

# ICELANDIC CONNECTION



ISSN #1920-423X

*Vol. 67 #1 (2015)*



96<sup>TH</sup> ICELANDIC NATIONAL LEAGUE OF NORTH AMERICA CONVENTION  
HILTON MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL AIRPORT MALL OF AMERICA HOTEL

## Icelandic Connections: The Sagas Continue

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# ICELANDIC CONNECTION

VOLUME 67, NO 1 (2015) • WINNIPEG, CANADA

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# ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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

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## SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

Typed submissions of articles, book reviews, short stories and poetry are welcome.  
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*The views expressed in all contributions which appear in the Icelandic Connection are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the publisher or editorial committee.*

**Printed in Winnipeg, Canada by Dycom Direct Mail and Lögberg–Heimskringla**  
**ISSN: 1920–423X**

# ON THE COVER



PHOTO: LENNARD BRYDON

Arden Jackson and vínarterta at Iceland Affair, Norfolk, Connecticut.  
Vínarterta: Made with pure Icelandic extract and pioneering spirit.

# Editorial

## Vínarterta Making: a Dying Art?

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by Lisa Sigurgeirson-Maxx

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For many *vesturíslendingar* (Western Icelanders) *vínarterta* is an almost tangible proof of our heritage. The familiarity of it is strong enough to be associated directly with that which defines us as “being Icelandic.” Certainly Christmas is just not Christmas for many families of Icelandic descent without this favourite cultural food that traveled to North America with our forbearers over one hundred years ago.

Those early Icelandic settlers were not leaving their country, or so they understood and had been told. They were said to be expanding the borders of the old country to this new land across the sea where life, it was promised, would be easier and more prosperous than those harsh years had been in nineteenth century Iceland. Many of the early emigrants - those who made the voyage in the late 1800's and early 1900's - were, after all, not moving to Canada, *per se*, but rather to the vast territory of unsettled land north of Winnipeg, then known as New Iceland. And so, with them came the defining ways of life of their homeland; their language, their beliefs, their customs. Traditional foods are one of the strongest holds of a cultural heritage that differentiate the peoples of the world. Among the foods that immigrated to the North American continent are such Icelandic delicacies as *rúllupýlsa*, *lifrarpylsa*, *pönnukökur*, *kleinur* and, this season's favourite, *vínarterta*.

The women of those early years were of a stoic and hardy breed. Living the life of early settlers in abject poverty and stark pioneering conditions, it is incredible that anything survived. It is a testament to them that foods from the homeland are still savoured and enjoyed generations later. But perhaps it was partly due to those very foods, to their familiar tastes and to the tradition that created them, that kept those women going through the long, dark, and bitterly frozen months of the North American prairie winters.

Tradition, The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary says is “the act of transmitting or handing down... from one to another, or from generation to generation; transmission of ... customs... esp. by word of mouth, or by practice...” Tradition is a thread that weaves together our past and our future, through lifetimes of customs, practices and knowledge; handed down from one to the next; creating what, in any given time, will become cherished memories, treasured traditions themselves.

Enter *vínarterta*; a veritable symbol of Icelandic Canadian/American ethnicity. *Vínarterta*, baked and served as a Christmas and special occasion cake is a most highly cherished tradition, although somewhat oddly, not one still practiced regularly in Iceland today. History has it that *vínarterta* had been in vogue in Iceland in the late

1800s. So, as traditions are wont to do, it came to the new land to be passed down from one generation to the next; many of us, like myself, learning the art of vinarterta-making from our own beloved ammas.

Although the Icelandic language in North America has seen much decline as with each generation we move further into the multi-cultural life of our modern day world; and although our surnames all end with “son” – with one “s” instead of two – and none end with “dóttir;” it is evident that vinarterta has held stoically to its deeply ethnic-rooted ground. The question is can it hold fast still?

Some of my personal most beloved memories are of myself as a young girl, sitting with my amma at her kitchen table, a pot of slimy, stewed prunes between us, armed, we two, with paring knives and stories to tell; we’d sit, she and I, and despite the prunes, sucking the sweet pits clean. We’d stir and then roll and lift and cut and pinch the dough into perfect thinness, perfect dimension; we’d lay each hot, brittle, cooked layer on the sill on the back porch to cool faster; and then we’d lay the layers down and smear on the black, sticky filling, and build our prize – this year’s vinarterta. A completed work of art; its creation the more precious for having been shared.

One of my greatest joys has become to pass on this complex and time-consuming creation with the little ones in my life; first I did so with

my daughter as she grew, and I continue to do so each year with the children at my table; now with the ones who call me amma. How many of us still hold the memories so dear, still take the time in this busy, chaotic world, to pass it on, this treasured tradition?

For me it is not only a joy to create and re-create the art and craft of vinarterta-building, but it is in my blood and in my bones that I must continue to do so. It is like a sacred creed was signed, a precious pact made back then with my own amma, at her table, as the dusk was settling around us, all those years ago. And so it is to this end that I have written and photographically illustrated a how-to recipe book entitled *Making Vinarterta with Amma* to pass on to those that come after me. I say yes, Vinarterta, hold fast. Maintain your grip. Dig ever deeper your roots of heritage. If I have anything to do with it the only dying that the precious and delicious vinarterta will experience will be at the mouths of hungry children.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA SIGURGEIRSON-MAXX

Lisa’s niece and grandsons making vinarterta

# Vikings, Vestur Íslendingar and Vínarterta – Celebrating Striving and Thriving

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by Arden Jackson

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At the site of the festival, with everything put away in the little white house that was to be home, I wondered at how a striped Icelandic cake had brought me here. Is it true that what we eat becomes us? Are we millennia old traditions of

‘nothing wasted’ parts of smoked, cured, salted, dried and brined lamb and fish? Are we flowing milk, butter, skyr, cheese and whey? Are we gathered birds, eggs, moss, grass, berries and fruit? Are we Harðfiskur, Rúllupylsa and Pönnukökur? Are we, our



PHOTO: ARDEN JACKSON

Reconstructed Turf House, L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site, Newfoundland



cultural rituals and recipes? And mostly, are we *Vínarterta*?

For the second year, I prepared a little of who we are in the form of *Nýja Ísland Forréttir* (New Iceland Appetizers) and *Vínarterta* for Visitors, Viking Re-enactors, and other Chefs at the Westward Viking Festival 'A Real Taste of Vinland' Gala Showcase at L'Anse aux Meadows, National and UNESCO World Historic Site. The Parks Canada truck that delivered me had slowed only for moose as it rolled over the ancient terrain of the Viking Trail on the Great Northern Peninsula from Deer Lake Airport, through Gros Morne National Park and up to L'Anse aux Meadows. It was weighed down with 125 kg of *Vínarterta*, Lamb, Icelandic Salmon, Smoked Trout, fresh breads, sauces, garnishes, gear, and the wooden dragon I had packed.

Newfoundland is stunningly beautiful and appropriate for a Norse culinary adventure. When I arrived at L'Anse aux Meadows a low lying mist blanketed the

sparsely settled boreal landscape of Vinland and on the unexpectedly still water of the North Atlantic the fishing boats were asleep in the warm dusk. The turf houses of the reconstructed Norse village on the National Historic Site in the distance were just visible in the shrubby rounded mounds of rock and grassy meadows all around. A deep happiness awakened in me as I thought of *Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir* and imagined her walking up the sandy beach to her outpost home after days on the water in her lapstrake ship.

*Guðríður* was the first European to give birth in the country they called Vinland as told in 'The Saga of the Greenlanders.' I thought of my ancestral connection to her and the Icelanders who had initiated long voyages over 1000 years ago, and significantly again in 1875, to secure happiness, health and success for themselves and family. The trail to this place for me was marked and sustained by a long line of loving nurturing courageous and tenacious women and men intent on



PHOTO: ARDEN JACKSON

View from Beach the Reconstructed Turf House, L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site, Newfoundland



PHOTO: ERIN MCKEE

**Arden and vinarterta at Westward Viking Festival ‘Taste of Vinland Gala Showcase’,  
Visitor Centre, L’Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site, Newfoundland**

making home places more abundant for their family. More and more it feels perfectly natural for me to connect in a multi-sensory way with methods for sustaining the body and soul of the Icelandic heart with curiosity and exploration of food, culture and design of things then and now and taking the best to move forward.

As I imagined Guðriður, I embraced the thought of all the Ammas that came before us. I considered what choices and actions were critical to create a core of wellbeing as a place to fall back on for themselves and their families during crisis and in times of love. I think a sense of peace and a calm knowledge in the soul is a key to surviving great difficulties without being shaken. So they must have had

that. Intention to prevail and thrive and unflinchingly making the best of everything in every way with inventiveness, resilience, adaptability and creativity was critical. So they must have had that. An attitude of self-confidence applied with practiced thought and action can create a space for living authentically, consciously, respectfully and loving unconditionally. So they must have had that, and healthy, body strengthening nutrition, too. They must have known how to achieve that, even in the most meagre conditions.

In Viking Age Iceland and Greenland it seems that feast and famine were balanced by well planned and executed farming, fishing, conservation and preservation. In the following millennium

in Iceland and settlement times in North America the story was the same. When our ancestral mothers arrived at newly found remote places at the harsh edges of a new land, either in Vínland, or Nýja Ísland, I think their core wellbeing mindset would have had them taking flight with the opportunities. Bountiful fish, wildlife, timber and resources meant great food, functional shelter, a place of sustenance, healing, and repair. As well, they could see it as a place of joy, birth and community. There would be significant challenges, however, there was a real possibility of obtaining good ingredients for a healthy life. More, I think that heart centred living, adventure, discovery, celebration and stellar

accomplishment were absolutely inevitable for Viking Age people, Icelandic Pioneers and their descendants. When I consider our history, I am convinced that we are hardwired for success. And, that having and achieving all these things is as simple or as complicated as we make it in terms of the choices we make, and the persistent action we take.

The lessons I learned in my own Amma's kitchen far exceed the making of food for her husband Alli Sigvaldason, a fisherman on Lake Winnipeg, nine children, spouses, twenty grandchildren, relatives and friends. Likely the same lessons were taught to earlier generations in a similar way through disciplined



PHOTO: ERIN MCKEE

Arden with Assistant Mitch Hobbs and Traditional Icelandic Food at Westward Viking Festival 'Taste of Vinland Gala Showcase' at Visitor Centre, L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site

thought and deed, not so much in words. I am grateful for the awareness of the life that shone through my Amma and the knowledge of the difficult and demanding relentless disciplined effort required. Anna Eastman seemed nourished by an indomitable spirit, steadfast values, ethics, and an exceptionally positive attitude of comfort, quiet, refined, simple, sure, unintimidating knowledge and sense of being, and love. I imagine Guðríður with the same attitude of living by her own chosen standards and being respected whether on the sea or in the turf house. I'm sure that the pioneer lives of langammas in the wooden shanties demanded command of both practical and miraculous methods to survive. I think of the women of each of these generations; the Viking, the Pioneer and the Vestur Íslendingar and how little changed over a thousand years.

The culinary mission that holds me is Vínarterta. It embodies the stories of these great people from a position of love and possibility, and yet it is more than that. Vínarterta is a way, a method, and a celebration of living. I believe it is important to explore, learn, share and protect significant historical treasures and resources that sustained often starving Icelandic people for centuries. In stark contrast to the wastefulness and excesses of today, perhaps the simplicity, healthfulness, and wisdom of traditional Icelandic food processes are ideas worth following. Not only were our ancestors mothering, nurturing and feeding, I believe they were visionaries who had the audacity to believe they could get to where ever they chose to go, even North America. As change makers they infused everything they were doing with a sense of purpose, a deep compassion and commitment to serve and to transform the direction of strife to one of striving.

Culture, it seems, determines what,

when, how and with whom we eat and is also influenced by the many effects of other things. The rituals and processes around eating for sustenance, health, comfort, celebration, holidays, and even for the creation of art and experience are connected strongly to the land and the spirit world. What is available to us is historic mastery of making the best of everything in brilliant and special ways in tough times. Our generation now expands in awareness of making, enjoying and sharing traditional Icelandic food and contemporary interpretations. Like a culinary tourist, I am intrigued to find out things, see, taste and make discoveries and be moved with ideas through connection with the artifacts, the stories and recipes.

After the Westward Viking Festival was over, I looked out across the ocean towards Iceland from the site of the turf house, and realized that I knew how a striped Icelandic cake had brought me there. I recalled what I had learned from my Amma. I felt her with me, and remembered how her kindness and wisdom was always clear and energized by her whole being, and I heard her. Maybe I heard Guðríður also.

*I am here, Elskan mín. I am always here for you. You are made of me, and all of this that you can see and what you cannot see. The air that breaths you, the land that nourishes you, and the water that carries and connects everything is created and flows as you and blesses you. You arrived here with ever-present infinite and expanding love, as we all do, as your birthright. You already have everything you need. More than anything, I share the pure love and pioneering spirit that was given to me so that you may always remember your legacy and your destiny. In contrast to the flesh and the blood that you are, refined and storied unique deliciousness is you.*

*I am a dreamer. I dream, believe, trust*

*and have faith that I will achieve all I desire in health, love and success. I am a risk taker and strike out on new paths rather than worn ones. I find new places and try something new for even better rewards. My way might be lost from time to time, and then I remember where I came from. My heart keeps bringing me back on course with new opportunities. I am disciplined and confident. There are no short cuts. I rise early and work hard in the direction of my goals. I learn the hard lessons so I don't repeat them and teach others along the way. I am giving and forgiving. I give what I wish to receive more of and then give some more. I share my talents and unique gifts with people where ever I go. I look for success, not perfection. I forgive myself and forgive others. I am grateful. I begin with gratitude and practical action infused with appreciation, creative expression and love. I am present. I see beauty, wonder and feel peace, happiness, and contentment in my heart knowing it is always there, and can never run out. I am loved, lovable and loving. I create loving family, friendships and partnerships to celebrate the great life forged by contrasting gentleness and strength, beauty and practicality, resilient and unwavering character.*

Yes, I am what I eat. I am millennia old traditions of 'nothing wasted' parts of smoked, cured, salted, dried and brined lamb and fish. I am flowing milk, butter, skyr, cheese and whey. I am gathered birds, eggs, moss, grass, berries and fruit. I am Harðfiskur, Rúllupylsa and Pönnukökur. And mostly, I am Vínarterta.

\* \* \*

About Vínland, from the Parks Canada Website:

<http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/nl/meadows/natcul/saga.aspx>

To the Norse of the last millennia, Vínland was a country, not a place. L'Anse aux Meadows was the entry point to an area

thought to stretch to New Brunswick and down the St. Lawrence River. The legends from the Sagas tell of Leif Eiríksson's and other voyagers' explorations of this area and the actual locations have been the subject of much debate. In 1961 the Norwegian Archeologist Anne-Stine and Helge Ingstad excavated mounds shown to them by fisherman George Decker and found absolute evidence that the Vikings had settled in North America 500 years before Columbus.

The remains of turf walls for eight buildings from the 11th century and one exactly the same layout as Eiríksson's house in Greenland, is what the turf houses at L'Anse aux Meadows are based on. Also found was a soapstone spindle whorl, once used as the flywheel of a handheld spindle, a ringed cloak pin, a bone pin, a whetstone, used to sharpen needles and small scissors, was found near the spindle whorl. It would have also been part of a woman's kit. Iron boat nails and rivets, worked wood and other objects were found. There was evidence of iron-smelting and forging, and hearth charcoal is dated to A.D. 1000. The style and construction of the longhouses and outbuildings are identical to 11th century Iceland and Greenland. The artifacts indicated weaving and iron-working, activities which were not practiced by Native Americans until after A.D. 1500. These finds confirm L'Anse aux Meadows as the earliest European settlement yet known in North America. This was certainly part of Leif Eiríksson's Vínland that may have stretched down the Gulf of St. Lawrence. A non-native beech nut and worked butternut from trees only found further south along the coast and lack of evidence of long term settlement point to this site as a base camp. It was declared a National Historic Site in 1968 and a World Heritage Site in 1978.

# The Yule Lads

---

by Ken Barr

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Living in caves out of town,  
They wait all year for their chance,  
For mischief in December,  
To dance their holiday dance.

The thirteen sons of Grýla,  
Their father Leppalúði,  
Each yuletide season they come,  
For mischief, wait and you'll see.

Each one is so different,  
In at the antics that they choose,  
But they're brothers after all,  
Each one with nothing to lose.

So starting December twelfth,  
They come to town one by one,  
Each day brings another lad,  
As they come to have their fun.

The first of them was Sheep-Cote,  
With legs as stiff as wood,  
He wanted the farmer's sheep,  
Their milk was very good.

He tired to milk the ewes,  
But couldn't in the end,  
His knees were much to stiff,  
He could not make them bend.

Second there came Gully Imp,  
A crafty little elf,  
He would sneak into the barn,  
And steal the milk for himself.



He would hide among the stalls,  
And give the cows a quick wink,  
Before he stole the milk pail,  
Faster than you think.

The third brother was Stubby,  
A short and stout little man,  
He loved to eat the scrapings,  
From the bottom of a pan.

Slipping pans into his pouch,  
Whenever he was able,  
He'd eat the burnt bits in them,  
At his own dinner table.

Spoon Licker, the forth brother,  
So thin and always hungry,  
Would lick the spoons while cooking,  
Which made the good chef angry.

Sneaking into the kitchen,  
He would pull the cooking spoon,  
From the meal upon the stove,  
And he'd lick it much too soon.

The fifth brother Pot Scraper,  
He loved to eat the scrapings,  
That were cooked into the pots,  
The ones that he was stealing.

He'd sneak into the houses,  
Thinking himself so clever,  
And off he'd run with the pots,  
To feast upon his treasure.



Bowl Licker the sixth brother,  
We would always lick the bowl,  
That was placed upon the floor,  
Getting it was his main goal.

He would lick every bowl clean,  
That was meant for the dog or cat,  
And then he'd laugh to himself,  
And say, "how do you like that".

Seventh brother Door Slammer,  
Such an angry little man,  
When people home were sleeping,  
He'd be as loud as he can.

Slamming doors and making noise,  
Not a very good house guest,  
With all of his door slamming,  
No one home could get much rest.

Skyrgámur the eighth brother,  
Would steal into the houses,  
And gobble up their yogurt,  
Milk, cream, skyr and cheeses.

He'd eat all that he could find,  
Too much food for one alone,  
Still he ate until it hurt,  
Then he'd start to howl and groan.

Sausage Swiper was the ninth,  
A crafty little raider,  
Hiding in the house rafters,  
Waiting to steal his dinner.

From his perch on high watching,  
The cooking of the nightly meal,  
Swiping sausage when he could,  
And waiting for more to steal.

And tenth was Window Peeper,  
Always peeking through the glass,  
Looking for things he could steal,  
There was nothing he would pass.



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He's always on the look out,  
For treasures that he can steal,  
He's always got his eyes out.  
For valuables so real.



Door Sniffer was eleventh,  
Always looking for lace bread,  
He could smell it from so far,  
Or sniffing for cakes instead.

With a nose as large as his,  
He could smell lace bread for miles,  
No ones food was safe from him,  
He had his crafty wiles.

Ketkrókur the twelfth brother,  
Many skills he would display,  
Stealing meat with his long hook,  
Eating on St. Thorlak's Day.

Standing upon the chimneys,  
Stealing many legs of lamb,  
While using his long meat hook,  
Saying, This is who I am.

Thirteenth was Candle Beggar,  
A cold and lonely young elf,  
Following children begging,  
For candles to have himself.

The brightest lights he could find,  
So special for Christmas Eve,  
To have a candle so bright,  
A miracle to believe.

The last brother arrives on,  
December twenty fourth, so,  
Having all of their fun,  
The brothers prepare to go.

With the holidays over,  
One by one they return home,  
And dream about next season,  
When they make their Christmas  
room.

**Ken Barr**  
**December 22, 2013**



This is taken from a new book by Ken Barr who gave us permission to use it. He has reintroduced the Jolasveinarnir through the eyes of an outsider and confesses that he has modernized them. His book is available through Amazon entitled *Jolasveinarnir, The Yule Lads and Their Family*.  
ISBN 9781499277678



# The Sounds Of Snowflakes

Written and Illustrated by Vala Ingolfsson



Aaron could hear the snowflakes. Past the downy comfort of the quilt covering his cheek, the snowflakes made their cold, crisp music, as they always had. The snowflakes had a special sound. They sounded like miniscule glockenspiels crafted from ice. They sang their twinkling songs as they brushed against the frosted window.

A different noise pulled him away from the glass. This noise was soft and warm, not crisp and clean, like the snowflakes. This noise smelled like butter and chocolate. “Jack Frost nipping at your nose...” Aaron floated to his doorway to better hear his mother’s soft voice. She was singing her favorite carol, the funny one about the boy who painted on frosty windowpanes.



The boy tiptoed across the carpeted floor, towards the cold resonance of the window. He liked to be as quiet as he could be when the snowflakes were singing. Aaron pressed his ear against the frosty glass. He stayed there for many long moments, in silent serenity, until a

“Today is a special day!” The mother scooped up her small son, folding him in a warm embrace. “Why is today special, Mother?” Aaron looked blankly up at her. “You shall see.” Aaron could hear her smiling, he liked when he could hear her smiles. Mother set Aaron down, and took

him by the hand, leading him gracefully to a place that smelled like pine needles, a place filled with gentle wordless carols.

Mother told the boy to sit down. Aaron did as he was told, and soon, he felt something small and rectangular being pressed into his lap. He ran his hand over it. The box was smooth and glossy, with a large rise on top. Mother told him that the rise was a ribbon. Aaron pulled the box to his face. It smelled like the shops, like peppermint and chocolate and bread and meats all at the same time. Mother told him to open it. He ran his fingers along the box until he found a small crease. From there, he carefully peeled away the smooth paper and the puffy ribbon. Aaron liked the way the box felt, so he was very careful not to tear the glossy paper. What was under the paper felt dry and hard. He pulled away two flaps where the ribbon used to be. The

boy reached into the now open box, and felt something scratchy and bumpy. It was folded in a very careful manner. Aaron held the wooly fabric against his face. It smelled musty and animal-like, and it felt slightly oily in his hands.

Mother took them gently from his hands, and pushed them softly onto his bare feet. "They're socks." She sat up, and watched her son feel his feet curiously. "I thought you would like to feel the wool." Aaron reached up tentatively, and carefully wrapped his hands around his mother's neck. "Thank you." He murmured. Mother handed him the wrapping paper that had been covering the box. "Would you like to listen?" She asked. Aaron nodded, and held the paper close to his ear. A smile broke across his rosy face as he crumpled the paper.

It sounds like snowflakes.



# Shedding Light on the Winter Solstice

---

by Signy McInnis

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The light of the moon sparkles on the crisp white snow. Wonderful blues, reds, greens, yellows, and whites of lights are displayed around the neighbourhoods. December 21st is that day of the year of the least daylight hours, also a time when cold temperatures reign, at least here in our part of the Northern Hemisphere. Garlands, stars and snowflakes are lit up in windows, lights adorn the houses, and yard ornaments are sometimes lit by flood lights. The northern lights chance to show themselves on winter nights, and the stars seem to shine brighter, dancing over new-fallen, sparkling snow.

It is the winter solstice; the shortest day / longest night of the year. A time to celebrate the coming of longer days, to bring the sunlight back into what has already been and will still be, a cold dark winter time. In northern Europe, the sun hardly rises in the winter, so for the many millennia that humans have inhabited that part of the world, the Nordic people have lit fires to remind the sun to come back again. They called this time of the year Yule and other variations of that word are still in use for the Christmas season of celebration. For instance the Swedish, Norwegian and Danish word *jul* and the Icelandic word, *jól*. Still today, Yule is the

common word used by the Highland Scots for this winter celebration. Yule was an important time of celebration among these Germanic, Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Nordic groups. Christian priests set the myth of the birth of the Christ child at the mid-winter point in order to maintain the practice of this popular celebration. In fact, there is no astronomical or historical



PHOTO: SIGNÝ MCINNIS

Winter Solstice blaze at my uncle's farm

basis what-so-ever that the Christ child was born in December under a magical star of the East.

In an *ásatrú* celebration, the practice of revering and respecting the ancient gods of the Nordic people, one of the key factors of celebrating this time of year is to give something back to the earth. The winter solstice sacrifice needs to be of something the earth has provided, such as some mead, meat or grain. The Nordic people always gave something back to the gods who had gotten them through this far, and would then help get them through

the rest of the winter. These celebrations were observed in homes decorated with boughs of evergreens and with feasts, drinking and partying. The seasons of growing crops and livestock, making mead and preparing food for the larder were over and the time had come to settle indoors for the long winter. There was not much else to do but tend the fires and spend the long hours of darkness together entertaining one another by telling and re-telling the stories of the heavens, the netherworld and middle earth. They recited the story of how mankind had come to exist and

how the gods played their part in the lives of the people. They told stories of love and adventure, bravery and treachery and all those things that gods and giants and humans do to one another.

The importance of celebrating Yule is in the hopefulness that we would survive another winter as our people had done countless cycles before us. Most certainly, the act of celebrating brings people together to look forward to warmer days ahead.

More recent celebrations of the solstice include festivals of lights, held all over the world. Some places light the skies with fireworks, some light their homes and towns with strings of lights. Some still have a more traditional celebration, with a feast complete with wine and beer, and often a bonfire



PHOTO: ELVA SIMUNDSSON

My cousins and I enjoying the bonfire heat on a -30° Winter Solstice night

with family and friends. Many of our current so-called Christmas and New Year's Eve traditions are an extension of the Yule celebration. We still decorate our homes with evergreens; we light lights and enjoy special meals of good food with the good company of friends and family.

Here in Manitoba, my family, in the rural community of Geysir near Arborg, gathers together. Last year we gathered at the family homestead where my uncle still lives. Out on the farm, they had assembled an old flax-straw bale and some scrap wood and threw it in a pile. With the application of a propane torch, the pile went up in a great flame. The negative double digit Manitoba temperatures didn't stop this crew from enjoying the warmth of the bonfire and excellent special effects of the flax straw sparks.

The two years previous, we were not celebrating at the farm, so we opted for family pizza gatherings instead. The first of the two was held in Winnipeg. At the end of the evening we realized we had neglected to 'sacrifice' something back to the earth. We were discussing this on the way home and we agreed that we'd have to spill a beer when we got back. I can only guess the Nordic god Óðinn was not pleased with us and our careless disregard for the required observances. He intervened in his own way and we struck a deer on the highway on the ride back to Gimli. A bit of blood was spilled during our unfortunate accident. Further sacrifices needed to be made to pay the damage repairs. We had been taught our lesson!

The following year's family solstice pizza party was held at Brennivín's Pizza Hus in Gimli, and you can be darn sure we remembered to share some drink back to the earth following our group dinner. We were not keen on having a repeat of the previous year's accident if we could help it.

This year, we intend to go back to the fire, probably blast some fireworks and celebrate the solstice, hoping that the light of the fire and the lights of the season will encourage the sun not to forget that the time has come for it to change its course and begin to lengthen our daylight hours. There are no guarantees that this will happen on its own, so we should certainly do what we can to ensure that the sun is reminded of its duties. We can all help. Light candles, hang Yule lights and gather together with family and friends during the Yule season for food and drinks. Our people have been doing it for many centuries and it's always worked so far. As for my family, we are looking forward warmer and brighter months to come. We will gather again in March to celebrate the equinox, the coming of spring and marking an end to winter.


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# Christmas At Our House

by Norma Guttormsson

*"Bells on bobtail ring  
Making spareribs bright  
What fun it is to ride and sing  
A sleighing song tonight..."*



Spirits were not familiar to Ellen, our eight-year old daughter, but her version of *Jingle*

*Bells* meant something special to her. She thought for sure this song was about one of her favourite meals. Another favourite thing for her was making new Christmas cards from old ones. Spread over the table in the nook was everything she needed for her creations – cards, paper, crayons, scissors, glue, stickers – while she sang along to a cassette tape.

Christmas at our house (at right) holds a variety of memories depending on what was also happening in the family. In 1971, we found out that another baby would arrive next summer. Ellen and I were positive that she would have a sister, but our surprise turned out to be another brother. I had to tell her that we'll have to think of a boy's name now. From then on, life was increasingly busy and I chose to work at home as the solution to finding childcare. The dining room was turned into a play room. Now there were four children and being flexible was the only way to keep the word 'Merry' in the traditional Christmas greeting.

We had three ways of acquiring a tree - we could climb the hill behind our

house on a two-acre property to cut down one of our own, select a perfectly pruned spruce from a tree farm or choose a fir at a local lot. The year we decided to bring home a very tall tree was also the year we acquired a new kitten. But this kitty-cat had been born in a flower bed in a friend's backyard. A stray mother, great with child, had settled among the bushes and gave forth a thriving litter. When the kittens were ready to leave the nest, we weren't really prepared for an outdoor cat to settle indoors. Purdy was used to leaping and climbing bushes and trees. Although we welcomed him to our home, he was often found at the top of the eight-foot tree - or climbing up the draperies - or plucking the strings of the grand piano! Bill, the oldest brother, was trying to 'tame' our new pet, but finally tied the tree to the wall to prevent it from toppling over one more time.

One year, Christmas Day crept up on us so quickly and we still hadn't picked out a tree. David, of Scottish heritage, was a schoolteacher and the month of December was always overwhelming with classes, exams and marking. By that time when our youngest son Niel was five, I owned a 'book and gift' shop which was thriving during the busiest month of the year. There were also piano students who came to our home for lessons. Some years, the tree was set up in the rumpus room where they waited, and other years, in the living room - but we could

manage only one tree. And we could also manage one string of lights on the roof. That special day was coming closer and we realized that popping up a tree on the 23rd for what I called an ‘instant Xmas’ wouldn’t be meaningful. So I brought home a Nativity Scene from my store and displayed it on the raised hearth. All the gifts were placed there and Christmas morning still brought the same thrill. But I recall lying awake at bedtime and asking myself, “What kind of a mother am I?”

When we decorated a tree as a customary family event, thankfully, the children were able to help out. But the usual problem of wrapping gifts loomed ahead when David and I would be facing another very late night on Christmas Eve, possibly until two in the morning. Realizing that the children would be getting up in just four more hours to

discover what Santa had brought – we came to our senses! The weeks before Christmas were always so exciting; it was almost more than what the children could live through. They had poured over the Christmas catalogues for weeks, making their lists and cutting out pictures to add a lasting impression. That year, I gave them something else to do besides making their own cards. Each one was given a very large shopping bag of white heavy paper. Gathered in the nook with all the usual supplies, they decorated their bag with creative scenes and clearly printed their names on top. Then on Christmas Eve, all we had to do was to sort the presents still in the wrappings from the stores and simply put them into the decorated shopping bags. They were placed under the adorning tree ready for the early Christmas morn. And the best



PHOTO: NORMA GUTTORMSSON

5751 Hammond Bay Road Nanaimo on Vancouver Island, BC

part...? – getting off to bed by midnight! However, as I laid awake again, I asked myself that familiar question, “What kind of a mother am I?”

Living at the coast, we didn't expect to have snow for Christmas, but we could decorate with cedar boughs and holly from our own hedges. When we were blessed with the fluffy white stuff, we considered it one of the best presents as the children could play outdoors and have fun tobogganing down our hill. Both David and I grew up on the prairies, so we knew how to skate. Raining or not, everyone could lace up and enjoy the 'Family Skate' at the arena followed by hot chocolate and munching on the gingerbread house. After many years of Yuletide celebrations, if I am asked about family traditions, I reply that we always had a wreath on the front door, a party on Christmas Eve, a turkey on Christmas Day - and the children shopped for new pyjamas. If they were taking part in the Nativity Scene at school or at our neighbourhood church, they would also get a bathrobe. It worked really slick if your role was one of the many shepherds, or especially, if you had been chosen to be Joseph or one of the Three Kings. A towel carefully tied on top of your head completed the costume. When Bill was in kindergarten, he didn't want to be a shepherd, so he asked his teacher if he could be in the stable. We thought he wanted to be closer to the manger as he had a baby brother at home. She thought it would be fine to include a bull! The costume was a bit of a challenge.

Another year, after we had gone shopping for nightwear, the children were sitting in the living room watching TV while I went off to the kitchen to

prepare our supper. They were also still admiring their purchases. Standing at the sink with water pouring from the tap, I heard, “Sex act! Sex act!” Immediately, I marched directly to the living room and lunged toward the television to turn it off! Feeling relieved, as a responsible mother, I knew my children wouldn't be exposed to anything obscene. Then I spun around and returned to the kitchen to continue peeling the potatoes. All of a sudden, I heard Joel who was five, calling out with his new pyjamas held up high.

“Mommy, Mommy, I'm a big boy now. My jammies are 6X!”

“Oh! ... Oh!! ... That's wonderful, dear, I replied calmly. You **are** a big boy!” Leading him back to the living room, I added, “Let's finish watching your program.”

Ellen, now 12 years old, was relaxed on the sofa reading her Nancy Drew Mystery. She looked up completely bewildered wondering what that was all about. Again, need I ask myself the proverbial question...?

Christmas Eve was magical with the sparkle of the lights and decorations. Glowing candles and flames in the fireplace added wonderful warmth to our party. First, we got dressed in 'our best' and attended the church service. Then at home again, it was so much fun for the children to enjoy vinartern, pop and treats - watch a special program - play games - stay up later - and open one present. When it was time for bed, I can still recall the thrill on their faces as they were tucked in awaiting the arrival of Santa Claus. Góða nótt elskan.

“Merry Christmas to all and to all a good-night.”



# Kaillie Humphries Gets Her Wish

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by Gail Halldorson

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Sigrid Stefanson wrote recently about two-time Olympic gold medalist Kaillie Humphries' remarkable achievement in women's bobsled. Kaillie has now succeeded in persuading the International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation (FIBT) to allow mixed gender teams in the four-man bobsled event. FIBT President, Ivo Ferriani, announced the executive committee's decision saying "I strongly believe women can drive a four-man and be competitive. For us, it's the natural evolution of our sport." Previously, women had only been allowed to race the smaller sleds built for two. "It's a dream come true," said Kaillie "It's so exciting. I feel the exact same way as when I won gold."

Kaillie has been asking for equality in

a sport that has not really been progressive in its views, for instance, in the late 1990s, women were handed boxes of laundry detergent as World Cup prizes. And about 10 years ago, when Kaillie started bobsled racing, women were not allowed in the start house in St. Moritz, Switzerland. They were outside in the cold, in tents.

This decision will allow Kaillie, and women bobsledders all over the world, to try for a spot on the men's four-man bobsled teams. Humphries says, "I still have to go through selection races like everyone else, so it's not a given. I still have to prove myself."

A four-man bobsled team is made up of three brakemen and one pilot. Size and strength give men the advantage as brakemen. Women will compete with men



PHOTO FROM THE COLLECTION OF RAY SIMUNDSON

for the pilot position. A good pilot can make up time down the track. American bobsledder, Steve Holcomb, has likened a two-man bobsled to a sports car and a four-man sled to a school bus.

With the season starting in six weeks, this development is a mixed blessing says Bobsleigh Canada Skeleton (BCS) CEO, Don Wilson. "We know Kaillie is very interested in doing it, we just have to figure out how we can make this happen." After the usual qualification route, Kaillie and American pilot Elana Meyers Taylor, who is also keen to drive a four-man sled, will have to show they can safely finish five races on three tracks on the lower-tier circuit. Then they can move up to the World Cup level. Kaillie wants to pilot a four-man sled at America Cup races in Utah and Calgary in November, then at the first World Cup event in December. Mixed teams could compete in the 2018 Olympics in South Korea. Ferriani cautions it is "too soon to create too much speculation."

Kaillie sees the mixed-gender team as a step toward getting a women's four-man event. "For now, this bridges the gap."

*Thanks to: Sharon Halldorson who edited this article and made suggestions.*

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### Editors note:

Kaillie Humphries has received the very prestigious Lou Marsh Trophy.

This is awarded annually to Canada's top athlete as selected by representatives of one of the country's leading news organizations. Other candidates were Eugenie Bouchard (tennis), Milos Raonic (tennis), Drew Doughty (Hockey defenseman) and Johnny Powless (lacrosse). Humphries piloted a crew of herself and three male athletes in five races this season to qualify for the World Cup circuit.

# The Evil Wights Of Holy Eve

Reprinted from the Icelandic Canadian Volume 31 Number 2

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Translated by Caroline Gunnarson

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In olden days the road to church was long and strewn with hazards for the farm folk of sparsely populated Iceland. Yet the faithful braved all obstacles, though according to ancient folklore, many of them were brought about by supernatural powers with evil intent.

Of special importance was evensong on the Holy Eve of Christmas. Every soul in the household eagerly looked forward to this service, yet one must always be left at home to guard the house. To survive the lonely watch on Christmas Eve with one's life and reason intact was a great and unusual feat, for all sorts of beings came out of the stones, the hills and the mountains to harass the person who sat out the Holy Night alone. Elfin visitors would take over the house, decorate it with gold, silver, lights and garlands, and stage their Christmas ball in it, the dancers decked out in silks, velvets and precious gems. If the watcher stayed calm and reasonable till day break, the visitors sometimes had to flee, leaving all these treasures behind. But more often, the pious found the one they had left behind stark mad on their return from church.

Night trolls were often abroad, too, on

Christmas Eve. Though other Nordics are short of stature and stocky, those native to Iceland are of gigantic proportions, ravenous eaters and fond of human flesh, if they happen to be the barbarous and evil types. Good or evil, they seem to have an eye the daintier type of feminine beauty seen in normal humans, and have been known to resort to many kinds of sorcery in their romantic forays into human communities.

The night troll has the unique weakness of not being able to survive the light of the day. It must go about its business at night and retreat to its own habitat before daybreak. If it gets caught by the first rays of the sun at daybreak, it turns to stone.

Many of Iceland's great rocks and boulders, even high, steep mountains started out as night trolls who failed to get the job done, forgot themselves in their eagerness and were caught by the rising sun.

*The story translated here is taken from "Tröllasögur, Orval", an anthology from a collection of legends about trolls by the eminent collector of Icelandic folk tales, by the late Jón Arnason.*

# The Night Troll

Reprinted from the Icelandic Canadian Volume 31 Number 2

It happened on one farm, that whoever watched over the house while the others attended evensong on Christmas night, was found the next morning either dead or mad. This was a worry to the household, and few willing to stay home on Christmas night. One Holy Eve, a young woman offered to watch over the house, to the relief of all the others, who then set off for church and left her alone, The girl sat in the living room and crooned to a child she held in her lap.

During the night she heard a voice at the window:

Fair is your hand,  
My swift one, my sharp one,  
Dilli-dilli-do.

She replied:

It never dipped in dirt,  
My devil, you're evil  
Korri-korri-ro.

The voice at the window:

Lovely is your eye,  
My swift one, my sharp one,  
Dilli-dilli-do.

She replied:

It never looked on evil,  
My devil, you're evil,  
Korri-korri-ro.

The voice at the window:

Dainty is your foot,  
My swift one, my sharp one,  
Dilli-dilli-do.

She replied:

It never trod in dirt,  
My devil, you're evil,  
Korri-korri-ro.

The voice at the window:

Day dawns in the east,  
My swift one, my sharp one,  
Dilli-dilli-do.

The girl replied:

Stand alone and turn to stone,  
But do no harm to anyone.  
Korri-korri-do.

With that the evil wight fell from the window, but when the people returned from church the next morning, a huge rock stood in their path, and there it stands to this day, The young woman related all she heard during her lonely watch, She had seen nothing, for she never glanced toward voice, and the wight at the window had been a night troll.

# The Icelandic Settlement of Hekkla

*Reprinted with permission from Sideroads magazine*

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by Marilyn Cole

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Let us, for a moment, go back in time to the late 1800s. The Canadian government is promoting immigration by offering cheap land grants and cash incentives to those willing to leave their native country to settle in Canada. Life in Iceland is difficult (historians give various reasons – from volcanic eruption to the failure of grass crops). Whatever the actual facts, 165 Icelanders decide to take up the offer to emigrate. They embark on the packboat “Queen” on August 4, 1873, docking in modern-day Edinburgh, Scotland, where they board a train to Glasgow. From there they sail on the steamer S.S. Manitoban, arriving in Quebec City on August 25th.

The Province of Ontario is offering a bonus of \$6.00 for each adult and \$3.00 for each child under twelve plus free transport and meals en route to encourage these immigrants to settle in the province. And, taking the officials at their word of plentiful work and arable land, the group board yet another ship arriving in Rosseau, on the evening of August 30th. They spend the night on board the ship, disembarking to move to the Immigration House the next morning (this area is now part of Rosseau Lake College). It must have been so frightening to these Icelanders, who did not speak any English or French, to find themselves in a strange land, with little money or belongings and unaccustomed to the terrain. And to top it all off, the promises of jobs and arable

land were grossly misrepresented.

Nevertheless, this group of hardy adventurers were determined to make a go of it. Having heard that there is available land six miles east of Rosseau, Baldvín Helgason, Davíð Davíðsson, Anton Kristjánsson and Jón Hjálmarsson are guided through the bush to see these properties. They decide to settle there with their families who are awaiting word back in Rosseau. Helgason purchases 200 acres for \$150 and Davíðsson buys the adjacent property. Despite the very rough and rocky terrain, the families, including a very pregnant woman, make their way to this land, naming the settlement Hekkla, after an active Icelandic volcano, spelled Hekla. This is the first permanent Icelandic settlement in Canada.

Davíðsson's property had a house, and the two families totalling 15 people in all, lived there for the first fall and winter. In October of that year the two households bought cattle and cut marsh hay to feed them. It was a challenging time for all with little food and no privacy.

According to the “History of Cardwell Township 1866-1950,” other Icelanders continued to arrive in Hekkla during the fall and winter of 1873-1874. Bjarni Snæbjörnsson shared a small log house, built on Bjarni's land, with Jakob Lindal and his sister Ingunn Jónatánsdóttir. It was chinked with wet moss and lime that made a mortar-like consistency, providing a fairly draft-free building.



PHOTO: GAIL EINARSON-MCCLEERY

### Today, the Hekkla Cemetery is a history lesson in itself

But what happened to the promised employment? The adult men were offered jobs to construct the Colonization Road (close to the modern-day Muskoka Road 3) but because of their inability to produce their own food, they found themselves owing money taken off their wages. Once this debt was paid, they earned fifty cents daily clearing trees. These pioneers were not experienced woodsmen but learned through hardship how to construct a road which eventually went past their lots. A corduroy road is made by placing logs covered in sand perpendicular to the direction of the road over swampy areas. Although an improvement over muddy trails, it still presented a hazard to horses and people as the logs shifted.

Of the 165 original immigrants, many abandoned the idea of settling in the Rosseau area and chose to move on, hoping for a less difficult life. Some went out west to Wisconsin and the Dakotas, while others settled in the village of Kinmount, Ontario, spurred on by promises of work building the Victoria Railway. But these pioneers experienced no better conditions than those who remained in Hekkla. Poverty and unemployment continued to plague them. Today there is a memorial made by sculptor Gudrun Girgis commemorating the 352 hardy souls who settled there before later moving on to Gimli, Manitoba.

Through sheer tenacity, the Icelanders carved out a living in Hekkla, gradually

changing the landscape of dense forest to fenced fields. They learned to make maple syrup and straw hats with netting to ward off the ever-present mosquitoes and blackflies. They helped each other to construct barns and houses. Other Icelanders began to arrive in 1878, 1883 and after 1885. The last recorded family to arrive was the family of Ágúst Guðmundsson (they changed their name to Goodman). Mr. Goodman died March 20, 1923 at the age of 73 and is buried in the Hekkla Cemetery, as are many of the original settlers.

By the turn of the century, many of the original Icelandic settlers had moved on or their children had married neighbouring settlers – emigrants from Scotland, England and other European countries. The harsh winters, poor soil, inadequate land and the isolation were too much for many.

Today, the Hekkla Cemetery is a history lesson in itself, with the names carved on the tombstones of many of the original Icelandic people. Their descendants can be found throughout the province, but some still live in nearby towns, including Rosseau. Among them are Marg Presley (the granddaughter of Mindi Einarson), Terry Einarson (the grandson of Mindi's brother Fred) and Craig Finnson (the grandson of Mindi's sister).

Cousins Doreen Nowak and Ray and Bruce Crawford are three more local people of Icelandic descent. Doreen (nee Shortt) grew up on the farm now known as Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary and Ray's family lived at the end of Crawford Street, where he continues to reside. They have a common ancestor in Árnþjórg Etta Einaradóttir who came to Hekkla in 1878 when she was ten years old. She married Richard Shortt in 1891 and had eight children, one of whom was Gordon

(Doreen's father) and another was Maude (Ray and Bruce's mother). Etta passed on before Doreen or Ray or Bruce could know her, but Doreen's sister Jessie did when she was very young. Unfortunately, Jessie, who discovered at the age of 80 a love for painting, has passed on as well. Her paintings record area buildings and scenes from another era.

Ray recalls that when he was around 14 years old, he had helped his uncle Roy Shortt to bring hay from Roy's Hekkla farm down to the Crawford Street property, stopping in at the Hekkla store, where Roy bought him a chocolate bar. The store was built in 1943 by Charles Lilly. It became known as Morrison's store in 1946 and the family operated it until 1951. Eventually the building burned down in the 1950s.

In 1882 the first school established in Cardwell Township was built on the property of Gisli Einarson, to accommodate the local children. The log school had a blackboard at one end and the first thirteen students sat on wooden benches and homemade desks. They were all taught in the one room by Mr. McEdwards. This first school only survived for two years, and another log school was erected close to the original building and remained in use until 1930, when a nearby brick building was erected and served as a school until 1963. Doreen, Ray and Bruce all went to the Rosseau Falls School, but do recall spending time with cousins who went to the Hekkla school, known as School Section #2.

Doreen, Ray and Bruce often attended social events in the old community hall, meeting up with cousins who resided in Hekkla. Doreen's first memory of going to the settlement was the celebration of the 50th wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Beirness when she was around ten. Very often people who could play an instrument would get together in

someone's house for what was known as a "house party." All ages would be part of these entertainments, including young children like Doreen and Ray. "I used to play with my cousins, the McRae sisters because we were all around the same age" says Doreen. Ray recalls attending weddings, turkey dinners, concerts and other social functions in the hall, now a private residence on the property known as Lilies in the Valley. When the schoolhouse was vacated, it became the new Hekkla Community Hall and today still hosts social events, particularly the luncheon after the Hekkla Santa Claus Parade (known as the smallest in Ontario).

The Hekkla church is another

historical building of note. It originally sat on the corner of Highway 141 and the Nipissing Road (known as Ashdown Corners), but after being empty for some time, it was dismantled and moved by horse and sleigh to Hekkla in 1900, to serve the region's parishioners, as well as a community gathering place. According to Doreen, the church changed religions three times during its history (Methodist to Presbyterian to United) and still opens its doors one day annually for worship.

Those of Icelandic descent hold a special fondness in their hearts for the settlement of Hekkla, and have made it a point to visit. On July 21, 2005 a group from Iceland rode their native horses down



PHOTO: GAIL EINARSON-MCCLEERY

Edith Smith (age is in article) with Kristján Sævald Pétursson and Signý Ása Káradóttir, Snorri West 2014



Hekkla's main street, where a large crowd had gathered. They continued on to Gimli, Manitoba and a DVD was produced of this trip. On April 22, 2010 the Hekkla Historical Society hosted a group, including the Icelandic Ambassador to Canada Sigríður Anna Þórðardóttir. They toured the Hekkla church and cemetery and then stopped for lunch in the Community Hall. As a token of appreciation, they presented a special pendant depicting a combination of the Norse god Þór and the Christian cross to their hosts. And on June 24 of this year, four young people from Iceland spent a few weeks visiting settlement sites in the U.S.A. and Canada. Organized by the Honorary Icelandic Consul Gail Einarson-McCleery and sponsored through the auspices of the Icelandic Canadian Club of Toronto. The four toured Washington, D.C. (during the celebration of Iceland's Independence Day on June 17th) as well as Toronto, Ottawa, and Hekkla. Hilmar Páll Hannesson, Anna Guðrún Ragnarsdóttir, Kristján Sævald Pétursson and Signý Aesa Káradóttir explained that they wanted to learn about their heritage in North America and were honoured to be chosen for the Snorri West 2014 program. During their time in Hekkla, they were hosted for a luncheon in the old schoolhouse by several of the area's Icelandic descendants, one of whom was Edith Smith of

Utterson, who has a wealth of knowledge on the subject and still owns a traditional Icelandic costume. The visitors took a tour of the church, cemetery and other places of interest during their stay. Unfortunately, none of the original pioneer houses has survived the toll of time. Before returning home to Iceland, they visited Halifax and L'Anse Aux Meadows in Newfoundland, an early Viking settlement.

Much of the history of Hekkla has been documented and preserved in a book entitled "History of Cardwell Township 1866-1950)" through the efforts of a team of local residents, who formed the Hekkla Historical Society. The book contains many old photographs and gives considerable detail about the various families who lived in the township, both Icelandic and others. Earl Marchand, another Icelandic descendant who lives in Bracebridge, took on the job of producing a book recording the history of the Hekkla Church and Cemetery as a separate publication, and if a visitor pauses at the cemetery, they will notice many tombstones written in Icelandic. We are very fortunate that this rich and historical information on one of the early Muskoka settlements has been so well documented, and I want to thank Doreen Nowak and Ray Crawford, in particular, for providing personal reminiscences.



**ARDEN JACKSON**  
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# The Reckoning

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Translated by Borga Jakobson

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From the short story *Undir Utfall* by Guðrun H. Finnsdóttir published in the anthology *Vestan Um Haf (West of the Ocean)* compiled by Einar H. Kvaran and Guðmundur Finnbogason

There comes a time for all of us when we have to check the balance sheet of our lives, to evaluate ourselves and our life's work. This evening, Ofeigur from Lundi was reckoning the debts and credits of his fifty-odd years. He let his horse loiter along at his own pace over the road. There was only a light frost in the air and it was a calm, moonlit night. A layer of new-fallen snow covered all as far as the eye could see, except the trees in the shelter-belts which stood out like soldiers on guard.

Ofeigur was tall and broad-shouldered and a good-looking man, with dark hair, quick eyes and striking features. He had loved a good time in his younger days and never lacked for admirers among the opposite sex. Things had worked out well for Ofeigur. His neighbours said that it seemed that luck was always on his side. He prospered well financially and was held in high regard as well.

In fact, his prosperity was not a matter of luck. He had worked tirelessly and never taken time off until recently when he had been forced to on account of illness. This day he had visited the

doctor, who was an old friend. He had been told, in truth, that the end of his life was near. Ofeigur accepted the news calmly but tonight he was preoccupied with his thoughts. Now that time was running out, he felt for the first time that he had not accomplished much and that his life had been bereft of everything but work and worry over his farm. Oh yes, he had gained money, power and respect in the community. It was as if he had grown outwardly more influential and powerful, but inwardly his sensitivity had lessened and his soul was starved. He had to make amends here and there. But it was really Solveig, his wife, who had been short-changed, when he considered the balance sheet; his wife, who had loved him and cared for him, raised his children and struggled and worked with him all these years.

He did not know when it began, or how it happened, but they had been gradually growing apart from each other. They both loved the farm and worked together well but joy and love seemed to have vanished from their hearts and had been replaced by diffidence and lack of interest. Lately, there seemed to be a

wall between them which neither one assailed.

He had blamed their temperaments; he was domineering, quick-tempered and hard-working; she was stubborn, dogged and had little to say. But was not the underlying explanation one and the same- too much toil, weariness and lack of variety, which gradually wear out joy and hope? For Solveig used to be happy-happy, gentle and beautiful. Beautiful she was still, but the happiness was gone. Was he not somewhat to blame for that? She was quiet, serious, and responsible; constantly working now to the point that even his mother, had she been alive, would have been concerned about her. Yes, even his mother who had thought at the time they were engaged that Solveig did not know how to work. Even she would wonder at her ceaseless industry.

After he became engaged to Solveig, in spite of opposition, how he had loved her and vowed that he would take care of her always. But had he taken care, in fact?

Now, as he travelled slowly homeward, suddenly he relived the evening of their engagement. Every little incident from that journey came back in memory. What a different journey from this except that they both took place on Christmas Eve. Then he had with him youth, love and his hope for the future-Solveig, but now he travelled with thoughts of impending death.

There was a Christmas concert planned in the country schoolhouse that night and it was the biggest event of the season. The younger brothers and sisters were beside themselves with excitement. He was no less excited than the children because Solveig was going, too. She had come from Iceland the year before and was now working as a hired girl for his mother. She had not been

there long when he realized that he had fallen in love with her- yes, fallen in love so seriously that he wanted this poor, unassuming girl for his wife, if she would have him. From the beginning she had a way of keeping people at a distance if she wanted to. There was a flurry of excitement as the family prepared to go to the concert. He arranged it so that his brothers and sisters all went in the big sleigh. He hitched the small sleigh, which only seated two, to his favourite horse that he had raised from a colt, and took Solveig with him.

It was genuine Manitoba Christmas weather; star-studded heavens, moonlight and complete calm. The stillness of the night was almost awe-inspiring. There was a hard frost that night and the snow lay in waves like a frozen sea. It was like travelling through a fairyland as the snow flew from the horse's hooves and cracked under the runners of the sleigh. There on that clear starlit Christmas trip he had shared with her his thoughts and offered his love and he had received the answer that his heart desired. And they flew over the snowdrifts, alone in a dream of joy.


The schoolhouse was small, with a low roof; but the Christmas tree was big and beautiful, and sent its fragrance through the whole house. There were a few candles on the tree, but mostly it was decorated with homemade baskets and bags of colored paper filled with sweets. The children sang, played instruments and recited and finally the Christmas presents were handed out. He remembered the surprise and delight on Solveig's face when she was given the gift that he had smuggled under the tree as they came in and how she blushed when she opened the parcel and found a dress length of silk and a little golden brooch from him.

All the faces beamed with joy and good will as the people dressed to go home. Calls of "Good night! Merry Christmas!" were exchanged as the sleighs departed. "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!" sang the sleigh bells, till the sounds were lost in the distance.

Now he was home. The house was ablaze with lights. When he opened the door and walked in, the aroma of Christmas dinner blended with the fragrance of the fir tree which his daughter was decorating in the sitting room. The Christmas tree greeted him, glistening in tinsel and lights. His daughter, beautiful, happy and dressed in her best, came to meet him as soon as

she noticed him come in, and helped him out of his fur coat. He now saw Solveig pass through the kitchen where she was preparing the Christmas dinner. The house was all polished and decorated—nothing was forgotten. An air of festivity pervaded the house. Christmas time had arrived.

Christmas visitors – friends and relatives from the neighbourhood—began to gather. They were received with pleasure and hospitality and generously entertained. No one seemed happier than the head of the household. He was a perfect host, made sure that all were enjoying themselves and that no one was left out. The evening continued with good food, good cheer and song till the last guests departed and the family settled to their rest. The parents were left alone downstairs. Solveig went back and forth through the house, setting everything in place. Ofeigur wandered into the sitting room, where the fire still burned in the hearth. He sat down in his easy chair and stretched his feet out to the warmth of the fire. He was heavy with weariness, after the excitement of the evening and the news of the previous day. He stared into the fire and watched the logs flame and finally turn into a pile of ashes. It occurred to him then that the trees were returning the sunshine that they had absorbed during their lifetime, which had been lent to them to sustain them. Could he last long enough to do the same?



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# Christmas, 1916

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by W. Kristjanson

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Reprinted from the Icelandic Canadian Volume 32 Number 2

Christmas, 1916 symbolizes for me my first experience of France, in World War I. This was at the Canadian camp at Rouelles, at seven miles out of Le Havre. We, a reinforcement draft for a Winnipeg unit, the 44th, left Southampton for Le Havre on December 13.

Space was allocated to us on deck. As the evening closed in, we lay down as we were, with our equipment for a pillow. Said my cousin, Sam, "How do you think you'll stand it?" A summer at sandy Camp Hughes had been a good conditioner for us, for the 30,000 who trained that year.

In the gray morning light we slid in between the dark gray headlands of the Seine estuary to the docks of Le Havre. On shore, we marched in of route along the narrow, streets of this ancient town, metal heel plates clicking on the cobble pavement.

Our bell tents at Rouelles were intended for eight; but fourteen of us were packed in. At night, with feet to the centre pole, we were like spokes of a wheel towards the hub.

We were taken in hand by instructors who had seen service in the trenches, to acquaint us with methods of trench warfare. Our training area was a flat-topped escarpment, carpeted with flattened wiry brown grass.

The rainy season was still on and the

nights were December cool. For warmth at night we slept with some of our clothes on. The camp was virtually a mud hole and our socks, so often sopping wet, we kept on so as to start the morning with them dry. In the circumstances, it was not long before a minute gray-coated enemy host infiltrated our tent.

Scarcely noticed, Christmas Day arrived. If memory serves me right, we trained as usual up on the plateau, but perhaps we returned to camp.

Entertainments at the Y.M.C.A., in a long, dimly lit room with an unfinished wood interior are remembered. Was it on Christmas night that one of the soldier-performers sang "Mother Machree" to a stilled audience?

Perhaps it was just after the New Year that we were granted a few hours pass to Le Havre. Back in Camp in Surrey I had received three lessons in French from a "Y" worker. Three lessons had left me somewhat less than proficient in the language, but in a Le Havre confectionery shop I proudly attempted to ask in French for a chocolate bar. All went well with the chocolate but I stranded on the bar. Said the pleasant young lady clerk, in perfect English, "Is it this you would like?"

Came the day when we marched past in review order for inspection by Lieutenant-Governor Turner. Then we entrained for

the front. The box cars into which we loaded bore the traditional legend: Huit Cheveaux – Quarante Hommes – 8 horses – 40 men. On the journey up we passed historic Rouen, far below us in its valley.

On a dark midnight we detrained at Bethune, some thirteen miles behind the Souchez sector on Vimy Ridge. To the south the low horizon was a play of light, like flashes of summer lightning. Somebody remarked, “The Somme.”

Waiting limbers took us to the unit transport lines. In daylight we marched the remaining six-miles, past Hell Fire Corner and past the battered ruins of

Souchez to the communication trench. There we were given a rum issue. It was only a tablespoonful but we had to restrain 19-year old over-grown boy Smith from climbing out of the mucky trench to proceed overland.

That night the new arrivals provided a working party for the front line.

Christmas Day on Vimy Ridge had been marked by cold rain and shelling – “rain that drove the chill to the marrow.”

This was my Christmas season 1916, nigh sixty years ago. At this Christmas in these months, in these years we formed life-time-enduring bonds of comradeship.

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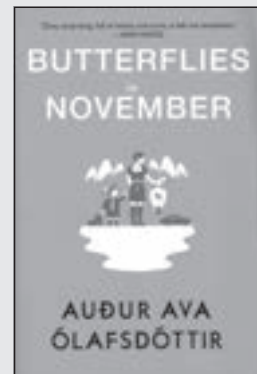
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# Eirík's Saga Rauða

## The Saga Of Erik The Red

*It is believed that this saga was written in the 13th C. The author is anonymous. It is about the Norse exploration of North America around 1000 AD/CE. There are fourteen chapters. This edition begins with the first three. The remaining chapters will be printed in subsequent editions. The late Emil Bjarnason wrote this translation from the original Icelandic. He explains, "In translation, except for the obligatory substitution of th for þ and d for ð, I have used the Icelandic spellings of names and places."*

### Chapter 1

There was a warrior king who was called Ólaf the White. He was the son of King Ingjald Helgason, son of Ólaf, son of Gudröd, son of Hálfðan whitebones, King of the uplands.

Ólaf fought in west viking raids and won Dublin in Ireland and Dublin county and made himself king thereof. He married Audur the wise, daughter of Ketil flatnose, son of Bjarni, a Norwegian. Thorsteinn the red was their son.

Ólaf fell in battle in Ireland. Then Audur and Thorsteinn went to South Islands. There Thorsteinn married Thuriður, daughter of Eyvinder Austmann and sister of Helgi the thin. They had many children.

Thorsteinn became a warrior king. He went raiding with Earl Sigurd the rich, son of Eysteinn the rattler. They captured Katanes and the Hebrides, Ross and Meræfi and more than half of Scotland. Thorsteinn became King until the Scots betrayed him and killed him in battle.

Audur was in Katanes, when Thorstein died. She then had a Knörr built secretly in the woods, and when it was done, she set herself up in the Orkneys. There she

gave in marriage her daughter Gró; she was the mother of Gréladur, wife of Earl Thorfinnur the headsplitter.

After that Audur went to look for Iceland. She had a ship's crew of twenty freemen. She reached Iceland and spent the first winter at the farm of her brother. Later Audur bought all Dalasýsla between Dögurðarár and Skraumuhlaupsár. She lived in Hvammi. She held a prayer meeting in Krosshólum; there she had crosses raised, for she was baptised and religious. With her, many noble men turned out who had been captured during west viking raids and were considered slaves.

One of them was called Vífil; he was a man of distinguished ancestry who had been taken prisoner west of the sea and was called a slave, until Audur freed him; and since Audur gave homes to ship's crewmen, Vífil demanded to know why she did not do the same for him. Audur replied that it made no difference; he was considered noble, which he was. She gave him Vífilsdal and there he lived. He had a wife whose name was ...; Their sons were Thorbjörn and Thorgeir. They were talented men and were brought up by their father.

## Chapter 2

There was a man named Thorvaldur, son of Ásvaldur Úlfsson, son of Öxna-Thorisson. His son was Erik the Red. The father and son moved from Jaðri (in Norway) to Iceland by reason of exile, and took land on Hornstrand and lived at Dröngum. There Thorvaldur died.

Erik then married Thjóðhildur, a daughter of Jörundur Úlfsson and Thorbjörg knarrarbringu who was the wife of Thorbjörn the haukudaler. Erik then rode north and cleared land in Haukudal and lived at Eiríksstad near Vatnshorni. Then Erik's slaves caused a landslide at Valthjófs at Valthjófsstad. Eyjólfur saur, his cousin killed the slaves at Skeidsbrekkum near Vatnshorni; for that Erik killed Eyjólf and Holmgongs-Hrafn. Eyjólf's cousins commenced an action, and Erik was banished from Haukadal.

Erik then took land at Brokey and Öxney and settled at Tröðum on South Island the first winter. Then he lent a house post to Thorgesti. Later he asked for its return, which was refused. Erik tried to take it, but Thorgesti came after him and they fought. In the fighting, two sons of Thorgesti and some others were killed. Later there was a battle with more men in which Erik was supported by Styr, Eyólfur from Svíney, Thorbjörn Vífilsson and the sons of Thorbrand from Álftafjörð, while Thorgesti was supported by the sons of Thordur gellis and Thorgeir from Hítardal, Áslákur from Langadal and his son, Illugi.

Erik was found guilty at the Thórsness Thing. He outfitted his ship at Erik's Bay while Eyólfur hid him in Dímunar Bay, while Thorgesti was searching for him among the islands. Thorbjörn, Eyólfur and Styr accompanied Erik out from the islands and parted with him with great

friendliness. Erik believed that he would experience similar trust should he later encounter them or their kin and need their help. He told them that he intended to look for the lands that Gunnbjörn Úlfsson saw when his ship had been blown off course in the western sea. Erik sailed below Snæfellsjökul. He reached the area called Bláserkur. He kept going to the south to see whether there were any settlements.

He spent the first winter in Eiríksey, near the middle of the eastern settlement area. In the spring he went to Eiríksfjörð and took up land for a farm. That summer he travelled to the western unsettled areas and gave names to many places. He spent the next winter at Eiríksból in Hvarfagnípa and the third summer he went north to Snæfell and into Hrafnfjörð. There he felt that he had reached the bottom of Eiríksfjörð. Then he turned around and spent the third winter in Eiríksey, at the mouth of Eiríksfjörð.

But during the summer he returned to Iceland and arrived in Breiðafjörð. He spent that winter with Ingólfur at Hólmlátri. In the spring they fought with Thorgestur, and lost. After that they were reconciled. That summer Erik went to build up the land that he had found, which he called Greenland, because he believed that many people would move there if it was well named. According to Ari Thorgilsson, that summer twenty-five ships sailed to Greenland from Breiðafjörð or Borgarfjörð, but fourteen failed to reach it. Some turned back and others were lost. That was fifteen years before Christianity was adopted by law in Iceland. At that time, Erik settled in Brattahlíð, Greenland.

## Chapter 3

Thorgeir Vífilsson got married to Arnora, daughter of Einar from





BY ARNGRÍMUR JÓNSSON COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Eric the Red (Eiríkur rauði). Woodcut frontispiece from the 1688 Icelandic publication of Arngrímur Jónsson's *Gronlandia* (Greenland). Fiske Icelandic Collection. (Wikimedia Commons)

Laugarbrekka, the son of Sigmundur, son Ketil Thistle, who settled at Thistlefjörð. Another daughter of Einar was called Hallveig; she married Thorbjörn Vílfilsson and took up land at Laugarbrekka, at Hellisvöllum. Thorbjörn rode there and became a prominent citizen. He was a good farmer and was very generous. Guðrídur was the name of Thorbjörn's daughter; she was a handsome woman and most highminded in all her activities.

There was a man whose name was Orm, who lived at Arnarstapa; he was married and his wife's name was Halldís. Orm was a good farmer and a great friend of Thorbjörn, and Guðrídur was with him for many years as a foster child.

There was a man named Thorgeir; he lived at Thorgeirsfelli. He was wealthy and had been a freed slave. He had a son, whose name was Einar; he was also a handsome and accomplished man; he was also a dandy. Einar engaged in sailings between countries and did well at it. He spent alternate winters in Iceland and Norway.

Now it must be said that one autumn, when Einar was in Iceland, that he went with his wares out to Snæfellsstrand, wishing to sell them. He came to Arnarstapa. Orm asks him to stay, and that suited Einar, since there he found friendship in abundance. His wares were

placed in an outhouse for storage. Einar showed Orm his goods offering him his choice. Orm thought him a good seafaring man and a very lucky man. But as they were putting away his goods, a woman passed by the door of the outhouse.

Eisner asked Orem, who was the beautiful lady, who passed by the door: "I have never seen her here before."

Orem answered: "That was Gordídur, my foster daughter, the daughter of Thorbjörn at Laugarbrekka."

Eisner said: "She would be a good catch; or have others spoken for her hand?"

Orem replied: "She has certainly had offers and it's easy to find out; I imagine that she is very particular about whom to marry, and so is her father."

"So," said Eisner, "it appears that this is the woman that I wish to propose to, and I ask that you explore the matter with Sherborn, her father, and do your best to make this come about. I will be forever in your debt if you can arrange it. Sherborn should see that this would be a good match since he is a well respected and trustworthy man, but I am told he is just starting to acquire possessions; but I am short of neither land or cattle, and if I were his son-in-law, it would be of great benefit to him if this should happen."

Orem replied: "Certainly I am your friend, but I have some doubts for Sherborn is a stubborn and self-willed man."

Eisner stated that all he asked was that his proposal be conveyed. Orem agreed that it would be done. Then Eisner went south again until he reached his home.

Sometime later, Thorbjörn had an autumn party, which he considered a duty, since he was a leading citizen. Among the guests was Ormur from Arnarstapa and many of his other friends. Ormur took

*Rev. Stefan Jonasson*

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up with Thorbjörn the matter of Einar, whom he described as a promising young man. Then he conveyed Einar's bid for Thorbjörn's daughter's hand. He stressed the financial advantage it would bring to Sherborn.

Thorbjörn replied: "I have not expected to hear from you a proposal that I give my daughter in marriage to the son of a slave; and she will no longer remain with you if you thought so little of her."

After that, Ormur went home, and the other suitors, each to his home. Guðrídur returned to her father's house and remained there for the winter. But in the spring, Thorbjörn held another party, attended by many men; it was a magnificent party. And at the party, Thorbjörn took the floor and spoke:

"Here I have lived a long time, and I have sought the company of men of good will and affection. For me, our association has gone well. But now, my fortunes have deteriorated for want of assets, which until now have been respectably managed. Now I wish to give up my household and honours. I intend to leave the country and renounce my lineage, and visit Erik the red, my friend as he was when we parted in Breidafjörð. I will go now to Greenland this summer, if possible."

Men were taken aback at this change of plans, for Thorbjörn was a friendly man, but they were sure that, having spoken so firmly, he would not be dissuaded. Thorbjörn gave the men presents, and so ended the party. Everyone returned to their homes.

Thorbjörn sold his home and bought a ship, which was anchored at Hraunhafnarósi. Thirty men went with him to the ship; among those who joined the voyage were Orm of Arnarstapa and his wife and other friends of Thorbjörn, those who did not want to be parted from him.

Later they put out to sea, and soon

after a fair wind rose, and they were driven off course. During the summer they went unkept. Many were taken ill. Orm and his wife died as well as half the crew. The seas swelled and men suffered scurvy and other ailments, and yet they reached Herjólfssnes in Greenland by winter.

The householder of Herjólfssnes was called Thorkell; he was the best of farmers. He took care of Thorbjörn and all his people through the winter. He provided for them magnanimously.

*To be continued in the next issue*



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# POETRY

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## Night of the New Year

by Stephan G. Stephansson  
(Paul A. Sigurdson, Translator)

Forsake me not, soul of the passing year!  
Now let me feel the sanctity of others;  
My destiny enweave with all my brothers,  
Sharing every joy and every care;  
Forgetting those most dark in prophesy,  
Sullyng that virtue which is golden;  
Truth and freedom e'er to be beholden;  
Treasure, dearest thing to me.

Let me, when rank with rank contends for gain,  
Speak for the weaker men, their worth revealing,  
Fight those with hearts of little feeling,  
Minds too cold to care for common pain,  
Let me defy those groups which ridicule,  
Scorning me, themselves the profits taking,  
Virtue's bloom and kindness forsaking,  
Making arrogance the rule.

Give me heart to guard, however slight,  
The will of others trusting and believing,  
Caring hands with worthy fingers weaving  
Laurel wreaths to crown the brow of Right;  
Rejoicing when the day can tell the tale  
Of some new victory – the night beginning –  
Tells the goodness had another winning.  
Love right through my help may fail.

Let me forsake the travelled ways, and strong in will  
 Steer to the deep – all troubles leave behind me;  
 Weary, but stronger from experience, you'll find me,  
 Braving the sea of life in gloom and chill.  
 I've reached the half-mark on life's morning sea;  
 The heavens shine in spite of storm- clouds showing;  
 I sail, my guide, my inner beacon glowing,  
 Dark though New Year's night may be.

Reprinted from the Icelandic Canadian Volume 44 Number 2

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## Candlelight



Everything that I loved dearly  
of a childhood morning,  
I joyfully cherish  
in a memory:  
a morning blush,  
a rainbow in the clouds,  
the first spring blossoms,  
violets in a hollow.

Fall colours of forests,  
roses of hoarfrost,  
lamp light at evening  
and sagas read.

- Christmas approaches,  
tender joy!  
Lit on a table  
candlelight.

And though the lightbulbs  
break up the darkness  
of the whole hemisphere  
on holier nights,  
are to me dearest  
the candlelights  
of treasured memories.

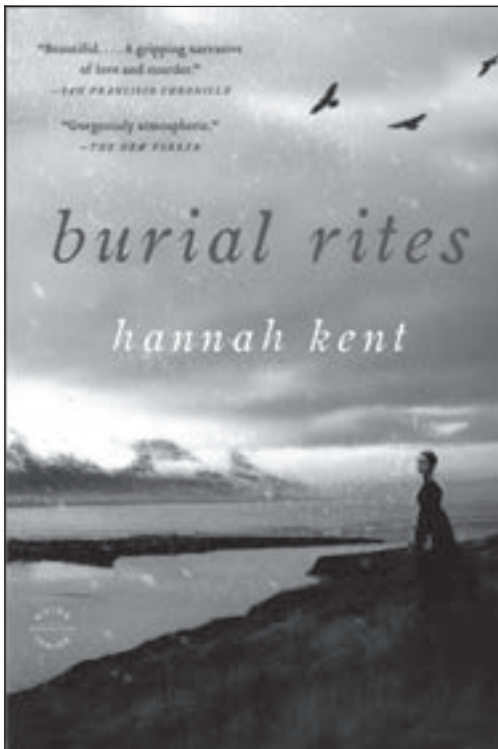
- Merry Christmas

Jakobína Johnson  
(Translated by Elin Thordarson)

# Book Review

## Burial Rights

by Hannah Kent



**Reviewed by Wanda Anderson**

**Paperback: 352 pages**

**Publisher: Back Bay Books**

**(April 1 2014)**

**Language: English**

**ISBN-10: 0316243922**

**ISBN-13: 978-0316243926**

I knew I was going to fall in love with this book when I read Guðrún Ósvífursdóttir's well-known quote from *Laxdæla Saga*: *I was worst to the one I loved best*. From the opening epigraph I knew Hannah Kent's *Burial Rites* was a book I would not be able to put down.

At the age of 17 the author of *Burial Rites*, Hannah Kent, left her hometown of Adelaide, Australia as an exchange student to live for one year in Sauðárkrókur, a fishing community in Northern Iceland. While she was there she traveled with her host family to a place called Vatnsdalshólar and noticed three small hills on the landscape. She asked her host family if the area was significant. They replied, "Over a hundred and fifty years ago a woman called Agnes had been beheaded there. She was the last person to be executed in Iceland." Upon returning to Australia, unable to dismiss the story of Agnes Magnúsdóttir from her mind, Kent made this historical event the subject of her PhD. And in 2011 she won the Writing Australia Unpublished Manuscript Award for *Burial Rites*.

The novel is a work of fiction based on true events taken from actual court and ministerial records, parish archives and censuses. It tells the story of Agnes Magnúsdóttir, the last person to be executed in Iceland on January 12, 1830 at

Þrístapar. Kent describes events that take place between 1828 and 1830. She tells the story of Agnes Magnúsdóttir, Friðrik Sigurðsson, and Sigríður Guðmundsdóttir and their roles in the murders of Natan Ketilsson and Pétur Jónsson in 1828 at Illugastaðir, a farm on Vatnsnes in Northern Iceland.

I picture Agnes Magnúsdóttir as a woman of beauty, strength, intelligence and a fierce determination to survive. As a child her mother leaves her as an orphan at the farm Kornsó, and over the next 30 years she fights to survive. As destiny would have it, she eventually returns to Kornsó to live out her life as she awaits her execution.

As a reader who appreciates descriptive writing, Hannah Kent took me to a time in Iceland when life was full of hardship, especially for the poor. She describes

Northern Iceland exactly how I have seen it. She captures my thoughts of Iceland in those years and how life must have been for people living in crofts like Illugastaðir and Kornsó. She describes the characters in her book so passionately that I felt connected to them.

I read this book twice as I wanted to make sure I did not miss anything the first time. Satisfied that I had read it thoroughly, on a recent trip to Iceland I had this overwhelming desire to visit the execution site and see for myself what Agnes Magnúsdóttir witnessed before her execution. As I stood on the mound at Þrístapar and looked around, I had a feeling of contentment and with that I paid my respects to Agnes Magnúsdóttir. Passionate, yet haunting, Hannah Kent's *Burial Rites* is a very moving novel that will stay with me forever.

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# Contributors

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**WANDA JOSEPHSON ANDERSON** born and raised in Gimli, MB now resides at Skallastáðir, the family farm west of Riverton. She is presently a board member of Icelandic River Heritage Sites and past Program Coordinator of Snorri West (10 years). Wanda continues to work hard at strengthening the ties between North America and Iceland.

**KEN BARR** After spending over twenty years touring the world with KISS, Alice Cooper and many other bands as a technician, Ken decided to chronicle his career by writing his first book, *We Are The Road Crew*. Several years and several books later, Ken was introduced to The Yule Lads and instantly felt a connection. He has written about the brothers, their family, and has even given life to the “Lost” Yule Lads. Since then he has teamed with an artist, and soon an illustrated edition with a brand new look for the brothers will be available.

**EMIL BJARNASON**, 1918-2006, became interested in the genealogy of his family. In an effort to go earlier than the information in the Icelandic archives, he was using the Sagas as a source. Not being satisfied with some of the translations, he decided to re-translate them. This is one of his efforts.

**MARILYN COLE** is a retired zookeeper and now lives in Muskoka, ON. She has a BSc in physical anthropology and a Master's degree in environmental studies. In her earlier years she has done fieldwork on primates in Borneo, Gibraltar and Central America. She has been writing articles for local newspapers and magazines since 2008 and enjoys researching the information for the articles.

**NORMA GUTTORMSSON**, M.Ed., is a second generation Icelandic Canadian. She is the daughter of the late Dr. Pétur Guttormsson and Salín Reykdal. Norma is a retired ESL instructor living in North Vancouver. She has four children and four grandchildren.

**GAIL HALLDORSON** is a retired High School Librarian living in Sandy Hook, Manitoba.

**VALA INGOLFSSON** is a young writer of Icelandic heritage. Her parents are Erla Anderson and Ármann Ingólfsson of Edmonton, and her grandparents are Nina Colwill and Dennis Anderson of Gimli and Hrefna Hjálmarsdóttir and Ingólfur Ármannsson of Akureyri.

**BORGA JAKOBSON** was born and raised in Geysir, MB. Her first language was Icelandic and her parents read Icelandic stories for the children. In the past few years she has enjoyed translating stories from Icelandic into English, especially stories from the work of Johann Magnus Bjarnason. The best known stories are *Errand Boy in the Mooseland Hills* and *The Young Iclander*.

**LISA SIGURGEIRSON MAXX** was born and raised in Steveston, BC where her Icelandic father, Vilhjálmur Jakob (Bill) Sigurgeirson and his family settled in 1943, when Bill was a boy of twelve, having moved west from Hecla Island. Lisa currently keeps busy as an amma, as a freelance writer, as a singer-songwriter-performer, (<https://www.facebook.com/lisamaxx>) and as a parenting educator, columnist and guest speaker. The singing amma is the name Lisa goes by in the world of parenting (<https://www.facebook.com/thesingingamma>)

**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: LESLEY STEVENS

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## The Back Page

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On December 20th, 2014 in Calgary, Kaillie made history by winning bronze with her mixed team of bobsledders at the World Cup. Her family were there to cheer her on.

Makenna Stevens (9 years old), Hadley Stevens (8 years old) and Nathan Stevens (7 years old) were proudly standing by at the finish line to cheer on their cousin Kaillie Humphries at Canada Olympic Park. They were so thrilled to see her at the finish line, as Nathan proudly walked up to her and said, "I'm your cousin you know!"

All three Stevens children are so inspired by Kaillie and proud to have a cousin who has won two Olympic gold medals. They said that they will always cheer for her and believe in her. She is such a great example of someone who has put in a tremendous amount of effort to follow her dreams. Strong family values are important in our family and the Stevens children were impressed by how nice and kind Kaillie was to them.

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