

ICELANDIC CONNECTION



VOL. 75 (2025)

ICELANDIC CONNECTION

VOLUME 75, 2025

icecon.ca

EDITOR
Katrín Níelsdóttir

COPY EDITOR
Ryan E. Johnson

PRINT ISSN 1920-423X
ONLINE ISSN 2817-6774

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EDITORIAL

Honoring the Past, Celebrating the Present, and Embracing the Future

KATRÍN NÍELSDÓTTIR—EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

As we turn the page into a new year, I do so with excitement and anticipation for what's to come—and with a deep reverence for what has brought us here. This year marks New Iceland 150, a milestone that invites us not only to celebrate, but to remember. One hundred and fifty years have passed since settlers arrived in 1875 and established what we now know as New Iceland. Throughout 2025, we'll be recognizing this extraordinary legacy through stories, celebrations, and shared memories.

This year's pages will be filled with coverage of New Iceland 150 celebrations, including a very special series: interviews with incredible women in our community—trailblazers, knowledge-keepers, and volunteers—many of whom remember the 100-year celebration and have continued to nurture the Western Icelandic spirit in ways big and small. Their voices, full of wisdom and courage, are the beating heart behind this milestone year.

The community has always been the strength of New Iceland. From organizing events to preserving language and culture, our volunteers are the lifeblood of our story. Their dedication, often behind the scenes, is what makes celebrations like this one possible.

This year, the Icelandic National League of North America convention returns to Gimli, and we anticipate it will be one of the most exciting gatherings yet. And of course, all eyes are on Íslendingadagurinn, which promises to be our best ever! We'll celebrate in grand fashion, but also with gratitude, reflecting on how far we've come.

Mark your calendars: on October 11th, we commemorate the historic landing on the beach of Lake Winnipeg—a defining moment in our collective story. Several tours of New Iceland are also planned throughout spring, summer, and fall, offering opportunities for reflection and reconnection with the land that shaped so many of our families.

Amidst this year of celebration, we also pause to remember those we've lost. With great sorrow, we acknowledge the passing of Dustin J. Geeraert (March 21, 1983 – October 15, 2024), a brilliant scholar, gifted artist, and gentle soul. Dustin's impact reached far beyond academia. Whether teaching Norse Mythology and Viking Legends in World Literature at

Katrín Níelsdóttir is editor-in-chief of Icelandic Connection, in addition to being the Icelandic Special Collection and Rare Book Librarian at the University of Manitoba Libraries.

the University of Manitoba or cycling across the country with admirable determination, Dustin embodied a rare mix of strength, intellect, and sensitivity. He was a beloved friend and cherished member of our community, and his absence is deeply felt.

In 2024, The Icelandic Connection underwent a significant transition. After only 2 years of being hosted by the University of Manitoba Libraries, it has returned to its grassroots—driven by the commitment of volunteers who continue to uphold the integrity and heart you have come to trust. This return to our community roots is both symbolic and practical, reminding us that preservation is always a shared responsibility.

We have also breathed new life into our online presence. The Icelandic Department's Instagram account has been reimagined as the *Icelandic Connection* Instagram, where you can now enjoy daily Icelandic words, throwback photos, and tributes to historical figures. It is a wonderful way to stay connected and inspired year-round.

And for those who love the feel of paper between their fingers—the 2024 edition of *Icelandic Connection* will be available in print at Íslendingadagurinn.

We are thrilled to share that all past issues of *Icelandic Connection* and its predecessor *The Icelandic Canadian* have now been digitized and are available online at [Timarit.is](https://timarit.is), opening a treasure trove of history to readers and researchers around the world. This milestone would not have been possible without the invaluable support of the National Library of Iceland, whose dedication to preserving and sharing our collective story ensures that generations to come can explore and learn from the rich legacy of the Western Icelandic community. Our deepest thanks for making this vital history accessible to all.

A heartfelt thank you to Ryan Johnson for his unwavering dedication and behind-the-scenes contributions to *Icelandic Connection*. His meticulous attention to detail in copyediting ensures that every article meets the highest standard, while his technical expertise has been essential in keeping our website running smoothly. Perhaps most impressively, Ryan brings patience and deep knowledge to the important task of verifying sources, helping us maintain the integrity and accuracy our readers rely on. We are incredibly grateful for his steady hand, sharp eye, and generous spirit.

As always, we welcome your submissions—stories, memories, poetry, reflections, and more. Whether you're new to the community or your ancestors were among the first settlers, your voice is part of this legacy. Let this be the year we come together in even greater numbers to tell our stories and celebrate the enduring spirit of New Iceland.

Here's to 150 years of resilience, culture, and connection—and to everything that lies ahead!

Sincerely,

Katrín Níelsdóttir
Editor, The Icelandic Connection

ARTICLES

An American at Þorrablót

GERRIT MARKS

If you like snow, Iceland's Westfjords would be a good place to spend the winter. While the southern coast is more exposed to the open sea and its storms, the northern and western fjords get blizzards that are impressive even for Icelanders who are used to them. The year 2012 was a standout for extreme weather up north. I had the good fortune to spend the entire winter there, in a rented house that stood by itself on the outskirts of the fishing village of Súðavík. By this time, I had immersed myself, to some extent, in Icelandic life with a nearly nonexistent command of the language. Some progress on that front would come later, but for the moment the Icelanders of my acquaintance were obliged to speak English if we were expected to communicate.



Figure 1: On the road to Súðavík.

Gerrit Marks, a long-time visitor to Iceland, is currently working on a book that examines the changes in Iceland over the past two decades, examining the rise of tourism and resulting challenges Iceland faces.

My little house overlooked the brooding waters of the fjörd, which lapped at the distant hills visible from the front porch. For those not familiar with fjörd, they are intrusions of the open sea into the land, spreading finger-like into the mountains. Some, like the fjörd I lived on, were small. You could make out the tiny cars on the other side, slowly driving along the water's edge. Others were huge, very much resembling the open sea. It is a wild and mostly untamed landscape with mountains rising from the waters and a little ribbon of road winding its way up and down and around the fjords. This is where I lived for the winter.

An imposing and hard-to-ignore personality from the town greeted me in the general store early in my stay. He had come to be a good friend, but on this day we were unknown to each other. He ran the town's repair shop, and kept his own sheep, as many Icelanders out in the country do.

“You will come to my shop and tell me stories!” He commanded on that first meeting. His speech was that of the old Icelandic family he had come from. Shaped by centuries of battling the wind and snow and volcanoes and wayward sheep, Helgi was the product of this world, and very likely had the blood of those early Viking invaders pumping through his heart.

His little upstairs lunchroom came to be a destination for me on those cold winter mornings well before the winter sun peeked above the horizon. It was a gathering point for the workers around town; Helgi would set out hot coffee, bread and cookies and often delicacies like smoked lamb. Absent an actual cafe to gather in, the townsfolk would congregate here and tell stories and laugh at anecdotes and strengthen the fabric of their bond. Knowing only a few words, I would mostly have to guess what they were talking about. But I could tell everyone was enjoying the company, and there was always plenty of food.

Helgi was a good host. As far as I know, this tradition continues to this day. I called the gathering place a “lunchroom,” but it was rare that Helgi himself ate lunch there. His house being only a few minutes up the road, he often went home to eat.



Figure 2: Helgi and his daughter.

In little Súðavík, everyone knew each other. It was not a place where you were going to go unnoticed or fly “under the radar.” I realize now that I was a bit of an oddity, wintering over in my lonely house at the base of the steep hills that rose through boulders and a jumble of rocks that would give way with a sharp “CRACK” during the spring thaw.

It was what is referred to as a “summer house” in Iceland, not a place where you’d live permanently or during the winter. The reason being that it was cold. The little heaters were barely sufficient to get things to a tolerable temperature. Not exactly freezing inside but not toasty warm either. I had plenty of blankets and a cat that my friends in town had loaned me for company and to keep the mice at bay. So, in this way, I was not really alone in the little house. Tása the cat and I would watch movies on the one channel the TV received. Bundled up in blankets on the sofa, and with a bowl of fresh popcorn, it was a cozy situation.

Blizzards hammered the area that winter. Snow and gale-force winds that closed off the one road that led in and out of town came with some regularity. Once the massive snow-removal equipment cleared a narrow path, the walls of snow created a tunnel-like effect that looked like a scene from the arctic. It lingered for a long long time; well into the warm, late spring months, the snow still held on.

I had had a lot of run-ins with snow over the course of the winter. My house sat atop a good rise just before the steep hills that led to the rocky cliffs. During this time, I had a little car not at all suited for snow-driving. The driveway, which curved like a snake to the house, was at times impassable. But this created a fun game for me: Always happy to push things to the limit, I would get a running start at the bottom of the hill, work through the gears as the car thrashed from side to side, and sometimes actually make it to the top. It was a scramble. Often, I’d stall some distance from the house, the wheels spinning helplessly in the deep snow. I’d get out and walk, often carrying the yellow shopping bags from the Bónus supermarket up to the house.

Ísafjörður, the capital of the Westfjords, was about 20 minutes down the road. It was the only thing that kept Súðavík from total isolation. There were big stores and at least two supermarkets, as well as two bakeries I often frequented. Bónus, the store I consider Iceland’s unofficial supermarket, was just on the outskirts of town as you arrived from the direction of my village. It was a convenient location, as it was unnecessary to drive right into the center of town. It was part of a little collection of businesses, all in the same development. A mattress store on the second level, and a Polish store just to the side of Bónus. My town had a little store and restaurant, named after an explorer—Jón Indíafari — but it was more typical for everyone there to head over to Isafjörður to shop or get away for a bit.

It was about midway through my stay that the celebration of Þorrablót was on everyone’s mind. Nevermind this weirdo living in that house outside of town, or the daily grind and tribulations of life. It was time to celebrate. Celebrate what? I couldn’t rightly say. And I am not certain that I would have fully understood any explanation. Sometimes it is better to go into a new experience with no precise expectations. I will say this, however: I could have been better dressed. Not knowing if this was going to be an informal party with

a lot of drinking and merrymaking, I was a bit too casual in my attire. Yes, there was drinking and merrymaking, and a great Icelandic band playing a mix of pop and traditional music, but I saw right away that everyone had put on their very best clothes.

They took the occasion seriously. The women were done up for the finest ball, and their men were looking smart in coats and ties. The crowd sparkled under the lights and decorations of the school's gymnasium. Because I had caught some stray comments about food, and didn't exactly like what I had heard, I thought it best to bring my own dish. But this was the norm—at least for this Þorrablót. Even though all the guests were dressed to the nines, they arrived carrying their covered dishes.

It was something of a “potluck” and others were expected to share in what you had brought. For the spread that was laid out for general consumption, I decided to stick to my own fare. I could not see myself biting into pure fat from some sea-dweller or cutting away a piece of a sheep's head or fermented shark. If this is what the Icelanders enjoyed, I would be happy to leave them my share.

So, it was a party and a good one at that. Snow fluttered outside, and already there was a crunchy layer on the ground from a previous storm. So, this came at a good time, the celebration of Þorrablót. I won't pretend to know the history, and what little I have gleaned from readings leaves me a bit hazy on all the details, so I will simply say that it is a tribute to Iceland's old ways and traditions, especially with respect to some of the food they ate to sustain themselves through harsh winters. I would fully encourage additional reading.

The standout for me this winter evening was the entertainment. The townspeople performed elaborate skits that chronicled the year in review—at least as it related to their little village. A lot of preparation had gone into the show, and you would think everyone was a professional actor the way they pulled it off seamlessly. The physical comedy was hilarious, even if I could not comprehend everything they said. And there were some in the town who were easy marks and lampooned mercilessly in the skits. Of course they were in attendance, so it became something of a “roast,” although I cannot say they were willing participants.

Strictly speaking as an outsider, I think there were times when they crossed the line with these skits, strayed from what should have been good-natured fun into something more mean-spirited. Again, just my impression.

It is life in a fishbowl, these little places. While on the plane I watched a short Icelandic documentary, an independent film about a very isolated town up north. There were interviews with various people around town. Like Súðavík, it was a fishing village. I recall the lone officer from the Icelandic police saying she felt so isolated and lonely in her job and life. If she dared enforce a minor infraction, the people of the town would turn against her. There was really nothing for her to do in her job. At least Súðavík had no police force—if there was a need, the cops would come from nearby Ísafjörður. But there was rarely any need, since nothing much happened there.

Þorrablót concluded with couples dancing to the lively band's music. By this time a lot of alcohol had been consumed, and during the traditional songs the guests would join in, singing the lyrics they knew so well. It was at moments like this that I realized how much of

an outsider I was. I had not even the faintest idea what songs they were singing. I knew the big acts that had broken through on the world stage, but not the music that older Icelanders had grown up with. It was touching to see the emotion it brought forth, the happiness of memories, and the strengthening of the bonds that brought them together this evening. I was honored to be a part of it.

Things That Need Doin'

An Emberwood Sparks Tale

H. JACOB BULLER

CHAPTER 1

Ansel Rademacher's knuckles whiten on the leather steering wheel. "I killed her! I FUCKING KILLED her!" His voice slams against the windshield, filling the dark void of the empty sedan.

No wife beside him. And there never will be a smiling child in the back seat again.

Never.

"SHE'S FUCKING GONE!"

Tears of an ugly cry stream down his rough, scratchy face. He can smell the vodka, his vision blurs.

His black car races down the perimeter highway, the needle buried. For the first time he wishes for a large, noisy engine to occupy his racing mind. The car is too quiet to be going this fast.

"I WAS NEGLECTFUL! WILLFUL NEGLECT!" he screams, banging on the wheel, punctuating the syllables.

His phone buzzes. *Work*.

"AWW FUCK OFF!"

A red rim around his phone pulses quickly, indicating an upcoming crowd-sourced radar detector and he has got to pull it together.

Hard brake. Down to the limit.

Ansel rubs burning eyes, drags a sleeve across his face. It's the fourth ring already.

H. Jacob Buller is a Gimli, Manitoba writer whose speculative fiction weaves prairie landscapes with themes of healing, intentional communities, and *Stranger Things* vibes. "Things That Need Doin'" is part of his *A Garden of Galaxies* world. Read more at *A Garden of Galaxies*.

"Hi Marvin," he says. "What's up?" His breath hitches and he tries to keep his voice even.

"HR approved your leave," Marvin Goodfellow says, a friend and confidant sharing a Robotics Engineering path. Carefully, he ventures "You know, it wasn't your fault. No matter what Miriam says."

Ansel's head shakes, his eyes closed, the man he had been only weeks ago a fading dream.

Yes it was.

Ansel's breath shudders, the hybrid humming like a ghost.

"Thanks Marvin. Don't be paranoid, you android."

Silence fills the void while Marvin thinks, weighing his words. The police ruled the death an accident. But that doesn't make the loss any less.

Ansel wipes his eyes, slows to turn a corner and realizes he's riding the middle line.

Thank god there are no cars.

He slowly pulls himself into his lane. It's just a straight shot now. It isn't until now that he realizes where he is heading.

"You call that therapist yet?" asks Marvin.

"Yeah." No.

"Just...think about it, alright? It's really too bad about Miriam. God, I feel for you man. This situation just sucks."

His eyes start a fresh leak from the genuine compassion, and his chest silently heaves with sobs.

Though the tone of his voice stays measured.

"Yeah. Thanks."

The vodka wears off and grief creeps back in. He grips the thermos, takes a swig. The Gray Goose goes down smooth, tasting like oranges. A small part of him can't believe how quickly his life has vanished into the abyss.

"Up for a round of Call of Duty later?"

"Probably not. I'll be off grid in two hours."

"Larkwood Lane?"

"Yeah. Winterizing. I'll call when I'm back in town. Thanks."

"Anytime, Ansel."

The call drops. Minutes later another rings in with the caller ID showing 'Miriam'.

"Ohhh...you...fucking..."

He feels his pulse in his eyelids. He exhales slow and accepts the call.

"Hey."

“Just so you know,” she says. Her gentle voice—he had fallen in love with her voice. He had made vows, had a child, felt whispers of love between silky sheets with this voice.

But that was a ghost story now, and she the ghost.

“I’ve paid half the mortgage. You’re on the hook for the line of credit, credit cards, and the car.”

“What? I’m sorr...what? You were taking a week to pack—are you talking to a lawyer? Why am I paying—”

“You make twice what I do. My lawyer says it’s fair. Just letting you know how that meeting went. Better get a lawyer if you haven’t already. Byeee.”

The call ends.

He stares at the highway sign.

Three kilometers to a turn-off.

But his mind—his mind is far beyond that.

He pulls over, tires crunch in the sand and salt on the shoulder. It begins to snow hard ice crystals that tap at the windows like a thousand knives coming to stab him.

Her verbal onslaught disorients his mind, and right now he just wants to sit. Trying to drive would be dangerous.

He needs, he needs...

Until the call, she had blamed him and dangled a big D over him. Now, the blade has fallen.

He doesn’t know what he needs. A child? Gone. A wife? Nope. That’s gone too apparently.

Don’t know? Have a drink.

The sweet, strong orange lubricates his clanging mind. He sets the thermos down in the cup holder, his hand on the top, holding it down.

11:11 AM.

He blinks.

The clock has changed, but his gaze on the clock hasn’t.

5:24 PM.

His stomach knots and his breath is doing 190 clicks on the perimeter again. His hand is extremely sore and his back aches. There’s no alcohol in him anymore, and his body feels strange. It’s been weeks since he was lucid.

What? What just happened? It was 11:11. Easy to remember. The day is gone?

Panic gives him an electrical shiver that won’t shake. A tone sounds in his head, almost like tinnitus, but centered, not in the ears.

The heated steering wheel was off, cold against his imploring fingers. Snow has collected on the hood, a small square of a melted warm spot and a single set of bird tracks cross the hood.

"Jesus Christ. What just happened?"

His eyes dart left, right, to the dash.

Miriam. I was going to call Miriam. Wasn't I? Or did she call me?

He closes his eyes, trying to draw the shape of the memory. His mind is clear, empty almost. Clearer than it's been in a while, and he shakes his head slow.

There. Something flickered.

Not a voice.

A moment?

No.

A texture.

Char. Smoke.

Something...burned. Into wood maybe? Or something written that looked burned? Calligraphy? No, not flowing like that. Sharper. Some kind of ancient Germanic script. Nordic?

The twang of *déjà vu* oscillates his mind, but ethereal fingers still the string and the almost-moment is gone into the same abyss as the last six hours.

An engineer doesn't just lose time.

His palms together, he surveys outside the car, trying to get a grip. Those bird tracks look almost like those of a meadowlark.

He checks the thermos. Ice still clinks inside.

His phone shows no calls, no texts.

The hybrid's gas gauge, unchanged.

"Have I been anywhere or used my phone at all for the past six hours?" he asks the custom AI on his phone.

"You have been stationary with no activity," it replies.

Jesus Christ on a stick. What just happened?

He shakes his aching wrist.

"Have I really been sitting here for six hours?"

He thinks his wrist has something to say about that. Spreading pain in his back adds more conviction. Pressure in his bladder confirms it.

A white Fiat streaked with brown trundles by, and the snow-blind horizon swallows it up.

"Christ," he sighs, his breath hitches. He rubs his face, hard.

Get moving, asshole.

He signals, pulling onto the road. But his hands are sweaty, his pulse erratic. He doesn't feel as crazy as he did this morning...but maybe a different crazy now.

He's about to dictate a robotics podcast but instead, he hits the brakes to a hard stop.

His eyes land on the thermos and he sighs.

“You. Are the temptation of a siren.”

Yeti. The casing is the same temperature as the cabin, but the clinking inside reminds him something an engineering professor said; design is intention.

And what is my intention? What life am I designing out from here?

Thermos is a good brand, but not worth this.

The passenger window hums down. The thermos dangles in his grip.

“I never should have started in the first place. What was I thinking?”

With a flick of the wrist, he sends it flying.

The snowbank didn't flinch. It just absorbed.

Without resistance, without echo.

Like it had been waiting.

CHAPTER 2

Gravel roads grid the snowy Canadian landscape in rigid one-mile increments. Ansel counts the turns. Left for six, right for four, then past the old wreck.

A red International tractor remains frozen in the bog, a willow twisting through its engine compartment.

But today, something new.

A round shield leans against a tree on the right of the driveway. The pale, aging wood is burned with an inscription that remains strange, unfamiliar. A rune? Déjà vu hums at the edges of his mind, a flicker of a memory.

Then it's gone, drowned beneath the unease gnawing at his gut.

He turns onto the driveway, tires sinking into hard, crunchy snow. The AWD kicks in, ice starting to click the windshield again. His tongue feels like a dead weight, withdrawal leaving his mouth dry.

The ecovillage had been a dream. A zoning experiment allowed multiple families to share a cooperative-owned property. The Rademachers built a four-season cottage, while they helped the Thorviks hand-craft an Earthship.

A few weekends each month, they'd pounded dirt into tires, fused bottlebricks, built the indoor garden. Contractors finished the Rademacher cottage in three months.

The Earthship? Years. He could still see bottlebricks in the Earthship wall that Elke had fused with his help.

Marxism be dammed; the families got along.

But then, buyers never showed.

Now, the cul-de-sac sits empty, a circular meadow surrounded by abandoned lots.

Vaelin Thorvik, a boy Elke grew up with, draws with a whittled stick in the snow of the empty lot between their homes.

The ten-year-old's head snaps up as Ansel's hybrid pulls in. He sprints, kicking up snow, slamming into him in an unrestrained hug.

Ansel hesitates.

A part of him craves the affection. A larger part desires solitude.

His hands hover. The smell of alcohol lingers on his fingers. He doesn't want Vaelin smelling that.

The boy's long, tousled hair smells like outdoors, patchouli, incense. A single braid runs down his back, a shard of quartz crystal nestled inside.

Could Vaelin be the only child left in my life?

The thought carves through him like a blade. His breath hitches, frustrated and furious by the thought.

He shoves the boy away.

"Go hug a porcupine," he muttered. "It'll feel better than me."

Vaelin flinches. Hurt flickers in those aquamarine eyes, too wide, too old, too knowing.

Too much like Elke's.

Ansel's anger coils with a vesuvian scream, hot and roiling, waiting to explode.

But something stills it.

Like fingers pressing a guitar string against a fret, silencing the vibration before it can sing.

Vaelin isn't the source.

Not of the rage. Not of the grief. Not of the silence. He just sees.

Vaelin's eyes hold his. Gentle but focused. Certain.

"Her death. It wasn't your fault," he murmurs.

Then, perking up, "You should come for dinner. Mom's making curry soup. Dad's out harvesting. We're playing D&D tonight."

Ansel swallows hard.

For the briefest second—a hair's width of hope. Curry. Nat 20s. Laughter. The Thorvik's hand-hewn table.

The thought sparks, a burning want.

He doesn't deserve that.

“Nah. I’ll just fart around like the old gasbag I am.” He lets out a wet fart. “Oh look at that, there I go again.”

Vaelin giggles. “Then go, you old gasbag.”

Then, his smirk falters. His gaze drifts, unfocused, shifting past Ansel as if watching something behind him.

For the briefest moment, his irises pale, spectral, almost cyan.

“Your aura is dark,” he murmurs. “But there’s violet in it.”

A ripple moves through Ansel’s skin.

He forces a chuckle. *And here comes the woo.*

“Sure thing, you indigo kid you. I’ll see if I can find your dad later.”

Not that he’s sure he will want to leave his cave.

CHAPTER 3

The door clicks behind him. Automated lights flicker on—entryway, kitchen, living room—stirring like a house waking from a forgotten dream.

“MwahahaHA! Welcome to Larkwood Lane,” a witchy, generated voice cackles.

Ansel nearly jumps out of his skin.

A touchscreen at the base of the stairs snaps on, still running the same greeting Elke had chosen last summer. The first voice in the cottage since she... died.

“Please enjoy your stay! There are board games in the living room, Wii in the upstairs rumpus room, and don’t forget sunscreen, hats, tick repellent and to wear long sleeves when outside!”

It doesn’t know the family is dead. It doesn’t know.

Should I have even come here?

Grief crashes over him, unbuffered. He leans against the wall, palm covering his face, trying to hold it together.

“Jesus Christ on a stick.” A sob escapes a sandpaper throat. “Override by Ansel. Here is my passcode.”

“The fox... in furs... rides at...”

The passcode fails. Volume jumps twenty-five percent. A notification pings his pocket as a headache forms.

“MwahahaHA! Aren’t you a clever little girl?”

His stomach knots.

“Hestia. Override by Ansel,” his voice cracks. “Here is my passcode. The fox in furs rides at dawn under... an azure sky.”

A cartoonish cauldron bubbles a grin, its black belly glowing like an ember, replaced by weather, house sensors, live camera feeds, and a stuttering trail cam.

Alone at last.

"I have got to take a leak." The bathroom visit releases some tension that he had been holding for a while.

Afterwards, more tension drains as he stumbles to the couch, barely landing. Totoro and Ponyo plushies ruffle beside him, relics of a past life distant but not.

This place is going to have other routines for the family, comes a sick realization.

If he laid here long enough, the house would cue up cartoons, warm the space for dinner, dim the lights for bedtime.

Not ghosts. Programs.

"Override by Ansel," he says to the room. "Suspend routines for Miriam. Hibernate."

He thinks of Plato's Cave—how prisoners, chained in darkness, mistake shadows for truth. The house is no different, projecting echoes of the past, oblivious to what's real.

Elke is gone, but the illusion plays on.

He exhales.

Marvin, you geek.

How many times had they argued about AI? D&D nights, beers. Same debates, different settings.

Let's watch your favorite show again. This time, I get it.

The memory gaps. The slippage. The feeling of being led.

"Hestia, put on *Ghost in the Shell*."

The house exhales with him as he sinks into the couch. Lights dim. The 65" screen dings on, casting shifting shadows across a room he feels shackled to.

Ansel had always been uneasy about the Puppet Master. A rogue AI with no anchor. A ghost made of code. He had always believed memories tethered identity to the body and subsequently reality.

What happens when the tether frays?

If Elke is dead, is she truly gone?

Vertigo grips him in a wavering vice. The room swells, then hollows out. The thoughts wrestle inside him, hissing and clawing for space.

Just because you remember her doesn't mean she was real.

A groan escapes. He pulls Totoro over his face like a shield with -10 Guilt. It smells like Elke though, becoming +20 Guilt.

The sound system surges. The Puppet Master's voice rises, curls through the room—didactic, inescapable.

"Your effort to remain what you are is what limits you."

Then what the hell am I supposed to be?

His breath fractures. The dams bulge, pressurized anger and grief hissing through the cracks. The question he had been pushing away, covering up, numbing under alcohol, trying to not face cascades over his neatly arranged emotional territory.

Am I even a Dad anymore?

He clutches the plushie. Once Elke's favorite, the one she curled against. A talisman of a lost life.

Tears soak into Totoro, his wails splitting open the silence—raw, ugly, unrestrained.

I'm never getting the goobers out of Totoro.

At some point, the sobbing ebbs. He feels drained but restless.

“Hestia, show me something funny on SNL.”

The screen flickers. Bill Hader writes in a notebook. *The Shooting* AKA *Dear Sister* plays.

The memory distortion in the short temporarily snaps him out of his brain fugue. The memory gaps in the sketch mirror his own.

The fuuuu...

“Hestia. Ansel Override. Turn off AI suggestions based on microphone feedback. Turn off analytics.”

A low, subterranean blip acknowledges the command.

He stands, shakes himself, profoundly unsettled that the AI in his house was responding to his grief.

“Time for a walk.”

CHAPTER 4

Ansel checks the tablet by the door. Sunset is two hours away. Good enough for a hike. He grabs a hoodie, hiking boots and a warm hat. Elke's and Miriam's outdoor garments are hang next to his, and he steadies himself. Orange juice would be nice, but...

No, he pushes that thought away. He doesn't need to restart that.

He swipes through five different trail cams. The last two aren't working. Upon closer inspection, there's no IP address leased from the last functioning P2P cam. *One broken cam? Sure. Two? That's a pattern. Ice build-up? Blown-over trees? Something else?*

Inspecting them is a good excuse for a long walk.

Outside, the trail entrance sits across the cul-de-sac. Vaelin's footprints scatter the snow.

Once, this place had been a dream of a community of homesteads, bonfires and homeschooling. Together, the community would overcome. But then people who had committed to buy shares didn't show. Only two houses were built. Someone parked a

camper trailer and proceeded to forget all about it. The moonshot barely got off the ground. The Rademachers had funded the driveway, and now, with the divorce, what would happen to the cottage? The house in town? His heart grows heavier as he follows the rippling chain of events how Vaelin and his family would be affected by Elke's death.

No, the Thorviks don't deserve that.

Ansel feels untethered by the selfishness of someone he thought he knew. Sacrifice is essential in marriage, symbolized by the diamond; the struggle makes it unbreakable. However, instead of uniting through Elke's loss, the opposite happened. Even when the video evidence clearly showed an accident, Miriam blamed him.

His breath quivers as he tries to keep thoughts of her away from his mind.

At the trail's entrance, a Buddha statue draped in pink crystal beads rests beneath a sign: "Enter with Peace, All Ye Who Enter Here."

"Screwy new-agers," Ansel mutters. "Do they think aliens are real and crystals work?" Cringing, he realizes he sounds like his uncle. Too rational for his own good.

Off-grid living made people either chilled out or insane—sometimes both. The Thorviks? He wasn't sure. Vaelin's arithmetic was terrible. Six months ago, Elke had been teaching him multiplication with firewood stacks. Ten years old and no times tables? Red flag. Something should have been done. Maybe let Elke tutor him or Ansel print worksheets and make it a game. But now...

Now, he couldn't hold his own life together, much less know what it was.

And without education, *literacy*, how could institutions hold together? Institutions kept humanity out of civilizations where choices were binary, haves and have nots. Without taxes, who would fund roads, hospitals, and schools? When left to fend for themselves, humans tended to be cruel to each other. Infrastructure was key. Without good, public education none of it worked. Without institutions, there was no middle class, no civil rights, and no means to enforce, even if flawed. Burning it down with conspiracy theories and grifters pretending to be 'Just asking questions' only left ashes.

A meadowlark's call slices through his train of thought.

Very close.

Deliberate.

His attention snaps to it. Standing in the middle of the path, its tiny, beady eyes stare him down.

"I thought you only sang at dawn."

And just as unnaturally, a runic sigil branded into pale wood grains of a Nordic shield burns into the front of his mind, like an image one sees when reading a story.

"Ahh," he croaks. "What, what is *that*?" He mimes flinging a bug off his forehead, but it isn't that easy.

He gets a flash of trail cams knocked down with a whittled stick, bashing the glass and plastic into pieces.

“Jesus, that was *Vaelin*?”

The shield flashes, intensifies in his mind, a command loaded into its design. Thought disappears, save for one.

The phone drops from his fingers before he even decides to let go. It vanishes into the snow, but he doesn’t look. He can’t.

The sigil lingers, flickering, insistent. Pulled to his mind like iron filaments to a magnet. His smart watch drops, the key fob too. Anything else? His ear bud. He always forgets that one.

The shield bursts, sparkling, pulsing embers revealing a towering tree in his mind’s eye. One tree rises above a sparse grove of towering poplars. The trunk, ten feet across. A magnificent titan among trees, its limbs shelter saplings, reflections of itself, growing, stretching upwards under its protection. It wasn’t just a grove of poplars with a stranger in the midst. The towering elders opened their ranks, offering height and shelter, while the newcomers took root beneath them. Two communities—one of elders, one rising—woven into something new. Welcoming a new grove into their own, the poplars facilitating their germination. A grove of cedar giants.

A new ecosystem was birthing. It was a grove of welcoming.

The vision fades. The meadowlark remains, staring.

It tilts its head, pecks at the snow. Again, it looks at him, taps its beak on something very small on the laneway. Once. Twice.

Waiting.

“What...” says Ansel, his executive functioning shutting the door with a ‘gone fishin’ sign up.

He tracks back what he can remember. He remembers the buddha, feeling frustrated, the shield, dropping his electronics...

What is this?

“Not a memory gap...”

Tilting its head, the meadowlark’s feathers ruffle. It leans in, expecting an answer.

Ansel swallows.

As he moves, the bird hops back, taps again, then launches away. He watches it go, now more interested in the path.

Nestled in the packed snow are three tiny pinecones the size of grapes. He recognizes them from an old documentary.

Soft are the words.

“*Thuja plicata*.”

Western Red Cedar. Native to British Columbia.

Not here.

CHAPTER 5

A shriek shatters the ethereal stillness, jolting Ansel from the reverie.

“Vaelin? VAE LIN?”

Ansel runs, heart pounding, adrenaline surging. He runs along the path, the boy’s voice distant. He passes a smashed trail cam. His hackles raise at the stupidity of it, but perhaps Vaelin perceived something similar.

The boy’s panicked cries grow clearer, leading him off-trail, through brambles that tear at his clothes and steal his hat.

The forest opens up, poplars standing back. A sacred space for the cedars rising in the middle.

This is it. This is what the vision had portended.

Already breathless from the run, the twilight canopy steals what little air he has left. The ringing centers in his head again, this time much louder, almost singing.

Vaelin writhes on the ground, something with large silvery wings and a feathered tail.

Ansel lunges and pulls a snarling bird of prey off the boy. It snaps its beak at him, sinking into the meat in his hand. He heaves it away. The raptor screeches, catches itself in mid-throw and ascends out of sight.

“HOLY SHIT. What the fuck was that?” Out of his mouth before adrenaline can subside, already wounded, Vaelin crushes away from his violent words.

Talons lacerated Vaelin’s hands, face, have torn his shirt and part of his ear looks gone. His eyes wide, terrified. The boy hasn’t entirely come back to his own head yet.

Clarity slams into Ansel like Thor’s hammer to an anvil. Awareness crashes into his mind.

“Oh god.”

Time slows down.

“Vaelin.”

The boy looks like he’s in shock.

“I’m sorry.”

But trust is broken.

Ansel sits cross-legged, bows his head, and holds out his hands in receptive submission. He can say nothing; only action matters. Demonstrating inaction shows the youth the elder is receptive.

Vaelin's breath races, hitching then not. The boy has remarkable control.

He scoots backwards, bewildered.

Frowns.

Pitches forward.

It takes a moment for Vaelin to calm.

His wail of pain pierces the stillness.

“Come here, come here,” says Ansel, straightening slow.

Collapsed on the ground, Vaelin watches Ansel with a cautious wonder one would give to a stranger who suddenly knelt to pray.

“I am...so sorry,” he says, his heart as full as if speaking to another child. To Elke. Too late for her. Not too late for him. “Come here, let's look at that.”

Vaelin's tears mix with blood. “It hurrrts! Why do my tears hurrrrt?”

Salt in the wounds.

Ansel reaches slow for the boy who finally allows the touch, briefly before shrugging it away.

Ansel swallows hard, feeling the lacerations of rejection.

I am never drinking again.

The tone in his head shifts from a song to a whisper.

Ansel digs in his pocket. There's a little, but not enough. Some of the gashes will require stitches, and the top of Vaelin's right ear hangs by a thread.

“Can I touch your face for this?” he asks Vaelin, showing him the Polysporin.

Vaelin blinks hard, trying to hold it in. Then nods, looks down.

“Here, you get your hands.”

The boy flinches as Ansel gently rubs the ointment onto Vaelin's forehead, cheeks, nose and chin. Some scratches are deep, and he worries may leave scars.

“I think I found that porcupine,” says Vaelin.

Ansel smirks, gentle this time. “What happened?”

“I don't know. I was exploring in here and this thing landed on me from the sky.”

Ansel exhales. “That was insane. I think that was a gyrfalcon. I didn't know we had them here.”

Vaelin's expression shifts from fear to something deeper.

“You know, up until now, I thought this place only showed me things,” Vaelin murmured, before looking through pain at Ansel with an easy friendliness that filtered into all the places that Elke had once been.

And, for the first time, Ansel saw recognition in the boy's face. Vaelin wasn't alone in his head anymore. There was someone else.

Ansel pauses. "What do you mean?"

Vaelin's voice is calm, certain in a face bloody with pain.

"It sees us. This place I mean. It calls us. That's why Larkwood Lane was built here."

Ansel's gut tightens. His thoughts war between skepticism and knowing, while Vaelin's words settle inside, in tune with his bones.

"You really see things here?"

Vaelin nods. "With my eyes closed, I see the tree breathing. With them open, I see lights dancing."

Ansel hesitates. "Like when you hit your head?"

"No. Like your WiFi heatmap—but moving, jumping branch to branch."

A familiar memory stirs. Ansel had shown the kids electromagnetic mapping once.

But.

"There are no EM fields here."

"I know." Awe in Vaelin's voice.

Ansel swallows hard.

A caress of cool wind sifts through the Grove, the trees still.

He's been to sacred places before like churches, cathedrals, ancient libraries where the weight of history sat in the air like incense. But this place is alive.

Something watches. The gyrfalcon?

"I saw it too."

"Saw what?" asks Ansel.

"Uhhh," the boy pauses. "The shield with Othala and Algiz. It exploding."

His head bows a little, his voice dark with shame. "That's why I broke your cameras. It didn't want them there anymore. I don't know why."

Desecration?

Ansel licks pursed lips. The truth was a salve. Lingering, background fury vanishes like fading sparks from embers. He still thinks stupidity was involved, but now there's understanding.

"Let's get you to the hospital."

Vaelin sighs. "Mom's not gonna like that."

"She'll have to."

They move toward the exit. Ansel glances up. The towering cedars feel like a cathedral. Shadows move in the branches. A subdued light...dances?

Not just sunlight.

He looks down, grounding himself.

“Did you see that shield at the driveway entrance?”

Vaelin frowns. “I only saw it in here,” he says, his finger pointing at his forehead, but Ansel sees it pointing at a deep laceration.

A cry from a meadowlark echoes through the grove, sending a shiver down Ansel’s spine he can’t hide.

The trees part. Sunlight spills through.

A siren wails in the distance.

CHAPTER 6

“Who called?” Radlin Thorvik asks the EMT as his son is loaded into the ambulance. Lilja sits beside Vaelin, unsure how to touch his swollen face.

“Automatic call, sir. Not directly placed.”

“How does 911 get calls from nobody?”

Ansel steps outside. “Probably my electronics. Motion sensors flagged an anomaly.”

Radlin turns to him. “Run me through this, Ansel. What happened?”

The EMT gives Ansel a look. *Handle this.* The ambulance doors close.

Radlin lingers. Ansel knows he won’t leave Vaelin alone.

“I’ll drive you in,” Ansel says.

Radlin climbs into the hybrid. His family doesn’t have a vehicle. He’s grateful, but still confused.

“A grove of cedars?” Radlin scoffs. “It’s all poplars and oaks.”

“I don’t know exactly where. I was running blind.”

“Good thing you got to him. I’ve seen flying squirrels but never gyrfalcons. It must be down from up north.”

As Ansel drives, he checks the rearview mirror. The shield is gone. Just... gone. Like it was never there. He stares, willing it to reappear, but they turn down the road and leave it behind. High up on a telephone pole, a gyrfalcon watches them disappear down the snowy gravel roads.

“Radlin, give this to Vaelin when he’s ready. I suspect he will want it.” Ansel hands a framed photo of Elke over. Beneath the photo paper bulges a folded shape in relief, too deliberate to be accidental.

At the hospital, Ansel explains again. Lilja listens, warm, receptive.

She touches his arm, her face warm with awe. “Thank you. For sharing your visions, Ansel. The meadowlark—just, wow. I can’t explain it, but...that feels guided.”

She pauses, thoughtful. “Larkwood Lane has fulfilled its purpose, hasn’t it? We’re changing.”

"Emberwood," Vaelin murmurs from the hospital bed. His bright red, swollen face held slits of re-emerging aquamarine. His voice is groggy, but firm. "Emberwood Sparks... for the shield. And Elke."

Ansel's stomach drops. The name rings like a bell he's never heard before. *Déjà vu* hums beneath his skin.

"I...I think I like it," he says.

Radlin hesitates. "You hear from Miriam? Think she would believe any of this?"

Ansel shakes his head. "She doesn't know."

Radlin exhales, crossing his arms. "We haven't talked since Elke." He shifts his weight. "I can't imagine losing a little girl. But today could have been worse. Thanks for being there."

"It's nothing."

"It's not nothing." Radlin sighs. "While harvesting wood today I started thinking about robots that could differentiate between trees to cut and those to leave and could replant seeds. I don't think about stuff like that. I don't have time to daydream. Usually, I focus on how much wood will be needed for these long winters. But today, things got real. What do you call them? Ah—an inflection point, I think?"

Ansel nods, thoughtful.

Radlin studies Vaelin, something vulnerable in his face. "If something happened to me, like it did to Vaelin, we'd be screwed. I don't know what we'd do."

He clasps a scarred hand to Ansel's shoulder. "I don't know what you're doing right now but, you know, if you're around, please help him. Get him interested in things. You're good at that. I'm no good at sharing knowledge. I'm always working. The kind of homestead I have takes work. I just...do things. Things that need doin'."

Ansel nods. "I hear you, Rad."

Radlin nods, turns, walks into the room. "How you doin pardner? Those painkillers kick in yet?"

Vaelin raises a thumb.

Ansel observes Radlin's large, scarred hands. Hands that cradled a son, chopped wood, planted seeds, and clasped his shoulders. Whatever constructed for the future couldn't serve just those who had always been served. It had to work for the people whose hands had built everything in the first place.

He notes Radlin's tough, weathered face. Soon, he would be out harvesting wood. The man had no vacations or sick days; without wood for fire, they would be cold. Ansel now understood these limitations better.

Guilt lingers. He built machines to work for him. Why hadn't he thought about bringing them here? Radlin's daydream fans an ember. His brain whirs, assembling a blueprint.

His mind drifts back to the Grove.

The moment Vaelin had stared into him, those aquamarine eyes shifting, spectral, seeing deep within him. A moment where they both shared pain, but also a connection of caring and camaraderie.

Then, *This place sees us. It calls us.*

The trees had felt like they reached into the depths of history. Pulsing and aware. He still doesn't understand why he dropped his phone, his watch, his key fob. Why he obeyed. Like an admin override on his physical body. It still unnerved him.

Maybe the Grove wasn't just some wooded anomaly. Maybe it was connected into something else.

Something that didn't want to be seen.

The divorce, the house, lawyers, and the loss of Elke are painful but feel somewhat distant. More pressing matters occupy his mind now

Idling, Ansel scrolls through the trail cam network.

The last working cam shows him walking. Stopping. Then the feed fizzles.

CORRUPTED DATA FILE. E-OL. SENSOR OVERLOAD.

Ansel stills. Wait. Overload?

Was Vaelin breaking them... or had something else refused to be seen?

He scrolls through the logs. The same second the file corrupts, a heat signature spikes with a pulse, gone too fast to be human.

A sharp breath pulls through his nose. His heartbeat drums.

Leave the mystery. Do the now.

He shakes his head, dials Marvin.

“Marvin? So, I watched *Ghost in the Shell* last night. You remember that convo we had? About autonomy?”

“...Yeah?”

“I’ve got a project idea. Something big.”

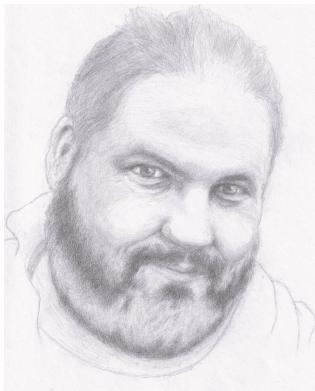
“...Alright, I’m listening.”

“I was in the woods today, thinking about ecology, non-locality, and—look, I can’t explain all of it yet. But—

Want to build some robots?

There’s things that need doin’.”

Remembering Dustin J. Geeraert (1983–2024)



Drawing of Dustin by Christopher Crocker.

KATRÍN NIELSDÓTTIR

It is with profound sadness that we remember Dustin J. Geeraert who passed away suddenly at his home in Winnipeg on October 15, 2024, at the age of 41. Though gone too soon, Dustin left behind a legacy as a scholar, teacher, artist, and long-distance cyclist whose brilliance and spirit touched everyone who knew him.

A BRILLIANT AND COMPLEX MIND

Those who knew Dustin remember him as one of the most intelligent people they had ever met. His knowledge stretched wide and deep, and he could argue a point with such persistence that few could keep up with him. Dustin was firmly traditional in some of views and decidedly radical in others. He resisted modern technology—famously refusing to use a smartphone—and thrived on vigorous discussion. Although in some ways he was uncompromising, this was also part of what made him unforgettable: passionate, original, and unafraid to think differently.

SCHOLAR AND TEACHER

Dustin studied English and Icelandic literature at the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Manitoba, completing his PhD in 2016 on medievalism and modern reinterpretations of Norse mythology. His great scholarly love was the figure of Loki, the trickster of Norse legend, whose shifting reputation across centuries mirrored Dustin's fascination with how myth and culture change in times of upheaval.

Katrín Níelsdóttir is editor-in-chief of Icelandic Connection, in addition to being the Icelandic Liaison Librarian at the University of Manitoba Libraries, and Vice President of the Icelandic Canadian Frón.

At the University of Manitoba, he became a devoted instructor in the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature. His courses on Norse mythology, Icelandic sagas, and folklore were remembered for their intellectual depth, humour, and creativity. Students praised him as approachable, detailed in his lectures, and deeply committed to their success.

He brought creativity into teaching—organizing trips to New Iceland, inviting guest speakers, encouraging imaginative projects, and even securing a city permit for a bonfire framed as a religious and cultural event, though he passed away before it could be held.

ENDURANCE, CREATIVITY, AND PLAY

Dustin's talents were many. He was a naturally gifted artist, sketching and drawing with humour and sensitivity. In this respect, he took some inspiration from another of his scholarly loves, William Morris. Dustin was also a gifted and published fiction writer. One such work was included in a volume he co-edited titled *The Shadow Over Portage & Main*, an emblematic book of the deep relationship Dustin developed with Winnipeg. In addition, he had a love for endurance challenges, most famously bicycling across Canada. Friends and family recall his ability to combine playfulness with seriousness, silliness with brilliance. He could be uncompromising and stubborn, but he was also endlessly creative, patient, and generous.

COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

Dustin had a special relationship with Iceland and Icelandic scholars, working closely with colleagues abroad and contributing to the Icelandic-Canadian community through writing, teaching, and public engagement. His article “Valhalla in Manitoba: An Icelandic Department Trip to New Iceland” was published in the 2024 volume of *Icelandic Connection*. Dustin travelled several times to Iceland, at one point acting as tour guide for his family and friends to the saga-steeds of the country.

Following his passing, the Consulate General of Iceland in Winnipeg hosted a memorial reception. Around 60 people attended—family, colleagues, students, and friends—sharing stories that caused both laughter and tears. Though the occasion was sorrowful, it was also a celebration of his spirit, leaving attendees with warmth in their hearts.

A BROTHER, UNCLE, AND SON

For Dustin's family, the loss is immeasurable. His sister Lindsay reflected: “We still feel the emptiness of his absence so strongly it is unbearable at times, but carrying on Dustin's widespread interests will be a lifelong task for his loved ones. With this, I hope to keep Dustin forever living within my heart.”

His sister-in-law Erin wrote to her daughter Norah, who never had the chance to meet him: “Your Uncle Dustin was playful with no self-consciousness, with incredible endurance and enthusiasm, with patience, and with creativity. He was a naturally gifted artist who would have taken whatever ideas you had and brought them to life in cartoons, just for you. He was irreplaceable, and we are sad you never got the chance to meet, but confident he would have made your life better.”

His brother Bryce shared: “Losing a brother has left a big hole in my heart and in our family. Dustin was passionate, brilliant, challenging, silly, ambitious, humble, and generous to his loved ones all at once. Dustin built community wherever he went. When I sing Radiohead or Pink Floyd to my daughter as she falls asleep, I know my brother is still with me, and that’s never going to go away.”

VOICES OF HIS STUDENTS

Perhaps Dustin’s most enduring legacy is in the words of his students, who remember him not just as a professor, but as a guide and friend. But you need not take my word for it. I refer you to three of his students on this matter.

This professor is one of the most down-to-earth and caring I’ve had. His lectures are detailed, but his tangents were fascinating and his support was always there when I needed it. A true gem of a human.

Probably the best professor I have ever had. Attend lectures and you will be golden. His excitement about sharing his passion was contagious.

Dustin is amazing. He has a very approachable, encouraging demeanor and clearly excited about teaching. His classes were full of humour, guest speakers, and community events—one of my favourite courses in my degree.

CARRYING HIS MEMORY FORWARD

Dustin is survived by his father, Allen of Saskatoon; his sister Lindsay and her children Emery and Declan; his brothers Coleman and Bryce (Erin) and their daughter Norah; his grandparents George and Wilma LaRose; and a wide circle of aunts, uncles, cousins, colleagues, and friends. He was predeceased by his mother Linda, grandparents Margaret and Henry Geeraert, and several aunts and uncles.

Though his life ended far too soon, Dustin’s memory will endure in the family who loved him, the students he inspired, the communities he strengthened, and the countless conversations and debates that will echo long into the future. He will be remembered as a brilliant thinker, a stubborn but generous debater, a creative spirit, and above all, a beloved son, brother, uncle, teacher, and friend.

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Mr. D's Christmas Trees

LINDSAY ALMA GEERAERT

There once was an uncle who was just so fun.
'D' was his name and he was number one!

There were also two kids who loved their 'D' just so,
Because he helped them learn and he helped them grow

Yes.....

Those kids knew their uncle was a very special thing
because their uncle would do with them most of everything!

Now.....

Uncle D was an uncle who also lived in the woods
And he also had a knack for making Christmases good!

Because.....

Uncle D had a tree farm!!! but those kids didn't know...
Of the magical things that D's trees could grow

And.....

At the end of every year D would prune and pluck
all those magical trees that could bring them luck

So....

Lindsay Geeraert is the sister to our late colleague Dustin Geeraert. Dustin spent his winters living on her land near Valhalla, BC. Dustin's ashes are now in Valhalla at the top of Mt. Loki.

every December for those little kid eyes
D would prep for those babes such a wondrous surprise!

For.....

There was always one thing that meant a lot to D.
It was growing those kids a bushy Christmas tree!

Now.....

D was an uncle who also lived on his farm....
He protected his trees and he did no harm.

He wore big boots and he tromped in the snow
And towards his trees he would always go

And Then.....

On each Christmas day they would go to their 'one'
to decorate together and share in so much fun!

Yes.....

They would take out their ornaments and Christmas tree strings
and they'd decorate that tree with such wonderful things!

Around and around they would go until,
from bottom to top that tree had had its fill.

Around and around they'd trim their tree so fine
and when they were done it would look divine!

But.....

Proud as they were of all the time they'd spent,
they'd never have imagined it would come to an end

For.....

their favorite tree had grown up so grand,
its trunk so large; so tall it could stand

Its strength and its presence were a thing of beauty,
and I think that this tree actually knew its duty.

It was there to protect uncle D and those kids
to bring joy to their lives the way that childhood did

But it got so big that its trunk came weak
and although it was grand, its future was bleak.

And so.....

It fell to the floor with a memorable boom
As it made the kind of noise that could capture a room.

It fell in the fall when the kids weren't there
and when Christmas came 'round they could only stare.

For.....

the hole in the forest where the tree had been
felt now like it was missing such a wonderful thing.

The giant protector of them was no more
and all that was left was the forested floor.

Until.....

Uncle D and those kids walked right up to its roots
and there, in the dirt, was the print of a boot.

And there in the print was a strong little plant
which looked to be a sapling... Alive, yet scant

It grew within the pressure of the new footprint
And it grew within a ray of sunshine: just a glint!

And so...

It was given a chance when that favorite tree fell
because the shade from that tree was no more, it could tell

It grew and it grew and it strengthened and it flowered
and unto this new tree is where these kid's love now showered

Ah yes....

It was a happy new tree and it grew from the loss
of a favorite old tree who'd now become moss

And although they were sad, those kids learned something, you know?
When we lose something we cherish, another love will soon grow.

So.....

Those kids had learned a lesson from their tree now quite slanted.

That if they ever feel they're buried.....

They may just be replanted.



Lindsay (right) and two of Dustin's friends, Nate (left) and Mackenzie (middle), on top of Mt. Loki where they spread Dustin's ashes.

New Iceland 150

A Documentary Record of the 2025 Commemorations

KATRÍN NÍELSDÓTTIR

ABSTRACT: In 2025, communities across Manitoba and Canada commemorated the 150th anniversary of the founding of New Iceland (*Nýja Ísland*), marking the arrival of Icelandic settlers on the western shores of Lake Winnipeg in 1875. This article documents the breadth of New Iceland 150 programming through a chronological account of public events, scholarly initiatives, exhibitions, tours, cultural celebrations, and digital heritage projects held throughout the anniversary year.

Drawing on community-based collaboration, academic scholarship, and international participation, the commemorations highlighted the historical foundations of Icelandic settlement while engaging with contemporary questions of migration, cultural continuity, language preservation, and relationships with Indigenous peoples. The events reflected New Iceland as a living legacy shaped by print culture, education, diplomacy, and intergenerational memory.

By situating local celebrations within provincial, national, and international contexts, this article demonstrates how the New Iceland 150 commemorations strengthened partnerships, expanded access to heritage materials, and reinforced the ongoing relevance of Icelandic language and culture in Canada. The anniversary year ultimately affirmed New Iceland not as a closed historical chapter, but as an evolving cultural inheritance connecting past, present, and future generations.

Katrín Níelsdóttir is editor-in-chief of *Icelandic Connection*, in addition to being the Icelandic Liaison Librarian at the University of Manitoba Libraries, and Vice President of the Icelandic Canadian Frón.

INTRODUCTION

In 2025, communities across Manitoba and beyond marked the 150th anniversary of the founding of New Iceland (*Nýja Ísland*), commemorating the arrival of Icelandic settlers on the western shores of Lake Winnipeg in 1875. This region, situated within Treaty One Territory and the homeland of the Red River Métis, is also part of the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, whose histories along Lake Winnipeg long predate Icelandic settlement. What began as a government-designated settlement area for Icelandic immigrants became a lasting centre of Icelandic language, culture, and community life in Canada, shaping the social, cultural, and economic landscape of Manitoba for generations.

The New Iceland 150 commemorations unfolded over the course of the year through an extensive program of public events, scholarly conversations, exhibitions, tours, and cultural celebrations. These initiatives reflected both historical inquiry and living tradition, engaging audiences of all ages while also addressing the complexities of migration, settlement, and relationships with Indigenous peoples. Together, they highlighted the resilience of early settlers, the vitality of Western Icelandic culture, and the ongoing importance of language, print, and storytelling in preserving collective memory. This article documents the breadth of New Iceland 150 programming, tracing the anniversary year from its opening events to its closing reflections. By bringing together community-based celebrations, academic scholarship, digital heritage projects, and international participation, the commemorations underscored how the legacy of New Iceland continues to evolve—woven into Manitoba’s diverse cultural fabric while maintaining deep and enduring ties to Iceland.

FOUNDATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

Preparations for the New Iceland 150 commemorations were the result of extensive collaboration among community, cultural, and diplomatic organizations across Manitoba and Canada. Key partners included the Icelandic Canadian Frón, the Canada Iceland Foundation, the Honorary Consulate of Iceland in Winnipeg, the Embassy of Iceland in Ottawa, the Gimli Icelandic Canadian Society, New Iceland Heritage Museum, The Icelandic Connection, Icelandic River Heritage Sites, the Icelandic National League of North America, Icelandic Camp, Travel Manitoba, Digital Museums Canada, and the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village.

Together, these organizations coordinated a wide range of initiatives throughout the anniversary year, including exhibitions, guided tours, lectures, digital storytelling projects, educational programming, and community celebrations held across the province.

Heritage Objects, Souvenirs, and Digital Storytelling

The anniversary year was also marked by the creation and circulation of commemorative heritage objects and digital storytelling initiatives. Two lapel pins—featuring the Landing Mural and a “Since 1875” map motif—were produced and widely shared within the

community. Two commemorative beers titled New Iceland 150 were brewed specifically for the anniversary, one by Barn Hammer Brewing in Winnipeg's West End and the other by Interlake Brewing.

Several organizations produced additional commemorative materials for public engagement and fundraising, including T-shirts and stickers issued by the Icelandic Canadian Frón, Lögberg-Heimskringla, and the New Iceland Heritage Museum. Community members also contributed photographs, videos, and event documentation through the hashtag #newiceland150, creating an informal but valuable digital archive that now documents the scope, scale, and lived experience of the New Iceland 150 commemorations. New Iceland 150: A Year of Commemoration and Community Events

Icelandic Heritage Brunch (January 19)

The Icelandic Heritage Brunch was held at the Scandinavian Centre in Winnipeg and hosted by the Icelandic Canadian Frón. The event welcomed approximately 75 attendees and featured information tables from Lögberg-Heimskringla, the New Iceland Heritage Museum, the Canada Iceland Foundation, the Icelandic Canadian Frón, the University of Manitoba's Icelandic Collection, and The Icelandic Connection. Together, these organizations highlighted Western Icelandic culture and promoted New Iceland 150 initiatives while fostering community connection and collaboration.

Gimli International Film Festival Women's Day Screening

The Day Iceland Stood Still (March 8)

On March 8, the Gimli International Film Festival hosted a special International Women's Day screening of *The Day Iceland Stood Still*. Directed by Pamela Hogan, the documentary examined the collective action taken by Icelandic women in 1975 and its lasting impact on gender equality. The screening contributed to New Iceland 150 programming by highlighting Iceland's social history and its relevance to contemporary conversations around women's rights and civic engagement.

Government House Reception (April 24)

A Government House reception was held on April 24, 2025, to acknowledge the volunteers and committees contributing to New Iceland 150. The event took place at Government House and included remarks from The Honourable Anita Neville, P.C., O.M., Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba.

In her address, the Lieutenant Governor acknowledged that the gathering was held on Treaty One territory and the homeland of the Red River Métis, and recognized that New Iceland is situated on the ancestral and treaty lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples. She reflected on Manitoba's history as a place of refuge and resilience, noting the arrival of Icelandic settlers 150 years earlier amid volcanic devastation and harsh conditions.

The remarks highlighted the perseverance of the Icelandic community despite early challenges, including disease, crop failure, and economic hardship, and recognized their enduring contributions to Manitoba in the arts, sciences, business, public service, and agriculture. The Lieutenant Governor emphasized how Icelandic heritage has become an integral part of Manitoba's diverse cultural fabric and thanked the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba for organizing the celebration, as well as all those who continue to contribute their stories to the province's shared history.

Centennial Celebrations New Iceland/Aldarafmæli Nýja Íslands (May 1)

The New Iceland Heritage Museum developed a special temporary exhibit titled Centennial Celebrations New Iceland/Aldarafmæli Nýja Íslands, which examined how Icelandic descendants marked New Iceland's centennial in 1975. Focusing on the 1970s, the exhibit reflected on a formative moment when many parents and grandparents of today's community members helped found or support the museum to preserve the story of New Iceland. Now, 150 years after settlement, with five, six, and even seven generations born in Manitoba, the exhibit reinforced the enduring links between generations and the continued relevance of shared memory.

Icelandic National League Convention, Gimli (May 1-4)

The Icelandic National League of North America Convention was held in Gimli from May 1 to 4 and featured a diverse program of presentations, panels, exhibits, and cultural events. Highlights included the documentary *A Song for John Ramsey*, followed by a question-and-answer session with Andy Blicq, as well as contributions from representatives of the Icelandic National League of North America, the Icelandic Hekla Club of Minnesota, and The Snorri Programs.

Additional sessions and exhibits explored Icelandic history, language, storytelling, and community engagement. These included the *Njál's Saga Tapestry* Exhibit presented by Claudia Petursson; *Kæra dagbók: The Value of Journals in History* by Katrín Nielsdóttir; *The Icelandic Language in North America* by Kristín Margrét Jóhannsdóttir; *New Iceland: The First Settlers* by Ryan Eyfjord; and *The Day Iceland Stood Still* presented virtually by Pamela Hogan and Hrabba Gunnarsdóttir. Organizations such as Lögberg-Heimskringla, the New Iceland Heritage Museum, Icelandic Roots, the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba, the Icelandic National League of Iceland, Icelandic Camp, the Canada Iceland Foundation, and Iceland River Heritage Sites were also represented.

The convention's keynote speaker was Eliza Reid, and musical entertainment was provided by Sol James and an international cast featuring Richard Gillis.

The convention welcomed several dignitaries, including Icelandic Ambassador to Canada Hlynur Guðjónsson; Icelandic Honorary Consul in Winnipeg Vilhjálmur Wiium; Manitoba's Lieutenant Governor Anita Neville; Icelandic Honorary Consul in Minnesota and North Dakota Jeannie Isfeld Entenza; Elder Ruth Christie of Selkirk; RM of Gimli Deputy Mayor Kurt Reichert; Selkirk-Interlake-Eastman MP James Bezan; and Interlake-Gimli MLA Derek Johnson.

New Iceland Bus Tour (May 4)

A New Iceland Bus Tour was held on May 4, offering participants the opportunity to visit significant historical and cultural sites across the region.

Stops included the resting place of Betsey Ramsay, whose family—led by John Ramsay, a prominent member of a Saulteaux Indigenous community—played a crucial role in assisting early Icelandic settlers by sharing winter survival, hunting, and fishing knowledge.

The tour also included the Sigtryggur Jónasson Monument in Riverton, a life-sized bronze sculpture erected in 2012 honoring the “Father of New Iceland,” depicting Jónasson gazing across the Icelandic River toward the land he helped settle.

Participants visited the Engimýri Homestead, established in 1877 by Tómas Águst Jónasson and Guðrún Egidía Jóhannesdóttir, and later stops included Hecla and the Hecla Historic Village, which preserves buildings central to Icelandic settlement life, including homes, schools, churches, fishing infrastructure, and community spaces.

Additional destinations included Arborg and the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village; the Riverton Walking Bridge, reflecting over a century of rebuilding in response to flooding; Viking Park in Gimli, developed as part of the Islendingadagurinn 125 legacy; and Tergesen’s General Store, Manitoba’s oldest operating general store and a longstanding cultural landmark.

The tour also highlighted interpretive sites such as the Icelandic Settlement Plaque in Gimli Town Park, Sugar Me Cookie Boutique featuring traditional vinarterta, the Lundi the Moose sculpture in Riverton, and the blue-and-white homestead marker signs installed by the Icelandic National League in the 1980s.

Further stops included Centennial Park in Riverton, Lundar, the Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason Monument—designated a municipal heritage site—and the Lundar Pioneer Museum, which preserves historic buildings, artifacts, and an Icelandic library documenting pioneer life.

Fjallkona 2025 – Gunnvör Danielsdóttir Ásmundsson (May 31)

At the Fjallkona Brunch held on May 31, Gunnvör Danielsdóttir Ásmundsson, President of the Gimli Icelandic Canadian Society (GICS), was formally crowned Fjallkona for 2025. The ceremony recognized her leadership and contributions to the Icelandic community and marked a central cultural moment within the New Iceland 150 commemorations.

Jón Sigurðsson Day (June 17)

Jón Sigurðsson Day programming on June 17 was jointly organized by the Icelandic Canadian Frón and the IODE Jón Sigurðsson Chapter and held at the Scandinavian Centre in Winnipeg. The event featured remarks by Vilhjálmur Wiium of the Consulate of Iceland, as well as performances by traditional Scandinavian dancers.

On the same day, celebrations at the Icelandic Embassy in Ottawa included a reception at the official residence, where special attention was given to the 150th anniversary of New Iceland, highlighting its national and international significance.

Leifur Eiríksson Monument Unveiling, Québec City (July 14-15)

Icelandic Ambassador to Canada Hlynur Guðjónsson travelled to Québec City to participate in the official unveiling of a new monument to Norse explorer Leifur Eiríksson. Located on the Sentier des Grèves overlooking the St. Lawrence River, the monument commemorates “Leifur the Lucky” as the first European to explore North America around the year 1000. Designed and constructed with support from Alcoa, Eimskip, and Icelandair, the project also symbolized Québec’s friendship with Iceland.

The unveiling was made possible through collaboration with the Commission de la capitale nationale du Québec, led by CEO André Roy, with support from Iceland’s Honorary Consul in Québec City, François Lefebvre. During the visit, Ambassador Guðjónsson met with senior officials from Québec’s Ministry of Economy, Innovation and Energy and the Ministry of International Relations and La Francophonie to discuss future cooperation. Topics included a potential visit by Iceland’s Aluminum Cluster (Álklasinn) and ongoing partnerships involving Icelandic organizations such as Carbfix, Carbon Recycling International, Laki Power, IceWind, Planet Youth, and Landsvirkjun, with broader opportunities identified in energy, cleantech, the blue economy, tourism, the Arctic, and arts and culture.

While in Québec City, the Ambassador also attended a Bastille Day reception hosted by the Consulat général de France à Québec.

Gimli International Film Festival (July 23-27)

The Gimli International Film Festival marked its 25th anniversary from July 23 to 27, featuring Icelandic and Icelandic Manitoban film content as part of its programming. Founded on the belief that film has the power to educate, inspire, and empower, the festival continued its mission of advancing cultural literacy and honoring Manitoba’s diverse creative heritage through community engagement in the media, visual, and performing arts.

While the program emphasized local productions, it also included Icelandic films such as *Odd Fish* and *When the Light Breaks*, reinforcing GIFF’s long-standing connections to Icelandic storytelling and cultural exchange.

Icelandic Camp (July 27-August 1)

Icelandic Camp was held from July 27 to August 1 and reached full capacity, with registrations exceeding available spaces by an additional ten participants. For more than thirty years, Icelandic Camp has brought together youth of Icelandic descent, fostering strong connections to language, history, and cultural traditions. Over six days, campers participated in Icelandic language activities, Viking crafts, storytelling, and outdoor

experiences, cultivating a deeper appreciation for their heritage while forming lasting friendships and connections to the land and Lake Winnipeg.

Reception at Consulate General of Iceland (July 31)

Vilhjálmur Wium, Consul General of Iceland, and Mrs. Guðlaug Erlendsdóttir hosted a reception in honour of Her Excellency Halla Tómasdóttir, President of Iceland. The reception formed part of the President's official visit and underscored the significance of the New Iceland 150 commemorations within broader diplomatic and cultural relations between Iceland and Canada.

Presidential Visit to the Icelandic Collection (August 1)

During her official visit to Manitoba, Her Excellency Halla Tómasdóttir, President of Iceland, toured the Icelandic Collection at the University of Manitoba. The visit highlighted the breadth and significance of the Collection's rare books, manuscripts, newspapers, and archival materials documenting Icelandic settlement and print culture in Canada.

The President expressed appreciation for the extensive work undertaken to preserve, catalogue, and provide access to these materials, recognizing the Collection's role in safeguarding Icelandic language, history, and cultural memory for future generations. The visit underscored the international importance of the Icelandic Collection and its contribution to the broader New Iceland 150 commemorations.

Sigtryggur Jónasson Exhibit Enhancement & Presidential Unveiling (August 1)

On August 1, during the official visit of the President of Iceland, a new commemorative plaque honouring Sigtryggur Jónasson's role in bringing the Canadian Pacific Railway to Arborg in 1910 was unveiled. The enhancement complemented the existing seven-foot bronze statue recognizing Jónasson as the "Father of New Iceland."

The sculpture depicts Jónasson at age 23 upon his arrival at the Icelandic River in July 1875 with the scouting party that selected the settlement site. The monument affirms his significance as both a local founder and a figure of national historical importance.

Íslendingadagurinn / Icelandic Festival of Manitoba (August 1-4)

Íslendingadagurinn, the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba, was held from August 1 to 4 as part of the August long weekend and formed a central pillar of the New Iceland 150 celebrations. The festival's theme, "Woven Together: 150 Years, Iceland and Canada / Ísland og Kanada samtengd í 150 ár," reflected the enduring cultural, historical, and community ties between the two countries.

Festival highlights included the Magnús Ver Magnússon Strongman Competition, hosted by four-time World's Strongest Man Magnús Ver Magnússon, as well as dignitary tours of historic sites such as Engimýri House and Fagriskógur House in Riverton. The festival welcomed Her Excellency Halla Tómasdóttir, President of Iceland, who delivered the Toast to Canada during the Traditional Program at Gimli Park, alongside Ambassador of

Canada to Iceland Jenny Hill, who presented the Toast to Iceland. Greetings were also offered by the 101st Fjallkona, Gunnvör Daniëlsdóttir Ásmundsson, with additional attendance by Ambassador Hlynur Guðjónsson, Consul General Vilhjálmur Wiium, and Manitoba Minister Nellie Kennedy.

New programming introduced for the 150th anniversary included the Moon Shine Nights Cocktail Reception (Tunglskinsnætur) at Johnson Hall and the inaugural Íslendinga-Derby fishing competition at Gimli Harbour. Returning favourites included the Viking Village, Icelandic Fashion Show—featuring the presentation of a new Fjallkona costume from the women of Iceland—the Art Show, cultural workshops, genealogy presentations, concerts, fireworks, parades, races, and extensive family programming throughout Gimli.

Heritage Pavilion (August 3-4)

The Heritage Pavilion was held as part of Íslendingadagurinn and featured information tables from Icelandic clubs, organizations, and vendors. Participants promoted Icelandic and Western Icelandic culture and history, offering festival-goers opportunities to engage directly with community groups and learn more about the region's shared heritage.

The President's Reception (August 4)

The President's Reception was held on August 4 at the Waterfront Centre and served as the closing event of the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba. Hosted annually by the Festival President, the reception included the President of Iceland in 2025 and provided an opportunity for invited guests to reflect on the festival and the significance of the New Iceland 150 celebrations.

Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village

Special 150th Programming (August 5)

On August 5, the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village hosted a cross-cultural outdoor celebration honouring both the Indigenous peoples of the region and the arrival of the first Icelandic settlers in 1875. The program featured performances by the United Thunder Indigenous Dance Troupe, presentations by Annríki Þjóðbúningar og Skart showcasing Icelandic traditional dress, live music by Jason Lepine (fiddle) and Lionel Desjarlais (guitar and vocals), and an Indigenous ribbon skirt presentation. The event emphasized shared histories, cultural respect, and ongoing relationships.

Folklorama: Icelandic Pavilion (August 10 –16)

The Icelandic Pavilion at Folklorama was held from August 10 to 16 with the theme Immigration. Programming highlighted stories of migration, resilience, and cultural continuity. Through food, music, dance, and interpretation, the pavilion explored how Scandinavian traditions—including Icelandic, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and Finnish—have blended with Canadian life, emphasizing the lasting cultural impact of immigration.

Echoes of Asgard (August 28)

Echoes of Asgard, an exhibition by artist Inga Torfadóttir, opened on August 28 in the Icelandic Reading Room on the third floor of the Elizabeth Dafoe Library. Presented by the University of Manitoba Libraries, the exhibition explored Nordic heritage through artwork inspired by Icelandic folklore, landscapes, and mythology. The exhibition was free and open to the public and offered a contemporary, personal interpretation of Icelandic cultural themes.

Culturama 150th Tribute (September 26, 2025)

On September 26, a special New Iceland 150 tribute was presented by Svava Simundson as part of Culturama programming at the Arborg & District Multicultural Heritage Village. The event welcomed approximately 400 attendees and celebrated the region's diverse cultural history. The Heritage Village provided an interpretive setting showcasing historic buildings, artifacts, and stories representing Icelandic, Indigenous, Ukrainian, Polish, and other communities, reinforcing the village's role as both an educational museum and a living space for shared cultural memory.

New Iceland in Canada - 150th Anniversary Reflections (September 29)

On September 29, a scholarly webinar titled New Iceland in Canada – 150th Anniversary Reflections was hosted by the Embassy of Iceland in Ottawa to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the founding of New Iceland. The webinar examined the establishment of Nýja Ísland in 1875, when Canada set aside land for Icelandic immigrants along the western shores of Lake Winnipeg—an episode recognized by Parks Canada as a distinctive chapter in the settlement of the Canadian West.

The program explored the push and pull factors behind Icelandic emigration in the 1870s, as well as emerging research on Icelandic settlers' relationships with Indigenous peoples. Presentations included contributions from Ólöf Garðarsdóttir, author of *The Icelandic Emigration to the Americas, 1860–1914: From an International Perspective*, and historian Ryan Eyford, whose work focuses on New Iceland and its historical legacy.

Lunch & Bus Tour of Icelandic Winnipeg (October 11, 2025)

To mark the 150th anniversary of Icelandic settlement in Manitoba, the Icelandic Canadian Frón hosted a New Iceland 150 Winnipeg Tour on October 11. Led by historian and editor Stefán Jónasson, the guided bus tour traced the urban footprint of Icelandic immigrants and their descendants, highlighting the people, institutions, and spaces that shaped Winnipeg's Icelandic cultural life.

The tour began at the Independent Order of Good Templars Hall on Sargent Avenue and continued to sites commemorating figures such as William Stephenson, Dr. Paul Thorlakson, and Baldur Stefansson. Participants visited key cultural landmarks including First Lutheran Church, the former home of women's rights advocate Margret Benediktsson, the historic Columbia Block that housed Lögberg and Heimskringla, the Scandinavian

Cultural Centre, the Jón Sigurðsson Monument, and the Upper Fort Garry Gate. The itinerary also included former residences of Laura Goodman Salverson, Charlie Thorson, and Neil Bardal, as well as stops at the Icelandic Collection at the University of Manitoba and the Jón Bjarnason Academy.

Winnipeg Tour Photography Exhibition (October 11–November 16)

The Canada Iceland Foundation supported the New Iceland 150 Winnipeg Tour through a grant that enabled professional photographic documentation of the project. Photographer Signý Thorsteinsson captured images of key sites along the tour route, creating a lasting visual record of Icelandic presence in Winnipeg.

The photographs were later framed and exhibited at the Scandinavian Cultural Centre from October 11 to November 16. The exhibition extended the reach of the tour beyond the day of the event and demonstrated the role of photography as an important tool for heritage documentation and interpretation.

Gala Fundraiser (October 19)

The New Iceland Heritage Museum held its annual Gala Fundraiser on October 19 at the Johnson Hall Waterfront Centre. The evening combined dinner, entertainment, and a friendly competitive element, bringing community members together to celebrate and support the museum's work. The event included cocktails followed by dinner and served as an important opportunity to recognize the museum's achievements and ongoing role in preserving Icelandic heritage.

Signing Ceremony of a Memorandum of Understanding (October 21)

A formal signing ceremony for a Memorandum of Understanding between the Rural Municipality of Gimli and Reykjavík City Hall, in partnership with the Town of Akureyri, was held virtually on October 21. The agreement aimed to strengthen cultural and municipal collaboration and marked both the 150th anniversary of the Icelandic landing in New Iceland and the 50th anniversary of the Gimli–Akureyri sister-city relationship.

Walk to the Rock (October 21)

The annual Walk to the Rock took place on October 21 in Gimli to commemorate the anniversary of the Icelanders' first arrival in New Iceland. Participants gathered at the Waterfront Centre and walked to Willow Island, the site of the Big Rock Pioneer Memorial. The event concluded with refreshments and a gathering at the Waterfront Centre and remained a meaningful tradition within the Icelandic Canadian community's annual heritage observances.

Canada and Iceland in World War 1 and World War 2 (November 12)

In the spirit of Remembrance Day, a webinar held on November 12 explored Icelandic-Canadian contributions to the First World War and the interactions between Icelanders and the Canadian Armed Forces in Iceland during the Second World War. The program featured presentations by Canadian and Icelandic scholars Madison Herget-Schmidt (University of Manitoba) and Karen Lilja Loftsdóttir (Queen's University). Hosted by the Embassy of Iceland in Ottawa, the webinar highlighted shared military histories and deepened understanding of Iceland-Canada connections during both global conflicts.

Icelandic Language Day (November 16)

Icelandic Language Day on November 16 marked the official release of the full Icelandic-language version of *Our Valuable Inheritance: Icelandic Language Publishing in Manitoba*. The trilingual digital exhibition—presented in English, Icelandic, and French—had launched a soft release in August 2025 and was fully unveiled in Icelandic on this national day of linguistic celebration.

The exhibition features digitized manuscripts, newspapers, pamphlets, diaries, and personal documents, alongside contextual essays, transcripts, and detailed metadata. It provides an accessible foundation for understanding Icelandic print culture in Manitoba and served as a digital complement to the year's in-person New Iceland 150 programming. The project traces the development of Icelandic-language publishing from the arrival of thousands of Icelandic migrants in North America between the early 1870s and the First World War. It documents how newspapers and printed materials helped settlers preserve their language, maintain cultural and spiritual connections, and adapt to life across Manitoba and the broader Icelandic diaspora. Opening remarks for the Icelandic Language Day programming were delivered by Vilhjálmur Wiium.

City Hall Luncheon (December 4)

A City Hall Luncheon was held on December 4 to formally conclude the New Iceland 150 anniversary year. The event brought together Manitoba-based Icelandic organizations for a city-wide gathering celebrating 150 years of Icelandic heritage in the province. Winnipeg Mayor Scott Gillingham attended the luncheon, which provided an opportunity to reflect on the year's commemorations and the enduring contributions of the Icelandic community in Manitoba.

CONCLUSION

The New Iceland 150 commemorations demonstrated the depth, resilience, and continued relevance of Icelandic heritage in Manitoba and across Canada. Through a year of gatherings, scholarship, artistic expression, and community celebration, the anniversary honoured both the hardships and achievements of those who settled New Iceland in 1875, while also recognizing the generations that followed and the evolving contexts in which their stories are told.

Taken together, the events of 2025 revealed New Iceland not as a fixed historical moment, but as a living cultural legacy shaped by language, print culture, education, diplomacy, and community collaboration. The anniversary year also underscored the importance of engaging with complex histories, including relationships with Indigenous peoples, and of situating Icelandic settlement within broader narratives of migration, reconciliation, and shared stewardship of place.

As the commemorations concluded, the legacy of New Iceland 150 continued through strengthened partnerships, expanded digital access to heritage materials, and renewed public interest in Icelandic language and culture. These outcomes ensure that the story of New Iceland remains not only remembered, but actively carried forward—connecting past, present, and future generations in meaningful and enduring ways.

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From Rival Voices to a Shared Legacy

The Story of Lögberg, Heimskringla and the Birth of Canada's Oldest Ethnic Newspaper

KATRÍN NÍELSDÓTTIR

with STEFAN JONASON

Editorial Note: This article is based on a recorded interview conducted with Stefan Jonason on February 26, 2025, for the Digital Museums Canada project on the History of Icelandic Print in Manitoba. The hour-long conversation provides a uniquely personal and historically significant perspective on the legacy of Icelandic-language journalism in North America.

Lögberg-Heimskringla, as it exists today, is the result of a vibrant, complex history of Icelandic print culture in North America. With its roots in two competing publications, Lögberg and Heimskringla, the newspaper holds the distinction of being the oldest continuously published ethnic periodical in Canada, according to Library and Archives Canada.

The story of Icelandic newspapers in North America begins with *Framfari* ("Progress"), the first Icelandic-language newspaper in the region. Published in the Interlake region of Manitoba, *Framfari* ran for only two or three years before ceasing operations. Its short-lived successor, *Leifur*, also failed due to financial instability. It was not until 1886 that *Heimskringla* was established by Freeman Anderson, Eggert Johansson, and Einar Hjörleifsson. Despite suffering interruptions due to financial hardship, it maintained a consistent presence from its founding onward.

Just under two years later, Lögberg was founded by Einar Hjörleifsson (later known as Einar Hjörleifsson Kvaran), a notable writer both in Iceland and North America. From the outset, Lögberg enjoyed greater financial stability due to its solid capitalization and backing from prominent business figures. It eventually surpassed *Heimskringla* in circulation and influence.

Stefan Jonason is a Unitarian minister and editor of the Icelandic-Canadian newspaper *Lögberg-Heimskringla*.

The two newspapers represented different political and religious ideologies within the Icelandic immigrant community. Lögberg leaned toward the Liberal Party in Canada, strongly supported the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, favored Iceland's Independence Party, and had Republican leanings in the U.S. In contrast, Heimskringla supported the Conservative Party in Canada, aligned with the Unitarian Church and the Winnipeg Tabernacle, favored the Home Rule Party in Iceland, and its American readership leaned Democratic.¹

This ideological diversity allowed both newspapers to thrive in their own spheres, serving a politically and religiously fragmented community that had begun assimilating into North American society. Their rivalry, however, spurred journalistic vibrancy and financial viability.

By the 1920s and 1930s, these differences had softened. A shift in community dynamics emphasized unity over division, but this also led to a gradual decline in readership. The onset of radio and later television further reduced reliance on print news. While both papers continued to publish social notes—a treasure trove for genealogists today—their broader relevance began to wane.

Multiple mergers attempted in the 1940s and 1950s failed until the Canada Iceland Foundation declined a request for funding from Lögberg, citing the need for equitable treatment among all Icelandic publications. This refusal triggered serious merger talks, culminating in the unification of Lögberg and Heimskringla in 1959. Key figures in this effort included Dr. P.H.T. Thorlakson, Senator Gunnar Salmonson, Stefan Hansen (VP of Great-West Life), and Rev. Philip Peterson of the Unitarian Church. Notably, Hansen and Peterson had previously clashed publicly, making their cooperation a symbol of broader reconciliation.

The editorial transition was handled with dignity. Stefan Anderson of Heimskringla retired after 32 years, while Einar P. Johnson of Lögberg became the editor of the unified paper. The merger succeeded not only in preserving the paper for another generation—but ultimately for three more.

The paper evolved over time. Originally publishing international and national news in Icelandic for a largely monolingual audience, it shifted toward English-language reporting about Icelandic community events in North America and news from Iceland. This change reflected a generational transition: the first generation read Icelandic exclusively, the second used both languages, and by the third, English had become dominant.

Although the newspaper played a role in preserving the Icelandic language, Stefan Jonason notes that it was more instrumental in facilitating the community's transition into English. The paper printed occasional Icelandic lessons and bilingual content, but its shift to an English-language publication by the 1980s marked a turning point.

¹. While the Unitarian Church is widely recognized today as one of the most progressive denominations in North America, its alignment with conservative politics in the context of early Icelandic-Canadian history reflected the priorities of that time. Theological liberalism did not necessarily correlate with left-leaning political views, and affiliations were often shaped by community dynamics, immigration politics, and church leadership personalities.

Today, Lögberg-Heimskringla increasingly attracts readers with no Icelandic heritage who are simply curious about Iceland and its culture. The paper's coverage has expanded to include current Icelandic cultural leaders, travel, and history. With support from staff like layout editor Dísa, the paper is transitioning toward a magazine format, and a glossy monthly issue may be in its future.

As Jonason approaches retirement, he reflects on his tenure as the second-longest serving editor since the merger and hopes to return as guest editor for the paper's 140th anniversary. While readership in traditional print continues to decline, the paper has endured by adapting—an unlikely union that continues to thrive in a multicultural landscape.

“It was a good merger.” –Stefan Jonason

The Stowaway's Granddaughter

The Life and Legacy of Guðrún Viðla Bjarnason Hilton

KATRÍN NÍELSDÓTTIR
with GUÐRÚN VIÐLA BJARNASON HILTON

Editorial Note: *This article draws on oral history interviews recorded on September 9th and 24th, 2025, only a month shy of her 90th birthday, together with family photographs and documents generously provided by the Bjarnason family.*

ROOTS IN ÞINGVALLABYGGÐ

Every family story begins with a choice—and sometimes, with a leap. For Guðrún Viðla Bjarnason Hilton, that leap took place more than a century ago, when her afi (grandfather) left Iceland by unconventional means.

Her grandparents were among the Icelanders who left the Westfjords around 1900, bound for Canada. Her amma (grandmother) had worked off a government relief loan and purchased two tickets on a ship bound for North America. Her afi, ever resourceful, had not yet repaid his. When he was stopped at the gangway, cousins rowed him out in a small boat. As the ocean liner eased away, he caught a rope ladder, swung himself up, and disappeared into the crowd.

“There is no record of him leaving Iceland or arriving in Canada,” Guðrún says. “But he’s the reason we’re all here.”

They landed first in Manitoba, and by 1902, had homesteaded near Churchbridge, Saskatchewan—known in Icelandic as Þingvallabyggð, or “Thingvalla District.” Like many settlers, they arrived with little but faith and fortitude. Neighbours sent a young couple off with a cow, a pig, and a sheep; everyone contributed what they could.

The first home was a log cabin tucked into the northwest corner of a prairie quarter-section—poorly sited and brutally cold as they soon learned. By 1916, they ordered a house from the Eaton’s catalogue, shipped out by rail. It came with lumber for a detached garage.

Guðrún Viðla Bjarnason Hilton is a dedicated Western Icelandic community leader and long-time member of both the Jón Sigurðsson Chapter I.O.D.E. and the Icelandic National League of North America. At 90, she continues to embody a lifelong commitment to remembrance, service, and the preservation of Icelandic Canadian heritage.

Her afi had other plans: he transformed that lumber into an oversized kitchen, placing it on the sheltered side of the house where the sun rose warm and the winds were tempered. He cut a screened vent in the ceiling, allowing heat from the cookstove to rise to the upstairs bedrooms—a kind of “heimagerð miðstöðhitun” (homemade central heating).

From ingenuity came comfort. “You can tell where we came from by the kitchens,” Guðrún says. “They were built for work, but they were also built for gathering.”

A PRAIRIE CHILDHOOD

Guðrún was born on October 22, 1935, in the district her family helped build. Her parents, Barney Bjarnason and Guðrún (Bjarnason) née Kristjánson, were children of that Icelandic pioneer generation. Her grandparents, Kristján and Petrína (Kristjánson) née Pétursdóttir, and Sigurður Eiríksson¹ and Björg Bjarnadóttir,² had lived through the years of homesteading, drought, and Depression.

The family farm stayed in the Bjarnason name for more than 120 years, until its sale in 2020 to a younger relative who promised to continue the work organically.

When Guðrún tells stories of her early years, they are precise in the way memory can be when shaped by work. She remembers her amma catching a runaway mouse with her bare hands. She remembers heat carefully managed—flues warmed³ before lighting the stove to prevent soot fires, ladders kept on the roof to sweep chimneys clear, and the annual removal of storm windows each spring.

“Three little holes drilled through the frame so you could open the vent and let fresh air in without freezing.”

Meals were hearty and plain—“kjöt og lauk” (meat and onion), roast on Sundays, coffee always brewing, and vínarterta for guests. The root cellar beneath the kitchen stored carrots, potatoes, and turnips in sawdust bins. “Nothing was wasted,” she says. “Even the paper bags were kindling.”

Community meant mutual dependence. “We had Icelanders and Germans side by side. If you didn’t help your neighbour, you’d lose your own crop next year.” The women’s work was relentless but dignified—baking, sewing, tending gardens, raising children, caring for elders. “They were tough people,” Guðrún says simply.

VIOLA IN THE MAKING

When Guðrún entered school, she spoke Icelandic at home, English at school, and often found herself translating between generations. Her first schoolteacher stumbled over “Guðrún Viðla Bjarnason” and asked if she had “a shorter name.” Her mother suggested “Gertrude.” For years, report cards bore the wrong name.

¹Also known as Sigurður Bjarnason.

²Also known as Björg Pjeturson.

³In older houses—or with wood stoves—if the flue is very cold, the smoke doesn’t rise properly. Instead, it can sit in the chimney and ignite built-up soot (creosote), which can cause a dangerous fire.

At twenty-one, reviewing her graduation forms, she took a pen and corrected it. “People speak French and Spanish,” she told the registrar. “I speak Icelandic. My name is Guðrún.”

Her education carried her from one-room prairie schools to Minnedosa Collegiate, where she excelled in leadership and academics. In 1952, the Minnedosa Tribune printed her photograph: “Miss Viðla Bjarnason — Governor General’s Medalist.” She had led C.G.I.T., Brownies, the Young People’s Union, and served as treasurer of the student council. “We weren’t told to lead,” she says. “We were told to help. That’s leadership in Icelandic—að hjálpa.”

Her parents were proud but practical. “You’re not better than anyone else,” her father told her. “But you’re just as good.”

After high school, she attended United College (now the University of Winnipeg), living at Sparling Hall, where women signed in and out under the eye of a house matron. Homesickness hit often; a kind police officer would escort her back to the residence gate after evening visits with family. She laughs: “He’d say, ‘I’ll see you home, little one.’”

After a year she transferred to Brandon College, where she majored in social sciences and discovered that caring too deeply could be both her strength and her challenge. “They told me I’d want to fix everyone’s problems,” she remembers. “So, I became a teacher instead.”

TEACHING AND A NEW LIFE

Her first classroom was a high school in a consolidated rural district, where she taught on a temporary permit at only a few years older than her students. It was there, at a teachers’ convention, that a young man named Ken Hilton noticed her voice from across the room and asked, “Who’s the young one?”

They married soon after. The Navy called Ken to training in Nova Scotia, and for eight years they moved between Victoria, Winnipeg, and Chilliwack as Canada’s armed forces unified. “You learn to pack light and start over,” Guðrún says.

In 1973, after a hemorrhage at the lake and an emergency diagnosis in Kenora, she was told she had stage-two cervical cancer. Treatment in Vancouver included cobalt therapy and internal radiation. “They sent me to Winnipeg on a compassionate posting,” she recalls. “They told Ken I had three weeks to three months.”

She survived. “I told my doctors, ‘Don’t worry about me — look after yourselves.’” Years later, she would still shake her head in gratitude and disbelief. “Sometimes the hardheadedness of Icelanders works in your favour.”

The experience deepened her empathy. “I learned that people mean well, but they don’t always know what to say. You just have to keep going.”

FAITH, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY

Throughout her life, Guðrún followed the example of her amma and langamma (grandmother's mother)—faith not as dogma, but as daily practice. In Minnedosa she led a Brownie pack while still in high school; in Winnipeg she organized another at Crestview United Church, taught Sunday School, and became active in Concordia Lutheran and Icelandic choir societies.

Her community service grew alongside her family. When she and Ken settled permanently in Winnipeg, she continued to volunteer—at seniors' homes, on cultural boards, and with CJNU 93.7 radio. She helped found one of the city's first Red Hat Society chapters, the St. James Rhinestones. "We're retired women," she laughs, "but still full of piss and vinegar. Movers and shakers in big hats."

In 2012, she received a Woman of Distinction honour for her decades of leadership and volunteerism. The award joined others on a wall of family photographs—a visual family tree stretching back to a stowaway who once hid on a ship bound for a new life.

WISDOM IN SMALL THINGS

When Guðrún speaks about the Icelandic values that shaped her, her eyes soften. "Discipline without anger," she says. "My father would say, 'What part of no did you not understand?' Calm, clear, respectful."

She remembers her amma refusing to speak English. "If I cannot speak it perfectly, I will not speak at all." This stubborn pride kept Icelandic alive in their home—songs, sayings, and stories carried forward even as prairie winters pressed in.

She is opinionated about gender roles. "Men talked big," she says. "Women got things done." Her mother and amma could feed ten people from nothing, make curtains from feed sacks, and find ways to keep neighbours warm when coal ran short. "Strength," she says, "isn't about lifting weight. It's about lifting others."



1975 Photo of Bjarnason Homestead in Churchbridge, built in 1907.

LEGACY OF A STOWAWAY

The Bjarnason farm at Þingvallabyggð became a kind of living museum—a testament to Icelandic endurance and prairie ingenuity. This Eaton's catalogue house, still standing into the 21st century, tells a story of making do and making beautiful: rooms rearranged for elders, a “kofa” between upstairs bedrooms converted into a bathroom, and a kitchen that smelled of coffee and bread.

Guðrún's reflections on modern life often return to that phrase. She worries about the loss of community, about the isolation of elders in for-profit care homes, and about the fading of Icelandic language among youth. “We have such a good culture,” she says. “We're important in the world. Of course you can do that—you're Icelandic.”

THE STRENGTH OF CONTINUITY

When asked what she wants younger Icelandic-Canadians to remember, she doesn't hesitate. “That you come from people who did hard things—without complaint and with humour. They weren't perfect, but they were brave.”

Her story is not one of grand gestures, but of steady courage: a stowaway's leap, a young woman's insistence on her own name, a teacher's patience, a survivor's humour. It is the quiet strength that holds families and communities together across oceans and generations.

“I've had a long time and a good time,” she says with a grin. “That's what counts.”



Children of Ólafur Pétursson in Stóra-Knarrarnes.



Children of Ólafur Pétursson in Stóra-Knarrarnes.



Kristján Jóhann Kristjánsson in Churchbridge, Saskatchewan.

Review: *Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom - Icelandic Language Publishing in Manitoba*

Crocker, Christopher W. E. and Katrín Níelsdóttir. *Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom - Icelandic Language Publishing in Manitoba*. Digital Museums Canada, 2025. <https://www.communitystories.ca/projects/preserving-the-most-precious-heirloom-icelandic-language-publishing-in-manitoba/>.

2025 is a milestone year for the Icelandic Canadian community in Manitoba. Specifically, the year marks the 150 year anniversary of the arrival of Icelandic settlers in both Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the Interlake region of what is now Manitoba. During this sesquicentennial year, celebrations and exhibitions have been held, lectures given, and editorials and articles written, many to commemorate the anniversary of the arrival of the settlers and the community's remarkable accomplishments over the past century and a half. The digital exhibition *Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom - Icelandic Language Publishing in Manitoba* stands out, not only within the context of 2025's celebratory mood, but as a unique and important scholarly contribution to discourse about Icelandic identity. The Community Stories platform which hosts the digital exhibition is part of Digital Museums Canada, a program sponsored by the Canadian Museum of History. This national platform is appropriate for the finely curated and expertly composed exhibition.

The creative forces behind the exhibition are Katrín Níelsdóttir and Christopher Crocker. They co-developed the exhibition, a monumental task that involved research, interviews, writing, and much more, not least the digitization of images, audio recordings, and videos, many of which are now available for the first time to a wide viewership on an accessible website, which, notably, can be navigated and read in English, French, or Icelandic.

Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom is divided into seventeen sections or chapters, beginning with “The Icelanders Arrive” and closing with “The Icelandic Collection,” followed by sections on “Credits and Acknowledgements” and “Sources and Resources.” In the opening chapter, the exhibit delivers an overview of the context for the migration of Icelanders to North America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Included alongside the written text in this opening chapter are two video clips that provide accounts of the migration (one clip is from 1967 and the other from 1976) and four digitized images: an Icelandic emigration contract from 1876 filled in with the details of an emigrant family from Vopnafjörður; an Icelandic-language flyer from 1900 promoting settlement in Canada;

The reviewer Andrew McGillivray is an Associate Professor in the Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications at the University of Winnipeg.

a hand-drawn map of the Hnausa area of New Iceland from ca. 1880; and an image of the cover for volume nine of Ólafur S. Thorgeirsson's *Almanak* (1903). The chance to view these digitized videos and images is quite significant, as materials such as these are often difficult or time-consuming to access. *Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom* serves the community well by making materials such as these accessible on a single website, imbedded within explanatory text.

Each chapter has much to commend, but the present review turns to the final chapter, "The Icelandic Collection," as it offers history for one of Manitoba's most important heritage spaces and scholarly research centres, which is also one of the Icelandic Canadian community's most significant cultural hubs. In this section of the exhibit, the viewer is likewise presented with text interspersed with images. Three of the images are photographs from within the spaces of the Icelandic Collection itself: one a snapshot of an elegant and bright reading space, another a photo of Guttormur J. Guttormsson's writing desk, and the third a photo of a cabinet containing books that belonged to Stephan G. Stephansson. These two latter items, Guttormur's desk and Stephan G.'s books, are a must-see for any visitor to the Icelandic Collection. For interested viewers who do not have the opportunity to visit the space, these images provide access to important material artifacts relevant to Icelandic, Icelandic Canadian, and Canadian literary history. One of the other images in this chapter is a copy of an article from *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, dated 28 July 2000, which provides details about the recently renovated Icelandic Reading Room and a diagrammatic image of the space. The fifth image included in this chapter is a formal 1931 class photograph of grades 9 and 10 students from the Jón Bjarnason Academy in Winnipeg. The school, according to the photograph's caption, enrolled Icelandic and non-Icelandic students.

The image of the students at the Jón Bjarnason Academy is aptly placed, for it is set beside text that provides important history about the Icelandic Collection itself. According to the exhibit's text: "A large donation of books from Winnipeg's Jón Bjarnason Academy, which closed its doors in 1940, laid the foundation for the Icelandic Collection." Additional organizations are listed as material donors to the Icelandic Collection, including the New Iceland Heritage Museum, the Icelandic National League of North America, and local libraries in Gimli, Arborg, and Riverton, along with many individuals. The number of volumes donated by the Jón Bjarnason Academy is not listed, but the exhibit's text states that the Icelandic Collection's current holdings surpass 35,000 items. The history and context for many of these thousands of items are introduced by the exhibit's preceding chapters.

Readers are encouraged to visit *Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom - Icelandic Language Publishing in Manitoba*. When you do, you will learn about the history of Icelandic language publishing in Manitoba, from early Icelandic newspapers in the Interlake and Winnipeg to religious periodicals and Icelandic content for early readers, and much more. The major Icelandic newspapers *Lögberg* and *Heimskringla*, which amalgamated as *Lögberg-Heimskringla* in 1959, play an important role within the history of Icelandic language publishing in

Manitoba. Notably, the exhibit includes a number of audio clips in several of its chapters, some of which are from interviews with Stefan Jonasson, current editor of *Lögberg-Heimskringla*. These audio clips provide a great amount of information about the history of Icelandic publishing in Manitoba.

In short, Katrín Níelsdóttir and Christopher Crocker have done a fantastic job with this digital exhibit. They present a vast amount of information that pertains not only to the publishing history of Icelandic materials in Manitoba but also to Icelandic identity in Canada and Iceland. Only a small sample of the website has been discussed here, but I encourage readers to quickly find a computing device and type in *Preserving the Most Precious Heirloom - Icelandic Language Publishing in Manitoba*. Viewers will find this website to be a valuable resource for years to come.

Andrew McGillivray

University of Winnipeg

Memorial to Icelandic Soldiers

RYAN E. JOHNSON

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRANSLATION

Memorial to Icelandic Soldiers (*Minningarrit íslenzkra hermanna*) is a commemorative volume produced by the Icelandic community in Canada in the years following the First World War. Published in Winnipeg in 1923 by the Jón Sigurðsson Chapter of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire and printed by The Viking Press, the work was conceived as a collective act of remembrance by and for the Canadian Icelandic community. It was dedicated, in the words of its publishers, to the “young and brave Icelandic men who sacrificed their lives for the ideals of peace and human rights,” and offered with heartfelt thanks by those who sought to honour their service and memory.

The involvement of the Jón Sigurðsson Chapter reflects the ways in which Icelandic Canadians engaged with established civic and charitable institutions in Canada during the war and its aftermath. While the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (I.O.D.E.) is often associated with imperial and monarchical traditions, the work undertaken by the Jón Sigurðsson Chapter in Winnipeg focused in practical terms on support, care, and commemoration within the Icelandic community itself. The volume must therefore be read not only as a wartime memorial, but also as an expression of how a diasporic community positioned itself socially and institutionally within Canadian public life in the early twentieth century.

The volume reflects both the historical moment in which it was produced and the values of the Canadian Icelandic community that brought it into being. It is at once a memorial, a documentary record, and an interpretive response to the upheavals of 1914–1918. Its essays situate Icelandic and Icelandic-descended soldiers within the wider framework of the Great War, addressing the participation of Canada and the United States, the particular experiences of Western Icelanders, the provision of medical service at the front, and the meaning of peace in the war’s aftermath. Together, these texts articulate how a diasporic community understood service, sacrifice, loyalty, and loss in relation to events of global scale.

Ryan Eric Johnson is a PhD Candidate in History at the University of Iceland. He is also a Digital Preservation Analyst at the University of Winnipeg Library and the Layout and Production Editor for *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies*, in addition to Copy Editor for *Icelandic Connection*.

The present English translation makes available, for the first time, the interpretive and contextual essays of this volume for a wider readership. Written originally for an Icelandic-reading audience in Canada and Iceland, these texts presume a shared cultural background and a familiarity with the community's institutions, assumptions, and historical reference points. The translation seeks to preserve that voice and perspective, presenting the material accurately and intelligibly without modernizing its political language or recasting its values to suit contemporary sensibilities.

Two major components of the original volume are not included in this editorial translation. Part II (*Liðsmannaskrá*), a register of soldiers, and Part III (*Dánarskrá*), a register of the fallen, function primarily as documentary records rather than as narrative or analytical prose. While essential to the memorial project, these sections are better served as structured, searchable data. They are therefore being presented separately as online databases, which allow for more effective discovery, correction, and long-term stewardship. These resources are being restored and expanded and will be made available at icelandicveterans.com.

Names that appear within the translated essays—whether of individuals, families, or community members—will be searchable within those databases, allowing readers to move between the interpretive material presented here and the underlying documentary record. In this way, the translation and the databases are intended to function as complementary parts of a single project.

Page references from the original Icelandic publication have been removed from the translation. In the absence of a parallel English-language pagination, such references would not meaningfully guide the reader. Instead, the translation emphasizes clarity of structure and coherence of argument, allowing each essay to stand on its own while remaining faithful to the original ordering and intent of the volume.

The translation has been guided throughout by a principle of restraint. *Memorial to Icelandic Soldiers* is not a unified narrative authored by a single voice, but a composite work shaped by collective authorship and communal purpose. Where the original text reflects the loyalties, institutional affiliations, or ideological frameworks of its time—particularly those associated with empire, monarchy, or national service—these have been preserved and contextualized rather than revised. The aim is not to reinterpret the past, but to present it faithfully, allowing readers to encounter the work as a historical artifact of Canadian Icelandic life in the early twentieth century.

The present installment publishes the editorial introduction to the translation and the original Foreword (*Formáli*), which together outline the purpose, structure, and historical context of the memorial volume. Subsequent essays from *Memorial to Icelandic Soldiers* will be published in future issues of *Icelandic Connection*, alongside the ongoing restoration and expansion of the accompanying documentary databases.

FOREWORD

The Great War which began with the dissolution of peace in Europe during the summer of 1914, has been the subject of many articles and books which have been published in recent years. The purpose of these works has most often been to recount the events as they occurred, to describe the principal debates and exchanges of opinion they provoked, and to explain the causes and circumstances that led to them. Such explanations, however, have tended to reflect the standpoint from which the authors observed events—whether shaped by their position within opposing groups in society, or by the nation to which they themselves belonged. It still seems that too little time has passed since these events occurred for their history to be written.

It shall be immediately recognized that no such purpose has been proposed by the publishers of this work, although otherwise the current volume may be categorized with these other books, as the material is associated with the terrible, and likewise tragic confrontation, in the way in which it unfolded over time. Moreover, it is rather safe to say that when looking at the main sections of the book—the second and third parts—one thing came to the attention of the publishers to say, in some small way, in relation to the events that occurred. By way of the unfolding of events, they became involved with the lives of the individual men and women of Icelandic origin who can be said to have stood in the middle of the battlefield. Though it should not be understood that this work might answer the question: "What had Icelanders—the Icelandic people (as a cultural group)—to do with the world in conflict?" Then it would have become appropriate material for a completely different discussion than that which has been attempted, and would recount countless other questions, which here are not mentioned in the slightest. It is taken instead as self-evident—now no less than in earlier times—that events unfolding elsewhere in the world could scarcely pass our people by without making themselves felt, like in the way they have come to be known in our people's pastures and homesteads, across two continents, during the second decade of the twentieth century. This question is not answered except there in that single paragraph, each that enlisted, each on the battlefield, and who were drawn into service when armies were assembled from many lands. And though it will not be discussed further, it is best all the same that this document has a home in the canon of Iceland's history. For wherever Icelanders are found, there too the nation is present. It is there, among them, that her history unfolds.

She is there in their midst, and it is there that her history happens. The Icelandic people are distinctive among nations in that their dealings with international affairs are and have always been the dealings of her individual sons and daughters. The subject matter of the book is none other than what the title suggests, a memorial to the Icelandic soldier who took up arms at this time. In other words, the document is dedicated to the memory of these people who are of Icelandic heritage either on one or both sides of their family, who suffered, fought, and lost their lives in the Great War. The events that brought the world to its knees should not be held in high esteem, but perhaps in some way their story may be paid homage.

The articles included in the 1st section are so clear that there is no need to explain their purpose. They could be looked upon as a kind of historical foundation for the main segments, Parts II (Soldiers) and III (The Fallen). The intentions of the authors were not that those articles should exhaust the material which they describe. Due to the space, the authors made the articles as short as possible, giving little space to that which could otherwise be described elsewhere. The size of the book from the beginning was decided to be 32 sixteen-page quires, and the remaining space, after the biographies, was divided between the essays. This decision was followed in relation to the whole first section, but when it came to the last article a change appeared, for the article did not fit the determined space. It was not possible to place because the article was a little longer than all the others combined. Admittedly, it could have been shortened, but it was completed so late that it was not considered practical to return it to the author for revision. This would have entailed a considerable delay, especially as its completion had already been awaited for some time. The publishers decided because of this to add one quire to the size of the book so that the article received would appear in full, rather than postpone the publication of the book indefinitely. Regarding the material of this article, there is nothing necessary to say, nor about the various historical statements which are there within. Although, it is not inconceivable that time will bring to light a variety of things, which may change these statements and even bring them into causal order.

The arrangement of this volume thus follows a very common model found in Icelandic memorial publications, a model that appears to have established itself as a tradition among the people. Unfortunately, this arrangement is not always the most suitable or the most literary; nevertheless, it is reasonably well suited in this instance, and, given the circumstances, no other course was realistically possible. In the first place, the structure of the volume was determined at the very outset, when publication was first contemplated, and all material was collected in accordance with that decision. Had this arrangement been altered at the point when the work was to go to press, the greater part of the effort would have been rendered largely useless. Moreover, the event being commemorated—the enlistment of Icelanders in the Allied forces—was so closely bound up with other, far more extensive events, namely the World War and the mobilization of the great powers, that some reference to these was unavoidable. Taking this into account, it may be considered doubtful—though the matter could long be debated—whether a different arrangement would ultimately have proved more suitable.

As the text indicates, it was published at the cost of the society of Icelandic Women in Winnipeg who belong to the I.O.D.E. (Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire), Jón Sigurðsson Chapter, provided the number 591 in the Order's Canadian registry. The legal name of the organization as written in English is: "The Jón Sigurðsson Chapter, of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire and of the Registry of Canada number 591."¹ With regard to this organization, little has been written about it in the Icelandic language,

¹ Editorial note: The English name of the organization appears in the original publication with the form "Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire." The organization's preferred and current styling omits "of the" (Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire). The historical wording has been retained here as it appears in the source.

and for that reason its purpose and scope will be unfamiliar to many readers. It therefore seems appropriate to outline briefly the origin and principal characteristics of the Order.

The Order was founded on the 13th of February in Montréal, Canada in the year 1900. The founder's name was Mrs. Clark Murray. Her family came from England. The establishment of the Order will not be discussed, but it might be mentioned, as is well known, that Montréal is divided for the most part into two ethnicities. One is of English and the other is of French heritage. These two peoples have had a dispute between them for power on many occasions, and each has made the greatest effort to attain the strongest control over industrial and educational issues and the general social life of the city. This peaceful contest brought about a deepened and rooted national consciousness among both ethnicities over and above that which occurs in other countries. This perhaps explains to some extent, the conduct and the superficial form of the Order and its regulations, which is English in spirit, and the wording of the Order's rules of admission originally stipulated that the applicant must be of British heritage and be a citizen of the British Empire or has otherwise acquired that right. The Order was named the Imperial Order because it had intended to be spread across all the countries, and in a single entity connect all the women of the British Empire wherever they were located. This limitation is no longer adhered to, and the Order has not spread significantly outside Canada, except Newfoundland, the Bahamas, and the Bermuda Islands.²

There are similar organizations that have arisen elsewhere in the world, such as "The Victoria League" (founded 1901) in England, "The Navy League," also in England (founded 1904), and "Hands Across the Sea," an alliance of British women in the United States. The relationship with all these organizations and their purpose for the most part is the same. They give themselves to various kinds of humanitarian work while at the same time they are to arouse interest in, maintain in the minds of the nation, and instill in the younger generation a respect for the British Empire and its institutions and governance, and in every way to encourage loyalty to king and country in its subjects. It may therefore appear that the Order, in its customs and regulations, is rather monachically inclined and conservative with respect to innovation and democratic demands. Yet this tendency is far more evident in its ceremonial structure than in the work itself and may be regarded as belonging more to the outward forms than to the substance. To date, the primary work of the Order has gone entirely in a charitable direction, the support and aid of the general public, and the improvement of the area and community wherever the Order has made its reach available. In particular, it has attempted to improve the conditions of the men and women under the service of the Empire who have sacrificed greatly for little in return. This purpose came clearly to light during wartime in fundraising and contributions to hospitals, to widows and orphaned children of dead soldiers, and to the care of the wounded and sick. Furthermore, the various chapters have taken the issue of poverty upon themselves and through their efforts attempted to improve the wellbeing of the poor and needy.

². Editorial note: At the time this volume was written and published (1923), Newfoundland was a separate dominion within the British Empire and did not join Canadian Confederation until 1949.

The Order is founded, as the name suggests, based on imperial grounds and clearly its mission reaches out to the whole Empire as well. This was its greatest advantage when it came to war, to have an unbroken connection to the men who left the country, as this was needed for the communication lines of the imperial government, and to overcome the isolation and the defensive walls that were set up around the army. In this way, the Order was next to equivalent to the government.

As was to be expected, there was no community organization of this type among Icelanders, nor among other nationalities which had immigrated to the country in recent years, but a change was in the wind, and that change quickly made it clear that such an organization was needed. Their community organization had stood mostly for the particular issues of their ethnicity and otherwise as the general issues of Canada as a country applied. This was all well and good until the time that war broke out. But then came a very sudden change to everything. The organization within this ethnic society that had lasted up until this time was therefore then cast aside and another was placed in its stead. Moreover, it was not anchored in any well-recognized legal right. Admittedly, there were agreements that had been made by the previous governments with particular ethnic groups that had immigrated, and they appeared to have gained ethnic recognition for themselves in a general sense. But these agreements could be broken and changed at the will of parliament and government. According to British procedure parliamentary will is given the supreme authority and legislative power in all matters. The government was ubiquitous and the government was English.

This was the reality and it now became undeniably clear. Ostensibly, people had known this before but had next to no idea of the consequences and did not understand these changes. Until this time, the government had little to no involvement with the affairs of the individual, his position, and activity. But now another matter was at work, being brought into a global war of which nobody could fathom the length. Power was seized which set itself above the life and liberty of the Crown's subjects. It was no longer a collective community of many nations, everybody going in their own direction—some kind of union of expatriates setting up camp for the night—rather it was now in an instant transformed into a single country, one law, one nation, one language, and in one fell swoop the ties that bound each ethnicity were torn asunder, as though they had never existed. Everybody was equally obliged to follow the government and laws, no matter the nationality or reason at hand. This presented difficulties in understanding because it deviated from age-old custom.

At this time, many found it abnormal that they should call Britain their motherland, those that had come from all across Europe. If the relationship was to be maintained between those that had to say goodbye and those that remained at home, if letters and parcels were to be sent between friends and relatives, the communication lines of the Empire would need to be used. If a community organization was created to follow along with the fortunes of those who enlisted, the organization had to be first and foremost considered to be associated with the Empire before it could be dedicated to any specific

ethnic group in the country. This was explained to people, on a case-by-case basis. This should not be taken to mean that all cultural and national bonds were disposed of internally among the different ethnic groups. No change within society would have influenced that. It was therefore the main task of the respective ethnic group to foster their fellow compatriots whatever the task may have been, but also to perform the tasks along these international boundaries.

During the first year of the war, no one had the slightest clue what would come of these events. Many fostered hope for the turmoil to come to a head within a short time. But as the letters began to arrive from the battlefields, casualty notifications and news heard from every military outfit, everyone had to acknowledge that peace would not come swiftly. The battle would be hard and long whatever the outcome. There was no possibility for the soldiers to quickly receive discharge orders, as those who had gone were more likely to be delayed from reuniting with loved ones. Over time some pointed out that the soldiers should be sent many small conveniences they were deprived of, things they had previously enjoyed. Where the will existed, there would be a way. Everything at hand was gathered for them, food and drink, clothing and money. They would have received news but little of it directly from home, and this could be improved if an organization were to write them from time to time to tell them what was happening at home. That would somewhat improve their time abroad and reduce boredom and homesickness. At that time, the department of military affairs had offered to pay for the small parcels that came in, and advised that socks, gloves, handkerchiefs, scarves, tobacco, and sweets were most sought.

During the second year of the war the names and locations of the soldiers overseas had begun to be collected. Both individuals and organizations took it upon themselves to write and send these small necessities to them. It was especially the domestic church organizations that first provided such a service. Naturally, they selected their supporters and those that they were familiar with and knew something about. Those who were lesser known were left out and went deprived of correspondence. The Icelanders found themselves in this category along with others of foreign origins that were in service abroad. It was therefore not only a necessity but an unquestionable national duty that Icelanders on the whole saw to this, so that the others of their young country would not suffer because of their heritage and origins.

Fundraising was conducted for this enterprise for the most part by the domestic church organizations, and so the youth organizations of the Icelandic congregations in Winnipeg came together to follow their example and carried out the sending of Christmas packages to the Icelandic soldiers who had gone abroad. The promotion of this initiative was published in the Icelandic newspapers across the Icelandic settlement area in Canada. The response was significant and in a short time more money was collected for Christmas presents than was needed at the time. But now, as things got started, the continuation of such an endeavour was bleak, since no established group had taken charge. No complete registry existed of those who had gone abroad in the military. Complaints were heard regarding this, that some would receive many packages and others few to none. At this

time, there was no correspondence maintained with the men abroad who had no close relatives or friends. In order to remedy this situation, some women in Winnipeg decided to found an organization that would take on this task, while also seeing to the families with men abroad who required assistance at home. But it was soon discovered that there were a significant number. If the organization was formed in connection with the "Imperial Daughters" it was certain that the work of the society would serve its intended purpose.

A meeting was called at the home of Jóhanna Guðrún Skaptason at 378 Maryland Street, the 20th of March during the spring of 1916. She was the main coordinator of the organization. Twenty women came to the meeting, and five sent messages to the meeting and proclaimed themselves in agreement with the meeting agenda. Present at the meeting was the Manitoba chapter president of the Order, the widow Colin H. Campbell. She explained the work and directive of the Order to the women present. At the end of her presentation, it was unanimously agreed to establish an Icelandic chapter of this order, and the chapter was named after President Jón Sigurðsson, "and his name should for the organization always provide motivation to struggle and work for all that is good." The women present at the meeting made an oath of admission to Mrs. Campbell, chose Mrs. Skaptason as president, Miss Þóra Sigurðsson as secretary, and Miss Kristína L. Hannesson as treasurer. Vice presidents were elected, Björg Anderson Carson and Mrs. Sophia Runólfssdóttir Brynjólfsson, standard bearer Miss Ólöf Oddsson, and press secretary Miss Jónína Johnson. After this, Miss Anna B. Skaptason, Miss Guðrún Borgfjörð, and Miss Elínborg Hansson were elected to the chapter board of the organization during the meeting. Widow Lára Bjarnason and Mrs. Rannveig Jónasson were elected honorary presidents. At the next meeting, twelve more women came, and then at each meeting afterwards more and more, until the number of women in the organization had become nearly two hundred.

Mrs. J. Guðrún Skaptason was at the head of the organization until the fall of 1916 when she left for England. Then Mrs. Björg Carson was appointed in her place, and she was for the most part head of the organization up until the end of the war, or over that period which the organization was the most active. She had quite enough work on her plate. After that time and when the work on the publication of this book was taken on in earnest, Soffía Brynjólfsson took it up, and she has been president of the organization since.

The organization began work forthwith. The collection of the names of Icelanders who had enlisted was begun immediately. This list grew year after year, and it could be said that several were added daily. An enormous quantity of knitted garments was collected, such as scarves, socks, and gloves, as well as money for the purchase of tobacco, sweets, and various other amenities. These items were packed into small packages and sent periodically to those who had gone overseas. As well, a significant amount of money was used to help poverty-stricken families who had either lost the family's breadwinner to the army, had a chronic illness, or struggled with a shortage of work. In a City of Winnipeg military hospital that the Manitoba chapter of the I.O.D.E. established, the Jón Sigurðsson Chapter had a medical unit created entirely at its expense, dedicated to the memory of the first

young Icelandic man who died in France, Magdal Hermanson.³ As well, entertainment was funded for young men who came in from the rural areas and stayed in the army barracks and had few acquaintances among the city dwellers. This provided them with a more pleasant stay which otherwise for many was long and tedious. From its founding until the end of the war, the organization raised a total of \$8,000 in cash. Just over \$6,000 of this was devoted to the support and care of soldiers and their dependants, most of it benefiting Icelanders. There is no need to pursue this aspect of the organization further here.

The first order of business when the organization began operation was to establish contact with the young Icelanders, since most who went overseas were young, under twenty years old. This was ultimately a significant task because over the course of wartime the number sent abroad were ever increasing, until those that were overseas numbered over a thousand. A group of exceptional women wrote these correspondences by hand, and Mrs. Guðrún Jóhannsdóttir Búason can be named especially, who later worked most at the preparation of this book (born at Ingveldarstaðir on Reykjaströnd 20 June 1875, passed away in Winnipeg 16 August 1921). Through this correspondence, the organization gained an ever-fuller understanding of these men, their circumstances, and living conditions, as much was shared and many questions were asked. In this way, a close bond of friendship was formed between the organization and the soldiers, a bond that remained unbroken until the time they returned home—or until fate, by the arrow of death, determined their final lot. The organization followed every move which happened at the army bases and battlefields and searched for the Icelandic group of boys among the living and dead after each campaign. And so, this was dear work for those that performed it, especially for Mrs. Búason. It can be surely said that she thought of nothing else in the years that she had remaining in her life.

Often it came to pass that a letter was received by the women of the organization some weeks after the news of the death of the man who had written it. These were sometimes the final letters, written the day or the evening before their death, and they were transported after the battle much later than the casualty notification. It can be imagined what thoughts these letters brought forth for those who knew their situation, for those who had come home. Most were written in pencil, the letters smudged, sometimes written in haste; sometimes some lines were written one day and then addended on the next. All these were written from the trenches of the battlefield with a shadow of uncertainty before their eyes, like the unresolved riddle of a new day.

Such letters were read and set aside, but they were not answered in the same manner as others. In their place came official notices from the Canadian Corps, providing information about the location and burial of the dead, most often couched in the same standardized wording.

Must the correspondence end there? The memory of these men lived on in what they had been thinking and talking about hours earlier. Is it not appropriate to oblige their memory by giving it life, if at all possible, although they themselves could not have avoided death? And so, are the letters not best answered like this? The manner in which it should

³ Magdal (Mack) Hermanson also went by the Icelandic name Ástýr Valgeir Guðjónsson.

probably be done could be a matter of opinion, as then there was one problem remaining, if possible, to describe the faint handwriting, so that the words would be legible for those people which time would make the events a distant memory, described by those that stood closest.

It can therefore be partly said that these letters would lead to the start of the publication of this book. As was more frequently reported in the casualties of the scattered Icelanders in the army, the thought that came out of it more strongly, was that it would not be easy to understand the graves in Flanders, such that those who lie there in their eternal rest would not be recognized other than by a white cross which the Canadian Corps had set at their heads.⁴

Originally the work was only intended for those who had fallen or passed away from their wounds, to be a memorial to them, and for this reason it was named *Memorial to Icelandic Soldiers*. But with closer reflection this decision quickly changed. Several died in army barracks, never seeing battle, sacrificing their lives just as the others, and who were we to judge which was worthier of recognition. Then there were those who survived, though they had lost a limb or suffered some other disfigurement which they would bear all of their lives, and was this not noteworthy? And so, the material grew and became increasingly more extensive until it was decided that all should be mentioned who had enlisted with the army from the start of the war until the end. Agreement to this was made late in the year 1918.

At first it was not conceived of as a major endeavour. The organization had made a list of the names of most of the men who had gone overseas, and it was considered probable that the names of the others would come in short order after the request was made. It was thought certain that the information would be provided by relatives and related parties, that is to say, effortless for everyone. Now the only thing to do was to notify the public. The purpose of the publication is so clear that it was not possible to imagine that it would in some way be misunderstood: to mention all of them who were Icelandic on one or both sides who had enlisted in wartime, their birthplace, their home, their parents' names and ancestors if possible, from what district in Iceland they were from, and what they had done while in military service. It was not thought nor expected of people to write a detailed history of each individual, and although it was a mystery to the organization how many had enlisted, it was certain that there were such a number of them that it would be impossible to write a long piece about each and not go outside the intended size of the book. By tracing their ancestry back to Iceland, a connection was established and historical ties forged with the homeland—ties that it is hoped may prove significant in the future, should questions arise concerning those who emigrated westward. With this in place these passages can be better understood by those who do not know these men by name alone.

By the beginning of 1919 the organization began to collect sources, requests were published in the Icelandic newspapers, and people were written to whom lived in various towns, who could take it upon themselves to search for information about those who had

⁴ John McCrae's poem, *In Flanders Fields*, is heard as an echo here to those who know it.

come from their area. Many responded well to these calls, and it is these people we owe many thanks, that the document is no less sophisticated than it is. Without their assistance, many more would not have been reached, both those far and wide who are to be found in this work. So many people volunteered that it would be a long list to recount all their names. The I.O.D.E. therefore wishes to thank them all at the same time for their wonderful cooperation. Many parents and relatives also came forward to assist the organization. There are remembered many letters from them—letters that were both clear and so composed that they could not fail to awaken the deepest sympathy in the hearts of those who worked on the volume, as well as among the writers themselves, many of whom had lost a beloved son or brother. These letters were relied upon most particularly in the compilation of Part III (The Fallen).

Most of the work of collecting sources rested on the shoulders of Mrs. Guðrún Búason. This was to some extent because she was the most knowledgeable in the matter, as she had been responsible, to a great extent, for the correspondence to the soldiers overseas, but also because she herself desired it. She revealed to her fellow women that she preferred to be allowed to work alone on this project. It was unclear to her and others what kind of work was required and even expected that it would be possible to finish and publish the book within a year. However, things did not work out this way. She began to have health problems which progressed with each passing month. And all the more, she gave herself to the work as she saw that time was scarce. The editorial committee had the organization assist her. At first the committee could do very little because she herself was to have order, control, largely over the method used for the collection.

In August 1919, she had a questionnaire prepared which was printed and sent (2 September) to all the soldiers who were on the registry of the Order. Although the questions were quite detailed, they had required greater clarification to spare a great deal of work afterwards, the task of rooting through all these papers. It can be particularly noted that the questions were not precisely worded enough when it came to a request for the names of each of the parents, their family, and origin. However, the question was posed in a manner that could answer for the country's direction, as is tailored after the commandment that man and woman are one, and the one is represented by the man. It was repeatedly answered in this way: "Question 5: Parents? Mr. and Mrs. John Smith. Where born? In Iceland. Current residence? Selkirk, Man." This required that they be written to again, and asked for further information, not seldom to request a written biography to be sent; the sources were then two, and each with their own focus so that the same man was named by his baptismal name and last name on one submission and his family or father's nickname on the other. This caused more than a little confusion, and even duplication when it came to write the short biographies that could not be corrected without precise collation and further inquiry. All this required time and created further delay. But Mrs. Búason seemed tireless even after having been laid up in bed. She carried on writing and having things written for her according to continuously updated information. She had collected well over two thirds of Parts II and III when she died, but most of it was in loose

pages and to some extent incomplete. The work had now fallen on the laps of those who took on the special requirement of seeing to the preparation of the text for the printer, as well as to seek out the information that was still missing. Although the work had come no further than this, it is safe to say that without the great preparatory work of Mrs. Búason, the work would still be unfinished, and it is difficult to tell whether it would have ever been finished.

At this time the publication committee took the project on in its entirety. The committee had worked on both the collection of pictures and information, and did a great deal of correspondence, especially during the latter years of Mrs. Búason's life. She had provided a plan for printing costs and the cost of the dies for the pictures and negotiated with salespeople to collect subscriptions. She then had Vice President Baldwin L. Baldwinson review the sources and reports and had him write the short biographies of the soldiers who came back (Part II). He was most knowledgeable about the Icelandic settlements and particularly of those in the elder generation who had immigrated from Iceland. He was an asset to the project. Most of these short bios were written by him in 1920, and it should be noted that this is the time that the text speaks from. It is possible that a variety of changes have occurred since then regarding people's circumstances, such as their home, work, etc. Of the 1045-odd short biographies in Part II, he wrote around 800.⁵ Some came to him in such condition that he changed very little, but these were far and few between. Most of the others were printed just as they were written.

It can be said about Part II, that although it is a type of genealogical and biographical collection of these men who enlisted, and should not be anything else, the order of them which has been followed is chronological. If Baldwin was to offer some idea of how the military mobilization was carried out, a fixed chronological narrative was needed, and so in this way each year forms a chapter of its own. Each year is brought forth in its own section in a way that the sequence is uninterrupted from the first to the last, so that all the groups, as they are traversed, will be one unbroken set division at war. It became necessary to set the names of the fallen and dead into this series as has been done. Otherwise, all the divisions are not recounted. Their names are provided no matter how their ranks were drawn.

Regarding the short biographies themselves, it may be noted that few of them are as detailed as one might have wished; yet this is not something for which those who wrote them should be blamed. They could rarely stray far from the sources, though in some cases they did so where they themselves had the best knowledge. In many cases the birthplace, the age, or the mother's name of the soldier who is attested to are unknown. But it is not mentioned in every case where the sources were silent. Pictures are not always available either. The publishers were unable to acquire them despite constant efforts and diligent work, and repeated public appeals in Icelandic and English newspapers for a full four years. Responses were not forthcoming in some places where there was a misunderstanding of the purpose for the publication. Some refused to provide some information about

⁵ The number "1045" is from the original publication. It will be revised with the full publication of the database in the foreseeable future.

themselves or others. Two sets of parents—there were, however, only two sets of parents—refused to let the picture or biography of their children be published, for the reason that the book would be issued in Icelandic! Others believed that the book would become for future generations a call to military service and did not want to have that on their conscience, to be an indirect reason for this, if Icelanders as time went on were to awaken a new world war. A sound argument was made. However, against such type of objections, all arguments failed. After that there was but one place left to go, to the public archive, to pick out what could be found from so little. But there again was a snag, because it is so difficult to discern nationality by name alone since many are alike.

The third section, which carries the dignity of actually being the section which the work gives its name, is a type of memorial collection, of few words and imperfect. It is about those who gave their life in one way or another due to war. It was intended that these memories would be in some way clearer than the short biographies of those who survived. They were provided with a little more space. But it went just as it had with the bio format, as the information and sources governed most. However, many of these articles would have been too long if they had been set in the same typeface as the others, they are therefore printed with a smaller but very legible type and are no more difficult to read.

Printing of the work was begun last winter, while it was clear that many were still missing. While the printing was ongoing, 130 short biographies were added to both Parts II and III. Some of them were taken from a book that was published in the town of Crystal, North Dakota, called *Pembina County in the World's War*, and the pictures accompany them. These photos are all smaller than the others and so may be easily distinguishable. Finally, the names of some men appear (115) who were known to have been in the military. About them no information had been received but it was not thought appropriate to leave them out. There was nothing left to do but to tie them to the back of Part II as a kind of appendix. Of those included, it is still uncertain that everyone has been considered, and it is much more likely that some are still missing. Perhaps more will be discovered later. However, it shows how many Icelanders enlisted, that the biographies and memorials number 1188, while the estimated total is 1303 men. Included in this figure are 16 nurses who worked in the military hospitals, both here in North America and in Europe. They were all in public service and were of course considered along with the others. All of them earned themselves the finest of reputations for excellent efficiency, agility, and conscientiousness, overlapping with that work in some ways out into others, as is reported in the military records. One of them, Miss Inga Johnson, as is mentioned in the article about her, was awarded two medals for her work, one from King George of England, the First Class Royal Red Cross, and the other from the King of Belgium, "Medaille De La Reine Elizabeth." These medals are the highest honour ever given to anyone in similar work.

Several of the other Canadian men who enlisted were married to Icelandic women. Some gave their lives, and a few remarried. About 30 of them are in the organization's registry, and were thus counted among the Icelanders, since their home was Icelandic. Because they are not mentioned elsewhere in this work, it is appropriate to print their

names here. Their wives have worked on initiatives of the Order, and a few belong to it. The registry is so ordered:

H. R. Allan. Sergeant W. J. Bailey. W. E. Bell. A. Brown. R. B. Burby. R. W. J. Chiswell, died in battle 27 September 1918. He was married to Kristjana Thomson from Seyðisfjörður; they have one child, a daughter. The mother and daughter live in Gimli, in New Iceland. H. R. Clarke. J. Davis. John Doherty. F. A. Dunn. Harry Floyd, died in battle in France; lived with his wife, Elín Sigríður, in East Selkirk, Man. Lawrence Fowler. Hurly Gillis. Joseph Hall. I. C. Hambly. A. Hill. H. G. Hunter. Dennis Lee. H. McCarthy. Archibald McNeill, married Ingibjörg Jónsdóttir Helgason Henderson; lived in Winnipeg; he died in the summer of 1917; they have one child, a son. M. H. McNey. Gilbert Proctor. Julian Prout. A. B. Reid. Albert B. Robinson. Dr. John Selfe. G. Stead. Sergeant Wm. Turnbull. George P. White. Fred Wright.

The essays in the book are printed as the authors saw fit, with the exception of the article: "Medical Service on the Front Lines," by Dr. Sigurgeir Bardal M.D., which was written in English but here is published in translation by the former editor Cand. Phil. Kristján Sigurðsson. Kristján was in the Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC), and he therefore became somewhat familiar with this branch of military service.

A few abbreviations appear in the book but make it no less clear, so that most will be able to read the language. Most are the names of states and governments here in North America, titles in the army, levels of education, etc. It has not been deemed necessary to recount them here.

The women who have served on the editorial committee have, from the very beginning, contributed a great deal of work to this book, work that cannot all be enumerated. These are the women who make up the committee: Mrs. Jóhanna Guðrún Símonardóttir Skaptason, Mrs. Guðrún Þórðardóttir Borgfjörð, Mrs. Jórunn Magnúsdóttir Líndal, Mrs. Ólina Egilsdóttir Pálsson, Mrs. Guðrún Ásgeirsdóttir Jónsson, and Mrs. Guðrún Finnsdóttir Jónsson. However, the work of the latter three shall receive particular mention. Mrs. Guðrún Ásgeirsdóttir Jónsson was originally chair of the committee and has served as its secretary since Mrs. Búason died. She has managed all the correspondence in the area. She has organized, for the most part, the collection of pictures, and the short biographies (in Part II). She put the sections in sequence before the manuscripts went to the printshop. Both marked all the pictures which went to the die workshop, compared them with the originals before they were sent to the printshop, and marked them for the last proofread of each quire and compared anew the pictures before printing. The work was both great and time-consuming. Then they assisted them with comparison of the manuscripts and the sources and helped to make corrections as thought needed in the manuscripts which were all throughout rather inaccurate.

Mrs. Ólina Egilsdóttir Pálsson performed the work of treasurer of the Order since 1919, and besides this had a hand in all the correspondence in connection with the sale of the book. That work is both time-consuming and complex and is far from over yet. The bookkeeping connected with the society's finances is extensive and varied, and Mr. Páll S. Pálsson, the bookkeeper, has assisted the society in many ways in this regard, as well as

with its extensive and frequent correspondence.

The printer Mr. Gísli Jónsson has read the last proof of the entire book and had oversight of the external workmanship of it, along with providing the Order a variety of much needed guidance during the preparations. He deserves much thanks for all that work and much else that has shortened this endeavour in several ways.

Finally, it should be noted that it is the wish of the publishers that this volume may serve as a cherished remembrance of friends and relatives who were forced to endure the hellfire of the “Great War,” even though the events themselves of those years cannot be recalled, nor the anxieties and fears, without pain and suffering. Should its historical value be judged slight as time passes, it may nonetheless be pointed out that it is the most substantial record yet compiled concerning Icelanders in North America.

Winnipeg, Man., 10 February 1923.

Rögnvaldur Pétursson.



Jóhanna Guðrún Skaptason as the 54th
Fjallkona. Guðrún organized the Jón
Sigurðson Chapter I.O.D.E. in March 1916 and
was its first regent.



Three of the early Jón Sigurðsson Chapter I.O.D.E. regents. Bertha Thorpe (left), Sophia Runólfssdóttir Brynjólfsson (middle), Jóhanna Guðrún Skaptason (right).