
Fréttir

The Icelanders of Victoria Newsletter

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From the editor

Wayne Erickson

Email: alloaks@sbam.ca; phone 744-3644.

Since the last issue, club activities have included the two picnics, June 17 at the home of Vince & Runa Pleshek for Iceland's Independence Day, and July 30 with the Icelandic Canadian Club at Peace Arch Park.

The Board and I would like to hear from you if you have some news or attend an event of interest to "things Icelandic". Why not make a small report to share with the other members ?

Membership

New or renewing members can contact Kay or Brian Sessions (595- 0938).

Website changes and thank you

Changes are underway to our website with the addition of Tom Benjamin and Margo Matwychuk as volunteers. Fred Bjarnason and the rest of the Board would like to thank Phil Bartle, the outgoing webmaster for his years of service. Tom is currently

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Almanak

Icelanders of Victoria Potluck Dinner and Annual General Meeting *Friday September 23rd 5:30pm*

Doors open at 5:30, Dinner at 6:00, Meeting at 7:30 pm..

Join us for this potluck dinner and annual meeting at Norway House, 1110 Hillside Ave. If you have any questions you can call our President, Fred Bjarnason, 387-2089 (daytime); 888-2832 (evening).

Presentation by Holmfríður Tómasdóttir *Wednesday Oct 19 7:00 pm.* at Norway House

Jólahátíð Christmas Party *Sunday December 4, 2:00 pm.* Norway House, 1110 Hillside Ave.

New Icelandic Ambassador to Canada

Markús Örn Antonsson, the new Ambassador from Iceland, will be taking office in Ottawa on November 1.

Celebrating Iceland's Independence Day

A wonderful time was had by the many participants at the June 17 picnic. The food was great and so were the folktales from Faye Mogensen, the Storyteller. She has some Icelandic roots and this is a classic form of entertainment, which is still part of Icelandic family gatherings. Many thanks to Runa, Vince and Roxanne Pleshak, along with all their animals - especially Chili.

From a report by Donna Einarsson



Club members at the Independence Day picnic at Vince and Runa Pleshaks home, photo by Donna Einarsson.

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helping Phil, before he steps back from the position and Margo becomes involved. One of the challenges for the new team will be preparing the website for the Club to host the INL (Icelandic National League) convention in the spring. Donna Einarsson acted as our emissary on the convention during her recent trip to Manitoba.

Icelandic Canadian Club Peace Arch Picnic

By Joan Young

On Saturday, July 30 Fred Bjarnason and I attended the annual Icelanders Picnic which was held at Peace Arch Park this year. The picnic, hosted by the Blaine Club, was well attended and considerable effort had gone into organizing traditional foods, displays and entertainment. A highlight for me was the purchase of a book titled "Icelanders on the Pacific Coast" which contains information about the early Icelandic settlers at Point Roberts, Blaine, Bellingham and Marietta. Many of the family names were familiar because there seemed to be considerable migration back and forth across the border in those early days. A limited number of these books have been published by the Icelandic Club of Seattle and are available at a cost of \$20US.

JY

Hannes Lárusson visits Victoria

Editors Note: This article completes Eric Clemens' reporting on the April Beck Lecture series.

Hannes Lárusson, artist and author, delivered three lectures at the University of Victoria on April 5-7, 2005. Sponsored by the Richard and Margaret Beck Trust and the Department of English, Hannes's Victoria appearance was part of a tour that included engagements in Manitoba and Vancouver. It also gave him an opportunity to visit his kinfolk, Jonas, Keith and Debra Larusson, members of our Icelanders of Victoria club.

Hannes Lárusson is a unique Icelandic artist whose conceptual and performance works in a variety of media and installations have gained international recognition. Since 1977, when he had his first one-man exhibition in Iceland and presented his first performance in Vancouver, his resume has expanded to include more than 75 exhibitions or performances in Iceland, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. Hannes is a well educated fellow who has studied at the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts, the Vancouver School of Art (now the

Emily Carr Institute), Universita Degli Studi Di Firenze in Italy, the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program in New York, the University of Iceland (B.A. in Philosophy), the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (Master of Fine Arts) and Iceland's University of Education (Pedagogy). This background is reflected not only in his art but also in articles, critiques, lectures and speeches on such topics as the building of art museums, the heroic status of artists, the planning of art academies and the promotion of Icelandic art abroad. He consistently challenges conventional perceptions, often satirically, and has sometimes been a centre of debate in Iceland.

Hannes's presentations in Victoria were delivered with the aid of "power point" technology. Two were about Icelandic turf houses. The other was about his own work.

Artifacts: Function and Art in Traditional Icelandic Turf Houses

The first lecture on Tuesday morning, April 5, was attended by about 30 people, including a number of university students. Hannes began by observing that "The House Book", which purports to be a comprehensive survey of the various types of houses in the world, makes no reference to the traditional Icelandic turf farmhouse, an arguably serious omission.

The Icelandic turf farmhouse evolved over a period of more than 1,000 years, from Viking longhouses at the time of the first settlement to the farmhouses of the last century, as the people continuously refined their building methods with the limited materials available to them - uncut rocks, specially cut turf, a timber framework. Today, most of the old turf houses are in ruins but some, like the larger farmhouses associated with parish churches, have been preserved.

The Icelandic turf house did not have fireplaces for heating because fuel was in short supply. It was primarily a winter house, providing protection from the elements, and the human body was the primary source of heat within it. The heart of the house was the *badstofa*, the main room in which people ate, slept and gathered to read and entertain one another with stories and songs. Food was cooked over an open fire in a separate kitchen space ventilated by a chimney.

The house plans varied considerably, from a few very simple rooms to complex arrangements of separate rooms with specific functions, usually added over time and connected by an internal passageway. The gabled fronts that we associate with an Icelandic farmhouse were a relatively recent

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development. The farmhouses required regular maintenance and had to be rebuilt every 30-40 years because the sod settled, falling away from the timber frame and stone foundations.

Time, Space and Language: A Presentation of the Artist's Own Work

The second lecture on Wednesday evening, April 6, was again attended by about 30 people but this time some were from the local artistic community. Given the nature of the presentation, and because it was not possible to take notes (the lights were turned off), I am tempted to say, "You had to be there", and leave it at that. However, I shall try to convey at least a sense of what he presented, with reference to web sites and some literature that his kinfolk kindly lent me.

Hannes's work is not easy to describe, much less define. Perhaps the most common theme is a "continuing investigation into the relationship between contemporary visual art and Icelandic ethnic heritage". As Lethbridge artist and professor James Graham writes, "Hannes is both a traditionalist and master satirist; an Icelander deeply proud of his culture yet sharply critical of its membership."

The work often incorporates time-based elements such as video, sound and performance, but there is much more to it than that. "In his installations, Lárusson often merges craft techniques with conceptually based strategies of production, as he looks to engage the viewer in a broader conversation... In effect, the installations that he creates act as a theatre stage, with his sculptures serving as props, and he himself, the artist, assuming the role of an eccentric character gleaned from the subconscious of Icelandic society".

Fine painted wood carvings of such things as ladles, bowls, birds and books can be found in many works, always in an unconventional or satirical context. Beautiful sculptures of falcons have cups full of coffee grounds balanced on their heads, an amusingly obvious but rather charming reference to two symbols of Iceland. Uniquely shaped wood stoves appear in several installations, as do small buildings. In one case, the building is supported on upturned champagne bottles. References to champagne and sagas can be found in other works.

Hannes has filled a space with inflated balloons several times. On one occasion, he donned an orange helmet and then noisily burst the balloons with a spear for about 45 minutes. He often dresses in colorful costumes as part of a performance. Indeed, while there is always an underlying critical edge to it, and the work is usually complex, ambiguous or even cryptic in its meaning, much of what he does is colorful and playful, with a light-hearted quality that children often seem to understand and accept more readily than adults do.

For me, Hannes's presentation was enormously appealing and a lot of fun. Perhaps it is the child in me. Anyway, you really did have to be there to appreciate it properly.

Structural Aspects of the Old Icelandic Farmhouse: A First-Hand Experience

The third lecture on Thursday evening, April 7, was attended by about 40 people, including more members of our club than were at the first two. Again, it was impossible to take notes because the lights were turned off but it turned out that part of the presentation was very similar to the first lecture about turf houses discussed above.

The main theme of the lecture was the work Hannes had been doing to reconstruct *Medabolt*, his family's traditional turf farm house near Reykjavik. He illustrated it with a small model of a turf wall and an example of the type of spade used for cutting turf, explaining how it was cut and laid in a diagonal pattern. At the end of the lecture, he brought out some hardfish and flat bread for the audience to sample. It is the kind of thing he often does to entice people to share in his experience - and become part of the performance.

EC

A new book on the Icelandic settlers from Riverton, Manitoba

Hnausa Reflections highlights the history of the Icelandic settlers and their descendants in the Hnausa, Breiðavík (Riverton) area of Manitoba. If interested you could try Tergesens Bookstore in Gimli as they might carry this book. (Tergesen H.P. and Sons, 82 - 1st Avenue Gimli, MB. Ph: (204) 642-5958).

Icelanders of Victoria Board of Directors

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www.victoria.tc.ca/community/Icelanders

A new book in Icelandic on Canadian Icelandic writers

Íslandslag. Íslensk-kanadískar bókmenntir í ríma öld (in English The Song/Image of Iceland. This book covers over a century of poetry, short stories and book chapters. The club's own Bill (William D.) Valgardson is featured with a translation of his "Bargaining in December". The book will also be of interest to members who can read Icelandic and to relatives of other authors. It happens that my great grandfather's brother, Kristinn Stefansson is listed with three works. There is a special offer of 100 CAD for INL members. Fred and other board members have an email with more information, or you could write to the editor in Iceland:

gardar@asgardur.net

Icelanders of Victoria at Sooke BC

By Donna Einarsson

On Wednesday, August 3rd, The Icelanders of Victoria joined Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland in displaying artifacts and information about their country at the Sooke



Icelanders of Victoria Display at Sooke
Photo by Donna Einarsson

Fine Arts Festival.

The Sooke Fine Arts Festival is an annual juried art show held in Sooke BC, which is about 30 minutes west of Victoria. The show, from July 30th to August 7th, was marvelous with art presented in many different forms. It is the largest juried art show on Vancouver Island and well attended by the public. This year different ethnic groups were asked to take part by telling about their country, and the Scandinavian day was August 3rd.

Ruth Cartwright, and Donna and Ernie Einarsson set up the display in the limited space available and covered the whole day from 9:00 am to 10 pm. It was an enjoyable day and many people stopped to watch the VCR playing Icelandic tapes, provided by Norm Jonasson, on our small television set, and to look through our books. Some even took home copies of Lögberg-Heimskringla that were on display. Look closely at the picture, and you might see the Icelandic horse hide, donated by Len & Karen Vopnfjord, we used as a background for our display.

DE.

Did you know

Next year our club is hosting the Icelandic National League (INL) convention April 20th-23rd, 2006 at the Hotel Grand Pacific here in Victoria. I'm sure there will be lots of help needed if you would like to volunteer.