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On the Cover

Icelandic Emigrant, 1874 - 1876

Editorial

by Birna Bjarnadóttir

The year 2007 is set for Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807–1845), the farmboy from Öxnadalur who later became one of Iceland´s most remarkable natural scientist, and in the minds of some, the best poet ever born on the island. At the time of his death, on May 26 in 1845, he had also risen to the stature of a national hero, being instrumental in the nineteenth century independent movement.

There are substantial reasons for this achievement. At an early age, his love for nature is said to have presented itself to him in the guise of a beautiful and captivating riddle. And as a young man, leaving the Boarding School of Bessastaðir (in south–west Iceland), his teachers wrote in his Graduation Certificate: "gifted with a penetrating intelligence, an excellent memory, and a living appreciation for what is true and especially for what is beautiful." Thus, while approaching the legacy of Jónas Hallgrímsson's life and work, one cannot help but to encounter the brushstrokes of numerous gods and goddesses. Hail to you Óðinn! to hand a profound poet down to us; hail to you Ancient Greek gods! to inspire the farmboy from Öxnadaulur to serve and follow the goddess of beauty in the spirit of Eros. One should also acknowledge the Son and the Father. For unlike some at the beginning of the twenty first century, Jónas Hallgrímsson, despite his countless trials, harboured faith in the creator's gifts.

The year set for beauty marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Jónas Hallgrímsson.

As can be expected, cultural events are taking place throughout the year on both sides of the Atlantic, more or less in a creative collaboration with the Jónas-committee, formed by the Ministry of culture and education in Iceland. The main outposts of Icelandic language and culture have been drawn into the enchanting enterprise, Manitoba being one of them. On August 5, a singular event took place in Johnson Hall, Gimli, in a rewarding collaboration between the University of Manitoba´s Department of Icelandic Language and Literature, the Íslendingadagurinn's Committee, and the Icelandic Government. This time, the annual Celebrity Concert was dedicated to the memory of Jónas Hallgrímsson, featuring the Valley-Group and the composer Atli Heimir Sveinsson. The musical program, inspired by the poems of Jónas Hallgrímsson, and composed by Atli Heimir, was performed by Hulda Björk Garðarsdóttir soprano, Eyjólfur Eyjólfsson tenor, Anna Guðny Guðmundsdóttir piano, Hávarður Tryggvason double bass, Sigrún Eðvaldsdóttir violin, and Sigurður Ingi Snorrason clarinet. It is sufficient to say, that Atli Heimir Sveinsson is one of Iceland's leading contemporary composers, and the Valley–Group an ensamble of some of Iceland´s most gifted and renowned musicians. There were also two speakers on site. Rev. Stefan Jonasson, a true theologian in that he appreciates the arts, gave a brief talk on the legacy of Jónas Hallgrímsson's life and work. Dr. Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, an associate professor in Icelandic at the Unviersity of Iceland, gave another brief talk on Jónas's poetry. Last but not least, David Gislason, the farmer, poet and translator from the New Iceland area, recited his translation of Hallgrímsson's poem "Ferðalok", or "Journey's End," the poem many refer to as the most beautiful poem ever written in Icelandic.

In a year set for beauty, it should also be noted that the early Icelandic settlers in North America were no strangers to Jónas Hallgrímsson. When reading through their memoirs, it becomes evident that two books were read quite frequently: Hallgrímur Pétursson's Passion Hymns and Mynster's Reflections on the Principal Points of Christian Faith. The latter, written by the Danish bishop J.P. Mynster (1775–1854), was also read in Icelandic, translated by Brynjólfur Pétursson (1810–1851), Jónas Hallgrímsson and Konráð Gíslason (1808–1891), published 1839 in Copenhagen. The early Icelandic settlers were thus at home in the still incomparable religious poetry of Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–1674). They were also the people to ferry over the Atlantic Ocean an Icelandic translation of Mynster´s text, a translation renown for its poetic beauty. The translators, who had all moved to Copenhagen to seek higher education, were friends, and along with Tómas Sæmundsson (1807–1841) - who had also studied and lived in Copenhagen, and travelled far and wide within Euorpe prior to his returning to the isolated island back home - belonged to the so–called Fjölnir-group. This group of friends were the people to create and publish the annual periodical Fjölnir, its first issue to appear in 1835. What the friends envisioned was nothing less than a cultural and economic revival for Iceland, later to be recogniced as one of the most creative attempts in the history of Iceland to acknowledge both the indespensible role of culture, and the desirable relation between utility, beauty and truth.

In a year set for Jónas Hallgrímsson, it is also time to recall the circumstances in which this group of friends, or, in the words of Halldór Laxness, these apples of Iðunn, managed to rejuvinate the Icelandic nation in the nineteenth century. They did not originate from "fancy offices, supported by bulging bankbooks, nor from powerful officials." This renewal, Halldór Laxness also wrote, and David Gislason translated; "came at the hands of a few insignificant revelers, living in a big city south of Oresund, colourless and wearing worn out shoes." Jónas, the poet in the group, "has not told us any heroic tale which is in danger of losing its colour to the cold irony of life, nor opened up for us a fairy tale world more beautiful than reality itself."

Jónas Hallgrímsson: The Poet
Behind Iceland's modern awakening

by Stefan M. Jonasson

Some countries have been born through revolution, such as the United States of America with its War of Independence, while others have emerged through evolution, such as our own Canada, which came of age as Britain began to divest itself of its empire. Still others have been fashioned through military conquest or else have lingered as the vestiges of a once-larger country that has disintegrated into smaller ones. Modern Iceland stands out as a country that was given birth through literature, its poets and novelists and journalists occupying the roles of midwife and nurse, statesperson and general.

While much has been made of the importance of literature to Iceland's development, the point was driven home to me quite forcefully on my first visit to Iceland, when I made the requisite pilgrimage to Þingvellir. Most people know Þingvellir as the historic meeting place of the Alþing, Iceland's parliament, which began gathering there amidst its hauntingly beautiful landscape in 930. Those who have been blessed to visit this shrine of Northern democracy will be familiar with Almannagjá, the magnificent ravine that betrays the great continental plates colliding below at the speed of geology, and the Law Rock from which, in ancient times, the lawspeaker oversaw collisions of opinion happening at the speed of the human temper. Flowing throughout are the charming waters, from the execution pool, where the condemned rendezvoused with death, to the wishing pool, which seems bottomless, like the quietly-uttered dreams that have been whispered by hopeful souls who have christened it with their offerings of coin. Those who have only seen Þingvellir in postcards will be familiar with the neat little four-peaked farmhouse—a parsonage really—and the modest frame church reminding us of things eternal, in the unlikely event that the landscape itself has failed to make this impression. It is only if one possesses both curiosity and staying power, however, that one is likely to wander up the gentle slope behind the church to discover skáldareitur, the resting place of the poets Einar Benediktsson and Jónas Hallgrímsson, precisely where in other lands one might have expected to find monarchs and parliamentarians, bishops and war heroes.

Jónas Hallgrímsson was laid to rest in this most honoured of places in 1946, two years after the proclamation of the Icelandic republic and 101 years after his untimely death in Copenhagen, when he was just 38 years old. Standing at his

grave that first time, I called to mind a few poems—well, actually a few snippets of poems, since my memory is better suited to recalling obscure facts than lines of verse. The first poems to come to mind were his whimsical verses, such as Borðsálmur or "Table Hymn," a wittily irreverent piece written in the form of a responsive hymn, and his prayer of an imagined farmer to the goddess of drizzle, offering his cow, his wife, and his faith in return for some sunshine to burn away the mist. How strange it is, I thought, that the composer of such whimsy should be immortalized so. It has taken me years to grasp his significance as a poet and scientist, scholar and statesman.

My own deeper interest in Jónas grew out of the discovery that he had written a poem about my third great-grandfather, Jón Þorláksson Kjærnested – "Á gömlu leiði 1841" (At an Old Grave). There's nothing like family conceit to motivate interest! It seems that this ancestor of mine had taught Jónas how to swim in the years following the tragic death of the poet's father by drowning, when Jónas was still eight years old. In 1841, while traveling around Snæfellsnes in his work as a naturalist, Jónas stumbled upon his old teacher's grave at Ingjáldsholl, penning a verse that both eulogized Jón Kjærnested and betrayed Jónas's own recurrent melancholy. Two verses will suffice to convey the flavour of the poem:

> Hardship! Though your unhappy son
> Lies here secure in nature's keeping,
> Clad in eternal night and sleeping,
> His soul's enduring weal is won! ...
> Rest in your mold-embosomed bed
> Patiently, old friend long departed,
> And peace enfold you, weary-hearted!
> Iceland was cold, ● Kjærnested.[1]

In the years since, I've come to appreciate Jónas Hallgrímsson's significance to the flowering of romantic literature and rationalist philosophy in Iceland – an unusual combination – not to mention his influence on the embryonic independence movement. As a poet, scientist and social commentator, he was truly a "Renaissance man" and he left an enormous legacy for one who died so very young.

It was suggested to me by a parishioner, some time ago, that "Ég bið að heilsa!" (I Send Greetings!) is the most beautiful poem ever written, and I can find little reason to quarrel with this sincere and appreciative hyperbole.

As a vocational exile's love poem to his homeland, it is unequalled in its sentiment and eloquence, which were captured in this translation by Jakobina Johnson:

As a nature poet, Jónas is rivalled among Icelandic writers only by our own Stephan G. Stephansson and the different landscapes they celebrated has meant that

they complement one another rather than compete, although Jónas has been largely unknown to the passing generations of North Americans of Icelandic descent.

Unlike many of the Romantic poets

> The balmy south a gentle sigh releases –
> And countless ocean billows, set in motion,
> Breathe to my native shore the south's devotion,—
> Where strand and hillside feel the kindly breezes.
> O give them all at home my fondest greeting,
> O'er hill and a dale a sacred peace and blessing.
> Ye billows, pass the fisher's boat caressing;
> And warm each youthful cheek, ye south winds fleeting.
> Herald of springtime, thou whose instinct free,
> Pilots thy shiny wings to trackless spaces
> To summer haunts to chant thy poems rare.
> O greet most fondly, if you chance to see
> An angel whom our native costume graces.
> For that, dear throstle, is my sweetheart fair.[2]

across cultures, who perceive some pristine and heroic age and write out of their love for it—a tendency for which the Icelandic sagas provide ample fodder—Jónas Hallgrímsson viewed his homeland with the eye of a naturalist, oftentimes imbuing his verse with a scientific precision to match its poetic power. It was once suggested of one of his poems that its geology was as sound as its grammar.

Jónas's place in the development of Icelandic literature is comparable to that of his contemporary, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in American literature. However, while Emerson's appreciation of nature was almost entirely romantic, Jónas brought the understanding of a scientist to his celebration of the natural order and, more significantly, the quality Jónas's poetry is more even and far superior overall, even if its quantity is far less, owing to his early death. Jónas Hallgrímsson was one of the key figures—perhaps the central personality—in the literary reawakening of Iceland.

The literary scholar Stefán Einarsson wrote of Jónas:

> Being the greatest representative of unadulterated classic beauty among the Romanticists, he sometimes painted brilliant, often geologically correct, canvasses of his landscapes, sometimes placed himself in the midst of nature among familiar flowers and scenes, greeting them with the loving intimacy of a St. Francis. He could do the same with the birds, the farmer with his scythe, and the fisherman in his boat, and he was really the only one who succeeded in painting country life as attractive … As Bjarni Thorarensen was the poet of rugged winter, Jónas was the songbird of summer.[3]

While history best remembers Jónas as a poet, it is important for us to remember that he was also an accomplished scientist and a key political figure in the budding nineteenth-century nationalist movement, which laid the foundation for the restoration of the Alþing and the eventual independence of Iceland with its robust culture and liberal democratic institutions. If Jón Sigurðsson was the political genius behind the nationalist movement in nineteenth-century Iceland, then it can fairly be said that Jónas Hallgrímsson was the movement's poetic inspiration.

This year, we mark the bicentennial of Jónas Hallgrímsson's birth at Hraun in Öxnadalur and we remember his life and gifts with deep appreciation and more than a little awe. Legend has it that that there was a treasure chest atop Hraundrangi, the needle-like summit that towers over Jónas's birthplace, although when three climbers reached the summit for the very first time in 1956, there was no treasure to be found there! We must not conclude, however, that the legend of a treasure was entirely mistaken. The real treasure of this place lay not at the mountain peak but rather at its base. This treasure was quietly born, two centuries ago this November, at a humble turf parsonage in the valley below.

Notes

1. Jónas Hallgrímsson, "Á gömlu leiði 1841" (At an Old Grave, 1841), trans. Dick Ringler, in *Bard of Iceland*: Jónas Hallgrímsson, Poet and Scientist by Dick Ringler (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 199. Ringler's volume is the authoritative English-language work on the life and letters of Jónas Hallgrímsson and is a masterpiece in the art of translating poetry!

2. Jónas Hallgrímsson, "Ég bið að heilsa!" (I Send Greetings!), trans. Jakobina Johnson, in Icelandic Lyrics: Originals and Tranlations, ed. Richard Beck (Reykjavík: Þorhallus Bjarnarson, 1930), 56-59.

3. Stefán Einarsson, *A History of Icelandic Literature* (New York: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), 225-226.

Stóð ég úti' i tunglsljósi

Stóð ég úti' i tunglsljósi, stóð ég út við skóg
stórir komu skarar, af álfum var þar nóg,
blésu þeir í sönglúðrá' bar þá að mér skjótt
og bjöllurnar gullu á heiðskírri nótt.

Hleyptu p\þeir á fannhvítum hestum yfir grund,
hornin jóa gullroðnu blika við lund
eins og þegar álftir á ísa grárri spöng
fljúga suður heiði með fjaðraþyt og söng.

Heilsaði' hún mér drottingin og hló að mér um leið,
hló að m´r og hleypti hestinum á skeið.
Var það út af ástinni ungu, sem ég ber?
eða var það feigðin, sem kallar að mér?

The ride of the Elves

translated by David Gislason

Standing in the moonlight, and sheltered near a wood,
Scores of elves came riding, a host, near where I stood.
Trumpeting their bugles, they burst upon my sight,
Chiming their bells on the clear, starry night.

Hooves were flashing silver, their horses white as snow.
Hard upon the heather, so quickly they did go.
Like a flock of swans o'er the moorland icy grey,
Song on the wing, flying south a wintr'y day.

Laughingly she hailed me, the queen, as she rode by.
Laughed at me and left me alone to question why?
Was it for the love that I innocently bore?
Or was my fate sealed on the moorland evermore?

Hvað er svo glatt

by Jónas Hallgrímsson

Hvað er svo glatt sem góðra vina fundur,
er gleðin skín á vonarhýrri brá
Eins og á vori laufi skrýðist lundur,
lifnar og glæðist hugarkætin þá.
Og meðan þrúgna gullnu tárin glóa
og guðaveigar lífga sálaryl,
þá er það víst, að beztu blómin gróa
í brjóstum, sem að geta fundið til.

Það er svo tæpt að trúa heimsins glaumi,
því táradaggir falla stundum skjótt
og vinir erast burt á tímans straumi
og blómin fölna á einni hélunótt.
Því er oss bezt að forðast raup og reiði
og rjúfa hvergi tryggð né vinarkoss,
en ef við sjáum sólskinsblett í heiði,
að setjast allir þar og gleðja oss.

Songs of the Icelanders (an excerpt)

Translated by Brandur Finnson

How we exult when good friends get together
With gaiety on every hopeful brow.
As in the springtime, bows in balmy weather
Will blossom forth as we do here and now.
While in our minds the spirits gently glowing,
The gods' own nectar will our sorrows heal,
And we shall find the brightest blossoms growing
In bosoms that can really, truly feel.

Journey's End

The star of love
over Steeple Rock
is cloaked in clouds of night.
It laughed, once, from heaven
on the lad grieving
deep in the dark valley.

I know where all hope ---
where my whole world ---
flames with the fire of God.
I throw off the chains
of thought, I fling
myself into your soul.

I sink myself,
see into your being,
live your very life;
each gracious moment
that God loves you
blooms in my burning heart.

Alone together
we gathered flowers
high on the heath at dawn.
I wove you wreaths,
reverently laying
loving gifts in your lap.

You heaped my forehead
with fragrant rings
of bright blue flowers,
one, then another;
you nodded and smiled
and swiftly snatched them away.

We laughed in the highlands
while heaven grew clear,
bright at the mountain brim.

Not a single joy
seemed to exist
apart from living our life.1

The wise flower-elves
wept in the hollows,
they knew we would need to part.
We thought it was drops
of dew, and kissed
cold tears from the crossgrass.

I held you on horseback
in the hurtling stream
and felt with fond assurance
I could lift and carry
so light a flower
over all the leagues of life.

Beside the bank
of Boar River
I carefully combed your hair;
eye stars flash,
flower lips smile,
cheeks turn ruby red.

He is far from your fair
friendship, the lad
deep in the dark valley.
The star of love
over Steeple Rock
is burning back of clouds.

The heavens part
the high planets,
blade parts back and edge;
not even eter-
nity can part
souls that are sealed in love.

Ferðalok

Ástarstjörnu
yfir Hraundranga
skýla næturský;
hló hún á himni,
hryggur þráir
sveinn í djúpum dali.

Veit ég hvar von öll
og veröld mín
glædd er guðs loga.
Hlekki brýt ég hugar,
og heilum mér
fleygi faðm þinn í.

Sökkvi ég mér og sé ég
í sálu þér
og lífi þínu lifi;
andartak sérhvert,
sem ann þér guð,
finn ég í heitu hjarta.

Tíndum við á fjalli,
tvö vorum saman,
blóm í hárri hlíð;
knˇtti ég kerfi
og í kjöltu þér
lagði ljúfar gjafir.

Hlóðstu mér að höfði
hringum ilmandi
bjartra blágrasa,
einn af öðrum,
og að öllu dáðist,
og greipst þá aftur af.

Hlógum við á heiði,
himinn gladnaði
fagur á fjallabrún;

alls yndi
þótti mér ekki vera
utan voru lífi lifa.2

Grétu þá í lautu
góðir blómálfar,
skilnað okkarn skildu;
dögg það við hugðum,
og dropa kalda
kysstum úr krossgrasi.

Hélt ég þér á hesti
í hörðum straumi,
og fann til fullnustu,
blómknapp þann gæti
ég borið og varið
öll yfir æviskeið.

Greiddi ég þér lokka
við Galtará
vel og vandlega;
brosa blómvarir,
blika sjónstjörnur,
roðnar heitur hlýr.

Fjær er nú fagri
fylgd þinni
sveinn í djúpum dali;
ástarstjarna
yfir Hraundranga
skín á bak við ský.

Háa skilur hnetti
himingeimur,
blað skilur bakka og egg;
en anda, sem unnast,
fær aldregi
eilífð að skilið.

This is part of a large collection of translations from Jonas (with accompanying commentaries) that can be found on the Web site http://www.library.wisc.edu/etext/Jonas/ or in the book BARD OF ICELAND: JONAS HALLGRIMSSON, POET AND SCIENTIST (University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).
- Richard N. Ringler

Hannes Hafstein stated in 1883 that "Journey's End" was written during the final, depressed winter of Jónas's life. It was at that time, says Hannes, that "the memory of forgotten love affairs from his school days revived, surfacing in the exquisite poem 'Journey's End'".

Nothing more concrete about the poem's origins was forthcoming until 1925, when Matthías Þórðarson published his important article "Journey's End"("Ferðalok"; 9Iðu169-74), in which he showed that the girl whom Jónas recalled so poignantly in this poem was named Þóra Gunnarsdóttir and she and Jónas had fallen in love in July 1828 when Jónas—on his way home to Steinsstaðir for the summer after completing his fifth year of school at Bessastaðir—accompanied the pack train of Þóra's father, Reverend Gunnar Gunnarsson, north from Reykjavík to Eyjafjörður (where Gunnar had been given the pastorate at Laufás).

Matthías says that the source of his information was Þóra's much younger half sister, Kristjana Havsteen (born 1836), who had obtained her knowledge partly from her mother Jóhanna Gunnlaugsdóttir Briem (who had obtained it directly from her husband, Þóra's father), and partly from an unidentified female friend of Þóra's.

Þóra had been born on 4 February 1812 and was some four years younger than Jónas. In the summer of 1828, when the events in question are supposed to have occurred, she was sixteen, "an extremely lovely and promising girl, adored by everyone" (5DXL). Reverend Gunnar with his pack train and its attendants, accompanied by Þóra and Jónas, took the usual inland route (the old Skagfirðingar Track) from Kalmanstunga in Upper Borgarfjörður, travelling northeast across Eagle Lake Highland (Arnarvatnsheiði) and Big Sands (Stórisandur). It was in these highland surroundings that Jónas's and Þóra's love blossomed; it was here that he "held her on horseback / in the hurtling stream" - probably as they rode double across the dangerous Blanda Fords (Blönduvöð). A few kilometers farther on he combed her hair—a touching sign of their growing intimacy—on the banks of Boar River (Galtará), a tiny tributary of the Blanda, where the party may have paused to rest its horses or camp for the night (cf. 12Iðu278).

"Journey's end," for Jónas, came when they reached his mother's farm at Steinsstaðir after a trip from Reykjavík that had probably taken 3-4 days. Here the lovers parted. Before they did so, however, Jónas asked Þóra's father for her hand in marriage. Reverend Gunnar told him that the pair were too young to be formally engaged: "The future was uncertain, he said, and it would be best to see how their situations developed during the next few years and whether they remained attached to each other" (5DXLI). Perfectly sensible. After all, Þóra was only sixteen, and Jónas was still a student at Bessastaðir.

We are told that the pair exchanged letters for a while but in all likelihood never met again. Jónas did not go out of his way to look Þóra up and two or three years later he seems to have had another woman in mind as a prospective bride (see ÁBT54-9).Color photo of Þóra Gunnarsdóttir's grave, small version. In 1832, not long after Jónas sailed for Copenhagen, Þóra was betrothed by her father to a clergyman fourteen years older than herself whom she married ("half-unwilling" it is said) in 1834. Some dozen years later, not long after Jónas's death, she is reported to have heard "Journey's End" read aloud at a wedding feast, to have realized how deeply he had loved her (and that he had never forgotten her), and to have been so overcome with sorrow that she took to her bed. She outlived Jónas many years, dying of typhus in 1882.

All this is the stuff of which legends are made, of course, and "the bittersweet love of Jónas and Þóra has become one of Icelanders' best known love stories" (ÁBT80).

It is not known with certainty when "Journey's End" was written. As noted earlier, Hannes Hafstein—probably on good authority—believed it to be a product of Jónas' last winter. The surviving manuscript points in the same direction, since it dates (probably) from early January 1845 (see KJH314). There is plainly a close connection between "Journey's End" and Jónas's poem "Quatrains" ("Stökur"), and since "Quatrains" can be dated precisely (21 December 1844), it is likely that "Journey's End" was written around the turn of the year 1844-5. Matthías Þórðarson's argument that it was composed at Steinsstaðir in 1828, immediately after Jónas and Þóra had parted, can no longer be given much weight (see Kf161-86). Matthías took the combination of present-tense verbs with precise topographical allusions, in strophes 1-3 and 10, to imply that these parts of the poem must actually have been composed in the surroundings they describe, whereas a glance at Jónas's late cycle of topographical poems, with their intricate interweaving of topography with past and present time, ought to have pointed him in a different direction. Indeed, much of the controversy about the dating of "Journey's End" has occurred because of Jónas's deliberate blurring of the boundary between past and present. In the surviving manuscript we actually catch a glimpse of him engaged in this chronological prestidigitation. The second half of strophe 9 originally read (before he altered it):

eye stars flashed,
flower lips smiled,
cheeks turned ruby red -

which is obviously much more true to the real "time-facts." (Similarly, in the fourth line of strophe 8, Jónas first wrote "could," then altered this in the manuscript to "can," then reverted in the published version to "could"!) The deliberate confounding of past and present, throughout the poem, serves to suggest that love triumphs over time, just as it triumphs over space (as is asserted in the final strophe).

After taking leave of Þóra in 1828, Jónas went on to have relationships with several other women, so the poignant, reawakened memories in "Journey's End" are more likely to be a symptom of his generally depressed mood, in the last winter of his life, than of any obdurate lifelong obsession.

In light of the oral traditions about the poem's origins, which seem as authentic and well-authenticated as such things can be, it would be perverse to deny the presence of a strong autobiographical element in "Journey's End." On the other hand, in a poem that was probably written about the same time as the topographical poems mentioned above and that deals (like them) with memories of travel in Iceland, it is not at all likely that what we have is an attempt at reportage or reconstruction of actual facts, but rather extremely probable that there is an imaginative (and even imaginary) dimension to the experiences recounted in the poem.

Revisions in the surviving manuscript show that at first Jónas gave it the title "My Love" ("Ástin mín"). This phrase is ambiguous and can be taken as answering either the question "Who is she?" or the question "What is its nature?" - or indeed both questions at once (see Kf172). Jónas subsequently altered the title to "An Old Story" ("Gömul saga"), which may have had ironic overtones. Finally he settled on "Journey's End" ("Ferðalok"), the magnificently suggestive title under which the poem was published in the eighth issue of Fjölnir several weeks before the accident that caused his death.

Gudrun the visionary
The Hovering Metaphysical Love

by R●bert Tate

The depths of winter can wreak havoc in the mind, far, far from warm waters and rays glistening on skin. Somberness brews in shadows of constant fire where smoke seeps into the lungs, blocking clear passage of long forgotten clean air. Bed becomes profane in the perversion of passivity, at once a welcome respite amidst autumn's death, then decaying into the chaos of nyctophobia, insomnia, fatigue. What mysterious periods are those that are now equated with medical illness and disregarded as, shall I say, invaluable lulls, important for questioning our complexities of nature? Did not Descartes do his best thinking in the comfort of his bed? These extended durations, lurking incessantly on the brink of sleep and sentience are not desirable to many, albeit living in a culture of vanity and harsh realism, bereft of emotion-sharing, it may be difficult to accept the thaumaturgical benefits of deep sleep. However, to the Icelanders in the saga ages through today, the dream-state is not shrugged off the shoulder of significance too quickly. The interpretation of dreams has been a tradition in Iceland since settlement in the 9th and 10th centuries, brought from other lands and locked in that landlocked nation ever since, putting fate forever close to home and the superhuman near to earth.

Gudrun Osvifsdottir of *Laxdæla Saga* may have gone out to cleanse more than just her clothing at the hot-springs of Sælingsdale on the day she recited her dreams of the previous winter to Gest Oddleifsson, a wise chieftain, of which four in particular "disturbed (her) greatly."[1] It was spring; a time to purge the collected demons of winter, which can only be understood at a visceral level by those that dwell in climates that experience extreme fluctuations in perennial shifts, like Icelanders or, say, Winnipeggers. I am speaking of spring to be a period of rebirth or awakening.

Gudrun asks Gest to interpret her dreams and is not scared of hearing anything that may be dissatisfying, as she mentions that previous allegorizations have not satiated her, presumably due to their positive attributes. Rightly so, for if Gudrun had experienced a winter depression, as I am implying, why would she have accepted anything that made light of her anxious state? It is then obvious that Gudrun knows her dreams are not positive ones and assurance from a respectful outsider would confirm any inhibitions to believe such a terrible destiny. Her dissatisfaction of these previous interpretations is indicative of her stubbornness, independence and strength of personality that is exemplified in the first dream, which makes Gudrun stand apart from many medieval female characters in world literature. In it, she is reluctantly wearing a head-dress and despite others' advice to hold it dearly, she throws it to water and rids herself of it. So we get a sense that Gudrun will not suffer to please others; a perfect attitude of character for one in a love story. Gest interprets this as her first husband, as each dream, symbolizes each husband she will have and tragically, the loss of each as well.

In *Grípisspá* it is said, "one cannot escape one's destiny"[2] and thus Gudrun's first husband becomes a man named Thorvald Halldorsson of Garpsdale. Like the headdress, Thorvald does not become Gudrun and she must get rid of him. She divorces him on account of his wearing feminine clothing, which Gudrun made for him following the malicious advice of Thordur Ingunnarsson, whom in turn, becomes her second husband.

This was the plan. Thordur divorces his wife Audr in order to marry Gudrun and she takes revenge by stabbing him in the night. That was not planned. Thordur does not die from this, but eventually drowns after coming into conflict with the Kotkel family, notorious for their sorcery.

Thordur is a silver ring in Gudrun's second dream. She loses this valuable thing in a lake, not a stream. Deliberate? To toss something in a stream is to watch it drift away. To lose something in a lake is to drop and cry. From conflicting blue hues of mysterious horizons to rocky shores, a lake casts mists of awe and beauty always, but your lover is in it, and finding him is impossible. This is torment and heavy loss as is felt in a dream and more so if you go looking. When the beauty of land is compromised, the psyche is damaged.

It should be noted here, that after Gest parted from Gudrun, he came across two golden boys that fell into Gudrun's destiny. Bolli and Kjartan are the best of friends, swimming in innocence, but Gest sees that Bolli will kill Kjartan eventually. Perhaps, Gudrun's famous final words ("I was worst to the one I loved most"[3]) are best to be here.

We like to think they refer to Kjartan because romance pluck's the heart's harp. However, it is a complex issue when discussing Gudrun's visions. Kjartan and Bolli (Gudrun's third husband) seem to be melded into one dream, perhaps because they are so close that they are regarded as one. Gudrun's gold ring is broken in two when she stumbles and both Kjartan and Bolli bleed. The saga later reveals that Kjartan and Gudrun become very intimate and many believe they will marry, as they made a wonderful match. But Kjartan sails to Norway with Bolli and some others and after some time Bolli returns with news that Kjartan is still in Norway and possibly engaged with a woman of noble stature, named Ingibjorg. I believe Kjartan is still in love with Gudrun, but he has no means of communicating this and to his misfortune, Gudrun eventually marries Bolli. Kjartan returns and after some quarrels, marries Hrefna.

Thus, in this third dream, we can also note that Gudrun, if the fates be true, is not overly pleased with this gold ring, as she says: "I had the feeling that I would enjoy this ring longer than the other one; but it didn't seem to become me all that much better, to the extent that gold is more precious than silver."[4]

Perhaps, Gudrun's gold ring is both Bolli and Kjartan as companions and when she falls, this reflects her confusion, and thus her decisions that were made out of necessity and not out of love that caused them to become enemies. When a ring breaks in pair, neither is for wear.

This is a profound moment in dream for Gudrun in regards to the love triangle as it unfolds, because it reveals much about her character. She is so strong a person that she would rather hurt herself than be taken advantage of, as is apparent in her marriage to Bolli, which is partially out of jealousy for Kjartan not having come home to marry her.

But, we also see a touch of impatience, resulting in regret with Gudrun. If fate would have allowed her to wait a short while longer for absolute truth, she may have still had a chance with Kjartan, as law in Medieval Iceland prohibited widows to be coerced into marriage. The regret is evident in her phrase: "... And yet I felt sure that the ring would have stayed whole if I had looked after it better ..."

The fourth dream is much the same as the first two; another drowned love. This time, the precious material good is a helmet of gold and the husband that commodity turns out to be is Thorkell Eyjolfsson, a great chieftain who fatally sinks into the cold waters of Hvammsfjord.

The question now becomes; did Gudrun cleanse her soul at those hot-springs of Sælingsdale? If anything, her fate was illustrated and the reader has definite foreshadowing. In my opinion, this is the major turning point in Laxdæla Saga and we ask ourselves; is there any hope for Gudrun? Is there any escaping fate? When we find that the answer is no, then we find some insight into the anonymous author's intent. Not simply to entertain through

violent action and romantic suspense, but to reach a higher level of literature, one that pinpoints human emotion and at the same time provokes thought and philosophical questioning. We are dealing with a visionary character, one that has become the most famous of all saga females.

Perhaps Gudrun moves us because we are like her, because we all dream. What is sad is that Gudrun understands herself and knows there will be much pain in her life. We do not know our futures. If it were so; would we make decisions to try and avoid pain, privation and suffering? Of course we would try. We do try so hard to understand our nature and ourselves but often, this ends in discouragement. The life of our visionary prophet is an example of how we should not ask too much of ourselves, as so many of us do, especially in the winter when we have too much time to think.

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Jon Hjaltalin
Lands Doctor

by Halldor K. Fridrikson
translated by Thor Hjartarson

Jon Jonsson Hjaltalin was born on April 21, 1807 at Saurbaer on Hvalfjardarstrond in Borgarfjordur-county. His father was Jon Oddsson Hjaltalin, a pastor at Saurbaer, and later at Breidabolstadur on Skogarstrond. Jon Jonsson Hjaltalin was a direct lineal descendant of Bishop Jon Arason, and that lineage is set out as follows:

1. Bishop Jon Arason, 1484-7.nov.1550, executed at Skalholt, his son
2. Rev. Bjorn Jonsson, pastor at Melstadur, 1506-7.nov.1550, executed at Skalholt, his son
3. Magnus Bjornsson at Hof on Hofdastrond, his son
4. Eirikur Magnusson in Djupidalur in Skagafjordur, his son
5. Magnus Eirikson at Njardvik in Gullbringa-county, his son
6. Jon Magnusson in Reykjarholl in Fljot and Reykir in Hjaltadalur, manager at Holar for Bishop Steinn, his son
7. Oddur Jonsson Hjaltalin, manager of the Bishop's seat for northern Iceland and the cathedral at Holar in Hjaltadalur, his son
8. Jon Oddsson Hjaltalin, Sheriff in Gullbringa-county 1728-1743, his son
9. Oddur Jonsson, Magistrate at Raudara by Reykjavik, his son
10. Rev. Jon Oddsson Hjaltalin, pastor, father of Jon Hjaltalin, chief medical officer of Iceland.

On another side of the family tree, his lineage can be traced back to Loftur Guttormsson 'the Rich' at Modruvellir in Eyjafjordur. His mother, Groa Oddsdottir, was the daughter of the Reverend Oddur Thorvardsson, pastor at Reynivellir in Kjos, who died in 1804. Groa was the later wife of Rev. Jon Hjaltalin.

The wife of Jon Oddsson Hjaltalin was Metta. Her father, Jens Johannsson, was the town judge in Arosum in Jutland, Denmark. Jon, the county sheriff, was the first to take the surname Hjaltalin, derived from the name of the valley where he was born and raised.

Jon (the land's doctor) grew up with his parents, first at Saurbaer and later at Breidabolstadur on Skogarstrond, where his father moved the family in the spring of 1811. Jon went to school about that time, and it is likely that his father had tutored him to some extent at home. In the autumn of 1825, Jon enrolled in the lower class at the school at Bessastadir, and after studying there for two years he was moved to the upper class for three winters. During this time, he received an allowance of 30 Danish dollars for the first three years and 60 dollars for the last two years. After five years, he was hoping to graduate. However, this did not come to pass for reasons that are not entirely clear. In all likelihood the teachers at the school withheld his certificate because, in their opinion, he had not progressed as rapidly as his intelligence should have allowed. Consequently, it was thought he had not put enough effort into his studies, since he was reading other materials that were not part of the curriculum. It appears that he lacked sufficient maturity. At any rate, he didn't want to continue at this school, and he gave notice of his intention to terminate his studies in the spring. He then obtained his certificate the following summer from Rev. Gunnlaugur Oddsson, who was the pastor of the cathedral in Reykjavik.

Jon then took a position with the chief medical officer of Iceland, Dr. Jon Thorsteinsson, and remained under his

tutelage for four years, according to the register of the Reykjavik Parish, first at Nes by Seltjorn until the spring of 1833, and then in Reykjavik the next year, as the said Jon Thorsteinsson had moved to Hlidarhus. In the meantime Jon Hjaltalin had received enough education to be a district physician. It seemed that he was unable to pursue further studies at the University of Copenhagen due to lack of funds, as his father was a poor man all his life.

In the summer of 1834, however, he decided to go to Copenhagen to continue his studies in medicine, as he had been offered financial assistance by the Konferenzrad, Thordur Sveinbjornsson, who had become associate justice in the Supreme Court of Iceland. He was married to the widow of Stefan Stephensen (sub-governor in Iceland), Gudrun Oddsdottirr, who was related to Jon Hjaltalin. It would seem that he obtained passage on the ship that was to bring Crown Prince Frederick (later Frederick VII) to Iceland that summer. Undoubtedly he got free passage.

When Jon arrived in Copenhagen, he continued his medical studies and took an exam in surgery with the Medical Academy in the spring of 1837, receiving first class honours. The year after (1838) he went on a journey to Germany to visit hospitals for men with nervous disorders, and in the spring of 1839 he took examinations in another branch of medicine at the University of Kil in Holstein, graduating with honours (laudabilis summa cum laude) and receiving a doctor's degree for a paper he had written in Latin ('De Redesyge, Lepra et Elephantium Septentionate'). After completing this course of studies he returned to Copenhagen and was made a doctor in the King's regiment, and on September 4th of that year he received the title of Surgeon of the Battalion. This all demonstrated that he had gained a good reputation for his learning and was considered a good doctor.

In the summer of 1839, Dr. Jon Hjaltalin returned to Iceland and wrote an article entitled "Criticism of the One Eyed Odin", which was printed on the Isle of Videy at the urging of a number of merchants in Reykjavik. He felt indebted to the Tomas Saemundsson for his good review of his book on veterinary science, which appeared in the periodical Fjolnir (another name for Odin). The periodical was dedicated to the independence movement. In 1840 he received some remuneration to go to Iceland to research leprosy, and as a result he stayed for most of the summer. During that summer he married his fiancée, Karen Jacobine, the daughter of Hans Baagoe, a merchant in Reykjavik but formerly at Husavik in Thingeyjarsyla. Dr. Jon Hjaltalin and his wife lived together for 26 years, until her death on May 22nd, 1866. However, the marriage was childless.

In the fall, Jon Hjaltalin returned to Copenhagen where he remained for the next winter. In the spring he received a commission to go to Germany to study hydropathical cures, which were being applied with considerable success in that country. After he returned from Germany, he decided to offer such treatments in Denmark. On July 1, 1842, he was appointed doctor of the 5th Regiment of the Danish infantry. On the 30th of April 1844, he received permission to set up a station for hydropathical cures at Klampenborg on the eastern shore of Sealand, about a mile north of Copenhagen, including a considerable area to establish the proper facilities. He needed to secure financing for the project, and in order to devote his efforts to this new endeavor, he resigned his position as army doctor on May 4th of that year. He was involved with the hydropathical cure facility for 5 years until 1852. A disagreement then arose between him and the manager of the facility and some of the investors, and as a consequence he terminated his involvement in the facility.

At that time Dr. Jon Hjaltalin felt a need to return to his homeland, and in the summer of 1852 he went back to Iceland. At the request of the government, he then decided to investigate the health benefits of sulphurous vapors found in Iceland. He also wanted to research braxy[1] to determine the nature of this disease. As a result he decided to establish a residence at

Eyrarbakki in Arnessysla, where he remained until the spring of 1855. He then took a trip to investigate the feasibility of mining sulphurous deposits near Krisuvik and the Hengla Mountains. He also travelled north to Thingeyjarsysla to inspect sulphur mines at Brennisteinn Mountain and Hver Slope. He then reported on these travels with great discernment and outlined the potential benefits of these mines in a letter to Jon Sigurdson, which was printed in the periodical The New Company Script, pp. 24-82.

During the winter of 1851-52 Dr. Jon Hjaltalin lived at Eyrarbakki, and in the spring he went on a journey to the eastern part of Arnesysla to inspect hot springs located in that area. Later he travelled west to Borgarfjordur to examine sulphurous springs located in that district. While he lived at Eyrarbakki he also studied the disease braxy. Later in the summer of 1852, he sailed to Copenhagen where he stayed the following winter. When he came back to Iceland in the summer, he undertook the task of burning seaweed to extract pharmaceuticals for medicinal purposes, including gloiber salt and other materials. He continued such activities for the next few years until he accepted an appointment asf chief medical officer for Iceland. He determined that the cost of preparing seaweed for medical purposes was not justified, and therefore discontinued the project.

When the previous chief medical officer, Dr. Jon Thorsteinsson, died in February of 1855, the representative of the King appointed Jon Hjaltalin as his replacement with all the duties, rights, and privileges attendant upon the office, and, as a consequence, Jon Hjalatlin moved to Reykjavik early in the fall. His appointment was confirmed by the King on September 18th of the same year. He carried out his duties until he resigned on July 19th 1881.

In 1859, Dr. Jon Hjaltalin was appointed a member of the Althing (Icelandic Parliament) by the King, and he remained a member until 1881. That the position of chief medical officer has gained the prominence it has, is largely due to Jon Hjaltalin. Even if he had done nothing else to further progress in the land of his ancestors, he gained the recognition and gratitude of his countrymen.

From the time of his appointment as chief medical officer, Dr. Jon Hjaltalin realized that Iceland was without sufficient medical services. There were only seven doctors in the whole country, and the likelihood of maintaining a doctor in each of the seven jurisdictions was uncertain unless a medical school could be established in the country. It was always difficult to replace a district physician, and one of the districts had already been without a doctor for a number of years. One strategy was to offer financial assistance to a medical student if he agreed on graduation to serve an outlying area. Dr. Hjaltalin outlined clearly his opinions on these and other matters in an issue of New Company Script in 1844, entitled "Concerning the Replacement of Physicians in Iceland". He pursued the same goals in his letters to Jon Sigurdsson, and in these letters he clearly demonstrates that health care was in a poor state and would remain so until a medical school and hospital were established in the country. It may be justly stated that improving the health care system was the cause closest to his heart when he was appointed chief medical officer, and I shall endeavor to delineate the progress he made on these matters during his lifetime.

The first step Dr. Jon Hjaltalin took in this matter after he had become a "lands doctor" was that he put forth a motion at

the National Assembly (Althing) that a hospital be built in Reykjavik and that local medical studies be made available in the country (See Althing, 1857 pages 156-160). The Althing then petitioned the King on this issue, but the government did not see fit to act on these matters. However, Hjaltalin himself was a member of the Althing, as an appointee of the King, and he made the motion himself to establish a medical school and hospital in Reykjavik. He sent the same entreaty to the King. Still the government did not see fit to approve the petition coming from the National Assembly, as it raised the issue of financial assistance already being paid out to Icelandic medical students in Denmark. Would the establishment of a medical school and hospital in Iceland compromise the funding system to assist medical students in foreign schools, especially Denmark? In the session of 1861, the issue of a local medical school and hospital, along with the implications for the present system of funding medical students in foreign schools, was brought forward. As a consequence, the National Assembly acquiesced to Hjaltalin's recommendations and sent an addendum to his petition to the King, requesting that the Chief Medical Officer for Iceland be allowed to provide instructions to medical students on a national basis as long as the quality of the instruction meet the standards set jointly by the King's officials in the health administration in Copenhagen and the Chief Medical Officer in Iceland, and that satisfactory completion of the ensuing examinations would qualify Icelandic medical students to practice medicine in the various districts in the country. The cost of financing such studies would be borne by the National Treasury to the amount of 600 Danish dollars or 1200 kronar, to be paid out of existing funds allocated for medical training and hospital facilities.

The decision of the Althing was to disallow the establishment of a local medical school and hospital, but they agreed to arrange for the establishment of an institute that offered pre-medical studies. Hjaltalin considered that, although the establishment of a medical school and hospital had been denied, a measure of success had been achieved by the fact that a program for pre-medical studies had been approved. He therefore took a positive view of the decision and did not pursue the matter further for the time being. It meant essentially that a facility for pre-medical studies would be established locally, and that would likely lead to the formation of a medical school some time in the future. The king gave his assent to this motion on May 28, 1863.

Eventually a medical school and hospital were approved by the Althing and ratified by the King. It was the considered opinion of the National Assembly that adequate funding would be required if the school was to succeed, so pending approval by the King, a decision was made on May 10, 1867 to assist an initial five medical students with grants of 400 Danish dollars (800 kronar) annually, and that this financial assistance obliged each student to begin his practice in an area of the country most in need of medical services. The assistance would increase 100 Danish dollars every third year until it reached 500 dollars a year.

In 1867 Jon Hjaltalin lobbied the government for full accreditation of the proposed medical school, with the Chief Medical Officer for the country as overseer and two additional instructors. As previously indicated, the motion was approved by the National Assembly, subject to a number of amendments. Finally, a law was passed by the National Assembly approving the establishment of a medical school in Reykjavik, and the said law received the approval of the King on February 11, 1871.

In this way Dr. Jon Hjaltalin managed to realize the cause he had championed for 32 years, from the time he first raised the matter in the New Company periodical in 1844. Subsequent progress in this matter is demonstrated by the fact that there were initially only seven doctors in the whole country, whereas there are now 21 - with 19 of that number having received instruction from Dr. Hjaltalin himself, while only two received their accreditation in Denmark. (The reader must bear in mind that the article was written sometime in the 19th century. Today the number would be higher.)

Closely related to the issue of locally trained doctors is the one concerning the establishment of a hospital. Dr. Hjaltalin was fully convinced that it was necessary to establish a hospital in Reykjavik. Although he was not a member of the committee formed to bring the hospital into existence, he nevertheless played an important role in that matter.

Sometime before Dr. Hjaltalin became Chief Medical Officer for Iceland, a number of men were practicing homeopathic medicine, particularly in northern Iceland. In Hjaltalin's opinion, such practices should not be sanctioned as they misled people and dispensed dangerous or ineffective palliatives, and none of these practitioners had been properly trained as physicians. In the winter of 1855-56, he made the government aware that, in his opinion, homeopathic practitioners and the remedies they offered were deleterious. He also suggested that the full weight of the law be brought to bear on these quacks (See Government Archives pages 143 and 162). Around the same time, he wrote articles in various periodicals condemning those practicing homeopathic medicine.

A third issue in which he expressed an interest was the one concerning a disease that attacked the skin of sheep. Hjaltalin expressed clear views on the slaughter of infected sheep in southern Iceland in the year 1856, and he did not think the measures taken by farmers in curtailing the spread of the disease was in keeping with acceptable medical and hygienic standards. As a progressive individual who had a great love for the land of his ancestors, he felt the methods being employed were wasteful and did not effectively contain the spread of the disease. He also considered that farmers should be more enlightened and progressive than they were in the middle of the 19th century. It appeared to him that the mindset of the time was similar to that common 100 years before. Various community leaders looked to him to provide direction on overcoming backward methods of farming and animal husbandry, and as a result he was included as a member of a committee seeking ways and means of arresting the disease in the sheep. Also on this committee were such leading men as Tacherings and Jon Sigurdsson. In addition to this Hjaltalin concerned himself with many other matters that he felt impeded progress.

Jon Hjaltalin, the “land's doctor,” was not only a progressive doctor who was knowledgeable about the latest trends in medicine, he was also interested in new ideas circulating among his contemporaries. He read the best books in Danish, German, English and French, and he had a broad range of knowledge on various subjects, especially as they pertained to science. He also travelled a great deal and familiarized himself with the ecosystem of his country, as it related to geology and the earth sciences. He spent a considerable time studying geology in the hope that he could discover minerals that might prove feasible - particularly iron and chalk - and he bought shares in the Helgustadur-mines, which contained silverberg.

Dr Jon Hjaltalin was a man of quick intelligence, but he didn't study the implications of each issue before the National Assembly at length if they didn't pertain to medicine and science. He was also a good poet and spent a great deal of his time in his youth versifying. There is, however, only one known poem still in existence, composed on the death of his friend the late Dr. Gisli Hjalmarsson. A nationalist, he supported any project that would benefit the nation, and everything he wrote or spoke on at the National Assembly was aimed at furthering progress. The King awarded him the Danish Knight's Cross in 1866, and when he retired from his position as "land's doctor" on the 18th day of July 1881, the King gave him the title "etatsrad." He was also awarded a sum of 1000 kronur by the National Assembly (Althing) in recognition of his contribution to the well being of the nation, and in addition, the French government awarded him their knight's cross.

At about 5 feet 9 inches, Dr. Jon Hjaltalin "Land's Doctor" was a relatively tall man at a time when the average man stood at about 5 feet 7 inches. He was broad over the shoulders and rather impressive looking. In his younger years he was slim and narrow around the waist, but he became quite heavy in middle age. His hair and complexion were fair and he had blue eyes, and his hair became silver gray in later life. He had a prominent chin. A man of pleasant personality, he walked around Reykjavik in his retirement, visiting friends and acquaintances. He died in his sleep on June 8, 1882, having just turned 75. His funeral was held on the 17th day of June, with many people in attendance.

1. Braxy is an inflammatory disease in sheep, due to a change in food from succulent to dry; and the name given to mutton of sheep affected with it.

Halldor K. Fridriksson (1819-1902) was for many years headmaster of the Grammar School in Reykjavik. A scholar of some note, Halldor studied in Copenhagen as a young man and worked with Cleasby on his well-known dictionary. During his years abroad he also belonged to the group of nationalistic young Icelanders known as the Fjolnismenn, and he was a close friend of Iceland's national hero Jon Sigurdsson. Among his many publications were numerous textbooks and editions of the sagas. Among the children of Halldor K. Fridriksson and his Danish wife was Dr. Moritz Halldorsson in North Dakota.

Memories of Riverton

As told by a French-Canadian Icelander

by Lu Olafson

One day in late August of 1944, as a very determined young person, I got off the train at the railway station in Riverton, Manitoba. I was met by Thordis Thompson, then Secretary-Treasurer of the local School Board. She escorted me to my boarding house, the home of Ninna and Bob Page. Little did I dream that I would spend the next 27 years of my life in Riverton - and grow to love it and its many Icelandic people.

Prior to this time I had only the vaguest notion of Icelanders, supposing them confined to Iceland. My life experience so far had not been particularly worldly, having grown up and been educated exclusively in French-speaking communities. Ironically, I may have been the only French speaking school teacher between Pine Dock and St. Boniface at the time, but I was nevertheless warmly welcomed by these interesting and literate people.

I quickly proceeded to launch my chosen career, having inherited a love of teaching from my mother and two olders sisters. My first days in a classroom of 30 eight and nine year old children were rather comical. Unfamiliar with all things Icelandic caused me to mispronounce their names, eliciting much hilarity among the students. Finally I brought home the roster and asked Ninna to instruct me in pronunciation. It took a while but I did eventually master it. Today I have no difficulty whatsoever with tongue-twisters like "Islendingadagurrin" and names like "Arnheidur."

In 1945 the war ended and servicemen began returning from overseas. It was then that I met Leslie, second son of Oddur and Lina Olafson. We were married in June 1947. The following two decades were taken up with homemaking and the raising of three sons: Ryan, Howard and Craig.

Our big yard on the eastern edge of the village became a magnet for the neighbourhood boys - the Olsons, Einarsons, Johannsons and more Olafsons. The initial attractions were a large sandbox and a fancy swing set, to be eventually replaced by a badminton set, baseball diamond and a place to play kick-the-can - a game loosely based on cricket. Needless to say, my precious shrubs did not survive; only the hardy spruce trees could endure.

In winter the driveway was used for hockey practice, complete with a goalie net. All three of our boys played hockey from the age of seven to the end of high school. This entailed driving them to practices and to neighbouring towns for weekend games, attending home games, and the care and feeding of visiting teams. The first two weeks of July the boys and their friends had to be drivn to Hnausa dock for daily swimming lessons. Another popular summer activity was little league baseball. I used to think that hockey, swimming and baseball mothers should be awarded medals of their own for endurance, but in retrospect, these were the best years and certainly the most active.

Once our oldest son was old enough to babysit in the evenings, I returned to one of my favourite sports - curling. I also joined the Women's Institute which is an organization that did much to improve the community. At various times we sponsored figure skating, Red Cross swimming courses and were instrumental in setting up regional libraries.

I served on the local school board for several years, and in my spare time, learned ot play Bridge and to square dance. While taking part in all these activities, I was never aware of any socio-economic snobbery. Riverton was a truly democratic community as well as intellectual. Some of

its poorest families produced some of its brightest scholars and were highly respected.

In the days before television took over our lives, we improvised our own entertainment. At least once a month we gathered in the Lutheran Church in the evening to hear musicians such as violinist Joe Palson, pianists Lilja Martin and Sigurlin Bergen, and several local singers. There were readings and talks by the famous poet, Gutti Guttormson, whose extraordinary wit was unmatched anywhere.

Saturday nights we danced to the music of "Johnny and his Musical Mates" in the community hall. There was always someone's birthday as an excuse for a house party, which included music, good conversation and wonderful food. And who among us will ever forget Stebbi Sigurdson's rendition of Al Jolson's *Mamie?* These were truly the good old days.

I made many life-long friends in Riverton: Sylvia Sigurdson (my first Icelandic friend), Beatrice and Dora Olafson, Judith Sigurdson, Helga Dahlman, Sigurlin Bergen and Anna Thorarinson. There was also my helpful sister-in-law, Pauline McCabe and my wonderful neighbours, Runa Anderson, Asta Gislason and Anita Einarson.

In the early 1960s I returned to teaching and enjoyed working with people like my principal Thor Johannson, Eleanor Egesz, Margaret Johnson, Irene Kwasiuk, Gunna Sigurdson and Peggy Gudmundson. These were very interesting years.

I must mention a special friendsip. During my early years in Riverton as I walked the fair distance to school along Thompson Drive, I often encountered the poet Gutti Guttormson. He invariably and courteously greeted me with "Bonjour Mademoiselle," the only time I ever heard French spoken with an Icelandic accent. We had great conversations - in English!

In 1972, our youngest son completed high school and we moved to Winnipeg to a home on Waterloo Street where we reside to this day. Over the years, we have kept in touch with our Riverton friends and reltives, though their ranks are getting thinner. Some have died, some have retired elsewhere, but all the good memories remain of the friends relatives, neighbours, students and fellow teachers of a unique community.

Snorri experience

by Sara Loftson

Life is lived in moments. And every moment of my first trip to Iceland with the Snorri Program this past summer made me feel fully alive and proud to be Icelandic.

Pressing my nose against the window as the bus passed by huge stone statues outside of Keflavik airport. Brushing my teeth to the sound of Hallsgrimkirkja's clanging bells. Choking down rotten shark and chasing it with Black Death. Gasping for breath while walking up Mount Esja.

Sharing a laugh with the president of Iceland in his home. Stopping the car to let a family of sheep pass on the highway. Feeling the tap of a screeching turn's pencil point beak on the back of my head on Grimsey Island. Smiling into the bright red midnight sun.

Hearing my name being said with a thick Icelandic accent. Tasting the sweet warmth of freshly home cooked pönnukökurs. Holding a handful of dried up lava bits at the Krafla. Sniffing out tiny black flies at Myvatn as they tickled the inside of my nostrils.

Smelling fresh unpolluted air as I rode my bike down a hillside in Akueryi. Shredding important documents by accident while working at Landsbankinn. Waiting in anticipation for a whale to emerge from beneath the Atlantic Ocean. Bumping up and down a dirt road on the back of an Icelandic horse.

Crashing into the water after falling out of a river raft. Caking on a gooey silica mud mask while basking Blue Lagoon's geothermal waters. Walking through the continental rift at Thingvellir. Reciting the Lord's Prayer in Icelandic by memory during a talent show.

My six-week excursion to Iceland with the Snorri Program feels like but a moment in time, yet I know these memories will stay imprinted on my heart forever.

Sara Loftson with a handful of lava.

L-R Dr. Ken Thorlakson, Kristian Vigfusson, and representive of the Manitoba Historical Society

Fiction

Journal of Porstein Gunnlaugsson

by Kristian Vigfusson

September 18th, 1893

Today, I have decided to begin writing a journal. I will be writing in it every now and then to record our story. We are moving to Canada, Þórey and I, because we want to get married and have a better life. Neither one of us owns any land, nor do our parents have any land to spare. In order to sustain a home and family, a person has to own property. Recently we heard of this new country, where you could have many acres of land for a small price. We will now have to leave our homeland in search of a better life in a new and distant land.

September 19th, 1893

Today, we met with an immigration agent, who gave us directions on where to go. He also gave me a wordbook, which will help me learn the English language. Þórey and I will board a boat at Sauðarkrókur with our meager belongings. We will travel to the new land, Canada, where we hope to have a better life and more opportunity for our children. We have only told our closest family we are leaving. We will journey to Leith, Scotland, on a small, yet seaworthy vessel. We are very saddened to leave our family and our beautiful country behind, but if it means having a better lifestyle, it seems the right thing to do.

September 27th, 1893

Yesterday, we packed up our few belongings into a wooden trunk. We will need our heavy woolen clothes for the voyage across the ocean. As we have never owned our own home, we do not have many household belongings. My mother gave me a Bible and five of my favourite books to take with us. Þórey´s mother gave her a beautiful woolen blanket to help keep us warm on the voyage. We will use it, as well, in our new home and it will remind us of all the loved ones we are leaving behind.

It was more difficult than I could ever have imagined, saying goodbye to our parents and our sisters and brothers. I am hopeful that maybe, someday, they will join us in New Iceland and we can all be together again.

We left the farm very early this morning and arrived at the dock in Sauðarkrókur with plenty of time to spare. It has been a very cool and cloudy day with a brisk north wind blowing. After the boat left the dock, it wasn't long before we were unable to see the shores of our homeland through the mist.

October 2nd, 1893

We arrived in Leith, Scotland, on schedule, where we spent the night. Then, the next day, we travelled on to Liverpool, England by train.

Liverpool is an amazing place. It is so huge, that it is hard to find our way around. We were glad to find a place to stay for these two nights, at a small inn, close to the docks. I have never seen so many people in one place, at one time. Many of these people look very different from us; some of them even have different coloured skin. I can´t help wondering where they all come from. Þórey and I went for a walk along the docks to watch the boats being loaded. We heard many different languages being spoken, none of which was Icelandic. It seems very strange not to be able to understand the language that people are speaking, around you.

We were grateful for the wordbook that the immigration agent gave us, as we have been able to make ourselves understood enough to buy some bread and cheese to take with us on the voyage. We have also brought with us, some hardfish from home. It has been thoroughly dried, so that it will keep well during the journey.

October 3rd, 1893

It is late afternoon, and we have now boarded the ship that will take us to our new home!!! We sail for Quebec, Canada, in the morning. This journey will take us a little more than one week, depending on weather.

This ship is quite large, but very crowded. There are many families aboard, with babies and small children.

October 10th, 1893

There are many Icelanders on this ship, some from Skagafjörður, others from Vestur Húnavatnsýsla. The vessel pitches and rolls, making many of us very ill. Three of the passengers have died from some sort of fever. Þórey and I are very sad to know that their dreams of a better life will never come true.

October 20th, 1893

We arrived in Quebec this morning. This is a strange place where the streets are made of small stones and there are tall buildings very unlike our little Hofsós. We are taken aside by a man whom we do not know and he begins talking to us in a foreign, unknown language. The man leaves and sends another man to watch us. We try to leave but he tells us "nei." Confused, I start speaking to him in Icelandic. To my surprise, he says to me, "I don't speak Icelandic." We wait for half an hour when finally a plump and short Icelander, who I assume is the man we have been waiting for, comes out with his hand outstretched exclaiming "sæll vinur!" We are happy to see another Icelander and I shake his hand immediately. Tonight, he tells us, we are to spend the night in a small barn-like building, which he calls an immigration shed. He tells us that in the morning we shall go by train to Toronto; then by steamship to Duluth. From there, another man will tell us where to go.

December 14th, 1893

We are travelling west to Mountain, a town in the Dakota territory, by train today. Þórey is sleeping while I am writing in the journal. We are passing through a heavily wooded area, covered in snow. The trees are huge in comparison to those in our homeland. I am thinking that this somewhat hilly landscape reminds me of Iceland, the land of my birth.

I am learning the English language slowly and with my trusty wordbook, I find that I am able to pick up on words such as "store" and the like.

December 18th, 1893

We arrived in Mountain two days ago. When we arrived, we asked people where we might find a place to stay. We were told of a young Icelandic couple that settled on a farm in this area last year. As it turns out, the family is also from Skagafjörður. They have offered to take us in, for the time being. Although we have never met before, we feel a kinship because of our common roots. Their names are Jón and Ásdís and they have just had a baby. The baby's name is Sigrún. They explained to us this morning that if Þórey would help in the kitchen, clean the house and help with the baby, we could earn our keep. They are pleasant people and Þórey and I are more than happy to help them out while we are here.

December 23rd, 1893

It is getting close to Christmas. Þórey and I have been hastily making something to give to our new friends. We have almost nothing; we have hardly enough for ourselves, but Christmas is a time for giving and so I have almost completed a carved wooden spoon, and Þórey has knit a pair of mittens for each member of the family, including the new baby. Jón and Ásdís offered to pay me while Þórey earns our keep and that way, they get a hired hand and a maid for the price of a hired hand. We feel very fortunate to have found shelter with such kind people.

December 25th, 1893

Christmas is here, and we have had a wonderful day. Ásdís and Jón were both surprised and pleased by our gifts. Their gifts to us were some candles and some playing cards which we appreciated very much. We played cards, drank coffee and visited after the chores were done.

January 10th, 1894

We are thinking about leaving in a few weeks. We will travel north to Winnipeg and from there decide where we will go. We have enjoyed our stay here in Mountain with such wonderful people. We wish them well.

February 1st, 1894

Though it seems a peaceful town, and an industrious one at that, we have decided to move north from Mountain, to our dreamland of "New Iceland," where our people have established our own area with our own government, our own schools,and a newspaper in our own language. "New

Iceland!" is to be found north of the "postage stamp province" of Manitoba. Here in Mountain we shall stay for a week and purchase canvas (to make a makeshift tent), two oxen, an ox cart and building supplies to make our home with, though we expect to live in a tent for at least one month.I purchased a splitting axe from a man named George; I also purchased some pulling chains and an empty wooden barrel in which to store grain.

February 14th, 1894

We have arrived in Winnipeg. This is a merry day indeed, and I need to purchase some food stores and a plow. It is very cold, but at least it is warmer than it was. We have decided to take a flatboat down the river in the spring. Then from there, we will go along the shores of Lake Winnipeg and to the little town of Lundur. From there we will journey up the Icelandic River. I have now applied for a patent on NE-25-22-2E, a quarter section of land, which can be found by going up the river until you reach an East-West cut line about four miles upstream. Then you go down the cut line about three miles and you're there. There are supposed to be markers there, some on every lot so it won't be so hard to find.

Þórey and I got married last Saturday; it was a very joyous occasion. Now we can raise a family. I had wished that my family and Þórey's family had been there to see it. The thought of our families makes me wonder how they are doing. I hope they are doing well.

February 18th 1894

I find this city, Winnipeg, rather strange. It has towering buildings and there seems to be activity everywhere. The streets are always wet, it seems, and the only place these poor horses and wagons can go is on the one single dry path. Þórey and I went for a walk, away from the building we are staying in. We noticed an improvement in the weather and we can hardly wait until spring arrives. We are earning our keep by working for the man who owns the boarding house where we have been staying. I am working at his livery stable and Þórey is working as a maid in the house.

April 12th, 1894

The snow is gone. It is warming up and we are nearly ready to leave, but the ice is just starting to break up on the river and I have been told that it will be some time before the lake is free of ice. We have to be patient (in the meantime we can earn some more money).

May 12th, 1894

We are travelling on a flatboat down the lake now. The scenery is altogether different. The birds are strange and the land is flat.There are lots of trees in the area; we have only seen a few clearings.The water is rough and dirty and it looks like rain.We are going to stop for the night. We will be thankful for the canvas tent I bought.

May 20th, 1894

The weather was clear and sunny for

the rest of our trip. We arrived at our location. I took to making an enclosure for the oxen, we have very little money left, about twenty dollars, and our food stores will last us only half a year. The weather is starting to show signs of warmth, the sun is beating away the excess moisture and things are generally looking up.This is a good sign. The bush itself is so silent; there is a ringing in your ears as you stand outside, unless of course you hear birds or wild game of some sort.We are fortunate to have brought our warm clothing from Iceland, for it will serve us well in the upcoming winters. We have a small fire going almost constantly and it is very nice to have it.

May 21st, 1894

We have hit another warm day. I have nearly completed the enclosure. Þórey has become pregnant.This concerns me for we do not have a house in which to raise a family. I must hastily construct a makeshift house, which we may add onto later. Today I will start the house and seek help from our newest neighbor, Kristjón Finnsson.

May 23rd, 1894

We are a bit downhearted, as there are strange bugs that are constantly swarming at our door. If we keep our door open at night as much as thirty seconds, the house fills with these infernal things, which seem to be drawn to the light of our candles. They bite!...they always bite! Sucking away at our blood and the bites itch, ooohhh do they itch! I am worried for Þórey. She has fallen ill, and she has many strange red marks where she has been scratching at these bites. It almost looks like blood poisoning.

May 25th, 1894

I went to Lundur to fetch a homeopathic doctor today. He told me that these bugs were not poisonous and that the English men called them "mosquitoes." He also said that we are so badly affected by them because we are not used to their bites.

June 1st, 1894

Kristjón Finnsson and I have been gathering logs and peeling them for the last few days. We have made a small off ground log holder attached to four trees in a nearly perfect square. There the logs are to dry over a period of three to four days. We shall begin placing the logs after that period is over. Þórey and I have decided where we will put the house.....on the Southwest corner of our land, opposite the swamp on the Northwest corner. Kristjón and his wife May are struggling to speak with each other as May only knows English and Kristjón only knows Icelandic. Kristjón purchased an Icelandic-English dictionary and they are able to converse this way. They also converse in sign language. Tomorrow is Sunday and as always, we shall stop working for the day. As Icelandic people it is important to take a break on Sundays.

June 2nd, 1894

Þórey and I went for a walk to the riverbank this afternoon. We sat in the long grass with our feet in the water, watching the large numbers of fish swimming about and seeing whether we can catch one. To my dismay I couldn't seem to catch any! I was hoping to boil one up and have it for dinner. It is strange for us to eat so much red meat when we come from a country so abundant in fish. Þórey is really coming along with her pregnancy. She is letting out the front of some of her clothing. Tomorrow we start the house. Kristjón told me that if I have his help now, when I need it the most, he should reserve that priviledge for himself, when he is in need of me.

June 23rd, 1894

The first four logs on each of the four sides have been chinked and placed, and there has been space left for a door. Þórey has started clearing away the sticks and logs cluttering the area while Kristjón and I build the cabin. We heard some strange noises last night in the tent, like a volcano in the distance and flashing lights on the wall of our tent. The rumbling got louder and louder, suddenly there was a bright flash and a terrible wind. All at once it was raining more than we had ever seen in our lifetime together; pouring rain, loud booming noise and bright flashing lights. We learned earlier today on our trip to Lundur that this was a common thunderstorm - there are so many new things to experience here in Canada.

June 8th, 1894

The house is sure coming along. It is wonderful, and we covered the roof with sod, as we did with our first homes in Iceland. The house is beautiful. We had to go to Lundur to get the windows and it was difficult chinking the top logs, but days later we are finally finished. Another settler and his family have moved into the area.The family's last name is Gislasson, but as yet, I don't know their first names. I hear, too, that his wife is a midwife. As soon as our house is built, we shall go and visit them. Kristjón will be adding to his house in a few days, after our house is completed, and I shall help him with that.There is always hot food for us working men and always help when it's asked for. May suggests that we all go to visit the Gislassons on Sunday, and we all agree that we should go visit them and bring them some nice thing, like a bouquet of wildflowers or fresh caught fish from the river, filleted and ready to bake. We must start seeding the wheat we bought in Lundur a week ago, because from what the storekeeper in Lundur told me, we only have three months in which to grow it.

June 14th, 1894

Today is Sunday. The Finnssons came to our house and we had morning coffee and headed over to the Gíslasson's. They are pleasant people. Halldór and Þórey Gíslasson are their names and they are also from Skagafjörður. It turns out that we are related distantly, unlike Kristjón who came from Varmahlíð. We enjoyed a nice filleted fish dinner baked in a cast iron stove (which reminds me, I still have to go to Lundur and purchase one for Þórey and me.) The meal was delicious! Þórey is a wonderful cook. She says it is her mothers doing, teaching her to cook so well; I believe it is purely talent. We decided that we should try and get some trade routes going and that we should try cutting and selling wood for money as a co-operative. If we purchased a flatboat we could take at least one load a day to Lundur and we could make a lot of money that way. The weather is sure warming up, and there is almost no moisture, which is strange, I'm told, for this region.

June 21st, 1894

Today was a beautiful day. Kristjón, Halldór and I went to Lundur to buy the tools for a sawmill. We have all built our houses now and we thought it would be appropriate to start an industry in the area. Across the river, on the North side, we have cleared an area. This land belongs to Halldór but he has agreed it is the best place for the mill. Kristjón's two horses can be used to haul the timber to the dock and

we can bring in a steamship to pull the daily load of one flatboat to Lundur.

June 25th, 1894

The men in Lundur liked it! They told us that if we could set up the material they gave us, and use it, after ten loads of timber it would pay for itself! Imagine us owning a logging mill, and our wives, picking berries and raising our children together. It is a wonderful thought! We have decided to try and start a small community....maybe with a small church and a community pasture for our animals. After we get some more people into the area I think we could use a blacksmith. Maybe I could try my hand at the smithy - my father did it. It might run in my blood. Well tomorrow is a long day I must get some sleep.

June 30th, 1894

The mill has been set up; Kristjón went to Lundur to buy a crosscut saw. With a crosscut, we could saw the biggest trees far easier. Between the three of us we figure we could cut about three or four units of lumber per day. If we haul one flatboat a day then we will sell one unit a day, so every day we should bring in two boats, and maybe we could get a few other people to help us out. If we sold three units a day, one in the morning, one at noon, and one in the evening we would make approximately three dollars a day, including expenses. After a week we would have eighteen dollars; six dollars each. After a month we'd each have twenty four dollars. Things are looking up!

July 4th, 1894

Þórey is due to deliver the baby at the end of December. She's starting to become round around the middle. The animals in this area are strange. There are deer, birds, bears, and a strange cat like creature that we ran into the other night. Þórey and I were walking back home after our walk, when a strange animal crossed our path. I told Þórey to get behind me and she did. Good thing too. I approached the animal slowly, this strange cat like creature with a long black tail and two white stripes on it, one on each side of its' spine. I could barely see it in the night, but the moon shed enough light that I could see it. Its tail was pointed at me, as if it were some sort of peculiar weapon. I was shocked when it emitted a foul and terrible stench and promptly left the scene. I felt I could never get rid of the stench! So many things we have experienced here, in Canada, so many strange things that we have never seen before.

July 10th, 1894

The wheat is turning, the oxen are healthy and the logging system is under way. I have earned ten dollars! It is great working with those men, Halldór and Kristjón. They are astute businessmen. Kristjón has learned English quite well, as have Halldór and I. May, Kristjóns wife, has learned some Icelandic, though not nearly as much as Kristjón has learned English. We haven't been practising our English overly much because all the people in Lundur speak fluent Icelandic. A great many things have happened in the last year; a lot that we have to take time and look back on. I can really see the advantage in this journal now; I can look back and follow in great detail what we did and what we went through to get here. By this time next year, we will have a six or seven month old baby, we will have a larger house, a proper barn and sufficient food. We will be able to sell wood all winter, and for that, make some money as well, though we will have to harbour it over the winter, as a steamship cannot travel the Icelandic River in the winter. Perhaps we can build a sleigh, drawn by horses that can be used on the ice—

July 20th, 1894

There is much work to be done. We have postponed the cordwood ship for at least a week. We are to build a barn for Halldór. He has purchased two milking cows and I, likewise. We hope to build a barn in two weeks and so we will but sleep and work. After we cut the grain we will build another barn, this one for me. If we have time we will build another for Kristjón though it won't be needed because I can house Kristjón's few oxen over the winter. I will have to buy three milking

cows after we get my barn up so Þórey and I can have some drinking milk. There may be another man moving to the area, though we don't know his name.

August 5th, 1894

Halldór's barn is complete. The weather is unusually wet, the grain is still standing but we shall stack it as soon as we get a dry spell. I have asked for the help of the other men, Halldór and Kristjón. We know the name of the man and his wife and two kids coming from Iceland. Aðalsteinn Sigfússon is his name, his wife is Asrún Rafnkellsdóttir, and their children are Salómé and Þorsteinn. They have aquired the land west of us and north of Halldór and Þórey. We will all go and greet them when they arrive, the same way we did with Halldór and Þórey.

August 8th, 1894

There was a terrible storm last night - thunder, lightning, rain and large objects all of which fell from the sky. It was a terrible racket and it woke both Þórey and me. We went outside and to our surprise there was ice covering the ground as far as we could see. I picked up a piece of ice from the ground, it was nearly perfectly round, there was a cold feeling in the night air, which was occasionally illuminated by a lightning strike. I am worried for our crops - we were planning to stack them today, and I am writing this account this morning before I leave with the other men to the crops. I hope they are all right.

August 9th, 1894

The crops are ruined. The stalks crushed - our hopes, dreams, crushed with it. We will rely solely on the timber industry for the time being. We are dangerously low on food. I must travel to Lundur . . . we will salvage what is left.

August 18th, 1894

We were able to salvage enough grain for ouselves. We will take the wheat to Lundur to the flour mill. We don't have the means to make flour otherwise. It costs one bag of flour for every seven crushed. We are still trying to cut the wood; we have brought in an extra steamship per week, which gets an extra three dollars. We are actually doing very well compared to some who have left already. We have heard that Aðalsteinn and Ásrún have arrived in Winnipeg and will come out in the spring. They are anxious to meet us, and we likewise. Only four months left until we have a baby, I hope to God it is a boy because I need the extra help. These days Þórey has tended to stay inside more, cooking, cleaning, etc. She does go out and pick berries now and again though and also tend to the small potato garden.

August 22nd, 1894

Today is Þórey's birthday. It's a wonderful occasion. We invited our friends and neighbors to celebrate with us. May made a small cake and we had coffee and kleinur.

September 3rd, 1894

A cool fall we are having. I travelled to Lundur and purchased a rifle. I know there is good game in the fall as I have been told that in Lundur. There was a large confusion as to what I am to shoot . My English is not too good, and I thought I heard somebody say they shot a mouse. Now why would you shoot a mouse I thought to myself? There is no meat, no point in shooting it. When I saw the so-called "mouse" I realized I was mistaken. It was just outside the Lundur store, a huge animal called a moose,with massive horns and a long flexible nose. As I left the grocery, where I purchased the gun I was approached by one of the English speaking men; he asked me if I planned to do the same with my rifle - I said yes,and all the men laughed - whether it was at me or with me I do not know. At suppertime I went back on the steamship to our little village. We haven't yet decided on a name. I like the name Geysir but the other guys don't think it is good enough. I have also started to smith. I tried a pair of horseshoes, which failed. I tried a simple metal broach (one not suitable to wear, only pin things together) that also failed, I decided to try the shoes again, and to my surprise they actually resembled real horseshoes!!! I am so proud.

September 15th, 1894

Today was my birthday. I am twenty six years old. We had a party. Our friends and neighbors came over and we had kleinur and a cake made by Þórey. It was delicious! We all had a great time.

September 20th, 1894

I haven't written for a while because I haven't been feeling very well, I have decided to stay at Kristjón's house until I feel better so I don't infect my wife. With a baby it is very risky to get sick,you can not only lose the baby, but also lose your life. I hope to God Þórey is all right. I am tired. I am going to head over to Kristjón's house for a few nights. I shall come back during the day or for the day, but I shall sleep at Kristjón's.

October 1st, 1894

I slept about three nights at Kristjón's, tried to work in the daytime but I was usually too weak. I was vomiting so harshly the first night, Kristjón sent for a doctor in the morning.The doctor said I only had the common stomach flu and that it was smart to stay away from everyone else. Kristjón and May didn't mind. At least that's what they told me. Today we sawed another couple of cords of wood between the three of us. I have noticed the temperature start to really drop lately.

October 28th, 1894

Nothing too eventful except snow. It snowed last night a bit and it melted again this morning. I think it's time we started saving the extra cord of wood per day. We will need timber for burning in the winter. It is nearly a year since we arrived; the things we have gotten are wonderful. We built a house and a barn, and a fence too. We have a nice yard and two families of wonderful friends. It was hard to clear the land at first - the three of us men, Kristjón, Halldor, and I cleared the majority of it together. Since I was first to the area I cleared almost half my land by myself.

November 18th, 1894

Today is the anniversary of my first entry in this journal. We held a party and invited Halldór, Þórey, Kristjón and May. We must have stayed up half the night, it was a joyous occasion. We sang, played cards, talked and ate. I enjoyed myself very much! There is a lot of snow on the ground, about five inches.

December 1st, 1894

The blizzard we didn't want came last night. There are snowdrifts up onto the barn, up over the house and even onto and around the fences! We had to dig our way out of the house this morning so it's easy to imagine how much snow we got!

December 21st, 1894

It is nearing Christmas, Þórey has made soap for Kristjón and May, and I have made a basket of willow bark for Halldór and Þórey. We hope they like it. We would very much like to get together to celebrate. Christmas is a time we hold very dear, and it is important that we keep it alive in our hearts.

December 25th, 1894

Christmas is here. This afternoon we went over to Halldór and Þórey's. Kristjón and May came too, we gave our gifts away and the receivers were overjoyed. We were given soap and a basket of kleinur. It was a very nice afternoon; We had coffee and kleinur and talked up a storm. Þórey is nearly ready to give birth. We expect the baby to come any day now.

December 27th, 1894

Today I became a father. Þórey gave birth to a healthy baby boy without incident. We have named him Guðmundur. In a few years he will be a great help to me. In the upcoming years he will keep Þórey occupied while I work. We didn't have to get the doctor, as the midwife, Jakobína Gíslason, lives one mile away. This has been an eventful year full of wonderful surprises and we look forward to our life in this new land.

Editor's Note - This story was written by Kristian Vigfusson of Arborg, Manitoba. It was an assignment in Mr. Nelson Gerrard's Grade 11 English Class

at the Arborg Collegiate Institute. It was to be a fictional journal based loosely on historical facts. It was submitted to The Young Historians Competition, an annual competition held by The Manitoba Historical Society. It was judged 2nd in in the Province in 2003.

Poetry

Family Realty

by Otto Christensen

From a family like yours, I suppose.
Independent people's mystery.
I bloom boldly as a rose,
Rooted in the soil of history.

Maybe by genetic disposition
I got that love for a timeless myth.
Inbred saga-intuition
Leaves me conscious of whom I am with.

Stories of heroism, even a name.
Structural qualities that will last.
Either we are just the same
●r shaped by subtleties of a common past.

The stream, the water, the life, that I live.
In wonder I walk along its edge.
Dangerous and attractive.
My heritage demanding a pledge.

Questions before me and answers behind.
Friends to enjoy and share with for now.
Reflective, faithful, compline.
Strength within grows strong, breeding know-how.

My family is like yours, I now see,
In matters of loving and yearning.
The gene of sameness may be
The art of humanity; learning.

Book Reviews

Winnipeg Modern: Architecture 1945 to 1975

Reviewed by Neil Einarson

The importance of Winnipeg's turn-of-the-century architecture has long been recognized. The publication in 2006 of *Winnipeg Modern: Architecture 1945 to 1975* brings an exciting new perspective on the significance and quality of the Modernist architecture of the post war period, arguably "one of the richest stocks of Modernist Architecture in Canada."[1]

The book is timely as the sheer volume of modernist structures constructed over the last 60 years, and not all of it good architecture, can jade perception and the current work helps to re-discover the context, excitement and qualities of the earliest works and their architects.

Winnipeg Modern explores the era as an anthology in nine chapters from a number of perspectives including insightful overviews, as well as chapters on individual buildings (Centennial Hall at the University of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Airport) and individual architects (Gustavo da Rosa and Etienne Gaboury). With many excellent drawings and photographs, outstanding being the photographs of Henry Kalen, the book was published to coincide with an exhibition held at the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 2006.

The need for considerable new growth in Winnipeg came from pent up demand from the stagnation of the 1930s and the hiatus on new construction during World War II. In the new post War era, new families wanted new homes and new neighbourhoods, generating the need for new housing, churches, businesses and shopping centres. This demand, plus progressive government policies and the centennials of 1967 and 1970, lead to new schools, university buildings, government offices, airports and cultural centres. Combined with this was the spirit of the age. Modernist thought held that with a more rational urban environment, that rational planning and architecture could improve the human condition. The new modernist architects "sought to build function in form, to enclose volume and space rather than impress with mass, to rise and spread with regularity and proportion rather than symmetry and balance, and to achieve elegance with simple undecorated materials"[2]

The high quality of *Winnipeg's Modernist Architecture* is also attributed to the School of Architecture at the University of Manitoba, and in particular the work of John A. Russell who became its head 1946. That year that enrolment jumped 125% due to returning veterans and Russell modernized the curriculum, brought in new similarly-minded faculty members, and encouraged graduating students to work or study in centres of Modernist architecture.

One of these early Modernist students was David F. Thordarson (1926 – 2003), the first architect of Icelandic descent to graduate from the University of Manitoba. In 1949, recently graduated and aged 23, Thordarson started working at the architectural firm of Green, Blankstein and Russell (GBR) where he would remain until 1991. There he served as the principal designer of an impressive number of significant buildings and his work is mentioned and illustrated throughout *Winnipeg Modern.*

In the chapter "The Meaning of White," Kelly Crossman attributes Thordarson's 1951 Elizabeth Dafoe Library at the University of Manitoba, as the pivotal building introducing modern architecture to Winnipeg: "the space inside was open and expansive, offering visitors and experience few had encountered before. One part of the building seemed to flow into the next; even on the coldest day of winter it would be easy 'to move about, to see new vistas from one space to another.'" Moreover, as an architect "sensitive to the innate qualities of materials" his use of Manitoba's traditional building material, Tyndall limestone, linked the new buildings to a sense of place and helped in the creation of a regional architecture.

Crossman describes another early work of note, St. George's Anglican Church on Wilton Street of 1956-57. The congregation had originally considered commissioning a Gothic Revival church, but determined to have a modern design with a traditional basilican plan with narthex, nave, aisles, east window, west window and bell tower. Once again, Thordarson sheathed the building in native limestone, creating a masterful abstract rendition of the traditional, with special qualities of light and form.

The Norquay Building of 1959 and the Winnipeg City Hall and Administration Building of 1964 are also principle designs by Thordarson, the later with Bernard Brown. While there are fine photographs of them in Winnipeg Modern, the textual references to them are brief. Whereas, a whole chapter by Bernard Flaman is devoted to the architecture and art of the Winnipeg International Airport which Thordarson designed with Bernard Brown. Completed in 1964, the building was one of a network of new airports built by the Canadian Department of Transport to highlight the modernity of Canada. Of the network, the Winnipeg Airport is noted for the "elegance of proportion and articulation." And, once again, although modern, the building is influenced by its region, sheathed in Tyndal limestone and skilfully designed with a sensitivity to the light and landscape of the prairie. In his chapter, "Wide Open Space," Herbert Enns describes how the mezzanine floats above the ground plane of terrazzo and below a luminous artificial-sky ceiling creating "a heroic and abstracted space suspended in the terminal between the city to the east and the runways and setting sun of the west."

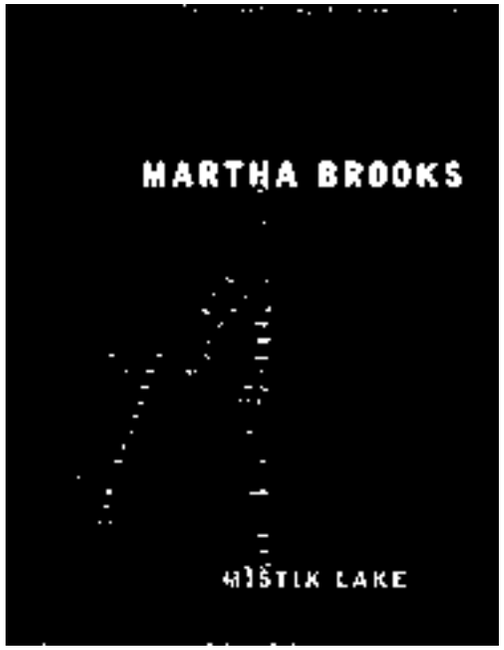
These examples support Kelly Crossman's contention that Thordarson, through his skilful use of Tyndall limestone, was able to take an international style and refine it to create a unique regional architecture: "In his hands this became a material capable of great beauty and refinement, and a means, arguably, by which Modern architecture in Winnipeg could be linked with its geographic and socio-cultural context."

A striking photograph of the Winnipeg International Airport was selected as the cover illustration for *Winnipeg Modern.* This selection gives some indication of the importance of the architectural contribution to Manitoba made by the first graduate of Icelandic descent.

Notes:

1. Serena Keshavjee, Introduction, page 3.

2. David Burley, Winnipeg's Landscape of Modernity 1945-1975, page 32.



Mistik Lake

by Martha Brooks
Groundwood Books, 2007
Reviewed by Kristin Perlmutter

It has often been said about small town life that the bad news is that everyone knows your business and the good news is that everyone knows your business. The accuracy of this description is proven in *Mistik Lake,* the small lakeside community in Martha Brooks' latest novel. In 1981, when a carload of teenagers is lost beneath the ice of Mistik Lake with only one survivor, a chain of events is set in motion involving three generations in a local family. Sixteen year old Sally McLean becomes the focus of local attention. Her subsequent alcoholism and abandonment of her family add further grist to the mill.

With its Icelandic and First Nations roots and its burgeoning summer population, Mistik Lake could also have been set where I read it - in Gimli, Manitoba on Lake Winnipeg, where I have spent decades of summers. Perhaps this sense of place and the fact that I am an Icelandic Canadian woman of "a certain age" who can appreciate the sensibilities of the two alternating narrators, Sally's teenage daughter and her Aunt Gloria, made it inevitable that it would cause me to reflect on some of my own life issues. It is certainly not essential to identify with the book in this way but it did create a powerful resonance and readers of Icelandic descent will appreciate the cultural references woven throughout. The book speaks to anyone who is part of a family and part of a community. Seeing the lives of the characters unfold from more than one perspective and having the text springboard you into making personal connections is what makes this novel work for both young adult and more mature readers.

One of the issues that is hard to ignore when reading *Mistik Lake* is that of the validity of personal and family history. As I read, I sometimes visualized Odella, Sally's young daughter, as a patient lying on a ward, overhearing snatches of what the medical staff were sharing with family members about her condition that they had not seen fit to share completely with her. Some of the questions raised include "Who gets to know things that concern him or her in a deeply personal way? Who decides what information is appropriate to share, and when? Who knows what about whom? What is the "truth" about the past? Do we really know those closest to us? Have others in our community got inside knowledge from the past that would transform the way we see things?" Each generation has its secrets and, without access to these, one fills in the gaps and then varnishes the truth.

Mistik Lake also provides a strong sense of the inter-connectedness of life and of how actions, omissions, triumphs and mistakes of family members past can colour the lives of future generations. We tend to see our own stories though rose coloured glasses or through dark shades, perhaps, without understanding whey they have been tinted as they have. We can't change the past but revelation of secrets may help us to see it differently and understand it more completely. This book teaches important lessons about how to come to grips with forgiveness, sadness, regret, duplicities, which we all must face at one time or another.

Michael Solomon's elegant book design adds to impression of depths of meaning in a watery place, ever constant and ever-changing.

Martha Brooks lives in Winnipeg with her husband, Brian. She is an acclaimed playwright, novelist and short fiction writer who has won many awards, including the Governor General's Literary Award for her novel, *True Confessions Of A Heartless Girl.* She is also well appreciated as a jazz singer and recipient of the 2002 Prairie Music Award for Best Jazz Album of the Year.

Report of the VIP Fund Committee: September, 2007

The Icelandic community generously supported the highly successful Valuing Icelandic Presence Millennium Campaign and continues to do so. The proceeds from that Campaign were used, in part, to fund the capital cost of the new Iceland Reading Room and Collection space, the remainder was invested as part of the University of Manitoba Trust, the proceeds of which have been used to support initiatives in both the Department of Icelandic and he Icelandic Collection. In accordance with the agreement signed between representatives of the community and the University, the responsibility for disbursement from these funds lies with the VIP Fund Committee. That Committee is pleased to provide an up-date on the uses and benefits of the funds to date as well as the current financial status.

As reported before in 2003 and 2004, the Committee (half community and half University) has continued to serve the (anticipated) useful purpose of bringing representatives of the community and the University together for discussions of matters of mutual interest. To emphasize this aspect of its responsibilities, it had the additional pleasure of having Atli Asmundsson at its meeting of November 29, 2004.

As set out at the time of the VIP Millennium Campaign in its three initial purposes, the uses of the moneys since disbursed by the VIP Fund Committee have been principally:

- to create the new space for the Icelandic Collection and the Iceland Reading Room in the Elizabeth Dafoe Library (which, we dare say, most of you will have visited and admired);

- to stabilize the on-going funding for the second academic position in the Department of Icelandic by providing a significant contribution to the costs of that position (The other principal source of funding of that position has been the Multiculturalism Fund established at the time of the H. I. P. Campaign.); and

- to restore and sustain the annual subscriptions for periodicals, and purchase missing back issues and other retrospective monographs and materials for the Icelandic Collection.

The VIP Fund Committee has been faithful in recognizing these as the primary purposes of the funds available to it but also responds, from time-to-time to other needs identified by the Heads of the Department of Icelandic and the Icelandic Collection that fall within the stated purposes of the Fund..

Since its last report, receipt of donations and investment of funds as part of the University of Manitoba Trust have continued to add considerably to the account balances of the VIP Fund. At June 30, 2007 the three components were as follows:

Capital	$1,231,805
Capitalized Revenue	25,561
Current Revenue	48,587
Total	$ 1,305,953

By the agreement that established the V. I. P. Millennium Campaign, the proceeds of the first $900,000 of capital created by that campaign must be distributed to the Department and Collection on a 65%-35% basis. This has resulted in what have been sustained allocations which currently amount to $29,250 used to support the salary and benefits of the second position in the Department and $11,250 principally used for acquisitions, including the important continuation of periodical subscriptions, by the Collection.

The availability of these substantial annual funds has not only provided the assurance needed for on-going expenditures but also has freed-up the use of moneys arising from the other Trust Funds available to the Department and Collection in order to support a multitude of other activities important to the sustaining of the Icelandic Presence at The University of Manitoba and, indeed, in the broader

Icelandic communities. These include: travel and memorial funds for student exchanges, academic staff visits, the sesqi-annual scholarly meetings with the University of Iceland, provision of special community lectures, seminars and meetings, special art exhibits in the Dr. Paul H. T. Thorlakson Gallery in Iceland Reading Room, support of scholarly publications and research, and, now, the prestigious appointment of Guy Maddin as distinguished film-make in residence (in cooperation with Film Studies in the Department of English) - to name only a sampling. In the Collection, the VIP funds have stabilized the subscriptions to periodicals where continuity is essential as well as funded retrospective purchases of back issues of periodicals and monographs. The total support of the Department and Collection still needs on-going donations from its many enthusiastic supporters but, be assured, the level of the overall funding and the structure of its management now seem to assure the continuing viability of the Icelandic Presence.

Because the Trust Fund earnings in any one year are subject to variations in the investment market and directly affect the Current Revenue available for disbursement, the VIP Fund Committee has deemed it prudent to provide a reserve against the possibility of a temporary shortfall below the levels that have supported on-going initiatives by the Department and Collection. Therefore, it has for the past several years deliberately returned some of the Current Revenue to the Capitalized Revenue account where it shares in the Trust Fund growth but is available for disbursement by the Committee should the need arise.

As noted in its previous reports, this Fund is an on-going account within The University of Manitoba Trust and will continue to benefit from both further donations, some of which have been pledged as part of the VIP Millennium Campaign, and further returns from the investments of the Trust. The Committee is pleased once again to acknowledge publically the seminal role played in the creation of this fund by the three major donors from Iceland, namely the Government of Iceland, Eimskip and the University-Eimskip Fund. But it also feels most strongly that the community at large should take great pride in its own success in establishing this important Fund in support of the Icelandic Presence at the University of Manitoba.

With the continued support of the community, the future looks bright !

Richard Johnson,
Chair, VIP Fund Committee

*The Capital figure is the Book Value of the Trust Find Account at June 30, 2007. This comprises the donations actually received to that date as well as the growth in the invested moneys less all capital expenditures, notably, the $750,000 to create the new space. The Capitalized Revenue is the sum (with earnings) available also in the Trust as a accumulation of unused moneys in previous years and may be disbursed along with the Current Revenue.

Contributors

BIRNA BJARNADÓTTIR holds a Ph.D in Icelandic literature from the University of Iceland. She studied literature and aesthetics at the Freie Universität in Berlin, the University of Warwick in England and the University of Iceland. In 2003, she was appointed Head of the Chair of Icelandic at the University of Manitoba´s Department of Icelandic Language and Literature, and in 2006, she was appointed Acting Head of the same department.

OTTO CHRISTENSEN B.Ed. M.Div. Homemaker and neighbour. Born in Denmark; taught in Denmark and Nigeria, pastored in Denmark and Canada. Loves people, stories, family and traveling. Believes feeling at "home" is a condition of the heart. Resides at Viðey, Geysir, Manitoba.

NEIL EINARSON s the Manager of the Heritage Buildings Unit, Historic Resources Branch, Manitoba Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport and a member of the City of Winnipeg's Historical Buildings Committee. He has a Bachelor of Environmental Studies from the Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba and a Masters of Philosophy in Architectural History from the University of Essex.

THOR HJARTARSON is the only son of Sigurros Thomason, born at 1-6(Brown), Manitoba and Hjortur Hjartarson, born at Uthlid, Biskupstungum, Iceland, both deceased. After receiving his BA he went on to teach both high school and adult ed. He spent several years as a municipal clerk and finally worked in a resume business before retiring.

REV. STEFAN M. JONASSON is Director for Large Congregations at the Unitarian Universalist Association, which is headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts. He also serves as minister to the Unitarian churches at Arborg and Gimli—two tiny congregations in the Manitoba Interlake. This paradox does not go unnoticed! Stefan's ties to The Icelandic Canadian magazine are extensive: he has served on its board since 1981, with one hiatus, and he is the brother of the late Eric Jonasson, a former business manager of the magazine, and great-nephew of Axel Vopnfjord, a former editor.

SARA LOFTSON researches and writes about Iceland because she wants to learn about her cultural origin (and get her dad off her back.)

LUCILLE OLAFSON was born in Pinewood, ON, a village close to Fort Frances. Her father was from Quebec and her mother from France. She received her education at St. Joseph's Academy in St. Boniface and University of Manitoba. Presently, she is a wife, mother and grandmother who enjoys entertaining, reading, gardening and playing bridge.

KRISTINE PERLMUTTER is a special education resource teacher and feelance writer living in Winnipeg. She is married to Bill Perlmutter and is the daughter of Borga and the late Dr. Bjarki Jakobson, all of whom have been heavily involved in the Icelandic community. She spent twenty-five years as a member of the editorial board of The Icelandic Canadian.

ROBERT TATE was born and raised in Winnipeg's north-east to a rather complex and modern family in the suburbs while attending catholic schools through to high school. He worked in north-end automotive warehouses after graduation and after three years decided to pack up his lower back pains of manual labour for the University of Manitoba's School of Art, where after 3 majors in video, painting and sculpture is now commencing the final thesis year.

KRISTIAN VIGFUSSON was born in 1986 and is the son of Einar and Rosalind Vigfusson. He grew up on the family farm just outside Arborg, Manitoba. His interests include music (keyboard and guitar), computers, travel and anything Icelandic.

PHOTO KAREN EMILSON

The back page

Siglunes School - 1907 - 1969
"It served us well"

Atli Asmundsson and wife Thrudur Helgadottir, right, and Almar Grimsson and wife Anna Bjork Gudbjornsdottir, left, at the site of the former Siglunes School near Vogar, Manitoba.
The school was the first in the community built in 1907 and generations of people in the community were educated there until its closure in 1968.
John Johnson, centre, attended the school and his wife, Vera (Tegelberg) taught there. Mark Emilson was a pupil in the last Grade Eight class to graduate from Siglunes.