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ICELANDIC CONNECTION

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DESIGN & TYPOGRAPHY Catherine McConnell

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SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADVERTISING & EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE
Icelandic Connection, Box 1156, Gimli, Manitoba R0C 1B0 CANADA
CONTACT Lorna Tergesen (204) 642–9650 for inquiries about the magazine

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ON THE COVER

PHOTO: ANDY BLICQ

William Prince visiting Betsey Ramsay's Grave

Editorial

The Heartbeat of Reconciliation: *"Your Dad and Auntie were such good friends"*

by Glenn Sigurdson

My dad, Stefan Sigurdson, passed away in 2012. Our close collaboration in the years prior to his death was invaluable to me in writing *Vikings On a Prairie Ocean,* published in 2014. It enabled me to ground the book confident in its detail and authenticity. In opening this edition of *Icelandic Connection's* journal focusing on the relationship between indigenous people and the Icelanders since their arrival in 1875, I believe there's much to learn from my Dad's life and way of being that provides a deep insight into that relationship. In the Preface to the book I shared these thoughts about him:

"Stefan Sigurdson was a special man with a quiet way. He was born into an Icelandic-Canadian fishing family in Hnausa, Manitoba on the shores of Lake Winnipeg on November 21, 1921. He spent the first seventy years of his life in the village of Riverton, the family home and headquarters of Sigurdson Fisheries Ltd., with its own legacy of more than a century on Lake Winnipeg. Dad was known as a statesman within the Lake Winnipeg fishery. His gentle wisdom and charisma were felt in the communities around the lake, in Winnipeg doing business or selling fish into the markets of Chicago. He formed deep relationships with the indigenous people, always mindful that they had lived around the lake and off the lake and the mighty rivers that enter and leave it, long before the arrival of any Icelanders. Dad gave strong leadership by giving strength to others without ego, and always with respect."

The night of his funeral, my brother Eric and I were reminiscing about all our memories growing up on Lake Winnipeg as boys and young men, playing and working alongside him. Suddenly it struck me, "Eric, we should give Tom Bittern a call." Eric was quick to agree. I told him that Johnny Sigurdson had stayed in close touch with Tom over the years and had recently told me that he was living in Poplar River. This was a community on the north-east shore of Lake Winnipeg some 20 or 30 miles from Berens River where the Sigurdson family established one of their first fishing operations on the north end of the lake in 1895. It didn't take long to track down a number for Tom.

When I asked for Tom the answer was quick, "He's at the fish station." It was probably close to 10 PM in Manitoba but

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF GLENN SIGURDSON

Berens River

on those long beautiful summer evenings the fish station would still be alive with action. Tom was the station manager. But I was not surprised when I was told that he was out on the "gut boat" and would be back soon.

It was like nothing had changed in half a century. Tom and I were boys growing up together at the Berens River Station. One of our jobs as boys was to load onto a whitefish boat drums of fish entrails – the "guts" of the fish as they were cleaned and dressed for weighing and packing and at the end of the day, take them to a small island about a half a mile. Within moments of dropping the contents of the barrels into the water alongside the banks of the island, millions of birds, seagulls and pelicans, would've gobbled it up with an energy that no garburator could ever match.

Tom had been with Dad since he was a boy. He had worked in the sheds, chipping ice from the mountain of ice harvested each winter and stored in the massive icehouse before he graduated to packing fish. By the time he was eighteen he was already the weigh man and shed boss over whose scale every ounce of fish passed. Here he would sort and weigh the different species presented by each fisherman and provide them a receipt for product delivered. Then the fish were packed into boxes, iced, tagged and put into the freezer awaiting the next boat out.

Tom called back when he got to the station. After a few words of excitement at reconnecting after all these years, and telling him of Dad's passing, he was kind enough to say: "I often think about you guys and those days." I asked whether Dollie had also passed and as he said yes. He added: "Your Dad and Auntie were such good friends."

That's struck a deep chord in my heart. They surely were good friends. If Dad was

the king of that small island at the mouth of the Berens River, Dollie was the queen. For four to five months every year Sigurdson Island turned into Grand Central Station of the fishing world. Dad and Dollie's day would begin together at 7:30 AM. Dad had been up an hour earlier but spent the first hour on the two-way radio, the days of hourly calls with all the stations and our fish freighter. The fishermen and the shore hands had already had breakfast. Dollie would have eggs and toast ready for Dad. While he ate they sat together to plan the menu for the day, they would discuss the gossip of the day and the goings on, in and about the community and the station.

When Dollie, as wide as she was tall, not overweight but short and sturdy, stood along the big windows at the back of the cook house she would have a panoramic view of the mouth of the river with the community just beyond. Magically she seemed to know every bit of information about what was up and who was up to it on the island and in the settlement. She had a particularly eagle eye on any drunks or booze coming onto the island. She had been known to take her broom to some of them on the dock before any trouble got going. Let's just say she knew "who was who in the zoo", and so did Dad. Billy Goosehead had showed up with that woman over from Jackhead yesterday, the troublemaker. And Dad would add that so and so was up to his tricks yesterday in the shed trying to pass some spoiled fish over the scales having not lifted for four days!

Tom was anxious to tell Eric and me that it was he who had been asked by the community to tear down the old station and make way for a new one – on the same location – just like your Dad always knew was the right place. Dad always believed that the best place for a fish station was on that small island about a half mile from the entrance to the river just up from the mouth, for here the focus was on getting out to your nets first thing in the morning and then back in early and away from nightly shenanigans. That granite rock with the winds always blowing had the further advantage that there were a fewer flies and mosquitoes to torment. There has always been the lingering view amongst some within the community that the fish station should more properly have been built on the mainland.

A couple of weeks ago on Facebook I had a moment of great nostalgia when Baldi Johannesen, from Riverton, now fishing out of Gimli, with the long family legacy of fishing on Lake Winnipeg, posted a picture of whitefish livers sputtering beautifully browned in a frying pan. On the station as a boy, that was often my job. I would stand around the men cutting and cleaning the fish and with each flash of the knife they pushed the entrails toward me so that I could pull out a big fat whitefish liver and drop it into a pail where I would take them up to Dollie to cook for the evening meal. Whitefish livers are exemplary. Their only problem is that they are delicate and cannot be frozen so you had best eat them fresh, and there was nothing more of a delicacy. I would stand in the large shed and walked amongst the tables. Five or six men stood around each "table" – a piece of white plywood with a diamond hole in the middle planted on top of the 45 gallon drum in which the top had been peeled off like a can of salmon. Here the Icelanders and the Indians, as they were known and called themselves in those days, together would laugh and talk as they worked. They would do so in both Icelandic and Ojibway and together in English.

It was no big deal. It was all just part of living and working together. But it appears in hindsight that it was, and remarkably for many remains so.

Now, finally, the Canadian public has

awoken to the reality that indigenous life on this continent has been here likely for fifteen to twenty thousand years. In the early years of contact with Europeans the young men crossed the ocean from England, Scotland and the Hebrides to begin work for the 'Company of Adventurers Trading into Hudson's Bay'. Since the formation of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670 their relationship, especially in western Canada, had been characterized by a mutual interdependence where the beaver pelt was the currency of the day. They may have once dreamed of going home as wealthy men, but for most, this land became their home and their blood and their names became part of this land and its people.

It was when Canada was formed that significant change in that relationship occurred. The Government of Canada adopted a policy of what was in effect forced integration and cultural dislocation with the brutal instrument of residential schools. Children were ripped from the arms of their parents, under threat of jail and their language and culture, history and identify was taken from them. And this environment became the hunting grounds for pedophiles. It took generations to wreak this social havoc, and it may take many generations to fully move beyond this legacy.

Let's push the pause button for a moment. Think of our Icelandic forebears when they arrived. Most of them were peasant sheepherders. They were impoverished. They lived on the land, a rugged and unforgiving land. Some had fished on the sea. In their own right they were indigenous to that land. It had been unoccupied by anyone before their Viking ancestors had arrived ten centuries before. They had endured brutal hardships. Most could not speak English. The taste of a long and overbearing Danish colonial rule was still very bitter in their mouths. They were given an "Icelandic Reserve", like the Indians, within a month of the signing of Treaty 5 in September 1875, in which none but Icelanders could own land. The people to whom they were most proximate were the indigenous people, and soon that relationship extended to the indigenous settlements along the lake as fishing became their economic life line. The Icelanders struggled just to survive. And with their indigenous neighbors they were felled by smallpox, and together quarantined. When one casts one's mind back to those times it is not difficult to imagine that the Icelanders and as they were then known, the Indians, would not build good relationships.

My Mom, Sylvia Brynjolfson, who left us in 2015 was the daughter of an iconic fishermen on Lake Winnipeg, Marus Brynjolfson from Hecla and then Riverton. She was deeply embedded in her Icelandic

culture as a Hecla girl, speaking, reading and writing the language impeccably. She was herself a writer and shared with me many wonderful stories that found their way into the book. She was the perfect partner for my Dad. She understood the fishing way of life and his world like few others. She was no less a part of this book than he was. And her Dad, my Afi, stirred the passions in my young mind. I write this of him in *Vikings on a Prairie Ocean:*

"Nothing raised Afi's ire more than this "goddamn government bullshit" that Indians couldn't go into the beer parlor. He ate, worked and slept with Indians all his life in camps and boats, but they couldn't go for a drink together – equals on the water, but not in the beer parlor. When Afi's fury was particularly aroused, he punctuated his forceful advocacy with a reddened face and bulging veins. Mom recalls the poignant moment when his long partner and close friend, Roy Murdock, an Indian, was about to join the gang "for a few." Afi was aching for a chance to put his rhetorical skills to work, making it clear that "he would take care of any trouble." Roy's wife was not as confident, and quietly urged, "Now, Roy, you know you're not allowed to go." Roy listened. Afi calmed down and backed off. Men like Roy could go to war and fight for the country (not to mention drink while on leave during the war), but couldn't take a drink at a local Lake Winnipeg pub. Soon, at least, some Legions opened up for the veterans and Roy could head in there to down a few. Wherever there was no Legion though, it was some years until the Indian fishermen would enter a beer parlour without being in peril. The currents of social justice were starting to swirl in the country, and Afi's thunder was an early 'wake up call.'"

Fast forward to 1972. The lake had been closed for two years as a result of mercury contamination from a pulp mile a couple of hundred miles away in NE Ontario. The decision to reopen was made in the spring of that year. Many fishermen had stopped fishing in the intervening years. The government decreed that unless you were fishing that opening season you would forever lose your license. Afi and Amma had been given a trip of a lifetime to Iceland for their 50th wedding anniversary by the family. All the plans were in place for their leaving in June. In light of the circumstances the request was made to exempt the old man from this rule. But the government was not to be deterred and persisted in the position that unless he was on the water that season he would never get a license. Many intervened on his behalf including "friends in high places", with names ending in "son"! Finally, sanity prevailed. The boat would be run by the men he had fished with for 25 years, Roy Mason and Lloyd Sinclair from Fisher River. When Afi came down the escalator in the airport two beaming men were waiting for him to tell him with great excitement that it had been the best season ever. They had caught their limit within days. If you look at the silhouette picture on the album Lake Winnipeg Fishermen, a picture taken by my brother, you will see he three of them lifting nets together. That was how it was then, for those people in those times.

Now, as a national community in Canada we are having to come to grips with how we are going to remake the relationship with indigenous Canadians across the length and breadth of the country. It is not an easy task on an easy road. Men like Dad and Afi and women like my Mom and Dollie are no longer around to impart their wisdom. But there are many in many ways and places giving leadership on the pathways to reconciliation. For me, I am blessed for I can drill deeply into my memories to know the essential elements of what "it will take".

I learned this from the life I grew into as a boy on Lake Winnipeg. Today the watchword is reconciliation: Dad and Mom, my Ammas and Afis never heard that word in their days; they lived it.

Peter and Glenn, Berens River 1954

Reconciliation is a fancy word for living and working together, respecting each other and our differences. It is about being together and doing things together and getting to know each other as human beings and as friends. There is no more powerful elixir than respect each for the other. That is what it's going to take.

I have lived much of my life helping others to build relationships between a range of people and organizations on the land and on the water, with different values and interests across this big robust country. And to resolve differences, for inevitably in any relationship there are differences. But differences are bigger than that. We are each different. Differences is what gives life its energy. Differences give us our identity. Differences is who we are. Much of my work has inevitably involved first nation peoples. I came to understand, in writing *Vikings On a Prairie Ocean* that my boyhood experiences guided and grounded me for the work I do today.

Although I now live in Vancouver, I return each year to my cottage on Lake Winnipeg at the Narrows between Pine Dock and Matheson Island. This summer I had a special visit with a very old friend, Peter Boushie. He was a little boy the same age as I was at Berens River. His Mom and Dad always came to set up their tent and live for the summer on the island during fishing season. His brothers, Gestur and Charlie who were deckhands then on the *JR Spear*, were so good to me, often teasing me that my Berens girlfriends had waited for the year on the dock awaiting my return. When we were three, Peter and I would spend hours together putting nails into the little porch in front of the small camp we called home right next to the tent. Then later, we would nail boxes together.

Another summer friend of mine, Bernard Selkirk from Pine Dock came up to the cottage and told me that Peter was coming to Matheson Island the next day. He said he would pick me up would take me up to meet him. Then after all those years Peter came in to his yawl to pick up a number of supplies needed for the rock crusher that was finishing off the road into Berens River. I walked up to the boat and said, "Peter, Glenn Sigurdson here. Long time no see!" He looks bewildered for a moment and then said, "Glenn, I never thought I would see you again." We had a good reunion and he offered to come next summer to get me and take me for a visit

Glenn and Peter

to the community.

The world is small. One afternoon this fall I was in Winnipeg for some work. After a downtown meeting I decided to walk along the walkways along the Assiniboine River past the Legislative buildings and beyond. I came upon three indigenous guys near the end of the trail. They had a few big Pepsi bottles and looked to be in a pretty happy mood. I said to the guys with a smile, "You guys taking a little holiday time away from the big city?" and they smiled back at me. The first thing they said is, "Sir you should be careful walking with those shoes on as it is slippery down here." It had been raining earlier and I responded: "I've been pretty careful and I was OK." One of the guys seemed like a real character so I asked him: "What's your name?" He responded: "Randy." and the other guy said: "Oh yeah, Randy's a real smart guy. If he is at a party he asks everyone their birthdays and he never forgets them and your 'sign' if you meet him a year later." I said: "That's really something. How do you do that Randy?"

The same guy turned me and said: "He told you his name what's your name?" I replied: "My name is Glenn Sigurdson." The third guy looked at me and said: "I know that name." "What's your name?" I asked him. It was Boushie. "You're from Berens River, aren't you?" "Yes, you knew my dad, Albert Boushie." I said I remembered him. The other guy then turned to me and said he was a Monkman. "Are you from Loon Streets or Mathieson Island?" "No, my mom took us to Vogar. Her name was Esther, she used to work with you people on the lake." And the guy from Berens said, "How's Kevin doing?" a reference to my cousin still in the net and fish business. "He seemed good this summer. Said they had a good season up at Dauphin River where he was managing the station." They were happy to oblige with a picture, all smiles like any holidayers. And I was off, turning up the trail within a moment or two walking amongst the old mansions of Middlegate just below the Misericordia Hospital.

I told a few friends that story. I showed them the picture of the guys. They were amazed by the coincidence of the connection that I made there on the riverbank. But to them what was more amazing was the ease with which I had engaged those guys in conversation; they said that most people would have uneasily scurried around them, face down. I never thought about it. To me it was no big deal.

PHOTO: ANDY BLICQ

A Song For John Ramsay The film

by Gail Halldorson

[Hello - Tansi]*

John Ramsay (1837-1894) is a legend in the Manitoba Interlake. A Cree thought to have been born on an island in Lake Winnipeg, he taught the Icelandic newcomers to fish on Lake Winnipeg (they were ocean fishers in their home country) all year round, to cut timber and build log homes, to build lake-worthy boats, to hunt with a gun or a bow and arrow, and many other things about their new homeland. [helpfulness – wíchíhiwéwin] [kindness – *kiséwatisíwin*] The Canadian Government of the time granted homesteads to the Icelanders – but would not let John and his people claim any of the land they had lived on forever. John continued to ask for compensation for many years but the government gave him nothing. Ólafur Ólafsson received a patent and occupied John's land which Ólafur called "Ós". Ólafur told John he could cultivate a garden and camp on the land as he always

PHOTO: ANDY BLICQ

had, which he did. Then, so disastrously for all, one of the newcomers brought smallpox. The horrible disease devastated everyone, and John lost his beloved wife, Betsey, and his sons. Some say there were two sons, some say three. His remaining daughter was seriously disfigured by the disease. In spite of all that, John Ramsay became a friend to the Icelanders.

The New Iceland Heritage Museum has had a plaque and a recorded message honouring John for many years. Thankfully, [I am happy – niminwénitén] they decided to do more in celebration of Canada 150. Money was collected for a half-hour film, a song, and a new exhibit. The major donors were the Westshore Foundation, Thomas Sill Foundation, Canada 150 Fund, and the Province of Manitoba. The John Ramsay Exhibit, titled *John Ramsay – Life and Legacy*, opened at NIHM on October 21st, 2017. This is a poignant story; boxes of facial tissues were supplied.

The film, *A Song for John Ramsay,* was shot and produced in Manitoba's Interlake by Andy Blicq and Huw Eirug of 4th Avenue Productions Inc. in Gimli. It depends heavily on the song, *The Ballad of John Ramsay,* written by William Prince (who is from Peguis First Nation in Manitoba), Scott Nolan and Jamie Sitar. William sings and plays the song using his Indigenous sensibilities to portray the heartbreak in John's life when he lost Betsey, his boys and his land as well. He travelled on foot to the Stone Fort (Lower Fort Garry) to purchase a stone for Betsey's grave and hauled it all the way back. She had loved the sound of the water, so he placed the grave close to Lake Winnipeg [by the shore – chikask] and built a fence around it.

The story of the Trausti Vigfusson connection is also told. Sometime in the early 1900s, John came to Trausti in a dream and requested that he repair the fence. Trausti was a carpenter, but he was very poor. It took some time before he did as he promised but after a second dream visit from Ramsay, he repaired the fence. On the way to Betsey's grave, he had stopped to buy fish [kinosewak] and was told the fishing had been very poor that season and there was none for sale. But when the fence was fixed, the owner of the property checked his nets one more time – this time they were full of fish. Gestur, the land owner, said it must have been a gift from Ramsay.

There are no pictures of John and

nothing written by him. It was a very challenging assignment to put together an entertaining and informative film. Andy and Huw did it successfully by concentrating on the song, historical comments, interviews, and the beautiful scenery around Sandy Bar and the Icelandic River (in the early days called the White Mud River, then Icelander's River). They enlisted a respected Interlake historian, Ryan Eyford, who wrote a book containing some of the John Ramsay story *(White Settler Reserve: New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West, 2016).* They found Ruth Christie, a descendant of John Ramsay. She is passionate about the story.

Andy Blicq had been looking for a storm over the lake to use for a mood piece in the film. He went for a drive out to Sandy Bar and when he got to the vicinity, a thunder and lightning storm broke out. When William Prince walked to Betsey's grave with a handful of wild flowers, a bunch of bees came to gather nectar from them after he lay them down. Photo ops for sure, but did John Ramsay have anything to do with it? Maybe these occurrences will add to the legend [achanokéwin] of John Ramsay.

Andy said "I've learned a lot about what reconciliation truly means." John Ramsay and his people had a relationship with the Icelandic settlers that didn't need reconciliation. They were good friends and neighbours on the land then. We can only hope to get back to that.

Shortly before his recent death, noted singer/songwriter Gord Downie told one of his brothers "There is no higher power than helping people." I think John Ramsay would have agreed.

A Song for John Ramsay will be shown on BellMTS video on demand television this fall, in late November 2017. William Prince's *The Ballad of John Ramsay* was released on iTunes on October 27th. Well worth seeing and hearing.

[Goodbye – Kawapamitin]

* the words inside the square brackets are the English word, then the Swampy Cree (Saulteaux) word. Where there is only one word in square brackets, it is a translation to Swampy Cree from the preceding word/s. I used the *Ochékiwi Sípí Cree Dictionary: Swampy Cree Dialect* and the *Cree Everyday Phrases & Words* books given to me at Fisher River Cree Nation. Thank you, [ékosani] Fred Crate.

Thanks to my daughter, Sharon Halldorson, for suggestions and editing. She got very involved in the story after she heard the song.

CONSULATE OF ICELAND

Gordon J. Reykdal
Honorary Consul

10250 – 176 Street
Edmonton Alberta T5S 1L2
CANADA

Cell: 780.497.1480

E–mail: gjreykdal@gmail.com

The Ballad of John Ramsay

Written by William Prince and Scott Nolan

Shoreline rapture
Mid-October
Eighteen seventy-five

South of the White Mud
Tip of Big Island
Saulteaux and Cree blood on the ground

The rebellion is over
Feather and fur
No need to survive

After the treaties
Here lies New Iceland
Pen and paper crown

Ramsay, the saviour
Indian Jesus
Breaker of bread in these hard times

If I could save them all again
I think I'd save you first
Your body is fenced in
A misspelled grave now
Living is my curse

There's even less to live for now
With even less to live for now
There's even less to live for now
And upon her face a grim reminder
Still so beautiful inside
Her hair long now like the season
Reflection of love in her eyes

I'd wake a man up from his dream
Hold your hands inside of mine
At night I hear my choices scream
How could you let all of them die?

If I could save them all again
I think I'd save you first
Your body is fenced in
A misspelled grave now
Living is my curse
Living is my curse

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF GAIL HALLDORSON

Johann Vilhjalmur Johnson (3rd from left) and his crew in front of their Halifax bomber

The Night in 1945 when my RCAF Halifax bomber was shot down

A handwritten account by Johann Vilhjalmur Johnson

With Gail Halldorson and Diann Johnson Hays

Prologue by Gail Halldorson

In May 2017, the Facebook page 'Meanwhile in Gimli' carried a post from Diann Johnson Hays. She included a 6-page account of her father, Johann Vilhjalmur Johnson's, experiences the night his Halifax bomber was shot down over the Kattegat Sea between Denmark and Sweden during WWII. It piqued my interest. In an opening paragraph, she gave information about Johann's brother, Julius Bjorn (Barney) and his fate in the war. She also mentioned that their parents were Jon Bjornsson (J.B.) Johnson (Jonsson) and Josefbina Josephson. I recognized J.B. and Bina right away from writing and research I have done: J.B.'s trip to England with 99 Lake Winnipeg sled dogs for Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1914 Trans Antarctic Expedition in The Icelandic Canadian (*Halldorson, 2007); the Johnson fishing plaque in the New Iceland Heritage Museum's Lake Winnipeg Visitor's Centre, (c.2005); and the Johnson-Stevens fishing partnership from 1939 to about 1956 in the NIHM's Book of Life. I got in touch with*

Diann immediately asking if I could share her information with the New Iceland Heritage Museum and the Gimli Glider Exhibit (GGE). In the future, GGE will be including WWI, WWII, and RCAF Station Gimli (later called Canadian Forces Base Gimli). I got in touch with Lorna Tergesen and suggested it would be a good article for the magazine The Icelandic Connection *(formerly* The Icelandic Canadian*). Diann said "Yes. This is very exciting!" and so, here we are.*

Introduction by Diann Johnson Hays

This is my dad's handwritten account of the night in 1945 his RCAF Halifax bomber was shot down over the Kattegat Sea. My dad was born in Gimli on May 25th, 1923 to Jon Bjorn (J.B.) and Josefbina Johnson and died on December 16th, 1999. His older brother, flight engineer Julius Bjorn (Barney), died earlier when his Halifax bomber was hit by a German bomber over Holland, where he was later buried. I've wondered in recent years whether my father may have lived with survivor's guilt following Barney's death in WWII.

Siblings of my dad and Barney are: Runa, Simbi, Pauline, Helgi, Lara, Bina, and Jonina (Johnnie) – all deceased except Johnnie, the youngest.

The Night in 1945 When My RCAF Halifax Bomber Was Shot Down by Johann Vilhjalmur Johnson

July – Nov 1944 #111 O.T.U – Bahamas – Coastal Command. Training on B25s and B24s.

December 1944 – reassigned to antishipping due to heavy losses of 58 Squadron crews.

Sent to #1674 H.C.U. Aldergrove, Northern Ireland. Trained on Halifax MKIIs and MKIIIs in antishipping.

March 23, 1945. Assigned #58 Squadron, Stornoway in the Scottish Hebrides.

April 12/45 at 9:05pm. On antishipping patrol in the Kattegat between Denmark and Sweden. Bombed I.T.R.

April 15/45. Anchorage (fjord) attack. Bessaher-Rorirk, Norway – large shipping. Caught in searchlights. Abandoned attack after rear gunner shot out one of the search lights.

April 20/45. On antishipping patrol. Kattegat. Attacked by 3 Me110s as we entered the slot between Denmark and Norway. Skipper took the Halifax down to between 100' and 50'. Lost the Me110s. Continued the patrol. Bombed a medium vessel (5000 tons). Low on fuel. Landed Milltown, Scotland for breakfast and refueling.

April 23, 1945 at 20:15 hrs. We took off with a nine man crew heading east out of Stornoway in the Hebrides flying north of the secure zone around Scapa Flow (British Naval Base) to an antishipping patrol in the Kattegat. On the return patrol along the Swedish coast on a northward leg between Denmark and the Island of Anholt, I sighted a convoy of five German ships on my radar scope. They were bearing southwest, two destroyers and a flagship flanking two merchantships, at a range of about 25 miles. When they detected us, the ships changed into a line-astern configuration. A moonlight night gave the convoy captains an advantage. Nevertheless, the skipper decided to sink at least one of the merchantships. So he flew alongside the convoy – dropping flares. Flying on the opposite flank, he started the bomb run as the flares ignited, silhouetting the boats. The bombs hit the 10,000 ton M.V. and the boat exploded with flames reaching great heights. As the skipper banked the Halifax, we received a shell into the belly of the plane just forward of my radar cabin. Fire broke out immediately in the fuselage with volumes of acrid smoke making breathing very difficult. The skipper called

Johann Vilhjalmur Johnson in full uniform

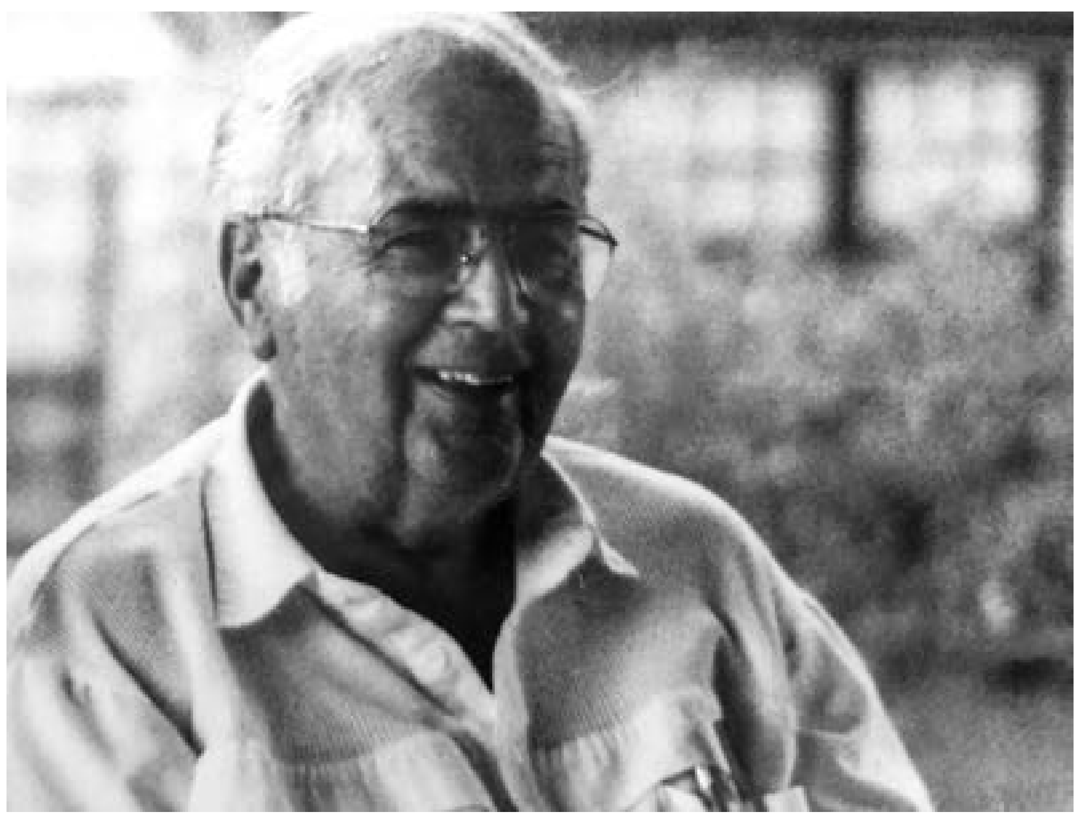
out "ditching positions, ditching positions" over the intercom. Those of us in the rest position of the Halifax put on our chutes and sat with our backs to the bulkhead. However, we were suffocating with the smoke so I climbed the ladder to the mid-upper escape hatch, dropped the hatch door and started the climb through the hatch. One of the crew was behind me. I don't remember anything after that moment until I regained consciousness in the sea, some distance from the ditched aircraft (on fire). Later I found that I had a large bruise on my forehead; possibly from striking my head on the mid-upper gun turret. I removed my chest chute and swam toward the aircraft. My Mae West life jacket was slightly inflated. When I reached the port wing, the skipper was crawling out the window, bleeding from the head, and he was followed by the tailgunner who also was injured. We attempted to remove the cover of the wing dingy storage compartment but failed to budge it. The skipper then just put his right hand into the flames emerging from the hatch to release the dingy by the cable handle. He received extensive burns to his hand and arm. The dingy was released and inflated but was not free as the wires holding emergency supplies were tangled to the trailing edge of the port wing. The tailgunner took the dingy knife, cutting all the wires to free the dingy but the emergency supplies were lost. We would be without food, medicine and water. No other crew members emerged from the aircraft. It appeared that six of our members had perished, either on impact or from the smoke and fumes. However, as we prepared to leave in the dingy, a low moan was heard coming from inside the ship. I received a boost from the skipper and entered the aircraft through the forward escape hatch. I felt around with my feet and hands in the waist deep water and came across a body. The head was above water. I hoisted him up through the hatch to the skipper. The man was barely alive, very severely burned, skin falling off his face. He was our second dickey, borrowed this night to replace our regular pilot who was ill with diarrhea. We got him into the dingy and the four of us huddled closely because half of the

dingy was deflated, probably from shrapnel. As we departed our Halifax, tracers were spewing from the machine guns due to the heat of the fire in the turrets. The aircraft slowly went down and then, with a suction sound, sank. We floated away. The sea was relatively calm. We were tired, confused and scared. At daybreak, we started to discuss our situation, which to all present was very bleak. We had been shot down at 0200 hrs – approximately six hours after takeoff. We didn't have water, food or medical supplies. Our second dickey was suffering terribly but we couldn't do much for him. He was in and out of consciousness. He died on April 24 at around 1100 hrs. We said a prayer, took his Mae West off and rolled him gently over the side. It was sad but we wondered how long we would last. The night of the 24th was very stormy with waves swamping us at times. The morning of the 25th, the sea was calm and the sun shone. We took off part of our clothing and hung them on the dingy mast to dry. After 60 hrs. at sea, we sighted an island in the distance which we knew to be Anholt – a German occupied island bristling with radar masts. We tried to sail to the island but we were frustrated by the damaged dingy. However, we soon sighted a trawler approaching us. It was a Danish boat whose crew refused to take us to Sweden because German guns were trained on us and their families were on the island. We were welcomed by the German marines and Gestapo. The latter took charge of us ordering us into their lorry. We were deposited at some type of clinic building where we were directed to beds, examined and interrogated by a Colonel. After a day or so of medical treatment, we were taken by boat to Aarhus, Denmark. In Aarhus, we were driven to a Luftwaffe hospital (a converted Danish theatre) where we were hospitalized with two Sterling crew members who were also shot down on the 24th. The treatment was almost nil as the Germans were short of medical supplies. We were guarded day and night. On May 5th, a German officer entered the room to announce that his Fuhrer had died fighting in Berlin (Bull). We were turned over to the Danish Red Cross and transported to the Aarhus General Hospital where we were treated and stayed until June 14th, 1945. Then we were transported by plane to Bournemouth, England to await disembarkation to Canada.

Conclusion by Diann Johnson Hays

My father was very grateful for his strong and loving parents and for his Icelandic heritage. Dad taught my siblings and me to know and respect our heritage, as well as to deeply feel a part of the Canadian Icelandic culture. On Christmas Eve, we drank hot súkkulaði while we opened our presents and listened to Dad's many stories about growing up in Gimli. His Gimli tales were always humorous and often poked fun at himself or one of his siblings. Notably, when he was seven, older brother Simbi and his friends encouraged little Joey (as his family called Johann) to light some gun powder with a match, which consequently blew off all of his eyelashes and eyebrows and left him with a black face to be scrubbed off by his furious mother.

However, we didn't hear any stories about Dad's elder brother, Barney, likely because Barney was so much older and was out of the home, working in mines in another province. Whenever Dad spoke about Barney, it was always with deep reverence. He was my father's hero and it was obvious to us that he had been his hero long before Barney died, a hero in WWII. A few years ago, I found a letter from Barney to my dad after Dad had enlisted in the RCAF. Barney, writing from the air force base he was attached to in England, talked about a very special girl he was



Johann in Florida after he retired

dating and about how proud he was of my dad for enlisting in the air force.

It wasn't until years after my dad died that I learned what he and Uncle Barney experienced in WWII. When Dad's Halifax bomber was shot down over the Kattegat Sea, he climbed back inside the plane which was on fire and packed with bombs, to try and save a crew member's life. I also discovered how Barney died. I knew from a young age that Barney had died a hero's death when he and the captain of the Halifax bomber (identical to my dad's plane) stayed with the bomber after it had been strafed by a German Messerschmitt. They prevented the Halifax from crashing into a village in the Netherlands and instead came down, fuselage only, in a field far from the village and caught on fire. Barney and the captain were found still strapped in, side by side in the cockpit. I was stunned by these two stories.

In 1997, my father was invited to speak at a memorial ceremony in the city of Roermond in the Netherlands. The ceremony was for the men in the Halifax bomber who had saved their lives and thus the lives of future generations by staying in their burning plane and sacrificing their own lives. A day after the ceremony, my dad and his companions traveled to Nijmegen, the site of the Canadian War Cemetery where Barney (Julius Bjorn Johnson) is buried. The brothers were finally at peace.

From a letter home to the Johnson family written by my father on October 21st, 1997 from the Netherlands:

"There is a French expression 'Comme

Il Faux' which is appropriate and really sums up what our journey and mission meant. In English, it means 'As it should be.' My husband Bill and I returned from the trip in Oct 1997 – jet lagged and tired but fulfilled. We had in effect represented our family at a funeral for Barney, fifty-four years after he died. We placed a wreath at the foot of the grave on behalf of our families. In the centre of the wreath Mom and Dad's picture was placed."

Epilogue by Gail Halldorson

Johann V. Johnson was born (May 25, 1923) and raised in Gimli, Manitoba. His parents were J.B. and Bina Johnson. Johann married Charlotte Harrison in Wapella, Saskatchewan on September 9th, 1950. In 1952 he graduated from the University of Guelph, Ontario with a Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine degree (D.V.M.) Later that year, the family moved to Carlyle, Illinois with new baby, Diann, where Johann worked as a veterinarian. Kristine was born in 1954 and in 1956, Johann bought a veterinary practice in Marshalltown, Iowa. Robert was born there in 1957. Johann sold his practice 1961 and the family moved to Monmouth, Illinois where he worked in the Department of Agriculture, Animal Health Division. In 1964, he accepted a position with McHenry County in northern Illinois near Chicago. He later went on to earn his Master's degree in Public Health from the University of Illinois (M.P.H.) and soon became the McHenry County Public Administrator. In 1988 Johann retired from his employment as head of the McHenry County Animal Control Centre and Assistant Public Health Administrator. After retirement, he and Charlotte moved to Leesburg, Florida, where he passed away on December 16th, 1999.

Johann received many awards and accolades during his career. Two of them were: the Theta Award for outstanding contribution to environmental preservation in McHenry County and the Distinguished Service Award from the Illinois Public Health Association.

His story is as he wrote it, except for added punctuation to make the reading easier and some capitalization for consistency. In one of her emails, Diann said "My dad would feel greatly honored." We, too, are honored just to write about him.

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Email: inl@mts.net

Dreams and Claims
Icelandic-Aboriginal Interactions in the Manitoba Interlake

by Dr. Anne Brydon, PhD

Reprinted from **The Icelandic Canadian** *Volume 58 #3*

"All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives"
- Benedict Anderson (204)

An Aboriginal man named John Ramsay figures prominently in contemporary Icelandic-Canadian accounts of the relationship between Icelanders and Native Peoples during the years immediately after Icelandic settlement in the Manitoba Interlake, which began in October 1875. In the story, Trausti Vigfússon obeys the ghost of John Ramsay after the ghost comes to him in a dream. In 1910, Trausti dreamt that the recently deceased Ramsay requested he attend the neglected grave of his wife, Betsey, who had died with four of their five children[2] during the 1876 smallpox epidemic. The figure of Ramsay emerged from the forest and told Trausti he wanted a fence built around her grave, as is the practice of Aboriginal groups in that region. Trausti, a carpenter, had the ability but lacked the financial means. In the dream he protested to Ramsay that he was poor and the grave distant. Why couldn't Ramsay approach other carpenters who were more established? Ramsay replied that Trausti was the only person with whom he could communicate.

In October 1997 and February 1998, I spoke with Trausti's 97-year-old daughter Tóta (Þórunn) Vigfússon. She recalls the seriousness with which her father, mother and grandmother discussed the responsibility the dream placed on Trausti. He saved the wood piece by piece until he had enough pickets cut for the fence. It took him years to complete the task. In the account written by Icelandic-Canadian journalist Kristine Kristofferson, Trausti had to be reminded a second time by Ramsay's ghost. This makes for a more dramatic narrative but is not accurate: according to his daughter, Trausti recognized immediately the necessity of obedience. He related the story of his dream to anyone who would listen, until his brother told him he was making a fool of himself. But when Gestur Gudmundsson, owner of the land on which the grave lay, heard tell of the dream, he hastened to supply Trausti with the oxen to drag the fencing to the site. Kristofferson says that Trausti's luck changed once he fixed the grave. I asked Tóta if this were true. She replied, with an ironic smile, "I don't know about that, but he certainly felt better."

The story of Trausti's dream has been told and retold, typically with interpretive add-ons and factual errors, as a means of

demonstrating the good relations between natives and newcomers. It had been circulating in the Icelandic community for years before Kristofferson wrote it as a *Winnipeg Free Press* human-interest story in 1967. Its publication prompted Icelandic-Canadians to build a monument at the grave located east of Riverton. In 1989 the grave was again restored and designated a Manitoba Municipal Heritage Site. We do know that an individual's dream gradually transformed into a cultural narrative about the Icelandic-Canadian past. But we cannot know for certain the motivations of those people who cannot now speak for themselves. My goal is make sense of their actions by placing them in a broader social and cultural context. This context is not only Icelandic; it is also Aboriginal, a point Icelandic-Canadian writers have thus far ignored.

Background

When Icelanders immigrated to Canada in the 1870s, they left behind a country gradually advancing in its national independence campaign against Denmark. Most people in the country were still locked in a struggle to survive the poverty and starvation induced by a feudal-like farm economy and an over-exploited Arctic environment. For some, political reforms were too slow in coming. There was an outbreak of sheep pestilence between 1856 and 1860; then the volcano Mount Askja erupted in 1875. There had already been years of poor fodder growth. Optimistic stories of good wages, fertile plains and bountiful rivers and lakes were carried in letters and newspaper articles by Nordic emigrants to North America, and found an increasingly receptive audience in Iceland.

Great Britain had been taking an increased interest in Iceland during the nineteenth century, as one small extension of its colonial reach throughout the world. The trade monopoly imposed by the Danes was loosening, enabling British fishers to land on the coast of Iceland to process their catches. Great Britain was in a better position than Denmark – the latter had been politically paralyzed since its defeat by Prussia and Austria in 1864 – to take advantage of the socio-political and demographic upheavals rupturing Icelandic society (Brydon 1995). Britain's ruling majorities preferred northern Europeans to settle the colonial frontier, and even if Icelanders were few in number – in 1870 the population was 47,000 – it still proved profitable to run a steamship between Scotland and Iceland to transport the men, women and children seeking freedom from debt and the paternalism of the farm household.[3]

Optimistic tales were poor solace when the realities of frontier life brought settlers face to face with destitution and death. Icelanders were ill prepared to make adroit decisions when they landed in Canada, and they had to modify or invent new stories about themselves to sustain their emotional well being in a foreign and seemingly wild place.

Until recently, popular knowledge about the reserve granted Icelanders by the Canadian government has been based more on a small handful of secondary sources, now decades old, rather than on the plentiful archival documents which largely remain unexamined. The story of the Icelanders' first meeting with John Ramsay, most likely Saulteaux (although others argue he is Cree), has not been reassessed since its inscription 80 years ago by an Icelander writing in Icelandic. Nearly all published histories of Icelandic-Canadians have been written by authors of Icelandic descent; even their more scholarly endeavours typically show the imprint of socialization into a standard and limited

historical narrative of community victory over adversity. Many of these accounts are competent and informative, but if we examine their occlusions and exclusions we find intriguing aspects of Icelandic ethnicity that have not been publicly discussed. In private, I have been told contrary versions of the standard historical narrative during the 16 years I have conducted research in the community. This study emerges from the context of public versus private stories and the pervasive discomfort some people show when discussing the celebratory, at times self-congratulatory, official narratives.

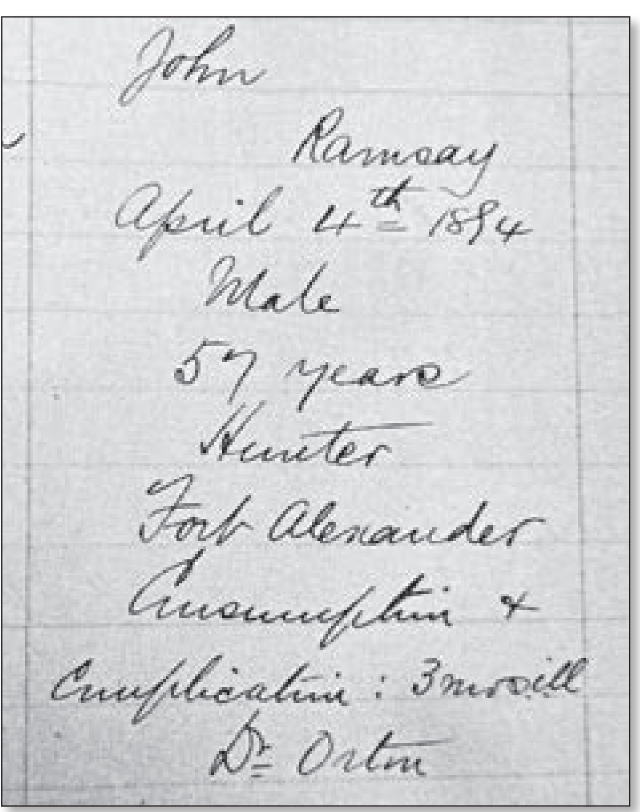
Social and ideational forces have shaped and selected the memories on which Icelandic-Canadian histories have been based, and their nostalgic narration at times glosses over less palatable behaviours and events. Interpretation of the past has been shaped by the hardships faced by the new settlement, the experience of nationalist aspirations in the homeland, and a forceful nineteenth-century Icelandic world-view imbued with ghosts, trolls, hidden people and the persuasive power of dreams. The hardships have long since passed, but some stories persist as accepted truth, shutting out other possible understandings of the past.

The narrative account of John Ramsay's ghost as definitive of Icelandic Aboriginal relations can be fruitfully examined as part of the complex process of making history liveable; the process is a strategy to suppress, displace and transmute pain. Braid has recently discussed how narratives provide important cognitive tools for making experience meaningful. Theorists of nationalism – Anderson, Bhabha, Giddens, Hobsbawm and Ranger and Lowenthal – have demonstrated how the narration of national histories plays a significant part in creating national and ethnic identities. Hobsbawm convincingly argues that nationalisms come before nations: they arise as self-conscious attempts to privilege the past's interpretation as the inevitable unfolding of an immanent national consciousness. History and memory now carry a heavy burden: they have become the pre-eminent means by which people orient their sense of self towards larger collectivities.

National and ethnic histories are selective. As is evident in the story of Ramsay, a man who gave crucial aid to the Icelanders during the early years of settlement and was deeply admired by them, the stories of other nations and ethnic groups are accessed sporadically, as long as they fit into the myth of the historic unfolding of the new identity, what Hobsbawm and Ranger term an "invented tradition." We learn little from Icelandic written sources about the social and cultural contexts of Ramsay's complex life, nor of the lives of other Saulteaux, Cree and Ojibwa peoples, nor of those Icelanders who married or cohabited with Natives and then met with bigotry. This is neither surprising nor blameworthy. But silences need to be recognized for what they are and how they occur, since they have lingering effects in the present.

National narratives can motivate seemingly ordinary and disparate social practices. Iceland's independence movement provided a means for early settlers to conceptualize their own identity and actions in diaspora, through the continuation in Canada of nationalist political ambitions. In Iceland, leaders of the nationalist independence movement envisioned their goal as the freeing of the repressed heroic spirit that had once found expression in the Icelandic sagas and Eddas, arguably medieval Europe's finest literary achievement. In Canada, the Icelanders quarried literature and folklore for metaphors and tropes to interpret

new realities. For example, they continue to compare their arrival on the shores of Lake Winnipeg to Ingólfur Arnason's settlement of Iceland circa 874 or to Leifur Eiríksson's arrival in Newfoundland circa 1000. Place names linked Manitoba's bush to the homeland's unfolding narrative, in what Anderson describes as the creation of synchronic or parallel spaces. The act of naming creates and demarcates; it lays claim to the world and orders it to fit into familiar ways of thinking. The settlers named their reserve New Iceland – the very name speaks volumes – and its first town site was Gimli, named for the heavenly hall reserved for the good and righteous, according to Norse mythology. The delegation that chose the site for the reserve renamed the White Mud River initially as Icelander's River – note the possessive form – which soon became Icelandic River. New Iceland soon had its own constitution; Icelanders in North America are known, still, as West Icelanders, as those living west of Iceland. West Icelanders named their farms after landmarks or places back home. The overall impression left by these actions and narratives is one of a new and virgin territory onto which Icelanders could freely inscribe their own dreams and desires. The native and nonnative presence in the region was silenced, as were everyday interactions Icelanders had with the people already in Canada.


John
Ramsay
April 4th 1884
Male
57 years
Hunter
Fort Alexander
Consumption &
Complication : 3 mo ill
Dr Orton

Icelandic-Canadians have extensive written records about themselves. The First Nations peoples of the Manitoba Interlake have had far less opportunity to put their histories into written and published form or to have their stories heard outside their own communities.[4] Most of John Ramsay's band was decimated by the same smallpox epidemic that killed many Icelanders. Survivors were absorbed into bands at Grassy Narrows, Hollow Water and Fisher River along both shores of Lake Winnipeg. Their stories so far remain undocumented in the scholarly literature, although members of the Fisher River band have undertaken an oral history project. Ethno-historians have been actively reconstructing the pre- and post-contact periods of what once was Rupert's Land by means of oral histories and detailed archival research (cf. Brown and Brightman; Carter; McColl; Titley). Such research provides a general background for the events discussed in this paper.

Although their origins are found in more easterly Ojibwa populations in northwestern Ontario, the Saulteaux

displaced the Cree around Lake Winnipeg by the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Cree worked the York boats on the lake, transporting trade goods for the Hudson's Bay Company, and lived with and sometimes intermarried with the Saulteaux (Steinbring). The most detailed ethnographic work on the Saulteaux is by Hallowell, who called them Northern Ojibwa (1942; 1955; 1992). Hallowell spent almost 10 years living with the Berens River people, who are located on Lake Winnipeg north of New Iceland. But the ethnographic record is not complete, in part because of the Saulteaux' s migratory movements in the early contact period and their more remote locations. Coupled with confusions over European attempts to categorize groups by origins and language, the character of the White Mud and Sandy Bar people is not entirely clear.

According to Steinbring, the Saulteaux are distinct from another group referred to as "Northern Ojibwa" in the Handbook of North American Indians, because the Saulteaux have traits the Northern Ojibwa lacked, such as the Midewiwin or Grand Medicine Society. These traits relate them to the southern Ojibwa or Chippewa. According to Winona Stevenson, 17 Saulteaux bands could be found on Lake Winnipeg. Sometime during the nineteenth century, the Red River Saulteaux joined with the Ottawa, who were planting corn next to Netley Creek, which was to become the southern boundary of New Iceland. The Netley Creek Saulteaux left the St Peters settlement to the south after it was missionized sometime between the 1830s and 1864. This split the community into traditional and Christian factions. Ramsay was possibly a member of the traditional faction. He was amongst those who left for Netley Creek. The White Mud-Sandy Bar region was the northernmost hunting and fishing grounds of the Netley Creek people. Just north of the White Mud River, from Grindstone Point to Jackhead River, were Saulteaux from the Lake St. Martin and Berens River areas. Later, the population of Fisher River was comprised of Cree from Norway House and Saulteaux from St Peters and Netley Creek. (The Icelandic Deputation that visited the White Mud area in 1875 referred to "Norway House Indians," which makes it difficult to make a final determination as to this group's origins.)

Icelandic settlement in Canada began with Sigtryggur Jónasson's arrival in 1872. Although it was not his intention, Sigtryggur was destined to become the leader of Icelandic settlement in Canada. His first step in this direction came when the Ontario government asked him to act as their agent and greet 365 Icelanders arriving in Quebec City in September 1874. He helped transport this group to Kinmount, in Ontario's Muskoka District. A smaller group had arrived in Canada in 1873; some moved on to Wisconsin, and 115 settled near Rosseau, also in Muskoka.

The settlements at Rosseau and Kinmount were unsuccessful. The land was too poor for farming. Wage labour was scarce, housing pitiful, and many of the children died during the winter for lack of proper nutrition. During the summer of 1875, five Icelandic men travelled west to Manitoba to find land for an exclusively Icelandic block settlement, or reserve. John Taylor, an unordained pastor working at a Bible Society shantytown, accompanied them and was appointed by the government as their agent. On 20 July, they chose a site on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg, an area approximately 12 miles wide and 48 miles long, extending north from what was then the Manitoba boundary at Selkirk to include Hecla Island. (A few months earlier, a

Pencil and ink drawing by Nelson Gerrard from the book, *Icelandic Settlers in America* by Elva Simundsson. Thanks to the Gimli Icelandic Canadian Society of the INL for its use.

Norwegian delegation, also seeking land to settle, rejected the same land as unfit for habitation.)

The first party of Icelanders arrived at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers in Winnipeg on 11 October 1875, three days after a Dominion Order-in-Council granted the reserve. They learned that Taylor had not made any arrangements for their provisioning, and a debate ensued as to the wisdom of continuing on to Lake Winnipeg via the Red River so close to winter's beginning. A few stayed in the immigration sheds in Winnipeg. The rest wanted to go immediately to Icelandic River, but rough waters forced them to land near present-day Gimli. There they spent the first harsh winter, poorly supplied and lacking appropriate survival skills. When spring came – it was delayed that year, and the ice did not leave the rivers until late May – some returned to Winnipeg. Three families continued on to Icelandic River, where they met John Ramsay and his people.

Narratives of the Past

The most thorough documentation in recent published form of the encounter with John Ramsay and his people is found in Nelson Gerrard's Icelandic River Saga. Writer and poet Kristjana Gunnars has given it a literary interpretation by means of a meditation on ghosts. Other versions of the story told from an Icelandic point of view are to be found in other histories. They appear to draw on the same source as does Gerrard, who translates the reminiscences of Fridrik Sveinsson, which were published in Thorleif Jacksson (Þorleifur Jóakimsson), *Frá Austri til Vesturs* (From East to West). Fridrik was 11 years of age when he and his family claimed the land at Icelandic River on which the Sandy Bar White Mud Saulteaux, including John Ramsay and his family, were living and gardening. It is not clear how long after the fact Fridrik wrote down his memories. If he wrote specifically for publication in 1919, then they are memories of events going back 43 years. No other eyewitness accounts exist to provide corroboration.

Fridrik tells of how Ólafur Ólafsson (who named the site of original settlement "Gimli"), Johannes Sigurdson, Flovent Jónsson and their families came to Icelandic River during the early summer of 1876, after the hard first winter spent near Gimli. Although Fridrik does not mention this, these families would have known already that the Saulteaux were living at Icelandic River, since a pamphlet about Nyja Ísland distributed to the immigrants included this information. The report made to the Canadian government by the Icelandic Deputation on 5 August 1875 provides evidence that the Icelanders saw signs of Indian habitation on Icelandic River and at Sandy Bar (directly east on Lake Winnipeg). Joseph Monkman, a longtime friend of John Ramsay and a member of the St Peters band, located south at Netley Creek, had guided the delegation. The deputation reports that:

We had a good guide with us, who had been along with the surveyor of the coast. We had also two other Half-Breeds.... But we did see with our own eyes good potatoes which the Indians had planted in June, and also what is termed Red River corn, both growing at Icelander's river. And at the south end of the Lake Winnipeg good wheat, potatoes, oats, peas and barley, as well as the Red River corn just mentioned were all cultivated with success. The Indians catch fish all summer in their nets, and manage to live on what they catch from day to day, although in our opinion their outfit is rather poor, and apparently they never try anywhere but close to shore.[5]

It seems likely that the Icelanders

had contact with Ramsay's people during this visit. Evidence can be found in an extensive letter written to Lieutenant-Governor Morris on 3 August 1875 by the Icelandic delegation. The letter drew Morris's attention to the possibility of conflict over the northern boundary:

We beg to call attention of your Excellency to the fact that a number of Norway-house Indians are at this time contemplating a settlement on White Mud River and on the adjoining coasts. This is the very spot which we have selected as the nucleus of our settlement, and therefore it would be of the very greatest advantage both to these Indians and to ourselves if some very distinct and clearly defined line of division could be adopted and enforced. North of Grindstone Point would be very suitable for them, and they are for the most part content to go there.[6]

The phrase "contemplating a settlement" is curious. By their own account, the Icelanders had seen the gardens already established at the White Mud River. It is possible that they were told more people from Norway House were intending to join with the Sandy Bar-White Mud River band. It certainly would be in the interests of the Icelanders for the Indians to move off the good agricultural land of Icelandic River to make way for Icelandic settlement, but we should not be too hasty to conclude that the Icelanders were accurately reporting the desires of the natives they encountered. Raymond Shirritt-Beaumont (pers. comm.) suggests that the Icelanders were quoting from stories circulating at the time, of a Cree exodus south from Norway House. He refers to an undocumented claim by Nan Shipley in The James Evans Story that, as early as the 1840s, some of the Cree at Norway House were thinking of moving to Grassy Narrows in order to take up farming, although an exodus did not begin until after 1875. Nonetheless, the events I relate below indicate that the Saulteaux already established at White Mud River were angered when three Icelandic families moved in summer 1876 onto the land they occupied. Clearly, they were not as willing to relinquish their land as the delegation reports.

The letter of 3 August clearly indicates that during their 1875 visit the Icelanders learned of native interests and attachments to land the Icelanders sought to claim. The deputation noted, "The Government at Ottawa has consented by telegraph to have this tract of land set apart for the exclusive settlement of Icelanders. Its boundaries will be more clearly determined when it has been surveyed and sub-divided into townships." It seems someone in the federal government decided Icelanders could occupy the land before its status had been ascertained.

This is background to Fridrik's account of the summer of 1876. From Fridrik's account we can see that Ramsay and his companions were likely attempting to scare the Icelanders away. Ólafur Ólafsson – Fridrik was his foster son – began to build a cabin on the northwest side of a creek running into Icelandic River, at a location he named Ós. This was next to the location where Ramsay, according to Thompson, lived and had a garden on the northeast side of the creek. Fridrik ambiguously states, "Ramsay soon began to make his presence known" while everyone helped Ólafur build his cabin, but some time passed before an open conflict occurred. One day, Ramsay three times pushed the boat away from shore as the men rowed across from their encampment to commence work. Ólafur finally held his axe above his head and Ramsay angrily left the scene. Later that day the settlers saw two canoes filled with Natives firing their guns in the air and occasionally at birds. The Natives then

entered the Icelanders' temporary home without invitation. Later Ramsay arrived with a translator, who informed the Icelanders that the Saulteaux considered the Icelanders' settlement on the river's north shore an infringement of Saulteaux land rights. They believed the boundary lay on the south shore. The Icelanders were uncertain because, as Fridrik points out, the land had yet to be surveyed.

Sometime after 17 August, Ólafur, Johannes, and Fridrik decided to head to the Red River, where they expected to meet with Sigtryggur Jónasson, who was arriving with a new group of settlers. They met Sigtryggur and an unidentified Indian agent, who assured the Icelanders that the boundary extended north of the river. (It is unclear on what basis he made this judgement, given that no survey of the reserve had yet been completed.) The Icelanders, however, took his word as definitive. Fridrik states that "the Indians – once informed that they had no right to claim ownership of the land north of the river – made no further attempts to hinder the Icelandic settlers from getting established." Ramsay appears to have eventually established good relations with the Icelanders, and this is the one aspect of the man's life that Icelandic-Canadian histories emphasize. Ramsay's character, physical strength and generosity are celebrated; in Fridrik's account his good looks and cleanliness are contrasted favourably to what the latter terms the "slovenliness" of other Aboriginal Peoples.

Fridrik's account is incomplete. In fact, Ramsay did not give up his quest to retain his land. Correspondence amongst various government representatives indicate that Ramsay attempted at first to regain his land and then, when that appeared impossible, to seek financial restitution. Clearly Ramsay considered the land his, no matter what an anonymous Indian agent said to the contrary. How much did Icelanders know of Ramsay's sense of entitlement? It is difficult to determine, although John Taylor, the Icelandic agent, was clearly aware of it, and it seems unlikely this would be information he would keep to himself.

Endnotes

1. My thanks to Jennifer Brown, Jim Gallo, Nelson Gerrard, Daisy Neijmann, Haraldur Ólafsson, Gísli Pálsson, Raymond Shirritt-Beaumont, Winona Stevenson, Tóta Vigfússon, and Helga Ögmundardóttir. Some of the costs of this research were paid for by funds provided by the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Social Science, University of Western Ontario. This article is a corrected version of one appearing in the Journal of Canadian Studies (2001; 36(2): 164-190).
2. The number of Ramsay's children varies in different accounts, but those written closest to the time of the events described cite five children, and not two or four.
3. This is a general explanation for why some Icelanders emigrated, but the motivations were more numerous and complex than can be adequately accounted for here.
4. An unpublished exception is Winona Stevenson, "Icelanders and Indians in the Interlake: John Ramsay and the White Mud River" (University of Winnipeg, 1986).
5. Sessional Papers (No. (8), 39 Victoria A1876); published in translation from the original Icelandic.
6. Morris Papers, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG12 Bl 1066.

Continued in next issue
(Including the references)

Ruth and Recognition

by Ruth Christie

When a child takes their first step, the parents are smiling, clapping and encouraging them to take another and another. Learning to rise each time they fall will bring even more praise. Walking enlarges their domain and they enter the world of communication. Very soon they gain wisdom by listening. It took me awhile as an adolescent to understand one of my grandmother's teaching…the Creator gave you two ears and one mouth. Achieving success in the arts, music, sports, academics, business or politics gives one a sense of pride, because your gains bring you value, recognition or awards. Being in a community you are contributing and accepted.

Remember the pride you felt when your teacher praised you because of your 100% mark on your spelling test? Or maybe the elation that swelled your chest when you hit that home run? Oh, the thrilling emotion when that tall "dream boat" walked across the floor and asked you to dance. I'm asking you now to travel with me. (I apologize for bringing you back so abruptly.)

This takes place when I was very young. It's autumn, late autumn, most of the brilliant boastful colors have gone. The sky is overcast. Heavy, sluggish waves heave themselves upon the granite shore. The wind is raw as I wait expectantly.

I push my wine tam down over my ears but I can still h ear the sound. It's coming from the south. In my head I count until it's in sight from behind the point. One person is in the boat. It's close to the reefs and riding low in the water. Will it turn into our bay? Yes!!! My siblings join me. Without a word, we wait and watch, as it slows and stops. My older brother leaps to a boulder in anticipation of the after wake of waves. He guides the boat to a safe mooring.

The driver pulls back his fur trimmed hood and laughs, as he joins us. Outney!! It's Outney Johnson. He reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a small paper bag and hands it to me. I thank him. I'm feeling special, very special.

We walk hand in hand up the hill to the warmth of the kitchen. My parents ask him to stay overnight.

While Outney joins my father in the living room, I open the bag. I don't know what it is. I tell my mother, "It looks like an apple but it's all hairy." She laughs and says, "It's a peach!" I've never seen a peach before, but I open the knife drawer and take out a paring knife. "Oh, you don't have to peel it – just cut it into slices." She knows I'll enjoy it more if I share it with my brothers and sister. My mother is so wise I think. I can't cut through it. Something is very hard in the centre. My mother who knows everything explains that a peach has only one large seed called a pit. I pass the slices around on the wooden cutting board. We eat the slippery, juicy fruit off the peel and giggle together.

After supper, Outney lifts me onto his knee. I pull his ears… they're large. Stroking the red hairs on his freckled

arms, reminds me of the peach. I check the pocket of the bib of my overalls. Yes, the peach pit is safe and so am I.

I should have given you a heads up, for those of who didn't know. I am a story teller. That's one of the reasons the International Visits Program of the Icelandic National League League of North America chose me as Cultural Exchange Participant in 2002. The second reason, I am descended from John Ramsay and Joseph Monkman, both of whom were very much involved with the early Icelandic settlers. In the Cree culture leaders make decisions that will benefit seven generations forward. I have been blessed. Because of the help my great grandfather gave to them in the Riverton area, he is a hero. The guide in 1875, when the Icelanders were searching for a suitable settlement on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg, was my great, great-grandfather Joseph Monkman.

Over the years my connection with the Icelandic community just kept growing. I'll share some of my adventures so you can see how those two leaders have benefited me because of their unconditional co-operation.

For 20 years I worked as a Historical Interpreter at Lower Fort Garry teaching visitors about Aboriginal history and culture. The summer of 1998 a co-worker shared the *Free Press* paper with me on my lunch break. Phil Manaigre and a film crew were taking John Ramsay's headstone by canoe and were launching from the site in two days. I told my supervisor that I was John Ramsay's great-granddaughter and requested leave to take part in the 130 km trip. He not only granted my request but I was kept on salary. "The publicity will do good for Parks Canada and will be beneficial to you personally," he said while giving me the phone number of Phil's secretary. I was embraced as a new found member of the entourage of cast, crew and participants. We were welcomed at each stop by friendly faces and helpful locals during the nice day trip to Sandy Bar. Monkmans and Icelanders came together at Betsey's gravesite in a ceremony to honor John Ramsay and his legacy of kindness and love. This was a journey that will live on in my memory.

Neil Bardal arranged for the Speaker of The House and her guests from Iceland to hear my presentation in the multipurpose room of how my people were almost decimated when the second group of Icelanders brought with them the dreaded smallpox Ramsay lost his wife and two sons. Out of a band of seventy only seven lived.

On a brighter note, David Gislason brought the 36 member Alafosskorinnn choir to the tipi where they sang three songs especially for me. They were all over 70 years in age. The last song was so sad, I had to turn away to hide my tears. Upon their departure they said, "If you ever come to Iceland, you'll be treated like the Queen of England." As I had not yet known of the International Visits Program, I only nodded. When I did go, I was treated royally. Some had retired but they reassembled in one home where they sang again, but only if I would tell a story. After a wonderful dinner, I obliged them.

In 2003, I joined the Bruin Chapter in Selkirk where I took Icelandic lessons

Rev. Stefan Jonasson

GIMLI UNITARIAN CHURCH

9 Rowand Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3J 2N4
Telephone: (204) 889-2635
Email: smjonasson@shaw.ca

and learned to sing along as they practiced for Sumardagurinn Fyrsti. This intimate group of people were so supportive to me as we all were notified I would be going to Iceland. At their Chapter's April event at the Legion I would donate items for the silent auction. Once I donated a beaded bracelet which a young girl won. She came over to introduce herself and her Amma. The bracelet was too large. I suggested she give that one to her Amma and then I would make her an identical one which would fit her wrist.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MANITOBA MAN AND NATURE MUSEUM

Ruth Christie

The Path to Gimli is the story of four friends who travelled on Icelandic Horses from over in Tyrarbakki, Iceland through Ontario to Gimli. Declan O'Driscoll contacted me when he was making arrangements for the horses to acclimatize at Clear Lake Farms and again I was part of this documentary. When at Ponemah I set up a tipi and a Metis gentleman and his granddaughter stepped out of the Red River Jig while accompanied by two local musicians. The horses and riders stopped at St. Peters Dynevor Church and my granddaughter got to ride one of the horses. Many of my relatives, some even came from Norway House, joined the Icelanders for a feast indoors and later shared stories around the camp fire. One gentleman came in an R.C.M.P. uniform of his time only to add color to the evening. The next day at Íslendingadagurinn the Pony Express Horse arrived bearing a pack filled with letters to relatives in Gimli which were distributed. A special stamp commemorating the event sealed each letter. Declan told me I had some letters in the pack but he would have them delivered right to my home in Selkirk. I was also given a red T-shirt with their logo and all

the places they stopped at were listed on the back with dates.

At Arborg when Trausti Vigfusson's 1898 house was moved to the Heritage site I was a special guest, a living link to the legend. Pat Eyolfson sent me an invitation in the mail. This building and its spectacular history was the first one on the site. *CBC's* Country Canada – A House with Haunted Memories, had the event filmed and it was shown in October 2000. In May 2008, I was again invited to attend the Grand Opening of Arborg Multicultural Heritage Village. Many people from all across Canada and parts of the United States came for that weekend. Just this past May two new tipis were purchased and while they were being put up I explained the practical and symbolic elements of these awesome structures and shared stories of Indigenous culture. The staff served a bountiful lunch.

In August of this year, 2017, I was invited to the Official Opening of the Viking Park in Gimli which was during the 128th Íslendingadagurinn. I offered a traditional Indigenous blessing and an ancient Gaelic rune. One hundred and forty years after the Icelanders arrival, "a wall displays their history and they recognize the goodwill and support that many Indigenous Peoples extended to the Icelandic settlers that helped them survive the hardships they faced in their new home."

Lastly, 4th Avenue Productions Inc. are creating an exhibit which will be the substance of a documentary called *A Song for John Ramsay*, at the new Iceland Heritage Museum on October 21, 2017.

I believe, from the time of my first peach, I was destined to walk with you on this journey known today as Truth and Reconciliation.

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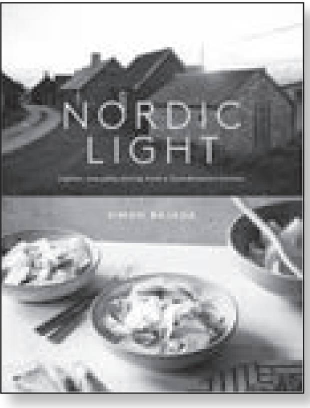

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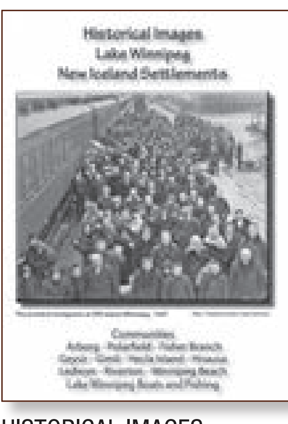

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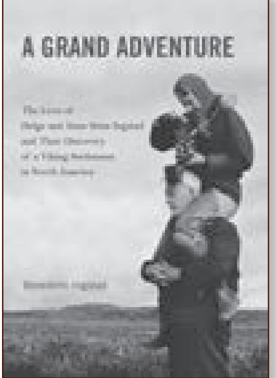

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Grandmothers and China Teacups

by Lisa Sigurgeirson-Maxx

When I was a very little girl, Granny Martha lived in my amma and afi's garden suite in the small, coastal, fishing village of Steveston, BC. She worked for a number of years, seasonally, at a cannery in the village, walking the mile and a half or so to and from her long work-shifts. Her modest home always had an undercurrent odor of fish lingering in the air, stuck in the curtains perhaps, and in her clothes and hair. But I never minded it. It was just part of the charm of visiting Granny Martha.

Granny was the quintessential "Little Granny" – just over four and a half feet tall, she carried a few extra pounds on her short, stocky frame. I remember the big smile (rarely with any teeth), her sparkling laughing eyes, her little round face and always the warm hug for each of us kids who would mill between the grandparents' homes, upstairs and down. Granny Martha was technically not my grandmother but we all thought of her as "our granny." Granny was actually my cousins' grandmother, the mother-in-law of my dad's youngest sister, Diana.

(Laura) Diana Sigurgeirson was born on Hecla Island in 1933. With her Icelandic family in 1943, at the age of nine and a half, Diana moved west to Steveston. Her dad – my afi – found work in those lean years as a fish-boat designer and builder out on the Pacific coast.

(Arnold Patrick) "Buddy" Recalma was a First Nations commercial fisherman from Qualicum on Vancouver Island and delivered fish, often in to Steveston, a key fishing and cannery port in those years of the booming fish industry. Auntie Diane met him on the fisherman's wharf one day, so the story goes and married her true love, "Uncle Buddy" in 1952.

Diane and Buddy lived in Steveston in the early years of their marriage, just down the road from amma and afi's house in close proximity so that amma could help with Diana's firstborn child, as Diana spent a lengthy time in the TB Ward of Vancouver General Hospital before and after the baby was born. Not long after the birth of their second child the small family moved to Qualicum where their next three children would eventually complete the family. They lived in "the big house" on the Qualicum Indian Reserve, Uncle Buddy being Chief, until Buddy passed away in 2002.

Diana raised their children to be proud of their aboriginal heritage. As children we often received hand-made knitted, sewn, crafted or beaded gifts from our young cousins. Intricately beaded headbands were a personal favourite. They also lived a rural life, growing huge vegetable gardens and putting food up so the larders were full. The gardening and knitting was in some way I imagine, not unlike Diana's earliest years on Hecla Island.

During the 1960s through the 1980s Auntie Diane and Uncle Buddy worked tirelessly and passionately for the rights of the aboriginal people through their close involvement with the Indian Affairs branch of government. They worked for their people and for the larger aboriginal community, advocating for their cultural,

social and economic rights. Diana sat on council, and appeared in court hearings as needed as the "Policy Chair" for the Qualicum First Nation.

The last time I saw my Auntie Diane at her home in Qualicum was on the evening of December 23rd some years ago when I happened to drop in unexpectedly because I was quite literally, in the neighbourhood. I knocked on the door and as always, was welcomed in immediately and invited to sit and eat at the large dining room table. My Auntie was well known as a very generous hostess, learning from both the Indian potlatch tradition and the steadfast Icelandic practices of welcoming and generosity. One never went away hungry nor without a few bags of provisions for the trip home.

That pre-Christmas visit Auntie Diane sat me down, fed me up and didn't miss a beat in her whirling busyness in the kitchen doing a lot of what soon became obvious to my well-trained eyes, Icelandic Christmas food preparations.

"This year, I decided," she informed me as she worked away cooking hot kleinur, "I decided to do a good old Icelandic Christmas. These ones," she indicated, with her baking utensils waving a bit madly around to include her grandchildren who scurried about in her fray, "these ones need to know they are Icelandic, too! They are not just Indians," she said, with a cheeky, Auntie-Diane-grin. "And this one here," she pulled a young granddaughter into an impetuous hug," This is my Little Icelander. She loves learning about all of this," Auntie said, sweeping her arms out to include all the Icelandic baked goods that covered the counters – vínarterta, pönnukökur, and even some rosettes I believe, if my memory serves. "So, this year I've decided," she said with a factual attitude that nobody would dare question. "This year we are doing an Icelandic Christmas again." I, for one, was happy she was actively acknowledging both the lines of my cousins' lineage.

We talked of teacups that evening. I'm not sure why it came up exactly, but I told her that I had recently been given a couple of my amma's teacups, after her passing. I can be very sentimental and, in the last years of my amma's life, I explained, I was the only one that I know of who would insist on drinking tea with her out of her dainty china cup collection. "I have a budding teacup collection," I smiled. Auntie Diane raised an eyebrow and said "Teacups? Do you want one of Granny's to go with your collection?" "I'd love one of Granny's teacups!" I enthused. She was already rustling in a back cupboard from which she procured a beautiful china cup with little flecks of gold-painted design on it.

IMAGES COURTESY OF LISA SIGURGEIRSON-MAXX

Christmas at the Ross' 1959. Auntie Diane is sitting in the dark dress, second from the right. Uncle Buddy is standing third from the right. Three of Auntie Diane and Uncle Buddy's kids are here: Kristina, beside her mom's lap, Mark, holding hands with my dad, second from left and Ingrid with a bottle, next to Jake, third from left. My amma is seated in the centre, my afi, holding the youngest, centre, back.

My amma's teacups sit proudly beside one of my Nana's – my Scottish grandmother's – and next to them is the teacup of Little Granny's. Added to this collection are a pair of teacups my mum and dad had been given as a wedding gift. And as well, one from my step-mums' modest collection joins the ranks. So, all The Grandmothers are honoured on my teacup shelf in my dining room now. I enjoy tea with my grandchildren out of china cups quite regularly.

Granny Martha's final resting place is near the sea on Vancouver Island, close by to the Little Cabin she stayed in all the years she lived at home in Qualicum. Interestingly enough, my amma's ashes are interned there beside Granny's. So, I suppose, they "share a house" once again; "the Icelander and the Indian;" the Grandmothers sleeping peacefully next door to one another.

Auntie Diane asked to have her own ashes buried on Hecla Island, as it seems she desired to return to her own ancestral heritage; to her own roots after her lifetime of supporting her husband and children's' Canadian First Nations cultural heritage.

Circles of life are so intriguing, I find. And tea is always so much tastier when enjoyed sipped over the thin, clean edge of a china teacup.

An Interview with Jónína Kirton

by Heiða Simundsson

You were born on the prairies, whereabouts? Where did you grow up?

Growing up I had a somewhat nomadic life as my father struggled with finding steady employment after the Korean War ended in 1953. I was born in 1955 in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba and we lived in Churchill, Fort William (which is now Thunder Bay), and Goose Bay Labrador before moving to Winnipeg when I was thirteen. I was very deeply saddened when we moved to Winnipeg as I loved living in Goose Bay as it was a very small community and the forest was just behind my home. Having access to land was always important to me and our first home in Winnipeg did not have that. I was so grateful when we moved to Charleswood the following year and now I had empty fields just down the street. Charleswood felt like its own small town. I was home again.

Your heritage is both Métis and Icelandic, can you tell me about your parents?

Both of my parents were community minded people. My mother, Lorraine Denham later Kirton, was Icelandic and I believe Irish. Her mother, Jónina, was 100% Icelandic. Her parents were poor farmers in Saskatchewan and they had 17 children. A devoted Anglican, she spent much of her time organizing teas and craft sales for the church. She also worked for a number of years as a nurse at Tuxedo Villa. She loved this work.

My father, Ken Kirton, was Métis and to this day his connection to his own ancestry remains a bit of a mystery. I do know that both of his parents were Métis and that he lost his father at a young age. My father was very good at sports. A hero to some. In fact, he was once offered a contract with the Montreal Canadiens farm team and a try-out with the Montreal Canadiens. A Korean War vet, he turned this offer down as the money was not good and he had a family to raise. Instead he pursued a career as an air traffic controller which was a nice fit as he had worked with radar on the navy ships during the Korean War. A poor “half-breed” from what he called “the wrong side of the tracks” in Portage la Prairie, he wanted more for his children and did much to make this happen.

Sadly, my parents’ happy ending was not very happy as my father drank a lot, there was violence and then there were the losses… two of my brothers died in their teens, my mother never got over it so her health failed and she died in 1987 at the young age of 56. My father just passed away this year having lived so much of his life without the love of his life. He never remarried.

Did you grow up being a part of and learning about both cultures?

Yes and no. My father’s cousin did tell me that I sat on the knee of my great-grandfather and that he was a fiddle-

playing Métis man that would sing songs to me in Michif. I had no conscious memory of this but a part of me always knew I had exposure to the language and the culture as my reaction to hearing Michif or Cree was to become a small child and to want to lean into the speaker or to crawl up on their knee. Sadly, my exposure to Métis culture was impeded by my grandmother's and my father's decision to leave behind their language and culture. There is speculation that my grandmother did this when my grandfather fell from a grain elevator and died. Some say that my grandmother worried about being an Indigenous woman with four small children and no husband. Whatever the reason she and one other sister refused to speak the language they had grown up with. They told everyone they were French but I always knew that this was not the full story.

The only thing I knew about Icelandic culture was that we had Vínarterta at Christmas. My grandfather always said his wife, Nína aka Jónína, was crazy, that all Icelanders were "crazy". Truthfully, the Icelanders in our family were quite quirky. This was something I valued and it is a trait that I too have. It has served me well as a writer.

Do you speak additional languages besides English?

I do not. I have tried to learn some Cree and Michif but it is as if I have inherited my grandmother's fear of speaking an Indigenous language. It is incredible what we internalize. I recall the way she would shake if I asked her if we were 'Native'. Somehow her fear was passed to me – or – is it that I was exposed to the language (with my great-grandfather or my grandmother's other sisters) so spoke the words and got in trouble for it? I have no idea. All I know is my body is filled with fear when I try to speak the words.

What were some cultural traditions your family participated in?

Just the usual Christian and Canadian holidays. As mentioned earlier the only evidence of Icelandic culture would be the Vínarterta my mother made at Christmas. My father claimed no connection to the Indigenous world. Even so I can see the Indigenous worldview in my father. No doubt his grandfather played a huge role in the shaping of him as a young Métis boy.

Do you identify with both cultures? Does one resound more strongly with you than the other?

I have always felt Indigenous – so not white. Having such a large family, on the Icelandic side, I have often been the only person of colour in a sea of blonde hair and blue eyes. Given our physical differences I did feel different from my Icelandic relatives. I did most relate to the Indigenous side. In part, this is no doubt due to my physical appearance but it is more than that. My world view has always been more on the Indigenous side. Having said that I am a poet and apparently there were many poets on my Icelandic side so no doubt my Icelandic ancestors also speak through me. I am truly a mix.

What pieces of Icelandic culture do you identify the most strongly with? With Metis culture?

My love of words comes from both sides. Words as medicine is an Indigenous concept that I fully embrace. The importance of storytelling is key to both cultures. I feel compelled to tell my story via poetry, this seems an Icelandic thing. That both cultures have this love of story makes me want to add my voice to the many narratives that name and shape the world around us. Words live in our bodies; the words of our ancestors are still going before us – just as our words will go before the next generation.

I don't know much about other aspects of Icelandic culture. As for the Métis, I love

PHOTO: AYELET TSBARI

Jónína Kirton 2014

I would say the biggest difference would be the written and the oral tradition of storytelling. Much of the Indigenous teachings and storytelling has been oral so not written down. Clearly the Icelanders used to also have an oral tradition but it is some time now that they have been recording things in writing. I am only now beginning to see how writing things down changes things.

How did you come to call the West Coast home?

I fell in love with these lands when I came here for a holiday in my late teens. During that vacation, I promised myself that I would live here one day. I had not pictured 'here' as being Vancouver. I always thought I would end up in a small town on the island or in the interior but I transferred here, with Canadian Airlines in 1987 and Vancouver has been home ever since. I still dream of returning to small town living.

the music, the beadwork, and the laughter. Aware that we are a weaving of cultures we try never to take ourselves too seriously.

What would you say is a similarity between the cultures, and what would be a strong difference?

Both cultures respect other ways of knowing. I heard that in Iceland they will not build roads where the hidden people live. There is a respect for the land that incorporates other ways of knowing and leaves room for those with 'gifts' not just 'formal education' to be heard.

When did you begin writing? Was it a hobby at first or was it a serious past time from the beginning?

I am a late bloomer. I took my first writing class just over ten years ago. When I began writing I had intended to write one 'how to host sacred circles for women' book and my memoir. I always say that poetry chose me as when I applied to the

Simon Fraser Writer's Studio for creative non-fiction they put me in the poetry stream. They saw a poet and were they right. I speak poetry. It is my language. I am so grateful that I discovered this. When I began it was not my intention to become a full-time author and certainly not a poet but now – I am all in! Writing has become my life. I am either writing, doing readings or presentations, working as an editorial board member for Room Magazine, or on the SFU Writer's Studio board of directors, or working with other writers. I love it!

Did you have another career previous to being a writer/poet professionally?

I am one who sheds their skin every five to ten years. I have worked in a number of different areas. I have been a banker, a make-up artist, an airline employee, an enforcement officer with the family maintenance enforcement program, a peer-support facilitator trainer, and a facilitator. I have worked and volunteered in the non-profit sector with Native Health, social and co-op housing, battered women and single mother's support groups via the YWCA.

A colleague of mine described your poetry as accessible? Why do think people would find your writing accessible?

My poetry is intentionally accessible. I use poetry for storytelling. As mentioned earlier I wanted to tell my story via memoir but what I discovered was that poetry was a better vessel for a story like mine. Due to trauma, my memory was fragmented. Poetry allows the space for fragments and it also allows me to gesture towards things that I am not ready to fully express. It gave me a way to describe the pain and the pleasure of being a mixed-race woman raised by two well-intentioned people who never understood the world their daughter inhabited. I was aware that keeping the language simple was important. Having said that my work is deceptively simple as there are many layers to it all.

How would you describe your writing style? What do you hope to achieve by sharing your writing with others?

I have been told my vernacular is Prairie Indigenous. I have to say that this tickles me and have no doubt this sensibility has informed my writing style. I am frank and have never been one for convention. Is this the Icelandic side? Perhaps.

I do love the idea of poetry as protest. Much of my most recent book, *An Honest Woman,* was written during the US election. As I watched Trump rise to power I was heartsick for young women. I want more for them, for all women but most of all for women of mixed-race especially Indigenous women who are clearly targeted far more than their non-Indigenous sisters. It was my hope that my stories might make some women feel less alone and to bridge the gap between young feminists and older feminists like myself.

But truthfully, none of this matters when I am actually writing. The writing pushes on me. The writing asks me to take deep dives and to look for good medicine. While there, it is just me and the beauty of words. The craft, the fine-tuning sings in my body and I am freed of the story whether or not anyone else reads it.

Your first book of poetry *page as bone – ink as blood* is described as "intimate". Would you agree?

In a sense, it is intimate. Like little gasps, it breathes truth in small doses – but – it is not as intimate as my readers might think. I use metaphor to both enlighten and to hide. One can get the twinge in the gut and think they have been told the story but truthfully, I generally only gesture at the story. There is so much I do not say. This is intentional.

One reviewer of your work calls you "courageously honest", do you think it takes courage to be honest and share

intimate moments and feelings with an unknown audience?

It did take courage to tell my story. There is risk involved, as there is a price to pay for speaking to the things that most people hide. It is a price I was willing to pay as it was for a higher purpose. Having said that I have found myself wanting to hide and withdraw since releasing that book. I was exhausted by the writing of it but it is more than that. My father passed away just as it was being finished. I had to sit at his memorial, with many people including my own brother, who would be disturbed by what I was about to share with the world. It was never my intention to harm anyone. I have to go back to that higher purpose over and over. I wrote the book for the young women of today – to say, 'I see' what is happening and I will not be put to sleep by the pressure to accept the narrative of the colonizer, the patriarchy.

What made you decide to publish your poems for the first time?

Once you begin writing it seems a natural next step to publish. Given this I sent out poems years ago and was fortunate to have some published. Even though I had some success with publishing, I have rarely submitted work, unless asked to do so. I am not a very prolific writer so do not have a lot of poems just sitting around.

Your second book of poetry *An Honest Woman* focuses on femininity, sexuality, and women in general; what prompted this?

Originally, the book was largely autobiographical. I was exploring what it was like to grow up mixed race – Indigenous/Icelandic with a white Christian mother. I was unpacking the things that I had I learned from my mother and father about being a woman – about sex, love and marriage – and the ways my Indigenous identity threatened what they wanted for me. And then the U.S. elections brought an unexpected gift.

Suddenly the whole world was watching and talking about the very things I was writing about – race, gas lighting, sexual assault/harassment and who is considered honest in the "he-said-she-said" arena. Toxic masculinity, the effects of racism and the vulnerability of women was on full display. Given this I was acutely aware that there was an opening and that I could not afford to miss it. In the final hour I restructured the whole book. I added poems about Trump and the Clintons and deleted some of the more autobiographical poems. By doing this I was able to shift the focus to others. This book was no longer about me or my mother or my father. It was about the world we live in. By using real life quotes from someone like Trump, Clinton and Fritzl's trial I was able to offer indisputable truths about the world that girls are born into.

It took some time to find a way to approach the vulnerability of all women and girls without diminishing the reality that Indigenous women are more at risk. My own experiences offered a way to keep Indigenous women front and centre. Why was I the target of so much sexualized violence is the question behind a number of poems. What did my mother, my father and the world teach me about love, sex and marriage? How are these two things linked? I do not have the answers yet but wanted to invite dialogue, to open a conversation about it all. I am happy to say that although the book was only released at the end of April I have already heard from many women who can relate to some or all of the book.

Would you consider yourself a feminist? And what does that word mean to you?

I have been a feminist as long as I can remember. At a young age, I saw the inequities in my parent's marriage and I

decided that marriage or a life of servitude was not for me. I refused to take typing in high school as I was never going to be someone's secretary. But it is more than that – as a feminist – I am concerned with equity and inclusion for all.

How does your heritage influence your perspective on being a women?

I am certain that my ancestors speak through me and that on both sides there were feminists. I come from strong women. The Métis wives travelled with their voyageur husbands and taught them how to live on this land. The Icelanders, or Vikings with their Shield Maidens who fought alongside their men. How could I not be a strong woman? It is natural for me to be independent. No doubt this trait was passed down to me. It was a continuous annoyance to my parents who wanted a sweet and submissive daughter. The name of my book, *An Honest Woman*, inspired by something I heard often growing up. "He'll make an honest woman out her." My parents wanted a marriageable daughter but instead they got me.

You organized the first National Indigenous Writers Conference in 2013? Why did you want put this event on? Why was it important to you? Have you hosted any events since?

I was simply the coordinator. This event was organized and sponsored by SFU Publishing Department and the Aboriginal Writers Collective – West Coast. It was Joanne Arnott that asked me to step in and help with the coordination. She walked me through the whole thing as I was not that familiar with the Indigenous writing world. I was happy to play a small part in this event happening and to make connections with other Indigenous writers from across Canada. I have been involved in many writing events, mainly as a participant or presenter. I am on the Room Magazine editorial board and we host readings, a festival and workshops.

Are you working on any new projects currently that readers can look forward to?

I am considering what to do next. My last book, *An Honest Woman*, was just released in April and I am already hearing back from women working in the field of violence against women. Given my discussions with them I am looking at developing and delivering writing/healing workshops for women who have been victims of violence. As for a writing project. I would dearly love to come and spend a summer at Gimli to explore my Icelandic and Métis ancestry further and then write about where these cultures have converged.

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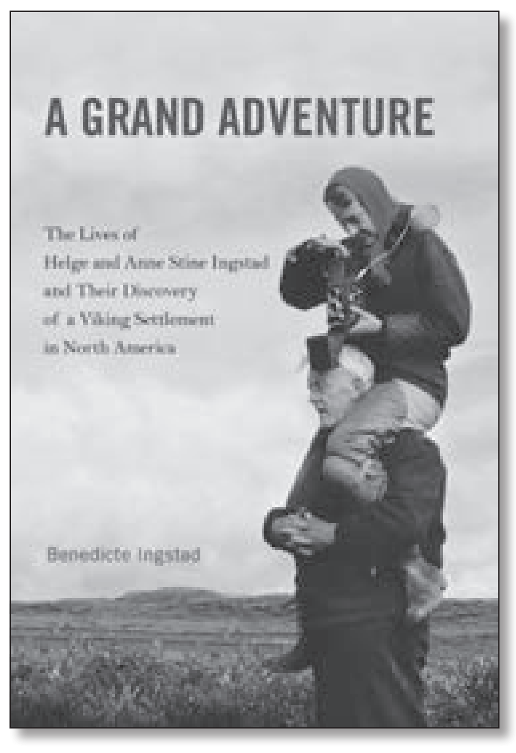
Book Review

A Grand Adventure: The Lives of Helgi and Anne Stine Ingstad and Their Discovery of a Viking Settlement in North America

by Benedicte Ingstad

Reviewed by E. Leigh Syms, PhD, C.M.



A Grand Adventure: The Lives of Helge and Anne Stine Ingstad and Their Discovery of a Viking Settlement in North America
Benedicte Ingstad
Hard cover, 472 pages
McGill-Queen's University Press, May 29 2017

This is a biography of Helgi and Anne Stine Ingstad written by their daughter, Benedicte. Many readers will be familiar with this couple as the Norwegian researchers who were the first to develop public awareness about the L'Anse aux Meadows Site in Newfoundland and then devoted many years to the excavation and promotion of the most outstanding Viking site in North America. But, this is a biography that covers their entire lives; a fascinating account that is filled

with numerous adventures, insights into traditional First Nations lifeways, and political intrigue.

Both grew up in Norway. Helgi earned a law degree in 1920 to satisfy his father but he gave up this career to fulfill his insatiable desire to travel and explore new areas. He moved to Canada where he took up trapping in the northern wilderness of Great Slave Lake and beyond, into the tundra. There, he joined a camp of "Caribou Eater" Dene and published his four-year experience living with the traditional Dene in *The Land of Feast and Famine* (1930) which made him famous and a hero in Norway. This very successful book launched him into a career as writer and public speaker which provided his major funding. After being a government bureaucrat in Eastern Greenland, he published *East of the Glacier* (1936). In 1936 he moved to the USA where he worked as a cowboy in Arizona and wrote about his experiences with Apaches in *The Apache Indians: In Search of a Missing* Tribe (1939). In 1949-50 he joined the Nunamiut, an isolated inland Inuit group on the Brooks Range of Alaska, where he was so immersed in their daily activities that he felt that he had developed the same mind set.

Ingstad was a government bureaucrat in East Greenland for a number of years where he enjoyed Arctic experiences travelling mainly by dogsled. During cold raging snowstorms he learned to count on the intelligence and the instinct of his lead dog to carry him safely to his destination. He supported the Norwegian underground during the Nazi occupation during WW II. During all of these activities he continued to write and give innumerable lectures.

Anne Stine was a young 17 year old romantic who decided that she was going to marry him after reading *The Land of Feast and Famine*, although she was 18 years younger than he. She initially stayed at home, raising a family. She then went to university where she attained an MA in archaeology and became the archaeological supervisor at the L'Anse aux Meadows excavations.

In the 1950s, Ingstad's interest turned to Viking developments. There is considerable discussion on his reviewing the sagas, checking the Viking sites in Greenland in 1953, and renting boats to search the East Coast from the northern states to north of Newfoundland. They spent four years excavating L'Anse Aux Meadows, funded mainly through donations, book royalties, and innumerable lectures. Ingstad produced *Westward to Vinland (1969).* Anne Stine wrote an entertaining account of the excavations,

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The New Land with Green Meadows (1976) and a massive compilation of numerous studies, *The Discovery of Norse Settlement on North America*, Vol. I (1977). Volume II by Helgi was completed in 1985. Anne was an unpaid volunteer until she received a Norwegian annual grant in 1977.

The accounts of the trials and tribulations that the Ingstads faced were horrific. A Danish archaeologist laid claim to have found L'Anse Aux Meadows first. Despite the Ingstads having clearly excavated square buildings and having found iron nails, some archaeologists remained unconvinced. There are long sections on lies and skeptical comments and jealousies among some international archaeologists, the Newfoundland government and Parks Canada. Once the spindle whorl and copper pin were discovered, there was no longer any doubt about the site's authenticity. These various events caused severe distress for both and depression for Anne. A new set of problems is discussed when the site was taken over by the Newfoundland government and then turned over to Parks Canada. The Ingstads felt that they were squeezed out as they were no longer being consulted nor were they being funded to come to major openings. The discovery of the copper ring pin brought international fame, major funding from National Geographic, and, finally, major recognition through honourary degrees and invitations to all events.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. It was not what I was expecting.

Contributors

DR. ANNE BRYDON, PhD, is a Professor of Anthropology at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, ON. Her Master's research thesis was based on a study of ethnicity focusing on the Icelanders of Manitoba.

RUTH CHRISTIE is an elder in Residence at the Aboriginal Student Services Centre of the University of Winnipeg, offering guidance in traditional teachings, cultural activities and guest lectures.

GAIL HALLDORSON is a retired High School Librarian living in Sandy Hook, Manitoba. She enjoys her volunteer work at the New Iceland Heritage Museum.

WILLIAM PRINCE is a multi-award winning Canadian folk and country singer-songwriter and a member of Peguis First Nation in Manitoba's Interlake. His most recent accomplishment was the 2017 Juno Award for Contemporary Roots Album of the Year for his debut album *Earthly Days.*

GLENN SIGURDSON is a mediator, teacher, writer, lawyer. His is the Honorary Consul General of Iceland in BC. www.glennsigurdson.com; www.vikingsonaprairieocean.com.

LISA SIGURGEIRSON-MAXX was born in and raised in Steveston, BC where her Icelandic father, Vilhjalmur Jakob (Bill) Sigurgeirson and his family settled in 1943, when Bill was a boy of twelve. They had moved from Hecla Island. Lisa currently keeps busy as an amma, a freelance writer and singer-songwriter-performer.

HEIÐA SIMUNDSSON is a teacher of mathematics at Arborg High School and a farmer specializing in organic cropping practices.

E. LEIGH SYMS, PhD, C.M. is Curator Emeritus in the Archaeology Department at the Manitoba Museum. One of his particular interests is Viking archaeology, and he has long been a proponent of portraying the outstanding accomplishments of Vikings and authentically portraying their dress (no horned helmets)! He produced a travelling exhibit on the Vikings for the Museum which was enthusiastically received in many venues for over 25 years. He is also a former executive member of the magazine.

the bulkhead. However, we were suffocating with
the smoke so I climbed the ladder to the
mid-upper escape hatch, dropped the hatch door
and started the climb through the hatch. One
of the crew was behind me. I don't remember
anything after that moment until I regained
consciousness in the sea some distance from the
ditched aircraft (on fire). Later I found that
I had large bruise on my forehead; possibly
from striking my head on the mid upper gun
turret. I removed my chest chute and
swam toward the aircraft. My mae west was
slightly inflated. When I reached the port wing
the skipper was crawling out the window, bleeding
from the head and he was followed by the
tailgunner who also was injured. We attempted
to remove the cover of the wing dingy storage
compartment but failed to budge it. The skipper
then put his right hand into flames emerging
from the hatch to release the dingy by the cable
handle. He received extensive burns to his hand
and arm. The dingy was released and inflated
but was not free as the wires holding emergency
supplies were tangled to the trailing edge of the port
wing. The tailgunner took the dingy knife cutting
all the wires to free the dingy but the emergency
supplies were lost. We would be without food,
medicine and water.. No other crew members

IMAGE COURTESY OF GAIL HALLDORSON

A page of Johann Vilhjalmur Johnson's handwritten account –
The Night in 1945 When My RCAF Halifax Bomber Was Shot Down

The Back Page

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