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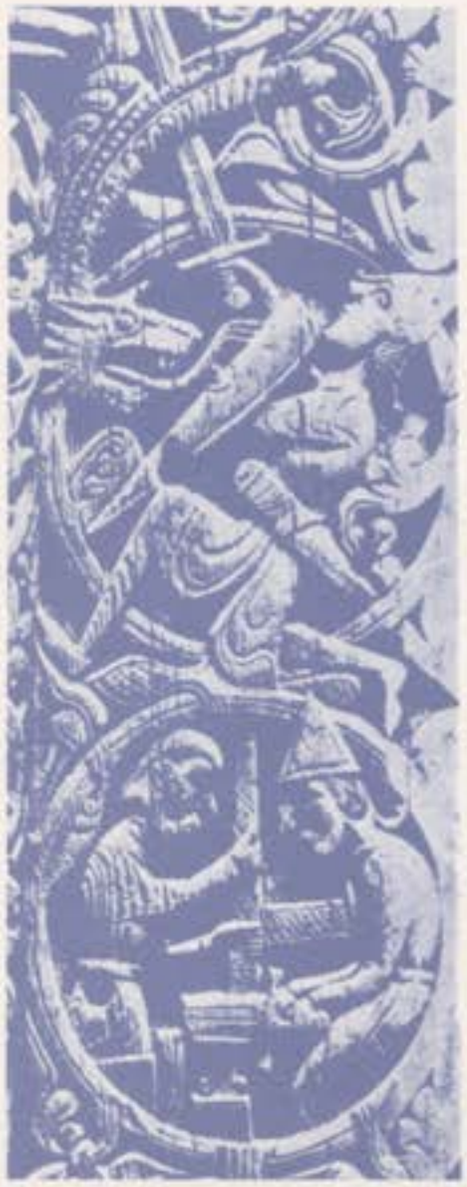
THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN



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These are pictures of engravings on the door pillars of a church at Hylestad in Setesdal, Norway. They depict the slaying of the dragon, Fafnir recorded in the Saga of the Niflungs in the Poetic Edda. (1) Reginn fashions the sword, Gram; (2) the sword is tested on an anvil; (3) Sigurd slays the dragon.

* *

Courtesy of Eric Crone

The Death of the Dragon, Fafnir.

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The Icelandic Canadian

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EDITORIAL

TWENTY SURE-FIRE METHODS FOR ELIMINATING THE ICELANDIC HERITAGE FROM NORTH AMERICA

by Kristine Perlmutter

I feel quite certain that, if the following measures are observed closely, the Icelandic heritage in North America may be successfully eliminated:

1. Do not assist or give scholarships to students studying Icelandic at North American universities and advise students that it is an impractical course.
2. Do not award scholarships to, or otherwise assist, students from Iceland to attend North American universities and students from North America to attend the University of Iceland.
3. Do not support the chair of the Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba, and other similar departments in Canadian and American universities.
4. Do not support courses in Icelandic, both in schools and out.
5. Do not make use of the comprehensive Icelandic collection at the University of Manitoba or of those in other Icelandic libraries.
6. Do not encourage, or give assistance to, the translation of Icelandic literary and historical classics into English and North American literature into Icelandic.
7. Do not support publication of biographies of prominent western Icelanders or anthologies of western Icelandic writing.
8. Do not send your children to Icelandic Language Camp or on exchange visits to Iceland.
9. Do not encourage, or give assistance to, visits, performances, exhibitions and publications of Icelandic artists in North America and North American artists in Iceland.
10. Do not assist in the collection and preservation of works of art, handicrafts, books, periodicals, manuscripts, documents (correspondence, memoranda, notebooks, diaries, family Bibles, financial records, scrapbooks, photographs) by or relating to the people of Iceland or people of Icelandic descent.
11. Have untrained staff look after archival materials and allow temperature and humidity to speed deterioration of these items.
12. Don't subscribe to **Lögberg-Heimskringla,** Icelandic weekly newspaper, or *The Icelandic Canadian,* quarterly magazine.
13. Have no Icelandic books or translations available at home; afford the young no opportunities to read Icelandic stories or hear the Icelandic language spoken or sung.
14. Do not move far afield in involving members from all areas of the Icelandic community in projects and organizations.
15. Complain and criticize but don't offer to help; assume that no work is needed, but that Icelandic organizations magically run themselves.
16. Do not invite western Icelanders of your acquaintance to become involved in the activities of the local groups. (This is particularly easy to do if there has been inter-marriage of those of Icelandic descent to non-Icelanders).
17. Don't encourage people of all ages to

become involved in activities related to the Icelandic culture. Do not provide a family orientation for activities, because it would result in people becoming involved from an early age.

18. Don't turn out for events organized by local Icelandic groups or support them by your membership.
19. Remove all traditional elements such as Icelandic music, poetry, speech-making, pagentry and traditional foods and make Islendingadagurinn just another summer festival.
20. Through dissension and lack of communication among the various Icelandic groups, make sure that we do not get together and get a building (or space connected with the proposed Betel Home complex which it is hoped will be built in Winnipeg) for use as our cultural headquarters, to house: a hall for meetings, facilities for serving refreshments, an auditorium with a stage and space for Icelandic language lessons, offices for *Lögberg-Heimskringla* and *The Icelandic Canadian* and a library.

Note: My editorial comments are phrased negatively partly to get your attention but partly to emphasize the fact that sometimes we are working at cross-purposes and not as effectively as we could be towards maintaining the Icelandic cultural heritage in North America. Some will undoubtedly feel that I have over-stated the case but, as an active member of many Icelandic organizations in Manitoba, I feel that we must not get too complacent. These issues do bear examination. As Dr. Watson Kirkconnell once said, "It is not enough to produce a brief cultural euphoria in each ethnic group on its pathway to extinction." Obviously, if you twist my comments around, you will see what measures I feel would ensure that this does not happen to Icelanders in North America. K.I.P.

* * *

AT THE EDITOR'S DESK

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The Jon Sigurdsson Chapter of the I.O.D.E. $100
Elma Gislason $100
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PEOPLE

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF A YOUNG MAN

Sturla T. Gunnarsson

Sturla T. Gunnarsson was born in Iceland in 1951 but moved to Canada with his parents in 1952. His work experience includes: fisherman (British Columbia and Iceland), truck driver (Shetland), English teacher, shepherd, labourer (Crete). Now a resident of British Columbia, he is the Director/Producer of several films, including *"After The Axe"*: a sixty-minute film on executive termination, featuring James B. Douglas; co-produced by N.F.B. and C.B.C.; to be premiered at Montreal Film Festival and aired by C.B.C. as a prime time special.

Mr. Gunnarsson was Producer/Director/Editor of Rainforest Films, Vancouver, 1977-79; Producer British Columbia Television (B.C.T.V.), 1979; Editor British Columbia Television, 1978-79; Editor Provincial Education Media Centre, 1977-78; Edited *"English As A Second Language"*, eight half-hour training films.

How many of us at the age of thirty or so have accomplished as much as Sturla?

Ric Nordman

Rurik (Ric) Nordman is the M.L.A. for Assiniboia. He was born at Cypress River, Manitoba, the second son of Chris and Jean Nordman (the former Jean Amason). Rurik's grandfather, Gudmundur Nordman, was one of the first five settlers in the Argyle area of Manitoba, arriving and settling in the Bru district in 1881.

The Chris Nordman family moved to Winnipeg in 1933. Rurik received his education at Daniel McIntyre Collegiate. He was confirmed at First Lutheran Church in 1935.

After spending almost six years in the service of his country, along with his three brothers, he was honourably discharged as a Lieutenant in 1946.

In 1944 Rurik married Kae McPhee of Wellwood, Manitoba. They have been blessed with two sons, Grant and Gregory.

Upon his discharge from the Canadian Army, Ric entered the hospitality industry and over the years owned and operated several restaurants in Winnipeg and in Santa Monica, California, where Kae and Ric resided for eight years.

Ric has always taken a keen interest in community concerns, community club, and church — Messiah Lutheran Church in Westwood (he served as the founding secretary and still serves as treasurer).

In 1974 Ric accepted the challenge and stood for election and for the next seven years served as the Winnipeg City Councillor for the St. Charles ward. Again in 1981 he accepted a further challenge and successfully contested the Provincial seat for the constituency of Assiniboia and sits as the only M.L.A. of Icelandic extraction.

* * *

PEARL PALMASON RETIRES FROM TSO

by Ruby Dawson

Pearl Palmason, violinist, retired from the Toronto Symphony Orchestra last August after 40 years. Her last performance with the orchestra was at Ontario Place, where she was the featured artist and was presented with a water colour painting of Massey Hall.

The *''International Who's Who In Music''* states: ''PALMASON, Pearl, b. 2 Oct. 1915, Winnipeg, Canada. Violinist. Educ.: studied w. Elie Spivak & Kathleen Parlow, Royal Conserv. of Music, Toronto; w. Carl Flesch, London, 1938-39; w. Dr. Demetrius Dounis, N.Y., 1947-48; A.T.C.M.; L.R.S.M. Debut Town Hall, N.Y., 1948. Career: Has played solo appearances in recital or w. orchs. in Winnipeg, Toronto, & throughout Ont., N.Y., London & Iceland; Mbr. for years Toronto Symph.: Mbr. Hart House Chamber Orch. cond. by Boyd Neel; Has played in Europe, Canada & U.S.A. w. Toronto Symph. & Hart House Chamber Orch. Mbr. Toronto Heliconian Club. Hons.: Silver Medals, Toronto Conserv. of Music, 1928, '29, '31; Scholarship 1934; Aiken's Meml. Trophy, Man. Music Fest., 1932. Hobbies: Swimming. Address: 40 Maxwell Ave., Toronto, M59 2B5, Canada.''

Pearl has also been to China and Japan with the T.S.O.

She was the daughter of Sveinn and Groa Palmason of Winnipeg. Our father was a building contractor.

One thinks of the ''fickle finger of fate''. In 1939 (war had broken out) when Pearl had completed her two years' study with Carl Flesch in England, she booked passage on the Athenia, wired home for money which did not arrive in time, and she ''missed the boat''. The Athenia was sunk on that voyage. Fortunately our cousin Sveinn Ingvarsson, of Iceland (named Sveinn Erlendur after his two uncles who went to America), happened to be in London at the time and was able to book her on the Oslofjord, a new ship sailing from Norway to New York. The Oslofjord was sunk a month later.

This brings to mind another story. Around the turn of the century our uncle Ingvar Palmason decided to join his two brothers in America, via a ship from Norway. He also ''missed the boat'', returned to Iceland to become Member of Parliament for 22 years, and in 1944 when Iceland declared Independence from Denmark and became a Republic, he was the one who delivered the speech on that momentous occasion.

Our late brother Palmi Palmason, violinist and teacher, played a very important role in Pearl's life. It was under his teaching that she won silver medals for the highest marks in Canada, and also the two-year scholarship with the Toronto Conservatory. To the end he was her best friend, confidante and mentor. Palmi was the eldest. Stefan, the youngest, R.C.A.f. pilot, was killed in 1942, age 23. Palmi, also R.C.A.F., having had three close misses, survived the war.

Pearl continues to be very busy with her violin. Her trio and quintet give concerts, etc. Her activities are too numerous to mention. She also teaches. As Pearl says, ''A healthy dedicated musician never retires''.

* * *

THE MAYOR OF GONZALES, CALIFORNIA HONORED

Mayor Joe Sveinsson accepts the city park mural, in the name of the city, and thanks the inmates and prison personnel who participated in painting it.

New officers were elected recently to preside over the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments during 1982.

Dan Forbus, the First District supervisor from Santa Cruz County, retained his seat as president. Elected as first vice-president — a position that remained vacant last year — was Gonzales Mayor Joe Sveinsson.

Replacing Sveinsson as second vice-president is Robert Garcia, a city councilman from Capitola and former member of the Central Coast Regional Coastal Commission.

All officers serve one-year terms.

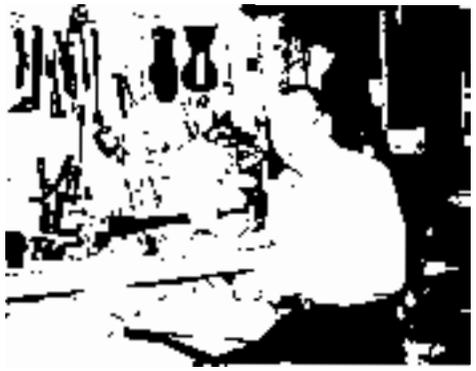
* * *

CHRIS EYFORD, VIOLIN MAKER

by Hulda Clarke

To have a dream of creating a thing of beauty such as the violin and then to have the skill to bring it to fulfillment is the notable achievement of Chris Eyford of Burnaby, B.C.

Now, in his retirement he is devoting many happy hours to the making of violins and has developed it into a fine hobby.



Chris Eyford

Crafting violins can be a demanding art and involves many things such as the flawless carving of the wood, experimenting with various types of varnish, the striving for excellence of tone and so on.

Chris reads every available book on the subject and his aim is to have each new violin that he makes, superior to the last one. Within the last five years, since he retired from his contracting business, he has made one viola, seven violins and four more are in the making.

He has proved himself an expert craftsman by winning second class in a violin making competition in 1980; one which drew entries from all over the United States and Canada. His entry was the one and only viola he has thus far made and was judged on workmanship, playability and tone.

Chris's first attempt at making a violin, at the age of seven, may not have won him an award but it did show he was an enterprising lad when he made one from cardboard cut into the shape of a violin, glued onto a strip of wood and then strings were added. To complete this masterpiece he needed a bow but that did not phase him. He cut some hair off a horse's tail and glued it on each end of a stick. He was now ready to tune up. At the age of sixteen, he had his next venture into the art of violin making but whereas now he uses B.C. Maple and Spruce, that violin had its musical beginnings from the seat of an old chair.

Chris is the son of Sigurdur and Bergljot Eyford who came to Canada from Iceland in 1905. The family lived for a time at Oak Point, whence from Chris moved to Vancouver in 1936 where he worked first in a furniture factory and then in construction. He married Laura (nee Johnson) in 1937 and she has played an important role both helping him build up a successful contracting business and also encouraging him in his hobby. They both enjoy musical evenings with friends where Chris is in demand with his violins.

''What will you make next? A Stradivarius?'' he was asked recently. With a twinkle in his eye Chris gave a good answer, ''No, an Eyford.''

A TOAST TO THE VIKINGS

An address delivered by Roy St. George Stubbs at the Annual Banquet and Dance of the Icelandic National League, March 27, 1982.

Judge Stubbs

Figaro, the Barber of Saville, an incorrigible busybody, who had a finger in every pie in his native city, boasted of his expert knowledge of the English language. The truth was that he knew one English word, a swear word — a mild one — Goddam. My knowledge of the Icelandic language is more extensive than Figaro's knowledge of English. I do know more than one Icelandic word. But my knowledge of Icelandic history and literature is a little more extensive than my knowledge of the Icelandic language, or I would not have presumed to accept your invitation to speak to you tonight, on the occasion of the annual dinner of the Icelandic National League.

I first realized that there was something special about Icelanders, when I read in one of my children's books that in Reykjavik every fifth store is a bookshop. At the time Winnipeg, more than five times the size of Reykjavik, could not boast a single first class bookshop. Fortunately, this condition has now been remedied, but Winnipeg is still not even close in the running with Reykjavik. Evelyn Stefansson, wife of one of Iceland's greatest sons, was speaking no less than the truth, when she said that Iceland is the most literate country in the world — a country 'that publishes several times more books per capita than any other country.'

Iceland was known to the ancient Greeks. In the third century B.C., Pytheas a Greek explorer, made a voyage into uncharted seas, visiting an island in the North Atlantic, which he called Thule. His description of this island indicates, with reasonable certainty, that he had discovered Iceland.

Vikings from western Norway began to settle in Iceland late in the ninth century. A few Irish monks who wanted to lead a life of solitary contemplation were already on the scene. Harald Fairhair was the first king to reign over a united Norway. His reign was a long one — fifty-eight years — from 872 to 930. He was an assertive, aggressive king, determined to have no one powerful enough in Norway to be able to dispute his authority. He campaigned systematically against the great Viking chieftains of Norway to make them acknowledge him as their liege lord. Some of these chieftains were not prepared to live in Norway on King Harald's terms. ''(They held) all 'royal right' a lie — Save that a royal soul hath wrought.'' They left their homeland for Iceland where they would not have to bend the knee to any overlord. Professor Gwyn Jones makes this significant statement: ''No country was ever happier in its founding families (than Iceland).''

They were individualists, these Vikings; or, in the modern phrase, independent people. Neither their minds nor their beards had a formal cut. They did not believe that all men are created equal. They did believe

that there are no true barriers between men. The only discipline to which they responded was the highest form of discipline — that which man imposes upon himself. They lived and they died, when the occasion required it, in obedience to their self-made rules. What they did, kept faith with what they thought. Their great desire was to live on good terms with themselves. To maintain their self-respect was the law of their being, the very breath of their nostrils. They were men of the sea and the sea breeds only one sort — the virile sort, who have power in their arms and wit in their heads. They were not lotus eaters, but men of vigour, of decision and initiative, of character and intelligence, of resourcefulness and self-reliance. "Certain defects are necessary," said Goethe, "for the existence of individuality." The Vikings had a grave defect which led to the spilling of a lot of blood. They were overly sensitive. Their skins were as thin as a sheet of onionskin paper if their pride was challenged. As Magnus Magnusson puts the point, in the introduction to the Penguin edition (in translation) of Njal's Saga: "It is a little pathetic, now, to read how vulnerable these men were to calls on their honour; it was fatally easy to goad them into action to avenge some suspicion of an insult."

In the days when covered wagons trekked across this continent of ours, it used to be said that the cowards never started on the journey and the weak died by the way. There were no cowards and no weaklings among the men and women who crossed the cruel Arctic seas to the small island of ice and fire in the North Atlantic. They did not find an easy life. Nature was most unkind. It gave them nothing that was not paid for by strenuous effort. But because of their exceptional qualities of mind and body, they were able to adjust to the hostile environment of Iceland.

The Vikings were said to love "war and women, wassail and song, pillage and slaughter." In the history books, they have been called many names, most of them uncomplimentary. Here are two of them, as a sample — 'heathen wizards,' 'warlike ruthless pagans'. The fact is that they were no better and no worse than their contemporaries. They should not be judged by modern standards but in the framework of the time and the temper in which they lived. But if we do judge them by modern standards, do they come off too badly? Were they not, in fact, amateurs in the black arts of pillage and slaughter, in comparison with modern man. They had no scientifically designed ovens for burning their fellowmen by the millions; no slave camps in which men's bodies are crippled, their minds warped and their souls stunted; no bombs, which when dropped from the sky, fall, like the gentle rain from heaven, upon all beneath; no means of overkilling every man, woman and child who now walks the good earth.

In Armistice, the powerful poem in which he tore off the veil that hides the ugly face of war, Stephan G. Stephansson contrasts the way war was waged in the brave old days with the way it is waged in this degenerate age (the translation is Paul Bjarnason's):

"In former ages gallantry and courage
Were personal and sacred to the hero,
A trait by friend and foe alike admitted.
The fame he earned, attacking or defending
Was his by right, to relish and remember.
The fighters met each other in the open,
Both wild and free, and strength and skill were noted.
The killers now are unseen lethal agents,
Like epidemics sweeping through the natives."

Truly, the romance has vanished. Vanished, forever, are 'the pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war.'

The Vikings were always given what we would call today a bad press. As H. G. Wells says: "Most of our information about these wars and invasions of the Pagan Vikings is derived from Christian sources, and so we have abundant information of the massacres and atrocities of their raids; and very little about the cruelties inflicted upon their pagan brethren, the Saxons, at the hands of Charlemagne."

The Vikings who settled in Iceland raised Scandinavian civilization to the highest level. My authority for this statement is not open to question. "We have already found that it was in Iceland," says Arnold J. Toynbee, in his *A Study of History,* "and not in Norway, Sweden or Denmark, that the abortive Scandinavian civilization achieved its greatest triumphs both in literature and politics."

The Vikings in Iceland established a National Parliament, or Althing, in 930, thus laying down the foundation of our age's first democracy. Several times, I have heard Hon. J. T. Thorson, refer, very proudly, to the Althing, as the Grandmother of Parliaments. It was in the field long before the Parliament at Westminster which is known as the Mother of Parliaments.

The Althing met once a year on the plain of Thingvellir, about thirty miles from Reykjavik. It had both legislative and judicial powers. "Here the people gathered to hear the laws proclaimed," says Johannes Brondsted, in his fascinating book *The Vikings,* "to lodge their suits, to worship their gods, to display their skills and to buy and sell."

The Althing was presided over by a law speaker. The first law speaker was a man named Ulfljot. He had been sent to Norway to learn the law and to prepare a law code. His code has not survived as it was never copied down on vellum. As an old Icelandic lawbook comments: "The Lawspeaker is required to tell everyone who asks him what the article of law is, both here and at his home, but he is not required to give anyone further advice on lawsuits."

The early laws of Iceland were not efficient. The ultimate vindication of all law is force. Icelandic law had no power to enforce its decrees, no means of employing compulsory process. It had influence to persuage rather than power to command. As Jhering, a great legal scholar, has said — "a legal rule without coercion is a fire that does not burn, a light that does not shine." Powerful litigants in Iceland, when the decree of the Althing went against them, sometimes carried an appeal to the sword. The blood-feud, whose aim was personal redress and not punishment, ran rampant, because the law did not have behind it the compulsion of force.

The Vikings were pagans who worshipped heathen gods whom they had created very much in their own image. They were pagans but not barbarians. They lived an active life of the mind and the spark of wonderment burned brightly in them.

Let us not be frightened by the word 'pagan' — a word which has been overloaded by emotional overtones over the centuries. If the contribution of the pagans to civilization were to be blotted from the record, how much poorer would this sorry world be! In the chapter which he contributed to *'Iceland's Thousand Years'* (published in 1945), Dr. Philip M. Petursson spoke some fair words for them. "Icelanders were still pagan," he said, "when they recognized the rights of men to freedom of thought and expression, and acted on that principle. Therefore, even in pagan times, their outlook and practice were very similar to what we have regarded as the prerogatives chiefly of Christians."

Iceland adopted Christianity by decree of the Althing in 1000. Christianity was carried by the sword to many less favoured peoples. The Vikings in Iceland accepted it because of their deep faith in the process of democracy. Christianity brought about some immediate modifications in their way of life, but it did not penetrate to the roots of their being immediately. Let me allow Vilhjalmur Stefansson to explain: "When the Norsemen accepted Jehovah, they did not cease to believe in Thor and Odin, but they renounced them in favour of the higher New God and the preferred new religion. Thor and Odin continued to exist, becoming in the minds of the people the enemies of the new faith and of all who professed it."

Christianity was not in harmony with the Viking's pagan philosophy. It did not glorify the heroic virtues. It was too tame a creed. There would be fewer cakes and less ale for him under the new religion. One can imagine a battle scarred old Viking, sitting in his home at the close of day; drinking his mead, perhaps, from the skull of some enemy he had killed; and relating to a crony or two how he got his battle scars, anticipating these words of Swinburne:

"Thou has conquered. Oh pale Galilean;
The world has grown grey from thy breath."

In Norse Mythology, Odin, father of the gods, risked his life to steal the Mead of Inspiration from the Giants. The Giants symbolized 'Evil' and the Gods 'Good'. It was foretold from the beginning that Evil would triumph over Good, thus bringing about the twilight of the gods.

Whoever drank the Mead of Inspiration became a poet. Odin must have arranged to give the Icelanders a double portion of this magic potion for they were a race of poets. Skuli Johnson once wrote: "Indeed it is a commonly held belief in Iceland that everybody is capable of achieving an average quatrain."

Speaking of the Northmen who settled in Iceland, Carlyle said "They were poetic these, men who had deep thoughts in them and uttered musically their thoughts."

They uttered their thoughts in a literature which is generally divided into three branches — the Eddas, Scaldic poetry and the Sagas. There were giants in the earth in those days. The poetic Eddas deal with the achievements of some of these giants, blending history and legend into great verse. That remarkable woman, and ripe classical scholar. Edith Hamilton, in speaking of the Elder Edda, has this to say: "The material for a great epic is there, as great as the Iliad, perhaps even greater, but no poet came to work it over as Homer did the early stories which preceded the Iliad."

The Scaldic poets were professional poets who were patronized by the kings and great chieftains of Norway, Denmark, Sweden, England, the Orkneys and Ireland. He who paid the piper called the tune. Snorri Sturlason, Iceland's sovereign man of letters, both a speaker of words and a doer of deeds, writes of the acknowledged proclivity of the skalds, "to make much of the valour and prowess of the king in whose service they were, for none would have had the temerity to ascribe to the king deeds which he himself and other auditors recognized as inventions and piffle." Much scaldic poetry is fulsome panegyric, rosy-hued eulogy, written in exotic, highly complicated and detailed patterns of verse. Hear the verdict of an expert, the late Professor Peter Foote, who visited Winnipeg, in 1975, to address the Icelandic-Canadian community: "The study of scaldic verse is beset with many difficulties. Its meter is complex, its word-order free, its diction and imagery often obscure."

The Sagas are the crowning glory of Icelandic literature. They are prose tales.

They tell stories. They tell them, in an epic strain, in strong and lucid prose, with every word having its part to play in carrying forward the narrative. They have no axe to grind. They do not preach a message; nor do they teach a lesson, nor illustrate a theory. They offer no philosophic discussions on the fickleness of fate, nor any lengthy descriptions of nature's hidden face. The best of them are informed with a poetic vision. They are the sap and blood of great literature. As James Norman Hall, of the Mutiny of the Bounty fame, puts it: "All the Icelandic sagas and this one in particular (the specific reference is to Njal's Saga) spoil one for the reading of contemporary tales. The people 'come alive' of themselves by what they say and do; one is completely unconscious of any narrator." John Masefield confirms this verdict. "I found in them," he said, "a reality touched with romance that seemed the perfection of storytelling."

In speaking of the Eddas, Edith Hamilton invokes the mighty name of Homer. The writers of the sagas were cut from the same block as that blind old man, who begged his bread through seven cities, all of whom claimed him when he was dead. "The thing that endures," says Homer, "that gives value to life, is comradeship, loyalty, bravery, magnanimity, love, the relations of men in direct communication with each other, personally, as persons." Above and beyond, the brutal realism, the savage violence, the gory accounts of the hacking off of heads, and the slitting open of stomachs, recounted in the sagas, they do affirm that these are the values that count. Homer's words run in step with the thoughts of the writers of the sagas, lesser men than he, but still giants.

The age of the sagas spanned one hundred years — from 930 to 1030. They were passed orally from generation to generation until they were committed to writing between about 1200 and the early days of the fourteenth century. Some thirty of what are known as the family sagas have been exempted from the wrongs of time and chance. The authors are unknown, with one possible exception.

What purpose did these authors have in mind? In the first and last resort, they were writing literature, not history. As Hermann Palsson says, "(they) were more concerned with moral and aesthetic truths than with historical facts."

De Quincey divides literature into the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. The function of the literature of knowledge is to teach — instruction. The function of the literature of power is to move — entertainment. The saga writers were aiming at these two functions — instruction and entertainment, giving entertainment the edge over instruction. Professor Gwyn Jones, in his happy way with words, says this of them: "The sagamen were in general of serious purpose and well-stored mind; they were organizers of material, both oral and written; and to think of them as mere transcribes by ear does them scant justice."

In September, 1936, when he was Governor-General of Canada, Lord Tweedsmuir visited Gimli. In an address to an audience of Icelandic-Canadians, he said: "For myself I put the Icelandic Sagas among the chief works of the human genius."

Lord Tweedsmuir had an energetic mind, cast in the Scottish mould. His active conscience would not allow him to give praise, when he did not think that praise was due. His words can be taken at their face value. As a young man, he studied Icelandic so that he could read the Sagas in the original. Let us think about his words for a moment. He places the Sagas in the company of the poetry of Homer, Shakespeare and Goethe, the art of Leonardo, Michaelangelo and Rembrandt, the music of Mozart, Beethoven and Verdi. In all truth, that's reaching for

the top. Can praise go any higher? And in the light of this praise, consider the fact. When the Sagas were being composed the population of Iceland was somewhere between 50,000 and 80,000. The first census was taken in Iceland in 1703. It showed the population of the country to be 50,330. There had been a falling off in population since the thirteenth century — but by what amount is conjecture.

An English poet, a later-day Viking, W. E. Henley claimed to be the master of his fate and the captain of his soul. The early Viking never made such a claim. He was the captain of his soul but he never presumed to be the master of his fate. As he saw it, he was the blind fool of fate, the slave of circumstance. He lived under sealed orders. It was his destiny to obey these orders to the letter. His life was a broad highway, stretching its length before him, and whether it led uphill or downhill, through pleasant meadows or treacherous swamps, he had to follow it to the very end. What was in his complete control was his attitude to whatever fate had in store for him. He took the best, or the worst, that fate had to offer with equal grace. Good conduct, conduct which enabled him to keep his self-respect, was his constant aim. He never expected a reward for his good conduct, in this life, or a future life. He did good, as he saw it, for good was good to do. For want of a better phrase, he had a sense of style, which was reflected in his attitude to death; death, which passes no one by, the final fatal blow that fate can strike. He accepted life as a prelude to death. ''Death it is true,'' says Professor Gwyn Jones, ''was not to be sought, but it was not to be avoided either, if by avoidance a man lessened his own stature.'' Professor Jones offers an example, of what I have called the Vikings' 'sense of style'. In the saga of Erik the Red, brief mention is made of Bjarni Grimolfsson's calm acceptance of the destiny that fate had designed for him. He was a sea captain. His ship ran

VIKING FIND OF THE CENTURY

This century's most important find of Viking Age gold and silver jewelry, was the description applied by the head of the University Museum of Antiquities in Oslo, *Arne Skjolsvold,* to the recent discovery in south Norway of about 2.5 kg of jewelry believed to date from approximately to year 800.

The objects, which were discovered by a man working on the site for his new house, included twisted silver necklaces, rings and pendants, large bracelets of twisted gold, beautifully worked filigree brooches and gold rings.

In times of unrest, it was customary for the Vikings to bury their valuable objects in expectation of more peaceful conditions, and this discovery confirms that this practice was normal in Norway as early as the year 800.

Another interesting feature of these objects is that they are inscribed with runic lettering, three names being clearly identifiable.

The Viking treasure has now been safely deposited in the vault of the University Museum of Antiques in Oslo. It will shortly be thoroughly examined by experts and, hopefully, put on public exhibition in the not too distant future.

—Courtesy of Scandinavian News

into stormy weather in the Ireland seas and had to be abandoned. On board was a small boat which was big enough to hold only half the crew. ''Because the boat will not take more than half our men,'' announced Bjarni, ''my proposal is that we draw lots for the boat, for this ought not to go by rank.'' He himself drew a lot for the small boat. When he had taken his place in the boat, an Icelander (he is not named) who was still on the ship and who had followed Bjarni from Iceland, cried, ''Do you mean to leave me here, Bjarni?'' ''That is how it must be now,'' replied Bjarni.

''Very different were your oaths to my father,'' he replied, ''when I left Iceland with you, than that you would desert me like this. You reckoned then that you and I should share the one fate.''

''That cannot be,'' Bjarni told him. ''But get down here into the boat and I will get back on board ship, since I find you so concerned to live.''

And Bjarni Grimolfsson fulfilled his destiny in true Viking 'style'.

King George V of Great Britain used to say that La Boheme was his favourite opera because it was the shortest. A saga-buff could well say that Njal's saga is his favourite saga because it is the longest; but it is more than the longest; it is the greatest. Professor Gwyn Jones calls it Iceland's supreme work of art but not a lonely giant. From this saga which holds up a mirror to the Icelanders in which we can see them in many varied aspects of their daily life, I offer two examples of the Viking's sense of 'style'.

Gunnar of Hlidarendi was a prince of men in every way. ''He was tall and strong,'' records the Saga, ''and well skilled in the use of arms. He could wield a sword and shoot equally well with either hand, and he could deal blows so swiftly that three swords seemed to flash through the air at the same time . . . In full armour he was able to leap higher than his own height, and just as far backwards as forwards. He swam like a seal, and indeed there was no sport in which it availed anyone to compete against him. It has been said that no man had been his equal . . . He was the most well bred of men, hardy in every respect, generous and even tempered, a faithful friend, but very careful in the choice of friends.''

This man, the paragon of Viking virtues, through an undeserving woman, became involved in a series of blood feuds. After many fierce conflicts, against great odds, in which he killed many men, he was outlawed by the Law Mount. His brother, Kolskegg, ''a noble fellow who knew no fear,'' was always at his side. He was also outlawed. They were travelling on horseback to the sea coast to take ship for Denmark. Gunnar's horse suddenly stumbled and he was thrown. As he lay on the ground he looked back at his farmstead. Slowly, he got to his feet and told his brother that he could not leave Iceland, that he was realizing for the first time what he would be leaving. A Canadian poet, Gael Turnbull, put these words in his mouth. He speaks them from his burial mound:

I looked back
and saw the land that I knew
and the paths I had trod with my feet
and the walls I had built with my hands
and the sheep I had marked on the fells
and the hay here in the meadow
ready to mow
for me to mow
Did they think I would quit?
Though they took my breath,
I kept what I loved.

Gunnar tried to persuade his brother not to leave Iceland.

''That shall not be!'' answered Kolskegg. ''I will not betray the trust others put in me, neither on this occasion, nor on any other. This is the one and only thing which will separate us. Tell my kinsman and my mother that I never intend to see Iceland

again, because I shall learn of your death, and then I shall have no reason to return.''

When Gunnar defied the edict of the Law Mount, he sealed his own doom. At harvest time, forty sturdy warriors, many of them his enemies, visited his farm to put an end to his life.

Gunnar showed less care in the selection of his wife than he did in his friends. Her name was Hallgerd. She had as many womanly vices as he had manly virtues. She was such a woman in whom honest people could find nothing to praise but her beauty. When she put up a servant to steal for her, Gunnar slapped her face. During his last battle, against the odds of forty to one, his bowstring was cut in half.

''Give me two strands of your hair,'' he said to Hallgerd, ''and you and my mother twist them together to make a bowstring for me.''

''Does anything depend on that?'' she asked.

''My life depends on it,'' he replied. ''Because they will never get me as long as I can use my bow!''

''In that case I'll remind you of the slap on the face you gave me,'' she answered, ''and I don't care whether you hold out a longer or a shorter time!''

''Everyone has something he is proud of,'' said Gunnar. ''Nor shall I ask you a second time.''

Facing an inescapable doom, Gunnar did not yield. In true Viking style, he died resisting, undefeated. He gave up his life but he kept what had made his life worth living.

Gunnar had a friend named Njal — a man of a different stamp than himself. Njal was a man of peace, wise in many things and reliable in knowledge. ''He was so well versed in the law,'' says the Saga, ''that his equal could not be found anywhere. He was learned and had the gift of second sight. He was benevolent and generous in word and deed, and everything which he advised turned out for the best. He was gentle and noble-minded, and helped all people who came to him with their problems.''

Njal had a wife named Bergthora. The saga describes her as ''a most excellent and capable woman but somewhat harsh.'' Njal and Bergthora had three daughters and three sons. Two of the sons were mighty fighters. They hero-worshipped Gunnar and had designs of following in his footsteps. The inevitable happened. They became involved in a blood-feud. Njal adopted the son of one of the men they killed. His name was Hoskuld and he married Hildigunn, a

niece of the noble Flosi, a man of integrity. Njal's two sons accepted the gossip of a trouble-maker and tale bearer at its face value; and, as the evil result, killed Hoskuld. Reluctantly, Flosi took up the quarrel. He gathered together one hundred and twenty men and set out for Njal's farmstead. There they encountered some thirty men and engaged them in a fight. They suffered great losses and decided to resort to fire. At Njal's insistence his party took shelter in his farm house. Flosi's men set fire to the farm house. As the blaze got under way, Flosi spoke to Njal. He agreed to let all women and children leave the burning house. And then, he said to Njal: ''I want to offer you — permission to leave the house, for you do not deserve to be burned inside.'' ''No, I will not come out,'' answered Njal, ''for I am an old man and little fit to avenge my sons, and I do not want to live in shame.''

Flosi then said to Bergthora: ''You come out, mistress of the house, for under no conditions do I want to burn you inside.''

Bergthora replied: ''As a young woman I was married to Njal and vowed that one fate should befall us both.''

And so, with her husband and her sons, she perished in the flames. She challenged fate and died victorious. ''In that sort of situation, in those retorts,'' comments Magnus Magnusson, ''lies the essence of the Sagas.''

Most of the villains in the sagas, if such they may be called to distinguish them from the heroes, are men of true nobility and have elements of greatness. They are not flawed human beings, but the victims of fate, no less than the heroes.

In all the Sagas, gold nuggets flash to light which illustrate the Viking's sense of style. May I recall to you an example from the Saga of Gisli. Gisli was outlawed because of his part in a blood feud. An outlaw was beyond the help of the law — it was an offence to give aid to him, to help him in any way, to feed or house him, or to take any action to enable him to save his life.

Gisli was married to a woman named Aud. Eyjolf, one of his chief enemies, tried to persuade her to betray her husband. He offered her sixty ounces of silver and to arrange a marriage for her better in every way than her marriage to Gisli:

''You can see for yourself,'' he said, ''how miserable it becomes for you, living in this deserted fjord, and having this happen to you because of Gisli's bad luck, and never seeing your kinsfolk or their families.''

''I think the last thing,'' replied Aud, ''that we are likely to agree about is that you could arrange any marriage for me that I would think as good as this one. Even so, it is true, as they say, that 'cash is the widow's best comfort,' and let me see whether this silver is as much or as fine as you say it is.''

Eyjolf counted out his silver for her inspection. She admitted that it was of the first quality, and asked him if she had the right to do with it as she pleased. When Eyjolf told her that she had that right, she put it in a big purse, and threw the purse at his nose so that his blood spurted out all over him.

''Take that for your easy faith,'' she cried, ''and every harm with it! There was never any likelihood that I would give my husband over to you, scoundrel. Take your money, and shame and disgrace with it! You will remember, as long as you live, you miserable man, that a woman struck you; and yet you will not get what you want for all that!''

Grettir's Saga, which is considered second only to Njal's Saga in human interest and literary perfection, has a greater admixture of the supernatural, of the arts of black magic, than most of the other sagas. It is history embroidered with legend. It is not a story for sceptics. For its full appreciation there must be a willing suspension of disbelief.

Grettir was born, under an unlucky star, in 997, three years before Iceland adopted Christianity. He knew nothing of Christian humility or meekness. He was quite incapable of turning the other cheek. He was a pagan to the roots of his being.

"It happens to each according to his fate." These words expressed his philosophy of life. He was reputed to be the bravest, the hardiest and strongest man who ever lived in Iceland, "nor has the land seen his like again". He was also one of the laziest, the most head-strong and undisciplined. As Professor Haraldur Bessason has written, "Throughout his life he showed extraordinary reluctance to submit to authority of any kind." In short, he was outcast from the general rules of life.

As an instance of his strength, the Saga tells of his picking up a fat bull, destined to be slaughtered for Christmas, and carrying it on his shoulders.

Fate never gave him a smile. Many quarrels were thrust upon him which he would gladly have avoided. When he did get into a fight, his sword sang a greedy war-song. For his ill-luck in killing many men, he was outlawed. He lived in Iceland as an outlaw for over nineteen years; never certain where he would sleep, or where his next meal would come from. All these years, he lived under a supernatural curse, which made him afraid of the dark. His youngest brother, Illugi, shared his last years with him. As the two brothers took their last leave from their mother, she said to them: "Now you are going, my two sons, and you are fated to die together, and no one can escape the destiny that is shaped for him. I shall never again see either of you, and you must share between you what comes . . . I have had some very strange dreams. Keep clear of sorcerers, for there are few things stronger than witchcraft."

When she began to cry, Grettir said, "Don't weep, mother, for it will be said that you bore sons and not daughters, if we are attacked with weapons. Farewell."

The brothers met their fate and proved that they were sons, not daughters, in their last fight — a fight, which in true saga tradition, was a fight against overwhelming odds. Grettir's effectiveness to give his best in this last fight was reduced by the powers of witchcraft. While he was chopping a log, which had been bewitched, his axe slipped and give him a wound in his leg which would not heal.

The leader of Grettir's enemies in his last fight was a man named Thorbjorn Ongul. After Grettir had been killed in cowardly fashion, Ongul gave his choice to Illugi, who was badly wounded, either to be slain or to promise to do nothing against the slayers of his brother.

"That might have been worth talking about," said Illugi, "if Grettir had been able to defend himself, and you had overcome him bravely and openly. It is out of the question that I might save myself by becoming a coward like you. I will say only that no one will be a greater enemy of yours than I, if I live, for I will be slow to forget what you have done to Grettir. I would prefer to die."

When Ongul told him that in the light of

this attitude, he must die, Illugi laughed and said, "Now you have chosen what is more to my liking."

Iceland is bigger than Ireland. It contains some 40,000 square miles but only about one fifth of this area is capable of supporting human life. the rest is covered with ice, rock, lava and volcanic ash. Thus Iceland can sustain a very limited population.

In 1875, one of her numerous volcanoes errupted, laying waste large areas of farming and grazing lands. Many Icelanders had to seek new homes beyond the seas. Some came to Canada.

With help from the federal government, a colony, named the Republic of New Iceland, was established on the banks of Lake Winnipeg, beyond the northern boundary of the Province of Manitoba, which was then known as the postage stamp province. Late in the fall of 1875, 285 Icelanders, including seventy young children, arrived to take up residence in New Iceland. They named their principal settlement Gimli; which proved to be no paradise for those early settlers. They encountered sub-zero weather which they had never experienced in Iceland because the warm waters of the Gulf Stream keep Iceland's temperature fairly moderate. Sub-zero weather holds no terrors for those who know how to meet it; but for those who are exposed to it for the first time, ill-housed, ill-clad and ill-fed, there is nothing that can match it for discomfort and misery.

In her interesting book, Icelandic Settlers in America, Elva Simundsson quotes from a letter which a Gimli colonist wrote to a friend in Iceland, in 1876: "However suitable the name Gimli may be here or whether it was first named as a joke, or in earnest, I do not know, perhaps it is for the same reason that Erik the Red named Greenland, saying that more would seek to go there if the name were attractive."

In the spring of 1876, another group of settlers from Iceland, about 1200 in all, arrived to make their homes in the wilderness of New Iceland. Farming and fishing were the occupations at which they were hoping to make their livelihoods. Things seemed to be proceeding well, when tragedy struck. In the winter of 1876, smallpox raged through the community. One seventh of the settlers, most of them children, fell victims to this scourge.

How did the inhabitants of Manitoba react to the misfortunes of the Icelandic settlers? By sending them medicines, warm clothes, good food, in a spirit of Christian charity. Not a bit of it. Their reaction was quite different. They quarantined them. They posted armed guards at the northern boundary of Manitoba to isolate the settlers in their own bailiwick. Next spring the settlers were not able to visit Winnipeg to buy seed for the crops they had hoped to grow.

But the Icelandic settlers could not deny what destiny had in store for them in their new homeland. They were destined to triumph over all the odds that faced them, including a hostile attitude on the part of the older settlers. And it did not take them long.

In explaining the rapid rise of Icelandic Canadians to eminence in every phase of life in Canada, Judge Walter J. Lindal once said that they did it by proving that they were just a little better than the next fellow, that they gave to every task which they undertook just an ounce or two more of extra effort. He was not speaking with a large chip of conceit on his shoulders. He stood upon firm ground. He was speaking the literal and the exact truth.

In forging ahead on all the practical fronts of life, the Icelandic Canadians were not deaf to the claims of the spirit. The pens were always active. On this score, one who has earned the right to be heard, Dr. Watson Kirkconnell, has written: "The pioneer generations of the English and French in Canada were practically in-

articulate or worse. It is the glory of the Icelandic settlers that in their first generation among us they have created a poetry based on Canada and their experience of it, that is worthy of challenging comparison with the best that three centuries have produced in their foster-country.''

Dr. Kirkconnell was a towering figure in two worlds — the academic world and the world in which the original mind reigns supreme. During his lifetime, he garnered a whole trunkful of honours of various sorts, several from Iceland, but full justice has yet to be done to him. He came to Winnipeg in 1922 to join the teaching staff of United College. Soon after his arrival, he became interested in what he calls Canada's unseen literature. He discovered that twenty-four major volumes of poetry had been published by Icelandic-Canadian poets. For many years, he contributed a review of 'New-Canadian Letters' to the annual survey of Letters in Canada published by the University of Toronto Quarterly. He reports that between 1936 and 1940 some ninety Icelandic-Canadian poets achieved publication. How do we account for this great poetic activity among the Icelandic-Canadians? This question has a simple answer. They regarded poetry as an indispensable part of daily living, like eating and drinking. In their judgment the writing of poetry is a natural activity of civilized man.

One night in India, where I spent some time during World War II, I heard a speech by a woman, who was a leader of the women's liberation movement in that country. I do not remember her name but I shall never forget these words from her speech: ''Educate a man and you educate an individual, educate a woman and you educate a family.'' This thought would have appealed to the early Icelanders. In those long winter nights of long ago, when an Icelandic family gathered around the home fire to recite, or to read the Sagas, women had their part to play as well as men. ''In the light of the Sagas,'' asserts Magnus Magnusson, in his absorbing book 'Vikings', ''it is clear that women played an unusually positive role in society for those mediaeval days. They were frontierswomen in action and spirit; they also had 'liberated' legal rights far in advance of their times, like the right to divorce and a claim to half the marital property. They made their presence felt — at times, quite literally, with a vengeance.''

What exactly did the Indian woman mean? To begin with, educated women want educated children. They want educated children because they know that education will enable them to lead richer and fuller lives, that education will open more doors for them on the wonders of the world. In Iceland there was a tradition of home education. Children were taught to read and write by their mothers; and, of course, when a child is taught to read and write, if there is pressure from inner desire, he is on the way to the only education that counts in the long run — self-education, education which is prompted by the desire to learn. Icelanders have always believed that most of what we learn, we learn by ourselves. In support of this belief, may be cited the careers of those two mighty men of the pen — Stephan G. Stephanson and Guttormur J. Guttormsson.

But there is a wider meaning to the Indian woman's words. Mothers are the natural messengers of cultural values. They transmit them to their children by a process which is not always a conscious one. Perhaps, Antonin Dvorak was thinking of this process, when he wrote *'Songs My Mother Taught Me':*

Songs my mother taught me
In the days long vanished

Now I teach my children
Each melodious measure.

There is some evidence that the present generation of Icelandic-Canadian mothers are not teaching their children the songs that their mothers taught to them. In this regard Dr. Richard Beck offers testimony. ''But the thing is, you know,'' he said, ''I think the question is now we are in the third and fourth generation and you're up against this problem that the parents of Icelandic origin; excepting a very few exceptions, they're not teaching their children the language.'' It is the language, as Dr. Beck pointed out, that is the golden key that opens the treasure chest of the literary heritage of Iceland.

When Lord Dufferin, then Governor-General of Canada, visited New Iceland, in the fall of 1877, he told an audience of Icelandic settlers in Gimli . . . ''you possess in a far greater degree than is probably imagined, what which is the essence and foundation of all superiority, namely intelligence, education, and intellectual activity. In fact, I have not entered a single hut or cottage in the settlement which did not contain, no matter how bare the walls, or scanty its furniture, a library of twenty or thirty volumes; and I am informed that there is scarcely a child amongst you who cannot read and write.''

One wonders if the present Governor-General of Canada could make a similar comment after making a similar visit today. Would he find in many homes that that modern symbol of our anti-intellectual civilization — that mindless instrument which exercises the eyes more than it does the grey cells — the television set — has replaced the library? We are living in an age when there is a great deal of anti-cultural fall-out in the air that we breathe. It has affected all of us. Icelandic-Canadians are not exempt from its paralyzing influence.

Elva Simundsson tells us, in her book, to which I have already referred, that the Icelandic settlers in America were determined from the first to establish their own newspaper. ''They felt this would be a way of informing the Icelanders,'' she says, ''about affairs in their own communities and happenings around the world. A newspaper in the Icelandic language would be another link with the motherland and would help to preserve the Icelandic language and culture in the younger generation.''

The Icelanders in Manitoba soon achieved this ambition. They established a newspaper which was published in Icelandic. In fact, they established two — and, for a short period, there was even a third. But as the years passed, they had increasing difficulties in maintaining these papers. In his Memoirs, 'A Slice of Canada', published in 1967, Dr. Watson Kirkconnell reports sadly: ''In the Icelandic community . . . there were once two healthy weeklies: at last they were forced to amalgamate in order to survive; and now the combined Lögberg-Heimskringla is a small eight-page sheet that may well be on its death bed.''

The Lögberg-Heimskringla has refused to die. It lives on but not in a condition of vigorous health. It has made concessions to those Icelandic Canadians whose hold on their ancestral tongue is slipping: it is printed partly in English.

The other day I was talking with Kris Kristjanson. He told me something that made me think that the fight has not been lost, that the time has not yet come to throw in the sponge. He said that there is a farmer living between the lakes, who is prepared to establish a scholarship in the amount of $50,000. The purpose of this scholarship would be to send students to Iceland for study in the hope that they would become newspaper editors. The name of this farmer, who seeks to preserve the values that his forefathers prized, who wants to save the old culture and intellectual traditions of Iceland, is Edward Gislason. In his

view, the way to develop in the younger generation a compulsion to drink at the springs of their ancestral culture is to put into their hands a newspaper published in Icelandic. A newspaper, he believes, is the best medium for watering their racial roots; and, as long as these roots have life in them, the saga of Thule's ancient glory will be remembered with reverential pride.

The fire of a bright new civilization was lighted by the Vikings in Iceland more than one thousand years ago. A burning brand from this fire was brought to this country by descendants of the Vikings more than one hundred years ago. As the years go by, this brand may burn with a lesser flame, but it will never go out, as long as there are men like Edward Gislason: men who cherish, deep in their souls, the cultural values on which the greatness of Iceland, in Viking times, was based.

THE COURIER DIPLOMATIQUE

by Kristine Perlmutter

Courier Diplomatique, a colourful, beautifully presented magazine featuring matters pertaining to the various foreign embassies located in Washington, D.C., has recently come to our attention. Each issue of this magazine showcases a particular country and Iceland had its turn in the March 1982 issue.

Besides being appealing, well laid out and loaded with colour photographs presenting many facets of Icelandic life and scenery, the magazine's feature articles present timely topics of interest to Icelanders and Western Icelanders. Among the variety of articles included are the following: "The Ambassador's Home", "Hans G. Andersen — Iceland's Ambassador", "President Vigdis Finnbogadottir of Iceland", "Warmth in Iceland", "Life in Iceland", "Iceland: A Destination for Tourists", "The ABC's of Iceland", "The Hilda Story", "Entrepreneur from Iceland in U.S.A.", "Iceland's Industrial Development", and "Atlantic Salmon Fishing in Iceland". An article entitled "The Icelandic Heritage" by Axel Vopnfjord of *The Icelandic Canadian* is also included.

For those interested, *Courier Diplomatique* is based at 3-1305 Wisconsin Ave. N.W. Washington, D.C. 20007 and the current price per issue is $2.00.

INTERLUDE

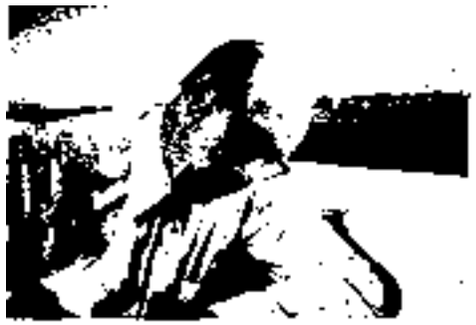
by Kristiana Magnusson

One by one they leave
and close up shop,
fishing nets and gear
all bedded down,
as the last boat
is hoisted up
from its soft cocoon
of lapping waters,
its tattered remnants
of buoy flags
now waving
a forlorn goodbye.

Across the purple haze
of autumn mists,
the wind moans soft and low,
scattering flaming leaves
of tamarac, birch and ash.
Only the friendly chit-chat
of an idle squirrel
and the haunting call
of wild geese in the sky
breaks upon the stillness
of a fishing camp,
closed until next season.

RECENT TRENDS IN ICELANDIC LITERATURE

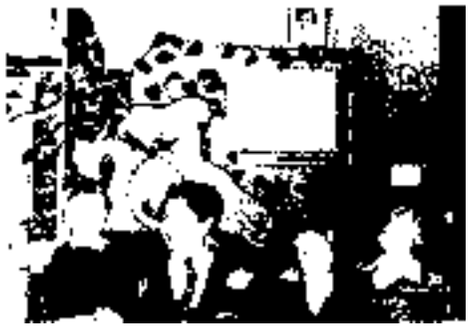
by Loftur Bjarnason, Professor Emeritus
Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California



Loftur Bjarnason editing the translation of A Brattann at the home of Johannes Helgi, Þalaland 7, Reykjavik, Iceland. From the picture it is obvious that there are at least some days when one can work in his shirt sleeves out of doors.

The art of story telling has a long tradition in Iceland, going back to the twelfth and possibly even the eleventh centuries — the age of the great and impressive family sagas. Essentially the same can be said about poetry. As everyone knows, for generations the court poets (the skalds) of Scandinavia generally, and Norway in particular, were mostly Icelanders. No one who has read *Egil's Saga* could possibly forget how Egill bought his life by composing during the course of a single night that great poem *höfudlausn* eulogizing his most implacable enemy, Erik Bloody-Axe.

During the last century or so there have been so many Icelandic authors who have shown great talent in writing good novels, interesting short stories, and fine poetry that it would be tedious to ennumerate them. One form of literary art that has received less attention, however, is biography. To be sure, this form of art has not been completely neglected, but still it has received less attention than it deserves, and has been practiced in Iceland less vigorously than other forms of literature. Iceland has not yet produced a *Queen Victoria* such as was written by Lytton Strachey, and certainly no Icelandic author has churned out biographies with the speed and dexterity of Emil Ludwig who dashed off almost one each year during the early and middle thirties.



Left to right: Guttormur, Johannes Helgi, Jon Gauti, Margret Guttormsdottir.

It is all the more interesting, then, to encounter an author who, in addition to the usual fields of writing, is devoting more and more of his efforts to biography. Such an author is Johannes Helgi.

Born in Reykjavik on September 5, 1926, the son of Jon Matthiasson and his wife Jonina Johannesdottir, the future author graduated from the Icelandic School of Commerce (Samvinnuskolinn) in Reykjavik in 1946. For three years he followed the sea as a member of the crew on various Icelandic fishing vessels. It is with some authority, then, that he describes the mountainous waves, the violent storms, and the icy winds of the North Atlantic in his stories and novels.

His busy life as a crew member did not prevent him from reading and studying in his spare time with the result that in 1949 he took and passed the test given by the

National School of Telegraphy (Loftskeytaskolinn). This was followed by extensive travel abroad where he either visited or studied in Denmark, Germany, France, and Great Britain. Upon his return to Iceland in 1953 he was commissioned as Secretary to the Icelandic Parliament (Alpingid) and news reporter for the National Radio Station assigned to cover the Alping. This position he held until 1963 when he became Archivist for the city of Reykjavik, a position that he held until deciding to become a free-lance writer in 1973.

As was mentioned above, Johannes Helgi speaks with authority in describing life and events in small boats on the open sea, for he has had several years of experience on fishing vessels of every size and description. In a like manner he speaks with authority when describing life and customs in the fishing villages and even the attitudes of the Icelandic people, for during the war years he worked as a common laborer for the British and American troops, including a stint as chauffeur for American officers. Briefly, he has seen life from a number of points of view.

Johannes Helgi had already written and published several short stories and had even collected them and had given them out as books long before he made the decision to become a free-lance writer in 1973. Several of these stories received not only national acclaim, but also were translated into several languages and received high praise from international reviewers. One of the earliest of these books was *Allra vedra von* (Any kind of weather), a collection of short stories, published by Setberg in 1957, for which he won a grant from the Icelandic Government. He has, indeed, won several prizes and grants since then. Moreover, several of his short stories have received such favorable endorsements that they have been included in collections of international short stories. For example, one was selected to appear in *54 Meilleurs Contes du Monde: Les laureats du concurs international 1954-55;* another in *World Prize Short Stories;* and still another in *Short Stories of Today* by twelve modern Icelandic authors. This by no means exhausts the list: he has also written plays for Icelandic National Radio as well as an almost endless succession of articles for newspapers and magazines. Some of these he has assembled and published in book form, such as *Gjafir eru ydur gefnar* (Gifts you are offered), Almennabokfelagid, 1976.

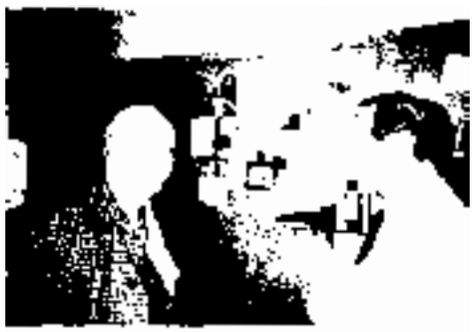
In addition to expressing his opinion on world affairs, internal Icelandic politics, economic problems, and social life in Iceland, Johannes Helgi has long been a loud voice crying in the wilderness, pointing out to the Icelanders that if they want great literary art, they must be willing to pay for it. He is uncompromising in his opposition to the 23.5 per cent sales tax that is imposed by the Icelandic Government on books written by Icelandic authors. He contends that such a tax stifles literary

creativity in Iceland by making it almost impossible for Icelandic authors to dedicate themselves entirely to their art without having to do other work. He is probably right, for there are very few Icelandic authors who can eke out a living by their literary efforts alone. Although most people concede the justice of Johannes Helgi's contentions, many are quick to point out that as a nation Icelanders are so articulate that almost anybody writes with precision and even with a certain degree of style. One must be very good indeed to stand out sufficiently to deserve an award or a stipend from the State.

The first effort by Johannes in the field of biography — at least the first that saw publication — was *Hus malaranns* (The house of the painter), Setberg, 1961, bearing the subtitle *Endurminningar Jons Engilberts* (Reminiscences of Jon Engilbert). As most Western Icelanders know, Jon Engilbert (1908-1972) was one of Iceland's most talented and best loved painters. He was a well known figure not only in Iceland, but also in other countries such as Norway where he spent several years as a rising young artist and student.

The next biographical study Johannes called *Hin hvitu segl* (The white sails), published by Setberg in 1962. This bears the subtitle *Heimildarskaldsaga* which might well be translated as "an authoritative novel," and is a most interesting combination of a novel and a biography as the title and the subtitle suggest of Andreas Petursson from Keflavik, who for half a century or more lived on and from the sea from the days of high-masted sailing ships to modern steel trawlers, and who lived through the transition of fishermen going out to fish in whaling boats with oars and primitive equipment to the modern diesel-driven laboratory vessels that characterize the Icelandic fishing fleets of today.

In his next biographical study, *Sigfus Halldorsson opnar hug sinn* (Sigfus Halldorsson opens his mind), Johannes Helgi allows his readers to get intimate glimpses into the life and character of Sigfus Halldorsson, one of the most popular and gifted composers of modern Iceland, and one well known to most readers of *The Icelandic Canadian,* for Sigfus Halldorsson came to Canada only a year or so ago, touring and entertaining the Icelandic communities.



Professor Loftur Bjarnason conferring with Agnar Kofoed-Hansen regarding a point in the translation of A Brattann, early in 1981.

His most recent book, *A Brattann* (Aiming for the sky) Almennabokfelagid, 1979), is a biography to be sure, but it is much more than that. It is also a history of the development of civil aviation in Ice-

land. Allowing Agnar Kofoed-Hansen, the present Director General of Civil Aviation in Iceland and the subject of the biography, to trace in his own words his life from infancy to his present station as Iceland's highest ranking officer in the field of aviation, he not only evidences critical judgment in presenting historical facts, but he also shows great art in depiction of character. He traces the life of Agnar Kofoed-Hansen from his earliest recollections as a sickly baby, born in a garret at Hverfisgata 71 in Reykjavik through his various adventures as an undersized youngster, slow in development, tormented by his peers who call him ''Agnar Cow Foot,'' through his years of training as a cadet in the Royal Danish Naval Aviation Academy where as a result of his outstanding academic record he is granted a scholarship and unexpectedly becomes the hero of the school by winning a crucial boxing contest, on through his years of gaining aviation experience by flying with Det Danske Luftfartselskap, better known as DDL and with Lufthansa, his determined efforts to bring aviation to Iceland, and finally his unmitigated success in establishing and maintaining the Akureyri Aviation Society which has since become the national aviation company.

As stated above, *A Brattann* is a biography to be sure, but it is much more. It is a success story in the Horatio Alger Jr. tradition, with the difference being that none of it is fiction: it is all true and really happened. It is an inspiring book in that it emphasizes all that is most honorable and manly; all those traits of honesty, self-reliance, dedication to principle that we respect and admire but which are so often overlooked or even debunked in modern literature. Moreover, it is a book that deserves attention as a work of art. It is well planned and artistically executed. The style is lively, natural, and straightforward. It is completely unencumbered with the ghost-writer's opinions or comments. Johannes Helgi allows Agnar Kofoed-Hansen to tell the story of his life in his own words with few or no comments of an external nature. It is truly an exciting — I might even say spiritually uplifting book. I predict that every Canadian of Icelandic descent will take pride in reading of the life, the achievements, and the accomplishments of the protagonist and will enjoy the vigorous and lively style of the author. It is even now being translated into English and is expected to appear late this summer or early this autumn.

In true Kierkegaardian tradition, where the best is saved as a postscript, it is only right to add that Johannes Helgi is married to Margret Guttormsdottir, a teacher in the public school system of Reykjavik. They have two handsome children, Jon Gauti and Guttormur Helgi. The first is named for his father's father as is the second for his mother's father in accordance with long established Icelandic custom.

ON BEING ICELANDIC

by Kathryn Leonard

I happened to look up from the piano as Mr. Fisher kissed Mrs. Fisher. She was standing by the kitchen stove in her apron, spatula in her hand. He kissed her hard on the lips and she put her arm around his neck — and I stared — mouth open. In all my ten years I had never seen such a thing.

Dodie Fisher nudged me on the piano bench. ''Kathryn, you're not supposed to look,'' she whispered. Guiltily, I turned my eyes back to the sheet music she was playing and stammered, ''Dodie, I think I'd better go home now. My mother gets mad if I'm late for supper.''

I slipped out the front door, took a quick turn and scooted toward home. I hopped over deep ruts in the alley that hadn't been maintained in our town of Bowbells, North Dakota, since the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor the previous winter. I jumped up the steps into our back door and found my mother busily preparing our evening meal. ''Kathryn, don't run away. Set the table for me,'' she said. ''Wash your hands first.'' I displaced her at the kitchen sink for a moment and then in a preoccupied way, I began gathering silverware and dishes from the cupboard. I made several silent trips from the kitchen to the dining room before my mother asked quietly, ''Something wrong?''

''No,'' I answered, wondering if I should tell her. ''But do you know what I saw at Dodie's? Right in front of us kids, Mr. Fisher kissed Mrs. Fisher.''

''Humm,'' said my unperturbable mother.

''Did the Fishers kiss like that because they own the movie theatre?'' I asked. ''I thought only movie stars did that.''

''No,'' my mother said. ''But you're not used to demonstrative affection. That's a problem of being Icelandic.''

I went on setting the table, finally placing a glass of milk for each of us (Mr. Fisher was also our milkman), wondering what my mother meant — ''problem of being Icelandic.'' My parents took such pride in their Icelandic background, I was unaware they knew there were any problems.

I knew some problems of being Icelandic first hand. The main one was that there weren't enough of us. Every morning as my mother braided my hair, she told me to stand up straight, to make sure my shoes were polished and my fingernails clean. ''Remember, you're the only Icelander anyone in your classroom knows — probably the only one they'll ever know — and you have to be a good representative,'' she told me. ''Icelandic children study hard. It's part of our heritage. Now your dad and I don't expect you to be perfect, just do your best.''

I liked school and I tried. I knew the nationality of everyone in my class; we were all second generation Americans. But it was true — I was the only Icelander. There were times I wished we didn't live in Bowbells. If we lived in Upham or Bottineau near some of my cousins, we wouldn't be the only Icelandic family, so we wouldn't have to behave so carefully.

While we were eating supper, I tried to imagine my father kissing my mother. I couldn't.

''Stop fidgeting, Kathryn,'' grumbled my big sister. ''Eat your carrots.'' I hated carrots. I tried a mouthful but kept squirming with my uncomfortable thoughts.

My brother, Ted, kicked me under the table and made a face. ''Eat your carrots,'' he mimicked.

''Mama,'' I appealed.

''All of you behave,'' said my father from the head of the table. We were quiet.

I went on picking at my food, not listening to the conversation. Then I blurted out, ''Daddy, you wouldn't ever kiss Mama, would you?''

Everyone stared at me. Then my parents started speaking in Icelandic so that I couldn't understand. My brother and sister were listening as if they could catch a word or two. The only thing I understood was my mother saying ''Fisher.''

My father almost laughed, but looking at me, he said soberly, ''Your mother will talk to you after supper.''

''You always do that,'' I complained. ''English all the time until you don't want me to know what you're talking about. It's not fair.''

My father restrained a smile. ''You'd better learn Icelandic, Kathryn. You know, it's the only language spoken in heaven.''

Everyone chuckled, but I didn't get the joke.

''Only language spoken in heaven,'' Ted grinned. ''Why's that again, Dad?''

''It's so ancient and pure, it's God's favorite,'' my father answered straight-faced.

More chuckles and I still didn't get the joke.

After supper I cleared the dishes from the table while my brother and sister had their usual fight about who was going to wash and who was going to dry. They had to argue in whispers because my parents didn't allow fighting. That night they were too noisy, so my father came in to the kitchen to settle things.

''Stop that. Brothers and sisters get along. Now whoever washed last night will dry tonight. No quarreling.''

I went into the living room to talk to my mother who was supposed to explain something about kissing. I was embarrassed and I hoped she'd start the conversation. My mother never seemed embarrassed. She put aside the newspaper when I sat down beside her on the sofa. My father sat in his rocker also reading.

''You should listen more when we speak Icelandic, Kathryn,'' my mother said. ''You'd learn it if you'd listen and then make an effort to speak.'' I sighed because I knew I was going to get another lecture. My mother would talk and talk and then tell me a story to illustrate a point she was explaining, a point I never quite grasped.

''Now, you know we kiss all our relatives when we visit them. You're used to that,'' she said.

''Yes,'' I answered tentatively.

''Well, between visits there isn't much kissing among many of us Icelanders, but that doesn't mean we don't love each other. We have our customs. We aren't very outgoing in many ways — in fact that can be a problem. We often keep too many feelings inside — love, anger, even joy. Now when Mr. Fisher kissed Mrs. Fisher, he was expressing his love. But people don't have to be outwardly affectionate to feel love. Your dad and I love our children, but we don't do much hugging and kissing.''

''Is that why the Dolans kiss Monica before bedtime,'' I asked, thinking of the last time I had stayed overnight with my friend. ''Because they're Irish?''

''That might have something to do with it. They're just more outgoing, but now let me tell you a story. This one is from the sagas.''

Mother went on to tell me about a time long ago when a brave man named Gunnar married a woman who had long beautiful hair. This woman was not only a poor manager of their household, she constantly tried to make trouble between her husband and his friends. She even had her servants steal provisions from their neighbors. Gunnar was so outraged when he realized she served stolen food to him and his guests that he slapped her on the face. She warned her husband she would pay him back for that. In time fortune went against Gunnar. Eventually he and his family were alone

when he was attacked by many men intent on killing him. He fought fiercely with his bow and arrows. The intruders were almost ready to retreat when the string on his bow broke. He knew it would be the end for him if he couldn't replace it. He asked his wife to give him two locks of her long thick hair to make a new string — but she refused — and reminded him of the time he had struck her.

My mother paused ominously.

''Did they get killed?'' I gasped.

''That was Gunnar's last day,'' she nodded. ''His wife had a miserable life after that.''

''How could she be so dumb?'' I bounced up and down on the sofa in great indignation. ''Why didn't she give him some hair?''

''She was selfish and prideful beyond all reason. This story helps to explain why Icelandic husbands and wives are considerate of each other.''

''Because otherwise they could get killed?'' I asked, wide-eyed.

''Who knows?'' said my mother. ''But they do know for sure that at all times they need each other's cooperation. You see, you're not used to grown-ups kissing each other, but you're also not used to grown-ups deliberately causing each other trouble. You've never seen them hitting each other.''

''Hitting!'' I was incredulous. I tried to imagine my father hitting my mother. I couldn't. But I ran to his chair and pulled the newspaper from his eyes.

''Daddy,'' I said, ''you wouldn't ever hit Mama, would you?''

''No siree,'' he said, trying to keep from smiling. ''In any fight I'd want her on my side for sure. But sometimes the same people who do the kissing do the hitting. You'd better marry an Icelander so you'll know what to expect,'' he took his half smile back behind his paper.

I decided to go to my room to finish my homework, relieved I didn't have to worry about marrying anyone yet.

Before I went to bed, I went back into the living room where my father still sat with his newspaper. ''Daddy, I don't think I'm ever going to learn Icelandic,'' I said. ''I can't even make those funny sounds you and Mama make.''

My father shook his head. ''Don't worry about that now,'' he said folding his paper. ''Look at this,'' he pointed to a front page picture of a fat faced man with a cigar in his mouth. ''This man learned only English, no other language. Now if you can do as well with English as Winston Churchill, your mother and I will be perfectly satisfied. And that will probably be good enough for heaven, too.''

My father almost laughed, but I didn't really know at what he was laughing.

ON PUGET SOUND

From the Memoirs of Dr. Valdimar J. Eylands

(Concluded)

Once I interrupted the good company of a farm couple I visited. I was on my way home from Blaine to Bellingham when I stopped at a farmhouse near the road to chat with an elderly couple who were very faithful members of my Blaine church. We sat in the front room and chatted after the inevitable cup of coffee. All of a sudden, two apparently well-fed mice came running out on the floor and started to play. No one present seemed to think this was anything unusual, but the farmer said, "Why are you coming NOW, you little devils?".

Sometimes they thought my preaching was too soft and sentimental. Once, after a service, my wife and I were invited to the home of one of our leading members for refreshments. The man of the house was known for his frank and sometimes rather crude expressions. He now started to tease me, as we sat around the coffee table, saying that my sermon had been soft-soap, and not much spice in it. "I want," he said, "to hear a strong, realistic sermon about hell and the devil." His wife, sitting opposite him, snapped "It would no doubt be very good for you to hear about that . . .".

A host of memories crowd me when I think back on those days. Some are sad or silly, humorous or solemn. Late one afternoon I was asked to come to Blaine in a hurry to settle a domestic quarrel. A couple were expressing their opinion of each other in such a loud voice that the neighbours feared they might lay hands on each other. I did not have much faith in my ability to settle a domestic fight of such intensity but, of course, I went over there. When I got to the house no one responded to my ringing or knocking, and so I walked in. There the couple sat, very shamefaced, as far from each other as the walls of the house allowed. They responded only reluctantly to my questions, but admitted that their honeymoon was over quite awhile ago, and that they did not get along too well. I sat with them for awhile, and said whatever I thought a minister should say under such circumstances, and had a closing devotion with them. They embraced, and said they would forgive each other and forget. Whether they did or for how long I do not know. I never heard of further trouble between them.

But this trip almost ended in a disaster for me. On the way home I stopped at the home of friends along the road, and the housewife gave me a tinful of eggs which I put on the back seat of the car. But on the way I lost control of the car on an ice-covered bend on the road, and landed in the ditch upside down, the eggs, meanwhile, coming over me like a shower. I was thrown into the roof of the car with considerable force and sustained a back injury which I had to have treated for many months. The car was also damaged. But that which I remember most clearly from the whole episode was the expression on the face of my wife when I entered the house. I had left home for this trip dressed in a neat, dark suit, and wearing an overcoat of a similar color. What the good wife saw when I entered that night was certainly not a very neat looking husband but one all torn and bespattered from head to foot, looking pale as a ghost. Remembering the errand on which I was, she drew her own conclusions immediately from the evidence and exclaimed, "What is this man? Did you, the minister, get into a fight?"

About this time a law was enacted by the United States Congress granting all senior citizens, above a certain age, a small annual pension. But only citizens were eligible. In the Icelandic community there were a number of persons who had lived in the country a number of years, but never bothered about naturalization. Hearing about this pension, many of those persons became, all of a sudden, ardent American patriots, and wanted to study for the naturalization examination which was held periodically at the county seat. I remember particularly one elderly man who up to now never wanted to admit that he was or ever would be anything but a Skagfirdingur (a member of a district in Iceland by that name). Now he came to me and wanted instruction for citizenship. He had been in the country full forty years, but had refused even to try to understand or speak English. It was, therefore, very difficult to make him understand, not to speak of expressing such terms as Executive, Legislative and Judicial which are essential and elementary in the study of the U.S. political structure. My friend simply could not say those words no matter how he screwed up his face and twisted his mouth. Both of us rather despaired of his performance in the examination which was just around the corner. On the night before this fearful test he came to me and asked me to explain to the examiner that he had sustained a stunning blow on the head by knocking it against a stone the day before when he was rounding up his cows in a field, with the tragic result that he could no longer remember anything. Fortunately for himself, but unfortunately for his story, he showed no evidence of the accident reported. But the examiner was a very kind and understanding man. On starting to examine my friend he realized that he was not exactly fluent in the language of his adopted land, and knowing that I had been helping some of the old-timers master the essentials of the U.S. government structure and history, he turned to me and asked, "Have you instructed this man?". I could honestly say, "Yes", and my candidate was passed, and thus became a U.S. pensioner during the remainder of his days.

One of the members of my church in Blaine was a Justice of the Peace, and as such, it was his duty to deal with traffic regulations and other minor offences. He took his duties very seriously, and yet his justice was sometimes blended with humor. He was a very strong Lutheran and made no secret of it. It was said that he had on his office desk a three-armed candle stick, and when he declared court in session he would light all three candles to signify that his judgment was rendered in the name of the Triune God. It was also reported that he had a pair of field glasses on his desk and that before pronouncing his judgments he would pick up these glasses and look at the accused through the wrong end, thus making the person appear at a great distance. This was to indicate a completely impersonal judgment, based solely on the law.

One day an old Icelander was brought to this court. He was one of those old-timers who would not admit that he had ever left Iceland or that there was another language than Icelandic. This man was accused of driving into a main highway, disregarding a large Stop sign at the intersection. The judge put on his glasses, consulted his big law book and then, looking sternly at the accused, said, "I sentence you to take lessons in English, until you can read and understand the word Stop". Thus the case was dismissed.

Every year there was a festive gathering held at the Peace Arch near Blaine which was attended by people from all the neighbouring settlements in Vancouver, Point Roberts, Bellingham and Seattle. This meeting was usually held on or near the 17th of June. Distinguished speakers were imported to add attraction. I remember names like Margret J. Benedictsson, the early Women's Liberation advocate, Bardi Skulason, a noted criminal lawyer from Portland, Oregon, Dr. Richard Beck, well-known professor from Grand Forks, North Dakota, Halfdan Thorlaksson, comptroller of the Hudson's Bay Company in Van-

couver, and the well-known Winnipeg Icelanders, Dr. Sigurdur Jul. Johannesson, and the Rev. Dr. B. B. Jonsson.

I was usually a member of the committee preparing for these Peace Arch meetings, and it often became my lot to meet and entertain these visiting speakers. This always included a boat trip on Puget Sound, or a trip up to Mt. Baker and the scenic wonderland of its environment. The visitors from the prairies were particularly impressed with the mountain and coastal scenery.

It was in connection with one of those Blaine Summer Festivals that I became personally acquainted with Dr. B. B. Jonsson, Pastor of the First Lutheran Church in Winnipeg, and Ingiridur, his wife. Some months after his return home he wrote me one of the most surprising letters that I ever received. He wanted to know whether I would consider coming to Winnipeg, and working with him as an assistant pastor. Dr. Jonsson was, at this time, approaching the age of three score and ten, and his health was failing. He had been the pastor of this large city church for almost twenty years. He had also been the president of the Icelandic Synod for a number of years and the editor of its official publication, the *Sameiningin*. He was considered an outstanding intellectual and an eloquent and influential preacher. The First Lutheran Church in Winnipeg was the leading church among the Icelanders in the western world, and was considered a sort of a cathedral of the denomination in Canada. I was, at this time, aware of the fact that some of the pastors of the Synod were lifting their longing eyes toward Winnipeg: some of these had a host of friends in the congregation, others had long since attained prominence in other congregations of the Synod. None of those men would, of course, consider becoming assistants to Dr. Jonsson; indeed, such a position might not be advantageous if and when the congregation faced an election of a pastor. I was, of course, impressed with the confidence this distinguished pastor placed in me by this request. I also thought of the benefits a young pastor might derive from being associated with a pastor of Dr. Jonsson's stature. At this initial approach I did not commit myself one way or another, but told him I certainly would consider the matter if there should be any further developments along this line. We kept on corresponding about the matter for a couple of years. The First Lutheran Church did not feel that they could afford an assistant, unless Dr. Jonsson turned over a considerable amount of his salary, but this he could not do.

In the course of time the Selkirk Lutheran Church became vacant, and this resulted in the congregations in Selkirk and Winnipeg issuing me a joint call. Under the terms of this call I was the pastor of the Selkirk congregation with residence in that city, but was to assist at the First Lutheran in Winnipeg by preaching there twice a month, and taking care of the work among the young people, visitations, etc. I realized that there was no future for me as pastor on the Pacific Coast. My family was growing in numbers and needs, but my income was not increasing at all. This joint call from Manitoba was not attractive at all, and it involved considerable risk. The First Lutheran had so adjusted her sails in the terms of this joint call, that she could throw me off the boat at any time after one year. Evidently they did not want to tie themselves to a long time contract in case their situation should change. After considerable correspondence, I decided to go to Manitoba and serve the congregations in Selkirk and Winnipeg for a period of three months. This would be a trial period for all concerned at the close of which a final decision would be made.

AN EXCERPT FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THORDUR "TOM" LAXDAL

edited by LaDonna Breidfjord Backmeyer

(Concluded)

How clearly I remember our approach to the St. Lawrence, the green banks and small towns and villages on each side of us as we steamed upriver on a beautiful morning. We landed at Montreal and spent one night there before boarding a train that would take us west to Winnipeg. In Winnipeg we had friends and relatives, people who spoke our own language. How happy we were! We spent three or four days in that city resting up after our long and tiring journey; then, once again, we set forth by train to cover the remaining four hundred miles of our trip. Father met us in Wadena, Saskatchewan, and we thought at that time that all of our troubles were over. This was the new country, but we all had trust and hope in our father as he had always provided so well for us.

After arriving in Wadena we were taken to the home of an Icelandic family, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Vatnsdal, the owners of a lumber yard in which my father had worked. These people, friends of my father's, provided a lovely dinner for us, after which we said goodbye and left to cover the final twenty miles of our journey to the new family home. Father's first cousin, Louis (Lulli) Laxdal, my mother's nephew, Skuli Jonsson, and a young fellow of eighteen years, Bjarni Thorlacius (who later married my sister, Jona), had also come to Wadena to meet us. Father drove a spring-fitted Democrat, a sort of two-seated wagon, and each of the other men drove a wagon pulled by a team of horses. The road was poor, mostly prairie trails, and our progress was slow as the road wound in and out among the sloughs and poplar groves. It took us all day to go the twenty miles to Dad's homestead. However, one of the outfits, the wagon that carried Skuli, Jona, and Oli, did not make it, so those three had to spend the night with some Indians. As we had been told in Iceland that Indians killed white men on sight, this was no picnic for any of the three, but by the next morning their wagon approached our new home. I don't think that any of us slept much that first night as, except for Mother and Dad, we had no beds, but we were glad that this was the end of our journey.

Dad's homestead was very poor farming land, mostly sloughs and bush, with only fifteen acres of cultivated land. He had built a log house on the place, but had not had time to plaster or chink the cabin. One could see out between the logs, and the wind and the rain blew directly through the gaps. To come to this house was a drastic change, mostly for our mother, and although she never did complain, we often saw tears in her eyes.

Our new home was located ten miles from the nearest village of Leslie, two miles from our nearest neighbors, the Stefanson family, and five miles from the nearest school, located at Kristnes. The first years on that homestead were pretty rough because we had no money. However, some friends of Dad's gave us two cows, and others donated a dozen chickens. We lived mostly on milk, eggs, potatoes, wild geese, ducks, prairie chicken, partridge and rabbit. The rabbits, ducks and geese were plentiful, so Oli and I quickly became good shots. Hunting certainly was a cheap way for one to eat. Nevertheless, one still had some expense. Since a box of twenty Dominion shotgun shells sold for

sixty-five cents, Mother would sell her homemade butter for twenty cents a pound and her eggs for fifteen to twenty cents a dozen, thus allowing us to buy a box of twenty shells now and again. We were very careful with these shells, and we never did shoot at ducks unless we could line up two or three. We seldom missed. There was no other way to get along; most of our neighbors, too, had very little.

I remember well the first money that Oli and I made. We were snaring gophers, which is done by making a running noose on a string or twine, waiting till the gopher sticks his head out of his hole, then pulling the string. On this particular day we saw two men driving a buggy and a team of horses approaching along the trail which passed in front of our house. The men stopped and spoke to us in English, and although we did not understand a word, we did catch the name of the town that was located to the east of Leslie, Foam Lake. We assumed they were asking for directions, and because there was a fork in the trail, one leading to Leslie and the other to Foam Lake, we jumped into the back of the buggy and motioned them to go on. After arriving at the fork we pointed to the road they should take. The men gave us twenty-five cents each, which made us very proud. We hurried home and gave our earnings to Mother. Later in the summer we went to a school picnic at Kristnes. We bought a ten-cent bag of peanuts and ten cents worth of striped candy, a treat for the whole family. Mother added thirty-five cents to the thirty cents we had left over, and that paid for another box of shells.

In the fall of 1909, when I was nearing my sixteenth birthday, my father got me a job with a neighboring couple, Laki and Ingibjorg Bjornson. This was a fine couple, nice and kind folks, and I learned a great deal from them. Laki was a steam engineer and he hired out to run a threshing machine, a Case twenty-five horsepower steamer. Whereas most farmers in those days used oxen, Laki farmed with horses. He taught me how to drive horses, and one day he put me to work cutting hay with an old team. One of the horses of this team had stiff back legs, causing him to fall down if urged to back up, but I wasn't told this. One day the horse did fall, landing on the mower pole and breaking it. I became frightened, but Laki didn't scold me. He just said that the old horse was stiff, and that he should have warned me of this. I worked for the Bjornsons for two months and received fifteen dollars in cash, which I gave to my dad, and a two-year-old heifer that later became a good cow. These were the first wages I had ever earned; the first to be earned by any member of my family. The heifer was the first farm animal that I had ever owned.

On January 1st, 1910, I obtained a job at a store in Leslie, owned by another Icelander, S. B. D. Stephanson. Although my English hadn't improved too much, I didn't have much trouble as Leslie was in the center of an Icelandic community. I lived with Stefan and Inga Stephanson, the owners of the store, a good and kind couple who helped me to get along with people. There was one time, though, that I did get into difficulty with a big, old, burly Irishman named Bill Ireland. Stefan and the other clerk had left to have supper and I was alone in the store. Bill came in and gave me his order for supplies, and one of the items he wanted was sugar. I knew there were three kinds of sugar: lump, brown, and granulated, so I asked him which kind he wanted. Bill replied in his rough and booming voice: "I want white sugar." I asked again, "What kind?" Then he really blew up. He called me a dumb Icelander and said that I didn't know anything. I was scared, but fortunately Stefan came back just then and he told Bill a thing or two. This calmed Bill down and the incident was over. I worked for the Stephanson store for eight months, was paid fifteen dollars a month with room and board, and was speaking English quite well by the time I left the job. For that I can thank another Irishman, Bill Whiteside.

Although he had spent six months in jail for horse stealing, Bill Whiteside had a heart of gold. He would come to the store, talk to me and correct my pronunciation. He was a very good friend, and once in a while he would give me a dollar. Bill was clever and witty. He owned a livery barn in Leslie and kept several teams of drivers for hire. He also owned a fast pony, and because I did have experience in riding the Icelandic horses, he let me ride this pony, allowing me to become a rather good jockey. Bill was a trader in general. He was an agent for a machine company, and he did quite a bit of horse trading on the side. Although his horses always did look fine, there was always something wrong with them. They were run-aways, or balky, or wild. As a rule, Bill got the best of every deal.

Speaking of Bill Whiteside reminds me of another character that I came across while working for the Stephansons. There was a tract of land in the Leslie area that was owned by some wealthy men in England. Although this tract, about two or three sections, was managed by an Australian by the name of Holman James, Holman's knowledge of farming was nil. He had been a bull driver while living in Australia, and had become the world's best whip cracker. Holman had a trunk full of from ten to fifty foot long whips and had performed on stage for a number of years. During that period of time in which I worked at the store I was able to watch this man use his whip to cut a cigar into three pieces while the cigar was held in an assistant's mouth. He could also use his whip to trigger an assistant's pistol, or to cut a match in half. Holman was a rather simple man, although he was educated in England and did have an English accent.

One day while I was working in the store, Stefan made note of the fact that my clothes were getting quite worn and that they were too small. He then offered to order a suit of clothes for me at the wholesale price of ten dollars. When the new clothes came, I wanted to go home to show the suit to my parents. It was ten miles to our home, so the next Sunday, about May 15th, I left Leslie all dressed up and riding a bicycle. The roads were rough, and after five or six miles of difficult riding I accepted a ride with a neighbor named Jacob Norman. All of a sudden Jake stopped the buggy as we saw what looked like a black cat with two white stripes down his back. Jake said it would be nice to catch that cat, so I got out of the buggy and ran after the animal as fast as I could. The cat stopped when I got too close, lifted his bushy tail and sprayed my new suit with a terrible smell. I had never seen a skunk before as there are no skunks in Iceland. My parents thought this a very unfair joke for Jake to play on anyone, and they told him what they thought as everyone was sure that the suit was ruined. Jake apologized for his prank, and when I returned to Leslie that evening everyone wanted to know who had killed the skunk. I took the new suit of clothes to my friend, Dr. Julius, to ask him if he had anything in his drugstore that would kill the smell. He gave me essence of peppermint and told me to sprinkle it on the clothes, then to put them into a clean bag and to bury the bag in the ground. Five days later I dug the clothes up and the smell had disappeared. I never did try to catch a skunk again!

I left the Stephanson home in the fall of 1910, worked on the farm at home doing plowing and haying for a while, then went to work for the threshing crew that worked for Gisli Bildfell. Gisli owned his own threshing outfit, and I was to be a straw

monkey on this crew. A straw monkey stood on the rack that was fed by the blower of the threshing machine, forked the straw off this rack and pitched it to the engine where it was burned. The burning straw produced the steam pressure that kept the engine going. This was not a hard job, but because we sometimes worked from fourteen to sixteen hours a day, I was usually very tired by the time the working hours were over. At first I slept in the haystacks, but later I found that if I were to allow the rack to overfill with straw, the straw would run over the sides of the rack so that the fireman and I could spread some of it beneath the wagon, thus providing us with a soft and sheltered bed. This arrangement gave us some good sleep until the weather turned cold. Then we took to sleeping in the granaries, the sheds, or the chicken coops, the latter resulting with many specks upon our blankets. I was small for my age, sixteen years, and this entire experience hardened me up a bit. We rose at 5:30 a.m. to feed and harness the horses, had breakfast, which in some places was very good and in others was not so good, worked all day, had supper at 8 or 9 o'clock at night, then went to bed. We began working on September tenth, threshing from the stooks until the snow was too deep, then threshing from the stacks. I worked until Christmas and earned $128.00. My pay was one dollar a day.

On January 1, 1911, I went to live with, and work for, Mr. and Mrs. B. Jassonson, friends of my parents and one of the first four families to settle in the Foam Lake area. These people settled at that location in 1892, and by the time I went to work for them they were considered well off financially. Besides helping with the family chores, my duty was to drive the two children, a boy and a girl, to school. I, too, went to school during the three months of each of the two winters that I spent with the Jassonsons; the only formal schooling that I was to have. Being the oldest boy in my family, I had to earn money. However, I always did try to read and to learn as much as I could outside of school.

The teacher at our small school during that time was a fine gentleman who had come from Ontario and had taken a homestead near Kristnes. He was a well educated man and very strict. Most of the students at the school were Icelandic, though a few were Swedish and a few were English. The Icelandic students were not allowed to speak their mother tongue inside the school grounds, nor were they allowed to read that language. One day the teacher caught me reading a paper that he thought was Icelandic. It was actually a Swedish newspaper that had been used to wrap a lunch belonging to one of the other pupils. The teacher made me stay after school, which meant that I had to walk the two miles home, but when he found out what the situation had really been, he apologized. While staying at the Jassonson home my wages were fifteen dollars a month, about five cents an hour, plus board.

My father had always been in business in the old country. He had never been a farmer, so he found the changes in the new land more difficult than most. In the spring of 1911 my family moved to the homestead of Lui Laxdal. Lui had moved to the town of Kandahar and had gone into the lumber business. At the time of his move he offered the use of his buildings, which were much better than ours, to my parents. In addition to giving the family better living conditions, this change in location put them three miles closer to the school at Kristnes, thus allowing my younger brothers and sisters to go to school. However, since we kept our cattle on the home place, and since someone had to care for these animals, I was left behind.

We bought a team of oxen, Swen and Dell, during that spring of 1911. Swen was part Holstein, fast and always thin. He had been used previously with a horse and he was "wind broke". Swen also had a bad bowel condition, and if we made him trot he would cough and throw a green stream twelve to fourteen feet back. It paid to always be on guard for this. Dell was a Hereford. He weighed 2,200 pounds, was very strong, though terribly slow. When driving these two animals together one had to keep tapping Dell on the tail with a whip. He always arrived in town about eighteen inches behind Swen, but he did get there.

In the fall of 1912 I filed on my own homestead, one that my dad had made an application for prior to my coming to Canada. I was not quite eighteen years old at the time of my filing, but the clerk in the government office at Sheho, Saskatchewan, was not too strict on age, not as long as he received the ten dollar filing fee. My mother's nephew, Skuli Jonsson, was well acquainted with the clerk, so he offered to drive me to Sheho, about twenty miles away. Skuli and I left from the Jassonson home, where he was staying, on a cold September morning. He was driving a fine team of drivers and we were both well dressed. I wore a big fur coat and high heeled shoes, the latter to make me look, at least, somewhat taller. I was still quite small for my age. After we arrived at the Government Land Office, Skuli told the clerk our business. The clerk took a good look at me and asked Skuli if I was eighteen years old. Skuli lied and confirmed that I was, the application was filled in, and I signed it, but not without fear. However, no questions were asked, and by the time the paper was signed I had a homestead situated on section 15-32-12, west of the 2nd meridian! We drove back to the Jassonson's feeling very pleased with ourselves, and by 1913 I had made the required improvements on my land, those set by the Canadian government. At that time I received the title to this property.

CANADA ICELAND FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP OFFERED

We invite students of Icelandic or part-Icelandic descent to apply for the following scholarships which are offered or processed by The Canada Iceland Foundation.

Thorvaldson Scholarship — One scholarship of $500.00 to be awarded in 1982. This annual scholarship will be awarded to a student in university or proceeding into a university in Canada or the United States. The recipient must demonstrate financial need and high scholastic ability.

Einar Pall and Ingibjorg Jonsson Memorial Scholarship — One scholarship of $500.00 to be awarded in 1982. Award to be determined by academic standing and leadership qualities. To be offered to a high school graduate proceeding to a Canadian university or the University of Iceland.

The Canada Iceland Foundation Scholarship — One scholarship of $500.00 to be awarded in 1982. Award to be determined by academic standing and leadership qualities. To be offered to a university student studying toward a degree in any Canadian university.

Students wishing to apply are asked to submit applications with supporting documents before September 15, 1982. Information and application forms are available by telephoning 475-8064 or by contacting:

Canada Iceland Foundation
c/o M. Westdal, Secretary
40 Garnet Bay
Winnipeg, Man. R3T 0L6

THE RESTORATION OF THE STEPHANSSON HOUSE

Provincial Historic Resource

Jane McCracken, Research Officer

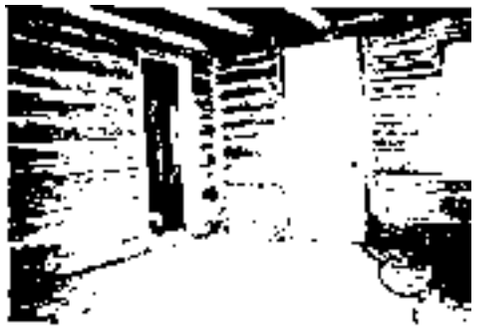
Stephansson House. New siding and roof.

The home of Stephan G. Stephansson was designated a Provincial Historic site by the Government of Alberta in 1976 because of Stephansson's stature as possibly the foremost Icelandic poet since the thirteenth century. His move to the Alberta Territory in 1889 freed Stephansson of the intra-community friction between the Icelandic Cultural Society and the Icelandic Lutheran Church and this freedom is reflected in the volume of poetry which Stephansson produced while he lived in the small Icelandic settlement centered around Markerville, Alberta. Recognition by Icelanders in North America and at home was not necessarily followed by recognition by the majority of Canadians. It was not until 1953 that the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada erected a cairn to him in the community park at Markerville and, following the formation of Historic Sites Service, Alberta Culture in 1973, the home was designated a historic site of provincial importance.

By the time the government purchased the 4.21 acres of land around the Poet's home from the Leif Eiriksson club of Calgary in 1975, the log and framed house had fallen into a bad state of disrepair. An overburden of earth which had built up over the years above the rock foundation had caused extensive damage to the exterior walls. A hole in the roof allowed moisture to penetrate and completely rot one of the interior log walls and the upholstered furniture, bed mattresses and linens had become the homes of field mice and other nocturnal animals.

Prior to undertaking any restoration work on the Stephansson House, a historian on staff at Historic Sites Services was assigned in January 1978 to research the life and times of Stephansson. During my first research trip to Winnipeg in the spring of 1979 I discovered four volumes of *Bref og Ritgerdir* which I requested two members of the Stephan G. Stephansson Homestead Restoration Committee to translate. Although primarily interested in Stephansson and his thought, I was also looking for information concerning the house. A few tantalizing hints about his home were uncovered but, unfortunately, there was not enough detail to determine the actual stages of construction.

This had to be uncovered by the Restoration section of Historic Sites which, in the summer of 1979, sent a crew to document the exterior and interior of the house. As-found photographs showing construction details outside such as the roofline, the decorative mouldings, the corners etc. were catalogued for future reference. Once as-found photographs were taken of the interior, the furniture was removed to a warehouse for storage and eventual restoration. Now, the restoration technicians were able to begin the careful stripping of wall and floor coverings on the interior in order to a learn the details of the stages of construction.



"Big Room"
After wall linoleum removed, but before floor linoleum removed.

Work began in the front room, otherwise known to the Stephansson family as the "big room". The flower-printed linoleum which Stephansson had tacked to his hewn log walls was carefully removed. After experimentation, it was decided that despite its brittleness, the linoleum could be saved for re-use. It was then rubbed with linseed oil and stored with the furniture. Layers of linoleum in the "big room", the study and the kitchen were all removed. Because of its badly worn condition, the linoleum was not saved. However, each layer in each room was photo documented and samples for type and pattern taken. When all the linoleum was removed, the technicians found old newspapers and periodicals, some in Icelandic and some in English, which Stephansson had used to insulate his floors. This remarkable archival find was removed, catalogued and saved for future reference.

Information gleaned through the probing and stripping of selected interior surface coverings enabled Historic Sites to determine four or five different building phases. The original log house Stephansson erected soon after his arrival in Alberta was a hewn poplar log home 4.6 meters by 4.9 meters. Today, this area comprises the rear of the house which was Stephansson's mother's bedroom and the craft room. A few years later, perhaps in 1893 when Gestur was born, Stephansson built a large addition onto his home. A double row of unpeeled spruce logs added the overall height of the original house and a large unpeeled log addition comprising the "big room", the study, bedroom and the upstairs was built onto the south wall. At the same time, a crude poplar summer kitchen was built onto the east side of the house. Because the logs were unpeeled and not chinked on the exterior but hewn flat on the interior, Historic Sites believes that Stephansson immediately clad his home with bevelled tongue and groove siding.

The house remained solely a log structure for a few years. But, by the turn of the century with the arrival of the last of his eight children, Stephansson once again undertook major changes to his home. He dismantled the log summer kitchen and framed in another kitchen. He added a badly needed bedroom at the front of the house just south of the kitchen, added the verandah and framed in the bay window in his study. Historic Sites believes that the house was at this stage when the well-known photograph of the house was taken in August 1907. But, Stephansson was not yet finished. At an undertermined date, he dismantled the entire roofing system on the east side of the house, raised the height of the kitchen and pantry and sloped the new roof, which covered the entire east side, all in one direction. The results of his years of labour and renovations was a picturesque Victorian cottage which belied its basic log structure.

Selected stripping of the interior gave Historic Sites valuable information about the stages of construction. It also revealed many structural weaknesses. If the house was to be open to the public, stabilization of the structure in its existing form would not have been adequate. The decision was then made to begin a full restoration of the

house in the summer of 1980. In order to replace the rotted sill logs, the overburden of earth around the foundation was removed, revealing for the first time Stephansson's original rock foundation. Next, the old siding was removed up to the window frames. Because of the condition of the sill logs, the house could not be jacked up. The restoration team decided to build forms for footings and a partial basement which was then used to support the raising of the structure. Log craftsmen removed the rotted logs and replaced them with new timbers cut and joined exactly the same as the originals. As in most restorations, a choice between historical accuracy and practicality had to be made. To lower the house onto only a rock foundation would have meant an eventual repetition of the problem of rotted sill logs. To retain historical "flavour", Historic Sites cemented Stephansson's rocks on top of the footings and then lowered the house onto the rocks. A basement was poured in the same area Stephansson had dug his cellar and in February of this year a modern gas furnace replaced Stephansson's furnace he had purchased from the Eaton's catalogue in 1919.

Due to inclement weather, the preceding work was not finished until late summer. The winter of 1980 saw a new cedar shingle roof put on the house and, because of the deterioration of the old siding, new siding specially milled to match the historic fabic was added. Windows and doors were sealed and active work at the site ceased for a year.

This does not mean that Historic Sites Service was idle. The Stephansson House Planning Team, formed in 1979 and consisting of the historian, planner, facility director, restorationist and graphic designer, began planning the development of the Stephansson House Provincial Historic Site. Considerations concerning historic landscaping, the size, shape and location of the parking lot, the type, size and text for the outdoor displays, the guides' accommodation, the colour of the exterior of the house, the curtain fabrics and the patterns for the linoleum, to name but a few topics, have all been discussed. All decisions made by the Planning Team attempted to reflect historical accuracy. This applies in particular to the historic site, its furnishings and the dooryard. Stephansson had outlined his property with poplar, spruce and caragana and this area is being left, with no construction of modern facilities allowed. The parking log, public washrooms, outdoor displays and administration building are grouped together on the riverbench field west of the house and beyond the trees so that they are not visible from the house.

In January of this year, restoration of the interior of the house began. All the tongue and groove wall panelling, which Stephansson had used extensively throughout his house, was removed and put aside for reinstallation. The walls and ceilings were then cleaned and the bark on the logs removed so that a wood preservative could be applied to the logs. The next step was to insulate the exterior walls. While not historically correct, for Stephansson did not insulate his home, insulation was installed to maintain effective climate control, as well as to prevent heat loss. Once the panelling was replaced, this, of course, was not noticeable. Electrical wiring was another accommodation which had to be made. Stephansson never had the modern convenience but Historic Site has wired the house for easy maintenance. All outlets are hidden from view. A security telephone, not to be confused with Stephansson's telephone next to the front door, was installed upstairs.

There is still much to be done before the site opens to the public. The wall panelling has to be cleaned and painted or stained. Window and door frames have to be restored, installed and painted and floor coverings have to be installed. Historic Sites is attempting to replicate historic patterns on the linoleum by silk-screening. To our knowledge, no other agency has done this and it will be a matter of time before it is known how well this process withstands visitor traffic.

The Stephan G. Stephansson Homestead Restoration Committee, which has been a great help to Historic Sites the past three years, has co-operated with us in a number of ways. The gift of money which was given in 1975 by the Icelandic Farmers' Union has been held since then in trust by the Committee. Last spring, it was decided to use the funds towards the restoration of the furniture. We have been lucky, for Historic Sites has most of the original furnishings which were donated by the Poet's daughter, Roas Benediktson. They were, though, dirty and in some cases badly damaged. And a number of items known to be in the house in 1927, the date to which we are restoring the house, were missing. Under the guidance of Historic Sites, the Provincial Museum of Alberta has restored the furniture to a used but not badly worn condition and has purchased those artifacts that were missing.

We have been fortunate, too, in receiving the co-operation of all Icelanders. A call for books to copy the Stephansson library housed at the University of Manitoba has resulted in several large donations from various clubs and smaller donations from individuals. A koffort, needed for the kitchen, has been donated by the Farmers' Union and an Icelandic costume, identical to Helga's, has been made by the Icelandic National League in Reykjavik. Without the co-operation and enthusiasm of Icelanders in Canada and at home in Iceland the complete furnishing of the house would not have been possible and, therefore, the quality of our interpretive program would have suffered.

The Stephansson House Provincial Historic site opens to the public 12 June, 1982, and is open seven days a week from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. until the Labour Day weekend. Interpreters will give a guided tour through the house and there is no charge for this. Official opening ceremonies will be held at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday 7 August. Because of last minute arrangements for the ceremonies, we are asking that visitors not arrive at the site before 1:30 p.m. But everyone is welcome and it is hoped that we will have a large crowd for the opening of one of Alberta's most significant historic sites.

FANTASTY

by Holmfridur Danielson

Oh, the wonderful madness of youth!
The loving, the longing, the planning;
The yearning, the crying, the soaring
Of the soul in its prison.

Oh, happiness, heavenly pure, —
To be living and doing and daring!
Waiting and hoping, — yes knowing
That dreams do come true!

Oh, divine and delicious joy
Of dreaming, — of blissfully floating,
On delicate fabrics of fancy
Through fairy dells onward.

Then the fearful and fantastic grip
Of fetters that, binding and bruising,
Hinder our steps, ever holding
The soul from its freedom.

Ah, the torture, the terrible pain
Of curbed fires burning and raging;
Of groping in chaos and searching
Through Infinite Worlds of Mind!

A YOUNG PIONEER

by **Arnetta Hanson Moncrief**

In 1881 young Vigfus Hannesson (later changed to Hanson) and his older brother, Hannes, came from Iceland with other settlers, most of whom went to Gimli. Vigfus and his brother decided to seek their fortune in Winnipeg, where they obtained work unloading lumber off the Lake Winnipeg boats. This was hard work — and often dangerous — owing to slush and slippery ice at the landings. But the boys had great determination, their avowed purpose being to earn enough money to send for their parents, Snaebjorn and Solveig, and the rest of their family to come to Canada. They stinted on their food. After a time Vigfus, a growing boy, became too ill to work. However, he recovered, and soon afterwards found a job with the C.P.R. hotel in the city. His function was to meet the passengers from the East, inducing them to come to the hotel.

Carrying a lantern, he would greet the passengers: "This way, follow me to the C.P.R. hotel." Then he led the way for those who would 'follow' him to the hotel.

In those days some of the English-speaking citizens showed their contempt for newcomers who spoke a foreign tongue by playing mean tricks on them. One older worker at the hotel picked on Vigfus and once threw his only cap into a swiftly running drainage ditch in which it disappeared. When the manager found out, he made this man pay for a new cap for the boy. After this the man ignored Vigfus.

His next venture was to work for the Canadian Pacific Railway, now being extended across the prairies and through the Rockies. Many tragic events befell the work crews, one being an epidemic of typhoid fever. Many died and were buried in the snowbanks along the right-of-way. Vigfus decided to leave the camp on foot to go farther east where there was work being done on a snow avalanche. Along the way he encountered robbers on horseback, who, after discovering he had only a small coin on him, felt sorry for him and gave him 25 cents, a considerable sum in those days.

Vigfus carried on with his work on the railway and became a brakeman on the trains. Later he gave up his job and his ambition of becoming a conductor. He then went to Seattle where there was more employment. During his first night in a hotel there, he had a vision or a dream, seeming to see the murder of a young woman. The next morning he told the desk clerk what he had dreamt. The man exclaimed: "This is amazing! Everything you have narrated happened in that room a year ago!" Incidentally, the murderer was caught. Vigfus was psychic; he sometimes foretold important events.

Two cities of Canada, Calgary and Edmonton, were in their embryonic beginnings. Vigfus, having saved a considerable sum of money, bought a small property in one of these cities. Later he sold it at a profit.

At this time conditions were difficult in Iceland; earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, inclement weather, and famine. As a result Vigfus' parents, Snaebjorn and Solveig, who had been rather prosperous farm-folk, had become almost destitute. The young brothers in Canada sent them their fare. The family then left their farm, Hrisum in Helgafjall's parish, to migrate to Canada. Later they moved to Dakota Territory where they established their home.

Vigfus married a talented young woman, Margret Rose Jonasson, whose parents were pioneers in the Gimli district. She was an artist and her paintings sold well. Vigfus proudly displayed one of them in the living room. Their first home was a log cabin built by an earlier settler in Cavalier County. Later they built a comfortable two-storey house in Pembina county. Their five children grew up in North Dakota and became worthy citizens.

Vigfus had a well-stocked library including the Icelandic Classics. Every day he read for the family gathered in the large kitchen. He read good literature in English such as 'Ivanhoe'. Snaebjorn and Solveig enjoyed reading poetry, which was often memorized by the children. They cut pictures from newspapers of many great poets featured there, glued them on stiff backing, framed them and displayed them around the house. Just looking at these pictures often got the family, and visitors as well, launched into spirited discussions regarding poetry.

Hospitality was a way of life. Visits of kin and friends — some of them being childhood associates — were looked forward to and enjoyed with little feasts of Icelandic delicacies, resulting in relaxed comradeship.

There were joys and sorrows. One joyous memory was the house-warming party given for Snaebjorn and Solveig when they moved into their new house. They were presented with a beautiful Chippendale mahogany grandfather clock. Every eighth day Vigfus would ceremoniously pull the weight of this elegant time-piece, and it would sound the hours and half-hours with its melodious chimes heard all over the house. One tragedy was the accident that caused the death of Vigfus' youngest brother, Oliver. He was thrown from a mower and trampled to death by the horses.

This pioneer who came with his dreams, energy and aspirations to Canada and later to the U.S.A. did his faithful share in the creation of the history of our countries. He lived a good productive life, loved his country, his family, rejoiced in the successes of his children and grandchildren. Having served in the Northwest Rebellion, he carried himself with a smartly erect military bearing.

In his early seventies he developed a fatal illness. When all hope had faded, he braced himself to take the long trip to Philadelphia to consult with his son, a medical doctor. The morning he was about to leave his chronological clock stopped. His life flickered away as does the last light of evening. Thus ended the life of this man, whose faith and determination enabled him to surmount the many obstacles that came his way. His cheerful disposition and sense of humour held him up in all his struggles. His buoyant spirit shone around him making the path easier for others.

THE EMILIA PALMASON STUDENT AID FUND

(Formerly the Pjetur Palmason Family Memorial Scholarship)

Two bursaries in the amount of $500.00 each are to be awarded. The recipients must be of Icelandic descent, good moral character, college calibre and primarily in need of help to continue their studies at High School, College or University level. The recipients will be asked to sign a pledge that "somewhere along the highway of life they will try to provide comparable help to another needy student."

Students applying for these bursaries are asked to submit applications with supporting documents by June 30, 1982. Information and application forms may be obtained by telephoning 475-8064 or by contacting:

CANADA ICELAND FOUNDATION
c/o Mrs. M. Westdal, Secretary
40 Garnet Bay
Winnipeg, Man. R3T 0L6

HECLA ISLAND PROVINCIAL PARK

The 125 miles of highway between Winnipeg and Hecla Island start out through flat wheat fields, which gradually give way to a mixed forest of poplar and spruce and eventually to a strange and fascinating countryside of bog and marsh. Shining patches of water flank the road as it approaches the causeway leading from the mainland to the island. This is interlake country (between Lakes Winnipeg and Manitoba) and it surprises the prairie traveller by glimpses of the huge, ocean-like stretches of Lake Winnipeg. In fact, brochures describe Hecla as a ''marine park''. On the way, the traveller can leave the main road and detour into towns such as Gimli and Riverton where harbours full of fishing boats give a seaside feeling on this huge freshwater lake.

And as you drive across the causeway that links the mainland with Hecla Island, the jewel of Lake Winnipeg, it is easy to see why the Icelandic settlers of 100 years ago ended their search for a new home here.

Hecla, with wildlife to rival almost any other part of the province, and a history as interesting as its scenery, is one of Manitoba's newest provincial parks. It is also one of the smallest. Only 18 miles (29 km) long and six miles (10 km) wide, it is now one of the finest tourist centres in the province with a golf course that is among the best in the country, a harbour with potential to handle a small fleet, and an excellent lodge (Gull Harbour resort), which has an indoor pool, a sauna, an exercise room, a children's game room and pool tables.

But in its early days Hecla was a grim place, and the stories of how the Icelanders exchanged poverty on their own island for hardship on a far and distant one ranks with the most outstanding pioneering exploits ever told. Volcanic devastation sent them sailing west, driven by **Utthra,** as they called the spirit of adventure that motivated them. The same spirit had driven their Viking cousins in a similar direction hundreds of years before.

Ethnic communities

The Icelanders dreamed of setting up a colony governed by their own laws, culture and language, where they could find the moderate prosperity denied them at home. The first group settled along the western shores of Lake Winnipeg where the land was fertile and the waters full of fish. With the cold weather approaching they hurriedly built log cabins and set up tents in which they endured a winter of indescribable savagery. Most of them survived the weather and a deadly outbreak of scurvy, but it required great courage.

The following year another large group of nearly 800 people left Iceland, but many fell victim to crowded steamer conditions and it was only a fraction of that number who eventually reached Hecla.

Legend has it that their intended destination was even farther north, but that a cow fell overboard and swam ashore on the island, and the settlers took that as an omen and stayed there.

But just as the community began to take shape and life started to improve, disaster struck in the shape of a smallpox outbreak that plagued the entire Icelandic settlement. Hundreds died, more than a third of the population of Hecla Island was struck down, an eight-month quarantine was imposed, and when it ended only 115 people remained.

The next year many of their crops failed and it was only their traditional skills as fishermen that saved the islanders from extinction. Further hardships took their toll and the dream of establishing a New Iceland fell into ruin as many of the settlers moved on.

Now a park

But on the mainland, blond, blue-eyed children are a reminder of their heritage and at Gimli, heart of the community the annual festival, Islendingadagurinn, celebrates their origins.

When Hecla became a provincial park in 1969 its wildlife was put under protection and animals now roam freely in the forests of spruce, aspen, birch and poplar. In the early morning on the southern marshes, moose and deer feed at the water's edge while bald and golden eagles circle overhead. The island is also a major stop on the migratory flight path of Canada geese, snow geese and a dozen varieties of ducks. Native birds like the American bittern, night heron, redtailed hawk and great grey owl make it a bird-watcher's paradise. It is not the same kind of haven as the early Icelanders envisioned; but as a resort area it is first-class.

For more information contact Travel Manitoba, Department 1135, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0V8.

Courtesy of Winnipeg's Downtown and Suburban

IN THE NEWS

"SCANDINAVIA TODAY," A NATIONWIDE CELEBRATION OF NORDIC CULTURE, TO PREMIER IN FALL 1982

January 25, 1982 — SCANDINAVIA TODAY, an American celebration honoring the cultural and intellectual life of modern Scandinavia, will commence simultaneously in New York, Washington, D.C., Minneapolis/St. Paul, Chicago, Los Angeles and Seattle in the fall of 1982 and continue through mid-1983. Designed to heighten American awareness of the arts and culture of Denmark, Finland, Iceland , Norway and Sweden SCANDINAVIA TODAY will be the most extensive panoramic display of modern culture ever to take place in the United States. The program will include exhibitions of painting, textiles, design, graphics and photography; lectures and panel discussions by Scandinavian and American authorities; performing arts events by orchestras and musical ensembles; opera, ballet, theatre; and television and radio programs.

SCANDINAVIA TODAY will open in Washington, D.C. on September 8, 1982, in Minneapolis on September 10, 1982, and in New York City on September 13, 1982. In each of these cities a keynote address will be given by Vigdis Finnbogadottir, the President of Iceland, on behalf of all the Nordic countries.

Courtesy of The American-Scandinavia Foundation

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