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Treasurer· Paul D. Olafson, CA
54 Siddall Crescent
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2K 3W6
Telephone: 1-204-667-1168

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On the Cover 207

Editorial 208
- Dr. John S. Matthiasson

Eric Jonasson - A personal remembrance by his brother 211
- Rev. Stefan Jonasson

The Icelanders of Blaine 217
- Gustaf Kristjanson

Mr. Carson 223
- Johann Magnus Bjarnason - translated by Ninna Campbell

And God said, "Let There Be Red" 231
- Bill Holm

Myth, Folklore and Christianity in Pagan to Medieval Iceland 236
- Adam Lawson

The Borg Home 241
- JoEllen Kemp

Impressive Consecration Service for Iceland's new Bishop, Karl Sigurbjornsson 245
- Eric H. Sigmar

Book Reviews

The True Intrepid: Sir William Stephenson and the Unknown Agents - Bill Macdonald 247
- reviewed by Dr. John S. Matthiasson

Letters to Icelanders: Exploring the Northern Soul - Betty Jane Wylie *- reviewed by Nina Lee Colwill* 250

Contributors 251

The Back Page 252

Cover: A round barn. Photo by Bob Firth, Infinity Editions

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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Thanks to photographer Bob Firth of Infinity Editions, we can imagine the barn that belonged to Victor & Elvira Josephson.

Editorial

by John S. Matthiasson

Like others who have been associated with this magazine in one way or another, I have long been troubled by the name *The Icelandic Canadian.* It is true that there is some historical significance to it, for it was founded as the official publication of the Icelandic Canadian Club of Winnipeg. The club was formed at a time when some members of the Icelandic community in Winnipeg became concerned that the Icelandic language had been lost to a younger generation, and that something had to be done to retain among them a sense of identity with an Icelandic heritage. The only active Icelandic organization in Winnipeg then was the Frón chapter of the Icelandic National League (INL), and their meetings were conducted almost entirely in Icelandic.The two Icelandic newspapers published in Winnipeg were in Icelandic as well. So, a club was created which would foster things Icelandic, but have all of its proceedings carried on in English. Not long after, the membership decided to publish a quarterly magazine which would have only English content, and so was born *The Icelandic Canadian.*

Over time the magazine became fairly successful, and its subscription list expanded far beyond Winnipeg. Eventually it became formally disassociated from the Icelandic Canadian Club, and later, the club itself was amalgamated with the local INL chapter, with meetings of the new Icelandic Canadian Frón being conducted primarily in English. Today our subscribers can be found in virtually all regions of both Canada and the United States and, indeed, in many far-flung parts of the world, including Iceland. Certainly the content of the magazine is not limited to Canadian materials. In this very issue there is news from Iceland and articles on American topics. So, our name may be a misnomer, and misleading.

A second problem with the name relates to the history of Icelandic settlement in North America. There is no question about the fact that the two largest influx of Icelandic settlers were to the Interlake area of Manitoba, once known as New Iceland, and to the urban center of Winnipeg. But, there were other migration routes as well. A major one was through Wisconsin and up to North Dakota. Communities with Icelandic names such as Gardar attest to this. There was the smaller one to Spanish Forks in Utah. Over time the descendants of the pioneer settlers in Manitoba have moved east to Ontario and west to British Columbia. In the United States there has been a similar flow from North Dakota to Washington and Oregon. Today, a new wave of Icelanders has made its way to North America, with many settling in California, New York city and elsewhere. (I hope I have not offended anyone by ignoring other destination places, such as Markerville and so on. These examples are used simply as illustrations.)

My point is that the Icelandic presence in North America today is continent wide, and not localized in any particular region. *The Icelandic Canadian* is the only magazine which attempts to represent that presence, and to speak for it. It is not, and should not, be limited in distribution or content to Canada.

What is now being termed "the Icelandic presence" in North America, then, is broadly located, but it is also very fragile. Our ancestors came from a small, sparsely populated island in the north Atlantic, and although we, their descendants, have distributed ourselves across a continent, there are only so many of us, and we are spread thinly. If we are to keep the presence alive, communications across the spaces must be maintained and improved. No sections of our community can be left out of the network.

There is evidence that, as we approach the new millennium, the network is indeed being strengthened and broadened. New chapters of the Icelandic National League have been established from coast to coast in Canada, and several have been formed in the United States. These will become local foci for efforts to perpetuate an Icelandic identity here, and they will work with one another as new links are forged. In the summer of 1999, a major commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the August 2nd celebration will be held in Mountain, North Dakota, with dignitaries such as the President of Iceland in attendance. This American event will rival the better known Íslendingadagarinn held annually in Gimli, Manitoba, and planners on both sides of the border are working in collaboration with one another.

A millennium committee has been struck with members representing Iceland, Canada and the United States, and they are planning several significant ways to publicize on a grand scale the voyage of Leifur Eiriksson to the new world a thousand years ago and the arrival of Icelandic emigrants more than a century ago.

It is time, then, or so it seems to me, that we recognize that the Icelandic presence in North America is continent wide, and do whatever is necessary to strengthen that reality, so that it will be there for our descendants. One way is to ensure that our publications - both the magazine and the weekly newspaper, *Logberg-Heimskringla,* have more than simply Canadian content - even though both are published in Canada. For this, both need input from the many centers in the United States. So far as the magazine is concerned, we can live with our name until someone suggests a more appropriate one, but the content of *The Icelandic Canadian* must reflect all of our far-flung outposts in North America, and if it is to do so, the help of our readers is needed. Send us your stories, poems and essays, and we will work together to truly represent that presence which is so dear to us all.

Eric Jonasson

Eric Jonasson

A personal remembrance by his brother

by Rev. Stefan Jonasson

Eric Jonasson was always inclined to be somewhat melodramatic, so I suppose that the manner of his leaving us would have pleased him, even though death found him in the prime of life and took him in the midst of his work. Eric died suddenly but peacefully – just six days short of his fiftieth birthday – on Novermber 11, 1998, after suffering a heart attack at his home in St. James. The longtime business manager of *The Icelandic Canadian* had just been re-elected vice chairman of the St. James-Assiniboia school board the evening before and he was looking forward to serving his fifth consecutive term as a school trustee. It had been a very good day, that last day. It is fitting that he breathed his last on Remembrance Day, a day that he honoured and marked each year with a reverent spirit. Given his wry sense of humour, surely Eric would have been gratified to think that the anniversary of his parting would henceforth fall on a public holiday!

As the oldest of our parents' four children, Eric was already part of the furniture, so to speak, by the time I happened along. Since he was nearly twelve years my senior, our relationship was complex – he was my brother, to be sure, but he was also a mentor and confidante, protector and promoter. Most importantly, though, he was my friend.

I suppose I would say that Eric was my hero when I was a boy. He was enough older than me to appear worldly-wise and sophisticated; I was enough younger than him to pose no serious threat. As an adult, I arrived at a more temperate estimate of his nature – appreciating him in more human terms – though he continued to be my friend and confidante. From great things to small, Eric influenced my interests and habits. My own love of history is largely a gift from him. So are my preferences for fountain pens over ballpoint, folk music over rock, and perhaps books over savings accounts!

After earning pocket money by singing in the coffee houses that flourished in Winnipeg, Eric's first career was as a mapmaker. Employed first by Western Photogrammetry and then by Applied Photogrammetric Services, his work eventually took him to Toronto and Regina. In 1975, returning to Winnipeg, he established his own mapping firm in partnership with Peter Gould – Carto Graphics.

If mapping was his vocation, then genealogy was clearly Eric's avocation. Since Eric was interested in genealogy for as long as I can remember, I've never been sure just how he came to be interested in it. I've sometimes suspected that he was hoping to show how some fraud or mistake in an ancient birthing room had led to the current royal family occupying Buckingham Palace in error, while we, the rightful heirs, languished on Riverbend Crescent! Whatever sparked his early interest, there can be no doubt that Eric loved his family and was devoted to the art of preserving family history. Given his passion for this work, and his desire to share his skills and insights with other people, it is wonderful that he was able to pursue genealogy as his second career. In his first book, *Tracing Your Icelandic Family Tree*, Eric sought to remedy the lack of information that was then available to Canadians and Americans of Icelandic descent who were actively researching their family histories. Eric's interest extended far beyond his own Icelandic heritage, though, so he quickly established himself as a leading authority in the field of family history. His reputation led to an invitation to be one of the featured speakers at the World Conference on Records in Salt Lake City in 1980. As founding president of the Manitoba Genealogical Society and first editor of *Generations*, as author of *The Canadian Genealogical Handbook*, as consultant and publisher, Eric helped untold numbers of families discover

their roots and find meaning within the context of the most important of human institutions – the family.

While Eric established Wheatfield Press as a vehicle for publishing his genealogical works, its scope expanded to include historical and literary publications. In addition to Eric's own books, Wheatfield Press published works ranging from Emil Gudmundson's *Icelandic Unitarian Connection* to Gus Sigurdson's many volumes of poetry. In all honesty, Eric probably wasn't the best marketer of books, but no one could have devoted more care to the production of a superior product.

When Eric published *The Canadian Genealogical Handbook* in 1976, the book's dedication read: "For Elizabeth, My partner in all things." It came to me as something of a surprise to discover that my brother was a closet romantic, but through the years I have come to know that these words were no idle turn of phrase but truly declared a heartfelt sentiment. Together, they raised two children, Erin and Kristjan. Like our own father, my brother cherished the simple joy of talking with his children. More than once, he told me what a blessing it was to see both of his children grow into the kind of individuals that are a delight to know.

In 1980, Eric gave each of us in the family what is surely my nomination for "the best Christmas present ever" – *Five Generations*, an account of our family story which reminds us of the priceless heritage we claim. We stand on the shoulders of noble forebears, who struggled and loved as we do now, who lived not for themselves alone but for the greater glory of this grand human enterprise of which we are but the latest flowering. In the introduction, Eric wrote of our ancestors, "I have come to know many of them quite intimately – others more distantly. I appreciate them all – the rogues and the rascals, the saints and the innocents, the hardworking and the lazy, the ingenious and the common-place. I hope you appreciate them too! I hope you will find it a valuable gift for this season of the year, and that you will remember in years to come that this collection is not only a gift of myself to you – but is also a testament as to who you are and, in part, who your children will be." Eric's passion for family history had an eye to the future as well as the past and this volume is a more precious gift to us than he could ever possibly have imagined.

Three years after this gift, Eric organized the Kjærnested Family Reunion to mark the centennial of the arrival of the Icelandic branch of our family in Manitoba. At the reunion, we unveiled a commemorative cairn in the Husavik Cemetery, which we had erected with stones from our great-great-grandfather's farm. At the homestead itself, a throng of descendants ate and drank and sang and reminisced.

Eric's passion for genealogy reinforced his love for history, in general, and for things Icelandic, in particular. Eric believed that we needed to experience history rather than simply memorize it or analyze it. This led him to develop walking tours that enabled participants to experience the Icelandic heritage of Winnipeg, the Manitoba Interlake, and North Dakota. In fact, a few weeks before his death, Eric and I were out on the prowl with my youngest daughter, identifying possibilities for a walking tour that would have told the story of the Icelanders in Winnipeg by focusing on the lives of the leading members of the Icelandic community who lie buried in our city's cemeteries. At that time, we walked over the very place where he now rests.

Over the course of two decades, Eric was an active supporter of *The Icelandic Canadian* magazine, believing it to be the most important vehicle available for maintaining and promoting the Icelandic culture here in North America. He was a regular contributor to the pages of the magazine and twice served as its business manager. For him, the magazine was not so much a publication as it was a sacred cause, so he worked passionately in its best interests, as he worked passionately in most everything he did.

Like the poet Robert Frost, it might be said that my brother had something of "a lover's quarrel with the world," which led him to seek elected office in an effort to contribute some small measure to the common good. Little could he have known, when he first sought public office, just how broad the field of his endeavour and the sphere of his influence would become.

It was my brother's conviction that public education was the best guarantor of a free and democratic society. We hear a great deal about the public's fears that a two-tier medical system may be developing – but there is a strange silence in the face the slow emergence of what might be called a two-tier school system. Eric devoted considerable energy to defending the *public* school system against the continuing encroachments that undermine its mission and rob it of the precious resources available for its support. More than anything, his work for both the Manitoba Association of School Trustees and the Canadian School Boards Association grew out of his burning desire to influence provincial and federal politicians as they made decisions that affected the well-being of public schools – not just in his own community but in communities throughout the province and across the country. It is undoubtedly his passion for this work that led to his elevation to the presidency of both of these important organizations.

Having grown up in the east end of St. James, where the circumstances of neighbourhood families ranged all the way from poverty to comfort, Eric knew that a sound education was the great leveler of social circumstance. It opens the fragile window of opportunity for children of modest means and is great motivation to get ahead in a competitive and unforgiving world. So he believed that no effort should be spared when it came to enriching early childhood education, cultivating each child's natural sense of curiosity and wonder. He believed that no effort should be spared in helping children to discern and develop their personal gifts as they grow towards maturity. He believed deeply that no effort should be spared to keep our young people in school until they graduate! And so Eric committed himself to those policies and programs that made our children and their education the first priority.

Beyond the trustees' routine of seemingly endless meetings and public appearances, Eric especially enjoyed having the opportunity to visit area schools and interact with his most important constituents – the ones without a direct vote. He regularly attended the various awards days at local schools and often visited schools to read stories in class and interact with the children. And the children rewarded him with their attention and delight. Little could they have known that he was sometimes the man in the Santa Claus suit, too! This was a role that he had played more than once in our own family, much to the delight of nieces and nephews, and it was as Santa that he hoped to bring a little joy and delight to the lives of the children of his wider concern.

"I am of the opinion," wrote George Bernard Shaw, "that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. ... Life is no brief candle for me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations." It is in this spirit that my brother led his own life. Striving to serve the wider community, often at considerable sacrifice to himself, Eric nevertheless knew that it was a privilege to so serve the greater good. Although his life was all too brief, it was no brief candle but rather a splendid torch of love

to family, dedication to high ideals and service to the community. While that torch has now been passed to the keeping of the generations, its flame continues to burn in lives that have been enlightened and warmed by its glow.

I am gone

I am gone, my time is over,
Deep into the ground I go;
But I hope my life's had meaning,
Since it started, long ago.

I have tried my best to be –
Caring husband, father, friend;
And I hope I'll be remembered,
Fondly, now I've reached my end.

I have laboured long and hard,
Serving my community –
Sharing all the strengths I have
To make it better than it be.

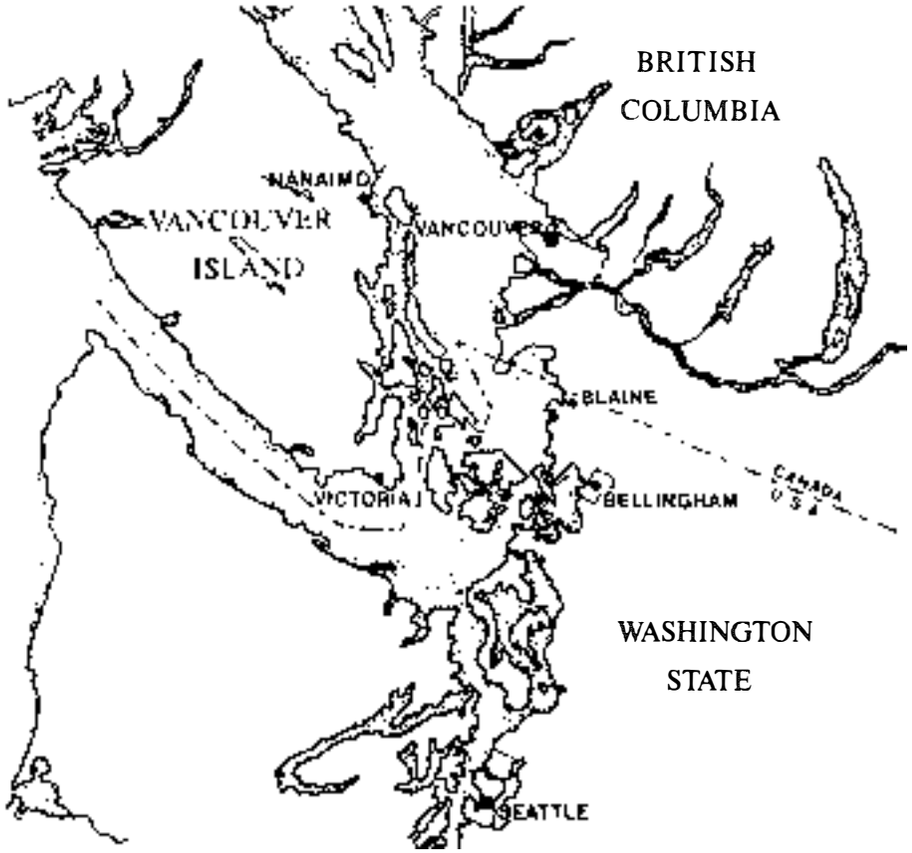
I have strived through words and letters
To provide a sense of past;
Helping friends find lost ancestors,
And kindle heritage that lasts.

I have fought the many battles
Fate throws up up along life's way;
Some I've won, and some I haven't
In my struggles, day to day.

I've had strength, as well as weakness,
But I hope my strength will be
Remembered only, on my passing,
By everyone who cares for me!

I am gone, my earthly body
Rests contently down below;
For I'm sure my life's had meaning
Since it started, long ago!

– Eric Jonasson



The Icelanders of Blaine

by Gustaf Kristjanson

In the extreme northwest corner of the State of Washington, nestled against the Canadian border, lies Whatcom County. On its eastern edge are the Cascade Mountains, dominated in this area by the snow-clad eminence of Mount Baker. The western edge is washed by the waters of Georgia Strait. To the average American motoring northward, the coastal town of Blaine in Whatcom County may seem little more than the final stop on Interstate Highway 5 before crossing the border into Canada en route to Vancouver. To people of Icelandic descent, however, it has been one of the best known centres of Icelandic pioneer settlement in North America.

Blaine was founded a century ago in an area that was then largely virgin forest. It was later to become a lumber shipping port, with busy shingle mills and salmon canneries. It still serves as a base for fishing boats that harvest the teeming waters of Georgia Strait, but the sawmills and canneries have closed and tourism is now the major industry. When the first settlers arrived, it was as part of the wave of pioneers looking for new land to till and a fresh start in life. One of these pioneers was Oli Lee, a man of Norwegian ancestry who had been farming near Grafton, North Dakota. In 1888 he purchased forty acres of land near Birch Bay, a few miles south of Blaine. Oli's wife was Thorunn Halldorsdottir, who had arrived from Iceland in 1876 as part of the first wave of immigrants from that country. Originally her family went to the New Iceland colony in Manitoba, but subsequently Thorunn married the aforementioned Oli Lee and moved to North Dakota. Not long after that another young Icelandic woman, Gudny Thorleifsdottir, joined them in their home as a domestic. Gudny had immigrated from Iceland earlier that year. Some years later she married Petur Lee, a cousin of Oli. A few months after Oli and Thorunn moved to the Pacific Coast they were joined by Petur and Gudny, who purchased forty acres of land in the same locality. It would appear that these two worthy ladies, Thorunn and Gudny Lee, were the first Icelandic settlers in the Blaine-Birch Bay area. The hardships that they experienced were not unlike those of pioneers everywhere - social isolation, infrequency of mail service, difficulty in obtaining supplies, and so on.

It is believed that the next settler in the Birch Bay area was Joel Steinsson, who arrived about the turn of the century. Somewhat prior to that, however, Hjorleifur Stefansson, Sveinbjorn Bjornsson, and Benjamin Alexander were probably the first men of Icelandic origin to settle in the town of Blaine itself. That was in 1897. Hjorleifur and his wife, Gudrun, had spent a couple of years in Seattle before moving to Blaine and had originally migrated to Grafton North Dakota after leaving Iceland. Benjamin also, had spent some time in the Grafton area. Sveinbjorn had travelled widely as well, having lived in Seattle, in Victoria, British Columbia, and for about eighteen years in Nome, Alaska. It was an age when there was much movement of population to open up the country and "Go west, young man" was the watch word.

Information on these early settlers has been obtained from the biographical sketches prepared by Margret J. Benediktsson and published in the periodical *Almanac* for the years 1926 and 1929.* Margret J. Benediktsson herself a woman of considerable gifts was very prominent in the suffragette movement of her day. She chronicled the experiences of dozens of Icelandic settlers in the Blaine area - far too many to describe or even mention in this short account. On reading through these sketches certain facts emerge. Almost without exception the people discussed were born in Iceland and in most cases grew up there. However, there is hardly an instance of any who emigrated directly to the Pacific Northwest. The general pattern seems to have been to go first to Winnipeg or the North Iceland area of

Manitoba (or, occasionally, to Selkirk or the Argyle District). Another pattern, almost as frequent, was to emigrate to North Dakota (Mountain, Pembina, Hallson etc.). All of this is, of course, understandable. They would wish to begin their life in the New World by joining friends or relatives in a settlement where Icelanders were already established. Often they would go to Manitoba first, thence to North Dakota, and finally to the Pacific Coast. Many who came to Blaine had spent some time previously in Seattle or Bellingham, or in some cases in Vancouver or Victoria, British Columbia. For a good many, Blaine represented the end of their wanderings. While every individual case was different, the patterns mentioned were fairly representative of the majority. There was no mass immigration of Icelandic settlers to the area. They came by individual families, often to join relatives or close friends.

Obviously, their common Icelandic background and culture helped to sustain them and promoted a sense of community in the early days. There was a bond between adjoining communities as well. Einar Simonarson, who has been practising law in the nearby town of Lynden, Washington, for the past half century, can recall the time (while growing up on his father's farm at Birch Bay) when visitors would cross by boat from the settlement at Point Roberts and stay for several days. Einar's father, Thorgeir, was one of the early settlers in the area, after having spent some time in Winnipeg, Seattle, and other locations.

Since the majority of Icelandic settlers purchased a plot of land when they arrived in the district (homestead land was not available), it would appear that their primary means of livelihood, to begin with, was farming. A few, however, did operate businesses in the town, even in the early years of the century. Doubtless others worked in canneries and on fishing boats, although the boom years of the canneries somewhat predated the arrival of most of the settlers. Mention is made of several who built their own homes, so carpentry was obviously a skill that stood them in good stead.

in Icelandic settlements in other parts of North America, many of the second and third generations went on to higher education and have furthered their careers by moving on to other parts of the country. In earlier days, however, some were able to make a notable contribution locally. At one time, for example, there were no fewer than six lawyers of Icelandic descent practising in Whatcom County. Others were involved in government on a local level. Magnus Thordarson (who operated a grocery store) was on the local council for a number of years. So was J. O. Magnusson, another businessman in the town, who not only served on the council but was also police chief for a period of time. Probably the best known in the realm of public service was Andrew Danielsson. Born in

PHOTO BY VICTOR O. JONAS-

Fishing boat, looking west from Blaine.

Iceland in 1879, he emigrated to North America when he was only nine years of age and spent the first years with his uncle at Poplar Point in Manitoba. Arriving in Blaine in 1902 he worked in a store at first, later owning a store in partnership with O. O. Runolfsson. The business was later sold. Danielsson continued for years in the insurance and real estate business. He served for a while on the local council, and ultimately was elected to the state legislature.

From the beginning, the Icelanders had a lively intellectual and social life. There were really two groups of people, however, those who lived in the country and those who lived in the town. A "Lestrarfélag" or Literary Society was founded as early as 1903. This society bore the name "Harpa." There were about twenty people involved. Among those who are mentioned as having been prominent in the organization were Hjorleifur Stefansson and his wife, Gudrun, who have been mentioned above as having been among the very earliest settlers in Blaine. Another who was active in its affairs was Gudbjartur Karason, whose son, Halldor, now retired, was for many years a professor at Western Washington University in Bellingham. Other organizations followed the founding of Harpa. The local Foresters Lodge was set up in 1904. All of its members were Icelandic. In 1905 the women's society "Líkn" was established. This was later to evolve into the ladies' aid society of the Lutheran Church.

It was in 1912 that Rev. Hjortur Leo came out from Winnipeg to organize the Lutheran congregation. The church building was erected in 1914. While Hjortur Leo would return occasionally for brief periods, the first regular minister was Rev. Sigurdur Olafsson. The church proved to be much more than a religious centre. It was also a centre for cultural and social life in the community. Halldor Jonsson was the minister during the 1920s. Toward the end of that decade religious dissension developed (characteristic of so many North American Icelandic communities) and there was a split in the congregation. Halldor went with the more liberal group -- the Free Church, as it was called. Up to the mid-thirties Valdimar Eylands served Lutheran congregations in both Bellingham and Blaine. The difficult economic conditions of those years made it more and more difficult to maintain a minister on a regular basis, although the church continued to be served by various preachers on an interim or some kind of temporary basis. Among those who served the congregation in this way were Rev. Harold Sigmar, who had previously been with congregations in Saskatchewan, North Dakota and Vancouver, British Columbia, his son, Eric, and Rev. Erling Olafson. Harold Sigmar, incidentally, ultimately settled in Blaine as his last regular pastorate. As the years went on, decrease in the use of Icelandic as the common mode of speech in the community meant that eventually ministers of non-Icelandic background took over the pastoral duties.

Rev. Ragnar Kvaran came out from Winnipeg in the latter twenties and helped to organize the Icelandic Free Church. Following the departure of Halldor Jonsson (referred to above), Fridrik Fridriksson took over as its minister. He had been serving in the liberal church in Wynyard, Saskatchewan, for a few years prior to that. In 1933 he left for Iceland, from where he had originally come, to minister to a congregation of the state church (Lutheran) in that country. Albert Kristjanson scrved both the Seattle and Blaine Free Churches from 1933 on. When Rev. Kristjanson retired he settled in Blaine and lived there until his death a few years ago.

As pointed out above, the churches were cultural and social centres as well as religious centres. Lectures, concerts, programs of all kinds, as well as lessons in the Icelandic language, were very much a part of the community's life, especially in the 1920s. The winter festival of Þorrablót was celebrated annually. Tombolas and bazaars helped to liven up social life as well as raise funds that were needed for charitable work. The "Líkn" and Harpa societies would put on plays that were much appreciated. Anna Karason, the wife of Halldor referred to earlier, speaks glowingly of those days, the card parties, the dances, and other social functions. People of all ages participated. There was a wealth of musical and dramatic talent that could be called upon. She remembers in particular the staging of the Icelandic drama "Skuggasveinn."

Other aspects of cultural life were not neglected. Magnus Jonsson wrote poems and

essays, many of which were printed in the Icelandic language papers. Magnus was a most interesting personage. Born and brought up in Iceland, he and his wife did not migrate to North America until they were well on in their thirties. After spending many years in Icelandic communities in Manitoba, they ended up in Blaine in 1902. Eventually he became completely blind, but his creative talents did not diminish for all that. His son, Jon, was talented in other ways, becoming a gifted musician and choir director.

A prime focus for musical and intellectual activities was the annual picnic or Icelandic Celebration. Various sites were utilized for this occasion in the early years. Residents of Blaine can remember when they were held in Lincoln Park and also in Montfort Park. Finally the permanent site for the annual festival became the Peace Arch State Park on the Canadian border. Here residents of Washington State and lower mainland British Columbia could assemble to celebrate their common Icelandic heritage. The acres of green grass and the majestic Arch itself make a most appropriate spot for the festivities. Here the virtues of our ancestral culture could be extolled, and the strains of The Star Spangled Banner, O Canada, and Ó guð vors lands helped to remind one of the international nature of the occasion.

The expansion and "internationalizing" of the Icelandic Celebration was promoted by the newly-formed chapter of the Icelandic National League, which called itself"Aldan" (The Wave). This was organized in Blaine in the spring of 1944. As the years went by the fostering of the annual celebration was to become the main concern of this organization. Its president in the early years was Andrew Danielsson and the Secretary was Rev. Albert Krisjanson. A featured speaker would be brought in each year, usually from Winnipeg or one of the larger Icelandic settlements. A system was evolved whereby the chairman for the occasion would alternate between Blaine and Vancouver, British Columbia. Local choirs would usually supply music, with Halfdan Thorlaksson assembling a choir in Vancouver or Elias Breidfjord performing that function in the town of Blaine. Another feature of these celebrations would be the annual tug o' war between rival teams selected from the American and Canadian communities. As the years went by many of these activities diminished and attendance has declined. The committee in charge continued to operate for many years as the Icelandic Celebration Committee. Some of the members of this committee, such as Einar Simonarson and Eddi Johnson (who would often alternate from year to year as chairman) continue to put their efforts into this right down to the present time, working closely

PHOTO BY VICTOR O. JONASSON.

The Peace Arch at the Canada/U.S. border crossing just north of Blaine.

PHOTO BY VICTOR O. JONASSON.

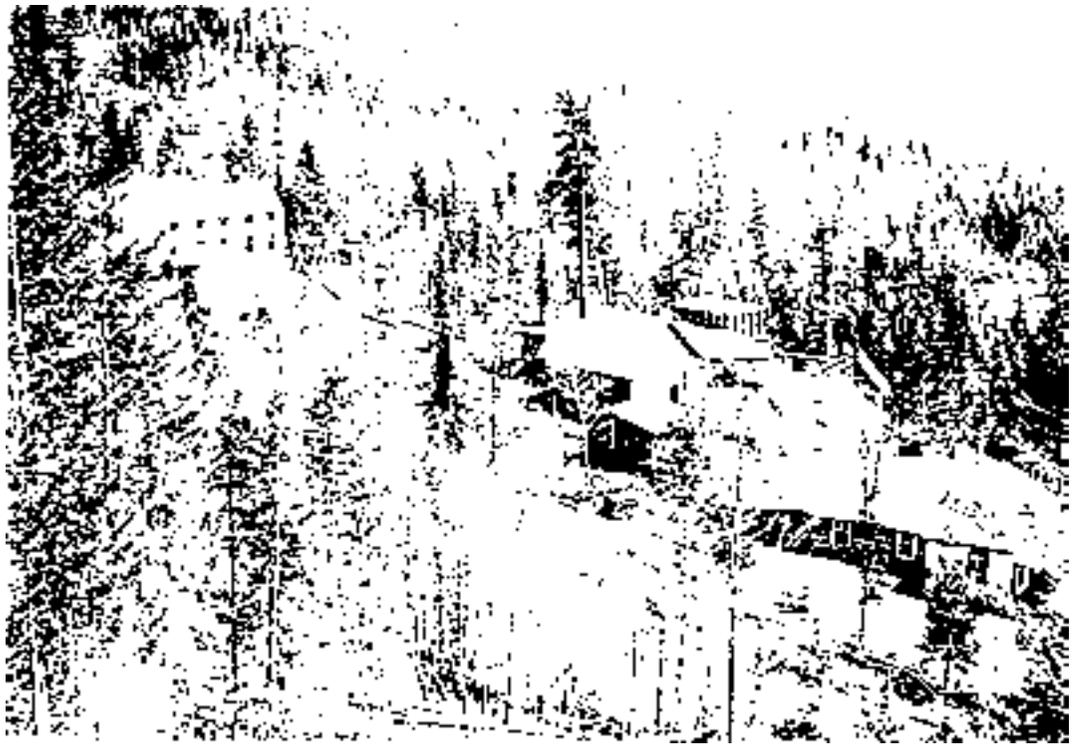
Stafholt Senior Citizens Home, Blaine.

with their counterparts, such as Oskar Howardsson, in Vancouver. Nowadays, the celebration has once again assumed the proportions of an annual picnic. But good fellowship and the Icelandic spirit remain.

Another project which greatly occupied the attention of the lcelandic National League chapter in Blaine when it was first formed was the establishing the Icelandic Old Folks Home. One of the marks of a civilized community is the way it treats those members who have reached their declining years. In this respect the Icelanders of Blaine have merited the highest of praise. In 1949 the Home was opened. It is called "Stafholt" and was named after the childhood home of the Stoneson brothers of San Francisco (who contributed considerably toward its establishment. Here the elderly now are able to enjoy friendly and comfortable surroundings and to maintain reminders of their cultural heritage, such as Icelandic cooking on special occasions and the conversations of friends with like background and interests. Einar Simonarson served as Chairman of the board for Stafholt from its founding until it was turned over to Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society in 1985. The Stafholt Women's Auxiliary has always provided needed articles for residents, and faithful volunteers assist the staff in physical therapy sessions, taking residents for walks, writing letters and cards, and in other ways. Support has also been generous from such organizations as "Eining" of Seattle and the Freya Club of Bellingham. As the years have passed since its founding, the number of Icelandic residents in the Home has become fewer and fewer. Now members of all races and creeds are welcomed in. The spirit which motivated it at the beginning, however, remains. Over the main entrance is a bronze plaque depicting the lcelandic falcon, traditional national emblem of that nation. Here is one more symbol of the fact that, in this small corner of North America, the memory of the land of our ancestors is not entirely dead.

This small town has seen its changes. The wheels of "Rjoma" (Cream) Geiri's milk wagon have been stilled for many a year and no more do people stop to visit (with Litli Steini in the small dwelling on Dakota Creek. The busy Interstate sweeps by and people hardly stop to take a glance. Still, the memory of slower and simpler days will linger on, when Blaine was the centre of a small, brave Icelandic community starting a new life on the Pacific strand.

*"Íslendingar á Kyrrahafsströndinni - Blaine." *Almanak*. Winnipeg, Olafur S. Thorgeirsson, ed. & pub., 1926 pp. 66-90 and 1929 pp. 36-72.



Mining town in B.C. during the early 1900s.

Mr. Carson

by Johann Magnus Bjarnason
Translated by:Ninna Campbell

Ashcroft is a small town in British Columbia, located along the Canadian Pacific Railroad, on the south bank of the Thompson River, two hundred and forty miles from Vancouver, and is about one thousand feet above sea level. The town is long and narrow and seems as if it had been tossed and slipped in between the river and the railroad. It has many favourable features, not the least of which is that it has the best potatoes in the world, and they are named for the town. From Ashcroft lies the highway leading north to the Caribou and the Omineca gold mines. From there daily trips are made with large horse and mule trains, transporting various wares between the town and the mines. The land around the town is quite hilly and dry, but there is some gardening and livestock farming.

In the fall of 1911 I stayed for about a month in Ashcroft and the population was then around six hundred. There were no Icelanders residing there at that time that I was aware of. I had not been there for many days before most or all of the inhabitants of the town knew my name and what my nationality was. Still I had little to do with the townspeople during my stay. I stayed at the local hotel and wrote from morning until night on working days, but on Sundays I took walks through the hills south of the town for exercise and amusement.

A few days before my work in Ashcroft was completed, a young man brought me a letter from a man named William Carson who lived about forty miles north of the town. The letter contained a request from Mr. Carson to come to see him before I left Ashcroft and to stay with him for a few days. He said that he had been told that I was an Icelander, and wanted to speak with me regarding a most important matter pertaining to an Icelander of whom he was very fond. He himself could not come to Ashcroft to see me, because he recently had fallen off his horse and suffered considerable internal injuries. He asked that I send my reply with the messenger, letting him know what day he might send a man and horse to fetch me.

I wrote Mr. Carson a few lines to send with the messenger replying that I would be willing to visit him when my work in Ashcroft was completed. I specified the date that he could send for me and stated that I could stay with him for two days. - But before I wrote the letter, I sought out the owner of the hotel and asked him about this William Carson. He said that Mr. Carson was a wealthy rancher and a fine man, and everyone who knew him spoke warmly of him, but that he was not very sociable and was very reserved.

The day that I had specified I would go arrived. The night before, Carson's man had arrived, and it was the same young man who had brought the letter. He arrived on a brown horse and had another white one in tow. The white horse was intended for me. He was one of the finest riding horses I had seen, spirited and with stamina, yet obedient and easy to control.

We left Ashcroft in the early morning. It was cloudy and there was a cold wind from the North. - being late in September. After we had crossed the bridge over the Thompson River, the first part of the trip was over countless grey, barren hills and deep hollows filled with reeds. It was a boring part of the route. But as the day wore on, the scenery began to change - small patches of trees and grassy dales appeared, small lakes and creeks and pretty farms with livestock grazing in green meadows.

My guide named Dominic was of Italian origin. He was eighteen years old, handsome, rather short but energetic. He did not say

much but answered softly when I spoke to him. And he spoke good English. His answers were, however, short and on occasion ambiguous, especially if I asked about Mr. Carson and his home life."Mr. Carson is big," said Dominic always when he spoke of Mr. Carson by name. "Does he have a big temper?" I asked at one time. "He is just big," replied Dominic. "Is he big in all matters?" I asked. "Big!" said Dominic - After that there was a long silence. - I asked him once whether he knew many Icelanders. "I have never seen an Icelander," said Dominic. "Isn't there though an Icelander in your area?" I asked. "None," replied Dominic. "You have never known that Icelanders existed?" I asked. "Never," replied Dominic. - Another long silence ensued. And I began to think many things.

At nightfall we descended into a very large, beautiful valley which stretched from east to west. A river ran through it and there was much greenery on both sides of the river. Sheep, cattle and horses were grazing in the meadow. In the woods on the slope stood a white and imposing timber house, and nearby were several out-buildings that were all painted red. This was the farm of Mr. Carson and it reminded me of an old chieftain's domain in Iceland.

When we had almost reached the house, I noticed that a man stood beside the gate of the fence which encircled the house, and he held a telescope in his left hand. This man appeared to be about fifty years of age. He was of medium build and muscular, had dark hair and eyebrows, and a beard. His face revealed an unshakable steadfastness and determination and showed that he possessed qualities of leadership. His eyes, though, were rather dull, as if he had not slept all night, or had perhaps been drinking, but they also disclosed that the man was intelligent, observant and reserved. He was well dressed and had wound a Scottish scarf around himself. - this was Mr. Carson.

As soon as I dismounted he came toward me, gave me a friendly handshake and bade me welcome. He immediately ushered me into the house, and Dominic took the horses away, after having given his master a small package of papers.

I stayed at the farm of Mr. Carson for two days and three nights in the best circumstances. I was treated like a king and a lifelong friend of the host, and nothing was spared to make me feel at home. I quickly noticed that most of the hired help was of Indian ancestry. Only one hired hand was white, and that was Dominic; and then I saw two white women one rather young and the other middle-aged. They were both Italian, most likely Dominic's mother and sister.

The first night that I was there, Mr. Carson and I discussed many things, but he did not mention the Icelander that he had referred to in the letter; in fact we were never alone for a minute that evening as the house was full of visitors. Several visitors were there already when I arrived, and two or three others arrived later that evening and stayed the night. They were all miners and herdsmen, some of them truly menacing, and all claimed to have urgent business with Mr. Carson. The day after my arrival, two more guests arrived; they had travelled a long way and sat and talked with Mr. Carson long into the night. The following day he rode with

them, a short distance, to the south fork, and lay down when he returned and slept all day. But after supper that evening, he invited me into a small study that was adjacent to his bedroom, and offered me a seat in a large easy chair, and seated himself across from me and offered me a Havana cigar of the best sort.

"At last I get an opportunity to talk to you," said Mr. Carson, and there was a trace of Scottish accent in his speech."I have been so busy since you arrived that I havent even had the opportunity to offer you a cigar, or anything else."

"It has been full of visitors here these past days," I replied.

"Yes, there are always many daily visitors here," said Mr. Carson. "My house here is on the main highway, and that is why so many stop here, including the uninvited. And one must always attend to the needs of the uninvited guests first." He lit his cigar, leaned back in his chair and looked at me.

"Mr. Carson," I said,"how did you find out that I was an Icelander?"

"A friend of mine in Ashcroft found it out somehow and let me know," replied Mr. Carson.

"You mentioned an Icelander in your letter," I said after a moment of silence.

"Yes," said Mr. Carson, and blew a cloud of smoke in a most leisurely manner. "And I must tell you something about him."

"Is it a serious matter?" I asked.

"Maybe not that serious, but seldom heard of and for that reason is especially unbelievable."

"Wouldn't it be better if you told me something about it?" I said, and tried to smile.

"I must discuss this with an Icelander," said Mr. Carson quietly. "For that reason I sent for you, because I wanted to tell you of it. As a matter of fact **all** Icelanders should know what has happened to one of their countrymen here in the mountains."

"Do you know him well?"

"Like I know myself. He is my bosom friend."

"What is his name?"

"He **was** called John Johnson."

"Is he dead?"

"No. But he has changed his name. He has likely not been known as John Johnson in Icelandic. That is probably the English version of his name. But about that I cannot be sure."

"Has he been in this country for a long time?"

"He arrived here in Canada in the summer of 1885, and it is most likely that he left Iceland that spring. He came west to the Rocky Mountains in the beginning of August that year and started working for the Railroad. He knew very little English, and there were no Icelanders with him. He wore clothing made of Icelandic wool, was roughly twenty years of age and called himself John Johnson."

"But where is he now?" I asked.

"That I shall tell you, when I have told you what it was that happened to him."

"As I just told you," Mr. Carson continued, "this young Icelander arrived here in the mountains of the west in the summer of 1885, and he was alone. He worked for the Railroad for a while in the Fraser Valley and was called John Johnson. Most of his co-workers were Italian and he was the lone Icelander in the group. - The supervisor was named Flanigan, an Irishman, a hard worker and loud, but he was a good chap. In the beginning Flanigan was harsh and sharp with the Icelander, but became like a father to him as time passed. - But then the Icelander was accidentally hurt two weeks after his arrival, and Flanigan blamed himself although it really was not his fault."

Mr. Carson paused for awhile, inhaled deeply on his cigar and blew the smoke out ever so slowly.

"No it was absolutely not Flanigan's fault," he said suddenly, as if he had awakened from a dream.

"What happened to the young man?" I asked.

"He **fell** - plunged into the Fraser Canyon."

"Did he break any bones?" I asked.

"No, he did not break any bones, the fall was not great. He fell off a ledge which was only six feet high."

"What was underneath?"

"**Gravel**," said Mr. Carson. "Just gravel and sand and the young Icelander did not break any bones. He was not injured externally, that was evident. There wasn't a scratch on his hands or face and he didn't even have a bloody nose.

"He must then have had internal injuries?" I said.

"No, he didn't seem to have any internal injuries. But he fainted, and lay unconscious for a long time."

"And did he not have any soreness when he came to?" I said.

"He did not seem to have any pain after regaining consciousness. But he had a loss of memory for awhile."

"This accident could then not have been that serious," I said.

"That has yet to be decided," said Mr. Carson, and frowned a little. "But in my opinion, few have had such a serious accident as this Icelander who fell into the Fraser Canyon in the fall of 1885."

"The after-effects of this were quite serious," said Mr. Carson. "They were so serious that this countryman of yours has still not recovered. And old Flanigan, the supervisor, blamed himself for the accident and has regretted it to this day."

"Did someone push the young man off the edge?" I asked.

"No. He stood **alone** on the edge when he fell. And no one has any idea to this day what caused him to fall. But old Flanigan insists that he was to blame, even though he was one hundred fathoms away from the cliff, when the young man fell."

"Has this Icelander then been in poor health since then?"

"Just the opposite. He has always been as healthy as a horse and was a miner for many years, went to the Caribou and Klondike and endured all the hardships of the gold mines, without once being sick."

"Then what trauma did the young man sustain, following his fall into the Canyon, seeing as he did not lose his health or injure himself in any way?"

"He lost a great deal."

"Did he lose his job? Or what?"

"He lost that which is more precious than a job with the Railroad."

"Is that so!" I said. "It certainly is none of my business, and I would ask you, Mr. Carson, to forgive me for my inquisitiveness and curiosity."

"You do not have to ask my forgiveness," said Mr. Carson. "I want you ask me as much as you like about this, because I sent for you so that you would know what happened to your countryman. It is my concern that you get the right impression about this matter. But I cannot tell you everything clearly unless you question me. I have told you what year the young man came here to the mountains, what he called himself, the name of his supervisor, who his co-workers were, where he was standing when he fell, and how many feet he fell. And I have emphasized that he was not hurt internally, nor did he break any bones, nor was he bruised or hurt in any way. And I have also stated that in spite of all these things he has, by falling, suffered a loss so great that he will never recover. He suffered a great loss."

"And may I then know, what that was?" I asked. "Yes, it is exactly that which I wish you to know," said Mr. Carson, and he eagerly inhaled the cigar. "My desire is that **all** Icelanders will know. I would be pleased to use my remaining life to tell Icelanders about it. I will never tire of telling of it. I could write a large book, have it printed at my own expense, and would even pay to have it distributed both here and in Iceland. The matter is of such importance, because the young man lost such an indescribably large and valuable **thing**.

"And what was it then that he lost?" I asked.

"What he lost! You ask, what he has lost! I will tell you, because I have sent for you for the purpose of informing you of what he has lost. Pay attention and **never** forget it. **He lost his memory!**"

"He lost his memory?" I asked.

"Yes, he lost his memory. When he fell into the gorge he was unconscious for awhile, and when he came to, could not remember anything that had occurred previously in his life. He could not remember what nationality he was, he could not remember his name or where he came from, or how old he was. He had forgotten his former childhood homes and friends, father and mother, and his native language, and even his prayers. His past was a dark emptiness in his mind - dark emptiness and chaos. And the most pathetic thing of all was that no one knew what he had lost; even he himself did not have the faintest idea. Nobody noticed, when he awoke from his unconscious state, that he had forgotten those few English words that he had learned before he fell. And no one noticed until several months later that he never received any mail, and that he never mentioned his nationality, or his homeland, and he never expressed any desire to change jobs or to leave Flanigan and his Italian co-workers. But he quickly learned to speak English. He was considered a good worker and everyone liked him. And so it was that one day, nearly nine months after the accident, that Flanigan the supervisor, realized that the young man was not quite himself, and that he had forgotten his former life. He then took the young man east to Winnipeg. There they found Icelanders. But none of them recognized the young man, and he did not understand one word of the language that they spoke. They said, however, that the clothing that he wore was made of Icelandic fabric. And he possessed a small book that they said was written in Icelandic. Next, Flanigan took the young man south to the United States to visit a doctor of high repute. The doctor examined the young man and stated that that which ailed him was amnesia, and that there was no cure - but that were the young man to be in a similar accident as that which occurred in 1885, he might suddenly recover his earlier memories, and likely he might forget that which had occurred during the interval between his fall and the present and he would be in just as bad a situation, if not worse. Flanigan and the young man returned to the mountains. They worked for the Railroad for awhile and then went prospecting for gold in the mountains of Northern British Columbia and then to the Klondike. And finally, they settled here in the valley. The Icelander remains the same where his memory is concerned but there are two images that are appearing in his mind. They are of two women. One is of a middle-aged woma, and the other of a girl around twenty years of age. Each time that these images come to his mind he becomes especially sad and restless. He becomes filled with a burning desire, but he cannot understand why, or where this feeling originates. Now for many years, he has tried to ascertain whether any Icelander had disappeared suddenly in 1885, but no one, either in Iceland or America can provide any information about such an occurrence. And now the story is ending."

"And where is this Icelander living now?" I asked.

"He lives here."

"Does he live in this house?"

"He is the owner of this house," replied Mr. Carson, "because **I** am this Icelander whom I have been telling you about - **I** am this unfortunate Icelander who was cast into this unbelievable adventure that caused me to forget and lose twenty years of my life."

"But you said that the Icelander had called himself John Johnson."

"Yes, that I am told," said Mr. Carson,"but shortly after I recovered consciousness, I felt that my name should be Carson or Karson, and have used that name ever since."

We both sat in silence for a time.

"Do you still have the Icelandic clothes and book," I asked.

"No. I lost them north in the Klondike

when my cabin burned."

And Mr. Carson frowned when he said that. He paced the floor for some time without speaking, then suddenly stood in front of me and said, "You have doubts that my story is correct and true."

He said this rather harshly. "I have no trouble believing your story," I replied, "but you do not resemble an Icelander. You are more like a Frenchman or Spaniard, and you speak with a Scottish accent."

"I have heard that before," said Mr. Carson,"and it may very well be that I am a Spaniard, or a Frenchman or a Scot. But I am told that I was an Icelander, or that I said that I was an Icelander, before I fell into the gorge. It does not really matter what nationality I am, but the images of these women that will not leave my mind are what I would like to clarify. These pictures are always in my mind, as if in semi-darkness and are never explained. My inner self is forever trying to determine who they are, these women that I knew, that I had known and loved, but cannot remember where or when."

"They may be your mother and sister," I said.

"Or my mother and my **sweetheart**," said Mr. Carson. "But the images never come clear, no matter what. They are always in a mist, or as if I am looking at them through a thin veil, and I feel that everything would clear up and I would recognize everything if this mist would let up and the veil was lifted. I have exerted every ounce of energy that I possess for hours on end, day after day and night after night, for nearly twenty-five years to try to solve this riddle, but always without success. The pictures do not become clear and my inner self is slowly losing strength."

Mr. Carson seated himself across from me, and I could see that beads of perspiration had formed on his forehead.

"Now I shall tell you why I really wanted you to come here to me, he said after he had gazed at me for awhile. "I would like to ask you to let me hear something in **Icelandic** - verse or story, or a hymn or anything, it does not matter what just as long as it is **Icelandic ,** just to find ou, whether I recognize anything, either a word or sentence, that could shed light on these mental images of mine so that my memory would awake, and I could return home safe and sound."

"Yes, certainly!" I said.

"Please begin immediately." And Mr. Carson lit another cigar and sat back in the chair.

I now began speaking Icelandic and spoke as clearly and understandably as I could. I recited everything that I had memorized as a student growing up in Iceland. I recited lullabies, old rhymes, riddles, evening poems, morning poems, hymns and prayers. I named every possible item, animals and birds, towns and districts, rivers and mountains, fjords and bays, men and women. I even went as far as to recite poems using different meters and expression and to sing some poems in a loud voice.

But it was all in vain. Mr. Carson did not seem to understand one word in Icelandic. He sat and smoked one cigar after another and did not stop me until the clock struck midnight. He apologized and said that he must leave. He bade me good night and walked into the adjoining bedroom.

Next morning, when I was ready to leave, Mr. Carson came and accompanied me out to the road. He bade me a sincere goodbye, thanked me for visiting him and presented me with a small gift that was wrapped and asked me to accept it as a token of friendship. It was a gold nugget, the size of a duck's egg. I accepted it with thanks.

Dominic escorted me all the way to Ashcroft. And I have never seen him or his master since.

And God Said: "Let There Be Red"

by Bill Holm

"Were you born in a barn?" asked your mother in a sardonic voice after discovering one of your messes, or after having to close a door you had left open in your childhood forgetfulness and sloth. "Just like Jesus," a smart comeback, earned you either the back of a hand or a stern command to bring your chaos into civilized order.

Actually, if your mother thought about that question, and if you were born on a normal farm, she would have realized that it was not an insult at all. The barn, most frequently, was larger, cleaner, better appointed, sometimes warmer and in its architercture, more elegant than your house. It was all right for human beings to be cramped, uncomfortable, and cold, but cattle, horses, and pigs deserved better, and hay needed to stay drier than children.

The famous old story by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, "The Revolt of the Mother," set in New England, is a sort of prefeminist fable. It could as well have been set in the Midwest. Mother's behaviour, rather than making a political statement, is a touchstone of simple rationality. Maybe that's the function of true political gestures: to restore fellow citizens to the light of reason. Father, after promising for too many yeras to build a new house to replace the cramped wreck in which mother has raised their children almost to adulthood, cannot resist the temptation to build a new barn instead in order to expand his livestock herd. He builds a fine new barn, goes off to dicker for more cattle, and brings home his new stock, only to find that Mother moved into the new barn, stove, four-poser bed, crystal punchbowl, oak rocker, and all - the whole catastrophe. She has no intention of moving back, so the poor livestock have to make do with the old house.

It's a fine comic reversal, so long as you are of Mother's party. Most of my boyhood neighbours in Swede Prairie township would have tried to figure out how to get Motehr up to the Cities for a few days to calm her down, so tha they could discreetly move her back where she belonged. Then they could proceed to run the silage auger into the east side and buy ten more head.

In the Cities, Father puts on his necktie, snaps shut his briefcase, and goes off in his Volvo every morning to battle the dragon of freeway traffic before doing his daily hunting and gathering at a desk under fluorescent lights in a glass and iron box. He surfaces again into the domestic world after dark, if golf or late meetings have not distracted him on the way home. So goes the old cliché of the American salary man. Like all clichés, it's about half true.

In the other part of this cliché, Mother stays at home in a fine suburban house, vacuuming carpets, dusting bric-a-brac, ferrying daughter to dance class, son to Little League, then stopping at the mall to price new sofas, sideboards, and decorator prints of charming rural scenes before station wagoning back down the cul-de-sac to make ginger cookies and pot roast. The metaphor behind this imaginary family, of course, is that the urban domestic world and the world of business and affairs are invisible to each other, separated by sharp demarcations of space and habit. This cliché, mostly true, is a primary distinction between urban and rural life.

On a farm, business and domesticity face each other across a narrow yard with iron and intractable faces. They deal with each other, mix, negotiate, interpenetrate, not always gladly, but always necessarily. One sees what the other does at every moment of every day in every season. What is taken from one world is received by the other. These two worlds are a balance scale with manure and a yard light between them. If a new truckload of feeder cattle weights one

end, the other rises until a new washing machine or livingroom suite brings back the balance. The idea of a farm as a happy unity painted by Norman Rockewell is the purest nonsense. The house and the barn are a pair of contraries, often in silent war with one another, at their best in a state of creative tension. The barn is the world of business and affairs. Historically and practically, it wins.

If you drive by almost any deserted farmstead, notice that the barn has outlasted the house. It was better built and better maintained through most of its history. Often a barn went on giving useful service, storing hay, livestock, machinery, long after the house turned into a rest home for mice and pigeons, or a practice target for marauding teenage boys. By the time the barn developed its elegant lean, a harbinger of its end, the house usually suffered a terminal illness and was either cremated or bulldozed into a rock pile.

The only inflexible rule of barn architecture was red - no other colour would do. A barn was something like Henry Ford's description of customer options on the Model T. He would make one for you in any color so long as it was black. Beyond red, barn design provided more avenues for the expression of whimsy, creativity, and new-fangled fashion than a house. The gaiety of cupolas; the imaginative trim on a hay barn door; the haughtiness of weather vanes and lightening rods; the sense of height and soaring in a steeply pitched roof; the shape of the barn itself: rectangle, hexagon, circle; the grand size that proclaimed wealth and power; the meticulous stone masonry of the foundation; the ingenious trapdoors and feeding chutes; the narrow medieval stairs into the hay mow; the vaulted cathedral ceilings to keep the alfalfa safe and dry; the nooks and crannies where cats slept between their shifts ravaging barn rats and giving apoplexy to pigeons; the imperial rows of orderly stanchions for milk cows; the grand canal of the guter . . . There was poetry in most barns, but only expository prose in the house. Mrs. Wilkins' revolting mother probably meant to make her children into artists by moving them into the new barn. It's an odd paradox (but then what paradox isn't?) that the world of practical business fed the soul while the house fed the body its everyday hot dish and watery coffee.

Some of the grandest lines of American literature were born in a barn. Long Island was still rural when Walt Whitman grew up there in the 1820s, and he remembered the barns of his own childhoods with delight in "Song of Myself."

The big doors of the country barn stand open and ready,
The dried grass of the harvest-time loads the slow-drawn wagon,
The clear light plays on the brown gray and green intertinged,
The armfuls are pack'd to the sagging mow.

I am there, I help, I came stretch'd atop of the load,
I felt its soft jolts, one leg reclined on the other.
I jump from the cross-beams and seize the clover and timothy,
And roll head over heels and tangle my hair full of wisps.

If you read those last two lines aloud, you might be tempted to do somersaults all over your living room.

Does it surprise you that children love hay barns more than churches, school rooms or their own cramped house?

As a grown man Whitman thought not of the excitement of barns, but of their calm and loveliness and what could be seen looking out from them.

A Farm Picture

Through the ample open door of the peaceful country barn,
A sunlit pasture field with cattle and horses feeding,
And haze and vista, and the far horizon fading away.

The little scene he paints has been photographed on farm co-op calendars for a long time now, and though a visual cliché, has not lost its power to charm and take us away for a few seconds from the frenzy of our noisy century.

The most famous barn around Minneota when I was a boy belonged to my eccentric cousins, Victor and Elvira Josephson, twins, university educated , the last living children of their wealthy father. They read books, raised an army of cats, never married, and built round buildings. The barn went up around 1910, an experimental design from the University of Minnesota Agriculture Extension, a pre-World War I state-of-the-art cow, horse, and hay house. It sat surrounded by a fine grove next to the Yellow Medicine River, almost invisibel from the country road, only the top of the shingled dome and a gleaming cupola peeking above the trees.

Victor and Elvira died a month apart in the mid-sixties. The house burned the night after the sale. The new farmers who bought the land plowed straight up to the river, leaving the round barn for the first time in its histroy fully exposed to marauding photographers. They rose to the bait with their cameras, and for about fifteen years Kodak made a fortune, developing all-season photographs of that splendid barn.

But no livestock lived there any more: The round barn, since it served no practical purpose, was left to the mercy of weather and decay. The shingles on the vast, steeply curved roof slid off as they rotted randomly, leaving maybe a hundred holes of ligth forty feet above your head. The effect, like a low sky full of star points, was more romantic and lovely in its dying than it had ever been while still in good repair. The round roof was an acoustical marvel, too. I practiced opera arias there on sunny afternoons. Even a church choir duffer sounded like Caruso after a passionate Italian phrase reverberated around that roof and bounced back onto the bare wood floor, hayless for the first time in it's history. A plainsong would have sounded well, too, but somehow seemed culturally misplaced in the barn of Icelandic agnostics.

Not only eyes and ears were charmed by that barn; the nose loved it best of all. Once cattle and horses have eaten and shat and slept, been born and died in a room, the boards smell of them. The smells of old hay, leather, sour milk, dust, cats, petrified manure, cheap pipe tobacco, haunt you forever in old barns. Oddly, almost no one thinks of those smells as decay, sadness, or failure. There are a kind of old quilt pulled over your nose on a blizzardy night. Whoever bottled that smell would earn the gratitude of the human race. One sniff might calm an army or almost make a politician truthful.

It was a sensual old barn too. I once fell in love with an Icelandic woman from the old country, and took her there on a fine summer afternoon. This is what happened.

Round Barn

She and I go to an old round barn by the river.
The barn is full of the smell of old hay.
Wind whistles through missing shingles in the high dome.
Iron stalls are empty now.
We see hoof prints on black dirt, made by cattle long since dead and eaten. From a nail she takes down a horse harness, leather dried and cracked.
"From Iceland," she says, and caresses it.
We walk into the empty hayloft, fifty feet high, shaped like a cathedral dome. The last sunlight blown into the holes in the dome by

prairie winds shines the floor like a polished ballroom.

I walk under the dome, open my mouth and sing - an old Italian song about the lips of Lola the color of cherries.

The sounds rolls around the dome and grows.

It comes back to me transformed into horse's neighing.

The barn is gone now, its lumber recycled and its old cattle yard growing rich soybeans. But the countryside whever you are will still provide a curious old barn or two for you to visit when your life presents you with the need. Old barns are fine places for singing, for contemplation, for love. If, in old age, you grow crotchety and awkward, and some snarly young attendant snaps at you, "Were you born in a barn?" smile sweetly and answer, "Yes, me and all the other gods . . ."

The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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Contributions should be typewritten, double-spaced, and with ample margins. Pages should be numbered, with the author's name in the right top corner of each page. The author's full name and address must appear in the left top corner of the first page. Matter to appear in italics must be underlined

Notes should be kept to a minimum. Whenever possible the material should be incorporated into the text instead, if necessary in parentheses. Notes should be typed with double spacing at the bottom of the relevant pages or on separate sheets and arranged in one continuous numbered sequence indicated by the Arabic numeral followed by a stop

A corresponding bibliographical list should be included at the end of the article. The bibliographical list should be in alphabetical order by the surname(s) of the author(s) or editor(s). Icelanders with no surname should be listed by their forename. The name of the publisher and the place of publication is required. The following examples provide more detailed guidance on presentation, especially on the use of punctuation and italics

McCracken, Jane, ed.,
Stephan G. Stephansson Selected Translations from Andvokur. Edmonton
The Stephan G. Stephansson Homestead Restoration Committee, 1982

Þorsteinn Þ. Þorsteinsson and Tryggvi J. Oleson, *et al*
Saga Íslendinga í Vesturheimi
5 vols. Reykjavík: Menningarsjóður; Winnipeg: Þjóðræknisfélag Íslendinga í Vesturheimi
1940-1953

Matthiasson, John S.
"Adaptation to an Ethnic Structure: The Urban Icelandic Canadians of Winnipeg"
In *The Anthropology of Iceland*, ed. Paul Durrenberger and Gísli Pálsson. Iowa City:
University of Iowa Press
1989, pp. 157-175

Kristjanson, Gustaf.
"The Icelanders of Blaine."
The Icelandic Canadian 45:3
(1987), pp. 15-21.

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The ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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Myth, folklore and christianity in pagan to medieval Iceland

by Adam Lawson

In Pagan times, the Icelandic people, as well as the people of the Scandinavian countries, had spiritual beliefs that have lasted throughout the ages up to the present. These beliefs were of the Norse mythological gods and of folklore creatures like Trolls. By the late 1300's, Christianity had taken hold of their religious beliefs. Over the next few hundred years, the mythological gods changed from being all powerful to simply well known stories called sagas. However, the people of Iceland were able to hang on to their traditional mythological folk tales and religious beliefs. In the face of the power of Christianity, elements of old Norse mythology were combined with Christianity creating an end result that was pleasing for all.

The old Pagan religion, which has no specific name, was filled with many different gods and creatures that had their own individual characteristics which were all recorded in early writings. These gods of the old religion were very real to the people in Northern Europe who believed in them. Odin was the strong and wise father of all the gods.[1] He was a kind being whom everyone respected and admired. Odin was one of the gods who created the world and subsequently one of the most important gods.[2] He was also the god of war and wisdom. It was said that he sacrificed an eye to gain inner sight.[3] Thor became next to Odin in power and was sometimes called his son.[4] Thor owned a chariot drawn by two goats.[5] When he rode his chariot in the sky, he created thunder and lightning.[6] Thor was constantly in battle against the evil giants. He threw his hammer at his enemy and it would come right back to him, making the hammer a very valuable weapon. He was always fighting to keep it safe with him.[7] Baldur was the god of light and peace.[8] He was murdered by the trickster Loki but was said to return eventually. Scholars think this meant he was the god of vegetation because plants die in winter then come back in the spring. "These and many other gods were all part of the universe which then was represented by the "ash tree". There were three roots to the "ash tree"; one for the gods, one for the giants and one constantly being gnawed on by serpents. It was thought that eventually the serpents would gnaw through the root and the universe would come crashing down."[9]

Another element to mythology that was very real to the people were the folklore creatures. Creatures such as trolls were used in many stories that taught lessons about life to the people. An example would be the troll that caused havoc on their farm animals. This story taught them to always keep an eye on their animals to be safe. Other folktale creatures such as fairies of the forest were told as entertainment for the children because the fairies were very magical. But it was said that often, the fairies would trick you into following them into the forest and you would never return. This taught

1 Dorothy Hoford. *Thunder of the Gods* Lee and Shepard Publishers: Boston, 1952. p.l.
2 Ingri Mortenson d'Aulaire. *Norse Gods and Giants.* Doubleday: Garden City, N.Y., 1967, p.158.
3 Ingri Mortenson d'Aulaire. p.158.
4 Ingri Mortenson d'Aulaire. p.158.
5 Ingri Mortenson d'Aulaire. p. 158.
6 Ingri Mortenson dAulaire. p. 158.
7 Dorothy Hoford, p.4
8 Ingri Mortenson d'Aulaire. p.158.
9 Sigurdur A. Magnusson. *Northern Sphinx.* Mc-Gill-Queens University Press, 1956. p.65.

the children to never wander around the forest alone.[10] These folktales however are all stories passed from generation to generation changing a little each time. They may have been true and they may not have been true. It will never be known.

Virtually all that is known about the religion and beliefs of the Pagan times is taken from the 35 Eddic poems, 14 of them being mythological and 21 being about legendary heroes.[11] These Eddas are one of the most remarkable collections of mythological stories ever.[12] They were written by the Icelandic authors after centuries of being told by word of mouth. By the time these stories were recorded, however, Christianity had made its way into the Norse countries. Even though there does not seem to be any trace of Christian ideas in the poems, it is believed that Christianity did affect the translation from word of mouth to written form.

By about the year 1000,[13] Christianity had become the major religious belief in Iceland. This happened for a number of reasons: spiritual, economic and political. One of the spiritual reasons for the change was that the old Pagan religion was very gory and violent, which was in opposition to the Christian beliefs in gentleness and forgiveness. An example of how gory old mythology was, is as follows: "The heroes, says the Edda, who are received into the palace of Odin, have everyday the pleasure of arming themselves in order of battle, and of cutting one another into pieces; but, as soon as the hour of repast approaches, they return on horseback, all safe and sound, to the hall of Odin, and fall to eating and drinking."[14] Another spiritual reason for change was that in the old Norse ways, much of the creation and reasons for almost everything that happened in the universe was a result of conflicts between gods.[15] In Christianity, there is only one god, thereby eliminating the arguments and what they symbolized.

Much of the change also had to do with the Church becoming more powerful both economically and politically. The loss of vitality in the old beliefs was the result of the unbalanced strengthening of the church.[16] It started to become really strong when the Godar, which was the upper class, turned to Christianity.[17] This group gave up much of their wealth, including land and money.[18] Because of this, the Church soon owned a massive amount of land.[19] But at this time, the Church remained solely a religion and not an aspiring political power.[20] However, by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the bishops in the Churches in Iceland were working toward having the same amount of total control over their country as their brothers throughout the rest of Europe.[21] In 1279, which was thirty-five years after the Norwegian takeover, all of the estates and patronage rights were put in the hands of the Church.[22] By the time of the reformation, the bishops owned about half the land and were nearly absolute rulers.[23] The bishops then became very greedy in the way of taxation and tithes, and in some ways were forcing conversion to Christianity.[24] This was hard for some of the people to do because the

10 Garoarsson, Gunner & Johann, Garoar. Virtually Virtal Iceland. http://www.itn.is/~gunnsi/gardar1.htm, June 6/96.
11 Sigurdur A. Magnusson. p.49
12 Sigurdur A. Magnusson. p.75
13 Magnus Magnusson. *Iceland Saga.* The Bodley Head: London, 1987. p.208
14 Rev P.C. Headley. p.22.
15 Sigurdur A. Magnusson. p.57
16 Katherine Scherman. *Daughter of Fire.* Little Brown and Company: Boston & Toronto, 1976. p.246.
17 Katherine Scherman. p.246
18 Katherine Scherman. p.246
19 Katherine Scherman. p.246
20 Katherine Scherman. p.246
21 Katherine Scherman, p.246
22 Katherine Scherman. p.246
23 Katherine Scherman, p.246
24 Katherine Scherman. p.246.

two religions were so very different.

By the late Middle ages, around 1300-1600, the myths and folklore had been changed to coincide with Christianity.[25] The Scandinavians had always believed in folklore creatures but there had definitely been some changes to them since the dawn of the Christian era. The following are examples of the additions and changes in folklore: There were new trolls added for the Christmas season called the Jolasveinar.[26] These thirteen mischievous dwarfs start appearing every night starting on the 12th of December.[27] Each of the dwarfs helped reinforce a different lesson, such as remembering to not leave the meat out overnight and to keep an eye on your farm animals, but the main one was directed toward the children.[28] If the children were good, these Jolasveinar would not do them any harm.[29] Another example was how the trolls were now believed to hate Christianity. If a man was compared to a troll this meant he was very bad. Also, if a troll was ever chasing after you, you would be safe if you ran into the nearest church. This was quite obviously started by the Church to encourage more Church goers.

Another area affected by the Christian era was the mythological aspect of the Icelandic culture. As mentioned before, literally all that is known now about the pagan mythology was recorded as stories in writings called sagas. "The pagan mode of thought is so distinctively characteristic of the sagas that traces of a more modern way of thinking stand out in sharp contrast. Such signs of foreign influence are found rather frequently, not least off all in several of the more significant works such as *Laxdæla* and *Njála*. These represent primarily reflections of Christian principles and values. Christianity, it will be remembered, became the official religion of Iceland during the Saga Age itself. And when the sagas were written during the thirteenth century, the country had been Christian for over two hundred years. It would have been nothing short of miraculous if Christianity had not left it's mark in this literature."[30] There are traces that Christianity has permeated its way into the sagas. For example, in one saga, there is a very Christian character in that he does not get revenge for his fathers death because he does not want other persons to suffer on his account.[31] In the old pagan way of thinking, there could be nothing more distressing than not getting revenge for a death.[32] Another example of Christian influence is found in a verse composed in 1222 which reads: "Proud Sturla has exacted fitting vengeance for Tumi - the raven is standing on the corpse: Christ rules over glory and safety."[33] In this verse, it is stated that Christ is involved with the pagan ideology of the blood-feud as a replacement for Odin's guardian bird the raven."[34]

It might be argued that anti-pagan sentiments are not necessarily pro-Christian attitudes and that the virtuous heathens and reluctant Christians in the sagas are the exception that proves the rule: the prevailing temper of Sagas of Icelanders is pagan. But the cultural milieu is Christian, and the functions of the virtuous heathen and the significance of anti-pagan predilections were certainly clear to the mediaeval reader. Few scholars would deny that saga authors present an idealized picture of the world of their pagan forebears, especially as far as fighting and killing are concerned. But most amazing of all in the Sagas of Icelanders is the attitude toward women and sexual morality: rape, concubinage, and extramarital dalliance--again in contrast to the more realistic sagas-are as uncommon as torture. It is found in this pagan society the real-

25 Peter Hallberg. *The Icelandic Saga*. University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, 1962. pp.105-109.
26 Leigh Syms. "Have You Seen the Jolasveinar?", Icelandic Canadian Winter 1994, pp.83-84.
27 Leigh Syms, pp.83
28 Leigh Syms. pp.84
29 Leigh Syms. pp.84
30 Peter Hallberg. pp. 108-109.
31 Peter Hallberg. p. 112
32 Peter Hallberg, p. 112
33 Peter Hallberg. p. 113
34 Peter Hallberg. p. 113

ization of many of the ideals of sexual morality taught by the church, but not generally respected by the people, in Christian Iceland. Again the only reasonable explanation is that the Sagas of Icelanders were intended as moral example for the thirteenth century."[35]

What conclusions can be drawn? It is evident that the pagan gods, even with the coming of Christianity, had taught many lessons and were integral in the shaping of Iceland's culture. Because they were carefully recorded in the Icelandic sagas, the pagan gods and folklore creatures survived. Even by the mediaeval times, they prevailed and were woven in with the new and very contrasting Christian ways.

35 Paul Schach. *Icelandic Sagas.*
Twayne Publishers: Boston, 1984. p. 175

Introducing the Magazine Designer

Karen Emilson is the new designer/typesetter of the Icelandic Canadian Magazine.

Karen works full time for the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association and lives on a ranch in the Icelandic farming/fishing community of Siglunes - near Ashern.

As the former owner of a printing and newspaper business, Karen brings with her more than 10 years of experience in the desktop publishing field. Also, she is a writer and in 1996 self-published a non-fiction book, titled "Where Children Run." Her Icelandic ties are through marriage - her husband is Mark Emilson, son of Siggi and the late Jonina Emilson of Vogar, Manitoba.

The Borg home

by JoEllen Kemp

The first article about Borg appeared in the 11/11/98 edition of the ***Cavalier Chronicle.*** *It is reproduced in its entirety here. The second article was taken from Borg's newsletter called* ***"The Pioneer"****.*

In its 50th year of existence, the Borg Pioneer Memorial Home has just completed another major remodelling project as part of its five decade effort to meet the needs of the people it serves and remain viable in an ever-changing health care market. The $93,000 project, completed 50 years after the Borg's cornerstone was laid, turned double rooms to singles and added bathroom facilities on all three floors.

In the archives that chronicle the beginnings of the home, the commitment of seven Icelandic congregations that sponsored the project is evident. For people in Vikur, Gardar, Hallson, Eyfo•rd, Vidalin, Peters and Upham to raise $133,000 during material, labour and financial shortages caused by World War II, took unusual optimism.

But the money and materials were found and the building went up with much volunteer effort from those in the Icelandic and surrounding communities. That same commitment is what continues to keep Borg strong a half century later, according to its current director, Sharon Laxdal.

"We now have 37 private rooms and three double rooms for married couples or those who prefer to be with someone," says Laxdal referring to the most recent remodelling project. "At the present time we are full with a waiting list."

But this is no time to rest on laurels, according to Laxdal, and indeed, the Board and its supporting congregations continue to look ahead to the future. " We're looking ahead to celebrating the fiftieth next fall," she says. " But we're also looking to keep things updated. We're kind of isolated out here, so it's important to always be asking what would keep us competitive.

Those who envisioned a modern facility that would serve as their "old people's home" in the early 40s would hardly recognize what they accomplished today. Varying projects throughout the years have added well over $800,000 in updates to the original three-story structure.

"We're constantly trying to provide our residents with the luxuries they have come to expect." says Laxdal. " People are looking for a lot more than they did 50 years ago. We expect a lot more from long term care than we did back then."

"Basic" care, the type of long term care offered to residents of Borg, is still very cost effective, according to Laxdal. " It's about one third of the cost of skilled nursing care," she says. Rooms at Borg are around $35 a day for "doubles" and about $38 to $39 for private rooms.

An elevator addition in 1977 made all three floors accessible to wheelchairs at a cost nearly equal to the original building project. In 1986, a 3,000 square foot addition provided new offices, an updated kitchen and and a large dining/living area for meals and various activities. Additional plans that year brought about a six-plex apartment complex on the Borg grounds and major renovations to the original building.

The nine newly decorated single rooms and additional bathrooms are just another step toward keeping up with today's long term care market. "Resident's want their own rooms, "explains Laxdal, recognizing that it is hard to share a room at this stage of life. "It's nice for them to have their own space and it definitely does away with roommate conflicts.

Walking through the resident living areas, the halls are decorated with memories of family and the past in various themes. One hallway bears pictures of children with their pets; another has floral prints and a third has Terry Redlin prints of scenes from rural yes-

terdays. Most rooms are spacious enough to allow personal effects and furniture, representing some of the comforts of home.

Looking around at the activity throughout all the areas of the building, Laxdal says, "I think it's so wonderful this home is fifty years old. Many things don't survive fifty years today."

"A lot of the same principles that started the home are still at work today. People in the area still support it. We have good employees from the community. Many have been with us for years. The Auxilliary and Board are very active. There are lots of volunteers who help us out. The support of the people has been what has kept the home going throughout the years."

A Look Back into Borg's History
by F.M. Einarson

A home for the aged was a project suggested by Dr. B. J. Brandson, an outstanding Winnipeg physician and philanthropist, who was a native of the Gardar community. He was Chairman of the Icelandic Evangelical Lutheran Synod Old Peoples Home Committee at Gimll Manitoba. In 1944, he submitted to Dr. Harald Sigmar, then pastor of the North Dakota Icelandic Parish, the idea that a home for the aged should be built somewhere in Pembina County. Dr. B. J. Brandson said the Icelandic Synod of Winnipeg would donate $15,000.00 out of the funds belonging to the Old People's Home at Gimli, Manitoba. As a result of this suggestion the seven congregations decided to sponsor the project. There was one member from each congregation elected to serve on a committee, to find out to what extent the people in the respective congregations would support such a project. After a thorough survey had been made, the committee was convinced that it was the desire of the people that a modern home should be built.

It took as unusual optimism, to say the least, to undertake such a project under the prevailing conditions, as the country was at war and a serious material and labour shortage coupled with the fact that the success of the project depended on voluntary donations of about $80,000.

At this point it was decided to make the present committee, a board of directors, and add the Upham Congregation of Bottineau County to the sponsorship, with one director representing them. The Board of Directors were instructed to organize and incorporate an Old People's Home Association under the sponsorship of the following congregations: Vikur, Gardar, Eyford, Vidalin, Fjalla, Peters, and Upham.

The following are the names of the directors chosen - F.M. Einarson - Mountain, Treasurer- J.E.Peterson- Cavalier, Secretary- Victor Sturlagson - Langdon, Alvin Melsted - Gardar, Alli Magnusson - Milton, Einar Einarson - Hallson, G.T. Jonasson - Eyford, Asmundur Benson - Bottineau, Dr. H. Sigmar - an ex-officio member. P.S. Snowfield - Cavalier was retained as Attorney for the association.

During the next three years much time was spent in soliciting funds and planning for the general construction of the Home. Where to locate the home was a major problem. Many favoured Mountain; others favoured Cavalier as the proper location. The city of Cavalier offered to donate the site.

Locating the home at Mountain seemed to be out of the question, as there was no water system there.

To make it possible for the home to be located at Mountain, the City Council applied to the State Geological Department for a ground water survey to determine where and how much water would be available. The result of the survey showed an ample supply of water one half mile west of the town. So great was the desire of the people of Mountain to have the home located in the center of the Icelandic Communities, that they authorized the City Council to go to the expense of installing a modern water system for the town and home. With the assurance that ample water would be provided, the committee selected a six acre plot overlooking the beautiful Red River Valley. Five acres of this plot were later donated by Mr. and Mrs. Haraldur Olafson. (Maria Olafson was the daughter of Mattusalem Einarson, an early settler of the community) and one acre was donated by Mr. & Mrs. Walter Hannesson. John B. Stephanson of Moosejaw, Saskatchewan, a son of Hensel, was given a cost plus contract for the construction. Carl Hanson, Winnipeg, Manitoba. was retained as construction fore-man.

June 24, 1948, was set for the construction to start. On June 22, a telegram was received informing the committee that the cement order had been cancelled and could not be filled. The committee forthwith contacted lumber yards in Walsh, Cavalier, and Pembina counties. In 36 hours, they had purchased and delivered 2900 bags of cement and the work started on schedule. Men from the various communities volunteered their services in clearing the ground, pouring the concrete and hauling the material.

Fifteen hundred people attended the cornerstone ceremony, Sunday September, 19, 1948. Among the well known persons were Governor Fred G. Aandahl, Attorney General Nels Johnson and Clifford Williams - head of the Old Age Assistance Division, all of Bismarck, North Dakota.

Impressive consecration service for Iceland's new Bishop, Karl Sigurbjornsson

by Eric H. Sigmar

Over 1200 people crowded into Reykjavík's magnificent Hallgrím's Church as retiring Bishop Ólafur Skúlason conducted the consecration service for his successor, Pastor Karl Sigurbjörnsson on Nov. 23, 1997. Bishop Karl had served Hallgrím's Church as pastor for twenty-two years prior to his election as Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Iceland.

A moving and stirring processional hymn composed by Þorkell Sigurbjörnsson, Bishop Karl's brother, and text by former Bishop Sigurbjörn Einarsson, Karl's father, brought in the huge procession of scores of pastors and bishops into the cathedral-like Hallgrím's Church. The prelude hymn was sung by three massed choirs, - the Dómkirkja Choir, the Mótetteu Choir of Hallgrím's Church, and the Kársness School Children' s Choir, accompanied by the organ, trumpets, and tympani drums!

It took several minutes for the long procession of most of Iceland's active and retired pastors, bishops from Scandinavia, Iceland's retired bishops and vice-bishops, representatives from the Lutheran World Federation, the Church of England, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to reach the large chancel up front.

Other special guests included the President of Iceland and his wife, the Prime Minister and his wife, the Minister of Church affairs and his wife, the Mayor of Reykjavík, and the Church Councils of the Dómkirkja and Hallgrím's Church. Normally Bishops' Consecration Services are held in the Dómkirkja (Iceland's 250 year-old Cathedral), but because of Hallgríms Church's larger seating capacity~ and Bishop Karl's 22-year ministry there, it was appropriate to hold the service there.

Liturgist at the service was Pastor Hjalti Guðmundsson of the Dómkirkja. It is interesting that both he and Bishop Ólafur Skúlason served as pastors many years ago in Mountain, North Dakota. Pastor Eric Sigmar of Auburn, Washington was a special guest, invited by both Bishop Ólafur and Bishop Karl. He had been present 38 years before at the Consecration Service for Bishop Sigurbjörn Einarsson as the official representative of the former Icelandic Lutheran Synod of America, which he then served as its President (Bishop). At this service he was also the representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and brought greetings from its presiding Bishop, Dr. H. George Anderson of Chicago.

Music throughout the service was uplifting and beautifully performed. Two of Iceland's greatest organists and choir directors led the choral and organ music: Hörður Áskelsson of Hallgrím's Church, and Marteinn Friðriksson of the Dómkirkja, One of the anthems was composed by Misti Þorkellsdottir, a niece of Bishop Karl's. One Of Iceland's greatest hymns, "Víst ertu Jesus, Kóngur klár," words by Hallgrímur Pétursson, for whom Hallgrím's Church was named, was sung by all present.

According to tradition a"vita" (life story) is prepared by the candidate and read by a friend or associate at his Consecration. In his "vita" Bishop Karl lifted up one of his first memories as a little boy, as he remembered sitting on his older sister's lap and witnessing his pastor father baptising a child in the parsonage living room. He recalled that his father had made the baptismal service very special for the family, and how his mother had received them before and after the ceremony with kind hospitality. This was for him an illumination of the affinity between family and

church. He then quoted the words of Luther that "no ordination (consecration) is of higher rank than baptism," which ordains us as ministers of Christ. The church with its mission and work, which he saw first-hand in his family upbringing, the example of dedicated clergy and lay Christians, all had a part in his decision to become a pastor. In his brief but provocative sermon, Bishop Karl emphasized Jesus' message that we glorify and serve Him in showing loving, caring service for others.

"This is the mission of Christ's Church," he said, as he quoted from the Gospel of St, Matthew 25:40, "Truly, I say to you as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

In his charge to the new bishop, Bishop Ólafur Skúlason said, "It is our Lord's command and claim for you that you be faithful and vigilant in your new call, and that it be built on the sure foundation which is Jesus Christ our Lord. It is incumbent upon you to give attention to your call and responsibility to serve your flock - the Church of Iceland - with humility and by faithfulness to the truth of God's Word, and the witness of the Church."

The Consecration Scripture lessons were read in Icelandic, Finnish, Norwegian, Faroese, and sign language. The other Scandinavian bishops participated in the prayers and with the administration of Holy Communion. Perhaps the most moving moment of the service came when 87-year-old Bishop Sigurbjörn Einarsson placed the Bishop's Cope on his son's shoulders just prior to the actual ceremony of consecration by Bishop Ólafur Skúlason.

Eric Sigmar

Following the service the pastors and their wives, visiting bishops and other guests were invited to a reception in the Reykjavík Art Gallery. Greetings and remarks there were brought by the new President of Iceland,Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, and by the Minister of Church Affairs, Þorsteinn Pálsson, and by the new bishop. An evening banquet concluded the festive events of the day at which time many greetings were brought by visiting guests. Included were remarks by Pastor Eric Sigmar wherein he extended greetings from Americans and Canadians of Icelandic descent, as well as other friends of Karl in North America. Karl, his wife Kristín, and their three children exchanged homes for a year with Svava and Eric in 1988-89 at the time of Eric's retirement, at which time Karl pursued post-graduate study at Seattle University.

Pastor Eric concluded his remarks by saying that he and Svava (who was also in attendance) were convinced that Pastor Karl would be a strong and faithful leader as Bishop, and that Karl and his family would be remembered frequently in their prayers. His closing words stated, "May God grant you his strength and grace to proclaim and live the truth of God's Word in your years of pastoral Leadership of the Church of Iceland."

Book Reviews

The True Intrepid: Sir William Stephenson and the Unknown Agents

by Bill Macdonald
Surrey, B.C.: Timberholme Books, 1998.
Reviewed by Dr. John S. Matthiasson

Perhaps one of the more intiguing figures of Canadian history in this century has been Sir William Stephenson, known as the spy-master extraordinaire and, according to some, the model for James Bond. Canadians of Icelandic background have been particularly interested in Stephenson, who was long rumoured to have been of Icelandic descent himself.

At least three previous books have been devoted to Stephenson's life - THE QUIET CANADIAN, A MAN CALLED INTREPID and INTREPID'S LAST CASE - and probably many articles, but the man himself has remained in many ways a mystery. In 1985, a young Canadian journalist named Bill Macdonald met Stephenson in person at his island retreat of Bermuda, and then spent the better part of the next ten years collecting material for a biography of this man whom he had come to admire greatly. The result of his research is the volume being reviewed here, in which he challenges many of the conclusions of the earlier books, and tries to give us a picture of the real person. After reading his work, I am still left with a sense of mystery about the spymaster.

According to Macdonald, previous accounts of Stephenson's ancestry and early life in Winnipeg were garbled and filled with error. His own research showed that William Samuel Clouston Stanger was born to an Icelandic mother and a father from the Orkney Islands. His widowed and financially strapped mother later gave him to Icelandic friends to bring up. The Stephensons, who renamed the child William Samuel Stephenson, lived in the Point Douglas area of Winnipeg, which at the time had a largely Icelandic population. So, the man from intrepid did have an Icelandic background, and spent his formative years in an Icelandic-Canadian setting.

Although the adult Stephenson was to prove himself to be a financial wizard, he only completed grade six before dropping out of school to work first for a lumber company and later as a telegram delivery boy. Over time, the middle class status of Point Douglas declined and it became the red light center of Winnipeg. The Stephensons then moved to the west end of the city, along with many

other Icelandic families. At one point, young William was involved in an incident which perhaps fore-shadowed his later work in espionage when he identified a notorious bank robber and killer. To protect him, the police and press hid the identity of the messenger boy whose evidence had led to the capture of John Krafchenko.

Stephenson enlisted in the Canadian forces during World War I, and while in the service was a boxing champion and flying ace. Acts of heroism led to his being awarded several decorations. Captured by the Germans, he later escaped and at the end of the war returned to Winnipeg. He turned his attention to business, and even invented a new mouse-trap which he tried to market. (I cannot resist mentioning that he purchased a house on Ingersoll Street, only a few doors from the home of my own maternal grandparents.) Later he formed a company with a friend, which flourished for a while, but eventually went bankrupt. Stephenson left Winnipeg just ahead of his many creditors in the Icelandic community of the west end, and in 1922 headed for England. In London he hit his stride in business - probably having learned from previous mistakes - and in time amassed a considerable fortune. This allowed him to develop acquaintanceships within the British upper class and among politicians. When World War II broke out, he was well primed to take on the role which was to bring him fame, while also shrouding him in mystery - that of spymaster.

This extremely private person - which may explain in part why he was known as 'the quiet Canadian' - was sent to New York by Winston Churchill himself to head the British Security Coordination (BSC), a branch of the British intelligence service. A training camp was established in Ontario, and soon a cadre of professional spies along with technicians and clerical workers was formed to carry out the work of espionage. Stephenson also developed what he called his 'private army', which included celebrities such as Alexander Korda, the film producer. Interestingly - at least to this reviewer - only about a third of the book is devoted directly to Stephenson and his involvement in the BSC. Instead, the largest part of it is based on interviews with persons who worked with him during the war; the "unknown agents" of the title, and in these sections we learn more about them than about Stephenson.

Macdonald is to be commended for convincing so many of Stephenson's associates to talk with him. Some were at first very reluctant to do so, but others seemed to have been anxiously waiting for the opportunity to discuss their war-time activities in the clandestine world of espionage. Very central to the BSC operations were several Canadian women, some of them from Stephenson's home-town of Winnipeg. They all appear from the interviews to have had a strong sense of commitment and even devotion to their leader.

One of the more fascinating members of the team was Benjamin de Forest Bayly, a one-time professor at the Unversity of Toronto. Macdonald claims that he was the "most secret member" of the staff. Long after the end of the war his name and involvement with the BSC were kept hidden from the public, but the latter is fully revealed here. He was a code-maker and code-breaker upon whose expertise and possibly brilliance Stephenson relied heavily.

While reading Macdonald's book, I found myself at times bogging down in the huge amounts of detail presented, but after working my way through it, I was able to put together at least a partial image of William Stephenson; this man with an Icelandic background who seems to have had such a major impact on the course of World War II. As Macdonald himself modestly states, "a definitive story of Stephenson is unlikely," but he has filled in some of the spaces. In recent years many attacks have been launched against Stephenson's reputation. Macdonald has defended it well against such criticism. His book is engagingly written and worth reading by anyone interested in this most elusive character of Canadian, British and American war-time history.

Let me end with a foot-note. There was another man of Icelandic descent who also began his life in Manitoba and whose life also took on almost legendary proportions. That was Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the great explorer and anthropologist, who was christened William Stephenson. (Stefansson is mentioned in this book only once, and ufortunately his name is mis-spelled. It is given as Vilmar Stefansson.) These two legendary figures - the one who opened up new worlds and the other, who long kept his own world a secret - both born in Manitoba, and with the curiously similar names, are without doubt the best known of all western Icelanders.

Letters to Icelanders: Exploring the Northern Soul

by Betty Jane Wylie
Toronto: Macmillan Canada, CDG Books Canada Inc., 1999.
Reviewed by Nina Lee Colwill

Most of my life I've lived among Icelandic Canadians. I married one and gave birth to two (albeit diluted); I grew up in Gimli and plan to die there, and I've been to Iceland fifteen times. What could I possibly learn by reading Betty Jane Wylie's new book, Letters to Icelanders: Exploring the Northern Soul? More, it turns out, than I thought.

In 1935, W.H. Auden and Louis MacNeice wrote a travel book entitled Letters from Iceland. For her thirty-fifth book, Betty Jane Wylie has refocused the prism and taken us, not on a journey through Iceland, but on a trip through the heart of a Western Icelander. It's a pot pourri of poetry, letters, recipes, and short stories, little-known facts and well known myths. We flit back and forth across the northern Atlantic, touching down in Gimli, L'Anse aux Meadows, and Hofsos, back to twentieth-century Winnipeg, then off to ninth-century Husavik. It's a nostalgic book, a wistful book, a fact-filled book.

Do you know, for instance, that Reykjavik was chosen as the cultural capital of Europe for the year 2000? That Gimli's famous cairn, built in 1935 to commemorate the diamond jubilee of the Icelandic settlers, has a cornerstone stuffed with newspapers of the day? That a recently published Icelandic book lists every first name in the country and the number of people who bear each name? That many Icelandic homes are heated by 800 C water, piped into them from deep in the earth, water that pours into the sewer system at 350 C and runs under roads to de-ice the pavement? That a fifteenth-century outbreak of the bubonic plague reduced the population of Iceland to four traceable clans? That less than 1% of the Icelandic population was born in another country, and most of those are form Scandinavia? That genetic research has traced the only breast-cancer mutation in Iceland back to a sixteenth-century cleric? That tissue samples have been collected from every autopsy in Iceland since the 1930s and stored in wax? That a "wake-pick," a wooden device to catch a knitter's eyelid when she started to doze off, was used in early Iceland to keep people awake until their daily knitting quota was reached? That the Icelandic Language Institute creates new words rather than allowing Greek or Latin roots to infiltrate the language; thus the Icelandic word for television is sjonvarp (throw a picture) and for bicycle is hjolhestur (wheel-horse).

Yet the appeal of Letters to Icelanders lies not merely in the facts, although there are many, but in the perspective. There's an engaging self-indulgence to Letters to Icelanders, a touching introspection. Betty Jane Weylie refocuses not only her prism, but ours as well, forcing us to view everything we know of Iceland--the sagas, the kleinur, the geysers, the kennings--from a slightly different angle.

Contributors

JOHANN MAGNUS BJARNASON was born in Iceland in 1866. He emigrated with his parents to Markland, Nova Scotia in 1882. He moved to Winnipeg Mantioba and for the next several years he moved around, settling in Geysir in 1892. He was a school teacher, writer of fiction, drama and poetry.

NINA COLWILL is a psychologist and management consultant, the author of three books and some hundred articles and book chapters. She is currently writing her first novel.

BILL HOLM is an essayist, poet, pianist, traveller and raconteur. He travels throughout the country and sometimes abroad to give lectures and readings. He hails from Minneota, Minnesota.

REV. STEFAN JONASSON is a member of the Icelandic Canadian magazine board. He is a practising Unitarian minister.

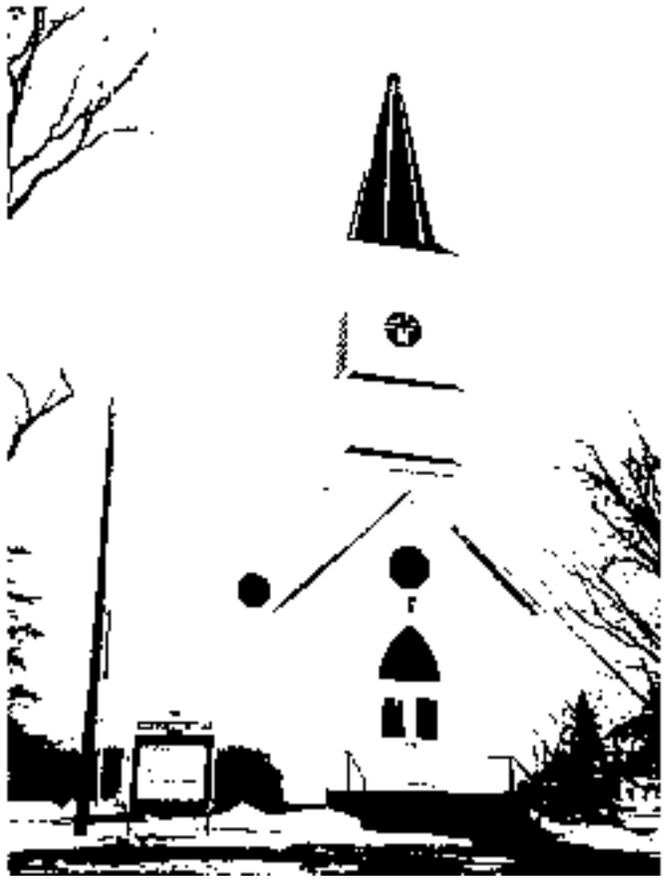
JOELLEN KEMP was a writer with the Cavalier Chronicle.

GUSTAF KRISTJANSON was a former board memeber of the Icelandic Canadian. He and his wife Nora have now retired to British Columbia.

ADAM LAWSON is a student at Markham District High School in Markham, Ontario. He is the grandson of Ivadell Sigurdson and the late Paul Sigurdson of Morden, Manitoba.

JOHN S. MATTHIASSON is a retired professor of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba. He is the Scholarly Essays Editor of The Icelandic Canadian.

ERIC H. SIGMAR is a retired pastor of the Lutheran Church. Over the years, he served congregations in Manitoba, Washington (state) and Iceland. He now lives in retirement with his wife, Svava (Palsson), originally of Geysir, Manitoba, in Sunburn, Washington.



The Vikur Lutheran Church in Mountain North Dakota was erected in 1884.