

# A Note on the University of Manitoba Icelandic Special Collection

## SIGFÚS HAUKUR SIGFÚSSON

Hallowed is the place where history converges, and where ancient books rest, while waiting for a passing soul to open them up so that they can retell their tales of time long past. During my sojourn into the Icelandic Reading Room, I had the privilege and honour of meeting the great people whose work in cataloguing and protecting priceless documents is commendable.

Katrín Níelsdóttir was a wonderful host who happily gave me enough material to read as well as supporting me in doing research for the Icelandic National League of North America. My stay here was magical, to say the least. My small notebook became filled to the brim with a variety of information regarding the Western Icelanders.

Reading the first issue of *Framfari* was a highlight of my stay. *Framfari* is a newspaper that was published on the 10th of September 1877 in Lundi, Manitoba. While reading it I found myself transported into the past. The editor puts it forth in the issue that their main mission is to keep the Icelandic language and Icelandic national identity alive in the new world.<sup>23</sup>

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1. 'Til kaupenda og lesenda Framfara'; Houser, *Framfari*, 2.

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The quality of the news written impressed me; they did a good job being precise and covered events all over Iceland. What we should realize and never take for granted is that *Framfari* was a community effort; even though the community suffered the past autumn in 1877 from “sickness,” the community pulled through and brought the dream of having an Icelandic magazine published into reality. Due to the printing press they bought being an English model, the *Framfari* people had Icelandic characters specially made for it (there were no ð Ð þ or Þ in the standard English press) in addition to Æ æ Ö ö and the accented letters.<sup>24</sup>

No river was too wide to cross and no mountain too high to climb; they kept going no matter what. We should be proud of this heritage of ours. The more I read about the Icelanders who moved west, the more I begin to think they were our best and brightest the country had to offer. Some of the articles tell of Hjörtur Þórðarson, who was also known as Chester Thordarson. And there are others, Stephan G. Stephansson, Káinn (Kristján N. Júlíus), and Margrét Jónsdóttir Benedicsson. They are people we should be proud of.

They all left Iceland never to return. And while there are thousands of people who left, to highlight only a few says very little about the rest. Also to say they were the best and brightest, while some may not agree—any writer can always say so and so was bright, look at these articles about them. Regardless, they all kept a bit of Iceland in their hearts. We should be proud of our heritage and ancestors, as I am sure that the ancestors of this generation of Western Icelanders’ smile down on us as we fan the flames of our Icelandic traditions, and wherever our ancestors are, we keep a part of Iceland alive with them.

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2. ‘Til kaupenda og lesenda Framfara’; Houser, *Framfari*, 1.

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