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Helga Egilsdóttir, mother of Sigtryggur Jónasson (Father of New Iceland)

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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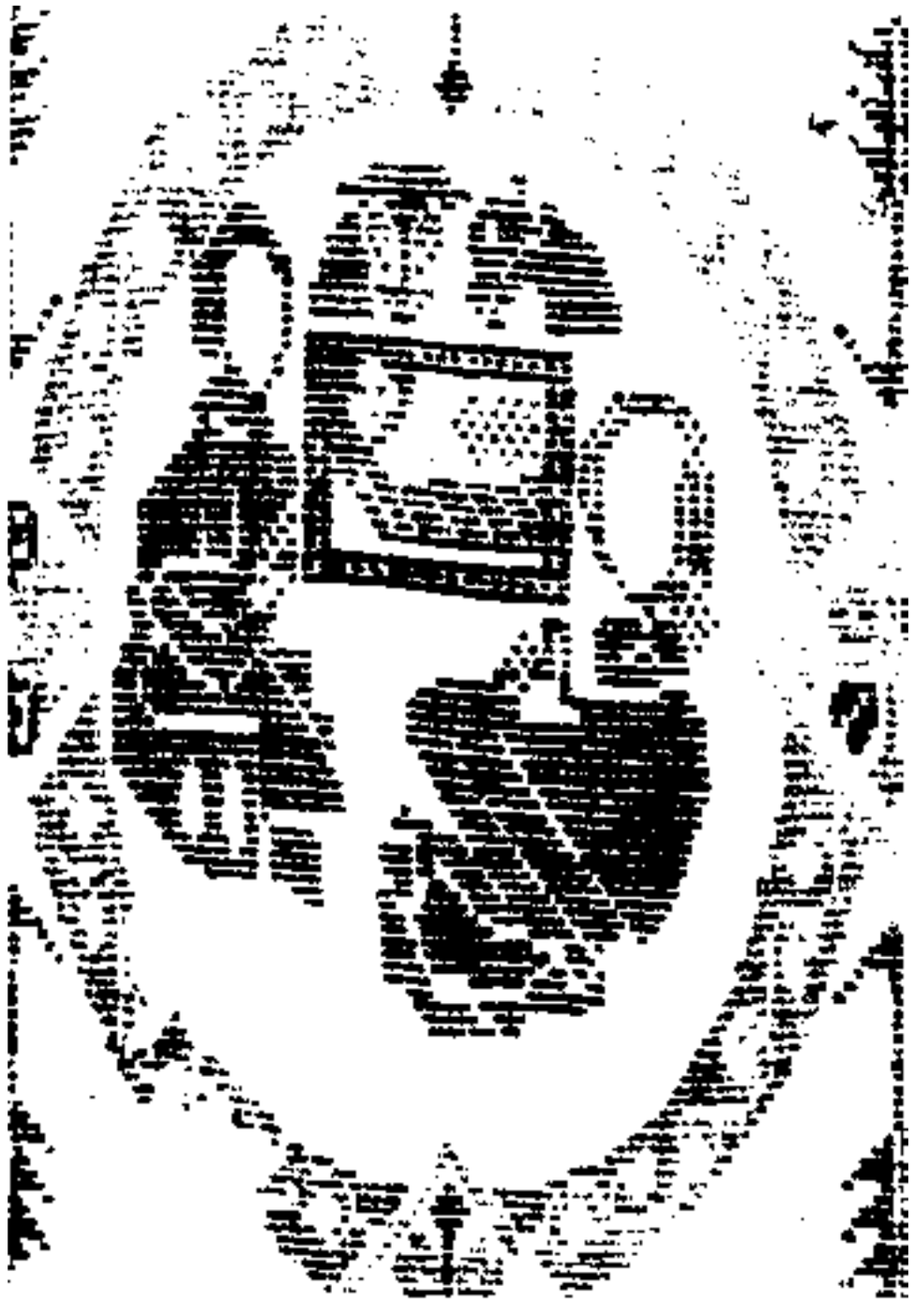


Embroidered bed-hanging depicting 13 biblical scenes. Nativity. c. 17th century National Museum of Iceland.

(photo from Íslenzk Myndlist Í 1100 Ár, Listáhatioí Reykjavik 1974)

GUEST EDITORIAL

HOLY NIGHTS

by Stefan Jonasson

"Each night a child is born is a holy night."
— Sophia Lyon Fahs (1876-1978)

It was a chilly October day when we embarked upon our final journey on the road to parenthood. The sun had not yet risen above the horizon, although the sky was aglow with the flicker of stars. Not one star, but a multitude of stars: each a reminder of the awesome vastness of creation. No grand star foretold the coming event. No angel voices sang praises from above. No shepherds tended their flocks nearby and no wise men came.

We climbed the stairway leading to the front door of the brown brick hospital, full of anticipation and fear and hope. When we first arrived there were no rooms available, so we registered and waited patiently in the lobby. After a while, we were led to a small, darkened room which would be home for the coming day. Although it was no stable, it was far from a comfortable place, for it somehow seemed a little strange and frightening. Cindy and I talked some, but mostly we just held each other's hand and strolled through the bright corridors of the hospital. The unfolding events seemed to be, at the same time, both wholly natural and near miraculous. Some fourteen hours passed before a nurse handed me our newborn daughter, Brandis. She was crying and I cried too. She felt cold; I felt very warm.

The first snow of the season was falling softly to the ground as I left the hospital with a view to spreading the good news among family and friends. As I walked through the October snow, and as I watched my daughter's tiny brown eyes follow the lights on the Christmas tree some weeks later, I came to understand and share in one of the deeper meanings of Christmas. For the first time I can remember, I clearly saw that the miracle of new life was not the private joy of some Mary and Joseph in a far off time and distant place. Rather, the birth of a child is a truly sacred event for all people in all times and all places. Each night a child is born is a holy night.

Last year, the spirit of Christmas came to me in the opening days of October. And that is the way it should be. The spirit of Christmas is not meant to be restricted to a few dark days in December. It cannot be contained within the calendar of the church. It cannot be packaged by retail merchants. It cannot be dispensed by advertiser or the news media. The spirit of Christmas grows out of the ordinary experiences of common women and men. When we touch others, or are touched ourselves, we encounter Christmas.

I remember, as a small boy, going with my parents to the local fair. I was somewhat unusual for a child of eight or so, for I did not much enjoy the many rides that lined both sides of the midway. I would marvel at the many exhibits, or wander by the animal pens, but rides were for other people. I was captivated, though, by the numerous games of chance that were scattered throughout the fairgrounds. My favourite was a game of pure chance where each contestant placed their bet on a particular colour. A ball was then tossed into a ring of coloured squares to determine the winning colour. I was too young to play the midway games, but on one occasion I was able to coax my mother into playing. Round after round she placed a quarter into his pouch. We left for home, having won nothing. Halfway down the midway, my mother looked down at me and saw the disappointment in the eyes of a child who did not understand. She turned and walked back to the booth where she played one more quarter. This time baby blue won, and my mother handed me a pink plush dog. It was not an especially valuable gift, but it was the right gift at the right time.

Gold and frankincense and myrrh were great gifts when the three wise men presented them to the baby Jesus. And today, also, the merchants would have us modern day wise folk present great gifts of gold and silver and electronics to our children. But to a small boy, a modest plush dog can be the greatest gift of all, because it is given with love. The value is in the giving, not in the gift. Each night a gift is freely given and gratefully received is a holy night.

I cannot remember why we had quarreled: it must have involved something quite unimportant. But I do remember that the silence echoed off the walls. I well remember the silence of that day because it was Christmas Eve and the quiet seemed unnatural. We found ourselves alone in each other's company. The lights on the tree cast a warm enough glow to melt the coldest of hearts. "I'm sorry," I murmured. "I love you," came the reply.

Our human relationships are full of quarrels and reconciliations, discord and harmony, separation and connectedness. Every day forgiveness is sought and granted. Somewhere this Christmas two brothers will speak to each other for the first time in many years. Somewhere this festive season a runaway daughter will wire her parents to tell them that she is coming home. Somewhere, as the New Year approaches, quarreling neighbours will lift a glass together to drink to each other's health. Each night the estranged are reconciled is a holy night.

I remember well the Christmas celebrations of my childhood. On Christmas Eve the children would retreat upstairs to wait for Santa's visit. Before long, we would hear Santa bellow in a loud voice, quite reminiscent of my father's voice, and then leave through the front door. We would hear the jingle of bells as he left. That was our cue to descend the stairs to the living room, where we would find stockings and gifts. Dad would busy himself taking pictures and telling jokes. Neighbours would come and go through the evening. Year after year, the Christmas celebration unfolded as it should have. Then, when I was eighteen, my father died. Santa stopped coming the same year: it was a hard blow. But we still visit, in a way, through my memories. And in my mind's eye, he is always there when I need him. Each night a departed loved one is remembered is a holy night.

The meaning of Christmas is found in the common experiences of our day to day existence. That which is divine is rooted in our families, our relationships, our efforts, our trials, and our memories. Jesus exemplified holiness, to be sure. But others too have blessed the world. Our own century has seen Albert Schweitzer and Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa. The holy of all ages have been ordinary people who have performed extraordinary deeds. In every person there is the spark of divinity. The holy grows out of the ordinary, the sacred is found in the profane. May all our nights forever be holy nights.

Greetings
from
A Friend

FEATURE

THE ICELANDERS

by Marian McKenna Ph.D.

PART IV
THE WINNIPEG ICELANDERS

Shanty Town (The Flats) Circa 1875-80, on Hudson Bay Forts East of Main Street from Broadway towards Water Street.

Courtesy of Manitoba Archives, New Iceland Collection

In Winnipeg, the earliest settlement of Icelanders was concentrated east of Main Street between Broadway and Water Street — an area then known as the Hudson's Bay Flats. Looking west from the former Broadway Bridge at Broadway, one could command a full view of the Icelandic shanty town, which by 1880 sprawled across the Flats. Nearby were the Hudson's Bay warehouses, once used to supply "the Honourable Company's far flung trading empire" in the Northwest. Here the poorest of the newly arrived immigrants squatted in lean-to's, tents, or crude wooden shacks that dotted the unoccupied lots on the outskirts of the settled area. Some of this land was in the Hudson's Bay Reserves. Fridrik Sigurbjornsson is credited with having built the first solid Icelandic house in 1876 in the colony on the Flats, near the Hudson's Bay warehouse No. 6.[83]

Upwards of fifty Icelanders remained behind in the city when the main party of emigrants left for the reserve in 1875, and by 1879 the Icelandic population in Winnipeg had increased to 500 or 600.[84] Unlike their countrymen on the reserve, they received no form of federal financial assistance to tide them over the first winter. Those who failed to settle on the reserve, according to the law, forfeited not only the loans made available to rural settlers, but the cost of their transportation from Quebec City to Winnipeg. However, the urban immigrants neither expected nor wanted any financial help. Their immediate reason for remaining in Winnipeg was to earn money to send to relatives on the reserve, or to set aside funds for starting a farm or small business. It was not uncommon in those days for families to remain on the land while the men went to the city to become wage earners.[85] Women were accustomed to doing farm chores. Some of the men from the Icelandic reserve worked permanently or sporadically in Winnipeg after 1875 and some of the women went into domestic service there. Additional employment was available in transporting goods and supplies to the reserve from Winnipeg.

In her novel *The Viking Heart,* which gives a factual account of the Icelandic immigration into Manitoba, Laura Goodman Salverson writes about new immigrants who arrived in Winnipeg in the spring, and the nature of their problems and difficulties.[86] Drifting into the city in small groups or as individuals, often directly from the Old Country, they were given no such support as the first of their countrymen on the reserve had received. There was, of course, a Labour Bureau in the city, along with a number of private employment agencies, but the Icelanders were a fiercely individualistic people who searched for their own employment, sometimes aided by fellow Icelanders, even if they had themselves only been in the city for a year or two. Somehow, and one wonders exactly how, they managed to survive.

There was, as a result, much suffering in the city, as well as on the reserve. Sickness was prevalent, owing to poor housing, bad drainage, impure water, insufficient food and clothing. The extremes of climate — intense cold in winter and the heat of summer — to which they were unaccustomed, added to their misery. In many cases both parents were forced to go out working in order to keep themselves and their families from becoming a charge on the city administration. But it was virtually impossible for most families to afford enough food or fuel, as wages at that time were pitifully low, and the food available in the city was inferior to that in the country. A shack could be rented for as little as $4.00 a month, but a man's entire income usually averaged less than $16.00 a month, and $6.00 or $8.00 of that went for fuel in the winter, leaving only $7.00 or $8.00 a month for food and everything else.[87]

For urban immigrants, the most immediate problem was to find some form of inexpensive housing or shelter for themselves and their families. The men were at first employed doing manual labor, such as sawing and cording wood, digging sewers, loading firewood and cargo on river steamers, and working on railroad construction. In Winnipeg some Icelanders were employed at the Brown and Rutherford lumber mill, the source for much of the wood used to build the Icelandic Shanty Town on the Hudson's Bay Flats. A few men found work as clerks in stores, or began to make use of their skills as carpenters.[88] Icelandic contractors built the North End Y.M.C.A., several of the city's business blocks, and some of its public schools. The Icelanders were the first ethnic group in Winnipeg to have their own carpenter's union.

As early as 1879 Arni Frederickson

had a store and shoe repair shop at 403½ Main Street. He was elected a city alderman in 1892. But most of the newly arrived immigrants could find only back-breaking manual labor, e.g. grading for the laying of railroad track, or digging basements. About twenty-five Icelandic workers were employed by the city to dig the storm cellars being installed along Main Street after the turn of the century. This work was made more hazardous by the danger of cave-ins; in 1893 the newspapers reported a cave-in that killed two Icelandic workers. This type of employment at first was the only kind available for immigrants with no marketable skills and no knowledge of the English language. Worse yet, these jobs were only temporary.

The plight of the individual Icelandic worker in the city is revealed through the experience of Arinbjorn S. Bardal, (1866-) who emigrated to Winnipeg in 1886 with twelve dollars in his pocket, but by 1912 he owned one of the best equipped livery stables in the city, and with the profits from this and other enterprises, he established an up-to-date funeral home which is still operated as a family business. Not all Icelanders were as upwardly mobile in a single generation as Bardal, but all faced the same ordeal initially.

As a boy in his native Svartárkot in Bardardal, he led a carefree existence, chasing his brothers through the lava fields to the south of their farm. When he was five, the family moved to Eyjafjord, where for a time his father prospered with the hardy strain of sheep he brought to that area and used for breeding stock. In 1874, when he was eight, they moved again, this time to Vididal, but the move proved to be a mistake, for although the farm was much larger, the land was poor. There was not much opportunity for Arinbjorn to get an education; at the age of twelve he had to take on the full responsibility for tending the flocks the year round. He claims that had it not been for the Lutheran Church, which required religious training in preparation for confirmation, most of the rural Icelandic children would have had no education at all. During a long illness a local pastor taught Arinbjorn to read and write.[89]

High losses of livestock in 1877 caused food shortages in his village. His brother Páll emigrated that summer to America. The following two winters were even longer and colder. Finally, in January of 1886, after his mother died, Arinbjorn decided to leave Iceland for Canada. His father was by then too poor to pay his fare, so the young man borrowed the money from a friend. When he arrived in Winnipeg with his sister and her family, his brother Páll took them into his home and Arinbjorn began to search for work.

Like most newly arrived immigrants, over the next few years he worked at a variety of jobs for short periods of time. Working for the railroad, laying track, he managed to pay back the money borrowed in Iceland. He dug sewers in Winnipeg for seventy-five cents a day, and unloaded coal in Fort William for twenty-five cents an hour. Unlike many of his fellow Icelanders, he had no liking for construction work. He spent a half a day "carrying a mortar hat" on the site of the new post office then being built at Main and McDermot, but when he met his foreman on the fourth floor at noon, and was asked how he liked his new job, he replied: "Like this." and dropped the mortar hat down into the basement. He went home and never collected his half day's pay.[90]

Bardal worked as a farm hand, a lumberjack, a section hand for the Northern Pacific Railway at St. Norbert's, and spent brief periods haying near Lundar, and threshing near Gladstone, Manitoba. His future began to brighten the winter he began driving a wagon for B. S. Lindal, who had a wood and coal hauling business in Winnipeg. After a short interval the Unitarian minister, Bjorn Petursson and his wife loaned him $200 to buy out Mr. Lindal and he found himself in the transport business, making a good living. When the income from this began to fall off he entered the taxicab business, operating a livery stable, and with the profits from this and the sale of the transport business, he made a modest beginning operating a funeral parlour. "I sold home-made coffins for ten dollars, and factory-made from twenty to thirty-five dollars. There was very little embalming done in those days."[91]

The Bardal Funeral Home was financed through its early years by the profits from the taxi business, which expanded under his shrewd management and efficient operation. An example of this was his collaboration with another businessman, George Gardiner. The latter owned a black hearse while Bardal had a team of black horses, and so for years Bardal's horses drew the Gardiner hearse for both funeral homes.[92] By virtue of hard work, ingenuity and good fortune, A. S. Bardal saw his diversified business enterprises grow and prosper. Eventually he gave up the taxi business to devote his full energies to the funeral parlour, the direction of which was later taken over by his son after his death.[93]

Magnus Arnason (1884-1953) emigrated to Winnipeg in 1911, somewhat later than Bardal, in search of employment. He was born in Reykjavik, orphaned as a young boy, and taken to Denmark with the poet Einar Benediktsson. There he learned Danish and the trade of a house painer. When he arrived in Winnipeg, he found work in mid-April digging cellars for houses. "That" he relates "was work that many here in Winnipeg avoided, for it was considered rather bad, and was therefore available."[94]

It was not long before he learned he could get better employment painting houses, something he had done for years in Denmark and Iceland. There was a great deal of building going on in Winnipeg at that time, but this work only lasted throughout the summer months. Around mid-November it turned so cold that he had to give up that work and try something else. "As matters stood," he states, "it would not do to give up working, for at that time wages were not so high that one could save much."[95]

With two other Icelanders, Filippus and Gudmundur Filippuson, he left Winnipeg and went to work for a railway company in the eastern forests of Ontario, in reply to an ad which read:

GOOD AXEMEN WANTED.
$50 A MONTH.

No consideration at all was given to the fact that they knew nothing about handling an ax. The railway paid their fare one way to the end of rail, and from there they walked the thirty miles to the hut that was to be their home for the next three months. They had to sign up to work at least three months and the company expected "fully experienced axemen" or else it reserved the right to withhold their pay. Brimming with youthful enthusiasm and strength, for they were accustomed to hard work, they felt fully qualified to take up this work.

However, the working conditions they encountered, as narrated by Arnason in his memoir, proved so cruel and

extreme that on the basis of his report alone they stretch the reader's credulity. However, all those who knew Arnason, a quiet, well-mannered man, not given to exaggeration, never doubted the truth of his account. Furthermore, these memoirs were written for himself and his family, and were never intended for publication. A fellow workman who had personal knowledge of the conditions Arnason described, testified that his account was authentic.[96]

Eventually the three men returned to Winnipeg, where Arnason resumed his trade as a house painter, but the triumvirate dispersed when Filippus left for San Francisco, and Gudmundur returned to Iceland. These memoirs by Arnason, when studied in the light of twentieth century working conditions among the unskilled and semi-skilled, are a remarkable document, revealing conditions as they existed before protective legislation and labor unions. They are an eloquent argument for the passage of this much-debated social legislation.

* * *

Part of the difficulty faced by the early Icelandic immigrants in the years 1880-1914 lay in the fact that Winnipeg was undergoing a period of expansion, rapid growth and prosperity. There was usually a surplus of unskilled workers, mostly immigrants to the city, during a time when foreigners constituted as much as thirty percent of the entire population. There was even a surplus of skills, such as that of harness makers, to the chagrin of men like Laura Goodman Salverson's father. Work had never been so scarce in Winnipeg in all its history as it was in the spring of 1912, the year after Arnason arrived. This was the assertion made by the head of the City Labour Bureau.[97] While admitting that the railroads had taken a great many men out of the city on extra gangs for construction projects, he denied the claim that there were enough jobs in the city for all able-bodied men who wanted to work.[98]

Icelanders coming to Winnipeg after 1890 were unaware that they were being propelled into a highly competitive labor market for which they had little to offer except brute strength. Advent to the city was for most of them the first opportunity to try their mettle in the outside world. In overwhelming numbers they were a rural people, accustomed to growing cattle and sheep, or engaging in deep sea fishing. Not only were they unfamiliar with grain farming, but with most forms of industrial life, mining and lumbering. Like Arnason and his companions, they either had to adapt to new work situations, or starve.

In her autobiographical account of the hardships faced by her family in early Winnipeg, the Icelandic-Canadian novelist Laura Goodman Salverson went to the heart of the problem, describing the frustration and disillusionment experienced by her father, a skilled harness maker who was forced to work for starvation wages in the shop of a heartless, tyrannical employer.

> It is not surprising therefore that when my father decided to come to Canada he should think of his skill as something on which he might rely to provide a decent living for himself and his children. It would have been surprising had he even dreamed that a good craftsman, despite a very decent education, could so effectively be reduced to the status and misery of a slave in the glorious country that ballyhooed its magnificent opportunities by way of press and prophet.[99]

The psychological effect that enforced poverty and insecurity had on every member of an immigrant family is

Antonius Eiriksson, wife Ingveldur, foster son Jon New Iceland Immigrants c. 1890
Courtesy of Manitoba Archives, New Iceland Collection

incalculable, but it requires no great effort of historical imagination to understand the sense of dismay they felt, or the sense of isolation and unfamiliarity which engulfed them. "Yes, Mama knew that it was hard to keep one's soul alive in this harsh country," Mrs. Salverson reports, ". . . and sometimes a note of bitterness, unmixed with accusation, colored her sentiments."[100] Her family was only one of thousands of disillusioned newcomers who learned when it was too late that they had been hoodwinked by ambitious immigration agents:

> Unfortunately for us, the zeal of the immigrant agents somewhat outstripped their veracity. The tales they told had less point in truth than fiction. But to my adventure-loving father, the glowing recital was a potent inspiration and the answer to all his boredom and perplexity. Why, if even one-tenth of the reports were true, a man could prosper in that far-off Dominion. And how good it would be to be done with carping criticism. . . .[101]

But after all, had not everything been cruelly bitter in the Old Country? They might have known that if the shores of Lake Winnipeg were no golden strand, neither were the streets of Winnipeg paved with gold. The Goodmans were only one of the countless number of immigrant families in turn-of-the-century Winnipeg who were wounded by failure. When Goodman could no longer bear the humiliation he was forced to endure in his work place he left, took his family south of the border, and tried to make a new beginning in Duluth. But he had no more success there than in Canada. His daughter writes:

> Well, back we went to Winnipeg, to a colourless existence bounded by narrow, enclosing walls; back to the drab streets with their ugly, unimaginative houses and the dreary procession of plodding humanity bent upon its furtive scramble for bread — back to a leaden backwash of life where the one touch of beauty was the remote, incorruptible sky. For the time being, Papa was beaten. . . . We settled down to the old penny-pinching grind, moderately convinced that Winnipeg would be our destined battle ground.[102]

Laura Salverson was only one of a number of sensitive first and second generation Icelandic writers or diarists to record "the starvation of the soul" not only for traditional native values, slowly eroded by the demands of adjusting to a new society, but for their inborn concept of beauty. A little known immigrant girl of twenty, who sailed away from her native land in a small steamer, and watched the snow-clad mountains disappear in the distance for the last time, recorded these impressions in her diary after her arrival in Winnipeg:

> The government of Canada had provided us Icelanders with an agent all the way from our starting point until we reached our destination, and every time he opened his mouth, he kept describing to us the beautiful scenery in and around Winnipeg. But when we got to the old immigration shed in the north part of the town [this was in the year 1887] it seemed to us that this agent had somehow misjudged our sense of beauty. If he saw beauty in the muddy streets, ditches and huts surrounding the immigration shed, all I can say is that his taste differed from ours considerably.[103]

As Mrs. Salverson herself concluded, a few were bound to lose out in the great battle for survival in the harsh new environment, but the greater number were destined to succeed. This was more true of Icelanders, perhaps, than of most other European groups entering Canada. A handful of enterprising men like Helgi Jonsson — "the gold baron" — grew rich during the boom of 1880-1882, years of frenetic land speculation, building, quick turnover, and

brisk sales of city lots. Nearly everyone who had a little cash to invest dabbled in real estate and prospered. The Icelanders, imbued with the cooperative spirit brought from their homeland, formed their own real estate consortium in November of 1881. The stock certificates which sold for $100 a share were printed in Icelandic. Unfortunately they went into the real estate market at the tail end of the boom, and in the depression that followed their company went into liquidation.[104]

Many others achieved a degree of success in small business, if only on a more modest scale. In 1879 Arni Frederickson opened a general store on Main Street, just north of City Hall. A year later, he sold his store at a profit and emigrated to North Dakota, only to return to Winnipeg and open another general store on Ross Avenue, which became one of the city's most successful retail establishments.[105]

As the decade of the 1880's advanced, the small settlement on the Flats began to spread northward to Notre Dame Avenue, east of Main Street, and into Point Douglas, in those years one of Winnipeg's oldest and most respectable neighborhoods. The city itself was growing fast. Main Street by then was a safe thoroughfare with the mud pits all filled in and good sidewalks running in all directions. There were a number of Icelandic boarding houses; one was located between the Grand Central Hotel and the Red River, just off Main Street. Another, on the corner of Main Street and Henry, was owned by Jon Thordarsson. It became a popular meeting place for Icelanders, while another center of social activity was the Corona Hotel.

As already noted, the first arrivals lived on the river flats, but soon the Icelanders were beginning to leave the Flats, although there were still several families living near the Bay warehouse.[106] Eventually they bought lots and began building in the area around William Avenue. The ones who were getting on in the city were to be found on streets like Ross, Alexander, and Logan. The tendency to cluster together in a compact ethnic colony was not so marked among Icelanders as it was among other immigrant groups. The North End had its pockets of Jews and Ukrainians, and before the 1930's these neighborhoods maintained a remarkable cohesiveness, but the Icelanders, relatively early in their history began to disperse to different parts of the city.

The Thorgeirssons, for instance, who lived at 590 Cathedral Avenue, saw north Winnipeg grow from a prairie pastureland into a solid middle class community.[107] In the early 1890's parts of the North End were a mass of sloughs and creek beds: in the spring the McGregor Ditch was a well known fishing spot. The Thorgeirsson house at 590 Cathedral Avenue was built in 1902, and for the next several decades neither the house nor the street changed much. In Thorgeirsson's day the surrounding area was all pasture land. The newer homes were being built around Arlington Street, and stretching along McPhillips. Thorgeirsson owned a herd of dairy cows and three hay racks which children chased after in an attempt to steal a ride. When he was not tending his dairy herd, J. W. worked for the city, collecting ashes and dumping them into the slough around the old General Hospital on William Avenue.[108]

But the real heart and center of Winnipeg's Icelandic population, which by 1890 numbered almost 3000, was Sargent Avenue. This thoroughfare ran like a spinal cord through their district, and was known to Icelander and non-

Icelander alike as "the Icelandic Main Street" or "Goolie Crescent."[109] The term "Goolie" is one of obscure origin. No one seems to know how it evolved or where it came from, but it is evidently one of those pejorative words like "Yid" or "Bohunk" which was applied to Icelandic newcomers, possibly meant to carry overtones of "ghoulish" but considered by everyone, including the Icelanders, to be a milder epithet than the more contemptuous "Pollack" or "Mick."

Sargent Avenue begins at Edmonton Street and stretches all the way to the International Airport. The bus route from the airport to the downtown core runs for most of the way along this famous artery. According to Vince Leah, a writer for the Winnipeg *Tribune*, one did not encounter many Icelandic homes in the old days until one reached McGee Street, the site of the Icelandic Good Templars Hall and Skuli Bjarnason's barber shop.[110] Walking downtown to the Bay or Eaton's through this neighborhood the pedestrian would pass at least two Icelandic churches, the offices of two Icelandic newspapers, and countless small stores and shops.

Two Icelanders named Fridfinnson and Gislason ran a billiard hall; Oscar Sigurdson had an electrician's shop; a Mr. Johannson had a shoemaker's shop in the shadow of the No. 10 Fire Station. Some of the other merchants along Sargent Avenue in the vicinity of Furby Street included Gunlaugur Johannsson, grocer, Olafur Thorgeirsson, who owned a book and print shop, and Mrs. Lily Halldorson, who had a barber shop. Within immigrant neighborhoods of that day, barber shops also served as community centers, and the areas in front of them at night often resembled a village square. An even greater diversification of trades was represented in Winnipeg as the Icelandic population increased.

Eventually, in the two decades following the First World War the city's growing Icelandic population began to spill over into the West End, which in the 1930's and 1940's stretched from Balmoral to Valour Road. In Principal Sparling School in the West End, half or more of the teachers were Icelanders. Not all the residents of the West End were Icelandic however; there were Irish, Scots and English living there, and some of their children attended the St. Edward School on the outer end of the district. In time, as the North End population began to spill over into other districts, a smattering of Ukrainians began to give this part of the city a more cosmopolitan character. But Winnipeg's West End was very much an Icelandic colony in those days. And it is said that the Chinese owner of the Wevel Cafe spoke English with an Icelandic accent![111]

The largest Icelandic population was concentrated in the West End in the 1930's when it seemed that every second boy was named Bjorn or Hjalmar. The falcon, an Icelandic symbol, was visible almost everywhere. The Falcon Skating Rink was on the corner of Sargent Avenue and Home. Many young Icelanders distinguished themselves as skilled hockey players. Children in the neighborhood were sent to buy bread at the Falcon bakery. The Falcon Athletic Club on Sargent Avenue, despite its name, turned out on closer examination to be a pool hall.[112]

The West End stretched as far as Omand's Creek and the city dump, two favorite playgrounds for neighborhood children. Icelandic names predominated on Toronto Street, Lipton, Ingersoll, Garfield, and the center of it all,

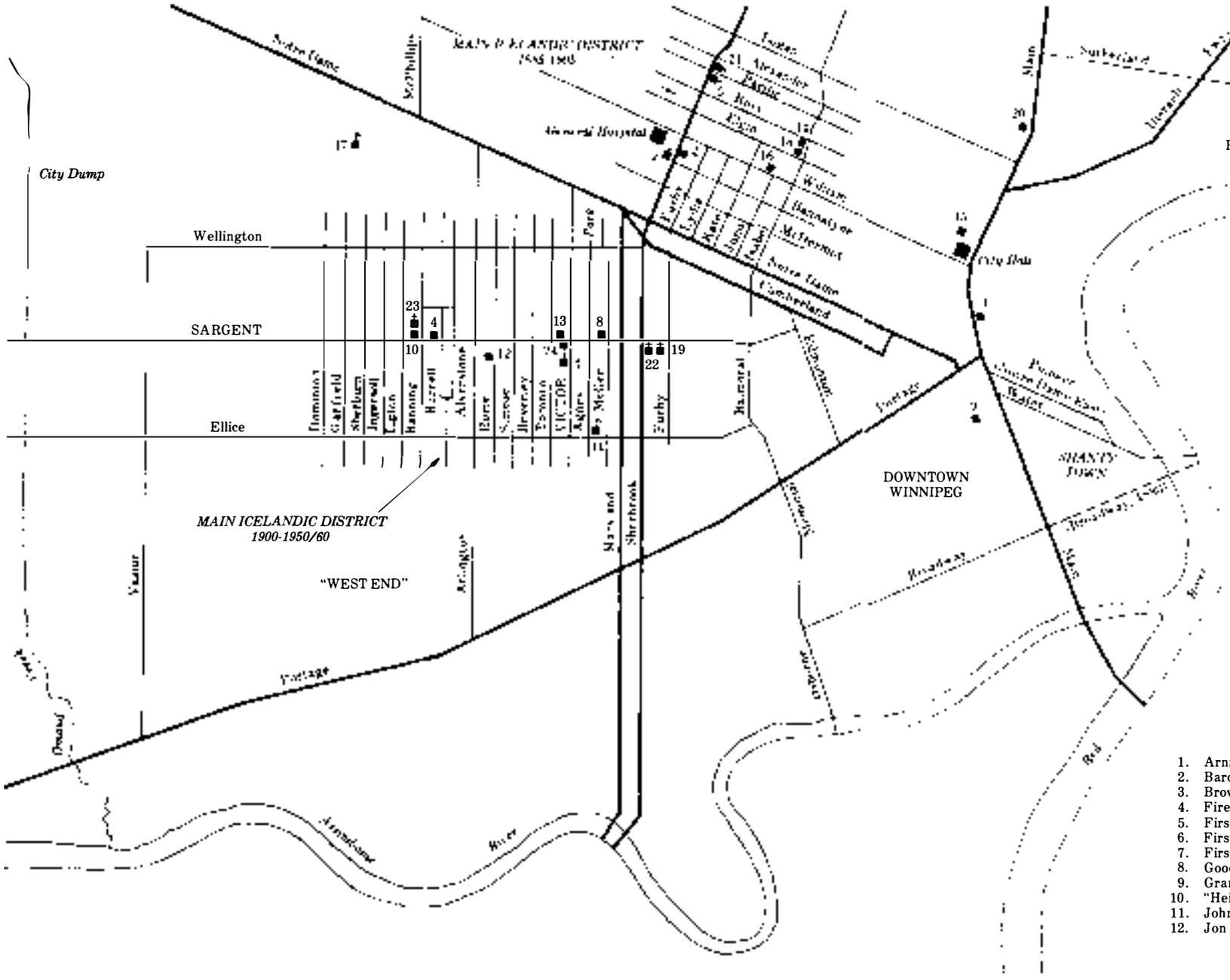
Victor, where the aristocracy of the community lived in what were then considered majestic homes, but what have since become modest middle class houses.[113] If a map were drawn plotting the boundaries of the Icelandic districts from the earliest arrivals in the 1870's and 1880's through the period of the more concentrated neighborhoods of the 1930's and 1940's, it would follow the artery of Sargent Avenue and its vicinity from Nena Street (re-named Sherbrook Avenue) west to Dominion. The epicenter of the Icelandic district was the intersection of Sargent Avenue and Victor Street, in much the same way that Portage Avenue and Main Street is the very heart of downtown Winnipeg.

The dispersal from the shanty town on the Flats to some of the city's better residential neighborhoods was gradual, and nearly all the individuals who formed this exodus have been lost to posterity. Not so some Icelanders like Gisli Olafson, for example, who emigrated to Winnipeg in 1886, after having tried prairie farming for three years with little success. He became one of the city's prosperous grain merchants and went into the construction business as well. By that time construction was practically dominated by Scandinavians. He built the Olafson Block on the corner of King and James Streets, and by 1895 was owner of one of the more impressive Victorian homes at 539 William Avenue, characterized by the domed tower which was then so popular.[114]

Icelanders contributed their share to the economic growth of the city and made their mark especially in the building trades, reaping substantial profits in the construction boom of the 1880's. The beginning of the drift to the West End can be traced from that decade, when the Icelandic Investment Company first began building on Nena Street, and continued to build in a westerly direction. The Icelanders bought or rented small frame houses, or lived with relatives. In the years after 1910 their children attended the John M. King School on Ellice Avenue, and a number of young girls worked as seamstresses in the Western King Clothing Factory.[115] In that pre-war era which now seems so remote, the streets of the West End resounded each morning with the clatter of horses' hoofs. His wagon brought the family milkman, vigorous, quick-stepping Oli Goodman, measuring out the quarts from his milk can top. Families were moved from one house to another by Strang's Transfer and its slow, creaking wagon, with the children trotting merrily along beside the horses. And the ice wagon in summer occasionally dropped slivers that were quickly recovered by delighted youngsters. Of course, there was also the rig of Joe the Baker, who stopped at every other house for coffee, and who, it was said, kept his books in Icelandic.[116]

* * *

The story of the foreign populations in Winnipeg that were neither English nor French must begin with the Icelanders. When, in 1975, they celebrated the centennial of their arrival in Manitoba and Winnipeg, they could point with pride to the fact that during the intervening one hundred years their experience in the city had formed an integral part of Winnipeg's colorful past. While it is true that in the beginning the Icelandic newcomers made only a modest contribution, what they had to offer, whether it was manual labor, some marketable skill, or the determination to adapt to new work skills, formed an essential component



THE ICELANDIC DISTRICTS OF WINNIPEG

North

Map courtesy of Eric Jonasson, 1987

MAP KEY

1. Arni Frederickson Store, 1879
2. Bardal Funeral Home
3. Brown and Rutherford
4. Fire Hall No. 10
5. First Lutheran Church, 1887-1904
6. First Lutheran Church, 1904-21
7. First Lutheran Church, since 1921
8. Good Templar's Hall
9. Grand Central Hotel
10. "Heimskringla" Offices
11. John M. King School
12. Jon Bjarnason Academy
13. "Logberg" Offices
14. North West Hall
15. Olafson Block
16. Olafson House
17. Principal Sparling School
18. Progressive Society Hall
19. Tabernacle Church, 1894-1914
20. Thordarson House
21. Unitarian Church, 1892-1904
22. Unitarian Church, 1904-21
23. Unitarian Church, since 1921
24. Wevel Cafe

in the economic life of this bustling mid-western city.

They were the first substantial group of émigres to come to Winnipeg from a stritly European background. Many of the first settlers poured their considerable energies into making a success of the colonizing venture on Lake Winnipeg, then known as New Iceland. But over time there was a marked out-migration from the rural to urban centers, notably Winnipeg. In accordance with prevaiing trends, the years 1940-1970 saw a dramatic population shift from rural to urban Icelandic settlements, so that by 1973 approximately 18,000 to 20,000 people of Icelandic descent were living in Winnipeg, which in terms of numerical strength alone, not to mention the dynamics of its intellectual and cultural institutions, had long since taken its place as the center of Icelanders in North America.[117]

NOTES

83. *The Icelandic-Canadian,* XXXIII, No. 4 (Summer, 1975), pictorial section, pp. 41 ff.
84. Editorial by W. Kristjanson, "The Winnipeg Centennial," *ibid.,* XXXIII, No. 3 (Spring, 1974), 7.
85. *Ibid.*
86. *The Viking Heart* (Toronto, 1975), pp. 108-112.
87. *Ibid.*
88. Kristjanson, "The Winnipeg Centennial," 7.
89. Lee Brandson, "Arinbjorn Sigurgeirsson Bardal," *The Icelandic-Canadian,* XXXII, No. 2 (Winter, 1973), 23.
90. *Ibid.,* p. 25. Among the papers of A. S. Bardal was found an autobiography, which deals mainly with his boyhood in Iceland and his struggles as a young man trying to earn a living in Canada. The original manuscript of this autobiography is in the State Library in Reykjavik.
91. *Ibid.,* p. 26.
92. *Ibid.*
93. *Ibid.*, p. 27. Bardal married for a second time in 1900, and fourteen children were born of this second marriage, of whom two died in infancy.
94. "A Memoir by Magnus Arnason, 1884-1953," translated by Sigurbjorg Stefansson, *The Icelandic-Canadian,* XLI, No. 2 (Winter, 1982), 14-27. See p. 14 for the quote.
95. *Ibid.*
96. *Ibid.*
97. Manitoba *Free Press,* May 9, 1912, 8.
98. *Ibid.*
99. *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter,* (Montreal, 1949), p. 79.
100. *Ibid.,* p. 63.
101. *Ibid.,* p. 99.
102. *Ibid.,* p. 213.
103. "Indo," "A Winnipeg Immigrant Girl 1887," *The Icelandic-Canadian,* XXXII, No. 4 (Summer, 1974), 26. The editor notes: "It is revealing no secret to state that "Indo" stands for Oddny."
104. Lindal, *Icelanders in Canada,* p. 163.
105. Arni 'Tailor' Anderson had a shop on Sargent Avenue, as did Mitchell Tailors on Portage Avenue. Carl B. Dahl, "A Boy's Winnipeg Decade, 1910-1920," *The Icelandic-Canadian,* XXXIX, No. 1 (Autumn, 1980), 12-13.
106. *The Viking Heart,* pp. 79-80.
107. "The Thorgeirson Family: A Page from the Past," *The Icelandic-Canadian,* XXXVII, No. 4 (Summer, 1979), 39-40.
108. *Ibid.*
109. Vince Leah, "Icelanders Gave Sargent Avenue character of its own," *The Icelandic Canadian,* XXIX, No. 4 (Summer, 1971), 15. Winnipeg-born John S. Matthiasson, an anthropologist who grew up in the Icelandic community, believes there is some connection between the term "Goolie" and the Icelandic lodges, Hecla and Skuld in the International Order of Good Templars. See "Icelandic Canadians in Central Canada: One Experiment in Multi-Culturalism," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology,* IV, No. 2 (Summer, 1974), 49-59.
110. *Ibid.*
111. John S. Matthiasson, "The West End of Winnipeg in the 1940's," *The Icelandic Canadian,* XXXV, No. 3 (Spring, 1977), 47.
112. "A Note on the Icelandic Population in Winnipeg's West End 40 Years Ago," *ibid.,* XXXII, No. 2 (Winter, 1974), 25.
113. Matthiasson, "The West End. . . ." 45.
114. R. R. Rosteki, "Some Old Winnipeg Buildings," in *Transactions* of the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, Series III, No. 29 (1972-3), 13.
115. Carl Bjarnason Dahl, "A Boy's Winnipeg Decade, 1910-1920," *The Icelandic Canadian,* XXXIX, No. 1 (Autumn, 1980), 12-13.
116. *Ibid.;* cf. Matthiasson, "The West End. . . ." 46.
117. Two major publications, an Icelandic language weekly and an English language quarterly *(Lögberg-Heimskringla* and *The Icelandic Canadian* respectively), had their offices in Winnipeg. The main office of the Icelandic National League, founded in 1919, with ten chapters in the United States and Canada, is also in Winnipeg.

THE ICELANDIC COLLECTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA — FIFTY YEARS

by Sigrid Johnson

Located on the top floor of the Elizabeth Dafoe Library in the Department of Archives and Special Collections is The Icelandic Collection of the University of Manitoba. This year it marks the Golden Anniversary of its establishment.

The nucleus of this collection was the Arnljotur Bjornsson Olson library of about 1,300 volumes, which was presented to the University of Manitoba by Mr. Olson, of Gimli, in May, 1936. When Mr. Olson as a young man came, an immigrant, to this country he did not bring much in the way of worldly goods with him, but he did bring a trunk of books. His vocation was farming, but he found time for reading, especially for reading of Norse literature. Through the years he added to his books and, as he added, his dream grew of a generation arising who would know and love this literature as he knew and loved it. Therefore the gift to the University, and the hope that a chair in Icelandic and Norse literature should some day be established. In the years that followed, several smaller bequests were received from the estates of members of the Icelandic community. The Icelandic Collection was doubled in size in September 1940, when the Jon Bjarnason Academy closed its doors, for its entire library was offered to the University of Manitoba. The library contained more than 1,500 books and periodicals.

The future of the Icelandic Collection was assured in 193 when the Icelandic Parliament passed an act by whose terms the University of Manitoba was to receive, free, one copy of every book, periodical and newspaper published in Iceland. The first shipment from an Icelandic printer arrived in 1940. Throughout the following decade, over twenty-five hundred volumes were received. This continued in varying degrees until 1978 when the Collection was officially redesignated as a selective depository; since that time it has received free a limited number of the more important publications to come out of Iceland each year. Meanwhile, the University of Manitoba Libraries, recognizing the Collection's value and research potential, assumed the responsibility for funding the Collection so that it might continue to receive most books, periodicals and newspapers published in Iceland annually.

In the summer of 1951, a magnificent collection of newspapers and periodicals was presented to the Icelandic Collection by Reverend Einar Sturlaugsson of Patreksfjordur, Iceland. There were approximately four thousand volumes of about 870 periodical titles printed between 1796 and 1950. These he had been collecting for years, having spent a considerable amount of his spare time at this activity, travelling widely and writing hundreds of letters in order to complete his sets. And rumour has it that certain issues are not

even held by libraries in Iceland.

Over the years, a great many generous gifts have been received from members of the Icelandic community; these are too numerous to list individually, but they have helped to make the Collection one of the best research libraries in the field of Icelandic studies. The Icelandic Collection now contains nearly 23,000 volumes and is the largest collection of Icelandic materials in Canada. It is the second largest such collection in North America, the largest being the Fiske Icelandic Collection at Cornell University.

Included in the Collection are books, periodicals, newspapers, government publications, sheet music (including the score for an entire symphony), and materials of an audio-visual (i.e., photographs, slides, tape recordings, phonograph records, and even a full-length motion picture), archival (i.e., manuscripts, personal papers, organizational records), and microform nature (i.e., microfilm and microfiche).

Icelandic is the primary language of the Collection. Selected items in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are included, as are translations from these languages into English. Geographically, the Collection covers Iceland, Scandinavia, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and the Arctic, and it acquires all available material by and about Icelanders in Canada and the United States. Material in all subject fields, with the exception of the pure sciences, is collected. There are no chronological limitations on the material included.

Among the prized possessions of the Collection are the personal libraries of two of the Icelandic Canadian community's foremost poets, Stephan G. Stephansson and Guttormur J. Guttormsson.

Although the Icelandic Collection exists primarily to serve the faculty and students of the University, in particular the department of Icelandic language and literature, it is also the major resource centre in Canada for scholars and researchers interested in Icelandic and Icelandic Canadian area studies. In addition, it serves the intellectual needs of the Icelandic community in Canada.

During the early years, the Collection was staffed by several curators fluent in the Icelandic language. These included Gudrun Erlendsdottir, Helga Palsdottir, Hjortur Palsson and Hrund Skulason. In addition, from the arrival of the first Icelandic books to the University in 1936 and until well into the 1940's Professor Skuli Johnson of the University's philosophy department gave liberally of his time to the cataloguing of the books and setting up of the original Icelandic Collection. Since 1975, the Collection has been staffed by a professional librarian, Sigrid Johnson. In 1980, a part-time sessional library assistant was added. This position is presently occupied by Kristrun Turner. Both present staff members are bilingual (i.e., English-Icelandic). In brief, the duties of the librarian include being the Collection's bibliographer, reference librarian, cataloguer, archivist, and public relations officer.

As for services offered by the Collection, first and foremost, the staff obtain and make available to faculty and students materials which support study and teaching in the department of Icelandic language and literature. As funding permits, materials are obtained and made available for other patrons of the Collection. Similarly, they provide reference service to, and do literature searches for, all users of the Collection. Frequently, the staff assists in the translation of Icelandic text. Materials from

the Collection are circulated via interlibrary loan throughout Canada and occasionally to the United States and even Europe. Barring any copyright restrictions, photocopying of materials which do not circulate, as well as simply photocopying in response to a telephone or mail request, is performed by the staff. It is possible to have copies made of most of the photographs and sound recordings held by the Collection. Furthermore, the librarian often acts as a consultant to other libraries that handle Icelandic materials and frequently provides evaluations of private Icelandic libraries and recommendations on the disposition thereof.

However, it is anticipated that a project for which the librarian has twice been awarded funding from the President's Academic Development Fund, but which is still in the early stages, will become one of the Collection's most valuable services. The project is titled "Iceland Diaspora", and it will be a database containing information on people of Icelandic origin in North America.

Initially, the database will contain such basic information on emigrants from Iceland to North America as year of emigration, place of origin in Iceland, destination in Canada or the United States, age, sex, marital status, occupation, places of residence in North America, and cross-references to other family members. It will also include references to published and original sources of further information.

Information placed in the database will be obtained from published sources (in the Icelandic language), including monographs (e.g., biographies), periodicals (e.g., almanacs), newspapers and censuses, and original sources, including ships' manifests and church records. The aim is to make more accessible to scholars and researchers the wealth of information the Collection contains on Icelanders in Canada and United States.

The small size of the Icelandic ethnic population, along with the detailed documentation available, makes such a project highly feasible. Information accessed through such a database will provide excellent case study material for scholars in the social sciences, e.g., geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, and historians.

The Collection is staffed Monday to Friday from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 1:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m., excluding holidays. Catalogued Icelandic materials are available during regular Elizabeth Dafoe Library hours. Anyone holding a valid University of Manitoba Libraries borrower's card is entitled to borrow materials from the Collection. The telephone number of the Icelandic Collection is (204) 474-6345. Whether a patron requires the answers to: the equivalent of "happy birthday" in Icelandic, cousin Birna's telephone number in Hafnarfjordur, where to purchase an Icelandic-English dictionary, a recipe for rullupylsa or a detailed plan for constructing a Viking ship; or materials for research papers on topics including migration patterns among Icelanders in Canada, the dating of the Icelandic family sagas, or the British occupation of Iceland during World War II, the Icelandic Collection has the resources to answer such questions and the staff to assist patrons in accessing the resources.

After fifty years, and at the centre of Icelandic settlements in Canada, Mr. Olson's trunk of books continues as the nucleus of the Icelandic Collection enabling it to preserve and reinforce the Icelandic cultural identity in the Canadian cultural mosaic.

May Morris, c. 1890. From a series of informal photographs taken of her in the garden in Hammersmith. *(photograph: William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London)*

In Memoriam . . .

by Gudrún Jónsdóttir

In the Sunday Times, 31 May 1981, Lesley Garner wrote about what he called a "Tiff by the Thames over decaying Morris shrine", the old Kelmscott House. According to Lesley Garner, this old house is almost beyond repair and members of the William Morris Society, who inherited it, cannot come to an agreement over ways and means to restore it. As a comparison, Lesley Garner points out that Kelmscott Manor, the last home of William Morris, has been restored by the architect Donald Insall.

Having read this and seen the picture of Kelmscott House, I closed my eyes for a moment and remembered back nearly sixty years in time. It was summer and must have been in either 1922 or 1923. Two foreign ladies came riding up the lane leading to the manse where I lived with my parents. This was nothing new. Sixty years ago there were no hotels in the Icelandic countryside and foreigners who then travelled by means of the Icelandic ponies as there were no motorcars --usually went to the nearest manse to ask for accommodation. Ministers, doctors and country judges were the only people likely to understand foreign languages and the ministers were the easiest to approach, the doctors being too busy and the country judges less hospitable. Most of the travellers I had seen, however, had been gentlemen and two ladies travelling alone were unusual.

The ladies were as unlike each other as any two people could be. One was rather small, slim and greyhaired. She changed for dinner into a skirt, jumper and cardigan, putting a row of shimmering yellowish-green beads around her throat. She talked quietly, did not laugh, but smiled softly, sat and painted flowers in watercolours and wrote down things in her notebook. Her name was Miss May Morris. The other lady was tall and rather fat with short, black hair that curled around her chubby face. She did not change for dinner except for putting on a different kind of trousers. She talked rather loudly and laughed often. Her name was Miss Lobb.

The ladies stayed at the manse for a few days and my father talked with them in a foreign language. I could hear that it was not Danish, but I could not understand a word of it. Then my father borrowed some horses from the neighbors and rode away with the ladies. When they came back again Miss Morris sat painting and Miss Lobb walked around and laughed. After a few days they said goodbye and rode away, this time to Reykjavik.

In the autumn my father got word from Búdardalur, the nearest village, that packing cases addressed to him had come with the boat from Reykjavik. When these packing cases came to the manse I was on tenterhooks to see what they contained. Oh! There were books --- all kinds of books many of them with pictures of people, things and places, but they were all in a language which I could not read. There were also things for me in the boxes: watercolours and books with drawings, ready to be painted in. I had never seen anything like it. Then there was all the paper --every single book was wrapped in light-grey paper -- and my father said that I could have all of it. What a joy for a girl who was always writing when there was any paper to be had.

Two years later the ladies came again. They stayed at the manse for a

few days and then went on, riding through the district accompanied by my grandfather. Miss Morris continued to paint and write in her notebook, but this time she talked to me and I was able to understand a few words. She also taught me a game called "cat's cradle" which was much fun, but, not being mechanically minded, I soon forgot it again. She gave my mother a watercolour painting showing a mountain in the district of Saurbaer where my mother was from. After the death of my mother in 1977 this painting was donated to the National Museum of Iceland.

Again the ladies returned to Reykjavik and then to England. There came letters from them, however, with foreign stamps, and before Christmas several boxes full of books came with the boat. I received more watercolours and books with drawings. The drawings were of strange birds and flowers I had never seen. Again, all the books were wrapped in grey paper which I got for my own use.

In 1929 the English ladies came for the last time. Miss Morris was much the same as I remembered her and so was Miss Lobb. I remember the last day when they were about to leave. The horses waited in front of the house and Miss Lobb was there laughing and joking. I was upstairs, standing at the window looking out when Miss Morris came to say goodbye. I had learned some English by then, but I was terribly shy and could only utter a few broken sentences. Miss Morris smiled, took my hand and held it for a moment saying goodbye. Then she went out, got up on her horse and rode away. I never saw her again. For Christmas I received a package from England with a book in it. It was George Eliot's "Felix Holt" and on the fly-leaf was written: To Gudrun Jonsdottir from May Morris. I still have that book.

William Morris travelled in Iceland at least twice. He was fascinated by the Icelandic Sagas and wrote poems about some of the characters in the Laxdaelasaga. This Saga is the history of the Dalasýsla district where my father was a minister for thirteen years. Miss Morris came to Iceland to see the places her father had described in his poems, capturing them in watercolours to look at in her home at Kelmscott Manor.

I knew that Miss Morris lived at Kelmscott Manor for I had seen the address often enough on envelopes when my father wrote to her. After his death I wanted to read the letters he had received from Miss Morris, but my brothers have taken over his effects and they did not find the letters. The only thing I have is a photocopy of her visiting card which one of my brothers had picked up by chance and copied for me.

The books Miss Morris sent to my father are now scattered among the family and some of them have even been lost. But when I had learned English well enough for reading, these books were an "open Sesame" to me, showing me a new world. There were poems: Byron, Keats, the Brownings, Shelley, Tennyson; anthologies and folklore; novels by Dickens, George Eliot, Walter Scott, Thomas Hardy and Thackeray; books with pictures of English country houses, the Royal Family, famous Generals, famous paintings and sculpture, and two editions of the Britannica.

So many memories are linked to the name Kelmscott — memories of years when the books Miss Morris had sent made my otherwise bleak life bearable — and memories of a lovely lady who was kind to a shy and awkward girl in an old Icelandic manse.

THE EFFECT OF THE LITTLE ICE AGE ON ICELAND

by Linda Larcombe

(Continued from the Summer issue, 1986)

HISTORY OF ICELAND

Iceland was originally settled in AD 874. It had been explored some years earlier by the same people who were its first inhabitants. The majority of these first settlers were Norwegians who were seeking freedom from imposed authority in their homeland. The new settlement was organized as a republic with authority being under the joint control of a number of leading chiefs, the Althing, who held a general parliament each year from AD 930 onwards.

During Iceland's republic (AD 930-1262) sheep and cattle farming were the primary modes of subsistence. Grain was grown in a few locations but hay was the only regular crop.

Fig. 4 Variation of glacier termine since AD 1600.
(From H. H. Lamb 1977;151)

Due to the largely uninhabitable interior, farms were relatively isolated. Rather than being grouped together to form a village, the people were scattered in a ring around the interior region. The beginning of this period is best described as a placid time. Later, in AD 1262-4 the Icelandic people made an agreement with the Norwegian king that the authority of King Hakon and his descendants would be obeyed in return for economic and administrative assistance. As a result of this association with Norway, Iceland, in 1533 came to be governed by Copenhagen when Norway became a dependent of Denmark. It was during this period of Danish rule that Iceland suffered devastating blows from the environment as well as the ruling power.

SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

Since medieval times, farming based on animal husbandry has been the mainstay of the Icelandic people. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, the seasonal round of the farmers basically followed the natural cycle of the animals. During the summer the sheep, cattle and horses were left to graze on uncultivated common land. This ensured that the sparse grass and sedge vegetation would be used to the best advantage.

The harsh winters and the cover of ice and snow does not allow for grazing. The animals therefore were kept inside between October and June during which time they were fed hay. The farmers were kept busy cutting grass during the summer to provide for the animals. The only form of cultivation practiced before the 1800's was the spreading of manure on the field once a year. Presently the hay meadows, totalling about 40,000 hectares, are either ploughed annually or cultivated with special device that levels the ridges caused by frost action *(Fig. 5)*.

The rich fish supply of the Icelandic waters has always been a staple of the people's diet. Since the 14th century, fish has been a main export from the island, cod being the primary catch.

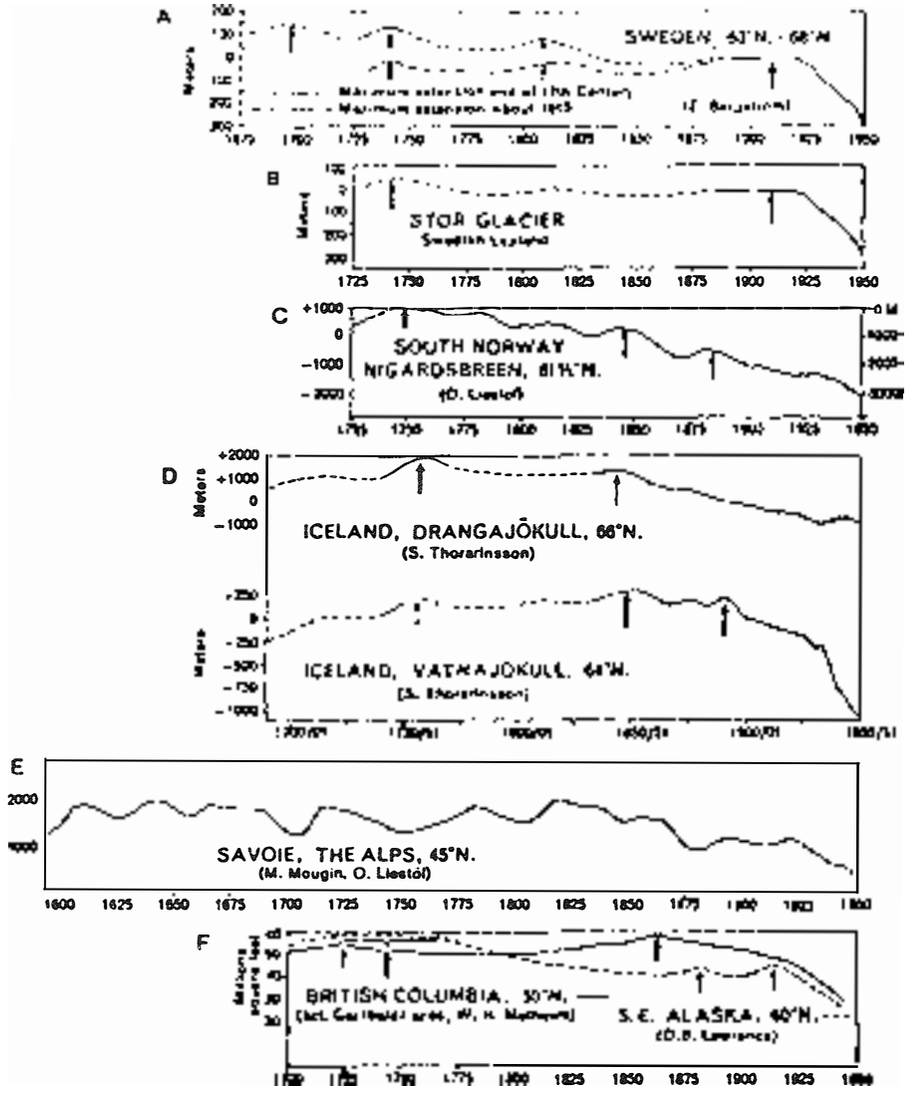


Fig. 4 Variation of glacier termine since A D 1600.
(From H. H. Lamb 1977;151)

Iceland's fishing industry is successful as a result of the two major ocean currents that provide ideal conditions for a variety of marine life. The mild Irminger current off the south and southwest coasts provides a spawning ground for cod, saithe, haddock, herring and halibut, from February to May. Iceland's fisheries became dependent on this cycle, catching the fish which were coming from the spawning ground in the spring, summer and autumn months.

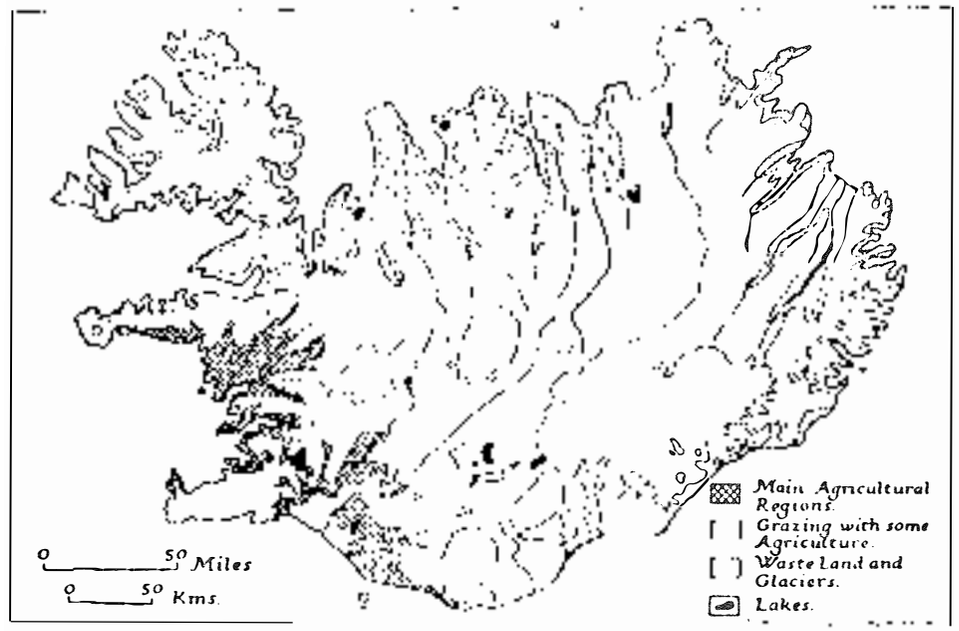


Fig. 5 Main agricultural districts.
(From Gt. Brit. Naval Intelligence 1942;288).

EFFECT OF CLIMATIC CHANGE ON SUBSISTENCE

Iceland's marginal environment is susceptible to even slight changes in climatic conditions. During the Little Ice Age, the decline in production of the two major subsistence modes, animal husbandry and fishing, along with the decline of trade during the Napoleonic wars, and the occurrence of disease between 1550-1850 devastated the island population.

> Iceland experienced forty-three years of distress due to cold winters, ice floes, failures of fisheries, shipwrecks, inundations, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, epidemics and contagious disease among men and animals, which often came separately, but often in connection with and as a result of one another *(Magnus Stephensen Island i. det 18de Aarhundrede. IN Gjerset 1924; 322).*

The success of Iceland's livestock depends upon the production of sufficient grass for summer grazing and winter fodder. Ogilvie *(1980;61)* notes that a number of factors influence the growth of Iceland's vital grass crop. Soil type, length of the day, height above sea level as well as climatic variables such as summer temperature, rainfall and the extent of frost in winter and spring in combination with the occurence of sea ice off the coast also has an effect on the growth of the grass.

The decline of the growing season due to greater amounts of drift ice during the Little Ice Age resulted in a reduction of the quality and quantity of the grass crop. The depletion of the grass would make vegetation sparse for the grazing animals. During the winter, insufficient hay was available to feed the livestock. If it appeared that enough

hay was not going to be harvested to last the winter, many of the animals were slaughtered in the autumn. Inevitably however, cattle died of cold and starvation during the winter since the people were reluctant to slaughter them in the fall *(Ogilvie 1980;61).*

> As a result of the rain and frosts in the early spring the ground became ice-covered and there was nothing for the livestock to eat so they had to be given hay, but this was in short supply after last year's meagre harvest. The livestock especially sheep and horses, died in great numbers. People also died from lack of food *(Baroastrandarsyla 1752. In Ogilvie 1980;66).*

Throughout historic time, fishing boats in Iceland were small, open row boats. The small size of the boats restricted the range that could be fished and also limited the size of the catches. These small catches were further reduced in size in the late 17th to late 18th century resulting from the climatic change during this time *(Ogilvie 1980;62).*

It has been found that a change in sea temperatures and ocean currents affects the reproduction and early survival of cod although the relationship is not fully understood *(Woodhead and Woodhead 1959. In Ogilvie 1980;62),* The colder climate experienced in the 18th century would have resulted in a decrease of the range of the cod, causing the cod to stay south of its previous range. Lamb *(1977;511)* uses the Faeroe Islands as an example of the effect on the fisheries resulting from the change in climate and sea currents. During the colder phase in the 1700's, the warm Gulf Stream-North Atlantic drift passes further to the south or southeast of Greenland. On this occasion the cod fisheries on the Faeroe Islands experienced a severe decline in production. *(See Appendix 1)*

In Iceland comments on the state of the fishing the effect of the Little Ice Age.

> 1729: occurred late because of the sea ice; 1730: very poor; 1731: failed here in the north; 1732: the fish seem not to have come as close to the land as usual. This is believed to be because of the drift ice; 1734: failed in some places: . . . *(B. S. Skagafjaroarsysla, 1729-1758. In Ogilvie 1980;61).*

Favourable climatic conditions were also necessary after the fish were caught. Drying, rather than salting was the form in which fish was consumed locally and exported. The Icelanders depended on cold, dry weather in order to dry the fish. Should the weather be wet, the fish that had been caught in the winter and left in heaps to be dried in the spring, would rot (Ogilvie 1980;63).

APPENDIX 1

Decade	Year 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1720s										603
1730s	373	159	0	0	0	20	106	1011	40	40
1740s	267	0	0	0	420	112	0	436	4702	2421
1750s	3860	1084	50	360	0	0	100	2636	1404	0
1760s	0	0	588	931	0	801	1600	966	420	110
1770s	0	520	1092	0	0	0	124	136	460	33
1780s	0	0								

Yearly export of fish from the Faeroe Islands.
Units: Voger (1 vog = 36 pounds).

Trade had always been an important part of Iceland's economy. Prior to AD 1400, Iceland maintained close trade relations with Norway. War between Denmark and Norway brought Iceland under Danish rule in 1550. Denmark established a strict trade monopoly with Iceland that lasted until 1787.

During the years when the sea ice was the most severe the arrival of the vital supply ships from Copenhagen was prevented. Iceland's inability to be self sufficient was cruelly felt when a series of harsh winters in the 1750's prevented the arrival of the supplies from Europe.

> The sea was covered by ice the whole summer and this prevented all fishing and all delivery of foodstuffs from Copenhagen and also affected the grass crop *(B. S. Hunarathnssysla, 1756. In Ogilvie 1980; 58).*

Other calamities intensified the suffering of the Icelandic people during the Little Ice Age period. A sheep disease, introduced to Iceland through the importation of rams from Spain to strength the stock in 1761, caused one-quarter of the sheep population to die or be slaughtered in an effort to stop the spread of infection *(Fig. 6) (Gjerset 1924;325).*

The eruption of the volcano Laki in 1783-4 was recorded as the worst eruption in historic times. The eruption was cited as the cause of 10,000 deaths in Iceland when pastureland was covered with lava or ash causing famine to be further widespread.

Epidemics ran rampant through Iceland during the 18th century. Barely after recovering from the Black Death in 1402-4, smallpox decreased the population by one-third in the 1700's *(Stefansson 1939;28).*

The decline in production of Iceland's fisheries and farms is clearly related to the temperature change that occurred between AD 1550-1850. Options for a variety of resource procurement systems were not available when the primary resources failed to produce. In short, the Icelandic people were unable to successfully adjust to the climatic change without the conflicts of their environment *(Fig. 6 and 6A).*

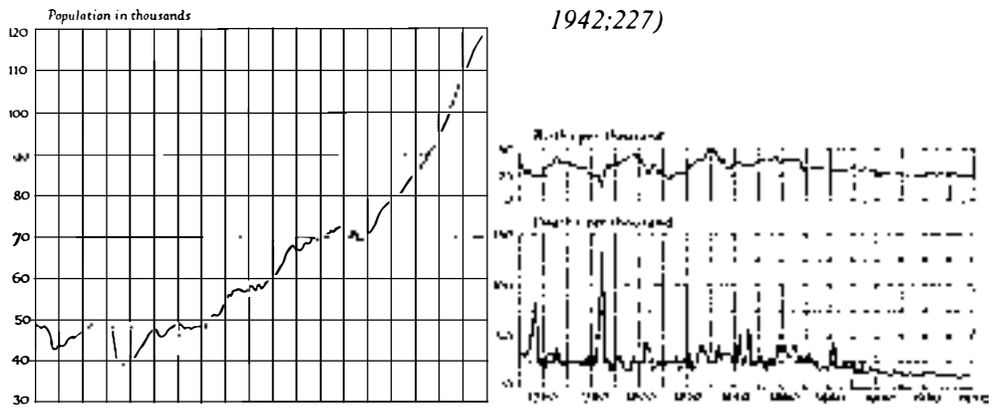
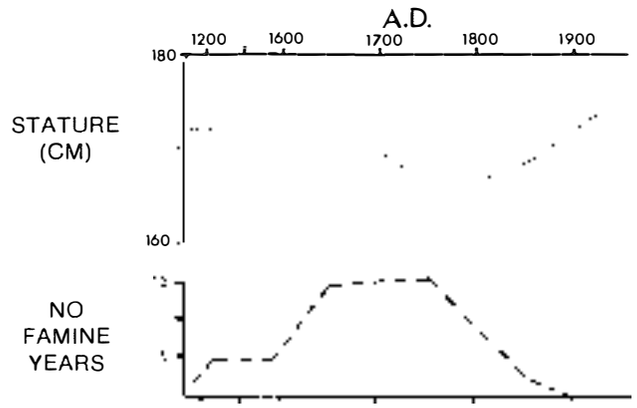


Fig. 6 Graphs of vital statistics, 1751-1940. Note the rise in the mortality rate in 1783-84 resulting from the eruption of the volcano Laki.

(From Gt. Brit. Naval Intelligence 1942;227)



(Fig. 6A) Changes in mean stature in Iceland during the past eight centuries, in comparison with the number of famine years each century. Adapted from Steffensen, J. (1958). Stature as a criterion of the nutritional level of Viking Age Icelanders, Prieji Viking a fundur, Third Viking Congress, pp. 39-51.
(From Brothwell, D.C. Dietary Variation and the Biology of Earlier Human Populations. In P. Ucko and Dimpleby The domestication and Exploration of Plants and Animals.)

CULTURAL CHANGE

Unable to adapt to the changes that had taken place in Iceland during the Little Ice Age, the only option open to the people was emigration. This response to the hardships however, was not undertaken until approximately twenty years after the close of the Little Ice Age. That emigration was a result of the decline of the standard of living during the three hundred year period, is clear. Additional factors operated after 1850 that allowed and encouraged this response.

Prior to 1873 "emigration is conspicuous by its almost total absence, even around 1870 when it is rampant in every country with which Icelanders have contacts" *(Kjartansson 1983;4).* In 1870 groups of 4, 12 and 23 people left Iceland. This small number began the growth that later, ranked Iceland high for emigration for areas of Europe.

Denton and Karlen *(1973)* suggest that a partial recovery from the Little Ice Age occurred between 1830-1850 where a milder climate was experienced in Iceland. This is substantiated by information from Gjerset *(1924;363)* that a steady increase of sheep and cattle populations after 1800 occurred. A census during these years indicates a steady growth in the population of people which would suggest an improvement of conditions in general.
This recovery however, served to encourage emigration when a minor glacial advance was experienced in 1850 *(Denton and Karlen 1973;155).* This event coincides with a decrease in agricultural productivity between 1852 and 1872 *(Kjartansson 1983;4).* Deterioration of the sheep population also occurred at this time. Gjerset reports that the rapid decline of the population was the result of "the destructive sheep disease of 1856-1860" *(Gjerset 1924;363). (Fig. 7)*

The population growth that occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century added to the economic pressure *(Fig. 6).* The large group of adults in 1870 were approaching their mid twenties and were creating demands on the resources that could not be met. It is conceivable then, that a lower standard of living was experienced by many Icelanders and that few opportunities lay ahead of the young Icelanders.

1870 saw the beginning of emigration with as many as twenty-three Icelanders going to the Middle West of North America. Reports from these twenty-three, plus other small groups, as well as newspaper coverage of America, told of the opportunities to be had at these new settlements. In 1873 emigration increased five percent and the seventeen percent in 1876. Kjartansson attributes this rapid increase to the introduction of Iceland's first emigration agency, the Allan Line *(Kjartansson 1983;4).* In the spring of 1873 fourteen percent of the whole of Icelandic nation had expressed interest in the Allan Line's advertisement regarding emigration.

Kjartansson *(1983)* emphasizes that it was not the activities of the Allan Line alone that was responsible for the sudden mass migration but rather a culmination of a number of pressures that occurred which provided a push for the people towards emigration. The famine and disease during the Little Ice Age and the catastrophic volcanic eruptions took the Icelanders to the limit of the hardships they could endure.

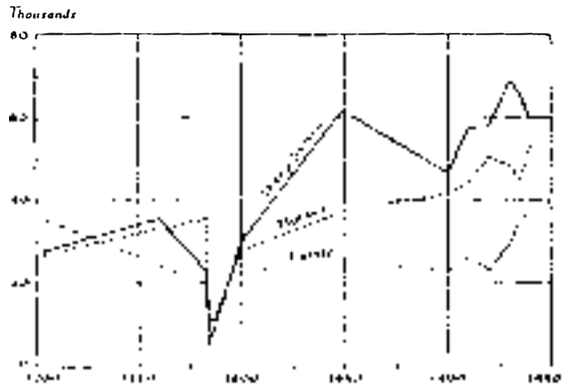


Fig. 7 Number of sheep, horses and cattle 1702-1939. The number of sheep has been divided by ten. The decline of livestock in 1783-84 was the result of the eruption of Laki. A sheep disease at this time also depleted this population.

(From Gt. Brit. Naval Intelligence 1942;294).

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"HNEFTAFL": AN EARLY NORSE "CHESS" GAME

By Eric Jonasson
November 1985

Icelanders have a great propensity towards all things intellectual, perhaps manifested most noticeably in the considerable support they give to their publishing and cultural industries. In fact, Iceland produces a per capita output of published titles three to four times greater than that produced by other Scandinavian countries, and about 20 times greater than the per capita output of the United States. Icelandic periodicals abound, encompassing every topic conceivable, and newspapers, both daily and weekly, are abundant throughout the country. Reykjavik alone (1980 pop. 83,500) boasts five daily newspapers. This intellectual activity extends well beyond the desire for the printed page and it is not surprising to learn that other intellectual stimulations, typlified by the popularity of the game of "chess", are commonplace activities in this country of fewer than one-quarter of a million people.

Long before the first Icelandic settlers began arriving in North America, chess had entrenched itself as a favourite pastime of the Icelandic people. This leisure-time activity emigrated with the early pioneers, and the game retained a wide popularity in Icelandic homes on this side of the Atlantic Ocean until almost the middle of this century. This interest in the game led to the formation of the first Icelandic chess club in Winnipeg towards the end of the nineteenth century. Other clubs quickly followed.

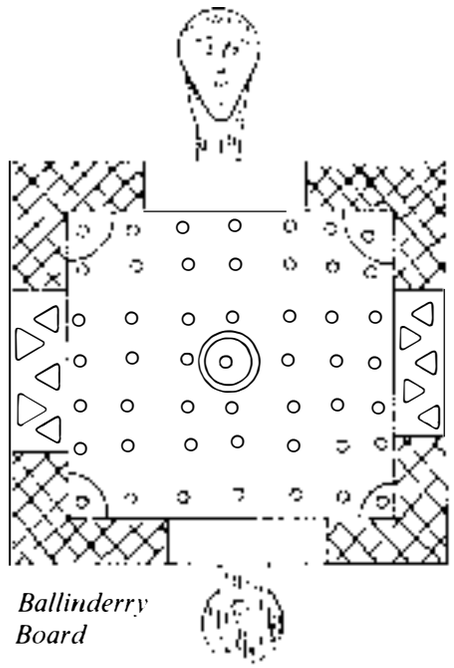
The most prominent of the early Icelandic chess players in North America was Magnus (Magnusson) Smith, who emigrated from Iceland in 1885 and came to live in Winnipeg. His involvement with the game was intense, and he was three times Canadian chess champion (1899, 1903 and 1906). When H. Pillsbury, United States chess champion, played simultaneous chess in Winnipeg in 1901, he lost to Smith 2-3, later commenting that he doubted whether he would have been able to win against Smith even if the two of them had played alone. In time, Smith became the playing partner of Emanuel Lasker (World Chess Champion, 1894-1927), and eventually was the editor of the chess column in the New York "Evening Post" and of Lasker's Chess Journal. Other noteable Icelandic chess players during the early years of the twentieth century included Agnar Magnusson, Winnipeg chess champion in 1929 and Manitoba champion in 1932; Carl Thorlakson, Winnipeg champion in 1926-27; and Gudjon Kristjansson of Winnipeg and Hecla Island, Canadian Chess Correspondence champion in 1926.[1]

Although chess holds prominence today as the board game of the Icelanders, their ancient forebearers employed a number of other games to help pass their leisure hours. Gaming boards scratched onto thin pieces of slate and various gaming pieces have been found in the Norse ruins of the Orkney Islands and elsewhere, and references to board games can be found in early Icelandic

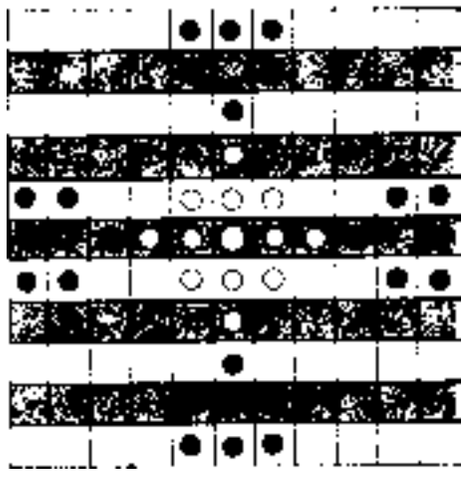
literary works, one example of which is the reference to "hnettafl, or hneftafl" in Chapter 70 of *Grettir's Saga.* Other games, such as "Fox and Geese" and "Kotra" ("Icelandic Backgammon"), are believed to have evolved from games originating in and played in the Scandinavian countries during the Middle Ages.

In 1932, a wooden board measuring 9½" square and containing 7x7 holes for pegs was found in a lake-dwelling site at Ballinderry, County Westmeath, Ireland. The board was framed with 10th century patterns, suggesting that it had been manufactured in the Isle of Man, then a Norse colony.[2] The board is somewhat reminiscent of the one used in the ancient Welsh game of "tawlbwrdd", a game mentioned in early 10th century Welsh literature and believed to have been introduced into the area by the early Norse.[3] It is possible that these two boards represent variations of the same board game, with their roots in Norse culture. Several years ago, John Astrop described a game in his book *"The Pocket Book of Board Games* which he called "hnefatafl," the Viking Game", using the Balliderry board as the model for his own and providing instructions similar to those used in "tawlbwrdd".[4]

Because so little is known of "hneftafl", except for a few references in early Icelandic literature (*Grettir's Saga* states that the gaming pieces contained "tails", indicating that the gameboard made provisions for "pegs"), it is impossible to state for certain whether it was similar to "tawlbwrdd", or whether the "tawlbwrdd-like" board from the Isle of Man was yet another, unnamed, early Norse game. But Norse games these were, and there is no evidence to indicate that either or both were not "hneftafl".

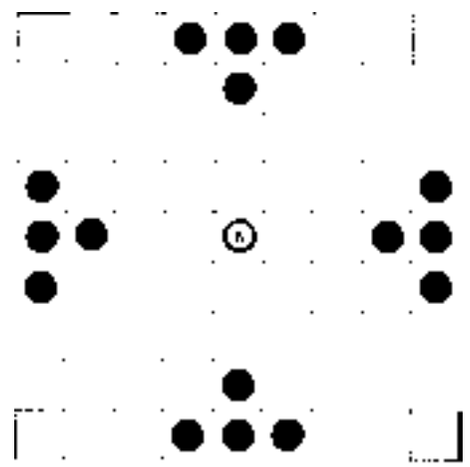


Ballinderry Board



"Twalbwrdd" Board

The following gameboard and instructions are based on the general rules for "tawlbwrdd" and on an adaptation of the Ballinderry board, and are provided here for the curious who might wish to pass a few winter evenings playing a game similar to one once enjoyed by their Viking ancestors. For the sake of identification, it has been named "hneftafl" by the compiler, but traditionalists who take offense at this boldness in its naming may choose to refer to it simply as "Viking Chess". The gameboard can be made easily out of cardboard or other card stock, and the playing pieces from a checkers set can be used quite effectively for the playing pieces of the game.[5]



"Hneftafl" Gameboard

OBJECT OF THE GAME:

The object for the White player is to move the KING from the centre square to any square on the periphery of the board. The Black player's objective is to capture the KING before it reaches any of the outside squares on the board. This is a game for two players only.

TO BEGIN THE GAME:

Set up the playing pieces as shown on the illustrated gameboard. Decide which player will be White, and which will be Black. Players take alternate turns, with the Black player making the initial move.

TO PLAY THE GAME:

All pieces, except the KING, can move orthogonally *ie. across the board, or up and down the board) any number of vacant square in any one direction during each turn, but cannot move diagonally. This is similar to the "rook's" move in chess.

The KING can move orthogonally, similar to the moves of the other pieces, but may only move one square at a time.

Only one playing piece may be moved during each player's turn.

Pieces are captured and removed from play by trapping the opponent's piece, including the KING, between two of your pieces on opposite sides of the captured piece (but not diagonally).

During play, players may move their pieces between two of the opponent's pieces without being captured, but may not stop on the vacant square between the two opposing pieces. The KING may be moved onto the vacant square between two opponent's pieces without being captured, but only after declaring this intention by saying "resting" before the move is made. The KING must vacate this square on the next move.

TO WIN THE GAME:

The White player wins when the KING reaches any square along the periphery of the gameboard. The Black player wins when the KING is captured. If a stalemate occurs, the game is considered a draw.

VARIATIONS OF THE GAME:

To make the game more interesting, or more challenging, any (or all) of the following variations may be incorporated into the general rules:

1. To capture the KING, the opposing player must surround it on all four sides (instead of just two).
2. To win, the KING must reach one of the four shaded squares in the corners of the gameboard (instead of just reaching the squares on the periphery of the board).

3. To determine eligibility to move a piece, use one six-sided die. Each player throws the die alternately. If an odd number is thrown, the player may move one piece; if an even number is thrown, the player misses a move.

NOTES

1. Kristjanson, Wilhelm: *The Icelandic People in Manitoba: A Manitoba Saga* (Wallingford Press: Winnipeg, MB 1965) pp. 453-454.
2. Bell, R.C.: *Board and Table Games From Many Civilizations 2* (Oxford U.P.: London 1969), p. 46.
3. Ibid., pp. 43-44.
4. Astrop, John: *The Pocket Book of Board Games* (Kestrel Books: Harmondsworth MX, England 1980).
5. A similar game, based on "tawl-bwrdd", called "Breakaway™" was issued in 1982 by Gabriel (a division of CBS Inc., Hagerstown MD 21740) for those who would prefer a ready-made gameboard.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

STEFAN JONASSON

Stefan is the chaplain at the Unitarian Church on Banning Street, Winnipeg. His ambition is to become a Unitarian minister. He and his wife, Cindy, have one daughter, Brandis.

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An American from the State of New York, she has been a professor of history at the University of Calgary for many years. Marian has done a great deal of research regarding the Icelandic settlers in North America and their descendants. It is possible that sometime in the future she may consolidate her research in a book.

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He has been the Business / Advertising Manager of The Icelandic Canadian for a number of years, also has contributed a number of articles that have been published in our quarterly. He was elected recently to the St. James-Assiniboia School Board. He and his wife, Liz, have two children, Erin Dagbjört and Kristjan Leonard.

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No information available.

Submissions are welcome. Please contact the appropriate editor.