

ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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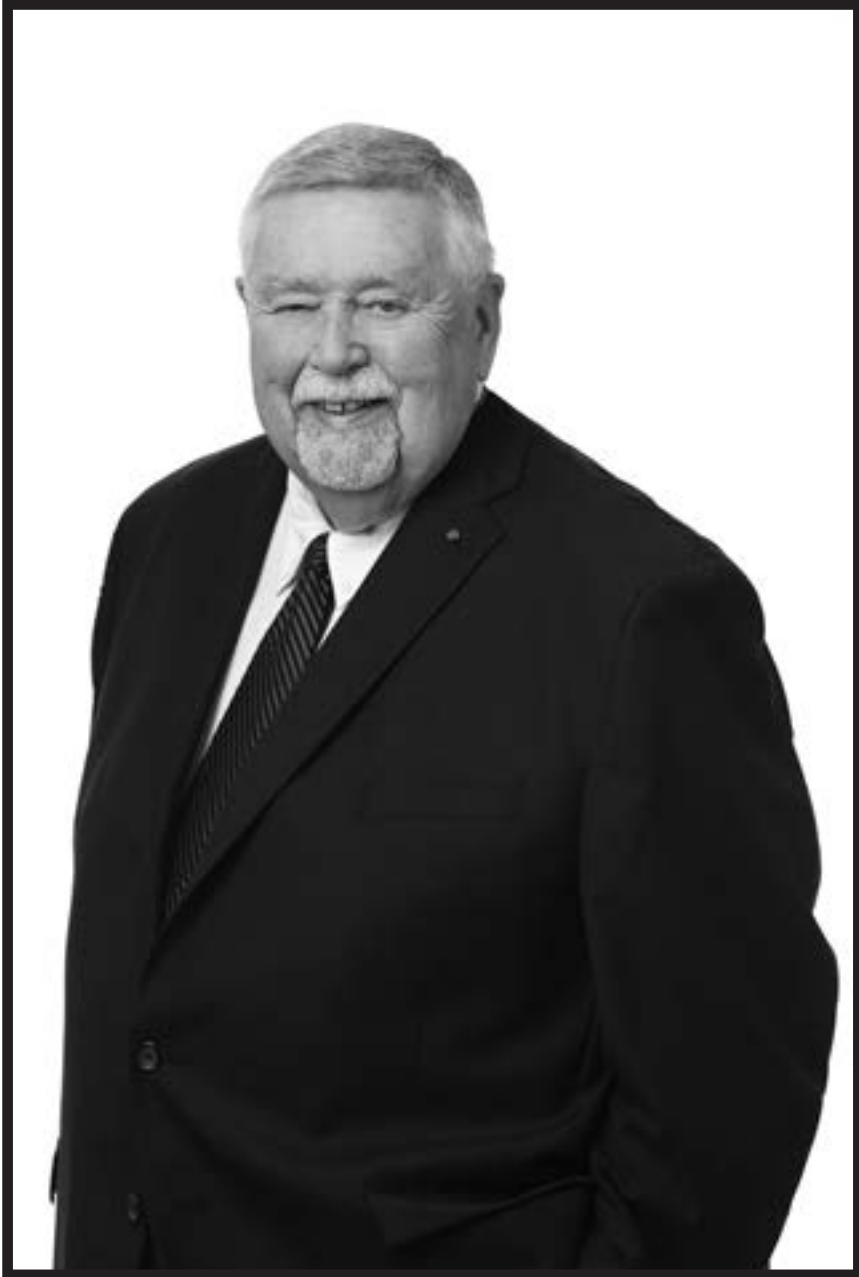


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Jon Timothy Samson, 2015

Editorial

Things Wordly and Otherworldly

by Lorna Tergesen

Although it has been a beautiful fall in Manitoba, one knows what lies ahead for us here in the centre of Canada and the North American continent. We know the chilling winds and dropping temperatures will be on us as surely as they have for all our existence. Nights are getting longer while the daylight shortens, perfect for indulging in ghost stories and other fanciful tales.

Stefan Jonasson has explained that our perception of a ghost is quite different from those imagined in old Iceland. Are these stories readily handed down in our culture? My personal experience with such tales always occurred over bonfires in warm, sultry summer evenings. Other stories such as Hrund Skulason's encounter with a ghost as told in this issue occurred during the winter. The stories our contributors have told of their experiences with the spirits appear to have no preference to time of year or place of being. This tells me that there is likely no specific season for them.

This issue has a story of Olaf Krarer (whose real name was Ólöf Sölvadóttir) who called herself the Little Esquimax Lady, and convinced the world that she was an Inuit woman. Now there was a storyteller! Another storyteller in our community, Dr. Ryan Eyford is quite

the opposite. He has recently released an exhaustingly researched narrative of the inception of the earliest years of the New Iceland settlement, as told within the historical context of Canada, Manitoba and North West Territory archival documents as told within the context of Canadian, Manitoban and North West Territory archival documents, interspersed with narratives from reports directly gleaned from Icelandic immigrant sources. His book is reviewed here. Also, we are publishing the address he gave at the traditional program of the 2016 Icelandic Festival of Manitoba.

A tribute to Timothy Samson for his unending service and support to our Icelandic Canadian community is featured in this issue. As he has recently announced his retirement from active practice after forty-nine years of service as our key legal advisor. We wish to honour him. This is an attempt to outline his community involvement and to display our sincere thanks for his years of dedication. The other biography in this issue is that of Stefania Sigurdson. She was a strong, bright, independent woman in her day. Her life story, of which we are being given a glimpse in her biographical article, would be an excellent thesis paper for someone studying women's social activism.

Everybody's Lawyer

by Elva Simundsson and Lorna Tergesen

Jon Timothy Samson was born in the west end of what was then known as the 'Icelandic' neighbourhood of Winnipeg. He was the son of John V. Samson and his wife Sigridur Oddny Gudmundson. His father was a printer and worked on the newspaper *Heimskringla* which was produced entirely in Icelandic in those days. John V. Samson later became co-owner of Viking Printers, *Heimskringla's* printers until it merged with *Lögberg*. Right from infancy, Tim was regularly immersed in the Icelandic language listening to his parents, watching his father work and listening in on his father's dealings with the newspaper's issues and with the Icelandic-speaking visitors to the press.

Tim's childhood friends were the neighbourhood kids – which included familiar names in the Winnipeg Icelandic cultural community such as the twins Carl and Peter Johnson, Buddy Bjarnason, Bill Helgason and Neil Bardal. They mostly attended the same schools, Principal Sparling, General Wolfe, Sargent Park and Daniel MacIntyre High School. From there Tim attended United College and finished a BA from the University of Manitoba. Following his undergraduate degree, he attended the Manitoba Law School.

In the years that Tim attended, the Law School required their students to complete four years of study; for three of those years attending classes in the mornings and articling with a law firm

in the afternoon. Tim was accepted as an articling student with the Winnipeg firm of Thorvaldson, Eggertson, Saunders and Mauro who later merged with another prestigious Winnipeg firm to become Aikins MacAuley & Thorvaldson. After he was called to the bar in 1967 he stayed on with that firm throughout his whole professional career where he concentrated primarily on business law. He announced his retirement from practice in January of 2016. In Canada and throughout most of the Commonwealth countries the designation of Queen's Counsel is only given to especially meritorious lawyers. In 1995 the Province of Manitoba recognized J. Timothy Samson, Q.C. as worthy of this honour.

During his early years of legal practice Tim married Eleanor High. Eleanor is of United Empire Loyalist ancestry which means her family has been Canadian for a hundred years longer than the Icelandic immigrants. Surely she has had a hand in teaching this descendent of 'rather recent' Icelandic pioneers a thing or two about his Canadian roots and Tim has worked equally hard at educating Eleanor about every aspect of the Icelandic cultural community in Manitoba. Together they have visited Iceland five times and explored almost every corner of that country. One of these visits was as participants in the Snorri Plus program. As well, their two children, Aquila and John have joined into their father's passion. Aquila, who is a graphic designer, took part in the very

first Snorri Program, the young adult Icelandic cultural experience. She later spent a month in Iceland participating in an Arni Magnusson Institute course. John attended the David Arnason and Bill Holm Writer's Workshop at the Hofsó's Vesturfara Setur. He is currently a director with the Núna (now) Iceland/Canada young artists' exchange. John is a musician and singer/songwriter.

Tim did not just practice law but he also passed along his expertise as a teacher and mentor. Right from the earliest days of his career he began teaching a Business Law course for civil service employees in federal, provincial and municipal governments. He taught 'Canadian Business Law' for students who were working toward their Canadian Institute of Management (CIM) designations. For this, he received the 'Praise Award' in 2005 for excellence in teaching from the Institute. During and after this time, Tim also conducted a course at the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Law on Business Law and mentored law students. He did not just focus on law and law students. He gave his services to a program called Educare, serving as both a director and a term as president of that non-profit organization which provided training to young people upgrading their education and work skills.

So what did Timothy Samson do in his spare time? So many Icelandic-Canadian organizations in Manitoba know the name Tim Samson. He was the favourite pro bono (the legal term for 'working for free') lawyer and legal advisor of the Icelandic-Manitoba community. Tim was always approachable and he could translate legalese into comprehensible English. He has also served as president, director, organizer, fundraiser and/or board member of multiple organizations in our Icelandic-Canadian community.

He served a term as president of the Icelandic Canadian Club of Winnipeg (which has now merged with Frón). He began a long-standing association with the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba back in the early 1980s having served as their (honorary) legal counsel for all these years. He has worked with the Festival in updating its private act of incorporation and trade marking its name. He was invited to deliver the 'Toast to Iceland' address at Íslendingadagurinn in 2002. He worked with the Icelandic Cultural Corporation in preparing its incorporation paperwork when it was formed in 1971 by the late Stefan J. Stefanson. He has stayed involved in various capacities as a director and a legal advisor all through this organization's metamorphosis into what we now know as the New Iceland Heritage Museum in Gimli.

Tim served on the University of Manitoba fund raising committee 'Valuing the Icelandic Presence' that raised over two million dollars for an endowment for the Icelandic Collection and Chair of Icelandic Language and Literature. He continues his involvement with this committee to oversee the administration of this endowment fund. In 1987 Tim was invited to sit on the board of directors of the Canada Iceland Foundation, Inc., also an endowment fund and scholarship administering organization. He served first as a Vice-President and then President, a position he still holds.

The year 2000 was a significant year for people of Icelandic descent in Manitoba and Canada in that it was not just the millennium year but also the 125th anniversary of the arrival of the first Icelandic immigrants into their New Iceland land grant territory. President of Iceland Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson came to Winnipeg in 1997



The Samson family from left: John, Tim, Eleanor and Aquila.

to talk about Icelandic community's up-coming anniversary celebrations. Tim was a director and the secretary to the Millennium 125 Commission that was formed at that time to take part in the Millennium celebrations. He organized an event to be hosted by the President to facilitate his meeting with members of the Icelandic community. The Commission organized the many Iceland-sponsored events that took place right across Canada. His significant contribution to the Government of Iceland in this involvement resulted in Tim being awarded the Knight's Cross of the Icelandic Order of the Falcon. The honour was bestowed by the President of Iceland at a ceremony on the President's return visit to Winnipeg in the year 2000.

The name of Timothy Samson has

been passed along from one Icelandic consular appointee to the next who have occupied the position of Consul General of Iceland in Manitoba. He has been a friend and informal advisor on navigating Canadian matters to the succession of diplomats who have occupied that office in Winnipeg. He counts as his good friends these Consul Generals and their spouses and he and Eleanor continue to maintain friendships with them long after they leave Winnipeg. He began his friendship with the very first Icelandic diplomat in Canada, Svavar Gestsson in brainstorming on the idea of the Snorri Young Adult Exchange Program and has continued a friendship with the 'Founding Father' of the Snorri, Almar Grímsson. Also significant is the work Tim undertook with Consul General

Atli Asmundsson in the formation of the Nuna (now) exchange program between Canadian and Icelandic young artists in visual and performing arts.

This very long list of involvements certainly proves that Tim has had his finger in nearly every Icelandic cultural activity and organization in Manitoba. He told this interviewer that he had many of these activities introduced to him by his

dear lifetime friend from childhood, the late Neil Bardal. As he said, Neil would call him up and: 'Neil always found a willing participant'. We in the Icelandic cultural community of Canada certainly appreciate Tim's gracious willingness to be our advisor. He has been the go-to legal person for our Icelandic-Manitoba organizations for over forty years when they have had legal questions and concerns.

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Toast to Iceland

Íslendingadagurinn, Gimli, August 1, 2016

by Dr. Ryan Eyford

Dear Friends, Honoured guests—It is my great pleasure to welcome our guests from Iceland here to Gimli for Íslendingadagurinn. As people of Icelandic descent we take great pride in telling our relations from Iceland about the history of New Iceland, about how our ancestors made a home here alongside other newcomers, and the region's Indigenous people. As we gather to celebrate New Iceland, it is important not only to acknowledge that we are in Treaty 1 territory, but also to remember the kindness and generosity that many Indigenous people extended to the Icelandic settlers when they arrived here almost 141 years ago.

We know that many of those Icelandic settlers and their children went on to make important contributions to the province of Manitoba. This year in Manitoba we are marking the centennial of a human rights milestone that Icelandic women played a significant part in: in 1916 most Manitoba women acquired the right vote in provincial elections. I say 'most women' because many Indigenous women were not eligible to vote in the province until 1952. I say 'acquired the right' because to simply say that right was 'granted' would discount the sustained work over many decades that pushed the Manitoba legislature to enact that change.

Steina Stefansson, a *Free Press* journalist, daughter of original New Iceland settlers, and one of the leaders in that long campaign for women's suffrage,

spoke at Íslendingadagurinn in 1916. She was only the second woman to do so. In her speech Stefansson credited Margrét Jónsdóttir Benedictsson, an Icelandic immigrant woman, as the founder of the movement for women's equal rights among the Icelanders of Manitoba. From 1898 to 1910 Benedictsson published *Freyja*, a journal dedicated to the advancement of women's rights.

So today I want to toast Iceland for its contribution to the struggle for women's suffrage in Manitoba, and especially for Margrét Benedictsson. Benedictsson drew inspiration from the culture and politics of her homeland. When asked by an American friend why she chose to name her journal after the Norse goddess Freyja, Benedictsson responded: "She is the goddess of love and is more... In her is combined love and war...now she is making war on the old-fashioned world—the quiet submission of enslaved womanhood." Benedictsson wrote that her passion for freedom and liberty had first been ignited by the example of Jón Sigurðsson in Iceland's struggle for independence. She also had high praise for Bríet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, a leader in the campaign for the enfranchisement and education of women, and the first woman elected to Reykjavík city council. Icelandic women gained the right to vote in 1915, one year before their sisters in Manitoba. In reporting on the suffrage movement in Iceland, Benedictsson urged her Canadian



PHOTO: STEFAN JONASSON

**Dr. Ryan Eyford at Íslendingadagurinn,
August 1 2016**

and American readers to follow the example of their Icelandic sisters: “What part are you going to play in the fight for women’s liberation?” Icelandic-Canadian women and men took up that call, and partnered with other Canadians to bring about a significant political change. Margrét Benedicctsson, daughter of Iceland, serves as an example of how immigrants have enriched our culture and invigorated our democracy here in Manitoba.

Margrét always argued that the vote was only a means to the end of achieving equal rights for women. The history of the women’s movement in Iceland since 1915 gives ample evidence that Margrét’s Icelandic sisters felt the same way. There are many examples I could cite: women uniting into voting blocs as women’s lists, the dramatic women’s general strike in 1975 that brought the country to a virtual standstill, and the election of

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir as Iceland’s fourth President in 1980—the first woman in the world to be elected as head of state in a democratic election. All of this work has had consequences. Today, the World Economic Forum frequently ranks Iceland as the country with the greatest degree of gender equality. In categories such as workforce participation, educational attainment, and political representation Icelandic women stand at the top of the rankings, alongside women from the other Nordic countries. The reports reveal what those countries have in common: family policies that provide generous maternity and paternity leave, and a system of universal early childhood education. If she were alive today, Margret Benedicctsson would undoubtedly be very proud of the country of her birth.

In closing, it would be impossible to deliver a toast to Iceland in the summer of 2016 without mentioning *fótbolti* [football] and *strákarnir okkar* [our boys]. In a year when we see many negative stories from the world of sports, including doping in the Olympics, Iceland’s historic performance at the Euro Cup was a breath of fresh air. While the media coverage tended to focus on Iceland’s small size, the percentage of the country’s population that was in France, and the fact that the manager is a dentist, what impressed me the most was the heart, commitment, and unity of purpose that the players showed on the field, even as the dream was coming to an end. They would be a credit to any nation no matter how large or small.

For those of you who, like me, were left wanting more of the sea of blue, and the thunderous chants of *Hú*, I have good news. The Icelandic women are at the top of their group and poised to make a big impression at the 2017 Women’s Euro Cup in the Netherlands next summer. *Áfram Ísland!* Thank you.

The Fur Tree

by Norma Guttormsson

In 1948, my father moved our family from Vancouver to a small town in Saskatchewan, population 1,240! Naturally, I had been used to very green Christmas seasons and very bushy trees.

I fondly remember Christmas on the prairie. From the beginning of December, everyone looked forward to the sparkle that turned Main Street into a special place. The clerks in the stores decorated their windows, and a string of lights glowed brightly in front of the train station. The crunchy snow glistened about our house which was adorned with bulbs giving a colourful welcome to the waiting room. My father was the doctor in town and he had his office in our home. My mother was his receptionist.

One day, I came home with the good news that the Christmas trees had arrived! I begged Mother to take me downtown to pick one out. Finally, as the dark afternoon approached, we walked on the snow-packed sidewalks to Main Street where I excitedly beheld its glory. It was looking more dazzling every day. I ran ahead to the confectionery store near the station and found the trees stacked up against the side of the building. Mother had paused to talk to a friend pulling up the collar of her sheared-beaver coat. Tiny flurries danced about kissing the remaining trees. By this time of day, they had been well picked over. Chris, the Greek proprietor, came out of his warm store and called to Mother,

“Hello Missus! My trees are nicer than I ever had before. They’re fresh

in this morning.”

Chris always talked with a lit cigarette tucked into the side of his mouth. Mother cleared her throat and stood tall. She was at least five feet ten and measured the tree of her choice from her own height. I thought they all looked rather pale, but she assured me that we would find the best tree. She pointed to one for her inspection and Chris brought it forth standing it in front of us.

“A dandy! A real dandy, Missus!” he said while pulling out the branches.

Mother gripped the trunk, and then suddenly – lifted the tree up and pounded it firmly on the ground. I shrieked,

“Mom! Look what you did! All the needles are falling off!”

“Well, I don’t want them to be falling off in the house,” she replied calmly.

I turned to Chris and asked him,

“Don’t you have any bushy ones?”

Chris sensed my disappointment. As he took the coins, he told us to wait a moment. Mother tipped the tree and started to round the corner of the store. When we passed the front door, Chris was beaming while holding a small bag in his hand.

“Here’s something that’ll make your tree very beautiful,” he said, his cigarette drooping with a long ash. Thanking him, I clutched the bag in one hand and the tree with the other helping to drag it home. The fluffy angel hair created snowy boughs swirling about the bulbs and spreading its *fur* into a bushy tree. It was the most beautiful tree I had ever seen.

Stefania Sigurdson

by Dr. John Sigurdson and edited by Lorna Tergesen



Stephania Sigurdson (Bonny) was born in Winnipeg on March 12, 1901. She was the third child of Johannes Sigurdson and Thorbjorg Jonsdottir. She was called Bonny because as a child she had a bonnet that she loved to wear, would point to it and say “Bonny” and hence was stuck with the nickname for life. The family lived in

Hnausa until 1903 and then to Gimli. At the time of the 1911 census the family was living in Selkirk. Stefania was aged 11 at that time. In this year too, they moved to Winnipeg. Like her sister Loa and brother Larus, she also went to Kelvin High School. In transcripts it is noted she was in grade 10 in 1916 and grade 11 in 1917. In 1916 she was living with her family on Stafford Street and was age 14. From 1920 to 1925 she was in the faculty of Arts and Science and she was admitted to the degree of Bachelor of Arts in May of 1925. She took another year in fourth year science and was given the degree of Bachelor of Science in May of 1926. In her files are her graduation photos for each of these degrees. She went to New York to Columbia University. She said while she was a student there she was invited for tea with Andrew Carnegie and his wife.

She then went on to Stanford to get her Masters degree. She and Helen Page were two of the few women taking Graduate degrees in 1928 and 1929. She arranged for Helen to help her brother Larus with his graduate research work

on rabbits. When one of the rabbits that Helen was anesthetizing died, Helen was so upset that Larus took her out on a date to console her, leading to their courtship and engagement. When Larus and Helen got married at the Stanford Memorial Chapel, December 22, 1928 Stefania and Axel Jonsson were the two witnesses. While at Stanford she became a member of the Iota Sigma Pi Sorority.

She returned to Winnipeg to live and on May 8, 1930 she obtained a Canadian passport. She traveled all through Europe with Larus and Helen. (Larus completed his maternity training at Trinity Hospital in Dublin.) Stefania's passport shows that she was in Calis July 22, 1930, in Switzerland August 4 and Italy after that. She returned to live with her mother and invalid sister. She was engaged to a man named Bjossi for 30 years, but never married because she had to look after her widowed mother and invalid sister. Bjossi, after many years, broke off the engagement and married a woman half his age. She lived with her mother and sister in Riverton during the 1930s and 1940s and during the summer they lived at their house in Gimli on Third Avenue. She was very active in the Unitarian Church and all their activities such as the Western Canadian Alliance of Unitarian Women plus she was on the board of the Unitarian

Universalist Women's Association. She was also very active in politics and was a staunch member of the Liberal Party. She knew the Liberal Prime Ministers of Canada and in the 1940s Prime Minister Louis Saint Laurent came to the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba and she entertained him at her Gimli house. She would have been named a Senator but Diefenbaker, a Conservative became the Prime Minister and named Solli Thorvaldson the Senator for Manitoba instead.

In 1951, the family became owners of the Arborg Store when Sveinn Thorvaldson died and the Sigurdson Thorvaldson Company was dissolved. She moved to Arborg with her mother Thorbjörg, her sister Loa and brother John. She was the manager of Sigurdson Limited on Main Street and River Road. The family lived in a house across the river. Jon and Joe (her nephew) both had to work under her. She was a tough boss always bawling us out for sitting on the counters instead of standing all day.

The store was sold and she moved back to Winnipeg with her mother where they lived at 492 Dominion Street. In Winnipeg she was active in the Ladies Aid of the Unitarian Church and also in the University Women's Club. Still politically active with the Liberal Party she was honoured to be asked to introduce Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau at a major fund raising





Stefania as the manager of Sigurdson Limited on Main Street and River Road in Arbrog Manitoba.


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dinner in Winnipeg. Nearing 70 years of age and having a “great deal” of admiration for the Prime Minister, she was selected because she was known for her eloquent speech making. Throughout her life she had worked the polls at election time. Many causes were dear to her, especially those related to women. She worked diligently to attain the right to abortion which passed in 1988.

She was a gracious host to many. After Thorbjorg’s death in 1971, she inherited the family home along with her brother Larus. She lived there with her nephew Joe until her death. She had developed colon cancer, dying from metastases on July 28, 1991 at the Misericordia Hospital. She was 90 years old. Her memorial service was held at the Unitarian Church on Banning Street and she is buried at the Hnaua Cemetery.

Prejudice in Early Winnipeg: Olof Krarer, the “Esquimaux Lady”

by David Loftson

Olof Krarer’s real name was Ölöf Sölvadóttir. She was born in 1858 and, like my father’s family, was from northern Iceland. She left Iceland with her family in 1876 and settled in New Iceland (Gimli area of Manitoba). There was a mass exodus from Iceland at this time, with about a quarter of the population fleeing the destruction caused by the Askja volcano eruption. About 80% settled in Manitoba.

Arrival In Manitoba

Life was difficult in New Iceland, it was much colder than Iceland, the fish in Lake Winnipeg were strange and the soil, though better than in Iceland, was poor. Many of the new arrivals soon moved to Winnipeg. In the 1870s, Winnipeg was a young and small city and Icelanders were the first new immigrant ethnic group in the city. They faced prejudice. They had a strange language and strange customs and they were poor. They were a curiosity. My father used to tell me a story of the first boat of Icelanders that arrived from Minnesota in October 1875, landing at what is now The Forks in downtown Winnipeg. Winnipeggers flocked to see these strange new people; but were disappointed in what they saw. They’d expected “Eskimos”, not white Europeans. I always thought my father exaggerated, but it turns out he didn’t – there were a lot who assumed Icelanders were “Eskimos”,

which is why Olof Krarer’s story was possible.

Ölöf Sölvadóttir

Ölöf was different from other Icelanders, she was ambitious and she thought she would make her fortune in America. People within the Icelandic community laughed at her. She was also a dwarf, an achondroplastic dwarf, who





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stood 40 inches tall. In Winnipeg she worked as a waitress and hearing her accent, people would ask where she was from. She would say Iceland and she'd be angered when people responded by telling her they'd 'never met an Eskimo before'. Ölöf, after all, was a proud descendent of Vikings. Bored with waiting tables, Ölöf ended up joining a circus that came to Winnipeg, which I've discovered was common for people with disabilities. People still thought she was an Eskimo and when the circus was in Duluth, Minnesota; the mayor offered her \$5 to give a talk about her 'homeland' of Greenland and she accepted. She made up ridiculous and offensive stories about Eskimos. This was the start of an almost 40 year career on the lecture circuit. She proved the naysayers wrong; she had made a success of her life. Ölöf was a highly intelligent woman who took advantage of the ignorance of the

general public. She was obviously a good story teller and a good actress as well as a con artist. She lectured around the U.S. to thousands of people and she was taken seriously.

Ölöf's View Of Eskimos Of Greenland

Ölöf billed herself as "The Little Esquimaux Lady". The stories she told to the public were outrageous. She told people that Eskimos were born with white skin in Greenland but never bathed and covered themselves with whale fat so they appeared dark skinned. Her arms were typical achondroplastic dwarf arms but she said that they became that way because of the living conditions of Eskimos in Greenland. She could not play outside her snow-house because it was so cold and had to stay inside to keep warm; she had to sit with her arms folded and keep still and then her arms became short and curved.

About transportation she said Eskimos used great frozen fish cut in two lengthwise as sleds. About marriage she said that when a young man wanted a wife he had to steal her from her parents' snow-house and the girl's parents would kill him if he was caught. About her moving to Iceland she said she moved with her family by walking across the frozen ocean from Greenland to Iceland. She said it was a thousand miles.

Her Influence

The explorer, Robert Peary's, goal in life was to be the first man to reach the North Pole and he wanted to do it through Greenland. He heard about Ölöf and attended her lectures and knew she was a con artist but wanted the public to be excited and support explorations to the North Pole so said nothing.

Perhaps Ölöf's biggest mark in history was through her influence on

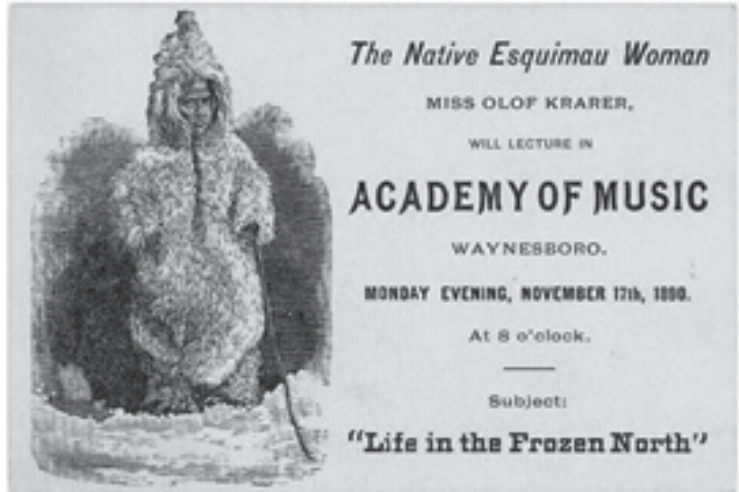
school curriculum. Rand McNally and Company published a book in 1902, "Eskimo Stories", which included a lengthy chapter, "The Story of a Real Eskimo," the autobiography of Olof Krarer. Ólof's story was published for the next 34 years.

The Con

The deception was first publicly uncovered in 1892 by Jón Olafsson, an Icelander living in Winnipeg; in an open letter to the *Manitoba Free Press* he said that her stories were lies. For example the ocean between Greenland and Iceland is always ice free, open sea and no one could ever walk across it. He was ignored. Finally two years after her death in 1934 she was exposed as a complete fake.

The Reality

Scholarly works have examined the



An advertisement from 1890 promoting a lecture by Olof Krarer, the fraudulent "Esquimaux Lady."

ways that people with disabilities were displayed, or displayed themselves, in circuses and freak shows in order to make a living. They were often portrayed as exotic and / or savage in order to attract people pay to come and see them. The stories Ólof made up about Inuit people were outrageous and racist, but she used them to survive in a world hostile to her because of her dwarfism.

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The Haunting at Heritage Village

by Carol Gardarsson

Hallowe'en was creeping ever closer, the dregs of a harvest moon still faintly piercing the dark. The evening air was crisp with the promise of frost, the sky strewn with stars like snowflake seeds preparing to fall. The Arborg and District Multicultural Heritage Village, just outside the edge of town, had hummed with activity all day but now lay dark and deserted. Windows in the empty buildings stared out blankly across the grassy lot where two teenaged boys stood huddled in their jackets, hands deep in their pockets.

"Geez, Michael, it's friggin' cold out here," muttered the shorter boy, whose running shoes did little to keep his feet warm in the dew-dampened grass.

"Yeah, well, it IS October, what d'ya expect?" Michael checked his watch again and then sighed heavily. He watched his warm breath puff out in a white cloud. "Well, I'm not waiting any more. I told George eleven o'clock and he's late. You snooze, you lose."

Michael took a couple of tentative steps towards the biggest house in the deserted village and stopped to look back at his companion. "Liam – come on! Let's go! We're not waiting for George."

Liam glanced over his shoulder toward the dark strip of pavement that was Highway 68. George's bicycle was nowhere in sight. He looked back at Michael, indecision still written on his face. "I don't know, Mike. We could get in trouble for this."

Michael laughed. "You're scared, aren't you?"

Liam shrugged. "No! But I heard that some of these houses are haunted; like I mean, *really* haunted!"

Michael snorted. "Yeah, the people who run this place tell everybody that. They figure it'll keep people from poking around at night." He shrugged. "Hey, if you're too chicken to go inside, just say so and we'll go home. I'll tuck you into your little bed so your mommy can kiss you goodnight..."

Liam flushed. "Shut up, Mike. If we get caught my parents will kill me. I'll be grounded for the rest of my life!"

"Then we'd better not get caught." Michael bent over and picked up a plastic grocery bag. He grinned at Liam. "Time to party!" He started off towards the largest of the heritage houses. Liam tagged slowly after him, hopefully checking over his shoulder for signs of George on the empty highway.

When they'd reached the door of the house, Michael set down his bag and, using some tool he'd pulled out of his pocket, fiddled with the lock. When he heard a satisfying click, he turned to Liam. "See? Told ya. Piece of cake."

The two boys cautiously entered the dark house, Liam holding his breath, eyes fearfully wide. "Mike!" he whispered loudly, "wait for me!"

"Shut the door!" Michael pulled a flashlight out of his pocket and clicked it on. He led the way upstairs, playing the

beam of light on the narrow, steep stairs. Liam hurried close behind him. The house seemed to hold its breath, too, as the boys came to the first door. Michael stepped over the light chain that barred the doorway. Liam glanced down at the sign that said, "No Admittance – Staff Only" and felt a twist of guilt in his stomach. He stayed near the doorway while Michael wandered around the little room, shining his flashlight onto some of the pioneer's personal possessions donated for the display. He flashed the light back at Liam. "Come on in – what are you so scared of?"

Liam shook his head, whispering, "C'mon, Mike! Let's go back downstairs. This place gives me the creeps!"

Michael chuckled and sat on the bed. "In a minute," he answered. He carelessly stretched out on the bed, sighing. "See? No spooks." He got up and walked over to sit in a rocking chair and rocked it for a moment. Creak, creak ... creak, creak ... creak, creak... Then he sprang up and, grinning at Liam's discomfort, strolled back to the door. "I think I'm ready for a beer, now."

Liam felt prickles all down his neck as he looked over his shoulder into the little bedroom and saw the rocking chair still moving. The bedcovers were all mussed and the pillow had a dent in it where Michael's head had rested. He followed his friend down the stairs. Liam kept glancing back; a feeling that he was being followed made the fine hairs on his arms stand up.

Michael sauntered into the little kitchen, plunking the plastic Co-op grocery bag on the table as he pulled out a chair and sat down. He pushed a chair towards Liam with his foot as he dug into his pocket. Pulling out his cellphone, he clicked it on and began checking his messages, muttering that 'cowardly George' hadn't even left a message. The

phone's pale blue light glowed eerily in the room. Liam moved his chair so his back was no longer to the door. Although his breathing was deep, he felt suffocated, like he'd been holding his breath.

"Relax. Have a beer," said Michael, putting down his phone. He set the lit flashlight on the table so it shone upwards at the ceiling. Glancing at Liam, he reached into the bag and pulled out two beer cans, handing one over. Liam took it but still couldn't seem to relax.

The house was deathly silent around them. A faint creaking noise from upstairs made Liam jump. "What was that?" he asked, midway through opening the tab on the can. "Did you hear that?" A faint hissing sound came from the can.

Michael grinned. "It's an old house. They make noise. Big deal." Michael took a swig of his beer and reached into his pocket for a pack of cigarettes and a matchbook.

Liam shook his head. "I don't think you should smoke in here," he said in a hushed voice.

Michael tapped out a cigarette and, placing it between his lips, struck a match. The sulphur tip flared brightly for a moment as Michael moved it towards his cigarette. Liam leaned over and blew out the match.

"Hey!" cried Michael, "What'd you do that for?"

"I don't think they'd like it if you smoke in here," answered Liam lamely. His beer stood on the table, untouched.

"Yeah, like they're ever going to know it was me," retorted Michael, ripping off another match. He struck it. "You're such a..."

He stopped in mid-sentence. The sound of heavy footsteps coming down the stairs left him holding his hand in mid-air, still cupped around the flickering flame.

A faint, whispery moan seemed to drift down the stairs behind the phantom footsteps. Liam jumped to his feet. "You heard that, right?" He turned to look at Michael, but he was staring past Liam, towards the staircase. Liam felt a bolt of fear race from his stomach to his heart. He slowly turned back towards the stairs and stared into the murky darkness. "What is it? What did you see?" he whispered in a choked voice.

Michael sat frozen at the table, the lit match still in mid-air, the flame now inching towards his fingers. His expression was one of absolute horror. Liam's breathing suddenly became fast and shallow. He grabbed Michael's arm and shook it. "What did you see?" The lit match fell to the floor. A gust of wind blew into the room from nowhere. It extinguished the match and ran icy fingers through Liam's hair.

The flashlight wobbled as Liam brushed against the table. He made a grab for it but it topped over and rolled onto the floor behind the table. Its rocking beam of light now shone on the foot of the stairs. Liam backed away from the staircase until he was pressed against the wall. He was gasping now. "What did you ... see?" he whispered again, weakly.

A faint, repetitive sound came from upstairs. It began to grow louder and louder. It was coming from the bedroom upstairs. Liam knew that sound; it was the rocking chair, rocking back and forth. Creak, creak ... creak, creak ... creak, creak...

The strange, whispery moaning came again, only this time it was much, much closer.

Liam clapped his hands over his ears. The sound seemed to be seeping inexorably into his head. His breath came faster now, but he felt suffocated, pinned against the wall in terror. He stole

a glance at Michael. He watched the unlit cigarette between his lips wobble and slip out of his mouth. It rolled down the front of his jacket and onto the floor.

Michael was no longer staring at the staircase. His eyes were now riveted on something in the darkened corner of the kitchen, something past where Liam stood pressed desperately against the wall. Gulping hard, Liam slowly, so slowly, turned his face to the darkened corner.

A hazy figure seemed to hover over the floor. It was the figure of a dark-haired woman. She wore a long, dark dress with a light-coloured apron. Her head was tilted down as though looking for something on the floor.

Liam heard a strangled cry. A second later he realized it was coming from his own throat. Tears began to fill his eyes, and he frantically blinked them back, staring in sheer terror at the ghostly figure as it floated in the darkened corner, just a few feet away.

A voice inside his head screamed for him to run, but he was frozen. He tried to move his feet, but they might have been set in cement.

And upstairs the sound grew louder: Creak, creak ... creak, creak ... CREAK, CREAK...

A sound beside Liam made him jump. Michael's beer can had slipped from his fingers and clunked onto the table. It tipped over, foamy beer pooling across the tabletop, dripping off the table's edge onto the wooden slat floor.

The sound from upstairs seemed to fill Liam's head: Creak, creak ... creak, creak ... CREAK, CREAK... The ghostly woman's head began to move. She was lifting her head to face Liam.... she was going to stare right at him, stare deep into his soul with her cold, dead eyes.

The sound of the rocking chair came faster and faster, louder and louder...

Creak, creak, creak, creak, CREAK, CREAK, CREAK, CREAK...

A strangled cry from beside him made Liam jump and he turned to look at Michael, who had somehow managed to get to his feet. His eyes were opened so wide they seemed to swallow his whole face.

The ghostly woman began to moan, holding her stomach as though in deep, agonizing pain. Slowly she lifted her head even more.

Liam felt something grab his arm and flinched in terror. It was Michael. His grip was vise-like, painful even through Liam's heavy jacket. But the pain seemed to cut through his terror and he was suddenly able to move his legs. Still in Michael's painful grip, he ran, dragging Michael with him, through the dark to the front door and flung it open.

Creak, CREAK... CREAK, CREAK ... CREAK, CREAK ... CREAK, CREAK ... CREAK, CREAK...

The noise grew in intensity as they reached the front porch; once outside they half-jumped, half stumbled down the stairs.

As soon as they hit the gravel path, Michael released his grip and began to run full out. He passed Liam long before he reached the place where they'd stashed their bikes.

Gasping, Liam looked back over his shoulder, half-falling as he ran. The front door stood open and the ghostly spectre floated in the gaping blackness. He could still hear her moans as she stared after them. Her face was now a pale oval above her dark dress but her eyes ... those piercing eyes would haunt Liam's dreams for years to come.

He leapt onto his bike and sped after Michael to the highway, pushing his pedals with every muscle in his legs, spitting gravel with his back tire.

But he could not outrun those eyes burning into the back of his head.

The next afternoon, Michael phoned Liam. They met in downtown Arborg, at the Chicken Chef restaurant. In broad daylight, with scores of people around them in the familiar surroundings of their bustling hangout, they took a quiet booth. They ordered some fries and drinks but barely touched anything. They avoided each other's eyes, still unable to talk about what had happened. The gravy on Liam's fries turned gelatinous before Michael spoke the words they both wanted to believe. "Nothing happened last night. Nothing."

Liam stared at Michael. He wanted to nod, wanted to agree. But he couldn't.

All the rest of the night before, huddled in his own bed beneath his thick blankets he had shivered, nauseous with fear, sobbing silently.

All night, the sound haunted him, repeating over and over again. At first it was so loud it seemed to be coming from inside his room.... But as the dark hours ticked by, Liam knew he could never shut it out - because the sound was really coming from *inside his head* ...

Creak, creak ... creak, creak ... creak, creak...

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The Strange Sightings of the Lady of the Lake

by Erla Jonasson

The sighting I am describing here happened to me many years ago on a chilly full-moon evening in late fall. My husband (my boyfriend at the time) and I had driven down to Lake Winnipeg and had walked out on the Hnausa Dock to take a look at the water/slush that was just turning into ice. My husband ran back to the car for a minute and I stayed at the end of the dock just gazing into the ribbon of moonlight that glittered over the icy lake. I must have been staring intently

because when my husband came back, he questioned: “What are you staring at?” I replied: “Can’t you see her?” I was looking at an ethereal figure, floating, as if walking, on the surface of the ice slush, her hair gently flowing down her back and the long, white dress ruffling in the light breeze. She had appeared from between the trees on the shore, some half a kilometre north of the Hnausa Dock from what appeared to me to be from the site near the graveyard at the place called Kirkjubæ on the shores

of the lake. She moved; not fast; but definitely at a steady pace from the shore and out onto the lake. I blinked, and she was no longer there.

My husband stared. He had seen nothing! I know what I saw. I explained it all to him and he just shook his head. I began to shake my head too, wondering if I had fallen into some very strange and vivid dream and thought no more of it at the time.

Many years later, I had the occasion to meet up with a fellow who lived on the lakeshore by Hnausa and I told him my story of the 'Lady of the Lake'. He was astonished! He then told me of his daughter Shirley's experience.

Shirley had come home one full-moon night in late fall and told her father her story of a ghost sighting almost identical to mine. This was no coincidence! Shirley had seen the mysterious lady gently float on the surface of the water, emerging from the shore at Kirkjubæ – exactly like my lady – and continue out on the ribbon of moonlight until she suddenly disappeared. Apparently Shirley had taken friends with her down to the lake on full-moon nights trying to re-create the sightings but she never appeared except when Shirley was alone.

But, Shirley didn't stop there. She dug into the graveyard records checking names and ages of the people buried at that cemetery. She hounded older neighbours for stories on the various people and concluded that the only possibility for identification of her ghost was a lady named Margrét who had lost her fiancé when he fell through the newly formed ice one fall, and drown. It was said by those who remembered the story that Margrét had died of a broken heart and was buried at Kirkjubæ.

I can still see the moonlight on the water, the flowing dress and the shape of

the young lady if I close my eyes and think back on that evening. When I learned the name of my Lady of the Lake, I had to smile to myself. My middle name is Margrét. Maybe that's why she appeared to me.



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Ghost stories

The following stories are from the translation of Jón Árnason's collection of oral folktales. The translators were George E.J. Powell and Eiríkur Magnússon. The volume they were originally published in was *Icelandic Legends* (London, 1864-1866).

Edited and submitted by Stefan Jonasson

Dry Bones

There were once two friends, the older of whom was a drunkard. It happened that the younger was betrothed to a girl and had invited the elder to his marriage-feast. But before the time came, the drunkard died. The wedding ceremony was performed and the feast held at the church where the drunkard was buried.

That night, the bridegroom dreamed that his friend came to him and addressed him in piteous tones, saying, "Pour out one keg of brandy into my grave, for my dry old bones are thirsty."

Next morning, the bridegroom emptied a cask of brandy on to his friend's grave and never saw his ghost again.

A ghost's vengeance

Some years ago, two friends were conversing together on various subjects, and, among others, on corpses.

"If ever I happen to find a dead man," said the one, "I shall do my best for it and bury it."

"For my part," replied the other, "I shall take no such trouble, but pass it by like any other carrion."

Some time passed away and one day Ketill (that was the name of the latter), while out walking, found the corpse of an old woman lying in the road, but he passed by without paying the slightest attention to it.

Next night, after he was in bed, this old woman appeared to him and said, "No thanks to you for your neglect of me; for you did me neither good nor evil."

She looked so horrible that he jumped out of bed, grasped a large knife that lay near him, and chased the spectre from the house, cursing and swearing, and crying,

"Shall I stab you, you old witch?"

After this, he went to bed again and fell asleep; then he saw the old woman a second time, holding her lungs in her hand, all clotted with blood, and making as if she was going to strike him with them. So he jumped out of bed with the knife but, before he could reach her, she had disappeared.

When he had got into bed again, and was asleep, she came a third time, and made as if she would strangle him. So a third time he jumped out of bed with the knife but failed to reach her before she vanished.

And this hag's ghost followed the unhappy Ketill all his life, and drove him with her wrath and spite into an untimely grave. Whether Ketill's friend ever found a corpse and had a chance of carrying out his charitable intentions with regard to it, this story tells not, neither does it so much as hint at what reward he would have gotten for his pains.

Ketill the Priest of Húsavík

There once lived a priest at Húsavík, whose name was Ketill. Finding the churchyard rather crowded, he dug up a good many of the coffins, saying, "that they were no use where they were, but only took up room," and used them for firewood.

Some time after, in a kitchen, three old women were sitting round the fire where some of the coffin-planks were burning. A spark flew out and set fire to the dress of one of them and, as they were sitting close together, the flame quickly caught the dresses of the other two, and burnt

so fiercely that all three were dead before anyone could come to their assistance.

Next night the priest saw a man come to his bedside who said, "Do not endeavour to make room in the churchyard by taking out our coffins and burning them; you see that I have already killed three old women and if you go on in this way I will kill many more and fill up your graves for you quicker than you will like."

The priest took the warning, burnt no more coffins, and saw no more ghosts, nor were any more old women killed.

White cap

A certain boy and girl, whose names this tale do not recall, once lived near a church. The boy, being mischievously inclined, was in the habit of trying to frighten the girl in a variety of ways till she became at last so accustomed to his tricks that she ceased to care for anything whatever, putting down everything strange that she saw and heard to the boy's mischief.

One washing-day, the girl was sent by her mother to fetch home the linen, which had been spread to dry in the churchyard. When she had nearly filled her basket, she happened to look up, and saw sitting on a tomb near her a figure dressed in white from head to foot, but was not the least alarmed, believing it to be the boy playing

a trick on her, as usual. So she ran up to it and, pulling its cap off, said, "You shall not frighten me this time." When she had finished collecting the linen, she went home; but, to her astonishment – for he could not have reached home before her without her seeing him – the boy was the first person who greeted her on her arrival at the cottage.

Among the linen, too, when it was sorted, was found a mouldy white cap, which appeared to be nobody's property and which was half full of earth.

The next morning, the ghost (for it was a ghost the girl had seen) was found sitting upon the same tombstone as the evening before with no cap upon its head; and as nobody had the courage to address it, or



knew in the least how to get rid of it, they sent to the neighbouring village for advice.

An old man declared that the only way to avoid some general calamity was for the little girl to replace the cap on the ghost's head, in the presence of many people, all of whom were to be perfectly silent. So a crowd collected in the churchyard and the little girl, going forward half afraid with

the cap, placed it upon the ghost's head, saying, "Are you satisfied now?"

But the ghost, raising its hand, gave her a fearful blow and said, "Yes; but are you now satisfied?"

The little girl fell down dead and, at the same instant, the ghost sank into the grave upon which it had been sitting, and was no more seen.

Murder will out

Once upon a time, in a certain churchyard, some people who were digging a grave found a skull with a knitting-needle stuck through it from temple to temple. The priest took the skull and preserved it until the next Sunday, when he had to perform service.

When the day came, the priest waited until all the people were inside the church, and then fastened up the skull to the top of the porch. After the service, the priest and his servant left the church first and stood outside the door, watching carefully everybody that came out. When all the congregation had passed out without anything strange occurring, they looked in

to see if there was anyone still remaining inside. The only person they saw was a very old woman sitting behind the door, who was so unwilling to leave the church, that they were compelled to force her out. As she passed under the porch, three drops of blood fell from the skull on to her white headdress, and she exclaimed, "Alas, murder will out at last!" Then she confessed that, having been compelled to marry her first husband against her will, she had killed him with a knitting-needle and married another.

She was tried for the murder, though it had happened so many years back, and condemned to death.

The Son of the Goblin

The farm Bakki (now called Prestbakki in Hrótafjörður) once stood further north than it does now, and the reason that it moved from its ancient to its present position is as follows.

It happened that a certain farmer's son courted the daughter of the priest who lived at Bakki, but met with a refusal of his offers, which grieved him so sorely, that he fell sick and died, and was buried at the church near the priest's house. This had happened in summer. The following winter, people noticed a certain strangeness in the demeanour of the priest's daughter, for which they could not account.

One evening, it happened that her foster mother, an old and wise woman, went out to the churchyard with her knitting, as it was warm enough, and the moon had but few clouds to wade through.

Some time before this, her foster child had told her that since his death her old lover had often been to see her, and that she found herself now with child, whose father had assured her that the infant would prove an ill-fated one; and the unfortunate girl had asked the old woman to try to prevent, from that time forth, her ghostly lover's visits; and it was for this purpose that the good lady had gone out into the churchyard. She went to the grave of the young man, which was yawning wide open, and threw her ball of thread down into it, and having done so, sat down on its edge to knit. There she sat until the ghost came, who at once begged her to take up the ball of thread from the grave, so that he might enter his coffin and take his rest.

But the old woman said, "I have no mind to do so, unless you tell me what you do out of your grave at night."

He answered, "I visit the priest's daughter, for he has no means of preventing me from doing so. Before long she will be delivered of a boy."

Then the old woman said, "Tell me this boy's fate."

"His fate," replied the ghost, "is that he will be a priest at Bakki and the church with all its congregation will sink down to hell the first time he pronounces the blessing from the altar. And then my vengeance will be complete for the injury the priest did me in not allowing me to marry his daughter during my lifetime."

"Your prophecy is, indeed, a great one, if it meets with a fulfilment," answered the old woman; "but are there no means by which so horrible a curse can be prevented?"

The ghost replied, "The only means are for someone to stab the priest the moment he begins to pronounce the blessing; but I do not fancy that anybody will undertake that task."

When she had gathered this information, the old woman said to him, "Go now into your grave and be sure never again to come out of it."

After this, the old woman drew up her ball of thread and the corpse leaped into the grave, over which the earth closed itself. Then she recited over the grave some magic spells, which bound the corpse in its last rest forever; and returning home, she told nobody what had passed between her and the ghost.

Some time afterwards, the girl was delivered of a fine and healthy boy, who was brought up at Bakki by his mother and his grandfather, though the latter did not know who its father was. In his early youth, people saw that he excelled all his companions both in mind and body.

When his education was complete and he had arrived at the proper age, he became his grandfather's assistant.

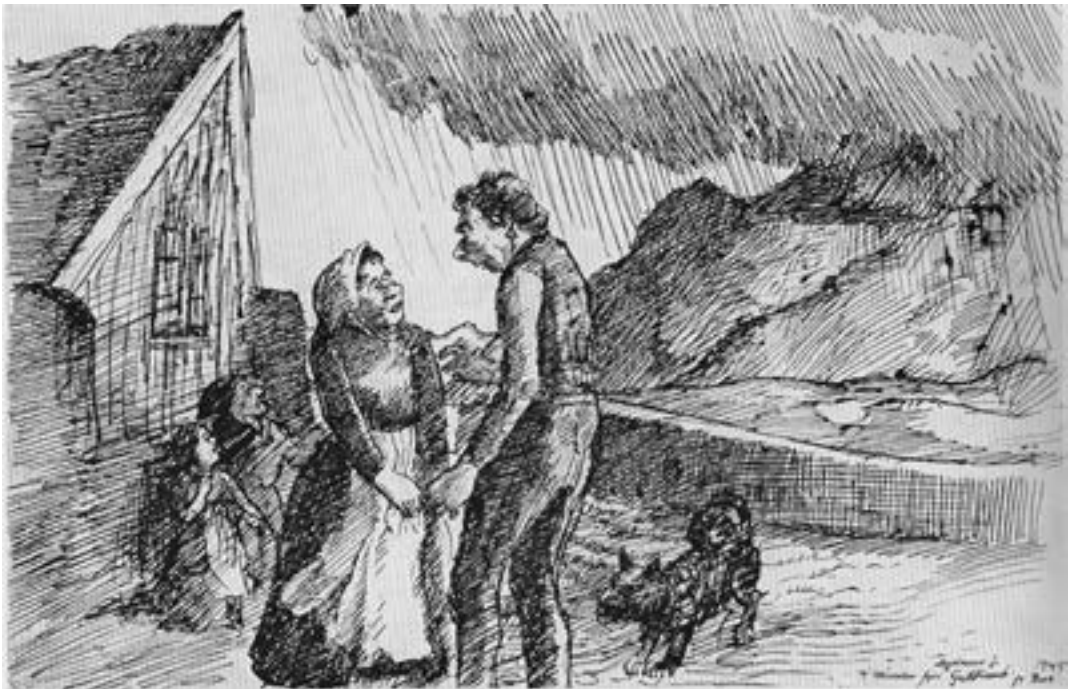
Now, the old woman saw that something must be done to prevent the approaching ill-fate, so she went to her son, who was a man of great courage and one who did not shrink from trifles, and told him the whole story of her interview with the goblin, and begged him to stab the young priest directly as he began to pronounce his blessing from the altar, promising herself to take all the consequences for the deed. He was at first very unwilling to do this, but when she pressed him with earnest entreaties, he at last made the promise she required, and confirmed it with an oath.

At length the day came on which the young curate was to perform service for the first time, and the large congregation assembled in the church were struck by his eloquence and sweet voice. But when the youth stood at the altar and raised his

hands for the benediction, the old woman signed to her son, who rushed forward and stabbed him, so that he fell dead on the spot. Horror-struck at this fearful act, many rushed forward and seized the murderer, but those who went to the altar to raise the priest found nothing of him but the top bone of his neck, which lay where he had been standing.

Everyone now saw that what had happened was no everyday murder, but that some goblin had something to do with it. Then the old woman, standing in the midst of them, told them the whole story. When they had heard it, they recovered from their panic and thanked her for her foresight and her son for his quickness and courage. They then perceived that the east end of the church had sunk down a little into the ground because the priest had pronounced the first few syllables of the blessing.

After this, the farm of Bakki was so haunted by goblins that it was removed from its old to its present location.



The Two Sigurðurs

A farmer once had a son named Sigurður, who was so ill-tempered that no one could live in peace with him.

One day, it happened that a man whose name was also Sigurður came to the farmer's house and asked shelter of him for the winter, which the farmer consented to give him. The stranger did nothing but play the flute and the farmer's son became so fond of him that he cared for nobody else.

In the spring the stranger went away and Sigurður became so sick of life at home that he also left the farm and went in search of his beloved namesake. From house to house, from parish to parish,

and from district to district he went, continually asking for Sigurður. At last, at a certain priest's house where he made the same inquiry, they told him that a man of that name had just died there and lay in the church. On being admitted to the church, the boy sat down by the open coffin, intending to watch over it all night.

At midnight the corpse of Sigurður (for it really was his friend) rose from the coffin and left the church, but his namesake sat still and awaited his return. At dawn the corpse came back, but Sigurður would not let him return to his coffin, in spite of his entreaties, before telling him how he had spent the night outside the church.

So the dead man said, "I have been looking over my money. Now I must get into the coffin."

"No," replied the other; "you must first tell me where your money is."

"In one of the corners of the family room," said the other.

"How much of it is there?"

"One barrel full."

"Did you do nothing," inquired the youth, "besides counting your money?"

The corpse denied doing anything more but the living Sigurður continued to press him to tell him how he had been employed. On pain of refusing to admit him into his coffin again, the other answered, "Well, then! I have killed the priest's wife, who has just had a child."

"Why did you commit so mean a crime?" asked Sigurður.

"Because during her lifetime I tried to seduce her," replied the corpse, "but she always resisted my persuasions."

"How did you kill her?"


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The dead Sigurður answered, “I drove all the life in her body into her little finger.”

“Can she not be revived?” asked the youth.

“Yes! If you can untie the thread that is round her finger without shedding any blood, she will come to life. And now I really must get into my coffin.”

The other only allowed him to do so on his promising that he would not ever try to move again.

In the morning, as soon as the sun was fully risen, Sigurður left the church and entered the family room, where he found everybody plunged in grief. On his asking them what was the matter they

told him that the priest’s wife had died in the night and nobody could diagnose why. So he asked permission to see her, which was granted him and having gone up to the dead woman he undid the cord which he found round her little finger. He urged back the life from it into her body and she sat up alive and well. Then he told the priest about his conversation with the corpse of Sigurður, and to prove his words still further, showed him the money hidden in the corner of the family room. The priest thanked him cordially for the good service he had done him and after this Sigurður became as much beloved as he had before been hated.

Chasing a ghost

by Bailey Palsson

The following is a true story:

Grímur and Bessy were heading out to the hotel in Gimli for an evening on the town. As they were driving, one of Grímur’s buddies passed him on the road. Now, Grímur wasn’t shy about going fast on the road – and he was a mechanic so he knew how to tinker with the engines. He floored the car, doing 140 mile per hour and grinning, but just couldn’t catch up to his buddy. He saw the car turn into town and followed it as it turned into the hotel parking lot. Grímur jumped out of his car to catch his buddy, impressed by his daring

getaway. He saw the car in the parking lot but no one was in it. His buddy must have already gone inside. Grímur went inside and looked around, but his buddy was no where to be seen. He asked the bartender where his buddy was. The bartender looked at him and responded, with a sentence that chilled Grímur to the bone: “He died a week ago”.

Grímur went back outside to check the car. It was his buddy’s car alright, still there. Definitely his friend’s car. He bent down to feel the hood of the car.

It was ice cold.

An Icelandic Folk Legend

Will Larson

Reprinted from The Icelandic Canadian, Winter 1989

Icelanders are sitting upon a treasure hoard of legends and folk tales, most which have yet to be translated for the enjoyment of their English-speaking brethren. The following is a paraphrase of one such a tale plucked from Jón Arnason's collection (Islenzkar bjodsoqur og qvintyri, vol. 2, pp. 179-181.) it is entitled "Oddur Hólaráðsmadur" and dates from the hard times of the late 18th Century, recalling better days when the pre-Reformation Church had a larger role in the sustenance of the poor. Hólar, on Skagafjörður was the location of the bishopric for the northern half of Iceland from 1105 to 1801 where a cluster of church farms supported the administration of cathedral, a printing press and a Latin school for divinity student-scholars.

Many years ago in a midwinter cathedral household at Hólar found its annual supply of dried fish depleted. The farm foreman that year was a fellow named Oddur, an able and stalwart steward of God. The Bishop summoned Oddur to his presence and duly chastised him for this foresightless state of affairs, not only was this staple exhausted, but now so late in the season there would be no surplus obtainable anywhere on the entire North slope. The Bishop directed that a packhorse train be winter-shod fro a caravan up over the mountains to the South of Iceland to purchase dried fish, and that Oddur was

to hand-pick and lead the trek. Oddur's jaws clenched from the rebuke, fullwell knowing that the customary generous quantity of stockfish had been laid by that fall and that the fault lay with the kitchen help. The steward replied that he would manage the trip unaided rather than tie up hired help to look after the horses. The bishopr thought this rash, but nonetheless allowed Oddur his will.

Oddur had a mastiff, a strong brute and so clever it had the wits of a man. He took hsi dog with him as helpmate and the journey South went uneventfully. Oddur purchased dried fish at bargain prices, and now started back North. He had just got as far as the mountains when a heavy blizzard swept in on him. Soon he had lost not only the path but his sense of direction, and trudged on disoriented. Before lon he found himself decending into a deep valley through which he journeyed for a while until he came upon a rushing river. This he forded in twilight and continuing on soon came to a rustic cottage. Oddur knocked at the door and out from the gloom within loomed a large man of villainous appearance. Oddur greeted him respectfully and inquired whether he was the head of the household. The man stated he was. Oddur requested overnight shelter for himself and pasturage for his pack-horses, to both of which the man said he

was welcome. The steward saw that his dog took an instant dislike to the farmer and glared at the man, inaudibly snarling and intermittently baring his fangs. Oddur was uncomfortable; about this, but nevertheless unloaded his horses and hobbled them close to the farmhouse. He called for his dog to enter the cottage with him, for he wished to keep it close by his side. The beast was strangely obstinate and with a scowl lay down over by the horses where it continued to growl softly.

The farmer waited at the door beckoning him to enter, and Oddur went to the house. The farmer led him through a stooped entrance hall into the pitchblack family room. Oddur was shown the edge of a bunk bed and the farmer sat down just across from him. Oddur was unable to detect sounds of other occupants in the house. He was not offered a clothing exchange for his wet clothes, nor was any entertainment given. The farmer from his bunk small-talked on, and asked many searching questions about the goings-on down in the "inhabited parts," and the nature of his journey to the South coast. Oddur gave truthful answers to every query. This one-sided conversation in the dark had continued for some time, when Oddur noticed his host's voice began to trail off into a drowsy mumble, and then a last drop into deep sleep, snoring resonantly.

At this moment an eerie flash of light fully illuminated the windowless room allowing Oddur to scan the entire room. Upon looking straight up he could see that above the bed upon which he was reclining a large guillotine-like boulder was precariously balanced. From the trip-lever on the upper side of the flat stone a cord stretched up to a rafter-beam and thence down again to the farmer's bunk. It was apparent that the activating rope was in the farmer's power and that anyone on whom the boulder might fall was surely

lost. He concluded his accommodations were the most un conducive of a good night's rest and it would be best that he slip away while the farmer still dozed. He tiptoed outside and the night weather was now clear and moon-birhgt. When he approached the horses he found that his dog had gnawed off all the hobbles and had herded them over to where the baggage had been stacked. With great haste Oddur loaded up his pack animals, and the dog charged at the horses, nipping them to trot off the same direction from which they had come.

Oddur had just reformed the river, when he saw the farmer running toward the river with an oversized spear in his hand. On reaching the riverbank the villain hurled the spear over the river, aiming at Oddur's midsection. Oddur sidestepped the missile which buried itself deep into one of the stockfish loads, doing no harm.

Then the farmer said: "You are a lucky man Oddur, to have evaded my clutches, for I had drawn you hither by my powers to murder you. But now I see you are invisibly aided, for by neither your own wit nor wiles could you have escaped. Take home to Hólár my great spear in remembrance of our meeting, and never shall Hólár be in want of stockfish, while my spear remains there." With this the farmer wheeled and stamped back, fuming. He had no hearty farewells for Oddur, who nevertheless journeyed homeward with good fortune until he returned to Hólár where he was well-received by the Bishop. He asked Oddur how his trek fared, who replied that it had transpired without events worthy of retelling.

The Bishop responded: "Oddur, I suspect you have been in grave life-peril and you need not hide anything from me, for verily you would have come up short if my presence had not been with you." It is said that this spear is still at Hólár and no

one has ever heard, at any time since, that its bishop has been in want of dried fish.

This is a nicely turned tale. In style it follows Icelandic ways of word-thrifty understatement and of conveying emotional feeling only by indirect inference. Sociologically the story remains respectfully devout, yet speaks to the church of unmet needs. It projects a sage times flavor by leaving the reader to preference whether

Oddur's elusive guardian wa the bishops personal "hamingja" or the intervention of the Holy Spirit. This ability of the bishop echos the type of mystic good deed attributeed to the postmortum spirit of the two King Olafs. As the escalating suspense of this legend unfolds the reader remains comforted by a subtle optimism, in large part because the story's plot sequence replicates the plot formula of the fairy tale, in which a happy conclusion is guaranteed.



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The Chase of Skuli (Skulaskeid)

by Grimur Thomsen
Translated by Dr. Björn Jonsson

Reprinted from The Icelandic Canadian, Spring 1960

Foreward

Grimur Thomsen's poem is based on one of the folk tales printed in Jon Arnason's big collection of folklore (Vol. II p. 123, second edition, 1954).

The story, which is a short one and without a fixed setting in time, tells of a certain man by the name of Skuli who, having received a death sentence at Althing, mounted his horse and fled homeward. Chased by his enemies, Skuli directed his horse on to the entirely impassable parts of Iceland's wilderness where no one else would dare to cross. As he reached his home, his horse collapsed from exhaustion

and received a dignified burial with the traditional commemorative feasting.

Skuli is the only character the folk tale mentions by name. In his poem Grimur Thomsen adds other names, especially those of men and horses. The name Sörli, with its distinct legendary overtones, is particularly impressive. One may say that both folk tale and poem epitomize the time-honoured loyalty of the Icelandic horse by showing that "this most useful of servants" may be prepared even to offer the supreme sacrifice on the altar of his master's good fortune.

H. B.

They chased him on eight horses, onward thrusting,
with two outriders each for relay suited.
But as old Skuli on Sörli alone was trusting,
his pursuers could hardly be eluded.

With the trails lay smooth and free before them
neither did they lag nor make his capture,
but when the chase on the hills and heathlands bore them
for Skuli it was no mroe a cased of rapture.

Sörli surged ahead and leaping galloped
heedless over clefts and boulders hurling,
Rocky crags with wellshod hoofs he walloped,
behind him lavadust in whirlwind curling.

The flock of foes no longer counted many,
on Giant's Knoll five steeds expiring grasping,
and at Willow Glen there was not any
able, but Svein's Brown, his breathing rasping.

No rest they had, werr unabated driven,
the chargers slimmer now had grown and meager.
But though the racers were from hunger riven,
in spirit and endouver they were eager.

Now Skuli wearied, in this game grew bolder,
at Ok dismounted, saddle tighter girded,
Sörli's high-arched neck he stroked and shoulder,
an appeal he to his steed thus worded:

"Oh, Sörli dear, as foal I have you tended,
the finest fodder given and the best forage,
now my likf is to your feed commended,
safeguard me now and show your nobelest courage!"

The blessed beast seemed to have comprehended
his master's plea, with neck and ears upraising,
he neighed and fast, with forces unexpended
and fetlocks taut the lave fields took pacing.

His talent Sörli used, unmatched forever,
the dwarfs were stunned as rocks reverberated.
And in the annals of the nation never
was horsemanship and skill like this related.

Quicker than a sandpiper can scurry,
sinew-taut his legs over clefts went bounding.
Horseshoes rang as in the flailing flurry
flew hails of stones, rent by relentless pounding.

Faster than an arrow rushes racing
like whirlwind over rockstrewn desert dashing,
hoofspoor chisled rocks his route still tracing,
where footsure Sörli made his way in passing.

They did no lonber do so well in chasing,
the others one by one drop from the story.
The sagas this account of Skuli's pacing
give, and no more. This was his glory.

He rescued Skuli from a fate most dire,
 his life and weal spared not, a generous giver,
 with bleeding legs and bursted lungs expire
 he did. Dropped dead near the White River.

Sörli is howed in Husafell, there gnawing
 his bit, in harness from his stall is gazing,
 at his lave-bedding restless pawing,
 waiting on new mountain trails for pacing.

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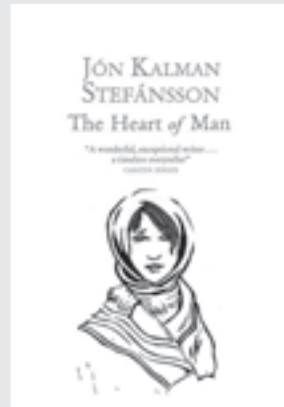
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PHONE ORDERS WELCOME

The Apparition

by Hrund Skulason

Have you ever experienced the stupendous sensation of standing face to face with a ghost? I have had such an encounter and it is not easily forgotten. In our enlightened age it may no longer be a mystery to the spiritualists, but to a sixteen year old girl it was a frightening experience.

This happened back in the “good old days” when electricity was just a futuristic dream for many of the remote districts of the prairies in Canada. Youngsters (I had never heard the term ‘teenagers’ in those days) were expected to share the household responsibilities by performing allotted chores. My brother and I were in charge of milking the cows, separating the milk and feeding the calves

The evening began routinely and uneventfully, all was done except the delivery of the separated skim milk to the eagerly awaiting calves. My brother was not feeling well so I volunteered to finish this ‘fun’ job by myself. I had no cause to be nervous.

It was a typical November evening in northern Manitoba. There was no snow on the ground and not a cloud in the deep dusky blue sky. The stars in the Milky Way were brilliant and seemed close enough to touch, the air was frosty and eerily still

I ambled slowly along the worn and familiar path, humming a romantic Icelandic song, swinging the coal-oil lantern in one hand and the milk pail in the other in unison with the tune. I was isolated in the magic dream world of

a young girl and this was indeed a rare opportunity to daydream. It’s hard to conjure up images of a handsome knight in shining armour while constantly being surrounded by five younger siblings. Nothing was further from my mind than ghosts and goblins. Halloween had long since come and gone!

I gave no thought to the chores, nor did I need to pay much attention to my work. All the gestures were routine and automatic. I went in, hung up the lantern and gazed at the familiar surroundings. The animals lay in their stalls, contentedly chewing their cud, except for the calf I had come out there to feed. There was a feeling of warmth and security in the dimly lit barn. I stirred a measure of calf-meal into the milk and approached the bellowing little beast. While leaning down to steady the milk pail, I glanced up toward the opening barn door. I rose up to my feet in surprise and there in the open doorway stood Mr. Jackson. We had known him since we moved to this town over a year ago. He was an elderly gentleman, considered by grown-ups to be rather eccentric. He lived a mile or two from town and always drove an old buggy pulled by a reddish brown horse with a white star on its forehead. He made daily trips to town for supplies and always had a sack of grain and a bag of groceries in the back of the buggy. We got to know him because he often passed us on our way home from school. We were pleased when he stopped to talk to us and he was



Hrund Skulason

always eager to listen to any news that we had to offer,

I realize now that he was a lonely old man craving human companionship but as youngsters, we felt honoured to have a grown-up willing to talk to us.

When I saw him in the doorway, I was about to say: "Hello Mr. Jackson" when a horrible thought struck me. We had just heard the news earlier that Mr. Jackson had died yesterday! I literally froze. My heart seemed to stop and my blood ran cold. Thoughts raced through my mind at frightening speed. I remember praying: "God help me get out of here!" There was no escape. Mr. Jackson stood in the doorway of the barn, blocking my only exit by holding his outstretched hands on both doorframes. He wore gray woollen mittens and his usual baggy trousers and heavy wool sweater. His cap was pulled down over his ears and he had a gray scarf tied around his neck. All these precise details are still in my mind so many years later.

I stood still. For a few paralyzing moments I gazed in terror at the image in the door. "Why is this happening to me? How can I get out of this surreal situation?" Then it happened! The calf jerked his head and the feeding pail began to tip. Instinctively I bent down to prevent the milk from spilling. When I looked up at the doorway, there was no one there. The spell was broken and I could move. I'm sure I broke an Olympic speed record in my panic to race to the safety of home. When I got inside the house, I was shaking like a leaf and was as white as a proverbial 'ghost'. I collapsed into a chair and tried to calm down and still my pounding heart. Mother came running to see what the problem was. Between gasps, I managed to relate the Mr. Jackson story about his sudden appearance and how I was prevented from leaving the

barn. Imagine how I must have sounded to a sane-minded person! "You must have imagined it all", my mother said calmly. An experience like this cannot be imagined! I am still certain today as I was back then that Mr. Jackson had stood in that barn doorway. I had just recovered my composure when we heard a knock at the door. I jumped up in panic, not knowing what to expect. My mother answered the door and a strange man entered. He gave us his name, which was unfamiliar to us, and asked to speak to my father. Our father was the Lutheran minister in the parish. The stranger told him that a relative of his, Mr. Jackson, had recently died and his final request was that my father conduct his funeral service. Regretfully, father had to refuse. He was mortally ill himself and passed away only two weeks later. Was there a connection between the two incidents? Was Mr. Jackson trying to tell me that he wanted dad to bury him? Or was he warning me of my father's impending death? Should I have been braver and tried to speak to him? The answer will forever remain an unsolved mystery. Seventy-six years have passed from the time this event happened in my youth to the time I am now telling my son this story for him to write down. To this day, I still refuse to regard the apparition of Mr. Jackson as a figment of my imagination.

*Dictated to her son, Thor, 26th October
2000 by Hrund Skulason.*

POETRY

Afterglow

By Stephan G. Stephansson

Translated by Thorvaldur Johnson

Reprinted from The Icelandic Canadian, Autumn 1978

Throughout all the ages
Matter is with life imbued;
Flaming stars in stages
Die to be with fire renewed.
Creation, growth and heat and flame
Eternally are Nature's aim.

Quickens life and passes,
Mind and heart complete their play;
In the cosmic masses,
On some far off New Year's day
Galaxies of frozen suns
Will blaze again as they did once.

Though the myriad night-eyes
Of the blazing skies go blind,
Still, some hidden plan lies
Deep in the eternal mind,
Setting free through time and space
Waves of life-imbuing rays.

Light of day abating
Glimmers now the afterglow,
Only left the waiting!
Dark of night is closing now
On this head that seeks its ease
And hopes that night will bring it.

Kaslo

Reprinted from The Icelandic Canadian, Winter 1990/1991

**Kaslo
walks
fearful** with his lantern
 into the night
 of spirits lurking
 beyond gray creviced rocks
 past craggy mountain caves
 beyond ghost-laden houses
 past aging picket fences
 back to the back of beyond.

**Kaslo
yearns
seeking** with his lantern
 for days of love
 the spirit of youth
 beyond time before this time
 past days of schoolboy pranks
 beyond lazy fishing days
 past racing mountain streams
 back to childhood once again.

**Kaslo
sleepwalks
dozing** with his lantern
 back and forth
 between now and then
 beyond loving winsome maids
 past golden fields of grain
 beyond sun-lit fishing streams
 past days of yesteryears
 back to time before his time.

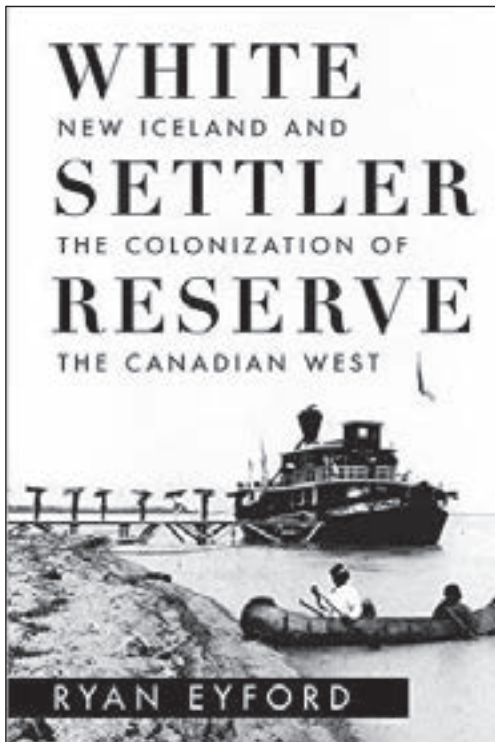
Kristjana Magnusson

Book Review

White Settler Reserve: New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West

by Ryan Eyford

Reviewed by Elisabeth Ward, PhD



Reviewed by Elisabeth Ward, PhD

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016
272 pages

Macro meets Micro A new academic text on the Icelandic Settlement

Ryan Eyford has pulled off a remarkable feat in his book “White Settler Reserve: New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West.” He has taken his personal family history and turned it into a complex, thorough, and important academic work. He writes in the Acknowledgements, “My late afi Jörundur Árni Eyford tried to teach me not only Icelandic vocabulary but also the Saulteaux words he had learned from our Ojibwe neighbours.” This book is in some ways inspired by that experience at his grandfather’s knee. The author’s heartfelt concern for both the Icelanders and the Indigenous peoples living together on the shores of Lake Winnipeg over 100 years ago comes through in glimpses, such as in the figure of John Ramsay, whose story and perspective is woven throughout the book.

These glimpses of personal connection are paired with impressive

historical sleuthing, bringing to life key figures in the Icelandic immigration to Canada, especially in the figure of John Taylor, the agent responsible for overseeing the Icelandic Reserve. Unlike previous works on the settlement of New Iceland, Eyford goes deeper into John Taylor's past, especially the period before he became a Baptist Missionary. Taylor's time growing up in a slave-owning family in Barbados, and a criminal case accusing him of perpetrating slavery after it was abolished in the Commonwealth, is the focus here. In shedding light on this aspect of Taylor, Eyford is bringing voice to those forgotten and nameless servants Taylor brought to Texas, where they became slaves. There is a quiet sense of righting historic wrongs in Eyford's treatment of these disadvantaged and oppressed people.

The book is however first and foremost an academic text, and a theoretical one at that. Although Eyford does structure his book according to a basic, familiar chronology of pre-migration, migration, hardship, to the loss of the Special Reserve status with integration into Manitoba, this is not a grand narrative that seeks to give a compelling sense of cause and effect, nor a clear explanation of why it had to go the way it did. Indeed, academic history writing has generally abandoned those sorts of straight forward narratives. Eyford's approach, like many other professional academic historians, rests on the writings of Michel Foucault, a philosopher whose thinking has been highly influential since the 1980s. Foucault's vision of human history is not a happy one: he argues we are all embroiled in complex and destructive patterns of unfair power distribution, hidden within bureaucratic processes and commonly accepted 'ethical' ideas.

Eyford carefully illustrates many of these processes in his book, most clearly in the case of the reaction to the smallpox epidemic, when the state apparatus exerted all its power on the settlers. But Eyford also offers some hope in regard to the other vehicle of the state, the heavy debt Ottawa attempted to impose on the Icelanders. Eyford demonstrates that the New Icelanders used the very rhetoric Taylor and others had been using to coerce them into working harder and longer without patent to their properties against the forces in Ottawa. It is only by adopting the rhetoric and ethics of the power elites that oppression can be temporarily thrown off, is the lesson here, and a lesson the New Icelanders appear to have learned well.

I look forward to using *White Settler Reserve: New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West* in my university courses, and I suspect many others will as well. Ryan Eyford has done a fine job applying complex historical theory to the case of New Iceland, demonstrating all the complex power systems at play and the possibilities of working within those systems. The comparison between the Mennonite settlement and the Icelandic settlement, as well as the focus on relationships with Indigenous peoples, furthers the academic appeal of this work. It is a fascinating part of Canadian history that will likely become more widely taught thanks to Eyford's book.

I personally would have liked for him to have included in his analysis the role of storytelling, reading and literacy within this dynamic. He does mention the high literacy rate of the Icelanders, but only in passing. Eyford mentions the fact that the New Icelanders used Old Norse terminology to refer to the bureaucratic organization of New Iceland as a way to

suggest that Icelanders were especially bureaucratic, but clearly the settlers also saw a narrative parallel between the Viking Age settlement of Iceland and the 19th century settlement of New Iceland, even dividing the settlement into four quadrants as Iceland was. How those perceptions of 'liberty' coincided

with English 'liberalism', which Eyford identifies as a key construct of the dominant Anglo-Canadian class, is not fully developed. Perhaps that is because this work does not so much go into the mindset of the settlers of New Iceland, but rather focuses on all the forces and people arrayed around them.



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Contributors

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CAROL GARDARSSON worked as a community newspaper reporter, editor and publisher for several western Canadian newspapers and magazines for over 30 years. Carol now lives in Sechelt, British Columbia, with her husband, Gardar. She authored the book series *Brewing Evil*, based in Manitoba's Icelandic community as well as *Tales of the Interlake*, a collection of seasonal Manitoba-based short stories in verse, some of which have been published in local newspapers.

NORMA GUTTORMSSON, MEd, daughter of Dr. Pétur and Salín Guttormsson. Her grandparents are Vigfús and Vilborg Guttormsson of Riverton, Otto, Oak Point, Lundar, MB and Kristján and Sigurborg Reykdal of Baldur, MB. Norma has four children and five grandchildren. She is retired and lives in Maple Ridge, BC.

ERLA JONASSON lives on the farm Hléskógar in the New Iceland area of Manitoba. She is a semi-retired farmer and a teller of ghost stories to her five grandchildren.

STEFAN JONASSON is editor of *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, the Icelandic newspaper published in Winnipeg since 1886. An ordained Unitarian minister, he served as a denominational official with the Unitarian Universalist Association for 24 years, in addition to serving congregations in the Manitoba Interlake. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife Cindy and they have two adult daughters. A past president of the University of Winnipeg Alumni Association, he is currently a member of the university's board of regents.

DAVID LOFTSON enjoys researching and writing. He is a frequent contributor to CBC radio. He has also been busy raising funds and assisting with our newest Syrians.

BAILEY PALSSON grew up on a dairy farm in Hnausa, MB. She is currently an X-ray technician in Winnipeg, MB and never gets tired of hearing ghost stories, new and old.

DR. JOHN SIGURDSON is from California. He wrote this article on his aunt some years ago and allowed us to use it. He is the son of Dr. Larus and Helen.

ELVA SIMUNDSSON, MLIS, is a member of the *Icelandic Connection* board of editors and a random book reviewer and proofreader for the journal. She lives in Gimli, MB.

LORNA TERGESEN enjoys living in Gimli where life is never dull. Many come to this town to retire but retirement here is not for the faint of heart, for there is always a project, social function or community endeavor to participate in.

DR. ELISABETH WARD is Director of the Scandinavian Cultural Center at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. She was previously Program Director of Víkingaheimar Museum in Reykjanesbær, Iceland. She holds a PhD from the University of California at Berkeley, with an emphasis on the Icelandic Sagas. Her mother was born in Keflavík Iceland and Elisabeth spent many summers with grandparents in Iceland while growing up in Southern California. Her son, Pálmar Guðmundur attended Icelandic Camp in Gimli summer of 2016 and they plan to return.





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Graveyard in the Interlake of Manitoba

The Back Page

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