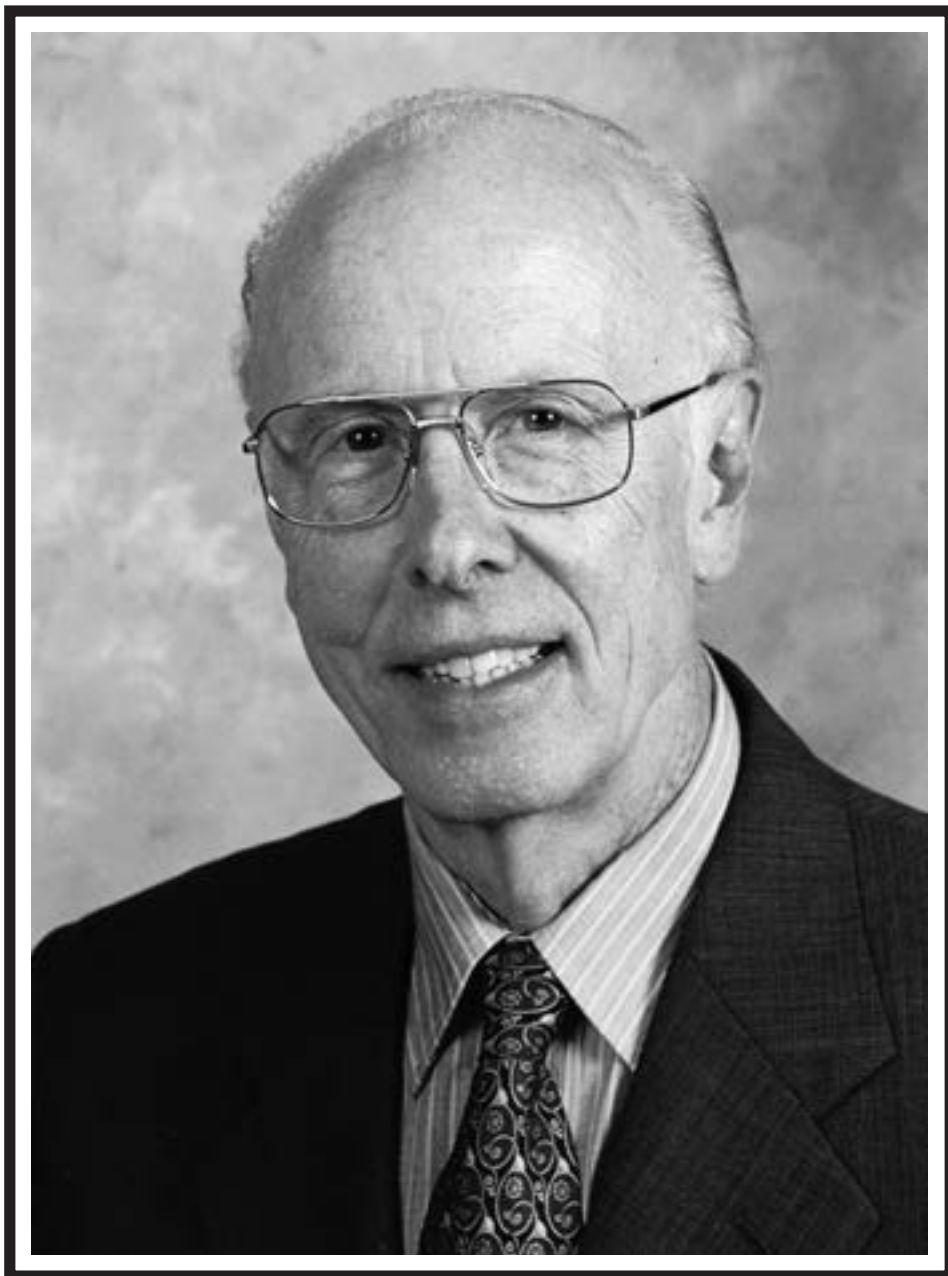


ICELANDIC CONNECTION



ISSN #1920-423X

Vol. 64 #1 (2011)

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We invite students to apply for the following scholarships which are offered, or administered, by the Canada Iceland Foundation. Priority may be given to first time applicants.

ALL APPLICATIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY FRIDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER, 2011

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ICELANDIC CONNECTION

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ICELANDIC CONNECTION

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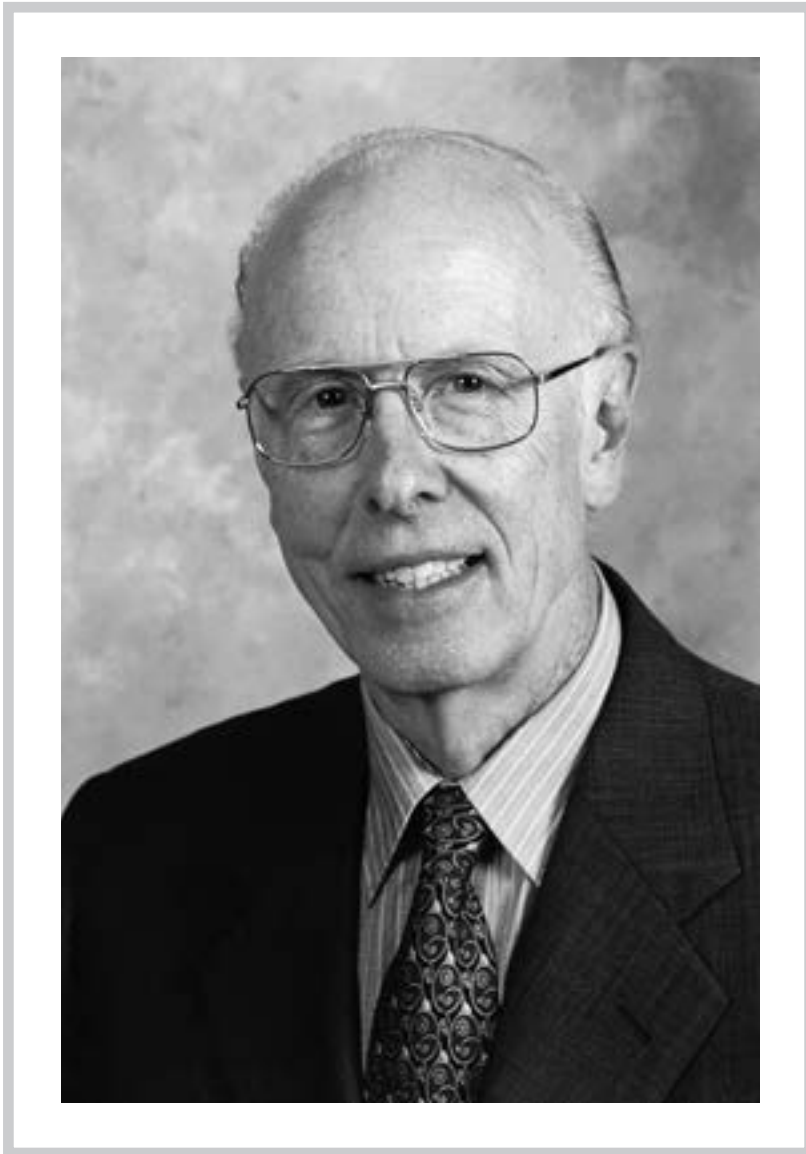


PHOTO FROM THE DR. KEN THORLAKSON FAMILY COLLECTION

Dr. T. Kenneth Thorlakson

Editorial

Reflections on my good fortune – friends that are heroes

by Garry Oddleifson

When Lorna Tergesen, our hard working editor offered me the opportunity to write an editorial for this issue, which pays tribute to Dr. Ken Thorlakson, I was delighted to agree. I have been known to take on jobs before – often times these were tasks for which I have no past experience and no known talent. Such is the case with this editorial, so I began to feel a bit daunted by the task, feeling that maybe I had made an error (again!) in accepting this duty. But it occurs to me that editorials are essentially commentary and need be neither objective nor impersonal. Thank goodness! I can't imagine writing about a dear friend such as Ken and having to adhere to such restrictions.

Someone once said, or I read it somewhere, that one should hang on to friends because they are the most valuable thing in the world. In the folly of youth, I mostly ignored that advice and only had one lifelong friend. He passed away about 15 years ago and is sorely missed. But since I became strongly involved in the Icelandic community in Toronto and Winnipeg I have gained tremendously from friendships. As a member of the Icelandic Canadian Club of Toronto, I was recruited by and nurtured

by Donald Gislason and found comfort and support in many friendships.

When I moved to Winnipeg in 2003, I quickly became very involved in our community and soon found myself recruited as VP of the Icelandic National League of North America. I then felt strongly in need of mentoring once again. Three people that gave me confidence and encouragement were Evelyn Thorvaldson, Neil Bardal and Dr. Ken Thorlakson. I can easily say that I have felt great respect for these three, but also mountains of affection.

Many opinions are given regarding the staying power of our community, now including third and fourth generation descendants. My interpretation involves the quality and strength of our leaders. We have been blessed with many of them in every field – literature, judiciary, politics, medicine, exploration, business – you name it; and they all inspired us to become involved in some way, whether to simply take part in language classes or to try baking vínarterta or to do much more. My friend Ken is an example of this leadership.

It amazes me now to realize that, until a few short years ago, I had not met Ken. Of course I was quite aware of his efforts in our community and knew of his magnificent

success as the director of the Valuing Icelandic Presence campaign to raise funds for the Icelandic Department and Icelandic Collection at the University of Manitoba. We met when he took on the leadership of the Future Fund Campaign to raise funds for *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, where I have been one of the volunteers and a board member.

Although aware of his prior success, I wondered how this soft spoken and mild mannered gentle man could achieve what was required. My background was in private industry, working in manufacturing, both in sales and production and I was accustomed to motivation coming through the prospect of monetary incentive or the fear of failure. It came about that Ken asked if I would join the *Lögberg-Heimskringla* Campaign Action Committee. I agreed and looked forward to learning how we might make the campaign fruitful.

I found that Ken has the ability to lead, not through some mystical psychological motivational technique, but simply through the ability to inspire, based on his own positive attitude and in making us all see that we had a very worthy product, a point that is very important in such a campaign. At our first committee meeting, I learned that Ken had already achieved a great deal. The people of Iceland would take care of the digitization of our archival copies going back to the first issue in 1886 (*Heimskringla*) and 1888 (*Lögberg*). This was a vital part of our goal because digitization has circumvented their vulnerability. And, he had already obtained a very large cheque from our initial personal donor, and made approaches to several others.

His style, as expected, was very different from my experience but it worked. I now know that leadership can be quiet and friendly. It only needs the leader to be dedicated to a purpose and Ken was surely that.

During the campaign, I had the much treasured opportunity to get to know Ken during the trips we made to Lundar, Arborg, Riverton and Selkirk. I was given the driving job and enjoyed several hours of very interesting conversation. I had scant knowledge of his antecedents and their place in the history of our community. I was very impressed with Ken's modesty in describing the achievements of his great uncle in North Dakota and especially his father, Dr. Pall Thorlakson, a progressive thinker who was a driving force in the advancement in the way medicine is practiced locally. I also recall asking Ken what his surgical specialty is, and he replied that he chose general surgery and that he had gone to England after graduation to study under a respected general surgeon. It struck me that general surgery afforded him the chance to help the most people. Since that time we have travelled together every Íslendingadagurinn Monday, continuing these very pleasant conversations.

To me, having Ken as a friend is a blessing that I will always be thankful for. I still miss Toronto somewhat, as it was my home for 38 years. But I have found many reasons for being happy in my decision to come home to Winnipeg. Along with my close and loving family, Ken is one of those reasons.

Rev. Stefan Jonasson

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Dr. Ken Thorlakson: Catalyst for Revitalization

by Kevin Jon Johnson

1. Could you comment on the role of your father in the Icelandic Canadian community and on his role in your life insofar as he inspired you in your vocation and your recent community service?

I saw firsthand that whatever my father undertook, he did so with an energetic singleness of purpose, a strength of personality, a generosity of spirit, an undefeatable optimism and an ability to motivate others into accomplishing common objectives. He made wide-ranging contributions to the medical profession and to the wider community, and had an abiding interest throughout his life in furthering all things Icelandic. He was indeed an inspiring role model for me in my choice of a career as a doctor and surgeon, as well as for my active involvement in the Icelandic community.

My father's leadership during the 1950s – in establishing the Chair of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba (after which the Department of Icelandic was created) and in spearheading the amalgamation of the *Lögberg* and the *Heimskringla* Icelandic community newspapers – were central to my becoming involved some forty years later.

2. If your recent leadership roles, VIP and L-H, represent important

achievements in your volunteer activities, to what earlier volunteer or community work did you dedicate time and energy?

I served on the boards of and chaired fundraising campaigns for the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, Rainbow Stage and St. John's-Ravenscourt School. I was a member of the boards of the University of Manitoba Press and of the Winnipeg chapter of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, and was for twenty-five years on the Manitoba Advisory Board of the Canadian Scholarship Trust Fund.

I belong to the Manitoba Historical Society and present awards annually at the Young Historian's Award Ceremony. In 1998 I chaired the 11th Annual Manitoba History Conference, which was under the auspices of the Department of Archives and Special Collections at the University of Manitoba.

Within the Icelandic community, I have been a member of the Betel Home Foundation since 1974 and chaired the Betel Home Medical Advisory Committee for Gimli and Selkirk from 1978 to 2001. I have, with my wife Lorna, been a patron of Gimli's Íslendingadagurinn for over 25 years and in 2003 had the honour of delivering the Toast to Iceland at the Festival.

3. Did your community-minded activities offer a balance to the demands

of a surgical practice? How did you find the time?

There always seems to be time for the things you like to do! Devoting a substantial part of my nonprofessional time to one or more community endeavours had for me an energizing effect and helped to keep things in perspective. What made this time particularly special was that it was spent in the company of others also committed to effecting positive change and achieving specific goals.

4. What cross-over skills and attributes may a surgeon bring to community service?

Many skills and attributes may be called upon depending on the occasion – although they may not always be exercised with a uniform measure of success! I will suggest the following (and there are certainly others): having a clear goal, planning well ahead, attention to detail, taking nothing for granted, concentrating fully on what lies clearly at hand, keeping an open mind to alternative solutions, maintaining a team spirit with appreciation for the contributions of others, adapting readily to new knowledge and changing circumstances and having empathy, patience, optimism.

5. What do you regard as among your finest achievements in and outside of your medical practice?

Early in my medical career I achieved fellowships in the Royal College of Surgeons of England, the Royal College of Surgeons of Canada and the American

College of Surgeons. Each required intensive studies, special examinations and/or documented surgical experience over the course of a number of years.



Kevin with daughters Julie and Go

While a member of the teaching staff in the Department of Surgery, Faculty of Medicine, at the University of Manitoba, I gained great personal satisfaction from three of the projects I undertook. I originated and edited for 18 years the Surgery Undergraduate Teaching Manual, I introduced the use of surrogate “patients” for teaching clinical-examination techniques to undergraduate

surgical students and I created a stratified formula for the remuneration of part-time surgical-teaching staff, the first of its kind in a Canadian Department of Surgery.

During the planning phase of the VIP fundraising campaign, I conceived the idea and was an initial prime mover in the creation of the joint interdisciplinary conferences alternating between the University of Manitoba and University of Iceland now held every other year.

6. Tell me about some of your other activities, positions, undertakings or special interests in or outside of your medical career.

I was on active duty during World War II on board a Royal Canadian Navy frigate in Atlantic convoy before graduating from medical school at the University of Manitoba. Postgraduate studies took me to London and other centres in Britain where I gained experience in general surgery before I commenced medical practice in general surgery at the Winnipeg Clinic. I joined the active medical staff of the Winnipeg General Hospital (which evolved into the Health Sciences Centre), and as mentioned earlier, taught in the Department of Surgery, Faculty of Medicine at the University of Manitoba (latterly as Associate Professor). Later, I also joined the active medical staff of the Victoria General Hospital.

Within the Faculty of Medicine I taught clinical surgery and was a member of the committee for undergraduate surgical teaching for 25 years. I particularly enjoyed my small group teaching sessions mentoring young men and women who would one day be doctors. Outside academia I served terms as president of the Manitoba Chapter of the American College of Surgeons and of the Canadian Association of Clinical

Surgeons (Western Division).

I have had four unforgettable visits to Iceland. In July 1974 Lorna and I accompanied my parents to the ceremonies celebrating the eleven-hundredth anniversary of the settlement of Iceland, at which my father extended greetings on behalf of the people and government of Canada. In March 1999 I flew to Reykjavik with University of Manitoba's Dean of Arts, Dr. Raymond Currie, and Director of Libraries, Carolynne Presser, seeking support for the VIP Campaign and to propose the establishment of biennial inter-university conferences with the University of Iceland. In 2002 I travelled with a delegation to the 2nd biennial University of Manitoba–University of Iceland interdisciplinary conference. In March of 2005 I went to Iceland to view the University of Iceland Library's digitizing facilities and to meet with Þorgerður Katrín Gunnarsdóttir, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science for Iceland, to discuss using these facilities for digitizing all issues of the *Lögberg-Heimskringla*.

My wife Lorna (née Olson) and I have a daughter and two doctor sons who, with their spouses and our four grandchildren, reside in Winnipeg. Summers on the family island at Lake of the Woods in Ontario include tennis, boating and swimming with the family.

7. Neil Bardal, who chaired the Heritage, Image and Pride (HIP) committee before you succeeded him in the renamed Valuing the Icelandic Presence (VIP) committee, told me that he had raised donations at almost ten dollars per pledge, whereas you could raise one hundred thousand dollars per pledge. Neil exaggerated, but you do appear to have had a Midas touch. To

what do you attribute this golden touch?

First I should point out that the origins, circumstances, breadth and goals of the two campaigns were very different. The HIP (Heritage, Image and Pride) campaign that Neil and Steini Kristjanson co-chaired began at the urging of my father in 1985. It struggled over the following ten to fifteen years in a continuing effort to shore up the principal of the ever-dwindling endowment fund that had originally underwritten the establishment in 1952 of the Chair of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba. The HIP campaign met with some success, a high point being the establishment (with the help of a grant from the Secretary of State, Department of Multiculturalism) of a teaching position in the Department of Icelandic in 1992, in the field of Icelandic-Canadian studies.

But in my view, the VIP campaign was a whole new ball game – with a completely different objective, approach, structure and personnel.

Neil's comment almost certainly stems from his off-the-cuff reaction when I told him about the ultra-generous and completely unexpected lead donation to the VIP campaign. The donor and the remarkable circumstances behind that gift provide a glimpse into the behind-the-scenes workings of the campaign as it began to build – but that is a story in itself!

As to the comment about my 'golden touch,' I myself certainly did not look at it that way. The campaign required a great deal of time and energy, not only by me but also in varying degrees by everyone involved. Success in attracting contributions to the VIP campaign was due to a number of coinciding factors, including a 'do-it or

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die' cause, a favourable alignment of time and circumstances, a coming together of a number of very remarkable people who were in a position to help and did so and an across-the-board generosity. Neil had kindled the flame!

8. The financial goals were established for securing the Icelandic Chair and Collection at the University of Manitoba, but how did you and your supporting Board members arrive at the timeline and goals for the *L-H* campaign? Any surprises in this campaign?

By December of 2003, the Lögberg-Heimskringla Inc. board of directors had determined that the newspaper could no longer continue to operate with the funds available to it. At this juncture, representatives of the board asked me to meet with them and we established the level of funding that would be necessary to stabilize the paper's financial position. After subsequent discussions with the entire board and others about the immense challenges facing *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, it became obvious that unprecedented changes were essential if the paper were to continue publishing – so the bar was raised. We deemed it crucial, indeed urgent, to mount a major fundraising campaign on a scale and magnitude never

before attempted by the paper. I was invited to chair the initiative.

The goal for the campaign was to raise \$1.5 million toward three stated objectives: to invest in the staff, equipment and facilities essential to providing a quality, widely circulated publication; to establish an endowment fund which would create the fiscal stability required for the future operation and growth of the paper; and to digitize all issues (representing 119 years of history) and make its pages, past and future, searchable on the Internet. As far as a timeline...since a fundraising initiative of this kind was unprecedented for the *L-H* newspaper, we had no idea how long it would take to meet this goal, and therefore had no specific end date in mind.

As with any fundraising campaign, there were letdowns, but also many happy surprises, including the lead gift I alluded to earlier. Indeed, every positive response – however big or small, or from whence it came or in whatever form – always provided a great source of encouragement and a big boost to our sense that the goal of the campaign would be reached. The biggest and most rewarding surprise was that our collective efforts achieved even more success than we had hoped for.

9. For many who share a passion for sustaining the Icelandic cultural presence in the New World, I would venture that you stand on the highest echelon among recent culture heroes. Any more dragons on the horizon?

Heroes and dragons are for fairy tales! Nowadays, and on the horizon, they go by other names!

10. Is community service a responsibility, a privilege, or a passion?

All three!

11. What do you envisage as the

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most serious challenge facing the sustainability of the Icelandic culture in North America today?

The same challenge that, to a lesser or greater degree as time passes, affects all immigrant peoples. For succeeding generations, in their homes and communities away from their country of origin, there is less general exposure to their culture and heritage and in particular, the opportunity to converse in, and ability to comprehend their native tongue. The Icelandic language is the bedrock of its culture. Fortunately the heritage of our transplanted national culture rests on many other underpinnings, including a close and continuously nourished relationship with Iceland.

12. On the obverse, what do you see as the greatest strength?


The ongoing and continual active and purposeful renewal of personal and formal ties between the people of Iceland and people of Icelandic descent in North America has had, and continues to have, a powerful impact on sustaining Icelandic culture in North America.

13. On behalf of the *Icelandic Connection* magazine, I would like to extend heartfelt thanks for your good and great services to our community. Do you have any closing comments?

As a long-time subscriber to the *Icelandic Canadian* (now very appropriately renamed the *Icelandic Connection*), I would like to take this opportunity to commend its present editors, staff and contributors for so ably continuing the magazine's 59-year record of scholarly research into Icelandic and Icelandic-North American history and culture, and for seeking out and publishing relevant literary works and quality articles of interest and importance.

Editorial Note:

Dr. Ken Thorlakson has received several honours for service to the community, to the medical profession, to the University of Manitoba, and to Iceland, including the Commemorative Medal for the 125th Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada; Senior Membership of the Canadian Medical Association; the University of Manitoba's Peter D. Curry Chancellor's Award; Honorary Fellow of University College at the University of Manitoba; Member of the Order of Canada; and Knight of the Icelandic Order of the Falcon.



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New Iceland: A Transition from Iceland to Canada

by Thor Richardson

The Icelandic people in Manitoba created a unique entity in Canadian history. The formation of New Iceland in 1875 on the shores of Lake Winnipeg was an Icelandic reserve in what was then the unorganized part of the North West Territories. The Icelanders were insistent about preserving the elements of traditional Icelandic society, culture and language. Within a year they drafted and ratified a permanent constitution which prescribed the social, administrative and political framework of New Iceland. They created their own laws, started their own school, held religious services and distributed a written newspaper. However, the settlement never materialized as the leaders intended. It was plagued by a series of natural disasters including floods and a smallpox epidemic, and religious controversy which ultimately decimated the colony. The original purpose of the chosen site on the western bank of Lake Winnipeg remains important; it was the only place in all of North America where an exclusive Icelandic settlement was established. As such, New Iceland facilitated the transition from purely Icelandic traditions to the Canadian way of life.

Eighteenth century Iceland was a very difficult period for its inhabitants. Living conditions were hard and customs were outdated. People still lived in sod houses and the two main industries, livestock and fish, were at a standstill. The country was

still recovering from a smallpox epidemic which struck in 1707, wiping out nearly one third of the country's population. Natural disasters, such as the volcanic eruption in the Dyngju Mountains in 1875, forced hundreds of people off their land, as ashes and pumice, in many places as thick as ten centimetres, covered a large area. The destruction of arable land was devastating and many young people gave up hope of finding a possible farm site. All of these factors, combined with an unusually harsh climate throughout most of the century, resulted in a wave of emigration. During the last three decades of the century, almost 12,000 Icelanders left their homeland in search of a better life in the New World. They formed 0.03% of the 52 million Europeans also taking a chance at living in North America, who left between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the beginning of the Great Depression.¹

The single most important factor that separated the Icelandic immigrants from the rest of the European movement was their abiding connection to Iceland and its culture, and the dream of creating a new Icelandic exclusive settlement. In 1872, Sigtryggur Jonasson became the first Icelandic settler in Canada. A year later, the first large group of Icelanders arrived on the shores of the St. Lawrence, with the intent to settle in Wisconsin. With the

help of Sigtryggur Jonasson, the Canadian government persuaded most of the settlers to stay in Canada. They granted them three conditions: Icelanders were to enjoy full liberty and rights of citizenship as soon as they fulfilled residence requirements; they were to be granted a sufficiently large tract of land for their settlement; they were to have the unfettered right to maintain their personal freedom, their language and sense of national origin for themselves and their descendents for all time.² The initial two attempts at settling in Canada were both in Ontario, the first located in Rosseau, the second in Kinmount.

After two unsuccessful attempts at settlement, it was concluded that an exclusive Icelandic settlement in Ontario was not possible. Many varying suggestions were proposed, including Alaska, but the one location that was most attractive was the Red River Valley. News of its fertile soil and more favourable climate was spreading. With interest growing, John Taylor, a key figure in the community, travelled to Ottawa and requested financial support for an expedition to the Red River Valley. The government supported the cause and with that a group of six men including John Taylor and Sigtryggur Jonasson, set off to explore the potential site. The men reached Winnipeg in mid July – in the peak of one of the most disastrous grasshopper plagues in history. The group explored the area west of Winnipeg; however this land was not suitable for raising stock, which was their first priority. They also explored the area surrounding Winnipeg, but found it either destroyed by grasshoppers or not secluded enough. They then considered the option of settling on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg. At the time, the land was north of Manitoba and in the North West Territories.

Immediately they were impressed with the absence of grasshoppers. The area provided ample timber for construction and plenty of hay for animals. The land appeared to be fertile and the lake was full of fish. There was plenty of other food including wild game and an abundance of berries. The Red River provided year round transportation to the town of Crossing. Finally, the area was virtually uninhabited. *“To the best of our knowledge, the land we have acquired for our colony is the best available in the West, and better than anything we have been offered until now.”*³ It was decided that this site would become New Iceland and that the first movement would commence immediately. The plan was for John Taylor to return to Kinmount and guide the colonists to New Iceland. In the meanwhile, Sigtryggur Jonasson would return to Iceland to gather more immigrants. To pay for the lengthy trip the group would require federal assistance. Taylor and Jonasson met with Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie asking for financial help. Mackenzie explained that it was government policy to help settlers coming to Canada, not helping them move from one part of the country to another. Fortunately for the Icelanders Governor General Lord Dufferin intervened. He had visited Iceland in 1856 and became very fond of the country and its people. He insisted that the government assist these people and treat them with utmost respect, just as they had treated him. With his support the land grant was provided. Almost instantly the news and excitement about the new settlement spread throughout the greater Icelandic population. People immediately sold their stock and land, sometimes at half price, just to be part of the westward movement. The group of 270 left Toronto on September

2th aboard the Grand Trunk Train. Finally on October 11th, the Icelanders reached Winnipeg. It is during the final leg of the trip when Olafur Olafsson suggested New Iceland be called "Gimli", which means "Paradise". The *Winnipeg Free Press* described the newcomers as, "*smart-looking, intelligent, and excellent people and a most valuable acquisition to the population of our province.*"⁴ Those who carried on to the site collectively purchased six flat bottom boats or scows as a means of transportation. On the seventeenth of October the settlers set sail for New Iceland, and anchored five days later at Willow Point, six kilometres southeast of present day Gimli. An abundance of nearby trees provided the timber required for building homes and construction commenced immediately. Unfortunately, many people fell ill during the first weeks of settlement, most likely because they resorted to sleeping unsheltered in the scows while homes were being built. Although it took a while to learn, the Icelanders became proficient fishermen on Lake Winnipeg and fish formed the basis of their diet.

The first winter at New Iceland was one of the coldest winters on record, with temperatures often reaching minus forty degrees Celsius. Unfamiliar to this type of extreme cold, many settlers were poorly dressed for the conditions. The morale of the settlers was reduced even further as food became scarcer. By Christmas Eve breadcrumbs were all that was eaten – shocking contrast to the traditional Christmas celebrations found at home. During that first winter John Taylor took the role of the religious leader, conducting Sunday services. A school in Gimli was established with Caroline Taylor, his niece, as the teacher. In the summer of 1876

approximately twelve hundred Icelanders, the "Large Group", arrived in Canada, the vast majority proceeding to New Iceland.

In the fall New Iceland was hit hard by a smallpox epidemic. It is believed the disease originated at the Icelandic River in September of 1876. Foreign to the Icelanders, it was considered a mild disease like chickenpox and was not taken seriously. The disease was soon carried to Gimli and by November it broke out with full force. Overcrowding in homes made the spreading of the disease inevitable. A few weeks later three doctors arrived and established a hospital in Gimli. Fears that the epidemic would spread into Manitoba, New Iceland was put into quarantine. The quarantine further distressed the colonists. Icelanders were barred from any outside contact and thus could not work outside the colony. Many resorted to relying on government supplies which were often not granted. Life in the colony during the first winter was dismal. One colonist wrote, "*The sufferings of the sick, the task of nursing them, the strangeness of the people in an isolated place, poverty, and the loss of loved ones, all combined to make life for the settlers dreary and difficult.*"⁵ By April of the following year the smallpox epidemic had subsided. It had however, taken one hundred lives and had contracted almost half the population. Even after the disease had left the colony, the quarantine still remained. It was not until July 20th, four months after the last case, were the barriers lifted through a march across the lines. During the 228 days of quarantine employment was unavailable in the colony, local goods could not be sold outside and opportunity for employment in Manitoba was disallowed. The morale of the Icelanders was inescapably affected by the events of the year.

The Icelanders were primarily concerned about preserving the cultural values which they had brought with them from the home country and maintaining their national independence. It soon became clear that it was vitally important to maintain an Icelandic newspaper or periodical. "*Framfari*" was the name of the new journal, the first to be printed in Icelandic west of the Atlantic Ocean. The name itself, "Progress" indicates very well what idea it represented. The first edition which appeared on September 10, 1877 opens with an address to the readers and subscribers in which the purpose and policy of the paper are defined:

*As soon as Icelanders started emigrating to this continent in appreciable numbers, they began to voice the fear of losing their language and national identity here unless something special was done to preserve them. They have agreed that two things were necessary in order to maintain this precious heritage: one, that Icelanders should form their own colony, and the other, that a journal be published in Icelandic here in America. These two are so intimately related that it was scarcely thinkable that one could prosper without the other.*⁶

It was a newspaper of four pages and was to be published three times monthly.

With the printing of the *Framfari*, the Icelandic immigrants in Canada had achieved the exclusive Icelandic settlement and a publication in their native tongue. It had been their conviction that this would be the foundation on which Icelandic heritage in North America would be built. Although *Framfari* lasted for only two years and was financially disastrous for those who invested in it, this venture was an outstanding success in many other respects.

Aside from inspiring the settlers of New

*Iceland at a time when their spirits were low, it had kept them informed of both local and outside events and provided occasional employment for numerous settlers, and it had served as a link between Icelanders scattered across North America. Finally, in retrospect, it paved the way for other Icelandic language papers...and it survives today as a symbol of the progressive and highly-cultured character of the pioneers of New Iceland.*⁷

In 1877 a religious controversy arose that would later be one of the biggest factors in the exodus from New Iceland. The dissension between two ministers, Reverend Jon Bjarnason and Reverend Pall Thorlaksson, inevitably divided the colony into two factions. Thorlaksson maintained that as citizens in a new country, they should be ready to accept new ways in North America, such as religious teachings. In addition, Thorlaksson's personality greatly added to his appeal. His ability as a leader was never questioned and for that he had many followers. Bjarnason, on the other hand, saw himself as a representative from the church in Iceland. His followers wanted complete control over their church and schools and wanted to make every effort to preserve the Icelandic language and culture. The religious controversy has been referred to by one of the pioneers of 1875 as the worst of three plagues which hit New Iceland in the early years. "*It poisoned the soul, and community life.*"⁸ The controversy, however, was not entirely negative. It arose because religion meant so much to the settlers. As Reverend Jon Bjarnason later observed "*the controversy did much to clarify the views of the colonists in religious matters.*"⁹

In the summer of 1878, Thorlaksson and four men left in search of a better site to the south. They determined that the Dakota Territory, now present day North

Dakota, provided a much better settlement site. Many families, most followers of Thorlaksson, left for Dakota Territory. Many more families joined them and a large Icelandic settlement was established. The exodus from New Iceland continued over the next few years. The flood in the fall of 1880 which inundated the lower-lying areas of settlement resulted in a full scale exodus. In addition to moving to Dakota, some moved to Argyle and Winnipeg in Manitoba and some went west to Saskatchewan. These settlements differed from New Iceland in one very important aspect. Tracts of land were not set aside for them as Icelandic reserves. The immigrants filed upon homesteads in areas of land already surveyed, either

among or in the vicinity of settlers from other lands. The emigration continued slowly until 1886, when only fifty families remained from the four hundred in 1878.

One of the features that characterized New Iceland was its form of self government. The Order-in-Council of October 1875 sets out that John Taylor, Icelandic Agent, had requested that *“the Western Coast of Lake Winnipeg, extending from the mouth of the Red River on the south to a point known as Grindstone Point to the north, including Big Black Island, and extending from Lake Winnipeg to Range Two east of the Principal Meridian, be an Icelandic Reserve.”*¹⁰ The settled part of the Icelandic Reserve was divided into four districts: Viðirnes-district; Arnes-district; River district, and Big Island-district. (See Map) Approval of the residents in the four districts had to be obtained. On February 14, meetings were held in each of the districts. At these meetings district councils of five members were elected, each council to select its own chairman or reeve. One week later the District Councils met at Sandvik, on the lake front southeast of Lundi. A provisional chairman and vice-chairman were elected for a regional council for the area. Proposals for a temporary constitution for the Region, consisting of 18 sections were agreed upon to be in force for the balance of the year 1877. The elections were held on January 2, 1878 and on January 11 the elected representatives met at Sandvik, when the Laws and Regulations were finally approved. (These are contained in the Appendix.) They were published in *Framfari* on January 14, 1878 and thereupon became law.

The laws and regulations of New Iceland were a combination of provincial legislation and municipal by-laws. *“They are the product of minds that were deeply*



*conscious of the rights of the individual in a democratic state and the collective duties imposed upon all.”*¹¹ The delegates from each district had to obtain instructions and authority from general meetings in the districts. This was carried out to the very last meeting at Sandvik. It was also made clear that the settlers were part of the people of Canada and that the Laws and Regulations were subject to the powers of the Parliament of Canada if any federal legislation or Order-in-Council were violated. Supreme authority in New Iceland lay with the five-man executive assembly, known as the Vatnsthing. Composed of representatives from each of the four districts, with another member chosen from their ranks, its duties included the setting of laws, building of the colonial road and the adjudication of disputes. The assembly was chaired by the governor whose duties also made him the colony's official representative outside its borders.

On October 9, 1897 the Dominion Government passed Order-in-Council 2306, rescinding the original Order-in-Council of 1875 “...that the even and odd numbered sections remaining at the disposal of the Government in the tract in question be thrown open for sale and homestead entry by any class of settlers who may wish to locate in the vicinity.”¹² The dream of one, exclusive, Icelandic settlement in North America where all Icelandic immigrants could live together had come to an end. New Iceland was open to non-Icelandic settlers.

There are many speculations as to why the vision of one large Icelandic district failed. One such theory suggests that New Iceland did not have a unifying focus:

...there was no definite objective; the settlers did not have a particular religion or branch of a religion they sought to defend or collectively expand; there was a loyalty to a

*heritage, but it was not all-absorbing and there were no threats to it from without, at least no deliberate attacks; there was a developing loyalty to Canada, but it was very gradual, a growth not calling for challenge. There was no really unifying cause; nothing above and bigger than the group; nothing above that which each leader felt he had to protect and expand; nothing so transcendent that leaders would seek to cooperate with leaders in other groups.*¹³

Another theory suggests that the “energy, education and desire for freedom [of the Icelandic settlers] were elements that, combined with natural disasters, prevented them from achieving their aims in New Iceland.”¹⁴

In an article in *Framfari*, Reverend Jon Bjamason wrote:

*I was one of the many Icelanders here, who wished for an exclusive, Icelandic colony but am now convinced that an Icelandic settlement as people in Iceland and here have from the beginning hoped for cannot succeed and will without doubt always struggle. The main goal and objective of Icelanders here in this land should not be to preserve their nationality because, truthfully, men should come here to begin a new life, get new ideas, become a new nation and rid themselves of whatever prevented progress and general well-being back home. My compatriots will never accomplish this if they isolate themselves here just as many here already have begun to admit.*¹⁵

The Icelandic settlers realized that preserving their national heritage and culture could not be the only goal of the colony. In order to succeed, they must become part of their new world.

While various factors hindered its progress and eventually led to its downfall, the Icelandic settlers created a totally unique organization on the shores of

Lake Winnipeg. It was the only exclusive Icelandic settlement in North America. In this respect, New Iceland allowed the transition from purely Icelandic traditions to the Canadian way of life. *“The heritage which they treasured they hoped would become a part of the common, enriched, heritage of their new homeland.”*¹⁶

The achievement of New Iceland was a lasting tribute to the Canadian cultural mosaic.

APPENDIX

CONSTITUTION OF NEW ICELAND: SELECTED ARTICLES AND SECTIONS

Article I - Division of New-Iceland

The Icelandic settlement in New-Iceland is named “Lake-Region,” “Vatnsthing” and shall be divided into four districts. The four districts are: Vidirnes-district, comprising Townships 18 and 19 in Ranges 3 and 4 east; Arnes-district, comprising Townships 20 and 21 in Ranges 3 and 4 east; River-district, comprising Townships 22 and 23 in Ranges 3 and 4 east; Big-Island-district, comprising the entire Mikley (Hecla).

Article II - Election of district committees and conciliators

The inhabitants of each district shall, at a public meeting, which is to be held annually on the seventh day of January, or on the eighth day of January, when the seventh falls on a Sunday, elect five men to a committee called District Committee, two conciliators and one vice-conciliator. They who receive the largest number of votes are duly elected members of the District Committee, but only if there are present more than half the residents in the District who are eligible to vote in accordance with Article III of these Laws and Regulations.

Article III - Right to vote and eligibility for election

Every man shall have the right to vote for the election of a District Committee who is eighteen years of age, is a resident or owns real estate or who is a householder or has steady employment in the district, and who has unblemished reputation. All those who have a right to vote are also eligible for election to District Committees, except those who are incumbent clergymen or permanent public school teachers but no one shall be eligible for election who is not twenty-one years of age.

Article IV - Duties to the public

1. Meeting attendance: Residents in every district shall attend a public meeting in the period March 15th-April 15th on the date and at the place determined by each reeve, in order to discuss matters affecting the public welfare of the district. (Note: This was compulsory.)
2. Roadwork and road fees: Every male twenty-one years old is compelled to work two days of road construction or he shall pay \$2.00 to the road fund in which district he resides. Those who do not have a permanent residence shall do the same in which district they are employed at the time roadwork is expected. District Committees determine where and at what time of year such labour is performed.
3. Notice of deaths, births and marriages: Every householder shall inform the reeve of deaths or births in his home. Each male who gets married shall inform the reeve.
4. State of husbandry: All farmers and householders are obliged to provide the reeve every year with clear accounts of the state of their husbandry.
5. Support of widows and orphans: Residents of each district are obliged to support widows and orphans according to regulations approved by the inhabitants of each district. Those unable to work for whatever reason shall likewise be supported.
6. Meeting Halls: Residents in every district shall provide for a meeting hall.
7. Fee for public need: Every voter shall pay the sum of twenty-five cents annually to a fund for public needs. Payment due before end of September each year.

Source: Jonas Thor, *Icelanders in North America: The First Settlers* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002), 267-272.

Article V - Election of District Reeve, Treasurer and Secretary

District Committees are to elect from among themselves a District Reeve, a Vice-Reeve, a Treasurer and a Secretary.

Article VI - Duties of District Committees

1. Supervision of roads
2. Support of widows and orphans
3. Assistance to the poor and disabled
4. Arrangement of meeting halls
5. Election of Governor of the Regional Council: All members of committees of each district are duty bound to attend meetings to elect a Governor and a Vice-Governor of the Regional Council. The meeting for this purpose is to be held on the seventh day after the meeting for the election of

District Committees, one year at Lundi (Icelandic River) and the other at Gimli.

6. Health Care: Committees to supervise the general well being of individuals in every district. In the event of an outburst of a contagious disease, committees to make proper precaution in order to prevent an epidemic.

7. Support of fellowship and enterprise

Article VII - Functions of District Reeves, Treasurers and Secretaries

A. Duties of Reeve

1. Plans for general meetings
2. Arrangements for committee meetings
3. Records of meetings
4. Records of population and husbandry
5. Statutory labour
6. Records of deaths, births and marriages
7. Records of auctions, real estate transactions and administration of district funds
8. Attendance at Regional Council meetings
9. All records available for auditing by January 7th, each year

B. Duties of Treasurer

1. Collection of all fees
2. Bookkeeping

C. Duties of Secretary

1. Keep records of all public and committee meetings
2. Elections. Shall prepare list of eligible voters, receive and count votes in all elections

Article VIII - Management of estates of deceased persons and revenue

(Note: This was necessary as New Iceland was in an unorganized territory. District Reeves had similar powers to those of Surrogate Court Judges and fees were fixed on a percentage basis.)

Article XIV - Functions of the Regional Governor

1. Governor shall call all Regional meetings and chair them.
2. Keep records of meetings
3. Publish summary of records of the districts
4. Keep records of statutory labor
5. Shall refer to the Government of Canada all matters that concern the Region and are required to be referred; and shall notify the District Reeves of all directives of the Government in so far as they concern the Region.

The settlers were aware of their own powers in a reserve in an unorganized territory, but realized just as well that they were bound by legislation of the Parliament of Canada and by

federal Order-in-Council binding upon all citizens of Canada.

6. Notify reeves of issues to be discussed at district meetings

7. Chair arbitration committees

8. Give annually an account of his work

Article XV - Validity of elections and voting

Elections are valid for only one year. The majority of votes decides the election. A man may seek re-election.

Article XVI - Payment for writing material and books

Payment of material needed by the Governor, Treasurer, or Secretary to keep records was by the regional treasury.

Article XVII - Coming into force of these laws and regulations

(Note: These laws and regulations came into force once they were published in Framfari, on 11 January 1878.)

Article XVIII - Amendments to these laws and regulations

These laws and regulations may be amended upon motion passed at a main meeting of the Regional Council, and subsequently approved by a majority of all eligible voters of the region at District meetings which shall all be held on the same day.

ENDNOTES

1. Gudjon Arngrimsson, *Nyja Island: Saga of the Journey to New Iceland* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1997), 17.
2. Walter J. Lindal, *The Icelanders in Canada* (Winnipeg: Viking Printers, 1967.),102.
3. Arngrimsson, 125.
4. Jonas Thor, *Icelanders in North America: The First Settlers* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002), 83.
5. W. Kristjanson, *The Icelandic People in Manitoba: A Manitoba Saga* (Winnipeg: Wallingford Press, 1965), 50.
6. *Framfari: 1877 to 1880* (Gimli: Icelandic National League of North America,1986), 1.
7. Nelson S. Gerrard, *Icelandic River Saga* (Winnipeg: Inter-Collegiate Press, 1985),43.
8. Kristjanson, 115.
9. *ibid.*
10. Lindal, 138.
11. *ibid.*, 145.
12. *ibid.*, 168.
13. *ibid.*,318
14. Thor, 263.
15. *Framfari*,300.
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The Story Behind Two Successful Icelandic Community Fundraising Campaigns

by Dr. T. Kenneth Thorlakson

I. Valuing the Icelandic Presence Campaign at the University of Manitoba (1999–2000)

The following is a ‘behind-the-scenes’ story of the Icelandic community’s 1999 to 2000 fundraising campaign to save from closure the Department of Icelandic at the University of Manitoba.

In 1951, following a successful fundraising campaign within the North American Icelandic community, an endowment fund was established for a Chair of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University. To support the Chair, the Board of Governors created a Department of Icelandic and Literature within the Faculty of Arts and a professorship in Icelandic Language and Literature.

By the late 1990s, despite another fundraising campaign begun in 1985, the fund had become depleted. Severe budgetary constraints were afflicting the Faculty of Arts and the Department of Icelandic was in imminent danger of being closed down. Furthermore, the facilities for housing and managing the University Libraries’ Icelandic Collection of then more than 27,000 volumes and manuscripts were becoming wholly inadequate. There was a possibility that the Collection, which had been freestanding since its inception following a gift of Icelandic books in 1936, would be

amalgamated into a larger multi-language section of the Elizabeth Dafoe Library. Indeed, there had emerged a genuine fear that these two valuable Icelandic assets would cease to exist as individual entities within the University if a financial solution was not forthcoming.

Senior representatives of the university met with a group of individuals from the Icelandic community to evaluate the importance of continuing the Department of Icelandic, its Chair of Icelandic Language and Literature, and of maintaining the Libraries’ Icelandic Collection as a single entity (these three are known, collectively, as the University’s ‘Icelandic Presence’).

As a consequence of these deliberations, the Dean of Arts, Dr. Raymond Currie, and the Director of Libraries, Carolynne Presser, developed a proposal to preserve the Icelandic Presence and submitted a cost estimate to realize these ambitious objectives. The proposal was subsequently approved by the University Development Council.

One Sunday afternoon in the fall of 1998, Neil Bardal came over to my home. During the following two hours, he detailed concerns that he and other involved persons

at the University and in the Icelandic community had about the University of Manitoba's Icelandic Presence. It was evident that a major fundraising campaign was urgently needed. Furthermore, he told me, if enough funding was reached, the Department would then be able to hire a much-needed additional member to its teaching staff and the worn-out premises and facilities of the Collection could be expanded and modernized.

Later that year, I was Neil's guest at a reception that he hosted at the Manitoba Club for principals of the University's Icelandic entities. This was followed by a 'working dinner' during which there was wide-ranging discussion, culminating with the opinion that the solution to the problem "would take some two million dollars – and no one in this room can find that for us." Though the meeting ended on a pessimistic note, the seeds had been planted. Neil had gotten the ball rolling!

Not long after, Neil arranged a lunch meeting at the University where he and I met with Dr. Curry. The Dean disclosed that some of his department heads were of the opinion that the level of funding apportioned to the Department of Icelandic from the Faculty of Art's ever-diminishing budget was unjustified and that departments with considerably larger enrolments should have first call on these limited funds. He asked us, "Would the Icelandic community be disappointed if there no longer was a Department of Icelandic at the University?" His message was clear – that it would be up to the Icelandic community to come up with the necessary \$1.65 million needed to implement the ambitious plan.

Dr. Currie and Neil asked me to take on the task of organizing and leading the drive for the funds required for this rescue/revitalization undertaking. I

accepted the challenge.

With invaluable advice from many, I proceeded to formulate a campaign plan and to assemble a Campaign Cabinet.* This community-activated, university-based fundraising initiative was in time given the name 'The Valuing the Icelandic Presence Millennium Campaign,' better known as 'The VIP Campaign.'

This enterprise had the good fortune to coincide with the millennium year 2000. Exciting events were taking place throughout Iceland, Canada and the United States in celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the discovery of the New World by Icelandic mariners. It was a spirited time of goodwill and generosity for all things Icelandic!

At the University of Manitoba, president and vice-chancellor Dr. Emöke Szathmáry was incredibly supportive. She personally welcomed visitors and delegations to the university from Iceland as well as from the Icelandic community and hosted many related functions. Dr. Szathmáry went on to establish valuable bilateral academic and cultural links between her university and the University of Iceland and formed a warm, professional relationship with its rector, Dr. Páll Skúlason. During this period, Dr. Szathmáry and Dr. Skúlason each made formal visits to the other's university, where they signed agreements for academic and student exchanges that continue to this day.

In response to the campaign, the government of Iceland, the Eimskip Shipping Company and the Eimskip University Fund donated to the University of Manitoba a combined gift of one million dollars for its Icelandic Department and Icelandic Library Collection. This remarkable generosity and good will was facilitated by Svavar

Gestsson, Consul General for Iceland in Winnipeg and Special Envoy for Millennium Affairs in Canada and by Alti Ásmundsson, who at that time was press attaché at Iceland's ministry of Foreign Affairs. Davíð Oddsson, prime minister of Iceland, Hörður Sigurgestsson, CEO of Eimskip, Björn Bjarnason, Iceland's minister of justice and Rector Skúlason played central roles in the provision of these munificent gifts.

endowment fund now provides annual grants that support teaching programs in the Department of Icelandic, and library services and acquisitions for the Libraries Icelandic Collection. The campaign also served as a catalyst in the creation and development of other valuable links within the Icelandic community and between the community and the University, the government of Iceland and the University of Iceland.



PHOTO: PAULA HORECZY / COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

**University of Manitoba president Emöke Szathmáry
and University of Iceland president Páll Skúlason
sign historic Protocol of Agreement**

The VIP campaign more than exceeded its goal, thanks to so many generous donors whose names are recorded on a donor wall at the University. The campaign resulted in the creation of a beautiful, state-of-the-art space on the third floor of the Elizabeth Dafoe Library, named the Iceland Reading Room in recognition of the magnificent gift from the government of Iceland. The campaign also resulted in the establishment of the 'VIP Endowment Fund.' This permanent

with government, business and university representatives. We were particularly honoured that, for the duration of our stay in Iceland, Svavar Gestsson, the newly appointed consul general for Iceland in Winnipeg, acted as our host, planned our itinerary and accompanied us to meetings and events.

We visited the University of Iceland where Dean Currie made a formal proposal to Rector Skúlason to hold a

**Biennial
Interdisciplinary
Conferences**

At the outset of the campaign, the Campaign Cabinet had planned a major conference at the University of Manitoba to focus well-deserved attention on its Icelandic studies program and library collection.

With this and other campaign objectives in mind, Dean Raymond Currie, Carolynne Presser and I flew to Reykjavík in March 2000 to meet

series of interdisciplinary conferences, alternating biennially between the two Universities. Dr. Skúlason and his colleagues expressed great interest. With this encouragement, David Arnason, as a VIP Cabinet member and as head of the University of Manitoba's Department of Icelandic, in coordination with Guðrún Björk Guðsteinsdóttir, the head of the University of Iceland's Department of English, proceeded to organize the first conference. The 'partnership' conference was convened at the University of Manitoba during October 26–28, 2000. It was titled 'Building a New Relationship' and was held in conjunction with the dedication and formal opening of the newly completed Iceland Reading Room by Prime Minister Oddsson.

Conferences have since been held every eighteen months, alternating between the two universities. Richard Sigurdson (dean of the Faculty of Arts), Birna Bjarnadóttir (chair of Icelandic Language and Literature and head of the Department of Icelandic) and David Arnason have played vital roles in organizing and promoting these successful conferences. The most recent, the seventh, was convened September 17–19, 2010, at the University of Manitoba and the New Iceland Heritage Museum in Gimli, Manitoba. Entitled 'Earthly and Cultural Metamorphoses,' it was dedicated to the memory of Professor Haraldur Bessason, chair of Icelandic Language and Literature from 1956 to 1987.

*** Members of the VIP Campaign Cabinet:** David Arnason, Neil Bardal, Raymond Currie, Lenore Good, Ken Howard, Don



PHOTO: PAULA HORECZY / COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Björn Bjarnason (left), Minister of Education, Culture and Science of the Government of Iceland, and Hörður Sigurgestsson, the CEO of the Eimskip Shipping Lines, view plans for the renovation of the Icelandic collection area in the Elizabeth Dafoe Library

Johnson, Ray Johnson, Laurence Johnson, Richard Johnson, Sigrid Johnson,¹ Robert O'Kell, Carolynne Presser, Hartley Richardson, Tim Samson, Tom Stefanson, Arni Thorsteinson, Kirsten Wolf,² Ken Thorlakson (chair).

1. Sigrid Johnson is head of the Icelandic Collection section of the Elizabeth Dafoe Library.
2. Kirsten Wolf was chair of Icelandic Language and Literature, and head of the Department of Icelandic from 1988 to 2001.

II. Future Fund Capital Campaign for *Lögberg-Heimskringla* (2004–2007)

Throughout its long history, the *Lögberg-Heimskringla* newspaper has fulfilled an important function. It has 'created community' for those of Icelandic descent in Canada and the United States, and has provided a dynamic link between Iceland and North America. *Heimskringla* first appeared in 1886 and *Lögberg* in 1888. The two merged in 1959, and since 1980 the newspaper has been written almost entirely in English. It is the oldest continuously published ethnic newspaper in North America.

However, over much of this time, subscription and advertising revenues had only marginally sustained the operations of the newspaper. Despite donations, benevolent grants from the government of Iceland and, more recently, funds generated by the *L-H's* annual golf tournament, the newspaper had barely managed to survive. Entering the latter days of the 20th century, *Lögberg-Heimskringla* Inc. teetered financially as it struggled to migrate technologically into the computer age. Bill Perlmutter, the long-standing and extremely able treasurer, sounded the alarm bell. There followed a complete review of the newspaper's entire operations.

By December of 2003, the *Lögberg-Heimskringla* board of directors had determined that unprecedented changes would have to be made to meet the immense challenges facing the paper if it were to continue publishing.

At this juncture, representatives of the board asked me to meet with them. The amount of funds that would be necessary to stabilize the financial position of the paper

was set forth. In the days ahead, further discussions with members of the board and others resulted in raising the sights to a sum that would allow the newspaper to enhance its product quality, increase its operating revenue, and maximize its operating efficiencies, performance and profitability. To accomplish this, it was deemed crucial, and indeed urgent, to mount a major fundraising on a scale and magnitude never before attempted by the paper.

I was invited to chair the initiative. I first called together a small number of well-known individuals in the Icelandic community for the purpose of informing them of the circumstances, to seek their advice and to enlist their support. This group of people formed the nucleus of an Icelandic-community support team that over time expanded into a Campaign Cabinet⁵ with broad representation throughout Canada and the United States.

The campaign's goal was to raise \$1.5 million toward three stated objectives: to invest in staff, equipment and facilities essential to providing a quality, widely circulated publication; to establish an endowment fund which would create the fiscal stability required for future operations and growth of the paper; and to make all issues of the newspaper, past, present and future, easily accessible on the Internet. It was given the name 'the *Lögberg-Heimskringla* Future Fund Capital Campaign' and got underway in January 2004.

The first phase was one of planning, building cooperative relationships with other Icelandic cultural organizations and preparing campaign material. The second

phase began early in 2005 with emphasis placed on seeking leadership gifts and other anchoring donations. The third phase, the public phase, was officially launched on June 17, 2005, and continued throughout that year and the next, officially ending on June 17, 2007.

The planning, organizing and preparation of materials for the campaign took most of 2004. This process involved many individuals from the Lögberg-Heimskringla Inc. board and staff and from the Campaign Cabinet.¹ A campaign administrative committee was formed.² Joe Laxdal of Yorkton, a member of the newspaper's board of directors, developed our compelling Case for Support statement. Angela Smook (a professional fundraising consultant) was, in the early stages, campaign administrative coordinator, a role that was later filled by Lorne MacPherson.

Particularly strong hands-on support was forthcoming from the newspaper's incredibly dedicated staff members:

Lillian Vilborg MacPherson, during her three years as editor, had made a unique and lasting contribution to the preservation and perpetuation of Icelandic heritage.⁴ Her columns appeared regularly in the paper until February 2004, at which point Lillian retired due to ill health and died shortly thereafter. This was just as the campaign was getting underway. Lillian had been a major motivation for my agreeing to organize the fundraising campaign for *Lögberg-Heimskringla*. My close association and valued working relationship with her husband Lorne during the campaign and beyond was therefore particularly meaningful for both of us.

Steinþór Guðbjartson, arriving from Iceland in March of 2004, became the paper's new editor. By travelling

to Icelandic communities throughout Canada and the United States to obtain firsthand news and stories, he elevated the profile of the paper and brought attention to the campaign.

David Jón Fuller succeeded Steinþór as managing editor of the paper in August of 2005. He became an ex-officio member of the campaign team. David made sure that the campaign was given good coverage in the newspaper.

Audrey Kwasnica, the 'backbone' of *L-H* as its committed, seasoned business manager and computer guru, lent her expertise unstintingly to the campaign.

Karen Bowman, brought on later as the campaign committee's administrative assistant, set up a computer database that recorded and systematized for immediate recall the seemingly vast amount of text and figures generated by the campaign.

Catherine McConnell, *L-H's* advertising, production and marketing manager, was always available to share her considerable promotional and creative skills.

Robert Baker, an *L-H* Inc. board member, joined the campaign team in the final year. Bob re-energized the campaign, not only with his considerable knowledge and experience as a professional fundraiser, but with his energy, optimism and enthusiasm. He contributed in many ways to the final push that resulted in the campaign's ultimate success.

By January 2005, the emphasis of the campaign was on obtaining leadership gifts. To begin, however, every member on the *L-H* Inc. Board³ made a monetary contribution. Clearly identified benefactors are essential for any major fundraising campaign to succeed and ours was no exception. Its lead donors were Mrs. Irene Eggertson, Gordon Reykdal, and Donald K. Johnson. As the

campaign got underway, the government of Iceland generously made add-ons to its annual grants, as well as a one-time sum to Lögberg-Heimskringla Inc. Don Johnson led the campaign across the finish line with a matching-fund grant that he initiated and co-sponsored with Iceland's largest bank, Landsbanki.



PHOTO : DAVID JÓN FULLER / COURTESY OF LÖGBERG-HEIMSKRINGLA

**Front: Dr. Ken, Donald Johnson, Björgólfur Guðmundsson (Landsbanki) and Gordon Reykdal
Rear: David Gislason and Curtis Olafson**

As a result of quiet but vigorous fundraising based on relationship-building, generous support for *Lögberg-Heimskringla* via the Future Fund Capital Campaign had soon been pledged or received in various amounts and forms. By July 2005 the campaign had surpassed its goal of 1.5 million dollars, and reached \$1,618,600. Of this, \$600,000 went into the Endowment Fund invested at the Winnipeg Foundation. The \$8,900 donated by L-H's U.S. subscribers has stayed with L-H USA Inc. to support its operations.

A total of 952 individuals made donations, the large majority being subscribers to the paper. Another 575

individuals were honoured by donations given in their memory. The names of 1531 individuals in the Icelandic community, past and present, who were associated with gifts to the campaign are on permanent record on a beautiful donor wall that was unveiled at a reception commemorating the 50th anniversary of amalgamation of *Lögberg* and *Heimskringla* held in L-H's offices on November 13, 2009. This wall was created and installed by John Henry Creations, and involved countless hours of proofreading and re-proofreading of Icelandic spellings, particularly by David Jón Fuller and Karen Bowman, to ensure complete accuracy of each and every name!

The development of strong working relationships with other Icelandic community organizations had been an important component of the Capital Campaign:

The Icelandic National League of North America was the first – and became the most – comprehensive affiliation, beginning with Walter Sopher's installation as president at the league's annual meeting at Hecla, Manitoba, in 2004. His immediate personal and enthusiastic commitment to both organizations made for a great synergy thereafter. Walter became a member of the Campaign Cabinet, and later a member of the L-H Inc. Board of Directors. The INL's vice-president, Garry Oddleifson, later its president, headed up a liaison team that visited several Interlake chapters, linking them with the public phase of the campaign.

Sandra Sigurdson and Tim Arnason, both past presidents of the Icelandic Festival Committee, were instrumental in facilitating a valuable reciprocal arrangement that greatly increased awareness of *Lögberg-Heimskringla* and the campaign during the Festival's 2005 Íslendingadagurinn.

Lorna Tergesen, managing editor of the *Icelandic Canadian* (now the *Icelandic Connection*) published an article in the 2005 fall issue about *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, written by the newspaper's then assistant editor and layout editor David Jón Fuller. As well, space was donated in the same issue to publicize the campaign.

Curtis Olafson and the Icelandic Communities Association of North Dakota, of which Curtis was founder and president, became strong supporters of *Lögberg-Heimskringla* and its Capital Campaign. In their June 2005 newsletter, the members of the association enclosed and sent out to over 700 households a promotional flyer publicizing the Future Fund Capital Campaign, along with information about the *Lögberg-Heimskringla* newspaper, and a subscription form and reply envelope – all at no cost to *L-H*! Garry Oddleifson, as a member of the Campaign committee and vice-president of INL of NA, collaborated with Curtis in this support project.

As an initiative of the campaign, *Lögberg-Heimskringla* Inc. established a U.S. charitable corporation, *Lögberg-Heimskringla USA Inc.*, based in Edinburg, North Dakota. L-H Inc. board

president Grant Stefanson and Curtis Olafson negotiated a process by which U.S. tax receipts could be issued from this entity. A number of generous donations, not only to the Capital Campaign but also to the newspaper itself, were received in this way from U.S. citizens of Icelandic descent.

In yet another campaign initiative, *Lögberg-Heimskringla* Inc. signed an Agency Fund Agreement with the Winnipeg Foundation to create a *Lögberg-Heimskringla* Endowment Fund, a key objective of the Future Fund Capital Campaign. The principal in the Endowment Fund remains permanently with the Foundation, while its annual income henceforth provides quarterly payments to L-H Inc. This beneficial association with the Winnipeg Foundation was facilitated by



PHOTO COURTESY OF LÖGBERG-HEIMSKRINGLA

Dr. Ken and Grant Stefanson, President of *Lögberg-Heimskringla* at the unveiling of the Future Fund donor wall located in the *L-H* office

Cathy Auld, director of Donor Relations and corporate secretary of the Foundation, and Bill Perlmutter, L-H Inc. Board treasurer. Oskar Sigvaldason made the inaugural donation to launch this fund.

Responding to the campaign, the government of Iceland provided financial support for the creation and perpetuation of a digital library of all issues of *Heimskringla*, *Lögberg*, and *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, past, present and future. By facilitating access through rapid retrieval by date, topic, individual name, etc., this archival information is now available to English-speaking readers and researchers via the Internet. This gift was furnished in the form of a grant to Lögberg-Heimskringla Inc. and was in addition to special grants over a five-year period to assist the newspaper in its ongoing operations during a difficult period.

After establishing a Winnipeg location for his company, The Cash Store, Gordon Reykdal of Edmonton arranged for part of its space to be provided rent-

free to the newspaper over the five-year period of his lease. This was later extended to eight years. In the fall of 2004 *Lögberg-Heimskringla* moved into spacious new office facilities at 283 Portage Avenue in Winnipeg. These new premises are an incredible improvement over its previous cramped quarters and have immensely increased *L-H's* capacity to produce a consistently high-quality publication.

The Future Fund Capital Campaign not only rescued Lögberg-Heimskringla Inc. financially at a time when its continued existence was threatened, but it became a catalyst for significant developments and relationships that are a lasting legacy.

1. The Future Fund Capital Campaign Cabinet:

Tim Arnason (Winnipeg), Harold Bjarnason (Gimli), Neil Bardal (Gimli), David Gislason (Arborg), Ron Goodman

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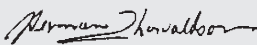
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(Calgary), Don Johnson (Toronto), Janis Johnson, (Gimli and Ottawa), Joe Laxdal (Yorkton), Curtis Olafson (Edinburg, N.D.), Eric Olafson (Salt Lake City), Gordon Reykdal (Edmonton), Tim Samson (Winnipeg), Eric Sigurdson (St. Louis), Oskar Sigvaldason (Oakville and Toronto), Ernest Stefanson (Gimli), Arni Thorsteinson (Winnipeg), Ken Thorlakson (Chair).

2. The Future Fund Capital Campaign Administrative Committee:

From the L-H Inc. Board: Bob Baker, Vi Hilton, Garry Oddleifson, Bill Perlmutter, Evelyn Thorvaldson, Grant Stephanson (*L-H* President, ex officio).

From the *L-H* Staff: David Jón Fuller (editor), Karen Bowman (campaign administration assistant), Audrey Kwasnica (*L-H* business manager).

From the Icelandic community: Lorne MacPherson, Ken Thorlakson (Chair).

3. Board of Lögberg-Heimskringla Inc. during the Future Fund Capital Campaign:

Grant Stefanson (president), Ragnar Bergman, Julianna Bjornson, Vi Hilton, Elva Jónasson, Joe Laxdal, Bill Perlmutter, Walter Sopher, Ernest Stefanson, Kris Stefanson, Evelyn Thorvaldson, Brian Tomasson.

4. Lillian's Book

Through the stimulus of the Future Fund Campaign, Lögberg-Heimskringla Inc. published a book called *Harðfiskur and Skyr: Memories and Stories of an Amma and Editor*, a collection of the articles and editorials that Lillian Vilborg MacPherson wrote for the newspaper during the three years she served as editor. Her writings reflect her broad range of interests and illustrate her passion for her Icelandic heritage. Many of the stories relate to Icelandic culture and to the early days of Icelandic settlement in North America. Unfortunately, Lillian did not live to see the book in print. She died of cancer in April 2004. Lillian's childhood friend, the late Joe Laxdal, who at the time was a member of the board of *L-H*, oversaw the book's publication. Copies are still available for sale at the office of *Lögberg-Heimskringla*.



**Atli Ásmundsson,
Neil Bardal and
Almar Grímsson**

Special Note:

Telling the stories of the two Icelandic community campaigns is by way of recognizing and saying a personal thank you to all who contributed inspiration, time, effort and money to them. These accounts include mention of many individuals who played central, defining and/or continuing roles during these two pivotal undertakings. Everyone, in whatever way they provided support, were essential to the successful outcome of the campaigns and toward the preservation and enhancement of two valuable Icelandic community assets.

During the campaigns as well as the years that followed, relationships strengthened between Iceland and people of Icelandic descent in North America, new links were created and

developed and much of value to the community was accomplished. That all of this came about and in the ways that it did could not have been without the inspiring presence and quiet effective actions of three remarkable yet unassuming people who were with us in the right place at the right time: the late Neil Bardal, the heart and soul of the Icelandic community; Atli Ásmundsson, our wise friend and untiring advocate, the Consul General for Iceland in Manitoba; and Almar Grímsson, peripatetic creator of the Snorri Program, president of his country's Icelandic National League and who made us all feel like family. We are grateful for their friendship, support and good counsel and for the vital and unique roles they have played in our community.

Tjörnin

by Caroline Purchase

Summary of a Forthcoming Novel

Murder is almost unheard of in Iceland. Against the backdrop of Iceland's impending economic crash, a woman's body is discovered in a copse of trees beside Tjörnin, a small lake located in between downtown Reykjavík and the University of Iceland. While Detective Kristján Þorleiksson and the police push on to solve Eileen Bjarnason's murder, the Canadian victim's husband, colleagues, and neighbours resist the investigation to uncover the secrets they each possess for reasons of personal gain, shame and naivety. Their zealous protection of information results in compounding tragedies. Two foreigners, both Americans, are killed consecutively

followed by the attempted murder of newcomer Canadian, Kaja Jonson.

Into an almost-innocent society, Iceland's economic excess has introduced issues of drug trafficking, prostitution, anti-foreigner sentiment and more. Each thread Þorleiksson pulls snags further ones. The tales of Stefán Sigurðsson, Eileen and Kaja's department head; Eirík Bjarnason, Eileen's husband; Belinda and Jason Gritman, Eileen's neighbours; and Jóna Dagbjártsdóttir, Kaja's second cousin; and other characters are woven throughout the novel. Amidst the investigation, major characters Kristján Þorleiksson and Kaja Jonson are pulled back into their respective pasts and must address them in order to proceed with their own lives.

Two excerpts

Almost midnight on Sunday and Kristján Þorleiksson reclined under his duvet with pillows cushioning his back, a mangled hardcover edition of *War and Peace* open on his lap, and a ceramic cup of tea on his bedside table. He kicked off the cover, rearranged his pillows, took a sip of too minty tea and grimaced.

The wind whipped up and smells of fall decay pushed through the open

window. He heard faint scraping and sprung out of bed to watch the gusts of wind force a lone birch's branches to strike the aluminum-sided house across the street. Mystery solved, he thought, smirking at his curiosity. He glanced at the novel on his bed, a remnant of his chosen and forsaken life's path.

Tomorrow promised a fresh start to the year for professors and students

when classes resumed at the University of Iceland. Instead of lecturing to eager new faces, he'd be reviewing weekend misdemeanours with his detectives at the lögreglustöð, the police station.

Þorleiksson breathed in the tang of autumn while memories swirled around like dead leaves caught by the wind. He'd been a literature student at university excited by the prospect of graduate school and becoming a professor. Then Herdís' life was snuffed out in Boston.

He clamped his jaw.

The shrill ring of the phone startled him. Reluctantly he picked up the receiver, knowing from the late hour it was work calling.

"There's a man on the other line who says he's found a dead woman," a female voice announced excitedly. "Don't know where in the manual it says how to deal with this, sir."

Þorleiksson could picture the new receptionist with the multi-coloured hair. Her name? Next time, when she was calmer, he'd speak to her about the importance of identifying herself. "I'll take the call, takk." Her name came to him. "Sigrún, have you sent an officer to the location?"

"I'll dispatch one now," she replied. "Here's the man."

He drummed his fingers on the night table, waiting for the call to connect. He heard a click. "Detective Þorleiksson here."

"Halló?" said a quavering bass voice. "I, I mean my dog just found a dead body as I was taking her for a walk around the lake and she ran into the bushes and started barking and another guy came along asking me if I had seen a woman and the dog wouldn't shut up and she came running out of the bushes and ran back in and the man and I went to look at what she was barking at and it's a dead woman

and the man says it's his wife and I don't know what to do and—"

"Sir," Þorleiksson said firmly, "listen to me. What's your name and where are you?"

"Leifur Magnússon. I'm by the lake, by Tjörninn."

"Where exactly?"

"The west side. You know, where the trees are?"

Þorleiksson knew the spot. There weren't many trees in Reykjavík, for that matter in all of Iceland.

"Stay put. Don't touch anything. And keep the dog on a leash."

"It's too late. My dog didn't do anything wrong, but the husband was shaking her. He wouldn't believe she was dead." Magnússon paused. "He sat down on the ground and held and rocked her. I left him alone when he started crying."

"Go back and stay with him. An officer will be there any minute and I'll be there soon." Þorleiksson hung up, puzzling through the facts. Why was her body in the bushes?

He dialed the lögreglustöð. "Sigrún? Send a medical examiner and forensics to the southwest side of Tjörninn. The witness you spoke to, Leifur Magnússon, is there. So is the dead woman's husband. Call Detective Egilsson and whoever's next on rotation."

In his fifteen years as a cop, he'd investigated few suspicious deaths. People didn't get murdered in Iceland.

Kaja Jonson studied the bleak and foreboding sky from her new office at the University of Iceland. How fitting, she thought. Suits the rest of this god-forsaken place. Not even a week in Reykjavík and she wanted to go home.

Startled by a sharp knock on the door, she turned to see the chairman of literature, in one long stride, enter the room. With those long legs, he could broad jump, she thought, and then admonished herself, for Sigurðsson supported hiring candidates from outside Iceland, whereas many faculty members did not. If it weren't for him, she wouldn't have this job.

Without even a *góðan daginn*, Stefán Sigurðsson said, "Why did you move the desk, Kaja? It's not welcoming to face away from the door."

"I like to admire the view."

Kaja and Stefán silently stared at each other. She broke eye contact first, bowed her head, and thought longingly of the panoramic vista from her apartment in Vancouver. Many times she had gazed out at the expansive ocean, the North Shore Mountains, and the lush canopy of trees in Stanley Park. In addition to pleasing her eye, the view had calmed and inspired her. She glanced up, waiting for Stefán to speak.

"You'll now teach three courses this term instead of two," he said. "Your first class is this afternoon. Since the subject matter is one you're familiar with, I'm sure you'll be fine."

"Pardon? My contract stated I'd have two courses only."

"I know, Kaja, but under the circumstances, we need your help." Stefán's face coloured and his jaw became more rigid. "Your salary will be adjusted."

"What circumstances?"

"Please, it's a private matter. I'm asking for your co-operation." He paused. "Professor Bjarnason, who taught Victorian literature for years," he looked down at his shoes, "she ... she passed away unexpectedly last night."

"How?"

"All I know is she was out running."

"But —"

"Victorian Lit is reputedly your area of expertise and you're available now," Stefán said. "We can talk more later." He stepped forward and dropped a file on her desk. "These are the notes I found in Eileen's office. Please go see Tinna, my assistant, for the course outline and material."

Before Kaja got a word in, he said, "If you'll excuse me, I'm late for a meeting." He left, closing the door behind him.

Kaja sat there, stunned. Last week at the faculty meeting, he had introduced her to all the professors. They'd been polite but not friendly, except for Eileen.

"I'm so excited, a fellow Canadian," Eileen had said, and hugged her. "Stefán says you run. You must come out with us."

While glad for her warmth, Kaja noted the others' disapproval. A public display of affection, particularly towards a stranger, chafed against the Icelandic grain. At the time, she felt embarrassed. Now she was struck by Eileen's bravado.

She pictured Eileen's sparkling and intelligent hazel eyes, remembering the warmth in her voice: "If you feel like I did after I moved here from Winnipeg ten years ago, I imagine you're in shock."

When Kaja told her she had moved to Iceland on her own, Eileen replied, "At least I came with my Icelandic husband. We met at University of Manitoba." She touched Kaja's shoulder. "I trust you have some relatives or friends to help you through the adjustment."

Her chance to get to know Eileen was gone. Nor could she ask if Eileen had known her afa, her grandfather, who had taught Icelandic history at the University of Manitoba — until he died.

She rose from her desk and stood by the window, realizing that it wasn't Eileen's

death alone that made her sad. It fed into other losses she was experiencing. Breathe, breathe, breathe. Did Eileen have a heart attack? She looked the picture of health. Life didn't make much sense.

Kaja turned back to the pile of paper on her desk. She swore softly. Stefán didn't have to dump news like that, with little explanation. And she had let him get away with it.

Her anger turned into panic. This afternoon, how could she possibly be ready? She couldn't think on her feet. Preparation, a lot of preparation, was needed for her to feel comfortable teaching a class. She picked up Stefán's pile of paper. Another wave of anger washed over her. Now she'd miss her lunchtime run. She sighed, resigned to go after class ... if she survived it.

Kaja turned her attention back to the upcoming class. Thank God, Eileen was well organized. There was a reading list for the students, notes outlining the course, and, even better, detailed notes for the first month's lectures. Not so bad after all.

For the next two hours, Kaja familiarized herself with Eileen's material. The first novel was Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, one of her favourites. She grabbed it from her bookshelf, flipping through it to find passages to cite before realizing the page numbers in her older edition wouldn't correspond to those in the recommended edition. Most likely a copy of the newer text would be in Eileen Bjarnason's office. She decided to look. Besides, she had to see the departmental secretary. First she'd find Eileen's office and hope she didn't run into Stefán.

Kaja strode by the offices to the end of the hall. She ran down the stairs to the second floor where she was sure Eileen's office was located. It was no more hospitable looking than the third. Same

grey linoleum floors, whitewashed walls, and ceiling-mounted fluorescent lights. She scanned each office door until she found Eileen's office at the end of the hall to her right. To her surprise, the door was slightly ajar, not closed and unlocked as seemed to be the Icelandic custom. Kaja could hear the rustling of paper. She stood by the door, not sure what to do. Knocking softly on the door, she called out, "Hello?"

"Já?" a deep baritone voice answered.

"May I come in?" Kaja replied.

A dark-haired man with a wary expression swung the door partway open, blocking her view of the office. His blue eyes examined Kaja.



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Ghosts of Iceland

by Avery Simundsson

Talk of the supernatural inevitably leads the question “Do you believe in ghosts?” Whenever any of my university comrades broach this topic, I always forget how unique an upbringing I had compared to my fellow students at the University of Manitoba. Winnipeg is a multi-cultural city. We have a Chinatown, a Little Italy and St. Boniface among many other cultural niches. You can find a restaurant of almost any ethnicity in Winnipeg, from Kenyan to Laotian, to German, and everything in between, all at the click of the mouse using the magic of google. My hometown sits on the opposite spectrum consisting of Icelanders and Ukrainians whose families settled there during the great migration over a century ago. Our town wages a constant but comical rivalry between Ukrainians and Icelanders and if you aren’t one of the two, I don’t know how you put up with it.

I grew up on the Icelandic side of town in a district called Geysir. It is an area rich with Icelandic heritage and stories about the first Icelandic settlers held me with rapt fascination as a child. I grew up putting my shoe on the windowsill as Christmas neared in hopes that the elves would leave me treats. I clambered over rocks looking for those covered in lichen to sniff them and see if the elves were brewing tea that day. I spent hours fixing up what I thought were the homes of the “hidden people”, leaving them gifts that always magically disappeared the next day.

I was mesmerized by Grettir the Strong’s battle with spirits and clung speechless to my father upon hearing the tale of the deacon of Myrká. Now that I am all grown up, when the conversation turns to the supernatural, I still find myself somewhat surprised when someone asks me if I believe in ghosts. I always have the same answer: “Where I grew up, it wasn’t a question of whether or not you believed in ghosts. Just if you could see them.”

Icelanders have a compelling fascination with the supernatural and their centuries of literary works are prominent examples of this. The Sagas are teeming with characters having the second sight and there are almost as many supernatural characters as there are living ones. “Ghost stories” around the world refer to campfire thrillers and uncanny or unnatural encounters with what are perceived to be spirits of those who have passed on. But the ghosts of Icelandic ghost stories paint a far more colourful picture. These supernatural beings are wicked, kind, terrifying, placid, clever, stupid, and everything in between. They are a race of their own with various classifications for the many genres of otherworldly creatures. Some are helpful guardians, others revel in trickery and deceit. But in the sagas, all exist in this world and are no more unnatural than you or I.

Not only do Icelanders have a rich history of ghost stories, but second sight,

or a sixth sense, is a prominent trait in Icelandic bloodlines. I have numerous friends, relatives, and relatives of friends that claim to be able to read energies, or dream future events, or know of one who had passed on before being told. As a child, though I was always fascinated by these claims, I simply accepted them with very little thought about their validity, as my skepticism was ruled about by the commonplace of these claims. To me, the little people who lived out behind our cowshed were equal playmates to my siblings. Perhaps even better as they were much quieter and always agreed with me.

I sometimes wonder why Icelanders are prone to these characteristics and though I have never been one to claim them beyond my childhood imagination, I have had several interesting events in my life that make me wonder. While travelling in Indonesia, I was taking a Batik art class. One of the instructor's friends watched me at my work for a few minutes before he spoke. "You have an aura," he said. "It is very strong and good. You are lucky." Another time in Winnipeg, I was taking an instructional martial arts class and working on creating "energy balls" with our hands and minds. The instructor walked around the circle watching each individual. He stopped at me in my clumsy attempts. He took my hands and looked at them. "You've done this before," he said, even though I hadn't. I've always found that I seem to think on very similar brain waves to those around me. I say things at the same time as other people or I tend to be thinking exactly what they say when they say it. Once, when at a youth conference of 300 people, we were watching an entertainer do mind tricks. After asking everyone to focus on their names tags, he picked me

out of the crowd and told everyone my first and last name, and exactly what I was thinking. He told me my mind was open and the images I sent to him were clear as daylight.

Maybe that's the case for all Icelanders. Perhaps the way in which our brains are wired is such that they do not function in a closed circuit and can easily shift frequencies allowing us to feel, see, and smell things that others can't. The brain is an extremely complex entity and we have very little understanding of how it actually works. Perhaps we are genetically able to open or reroute these pathways much easier than others, explaining the nature of "inheriting" these supernatural traits. The method of circuitry in our brains determines how we think, whether we have an aptitude for arithmetic or literature, whether we can react to an emergency and whether we can athletically coordinate our minds and bodies. Circuitry may also dictate what we can experience, and the levels of consciousness we can have in our own world and others. But then again, perhaps it is little more than the superstitious nature of a culture that developed in a land so harsh and unpredictable that only those who were already dead could survive in.

Either way, ghosts are an integral part of Icelandic heritage and no matter what happens to me, my childhood belief in ghosts and elves will never really disappear. I'd welcome them into my town anytime – someone needs to keep those Ukrainians in line.

Sula Johnson

by Kristy Hoffman

Reprinted with permission, from the
winter 2010 issue of SANDBOX magazine

Sula Johnson graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Communication at University of Winnipeg and Red River Community College with a major in Public Relations. Her Afi and Amma, the late Joseph and Metta Johnson were formerly from Eddystone, MB. Presently Sula is the layout editor at Löberg-Heimskringla.

A little less glamorous and back to the basics – well, that is one way to describe the events of the past year in the life of Sula Johnson, a former stylistic contributor to SANDBOX magazine.

“Over the year I have worked to finish my degree, so I have not been left with a lot of time to work creatively,” she explains, noting that glamorous and creative endeavors have taken a back seat to tasks of a rather basic nature, including that of developing a philosophical perspective on her surroundings.

“No parties, no magazines, nothing cool,” she says with a smile. “I am really trying to think about who and what I want to be in the world.”

Now a recent graduate of the Creative Communications program, Johnson has continued her involvement in Triple Threat, the Winnipeg-based promotion and event planning business. She is recognized alongside Melissa Trainor and Niki Trosky as the masterminds behind such cleverly-themed celebrations as 2009’s “Down the Rabbit Hole”, as well as their most recent, “Cake or Death”.

While the event planning scene may very well be an early indication of Johnson’s professional character, it was on a recent

trip to Germany that she was given the opportunity to explore an aspect of her personal identity that had previously been unfamiliar – if not entirely unknown.

“I went to Germany for a little while with my biological father.”

She describes the distant nature of their relationship and briefly reminisces about meeting an entirely new side of her family during her trip to Europe.

“It is for this reason that I have not been involved creatively in any recent works.”

Once again back in Winnipeg, she is eager to apply the fresh creative perspective she acquired through what has proven to be a year of personal evolution.

“I have learned so much since contributing to SANDBOX. I am ready to combine my personal development with my creativity.”

Although no specific projects have been planned as of yet, she speaks of her intention to focus on fostering her creativity, while describing a willingness to follow any opportunity it presents.

“Whether it be through a visual medium or the written word, I am very much looking forward to expressing myself, to setting free all that I have

learned over the past year.”

When mentioning the time she had spent with SANDBOX, a chatter of lively recollection is evoked.

“Everyone at the magazine is involved because they really love creating, you know, the atmosphere and the environment of it all,” she begins with enthusiasm. “It is a very positive collaboration and I loved meeting people in the city who have the talent and drive to tell stories through the means of all kinds of mediums.”

“I was [fortunate to have] the opportunity to be a part of it both behind and before the camera,” she explains in reference to her time as a stylist and subject of “Three Is A Charm”; an article appearing in the May issue that profiled the aforementioned event planning business, Triple Threat.

Here and now, Sula Johnson is between a wise past and a future, that, while vague, will likely be rich with



PHOTO BY LISA VARGA

Sula Johnson

artistry. Throughout her accomplishments of a glamorous, creative, and basic nature, there remains a single constant: she is making her way.

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POETRY

The Sprite of Hecla Island

by Carol Gardarsson

She is wild and untamed, a most beautiful place,
For no man has the courage to alter her face;
Like a woman so lovely this island can seem
But her nature, like wind, can be wanton and free.

Oh, the warmth and sunlight that each summertime brings
Make her seem quite as graceful as birds on the wing.
But in Autumn, beware! for like leaves her mask drops
Her true nature revealed, she then scorns summer's props!

It is then, in the fall, when the wind shrieks and roars,
When the lightning and thunder drive waves to her shores,
That the spirit of Hecla, once gentle, so tame,
Takes a form more befitting her passionate name!

It was autumn, quite late, when he stood on her shore
And was drawn by her beauty as never before;
Though summer still clung like a torn, tattered dress,
Her stark splendor, revealed, was enough to impress!

There he stood, and in awe, for to him she displayed
All her power, her passion, which others dismayed;
Yes, he saw the waves churn, heard the groan of the trees,
They were wild in attempts to stave off winter's freeze!

The wind, mad and wanton, was perfumed with ozone
From fierce lightning which hammered into Hecla's home;
The thunder, like laughter, rolled crashingly by
So loudly it made the wind's scream seem a sigh.
And dead leaves, now like birds, swirled and took to the air,

Sped like fowl to be snatched by cold whitecaps, out there.
Yes, he saw and he heard and he felt Nature's hand
Which enforced all the rights to young Hecla's command;
It was there, on her shores, her majestic domain
That he saw Hecla's spirit – the ghost-maid she became!

Do wild roses have beauty? For that beauty was hers!
And the grace of lush streams was the grace that was hers;
Her long hair was as soft as the down of foxtail,
Her hands were spring blossoms, pink seashells for nails.

But her eyes were as deep as the lake round her shore
And they shone with such life as he'd not seen before;
They were grey, in a flash, like Spring's dark, leaden clouds
Then back, once again, to her green summery shroud.

Did he fear? Did he plead for the soul that was his?
He did not, for no perilous thought stained his bliss.
Instead, on his knees, like a slave to his master
He watched her approach, felt his blood coursing faster!

Her gown flowed like wind, he believed that it was
For she moved like a shadow without a step's pause;
And he waited, enrapt, for this queen's royal touch –
At that moment, you see, he'd have died for that much!

As young Hecla approached, as though borne on the breeze,
Long hair snaked on the wind, and then coiled round her knees.
And her glorious face was alight with a smile –
She was pleased, this young maid, with her toy – for a while!

Had he known at that time how her face could grow dark!
How her glance, now so soft, could be savage and stark;
How young Hecla, now framed in her soft, flowing mane
Could entrance a man's soul – and then drive him insane!

But her smile – oh, that smile! brought a lifetime of joy
And, at present, young Hecla was pleased with her toy –
Yes, he felt what she wanted, his will undermined –
Like a fly in a web, he lost all track of time!

As a snake, with its prey, can somehow hypnotize,
 So young Hecla held him with the power of her eyes;
 He knew, with his folly, he should be ashamed
 But as Hecla drew near, his voice called out her name.

There are sea-maids, know sailors, who sing haunting songs
 For the sound drives men mad so they flock there in throngs;
 And although these old seamen know what peril is wrought
 Those sweet maids beckon sailors – til they've crashed on the rocks!

It was just like those sailors that he came to her –
 He'd no will of his own – no, he couldn't deter!
 And thusly, together, these two intertwined
 Both wandering her island, to danger so blind.

When he whispered endearments to her haunting face
 She smiled, eyes dancing, and returned his embrace.
 Time was a stranger he knew not, or cared,
 Yes, even to think of such things he'd not dared!
 His jealous young Hecla possessed all his soul
 Though he couldn't dream then, of a more wondrous goal!

Ah, but man in all truth is quite tender and fraile –
 Though his will would go on, his poor body would fail;
 Although to her purpose, his love was so blind
 It was Hecla's desire that their souls should entwine!

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And so, on she drew him, though his weak body strained
 And the thistle and tree-bark were, with his blood, stained.
 Yes, that ghostly maid's wish was that he should remain
 To share. with young Hecla, her wintry domain!

How long had he wandered with that wood-nymph soul
 He couldn't recall – he was much later told.
 They say when they found him, he pleaded release,
 That he begged Hecla, leave him! relinquish his peace!

For in winter she's barren, that isle on the lake,
 And companionship's something she's entitled to take.
 And so I must warn you, all men, once again –
 Steer clear of the isle that is Hecla's domain!

Her haunted soul wanders a short time each fall
 To seek her companion –
 Beware! to us all!

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WHAT THE BEAR SAID
Skald Tales from New Iceland
 W. D. Valgardson

SHORT STORIES BY
 W. D. VALGARDSON

Book Reviews

Missy's Midnight Caper

by Rosa Bjarnason Kontogianni
& Paul Bjarnason



Reviewed by Norma Guttormsson
Rose Flower Books, Vancouver, 2010
Hardcover, full-colour – 32 pages
ISBN 978-0-9866292-0-4

Music and friends – what more could anyone ask for? This charming story will delight readers of all ages. A granddaughter and her grandfather have created a sweet tale about their favourite feline friend. In the story, Missy lives with her owners and expects them to retire early so that she can do what cats love to do – go out at night. For Missy, midnight

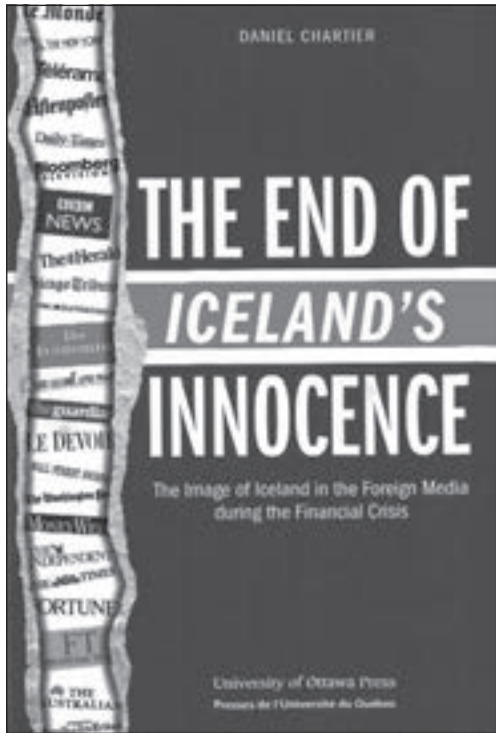
is her hour for adventure. She has a secret. It unfolds as each page turns until the surprise is revealed. The inspiration of the young author will be readily appreciated. Drawing from experiences that are meaningful for her at the age of seven, she imagines a social life for Missy, her teddy bear and other stuffed animals. Do they have eyes of their own? The animals were very special for my granddaughter, Sophia, when she read the book. Missy's *Midnight Caper* will be enjoyed by readers who love cats or play an accordion or another instrument. An original melody with words is included and every page features a colourful illustration. Although this picture storybook has been written for children, we can all join in the fun. What did I learn from my encounter with Missy's nocturnal caper? Simple pleasures are treasured.



The End of Iceland's Innocence

The Image of Iceland in the Foreign Media During the Financial Crisis

by Daniel Chartier



Reviewed by David Gislason
University of Ottawa Press/Presses de
l'Université du Québec, 2010 – 240 pages
ISBN 978-0-7766-0760-3

The End of Iceland's Innocence, The Image of Iceland in the Foreign Media During the Financial Crisis, a book by Daniel Chartier was published in 2010 by the University of Ottawa Press, along with co-publisher, Presses de l'Université du

Québec. The book is an English language translation of *La spectaculaire deroute de l'Islande, l'image de l'Islande Durant la crise économique* de 2008.

Daniel Chartier is a professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal and director of the International Laboratory for the Comparative Multidisciplinary Study of Representations of the North. (Who knew that such an institute existed?!)

His book looks at how the image of Iceland has been affected by the rise and fall of its private banks, notably Landsbanki, Kaupping and the Glitnir bank.

As the title suggests, this book is essentially a compilation of the coverage given to Iceland's financial crisis of 2008, primarily by nine leading foreign newspapers : *The New York Times* of New York, USA; *Le Devoir* of Quebec, Canada; *The International Herald Tribune* of Paris, France; *The Financial Times*, of London, U.K; *The Herald* of Glasgow, U.K.; *The Globe and Mail* of Toronto, Canada; *The Australian* of Sydney, Australia; *Le Monde* of Paris, France; and *The Guardian* of London, U.K.

This listing of well respected international media journals is a potent illustration of the old adage, "be careful what you wish for"! Iceland, with its unique language, small homogenous population, incomparable landscape, pristine pastures and artistic excellence in many fields has long sought for attention to these and other national assets from the foreign media. Tourism has been carefully developed and

marketed and become a thriving industry. Upscale markets are developing a taste for high-priced lamb, fattened on the summer pastures of the unspoiled highlands.

In 2008 the media turned its attention to Iceland as never before, but not to extol the virtues of the landscape of the country or the artistic excellence of its people. They sensed that all was not well in the financial sector, and nothing draws the interest of the media like the smell of trouble in the banks. The feeding frenzy began in earnest when the British Government invoked its anti-terrorism act to freeze the assets of Landsbanki and the Kaupping bank in the U.K.

This book is largely composed of articles from 2008, as markets and bond rating agencies began to get nervous about the affairs of the Icelandic banks, and, inevitably, Iceland itself. The *Telegraph* likened the country to “one big toxic hedge fund”! It goes on through 2009 and the upheavals that led to the fall of Prime Minister Geir Haarde’s government. The final entry in the chronology of events is dated January 5th 2010, the day that Iceland’s President, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson vetoed the Government’s IceSave bill, legislation based on a negotiated settlement with the governments of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

For those with a deep affection for, and family roots that reach back to Iceland, this book is not an easy or entertaining read. As the author points out, little distinction was made by the foreign media between the financial institutions, the political parties, or for that matter, the people themselves. In a country as small as Iceland, the lines are blurred. Nor does the book, to any degree, make an effort to place responsibility or blame for the

demise of the banks, beyond highlighting the gross excess and recklessness of the new entrepreneurs, as they expanded offshore and used the resources of the banks to go on an unprecedented buying binge. Iceland’s “New Vikings”, financial marauders, were out to make their mark, as quoted from the *Dallas Morning News*:

Over the last six years, a group of about a dozen young, U.S. educated financiers took Iceland on a Viking voyage of acquisitions, grabbing airlines, banks, mortgage lenders and securities traders from Texas to Hong Kong.

And later, also from the *Dallas Morning News* on Dec. 10th, 2009:

The Viking financiers have sought refuge abroad. ‘Their public relations experts say rehabilitating their images will have to wait until the financial blood-letting stops.’

This book does not purport to be an accurate analysis of events leading up to, and following the October crisis. It does state that, for most of the outside world, media reports are the primary way through which Iceland as a whole will be viewed and that its reputation as a utopian island nation has been badly tarnished. The newspapers question the adequacy of regulation in the Icelandic banking arena. In the euphoria that gripped the nation during the heady days of easy credit and low interest rates based on foreign denominated funds, where were the regulators? In *Njáls Saga*, the lawspeaker, Njáll Thorgeirsson quotes an old Nordic saying, *Með lögum skal land byggja, en með ólögum eyða*, “With laws shall the land be built, but with lawlessness laid waste”.

What does become clear is that Iceland’s reputation has been damaged by the reckless excesses of the “New Vikings”, and its financial affairs will not soon be restored to good health. Icelanders are bitter, the Vikings have departed and they

are left to clean house and restore order – left to restore a shattered image in the eyes of a world which knows them only through what they read in their newspapers. The question we are left with is, “who will pay, and what price can be attributed to a nation’s reputation and integrity?” In the spring of 2011 we still await the answer to that question. A second attempt to resolve the IceSave issue has again been vetoed by the President, and as before, turned down in a national referendum. Interestingly, the foreign press quoted here does not delve

into the value of the banks’ assets frozen by the U.K. Government, or any pledged as security by the high-flying investors.

In spite of the fact that this book deals with a very painful period in Iceland’s history, it does so with some sensitivity. While it leaves many questions unanswered, it provides a broad sweep of events and of the people at the centre of Iceland’s financial debacle.

The author dedicates the book to: “My Icelandic Friends”.

Kingdom of Trolls

by Rae Bridgman

Reviewed by Heiða Simundsson
Sybertooth Inc., 2011
Children’s paperback – 294 pages
ISBN 978-0986497414



Follow Wil and Sophie on an adventure to Iceland with Rae Bridgman’s new book, *Kingdom of Trolls*. Learn about crystal balls, rune stones, trolls, ghosts and some rather tasteful museums in Iceland. With a book so full of mystery, folklore beings and “galdur” there is no better setting than Iceland.

This is Wil and Sophie’s fourth adventure brought on by a mysterious unbeknownst organization called the Serpent’s Chain. Wil and Sophie are connected to this organization through the black medallion worn around Wil’s neck and through both their deceased sets of parents; however, these two children are very much in the dark as to how all the puzzle pieces in their lives fit together.

They have very little information about the history or background of themselves and the situation they are currently in. So while they are busy having adventures and fouting foul plans, supposedly laid out by the Serpent's Chain, they are also always garnering pieces of information about the Chain and their parents' links to it. In *Kingdom of Trolls*, there is also the underlying, rippling, confusing, emotional question of whether or not the chain is as evil as they first believed.

Picking up this book, it is a little hard to follow some of the basic structures of the world Bridgman has created in this series, although this may be remedied by reading the previous books. The novel has an unoriginal "children detectives" theme to it, although the magical element does set it apart from others. One critic

compared it to the Harry Potter series and I can see that there are similar elements - such as the deceased parent(s) of the main child character(s), the hidden magical community interacting with unsuspecting non-magical people on a day-to-day basis, and the spontaneous accidental danger that the characters find themselves in, but the comparison stops there. Although well researched and written, Bridgman lacks J.K. Rowling's talent for bringing the characters to life on the page. And as much as Sophie's glasses changing colour according to her mood is a creative, fun and original detail, Bridgman's imagined magical world isn't as clearly defined or as interesting as compared to the one Harry Potter lives in, and therefore I found the book not quite as engrossing.

The book is punctuated by very short chapters which makes it easy to read when you have a few spare minutes here and there. It is a book that I think would be more involving if you have read the prequels, although it is enjoyable on its own. For anyone that enjoys a novel involving a little mystery, a little fact, a little humour, and a little bit magic and folklore all mixed together, pick up *Kingdom of Trolls*. I am at least curious now if the museum featured in the book, the one containing only male... specimens, truly exists or not... only in Iceland.



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Contributors

GARRY ODDLEIFSON To understand how involved in the Canadian Icelandic community one only needs to know how many boards Garry Oddleifson has served or serves on. In Toronto, he was the President of INL Club, 1996-97. Once in Manitoba he has assisted the fund raising committee of the VIP for the Icelandic Department of MB and *Lögberg-Heimskringla*. He serves on the Frón Club, Betel Board, Canada Iceland Foundation and the Icelandic National League of NA.

KEVIN JON JOHNSON B.A. (Honours); B.Ed.; M.A. lives with his Japanese wife, Tamami Maeda, their son Go and daughter Juli in Sakai. Kevin teaches at Osaka YMCA International School where he also serves as coordinator of the Saturday School and the WASC Self-Study.

THOR RICHARDSON won the Manitoba Historical Society's Young Historians award in 2005 for his research paper on New Iceland.

CAROLINE PURCHASE is a former Winnipegger of Icelandic descent. Her afi, Wilhelm Kristjanson, was a founding editor of *The Icelandic Canadian* and her amma was a fjallkona in 1966. From her afi and amma Caroline inherited a love of and fascination for all things Icelandic. She is a dedicated traveller to Iceland.

AVERY SIMUNDSSON grew up on a mixed farm just north of Arborg and is currently entering her third year of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Manitoba. Though she should spend more time studying, she keeps herself busy with the activities of the faculty student council, juggling club, and elaborate cooking experiments which she tests on her three roommates. To date, they are still all alive and well.

CAROL GARDARSSON has successfully self-published a four-book historical fiction series based on fact, entitled *Brewing Evil*. Currently she is working on the fifth book in the series and has other books in the works, including an anthology of her poetry entitled *Tales of the Interlake*. The rugged beauty of Hekla Island inspired her poem.

DAVID GISLASON was born and raised on a farm in the Geysir area near Arborg, Manitoba and made farming there his lifelong career. His interest in poetry and the Icelandic language led to the publication in 2010 of his book of poetry, *The Fifth Dimension*, largely in translation from Icelandic. David has had an on-going interest in things Icelandic, leading to his being awarded Iceland's prestigious *Knights' Cross, Order of the Falcon*, in 2000.

NORMA GUTTORMSSON, M.Ed., is a second generation Icelandic Canadian. She is the daughter of the late Dr. Pétur Guttormsson and Salín Reykdal. Norma is a retired ESL instructor living in North Vancouver. She has four children and four grandchildren.

HEIDA SIMUNDSSON grew up on a farm near Arborg where she has frequent opportunities to connect to her Icelandic-Canadian heritage. She is a recent B.Sc. B.Ed. grad and is a supply teacher in Evergreen School Division. She relishes in the fact that she is a farm kid at heart.



The Back Page

The Male Voice Choir, Jökul, from Höfn in Hornaförður entertained in Manitoba and Saskatchewan delighting all those that heard them. Their director is Johann Moravek and the pianist is Gudlaug Hestnes. In Saskatchewan they played their accordions for a country dance, much to the enjoyment of all.



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