

ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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ON THE COVER



PHOTO: LEIF NORMAN

True spirit of Íslingadagurinn

Editorial

One Hundred and Twenty-five Years

by Lorna Tergesen

This will be a very special Íslendingadagurinn as it celebrates its 125 anniversary. Most of you readers will have some very special memory of time spent either in Gimli, Winnipeg, Mountain, Hnausa at an event honouring our Icelandic cultural background. It seems to me that as our community ages we are really privileged to continue enjoying some of the traditions our forefathers established for us.

The first celebration days were picnics with some organized activities for young and old, as well, interesting patriotic speeches. It was a place for our forefathers to come together to meet with long lost friends and to find out what had occurred over the year in their New Iceland communities. Happily, this has not changed.

Over the years the activities have broadened the time frame of the celebrations.

Now focusing on the Gimli event, I have witnessed a great number of activities that have been added. Feature events during the weekend have grown. Visitors from Iceland have become a major feature. The basic tribute of toasts to Iceland and Canada prevail and the Fjallkona still presides over the event as a very major part.

Íslendingadagurinn began in Winnipeg in 1890 but as you will read in a further article, it moved to Gimli in 1932 on a trial basis. We now know the results of the trial as we gather for the 125th on August 1 2, 3 and 4, 2014 in Gimli, Manitoba.

Over the years the festival has grown from a single day to a three-day event. Sports were a major event in past years but now only encompass the 10 mile road race and of course, the family races, which if you have never observed, are well worth seeing.

This is where the older generation invites the youth to show their Viking abilities of endurance and speed. The thrust of the entire weekend is to have families get together to enjoy meeting distant cousins and friends. Over the years there have been many varied forms of entertainment. Chess matches, glíma, sandcastle building, Icelandic horse demonstrations, folk concerts, fashion parades, art shows, celebrity concerts, jazz evenings, beer gardens, evening sing songs, dances, parades, Viking encampments, cultural displays, vendors, pancake breakfasts, writing competitions, children performers and performers for children, to mention only a few.

The Festival committee is composed of

volunteers who spend many hours working to make the weekend a success. Very often the volunteers follow in the footsteps of their parents or grandparents in working to maintain the festival. So it is not unusual to find in the list of past presidents, that their sons or daughters have also followed their example. Belonging to the committee becomes a commitment similar to that of a social club, where members care about each other's well being. My personal involvement has always been a rewarding experience. Although I have long since retired from any position, the celebration is very dear to my heart. My husband and I became involved when, some time ago, we

complained about the lack of activities and were then challenged with, "Well, if you have any better ideas, please join us and take on a project or two." We did and I am truly the better for it.

So should you wish to become part of the celebrations, don't hesitate to join. There is plenty of work, some not easy but always a good experience and it will be very much welcomed by the committee. Saying you don't live in the community is no excuse, you can pitch in for a few hours on the weekend and your assistance will be very much appreciated. I am sure you will enjoy yourself. Go to the web site for this years agenda. www.icelandicfestival.com

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Excerpt from *Íslendingadagurinn* *An Illustrated History*

by Jónas Þór

The Fjallkona was an immediate success at the 1924 celebration. Her costume, speech and presence were a tremendous addition to the program. She delivered a message of encouragement from Mother Iceland to her children now living in another country, making it clear that although they now resided in Canada or the United States, she was still their Mother and that relationship could never be broken. The Fjallkona's message has not changed through the years. She still insists that although one may be born and brought up away from Iceland, one's roots are Icelandic. She recognizes with pride the accomplishments of her children but constantly warns them never to neglect their duties to Iceland.

However, despite the success of the Fjallkona at the festival, committee members still encountered problems in Winnipeg. Although there appeared to be a genuine awakening in the Icelandic community, attendance began to drop in the last few years of the 1920s and a growing dissatisfaction with the few available Winnipeg sites became more and more apparent.

A meeting of the festival committee on April 15, 1932 addressed the issue. A report by the Park committee showed that public parks in Winnipeg were in many respects inconvenient for such a celebration. For example, Wesley Park had much to offer for outdoor activities

but no shelter in case of rain. Also, the park was not available on Saturdays for private events. River Park offered a shelter from rain but was normally overcrowded on Saturdays. The Park committee reported that the idea of holding the festival outside of Winnipeg had been expressed with greater vigour by a number of Winnipeg Icelanders. Those favouring a change of venue pointed out that the celebration was losing its significance in Winnipeg and that general interest in the event was declining. Members of the committee suggested a discussion on a possible move from Winnipeg in 1932.

The idea won support of most festival committee members. They discussed the merits of locations such as Selkirk and Gimli, and then directed the secretary of the committee to seek the opinion of Gimli people on a joint celebration in Gimli Park in the summer of 1932. Gimli Park was considered an attractive location. Not only did it offer privacy and adequate facilities, it was also in the heart of New Iceland, within reach of smaller Icelandic communities, such as Arborg, Riverton, Lundar and Selkirk. Of ten festival committee members present, nine voted for the motion. The only member opposed argued that a joint celebration in Gimli would damage the Hnausa festival.

The next committee meeting

took place on April 29. As a result of correspondence between the Winnipeg festival committee members and Gimli people, three men from Gimli attended the meeting – Guðmundur Fjelsted, Hannes Krístjansson and Carlyle (Curly) Jóhannsson. These three had been chosen at a public meeting in Gimli that had also agreed on three issues:

1. Motion by Mr. G. Fjelsted, seconded by Mr. H. Krístjansson, that Gimli Icelanders attempt to cooperate with Winnipeg Icelanders and work with them at holding a joint celebration in Gimli.
2. Motion by Mr. H. Krístjansson, seconded by Mr. H. Austman, that a committee of three be chosen in Gimli. Its purpose would be to seek answers to questions asked by the Winnipeg festival committee and be ready to attend a Winnipeg festival committee meeting.
3. Motion by Mr. W.J. Árnason, seconded by Mr. G. B. Magnússon, that Mr. G. Fjelsted, Mr. H. Krístjansson and Mr. Einar Jónasson be selected as the committee members for Gimli.

Einar Jónasson was unable to accept his nomination and consequently Carlyle Jóhannsson became his replacement. Also present at the April 29 meeting were Rev. Rögnvaldur Pétursson, Mr. J.J. Bildfell and Mr. Ásmundur Jóhannsson, three leading individuals in the Icelandic community in Winnipeg. A motion was carried that all guests be given the right to take part in the meeting in the same manner as regular festival committee members. The three Winnipeg members were present in order to express concerns about the proposed move out of the Manitoba capital.

Mr. G. Fjelsted spoke on behalf of the Gimli delegation at the beginning of the meeting and claimed that Gimli Icelanders were eager to co-operate with Winnipeg Icelanders in an effort to make the 1932 celebration, if held at Gimli, a most successful one. It was his opinion that a joint Gimli celebration would in no manner harm the Hnausa festival.

Hannes Krístjansson then presented the following letter from the Gimli Park Board:

Moved by Mr. Thordarson and seconded by Mr. H.P. Tergesen that the Park and the Pavilion be rented to the committee of Winnipeg on Civic holiday, Monday the 1st of August, 1932 for a fee of \$10.00 which was to cover cost of lighting and cleaning up.

(Signed: B.M. Jónasson, Secretary-Treasurer)

When the president of the Winnipeg committee, Dr. Blöndal, asked the guests from Winnipeg if they had a “message” for the committee, all three spoke and expressed their opposition to any move from Winnipeg. Mr. Bildfell claimed he understood the committee’s concern with decreasing attendance, but argued that if the celebration was moved from Winnipeg, even if only for one occasion, it would be extremely difficult to start again in Winnipeg. He recommended the introduction of a new event at the celebration to pull in the crowds. Rev. Pétursson also maintained the celebration would suffer more if moved away from Winnipeg. Ásmundur Jóhannsson said that the first thing that came to his mind when he heard about the suggested move was that a few of the Icelanders were looking for yet another controversy. He was also against any move and added that it seemed unnecessary to him to look for speakers at the celebration

outside Winnipeg, but that last year the committee was guilty of bringing in a person all the way from the Pacific coast.

Then members of the committee presented their points of view. Mr. E. Haralds pointed out that if the celebration took place outside Winnipeg this summer, it would only be an experiment, an attempt to bring more life to the festival, not to destroy it. Mr. G. Hjaltalín also stressed that if the celebration was held elsewhere it would in no manner damage the event. Mr. G.P. Magnússon argued that there must be some reasons for the presence of the three guests from Winnipeg other than their “profound love for the Íslendingadagurinn. They do not attend our annual meetings nor does the festival committee benefit financially through their contribution at the ticket booth at the gate at the celebration as they seldom bother to show up.” He concluded that there were other reasons for their opposition and suggested one was jealousy: “The idea of holding a joint festival at Gimli Park this year was not born in their heads and consequently they oppose it.”

Rev. Sólmundsson admitted that of all committee members, he had the greatest difficulty in taking a stand as he was “really a Gimli resident.” But it was his opinion that in the next few years, it would be decided whether there would be only one Icelandic celebration for all Icelandic communities or, as was the present situation, a number of small festivals. He admitted that he would support a permanent move to Gimli if it was “legally and morally acceptable.” The president of the committee then thanked the Winnipeg guests for their participation, and they left.

As the minutes of this meeting were accepted at the changes, we can conclude that the above arguments, weak as they

were, were the only points raised against a move to Gimli. Perhaps, the participation of the Winnipeg delegation was a last-minute arrangement; their comments show opposition to the proposal but no logical arguments. Nor did they produce any evidence showing why such an experiment would prevent a future Íslendingadagurinn in Winnipeg. The minutes express very little fondness for the three Winnipeg men. After further discussion, Mr. Th. Hanson moved and Mr. Jón Ásgeirsson seconded that a public meeting be called in Winnipeg on May 10th to settle the issue. The motion was carried.

The bitterness expressed at the April 29th meeting needs some explaining. Its roots went back to 1927, when the Icelandic National League unanimously decided:

That the Icelandic National League take upon itself the responsibility of arranging for a contingent of Vestur-Íslendingar to participate in the Millennial Celebration to be held in Iceland in 1930 (and) that a committee of five be appointed to be in charge of the excursion on behalf of the League.

The Millennial Celebration was planned for Þingvellir in Iceland in 1930, to mark the founding of Alþingi, the Parliament of Iceland that had been established in 930. Representatives of the leading nations had been invited to attend. Naturally, people of Icelandic descent in America in particular were urged to attend. Many Icelanders were interested but for most, the transportation was too costly.

The Millennial Committee in Winnipeg had considered raising the funds needed for the contingent to Iceland, but came to the conclusion that financial assistance should be sought both in the United States and

Canada. The Saskatchewan government apparently supported the idea and by March 1st of 1928, the Millennial Committee was happy to report that some money had already been received from Saskatchewan.

Opposition to government grants had been raised immediately. In an article in *Lögberg* on March 29, 1928, Dr. B.J. Brandson strongly criticized the use of government money. The Millennial Committee replied a week later in *Heimskringla*, explaining their method of raising funds.

This was more than enough for many of the Icelanders. Soon everyone took a stand. On one side, the proud pioneers and their immediate descendants, whose parents had refused to go on “welfare” back in Iceland and who chose to be independent on foreign soil, vowed “never to ask a government for a penny.” Facing them were the cheerful recipients of government aid. This debate resulted in the two groups’ each chartering a ship to carry more than six hundred people of Icelandic background to Iceland in the early summer of 1930. The wounds had not healed by 1932 when the move of the Íslendingadagurinn from Winnipeg to Gimli was debated. The three gentlemen who attended the festival committee meetings on April 29, 1932, Rev. Rögnvaldur Pétursson, Jón J. Bildfell and Ásmundur P. Jóhannsson, leaders in the Winnipeg Icelandic community, had all been members of the Millennial Committee and had been strong supporters of government assistance in 1928-1930. Obviously, most festival committee members had taken the opposite position.

The public meeting to consider the festival site was held at the I.O.G.T. Hall on May 10th, 1932. An announcement from the committee had appeared in

both Icelandic papers the previous week, inviting the general public to take part in discussions on a possible move of Íslendingadagurinn to Gimli for the 1932 event. A good crowd heard the secretary of the festival committee read a telegram from Mr. Sveinn Thorvaldsson, president of the Hnausa festival committee, in which he offered the full co-operation of his committee. He also proposed a joint festival at Iðavöllur (Hnausa Park) in the summer of 1932, but the people at the meeting were more interested in Gimli as a possible site, so his proposal was declined.

Dr. Blöndal opened the meeting by asking if the use of both languages, Icelandic and English, should be permitted during proceedings. He pointed out that some of the younger people might want to participate in the discussions and would feel more comfortable using English. His arguments were accepted and both languages were allowed. The need to address the issue of English had never before been discussed at a festival-committee meeting. This marked the beginning of the use of English at meetings of the festival committee.

The meeting then continued. Jón J. Bildfell had not changed his mind since the April 29th meeting and still opposed a move to Gimli. He admitted that he had nothing against the location or her people. No, he was simply convinced that the Íslendingadagurinn’s ethnic values would diminish if such a move was made, and that Winnipeg-Icelanders stood to lose much through such a change. The next speaker, A. Jóhannsson, suggested that the public had lost faith in the festival committee. He argued that the Íslendingadagurinn would suffer a great loss financially as well as culturally if it moved to Gimli. He concluded his talk with some derogatory remarks directed at festival committee members.

Toasts to Iceland

by Rev. Stefan Jonasson

From the Toast to Iceland 1958

by Joseph T. Thorson



I have heard Icelanders speak of the beauty of Iceland. Now I believe them for I have seen it with my own eyes. We shall never forget our second day in Iceland. The Rector of the University and the professors of the law faculty together with their wives took us east from Reykjavík into the mountains and through Biskupstungur, the home of my ancestors for over a thousand years, all the way to Gullfoss. There is not a more beautiful waterfall anywhere. This trip gave us our first view of the countryside, the lava with its curious shapes and the glint of the

sun on it, the lovely wild flowers growing in the pockets of soil, the sheep grazing peacefully in the meadows, the clear water in the streams and lakes, the mountains with their warm tints, the steam rising from the ground in the valleys and the glaciers in the distance, truly a land of fire and ice, and here and there the trim clean farmsteads. It is no wonder that Iceland has produced such great artists as Ásgrímur Jónsson, Jón Stefánsson and Jóhannes S. Kjarval. There is a beauty in the landscape of Iceland that is different from anything that I have seen elsewhere. On the way back from Gullfoss I caught a glimpse of Ásakot in the distance, the home of my mother's people for many generations. That day we also stopped at Skálholt and then went on to see Almannagjá, Lögberg and Thingvellir, where the first Parliament of Iceland was held in 930. The next day took us to Hveragerði with its wonderful greenhouses and Bessastaðir, the home of the President, with its beautiful outlook to the sea.

I could speak at length of Reykjavík itself with its combination of old and the new, the fresh cleanliness of its buildings and streets and the great expansion of housing that has taken place, but this is not the time for that. You will, however, let me say how thrilled I was to see the house that my father built before his coming to

Canada, still called “Stefán’s hús.” ...

Now I come to the theme of my address. What are the outstanding qualities that have made our nation, so few in numbers, the great nation that it is? Some will speak of the contribution that Iceland has made to the literature of the world, particularly the sagas and poetry of her golden age. But while the Norse literature, written in Iceland, holds an honoured place among the classical literatures of the world, I put the spirit of independence and the love of freedom as the basic qualities on which the Icelandic nation is built. They were the qualities that brought Ingólfur Arnarson and his followers to Iceland in 874 after the battle at Hafsfjörð. Rather than submit to the sway Harald the Fair-haired, he and his followers left the land of their fathers in search of the independence and freedom that was denied to them there and they found what they were seeking in the far-off island in the northern seas. These were the qualities on which the first republic was established. They sustained the nation during its darkest days and they will, I am certain, continue to do so. ...

...After the arrival of Ingólfur Arnarson and his followers many others came to Iceland, from Norway, the Western Islands of Scotland and Ireland, but it was not until 930 that the first republic was established and the first session of the Althing, which met at Thingvellir, was held. I shall not attempt a description of the organization of this new state. The code of law which Úlfljóttur had compiled from Norway was accepted as the common law of the land and the Althing was vested with legislative and judicial power. It had jurisdiction over all matters, spiritual as well as temporal. The remarkable feature of the first republic was that there was no executive authority. So far as we know, there has never been another state like it. The Althing was both a law court pronouncing judicial decrees

and a law-making body enacting laws but there was no authority charged with enforcing the laws or carrying out the decrees. The only government that was accepted was the rule of law itself and it was the responsibility of everyone to see that it prevailed.

The period of the first republic was the golden age of Iceland during which the immortal sagas and eddas were written. But internal dissension and strife finally brought it to an end and, in 1262, Iceland surrendered herself to Norway and subsequently came under the sway of Denmark. With the surrender, peace came to Iceland, but its independence and the freedom of its people vanished. It could hardly be said that up to this time there had been any development of a separate Icelandic nationality. That had still to come.

After the surrender centuries of hardship followed, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions with streams of lava flowing to the sea, the Black Death and inroads of pirates. The sons of the Vikings of old could not now defend themselves against their attacks. The eighteenth century was the worst of all. Thousands died of famine and the plagues that followed one another in rapid succession. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions took their toll of man and beast. The population had dwindled to less than 40,000 persons. Iceland had sunk to the lowest level in her history and conditions had become so dreadful that it was even proposed to abandon the land and settle its people in the plains of Jutland in Denmark. But this proposal was emphatically rejected.

The end of the eighteenth century saw the dawn of a brighter day. The desire for political freedom that had inspired the French Revolution spread to other lands and had its effect in Iceland. Now the demands for freedom of trade and self-government began to be made.

Now there was a quickening of national sentiment and the development of a national consciousness. This showed itself in various ways. The scholars began to cleanse the language of its foreign impurities and restore it to the form in which the sagas had been written. There was national pride in the maintenance of the Icelandic language. And political leaders became insistent in their demands for freedom of trade and government. I shall not attempt to set out the various steps in the struggle. It will be sufficient to note that in 1843 the Althing, which had been suspended, was restored, that in 1854 freedom of trade was granted and that, on August 2, 1874, a substantial measure of self-government was won, largely through the courageous efforts of the great patriot, Jón Sigurðsson. There was great rejoicing in the land but the desire for separation from Denmark with independence and complete freedom was strong. Now it could be said that the feeling of nationality was intense and the national consciousness fully developed. ...

... When I spoke here in 1913 the Icelanders were Danish subjects but their demand for political freedom was irresistible. It was met in 1918, before the end of the First World War, by the establishment of Iceland as a kingdom in personal union with Denmark. This arrangement came by way of agreement between the two countries and was to extend for a period of twenty-five years. Now Iceland, for the first time since 1262, when she surrendered to Norway, had freedom of self-government subject to some restrictions in the realm of external affairs. ...

But Iceland did not await the end of the Second World War to see her dreams come true. It was a term of the

agreement between Denmark and Iceland that each should be free, after the end of the twenty-five year period, to decide its future course. By an overwhelming vote Iceland decided to sever her relationship with Denmark and go her own way and on June 17, 1944, the Republic of Iceland was established. Now Iceland has regained the independence and freedom on which the first republic was based and she is able to take her worthy place in the United Nations as one of the free nations of the world.

... The free nations must be able to prove by their own example that it is possible to build an orderly society in which individual freedom is safeguarded and a fair distribution of wealth is assured. Personal freedom by itself is not a sufficiently broad base for such a society. A broader base must be used. Provision must be made for the establishment of the social, economic and cultural conditions that will enable the members of the society to enjoy the individual freedom to which they are entitled and realize to the full their individual personalities. ...

It will be the task of the free nations, with Iceland among them, to build such a society and I am confident that they will be able to accomplish it. Iceland will face the testing time that lies before her with the steadfastness that she has always shown. ...

If Ingólfur Arnarson were to rise from the grave he would be proud of the land that he and his followers founded for he would see in its people the same spirit of independence and the same love of freedom that brought him and his followers there in 874. I like to look at Iceland through his eyes for I too see a nation that cherishes its freedom and will not fail.

From the Toast to Iceland 1993

by Betty Jane Wylie



PHOTO: CYRIL JESSOP

Can you imagine what our Ammas and Afis would have said if you had told them that one day, before the twentieth century was over, a speaker, one of their offspring, would rise to give the toast to Iceland, who could not speak the Icelandic language? I could reply for them

with one of the few words of Icelandic that I do know, but I also know that it is unspeakable in a family gathering.

Mind you, my *Afi* would not have said much; he used to take up his position on the veranda of the house down the street there — two blocks from the park gates, and he'd sit and watch the sky, and predict rain, because he thought Íslendingadagurinn should be held at Willow Point, not Gimli. And if that had happened, where would Tergesen's store be today? And where would I be?

Where, for that matter, would you all be, if it hadn't been for our foremothers and forefathers who left Iceland during that one major exodus before the turn of the last century, and who wound up in a New World with even more snow and sunshine, slightly shorter winter nights, lots of different kinds of fish, and more trees than they could shake a stick at? We talk about root shock for plants; transplanting is even harder on people.

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Toasts to Canada

The Toast to Canada 1958

by Dr. S.B. Helgason



This annual celebration is a day when we of Icelandic origin gather to meet old friends and relatives, to discuss many and varied topics of general or personal interest, or perhaps to meet in friendly competition on the athletic field. But it is also a day on which we gather to celebrate the traditions and achievements of the past, to think on our place in the society in which we live, and perhaps to ponder a bit on what the future may hold for us.

Our Icelandic ethnic group is small in relation to the world population, and small in relation to the population of Canada. We feel proud, and I think justifiably so, of the eminence achieved by so many of this small group which has made Canada its home. Their achievements in the

professions, in literature, in the arts and sciences, in statesmanship and in many other fields of endeavour, are so well known to this gathering that they need no enumeration. Neither is there any need to emphasize the role of those who have labored without public attention or acclaim, with perseverance and fortitude to build a young nation. We are perhaps at too close range to measure truly their achievements, but who can doubt their influence on the growth of the nation. We wonder at the forces that must have impelled them. Perhaps the spirit of the Vikings was strong in those who set out so willingly to build a new home in a new land. Here indeed, was an adventure worthy of their stamina and skill. Of course, love of adventure was not enough. Many generations of a rugged environment had built a race with the will, the strength, the endurance, and the dedication, to succeed in a country in the making. This was the material and physical equipment they had.

Many of the manners, customs, dress and foods we like to recall and retain, are cherished not only for their basic worth and attractiveness, but also because they are symbolic of the things we admired in our pioneers. But they never forgot, and we must never forget, the deep and meaningful traditions that were their moral and spiritual support. I doubt if their achievements would have been possible, and certainly their pride in them would have been hollow, without their deep sense of religion, their pride in a long history of

representative government, 'their devotion to fine literature, their respect for learning, and their admiration for hard work and achievement in every endeavour. Their admirable sense of values was based on those traditions. They tried hard to pass them on to us. If we fail to maintain them, we fail our forefathers, we fail our own generation, and we fail future generations, for these are traditions worth retaining.

The social order of our age is a complex and often baffling one. This is scarcely surprising when we consider the few short years it has taken to vault us from the horse and buggy days into the atomic age. We can scarcely be blamed for feeling like a housewife who has been faced with nothing more complex than a wood-burning stove and is suddenly called upon to cook a meal on one of these modern contrivances with a control panel which rivals that of an aeroplane. We are constantly faced with monsters of our own making which threaten to destroy us unless we master them.

Knowledge and wisdom are required in abundance to cope with the complexities of modern living. Science is blamed for many of our ills as well as being credited with some of our achievements. In the area of biological science which is the basis of much of our research in agriculture, we are more and more impressed with the interdependence

of the various branches of science. Few would consider these researches as having any possible harmful connotation, but even now the fields of atomic and radioactivity research are serving useful purposes in agricultural research. I mention these things only because it illustrates how one science can scarcely progress normally without parallel progress in others.

We hear a great deal these days about the lack of respect, let alone admiration, for learning. While the term "egghead" in reference to men of learning has not gained currency in Canada, the viewpoint it implies is none-the-less present in our national thinking.

Admiration for physical prowess and disdain for mental accomplishment are characteristics of youth, which, properly guided, change with maturity. It is to be hoped that this also applies to youthful nations. If so, it is essential that the necessary guidance be provided as soon as possible. Educators and other thinking people everywhere in the free world are concerned about the lack of interest and desire for improved educational standards and opportunities. Our forefathers held a belief that greater knowledge and wisdom were the keys to success. What has happened to that belief? This is surely one of the traditions worth maintaining.

Canada was a land of promise to our

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pioneers. They saw abundance in her lands and her forests and her waters. They saw in her a new home and a new life and the promise of greatness to come. Canada is still a land of promise, for her wealth of resources has barely been touched. Her future greatness will depend very much on how wisely we and our descendants use this great potential wealth.

What of those traditions which our parents and grandparents cherished? Perhaps we have paid too much attention to the physical symbols of our heritage, forgetting the more enduring values they tried to pass on to us. In this

age of opportunity and challenge we have a great responsibility. Could we but pass on to the growing generation within our sphere, some of the love of our forefathers for learning, some of their admiration for achievement brought of hard work, some of their dedication to religion, justice and ethics, that would be a great achievement. If, in addition to moral inspiration and desire, we could provide some of the physical means to make the best of their inherent abilities, then we can be sure we would be doing one of the things to uphold the desires of the ancestral founders of our nation, to build an ever greater Canada.

From the Toast to Canada 1959

by Dr. Thorvaldur Johnson

On an occasion such as this there are two topics that naturally come to mind. The first is this: What can we Icelanders or descendants of Icelanders



bring to the shaping of this country which is still in the making – for Canada is not a country as yet crystallized into any final form as, for instance, England and France. It is a country still in the making and inevitably we, Icelanders, shall play some part, however small it may be, in moulding it into its future form. The second topic that comes to mind is perhaps best stated by the question: What form do we wish this country to take? These two questions are not matters on which I can give any final answer. I can only give my thoughts on them, and I cannot even hope that all of you will agree with them.

Let us deal first with the question of what we Icelanders, or descendants of Icelanders, can contribute to the Canada of the future. This matter is closely related to the question of what is going to happen to the Icelandic element in this country. To answer that, I can only say that we can make a guess at this if the past is any guide to the future.


If all the non-English speaking national groups that I have come into contact with were arranged in order of their assimilability, I should say that the Icelanders come first, as the most readily assimilable group. This is, perhaps, natural, since there are no real barriers of race, religion, or general outlook on life that separate us from the Anglo-Saxons. Assimilability is advantageous to the individual because as soon as he is indistinguishable from the dominant element in the country he is no longer discriminated against. But it is obvious that once we Icelanders have become assimilated to the extent that we have lost consciousness of our Icelandic heritage, we are no longer in a position to transmit that heritage either to our descendants or to others in this country.

There is no question that our forebears brought with them to this country an important heritage. They brought a literature that was flourishing when most of Europe was merely emerging from the Dark Ages; and they brought with them a strong tradition of political and religious freedom. The Icelandic farmers who pulled up their roots and transplanted themselves in this continent were a highly literate, I might even say an educated, group. I will remember the Sunday afternoons when they and their wives would gather at my parents' home. The discussions that took place rarely dealt with daily tasks but to my fascination, they ranged over the whole realm of literature, philosophy, religion, and such science as they knew. Many of these people were no mean judges of poetry, and some of them composed it. I did not realize that these characteristics were peculiarly Icelandic until I came into close association with other national groups. ...

Let us now consider the second topic I raised, that is: What would we like Canada to be? The idea of nationalism has been

abroad in the world for the past several hundred years; and it is only natural that we should assume that Canada should be made into still another nation with a national sentiment of its own, a distinctive literature and institutions, and even ways of thinking that differ from those of other nations. If such a nationally distinctive Canada should arise, it would be built up from contributions of the numerous national and racial groups that are now in the process of being welded into some sort of unity. ...

If this is to be our objective, are we people of Icelandic descent in a favourable position to play a significant part in this effort? In the affirmative there is at least this to be said: We have not brought to this



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country any attachment to any of the great antagonists in the struggle for power. We can wholeheartedly subscribe to any effort that Canada may make: and since we, in spite of our small numbers, are not always without influence, we may even help to shape the direction of this effort. Let me

close by expressing the hope that Canada may assume a leadership in the worthy task of bringing amity among nations, and may I express the further hope that we of Icelandic descent may take our place among the foremost in this effort.

The Fjallkona

The Fjallkona is Iceland – from *Morgunblaðið*,

translated by Árný Hjaltadóttir (2001)

It has been a tradition that a young woman come forth in the role of Fjallkona, clad in the *skautbúningur*, reciting a poem which is usually an ode to the country, at the celebration of Iceland's Independence Day. Where does this tradition hail from?

In a letter to Jón Sigurðsson written on April 11, 1866, Eiríkur Magnússon explains the symbolic meaning of the picture painted from his formula by J.B. Zwecker of a young woman symbolizing Iceland:

In this picture Iceland is depicted as a woman, therefore she wears a crown of ice on her head with fire erupting from it. On her shoulder sits a raven, Iceland's wisest bird, an old friend of Odin and of the poets, a bearer of news and foretelling. A seagull flutters over the sea, and over the breakers of time sagas and runic scrolls are carried unto the land and up into the woman's lap, and she has already managed to get a hold of one of them. This was to be the symbol of our literary, saga country. It is night, the sky is star spangled and there is a full moon. Behind her are mountains bathed in moonlight.

This picture was published with the

English translation by Eiríkur and G.E.J. Powell about Icelandic folk tales. Benedikt Gröndal Sveinbjarnarson later used this depiction in 1874 in a well known Independence Day picture which he had printed, and it was displayed in many homes far into the twentieth century. In a poem which Bjarni Thorarensen composed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, *Eldgamla Ísafold*, the word "fjallkona" appears for the first time, and the poem is written on the above-mentioned picture by Benedikt.

Icelanders in America adopted the tradition around 1900, to have a woman appear in the figure of Fjallkona at Þorrablót, and from 1924 at the Íslendingadagur.

This tradition has been kept up since, and was adopted at Þingvellir in 1944 when Kristjana Milla Thorsteinsson was to deliver the Fjallkona speech, dressed in the *skautbúningur*, but decided against it because of the weather. Since then much has happened, the weather has often been inconsistent on June 17th and probably will continue in that tradition.

Address of the Fjallkona 1958

by Olavia Finnbogason



Fate seems to bring us various kinds of days: some long and tiring, others unforgettable because of the heartfelt associations they have for us.

To the latter belong the days here dedicated to me every year. A mother is gladdened by the devotion of her children. Such days also foster a feeling of unity among those present. Those responsible for them deserve thanks.

I am very pleased to address you on this historic spot to which my children came in the last decades of the nineteenth century, converting a wilderness into a garden. In those days adversity of many kinds faced me and it was not without a trace of anger that I saw my children leave, although their devotion to me could be seen by the fact that they called their new home New

Iceland. As the years have passed this anger has completely disappeared and I have seen that what I considered a loss was in fact a great gain. You have remained true to your Icelandic heritage and this is evident in the name of this spot Gimli, which means a blessed spot, a place where good men dwell.

As the years passed another example of the love and devotion of my children was seen in the founding of Betel, which means God's house – a place where Icelanders might spend the last years of their life. It clearly attests to a spirit of Christian love and sacrifice, and the present generation has shown the same feelings as their fathers in rebuilding and extending Betel. I am deeply grateful for this, for what you do for my elderly children you do for me.

Times change and people also. I cannot claim your undivided devotion. Your allegiance is, of course, to your present homeland. The language spoken by your fathers is now unfamiliar to many of you. But the ideals and manly qualities of your fathers are not limited by citizenship or language. I only ask that you do not forget your origin or your cultural heritage, and that you remember me and preserve the finest qualities of the Icelandic people throughout the ages.

Let us trust God's words: each seed sown in charity carries the promise of heaven on earth. Each holy prayer can count on God's grace. Should we not banish fear and hatred, since aid and mercy are available to all in the faith which can gather together a thousand peoples in the service of truth, love and peace.

Greetings from the Fjallkona (June 17, 2000)

by Lenore Good



The traditions that we have developed in New Iceland are a way for us to acknowledge and celebrate the richness of our heritage. We can be proud of Íslendingadagurinn, the longest continuously operating Festival of its kind in Canada. Íslendingadagurinn gives us an opportunity to remember the homeland of our forefathers, celebrate our heritage, and showcase the musical, artistic, and literary talents of our community. The tradition of the Fjallkona was inspired by the symbolism of an Icelandic poem written in 1752. The Fjallkona was first introduced as the symbol of Iceland at Íslendingadagurinn in Winnipeg in 1924. Iceland adopted the New Iceland tradition in 1944 as part of its Independence Day celebrations. A poetic metaphor in Iceland inspired a tradition in Canada which was subsequently adopted in Iceland. This illustrates the strength of the

ties between the two countries, which are reflected in our Traditional Program by Toasts delivered by distinguished representatives of each country. . . .

I grew up in a home where Icelandic was spoken. My afi loved to recite poetry, and as a child I learned to love the language and the literature of our forefathers. My husband, Chris Good, and I believe that cultural heritage is important, and have encouraged our daughters, Kristin and Karen, to learn about their Icelandic background. It was a pleasure for us to be involved with the theatrical productions at the Icelandic Festival. We believe that theatre is one way to recognize the achievements of literary and artistic leaders such as Guttormur J. Guttormsson and Charles Thorson, as well as contemporary artists such as Hrafnhildur Hagalin and to create an awareness of their contribution to our community.

With each succeeding generation being further removed from our Icelandic pioneer forefathers, and with fewer Icelandic-speaking people in our community, we must develop a new vision in order to pass on our cultural heritage and celebrate the ties that exist with our mother country. This year, several visionary initiatives have been taken including the New Iceland Heritage Museum in Gimli, The Valuing Icelandic Presence initiative at the University of Manitoba, and the numerous cultural events and exchanges that are taking place under the auspices of the Millennium 125 Committee. We must build upon this excellent work and commit ourselves to increasing support for contemporary artistic, musical, literary, and dramatic endeavours that will instill cultural awareness and pride within our community.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ICELANDIC FESTIVAL OF MANITOBA

The women from Iceland adorned the parade in their traditional attire in 1975

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Poems

My Kingdom

By Jón Ólafsson / Translated by Vilhjalmur Stefansson

The land is in gloom and the cloud-banks have risen
To blot out the world from the field of my vision;
But the June sun still sparkles on shimmering streams
In a land fair and cloudless — my Kingdom of Dreams.

Spring is slow in its coming; the bare trees still shiver;
Not for weeks will the dew on the young grasses quiver;
But the spring is eternal, the white petal gleams
With the dew of the morn, in the land of my dreams.

An exile, I pine for the heaven-blue fountains
Of my island-home's snow-capped and green-bosomed mountains;
But a land even fairer than it you will see
If you come over seas to my dreamland with me.

Though to prison the courts of our lords may consign me,
Though the Danes may exile and their puppets malign me,
I know an asylum where all men are free,
And my cottage stands waiting in dreamland for me.

My exile left friends that I loved far behind me,
And a stranger I am in the land Fate assigned me;
But my spirit still dwells with the loved ones at home,
In my dreams I am with them wherever I roam.

Some that I cherished the darkness has hidden
Where even the entrance of love is forbidden;
I cannot go to them, but still they are free
To walk through the meadows of dreamland with me.

Riches I have not, but why should I sorrow
 Though poverty oft have no bread for the morrow?
 My way is not nearly so hard as it seems
 For fancy is gold in the land of my dreams.

What are the kings of the earth in their splendor:
 Their thrones toppled down on their vanishing grandeur.
 For their courts and their scepters I care not at all;
 In the kingdom of dreamland the thrones never fall.

In the dark night of sorrow, when heart-strings are breaking
 And no balm of this world soothes the pain and the aching,
 The soft dawn of dreamland may bring on the day
 And the sunshine of hope kiss the tear-drops away.

When my voyage is ended on life's tossing billow,
 When at last in the evening my head seeks the pillow,
 Then God, hear my prayer, for this it will be:
 "Let the friends that I love dwell in dreamland with me!"

At a Funeral

By K.N. (Kristján Niels Júlíus) / Translated by Bogi Bjarnason

I feel content that you would grin with me
 Could you but witness what I hear and see.
 For you were not accustomed — not your fate —
 To be thus borne along by friends, in state.

But death has changed your status so that now
 Your friends assemble in your honor, bow
 Their heads in faith, in grief, humility,
 And all unite in speaking well of thee.

“Íslendingadagurinn”

Hjörtur Leó

Translated by Peter John R. Buchan and Elin Thordarson

Introduction by Elin Thordarson

The following two translations are glimpses of a time long past. 111 years ago to be precise. The first translation, originally published in Icelandic in Winnipeg’s *Lögberg* newspaper, is a look at what a typical *Íslendingadagurinn* would be like in the early twentieth century, well before it evolved into its current manifestation. We see that back then the festival was true to its name. *Íslendingadagurinn* [The Icelanders’ Day] was only a one day affair, instead of the long weekend that it occupies now. And in 1903, when the festival in question was held, it occurred in Winnipeg’s River Park along the Red River at Churchill Drive. The second translation is a letter written by a highly respected figure in the Icelandic community at the time, the schoolteacher and Reverend Hjörtur Leó, in response to his perceptions of the Icelandic festival and that day’s program.

Hjörtur Jónas Leó was born in 1875 at Skagaströnd in northern Iceland. At the age of eight, in 1883, he immigrated to Canada with his parents, settling in New Iceland, just west of Gimli. This makes him only 28 years old when he wrote this scathing letter to the *Lögberg* newspaper.

Hjörtur was considered a brilliant man, highly educated. A chess man. He

served at several Icelandic Lutheran churches, including that in Lundar, Manitoba, and taught at the Jón Bjarnason Academy, the only Icelandic language collegiate to operate in Winnipeg’s Icelandic neighbourhood.

The letter he sent in to the *Lögberg* paper, which ran on the front page, shows a man’s clear frustration with the state of affairs among the people of Icelandic descent. For Hjörtur, the festival is obviously losing its meaning, even at a very early stage, it being only the 13th annual in 1903. It seems to him that some aspects are out of proportion, marring the true significance of the day. This is a letter from 111 years ago, and the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba, *Íslendingadagurinn*, is now 125 years old. I include these translations in this collection of festival material because not only is it an example of the tone of a respected and influential Icelandic figure whose thoughts and words have not been widely translated, and is a glimpse of a time gone by that we can only imagine (and it shall all be lost if we do not imagine it), but also that even in 1903 the people of Icelandic descent had to ask themselves what the meaning of their celebration is. Call it tradition. Why is this weekend significant? Why is this important to me... to us... to the past... to the present... to the future... ?

From Lögberg, 30 July, 1903 (p. 3):

ÍSLENDINGADAGURINN

3. August 1903. XIII Annual.

The Festival will be held in the Exhibition Grounds – The Park opens 7 o'clock daily. --- The Festival will commence 9 o'clock in the morning.

Admission: 25 cents for adults and 10c. for children under 12.

PROGRAMME:

Races:	\$3.00	3. Long Jump
	2.00	1. \$4.50
Girls under 6 50 yards	1.00	2. 2.50
1. \$1.00		
2. .75	Unmarried girls over 16 100 yards	4. Hop, Skip, Jump
3. .50	\$3.00	1. \$3.00
	2.00	2. 2.00
Boys under 6 50 yards	1.50	
\$1.00		Bicycle Races:
.75	Unmarried men over 16 100 yards	Novice Races (1 mile)
.50	\$3.00	\$5.00
	2.00	3.00
Girls 6-8 years 50 yards	1.50	2.00
\$1.00		Handicap for all (1 mile)
.75	Married women 75 yards	\$10.00
.50	\$3.00	5.00
	2.00	3.00
Boys 6-8 years 50 yards	1.50	
\$1.00	Married men 100 yards	Scratch-race (2 miles)
.75	\$3.00	\$10.00
.50	2.00	7.00
	1.50	5.00
Girls 8-12 years 75 yards		
\$1.50	Old men 50 and older 100 yards	
1.00	\$3.00	Glima
.75	2.00	
	1.50	\$10.00
Boys 8-12 years 75 yards		7.00
\$1.50	Jumping:	5.00
1.00	1. Pole vault	Additional award for the most outstanding wrestler \$6.00
.75	1. \$5.00	
	2. 3.50	Dance (waltz)
Girls 12-16 years 100 yards		
\$3.00	2. High Jump	\$5.00
2.00	1. \$3.50	3.00
1.25	2. 2.50	
Boys 12-16 years 100 yards		

Poems and speeches, same as always (Island, Canada, Western-Icelander). There will also be living chess matches.

S. Anderson,
President.

Sig. Magnússon,
Secretary.

From Lögberg, 6 August, 1903 (p. 1).

“Íslendingadagurinn”

There was a ominous appearance to that morning, and people were afraid that it would rain and diminish all their fun, which all the guests of “Íslendingadagurinn” were certain was awaiting them. But it was not so. The weather was quite nice, and was not to blame, though some asked themselves that evening whether they had had any fun at all.

For me, and many others, it was in doubt whether we had benefited from this celebration.

We should go over some of the things presented as entertainment.

The program of the day, which is now in the hands of many people, was followed to some extent, and anyone who wants to can see that it was a varied one. There was one good thing, and it was this, that the speeches and poems, the “same as always,” were not delivered. In their place Mr. Sigurður Júl. Jóhannesson composed three poems for the celebration, and Mr. Kr. Stefánsson, one. I don't intend to go into

these poems; they don't deserve it. But it is rather partisan and unbalanced, that one man should write three poems on the subject of a single day of national celebration, and also deliver a long speech.

The speeches were rather good, but nothing exceptional. Of course I couldn't hear them as well as I would've liked; and certainly no one else, who was trying to pay attention, could, except those who sat on the stage, and those closest to it. That must have been the case, as I saw no one applaud except for a few of those who sat on the stage. The usual suspects began and ended the ritual.

Is there no way to get people to understand that it is imperative to be quiet when speeches are being held? The whole point of a speech is that someone hear it.

Bicycle races, jumping and glíma took place. I'm no judge of how well it went, but it can't have been worse than last year's.

During the glíma people formed a circle around the wrestling ring. But as usual, it was so tight and crowded that some people had no chance of seeing the artistry of those who were wrestling. Even though a police officer was in the crowd and did his best to get people to line up properly.

It was a real shame that the musical performances were not as good as previous years. I was told that “the band” didn't want to work for less than over a hundred dollars. It's becoming a costly entertainment to have them

Rev. Stefan Jonasson

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play. The Icelanders in the band should have done their part to make the cost as painless as possible, if they are in support of this annual celebration. And ten of them together should be able to do something. But maybe they, like I and maybe others, feel that this is not an “Íslendingadagur” [*Day of Icelanders*]. And if so we shouldn’t blame them for that.

A few men were “bounced” and it is good to know that this school tradition has started to have a good hold on the thoughts of some Icelanders.

Coffee and bread were there to be had, and so were these “soft drinks,” orange drinks and others. Either not all the drinks were “soft,” or many had had with them provisions out in the park, because it is clear that many men were drunk there. It might have been the cause of the fights and scuffles there, but the participants should have known better.

I went home about 7 o’clock and so missed out on the most popular entertainment, the dance. On it, I cannot comment.

Most that I had spoken with that day said that “Íslendingadagurinn” gets worse every year. There is a lot to that. There were also fewer people this year than before, unless they all showed up later in the evening to dance.

The problem is that this celebration is a party matter, not a national one. Is it not time to either: stop this “Íslendingadagurinn”-celebration altogether, or try to make it more appealing by reinventing the entire thing? But for this all the Winnipeg-Icelanders need to work together in this matter. They are not too numerous for that to happen, and they should be able to agree on it. If that doesn’t happen this celebration will become a national shame, and not a festival in a few years. And it is well on its way to that goal already. And in closing: how did the Good Templars who are on the

committee like the drunkenness in the park yesterday, and some of the award cheques that were presented? It would be interesting to know that.

Winnipeg, 4. August, 1903.
H. LEO.



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Local Icелander Harvey Benson

My favourite memories of Gimli's Icelandic Festival

by Sherry-Lee Benson-Podolchuk

It is an early Sunday morning and hundreds of people are standing around in a huddle awaiting the inevitable sound that would indicate the beginning of the long run from Winnipeg Beach to Gimli. It is the annual Icelandic Festival 10 mile road race and this year marks the 125th year of the festival. Bang! The starter pistol echoes up into the early morning sky and amidst the reverberation came another sound, the anxious pounding of laced runners of all colours, shapes and sizes and men and women of all levels of running experience. I am running, or to clarify, jogging the race, not to win but to say at my age, 'hey I finished again'. The love of this race came from my dad, Haraldur (Harvey) Gisli Johann Benson who was born 1924 and raised in Gimli. His father Gisli Benson was a fisherman and when Harvey was a young man, followed the family tradition of joining him on the lake before deciding on a career in education as a teacher, then eventually principal. Harvey enjoyed fitness and his first memory of the Icelandic Festival was in his early teens.... 'Well when I was a teenager, about 15 or 16 years old, I went to the Icelandic celebration and I was always interested in sports so I was sitting beside the jumping pit, and they were running the Hop, Step, and Jump. And there was a guy from Lúndar, a huge man, Svein Sigfusson, (1912-1992). Anyway, the man

that was putting on the event, he put the handkerchief down where the take-off was to be for the event. Okay, so the other fellows competing jumped into the pit. Then along comes Svein and he takes one step and he is in the pit, then he jumps and he is in the audience! What an impressive jump! Each contestant was allowed three jumps and the best jump was what counted. After Svein took his first jump, the judge said "Svein, I don't think you have to jump anymore." Obviously he was miles and miles ahead of the other guys and won. I was certainly impressed by Svein's ability.' There is a twinkle in my dad's eyes as he relates this event that marked a long life of keeping fitness part of his daily regime. Harvey explains how the yearly ritual of the Icelandic festival and the sports were intertwined and connected all his life. He fondly explains how he began training for the Icelandic one-mile race.

'Well, I would very often run the one-mile and the half-mile and sometimes even the quarter-mile races. Anyway, one time I was fishing with my dad up north at Warren's Landing, and I would go out in the evening after we finished work and train, because I'm trying to get in shape for the celebration, in case I make it home to Gimli. Some days when Tom Bird, (a very interesting man), and I were in the whitefish boat we caught ducks in a net and Tom would give them away

to the many people who came to work at the camp. This particular day Tom is laughing and laughing and I asked 'what is so funny?' Tom explains that several of the local women warned him of a "crazy man running down the beach and nobody was chasing him." That crazy man was me!

Dad won the race many years and during that time as part of his training his sister, Allie Benson Pascoe, would sometimes bike along playing coach. Years later dad began to run the 10 mile road race. 'A long time afterwards, in fact, I remember one time around 1972 or so I was carrying Eric in my arms, and I would go watch the 10 mile race at the start line and decide if the wind is from the south then I'm gonna go. And very often the wind was from the north and I didn't want to go. But then I finally went and finished. One time I did not really train for the race and decided that day to run. It was really hot and at the end, I did finish, I flopped into the tub of water filled with cut up oranges. Of course no one wanted the oranges. In hindsight I realize with my age I could have died. I encourage everyone to run for their health.

But I was amazed at the time when I was holding Eric watching the first runner coming in, I think his name was McCubbens and he won the race many times. His stride was long and he was sprinting the last few yards and it was amazing to track him. Of course things change and later in life I was asked to be a judge for the parade. Over the five years, I tried to be as fair as possible and give as many awards to different floats to share in the prizes. I asked dad "what is different in the Icelandic Festival of today and how has it changed from the perspective

of a person who had been part of the community for eighty-nine years. How has the culture of the town changed?" 'In the early days of the Icelandic Festival it was mostly Icelanders and people came from all over, Lundar, Riverton and Arborg. These were big family events. In some ways it is a big disappointment in that it has become commercialized. Volunteers are becoming less and less, it used to be a family thing to do. Fishing is the life-blood of Gimli, and a few years ago I came up with the idea of setting two nets during the Icelandic festival and taking tours. No charge – it was free. Basically what Irving Kardal and I did was we took 6 or 7 people in lifejackets, out onto the lake, just outside the harbour, and we lifted two nets, as safe as you could ever be, because we never went out if there was any kind of wind. People got to see and feel the experience of pulling the nets and picking fish. They were so excited. Back at the dock everyone got to try to fillet the catch and took home some fresh fish. However, with new insurance rules and the paying of \$3000 premiums for three days, I could not keep up the event. Despite people signing a waiver, I still would have had to pay.' I was on that tour and yes, the people expressed joy at the adventure and were respectful in recognizing the amount of work required to catch fish. Harvey referred to this as 'gentleman fishing'. In other words, only a couple of nets, but he loved it just the same.

As the 125th anniversary of the Icelandic Festival approaches Harvey, my dad, will be at docks sharing in the fishing with his sons and also at the finish line waiting for another Benson to complete the 1 mile and 10 mile road race.

Address by Gylfi Sigfússon CEO/President of Eimskip in Winnipeg on June 17th 2014

Dear Guests, it's a great honor and pleasure to be here on Iceland's National Day, June 17th 2014

First, I would like to say "Thank you!"Thank you for the goodwill that my colleagues from Eimskip and I feel towards us here in Winnipeg and it was wonderful to see all the historic sites that we visited yesterday and this morning. It is also a very special experience to be here in the heart of the Icelandic community in Canada on Iceland's National Day, in the year when Eimskip celebrates its 100 years anniversary.

A great deal has been written about the Icelandic settlements in the New World, and it is very common, both for people of Icelandic descent here, and for people in Iceland, to explore their family roots and connections on both sides of the Atlantic.

Eimskipafélag Íslands ('the Iceland Steamship Company', generally known in English under the name 'Eimskip') is Iceland's oldest shipping company, and it was founded one hundred years ago, in 1914. I would not be standing here today as the CEO of Eimskip if it had not been for the generous contribution by the Western Icelandic communities towards the establishment of the company, a century ago. The communities here were not expecting anything in return for their generosity. There was no prospect of quick profits and there were no plans to run services to North America. Perhaps

this shows best how truly and generous this invaluable contribution was from the North American communities to Iceland's efforts to secure economic independence.

Between 15 and 20 thousand people left Iceland between 1870 and 1914 to seek a better life in Canada. At the beginning of 1870 the entire population of Iceland was only 70,000, which means that something like a quarter of the population emigrated during those years. Life in the New World was very hard for them at first, but determination and stamina drove them on. From the outset, they saw it important to maintain contact with their homeland, to cultivate their heritage and keep the Icelandic culture alive in North America.

To begin with, those who left Iceland were by some regarded as deserters, but this all changed when reports began to come in of how they were prospering in their new country and how helpful they were being towards Iceland. This was a time of great poverty in Iceland and those who went west hoped to make their dreams come true. Many of them were skilled craftsmen and made a good living following their trades while life in Iceland was still hard.

Nineteen prominent figures in Winnipeg were approached and asked to raise share capital among the Western Icelanders for the foundation of an Icelandic shipping company. They were keen to help and they appointed



PHOTO: LEIF NORMAN

Manitoba Premier Greg Selinger (left) with Gylfi Sigfússon, CEO/President of Eimskip, Sherry Bjornson in the background

a committee in the spring of 1913 to organize the campaign.

Some of these people had collected 10,000 krónur – a substantial sum in those days – to put up a statue of Jón Sigurðsson, the leading figure in Iceland’s independence movement in the nineteenth century. The statue of Jón Sigurðsson now stands in the center of the Austurvöllur square in Reykjavík, facing the parliament building and it’s replica is standing here behind me as you all know.

Lögberg and *Heimskringla*, the newspapers of the Western Icelandic community, carried stories about the settlers in Canada and were often quoted in the Icelandic papers. For Icelanders at home, these tales of their far-away relatives were like something out of the Arabian Nights.

The announcement of the flotation of the company in the press included a strong expression of support for the venture. On the 24th of April 1913, *Heimskringla* said: “There is no doubt that this is both the most urgently-needed and the most thoroughly thought Icelandic company that Icelanders have ever set out to found. It is very vital for the future fortunes of the whole Icelandic nation, and it must be made a reality as soon as possible.”

The preparatory committee in Canada consisted of 11 people with Thomas H. Johnson, minister in Manitoba, as its chairman. It was decided that the committee should keep the matter under discussion during the summer while waiting for further news from Iceland about how the idea had been received there. Some of the people attending

the meeting where the committee was appointed were to visit Iceland that summer for a vacation and it was decided that they should find out as much as they could about the proposed new company while they were there. Their names were Árni Eggertsson, Ásmundur P. Jóhannsson, Jón Tryggvi Bergmann, J. J. Vopni, Sveinn Thorvaldsson and Sigurður Sigurðsson. Árni, Ásmundur and Jón Tryggvi put down their names for substantial shares in the new company. When the group came back to Winnipeg in September 1913, they called a meeting where they gave a glowing account of their trip to Iceland and urged the Icelandic community in Canada to play its part in setting up an Icelandic shipping company so as to break down what was, in effect a foreign monopoly on cargo and passenger transportation to and from Iceland and give a boost to the nation's sense of independence and its ability to stand on its own feet. They said, that at no time during their visit, they heard any opposition against the idea of founding the Steamship Company, and they all believed that with good management it could be financially viable. They proposed that the preparatory committee hold an open meeting in Winnipeg where all Western Icelanders would be invited to express their views on the matter, and then that a committee would be set up to supervise the next steps and see the matter through. All those who had been on the trip to Iceland, urged the entire Icelandic community in North America to join in supporting their brothers and sisters at home and make this patriotic venture a success in every way they could.

It was at 12 o'clock, noon on Saturday, 17th of January 1914 when the foundation meeting of Eimskipafélag Íslands (Eimskip) opened in Iðnó, the main meeting hall in Reykjavík. Flags were

fluttering all over the town in the light easterly breeze that morning and it could be seen from the bustle in the streets that something special was going on. There were throngs of people in the streets, many of them dressed in their finest clothes, groups from all walks of life standing on street corners eagerly discussing what was taking place. Most schools had given kids the day off and shops, offices, banks and various public institutions had closed for the day. At the appointed hour the Iðnó hall was full with about 450 people waiting for the meeting to start. Because the hall was so crowded it was decided to change the venue to the church Fríkirkjan, two hundred yards away.

The Western Icelanders' delegate at the meeting, Jón J. Bildfell, read out a greeting from the Western Icelandic community and described the share capital flotation there and the response to it. This was loudly applauded. The debate on the proposed articles of association for the company dragged on until three o'clock the following morning, when it was decided to adjourn the meeting until the 22nd of January. This second meeting lasted from noon until four o'clock the following morning, but those who were present said it was one of the most enjoyable gatherings they had ever attended. There was general enthusiasm and a clear sense of purpose, with an emphasis on taking care over the preparations so as to lay down a firm foundation for the national flagging shipping company. The press called Eimskip "the Nation's Favored Child" and saw its foundation as one of the most positive steps in Iceland's progress and a move that could move the nation closer to real independence.

Many of the Western Icelanders who were involved in the founding of Eimskip and later served on its board undertook

a lot of strenuous and time-consuming journeys by visiting Iceland in those days. Árni Eggertsson and Ásmundur P. Jóhannsson, for example, travelled to Iceland again and again to attend the company's annual general meetings, and Jón J. Bíldfell, one of the most active campaigners for its foundation, spent altogether three months on one of his visits to Iceland for this purpose. He travelled some of the way with cargo vessels and some of it with fishing ships and had a difficult time due to bad weather. Jón had adventure in his blood and had worked, amongst other things, as a lumberjack, a railroad builder and a prospector for gold. He was a member of the board of Eimskip from the annual general meeting of 1917 until 1922.

Before this time there had been a certain amount of bad feeling in Iceland towards those who had left Iceland to seek their fortunes elsewhere, but this changed in the wake of the great warmth and goodwill shown by the North American Icelandic communities regarding the foundation of Eimskip.

About 1,200 Western Icelanders became shareholders in Eimskip when the company was founded, owning a total of about 200,000 krónur in share capital, which was almost 25% of the total. This willingness to take part in the creation of Eimskip has been seen as the greatest manifestation of their cultural allegiance and pride towards the old country. The majority of those who invested in the company in the beginning had no expectation of returns: they did what they did purely because they wished to see the land of their ancestors prosper. The same could be said about the company's first shareholders in Iceland too, except that they would also benefit from the existence of an Icelandic shipping fleet, with more efficient cargo services and access to better

traveling, but for the Western Icelanders there were no such gains to expect. Their vision and their practical contribution are something that deserves to be celebrated and recognized, to the credit of their generation. There were Western Icelandic members of the board of Eimskip until 1976, or for over 60 years.

The establishment of Eimskip was the basis for Iceland's home rule, and later for the nation's full independence. Before Icelanders could even think about independence, they had to have a good transportation system of their own so as to be in control of their access to foreign countries, imports to Iceland and the export of their products to markets abroad.

It was decided that Eimskip's vessels should be named after Icelandic waterfalls, and the first two were named


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Gullfoss and *Godafoss*. *Gullfoss* arrived in Iceland in April 1915, an attractive and well-built vessel with a capacity of 1,200 tons and space for 94 passengers. The *Godafoss*, which arrived in Iceland in June 1915, had a capacity of 1,500 tons. It stranded off the coast of Iceland at the end of November 1916, but everyone on board was saved and most of the cargo was salvaged despite very difficult weather conditions at the site. After this a second-hand vessel, with a capacity of 1,600 tons was bought. It was named *Lagarfoss*.

Iceland, and Eimskip with it, did not escape from the ravages of last century's two world wars. In 1917, when sea routes to Europe became too dangerous due to submarine attacks, Eimskip began services to North America via routes that were out of the danger of submarine strikes. Services to North America were continued for a while when normality was eventually restored to the North Atlantic after the end of the war in 1918, but were stopped in 1921 as they were no longer profitable. Nevertheless, these services between Iceland and North America had been of tremendous benefit to Iceland and marked a completely new venue in the country's foreign trade. Between 1917 and 1919, nearly a third of all imports to Iceland came from the USA and there is no doubt that the Icelandic people would have suffered very serious shortages of necessities of various types if Eimskip had not been in existence at this time. When war broke out again in Europe in 1939, the sailing routes of Iceland's merchant fleet lay across dangerous waters and it was also clear that the usual markets for exports and imports would be closed, since the two main countries at war, Britain and Germany, also happened to be Iceland's chief trading partners. It was therefore decided to put two of the company's ships on services to America again, and they started calling

at New York in fall 1939. In spring 1940, after Germany occupied Denmark and Norway and Britain occupied Iceland, transportation to and from Iceland was almost entirely restricted to Britain and North America. The Nazi occupation of Scandinavia completely changed Iceland's situation in the war, because shipping routes to the Continent were mostly closed, though it was still possible to risk making the crossing to Britain. But for the time being, quick and regular services by merchant vessels between Iceland and other countries were no longer an option.

At the beginning of the Second World War, Eimskip was operating five charter vessels. In 1941 three of them were sunk by German forces, with a loss of 38 seamen, including 16 Icelanders. A year later, another chartered vessel operated by Eimskip was sunk on its way from the USA to Iceland. In November 1944 came the report that *Godafoss*, which was then the company's flagship, had been sunk off the coast of Iceland by a German submarine. It went down in just a few minutes; 43 passengers and crew died and 19 were rescued. Although by the beginning of 1945 the war was drawing to a close, it continued to take its toll on our fleet. In February that year, *Dettifoss* was sunk by a German submarine just north of Ireland, with the loss of 15 men. Thus, three of the six vessels that Eimskip owned at the beginning of hostilities were gone by the end of the war, including the *Gullfoss*, which was captured by the Germans in Copenhagen in Denmark in 1940 and was found in Kiel in Germany in a very bad condition in 1945. The war years demonstrated again how vital it was for the independence of an island nation to have its own merchant fleet. Without Eimskip, essential cargo services to and from the country would have been entirely subject to the whims or capacities of

foreign military authorities during this time.

In 1964, on Eimskip's 50th anniversary, the Western Icelanders among the company's shareholders clubbed together and donated their share capital to a fund to support the University of Iceland. This was known as the Eimskip University Fund and was dedicated to the memory of all the Western Icelanders who had played a part in the founding of the company. It is intended to supplement the university's resources and enable promising students to pursue studies there. At present, it is open for grant applications from doctoral students, permanent teaching staff and specialists at the university. Master's degree students can also apply in certain cases. It would be appropriate if Eimskip could through the fund in the near

future extend the support to the Western Icelanders through this fund so that your community could benefit from the generous gift you made half a century ago. The University of Iceland is now on the list of the top 300 among about 17,000 universities in the world. A history of the Eimskip University Fund is now being written, and as CEO of Eimskip I have a seat on the board of the fund.

Eimskip has encountered both fair weather and foul in the hundred years that have passed since the company was founded. Taken as a whole, however, the company has been highly successful and is proud of its contribution to the development of Icelandic society. The company today has 51 offices in 19 countries; it has 16 vessels in its fleet and employs about 1,400 people, thereof



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about 800 in Iceland. Less than half of our revenues are generated by operations in Iceland. We are currently having two vessels built in China, the first of which is due to be delivered later this month. It will be named the *Lagarfoss* and will be the seventh ship in the company's history to bear that name. The second ship is due for delivery next year. Eimskip is listed on Iceland's stock exchange and it is also planned to seek listing in one of the Nordic countries, probably Norway, partly to make it easier for foreign investors to become involved in the company.

We marked our hundredth anniversary in January this year with the publication of a set of three books: one covering our hundred-year history, one on all the vessels the company has operated and one on a selection of the works of art owned by Eimskip. These books (published in Icelandic) make interesting reading for those interested in the company's history and that of the Icelandic nation, and we will be presenting some copies during this visit. We also made a documentary film surveying the history of the company in two chapters, which was shown on

Icelandic National Television at Easter. We also have an English version of the first chapter that will be shown in the Art Gallery later today, so some of you should be able to enjoy an over-view of Eimskip's first decades of operation.

I would like to end my speech by conveying to you all a warm greeting from Eimskip's 1,400 employees, and from all Icelanders, and to thank especially the relatives and descendants of those who gave such valuable support to the founding of our company a century ago. I would also like to thank you for cultivating as well as you do, your relationship with Iceland and its people and for keeping alive the culture and heritage that your ancestors brought with them across the sea when they emigrated.

Again, thank you for your warm greetings and I hope you will enjoy the rest of our Icelandic National Day on the 17th of June 2014, one hundred years after the establishment of Eimskip, something that was not possible to accomplish without the support of the Western Icelanders in the New World. Thank you and have a nice day.

K. N. Júlíus

by Sunna Furstenau

Kristján Niels Jónsson Júlíus (1859-1936), a satirical poet, was born near Akureyri, Iceland to Jón Jónsson and Þórunn Kristjánsdóttir. His father was a blacksmith. K.N. or Káinn (pronounced like ‘Cow-En’) as he was known at the time, left Eyjafjörður in 1878. K.N.’s older brother, Jón Júlíus Jónsson, had left in 1876. Two of his younger sisters came to America in later years.

Their mother died when K.N. was 14 years and afterwards, he lived with his uncle, Davíð Kristjánsson. He lived there until he was eighteen. In 1878, he immigrated to the west. At first, he lived in Winnipeg and then moved on to Duluth. Finally, in 1893, he moved to the Thingvalla area of North Dakota. He never married and had no descendants. He was mostly self-taught and had very little formal education before leaving Iceland.

Káinn labored for most of his adult life in our rural community called Eyford in Thingvalla Township. Many of the graves in the Thingvalla Cemetery were dug by him and he was the last gravedigger to live in the Eyford community. The following is taken from an old newspaper:

“He went at his task as if he were making up a bed for a tired friend, said his close friend, Dr. Rögnvaldur Pétursson, and most of those buried there were the poet’s personal friends. Here he, too, rests now on the grassy flat, with a small stone

at his head. But at the side of the church stands a stately monument with his likeness carved into it. It was placed there by the friends and admirers of K.N. in the United States and Canada, but designed by the neighbors, who thankfully remember the poet whose gentle humor lightened their burdens and eased their struggles for half a century, brought sunshine into their homes, and was an ever active geysir of fun and easy, original wit. Poor as he was in terms of material possessions, K.N. enriched these communities and set their cultural atmosphere as no other man has.”

He was a unique, beloved poet and humorist. Some of his poems became published in two books. The original book, *Kviðlingar*, was published in 1920. *Kviðlingar og Kvæði (Ditties and Poems)* was published in 1945 and edited by Richard Beck. In 1937, a book in Iceland was published called *Rabb um K. N. og kveðskap hans* by Magnús Gíslason. In 1965, a book called *Vísnaþók Káins / Kristján Niels Jónsson (K. N.)* was produced by Tómas Guðmundsson in Iceland.

In the 14 August 1946 edition of the *Heimskringla*, you can find an advertisement selling New Books by the Björnsson Book Store. K.N.’s book, *Kviðlingar*, is for sale at \$15.85 and is one of the most expensive books listed. That would be over \$180 in the 2013 value of the dollar.

A large monument, dedicated to K.N. Julius, was built on the north side of the

church in 1936. The inscription on the monument to K.N. reads:

The Satirical Poet

Translated by Magnus Olafson

*Born to make tears few,
The mocking flashes of your verses,
Lighten and renew the spirit.
So dream about the beautiful fjord,
of your beautiful childhood home
in the countryside.*

In Icelandic:

Kimnisskaldid

*Fæddur til að fækka tárur.
fáir munu betur syngja.
Kimnileiftur ljóða þinna,
léttu spor og hugann yngja.
(R. Beck)
Svo dreymi þig um fríðan Eyjafjörð,
og fagrar bernskustöðvar inn í sveit.
(K. N.)*

The monument was originally built in 1936 and was reconstructed in 1999 in conjunction with the 100th Annual “Deuce of August Celebration.” The celebration was originally called the 2nd of August Celebration and through the years, became more well-known as the Deuce.

Now these flags fly above his grave and his monument. It is fitting that the North Dakota flag, the Icelandic flag, and the USA flag fly above the grave of this man who knew two homelands. He lived most of his life in North Dakota in the years from 1893 – 1936.

The following are poems on the K.N. Storyboard Panel, located at the Thingvalla Church Memorial site:

About Little Christine Geir

Translation by Magnus Olafson

*Since the first I saw you near,
My need for sunlight dwindled;
The light for my life's path,*

Is by the light in your eyes kindled.

*Síðan fyrst ég sá þig hér,
sólskin þarf ég minna.
Gegnum lífið lýsir mér
ljósið augna þinna.*

Anna Geir was a widow with five young children. When Káinn arrived in Pembina County, he was searching for work. He was informed about the family's situation and he worked on the Geir farm as a farmhand for the remainder of his life. Christine (Geir) Hall was born and raised on the family farm where Káinn lived and worked. K.N. did some brick laying work in the community along with digging most of the graves at the Thingvalla Cemetery. He died on the Geir farm of a stroke 25 Oct 1936.

The address given in 1999 by Christine Geir Hall at the rededication ceremony of the monument is available at this website address: http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=164934&pageId=2241659&clang=en&q=K%20N%20J%FAI%EDus

Dakota Sunshine

Translation by Gudrun Hanson

*When our weary winter yields
And spring relives its story,
Ah, what a pretty sight to see
The sun in all its glory!
And when the wide Dakota fields
With ripening wheat are swaying,
A pretty sight to see the sun
Upon the uplands playing.
When all this tender hay is cut,
In sickled-tows reclining,
Ah, what a pretty sight the sun
Upon the meadows shining.
Then he who yearns to catch a fish
Goes to the river streaming.
A pretty sight to see the pike
In sunny water gleaming.
When in the morn the farmer milks,*



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K.N. Júlíus

*His brow with pleasure showing,
A pretty sight to see the sun
On all the cattle glowing.
If one can get a bit of gin,
At best by illness hinting
Then 'tis a pretty sight the sun
Upon the bottle glinting.
And now it seems to be the trend
To dress in latest styling,
And 'tis a pretty sight the sun
On lovely dresses smiling!
And if you long to go to church,
Your gladdened faith aligning;
Then 'tis a pretty sight the sun
Upon the preacher shining!
And though the 'take' is very small
The man's surprise be showing;*

*It is a pretty sight the sun
Upon the platter glowing.
But if I had to go to church,
My need for succour pining,
I would as life the sun itself
Refused to go on shining.
And when I've passed beyond this place,
My bones to dust decaying,
'Twill be a pretty sight the sun
Upon my tombstone playing.*

This next poem is about the Icelandic celebration in our area called "The 2nd of August" and also known for over 50 years as "Deuce of August." This is one of K.N.'s famous drinking poems. He talks about Reverend (Séra) Hans Thorgrímson who

is one of my favorite pioneers. Séra Hans was a highly respected pioneer pastor and he probably did not find K.N.'s drinking poems very funny. Séra Hans was very much against drinking and local stories say that he had not attended the party alluded to in the poem and he was very angry about this poem. North Dakota was a dry state at this time.

August Second

*Many left in drunken sail
Everywhere flows beer and ale;
Whisky? No one lacked a bit,
Cause Swain and Dor were selling it.
Women served their coffee swill;
Men ranted speeches at their will;
There was singing, there was dance.
There was I with Reverend Hans.*

Annar Ágúst

*Margur þaðan fullur fór
Freyddi á skalum malt og bjór
Brennivín þar brast ei neinn,
Þvi báðir seldu, Dóri og Sveinn.
Kvennfólk var með kaffisull
Karlmennt fluttu ræðubull
Þar var söngur, þar var dans
Þar var ég og Séra Hans.*

Séra Hans was the pastor in Pembina County from 1883-1886 and then again from 1901-1912. Káinn came to Thingvalla Township in 1893 when Reverend Friðrik Bergmann was the pastor. So, this poem, "Annar ágúst" (August Second), was most likely written between 1901-1912.

The very short version about the ND alcohol law is as follows: North Dakota was approved for statehood 22 Feb 1889 (4 years before Káinn arrived). A clause was proposed at the 1889 North Dakota constitutional convention that summer to prohibit the sale and manufacture of liquor. The clause was voted on by

the people of ND and was approved at the October 1st vote. Saloons, liquor sales, and alcohol manufacturing were outlawed, beginning July 1, 1890.

Finally, in 1932, ND voted to repeal state prohibition. Alcohol could be manufactured, bought, and sold legally for the first time since North Dakota became a state. Káinn was still alive to see prohibition repealed but Séra Hans was the pastor in Grand Forks at the time. I suppose that Káinn could have written this poem when Séra Hans was working in Grand Forks and maybe even after prohibition was lifted in 1932. If anyone knows the actual date this poem was written, please let me know.

I am glad this is one of the poems on the panel. Some told me it was not appropriate as part of the church memorial. I believe it helps to tell the story of our ancestors and it brings us some humor. Something that seemed important to Káinn and to his honor, this storyboard panel was designed.

Bjorn Olgeirson is quoted in the *Lögberg-Heimskringla* newspaper 24 Sep 1999:

Björn Olgeirsson knew K.N. well in his youth. "He was a bit unusual," Björn said, "but he did not drink as much as he is rumoured to have done. He only made the occasional trip to town and got a bit cheerful. Then he walked back, making poetry on the way. He was a great humorist who made many interesting poems."

A few other poems that have been translated into English are as follows:

Back Home

*So dream about your lovely island fjord
And childhood haunts upon the upland run;
Where nowhere do the colors of the land
Shine fairer in the glory of the sun.*

*As shepherds halloo from the mountain
passes,
Their flocks descending to the the valley
grasses.*

In The Barn

*One day when all was quiet
I heard the moo-cows bawl;
I think that they were holding
A "Ladies Aid" for all.
For everyone was yapping;
But none were understood
They talked of all and nothing,
But most concerning food.
"Yes, we're full and chubby,
And we have lots of feed;
Like corn and ground up barley,
And stacks of hay with seed."
"It's not my business really,
and I don't care, 'tis true,
But by the way, dear Spottie,
What is the date you're due?"
"Come has the time for supper,
What will we get for treat? Be damned!
Here comes that K.N.,
And brings us straw to eat!"*

Is It Any Wonder?

*No wonder that he dabs in rhymes,
And likes to chase the chicks;
No wonder that he drinks a lot,
And has a yen for tricks;
No wonder that he steals a bit,
And is a liar too;
No wonder when he hangs around
With such a rascal crew!*

The Dance

*I attended a dance there one evening,
I'd been feeling so lonely and low;
I wanted to go and observe it,
And watch how the evening would go.
There youth celebrated its hour.
I felt a familiar fire.
I sat til the daylight was dawning,
In the swirl of hypnotic desire.*

*The glorious maidens kept dancing
With spiffy admiring guys.
I sat in a corner unbothered,
Alone there with curious eyes.
They bared both their arms and their
bosoms,
Their ringlets asway and aglow;
Such goddesses filled with a power
To rouse all the sick with their show.
The blood in my veins was aboiling,
My lips were a flammable red;
My eyes with the fires of passion
Were popping right out of my head.
The fires ignited my body,
And burned at my heart-strings too;
They singed a part of my jacket,
Eventually burning it through!*

K.N. was chosen as "Settler of the Week" by Hálfðan Helgason and featured in this newsletter: http://www.halfdan.is/news/newsletter_012.htm

Kevin Jon Jonsson wrote an article for the *Lögberg-Heimskringla* 13 Dec 1996 and included many poems and translations here: http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=164812&pageId=2240574&lang=en&q=K%20N

More information about the Icelandic celebration called the Deuce of August or 2nd of August can be found on the website: www.august2nd.com

2nd of August – Why We Celebrate

by Sunna Furstenu

The annual "Deuce of August" or "2nd of August" Celebration is held each year in Mountain, North Dakota. Icelanders from all over North America and Iceland attend the event that promotes and preserves our Icelandic Heritage and Culture – and lets us have lots of FUN!

The year 2014 will be the 115th celebration. Check out the website www.august2nd.com for event details.

Why Do We Celebrate?

By 1874, Iceland had been under harsh Danish rule for hundreds of years and the people wanted their freedom. A man named Jón Sigurðsson was determined to get it for them. The following has been excerpted from a booklet called "Solving the Mystery of the 2nd of August" by Sir Magnus Olafson. He excerpted the information from an article by Oscar G. Johnson out of the work "Reflections by the Quill" by Quill Historical Society of Wynyard, Saskatchewan.

Jón Sigurðsson wanted freedom for Iceland from Denmark. He wanted schools in Iceland—a medical college, an agricultural college and other schools. Up to this time, little consideration had been given the people of Iceland by the Danish government. Jón Sigurðsson had moved to Denmark around the year 1830 where he was educated and

became a librarian at the King's Library. He became a member of the Parliament in Iceland. There he became President of the assembly. He hammered away at the Danish government until finally, in January 1874, King Kristjan the Ninth made the announcement that he would visit Iceland during the summer of 1874, and that he would bring a new constitution for Iceland. For that purpose, King Kristjan the Ninth decreed that the Icelandic Parliament should be called into session from August the first to the seventh.

On August the Second, he asked the Icelandic clergy to have services in every church in the land. On that day, he would hand over the New Constitution to Parliament. Jón Sigurðsson did not attend that session of Parliament but he advised the leaders to accept the constitution, even though it was inadequate, because it was a step in the right direction. But he cautioned the people never to down their desire for independence. His by word was "Aldrei að víkja" (Never let down). It is known that a small group of Icelandic people who immigrated to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA in the early 1870s held a celebration on August 2, 1874, to celebrate this event. It is also known that the Icelandic community of Winnipeg held the first celebration on the second of August in the year 1890 and called it, "The Day of the Icelanders." While August

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNNA FURSTENAU'S BLOG WWW.ICELANDICROOTS.COM

the second was never declared a legal national holiday in Iceland, this day was celebrated whenever and however small the settlement was, whether in Canada or the United States by the Icelandic settlers who called the second of August, "The Day of the Icelanders."

Iceland officially declared its independence from Denmark on June 17, 1944 and became a republic."

"August the Deuce" also known as "Deuce of August" or "2nd of August" is organized by the North Dakota Icelandic

Communities Association. For more information, go to the website or to our Facebook.

There are Street Dances, Icelandic Foods, Kids Games, Car Show, Kids Tractor Pull, Music, Old Time Dance, Genealogy Center, a Heritage Program with dignitaries from Iceland and North America, and the North Dakota State Pickup and Tractor Pull. There is something for everyone.

See you at THE DEUCE!

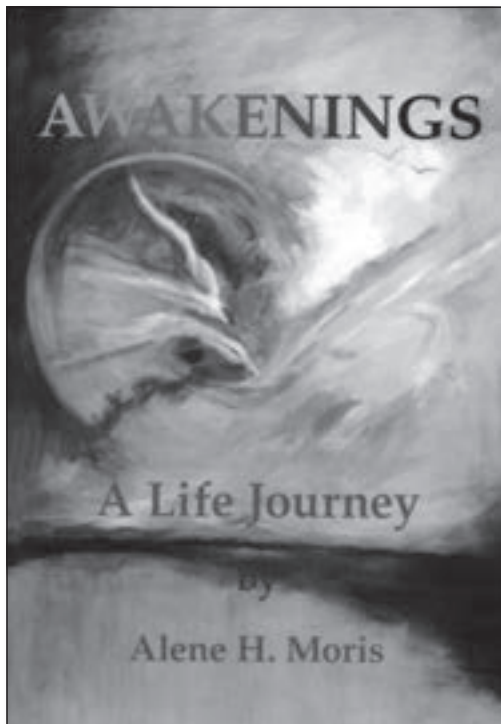
Book Review

Awakenings A Life Journey

by Alene H. Moris

Reviewed by Lorna Tergesen

Awakenings
A Life Journey
Alene H. Moris



For those that attended the 2013 Icelandic National League Convention there is no need to explain the powerful and inspirational speech delivered by Alene Moris.

With such elegance and grace, she delivered the most powerful message. Well into her 80's she struck us all with her passion for her topic, that of women and home.

We carried her speech in Volume 65#3 edition of the *Icelandic Connection* and were very proud to have done so. But delving further into her career, I discovered that she had written her autobiography entitled *Awakenings A Life Journey*. I had to get it and read further into her very varied and interesting life. It is truly a remarkable story, one that I am certain many in our community will enjoy.

Alene is of prairie stock, her father being a Minnesotan of Norwegian heritage and her mother of an Icelandic North Dakota family. The family moved to Regina when Alene was 3 years old as her father was appointed to head the Children's Division of the provincial

social welfare department. He was also very active in the United Church of Canada. Her mother was very enthusiastic about Eleanor Roosevelt and other women's issues that she saw through her husband's work and the church. These early beginnings nurtured her future work for in her youth she had experienced the Depression with its extreme poverty and then the war where she witnessed violence and racism.

In those early years, Alene was a very happy student with all around good grades and an aptitude for sports and music. During this time of her life, her father passed away suddenly with a cerebral hemorrhage, tossing the family into financial turmoil. Her mother soon learnt that as woman she would not qualify for many jobs, certainly not owning her own business as she had done before her marriage. (The first woman to own a real estate and land surveyor business in the Province of Saskatchewan.)

Like so many young women of that era, she began teaching in remote country schools. Eventually she went to the University of Saskatoon and St Olaf's in the USA. She had met a young man by the name of Stan Robinson who she thought would be her life partner. She was truly heartbroken when he passed away by drowning.

Going back to St. Olaf's her life shifted again and here she did meet her partner, Walt Moris. Walt had decided to become a Lutheran minister. In time they married and had a family that kept Alene very busy. She enjoyed their postings and all the people she met along the way, but a foreign posting to Malaysia was where her political insights truly came to the fore and began her extraordinary career of trying to assist women.

When the women were beginning to

try to enter the work force, Alene saw the immense issues that they faced. She had the foresight to go to major companies and industries to speak to the male dominated boards and executives to inform them as to what methods they might employ to encourage more women into their work force. These attempts were not always met with enthusiasm but eventually made the American nation take note of her message.

In her personal life during these times there were several moves and changes. At times she was totally exhausted from all the effort she was putting forth in her endeavours. However she never was defeated, always bouncing back with new ideas or work partnerships.

Awards streamed in from so many areas, one account that particularly interested me was her receiving an Alumni Award from St. Olaf's with her 86-year-old mother, aunt and sister plus her husband in attendance. Her aged mother so very proud of her daughter's achievements.

There are also such interesting passages of her fighting the racial issues that black women in America endured. The Individual Development Center, that she established, was the focus of her work for years. This was dealing with advising women and girls on career choices, trying to encourage business and academics to adjust their thinking to the emerging roles of women. Alene won so many battles for them.

The book reads as though you were sitting down with Alene with her telling you her life story. One experiences all her travels, trials and tribulations while still enjoying the gratification of her work and honors. The story of her marriage, children and extended family is rich and revealing. A thoroughly enjoyable read.

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SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED

We invite students to apply for the following scholarships which are offered, or administered, by the Canada Iceland Foundation. Priority may be given to first time applicants.

ALL APPLICATIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY MONDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER, 2014

Information and applications are available electronically by request at
 Canadalceland@netscape.net
 (for application requests only), or in hard copy from Lögberg-Heimskringla.

The completed applications are forwarded to:
 Canada Iceland Foundation Inc., Box 27012, C-360 Main Street, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4T3

The Heiðmar Björnson Memorial Scholarship

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

Emilia Pálmason Student Aid Award

An award of \$500, to be given annually. The recipients must be of good moral character, college calibre and primarily in need of help to continue their studies in high school, college, or at the university level. The donors hope that "somewhere along the highway of life" the award winners will try to provide comparable help to another needy student.

The Gunnar Simundsson Memorial Scholarship

One scholarship of \$500, to be awarded annually. This annual scholarship will be awarded to a student in university or proceeding into a university in Canada or the United States. The recipient must demonstrate financial need and high scholastic ability.

The Lorna and Terry Tergesen Scholarship

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

The Walter and Beulah Arason Scholarship

One scholarship of \$500 to be awarded annually to a student of good academic standing entering the

University of Alberta or continuing their education there.

The Margrét Bjarnason Scholarships

Scholarship of \$500 for a student pursuing a post secondary education, who graduated from a high school in Evergreen School Division in Manitoba and who demonstrate scholastic ability.

The Judge Walter J. Lindal Memorial Scholarship

Scholarship of \$1000 to be awarded in memory of Judge Walter J. Lindal, to a student demonstrating scholastic ability and proceeding to or attending university with a view to studying law or international relations.

The David Franklin, Ad. E. Scholarship

A scholarship of \$500 to be awarded to a student who has demonstrated financial need, academic achievement, strong leadership and community involvement, who will be attending a university in Canada or Iceland to study law or international relations. This scholarship is donated by David Franklin, Ad. E. to mark his ten years as Honorary Icelandic Consul in Montreal.

The Benson Sisters Memorial Scholarship

A \$500 scholarship in memory of Olga Rowlin, Laufey Smith and Kristin Arnason, to be awarded to a student pursuing post-secondary education. Preference may be given to a student with financial need and/or who has a mental or physical disability.

Contributors

SHERRY BENSON-PODOLCHUK is a resident of Gimli and recently retired from the RCMP. Author of *Women Not Wanted* and international educator on helping people learn to deal with workplace conflict and bullying. She encourages people on the benefits of exercise for both mental and physical well being.

PETER JOHN R. BUCHAN is the Icelandic Language instructor at the University of Manitoba. As well, he is a gifted translator and tenor.

“SUNNA” PAM FURSTENAU was raised on a farm at Thingvalla, North Dakota where she developed her love of everything Icelandic. She is the President of the nonprofit, Icelandic Roots, which promotes and preserves the heritage, history, and genealogy of the Icelandic people here in North America, in Iceland, and everywhere Icelandic people have lived. She is a Director for the local Icelandic Communities Association, 1st VP of the Icelandic National League of North America, and the USA Representative for the Icelandic National League in Iceland. Check out her Website, Blog, and Genealogy Database: www.IcelandicRoots.com

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.

LORNA TERGESEN had volunteered with the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba for many years always enjoying the fellowship and challenges it presented.

JÓNAS ÞÓR while living in Manitoba, was commissioned by the Icelandic Festival to write a history of Íslendingadagurinn for their centennial in 1989. Now residing in Iceland, Jónas is a frequent visitor/tour guide to Canada and USA.

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.





PHOTO: CYRIL JESSOP

The Back Page

Icelandic Celebration 1925

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