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Vol. 71 #4 (2020)

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ICELANDIC CONNECTION

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ICELANDIC CONNECTION



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ON THE COVER



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRIAN JOHANNESSON

Konrad (Konnie) Johannesson

Editorial

The History of the Editorship of *Icelandic Connection*. And its Future.

by Elin Thordarson

For a small literary magazine that's been in continuous publication since the Second World War, approaching eighty years, the editorship of *Icelandic Connection* sure doesn't change hands that often. A testament, I think, to the magazine's inherent importance and fundamental value; its significance and relevance to its readership, to its board and to its editor.

Icelandic Connection began its publication in 1942 under the name *The Icelandic Canadian*. At its helm was the esteemed writer Laura Goodman Salverson, author of *The Viking Heart* (1923) and by the time *The Icelandic Canadian* began its publication she was already a two time Governor General Award winner for her novels *Dark Weaver* (1937) and *The Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* (1940).

In Volume 1, Number 2 she submits for permanent record the vision that herself and the rest of the editorial staff and business management had for *The Icelandic Canadian* in 5 points.

To assist in making the things of value in our Icelandic heritage a living part of ourselves as Canadian citizens and thus improve the quality of our contribution to

the distinctively Canadian pattern.

To provide an instrument by which the children of the ever increasing mixed marriages may be reached, and through which we seek to instill in them a better knowledge and a keener appreciation of our heritage.

To provide a means where Canadians of Icelandic extraction, pure or mixed, can become better acquainted with each other and thus strengthen the common bond of the past which in itself will strengthen the common bond of the future in the larger Canadian scene.

To stimulate greater effort by making known to our readers the contributions of Icelandic Canadians to the highest and best type of citizenship.

To place before the people of Canada and particularly the other ethnic groups, our interpretation of the position we should take as Canadian citizens, and thus contribute to Canadian unity by helping to form a common basis of approach.

Salverson's editorship, as impressive as it is to have a prestigious literary award winner at the helm of a new publication, was unfortunately not very long lasting and she was shortly replaced by the Honourable Judge Walter Jacobson

Lindal, who undeniably holds the position of editor in chief, and later editor emeritus, for the lengthiest amount of time of any editor of *Icelandic Connection*; which was, from what I can tell, 1945 to about 1976; the time of his death. He might also be the editor with the most varied of experiences in life; from law to politics and publishing Lindal was an absolute titan on the Mount Olympus of Icelandic Canadian figures.

Lindal was born in Iceland in 1887 and emigrated with his parents at an early age. He was educated at Wesley College and graduated from University of Saskatchewan's Law School in 1914, called to the Manitoba Bar in 1919 and appointed to the King's Counsel in 1932.

Somewhere in that time he served as captain during the First World War and was an active member in the Manitoba Liberal Association, becoming the Winnipeg candidate in the 1927 general election. By 1942 he was the founder and president of the Canada Press Club and was also appointed to a county court judgeship. And then his editorship at *The Icelandic Canadian* begins. He takes the helm at the end of the Second World War and steers it well into the 1970s.

Judge Lindal was replaced by Wilhelm Kristjanson in 1976. Born in 1896 in Otto in the RM of Coldwell, and educated at Oxford and the University of Chicago he would have been eighty when he took over *The Icelandic Canadian* after a life of teaching in rural Manitoba and then Winnipeg. Like Lindal he was a veteran and was wounded at Vimy Ridge and in the Second World War he served in the Reserve Forces. He was a member of the Royal Canadian Legion, the Manitoba Historical Society, the Icelandic National League, the Masons and the Unitarian church. He died in 1979 after only a couple years as editor.

Next comes Axel Vopnfjord born in 1902 at Husavik near Gimli, Manitoba.

Contemporaneous to Wilhelm Kristjanson, as young man Axel began a lifelong career in teaching at schools throughout Manitoba and by 1961 he was teaching at the Manitoba Teachers' College and retiring in 1968 from a position as an assistant professor with the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. He would have been in his mid- to late seventies by the time he took over the publication of *The Icelandic Canadian* in 1978 according to his write up on the Manitoba Historical Society website.

In fact, this history lesson in the changing hands of the editorship of what is now *Icelandic Connection* is completely lifted from Gordon Goldsborough's work on the MHS site. Which is to say that each of our magazine's editors qualify, according to MHS, as a notable Manitoban for their life's contributions to the history of this province. They are important figures, noted for their capability, competence, and the scope and scale of their varied experiences. It should be inspiring to recognize the significance in the *Icelandic Connection's* lineage.

Following Vopnfjord there appears to be a co-editorship between Dr. Kirsten Wolf at the University of Manitoba's Icelandic Department, and the late Sigríð Johnson (1950-2018) at the Elizabeth Dafoe Library's Icelandic Collection. Wolf, a native of Denmark, is currently the Birgit Baldwin Professor and Torger Thompson Chair at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. But at the time of her editorship role she was the head and chair of the Icelandic Department at the U of M here in Manitoba. Working closely with her, just across a footpath on the university campus, was Johnson who took over the maintenance of the

largest collection of Icelandic materials in Canada (the second largest in North America – the largest being at Cornell in New York). She oversaw the 27 000 item collection which is an important hub for research in Icelandic studies and a significant site of the preservation of Icelandic culture and heritage in Canada.

Working behind the scenes during that time as the magazine's secretary and eventually taking over the position of editor is Lorna Tergesen, and there is of course Elva Simundsson who, along with their board, have worked together on this publication since the 1980s. They have kept this magazine thriving by preserving the heritage of the descendants of Icelandic people in North America through the publication of scholarly articles, book reviews, poetry, translations, fictions, cultural event reporting and the sagas in translation. But their time, like the editors before them, is coming to an end. And *Icelandic Connection* once again enters another phase in its history. It is my great honor to accept the position of editor of this very fine, long-standing publication.

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Elin Thordarson. From a lineage perspective I am of Icelandic descent on my father's side. The ancestor that came to Canada was named Erlendur Thordarson. Him and his wife Sigurbjorg settled in Winnipeg. My *langafi* was Frederick Thordarson who by the time the Winnipeg Falcons were setting sail for Antwerp was on the team's executive board and stayed home because of the birth of one of his four children. One of whom was my Auntie Shirley McCreedy who served for a long time with *Icelandic Connection*, her brother David Thordarson – an architect with GBR in Winnipeg – was my grandfather. My father was the late Jon Thordarson, a photographer with several

of Winnipeg's newspapers over time and became the photo editor at the *Winnipeg Free Press*. I received my Masters of Arts degree from the University of Manitoba's Icelandic Department in 2011 studying under Dr. Birna Bjarnadóttir. My thesis examined the plays of Guttormur J. Guttormur. And with Dr. Christopher Crocker we managed to translate his volume entitled *Tíu leikrit* into English as *Ten Plays*. Since then I have been writing, translating, parenting and working in the children's department at Winnipeg's largest library.

Since Laura Goodman Salverson published the five point mission statement in a 1942 volume of *The Icelandic Canadian*, this magazine has always featured the lifeworks of Icelandic descendants as a means of preserving the cultural heritage. It's my aim as I take over the editorship of *Icelandic Connection* to feature the academic research of people studying Icelandic culture, or to introduce readers to native Icelandic scholars and the projects they are working on. I intend shortly to send out a call for papers to universities that have Icelandic or Scandinavian Studies Departments to target scholars that have committed themselves to the study of Iceland. It's my belief that academic scholarship is a kind of cultural heritage and making ourselves acquainted with the scholars and students interested in Iceland is yet another way to preserve the cultural heritage of the descendants of the Icelandic immigrants in North America. I will also be accepting essays, fiction, journals, translations, poetry, reviews from non-academic sources. If there is something you would like to share please send a copy to editor@icecon.ca and I will be happy to read it. Takk kærlega.

– Elin Thordarson

Konrad (Konnie) Johannesson Memoirs and Diary, 1910–1919

by Brian Johannesson

Introduction

My father, Konnie, the fourth of eight children, was born in Glenboro, Manitoba on August 10th, 1896, shortly after that his family moved to Winnipeg. His father Jónas, from Reykjalið, was a successful house and apartment builder and could afford a very good education for his family.

His mother Rósa Einarsdóttir, from Husavik, was a pillar of the First Lutheran Church for many years. Somewhere along the way Konnie learned to play the violin rather well.

“Frank” Fredrickson and “Davey” Davidson were childhood friends of Konnie, they had all grown up together in Winnipeg and enlisted together. ‘Freda’ (my mother) was his (unofficial) fiancée, they were married in May 1921.

I inherited the diaries, letters and a negative book after the death of my mother in 1969. The book contained over 100 negatives, most of them still in excellent condition, from which most of the pictures were printable. These negatives were given to the National Archives in Ottawa in 1974. I still have the diaries and the rest of his papers.

Dad wrote these memoirs in the late 1950s, using his old Underwood typewriter. I still remember the sound of his two-finger keyboard-bashing.

* * *

Konnie’s story from his memoirs and diaries:

My interest in flying machines began one afternoon in July back in the year 1910, when I was 14 years old. The afternoon was warm and sunny, and I walked from our old family home at 675 Mc Dermot Street to the Fair Grounds on Dufferin Ave. west of Arlington St. in Winnipeg. On that afternoon I saw my first flying machine. I never did figure out how I managed to get close enough to that machine to actually touch it. I guess I must have been prodded by a boy’s natural curiosity. I didn’t realize I was in forbidden territory until I heard a loud voice yelling to someone to get the H--- out of there. That someone turned out to be me.

Well, before my presence was noticed I had had a few minutes to have a good look at the first flying machine to be assembled in Winnipeg. In those days, the aircraft used in these exhibition tours were always dismantled and shipped by rail from point to point. This time, along with several years following, belonged to the fix and fly era, and to fly an aircraft was definitely a circus or exhibition stunt. That afternoon turned out to be perfect flying weather, with a gentle westerly wind, right up and down the long way of the inner grass area of the race track.

Flights were always advertised or announced as “weather permitting”. I figured that this afternoon the weather was

going “to permit,” so I parked myself as close as the enclosure fence and waited. A rumour was passing through the crowd that the flying machine would fly, so space along the fence near the machine was fast being filled. At this time I cannot remember whether it was Coffine, Elie or Catherine Stinson who made the first flight over the Exhibition Grounds, but somehow I seem to favor Elie. The flight that afternoon certainly impressed me no end; each afternoon and evening I found myself perched up on the overhead bridge, not too distant from the Grounds, waiting and hoping that the weather “would permit”.

However, the urge or yearning to fly was deep rooted and occupied many of my conscious as well as sub-conscious hours in the next few years. The automobile age was now upon us in full vigour and this in a very large way was an out for my flying urge. If I couldn't fly I could do the next best thing, and that was to ride in an automobile or on a motorcycle. These two-wheeled inventions of the devil proved just the needed diversion to keep me content during my teen-age years. Fortunately for me my father had an automobile in 1912 and I was allowed to drive it (*at age 16*) while still in short pants. But my best piece of good fortune came when my life-long pal got a motorcycle given to him by his Dad. My buddy Arni Eggertson was not mechanically inclined, so I acted as his grease monkey and mechanic to keep the motorcycle running. Needless to say, I practically glued myself to that machine while it lasted.

World War I was now upon us, I was at the University of Manitoba going in for Civil Engineering. News of the part flying machines were playing in warfare was appearing in our daily papers regularly. At this time there was no recruiting for the Royal Flying Corps in Canada and if one wanted to join this Service, one would have to present oneself at Headquarters in London,

England. To this ultimate end, in March 1916 I joined a local Infantry Battalion, the 223rd Scandinavian-Canadian, with a promise from the C.O. that I would be allowed to transfer to the Royal Flying Corps after we arrived overseas.

Along with two buddies of mine, this was accomplished, and it was not long after arriving overseas that we found ourselves enroute to the Air Ministry in London where we were accepted as Cadets and sent to St. Leonard's-on-Sea for Cadet Training in September 1917.

(For earlier 1917 diary events refer to the author's previous article in Icelandic Connection Vol. 71, #1 (2019))

1917 Diary

Tuesday September 11th: Arose at 6. Roll call at 7 am. Breakfast at 8. Measured for suit in morning. Drilling in afternoon. Books issued by QM (*Quartermaster*). Off at 4:15 pm. Lecture at 9 pm. back at 10 pm.

Wednesday September 12th: Arose at 6. On fatigue for morning, took picture from window. Paraded to QM Stores. Rode over town in RFC truck all morning. Paraded to Stores for Tunic in afternoon. Got my first Imperial tunic. Sat around and sang after tea. Had dinner at 7, spent evening fooling around piano.

Having completed our course in England, on October 13th 1917 we were packed off to Egypt, to learn to fly.

Monday September 24th: On parade in morning. Volunteered to go to Egypt with Frank, Davey and others. I only one picked. Couldn't be taken on account of M.O not having my Medical History sheet. Lectures all afternoon. Took film downtown, made few purchases. Sat around played and sang until 9. Retired at 10.

Saturday October 13th: Arose at 4:00 am. Had breakfast at 4:30. Left for London at 6:01. Had an hour and a half to spend

in London. Got bags at Burberry's, bought tropical shade puttees. Left for Southampton at 12, arrived about 2. Detrained on docks. Packed our own baggage on steamship Lydia. Got blankets. Spent some time beside funnel on upper deck. Had supper of bully beef and bread, tea. Got good berth for Davey and I. Retired at 8:30.

Sunday October 14th (at Southampton, en route to Egypt, day 1): Arose at 7:30. Had breakfast of bread, jam, cheese and tea. Steward cleaned, up, had inspection. Carried our luggage back onto the docks. Walked around Docks, Hospital ships from France in. Talked with Americans just over. Embarked on the Queen Alexandra, left for France at 6:30. Chased by submarines, had to turn back into port. Lay out in Harbour all night. Slept now and again beside funnels and down in Saloon. Had bread, gun (??) food and jam for supper. Lay up on top deck all evening. Cold and windy.

Monday October 15th (at sea, en route to Egypt, day 2): Woke up down in Saloon between kit bags, suitcases, on floor in all my clothes. Disembarked about 8 am. Stuck around docks all day. Bought a couple of good meals at Officer's restaurant. Embarked on Queen Alexandra again at 4:50, pulled out for France at 6:30. Made France alright, pulled in at Cherbourg about 1:00 am. Didn't feel well down in Saloon, sat up on deck nearly all night.

Tuesday October 16th (at Cherbourg, en route to Egypt, day 3): Awake all night before. Disembarked at 7 am. Had biscuits and cheese for breakfast. Marched through Cherbourg to rest camp. Arrived about 11:30. Rainy and muddy out. Allowed to go down into village in evening. Visited ... --- .-.---) – (some sort of code for a place name, to get past Censors?) Had tea, caught 8:10 car, went back to Camp. Made up some sort of bed with 4 blankets and retired.

Wednesday October 17th (at Cherbourg, en route to Egypt, day 4): Arose

at 7 am. Turned in blankets. Lay around tent all afternoon. Left camp for train at 6 pm. Entrained at 7:30, Left for St. Germain at 8, travelled all night. Marching to train from camp we waded through water up to our ankles. Arranged seats in compartment to form a bed and retired at 9:30. Rained all night, dozed occasionally.

Sunday October 29th (at Taranto, en route to Egypt, day 15): Arose at 7:30 am. Played indoor baseball, basketball and what not with a tennis ball in our hut. Some fun. Packed up and got ready to embark. Carried our luggage down to pier at 11 am. Shoved off from pier at 2:30 pm. Spent afternoon on board *Aragon*. Put down in No. 1 hold with bunch of officers. About 100 nurses on board, they occupied all the cabins. Sat out on deck until 10:30, boys singing and fooling around. Started imitation of orchestra with bunch. Great sport, laughed myself sick. Hung up my hammock, crawled in and fell asleep about 11:30 pm.

Saturday November 3rd (en route to Egypt, day 20): Arose at 7:15 am. Sat up on deck and watched boxing tournament between cadets. Willoughby and Harrison the best. Tug-of-war after between Officers and Cadets, Cadets won. Sighted land about noon, arrived in port at Alexandria at 2:00 pm. Carried off my luggage. Very hot weather, strong sun. Told that it was an exceptionally cold day. I must have lost 2 pounds during afternoon. Disembarked at 7 pm. Marched through city to station, left for Aboukir at 9:15 pm. Met Johnnie Thompson. Arrived in camp at Aboukir 10:00 pm. Got blankets, retired about 11 pm in tents under palm trees and bright moon.

Thursday November 8th: Arose at 6 am. Off parade in morning. Draft of 30 picked to go to Ismailia to do Elementary Flying. Left at 1:30 am. Arrived at 9:30 pm. Marched out to camp, put in tents, three in a tent. Had batman between us. Dined in

Mess with Officers. Retired about 11 pm.

Friday November 9th: Arose at 7 am. Paraded before O.C, (*Officer Commanding*) gave particulars, attached to Flights. Dave, Frank and I in 'B' Flight. Had lunch in tent, served ourselves. Told that we were going back to Aboukir in the morning. Wrote up Diary, had a sleep in afternoon. Woke up at 4 pm, went over to mess, had some tea. Met Joe Benson. Sat out on verandah all evening talking to Gibson of Portage la Prairie (*Manitoba*). Retired about 9:30.

Saturday November 10th: Arose at 7 am. Packed up and had my stuff ready to leave. Wrote letter to Dad telling him of the way I was existing and the price. Left Ismailia at 2:07, took picture of Station. Snapped views along route. Arrived at Sidi Gabeah at 8 pm. Spent hour there and caught 9 o'clock train for Aboukir. Service on train. Carried my own baggage to my tent. Looked at Murray's pictures taken on trip. Retired at 11 pm.

Saturday November 17th Arose at 4 am. Packed up and proceeded to Heliopolis. Arrived at Cairo and took tramway cars to Heliopolis. Stationed and quartered in Palace Hotel room 515. Spent afternoon fixing up room. Spent evening downtown looking over Cairo. Returned to Heliopolis about 9, had a bath and retired. Slept like a log.

Here we had the
#3 School of Military

Aeronautics in the Hotel Heliopolis at Heliopolis just outside Cairo.

Sunday December 16th: Arose at 7 AM. Went out to Ranges at 8. Frank and I did such good shooting that Officer I/C said he was going to recommend us for fighting machines. Spent afternoon looking over notes. John Thompson came over to see us, stayed in all night and killed time fooling around. Retired about 9 pm.

Friday December 21st: Arose at 7. Davey and Frank put on list to go to Ismailia, I left off. Too far down



Figure 1: Henry Farman Shorthorn

the alphabet. Boys all left at 10:30 for Ismailia, I left behind. Stalled around all day killing time rest of day. Got fellows to move in with me, retired about 9 pm.

From here, on January 6th 1918 we went to #21 Training School at Ismailia where we had our elementary training on the Maurice Farman biplane, very much like the first flying machine I saw back at the Winnipeg Exhibition in 1910, except perhaps, that there were no front outriggers or front elevators.

1918 Diary

Sunday January 6th: Arose at 7 am. Packed my kit ready to go to Ismailia. Left at 11 am from Cairo. Arrived Ismailia at 2 pm. Frank met me. Got in same Flight as boys. Met all the old gang again. Hilly and I bunking together. Retired about 9:30 pm.

Monday January 7th: Arose at 8 am. No Flying. Reported to Orderly Room at 8:30 and at Flight Office at 10:00. Brushed (?) over a machine with 'C' Squad. Spent afternoon lying around. Dressed for dinner, ate, retired at 9:30 pm.

My Instructor Lt. Calley and I sat in a "bath-tub" type nacelle slung in between the two planes with the engine just behind us, Dual control was accomplished by reaching around the party in front, practically sitting in your lap, if it was arranged that you should sit in the seat proper. I had long legs and arms, so I was usually the one behind with the Instructor in front of me. (see *Figure 1 on page 154*)

Tuesday January 8th: Calley my Instructor took me up for my joy ride and aerial winding.(?) I spent 22 minutes in the air and liked it fine. I did nothing in particular in the afternoon. (*Konnie's first flight*).

Wednesday January 9th: Arose at 5 am. Frank and I took out machines ready for early flying with others. Frank got up ahead of me. I spent 5 minutes in air and

came down to alarm signal. Retired about 9:15 pm.

Thursday January 10th: Arose at 5 am. Frank and I early flying again. I got up first and put in about 40 minutes with Calley. Spent afternoon lounging around. After dinner we had a sort of rehearsal in Staff's anteroom. Frank and I left for our tent immediately after. Retired about 10 pm.

Friday January 11th: Arose at 7 am. Calley took me up for 8 minutes. Cleaned up No. 4, oil leaking from engine, covered tail plane. Lay around in afternoon. Spent some time playing fiddle. Dressed for dinner and fooled around with Hilly. Practised in Mess after dinner. Retired about 10.

Saturday January 12th: Arose at 6 am. Up for early flying. Bumpy up. Got in 40 minutes flying before too windy to keep it up. Practised with Orchestra after dinner. Mr. Davies played bass. Others on drum, bells ,etc. Old Doc conducting. Left at 9:30. Went to bed.

Saturday January 19th: Up with Calley, had 49 minutes. Up with Smith right after, had 21 minutes. Decided to launch me (*Solo flight*). Whiled away afternoon. Retired 9:00 pm.

Sunday January 20th: Arose at 5 am. Smith sent for me. Went up for 30 minutes, did landings. To be launched tomorrow. Went downtown in afternoon and took snaps. Had tea at the Savoy with Frank Frederickson, Davies, Willoughby and friends. Retired after dinner.

On January 21st, after some two hours and twenty-three minutes of taking-off, banking and landing, I was launched. (*flew solo*) After two successful landings, I was called in, having snapped an undercarriage wire in the last one. Thus did I finally gratify that old urge or yearning. I sure thought I was somebody after that but fortunately reason and common sense took over, as flying hours piled up and with them a very healthy respect for engines and



Figure 2: After 1st solo flight

aircraft. (*which he maintained for the rest of his aviation career*)

Monday January 21st: Arose at 5:30 am. Went up with Smith for 30 minutes. Was launched (soloed) for 26 minutes, made 2 landings. Printed bunch of pictures, retired about 9:30.

Wednesday January 23rd: Arose at 6 am. Went up with Smith for 11 minutes. Then solo for 53 minutes. Made good landings. Read until tea. Went down to Ismailia for pictures. Had dinner and retired at 9 pm.

Thursday January 24th: Up first for 5 minutes. Had to land, throttle control loose. Up for 60 minutes after repairs. Had breakfast. Up again for 25 minutes. Bumpy. (air turbulence in the desert)

Friday January 25th: Arose at 5:30. Up for 42 minutes then 36. Finished Rumpety (Maurice Farman Shorthorn) solo. (*see Figure 2, page 156*)

With a total of 10 hours and 2 minutes in the air, I graduated from No. 21 Training Squadron, Ismailia on January 26th and was recommended for advanced training on Gnome Avros, at No. 58 Training Squadron at Suez.

Saturday January 26th: Arose at 7. Got my Log Book and transfer card and left for Suez at 2:15 pm. Arrived at 4:50. Reported to Orderly room. Slept on floor in Davey's room.

Here my actual flying training started. The Rotary Gnome engine was a tricky engine to control, and fortunately I, with the previous experience of engine running and adjusting the motorcycle carburettor, took to it like a relative. These old 504K Avros with either Gnome or Monosoupape rotary engines were a delight to fly, "sensitive and reactive" to the slightest touch of the controls. Graduation from No. 58 T.S. was all too soon, however trainees were piling up and could not be accommodated for lack of aircraft and Instructors.

Monday January 28th: Arose at 7:30 AM. Did an hour's buzzing (*Morse Code on the radio while flying*) in Avro. Fixed up new room. Retired about 10:15 pm.

Tuesday January 29th: Arose 7:45 am. Did an hour's buzzing & machine guns. Printed some pictures in afternoon. Read, had dinner and retired about 9:30 pm.

Wednesday January 30th: Arose at 7:15. One hour's buzzing, two hours machine gun. Cleaned buss (the airplane). Printed pictures in afternoon. Figured up my Pay Book to date. Retired about 9 pm.

Thursday January 31st: Arose at 7:15. Two hour's MG, one hour buzzing. Cleaned Busses. read bunch of (*Winnipeg Tribunes*) that Dad sent. Retired about 10 pm.

Friday February 1st: Arose at 7:15. Two hour's MG, one hour buzzing. Passed buzzing test. Read papers from home. Went up for first ride in Avro (504), did couple of Immelman turns, up for 20 minutes.

Sunday March 3rd: Arose at 6:30. Up with West-Whyte for 30 mins. He calmly jumped out and sent me up alone. (after about 3 hours of dual instruction in an Avro with West-Whyte over the past 3 weeks) I did 2 circuits, first landing rough, second landing average, up for 10 minutes solo. Retired about 9 pm.

Tuesday March 5th: Arose at 5:30 am. Up at 6:00 on '82. Petrol feed broke, forced landing. Time up 5 minutes. Up on '76 for 25 minutes. Inlet valve went (*failed*) at 4000 feet over Tewfik. Got back to camp.

Tuesday March 12th: Hung around Tarmac, went to Ranges. Attached to Parnell for instruction.

Wednesday March 13th: Up for 45 mins dual with Parnell. Did turns steep & shallow, 8000 ft. Did a spin and 4 cartwheels. Read all afternoon, played violin in evening.

Saturday March 16: Up for 50 mins

with Tidmarch. Said my flying was good. Stunted me, felt rather giddy.

Tuesday March 19th: Arose at 7:00 am. Did 45 minutes in 7806. Switch on buss broke. Up again for 60 minutes in 4286, 5 landings. Did 30 minutes in afternoon, 5 landings.

Wednesday March 20th: Arose at 7:30 am. Was up for 15 mins and 50 mins on 3223. Had close call. Did 55 minutes in afternoon. (*the close call, entered on the previous page, was: "this morning I got into a spin 200 feet off the ground. I just got out in time. After that I felt – well not exactly pensive yet happy"*).

Thursday March 21st: Arose 7:30 am. Cold shower, up for 65 mins. Up again for 65 mins. in afternoon. *Caulfield did spin into ground.* Passed MG and CC gear (machine gun and interrupter ?) *Camford crashed, flat turn spin.* Stayed home all evening, retired at 9:30.

Saturday March 23rd: Arose at 7 am. Cold shower. Up for 1:20 without landing. Very cold at 8000' also bumpy. *Graduated with total time 20 hours 7 mins.*

And so, on March 25th we found ourselves returning to Heliopolis where the School of Aerial Gunnery (S.A.G) was located. Here, flying as an aerial Gunner, jockeying an old BE2c or a D.H.6 (we actually used live ammunition), we flew our assigned target practice. And then if we had a few rounds left over, we would hit for the neighbouring desert hoping to find something we could shoot at. This training we really enjoyed. This course ended all too soon, only ten days in all.

Monday March 25th: Arose at 5 am. Packed up bed and roll. Left for Cairo SAG (?) on 7:15 Tram, arrived and had lunch at Shepherd's Hotel. Reported to Adjutant of 38 Squadron S.A.G. In hut with Grant and Spalding. In bed at 9, Frank came and pulled me out and we went downtown, had a great time, danced, etc.

Tuesday March 26th: Arose at 7:30. Up 3 times, fired at trenches, made 28 out of 40 with Lewis. Fired at truck with Vickers. Went solo on BE2E after three landings.

Wednesday March 27th: Up with Lewis, fired at silhouettes (planes).

Saturday March 30th: Arose at 4:30 am. Usual work for the day. Went downtown in morning. Slept in afternoon. Worked from 4 to 6. Spaulding and Grant out on desert, didn't get in until 2:00 am.

Thursday April 4th: arose at 7. Course complete, finished packing. Took 11 o'clock train for Suez. Arrived 5 pm. Hall and I got in hut with Tulloch.

We were now posted to Pool Flight at Suez, from which were drawn all the replacement needs. While at Pool Flight we had the opportunity of flying the latest single-seater fighter aircraft.

Friday April 5th: Arose at 8. Reported to C flight. Hung around Hangers. Windy out, started to rain.

Friday April 12th: Avro 8531 Solo 25 minutes.

Sunday April 14th: Avro 8531 solo 30 minutes and 55 minutes.

Monday April 15th: Up for 30 mins with Aitkens. Up solo for 30 mins.

Knight killed himself in a Nieuport.

Tuesday April 16th: Avro 4345 Solo 25 mins 40 mins. Avro 4465 with Rowell 15 mins.

Thursday April 18th: Arose 5:15 am. Up for 60 mins solo. Sultan over to see flying in afternoon. Retired 8:30 pm.

Here I got my hand in on the Bristol Monoplane, the Sopwith Pup, Nieuport Scout and Bristol Scout, all rotary engined aircraft. The S.E.5 came into the picture at this stage, but I never got a chance to fly one. We only got the one, and it was damaged by the time my turn came around.

Wednesday April 24th: Arose at 5 an. Up for 45 mins in Avro 4455 with Aitken, chasing clouds. Up 65 mins solo. Had scrap

with Bekley in Mono Bristol fighter.

Friday April 26th: Avro 4284 30 mins dual with Lt. Burton. Paraded at B Flight.

Saturday April 27th: Avro 4284 Lt. Burton dual 35 mins, dual 25 mins. Burton said he was pleased with my flying.

Tuesday April 30th: Arose at 5:30 am. Launched successfully in Sopwith Pup. Did 35 mins, took off tire.

Thursday April 18th: Arose at 5 am. Up on Pup 65 mins. Formation flight on Avro 35 mins. Egyptian Christmas Day.

Friday May 3rd: Sopwith Pup 6057 solo 45 mins.

Tuesday May 7th: Arose 5 am. Up on Pup 70 minutes solo, went out over pyramids. *Mitchell, one of the Instructors killed in accident in a Nieuport.*

Friday May 13th: Rigging day. Paraded at 2:30 pm. Transferred to A Flight.

Wednesday May 15th: Arose 7:30 am. *Lucas killed.*

We also had an opportunity of getting in some camera practice, in the air. Regulations required that we carry a safety pilot with us whenever we took off for gun camera practice. This was done so that we would not collide with our prey; being absorbed to the full in getting our target lined up in looking down the gun barrel sights. The safety pilot was to keep us a safe distance away, taking over when necessary. Of course, we had to have one collision take place before this measure was thought of.

Out of this rabble constituting Pool flight grew the School of Aerial Fighting. Fortunately for me, I was one of the fully trained pilots on hand at the time so it was quite logical that I should be grabbed for one of the jobs at this school. My stay at S.A.F., just two months, was all too short. I enjoyed this work immensely, it was sort of a membership in a team, competing in an exciting dangerous sport. We, the Instructors had to keep on our toes, the

final test of our work was the final bout between ourselves and our pupils armed with gun cameras flying solo.

The issue here was could we afford to let a student record direct hits with his gun camera and thus show up our evasive tactics and flying, or should we fly rings around him and send him back to earth with a blank film. Arguments waged long and loud in the Mess at nights, and I don't think the right answer was ever decided upon, but I do recall wagers on the best group of shots for the day. The winner of course being the one with the best concentrated spray in vulnerable spots. These winners were usually active participants in sports and had "above average" flying ability. Even at this stage in flying training, the value of participation in active sports of all kinds was becoming evident.

Up to now, flying training followed no set pattern, each Instructor used his own method and consequently there was a lot of wasted time in the air. Some would spend hours on landings, with the pupil only in control on the actual landing. Hence the pupils could make beautiful landings consistently but were hopeless in the air and would not even venture a turn to the right. Anyhow it was not the kind of training that "active service" pilots 'should' have. From this hopeless inadequacy in training developed the need for a standardized form of instruction. And so, the "Gosport system" was inaugurated in the formation of the Flying Instructors School (F.I.S) This school was located on a new 'drome just a few miles South of Heliopolis.

I had had considerable front seat flying (*as a pilot*) at S.A.F. and had been tested by a Lt. Dobbie, who came out from Gosport England to train and gather a staff for the new School. Out of some two dozen Instructors at S.A.F., another Canadian and myself were chosen to go to the new school on May 25th, 1918. This was a big event in

my short life of flying. Somewhere about now, the original Royal Flying Corps was absorbed into the Royal Air Force, along with the Royal Naval Air Service.

Thursday May 23rd: Up for 65 mins with Meecham and 45 with Pratt (*students*). Moved into Instructor's quarters got my new suit.

Saturday May 25th: On Parade. Officially informed of appointment as Instructor A.F.S. (Advanced Flying School).

Friday May 31st: Arose at 7 am. Khamsun wind blowing all day nearly roasted. Rigging day.

Sunday June 2nd: arose at 5:30. Up for 30 minutes. Went over to see Staff Captain at 9:00 regarding antedating of commissions. Station Pilot for the day. Tested buss. Slept in Orderly Room, retired 9:20 pm.

* * *

Part II will be continued in the next issue of the Icelandic Connection

Endnotes (for part I and II included):

With the exception of the years 1919 to 1928, Konnie was involved in aviation in Winnipeg and northern Manitoba for the rest of his life.

In 1920 he played the defence position on the Winnipeg Falcons, the Canadian Olympic Hockey Gold Medal winners at Antwerp in April 1920.

He received Temporary Commercial Pilot's Certificate (Flying Machines) No. 13-W-29 on July 16th, 1929 from the Air Board of Canada.

He also received "Above average Pilot and above average Instructor" ratings from the Department of National Defense, Air Service, Ottawa, on February 15th, 1932.

He became Airport Manager and Chief Flying Instructor of the Winnipeg Flying Club in 1929. Two of his more distinguished students of 1932 were:

Group Captain Johnny Kent, DFC, AFC, Virtuti Militari. Commander, Polish Squadron, R.A.F.

Group Captain Al Bocking, DFC & Bar, CD. Commander XI Squadron R.A.F. In 1932 he started Johannesson Flying Service, flying passengers and freight from Winnipeg mostly to points north and east of Lake Winnipeg.

On July 17th 1939 he was appointed as a Master Flying Instructor by the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators of the British Empire.

During WW II Konnie operated a Flying School in Winnipeg, (see cover photo) teaching Icelandic-speaking students to fly so that they could join the R.C.A.F. Three of these students later returned to Iceland to form Loftleiðir, now merged with Icelandair.

His older son Kenneth was in the R.C.A.F. during WW II, posted to RAF Station Upavon in England as a Flying Instructor. He also received "above-average" ratings as both Pilot and Instructor.

His fourth grandson, Allen, after flying for 31 years, recently retired as a Captain with Jazz Air, an Air Canada subsidiary.

In 1947 Konnie bought a strip of land north of Winnipeg stretching between Highway 9 and the Red River. After a 3-year legal battle he started Rivercrest Airstrip Ltd., combining a landplane and seaplane base with an aircraft repair and overhaul business.

Konnie retired from active flying in 1949, but continued operating an aircraft repair and overhaul service at his private airstrip and seaplane base at Rivercrest, just north of Winnipeg, until 1967. He died of pneumonia in Winnipeg on October 28th, 1968. He was buried in Brookside cemetery with his wife Freda and older son Kenneth now beside him and a full view of Winnipeg Airport on the horizon to the south.



PHOTOS AND IMAGES COURTESY OF KAREN BOTTING

Johanna Wilson reading the *Veterans of Icelandic Descent Book World War II*, in September, 2020

Veterans of Icelandic Descent World War II

by Karen Botting

Three members of the Jon Sigurdsson Chapter IODE valiantly took on the task of creating a book honouring and memorializing the men and women of Icelandic descent who fought in World War II. The result was *Veterans of Icelandic*

Descent World War II published in 1990.

Although Johanna Wilson (Jo), Mae (Dee Dee) Westdal and Dora Sigurdsson were inspired by the women, including Jo Wilson's mother, Gudrun Skaptason, who did the World War I book in 1923,



Dora Sigurdsson and Dee Dee Westdal

the impetus came from the many people who approached them asking for a sequel of the book to honour World War II veterans. Jo specifically recalls Dr. Larus Sigurdsson even suggesting it was her “duty” to follow in her mother’s footsteps as she sat in Gimli Park fundraising for Jon Sigurdsson Chapter IODE at the Icelandic Festival.

With both this public encouragement and the support of Jon Sigurdsson Chapter IODE, Dee Dee, Jo and Dora took on the challenge and formed the WW II Veterans Committee in the late 1980s. As Dee Dee remarked, it was an honour to follow these women, especially when so many people had taken an interest in this World War II project. The committee of three also realized they had big footsteps to follow.

After World War I, the women of the Jon Sigurdsson Chapter, who had been involved in the war effort, set aside \$500 for a memorial to the Icelandic soldiers. They decided to use their funds to publish a book, *Minningarrit Islenskra Hermannna*,

containing a short biography and portrait of every veteran of Icelandic origin. As Dee Dee noted, these women did a fabulous job without using any technology and doing everything in handwriting. When the book was completed in 1923, it contained a photo and write-up for each of 1300 veterans who had served in either the Canadian or American forces. Copies of the book were sent to leading universities in Canada, England and the United States. Jo remembers helping her mother wrap the books in brown paper, ready for mailing. As well, a copy was sent to the Governor-General of Canada, Lord Tweedsmuir, for which he sent the following acknowledgement to Jo’s mother.

Dear Mrs. Skaptason

Thank you very much for the gift of the Icelandic Soldiers Memorial book which I am very glad to have. I have always had the deepest interest in our Icelandic Canadians! I only wish we had more of them.

Yours sincerely, “TWEEDSMUIR”

Planning to use the format of the World War I Veterans book, *Minningarrit Islenzskra Hermanna*, Dee Dee, Jo and Dora wrote an article about the World War II project for the *Lögberg-Heimskringla* newspaper to peak people's interest. They also advertised in various publications in North America including the Saskatoon Star Phoenix and the Cavalier Chronicle in North Dakota. Veterans and their families were asked to reply to the advertisements to receive an application form for inclusion in the book. To ensure they had a real interest in the project, each applicant was required to send a down payment of \$15. If there was not enough interest in the book, the women were quite willing to return the money.

However, the Committee did not have to worry. Over 2000 veterans' biographies and photos were submitted! Some of these biographies had already been published in the *Icelandic Canadian* magazine, now the *Icelandic Connection*.

With such an overwhelming response, Jo, Dee Dee and Dora decided to divide up the roles. Jo Wilson received the applications at her home, where she had the perfect slot for the mail to be dropped through without damaging the photos. She wrote up each biography, sometimes with the help of her husband, Frank. Dee Dee Westdal, with the aid of her husband Harald, proofed the same information and made sure each biography was in

I.O.D.E.
Servicemen's Record Book

The Jon Sigurdson Chapter of the I.O.D.E. is sponsoring the publishing of a book recording the names and photo of some 1,500 veterans of World War Two who are of Icelandic descent. The book will be in hard cover and hopefully will sell for \$35. We need to presell 200 copies to help finance printing.

Your support for this project would be appreciated.

Please mail your cheque or a suitable deposit to:

Mrs. A. F. Wilson,
802-188 Roslyn Rd., Wpg. R3L 0G8

or

Mrs. H. Westdal,
40 Garnet Bay., Wpg. R3T 0L6

This space made available courtesy

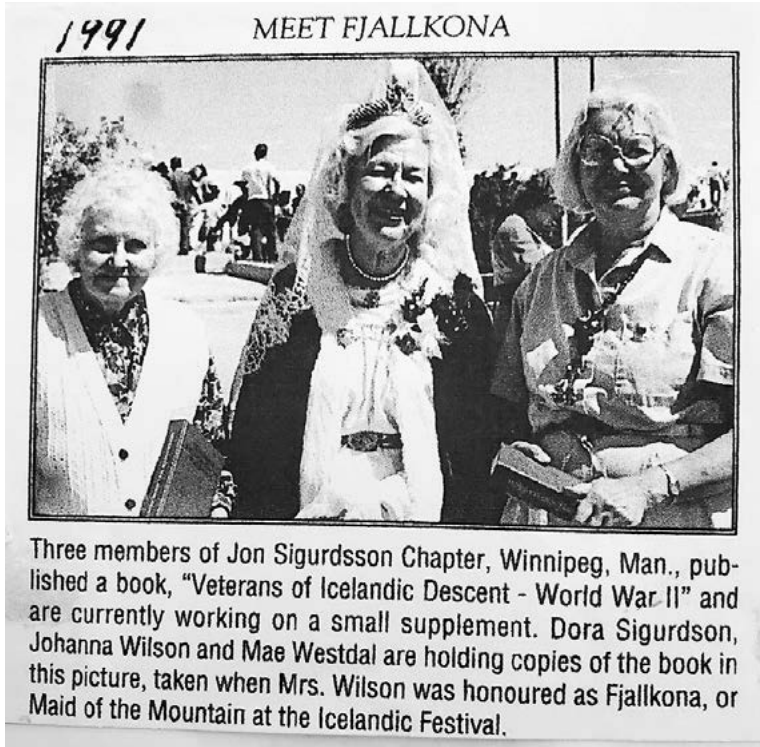
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Lögberg-Heimskringla April 1989

Advertisement in the *Lögberg-Heimskringla*
April 7, 1989 edition

the same format. Dora Sigurdsson, the treasurer, kept track of the \$15 deposits from the applicants, and the expenses. She researched the veterans' Icelandic roots in her extensive library which she also used to do genealogies.

Once all the biographies were collected, the next step was to get each page camera-ready for the publisher. By doing this the committee would save money thus making the book financially accessible to everyone. Two second-hand IBM typewriters were purchased, both having the ability to justify the print on the right-hand side of the page. These machines were set up in Dee Dee's rumpus room where she began typing and placing the photos on each page. These pages needed a lot of attention to detail, which was



Newspaper article from scrapbook, 1991, source unknown

provided by Dee Dee's daughter Lauren.

The three committee members really bonded, having spent hundreds of hours together in thought, in conversation and in consultation with the veterans. The women always met at Dora's place in Betelstadur on Sargent Avenue in the west end of Winnipeg because she was the only one who could not drive.

When this monumental task was completed, a print-ready copy was sent to Hignell Printing, a company with Icelandic connections. After more than two years of intense work, *Veterans of Icelandic Descent World War II* was published in December of 1990.

Jo Wilson recalls that the committee really wanted the book ready for Christmas. The publisher rushed the printing to have it done by then, discovering afterward that the printing on the book spines

was off-centre. He offered to reprint the books. However, the committee examined them and determined that it was not noticeable. This proved to be of benefit to the committee as they received the books at a discounted rate thus keeping the costs down.

Those who had put a down payment of \$15 on the book would receive their copy when the additional \$20 had been paid. Each book was then mailed out in a cardboard box packaged by the committee members. Now that they had

finished, the three women threw their papers in the air, shouting, "Hoorah! We're done!" In the end, Dee Dee, Jo and Dora all felt a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

Recognizing this great achievement, the Canada Iceland Foundation presented the women of Jon Sigurdsson Chapter IODE with a silver tray.

In 1993, a supplement was created, adding the names and biographies of those men and women who were missed in the first two Veterans books as well as of those who fought in the Korean War. Unfortunately, because of the expense, the supplement did not contain photographs.

For many years after publishing the book, Jo and Dee Dee, along with other IODE members, could be found under the same beautiful shady tree on the grounds of Gimli Park at Íslendingadagurinn. Here



Jo Wilson, left, selling the *Veterans of Icelandic Descent World War II* at Íslendingadagurinn under a shady tree in Gimli Park in 1999

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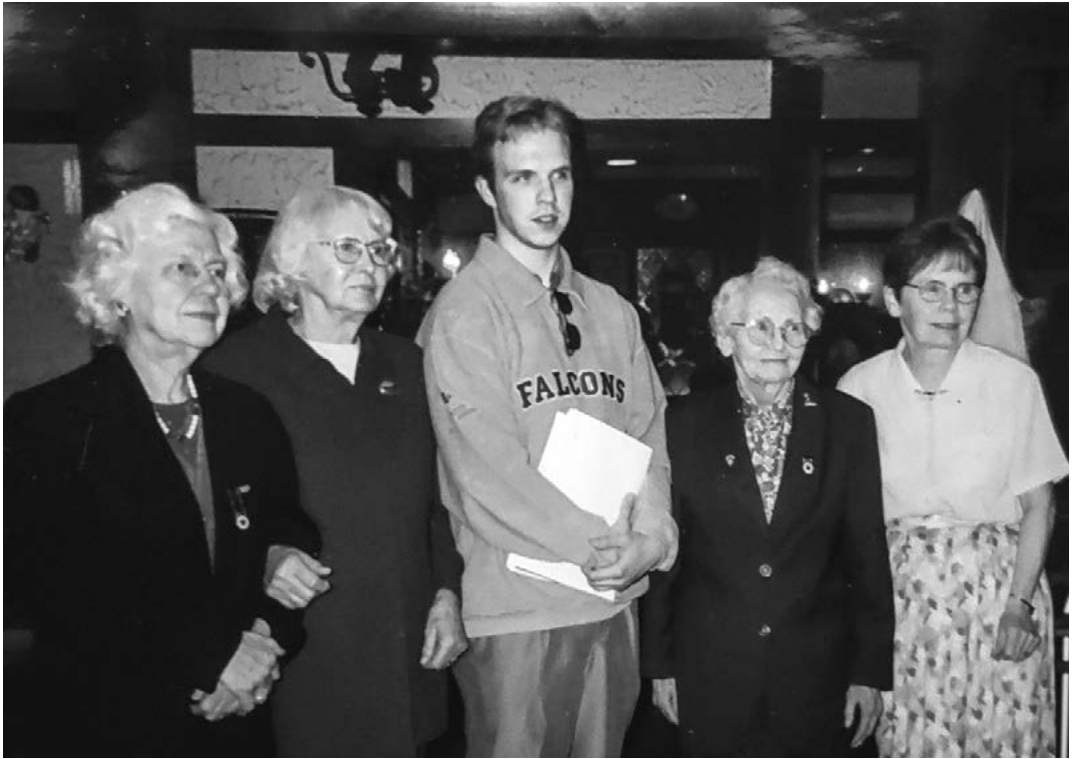
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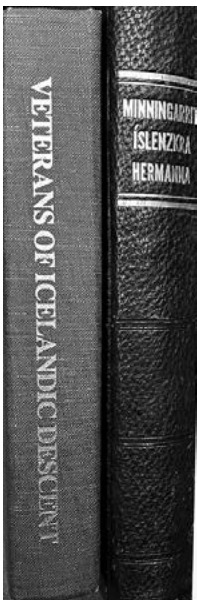
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Ryan Eyford receiving a Good Citizens Award from Jon Sigurdsson Chapter IODE in 2004. Left to right: Jo Wilson, Dee Dee Westdal, Ryan Eyford, Dora Sigurdsson, and Deanna Islielson, president of the Chapter.

Below: photo of the spines of the two veterans books.



they sold copies of the book, as well as raffle tickets and handmade items to raise funds for the Jon Sigurdsson Chapter scholarships and philanthropic work.

In 2004, Ryan Eyford was recognized with a Good Citizenship Award by the Jon Sigurdsson Chapter IODE for his work in creating a database for the two veterans of Icelandic descent books and

the supplement.

Today, *Minningarrit Islenzkra Hermanna 1914-1918* and *Veterans of Icelandic Descent World War II* have been digitized at the University of Manitoba.

War is a dreadful thing and for those who served on foot and on ships, in tanks and in planes it was a terrifying experience, difficult to even imagine. But it did bring about what has been referred to as the "Brotherhood of War" for those who agonized through it. This book brings that brotherhood back together.

– Preface of *Veterans of Icelandic Descent World War II*

Capt. Freeman Skaptason and Lt. Col. Einar Arnason OBE

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**C/PN ASGEIR REYNI R BLONDAHL**

Reynir (Ray) Blondahl was born September 5, 1919 at Kynyard, SK, son of Asgeir Ingimundarson and Elin Fanney (Jonssdottir) Blondahl, who were both born in Iceland.

Ray enlisted in the Royal Canadian Electrical & Mechanical Engineers in September, 1940. He served in Canada, Italy, France and Holland and was discharged in January, 1946.

**SGT JON ALDMAR BLONDAHL**

Aldmar Blondahl was born June 8, 1914 at Kynyard, SK, son of Asgeir Ingimundarson and Elin Fanney (Jonssdottir) Blondahl, who were both born in Iceland.

Aldmar enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force in May, 1942. He served with the Western Air Command on Vancouver Island and with the Northwest Air Command in Whitehorse, Grande Prairie and Edmonton and received his discharge in May, 1946.

**PTE OMAR BLONDAHL**

Omar Blondahl was born February 6, 1923 at Kynyard, SK, son of Asgeir Ingimundarson and Elin Fanney (Jonssdottir) Blondahl, who were both born in Iceland.

Omar enlisted in the Canadian Army in 1940 and received a medical discharge in 1941.

LAC VALUR BLONDAHL

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Valur Blondahl was born July 27, 1916 at Kynyard, SK, son of Asgeir Ingimundarson and Elin Fanney (Jonssdottir) Blondahl who were both born in Iceland.

Valur enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force on March 5, 1943 and served in Canada. He received his discharge in February, 1946.

**FIRST LT INGEBOG BORGFORÐ**

Ingeborg Borgford was born February 4, 1912 at Arnes, MB, daughter of Jon Saemundson and Arnina (Anderson) Borgford. Jon was born in Borgafirdi and Arnina in Snaefellsnesi, Iceland.

Ingeborg enlisted in the United States Army Nurse's Corps on December 18, 1943. She served in Europe and the United States and received her discharge on March 16, 1946.

**LAC JOHN S. BORGFORÐ**

John Borgford was born July 11, 1914 at Arnes, MB, son of Jon Saemundson and Arnina (Anderson) Borgford. Jon was born in Borgafirdi and Arnina was born in Snaefellsnesi, Iceland. They later lived at Selkirk, MB.

John enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force on September 24, 1941 and trained at the University of SK and the RAF Radar School, Clinton, ON. He served in England with RAF Bomber Command as a Radar Mechanic and was discharged on October 10, 1945.



Sample page spread of the *Veterans of Icelandic Descent Book World War II*

Thanks to these three dedicated women of the Jon Sigurdsson Chapter IODE who have created an historically significant volume which also has personal meaning to many.

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Christopher O'Kelly V.C., MC. a World War I War Hero remembered

by Keith Kristofferson

Introduction

World War I was one of the bloodiest and most devastating conflicts in history, when viewed from the individual perspective of the soldiers who fought in



PHOTOS SUPPLIED BY KEITH KRISTOFFERSON

this epic battle. It was a war where emerging technology such as artillery, machine guns, trenches, chlorine and mustard gas had a tremendous impact on each and every one them, both physically and psychologically. The closeness of the fighting in hand dug shallow trenches, in some cases only yards apart, often lead to a ferocious determination by the soldiers on either side, to kill their enemies regardless of the cost.

Over the four years of the conflict, from 1914 to 1918, the continuous artillery bombardment, machine gun and small arms fire and poison gas attacks combined with the endless rain and mud in the trenches, created intolerable conditions. The ongoing sights of dead and mutilated bodies, surrounded by the persistent odours of decaying flesh which permeated the trenches as rats ran about freely at night carrying disease, caused even the hardest and stalwart soldiers to succumb to this plight.

After the war finally ended on November the 11th 1918, the prolonged physical, psychological and emotional trauma that the soldiers experienced in this conflict, haunted many of the survivors for the rest of their lives. Thousands of wounded men faced long term

rehabilitation for disfigurements and amputations to their bodies, blindness, deafness and “Shell Shock” (now called PTSD) for their continued exposure to endless stress. This emotional impact was also deeply felt and shared by the loved ones and relatives of the dead, wounded and returning veterans, often resulting in family break-ups and physical and mental abuse to many wives and children. This situation was also exacerbated by the fact that many returning veterans could not find jobs, which only prolonged their existing hardships and suffering.

Camp Morton Provincial Park is located 5 miles north of Gimli Manitoba and is located along the shoreline of Lake Winnipeg. The park is a well-known facility which provides recreational opportunities for the many visitors who come there during the spring, summer and fall time periods.

Over the last several years, Camp Morton Provincial Park has become an increasingly popular meeting place to hold the annual November 11th Remembrance Day celebration outdoors. The event is held in a general area along the lakeshore where two historical cenotaphs are located to commemorate First World War soldiers. The first one was built by the Union Bank of Canada to honour many of their fallen comrades who made the supreme sacrifice during WW I. This cenotaph was originally located near McKelleran Creek, on property owned by the Lakeside Fresh Air Camp, approximately one mile south of the Camp Morton Park.

The other one however, was built on site at Camp Morton in 1927, where it has withstood the test of time over the years. The location of this particular cenotaph however, appears to be somewhat of an anomaly, in that it was constructed on Roman Catholic

Church property, by Roman Catholic parishioners and commemorates only one man, Major Christopher, Patrick, O’Kelly. Major O’Kelly had received the highest award for Valour given by the British Commonwealth, for his heroic actions during the second Battle of Passchendaele in Belgium during WWI, the Victoria Cross.





A brief history of Camp Morton provides some insight into the current location of Major O'Kelly's cenotaph, along a remote shoreline of Lake Winnipeg, rather than in a large city, where his achievements would have been more readily recognized.

In the middle of May 1920, Archbishop Sinnott who had just returned from Rome, decided to construct a summer camp for Catholic children of Winnipeg to provide the children "with guarantees of safety and watchful supervision, which with plenty of fun and adventure, would ensure a healthy growth of body, refinement of mind, and goodness of heart". A suitable and safe location was eventually found 5 miles north of Gimli Manitoba along the shores of Lake Winnipeg by an inspection team consisting of Father Blair, Father Morton and D.F. Coyle.

Father Morton immediately began to set up a team of parishioners to begin the preliminary work of clearing the site, identifying infrastructure locations and

construction of the chapel, dining hall, water tower and many individual cabins to accommodate both staff and children. The construction was primarily carried out using local materials such as logs, stones, sand and cement.

Monsignor Morton was a well-educated man and greatly respected for his numerous works and accomplishments in England before coming to Canada, having joined the clergy relatively late in life, at 42 years of age.

The Rev. Dr. T. W. Morton BSc. F.Ph.S., F.C.S had been honored by the Pope and later became Science Master at Beaumont College, Old Windsor; Lecturer and Army Coach in London; and Professor of Science and mathematics at Prior Park, Bath. Monsignor Morton came to Winnipeg in September of 1919 and became rector of St. Mary's Cathedral in Winnipeg. This well-known scholar and teacher in England had also tutored Winston Churchill at one point in his career.

The camp was eventually named after him for the pivotal and enduring role he played over the years in establishing and administrating this highly productive and successful camp. Monsignor Morton also built a small miniature castle near the lakeshore of Lake Winnipeg as a summer home for himself, which reminded him of his family home in England.

The camp combined the teachings of Catholicism with the recreation and pleasure of a summer camp. The boys used the camp in July and the girls in August. Sports consisted of soccer, tennis, baseball and swimming. Arts and crafts were practiced in the recreation hall. The camp was staffed primarily by Catholic Sisters of various religious orders, with each order having a particular function, providing meals, religious instruction, recreational activities, nursing care, and looking after

the children in general. The camp was eventually sold in the late 1920's to the Lakeside Fresh Air Camp for children, an organization registered under the Companies Act May 1921, as a charitable association which opened its doors to underprivileged children and senior citizens. Waning interest and the high cost of maintaining the facilities in the late 1960s eventually resulted in its sale to the province of Manitoba in 1971 who eventually turned it into a provincial Park.

When the Canadian Militia had to mobilize a large armed force to participate in the Great War in Europe, they created the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). Over 424,000 Canadian soldiers went overseas to fight in the CEF from 1914 to 1918. The CEF consisted of 4 Infantry Divisions in 1914 with approximately 10,000 to 15,000 men in each division. A division consisted of 3 brigades with 4 battalions per brigade. A battalion had four companies and each company had 4 platoons.

The infantry component of the CEF was organized into numbered battalions, which often acquired secondary titles like the 144th Battalion (Winnipeg Rifles). In 1916, at full strength, an infantry battalion consisted of 35 officers and 977 other ranks commanded by a lieutenant colonel.

An infantry battalion was divided into four rifle companies, which were numbered 1 through 4, or designated A through D, depending on the unit. A company had 5 officers and 240 men and a platoon about 40 men. Initially, the company was mainly used in tactical maneuvers, but as small arms firepower increased, individual



units now saw greater tactical use, such as machine gun units.

As the war progressed over the years, the CEF acquired a total of 262 numbered and named battalions. A battalion and a regiment are often confused in terminology, but in actual fact are very similar, where a regiment is more of an administrative entity in peacetime with its own distinctive name, insignia, traditions and customs and a battalion is a tactical entity in wartime.

Christopher Patrick John O'Kelly was born on November 18th. 1895, the only

son of Christopher and Cecilia O'Kelly (nee Morrison) in Winnipeg, Manitoba. His father and mother were of Irish decent and both were Roman Catholics. He had two sisters, Monica born in 1894 and Margaret born in 1897. Christopher attended several public schools in Winnipeg and was currently enrolled in St. John's College, at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, when the First World War began.

Cristopher enlisted in the 90th Regiment of the 144th Battalion (Winnipeg Rifles), commonly known as the Little Black Devils on October 10th, 1915 with the rank of Provisional Lieutenant. In February 26th, 1916, he served in the 144th (Winnipeg Rifles) Battalion as a full Lieutenant. The 144th Battalion was part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) and left for England from Halifax arriving in Liverpool England on September the 18th, 1916. Soon after arriving in England, Christopher O'Kelly was transferred to the 52nd Battalion (96th Lake Superior Scottish Regiment) which was assembled in Port Arthur Ontario (now Thunder Bay) and joined them in

France. Christopher was now with C Company, leading No. 9 Platoon, a unit of 40 men.

The Canadian Corps was comprised of four Infantry Divisions (120,000 men) under the command of General Arthur Currie from B.C. Canada. This was the first time that all four divisions fought together on the Western Front, in the battle of Vimy Ridge in northern France. The Canadian Corps successfully captured Vimy Ridge in a hard fought battle from April 9th to April 12th, 1917 under very poor weather conditions, with blowing snow and sleet, where previous attempts by the British and French had failed. The offensive continued for another two months as the Corps moved down the ridge towards the trenches in the Avion-Méricourt sector.

At 2:30 am on June 28th, 1917, the Canadian troops began to move forward in coordination with a creeping artillery barrage, which moved forward at one minute intervals, to provide the men time to assault the German trenches. O'Kelly and his men were delayed by several sections of barbed wire that remained intact throughout the barrage, causing the men great difficulty as they tried to scramble through them.

As they approached the first trench the Canadians came under intense machine gun fire from the enemy. O'Kelly's men reacted swiftly to this menacing threat and returned a withering fire onto the machine gun positions while Lieutenant O'Kelly moved forward tossing grenades at the enemy position. The German crew were quickly killed and O'Kelly brought in the



captured machine gun. This decisive action prevented the German gun crew from inflicting more serious casualties on the attackers and Christopher O’Kelly was one of three men to win the gallantry award for their decisive action, The Military Cross. He later received this medal at Buckingham Palace on December 19 th , 1917 from King George V. O’Kelly was subsequently granted the rank of Acting Captain.

In the meantime as the fighting continued, Canadian troops on October 6th, 1917 began relieving the New Zealanders who were carrying out the attack on Passchendaele Ridge in Belgium. The 52nd Battalion joined the attack where the 43rd and 58th Battalions had suffered heavy casualties without achieving the brigade objective of the German front line. Both C and D Companies of the 52nd had moved forward to assist holding that part of the line which had been captured. At the same time, it was learned that the remaining German pillboxes (concrete defensive structures in the German lines) on the Bellevue Spur, dominated the captured ground below, inflicting heavy casualties on the 43rd, Battalion. Orders were received from brigade headquarters for the 52nd Battalion to fill the gap on the left of the 43rd with A Company, flank the German pillboxes with B Company and push through the 58th to secure the rest of the spur with D Company. The

entire brigade assault now rested on the 52nd Battalion supported by the other two units.

Captain O’Kelly led his company over 1000 yards under heavy fire without any artillery barrage, capturing the enemy positions on the crest of the hill on November 6th, 1917. He then organized and led a series of attacks against the “Pill-boxes”, where his company captured six of them with 100 prisoners and 10 machine guns. Later on in the afternoon, he led his company to repel a strong counter-attack, taking more prisoners, and later in the night captured a hostile raiding party consisting of one officer, 10 men and a machine gun.

In this action, Acting Captain Christopher O’Kelly received the highest award “For Valour” in the British Commonwealth, the Victoria Cross. He received his award at Buckingham Palace on March 25th, 1918 from King George V, for his gallant action. At this point in his life, Acting Captain Christopher O’Kelly had won both the Military Cross and the Victoria Cross, before his 22nd birthday,





and was promoted to full Captain.

Christopher O’Kelly remained in England with the 18th Reserve Battalion escorting groups of soldiers being transferred, then rejoined the 52nd on

the 26th of August commanding A Company. The 52nd Battalion took part in a series of battles for the Canal du Nord, part of the German “Hindenburg Line”, near Cambrai. Captain O’Kelly, was wounded by machine gun fire, and then hit by shrapnel while taking cover in a shell hole. He had to wait in the Casualty Clearing Station behind the enemy lines until 2nd October, before eventually ending up in a convalescent hospital in England.

He was later transferred to the Manitoba Regimental Depot and then the 18th Reserve Battalion to await reassignment, but before that could happen, the war ended. O’Kelly was transferred back to the 52nd Battalion as he had recovered from his injuries and was now back in England, on March 9th, 1919. He and his remaining 587 comrades left Southampton, England on the *SS Olympic* with 4413 other Canadian troops landing in Halifax, where he and his colleagues proceeded to the Lakehead in Ontario for “dispersal”. The remaining members of the 52nd Battalion arrived by train on 29 March to a huge civic welcome. On April 1st, 1919 O’Kelly was demobilized.

On April 14th O’Kelly received a hero’s welcome from his fellow citizens in Winnipeg’s Columbus Hall. At the reception, Archbishop Alfred Sinnott said that the Catholic Church, of which O’Kelly was a member, were very proud of him, “Captain O’Kelly,” said the Archbishop, “you are welcomed home”. When a reporter from the Tribune, asked O’Kelly at the Fort Garry Hotel about what he thought of all the excitement he was receiving over his Victoria Cross, O’Kelly modestly responded “I was only carrying out my duty, anyone else would have done the same thing under the circumstances”.



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Captain Christopher O’Kelly returned to Winnipeg and took a job selling real estate. O’Kelly, rejoined his old militia unit, the Winnipeg Rifles in 1921 and was promoted to Major in March of 1922. Tragically however, on Nov. 15th, 1922, Christopher O’Kelly and another companion Bill Murray, whose father was part owner of the real-estate firm O’Kelly had been working for, drowned accidentally in a motorized canoe on a prospecting trip for gold near Lac Seul in Northern Ontario. His body was never found. Christopher’s sudden death was ironically noted by one author, “here was a man who had survived some of the bloodiest battles in WWI, only to meet such a tragic death in a simple boating accident”.

An article in *The Tribune* on July 18th, 1927, reported that a stone Celtic cross had been placed on a pyramid of stones on a grassy knoll at Camp Morton, a few kilometers north of Gimli. The monument was raised on the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church, which had established a summer camp for children at the site in 1920. Major O’Kelly’s Victoria Cross, Military Cross, British War Medal, and Victory Medal were donated to the Canadian War Museum in 1970 by his two sisters, Mrs. Margaret M. Wall and Mrs. Monica Kiely. The Ecole O’Kelly School for children of military personnel at Canadian Forces Base Shilo in Manitoba was named in his honour in 1976. The Government of Manitoba recognized the bravery and courage of the 14 Manitoba Victoria Cross recipients including Major O’Kelly by naming provincial lakes in their honour through the Manitoba Geographical Names Program. O’Kelly Lake is located between the communities of Bloodvein along the east shore of Lake Winnipeg and Little Grand Rapids along the west shore of Family Lake, and is 248 kilometers northeast of Winnipeg.

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The Ten Dollar Bill

by Einar Vigfusson

It was not easy to acquire a ten dollar bill in the late thirties and early forties. This is a story which shows the real value of one of these...

One fine June day my father announced to three of us boys that he would be taking us to the city the following week.

"I just sold three of the cows and I'm going to Winnipeg next week with my brothers, Einar and Bergur and we will make a deal to buy an overshot hay stacker. These stackers are built in Manitoba and we need one to replace our old one, Dad said.

There should be ten dollars left after we have paid for the machine.

We couldn't believe our ears!! Dad and his brothers would take us along!! We had never been to the city in our lives.

The day before we were to leave for the city, Dad was finishing the mowing on five acres of hayland southeast of home. We were out there and had lunch with him which we always loved to do.

For some unknown reason, he carried the beautiful ten dollar bill in his pocket. At four o'clock he stopped his work and had his coffee lunch with us. Reaching into his pocket he suddenly announced, "I've lost the bill and if we don't find it you will not be able to go with us tomorrow. It was to be our fun money. "I don't understand how this could have happened. I am so sorry for my carelessness".

We were devastated and set off immediately to look for the bill on the hay meadow. After an hour or more we came

back to our lunch spot empty handed. Needless to say we were heartbroken.

Just then I looked out on the field and thought I saw something waving in the wind. We all ran excitedly towards it. Yes!! It was the ten dollar bill! Our trip tomorrow was on!

To us boys this trip was definitely one of epic proportions akin to that of the early explorers. We looked forward to it with great anticipation.

We were up and ready very early the next morning. The old Ford was fully loaded and also carried three patched spare tires. The so called pavement of the city streets was simply a sand and tar mix which became very, very hot in the summer sun. It was murder on the poor rubber tires of the day.

So off we went on the greatest adventure of our young lives. The endless miles of country road seemed to go on forever.

The poorly graveled road was hemmed in by mostly deciduous trees. The evergreen trees had not moved south as far as they are now. Once in awhile we saw farmsteads cut out of the woods and small fields, sloughs and hay meadows.

Suddenly the city appeared before us. It did not appear to be anything like we had imagined. The streets were narrow and dirty at first but as we approached the city centre, it improved a bit. An overhead maze of electrical wires hung over the streets. They supplied the power to run all the lights and also the street cars which we

found very fascinating.

The first thing we did was to have Chinese food at a restaurant known as the Shanghai. We had never eaten Chinese food before and found it to be delicious, but very different from anything we'd had before.

We had now begun to spend the ten dollar bill.

Next my Dad and uncle Bergur went to a hotel called the Green Briar Inn where they met the person they were dealing with on the stacker, while Uncle Einar took us sight-seeing along North Main Street.

We had never seen so many large buildings. Walking beside them made us feel very small. Many of the stores had interesting displays in their windows; even brand new bicycles!!

As we walked along, we met people who were speaking different sounding languages that we had never heard before. It wasn't English or Icelandic, we were sure of that.

Now Dad and Bergur joined us and it was time to start off for home.

Dad said, "We are going a different route home. We will go north on Main Street, past the town of Selkirk and on to a place called Winnipeg Beach which I am sure you will find very interesting."

The summer sun was still fairly high as we drove into the town of Winnipeg Beach.

"The Beach", as it was called, catered to hundreds of Winnipeg city dwellers who loved to spend part of their summers there. Many had summer cabins or homes and the women and children might stay over the two summer months while the men worked in the city. There were many passenger trains that ran out to the Beach in those days. The late ones and the weekender ones were there to serve the dads who would join their families at every opportunity. The train they called

the Dad's Special, arrived on Friday evenings.

This idyllic spot was also a favorite of young lovers and it has been said that a large portion of the population of the city of Winnipeg had been created on the beautiful beaches of Lake Winnipeg.

Along the edge of the lake ran a long boardwalk on which was an assortment of all kinds of arcades known as Penny Arcades where you played neat games of chance for a penny apiece.

Right behind this were rides of all sorts in the shadow of the giant roller coaster. These rides cost five or ten cents and the roller coaster was fifteen cents.

One ride I forgot to mention was the carousel or merry-go-round as we called it. It was unbelievable – a round table with about forty carved and painted wooden horses that pranced up and down on their shiny brass rods as the whole thing went round and round. Of course there was a kid on every one and they laughed and shrieked as the horses sped around on their wild ride.

In the middle of the carousel was a calliope, a gorgeous pipe organ that played all kinds of beautiful music continuously. It could be heard all up and down the crowded boardwalk.

What fun we had riding in the old fashioned bumper cars and the

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little airplanes.

We spent a couple of hours in a magical world that we could not have known existed and I must say we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Soon it was time to go home. After we all had our first taste of sticky, pink, cotton candy, we got into the car and headed for home. I am sure we slept a bit and dreamed some nice dreams on the way. Although I didn't remember arriving at home, I woke up next morning,

surprised to be in my own bed.

I really wondered, "Was this all a dream or did it really happen?"

At breakfast the next morning, my Dad said; "Well, we sure got our money's worth yesterday!! It looks like I still have two dollars and twenty five cents left over from the ten dollar bill!!"

Wow!

During my whole life, I never forgot the fun we had that day!!

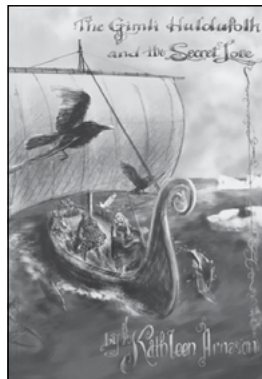
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Svava's Choir Boys

by Svava Simundsson

What is in a name? What is, “of no value”?

I have a set of six small figurine choir boys.

My first name is Anna. I have never been called by my first name and always have gone by my middle name, Svava, and although I think at many times it would have been so much easier at times just to go by my first name, such is not the case.

An elderly woman who lived in Gimli, who's name was Anna, gave to me this set of choir boys. Why I don't know, but I always surmised that it was because of me being her namesake and because I was a little girl who might treasure these

little figurines. In my family, as children we were not indulged with very many toys or treasures of any sort and so I thought rather fondly of my little choir boys, and displayed them on a shelf in my room.

I knew Anna because she was a caregiver to my grandfather. My grandfather, Jóhann Sæmundsson, had built a house in Gimli and then sold his house to Anna and her father Lárus Nordal but Jóhann continued to board with them well into his old age and so when I was very young I got to know Anna a little when we would come to visit my grandfather.

Anna had always had a great interest in music. She grew up in Leslie,



Saskatchewan and there she had started taking piano lesson and sang in choirs. She had attended St Mary's Academy in Winnipeg and took voice lessons and continued with her piano lessons. Unfortunately the outbreak of the Spanish flu put a stop to her further music education at that time and she returned to Saskatchewan. She later had opportunity to study voice lessons and piano lessons and became an accomplished pianist. She taught piano lessons, sang as a soloist for concerts, sang in choirs and conducted choirs, and played piano for church services. She had a keen interest in music and so would someone have given this set of little choir boys to her, recognizing that

interest? Likely she would have listened to the beautiful sound of the amazing voices of an all boy choir and would just have acquired this set of little choir boys for herself, possibly.

Anna's talent in the arts came by her rightly. Her mother, Rósa Davíðsdóttir, was a first cousin to S. K. Hall, the renowned pianist, piano teacher and composer. Anna's mother Rósa was also a first cousin to K. N. Júlíus, renowned in the arts, not for music but as a poet and rhymester. Rósa herself loved to sing and acted in the local play productions. Further to this interest in musical arts, Anna endowed a monetary gift to Iceland to fund the establishment of a

scholarship in her parents name to go to students interested in continuing studies in singing.

My little choir boys wear floor length red cassock. Cassocks are typically buttoned from the collar to the hem and over the cassocks the little choir boys wear surplices. Surplices have a square yoked neckline and are worn to mid-thigh length and have a wide full sleeve. The cloth collars are large red satin bows at the throat. As a child I had never seen boys dressed in these exotic ecclesiastic garments except perhaps on Christmas cards. One year my aunt gave my brothers a long play record of a Vienna boys choir



and we played the record often and listened to the amazing voices of that world renowned choir.

When I was older and leaving home I wrapped each little figurine in tissue and put them in a small box, left them at my parents place along with some other things I intended to keep, and there they stayed until about a year ago when I came across them and took them out to have a peek at them. I certainly haven't decided what I need next to do with them. I noticed that they were looking a bit old and their color had become a wee bit faded. I have a good friend, Georgina, who is an artist and wondered if she would spruce them up for me. She would have the supplies of paints and such to do the job and then I would have to get on with deciding what to do with them.

I told Georgina that they were old but I really didn't know how old, so she was reluctant to freshen up their paint until she could ascertain whether or not they were valuable. We had that checked

out. They have been made in a plaster cast and appraised to be, "of no value".

Georgina took on the task of sanding them a bit and then painting them and when they were all done she gave me a call to come pick them up. When I got them back I opened up the box, unwrapped each little figurine and was taken completely by surprise when I saw what she had done. What had once been identical monocultural little choir boy figurines were now, true to the artistic talent of the artist, each painted to show multiculturalistic tones to their skin color, hair color and eye color. They are delightful. They were, "of no value", perhaps they are of value now, with their artistic flare. They were "of no value" except perhaps to a long ago music lover. Are they, "of no value" to a little girl who displayed them – a gifted treasure. I had a namesake too, a long time ago.

*Thank you to artist, Georgina Ball.
Information from Dilla Narfason.*

Siggi Ben and his Harmonika

Translated from an oral interview taped for the New Iceland Heritage Museum

by Oli Narfason

Siggi Ben found great comfort during his quarantine with his Horner accordion. When he arrived in Canada he was put into quarantine due to typhoid fever. He was an accomplished player of this wonderful little gift that has now been bequeathed to the New Iceland Heritage Museum. It was something to do with the perfection that he played it with. I was never aware of him making a mistake. Knowingly what was suitable

and who he was playing for made it almost magic. It was wonderful to hear what he could do with this instrument.

Siggi was a little different from most, but he was a true Icelander. I am not sure he ever wanted to learn English. He had likely picked up some while he was in quarantine and he could understand it enough to get by if he had to. He preferred to get by in Icelandic.

He was a positive man and highly respected in every way. Not everyone agreed with him but that was fine with him. He had an Icelandic trait as they say, he wasn't stubborn but he was reluctant to change his mind.

After work, in the evenings, the harmonika came first. There was a neighbour girl, Siggi would come out on the front porch in the evening and she would sit and listen to him. He would play for whoever was around and people would come out and listen. There wasn't much entertainment



Illustration by Julia Penny



A Horner accordion

in those days, so this was a special time.

He was always ready to play and it was much appreciated, *usually*. Once his wife was having a meeting with some women and Siggí thought he would come in and give them some entertainment and took over the show. Apparently she wasn't too impressed.

He always played at the old folks homes and Betel. He was anxious to provide some entertainment for them. Money was no issue. He didn't need to get paid, he would just play for you. Many hearts filled with joy when people listened to Siggí Ben play his harmonika.

After the Minerva Ladies Aid was founded in 1920, he would always go to their annual events and bring along his harmonika. He would play for as long as they would listen. In later years, I tried to

keep up the tradition and Dennis Carlson and I were there to lead a sing along. I would take the old harmonika along and play a little tune. If my hand got sore or I faltered I would just look up and say a little prayer and ask Siggí to help me and it never failed, he always helped me. Soon as I asked him I could run through the tunes like anything. It was a great feeling to know that Siggí was there in spirit. I think to this day and forever on his spirit will linger on attached to the harmonika. As it lives on in the museum I think Siggí will be with it, I hope it will remain well taken care of for decades to come, if not a century or two.

Siggí would play for the dances if any organization or a few people wanted to put one on. He was willing to play for he was a one-man band. He would play



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROGER LAMBERT

112 South Colonization, the home of Siggí Ben

from 9 pm to 1 am. If it was a fundraiser it would be free. If it was someone who was looking to make a few bucks, then he might ask for a dollar. If it didn't turn out well, he might take only 50 cents. It didn't matter if it was 40 below or 40 above he would be there.

I don't ever recall him having any means of transportation except maybe a team of horses or riding a single horse. It was a two mile walk for him to get to the hall carrying the accordion. I never remember the harmonika having a case. He just carried it in reasonable comfort where it was exposed to the elements. In spite of this kind of environment the harmonika went through it is amazing how it has survived. Even the kids would play with it. Not a gentle thing with kids

fighting over who would play it next. It is amazing how it survived, it just rolled with the punches.

Siggí, in the summer time in the evening it might be 29-30 degrees or maybe a little more. He would sweat and sweat. He would have one or two or more big handkerchiefs. When they wouldn't absorb any more and they were soaking wet he ran to wring them out. Yet somehow how he made it and never missed a beat or a note. He was not happy unless it was perfect. I don't know how many hundreds of times he played for people at Minerva hall and the poor old harmonika how it has lasted is a mystery to me.

One thing we must remember here is the age of the harmonika. It was

brought over in 1903 and who knows how old it was then. It might have been five or 10 years old, we will not know exactly. Thinking when it came out of the factory it would make it more than 120 some years old. When you think of that, remember that it has been through all kinds of environments and elements. At least since I got it has been exposed to the elements and rarely protected. The neighbors used to come and borrow it from time to time. Sometimes the harmonika was gone for a week or a month. The neighbours would have it and enjoy the instrument. We thought that was great for everyone to try and learn to play it.

How I acquired it.

The Minerva Ladies Aid which was founded about ten years before the occasion of the raffle I am about to describe. Sigggi had always provided the musical entertainment when any function was held in the hall. I never did really hear why Sigggi was in a hard place except that he was not totally satisfied with the old harmonika or squeeze box. The reason was never spoken of but it could have been that it played in only two keys. I suspect that the keys that it did play in were not compatible with music of the day. I think he really wanted to be involved with playing with an orchestra.

The Ladies Aid decided to support his feeling that he needed a new accordion. It was decided to hold a raffle as a fundraiser and that would be culminated in their annual Tombola in the winter.

In those days, babysitting was unheard of. There was a big long table up on the stage and as babies or toddlers were ready to go to sleep, they were simply put up on the table – all rolled up on the table not to be disturbed till coffee time which fell around midnight. I was about five years old at the time. It seemed like a magnet pulled me up there. I was not put on the table to sleep through the whole evening. I was there present right on the stage to see and hear Sigggi. So that when it came time to make the draw, someone suggested why don't we just have Oli pull the winning ticket. The ticket just happened to come up and was for my sister Gerður. All of a sudden it became the possession of one of the Narfasons. That is how it wound up at Vídivöllum, the farm name of the Narfason farm. When it came to our place, I didn't know anything about it and I just fooled around with it just like any kids that came along visiting. It became a bit of a competition to see who could make the most noise with it and that was really not appreciated. It didn't see much use until neighbors started to wonder if they could borrow it to see if

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Oli Narfason

they could learn to play. I wouldn't say it took a lot of abuse but it sure didn't get much tender loving care.

As time went on, we were into the great depression, there was an immigrant we will call Joi, who had emigrated some few years before from Iceland. It seems to be logical that he was shall we say encouraged with probably getting passage and probably a stipend we used to call remittance. That would have run out at some point as he would have been in Canada by the time, he wound up at

our place 15 or even 20 years. Joi was a remarkable fellow, but he had a problem, an addiction of course. It was well known in the area, in town and the district that there was never any tobacco, alcohol or liquor in the Narfason household. That was just a no no. Our family was well known for the generosity of the people who lived there if there was someone who was homeless and didn't have any options left. Somebody would phone and ask if we could come pick him up and spend time with us so he could get over his desire for alcohol and get back on his feet. This went on for some time. The first time he came he saw the harmonika he picked it up and he played it as beautifully as Siggí. Apparently, he was artistic in every

way. He could paint, sketch he could make sprellikall (a merrionette kind of puppet). He wasn't kid friendly; he didn't have a lot of patience for kids. He was not a patient man. I would just watch him and by golly you know I could do the same thing he did. I could pretty soon pick out a few notes and it started to get a little interesting. As time went on there were others during the Great Depression that were similar to Joi and another one of these people wound up in

our household probably around the later part of the depression.

He was a Swedish immigrant and he had learned to play with an orchestra. He was more kid friendly, and he wanted to teach me. He taught me to chord on the harmonika and on the piano too. A very nice man and very artistic, as you could imagine with both wood and metal. He also taught me how to chord on the piano and pick out a tune and how to effectively play the harmonika. Then as time went on, I took the harmonika out to fishing camps. They were most appreciative when I pulled it out and played a few tunes.

Usually the environment it was in was not ideal for a harmonika, no temperature control, too damp at times, too hot but most of the time in winter it was far too dry. Somehow it endured, I can't believe how the bellows on the accordion would

be able to stand up to it to this very day with some patching, for they were a paper product with a fancy design. It remained playable and the notes have been amazingly true. It is noteworthy that I twice took the accordion into Winnipeg about 50 years ago. There were two main accordion repair places and neither one could help me because the bellows were not available in the right size for this accordion. They didn't have the right size so they just said, "Nope we can't do a thing for you", and that was it. It was unfortunate because if I could have gotten them to fix it up at that time it would still be in really fine shape. But that is just the way the cookie crumbles!

When I first went out to the fish camp for the winter which would be around four months usually. Then I would take the harmonika along, it seemed to



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be a joy for those who were at the camp. I recall one old timer, a man who was getting up in age asking me if I would play at his funeral, a favorite tune that I played quite often. As well I was asked on short notice less than 20 years ago to play it at a funeral for a local lady. I played *You are My Sunshine* on the harmonika. It was starting to need a little help with the lungs because it had a few leaks but somehow I made it and I guess it sounded pretty good. Through the years, I tried my best to keep the tradition going and if somebody wanted me to play it I was more than willing. I wish I could still play it but I guess it will live on with Siggi's spirit.

I feel so fortunate and so privileged to have heard Siggi Ben play his old

harmonika. Whenever I pull out the old squeeze box, I somehow feel he is still with us in spirit and I have no doubt his spirit will live on as long as the old accordion endures.

As time went by, I used to take the old squeeze box to Betel occasionally. I played regularly on Wednesday evening in the old Betel home. That seemed to be really appreciated. I used to go to the Minerva Ladies Aid annual visit as well as the Icelandic National league annual visit and always took Siggi along. Even after my fingers got a little numb and stiff it seemed that if I looked up and asked Siggi to help me everything would work out. I feel so blessed to have had Siggi as a family friend and it is comforting to know that his spirit lives on.



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POETRY

Translation of “Bikarinn,” a poem by Jóhann Sigurjónsson

The Goblet

Alone you will find me drinking
during the evening hours
My glass with the golden liquid
gives off the scent of flowers

Joy that is long since over
awakens and does delight me
Sorrow, long lost and buried,
is weeping anew inside me

Right next to me, Death is looming
he holds without any slackness
the infinite sky of evening
filled to the brim with blackness

Translated by Vala Hafstað

Bikarinn

Bikarinn Einn sit ég yfir drykkju
aftaninn vetrarlangan,
ilmar af gullnu glasi
gamalla blóma angan.

Gleði, sem löngu er liðin,
lifnar í sálu minni.
Sorg sem var gleymd og grafin,
grætur í annað sinni.

Bak við mig bíður dauðinn,
ber hann í hendi styrki
hyldjúpan næturhimin
helltan fullan af myrkri.

Jóhann Sigurjónsson
1880 - 1919

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Contributors

KAREN BOTTING. Of Icelandic heritage, Karen Borgford Botting grew up in Winnipeg's West End and continues to spend lots of summer time at her family's homestead property at Arnes, Manitoba. She is very active in both the Icelandic Canadian Fron, as was her father Skapti Borgford, and the Jon Sigurdsson Chapter IODE, following in the footsteps of her amma, Gudrun Borgford.

VALA HAFSTAÐ is the author of two poetry books in English – one of them bilingual. She lives in Iceland, where she works as a translator and journalist.

BRIAN JOHANNESSEN Born in Winnipeg, Brian Johannesson grew up with hockey memorabilia all around him but found it only of curiosity value at the time. His father Konnie had played defence for the 223rd Battalion hockey team and for the Winnipeg Falcons for several years, including 1920, the Olympic year.

After graduating from the University of Manitoba in 1958 Brian moved to Montreal and then with his family to Waterloo, Ontario in 1967. By 1999 he had enough documents, diaries and artefacts to create his first Winnipeg Falcons website. Then he rewrote it entirely in 2006 after acquiring his mother's scrapbook, a treasure trove of several hundred newspaper clippings about the 223rd Battalion and Falcons teams.

Brian now lives in Kitchener, Ontario, culturally a very long way from Icelandic Winnipeg; his Falcons' website is at www.winnipegfalcons.com

KEITH KRISTOFFERSON was a Regional Fisheries Manager for the Province of Manitoba and a District Manager for Fish Habitat for Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). Keith obtained a B.A., BSc. and Master's Degree in Natural Resources Management from the University of Manitoba. Keith has a great interest in military history on land, sea, and air in Canada, Great Britain and the United States of America. Keith has also been a long time member of the Royal Canadian Legion, Gimli Branch 182.

OLI NARFASON. Proud to have come from Minerva, Oli Narfason is well known for his strong commitment to community work and charity. He was known for developing his pedigree Holstein Friesian herd, both in milk production and then showing animals across Canada, winning the Master Breeding Shield twice.

SVAVA SIMUNDSSON. After living six years in Iceland, two of which were spent studying Icelandic at the University of Iceland, returned to Geysir Manitoba with her two young daughters. She now lives in Arborg and works in Early Childhood Education.

ELIN THORDARSON, the editor-in-chief of the *Icelandic Connection*, is a writer, translator and mother from Winnipeg, Manitoba.

EINAR VIGFUSSON was born in 1933 on the family farm Drangey just outside Arborg in Manitoba's Interlake. He was a natural born storyteller and could recall so many interesting incidents that happened during his life. A few years ago he started writing down his memories, intending this collection for his children and grandchildren. The world and our way of life has changed so much since 1933, so there is ample subject matter! He was a farmer, an keen observer and lover of nature, an artist and realistic wildfowl carver. He passed away in the fall of 2019.





PHOTO COURTESY OF LORNA TERGESEN

The weekend train bringing campers and fathers
to Lake Winnipeg

The Back Page

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