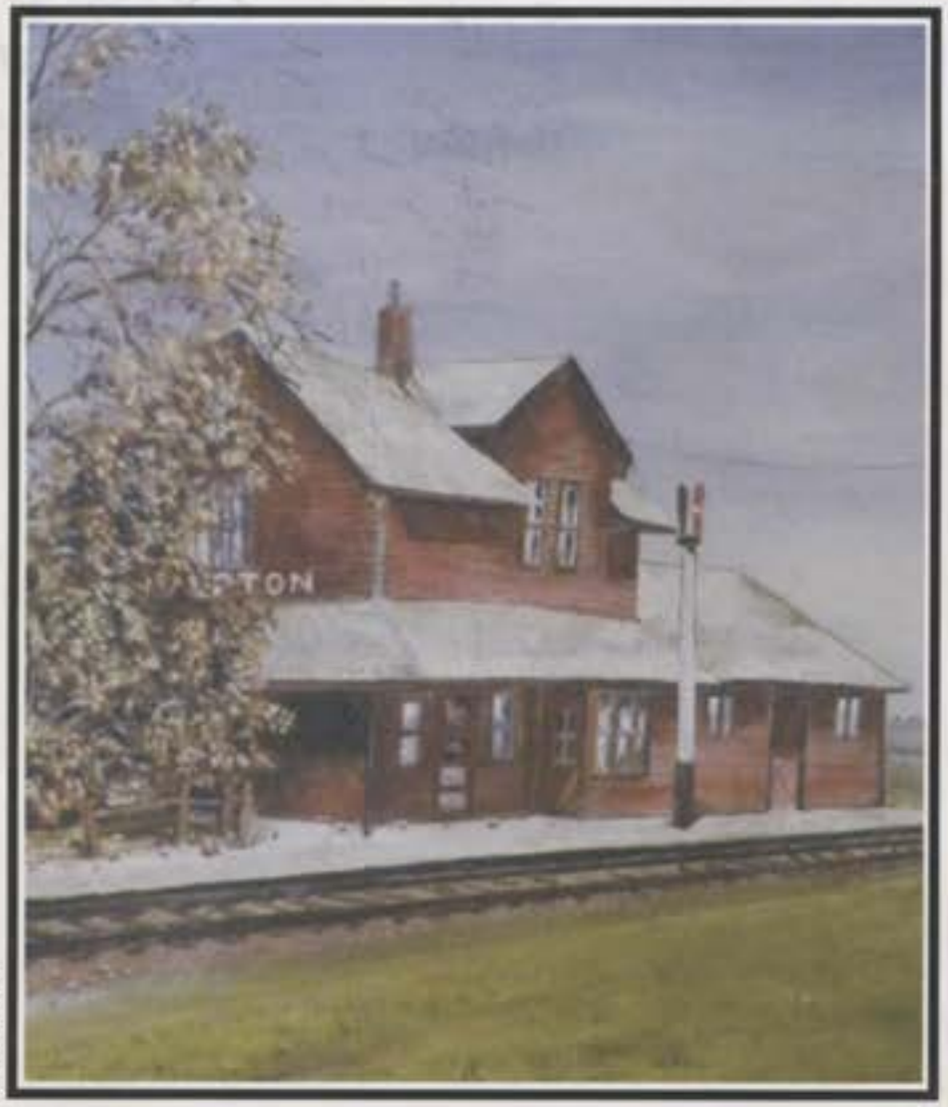
The ICELANDIC CANADIAN



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THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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Canada

On the Cover

Painting by Jerome Ramnath

Editorial

Icelandic River Heritage Sites

by Harley Sigurður Jonasson

This editorial is about the historical and heritage significance of the Icelandic River area, and thus begins with the decision of the Icelandic settlers in Ontario to search for a new colony site in the West. The delegates elected to visit the Northwest and report upon its fitness for a future home for the Icelanders were Sigtryggur Jónasson and Einar Jónasson. They were accompanied by John Taylor, an English missionary who was to act as a representative of the Canadian government. At Moorhead, Minnesota, they were joined by Skafti Arason, Kristján Jónsson and Sigurður Kristofersson

The following narrative is for the most part taken from the August 11, 1875 edition of The Daily Free Press, which describes the journey of the exploration party from Fort Garry to the Icelandic River. The Free Press article quotes directly from notes made by John Taylor during the journey.

"The party left Upper Fort Garry on Tuesday evening, July 20 and reached the Stone Fort (Lower Fort Garry) the same night. On Wednesday they were only able to proceed 12 or 15 miles further and a strong North wind kept them in camp all the next day. On Friday they were joined at 4 a.m. by Monkman, the best guide they could possibly have with them, and who fully sustained his high reputation during the trip. Dr. Schultz accompanied Monkman to the boat but did not proceed with the party. Two Metis also accompanied the party, one as the steersman and the other as cook and bowman. They arrived at the mouth of the Red River by 9 a.m. and traveled on to Willow Island, Drunken Point and finally reached Sandy Bar at 7:30 where they camped for the night near a number of Indian huts.

After breakfasting on a prodigious quantity of Lake Winnipeg fish, they resumed their travels into the fine bay which sheltered them from the strong north wind. They agreed that if this was to become their colony they would name the bay Kristjan Bay after the youngest of their party. They proceeded up the river, which they named Icelandic River, past extensive hay marshes until they came to higher banks with poplars about four miles from the mouth. At about eight miles upriver the river narrowed and an Indian dam placed across the river for fishing purposes stopped their progress for the day. At that point they decided to postpone operations until Monday.

The country was exactly what they wanted as far as they had come, and their first Sabbath was fervent and solemn. After their closing hymn (O God of Bethel) had been sung, Monkman gave free expression to his emotion, "A settlement thus began," he said, "can not fail to be a blessing to this country."

After further exploration during the next two days, they were entirely satisfied that this was the very place where an Icelandic settlement could be made with every reasonable prospect of success. On Wednesday they began their return trip, making their last lake camp on a sandy beach. A heavy north wind sprang up the next morning, and they started at 6:00 a.m. to look at the country to the south. However, the wind increased, making it inadvisable to attempt to land their boat. In six hours they ran 50 miles through a heavy sea, entering the mouth of the Red River and reaching the Stone Fort that evening. They reached Fort Garry the next day, July 30, having made the trip and accomplished their purposes in an unexpectedly and unprecedented short period of 10 days."

Immediately after their return, a letter was mailed to the government of Canada, requesting a large tract of land be set aside for their New Iceland colony. The area selected by the Icelandic delegation comprised Townships 18 to 24 inclusive in Ranges 3 and 4 East of the First Principal Meridian, and included Big Black Island and the small islands lying between it and the west shore of lake Winnipeg.

One can only imagine the emotions that overwhelmed these hardy Icelanders as they gazed for the first time upon these pristine wilderness lands, abundant with haylands, timber and wildlife, and the clear fresh waters of Lake Winnipeg and the Icelandic River teeming with fish.

It would indeed have been a time of great rejoicing and excitement when the dreams and aspirations of the Icelanders to secure a large tract of land suitable for a New Iceland colony were realized, with the setting apart of their chosen lands as a Reserve for the Icelanders, by Order-in Council No. 897 on October 8, 1875.

The history of Icelandic River is one of adventure, tragedy and triumph. It is a most unique history and one that needs to be preserved, protected and celebrated. It was with this in mind that a group of individuals got together on October 22, 2006 and formed a formal committee dedicated to these purposes.

Icelandic River Heritage Sites Inc. (IRHSI) was incorporated March 26, 2007 as a non-profit organization under *The Corporations Act* of Manitoba. Its founding directors were Harley Jonasson, President; Nelson Gerrard, Vice-President; and Joel Fridfinnson, Secretary. The current Board includes Harley Jonasson (President), Nelson Gerrard (Vice President), Joel Fridfinnson, Wanda Anderson (Secretray Treasurer), Margaret Wishnowski, Sigmar Johnson, Dr. Irvin Olafson and Keith Eliasson. IRHSI is also fortunate to have active and dedicated committee members Lorraine Sigurdson, Joyce Johnson, Val Anderson and Michelle Erickson and many volunteers who help out at the various events the organization hosts.

In March 2007 the organization registered its name as Icelandic River Heritage Sites Inc., and was incorporated as a not for profit organization under *The Corporations Act* of Manitoba. IRHSI was registered as a Charitable Organization by The Charities Directorate effective February 23, 2008.

In accordance with its Articles of Incorporation, undertakings of IRHSI are restricted to those activities and events that identify, support, protect, celebrate and otherwise contribute to the recognition, preservation and sustainability of heritage sites, resources, people and culture associated with the Icelandic immigration to Canada and the Icelandic settlement in Manitoba.

Commemoration of heritage sites, events and people will demonstrate in a tangible way the value that everyone who lives in or has ties to the Icelandic River area places on preserving this rich history and heritage for future generations. The IRHSI initiatives are expected to provide significant benefit to the communities in terms of increased tourism. Hundreds of visitors from throughout North America and Iceland come to Manitoba each year, eager to visit the places where the saga of New Iceland unfolded, where family members or relatives settled and in many cases where they were buried.

Several heritage projects have been identified and the list continues to expand as new proposals are brought forward. IRHSI has chosen two priority projects as its immediate focus: Sigtryggur Jonasson statue, and Nes Cemetery restoration.

Without question the single most important player in the great drama that began with the founding of New Iceland in 1875 is Sigtryggur Jonasson – visionary leader, entrepeneur, statesman, and "Father of New Iceland." While Sigtryggur Jonasson has been widely recognized for his remarkable achievements, his grave in the Riverton Cemetery is marked only by a small stone. To recognize the most noble and accomplished Icelandic Canadian of all time, IRHSI is in the process of commis-

sioning a life size sculpture of Sigtryggur to be installed on the banks of the Icelandic River at Modruvellir in Riverton.

Sigtryggur arrived in Canada in 1872 at the age of twenty, the first permanent Icelandic settler in Canada. In 1875 he was in the delegation that selected the area of New Iceland for an Icelandic settlement and played a major role in having the area set aside and reserved for the exclusive settlement of Icelanders. Instrumental in the drafting of the Constitution of New Iceland, Sigtryggur was elected as the first Governor of the four districts created by the constitution.

Sigtryggur's list of accomplishments is long and impressive. He was instrumental in establishing the region's first Icelandic newspaper Framfari, financing this venture to a large extent and editing for a time. He founded a lumber and transportation empire on Lake Winnipeg in partnership with Fridjon Fridriksson, thus providing both the critical employment and positive vision needed to sustain the colony. Sigtryggur was also a ship's captain, one of the founders of the Icelandic weekly Logberg, a benefactor of the First Lutheran Church, immigration agent for the government, advocate for improved transportation in Iceland (whose efforts led to the eventual founding of Eimskipafelag, homestead inspector, and Member of the Legislature of Manitoba. Another of Sigtryggur's notable achievements was his success in lobbying the federal and provincial governments to extend the railroad to Gimli and later to Arborg and Riverton.

Jonasson's original homestead on the west bank of the Icelandic River, Modruvellir, is considered the most appropriate location to honour this visionary leader of Icelandic settlement in Canada. During his occupancy from 1876 to 1881, this site near the Riverton Centennial Park served as Government House for New Iceland, as well as a cultural centre housing the district's first school, the post office and the editorial base of the Framfari. Jonasson's home also became the headquarters of New Iceland's first major corporation, a shipping, mercantile and sawmill enterprise.

The final resting place of Sigtryggur Jónasson (1852-1942), 'Father of New Iceland' and one of the most remarkable Icelanders to immigrate to Canada, is in the Riverton Cemetery, on the east bank of the Icelandic River, a half-mile south of Riverton. Here Sigtryggur lies among his kinsmen, on the bank of his beloved Icelandic River in the heart of New Iceland.

IRHSI has commissioned an 18 inch tall bronze standing statue of Sigtryggur, standing next to a tall stump with telescope in hand, and satchel with map over his shoulder, and depicted in authentic period clothing as an explorer. The statue is expected to be completed in the near future. The Board plans to commission the life sized bronze statue shortly after receiving the 18 inch prototype in order that it may be ready for unveiling in conjunction with the expected designation of Sigtryggur as a Person of National Historic Significance in the summer of 2010.

NES Cemetery Restoration and Enhancement Project

Nes is a sadly neglected and eroding smallpox cemetery on the banks of the Icelandic River. Marked only by a solitary blue and white sign bearing the inscription "Nes Cemetery 1876," this almost forgotten site shows little outward indication of its dramatic history. One of at least six smallpox cemeteries dating from New Iceland's fateful winter of 1876-77, Nes is not only the resting place of some 30 identified Icelandic men, women, and children, but of an estimated 50-80 people believed to be members of the Sandy Bar Band. Most of those buried at Nes died of smallpox that ravaged New Iceland shortly after arrival of the settlers, but others who died before 1880 were also buried here.

Shortly after 1880, a homesteader from Hecla Island chose this spot as a building site and erected a home amidst the graves. Following his untimely death some 10 years later, the house was abandoned due to strange occurrences and though attempts were made to reoccupy the site, no one ever remained long. Neighbours, including local poet Guttormur Guttormsson, reported mysterious happenings at Nes over the years, and eventually this low site along the river reverted to meadowland. Over the years, however, riverbank erosion has placed Nes Cemetery at risk and it is critical that restoration measures be undertaken immediately to protect and enhance this special site.

The goals of Icelandic River Heritage Sites Inc. include not only riverbank stabilization and tree planting at Nes, but a unique monument incorporating both a bronze sculpture and a symbolic sheltering structure.

IRHSI has received strong support from other Icelandic organizations and from the Village of Riverton and R.M. of Bifrost Councils. The support of the people in the community has been outstanding. The fundraising events hosted by IRHSI are well attended and supported by the communities of New Iceland and beyond, regardless of the day of the week or time of year. The main sources of funds to date have been the sale of our Icelandic River Roast coffee, hosting events for visiting tours from Iceland and some private donations and grants. Although sufficient money has been raised to commission the 18 inch statue, an additional $100,000 is required to complete our two priority projects. We look forward to the continued support of the Icelandic community at large in our efforts to reach our $100,000 fundraising goal.

For more information and ongoing updates on activities of IRHSI, please check out the IRHSI web site at: www.irhs.sagapublications.com

The Thorvaldssons

by Irvin Olafson

I have to tell you about Amma Stina's new family, the Thorvaldssons. Sveinn's first wife was Margaret Solmundsson and they had 14 children, 13 of whom reached adulthood. Stina brought 4 children to the marriage and she and Sveinn had five more children, a total 22!

My Amma was a quintessential 'Johannesson.' The Johannessons were gentle, kind, intelligent, honest, with a love of music, and they were used to hard work and being poor. Sveinn brought a new dimension to Amma's life. His was a very large, prosperous, busy, well-educated man that, for the most part, went out into the world and became successful in many walks of life. Solli, one of his sons, for example, became a corporate lawyer, sat on boards of many national companies, became a Senator and the head of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada.

Amma managed the Thorvaldsson household, which consisted of a large home with six bedrooms, a parlour, dining room, main kitchen, summer kitchen and well house. There were two barns, a garage and a large garden. There was usually a maid and handyman to help with the chores, but the bulk of the work fell to Stina. She milked the cows, grew vegetables, preserved, processed the wool, helped to slaughter the animals and made boilers full of blodmor, slatur, svid, etc. She made skyr, mysost and baked bread. She sewed clothes for the children and for many years found some time to knit me blue cable-knit cardigans for my birthdays. These sweaters were beautiful and were my uniform and when I outgrew them they were passed on to others.

Amma was 'the salt of the earth,' and could do anything. Sveinn expected formality at the dining table at all times. So she would prepare and serve dinner, remove her apron and then take her place at the other end of the table until she served coffee and dessert. Sveinn carved the meat and plated dinners for all present, all in a very formal way. Sveinn who had been a teacher in his earlier life, asked questions of everyone present, 'what did you learn at school today?', 'what is the capital of Mesopotamia?', etc. Needless to say it was nerve racking, especially for me as I had, by this time, developed a respectable stutter.

Amma Stina kept a gallon jug of Newfie cod liver oil on hand for me. She believed liberal swallows of this terrible elixir would cure my stuttering. Needless to say it didn't, the mere thought of that jug aggravated my condition. However, I did get an orange (an exotic fruit for Riverton in those days) or some other treat for being compliant.

When Lois Sigurdson and I were kids several of us would go over to Amma's to play eevy-ivy-over with Violet and Irene, Stina's daughters. This was a game where you threw a ball over the garage and yelled 'eevy-ivy-over.' The objective was to catch the ball before it touched the ground and then throw it back. Another game was knock-the-tin-can, a very distant relative of cricket. Amma would always come out with lemonade or raspberry vinegar and peanut butter and jam sandwiches made with 'homemade bread'. I can still taste them. I lived next door at the time and I knew how hard she and my Aunty worked and it amazed me that she took the time to look after us in this way.

My sister Christine lived with Amma, while I lived with Auntie Sella. Christine and I were very close. She still reminds me that I needed her as my mouthpiece when my stutter was particularly bad. I remember making a play house out of hay bales out in the meadow. It looked like a regular pile of bales but the interior was open with a missing bale for a window and another

for a door. This was our secret place to be alone and compare notes on survival. This house of hay was cozy even in a blizzard.

Let me introduce you to some members of the Thorvaldsson cast. Aunty Sesselja (Sella) Johannesson Thorvardson and Amma would sit quietly, self-composed and secure in the knowledge that this large, educated, ambitious household was intact, comfortable and sustained for the most part by their prodigious domestic efforts. These ladies probably sewed their own dresses and grew the gladiolas, definitely a Johannesson touch.

I would be remiss if I did not elaborate on Sveinn Thorvaldsson and his brothers Thorvaldur and Thorbergur. The Thorvaldssons came to Winnipeg on August 1, 1887. There were six in the family: Thorvaldur, forty-five, his wife Thuridur, fifty, Sveinn, fifteen, Gudrun, eight, Thorvaldur seven, and Thorbergur, four. They started to farm at Arnes but Sveinn set off to work as a cook in a fishing camp. He came home to help build the family home. Then he walked 13 miles to Gimli to catch a boat to go fishing. In January he walked forty miles to Selkirk and worked in a lumberyard. Sveinn hired out at every opportunity to earn money for the family. In 1889 a school opened at Arnes and Sveinn worked and learned English. Two years later he attended a teacher's school in Winnipeg and earned a teacher's certificate. He taught school at Arnes and Mikley (Hecla) where he met his first wife Margret Solmundsson.

However, Sveinn's entrepreneurial instincts prevailed. It seems that he and his brothers had similar familial traits that destined them for success. They were extremely intelligent, willing to work hard, had a driving thirst for education/knowledge, were self-disciplined, and morally and ethically virtuous. Sveinn, the eldest, had a responsibility to earn money to support the family, and he did.

In 1895 Sveinn went to a dairy school and then opened a creamery in Gimli, later moving it to Riverton. In 1902 the partnership of Stefan and Johannes Sigurdsson was dissolved and Johannes joined Sveinn in a new venture, 'The Sigurdsson-Thorvaldsson Co. Ltd.' This company would eventually own stores in Gimli, Riverton, Arborg, Hnausa and Bissett and the company became involved in forestry, lumber, petroleum, shipping (on Lake Winnipeg), dairy production and dry goods export.

Beginning at an early age Sveinn took an active interest in politics. He was a reeve of the Gimli Municipality and later of Bifrost. He was a member of the Manitoba legislature, with fifteen years service. In 1910 he became president of the Gimli Conservative Association. (his son Senator Solli Thorvaldson years later became head of the Conservative Party of Canada). Sveinn lobbied the governments of Manitoba and Canada to extend the railway to Riverton and on November 14, 1914 the first train rolled into Riverton.

Sveinn started an Icelandic school that was open to everyone, with classes held on Saturdays; and for attendance one received an orange and a ticket to the matinee movie. So Ukrainian and Indian kids learned Icelandic along with the rest of us.

The two bridges, the railroad, the community hall, the Federated Unitarian Church and Parish Hall, the Co-Operative Creamery and all roads that lead in and out of Riverton were promoted and completed during his many years of leadership.

The interests of Sveinn Thorvaldsson extended far beyond the borders of New Iceland. He provided assistance in establishing the Icelandic Steamship Lines, Eimskipafelag. Later the Board of Eimskip (and Icelandair) expressed their appreciation for the efforts of Sveinn and other Western Icelanders for investing in the company when it needed capital to continue operations. For this and his many other services to Iceland, the Icelandic Government conferred on him the Order of the Falcon. Sveinn was also made a Member of the Order of the British Empire, a title that earned him the ignominious nick name of 'over boiled egg' by his detractors.

Now about Sveinn's brothers. Thorvaldur attended Wesley College in Winnipeg and graduated with a Gold Medal in 1902. He was an extrovert, a natural public speaker and debater, and he organized the 'Icelandic Students Society' that evolved into literary groups, debated in English, Icelandic, and French, produced plays and raised money for financial assistance to students. It is beyond my comprehension how this poor but brilliant young man was accepted into Harvard, but he was and he graduated with a Bachelor of Science cum laude.

Charles Eliot, President of Harvard University, asked him to stay and speak to Unitarian organizations in Massachusetts. On February 4, 1904, Thorvaldur experienced severe stomach cramps. He was operated on for a ruptured appendix and died four days later. His roommate at Harvard was Vilhjalmur Stefansson. In his autobiography Vilhjalmur writes, "A week later I was on my way to the Icelandic settlement on the west shores of Lake Winnipeg, taking home for burial one of the most promising young men I have ever known."

Thorbergur, four years younger followed in his brother's footsteps and in 1911 received a PhD and was awarded the Hooper Travelling Fellowship, the highest scholarship granted by Harvard. He won more fellowships in Europe and studied and did research in the top schools. Thorbergur became the Dean of Engineering at the University of Saskatchewan and a world-renowned expert on reinforced concrete.

Sigurdur Erlendsson and family came from Iceland in 1876. He and his two sons Stefan, aged twelve, and Johannes, aged eight years, settled at Mill Bay on Hecla Island. Stefan showed his initiative at an early age. His father, Sigurdur Erlendson writes in his memoirs of events in 1887, "In April that same spring I homesteaded one mile away from here, north along the lake, and built a rough log cabin there. Stefan was my main helper, and assisted me in all work although he was only 12 years old. My younger son Johannes, then 8 years of age, brought the dinner to us daily of fried whitefish. I thought he did well, young as he was, to walk all that distance against the north wind and no road along the lake. I was happy then with my boys and thought I could see they would accomplish things in their lifetime."

The two brothers were able to get work at a sawmill at Hecla and at the same time, learn the English language. Knowing how to speak, read and write English was an asset and helped them get employment with fish companies, such as Booth Fisheries that were already setting up fish stations in the north basin of Lake Winnipeg. They soon became sail boat operators and station managers.

In 1887 they set up a fish business at Breidavik (later Hnausa). Stefan, at age 26, married Valgerdur Jonsson of Grund or Gull Harbour and Johannes married Thorbjorg, daughter of Jon Jonsson who had already set up a fish station at Gull Harbour. The Hanneson brothers had a station at Gimli so Hnausa seemed a logical place for the brothers' business venture. Settlers were moving into the district and a railroad was promised by 1915 with Riverton as the terminus. And so it began, the "Sigurdson brothers" were on their way to a successful life in business and community service.

The partners, organized as "Sigurdson Brothers," were established as fish dealers and general merchants and were ready to expand into the North Basin of Lake Winnipeg, with Hnausa as a major supply center for the area. A major obstacle was to get the government to build a dock and harbour to increase the viability of Hnausa. The brothers were politically minded and Stefan was elected as reeve of the municipality in 1893. His first priority was to get a dock constructed.

In order to get a depth of 12 feet of water the dock had to be 600 feet long, shorter than a dock planned for Gimli. The government approved construction of the Hnausa dock and construction started in the winter of 1895. The dock did not facilitate layovers but served the purpose.

Docking facilities at Hnausa enabled them to start construction of their dream boat the 'Lady of the Lake.' This vessel would be large enough to handle opera-

tions in the North Basin and in 1897 the 'Lady of the Lake' was launched.

The Hnausa Dock was now a reality, settlers were moving into the area. Boats were on the move hauling freight and passengers between the settlements of New Iceland and Selkirk.

A list below gives us some idea of the vessels moving in and out of Hnausa: Sailboats, Sigurros, Viking, Vestoria, Tern, Miska, Mikado, Lady Ellen, Aurora, Ida, Gimli and Lady of the Lake.

In the late 20s and 30s the fishing industry was undergoing many changes. Sailboats were replaced by gas and diesel motorboats and the Hnausa dock had to be enlarged to handle the larger freighters and companies operating there. The dock was extended with a lighthouse at the end and a breakwater on the south side creating at last an all weather harbour. This allowed companies to tie up and winter their boats in the ice. The list below gives us some idea of the companies in operation at Hnausa and the extent of the activity at the Hnausa Harbour:

Company Vessels
1. Sigurdson Fisheries
Lady of the Lake, J.R. Spear, Goldfield
2. Magnusson Bros.
Betty Lew, Icelander
3. Canadian Fish Producers
Lady Canadian
4. Steini Sigmundson
Sigmund
5. Selkirk Fisheries
Suzanne E
6. Northern Lake Fisheries
Douglas M
7. Keystone Fisheries
Keystone
8. Bjornson Bros.
Bjornson H
9. Hallgrimson Fish
Fisherman
10. Herman Thorsteinson
Orlando

In 1903 Johannes sold his share of the business to Stefan and entered into partnership with Sveinn Thorvaldsson. Sigurdsson-Thorvaldsson Company had stores in Arborg, Hnausa, and Riverton. Johannes, like his brother Stefan, was involved in community affairs and politics and soon became the Reeve of the Municipality of Gimli and later its first Mayor. His new company later built a general store at Hnausa near the railway as well as a large home for the store's manager.

Stefan then reorganized his business with his two sons Solli and Sigurdur Victor (known as S.V.). Operations were now mainly in the south end of the lake and up to Berens River. The business fell on turbulent times, the store burned down and Stefan suffered a stroke and died in 1917 at the age of 53.

The death of Stefan changed many lives. His son S.V. had enlisted in the Air Corps and was overseas. His plan had been to study medicine but he returned home to work in the family business. He had attended the Hnausa School with Kristrun Marteinsson and they were married shortly after his return.

In 1921 Sigurdson Fisheries was reorganized with S.V. as President and his two uncles S.R and Stefan (Stebbi), as partners. The railroad did come to Riverton in 1914 and the town experienced a mini-boom. The company was moved there in 1922. Fish companies were buying up property and building fish sheds to receive fish hauled from fishing camps on Lake Winnipeg by horse drawn freighting outfits.

In 1928 S.V. and Kristrun moved into their new home. The marriage produced eight children: Stefan, Helga Norma, Valgerdur Eliza, Victor Johannes, Kristrun Gladys, Lois Lillian, Ralph Larus, and Gordon Bjarni.

S.V. served on the Council of the Municipality of Bifrost and was Mayor of Riverton for 12 years. Stefan'saccomplishments include:

The Dock

Stefan Sigurdson was convinced that, by applying political pressure, the government could be persuaded to build a much-needed dock at Hnausa. Stefan was a determined young man, and when he applied his energy and enthusiasm to any project resis-

Kristrun & S.V.

tance against him was hard to maintain.

Stefan and Valgerdur

He was elected to the top position of Reeve of the Municipality of Gimli in December of 1892. At the first meeting of Council he arranged for a resolution, directed to the Federal Government, asking for two projecting wharfs, one at Hnausa and one at Gimli. Citizens were petitioned and 345 signatures were forwarded to the Member of Parliament for Lisgar. Stefan continued to fight for his constituents and was re-elected in 1894. He arranged for Mr. Bradbury, a strong conservative, to go to Ottawa on his behalf. Mr. Bradbury succeeded in getting approval from the Conservative Government for both wharfs. In 1895 the Hnausa dock was completed, 5 years before Gimli's dock.

The Railway

About the same time that he lobbied for the docks, he was engaged in another project. While Reeve of Gimli, he promoted and petitioned to establish railway service to the settlement of Hnausa and Riverton. He followed up the petitions with delegations to railway executives and subsequently, in 1911, Stefan (at his own expense) with three other delegates, went to Ottawa to get an extension of the line from Gimli to Riverton. They returned with the assurance that this extension would be constructed.

St. Andrews Locks

Another project of great importance that directly affected the future of Hnausa and Lake Winnipeg was the building of the St. Andrews Locks to overcome the Lister Rapids between Winnipeg and Selkirk. As a ship owner, Stefan was convinced this improvement would yield untold advantages to the Lake Winnipeg settlers.

Education

Stefan was seriously interested in providing the best education possible for coming generations, and served for many years on the (Baldur) Hnausa School Board. He represented the district on a commission set up by Roblin, the Premier of Manitoba, to study the educational needs of the Province. One of his recommendations was that children in rural areas should have ten months of school in each year (as did urban children). The practice at the time was to provide 6 or 7 months of schooling. Surely country kids all over Manitoba are pleased that Stefan's recommendation for a longer school year was implemented.

The Lady of the Lake

Stefan and Johannes received the financial support of Booth Fish Co. to build a new boat called the 'Lady of the Lake.' This vessel was impressive for the times. It was 100 feet long with a six foot draft when empty and capable of carrying hundreds of boxes of fish, up to 80 passengers, and con-

siderable cargo. The 'Lady' became an important component in making Hnausa commercially viable.

Lady of the Lake

It was in a prosperous period that Stefan decided to build a new home for his family. In the summer of 1906 he had carpenters from Winnipeg and Selkirk erecting a home that was, for decades to come, the outstanding showpiece in the whole Icelandic settlement. It was a 2½ storey dwelling, strikingly handsome; steam heated, with gas-lights, and all the conveniences found in a city home.

The family home

Back to Business

It was not until 1910 that Stefan felt strong enough financially to re-enter the arena where giants of the fishing industry met in competition for the choice prize; the marketing of the much sought after Lake Winnipeg whitefish. He acquired ownership of the 'Mikado' probably the largest of the major boats operating on the lake. The Mikado was very busy that summer hauling not only Stefan's fish but also carrying freight and passengers to her full capacity.

The Mikado piled up on rocks in the fall but was repaired and ready for service the next spring. In 1911 a disastrous fire destroyed the store at Hnausa. Stefan rose up out of the ashes and good fortune smiled consistently in the coming years until 1915.

In May of 1917 he suffered what appeared to be a 'mild stroke' and died at the Winnipeg General Hospital on May 16, about a week after his initial attack. His untimely death at age 53 was a shock to the community. He had been an outstanding leader in the many progressive steps taken to improve the lot of the immigrant settlers. In the fishing industry, he built a successful company that could compete with native born Canadians. He was ever on the alert for advantages that would help the settlers and fishermen improve their position in a system made to serve the large capitalistic fish companies. In public service he was ever ready to sacrifice his time and effort on behalf of the people.

Behind every great man is a great woman. Stefan's Valgerdur is portrayed below in an article from the Ardis, a yearbook of the Lutheran Women's League of Manitoba (Icelandic) 20th Edition, 1952, translated by Sylvia Sigurdson of Riverton.

Called Home, An Eminent and Grand Lady

This gracious and heroic woman, Valgerdur Sigurdsson was born at Svarfholi, in Borgarfjordur, Iceland on the 25th day of March, 1856. Her parents were Jon Halldorsson and Helga Jonsdottir.

An unusual adventure happened to her and she had the opportunity of going to England. As a young girl, she had suffered some loss of sight. It happened that a well known couple, Eirikur Magnusson, a librarian with a master's degree at Cambridge University in England, and his excellent wife, visited at her parents' home. They invited her to accompany them back to England with the aim of seeking improvement for her impaired vision. This invitation was gratefully accepted and the young girl lived with this distinguished

couple for almost five years. With their assistance the sight in her imperfect eye was fairly well restored and she was able to attend school in England for a few years. She then returned to Iceland and taught English for several years.

Fru (Madame or Lady) Valgerdur moved to Canada in 1886 and settled at Mikley (Hecla) where her brother Jon resided. A year later she married Stefan Sigurdsson Erlendsson, one of the greatest entrepreneurs of his time in New Iceland. They moved to the mainland in 1890 and took up residence in Hnausa, Manitoba, where Stefan, in partnership with his brother Johannes, who was also an enterprising young man, established a trading center. They later expanded into more ventures that helped to give impetus to the development of the settlement. Stefan had built a large freight and passenger vessel for use on Lake Winnipeg and conducted his business with unusual energy and results.

Seven children were born to Stefan and Valgerdur. L to R. Sigurdur Victor (S.V.) Jan. 23, 1895 to Jan 6, 1970, Erikur Solberg 1893 to 1935, Baby Stefan 1898 to 1901, Johannes 1888 to 1905, Jorunn Eliza 1891 to 1914, Gudrun Anna 1896 to 1904. S.V. was the only one to reach old age.

Fru Valgerdur lost her husband on May 16, 1917 (b. 1864), a heroic man whom she admired and whose advice she often sought. Their home was known far and wide for their generous and bountiful hospitality.

Fru Valgerdur's life was longer than is usually common. She was practical and a woman of good taste. It was difficult for her to tolerate a task not well done. She was demanding of herself and expected from others that they should have done an honest day's work by the end of each day. Her dedication to her daily life and to her fellow man was unlimited. She was a woman who worked hard to measure up to her high ideals and aspirations.

Fru Valgerdur died at the home of her son and daughter-in-law in Riverton on September 8, 1952 and her funeral took place four days later. It began with farewell prayers at the home of her son, where two ministers Dr. Runolfur Marteinsson and Rev Bjarni A. Bjarnasson officiated, and then moved on to Braedrasafnadar Church where beautiful sermons were given by the same clerics. A large crowd was present in spite of almost impassable roads caused by several days of heavy rain.

This great mother, whose fellowship and dignity lent a grand air to her community, was laid to rest in the cemetery beside the Breduvikursafnadar Church, in these pleasant surrounding, where she had known her greatest joys but where she had not escaped from heavy sorrows.

The following was written by Einar P Jonsson, entitled, Stefan the Man.

The following is a direct quote from Dr. Thompson's book. It is included to put a human face on a man who accomplished so much in 53 years and in times of great adversity. The good doctor writes…

"Above all Stefan was a sociable, friendly individual who liked to have visitors to his home and to these he was the perfect and generous host. He liked also to host and arrange large parties where everyone in the community was invited, and, at these gatherings conviviality, exuberance and unrestrained jollity was ever the supreme order of the day."

The 'Gimli Saga' describes Premier Roblin coming to Hnausa….

On July 3rd 1901 'the most elaborate

reception of all was staged at Hnausa. Premier Roblin was received at the palatial home of Stefan Sigurdsson of Hnausa. An avenue of evergreens had been set in the snow leading from the highway to the house. Decorating the entrance were the words. "Here you are at Home." A sumptuous feast had been prepared for the Premier and his retinue and later a 'honour parade' was held from the Sigurdsson mansion to the Hnausa School, and again the route was lined with evergreens. The vista of evergreens extended from the Sigurdsson home to the school and the prominent citizens carried the Union Jack and sang Icelandic folk songs with great gusto. At the school the entire community joined in a tribute to the First Citizen of Manitoba, Sir Rodmond P. Roblin. Stefan Sigurdsson and B.B. Olson responded.

And now before this part of the story relating to the fishing industry and its chief exponents in the years preceding the First Great War is concluded, the author (Dr. Thompson) wishes to add a slight personal touch. 'As a boy playing on the docks at Selkirk about the time Stefan Sigurdson acquired the 'Mikado', he had on many occasions, a chance to observe this remarkable man. Steeped as he was in the lore of Horatio Alger's characters where a hero rose from rags to riches, this man, to his mind, was the perfect symbol of such a storybook hero.

Whenever he swept down to the docks to give orders, like a true Norse chieftain, usually accompanied by a retinue of fishermen followers, who liked to bask within the bounty and benevolence of his generous nature, the younger boys crowded around well in the outskirts of the group hoping to be noticed and have nickels and dimes tossed to them, as hardly ever failed.

Stefan always seemed to be in a hurry, so that when he was going anywhere he moved with his upper trunk in a forward inclination and his feet coming down in short quick steps. Also not to be forgotten were his quick nervous gestures and the rising pitch of his voice when his emotions were aroused. All this left, on a boy with an impressionable mind, a firm lasting picture of a story book hero.' This then was a description of a man who stood out in a crowd. He had a charisma that carried the day.

Stefan Sigurdson was a remarkable man in many ways. Captain Ed Nelson, in an article in the Winnipeg Free Press in April of 1963 gives the following account of Stefan. 'The S.S. Chieftain was then operating a freight and passenger service between Selkirk and Gimli. This was before the railroad was built. The boat was under the management of Stefan Sigurdson, the Icelandic King of Manitoba at that time. Mr. Sigurdson was a striking figure, standing well over six feet, with powerful shoulders, ice blue eyes set in a strong but kindly face, and ringlets of black hair down to his shoulders.'

And so the story ends of a remarkable man who came to us at the right time, a visionary with energy and a sense of purpose who accomplished great things for the Icelandic settlers and fishermen, and passed on too young, and too soon.

Postscript

Sumardagurinn Fyrsti, Selkirk, 1897. On the First Day of Summer in April of 1897, the 'Lady of the Lake', newly built for Stefan and Johannes Sigurdsson of Hnausa, was launched at Selkirk, Manitoba, with much fanfare and excitement. In the words of a report published in the April 19, 1987 issue of Heimskringla,'....It was a fair summer gift indeed, given to the Icelanders in America by the Sigurdsson Brothers, merchants at Hnausa... the finest and sleekest, if not the largest ship launched on Lake Winnipeg to date...' Built at Selkirk, this impressive steam-powered, white and dark red vessel was christened with a bottle of champagne by a nine year old niece of the Sigurdsson's, Lara Helgasson, who called out 'Lady of the Lake' as it started down the shipway and into the Red River. At the same time a white flag bearing this name was unfurled on board the boat amidst cheers from the crowd.

The picturesque name 'Lady of the Lake' that was given the brothers' first boat, a small sailboat at Mikley, evokes

many fond memories and is still in the hearts and minds of the Sigurdson family. In the year 2000 the family made a gift to the Betel Heritage Foundation to construct the 'Lady of the Lake' Room in the Waterfront Centre at Gimli. This facility is a theatre with extensive audio-video facilities and is dedicated to the memory of the Sigurdson's and their families who were involved in the fishery on Lake Winnipeg. This room was officially opened by David Oddsson, the Prime Minister of Iceland, on October 22, 2000, on the anniversary of the Icelanders landing at Willow Island in 1875. A mural was commissioned to commemorate the five generations of Sigurdur Erlendsson's descendants and is displayed in the 'Lady of the Lake' Room. (The artist Luther Pokrant is a member of the Royal Academy of Art and a longtime friend of our family).

Credit for the personal insight into the early days of the family comes from Stefan Sigurdson, son of S.V., and a grandson of Stefan. Stefan is now the patriarch of the family and was witness, both as a young man and later as an active participant in the five generations of the family business, Sigurdson Fisheries, to the exploits of Stefan Sigurdsson of Hnausa.

More of the Sigurdson Family:

Sigurdur Victor Sigurdson, better known to friends and associates as S.V. was born at Hnausa on January 23, 1895 to one of New Iceland's oldest and best known pioneer families. S.V. was the son of Stefan Sigurdsson from Skogar in Mikley (Hecla Island) born at Storu, Laugar in Thingeyjarsysla on March 28, 1864. Stefan was the son of Sigurdur Erlendsson and Gudrun Eriksdottir who settled in Skogar shortly after their arrival in New Iceland in 1876. S.V.'s mother was Valgerdur Jonsdottir, also from Mikley.

Valgerdur had spent time in England in the home of the famous scholar Eirikur Magnusson, a linguist at Cambridge, and she taught school at Mikley. A native of the Borgarfjordur Region of Western Iceland she was born at Svarfholl in the Stafholstungur District on May 25, 1856. Her brother Jon Jonsson settled at Grund in Mikley. Oddur Jonsson, another brother, settled at Gimli after traveling extensively throughout North America. The sisters Thuridur, Jorunn, and Thorgerdur all married and remained in Iceland.

Kristrun, born at Hofn, near Sandy Bar on November 12, 1896 was the daughter of Bjarni Marteinsson and Helga Gudmundsdottir. The young couple moved to Riverton in 1922 and in 1928 moved into a new home on the banks of the Icelandic River. S.V.'s dream was to become a doctor but, upon his father's death in 1917, he became responsible for the family business. In 1919 he was joined in this venture by his two young uncles, Sigurdur R. and Stefan V. Sigurdsson. In 1922 they formed Sigurdsson Fisheries with S.V. as president. In 1925 they bought a small lake freighter, the Husk, from Sveinn Thorvaldsson of Riverton, later

replaced by the 'Lady of the Lake', the 'J.R. Spear', and the 'Goldfield' as the years rolled on.

Bjarni, Kristrun's father, was an inveterate letter writer and wrote to his family in Iceland regularly for over 50 years. Many of these letters were retained by the recipients and were returned to the family and were placed in trust at the National Icelandic Archives in Reykjavik.

Over the years the company continually expanded and fishing stations were established at Moose Island, Black Bear, Berens River, Catfish Creek, Spider Island, Georges Island, and Lynx Harbour. Sigurdsson Fisheries became the largest operation on Lake Winnipeg. It is now part of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Board.

S.V. and his uncles were involved in other ventures such as Lake Winnipeg Fur Farms (1938) with operations at Riverton and Selkirk, Gimli Motors (1944) the General Motors Dealer for the Interlake, and Lake Winnipeg Hotel Company (1945) built and operated the Gimli Hotel. In 1940 Monarch Construction was established with S.V. again as president. Monarch was a big business for its time and it built the road to Matheson Island, did extensive drainage of the Washow Bay area and did major contracts on the Red River Floodway (Duff Roblin's Ditch).

S.V. also took on civic responsibilities, first as councilor for 14 years, later as Riverton's first mayor. He was active in the Icelandic community, was a director of the Betel Home Foundation and the North American Publishing Company, which printed the Logberg-Heimskringla, was on the Icelandic Celebration Committee and a member of the Icelandic National League. He was on the board of the Riverton-Hnausa Lutheran Church and a member of both the Masons and Shriners.

Kristrun, in addition to managing the home and caring for the family, was very active in the church, sang in the choir, was a member of the Lutheran Ladies Aid and the Women's Institute.

S.V. and Kristrun were involved in many other community endeavors but their main interest and source of pride over the years was the family, four sons and four daughters.

PHOTO DICK THORSTEINSON COLLECTION

A mural depicting life along the shores of Lake Winnipeg.

Riverton, Canada!

by Glenn Sigurdson

Riverton was a center of energy. It started its life as Icelandic River, the originally designated headquarters of New Iceland. "The gateway to the north," people liked to call it, and its personality as a community was exuberant and entrepreneurial. First it was the fishing. From north and south, east and west, men and supplies would come rolling and stumbling into town as mobilization was underway for the next season and the trip to the fish stations up north on Lake Winnipeg. Then it was the big tractor trains, first with the Sigurdsons hauling endless sleighs of goldeyes and tulibees to the big company warehouses along the rail line and taking supplies and equipment to the Northern fishing camps and Ontario's Favourable Lake mine. Later it would become the base camp for the Sigfusson's winter road empire across northern Manitoba. The era of big construction followed where men went away for months at a time, not in pursuit of fish, but to build roads and ditches across northern Canada. In the surrounding areas many made their living as farmers, and in the bush cutting lumber and pulp. Women stayed home, running the kids and the village, and the men when they returned.

A busy place with a "lot of comings and goings," with a frontier-like feel that found its way easily into the beer parlours at the Sandy Bar and Riverton Hotels. This was not a sleepy village; there was always "stuff happening." Some might have called it a rowdy place with some rough stuff, but despite its rambunctious exterior, Riverton had style and spirit and talent. My friend Maurice Eyjolfson expressed the feelings of so many so simply- whenever asked where he came from, no matter how high he rose or where he was, always responded with a mile-wide smile and a ringing cry "Riverton , Canada!"

Nothing epitomized Riverton better than its ice rink and the efforts to build it. "Now is the time. Let's go boys, it's now or never," someone shouted. And another shout – "There is no better time." And so, in the late fall of 1949 the decision to make a final push to complete the building of a closed-in ice-rink in Riverton was made. My Afi, S.V. Sigurdson, the first Mayor of Riverton, recounted this upon the opening of the Riverton Skating rink on January 7, 1950. That night the Riverton Skating Rink joined the railway station, the community hall, and the big school as the houses where the soul of the community resided. As Afi said that night "IN RIVERTON, as in all towns of its size and economic conditions, a project such as this can be successful only when everyone in the community is behind the effort. It can truly be said that this is a successful community effort because every organization and every home in the community has in one way or another taken a part in the work. The fundamental reason for such wonderful co-operation and success is the hope and faith that we are doing something worthwhile for the youth of our community; that good clean sport will build better citizens for tomorrow."

The inspiration for the rink was from the effervescent mind of Dr. S.O. Thompson who conceived of the project of a closed-in rink shortly after the war, likely around the time I was born in 1947. The war years had been tough. Many of the young men from the village and surrounding area never returned. My dad was one of the lucky ones. Building a better future for the youth of the community was top of the list on Dr. Thompson's agenda and he soon drew many people into his vision. Contributions of money started to roll in, but completing the task would not be possible with available resources without substantial commitments of volunteer time and talent. Local crews sourced out tamarack stands and Chris Thorsteinson's Riverton Boat Works transformed them into huge

arches. Foundations were poured under the direction of a local contractor, Kalli Vopni. School principal, Peter Onysko, early in what would be a remarkable 20 year career of leadership and success, stood alongside his senior students helping with the work. Frost was coming and it looked like the project would need to be postponed, when the cry for the big final push came forth. A solid volunteer force of carpenters, fishermen and farmers was mobilized under the leadership of Oli Olafson who drove the project to completion, except for the wiring. The young electricians, Benedictson, Collins, and Johnson 'came to the rescue' and completed the enormous amount of wiring needed for a building of this magnitude. Building this rink was a remarkable achievement for a community of its size, at this time and undoubtedly one of the very first communities in Manitoba to do so.

The opening was made an even greater success by the presence of the skaters from the Winnipeg Winter Club. They were there through the leadership of Solli Thorvaldson, then a prominent Winnipeg lawyer and soon to become a well known Senator, but first and foremost, a son of Riverton whose father Sveinn Thorvaldson had been one of the cornerstones of the community over many decades. That began a long relationship between the Riverton Ice Club and the Winnipeg Winter Club which provided both the skating instructors and guest performers each year at the annual carnivals. When my Afi opened the fourth annual carnival on February 27, 1953 he was able to report that the rink now had been further developed with the addition of a time clock, bleachers and the completion of the upstairs club rooms with hard wood floors and drapes. Soon the 'clubrooms' were the home of everything from the international organization of country women known as the Women's Institute (the "WI"), to the social center of the big bonspiels when the ice surface was turned into an additional curling rink for three days each year.

No childhood memory is more alive than the endless hours I spent in that rink, starting as a little boy where I waited my turn on the bench for my skates to be tied tight by Walter Kornick, the first caretaker. Those were the days when the term caretaker was tantamount to caregiver and in Walter's wake came Dori and Margaret Bjornson, who were like surrogate mother and father to most of the kids in the village. Hockey was big in Riverton, very big, and the Riverton Lions roared across the Interlake, particularly roused as they entered the arenas in the neighboring towns of Arborg and Gimli. My typical routine had me coaching the peewees after school and playing hockey every night from 7 to 11 each day of the week except games on Friday night and Sunday evening.

No one escaped the clutches of the Riverton Figure Skating Club and the women like my mom Sylvia who ran it and most certainly not the aspiring young hockey players. I proudly made my debut as Gus Gus the Mouse in Cinderella in the carnival of 1954. Often I think it was figure skating that taught us to skate powerfully, erect and not bent over in typical hockey style and therefore better stick handlers as hockey players. It was the hockey triumph of our own Reggie Leach who would rise to NHL superstar status that would give the village a new brand 'The Home of the Riverton Rifle." Perhaps Reggie would not have been able to move down the ice in those smooth and mighty strides and drive the puck to the net from just over the blue line as he did in winning those NHL scoring championships, without his years doing edges and spinning and twirling about as a figure skater.

Riverton was in love with the train as soon as it made its debut in 1914. So much so, that the centre of their community efforts in the last few years has been the restoration of the station. Some remarkable projects provide an insight into why the train touched Riverton's heart. Ben Holyk with life-long passion for photography pulled together a remarkable collection of photos of the early years of the community. The train was everyone's train. The station became the centre of social life in the community when the train pulled in each night, and riding into Winnipeg was the melting pot where conversation flowed and relationships were built. The life of the community also comes through in another remarkable project spearheaded by Margaret Wishnowski, *Train Stories from the Icelandic River.* Here the stories from so many, from a few lines to a couple of pages, are drawn together in an amazing collage that tells so much, so simply, and so powerfully. Like Raymie Benedictson recounting these poignant words, "I remember the day, January 22, 1945, when I walked my brother to the station early in the morning. He was leaving for overseas after his embarkation leave. I never saw him again."

The Sigurdson Fisheries office, Sig Fish as everyone called it, was on the main street of Riverton. It was action central of the fishing world. The office was on a large piece of property along the Icelandic River, just south of where the three founders, Afi, Steve, and S.R. Sigurdson lived in the "three houses." Continuing south across the road you entered the Municipality of Bifrost where Dad bought three acres of land from John Eyolfson, which enabled him to get a Veterans Land Act loan to build the house where I grew up. Behind the office was the "big garage" where all the machinery-related work was undertaken, with nets and stuff stored upstairs. At the south end of the property was another sizeable building, the grey tin oil shed where the 45 gallon gasoline drums were stored, fronted by a large loading deck where the trucks pulled up to deliver and receive gasoline and diesel.

The office didn't look exactly how you might imagine a house of commerce, but that was very much what it was with an endless stream of activity always pouring through the front doors. It was bigger inside than it looked from the street, with a warehouse at the back, a storage area upstairs, and the main open office area in front, with two solid wooden desks. A tall counter greeted you as you came in the front door and a huge black safe dominated the far wall beside the two-way radio. The safe was always open during the day, and closed each night when the books of account and ledgers were returned to safekeeping, shut tight with a spin of the clumsy-looking combination lock.

In the darkness of a winter morning, when Dad went in to open up, it was dark, freezing and slightly creepy. The big brown oil heater that stood along the main wall, taking up more than its fair share of space, got grumpy from time to time and the smell of heating oil permeated everything, making me nauseous. But it soon warmed up, and when it was bustling with people and talk and action, as it almost always was, the Sig Fish office was warm and inviting.

To the left as you walked past the counter was a small front office – I guess in today's terms it would be the CEO's office –in my day it was seldom used, and most often, the door closed. This was Afi S.V.'s office, and had been since the day the place was built, but he was almost always away in those years at a Monarch Construction job site somewhere in the province building roads and ditches. When he was not there, there was always a lonely, empty feeling inside, but when he was in, it was a

beehive, with Pal, his faithful cocker spaniel, always in the middle of the action. Under the glass cover on the wooden desk that took over much of the office, were Lake pictures of people and stations and a litany of vessels that have passed through the family hands over the years, many of which had gone down in a Lake Winnipeg storm. Adorning the main wall in an elegant frame was a large portrait of my great grandfather Stefan, who as a boy of 18 at Hecla, had been part of the beginning of the commercialization of fisheries on Lake Winnipeg and the family's entry into the fish business. Stefan, a larger than life figure who was a major force in business and the life of New Iceland at the beginning of the last century, was heard to exclaim when he missed the train, "That's the damn problem when you don't own everything yourself," an epitaph now enshrined among the pages of *Train Stories.*

The desks weren't the only semi-permanent fixtures in the office. My Dad, Stefan, sat at the desk closest to the counter. Les Peaker sat at the back desk, a remarkable man who exuded a quiet dignity and great competence. Once his name had graced the marquees of many of the huge elevators in prairie grain towns, but Peaker Grain, like many others, succumbed to the clutches of the banks in the thirties. Suddenly Les was on the streets looking for a job, widowed with two boys and a new wife at home. A friend told Afi about the abilities Les could bring to any business and in 1942, he found himself sitting behind that big desk in the Sig Fish office, where he remained for over twenty years and Aileen, always Mrs. Peaker, became a fixture in the High School as a beloved English teacher.

Fish, not grain, would become the focus of Les's world. He was the financial and administrative centre of the various operations that circulated around the fishing business, for it seemed that when you were in the fish business you were in every business, running the books and the administration of the fish company, Monarch Construction, the Lake Winnipeg Fur Farm, the Gimli Hotel, the Allis-

Chalmers dealership, the Johnson Motors dealership and later keeping track of the Ski-Doos from Bombardier. He did it all on his own for the first years. When Dad returned from the war he added to his operational duties internship, under Les' scrupulous tutelage in financial matters. When Les left to become Secretary Treasurer of the newly formed Evergreen School Division, Dad assumed the administration and accounting functions on top of his management responsibilities and took over Les's place at the back desk

As each new season approached there was a rising crescendo of activity. Nobody punched time clocks. Command central was the office with Dad co-ordinating people from Chicago to Winnipeg to Fisher River, S.R. busy moulding leads and shellacking corks, and Captain Steve and Captain Victor repairing boats and loading tugs. The organizational logistics were formidable, but these men were experts from long years of experience. Everything from trunks with ledgers, boxes with pots and pans, trays of nets, and bags of flour would make their way to the Hnausa Dock, the historic location of the family's headquarters, where they would be loaded onto the Spear for the trip north to Berens River, Georges, Spiders and the Landing. Usually they would arrive just as the Riverton Transfer, coming from Winnipeg, with either Harry or Steve Olafson, and later Steve's son Danny, was unloading a load of groceries from McLean's, hardware from Ashdown's and dry goods from Altman Shep's. The first trip eacn year was the peak of excitement. Fishermen, weighmen and shorehands, cooks and cookies alike stormed down the dock by truck and taxi from every direction "to catch the tug" on its way north. From the doorway of the wheelhouse, Captain Clifford Stevens Jr. would shout out " let the headline go and with an enthusiastic gang lining the rails of the upper deck, and faces popping out and dangling from every portal and hatch on the lower deck, the JR Spear would steam out through the harbor gap and turn northward onto the open sea. Another season had begun.

Everyone in any way connected to fishing would find their way into the Sig Fish office. A lot of business got done, to be sure, but also a lot of 'visiting'. You never knew when someone came to the office, whether it was before the season frenzy or the after season lull, how long the visit may be, whether minutes, hours, or when the lock was turned as everyone made their way home for dinner or supper. There were no stop watches at the Sig Fish office, Nor did anyone do the "lunch" thing in Riverton. Those were the days when dinner was still dinner in the middle of the day and supper was still supper at the end of the day.

I could give you small glimpses of many of such visitors, but I choose to paint a short and more intimate portrait of one as emblematic of many others. My Afi Malli, Mom's Dad, was the quintessential Lake Winnipeg fisherman. With his pipe chugging Old Chum tobacco, and a cup of coffee in his hand, he plied his way across the shallow and treacherous waters of Lake Winnipeg every summer and fall and on the even more dangerous ice that covered it for six months every winter, starting in his thirteenth year and not stopping for sixty-two more. The lake moulded him and he personified it. Through him and many others like him who were sustained by the lake, we came to know its charm and its guile, its softness and fury, its mystery and soul. And by knowing the lake, we came to know and understand Afi and those like him.

Like so many Lake Winnipeg fishermen, he had a charisma that stuck to you. Dad learned that quickly. When Dad returned from the navy, he saw a beautiful young woman walking down the street entering the Sigurdson Thorvaldson store where she was working and his romantic instincts were enlivened. He soon learned she was Sylvia Brynjolfson, one of those 'real Hecla girls" as they are known to be called, whose family had moved to Riverton in 1942 while he was away. Talking fish to her dad Malli, by happenchance picking up the mail at the post office daily, would soon lead to talking

love to Sylvia, he reckoned, and so it would be. The births of Glenn, Elaine, and Eric followed, and Afi's presence in their lives would be no less indelible in their adoring eyes.

He wasn't a big man, about average height, perhaps a bit shorter and wiry. He was the Lake Winnipeg counterpart of "the old man and the sea." His face was a complex landscape, rugged but warm, his life told in the deep lines that furrowed every corner. He was a good-looking man, this despite the fact that he had no teeth. That was the unhappy result of the thousands of cups of coffee he drank before he was forty, sucking each sip through his sugar cube – "Mola Kaffi" as it was known amongst the Icelanders. He had false teeth made when his originals fell victim to the dentist's pliers, but he never had the patience to get used to them, so they sat in his dresser to be used "for best" as he used to say. Remarkably, unless you knew or were told, you never noticed that he had no teeth. And even more remarkably, his biggest challenge as a result was not eating a steak, but chewing hamburger.

My Afi wasn't a boy for long. His had not been an easy life. The youngest of a family of twelve, the primary burden of taking care of his chronically bedridden father and an elderly mother fell upon him, the year he began his life as a fisherman. His father died when he was 19 and he and his mother were together on Hecla. They had never owned the land on which they lived and he was determined to change that. A prime piece of land on the island, in the middle of an area then known as Milnuvik, came up for sale. By then, at his young age, he had saved enough money to buy it. His mother and he lived in a small shanty there until he married and that small shanty was the home in which my mother and my aunt Solveig began their lives. In 1927, with fir bought from lumber suppliers Brown and Rutherford of Winnipeg, he built a beautiful home on one of the choicest properties on the island. Today, this home and property remain emblematic of the island, operated for many years as the beautiful and only guesthouse on the island, Solmundson Gesta Hus. Whenever we were on Hecla as kids, as we drove by, Mom always pointed up to the second floor window on the right, just above the balcony, to show us where her bedroom as a girl had been.

The family was desperately poor and his older sisters had to go to Winnipeg to work. Whether they experienced or perceived discrimination with respect to their immigrant name and probably there were elements of both, they made the difficult decision to adopt a new name. So the Jonsson girls became Jones', and with them the rest of the family, including Afi's brother Beggi, who was eight years older than he. Afi took a different course. He had a deep sense of who he was and who he was not, at a very early point in his life. He would become Brynjolfson. He chose a name according to the ways of his forbearers in a land he had never known or seen, taking his father's first name Brynjolfur and adding "son." Other than always knowing that he was the Brynjolfson amongst the Joneses,(and be assured that names did not separate the ties that bonded him to his brother Beggi and his nephews Helgi, Binny, Beggie, and Harold), I never once heard him, or anyone else, speak of why or when he made that decision, but knowing him you knew why. On a rare occasion I heard him referred to as Malli Jones, but only by his Cree partners on Lake Winnipeg, who found Jones a lot easier to roll off their tongue than Brynjolfson.

Afi's fortunes rose and fell in perfect synchronicity with the fish populations over which neither he, nor anyone else, had any control. When the catch was low, he had to make do. But when the nets were full and fish were pouring over the gunnels of the Baby Spear (given as a gift by the family to the Lake Winnipeg Museum in Gimli where it sits today as a proud reminder of another time), he knew the simplest and most joyful power of nature's abundance. Financially, there were good years; there were also many bad. But Afi Malli spent all day, almost every day, breathing the fresh Lake Winnipeg air and feeling its spray, with his body working the lines and his hands picking out fish, summer, fall, and winter. Later in life, he told

the Winnipeg Tribune, "...even if I could change, I probably wouldn't. We never made much more than a living ... but it was a good living." And in that straightforward way, Afi spoke for so many other men who like him who made their living fishing Lake Winnipeg from boyhood until their last day. In those years fishing was tough and making a living was not easy, but what I do know for sure is that Afi and the fishermen like him had a good life. Fishing was not a job. It was their life. It was who they were.

For this self-taught man, there was one teacher greater than any other and he respected her beyond all else. Nature was not to be fooled with, but listened to, not resisted, always respected. Businesses could come and go because of her. Sometimes there was no way to predict it, other times people might look back and see the threats that they had missed right in front of their faces. My Afi Malli's biggest fear was that one day the fishermen on Lake Winnipeg would look back and wonder why they were never more worried about the possible effects of chemicals on the waters. This topic incited his passions more than any other. Long before it was fashionable to be an environmentalist, Afi was convinced, beyond any possible persuasive proof to the contrary, that chemicals would ultimately prove to be the bane of our collective exists. The front line of his vigorous views on the topic was often his niece, Marge Jones, while visiting on Friday evening enroute from the bus ride from Winnipeg, before making the balance of the trip to Hecla. Marge had the misfortune of working for the federal Department of Agriculture and carried the burden of defending, (as she most ably, and usually amicably) did, the use of insecticides and fertilizers on the prairie fields, which Afi reasoned would ultimately find their way from across the Canadian prairies into his beloved waters and its fish. Afi was a wise and prescient man.

The winds of change in the fishing world of Lake Winnipeg blew hard in the 60's .Fish stocks were collapsing. Prices were poor. Dramatic change was needed; It came with two barrels, one widely embraced, and the other to utter disbelief. In 1969, the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation was created and took over the marketing of all freshwater fish in the interior of Canada. Sigurdson Fisheries would become the major agent of the Corporation on Lake Winnipeg. Then fire burst out of the other barrel." These damn scientists in Ottawa have gone crazy," my exasperated father exclaimed in a call as I was beginning law school in Toronto, and he went on "They have shut the lake down because they say there is mercury in the fish that has come 800 miles down the Winnipeg River. How in the hell is that damn stuff in thermometers going to get all the way from a pulp mill in Dryden Ontario to Warrens Landing in the north end?" The lake was closed for the better part of three years. Afi's worst fears about the insidious chemicals had been realized; and any suggestion that mercury was really not a chemical but a mineral was soon turned into mincemeat with his usual verbal dexterity.

This combination of factors reconfigured the fishery when it re-opened, but good news followed near ruin with dramatic increases in fish populations experienced everywhere across the lake. New times brought more changes. As agents for Freshwater, Sigurdson Fisheries would need a new kind of facility that could also act as a receiving depot for fish .The Sig Fish office was demolished to be replaced by a long flat modern building covered in blue tin. The symbol of an era evaporated within a day.

If you were in the business of fishing on Lake Winnipeg, you were in the trans-

portation business, moving fish on water and ice. Soon you were building winter roads and then real roads. But in the muskeg of the north, roads were in many ways only an excuse to build a ditch. And that is where the draglines came onto the scene, essentially engines on big platforms with a big boom sticking out, rigged with cables to throw out a one and a half cubic yard scoop into the muck to build a road an inch at a time. So it was that men from Riverton put their imprint across Canada's north, one bucket at a time. Then came the expansion into tractors. Monarch Construction came first, and before its time was over it had built roads across the province and was the first and largest contractor in the building of the Winnipeg Floodway. Alongside was Steini Erickson, a veteran who survived Dunkirk as a mechanic on a landing barge, and returned to build from a base of one tree bulldozer, an army of machines. Erickson Construction would become the pre-eminent contractor on the rebuilding of the Winnipeg Floodway 40 years later. And countless companies came to life alongside, like the Orbanksi's; Walter, Murray and Lorne whose operations worked across the continent, Riverton Construction with Larus Thorarinson and his sons, prominent contractors in Calgary for thirty years, Falcon Construction owned by Oddur Olafson and his son Leslie, Evergreen Construction owned by Bill Triska, the Zagoweseki Brothers, The Finnson Brothers, Nordic Construction owned by my Uncle Grimsi Brnyjolfson. In recent years the inheritor of this legacy has been Ken Palson Enterprises. There are many others, all of whom, (named and those I have not named, I ask forgiveness) I regard as unsung and unrecognized heroes working under incredibly difficult situations transforming swamps into farms and opening up new lands and territories.

Fishing extended its tentacles in many other ways into the life of the community. Chris Thorsteinson and his father before him had been making boats for over fifty years, first with wood and then with steel. Riverton Boatworks developed the technology of compartmentalizating the construction of boats which enabled them to build them in Riverton and move them across Canada by truck to Newfoundland or to the Canadian Arctic. Alex Zagozewski took his genius with iron and steel, (learned under the able hands of his father who brought his blacksmith trade from the old country to Riverton), into boat building. Kenny, Chris's son perfected the art of moving and assembling the pieces at sites far distant from home base on Lake Winnipeg, all under the watchful leadership of Chris. One of their most famous and unique assignments was moving the replica of the Hudson Bay Company's boat from the 1600s, the Nonsuch, on tour 3000 miles across North America before resting her down in her final home at the Museum of Man and Nature in Winnipeg.

Riverton was always the centre of the

music; it was deeply embedded within every home in the community in different ways. Nothing better epitomized the "mustang" spirit that was always just below the surface in the community, than that remarkable annual event known as the New Year's Eve dance. The hall would burst out well beyond its capacity as the entire village, young and old were all there, as well as people from the surrounding Ukrainian settlements at Shornclifffe and Ledwyn and often a substantial contingent from Hecla, crowding into one place, a typical community hall by most standards, but later enlarged with an adjacent wing to accommodate the numbers. The odd straggler also showed up from Arborg and Gimli, trying to horn in on the action and pick up a lively Riverton girl.

The parties had been at full blossom for hours by the time the dance floor was in full flight as the clock snuck up on midnight. Johnny and his Musical Mates were reaching a crescendo, as Johnny, with his brother Chris and the Johanneson family members beside him, waltzed and polkaed the community across the decades and through the generations. Johnny and Chris seemed timeless, refreshed by succeeding generations of the family from time to time. This was "a night in the old town" for old-style dancing – no holds barred and usually that meant a tussle or a scrap of one kind or another as frustrations and booze washed out the old year and rambunctious energy ushered in the new. But no sooner had the scuffle started than it ended, either with the protagonists thrown outside to do whatever they were determined to do or with the exuberance of the dance floor simply washing the scuffle into the frenzy of swirling feet below.

Music ran deep within the fibre of Riverton, down through families and across generations. But Rome, in the Riverton world of music, was the Johanneson family, for all roads seemed to lead there, through circuitous routes of family and friendship. Music oozed out of this incredible family, with bench strength that grew with every birthday. Their spirit infected others in the community and that spirit spread out across New Iceland.

The tradition sprang from solid roots, for before the Musical -Mates, Gutti Guttormsson's band had been the ignition. Then, in the 60s a new player entered the scene –the Whisky Jacks, under the leadership of Solli Sigurdson, a PhD in one hand and a guitar in the other and the decade of the Hootenanny and sold-out halls was born. The signature pieces were always Solli's songs of the lake – ballads that got to the core of the people and the times – captured forever in an album, "The Lake Winnipeg Fishermen," that has its spot in almost every home in the Interlake with any connection to the fishery. The boys were all there alongside Solli – Cliff Lindstrom, Wesley Wilson, Dennis Olson, Haraldur Bjornson, Freddie and Brian Oleson, Roy and Earl Gudmundsson, and the rose among the thorns, Laura Dahlman. Soon they professionalized, with the addition of Riverton's own Ed Sullivan, as Roddy Palson blasted onto the stage.

The Riverton spirit moved down the road to Gimli during the Icelandic Celebration, where Johnny and His Musical Mates were an institution at the Monday night dance, a ritual as integral to the festival as the traditional program. In the Hootenanny days, the Whisky Jacks were in full flight warbling and roaring to a packed house. The Fine Country Folk followed soon after and in their wake the Fine Country Kids. Performing on the main stage, the Kids (anchored again by the Johanneson prodigies) enamored themselves to the Icelanders in the audience and soon found themselves performing in Reykjavik. And in later years, much later, Brian and Freddie would take their brand of music into Gimli Betel every Friday night, to the great pleasure of the residents, among who were their Mom and Dad, Kari and Emily Oleson.

This was the Riverton way and music was the voice. In 1994, the Hootenanny celebrated its 30th anniversary with a celebration of music in the life of the community and as a testimonial to those who had left the ranks of its great musicians far too early. Roddy "Sullivan" was at the podium, the performers from across the generations were strutting on the stage, and amidst the

throngs in the sold-out hall was Premier Gary Filmon and his wife Janice. Here is what Janice Filmon, as captured on the cover notes of the live recording, later said about her experience:

"Only on a Saturday night in a small Manitoba community could you be treated to such a special brand of entertainment . . . to have your whole being touched as you witness what is called the Hootenanny. Only in Riverton could you experience the universal language of love through this music.

One can only try to describe what my family and I experienced on Saturday, August 6, 1994. It was a showcase of the musical legacy that has been part of Riverton for more than thirty years, and what a legacy it is. What an inspiration to see young and old on stage performing together...speaking the same language, even though their ages were years apart. I know our family had our memory boxes just filled listening to these timeless performances.

The love and family values that are so entrenched in this very rich tradition are beautiful reminders of how we can remember and pay tribute to those who have passed along. Thank you for asking our family to be part of it. I am ecstatic that through this live recording many more people can enjoy what we felt that night at Riverton's recreational complex."

No one understood the mind and body of the New Icelanders better than Steinn Thompson. Like everyone else in Riverton, he was my doctor. And everyone for many miles in every direction would say the same. And that was so for over fifty years. Doctor Thompson, the quintessential country doctor, was a legend in his own time, revered equally by those who came under his care, and his medical colleagues. The centre of his domain was the Riverton Drug Store. His son Johnny was the pharmacist, a role that Doc performed until Johnny graduated and the medical office was the office behind. Many times I found myself sitting with Doc on one of his two plain round chairs with solid steel rods curving up from the floor to frame the backs. Doc always suffered from droopy eyelids, looking as if he was falling asleep, squinting to look down my throat, a Fudgsicle stick pushed down my tongue telling me to "open more" as he peered into another episode of tonsillitis.

So many times have I heard this story that perhaps it has lived in my mind as a second-hand result of the telling, but I believe otherwise. Even though only three, I can see the office and Doc squinting at that bottle brought to him by my anguished mother. He looked deeply into the red liquid it was holding and said, "This is not blood. This is food dye. Has he eaten something?" The jig was up and the empty bottle of maraschino cherries was soon discovered. Doc had a way of cutting to the quick and when it came to diagnosis he was an acknowledged master. He knew everyone in the community, their father and mother, and grandmother and grandfather. He knew family dispositions and tendencies, so when he made a referral to the

famous Thorlakson Clinic, now known as the Winnipeg Clinic, there was always a high level of respect for any tentative diagnosis reached by Doc Thompson.

His passion for people went beyond the well being of the person to the health of the community. Nothing escaped Dr. Thompson's concern for life – everyone and everything was important to him. Next to people, I believe his next greatest passion for living things was for the trees. Most of the trees in the community were planted by him, but only with a narrow lead on Kris Thorarinson, who shared Doc's enthusiasm, coming by this pursuit more naturally, for, in addition to his general store, he ran a lumber business based on a mill he operated at Hecla. Between the two of them Riverton was assured that it would have a vigorous growth of green hair. Their tree of choice was elm, an unfortunate choice in hindsight, given the later intrusion of Dutch elm disease.

Doc also exercised his devotion to the people and community wearing many other hats, including as an MLA (member of the legislative assembly) and in his last years as a historian of the area. Having grown up in Selkirk, he had been deeply immersed in the lake and its people since boyhood. No man was more deeply involved in this place and time than Doctor Thompson. In Riverton, in the Icelandic way, everyone young and old knew each other by their first name, so even at 4 it was Oli, not Mr. Olafson even if there was 60 years between us, except for Doctor, or Doc. Thompson which is the only way I ever knew him. Somehow, for him, using his first name did not fit, and I do not think I even knew it was Steinn till I started returning home from University.

Kids did kids' stuff, but we didn't get to sit in the family room eating supper in front of the TV. Young or old, you were at the table and in the conversation, learning to talk and to listen. That was the Icelandic way and it was my sense that it also became Riverton's way, whatever your background was. There were few secrets about anything. You knew the good news and the bad news, from family finances to arguments. You became aware of who you were and what you were a part of at a very early stage in life. I was free to live in my childhood world, but it overlapped in a myriad of ways with that of the grown-ups. That normally worked out quite nicely, but it wasn't always a good thing. Involvement and information about the adult world came with responsibility and accountability at a young age.

Riverton, maybe even more than most small places, didn't like to be pushed around. When the rural centralization ethos of the ARDA (Agriculture Rehabilation Development Act) program of the 1960s became twinned with "school consolidation" which would have the kids from Riverton bussed to Gimli or Arborg, the community stood on its haunches or perhaps more accurately, the women and kids stood together as one. Certain that with the loss of the school would go the village and with the likes of Mayor Beatrice Olafson, Anna Thorarinson, Emily Oleson, Sylvia Sigurdson and countless others on the warpath, with the kids as loyal lieutenants, no force of man or nature could penetrate their brigade. Armed with the statistics of an incredible record of academic success and the energy intensity of a ripsaw, they repelled assault upon assault. Riverton would continue to have its school, the authorities' finally announced. All that was left was to savour the sweet taste of victory and to await the return of the men from the construction sites and the fishing stations. With the war over, the mothers could go back to the more tranquil buzz of the WI and the Ladies Aid, and the kids to school, and to the rink, and on exotic expeditions to places like Sandy Bar.

Everybody knew of Sandy Bar, but almost no one ever went there, except kids on bikes for an adventure and old guys from Riverton to reminisce. I can't remember a time when I didn't know of Sandy Bar. For those of us who grew up in Riverton, it was our special place. Sandy Bar is a sliver of sand threading its way between the lake and the marshland, around the corner south from the mouth of the Icelandic River. Like an outstretched hand it reaches northward across the bay toward Hecla Island. Moving and moody

like the sky it meets effortlessly above, it shuffles and shifts with the ebb and flow of the swampy waters behind it and the crashing waves of the lake in front. It was a bit out of the way and quite an adventure to go there, so it wasn't a place one went every day. There were two ways to get there. By road, it was the kind of trip that meant you needed to get your bike and stuff ready before you went, like you were going on an expedition. Or, by boat- but almost no one went there by boat, except the odd fishermen and Brian Oleson and I who often took a skiff with an 18 horsepower motor and water-skied the three miles down the river, past Gutti Guttormsson's farm and the Big Bend out onto the lake and to the bar.

It's a lonely place, the sort of spot that just might inspire a poet. And it "Gutti" as young and old knew him, (and to this day Gutti in the Icelandic Community is enough to identify who you mean, like a modern day Cher or Madonna)who immortalized Sandy Bar in his poem of the same name, in a poetic triumph of the pioneering immigration from Iceland to Canada in 1875. From Gutti's window he could look over the marsh grass onto the thin strip of sand beyond. People from Winnipeg and Gimli often talked about Sandy Bar, and when they said the name they did so with the rhythmical intonation that elevated the emphasis on the "Bar," as if they knew it. I always knew that most of them had no clue where it was. On that narrow muddy road, made by the draglines through the swamp, to see another person, much less a car, on any expedition was a big deal. They had just heard the name from Gutti's poem. Gutti was a poet who had never set foot in Iceland, yet wrote in the Icelandic language with an elegance that immortalized him as a giant of Icelandic literature.

Many have tried to translate its essence into English, perplexed by the skilful rhyming and the power of the words portraying the agony that the immigrants faced and the ecstasy they hoped for. Against the backdrop of a fierce thunder and lightning storm, the poem Sandy Bar was conceived as he stood amidst the settlers' graves on that narrow sliver of barren beach. This place and the lives of those "buried deep at Sandy Bar" were inside his soul and with those words he entered into their long-sleeping souls. He immortalizes their legacy as the thunderstorm sails northward with the revelation that, "More than flesh and all its grandeur lives today at Sandy Bar." And he wrote, "Broad and definite tracks will lead to the world from Sandy Bar." So it was, and is. As I grew older, I discovered what these words meant to me, whether or not Gutti had intended them in this way. The world from Sandy Bar is a wide world and being able to imagine that world is the first step in going there. The descendants of these settlers moved out across North America, but for each of them there is a corner in their soul given to Sandy Bar.

In Riverton, people gave each other the space to be themselves. Perhaps it was because there were a lot of independent-minded people, many of who spent so much time away from home, that they valued home and life in the community all the more when they returned. Music was often the place where they came together. There was a live-and-let-live attitude and with it came an acceptance of people as they were. Poking fun at those "putting on the style," to borrow a line from one of Solli's songs was a more likely response to a situation than punishing gossip. Riverton was a "Whatever!" kind of place, to use a phrase that is part of the jargon from the worldly-wise teenagers of the generation of today. Perhaps the Riverton spirit of those days has quietly morphed its way into modern times as the world of "Whatever!"

Growing up with Music
A Riverton Inheritance

by Solli Sigurdson

PHOTO BEN HOLYK

Riverton Hootenanny Rehearsal - 1964

Left to right; Haraldur Bjornson, Lloyd Gudmundson, Dennis T. Olson, Wes Wilson, Laura-Lynn Dahlman, Clifford Lindstrom, Roy Gudmundson and Solli Sigurdson.

Many of us will inherit something in our lifetime: money, a plot of land, a religion, or even a dislike of tomatoes. We often inherit something that we don't know we are getting. I, like many growing up in Riverton, inherited a musical tradition. In telling only my personal story, I hope the hundreds of others who participated in the experience are honored.

As a kid in the 1940s, my biggest memories of the war years are probably "The White Cliffs of Dover" or "This Ain't the Army" as sung by my dad and my uncle, SR. A cousin told me that one of her greatest joys was Stebbi, my dad, picking her up in the old truck in Gimli and the two of them singing all the way to Riverton. My dad and SR were not choir singers but singers with a lot of words to a lot of songs in both Icelandic and English. One of my father's earliest memories was as a six-year old, standing on the counter of the store in Hnausa around 1910 and being told by the store clerk to sing, something he loved to do.

By the time my sisters and I came along Dad and SR were learning all kinds of songs from the radio. For my family, the 1940s in Riverton was one big singing party. Besides the war songs, we sang the old songs – "Let Me Call you Sweetheart," "With Someone Like You;" the new songs – "Don't Fence Me In" and "Paper Doll;" and even Al Jolson's "Swanee" and "April Showers." The singing was at its best when Daisy Jonasson or Sigurlin (Jonasson) Bergen played the piano. Otherwise we'd sing on our own and not from song sheets. In the old Icelandic tradition, we learned the words by listening to Dad and SR.

In the Johanneson household, Johnny, Kris, their sisters and brother were making dance music. Through people like Joe Palsson of Geysir, violin playing was a well-established tradition in Nyja Island. With others joining them, Johnny and Kris moved out of their house into community halls and their violin music became known far and wide. In those days, my Dad was a floor manager for the Gimli dances and so the music of the square dances, two steps, polkas, schottisches and the waltz quadrille were as familiar to us as Hank Williams' "Your Cheating Heart." Most of Riverton danced to Johnny's music and enjoyed hearing the special, last dance, "Good Night, Sweet Dreams, Sweetheart," a 1944 big-band song.

In Riverton, in the 50s, and for many decades following, Johnny's Musical Mates were a big part of community entertainment. The youngest Johanneson, Laugi, also played the guitar and sang. He knew all the old songs but mostly he sang country/western songs from the radio. Like many singer/guitar players in town, he sang at all the parties. In the early 50s, he and Einar Jonasson (from Djupadal) captured, for weeks on end, the "King of the Saddle" contest sponsored by a Winnipeg radio station. Having these celebrities now in town meant more parties with more singer/guitar players.

Playing guitar and singing had been a way of life in Riverton for years. Tache Forbister's version of "Little Ball of Yarn" was a naughty song that showed us all how entertaining a folk song could be. This was pure enjoyment. At any get-together in the 50s and 60s, you could hear a variety of songs - Icelandic, "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree" songs, war-time, popular music and especially country/western like "Hello Walls" and "Hey, Good Lookin'." The party-goers knew many of these songs and joined in. The first time I sang in public, I took my guitar to a stag in Sophie Hurdal's basement. The place was packed, all enjoying several other singers playing that night. Surprisingly, I was welcomed into the singing community. Coming back from university study in the United States, I brought along songs like "Whisky in the Jar" from the folk-music revival.

Someone should take the time to list all the singers/players of this time. There were plenty. The names that come to mind – Eastman, Johnson, Renaud, Olson, Gudmundson, Dahlman, Oleson, Wilson, Lindstrom and, of course, Johanneson – all have an Icelandic connection. In the early 60s, the Riverton Elks Club invited us to put on a "hootenanny" in the Riverton Hall. A hootenanny would just be a larger (and more sober) version of what went on in Sophie's basement. We quickly found eight of us younger singers to "raise the rafters" in the old Hall. More surprising was that in a town of 800 people, over 300 people from age 8 to 80 would pack the Hall, standing room only, for an evening of singing. We had a great time: every singer wanting to perform his or her favourite songs, every audience member wanting to hear his or her favourite.

In that first of many hootenannies, we harmonized "Good Night Irene" and "This Land is Your Land" just to show the folks that we knew how to sing but the audience favourites were "Cool Water," "Mule Skinner Blues," and, of course, songs like those of Buck Owens and Roger Miller. But a surprise hit was "Geysir Hall," a song that I had put together. The song was indeed an anthem to "Johnny and his Musical Mates." You could hear a pin drop in the packed Hall when I sang that second verse:

We had an old-time band down at Geysir
And you could hear those violins down to Geiri's store
Johnny's foot kept tappin' out the music
It's a tune I've heard a thousand times or more.
Oh, it was music made for granny
When they played old "Ragtime Annie"
You never heard such music at the grandest ball
And your spine would feel a chill
When they began the waltz quadrille
And we always called a "square" at Geysir Hall.

And they also enjoyed the lines that came out of the Icelandic tradition of poking fun at the "man of the hour":

I still can hear them playing "Goodnight, Sweet Dreams" and Johnny saying, "The next waltz will be a dance."

What a celebration of music in Riverton! The move from Sophies's basement into the Hall meant that now young and old were enjoying and embracing the singing and the songs. Singers need an audience and Riverton was proving to be an enthusiastic one. Music was growing deep roots in Riverton.

Growing up, fishing on Lake Winnipeg, I inherited the value of hard work but I value equally what I got from singing and music - right from our family-singing of the old and new songs, appreciating the glorious strains of the violins, learning to play the guitar as we sang hundreds of country, folk and pop songs and to sharing this music with the community, young and old alike. Our singing might, indeed, stem from a singing/poetry tradition that the immigrants brought with them from Iceland. As with many of those who played a part of this decades-long experience, our two children have likewise shared in this inheritance. Both of them as adults play the violin and love to sing. Many who shared this musical experience simply see it as a normal part of life - just something we did in Riverton. But in our hearts, we know it is something special - really special - an inheritance that I deeply appreciate.

Short Story

Taking Root

by Simone Renee Morin

The original version of this short story was published in the 1997 program for Manitoba's Icelandic Festival (Islendingadagurinn) and has now been revised and updated as of 2009.

There was a billow in the curtain of time. When I was a child you could find that billow down at the end of King Street in Riverton, Manitoba, in a place called, Lundi. It was the home of my amma and afi, Pauline and Earl Dahlman, and it was a special place like no other in my world, in a realm all of its own, where cottonwoods rained downy tufts and caragana hedges sweetened the air. Artesian water flowed endlessly – surely by magic in my child's mind, and from dawn until dusk the birds clustered near, singing a jubilee.

This special place became a well-loved homeland of many members of my family, along with Vidivellir to the north, which our family owned for over 100 years until my great uncle, Gilbert Guttormsson, passed away in 2009. Both homesteads are still considered by many as the true hearth of our family. Although bodies have relocated across Canada, hearts still beat in Riverton.

Storms unleashed beyond Lundi's borders seemed to gentle into showers the closer that they drew. The weather was always good – at least as far as I can remember. Fresh-scented grass, dewy and soft, pillowed my head as I watched the shape-shifting clouds roll on through. I imagined ancestral ghosts liked to linger and revisit with fondness. In my mind's eye, I could see these ghosts of Icelandic pioneers, together with the spirits of the Indians from the nearby Nes Cemetery and Sandy Bar, all of them fluttering by, respectful and reverent, tiptoeing in protective vigilance of the land and its people.

The past screamed out to me at Lundi. My people used to gather there – and still did in the old photographs papering the walls. There was no television through which the outer world could invade, and no phone to jangle us back to reality. The clapboard outhouse, ancient and weathered gray, stood time's test like few other things do today. Thankfully, a toilet roll came to sit upon the shelf replacing the old Eaton's catalogs and outdated telephone pages that we used as toilet paper during penny-pinching times. I'll never forget my mother showing me how to crumple, rub, and 'uncrumple' the pages so as to soften them before use. I thought she was surely the kindest person for showing me that trick while she said proudly, "Icelanders know how to economize."

There were chamber pots under every bed and the only sinks were basins. The running water flowed not through pipes, but, from a well outside. The water splashed over the sides of pails, sloshing icily on bare feet, as we children raced desperately for the porch, trying to get there before our straining arms spilled even more water than they carried back.

Although the house in Riverton was small, it was a Great-Grand-Daddy of a house all the same, aged and flogged by time. Never stately, yet bearing its disrepair like a badge of perseverance. Unheated, a summerhouse is all that it could be in those last few seasons. Yet, it is so much more in memories and in dreams; least of which it is the place I think of as my home, even though I only visited and never lived there myself.

This home is where I discovered my heritage. The surroundings transported me back in time, allowing me to touch my ancestry in a way that I'd never have been able to do anywhere else. Lundi is the place where I learned that I was born from Viking blood, and it is the well from which my pride, in buckets full, flows forth. For as long as I can recall, I've been Icelandic, not Icelandic (hypen) Canadian – and certainly not French or French-Canadian, although my father had been quite so. I am an Icelander, despite not coming from Iceland. I never knew I should consider myself a Canadian until I learned about that in school. Even then it didn't matter much. My heart was already bound to my mother and her people, a bond made even stronger with my time spent in Riverton.

It was there that I had my first taste of history. I read and re-read a binder full of reminiscent stories penned by my amma and her sisters, Begga and Hulda. I was spellbound for days by stories of over-sea travels, Indians, and the travails of pioneer life. I was shocked at the description of a beloved baby freezing to death in a house that offered too little protection from the icy reach of a harsh Manitoba winter. I learned about the small pox epidemic, and a great-great-amma whose nose bled until she died. I read about courage, strength and tenacity. I listened to countless stories about our house before and after it was moved from Nes to King Street, and of my great-afi's homestead, Vidivellir, where he composed poetry, music, and entertained honoured guests.

I heard all about how the house at Vidivellir burned to the ground and I felt the sorrow left in the fire's wake as tangible as the rubble and ruins. Being at Riverton, in a house left behind by a world moving forward, and inundated with so many stories and anecdotes about the olden days, I felt a part of it all, woven across time into the fabric of the past.

I took in everything from factual realities to fanciful tales. I listened raptly to the ghost stories whispered around crackling backyard bonfires, burning high with stalks of blue and petals of blazing orange. I heard about how the house had been moved from the old cemetery near Nes where the Icelandic and Indian victims of the small pox epidemic had been buried. I shivered when told about the Indian bones, unearthed by nature, and later re-buried. I cringed for the hapless victim whose frost-bitten toes had to be snapped off.

I've lost track of the multitudes of people who claim to have seen, heard, or felt strange things in our spooky house. My amma was awakened once from slumbering to see a beautiful Indian maiden, clear as day, standing in the living room archway. Looming above her head was a blackened hand, huge and larger than life. I have gaped wide-eyed and trembling at creaking stairs upon which no one visible was treading. Millie, the live-in nanny from my childhood, was a very spiritual woman from St. Thomas. When staying at our house in Riverton, Millie slept with her bible every night to protect her from the spirits she called haunts. Almost everyone I know who has visited Lundi has been

inspired by the house to a – feeling. To those, like myself, whose hearts hold it dear, the feeling is one of benevolence – like lost ones are watching over us, as if peeking through draperies fluttering in a breeze. Although it's always eerie, I've never felt malevolence, and a dream about Riverton has always been a good omen.

Riverton is where my first tender sprouts took root, tasting the fertile soil that's nurtured and helped me grow. It was at Lundi that my amma poured milk over my cornflakes, teaching me to eat them quickly before they turned soggy. It was there that my twinkly-eyed prince of an afi told me teasingly, and to my horror, that eating corn flakes would grow hair on my chest. My afi found a fragile seedling that, together, we planted behind the tool shed. He said the tree was mine and I felt so special having my very own tree. I watched it anchor itself into the earth and every summer when we came back to Riverton, I would race out back to see my tree and how much it had grown.

Riverton is where the buzz of small planes broke into childhood dreams, sending me racing out, screen door slamming, up the backyard dike, breathlessly hoping to catch sight of the plane landing on the Icelandic River out back of the house. It's there that I would play on a tree-branch-swing for hours on end, singing myself hoarse, day in and day out again.

The tooth fairy visited me first at Lundi and I raced to the corner store with the fairy-money clenched tightly in my sweaty palm, mouth watering just thinking of all the penny-candy I'd be able to buy. My mother taught me to swim there, dunking underwater, sputtering and breathing in gulps of water at nearby Hnausa Beach on Lake Winnipeg. Riverton is where I read aloud an entire story for the very first time; I remember it was The Little Match Girl from one of the many stacks of old Reader's Digests that could be found throughout the house.

I steered my mother's Chevrolet down gravel roads around Riverton, so nervous I barely dared to breathe, an iron grip upon the wheel, trembling as I toed the gas pedal. It's where I learned about death, by traipsing through graveyards, chock-full of prickly grass and sentry-like mosquitoes that chased us off as quickly as they could. Reading the headstones was our way of honouring the dead and, despite the mosquitoes, we'd take extra time at the unnaturally tiny graves of infants and children.

I imagine my blood is pumped by a heart nestled at Lundi. It is the blood of warriors, scholars, and princesses of days long gone. It is the life force of Vikings, pioneers, and survivors. It is the blood of Icelanders, strong and tenacious. I know not the language, nor do I carry the name. I have not the looks of an Icelander, nor a deep understanding of the culture, but I'm full of pride just the same. It's a valuable heritage, a treasure of mine, bestowed by seasons spent in a place, time seemingly forgot. It's where I began becoming me. Even though our house no longer stands today, nor do we now own the land, my heart will always call it home.

Undan Snjóbreiðunni

What Lies Beneath the Snow - Part Three

Revealing the contributions of Icelandic pioneer women to adult education in Manitoba, 1875 - 1914

by Jo-Anne Weir

Part three

Canada's postal service: A link to the outside world

This historical narrative develops a theme that emerged from the area of influence shown on the conceptual framework: Communications and Technology. Certain types of communication or new technology influenced the learning activities of Icelandic pioneer women in Manitoba, especially the Canadian Postal Service. This was a well-used means of informal or self-directed learning in the Icelandic communities, used by women (and men) to access the information they needed.

When Manitoba joined Confederation in 1870, it also became part of the Canadian Postal Service. Post offices were established in the province with weekly or semi-weekly mail service (Peterson, 1990. p.13). The outlying rural areas had post offices established later than the larger centres, and mail service was inconsistent until the railway reached the community. The Icelandic communities of Argyle, Selkirk and Winnipeg had rail service much earlier than did New Iceland and Posen, in some cases twenty-five years earlier. One of the effects of that delay was that New Iceland and Posen received less regular and less consistent mail delivery. Normal letter rates in the late 1880s were one or two cents, making this means of communication affordable for most pioneer families. (Glenboro & Area Historical Society, 1979, p. 36).

Use of the Canadian Postal Service was a means of informal learning for Icelandic pioneers even before they left Iceland. People living in Iceland often heard of the conditions in Canada for new immigrants via letters from those who had already left (Kristjanson, 1965, p. 15). This would have been seen as a more reliable way to learn about Canada than the statements and promises of immigrant agents. The news related in the letters would have influenced the decision to immigrate.

Once settled in Manitoba, the Icelandic pioneers continued to correspond with family and friends in Iceland and in other Manitoba and North American Icelandic settlements. In fact, Icelandic communities were exceptional in their use of the Canadian Postal Service. In the Argyle community, the Glenboro's postmaster report showed sales of $1200.00 worth of stamps (Glenboro & Area Historical Society, 1979, p. 36). This was at a time when the letter rate was one or two cents. The Honorable David Mills, Minister of the Interior in 1878, commented that the New Iceland settlers "send through the mail four or five times as many letters in proportion to their number, as did Manitoba settlers" (Kristjanson, 1965, p. 88).

Letters were not the only source of information received in the mail by the Icelandic pioneers. Wilhelm Kristjanson, son of Posen postmistress Margret Kristjanson, describes the "treasures" of the mail delivery:

> "The heavy canvas mail bag, with its massive disc padlock, contained real treasures for the intellectually alert and news-hungry settlers; the Winnipeg Icelandic weeklies, Heimskringla (1886) and Logberg (1888); The Icelandic Lutheran Synod

periodical, Sameiningin (1886) and the Liberal and Unitarian Periodicals, Dagsbrun (1893) and Heimer; the Weekly Free Press; the Family Herald and Weekly Star, old country Icelandic papers such as Isafold; the Nor'West Farmer and Farmer's Advocate; letters from the other Icelandic settlements and from Iceland, and, not to be omitted, the bulky, highly informative T. Eaton Company catalogue. There were also books for private libraries and for the community library. On mail days, first once, then twice a week, the post office was thronged, as a lively community center" (1980 p. 175).

The Icelandic pioneers' hunger for information about the world around them was a fact of life before they came to Manitoba. Their lives in Iceland were characterized by an interest in world affairs beyond the shores of their small island (Kristjanson, 1965, p. 12). They were accustomed to informing themselves despite the geographical isolation of living on an island. Upon arriving in Manitoba, they continued to seek out ways to become informed despite the geographical isolation of living on the prairies.

Learning was extended beyond the materials received in the mail to the post office itself as a source of learning. The post office became a sort of informal learning centre each week for the Icelandic pioneer women. It was here that they learned of the news in their communities and shared whatever news they had. They could use this venue to spread news of Ladies' Aid meetings, fundraising events or of suffrage and temperance presentations being made. Word of mouth was one way to spread the news, but they also could post notices of upcoming activities at the post office. Connecting with other women, as they did at the post office, is one of the ways that women used to learn (Belenky, et al., 1986).

There were many social benefits from the trips to the post office for the Icelandic pioneer women. Often the post offices were located in the postmaster's home, and his wife would provide coffee and hospitality each week. Some of the wives operated the post office, as did Kristin Christopherson of Argyle and Sella Bodvarson and Margret Kristjanson of New Iceland. The opportunity for women to sit down and have coffee with other women would have been a valued respite. Many would have their young children and babies with them. This would be an opportunity to discuss their children, their health, and other issues related to day-to-day survival. Pioneer women had difficulties coping with the social isolation of the prairies (Prentice, et al., 1988, p. 120), and the Icelandic women were no different. The post office visits offered one way to combat the feelings of social isolation. This was one of the benefits of adult learning activities for Icelandic pioneer women.

The letters and reading materials received in the mail, as well as the act of going to collect the mail each week, provided many informal learning opportunities. Their use of the Canadian Postal Service informed and sustained them during the difficult pioneering years.

Manitoba's geography and climate: Harsh teachers

When the Icelandic immigrants arrived in Manitoba, they faced a very different geography and climate than that of Iceland. The geography of Iceland in the interior is a volcanic mountain plateau, with lava fields and sand. The volcanoes are active, as was evidenced by the eruption of the Dyngjufjöll volcano in 1875, which caused many to leave Iceland and immigrate to Canada. Other parts of Iceland feature lakes, rivers, fjords and inlets (Kristjanson, 1965, p. 1). The climate is more moderate than Manitoba's. Mean temperatures in Reykjavik range from 5C in January to 10.6C in July (Brydon, 2006, p. 1). The Manitoba prairies with its greater extremes of temperature presented a formidable challenge and many new things to learn. Understandably, the rural Icelandic farmers and fishermen of New Iceland, Posen, Selkirk and Argyle were more affected by the geography and climate than were the urban Icelanders of Winnipeg. This is not intended to be a complete list of the many lessons learned by the Icelanders as they struggled to cope with the geography and climate of Manitoba. The intention here is to highlight some of the interesting or unique educational activities that Icelandic pioneer women engaged in during their settlement in Manitoba.

The trees and bushes presented new learning for the Icelanders. Iceland is not a forested country, so the Icelandic pioneers had little experience in constructing buildings with wood, as their homes in Iceland had been made of turf and stone, (Arngrimsson, 1997, p. 46). They also had no experience in clearing their farmland before planting. The whole family, including the women, learned informally to clear land for the crops (Gimli Women's Institute, 1975, p. 606). A source of income in New Iceland was to cut the felled trees into cordwood and transport it to market (Arnes History Book Committee, 1990, p. 48). This family enterprise included the women and presented another informal learning opportunity for them. The clay soils, combined with the flooding of the lakes and rivers of New Iceland and Posen, resulted in a chronic problem with drainage in the two communities. The women worked alongside their husbands, toiling to direct water away from their farm properties (Lundar and District Historical Society, 1980). Related to poor drainage was the issue of pest mosquitoes, a problem mentioned in several of the local histories as a terrible nuisance and one which they had no experience with in Iceland. They learned to wear netting to avoid bites and use smoke to keep bugs away from the livestock (Hnausa Book Committee, 2004).

The wide open geography of Manitoba meant that many early Icelandic immigrants were distanced from medical care. When a woman needed assistance in childbirth, often a trained midwife did not live in the area or could not reach the woman in time. Many Icelandic pioneer women were self taught midwives who learned informally by observing others. When someone was sick in the home, often a trained doctor was not available, and so many women provided medical care as best they could. They learned informally by observation, reading or simply common sense (Arborg Historical Society, 1987, p. 17; Geysir Historical Society, 1983, p. 123; Glenboro & Area Historical Society, 1979, p. 478). Sigridur Hordal acted as a veterinarian when her husband, who was a trained veterinarian, was unavailable. She would read his journal and follow his example (Lundar and District Historical Society, 1980, p. 458).

In Manitoba, people lived further apart than they were accustomed to in Iceland. The approximate geographic size of Iceland is 40,000 square miles, whereas Manitoba is over six times larger, at 250,000 square miles. As mentioned earlier, the social isolation was difficult for the women and they sought out ways to be connected to other women. They did this using various non-formal educational activities. A popular response was for the Icelandic pioneer women to become involved in drama productions (Geysir Historical Society, 1983, p. 32; Rural Municipality of Argyle, 1981, p. 150; Arborg Historical Society, 1987, p. 97). Others participated in painting classes (Rural Municipality of Argyle, 1981, p. 455) and handicraft classes. Gudrun Hannesson operated a handicraft school out of her home in Gimli (Gimli Women's Institute, 1975, p. 61).

The climate of Manitoba was especially harsh for the first couple of years of settlement in New Iceland. The extreme cold of the winters and the flood of 1880 led to economic hardship for the Icelandic Pioneers. The most tragic event during this early period of settlement was the smallpox epidemic that led to a quarantine of New Iceland. One of the reasons the disease spread throughout the settlement was the overcrowding and poverty that arose from the difficult climate of this time period. Women learned informally, under extremely difficult conditions, to contain the spread of the disease and prevent a future outbreak (Kristjanson, 1965; Hnausa History Book Committee, 2004). The poverty of this time period, which included failed crops, led to the women learning about alternative food sources. They learned informally from Aboriginals to collect berries and grow wild rice (Gimli

Women's Institute, 1975, p. 606, 661; Hnausa History Book Committee, 2004, p. 102). As their husbands continued to adapt to the geography and climate and find a means for the families to survive financially, the women looked for ways to bring much needed money into the household or to produce goods that could be traded for necessities. Women learned informally to market their knitted mitts, socks and other clothing and found markets for their homemade butter (Barker, 2002, p 35; Rural Municipality of Argyle, 1981, p. 588; K. Howard (personal communication) October 8, 2007).

Manitoba's geography and climate were harsh teachers indeed. Many of the educational activities of the Icelandic women were critical to their family's survival. Amazingly, in addition to their commitment to their family's welfare, they were committed to the welfare of other Icelandic immigrants who also struggled to survive.

Riverton Visit

by Keith Eliasson

Where are you today? Some will say Riverton, others will say Icelandic River, and yet others will say Lundi. Well, you are all right.

When the Icelandic immigrants were planning their new land, Nýja Island, they wanted a community that was entirely Icelandic and somewhat independent, where they could settle with other settlers of their language and culture. They decided that they would name their new colony Gimli. When they came to New Iceland in 1875, it was planned to include two towns in the north portion of the colony. These towns were intended to be called Lundi and Sandy Bar. In the initial survey of the area both towns were included in the survey. Upon arriving and seeing the fall fury of Lake Winnipeg, the initial plan was shaken. Landing at Willow Island and having to winter in the area actually developed the town of Gimli in the fall of 1875. The next year the town of Lundi was established.

The new colony was divided into five regions, Viðirnes, Arnes, Breiðuvik, Islendingafljót, and Hecla. Icelandic River or Fljótsbyggð was the area around Riverton. When the mail was sent to Selkirk and then forwarded on to the new colony it was usually addressed to New Iceland. The establishment of a post office in the new colony resulted in the establishment of Gimli Post Office in 1877. Mail was delivered to Peguis in the postal system and then re-sorted in Gimli and distributed to the rest of the colony. Letters were to include the name of the recipient, the farm name and district, Gimli P.O. Keewatin, Canada.

As Manitoba grew and municipal government was established, the entire area was known as Gimli Municipality. There had been so much growth in the area that a direct freight route to Selkirk established in 1883-84 allowed for the district to establish it's own local post office and the name Icelandic River. Riverton was then called Icelandic River. After many petitions, other districts slowly got their own postal address. In 1924 the address was changed to Riverton P.O. to correspond to the railroad's name for the community.

With the coming of the railroad the town was still referred to as Icelandic River. The train conductor was probably more influential than we realize. The story told in the Winnipeg Free Press is that the names along the new line were a bit of a mouthful for the conductors so they shortened Finnbogastadir to Finns, Breidavik became Hnausa, and Icelandic River became River Town. This later was further simplified to Riverton and has been the name for the town since that time. Riverton was incorporated as a village in 1950.

So where does this leave Lundi. Everyone knows that Lundi was the intended name for the town but it never was officially included as the name on the postmark. The names of Gimli, Icelandic River and Riverton have that distinction. So, one could say that the name Lundi was never "officially" adopted. However, the name Lundi was well known.

Sandy Bar was settled by a few families but never became a town. It was mapped out as a very nice coastal town but the initial experience left the development of the town only in the planning stage.

What can I tell you about Riverton? There are many stories about Riverton but the most frequently mentioned stories reflect that Riverton was the home of Sigtryggur Jonasson, Guttormur Guttormson, Svein Thorvaldson, Dr. S. Thompson, Gunnsteinn Eyjolfsson , just to memtion a few, and also the business enterprises of the lumber mills, newspaper, and boat building industries.

Most visits include the Centennial

Park in Riverton so I will concentrate on the memorials in that park. This would include Sigtryggur Jonasson, Guttormur Guttormson, and Framfari. I am only elaborating on these three memorials.

First, a monument is located in the Centennial Park commemorating the "Father of New Iceland," Sigtryggur Jonasson.

Canada was attempting to encourage settlement in the north and west territories. The postage stamp province of Manitoba had set aside an area for the Mennonite people in 1874. A group of Icelandic people had settled in the Muskoka County north of Toronto in 1873-4. Disappointed with the land that was available, the group expressed a desire to establish a settlement where they could all settle together. To avoid losing these Icelandic settlers to the other North American settlements that had attracted mainly Icelanders, North Dakota, Minnesota, and Utah, John Taylor went to Ottawa to plead their case for a land of their own. A similar arrangement was arrived at with the Government of Canada and the Manitoba Mennonite Reserve and the Icelandic Reserve was established. Since these settlers were very poor, Canada agreed to set aside land for this group and bear the expense of an inspection party to select a new site for their settlement. The party was under the leadership of John Taylor, with Sigtryggur Jonasson and Einar Jonasson funded by Canada. By the time that they left for Manitoba the group had grown to six with the addition of Skapti Arason, Kristjan Jonsson and Sigurdur Kristofferson, paying their own expenses.

The party arrived in Winnipeg on July 16, 1875. The land did not look too promising since one of the worst grasshopper infestations was laying the ground bare, even eating the potato stems. Since the Icelandic settlers were dependent on hay for their cattle this seemed like another calamity similar to the ones in Iceland that led them to leave their homeland. However, after some discussion the group decided to hire a boat and inspect the area along Lake Winnipeg. Reports that the land was good drew them north to the area from Winnipeg Beach to Hecla Island. The fact that they could navigate up the White Mud River for three miles and on raft a further three miles convinced them that this was an ideal location. The three paying their own way remained to seek employment on the CPR under construction. The others returned to convince the rest of the settlers to relocate.

John Taylor and Sigtryggur Jonasson were selected to meet with the government authorities and negotiate for the land and expenses to relocate. Although there was no support for moving from place to place in Canada, the arrangements not only included a land grant but also the expenses incurred in moving to Winnipeg in Manitoba. From there the group would have to make their own arrangements. The usual money for provisions to maintain the settlement during the first winter was also included.

Sigtryggur Jonasson had made a deep impression on the authorities that led to a lifelong connection to the politicians. His leadership and political connection were significant to the success of the settlement. The arrangements negotiated were accepted by the settlers and the first group of 270 left for Winnipeg on September 25, 1875. With the addition of more Icelanders in Duluth the group numbered 285 when they arrived in Winnipeg, on October 11, 1875. Problems such as a lack of hay for the cattle created some dissention. Along with the late arrival and the hardships incurred during the first winter, this dissention grew to a peak in 1877. During this initial period, the leadership of Sigtryggur Jonasson and John Taylor is credited with the success of the colony.

The recruiting of new settlers was the main role for Sigtryggur. He returned to Iceland on behalf of the Dominion government to encourage more Icelandic settlers to join the new Colony. The success of this recruitment is reflected in the growth of the colony despite all the hardships incurred. The second group arriving in 1876 numbered 1200. More arrived gradually with fairly large groups in 1878 and 1883.

The Icelandic Reserve as it was known, was from what was then the northern boundary of Manitoba, along the shore of Lake Winnipeg for seven townships, and to the west to include range 3E, with the inclusion of Hecla Island.

Sigtryggur made his home in Riverton and established a store in the town of Lundi. He also established a lumber and transportation business. The community honoured him on two occasions. In 1915 the early pioneers were honoured on the 30th anniversary of the settlement with Sigtryggur being singled out and presented with an inscribed gold headed cane as a mark of appreciation from the whole settlement.

On his seventieth birthday in June of 1922, Sigtryggur Jonasson was presented not only with $200 but, more importantly, the recognition of his contribution to the settlement. Sigtryggur remained in Riverton for a few more years but moved to Arborg to live with his son and daughter-in-law. He passed away on November 11, 1942 and was laid to rest in the Riverton Cemetery.

Framfari was the newspaper established in New Iceland. Located in Lundi it was the dream of Sigtryggur Jonasson. In January of 1877 he advertised throughout the settlement that a meeting would be held on the 22nd. The purpose of this meeting was to establish a periodical to serve the settlement. The meeting was well attended and the support was good, so a committee to set a budget was struck. A second meeting was set for February 5th to report on the viability of the enterprise. The estimated cost of $1000 was divided into shares of $10 each and 110 shares were pledged with the sale of 50 shares at the meeting. Records show that only 78 shares were actually sold and 32 were half paid. The New Iceland Publishing Co. was formed, a building built and a printing press ordered. The press arrived in June but the need for extra type for the Icelandic language delayed the publishing until September 10, 1877. The first editor was Sigtryggur Jonasson, serving in that capacity until the position was taken by Halldor Briem. Halldor and his brother Johann Briem were very active in preparing articles and providing interesting facts to the settlers. The 600 subscribers were located in Canada, USA and Iceland. The yearly subscription price of $1.75 was quite expensive and the paper fell into bankruptcy. The final issue in January 1880 marked the demise of Framfari. Framfari was the first paper to be published in Icelandic in North America.

The cairn in Centennial Park is directly across the river from where the Framfari was published.

Guttormur J. Guttormsson is well known in New Iceland and was recognized for his poetry in Iceland as well. There was seldom a celebration or gathering in Riverton that Gutti was not on the program. Gutti was an entertaining speaker and usually composed a poem to commemorate the occasion. The poetry made him the best known man in Riverton with recognition from many literary circles in Europe. Although he is mostly recognized for his poetry, he also wrote short stories and plays.

When we look at the pictures of the Riverton Brass Band then we see the leader, G. J. Guttormsson. He not only arranged the music for the Band but also wrote some of it. This band was recognized by Hon. Arthur Meighan as the finest rural band he had ever listened to. Gutti was more proud of this accomplishment than of his poetry.

The monument in the park recognizes the strong connection between Gutti and Sandy Bar. This was the attraction of the settlers to New Iceland. The nature of the area is captured in the poem reflecting its mystery as well as its majesty.

Now your visit to Centennial Park should be more meaningful with the story of the memorials located there.

Material for this presentation was sourced from *Riverton and the Icelandic Settlement,* authored by Dr. S.O. Thompson, and *Icelandic River Saga,* authored by Nelson Gerrard.

Poetry

Entanglement[1]

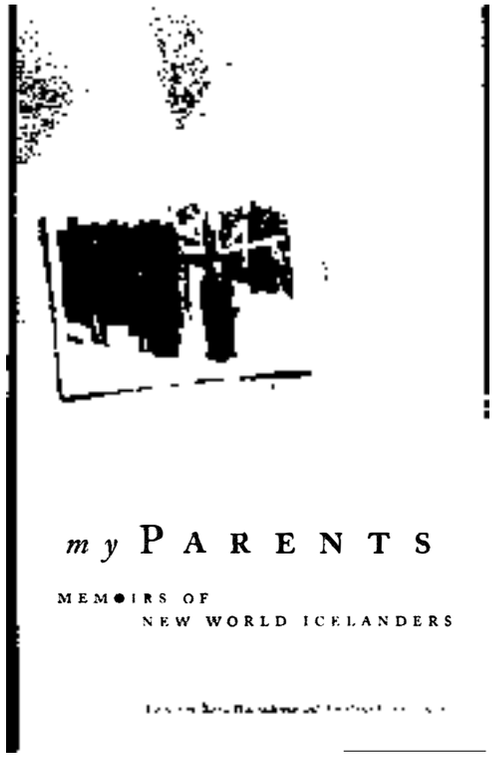
by Kevin Jon Johnson

Surpassing light is our entanglement –
Attraction at a distance slighting space;
My masculine is to your coyness sent
And instantly opposing it is grace,
But harmony exists in opposites,
The yin and yang embodied in our sex,
And we are one though seeming composite
And many worlds in us intersect.
This rag of time tomorrow will be gone,
And we will meet in Glory face to face;
Eternity is neither short nor long
Such quantities dissolve without a trace.
When time has died, then no one needs to mourn:
The bonds of love transcend all changing forms.

[1]Entanglement refers to the verified condition in quantum mechanics where two particles communicate with each other instantaneously. For example, a proton on one side of our galaxy may be entangled with an electron on the opposite side of the galaxy. The proton spins up, and the electron down, but then together in an instance the proton spins down and the electron up. This communication far exceeds the speed of light. Newton noticed such entanglement in gravity "action at a distance," and Niels Bohr firmly entrenched the concept of "complementarity" drawn from the opposite but complementary yin and yang of oriental philosophy.

The concept of complementarity explains the wave and particle duality of light. That "many worlds in us intersect" refers to the multidimensionality of our universe, apparently surpassing the four posited by Einstein in his relativity theory. While the "conceit" of quantum mechanics shows modern innovation, the sonnet form and allusions point back to Elizabethan metaphysical poetry.

Book Reviews



My Parents: Memoirs of New World Icelanders

University of Manitoba Press
2007, Paperback, 126 pps.

Reviewed by E. Leigh Syms

This delightful and fascinating collection of seven reminiscences of family memoirs is an English translation of an earlier compilation of fourteen parental memoirs that were solicited by Finnbogi Guðmundsson (the first Chair of the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature, University of Manitoba) and published in Icelandic in 1956. These are brief, highly personal anecdotes of families immigrating to North America and forging successful lives in a very different "new world." They are introduced by a thought-provoking Preface by Birna Bjarnadóttir, Acting Chair and Head of the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature, University of Manitoba. Birna thanks her many translators and proof-readers for their excellent work as evidenced by the quality and flow of these memoirs.

These biographies are very personal and they vary in approach in historical narrative to personality summaries. Some authors focus on their own lives while others emphasize their parents' early years. They represent initial immigration during 1875 to early 1900, most being in the 1880s. Most of these first generation authors were born between the 1830s and the early 1900s. All of these biographies are fascinating and all are very important accounts of Icelandic Canadian pioneer experiences and the values that children learned at their parents' knees. Their original and personal qualities augment and enrich the more generic and general historic overviews.

One is immediately struck by the "Icelandicness" of this collection of biographies. In addition to the plethora of Icelandic names of the parents, authors and spouses there are the compulsory genealogies that include grandparents, great grandparents and the districts from which they came in Iceland. This is surely one of the very few Canadian personal histories that is laced with excerpts of poetry!

The background of the parents varied greatly. Some had been raised with some wealth and had even studied in Denmark. Others had virtually nothing. All arrived in North America with relatively little, although always with a few books. Many became farmers in North Dakota and

across western Canada and struggled to subsist on very little in the early years. The authors found that their parents did not tend to want to reminisce about hardships in the homeland.

While they are all success stories, they do at times portray a significant amount of pain and hardship. We read that during the 1876 smallpox epidemic a couple was left facing the loss of all seven children and a young women was left dealing with the death of her husband and two young children. These women faced these tragedies with stoic fortitude and community support.

A number of common themes is apparent. The importance of reading, books and education is emphasized throughout. Most evenings particularly during the winter involved reading the sagas, telling stories about the sagas, reading the Bible, reciting poetry and reading from a variety of other literary sources. This rich literary and linguistic heritage was considered a "priceless treasure" (p.38). Several parents were poets and every community had a couple of folk-poets. Singing was enjoyed, particularly Pétursson's Passion Hymns. Most families had members who played musical instruments some of which were brought from Iceland.

One common theme was the strength of the mothers. They are described as providing the foundation of the family. As one noted, "I marvelled at my mother's ability to make do with what she had on hand. It was nothing short of a miracle" (p.106). Mothers are portrayed as calm, selfless and constantly working.

The seven parental memoirs are of Ólafur G. Johnson and Sigþrúður Guðbrandsdóttir by Sigurlína Backman (1896-1985), Stephan G. Stephansson and Helga Jónsdóttir by Rósa Benediktsson (1900-1995), Gunnar Björnsson and Ingibjörg Ágústína Jónsdóttir by Valdimar Björnsson (1906-1987), Guttormur Þorsteinsson and Birgitta Jósepsdóttir by Rev. Guttormur Guttormsson (1880-1956), Jón Guttormsson and Pálína Ketilsdóttir by Guttormur J. Guttormsson (1878-1966), Sigurbjörn Jóhannsson and María Jónsdóttir by Jakobína Johnson (1883-1977) and Eyjólfur Jónsson and Sigurveig Sigurðardóttir by Guðni Júliús Oleson (1882-1957).

It is interesting to note that despite all the hardships these people encountered, they lived to a ripe old age. Most of the parents and authors lived well into their 80s and 90s.

This book is a fascinating read. Those who are interested in their Western Icelandic roots or in pioneer life in general will view it as an exciting and invaluable resource. We are indebted to the various authors for sharing their memories, to Finnbogi for initially coordinating this work, and to Birna, her colleagues and the translators who made this English version available.

Hopefully, at some future date, we can look forward to seeing the translation of the remaining seven biographies.

Xenophobe's Guide to the Icelanders

By Richard Sale
Oval Books, London, 2009

Reviewed by Henry Bjornsson

This is part book report and part resolution of a bit of mystery. First, the book report.

Xenophobe's Guide to the Icelanders is part of a series published by Oval Books in England. A xenophobe is a person with a morbid fear of foreigners or strangers, and the series includes books written for the benefit of such folks, with a focus on countries a xenophobe might particularly fear. Most of the books in the series concern larger countries, like the United States, England, Russia, Germany, Japan, etc. A small nation like Iceland would seem unlikely to arouse much such fear, but the book has been written and is available, and it is certainly entertaining--maybe somebody actually fears the Icelanders! It was written by someone who obviously has spent a fair amount of time in Iceland.

This is the kind of travel book that is not afraid to step on a few toes, so it includes some fairly barbed references to drinking habits, some of the more exotic foods, and the huldufolk, among other aspects of Icelandic life a foreigner might find different from home. It also includes a critical look at the Icelandic economy and factors leading to last year's financial crash.

This is a short book of 86 pages. I found it a fun read, but some Icelanders and others protective of Icelandic sensibilities may object to some of its observations. On the last page, the author states, making reference to himself: "He would like to thank several Icelandic friends for their (sometimes inadvertent) assistance with this guide. Sadly, none of them is willing to be identified."

So much for the book report, now for the mystery. In the last section of the book is a poem called "The Icelandic Language," which is called a poem in Icelandic by William Jon Holm. The poem, obviously never written "in Icelandic," is a version of one of Bill Holm's poems, leading to the following email correspondence between me and Oval Books:

To Oval Books (re: Xenophobe's Guide to the Icelanders)
July 31, 2009

I am a second generation Icelandic American; my father was born there, as were my mother's parents. I do not speak Icelandic, and had never made a visit until last year, when I finally made it at age 75. It is a wonderful and somewhat puzzling place. Your observations and mine are quite similar. I thoroughly enjoyed your book, and will recommend it to others.

In the last section of the book, entitled "Language and Ideas," you include "The Icelandic Language," attributed to William Jon Holm, which you describe as "A poem in Icelandic." Bill Holm was not an Icelander, nor did he, to my knowledge, ever write a poem in Icelandic--he knew some of the language, but was not a master of it. He was, like me, an American of 100% Icelandic ancestry, a Minnesotan who never visited Iceland or learned the language at all until he was an adult. Also, he wrote as Bill Holm, not William Jon Holm.

He wrote a poem called "The Icelandic Language," but in English, and included it in The Dead Get By With Everything, a collection of poetry published in 1991 by Milkweed Editions of Minneapolis. It is close to the one you have, but not the same, and I have a suspicion that what you used is an English translation from the Icelandic version, which was itself a translation from English (his work is widely translated and published in Iceland), by someone who did not know of the poem's American origin. Here is the version in The Dead Get By With Everything:

The Icelandic Language
In this language, no industrial revolution:
no pasteurized milk, no oxygen, no telephone;
only sheep, fish, horses, water falling.
The middle class can hardly speak it.

In this language, no flush toilet; you stumble
Through dark and rain with a handful of rags.
The door groans; the old smell comes
up from under the earth to meet you.

But this language believes in ghosts;
chairs rock by themselves under the lamp; horses
neigh inside an empty gully, nothing
at the bottom but moonlight and black rocks.

The woman with marble hands whispers
this language to you in your sleep; faces
come to the window and sing rhymes; old ladies
wind long hair, hum, tat, fold jam inside pancakes.

In this language you can't chit-chat
holding a highball in your hand, can't
even be polite. Once the sentence starts its course,
all your grief and failure come clear at last.

Old inflections move from case to case,
gender to gender, softening consonants, darkening
vowels, till they sound like the sea moving
icebergs back and forth in its mouth. *

Bill published a fair number of books of poetry and essays. The last was The Windows of Brimnes, published in 2007, also by Milkweed Editions. Brimnes is a small house he owned in Hofsos, a fishing village in the north, on the Skagafjord, about 50 miles south of the Arctic Circle. I highly recommend this book of essays. For a number of years he conducted writing workshops at Hofsos. I had the pleasure of participating in one of these the first week in June, last year. As it turned out, it was the last. He died unexpectedly last February. I am happy that, in the fall of 2008, in the last year of his life, he received the McKnight Foundation award of $50,000 as Minnesota's Distinguished Artist for 2008.

- Henry Bjornsson

Oval Books reply, July 31, 2009

Dear Mr Bjornsson

Thank you very much indeed for your comments.

I am fascinated by your information and most grateful to you for taking the trouble to write at length about Bill Holm's poem. I have to say that he did not mention that he was American when we spoke. I had, of course, to get his permission not only to use the poem in our guide, but also to obtain his assent to use the version that appears in it. Until the latest (new edition) of the guide, we acknowledged the Milkweed Edition in every printing of the book (we also had to get their permission to use the poem, despite it being a different version). I feel badly that it was left out of this edition and will takes steps to reinstate it the next time it is printed.

The published version was not known to me at the time that I heard 'ours' recited at an awards' ceremony by the actress Sean Phillips who had been given it by him many years before. I was deeply affected by it and to procure a copy I began by contacting her - quite tricky since anyone of her profession is fiercely guarded by agents, etc. When I did at last make contact it transpired that she had long since lost touch with him. So I then got in touch Iceland's national newspaper asking if they would place an advertisement and how much it would cost. I was informed that it would have to be in Icelandic. So I wrote to an Icelandic publisher to ask they would kindly translate an advertisement I had drafted and place it in Morgunblaðið. The advertisement simply asked if anyone knew of the whereabouts of 'the poet Jon Holm' because this was the name Ms Phillips had given me. Quite remarkably a few weeks later someone responded. Somehow or another an Icelandic radio station got wind of this story and the result was a late night three-way conversation on a radio programme between myself, Bill Holm and the publisher.

You may be intrigued to hear that it is entirely due to the poem that we brought this nation into our series of Xenophobe's® Guides and set out to find a writer for it. For me it is a truly wonderful piece of work, in both versions. I am tempted to change over to the one you quote but, largely due to the extraordinary nature of its discovery I hope you do not mind if we continue with the one I am so fond of, and deeply moved by. However, I shall gladly correct the identity of the author to 'Bill Holm' since you say that this is the name under which he wrote.

I also look forward to reading other works by him and much appreciate your recommending his essays. He sounded like a delightful person and I am sorry that I did not have the pleasure of meeting him.

Thank you again for your most informative and helpful letter which was a joy to receive since it reminded me of this serendipitous episode in which some verses overheard heard when flicking channels on television resulted in such a rewarding outcome.

With kindest regards
- Anne Tauté, Series Editor Oval Books

Reply to Oval Books, Aug. 2, 2009

Dear Ms. Tauté--

Thank you so much for your prompt response. Obviously I was incorrect in assuming that the poem you printed was a translation of a translation, but that instead it was a different, probably earlier, version that Bill had given to Sean Phillips. I am particularly pleased to hear that it was this poem that caused Oval Books to publish the book in the first place. He would have chuckled and twinkled if he had known.

To say that someone is a "force of nature" is a cliché, of course, but it is hard to describe Bill without in some way creating such a mental assessment of him. He was a huge man, six and a half feet tall and always overweight, bright eyed, red faced and white bearded, the perfect Santa, with a voice that was not always loud, but which had enough natural volume when he needed it to make electronic amplification totally unnecessary. He was a fine classical pianist and harpsichordist with musical tastes that ran heavily to Bach, although in Iceland last summer he talked about a newfound appreciation for Chopin. He also played a lot of jazz, particularly Scott Joplin's ragtime classics. He quit singing publicly a few years ago, but for most of his life he was known for his tenor voice. He had a baby grand piano and a harpsichord in his home in Minneota, Minnesota, where he lived most of the year. In Brimnes, his little house in Iceland, where he spent a few weeks each year, he had a small Yamaha piano which he felt provided the best music

quality consistent with his limited space. He played every day. His published work was heavily autobiographical, and anyone who reads his poems or essays ends up knowing a lot about Bill Holm. In 1996 Milkweed published The Heart Can Be Filled Anywhere on Earth: Minneota, Minnesota, essays about his close connection to the prairie farm community of his childhood, and where he lived in his later years. In 2000 came Eccentric Islands--Travels Real and Imaginary, in which he starts with his name, Holm, which means island, and writes chapters relating to several islands, including himself, with two chapters on Iceland, comparing his impressions and experiences in 1979 with those in 1999, when the country had changed a great deal. Other books include Coming Home Crazy, published in 1990, based on his experience teaching English in a Chinese university in the 1980s, and Boxelder Bug Variations, a one-of-a-kind "Meditation on an Idea in Language and Music," fun and a little nutty.

His poetry is often funny, always graceful and meaningful. I expect there will be at least one posthumous book. His literary heroes were Whitman and Mark Twain, especially Whitman.

I live in Seattle, Washington. While composing this email my radio, in the background, dropped the name Bill Holm into my consciousness. The announcement said that this afternoon there will be a recorded interview with Bill by Rick Steves, who writes travel books and runs a travel agency, about Eccentric Islands. Certainly an odd coincidence. I will be sure to tune in.

There is a lot on the internet about him. I suggest that you type "Bill Holm Iceland" or "Bill Holm Minnesota" into your browser to avoid results for other Bill Holms, including a well-known Seattle man who is an authority on Native American art. All his books are readily available through internet bookstores.

I admit to being a bit of a missionary for his work. I have no doubt that you will find further exposure to it rewarding.

- Henry Bjornsson

*Bill Holm, "The Icelandic Language" in The Dead Get By With Everything (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1990). Copyright © 1990 by Bill Holm. Reprinted with permission from Milkweed Editions

Compare the version in The Xenophobe's Guide:

In an airconditioned room you cannot understand
the grammar of this language,
The whirring machine drowns out the soft vowels,
But you can hear these vowels in the mountain wind
And in heavy seas breaking over the hull of a small
boat.
Old ladies can wind their long hair in this language
And can hum, and knit, and make pancakes.
But you cannot have a cocktail party in this
language
And say witty things with a drink in
your hand.
You must sit down to speak this language,
It is so heavy you can't be polite or chatter in it.
For once you have begun a sentence, the whole
course of your life is set up before you,
Every foolish mistake is clear, every failure, every
grief,
Moving around the inflections from case to case
and gender to gender,
The vowels changing and darkening, the consonants
softening on the tongue
Till they are the sound of a gull's wings fluttering
As he flies out of the wake of a small boat drifting
out to open water.

Corrections

Greetings,
I thoroughly enjoy the magazine. In the last issue, the article on Icelandic teachers, my mother was one of the first to teach in Winnipeg. Her name was Kirstin Hermann, Kristin as noted in the article. Keep up the good work.
- Mike (Magnus) Olafson

Dear Lorna,
Much as I hate to be a critic and even though it is a matter that only I care about I would like to set a couple of things straight in the fine article about Margret Benedictsson in the last issue. The article stated "Margret left Winnipeg in 1913 to go and live with her daughter who was married and living in Washington State. Her son stayed behind with his father in Winnipeg." This is completely false and gives the impression that she spent her remaining days (43 years!) living with her married daughter. The facts are much more interesting.

She came to Seattle, Washington in 1912 with my father Ingersoll who was 12 years old. Her daughter Helen remained in Manitoba and was not married at that time. She made her living selling insurance for New York Life. She travelled the Pacific Northwest selling insurance to Icelanders and writing articles. Eventually she did live with her daughter who was then married and living in Anacortes. Many years of retirement were spent in Blaine, Washington. She died in Anacortes but she is buried in the family plot in Hillsdale Cemetery, Blaine, Washington.
- Sincerely, Norma Helen Benedictson Thomasson

Omission from Vol 62#3, the Contributors page:
Gudrun (Vi) Hilton was born in Churchbridge, SK. While in Victoria she belonged to their INL. Now she enjoys working in the Icelandic community in Winnipeg. She is a member of Fron, worker at Logberg Heimskringla and is often a tour director for those interested in "Icelandic Winnipeg."

Back row left to right: Signy McInnis, baby Aleesha Harms, Melvin McInnis, Inga Melvinsdottir. Front row: Thora McInnis and Langamma Hrund Skulason. This is the cutline that should have run under the photo in Volume 62, #3.

Contributors

HENRY BJORNSSON is 76 years old, retired, lives in Seattle WA. His father, Bjorn (Barney) Bjornsson, was born in Iceland, grew up in Manitoba, and homesteaded in the Argyle District near Glenboro before moving to Seattle in the 1920s. His mother, the former Clara Thorbergson, was born in Winnipeg, where she lived until she and Bjorn were married in 1930. In 1959 Henry married Lorraine Vopnfjord of Winnipeg, daughter of Axel Vopnfjord, long-time Editor-in-Chief of the Icelandic Canadian.

LEIGH SYMS is a retired archaeologist who is currently working on a travelling exhibit for The Manitoba Museum entitled "First Nations as First Farmers." For relaxation he and his Icelandic Canadian wife enjoy their cottage, Litlamörk, in Gimli.

IRVIN OLAFSON's first language was Icelandic as he grew up strongly influenced by his heritage. He is married to Lois Sigurdson and has 5 children. In 2000, Olafur Ragnar Grimsson bestowed the honour of the Order of the Falcon to him for his cultural contributions to the Canadian Icelandic community.

HARLEY SIGURDUR JONASSON grew up in Riverton at Engimyri. His parents were Johannes Hafsteinn and Jonina Jonasson. He is the Director of Crown Lands and Geomatics with the Manitoba Department of Conservation. He and his wife Sharon (Oddleifson) have three children. He has been involved with many organizations, serving as President of the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba; Logberg-Heimskringla and Prairie Vikings. He has also sat on various boards including the INL of NA, Canada Iceland Foundation, United Icelandic Appeal and the Gimli Film Festival.

GLENN SIGURDSON Q.C., the son of Stefan and Sylvia Sigurdson of Riverton, is a former President of the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba. Glenn, a founding partner of the prominent Winnipeg law firm, Taylor McCaffery relocated to Vancouver in 1989 where he has evolved a career as a mediator and facilitator of complex challenges, often involving land, resources and the environment. He enjoys an international reputation as a leader and teacher in his field.

KEITH ELIASSON has lived in Riverton all his life. Keith was a teacher in Arborg for three years prior to transferring to Riverton. He was principal of Riverton Collegiate from 1970 to 1990. Following that, he worked as a Continuing Education Coordinator and teacher-manager of the Evergreen Intervention Centre. Keith and his wife Gail live at Fljótsbakki along the Icelandic River.

JO-ANNE WEIR is a high school Special Educator who splits her time between her home in Winnipeg and her family cottage in Arnes, Manitoba.

SOLLI SIGURDSON was born and raised in Riverton and grew up in the fishing business on Lake Winnipeg. He has recently put his Lake Winnipeg Fisherman songs on a CD. He can still be heard singing around the Hnausa Cottages every summer. Still singing, he is retired and living with his wife, Shirley, in Edmonton. (Editor's note: Solli has donated his CD *One More Season* to the New Iceland Museum in Gimli where it is available.)

SIMONE RENEE MORIN is the great granddaughter of Icelandic-Canadian composer and poet, Guttomur J. Guttormsson. Her work has been published in Lögberg-Heimskringla, The Icelandic Canadian, and The Collective Consciousness. Renee was honored to place first in in the Icelandic National League's poetry competition (2007), the Manitoba Icelandic Festival's poetry competition (2006), and their short story contest (1997). Renee's work has also been recognized by The Winnipeg Free Press / Writers' Collective with an honorable mention in poetry (2006) and first place for short story fiction (2007).

BEN HOLYK COLLECTION

The back page

Moving the grain elevator out of Riverton.