

# *The Argyle Icelandic Community*

## *Origins, Establishment and Impact*



A Research Project of the Argyle Historical Museum

Supported by the Province of Manitoba



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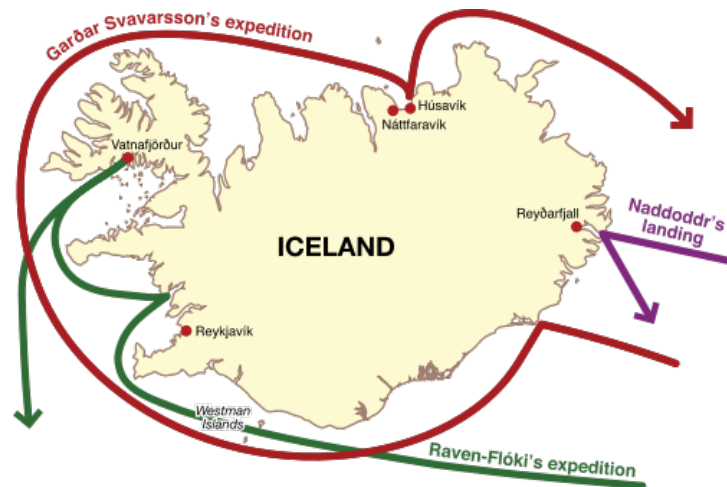
## *Origins*

The Dream & The Journey

## Icelandic Society – A Brief History

Although Irish Monks may have settled briefly in Iceland prior to the first visit by Norse raiders, it was Vikings, specifically renegade Chieftains, who established a lasting settlement.

They had known about the island for some time. A Viking sailor named Naddooddur happened upon it while lost, and a Swede named Gardar Svavarsson circumnavigated it about 1860.



The first attempt to settle was by a Norwegian named Floki Vilgeroason. He landed in the northwest but a severe winter killed his domestic animals and he sailed back to Norway.

It's no surprise that he named it Iceland.

Beginning in 874 many settlers came to Iceland from Norway and the Viking colonies in the British Isles. A Norwegian named Ingolfur Arnarson led them, bringing along with his family, slaves and animals.



By 930 the Chieftains had established a form of governance, the Althing, essentially the world's first parliament.

Iceland was independent throughout this period, a time known as the "Old Commonwealth". Its historians began to document their story in books they called "Sagas of Icelanders"

During the 12th century conditions on Iceland deteriorated. Overgrazing and the destruction of the forests led to soil



erosion. Lack of wood to build ships left the Icelanders dependent on Norwegian merchants. At that time wool, animal hides, horses and falcons were exported from Iceland. Timber, honey and malt for brewing were imported. Some Icelanders began to look to the king of Norway to protect trade.

Feuding between clans also contributed to the decline. Icelanders who desperately wanted peace eventually realized the only way to obtain it was to submit to the Norwegian king.

In 1280 a new constitution was drawn up. The Althing continued to meet but its decisions had to be ratified by the Norwegian king. Furthermore the king appointed a governor and 12 local sheriffs to rule.

In 1397, with the unification of Norway and Denmark, Iceland fell under Danish control.

The 14th and early 15th centuries were also troubled years for Iceland. In the early 14th century the climate grew colder. Then in 1402-03 the Black Death struck Iceland and the population was devastated.

Conditions improved in the 15th century. At that time there was a big demand in Europe for Icelandic cod and Iceland grew rich on the fishing industry.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> a strict Danish-Icelandic Trade Monopoly hurt Iceland's economy. The poverty of its people was further aggravated by a series of natural disasters (especially a particularly destructive volcano in 1783) that resulted in a population decline.

An independence movement resulted in the restoration of the

Althing in 1843.

Home Rule was established in 1904, but it wasn't until after World War I that full independence was gained.

These are the events and forces that shaped the lives of Icelanders up until the time of extensive migration to the "New World".

In 1870 many groups began exploring options for re-settlement in North America.

## The Last Straw

On 3 January 1875, Mount Askja, a large active volcano, erupted, spewing millions of tons of debris into the air. Over the next few weeks, dozens of eruptions occurred, filling the sky with smoke. Finally, on the second day of Easter, Mount Askja erupted with tremendous force. The lethal smoke and ash filled the air and rained down upon Icelandic settlements across all of Iceland.



*Askja erupted again in 1961 – but the minor*

*eruption lasted only a few days.*

This disaster was additional incentive for the migration of twenty percent of Iceland's population to North America. Winnipeg became the most popular destination during the 1880s. To this day, Manitoba remains North America's centre for Icelandic culture and activities. The localities of Gimli, New Iceland, Riverton, Lundar, Morden, Lakeview, Erickson, Baldur, Arborg, and Glenboro are known for their Icelandic cultural influence.

## New Iceland



*Sigtryggur Jonasson, father of New Iceland Colony.*

Source: *Archives of Manitoba*

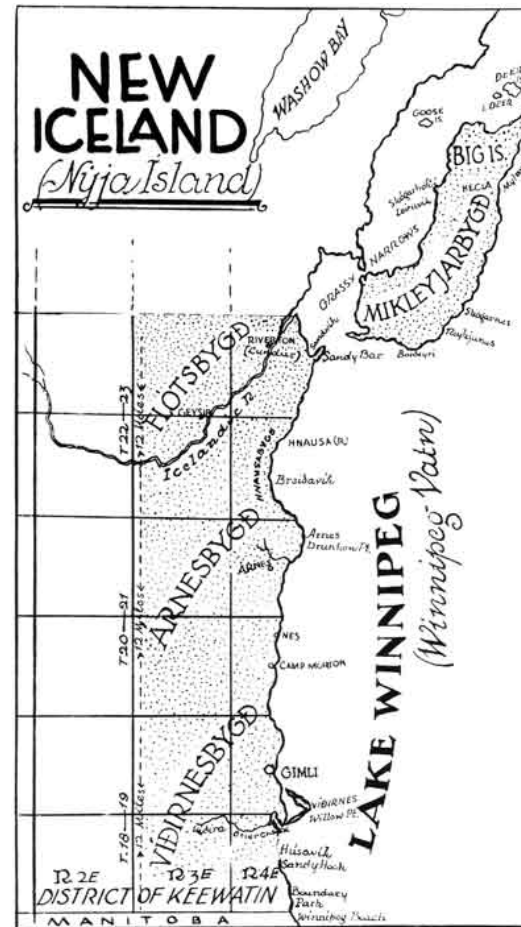
One group of Icelanders settled in Kinmount, Ont., in 1872 but they found that conditions there were unsuitable and decided to keep looking. In October of 1875, Sigtryggur Jonasson, with the assistance of John Taylor, a missionary who was to become a lifelong friend to the Icelanders, moved the settlers a spot along the shore of Lake Winnipeg. Here they established the "State of New Iceland" with its own constitution, laws and government, although in all except local matters, it remained under the authority of the Canadian Government.

The form of self-government was modeled on the *Althing* back home.

The Vatnsthing ('Lake Parliament') ruled over four districts:

- *Vidinesbygd* ('Willow Point Community', now the Gimli District);

- *Arnesbygd* ('Arnes Community');
- *Fljotsbygd* ('Icelandic River Community', now the Riverton District); and
- *Mikleyjarbygd* ('Big Island Community', now Hecla Island).



*An 1877 map showing the New Iceland settlement on the western shore of Lake Winnipeg.*

Source: *Archives of Manitoba*



New Iceland represents an important episode in the early settlement of the Canadian West. The arrangement made with the Canadian Government enabled them to preserve their language and cultural identity while quickly becoming a valued and respected Canadians. Numerous descendants maintain vibrant traditions and close ties with Iceland.



*John Taylor, missionary and Canadian agent for the New Iceland Colony, no date.*

*Source: Archives of Manitoba*

## Hard Times

But the beginnings in New Iceland were a challenge. The first winter set in unusually early and was extremely cold; there was a scarcity of food, warm clothing, and housing. Added to these problems, scurvy and other diseases took their toll of life. In 1876, a smallpox epidemic swept through the settlement and New Iceland was put under quarantine until 1877. The next three winters were so wet that hay crops were ruined and cattle were starving.



*New Iceland pioneers posing in front of their log cabin in the Gimli area, no date.*

*Source: Archives of Manitoba*

Eventually the settlement took hold and thrived, based largely on fishing and forestry, but for those more interested in agriculture the grass did indeed seem greener to the south and west.



*The Icelanders landed at this 'White Rock' located on the beach. Willow Island Park has been developed by the Arnason brothers and the White Rock on which the settlers symbolically landed has been polished and raised on a foundation.*



*Willow Island is lined with lakeside homes today.*



*Landing at Willow Point*



## New Beginnings in Argyle Municipality

Everett Parsonage, who had worked for John Taylor in Ontario, had settled at Pilot Mound and wrote to his friends in New Iceland, encouraging them to come west and settle. In August of 1880, Sigurdur Kristofersson and Kristjan Jonsson set out to visit their friend. Parsonage guided them in a northwesterly direction to an area where there were as yet, no settlers except two men, A.A. Esplin and G.J. Parry, who were living in a tent. Sigurdur and Kristjan were impressed with the land - much of it in rolling prairie grass with small lakes and wooded areas. It would be easy to break and there would be plenty of hay for cattle. When Parsonage rode to the crest of the hill overlooking the land near the present sight of Frels Church, he galloped back and shouted, "I have found Paradise!"



*Gentle hills, small lakes and fine views*

In the Nelsonville land office, near where Morden was later located, Sigurdur filed entry for the first homestead in the Icelandic settlement of what was to be Argyle - SE 10-6-14. He

named his farm "Grund", an Icelandic word meaning grassy plain. At Nelsonville he also bought a scythe and walked back to his homestead to put up stacks of hay for the cattle in the spring. Parry and Esplin helped him. They were just out from England and had no experience in putting up log buildings. Sigurdur had some experience in this and he helped them build a cabin.

A few weeks later Parsonage guided Sigurdur's father-in-law, William Taylor, along with Skafti Arason to the same area where they also took up homesteads.

Meanwhile, Fridbjorn Fridriksson and Halldor Arnason, accompanied by several younger men, drove 30 head of cattle from new Iceland to Parsonage's for winter feeding. This was a long and difficult task, taking them several days just to get the cattle across the Assiniboine River.

Parsonage gave Fridbjorn and Halldor directions to Argyle and they also filed for homesteads. These then were the first six men to come from New Iceland to homestead in Argyle: Sigurdur, Kristjan, William, Skafti, Fridbjorn, and Halldor. The following spring, on March 15, 1881, four families joined them:

***Skafti Arason:* with his wife Anna and two small children. He brought three work oxen and one pony hitched to four sleighs. On one sleigh, he had built out of lumber a small frame house 6' x 10'. He also had 10 cattle.**

***Gudmundur Nordman:* came alone with two work oxen pulling two sleighs and all his belongings.**

***Sigurdur Kristofersson:* left his wife Caroline and two small children in Winnipeg with friends, to come out later. He brought**

**his belongings in two sleighs and a few head of cattle.**

***Skuli Arnason:* brought all his belongings in two sleighs pulled by two oxen, and he had a few head of cattle. One sleigh was covered and he brought his wife Sigridur and four children.**

They travelled to Winnipeg, on to Portage la Prairie, then in a southwesterly direction. After 17 days they arrived on March 31, in the east end of the settlement near Skuli and Gudmundur's homesteads.

The last day the weather turned bitterly cold and snowy. To save the exhausted oxen some belongings were left along the way.

When night came, they camped together at a bluff near Skuli's land. The cattle were suffering from extreme cold and hunger. The weary settlers camped near the shanty of two settlers, Parry and Esplin, until April 15, Good Friday, when each went to their own land. The day was beautiful and mild, and in a few days the snow was gone. They camped and helped one another until their cabins were built.

A new chapter had begun.



# *The Argyle Icelandic Community*

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## *Establishment*

Building a Community

## Growth

The Argyle Icelandic Settlement grew quickly. Eight families braved the winter of 1881, 17 the next. Within 10 years the district was settled.

Sigurdur Chistopherson acted as an immigration agent and made several trips back to Iceland. He was so successful in encouraging many of his fellow Icelanders to immigrate to his newly-adopted homeland that he was nearly thrown into jail for his trouble. The Icelandic Government had begun to realize that they were losing many of their citizens to America, and did not take kindly to immigration agents luring their people away. He persisted, and in 1893, he brought back the largest group of Icelanders to come to Argyle at one time.



*Sigurdur Christopherson (1848-1921).*

By 1884, Skafti Aranson was able to report on behalf of the settlement: "We have 650 cultivated acres, 260 head of cattle, 62 oxen, 70 pigs, 60 sheep, 9 work horses, 2 ponies, 2 colts, 6 mowers, 6 harnesses, 3 reapers, 2 binders, 1 threshing machine, 13 wagons, 23 ploughs, and 12 harrows. "

Post offices were soon open - one at Sigurdur Kristofersson's home - Grund; one at Jon Olafson's home which he called Bru. Eventually the settlement divided into two communities surrounding these homes. There was also a small store at Grund.



*This building housed the Grund Post Office for a time.*

With crops in the field and food on the table, the settlers quickly turned to the real purpose behind all the work and hardship; establishing a better way of life for their families.

“Six schools were built by 1900; two Lutheran congregations were established and a large church built to be used jointly by them until a second could be built. The Ladies' Aid was organized; a lending library established; a Good Morals Club, and later a Good Templars Society were begun; three community halls were built which were the scenes of picnics, plays, tombolas, and dances. The Argyle Brass Band played for many of these dances and celebrations. In 1909, the Icelandic Women's Suffrage Society was organized; and later a Young People's Club. There were ball games played between the "Bush Rabbits" and the "Kangaroos" at Bush Rabbit Point on the Gudnason farm near Little Baldur. “ \*Come into our Heritage

## **Cultural Activities**

The Icelanders brought with them their customs and beliefs many of which have been incorporated into the general “Canadian” culture. "Skoes", the soft slippers made from sheepskin, may be forgotten, but the lacy Icelandic shawl, may still be found on a cold day, as are Icelandic sweaters from the wool of Icelandic sheep. While the sturdy Icelandic ponies some brought have disappeared from the scene, Icelandic sheep have recently made a comeback.



*Herb Christopherson with Icelandic*



*Sesselia Anderson spinning wool, about 1930*



*Icelandic ponies owned by Kristjan Isjeld.*



Love of books was a common element in all of the Icelandic Settlements. Someone might read aloud while others worked at mending, knitting, spinning and carding wool. Literary Societies developed, a tradition begun in Iceland in the early 1800's when they were in danger of losing their language and customs to the influence of the Danish masters. Given that, it was not uncommon to have a community poet. In the Grund area that poet was Sigurbjorn Johansson, who would write poems for the many special occasions of those early years. His daughter Jakobina Johnson was to follow in his talented footsteps and have several books of poetry published.

## Health Care

In the early days, Hernit Kristofersson was much in demand with his homeopathic medicines and cures and even after a doctor did settle in Baldur, many families would still prefer to call on Hernit's help. Peter Kristofersson's wife, Sigurveig Olafsdottir, was one of many Midwives trained in Iceland who brought their skills to this new land. She always carried a small needlepoint and leather satchel filled with medicines and necessary tools for delivering babies.

## Meeting Places

### Skjaldbreid



*Skjaldbreid Hall*

"Skjaldbreid", (Broad Shield) was built in 1896, at the eastern end of the oak bluff on Sigurdur Kristofersson's land. Initiated by the Library Society, it was the scene of concerts, dances, plays, and various celebrations. There the Good Templars met, the Ladies' Aid held their tombolas; the Young People organized their club; and there were Sunday School picnics.

## Celebrations & Social Life

In pioneer times, people made their own entertainment. The hall was busy in all seasons and for many purposes. Some of the more memorable occasions have been recorded in "Come into our Heritage:

A 3-act play (in Icelandic) called "Skugasvein". was performed on a cold winter night in 1897 to a packed hall. Admission was 25¢ for adults, and 15¢ for young people.

On June 18, 1898 the wedding of Lara Arnason and Kris Thordarson were wed at Frelsis and the guests then travelled to Skjaldbreid for a large meal. A poem was written by Sigurbjorn Johansson (community poet) and read aloud "to Lara and Kris on their wedding day".

A celebration was held Dec. 31, 1899, to welcome in the 20th century - this was an all-night affair!



*The Band*

The silver wedding anniversary of four of its pioneer couples: Ami Sveinson and Gudrun Jonsdottir; Skafti Arason and Anna Johannsdottir; Kristjan Jonsson and Arnbjorg Jonsdottir; Sigurdur Kristofersson and Caroline. Taylor took place on July 19, 1902. These couples had been married in 1877, at Gimli.

In 1905, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first homesteads filed, was the occasion a celebration. On Wednesday, June 14, a special train brought Icelanders from Winnipeg. Upon their arrival in

Glenboro, buggies, democrats, and wagons were waiting at the station to bring the visitors to Skjaldbreid.



*Log cabin built in 1931 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Icelandic settlement.*



*50h anniversary celebration at Grund of the Icelandic settlement in Argyle.*

It is fitting that the last time Skjaldbreid was used as a hall was for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the settlement in 1931. Once again a large celebration was planned with picnic, flags flying, games,



singing, band music and speeches. A small log cabin with sod roof was built in the Grund woods near Skjaldbreid - it was typical of the first homes the pioneers built for themselves. Although the Sunday School picnics continued on the site until the early 1940's, the days of the hall were over.

## The Argyle Hall

The Argyle Icelanders organized a "Good Etiquette Club" (Sidabotafelagid) for the purpose of contributing to the proper upbringing of their young men and women. That led, by the end of the nineteenth century, to the forming of a new organization - "The Independent Order of Good Templars, Idunn Lodge No. 36".



The Good Templars held their early meetings and concerts at Skjaldbreid and in 1903, bought a parcel of land near Frelsis Church where they built a Good Templars Hall. The Good Templars were active for many years, engaged in what today were would call acts of charity and community building.

In 1905, the building was enlarged, making it suitable for all occasions and gatherings. The new kitchen and dining room

would make it easier to serve meals and lunches. At dances in those early days, everyone sat down at tables in the dining room to eat their lunch while the band took its break.

The stage was featured a fine roll curtain with red and gold scroll surrounding a large scenery - hand painted by Fred Swanson, a painter and decorator in Winnipeg.

Church conventions, fowl suppers, minstrel shows, tombolas, concerts, dances, and Ladies' Aid bazaars were some of the many events held at Argyle Hall.



*"Grund," the Sigurdur and Caroline Christopherson home.  
The site of the Grund post office until the 1920's.  
([www.christpherson.net](http://www.christpherson.net))*



*The Grund site in 2011*

## Frelsis (Liberty)

Frelsis was more than a place of worship, it was the heart of the community.

Although it took some time for the community to build a church, many settlers held scriptural readings each evening in their homes and Layman services and Sunday School classes were in homes as well. By 1884, the "Frikirkja" congregation was established and Layman services continued in homes until they could be held in the newly built Hecla and Bru Schools.

On July 26, 1885, a new congregation, 'Frelsis' (Liberty). was formed - to serve the western part of the settlement. Rev. Jon Bjarnason served the congregation with periodic visits.

At a joint meeting in 1888, the Bru and Grund congregations agreed to build a church.



*Grund Frelsis Lutheran Church. Built in 1899 by the pioneers.*



*Photo from 2016*



*Interior of Grund Church - [www.cristopherson.net](http://www.cristopherson.net)*

Fundraising began with the Ladies' Aid, organized in 1885, contributing the first \$200. Two acres of land were bought for \$10 from Sigurjon Snidal. Carpenters, Byring Hallgrimson and Ami Sveinson, with the help of volunteer labour, had the



building completed by June. Hafsteinn Pjetursson, recruited from Iceland, served the district until 1893.

Over the years there have been many changes to the original design.

A belfry with steeple to house a 500 pound copper bell was added in 1896. Byring Hallgrimson hand carved the pulpit in his own kitchen and painted it soft shades of cream and orchid

with touches of metallic gold trim. Coal-oil chandeliers were donated; then later converted to electricity. A two manual "Doherty" organ was purchased in 1911.

Originally there were steps on both sides of the altar platform that led up to a higher platform behind the altar – for the organ and the choir. This was replaced one low wide platform.

## Bru

While Grund was the focal point of the western part of the Icelandic settlement, the eastern portion of the region became identified as Bru. This started with the establishment of a post office at Jon Olafsson's home. It was named after the Icelandic word for bridge. The Olafsson home, later Albert Oliver's home, was near the bridge on Oak Creek.

A school also of that name was established as early as 1885. The first school building was on SE 16-6-13, the homestead of Bjorn Jonsson. In 1897, it was moved to the northwest corner of SW 11-6-13. This building served until 1921, when it was replaced by a new school on the northwest corner of 11-6-13.



*Class at Bru School, taken in 1906 or 1907*

## **Frikirkja Church (Bru)**

The two congregations of Frikirkju (Bru) and Frelsis (Grund) worked together in harmony for over 20 years and shared the same church building.

Then the members of Bru Congregation decided on the need for a church closer to their homes. In 1910 called Frikirkju Lutheran Church was built on southeast corner of 21-6-13, with Jon Olafson of Glenboro as head carpenter. The building was composed of three sections: the main part, the east wing for the choir, organ and minister's room, and the altar portion. Beautiful stained glass windows adorn the entire building. In the book, "Lutherans of Canada", Dr. V.J. Eylands has written, "This is a beautiful church with a seating capacity of around 200, and was valued at the time of construction at about \$5,000. The beautiful furnishings of the church and its very fine liturgical floor plan have lead it to be described by many visitors as the most beautiful country church they have seen."



*Frikirkja at Bru*



*Café Bru – Frikirkja Church in its new location, and with a new purpose.*

## **Bru Lutheran Ladies' Aid, 1895-1981**

On June 13, 1895 several ladies of the Frikirkju Church congregation met to organize the Bru Ladies' Aid.

Each lady paid a 25 cent fee to belong to the society. Their first big project was to buy the communion ware for the church then in use. Their fundraising efforts contributed to the furnishing the new church and later the Bru Hall, as well as aiding various charities.

They were able to purchase all the beautiful oak pews and most of the furnishings for the Bru Church.

In 1913, the ladies formed the "Memorial Flower Fund" which for decades supported many useful projects, such as redecorating the church, setting up a steel fence around the graveyard and helping the needy.

## Bru Hall

The Bru Hall was built on the northwest corner of NE 16-6-13. The land was provided by Albert Oliver for the sum of \$1.00. The deed for the land was dated April 27, 1898. The Bru Ladies' Aid records that it met in the Bru Hall on May 18, 1898. It was also used by other organizations such as the Young People's Society, Literary Society, Dorcas Society, and for other public functions such as dances, receptions, plays, fowl suppers, showers, card parties and dinners for synod conventions. For many years the Bru Hall was the centre of activities for the district.

The hall was finally closed down in the 1960's.



## Bru Cemetery



The Bru Cemetery was established in 1884, on the northeast corner of NE 16-6-13. A one-acre plot was donated by Jon Olafson (Albert Oliver's grandfather). The cemetery is still being kept in good condition. In 1972, a fund was started - to which people with relatives buried there, made contributions. The interest earned by this fund goes toward the maintenance of the cemetery.

## The Dorcas Society of Bru

The Dorcas Society was formed in early 1918, a group of young women, who organized for the purpose of making money to do good works. The annual fee was set at 50¢ per member.

They raised money in these ways: they sponsored dances at Bru Hall; had whist drives, bazaars, tombolas, and barn dances in the area; annually took over the fruit stand at the Cypress River Fair; put on and sponsored plays which were shown at Bru, Glenboro and Greenway, the two most popular being

"Dust of the Earth" and "Eyes of Love"; and they put on minstrel shows.

They bought wool and made socks and mitts to send to the soldiers overseas. They made wool comforters for needy families. They gave liberally to the church, the patients of Ninette Sanatorium, Christmas gifts to the elderly and bed-ridden. Wherever there was a need the Dorcas Society would help if possible.



*Some members of the Dorcas Society of Bru. Thorbjorg Jonsson, Gudny Sigurdson, Villa Anderson, Lauga Helgason, Miss Olson, Josie Anderson, Svava Stefanson with Ester on Knee, Steinlaug Gudnason, He/ga Jonsson, Alice Anderson, Clara Josephson.*

The fellowship strengthened the bonds of friendship throughout the lives of these fine young women.



## EXCERPTS FROM THE BALDUR GAZETTE

*"Approximately 100 invited guests were right royally entertained Tuesday night, at the magnificent country residence of Mr. and Mrs. Hannes Sigurdson, of the district. Speeches were delivered, songs and duets rendered, the Argyle Band played, and in general, the evening was spent in having a jolly good time. During the evening, the genial host and hostess were presented with a beautiful solid silver tea service."*

*Nov. 25, 1915 - "The 5th anniversary service of the Lutheran Church at Bru was celebrated on Friday, Nov. 19, in the church at 3 p.m. A good program of songs and speeches was rendered, the executive having been fortunate enough to secure Miss Oliver, a noted singer of Winnipeg, to take part. After the concert, all adjourned to Bru Hall, where a splendid supper was served. No admission fee was charged, but a collection was taken, which amounted to \$88."*

*"Rev. Mr. Hallgrimson's three congregations, have presented him with a motor car. This is treating a minister in the right way. The members of a congregation like to be visited by their pastor and this gives facility for the maximum amount of visiting among his parishioners."*

*April 8, 1909 - "The concert and dance held in the Bru Hall on the 29th, under the auspices of the Argyle Band to commemorate the 4th anniversary of their establishment, was pronounced success. The first item on the list was the national Anthem played in harmony with a prelude specially composed for the occasion by the able bandmaster Mr. A. Oliver..."*

*Aug. 15, 1918 - "Icelandic Celebration - Aug. 2 is the national day of Iceland. The day was celebrated at Bru in Anderson's grove under the auspices of the Ladies' Aid of the district. The weather was fine and the people gathered there in large numbers. A platform was erected in the grove and a well-selected program was arranged. Reeve Johnson was in the chair and conducted the program in his usual style. Rev. B.B. Jonsson of Winnipeg gave a stirring address. Arni Sveinson delivered a splendid message. B. Walterson recited a poem composed by himself and made a few remarks. The Argyle Band entertained at intervals. The sports proved very interesting. The proceeds netted \$127.30 for the Overseas Club. "*



# *The Argyle Icelandic Community*

## *Origins, Establishment and Impact*



## *Impact*

### Contribution and Collaboration

***Did you know?** Manitoba has the largest concentration of Icelanders outside of Iceland's capital city, Reykjavik.*



## **Community**

From the beginning, the Argyle Icelandic Community, though self sufficient and self-sustaining, avoided being isolationist in any sense. They actively sought to also be part of the larger Argyle community. This manifested itself in many ways.

The impact of the Icelandic community is most convincingly expressed by the fact the name of the municipality's central community ended up with an Icelandic name.

## **Naming the Town**

In honor of the occasion one of the arrival of the railway and the creation of a town, a railway official, Mr. Lehorn suggested the town be named Chesterville, after Mr. Jesse Chester. Sigutrder Christopherson, father of the Icelandic pioneers, wished to name the town after a pretty flower but could not find a pretty flower growing in the district with a suitable name so he suggested the name of a beautiful Nordic god, supposed to be beautiful, the pure radiant god of innocence and summer sun, namely "Baldur".

Baldur was the son of Odin the supreme God and Creator), (the son of Grigga goddess of married love and of the hearth).

After many arguments a decision made by vote this name was adopted for the town which was about to become the leading centre of a rapidly growing community.

By 1890, many of the cultural initiatives begun in the Icelandic communities of Grund and Bru had also had an effect on the wider community. The influence was noted by the Baldur

Gazette in its 1899 Special Historical Edition:

### **GRUND SETTLEMENT.**

*The country north Baldur is settled chiefly with people from Iceland. A people who by reason of their intelligence, their industry and their thrift, have prospered exceedingly in the land of their adoption. They have more over adapted themselves to the political and social conditions of the country so readily that they are now in all respects Canadians. Many of them occupy positions of trust and responsibility. For example in this district, Christian Johnson who was for two years reeve and one of the present councillors, S. Arason, are both natives of Iceland. Many other instances might be given in proof of the statement that the Icelandic people are the equals of any other, no matter what their nationality, in ability and enterprise.*

## The Business Community



*Christian & Arnbjorg Johnson*

The Icelandic Immigration Agent, Sigurder Christopherson who was instrumental in the development of the Icelandic Settlement built an office in the new town as soon as it was established, connecting his community with the larger Argyle entity. Others followed, bringing their talents and entrepreneurial spirit, and taking advantage of the opportunities for commerce that Baldur presented.

In 1899 the Baldur Gazette list of Baldur business included:  
“Christian Johnson, dealer in agricultural implements, sewing machines; A. Helgason, bookbinder and account bookmaker, and Miss Dora Snydal, dressmaker etc.

## Builders

Builders, like Arni Sveinsson supervised the construction of Baldur's Lutheran Church. Bjorn Bjornson, a fine carpenter who built many homes and barns in the Icelandic district was one of the carpenters of the Baldur School in 1905



*St. Immanuel Lutheran Church  
Arni Sveinson – Head Carpenter*



### Health Care

Karolina Snýdal was born in Iceland, came to New Iceland in 1876 and homesteaded in 1882. When her husband Eyolfur passed away in 1898 Karolina became a midwife and practiced for over 50 years. She moved from the farm to Baldur in 1899. She delivered her last baby at the age of 75.

### The Arts

Sigurbjorn Jonannsson, father of Jakobina, Sigurveig and Egill. Sigurbjorn was a poet of some note both in Iceland and in Canada. He was Community Skaid (“poet laureate”) in the Icelandic Community in the District of Argyle, where he wrote poems for various special occasions. A book of his poetry was published by his friends in 1902. He died in 1903.



### Icelandic Literary Society

"bokmentafelag islendinga i argyle"  
*("Acquistion of knowledge through books" club)*

The first Icelandic settlers in Argyle Municipality formed a Literary Society known as “Bokmentafelag Islands”, which although short-lived, did establish the concept. In 1893 a new organization was established, using the few books left by the original club, to start the new library which they later named "Lestrafelag Islendinga i Argyle".

The following was taken from the April 25, 1901, Baldur Gazette and explains fully the aims of the club:

#### "Island Society"

“ The object of its promoters was a most worthy one - the supplying of literature to those who might not otherwise be in a position to procure it, and thus tend to educate and elevate all, by the perusal of the highest classes of literature. From its commencement, the society has met with marked success and in 1896, they built what is commonly known as the Grund Hall, in Icelandic, 'Skjalbreid'. Other help was of course given the society, though today they own the largest share of the building in which their library is kept. The library is open every Saturday from November 1, until the last of April, from 12 to 4 o'clock, for the changing and procuring of books. In regard to the method of purchasing and choosing books for their library, a committee is appointed that only wholesome and healthy reading may be procured. The whole list is made up chiefly of

works of standard authors and dramatic works - Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish, and English, a goodly sprinkling of the latter being noticeable, such as Scott, Drummond, Haggard, Bunyan, and Shakespeare and others.

The society had about 400 volumes and from 40 to 60 members.

In 1907 they decided to form a Baldur Branch of the club, to be called "Lestrafelag id Island". Half of the books from Skjalbreid (119) were brought into Baldur and kept at a private home until 1911 when the Literary Society bought a building to be used as a library. The library spent its final years on the Lutheran church grounds.



*Sign from the Literary Society Library*

In 1968, the remaining books were sold or donated to the University of Manitoba as well as the University of Victoria, B.C.

The focus on literacy that is common to all Canadian Icelandic communities can be traced to the creation of The Icelandic Literature Society in Iceland in 1816. Iceland had long been a colony of Denmark and scholars were concerned about loss of language and tradition. Throughout the nineteenth century there was a growing independence movement and preservation of language and customs became a priority.

## **Beyond our Borders**

### **Icelandic Suffrage Societies**

The Icelandic Suffrage Societies were the first groups organized solely to promote suffrage in Western Canada.

The Icelandic community in Manitoba was therefore a strong voice for the recognition of women's right to the franchise. Women's Societies and Ladies' Aid groups played a leading role in Icelandic community activities.

In 1890, at a meeting in the Argyle settlement, three speakers argued for the extension of the franchise, and the entire audience joined in the debate that followed.

The outstanding instrument in the suffrage campaign was the Icelandic-language monthly, *Freyja*, meaning "Woman," published between 1898 and 1910 by Sigfus and Margret Benedictsson.

In 1908, Margret Benedictsson founded the Icelandic Suffrage Association in Winnipeg, hailed by *Freyja* as the first in America, and affiliated it with both the Canada Suffrage Association and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance.

Also by 1908, an Icelandic suffrage group called "Sigurvon," or "Hope of Victory," (also referred to as "The White Band") was functioning in Argyle, and several other Icelandic communities followed suit.

A number of suffrage petitions were subsequently presented to the Manitoba legislature, “praying for the passing of an act to enfranchise all women, whether married, widowed or spinster, on the same basis as men.”

## **John Sigvaldason**



John Sigvaldason was born in 1904, in Baldur. After a career in education, he joined the R.C.A.F. in 1942, and the

Department of External Affairs in 1946. He was an assistant secretary in the office of the High Commissioner in London, England and in 1960 he was appointed Ambassador to Indonesia, then Ambassador to Norway in 1964. Mr. Sigvaldason retired from the diplomatic services in 1969 and taught Political Science for two years at the Brandon University following his retirement.

## **Tom Johnson**



Tom was born in 1928 in Baldur. He was signed by the Montreal Canadians in 1950. Won the Norris Trophy in 1959 and joined the Boston Bruins 1963.

## **The Baldursbra Icelandic Canadian Club**

A visitor to Baldur in the year 2017 will soon be aware that the region's Icelandic heritage is still evident and that the people are still proud of their traditions. In 1974, the Baldursbra Icelandic Canadian Club was organized. Its purpose was to carry on affairs of the Icelandic Canadian Club of western Manitoba at a local level.

As "Come into our Heritage" reported:

"The Icelandic festival in 1974, sponsored by the club, was the largest ethnic activity ever held in this municipality. Sena Gunnlaugson directed a small choir of children singing Icelandic songs. Their singing was recorded in the Lutheran Church at Grund. At the church service the Rev. Al Pope was the minister and the Rev. P.M. Peturson of Winnipeg led the liturgy in Icelandic. Mr. Ami Sveinson, the faithful and dedicated organist in the Lutheran Church for 50 years, was the organist for this event. The Festival of Baldur records which were made at this event were very enthusiastically received."

In 1978, the club sponsored the film 'They shouldn't call Iceland, Iceland', and also had the very talented Martin children of Brandon perform in the Lutheran Church.

The group has been responsible for looking after visitors from Iceland; feeding and entertaining them; and conducting bus tours through the municipality for them. The club has arranged bus trips to 'Icelandingadagurinn' in Gimli and to Brandon to hear the Icelandic Karlakor; donated books of Icelandic interest to the local school library; made donations to the local band; and also had the Icelandic Folk Dancers from Iceland come to entertain the community.



# *The Argyle Icelandic Community*

## *Origins and Impact*



## Timeline

The following collection of dates and activities has been drawn from Argyle's excellent local history books:

Come into our Heritage - R.M. of Argyle 1882 - 1982, Argyle Centennial History Book Committee  
Historical Sketches of Argyle Municipality, The Baldur High School Centennial Committee

A timeline is a useful way to establish a community's development, and a good way to note its highlights. All of this information can be used to develop the kind of content that is helpful in describing a community's history through short, effective and accurate texts that will be appropriate for educational support materials, plaques, website content, and myriad other follow-up projects. More notable activities have been underlined.

The dates and activities have been presented in a decade-by-decade format, which allows us to relive the past through the lens of the flow of time; but it is important to note that pivotal events can also be broadly grouped by major chronological periods in our history attached to primary activities of a given era.

## 1600 – 1699

### **International**

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British Colonies are established along the east coast of North America. These colonies would eventually become the “13 Colonies” that would break away from Britain to form the United States.

### **Canada**

---

What we now know as Central Canada (Quebec and Ontario) is called New France. The profits available through the Fur Trade would prompt westward exploration.

### **Manitoba**

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In the 1690's Henry Kelsey travels southwest from Hudson Bay – to the eastern edge of the Great Plains.

### **The Argyle Icelandic Settlement**

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When the first settlers arrived in Argyle it was obvious to them that they were not the first inhabitants of this land. Native people often passed through and evidence of past inhabitants was more visible in those days, be it in the form of burial mounds or prairie trails. Stone projectile points found in the Avery Mound (SW 14-3-13) near the northeastern corner of Rock Lake, show that an early culture called The Lake Shore Culture occupied the territory about 1500, BC. Although settlement by the Sioux, Algonquin, Plains Cree and Assiniboine people was intermittent as befitted their dependence on the roving herds of bison, it was ongoing and substantial. We know the region was then, as it is now, a home. With that knowledge comes the understanding that the story of the first peoples is still unfolding, and that it bears some similarities to the story of our ancestors. They also migrated here, likely as not led by advanced scouting parties (explorers?), and they adapted to the land and took from it what they needed to survive and even prosper.

## 1700 – 1799

### **International**

---

1783: The United States of America gain independence from Britain after a long military struggle.

### **Canada**

---

1759: The Battle of the Plains of Abraham effectively gives Britain control of the territory of New France. A treaty in 1763 formally cedes the territory.

### **Manitoba**

---

1738: The French Explorer, La Verendrye, builds Fort La Reine on the Assiniboine River (near present day Portage La Prairie).

1760: Exploration of southern Manitoba is undertaken by both the Hudson Bay Co. and the Northwest Co. with the establishment of fur trade posts near Souris Mouth and Hartney beginning in the 1760 - 90's.

### **The Argyle Icelandic Settlement**

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The closest fur trade post serving the Argyle region was in the Spruce Woods to the north. Pine Fort or Fort Epinette was established in 1785 and continued to be the western headquarters for Indian trade until 1794. It was located on the NE quarter section of 36-8-14 west: David Thompson visited the site in 1798 and B. Tyrrell located the remains of the early fort as late as 1890. Pine Fort was the headquarters for trade with the Mandan Indians of the Missouri country.

## 1800 – 1849

### **International**

---

1804-06: Lewis and Clark lead an expedition across North-western United States to the Pacific Ocean.

### **Canada**

---

The War of 1812 – 14.

In what is essentially a war between The United States and Britain, Canada successfully repels and American invasion with the help of native tribes. Many years later Dakota warriors, descendants of those who fought, still treasured medals given for service the British Crown.

### **Manitoba**

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1812: The beginning of agricultural settlement in Manitoba with the arrival of Selkirk Settlers. This would lead to the establishment of Winnipeg as the commercial centre of the region.

1822: Peter Fidler noted the abundance of sturgeon at the intersection of the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers. In the same year the forts at this intersection were attacked by the Dakota.

### **The Argyle Icelandic Settlement**

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Several competing Fur Trade Posts operated near the confluence of the Souris and Assiniboine between 1793 and 1828.

## 1850 – 1869

### **International**

---

1861-65: Civil War in the U.S.

1848-52: Potato blight causes extensive crop failures in Ireland.

### **Canada**

---

1867: Confederation united four British Colonies to create Canada. From the outset, leaders like John. A. MacDonald envisioned a Canada that stretched westward across the Prairies to the Pacific.

### **Manitoba**

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1859: Expeditions by Capt. Palliser and Henry Youle Hind explore the Northwest Territories to examine the suitability of the region for agricultural settlement.

1869: Louis Riel leads a group of Metis in the formation of a provisional government.

### **The Argyle Icelandic Settlement**

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The Red River Metis on their annual bison hunt would often pass west of Rock Lake in the region we now know as Neelin. There is evidence that some Metis later returned to settle.

## 1870 – 1879

### **International**

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1876: Battle of Little Bighorn, June 25 and 26. A combined Lakota, Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho force, overwhelms the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment of the United States.

1876: Alexander Graham Bell successfully transmits the first bi-directional transmission of clear speech. An improved design for the “telephone” was patented the next year.

### **Canada**

---

1874: The newly created Northwest Mounted Police march west from Dufferin, Manitoba, on passing the Turtle Mountains they have a brief glimpse of some of some Minnesota Sioux and their white captives.

### **Manitoba**

---

1870: The Province of Manitoba enters Confederation largely on terms put forward by Louis Riel.

1874: July 31 - First Russian Mennonites arrive at Winnipeg on the steamer International.

1878: December 4 – the first freight by rail reached St. Boniface.

First export of wheat from the prairies.

First grain elevator built in Niverville.

Steamboats service established the Assiniboine as far as Fort Ellice, stopping at the Cypress River and Souris Mouth.

### **The Argyle Icelandic Settlement**

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In the early 1870's a combination of economic factors and natural disasters, such as volcanic eruptions in Iceland, prompted increased, and large-scale emigrations to North America. On the advice of a Missionary named John Taylor a large group of settlers arrived on the west side of Lake Winnipeg in the late fall of 1875, establishing a settlement that has shaped the culture of that part of Manitoba through to the present day and was to spread to the Argyle region.

#### 1875

In October of 1875, Sigtryggur Jonasson, with the assistance of John Taylor, a missionary who was to become a lifelong friend to the Icelanders, moved the settlers to the Keewatin District north of Manitoba, along the shore of Lake Winnipeg. Here they established the "State of New Iceland" with its own constitution, laws and government, although in all except local matters, it remained under the authority of the Canadian Government.

#### 1878

The early settlers of the Glenora district arrived around 1878.

#### 1879

John Wilson homesteaded on the Marringhurst plains.

## 1880 – 1889

### **International**

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1882: Thomas Edison builds the first power plant in New York.

1885: Karl Benz patents his first automobile.

1889: The Eiffel Tower opens in Paris.

### **Canada**

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In 1885, after long-standing grievances remain unaddressed, Louise Riel and Gabriel Dumont lead an uprising of Metis in the Saskatchewan River Valley communities in the Prince Albert - Battleford regions. Subsequent actions by native groups lead by Big Bear and Poundmaker create concern in Manitoba communities but relations between settlers and native people remain peaceful.

### **Manitoba**

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1881: March 2 - Manitoba Boundaries Act passed in Parliament, providing for an extension of the province's borders.

The town of Brandon is created in May of 1881 when the site is selected over Grand Valley as a crossing and divisional point on the C.P.R. Within a month it is a busy centre.

### **The Argyle Icelandic Settlement**

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A combination of bad luck and bad weather combined with a smallpox epidemic, harsh winters and wet summers made life extremely difficult for Icelandic settlers near Gimli, but the colony persevered and eventually thrived. For those that preferred fishing over farming the location served them well once they adapted, but it wasn't great farm land and that likely prompted some to try their luck elsewhere.



Everett Parsonage, a pioneer of the Pilot Mound district, had worked for John Taylor in Ontario and through him had contacts with some of the Icelandic settlers at Gimli. He advised them to visit Argyle. In August of 1880 Sigurdur Kristofferson and Kristian Jonsson set out to visit Mr. Parsonage and he showed them a largely unsettled area in the rolling country in the northern part of the Municipality, an area we now know as Grund.

As soon as he could Sigurdur, filed on SE 10-6-14 and called his new home "Grund", An Icelandic word meaning grassy plain. More soon followed, with two more men taking homesteads that fall. Before Baldur was established a strong community was in place, and although the store and post office established at Sigurdur Kristofferson home didn't evolve into a village, the name Grund has lived on.

## The Icelandic Settlement 1880 – 1889

### 1880

In the year 1880 the influx of settlers began in earnest to the east half of the municipality.

Sigurdur filed entry for the first homestead in the Icelandic settlement of what was to be Argyle - SE 10-6-14.

In the same year Christopherson, Arason, and Johnson hoisted the Union Jack in the name of the Icelanders north of the Tiger Hills.

Other settlers of 1880: Sigurdur and Fridbjorn Frederickson



**This 1881 map shows that the Argyle region was just beginning to attract settlement in 1881.**

**Warkentin and Ruggles. Historical Atlas of Manitoba. map 153, p. 332**

### 1881

By 1881 the first council of the newly created R.M. of Argyle was in place although it was not active until 1882.

Other settlers of 1881: Kristjan and Thora Anderson, Skuli and Sigridur Anderson

### 1882

Other settlers of 1882: Bjorn and Kristin Anderson,

### 1884

Jon Olafson called the meeting. "All farmers" are present and 36 persons of over 18 years join in forming a congregation which they call Frikirkju congregation, indicating by the name, their non attachment to any state church. This was New Year's Day 1884. Trustees elected were: Bjorn Jansson. Skapti Arason, Skull Arnason.

The original Hecla School was built on 16-6-14.

The first picnic in the district took place in 1884 at Jones's Lake. Baldwin Benedickson entertained at stilts. Sigurjon Snyder shone in the ox race.

A post office was established at Jon Olafsson's home at Bru in the early 1880's. At first Mr. Olafsson walked to Millford for the mail, but later, when the railroad came through Cypress River in 1886, he would get the mail at Cypress River.

The Bru Cemetery was established in 1884, on the northeast corner of NE 16-6-13. A one-acre plot was donated by Jon Olafson



## 1885

Distance and mode of travel hampered the progress and continued growth of the congregation. The result was that on July 26, 1885, the Frelsis Congregation (Grund) was organized to serve the western community. The two congregations later reached a compromise to build a church at Grund.

The first Argyle Lutheran Ladies' Aid was held in a small log house the home of Hildur Thorsteinson, in June, 1885.

## 1887

Some writers record Bru S.D. No. 368 as having been established as early as 1885, with Mr. McBain as the first teacher. However, the first official register of attendance is for 1887, with 19 pupils enrolled. The first school building was on SE 16-6-13, the homestead of Bjorn Jonsson, and the present residence of Claire Johnson.

**Bru School**



1889

At a joint meeting in 1888, the Bru and Grund congregations decided to invite the Synod to hold their 1889 convention in Argyle municipality, and they also agreed to build a church.

Frelsis (Grund) Church built.



### **Frelsis Church in 2010**

At a joint meeting in March, 1889, it had been decided to call a minister. Ninety dollars was collected and sent to Hafsteinn Pjetursson in Iceland. He came immediately, was ordained in Winnipeg, and served the district until 1893, for a salary of \$500.

The Northern Pacific is run from Morris to Brandon.

## **Baldur is Born**

In 1889, after several unsuccessful efforts to secure a much-needed rail link, the Canadian Northern Pacific Railroad (a branch of the American company), proposed a line linking Morris with Brandon and passing through the center of Argyle. The towns of Greenway and Belmont were quickly established. But that left quite a stretch without a station and farmers felt they deserved better service.

Settlers in the district directly west of the present town and the north and south were not satisfied. To their way of thinking, a station should be placed between, Greenway and Belmont.

While the surveyors were busy grading the line, farmers in the Otenaw district lead by A.W Playfair, succeeded in convincing the railway company that another station was needed. The first site chosen was three miles west of the present town and again citizens including Jesse Chester, Reeve Peter Strang and Sigurdur Chistopherson, rallied in support of the current location. The surveyor reconsidered and chose a location a few miles further east. This still wasn't what the locals had in mind and Jesse Chester apparently carried the surveyor's equipment himself to the current site. His persuasion won out and in the spring of 1890 land was purchased from M.T. Cramer and Mr. Taggart for \$7.00 per acre.

Given that beginning, the name "Chesterville" suggested by a railway official Mr. Lehorn would have seemed appropriate, but Sigurdur Chistopherson's daughter Carrie has been given credit for the suggesting name "Baldur" the Nordic God of innocence and summer sun. A vote settled the issue and Baldur it was. Carrie herself was recognized in the name of the second avenue of the new town.

The development of the new town was well under way.

## 1890 – 1899

### **International**

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World's Columbia Exposition (World Fair) opens in Chicago in 1893 – to commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the new world (1492). Featured prominently are exhibits highlighting the possibilities of electricity.

### **Canada**

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1891: The end of the John A. McDonald era.

1896: Gold discovered in the Klondike.

### **Manitoba**

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Manitoba School's Question divides the nation as governments decide on the future of French Language instruction in schools.

The Manitoba Government authorizes the formation of local Farmer's Institutes and provides some grants. The goal is to improve farming practices.

The Farmer's Institute Act - 1890

### **The Argyle Icelandic Settlement**

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A decade of Growth

#### The Icelandic Settlement 1890 – 1899

##### 1890

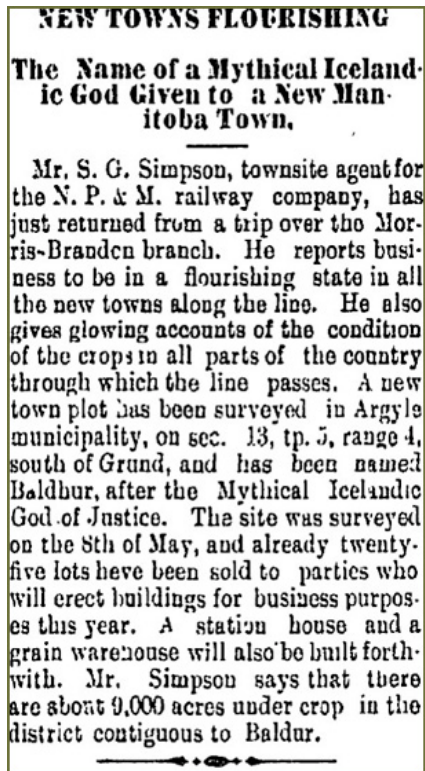
The Village of Baldur is established on a new rail line

In 1890, at a meeting in Argyle, Manitoba, a second district where Icelanders congregated, three speakers argued for the extension of the franchise, and the entire audience joined in the debate that followed. The outstanding instrument in the suffrage campaign was the Icelandic-language monthly, *Freyja*, meaning "Woman," published between 1898 and 1910 by Sigfus and Margret Benedictsson.

##### 1891

##### 1892

Sig. Christopherson, the first person to establish an implement shop, sold to W. Hearn in 1892. Immediately C. Johnson built an implement shop on a lot which he rented from S. Christopherson until W. O. Fowler bought it and later built his block and Chris Johnson had to move. He bought a lot on its present site and as a dealer in agricultural implements, Chris Johnson developed an excellent trade.



**The Brandon Sun, Jun 5, 1891**

### 1893

Rev. Hafsteinn Pjetursson (Frelsis) 1889-1893

The Island Society was established in the year 1893, at Grund with seven members. The object of its promoters was a most worthy one - the supplying of literature to those who might not otherwise be in a position to procure it, and thus tend to educate and elevate all, by the perusal of the highest classes of literature.

### 1894

Stables were built that at Frelsis. Families from Frelsis joined together in several groups to build three large barns - north and east of the church. The last of these stood until 1944, when it was torn down.

### 1894

On June 13, 1895 several ladies of the Frikirkju Church congregation met at Josef and Malmfridur Bjornsson's home, NW 16-6-13 (Holmkell Josephson's parents) to organize the Bru Ladies' Aid.

### 1896

The Skjalbreid Hall built in Grund in 1896 was used for various social events.

The Library Society was instrumental in having Skjaldbreid built, and for many years it was the scene of concerts, dances, plays, and various celebrations. There the Good Templars met, the Ladies' Aid held their tombolas; the Young People organized their club; and there were Sunday School picnics.

In 1896, a belfry with steeple was added to the porch to house the 500 pound copper bell, which could be heard ringing clearly for five miles

### 1897

Frey SD. # 890 established on 24-6-14.

Mimir SD. # 891 and Hola SD. # 889, (1-6-14) established

In 1897, Bru School was moved to the northwest corner of SW 11-6-13. Records show that in 1898, enrolment varied from 40-55, depending on the season and age of the pupil, with trustees being Harvey Hayes, Halldor Anderson and C.B. Johnson.

The Hola School District No. 889 was formed in the year 1897. The schoolhouse and four-team stable were built in the spring of that year on land bought from the crown - \$3 for the deed.

A race track had been built north of the Grund hall about the year 1897, for horse and buggy races.

### 1898

The first publication of the Baldur Gazette appeared on June 30, 1898.

The Bru Hall was built on the northwest corner of NE 16-6-13. The land was given or sold by Albert Oliver for the sum of \$1.00. The deed for the land was dated April 27, 1898. Apparently the hall was built that year

## 1900 – 1909

### **International**

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1901: Queen Victoria dies, Jan. 22. Edward the VII reigns.

1901: Marconi sends the first radio signal across the Atlantic.

1903: Ford Motor Co. established to manufacture automobiles

### **Canada**

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May 15, 1909: An Earthquake is felt across the prairies.

### **Manitoba**

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1901: Manitoba's first Hydro-electric plant opens on the Little Saskatchewan River northwest of Brandon.

1906: Manitoba farmers organize the "Grain Growers' Grain Company" with shares available at \$25. For any farmer wanting to join.

1908: Manitoba Government Telephones takes over the telephone service.

### **The Argyle Icelandic Settlement**

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The community reached what is termed the consolidation era (following the pioneer and establishment eras). Rail and roads are established. The initial spurts of growth have settled. Hastily erected frame buildings are replaced with more substantial houses and barns. Recreational and cultural options are explored.

## The Icelandic Settlement 1900 – 1909

### 1901

Serious outbreaks of scarlet fever and mumps.  
Rev. John Clemens  
(Frelsis) 1896-1901

### 1902

On July 19, 1902, the Icelandic community celebrated the silver wedding anniversary of four of its pioneer couples: Ami Sveinsson and Gudrun Jonsdottir; Skafti Arason and Anna Johannsdottir; Kristjan Jonsson and Arnbjorg Jonsdottir; Sigurdur Kristofersson and Caroline. Taylor. These couples had been married in 1877, at Gimli. Close to 500 people gathered at Skjaldbreid and a very entertaining program was enjoyed by all out among the trees. In the hall, a banquet was prepared by the women in the community. Rev. Jon Bjamason, who had married three of the couples, gave the anniversary speech. After the meal, toasts were proposed.

### 1903

In 1903, on a parcel of land near Frelsis Church the Good Templars built a Good Templars hall. The Good Templars were active for many years, producing diverse good effects. When prohibition became effective in Manitoba, there was less work for them to accomplish.



**A wide view from the south, dated Sept. 13, 1903. That is snow on the ground!**

From the September 17, Baldur Gazette; "This is one of the worst falls our farmers have had to contend with. All unstacked grain was saturated through and through by Saturday's big rain and snow storm, and it is feared that a great many of the stacks have let in the wet."

### 1906

Discussions and plans for a new church began at Bru in 1906. Three years later the decision was made to build a new church.



## 1907

In 1907 the Lutheran Church was built on the corner of Government Road and Carey Street. It was a white brick edifice. The dedicatory service took place on Nov. 24th, 1907.

## 1908

Thor SD. # 1430 established on 28-5-13

Telephone service expands throughout the municipality.

By 1908, an Icelandic suffrage group called "Sigurvonn," or "Hope of Victory," (Also called "The White Band") was functioning in Argyle, and several other Icelandic communities followed suit.

The Icelandic Women of Argyle form a suffrage society called "The White Band". The Icelandic Suffrage Societies were the first groups organized solely to promote suffrage in Western Canada.

## 1910 – 1919

### **International**

---

1911: Iceland gives the vote to all women over 25.  
1912: Titanic sinks after hitting an iceberg on its first voyage.  
1914: WW 1 – 1914 – 18  
1917: Russian Revolution and the beginning of Communist rule.

### **Canada**

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Conscription Crisis

### **Manitoba**

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1916: Manitoba is the first province to give women the vote.  
1919: Widespread drought. Winnipeg General Strike.

### **The Argyle Icelandic Settlement**

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Grund like all Manitoba communities was profoundly affected by the World War, and like all Manitoba communities is proud of its efforts on behalf of "King & Country". The Icelandic

## Settlement 1910 – 1919

### 1910

Bru Church was built on southeast corner of 21-6-13, with Jon Olafson of Glenboro as head carpenter, and was called Frikirkju Lutheran Church

### 1911

A two manual "Doherty" organ was purchased for Frelsis Church.

### 1912

Economic downturn in Manitoba – affects much local industry in smaller communities.  
Council set and annual license fee of \$5 for motor vehicles.

### 1913

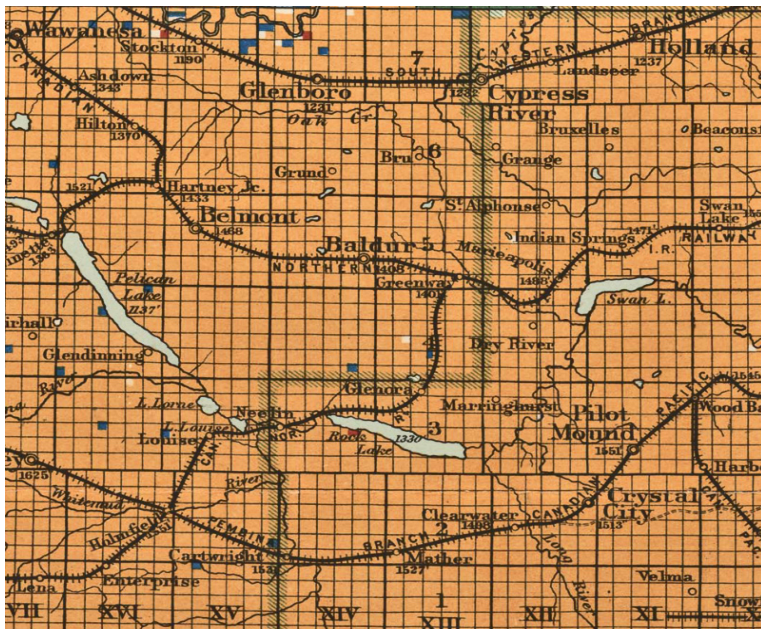
Nov. 10, 1913, the ladies aid decided to form a special fund and call it "Memorial Flower Fund" and donated \$50.00 in her memory. To this day the fund is being used for many useful projects, such as redecorating the church, setting up a steel fence around the graveyard and helping the needy.

### 1915

Excellent crop and high grain prices.  
Reports of War Casualties continue.



Oliver SD #1766, established on 21-6-13



The region in 1915

## 1916

Recruiting rallies held and local units of the Southern Manitoba Battalion set up.

On Aug. 19, 1916, a group of young women met at the home of Mrs. B.S. Johnson with the idea of forming a new society - with the main object being to work and send parcels to the soldiers - both food and clothing. A very large number of young men had left the Icelandic settlement to fight in WW 1.

After much discussion the society was organized and named "Dorcas Society". Miss Gudbjorg Goodman was chosen president.

## 1917

Manitoba Women are given the right to vote.  
Drought in Argyle.

## 1918

The Bru Dorcas Society was formed in early 1918, with Thorbjorg Jonsson as first treasurer. This society was a group of young women, who organized for the purpose of making money to do good works. The annual fee was set at 50¢ per member.

Nov 11 – The Armistice ends World War 1  
Dry conditions continue.  
50 cases of influenza reported in the region.

## 1919

General depression following the war. Low grain prices.

## 1920 – 1929

### **International**

---

The conditions imposed upon Germany after WW1 help trigger an economic collapse and political turmoil that results leads to the rise of Adolph Hitler and his Nazi Party.

1927: Charles Lindberg flies solo from New York to Paris.

1929: Stock Market crash signals the beginning of the Great Depression.

### **Canada**

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Post-War adjustments are difficult. The “Roaring Twenties” though fondly remembered, most correctly apply to the latter part of the decade.

### **Manitoba**

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1920: The Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association becomes “The United Farmers of Manitoba.” It turned its attention to progressive farm legislation.

## The Icelandic Settlement 1920 – 1929

### 1921

Bru School was replaced by a new school on the northwest corner of 11-6-13.

The Sunshine Highway was built through Argyle. It was a network of roads comprising a designated route from Brandon southeast to link with highway system in North Dakota (Devil’s Lake). It passes through Rounthwaite, Wawanesa, Ashdown, Baldur, Glenora, and Crystal City. Part of that route ran along what was also the most direct route between Baldur and Glenboro, since replaced by #5 Highway.



**Portions of the Sunshine Highway that were replaced as the road was straightened have been preserved as a pathway by the owners of the property.**

### 1922

Argyle Council grants remission on arrear on land settled under the Soldier Settlement Board.

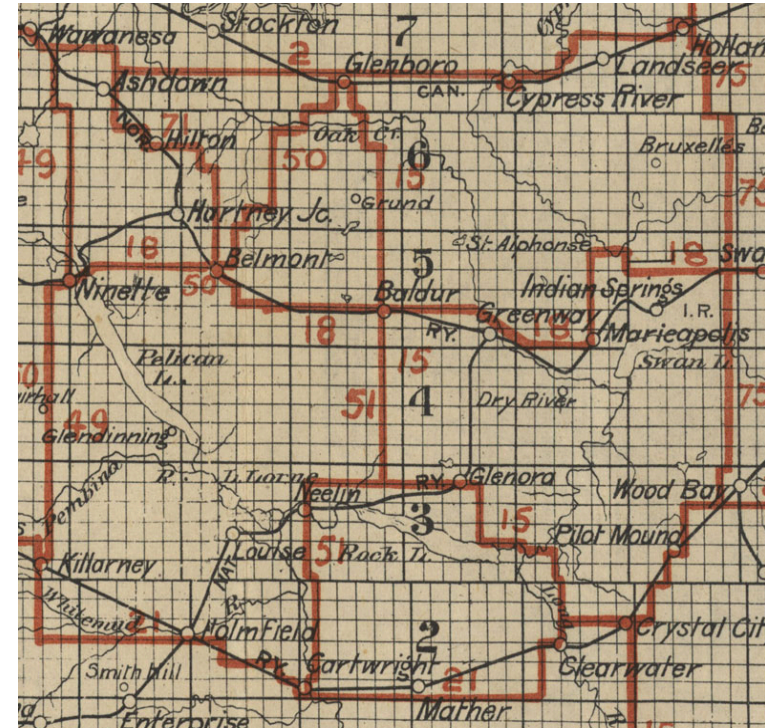
Wages for skilled workers drops from a dollar and hour to 85 cents.

1925

Rev. Fridrik Hallgrímsson 1903-1925

1927

General upturn in the local economy.  
Formation of the Baldur Cooperative Pool Elevator.



**Automobile Road Map of Manitoba (1924)**  
Emmett, A.C. Automobile Road Map of Manitoba [map].  
1:760,320. Winnipeg: Stovel Company Ltd., 1924.  
Image Courtesy of University of Manitoba Archives &  
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## 1930 – 1939

### **International**

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The depression set off by the stock market collapse in late 1929 is felt across North America and Europe.  
Sept. 1, 1939: Germany invades Poland, setting off World War 2.

### **Canada**

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The effect of the world-wide economic depression is compounded in Western Canada by an extended drought. In 1936 the Federal Government cancelled debt for feed and wrote off many advances to the drought areas.

### **Manitoba**

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The effects of the drought on the prairies are felt most acutely in the southwest corner of the province.  
The Farmer's Creditors Arrangement Act – aims to reduce farm debt loads.

### **The Argyle Icelandic Settlement**

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The depression and the drought affect Argyle much as they affect other communities.  
The expansion of the role and scope of schools, the influence of radio, and the changing technology in transportation all had an effect on life.

## The Icelandic Settlement 1930 – 1939

### 1930

Rev. K.K. Olafson (Frelsis) 1925-1930  
The Bru Young People's Society was organized by Rev. E. Fafnis in 1930-31.

The Grund Young People's Society was organized in Skjaldbreid Hall on July 9, 1930.

### 1931

Milk cows sold for \$30. A phone call was 5 cents, but even at that price many people gave up the telephone.



*Log cabin built in 1931 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Icelandic settlement.*

### 1935

Good rains early but the wheat crop rusted and rotted.

On July 28, 1935, a celebration was held to mark the 50th



anniversary of Frelsis Congregation. After a short service in the church, lunch was served to a large crowd in Argyle Hall. Rev. B.B. Jonsson was invited to be guest speaker.

#### 1936

Hot dry summer.  
Federal Drought Relief Program established.  
Dr. A. Keenberg was appointed the first Municipal Doctor.

#### 1937

Spring rain leads to an improved harvest.

#### 1938

Abundant crops.

#### 1939

September 1: Hitler invades Poland and World War II begins.

### 1940 – 1949

#### **International**

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December, 1941: The United States enters the war after Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour  
1945 – WW2 ends.

#### **Canada**

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Aug. 19, 1942: Nearly 1000 Canadians die and 2000 are taken prisoner in the failed raid on Dieppe.

#### **Manitoba**

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Rationing and consumer goods shortages become a way of life.  
Manitoba Power Commission decides to extend service to more rural areas.

#### **The Argyle Icelandic Settlement**

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#### 1945

The return of soldiers, many with war brides, signals the beginning of the “Baby Boom”.

Rev. Egill Fafnis (Frelsis) 1930 - 1945

#### 1946

Council received a matching grant of \$4000 to work on the Baldur- Glenboro road.