimney and a tall shrub.

Melissa didn't want to push herself on Robert, so they talked by phone when he felt up to it. He said he'd been married, had four children and some grandchildren; they live in California. He had been a metal fabricator and a superintendent at a shipyard. He loved his motorcycle, rode it everywhere. Ten years ago, he was struck by a hit-and-run driver, and now he was disabled. Things weren't always easy. Friends came by the house to check on him.

Robert said his last memory of his mother is watching her cower as Larry held a knife over her. He grew up believing he had witnessed her murder.

Robert said Debra did go to the Fairview Home, lived there for decades and died of illness in 1999. He had no pictures of her. He had few reminders of his youth; life as an Allen was difficult and sad.

Melissa dropped hints that she wanted to meet, and Robert said that would be great but he wasn't well and not ready for guests and he couldn't say when he'd be able. He did ask her to tell the folks back in Iceland that the chocolates were delicious.

The Oregonian asked Robert for an interview, and he declined, saying, "I just got the shock of my life."

Melissa wrote to Herdís: We may never know what happened to Esther. At least we know the story of her children.

Herdís replied, "We are all so happy that he is our Raymond, give him a Big Hug from all of us."

Melissa heard from her cousin Karen. Her father, Bill Gavin, long a widower, was well into his 80s, and Karen now faced the

task of going through his belongings. Who knows what we may find?

A few weeks ago, a builder purchased the property at Southeast Woodward Street and 35th Place. A wrecking crew moved in to tear down all structures, including the 1931 brick building with WAVERLY over the front door. The development plan calls for 18 custom homes, designed for family life, arranged around a great central courtyard, where children can run and play.

The War Bride: Icelandic woman who disappeared after a brutal marriage in Oregon created a new life

Lou Ann LeMaster answered her phone last month to hear her daughter say, It's the weirdest thing, I just got a friend request on Facebook from someone in Iceland.

LeMaster didn't know anyone in Iceland, but she joked to her daughter,

Maybe it's your grandmother trying to get in touch with you, and the two women laughed a little but sadly.

But Oddsdóttir had just discovered something: The war bride had lived on. She had changed her name, erased her past, built her new world.

Lou Ann LeMaster and her daughter listened in shock as all the puzzling secrets of Esther's life snapped into focus, and for the first time, they could see her clearly.

Now a trip to Iceland is a must, and Lou Ann can't wait to see her mother's family and give them the certainty that no matter what had happened to the war bride from Iceland, the American she became chose to live happily ever after.


Esther changed her identity. She altered her name slightly to Radna Esther Isholm, changed her place of birth from Iceland to France, and married Arthur Vickers, who was in the Navy. She never said much

about her past, and claimed her parents had been killed in World War II. She had three children, one of whom died in a car crash in his teens.

Arthur Vickers died in 1985 and Esther never remarried. She died of cancer in 2002.

This summer, a friend of Esther's searching relatives found out about her new identity and found her obituary, and contacted her children who were listed as survivors.

More: http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/i...woman_who.html



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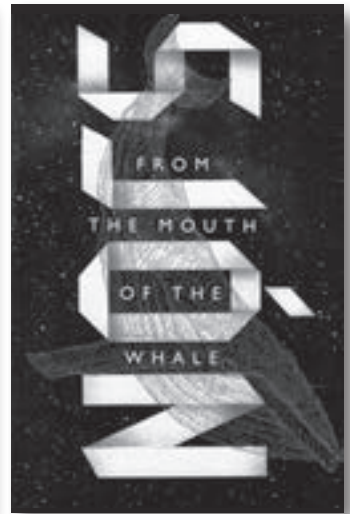
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Book Review

Fabulous Fabulist Three Novels by Sjón



Reviewed by Kristine Perlmutter

The Blue Fox,
The Whispering Muse,
From the Mouth of the Whale

by Sjón, translated by Victoria Cribb
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013

Imagine having only one wall of wallpaper to strip in order to change the way you view your world. It won't take long and it will be rewarding. Instead you are confronted by fifteen layers, some having been painted over before the next was applied. It will be a much more complicated endeavour than expected, requiring many passes over the same wall, but the altered perspective you desired will result.

So it is when you approach the first American editions of *The Blue Fox*, *The Whispering Muse* and *From the Mouth of the Whale* by the Icelandic author Sjón. Each is under 250 pages in length but is densely layered in fable, saga, myth, legend, metaphor, science, ancient poetry, folktales, the supernatural, the surreal, history and social commentary. Is it worth it? Absolutely.

Promotional material from the publisher describes *The Blue Fox* as “a slender, spellbinding fable of a novel, part mystery, part fairy tale.” Sjón has likened its structure to that of a string quartet. Parallel stories emerge with unity at the conclusion. The first story concerns a priest/hunter tracking a blue fox through the mountains in winter. The second story revolves around

the relationship between a naturalist and his charge, a young woman with Down syndrome rescued from a shipwreck.

The Whispering Muse concerns Valdimar Haraldsson, a twentieth century scholar who believes that the Nordic race is superior due to its diet of seafood. On board a Danish ship, he encounters a storyteller claiming to be Caeneus, crew member to Jason on his quest for the Golden Fleece.

From the Mouth of the Whale is the story of Jónas Palmason the Learned, healer and naturalist, who is exiled to an island as a sorcerer.

Iceland's Nobel prize-winning author, Halldór Laxness, has suggested that "it is a great good fortune for an author to be born into a nation so steeped in centuries of poetry and literary tradition." Sjón has had that benefit, as well as that of being born into a culture of storytelling and

belief in *huldufólk* and elves! He has called himself "allergic to realism" and suggested that "I sincerely believe that I am being used by stories and myth for retelling in our times."

Sjón (meaning "sight" or "vision") is an abbreviation of Sigurjón and is the pen name of Reykjavík poet, novelist, playwright and lyricist Sigurjón Birgir Sigurðsson. His novels have been translated into twenty-five languages. Up until now, he has been best known in the United States as a friend and collaborator of Björk. With Lars Von Trier, he wrote the lyrics for the Oscar-nominated song *Dancer in the Dark*. He has also performed with The Sugarcubes as Johnny Triumph. Sjón's involvements include Reykjavík UNESCO City of Literature, where he is currently chairman of the board. He also serves as president of the Icelandic PEN Centre.

T ERGESEN'S

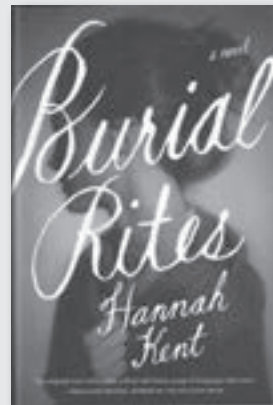
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Thank you

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DR ÁGÚSTA EDWALD graduated with a BA in Archaeology from the University of Iceland in 2004 and from the University of Bristol with a MA degree in Historical Archaeology of the Modern World in 2006. She started her doctoral research at the Department of Archaeology, University of Aberdeen in 2008 and became a post doctoral research fellow at the same Department in September 2012, working with Dr. Jeff Oliver on the Leverhulme funded project European Migrant Landscapes and Intercultural Relations on the Canadian Prairies 1870-1945.

DAVID GISLASON was born and raised on a farm in the Geysir area near Arbog, MB and made farming his lifelong career. He authored a book of poetry which included translated works of other Icelandic poets *Fifth Dimension* was published in 2010. He has received the prestigious *Knight's Cross, Order of the Falcon* in 2000.

KEVIN JON JOHNSON B.A. (Honours); B.Ed.; M.A. lives with his Japanese wife, Tamami Maeda, their son Go and daughter Juli in Sakai. Kevin teaches at Osaka YMCA International School where he also serves as coordinator of the Saturday School and the WASC Self-Study.

REV. STEFAN JONASSON Born and raised in Winnipeg, he is the co-ordinator of services to large congregations for the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. Except for a short hiatus, he has been a member of the editorial board of *The Icelandic Connection* since 1981.

HELGA (PETERSON) MALIS grew up in Gimli and moved back on her retirement, to the very property she was born on. She finds life in Gimli equally as busy as being in the work force, but a lot more fun.

KRISTINE (JAKOBSON) PERLMUTTER was a member of the board of *The Icelandic Canadian* magazine for 25 years. In her retirement, she is very interested in *The Icelandic Connection* and is a contributor from time to time.

AVERY SIMUNDSSON I'm a final year student in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Manitoba. I grew up in the Geysir district of the North Interlake and have always enjoyed working on the family farm. Fun Fact: this Christmas, I will finally be attempting to make vinarterta for the first time and would welcome any advice or tutors!

HEIDA SIMUNDSSON lives in a tent in a wilderness camp in the summers where she is the cook for a tree planting operation. In the winters she is a substitute teacher and works on her family's farm in Manitoba's Interlake when she is not travelling to the far corners of the globe.

ELIN THORDARSON, an *Icelandic Connection* board member, is currently working in the Winnipeg libraries. She is a graduate (October 2011) of the University of Manitoba's Icelandic Department's Masters program. Her thesis *A History of the Unconsoled: The Plays of Guttormur J. Guttormsson* is the first graduate level piece to be written on The Poet of New Iceland's works.





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The Back Page

Atli and Prúður exploring the Festival du Voyageur in Winnipeg

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