

# ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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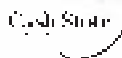
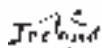
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# ICELANDIC CONNECTION

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|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>On the Cover</b>   | <b>143</b> |
| <b>Editorial</b>  | <b>144</b> |
| Lorna Tergesen  |            |
| <b>My Grandmother's Table</b>                                 | <b>146</b> |
| Julie Salverson   |            |
| <b>Laura Goodman Salverson</b>                                | <b>150</b> |
| Daisy Neijmann  |            |
| <b>Laura Goodman Salverson: Icelandic Pride and Prejudice</b> | <b>155</b> |
| Dr. Terrence L. Craig   |            |
| <b>Laura Goodman Salverson: A Reader's Reflection</b>         | <b>163</b> |
| Virginia Martin   |            |
| <b>Shoal Lake Sketches</b>                                    | <b>168</b> |
| Wilhelm Kristjanson   |            |
| <b>Life Saving Awards</b>                                     | <b>180</b> |
| <b>Poetry</b>   | <b>182</b> |
| Laura Goodman Salverson                                       |            |
| <b>Book Review</b>  | <b>184</b> |
| <b>The Fifth Dimension</b>                                    |            |
| Reviewed by Linda F. Sigurdson Collette                       |            |
| <b>Contributors</b>   | <b>187</b> |
| <b>The Back Page</b>  | <b>188</b> |

# ICELANDIC CONNECTION

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# ON THE COVER



PHOTO COURTESY OF NELSON GERRARD

Laura Goodman Salverson

# Editorial

## Tribute to Laura Goodman Salverson

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by Lorna Tergesen

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As many of you may already know, Laura Goodman Salverson was one of the originators of *The Icelandic Canadian Magazine*. The magazine served as an extension of the Icelandic Canadian Club in Winnipeg.

“The object of the Icelandic Canadian Club is to do all in its power to assist in the attempt to preserve Icelandic culture here. Placed as we are, it is inevitable that as the years pass, more and more people of Icelandic descent will lose the command of the Icelandic language and come to employ English as their medium of expression.”

Another aspect was to promote the war effort in America by noting those from the communities who had enlisted or taken any part in World War II. (There had been a good record of those who had contributed to World War I, and so they were following that lead.)

Judge W. J. Lindal, Professor T. J. Oleson, Heimir Thorgrimson. Hjalmur and Holmfridur Danielson were all instrumental in the beginnings of the magazine. They sought out Laura Goodman Salverson who was a noted, talented writer from the community to

assist them in their project. This she did with great skill and good advice. So now we plan to honour her with this issue of the magazine, which will mainly be about her.

As you will read, Laura Goodman Salverson received the Governor General’s award for Literature in 1937 and again in 1939. The first was for *Dark Weaver* in 1937 (fiction) and secondly for *Confessions of an Immigrant’s Daughter* in 1939. (non-fiction).

It is sad that neither these or any of Laura’s other books are now in print. My personal favourite, *The Viking Heart*, was available in the 1980’s in paperback format as was “*Confessions of an Immigrant’s Daughter*”. This later book was used heavily in University studies for a period as the pre-eminent book on immigration and settlement, showing how the immigrants tried to assimilate into the culture of North America. Now I wonder if it could not be used in some of the women’s studies courses at our universities.

Normally it is not our policy to print articles that have already appeared elsewhere, other than in our former magazines, but in this issue we truly

digress. To those authors who have so generously donated their work, we thank them. There is some repetition, but in order not to alter their original works, we have included everything in their articles.

Now it would be lovely to sit with Laura and have a good cup of coffee or maybe a strong drink, as I have heard that she was always ready to entertain or to share good times with her friends, family and fellow workers. In such a situation, we could ask all the questions that arise from reading her material and wonder how she enjoyed her status in the New Iceland community.

It is a shame that Laura is not more

visible in our Canadian Literary culture as Virginia Martin had proposed to the city of Winnipeg. All the work that Virginia put into trying to have Laura recognized by the Winnipeg Real Estate Board was for naught. The material and all the added information that she gathered is now in the hands of the Jon Sigurdson Chapter of the I.O.D.E., waiting for someone else to pick up the challenge again and to put her name forward for further recognition. Our thanks go to Virginia Martin for her efforts. We at the *Icelandic Connection* will be happy to co-operate with anyone else willing to take on the job.

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# My Grandmother's Table

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by Julie Salverson

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Some years ago I had lunch with Mrs. Mable Donnelly in her cheerful Toronto home. Mable was a year older than my dad, which made her ninety, more or less. I've lost track of her now, which is a shame because for almost twenty years she regularly shared Sunday dinner with my grandparents, Laura Goodman Salverson and her husband George. Mable is the one who should be writing this, because she was a long-time companion to my grandmother; in fact, she and my father, George Junior, were sweethearts in their young days living in Edmonton. Mable would have been about eighteen when she started working as a newspaper reporter. I think she told me it was the Edmonton Journal, but that surprises me. It was the 1930's and the Journal supported the Conservative party. Surely the elegant and lively woman my father affectionately called "our Goldie" would have favoured the Edmonton Bulletin, known as the Liberal's paper? I ask this not because I know Mable's politics – I don't – but because she spent so many evenings at a weekly Salon run by my grandmother in her home. I doubt LG would have allowed a Conservative in the door!

Many of my memories of LG – the name she was always called in our house and among friends, and how she signed her letters – are filtered through my dad's stories. His favorite was about the Arab who showed up to visit his mother in

flowing white robes covered by a thick Canadian winter coat. Dad may have been pulling his young daughter's leg – a few times he threw a horse into the story for good measure. The point was that LG had so many visitors, all the time, any hour of the day, from all corners of the globe. Her Salons were part of an old western Canadian tradition, and they were frequent and well attended.

Dad was born in 1916 and I imagine him as a small child, fascinated with the highly charged debate and fiery personalities that filled the house. I know the Salversons lived on the university side of the river in Edmonton, because Mable told me dad would walk her home, after the Salon was finished and usually late in the evening, across the high bridge to her downtown neighbourhood. My grandmother was quite unhappy when dad moved north to Flin Flon for his first job at a radio station, and Mable married someone else. Many years later, when LG and her husband came to Toronto to be near my family, the Sunday dinners with Mable began, ending only when LG died.

There are other flashes of things my father told me about his mother. She never suffered fools, not lightly, not at all. She was terribly stubborn, strong willed, not always easy to get along with and struggled with migraines all her life. She hated injustice with an eloquent passion. The first person she met in the flesh deeply



wronged by life was an Armenian peddler. His family had been wiped out in a Turkish massacre of Christians. She never forgot the man. Her favorite novel was *Les Misérables* (she'd have hated the musical) and Victor Hugo had pride of place on her bookshelves. She didn't trust organized groups or parties, political or religious, but fiercely supported individuals who fought



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAMI JAKOBSON SCHIRLIE

for freedom. Nellie McClung was one of her friends.

It has taken me weeks to finally sit and write this piece, because I'm sad I knew her so little. I do have a few memories of

my own. She was a painter, and I have a lovely landscape, somewhat in need of repair, that hangs on my study wall. I also have a framed award she was given in 1940. The engraving is in ornate Icelandic letters and like so many third generation immigrants, I can't read what it says.

For several years when my brother Scott and I were very young, we would visit my grandparents' house at 56 Putnam Avenue in Toronto for Christmas Eve. We always watched *A Christmas Carol* with Alistair Sim. When I was three or four Scott and I were left with our grandparents on the weekends. LG had a skittish cat that hid in the basement and she used to take me down the wooden steps and help me try to coax the thin, ragged creature from behind piles of boxes. My only real image of this woman I've come to know later in life, through her writing – the only true memory I have of the two of us together – is her sitting me down and showing me a special Book. I've never been able to find anything like it, but this large loosely bound manuscript had blank spaces on the page where you could paste pictures

of far away lands and peoples. She would help me cover the backs of the paintings, or photos, with glue, hold my hands as I pressed each small square carefully into the Book, and tell me stories. This one was

Alexander the Great taming his horse by whispering in the stallion's ear. That one was the fearless Boidicea leading her Celtic Icenii people against the Romans. Those Sunday afternoons with LG were the beginning of my curiosity for things far beyond the world I knew. They were marvelous times.

Some years ago I went to visit her collection in the Archives of Canada, in Ottawa. There were boxes and boxes of essays she had written, many of which she had read on the radio. Some of her prizes were there, including the two Governor General Literary Awards (she was the first woman to win, in 1937 for fiction and in 1939 for nonfiction) and there was one thin box of odds and ends. In it I discovered some faded greeting cards, one with my name on it. I sat in that large, public room, with tears streaming down my face. The ratio of what was personal and what was work in those boxes seemed out of balance. It's one of the many things I wish I could ask her about.

In the Archive I also found a manuscript. It is an unpublished (I hope to rectify this) second volume of her autobiography, called *The Funny Side Of Failure*. The book tells the story of how she became a writer in the context of what it means to work in the arts in Canada. It covers her childhood and teenage years through the eyes of a woman fifty or more years later. A tough exposure to life's harsh realities, tempered by her parent's love of reading, learning and attending to the sufferings of those less fortunate, forged both my grandmothers' character and her work; the one was, I think, inseparable from the other. Neither, I presume to suggest, were about certainty, but both were not afraid, with prudence, with thoughtfulness, to judge, to discern. I

think this was a source of friction between dad and his formidable mother. It may be one of the reasons my father prided himself on being a documentary maker who always showed what he called 'both sides' of a story.

In the book, LG writes: "An artist does not presume to preach; he lets his dominant values and the behaviour of his characters make it quite clear that ignorance, irresponsibility, superstition, and self-righteous tolerance, are the mainsprings of human misery." And then: "Scandinavians have always been pre-occupied with the moral aspects of the human journey from birth to death; the strange adventure whose alternate gateways are beyond man's choosing." My father inherited his mother's fascination with human beings, their frailty, their bravery and their ultimate insignificance. He was proud of his background, and spoke often of LG with admiration for her independence, and her integrity. I didn't read *Confessions* until I was a young adult. She was long dead by this time, and I regretted the folly of youth that kept me from knowing the book sooner. It was both moving and exhilarating for me to encounter her young life and, through her telling, understand better the foundations of my own.

There are incidents in *The Funny Side of Failure* I knew nothing about, and which shocked me. Her life was even more difficult than I'd discovered in *Confessions*. She was rescued from an early illness by a Dr. Chown of Winnipeg, who "drove wildly through the snowy streets" to fetch a young surgeon who performed a "brutal tracheotomy" which saved her life. She writes: "The child was five; and that was the end of childhood." My grandmother suffered not only typhoid fever (which

she calls malaria) and the tragic death of her younger brother, Stanley, but “Before I was out of my teens I had looked upon birth and death; faced disasters and humiliations; had shared in the shocks of two suicides; witnessed the secret shame and constant anxiety of a family where a member had succumbed to mental illness.” The book is full of fascinating accounts of living in her aunt’s boarding house helping young pregnant mothers, her first experiences of reading publicly and being published, and the world of literature in 1920’s Canada.


Her first poem, written on the kitchen steps “on a dreary day, in a dreary little house”, was about birds. More than forty years later a Catholic priest sets another such poem to music. “To A Wild Canary” became a choral piece used in schools, and I read, to my astonishment, “the published song is dedicated to my little granddaughter Julie.” I have had no luck in finding this piece, and if anyone knows what became of it, please tell me!

I have one typed letter LG sent to a friend on October 31, 1957. I pull it out now, as I’m finishing this piece, and in faded type on green paper I read that she hopes to be given a bit of money, some from a “reading job” and some from the Canadian Author’s Foundation. “It would make my final years more secure and perhaps might allow me to write again. The only thing I have ever wanted from life.” The letter, I realize for the first time, is to Mable.

“How did you first meet my grandmother?” I asked, as we sat eating her carefully prepared chicken soup. “I was in her writing class,” she said. I sat up sharply. My grandmother taught? I have playwriting students, maybe I can learn something! “How did she teach?”

I asked. “Oh”, replied Mable, buttering her toast, “We all sat around at this table and she had us do exercises.” I stared in astonishment at the slender oval oak table, ran my fingers over its dark, shiny edge. “*This* table?”

And so it was that not many months later, when Mable left her home and moved into a seniors residence, I got a call from her son. Mable wanted me to have my grandmother’s table. It sits in my living room, it is beautiful to me and I love every crack on its weathered surface.



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# Laura Goodman Salverson (1890 -1970)

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Daisy Neijmann (University College of London)  
Novelist; Poet; Autobiographer; Colonist; Editor.  
Active 1918-1960 in Canada; United States

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The Canadian author Laura Goodman Salverson has primarily been remembered for putting Iceland, and Icelandic Canadians, on the Canadian literary map. A celebrated and popular writer during the 1920s and 1930s, she earned herself a place among the pioneers of western and ethnic Canadian fiction. The later years of her writing career were less successful and more troubled, something that can be attributed to a combination of personal and literary-historical circumstances. She never completely disappeared from Canadian literary history, however, and during the last twenty years, with the rise in feminist and multicultural literary criticism, there has been a significant upsurge of interest in her work and her authorship.

Laura Goodman was the daughter of Icelandic immigrants who had come to Canada in 1887. Her mother came from an old and important Icelandic family, part of the clerical upper class. When she fell for an impassioned idealist divorcé with radical ideas about freedom and independence, her family strongly opposed the match, and the couple emigrated to Canada soon after they were married. Romance quickly gave way to the immigrant reality of poverty and drudgery, bringing their mismatched temperaments to the fore.

The unbridgeable gap between her proud, practical mother who never adapted to life in the New World and her restless, idealist father who was forever chasing new opportunities was something Laura Salverson would carry with her for the rest of her life, and would in fact resurface within her own life and personality.

When Laura was born, the family was living in Winnipeg, then a frontier city experiencing a boom which its primitive infrastructure could ill accommodate. In her autobiography *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* (1939), she paints a vivid picture of early immigrant life on the wrong side of the tracks. Her father, a skilled craftsman with a delicate constitution and a head permanently in the clouds, was ill equipped to suffer the appalling working conditions and found it hard to keep a job. His family suffered poverty and permanent itinerancy as a result, although this would have certain advantages for Laura as a writer: she later recreated in her fiction, from the vantage point of the labouring immigrant, her first-hand experiences of the development of the Canadian and American West during its formative years. These descriptions were a novelty in Canadian literature at the time, giving her work a documentary and historical value over and above the literary achievement. The West, together with the

Scandinavian past, would become the main literary landscapes informing her writing.

In spite of their itinerant existence, the family lived among other Icelandic immigrants for much of Laura's early years, and she did not learn English until she was ten years old and went to school. In *Confessions*, she describes this moment as a watershed, a formative moment in her writing career, for it was then that she began her avid reading in English and decided to become a writer herself. While this may have seemed a far-fetched ambition for a young immigrant working-class girl, from the perspective of her Icelandic background it was not. The Icelandic immigrant community was teeming with writers, most of them self-educated, and Icelandic immigrant writing was flourishing. Icelandic immigrant papers circulated widely and formed an outlet for these literary outpourings, among them regular columns by Laura's father. The most ambitious of these writers experimented with ways of giving literary expression to the immigrant experience, providing Laura with plenty of models to emulate. The difference was that they all wrote in Icelandic, while Laura was determined to write in English.

During her teens, Laura's social and political awareness developed. Her father's experiences as well as her own, working

as a domestic servant, made her realize the exploitation and inequalities that blighted the New World. Her father and her formidable aunt Halldóra, a midwife who ran a hospital from home, were her



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAMI JAKOBSON SCHIRLIE

inspirations in this respect, her father with his political ideals of freedom and social justice, and her aunt with her pioneering and tireless efforts to provide medical help and emotional support for women, especially those who had landed on the

wrong side of society's moral strictures. Laura worked in her hospital, and the misery and despair she encountered there left her with a life-long aversion to puritanism and hypocrisy, and made her a militant advocate for women's rights, but it also created in her a deep-seated fear of childbirth and a complex attitude towards her own femininity.

With the family always living on the edge of poverty, Laura had to work from an early age and initially had little opportunity to follow her ambition of becoming a writer. However, these circumstances taught her to follow the model of her father and write during whatever free hours the day allowed her, even if it meant sacrificing her sleep. A greater obstacle constituted the literary standards which the Icelandic literary community in general, and her father in particular, impressed upon her. *Confessions* contains many references to her father's warnings not to become another miscreant of letters, while the Icelandic community was anxiously awaiting the moment when an author of Icelandic descent would make a contribution to Canadian literature.

In 1913 Laura Goodman married the Norwegian immigrant George Salverson, and began a new life of poverty and itinerancy. George worked as a railway dispatcher and throughout their married life the couple moved all over Canada, while Laura tried to supplement their income, initially by taking in boarders and later by writing. The couple's life was plagued by misfortunes such as fires and floods, exacerbated by George's drinking. In 1914 the couple's son and only child, George Salverson Jr., was born.

Salverson began writing during her late teens. She first tried her hand at poetry, but soon turned to fiction in the form of

short stories. In fighting both her own insecurities and the external obstacles of getting her work published, she received invaluable support from important people in the recently established Canadian Authors Association (CAA). There was at the time no infrastructure to speak of supporting writing in Canada; Canadian publishing had always faced what seemed insurmountable odds in the form of a powerful industry across the border, Canadian geography, a colonial attitude, and a general apathy towards literature. However, in the wake of the First World War, Canadian nationalism was growing, and with it an interest in building a national culture and literature. Salverson benefited from these developments as she fell in with CAA members in western Canada who actively encouraged her to turn her experiences into fiction. In 1922, she entered a contest held by the Women's Canadian Club in Regina for the best short story to describe life in western Canada; her contribution, entitled *Hidden Fire*, won, and was later published in the magazines *Maclean's* and *Maple Leaf* (1923). At the time, she had already started work on what would be her first novel and greatest success, *The Viking Heart*, chronicling the experiences of Icelandic immigrants to Canada. It was published in 1923 and gained instant popularity. It was hailed as an immigrant epic celebrating the Canadian West and its settlers; the fact that the novel also contains scathing criticism of social injustices such as the treatment of foreigners and women and that it critically reviews the division caused by Canada's participation in the First World War has generally been ignored. In an unpublished letter to J.S. Woodsworth, Salverson complains that her publishers in fact made her cut the



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAMI JAKOBSON SCHIRLIE

### Laura, middle, with Minty and Anna

most scathing of her social critique.

She continued her writing and, considering her circumstances, her output during the following two decades is astounding. She experienced pressure to continue writing about immigrants and their integration into Canadian society, and initially she obliged, but soon became tired of writing a series of *Viking Hearts* and turned to writing historical fiction

instead. In her letters to her editor and mentor, Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press, she explained that she found the past easier to handle and mould into fiction than contemporary events, and also that this would allow more of her Norse nature to come through: she wanted to write a true saga into Canadian literature. These historical novels were, however, less successful in both commercial and artistic terms. Necessity forced her back to the subject of immigrants and with that move came success. In 1937, her multicultural immigrant epic *The Dark Weaver* won her the prestigious Canadian Governor General's Award for Fiction, although a considerably darker

tone dominates this work and it was not a great commercial success. Two years later, her autobiography *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* appeared, to international acclaim. She received another Governor General's Award for this book, although its commercial potential was killed by the outbreak of the Second World War.

The post-war years brought great

changes to Canadian culture and society, and Salverson never regained her former position as a writer. The CAA had lost its influence, in part because it was out of touch with post-war ideas on literature. The writers and critics who took over were quick to discredit and dismiss the writing the CAA had supported, now considered to be embarrassing in its nationalist boosterism and romanticism. Modernism was the word, and Salverson had little taste for it. She called it armchair experimentation by a male elite who had enjoyed the luxury of a university education in central Canada, found their literary models in urban centres, and favoured formal experimentation over ideas and ideals and a literary agenda of social reform. She continued to write, submitting several manuscripts which were not accepted for publication and are now lost, one apparently dealing with the Jewish community and anti-Semitism on the Canadian West Coast, another a satire on post-war antics. After these setbacks, Salverson decided to revisit the past and published another historical novel entitled *Immortal Rock* (1954). This novel is an interesting experiment, but is marred by its unfortunate choice of subject matter, which argues for the authenticity of the

Kensington Stone. It was the last book she published, although she did continue to write. The last work we have of hers is an unpublished manuscript, another autobiography consisting of two different versions with different titles: *The Funny Side of Fortune* and *The Funny Side of Failure*. They constitute a literary apologia for a failed career and are testimony to the tragedy of Salverson's life as a writer, which she felt had been marred by the same sense of unfulfilled potential that had so haunted her about both her parents.

Today, *Confessions* is the only work by Laura Goodman Salverson still in print, although *The Viking Heart* was originally reissued in the New Canadian Library series in 1975. However, her writing is attracting the attention of a new generation of readers and scholars who have begun to view her work in the larger context of ethnicity, feminism, and the politics of canonisation, leading to a renewed appreciation for her remarkable achievement despite the odds.

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# Laura Goodman Salverson: Icelandic Pride and Prejudice

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by Dr. Terrence L. Craig  
Professor of English  
Mount Allison University

---

Laura Goodman Salverson was one prominent Canadian writer to attack prejudice from the receiving end in the 1920s. She did so in defence of her own Icelandic background. If those called Galicians were considered by English-Canadians to be at the bottom of the “alien” pile, then surely Icelanders must have been near the top if not actually at it. Nevertheless Salverson maintained that they were an endangered species and complained strongly in her fiction and in her autobiography about their gradual disappearance into the mainstream of Canadian society. Her defence might seem to be something of an overreaction, considering that Icelanders were of Nordic stock. Her vehement assault on anti-Icelandic prejudice reveals the extent of such feelings on the part of English-Canadians. If racism was such an important issue to Salverson and her Icelanders, then what must it have been like for less acceptable groups such as Galicians and Jews?

Salverson concentrated on Scandinavian and Germanic characters. Born in Canada to immigrant parents who turned to Norse culture to soothe them in their New World difficulties (she did not begin to learn English until the age of eleven), she

became a fervent traditionalist herself, and while many Icelanders were assimilating for various reasons, she resisted such forces and argued for the preservation of the old ways. She operated from a position of superiority, believing that Icelanders, with their remarkable history of exploration and parliamentary government and their inspiring sagas, could only be losers if they assimilated into Canadian society. In *Lord of the Silver Dragon: A Romance of Leif the Lucky* (1927), and in *Immortal Rock* (1954), she connected North America and the Vikings together in an almost fanatical manner, asserting in the latter book, on slim evidence discredited by most experts even then, the Kensington Stone theory that Norsemen had penetrated overland from Hudson’s Bay as far as modern-day Minnesota in the sixteenth century. In her books set in more modern times, her Icelandic immigrants are portrayed as continuing this saga of settlement: her people and not Columbus discovered America. All of her twentieth-century Scandinavian characters are presented as heirs of this pre-Columbian tradition of colonization in North America, and therefore had no need to take second place to anyone, as if the order of arrival had something to do with subsequent

ranking. She served willingly as an interpreter, bringing Norse history and culture to the attention of Canadians who were unknowingly dismissing them as just more aliens requiring civilization and education.

Salverson considered the Icelandic cultural tradition to be superior to the vacuum she felt surrounding her by contrast in Canada. Aware of feminist issues (*When Sparrows Fall* was dedicated to Nellie McClung) and a firm pacifist, she

Salverson showed a little more awareness of Canadian history preceding whites than some others. One memorable Indian character appears in both her novel *The Viking Heart* (1923) and in her autobiography, *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* (1939). Laughing Joe, who has every reason to weep instead of laugh, personifies the plight of the Canadian Indian. He is a disinherited vagabond who amuses idle whites with his imitation of their laughter as a form



wrote a sense of Christian Socialism into her books that coexisted unhappily there with her bleakly agnostic fatalism. She saw modern Europe as a chaotic disaster area, and Canada as a yet unfulfilled dream. Her writing was confined by her self-imposed limitations. She restricted herself to Scandinavian immigrants for all her fiction set in Canada, and it may be argued that she did so not so much because of her familiarity with and allegiance to them, but because of her belief in their superiority and therefore their priority in literature.

of begging. <sup>[1]</sup> The inclusion of his representative tragedy, coupled with her depiction of Indians in *The Viking Heart* as “derelicts of a race once great in native splendour,” <sup>[2]</sup> and as objects to be used by whites but who still possessed traces of their former dignity and independence, shows her essentially sympathetic to the Indians’ defeat as a *fait accompli*. It was over, she implied: this sad preface to the main drama of whites in a newly-emptied land. It serves to establish her sensitivity, but does little more.

In her first and best novel, *The Viking*

*Heart*, Salverson drew heavily upon her own family's experiences as immigrants, the debt being in part acknowledged and in part obvious in *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter*, which appeared fourteen years later. In *The Viking Heart*, she fictionalized the story of the mass movement of some 1,400 Icelanders to Canada after the eruption of Mt. Askja in 1875 and economic pressures had made emigration necessary. By starting her story in Iceland she was able to refute various myths that English-Canadians held about Icelanders and aliens in general. She showed the people content and happy in their native land, and sad to leave it. They were shown appreciative of living in the midst of a great cultural tradition. To show immigrants at home in their own element before transplanting them to Canada where they would inevitably look out of place was and remains a valuable educatory aspect of such fiction, establishing as it does the worth of alien cultures and, by extension, alien peoples. Salverson also attacked the ludicrously exaggerated rhetoric of Canadian recruiters overseas, which had falsely enticed immigrants, some of whom might otherwise never have come. The stories she was to tell of the harrowing experiences of Icelandic settlers, particularly the quarantining for their first winter of a group in a swamp near Gimli because of smallpox, support her claims that Icelanders had earned their right to be accepted as Canadians in full measure.

In *The Viking Heart*, Salverson traced the history of one family, the Halssons, whose troubles of this sort were considerable. They persevered and suffered and at length came to terms with the land and with established Canadians by sharing bereavements. Death, and

especially the burial of loved ones in Canadian soil in so many books by or about immigrants, marks the total acceptance – the decision point of no return – by them of Canada as their new homeland.<sup>[3]</sup> Second generation Icelandic-Canadian Thor becomes a medical doctor and dies in France during World War One. His memorial service back in Canada is taken by an English Methodist minister who comforts Thor's mother afterwards. In a single sentence Salverson claims that the deaths of Canadians, regardless of their origins, unite all Canadians: "He was an Englishman and she an Icelander. But they looked each into the other's soul and found they had a common heritage."<sup>[4]</sup> Linking a Methodist cleric and a first generation "alien" immigrant in this way seems to be Salverson's answer to the enforced assimilationist policies proffered by Rev. Charles W. Gordon, whose pen name was "Ralph Connor," in *The Foreigner*.<sup>[5]</sup>

Salverson did not pursue the religious argument. Her vision of God as "The Dark Weaver," an intimidating balancer of events and indifferent guardian to humankind, makes conventional religion almost superfluous in her novels. *The Viking Heart* defends Icelanders from prejudice because they were Icelanders. It neither links them with non-Scandinavians against the common discrimination nor does it seriously criticize the English Canadians for their attitudes to any but Icelanders. She wrote as if to rectify a simple mistake which could be made up for by admitting Icelanders into the inner circle of power where they had a right to be. She bitterly noted the prejudice directed at the first generation. One of her characters, Bjorn, recounts it:

"You know the attitude that the

people had towards us. Suspicion, distrust and contempt. A little of that faded when we proved our worth in the rebellion. ... But we Icelanders are still a curiosity to many. They think us creatures of doubtful habit and uncertain intelligence. They tolerate

been allocated to the lowest strata in the Canadian hierarchy being accentuated by her personal pride in her own ancestors' high positions formerly in Iceland.

A later novel, *The Dark Weaver* (1937), is also the story of the immigrant experience, now enlarged to encompass

a representative sample of Nordic peoples. The prologue introduces several sets of people: the Boyens of Norway; the Marcussons of Denmark; the Holmquists, Russian refugees from Copenhagen; and Dr. Hartman and Oscar Beur from Germany. This is a multicultural novel even before it arrives in Canada. For various reasons these various characters immigrate and join together on the prairies, forming a spontaneous little community of their own. The characters represent not just an ethnic spectrum, but a political and philosophical one as well, ranging from capitalism to Marxism, and from insensitive self-interest to ultrasensitive self-abnegation. Under the gloomy threat of the nemesis-laden God who presides over the



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAMI JAKOBSON SCHIRLIE

### Laura, George Jr. and George Salverson

us because we are useful – because we are doing what they refuse to do, being of such superior clay.”<sup>[6]</sup>

Salverson resented the class her people were funnelled into on their arrival, her bitterness at her family having

plot, the personal tragedies of these people are played out. Their community is introverted, having little interaction with other Canadians. There are two experiences with the “outside.” The first is Ephraim Marcusson’s adulterous dalliance

with Marie, an Indian half-breed, and the second is the participation of Manfred as an aviator and Greta as a nurse in World War One. Ephraim's indiscretion is solemnly judged by the neighbouring Indian band who decide he must take Marie's child into his own family. Oscar Beau's negative reaction to this event merges imperceptibly with Salverson's:

"Those sanguinary faces staring out from the rim of firelight were as savage as a circle of wolves waiting to pounce upon their prey. Those horrible brutes, on whose faces cruelty and cunning marked the limits of intelligence, represented the sort of progeny Ephraim was asked to accept into his ancient line. Mein Gott! It was monstrous – so monstrous that Oscar felt as though the entire white race had suffered an intolerable affront. ... In face and form, disposition and temperament Marie might be French, but that could not alter the disagreeable facts of dual ancestry. Endearing or not she was likewise the innocent and helpless repository of savage traits and instincts. Dark thoughts."<sup>[7]</sup>

Marie dies and her daughter is adopted by Ephraim's forgiving wife. The child's subsequent life is not followed, so the reader is left wondering what chances Salverson would have given her for a normal life as a Marcusson.

As in *The Viking Heart*, the war provides an opportunity for these immigrants to prove their worth to Canada by fighting for Britain. Salverson hated war, but evidently recognized (perhaps from Rev. Charles W. Gordon's novels) that English Canadians judged Canadianness in part as the willingness to fight for the British Empire, and that, if

Icelanders were ever to gain their respect, they too must participate, as indeed they did. Yet Salverson deploras this necessity in strong terms, as when Greta sails for France: "Behind her lay the beautiful shores of a young peace-loving continent, betrayed into carnage by the duplicities of the old world. Ahead lay the bloody arena dedicated to the slaughter of the innocents!"<sup>[8]</sup> Manfred's psychological crisis after his Christmas bombing raid on Mannheim, and on learning that Greta had been wounded, leads him first to shoot down his cousin Ricky (a German pilot and a school friend), and then to suicidally crash in protest against a world where his perfect love can be destroyed so violently.

Salverson's immigrants in *The Dark Weaver* are good pioneers as she understands the world. There is, however, little sense of farming in the Canadian style. Urban and commercial careers were what her fictional characters aspired to. Although in fact the Gimli Icelandic community was agricultural and truly pioneering, her personal experiences were urban and transient, leaving her with little knowledge of farming. She presented her immigrants as moneyed, capable, and courageous, little different from the Viking nobility of her *Immortal Rock*. They come as European speculators, never expecting to be made to start out at the bottom. They end up as much Canadians as anyone else, having paid their dues to the graveyard and done their "bit" after the war. They have earned their respect.

Salverson's weakness was for romance. Because the romance element in *The Viking Heart* is minimal, the novel is probably her best work. An excess of it in *The Dark Weaver*, not to mention *Black Lace*, is what flaws her subsequent work.

*The Dark Weaver*, the third of her three immigrant novels, dissipates its energies in complicated romantic entanglements that do little for the plot and less for her didacticism. A prime example of the excess of romance in *The Dove of El-Djezaire* (1933), in which romance replaces realism in narrative of the experiences of Icelanders kidnapped and sold into slavery on the Barbary coast – a narrative based on a true event. The closest Salverson comes to writing about an Icelandic villain is in the person of Jan Klaus (or Murad Reis), a renegade pirate who leads the slaving expedition against his former island home. He turns out to be really half-Dutch

and half-Danish, however, and despite his adoption of barbarism, he is touched as he watches one of the slaves weeping on his ship. As Salverson puts it, with a characteristic melodramatic exclamation: “Ho, Jan Klaus! Once again race betrays you. ... Adopted of Islam, despoiler and thief, blood calls checkmate when it will. ... Deeds are of the day, instinct of the centuries.”<sup>[9]</sup> Also in *The Dove of El-Djezaire*, the author has a Jewess (Esther) who keeps a tavern (Abraham’s Bosom) patronized by the Moslems of Algiers. Salverson’s only Jewish character, Esther is “true to her emotional race.”<sup>[10]</sup> She does, however, contribute to the happy ending with some courage.

Salverson’s attitude to ethnicity was very similar to the English Canadian attitude. Her immigrant novels and her autobiography were in large part trying to establish Icelanders and other Scandinavians in the same superior category as the British. She deplored the pressures of assimilation and yet was forced to record them as part of the history of the Icelanders in Canada. Without actually making statements about racism as a theory, she employed the word “race” frequently in ways that implied racist beliefs. Her view of Icelanders was very one-sided and positive. Although at times they were shown as childish, they seem on the whole to have stepped in splendour out of the Icelandic sagas which were so important to Salverson as a child. It is clear that she believed that instincts, developed and integrated over centuries, had accumulated to form the ethnic character she proudly presented as Scandinavian. In her novel *When Sparrows Fall* (1925), which, although set in the United States, could with the omission of two or three sentences just as well be



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in Canada, the stalwart Ephemera reacts stoically to the news of a friend's injury: "All her Viking ancestry, manifested in her emotional restraint and clear courage, reacted to the thought. She was proud, as her forebears had been proud when their warrior dead were carried home on the shields of respectful retainers."<sup>[11]</sup>

Is this ethnic pride which, prompted by her own unpleasant experiences of being looked down upon, led to self-justification and over-compensation by the excessive gilding of her own type with virtues that seem absurdly out of place in North America? It must be said in her favour that she looked down on no one except possibly the Indians, whom she regarded as a dying race anyway and to whom,

despite their limitations as barbarians, she was willing to concede a certain degree of nobility and morality. Nevertheless, in most other ways associated with race, Salverson's work reproduces many of the same effects (and suffers from the same defects) as that of her contemporary, Rev. Charles W. Gordon. Both Gordon and Salverson wrote out of an overbearing sense of the superiority of their own white kind and individually their own discrete groups. Now immigrant groups with their own sense of superiority had begun to challenge that of Gordon's group. Salverson wrote to claim kinship with the elite English Canadians, doubtless with Gordon's romances before her as examples, and with the aim of joining

the entrepreneurial class. It is significant that her most vehement complaints about the difficulties of upward social mobility for immigrants, in *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter*, coincided with her extended apologia for her father's failure to improve himself in Canada. Her democratic principles were not very socialist, and were doubtless inspired by the suffering of the first generation pioneers (which she was largely spared) and her own personal poverty which continued after her marriage. The feeling of being cheated, of deserving more because of her racial origins (not just for herself, but for her people) came naturally to her. Before the Second World War, Salverson was one of the most prominent writers to draw attention to racial discrimination against immigrants in Canada, and her attitude stands in sharp contrast with those of English Canadian writers of the same period.

\* \* \*

This article is adapted from: Terrence Craig, *Racial Attitudes in English-Canadian Fiction, 1905-1980*, Chapter 3: "The Immigrant Reaction Before 1939" (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987).

## NOTES

[1] Laura Goodman Salverson, *The Viking Heart* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1929), pp. 128-129; and *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), pp. 50-51.

[2] Salverson, *The Viking Heart*, p. 128.

[3] Examples may be found in *The Viking Heart*, Edward McCourt's *Home is the Stranger*, and Illya Kiriak's *Sons of the Soil*.

[4] Salverson, *The Viking Heart*, p. 322.

[5] Rev. Dr. Charles W. Gordon (1860-1937) was minister of St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church in Winnipeg (1894- ), President of the Canadian Club of Winnipeg (1909-1910), and Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Canada in 1921, where he was a zealous advocate for church union between the Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. During the First World War, he served overseas as a Chaplain with the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Between 1897 and 1936, he authored 26 novels under the pen name "Ralph Connor," which made him a wealthy man. In 1910, *The Winnipeg Telegram* named him as one of the city's nineteen millionaires. Gordon's autobiography, *Postscript to Adventure*, was published posthumously in 1938.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108. The rebellion mentioned in this passage is the Northwest Rebellion of 1885.

[7] Laura Goodman Salverson, *The Dark Weaver* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1937), pp. 95-96.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 373.

[9] Laura Goodman Salverson, *The Dove of El-Djezaire* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1933), p. 51.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

[11] Laura Goodman Salverson, *When Sparrows Fall* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1925), p. 232. Salverson viewed stoicism and emotional displays as opposites. "Emotional restraint," seen as both an Anglo-Saxon and Norse virtue, proves the connection between English Canadians and Scandinavians.

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# Laura Goodman Salverson: A Reader's Reflection

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by Virginia Martin

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## Introduction

“Out of the heart are the issues of life”<sup>[1]</sup>

About fifteen years ago, a friend suggested I read the autobiography of Laura Goodman Salverson. Ever since, her story has captivated me. I have journeyed through used book stores across Canada, public and university libraries and the internet to track down her writings, sadly now all out of print. This is surprising for a Governor General Award winner, once in each of two categories, fiction and non-fiction. I now own a copy of each of her three contemporary novels, her volume of poetry and her autobiography.

Her life story is particularly compelling. The daughter of immigrants from Iceland to Manitoba, she wrote: “... I wanted to write a story which would define the price any foreign group must pay for its place in the national life of its country of adoption.” (*Confessions*, page 509)

Her writing about the immigrant experience both in her autobiography and in her fiction portrays a myriad of issues – especially those faced by women.

## Her Life

She was born in Winnipeg on Burnell Street in 1890. The house is still

standing. Her parents had immigrated to Manitoba from Iceland. She spent part of her childhood in Winnipeg. The family moved to a number of different places in both the United States and in Canada but later returned to Winnipeg.

She did not attend school nor learn English until she was ten years old. She completed high school but was not able to continue her education. Beyond that she was entirely self-educated. She reports reading a book propped up before her while she stoned fruit for jam.

She worked as a maid, a retail clerk, a nurse's aid, a dressmaker and in a sewing factory – many of the same jobs that immigrants hold today. Her experiences informed her writings in magazines and books.

After she married George Salverson, a railroad employee, in 1913, the family lived in various places in western Canada. She returned to Winnipeg from about 1941 to about 1958.<sup>[2]</sup>

She illustrated her devotion to the west in the dedication of her book of poetry, *Wayside Gleams*:

“These simple verses,  
Like the humble flowers  
That spring in gladness  
From the Prairie's breast  
I dedicate- in love and honest fervor,  
To mine own land,  
The Open-Hearted West”

## Meeting Destiny

Reading ‘Meeting Destiny’, a chapter in her autobiography, always moves me to tears. She describes starting school. A new friend suggests Laura join the public library. Laura said: “What...do you mean you can borrow books-anybody-just for nothing?”

She continues: “Never was there an adventure like that one ...when ...I set out for the local library...the moment I opened the door to see...row on row of books ...

see that nothing in the world mattered, except the faculty to see and to feel and to understand what went on in the world... And then in a blinding flash of terrifying impertinence, the wild thought leaped to my mind. I, too will write a book, to stand on the shelves of a place like this – and I will write it in English...”

The above quote is a short excerpt of five pages describing her first experience in a public library. (*Confessions* pp 296-301).

Laura decided her ‘destiny’ early on



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAMI JAKOBSON SCHIRLIE

Laura Goodman Salverson, far left

all to be had for the mere asking, such a flood of emotion filled me that I could only stand there rooted in wonder...I wanted to bawl – I wanted to howl to the stars. It was suddenly so clear what I wanted most in life and always would want...In the light of that consuming fire I could

and worked under difficult conditions to achieve her goal.

## Laura Goodman Salverson’s Career

Her publications listed at the end of this article include a number of short stories,

novels about the immigrant experience, historical novels, her autobiography and poetry. She had always aspired to be a writer and began her published career about 1920 when her short story “Hidden Fire” won an award.

She dedicated *When Sparrows Fall*, to:

“Nellie L. McClung

*Who has been a voice for the voiceless*

*The humble women of her land”*<sup>[3]</sup>.

I find her writing compelling for many reasons but two stand out:

The first is the story of her remarkable life. She overcame ill health, poverty, a need to earn a living and limited education to fulfill her dream of becoming a writer. She became a published award-winning writer in her second language, a rare accomplishment. She wrote: “...I had never heard any technical points discussed. I had no idea such material was available. I knew nothing in fact except what I wanted to represent...(*Confessions*, p. 509)

A second reason I find her work so compelling is her insight into and eloquence in illustrating women’s issues. In the 1920s and 30s, she wrote of domestic abuse, hypocrisy, the exploitation of eldest daughters who were expected to look after their younger siblings while their brothers had no such responsibilities. She wrote of the difficulties of young working women who had to keep up appearances and would cut food to pay for laundry, of the status and working conditions of household help, of the difficulty of finding employment, of piece work in factories and of the medical and economic implications of constant childbearing.

Her descriptions of several patients in her aunt’s maternity hospital, she said: “...really exceed fiction in melodrama, needless tragedy and twisted humour...” (*Confessions* p. 344)

Her writing about the immigrant experience portrays a myriad of issues – many that women still face today. She wrote vividly and clearly about the experience of immigrant and prairie society—such as the labour conditions of domestic and factory workers. She addressed political and social issues in a moving and compassionate voice. Because she decided early to write in English, she became a bridge between the Icelandic community and others.

She was actively involved in the establishment of the *Icelandic Canadian*, a Winnipeg quarterly, served as editor in chief, 1942-43, and wrote articles and stories for the publication. She served for many years as president of the Winnipeg Branch of the Canadian Author’s Association.<sup>[4]</sup>

This remarkable woman was described: “...Salverson was one of the pioneers of Canadian prairie fiction, perhaps Canada’s first native prairie novelist. In her books she attempts to reconcile the narrative form of the Icelandic saga with that of the popular romance in order to interpret Icelandic life for English-speaking readers”<sup>[5]</sup>.

This award-winning writer is not well known today among the reading public.

Merna Foster’s book, *100 Canadian Heroines* lists Laura, and states, “She played a significant role in preserving Icelandic cultural identity and merits greater recognition than she has been given.”<sup>[6]</sup>

### Her Awards<sup>[7]</sup>

She was the first person of Icelandic heritage to receive a Governor General Literary Award and the first person to receive two awards in two different categories within two years of each other.

The Governor General Literary Awards

were started in 1936. The following year, 1937 her novel *The Dark Weaver* was chosen for the award in fiction. Two years later in 1939 her autobiography: *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* received the award in the non-fiction category. Both were published by Ryerson Press.

In addition to her Governor General Awards, in 1938, she won a Gold Medal from the Paris Institute of Arts and Sciences and in 1955 she received the Ryerson Fiction award for *Immortal Rock*, a historical novel based on Norse explorations in America. <sup>[8]</sup>

### Summary

Laura Goodman Salverson's unique accomplishments should be acknowledged for her contributions to Canadian literature. She represents the first generation of Icelandic Canadians born in Winnipeg; she reflected the hard work necessary to have her writing recognized and she, very early, starting in the 1920s, wrote about the issues facing all immigrants, especially women. Perhaps now that more is being written about her and her books, we will see her receiving the circulation and admiration she so richly deserves.

What does it say about Canadian literature and publishing that her two Governor General award-winning books are not now in print and not available to readers?

Her books and short stories should be reprinted and made available to contemporary readers. Her awards and honours should be included in the reprinted volumes. We need to communicate, especially to Manitobans, the neglect of this great native prairie writer.

We should all recognize the accomplishments and read the works of Laura Goodman Salverson.

### Her Publications:

**Autobiography** <sup>[9]</sup>: *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* 1939

#### Novels

*The Viking Heart* 1923

*When Sparrows Fall* 1925

*The Dark Weaver* <sup>[10]</sup> 1937

#### Poetry

*Wayside Gleams* 1924

**Short Stories** (this is only a few of the about 150 <sup>[11]</sup> she wrote)

"Hidden Fire" (1922) *MacLean's* and *Maple Leaf* (won prize from Women's Canadian Club of Saskatchewan).

"The Greater Gift: A Christmas Story" originally in *The Western Home Monthly* and later reprinted a number

of periodicals and anthologies. Most recently in *Writings by Western Icelandic Women* (1996) Edited by Kirstin Wolf

"When Blind Guides Lead" (1925)

*MacLean's* (Feb)

"The Alabaster Box" (1927) *MacLean's* (Dec)

"Queer Heart" 1935-36 *The Canadian Magazine* (August)

"Slipper Ease" 1936-37 *The Canadian Magazine* (October)

She wrote at least four historical adventure novels including several about Viking settlements in Minnesota. Some were first published in serial form in magazines. One novel, *Johan Lind*, a serial in *Western Home Monthly* was never published as a book. I do not find her historical novels as compelling as her contemporary ones, although I have only read two of them.

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## FOOTNOTES

- [1] This is the last line of her Autobiography on page 523. Quotations from her autobiography are identified as Confessions, for *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter*.
- [2] Her listing in *Who's Who in Canada* from 1940-41 Edition to 1958-59 Edition states that in Winnipeg, she lived first at the Wellington Apartments and later on Oakwood Street.
- [3] Salverson. (1925) *When Sparrows Fall*. Thomas Allen, Toronto.
- [4] Bumsted, J.M. *Dictionary of Manitoba Biography*. Accessed on line. Feb. 22, 2009.
- [5] Hjartarson, Paul (1990) Laura Goodman Salverson. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. 92. Canadian Writers 1890-1920. p. 319.
- [6] Foster, Merna (2004) *100 Canadian Heroines: Famous and Forgotten Faces*. The Dundurn Group, Toronto. 'A Daughter of



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAMI JAKOBSON SCHIRLIE

## Laura and her son George

Iceland, Laura Goodman Salverson'. pp 222-223.

[7] Because I admired her work and wanted to contribute to increasing her current readers, in 2009, I nominated Laura for The Citizens' Hall of Fame in Winnipeg's Assiniboine Park. My submission with its letters of support was not successful.

[8] Wolf, Kirsten, Editor (1996) *Writings by Western Icelandic Women*. U of Manitoba Press. p. 178.

[9] Bumsted describes it as "a highly acclaimed autobiography."

[10] The only publicly owned copy of *The Dark Weaver* in Winnipeg is in the Icelandic Collection at the University of Manitoba. It is non-circulating. My cherished copy was a gift.

[11] Foster, Merna p. 222. A number of Laura's short stories are available on Microfiche in the Winnipeg's Millennium Library. Four, 'Hidden Fire', 'The Greater Gift', 'When Blind Guides Lead' and 'The Alabaster Box' are reprinted in *Writings by Western Icelandic Women*.

# Shoal Lake Sketches

by Wihelm Kristjanson

Reprinted from *The Icelandic Canadian*  
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PHOTO: EVELYN KRISTJANSON

*(continued from Vol 63 #3 2010)*

## The Young People's Society

The Young People's Society "Verðandi" (in Norse mythology, one of the three Fates) was formed January 9, 1902 with an original membership of twenty. The promoter of its foundation was a young man named Johannes Halldorson who

had come from Iceland in 1893. He was of an inventive turn, a book lover, possessed great zeal for learning and had obtained considerable education without benefit of formal instruction. The first executive was composed as follows: president Johannes Halldorson; secretary Guðmunda Johnson; treasurer Hjalmur Danielson; director of physical training Bjorn Hordal and others. The yearly fee was twenty-five cents. In the first year ten meetings were held.

The original purpose of the society was to promote mental and physical culture including wrestling, boxing, football and dancing. This ambitious physical culture program was realized only to a limited extent and after the first year and a half the society concentrated on mental culture. At the meetings there were debates, recitations and practice in relating stories and giving the gist of articles.

In the spring of 1905 there were eighteen members in the society and seventy dollars in the treasury. It was thus considered too great an undertaking for the society alone to erect the hall. The cooperation of the Community library organization "Mentahvöt" was sought and obtained. The site selected on the homestead of Bjorn Thorsteinson was approximately in the centre of the district.

Each society contributed seventy dollars from its treasury; subscriptions were raised among members and certain non-members volunteered financial support.

All carpentry work and all

transportation of supplies, including lumber from a distance of twenty miles were donated. The building 26' x 40" was completed in the summer. Later a refreshment room 14' x 20' was added. The name given was Markland Hall. Throughout the next decade until the outbreak of the war the Young People's Society was very active and its concerts and plays as well as those of "Mentahvöt, were the high light of the year's entertainment.

### **The Farmer's Institute**

In 1903 the Manitoba Government Department of Agriculture sent Mr. B. B. Olson of Gimli to Shoal Lake as its representative to give a lecture on farming. Previously representatives had been sent for the same purpose. At the conclusion of Olson's lecture delivered at the home of Jón Vestdal, the speaker urged the settlers to form a Farmers' Institute. Several of those present promptly gave their names and an active canvas for members was conducted. September 26, 1903 Olson returned for an organization meeting. There was an initial membership of sixty.

The president of the new organization was Bergthor Thordarson; the secretary-treasurer Petur Bjarnason. Both these men had belonged to a Farmers' Institute and were keen on forming such an organization in their new district.

A veterinary branch was soon established. Bjorn Hordal was in charge for many years and did good work. Subsequently Sigurður Holm, son of Daniel Sigurdson took charge and brought to this work rare skill and an ever-growing fund of self acquired knowledge; even performing difficult operations on cattle with the use of anesthetics.

The Institute secured the use of a

purebred "government bull" and was active in promoting improvement of stock and also agriculture as well as in attempting to combat the persistent scourge of coyotes who were all too successful in their depredation against the flocks of sheep in the district.

### **Women's Societies**

Two Women's Societies were formed in the district, "Hlin" at Markland and "Frækornið" at Otto about 1908. What went on behind the silken curtain at their meetings mere man does not profess to know but both these organizations flourished for many years, were helpful toward those in need and supported worthy community causes. The "Hlin" held its concerts at Markland Hall; "Frækornið" at the Norður Stjarna school.

First president of "Frækornið" by unanimous choice and president for many years after was Mrs. Margret Sigurðson. Prominent also in the society were Oddfríður Johnson (Mrs. Einar Johnson) and Asta Straumfjörð (Mrs. Ingimundur Sigurðson).

A unique feature of the society is the fact that its members belonged to both the local Lutheran and Unitarian congregations and contributions were made equally to both churches.

### **The Shoal Lake Brass Band**

A brass band of eleven members was formed on the initiative of the poet Guttormur J. Guttormsson supported by his brother Vigfus. Guttormur was the first bandmaster. When for reasons of health he had to give up playing, Luther Lindal became the leader.

The band made a notable contribution

to entertainments at Markland Hall. Its concerts were looked forward to with much pleasure and it held a place in the affections of the community, comparable perhaps to that of the Sousa Band in the regard of its larger and more cosmopolitan audiences.

The truth of Longfellow's verse beginning:

"I shot an arrow into the air;

It fell to earth, I know not where"

has incidentally been well illustrated in the case of the founder of the Shoal Lake Brass Band. Two of its members, Hermann Johnson and Thorsteinn Johnson later moved to Lundar where they organized a band of approximately twenty instruments. When war broke out many of these Lundar boys joined the 223 Battalion. They were then ready recruits for the band of that unit and formed an important part of it.

### **The I.O.G.T. Lodge "Berglindin"**

In the earliest years in Shoal Lake there were few who drank to excess and the prevailing tone of the district was one of sobriety. As the second generation grew to manhood and supplies became more accessible there was an increase in drinking and there was some evidence of this at concerts.

Two very active Good Templar lodges had been organized among the Icelandic community in Winnipeg, "Hekla" in 1887 and "Skuld" in 1888. Certain members of these lodges took up residence in Shoal Lake including Sigurður and Sigríður Holm and Sigurbjorn (son of Kristjan Sigurðson) and Sigurborg Kristjanson. These formed a strong nucleus for a lodge "Berglindin" organized by Paul Reykdal in Shoal Lake 1911. The initial membership was about twenty. In 1912 this had

increased to thirty-six. Mrs. Holm sewed virtually all the regalia for the officers of the lodge.

Meetings were held fortnightly on Sunday afternoons, generally at Markland Hall. Members attended from far reaches of the settlement, nine miles to the east (Kristjan Danielson) and six or seven miles to the north and west.

The "Berglindin" flourished and most of the members were regular in attendance. There were many youthful members and they derived special benefit from their association with zealous workers in a moral cause and from their acquaintance with ritual and participation in the programmes, a regular feature of every meeting. Also the benefit fund was well maintained by proceeds from concerts held for that purpose and on one occasion a donation of twenty-five dollars was made towards the hospital expenses of a member.

The programmes and the informal games at the meetings were a source of pleasure and this helped to retain the interest of the younger members.

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### **Politics**

In the early days men took their politics strong, like Hoffman's Drops or Hudson's Bay Rum. Then there were only two parties and to use the words of Gilbert and Sullivan;

"Every boy and every girl  
Born into the world alive



Is either a little Liberal  
Or else a little Conservative.”

The Icelandic settlers took to politics like ducks to water. The two Icelandic weeklies in Winnipeg, *Heimskringla*, Conservative and *Lögberg*, Liberal served up the party brew. An illustration of their totally different viewpoint is their account of a certain meeting. One paper stated that it was well attended, the room being half filled; the other, that it was poorly attended, the room half-empty.

In Shoal Lake, as elsewhere the lines were clearly drawn and often the campaign heat temporarily affected personal relationships. It was during of these early campaigns that Guttormur J. Guttormsson said:

*“Nú logar glatt við pólitíska pottinn  
Pétri fer að hlýna, það veit Drottin.”*

Freely translated:

Now burns the fire brightly  
Under the political pot,  
Peter begins to feel the heat  
– God wot.

Of the three early postmasters, Bjorn Lindal, of Markland, and Arni Freeman of Vestfold, were Liberal stalwarts, while Magnus Kristjanson of Otto was strong in the Conservative faith. The Liberals were in the majority in the district.

The provincial constituency of

Dauphin, created in 1892 comprised “all the territory in the Province north of the North boundary of Township eighteen not included in any other Electoral Division described in this Act, Township eighteen in Ranges three, four and five West, and the West half of Township eighteen in Range two west and the whole of Lake Manitoba and the islands therein.” (Statutes of Manitoba, 55 Vic.c.13.S. 40, 1892.)

The Shoal Lake settlement was included in this vast, sprawling and sparsely inhabited territory. What personal knowledge the voters had of the candidates in the 1896 election, T. A. Burrows and Glen Campbell may be left to the imagination. In 1899 the settlement was included in the new constituency of Gimli and for over a decade the voters had their choice between Sigtryggur Jonasson and Baldwin Baldwinson, both well-known for their colonization and journalistic as well as political work. In 1914 the constituency of St. George was formed and thereafter with the exception of E. L. Taylor, 1913-1914, the candidates were from nearer home. In 1915 Skuli Sigfusson, a Lundar pioneer of 1887 was elected.

Sigfusson was Liberal but in 1920 there was a break with the traditional parties and Rev. A. E. Kristjansson, a local Unitarian minister whose pronounced humanitarian

## PHARMACISTS

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views drew him to the Labour Group in the Legislature, was elected. In 1922 Sigfusson returned the constituency to the Liberal fold, and retained it against Paul Reykdal, Conservative in 1927. Then followed the years of the depression and another break. The humanitarian ideals of the Social Credit party appealed to many, all of who did not claim to understand the "A + B" theorem or the proposed administrative machinery and at the 1936 elections Miss Salome Halldorson, the Social Credit candidate, carried the constituency. In 1941 Sigfusson resumed his now familiar seat in the House. In 1945, Christian Halldorson, Liberal-Coalitionist, successfully carried the party standard.

In federal politics in more recent years, the C.C.F. party has had strong support. All these tendencies have been reflected to a greater or smaller extent in the Icelandic settlement of Shoal Lake, but by and large regardless of party affiliations, the people have been progressive in their political outlook.

### **Municipal Government**

The rural municipality of Posen was created by an Act of the Legislature passed in 1886. It comprised Townships eighteen to twenty-one, in ranges one to seven, West, and thus included North Shoal Lake territory.

The population of this municipality was very scattered and the duties of the council were limited. There was aid to persons in distress. Also at that time, power was vested in municipal councils to form school districts and it is noted that Posen municipal by-law number 89, effective March 19, 1894, formally established the School District of Vestfold.

This municipality was included in the municipality of St. Laurent, 1890-92, and lapsed soon thereafter.

A new municipality, named Coldwell, was created March 24, 1911. Chief promoters were Paul Reykdal and G. K. Breckman, of Lundar; and Richard and Henry Seaman, and Joseph Burge of Seamo. Icelandic and English settlers now found themselves working together and there was always close harmony between the two elements.

In 1913 the first year of operation, the council ordered forty hand scrapers, eight wheel scrapers, twelve ploughs, and 320 culverts. Plans were made for extensive road improvements under the Good Roads Act, and much needed work was commenced on trails that had served for upwards of twenty-five years.

The beginning is usually the hardest. A 1914 entry in the municipal minute book will strike a responsive chord in the hearts of those who traveled over the incipient roads in question: "Much work was done on the roads, more than was apparent." The district was not rich and there were constant financial difficulties. Unpaid taxes were transferred from the 1913 to the 1914 collectors' roll as follows;

|        |                  |
|--------|------------------|
| Ward 1 | \$ 1,743.38      |
| Ward 2 | \$770.77         |
| Ward 3 | \$2,625.90       |
| Ward 4 | \$4,885.97       |
|        | <b>10,035.02</b> |

Ten years later, during the months of September to December, 1923, the sum of \$11,212.41 was paid out for road work. By degrees a network of roads was built up and marketing conditions improved.

Several Shoal Lake men have served on the council. Arni Freeman was member

of the first council elected. Kari Byron who grew to manhood in Shoal Lake, has been reeve since 1930, a record that speaks for itself. Also Agust Magnusson served with distinction as municipal clerk for twenty-five years. A motion by G. K. Breckman and J. H. Popplewell, at a council meeting December 19, 1913 shows that he set high standard of work early.

“That the council recognize with pleasure the painstaking care with which Mr. A. Magnusson has discharged his arduous duties of office as Secretary –Treasurer of the municipality for the current year..... the first year of operation.....”

Municipal service is not service with gold braid and banquet, but it is democracy at the grass-roots and deserved recognition as such. In this particular

instance, too, it is interesting to note that here descendants of the Anglo-Saxon franklins who attended hundred moot and the descendants of the Icelandic bændur who rode to Althing have joined hands to make Canadian democracy a success.

### Health

The pioneers worked long hours and not always under salutary conditions, exposed as they were to the inclemencies of the weather and with feet wet from wading in the numerous sloughs. The early log houses were too often cold and the straw-thatched roofs not rainproof. Perhaps partly because of this, a number of the early settlers suffered from rheumatism, a condition which seemed to act as a perfect barometer. A not infrequent question was,



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“How is your rheumatism today?” a not infrequent remark; “There is going to be a change in the weather. My rheumatism is worse.”

For many years there was no doctor in the district. Mrs. Margret Sigurðson assisted at the first two births there, and many other births. Presently Mrs. Thruður Thorsteinson became the district midwife and many a Shoal Lake person did she assist at the start of this world’s career.

In the New Iceland group of 1902 there were two homeopathic doctors, Johann Straumfjord and Petur Bjarnason. Both were men of parts, mentally alert, jovial and interesting personalities. No doubt this was an important factor in their work of healing, in addition to their vials with their pink or water-coloured contents and their assortment of pills and powders.

Then there were the home remedies, the cure-all Painkiller and the fiery Hoffman’s Drops, the penetrating skunk-oil and healing yarrow. Unknowingly, vitamins were taken in large doses in certain Icelandic dishes, the liver and blood-sausage.

Dental decay, something the older generation had rarely known, plagued many of the children. There was not much to do about it, except to apply Painkiller to alleviate the suffering or to extract with the rough means at hand.

Tuberculosis struck down a number of victims in the earlier years, mostly young people on the threshold of life, reaching their hands out for what life had to offer.

As Lundar grew, that district acquired a resident doctor, Dr. Magnus Hjaltason who had come to Oak Point in 1908, now moved to the new centre and was within easier reach from Shoal Lake. In 1913 he was appointed municipal health officer at an annual fee of one hundred dollars.

Drs. Magnus Hjaltason, Agust Blondal, Sigurður Júlíus Jóhannesson, Numi Hjalmarson and Guðmundur Paulson have served heroically in a far-flung and most difficult territory.

It is not the intention to paint too grim a picture. The great majority of people had no need for a doctor from one year’s end to the other. Despite, or perhaps because of their hardships, the pioneers were generally noted for their vitality, cheerfulness and in many instances, a rich sense of humour. Many lived to a ripe old age, far exceeding the traditional three score years and ten.

### Conversation

Visiting was a feature of the weekly round, especially at a centre such as the post office. People, regardless of the purpose of the visit, usually stayed for a sociable chat and a cup of coffee. In the evening, there was sometimes a game of cards, Icelandic whist or Pedro. The conversation might turn to topics of current interest in politics, religion, literature, local and world news: to the tariff, Bob Rogers, Borden and Laurier; the interpretation of the Bible; a recent poem by Stephan G. Stephansson or Guttormur J. Guttormsson, or a new book from Iceland by Jón Trausti, or the serial stories in *Lögberg* and *Heimskringla*; the Russo-Japanese war or the war in Tripoli; Halley’s Comet; the latest table-rapping spiritualist session; the lady in hobble skirts who tripped on the staircase landing. Often, the conversation turned to events and persons associated with the first years in the country; the first employment on a railroad or on a Canadian farm, the short stay in Siberia, wagon trips to Winnipeg and the North-

West Rebellion.

The Hordals could, from personal experience, make vivid the terrible small-pox winter in Gimli, 1876-77, and they and some others had stories to tell of their years in North Dakota, including interesting accounts of the young lad, Vilhjalmur Stefansson. Some had seen John Hordal, in one of the gruelling twenty-four hour "go as you please", walk-or-run competitions in Victoria Park, 1888, seen him stagger in at the finish, a lad of seventeen triumphing over veterans. Ástráður Johnson, of Lundar, and Jon Bildfell, the Markland school teacher had gone to the Klondyke, two of a company of over twenty Icelanders, many of them personally known to Shoal Lake people. All these were remembered.

Often the talk turned to the sagas; to the wise and law-versed Njáll, the sardonic Skarphéðinn, the courtly and high-minded Ólafur Pá, and his romantic son Kjartan, the valiant Gunnar from Hliðarendi, and the ill-fated Grettir. All these personages became very real to the children who listened to the conversation, and who were also able to read the sagas for themselves. Then there were anecdotes of modern personages in Iceland, such as Simon the Dales-poet, and Bólu-Hjálmar, with verses freely quoted. Mrs. Elin Eirikson spoke many a time with fond pride of how she used to romp with a young lad, Einar Jónsson, now become a famous sculptor in Iceland. Life in Iceland figured in the conversation, watching the sheep, the fall round-up gathering mountain herbs, dashing along on gallant Iceland ponies, fighting for life when storm-bound in the mountains or tempest-tossed at sea in open fishing boats.

Iceland figured in the conversation. Iceland with its dales and mountains;

smooth green home fields and barren rocky uplands; noble but often treacherous rivers, and beautiful waterfalls; Iceland, with its meagre bounty on land and hard-worn harvest of the sea, land of ice and fire and land of arresting beauty which made the western prairie seem humdrum to the newcomers. This was fascinating to listen to. Life in Shoal Lake was more than one dimensional, comprehending as it did the Icelandic and the Canadian, the ancient and the modern, the natural and the supernatural.

### Flowers of the Mind

The land in Shoal Lake has produced little wealth, but on its stony soil there grow beautiful flowers, the half hidden violet, the proud tiger lily, the bright-eyed daisy and the delicate and fragrant wild rose. Likewise in Shoal Lake there have grown flowers of the mind in the form of intellectual, literary and artistic activities.

Helgi Sveinsson designed a plough, for which the Oliver Plough Company had agreed to pay fifty thousand dollars, in 1914 when war broke out the project was abandoned. Steinþór Vigfússon also designed an improved plough and a snowmobile.

In the field of literature, Guttormur J. Guttormsson, poet laureate among the Icelandic people on the American continent since the passing of Stephan G. Stephansson, published his first volume, "Jón Austfirðingur", when farming in Shoal Lake. Jón Runólfsson, some-time teacher at Markland School was a finely sensitive lyric poet who, in translating Tennyson's *Enoch Arden* into Icelandic, improved on some passages in the original. Runólfsson reveals exquisite tenderness and poignancy of feeling in poems such as

*A Night of Frost* and attains to real stature in *The Blue Banner at Christmas* which in 1918 enshrines his vision of world peace. J. Magnús Bjarnason, well-known writer of novels, short stories, fables and poems continued with his literary work while resident teacher in the district, 1916 to 1922. Vigfús Guttormsson, Agúst Magnusson and Bergthor E. Johnson have written some competent verse. Many others have revealed poetic and versifying ability and it seems to have been almost exceptional if one of the settlers could not produce a quatrain or a stave. Also many knew entire poems off by heart, although it is unlikely that any one equalled Paul Reykdal of Lundar in memorizing the contents of a whole volume of poetry.

In the field of music, Jónas Halldórsson, self-taught, composed some melodious and pleasing tunes, including a rather stirring one to the words of "Rís þú unga Íslands merki" (Aloft, young Iceland's Banner). Guttormur J. Guttormsson has significant compositions to his credit.

The women also found expression for their creative talent in composing poetry and in embroidery and some have received prizes at exhibitions for their needlework.

A few members of the second generation have done something in the field of literature to demonstrate that Shoal Lake flowers still grow.

### Social Life

Social gathering in the homes marked the early years. A concert was held in the home of Isleifur Johnson in Siberia, before the migration to the south was completed. People from Shoal Lake attended. There were speeches on assigned topics and Daniel Backman delivered a eulogy in verse form on the ox.

At these early socials there was dancing, sometimes to the music of an accordion. When the school-houses were built, concerts and dances were held there.

A picnic was held on the Jakob Crawford promontory, just south of the Otto post office in 1896. People attended from Lundar, ten miles to the west and from Eyjolfson's thirteen miles south. Kristjan Vigfusson gave a talk on his experiences accompanying a group of settlers proceeding north along Lake Manitoba. There were foot-races but no prizes were given. Old and young took part and Johanna Halldórsson, mother of seven, came first in the ladies event. In a game of "last couple-out" one of the players stumbled and broke his wrist. He was attended to by a homeopathic doctor, Guðmundur Isberg, temporarily settled in the district.

The first play to be produced in the district was "Sigríður Eyjafjarðar-sól". This was held in 1896 or 1897 at the home of Sveinbjorn Sigurdson. Thereafter plays were produced annually for over twenty years often three-act plays.

The building of Markland Hall, 1905 was in response to the vigorously developing social life of the community. At the concerts there were plays, recitations, debates, band music, vocal and instrumental music, tombolas, raffles, cake-walks. There was dancing, the graceful old-time waltz; the stately minuet; the lively two-step; the spirited schottische where some came down lightly and others came down hard; the cadenced three-step; the light-footed mazurka and the rightly named rush-polka. And there was the square dance with the grand rush for partners, then order out of the chaos, and Snæbjörn Halldorson or his brother Thorhallur, calling off for "Birdie-in-the-cage", "Pop-goes-the-weasel" or the

waltz-quadriple. During the breakdown, the music spirits gambol and jog on the violin strings, the piano goes thump-thump and the dancers, warm and perspiring, with joyful zest cross the last barrier. Finally it may be four o'clock or it may be six, comes "Home Sweet Home", swing into "Good Night Ladies".

Those who provided good entertainment at these concerts are too numerous to mention. Prominent in drama over the years was the family of Jonas Halldorson; Sigridur (Hordal), Rannveig, Nybjorg, Snæbjörn, Kjartan and Thorhallur; also Hjalmur Danielson, and his sister Jensina (Mrs. Guttormur J. Guttormsson), Ljótun (Goodman) Sveinson, Gudny (Sigurdson) Halldorson, Carl Lindal and Thorsteinn Johnson. In vocal music the trilling voice of Dora Goodman and Carl Lindal's quartette, as in the "Old Oaken Bucket", will long remain in memory. Hermann Johnson and Thorsteinn Johnson were two members of a good four-piece orchestra that knew how to play "Alexander's Rag-Time Band".

There were concerts at other places than Markland Hall, but in Markland Hall was centered the social life of the community. People often attended from as far away as Oak Point, twenty miles away. People from the neighbouring English and Swedish settlements often attended. Burly Jack Popplewell is remembered proceeding in front of a row of ladies, young and elderly rehearsing his Icelandic: "Ég elska þig. Viltu eiga mig?" ("I love you. Will you marry me?") Recollections of Markland Hall through the memory.

### **Athletics**

The young men of "Verðandi" did not realize much of their ambitious physical

culture program but about 1900, teachers such as Fred Olsen who at the age of eighteen had given a brilliant performance in goal for the Victoria hockey team of Winnipeg in their Stanley Cup triumph, joined in their games and taught them football as played on the college campus. Presently a youthful generation in the five schools of the district was graduating from "three old cats" to baseball, soccer and track and field events.

In 1907, a 2½ mile road race was held in Winnipeg, with entries from rural schools in the Province. The representatives from the Norðurstjarna School were the brothers Leo and Edric Hordal. Leo was fleet as a deer and a tireless runner, but Edric was more sturdily built. In the senior event, Leo out-distanced the guide and inadvertently ran around an extra block which proved too great a handicap. Still, he came in with the winners. In the junior event, Edric won the Russell Land Cup for the school and a set of Dickens for himself.

At the Icelandic celebration in Winnipeg, 1907, Thorsteinn Goodman of Otto was first in two bicycle races and on many subsequent occasions he and his Blue-Flyer featured the competition.

Kristjan Backman, grandson of Kristjan Sigurðson, who spent a few of his very early years in the district, was individual champion at the Icelandic celebration in 1907 and 1908. His stellar football at Wesley and the Medical Colleges is still spoken of admiringly by his team-mates. At the Canadian Track and Field Championship meet held in Winnipeg in 1909, Backman showed up very favourably in the hundred yards dash against the ultimate winner, Sebert of Toronto, a consistent ten second man.

At the Icelandic celebration of 1908, Einar Johnson, of Vestfold was second

in the hundred yards dash for boys. This was the beginning of a brilliant record in the annals of organized sport among the people of Icelandic origin in Canada. He won the Individual Championship at the Icelandic celebration of 1910 and 1911, tied for first place in 1912 and gained permanent possession of the trophy in 1913. Subsequently he won the championship three times. Such was his iron-man display that at one meet he won six events and placed second in the seventh.

Oskar Thorgilson was another Shoal Lake athlete noted for his great strength and performance. He was Individual Champion at the Icelandic celebration once and also won the "glima" or Icelandic wrestling. Kari Johnson also won the "glima" once.

Other Shoal Lake names appeared on the winners' list at the Icelandic celebrations: G. O. Thorsteinson, Thorhallur Halldorson, Skapti Johnson, Bessi Byron, Victor Vestdal and Wilhelm Kristjanson.

All the athletes that have been mentioned, with the exception of Kari Johnson, were members of the "Grettir" Athletic Association, representative of Lundar and the surrounding district, an organization which owed much to the unflagging zeal and energy of its president, Paul Reykdal. They played an important part in enabling the club to win the Oddson Shield at the Icelandic celebration for ten years in succession, 1914 to 1923.

At the University of Manitoba, after the First World War, Wilhelm Kristjanson held the record for the indoor mile and half mile walk and won his "M" at the Inter-Collegiate meet at Saskatoon in 1923 when the four western universities

competed. He also rowed for his college at Oxford, St. Catherines, in Torpids and the Summer Eights, 1925-26.

The dusty playgrounds of Shoal Lake, while not as historic as the playing of Eaton, nevertheless deserve to be remembered.

### **The First World War**

When the First World War broke out, it was not long before Shoal Lake boys volunteered. First were the four Ericksons, Vilhjalmur, Ingi, Bjarni, and Johann; then the three chums from the Jon Bjarnason Academy, Sigurdur J. Erickson, Gilbert Johnson and Wilhelm Kristjanson; Guðmundur and Thorsteinn O. S. Thorsteinson, Edric Hordal; Helgi Olsen, Columbus Lindal and others. Johann Erickson enlisted April 6, 1915; he was born April 10, 1898. Gilbert Johnson was seventeen when he donned uniform.

Their stories, pieced together is the common tale of those days; keenness to do their part; the monotonous squad-drill of the first weeks or months; Camp Hughes, with its bare, blowing sands and thirty thousand men under canvas in 1916; the process of integration and discipline; shore leave in England or Scotland; trench warfare, with its long stretches of monotony alternating with fierce bursts of action, with its vermin and trench-fever; the learning of fundamental human values and the enduring comradeships formed; the variety of personal contact, all-Canadian, and all-British; growing Canadian esprit-de-corps; casualties, hospital and English hospitality; the Armistice, and the return home, for those destined to return home; satisfaction in having done a job.

Gilbert Johnson did not return; quiet, sensitive, studious Gilbert Johnson who



died of wounds received on the Vimy Ridge sector, in August 1917. His bent had been for the ministry, Fusi Thorleifson, quiet too, and gentlemanly was grievously wounded on Vimy Ridge, April 28, 1917, and returned home only to die from the effect of his wounds. Sam Erickson, a good and genial comrade, had ambitions before the war for a legal career and had known what it is to acquire learning the hard way. He served an unbroken period of nearly two years at the front and was killed in action near Cambrai, September 28, 1918, six weeks before Armistice.

Those who served were tested and they stood the test well. They fought shoulder to shoulder with Canadians of various racial origins, helped to write a splendid chapter in the history of their country and acquired a new sense of the meaning of citizenship. They gained a wider and deeper conception of life.

### **The Past, the Present, and the Future**

October 31 and November 1, 1886 Freeman B. Anderson made a second journey of exploration to the Interlake district, this time along the east side of Shoal Lake, proceeding as far north as township 19, near the tip of the lake. This time he was accompanied by Jon Julius. The weather was fine and he describes an attractive scene, the lake which the pioneers will remember as being a beautiful deep blue, although extensively fringed by marsh grass, was like a mirror, the light-hued meadows and dark-hued woods still under the autumn sun. Sixty years later, the meadows and the woods are still there, but the lake has shrunk and the northern part has virtually disappeared, and where at one time the water was six feet deep the mower now makes

its round. But where in 1886 there was virgin territory, there are now dwellings and in the fall the haystacks dot the old lake bottom and the open fields around, and herds of cattle and flocks of sheep graze on the light-hued grass.

The tide of settlement, which reached its peak in the years before World War One, has now greatly receded. Many of the early pioneers are in their graves. Of the first group Kristjan Sigurðson died at the age of eighty-five; his wife, Margret lived to be almost ninety-nine. Some are living their autumn days in Lundar or elsewhere. The majority of the sons and daughters have scattered far and wide, from the Arctic Circle to California, from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Edric Hordal was for some time employed as a guide in the Arctic regions. Holmfriður, wife of the composer Björgvin Guðmundsson and also Fjölñir Lindal, live in Iceland. Several former Shoal Lake people are scattered along the Pacific coast, at Vancouver, Seattle and in California. Many fill responsible positions or are engaged in highly skilled trades. The number of those in the professions has already been indicated.

The second generation is bilingual and has for the most part cherished the Icelandic heritage. Its members know the story of their parents' pioneer effort and achievement. But the dispersal of population has brought about a sweeping change. There has been racial intermarriage, mainly with persons of British stock. Many members of the third generation know little or no Icelandic. But of the pioneers of Shoal Lake this may be said, in the words of Pericles, when speaking of the Athenian dead; that their story abides, "woven into the fabric of other men's lives".

# Life Saving Awards

**Saturday, July 24th 2010**  
**Winnipeg River, Otter Falls, Manitoba**

Around 5 p.m. Saturday, July 24th, 2010, a 59 year old man and wife were swimming in the Winnipeg River near the Otter Falls Resort. They were in water just beyond the designated swimming area. Suddenly they got into

trouble with the fast current and water depths in the area. Michelle and Eric Gislason, their son Kyle and his friend Dale Shumski were just then heading out in the Gislason's boat. They heard people shouting at them from shore and pointing out towards deep water. Upon looking they observed a woman struggling in the water, calling out for help. They



From left to right the people are: Christopher Love (Board Chairman Lifesaving Society), Dale Shumski, Kyle, Michelle, Eric Gislason and the Honourable Philip S. Lee, C.M., O.M. Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba

immediately drove their boat to her location and while on route, Eric told Kyle and Dale to prepare the boat ladder, get it out and ready. When they arrived at the woman, Kyle and Dale with the help of some other people also coming on scene were able to get the woman out of the water into their boat. She was hysterical saying that her husband had drowned and she kept trying to go back into the water. At this point they called 911. Michelle, Kyle and Dale all held her from going back into the water. No one could be seen in the water around them. They stayed in the area, searching for the missing man some 15 minutes, at which point the 911 operator relayed information to them and they headed for shore. Michelle comforted and remained with the woman

in the ambulance until her friends arrived. Other people continued to search for this woman's husband but their efforts were in vain and tragically his life was lost. Without the level headed, quick thinking of Michelle, Eric and Kyle Gislason and Dale Shumski this could easily have been a double drowning occurrence. The Lifesaving Society would like to recognize your efforts and hereby presents each of you with a Rescue Commendation Award.

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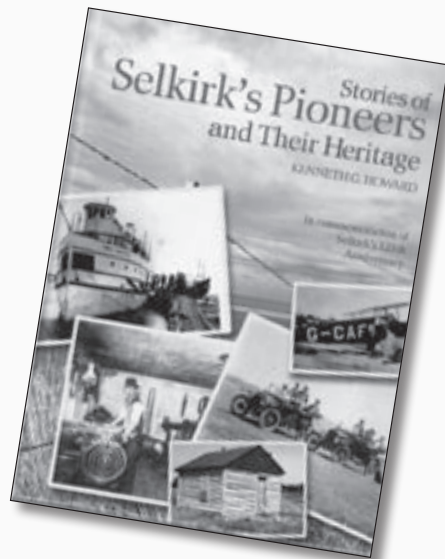
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January 2011*

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# POETRY

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## Heritage

By Laura Goodman Salverson

From Wayside Gleams published in 1925

The wealth of the world  
Is courted and sought,  
But the wealth of our God  
Can never be bought;  
It is had for the asking  
By you and by me,  
It is given in bounty  
To them that are free.  
There are gardens for pleasure  
And valleys for thought,  
Rich kingdoms, all priceless,  
That cannot be bought;  
They are held for the pilgrim  
That searches to know  
whose light crowns the mountain,  
In mystical glow.

There is gladness and laughter  
with loveliness frought,  
where all find contentment  
That n'er may be bought;  
For these are the gifts  
That are given and lent,  
That grow in the giving  
And never are spent.

## This Is the Age of Reason

There is a dearth of giving,  
A dearth of tender tears;  
A petty mode of living  
That withers up the years;  
no sound of exultation  
in glory fairly won,  
nor kind exoneration  
Of deed in blindness done.

So little joy in beauty,  
Of tolerance of pain;  
Nor striving after duty  
Which holds the heart of gain;  
So little time for leisure  
Within the quiet wood,  
For men are mad with pleasure  
Nor cherish patient good.

So little youthful laughter  
To lift our leaden care,  
That joy may follow after  
And dull delusion's glare;  
So lightly cherished friendship  
That love needs hide her face,  
Nor may find a kinship  
With her immortal grace.

There is no time for dreaming  
In this progressive age,  
And none, alas, for gleaning  
The gems from virtue's page----  
This is the age of reason,  
Though all men wonder what  
*Portends the changing season,*  
**AND WHAT THE GODS FORGOT.**

# Book Reviews

## The Fifth Dimension



PHOTO BY LEIF NORMAN  
COURTESY OF THE ICELANDIC FESTIVAL OF MANITBO

by David Gislason

Reviewed by Linda F. Sigurdson Collette  
KIND Publishing 2010  
ISBN: 9789979707752  
Soft Cover, \$19.99

In 2010, David Gislason's book, *The Fifth Dimension*, a collection of poetry and translations, was published by Kind Publishing, Department of Icelandic Language and Literature. Dr. Birna Bjarnadóttir wrote the Preface and David wrote the Forward. Both Birna and David establish the importance of poetry, the love of language, and the glory of remembrance.

Since it was published, *The Fifth Dimension* has travelled with me just as Will Geer and Bill Holm carried Walt Whitman's book *Leaves of Grass*. David's book is full of our heritage and perfect in size to carry in a purse or briefcase for those moments of silence, no matter the place.

What will the reader find? Begin with the cover. Focus on the photo standing out from the blackness of space. A small child looks to the horizon and stands in this reflective beauty of sky and water, a metaphor for the fluidity of the collection of poems contained within the covers of the book. To begin, David presents a selection of his poetry. The child's gaze lengthens and views our Icelandic Canadian poets of one hundred years ago. His view stretches further to the Icelandic poets taking us back more than 1000 years. The child possesses the three dimensions of space, the line, the height and width, and finally, the height, width, and depth. He also

possesses the fourth, the one of time, the dimension of relativity. Now, consider the possibility of the fifth dimension.

How does this photo relate to the title, *The Fifth Dimension*? The fifth dimension has many definitions depending on the discipline. In the fifth dimension, time is the eternal Now. Present, Past, and Future have no relevance and time will then stretch into Eternity. Time and space are fluid and illusionary not fixed as in the first three dimensions. David describes in his Forward the visit in 2000 by Hallveig Thorlacius. She “pondered over the mystery of the indefinable link that exists between the Icelandic people of today and their kin here in North America.” and said that “it’s like the fifth dimension, an inseparable aspect of our country and people.” The poems in this book present our collective Icelandic heritage through all the Ages. We are not whole without Iceland’s more than 1000 years of time and Iceland is not whole without us, the Lost Tribe so to speak. Heritage is the Space Time continuum. The young child is part of the scene.

Why write poetry, a form of literature that many find difficult to digest? Simply, it is who David Gislason is. In the time-honoured tradition of community poets, he records and celebrates life and death, childhood and adulthood, accomplishments and gifts, English and Icelandic, Iceland and Manitoba, youth and old age, happiness and sadness.

Each of David’s poems must be read aloud to appreciate the rhythm and rhyme. Thoughtfully, David provides enough information in the Notes for us to understand the special meaning it has for David and to celebrate the poem. On a few pages, he also includes family photos to give us the visual presence. When reading

poetry, consider “what meaning does this poem have for me” rather than “what does the poem mean?” David includes sixteen poems, all with individual themes, but the one that I reread is Cool Shades. After the summer visit of his grandson, David opens the tractor door and notices a forgotten small, denim jacket and sunglasses. The poem expresses emotions of happiness, sadness, remembrance – forget-me-not, love, all in eight lines.

E. Dieth states: “The great secret of the Icelander’s mental aspect is that he has not allowed his past to be dead and forgotten, he has kept it alive through all the centuries.” In the next two sections, David selects and translates twenty poems from Icelandic Canadian poets and twenty from Icelandic poets. These poems are like “tvíbökur”, twice baked, once by the poet and once by the translator. In the settlements, buns were twice baked to keep the bread free of mold. These poems are now preserved and will be enjoyed for many years to come.

A translator must make a choice to translate either literally or in spirit. As only two of the original poems in Icelandic are included, comparisons can not be made. David translated three poems composed by Guttormur J. Guttormsson whose valuable book *Aurora* includes both languages. Gutti penned the poem, *Mannsálin*, the *Human Soul*, which is engraved on a stone monument in Riverton in his honour. Poetry best expresses the human soul and has been called “the voice of prophecy, mythology, history, religion, national life, and of course, literature.” The selection of poems written by Icelanders who immigrated to North America provides a plethora of historical people and events giving insight into our 135 year story. The tribute poems by Friðrik P. Sigurðsson

honour the Gislasons, Bjarnasons, and Nordals. David translated the works of Stephan G. Stephansson, Guttormur J. Guttormsson, Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason, and others who, because of the Notes provided become acquaintances. With each reading of their works in translation, they are remembered.

One of the poems that David translated with special meaning for me is by Stephan G., *The Wayfarer*. In 1989, when I was researching an inscription for engraving on Íslendingadagsklukka, Ingthor Isfeld suggested the first lines from this poem. He said that every child in Iceland memorized this poem and they were not aware that the poet did not live in Iceland. This poem has been set to music in Iceland and was sung when the bell was unveiled in Gimli by Vigdís Finnbogadóttir in 1989. Following is David's translation of the bell's inscription. To me, the last line includes all of us with Icelandic heritage. It tugs at the heart.

*Though your travels encompass  
every country on earth,  
deep at heart you've been moulded  
by the land of your birth.*

From this short span of time and with complete feeling of family and familiarity, we take flight with the *Fifth Dimension* and land in many different ages, with Icelandic poets from Egill Skallagrímsson to Icelandic Folktales, to Davíð Stefánsson, to the beloved Jónas Hallgrímsson and many more. David's Notes provide just enough information about each poem. As poems are meant to be read many times, take the time to do that. Have this book as a resource and continue the quest into 1100 years of Icelandic literary history.

David in this section includes two small poems in Icelandic with his English translation. One poem by Egill was created in ca. 910 and translated in 2005. 1095 years later we still know about Egill and his adventures. At that time, skalds (poets) were trained to write poetry in praise of kings and events. In this instance, poetry saved Egill's life. The second small verse was his parting comment. Rhythm and rhyme ensured that the poems were remembered and eventually written down for posterity.

Once again, a certain translation tugs at the heart, *The Ride of the Elves*. Poetry can have special meaning because of associations. This poem was my afi's song as he sat knitting mitts and socks. He matched the rhythm to turning the handle of the machine. It has always been a family favourite.

No review can do justice to David's book. Consider this article as a pathway of words to entice you to follow the centuries of poetry that belong to you. Because of David Gislason and other translators, we have guidance on the journey. With David's poetry, we have our own records added to the 'Greats'. Heritage is a continuum.

In conclusion, this is a book for all of us. David has presented us with a gift that had been waiting for the right person, one who has music in his soul, one who could do justice to the translation of the poems from Icelandic to English. Note again the cover photo. The child is not alone in that huge expanse. He has his shadow.



## Contributors

**JULIE SALVERSON** Playwright, librettist and essayist, Salverson has published and taught extensively about the artist as witness, historical memory, politics, ethics and the imagination. Her essay *An Atomic Elegy* will be the cover story for *Maisonneuve Magazine*, summer, 2011. She is Associate Professor of Drama at Queen's University.

**DAISY NEIJMANN** is now currently in Iceland researching the Allied occupation of Iceland in Icelandic fiction. I do so enjoy being in Iceland!

**VIRGINIA MARTIN** *When Sparrows Fall* is Virginia Martin's favourite novel by Laura Goodman Salverson. Her interest in Laura is marked by admiration and respect for her accomplishments but there is also an over all concern about women authors who are out of print. Virginia is a retired speech-language pathologist. This is her first publication outside her professional area.

**DR. TERRENCE L. CRAIG** is Associate Professor of English at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick. He holds a doctorate in English literature from the University of Toronto and has published extensively on Canadian Literature, including *Racial Attitudes in English-Canadian Fiction, 1905-1980* (1987) and *The Missionary Lives: A Study in Canadian Missionary Biography and Autobiography* (1997). A contributor to the Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, Dr. Craig is an authority on the writings of Laura Goodman Salverson. He has taught in Malawi, Nigeria and Bermuda and was a Visiting Scholar at the University of Sidney in Australia.

**WILHELM KRISTJANSON** was born in Otto, MB. He attended Wesley College (now University of Winnipeg) and then Oxford University and University of Chicago with an education degree. He was the editor of *The Icelandic Canadian* magazine and authored *The Icelandic People in Manitoba: A Manitoba Saga*.

**LINDA F. SIGURDSON COLLETTE** is the daughter of the late Jóhann Straumfjörð and Helga Sigurdson of Lundar, Manitoba. Both were Presidents of the INL Lundar Chapter and Jóhann was President of the Icelandic National League of North America. Linda lives in Winnipeg and participates in various cultural and community activities. In 1996, she founded *Lestrarfélagið Gleymér-ei* (Reading Society Forget-me-not) which meets monthly and is now on Facebook and at this blog site: <http://www.lestrarfelag.blogspot.com>.

**LORNA TERGESEN** is the editor of the *Icelandic Connection*.

### Þjóðræknisfélag Íslendinga í Vesturheimi



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PHOTO: LINDA F. SIGURDSON COLLETTE

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## The Back Page

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Located in Memorial Park, Lundar, Manitoba, the Monument was erected in 1955 to honour the Icelandic pioneers. For the Centennial year in 1987, the Sundial, created by artist Richard Osen, was erected to honour all those pioneers from many other countries who settled in Lundar and District.

The early Icelandic settlements were Álftavatsbyggð to the west and Grunnavatnsbyggð (Shoal Lakes) to the east as well as Lundar.

# *Thanks*

*to our generous and faithful Donors*

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