ICELANDIC CONNECTION

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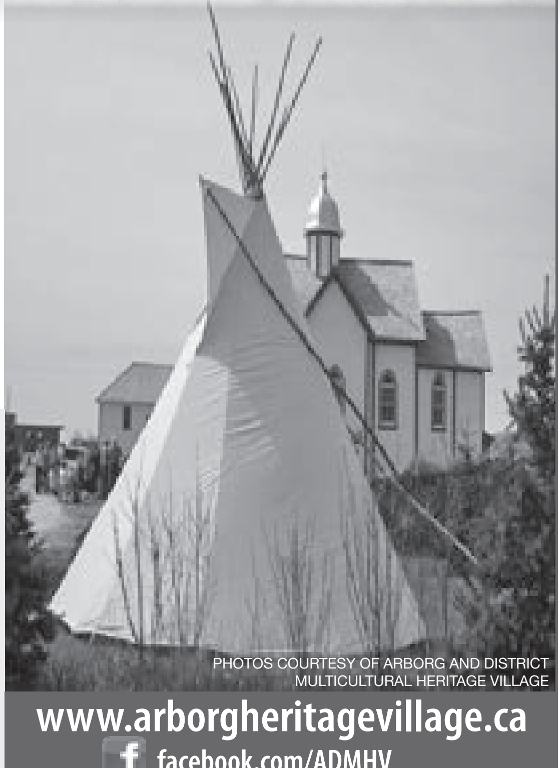

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On the Cover 3

Editorial 4
Kathi Thorarinson Neal

New Year Address by the President of Iceland 6
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson

Single women who emigrated from Iceland to North America,1870–1914: Forgotten women with agency? 12
Sigríður Matthíasdóttir and Þorgerður Einarsdóttir

Norwegian Viking Saga Confirmed 33
Published in www.dailyscandinavian.com, compiled by Editor in Chief Tor Kjolberg. Reprinted with permission.

A hundred words for snow 38
Fred Bjarnason

Poetry
Sailing Away from Iceland 1873 40
By Undína
Translation by Elin Thordarson and Peter John Buchan

Book Reviews
Straight from the heart – a review of 42
Her Darling Boy: The letters of a mother, her beloved son and the heartbreaking cost of Vimy Ridge
Reviewed by Judy Richardson

The Waiting Place 45
Reviewed by Lorna Tergesen

Contributors 47

The Back Page 48

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ON THE COVER

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President of Iceland, Guðni Th. Jóhannesson and First Lady, Eliza Reid

Editorial

Viking Park about to take shape

by Kathi Thorarinson Neal

The Icelandic Festival of Manitoba is pleased to announce that local fundraising efforts have helped enable the creation of Viking Park. Shelmerdine Ltd. has been awarded the contract to build the park and will begin in APril of this year.

In partnership with Betel Home Foundation and the R.M. of Gimli, the Festival and project supporters are creating a park that celebrates Gimli's spirit and will contribute to its growing tourism industry. Showcasing the iconic Viking statue, the park will begin at 2nd Avenue and extend to the foot of Harbour Hill. With its Elf and Troll Storm Gardens and runic puzzles, Viking Park will provide a unique Icelandic experience in Canada.

Although fundraising efforts are ongoing, local enthusiasm for the project has inspired the Festival to move forward with construction. Shelmerdine Ltd. will be onsite later this month to begin work on the park. Viking Park will officially open at noon on Saturday, August 5th during the 128th Islendingadagurinn.

Tim Arnason, a member of the 125 Legacy Project Campaign Cabinet, says the Festival is thrilled by the community's response to the recent Pathway Stones campaign.

"We raised over $400,000 this winter," Arnason says. "About half of these funds came from Gimli residents and the Icelandic/Canadian community. We will all enjoy seeing their personal tributes on the recognition features in the park."

Shelmerdine Ltd. was awarded the contract to create the park earlier this year. While no bids were received from local businesses, Shelmerdine Ltd. will seek to involve the community in a variety of ways, including renting equipment, purchasing materials and hiring workers.

The local schools are commemorating Canada's 150th by authoring unique inscriptions on large pathway stones gifted to them by the Festival.

"Gimli schools are honoured to be given the opportunity to take part in a project that not only commemorates the 150th birthday of Canada, but also pays special tribute to the role Icelandic settlers and Indigenous people played in the development of our community and from which many staff and students owe their ancestry," says Jim Gibbs, Principal, Dr. George Johnson Middle School.

The Festival's fundraising committee has raised $915,000 in cash and pledges and is close to the $1 million required to create the main components of the first phase of the park and replenish the Festival's reserve funds. Interest raised

ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF THE ICELANDIC FESTIVAL OF MANITOBA

through the reserve helps the Festival promote Icelandic culture and heritage by offering family-friendly events at low or no cost during the annual four-day festival.

Because some donations are coming in as pledges over time, the Festival will require bridge funding to build the park which is being provided at very low interest through the generosity of an anonymous donor.

"There is still ample opportunity to contribute to a project that reflects the unique spirit and ancestry of Gimli," Arnason says. Donations raised between now and Islendingadagurinn will be inscribed on recognition pieces in time for the 129th Islendingadagurinn. "We need to raise another $100,000 to complete phase one of the campaign."

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New Year Address by the President of Iceland, Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, 1 January 2017

Fellow Icelanders, Happy New Year!

My wife and I wish you all a prosperous New Year. This is the first time I address you on this day, having served as President of Iceland for five months. Short time though that is, I already have many pleasant memories when I look back and take stock. I should like to thank all those who gave me support and encouragement in my election campaign last summer. I should also like to thank the other candidates in the election, and my predecessors in office, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir and Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, for their goodwill and good advice.

More than seventy years have passed since Iceland founded its republic and elected its head of state. The foundation that was laid down then has stood the test of time. The President of Iceland is expected to be the confidant and representative of all Icelanders, of everyone who lives in this country. No individual is larger than the position itself. Each president in turn has nevertheless formed and fashioned the office of the president in his or her own way, within the framework of the law, tradition and the spirit of the times.

Here at Bessastaðir, most things continue as they were before. Admittedly, as observant television viewers have probably noticed, there is a new painting here on the wall behind me: *Flugþrá* ['Yearning for Flight'] by Jóhannes Kjarval. He painted it over a long period, basing it on the Greek myth of Leda and the Swan. With the title, Kjarval reminds us of man's powerful motivation to go higher and further, driven by vision and ambition.

It is also nice to be able to mention the new look of the presidential website, which has been completely overhauled. This was a remarkable innovation when it was first launched, an impressive news portal which perhaps served as a model to others in the governmental system in some ways. The URL is the same as before (forseti.is); now it is possible to link information there with social media and present news in a more up-to-date manner. Later this year it will also be possible for members of the public to visit Bessastaðir without a special invitation. On the new website it will be possible to register for a guided tour of the presidential residence and learn about this remarkable place and its role in our history and the present day.

Fellow Icelanders: Over the past few months I have sensed how much respect Icelanders bear towards the office of the President of Iceland; how much they appreciate this position of dignity and influence in our constitutional system. At the same time, they expect the president not to look upon himself as being superior to others. Indeed, in Iceland we have seen it as an advantage – and even boasted about it – that the head of state in our republic can go about among other people without needing to be constantly on his guard.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FORSETI.IS

President of Iceland, Guðni Th. Jóhannesson and First Lady, Eliza Reid

In the early nineteenth century, Bjarni Thorarensen was provincial governor *[amtmaður]* of the Northern and Eastern Quarters of Iceland. He was severe in his dealings with those of low social standing, but was also known for his sense of fun. At parties and receptions he often put his uniform aside and enjoyed the freedom that came with changing into ordinary clothes. His attitude towards power and rank can be seen in his well-known poem *Selskapsvísa* ['Keeping Company']:

Ekki er hollt að hafa ból,
hefðar upp á jökultindi,
af því þar er ekkert skjól
uppi, fyrir frosti, snjó né vindi.

[Of pomp and tradition the peak's
no place for a home; up there
Surroundings are barren and bleak:
Windy, cold, snowy and bare.]

It is good for everyone to come to the door as they are dressed. Helgi Björnsson put it this way in a recent popular song:

Vertu þú sjálfur, gerðu það sem þú vilt.
Vertu þú sjálfur, eins og þú ert.
Láttu það flakka, dansaðu í vindinum.
Faðmaðu heiminn, elskaðu.

['Be yourself; do what you want to.
Be yourself, just as you are.
Just let go, dance in the wind.
Hug the world; love!']

"Hug the world; love!" Is this possible, in our day? This past year has brought many people destitution, threats and fear. It was by no means all gloom, though, and other periods can certainly be found in history that have been worse and more dangerous. But many things turned out for the worse, which cast a shadow over positive developments and hopes for a better world. In our continent, acts of terrorism were committed in many places: in Brussels, Nice and most recently in Berlin just a few days before Christmas. In Syria, in Aleppo, innocent children and other ordinary citizens were the victims of hatred and a merciless power game. Savage wars and strife rage in many other places as well, even though they are not under the media spotlight. On the political front too, unexpected changes took place this year that leave the future less certain. Here I am referring to the outcome of the presidential election in the United States and the proposed withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

What lies ahead for Iceland in this turmoil? When the Republic was founded in 1944, Hulda – Unnur Benediktsdóttir Bjarklind – wrote her prize-winning poem *Hver á sér fegra föðurland?* ['Who has a Fairer Native Land?'] The Second World War was at its height. Seamen risked their lives to sail with food supplies (cargoes of fish) to Britain – both my grandfathers worked at sea during the war – and over two hundred Icelanders were killed as a result of the hostilities. Yet we were in a much better position than most other nations, as Unnur noted in her poem:

Með friðsæl býli, ljós og ljóð,
svo langt frá heimsins vígaslóð.

['With light and poems, our homes at peace,
far from a world by war convulsed.']

Her poem continued:

Hver á sér meðal þjóða þjóð,
er þekkir hvorki sverð né blóð
en lifir sæl við ást og óð
og auð, sem friðsæld gaf?

[Among all nations, whose is one
that knows nor arms nor bloodshed,

but lives content with love and song
and riches, gifts of peace?']

Our riches consist not only of peace, which in fact cannot be accorded a value in monetary terms. No; they consist not least in being able to trade freely with other states; in being able to travel and pursue education far and wide; in being able to live abroad and return; and in inviting others to come here and enrich our society. "Iceland's dear homestead" – to quote another phrase from Hulda's superb poem – only has a future in a peaceful world. The foundation of the Republic in 1944 would not have been to much purpose if the world around us had continued to burn up in the fires of armed conflict. Now, as then, we must make our contribution. Now, as then, we are a nation without an army, but we can make our contribution in the struggle against the forces that pose the main threat to peaceful life in our part of the world: the movements dedicated to extremism and hatred that regard nothing as sacred. All the same, we must not be indifferent as to what consequences our anger may have. It is planned to welcome about forty refugees from Syria in the early months of this year. May they succeed in finding a home at peace, far from a world by war convulsed.

For a long time, Icelandic society was homogeneous. I mentioned this in my inaugural speech: that it was not long since practically all Icelanders were members of the National Church of Iceland or of another Christian denomination, were white-skinned, had Icelandic as their mother tongue and bore names that were recognisably Icelandic. That time is now past and will not return. Progress in our day depends on diversity and the movement of people across the globe. At the same time, though, we must always ensure and defend our fundamental values: to have a state based on the rule of law and a welfare society in which human rights are held in high esteem, with gender equality, freedom of belief, freedom in love, freedom of speech and freedom to practise one's culture.

It would also be a wise move to make those who wish to settle here aware of the national characteristics that have helped us to survive in this challenging country of ours: resilience and stubbornness, solidarity when it is needed (and disunity at other times) and that special mixture of a lack of discipline and easy-goingness that both gets us into difficulties and out of them again – and may be summed up in the often-heard expression: "It'll work out all right."

Later this month, my wife and I will make a state visit to Denmark.

Denmark is a country where immigrants, including Icelanders, have set their stamp on the community. Many of them have succeeded in adapting to the local rules and customs, but others have not. Queen Margrethe of Denmark mentioned this in her New Year's address just over a decade ago, shortly after the 'Mohammed cartoons controversy' that arose after the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* printed cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. "No one," said the Queen, "should expect those who move to a new home in a strange land to jettison immediately all their cultural heritage." At the same time, however, she noted that new citizens must respect the laws and values of their new community.

Rev. Stefan Jonasson

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This is a sensible approach.

Back in the nineteenth century, Icelanders were also among the immigrants to Canada, the country where my wife Eliza was born. They were not always welcomed warmly there, any more than were people of other origins. Today, though, immigrant integration is seen has having been highly successful in Canada, where people with dissimilar backgrounds, languages and religions live together in harmony. "We have successfully demonstrated that drawing in people from around the world has been an extraordinary plus, not just to our country and well-being and our sense of selves, but to our economy and to our success as a nation," said the Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, recently – at a meeting with the Lord Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan.

Fellow Icelanders! "Each person fashions his own fortune." This old saying sets out in words how destiny and free will are intertwined; in Icelandic it can also be given another twist, with a change of intonation only, and the addition of a question mark: "Who fashions his own fortune?" A belief in unchangeable destiny can be found in many places in the sagas. "That which is intended will run its course," is an example from *Njáls saga.* The same idea is found in Davíð Stefánsson's poetry, written many centuries later: "We are all born in fate's narrow constraints."

Certainly, our lives are formed by our environment; by decisions taken by others, by events that we cannot foresee. Early last year, I met someone who had been at high school with me. Both of us were very happy with our lives.

The next thing I heard of him was that he was in hospital with his life in the balance after an unexpected health crisis. Fortune deals us very different hands. All the same, we are not the puppets of destiny. "Each man is free to try to save his life while there is the chance," said Kári Sölmundarson to Skarphéðinn in the burning scene in *Njáls saga* before he escaped and ran away. Nearly two centuries ago Sigurður Breiðfjörð composed this quatrain on the subject of free will:

Lát ei kúgast þanka þinn
þegar efni vandast.
Þú skalt fljúga á forlögin,
fella þau og standast.
['Keep your spirit free and straight
as the problems gather round.
I shall fly and tackle Fate,
bring it down and stand my ground.']

My friend recovered from his blow, though he lost some of his strength and spent most of the year in hospital. I made the mistake of asking him whether he now needed a lift to move between floors in his house. "I don't need any damned lift," he said, slowly, emphasising every single word, and added an ironic grimace as Skarphéðinn was famous for doing.

Resilience and stubbornness are virtues. How we react to difficulty can make all the difference, no less than the scope we are given for tackling the whims of fate and inequalities in material wealth. My school friend and I first met in the upper years of senior school, together with the others in our year; all of us were from different backgrounds. Some had rich parents, others did not; some had parents who were prominent figures in society. But background did not make an important difference. The same applied regarding the health services when one of us needed help to save his life. Wealth was not a determining factor as to whether his life could be saved.

I think most Icelanders agree on these fundamental pillars of our society: equal rights to education and to health care, irrespective of one's financial position. There also seems to be general agreement

on the need for Iceland's health and educational systems to be of high quality. If this is ensured, then there will be less risk of people becoming ensnared in poverty and being shackled through life by the circumstances of their birth. Everyone should have the chance to have a go, to excel, to become wealthy, to indulge themselves – but at the same time they should make a fair contribution to the common good. Let us bear in mind, however, that increased inequality leads to dissension and social tension. Humankind will never prosper if one per cent of the people on Earth own as much wealth as the other 99 per cent combined. A financial system in which a tiny handful hold the reins and do not take account of the interests of the majority is a threat. This is something that the US President, Barack Obama, and Stephen Hawking, the British scientist, have called attention to, and it is certainly possible to agree with his view.

The fact is that the strength of a state or a society cannot be measured in terms of economic growth or GDP, in armaments or population size. And even though we applaud Icelanders' achievements in cultural activities, in science and on the sports field, they are not necessary indications of the good points of the society. Its real strength lies in how well sick people, and others in need of care, and people with disabilities or developmental disorders, are looked after. The strength of a society can also be assessed in terms of how it cares for its children, and the quality of life for the elderly in their final years. All of these are measurements of the quality of life, the most important target at the end of the day. In comparison with many other countries, and with our own past, we have reason to be fairly satisfied. But there is always room for improvement.

Fellow Icelanders: Early in this century, Bragi Valdimar Skúlason wrote a little poem about the need to enjoy every instant because we never know what tomorrow will bring:

Líttu sérhvert sólarlag, s
em þitt hinsta væri það.
Því morgni eftir orðinn dag
enginn gengur vísum að.

['Each new sunset treasure,
just as if your last it were.
No one can, at evening's measure,
of the morrow's dawn be sure.']

We can all shape our own lives and our community according to the best of our abilities and aim at fashioning our own fortunes, confident of the support of others if we need it. I wish you all a good and prosperous New Year; a year of good work, sincerity, unity and progress.

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Single women who emigrated from Iceland to North America, 1870–1914

Forgotten women with agency?

by Sigríður Matthíasdóttir and Þorgerður Einarsdóttir

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In the period 1820–1950, about 2.9 million people emigrated from the Nordic countries.[1] This article will consider the unmarried women who emigrated from Iceland to North America in the period 1870–1914.[2] In terms of emigration from Europe, proportionally the greatest number of people came from Ireland, but both Norway and Iceland were not far behind.[3] Those who emigrated from Iceland amounted to 23 per cent of the country's total population.[4] The high proportion of women was a particular feature of Icelandic emigration. As a rule, men had a 'higher rate of emigration than women in the Nordic countries', although there were deviations from this pattern;[5] women, however, accounted for 50.7 per cent of the Icelandic emigrants. According to the Icelandic historians Helgi Skúli Kjartansson and Steinthór Heidarsson, this ratio was 'high and remarkably stable' in comparison to other countries.[6] No figures exist concerning the proportion of unmarried women, but it may be assumed that the number was high, since the general proportion of unmarried women in Icelandic society at this time was large.

Being single was a factor that affected the circumstances and prospects of women who emigrated. The role of married women in their new countries was predetermined to a far larger degree, consisting of care for the home and the family. Single women's prospects, on the other hand, were more precarious, involving greater uncertainty about their livelihoods and future lives.[7] Moreover, it has been suggested that the difference between emigrating when married with children, compared to

emigrating as a single person, was greater for women than for men. 'In a period when the married woman's situation essentially was defined by her position in the family', it can be assumed that the decision to emigrate, like the experience of emigration itself, was different for married women and single women.[8] It must be borne in mind that 'wage work was not central to most white women's lives'. Marriage must therefore be viewed as an 'economic opportunity' for women.[9] The process of migration was also structured by a 'variety of social relationships' such as class and nationality.[10]

The main purpose of this article is twofold. First, in order to provide an overview of the phenomenon, we will briefly discuss existing studies of single women who emigrated to North America. Second, we will argue that a certain group of women has been forgotten, both in the history of Icelandic emigration and in Icelandic historical accounts of women and gender – the single women who emigrated to Canada and the US, who belonged neither to the class of government officials nor to the 'lower classes' or domestic servants.[11] Our aim is to discuss the women's social position and how they are best positioned in historical research. We suggest that these women had a certain 'capital',[12] and that they also had resources, spanning education, a career or an employment history of some kind, or familial associations, for example. Our study is based on historical sources that have thus far been somewhat underutilised in the field of women's and gender history, namely short biographies of emigrants such as those found in the *Vestur-íslenzkar æviskrár* (the biographical records of the 'Western Icelanders', the Icelandic emigrants to North America) and obituaries in the Icelandic newspapers published in Canada, the *Lögberg* and the *Heimskringla*.

Themes in the literature

Iceland

The country that the Icelandic women left behind was traditional, rural society with a very small population. Increases in the population between 1820 and 1880, when it reached 72,445, took place without any fundamental change in the means of livelihood or conditions of labour. Urbanisation was very slow, and over 90 per cent of Icelanders lived by farming.[13] In the mid nineteenth century, there began a period that has been called 'the crisis in rural society'. It became harder for people to set up their own households, and so increasing numbers became household servants for life and never got married.[14] For some, the solution to this crisis was to emigrate to North America, although people who were well-off also emigrated.[15]

Most emigrants from Iceland went to Canada, contrary to the trend in almost all other European countries, from where the majority went to the US. The primary Icelandic settlement was in Manitoba, and soon Winnipeg 'had the largest settlement of Icelanders in America'.[16] They settled in other places in Canada as well. Icelanders also emigrated to the US, and in 1910 a substantial number were living there too.[17]

There was considerable international scholarly interest in emigrant history in the 1960s and 1970s, characterised by economic and social approaches based on quantitative analyses.[18] One of the Icelandic outcomes of this movement was the publication in 1983 of *A Record of Icelandic Emigrants 1870–1914* by the Icelandic historian Júníus H. Kristinsson.[19] The *Record* provides a summary of the names of those who emigrated, along with their sex, age, place in their family, and the year they left.[20] There has also been important research on this period by the Icelandic historian Helgi Skúli Kjartansson. This, together with the *Record,*

formed part of a Nordic research project on emigration from the Scandinavian countries to North America.[21]

Such quantitative methods are now thought by many scholars to be too narrow. The Norwegian historian Odd S. Lovoll, for example, writes that the 'human factor may easily disappear in a macro view of this historical phenomenon and in its statistical dimensions'.[22] This also means that it is important to balance the general ideas found in material from official sources with individual experiences and stories.[23] The Icelandic historian Vilhelm Vilhelmsson has recently contended that the past decade has seen a shift in research on Icelandic emigration to North America. He writes that the lives of the emigrants, 'their identities and myth-making have been scrutinized from a considerably more critical angle' than had been previously the case.[24]

Women

Women and emigration from the Nordic countries seem to be a rather under-researched field. The historian Lars Olsson wrote in 2001 that the history 'surrounding the Swedish men and women who settled in America' had tended to be written according to 'an international pattern of interpretation'.[25] Citing the sociologist Kathie Friedman-Kasaba, he stated that this was where 'largely male scholars' treated the 'category of "woman" as passive followers of "the real migrant", the male labour migrant or political exile.'[26] This is in line with the historiography of Icelandic emigration. The historian Laurie K. Bertram pointed out the contradiction in the fact that 'Icelandic Canadian historiography generally prides itself on Iceland's history of comparatively progressive property and political rights for women', but at the same time, important female figures 'occupy the outskirts of mainstream history and commemoration'. This is true, for example, of Salome Halldorson (1887–1970), who served in the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba from 1936 to 1941 and who was 'one of the foremost female leaders in the Icelandic Canadian community in Manitoba during the 1930s and '40s along with 'her other well-known female contemporaries'.[27]

However, according to the Norwegian historian Terje Mikael Hasle Joranger, changes are now taking place. Discussing research on Norwegian emigration, Joranger claims that 'Women's gender history, which has been largely neglected in former studies, in recent years has acquired a more prominent place in immigration and ethnic studies.'[28] He specifically refers to the book *Norwegian American Women*, published in 2011, the sole subject of which is the participation by Norwegian women in emigration, and their role in their new society.

The historian Ann-Sofie Ohlander has conducted pioneering work on the emigration of women from Sweden. She writes that in the period 1851–1908, the gender proportions were 833 women for every 1,000 men who emigrated. Looking at the proportion of single emigrant women to single emigrant men, it rose dramatically during this period. In 1851–1860, 462 women in this category emigrated from Sweden, against every 1,000 men. In 1891–1900, the number of women had risen to 981; thus, their numbers were almost equal.[29]

The higher rates of family-based emigration from rural areas at the beginning of the emigration period changed to increased individual emigration from towns in the 1880s and 1890s. This went hand in hand with increased emigration by women, which was usually higher from towns than from rural areas.[30] Migration within the home country ('step migration'), which was more common among women than men,

explains this to some extent. Women tended to move to larger cities to find work before making the jump overseas.[31] The study by Icelandic historian Ólöf Gardarsdóttir on the connection between the growth of coastal villages in Iceland and emigration to North America indicates that this pattern can be found in Iceland as well.[32]

Single women's agency

The historian Joy K. Lintelman sheds important light on the situation of single women who emigrated from Sweden to North America. She has examined letters they wrote home, and found that since they had more time to correspond, they wrote more about 'public issues', in addition to personal ones, than married women did.[33] Her study provides an interesting insight into the agency of single women. Lintelman has written about a particular Swedish woman, Mina Anderson, who emigrated when young and single, and whose memoirs became one of the sources for Vilhelm Moberg's novels.[34] She discusses the widespread influence of Kristina Nilsson in Moberg's novel about Swedish female emigrants, as a woman who did not want to leave her country, never adapted, and who suffered from 'homesickness conquered only in death'. According to Lintelman, this 'Kristina archetype' ignores 'the majority of Swedish emigrant women, like Mina, who made their own decisions to leave' and 'achieved many of the goals they had set for themselves in immigrating'.[35]

The historian Lars Olsson has also written about a young emigrant woman, Evelina Johansdotter, who was in constant negotiation with her surroundings. In addition to the obvious difficulties facing a young, working emigrant, he also describes her as an agent who actively assessed the advantages and disadvantages of the possibilities open to her.[36] This leads to another important theme in the research on emigration by single women from the Nordic countries, which at the same time sheds light on their agency in their work and working conditions. Being a maid or 'in service' was by far the commonest occupation. In 1900, 61.5 per cent of women in the US who had been born in Sweden gave it as their occupation,37 a proportion that seems to be in line with the situation in Canada concerning Scandinavian women in general. The historian Eva St Jean writes that according to 'Census Canada, in 1931 58 per cent of Scandinavian female workers were employed in the service industry, mostly in domestic service, but also in restaurants or boarding houses'.[38]

The historian Lars Ljungmark studied the structure of the population of the city of Winnipeg in Canada over a twenty-year period, from 1881 to 1901, by country of birth. He found that 90 per cent of Icelandic women (86 women in total) were 'unmarried and a large majority of them served in a family'.[39] Among the Icelandic women in Canada, Ljungmark found a high proportion of single women working as maids.

Women's work 'existed within a gendered space'.[40] Women's opportunities for waged work were limited. Paid labour performed by white women in British Columbia was 'largely confined to a handful of characteristically female areas'.[41] These varied in content and status. Women, for example, could work as laundresses and in restaurants, or be midwives or teachers, this last being the primary professional occupation open to women in the period between 1840 and 1920.[42]

A forgotten stratum of women – historical sources

The fact that relatively little has been written about emigration from Iceland and the Nordic countries from a gendered point

of view makes it important to consider the questions of how to approach the project, the methodology to apply, and which sources to use, and more specifically the types of sources available for the theme, the sort of evidence they provide, and what methods should be used to analyse them.[43] This is all the more necessary because the source material for emigration is vast, including material produced on both sides of the Atlantic, including newspapers, magazines, biographies, written local tales of various kinds, parish registers, censuses, immigration records, emigrants' letters home, and photographs of the emigrants. These sources provide very different and varied types of information and insight. One task at hand has been to establish the fundamental gendered characteristics of these sources. It seems, for example, that the majority of biographies and letters sent home were written by men.[44] Moreover, an important concern has been to obtain a qualitative insight into the lives of single emigrant women, while at the same time establishing a structural overview of their social position. Gender as a factor easily disappears in the traditional consideration of these sources. In order to balance the traditional view, we thus attempt to bring women's experiences and stories to the fore. Guided by questions such as those outlined above, we have focused on primary sources that we would argue should be examined more closely in research into the history of women and gender: short biographies, such as those to be found in the *Vestur-íslenskar æviskrár* and newspaper obituaries. The *Vestur-íslenskar æviskrár* contains short biographies of a considerable number of single women who emigrated to North America. We have identified women in the *Vestur-íslenskar æviskrár* who were unmarried and who provided for themselves, at least for some period after their arrival in Canada or the US.[45] Thus far, we have gone through the first volume and have not yet found any women who worked as domestic servants throughout their lives, despite the large number of female domestics. They seem to be largely invisible in the sources used in this project, although not entirely so in the history of women and gender, as some limited research has been done on them.[46] On the other hand, it is important to recognise that these women did not generally belong to the highest layers of Icelandic society and so were not part of the stratum of Icelandic government officials. This observation also applies to the Icelandic Canadian newspapers that carried obituaries of Icelandic immigrants, including a number for women who were unmarried when they emigrated from Iceland.[47]

These examples, which will be discussed further below, seem to present a picture of women that has not been given prominence within the field of women's history in Iceland. We contend that they show a certain variety in women's circumstances and modes of life, as well as a form of agency or scope for influencing their own destiny. The *Vestur-íslenskar æviskrár* and the obituaries contain examples of women who learned a trade in order to support themselves before they went to Canada, or after their arrival, and who especially trained as seamstresses. Then there is an example of a woman who was educated at the Women's School in Reykjavík and who supported herself in Canada for some time by teaching.[48] There are also women who pursued an entrepreneurial path, women who led a mobile life travelling between countries, women who were obviously endowed with some extraordinary personal qualities, and, not least, women who could count on good relations or contacts. Thus, members of the forgotten stratum of women become visible in their own right, and not simply in the shadow cast by their

men, whether their husbands, their fathers, or others.

Theoretical approach

As our aim is to explore the social and cultural status of the 'forgotten women' – the single Icelandic women who emigrated to North America in 1870–1914 – we consider their background, education, relationships, and career or employment history. We attempt to position single Icelandic women who emigrated within the field of women's and gender history, to analyse and understand these sources, and to create a place for them in a gendered theoretical framework. The work of the historian Joan Wallach Scott is an important point of departure. In the words of the historian Betty A. Bergland, it 'lays out theoretical framework for analyzing how gender shapes both history and historical writing'.[49] Scott views the concept of gender as a constituent element of social relationships between men and women and as the primary symbol of power relationships. Gender shapes the identity of men and women, which in turn shapes and reflects society. History is thus enacted in the field of gender.[50]

Historical sources such as those we have discussed here can be described as 'written narratives based on experience'. In their book on biographical meanings in life narratives, the ethnologist Lena Marander-Eklund and the historian Ann-Catrin Östman write that they use the word 'biographical' to signify 'biographies written by others as well as personally written life narratives and memoirs'.[51] They particularly emphasise two points of view. First, they stress the normative aspect of 'biographisation'. The lines along which 'a life is narrated and renarrated' are often determined or already given, and thus 'biographisation' is strongly connected to the opinions of the time regarding 'how a life should be lived and how it should be narrated.' This means that there is a dimension of power to the biographical narrative.[52] Second, biography is also a personally 'meaningful act'. To 'biographise' is to negotiate one's position in society and to take upon oneself both agency and subjectivity.[53]

These two dimensions apply to the sources used in our study, since they certainly took shape within a normative framework and are hence of interest to our theoretical approach. 'What is highlighted' in an obituary 'and what is omitted tells us not only what the author of the obituary considered important about the individuals but also what a particular culture values.'[54] However, the form of the obituaries and the short biographies also offers the opportunity to write about the women's personal qualities and achievements. Hence, these sources are a site where it is possible to attribute agency and subjectivity to the individual. It is indeed possible to highlight women's diverse capacities, and it is clear that the obituarists and biographers often used this opportunity to depict the women's agency within the discursive framework that was open to them.[55]

Furthermore, it is important to refer to theories about life stories and their various cultural and social functions.[56] Life stories are 'interpreted history', and their purpose is to constitute the individual, as emphasised by the ethnologist Birgitta Svensson. It is 'the way in which the life is remembered and narrated that will form the biography'. This means that 'the biographic memory and the life story do not necessarily need to be the same as the lived life. On the other hand they form a surface knowledge, a story shaped in order to describe life as we ourselves or someone else wanted to formulate it.'[57] Life stories thus do not directly reflect the 'lived life' of the subject that they are written about, but they do 'play a role through *structuring the experience* created by the lived life'. As

the historian Britt Liljewall, a life story helps in 'formulating … and evaluating *new identities and roles*, and these are needed in a society under change'.[58]

By this approach, we attempt to move beyond the binary view of emigration as either liberation or exploitation, since we believe it to be a bit of both. Ann-Sofie Ohlander emphasises the liberating aspect of emigration and freedom from patriarchal oppression in the home country, something that maids in particular suffered from. Emigration was therefore an 'act of freedom' and 'the relative improvements they experienced seems clearly to have been greater than those which men experienced.'[59]

The observation that emigration resulted in 'relative improvements' seems to be important in terms of the emigration of single Icelandic women. Historians have written about the strict social ties that individuals were subject to in rural Icelandic society.[60] One example of such 'ties', or even the oppression of individuals, was the legislation on the position of servants 'that made it obligatory for all persons over the age of 16 not living in households of their own, or residing in a household of their parents, to seek positions as servants … in other households'.[61] This has been referred to *vistarband* in Icelandic or 'labour bondage'.[62] It is necessary to bear these conditions in mind when assessing the changes in the women's situation.

It is also important to take into account research on the specific life conditions of women in Iceland. For instance, the fact that women formed the majority of the population and that a 'high percentage of women in nineteenth century Iceland never married'.[63] Women were more likely to remain household servants for life than men were. Moreover, research findings reveal the subjugation of female servants in Iceland and the immense difference in the economic and social positions of male and female household servants.[64] This is important when comparing the lives of women in Iceland to the lives of women in a similar position in North America. Icelandic researchers have claimed that 'wages were generally better in Canada, especially for women'.[65] However, there was also another side to the coin. Research has emphasised that the emigrant women in North America entered a complex society with clear hierarchies based, for example, on ethnicity and race.[66] Accordingly, some women seem to have suffered from exploitation in their new country. A question remains regarding how to treat this theme without assuming that women were in possession of agency that they did not actually have. These points of view (i.e. one that highlights 'liberation' and one that emphasises 'exploitation') are both therefore useful.

We seek to develop 'a nuanced … understanding of women's subjection' and not to assume beforehand some 'overarching or absolute power of men over women, irrespective of place and time.' The differentiation of the concept of power is important, as is the tracing of its origins. It is necessary to make men's dominance visible without losing sight of women's agency.[67] In the context of our theme, this means accounting for the possibility that women seemingly had to be actors in their own lives and to influence their surroundings.

Bourdieu's concept of capital, as developed by the sociologist Beverly Skeggs, provides an opportunity to conceptualise and contextualise the subjectivities and the agency of single Icelandic emigrant women.[68] Skeggs elaborates on Bourdieu's capital to encompass both structural aspects of class formation and the 'micropolitics of power'.[69] While economic capital is a self-evident term, social capital in Bourdieu's terminology comprises 'resources based on connections and group membership …

generated through relationships' such as family ties or 'knowing the right people'.[70] Social capital in terms of family relations is a key aspect here as family ties were, and are, very strong in Iceland and for single women they could invoke strength based on social networks and relationships that can be converted into social status and, hence, symbolic capital. For single Icelandic women who emigrated, social capital was of importance for social promotion, not least being well connected in terms of kinship and family background.[71]

Education, cultural skills including literacy, a talent in verse craft or the authorship of books earned people a certain respect in Iceland.[72] Different forms of capital can be transformed into symbolic capital if they are 'perceived and recognized as legitimate'.[73] Symbolic capital is a 'non-material: an attribute, a faculty, a position or a possession which others within the social space recognize as having value'.[74] People attain symbolic capital when the different forms of capital gain legitimacy and lend acknowledgement and respect to the holder. In the competition for status and power, people use whatever forms of capital they possess and have the opportunity to exercise.[75] All varieties of capital are context-specific and time-specific, have a relational character, and cannot been seen in isolation from one another. The overall configuration of different types of capital makes up the totality of the social position and resources that the individual manages to acquire and exercise.[76] The value of capital is never a given, since the hierarchy observed and the respect shown are subject to specific definitions. Gender power relations serve to condition how and what attributes are acknowledged in women and men, and therefore women and men can rarely compete for power and respect on the same grounds.

Another dimension to social capital in this respect is nationality and ethnicity, and hence the concept of transnationalism is important.[77] Instead of regarding the nation-state as the 'natural unit for research', we need to focus on how people or individuals experience themselves as being a part of two nation-states at the same time. Research on Icelandic emigrants to North America has to take this into account, as the Icelandic historian Ólafur Arnar Sveinsson has observed.[78] The 'Western Icelandic' construction of nationalist ideas is a prime example of a theme in which the transnationalist approach is vital. The immigrants in general 'were arriving at a moment when talk of nationalism and national identity was rife in Europe' and they carried diverse nationalistic affiliations with them.[79] A key theme in Icelandic national ideology, for example, was the 'resurrection' of the 'true Icelandic qualities' of the Golden Age.[80] The emigration of Icelanders to North America was embedded in such ideas.[81] Clearly, there was a strong connection between nationalist ideas and manliness.[82] As Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta and Frances Swyripa write, the immigrant women's lives were marked by complexities, 'conflicts and tensions that … [they] experienced inside their families, within their ethnic communities, and in their relations with society at large.'[83] However, there is reason to believe that women who were able to position themselves favourably within the Icelandic Canadian ethnic ideology also derived certain benefits from their 'Icelandicness', for example, in form of social status within their community. A mastery of Icelandic nationality's main symbols, such as the written language, was an asset for both men and women. We can assume that the self-esteem and values of the single Icelandic women who emigrated, along with how they behaved as they went through life, would have depended on their specific Icelandic cultural capital.[84] Many

of them managed to make use of their nationality and origin in their new country (through their mastery of the Icelandic language, for example).

Against this background, we would argue that one group of women has slipped out of sight in the traditional historical treatment and in modern women's and gender history. They were not pioneers in any traditional sense, nor were they women's rights activists. They did not belong to the upper layers of society, and they were not related to significant historical male figures, who could have granted them historical status of, for example, devoted wife (like Ingibjörg Einarsdóttir, 1804–1879, the wife of the Icelandic national hero, Jón Sigurdsson). They were not particularly determined or outstanding, nor were they able to command respect in the same way as men (like Halldóra Gudbrandsdóttir, 1573–1658, the daughter of Bishop Gudbrandur Thorláksson) or they were daughters who met a tragic end (like Ragnheidur Brynjólfsdóttir, *c.*1641–1663, the daughter of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson). They did not go down in history as unique women with traditionally male attributes (like Thurídur Chairman, 1777–1863, the most famous fisherwoman in Iceland's history), they were not poetesses (like Vatnsenda-Rósa, 1795–1855), and they did not figure in the Icelandic sagas (like, for example, Hallgerdur *langbrók* or Bergthóra Skarphédinsdóttir). They did not even belong to the working class, which is certainly a defined group in women's history. This means that we do not remember them as an integral part of the history of the men who have 'shaped history', and it is most likely the explanation for the fact that generally they seem not to be represented by extensive samples of personal letters or diaries. They are a forgotten stratum of women. In the following, we will provide examples that offer an insight into the experiences and stories of individual women from this forgotten stratum. We will discuss seven women, four of whom were young and unmarried when they emigrated, and three who were older and either separated or widowed. Who were they, then, these women and what do the historical sources tell us, either directly or indirectly, about them?

Thematic discussion – examples of women's stories

The sources tell of Gudný Thorvaldsdóttir (1871–1946), a woman who had been in service, working in renowned places in Iceland, and who then moved to Scotland 'where she served in guest houses for eight years'.[85] After that, she moved to Canada and settled in Winnipeg, ending her life in Vancouver where she died 'in the home of C. A. Sutherland, the secretary of the mayor', where she took care of his aged mother.[86] The sources also give an account of the life of Elín Sigurdardóttir Hall (1883–1960), who grew up in Skagafjördur in Northern Iceland, but who moved to Canada in 1900 when she was 17. Once there she began by working in a restaurant, but she went on to train as a seamstress. Never marrying, she supported herself by that profession and was moreover active in an amateur theatre in Winnipeg[87] as well as being a good singer.[88]

Moreover, we learn about Gudrídur Gísladóttir (1837–1918), who was also born in Skagafjördur.[89] She was a woman who was endowed with determination, as most of these women seem to have been, and with good relations. In 1862, Gudrídur married Fridrik Stefánsson, an MP, and they had three children. However, they separated (a fact that is omitted from her obituary), and in 1876 Gudrídur left for Canada with her son, Fridrik, who had been born in 1862.[90] In North America, she 'had

to support herself and her son by her work'. The first years were obviously hard, but things got better for her 'because already at a young age her son Fridrik got a well-paid position and she was able to lead a carefree life after that.'[91]

Kristrún Sveinungadóttir (1835–1917) was another woman who had a rather special history in Canada – and a correspondingly long obituary in the journal *Almanak Ólafs S. Thorgeirssonar*. She was born in Nordur-Thingeyjarsýsla in Northern Iceland. She married in Iceland and had a daughter, but separated from her husband in 1862. Before she left the country, Kristrún was a domestic in a prominent home, that of Arnljótur Ólafsson at Bægisá,[92] a clergyman and MP, and his wife Hólmfrídur Thorsteinsdóttir. Kristrún obviously developed strong ties with the family, and her obituary especially mentions a letter she wrote to her former mistress in 1901, some 25 years after she left Iceland. Hólmfrídur wrote in reply, 'I thank you cordially for a good and lovely letter from August this summer. You cannot believe how glad I was to receive it. I find in it your rare and unbreakable faithfulness to me and my people, the love and loyalty which so few people are endowed with.'[93] Kristrún Sveinungadóttir arrived in Winnipeg in 1876 and started working in a guesthouse, which was only the beginning of an extraordinary future. She became the owner of two building sites and built a house on one of them, according to her obituary becoming only the second Icelander to build a house in Winnipeg. She was also active in various societies; for example, she was involved in receiving and supporting immigrants from Iceland.[94]

All these women took the step of emigrating alone to a new country. They had certain capacities, which are reflected in the way they supported themselves by their trades and even by larger entrepreneurial achievements. Some of them also had artistic talents. Hence, they possessed cultural capital in the form of their varied knowledge and skills. They had social ties in the shape of strong family relations or friendship, which constituted an asset in their new country and which reflected their social capital. We will now present a more detailed account of three women.

Jóhanna Ketilsdóttir, an entrepreneurial, professional woman

On 28 January 1909, *Lögberg* published an obituary of Jóhanna Ketilsdóttir, who 'passed away on November 6th at her home, 691 Victor Street in Winnipeg and was buried on November 9th … in the Brookside cemetery'.[95] Jóhanna Ketilsdóttir

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was born in eastern Iceland, in Bakkagerdi in Borgarfjördur in Nordur-Múlasýsla, in 1856. She was the daughter of Ketill Jónsson and Sesselja Jónsdóttir, who lived there 'for quite a number of years'. According to her obituary, in 1878, when she was 22, she moved with her parents and siblings to the village of Seydisfjördur in eastern Iceland. There she met her future husband, Finnbogi Sigmundsson, 'a skilful carpenter', and in the spring of 1881 they were married.[96] Jóhanna Ketilsdóttir lived in the village of Seydisfjördur for the majority of her adult life, some 25 years, until she emigrated to Canada.[97] The couple had three children, two sons and a daughter. In 1895, Jóhanna lost her husband, while her daughter had died at the age of only 2, 'and that was the sorrow which she remembered most clearly'.[98]

Jóhanna can be described as an entrepreneurial and professional woman who seems to have worked and thus supported herself and her family her whole life. Soon after their marriage, Jóhanna and her husband Finnbogi started a restaurant (*greidasala*), which they ran for some years.[99] Clearly, she was not the legal owner of the restaurant, since married women were not considered financially competent at this time;[100] however, it is equally clear that she ran it along with her husband.

The historian Lori Ann Lahlum, writing about businesses owned by single women, states that 'Married women, too, owned businesses.' She takes the example of a couple, Martin and Gertrude Poyeson, in Idaho who 'owned and operated a boarding house'. The census, however, 'listed Martin as the "boarding house keeper", while Gertrude appeared to not be 'gainfully employed', due to the fact that 'Gendered notions of work and proprietor-ship' influenced how occupational status was recorded in censuses. Still, the success of a business such as a boarding house

Jóhanna Ketilsdóttir with her husband and son. She emigrated as a widow from Seydisfjördur in East Iceland in 1903. The East Iceland Archives (Héradsskjalasafn Austfirdinga).

depended on the 'skill with which the women completed … domestic tasks' such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry. So, the person who 'truly ensured' that the boarding house business of the couple functioned successfully 'was Gertrude Poyeson'.[101]

Jóhanna Ketilsdóttir seems to have been a woman who enjoyed a good social position in Seydisfjördur. According to her obituary, she was seen as being 'in the rank of the foremost women' in the village 'and she participated considerably in the social life'. It is a sign of her standing that, in 1898, when a hospital was founded in the village, Jóhanna was one of the women who applied to be a director of the institution. 'That was regarded as a fine position of responsibility and the result was that her application was accepted.'[102] In the four years that she

spent as the head of the hospital and 'by her work there, she achieved the confidence and respect of the people', not least of the hospital doctor, Kristján Kristjánsson, 'who was cautious and successful' and who 'did not have other people than her to assist him with the anaesthetization of patients who had to be operated on, something which happened regularly'.[103]

However, according to the obituary, it gradually became clear to Jóhanna 'that this work did not suit very well to her health. It seemed to be too difficult for her to be a witness to diseases and death. And in spite of the fact that she felt well in many ways in these years, and took a keen interest in the welfare of the institution … she resigned from her position in the spring 1903.' Then, she began to think about emigrating to Canada. There she had a brother and her son, Sigurdur (who had arrived here two years before), who would receive her. At last she said farewell to everything which she held dear in her native country and moved this same summer here to Winnipeg with her son Guttormur who was 11 years old and lived since then with him and her brother Jón here in the town.[104]

In an advertisement in *Lögberg* in November 1904, a woman by the name of Jóhanna Ketilsdóttir, living at 668 Victor Street, announced her sewing service, 'especially for children and young people, for a fair price', and also that she had space for two young women in need of board and lodging.[105] Jóhanna Ketilsdóttir from Seydisfjördur lived at 691 Victor Street and it is very likely that this was one and the same person.[106] Jóhanna Ketilsdóttir was a woman who was able to act on her own initiative to carve out possibilities and support herself and her family throughout her life. She was respected and acknowledged in Iceland before she emigrated and, hence, had cultural capital that facilitated her settlement in a new country.

Anna Sigrídur Gudmundsdóttir Sigbjörnsson, a cultured woman with connections

Anna Sigrídur Gudmundsdóttir Sigbjörnsson 'passed away in her home near Leslie, Sask., April 24th'. She had been born in 1876 in Grund in Jökuldalur in Nordur-Múlasýsla. Her parents were Gudmundur Jónsson, of the Hauksstadir and Hróaldsstadir family in the Vopnafjördur, and Anna Margrét Thorsteinsdóttir, of the Melar family in Fljótsdalur. Anna was 'with her parents' until she was 18. After that, she was 'more or less away from home for long periods', and one winter she stayed in Reykjavík, learning to be a seamstress. Seamstresses were a new class of professional women who appeared in Iceland around 1860, and learning a trade like sewing was certainly a step towards increased autonomy.[107] In spring 1903, Anna moved 'to America' with her sister, Jóna, where they settled in Winnipeg. She was then 27. In the winter 1904–1905, she married Sigbjörn Sigbjörnsson from Vopnafjördur in Iceland, who survived her. 'They lived in Winnipeg until 1908 when they settled down near Leslie.'[108]

Anna had some well-placed family relations. The obituary bears witness to the importance of listing these relations: apart from her sister, Jóna, who was married to Loftur Jörundsson, a master builder in Winnipeg, and her brother, Páll, who was a farmer in Leslie, it mentions another brother, Thorsteinn, who was 'married to Ragnhildur Jónsdóttir, the daughter of Jón from Sledbrjót, a Member of Parliament.' The memory of Anna is also firmly placed in a nationalist discourse, since she is depicted as one of the 'most true Icelandic settlers' of a generation that was now passing away.[109]

The obituary stated that Anna was a 'rare woman', being beautiful, intelligent, and popular. Of course, it can be difficult to

Anna Sigrídur Gudmundsdóttir Sigbjörnsson was a well connected woman with a talent for the written word. The East Iceland Archives (Héradsskjalasafn Austfirdinga).

interpret such statements, but it is clear that she had a talent that was highly regarded in the Icelandic community: she was skilled in verse–making and crafted 'many a witty verse and poem' when she was young in Iceland.[110] Clearly, she did not abandon this activity altogether when she moved to Canada, as she recited a poem of her own composition at a golden wedding in Leslie in 1946.[111] She also seems to have engaged in discussions about contemporary Icelandic literature, as can be seen in a letter to her friends in which she expressed her opinion on the controversial novel *Sjálfstætt fólk* (*Independent People*) by the future Nobel laureate Halldór Laxness.[112]

Anna seems not only to have been a woman with a talent for the written word, she had also relations among a kind of Icelandic 'literary community'. In his book, *The Saskatchewan Icelanders,* Walter J. Lindal writes about Leslie in the early twentieth century, and states that it 'became at once a cultural center and remained such for a number of years'. The reason for this, according to Lindal, was that several figures who lived there were 'endowed with literary gifts much above the average in any community' and they 'led in creating a literary atmosphere which spread far beyond the limits of the district itself.' One of the people he mentions was Mrs Rannveig Sigbjörnsson, who was married to Anna's brother-in-law.[113] Anna had close family ties to other artists apart from Rannveig Sigbjörnsson. Her son, Haukur Stefánsson, became a painter and her brother, Björgvin Gudmundsson, the author of the obituary, was a composer.[114] Anna Gudmundsdóttir Sigbjörnsson thus seems to have been a woman with considerable social and cultural capital.

Ingibjörg Björnsdóttir, a knowledgeable professional

On 23 September 1926, *Lögberg* published an obituary of 'Ingibjörg Björnsson, a nurse.' She had passed away in Selkirk, Manitoba, on 25 April the same year.[115] Ingibjörg was born in 1873[116] at Húsey in Hróarstunga in Nordur-Múlasýsla, the daughter of 'Björn Hallsson farmer in Húsey and his wife Jóhanna Björnsdóttir.' They were both descendants, as the obituary emphasises, of 'prominent farmers from the East.' When Ingibjörg was 19, she went to Reykjavík to learn midwifery. She was obviously regarded as eminently suited to this profession because she was 'encouraged to do so by the local government'. In 1896, she completed her training 'with a favourable testimonial' and then came back to East Iceland, where she worked as a midwife in different areas

Ingibjörg Björnsdóttir emigrated in 1903 and worked as a professional in Winnipeg for 24 years. The East Iceland Archives (Héradsskjalasafn Austfirdinga)

until the spring 1903, when she emigrated to Canada.[117]

Ingibjörg Björnsdóttir 'worked in the same field when she came to the west, in addition to nursing patients in their homes', something which she did with a great skill.[118] When she died in 1926, she had thus worked as a professional woman in Winnipeg for 24 years. From the descriptions of her, it can seemingly be deduced that she was skilled at her profession and had personal qualities that were useful in her work. A short death announcement describes her as an 'extremely fine and popular woman',[119] while according to the obituary she was also noted for her humour.

More interestingly, however, she had been able to acquire 'considerable more knowledge … than was usual for young farm girls.' This was due to her own desire to learn, because 'there was hardly any teaching other than the homes where able to provide.' Yet, she 'could never be without' reading, and this reading was seemingly a part of her own personal education, since she only read the best at hand.[120] From this, we can conclude that Ingibjörg had social capital in terms of a strong family background, as well as cultural capital revealed in her eagerness to learn and her nuanced taste in reading. As an 'extremely fine and popular woman', she also seems to have been respected and, hence, had symbolic capital.

Conclusions

In Nordic research on emigration, women's life stories and experiences are still an underdeveloped area and there is a lack of research on emigration from a gendered perspective. The same is true of Icelandic research. In this article, we have set out to contribute this field. We have argued that a certain group of women has been forgotten in the history of Icelandic emigration, and also in Icelandic women's and gender history. This group comprised the single emigrant women who belonged neither to the highest layers of Icelandic society nor to the 'lower classes' or domestic servants.

We have claimed that certain underutilised historical sources are crucial in making these women – and their social position – visible. These sources are obituaries in the Icelandic newspapers in Canada and short biographies of the emigrants such as those found in the *Vestur-íslenskar æviskrár*.

These sources make single emigrant women's life histories and agency visible. Although we do not believe that our sources reflect a simple relation to 'reality', we would still argue that they shed light on lived lives to a certain extent and thus enable us to unravel the women's agency and subjectivity. It is indeed possible to highlight the diverse abilities of these women, and it is clear that the authors of the two highlighted types of source often used this opportunity to depict the

women's agency within the discursive framework that was open to them.

We have found that these women possessed certain resources that we conceptualise as capital. They had capacities in terms of knowledge and skills that made them able to support themselves. They also had social ties, not least with male relatives and friends, which constituted social capital for women in a male-dominated society. By understanding these ties in terms of capital, we make them visible as constructed and perpetuated instead of 'natural' and, thus, unconceptualised. We portray the women as persons in their own right and not as simply an addendum to the men they were related to. They had cultural skills such as artistic abilities or verse-making, and some of them were socially respected. By this method, we have managed to highlight the subjectivity and agency of these women, as well as how they made use of their resources and capital in a creative manner.

We have traced the life histories and experiences of three women. However, they are only examples of the large pool of female emigrants who took the step of leaving their own country in the hope of a better future. We have discussed these three women in order to illustrate how they were able to act on their own initiative in many respects, both to carve out space for them- selves as individuals and to support themselves and their families. They all had social capital or cultural capital, or indeed both, to varying extents. We hope that this approach can be of both methodological and theoretical value in future research in this field, as a contribution to the history of women and gender in addition to the history of emigration in general.

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ENDNOTES

1 The Nordic countries are Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland. The num- bers for Finland refer to the years 1866–1930, while the numbers for Iceland refer to the years 1870–1925 (Hans Norman & Harald Runblom, *Transatlantic Connections: Nordic Migration to the New World after 1800*, Oslo 1987, p. 291).
This article is part of a larger research project, 'Research on why unmarried women emigrated from Iceland to North America 1870–1914', funded by the Icelandic Research Fund (IRF), and was written with funding from the Icelandic Research Fund (IRF; www.rannis.is) in co-operation with the Icelandic Emigration Center in Hofsós, North Iceland (www.hofsos.is). We wish to thank the head of the centre, Valgeir Thorvaldsson, for his generous help while setting up the project. We also wish to thank the following: The East Iceland Archives at Egilsstadir, which provided a work space and support; Arndís Thorvaldsdóttir of The East Iceland Archives, for her invaluable help during the early stages of the project and for bringing to our attention a number of single emigrant women from East Iceland; Nelson S. Gerrard, for pointing out not only a number of single female emigrants but also the importance of obituaries for our research; Unnar Ingvarsson, the previous head of the Archive of Skagafjördur North Iceland, for pro- viding assistance regarding emigrant women from Skagafjördur; and Lars Olsson, a senior professor at Linnæus University in Sweden, for his interest and discussions.

2 Continuous emigration from Iceland started in 1870, while there is a tradition in Ice- landic history of defining its 'end' as being the beginning of the First World War in 1914. Although there might very well be a need to revise this definition, such a step is beyond the scope of this project. See Helgi Skúli Kjartansson & Steinthór Heidarsson, *Framtíd handan hafs: Vesturfarir frá Íslandi 1870–1914*, Reykjavík 2003, p. 30.

3 Norman & Runblom 1987, p. 31.

4 Kjartansson & Heidarsson 2003, p. 104.

5 Norman & Rönblom 1987, p. –8.

6 Kjartansson & Heidarsson 2003, pp. 122–3; Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 years: The History of a Marginal Society*, Reykjavík 2000, p. 238 (all translations from the Icelan- dic are ours, unless otherwise stated). Ann-Sofie Ohlander, *Kärlek, Död och Frihet: Historiska uppsatser om människovärde och livsvillkor in Sverige*, Stockholm 1986, p. 110 notes that more women than men emigrated from Sweden in the period 1896–1900. It should also be noted that 'for significant periods of time women formed the majority of Irish migrants', so that in the period 1899–1910, for example, the ratio of women was 52 percent to 48 percent men, Lorna R. McLean & Marilyn Barber, 'In Search of Comfort and Independence: Irish Immigrant Domestic Servants Encounter the Courts, Jails, and Asylums in Nineteenth-Century Ontario', in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta & Frances Swyripa (eds.), Toronto 2004, p. 134; Janet A. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland 1885–1920*, Kentucky 1989, p. 3.

7 See Guillermina Jasso, 'Migration, Human Development and the Life Course', in *Handbook of the Life Course*, Jeylan T. Mortimer & Michael J. Shanahan (eds.), New York 2003, pp. 331, 335; Kathie Friedman-Kasaba, *Memories of Migration: Gender, Ethnicity, and Work in the Lives of Jewish and Italian Women in New York, 1870–1924*, New York 1996, p. 9.

8 Ohlander 1986, p. 112.

9 Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871*, Toronto 2001, pp. 171–3.

10 Friedman-Kasaba 1996, p. 9.

11 On the division of the Icelandic nation into occupational and social layers, see, for example, Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson, *Family and Household in Iceland 1801–1930*, Upp- sala 1988, pp. 32–41; Gudmundur Hálfdanarson, 'Íslensk thjódfélagsthróun á 19. öld', in *Íslensk thjódfélagsthróun 1880–1990: Ritgerdir*, Gudmundur Hálfdanarson & Svanur Kristjánsson (eds.), Reykjavík 1993, pp. 19–27.

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13 Gísli Ágúst Gunnlaugsson, 'Fólksfjölda- og byggdathróun 1880–1990', in Hálfdanarson & Kristjánsson 1993, pp. 74, 83.

14 Hálfdanarson 1993, pp. 20–7.

15 Sigurdur Gylfi Magnússon, 'Sársaukans land. Vesturheimsferdir og íslensk hugsun', in *Burt og meir en bæjarleid: Dagbækur og persónuleg skrif Vesturheimsfara á sídari hluta 19. aldar*, compiled by Davíd Ólafsson & Sigurdur Gylfi Magnússon, Reykjavík 2001, p. 32; Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 years: The History of a Marginal Society*, Reykjavík 2000, p. 233.

16 Karlsson 2000, pp. 236–7.

17 Kjartansson & Heidarsson 2003, p. 97.

18 Sune Åkerman, 'Amerikaprojektet och andra försök till samarbete inom humanistisk forskning: En personligt hållen återblick', in *Hembygden & Världen: Festskrift till Ulf Beijbom*, Lars Olsson & Sune Åkerman (eds.), Växjö 2002, p. 92; Birgitta Odén, 'På Ingrid Semmingsens axlar', in *Hembygden & Världen: Festskrift till Ulf Beijbom*, Lars Olsson & Sune Åkerman (eds.), Växjö 2002, p. 46; Magnússon 2001, p. 16.

19 Júníus H. Kristinsson, *Vesturfaraskrá 1870–1914: A Record of Emigrants from Iceland 1870–1914*, Reykjavík 1983.

20 Kristinsson 1983.

21 Kjartansson & Heidarsson 2003, p. 11; Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, 'Emigrant Fares and Emigration from Iceland to North America, 1874–1893', *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 1980:1, pp. 53–71; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'Introduction', in *Vesturfaraskrá 1870–1914: A Record of Emigrants from Iceland 1870–1914*, Júníus H. Kristinsson (ed.), Reykjavík 1983, p. xvi.

22 Odd S. Lovoll, 'Norwegian Immigration and Women', in *Norwegian American Women, Migration, Communities, and Identities*, Betty A. Bergland & Lori Ann Lahlum (eds.), Minnesota 2011, pp. 60–3; Sune Åkerman, 'Aspects of migration as behavior and phenomenon: Reflections from the high tide of Nordic migration research', in *Nordic Migration: Research Status, Perspectives and Challenges*, Christina Folke Ax & Nils Olav Østrem (eds.), Tromsö 2011, p. 16.

23 Perry 2001, p. 171; Magnússon 2001, pp. 65–6; see also Donna Gabaccia, *From the Other Side: Women, Gender, and Immigrant Life in the US, 1820–1990*, Bloomington & Indianapolis 1994, pp. 47–8.

24 Vilhelm Vilhelmsson, "Ánægja med thad sem er-id gamla, er andlegur daudi': Af hugmyndum og félagsskap íslenskra róttæklinga í Manitoba vid upphaf 20. aldar', *Saga* 2012:2, pp. 36–8.

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26 Olsson 2001, p. 79; Friedman-Kasaba 1996, p. 15.

27 Laurie Kristine Bertram, 'Fight like Audur: Gender, ethnicity and dissent in the career of Salome Halldorson – Manitoba Social Credit MLA, 1936–1941', *The Icelandic Canadian* 2009: 3, pp. 121–2.

28 Terje Mikael Hasle Joranger, 'Multiple identities? Ethnic identity formation among Norwegian immigrants in the USA 1850–1900', in Folke Ax & Østrem 2011, p. 86.

29 Ohlander 1986. For a detailed discussion of the numbers on, for example, age and marital status, see pp. 108–12. See also Ann-Sofie Kälvemark (later Ohlander),

'Utvandring och självständighet: Några synpunkter på den kvinnliga emigrationen från Sverige', *Historisk tidskrift* (Swedish) 1983: 1, pp. 140–74.

30 Lovoll 2011, pp. 65–6; Norman & Runblom 1987, pp. 266–7; Ohlander 1986, pp. 111–12.

31 Lovoll 2011, pp. 65–6; Norman & Runblom 1987, pp. 266–7; Ohlander 1986, pp. 111–12, 117–18; Ólöf Gardarsdóttir, 'Tengsl théttbýlismyndunar og Vesturheimsferda frá Íslandi: Lýdfrædileg sérkenni fólksflutninga frá Seydisfirdi 1870–1910', *Saga* 1998, p. 158.

32 See Gardarsdóttir 1998, pp. 158, 176–9, Table 4.

33 Joy K. Lintelman, "On my own': single, Swedish and female in turn-of-the-century Chicago', in *Swedish-American life in Chicago: Cultural and Urban Aspects of an Immigrant People, 1850–1930*, Philip J. Anderson & Dag Blanck (eds.), Uppsala 1991, p. 91; Joy K. Lintelman, 'Between the mundane and the memorable: The letters of single and married Swedish immigrant women', *Swedish American Historical Quarterly* 2005: 2–3, p. 170.

34 Joy K. Lintelman, *I go to America: Swedish American Women and the Life of Mina Anderson*, Minnesota 2009, pp. 4–9.

35 Lintelman 2009, pp. 4–5, 9.

36 Olsson 2001, pp. 77–9. These conclusions agree with Lisa Chilton, *Agents of Empire: British Female Migration to Canada and Australia, 1860s–1930*, Toronto 2007, p. 115, who remarks that historians of 'single women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have noted the prevalence of independent spirits in their subjects'.

37 Ulf Beijbom, *Utvandrarkvinnor: Svenska kvinnoöden i Amerika*, Stockholm 2006, p. 229.

38 Eva St Jean, 'Swedes on the Move. Politics, Culture, and Work among Swedish Immigrants in British Columbia, 1900–1950', Ph.D. diss., University of Victoria 2004, p. 115. St Jean also found that in 1931, 76 per cent of 'gainfully occupied' Scandinavian women in British Columbia, some 1,332 women altogether, were employed in 'service'. On the proportion of Scandinavians and Finns among domestic workers in Canada, see Varpu Lindström-Best, '"I Won't Be a Slave!" Finnish Domestics in Canada, 1911–30', in *I Won't Be a Slave! Selected Articles on Finnish Canadian Women's History*, Beaverton Ontario 2010, pp. 36–7.

39 Lars Ljungmark, *Svenskarna i Winnipeg: Porten til prärien 1872–1940*, Växjö 1994, p. 29, 31.

40 Lori Ann Lahlum, 'Women, Work, and Community in Rural Norwegian America, 1840–1920', in Bergland & Lahlum 2011, p. 84.

41 Perry 2001, p. 168.

42 Lahlum 2011, p. 93; Perry 2001, p. 168; Lovoll 2011, pp. 57–8; C. Lesley Biggs with Stella Stephanson, 'In Search of Gudrun Goodman: Reflections on Gender, 'Doing History' and Memory', *Canadian Historical Review* 2006:87(2), pp. 293–316.

43 These questions will be addressed in forthcoming articles. We intend to conduct a detailed analysis of single emigrant women from two districts in Iceland, namely Nordur-Múlasýsla in East Iceland and Skagafjardarsýsla in North Iceland, looking at the life stories of about 20 women in detail. In a second article, we will use Canadian censuses to establish in greater detail the 'structural social status' of these women.

44 See, for example, Ólafsson & Magnússon 2001; *Bréf Vestur-Íslendinga*, i, Bödvar Gud- mundsson (ed.), Reykjavík 2001; *Bréf Vestur-Íslendinga*, ii, Bödvar Gudmundsson (ed.), Reykjavík 2002.

45 Examples can be seen in Salóme Fridbjarnardóttir Baldvinsson, Sigurbjörg Fridbja- rnardóttir Björnsson, Sigrídur Daníelsdóttir Haralz, Hólmfrídur Jósefsdóttir Krist- jánsson and Sigrídur Sigurdardóttir White. See *Vestur-íslenzkar æviskrár*, i, Benjamín Kristjánsson (ed.), Akureyri 1961, pp. 30–1, 73–4, 163–4 , 224–5, 348.

46 See Margrét Gudmundsdóttir, 'Landnám kvennasögunnar á Íslandi', *Saga* 2000, pp. 36–8.

47 A search of newspaper obituaries

published in *Lögberg* in one year (1945) reveals none of women who worked as domestic servants all their lives; there is, however, one for a widow who worked as a housekeeper in the same home for 20 years (*Lögberg* 22 March 1945, p. 7).

48 *Vestur-íslenzkar æviskrár* 1961, p. 49.

49 Betty A. Bergland, 'Introduction', in Bergland & Lahlum 2011, pp. 11–12.

50 Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York 1988, p. 42; Perry 2001, p. 4.

51 Lena Marander-Eklund & Ann-Catrin Östman, 'Biografiska betydelser – norm ocherfarenhet i levnadsberättelser', in *Biografiska betydelser. Norm och erfarenhet i levnads- berättelser*, Lena Marander-Eklund & Ann-Catrin Östman (eds.), Norra Västmanland 2011, p. 7.

52 Marander-Eklund & Östman 2011, p. 7.

53 Marander-Eklund & Östman 2011, p. 8.

54 C. Lesley Biggs with Stella Stephanson, 'In Search of Gudrun Goodman: Reflections on Gender, 'Doing History' and Memory', *Canadian Historical Review* 2006:87 (2), pp. 305–306.

55 Themes such as these are discussed in the Canadian historian C. Lesley Biggs's work on the Icelandic Canadian midwife Gudrun Goodman (see C. Lesley Biggs with Stella Stephanson 2006, p. 298).

56 See Marander-Eklund & Östman 2011, p. 13; Anna Johansson, *Narrativ teori och metod. Med livsberättelsen i fokus*, Lund 2005, pp. 21, 213.

57 Birgitta Svensson, 'Det moderna varat som biografisk presentation', in Marander-Eklund & Östman 2011, p. 26, 35.

58 Britt Liljewall, *'Ack om du vore här'. 1800-talets folkliga brevkultur*, Stockholm 2007, p. 15. 59 Ohlander 1986, pp. 147, 135–6.

60 Hálfdanarson 1993, p. 18.

61 Gunnlaugsson 1988, p. 35.

62 Gudmundur Hálfdanarson, 'Defining the Modern Citizen. Debates on Civil and Polit- ical Elements of Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century Iceland', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 1999:24(1), pp. 111–112.

63 Gunnlaugsson 1988, p. 109.

64 Jónsson 1981, pp. 10–12, 48.

65 Kjartansson & Heidarsson 2003, p. 58.

66 See, for example, Olsson 2001, pp. 77–89; Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta & Frances Swyripa, 'Introduction', in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, (eds.), Toronto 2004, p. 12. Jimmy Engren, 'Ahr ju in nihd öv ä sörvängörl: Svenska hembiträden i de amerikanska källorna', in *Samhällshistoria i focus: En festskrift till Lars Olsson om arbete, migration och kultur*, Lars Berggren, Mats Greiff, Jesper Johansson, Johan Svanberg & Malin Thor (eds.), Malmö 2010, p. 318, 324–6 claims that Swedish maids, willingly or not, were 'closed in a sector of the labour market' that women of American origin 'were not eager to enter'.

67 Thorgerdur Einarsdóttir, *Bryddingar: Um samfélagid sem mannanna verk*. Reykjavík 2000, pp. 28–9; see also Torgerdur Einarsdóttir, *Läkaryrket i förändring: En studie av den medicinska professionens heterogenisering och könsdifferentiering*, Gothenburg 1997.

68 Skeggs 1997, 2004. For the relationship between Bourdieu's concept of capital and social network research, see Íris Ellenberger, *Danskir innflytjendur á Íslandi 1900–1970: Félagsleg stada, samthætting og thverthjódleiki*, Reykjavík 2013, pp. 33–4. This is a theme that bears greater study.

69 Skeggs 1997, p. 8.

70 For family ties, see Skeggs 1997, p. 8; for personal contacts, see Ylva Ulfsdotter Eriksson, *Yrke, Status & Genus. En sociologisk studie om yrken på en segregerad arbetsmarknad*, Ph.D. diss., Department of Sociology, Gothenburg University 2006, pp. 49–50.

71 See Torfi Tulinius, *Skáldid* í *skriftinni: Snorri Sturluson og Egils saga*, Reykjavík 2004; Torfi Tulinius, 'Pierre Bourdieu and Snorri Sturluson: Chieftains, sociology and the development of literature in medieval Iceland?', in *Snorres Edda – i europeisk og islandsk kultur,* Jon Gunnar Jørgensen (ed.), Reykholt 2009, pp. 47–71; Ellenberger 2013, p. 33–4.

72 Diane Reay, 'Gendering Bourdieu's concepts of capitals? Emotional capital, women and social class', in *Feminism after Bourdieu*, Lisa Adkins & Beverley Skeggs

(eds.), Oxford 2004, pp. 58–9. See also Daisy L. Neijmann, *The Icelandic voice in Canadian Letters: The Contribution of Icelandic-Canadian writers to Canadian literature*, in: *Nordic Voices*, Ottawa 1997, p. 78, 90; Vidar Hreinsson, 'Vestur-íslenskar bókmenntir', in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, iii, Halldór Gudmundsson (ed.), Reykjavík 1996, p. 730.

73 Skeggs 1997, p. 8.

74 Tulinius 2009, p. 52. 75 Tulinius 2004, p. 134.

76 Tulinius 2009, p. 49.

77 Chilton 2007, pp. 6–7.

78 Ólafur Arnar Sveinsson, 'Sjálfsmyndir og sendibréf íslenskra vesturfara', in *Söguthing Sagnfrædistofnunar 2012: Rádstefnurit*, Reykjavík 2013, p. 1, http://hdl.handle.net/1946/15604. See also Ólafur Arnar Sveinsson, "Riffillinn er hinn besti vinur hermannsins': Átök um sjálfsmyndir íslensks vesturfara', *Ritid* 2014:1, pp. 59–81. For an interesting discussion of such an experience, see Sigfrídur Gunnlaugsdóttir, "Thótt greini oss mál, oss sameinar sál': Cultural hibridity in the Poetry of Guttormur J. Guttormsson', in *Rediscovering Canadian difference*, Gudrun Björk Gudsteins (ed.), Reykjavík 2001, p. 68–9.

79 Royden Loewen & Gerald Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth-Century Canada*, Toronto 2009, p. 41.

80 For Icelandic nationalism in the early twentieth century, see Sigrídur Matthíasdóttir, 'The Renovation of Native Pasts: A Comparison between Aspects of Icelandic and Czech Nationalist Ideology', *Slavonic and East European Review* 2000:78(4), pp. 1–22.

82 See Laurie K. Bertram, 'New Icelandic Ethnoscapes: Material, visual, and oral terrains of cultural expression in Icelandic Canadian history, 1875–present', Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto 2010, pp. xi, 87. However, as Bertram notes (pp. xxix, 14), recent research stresses the 'the continual construction of Icelandic identity in relations to conditions, and particularly the pressures of Anglo-conformity and multicultural nationalism in Canada'. See also Neijmann 1997, pp. 78, 90.

82 See Sigrídur Matthíasdóttir & Ann-Catrin Östman, 'Möte mellan manligheter. Nationalism, bondeideal och (åter)skapandet av de övre skiktens manlighetsideal', in *Könsmaktens förvandlingar. En vänbok till Anita Göransson*, Gothenburgh 2003, pp. 91–4; Sigrídur Matthíasdóttir, 'Nationalisme, køn og kvindesag i Island ved århundredeskiftet 1900', in *Den dubbla blicken. Historia i de nordiska samhällena kring sekelskiftet 1900*, Harald Gustafsson, Fredrik Persson, Charlotte Thornbjer & Anna Wallette (eds.), Lund 2007, pp. 119–24.

83 Epp, Iacovetta & Swyripa 2004, p. 11.

84 See Tulinius 2004, p. 144.

85 See Hallgrímur Pétursson and Gudrídur Símonardóttir, *Nidjatal*, ii, Ari Gíslason (ed.), Reykjavík 1989, p. 305.

86 *Lögberg* 30 May 1946 p. 7. Gudný Thorvaldsdóttir's life story is interesting, for example, because her work was basically within 'service'. However, she seems to have managed to carve out a track within that trade that gave her social status within the community.

87 *Vestur-íslenzkar æviskrár* 1961, p. 153.

88 *Heimskringla* 4 February 1953, p. 1. Another example of an emigrant seamstress is Thórunn Rósa Magnúsdóttir Jóhannsson (see *Vestur-íslenzkar æviskrár* 1961, p. 190).

89 The sources do not agree on the year of Gudrídur Gísladóttir's birth. According to *Althingismannatal 1845–1995*, Reykjavík 1996, p. 154 she was born in 1839; according to the obituary in *Lögberg* 14 August, 1919, p. 1, however, it was 1837. In the census of 1845, she was given as being 7 years of age (http://www.manntal.is/?lang=en, s.v. '1845, Gudrídur Gísladóttir, 7').

90 See *Lögberg* 14 August 1919, p. 1; *Althingismannatal 1845–1995*, Reykjavík 1996, p. 154.

91 *Lögberg* 14 August 1919, p. 1.

92 Arnljótur Ólafsson from Bægisá is a rather well-known figure in Icelandic history. See, for example, Gylfi Th. Gíslason, 'Séra

Arnljótur Ólafsson: 150 ára minning', *Fjármálatídindi* 1974: Jan.–July, pp. 17–28.

93 Jón J. Bíldfell, 'Kristrún Sveinungadóttir', *Almanak Ólafs S. Thorgeirssonar* 1943, pp. 45–6.

94 Bíldfell 1943, pp. 44–51.

95 *Lögberg* 28 January 1909, p. 7.

96 *Lögberg* 28 January 1909, p. 7.

97 See *Bjarki* 19 January 1903 pp. 1–2.

98 *Lögberg* 28 January 1909, p. 7.

99 *Lögberg* 28 January 1909, p. 7.

100 In Iceland, it was in 1900 that married women were made the legal owners of the money they earned and could inherit property (Ártöl og áfangar í sögu íslenskra kvenna, Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir & Gudrún Dís Jónatansdóttir (eds.), Reykjavík 1998, p. 147).

101 Lahlum 2011, p. 93.

102 *Lögberg* 28 January 1909, p. 7. See also Héradsskjalasafn Austfirdinga, Sey–110–1, Gjördabók fyrir Seydisfjardarkaupstad (bæjarstjórn), 2 January 1895–24 June 1908, pp. 108–109.

103 *Lögberg* 28 January 1909, p. 7.

104 *Lögberg* 28 January 1909, p. 7.

105 *Lögberg* 17 November 1904, p. 8.

106 Jóhanna Ketilsdóttir is not a common name. However, according to the *Record of Emigrants*, there were two women with this name who emigrated. The other one left Iceland as a 1-year-old child with her parents in 1887 and would thus have been 20 in 1904 (see Kristinsson 1983, p. 105).

107 See Anna Sigurdardóttir, *Vinna kvenna á Íslandi í 1100 ár: Reykjavík* 1985, pp. 308–311. 108 *Lögberg* 18 October 1951, p. 4.

109 *Lögberg* 18 October 1951, p. 4.

110 *Lögberg* 18 October 1951, p. 4. She was skilled in versifying according to the traditionally accepted rules of Icelandic popular poetry. Such poetry is today still commonly improvised in Iceland and has long been a familiar part of everyday life.

111 *Lögberg* 6 June 1946, p. 5.

112 Héradsskjalasafn Skagfirdinga. KB, 228 4to, Bréfasafn Önnu og Lárusar Nordal, Gimli. Letter from Anna Sigbjörnsson, 18 December 1946.

113 Walter J. Lindal, *The Saskatchewan Icelanders: A Strand of the Canadian Fabric,* Winnipeg 1955, pp. 142–144. The others mentioned were W. H. Paulson, Dr Sig. Jul. Johannesson and the Rev. Runolfur Fjeldsted. For Rannveig K. G. Sigbjörnsson, see Neijmann 1997, p. 223.

114 See *Haukur Stefánsson 1901–1953*, Akureyri 1995; Haukur Ágústsson, *Ferill til frama: Ævisaga Björgvins Gudmundssonar tónskálds,* Akureyri 2011.

115 *Lögberg* 23 September 1926, p. 5.

116 *Ljósmædur* á Íslandi, i, Björg Einarsdóttir & Valgerdur Kristjónsdóttir (eds.), Reykjavík 1984, p. 303.

117 *Lögberg* 23 September 1926, p. 5; *Ljósmædur* á Íslandi, i. p. 303.

118 *Lögberg* 23 September 1926, p. 5.

119 *Heimskringla* 28 April 1926, p. 8.

120 *Lögberg* 23 September 1926, p. 5.

Editor's note

Here's a challenge. The article on single women emigrating to North America has challenged many to look into our ancestors arriving. At a Kaffitími in Gimli a year so ago Sigríður Matthásdóttir came to join us for a visit. She was still doing some research on her project. Around the table of approximately twelve or so, she asked us if we had had a woman in our family tree that had come alone across the sea. To our surprise, everyone could relate the tale of having just such a member in their background. Circumstances truly varied, from simply coming on adventure to see what life was really like, to desperate mothers coming with a number of small children in the hopes of having a better opportunity to feed and educate them. Some came with extended family members so that they had some hope of not being totally isolated and also having support from those who accompanied them. Do you have a story from your family to share? We would be very happy to share these stories. Send to editor@icecan.ca.

Norwegian Viking Saga Confirmed

Published in www.dailyscandinavian.com 5 December 2016,
compiled by Editor in Chief Tor Kjolberg
Source: The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU)
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The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) announced last month that its researchers had discovered the foundations of a wooden church where the body of King Olaf Haraldsson was taken immediately after he was declared a saint in 1031. St. Olaf, as he is now known, conquered and consolidated Norway in 1016 but held on to rule for a little more than a decade before his power was threatened by Canute I, king of Denmark and England.

Olaf died in the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030.

The Battle of Stiklestad is one of the most famous battles in the history of Norway. In this battle, King Olaf II of Norway (Old Norse: *Óláfr Haraldsson*) was killed. During the pontificate of Roland of Siena, the Roman Catholic Church decided to declare Olaf a saint in 1164.

His younger half-brother, Harald Hardrada, was also present at the battle. He became King of Norway in 1047, only to die in a failed invasion of England at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066. Harald was only fifteen when the battle of Stiklestad took place.

The authenticity of the battle as a historical event is highly questionable.

Contemporary sources say the king was simply murdered. According to the Anglosaxon Chronicle of 1043, Olaf II was killed by his own men while he slept. Adam of Bremen wrote in 1070 that Olaf II was killed in a simple ambush, and so did Florence of Worcester in 1100.

Those are the only contemporary sources that mention the death of the king. After the king's canonization it was felt that the saint could not have died in what was seen as cowardly circumstances. Rather, Olaf II must have fallen in a major battle for Christianity. The mythical story of the Battle of Stiklestad as we know it gradually developed during the two centuries following the death of Olaf II.

"Truly astonishing," says Anna Helena Petersén, project leader at the site

Now, archaeologists say they've found a key location in the king's posthumous journey from martyr to Norway's patron saint.

Archaeologists working in Trondheim in Norway are amazed by the discovery of a human skeleton in the bottom of an abandoned castle well. The skeleton provides evidence that confirms dramatic historical events mentioned in the Sagas.

The location and contents of the well are mentioned in Sverre's Saga, a chronicle of one of the kings of Norway, and one of very few historical manuscripts describing events in the Norwegian Viking age and medieval period.

Scholars have, as mentioned above, questioned the chronicle's trustworthiness as a historical document. But now, at least one part of the saga seems to hold truth – down to the tiniest detail.

"This is truly astonishing. As far as I know there is no known example of the discovery of an individual historically connected with an act of war as far back as the year 1197. And the fact that this actually corroborates an event described in Sverre's saga is simply amazing," says the project leader at the site, Anna Helena Petersén.

At Stiklestad where one of the most famous battles in the history of Norway took place

Man left in castle well for 800 years

In 1197 King Sverre Sigurdsson and his Birkebeiner-mercenaries

were attacked and defeated in his castle stronghold, Sverresborg, by his rivals, the Baglers. According to the Saga, the Baglers burned down buildings and destroyed the castle's freshwater supply by throwing one of King Sverre's dead men into the well, and then filling it with stones.

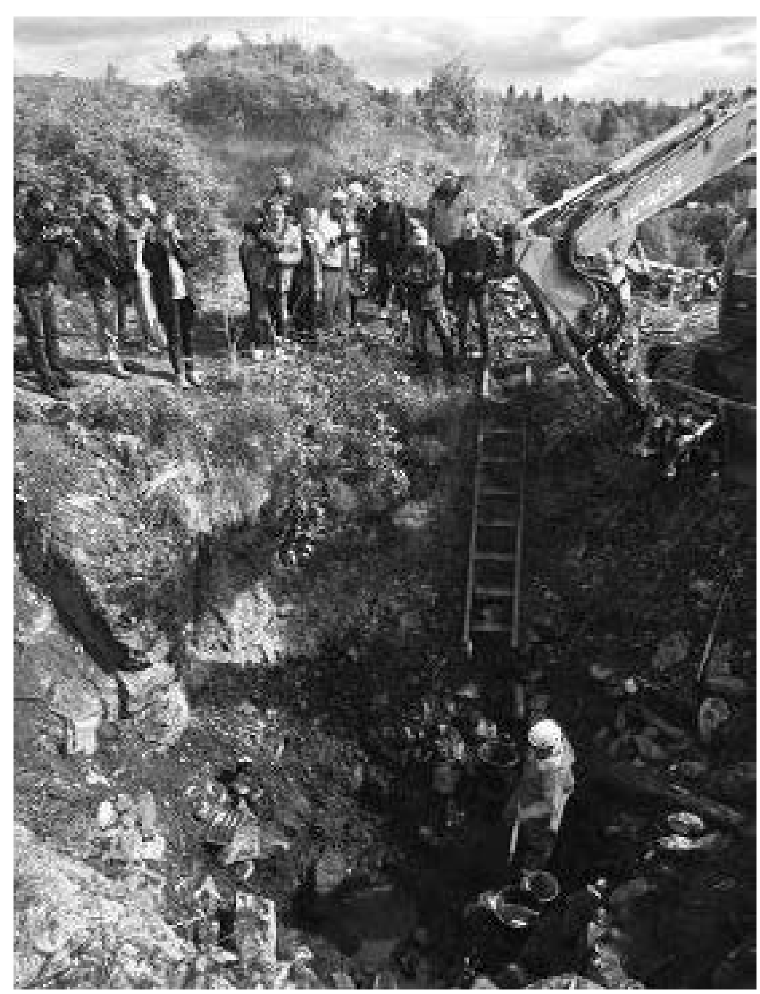
Now, following a trial excavation in the well, archaeologists can confirm this dramatic story. Archaeologists managed to retrieve part of the skeleton they found in the well in 2014. A fragment of bone produced a radiocarbon date that confirmed that the individual lived and died at the end of the 12th century, the same time as the incident described in the Saga.

Archeologists from NIKU working in the well

Skeleton and well structure

The archaeologists from The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research have returned this year to conduct a full excavation of the well with the goal of removing the layers of dumped stone and ultimately the whole skeleton.

The excavation of the stone debris down to the very first stone



Archeologists at the Castle Well – King Olaf II

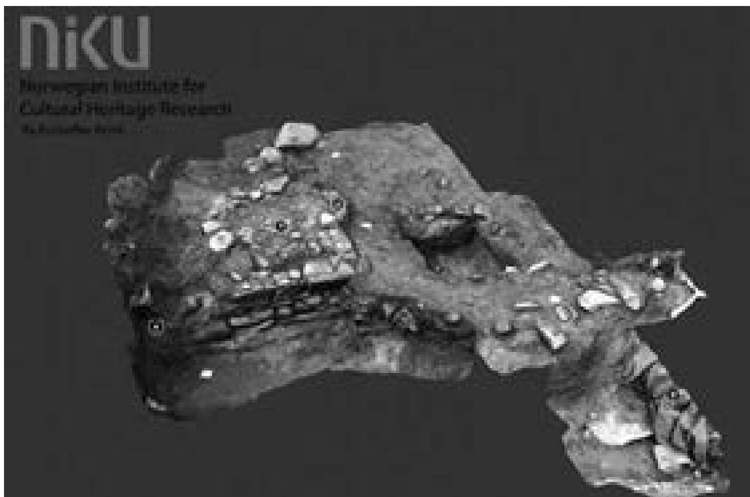
that hit the Birkebeiner's body has given the archaeologists additional insight into the nature of events in 1197. In addition, it exposed the timber posts and lining for the large castle well.

"This is a unique glimpse of an important historical event. You can almost feel it. It's almost as if you were there," enthuses Petersén.

The archaeologists at Sverresborg are being supported by a forensic specialist from the Trondheim police district, which adds to the feeling that we are witnesses to the result of a brutal crime.

The excavation is funded by the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage.

Norwegian Viking Saga Confirmed, compiled by Tor Kjolberg. Source: The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU)



A 3D model of the central excavations of the remains of St. Clement's Church in Trondheim, Norway, as seen on October 18. The stones are the foundation of the church, which has long been in ruins. Below: Skeleton remains found in Sverresborg.

Viking king shrine

A hundred words for snow

By Fred Bjarnason

February 2017 was one of the snowiest on record for BC's mainland and Vancouver Island. Note how many of these different types of snow they actually had there in just a few weeks.

A saying in Iceland claims that the Icelandic language has over a hundred words for snow, and although this may be exaggerated somewhat, it's still true that Icelandic has a very rich snow related vocabulary. Many of the words mean almost the same thing with only a small nuance separating their meanings. There are variations depending on when the snow lands, in which weather conditions and how much of it falls in one go. You can name snow according to what's happened to it after it's already fallen. There are even words for snow that moves in a certain way:

Snjór: a very generic word for snow, often seen in compound words.

It's used a lot as the first part of Icelandic names, f.ex. **Snjófríður** (= snow beautiful, F), **Snjólaug** (= snow pool, F), **Snjólaugur** (= snow pool, M) and **Snjólfur** (= snow wolf, says the Icelandic dictionary of names, M).***Snær*****:** another typical word for snow in general, also used for compound words and names. **Snæbirna (**= snow bear, F), Snæbjartur (= snow bright, M), **Snædís** (= snow goddess, F) and **Snæþór** (= snow Thor, M) for example.

Mjöll: snow that has just fallen, another word that you can use for this type of snow is simply **nýsnær** (= new snow). Mjöll is also a girl's name. Snow that is powdery is often called **lausamjöll.** And guess which famous fairy tale princess' name is **Mjallhvíti** in Icelandic? **Hjarn:** frozen snow, icy snow. Can mean the hard crust that forms on top of snow, or that corn snow or grainy snow that does not melt for summer.

Kafsnjór/kafaldi/kafald: deep snow or a heavy snowfall that creates huge piles of snow. The worst of these can cover entire towns so thoroughly that the whole **Björgunarsveitinn** rescue units are in constant alarm digging people and cars out of it.

Bleytuslag: oh how I hate this one. It's wet, deep snow. Do not even consider walking in it without rubber boots. **Bleyta** = wetness, **Krap:** slush (also a slushie). Another word you can use for it is **blotasnjór**.

Slabb is the worst of this type, it's snow that has first began to melt because the temperature has suddenly risen, and then it's began to rain. In other words, it's half melted snow mixed with water and it tends to form deep, road-wide puddles.

Él/moldél: hailstorm or a snowfall that suddenly happens without a warning. **Éljagangur** translates as intermittent snowstorms.

Hundslappadrífa: "snowflakes big as a dog's paws", a calm weather snowfall with unusually large snowflakes. Variations are **skæðadrífa** and **logndrífa.**

Hríð: snowfall with a considerable amount of wind, also translates as a snowstorm. It's used in compound words, and you'll want to see what kind of a word it's combined with to know what's going to be flying horizontally through the air – Icelandic vocabulary does have both **blotahríð** and **krapahríð**…

Fukt: a very small amount of snow.

Bylur: you'll want to be careful of this one, it means a severe snowstorm. Watch out for the compound words as well: **kafaldsbylur** and **moldbylur.** The latter means such awful

North Saanich on Vancouver Island, February 6th

weather that you cannot see an inch in front of you.

Skafrenningur: drifting snow, also called **skafkafald** and **snjófok.** Drifting snow is called **fjúk, fjúkburður** or **drift** if the wind is but a breeze, but a heavy wind changes the name into **fönn, skafbylur**, **skafhríð**, **skafmold** or **skafningur. Fönn** is also a girl's name, coincidentally!

Slydda: snow that is so wet it could as well be raining.

Hraglandi: sleet.

These are a few examples of different words for snow and the list is nowhere near complete, and it not only excludes almost all of the dialect words but probably many of the typical, generic ones as well. I think it's safe to say that by combining all the names of snow and all the compound words you can make out of them you might very well end up having those legendary hundred words for snow!

POETRY

Sailing Away from Iceland 1873

By Undína

Translation by Elin Thordarson and Peter John Buchan

A maiden pale o'er ocean swells,
On steady bark and true;
from icy island's wintery fells,
out on a sea so blue.

Now into waves of salty sea
the shining sun has set,
like the tender tears may flee
from eyes that pain have met.

Fades the home field, fades the peak,
Fades the valley under
Fades the sparkling, babbling creek,
Near and far, fades wonder.

Farewell she, and farewell he,
Farewell grove of flowers;
Farewell land, so dear to me,
Farewell long lost hours.

1873

We won't get very far discussing the figures of Icelandic poetry in North America without of course talking about Stephan G. Stephansson, or Guttormur J. Guttormsson, Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason, Jakobína Johnson, Dr. Siggi Júl, or even Káinn, Þ.Þ.Þ., Nick Ottins, or Kristinn Stefánsson (whose gravestone at Brookside Cemetery in Winnipeg is in need of resettling). From time to time, however, we come across another poet, one whose works are filled with the romantic doubt of the age of emigration; sorrowful, yet battling adversity, and altogether locked up in the Icelandic language.

Helga Steinunn Baldvínsdóttir, who wrote under the name Undína, was born in 1858 in Litla-Ásgeir's River in the Vestur-Húnavatn District. She immigrated to North America at the age of 15 or 16 in 1873 with her parents. She lived in both Canada and the United States but the last years of her life were spent living with her daughter in Washington State along the Pacific coast. It's said that she was married to a drinking man for about a decade, but left him with their two surviving children. They had previously lost 3 children together. She was also known for her needlework, especially her embroidered cushions, which she referred to as "her poetry." She was involved in the women's rights movement, and translated the poems in George Noyes Miller's *The Strike of a Sex*. Most of Undína's original poetry appears in the North American Icelandic newspapers of the time. However, with the assistance of Jóhann Magnús Bjarnason, a book of poems, entitled *Kvæði,* was published posthumously in 1952. She died in 1942.

The poem Sailing Away from Iceland 1873 was written when Undína was only 15 or 16. It is the observations from the deck of a boat, of a girl leaving her beloved country. Bidding farewell to not only the past, but to the future as well; the possibility of all of life's hours lived in her home country and a story of love come to nothing.

Baldvínsson, Garðar. *Íslandslag: Íslensk-kanadískar bókmenntir frá 1870 til nútímans.* Reykjavík: GB útgáfa ehf, 2006.

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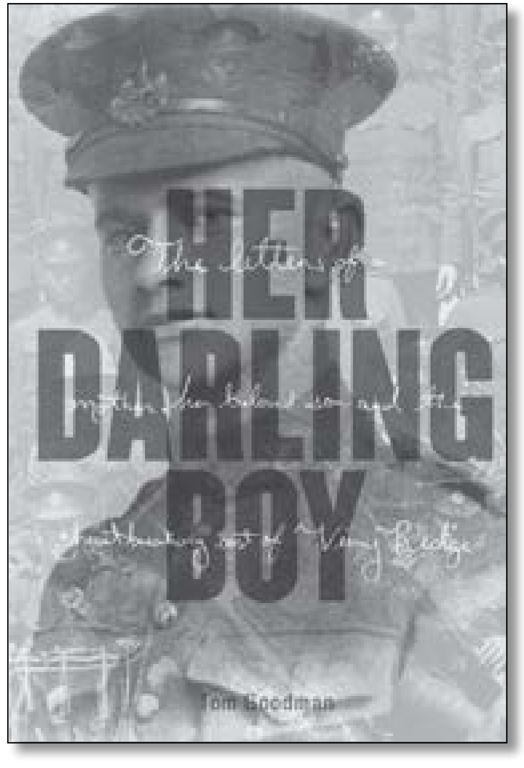
Book Review

Straight from the heart – a review of *Her Darling Boy*

The letters of a mother, her beloved son and the heartbreaking cost of Vimy Ridge

by Tom Goodman

Reviewed by Judy Richardson



Her Darling Boy
Tom Goodman
Winnipeg, MB
Great Plains Publications, 2016

There have been many books written about the First World War, especially in the ongoing centenary of that horrific four-year event. But, there are few that describe the experiences of an ordinary family and their son who enlisted to fight as a private. Added to this is the gift of reading their own words through collected correspondence. Archibald Polson, son of Elisabet and Ágúst Polson, enlisted in the 108th Battalion, a Manitoba regiment that was based in Selkirk and recruited throughout the province. Archie enlisted in February, 1916 in a regiment that had a strong Icelandic presence.

Following the war, the IODE's Jón Sigurdsson Chapter fundraised and

produced a book in honour of those Icelandic immigrants or their descendants who went to World War I. Written entirely in Icelandic, the book came out in 1923. I can't count the numbers of times I have poured over my copy of that book, looking at photographs and wondering whatever happened to some of those young men. I now know exactly what happened to Archie Polson because of Tom Goodman´s expert handling of archival letters to and from the young soldier. I also know the effects on his family, friends, and most especially Elisabet, his mother.

In his novel *Hitman's Guide to Housecleaning*, Hallgrimur Helgason includes what Ernest Hemingway would have called one true sentence. "War kills everybody, including the ones who live." I thought of that quote when I got to the later chapters of *Her Darling Boy*. Goodman takes us on a journey begun by a young man unseasoned by conflict, to the tragic death of that same man who has become much older than his years. He was 22 when he died in hospital, five months after suffering widespread shrapnel wounds at Vimy Ridge.

I was entirely caught up in Archie's letters during training at Camp Hughes and in Britain. I chuckled from time to time thinking how very much he sounded like my own grandsons, now of the same age as Archie was at the time. He repeatedly asks for cake and tarts to be included in his packages from home. Archie's boredom in camp and eagerness to go to the front are very typical of young soldiers, especially those who were waiting to go the glorious event that they imagined the Great War to be. I have not seen first-hand accounts of basic training before, and Archie's descriptions were quite detailed. He is also not shy about including his feelings and opinions in letters home.

The book also follows the train journey across Ontario and Quebec to ship out for Europe. I found myself looking up some of the train stations and mapping his journey. It is easy to imagine the young man seeing country unlike anything he has seen before. This masterful account also describes payroll procedures, leave passes, the leaves themselves, and many more everyday things in the life of a young soldier away from home for the first time. We learn about the girlfriend back home, and new young women he has met. We follow his friends and relatives, some still at home in Gimli and others also enlisted in the armed forces.

But as we know, "war is months of boredom punctuated by moments of extreme terror," (unattributed) and we learn soon enough that Archie and his company are at the front. The horrors of war are not described in Archie's letters, but as you read this book you see that a change has come over the young man from Gimli.

His mother, frantic at home, waits constantly for word of her darling boy. When a night telegram arrives to say he has been seriously wounded, the book becomes a roller-coaster ride of worry and hope, and most especially of trying to get information about his condition. Archie's right arm is amputated, but nevertheless he learns to write with his left hand very quickly. Nothing need be said – he was a brave and spunky fellow. He is expected to be shipped back home five months after he was wounded. Everyone, including Archie, thinks it is only a matter of time until he will be well enough to travel back to Manitoba. He has been up and about, gone on a leave, and is reported to be doing well. He has received two job offers from Manitoba, but expresses his desire to become a teacher.

Then comes the shock. Archie suffers a rare attack of tetanus from unremoved

shrapnel, and dies quite suddenly. The disbelief, sorrow and anger from his family come through very strongly in the letters following. And therein lies the horrific reality.

Goodman's description and inclusion of notes from family, do an excellent job of portraying Archie's mother in her life after the war. Her loss of faith was striking as she had always been the most devoted of Lutherans. It is impossible not to understand this development, having followed her correspondence. However she still believed in an afterlife, and perhaps that is how she was able to carry on until she could finally join her beloved son at the age of 90.

This book is a treasure in many ways. It is an invaluable addition to the body of literature dealing with the "war to end all wars." Those interested in the war experience of an ordinary private at the front will benefit greatly from its insights. It is an even more invaluable addition to the written history of Icelandic North-Americans, and I do not hesitate to say that every person of Icelandic descent should read it. Goodman has successfully presented in microcosm the horror that was all too common in World War I.

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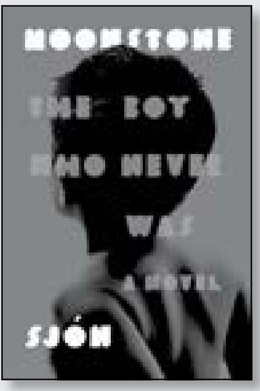

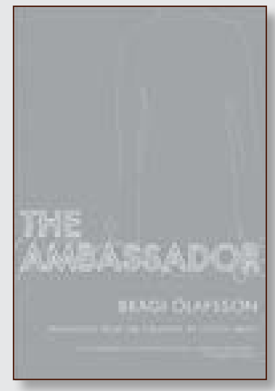

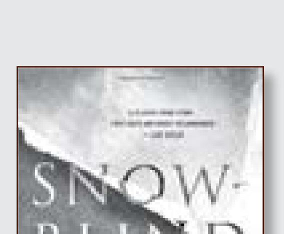

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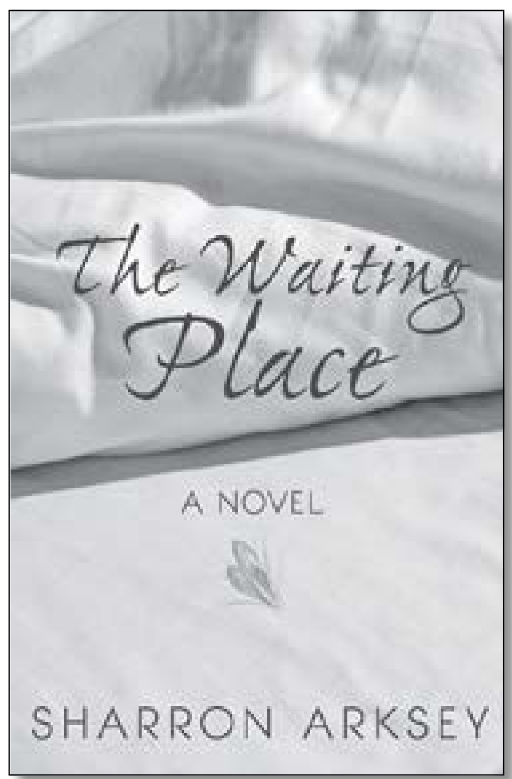
The Waiting Place

By Sharron Arksey

Reviewed by Lorna Tergesen



The Waiting Place
Sharron Arksey
Winnipeg, MB
Turnstone Press, 2016

Sharron is a farmer's daughter and a farmer's wife. Her writing draws very much from her personal experiences, although it is a novel. In her own words she said when asked of what *The Waiting Place* is about, she flippantly answers "Cows". Sharron has been writing for many years as a farm reporter with *Rural Routes.* This novel is a compilation of several articles she has written over the years. The writing is very accessible and the story line centres on the cycle of life. She has woven the nine months of her pregnancy into the seasonal life and work on the farm which is of course, a cattle farm.

She cleverly uses the theme of her nine month pregnancy to begin each chapter, by using the number over and over. For example, in the chapter on her seventh month of pregnancy she lists: "Things that come in sevens. The days of the week. The Seven Dwarves. Seven years of bad luck if you break a mirror. Seven wives for seven brothers. Lucky Seven. Seven Wonders of the World. Seven deadly sins. Canada's Group of Seven. Seven swans a swimming."

Dreams and aspirations of young farm girls have likely not changed much over the years but Sharron has a winning way of depicting both the triumphs and the downfalls. She readily refers to the dream of higher education, financial drawbacks and the gamble that farming has always been. Woven into all this are sections dwelling on the myriad of health and personal issues common not only to farm

families but to the entire population.

There are very astute observations that focus on the lives of the women around her and their contributions to farm life and also the community. Even with the modernization that has evolved on today's farms, we can observe the hard work that goes into making a living this way (not that farm work was ever easy).

Weather, as you can imagine, plays a major role in the life of a farm. The constant pressure of not knowing if the hay crops will be plentiful; the price of cattle going up or down and to the dreaded fear of some disease outbreak affecting the herd; all these things play in the back of the farm family's mind. In spite of the hard work and uncertainties of farm life, there are those wonderful moments when she realizes how much independence they have and how fortunate they are to be able to observe the wonders of nature's bounty. For instance, the unassuming beauty of wild flowers takes on a role in this novel as I know they do for most rural folk.

This charming book gives one a sense of what it is like to be a member of a rural community. Sharron has done an excellent job in painting the lives of those around her and also by relating her own experiences of motherhood. There is a lot of quick wit and humour to the story as well as her poignant and sensitive observations into the secret lives of the farm women. It has a brazen touch of honesty that makes the book so enjoyable.

Contributors

FRED BJARNASON is the President of the Icelandic Association of Victoria Chapter of the INL. He has been a chef for the Lt. Governor of British Columbia.

PETER JOHN BUCHAN is currently the Acting Head and Language Instructor with the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature at the University of Manitoba. He is also the music director at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg, and is himself an accomplished tenor.

ÞORGERÐUR EINARSDÓTTIR is a professor in Gender Studies, Faculty of Political Science, University of Iceland. She has led the development of the gender studies.

GUÐNI TH. JÓHANNESSON assumed the office of President of Iceland in 2016. A historian, he was a professor at the University of Iceland at the time of his election. He holds degrees from universities in Iceland and the UK and his field of research has been in modern Icelandic history. He and his Canadian-born wife, Eliza Reid have four children.

SIGRÍDUR MATTHÁSDOTTIR is a historian at the Reykjavík Academy. Her fields of specialty are gender history, women's history, nationalism, and emigration.

KATHI THORARINSON NEAL is the past president of the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba and co-chairs the 125 Legacy Project Campaign Cabinet with Grant Stefanson. Kathi is a communications and marketing professional who lives in Winnipeg with her family.

JUDY RICHARDSON is a retired librarian who has had a life-long interest in the Great War. She lives with her husband, David Gislason, in Arborg, MB.

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

ELIN THORDARSON has her masters degree in Icelandic Language and Literature from the University of Manitoba. She currently lives, writes and translates in Winnipeg and works in the Children's Department of the city's largest public library.

PHOTO: LORNA TERGESEN

Fjallkona carved from the snow at the Gimli Ice Festival 2017

The Back Page

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