



**Háskólinn
á Akureyri**
University
of Akureyri

Faculty of Social Sciences
Media studies
2010

Félagsvísindadeild
Fjölmiðlafræði
2010

The Role of the Icelandic Horse in Icelandic History and its Image in the Icelandic Media

Author: Sigfús Örn Einarsson

**Final Project in School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Lokaverkefni við Hug- og félagsvísindasvið**



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Supervisor: Markus Meckl

**Final Project for 180 ETCS credit B.A-degree in School of Humanities and Social
Sciences**

Lokaverkefni til 180 eininga B.A-prófs við Hug-og félagsvísindasvið

I hereby declare that this final-project is all my own work,
except as indicated in the text

Sigfús Örn Einarsson

Signature _____

I hereby declare that this final-project satisfies, in my opinion, requirements for a B.A-
degree

Markus Meckl

Signature _____

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INTRODUCTION

The Icelandic horse has been of service to the Icelandic people ever since it was brought to Iceland by its Norwegian settlers. For a very long time the Icelandic horse played a paramount role in making Iceland fit for human habitation. When Iceland was industrialized, the horse became much less important to its countrymen and at times its existence in the country even got criticized. With time it regained popularity among Icelandic people and its image seems to be getting increasingly positive. There are many associations of horse riders, and horse tournaments generally receive much attention. The general will to perpetuate and improve the Icelandic horse can be observed in many ways, such as with better housing and feeding. In the last decades more ambition has also been towards improving general riding skills and breeding methods.

The main purpose of this BA-thesis is to look at the history of the Icelandic horse and how it has been reflected in the Icelandic media since the mid 1800s. More specifically, it will look at how the image of the Icelandic horse has changed, parallel to its changing role in society following industrialization in Iceland. This is linked to how the Icelandic media influenced the formation of the Icelandic society in the 19th and the 20th century.

The thesis is divided into five chapters, each looking at a specific role of the Icelandic Horse in Icelandic society and how this has been reflected by the media. The first chapter introduces the topic by looking at the important role the Icelandic horse played in agricultural society. The second chapter describes how the image of the horse declined as its role was largely taken over by tractors, cars and other machinery. The third chapter explains how a romantic image developed of the horse as the man's best friend and most needed servant. The fourth chapter accounts for the history of the Icelandic horse as a representative of Iceland and the fifth and last chapter describes the developing image of the Icelandic horse as a leisure/sport horse.

CHAPTER 1 - THE SERVANT OF THE ICELANDIC FARMER

1.1. The Origin of the Icelandic Horse:

Sources explaining the origin of the Icelandic horse are limited and there has been a lot of speculation about it through Icelandic history (Gísli B. Björnsson, Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, 2004). The origins of the Icelandic horse have been traced back to the Mongolian horse (Stefán Aðalsteinsson, 2001). The most likely explanation is that the Finnish settlers brought horses of East Asian origin with them from Russia. From Finland, however, it was brought further to Scandinavia as well as the British Isles.

Norwegian settlers who started inhabiting Iceland in the 8th century brought their horses with them, just as other livestock (Stefán Aðalsteinsson, 2001). Given the hard conditions of long sailing routes across the Atlantic, and limited space on the open boats, it is likely that the settlers were selective when they decided which horses to bring along with them (Theodór Arnbjörnsson, 1932). Many things indicate that few or no horses were brought to Iceland after the year 1100 (Albert Jónsson, 1991). So unlike most other horse breeds, the Icelandic horse has not been mixed with other breeds for about thousand years.

Interestingly, results from a blood analysis in 2001, indicate that the Icelandic horse has the strongest blood relations to the Shetland-pony, from the British Isles (Stefán Aðalsteinsson, 2001). This could be explained by the fact that the Shetland Isles were also occupied by Norwegians for about 600 years, until it was annexed to the Scottish crown in 1472 (Move.Shetland.org, e.d.). As Norway is situated a lot further from Iceland than the Shetland Isles, it is presumed that in many cases, Norwegian settlers preferred to transport livestock from the Shetland Isles than all the way from Norway (Gísli Pálsson, 1997).

The horse breed with the second most blood resemblance to the Icelandic horse proved to be the Norwegian “Nordlandshest” or the “Lynghest” as it also is called. Although the blood of the Lynghest proved less comparative to that of the Icelandic horse than the Shetland’s pony, the “Lynghest’s” features and abilities are by far the most comparable to that of the Icelandic horse.

1.2. The Usefulness of the Icelandic Horse in the early Days

After the Icelandic horse entered the country it played a more vital role for its people than horses have done in most other countries (Sigurður A. Magnússon, 1978). In Iceland's rugged landscape and rural areas there were hardly any roads, carriages or bridges (Albert Jónsson, 1991). For centuries, therefore, the horse played a role of a carriage, bridge, transport wagon and even a train (Sigurður A. Magnússon, 1978). It carried its countrymen and their goods everywhere needed, from the most rural areas to the commercial areas situated along the coastline. From the coast it then carried food and other goods, such as building material etc. back home. It brought midwives to pregnant women, doctors to their patients and when someone passed away, it carried their human remains to their grave (Sigurður A. Magnússon, 1978).

Some claim that without the horse, habitation would have been virtually impossible in Iceland for a thousand years (Íslenski hesturinn, e.d.). Icelanders crossed Iceland's many dangerous rivers on their horse's backs. The rivers were cold, stretched over 300 meters in diameter (Sveinn Þórðarson, 2007) and had a bottom covered with a wet sand that men and horses easily got stuck in and drowned (Daniel Bruun, 1987). Therefore, horses that were considered strong swimmers were considered valuable and referred to as "waterhorses" (Sveinn Þórðarson, 2007).

When heavy loads had to be transported between areas the horses were often lined up in a row, four or five at the time. The rider then led the first horse and its tail was tied to the next one (Sigurður A. Magnússon, 1978). Due to the linear structure of each horse chasing the next, this method was usually referred to as the "Horse Trains". June and July was the transportation season, in which Icelandic farmers transported their merchandize to the coast and from there they brought other supplies to their home that they were going to live from during the upcoming winter (Sigurður A. Magnússon, 1978, Daniel Bruun, 1987).

1.3. In the State's Post Service

The horse trains were also used for post circulation in Iceland's by the mid 1800s. In 1776, an Icelandic post system was established. Initially the circulation of post was very poor since the post was transported by men on foot, who were only allowed to rent horses in order to cross rivers. Due to poverty post delivery was unorganized and limited to 2-4 annual tours around Iceland (Daniel Bruun, 1987, Um blaðaleysi og póstleysi á Íslandi, 1846). Some have claimed

that the post circulation was so ineffective that people in various Icelandic regions retrieved news from Danish ships, that had then travelled to Denmark and back to Iceland (Um blaðaleysi og póstleysi á Íslandi, 1846). After Icelanders could afford to make use of horses for post delivery from 1872, the communication system got more effective. For example, eight annual post travels were made covering all regions of Iceland in 1874. This improvement served a vital educational role for the Icelandic public, which was now able to get magazines as well as Icelandic books, already being published at that time. It proved essential for later developments of society, such as that of Iceland's independence struggle which was characterized largely by the public changing its views and opinions (Daniel Bruun, 1987, Guðmundur Hlíðdal, 1944).

During the summertime the horse trains were also used to move hay from the grass-fields to winter storage (Sigurður A. Magnússon, 1978). The hay was tied into bales, each weighing about 50kg. One bale was tied up to each side of the horse, which was eventually left to carry around 100kg. As a result of this arrangement 100kg was commonly referred to as one "hestburður". In that way a "hestburður" became a measurement of a unit that weighted as much as a horse was known to carry (Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon, 1989). Countless articles can be found from the 19th and the 20th century where hay supplies are counted in 100kg units that are simply referred to as "hestar" (Guðmundur Einarsson, 1880, Páll Zóphóniasson, 1958). As the phrase of a "horse power" gained increased popularity as a measure for engine power, the word "hestar" gradually gained a new purpose in the 20th century.

1.4. The Horse as a Food Source

Reading through Iceland's history of immense poverty many might assume that the horse must have been considered ideal for food exploitation. That is actually not the case. Up until year 1000 when Iceland became a Christian nation, one of the nation's greatest customs, was to eat horses. In fact, it was considered to be an honouring of the Gods of the Norwegian heathendom and was one of the main events during heathen festivals (Sveinn Sveinsson, 1889). Playing such a large role in the heathendom, the Christian missionaries banned the eating of horses in the name of Christianity, hence, minimizing the possibility of the heathendom prevailing among Icelanders. Those who kept eating horse meat were, therefore, considered heathen still or at least poor Christians (Hrossakjöt, 1918). Other protestant countries, however, embraced the eating of horse meat, although Catholic countries despised it after Gregor pope the III, of some unknown reasons banned Catholics to eat horse meat in year 732 (Búi, 1889).

Despite prohibition in Iceland, and general prejudices against the eating of horse meat, there were always a few Icelanders through the ages that ate horse meat, more regularly in some regions than others. In 1776 an Icelandic county sheriff published a brochure discussing the issue of eating horse meat. Although, he did not seem to have courage to urge people to eat horse meat, he stressed its practicality well and pointed out that eating horse meat was neither considered immoral nor against religion in other protestant countries. He got a harsh response from a prestigious Icelandic priest and apologized for ever mentioning the issue (Sveinn Sveinsson, 1889).

This is the first example of the Icelandic media playing the role of lessening the effect of the old custom to not eat horse meat. By the 19th century the Icelandic public had, of course, long forgotten why, in particular, it was considered shameful to eat horse meat (Hrossakjöt, 1918, Sveinn Sveinsson, 1889). The prejudice against it, nevertheless, remained strong among the nation. In the late 19th century people generally began to express themselves about this old issue in the Icelandic media. Those articles encouraged the eating of horse meat and social prejudices against it were deemed unnecessary and stupid (Búi, 1889, Sveinn Sveinsson, 1889). The nutrition of horse meat was discussed as well as its tastefulness. It was also being stressed that due to the fact that Icelandic horses are very self-sufficient, it should be considered a preferable meal (Sveinn Sveinsson, 1889). Articles with a similar purpose remained quite common in the beginning of the 20th century, while the opposite viewpoint was rarely seen. By 1920, eating horse meat was no longer considered uncommon (Gamall hleypidómur, 1907, S.P., 1920) and in the late 1920s, Icelandic stores were being opened that had the sole purpose of selling horse meat. Since then the Icelandic public has gotten increasingly accustomed to eating horse meat, although many compare it to eating a friend (Fyrirverandi bóndi, 1928, Þórdís Hauksdóttir, 2005).

1.5. Work Horses and Riding Horses

A clear distinction used to be made between work horses and riding horses. According to Daniel Bruun, Icelandic farmers commonly owned up to 150 horses that were differently gifted (1987). Work horses were meant to carry heavy loads on transportation routes, and riding horses were meant to carry the man. The majority of horses were used as work horses and those were most commonly left to survive on their own during the whole winter (Daniel Bruun, 1987, Tveir hestar, 1958). In order to eat they had, therefore, to scratch into the snow

until reaching yellow withered grass beneath. In seasons when snow piled up high, the horses could not reach the grass beneath anymore and commonly starved to death (Einar E.Sæmundsen, 1949, Vigfús Sigurgeirsson, 1943).

It was another story when it came to the riding horses. They were kept inside during the wintertime and fed along with the other livestock. There were usually only one or two horses on each farm that were treated in such manner, those considered the best ones in each home. They were used for riding during the winter and since they were considered too good to use for the horse trains, they were the ones referred to as “riding horses”. At some farms, better care was taken of those horses than any other livestock, they were even fed with oats, milk and sugar in some cases (Daniel Bruun, 1987, Þolinmóðar skepnur, 1914).

The life of the Icelandic horse was generally hard before the 20th century. The harsh conditions the horse had to put up with before the 20th century have often been blamed on the poor conditions of society (Stutt yfirlit yfir harðæri, 1870, Tiðarfar og heilsufar í desember, 1879). An author of an article from the latter half of the 19th century claimed, nevertheless, that Icelandic farmers were simply too careless and insensitive to care whether their livestock starved or not. The starvings were blamed on farmers which often were overly optimistic when estimating the hay supply needed for the winter (Um illa meðferð skepna, 1883, Dýravinur, 1896, Hermann Jónasson, 1887). The horse was the farm animal that faced hardship in circumstances of feed scarcity and as a result, this kind of carelessness came the hardest down on the horses (Daniel Bruun, 1987).

In the year 1884 a law was imposed on farmers that was meant to keep them away from starving their livestock in this manner („Þjóðviljinn“ og horinn, 1888). A lot of media discussion remained about starving animals and mainly starving horses. Other kinds of horse abuse got attention, one newspaper for example told about horse owners that dragged stubborn bulls to their pastures by tying their head to the tail of their horse. As follows, several animal protection associations were founded in the 1890s (Dýravinur, 1896, Hestamaður, 1886, Um illa meðferð skepna, 1883, „Þjóðviljinn og horinn, 1888). It was thus, not generally before the 1880s that ideals rose about humane treatment of the Icelandic horse.

Icelanders used horses for cultivation to some amount through the ages, for example for growing corn. Using horses for cultivation demanded that farmers learnt how to make a horse drag equipment, such as plows. Those skills developed slowly along the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th (Gísli Pálsson, 1997). Magazine articles can be found from this

period that contained directions relating to plow usage. Many of them also concluded that plowing was an impossible task in Iceland's solid, stony and uneven soil. It was also claimed that the Icelandic horse was not strong enough to drag such equipment (Jarðyrkjutilraunir, 1853, Ný félagsrit, 1949). Educational articles were then written describing plowing methods and asserting that plowing with Icelandic horses was not difficult for those who knew how to operate a horse for such purpose (Jarðyrkjutilraunir, 1853, J.H., 1851).

These examples reflect how the media was used in order to develop the technique of harvesting Icelandic horses in front of the agriculture tools that entered Iceland in the 19th, as well as the early 20th century. Whether agriculture failures were because of lack of man's knowledge or insufficient strength of the Icelandic horse, at least not everybody had much belief in the Icelandic horse as a dragging force for cultivation work in the mid 19th century.

In the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th, the Icelandic society began to industrialize. At first, it seemed like the Icelandic horse would keep a major role in an industrialized society. Roads and bridges were built for the purpose of carrying horse carriages, and therefore, the image of the horse was shifting into becoming that of an even more efficient employee (Heimir Þorleifsson, 1986 og Björn Þorsteinsson og Bergsteinn Jónsson, 1991). As an increasing proportion of the Icelandic population moved for employment in the capital area, the decreased manpower on the rural side was also met by the help of the horse, which farmers used to drag newly applied agriculture tools. Those spread around Iceland in the first decades of the 20th century and lifted heavy burdens off the farmers' hands during haywork in the summertime (Gísli Pálsson, 1997 og Þórarinn Hjartarson, 1999). The period of Icelandic horses used for dragging was on the other hand to become more short lived than many may have suspected at that time.

CHAPTER 2 - THE HORSE AS A BURDEN ON THE NATION

2.1. The Role of the Horse Starts to Diminish

As Iceland kept industrializing, tractors and other machinery was imported and began to take over the agricultural work that the horse used to be needed for. In a similar period, Icelanders

were starting to make use of cars which was making the horse increasingly redundant for transportation usage (Bragi Guðmundsson og Gunnar Karlsson, 1988).

In 1940, the British army occupied Iceland and stayed during the W.W.II. It helped build Iceland's infrastructure and employed a big number of the Icelandic public. The British government bought Iceland's primary consumer goods which brought Icelanders a great amount of British currency. In 1941 the U.S. army took over from the British army and industrialization continued in the country for the next decade (Björn Þorsteinsson og Bergsteinn Jónsson, 1991).

In 1944, Iceland gained sovereignty from Danish rule and by then Iceland's infrastructure had forgone a total makeover (Björn Þorsteinsson og Bergsteinn Jónsson, 1991). With the recent availability of foreign currency, 1300 tractors were imported to Iceland in the period between 1944 and 1948 (Bragi Guðmundsson og Gunnar Karlsson, 1988). By 1960, almost every Icelandic household was in the possession of a car (Björn Þorsteinsson og Bergsteinn Jónsson, 1991).

2.2. The Horse Perceived as a Burden on its Nation

The main result of the industrialization for the horse was that it had been made redundant in its own country. An ideal example of how strangely these circumstances were striking the nation is an article written in a newspaper in 1928. It informs that the livelihood of one of Iceland's largest horse breeding districts was already being taken away because of the fading demand for horses. The article makes an ironic remark about the district's counsel, as at the same time it was importing a tractor, replacing horses for cultivation work (Á víðavangi, 1928).

With the increased availability of tractors and cars, the nation's old servant was increasingly being compared to its new alternative. This comparison crystallized in advertisements, when new goods were being marketed. A prime example is an advertisement from the newspaper "Vísir", in 1927. It represents Chevrolet automobiles and says: "Þar sem hesturinn gefst upp, rennur Chevrolet létt um veginn". English translation is: "Where the horse gives up, a Chevrolet runs smoothly along the road" (Jóh. Ólafsson & Co., 1927). The advertisement implies that the horse is no match for the engine driven Chevrolet in long trips; a fact that was

becoming quite clear to the Icelandic public. A Goodrich tire seller also connects the horse's image to his advertisement in 1931. It has a picture of two elegant horses and a Goodrich tyre as well. Referring to Roman mythology, the text of the advertisement compares the durability of the Goodrich tyres to the great durability of Helios's horses (Heildverslun Ásgeirs Sigurðssonar, 1931). Although the image of a horse is compared to car tires in this advertisement, it is done with much more positivity towards the image of horses. Despite that fact, both advertisements express quite well the close connection between the image of the horse and the image of the car that was taking over its role.

Naturally, the image of the Icelandic horse changed along with the Icelandic society. The respect of the horse had for ages been built solely on its usefulness as a servant of a starving public. Therefore, the horse was not considered to be something to keep around for a mere joy. Finding the horse suddenly redundant, the general image of the horse definitely fluctuated in the minds of the Icelandic public, particularly among those who most enjoyed the new machinery and the opportunities that it provided (Ari Guðmundsson, 1950).

Despite of great poverty, Icelanders generally tended to think they afforded having many horses due to Iceland's vast lands and the "self sufficiency" of the horse during the winter. This seems to have been debated, since articles from as early as 1883 and 1919 express dissatisfaction about the number of horses in the country arguing that it was damaging to Iceland's pastures and territories (Guðmundur Magnússon, 1883, Sigurður Sigurðsson, 1919). Although the discussion was an ongoing one, it got ever louder after 1920 when the tractors and cars were beginning to take over the horse's importance. So in addition to being considered too many, horses were now also considered useless for almost everything except for selling abroad for a low prize. At this time the horse's image was, therefore, deteriorating immensely and those most negative towards the horse lived around the capital area, where roads and houses were being built on old horse pastures (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1949).

For the first half of the 20th century and as the horse got more redundant the reproduction of it was largely being met by exporting it in thousands (Ólafur við Faxafell, 1946). There were usually around 40-50 thousand horses in Iceland, but this number grew to over 60 thousand in the 1940s, after the horse exportation stopped during the W.W.II. (Daniel Bruun, 1987, Horfellir, 1897, Ólafur við Faxafell, 1946). Up until the 1950s people were discussing the number of horses in the country and the media is the best source for that discussion. Writing in "Ísafold" in 1920, one for example demands that rules be imposed on farmers, prohibiting

them to own many horses. Generally, he claims, there is not enough hay around and there is no use for horses to eat hay from other livestock and then prove damaging to Iceland's pastures during the summer (S.P., 1920). Others recommended that farmers would be taxed for their horse possession and 8-10 thousand horses would be selected to be put down immediately (Sigurður Sigurðsson, 1919). Similar views can be seen in the Icelandic media in the 1940s (Björn Egilsson, 1949). What becomes quite interesting while reading articles regarding this issue is that, although, the horse belonged to the livestock that faced the foremost hardship in circumstances of feed scarcity, it was always the horse that was brought up first in a negative discussion about feed scarcities. This implies that the Icelandic public was not particularly grateful to its age old servant.

2.3. The Horse Deemed the Most Practical Work Tool

Despite the fact that many were negative towards the horse during this period, that negativity was far from being shared by everyone. More conservatively thinking people saw things differently. Still wishing to keep the horse around, they fought for the horse's image, many claiming that despite the newly applied machinery there was still a lot of practical use for horses during various types of work (Ólafur við Faxafen, 1946, Theodór Arnbjörnsson, 1949).

A prime example of this viewpoint is an article from 1928, written by Helgi Hannesson in the newspaper "Lögrétta". Helgi doubted the practicality of the tractors, especially when cultivating uneven terrains. In that context he pointed out that although such machinery had proven to be useful in some circumstances, the experience of it was still very limited. In addition, he gave thorough calculations comparing the costs of cultivating with tractors and with horses. He concluded that it cost only half as much to cultivate land by horses (Helgi Hannesson, 1928). Similar views are apparent in an article in "Tíminn" newspaper from 1935, with reference to car use. The article informs that in Reykjavík, cars had only recently taken over the last work performed by horses and carriages, that of gathering and moving garbage from the streets. The author claimed that using horses for various jobs was much more practical than using cars. He also suggested that car use would be limited and the horse exploited instead anytime possible. By citing the costs of buying gasoline, tyres and spare parts, he recommended that Icelandic currency would be kept inside the country by the use of a domestic workforce (Jón Árnason, 1935).

There was a certain excitement characterizing the discussion about the horse's role in industrializing Iceland before the 1950s. On one side people claimed the horse to be dispensable; naming the costs of keeping etc., but on the other side people had still not given up the idea of the horse as the country's most advantageous work force. The general arguments about the horse's existence were, therefore, mostly of practical origin. That, in fact, correlates (Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, 2002) with the poor economical conditions in Iceland between the two World Wars; which forced the population to think practically. During the 1920s, world markets were unstable and the young Icelandic State had difficulties in coping with various circumstances, including unstable price- and currency levels, ascending customs in foreign markets etc. For this reason unemployment was ongoing in Iceland until the beginning of the 1940s (Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, 2002).

Although practicality was often expressed as the main issue about the horse's existence in those years, examples are also to be found of others who wanted to keep the horse around for longer. Without giving many arguments those could be referred to as sentimental dreamers. The author of an article in "Tíminn" from 1948 (J.H., 1948) belonged to this group of people. In his article he even agrees that getting rid of most or all horses might be the best thing from an economical standpoint. Despite that, he claims that in such a case he would definitely feel like something would be missing within the Icelandic society. These arguments are obviously made of an emotional ground.

CHAPTER 3 - THE MAN'S BEST FRIEND

3.1. Iceland's Independence History and the Romantic Literature Trend

Iceland's increased independence began with the French July-revolution in 1830. Many countries' populations then demanded better constitutions and more liberal society controls (Björn Þorsteinsson og Bergsteinn Jónsson, 1991). In Iceland's strive for independence the media proved vital. Various Icelanders were able to print and produce patriotic material that spread among the Icelandic public. Those messages emphasised that Iceland's ancient parliament, Alþingi, that had been abolished by the Norwegian kingdom in 1281, should be restored. A yearbook was published between 1829 and 1832, called *Árman á Alþingi*. Another group of Icelanders published a magazine in 1835-1847, which they called "Fjölnir". Those two among others, had the same purpose of provoking proudness and patriotic thoughts

among the Icelandic public; thoughts about independence. The Icelandic nation comprised of 60.000 people around the mid 1800. It demanded in the end that Iceland would get to select its own representatives to the land rule. Kristjan the VIII of Denmark indulged the Icelandic nation by establishing an Icelandic counsel in 1840 (Bragi Guðmundsson og Gunnar Karlsson, 1998).

What characterized the romantic literature trend during Iceland's independence battle were emotions and awareness. The connection between the man and the Icelandic nature played a large role, as well as the praise of Iceland's ancient times, before 1281, when Iceland was independent (Ingi Sigurðsson, 2006). These ideas were patriotic, and being published in the Icelandic media, they tended to unify the people, give it courage and lift the general spirit of society (Bragi Guðmundsson og Gunnar Karlsson, 1998). Without such unification the possibility of Iceland later becoming a republic would have been lessened considerably.

3.2. The Horse as “The Man’s Best Friend”

The horse played a role within the Icelandic society when it came to referring to Iceland's past in an emotional way. The horse had an image of being the man's partner and his saviour in hard circumstances. This can be noticed in poetry from authors of the late 19th century. Those poets intended to unite the Icelandic nation for the independence battle. That included appraising freedom and the Icelandic nature and the Icelandic horse was in close connection to those aspects.

Some of the most famous poets of the romantic period used the Icelandic horse as a subject in their poetry. The author of the poem that is perhaps most frequently mentioned in connection to horses today, is Einar Benediktsson. Out of the pride he had for his horse, which had recently won a horse raising tournament, he wrote the poem: “Fákar” in the year 1897 (Ferill, e.d.). The poem contains romantic ideas about the nature and the horse in a travel on mountains etc. A famous part of that poem says:

“Maðurinn einn er ei nema hálfur, með öðrum er hann meiri en hann sjálfur, og knapinn á hestbaki er kóngur um stund, kórónulaus á hann ríki og álfur”. Translation of that poem would be: “The man by himself is no more than a half, because in another ones company he is more than himself. A rider of a horse becomes a king for a while. Without bearing crown he owns both states and continents” (847.is, e.d).

That poem expresses freedom as well as friendship between a man and a horse. In order to realize how uncommon romantic poetry about horses was in the first half of the 20th century, it is ideal to search the most famous phrase in that poem by the search engine of the website timarit.is. By searching “og knapinn á hestbaki er kóngur um stund”, it becomes clear that the first time it gets mentioned is in Tíminn in 1918. In the 1930s it appears only once and only two times in the 1940s. After the year 1950 it starts, however, to get increasingly more mentioned (Timarit.is).

An article published as early as 1922 gives examples of horse poems written by Grímur Thomsen (1820-1896) and Páll Ólafsson (1827-1905), who were among Iceland's most famous poets. The article that contains their poems was even highly romantic in nature itself. It gave a very bright image of the Icelandic horse portraying it as a life-saver of the Icelandic public. It also describes the good friendship that is often created between a man and a horse (Hestavísur, 1922). Einar E. Sæmundsen gathered horse poems from various poets in an article he wrote in the newspaper Eimreiðin in 1921. The horse poetry of that article describes the proudness of a horse owner who often depends on his horse in order to stay alive (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1921).

Although the romantic image of the horse as the man's best friend was not so common in Iceland's romantic literature period during the independence battle, the Icelandic nature most often played a huge role (Ingi Sigurðsson, 1921). Obviously, poetry about the nature often included horses, since the public overall travelled by horse in the nature. The Icelandic horse stood, therefore, very close to romantic ideas that the Icelandic public had about its country, its nature, the freedom of riding in the wilderness etc.

As people moved to the capital area in the first half of the 20th century and Reykjavík developed as an urban centre, a sportsmanship started to develop around the Icelandic horse. The founders of the riding sport emphasized the importance of spreading romantic material about the horse, such as stories about exceptional horses and their achievements. This was meant to spread interest about Icelandic riding sports and was to be followed by the publishing of informative material about horses and horse sports. As the Icelandic public romanticized about exceptional horses and their achievements, the image of the Icelandic horse as the man's best friend developed. Of course, romantic ideas about the horse already reflected in poems composed in Iceland's independence struggle. Those were, however, fairly

rare among the Icelandic public in the first half of the 20th century, but spread out as the Icelandic horse became received the title of as the man's best friend.

Despite the fact that cars were getting more popular tools for the workforce than horses in Reykjavík in the beginning of the 20th century, there were individuals that still enjoyed riding. In 1922, Iceland's first horse-association was formed in Reykjavík, by forty of these men and women. The association was given the name "Fákur". The main objective was to increase interest in and knowledge of horses and riding-sports, as well as contributing to a proper treatment of the horse (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1949). These objectives were to be reached by four main activities:

1. Building a track to use for at a horse-competition each year.
2. Providing its members with an all round education about horses such as information on the nature of the horse, proper taming methods, as well as housing and feeding of horses. One of the issues here was how to provide pastures for the horses in the capital.
3. Gathering of stories about exceptional horses and their achievements.
4. Publishing informative writings about horses and horse-sports (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1949).

The two of the last numerated factors served the purpose of enforcing a positive image of the horse by romanticizing about its talents, usefulness etc. As stories spread about talented and useful horses in the old days saving their owners' lives etc., the Icelandic public gradually became accustomed to referring to the horse as "The Most Needed Servant". This development took time and the leisure riders met little understandings about their hobby for the first decades. The Reykjavík Town Council did, for example, not show much understanding to the members of Fákur from 1929-1933, making them pay quite a high sum for a rent of pastures (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1949). Nevertheless, the Icelandic horse got sympathy from Icelandic Parliamentary members at that time. In 1945, they approved to finance the building of new gravel roads for horse riding since the British army had ruined most of Fákur's gravel roads and refused to pay compensation. The letter that the Parliament members wrote in order to recommend the financing of the gravel roads contained a romantic view of the Icelandic horse. It said that for a thousand years the horse had been "The Most Needed Servant" as the only means of transportation. Also, that the horse had always been a trustworthy friend and a companion of every Icelander. Sentences followed that portrayed

romantic ideas about a rider on a vast sand beach along Iceland's coast. Therefore, Parliament members seem to have been among the early ones having romantic ideas about the social value of the horse (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1949).

3.3. The Role of the Media in Changing Attitudes about the Icelandic Horse

3.3.1 Geisli Horse-Magazine

In 1923, members of the "Fákur" horse-association started to publish, in an extremely limited handwritten edition, the very first "horse-magazine" which got the title: "Geisli". Its object was to fulfil the aforementioned aim of "Fákur's" members, to spread out stories about exceptional horses and their achievements and inform people about horses and horse-sports. Due to a limited edition, Geisli was mainly just being read up aloud during Fákur's regular meetings. Geisli's contents appeared in poems as well as in story form. Due to lack of general interest towards the subject, Geisli was only published with recesses until 1933 (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1949). From the lack of interest it can be assumed that Icelandic horse owners were still not prone to idealizing their horses very much at that time.

3.3.2 The Book: "Fákur"

In 1947 more experience had been gathered around the horse riding sport. In that year, members of "Fákur" decided to compensate for the lack of material for idealizing the horse as well as informing riders about riding techniques. Two years later, Einar E. Sæmundsen published a book with the title: "Fákur" (Björn Björnsson og Björn Gunnlaugsson, 1949). An advertisement in Vísir in 1949 representing Einar's book, says that the book contains an "innovative attitude" towards the Icelandic horse (Bókaútgáfan Norðri, 1949). The innovative attitude referred to was the romantic angle of the book presenting the horse as the man's best friend and the most needed servant. One of the book's chapter states, for example, that the horse has been more to its countrymen than a bridge over rivers and a means of transportation over rough landscapes. The horse is deemed as a companion of the Icelandic public, a riding toy for the youth and a common subject in good memories in the minds of the old ones (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1949).

Obviously this book was meant to spread romantic ideas about the Icelandic horse as the man's best friend. Apart from that, the book contained all round information about the horse and various activities of horse associations already established by then. That also had a part in forming a romantic image of the horse since it gave the horse a positive image and drew general attention to it again after it had lost its value as a practical workforce.

The ancient Norwegian mythology practiced in Iceland in the years before Christianity is discussed in *Fákur*. It is pointed out that the ancient philosophy of the nation's forefathers used to crystallize in their religion. Icelanders believed themselves to be descendants of Gods, of which Óðinn was the supreme figure, representing all the best human qualities. Óðinn was also the founder of the Icelandic poetry and as a result, it is claimed, the horse has through time been subjected in the language of the Gods. In the ancient mythology, the Gods were also believed to own horses and the book points out the high status the horse must have had among the public in ancient times, since the Gods were believed to own horses. Further pointing out the importance of the horse, examples are given of poems made by famous Icelandic poets in the 20th century, including Einar Benediktsson and Grímur Thomsen. One of Einar's poems especially mentioned describes an ancient myth about Óðinn and its eight legged Sleipnir. The myth says that Sleipnir formed a place in Iceland called Ásbyrgi, simply by stepping his hoof down (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1949).

3.3.3 The Role of “Hesturinn Okkar” in Romanticizing the Horse and Horse Riding

Although *Fákur* made a valuable contribution in forming the romantic image of the Icelandic horse, it still took some time for the concept to spread around the nation. That claim is, in fact, verified by Steinþór Gestsson who was the editor of “Hesturinn okkar”. Hesturinn okkar was the first Icelandic horse-magazine, first published in 1960. In the preface of the first issue, Steinþór Gestsson recalls that the National Horse Association was founded in 1950, or one year after “*Fákur*” was published. The general opinion in those days, he claims, was that the National Horse Association would not be long lived. Steinþór also claims that for a long time there had been a shortage of a horse magazine like “Hesturinn okkar” that served the purpose of spreading messages that were likely to help in developing the Icelandic riding sport (Steinþór Gestsson, 1960).

‘Hesturinn okkar’ contained leisure-material of various kinds, most of which the editor received from readers from all over the country. The interest in the Icelandic horse was,

therefore, becoming more widespread and visible, indicated by positive ideas about the horse sent from around country. So despite an ongoing debate about a decreased need for the horse, a part of the nation never abandoned the image of the horse as the man's friend and companion. Material of *Hesturinn okkar* included horse-poems and memorial articles about horses as well as men. Also there was a lot of travelling stories and stories of men and horses that were considered amusing or unique in some way. Some of these stories were of realistic-dramatic nature emphasizing how poor the Icelandic population had been before Iceland became industrialized etc. In these kinds of stories the phrase of "The Most Needed Servant" was frequently used. Other stories were highly dramatic in nature. They told about an unusually strong horse (Guðrún Jóhannsdóttir, 1960), a horse that had an unusual aptitude towards swimming (Þórólfur Kristleifsson, 1961) and even unusually intelligent horses (Jón Brynjólfsson, 1960). This kind of idolization of the horse, first being commonly noticed in the 1950s, comes together with the fact that the idea about the leisure horse was on the rise at that time. Most material of romantic nature that was published is likely to have played a vital role in restoring a positive image of the horse as useful, and now its usefulness suddenly lay in companionship and joy. As the horse's image came closer to that of a hero, its position became stronger in the Icelandic community, since heroes are generally welcomed and treated respectfully.

The idea about the horse as the man's best friend was built on the idea of the horse as having a general social value. Ironically, that idea did not appear much within the Icelandic society in the times before the industrialization, when the horse proved of most use to the nation. The premise for the horse to later become perceived as a leisure horse was, of course, the forming of a new Icelandic welfare state. After the Second World War, the Western world was industrializing rapidly. Hence, the need for Icelandic horses as a work tool abroad was diminishing at the same time as leisure riding was becoming more popular in the world.

CHAPTER 4 - THE HORSE AS ICELAND'S REPRESENTATIVE

4.1. A Work Horse Abroad

In 1855 Icelandic farmers started to sell their horses in thousands for exportation to the British Isles. In Britain they were mainly used for work deep inside coal mines, but elsewhere they were used for general farm-work (Daniel Bruun, 1987, Fjallkonan, 1887, Ó.Ó., 1887). The

positive thing about the horse exportation was the foreign currency Icelanders got from it. However, according to calculations given in an issue of *Fjallkonan* in 1887, the annual revenues from horse exportation did not exceed the cost of raising the horses (Ó.Ó., 1887).

As work horses inside English coal mines, the Icelandic horse is likely to have received sympathy from its countrymen. At least after reading the newspaper “*Morgunblaðið*” in 1913 where a man refers to the English coal mines as “hell”. Then only recently, some supervision had been established in England in order to improve the horrible treatment that horses had been receiving inside the mines. In order to get an idea of the general treatment, the English supervision imposed new rules that insisted on each horse being allowed to see the sky at least once a year. Description of severe treatment of horses inside the coal mines included horses being starved and the tongue being ripped out of a horse’s mouth (Vagabundus, 1913).

By exportation, Icelandic farmers saw an opportunity to get rid of shiploads of their smallest and least promising horses. Many were even under the minimum working age and most often totally unaccustomed to being man handled. Due to this reason few good Icelandic horses got exported, hence, the reputation of the Icelandic horse did not rise high and neither did its value (Dan Daníelsson, 1905). Nevertheless, the demand for Icelandic working horses remained an ongoing one in England. They proved strong compared to size, and in narrow working conditions inside coal mines the smallest ones were considered quite practical. For farm work abroad, such as dragging carriages and various tools it was, on the other hand, widely considered too small (D.D., 1926).

A discussion remained for the first half of the 20th century about the disadvantageousness of degrading the Icelandic horse abroad by only selling smallish and untamed work horses suitable for work inside coal mines. Breeding aims were often mentioned in that context and there were suggestions about eliminating small horses and breed the larger ones (Ólafur Jónsson, 1950). A Danish Count named Knuth influenced this discussion immensely by sending a letter to Iceland that got published in “*Morgunblaðið*” in 1939. Recently then, he had received three horses from Iceland that an Icelandic friend of his had chosen. Those were not considered exceptionally good riding horses on an Icelandic scale but were, nevertheless, fat, tall and considered to have a good anatomy (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1949). Knuth praised his newly applied horses and described that none of his fellow Danish farmers had ever heard about such large and beautiful Icelandic horses. Knuth recommended that larger Icelandic

horses would be chosen for exportation. In such case he estimated the prize of Icelandic horses to increase for about 75-100% (Reykjavíkurbref, 1939).

4.2. A Leisure Riding Horse Abroad

After Knut's letter got published, Fákur members put a pressure on Icelandic authorities to form a strategy that involved focusing more on the quality of few horses instead of the number of many horses. Therefore, the exportation of devalued and untamed horses was to be stopped and horse owner to be inspired to breed and raise larger and more beautiful horses with good qualities such as willingness, lightness, gait versatility and good temperament. Little was accomplished in the 1940s, largely due to the chaos that followed the W.W.II. (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1987).

In the 1950s, the Icelandic government began participating in marketing the Icelandic horse abroad as a quality riding horse (Alþingi, 1998). Early promotion tactics in 1953 included inviting six people from Great Britain for a riding tour in the Icelandic wilderness. Shortly after, one of those British riders wrote an article in a Scottish newspaper claiming the Icelandic horse to be the best pony breed in the world (Voru jafn hrifnir af hestunum og náttúrufegurð landsins, 1953).

The marketing of the Icelandic horse went well in the following years. In 1958 headlines were claiming that "the most needed servant" had been given a new role. The marketing of the horse was going well and a presumable amount of horses was being exported, mostly to Germany (Þarfasti þjónninn í nýju hlutverki, 1958). By that time the Icelandic horse was described as an ideal riding horse for the public of the mainland of Europe. It required a lot less food than other horse breeds, was easy to tame, had a great temperament, as well as extreme gait versatility (Íslenski hesturinn, 1958).

In the period between 1956-1965 the number of Icelandic horses exported abroad had reached 2.750, most of which exported to Germany and Switzerland. Around 1966 and 1967 the demand for Icelandic horses was not considered to be as much as many had hoped for (Tæpl. 300 hross flutt út, 1966, Hestamót, 1967). The most likely reason was the old Icelandic tradition of exporting second class horses. At least, around 1.650 riding horses were exported in 1969, although many of them were not even tamed. In a period after 1969, however, the aim was raised again in selecting proper horses for the exportation. The mean prize of the

horses then quickly tripled, or even quadrupled, in a short time as the demand for it rose parallel. The reputation of the Icelandic horse rose during the 1970s. The Icelandic nation was getting very optimistic about a profitable industry forming around the horse, naming a new profession of horse tamers as an example (S.B., 1972).

Around 30-40 thousand horses were estimated to be abroad in 1979, opposed to a sum of 50 thousand in Iceland. This was considered a great result at that time but in the 1970s horses were already being sold all over Europe, mainly to West Germany and the Scandinavian countries. The market also expanded to America where the Icelandic horse received good reputation for participating in The Great American Horse Race, across the whole North America. In 1977 and 1979 media discussions were, from time to time, about extremely high prizes that some of the Icelandic horses were being sold for (A.H., 1977, S.J., 1979). Therefore, the Icelandic horse stock had by that time, redeemed itself by widely proofing its value to the Icelandic nation.

The popularity of the Icelandic family horses has grown ever since it first got exported abroad for leisure riding purposes. In fact, Icelandic media articles from both 1958 and 1987 point out that the reputation of the Icelandic horse is likely to boost the general image of Iceland, and hence, attract tourism. The gait versatility of the Icelandic horse has often fascinated foreign riders, since it provides with possibilities in which way to ride. In addition, the Icelandic horse has been praised for being well temperament, exceptionally colourful and unusually cheap to feed (Íslenski hesturinn, 1958, Þráinn, 1987).

In 1969 an international organization was founded by 18 horse associations, situated in Austria, Belgia, Kanada, Danmark, Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Iceland, Italia, Luxemburg, Holland, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and the U.S.A. One year later the first European Tournament was held and followed by World Tournaments that have been held since 1991. Today there are over 100.000 horses abroad. By forward breeding, the anatomy of the Icelandic horse has gotten better since the beginning of the 20th century and so have its qualities. Its necks and feet have grown longer, so that the horse is now around 10cm larger in general, or typically from 132-142 cm (Félag hrossabænda, e.d.).

4.3. Exportation of Icelandic Horse Meat

Icelanders exported some horse meat during the 20th century, although it was generally not considered a lucrative business (Sauðfé nær helmingi fleira, 1962). Exportation of horse meat increased in the 1980s, since by 1979 a loud discussion had risen about poor pastures and insufficient hay supplies. Norway and Italy were among horse meat buyers, although Japan was the overall largest consumer (M.H.G., 1980, Tekjurýrnun bænda nemur 201. Millj. Kr., 1979).

4.4. Compared to Other Horse Breeds

When the Icelandic horse is being compared to other breeds, it is generally being praised in every way. There is, nevertheless, an exception which has to do with the size of the Icelandic horse. Although breeding aims and better feeding have resulted in a horse that is 10cm larger in average, its mean height is still below the universal pony standards. The fact that the Icelandic horse gets the title “horse” opposed to the “the Icelandic pony” for example, raises questions and critique from foreigners (Anniebanannie, 2008). The arguments that have been used against that claim include saying that there is simply no Icelandic translation to be found for the word “pony” (Robyn, 2008). Others claim that other things than a horse’s size has to do with whether or not it classifies as a horse and say that this has more to do with what the horse can be used for. They point out that the Icelandic horse is for example known for being stronger, more resistant and softer than most other if not all other horse breeds. In addition it is emphasised how sure footed and gifted the Icelandic horse is with reference to gait versatility (Albert Jónsson, 1991).

4.5. Representing Iceland on the Home Ground

In the years around 2002 some 3.000-3.500 foreigners were visiting Iceland every two years, attending “Landsmót”, Iceland’s domestic tournament (Landsmót 2004 á Hellu, 2002). Due to the fact that the Icelandic horse has been well conceived among foreigners, Icelanders are generally proud of their horse. Whenever something has to be shown to foreigners that is unquestionably Icelandic and original, Icelanders tend to present their horse. Foreign representatives such as queen Elisabeth have, for example, been taken for a visit to one of

Iceland's famous breeding farms. Without exception the horse appears to provoke admiration for its qualities, naming its gait versatility in particular (Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, 2004). That ability became popular as the leisure sport around the Icelandic horse.

CHAPTER 5 - A LEISURE HORSE

5.1. Riders in Ancient Times

Partly due to how isolated Iceland was before the 20th century, there was limited knowledge of classic riding techniques (Daniel Bruun, 1987). Since Icelanders were unaccustomed to foreign warfare, it is easy to imagine that an image of a knight sitting straight in his saddle, controlling a horse in battle never became much known in Iceland at earlier ages. Foreigners (Daniel Bruun, 1987) noticed that Icelandic riders did not make use of their legs or their reins in order to steer the horse, as long as the horse went into the right direction.

Since there were no roads in Iceland before the 20th century, the mission of Icelandic riders was simply to get fast between places on an uneven ground. In order to be able to keep a shafted whip in one hand, Icelandic riders had a way of steering their horses solely with the other hand and the horse, therefore, had a say in choosing the path. Without Icelanders caring so much about a riding style, horses that endured long and hard transportation, were of the highest value. Such horses had good stamina and were both strong and fast. In order to get by fast in Iceland's rugged landscape they also had to be limber and surefooted (Daniel Bruun, 1987).

5.2. The Horse for Work and/or Leisure?

From the beginning of industrialization until 1950, a debate remained about whether the main aim of Icelandic horse owners should be that of creating a better work horse or a better riding horse. The best work horses were supposed to drag as heavy burdens as possible. Therefore, such horses had to be as very strong, but as horses get larger and stronger, they also tend to become more rigid. Such horses are not considered good for riding so clearly there was no way of doing both. The discussion about breeding a better work horse for dragging went as far as considering the mixing of Icelandic horses and Norwegian Fjordhests, as they are larger

and considered related to the Icelandic horse as well. The main reasons for this debate about the preferable role of the Icelandic horse, was that many imagined that the horse would prevail as an alternative tool to tractors and cars. The discussion about exporting the horse for work exploitation abroad helped as well. Gunnar Bjarnason, the horse breeding counsellor at the time “Fákur” was written, approached this issue carefully in one of the book’s articles. Reading through the article it is, nevertheless, easy to see that his ideas about the horse’s future role were more towards that of becoming a leisure horse (Fákur, 308-310, 316, 330).

5.3. Developing Leisure Riding in Iceland

Riding techniques is the main indicator of leisure riding. Icelandic riding techniques were not discussed much in Iceland before its industrialization. Still, articles that had the sole purpose of educating Icelandic riders about proper riding techniques can be found from as early as 1909. Those entailed information about how the head of the horse was supposed to be positioned during riding, how one should sit in a saddle and how to make the horse run in pace and tolt (F.J., 1909).

Members of the first horse association Fákur in Reykjavík were pioneers in developing the image of the horse for leisure purposes. When cars had begun to occupy roads in the capital area, Fákur financed the building of gravel roads to ride on instead, as well as horse tracks to hold tournaments. By these means the tone was set for an upcoming trend of riding Icelandic horses solely for leisure. Fákur’s objectives helped with applying a positive image of the Icelandic horse. A part of this lay in stressing the opportunities in Icelandic leisure riding. This was largely done by comparing the qualities of the Icelandic horse to that of other breeds. Another vital factor in this respect was to promote good riding techniques. This was done by holding riding tournaments and also by providing education about anything that had to do with keeping horses, taming or breeding them (Einar E. Sæmundson, 1949).

5.4. Creating the Modern Image of the Horse

Portraying a positive image of the Icelandic horse was something that played a role in creating its modern image. One ideal way was to compare the Icelandic horse to other horse breeds. Before Iceland industrialized, the nation had little knowledge of other horse breeds and, therefore, had little comparison. Articles written as early as 1879 and 1899, described various

abilities of different horse breeds. They provided an image of the Arabic horse as the most famous and glorious of all horses. Neither of them, however, included a single word that phrased the Icelandic horse. At that time there was, for example, little knowledge about the origin of the Icelandic horse. Thus, although horses of East origin were being phrased, the fact that the Icelandic horse is of Eastern origin was not mentioned (Sn.J., 1879, „Um uppruna tegundanna“, 1899).

The man that perhaps played the largest role in creating a positive image of the Icelandic horse among horse owner was Theodór Arnbjörnsson. He wrote a book in 1932 containing information about all known horse breeds. The image that Theodór gave of the Icelandic horse was much more positive than the one in the articles from the late 19th century. He described the Icelandic horse as the most versatile gait horse in the world. He categorized the Icelandic horse breed among a handful of others, which he considered the most versatile in general; with reference to both riding and working abilities. The breeds he cited were all of Eastern origin, exceptionally strong compared to size and sturdy when it came to any kind of hardship such as hard work, poor diet or cold weathers. The Arabian horse he presented as the most famous relative of the Icelandic horse. Theodór also mentioned how special the Icelandic horse breed was due to its isolation through the ages, but mixing up Eastern stocks had been known for spoiling their rare qualities (Theodór Arnbjörnsson, 1932).

This information served the purpose of restoring the image of the Icelandic horse as a valuable stock. When Icelandic riders got the message that their horse was of the most versatile breed in the world, they are likely to have become more determined in riding it and forming a leisure sport around it. With a horse that Theodór considered to be the most versatile gait horse in the world, with the tolt and the pace in addition to the three common ones, the walk, the trot and the gallop, people are likely to have realized that there were various opportunities that lay in riding the Icelandic horse for leisure. In the 1920s when riders had recently begun to form leisure by riding their horses, Theodór suggested in one of Fákur's meetings, that Icelandic horses be trained as polo horses. Although many were interested, that option never got explored much further (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1949).

5.5. The First Horse Tournaments

Sources reveal that horse tournaments were common on the agendas of county gatherings in various Icelandic regions. Horse races did, however, not develop much for the first half of the 20th century and were not particularly popular events.

An article reviewing a festival held in North Iceland in 1874 describes a primitive racing track made with pins and strings attached between them (Einar E. Sæmundsen, 1949, Þjóðhátíð á Oddeyri, 1874). In 1925, there was still little general interest in Icelandic horse riding tournaments. This is revealed in an article from that year, describing the participation of only nine contenders in a horse tournament in Reykjavík. The prize for the first place had by then been raised in order to make the tournament more appealing (Dan Daníelsson, 1925). In 1930, “Fákur” saw an opportunity to call attention to the horse sport at the great festival being held at Þingvellir to celebrate the thousand year anniversary of Iceland’s parliament, Alþingi. Fákur got permission for a tournament there which included competing in high speed pace and the high speed gallop. With the exception of breeding horse shows, tournaments at that time only consisted of measurements of the speediest horses. This continued until the 1950s (Daniel Bruun, 1987, Einar E. Sæmundsen, Gunnar Bjarnason, 1982).

5.6. Developments towards the image of a leisure/sport horse

Leisure- and tournament riding of the Icelandic horse was relatively known for the first half of the 20th century. It was, however, not until the latter half of the 20th century that the image of the Icelandic horse as a leisure horse began to develop to some amount. As the reputation of the Icelandic horse grew abroad and domestically, people got more and more motivated to ride. Land-scale riding tournaments were held regularly after 1950 and the image of the Icelandic horse as a leisure horse developed as the riding sport developed around it.

In December 1949 the Icelandic Horse Association, abbreviated L.H., was established by the 12 horse associations already existing at that time. Among the aims of L.H. was harmonizing the operations of the Icelandic horse associations already existing. Also, to aim at breeding good Icelandic riding horses for tournament and leisure riding. Inconsistently, the general aim was to embrace all the best qualities of the Icelandic horse (Landssamband hestamannafélaga, 1951). It took more time and development for Icelandic horse tournaments to gain consistency. The horse magazines “Hesturinn okkar” and “Eiðfaxi” played a vital role in that

process. In Hesturinn okkar horse owners got an opportunity to discuss and change opinions about various things regarding Icelandic horse. In order for tournament riding to be possible it was, for example, essential that Icelandic riders were able to agree on which horse-traits were to be desired and which not (Jón Finnur Hansson, 2005). In addition, successful riders sent in articles that were meant to guide the less experienced ones about good techniques and good breeding aims (Kristinn Hákonarson, 1961).

The first nation wide riding tournament was held at Þingvellir in 1950 and got the name “Landsmót”. It received some 10.000 visitors and has remained a popular gathering since, presently held every two years. At Landsmót in 1950, the first horses were given all round measurement, with reference to anatomy and riding abilities. The things that were measured were willingness, glorious appearance, softness, pure gaits and gait versatility (Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, 2004). After the first Landsmót special committees were given the project of developing the standards of the Icelandic riding sport (Landssamband hestamannafélaga, 1951).

As more tournaments got held and Icelandic riders got generally more accustomed to their horse, the Icelandic riding sport developed along with the image of the Icelandic leisure/sport horse. In the 1970s and the 1980s, Icelandic horse tournaments were taking the shape of the ones that are known today (Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, 2004, Sigurður A. Magnússon, 1978). Riding the Icelandic horse for leisure and in tournaments has received increased popularity ever since. Nowadays, there are various competitions that riders can attend to. Apart from the breeding competitions, the main competitions nowadays, are the “gæðingakeppni” and the “Íþróttakeppni”. The gæðingakeppni is considered the more traditional one, mostly emphasizing the horse’s talents and spirit. Íþróttakeppni, however, emphasizes more on the classic riding art, that is, the cooperation between the rider and the horse. A clear distinction is made between horses depending on their gait versatility. Hence, horses that master only four gaits often compete separately from the ones that master five gaits. Overall, the main emphasis is put on the horse’s talent nowadays and the tradition of wild gallop races is about to die out. Instead of the gallop races a tradition of comparing the best tolt horses has become increasingly more popular in the latter half of the 20th century (Félag hrossabænda, e.d.).

CONCLUSION

Icelandic society has gone through an enormous transformation since the 19th century. Already it has been portrayed how these changes have resulted in a changed role of the Icelandic horse and its image in the media.

For centuries the horse was imperative for the survival of the Icelandic agricultural society, as it was the only means of transportation on Icelandic soil and a necessary work tool when it came to cultivating Icelandic land etc. Ironically, during the time of its most usefulness the horse received much worse treatment by its owners than it does today. General treatment of the horse got better as Icelandic living conditions improved in the 20th century. In the media of the time the Icelandic horse was mainly portrayed as a work tool and a servant to its people. Criticism in the media of the harsh treatment of the Icelandic horse helped change attitudes about the Icelandic horse and how it was treated.

In agricultural society it is estimated that there were commonly around 40.000 horses which at times was not so far from the size of the Icelandic population. Today, there are around 80.000 horses in Iceland which is still a high number considering a nation of 300.000 people. Around 10 thousand people are members of horse associations around the country and 30.000 general participators are estimated to participate in horse leisure activities. The horse is still keeping its age old role as a transporter during sheep herding in the fall. More frequently though, people ride in their spare time and many participate in tournaments. It is also popular among Icelanders, just as well as foreigners, to go for a travel for some days and experience the horse in the Icelandic nature. Horse breeding becomes more and more widespread and at various Icelandic horse farms people ride horses for leisure and/or occupation. Consequently, the general image of the horse in the media nowadays is quite different from the one in the 19th and early 20th century. The image of the horse in today's websites is, in fact, by many ways similar to the image that is given of the Icelandic nature. The Icelandic horse is presented as a unique breed, beautiful, versatile, as well as natural since it was pure bred for ten ages. It is also considered as strong, forward going well temperamental, bright and still it has a place in Iceland's art and culture.

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