THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN MAGAZINE

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On the Cover

Stephan G. Stephansson

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Editorial

By Bernice Andersen

Greetings from the Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society of Markerville!

October 3rd marked 150 years since the birth of Stephan G. Stephansson. In recognition of this, a celebration took place - in conjunction with our annual June 17 Icelandic picnic. Stephansson House Provincial Historic Site near Markerville, was a fitting place to honour the famous poet of the Rocky Mountains. The old fashioned picnic proceeded as usual, but this year, in the shadow of the restored homestead with races, games, peanut scramble and tug-of-war followed by ice cream for all. The trophy for the most points for participation in the races went to the Calgary Icelandic club, again this year. Calgary also took home the tug-of-war trophy which was in Markerville's keeping last year. The program which is most often held in Fensala hall, as it can rain on Icelandic picnic day , was on the front lawn of the Stephansson house on a sunny afternoon.. The formal program was organized by Olga Fowler, site Supervisor of Stephansson House and the 3 Alberta Icelandic clubs. It consisted of speeches: by the Stephansson family, government history of the site and others, music: by the Saga Singers of Edmonton and a Stephansson poem set to music and the highlight, of course was poetry: Stephansson's poetry was recited beautifully in both Icelandic and English. The new Fjallkona, Connie Clark, from the Edmonton Icelandic Society was crowned by Marie Sveinson of Markerville. Next year a woman from the Calgary membership will be chosen by them. Did I mention rain? It was in short supply this hot and dry summer, however it did manage to rain for a short time during the pot-luck supper held on the Historic Markerville Creamery lawn. That evening the play "The Quilt of Many Cultures" was presented. This play was written, produced and performed locally. It is a Canadian story about immigration, and was very well received. There are touching accounts of hardships and joys lived by our settlers. One story is of an 8 year old girl sent alone from Iceland to Canada, with a note pinned on her coat asking to please help her get to Winnipeg. The descendants of that little girl take part in the play and add their musical talent as well. This play was performed twice more this summer with larger audience's each time. In November we will perform the play in a much larger venue in our nearest city, Red Deer.

The play "The Quilt of Many Cultures", co-written by our current President Bill Birse, was selected for the 2003 Museums Alberta Public Programs Award. It may come to a venue near you. Try to take it in, you will be reminded of how Canada, our great country, was established.

Our society has a tradition to follow. We were the guiding community force behind the Stephansson House restoration completed in 1982. The Creamery was restored and opened as a museum in 1986 . Unlike the Stephansson House, which is operated by the provincial government, our club operates the Creamery Museum. This year we have taken on a third huge project, to restore Fensala Hall which was recently designated a Provincial Historic Resource. The Icelandic Ladies Aid "Vonin" meaning hope (formed in 1891) recognized the need for a social centre and the men pitched in. Fensala was opened in 1903. Our hall is the oldest continuously used hall in Alberta. Fensala will be restored to the same period as the Stephansson House and Creamery(1930's). Project start date was just after June 17 so we would have an alternate location for the special 150th anniversary celebration and the annual picnic (in case of rain). The local

folks , which gather every morning at the Creamery for coffee, watched as phase 1 took place over the summer. The last addition(1975) was stripped off and Fensala hall was moved off it's original stone foundation, a new cement foundation poured and then moved back. It was quite a sight to see the hall rolled into place to stand firm and serve our community for a second hundred years. There is a temporary cover over the leaky roof, soon there will be a new addition and a new roof. In the future we will have a unique historic facility with modern amenities that we will be proud to use on many occasions. It will be a place where we can host dignitaries or larger bus tour groups. We plan to have plays and workshops as well as other cultural and community events. Fensala will be open again this fall, although far from completed, for the annual show and sale "Christmas in Markerville."

Note of interest: Stephan G. Stephansson was the first secretary/treasurer for both co-operative ventures, the Creamery, originally the Tindastoll Butter and Cheese Manufacturing Association formed in 1899 and the Fensala Stock Company formed in 1902.

*Fensala was the home of the Goddess Frigg in Norse mythology. Frigg was the wife of Odin and the mother of Thor.

How does this happen? Where does the money and energy come from? The answer is dedicated volunteers, members of the Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society. They have been willing to become legal owners of the building, hire an architect, do a feasibility study and move on from there. The energy seems to come from what has gone on before. Another dream is unfolding. Support has come from private, corporate and other donations, as well as government grants. The profit from the play presentations will go to the Fensala Restoration Fund. Annual fundraisers, a Cookie Walk and the Viking Cup Golf Tournament, have been established, proceeds to restoration. To realize our objective three hundred and forty thousand dollars needs to be raised. A scale model of the finished hall can be seen at the Creamery. Thank-you to all groups and individuals who have supported the start of this project .

If Johann Haldor Johannson, my father and our first President, was alive today he would be very pleased to see the Stephansson House is still welcoming visitors, the Creamery Museum just completed it's 17th successful season and the Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society is strong and active after 30 years. It is from him and my mother, whose first language was also Icelandic, that my love of Iceland and all things Icelandic comes.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VIDAR HREINSSON

Stephan G. Stephansson in his later years

Out in the Open Air

The liberating legacy of Stephan G. Stephansson

by Rev. Stefan M. Jonasson

The American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson idealized the poet as the representative human being, in whom the powers of both divinity and nature came into focus. "The poet is the person," he wrote, "in whom these powers are in balance, the man without impediment, who sees and handles that which others dream of, traverses the whole scale of experience, and is representative of man, in virtue of being the largest power to receive and impart."[1] Few societies have better understood Emerson's sentiment than that of the Icelanders, who have celebrated their poets throughout the generations.

As we mark the sesquicentennial of his birth, scholars and general readers alike acknowledge Stephan G. Stephansson as the finest poet among the Icelanders in North America, if not the finest poet in modern Icelandic literature. Richard Beck described him as "one of the most prolific as well as one of the greatest poets Iceland ever produced," whose "literary achievements are astounding" and "presuppose unusual genius, irrepressible creative urge, and an untiring devotion to the poetic art."[2] Watson Kirkconnell styled him "Canada's leading poet," speculating that he would "some day be acknowledged as the earliest poet of the first rank, writing in any language, to emerge in the national life of Canada."[3] Harvard University's Stanton Cawley described him as "the greatest poet of the Western world," arguing that his work eclipsed that of the American giants Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson.[4] Whichever superlatives one may choose, Stephansson clearly ranks among the poetic geniuses of human history. But great souls often defy the labels that are applied to them. It is insufficient to call Stephansson a great poet, unless we mean to do so with Emerson's understanding of the poet as a representative person; otherwise, we must acknowledge that Stephansson's greatness cast its influence over a wider sweep of earthly concern than the art of poetry. As Richard Beck observed, "no one can read Stephansson's poetry thoughtfully and intensively without coming to recognize the greatness of the man as well as of the poet."[5] While many have focused on Stephansson as a poet in the literary sense, less attention has been given to him as a social prophet and philosopher. A pioneer farmer and poet, he was as importantly a pioneer thinker.

People often point to the title of Stephansson's collected works, *Andvökur* – or *"Wakeful Nights"* – as a particularly apt metaphor for the poet's life, driven as he was to compose his verses into the wee hours of the morning after long days of labour on the farm. Yet I would argue that his spirit is better captured in the title of his slender first collection of poetry, *Úti á vídavangi - "Out in the Open Air"* – which was published in Winnipeg in 1894. It was out in the open air that he worked the land to earn a living; it was out in the open air that he allowed his mind to transcend the limitations of conventional thought; it was out into the open air where he sought to lead those who have whiled away many a wakeful night reading his words and pondering their rich meaning. Emerson wrote that "poets are thus liberating gods"[6] and there can be little doubt that Stephansson's influence during his lifetime, and his enduring influence since, has been as a liberating force in the life of his readers, whether in politics, religion or literature. It is still out into the open air where this poet and prophet leads us.

The man who came to be known as the "Poet of the Rocky Mountains" (Klettafjallaskáldid) was born Stefán

Gudmundsson[7] on October 3, 1853, at the farm Kirkjuhóll in Skagafjördur. Like the other three farms where he spent his childhood and youth, the croft at Kirkjuhóll is now abandoned, its productive capacity having been largely exhausted even before the future poet's family occupied it. The material poverty of his childhood did not yield a poverty of the intellect, however, since his parents, Gudmundur Stefánsson and Gudbjörg Hannesdóttir, "possessed both intellectual alertness and cultural appreciation."[8] According to his own testimony, Stefán Gudmundsson was unschooled as a child, so his education was mostly the result of an insatiable thirst for knowledge. He described himself as "a parasite on others when it came to books" and he managed to befriend enough individuals with libraries of their own or membership in literary clubs that he was widely read even as a young man. All told, it was an unlikely beginning for a great literary figure. As Skuli Johnson observed at the dedication of the provincial park in Stephansson's honour, "there is nothing in the antecedents or in the circumstances of Stephan G. Stephansson to account for him."[9]

In 1873, when he was nearly twenty, Stephansson emigrated to North America with his parents, which numbers them among the first large group of Icelandic emigrants to North America. He worked as a labourer in Staughton, Wisconsin, for nearly a year before moving north to Shawano County, Wisconsin, where he worked seasonally as a lumberjack and fieldhand. There he homesteaded on 160 acres of spruce woods in the first of three attempts to establish himself on the land. While in Wisconsin he married Helga Jónsdóttir, his first cousin, with whom he would have eight children – five sons and three daughters. They were married by Rev. Páll Thorláksson in "his first priestly duty among the Icelanders."[10] The Shawano Icelanders, Stephansson included, moved to Gardar, Dakota Territory, in 1880. En route to his new home, the trunk full of books that he had accumulated over the years was destroyed, leaving him without his personal library.

Back in Wisconsin, Stephansson had been a member of a small Icelandic congregation led by Páll Thorláksson, who was serving a nearby Norwegian Lutheran church. When Thorláksson established a church at Gardar, Stephansson participated in its organization, serving as secretary at the founding meeting. At the end of this meeting, Thorláksson observed that the secretary had not signed the bylaws, which were patterned on those commonly found in the Norwegian Synod. When the minister questioned Stephansson about this, the latter indicated that he alone had voted against two of its provisions, one concerning the creeds and another prohibiting women from voting in congregational matters, which was contrary to the custom in Iceland. In an act of compromise that was uncommon for both men, the minister asked if he could append Stephansson's name to the bylaws as long as it was accompanied by a notation that he did not accept all of the bylaws' provisions. Stephansson agreed and was counted among the congregation's charter members. Following Thorláksson's untimely death in 1883, at the age of 33, the Gardar congregation split into two, with the majority seceeding to form the Park congregation. While the presenting issue involved the rights of women in parish matters, the split also revealed a deeper cleavage in theological matters. "Without realizing it," Stephansson later wrote, "the congregation split laid the foundations for the New Theology movement which denied the infallibility of the Creed and the Scriptures."[11]

Stephansson was one of two representatives from the Park congregation at the first annual conference of The Icelandic Evangelical Lutheran Synod of America, which convened in Winnipeg towards the end of June in 1885. He was a reluctant delegate but he did not want to let his liberal friends down in the event that a controversy arose at the founding convention. When Jón Bjárnason nominated Stephansson for the vice presidency of the synod, he declined the nomination and Magnús Paulson was elected instead. Remembering the event a quarter-century

later, Stephansson wrote to a friend, "You understand that Magnús as vice president could, in the absence of the president, become president, or bishop. I could have been in his position but I was so much to the left that two lifetimes separated me from the bishop's chair."[12] He was then nominated for secretary but refused that position as well. In the end, he was elected assistant secretary of the synod. "I stated the obvious," he later wrote, "that I was too lazy to refuse such a meaningless office." By the time the synod met for its second annual conference, Stephansson had left the Lutheran church and he never again belonged to any church.

Stephan G. Stephansson, at back of photo

Influenced by their reading of American freethinkers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Robert Ingersoll, Stephansson and a half dozen other men from the Gardar and Mountain districts in Pembina County organized the Icelandic Cultural Society (Hins Íslenzka Menningarfélags) during a meeting at the poet's home on February 4, 1888. Stephansson was the first secretary and leading spokesperson for the group, which included Ólafur Ólafsson of Espihóli, Jónas Hall, Björn Pétursson, the pioneer Unitarian missionary among the Icelanders, and two of the Brynjólfsson brothers, Magnús and Skapti, the latter being president of the society. The society quickly grew beyond thirty members and counted several prominent pioneers among its small membership.[13]

According to its bylaws, which were written by Stephansson, "the objectives of this society are to support and promote culture and ethics, that ethics and those beliefs which are based upon experience, knowledge and science. In place of religious sectarianism, it seeks humanitarianism and fellowship; in place of unquestioned creeds, reasonable and unfettered inquiry; in place of blind faith, independent conviction; and in place of ignorance and prejudice, spiritual freedom and progress upon which no fetters are placed."[14]

The Cultural Society was patterned on Felix Adler's Society for Ethical Culture in New York, which Stephansson had become aware of through the Free Religious Association.[15] It sponsored public addresses, debates and group study on a wide variety of subjects, including literature, religion, ethics, natural history and human psychology. Its most tangible effort was the establishment of a community library, the cost of which was underwritten by levying dues of one dollar per year.

The leadership of the Icelandic Lutheran Synod was not pleased with this development in Dakota, seeing it as a thinly veiled threat to the church and its teachings. Given that a literary society already existed in the area, which was dominated by influential churchmen, the Synod's suspicion was not without foundation. Jón Bjarnason, the president of the Synod and editor of its periodical, *Sameiningin* (Unity), waged a bitter public feud with Stephansson.[16] Having been the champion

of a more liberal perspective during the great religious debate with Páll Thorláksson a decade earlier, Bjarnason now found himself defending the increasingly conservative position of the Lutheran church, which was growing closer to the doctrinal emphases of denominational Lutheranism in North America and away from the relative theological liberalism of the church in Iceland.

Even before Stephansson's announcement of the Cultural Society appeared in Lögberg, Jón Bjarnason attacked the new organization in the pages of *Sameiningin,* writing, "one should not overlook that this society has been organized by uneducated Icelandic farmers who have attained such arrogance here in America that they consider themselves competent to challenge the Christian Church, the greatest institution of all time."[17] As the debate progressed, church leaders were not alone in their concern about this new development. Like other ethnic communities in Canada and the United States, the church had become an important symbol of cultural solidarity among the Icelanders, helping them to preserve their language and customs against the forces of assimilation.[18] At the time, the Lutheran Synod was the only significant institution, other than the newspapers, that bound Icelanders in North America together beyond the local level. So even the unchurched were naturally concerned when conflict arose between the Synod and the Cultural Society, though for cultural rather than religious reasons.

Stephansson was immersed in the writings of the leading freethinkers of his day, for whom even Unitarianism was held to be confining and conservative. He was familiar with the work of Frances Ellingwood Abbott, a founder of the Free Religious Association, Felix Adler, the founder of the Ethical Culture movement, and Robert Ingersoll, who was called The Great Agnostic. Both Stephansson and Björn Pétursson, the founder of the first Icelandic Unitarian church, read *The Index,* a weekly published in Boston by the Free Religious Association under the editorship of William J. Potter and B.F. Underwood. When The Index ceased publication in 1886, its list of subscribers was transferred to *Unity,* a publication of the Western Unitarian Conference in Chicago. While the Icelandic Cultural Society owed much to Stephansson's familiarity with the freethought movement, it was not, strictly speaking, a freethought organization, whatever Bjarnason and the synod may have believed. Several of its members had withdrawn from the church but others appear to have remained.

For the thirty-four year-old Stephansson, the organization of the Icelandic Cultural Society marked a watershed in his life. To begin with, it was in announcing the society´s formation that he unveiled his new identity to the world, becoming Stephan G. Stephansson instead of Stefán Gudmundsson. Unlike some of

its other members, the Cultural Society did signal a final break with the church in his case. Moreover, the ostracism of him and his family that resulted from his very public dispute with the synod leadership, coupled with poor agricultural conditions and an economic downturn, surely contributed to his decision to join the westward migration from Pembina County. Finally, his literary output increased, only to explode once he reached Canada.

The year that North Dakota achieved statehood, Stephansson moved once again, this time to Markerville district in what was then still Alberta Territory.[19] When the family first settled in their new home, the nearest post office was reportedly seventy miles away! He was to spend a little more than half of his life on the farm that has since become a shrine to those who love the verses he composed there in the quiet stillness of the night.

Those who claim that Stephansson's individualism caused him to stand aloof from organizations of any kind fail to remember the numerous ways he was involved in the community life of the Markerville district. Among other involvements, he was the founding chairman of the Hóla school district, secretary-treasurer of the district's creamery association, and the area's Justice of the Peace! Any one of these offices would have marked him as a community leader. His antipathy towards political parties and religious movements did not extend to the many other human organizations that sought to promote the common good. Practical initiatives to improve the community were able to draw him out of his study to add his efforts to those of his neighbours. Addressing the people of the Markerville district on New Year's Eve in 1891, he declared, "If we feel our community lacks some amenities needed to make it a more pleasant place, we can do something about it. We know Nature did not corral all hardships to leave them near Red Deer. ... So, if we feel that something is amiss, let's get our hands out of our pockets and do something about it."[20]

Stephansson's family rarely attended church in Markerville and, when they did, it was for a funeral or to hear a visiting minister from Winnipeg, especially if he were a Unitarian. Despite his disdain for the clergy, he developed a close and affectionate personal relationship with Rögnvaldur Pétursson, a Unitarian minister in Winnipeg who became the denomination's field secretary for Western Canada. Their friendship began in the first decade of the new century and continued until the end of the poet's life. Pétursson was the son of neighbours in Dakota Territory and was himself a gifted man of letters. Stephansson sought Pétursson's pastoral support when his son Gestur was killed and he wished himself to be buried by the Winnipeg minister, even naming him as his literary executor. But while he asked Pétursson to send liberal ministers to speak in Markerville, and while he applauded the establishment of Unitarian churches among the Icelanders, seeing the

Unitarians as part of the larger freethought movement, "Stephansson's relationship with the Unitarian church itself remained ambiguous," according to Jane McCracken.[21] While he may have found the Unitarians more congenial to his own thinking, even this liberal church must have seemed timid in its challenge to religious orthodoxy, while continuing many churchly practices that differed little from their Lutheran neighbours. Moreover, his concern for these worldy matters left him impatient with the metaphysical preoccupations of religion, whether liberal or orthodox:

I quite expect that very soon
I'll weary of this fussing
How holy men are splitting hairs
When God they keep discussing.[22]

Like most free-thinkers of the time, Stephansson held the person of Jesus in high regard, even if he dismissed any notion of his divinity. He held him to be a prophetic teacher, a social revolutionary, who challenged the selfishness and greed that led human beings to exploit one another, offering an ethic of love as an antidote:

He preached that human love, alone,
Could lead the way to Heaven's throne;
That all our deepest wisdom went
To waste, if lacking good intent.[23]

At the same time, his admiration for the pioneer, who prepared the ground for those who followed, led him to ask the audacious question, "Yet was not the Baptist / Greater than the Messiah?"[24] For even his more liberal readers this rhetorical question, which esteemed John the Baptist over Jesus, was unthinkable.

Overall, neither Jesus nor conventional religious themes figured prominently in Stephansson's poetry. His poetic imagination preferred sagas to scriptures, nature to theology, and everyday figures to distant messiahs.

Despite his deep affection for his friends and neighbours, which is most evident in his touching eulogies, his broad sympathy for humankind, and the idealism of his social views, Stephansson was not much given to sentimentality. In light of the remarkably wide range of subject matter and styles in his poetry, his work contains surprisingly few verses that might be considered love poems. Richard Beck writes of the poet's "manliness" and it may well be that Icelandic culture is one of the few remaining that consider poetry a "manly" art rather than a pursuit of the soft-hearted and sentimental. Yet there is an unmistakable tenderness reflected in his work, such as his eulogy for his son, Jón, who died at the age of three while the family still lived in Dakota. This poem was composed in four stages over a period of fourteen years, the second part a year after his son's death:

Just one year ago,
When buds were springing
Wakened by April showers,
Down this same pathway
Where alone I walk now
You romped at my side, my darling.
Wild flowers bright and
Green leaflets shining
You clutched in your wee soft hand;
And from the bushes
When you scampered to me
Piping, "See daddy, I'm here!"
Fall is approaching,
Frozen hoary
The leaves by the pathways I walk on;
Your feet are unmoving,
Your lips are cold now,
And stiffened your little fingers.
Along here I wander,
No one to pick me
Flowers that grow by the wayside;
Yet I keep hearing
From the rose bushes,
Your baby voice, "Daddy, I'm here!"[25]

Years later, Stephansson lost his sixteen-year-old son, Gestur, who succumbed to the rare misfortune of being electrocuted by grasping a wire fence that had become charged with electricity from a lighting strike. These losses must have been especially bitter to a man who harboured no faith in personal immortality, believing as he did that, while life itself had a quality of immortality, individual humans did not.

"As far as one can see," he wrote, "life is eternal; it was and it will be. ... What each and every individual has in common with the life of the living will live on after he ceases to exist."[26] Both Stephansson's stoicism and his belief only in the immortality of influence were reflected in his graveside address for Gestur: "Had he lived longer, he would have become more of a man but never a better one. ... He has enriched our memories, and although it is so very painful to lose him, the void in my life would have been far more grievous had he never been mine and if I had never known the enjoyment of his company."[27]

Stephansson's most original creations found their inspiration in the natural world with all its majesty and meaning. This tendency is seen even in his earlier work, such as this passage from his days in Dakota:

> When fields of grain have caught a gleam of moonlight
> But dark the ground –
> A pearl-grey mist has filled to overflowing
> The dells around;
> Some golden stars are peeping forth to brighten
> The eastern wood –
> Then I am resting out upon my doorstep
> In nature's mood.[28]

It was in Canada, though, that his nature poetry blossomed in both quantity and quality. If his childhood in Iceland unleashed his thirst for knowledge, and if his experiences in the United States led him to religious and social radicalism, then it can be said that it was in Canada where he matured as a poet and achieved greatness. Many of Stephansson's poems and especially his Alberta poems portray the breathtaking scenery of the Canadian landscape and distill from that landscape a sense of life's meaning, the "sermons in stones" of which Shakespeare wrote in *As You Like It.* He even managed to give texture to the Manitoba flatlands:

> By prairie and slough-side the train that we rode
> Drove ever relentlessly north.
> To our left the great River lay turbid and red
> And sprawled itself sullenly forth.
> Its breast never quickened in rapid or fall,
> Its dull heavy waters were fain
> To waddle forever with arms full of mud
> And the slummocky clay of the plain.
> The landscape unchanged and unchangeable stood,
> Save only where dryads of grace
> Had woven on edges of wandering brooks
> A leafy embroid'ry of lace;
> But the land itself lay like an infinite board,
> Unslivered, unknotted, and clean,
> As if all of the stuff of Creation were smoothed
> And stained an ineffable green.[29]

It should come as no surprise, though, that Stephansson's best nature poetry drew its inspiration from the immediate neighbourhood of his modest Alberta farmhome. Few poetic descriptions of the Canadian landscape can surpass the incomparable beauty of the middle stanzas of his "Toast to Alberta" –

> Thy glorious valleys widen down
> Through straths and shining passes,
> By shelter-belts of forest brown
> And hollows warm with grasses,
> To a mighty plain of green, that wakes
> In a wind that laughs and quivers,
> Fringed with a hundred azure lakes,
> Embroidered bright with rivers.
> Here veils of Northern Light are drawn
> On high as winter closes,
> And hoary dews at summer dawn
> Adorn the wild red roses.
> Sometimes the swelling clouds of rain
> Repress the sun's caresses;
> But soon the mountains smile again
> And shake their icy tresses.[30]

For one who never wrote for financial gain, the sheer volume of Stephansson's published work is astonishing. His poems fill 1,800 pages, while his articles and letters occupy a further 1,400 pages. Had his energy been devoted entirely to agriculture, coupled with his willingness to experiment with new methods, it is likely that he would have become a prosperous farmer in time. But his vocation for poetry meant that he was little better off materially than he would have been had he remained a tenant farmer in the old country.[31] Nevertheless, it is almost impossible to escape the conclusion that the richness of his poetry grew, at least in part, out of the poverty of his material circumstances. It is hard to imagine that his words would have been more precious or profound had he been pensioned off to devote himself solely to writing, since the challenges of everyday life flow though his words.

It is not a simple matter to categorize Stephansson politically, since his social philosophy blended elements of strong individualism, on the one hand, and an embrace of socialist ideals, on the other. No political party was broad enough or, perhaps more accurately, sufficiently free of self interest, to encompass the full range and depth of his views. Consequently, his support for political parties or movements was always something of a pragmatic wager. In Wisconsin, he supported the Republicans, then still very much the party of Abraham Lincoln, while in Dakota he supported the Democrats, who at the time sought to reduce protectionism. After moving to Canada, he initially supported Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Liberals, who advocated economic reciprocity and distanced the dominion from the military and colonial policies of Great Britain. Later he supported the United Farmers of Alberta during that movement's more progressive period. Whatever party he supported, he held to the ideal of advancing democracy. "Democracy has this advantage over other forms of government, when it is free of corruption, in that it serves as a forum for the education of the public on how to live together in the most just and benign way possible. With all its inevitable faults, Democracy can in any case not put the blame on the government alone, for those who vote for the government in power will have to take responsibility for their decision."[32] However else he might be described, Stephansson was a radical democrat in politics no less than he was in religion. We often find his socio-political views expressed in biting social satires, some of which demolish conventional viewpoints in as little as a four-line stanza, but the essence of his social ethic is contained in his turn-of-the-century poem "Evening" –

> Where wealth that is gathered by taxes or tolls
> Or tariffs – is counted as vain,
> Where no one's success is another one's loss,
> Nor power the goal and the gain
> – The first of commandments is justice to all,
> And victory causes no pain.[33]

Nowhere were Stephansson's political views more strident than when it came to his unqualified condemnation of war as a means for resolving human conflict. It is impossible to escape the conclusion that he would have been disgusted to see the trivialization of warfare by present-day politi-

cal leaders who speak of "cold wars "and "wars" on social ills, such as poverty or drugs, thereby desensensitizing their citizens to the true horrors of modern warfare, which then makes it easier for those same political leaders to lead their nations to the battlefield. Stephansson was uncompromising in his pacifism and unwilling to mince words when writing or speaking about the evils of war:

> In Europe's reeking slaughter--pen
> They mince the flesh of murdered men,
> While swinish merchants, snout in trough,
> Drink all the bloody profits off![34]

In the aftermath of the First World War, which had rallied most Icelandic Canadians in support of the British Empire, Stephansson published *The Trail of War* (Vígslódi), a cycle of thirty-eight poems, including such titles as "When Christ was Army Chaplain" and "The Protest of the Unknown Soldier." But the most moving and memorable poem in the collection was the epic "Battle Pause" *(Vopnahlé),*[35] which portrayed the carnage of battle in stark realism. Two soldiers from opposing armies talk to each other across the battlefield during a pause to bury the slain and clear the field before the next encounter. In their unfolding stories, Stephansson pointed to the political leadership and vested interests on both sides that fueled the so-called "war to end all wars." He spared no one, including the clergy who had once "sung of peace on earth" only to become pulpit cheerleaders for "the cause" once hostilities began. With feelings about the war still running high, the poem provoked a very negative reaction among Icelanders in Canada, even among Stephansson's friends; but in the end, the greatness of his poetry and vision transcends even the offense it may give to some.

In seeking the words to describe Stephansson, Emil Gudmundson wrote that he "accepted no consistent label, but among those given him are freethinker, atheist, humanist, materialist, and unitarian. None really fully described him, and each had a limited usefulness, but in his poetry, letters, and prose he consistently raised some daring and provocative questions about the issues of the meaning of life and death."[36] It may well be that "daring and provocative" are the most accurate things we can say about this master poet who lived out in the open air and who beckons us to join him there. But even daring and provocative only describe one side of his personality. One of his faithful translators, Paul Sigurdson, observed that, "humble in greatness, compassionate, loving, noble and forgiving, this simple-living farmer-poet epitomized most of the finest qualities that make up the mind, soul, and spirit of the human being." One thing seems clear: years after the quarrels that surrounded him in life, many of the issues seem almost trivial, while the genius of his insight and the inspiration of his words continue to move us. And so it is that Stephan G. Stephansson has managed to capture the hearts and minds of generations of readers, who see in his words and work a commanding vision that leads us to follow him out into the open air, even when we would prefer to fall back on the comfort and safe haven of our established ways.

> We're enriched by our vision not stories,
> And mostly the truth is obscure,
> But there is one standard prevailing
> Which tells if an age will mature;
> To live not for years but for ages
> And not to claim all of one's wages
> For earth's greatest good to endure.
> Through seasons of winter and summer,
> This truth we instinctively see,
> To make what is good into better
> And strive for the best that can be.[37]

FOOTNOTES:

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet" (1843).
2. Richard Beck, History of Icelandic Poets, 1800-1940 (Cornell University Press, 1950), 203.
3. Watson Kirkconnell, "Canada's Leading Poet, Stephan G. Stephansson (1853-1927), in The University of Toronto Quarterly 5/2 (January 1936), 277. In the introductory paragraph of his essay, Kirkconnell predicted that when Canada began the "place-worship" of establishing literary shrines, as was the custom in Europe, Markerville would have "a strong claim to recognition," owing to the poetic genius of Stephan G. Stephansson. The establishment of the Stephansson House Historic Site in 1976 fulfilled this prediction.
4. F. Stanton Cawley, "The Greatest Poet in the Western World: Stephan G. Stephansson," in Scandinavian Studies 5 (1938), 101-105.
5. Richard Beck, 210.
6. Emerson, op. cit.
7. Stefán Gudmundsson adopted the name Stephan G. Stephansson while homesteading in Dakota Territory. While it would be most appropriate to refer to him as Stefán Gudmundsson until sometime around the period when he organized the Icelandic Cultural Society, this essay will use his adopted name throughout in order to minimize confusion.
8. Richard Beck, 201.
9. Skuli Johnson, "Stephan G. Stephansson (1853-1927)" in The Icelandic Canadian 9/2, 1. This article was the printed text of Johnson's address at the unveiling of a monument and dedication of a provincial park in honour of Stephan G. Stephansson at Markerville, Alberta, on September 4, 1950.
10. Stephansson, Bréf og ritgerdir, trans. Kristjana Gunnars, in Stephan G. Stephansson: Selected Prose and Poetry (Red Deer College Press, 1988), 15-16.
11. Stephansson to Baldur Sveinsson (July 10, 1910), quoted in Jane McCracken, Stephan G. Stephansson: The Poet of the Rocky Mountains (Alberta Culture, 1982), 39. The New Theology movement among Icelanders in North America was led by Rev. Fridrik J. Bergmann, who was minister of the Gardar congregation before taking up the pastorate of Tjáldbudin (The Winnipeg Tabernacle) in 1903. Advocating an increasingly liberal and modernist theology, Bergmann led nine congregations out of the Icelandic Evangelical Lutheran Synod after a dramatic confrontation at the synod convention in 1909. In 1921, The Winnipeg Tabernacle amalgamated with the First Icelandic Unitarian Society to form the First Federated Church of Unitarians and Other Liberal Christians (literally, "other religious liberals"). Two years later, the United Conference of Icelandic Churches was founded, bringing together the Unitarian and New Theology congregations under one denominational umbrella. Ironically, it seems probable that Bergmann was behind Jón Bjarnason's challenge to Stephansson when the Icelandic Cultural Society was organized.
12. Stephansson to Baldur Sveinsson (July 10, 1910) in Bréf og ritgerdir, vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 1938), trans. Ninna Campbell, in Selected Translations from Andvökur (The Stephan G. Stephansson Homestead Restoration Committee, 1982), 68.
13. The Icelandic Cultural Society ceased to exist in 1891, largely because of the removal of its leaders to other places. Stephansson himself moved to Alberta in 1889, while Björn Pétursson moved to Winnipeg the following year with his new wife, Jennie

E. McCaine, where they founded the First Icelandic Unitarian Society. Several of the early members of the Unitarian Church in Winnipeg had been involved in the Icelandic Cultural Society before relocating to Manitoba.

14. Bylaws of the Icelandic Cultural Society (1888), a composite interpretation based on the translations of Wilhelm Kristjanson and V. Emil Gudmundson.

15. Felix Adler was both Leader of the New York Society for Ethical Culture, which he had founded in 1876, and, from 1878 until 1882, president of the Free Religious Association, which had been established largely by disaffected Unitarians, in 1867, who were reacting to what they perceived to be the growing conservatism of American Unitarianism. Ralph Waldo Emerson was the first member of the FRA. When Stephansson refers to Adler and his movement as the inspiration for the Icelandic Cultural Society, it is difficult to tell whether he is making reference to Ethical Culture or the FRA but the choice of name coupled with his specific reference to Adler seems to point to the former. Moreover, the nearby town of Hoople, Dakota Territory, was home to a small Ethical Society at about this time, which suggests the possibility of local influence from outside the Icelandic community itself.

16. Jón Bjárnason's dispute with Stephansson does not appear to have extended beyond matters of religion. While Bjárnason was critical of what he saw as the poet's pessimism and was uncomfortable with his use of satire, he was quick to recognize Stephansson's gifts as a poet of first rank.

17. Jón Bjarnason, Sameiningin (1888), quoted in V. Emil Gudmundson, The Icelandic Unitarian Connection (Wheatfield Press, 1984), 21.

18. See Jane McCracken's concise but insightful analysis of this issue in The Poet of the Rocky Mountains, 35-36. The later emergence of Unitarianism provoked similar anxieties about cultural cleavage and its consequences, which only really began to be healed with the organization of the Icelandic National League in 1920, by which time the process of assimilation and acculturation was already well underway.

19. To understand Stephansson as a pioneer farmer, it is helpful to remember that the present-day political divisions with which we associate him in many cases did not yet exist when he arrived.

20. Stephansson, Bréf og ritgerdir, vol. 4, trans. Bjorgvin Sigurdson, in Selected Translations from Andvökur, 18.

21. Jane McCracken, Stephan G. Stephansson: The Poet of the Rocky Mountains, 108-109. If Stephansson's relationship to the Unitarian church seemed ambiguous, the same cannot be said about Icelandic Unitarians' feelings toward Stephansson. Just as his organization of the Icelandic Cultural Society helped lay the groundwork for the eventual organization of Unitarian churches among the Icelanders in North America, his poetry provided the closest thing to devotional literature that the Icelandic Unitarians had at their disposal. At Icelandic Unitarian funerals, families were as likely – and latterly more likely – to request selections from Stephansson's poetry than selections from the Psalms! During his lifetime, it was the Unitarian-sponsored publications that were most receptive to his work.

22. Stephansson, "God Under a Magnifying Glass" (1914), trans. Paul Sigurdson, in Selected Translations from Andvökur, 67.

23. Stephansson, "Eloi Lamma Sabakhthani" (1901), trans. Paul Bjarnason.

24. Stephansson quoted in Johnson, op. cit., 3.

25. Stephansson, "To My Lost Son" (1887, 1888, 1895 and 1901); trans. Paul Sigurdson, in Selected Translations from Andvökur, 37.

26. Stephansson (1910) quoted in Roy St. George Stubbs, "North America's Unknown Master Poet," in The Icelandic Canadian 41/4 (Summer 1983), 25.

27. Stephansson, Bréf og ritgerdir, vol. 4, trans. Bjorgvin Sigurdson, in Selected Translations from Andvökur, 34.

28. Stephansson, "At Close of Day" (1883), trans. Jakobina Johnson, in Selected Translations from Andvökur, 30.

29. Stephansson, "En Route" (1898), trans. Watson Kirkconnell, in Selected Translations from Andvökur, 8.

30. Stephansson, "Toast to Alberta" (1898), trans. Watson Kirkconnell, in Selected Translations from Andvökur, 2.

31. See Johnson, op. cit., 3.

32. Stephansson, Bréf og ritgerdir, trans. Kristjana Gunnars, in Stephan G. Stephansson: Selected Prose and Poetry, 22-23.

33. Stephansson, "Evening" (1899), trans. Jakobina Johnson (adapted), in Selected Translations from Andvökur, 62.

34. Stephansson, "In Wartime" (1916), trans. Watson Kirkconnell), in Selected Translations from Andvökur, 77.

35. Vopnahlé is more commonly but less accurately translated as "Armistice."

36. V. Emil Gudmundson, The Icelandic Unitarian Connection (Wheatfield Press, 1984), 15-16.

Dedication of the Stephan G. Stephansson Homested Site in North Dakota

Summer 2003

by John Johnson

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentleman:

Welcome to the homestead site of Stephan G. Stephansson, the acclaimed Icelandic poet. Stephan lived here from 1880 to 1889 in what was then known as Dakota Territory. Today we are here to dedicate this stone marker in memory of Stephan in the 150th year of his birth.

My name is John Johnson; it was my grandfather John Johnson the 4th who, along with Hallgrimur Gislason, purchased this land from Stephan in 1889 when he decided to move to Markerville, Alberta, Canada.

Stephan arrived here in 1880 and lay claim to 157 acres of land - an area starting at the top of this hill in the west, running one mile east to the end of this road, and 1/4 mile wide on the north side of the road. The homestead was over there at the foot of the hill. There are several impressions on the ground and signs of a former foundation where we believe the house stood. So you see the bulk of the land was to the east of the home.

Eventually my grandfather John Johnson acquired all of this land. At some point, he did sell 25 acres of this land to enable easier access for the neighbours. Actually, the area around this marker is part of this 25 acres that is now owned by Norma Ruble and John Lawson. We greatly appreciate the fact that they have allowed us to place this marker in the actual location of the farmstead. (Norma - if you are here, I would like to personally thank you.)

Out in front, where you see a small red flag, stood a beautiful American elm tree. Stephan mentioned this huge tree in several of his writings. Many Icelanders have inquired as to the location of the tree, which stood for many years until it became a victim of Dutch elm disease like so many other trees in the area. At some point the elm tree broke in two. In an effort to save it, the tree was cabled together by the Eirikson brothers, but finally fell to the ground about 10 years ago.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALMAR GRIMSSON

Visiting from Iceland

Left to right: Marinella Haraldsdottir, Vilborg Isleifsdottir Bickel, Anna Björk gudbjornsdotir, Ragnheidur Jonsdottir, Jorunn Egilsdottir, Almar Grimsson.

Today we are fortunate to have with us two of Stephan G. Stephansson's grandchildren - Stefan Benediktson and his sister Iris Bourne. They are the children of Stephan's youngest daughter Rosa, who came a number of times to visit us in the Gardar area. They have graciously offered to say a few words on this occasion.

We now would like to unveil this stone marker that we are using to commemorate Stephan G. Stephansson's life in this area. This stone was located on the east end of Stephan's land, out in a pasture next to a fence line. Considering its size and location, we can be assured Stephan frequently saw the stone, and could well have been sitting on it when he composed this verse which we have inscribed on the plaque mounted on the stone marker.

Also included on the plaque is a summary of Stephan's life, followed by one of Stephan's verses which is very appropriate as we dedicate this stone marker in his memory.

"Hér kom íslenzkt afl,
sem hóf upp úr jördu steininn..."

"Here came Icelandic strength,
that hove from the earth the stone..."

- Stephan G. Stephansson

Stephan G. Stephansson Homestead Site 1880-1889

Stephan G. Stephansson, 1853-1927, was born in Iceland and emmigrated to America in 1873. First settling in Wisconsin, he then moved to this site in Dakota Territory in 1880. In 1889, he and his family moved and settled near Markerville, Alberta, Canada where they lived out their lives farming.

He was a prolific poet and composed some 1800 pages of poetry mostly at night after the day's work was finished. When his first major volume, *ANDVÖKUR* (Wakeful Nights), was published in 1908, he was acclaimed as the greatest Icelandic poet since the 13th century.

To bring things to a close, my daughter Janelle (Johnson) Ekness will recite the complete poem from which that final verse was taken, At Close Of Day, translated by Jakobina Johnson.

AT CLOSE OF DAY

And when the last of all my days is over,
The last page turned-
And, whatsoever shall be deemed in wages
That I have earned,
In such a mood I hope to be composing
My sweetest lay-
And then extend my hand to all the world
And pass away

- Stephan G. Stephansson

Letters from Friðjón Friðriksson

Translated by Sigurbjörg Stefansson

Friðjón Friðriksson

Letter # 5 - To Jon Bjarnason
Kinmount, July 26, 1875

Dear Friend: (Jon Bjarnason)

I have received your letter written on the 15th of this month. I thank you very much for it.

I do not remember what I told you in my latest letter, most likely it has not been anything too important, and this time I have still less - to tell you - worthwhile.

Finally all Icelanders here have gotten jobs, in various places, eight or ten work for farmers or in roadbuilding in the vicinity. 20 - 30 men work in railroad construction near Gravenhurst, a small town 60 miles northeast of here.

This railroad is called the Northern Railway, and it is supposed to be connected to the Canadian Pacific Line.

They get $1.25 a day. They left their families at the outskirts of Kinmount to be looked after by me, and therefore I am bound to lend them food and other necessities, until the men get paid. They only get paid once a month. By the way, this is difficult for me to do because my store's capital is very limited. Furthermore, a considerable number of debtors fail to pay, leaving their debts up to several hundred dollars - which for Icelanders is a considerable amount of money.

Anyway, the shop has still a good credit record and I hope that it will survive for some time. Most Icelanders are in good health. Only one is seriously ill. He has been ill - over 3 months - of tuberculosis. A few others became sick, but they recovered soon. I keep thinking about the necessity of establishing a fund for our poor Icelanders, but it is still just an idea of mine. There are many things to be done, but little is done. If we keep on and do not give in we are bound to succeed. I am very happy to see and hear - what I have known for a long time - that you want to do everything in your power to promote the Icelanders' prosperity and social life here in Canada because this is also my wish, but I lack education in order to be able to actualize it. I am, nevertheless, constantly busy - I have hardly an idle moment. First and foremost, I have to work in the shop which is gradually expanding, serving Canadians no less than Icelanders. Also, I have to assist Icelanders - be their interpretor when they are looking for work, negotiating salaries, etc., since only few are able to communicate in English. Each day new problems occur in connection with one or more Icelanders, often due to their misunderstanding. To tell you the truth, I am often on the verge of losing my patience because Icelanders are constantly in one trouble or another - they do not know what to do,

they ask me for advice, and then they don't follow my advice: they find everything difficult and then spend their time doing nothing. Concerning cleanliness, they are improving considerably. But then it was, indeed, high time because their uncleanliness was intolerable, when they first came here, resulting in my having to express time and again my disgust for this filth.

There are few things which could make me more happy than to see you here, supporting Icelanders both physically and spiritually. However, I shall not urge you to come here because if you were to come for a short visit, you would hardly be able to be of much help to the Icelanders that the cost of journey could be justified, and if you were to come for good - it would not be any use either because Icelanders are still too badly off to be able to pay their minister. Besides, the future of this colony is still uncertain, it might even be dissolved because - if Manitoba turns out to be attractive - most are anxious to move there. But then it is characteristic of Icelanders always to think that the grass is greener at the other side of the hill, in other words, they can never face the present, but they keep hoping for the future or they cling to the past.

Rev. Fridirik Burton (Episcopalian) has had services, once in a while, in the Icelandic schoolhouse. His sermons have been well liked, but the formalities of the English Church are colourless and boring, and are in my estimation not useable. Now a new minister has settled down in this town. He has offered to hold services for us every other Sunday. He is an old fatso: physically fat but spiritually thin, I think. I have translated the sermons since Sigtryggur left, but he (i.e Sigtryggur) used to do the translations. I suppose that having the sermons translated is not as satisfying for the people as if they had them delivered in Icelandic. There is, nevertheless, a great comfort in these church services.

Every Sunday I have a Sunday School for children, using Balles and Balsleves books. I read for them from the Bible - among other things.

I am in a hurry. Pardon my handwriting.

Yours, with love and respect,
Fridjon Fridriksson

Letter #6
Hrisum, Jan. 13, 1876

Most Honorable Friend: (Fridjon)

May the Lord give that you are recovering steadily when you receive this letter- - and may the Lord give you a long, prosperous and happy life.

I cannot agree with some who have expressed themselves concerning those children who were to be confirmed this spring. I find it most unfair to accuse you of negligence in this matter since it was not in your power to prevent your own illness - the Lord laid this cross on your shoulders.

Admittedly, I regret the fact that you could not confirm Sigga, my daughter. We were indeed hoping that you could perform the confirmation because we were confident that your blessings and prayers are not in vain but prove to be beneficial and fruitful forever. The fact that things turned out this way must be accepted calmly - as we are, indeed, doing. May the Lord give you back your health so that your friends and relatives can enjoy your company and conversations for a long time to come. But if the Lord decides to receive you in his land of glory one must accept that with humility and say as Job did: The Lord gave and the Lord took away - blessed be the name of the Lord.

Please remember me and my wife to your wife - may her sorrow turn into happiness. May the Lord bless you and protect you.

Your loving and sincere friend,
Sigurdur Steinsson
- Editor's Note: This man was Fridjon Fridriksson's father-in-law.

More letters on next page

Fridjon #7
Gimli, Jan. 13, 1876

Dear Friend:

When I sent you a few lines just before Christmas, I intended to write to you soon and tell you whether or not any improvements had taken place in our condition here. Even though things have not changed much - they, nevertheless, have improved somewhat adding a little bit to one's optimism.

Mr. John Taylor returned on the second day of Christmas from Winnipeg. He had gotten a considerable amount of food from the Government, and he was hoping to get more later - so that most likely we do not have to suffer from famine this winter. Nevertheless, Icelanders are discontented because there is a lack of many necessities such as coffee, sugar, rice, etc. Furthermore, Icelanders do not even bother to pick up the food - they expect the Government - not only to provide them with food - but also want the Government to have this food delivered to their homes, and they want the Government to provide them with utensils so they can enjoy the food; so they can just sit there idle rid of all worries.

After the New Year there were municipal and colony elections. Those who were elected are to represent Icelanders, take care of municipal affairs, etc. The representatives elect are: John Taylor, Fridjon Fridrikksson, Jakop Jonsson, Johannes Magnusson (from the Dala - county of the western part of Iceland) and Olafur Olafsson (i.e. myself). Fridjon is the treasurer, Jakop is secretary, and I am chairman. The representatives have not accomplished much yet, but we have, however, used our influences to promote the establishment of a school for children - even if the teacher is English. The school started two days ago. There are more than 40 children attending this school. The teacher is Miss Carry Taylor, John Taylor's niece.

Yesterday the committee received a

letter, signed by 51 heads of households in this town, containing a complaint about not having an Icelandic minister. Furthermore, this letter included a request to the committee to hire a minister, preferably you - as you can see from the copy of this letter which I hereby send to you. I have learned from your letters - which came here yesterday from Milwaukee - that you have decided against serving Icelanders here - maybe you have already accepted another and more attractive job. Even though we are going to suffer from your decision not to come here, because we do need a well educated and truly Icelandic spirited minister, I tend to be happy for you because of this decision since I am afraid that Icelanders would not show you due respect and provide you with adequate payments. I fear that theory and practice would not go hand in hand. Even though only a handful of people failed to sign the letter of request, I am afraid that many would prove themselves stingy in terms of paying their minister. Anyway, the committee has promised to present this request to you. John Taylor, however, has nothing to do with this request, because, for one thing, he has not been asked yet since most think that he wants to serve as minister himself. Most do not like that idea because he does not have the same religious beliefs as we. Moreover, he is not willing to baptize babies resulting in others having to perform baptism since most want their children to be baptized. I find it abominable to allow any busybody to handle the sacraments because either they are their sacred phenomena not to be treated like common, everyday things, or they are mere vanities which we had better abolish than see treated by some common clown. Please let me know as soon as possible whether or not you are interested in coming here and what conditions you find acceptable. I am in charge of some land, half a mile north of town, - it is 150 acres, beautiful land, available to you if you are interested. We could start to work this land for you soon, and build a house there - maybe you would prefer a house in the town? I do not think that that would be as attractive.

I have been chopping wood on my land today. Therefore, I am tired, lazy and my hands are shaking - not exactly in a good shape for writing. I, therefore bring this letter to an end, and ask our Lord to look after you.

Your friend,
O. Olafsson (from Espiholi)

Letter #8
Gimli, Jan 12, 1876

Most honourable
municipal Government:

As you know we, approximately 240 Icelanders, including many children, moved here last fall. Many of our children (approx. 10 years of age) have had no religious education. Furthermore, most of us

could, indeed, use some spiritual guidance. Therefore, we would like to ask you to use your influences to help hiring a good minister for us this spring or summer.

Our first choice is Rev. Jon Bjarnason in Wisconsin, who is known to possess those qualities which are necessary to meet our needs.

Concerning his salaries, we would like to point out that due to poverty it will be difficult for us to come up with adequate payment, but we do promise to work on his land, build a house for him, and to provide him with all the services within our power.

Respectfully,
O. Olafsson

Letter #9

To the Gimli Municipal Government:

I am going to use what is left of this sheet to add some information about the weather which has been rather good, usually calm and the sky has been clear, but the frost has been considerable. However, the frost in December and January has not been as severe as it was in November. The snow is loose and dry, some two feet deep.

There is not much of a catch in the lake but a considerable amount of rabbits have been caught. They are most suitable as food. There are more kinds of wild animals, but the Icelanders have not been successful in catching them. The soil here is excellent, and if the spring and summer are good I think that this district is most suitable to Icelanders even though we are going to experience difficulties at first. We are told that there are going to be sufficient work available at the railroad by spring, supposedly paying well.

Your friend
Olafur

Are you harbouring your own little modern-day saga and need somewhere to share it? Do you have a story, poem, biography, or favourite memory just waiting to be expressed? The Icelandic Canadian welcomes all original articles of interest to our readers and would like to hear from you!

Our editorial staff will consider all submissions, and are willing to assist you to prepare your work for print. In addition to your article, we also welcome accompanying photographs, and a brief autobiography.

Please send written material to:

The Icelandic Canadian Magazine
Box 1156, Gimli, Manitoba R0C 1B0
You can also e-mail submissions to: icelandiccanadian@yahoo.com

In the Red River Valley - The Treasure
Book II, Last Chapter & Conclusion

by Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason
Translated by Nina Campbell

Such was the last letter that Halfan, the castaway had written. All the main points about the treasure were the same as in the letter O'Brian kept for Arnor. At least so it seemed to us. Both these letters fully described where the tin can was buried in the ground and there could be no doubt where it would be found. The later letter also gave the name of the hotel, who the owner had been, and also said that the house was in Point Douglas and how far it was from the hotel to Fort Garry. This was the very information that was missing in the first letter on the other hand there was more in the earlier letter about William Trent and his brother, Henry, and also the reason that the money had been buried in the ground.

After we had discussed the matter back and forth for a while and had come to the conclusion that the crooked house was the house that was described in the letter, O'Brian said that since it was still daylight we could walk outside and measure the distance that was stated in both letters. Mr. Iceland was in full agreement of the proposal, and there was no question of my willingness in that regard. When we came outside, O'Brian took a measuring tape and compass from his pocket and both were put to use.

First, we measured out 32 fathoms in a a straight line (one fathom = 6 feet) northwest from the centre of the north side of the crooked house and marked the spot with a small stake, because there was no oak tree or anything to indicate that a tree had ever been there. We then measured 5 English yards straight east, and marked that spot with another small stake. Then we had to determine if we were exactly 16 yards (English) from the river, but we were by no means there. When we measured the distance, we saw that it was 29 English yards from the spot where the grass roots began to the edge of the riverbank to where we had placed the second stake. In addition there was no inlet or ditch on the bank, and no house visible directly across the bank on the other side of the river, or anything to indicate that a house had ever been there. There was however, an old ruin on the south side of the riverbank, but there was no aspen undergrowth nearby. As well there were two oak trees on the west bank north of the crooked house, but they were about 100 fathoms from it and about 10 fathoms from the river.

That night, when it was dark, O'Brian borrowed a shovel and dug a hole 3 feet deep where we had placed the last stake but nothing happened. There was no treasure to be found, not even so much as one small stone. All that came up on the shovel was just pale Red River valley clay. Old O'Brian then carefully shoveled the clay back into the hole, replaced the grass and patted it down vigorously with the shovel.

"Done" he said, taking off his hat and wiping the sweat off his brow, "This secret of the hidden treasure is now dead at last and buried forever and ever. Amen!"

"No, it is not at all finished yet" said Mr. Iceland smiling, "We have yet to find the treasure."

"And how will that be?" asked O'Brian

"We have to follow the directions exactly that are in the letter."

"I believe," said O'Brian, "That I have tried to follow them to the letter as well as can be."

"But we started wrong."

"In what way Mr. Iceland?" asked

O'Brian raising his voice a little.

"We have not found Madeleine Vanda."

"I searched for her for a whole year." said O'Brian

"And did you eventually find her?"

"Yes, I found her at last. She told me everything that she knew about the matter. But it was very little. She certainly remembered Berg the castaway. She remembered that he had disappeared from the hotel one day during a blinding blizzard and she never heard antything of him after that. She told me the name of the hotel and the innkeeper and her story compares favourably with the last letter from the castaway. But she has not the slightest idea about the hidden treasure nor does it matter. One aspect of her story differs from the castaway's letter, and that is about his departure from the Hotel. She says that it was late in March, but he said it had been in February."

"That is all good and well," said Mr. Iceland, "But you have never asked this lady to come with you and show you the house."

"No," said O'Brian after some thought. "I have never asked her to come here with me and show me the house."

"But in the last letter Mr. Berg places great emphasis on the fact that Madeleine Vanda should point out the house--should go there with those that come here from Iceland to get the treasure."

"It is my belief," said O'Brian as if he had been wakened from a dream, "That now I understand what you are getting at, Mr. Iceland. I see that it is absolutely necessary that this lady come here. She can maybe tell us something that will shed light on this matter in order that we can bring it to an end. And tomorrow, at two in the afternoon, I will be here with this lady without fail."

"And I shall be here at the same time," said Mr. Iceland with satisfaction. "I know now that you understand me."

They then bade me goodbye and set off to the west end of town.

But I went home to my room and I took a solemn oath to not go to work the next day. The next day, when it was nearly two o' clock, Mr. Iceland came to the crooked house with a suitcase in his hand. A few minutes later O'Brian arrived. And I have never seen a more obliging and modest man as O'Brian, when he was helping this dark skinned lady out of the carriage and assisted her up the staircase that led upstairs in the crooked house. Madeleine Vanda seemed to be happy and was particularly well dressed. I felt that she was prettier than when I saw her last, and all her actions were graceful. O'Brian introduced her to Mr. Iceland, and I saw that she regarded him with great interest, as if she felt she had seen him at some time before, but couldn' t think where it had been. Mr. Iceland greeted her in a most friendly fashion, and said he had wanted to meet her for a long time. She smiled good naturally and curtsied. She remembered that we had met before, and offered me her hand and she greeted my cousin cordially. I immediately noticed that she was especially talkative and she spoke rapidly, just like a little girl who had just returned home from a long trip and has much to tell her brothers and sisters.

"Do you recognize this house, Mrs. Le Turneau?" asked O'Brian when we had been seated in the dining room for a while.

"Yes" replied Madeleine Vanda, and looked around the room. "I know this house very well. It was once a hotel and was then called "The Buffalo", and it was often full of guests. The room which we are in now was used as a bedroom, and there were often three or four beds in it. And it

was here, in this room that Jessie One-hand and Robert Peg-leg fought all night."

"What did they fight about?" I asked.

"It was over nothing really" said Madeleine Vanda,"They were Metis, they were cousins and good friends, well known hunters, huge men and very strong. They came here one night in the fall, after they had been out hunting elk way up north in the wilderness. They liked their liquour, and started drinking as soon as they arrived at the hotel. And because the liquor was strong, and because they had downed it rather quickly, it began to affect them. They proceeded to argue over which was bigger - the sun or the moon. Jesse said that the moon was much bigger than the sun, but Robert maintained the sun was much smaller than the moon. Though they were both of the same opinion even though they were both wrong, they quarreled about this with such vehemence that they came to blows. They fought their way up the stairs and into this room. The door slammed shut behind them and it locked shut from the outside. The cousins fought all night, and the house shook from the fury until morning. No one wanted to go into the room before morning, when the innkeeper opened the door and looked in.

"And what did he see?" I asked.

"He saw two repentant sinners lying on a pallet in the middle of the room, and he found them reciting their prayers in the Cree language."

"And they have been disabled since then?" asked O'Brian.

"Yes, just like before, neither more or less" said Madeleine Vanda. " There was a slight change though, and it was this--now Robert had one hand and Jesse now had a wooden leg, whereas before it was Jesse who had one hand and Robert had the wooden leg."

"How did this happen?" asked O'Brian, and scratched his chin.

"It was all amazingly natural" said Madeleine Vanda and smiled. "Because when the cousins reconciled in the morning, they exchanged their names for the rest of their lives ---as is the custom in some Indian tribes, when two men compete and have been in deadly combat. But this event is memorable especially for the reason that the same night the cousins fought, another small happening occurred that was considered quite extraordinary and long remembered."

"Oh, tell us about it" I said, burning with curiousity.

"You have certainly heard tales of Big Wolf the great Indian warrior" said Madeleine Vanda. "He was chief of the Assiniboine tribe and a good friend of the Cree who lived on the plains to the west. One summer, when he was about twenty years old, he went south to Dakota to find his cousin who was an Indian chief that lived beside a river that flows in to the Red River by Fort Pembina. They were Sioux and closely related to the Assiniboines. The Chief of the Dakotas had a daughter who was extraordinarily beautiful, and her name was Soley. She was the same age as Big

Wolf, and they had no sooner met, than they fell madly in love. When Big Wolf was ready to return home to Canada, he asked his cousin for permission to marry Soley. His cousin absolutely refused, citing the reason that they were too closely related to be able to marry. The young love-smitten man pretended to take this as just another misfortune which could not be prevented. He then said farewell to his relatives and went on his way. Soon after he had started off, men noticed that Soley had disappeared, along with the best horse that her father owned. They guessed that she had run away with Big Wolf and intended to marry him. Soley had two brothers who were around thirty years old, very outstanding men, manly and courageous. And it did not take long for them to begin to follow their sister and her lover. They had two good riding horses each, and rode north toward the Manitoba plains. Their trip though was in vain, because as soon as they arrived, a large group of Big Wolf' s men came to his aid, and the brothers had to return home with heavy hearts. In the fall however, when Big Wolf and his friends went on a hunting trip on the plains to the west, Soley' s brothers came in the middle of the night and took her away. The next night they reached this Hotel, and Soley was then very sick. She was put to bed immediately in a small bedroom that is on the other side of the hallway, and it had only one window which was so small that a two year old child could not get out through it, even though it had been open. Soley' s brothers never left her door all night. They lay on their buffalo skins in the hall in front of her door and ate their meals there. And exactly that same night Jesse and Robert came to the Hotel and fought. All night long as I told you before. In the morning Soley's brothers intended to wake her and begin the journey home, hoping to arrive that night. But when they entered the room, she had vanished.

"And had she gone out through the window?" I asked.

"No, the window had not been touched."

"She would not have gone out the door" said O'Brian.

"Not that either," said Madeleine Vanda.

"She must have gone out through the roof." said Mr. Iceland.

"You have guessed correctly" said Madeleine Vanada and smiled. "Soley had gone out through the roof of the Hotel--but the roof is flat as you know."

"Someone had come to help her," said O'Brian.

"Yes, of course." said Madeleine Vanda. "It was her sweetheart Big Wolf who helped her. He had used his ax to chop a large hole in the roof of the Hotel, and with that he had helped the girl out, and when daylight came, they were long gone out to the plain where the Assiniboine warriors were waiting for them. The brothers never again tried to get their sister from the hands of Big Wolf."

"Wasn't it funny' I said, "That no one in the Hotel should be aware that a hole was being chopped in the roof/"

"That was natural" said Madeleine

Vanda, "because of the noise that Jesse and Robert were making. No one was thinking of anything other than the noise of the fighting."

"And they were likely followers of Big Wolf" said O'Brian.

"There can be no doubt about it" said Mr. Iceland.

"Now I would like to ask you something, Mrs. Le Turneau," said O'Brian. "And that is this: Do you remember anything about an oak tree a short distance north west of the Hotel, when you lived here?"

"Do I remember it?" asked Madeleine Vanda "Yes I remember that oak tree very well. Its branches covered with lovely leaves provided welcome shade for sitting under it on hot summer days. The branches seemed to be filled with a mysterious force when the breeze rustled the leaves, just like the feathers and fringe and tufts of the ceremonial dress of the Indians, when they race on the prairie. I often sat there alone on summer evenings, and sometimes felt as the wind whispered softly in the leaves that the old oak had changed into an Indian warrior. I seemed to see him bow down to me. I could hear the fringe rustle on his shoulder, and it was as if he was whispering"sei-sei sei-sei sei-sei" in my ear. Then I always remember what my mother had told me about this lovely oak tree when I was a child."

"It would be interesting to hear about that" I said.

"It is really not a long story" said Madeleine Vanda "and it was this: once upon a time there was a young and healthy Indian chief whose name was "Swan". He lived about fifty miles east of here. He had a pure heart, and was good and brave. For this reason the God Manitou regarded him highly and counted him as one of his dearest friends. But Swan had a sworn enemy, whose name was "Eagle" and he was a powerful and unscrupulous chief. Once Swan was out hunting here in the western prairie and was all alone. Then Eagle came upon him with many followers. They intended to capture him and torture him to death. But Swan was a fast runner, and ran south east on the plain as fast as he could, because he knew he had no chance against so many men. Eagle and his followers were all riding on good horses and pursued him with great zeal. They did not stop until they reached the inlet here.

By then Swan was so breathless and weak that he didn't trust himself to swim across the Red River, which was then high and flowing swiftly. Swan stopped a short distance from the river and called on God Manitou for help, because he dreaded the thought of being captured by his enemies.

"I can change you into a bird, fish or tree" said God Manitou," but I cannot change you back into a man, which of these three do you want to be?"

Swan replied, "My enemies shoot birds and catch fish, but they will never fell a grown oak tree—change me into an oak tree!"

"It shall be so" answered the God Manitou," but first you shall shoot an arrow from your bow as fast as you can."

Swan shot an arrow from the bow and it fell to the ground 63 feet from where he stood.

"Now you have marked a circle, which shall be sacred while you stand here as an oak tree on the inlet," said the God Manitou, "And a wonderful magic power will spread out from you for 63 feet in all directions, and bring good fortune to all good men and animals that come in its circle. This circle shall be a sanctuary for all innocent men and animals, that are fleeing from their enemies, as long as the oak tree stands here."

At that moment Eagle and his followers arrived and were going to capture Swan, but he suddenly vanished, as if he had sunk into the ground. And on the spot where they had seen him standing was a stately oak tree towering over all, which spread its beautiful leafy branches in all directions. "He has run to the riverbank and into the river" said Eagle very annoyed. " And he will never come up."

He turned around to go back home, in a foul mood, and his men followed.

The oak tree stood on the riverbank alone and isolated, like a supernatural being, faithful and good and everyone that saw it marveled at its beauty and grandeur.

Sometimes when men passed by it in the twilight, they seemed to see a young well built Indian chief in native dress standing under the oak tree pointing toward the river but when they came closer the young man vanished.

So one hundred years passed, and white men had now come to the inlet. They once lost a horse and thought surely he had been stolen by a certain Indian. They captured him and accused him of stealing the horse, but he denied it. In spite of his denials, they sentenced him to death, and the beautiful oak tree was to be his gallows. They led the poor man there in the twilight, bound his hands behind him, placed the rope around his neck and flung the other end around the branch of the tree. But when they lifted him up from the ground, the branch broke, the bindings on his hands fell off and he quickly removed the rope from around his neck and ran like a wild horse toward the riverbank and jumped into the river. This all happened so fast that the white men knew nothing until they saw that the Indian was far out in the river. He reached the far side safe and sound and they never saw him again. The next day it came to light that the Indian had been innocent of the crime of which he had been accused of because the horse had never been stolen. The owner's son had taken it without permission and gone south to Pembina to visit his fiancée who lived there.

It was always as if the oak tree held a protective arm over all that came close to it, providing that they were innocent, and it was the same if a person left something there or hid it, as long as it was not stolen--it was never lost and was always found, no matter how long it stayed there."

Now O'Brian and Mr. Iceland looked at each other.

"But do you know Mrs. Leturneau that this unique oak tree has disappeared as well as everything else from the riverbank?" asked Mr. O'Brian.

"Yes, I noticed that awhile ago, when I stepped out of the carriage" said Madeleine Vanda. "But I remember clearly that it stood here in full bloom, when I moved away from the Red River Valley with my parents in the spring of 1870."

"But would you be able to show us where the oak tree stood?" asked Mr. Iceland.

"Yes, I am absolutely certain of that" said Madeleine Vanda, "and I shall go outside at once and show you where it was."

We all stood up and went into the hallway.

"Yes, there is the bedroom that Berg the castaway last occupied" said Madeleine Vanda, and pointed to the door of the bedroom where O'Brian had stayed before.

"He was a true friend of the Lord, though a bit strange. In fact, he was always in pain while he stayed here. But he disappeared suddenly in a mysterious ways one stormy day late in March and no one asked about him after that. Men just assumed that he had drowned himself in the large hole in the ice on the river."

"Was it in March that he disappeared from the house?" asked Mr. Iceland.

"Yes, late in March of 1870" said Madeleine Vanda, with some emphasis.

O'Brian and Mr. Iceland looked at each other once again.

"Every room in this house has its own story," said Madeleine Vanda, as there were going down the stairs, " and it would make a pretty large book if all these stories were printed, but white people would not believe many of them."

We all walked northwest from the north side of the house and went slowly. Madeleine Vanda was continually telling us about this and that which had occurred in the crooked house in those years, when it had been a large and elegant hotel. Suddenly she stopped. We were by then about 30 fathoms (180 feet) from the house. "What is this?" she said after looking for a while across the river.

"How on earth did this happen?"

"What is the matter now, Mrs. Leturneau?" asked O'Brian and looked at her in bewilderment.

"I do not recognize this spot--I had expected that the oak tree should be here somewhere" she replied.

"Let us walk a little farther in this direction," said Mr. Iceland and pointed . He knew that we still had not gone 192 feet from the middle of the north side of the house.

"We need not go farther in this direction" said Madeleine Vanda, "because the oak tree had never stood on this spot on which we are now standing."

"Why do you say that" asked O'Brian and obviously totally surprised.

"I know that" replied Madeleine Vanda, "because there is no ditch on the riverbank, and no log cabin on the bank directly across the river. When I sat on the east side of the oak tree I remember that it was just 63 feet from the oak tree to the ditch that was on the riverbank."

"The house could have disappeared long ago and the same with the ditch on the riverbank" said Mr. Iceland.

"Of course" said Madeleine Vanda, "But nevertheless I can assure you, that there has been an unusual change here since I left in the spring of 1870."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Iceland.

"I mean," said Madeleine Vanda that the house that was once called "The Buffalo" must have been moved from the place where it stood when I worked there."

"Has been moved from the place?" said O'Brian and his eyes became strangely alert.

"Yes truly" said Madeleine Vanda "just look. Directly east of the house is a ditch on the riverbank—the ditch I was talking about. And there on the opposite side of the riverbank you can see the ruins of the log house. Let us consider this better. If you measure 63 feet in a straight line west from the ditch, I can not understand that you would come to the spot where the oak tree stood."

O'Brian and Mr. Iceland looked once again at each other and O'Brian's eyes sparked like polished diamonds. We all turned around, and walked up to a little ditch which was on the riverbank directly east of the northeast corner of the crooked house. I had seen this ditch many times, but paid no attention though it had been used for going up and down the riverbank, when people were getting water from the river, and it was done every day all year around many times a day. When we arrived at the ditch, O'Brian took up the measuring tape and compass and measured 63 feet in an exact straight line to the west from where the grass roots started on the riverbank. We were now west of the crooked house and had passed by it quickly. But the west part of this 63 foot line extended into the middle of the sidewalk on the southeast portion of Disraeli Street. It was obvious that the sidewalk did not reach any farther east than to the crooked house, because it was in the way and touched on the street—a distance of two feet. When we looked under the sidewalk (which was built on raised wooden planks with space underneath) we noticed a root from an oak tree which had been chopped down to the ground with the root still intact. From the root O'Brian measured 5 yards straight east, on the same line that he had measured before, and put down a stake, and it was

just 3 inches from the northwest corner of the crooked house. But the ditch that was by the riverbank was in a straight line from the stake and the log cabin ruins across the river.

"It must be here" said O'Brian in a low voice to Mr. Iceland, " and it has to be dug out from the inside--in the basement."

I have never seen O'Brian as light of foot and happy as now. It was as if he had instantly shed 30 years or more. His dark eyes reflected that there was sun and summer and jubilation in mind and heart. He nearly jumped with joy.

"Now your take is finished Mrs. Turneau" he said smiling, and placed a ten dollar bill in her hand.

"What nonsense is this, Mr. O'Brian" said Madeleine Vanda. "I am not going to accept money for riding here in a fancy coach and looking at my childhood haunts."

"You own the money and more" said O'Brian gently,"because you have today done a great favour for me and my friends. If you had not shown us the root of the oak tree west of us I would not have bought this crooked house tomorrow and the lot on which it stands."

"Oh, it is that way is it?" said Madeleine Vanda and smiled, "but I still do not own this money."

"Yes, you own it by right -- and much more" said O'Brian, and he danced around her. "And now I am going to support you while you step up into the carriage. The driver knows he is to take you home to your front door. Give my warmest greeting to your dear husband and children." He then almost lifted her up into the carriage as if she were a little girl.

Then Madeleine Vanda said good-bye to us all, --O'Brian, Mr. Iceland, my cousin and me, and started off for home in the fancy rented carriage. And our best wishes followed her like a large flock of snow white doves.

"Well now" said O'Brian when Madeleine Vanda had left, " Now I know for certain that the treasure is found at last, and it is under the northwest corner of this crooked house, exactly where that girl Mabel was digging this spring. But I do not want to move anything until Arnor and Edna Trent can be present and receive the money as soon as it is recovered. They will be arriving within three days with all speed. Then all that are now present will meet again in this place, and bear witness to the most remarkable event, that of finding the treasure. We all agreed to this plan. Then O'Brian and Mr. Iceland started off toward the west end of the city, but my cousin and I went into the house and discussed this matter for a long time.

That night O'Brian sent a telegram forth to Minneapolis. The next day a lawyer in Winnipeg was preparing a deed, that showed that O'Brian was now the owner of the crooked house and lot on which it stood. He had paid $950.00 for it and felt it was a good bargain. Three days later Arnor and Edna Trent came to Winnipeg. O'Brian quickly informed Mr. Iceland and they both came along with Arnor and Edna to the crooked house just after noon on the 28th of October. My cousin and I immediately accompanied them down to the so-called basement, and we began digging immediately under the northwest corner of the house. O'Brian went to work, the rest of us stood in a row as close as possible and watched all his movements with great interest. As for myself, I can state that I was literally breathless while this was happening. The main task was to remove the stone that Mabel Campion had begun to loosen. As soon as the stone was freed and had been rolled on the floor, the tin mug belonging to Halfdan the castaway came into view. It was on the west side of the stone and pressed up against it, and was about 1 1/2 feet underneath the dirt floor. The tin mug was small and square with a lid and the lock was sealed shut with varnish and well wrapped. The outside was wrapped in a patch of animal hide and something had been written on it but it was so blurred that it was impossible to read.

O'Brian handed the mug to Arnor as soon as he had removed the hide. Arnor cut through the varnish with a small pen knife, took the lid carefully off the mug and then handed it to Edna. We all watched silently and almost in awe at all this ceremony which in our eyes was truly solemn and significant.

Edna Trent took a small spool from the mug which contained 20 five hundred dollar bills, which were wrapped in a small blue spotted handkerchief and bound with canvas ribbon, and inside the spool was a note with this message in English;

"These 20 five hundred dollar bills belong to Henry A. S. Trent or his heirs. In the year 1869 the aforementioned Henry A. S. Trent lived at 843 Oak Street in the city of Brooklyn in the United States. This money is a gift from his brother William Trent by name, who was a merchant sailor and died on the ship Galahad in Hudson Bay in August 1869, and he asked me (my name is Halfdan Arnorsson Berg) to see to it that his brother would receive the money. A short time later the ship Galahad sank, and I came here in the fall, more dead than alive from an incurable illness. I know that I will die this winter and I am burying this money in the ground for the reason that I will explain in the letter. I am writing my sister Kristin tomorrow. She is the wife of Sigmundur Jon Sturluson in Seydisfjordur on the east coast of Iceland" H. A. B

In the mug was Halfdan' s bankbook which showed that in the spring of 1869 he had $2600.00 in a bank in New York. But now seventeen years have passed, and the interest has increased considerably. In the bank book was written in English that the bearer who came to the treasurer at the bank was the true heir of Halfan Arnorsson Berg, and he had signed his name in full.

When we had considered the matter with much care, and marveled at how carefully Halfdan had taken care of all this, Edna then put the bills and bank book back in the mug and gave it to Arnor. He replaced the lock on it and handed it to O'Brian and asked him to keep the money in a safe place and exchange it for Canadian money. O'Brian took the mug with a smile and put it in his pocket saying that it was the greatest honour that he had even been shown, to trust him - a clown- with so much money. After that we put the stone back into the hole under the corner of the house, shoveled the mud back on top, so that no traces remained and Mr. Iceland did most of the work.

This was certainly a day of celebration for us all. It was beautiful outside, and the weather was mild even though it was autumn, due to the so-called "Indian Summer" that had recently spread its indescribably wondrous enchanting warmth over forest and plain, rivers and lakes. Though Indian summer seldom lasts longer than two weeks, it is, and always will, be the most beautiful and loveliest time of the year in the Red River Valley.

My cousin invited all these happy visitors upstairs, and treated us to a virtual feast--Icelandic style--gave us hot chocolate and coffee, ponnukokur and kleinur and all manner of sweets too numerous to mention. Mr. Iceland delivered an excellent speech in English, and said among other things, that the earth always returned that which had been hidden within it. Arnor and Edna thanked everyone for their help and friendliness. Everyone agreed no one deserved more thanks than the late merchant sailor and outstanding man, Halfdan Arnorsson Berg. Nor was Madeleine Vanda forgotten. Everyone admitted that it was largely due to her that the treasure had been found. It may be stated here, that just

before Christmas in 1886 that she was sent $500.00 instead of the $200.00 that Halfdan had promised her, because Edna added $300.00 of her own money. It was O'Brian who presented Madeleine Vanda this money and explained how this had come about.

As soon as O'Brian said good-bye to us on this memorable wonderful festive evening, he asked me to tell my cousin though not before he had set off for home, that since he was now the new owner of the crooked house, she would not need to pay any rent while she stayed there. It came to light, as before, what an excellent man of many good qualities and generous nature that Mr. O'Brian possessed. My cousin always remembered him with gratitude, and his friendly nature. But Arnor and I loved and treasured him.

CONCLUSION

So the treasure that was hidden under the crooked house was found in Point Douglas in Winnipeg. Now thirty four years have passed. I have little more to add after going quickly over the story. But I really would like in closing, to mention a few people who have been a part of this story. I also think that the reader would like to know what happened to them.

The first ones to be mentioned are Arnor and Edna who returned south to Minneapolis two days after the treasure was found. They asked O'Brian as was previously told, to take all the money to a bank in Winnipeg, and then send them a draft for a bank in Minneapolis after $500.00 had been deducted for Madeleine Vanda, and all expenses in regard to withdrawing the money that was in Halfan' s bank book. O'Brian got a lawyer to assist him to withdraw Arnor's money, and all went quickly and well, and was completed before Christmas. Arnor and Edna were able to deposit all their money in a bank in Minneapolis the day before Christmas Eve 1886. If they had had their way the other half of the money would have gone to the three of us - O'Brian, Mr. Iceland and me. But Mr. Iceland and O'Brian made it clear on the day that the treasure was found, that they should never be offered any of this money because they could not accept any of it, either as a gift or a loan. They would however, certainly accept Arnor and Edna' s friendship. On the other hand, I often received large gifts from Arnor and Edna. My cousin received $200.00 as a Christmas gift from Arnor. Edna sent Mable Campion $200.00 in January 1887. It is possible she also sent her aunt Mrs. Colthart a large sum of money though I am not aware of it. It was certain that the money from Arnor and Edna gladdened many a poor person, not only then, but later as well. Arnor became an enthusiastic student at the University of Minnesota, and graduated as a physician in 1888. A short time later, Edna and Arnor were married, and that summer they moved to Brooklyn and settled there. Arnor soon earned a reputation as a good doctor because he showed such interest and sympathy to his patients. He was especially good at working with nervous disorders. It might be said that he specialized in that field. He was particularly good to all who were poor and suffering. He sent his sister money every year, and he wanted the best for everyone. Edna was a fine housewife, both hospitable and charitable and the couple were extremely congenial. Their home was exceedingly pleasant, and well-located in the city with a lovely view, very impressive. I stayed there twice and was treated so well--two months each time-- and have never had better days. In the summer of 1912 Arnor died suddenly of heart failure. Edna is still living in February 1921. They had four children--two sons and two daughters,-- and they are now all grown, all married, well regarded and well-to-do.

I will say here, that Arnor and Edna gave me full permission in the fall of 1909 to write about their search for the treasure, and gave me two letters that Halfdan wrote that I could keep permanently, also the old diary that is first mentioned in the story. But they did not want to be mentioned in any other way than that which directly concerns the search and I have kept that in mind.

Of O'Brian there is this to say--that he is still living and nearing his 90th birthday, and lives in Winnipeg. He may be seen walking down Main Street when the weather is fine and sunny. He walks with his gnarled cane, puffing through his beard and has a gentlemanly bearing. His eyes are always the same, twinkling like diamonds. They are always youthful just like the pure soul and noble heart of this remarkable man. It is just recently that he quit driving his horses. He was a true friend of the horse and indeed was kind to all animals. He is living with his son who is well-off and respected, that came from Iceland shortly after the turn of the century. It is a long time since his wife died, and he has never been really happy since then. He loved her passionately with all his heart. He was extremely fond of Arnor and they corresponded often. Many times O'Brian showed me the last letter that Arnor had written him. It was written two days before Arnor died. He was encouraging O'Brian as usual, to come south to Brooklyn and stay for one winter there. O'Brian would maybe have accepted the offer and gone for the fun of it, if Arnor had lived. When I had finished writing the first chapter of this story, I let O'Brian know and told him what I was going to write about and what I would leave out. He said he would agree with that, but I said that it was annoying that I should not write the story in the language that a true Christian Irishman could understand---

"But apart from other considerations, my dearest son" he said "You avoid like hot fire to make an elephant out of a fly, or a fly out of an elephant, which isn't much better. Above all, do not have an poetic or flowery talk in the narrative--rather stay with the truth of the matter, so that the reader understands. That which lasts is what is written and understood by the common people, because it is something they can retain. They do no want any gibberish, either in the narrative or anything else. This is why no story endures for long. It has to be true and without an embellishment.

I knew an author in Ireland. He was my cousin, who was a prolific writer of stories in poetic language. All were stories of his sweetheart. He said that among other things that she was "brighter" than the sun, and countenance was like that of a full moon. He swore a solemn oath that he had often seen mushrooms dancing around on the dung heap by his father' s barn, and he had often heard frogs singing a song of praise to the clock on the edge of the hill. People finally quit reading his works because they were not realistic. No one wanted to read about a woman who was "brighter" than the sun and keep in mind, my son, that while you write a story, I do not want you to make me out as some demi-god. Just describe me as I am. I am, as you know, an uncouth, crooked, pock-marked Catholic Irshman. If you wish to mention the wart that is on my face, do not say that it is on my chin, though it would certainly look better there. Just say that it is where it is--on my nose. Remember one thing. To tell the truth, and nothing but the truth. Then the story will be yours, and maybe it will be placed on the same shelf as the story of the Irishman Handy Andy."

O'Brian spoke thus and I kept all that in mind when I was writing the story.

There is not much to tell about my cousin Solrun. She lived in the crooked house till the fall of 1892. She then went to her daughter Anna and Kjartan's. They lived in the west end of the city and became well-off in their early years, because Kjartan was a good carpenter and was always employed. He was a man of good habits and spent his money wisely.

In 1904 they all went to the west coast and live in one of the large cities there. Kjartan established a construction business and has prospered, and may well be said to be one of the richest Icelanders in America. Solrun is now 87 years old and is said to be in good health. I am told she reads the Icelandic weekly papers without glasses and still writes legibly. Two young men and three young ladies call her "Amma" and two boys and four girls call her "Langamma".

She is always lively and in good spirits. When she sees another Icelander that has recently arrived from Winnipeg, she asks how things are there now where the old

mill and crooked house stood. She has no interest in other Winnipeg news.

As soon as O'Brian had bought the crooked house, he began to remodel it. It was painted and plastered. The basement was fixed up. Walls were built and the rooms on the main floor where remodeled to a great extent. Later it was changed to a grocery store and the owner was an O' Hara if I remember right. O'Brian rented an apartment there, but not the one upstairs while Solrun lived there. When she moved away for good the store closed. Then a carpenter named Williamson rented the entire building. He had his workshop downstairs and lived upstairs. In 1905 O'Brian sold the house and lot for a good profit. Then the old, out of the way, crooked house was torn down and another fine building erected in its place.

I have this to say about Bjorn, Solrun' s boarder, that was one of those men that set off in the gold rush to the Yukon in March of 1898. He was considered a man among men on that trip. He rescued two men from an avalanche in the Chilkoot Pass and was himself nearly drowned in Lake La Barge. He finally reached Dawson and worked at mining and wood cutting for two years. He was no richer when he returned to Winnipeg than when he left. O'Brian told him he had gone too far to search for gold, as the best and richest gold mines were here in Manitoba in his own backyard. All that needed to be done was to plough the land and plant wheat, and gold would soon be in his hands. Bjorn accepted this counsel and quickly settled on good farmland a fair distance down the plains, plowed, sowed and reaped with good results. He then got married, had a son and a daughter and saw to it that they got a good education. He bought a large strip of the best wheatland and became a large farm owner, highly esteemed, and realized at last that he had indeed found a rich gold mine--had found the hidden treasure that nature intends for every young man who has the spirit and ambition to

search for it.

Mr. Iceland, or Jon Jonsson—or whatever his name was, was called the "walking Icelander". He left Winnipeg soon after the treasure was found. Two years later he was traveling in Oregon and California and was said to have walked over the Rocky Mountains. He was not like the "walking Jew," at least the walking Jew that Eugene Sue, the Frenchman wrote about. Wherever that Jew set his foot down, left a mark of seven nails from the soles of his shoes. Accompanying him was a bad harvest, starvation, plague and misfortune. But the walking Icelander was different. Wherever his footsteps led, beautiful and fragrant flowers sprang up. He brought light and warmth and all who became acquainted with him were filled with happiness and contentment. He was a citizen of the United States and traveled extensively in New England and may have lived in Boston. He was seen in Cuba during the Spanish-American War at the turn of the century. He was among those who cared for the sick and injured. An Icelandic soldier spoke to him there. I have not heard of him since then.

Mabel Campion lived in the crooked house for two years. During that time she worked at the Albion Laundry, except when she was sick. WheN she was back on her feet after her illness, she never walked in her sleep, and never talked in her sleep either. Her temperament changed greatly after that. She became considerably calmer and discreet, and spoke well of everyone. She often attended church, read the Bible regularly and prayed for a long time before she went to bed. Once she said to my cousin and me,

"It was rather strange that I should be looking for a secret treasure when I walked in my sleep. It must have been a sign from a higher power that I should look for the good treasure—that precious treasure that stones and rust cannot harm. I have found it at last! I am so happy and full of heavenly joy, that no words can fully describe. I know that I am to help others to have the same happiness and benefit from the heavenly joy. There is a hidden treasure in everyone's heart--gold more beautiful than the most precious jewel and it behooves me to find it."

A short time later she joined the Salvation Army, became a captain and went to India in the summer of 1898 and I have not heard of her since.

Madeleine Vanda has been a widow for a long time, and is now living with her youngest daughter who is married and lives a short distance from St. Boniface. Her eldest son was highly educated and got a good position east in Quebec. Her other daughter has written several short stories which have been published in good magazines. She has maybe used some ideas for some of her stories from the old woman. The last time I spoke to Madeleine Vanda two years ago, she told me she had recently dreamed Berg the castaway and she believed he said to her "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Mrs. Colthart only stayed a short time in Winnipeg after the treasure was found. She went home to England and was two or three years in London . After that she went to Australia and died there at her sister's home a few years later. This is what Edna told me in 1909.

Godson went east to Toronto in the winter of 1887 and worked for a winter in a theatre. He was, it was said, a genius at preparing the stage, arranging the backdrops and rehearsing the actors. He died just before the turn of the century. His son grew up with his mother in Fort Rouge. He was in poor health all his life and died around the age of thirty.

Lastly I would mention that I was married in the spring of 1887. The girl that I so often saw skating became my wife. I am not allowed to talk about our courtship. My wife thinks I have said enough about her in the second chapter of this story, though I am not going to tell all the events that led to our marriage. She says truthfully that this is the story of the hidden treasure, that was found at last, and not a love story. I have always kept that in mind since I began the third chapter. I will content

myself to say that we, my wife and I, have lived in many places in western Canada and we have always lived well, and have always been happy. Bessi, my father-in-law, has lived with us in the lovely city of Winnipeg, and with our children. And here ends the story.

Good readers—with all my heart I thank you for your faithfulness and warm thoughts. Here is my hand, I bid you good-bye—likely the last time.

Poetry

The Travels of Jóhann and Steinunn's Koffort, a Family Heirloom

by lillian vilborg

There are not many heirlooms
in our family
and most come from
Steinunn Árnadóttir and Jóhann Porsteinsson
She from Borgarfjördur Eystra
He from the farm *Engilæk* in Nordur Múlasysla

When they emigrated in 1883,
she was 29 years old and he 30
At 5' 9", she towered over him, only 5' tall
They were working at the farm *Hrafnabjörg*
and had three children, Porsteinn, Gudlaug, 9 and Soffía, 1

With them on the *Craikforth* came their two daughters
and a *koffort* built from driftwood by Jóhann
a very plain, solid rectangular chest
with handcrafted metal hinges
that contained their books, clothes and precious belongings

The chest left from Seydisfjördur
on Iceland's east coast
and crossed the seas first to Scotland
Then west to Canada where it landed at Quebec City
Next it experienced the rough and tumble of the train
before it finally came to Winnipeg
to live for a few years.

Jóhann was a milkman.
It is said his feet didn't touch the floor when he sat on the streetcar
She kept house for "the English."

It is said she told them she could not work for them if they did not
allow her to eat at their table
Eventually they homesteaded *Haga,* a quarter section in the Mary
Hill district north of Lundar.
Their youngest son Jón and his twin sister Ólafía, born in 1890,
infants
when they arrived with Sigfús, Soffía, Gudlaug and Porsteinn
Eiríkka was born the next year

The *koffort* still like new
carried their things to Haga
and remained there for over eighty years
first in the log house Jóhann built
and then in the grand two storey wood frame
their youngest son Jón built in 1919

In the 1920s both Jóhann and Steinunn died
but the *koffort* still sat at the foot of the bed
in the master bedroom
In 1969 it journeyed to Betel in Gimli
where Jón and his wife Helga, then blind
spent their last two years.

Then the little chest, filled to the brim with pictures
travelled to Regina where Lillian, eldest living daughter of Jón and
Helga
granddaughter of Jóhann and Steinunn
read the story of emigration, settlement, birth, death, love, land, ani-
mals, friends, relatives
in the pictures spilling out of the box

When Lillian and her husband Hafsteinn Bjarnason moved from the
prairies to White Rock, BC
they took the *koffort* with them
but their apartment did not have space for the small chest
so they gave it to their youngest daughter Bernice Lindal
who lived in Burnaby, BC

She gifted the chest, now over 100 years old
to her daughter Lara
who sanded and oiled the driftwood
returning it to its natural finish.
Lara uses it as a hope chest
as did many young girls in Iceland
who received a *koffort* as a confirmation gift
and used it to save up for marriage

May the little *koffort* that Jóhann made
the one which has travelled from coast to coast in Canada
and served so well
and is still in perfect shape
sit at the foot of Lara's bed for a long and happy time.

January, 2003

Book Reviews

The White Strand: An Homage to the ancient Norse

By Ellinor Thun Ueland, poet and A. Warren Oddsson, artist. Edited by: Robert J. Asgeirsson
Penman Digital Inc, 2002
ISBN 0-9730968-0-2

Reviewed by Betty Jane Wylie

THE WHITE STRAND is a labour of love, painstakingly created: beautiful paper; handsome fonts (wih serifs); 29 reproductions of original drawings especially created for the book by the artist—almost one per episode—with an opaque protective cover page on each one; a colour photograph of the poet and artist accompanying a full biography of each; the English and Runic alphabets; a complete Glossary in Icelandic spelling and a recommended reading list (but without publishing information).

A note about the Glossary: it's useful and informative and allows the writer to use words otherwise unfamiliar to the reader. However, there are two words she uses that aren't in the glossary and also not in the dictionary. She uses "oar" and "knell" as verbs. "Row" is a perfectly good verb and so is "toll" or "ring." Both are monosyllabic and would not spoil her metre (which is somewhat capricious anyway.)

The narrative is wonderful and authentic and it is broken down into chronological episodes, charting the emotional as well as the physical progress of the early Norse people to Iceland. Their human history is set into th web of fate woven by the three Norns, the ancient seers of Past, Present and Future, which ends with Ragnarok, the end of time—not quite. The white strand, of the three colours the Norns use (black, grey and white) remains cloud-like, drifting, promising hope for another future, a Gimli, a heavenly home. If only I could give this effort an unqualified rave!

Illustration by Arthur Warren Oddsson (1958-2001)
Depicting the poem *East Wind - Homecoming*

The work so badly needs copy-editing that it makes my teeth ache. People often think that poetry allows for and forgives any lapses of grammar and logic because it's poetry. You've heard of poetic license, haven't you? This is not true. Just as in prose, a poetic sentence must have a beginning and an end, a subject and a verb. Granted, one can be elliptical: a subject may be implicit, a verb may be implied. But the sentence must make sense. A collection of random phrases piled up in charming disarray does not work. Clarity must prevail. Antecedents must be clear, that is, the reader should understand immediately who "they" or "he" or "she" refers to, preferably in the recent past and not three paragraphs or even four sentences earlier. Dangling modifiers are a no-no. Let me show you: being a stickler for grammar, this book does not please me. I am the stickler, not the book.

I haven't mentioned the punctuation. It is not necessary to put a period at the end of every line of poetry; some lines are run-on and don't make sense with a period. A period usually makes the next line an incomplete sentence. Nor is it necessary to sprinkle commas like salt and pepper among the phrases. That, is not, how a sentence, reads.

All these errors are so egregious as to make the poem almost unreadable. I copy-edited it twice. Some passages defied translation but I persevered.

Look at this:

Aching limbs from days of toil and strain,
Smarting eyes, sea salt and lack of sleep,
Wet from heavy seas with pouring rain,
And enclosed in fog, so thick and deep.

This is the third paragraph of the poem entitled *"Landfall - 1000 A.D."* which describes the Vikings' journey across the sea to find a new land. Nowhere in the first two paragraphs are the Vikings named. Descriptive phrases mount and one has to assume the presence of the people experiencing this trip. Here's a suggestion for edited copy:

Limbs ache from days of toil and strain,
Eyes tear with sea salt and lack of sleep.
All are wet from heavy seas and pouring rain,
Enclosed in fog, so thick and deep.

I am not for a minute suggesting that the writer has no skill with words; she is truly a poet. Here's a lovely passage, corrected only slightly:

Waves roll(ing) in, green as this cape,
Laced with sea-whipped froth,
Soft and deep as the folds of its shape,
With movements of velvet cloth.
Forever the waves wash(ing) onto the land.
Buried are secrets below.
Rumours creep in on the fickle sand(,)
For everyone to know.

(The brackets indicate my cuts.)

And here is a beautiful couplet ending a poem about a battle:

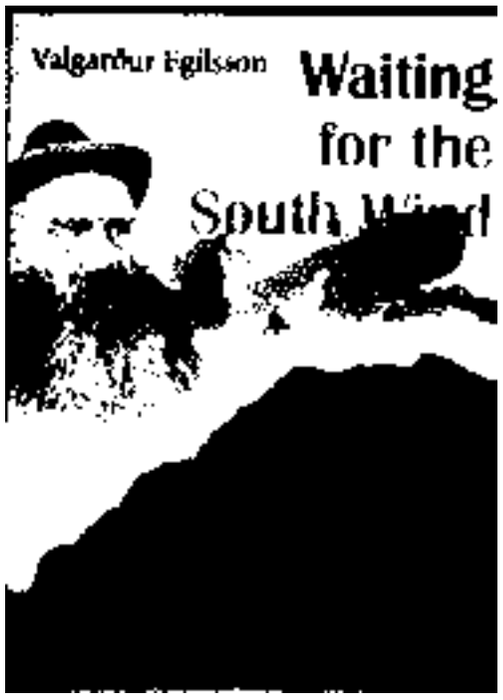
Northwind whispers in some foreign bay,
Picks up some fleece and blows it away.

I have chosen this image deliberately because of the poet's use of the wool (fleece) image - the three strands with which the Norns wove the fates of people. It's a consistent theme, beautifully played.

That's what the title means. *The White Strand* is the hopeful thread in one's life. Even afer the end, Ragnarok, the poet holds out this hope of a future. The ending is positive (with slight corrections):

Softly spun from the humming Norns,
Wool-like clouds are formed as thread,
Floating 'mongst the stars of future morn,
White strands of fate, drifting overhead.

It's still a little vague, but you get the idea.



Waiting for the South Wind

By Valgardur Egilsson
Rekjavík: Leifur Eiríksson, 2001

Reviewed by Nina Lee Colwill

This is the story of Valli, living on a farm in Eyjafjördur in the 1950s, waiting for the south wind, waiting for the golden plover, waiting for spring.

This was his kindergarten, it was forty square miles of landscape. The kindergarten was open twenty four hours a day and a thousand years back in time; ahead was the future as unforeseeable as always.

Valli lives with his parents and five brothers and a sister, in a world in which Jesus and God intermingle with the old gods. His father is a devoted reader of the sagas, his mother a devout Christian who abhors the pagan content of these ancient tales. Thus is formed Valli's evening ritual: listening intently as his father brings life to the old gods from the pages of the sagas, then addressing his bedtime prayer to "Our Father Who Art in Heaven." Even the farm names are a theological paradox. Valli's forebear, Helgi the Lean, called the farm itself Kristnes (Christness) a millennium earlier; but the sea-bound northern boundary of the property he called Reynisnes, from reynir, the holy rowan tree of the pagan religion. And overarching these contradictions are beliefs about the elves and the huldufolk. The site for their home was chosen for its protection by the Elf Knoll, a protection that was given freely when the avalanche came. And in return a shovel is never taken to the knoll, and hay is never cut there.

Valli also lives in the paradox created by his two very different families. His father is one of the Stonechurchers - a tall, strong, and silent people who never give or take advice, but are always ready to help. His mother is one of the Lake Folk, an attractive, fair-haired, joyful people known for their love of song and their quick recovery from sadness and anger. Only when the situation requires it, is Valli's father driven to speech; and only in the depth of misery does Valli's mother fail to sing at her work.

Life on an Eyjafjördur farm in the middle of the twentieth century was a difficult life. Valli's parents had moved the family out of town and into the countryside to teach them love and respect for the land, its plants, and its animals. But that choice means that Valli must learn his lessons from his older brothers and go to school only to write his exams. And that choice means hard work for Valli: breaking down snow bridges over the freezing spring river to protect the ever-curious

lambs; trying to control a horse with a yen for freedom; and taking his friends, the lambs, to slaughter.

Waiting for the South Wind is a treasure trove of colourful characters, living and dead. Valli's great-grandfather, Jóhann Bessason who scared off a polar bear with a red-hot iron and whose beard was so long that he used it for a bridle. Land's End Björg, fisherwoman, avant-garde poet, and spell-caster. Valli's ancestor, Pastor Reykjalín, whose love of wine, women, and song kept him in the bad books of the church leaders and in the beds of his female parishioners.

There are some exquisitely poetic passages in this prose, as well. One of my favourites is:

Ravens have been teasing dogs for ages, raven after raven, dog after dog, raven after dog.

There is a surreal element to this book as well, an other-worldliness that has the reader floating above the story. And yet it is so concrete, so specific in its detail that it cannot fail to please the scientist and the artist, the pragmatist and the dreamer.

Waiting for the South Wind is a multi-layered book, a book for many ages. Older children and younger teenagers will love the sharp detail of Valli's life. Whether he is passing his time in church eating flies in a pre-DDT era or attaching the coats of dead lambs onto orphan lambs in hopes that the grieving mother will adopt them, his is a life that few children today will ever experience. The adult reader will appreciate all of this and more – a complex philosophy presented with such simplicity that we sometimes have to set the book aside before we realize that we have read something profound.

Contributors

BERNICE LILYAN JOHANNSON-ANDERSEN is the granddaughter of pioneers Sigtryggur "Trigvi" Johannson and Sigridur Johannsdottir who homesteaded in 1889 near Markerville. She a charter member of the Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society of Markerville and the immediate Past President. Her maternal grandparents were Fredrik Kjartan Johnson and Gudlin Thorlaug Illugason. Bernice has a keen interest in the community of Markervile and her Icelandic roots.

NINNA BJARNASON CAMPBELL received an honourary life membership from the Edmonton Chapter of the Icelandic National League for her outstanding contribution to the Nordurljos Chapter and the Icelandic community. She now lives in Winnipeg so that she can be closer to her grandchildren.

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

JOHN JOHNSON is a retired farmer who still owns land that once was Stephan G. Stephansson's farm. He is a member of the Icelandic Communities Association - the group that organizes the 2nd of August celebrations annually in Mountain, North Dakota. His parents were John Johnson and Gudrun Melsted Magnuson.

REV. STEFAN JONASSON is a Unitarian minister and member of the board of directors of The Icelandic Canadian. He presently serves as Coordinator of Services for Large Congregations with the Unitarian Universalist Association in Boston, Massachusetts. He also serves as minister of the Unitarian churches in Arborg and Gimli. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife, Cindy, and daughters, Brandis and Heather.

SIGURBJORG STEFANSSON was a highly respected teacher. A school in Gimli bears her name. She was instrumental in establishing the libraries at Gimli, Riverton and Arborg. She had a great pride in her Icelandic heritage. Delving into the history led her to translating the letters so that they could be shared.

LILLIAN VILBORG retired after 26 years with the University of Alberta as Law Librarian and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Law. Lillian has re-located to Winnipeg, the city of her birth and formative years. She is the editor of Lögberg-Heimskringla.

BETTY JANE WYLIE is a prolific writer and playright. She is a very strong supporter of her Icelandic roots. *Letters to Icelanders, Exploring the Northern Soul* reveals her love for the Nordic spirit. She recently received an honourary doctorate of letters from the University of Manitoba.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BERNICE ANDERSON

The back page

Erected in 1988, the Centennial Monument in Markerville was made to commemorate the years settled by the Icelandic pioneers in Tindastoll, which later was named Markerville.

The 10 foot tall cream can with three stalks of barley represent the two most important components of the homesteaders' life, grain farming and the dairy industry. For the early farmers, their only source of regular income was the cream cheque. The inscription reads: "They did so much with so little." It was put in place by the Markerville Centennial Committee and the work was done by metal worker Don Lynn.