

ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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ON THE COVER



PHOTO: LEIF NORMAN / LEIFNORMAN.NET

Viking Park in Gimli Manitoba

Editorial

Viking Park

by Lorna Tergesen

Around 2013 discussion around the table at meetings of Íslendingadagurinn were focused on what would be a suitable tribute for the 150 anniversary of Canada. It was noted that in 1989, the hundredth year of its own existence, a great effort had been made to secure the Icelandic Festival with a capital fund that would allow the annual event to continue with a minimal cost to those that would attend. That objective had been very successful with only a few events that have to charge admission. And so the discussions went from repairing the outdoor stage at the park or investing in better and more accessible toilets, (not that this wasn't needed). Since none of these were enough to spur great reaction or recognition, the thinking began to evolve around the Viking statue. It was in need of repairs and what else could be done to enhance the area.

The committee approached the RM of Gimli council and found them to be very supportive. They realized that the Viking needed repairs and quickly. The Viking statue had been unveiled in 1967, another memorable year in Canada. Over the years it had made a move so it had endured quite a story of its own. Now located on 2nd Avenue in Gimli there

was a fair amount of property around it, much of it belonging to the Betel Home. Everyone involved saw the possibility of this growing into a park like setting. The co-operation from the Betel Home Foundation and the R. M. of Gimli has been invaluable.

Of course, this would involve again a huge fundraising effort. A separate committee was set up with Grant Stefanson and Kathi Thorarinson Neal as co-chair persons. Anyone who has been on such a fundraising effort knows that it takes so many willing hands to work, and people did come forward. When Íslendingadagurinn celebrated its 125th anniversary the committee had laid out their leg work and began to solicit funds from our community, hired designers and contractors. Open house forums were held in the community for people to see the plans and share their opinions on the project.

The very first supporters were well known and respected community minded. It was Lilja Arnason and Dr. Ken Thorlakson began the fund with their generous support both financially and in approval of the idea.

The history wall that surrounds the park with the pillars of family recognition



PHOTO: LEIF NORMAN / LEIFNORMAN.NET

within. Pathway stones with dedication and tributes line the interior walkways. The planting is all of local and sustainable foliage with colours varying through the summer / fall seasons.

There were several categories that were set forth to solicit funds. Major donors were donating \$125,000 and pathway stones were offered for \$125. Also several options in between.

When the park was officially opened on August 3, 2017 Íslendingadagurinn, just under a million dollars had been raised. It truly is a magical place.

The park was designed by HTFC (Hilderman Thomas Frank Cram) Planning and Design and built by Shelmerdine Garden Centre, with additional Gimli area labour and supplier involvement. Both of these companies worked tirelessly with the committee to produce what we are now so proud of.

On August 9, 2017 the Government of Canada and Government of Manitoba announced that the Viking Park project was a recipient of the Small Communities Fund Grant. The Fund supports priority public infrastructure projects in communities with fewer than 100,000 residents across Canada. The funds are made available as a two to one matched grant, matching funds raised by the Festival since July of 2017. The goal is to raise \$300,00 in order to trigger the entire \$600,000 in grant monies available.

Five remaining settlement markers, garden recognition and pathway stones are all available to complete the development of the first phase of the Viking Park. The Festival will install all garden components from donations placed after March 15, 2017 in Spring of 2018. We encourage interested people to get their donations and pledges in to ensure recognition can



PHOTO: LEIF NORMAN / LEIFNORMAN.NET

be completed for installation before the 2018 Icelandic Festival. Our 2018 deadline will be May 15. Potential donors are encouraged to visit the Festival website www.icelandicfestival.com or to contact any Viking Park Campaign Cabinet members or the festival office at 204-642-7417 for more details.

So now if you have not already supported or donated, please consider doing so. This legacy gift to our host community is truly worthy of Íslendingadagurinn's reputation of being meant to showcase our culture and invite all to join in as a family event for reunions and introductions to our ideals. We do have a time limit so if you are approached by one of the members, please consider donating and honouring your family or someone you love.

ERRATA

There were three additions, one deletion, and one misnomer made to two articles in *Iceland Connection Vol. 69 #3 (2017)*. The additions were made without the authors' knowledge or consent. Apologies have been made and accepted.

The John Ramsay story written by Gail Halldorson. (page 107)

Should read as follows: "(presumably Lower Fort Garry)". Page 108, col. 2, 1st paragraph: Remove: "...but after a second dream visit from Ramsay"; put in "and". Page 108, col. 2, 2nd paragraph.

Remove: "(Saulteaux)" Page 109, col. 2, 2nd paragraph.

The Halifax Bomber story. (page 112)

The credit for pictures should read: "Photos courtesy of Diann Johnson Hays". Page 112. In the 'Conclusion' written by Diann Johnson Hays, Remove: "My husband". Page 117, col. 1, 1st paragraph. (Diann was quoting from a letter written by her father, Johann. "Bill and I" referred to Johann and his brother-in-law, Bill.)

My Pathway to my Icelandic Heritage 2017

by Tyme Rocky Thompson

Last November, I was given the opportunity to go to Winnipeg, Manitoba. My mom, Elizabeth, was born there and lived in Pinawa, Manitoba for some time in her early childhood before moving to Edmonton, Alberta. Although she and her immediate family had moved, her extended family remain in and around Winnipeg. This was the part of my family that I couldn't wait to see and learn more about. I have always known of my Icelandic heritage from my mom's side. I have been calling my grandma, Amma, and grandpa, Afi, ever since I could talk. I couldn't wait to come to where my ancestors settled upon immigrating from Iceland.

In 1875, a group of Icelandic people were in Kinmount, Ontario. The decision was made to move to the District of Keewatin, just north of the province of Manitoba. The tract of land became known as New Iceland on the west shores of Lake Winnipeg. I had always had an understanding and knowledge of this, a fascination of it actually. When I heard that I had the opportunity to return to Winnipeg, I was ecstatic. Eight years had passed since my last visit as a child. At age 17, with my new found knowledge of my heritage, I was all the more excited to go.

The first couple of days spent in Winnipeg were for my sister's hockey tournament, the reason for this family trip. Taze, age 16, plays for the Chicago Young

Americans. My father, Rocky Thompson, is head coach of the Chicago Wolves who were in competition with the Manitoba Moose. We stayed downtown and explored. The weather was cold, but we enjoyed the Forks area. This is where Indigenous peoples have met for millennia and where European traders established a trading post. The boat from the Red River carried the first Icelandic immigrants here and they stepped ashore to the Immigration shed.

Next to the Forks was the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. This is a world class museum and a centre for understanding the meaning of human rights. It is an amazing place. I learned about historical events in Canada and the world which could take another article. Beside this museum is the location known as Shanty Town. Some Icelandic immigrants built shelters there in 1875.

The next segment of the trip was the arrival of my Lang Amma Helga Sigurdson and my Great Aunt Linda. They came from Lundar to watch my sister's hockey game. Great Uncle Johann and Great Aunt Joanne took Lang Amma and my sister True (age 11) with them to Chalet Beach. Taze's team won the game! After the hoorays, Aunt Linda, Mom and I went on a little tour around Winnipeg. I cannot believe how much Aunt Linda knew. Family homes, family schools, Shanty



SUBMITTED PHOTO BY A TEAM MEMBER

The hockey tournament at Seven Oaks Arena. Back: Linda F. Sigurdson Collette, Tyme Thompson, Rocky Thompson, Johann S. Sigurdson. Middle: Elizabeth Thompson. True Thompson. Taze Thompson. Front: Helga Sigurdson. Four generations (without Sandra).

Town, the Legislature and the huge Bison statues, Jon Sigurdsson statue, Women's Right to Vote, Sir William Stephenson (Intrepid), Upper Fort Garry, University of Winnipeg, Falcons practice site and many more things with stories about each. I saw and learned. It was truly a tour of a lifetime.

We ended the night by dropping off my mom and sister at our hotel, travelled up Highway 9, viewed Lower Fort Garry, Selkirk, the Catfish statue and continued to Chalet Beach on Lake Winnipeg. Uncle Johann and Aunt Joanne have their beach house on the land between Lake Winnipeg and the Netley Marsh. I remember when I was nine, we went there for, once again, hockey. My sister and I stayed there and

my parents came up after the games ended. Some of my fondest memories were made there, with some of the same people and it was comforting to see that little had changed. We went to sleep almost an hour after arriving and the next day, we were ready to set out on New Iceland Adventure.

We awoke about 9:00 A.M. to an Icelandic breakfast courtesy of Aunt Joanne. She had made rosettes and pönnukökur, Icelandic pastries, which, if you have never had, please go to your nearest Icelandic bakery and indulge yourself. You will not be disappointed. Because of weather, we were unable to tour Hecla, another family ancestral island home. Aunt Linda, True and I set off. We

glimpsed frozen Lake Winnipeg as we travelled north.

We stopped at Boundary Creek. At this site was the marker of the end of Manitoba and the beginning of New Iceland in the District of Keewatin. New Iceland was the settlement set aside by the Canadian Government for the Icelandic settlers who were looking for new homes after Iceland's volcanic activity. The Canadian Government saw them as the perfect people to settle. They were of European descent and understood the processes of government as Iceland had the oldest parliament in the world. This along with other factors led to the establishment of the settlement of New Iceland.

In 1876 smallpox broke out in New Iceland. The creek became the boundary of the quarantine zone. One in ten Icelanders, mostly children, died. The quarantine was so strictly enforced that when a wedding was conducted, the minister stood on the south bank and the couple on the north bank. Neither were allowed to cross over. The epidemic ended in 1877.

Off we went to Gimli with a large number of Icelandic descendants. Manitoba has the largest number of Icelanders outside of Iceland. Gimli, from Norse Mythology, stands for paradise. It has a population of about three thousand



PHOTO: LINDA F. SIGURDSON COLLETTE

New Iceland Heritage Museum

in winter; however, even in the cold of winter, it is one of the most charming towns I have ever been to. To say they have a strong Icelandic/Scandinavian culture is a vast understatement. Icelandic flags fly along with the Canadian red maple leaf flag all over the area. Icelandic references are everywhere. Our first stop was a shop called Tergesen's. For a small town general store looking place, I didn't expect to see as many cool things as I did. There were many items that you could easily find at a trendy mall store in the city. And, of course,

Icelandic merchandise. In a separate section are books about the Vikings, the Settlement, fiction and non-fiction books by various authors, children's books, knitting books, cookbooks, dictionaries and a few books in the Icelandic language. True and I were honoured to meet Lorna Tergesen, editor of the *Icelandic Connection* magazine and bookstore owner. Aunt Linda bought us many books. One that my family will savour concerns the Winnipeg Falcons, a hockey team made up of Icelandic Canadians from Winnipeg who would go on to win the very first Olympic gold medal in hockey. True found Kinder Surprise candy, not available in Chicago and I picked up a coffee cup which every morning will remind me of this trip.

Once we finished up in Tergesen's, we went down the street to the most information-filled place of our trip: the New Iceland Heritage Museum. The NIHM serves as a perfect collection of information of just how New Iceland settlers lived, what their customs were and what day to day life looked like. Our guide, Claude Thorsteinson, and Aunt Linda gave great insight on what everything was and just how my ancestors lived. When they first arrived, they lived in temporary tent-like shelters, with a fire burning oven and chimney for warmth, food and water. Many people, mostly children and new moms, did not survive the initial settlement due to the elements and lack of food. The near isolation of the colony allowed them to live essentially autonomously from Canada. The settlers wasted no time electing a five man council to keep order in the colony and keep charge of the supplies given to the colony. Much of it was used in the smallpox epidemic. After the outbreak subsided in early 1877, the settlers held a meeting to adopt its first set of laws and draft the Constitution for the colony. The Constitution combined Canadian

and Icelandic law and divided the colony into four districts, which elected its own five person council which elected a Reeve. The Canadian government approved the Constitution in 1878.

Living on the Settlement, however, came with its challenges. Despite the smallpox epidemic, life was rough. The first winter took much of the food supply and the terrain was unforgiving. Disputes over the land also occurred when the Icelanders came. The Cree and Anishinaabe people's traditional lands were within the boundaries of the New Iceland territory. A land dispute occurred in the first year of settlement and the tension between the Natives and Icelanders grew until a man named John Ramsay from the St. Peter's band, now the Peguis First Nation, resolved to accept the Icelanders into the territory and treated them as neighbours. John Ramsay helped to create dialogue and a link between the two groups. Ramsay and his family helped the settlers find food and materials, helped them find shelter and provided support through the next winter. The smallpox spread to the First Nations and was devastating for them. John Ramsay lived and continued the friendship between his people and his new Icelandic friends. He is remembered for his diplomacy between the two groups and creating a friendship between the once enemies. In the NIHM, we enjoyed the video series about these events.

The New Iceland Reserve was able to self-govern until 1887, when the Manitoba municipal government replaced it. The area would continue to be exclusive to Icelanders until 1897 when it opened to everyone by an Order-in-Council. The Icelandic-Canadian culture was very much steeped in the Icelandic culture. The Icelanders were Lutherans and attended church every Sunday. They were gifted in poetry, music and oral storytelling. Eventually the



PHOTO: LINDA F. SIGURDSON COLLETTE

Our sword battle in the museum

stories became the Sagas written down in the 13th and 14th century. I read some of the poems from the settlers and was truly moved. Children attended school with all classes taught by one teacher. They continued to learn Icelandic and its culture alongside English and Canadian subjects. Although I didn't get too much insight into it, I found out that some of the New Icelanders were in fact Free Masons.

As we went through the NIHM, Aunt Linda pointed out information on the Fjallkona. I was fascinated. The Fjallkona who reigns over the proceedings at Íslendingadagurinn, first appeared in 1924 in Winnipeg. Íslendingadagurinn was later moved to Gimli where it continues. My family is honoured with Fjallkona Helga Sigurdson 1988 and Linda Sigurdson Collette 2015. I had known of the tradition for some time, but I had not known of its origins until my visit to the NIHM.

Fjallkona translates to Mountain Woman. Her image first appeared in the poem, *Ísland*, written by Eggert Olafsson around 1750 and published in 1832. The word, Fjallkona, appeared in the poem, *Eldgamla Ísafold* by Bjarni Thorarensen in 1810. The Fjallkona is the personification of Iceland, much like Britannia in the U.K. and Liberty in the U.S. She symbolizes the land and is a depiction of the ideal Icelandic woman: being natural, brave, noble and beautiful. She is adorned by a sword, long hair down to her hips and an ice crown of white flame. She is the spirit of Iceland and its people. She represented them and later its dreams and future after the fight for independence from Denmark began.

The rest of the museum trip was looking at the old items that the New Icelanders had from both their initial settlement and their established lives, including ice skates, medicinal products, a milk barrel and an old general shop counter and display

case. They also had many books from the school and settlers in the museum for all ages and subjects in both Icelandic and English. It was such a fascinating chance to see truly how my ancestors lived, to see how they experienced day to day life and how they came first to be. The NIHM was the opportunity of a lifetime which I will forever be grateful and cherish.

We finished looking through the relics and exhibits, had a sword fight, a snooze and made our way to the exit. We said our thanks to Claude and purchased some souvenirs: an Icelandic flag patch, some CDs of the Lake Winnipeg Fisherman and souvenirs stamped with the NIHM insignia. Aunt Linda challenged me to memorize and learn to sing all of Solli Sigurdson's songs for the next time we meet.

Next on tap was the iconic Gimli restaurant, Kris' Fish and Chips. True was thirsty and wanted ice cream, but Aunt Linda wanted us to taste a little pickerel. That was our only opportunity. I must say it was the best fish and chips ever. My mom as a child would always come to Gimli during the summer and was thrilled when I told her of my lunch there. The Icelandic-Canadian heritage aside, it was to see where my mom had grown up and where some of her greatest childhood memories were made that was most important.

We stayed, indulged for what felt like forever and saw the sun beginning to set on Lake Winnipeg. With our bellies full, we set out to the final stop in Gimli, the Viking statue. Of course, there was a detour, a drive along the beach which is a huge summer destination for townspeople and Winnipeggers alike. I learned that movies are projected onto a floating screen anchored in the water and viewers sit on the beach. This is a spectacle I hope to experience in a coming summer season.

We arrived at the Viking, the

monument dedicated to the Icelandic heritage of the town and officially unveiled in 1967 by the President of Iceland, Asgeir Asgeirsson. This mammoth of a statue, standing at 15 feet tall, serves as a reminder of the settlers from Iceland who fled the volcanic activity on the island in the mid 1870s. We remember how this town came to be and where many Icelandic-Canadians began their journey.

Just when I thought it was over, Aunt Linda drove us north to see the cemetery and the Seagram's Brewery. Yes, just one more... We went on the Willow Island road and searched for a special place. It was very dark. Aunt Linda had mentioned it before, but I didn't pay it much mind at the time. The place was the White Rock. This rock on a little peninsula that juts out into Lake Winnipeg is where the Icelanders first landed when they were set adrift in the storm from the boat towing them. Here the first Icelander, Jon Olafur Johannson, was born in what became New Iceland and later Canada. I got to see where, in a way, my whole existence began and my obsession with my Icelandic heritage started.

When we arrived back to the cottage, my Lang Amma and Aunt Joanne had been baking. Out came the vinarterta, the traditional Icelandic layered cake with prune filling and flavoured with cardamom. This was the perfect way to end the trip, to indulge, once again, in a tasty Icelandic treat that has been made here for generations. It is one part of my Icelandic heritage that I remember having as far back as I can remember. It was also my parent's wedding cake made by my Lang Amma.

The adventure is complete. A special thank you to my Aunt Linda Sigurdson Collette for being the amazing guide she was. If it weren't for her, I wouldn't have known what to look for. Another thanks

to my Great Uncle Johann and Great Aunt Joanne for their having us and cooking for us such amazing Icelandic treats, for their hospitality and humour which will not be forgotten. Thanks to my Lang Amma Helga Sigurdson who is now 97 years young, for her conversations with me and answering all of my burning questions about history and her life. Lastly, thank you to my mom for putting the trip together and allowing me to explore my roots with the experts in Winnipeg. Thank you for the amazing trip to all who put it together!! I am so happy to have all my questions answered and see where my roots began and spread.


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A Pilgrim on Washington Island

by Wayne Arnason

A pilgrimage was once something you undertook only for religious reasons. We think of the medieval pilgrim knights seeking to reach Jerusalem during the Crusades, or Chaucer's 14th century band of pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury. More recently, what it means to make a pilgrimage has expanded in the consciousness of travelers. Certainly, there are still religious pilgrimages to be made. Most notably, Muslim Canadians and Americans journey each year to Mecca to fulfill their once-in-a-lifetime obligation to complete the *haj*. More secular people, however, are being attracted to "pilgrimage travel". People with no history or interest in the Catholic Church undertake the challenging *Camino de Santiago* pilgrims' hike in northern Spain each year, in search of a spiritual experience that somehow connects the physical-emotional challenge of the journey with the devotion of the believers.

Then there are the Western Icelanders, who make the journey back to the home of their ancestors each year in search of – what? Obviously, in search of knowledge of and connection with both their ancestors and their contemporary relatives, to be sure. Western Icelanders want to go back to experience first-hand the landscape and the extraordinary beauty of the most famous sites in Iceland. Yet, I think there is something more, something that has to do with how spiritual identity and ancestry are deeply connected within us, something

that has to do with making a pilgrimage.

These were my thoughts as I boarded a ferry boat called "Eyrabakki" on a pilgrim's journey. The distance of the water crossing I was about to make is trivial compared to the sea journeys undertaken by Icelandic immigrants to North America in the 19th century, or by their first-generation descendants who would journey back to Iceland by sea as pilgrims to their parents' homeland. My sea voyage would take a half hour across the fresh waters of Lake Michigan, to a place called Washington Island, the site of the second oldest Icelandic settlement in North America.

Despite the short distance, there is a reminder here of the perils of any water crossing, for the narrow strait that separates Washington Island from the Door County Peninsula of mainland Wisconsin is called *Porte Des Morts*, Death's Door. The name is said to have originated when skirmishes between two local aboriginal tribes over settlement on the island resulted in many warriors in canoes losing their lives in the tempestuous waves and currents. The French settlers thought the name apt, as "Death's Door" continued to be a zone of shipwrecks for centuries to come. Our journey on an early September weekend was accompanied by fine weather and modest winds, but we could imagine the challenges of the crossing on a different weather day.

The green cover of trees that forms the horizon line above Detroit Harbor where the ferry docks on Washington island

does not remotely suggest Iceland. Nevertheless, this is an island, and a remote one, and so Icelanders should feel right at home! It was the availability of land, and an economic opportunity for the man who helped broker the passage of the first Icelanders to come to Wisconsin, which made Washington Island a destination for them. I wanted to come here to experience in person the landscape that they found here and the challenges that faced these settlers. There is something in me, about who I am, that connects with them. Even though this settlement's relationships with the Icelanders who came to Manitoba were sparse, despite the fact that I was not directly related to these families, they are still my people. With an unexpected opportunity to spend a year living in Wisconsin, I wanted to know who they were, so I could better know who I am.

In truth, I had largely forgotten the Wisconsin Icelanders as people with an important place in the Western Icelanders' lineage. I have maintained an ongoing interest in the history of the Manitoba settlement, and visited all my ancestors' farms on four different trips to Iceland. I have gone out of my way to make pilgrimages to other North American sites of Icelandic settlement – like Spanish Fork, Utah, and Blaine, Washington. I had read some years ago the fine biography of Rev.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WAYNE ARNASON

Richard Purinton, the ferry captain, with Wayne Arnason

Paul Thorlaksson, the pioneer Icelandic Lutheran pastor, written by George Houser, which documents Pastor Paul's connections to the Icelandic settlement in Shawano County WI where he lived before his sojourns in Manitoba and North Dakota. The Washington Island Icelanders remained largely separate from this settlement, however, and if I once knew about them, they had receded from memory. They have certainly not receded from the memory of scholars of Icelandic history in North America. Any readers who attended the Icelandic National League

convention in Minneapolis in 2015 will remember an excellent lecture with slides offering an overview of Washington Island and the Icelandic settlers who went there, offered by Richard Purinton, a long-time resident and CEO of the Wisconsin Ferry Line which was carrying me across Death's Door. Mr. Purinton is married to Mary Jo (Richter), great-granddaughter of Arni Gudmundsen, an early Icelandic settler on Washington Island.

My ignorance of the Washington Island settlement can be chalked up to the fact that you have to be very intentional about travelling to this part of Wisconsin. Unlike Spanish Fork, or Blaine, or the Icelandic State Park in Mountain, North Dakota, you can't stop off there on the way to somewhere else! The Door County peninsula north of Green Bay on the eastern side of Wisconsin is a wonderful summertime tourist destination. My memories about Icelanders living on Washington Island were triggered when I spent a July weekend in Door County in 2016 and began reading about the area attractions, including the history of the islands at the north end of the peninsula. I started talking about my upcoming year in Wisconsin with friends at Icelandic Festival in Gimli later that summer, and found others who shared my interest and had more knowledge about Washington Island than I did. Linda Sigurdson Collette was especially helpful in telling me about her own visit there, and in giving me an introduction to the Purintons. With my interest piqued, my wife and I planned for a long weekend to allow time for the island to come to me, and not the other way around.

Washington Island consists of a little more than twenty squares miles of land, so bringing your car on the ferry allows for handy travel between the various centers of settlement and commerce on the island. For

one of our days on the island, we mostly used bicycles to get around. Our first stop after arriving at the Detroit Harbor Ferry Dock would be the office of the Washington Island archivist. There I found a treasure trove of books and articles about the rich history of the island. I realized that the Icelandic settlers there were late arrivals. Native people had of course lived there on and off over the centuries preceding 1836, when Wisconsin became an American territory. In 1839, a native-born American, John Robertson of New York, bought the first parcel of land owned on the island's north side. Investors in property on the island were initially attracted by the fishing and later the lumber resources. When the town of Washington was established in 1850, it reported a population of 159. By 1860 the total island population was four times that number, with most being native-born Americans, i.e. New Englanders and New Yorkers of English descent. A quarter of the islanders were newer immigrants, however, equally divided among Irish, Germans, and Norwegians. The American Civil War drew down the island's population to less than 300, with a third of those remaining foreign-born. By 1870, when four Icelandic bachelors arrived on Washington Island, the population had rebounded somewhat to 385.

Icelandic emigration to North America had begun in 1855, with the departure of a small group of Westman Islanders who had been converted to the Mormon faith by Danish and Icelandic missionaries. The Civil War in the United States discouraged any further interest in coming to America, and the openness of the Brazilian government to subsidizing immigrants made that country the next focus for prospective immigrants. It was a Dane named William Wickmann who started the next wave of interest among Icelanders in seeking a new life in the

United States.

Wickmann had been in Iceland since 1855, employed by a Danish trading company doing business through Eyrabakki, the only natural harbour on Iceland's southern coast. There he worked under the Gudmundur Thorgrimsen, whose general store made him the economic and political center of the town. In 1865, Wickmann emigrated to America, to Milwaukee where his sister was married to the Danish consul. The consul served an already substantial Danish settlement in the territory. It was Wickmann who became interested in property on Washington Island and bought land there. His glowing letters about opportunities in America to his former employer back in Eyrabakki roused interest among a group of young men who orbited around Gudmundur's store.

By 1870, with farming land in short supply in Iceland, young unmarried men were increasingly dissatisfied with the law concerning farm labourers, which bound people without their own land to stay with a specific farmer from year to year. Rural landless people found it difficult to begin a family with no options for work except as a subsistence fisherman, or as a farm worker for somebody else on a modest tract of that person's land. Wickmann's letters from America exaggerated the opportunities in Wisconsin, but even if they had not, the prospects for a young man in America seemed infinitely better than remaining in Iceland.

An employee in Gudmundur's store was the first to respond to Wickmann's invitation to consider coming over. He was twenty-year-old Jon Gislason. Jon was the son of a Lutheran minister, and grandson of a judge. He had an inheritance which could cover his expenses. Jon convinced his friend, twenty-four year-old Arni Gudmundsson, that he should come too.

Arni was a carpenter who had worked for Gudmundur. They talked about their plans with Jon Einarsson from Reykjavik, who was riding a circuit assisting the country doctor in that area and who frequented the store on occasion. Gudmundur Thorgrimsen was very interested in the opportunities in America and trusted his old friend Wickmann, so he offered to help the group financially. A fourth companion then cast his lot with the group: Gudmundur Gudmundsson. He was an elder to all of them at the age of thirty, and was at a different time in his life. He had been a captain of his own fishing boat, had a fiancé and was financially able to pay his way.

No photograph of these four men together exists. I imagine them as



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adventurous souls, confident that they could make something out of nothing in the new world. Unlike so many families in the next waves of immigrants who left Iceland due to deteriorating weather, economic conditions and volcanic eruptions, these men had a choice they could make to stay or go. Their lives were less complicated by family ties. They decided to take a leap into the unknown.

In the spring of 1870 they travelled from Eyrabakki to Reykjavik. The rumours they heard in the capital about life in America were quite a contrast to Wickmann's glowing letters. One of the four was told that there were cannibals in America. Another heard that he would be made a slave. Nothing dissuaded them, however. They boarded the ship which necessarily took them first in the wrong direction, to Copenhagen, where they could book passage to Liverpool for the transatlantic journey to Quebec City. From there it was a long train ride to Milwaukee. On June 27, 1870 William Wickmann was there waiting for them.

Wickmann presumed that fishing was the best employment for the Icelanders, and arranged for two of the men to get jobs on a fishing boat, and boarded the other two on a farm. Jon Gislason had his inheritance money, and did not immediately need a job, so he became Wickmann's associate in planning the next steps. Wickmann did not think that these rural people would be happy in a city that had more than four times the population of the entire country of Iceland. He took Jon to Washington Island and showed him the opportunities there for fishing.

William Wickmann's assumptions about the Icelanders adapting easily to the fishing business in America proved unfounded. The men who had fishing jobs found the American methods used on Lake Michigan unfamiliar and hard for them to

adapt themselves to. Wickmann suggested that the entire group should move up to Washington Island. They arrived as fall began.

When they first arrived, they found that their first task would be to clear the trees off the sixty-one acre homestead that Wickmann had purchased so that they could farm. The irony here is that these Icelanders knew little of trees! This was a job that involved considerable hard labour. Their initial efforts to load the timber they had cleared to be shipped across Death's Door to market proved disastrous, as they lost an entire load into the straits. Nonetheless, with Wickmann's help, they survived their first winter and their first season of farming.

In his book *Washington Island 1836-1876*, Conan Bryant Eaton reports that "baker's dozen of new Icelanders reached the island by way of Milwaukee in 1872. Most were lodged near Detroit Harbor by Wickman and Gislason and the men were at work in the woods when winter came." These were all a part of a group of seventeen that had left from Eyrabakki in June 1872. George Houser reports that among them were merchant Thorgrimsen's own son Hans, and at least two women: Gudmundur Gudmundsson's fiancé Gudrun Ingvarsdottir, and Maria Stefania. Maria was married and travelling with Haraldur, the brother of Paul Thorlaksson, and Paul was part of the group as well. These two Thorlaksson brothers and Maria chose not to go on to Washington Island when the group arrived in Milwaukee, but to see what they could do in the city instead. Here the story of Icelandic settlement in Wisconsin diverges into two streams, the Washington Islanders, and those who stayed in Milwaukee or who kept going further northwest to Shawano County by 1874.

In their first year in Milwaukee, Paul

Thorlakssson helped to arrange support from sympathetic Norwegian friends for the Icelandic immigrants when many of them could not find jobs. This situation could not continue, however. As much as they wanted to establish a homogeneous Icelandic settlement in Wisconsin on their own tracts of adjacent land as the Manitoba settlers would do, Paul and his father Thorlakur Jonsson decided to urge people to buy the remaining land scattered amidst the Norwegian settlers in Shawano, so they could begin to farm for themselves. Before this group moved, however, they gathered in Milwaukee on August 2, 1874 to celebrate the millennial of the settlement of Iceland and to conduct the first Icelandic language church service held in North America.

The group of settlers that started from Eyrabakki who decided to go directly to Washington Island arrived in the summer of 1872 and included twelve men, three women and two children. Among them was a second Arni Gudmundsen, who was to become a lifetime resident and leading citizen of the Washington Island, living there until his death in 1937 at the age of 92. The first winter of 1872-73 for this second group of settlers was extremely harsh. Many of them had college educations and had not done hard labor. The ice that year did not break up till late May of 1873. Several of the newest immigrants got on the first steamship that made it into Washington Harbor and never came back. Arni Gudmundsen was to follow them to spend the next winter in Milwaukee. His letters back to Iceland illuminate for us today the life of these new immigrants both on the island and in the city. During that first winter, in a letter from January 20, 1873 published in Eaton's *Washington Island*, Arni wrote:

"I have been in good health, still here in the same place chopping down cedar

trees and making firewood, together with my three compatriots Bjarni, Stefan, and Hans. Jon Gislason was also here, but he has given up farming for the time being. His friend Wickman has left the island and gone to Milwaukee where he is a clerk. It is safe to say that he (W) piled up nothing but debts here – he is not very thrifty. The winter here began in the middle of November with snow and frost and I don't remember it ever being as cold in Iceland as it was here around Christmas... as of now there are at least two feet of snow covering the whole island... In spite of the cold we have never felt it working outdoor – more so in bed at night, because the house we are living in really ought to be called a shed, like most of the houses on this island."

Later, from Milwaukee he wrote about a wedding celebration he attended:

"We came home from the church in a trolley so we could avoid the bantering remarks of rowdies about the tasseled hats. That evening we had a party here, to which selected Icelanders were invited. We had plenty of beer and rum toddy, chocolate, coffee, pancakes and other baked goodies which are most common here."

The letters from early settlers like Arni and reports in the newspapers were positive enough to continue to attract Icelanders with few opportunities in their homeland. More Icelandic settlers arrived in Milwaukee and some of them continued to be attracted north. The fishing market improved in 1874 and economic opportunities increased. By 1875, immigrants were coming from northern Iceland as well as from the south, and they were being solicited to settle in Canada as well as in the United States. By 1875, Wickmann and Gislason built a two-story dormitory on the southeast side of Detroit Harbor, to house the incoming Icelanders until they could build their

own houses. It became known among the established residents as the “Icelandic Castle”. In that same year, the political tide of leadership on the island began to turn. All the officials chosen in that year’s election were Scandinavian, among them Jon Gislason. William Wickman became the Chair of the Board of Supervisors.

After I finished my afternoon of research at the island archives and checked in to our hotel, the first place we wanted to visit was the site of the Icelandic Castle. The building itself is long gone. Jon Gislason ultimately built his own home on that property, after marrying Augusta Einarsdottir who had come back and forth to the island with her father Einar Bjornson and finally settled there. A historical marker in a small waterside park overlooking Detroit Harbor describes the site. We sat in the park and watched the sunset, imagining the comfort that sunsets over water must have brought to the early arrivals to this place, a place without mountains, shadowed by tall trees; a place with no sheep, different soil and altogether different fish. Even the rhythms of this northern latitude would have been unfamiliar, with shorter nights and unheard of heat during the summer and longer days in the winter. Like pilgrims throughout the centuries, the moon, the stars and the sun are the only friendly markers you have left within a strange landscape.

The winter of 1875 brought to Washington Island a cold spell never felt in Iceland, even colder than the winter Arni described in 1873, as the thermometer reading dropped to 40.5 degrees below zero. Nevertheless, people continued to come. Altogether there would be about 16,000 immigrants who made the journey to North American between 1870 and 1910, representing about twenty per cent of the population of Iceland. The Wisconsin newspapers over-estimated the numbers arriving and their impact on the

Washington Island settlement but it is safe to say that while always an ethnic minority among the Norwegians, the Danes and the Irish, the Icelanders played an increasingly important role in the civic life and community of the island. Jon Gislason’s tenure as Highway Overseer saw the laying out of many of the significant roads on the island. Arni Gudmundsen first became involved in town government as a justice of the peace and then served thirty-five years as town treasurer. In 1885 Gudmundsen also persuaded his brother Thordur, a doctor, to emigrate from Iceland and settle on Washington Island. The two brothers became important figures to everyone in the community, cementing the role of the Icelandic community on the Island despite their small numbers. By 1885 Washington Island’s population had reached 800 but only 70 were Icelanders.

Shopping for our groceries and souvenirs on the main retail street on Washington Island, we saw the Icelandic flag displayed on the lightposts along with the flags of the other nationalities represented in the island’s history. The names of Icelandic families are easily found on the tombstones in the cemetery on the north side near Washington Harbor, once the major freight harbour for the island but now mostly a park and beach. Some of those names and their obvious connection to Iceland have been obscured by marriages with islanders from other ethnicities. The descendants of so many of those named and remembered in that cemetery are no longer living on the island, or come back only for the summer season. The major industry now is tourism. Yet it is still possible to trace the lines of the original settlers to homes on the island and a highlight of this pilgrimage for us was the chance to enjoy the hospitality of Richard and Mary Jo Purinton in their home. As the great-granddaughter of Arni Gudmundsen



PHOTO: WAYNE ARNASON

Thordarson's boat house

and an island resident for much of her life, Mary Jo maintains an interest in her Icelandic heritage and a welcome for those who share it. Her husband's island history matches Mary Jo's, as he has worked in every possible role for the Ferry Company and continues to be a major interpreter of the island's life and history, both through his writings and his tours.

Richard Purinton has documented the life of Chester Hjortur Thordarson, a figure who adds yet another dimension to the history of Icelandic culture associated with Washington Island and its smaller neighbor, Rock Island. Thordarson was part of an 1873 group of immigrants from northern Iceland, arriving with his family as a six-year-old child. His family moved west from Milwaukee to Shawano County and eventually the Pembina settlement. C.H. Thordarson went on to college in North

Dakota and at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He made a fortune as an inventor and manufacturer of electrical equipment, most notably the high voltage transformer. Thordarson bought most of Rock Island starting in 1910 and made it a personal retreat and project for himself and his friends. His story is beyond the scope of this article and his relationship to the continuing Icelandic community on Washington Island was tenuous at best. Nevertheless, Thordarson is a notable and fascinating figure in the history of Western Icelanders, and one of the dividends of my pilgrimage was an introduction to his life and story. The largest trove of Icelandic memorabilia and artifacts in the area is found on Rock Island, which is now a state park. Thordarson's boat house, built in a Scandinavian style, with some of the craftsmen involved being Icelandic



PHOTO: WAYNE ARNASON

A chair carving from the Thordarson Collection

Canadians from Manitoba is a striking building in itself. The main reception floor is a museum of Thordarson's possessions which include an Icelandic dress his wife wore at their wedding and beautifully carved wooden furniture depicting scenes from Norse mythology.

As we sat in the sunroom at the Purinton home, talking about C. H. Thordarson and looking across the placid waters of Detroit Harbor, we realized that we were directly across the bay from where the Icelandic Castle had once stood. The descendants of the original settlers of Washington Island have now built their own castles, as the prosperity that their ancestors dreamed about for themselves and their children and grandchildren has come true for so many.

Part of the reason to undertake a pilgrimage is to better understand what it took to create the life that you now enjoy. The destination of a pilgrimage always means something to you, as a part of your story. It may be the story of your family, or the story of your religious heritage, or the story of the career or hobby that has drawn your passionate interest. However, beyond the destination, the journey itself is another reason that we undertake pilgrimages. We have time to reflect, to manage the risks and rewards of travel and to appreciate the experiences of generations before us who did the same. We come away with a deeper sense of gratitude for a life that is never our own creation, a life that is deeply connected to the lives of those on whose shoulders we stand.

Dreams and Claims Icelandic-Aboriginal Interactions in the Manitoba Interlake

by Dr. Anne Brydon, PhD

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Continued from Volume 69 #3

Smallpox epidemic

The first intimations of Ramsay's anger; towards the Icelanders appear in a letter of 12 April 1877, written by Dr. J.S. Lynch to the Indian Commissioner J.A.N. Provencher.⁷ Lieutenant-Governor Morris had appointed Dr. Lynch to tend to the Saulteaux dying from smallpox contracted from the most recent Icelandic arrivals. Kristjanson describes how at first the Icelanders denied the severity of the epidemic that was afflicting their own people. Only after Sigtryggur Jónasson returned on 9 November from a trip to the east was he able to persuade John Taylor to seek help. Lynch left Winnipeg to begin his duties on 17 November, a good two months after the outbreak, and arrived in Gimli on 20 November, a few hours after another physician, Dr. Young, arrived from Lower Fort Garry. Together, the two men tended the sick and dying before Lynch left with Joseph Monkman to travel north to Sandy Bar. There they found the Saulteaux community deserted. They burned the buildings to contain the smallpox; the following year some Icelanders moved onto the land.

The devastation to the Icelanders was

immense – of about 1,200 people, 102 died, although many of them had been immunized in Iceland. But the impact on the Saulteaux proved far worse:

Following the trail which led from the houses to the Icelandic Settlement, about three miles distant, on the White Mud River, we found the Indians, – the few that were left of them, encamped in Birch Bark Tents on the South side of the River – a Band of fifty or sixty, reduced to seventeen.⁸

Lynch spent the remainder of the winter visiting other afflicted native communities, guided by John Ramsay. In his lengthy report to Provencher, Lynch puts forward Ramsay's complaint:

On leaving the Settlement I promised Ramsay that I would represent to you what he regards, and what seems to me a case of great hardship.

He has lived on the point at Sandy Bar for twenty-five years, and was born on Big Island (later called Hecla Island, after the famous Icelandic volcano), only a few miles distant. He and his band have been hunters, fishers and farmers. The Bar is the fishing Station where their houses were, in which they lived during the winters.

But Ramsay had a farm, where he had tilled several acres for twenty years, on the

North side of the River. There was a good house on it, in which he and his family always lived in summer, returning to their winter house in the wood at the Bar only when the winter was approaching and the fishing season began.

Although he was quite aware that he was not living on an Indian Reserve, he believed that the farm was his, and that it could not be taken from him. I think he understood this to be one of the conditions of his Treaty, but the Icelanders have taken his farm and are living in his house, and to his remonstrances have told him that he has no right to it whatever, that it is an Icelandic Reserve, and he must leave the neighbourhood altogether.

Not knowing how far I might assure him of his being allowed to remain a tenant on what certainly seems to be his land, I have only told him that I would represent the case to you. He has never before had an opportunity of having his case heard. I can vouch for the truth of much of his statement, and believe it to be wholly as stated, in every particular.⁹

Ramsay contracted smallpox. He and his daughter named Mary or Maria, survived the epidemic, but his wife and four other children did not. Although no later accounts repeat his statement, Fridrik Sveinsson states that Betsey was buried with two of her children. She died in September, at the beginning of the epidemic and well before John Taylor notified authorities about its outbreak. Kristjanson (52) glosses Lynch's charges without mention of the Saulteaux, and presents a rebuttal:

The medical officers believed that the people showed apathy in the face of their experiences, but Sigtryggur Jónasson challenges their opinion, stating that the people kept up a remarkably good spirit during their great calamity, "which many who don't know their general disposition nor understand their language call indifference."

Given my own years of living in Iceland and familiarity with their reserved demeanour, I find it believable that the doctors would not perceive the nuances of their concern even when it was felt.

The medical officer Young reported on diarrhea and scurvy afflicting the settlement, and how the settlers were attempting to clean the "filth and noxious matter" from around their homes. Young suggested that some of the worst houses be burned since cleaning and disinfecting them would be impossible.¹⁰

Native contexts

By 1875 the Saulteaux, Cree and Ojibwa of Manitoba had generations of experience interacting with Europeans in connection with the fur trade. This region was part of Rupert's Land, granted as sovereign territory to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670. During the eighteenth century, the lake was a major crossroads for the rivers along which the fur trade moved, although the archaeological record indicates that travel along these waterways was frequent before then. Native peoples were aware of the increasing number of settlers entering the west; they were also aware of changes occurring to the ecology as a result of increasing usage. When it came time to sign treaties that would extinguish their land title, the Native peoples were motivated to negotiate reserves and other conditions, since it was clear to them this was their only way to retain any means of livelihood. They wanted to sign treaties not because the treaties were a good deal, but because the people had no alternative. Wild game and fish stocks were declining, increasing steamboat traffic reduced their employment as lake trippers on the York boats, and numbers of white hunters, settlers and surveyors gave indisputable proof of future changes.

When Lieutenant-Governor Morris

granted the Icelanders a reserve in 1875 he most likely assumed that the Aboriginal peoples around Lake Winnipeg would soon sign Treaty No. 5. In fact, not all bands signed that year. A number of them were missed during the autumn trip Morris made around the lake for the purpose of collecting signators to the treaty. Morris was unaware of the number and nature of band organizations, including the Sandy Bar-White Mud River band. This was not unusual during the treaty-signing process in Canada. Many groups and bands have been and continue to be excluded intentionally or unintentionally; they are subsequently grouped with other bands for reasons of bureaucratic expediency. Aboriginal self-identity is overlooked. The pressure of incoming settlers made officials move quickly to force land surrender in situations bereft of equality or informed consent. According to Dickason (251), "In the case

of Manitoba, the federal government gave surprisingly little thought to the terms of the expected surrenders; officials seem to have regarded the exercise as little more than a formality."

It was too late in the season to open negotiations with the overlooked bands. Instead, a meeting was set up at Dog Head Point for 25 July 1875. The Sandy Bar-White Mud River people, including John Ramsay, went to the meeting, which could not have turned out worse for them. Morris had given very explicit instructions to the two commissioners who met with the Saulteaux. First, the various bands were to be treated as one band, which was to elect one Chief. Amalgamation and election of a single leader went against Aboriginal ideas of social order; they were accustomed to small groups and more informal negotiations of leadership based on personal qualities. Judging from the commissioners'

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account of the negotiations and the Natives initial objections, the Aboriginal peoples did not want a foreign social order imposed upon them. But in the face of the commissioners' adamant refusal to negotiate and determination to stick to the letter of Morris's instructions, they finally agreed to elect a chief, as long as the commissioners agreed to carry forward each band's request for a separate reserve. The commissioners agreed – except in the case of the Sandy Bar-White Mud Saulteaux. Ramsay's people requested the lands they already occupied at White Mud River-Sandy Bar. The commissioners denied the request for a separate reserve on the grounds they had accepted annuities¹¹ at the St Peters reserve at Netley Creek. In effect, Ramsay's people were denied any existence as a legal entity despite the questionable criterion.

Contemporary land claims researchers say the place from which individuals take annuities is no indication of their band membership. The St Peters reserve was a prosperous one, and it acted as a magnet over a large region, attracting people from as far away as Norway House (Thompson).

Were the commissioners consistent in their judgements about the annuities? It would appear not. Some 20 of the 22 families of another band at the Dog Head Point meeting that day also collected their annuities at St Peters, but they were not denied a reserve. Given this inconsistency, it stands to reason that the commissioners had other motivations for disenfranchising and dispersing the Sandy Bar-White Mud River band. That reason could very well have been to erase the error Morris and the Department of the Interior had made in granting land to the Icelanders before the extinguishment of its aboriginal title. This interpretation cannot be treated as conclusive, however.

It is difficult to determine the exact timing of events. It would appear that the

three Icelandic families arrived at Icelandic River before the Sandy Bar-White Mud River people travelled to Dog Head Point. Given how the negotiations went, one can see the basis for Ramsay's anger. Any power to determine their own future had been denied his people in an arbitrary manner. To make matters worse, within a few months, most of their band, including Ramsay's wife and four of his five children, were dead from smallpox. No wonder, then, that John Ramsay prevailed upon Dr. Lynch to tell Provencher, the Indian commissioner, of his grievances.

Ramsay's Land Claim

On 16 April 1877, Provencher forwarded a copy of Dr. Lynch's account to the Minister of the Interior in Ottawa. In his cover letter, he comments:

I beg to draw your attention particularly on the hardships that these families settled at Sandy Bar had to suffer from the arrival of the Icelanders among them.

Some reports of the same character had before reached this office, but if not precise enough to allow any special means of redress, though more than sufficient to show the necessity of some general measure of protection.¹²

Provencher refers to a letter he wrote on 9 September 1876 to the Minister, which included a memorandum from Justice McKeagney, then an administrator for the province, concerning complaints and demands from Icelanders on the same land question.

The Deputy of the Minister of the Interior, Meredith, referred Provencher's letter to the Surveyor General for a report on 2 May 1877. In his reply, the Surveyor General begins cautiously, but concludes clearly on the side of Ramsay:

On the reference the undersigned begs to remark that there are no data in his office by which he can throw any light upon the

alleged occupation of land on the north side of the river in the vicinity of Sandy Bar on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg by the Indian Ramsay.

Assuming, however, the statement made by Dr. Lynch to be correct, it would appear to the undersigned that by the provisions of the Indian Act, Ramsay has full right to retain possession of his house and of the land titled by him. It is quite clear that in setting apart lands for the Icelanders to settle on, it was never contemplated to interfere with any rights which Indians or others, under the law may have possessed.

The Icelanders, therefore, have no claim to Ramsay's land or his house, and the undersigned respectfully recommends that Mr. Taylor should be requested to turn the present occupants out of it accordingly and restore possession to the complainant.¹³

Meredith must have sought advice from the Deputy Superintendent of the Indian Affairs Department, Lawrence Van Koughnet, since a memorandum dated 18 May 1877 is included in the Public Archives. Van Koughnet writes:

I think Mr. Provencher should be requested to place himself in communication with Mr. Taylor, the Icelandic agent at Gimli, informing him that by the 70th section (a) of the Indian Act 1876, the Indian Ramsay would appear to be entitled to undisturbed occupation of the land and premises referred to in Dr. Lynch's letter, and requesting him to cause the Icelanders who have taken illegal possession to restore the same to the Indians' claimant.¹⁴

In June 1877, John Ramsay laid before Morris a grievance against the Icelanders about his land. Morris advised him to join the Norway House band, which had been redirected to Fisher River, north of the Icelandic reserve.¹⁵ I have yet to find any evidence that Provencher followed the advice he received from Ottawa, and it would seem from Morris's advice to

Ramsay that there was an unofficial policy of putting Ramsay off pursuing his claim.

No further action seems to have occurred after this, since Ramsay officially renewed his complaint two years later (*ibid.*):

DECLARATION OF JOHN
RAMSAY

St. Peter's Reserve 9th June 1879
County of Lisgar

The declaration of John Ramsay a treaty Indian, taking treaty money from the Government of Canada represents, 1st That I have occupied a certain parcel of land on the bank of the White Mud River in the Territory of Keewatin now included in the Icelandic Reserve during the past fifteen years, or five years before the transfer of this country to the Dominion of Canada.

2nd That the said parcel of land contains nearly as I am tell (*sic*) about forty acres in a square form,

3rd That I have been prevented from living on and farming the said parcel of land during the last two years by the Icelanders,

4th That the Icelanders took any timber which I had prepared and built two houses on the lot in which they are now living – and I make this declaration Austenciously (*sic*) believing the same to be true and in vistue (*sic*) of the Act inlited (*sic*) as Act for the suppression and voluntary and extra Judicial oaths, his

(Sgd.) John X Ramsay
mark

Declared before me at St Peters this 9th day of June A.D. 1879 first having read out and

interpreted,
(sigd.) L.S. Vaughan
a Commissioner in B.R.K.

Two days later, in Selkirk, Joseph Monkman signed a declaration vouching for the accuracy of Ramsay's word. He also

reported on another confrontation between Ramsay and the Icelanders at Icelandic River.¹⁶

Selkirk, 11th June 1879
County of Lisgar

The declaration of Joseph Monkman since of the Parish of St Peters, Province of Manitoba (word illegible)

1st That I have known the land the subject of a declaration of John Ramsay a Treaty Indian during the past fifteen years

2nd That the land contains about forty acres and lies on the bank of the White Mud River in Keewatin.

3rd That I acted as interpreter for said Ramsay during the present spring when he wished to repossess himself of said land from the Icelanders.

4th that he was prevented for so doing by Icelanders who now have two houses built on said land part of the material of which houses was the property of said Ramsay and was unlawfully taken from him and used by the Icelanders. And I make this declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true and in virtue of the Act for the suppression of voluntary and extra judicial oaths.

(sgd) Joseph Monkman
Declared before me at Selkirk
the 11th day of June 1879
(sgd) L.S. Vaughan
a Commissioner in BR

Details of a second confrontation in 1879 between Ramsay and the Icelanders at Icelandic River do not exist in the published histories of West Icelanders. According to Fridrik Sveinsson's account, "Ramsay and Ólafur (Ólafsson) reached an agreement whereby Ramsay could camp on the land (at Ós) and cultivate his potato plot as long as he wished, and the two lived side by side in harmony from that day forward." That

harmonious relationship was shortlived, however, since Ólafur, accompanied by Fridrik, left New Iceland for North Dakota in March 1879 (Gerrard 211). Ólafur lost his wife and one foster son to the smallpox epidemic and had what Gerrard calls a "stormy" career in politics as the elected president of the colony. The move to North Dakota was the first of several moves he made around that State. He went then to several locations in Alberta and British Columbia before returning to Winnipeg in 1908. His departure from Ós might have appeared to Ramsay as an opportunity to renew his claim to the land and that might have been the context of the unsuccessful attempt at repossession that Monkman reports. Jón Bergvinson took official possession of the land in 1881, and his son Bergvin Jónsson obtained the homestead rights and patent in 1883 (Thompson 35).

Clearly, Ramsay was not satisfied by the lack of response to his complaints. Meanwhile, Provencher was dealing with an accusation of misconduct. In 1878, Provencher was found guilty on sixteen counts of fraud, including supplying inferior implements to the Indians, sending fictitious accounts to Ottawa and supplying poor cattle, wild cattle and unwholesome provisions to the Indians (McCull; Titley). By suggesting that the inquiry might have distracted him I am giving Provencher the benefit of the doubt. The guilty verdict indicates Provencher did not always work on behalf of First Nations peoples.

His successor, James Graham, resumed Ramsay's case after Ramsay made his declaration in 1879. On 22 September 1879, Graham wrote to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs that the Indian Agent Young had reported Ramsay's grievance to him. He states, "one Oloff Olofson, an Icelander took possession of and settled upon the lot, refusing to give it up when requested to do so." Graham does

not indicate when this request was made.¹⁷ He also states that Ramsay sought cash compensation in the amount of \$250 and notes, "I am enclosing a copy of Ramsay's own declaration and also one from Mr. Joseph Monkman. I am informed there are many others who are well acquainted with the facts of the case."

Only a portion of Van Koughnet's letter to Graham on 1 October is included in the file; it refers to land "improperly taken possession of by an Icelander" and instructs Graham to refer to a letter of 30 May 1877, to Provencher, and to communicate with John Taylor "with a view to that gentleman bringing the same under the notice of the Dominion Land Officer " There the fragment ends. Also missing from the file is the letter Graham wrote to Taylor. It is difficult to determine to what Taylor is reacting.

John Taylor's response of 15 March 1880 to the instructions forwarded by Graham begins by placing responsibility for Ramsay's compensation squarely in the government's hands. He continues in a manner that contradicts and discredits Ramsay's version:

I have received your letter of 26th February last with enclosed copy of a letter from Mr. Provencher to myself dated 9th June 1877, which letter never reached me, and copies of declaration of John Ramsay and Joseph Monkman, with reference to improved land and timber for a house claimed by J. Ramsay and said to have been illegally appropriated by an Icelander and which I am requested to have restored to J. Ramsay.

In reply I have to state for the information of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs that in July 1875 I was instructed by the Lieutenant-Governor Hon. A. Morris that the Indians had no claim whatever

to the lands at Sandy Bar and White Mud River on the West Shore of Lake Winnipeg and that they were about signing a Treaty under the terms of which they would remove to a Reserve at Doghead further north.

And I was further instructed by his Honor in October 1875 that said Treaty had been presented (unclear) and that I should locate the Icelanders on said lands which was accordingly done.

And further that in the following year 1876 I laid before Col Provencher the claims of J. Ramsay and other Indians and was informed by him that said Indians had no rights to said lands. (This suggests that Provencher was the anonymous Dominion Indian



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Agent referred to in Fridrik Sveinsson's account.)

I would therefore submit that having signed the Treaty with Lieut Governor Morris, and previous claims to these lands had such existed (unclear), were extinguished by their own act, with full knowledge and understanding of the same.

And further that having acted under the instructions of the Lieut Governor, the government is responsible for the consequences resulting from such actions and compensation for any damages must be demanded from the Government and not from the Icelander who was (word unintelligible) settled on said lands according to above instructions.

In his letter to me of 9th June 1877, the Acting Indian Superintendent refers to the lands at Sandy Bar but in the declaration made by John Ramsay he claims other lands, 3 or 4 miles distant at White Mud River.

In 1875 when I applied for the lands now contained in the Icelandic Reserve, there were a few small houses at Sandy Bar, say 3, but none were at White Mud River. These must have been created subsequently.

All the houses at White Mud River were purchased and paid for by the Icelanders, John Ramsay himself receiving payment for one. The house

timber referred to was lying on the river bank for a long period, and the Icelander who occupied the lot was on the most friendly terms with Ramsay. As this Icelander has sold out his improvements to another very deserving and respectable man and has gone to the States it is difficult to say whether the said timber (if used at all as stated) was illegally taken or arranged for between the parties.

I am sure that no Icelander wishes to defraud John Ramsay and he will be paid whatever he is fairly entitled to for his house timber, which was of little value.

In conclusion I would remark that no resident here knows anything of the said 40 acres of land claimed by Ramsay. A small cultivated plot of less than one acre, not fenced, was formerly used by him before the Treaty.

I have invariably impressed on the settlers here that they should cultivate a good understanding with the Indians, and I feel assured that the best feeling has always existed here. The result of further inquiry will be duly communicated.¹⁸

It is possible Taylor did not receive Provencher's letter, since New Iceland was under quarantine in the spring of 1877 when the letter was sent, and there were postal disruptions (Kristjanson). Taylor's arguments that the Saulteaux willingly signed away all rights to the land and that responsibility for compensation lay with the government are mutually exclusive, since one assumes the legality of the land transfer while the other implies a breach in need of redress. Further, the arguments are based in moral rather than legal terms. The argument that the land was barely used does not take into consideration the legal provisions of the Indian Act concerning the rights to occupancy of lands already in use by Aboriginal Peoples. As well, another

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logic prevails: whether occupancy is in a tent or cabin does not change the claim's legal status.

Taylor challenges Ramsay's credibility by contradicting Ramsay's account of his house, the value of the timber and the size of garden plot. He states that Ramsay has already been paid, then says that Ólafur Ólafsson's departure makes it impossible to know the legality of the transaction, then concludes that Ramsay would be compensated, but under what conditions of "fair entitlement" Taylor doesn't say. Taylor first raises doubts about whether Ramsay's timber was used, then casts doubt on its value. If it was usable, it presumably had some value. But Fridrik Sveinsson makes no mention of payment being made to Ramsay or any other native for a house. As well, Dr Lynch tended the Saulteaux at Icelandic River during the smallpox epidemic. He would know if Ramsay's house existed. Dr. Lynch concluded his letter with the statement, "I can vouch for the truth of much of his statement, and believe it to be wholly as stated, in every particular."¹⁹ This suggests Lynch did not see anything to contradict Ramsay's version although the statement does contain the hedge "much of." Taylor's assurances that the Icelanders had good feelings towards the Saulteaux is consistent with Taylor's at-times obsequious style when communicating with the government, and I interpret it as a rhetorical device intended to shift blame for any conflicts onto the Saulteaux.

That aboriginal-built houses existed somewhere at or near the Icelandic River settlement is confirmed by a letter written to his father by Björn Andrésson on 6 March 1877, telling of his initial months at Icelandic River: "Along with several others I stayed in one of the Indian houses until a month before Christmas when I moved into the house Lárus and I built on his lot ..." (Gerrard 33). A writer for the newspaper

Framfari (in Jóakimsson 30) refers to four or five Native huts (kofar) on the west bank of Icelandic River in which Icelanders lived during the winter of 1876-77. The poet Guttormor Guttormsson, who often expressed his great admiration for Ramsay and was photographed in 1935 beside Betsey's grave, states that Ramsay had a house on the south side of the river and a tent on the north side (Ógmundardóttir). Magnús Stefánsson reports tents and houses (tjöld og hús) at Sandy Bar, and when Jón Björnsson took land near Sandy Bar in 1876 he lived the first 10 months, along with eight others, in a Native-built log cabin measuring 10 feet by 12 feet (Jóakimsson 81). There are references to the Saulteaux living in tents and log cabins (bjálkakofar) in several other Icelandic sources. The only further reference I have found alluding to Aboriginal cultivation concerns Stefán Eyjólfsson, who in 1877 planted a successful crop of wheat on what is described as an "old Indian garden" (gamlan Índíánagard) at Icelandic River (ibid.: 51). The existence of John Ramsay's house, however, is still a matter of dispute for some people who assume the presence or absence of buildings is relevant to determining rights to land.

John Taylor had a divine revelation instructing him to guide the Icelanders in their search for a block of land to settle in western Canada.²⁰ Helping the Icelanders was his calling, and he laboured hard on their behalf until his death in 1885. It is not surprising, then, that he would strongly rebuff Graham's request that Ramsay's land be returned to him or paid for, if indeed these were Graham's instructions. To what degree Taylor represented accurately the views of Icelanders is in need of further analysis; initial research suggests that Taylor was not always the best judge of a situation, as Houser attests. Many Icelanders were discomfited by his actions, and some by his religiosity (Ógmundardóttir: pers. comm.),

or felt called upon to note that, while his intentions were good, his organizational abilities were lacking (cf. Stefán Eyjólfsson in Jóakimsson 12).

Without corroborating evidence, however, we are left with two conflicting reports – those of Taylor and Ramsay – and no means to evaluate the accuracy of either. Further research may turn up more evidence, yet I doubt if it could make the case any less ambiguous. The circumstances around Ramsay's declaration fall into a grey area in Canada's history. The legality of many actions taken during the settlement of the country was dubious at best. Determining the value of the timber or the existence of a wooden house or the size of the potato plot cannot in itself decide the legal validity of Ramsay's claim – if that is one's goal.

Concluding in next issue with:
Dreams and the Ambiguities of Memory

Endnotes

7. Public Archives, Indian Affairs, RG10, Volume 3646, File 8064, Reel C-10113.

8. Public Archives, Indian Affairs, RG10, Volume 3646, File 8064, Reel C-10113.

9. Public Archives, Indian Affairs, RG10, Volume 3646, File 8064, Reel C-10113.

10. Morris Papers, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG12 B1 1458, 1466.

11. Annuities were regular sums of cash or cash equivalents (for example housing) paid by the British administration to First Nations peoples in exchange for title to their lands. The practice began in 1817. Annuities were more economical for the British administration than a single cash payment, since the government could use revenues generated by selling parts of the land to settlers and land speculators.

12. RG10, Vol. 3646, File 8064.

13. Public Archives, Indian Affairs,

RG10, Vol. 3649, File 8200, Reel C-10113. The Indian Act of 1876 has governed, and in modified form continues to govern, the lives of status Indians. In Brian Tittle's words, the Indian Act is "a comprehensive piece of legislation which confirmed the Indians' status as minors and wards of the state, imposed restrictions on their civil liberties and created a mechanism whereby they could cast off these disabilities. It was assumed that the Native peoples would ultimately acquire full citizenship, but that could only take place when they had become 'civilized' – a transformation which would make them culturally indistinguishable from the white populations" (Tidey 1997: 35).

14. Ibid.

15. Provincial Archives of Manitoba, LB/M, Morris Papers, Morris to the Minister of the Interior, 29 June 1877.

16. Ibid.

17. Public Archives, RG10, Vol.3649, File 8200, Reel C-10113.

18. Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol. 3649, File 8200, Reel C-10113.

19. Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol. 3649, File 8200, Reel C-10113.

20. The Canadian government appointed William C. Krieger and Sigtryggur Jónasson as Icelandic immigration agents. Krieger travelled to Iceland in 1875, and in his report from Akureyri of 14 November, he states, "I visited a farm house in this vicinity a few days ago and was shown a letter from one of the Icelanders now in Wisconsin, dated 8 September; in which it said that letters had been received from Messrs Taylor and Johnson; the former acknowledging that he had a divine revelation in which it had been imposed upon him to take the affairs of the Icelanders in his hands.... I shall refrain from arguing the validity of a Divine revelation in regard to Mr. Taylor's proposed general scheme; as I deem it to be of no consequence in reference to the Icelandic emigration...."

A Unicorn Story

©Ainsley Alexis Thorarinson Scowen Bloomer (Bebe)
(Originally written in 1980s, revised in 1990s)



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Spirit resting in healing waters

Chapter 1

Evening bestowed upon us a deep sapphire blue sky with sprinkles of silvery sparkling stars while the opulent moon smiled. The lustrous lunar luminated streams of silver moonbeams that shone and shimmered over the sacred healing waters of the UNICORN SANCTUARY. Deep within the waters, polished pebbles

gleamed and glistened as they smiling up to us. A soft splish, splash, splosh... splish splash, splosh...splish, splash, splosh, sounds were heard as Spirit, Gem, Chalcadony and Jade stretched and strolled in the heavenly healing waters. Gentle breezes glided through the whispering air.

“Glorious is the evening.” Gem sang and Spirit, Chalc and Jade agree.

“And the story of us is being told tonight.” Spirit eagerly enlightened the others.

“Yes,” Gem said. “The story of Glory and the humankind.”

“Well its more like our kind and the humankind.” Chalcedony revealed.

“Well, it began with Glory” Gem specified.

“True.” Chalc added.

“Oh, I think I know that story. Is that the one about the horns?” Jasper questioned.

“Yes, yes and it's more about the same story.” continued Gem.

“I thought we heard all about that already.” Jade commented.

“Well there is so much more to tell.” Gem clarified.

The yearling unicorns looked at one another, breathed in the luscious air and then gazed into the healing waters. They were all in the process of learning more about their ancient ancestral past and honing in on their special spiritual gifts of: honesty, open-mindedness and willingness, coupled with a devoted faithfulness, true

friendship, lasting respect of ones self and others, noble honour and the attaining of the pure and precious inner peace inherent in all od the unicorn-kind.

The unicorn-kind lived in a sacred and serene surroundings safe in their own realm. Yet it was not always that way. At one time the unicorn-kind lived amongst the humankind in a harmonious atmosphere. Yet that life is long gone and they no longer live together within the same realm.

A glow appeared from the forest moving towards the waters as Spirit's mother made her way as she majestically moved through the waters:

“Yearlings it's time.” She spoke.

“Already?”

“Yes, come now and listen to the stories of our ancient ancestral past. Infinity will begin soon.”

Chapter 2

The yearlings meandered through the gentleness of a fresh, flourishing, forest as emerald green lush leaves glittered and glistened. Moonbeams illuminated pathways and guided them to a sacred spiritual, sanctuary we call the MEADOW OF HEARTS. Here every unicorn experiences for themselves their own inner spiritual knowing. The group gathered themselves around their cherished and esteemed elder known to us as Infinity. He is called thus because when one is in his presence one experiences the sensation that he has always been and will always be. He is gifted with a special memory of our ancestral beginnings and of our journeys hence forth. He lives in the prime present yet shares all the many memories of our past. He also exudes in another one of his gifts known as second sight and is able to envision multiple possible future scenarios. As the unicorns gather around him, he serenely waits and watches over them. When all is ready and still, he begins.



Spirit's mom comes to call the yealings

Chapter 3

“Welcome my spiritual ones to our inner sanctuary in our MEADOW OF HEARTS. Here we gather to share some of the sacred stories of our ancestral past. We are grateful and mindful of our-kind and of all our serene surroundings. Yet our lives were not always peaceful and tonight's sharing will reveal that to you. Tonight, you will learn about and be reminded about our history with the human folk, who now live beyond our OPAL DIVIDE.”

Infinity paused as he looked upon the unicorns and as all was silent, so he continued. “For those of you who are unfamiliar with our OPAL DIVIDE, it is a special sealed door between our world and the human world and was created many crescent moons ago. Our kind and

humankind once lived peacefully together within and beyond the OPAL DIVIDE. The sweet innocence of trust, honesty, faithfulness and loyalty were shared by all. We crossed the invisible boundaries of the OPAL DIVIDE daily, visible to us but invisible to the human folk. We befriended many a human and helped those in great need. All was well within the magical myriad of days and nights we spent together in tranquilly. Then it was one woe begotten evening, that a tragic thought passed through a human mind. From whence this thought came we do not know, but the thought came and instilled a powerful desire within the human. The thought expressed that one could obtain prosperous power and wondrous wealth with the owning a horn of a unicorn. This thought harboured itself, shared itself with other humans and a delirious desire to own a horn of a unicorn burned itself into the hearts of some of the humans. Private planning began as to how one could and would obtain a horn. Then on a crisp, dreadful peaceful evening like this evening, the fulfillment of this plan was forth into fruition.”

Chapter 4

“On that day a young and innocent woman child named Lily, came to the HEALING WATERS seeking the help of a unicorn healing and unknown to her and our unicorn kind it was also the same day that the unicorn horn seekers sought out a horn of a unicorn. Lily had been filled with a deep sorrow and a deep longing and in her anguish, she asked for the help of a unicorn friend. Glory, who was one of our ancient ancestors, heard her sorrow and appeared before her. Glory stood by her and listened as she told of her sorrow. Unknown to either Lily or Glory, a group of horn seekers were watching them.

In that evening while Lily and Glory

contemplated her story, the horn seeking human folk silently surrounded Glory. Glory and Lily became surprised because humans had never behaved like this before and this was certainly curious behaviour. Yet once surrounded the humans quickly bound Glory with ropes and then chains, Glory and Lily were terrified.

Lily screamed and Glory questioned; “What is the meaning of this? Why do you bind me?”

Lily was pushed away and told to go home, but she ran not to get away but to get help and Glory's questions were coldly unanswered. Glory repeated himself, “What are you doing?”

Then a shrilling and chilling answer came from one Glory could not see, “We want your horn, beast, we want your powers!”

Glory was shocked although having never experienced shock he could not identify the new sensation yet he stayed serene and educated the men by saying, “We have guided you throughout the ages in the attainment of peace of mind and serenity. This demand you seek will not go well for you for it is not well thought out and nor is it a reasonable request. You will gain nothing by this. If you remove my horn you will gain no powers for yourselves nor any of your kind. You are sadly in error for a horn without being on a unicorn has no power at all. You will only become drowned in a suffering of a sunken sorrow and the woe of an eternal grief.”

One of the human folk delirious with desire answered him, “This is not true. You lie to protect yourself. We have seen you, we want what you have, we want all of your powers. Hold still unicorn.” Glory warned the human men again. “I warn you. Unicorns do not lie and you will only have the affliction of agony and the torment of timeless tribulation if you continue on this ruthless road.”



Meadow of Hearts

Infinity gazed upon the ones yet all were wide crazy eyed.

Chapter 5

“The men refused lessen their grip or let him go and Glory sprung into the air leaping and bucking, bouncing and pulling to free himself. Yet the single unicorn was completely overwhelmed by the sheer number of human folk. They threw nets over the struggling singleness and tied the unicorn down with more ropes and chains. Once the unicorn was completely overtaken his horn was held and then with one fast and furious swoop his horn was sliced off with one hew of a sharp and mighty axe. Glory lay stunned and hurt yet grieved for the men who did the regrettable deed and for the loss of his one and beautiful horn.

Many other unicorns were captured

before the next moon rose and many had their horns sheered off. These actions by the human folk stirred within us a great upheaval and our perceptions of human folk were completely changed. We now saw them not only as another living form sharing the beauty of nature around us but as creatures lured by a greed for power into senseless and destructive acts. Many of our sparkling silver horns were severed by the human folk. As each horn was severed, the pain and the loss of the one was felt by all.”

Chapter 6

“We learned that not all of the human kind were inflicted with this hard hearted greed because as other human folk friends learned about the capture and severing of the horns of our kind, some of our most trusted and befriended human folk broke in to try to stop the useless capture of us and the shearing of our horns. As this struggle between the human folk ensued a war broke out amongst them.”

“Some of our Unicorn kind and human kind friends escaped as the war raged on. The war amongst them continued and continued. The war raged on until they forgot why they were even fighting amongst themselves. While they fought amongst themselves we ran. We ran through the OPAL DIVIDE into our unicorn world and began closing and sealing the many pathways of the DIVIDE. We prevented anything, person, animal or unicorn from entering into our world. We were shocked, shaken and shivering. We eventually calmed ourselves as we watched and waited. We waited for opportunities to let only the unicorns enter our world through the one area of the DIVIDE. We were able to see and hear into the human world, but the humans could not see or hear into our world. We waited ...we watched. We watched for the right moments to enter into the human world and recover the

rest of our own. This was done with great silence, secrecy and planning. One by one the opportunities presented themselves and one by one we were able to find and bring home our own. Our unicorns with their horns sheared off, were brought to the ETERNAL HEALING WATERS where their healing began. Even though their wounds eventually healed, the memory of the disaster remains within the scars upon their foreheads and scars within our hearts.”

Infinity silently looked over the spiritual unicorns as they listened and envisioned these happenings. It was a terrifying vision. He paused awhile and then continued, “Today nothing can cross the invisible boundaries of the OPAL DIVIDE as we have sealed them all. No unicorn-kind can enter into the human world and no human-kind can enter into our realm. Yet there is the one opening of the OPAL DIVIDE in which we continuously guard as there lies a living rainbow within the design of this door. We were in the aftermath of whirling raindrops the day this final door was rounded off and sealed.”

Chapter 7

“The human wars eventually ceased because we were no longer amongst them and they could not remember why they were fighting. Only the humans who had severed the unicorn horns could remember. Within their lust for power they found only the grief and sorrow that our ancestor, Glory, foretold to them. The great powers and riches these humans lusted for from the horns of the unicorns never materialized. They discovered the horn without the unicorn had no real power on its own. They tried and tried with various ways like melting the horn, but the horn would not melt. They tried grinding the horn into powder but the horn would not grind. They



The Healing Waters

carved and cut the horn but it would not be carved or cut.

They tried any imaginable way to use the unicorn horn but found nothing to work. They exhausted their resources in this futile endeavour. In frustration and in defeat they finally realized that what Glory had foretold them was true. Why had they not heeded his warning? A great feeling of defeat overwhelmed them as the vision of wealth alluded them. They became filled with a great regret and a tormenting sorrow as they began to see the damage they had done and the futility of it all. This regret and sorrow slowly turned into an unquenchable torment of shame for what they had done, coupled with the agony of anguish. These humans fell to their knees pleading for relief from their inner torment. Did anyone hear? Could anyone

hear? Would anyone hear? Could anyone do anything? What could they do? One by one, they fell and one by one we heard them.”

Chapter 8

“Telepathy is a wonderful tool if used in the right fashion and for the right reasons and we used this gift to communicate with the human folk. We learned that only those with a deepest and greatest regret and remorse, an open mind and a pure humbled heart could hear us. We listened to their song of long sufferings and torment and we tried not to forgive them, but our nature and our teachings are that of forgiveness. Little by little, tiny glimmerings of forgiveness silently flowed through us and through the great OPAL DIVIDE into some of the suffering human folk. We spoke with them telepathically. We channeled within them a gentle flow of forgiveness and a need of making amends for their wrongdoings began to stir within them. We saw this natural desire as a means to help them and ourselves heal. We instilled a vision into the human folk that would help their healing.

All the unicorn horns that were severed were to be gathered and brought to a special sacred and secluded spot within the human world. The horns were to be handled and guarded with special care. Only a human with a cleansed, pure, honest humble heart could handle a unicorn horn. Once the horns were found, gathered and stored into the special secret place then one could begin the healing process of inner forgiveness coupled with peace of mind and inner serenity.

Many humans set out to accomplish this quest and as their lives came to an end, they passed this quest onto to their sons and daughters an grandsons and granddaughters and on and on this

quest went on. There were many stories along this path and many a human had a different story to tell.” Infinity stopped here and rested.

Chapter 9

Whilst Infinity rested the others did too and when he was ready he continued. “Some humans who had no part in the taking of our horns heard and believed the stories and also joined this quest. Horns were found and gathered and taken to the special secret site and guarded with great care. We have seen this through the DIVIDE. Horns were gathered yet all kinds of horns. Humans can no longer tell the difference between our horns and horns of animals that roam the earth. So, a variety of horns were gathered and stored. When we are certain that all our horns are gathered we will appoint some of our kind to walk through the OPAL DIVIDE into the human world once again, gather our horns and bring them home to the inner sanctuary of the MEADOW OF HEARTS. This must be done secretly and unknown to all humans. All humans must never see us, nor know that we are present. We have forgiven humankind and we now speak with some of them through the OPAL DIVIDE. Only with repentance, true acceptance and an open mind can any human hear us. We can transcend peace of mind and serenity into the humans and we have attempted to answer their unceasing questions.” Infinity paused. There was a great silence amongst the unicorns.

Chapter 10

Spirit longed to appear before the young human he had seen through the DIVIDE and had been watching for a long time. Spirit’s mother, sensing this said; “You know as any of us that we live in another realm, dear. We can see and help

the humans from here without opening any doors or crossing any boundaries. It is best to leave them, son, for it is better they do not see us or even know we exist.”

Then the attention of the unicorns was drawn to Spirit as he spoke. “But, I long to speak with the young human child, hair golden as the sun, eyes dancing in blue. She seems so pure, so kind. She also seems to sense me, as I watch her enchanting movements. She needs us and our guidance for she seems so alone in that world they live in. I have heard her anguish again and again; she has appealed to me from beyond the OPAL DIVIDE. I ache and long to help her. I feel I must appear before her.”

Infinity heard this and in his great wisdom he responded. “Young one, ... millions of humans express these same qualities daily. We need to look closely. We can guide them if they are willing to be guided and able to hear our guidance. And

this longing in your heart to appear before a human is the great weakness that we all share. Heed these words yearling and strengthen your spirit in the knowledge of this truth. Humans do not need to see us. Those who can hear us can know us through the telepathic ways we have created. This is the safe way for us and for them. Let us meet again on the night of the crescent moon and we will concern ourselves with this feeling of longing to save them. Good night, my spiritual ones for this is the time rest.” Infinity graciously arose and stood noble amongst the gathered unicorns. Others arose with him. He made a motion and they slowly sauntered to another resting area.

Spirit felt that the night story was to answer some of his questions but only added more questions as they began rolling around in his head. He turned to the others still present. “How can some humans hear

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and some not hear?

Sterling Strong stated: “My dear Spirit, it is all in the nature of the human. Only with honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, a true spiritual cleansing and an acceptance of us can a human ever hear us and hope to heed our guidance. If pride, stubbornness, resentment, fear, anger, sloth, lust, greed or

other human negative qualities are in the way, then they cannot hear us. In time you will learn of some of the humans we have reached beyond the DIVIDE. You will learn how we have reached them and how some have heeded our guidance and stayed with us. Yet there are some that never reached out to us and some that we have reached but they went back to their old ways. True and pure happiness and spiritual freedom comes at a great price to the human and must be sought and continually worked towards on a daily basis. This process is silently slow and the human rarely knows what he or she is doing or that he or she is changing.”

“Hmmm,” Spirit murmured. “There is way too much to learn here. I thought I knew some of this and yet I feel like I am so slow to learn anything and only beginning to understand myself.”

“You will learn, my son, as we are continuously learning and this yearning in your heart to appear before a human child, well we have all had that and find peace in the knowledge that this too shall pass as we grow and change. For now, let us rest as Infinity has, let us join the others in the resting place.”

“But I have so many questions, for one who guards the OPAL DIVIDE while we rest?”

“Oh my goodness yearling,” his mom said, “it is good you have questions dear and they will all be fully answered in time. This is a more complex answer than I have to offer you but in summary we have the twilight, the night, the dawn and the day unicorns who all watch in their own time as is their nature. Now come and rest my dear one.”

Guardian

Pharmacist: V. T. Eyolfson

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POETRY

The Creation

By Herbert Bjarnason

This poem is based on Norse mythology
and how they perceived the world came into being.

Of Nordic myths and gods I write,
Of treacherous gods who loved to fight.
Of valiant warriors and deeds to bold,
Of poetic souls and hearts of gold.

In a chaotic universe of nothingness,
Only the abyss of Ginnungagap was there.
An abyss so deep it was bottomless,
With walls of ice to freeze your hair.

Northward lay Niflheim,
Shrouded in mist by day and by night.
Southward lay Muspell,
world of fire and perpetual light.
Surtr, the flame giant, all alone dwelt there,
sending sparks from his flame sword
into Ginnungagap's icy air.

Steam rose up from Ginnungagap,
Cascading frost to the chasm's floor.
Before you knew what was up,
Up rose Ymir, the frost giants' progenitor.

The six-headed giant Thrudgeimir,
from Ymir's sweat was born.
The Aesir god Buri,
from Ginnungagap's ice was torn.
The giantess Bestla, married Buri's son Bor,
Odin, Villi and Ve were the sons she bore.

The forces of good were the Aesir gods,
The forces of evil were the frost giant clods.
For thousands of years,
they fought each other with tooth and fang.
Down deep in the depths of Ginnungagap,
their war cries rang.

Odin and his brothers old Ymir blooded,
His gushing blood Ginnungagap flooded
Drowning all the giants (except for two),
Now they didn't know what to do
On Ymir's blood they sailed to Jotunheim
The frost giants' land for all time.

Odin and his brothers had quite a plan,
They would create a world for a thing called man.
They created the oceans from Ymir's blood fountain.
Ymir's teeth became cliffs, his bones became mountains.
Ymir's flesh became Midgard, earth, home of men,
Ymir's hair became earth's vegetation.
Ymir's skull became the heavens above,
I'm sure they looked on their creation with love.

They collected sparks from Surtr's flame sword,
Flung them into the sky without a word,
Millions of stars suddenly came into view,
What a celestial sight for those creative few!
The sun and the moon stood out that morn,
And that's how the universe and world were born.

Book Review

Viking Myths & Sagas

by Rosalind Kerven

Reviewed by Logan Stefanson



Viking Myths & Sagas

Rosalind Kerven

New York, NY: Chartwell Books,
Quarto Group, 2017

I have read a lot of Norse myths. This is not a boast, merely a fact. Being a third generation Icelandic-Canadian, I was made aware of the wild stories of the old Scandinavians while very young and I was hooked instantly. Giants and trolls, ghosts and monsters, battles and courage, poetry and magic; all these things were fundamental to my young imagination. So naturally I sought after as many translations and adaptations of these old stories and loved the different flair each individual author brought to these familiar stories. And while by no means am I an expert, I would definitely say that I have more than a few of these stories well memorized. Which brings me to the book in question, **Viking Myths & Sagas** by Rosalind Kerven. It brings me great joy to report to you that not only is **Viking Myths & Sagas** a fun and engaging read, but Kerven has unearthed plenty of exciting stories that evaded even my youthful obsession.

Before talking about the individual stories held inside, I want to point out the masterful structure of the book itself. Kerven organizes the multitudes of stories into clearly defined categories (“Ghosts

and Sorcery”, “Tales of Love and Hate”, “Tales of Exploration”, etc.) which makes it easy to flip through and find your favourite story without too much effort. Kerven made the wise decision to include a glossary in her book as well, with words in bold throughout the stories finding their definitions in the back, allowing the stories their authenticity without confusion or unnecessary explanations to the reader. And the academic notes at the end of the book are almost as interesting as the stories themselves!

Which now brings me to the main attraction of the book itself. In her intro to the book, Kerven explains the importance not only of stories to the Nordic people, but in their retelling. “One man's tale is only half a tale” she quotes an anonymous 13th century source. Well, I am pleased to report that if that is the case, the written tales collected here are some of the most fully developed stories I’ve read. The book gets off and running right off the bat, starting with the origin story of the magic mead; the birthplace of all stories. From there on, it’s a nonstop trek through a veritable who’s who of all the greatest characters imagined in the cold north. Thor, the thunder god, with his mighty hammer; Odin, the Allfather and his never ending quest for wisdom; and Loki, the wily god of mischief all get their due respect in these retellings. The order of the stories seemed odd to me at first, seeing as how Norse mythology can be considered quite linear, but as I haven't read the stories in their original Icelandic, I easily chalked that up to translation. It fortunately never took away from my enjoyment of the book.

Where this book really shined for me though, is in its retellings of the less known stories; the stories of human warriors and farmers, the stories of ghosts and hauntings. I had never encountered a large majority of these tales, and was delighted

to have such a plethora of engaging reads that were completely fresh to me. Some personal favourites included the story of Sigurd The Dragonslayer, the inspiration for Wagner’s famous Ring Cycle operas. I knew the basics of the story, but had never actually read a version before. I’m glad that Kerven’s version is my first, as her tale of Sigurd and his fight against the dragon Fafnir was equal parts thrilling and humorous. While the stories of the gods and their trials are arguably the most famous, it was the section titled “Ghosts & Sorcery” that stuck with me long after my initial reading, particularly the tale of “The Witch Queen’s Curse”. Iceland and Scandinavia overall truly have some of the most unique ghost stories I have heard, and Kerven gives them more than their due justice. My only regret is that I had not heard of these stories earlier! There’s plenty of translated poetry spread throughout the book as well, varying from the educational “How Odin Won the Runes”, to the “Kennings” taking you through the eyes of a court poet to see how he would have seen his world; to my personal favourite, the ever true “Words of Wisdom”. The poetry is perfectly placed throughout the book, acting as little breaks and breaths before the next barrage of epic prose, and end up being very quotable as well!

While my praise for this book is high, I don't think this is the perfect first read for someone completely new to Norse mythology. I’m not saying that one needs a doctorate before picking it up, but definitely a beginner’s knowledge on some of the more focal characters will aid in your enjoyment of the book immensely. As stated earlier, the linear order of the stories is somewhat played with so that sometimes characters just appear as the individual story sees fit; hence this is where background knowledge would

come in handy. My only other criticism is that some of the dialogue in the stories is written rather stilted, but once again, I simply remember that it is translated dialogue and therefore it does not take away from the overall enjoyment of the book. The dialogue at its worst is minimally awkward, at its best it reads like an over the top Shakespeare production and I do mean that as the highest compliment. These stories are over the top, the dialogue should reflect that.

Overall, the appeal of this book is one I can see spread to many people. Those who are just starting to learn about Norse mythology, those who already know all the popular stories, those who just find the idea interesting; all of these will find something to enjoy inside. If you're more drawn to

grounded stories, then the section on human heroes will be the one for you, or maybe even the more poetic and beautiful "Tales of Love". If you're interested in Viking exploration into new lands, there's a section for you as well. There really isn't a single demographic I can think of who wouldn't find something for them herein.

More than just amazing translation and breathtaking storytelling, **Viking Myths & Sagas** was able to take me back to when I first read these stories as a child and felt my imagination light on fire. Back to when all I could think of was adventures and monsters, and Rosalind Kerven deserves my thanks for that. It is a great read about the importance of storytelling, told with great care and respect for all those storytellers who came before.



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The Proust Questionnaire

The Proust Questionnaire has its origins in a parlor game popularized by French essayist and novelist Marcel Proust. He believed that, in answering the following questions, the true nature of an individual can be revealed. In this issue of *Icelandic Connection*, author and poet David Arnason takes time to answer the Proust Questionnaire.

1. *What is your idea of perfect happiness?* Long lazy days in the sun with the people I love.

2. *What is your greatest fear?* The death of people and other creatures that I love.

3. *What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?* Laziness.

4. *What is the trait you most deplore in others?* Unkindness.

5. *Which living person do you most admire?* Barack Obama.

6. *What is your greatest extravagance?* Wasting time.

7. *What is your current state of mind?* Contentment.

8. *What do you consider the most overrated virtue?* Thrift.

9. *On what occasion do you lie?* When truth would hurt the people I love.

10. *What do you most dislike about your appearance?* General messiness.

11. *Which living person do you most despise?* Donald Trump.

12. *What is the quality you most like in a man?* Gentleness.

13. *What is the quality you most like in a woman?* Caring and kindness.

14. *Which words or phrases do you most overuse?* Terrific.

15. *What or who is the greatest love of your life?* My wife.

16. *When and where were you happiest?* As a child on the farm.

17. *Which talent would you most like to*

have? Musical ability.

18. *If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?* I'd be a couple of inches taller.

19. *What do you consider your greatest achievement?* The last book I wrote.

20. *If you were to die and come back as a person or a thing, what would it be?* A rough-haired Daschund.

21. *Where would you most like to live?* Gimli, Manitoba

22. *What is your most treasured possession?* My library.

23. *What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?* Mourning.

24. *What is your favorite occupation?* Identifying things of the natural world: birds, plants, animals.

25. *What is your most marked characteristic?* My voice.

26. *What do you most value in your friends?* Kindness.

27. *Who are your favorite writers?* Jane Austen, Donald Barthelme, Halldór Laxness and Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

28. *Who is your hero of fiction?* Bjartur of Summerhouses.

29. *Which historical figure do you most identify with?* David Thompson.

30. *Who are your heroes in real life?* Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Tommy Douglas.

31. *What are your favorite names?* Michael, David, Marie and Shannon.

32. *What is it that you most dislike?* Cruelty.

33. *What is your greatest regret?* Life is too short to explore all the things I would like to experience.

34. *How would you like to die?* Quietly, in my sleep.

35. *What is your motto?* Always be sure you have a backup plan.

Contributors

REV. WAYNE ARNASON is a retired Unitarian Universalist minister living in Charlottesville, Virginia. His opportunity to visit Washington Island came while serving a year as an interim minister in Appleton, Wisconsin.

DR. ANNE BRYDON, PhD, is a Professor of Anthropology at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, ON. Her Master's research thesis was based on a study of ethnicity focusing on the Icelanders of Manitoba.

HERB BJARNASON was born and raised in Gimli and taught school for 30 years. He has had two short stories published in *Voices*, an anthology published by the Lake Winnipeg Writers' Group. He also had published in the *Interlake Arts Life and Leisure* magazine..

LOGAN STEFANSON is a cartoonist and playwright who lives in Winnipeg by way of Gimli. He is an avid reader of Norse mythology, and appreciates the chance to discuss storytelling in all of its forms.

LORNA TERGESEN has been involved with Íslendingadagurinn for more than 50 years. There is great satisfaction in participating and enjoying the friendships of such an organization. It is rewarding to see younger members joining to continue the objectives of the Festival.

AINSLEY A. THORARINSON S. BLOOMER is one of the daughters of Sigurstein Aleck Thorarinson and Steinun Emily (Terry) Thorarinson (nee) Isleifson, She is a retiree with a passion for Old Norse Mythology. She graduated from the University of Winnipeg with a major in Sociology and also studied Icelandic language, Old Norse Mythology, the Old Norse Sagas, Icelandic Folktales and Icelandic Children's literature from the University of Manitoba. She has taught Elementary Icelandic and Old Norse Mythology through the Scandinavian Centre, the St. James School Division Continuing Education, enjoys science fiction and fantasy as well as mythology. *The Unicorn story* is her first printed creation.

TYME ROCKY THOMPSON was born October 31, 2000 in Edmonton, AB. He has resided in Oklahoma City, Calgary, Peoria, Windsor and now Chicago, IL where he is Grade 11. His parents are Elizabeth and Rocky Thompson and his grandparents are Dr. Sandra and Dr. Theodore Heidrick. Tyme was born on (what would have been) the 58th anniversary of his great-grandparents, Helga and the Late Johann Straumfjord Sigurdson of Lundar, MB. Tyme plans to continue studies in History, Film and Fine Arts with a future family heritage trip planned for Iceland.



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