

Vatnabyggd

Icelandic Club Newsletter

April 2015

Report from the President

We had a very successful Thorroblot last year in Wynyard and due to some unforeseen circumstances the Thorroblot will again be held in Wynyard with what looks like some exciting entertainment and, of course, our once a year gastronomic treat with a small selection of Icelandic foods.

As well as being our club's major social activity, Thorroblot is our club's main fundraiser. We thank those of you who support the club through purchase of memberships, admission tickets, and the donation of and bidding for Silent Auction items. I would like to thank all the members involved in organizing the Thorroblot in my absence. A special thank you to Cindy Goodman for stepping up to the plate. If any Member knows of anyone interested in the Snorri or the Snorri Plus program Please get in touch with me. The deadline has passed for this year but 2016 is coming fast. The Snorri program can provide an unforgettable trip to Iceland to learn of your past and to meet living relatives. There is a matching program that brings young Icelanders to North America. Our Club entertained a small group of young ladies from Iceland through the Snorri West program two years ago and anyone who joined us at the Dalman Farm for supper will attest to their excitement at meeting the "western Icelanders".

We are always in need of new members. As well, we would like suggestions of what activities people would

like to see the club involved with. Meetings are at 2 p.m. the third Sunday of the month in the club room in the basement of the Icelandic Unitarian Church (the Brick Church) in Wynyard. You do not need to be a member to attend. There's always time after meetings for coffee, lunch, and visiting.

The members had a serious work bee last fall and sorted out 23 years' worth of our history. We have books and CDs that are available for loan.

Our next big event will be the June 17 picnic to celebrate Iceland's Independence Day. More details will be available closer to the event.

Thank You,

Karen Olafson, President, Vatnabyggd Icelandic Club of Saskatchewan Inc.

FOND FAREWELLS

The members of the Vatnabyggd Club send condolences to the families of these members who each, in his or her own way, left a legacy of service to our club and to our Vatnabyggd Icelandic community:

Kristine Goodman
Anna Eastman
Leon Arnason
Allisen King

The Language Project – An Overview

The three-year project, *Heritage Language, Linguistic Change and Cultural Identity*, headed by Höskuldur Thráinsson, professor of Icelandic linguistics at the University of Iceland, was the first North American Icelandic project to trace the development of North American Icelandic from its roots in 19th century Icelandic to the present. The data collected by the Icelandic language research team who visited North America in 2013 and 2014 have already been somewhat analyzed. The researchers have given talks at conferences, including the 4th Annual Workshop on Immigrant Languages in the Americas. The data have also been used for Master's theses at the University of Iceland and, in the fall of 2015, the University will offer courses on "Western Icelandic Language and Culture".

The project was designed to collect information about the use and development of Icelandic in the USA and Canada and the role that language played, and to some extent continues to play, in the life of Americans and Canadians of Icelandic descent.

The five team members were team leader Höski, accompanied by Iris Edda Nowestein, Matthew Whelpton and Daisy Neijmann. As well, Höski's wife, Sigríður Magnúsdóttir, served as the group's

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unofficial secretary and photographer and ensured that the platters of Icelandic chocolate were always filled.

"In 2013, part of the research team visited Manitoba and interviewed 60 speakers of Icelandic and 20 English-speaking people. In May 2014, another group went to Edmonton, Vancouver, Point Roberts, Blaine and Seattle, talking to 40 speakers of Icelandic and a few English-speaking people of Icelandic descent. In the fall of 2014, the group completed interviews in Fargo, Mountain, Regina, Wynyard, Foam Lake, Brandon, Portage la Prairie, Winnipeg, Gimli, and Lundar," said Höski. During that trip, they talked to about 50 Icelandic speakers, and 50 people who did not speak the language about their Icelandic roots and what it means to be of Icelandic descent.

They also tested 20 speakers of English for a secondary study into the interplay of languages as a way of connecting ethnicities. "We use the experimental methods employed in the international research project EoSS (Evolution of Semantic Systems)," said Höski.

"Data have already been collected in Iceland and we are interested to see to what extent the results for North American Icelanders will be influenced by the dominant language or culture. Hence the experiment was run for speakers of English in the various areas."

In spite of the miles covered and the work involved, the team reported having a good time. "The whole group, plus spouses, met for dinner at Höski and Sigga's and talked about the trip to Canada and the USA. "Sigga (Sigríður Magnúsdóttir, the group's unofficial secretary and photographer) and I had prepared a little show with pictures so everybody was going: 'Oh, yes, this is Susan, this is Leslie, this is Noreen, this is Vic. I talked to her/him.' It was nice, like reliving it all," said Höski.

“As well as producing theoretically interesting papers on our results, we also want to write something that could be made accessible to all the wonderful people who agreed to talk to us and helped us during our visits to Canada and the US,” he said.

Editor’s Note: There will be more specific information on the study in the next newsletter.

The Team Visits Vatnabyggd

When Höski first emailed to ask for help in organizing the Vatnabyggd leg of their tour, he was warned. Nobody from out of town gets out of Vatnabyggd without going on The Tour. They were very gracious about accepting the inevitable.

Work stations were set up in Wynyard, in the club room of the Icelandic Unitarian Church on Bosworth and in the Foam Lake Community Hall and the team spent one day in each location, meeting 27 people total.

They had requested Icelanders who still spoke a bit of Icelandic, non-speakers who still felt Icelandic without the language and, for one of their studies, some non-Icelandic people. Finding subjects was not a problem.

The team was so determined to pay their own way that they were surprised when we produced lunch and wanted to pay for it. Club members, explaining that Vatnabyggd means “hospitality” as well as “lakes settlement” said, “No.” They won.

However, nobody refused to dive into the truckload of Icelandic chocolate that the team provided. Was it a bribe for the participants? If so, we were all prepared to be bribed, over and over and over again.

As well as the two towns, the team toured the pioneer memorial in Elfros, an Icelandic cemetery, and Christie Dalman’s farm, the site of one of the parties.

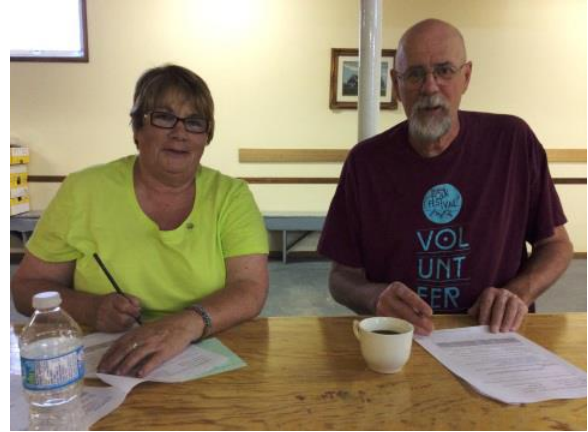
Top: Wynyard, Höski, Matthew, Sigga, Iris, Ed Goodman

Middle: Sigga, Iris and more chocolate

Bottom: Sigga attaches name tags - Vic, Vic and Kris



The Language Experts work in Wynyard



*Top: Höski checking out tools
Middle: But decides to work manually
Bottom: Audrey Shepherd with Daisy*

*Top: Gwen's hard work for Iris . . .
Middle: Definitely calls for more chocolate.
Thor agrees.
Bottom: Karen and Eric Olafson fill out
forms so they can have their turn.*

The Academics Get The Tour



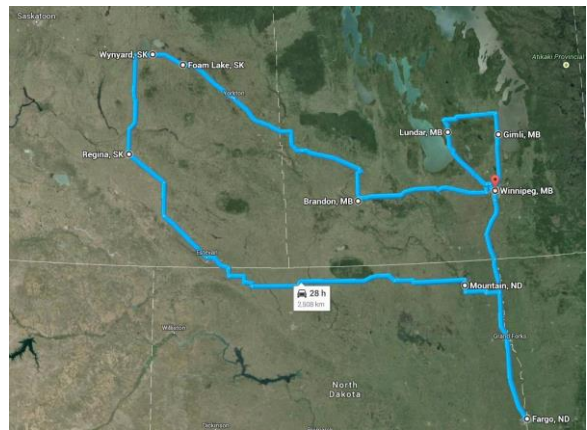
*Top Left: Foam Lake Museum Icelandic dress
Top Right: Pioneer Memorial Elfros
Left lower: Matthew has a new profession
Right Lower: A new vehicle for the team*



*Top: Sigga gives instructions to the next batch of participants. (Icelandic chocolate on the table.)
Middle: Sylvia Myall and Stella Stephanson, proving that they are diligent students
Bottom: Hard work done - - Höski, Bill Paulson, Sharolyn Olafson, ElmerOlafson, Edna Paulson*



Play time – a barbeque at Christie and Diane Dalman’s and an opportunity to check out some more of the local landscape and, below, the full route through considerable miles of landscape.



A letter from Höski to the club:

In Icelandic we would say *Takk fyrir síðast*, but direct translation into English sounds quite odd (“Thanks for last time”). But anyway, we’d like to let you know that we thoroughly enjoyed our visit to Saskatchewan in August: The friendliness, hospitality, interest and cooperative spirit was just great — not to mention all the information we got from you for our research project.

We were so happy that we decided to visit Saskatchewan – it IS different from visiting Manitoba, partly because it is somehow more intimate and you can get closer to the people. That's understandable, of course - they get pretty swamped by Icelandic visitors in Manitoba, I suppose. But, they were very nice to us there, too. It was just a bit different, as I said.

Höski

Book Reviews

A gift from Daisy Neijmann

Linguist, teacher and author, Daisy Neijmann, was on the research team that Vatnabyggd. Born in Holland, she has lived and worked in Iceland, Canada and the UK. She studied English language and literature in Amsterdam, with Old Norse and Modern Icelandic as ancillary subjects.

Colloquial Icelandic is an updated version of her earlier 2001 self-study Icelandic language course. The book is divided into 16 lessons and is accompanied by two CDs that allow the student to listen to the language as it is now spoken in Iceland. Also included are useful tips for visitors to Iceland – day-to-day living experiences, where to stay, eat, drink, shop, how to ask intelligent questions.

According to an unsolicited reviewer on www.goodreads.com, “This is, without doubt, the best course for learning modern Icelandic for someone who eager to begin speaking with confidence. I feel I am erhaps

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not an expert but I can speak conversationally thanks to this book.”

The book is readily available for purchase online and, in the Vatnabyggd area of Saskatchewan, Parkland library users can borrow it at no cost from either the Wynyard or Foam Lake library. Daisy donated a copy to each library.

And from homegrown Icelandic writers:

The *Foam Lake Review* office carries two books by Gail Helgason.

Fracture Patterns, a collection of short stories, was shortlisted for the Writers Guild of Alberta First Book Award and the City of Edmonton Book Award. “Bluffing”, about a bear attack, is taught in secondary schools in Ontario, Germany, and Switzerland.

Her novel, *Swimming into Darkness*, is set in two locations. Gilead is a town 12 miles south of Whitefish Lake in east-central Saskatchewan (yes, quite a similar situation to Foam Lake and Fishing Lake), during the doctors’ strike of 1962. Thora, the main character, and her friends are spending the summer at their cabins on Whitefish Lake, taking swimming lessons while, around them, on both sides of the doctor's strike the debate rages, grows and turns uglier. The other location sees an adult Thora in Edmonton in the summer of 1998. She is wrestling to complete a resurrection of the homestead of an Icelandic-Canadian poet by the name of Markus Olafsson before the deadline for its opening as a heritage site.

And now for something completely different, also available at the Review.

Emer Gudmundson claims that *Nocturnal Emissions* is going to be his only book because, he says, “Believe it or not, it’s too much work.” He is, in a word, “funny”. Oddly enough, another word to describe the

book, in spite of the title, is “philosophical”. “In ancient times, the Neanderthal probably observed a bear fishing in a stream. Following that example, he caught and ate his first fish.” Or, “If you are a dedicated yard sale enthusiast, you will eventually buy back something you got rid of a year or so ago, and wonder why it looks familiar.” And, “Years ago, when horse-power was the main source of pulling farm equipment, a farmer’s standing was judged by various factors . . . When harvest time approached, the stooks must be in a straight line and the eye of the critic was unforgiving. . .”

Bequest to the Vatnabyggd Club

Allisen King was born near Leslie, attended West Side School, and later moved to Saskatoon and then Vancouver. She was proud of her heritage, fluent in Icelandic, an interior decorator and designer by trade, an in-demand model who continued doing shows well into her eighties.

Allisen sponsored the upgrade of the Kristnes cemetery, and bequeathed monies for the Saskatchewan Cemetery project.

She also left a bequest to the Vatnabyggd Club. We are the recipients of three framed pictures of Iceland and a complete lady’s formal dress, which is on permanent display in the club rooms.

Translators needed for Icelandic diaries

Grace Tryhuba of Kuroki and her cousin Gunnar, are looking for people to help translate 100-year-old hand-written diaries. The first two years have been done by Pastor Íris Kristjánsdóttir of Prince Albert.

Árni Torfason was a farmer from the western fjords of Iceland (Vestfirðir). He married Sigríður Hákonsdóttir Espolin and they had five children, Ingibjörg, Guðmundína Ragheiður, Hákon Ragnar Espolin, Ásta, and Harold, the youngest, born in Canada in 1906. The family left Iceland in 1903, moving first to Manitoba

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then to a homestead south of Leslie, SK, in the Holar district.

Árni had begun his diaries on May 1, 1892, first recording mostly weather, and then, over time, including details about the family and about the people and the conditions surrounding them, sometimes very painful, other times shot through with gratitude and pleasure.

Ragheiður died in Iceland. Born in 1887, she did not live to mark her fifth birthday. Ásta married Fred Nordal, a local farmer and they raised six children, Siggi, Ingvar, Laugi, Leo, Gunnar and Emily (Kreuger). Ragnar married Anna Olgeirson and they had eight children, including triplets and twins. Grace is the baby of the family.

Gunnar and Grace are determined to find a way to have all 40 years of Árni’s diaries translated into English, then find a safe permanent location for that 40-year assortment of fragile notebooks that hold on their pages the history of Iceland, and of North America during homestead times: **May 1 first book:** “Sunday. Now is the beginning of new winter. Relentless east snowstorm, heavy going, loss of sheep in nearby farms.”

May 11: “Fog and calm weather, southeast, early sunrise, sun shone, weather warm, this day I collected gifts for tombola/lottery.”

May 13: “Same fog and rain. It’s Kongsbaenadagur (King’s Prayer Day according to the Icelandic calendar). Wagon arrived with a few things for Jón Stefánsson. My Ragnheiður lies down. She’s been ill since Góa time last winter. (Góa is a month in the old Icelandic calendar, late February until late March.)

May 21: “Same weather conditions, a meeting was held at Búðir to talk about donations to those who lost sheep.”

June 1: “Wind from east, impassable conditions with storm. Had to put the sheep inside in the middle of the afternoon and that

was strange. Never seen anything like it. Lambs fell down and died even though the sheep were fed.”

June 12: Sunday. Season of Trinity has started. Service at church. A meeting with the sobriety society. Very cold during the night. The fjord is full of packed ice. Wedding for people from the Faroe Islands.

June 26: Sunday. The dean went out in the country and Stefán from Sumarstaðir in Breiðdalur came and told the news that the farmer Bjarni Bjarnason at Brarnastaðir in Breiðdalur would be told to leave his home. But when the day came to turn him out of his home, nothing happened and Bjarni is still there. Snow coming from the east, not only on the mountains but also near our homes.

July 14: Sigríður went to Kolfreyjustaður to get advice for Ragnheiður’s disease that won’t go away.

September 1: “East wind with rain. I was home and waited for Ragnheiður’s passing. She passed away at 1:30 p.m. after three days of struggle. She became sick in February and never saw a good day after that. Sometimes she seemed to get better, but then it only got worse. No one could tell us what was wrong with her. For the past week, she was bedridden. Guðmundína Ragnheiður Árnadóttir was born in Selá in Fáskrúðsfirði in the winter of 1887, on the 18th of November. She was, therefore, nearly five years old when she died. She was very intelligent and it seemed that she would turn out to be an excellent person. She will be greatly missed by everyone who knew her, especially her parents.”

December 31: Now this year will say goodbye but it leave little behind, many memories that will by many be forgotten as the years go by. Last year’s winter was hard, and then came spring and the pack ice and everything was going mad. Summer was cold, frost hardly left the ground, hardly any grass grew, so very little haymaking. Winter

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began on October 28 with great snow so many of the sheep died. Merchants are tough, they have stopped giving loans to people. That means that things are worse now in this part of the country than before.

April 2, 1893: Easter Sunday. Very cold, frost and windy last night, sun today. Went to church. Two ships landed last night with many people from France.

April 11, 1893: Nice weather and warmth. The ship *Ernst* came and went but no supplies with it. That means we have hardly any food and there’s nothing here to buy.

July 5, 1893: Sunshine and south west wind. Fished well today, caught 350 fishes. My little Inga (Ingibjörg) watched over the sheep today for the first time.

September 14, 1893: Wind from the east, good weather. Two Danish ships came during the night. Inga went to the village for the first time in her life. She is now nearly eight years old.

October 20, 193: Blowing from east, rain. No orders coming. This summer has ended and it was good and blessed, plenty of fish, nice dry season and average haymaking.

Vatnabyggd Icelandic Club of Saskatchewan Inc.

President: Karen Olfason

Vice-President: Cindy Goodman

Secretary: Lynda Waite

Treasurer: Christie Dalman

Membership Chair: Gary Jonsson

Meetings: Third Sunday of the month, 2 p.m.

Everyone welcome.

Tee shirts, sweat shirts, other souvenirs available.
Club room has books and CDs for borrowing.

This is your newsletter. Let us know what stories and photos you would like to see. If you let us know your email address, we can email a pdf of the issue to you.

Joan Eyolfson Cadham

Newsletter editor

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