



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

**Icelandic Immigrants and
First Nations People in Canada**

Ritgerð til M.A.-prófs

Sigrún Bryndís Gunnarsdóttir

September 2010

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Enska

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Preface

Curiosity about the interactions between the first Icelandic settlers in Canada and the local aboriginals started me off on this journey of research. There are many distant relatives of today's Icelanders living in Canada as many Icelanders immigrated to Canada, especially in the late nineteenth century. I have relatives from my maternal great-grandfather's side whom I would love to get in touch with. But what interested me the most was to know how well nineteenth century Icelanders managed to adapt to their new surroundings which had only been inhabited by aboriginals before. I wondered whether the two peoples managed to communicate and cooperate or whether there was a wall of distrust and hostility between them. So I began digging into the information I could find in libraries, with people I knew and on the Internet.

Summary

In this essay I will examine the first contact between the Icelandic immigrants who settled the western shore of Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba in the late nineteenth century and the local Natives. I will discuss in detail various sources found among personal letters and diaries of Icelandic settlers. I will examine the story of these two groups during these first years of Icelandic settlement and go from the more “official” documentation of the Icelandic Immigrant Saga to its more personal and often different version. In many of the books that have been published about the experiment of establishing an Icelandic colony in Canada, not much has been written about the Natives. The main purpose of my work is to delve into these personal sources and get a more explicit view of how these two peoples experienced each other, and if these relations were friendly and profitable for one groups or not.

First, a short history about the local First Nations and the story of the Icelandic settlers is summarized. Narratives of Icelandic-Canadians are introduced which contain stories about the Natives. Immigrant Icelandic-Canadians poetry and contemporary work of Icelandic-Canadians authors involving the Natives are discussed.

The story of the Native, John Ramsay, is introduced as well as the story of Helgi Einarsson. These two men were of great importance to the Icelandic-Canadian history. Interracial relationships also discussed.

My conclusion is that these relations were most often friendly and beneficial for both groups. However, the Icelanders had to choose between having a good relationship with the Natives and being accepted as proper citizens by their host country. Despite this fact, a good affiliation survived between many of the Natives and the Icelandic-Canadians, and overcame this wall of ethnic separation. This proves that people of different races can build a common ground of communication if they so wish.

Introduction

The migration of Icelanders to Canada in the late nineteenth century was an important era in Icelandic-Canadian history. Iceland lost many good men and women while Canada benefitted from their arrival to unsettled territories. The immigrants fled the poor living conditions in their country due to volcanic eruptions, harsh winters, and great poverty. Iceland was still under Danish rule and monopoly ruled in trade and fishing. People wanted to make a new life for themselves in a new country, where they hoped to become independent and be able to sustain themselves and their families. The first Icelanders started arriving in small numbers in 1873 aiming to settle down in Ontario, but larger groups arrived in 1875 and 1876 and settled on the southwest shore of Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba. The purpose of this essay is to investigate this period of first contact between the first Icelandic settlers and the First Nations of Canada, to discover whether the contact was favorable or not, even both, by reading various authentic sources and arguments of different writers and researchers, and come to a constructive conclusion.

Porsteinn J. Porsteinsson, an Icelandic-Canadian writer, wrote the story of Icelandic immigrations to North-America. The book was published in three volumes. Two additional volumes on the subject were later published with a different editor. In his second volume, Porsteinsson tells the story of the Icelanders who chose to immigrate to Canada in 1873. These immigrants were tempted when the Canadian Government made them an offer they could not refuse. They were offered, among other things, two hundred acres of land for free and free temporary housing, as well as free travel within Canada to their destination. Out of a group of one hundred and sixty-five people who arrived in Quebec on August the twenty-fifth from Glasgow on the ship *Manitoban of Glasgow*, one hundred and fifteen of them had promised to go to Muskoka, Ontario, on

that particular agreement. The immigrants were bound by this agreement for three months but thereafter they were free to move to wherever they wanted. The Canadian government agents in Quebec were displeased to see many immigrants go to the United States and did not want to lose any of the Canadian-bound people to the US (Porsteinsson 191-92).

In her 1994 dissertation, *The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters*, Dr. Daisy Neijmann wrote, for instance, about the emigration and settlement of Icelanders in New Iceland. According to Neijmann, the Muskoka settlement tragically failed and once again the Icelanders looked for a new home. With additional immigrants arriving in 1874, they moved on to Kinmount, Ontario, but intentions to settle in large numbers failed as the soil was thought to be infertile and the Canadian authorities failed to meet set conditions. Many children died and adults became ill during their brief stay in Kinmount. In 1875, the Icelanders subsequently travelled westbound to the District of Kewatin, to Lake Winnipeg. With the invaluable help of the Governor General, Lord Dufferin, who had visited Iceland twenty years earlier and had been impressed by the country and the people, a new colony awaited them in Manitoba, which they called New Iceland. Lord Dufferin vouched for the Icelanders and funded the trip from Muskoka til Manitoba (72-74).

In order to comprehend the contemporary spirit of the people, who endured such a long and difficult voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in search of a new life, the best way is to read through the existing authentic information. Many of the first Icelandic settlers wrote diaries, personal letters to their relatives in Iceland, and even autobiographies, wherein they depicted their experiences and their relationships with other people in their

new land. These writings were sometimes not easily accessible and more often than not lay untouched in drawers or boxes waiting to be rediscovered.

The settlers did not arrive in unpopulated areas, as indigenous people already inhabited them and had done so for thousands of years. The Canadian authorities as well as the authorities of the United States considered the indigenous people, called First Nations people in Canada and Native Americans in the USA, a liability because of their own plans for white settlements, and had been forcing them off of their lands and onto reserves or reservations, which more often than not were quite unsuitable for habitation. Many of the indigenous people had actually always lived as migrants for centuries and moved from winter camps to summer camps and vice versa. The authorities of the two countries made treaties with them and bought lands from them and more often than not, the natives were tricked and ended up as broken-hearted people.

There is not much to find about the Natives in immigrant letters which have been collected and published. In two volumes of letters from Icelandic-Americans, *Bréf Vestur-Íslendinga*, by Böðvar Guðmundsson for instance, there are only a few references to the Natives. In other books as well there is a surprising, overall silence about the Natives who had for centuries inhabited the areas where the Icelanders had now settled.

However, sources can be found in the work of various Icelandic researchers and writers as well as of Icelandic-Canadians, in unpublished and published personal writings of New Icelanders, and they bring to light an impressive and rich knowledge of actual and often constructive interactions between the two peoples, even though some conflicts arose as well. The writings of the Canadian-Icelandic writer Laura Goodman Salverson, the immigrant poets Stephan G. Stephansson and Guttormur J. Guttormsson, the

immigrant Friðrik Sveinsson, the Icelandic writers Þorsteinn Þ. Þorsteinsson and Þorsteinn Matthíasson, the anthropologists Anne Brydon and Helga Ögmundardóttir, Dr. Daisy Neijmann, the Canadian historian of Icelandic origin Ryan Eyford, and the Canadian-Icelandic writer W.D. Valgardson, amongst a few, prove to be an invaluable asset to this essay. Their works often present an enlightenment of a productive and friendly first contact but some of them also produce facts that are not as favorable to the Saga of New Iceland, such as the works of Brydon, Eyford and Ögmundardóttir, who bring to light new information which give a different perspective of the Icelandic settlement in Canada. At the arrival of the Icelandic settlers, the First Nations in Canada were being herded into reserves and removed from favorable future white settlement areas. Several treaties between the Canadian Government and the First Nations had been signed but not in the District of Keewatin, which produced tension and a certain Native hostility (Sveinsson 34-35; Brydon 171; Þorsteinsson 344-45).

1. Nineteenth Century Manitoba

When the settlers from the Land of Ice and Fire arrived in their new land, three First Nations, the Cree, the Ojibwe, and the Saukteaux, had already lived there for a long time. They hunted game, fished in Lake Winnipeg and the neighboring rivers, picked berries, wild rice and other wild plants for food, and herbs for medicine (“The Subarctic”).

The First Nations peoples consisted of smaller bands of related families. They had had a hunting relationship with white people for two centuries when the Icelanders arrived to the Gimli area. Guðjón Arngrímsson relates in his book about Icelandic emigration to New Iceland in Canada, *Nýja Ísland: Örlagasaga vesturfaranna í máli og myndum*, the story of how the first white men arriving at the Hudson Bay were two French fur traders in 1668 who began trading with the Cree. Then The English Hudson’s Bay Company established itself there in 1670 and became a ruling force in the lives of the First Nations people in the whole of the North West Territory, including Manitoba. The local First Nations gradually learned enough English to be able to communicate with the white traders. Some Natives spoke fluent English, and they even had English names by the time of the first Icelandic settlement (Arngrímsson 194).

1.1. The Cree

The Cree, as they were called by the English and the French – an Algonquian tribe – had for centuries lived in the Northwest Territories as well as in other parts of Canada and the United States. Their ancestral language, a language of the Algonquin family, used to be the most widely spoken aboriginal language in northern North-America but today, only a few speak it fluently. As it says in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*: “The

tribal name originated from a group of natives near James Bay recorded by the French as Kiristinon and later contracted to Cri, spelled Cree in English” (“Cree”).

In their own language the Cree call themselves *Iyiniwok* or *Ininiwok*, meaning “the people”, *Nehiyawok*, “speakers of the Cree language”, or *Ayisiniwok*, meaning “true men” (“Native-languages”).

At the time of the Icelandic settlement the Cree Nation had been greatly reduced because of smallpox, an epidemic brought on to them by the white man, and this had happened to other First Nations over a period of more than a hundred years. The Cree were unusually open to inter-tribal marriages, which was not common among many other Nations and tribes of North America. They even married white people, especially Cree women marrying French hunters and trappers. The children of such marriages were called the Métis. Later that term included other people from mixed aboriginal-European origin. The Cree were considered to be peaceful and had a good affiliation with the whites. The Cree either lived in the woodland or on the plains and their ways of life depended on their surroundings and circumstances (Bélanger; “Native-languages”).

1.2. The Ojibwe

Also living by Lake Winnipeg at that time were the Ojibwe or the Ojibwa. The Ojibwe, or the Chippewa as they are known in the United States, had lived widely across North America as did the Cree, but they had also grown fewer in numbers during the nineteenth century due to European epidemics, such as the smallpox. They called themselves *Anishinabe* (plural: *Anishinabeg*), meaning “original people” (“Native-Languages”). They were mostly forest people who lived in the northern regions, but some Ojibwe Nations lived on the plains to the south. The Woodland Ojibwe lived in areas of poor soil and short growing seasons of the north. They were skilful hunters and

trappers as well as gatherers and harvested wild rice and maple sugar. They used maple syrup in food for seasoning and they used no salt for preserving food. Fish was their most important diet and they were adroit fishermen. Because of their environment they rarely used horses, or hunted buffalo as did the Plains Ojibwe. Their only domestic animal was the dog and they even ate dog meat at big feasts. The Woodland Ojibwe used the birch bark for almost everything, including their canoes (“History”). They lived in dome-shaped wigwams (Bogue, 17) and when the Icelanders arrived, they also lived in houses (Brydon 182).

1.3. The Saulteaux

Yet another First Nations was the Saulteaux, a sub-tribe from the Ojibwe. The Ojibwe and Saulteaux Nations spoke the same language, and both called themselves the “*Anishiniwabe*”. *Saulteaux* is a French language term meaning “people of the rapids,” as they were first known to live in Sault St. Marie before they moved to new areas, and they lived peacefully alongside the Cree. Their existence went way back in time: “The Saulteaux have an ancient history in the land now called Canada, and can trace their earliest origins in Canada to the Canadian Shield, around the area of Hudson’s Bay in the eastern part of the country” (“The Saulteaux Nation”).

These nations were in the fur business together and sold their furs to the Hudson’s Bay Company. The Saulteaux led lives of the forest people during summer and hunted, gathered and fished like the other forest Nations. But they had also adapted themselves to the way of the plains existence and grew corn and potatoes. During fall and the winter months they went south hunting the bison with the Cree and Nakoda. The Saulteaux people had begun trading with the French hunters and trappers even as far back as the very early sixteenth century when they settled down in Sault St. Marie, but first recorded evidence is from 1623 when Étienne Brulé, who was exploring Lake

Huron and went further north, met the Ojibwe for certain. The Saukteaux were mostly a peaceful First Nations people and chose much rather to trade with the white man instead of fighting against him and they did not fight after 1815 (Sulzman).

1.4. The Métis

The Métis were a people of a mixed race, most often of white men and Native women but also of Native men and white women even though that happened less often. These “mixed-bloods” were not accepted by the white community and were badly treated just like “full-bloods”. They were neither white nor Native and often they could not find their proper place in a rapidly growing westernized society. The Métis often chose to live the “Indian” way, chasing and hunting buffalo to their different feeding grounds. However, the white community used them as guides as they knew the land very well and the role of the Métis grew in importance as the white population grew in Canada.

On the website *A Webography: The History of Racism in Canada* much information can be found on the Canadian Métis in a chapter called “An Overview of Aboriginal History in Canada”. The subchapter “Trade and Social Changes” discusses aboriginal people of mixed race:

In the earlier periods, the French promoted the idea of establishing a single race. The British attempted to maintain more formal procedures and relationships at the trading posts. Mixed societies resulted in any case, known by different names at different times and places: Métis, mixed bloods, half-breeds, country born, home guard.

The subchapter “Relations After 1760” relates the importance of growing Métis participation:

The competition between English and French, and, after 1760 between the Hudson's Bay Company and other companies, had both social and demographic impacts on Native peoples.

The role of middlemen shifted from group to group as the fur trade expanded west and north. The proximity of posts as competition increased meant more time spent trapping as trips to the posts could be made more frequently. This in turn depleted fur bearing animals more quickly, raising dependency on European goods and increasing food shortages among the Indians. Provisions had to be imported for some regions and for some groups, this dependency became problematic.

Mixed-bloods were hired to help transport furs and played a key role as manufacturers and suppliers of pemmican. Many post employees were of mixed heritage. Indians were not hired on a full-time basis since it would remove them from the hunt. As the natural resources that had long sustained Native economies began increasingly to disappear, the dependence of Europeans on Aboriginal peoples was displaced by the dependence of Aboriginals on Europeans and their supplies.

And finally, the subchapter "The Red River Colony and the Métis" provides more detailed knowledge about the Métis:

Lord Selkirk, a member of the committee running the Hudson's Bay Company, was granted land in 1811 by the Hudson's Bay Company to establish an agricultural colony at Red River.

The region was already home to the Métis who had migrated there from around the Great Lakes.

Generally, the “mixed bloods”, to use one of the nineteenth century terms, were the offspring of European men and Native women. The term “métis” was applied to those with a French and Catholic lineage. Those with British (usually Scottish) and Protestant fathers were referred to as the “country born”. These people had lived lives of freedom within a unique economic niche based on fur trade, farming and production of hides and pemmican from the buffalo hunt. The manufacture of pemmican was important to the Métis as an economic product and to the fur trade posts of both companies as an important source of provisions. Selkirk’s establishment of a colony had an irrevocable impact on the lives of both the Métis and the newcomers.

This information sheds light on how the Métis had been born into a world which was torn between the whites and the Natives. They had been shunned and despised by the white people yet after 1760 their importance in various roles grew, such as being traders, farmers and hunters. The participation of the Métis in the economic growth was valuable to the whole community and they gained respect and prosperity. As the buffalo grew less in numbers due to extensive hunting, partly by the Métis, they lost their significance once more, which forced their existence into one of white dependency. Such was their sad situation in the 1870s at the time of the arrival of the Icelanders to Manitoba.

First Nations people and a predominantly Anglo-Protestant community of white people and “country-born” were living in the area when the Icelandic immigrants arrived in Winnipeg in 1875. A French speaking, Roman Catholic community of the Métis had been the largest group in the Red River settlement about twenty years earlier. In 1855 Manitoba was not yet part of Canada, “The settlement, part of the Rupert’s Land held by the HBC (Hudson’s Bay Company), was still administered by a governor and the

Council of Assiniboia, established by the HBC“ (“Riel, Louis”). The United States showed increasing interest in gaining control over this area, hoping for its annexation into their country. Manitoba was declared a Canadian Province in 1870 and Riel became a prominent political leader but strong opposition from the Anglo-Canadian population in Manitoba eventually drove him into temporary exile in the United States where he stayed until he took part in the second uprising in 1869. The Métis of the Red River Area, in fear of losing their majority influence, revolted in 1869 under the strong leadership of Louis Riel, who is described as being a

Métis spokesman, regarded as the founder of Manitoba, teacher, and leader of the North-West rebellion.... Both his parents were westerners, and he is said to have had one-eighth Indian blood, his paternal grandmother being a Franco-Chipewyan Métisse ... Louis Riel is one of the most controversial figures in Canadian history. To the Métis he is a hero, an eloquent spokesman for their aspirations. In the Canadian west in 1885 the majority of the settlers regarded him a villain; today he is seen there as the founder of those movements which have protested central Canadian political and economic power. French Canadians have always thought him a victim of Ontario religious and racial bigotry, and by no means deserving of the death penalty. Biographers and historians over the years since Riel’s death have been influenced by one or other of these attitudes. He remains a mysterious figure in death as in life. (“Riel, Louis”)

Louis Riel was sentenced to death and executed in 1885 for having led two Native uprisings in Manitoba, the one in 1869 and another in 1879. During the second Riel-revolt some Icelanders volunteered for the Canadian army and fought against Riel (Jónsson 47-49; Arngrímsson 234-35).

A crucial factor in the outcome of the Riel revolts was the difference in the way of life among the French-speaking Métis and the English-speaking “country-born”. The Métis loved to hunt buffalo and were not inclined to farm, whereas the English speaking community of whites and half-bloods were mainly farmers and cultivated the land. The strict Presbyterians did not approve of such instability in the Métis, especially the ones of Scottish descent, who despised the Métis and desired their lands. When the buffalo became scarce the Métis were forced to settle down and farm, which made them a threat to the white immigrant settlements (Arngrímsson 233; Jónsson 48; “Riel, Louis”).

Louis Riel was an important participant in the nineteenth century Canadian ethnic struggle of power struggle, and his story is one of historical importance.

Bergsteinn Jónsson, in his book *Til Vesturheims: um vesturferðir, Vesturheim og Vestur-Íslendinga*, which is about Icelandic immigration to North America, informs his readers of the fact that there were three major groups of people living in Canada. One of the groups consisted of the French speaking people of Quebec who were of French descent. The second group included the descendants of British or mostly Scottish immigrants, who had settled in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island as well as in Upper Canada, in Ontario. The third and largest group was the French speaking and Roman Catholic inhabitants of Manitoba who were

hunters, descendants of French skin traders and Natives. Such people of mixed race are called the Métis. They were, in a sense, in the worst situation because the English speaking Canadians hated them for their French origin and language, and they detested them for the colour of their skin and their Native origin. It was considered totally in order to ignore their views as no educated leaders appeared among them. (48)

With his words, Jónsson seems to sympathize with the Métis and perhaps compare their plight of being ignored to the one of the people in Iceland under Danish rule. At least, he felt the need to inform his readers about this fact about the Métis.

1.5. Icelandic Settlers in a New Country

The Dominion Government had agreed that the area on the west coast of Lake Winnipeg would be reserved for the Icelanders (Arngrímsson 123). Þorsteinsson explains in his book that when the Icelandic delegation was looking for suitable land for the new colony, they were offered land close to Winnipeg. Land which had recently been attacked by a plague of grasshoppers and the members of the delegation only saw black and barren earth. That plague was, at that time, considered to be the worst that had happened in that area. The Icelanders feared such creatures and the devastation that followed them so they looked elsewhere for land.

Þorsteinsson continues that they could have decided on land to the west of Winnipeg, near the newly settled Mennonite colony, but one of the delegation members said the Icelanders were so poor that they would not be able to buy working animals or tools for farming and agriculture and they had no idea how to do such work. They took the third option, to check the west shores of Lake Winnipeg and to the north, in the District of Keewatin, which lay on the north end of Manitoba by Boundary Creek. They were told that the shore was good land, there was plentiful fish in the lake and there were no grasshoppers in the Lake Winnipeg Area.

Finally, Þorsteinsson writes that when the delegation arrived to Lake Winnipeg, they found the forest to be more accessible than in Ontario, and they saw that there was plenty of land for all Icelandic immigrants to settle over a period of years. Another matter which made this choice feasible was the fact that it had been decided that the

Canadian Pacific Railway, running from coast to coast, would lie across Red River at West Selkirk and from there to the northwest, not far away from the southern part of the colony. That would provide the colonists easy transportation access to the outside world. Unfortunately, they later changed the route of the railway, leaving the colony in more isolation than planned (326-29).

One thing the delegation group failed to explore well enough before they decided where to live, was the climate. It was extremely cold in winter and extremely hot in summer and by arriving so late in the autumn, just before winter, it would be a disaster for the people. It is unbelievable that those men who made that choice had not learned from the cruel and deadly lesson of the Kinmount and Muskoka catastrophe. And there was another thing they should have explored much better and that is the fact that the soil was a marsh most of the year and the Icelandic immigrants did not know how to work the land (Neijmann 74).

Ryan C. Eyford, a Canadian historian of Icelandic origin, wrote the article “Quarantined Within a New Colonial Order: The 1876-1877 Lake Winnipeg Smallpox Epidemic” in 2006. He says that when choosing the site of their proposed colony, the delegation had stated that the Indians living at Sandy Bar were “Christianized and civilized” and not to be feared. Based on the assurances received from Lieutenant Governor Morris, they confidently asserted that “as soon as the Icelanders begin to settle here, these few Indians will be located elsewhere” (64). That, of course, did not happen. The Natives stayed on and created some problems for the immigrants who wanted this area exclusively as their own.

The Natives were considerably inferior to the white man at the time when the first Icelanders started to immigrate to Canada in the 1870s. They were treated badly by

many, and received much injustice from authorities and the white public alike. They were driven off their lands and herded into reservations which most often offered poor farming or work opportunities. They were despised and systematically degraded (Eyford 59-60). Poverty was tremendous and alcoholism was widespread. This was a tragic change in otherwise fiercely proud and strong peoples. North America had been their homeland for thousands of years but by the late 19th Century they had lost most of it because of the growing waves of European immigrants coming to North-America to begin a new life (Brydon 184-85). The whites had imported Africans since the beginning of white settlement in the seventeenth century or even earlier (“Slavery”). In the 1880s Canada made use of Chinese immigrant labor, especially to lay the railroads across the country (“Chinese”).

The Icelandic people had much in common with the Natives through oppression, harsh nature, lack of food and even broken spirits. They came from an environment of Danish colonialism and through several centuries they had had to endure oppression from their Danish King. Most people lived in great poverty and in somewhat a medieval hierarchy. The Danish Governor and his men were the highest-ranking ones, followed by the Church, and then the Danish and Icelandic merchants. The last in line of prominent people were the rich Icelandic farmers who owned their farms and land and employed workers of their choosing and more often than not, they treated them badly. Icelanders had to rely on natural resources, such as fish in rivers, lakes and sea, various types of wild birds, and domestic animals. They had to feed their animals and farming was hard if the land was difficult. Life was a continuous struggle and any natural disasters shook the fragile balance.

In documentation on the first Icelandic settlements in Kinmount and Rosseau in Muskoka District, Ontario in 1873-74, there are no records about natives living in that

area so we know nothing of their existence or of possible encounters between Natives and the immigrants. Five members of the immigrant group travelled in the summer of 1875 with John Taylor, “an unordained pastor working at a Bible Society shantytown” to Manitoba to find land where they planned to establish an Icelandic-only settlement (Brydon, 169). They decided on a site on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg which included an island, named Big Island or Big Black Island by the local Native tribe, the Big Black Island Band, now known as Hecla Island (Brydon 169-70; “Hecla” 28). Brydon interestingly makes note that “a few months earlier, a Norwegian delegation, also seeking land to settle, rejected the same land as unfit for inhabitation” (170).

When the Icelanders arrived in New Iceland many of the Natives had been gathered into reserves but the ones living near and by Lake Winnipeg had not signed Treaty no. 5 so they still lived in the area which was intended for the Icelanders. The Icelanders took over huts and other habitats of the Natives, who had already left or were leaving, and did not think much of it. They mostly ignored the Natives and focused on themselves and their ‘pioneering’. Yet, there were Icelanders who, in fact, sympathized with the Canadian First Nations people and had good associations with them. The settlers seem to have understood the Natives’ plight, as they could assimilate to them their own experience of being the poor and broken ones in Iceland, their old country.

The first party of Icelanders arrived in Winnipeg in October 1875 when it was near winter and some decided to stay in Winnipeg through the winter, but the main group decided to continue to their new land by travelling with difficulty down the Red River on flat, square barges and one York boat to Lake Winnipeg. From there they were pulled by the steamboat Colville across the lake until it anchored outside Willow Point on October 22, when the captain refused to go any further towards White Mud River as

the weather was getting worse (Þorsteinsson 341-45). They wintered where present-day Gimli is situated and suffered greatly from poor supplies and were unable to provide sufficient food for their families as they did not know how to hunt or fish in this unknown land. John Taylor, the Government's agent and his family did their best to help the Icelanders (Þorsteinsson 342-43). Yet, one cannot but wonder how Icelandic immigrants had visualized the Natives before arriving to their new country and how their actual experience of them turned out to be.

This experiment of an all-Icelandic colony failed a few years later after a series of disasters, such as a very harsh first winter, a deadly smallpox epidemic in 1876-77, a great flood in 1879, and many settlers moved to Winnipeg. Other Icelandic settlements were established in Manitoba, especially around Lake Manitoba. The first Icelandic settlement was left with only a small number of people by 1881 (Neijmann75-83).

2. The Stereotypical Indian and Immigrant Legends

The Icelandic settlers were definitely aware of the First Nations people and many had been frightened by tales of cruel, barbaric and murderous Indians, who scalped white people's heads, and therefore avoided contact with them. This stereotypical image of the American Indian was widespread among Europe and "civilized" North-America at the time and had been so since the massive white settlement continued west, all the way to the shores of the Pacific. The Natives were considered a serious hindrance to the settlers' new and exciting future and negative images of them were portrayed everywhere in order to drive them off their lands. The governments of the United States and Canada used this particular method of getting rid of a nuisance. Rumours were spread by many that the Natives had attacked white settlers, cowboys driving cattle between places, and stage coaches carrying passengers, goods and the mail. In some cases, this was true, in others probably not. The Natives were looked upon as being savage, heathen, uncivilized and unable to handle responsibility. Natives being called savages was much used in a derogatory manner (Bellfy). This nineteenth century belief still somewhat lives on today.

2.1. The Stereotype – Negative Image

The common stereotypical belief about the wild, vicious Indians is discussed in the following Icelandic-American published and unpublished works. Most of these works were written by men, as it was rather unusual that women wrote anything about their experiences as immigrants. Yet there were some women who wrote valuable narratives giving insight into the nineteenth-century life of immigrant women. The Icelandic people who settled in the United States had much less physical contact with the Natives than those who settled in the Canadian North-West Territories but nonetheless they were met with accounts of hostile Indians.

In Laura Goodman Salverson's *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter*, we learn about Ellen, an old charwoman:

I remember the hair-raising experience of an old charwoman whom the young wags loved to terrorize with tall tales of Indian atrocities. She lived alone in a tiny shanty on Point Douglas, and though her days were devoted to monotonous labour she was always exuberant in praise of her many blessings. (124)

Salverson continues and lets us in on Ellen's thoughts: "Blessed she certainly was, and except for that menace of redskins, found the New World all that one might have expected, since the good God made it" (125). One chilly and snowy October evening Ellen is walking back home from work and she is getting frightened of running into Natives: "On such a night it was good to have a secure shelter, a bit of a place that kept one safe from savage eyes" (125).

When Ellen arrives home she discovers that she had forgotten to fill the wood box before going to work that morning, and that she had to go out to get more wood for the night. When she opens the door she was in for a shock:

As stricken as Lot's sinful wife, she stood there, her horrified eyes fixed upon the road. God and his angels help her! Plain as the nose on her face, the doom she dreaded marched upon her. Three dusky, buckskinned knaves were striding towards the house, snow whirling round their horrid heads, a long lean hound loping at their heels. She was so frightened, so certain of the inevitable end, that it never occurred to her that she might shut the door, and by this simple act, escape an unwelcome visitation. Instead, she stood there, too petrified for speech, while the strangers, who, politely, enough, asked for shelter, filed in and with grunts of satisfaction, seated themselves on the bench before the table.

Evidently they wanted food, as well as shelter, thought the old woman, dim stirrings of rising anger minimizing her fear. The scallawags! Why didn't they kill her and be done! Why must they prolong the agony, the murdering villains! She supposed they would scalp her as a matter of course, for she had long, yellow hair. Just the sort of hair braves love to dangle from their belts, so the wags had assured her. (125-26)

Ellen's thoughts are clearly tainted with this evil Indian stereotype and she expects to die any minute yet the author implies that Ellen is filled with wrong ideas about the Natives by using a slightly witty tone.

Helga Ögmundardóttir refers to several individual accounts in her informative, and highly interesting MA thesis in anthropology on images, self-images and power in the relations between the Natives and Icelanders in the West from 1875 to 1930, "Ímyndir, sjálfsmýndir og vald í samskiptum Indíána og Íslendinga í Vesturheimi 1875-1930". Her thesis is based on the relations between Icelandic settlers and the Natives between 1875 and 1930 in Manitoba and Dakota. Ögmundardóttir went to Canada in 2001 in the purpose of interviewing the descendants of the Icelanders settlers and of the local Natives, and to write about them in her thesis. She interviewed people of Icelandic origin and of Native origin as well as descendents of mixed marriages. She gathered various authentic materials together, such as diaries, letters and personal interviews and they give an interesting and valuable insight into these people's lives.

Ögmundardóttir, for instance, refers to Guðný Sigurðardóttir, who opened the first store in Gimli with her husband, and wrote in her memoirs about what it was like when they arrived in 1875 to the place by Lake Winnipeg which was later named Gimli. It is stimulating to read the woman's narrative:

Yes, there were Indians, and they were not overjoyed by our arrival as they felt the land was theirs. We women were terrified of them, especially if the men were away. I remember how startled I was when I first saw these dark-skinned men. I was alone home and tending the store when several Indians came in. They undoubtedly found my appearance equally as strange as I found theirs, and they were especially fascinated by my hair which was light blonde. I really became nervous, though, when one of them came up to me and poked his finger at my spectacles. (60)

Ögmundardóttir also tells about Kristín Helgadóttir, who was from Skarðshamrar in Borgarfjörður. She was hired as a housekeeper in Canada and worked in various places during the first decades of the twentieth century. The well-known author, Guðmundur G. Hagalín, wrote and published her memoirs in two books, *Það er engin þörf að kvarta* in 1961 and *Margt býr í þokunni* in 1962. Kristín was believed to be psychic and her dreams often came true. She had a spiritual guide, an old Native woman, but she was not very happy with that fact. The reason why she did not like that old Native woman was because of her deep fear of Indians due to the horrible stories she had heard and read about them murdering and kidnapping white immigrants. She gradually accepted the presence of that old woman who often appeared and helped her when she was ill herself or helped her in healing others (Ögmundardóttir 109-11).

Guðjón Arngrímsson says the following in his book: “Undoubtedly, some of the Icelandic settlers, especially the children, have feared the Natives, as horrible stories about them passed among people in Ontario” (194; my translation).

He also writes: “There, on the bank of Red River, the Icelanders first saw their dark, future neighbours, these fearsome savages who scalped people if they were in a bad mood in the mornings, if you could pay heed to the stories”(194-95).

It is unavoidable to mention the Icelanders who moved to North-Dakota around 1878 as they were exposed to stories about the cruelty of Indians, especially the bloodthirsty Sioux. The tragic event at Little Big Horn in 1876, where General Custer and his men were massacred by a large, angry group of various Native tribes that fought for their rights to keep their hunting grounds in the Dakota Territory, was very fresh in people's minds. The United States Government had promised that the Natives would keep the Dakota Territory in perpetuity, but that agreement had been broken by the Government and the Natives were herded into reservations with or without violence. The Sioux Wars (1862-1890) in the area which is now South-Dakota, Nebraska and Montana, greatly affected the white inhabitants there and the whole country. Stories about the bloodthirsty Sioux became influential and widespread, and had bad effect on the immigrants. The politicians and the military used the event at Little Big Horn to commit atrocities against the Natives. The systematic killing of the buffalo by the whites and the Métis with army protection finally broke the Natives' fighting spirit. The Natives were finally crushed at Wounded Knee in 1890 when the United States military massacred 300 members of the Sioux Nation who had just given up their weapons (Ögmundardóttir 76-79).

Jóhannes Halldórsson, who went under the name John Frost in America, and lived in Milwaukee, wrote to his brother-in-law in October 1875 and discussed what his countrymen were discussing amongst themselves. Ögmundardóttir discusses Halldórsson's letter in order to compare the discussions about the Natives as stereotypes to the ones which were based on true experience. Halldórsson writes:

What is most talked about these days is the colony in Manitoba about which, in my view, too many people predict good things for the future. Certainly, the land is good and there probably is some fishing ... but there are other big

disadvantages such as flies ... and the cruel enemies of all colonists as well, the wild Indians, who are, in fact, harmless around Fort Garry or places where the military is placed and they dare not do anything wrong, but nevertheless they are not shy to use “Tomahawk” and “Scalping-knives” if they get near some “Yanco”. That is what they call all white men and it means a thief.

(Ögmundardóttir 60-61; my translation)

Halldórsson definitely believes that the Indians cannot be trusted and that Manitoba is barbaric compared to Milwaukee and not a place where he or other Icelanders should live.

Ögmundardóttir refers to Bjarni Guðmundsson who called himself Bjarni Dalsted when he settled in America. His very personal recollections *The Bjarni Dalsted Saga*, are based on his diaries, and contain prejudice which must be viewed in perspective of that period in history. Dalsted received an unusually good education in Iceland before his arrival in the United States in 1876. He became a farmer in Pembina County and knew English. He worked as a teacher, an interpreter and a justice of the peace and he joined the American army. Dalsted was also religious. He adopted a stereotypical view of the Natives as well as of other people he considered not to be civilized. His contempt for the Natives is obvious. Ögmundardóttir quotes the following from his memoirs:

“There are red men there that are called Indians who were born there. They did not fall out of the stars nor did they fall out of Bulgaria. They were peaceful unless the white people took a stick of wood to scare them” (82; my translation). Dalsted describes in detail how the Icelanders were badly treated upon their arrival in America and how they were even considered as low as the Indians. He had to fight an Irishman when working in harvesting as the Irishman was obviously abusing him in some way. Dalsted made

that Irishman plead for mercy and he consequently gained respect of his masters and the Irishman was driven away without pay (Ögmundardóttir 82).

Ögmundardóttir further notes that Dalsted was afraid of and distrusted the Indians and what they did. He believed that every move they made showed intent to kill him or harm him and he kept a very alert eye on them. Once, in 1877, when he was working for a farmer in South-Manitoba he went searching for horses on the prairie and, for fear of Indians, he was armed. This was a year after Little Big Horn and Louis Riel and the Métis were a threat in Manitoba so the white people were apprehensive and uneasy. He describes this particular day:

There were many places you could hardly meet anybody ... an ideal place for the Indians to lie and wait to scalp you. It was almost impossible to avoid them and death was almost certain. You could not go back because the Indians would think you were timid. They respect anyone who is bold and takes a chance. I knew there had been cases where the Indians attacked and scalped several men. ... Horses detected the Indians and did not like the smell of the Indians ... Suddenly, there was an Indian close in front of me on the west side of the road holding a gun with a muzzle on his shoulder and a blanket on the other shoulder. He was painted red, black and blue and his breast and neck were painted red. This man was tall, stout and heavy and looked like a dead man. He had a gopher cut in pieces laced into his braided hair. These were bear claws on his chest. I will never forget his eyes – cool, black and full of hate. I grabbed my own gun and he never moved. Sandy often told me not to shoot until I was sure they would start. If this Indian had raised his gun I would have shot. It is impossible to tell this as fast as it all happened. It was like a picture in my mind

but I was not scared and I kept on going. (Ögmundardóttir 84-85; my translation)

In addition, Dalsted expresses a common historical view of the Natives when he writes the following: “the Indians were always a threat and wanted to scalp the whites. The whites were now handling most of the freight” (Ögmundardóttir 84; my translation).

2.2. The Reality – Sympathetic Relations

Laura Goodman Salverson recounts the story of her Great-Aunt Steinun who lived with her husband, Mr. Haldorson, on a very isolated homestead, sixty miles from Winnipeg. Her husband cut his foot very badly and the wound became infectious and he was in danger of dying. They had no horses or a cart so she decided to use a hand sleigh which they used for hauling wood, and pull the sleigh herself with her husband on it. She was a tiny woman but of immense spiritual strength. Against her husband’s protests she prepared for their journey, and made her husband as comfortable as possible. Then Great-Aunt Steinun realized that she did not know the way to Winnipeg, nor did her delirious husband:

I thought for a moment that no one had ever been left so helpless, she used to say. Then I was ashamed of myself. What was the good of having a God you wouldn’t trust as well as your neighbour, I asked myself? So then and there I started, and, at the edge of the lake, put it up to the Almighty. Whatever thought He put in my head, I could take for guidance. And that’s what I did. (123)

Salverson continues to relate how her Great-Aunt had to be pressed into telling about what had actually happened on her journey “for she was always loath to delineate personal hardships” (123). It turned out that she had drawn the sleigh with her husband on it for hours, such a tiny and a most likely under-nourished woman, over the ice.

Finally a blizzard burst upon them and made her lose her way. Steinun's response was very modest:

Oh, it was a bit of a struggle, to be sure", she admitted. "What of it? I had to put myself in God's care. Humanly speaking, I was lost, I suppose, and the strength flowing out of me like water from a cracked crock. But again, what of that? Before I was overcome, an Indian found us, and took us home to his tepee. That was a lesson, let me tell you. The young squaw massaged my frozen feet with a mixture of bear's grease and some sort of herb. She fed us from the family pot, and before I set out once more, dressed me in deerskin leggings and moccasins lined with moss. Ah, they were good, those two brown people. They shared all they had with us and when the storm was over that fierce-looking brave saw me off on the right trail. So you see if my husband was saved, it was not all my doing, but a miracle of God's mercy, working through the simple heart of a savage. (120-24)

Salverson is full of admiration and respect for her tiny, courageous aunt, who against all odds got her husband to a doctor with invaluable help from a friendly, Native couple.

Kristín Helgadóttir from Skarðshamar, Borgarfjörður, overcame her deep fear of the Indians when she discovered that the Natives she met at a Native fishing post north of Lake Winnipeg, where she worked, were not so dangerous after all. Even though she lived there 30-40 years after the first immigrants had settled along the lake, she experienced this stereotypical image of the Indians, which actually was very much alive well into the 1960s. What she saw, was the Natives being treated contemptuously. They were living on reservations in great poverty and hunger. She felt great pity for them, especially after she got a young Native woman, Lydia, to tell her of her people's

conditions. She realized that “not only were they destitute, but also so poor, that sometimes they had to endure starvation during the latter part of winter, when the weather was bad and no game to be had” (Ögmundardóttir 111). She often thought about her dislike of Indians as a child and a teenager when she realized that she liked the Natives better every day. She had been told by some white Canadians that the Natives were lazy and bad workers but she learnt completely otherwise. They were conscientious, although they lacked initiative, and they were open and childlike in their trust (Ögmundardóttir 111-12).

Guðný Sigurðardóttir from Gimli, described above, soon discovered that the Natives were quite harmless after one of them had poked his finger at her spectacles: “They did me no harm, however, nor to the other women in the settlement, and soon we became used to these people and visited them in their tents” (Ögmundardóttir 60).

Helga Ögmundardóttir quotes Nelson Gerrard’s book *Icelandic River Saga* when she refers to Björn Andrésson, from Stokkhólmi in Skagafjörður, who wrote his father in Iceland in 1877, and gave a very detailed and vivid picture of how the relations really were between the two peoples, the Icelanders and the Natives. First, he informed his father how the settlers were able to take over some deserted Native cabins to live in:

... and there we found shelter in some log cabins, the winter homes of the Indians who were here at Sandy Bar.

Along with several others, I stayed in one of the Indian houses until about a month before Christmas when I moved into the house Lárus and I built on this lot.... (qtd. in Ögmundardóttir 61)

Then he talks about the Natives who lived there when the settlers arrived:

About thirty Indians or half-breeds, a little darker than ourselves, were hereabouts when we arrived, but many died of the smallpox, leaving only about eleven. We have bought potatoes from them as they had gardens here and got a good harvest last fall, and we have also bought fish and traded various things. Some of them know English, and they are at least token Christians, their minister living somewhere up along the Red River. They are very honest and are ready to do whatever they can for us. These people keep big dogs which they use to pull sleds in the winter, two, three, or even more men often riding on a single sleigh pulled by four dogs harnessed in single file. Little bells, similar to sheep bells, hang around their necks and ring when they are on the move. Some of the dogs have covers similar to saddle blankets, all embroidered and beaded. All together they form a very colourful procession. (qtd. in Ögmundardóttir 61)

Ögmundardóttir gives us yet another narrative that sheds a positive light to interactions between the Natives and the Icelanders. It is written by Guttormur J. Guttormsson, the well-known Icelandic-Canadian poet, whose parents settled down at Víðivellir by the Icelandic River in 1876. He was born there in 1878. His parents ran a “Stopping place” which they only kept open during the winter months, mainly for English tourists. They often housed Icelandic travellers as well but never asked them for a payment, he says. English missionaries on their way north along Lake Winnipeg to their Native congregation were especially welcomed. Víðivellir was situated on a very busy trading route between Selkirk and Winnipeg and several places by the lake, both on the river and on land. Many of the travelers worked as fishermen or loggers on the north shore of Lake Winnipeg. There was much traffic of boats and canoes all year around, many Indian tents were pitched along the river, and many whites and Natives traded at the trading post, Möðruvellir. Native hunters travelled on dog sleds to bring their furs up

to Stone Fork, the Hudson Bay's trading post. Guttormsson remembers the Natives' colorful clothing and the sound of the whips as they snapped them in order to keep the dogs running (61-62). The presence of Natives in the lives of the Icelandic settlers is obvious when reading these accounts above and the ones that follow.

Jón Bergvinsson, another immigrant, who settled down at Ós by the Icelandic River in 1879, wrote several articles about New-Iceland published in the Icelandic paper *Skuld*. In one of these accounts it is quite apparent that the Natives did not threaten the Icelanders nor did them any harm. He says that there had been many Indians when the settlers arrived, they had been quite harmless and helpful, but never had done anything evil. If, however, someone harmed them in any way, they would revenge themselves cruelly. He describes them as being of reddish color, beardless, rather shy, and they seemed to be afraid of people until they got angry. Jón writes that the Natives had many houses and that the settlers had got them all, some of them were bought and some not. He also says that most of the Natives had moved across the lake, to the northeast, but a few of them still lived in the Icelandic settlement. He talks about the Smallpox Epidemic and how it nearly killed all the Natives. He finishes this article by saying that no one thought of fearing those harmless people (Ögmundardóttir 63-64).

Another very sympathetic settler, Guðlaugur Magnússon, emigrated to Canada in 1874 and arrived in New-Iceland in the first large group of settlers in 1875. His narrative is retold in the book *Saga Íslendinga í Vesturheimi, Volume II*, written by Þorsteinn Þ. Þorsteinsson. He tells, among other things, about how the barges on which the settlers travelled on Lake Winnipeg damaged the fishing nets of the Natives and Half-Breeds. Magnússon also says that it was quite obvious that this ancient Native People had not known of the settlers' arrival and settlement in their native lands, and that the

government had apparently failed to inform them of this act, thus failing its duties.

Magnússon continues that he thought it a wonder how most Natives were helpful to the Icelanders after they had settled in New Iceland, even though there were examples of them having to make way for the Icelanders, but they were by that time used to having to give in (Ögmundardóttir 64).

The teacher and writer Þorsteinn Matthíasson travelled to Manitoba in the 1970s and interviewed West-Icelanders who either experienced personally the first settlement years or their parents or grandparents. These interviews were published in his book *Íslendingar í Vesturheimi. Land og fólk, II*, translated into English as “Icelanders in the West. Land and People, volume II”, in 1977. Matthíasson emphasizes the importance of fishing to the Icelandic settlers. Þórður Þorsteinn Bjarnason is one of those who Matthíasson interviewed. Bjarnason’s parents emigrated to Canada in 1887 and they settled in Árnes. He was one of thirteen siblings and he was a fisherman on Lake Winnipeg during his lifetime. He relates the following about the fishing and the contact between the Icelanders and the Natives:

The whitefish boats were 35 feet long and each boat carried three men. Two pulling the nets, one picking the fish out. These were sailboats and when the weather was still, they had to stay on the lake for hours. Up north, at the end of the lake, there were quite a few Indians. They worked on the boats with the Icelanders and turned out to be quite good workers. They were particularly handy at various odd jobs, for example loading transport boats. But they seldom stayed for long at the same place and they did not like to have a long working day. As soon as they got paid they went to the store and bought something. (Matthíasson 43; my translation)

Matthíasson continues by discussing how it was not favored that various ethnic groups intermarried but gradually they did and in the end relatively few people were wholly Icelandic on both their mother's and father's side. He also states that it was also rather common that Icelandic men married Native women but that it was much more unusual that Icelandic women married Native men (43).

Lára Oddsdóttir was a third generation immigrant and as a grown woman she worked as a cook for the fishermen north by Lake Winnipeg. She tells Matthíasson how she had loved that life. When she was twenty-three and a married woman for three years she lived in a small log cabin with a little boy and even though it was often very cold she found it peaceful and pleasant. She was happy despite the isolation and a monotonous life receiving no pay, only board and housing. She cooked for six men, four Icelanders and two natives. The Natives were very good to her as well as the Icelanders. She got up early to cook so that the fishermen could get out on the lake in time and while they were fishing she baked and cooked. She asserts that the Natives are the best people she has ever known (170-71).

2.3. Immigrant Poets and First Nations People

Stephan G. Stephansson, a farmer and a prominent poet, was an Icelandic immigrant who arrived with his parents and sister in Quebec in 1873 at the age of twenty. Viðar Hreinsson published Stephansson's autobiography in two volumes and the first of them is *Landneminn mikli. Ævisaga Stephans G. Stephanssonar* (2002). Hreinsson describes Stephansson's struggle in Wisconsin where he and his family lived until 1880. The Icelanders who went to Wisconsin from the immigrant harbor of Quebec in 1873 worked various jobs for farmers and did their best to survive. It was in Milwaukee, on 2 August, 1874, during an Icelandic National Festivity Day, where the idea of an

Icelandic colony in the new world was being discussed for the first time by four men. These men were Ólafur Ólafsson from Espihóll, Iceland, who first settled on Ramsay's land by the White Mud River, later Icelandic River, Jón Bjarnason, a teacher, editor and poet, Jón Ólafsson, another editor and poet, and Reverend Páll Þorláksson. They were all strong characters with fire in their hearts (Hreinsson, 160). Hreinsson continues: "Before the National Festivities were held in Milwaukee in July 1874 several Icelanders in Dane County got together and challenged Páll Þorláksson to look for a colony where they could move to in the fall" (Hreinsson 163; my translation). In 1880 most of the settlers in Wisconsin moved to Dakota and Stephansson was one of them. He lived there with his family until he desired to leave the area in 1888, fed up with religious fighting, too much drinking, and too much greed for money. He preferred the open space and solitude. He followed Ólafur Ólafsson and moved to Alberta with his wife and three sons, at the age of thirty-five, where he spent the rest of his days as a farmer, working long hours and writing poetry at night.

Stephansson showed great compassion for the Natives and on his train ride from Dakota to Alberta he witnessed the sad and destitute situation of the Natives as some of them lived near the railroad tracks which lay through uninhabited land, and sold buffalo horns to the travelers. He wrote his poem "Indiánar" or "Indians" on his way to Alberta and Hreinsson analyses the poem by stating that it expresses both sympathy and irony (320). Stephansson depicts the Natives as skraelings or barbarians dressed in red, blue, brindle and grey rags and smelling awfully. Hreinsson proclaims that Stephansson compares the Natives' situation to what he knows from back home in Iceland or from white man's culture. That he deplores the degradation of these people who once were proud and now they offer buffalo horns for sale and bargain with their dirty fingers, and that the Indians have sold their lands for whiskey and hunting game almost extinct. Now their lands are

ruined and they are not allowed to roam about as they once did. Hreinsson says that Stephansson finds this a sad testimony of Christian compassion. Finally, Hreinsson claims he can observe Darwinian ideas at the end of the poem. He informs that Stephansson says, at the unfinished end of the poem, that the white man has progressed a little further but he still doubts his superiority and dreams about mankind's innocent youth on the prairies (320).

Hreinsson also informs in his book that Stephansson and the other immigrants in Red Deer, Alberta, cooperated considerably with the local Natives who pitched their tents nearby and stayed there through wintertime. He says that even though they were without much luck they were trustworthy in communication. When the Icelandic men had to go away to work they asked the Natives to keep an eye on their wives and children and they never failed that trust (339).

In conclusion, Hreinsson writes about the Stephansson's long poem *Ferðaföggur* or "Traveling Baggage" where he illustrates awesome images of mountains and ocean, the city and the beach, and he reflects on the sad fate of the Natives and mentions the Native poet Pauline Johnson or Tekahionwake who had travelled around Canada, the United States and England and read her poetry dressed in clothing made of deer skins. It seems that her poetry had added something to Stephansson's cultural vision and that sadness had replaced the smirk in his poem "Indíánar" (135).

An undated letter was published in *Lögberg-Heimskringla* published on July 23rd, 1964 which Guttormur J. Guttormsson wrote to his friend, Thorlaksson, about the Cree Nation. Guttormsson was actually born in Canada, but was considered an immigrant poet as he always wrote in Icelandic and always worked in an Icelandic speaking environment. Evidence in the letter shows, though, that Guttormsson was eighty-four

years old when he wrote it: “You asked me to tell you in writing what I told you yesterday about the good Indian medicine – the root which I herewith enclose a sample of. I was about five years old when I first had knowledge of it. Eighty years have passed since then” (“Um indíánarót”, my translation). Guttormsson is born in 1878 so he was five years old in 1893, and adding eighty years to that, makes the writing year of this letter 1963 or 1964.

In the letter mentioned above Guttormsson is full of admiration for the Cree. He defines them as “very handsome, tall, healthy, robust and full of life” (“Um indíánarót”; my translation). He emphasizes that the Cree did not pick up any knowledge or habits from the settlers, but claims that the Icelanders learned a lot from Natives and should have learned more. He defines their diet, sun-dried animal meat which is not smoked or salted, fresh bird meat, and fresh fish. They drank “Indian tea” made out of now extinct plant that grew in moss of a tamarac wood, as well as usual tea. They never drank coffee or milk. They ate various kinds of berries and hazelnuts that they picked in the woods. They grew and ate potatoes and they drained the juice of the poplar tree for eating, maple syrup. The Cree smoked dried inner bark of the Dogwood, mixed with usual tea-leaves instead of tobacco. Guttormsson was amazed to discover that the Cree never had bad teeth or experienced a toothache while the Icelanders often suffered from both.

He continues in his letter to his friend about how prosperous looking the Natives were, who arrived from the north on small boats and canoes which were painted in lively colors, and pitched their white tents on green patches along the Icelandic River, and displayed their famous Hudson’s Bay blankets. He describes a particular occasion when the Natives had pitched their tents right opposite his family’s farm on the other side of the river. His family noticed an unusually large amount of goods being loaded

off the boats and they being curious, decided to cross the river and visit the Natives. It was actually a custom of theirs to do so whenever the Natives camped there. When asked by Guttormsson's mother what they were doing, the Cree explained that they were drying roots of a plant they had picked and it turned out to be a medicine plant which they then would sell in the town of Crossing.

Baldur Hafstað, a professor at the University of Iceland, has specialized in the poetry of Stephan G. Stephansson. He wrote an article, "Annars aumka ég Indíana ...", about Stephan G. Stephansson and Guttormur J. Guttormsson, and their poetry about the Natives. Firstly, he refers to Anne Brydon, a professor of ethnic anthropology at Wilfred Laurier University, and her essay "Dreams and Claims: Icelandic-Aboriginal Interactions in the Manitoba Interlake" (2001), where she writes about John Ramsay, a Native who lived in the Winnipeg area at the time of the first Icelandic settlement and how he was wrongly treated by Icelanders and the Dominion Government. Even though the Icelanders felt they were in the right by settling in Ramsay's area, Ramsay was treated with great injustice. Hafstað emphasizes that her main example of discussion was rather "unfortunate" as Ramsay became a great friend of the Icelanders, Guttormsson being among them.

Hafstað claims that Guttormsson expresses in his poem "Indíannahátíðin" or "Indian Festival" more about the white man's bad treatment of the Natives rather than speaking in anger against them. He also asserts that the poem "Jón Austfirðingur" does not depict hostility between the Natives and the Icelandic immigrants, rather describes some tension between the two peoples (167-68).

Neijmann discusses Guttormsson and his poem "Indíannahátíðin". She says that he knew Indians from his early days on his parents' frontier farm, and that Guttormsson's

descriptions of Indians were “realistic, tainted neither by hostility nor by a romantic idealism” (151). She also informs that Guttormsson wrote “illuminating accounts about the encounters of Icelanders and Indians and the cultural misunderstandings between the two” (151). Lastly, she says that Guttormsson knew that the Icelanders had been assigned to a strip of land that was not owned by white men (151).

Additionally, Hafstað discusses Stephansson’s comment, which he wrote in connection with his poem “Indians” in his book *Andvökur* or “Insomnia” in English, and sent it to Baldur Sveinsson in 1923, thirty-four years after writing this poem and twenty-nine years after it has first been published in the magazine *Öldin* in May 1894. Stephansson explained the reasons for writing this poem on his way to Alberta where he witnessed how the Indians had become a minority group of underdogs in their own land and white man’s culture being forced upon them. His final words of remarks were: “On the other hand, I pity the Indians even though I do it with a grin” (qtd. in Hafstað 171). Hafstað claims that Stephan was inclined to use an ironic method to speak his mind by speaking the mind of others. What lies under his official meaning is sympathy for the sufferer. Hafstað says that according to Stephansson’s words the Indians are disheveled and in a way parasites and they are also inclined to love trinkets very much. Yet, Hafstað feels obliged to add that Stephansson considers that his nation is related to the Natives. Stephansson thinks about his poor and stinking ancestors. His Icelandic countrymen were no less greedy for titles and being respected and they were quick to steal whatever they could when ships stranded and were wrecked on Iceland’s shores (170-72).

Hafstað discusses two other poems that Stephansson wrote about Indians, “Ferðaföggur” or “Luggage” and “Skógarvatn” or “Forest Lake”. In the first poem, Stephansson uses similes rather than direct comparisons. He talks about mountains in wounds which remind of “torn tents of Indians” (175) but otherwise this poem is more

about a man's position in a multinational context (176). In the second poem Stephansson describes how a group of explorers come to a great lake where they first meet Native children and then they meet a monk living with the Natives who lectures them about how badly the Natives have been treated by the white man. Hafstað feels that Stephansson is ruthless when he calls the western men foreigners who had committed genocide against the Natives but he lightens the tone at the end of the half-finished poem by making light-hearted jokes about the Indians and mocking the travellers and their false demeanour (180-81).

Hafstað ends his article by saying that “two of our best poets in the West describe the Indians in a memorable way, first Stephan G. Stephansson and then Guttormur J. Guttormsson. Guttormur is complete in his discussion, does not allow himself any playful comments and one can feel his complete compassion and true friendship towards the Natives. Stephansson is more reckless and complex; he is more diverse and could seem cold. Furthermore, his silence, or lack of feelings, raise interest and questions. It may seem that he wonders about this himself at the end of his life and that he wants to make amends for the “smirk” and not doing anything with creating something big which he did not manage to finish” (182). Hafstað feels that it was only until that moment, writing this poem, that one feels that the poet had said what he wanted to say about the aboriginals of North America (182).

An especially interesting and explicit article by Eysteinn Þorvaldsson was published in the Icelandic newspaper *Morgunblaðið* in 2007, where he displayed his strong opinions about the unfair treatment of the Natives of North-America, and looked to several Icelandic-Canadian poets to support this, many of whom displayed negative and unsympathetic views of the Natives people. Among a few, he referred to Stephansson's poem “Indians” and said that even though equality and humanity were values in his

poems and attitude towards the Natives, he felt that in this poem Stephansson was not more compassionate or understanding than others. Þorvaldsson also considered that Stephansson was repeatedly mocking the Natives and was quite displeased about it. He also felt that Guttormsson's poem "The Indian Festival" or "Indíannahátíðin" did not contain much sympathy towards the Natives or an understanding of the fact that the Natives could have their own ways of entertainment.

Þorvaldsson criticized the Icelandic-Canadian poets, and how they established in their poetry that the white people, especially the Icelanders, were the first native people of America, not the Native Peoples and tribes. He went so far as to say that the Europeans' interference with the Native people was a bloody history of violence and disrespect and that Icelanders actually took part by fighting against them in the Riel uprising in 1885. Þorvaldsson finally concluded that taking part in that warfare against the Natives and praising it was a sad testimony of the Icelandic immigrants. In his article, Þorvaldsson's opened a discussion of postcolonialism which refers to the way former colonized countries come to terms with their experience of being victims of imperial oppression, especially of European countries from the sixteenth century until the modern era, by representing their race, ethnicity, culture, and human identity through literature and poetry ("Postcolonialism").

2.4. Contemporary Prose – Modern View of the Natives

W.D. Valgardson is a Canadian author of Icelandic descent whose many books include lauded collections of short stories. One of them is named "In Manitoba" in his book *God Is Not a Fish Inspector* and is about Valdi Gudmundsson, a camp owner, at one of Manitoba's lakes, his wife and his employees. An Indian arrives at his door, asking for work. Valdi needs a man desperately as one of his men is injured and the Indian knows

that. Valdi offers him work for no wages only room and board, and a share of seventy for him and thirty for the Indian after the end of the season. This offer is grossly unfair and Valdi would never have offered such a deal to a white man but the Indian, Elliot Household, accepts the deal. Valdi's contempt for the Indian is very obvious and he distrusts him from the very beginning. When showing him to a room to sleep in he told him where to sleep and clean himself. At the door he turned and said: 'You keep your hands off the supplies' (66). By saying that, Valdi obviously expects this Indian to be a thief too.

Elliot claims he has fished on the Great Slave Lake in Manitoba and fished for Jack Simondson and Fusi Bergman (65-66). Valdi bursts into violent temper and says to his wife: "That Indian's a liar. His hands haven't got a callous on them" (67).

Elliot discovers that Valdi uses illegal nets as well as legal ones, but he says nothing. He turns out to be a good fisherman and catches fish when the others do not. Envy spreads all over the camp. Valdi finds out that Elliot had been in prison for knifing a white man but was allowed to come to the camp for work. When Valdi asks him why he was put in jail even though the white man started it, Elliot answers: 'He was a white man'. Elliot spat out. 'In Manitoba, whoever believes an Indian?' (74).

One of Valdi's men, Harold, mean and envious, says to Valdi: 'He's made more than wages already. He caught himself a fish when he got you to losing money'. He laughed nastily. 'Valdi Gudmundson being taken by an Indian. I never thought I'd see the day' (71).

Valdi decides to cheat Elliot of his share and asks his wife, Runa, to create a rape scene and he would then let Elliot escape, otherwise Elliot could give him away because of the illegal nets. Runa reluctantly does that, Elliot is beaten senseless, but later Valdi

lets him walk away in the dark. Elliot revenges himself by cutting his nets in the lake into shreds and when Valdi and Harold go on the boat Runa leaves Valdi.

In his work, Valgardson lets his white characters portray so much distrust, hate and contempt towards the Natives, and it must be considered that he is expressing an attitude of authentic social situation.

Valgardson's short story "Brothers", in his book *Bloodflowers*, carries a dark tone, very similar to the one in the story "In Manitoba". It depicts great distrust and contempt for the Natives and for whites who have gone Native. Fjola, Alex's cook, believes all Indians are thieves and she keeps her distance. When Norman Thomas, an Englishman, and his Native wife and their three children arrive to Alex's fishing camp by an unnamed lake and asks for a job and food she immediately advises him against it: "You give them something and they'll never leave" (37). Thomas manages to make a bargain with Alex about fishing shares, fifty-fifty and says: "'Your food comes out of what you earn. No cash until season is over and the equipment has been returned. Anything broken or lost, you pay for'. It was a hard bargain, but Thomas accepted it without complaint" (41). Tension runs high and Alex will not allow any of the family to enter his house until one of the half-breed boys, Everett, catches pneumonia and he is nursed by Fjola and his older sister, Lulabelle. Alex's men are allowed to have sex with Thomas's wife for cigarettes (43) and daily life at the camp is in an uproar. Alex is sexually drawn to Lulabelle but Fjola prevents him from taking advantage of the girl (50). The boy eventually dies, his body is taken to his parents and his sister is obliged to leave the house as well. The next day the mixed-race family leaves, stealing gasoline and spare tanks as well as groceries and tobacco. Surprisingly, Alex decides not to report the theft to the Mounties when the hired men are outraged by the theft: 'Let them

go', he said. "There'll be nothing left by the time they're caught. Besides, all I've lost is a hundred dollars. It could have been worse" (52). Despite Alex's dislike of Natives and being compared to living like one (44) he may have let the Thomas family off the hook because of Lulabelle.

Even though the main human expressions of the characters are of distrust, contempt and indifference towards Thomas's mixed-race family, Alex, the owner of the fishing camp, against everyone's strong warnings, surprises the other inhabitants of the fish camp by giving Thomas a job and letting them stay in the neighborhood. He seems to have been struck with a passion for Thomas's daughter, Lulabelle, but Fjola, his cook, senses this and prevents him from taking advantage of her. He ends up being cheated and robbed by Thomas and his wife, yet he lets them go without calling the police. He may have fallen in love with Lulabelle or he may have felt some love for her and pitied her. In midst of hate, sex, prostitution, lust, and desire of the story, some rays of love and concern unexpectedly emerge in Alex and gives it a sympathetic tone, leaving the reader with some hope after the harsh and dark tone in the beginning of the story.

3. John Ramsay

One of the best known Canadian Natives with whom the first Icelandic settlers got in close contact upon their arrival in Manitoba in their first years of settlement was John Ramsay of the Saulteaux First Nations of the Sandy Bar/Mud River Band. Their first encounter was not very friendly, but as time went by, many of the settlers got to know Ramsay personally. As he turned out to be very helpful and co-operative, he was openly praised for his good character. However, Ramsay had another side to him which not many people had the opportunity to get acquainted with. On the one hand, he was the peaceful, easy-going, friendly “Indian” who lived alongside the Icelanders, but on the other hand he was the discontented Native, who lost his land and his possessions to the same Icelanders. Ramsay was considered the good neighbour by the Icelandic settlers but some articles have recently been published which give a new perspective of John Ramsay, the Native who fought for his rights.

3.1. John Ramsay, the less known “active” and “protesting” Native.

John Ramsay and other Natives must have experienced much anger and displeasure at the arrival of the Icelandic immigrants. This was their land, the land of the First Nations, and here they had lived as a people for centuries. Nevertheless, they must have known that this was bound to happen as it had happened to other tribes all over North-America. The white governments of the Dominion and the United States had relentlessly seized the lands of the aboriginals and given them to white settlers. One treaty after another had been signed by the Natives; thus they, for the most part, had been tricked into selling their lands for nearly nothing, and the people had been herded into reservations. In 1875 the treaty between the Dominion Government and the First Nations for this part of Manitoba, Treaty 5, had not yet been signed, and having the Icelandic settlers suddenly on their doorstep must have been a shock. Confrontation

arose between the two local Native people who believed they were in the right, and the newcomers, and Ramsay got involved.

Friðrik Sveinsson, who was a ten or eleven year old boy in the first immigration group arriving to the Lake Winnipeg area in 1875, recounts in his memoirs “Endurminningar frá Landnámstíð”, published in *Brot af Landámssögu Nýja Íslands*, or “A fraction of the History of the Settlement of New Iceland” (my translation), edited by Thorleifur Jóakimsson (Jackson), that on the location where they were forced to camp on the west side of Lake Winnipeg during that first winter of 1875, they did not see much of the natives as they lived further north along the Lake where the fishing was good. He also says in his memoirs that the Dominion Government had appointed a certain part of the west coast of the lake to the Icelanders, and that he thought that the government had most likely notified the natives of that decision. The following summer of 1876, three of the settlers moved further north with their families to White Mud River, later called Icelandic River. Sveinsson and his foster father, Ólafur Ólafsson from Espihóll, were members of one the families.

According to Sveinsson, when the three families chose their land to settle on and started building cabins, they already found Indians living in that area. The Icelanders believed they had the right to settle down there and continued with their plans. The Indians were angered by this intrusion as they believed that the land north of the river was theirs.

John Ramsay was one of the Indians who protested against this new settlement and made it clearly known. He lived in a tent near where Sveinsson’s foster father decided to settle down, and had a well-tended potato plot there. One day, when the Icelanders came from their temporary encampment on the other side of the river to work on the cabin, Ramsay pushed their boat away from shore three times. Ólafsson had to threaten Ramsay with his axe before Ramsay angrily relented and left.

Later that day, two canoes with Indians approached and some of them started shooting at birds or perhaps their intentions were to scare the Icelanders. Sveinsson and two other boys witnessed this and ran home to notify their families. Shortly thereafter the Indians arrived and entered the cabin uninvited, sat down with their guns and waited in thick silence. They were later followed by Ramsay, who brought an interpreter with him who announced that they believed this settlement was a breach against the Indians' rights to that part of the country.

As the Icelanders were uncertain whether this was true or not and the land not having yet been surveyed, it was agreed that this would be checked and the Indians left. A new and large group of Icelandic immigrants arrived later that summer along with an Indian agent of the Dominion Government who confirmed that the Icelanders were allowed to settle on the land north of the river. According to Sveinsson, it seems that Ramsay finally decided to accept that outcome and that he made an agreement with Ólafsson to live on Ólafsson's land with his family and continue his farming. Sveinsson also states that Ramsay later became great friends with the Icelanders and helped them in many ways. He even lived with them for periods of time (Sveinsson 34-37).

Anne Brydon has taken a great interest in Icelandic-Canadian history and has written many articles and papers on the subject. She brings forth another version of John Ramsay's story in her essay. She looks at Ramsay's point of view and claims that Ramsay was not happy at all with the Icelandic settlement, and that he had fought for his right to the land he and his people had cultivated for some time. When the Icelanders started their settlement, their leaders opted to keep silent about the presence of aboriginals in the area. When news travelled back home about the new country, it was as if the immigrants had been the very first human beings to have lived there. This European colonialist point of view, especially of the nineteenth century, was widespread

across the world where the white man barged into countries previously inhabited by people of another race, for example Australia, New-Zealand, the land of the Sami in North-Finland, North-Sweden and North-Norway, and various islands in the Pacific and the Caribbean. This belief that the white man was superior to people of darker skin was the backbone of the British Empire as well as of France, Germany, Portugal and even Denmark.

Ryan C. Eyford refers to Reverend James Settee, who visited the native settlements around Lake Winnipeg, and his journal of 1876-1877, which stated that a permanent Ojibwa village was created in the autumn of 1871 at Sandy Bar (56, 63). Eyford writes that Settee seemed to have had a good relationship with the Natives and some of them had converted to Christianity. That Settee also informed that many of the Natives had been born in the region and believed it to be their home. Eyford quotes the following from the aforementioned journal: “They chose the site for permanent settlement because of its abundant fisheries and game offered many advantages for ‘new settlers’” (Eyford, 64). In 1875, when Settee visited the village, twenty-four families and a few widows were living there and he expected that the village would become a large one, with plans of a school for the children. Eyford speculates that there might have been a group of Swampy Cree from Norway House there as well, wanting to start an agricultural colony. According to Eyford, the Natives wrote a letter to Lieutenant Governor Morris and “requested that the region be designated an Indian reserve. This proposal was looked upon favorably until the prospect of an Icelandic reserve in the same location appeared in the summer of 1875” (64).

In 1875, a year before the Icelandic settlement at White Mud River and Sandy Bar, an Icelandic Deputation travelled through the area with a native guide and a very good

friend of John Ramsay, Joseph Monkman, to decide on the future land for the Icelandic settlers. The Delegation members saw Native villages and evidence of Native habitation there and even put that information in a pamphlet about New Iceland which was distributed to the immigrants. The delegation then handed in a written report of this which Brydon discusses in her paper. She says the immigrants were sure to know about the Native inhabitants in the area as it was mentioned in a pamphlet about New Iceland which was given to them before their journey to Canada (170) and the report shows clear evidence that there was a flourishing native settlement already at the arrival of the first settlers. The deputation's report says among other things:

We had a good guide with us, who had been along with the surveyor of the coast. We had also two other Half-Breeds... But we did see with our own eyes good potatoes which the Indians had planted in June, and also what is termed Red River corn, both growing at Icelfander's river. And at the south end of the Lake Winnipeg good wheat, potatoes, oats, peas and barley, as well as the Red river corn just mentioned were all cultivated with success ... The Indians catch them [fish] all summer in their nets, and manage to live on what they catch from day to day, although in our opinion their outfit is rather poor, and apparently they never try anywhere but close to shore. (qtd. in Brydon 171)

What is also very informative in Brydon's essay is that she refers to an important letter, written by the Icelandic delegation to Lieutenant-Governor Morris on 3 August 1875, where it is apparent that the delegation wants the Governor to interfere and stop the plan of a number of Indians of the Norway-House Cree Nation, who were at this time "contemplating" settlement along the White Mud River and on the adjoining coasts. Brydon finds the word "contemplating" curious and speculates further:

By their own account, the Icelanders had seen the gardens already established at the White Mud River. Perhaps they were told more people from Norway House were intending to join with the Sandy Bar-White River band. It certainly would be in the interest of the Icelanders for the Indians to move off the good agricultural land of Icelandic River to make way for Icelandic settlement, but we should not be too hasty to conclude that the Icelanders were accurately reporting the desires of the natives they encountered. (Brydon 171)

Brydon also points out that the letter drew Morris's attention to the possibility of conflict over the northern boundary. The delegation continues in the same letter:

This is the very spot which we have selected as the nucleus of our settlement, and therefore it would be of the very greatest advantage to both these Indians and to ourselves if some very distinct and clearly defined line of division could be adopted and enforced. North of Grindstone Point would be very suitable for them, and they are for the most part content to go there. (Brydon 171)

A conclusion can possibly be drawn from this letter that the delegation wanted to be certain that the Natives did not get permission to settle down on the Icelanders' chosen land. Brydon specifically points out the following very important information from that same letter: "The Government at Ottawa has consented by telegraph to have this tract of land set apart for the exclusive settlement of Icelanders. Its boundaries will be more clearly determined when it has been surveyed and subdivided into townships" (Brydon 172). Brydon suggests that this information actually gives some evidence to the fact that "someone in the federal government had decided Icelanders could occupy the land before its status had been ascertained" (Brydon 172).

Ögmundardóttir refers to Sveinsson's memoirs and his narration about John Ramsay, which has been discussed earlier in this essay. What is interesting is how she approaches the subject from an anthropologist's point of view, giving another perspective. She claims that she is not apologizing for the Icelanders who seized Ramsay's land nor is she making excuses for them having taken part in the injustices they made against the Natives. However, it should be understood that the settlers only saw things according to their own interests and they looked upon their settlement as a repetition of the original settlement of Iceland, where they were pioneers once more. This rosy pioneer picture did not include the aboriginals that had lived there a long time before their arrival and they were considered intruders. She draws the conclusion that by letting Ramsay stay on, Ólafsson was in fact acknowledging Ramsay's right to it and therefore showing ethnic tolerance. But she also states that if other Natives had claimed their rights to continue living there, the Icelanders would have responded in a more negative way (Ögmundardóttir 70).

Eyford brings up John Ramsay in his article. He discusses the tense situation at Sandy Bar between the local natives and the settlers, and tells about a Sunday Service held by Reverend James Settee in September 1876 where the Reverend "said prayers in Cree, Ojibwa, and English and one of the colonists provided Icelandic translation" (56). Eyford assumes that by having attended the service, "the two groups had a complex relationship; fear, suspicion, and resentment did not preclude cooperation and friendly interaction in specific circumstances" (56). Shortly after this service a Smallpox epidemic broke out, decimating the Sandy Bar band, leaving only seventeen out of fifty or sixty alive and killing many of the settlers as well.

Eyford also writes about Sveinsson's reminiscences about Ramsay and his people. What is particularly noteworthy about his paper is that he states that things were not that great between the two groups, the Icelanders and the Natives:

Once smallpox broke out, friendly exchanges between the two groups appear to have come to an end. Ramsay later reported to Dr. James Spencer Lynch that the Icelanders had refused to offer assistance to his people when they became ill, and even demanded payment for helping to bury the dead. In forwarding the report to Ottawa, Acting Indian Superintendent J. A. N. Provencher stated that he had previously received similar reports of the Icelanders' behaviour. (66)

It is evident that Ramsay participated in major events in Sandy Bar. Eyford cites the procedures made because of the Smallpox Epidemic, how the disinfection did not involve a total destruction of bodies and property in the Icelandic settlements but that it was evidently believed (my opinion), and wrongly so, to be the custom among the local Native communities to burn bodies, houses and possessions. They buried their dead in burial mounds ("The Ojibwe"). The survivors of the various Native bands either approved of the burning or not and even reacted violently if they disapproved. Eyford cites Thorleifur Jóakimsson's narration, published in *Frá Austri til Vesturs: Framhald af landnámssögu Nýja Íslands* or "From East to West: A Continuation of the Settlement Saga of New Iceland" of how John Ramsay, "one of the few survivors of the Sandy Bar band, helped Dr. Baldwin and Magnús Stefánsson burn the Indian village of Sandy River on the east side of Lake Winnipeg" (76-77). Eyford further continues:

However, Ramsay deeply resented the burning of his own village at Sandy Bar, conducted on the orders of Dr. Lynch. With most of the band members dead, this act had the effect of erasing an important physical vestige of the Sandy Bar

band's presence in the Icelandic reserve. It cleared the way for the land to be settled according to the survey of the area that had been completed near the end of 1876. Lynch apparently felt some remorse over this act and advised the government to compensate the surviving members of the band, although this does not appear to have been done. In June 1877 Ramsay travelled to Winnipeg to personally express his aggravation over this act to Lieutenant Governor Morris, but did not receive any guarantees. Morris suggested that Ramsay and the other survivors should leave the Icelandic reserve and settle at Fisher River to the north. (77)

What Eyford says here coincides with what Brydon discusses in her paper how the Natives felt they had the right to the land the Icelanders were given by the Dominion Government, despite the Government's decision to order the Natives to move into different reservations.

Brydon points out that when the Icelanders were granted the reserve in 1875 by Lieutenant-Governor Morris, "he most likely assumed that the Aboriginal people around Lake Winnipeg would soon sign Treaty No. 5. In fact, not all the bands signed that year" (175). Government officials did not respect "aboriginal self-identity" and many bands and groups had been excluded "intentionally or unintentionally". In order to complete the signing of the Treaty, a meeting was scheduled at Dog Head Point on 25 July 1875. At that meeting, most of the excluded bands were granted a reserve but the Sandy Bar-White Mud Saulteaux, who requested the lands they already occupied at White Mud River-Sandy Bar, were refused by the commissioners. The reason given was that "they had accepted annuities at the St Peters reserve at Netley Creek" (176). This was a great shock to Ramsay and his people as this decision meant that they did not have any legal rights.

Another band was refused a reserve as well, the Big Island Band who lived on Big Island, later called Hecla Island. This band was Anishinabe like the Sandy Bar-White Mud Saulteaux and the two bands had close ties with each other along with the Grassy Narrows Band of the Riverton area and the St. Peters Band north of Selkirk (“Hecla” 28).

What makes this shocking decision even more dubious is the fact that many members of another band at that same meeting got their annuities at St Peters, yet they still got their reserve. So Brydon supposes that there must have been another reason for breaking up the Sandy Bar-White Mud River Band. “That reason could very well have been to erase the error Morris and the Department of the Interior had made in granting land to the Icelanders before the extinguishment of its aboriginal title”. But she also warns that “this interpretation cannot be treated as conclusive” (176).

Nevertheless, it is fairly obvious that a mistake had been made when granting the Icelanders the right to settle by the White Mud River and Sandy Bar and the officials did their utmost to cover it up. Qamsay must have been much angered by the great injustice done to his band at Dog Head Point, the band consequently advised to join the St Peters band at Netley Creek instead. Sadly, adding to their misfortune within months after Dog Head Point, almost the whole band was decimated by the Smallpox Epidemic, killing among others five members out of seven of Ramsay’s family, Ramsay and his daughter being the sole survivors.

3.2. Ramsay’s Land Claim

Ramsay put forth his grievances in the years 1877-1879 to various government presentatives in order to get his land back. As reported by Brydon, who thoroughly researched the matter and found copies of letters in several volumes of Public Archives,

Indian Affairs and the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, the first complaint appeared in a letter which Dr. J.S. Lynch, the doctor appointed by Lieutenant-Governor Morris, the one who tended to the smallpox victims in the Icelandic colony at the time of the Smallpox epidemic of the winter 1875-1876, wrote to the Indian Commissioner J. A. N. Provencher on 12 April 1877. Ramsay had guided Dr. Lynch throughout that winter and they apparently had gotten to know each other quite well. Dr. Lynch gives detailed information about Ramsay and his situation offering a reliable and valuable insight into Ramsay's plight:

On leaving the Settlement I promised Ramsay that I would represent to you what he regards, and what seems to be a case of great hardship.

He has lived on the point at Sandy Bar for twenty-five years, and was born on Big Island (later called Hecla island, after the famous Icelandic volcano), only a few miles distant. He and his band have been hunters, fishers and farmers. The Bar is the fishing Station where their houses were, in which they lived during the winters.

But Ramsay had a farm, where he had tilled several acres for twenty years, on the North side of the River. There was a good house on it, in which he and his family always lived in Summer, returning to their winter house in the wood at the Bar only when the winter was approaching and the fishing season began.

Although he was quite aware that he was not living on an Indian Reserve, he believed that the farm was his, and that it could not be taken from him. I think he understood this to be one of the conditions of his Treaty, but the Icelanders have taken his farm and are living in his house, and to his

remonstrances have told him that he has no right to it whatever, that it is an Icelandic Reserve, and that he must leave the neighbourhood altogether.

Not knowing how far I might assure him of his being allowed to remain a tenant on what certainly seems to be his land, I have only told him that I would represent the case to you. He has never before had an opportunity of having his case heard. I can vouch for the truth of much of his statement, and believe it to be wholly as stated, in every particular. (qtd. in Brydon 173-74)

Ramsay evidently touched Dr. Lynch's sympathy and the doctor's letter caught the attention of higher officials.

A few days later, on 16 April 1877, Provencher forwarded a copy of Dr. Lynch's letter to the Minister of the Interior in Ottawa. Provencher shows much and somewhat astonishing understanding of the unfortunate situation of the Aboriginal people. Brydon quotes the following part of Dr. Lynch's letter:

I beg to draw your attention particularly on the hardships that these families settled at Sandy Bar had to suffer from the arrival of the Icelanders among them.

Some reports of the same character had before reached this office, but if not precise enough to allow any special means of redress, though more than sufficient to show the necessity of some general measure of protection. (qtd. in Brydon 176)

Ramsay's case was further forwarded up the chain of officials, this time by the Deputy of the Minister of the Interior, Meredith, to the Surveyor General in May 1877. He surprisingly ruled in favour of Ramsay. Again, the authentic words give the clearest picture:

On the reference the undersigned begs to remark that there are no data in his Office by which he can throw any light upon the alleged occupation of land on the north side of the river in the vicinity of Sandy Bar on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg by the Indian Ramsay.

Assuming, however, the statement made by Dr Lynch to be correct, it would appear to the undersigned that by the provisions of the Indian Act, Ramsay had full right to retain possession of his house and of the land tilled by him. It is quite clear that in setting apart lands for the Icelanders to settle on, it was never contemplated to interfere with any rights which Indians or others, under the law may have possessed.

The Icelanders, therefore, have no claim to Ramsay's land or his house, and the undersigned respectfully recommends that Mr Taylor should be requested to turn the present occupants out of it accordingly and restore possession to the complainant. (qtd. in Brydon 177)

It seems that Meredith showed prudence by also seeking advice from the Deputy Superintendent of the Indian Affairs Department, Lawrence Van Koughnet, for Brydon found a memorandum dated 18 May 1877, written by van Koughnet in the Public Archives. It includes the following information:

I think Mr Provencher should be requested to place himself in communication with Mr Taylor, the Icelandic agent at Gimli, informing him that by the 70th section (a) of the Indian Act 1876, the Indian Ramsay would appear to be entitled to undisturbed occupation of the land and premises referred to in Dr Lynch's letter, and requesting him to cause the Icelanders who have taken illegal possession to restore the same to the Indians' claimant. (qtd. in Brydon 177)

Despite these positive rulings made by high officials, nothing seems to have been done to correct this injustice against Ramsay. Brydon informs that Ramsay laid a grievance against the Icelanders about his land before Lieutenant-Governor Morris in June 1877 but Morris advised him to join the Norway House band, which then lived in Fisher River, north of the Icelandic settlement. Brydon concludes that she has “yet to find any evidence that Provencher followed the advice he received from Ottawa, and it would seem from Morris’s advice to Ramsay that there was an unofficial policy of putting Ramsay off pursuing his claim” (177).

Ramsay renewed his complaint two years later, in June 1879, claiming his ownership of land by the White Mud River, that he had been prevented from living on it and farming it, and that the Icelanders had taken timber he had prepared and built two houses on his lot. Joseph Monkman, his good friend, signed a declaration vouching for the accuracy of Ramsay’s word as well as reporting another confrontation between Ramsay and the Icelanders. By then, Ólafsson had sold his farm, Ós, and moved to North Dakota and Ramsay likely used a new chance to reclaim his land. Provencher had been found guilty of misconduct in 1878 and his successor, James Graham, took up Ramsay’s case in 1879. He wrote to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Van Koughnet, and informed him of Ramsay raising grievance to the Indian Agent Young involving Ólafsson’s possession of his lot. Qamsay also sought “cash compensation in the amount of \$250” (Brydon 180). The matter was referred back to Graham by Van Koughnet with the instruction of contacting John Taylor about this. Graham’s letter is missing from the Archives so Brydon warns that it would be “difficult to determine to what Taylor is reacting” (Brydon 180).

John Taylor, the government agent who was hired to assist the Icelandic settlers, spoke against Ramsay's claims in his response of 15 March 1880. He said he had been instructed by the Lieutenant-Governor Morris

that the Indians had no claim whatever to the lands at Sandy Bar and White Mud River on the West Shore of Lake Winnipeg and that they were about signing a Treaty under the terms of which they would remove to a Reserve at Doghead further north.

And I was further instructed by his Honor in October 1875 that said Treaty had been presented (unclear) and that I should locate the Icelanders on said lands which was accordingly done. (Brydon 180)

Taylor continued his letter by saying that Provencher had told him that "the said Indians had no rights to said lands" (180-81). According to Taylor, Ramsay had claimed lands a few miles away from Sandy Bar and no houses had been at White Mud River at the Icelanders' arrival in 1875 and must have been built later. He also stated that the Icelanders had subsequently bought all the houses and Ramsay received payment for one. Taylor brought doubt into the matter of Ramsay owning timber and insists that "no resident here knows anything of the said 40 acres of land claimed by Ramsay. A small cultivated plot of less than one acre, not fenced, was formerly used by him before the Treaty" (Brydon, 181). Taylor unquestionably puts the blame of this huge mistake of allotting the Icelanders the land before the Natives had signed Treaty 5 on the government officials. The matter was subsequently dropped as two contradictory reports existed and one must assume that the member of the minority group had a weaker voice in such a case.

After the Smallpox Epidemic Ramsay moved to White Mud River and lived there for a number of years before leaving the area for good (Ögmundardóttir 74). Ramsay had done his best to fight for the ownership of his land; he was in the right but was cruelly ignored by government officials who acted in accordance with the Dominion policy of denying the Natives their rights.

3.3. John Ramsay, the Legend

John Ramsay became well-known by the Icelanders. Today, modern Icelanders, and Canadians of Icelandic origin alike, consider him the best known of all the Natives living in the area at the time when the first settlers came to the White Mud River, later called the Icelandic River. Several detailed written narratives exist, giving a good description of his character and physique and how he behaved towards the settlers. He is said to have saved the lives of many settlers during those first years of settlement as they did not know how to hunt for food and Ramsay, one of very few Natives, taught them. The first winter of 1875-1876 was exceptionally cold, the coldest since man settled in this part of Canada (Arngrímsson 139-40).

Ramsay had already been living during the winter in Sandy Bar, where he owned a house, and during the summer in a tent by the White Mud River, for a number of years when the Icelanders arrived. There are, however, some discrepancies as to whether he lived in a house or a tent at the White Mud River but that issue will not be discussed here. He and the other Natives hunted game and fished in the lake and the rivers and grew potatoes. Ramsay was married to Betsey, and had five children in 1876 but as it has been mentioned earlier in this essay he lost his wife and four children to the Smallpox Epidemic that the Icelanders brought with them, most likely from Scotland, where the epidemic had been raging at the time the Icelanders passed through there on

their way to Canada. He then married another Native woman and had a child by her. He lost them both to some illness when the child was very young. He married his third wife, Julia, much later and they had no children.

Ramsay, being his band's leader or one of its chiefs, became his people's representative in their dealings with the Icelandic settlers. Several first generation Icelandic settlers wrote about their first encounters with John Ramsay at a later time, where they shed a light into the circumstances of that particular time of history of New Iceland. Many of the stories that have been told about him depict a friendly and helpful indigenous neighbour who helped the starving, unskilled Icelanders in very hostile living conditions during their first years of settlement.

There were Icelandic-Canadians who got to know Ramsay personally and they recorded their memories of him. Sveinsson describes his personal friendship with John Ramsay:

Ramsay was a very handsome man and lived richly in an Indian way. He was a superb shot and hunter, with integrity, always quick to give things back, hospitable and helpful, and turned out to be the best of neighbors. Even though he seemed to be a full-blood Indian, his skin was very fair, he was erect, slim and well built, extremely quick and lively in his movements. His wife was exceptionally beautiful as well as their children and the cleanliness of that family was admirable. He, who writes this, sometimes enjoyed Ramsay's hospitality in his tent; a very white table cloth was spread on the ground and the plates, cups, knives and forks, which they always used, were superbly clean and the cooking in fine order, and it was very unlike other Indian families we got to know, who were rather shabby. (36, my translation)

Sveinsson also writes about the death of Ramsay's first wife and their four children during the Smallpox Epidemic and that Ramsay was greatly grieved by his loss. He informs that Ramsay went to Winnipeg and brought back a headstone of marble which he put on his wife's grave (36).

Magnús Stefánsson, an immigrant from the North of Iceland, came to Canada in 1873 and moved around the country to work. He went to New-Iceland in 1875 and stayed there till 1878. He recounts in his memoirs, published in Jóakimsson's *Brot af Landnámssögu Nýja Íslands* in 1919 about the story of the settlers in New Iceland, that during the Smallpox Epidemic during the winter of 1876-1877, he was travelling through the Icelandic colony with Dr. Baldwin, and their guide was John Ramsay. On that particular occasion they were travelling on Ramsay's dog sledge east across Lake Winnipeg to the Indian dwelling of Sandy River, which consisted both of tents and buildings. When they got there, everyone was dead from the disease, or two hundred people. He said that they burned everything to the ground. What is the most disquieting is that Magnús bemoans a lot of furs belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company being destroyed, which gives the impression that the furs were more important than the inhabitants of that dwelling. His reaction could be explained in such a way that he felt the valuable furs could be saved but the dead could not (my tutor's suggestion). The team got into grave danger on their way back and had to take shelter by a crack in the ice on the lake as a ferocious snow storm hit them. The dogs would not go any further and Ramsay told Magnús and Dr. Baldwin that "he would live or die there until day broke" and helped Magnús take care of the doctor who was terrified. They got safely back home late the next day. Magnús seems to have known Ramsay quite well and both were used to harsh weather conditions whereas the doctor was not (Stefánsson 81-86). If it were not for Ramsay, all of them would have perished.

Other Icelandic-Canadians had a close contact with Ramsay which grew into great friendship. Halldór Jónsson, who was born in 1836 in Iceland and lived on the farm Halldorsstaðir at Icelandic River in New-Iceland, was one of them and he mentioned his deep friendship with John Ramsay in his memoirs. Jónsson already knew who Ramsay was but they got to know each other better when they met on the way from Sandy Bar to Icelandic River. He was on his way home one day during the Smallpox Winter of 1876-77, after having gone on an errand to Gimli. Ögmundardóttir writes about Jónsson's memoirs and says the following:

When Halldór was on his return trip, heading north from Sandy Bar to Icelandic River, he noticed a man standing in the bush along the road. On their encounter, he saw it was an Indian whom he recognized as John Ramsay. They were unable to communicate verbally as Ramsay knew no Icelandic and Halldór knew no English, but through their shared circumstances and sorry plight, they understood one another just by the looks on each other's faces. They sat down together to build a fire, and Ramsay, with a look of cold and suffering, lifted one foot to show Halldór the naked sole of his foot.

Without hesitation Halldór opened a bag he was carrying and pulled out a new pair of socks, which he gave Ramsay. (qtd. in Ögmundardóttir 73-74)

As a matter of fact, Ramsay brought Jónsson twelve big whitefish as payment for the socks, very soon after their arrival home, thus showing his gratitude and friendship. Ögmundardóttir further writes: "Halldór and Ramsay thus became firm friends for the rest of their lives, and over the years exchanged many more gifts" (qtd. in Ögmundardóttir 74).

Guttormsson wrote an article, published in *Andvari, nýr flokkur* in 1975 about Ramsay. This article, translated into English by Viðar Hreinsson, can be found on the website of the Icelandic Radio, servefir.ruv.is and is used here as a reference. He was just a young boy when he first remembered Ramsay and was in awe of him because he and his second Native wife, Elin, were exceptionally good looking. No explanation is given as to why his second wife bore a name of such Icelandic or Nordic origin. Guttormsson also admired Ramsay's material wealth, as he and his wife were dressed in beautiful native clothes and moccasins and their boat was covered in white skins to sit on. To a poor Icelandic boy this was wealth indeed, and his biggest wish was to be like John Ramsay. Guttormsson described how Ramsay walked towards the house "so happy and magnificent as the god Manitou" as he came to visit Guttormsson's family. Guttormsson continued with this exceptionally detailed and vivid physical description of the man, John Ramsay which brings him very much to life:

He greeted mother with a laugh, as was his custom. He was in the prime of his life. Not only was he the most good-looking native I have ever seen; he was also one of the best-built and ablest of men that I have seen. He was taller than the average man, with a straight back and broad shoulders, and his chest was thrust forward like that of a class French "officier". His neck was thick and strong. His hair was thick and full, cut above the shoulders, black and shining like a raven's. He combed it up and away from his straight and wide forehead. His eyes were dark brown beneath black, arched eyebrows set in a face the color of russet. When he was not making fun or joking, his eyes appeared serious, yet never without goodness and warmth. Usually his face was alight with happiness. His laugh (for he certainly was of good spirits) had a pleasing timbre. His nose was slightly curved, his mouth was tenuous and fair; a subtle beard grew above and

below the lips, and there also, a cleft chin. He had neither high cheekbones nor hollow cheeks. His face was thin, though not wanting of flesh; altogether an even and smooth countenance. He was light of foot and supple in grace. He was dressed then, as I often saw him on trips to town. He wore a costume comprised of a red chequered shirt and star-white trousers of expensive and thick material, with a colourful sash around his waist to hold up his trousers with tassels on either hip (natives never used suspenders). (“John Ramsay”)

Guttormsson was obviously very impressed with Ramsay as he appears to have been very different from many local Natives in character. Again, Guttormsson’s own words are the best source:

Right from the very beginning, Ramsay was the finest native in the area, and remained so all his life. He was free of their bad manners and idiosyncrasies. For example, they treated their sleigh-dogs very badly. They starved and beat them so badly without reason, so much so that their wails were heard from afar. Ramsay had a fine and well-kept team. He was never hard on them, neither with whip nor hand. In daily conduct, no one was more polite and civil than he. Though he had other customs and bearing than his fellow natives, he was nevertheless loyal to his tribe. His house was open to natives and Icelanders alike. When he stayed with Icelanders, enjoying their hospitality, and he heard of natives nearby, he went to stay with them, even though he had to sleep outside. No native was as helpful to Icelanders as he was. This can be seen by what is already recounted and so much more. He was most dependable in trade. He never tried to short-change anyone, though he himself, like other native Indians, was cheated by white businessmen. It is worth pointing out that native Indians had a different view of things than the white man. If a native found a thing to be

desirable, such as something that caught his eye, i.e. colored cloth, glass beads, silk thread or assorted baubles, then it meant all to him to possess it and make a small sacrifice for it. (“John Ramsay”)

Guttormsson explained how Ramsay was extremely kind to all teenagers and that they all loved him. He taught a friend of his brother, Fúsi, how to hunt and make bear traps. Guttormsson says that Ramsay owned a log cabin in the woods east of the river. He was hospitable and loved to invite Guttormsson’s family and other families over for dinner. Guttormsson clearly respected Ramsay immensely. Guttormsson and Sveinsson both shared similar opinions about Ramsay. They were full of admiration and respect for him and their written accounts have, in a way, made Ramsay into a kind of myth.

Ögmundardóttir discusses Ramsay briefly in her MA essay and says he was a good hunter and that he continued hunting near his home after he lost his family to the smallpox. He shared his meat with his neighbours and his stories of how he saved many Icelanders in the colony from dying from hunger still live on. She informs that the paper *Framfari* reported with somewhat surprise that Ramsay, one of few Indians living in the colony and who lived on hunting and fishing, had recently shot four moose and two bears up along Icelandic River. The Icelanders did not know how to hunt such big animals and one such animal could provide meat for a family of four for a whole year. Ögmundardóttir refers to Robert A. Brightman, who in his book *A Grateful Prey: Rock Cree Human-Animal Relationships* states the fact that sharing meat with neighbours was a native habit in that area and perfectly normal. It was also an honor for anyone who could give a gift without receiving back a similar gift and that placed the giver in a higher rank and the receivers of the gift owed the giver somewhat a moral debt. She found it plausible that Ramsay received various things from the Icelanders even though they were not as important as the meat (qtd. in Ögmundardóttir 72-73).

Anne Brydon spoke with Trausti Vigfússon's ninety-seven year-old daughter, Tóta (Þórunn) Vigfússon, in October 1997 and February 1998. They discussed her father's dream in which Ramsay, then deceased, appeared to him and asked him to rebuild the broken down fence of his wife's grave. Tóta Vigfússon said that her father "recognized immediately the necessity of obedience" (Brydon 165). Vigfússon spoke freely of his dream and Ramsay's request even though his brother said he made a fool of himself. It actually took Vigfússon years to save enough money so that he could buy the timber and rebuild the fence. The task was finally completed when the owner of the land on which the grave is situated, Gestur Guðmundsson, was told about Vigfússon's dream and he quickly offered Vigfússon the oxen to transport the fencing to the grave (Brydon 165).

On the official website of the Province of Manitoba, the following information can be found under Municipal Heritage Sites No. 28, about Betsey Ramsay's Grave (Riverton Area):

John Ramsay, a prominent member of a Saulteaux Aboriginal band in the Lake Winnipeg region, and his family, were instrumental in assisting the first Icelandic immigrants who arrived in Manitoba in 1875. The Ramsays provided the settlers with meat and instructed them in local survival skills (the building of warm log cabins and local fishing and hunting techniques). A smallpox epidemic that struck the settlement in 1876–77 also affected local Aboriginals, including the Ramsay family. John lost his wife Betsey and four of his five children. All were buried in the Sandy Bar cemetery.

In 1989, as a centennial project, the community of Riverton restored the grave and rebuilt the white picket fence ("Betsey").

What is remarkable is that Trausti Vigfússon's part in rebuilding the fence around Betsey's grave is not mentioned at all, nor the story that Ramsay, after his death, appeared to Vigfússon in a dream, asking him to rebuild it. One could possibly guess that stories about dreams are not so credible in the Anglo-Canadian culture.

3.4. John Ramsay, Activist and Legend.

John Ramsay proved to be a subject of great interest. He is today publically praised for helping those foreign people who arrived in his land, took it over and made him a homeless man, so to speak. He did not meekly accept his fate, but did his best to get his ownership acknowledged. His claim went to very high officials who, unexpectedly, ruled in his favor, but those who were to implement that ruling either seem to have neglected their duties or been involved in the establishment of the Icelandic settlement and stood firmly against him. However, Ramsay turned out to be the better of the two, so to speak. Even though he moved away from the area in the end, he was not forgotten.

Róbert Jack, an Icelandic minister of Scottish descent, wrote about John Ramsay in his article “Í Íslendingabyggðum”, or “In the Icelandic Settlements” in English, which was published in the magazine *Húnavetningur*. *Ársrit Húnavetningafélagsins í Reykjavík 1-5*. Qóbert was the minister of the “Brethren Congregation” or “Bræðrasöfnuður” in Lundur, Manitoba, in the 1950s and revisited Lundur, now called Riverton, in 1977 on the centenary anniversary of the congregation. He writes that he noticed that during that visit he never heard mentioned the Indian John Ramsay. He finds it perhaps normal as new generations had been born that did not know Ramsay. In the year 1953 he listened to many stories about Ramsay and many of those who told him their stories were quite old. They had known Ramsay as teenagers. All of them agreed that if it had not been for John Ramsay the Icelanders in Lundur would either have starved to death or they had had to flee further south which had not been any better at all. Jack continues further:

When the Icelanders settled in Lundur in 1876 Ramsay was very displeased about the Government’s decision to let white men live in their hunting grounds. But John Ramsay, who had got to know Christianity and had adopted the name of Scottish missionaries, accepted the situation after he had discussed the matter with the Indian agent.

Then he got to know the Icelanders, whom he liked very well and when he saw their helplessness because of them not knowing how to get food he offered them help. He was a very good hunter. It seems to be unbelievable but yet a fact, that this one Indian could keep forty Icelandic families alive with moose meat during the first winters. – Moose is similar to buffalo and the meat is like the strongest beef. One Icelander told me that Ramsay, who was of the Cree nation, had on and off received from those families and others whom he had given the meat some bread and milk and sometimes chicken eggs, which was little compared to what he had given those people. To show this Canadian Indian's trust and integrity towards these Icelanders, who he did not want to betray, he kept on bringing them food when the smallpox ravaged farms and towns during the winter of 1876-1877, and he lost his wife and four children. The Icelanders respected this man greatly and when he died from a very old age far up north of Riverton, the Icelanders carried his body to town where he was buried beside his wife. Furthermore, the Icelanders built a grand monument on Betsey Ramsay's grave. Later they named a rocky head which lies into Lake Winnipeg after this much loved Indian. (33)

It could be said that Ramsay was the representative of the suppressed, the aboriginals who had lived and died in that land for centuries before the white man came. The nineteenth century white man's colonialism swept across the world like an epidemic, killing, oppressing or driving away the original peoples of the occupied territories. These peoples have in many cases not yet been acknowledged as the rightful keepers of their lands and are still being maltreated by those who govern despite more modern individual freedom and better life in general. Ramsay stands out as the exemplar of the righteous gentleman who turned loss into victory in his life. He did his best to fight for the survivors of his band and their rightful claim to their land. He adjusted to his new circumstances with dignity and gained lasting respect from the Icelandic-Canadian community which has lived on until the present day.

4. Fishing and trading with the Natives

When the Icelanders were allotted their new land in the district of Keewatin it was known that they were accustomed to some fishing and sheep and cow farming in their old country. This new land was thought suitable for their new beginning even though it was covered in dense woodland at that time as there were rivers and lakes and the wood could be cleared for farmland (Þorsteinsson 326-29). Icelanders and Natives established collaboration fairly quickly between themselves in fishing and trade. Both peoples were used to fishing for their families in lakes and rivers but they used different kinds of methods and there were different types of fish. It was customary for men who were hired by farmers in nineteenth century Iceland to go sea fishing for the farmer during winter and they were used to rowing out to sea on open boats to fish with lines and nets. Many of these Icelanders who immigrated to Canada later turned to fishing as their main work. They adapted to the fishing ways of the Natives and the Métis. They learned from the Natives how to fish in Manitoba lakes, especially through ice. The Icelanders tried to use fishing nets which they brought with them but the mesh size was too large and they were not successful in their fishing. Also, they fished just by the coastline but the fish stayed in deeper water (Arngrímsson 139).

Reverend Bragi Friðriksson wrote the book, *Fórnfús Frumherji: séra Páll Þorláksson prestur Íslendinga í Vesturheimi* or “The Sacrificing Pioneer: Rev. Páll Þorláksson minister of Icelanders in America” in which he writes impressively about Reverend Þorláksson who became important to the early Icelandic-Canadian history. One of the explanatory notes in the book says the following: “The Indians were the ones who, at first, taught our countrymen how to fish through ice. The Icelanders learned it quickly and soon became in the forefront of fishing in Lake Winnipeg” (Friðriksson 247; my translation). Reverend Róbert Jack discusses the same subject in his article (34).

However, the origin of the technique of ice fishing was debatable. It was either originated from the Icelanders or the Natives. The true answer to that has not yet been established. The device that was used is called a jigger or “skriðill” in Icelandic, and was used to set the nets under ice (Ögmundardóttir 92).

Ögmundardóttir explains that fishing was not regarded as very respectable work among the Natives, it was only considered suitable for children, women and old people. At first the Icelandic immigrants fished for their families and often fish saved the lives of the people who lived on the shores of Lake Winnipeg and on Black Island, later Hecla Island. Sigríður Jónsdóttir lived on Black Island during those first settlement years and in 1879 she wrote to her friend. She describes how she arrived to bay north of Sandy Bar and she saw men in rags, bare and dirty and almost without shoes. When she arrived on the island she saw the women with bare heads, bare feet, with no aprons and in dirty rags as there was no soap and no money to buy things. She continues:

We received a small amount of milk with every meal, we also got food but it was not very useful, it was fish and potatoes because nothing else was available. The children did not have the appetite for it but were constantly asking me for food.

Our usual work for the women here is that when we open our eyes we light up the stove, put on a tea kettle and a sauce pan to start boiling fish ... we eat between eight and nine, after that we begin to boil fish for the cows, they drink all the broth and eat fish. We start cleaning the fish, then we start boiling for lunch and this is how it goes all day long every day. (Ögmundardóttir 94; my translation;)

Sigríður Jónsdóttir is one of very few immigrant women who provided modern day people with an insight into a woman's life from that period of time in New Iceland.

As the community grew, people needed more food and many took up fishing in order to sell fish and earn some money. Professional fishing industry expanded around the Lakes in Manitoba. Gimli and Riverton became fishing towns as well as many other towns by Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba. A very important part of the fishing was the fishing camps which were run during the winter fishing season (Ögmundardóttir 95-96). A number of Icelanders became prominent owners of fishing camps and fishing boats. One of them was Helgi Einarsson.

4.1. Helgi Einarsson

Einarsson was born in Neðranes in Stafholtstungur, Iceland in 1870. He immigrated to Canada with his family in 1887 and his family settled at first near Lundar, Manitoba. Dick Hoerder, who published the book *Creating Societies: Immigrant Lives in Canada* wrote about Einarsson. He narrates that Einarsson lived all his life in Manitoba, mostly in Lake Manitoba Narrows which is situated between Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg and later in Fairford (Hoerder 182). Einarsson began writing his autobiography in 1920, at the age of fifty, and it was published in Iceland in 1954. Einarsson describes in great detail the nineteenth century fishing industry in Manitoba. He chose not to mingle too much with other Icelanders and spent much of his time by the lakes where he fished and sold his catch and became a prominent fish merchant (Ögmundardóttir 100).

Ögmundardóttir recounts that like so many immigrants of his time he did various jobs such as working on the railways, transporting goods on the river boats, and fishing besides working on his parents' farm. He got used to working with people of various

nationalities and he valued people because of their mannerism and efficiency rather than accepting preconceived ideas from the society. She writes that Einarsson even admits in his autobiography that he sometimes was bored around his countrymen and points out that this kind of a confession is almost unheard of in the sources she used for her thesis (100).

Ögmundardóttir writes that Einarsson describes himself as being a shy man and that consequently it sometimes made things difficult for him. She suggests that his shyness was perhaps the reason why he stayed away from other Icelanders who were stuck in their fixed roles within the group (101). Many Canadians thought that Icelanders were Eskimos and it was not uncommon that they were totally surprised to see that the Icelanders looked a lot like themselves. It shows the Canadian common belief that Icelanders were rather like the Natives than of European descent. Einarsson experienced that and he describes it in his autobiography:

I remember well that I came into a house at Poplar Point in the morning, a little after seven, and I was trying to sell fish. The man came out and offered me to enter. I accepted that so that I could have a better conversation and he bought some fish from me. Then he asked me where I was from and of what nationality. I told him that I was an Icelandic. He became totally surprised and said he did not believe that Icelanders looked like me, and called to his wife to hurry up to get up to see an Icelandic. But I did not wait until Mary came down to see me and left right away after I had received the payment for the fish. The owner of the house thought that Icelanders were Eskimos and were hairy and dressed in clothing made of seal skins, but they never thought that they looked like him, except that they were taller as I was six feet in height and a little taller in boots. (72; my translation)

Einarsson moved with his parents to the Narrows, where he soon got to know the Natives quite well. They lived on reservations, and he discovered how the white community thought about them (Ögmundardóttir 101). As he began ice fishing during the winter he got to know the Sifton family who was one of the most prominent families in Manitoba at the time. “William Sifton was the brother of Clifton Sifton, the Dominion minister of the interior” (Hoerder 182). They were into trade and had considerable power in the region. Einarsson and the Sifton daughter fell in love but social class differences forbade them to marry and they were separated by her parents. The girl was later married to a man of her own class.

This painful experience seems to have tainted Einarsson’s love life for quite some time or until he gradually got into a steady relationship with Sara Stagg, a native woman living in at Dauphin River. Einarsson had known her father, Henry Stagg, through his work and after her father’s death they got to know each other better. They lived together whenever he was in Dauphin River and had five children, four boys and a girl who died in infancy. She was a Catholic and wanted to get married at the beginning of their relationship. He said the following about that in his autobiography: “I told her that first of all I did not expect to get married, and if I did get married, I would want to have a wife of my own race” (175; my translation). When she lay dying of tuberculosis, he finally relented and married her. After her death, three of their sons gradually came to live with their father but the fourth son stayed behind with his mother’s sister (Ögmundardóttir 106; my translation).

It is difficult to say why Einarsson did not marry Sara until so late. Perhaps he was hesitant because of the Sifton daughter, whom he never mentioned by name, only by the initial A (Einarsson 129-30). Perhaps he was ashamed and worried about being judged

by the Icelandic settlers as many of them soon took up the same attitude towards the Natives as other whites in the area. He openly claimed that he was an atheist so he did not believe in a marriage before God and therefore refused to get married. There was also a credible reason for this delay of getting married. When a Native woman married someone other than a Native she lost her status as a Treaty Indian and consequently she lost her right to financial support and other rights that the government had promised to give the Natives. That would have meant a loss of income and poorer living standards. What is the most plausible explanation for his unwillingness to marry Sara is that he did not want her and their children to be treated with prejudice and therefore he chose not to live within the Icelandic settlement. It is quite unusual for a man to be so open about his relationship with a Native woman and such an account is in fact almost one of a kind when reading through published and unpublished narratives and accounts. Einarsson was a prominent businessman and in hard competition with another large fish buyer in the Gimli area, an area which has been considered the center of Icelandic settlement and culture in Manitoba. Nevertheless, not much is written about Einarsson in Icelandic-Canadian writings and it points to the fact that Einarsson has not been highly thought of because of his common-in-law Native wife and their children (Ögmundardóttir 106-08).

In his autobiography, Einarsson tells how he became a captain of a treaty boat when he was offered the job by a Mr. Martineau who had been impressed with Einarsson's sailing skills on an earlier trip on the mail boat from the Narrows to Westbourne. Martineau seemed to have something to do with this treaty boat, most likely he was the Indian agent and paid the Native tribes around the lakes treaty money for the land that they had given up to the Government. Einarsson took his brother Kristján with him and "the Native chief of Ebb-and-Flow reserve as a guide" (Einarsson 69) as he did not

know the route and had never sailed on these lakes that they had to go cross (68-69).

Einarsson describes this in greater detail:

That boat sailed all over Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin and Winnipegosis with the treaty money for the Indians. I gratefully accepted that offer. I got a dollar and a half a day and everything for free. This trip lasted over a month. We left Westbourne with 10,000 dollars to pay to nine reserves. That is when I first got to know the Indians and learnt how to sail because I had never sailed before I built Leifur to sail. But Martinau thought I was a trained sailor and I did not protest. But all the sailing I had done was on a small boat which my father built for me when I was about eight or ten years old. (69; my translation)

This episode shows how courageous Einarsson was and unafraid of trying something totally new. He did not seem to fear nature and he quickly became comfortable with the Natives.

An article by J.J.B. was published in *Lögberg-Heimskringla* on 3 August, 1950 about the various Icelandic-Canadian fishermen and ship owners in Manitoba. One of those mentioned was Einarsson:

Helgi Einarsson, the son of Einar Kristjánsson of Bakkakot, Andakílshreppur, Borgarfjarðarsýsla in Iceland, started fishing in Lake Manitoba at a young age in 1887 and has been a fisherman and ship owner ever since. For many years he ran a huge fishing enterprise in the Narrows at Lake Manitoba and employed many fishermen besides employing those who transported the fish. Then he moved to Fairford and continued his fishing there as well as running a store for many years or until 1930. Helgi is a viking of a man, not only in health and labour, but he is also observant and has foresight. He was the first man on Lake

Manitoba, along with Jón H. Jónsson, who began sending unfrozen fish to the United States and by doing this, they created a totally new attitude about fish marketing. Helgi now fishes in Lake Winnipeg. (J.J.B. 37; my translation)

Einarsson was a remarkable and interesting man who chose his own way of life and did not let common belief or views taint his opinion of people or circumstances. Dick Hoerder, who wrote specifically about Helgi Einarsson being a notable entrepreneur in Manitoba, said that Einarsson “had premonitions of future events and felt he shared this with Native people” (Hoerder 182). This fact may explain why he chose to live and work among Native people during his life. He started ice fishing in the lakes and sold the fish to Winnipeg and then all over Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. He always worked with the Natives, and either bought fish and fur from them or employed them.

Steinþór Guðbjartsson, a journalist for *Morgunblaðið* and former editor of *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, went to Dauphin River in the year 2000 or 2001 and interviewed Helgi Einarsson’s grandson and namesake who is another remarkable entrepreneur like his grandfather and refers to himself as the “last Mohican”. Guðbjartsson says in his article in *Morgunblaðið*, “Helgi síðasti móhíkaninn”, from 2001, that Einarsson senior was the first man in Manitoba to sell fish to the United States in 1896 and later, in 1912, he began selling fresh fish to New York for a much higher price, and thus became a pioneer of that market for other Manitoban fishermen. Einarsson senior also ran various shops at different times in St. Martin, Sandy Bay, Little Saskatchewan now called Dauphin River, and on Reindeer Island on Lake Winnipeg. He used his own currency in his trade and the Natives could buy goods in his shops for the money they got for the fish and fur they sold to him. Guðbjartsson claims that it is being said that Einarsson had been a state within a state.

Einarsson senior wrote an extensive and detailed autobiography which is tremendously valuable to Icelandic-Canadian history. He was relentless in his fight against a twenty year monopoly license that was granted by the Canadian Government to a Selkirk fishing company to fish in the lakes North of Lake Winnipeg, and pressured fish inspectors and MPs, especially the minister of the Interior, resulted in the license being revoked (Guðbjartsson 2D). Einarsson senior was a strong character and had the spirit and courage to do what he wanted and go where he wanted. He assimilated himself to the Natives and Anglo-Canadians rather than to his own people. He died on a First Nations reservation at Dauphin River and is buried there. He has descendants who still live there. He is a man to be admired.

4.2. Interracial Relationships

As mentioned above, Helgi Einarsson had a Native wife. As a matter of fact, interracial relationships occurred between Icelanders and the Natives of both sexes but they were not discussed by the Icelandic community and those couples were in most cases, if not all, shunned by the Icelanders. It was considered inappropriate. Ethnic marriages between white people were not happily accepted but tolerated, but such marriages between a Native and a white person were nearly looked upon as a crime as the Natives were treated in a condescending manner by society and the government and therefore were not believed to be fit to live with white people. The leaders of the Icelandic community decided to deny the fact of these mixed relationships with total silence and they controlled what was said in published materials, such as books, magazines, and newspapers that covered the history of the Icelandic settlement (Ögmundardóttir 98). It is only recently that this fragile and previously shameful subject has surfaced in discussion and print. W.D. Valgardson, a Canadian writer of Icelandic descent, wrote an article “The Myth of Homogeneity – or Deconstructing Amma” which was published

in *Rediscovering Canadian Difference*. In his article, Valgardson shares with his readers the following:

There were, of course other forces at work within the community. One of the foremost was the relationship of the Icelanders with the native people. The two communities were tied together in both life and death. They suffered the ravages of smallpox together. They traded goods. For some the settlers were dependent on the native community to teach them about this new land. There was a great deal of intermarriage with the native community. In my family, my great uncle, Franklin Bristow, married a native woman. They had four children so four of my cousins are one quarter Icelandic, one quarter English and half Cree. Where I'm half Irish because of my mother, they're half native because of their mother. (210)

Ögmundardóttir also opens this discussion in her thesis. As the immigrants evolved into professional fishing in winter and the fishing enterprise progressed around the Manitoba lakes, numerous camps or fishing posts were established and many people of various ethnic backgrounds worked there. Ögmundardóttir refers to a piece of a diary written during the winter of 1917-1918 by Jón Jónsson, who was named after the village Amaranth on the western shore of Lake Manitoba. There he describes the social environment of these fishing camps where people of Icelandic descent, Natives and the Métis worked and often had close relations. It is illuminating to read this simple diary which actually is full of information:

December 24, 1917, we went to Amaranth and got drops which are good for the heart ... and then we got a drive back with half-breeds, men but not women. The 25th. They went tonight to a half-breed dance for fun, Óli, Carl and Skafti.

1 January 1918 ... walked to Amaranth tonight but got a ride back with a half-breed boy and a woman and there was no other room for me but to sit flat on my feet between the legs of an old woman and I was warm on all sides but the front side because it turned away from her.

16 January ... Skafti went to Amaranth tonight to attend a white men's dance.

1 February ... two half-breed women came here tonight and I had to pay them the 70 cents I owed them.

5. Two half-breed women came here to collect debts but I did not owe them anything now. (qtd. in Ögmundardóttir 96; my translation)

Ögmundardóttir believes that the debts these half-breed women were collecting must have been because of a home-made brew they sold to the fishermen in the camp.

Jónsson also writes about girls who stayed in those camps for other reasons than to cook and clean and he depicts how they caused friction between the men. Later in his diary he refers to an Icelandic girl in a letter, written in 1929 to his brother, a minister in North-Dakota. He tells a true story about a young woman who was betrayed by her Icelandic beau and she then married a half-breed who treated her well and she did not hide her marriage from other people. Her former beau tried to get her back but she said she was well respected and well treated by her husband and that he would have to do his utmost to get her back before she left her husband, even though she would rather want to live with an Icelander (Ögmundardóttir 97).

When an Icelander lived with a Native or a half-breed woman it was considered inappropriate but it was less criticized than when Icelandic women had love affairs with a Native man or a Métis. People said they had gotten "into the Indians" and they were believed to be lost and even socially isolated. An immoral behavior of a girl or a woman

was considered to be a disgrace for the whole group so it was a kind of a measurement for the moral situation of the whole (Ögmundardóttir 97-98).

The Icelandic-Canadian immigrant Þórður Brynjúlfsson wrote a diary, where he writes about the immorality of Icelandic women on board the ship that transported the immigrants to America. By associating with English boys too much they had disgraced the whole group (qtd. in Ögmundardóttir 98). Therefore, it was not only shameful to socialize with a Native or a Métis at that time but also with a person of a different European descent. Stories about Icelandic fishermen who had Native girlfriends or mistresses were oral rather than written stories and if there were any children from these relationships, people would not know anything about them as according to Native custom they went with their mothers if the couple broke up (Ögmundardóttir 99; Einarsson 180). Intermarriages or relationships were considered a total scandal and the Icelanders often disappeared into the world of the Natives or they somehow lived apart from the white people with their families. A public silence reigned about their existence (Ögmundardóttir 98-99; Brydon 168).

Ögmundardóttir's interviews with the descendants of these mixed relationships has paved the way for other researchers to hopefully follow her example in order to bring forth these people so that their stories will be told in more detailed narratives.

5. Conclusion

The history of the colony of New Iceland is interwoven into Canada's history. It was an experiment in creating a nationalistic settlement of people of only one nation with the encouragement of Lord Dufferin, Governor-General of Canada (Arngrímsson126).

More often than not a good relationship was established between the Icelanders and the local Natives through a mutual understanding and a similar situational background. But as the Natives were considered greatly inferior to the white people and looked down upon, such a relationship was publicly kept quiet about as the Icelandic settlers wished to be accepted by the Canadians as equals. If they were personally linked to the Natives, they were snubbed and received worse treatment from the white community. Usually, the correlations were those of the Icelanders being the boss and the Natives being the hired help, especially in the lake fishing industry or trade. Nevertheless, deep friendships and mutual respect existed among them in some or many cases, such as in the case of between Guttormsson's parents and the Natives. The Icelanders and the Natives were in closer contact in and near the smaller villages, and especially by the lakes, where fishing was an important industry. By looking at those areas and the stories related to them, interesting knowledge can be discovered.

John Ramsay is an example of a Native who could not be oppressed and he stood up for himself and his people's rights. Brydon, Ögmundardóttir and Eyford contributed valuable and even disturbing information about Ramsay's case which gave me a totally new insight into his life and his point of view as a Native. That his land claim should reach all the way to the Surveyor General who ruled in Ramsay's favor is remarkable, and that the matter was hushed up because of a governmental blunder (Brydon 177), was a shocking piece of information. It inspired me to know that Ramsay kept his

respectability as well as his dignity, and that he was equal to any white man. Even though the blunder was covered up and Ramsay's claim was not recognized, some later restitution towards him occurred from the Icelanders, especially by acknowledging Ramsay's part in keeping the settlers alive during those first years in the West Iceland Reserve. Ramsay absolutely deserves this belated acknowledgment and respect.

The story of Helgi Einarsson introduced a man of strong character who was courageous enough to stand out among his fellow countrymen, he became a pioneer and built up a fishing empire. He took a Native wife and became a father of four surviving children. He fought for the rights of the Natives with whom he worked closely most of his life. It surprised me to discover the extent of these intermarriages and it aroused my curiosity to research that particular fact further at a later time.

It is regrettable how the leaders of the Icelandic colony chose to ignore the right of the Native peoples to their land, even though the Natives did not believe in owning the land, but to be its keepers. The leaders did have an excuse, though, as the government's policy was to clear the land for white settlers, so their attitude towards the Natives was understandable, considering the spirit of the age. Many of my previous ideas about the decency and friendliness of the Natives were reinforced through my research and none of my ideas proved untrue.

Ögmundardóttir's arguments became a very important input to my own and her work facilitated my research in many ways, as our arguments quite often seemed to be in harmony. Brydon's article gave me startling, new information and it broadened my perspective of Native history of the Icelandic settlement. Eyford gave me new facts about the Natives and the Smallpox, which previously had not been available to me and broadened my perspective.

This research work has given some explanations as to why this silence reigned in most Icelandic-Canadian writings from the days of the first settlement in Canada. It was considered damaging to the reputation and prestige of the Icelanders-Canadians if they were officially linked to the Natives in any other way than through work-related situations. The Icelanders were not much respected when they first arrived in Canada and in order to rise in society they had to go by the rules of the dominant Anglo-Canadians. The Natives were not accepted as proper citizens of Canada and an affiliation with them was not profitable.

Working on this essay has also confirmed my beliefs that there existed indeed a mutual understanding between the Icelanders and the Natives from the first contact, which both groups benefitted from, one way or the other. What we can learn from this outcome is that despite man-made hindrances between ethnic groups, individuals always find a way to friendly interaction, which consequently benefits both parties. One should not underestimate the power of will and the power of reason.

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