

IN PLAIN SIGHT:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN ICELANDIC  
ETHNICITY AND CLASS DIVISION 1910–20

Andrea L. McIntosh

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
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**BY**

**ANDREA L. MCINTOSH**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of**

**Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree**

**Of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is an ethnohistoric examination of the impact of the Winnipeg General Strike and its associated rhetoric of class and ethnic relations on Winnipeg Icelanders as an ethnic group. As ethnography, the research examines the demographics, economics, social structures (business and voluntary associations) and ideologies as discernible through city archival materials, newspapers, written anecdotal histories, and sets of interviews with elderly Western Icelanders. It finds that while the ethnic ideology stressed social equality, honour, and nobility as the heritage of all Icelanders, urban life and the ethnic economic enclave of construction and real estate had produce economic stratification. This stratification was reflected in the composition of the leadership of voluntary associations, newspaper editorial boards and church administration. As such, de facto socio-economic stratification had emerged, but was muted by various mechanisms of social discourse and patterns of interaction. The British Canadian rhetoric about class and ethnicity generated by the Winnipeg General Strike highlighted tensions in these same spheres of discourse



among Winnipeg Icelanders. Consequently, Icelandic elite ideologies about ethnicity were manifest in the formation of the Icelandic National League, while the Icelandic working class voice was expressed through political involvement in the civic election.

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# **Part I**

## **The Context for A Study**

# 1 Introduction

In 1875, the Dominion Government of Canada granted a group of 285 Icelanders exclusive rights to settle, farm and fish, along the west shore of Lake Winnipeg, in what was then Rupert's Land. The isolated area, some 60 miles long and 12 miles deep, had been specifically chosen by Icelandic delegates. The group of settlers hoped it would become the place of rebirth of Icelandic culture (Arnason 1994). The landing spot became the town of Gimli, named after the mythical abode of the Old Norse gods who survive Ragnarok, the war of all beings, to recreate the cosmos. These immigrants were not alone in their hopes of re-establishing a national Icelandic identity; in Iceland itself the struggle for independence from Denmark was in process. In both countries, there was a popular movement to reconstruct Icelandic traditions and values, as interpreted from the saga origin myths. Unfortunately, the colony did not fare well in its early years. Some Icelanders settled in Winnipeg and many more migrated there seasonally to take advantage of wage labour opportunities.

The City of Winnipeg was incorporated in 1867, at the beginning of the settlement of western Canada. It would serve as the Gateway to the West, the point of dispersal for homesteaders. It would become the main supply centre for those heading west, and a gathering point for grains and other goods going east for export. Winnipeg became the centre for several industries, including railway repair shops, metal works and farm implements and garment manufactures. The rapid development of the city spurred on the building industries and real estate ventures as well.

To fulfil the need for farmers, general labourers, and skilled tradesmen, a campaign to attract immigrants was put into effect from 1896-1914. In that time, the population of Winnipeg grew from 42,340 to 163,000. Still, there were shortages of labour, but this did not result in economic competition between employers for workers. Private industry deliberately recruited peoples from various regions and classes of Europe, in order to pit ethnic groups against each other for jobs. On job sites, linguistic differences helped to prevent work gangs from uniting against foremen (Whitaker 1991: 8-9).

Labour organisers in Winnipeg were wise to the strategy, and worked to unite the various ethnic groups. Historians cite an increasing cleavage in Winnipeg society between workers, as a fairly cohesive group, and the city's elite as a ruling class (Artibise 1975, Masters 1950, Bercuson 1990). Strikes were common events, especially between 1910 and 1920. The defining moment of ethnic and class struggles was the 1919 Winnipeg

General Strike. Although the city elite blamed the strike on aliens and Bolsheviks, the strike was lead by the unionised British skilled tradesmen under the guidance of the Trades and Labour Council. Several histories document the strike (Masters 1950, Bercuson 1990, Bumsted 1994); none documents its affect on the various ethnic groups.

In 1910, the Winnipeg Icelandic population was concentrated in the middle class neighbourhood of the West End. Icelandic shops, churches and the Icelandic temperance hall, which served as a general community gathering place, were located along Sargent Avenue, the main thoroughfare through the West End. The success and activities of the entrepreneurs and professionals led the dominant British-Canadian society to consider the Icelanders a distinct race who had “set the pace” (*Free Press*, November 16, 1912) for all foreign immigrant racial groups (that is, non-British immigrants).

In spite of this reported prosperity, my research indicates that Icelandic residents in the West End occupied many different socio-economic strata. While the majority of Icelandic men were labourers and skilled tradesmen, others had become successful entrepreneurs and professionals. Many were involved in the building and real estate businesses in diverse occupations. Those who were better off financially often trained and hired Icelanders exclusively, and contributed to the community as a whole through supporting voluntary associations and the churches.

Socio-economic stratification in the Icelandic community was not as marked as in the Winnipeg society as a whole, but different levels of wealth were acknowledged. Although debates between newspapers were ongoing, class politics only became an issue of debate in the year prior to the Winnipeg General Strike. It was at this same time that Icelandic community leaders were making strenuous efforts and succeeding in creating a committee that would attend to the maintenance and expansion of Icelandic community and cultural endeavours.

## **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

This dissertation is primarily concerned with the transition between what appears to be association among Western Icelanders in Winnipeg where ethnicity is happenstance and convenient, to the formal association of Western Icelanders for the purpose of building a visible ethnic group and culture. This process took place in a time period that should have made it particularly problematic. First, 'foreigners', that is non-British immigrants, were increasingly scrutinised by the dominant culture as being potential threats to the social fabric. Secondly, divisions between the proletariat and bourgeoisie in Winnipeg were becoming openly hostile, and this was reflected among some Icelanders as their socio-economic stratification increased. Thus the social climate was not particularly favourable



to the development of an ethnic collective asserting its own cohesion, and difference from British Canadian society.

Icelandic immigrants had left Iceland as it was becoming a nation, and brought with them a nationalist rhetoric which asserted the basic equality and nobility of all Icelanders, the glory of the saga literature, and affirmed the importance of independence. During the Winnipeg General Strike, it was the extreme ideological positions about class in Winnipeg elicited by the pro- and anti- strike rhetoric that finally brought about discussion about stratification within Western Icelandic community. The resultant discourse and activity based in class politics belie the existence of socio-economic stratification that was hidden, obscured and muted by the dominant Western Icelandic ideologies of social relations and beliefs about ethnic values.

The dissertation is secondarily concerned with the construction of the image the Western Icelandic elite presented to the dominant, British Canadian culture. By 1910, Winnipeg was home to over eight ethnic groups, and British Canadian nativism was rife. Most 'foreigners' resided in the ethnic slum of the North End. Icelanders did not reside there, but were recognised as 'foreigners', and considered the best of the 'races'. Thus they had a reputation to protect, which they did through social reform and charity work within their own community. As the ethnic rhetoric stressed equality, in order to gain influence individuals had to carefully manage interpersonal relationships and their own image.

## 1.2 Theoretical Approach

This dissertation is framed within a Marxist anthropological framework, particularly that work that addresses ideologies. Recent Marxism scholars, particularly that of Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar (Althusser 1990, Althusser and Balibar 1970), Stuart Hall (1996) and researchers in the British Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, reject economic determinism and greatly expand the study of the role and dissemination of ideology, particularly in modern society. This work posits a complex relationship between social variables, usually specified as economics, political and social structures and the ideational system. The analysis of the working of the ideational system borrows heavily from Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci, examining both official and informal discourses which produce particular ideologies. Most importantly, recent Marxist thought insists on a culturally and historically specific analysis. In this way, Marxism anthropology remains holistic, and can incorporate the findings of specific analysis; in this case, sociological analysis of ethnicity in Winnipeg.

Some Marxists argue that ethnicity emerges primarily because of a perceived threat to the culture and traditions of a self-identifying group (cf. Muga 1990). A more widely espoused view is that as a result of extensive contact with other cultural groups, some groups deliberately assert their difference from each other (Abner Cohen 1974: 96-98, Eriksen 1993: 11-12). In these circumstances group members may choose to identify and

assert cultural traits and 'traditions' as a means to symbolise collective unity and strength. These symbols include language, religious practises, kinship patterns, and other social structures (Schmermerhorn 1996). Equally important to the continued existence of the group are subjective attributes, such as ideal personality traits, beliefs and value systems, and a particular world-view. Ethnic groups frequently display artistic styles and aesthetic forms, such as foods, clothing and hair styles, traditional music and songs, dances and literature, as symbols, or ethnic markers. Ethnic markers are objectively identifiable, symbolising the unity of the ethnic group, and its difference from other cultures.

Recent anthropological theories, including those derived from Marxism, assumes a dialectic relationship between economics, political and social structures, and ideational systems. Social structures, especially class, are seen as possibly but not necessarily manifest in each of the above realms. Thus to argue that full blown class formations are in existence, the researcher must demonstrate the influence or constraint of specific positions within the social relations of production in each of the realms (Hall 1996, Gledhill 2000).

The researcher has two writing styles in which to present the material. One is to test the existence of the particular social phenomena by pulling together all evidence in one place to prove or disprove its existence. The other is to describe the cultural life of the society being studied, and then pull together the common threads which point to the existence of specific social phenomena. I have chosen the latter approach in order to try

to create a picture of community life that is lacking in existing historical writings. This should also prevent the ethnography from being over determined by the theory.

### **1.3 Ethnohistoric Research: Methods and Sources**

As the time period to be studied is 1910-1920, and the focus is on social and cultural issues, this dissertation can be considered ethnohistoric in nature. As such, it exams over time the process by which Western Icelanders came to be an ethnic group. Its primary analytic focus is on the way class, a social arrangement based in the relations of production, was hidden by the ideological rhetoric and machinations that created of a strong ethnic community.

If the emergence of class-based political action around the time of the strike was symptomatic of *prior* underlying social and cultural structures, research into the Western Icelandic movement for ethnic identity Winnipeg 1910-1920 must answer the following questions:

- When and how did socio-economic stratification arise in the Western Icelandic community?
- Can this be considered class formation?

- How did community leaders become leaders, and what power did they have in the community?
- What was the impetus for the mobilisation of Western Icelandic community leaders to finally begin to co-operate for the sake of the culture and its economic growth?
- What were the dominant or prevailing ideologies about ethnicity and class in the ethnic community, and how were they disseminated?
- What were the processes that resulted in the successful downplaying of socio-economic difference and successful assertion of ethnic solidarity?

Ethnohistory must collect much of its data from sources other than those conventionally used by cultural anthropologists. There are few living individuals to serve as informants, and the society to be investigated no longer exists. Participant-observation cannot be undertaken, and therefore patterns of interaction cannot be observed. Instead interaction must be inferred from tracing fragments of individual lives through multiple sources. My main sources have included historic writings, interviews, and city archival material, such as tax assessments.

The historic writings used include old newspaper debates, autobiographies and other eye-witness accounts of historic events. The Icelandic press was used as a forum for ongoing debates, primarily by community leaders, but also by other community members who

wanted to express opinions on particular issues. This is an excellent source of information on politics views and ideologies about ethnicity. Most autobiographical material has been written by workers and their children, allowing for a window into a world that is less illustrious than that painted in the major histories by Kristjanson (1965) and Lindal (1967).

Another source of eye-witness accounts are minutes of various voluntary associations. Some of these report verbatim argumentation, thus affording the researcher access to some ideological positions not available in more public fora, such as the newspapers. Analysed as texts, they suggest something of the character of individuals, and the social processes and the cultural values that were upheld or contested. Problematically, no minutes of church administrative meetings are available, although records exist for the International Order of the Good Templars, and the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, Jon Sigurdson Chapter.

My participation in the Icelandic community has also resulted in the chance to interview the children and grandchildren of people alive during the strike, many of whom lived in the West End. Interviews recorded in 1983-85 by Lawrence Gillespie with elderly Icelanders are available through the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, and specifically deal with firsthand accounts of the General Strike, among other issues. Gillespie's inter-

views are useful for reconstructing the daily life and sense of community in the West End for the time period of this study.

I have traced customs that may have existed in 1910-1920 by reviewing records that existed before and after the time period in question. These works have included writings on society and culture in 19th century Iceland (cf. Pétursson 1990, and Gerrard 1985). Especially valuable are Thorsteinn Thor Thorsteinsson's (1935) and Tom Oleson's (1950, 1953) five volume Icelandic language history of Icelanders in Manitoba, because it includes newspaper accounts, court judgements, events and personal recollections and short biographies of prominent Icelanders in the Winnipeg community not found in other histories. Anthropological work by John S. Matthiasson (1983, 1989, 1994), which focuses on the West End community after 1940 and by Anne Brydon (1987) who studied the cultural construction of ethnicity at the Icelandic Day Festival in 1986, reveal cultural patterns of behaviour in different time periods.

The sources of information about demographics, economic and material circumstances of the Winnipeg population in general, and Icelanders specifically are housed in the Winnipeg City Archives and Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Those used were government censuses, city tax assessment rolls, Henderson (crisscross) directories, building permits and fire insurance maps. None of these is considered accurate, as they are not in agreement on

the most basic information. However, taken together the composite picture does establish general social patterns in relation to the above mentioned topics.

Each of the above types of data gives glimpses into the historic West End community, including household composition and daily life, social stratification, interaction in the neighbourhood and prevailing beliefs. In each chapter they have been combined in ways necessary to build a substantive description of each aspect of social life.

#### **1.4 Overview of Findings**

I will argue that Icelanders applied ideas about their culture and cultural characteristics that were present in the late nineteenth century nationalist rhetoric to their experiences in Winnipeg. Most prominent of these ideas was that all Icelanders were of noble lineage and honourable ancestry, regardless of present socio-economic circumstances, and that each individual had equal rights and responsibilities, including the right to voice an opinion.

In keeping with these ideologies, individuals could earn prestige if they displayed certain behaviours and attributes. These included good oratory and debating skills, the ability to write poetry, being learned, and assisting the common people. Thus doctors, lawyers, professors, and clergy were afforded the most prestige, regardless of income or lack thereof. In Winnipeg, while the British-Canadians lauded the ability to make a



profit, Icelanders held a certain prejudice toward businessmen and those who made an ostentatious display of their own wealth.

The Winnipeg General Strike affected individual Icelanders differently. Those who were most outspoken were newspaper editors, lawyers and physicians. Workers for the post office, police department and telephone system lost their jobs because they went on strike. But very little friction seems to have occurred between Icelandic contractors and workers. Icelanders from the rural areas actually came into the city during the strike because work was plentiful. The actions taken and their resulting effects varied within the Icelandic community.

The Winnipeg General Strike confirms several patterns of interaction previously apparent but of no particular moment among Western Icelanders. These include strategies involved in gaining prestige and thus becoming a community leader, or "distinguished Icelander", and the influential coalition formed by distinguished Icelanders despite their apparent ideological differences. A second area of interaction involves workers; the loyal but paternalistic relationships between Icelandic contractors and workers in the construction industries, and the cross-cultural class alignment among those working for non-Icelandic employers. Equally important is the co-opting of British-Canadian ideological stances which, in one form, that of national politics, denied the existence of class and

heightened the importance of ethnicity, and in another, that of Western Canadian labour politics, based political goals on class distinctions and downplayed ethnicity.

Most importantly, in the time period surrounding the strike, two cultural initiatives within the ethnic group took place. One was the formation of the Icelandic National League (INL), and the other was the launching of a labour party candidate for the post-strike civic election. While the INL was successful and the candidate was not, these initiatives elicited more definitive ideological positions and social processes within the Icelandic community than had been articulated previously.

## **1.5 Organisation**

This dissertation is divided into four parts. The first sets forth the theoretical framework; the Canadian, and Winnipeg, economic, social and ideological context; and finally a literature review of Icelandic and Western Icelandic history and culture. The second part enquires into the existence of ethnic community among Winnipeg Icelanders, the potential for economic stratification, and the importance of the domestic group and kinship in maintaining ethnicity and offsetting poverty. The third section investigates the interaction of Western Icelanders in the public realm, including an ethnic economic enclave, the churches and various voluntary associations. The fourth section deals with the political positions involving the 'proper' use of wealth, the Winnipeg General Strike, the forma-

tion of the INL, and the civic election. The conclusion reviews the reaction to the strike, as well as the muting of socio-economic differences discussed in previous chapters.

The next chapter of the dissertation will review the theoretical issues raised by a neo-Marxist approach to questions of ethnicity, race and class. Further, because a neo-Marxist anthropological approach insists on a culturally and historically specific, holistic analysis, useful observations from sociological studies about institutions and ideologies regarding ethnic groups in Winnipeg will be incorporated into the general theoretical premises relating to Icelandic immigrants, 1910–1920.

The third chapter will rely on secondary sources to delineate the economic growth of the Dominion of Canada, and Winnipeg's place in the National Policy of development. This section also pays attention to the two party bourgeoisie political party system, and its successful attempts to replace class politics with the politics of ethnicity. An examination of the development of labour organisation compares Eastern and Western Canadian patterns, including the influence of ethnicity on labour organisational policies. The chapter closes with an examination of civil society's engagement in the problems of workers and ethnic minority groups in Winnipeg.

The fourth chapter will also rely on secondary sources, to examine the social organisation of late nineteenth century life in Iceland. I will then review what is known of the early development of the Icelandic community in Winnipeg, and review recent work

on the mid-twentieth century West End, and recent expressions of ethnicity. This will provide a bracket in time around the decade of this study to illustrate continuity and change in social stratification and social institutions among Icelanders in Winnipeg.

Using the criteria of the sociological studies of Winnipeg, chapter five begins assessing the Icelandic population's potential for actually interacting as an ethnic group. The evidence suggests that the population density is not sufficient to meet the sociological requirements of an ethnic group, and the ethnic institutional components are similarly lacking. Nevertheless, the content of the Icelandic newspapers indicates that the Icelandic language, the neighbourhood's Icelandic leaders, and churches are an integral part of Icelander's lives. Further the business district, though relatively small, holds symbolic significance for community.

Chapter six then examines economic stratification among Icelanders. Clear divisions exist in occupation, with approximately one half of the neighbourhood being of the working classes. However, physicians, lawyer and wealthy businessmen are also to be found within the neighbourhood. Their homes are particularly ostentatious, but these men and their families continue to reside close to other Icelanders.

Chapter seven looks at kinship, marriage and the domestic group. The division of labour in the household, the importance of education, and the transition to British-Canadian material practises are all examined. In terms of social organisation, it finds

that an ego-centred kinship system seems to be frequently called into play by migrant workers. It also finds that marriages are arranged for the purpose of combining households. Further, in the West End, the taking in of boarders by a nuclear family seems to have been the norm, and was done in order to “make ends meet.”

Chapter eight summarises section two. It asserts that a sense of ethnicity is very much alive, and is manifest in both the business district and the home. Secondly, it finds that economic stratification exists, and that the workers are struggling financially, but have adapted models of the domestic group from the old country to mitigate against a deterioration in living conditions. The possibility that economic stratification coincides with social groupings suggests that economics may greatly influence social status. Finally, it raises the question of how protective prominent community members were of the social status of the group as a whole. Was an effort being made to hide ethnicity?

The ninth chapter focuses on the Icelandic involvement in the construction industry. Relations between real estate agents, building contractors, tradesmen and labourers will be considered in light of patterns and structures of normative social interaction from previous chapters. It will be argued that different forms of social relations within the ethnic economic enclave mimic the social relations of production on the nineteenth century Icelandic farm in two ways. First, the extensive use of contract labour is reminiscent of the contracted farm worker. Second is the potential for paternalism between foremen

and wage labourers. This paternalism not only reproduces the labour force by teaching a particular set of trade skills to junior members, it also reproduces ethnicity through the passing on of ideal ethnic behaviours. However, the enclave also brings about increased stratification in economic status introducing tensions between the ethnic ideal of an egalitarian society and real differences in wealth. These are mitigated by contradictory positions in the social relations of production.

Chapter ten focuses on a discussion of the organisation and relationship of religious-based groups. There is a long history of dissent between the different congregations on a variety of issues, spurred on by particularly charismatic clergy. I argue that debate became a model for achieving prestige and influence in the community, and was also used in the secular realm. The Icelandic historians claim there were deep divisions in the community based on religious and concomitant political beliefs, but the interaction of the pastors and church administrators suggests that in the higher strata the divisions were minimal.

The eleventh chapter turns to voluntary associations. During the time period of this study, Western Icelanders in Winnipeg formed special Icelandic chapters of two particular social causes supported by Winnipeg's middle classes. Those were the temperance movement and the women's efforts in support of soldiers in World War I. In supporting these social causes and joining the ranks of the dominant culture's civil society, Western

Icelanders had the opportunity to associate with middle class British-Canadian society. This possibly contributed to the prestige of individuals, and the ethnic group as a whole.

Chapter twelve will review the information from this section, focusing on 'distinguished Icelanders', those men and women who had gained prestige. I will pull together the disparate activities of the variety of individuals introduced in this section, and sort out the various religio-political camps among distinguished Icelanders. There are several concerns here, which are, first who gained prestige and influence, second, how did they gain prestige and influence, third, how much influence did this group have, and fourth, can this group be considered a class? In spite of a distaste for profit makers, several distinguished Icelanders were businessmen who transferred wealth into the realm of prestige through benevolent community work and a demonstrated ability to organise and argue for good causes. The influence they asserted came from direct persuasive argumentation, backed by the ability to include or exclude those of lesser social status, notably in employment. Finally, in spite of the degree of argumentation that took place among distinguished Icelanders, they can be seen to function as a coalition that asserted fairly uniform dominant ideology over the Winnipeg Icelandic community.

The thirteenth chapter pays close attention to the position of two distinguished Icelanders on the topics of wealth and class-based politics. This uncovers a clear discourse and faction of Icelanders who counter the dominant Western Icelandic ideologies. This

debate is the beginning of the expression of counter ideologies, which will force the clarification and justification of dominant ideologies. These include of the importance of 'classless' politics to Canadian society, and the importance of maintaining ethnicity.

In chapter fourteen, all evidence of the Icelandic community's actions and reactions to the Winnipeg General Strike will be discussed. This will be primarily ethnographic in nature. By all accounts, the strike caused little disturbance among Icelanders. Workers took a variety of stances, some striking, some striking but then working for the citizens' committee to maintain the city infrastructure, and some not striking at all. However, the opinions expressed in the two main Icelandic newspapers articulate specific political ideologies, and belie a shared 'middle class' stance.

Chapter fifteen discusses the formation of the Icelandic National League (INL). Occurring concurrently with the discussions in the labour movement leading up to the strike, were organisational steps that lead to the formation of the INL in 1920. The INL is the first organisation among Icelanders to come into existence specifically for the purpose of preserving Icelandic identity on this continent, and remains the most visible organisation in North America today. However, it will be demonstrated that those involved in the original formation were select group of community leaders, and their goals were paradigmatic of the middle class.



Chapter sixteen tackles a brief episode in civic politics—the election in the fall of 1919. It is of interest that a ‘town-hall meeting’ was held among Icelanders to elect an Icelandic candidate on a labour platform, and its attendees included a variety of distinguished Icelanders. The chosen candidate had been permanently fired from the police force for his actions in the General Strike. His supporters are those distinguished Icelanders who had previously articulated political views counter to the dominant Icelandic political ideologies. The chapter also examines the election platforms of the ‘Citizens’ running for election and finds that, contrary to the dominant British Canadian ideology of classless politics, the winning candidate plays the class card, by eliciting a pro-active stance from the middle class.

The final chapter will review the evidence for class differences and increased divisions in light of the General Strike, the formation of the INL, and the civic election. Most importantly, it will look at the ways that both discourse and the dissemination of discourse muted the articulation of class based practises and ideologies through the rhetoric of ethnic characteristics, ideals about ethnic social processes, and Icelandic nationalism. Moreover, it will demonstrate how the British-Canadian political ideologies, including socialism, could disguise differential power relations within the Icelandic building industry.

## 2 Theory

This study is situated within a Marxist theoretical tradition. The inclusion of Marxism in cultural anthropology was accompanied by a shift from the tendency to analyse cultures in isolation to a concern for the effects of global economic and political activity on local populations (cf Wolf 1982). This perspective is frequently used to analyse relations between a colonising power and the indigenous people of its colonies. Thus the geographic area of a study may encompassing different cultural groups, and indeed different nations within what is referred to as the capitalist world market. Although the overarching economic unifier may be capitalism, within it, different modes of production are juxtaposed, and may articulate in unequal power relationships. Historic cultural symbols and structures, and those of more recent substantiation, may maintain non-capitalist modes of production that can be either advantageous or disadvantageous to a collective (Keesing 1992; Gledhill 2000). Such collectives often take the form of ethnic groups; these are deliberately maintained, self-identifying units claiming a shared culture. As they arise from conditions

created by the capitalist world market, ethnic groups can not be studied apart from the specific economic and political conditions in which they are situated. And, it is a central tenet of Marxist anthropology that micro scale or local studies of cultural practise must analyse societies in relation to their historically and culturally specific mode(s) of production (cf Bonacich 1980, Hall 1996, Thompson 1989, Muga 1990, Wolpe 1986, Wolf 1980, Solomos 1986).

However, a Marxist study of an ethnic group cannot ignore its cultural characteristics; specifically the conscious nature of their construction, the groups emphasis on cultural beliefs, values and ideologies, its social structures, and its subjective attributes and artistic styles, as discussed in the introductory chapter. In a departure from early Marxism, the study of ethnicity as ideology is not derived from the ideologies pertaining to class, but from those pertaining to the ideology of the nation. In defining ethnicity, David Muga argues

Both objective (language, customs, kinship, etc.) and subjective (identity, self-awareness, self-expressed feature of culture and psyche, etc.) cultural elements make up a peoples' collective existence and notions of nationhood. Yet, these elements are closely linked to socioeconomic features in such a way that the concrete forms of a peoples' existence include economic and political factors, with the most important of these being political unity within an economic base. (Muga 1990: 60).

Nationalism was central to the ideologies that inform British and European empires at the time period of this study. The beginnings of nationalism grew alongside industrialism,

capitalism, and importantly print capitalism. As industrialism required large numbers of similarly skilled, and to some degree educated and literate workers, training began to increasingly homogenise cultural knowledge and literacy in several regions of Europe. With urbanisation and the decline of small rural communities, mass produced news and literature replaced direct personal communications with widely shared information among the literate. This knowledge helped create an imagined community. These imagined communities expanded beyond the city and back into the rural landscape itself. New symbols were needed to signify this collectively 'shared' culture. While these symbols included folk tales, music, dances and dress from the 'disappearing' rural life, it was the bourgeoisie rather than the urbanised Volk who elevated common crafts to national symbols. From supposedly natural geographic boundaries were drawn cultural, and then political boundaries. Shared 'cultural traditions', language, religion, and a shared history (leniently interpreted) gave credence to the mythology of the cultural and political unity of the people of a region—and as a nation. Eriksen argues that nationalism

postulated the existence of an imaginary community based on shared culture and embedded in the state, where people's loyalty and attachment should be directed towards the state. In this way, nationalist ideology is functional for the state (Eriksen 1993: 105).

Thus the ideology that gives the state political authority to maintain social order within its borders relies heavily on the myth of nationhood. Paradoxically, that capitalism grew alongside some nationalisms meant that socio-economic stratification—classes—actually

segmented the populace. State control of unification was possible because the ideologies of nationalism and to a greater degree patriotism help obscure class based differences through emphasising the homogeneity of 'the nation's people' or 'the race of nation x'. Ideologies of ethnicity are of course problematic when asserted alongside those of nationhood, and further complicate social divisions already created by class.

The recent Marxist abandonment of economic determinism for the notion of relative autonomy of the base and superstructure does not clarify the relationship between ethnicity and class. John Solomos sets forth the following problematic issues this creates for research into and analysis of the relationship between ethnicity and class.

(a) there is no problem of race relations which can be thought of separately from the structural (economic, political and ideological) features of capitalist society; (b) there can be no general Marxist theory of racism, since each historical situation needs to be analysed in its own specificity; and (c) 'racial' and 'ethnic' divisions cannot be reduced to or seen as completely determined by the structural contradictions of capitalist society (Solomos 1986: 104).

Solomos accurately summarises the more recent Marxist position, indicating what cannot be assumed about the relation between social structural conditions of capitalism and race or ethnicity. It says little of what can be assumed about ethnicity and socio-economic position.

Muga<sup>1</sup> argues

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<sup>1</sup>Muga is in agreement with other recent Marxists that class and ethnicity are not to be seen to be mutually exclusive concepts or processes reducible to one another but rather partially determined by each other

...the specific linkages between cultural phenomena and socio-economic ones must be the subject of an historical analysis which attempts to retrieve the various strands of ethnic continuity in a way which throws light on the transition between nationality (consciousness of community) and nationhood (consciousness for community)... The task of Marxist analysis is the reconnecting and recombining of relevant projections from the past which inform a group's cultural consciousness and self-affirmation and it is clear that specific socio-economic contexts help provide the precise connotation of the nationhood and sense of community [expressed by the specific ethnic group] (Muga 1990: 61).

Muga sets the task for a Marxist approach of the study of ethnicity to be the documentation of the processes of emergence (and disappearance) over time of ethnic social structures and formation; Muga does not assume the stability of culture and traditions (Muga 1990: 59-60). He views the development of an ethnic community (for nationhood) to be

a successive transition between quantity and quality where political, economic, social and cultural accretions slowly but persistently metamorphosise the ethnic matrix into its (full) potential of historic expression (Muga 1990: 60).

The impetus for metamorphosis may be in part external, as it takes place in a specific socio-economic context. But an ethnic group is self-affirming and deliberately formed. The transition on which Muga focuses is one from consciousness of community, that is an understanding of fellowship through shared culture, to one of self-identification as a group with a shared cultural past, present and future. Ideological apparatus are vital to this transformation. It might be expected that ethnic groups will take on institutions and traits similar to those of national (state) apparatus. These might include intellectuals and

politicians, institutions of civil society, their religious leaders and educators, and ideologies that play on similar themes to those of a nation. Whether the ethnic apparatus set themselves in an harmonious or oppositional position to the state will vary from context to context. In addition, the influence of socio-economic factors cannot be ignored—the ethnic group has and/or participates in a particular mode of productions, and is part of the capitalist world market. These issues will be examined in more detail presently.

## 2.1 Ideologies

For Marx, human consciousness is embedded within social relations; this he called *Praxis* (Giddens 1971: 40). While beliefs are rooted in the social relations of production, and it was the particular character of the social structures, such as those of the state through which ideologies were refracted that shaped and twisted their final manifestation (Giddens 1971: 209).

Central to early Marxist approaches to ideology was the concept of ‘false consciousness’. The term is standardly used to refer to the psychological condition in capitalist society wherein the lower classes are blinded to their own exploitation, and accept as natural the ruling elite’s explanations for differences in wealth, opportunity and power. Marx himself never actually used the term ‘false consciousness’. It is found only once: in a letter sent by Friedrich Engels to Franz Mehring in 1893 (after Marx’s death). In the letter

the term is not used to refer to the deception of ‘the masses’ about the order of the social world and their place in it, but rather in a discussion of whether a thinker or ‘ideologist’ could arrive at the truth of that world through pure thought. Engels suggests not.

The idea of false consciousness is said to lie in the section of *Das Kapital* on commodity fetishism (Giddens 1971: 208–209, Wolf 1998: 32–33). In this discussion, Marx describes how the real value of an object, its use-value, is transformed in a capitalist system into a monetary value. This occurs as the worker is alienated through the social relations of production and exchange from that which he produces. Thus, not knowing the real value of the product, he cannot know the real (use) value of his work, and measures it instead according to monetary value.

The recent discovery, that the products of labour, so far as they are values, are but material expressions of the human labour spent in their production, marks, indeed, an epoch of history of the development of the human race, but, by no means, dissipates the mist through which the social character of labour appears to us to be an objective character of the products themselves (Marx 2000: 55–56).

At this point the values of social positions and structures within the social relations of production are also obscured. The real values within the whole system are no longer apparent, and lay open to be named and labelled according to ideology producers.

So, most people live with false consciousness. This is not the result of stupidity, but an almost inescapable erroneous belief—the dominant ideology set forth by the bourgeois—about social reality that is made to appear objectively manifest, natural and true. Were



there time and the will for education, false consciousness could be lifted. Marx asserted, however, that not all people had access to the processes, such as theology, ethics or philosophy, by which to arrive at independent or emancipated thought. On the contrary, it was only in those societies where there was sufficient specialisation for there to be dedicated thinkers that ideas and beliefs behind the veil of 'mere herd-consciousness' (Giddens 1971: 208-209) would be discovered.

Today's thinkers—scholars—do examine the 'actual, grounded terrain of practises, representations, language and customs of a specific historical society' (Hall 1996: 439) in which human consciousness, or subjectivity is embedded in order to understand real social relations. Such a method is especially conducive to the discipline of cultural anthropology. This micro level focus provides the tools with which to analyse actor driven social processes that arise from complex interactions of economics, social structures, politics and beliefs and ideas. This provides for an explanation of the power of social forces, rather than merely a description of their existence (cf. Wolf 1994, 1998, Godelier 1994, Gledhill 2000).

Recent Marxist scholars, in addition to considering false consciousness, search for subtler forms of mistaken belief and more complex processes by which deceptive ideas are brought into circulation. The origin of their work can be found in Marx's and Engel's writings. The study of the ideational, symbolic and cultural realm has been heavily influ-

enced by Antonio Gramsci<sup>2</sup> and Louis Althusser. Perhaps the most ubiquitous concept is that of hegemony. Hegemony functions in the superstructural realm and is defined as an ongoing process of intellectual and moral leadership. It aims to win the willing consent of the populace and establish the legitimacy of a particular social order, specifically to 'educate people, developing their culture and obtaining their consent to the rule of the state's government' (Kurtz 1996: 109). Althusser gave ideology the specific definition used by recent Marxism, which is 'the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or social group' (Althusser 1986: 76). As did Marx both authors contend that the exclusive control and formulation of beliefs is not limited to the ruling class.

Members of any class can form ideologies and engage in the hegemonic process. However, most often the state and capitalists in the industry, business and financial sectors work in concert. Gramsci distinguished those who upheld the current dominating beliefs as traditional intellectuals, and those who took an alternate stance, organic intellectuals. In either case, intellectuals are individual agents working within a larger social system. The 'hegemonic practices of *agents* can and do create cultural formations and ideologies which they inculcate in subjects to serve the interest of the leadership they represent' (Kurtz 1996: 107; italics mine). Thus hegemony is an ongoing process with supports or

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<sup>2</sup>Gramsci's writings are episodic, fragmented, culturally specific and understated, given that they were written while he was a political prisoner, without references to other texts, and subject to censorship. I am relying on exegetical work by Stuart Hall (1996), David Kurtz (1996) and Eric Wolf (1998).

challenges to the existing order coming from various sources, and is not the sole property of the state.

There are a number of institutions which supported the ideology of the state, called Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). ISAs included state run educational systems, newspapers, television, volunteer and neighbourhood committees, work gangs and unions, charity groups, the family, and religious organisations (Althusser 1986: 63)<sup>3</sup>. The state run school begins the indoctrinating children, but the socialisation process continues throughout each individual's life in a variety of social realms. What children and later citizens are learning are 'rules for morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually mean rules of respect for the socio-technical divisions of labour, and ultimately the rules of the order of class domination' (Althusser 1986: 59). In this way, the social relations of production are reproduced. Although it appears that these institutions present a bulwark of state control of social relations and structures, in fact they are often at odds over the minutiae of what ideologies should be upheld, and how. Some may very well be the breeding ground for organic intellectuals who may contest issues of labour, class, or gender, for example—ideas and ideologies which threaten the traditional social order of the national society.

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<sup>3</sup>In pre-state European societies, the church had been the main ideological apparatus

It is for this reason that those who stand to benefit from the maintenance of the dominant ideology—that is, the bourgeois or ruling classes—are constantly engaged in a struggle to secure their position. This ‘war’ (Gledhill 2000: 77–78) may be fought in the intellectual realm, where organic intellectuals challenge the rules of tradition, or the law itself. In these instances they may actually earn concessions from the ruling classes, as in a strike, or promises of concessions which may or may not be fulfilled, or the objections may be quelled by physical means.

The latter is the prerogative of the state, after all, and hegemony is always paired with the possibility of physical domination (Kurtz 1996: 106). Gramsci refers to this simply as dominance, carried out at the hands of State Apparatus (Althusser 1986). Dominance is often used to refer to arrest, imprisonment and death. But any physical means of silencing organic intellectuals, their followers or other deviants, or removing them from society might also be considered under the term. Thus the removal of squatters from abandoned housing, the removal of children from their family, the restriction of certain people from the work force could also be considered acts of dominance.

Marx, Gramsci, and Althusser are addressing the nation-states control over its citizens and subjects. I argue that the ethnic group, based on an ideology similar to that of the nation state, will share with the nation ideological structures and processes. That is, if the citizens of a nation accede to the form of social order and their place in it, because

of false consciousness, then might we not find this same phenomenon among ethnic group members? Similarly, if leaders of the nation remain the ruling class through the hegemonic process, then might that process be in place between ethnic group leaders and their followers?

Indeed there is evidence that this is the case, available from studies of Winnipeg ethnic groups in the mid-twentieth century. Raymond Breton's (1964, 1978) and Leo Drieger's (1974, 1977) studies strongly suggest that the internal workings of ethnic groups mirror those of nations. First off, ethnic cohesion is strongest where there is a higher number of ethnic group members in a neighbourhood, and that neighbourhood can be recognised as being 'ethnic' (Drieger 1974: 36). Breton (1978) finds the presence of an ethnic marketplace within the ethnic neighbourhood to increase the maintenance of ethnic cohesion. This is, in some respects, like the validation of the polity and economic independence of a nation based on (supposed) long-term existence of a cultural group in a geographical area.

Drieger (1977: 90-100) examines the ideologies of ethnic groups and the ways in which these are manifest, and these show an even stronger similarity with the ideological processes of the nation-state. Both ethnic groups and nations create allegiance through the inculcation of a collective history, or origin myth. In the ethnic group, which needs to distinguish its history from that of the dominant culture, historic symbols and the

celebration of historical events create a sense of special, shared ancestry, a sense of purpose and a duty to ensure the continuity of cultural traditions. Second, specific ideologies are represented physically in symbols and celebrations that continually attract ethnic group members. And finally there is what Drieger refers to as 'Ideological mythology'—sets of belief that emanate from ethnic religious activity. The pull of the religious based teachings often go beyond the realm of the spiritual, to include personal morality, social control, power of the elite, civil liberties and welfare support. Thus the churches that Drieger studied in the early 1970s played a similar role to pre-state churches in the upholding and inculcating of (dominant) ideologies.

Like the ideological state apparatus which socialise citizens of nations, ethnic groups rely on ethnic institutions, which attract group members (Breton 1964, Drieger and Church 1974). Ethnic institutions include kinship networks, social clubs, charity groups, religious organisations, and newspapers. These institutions are in Althusser's terminology Ideological Apparatuses of civil society. Breton was concerned with the number of institutions required to satisfy needs for socialising that make being an ethnic group member meaningful. He found that the number varies, but in general, more institutions created a stronger sense of group membership. Althusser argues that ideological apparatus reproduce the social relations of production within the state; I argue that in ethnic groups, at the very least ethnic institutions reproduce the social relations of the ethnic group structure.

Finally, the role of ethnic group leader must be considered/footnote Around the world ethnic groups are in relations ranging from co-operative neighbours to those of protracted war. I am focusing on the particular historic and cultural situation of Winnipeg in 1910–1920. While it is evident that in some situations, where an ethnic group is asserting its sovereignty against the state, for example, ethnic leaders would be considered organic intellectuals, in other situations the classification is not so clear. As Icelanders did try to succeed as ‘Canadians’, were the leaders who supported Icelandic ethnicity and the Social and Reform League traditional or organic intellectuals? Or, is the classification in this case really useful? Moreover, can the relationships and social roles established by individual leaders be compared to the roles of statesmen and industrial barons, insofar as these men engage in hegemonic discourse for control of a nation?<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2 Ethnicity and Class

A Marxist perspective defines class in terms of positions within the social relations of production, which determine (or should determine) social structure, political alliances and ideologies. If positions in relation to production are to be assessed, control of three factors must be considered. These are money capital, physical capital (technology and raw

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<sup>4</sup>Barth’s theory of transactional analysis could be useful here, however while it locates the man or woman who would gain control within pattern of social action, it does not shed light of the impact such persons have on the community. Thus it does not address how an individuals quest for power aids in the ethnic groups formation of a collective from a mere ethnic assemblage.

resources) and labour. There is general agreement that those who control all three are the bourgeoisie, and those who control none, the proletariat. The 'purist' petty bourgeoisie position is considered to be that of the simply commodity producer, the self employed individual who produces and sells goods but employs few or no workers (Wright 1980: 329). In spite of the neat categorisations of people into classes on paper, real life is more complicated. The supposed internal unity of any class is fragmented and fractured by the concrete organisation of production and distribution itself, as well as economics, politics, cultures (ethnicity), and ideologies (Wolpe 1986: 121, see also Thompson 1989: 168–171; Muga 1990, Hall 1996). Thus class formations, such as a ruling class bloc or working class bloc seldom come into existence<sup>5</sup>. This is one of the remarkable things of general strikes where the working class does form a bloc.

A brief examination of two applications of early reductionist Marxist theory to issues of race and ethnicity in the United States will demonstrate the shortcomings of a strongly economic Marxist approach and point to strategies for improvement. While race re-

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<sup>5</sup>For lack of a better word, I will use the term 'class' where that position is the popular defining characteristic of a specific group of people, and one that is used by those I am studying. I am not disregarding the warning that a 'mechanical relationship between social class position and forms of consciousness' should not be taken for granted (Gledhill 2000: 78). For the sake of convenience certain social structures and ideologies commonly associated with classes will be labelled such. For example, the 'middle class' is frequently described as well-educated, professionals or entrepreneurs, involved in voluntary associations and, in the early twentieth century, social reform. I will make use of such generalisations from time to time, however the ascription of structures and ideologies to classes should be understood as just that—generalisations. Economic categories are defined by some writers as class positions; in this case I will use the term economic stratification. I will use the term social stratification to refer to differential amount of prestige and influence. Socio-economic stratification will refer to differences in wealth, prestige and influence.



lations in the US focus on white American antagonism toward black Americans on the basis of skin colour, most authors writing from the following positions argue for a generally applicable theory of racism and ethnic prejudice. Moreover, in the time period of my study, ethnic differences were considered to be racially based. Thus, the belief system and labour market at the time of my study would be suitable for examination through these theoretic perspectives.

The first theory has been variously called “super-exploitation” (Bonacich 1980, Hill 1980) and “internal colonialism” (Yinger 1986: 33, Bonacich 1980, Hill 1980). The idea here is that the ideology of ethnicity or race is used by employers to divide the labour force. Ethnic groups in the labour force are differentially oppressed such that some work for lower wages than others. Profits made off lower wage workers subsidise the cost of higher paid workers. Those in the higher paying category are usually of the same ethnic group as the bourgeoisie. Racial discrimination against other ethnic groups—a position shared by the bourgeoisie and higher paid workers—prevents the uniting of the work force. Moreover, higher paid workers inadvertently act in collusion with the bourgeoisie to oppress the lower paid ethnic groups (Bonacich 1980: 13). This situation is considered to occur with the rise of capitalism and colonialism, where white colonisers and white workers are privileged over indigenous groups, or in the case of the United States, a formerly enslaved population.

A second theory of racial or ethnic oppression is known as the split labour market. Like super-exploitation, it has the effect of dividing the labour force, and preventing the betterment of working conditions for all workers. However, it is not the bourgeoisie who are primarily responsible for the division. While capitalists and/or imperialists seek a cheap labour force, dominant ethnic group workers seek to maintain for themselves the highest paying jobs available. Minority groups are excluded from the best paying sectors of the labour force through racial or ethnic discrimination. Thus it is the dominant ethnic group of workers who are considered to perpetuate ethnic divisions (Bonacich 1980: 14, Yinger 1986: 35). However, capitalists still reap some benefits, insofar as there exists a reserve labour force that can be put into service inexpensively as needed. The reserve labour force can also be used to undermine the demands for better wages and working conditions of the dominant ethnic workers.

Both approaches take class struggle as the *de facto* context and the source of racial or ethnic tensions. That ethnic tensions can segment a labour force to the benefit of the bourgeoisie and detriment of all workers may be an accurate portrayal of how ethnicity functions in the labour market, but there are several topics related to ethnicity that these theories do not explain or address. Most problematically, these theories reduce ethnic differences to being epiphenomena of class, without explaining how the economic situation produces the cultural differences upon which ethnic identity are based. Moreover, the

focus on economics as the determinant of ethnicity removes ethnicity from the bigger picture of social structural, political and cultural issues of the social formation. Finally a the reductionist Marxist analysis does not explain why members of oppressed ethnic groups who are not differentiated by phenotype seek to maintain their cultural identity through deliberately created symbolic means.

So far, the neo-Marxist position on the issues ethnicity within the larger social context has been examined. The theory does not address the internal workings of the ethnic group, but what follows is an attempt to use the general schema to develop an approach to this process.

Early research in my study uncovered the extensive involvement of Western Icelanders in the construction industry and real estate business. A concentration of members of an ethnic group in particular economic activities is well documented in anthropological and sociological literature. There are three main models of the social structures associated with such enterprises in North America. The first is referred to as an ethnic market. This type of business is generally found in the ethnic community itself, catering to the ethnic group's cultural needs that are neglected by mainstream business. The economic activity is usually limited in scale, requiring little capital or labour. Typically, the ethnic market is formed by a geographic pocket of co-located retail outlets, restaurants and other services. A 'Chinatown' is paradigmatic of the ethnic marketplace.

A second model of ethnic business is the middle man minority enterprise. In this model, immigrants again operate retail outlets or other small businesses, often within an economic niche, but catering to the general population. This typically occurs when a certain commercial area is inadequately supplied by society in general. The businesses are not co-located, but may be family run or staffed by co-ethnics, and are thus insular in operation but not in customer base. The Chinese run laundry services of the past, and the current tendency for southeast Asian immigrants to operate small convenience stores are examples of middle man minorities.

The third model has been delineated by sociologists only recently, but it is the model that best suits the Western Icelandic involvement with the building industry. This model is referred to as an ethnic enclave enterprise. This type of activity tends to centre around the sourcing of raw materials, production, distribution and sale of a limited set of commodities or services. The ethnic group need not be the only supplier of such goods and services, but it nevertheless has carved out its own space among competitors within the larger community. The enclave enterprise involves large numbers of ethnic group members, interconnected in a variety of positions, including contradictory class positions, in relation to the means of production. It employs people with varying degrees of acculturation. The least acculturated usually take on the most menial tasks, those better acculturated, educated and connected to the dominant society tend to hold the highest positions in the

system of production. The social structure of the ethnic economic enclave thus unites ethnic group members, while assigning them various socio-economic positions. This can help maintain ethnic group cohesion.

There are benefits and detriments to the ethnic economic enclave. It supplies new immigrants with a means of making a living when they lack the required cultural skills to join the mainstream labour force. However, it can effectively insulate these same workers from the mainstream, and the means to adapt to the wider society. The arrangement may also allow employers to hire newer or illegal immigrants at particularly low wages. But those in the lower classes in the hierarchy gain expertise, they may move up and expand the business, such that new immigrants are required to reproduce the labour force. While the relationships may be exploitive of individuals, it may help the ethnic companies attain a foothold in a marketplace to which they lack access due to their lack of or inability to acquire sufficient capital.

The ethnic group carves out for itself a vertical niche—or to be consistent, enclave—within the dominant society's mode of production. This 'verticality' refers to the ability of the enclave to own the means of production and distribution, that is, the tools, vehicles, and other required machinery, and source or supply for itself the necessary raw materials. Further, personnel, including managers, people with specialised skills and knowledge, and the labour force are drawn from within the ethnic group. So effectively, the ethnic

economic enclave creates economic stratification within the ethnic group that can be exploitive, thus weakening ethnic group cohesion. On the other hand, it gives employers a form of dominance, insofar as they can exclude some persons from employment. Ideological components to ethnicity come into play in the economic sector when employers demand certain behaviours from employees. These may be work related, but they may also be related to ethnic group ideals

But, finally, mode of production within the ethnic enclave need not exhibit identical characteristics in the social relations of production in the dominant society. For example, acquiring a job may depend almost exclusively on an individual's kin ties, especially if he or she is a new immigrant. Or, the production of goods may take the form of a 'cottage industry' where clothing is sewn by women in their homes. In this way the social relations of production are subject to controls within the ethnic group itself, and need to be examined in the actual, grounded terrain of practises. It is through the assertion of ethnic ideologies over the social relations of production that provide the ethnic group with a modicum of economic independence which, in turn, allows for increased distinction from the dominant culture.

### **3 Overview of Canadian and Winnipeg Development**

When the British colonies in North America became the Dominion of Canada with Confederation in 1867, the problem of interethnic relations was already firmly entrenched in the political and social structures. The problem obscured class differences in Central and Eastern Canada. After 1900, the multiplicity of ethnic groups in Western Canada was even greater than in the East. The Western immigrant working population arrived with different political ideologies, and soon challenged the hegemonic political discourse. This would thrust class onto centre stage in daily affairs, and local level political process.

At the time of Confederation, the new European-based ideology of 'nationhood' emphasised the need for cultural homogeneity—that is, linguistic, religious, historic and tradition based uniformity—to validate political unity and viability. The problem of uniting distinct European cultures in Britain's North American colonies had been in existence since 1763, when France ceded its colonies in what are now Quebec and New Brunswick (Acadia) to Britain. In 1867, Confederation amalgamated Nova Scotia, New Brunswick,

Upper and Lower Canada, and the Crown ceded all lands previously granted to the Hudson Bay Company to the Dominion Government. The 'postage stamp' province of Manitoba came into existence in 1870, and British Columbia joined the Dominion in 1871. While the myth of the two founding nations highlights the French and British settlements in Eastern Canada, there were still other distinct cultural groups existing within the British colonies at the time of Confederation. There were, of course, scores of indigenous peoples, the Métis and the so-called Half-breeds settled or working in the Hudson Bay Company controlled territories. And while the single largest group of settlers were from Ireland, they were of two different Christian denominations, Protestant and Catholic. The Catholic Irish boosted the total number of Catholics (the French and Métis were also Catholic) in the Dominion, further fragmenting the ethnic divisions. From the start, ethnic and religious differences were a fact in the Dominion of Canada that needed to be addressed if its populace was to work together to build a nation.

Nation building quickly became a cause for both the emerging private industry and Dominion Government. The Conservative Government, led by Prime Minister John A. MacDonald, proposed what has become known as the National Policy (NP) (Day 2000, Brodie and Jenson 1980). The singular aim of the NP was the economic development of the Dominion, and the strategy had several components. First, it called for a considerable increase in the tariffs on goods imported from the south, specifically the US. This



increased revenue was to supply the start up funds for development, and limit American competition in Canadian markets. Eastern Canada was to industrialise, and the goods it manufactured were to be sold in the west. Transcontinental railroads were to be built to facilitate the transportation of goods and new settlers to Western Canada. The railways were to be privately owned, with construction assisted by government subsidies. Profits would come from tariffs charged for the transportation of goods and passengers. The primary source of revenue for the Dominion was to be the export of prairie grown wheat to Great Britain and Europe. The last required ingredient was an influx of industrial labourers in the east, and farmers for the west.

The National Policy was well supported by different factions of the elite, including the Liberal opposition to the Conservative party. To the industrial bourgeoisie in central Canada, the National Policy offered protection from US competitors and a real plan for economic growth. Exports to Great Britain from the Maritimes was declining, and new markets were needed (Brodie and Jenson 1980: 23). For working people, the plan offered increased employment opportunities in industry and transportation (Brodie and Jenson 1980: 62). The National Policy not only united the vast territory it provided the impetus for the development of industrial capitalism. The ideology of nation building, shared by the two political parties, the bourgeoisie, civil society and subordinate classes, had become a uniting vision in the Dominion; a hegemonic moment.

As both federal parties and the voters were in agreement about the NP, the political parties needed another issue to differentiate themselves. The Liberal party found support in the Francophone populations of Quebec and New Brunswick through an alliance with the Catholic Church. The Conservatives also capitalised on culture and religious difference, focusing on voluntary associations and secret societies of Protestant denomination. Though churches, social reform and charitable institutions may have been headed by middle-class members of society, their membership extended down to the level of workers and farmers. Thus class differences were obscured by religious and cultural divisions in the first decades of politics in Central and Eastern Canada.

In spite of labour's support of industrial capitalism, as early as 1870 various craft based unions came together regionally. These were organised by the Noble Order of the Knights of Labour, which advocated industry based unionism. In 1892 the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada was formed in Toronto (Brodie and Jenson 1980: 28-31). It had close ties to the American Federation of Labour (AFL), which advocated craft-based unions, and in 1902, the TLC adopted this approach, expelling the Knights of Labour. The Trades and Labour Congress discouraged the labour movement as a whole from forming its own political party, focusing instead on aligning itself with the political party that best supported its demands (Brodie and Jenson 1980: 30). In Quebec, the Catholic Church worked in a similar fashion (Brodie and Jenson 1980: 61). As workers

gained the franchise, Conservatives and Liberals courted their votes as part of the political process.

In spite of the fact that the federal parties courted workers votes, however, the Dominion government did not act on behalf of workers during actual labour struggles. The state tended to leave negotiations to the affected local private and public bodies, as did the TLC. When the Dominion Government was called on for assistance it frequently used forms of dominance, including the proclamation of martial law, and the use of soldiers to protect employers, non-striking workers and strike breakers (Brodie and Jenson 1980: 59-68).

Thus the political elite and industrial bourgeoisie within the Central and Eastern Canada obtained what appears to be the willing consent of most levels of society for their economic vision, the National Policy. One factor that contributed to this was, in part, happenstance. Because of the need for the two political parties to develop distinctive platforms, and ethnic relations were a salient social issue, political discourse emphasised ethnicity, rather than presenting any challenge to the bourgeoisie vision. The Trades and Labour Congress was perhaps the more significant component in the hegemonic process among the subordinate classes, while the Dominion Government's real role towards workers was one of dominance.

While Central Canada underwent industrialisation, between 1867 and 1900 the settlement and development of Western Canada—its periphery—proceeded slowly. The first problem was to rid the land of indigenous peoples and Métis, who were not considered proper agriculturalists. This resulted in armed resistance which was quickly quelled. To attract new settlers, the Dominion Government enlisted the aid of private industry. The Canadian Pacific Railroad, in particular, simultaneously undertook to build a trans-Canada railway, and canvas Northern Europe and Great Britain for settlers. However, in the first two decades after Confederation, the majority of new immigrants emigrated to the US soon after their arrival. This was due primarily to the harsh climactic conditions of the Prairies, and the difficulties in cultivating the existing strains of wheat in that climate.

In 1896, the Liberal Government came to power. The new minister of immigration, Clifford Sifton, initiating dramatic change in the rate and ethnic make-up of immigration (Whittaker 1991: 7). Between 1901 and 1916, (immigration was curtailed in 1914 due to the first World War), the population on the prairies increased by more than 400 percent. Realising that the West needed more farmers than British population could supply, Sifton had turned to other European nations and regions. He focused on recruiting the “stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers had been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children” (in Whittaker 1991: 7). Further, he was skeptical of the appropriateness of certain classes of immigrants from Great

Britain, arguing in 1899 that Canada was interested in “none but agriculturalists, we do not recognise the (urban) labourers at all” (in Whittaker 1991: 7). European nations were reluctant to give up their peasants, as agriculturalists were the backbone of many economies. Eastern Europe and Russia, however, were willing to part with large numbers of persons belonging to certain religious sects, yet adherent to agricultural lifestyle—these included Doukabours, Mennonites and Hutterites. Canada accommodated these groups by offering large blocks of land for communal settlement.

Sifton encouraged private industry to continue its role in recruiting immigrant labour. Immigrants were recruited to fulfil the government’s agricultural plans, and to work for railway construction, raw resource extraction, and in factories. Private industry was less concerned about the class or region of origin of the immigrants sent into the hinterlands. Its workers needed no special skills, and often worked in gangs headed by a co-ethnic who had learned enough English to communicate with foremen and bosses. Moreover, industry often employed men as ‘guest-workers’, migrants who returned to their homeland after a certain period of time.

Isolated from the labour movement in central Canada, non-anglophone immigrant workers in the west worked in substandard conditions. “Canadians won’t work in mines. They are quite willing to boss the job, but they are not willing to do the rough work themselves. . . What we want is brawn and muscle, and we get it.” said a mining authority

(in Avery 1977: 17). Moreover, Eastern Europeans were “willing to make any sacrifice in order to obtain land for themselves and their children” (in Avery 1977: 16). The desperate condition in the homeland of some non-Anglophone immigrants and their lack of cultural skills in Canadian society was a considerable boon for capitalist industry. Not only were these immigrants ‘willing’ to work for lower wages, they would also work in deplorable conditions. Further, they competed on an ethnic basis for jobs, and once hired had considerable difficulty organising a singular union. As mining manager Edmund Kirby put it, “In all the lower grades of labour and especially in smelter labour it is necessary to have a mixture of races which includes a number of illiterates who are first class workers. They are the strength of the employer and the weakness of the union” (in Avery 1977: 18).

Western labourers were not only geographically remote from the labour organisation of Central Canada, the make up of the labour force was quite different. Workers were often unskilled, of varying cultural origin, isolated from an urban centre, and migratory. Even in Winnipeg, factory work did not need many craftsmen, and also employed a mix of ethnic groups.

Consequently, the organisation of workers in the West was different from the East in three major ways. The first was that as most workers were unskilled or semi-skilled, the emphasis on industry-based unionism was strongly supported by labour organisers.

Accordingly, the Western movement distanced itself from the central Trades and Labour Congress, and established the Trades and Labour Council (TLC). Secondly, while labour leaders were primarily British-born, they generally recognised the need for multi-ethnic organisations, as did union organisers from the United States. Organisers from the International Workers of the World (Wobblies or IWW) in particular began to communicate to longshoremen, miners, loggers, fishermen, harvesters, and construction workers verbally and literarily in the various ethnic languages (Brodie and Jenson 1980: 101). The third difference was that as Western workers had immigrated to Canada decades later than those in Central and Eastern Canada, and had come from Eastern Europe and Russia, they had been exposed to socialist ideals in the old countries. Recently arrived labourers and tradesmen from England and Scotland, who had also been exposed to political organisation based in socialist ideals and class critique, were not as opposed to political activism as their central Canadian counterparts. Western workers saw the value in political activism, and Russian, Ukrainian and Finnish workers, in particular, along with British workers and clergy, formed socialist political parties, such as the Independent Labour Party, the Socialist Party of Canada, and the Social Democratic Party. In the second decade of the twentieth century, labour politicians acquire seats on city council.

However, due to the small numbers of organised electoral wards in the West, and the power of the central political system and its labour movement, no national working

class party emerged that could play a role in federal politics. The two party political system whose electorates were based in ethnicity was successfully exported westward. Liberals continued to court the non-WASP vote, and one of its Acts would be particularly problematic for Western Canada. In 1897, the Liberals amended the Public Schools Act of Manitoba. Clause 258 of the amendment stated that “when 10 of the pupils in any school speak French, or any other language other than English as their native language, the teaching of such pupils shall be conducted in French, or other such language, and English upon the bilingual system” (Avery 1977: 4). With settlers being given communal land blocks, and directed to certain areas geographically by agents interacting with specific ethnic groups, schools were soon set up which taught German, Ukrainian, Polish as well as French. (Avery 1977: 5).

After 1910, however, the welcome once extended to a multi-ethnic immigrants was curtailed. When the depression of 1912–1914 hit industrial centres, employment was scarce, and unions called on the Dominion government to cease the pace of immigration. When the First World War began, immigrants from the Austro-Hungarian empire and Germany were deemed ‘enemy aliens’ and came under considerable scrutiny. In 1914, the War Measures Act required the registration of enemy aliens, in order that such persons could be compelled to take an oath of allegiance, or face internment, or even deportation. It further prohibited the gathering of three or more such persons in one place, the use of



an enemy alien language, and the printing of any materials in those languages. In 1916, Clause 258 of the Manitoba Schools Act was revoked. The Conservative government, in preparing for the election of 1917, declared the Wartime Elections Act. This Act disenfranchised any British subject naturalised after 1902 who had been born in an enemy country, or a country wherein the mother tongue was that of an enemy country, until the end of the war (Brodie and Jenson 1980: 93). Because of the Bolshevik revolution, and the Red Scare throughout the US and Canada, in 1918 the classification of enemy aliens was expanded to include Ukrainians, Russians and Finns—groups known to support socialist ideologies. These groups were also restricted from gathering together, and from public communications in their mother tongue (Avery 1977: 22). Even in factories and raw resource extraction employers increasingly favoured English speaking workers, and considerable pressure was put on the federal government to begin mass deportation of enemy aliens. This nativistic climate remained beyond the end of the war, and into the next decade.

Nevertheless, the restrictions placed on non-British socialists and labour organisers did not silence radical labour activism. Like immigrants from eastern Europe, newly immigrated British skilled tradesmen had brought with them the ideals of the European international socialist movements. The British labour movement, informed by Marxist thought, considered those who did not own the means of production to be of one class.

Thus, in their view, the proletariat included white collar workers, women, children and members of most European ethnic groups (Masters 1950: 3). As noted, the strategy of the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council was that of industrial unionisation, and the more radical labour leaders further envisioned the uniting of all industry-based unions in the One Big Union (OBU).

### **3.1 The Rise of Winnipeg**

In keeping with the economic scheme that was the National Policy, “Winnipeg was established by businessmen, for business purposes, and businessmen were its first and natural leaders” (Artibise 1977: 86). Progress and development moved quickly, for reasons noted by Curtis E. William in the *Chicago Record Herald*, 1911:

All roads lead to Winnipeg. It is the focal point of the three transcontinental lines of Canada, and nobody [...] can pass from one part of Canada to another without going through Winnipeg. It is a gateway through which all commerce of the east and west, and the north and south must flow. No city, in America at least, has such absolute and complete command over the wholesale trade of so vast an area (in Artibise 1977: 23).

Although Winnipeg did not developed as rapidly as Central and Eastern Canada at first, from 1896 to 1914, its progress was meteoric. Economic growth was tied directly to immigration to the city, and more importantly immigration through the city to points further west. As envisioned two decades earlier, new settlers provided the market for

goods from the East, and the grain and natural resources for export. The primary economic functions in the first few decades in Winnipeg's history were the wholesale and retail trades in farm implements and household goods, and the shipment of grain and natural resources to central and eastern Canada and Europe. The rapid growth on the prairies brought manufacturing to Winnipeg. Of importance were the garment trades, employing many women, and foundries and railway repair shops.

Because Winnipeg was a temporary stopping point for some homesteaders, and a seasonal home for migrant workers, population statistics vary widely. The total City of Winnipeg population as estimated by the Henderson Directory for 1900 is 54,778 persons. The City Assessment Office put the number at 42,534 for 1900, and 44,778 for 1901. The Federal census figures for 1901 were 42,340. According to Federal Census figures, the population of Winnipeg increased 385% between 1901 and 1916<sup>6</sup>, to 163,000; the City Assessment Office figures put this increase at 472%, to 211,357 persons for the same time period. In 1921, the Federal Census recorded 179,087 residents.

Old-moneyed bourgeoisie tended to remain in central Canada and England, directing the building of the railroads and resource production from the centre of the Empire. The men and their families who moved to the periphery, and especially Winnipeg, were not a class of landed aristocracy and old money. They were rather of humble origin and little

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<sup>6</sup>this date is chosen because immigration was slowed due to the First World War

formal education, who had reached the pinnacles of commercial success on the frontier (Artibise 1977: 88). Bercuson describes them as nouveau riches, “not yet mellowed by the passage of time” (1990: 191). With no aristocracy to govern the new province, these new businessmen formed the City Council. In the first 45 years of Winnipeg’s history, 85 percent of seats were held by businessmen and financiers, 10 percent by professionals (doctors, lawyers and engineers) and 5 percent by artisans and working men (Artibise 1977: 88). Not only were the capitalists the politicians, they made up the Winnipeg Board of Trade, the Real Estate Exchange, the Winnipeg Development and Industrial Bureau and other commercial boards. Socially, they and their families frequented the same set of exclusive clubs, attended and sponsored artistic events and played in the same sporting leagues. No mention is made by historians of activities in the realms of charity, religious work or social reform. The elite were self-made men, whose social status and political power was derived almost exclusively from financial success, the greater the wealth; the greater the power (Artibise 1977: 88)

The pursuit of profits by the moneyed elite to the exclusion of other trappings of Empire, such as a clean and modern city, would have dire ramifications for the populace of Winnipeg. It affected urban geography, the development of basic amenities in the city, social organisation, the rights of workers, and even the health of its occupants. Its early economic progress earned Winnipeg the title “Chicago of the North”. Its elite’s focus on

commercial growth and the development of an ostentatious veneer at the expense of the urban infrastructure earned the disease of typhoid the moniker, “Red River Fever”.

### **3.2 Economics**

The settlement of the West by Europeans required, of course, the construction of European material infrastructure, and Winnipeg was the centre of the wholesale and retail trade which serviced that development. In addition, it became home to several ironworks, railway repair shops, garment factories, and mills; industries which served the building of ‘civilisation’. The construction of buildings for businesses, warehouses, repair shops, churches and homes was necessitated by this growth. As the construction industry and real estate business are the main businesses examined in this study, this discussion will primarily focus on these areas.

The building industry within Winnipeg at times barely kept up with the needs of the growing population. Construction, carried out by hand, without the aid of heavy machinery, needed enormous numbers of labourers. Severe winters usually restricted the building season to the months of May to November, although in boom years, construction continued year round (Bellan 1958: 290).

In the first twenty years of the twentieth century, growth of the city was irregular. The years 1896–1906 were years of rapid expansion, followed by financial stringency in 1907–

08 (Bellan 1958: 166-168). An influx of capital for the construction of both railroads and buildings reached city businessmen in another boom between 1909-1912. The war years, 1914-1918, had mixed results for the economy of Winnipeg. While building and railroad construction slowed, railway shops were converted to munitions factories. As the price of grain soared, the retail and wholesale trades prospered as farmers purchased new clothing, better equipment and furnishings. But the postwar recession ensured that the glory years of the early teens would not be repeated. However, a more detailed look at the economic trends in this time period reveals that not all strata of society fared equally.

The years 1909-1912 boom years, fourteen banks located or relocated their headquarters to Winnipeg (Bellan 1958: 201). Bellan considers 1912 to be the apogee of Winnipeg's power and influence in the West (Bellan 1958: 226). In that year, the value of production in the manufacturing sector reached almost \$50,000,000.00 (Artibise 1977: 36) The total cost of building permits issued reached a height of \$20,563,750.00, an amount not matched again until after 1940. That year 71 apartment buildings, 68 industrial buildings, 17 warehouses and 15 movie houses were built (Bellan 1958: 206), in addition to over 5200 dwellings and outbuildings. In spite of this activity, there remained a housing shortage in the city, especially among non-British immigrants. Many new houses were used as boarding houses; overcrowding, especially in the North End, was endemic.

The winter of 1912-13 saw the beginning of a world recession and economic stringency. This seriously affected the ability of builders of large scale projects to secure capital from Great Britain, and new construction was curtailed. Projects like the new Hudson Bay Company store, the new City Hall, and an agricultural implements plant were put off indefinitely (Bellan 1958: 248). However, where the costs of building in 1912, totalled \$20,563,750.00 on over 5200 buildings, in 1913 the total costs had only dropped to \$18,503,350.00 on over 4800 buildings, or by approximately 10%. In 1914, the value of building permits was still high, at \$12,160,950.00—higher than it would be until after 1940.

However, a detailed survey of building permits shows that while a few large-scale projects were curtailed, the building of residences and smaller establishments was not. This suggests that, out in the Dominion's periphery, many small and locally financed builders were not immediately and directly affected by world financial trends. By 1915, however, all levels of construction had been affected due to the outbreak of war in August 1914, and building permits for that year totalled only \$1,826,300.00. Housing was no longer a primary concern as the numbers of men away to war seems to have left homes standing vacant (Bellan 1958: 272).

The return of soldiers in 1918-1919 created a housing shortage, but building costs in 1920 were 108% higher than in 1914 (*Free Press*, May 20, 1920). Small scale private

builders and financiers shied away from investing in projects as they had done in boom years because of inflation and the post-war depression. Large scale projects such as Eaton's nine story mail-order building and the Metropolitan and Odeon movie houses went ahead. To ameliorate a near crisis situation in housing—the traditional realm of the small scale construction companies—the federal and provincial governments advanced funds to those intending to build residences.

The Icelandic builders were primarily involved in residential construction. Most entered the boom slowly, and but were able to hang on for two years longer than the large companies. This suggests that the Icelandic economic enclave functioned independently of the economic and financial bourgeoisie.

### **3.3 Class**

The delineation of class in Winnipeg society is clear enough in theory. The elite fit into common category of bourgeoisie or capitalist class insofar as they owned or controlled money capital, the physical capital (such as warehouses and factories) and labour. The multitude of workers were alienated from money capital, physical capital and sold their labour for wages, and worked in manual and industrial positions. Vestiges of a traditional petty bourgeoisie—that is artisans, shopkeepers and independent professionals—existed, alongside newer 'middle class' workers, including technicians, and more import-



antly white collar workers in the business and financial institutions drawn to Winnipeg's burgeoning economy.

As this classificatory system adheres to a strict Marxist reading, it was promoted by most Western Canadian labour leaders, and was used to unite workers throughout the city during the General Strike. Because the labour movement philosophy was Marx-based, the elite could easily equate the labour activities to the communist movements in eastern Europe.

However, the delineation of the real population of Winnipeg into classes is somewhat more complicated. First, the dominant cultural ideology assigned the various ethnic groups a social ranking, to be discussed in more detail shortly. Thus status groups within the working class, such as skilled tradesmen and unskilled labourers were further fragmented by ethnicity. Second, the working class was fragmented by gender. As men were considered family breadwinners, and women only part-time contributors to the family income, women's wages were much less than men's. In the garment industry in particular, women supplanted men as a cheaper source of labour. Third, as the economy was shifting from mercantile capitalism to industrial capitalism throughout Canada, who filled what class position was in flux. The positions of artisans, and craftsmen and women were being downgraded from that of self-employed producer (petty bourgeoisie) to wage labourer (proletariat). Conversely, the number of white collared and salaried workers was grow-

ing. As these workers neither produced a commodity nor controlled capital or labour, their class position was somewhat anomalous, but has often been denoted as 'middle class'.

Anecdotal evidence suggest that at least within the Icelandic economic enclave, two other anomalous class positions (cf. Wright 1980) were in existence. One is the contract labourer. In the Icelandic building industries, such men owned their own physical capital, such as a horse, cart, shovels and picks, but controlled no other labourers, and did not have the capital to invest in a project. These can be considered semiautonomous employees. The other is the small employer who has enough capital to invest in venture, but not all the physical capital, and employs some labour power. Unlike capitalists, the small employer must work alongside his workers for economic reasons—that is, he does not generate sufficient capital to free himself from the labour force. His workers may be contract labourers, and/or own their own extensive array of tools, as did carpenters of the day. Further, because they owned private capital, the workers of small employers may have made the small employment venture viable, and would be less expendable than unskilled factory labourers to the capitalist. Needless to say, contract labourers and small employers had little to gain from strikes.

However, within the Icelandic community, in spite of the economic enclavic relations of some men, the elite or distinguished Icelanders were not connected to the rest of the community exclusively through the social relations of production. As the dissertation will

demonstrate, those who were considered the most distinguished persons included clergy, newspaper editors, and housewives, as well as building contractors and small business owners, many of whom were small employers. Few men and their families could be considered to be of the capitalist class. Those people who occupied clearly distinguishable class positions worked for British-Canadian employers, such as the garment factories. The West End community itself would be eventually defined, in the context of the civic election, as 'middle class'.

The following breakdown of occupations is drawn from Artibise (1977: 102) categories, with data from 1911 gathered by me. The large discrepancy in the category 'other' is due to the lack of the category "domestic workers" in the 1921 census.

### **3.4 Urban Geography**

For the sake of clarity, the electoral ward system will be used to denote areas of the city. The southern portions of the city along the Assiniboine River inhabited by the elite is Ward 1. The oldest central section, just west of the Red River and north of the Assiniboine, became the 'downtown' and business district, Ward 2. Further west became the West End (Ward 3). Successive wards were numbered to the north: Ward 4 being north of Notre Dame Ave up to the industrial area south of the CPR yard, Ward 5 included the industrial area, the rail-yard, and heart of the North End, and Ward 6

Table 3.1: Percentage of Labour Force by Industry in Winnipeg

Industry	1911	1921
Primary: (agriculture, forestry fishing, trapping and mining)	0.9	1.7
Manufacturing	17.6	16.9
Construction	17.6	7.3
Transportation and Communications	13.7	15.8
Trade	25	21.7
Finance, real estate	n/a	6
Community, business	5.2	20.6
Government employees	5.2	4.8
Other	19.5	5.2

was again north of this, and primarily settled by late arriving skilled labourers from Great Britain. Before 1910 most Icelanders resided in Wards 4 and 5 south of the rail yards, gradually moving into Ward 3 (see figure 3.1).

When the first transcontinental railway, the CPR, came through Winnipeg in 1885, it cut directly through the centre of the city from east to west. In the heart of the city, “the longest railway yard in the world” (Artibise 1975; photo-plates) was constructed consisting of extensive stockyards and staging areas approximately one kilometre wide and seven kilometres long. The benefits to this were easy access to existing wholesale establishments and grain storage sites. The ease with which spur tracks off the main CPR track could be built to connect businesses to the shunting yards brought light industry and manufacturing to the downtown. The CNR acquired a right of way along the Red River, and set up a shunting and repair shop at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. The CPR depot for travellers was just off Main Street; the CNR depot about a mile south on Main Street itself.

The placement of these railways immediately created several problems. First, they, and the warehouses and industry they served, were built through existing residential neighbourhoods. Second, as the CPR and CNR brought immigrants and more specifically, migrant workers to the city, Main Street became filled with hotels, taverns and shooting

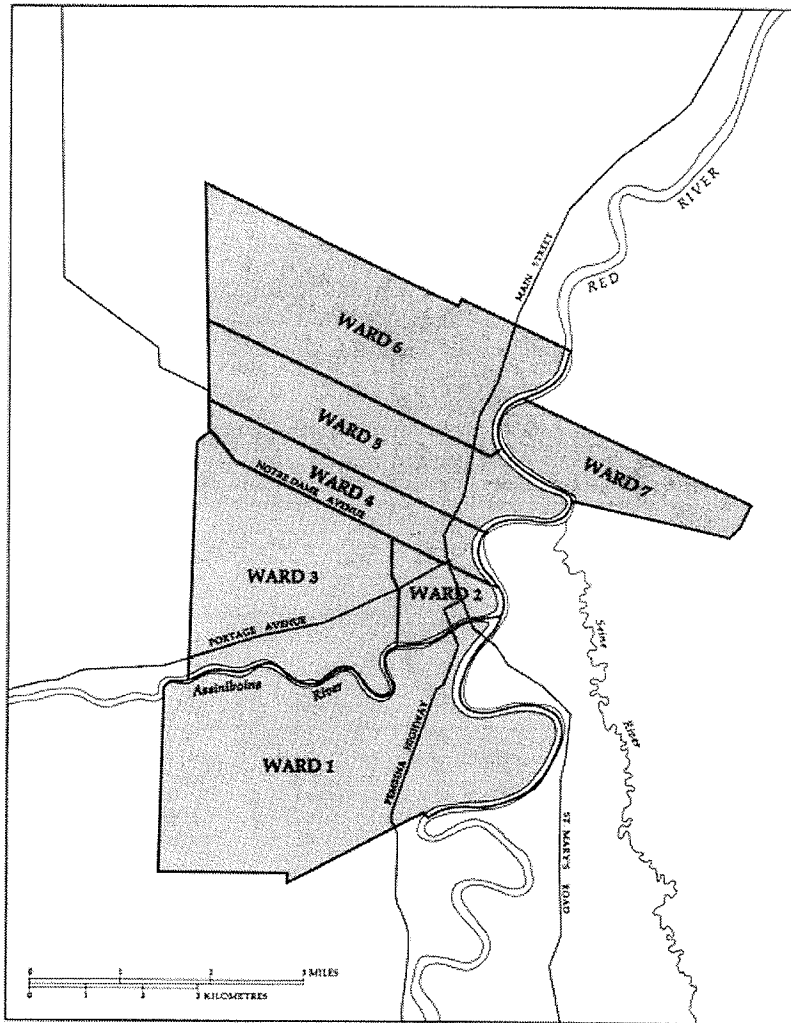


Figure 3.1: Winnipeg Wards: 1910

galleries, and peopled by “pickpockets, pool sharks, prostitutes, (and) confidence men” (Artibise 1975: 154).

Third, the CPR shunting yards cut off the North End from the original downtown area, and the western and southern portions of the city. Sewage and water mains were first built to supply the wealthy, and the downtown businesses. Ward 3 benefited from this as the mains were easily extended into that area. But the CPR rail-yard presented a logistical obstacle for the connection of sewage and water mains into the North End. It also prevented roads and streetcars from connecting the North End to the rest of the city.

### **3.5 Infrastructural Development**

The development of urban infrastructure is, according to most Euro-American standards, the responsibility of city government. City councillors in Winnipeg were involved in the development of the city’s infrastructure, but frequently followed the advice of the Winnipeg Development and Industrial Bureau. Winnipeg’s urban geography served manufacturing and the wholesale trades well. At the same time, it complicated the development of amenities in some areas of the city. The lack of political will to address these problems heightened the already wide gulf between the lifestyles of the rich and poor.

The City was slow to deal with the problems of sewage and animal waste disposal. The first sewage systems emptied waste directly into the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, but

as late as 1895 “even middle-class families lacked plumbing in their homes” (Bellan 1958: 101). “Box-closets” and outdoor pit-toilets were still common, serviced by the ‘honey waggon’ or simply emptied into a ditch, right into the 1910s. The seepage of sewage into the ground water was a major concern to health officials (Artibise 1975: 225–229). Added to the human waste was animal manure; as late as 1909 the City health department calculated that there were 6,000 horses and 1,000 cows within city limits (Artibise 1975: 354). Icelandic writer Laura Goodman Salverson notes that those who kept livestock were lauded for their thrift (Salverson 1939: 49).

The city water supply was a first handled by a private company, which pumped water directly from the rivers to the residential areas along the Assiniboine River, and the downtown industries. Problematically, this allowed raw sewage to get into the water supply. When the city took control, it dug artesian wells. However the population had expanded so rapidly that the system provided less water than the first. When water was needed to fight fires, it was pumped into the mains from the older system, so fires were frequently followed by outbreaks of typhoid (Artibise 1975: 215–216). In 1914, plans for the the Shoal Lake Aqueduct were approved and in 1919 the city finally received an adequate supply of clean water.

In 1880, the city’s power supply was produced by steam plants using coal shipped from Pennsylvania—at exorbitant cost (Artibise 1975: 89). The possibility of using the



rivers as a source of hydroelectricity was raised by city engineer H. N. Ruttan as early as 1887. Objections were raised by the city business elite to the effect that the city was too inefficient in its workings to succeed in any proposed plan, and furthermore was already in debt and did not have the capital to invest in such a low-return enterprise. In 1906, by-laws were passed that allowed the city to go into debt in order to establish a publicly owned hydroelectric facility, but no further actions were taken (Artibise 1975: 96). In 1908, Arni Eggertson, an Icelander, was elected to city council, and made it his mission to establish a publicly owned hydroelectric dam and city wide electrical system. In 1909, he turned the first soil on the Point du Bois dam on the Pinawa River. The power plant began operations in 1911, turned a profit and provided the lowest domestic electricity rates in North America (Bellan 1958: 210).

Artibise (1975) argues, that given the amount of wealth in circulation in Winnipeg between 1880 and 1914, the delayed development of a modern infrastructure was due to political machinations and private concerns for profits. He demonstrates that the city council generally left the development of basic amenities to the efforts of private business, and, inexplicably, simply did not act to ameliorate the material conditions of the city. Not all areas were affected equally, due in part to the wealth and social affiliations of their residents.

Evidence of harm that the city's elite neglect inflicted on urban dwellers can be found in its endemic diseases and high infant mortality rate. Slum areas are not an uncommon urban phenomena, especially as regions industrialise. To put Winnipeg's historic situation in perspective, its infant mortality rate may be compared with recent statistics. According to World Health Organisation statistics, the infant mortality rate in Ethiopia between 1980-84, (during the well-publicised famine) was 143.4 per 1000 live births. In the same time period, the rates in Brazil and Mexico were 72.4 and 52.1 respectively. Canada and the US were at 10.4 and 12.1.

Between 1908 and 1914—the height of Winnipeg's economic reign—infant mortality rates range between 125.9 and 199.5 per 1000 live births (Artibise 1975: 237). The rates varied considerably between Wards. Ward 4 was consistently one of the worst areas; in 1913, the infant mortality rate was 211.5 per 1000, In Wards 1 and 3, the infant mortality rates were 79.3 and 112.5 respectively. The deaths of children were the result of rapid contagion of measles, chicken-pox, scarlet fever, and whooping cough brought on through overcrowding and malnutrition. In the general population, the water / sewage issues contributed to rampant cholera and more particularly, typhoid. Winnipeg's incredibly high rate of typhoid earned the disease the name of Red River Fever (Artibise 1975: 231). Studies of major cities in Europe and North America consistently found Winnipeg to have the highest typhoid death rates for the first five years of the twentieth century

(Artibise 1975: 231). Ward 5, and the northern portion of Ward 4 were the worst regions in the city for typhoid fever.

Winnipeg was perhaps one of the most successful enterprises associated with the National Policy, focusing as the NP did on economic development, industrial capitalism and the acquisition of wealth. Immigrants and other workers were cogs in the wheels of NP progress. Benefits did not accrue to Eastern European, Russians, German and Jewish urban immigrants, or even British workers. While the North End may have been an ethnic enclave providing a cultural safety net for newcomers, it proved detrimental to its residents' health and well-being. To be labelled foreign, and subject to discriminatory hiring practises and wages was certainly dangerous.

### **3.6 The Labour Movement in Winnipeg**

The tightly knit elite . . . refused to concede anything to labour because they refused to recognise that industrial workers or trade unions were entitled to any special considerations in the plants or halls of governments. They saw labour as a resource, a commodity, and had no intention of relinquishing any of their power in the community to it (Bercuson 1990:190).

There were two areas in which unionisation was particularly large and strong, because the workers were newer immigrants from Great Britain. Both employed skilled tradesmen, who had been union members in the old country, and imported the union system to Canada. These two general industries were the railroad and the construction industries.

There leaders tended to squabble amongst themselves, but nevertheless worked together in the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council.

Until 1914 the demands of the labour movement in Winnipeg were quite conservative. These included increases in wages, the reduction of working hours, compulsory education and the nationalisation of railways, among other interests. Still, no less than 60 strikes were held by various unions in the decade leading up to the General Strike (Sutcliffe 1972: Appendix A). The building industries had been the most successful, and generally had better wages and shorter hours. Nevertheless, even the best paid trades did not earning a 'living wage' in the 1910s (Woodsworth 1912, Sutcliffe 1972).

Woodsworth (1912) surveyed the income of several occupations, those in the building industry will be discussed here, as they pertain directly to the occupational structure in the Icelandic community. Though there was no minimum wage scale, there was a system of recommended wages, but no means to compel employers to adhere to them. These ranged from 25 and 27.5 cents an hour for excavators and builders' labourers to 70 cents per hour for masons. The recommended wage for painters and carpenters was 40 and 55 cents per hour, respectively. The hours worked per week ranged from 48 to 60, with the lower paid workers working the most hours.

After stating the wage range, Woodsworth immediately notes that many receive wages much below the fair wage schedule. Sutcliffe's statistical analysis found that in 1912, wages were as found in table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Building Industry Wages in Winnipeg 1912

labourers	27.5 cents/hour	60 hours/week
painters	40 cents/hour	53 hours/week
carpenters	47.5 cents/hour	50 hours/week
masons	65 cents/hour	44 hours/week

Full-time work was officially considered to amount to 300 days a year (or 50 weeks a year), thus bringing the working man between \$750.00 and \$1680.00. However, construction work was seasonal, so in reality few men worked more than 200 days a year (or 36 weeks). Using Sutcliffe's calculations, qualified by the number of hours worked, labourers, painters, carpenters and stonecutters made \$594.00; \$763.00; \$849.00 and \$1029.6 per year respectively.

This means that skilled tradesmen, although still earning less than a living wage were earning 60% more and working 25% fewer hours than unskilled labourers. According to union rolls, the majority of skilled tradesmen were British immigrants, and to become an apprentice in Great Britain a child needed to be literate in English, thus the chance of an

apprenticeship for a non-Anglophone was slim. Thus ethnicity did play a role in creating different categories of fortune in the labour force; and non-British ethnic groups were at a disadvantage.

In spite of the work of IWW and British unionists to bring together all workers regardless of ethnicity, the strongest unions were those consisting of British immigrants and British-Canadian tradesmen. This included tradesmen such as carpenters and lathers in the building industry, and boiler makers and tool and dye makers working for the railroads. Non-British-Canadians, that is, 'ethnic' men remained outside the main unions working for separate companies, such as the Vulcan Ironworks and Manitoba Bridge and Ironworks.

Yet the impetus for the Winnipeg General Strike was the right of ethnic workers in four ironworks to collective bargaining and a fair wage on par with British workers in the railway unions. At this point ethnicity was not, in theory, a divisive issue within the labour movement in Western Canada, in spite of nativism in other sectors of society.

Although less information is available on women's work, women and children were part of the labour force. They were paid less than men, based on the prevailing notion that a working man had a family to feed, but a woman merely contributed to the family income. Occupations outside the home for women included retail and wholesale clerks, office work, telephone operators, but also work in laundries and the garment

industry. Women tended to work less consistently than men, and as such, union organisation proved difficult. There were however, strikes in the garment industry before 1900, and retail workers organised unions off and on throughout the 1910s (Gutkin and Gutkin 1997). My census indicates that many women who were listed as dressmakers in the earlier years, and presumably worked in their own homes, were later working as 'operators', referring to sewing machine operators in noted sweatshops—factories such as Great Western Garments on the northern fringe of the West End. This is a classic situation of industrialism undermining petty bourgeoisie production.

Children as young as 12 and younger worked in a number of ways, but especially as delivery boys for newspapers, pharmacies and groceries. Grocery deliveries in particular were often made between 2:00 AM and 6:00 AM to restaurants. Setting up bowling pins, sweeping out theatres and other public establishments, in the latter two cases often after closing time, were other frequently mentioned tasks. Many girls worked as servants. Still other children worked in factories, in a variety of tasks that included sewing and wrapping candies and toys. And of course, many worked on the streets selling newspapers and shining shoes. Apprenticeships could be acquired for boys who had some education, and this brought the child under more strict guidelines for fair treatment. There is little information about how children participated in the labour movement, in part because their labour was on a casual basis.

The First World War variously affected workers. More work became available for women in retail and clerical jobs. Those ethnics considered 'enemy aliens' could not enlist in the army, and filled the gap left by volunteer and conscripted soldiers. But living conditions for workers deteriorated. The price of goods rose significantly, and wages did not, real wages declined sharply throughout the war (Sutcliffe 1972). When soldiers returned in 1918–1919, considerable rancour was raised over the lack of employment, and the fact that enemy aliens had taken over the jobs soldiers had held before the war. Low wages, few jobs, and jobs usurped by the 'enemy alien' would all be issues of contention in the Winnipeg General Strike.

### **3.7 Ethnic Groups**

While the Dominion government and private industry shipped human beings out to labour in the hinterland, the (supposed) necessity of racial and cultural homogeneity within the nation seems to have been forgotten. The Winnipeg population was still a mixture of European 'races', of which approximately one-third were not British or French (see table 3.3).

The arrival timings of each group vary somewhat. British and French populations began arriving before the 1870s. Icelanders, classified in the above chart with Scandinavians, began arriving in 1875, and after 1905 nearly ceased immigration altogether. Between



Table 3.3: Ethnic Population Breakdown: Winnipeg 1901–1921

	1901	1911	1916	1921
Asian	0.3	0.4	0.455	0.5
British	71.2	62.3	67	67.4
French	6.5	4.3	3.9	4
German	5.2	6.6	3.5	6.2
Italian	0.3	0.6	0.8	0.7
Jewish	2.6	6.6	8.2	6.5
Netherlands	na	0.4	0.5	0.9
Polish/Russian	1.5	4.6	4.4	4.6
Scandinavian	7.5	3.6	3.6	3.3
Ukrainian	na	0.7	5.3	3.1
Others	4.8	7.6	0.8	1.9

1896 and 1908, most non-British immigrants arrived en masse, as did new waves of British tradesmen. Sifton's successor put a greater emphasis on attracting British immigrants after 1908.

Immigrants from different regions and nations of Europe were, in fact, quite different from one another in the time of mass immigration. They spoke different languages, held different religious beliefs (though most were of some brand of Christianity), had widely varying subsistence methods, technical skills, literacy, and other customs and habits. It is of course the case that all of these differences are social constructed and / or learned and could in theory be subject to change over time—and over generations. But in the first decades of this century, these cultural differences provided real social boundaries and barriers to social integration.

Moreover, people from different regions did not necessarily class themselves by the same terminology as the Canadian state. For example, many Jews were arriving from Eastern Europe, but they were not considered Eastern European. Many were conversant in Ukrainian, Russian, Hungarian or Polish, and could thus do business in the North End. And, it seems that Russians, Ukrainians and Finns got on well politically. Of importance to this study is the fact that people from Iceland were nationally Danish, but because of the struggle in Iceland towards independence, identified themselves as Icelandic. While other Scandinavians came together as a single cooperative group, Icelanders strove to develop

a distinct identity. This is reflected in the Winnipeg *Free Press* and J. S. Woodsworth *Strangers Within Our Gates* (1911).

Neither the Dominion Government or Winnipeg political elite and bourgeoisie took much interest in the conditions that resulted from mass immigration. It was left to British-Canadian social activists, charity workers, church ministers, and teachers (rather than the school system itself) and ethnic community leaders, clerics and educators to organise and ameliorate the social conditions that resulted.

### **3.8 Ideologies of ‘Race’**

In Winnipeg between 1910 and 1920 the then current ideology postulated that people who spoke different languages and were from different regions were of different ‘races’. This set of beliefs was informed by the social science of the day, specifically racial determinism and Herodotan ethnographic thinking. A ‘race’ was conceived of as a collective of people with nearly immutable characteristics, that had evolved over millennia of adaptation to a particular geographic area. ‘Race’ could be determined from skin colour, as well as by the nation or region of ancestry. ‘Races’ were divided hierarchically; Whites being at the top, followed by Yellow, Black and Red (Day 2000: 8). White people from various areas of Europe were also considered to belong to different ‘races’ (Day 1999: 126–127).

There were two prevailing notions of how a harmonious citizenry befitting of a nation might be created. One proposal that the admixture of races would, through natural selection, bring out the best traits of the various nationalities (Day 2000: 149-153. *Free Press*, Nov. 12. 1916). This position was also articulated by Ralph Connor, who further indicated a need for state-run school system, with mandatory enrolment, in English only. The other, argued by Woodsworth (1909; see also Day 2000) was the sorting of peoples into specific categories, each with a propensity towards a general niche in the Canadian nation.

Advocates of both positions agreed that each 'race' should be educated to Canadian and Protestant values as best as possible. There was also agreement on the need keep undesirable elements out of Canada. And in both cases, the aim was to establish a system that would best assist and utilise the various immigrants, in order to develop a harmonious citizenry from what was viewed as groups of people with fundamental human differences.

Social scientific books (Woodsworth 1909, 1911) and theses (Ivens 1909, McIvor 1908) written by Winnipeg authors during the time period of this study concentrated on ranking the incoming 'foreign races' in terms of their "distinctive physical, mental and social characteristics" (Woodsworth 1909: 217). This was also the gist of popular, public discourses. For example, a 1912-1913 series in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, entitled "Cosmopolitan Winnipeg" was designed to introduce the Anglo-Saxon reader to the various

'foreigners'. Its anonymous author is clearly working within the framework of racial determinism as applied to Europeans of various nationalities in the following argument

An immigrant is like new-born boy—potentially a force for good or evil. Whether kinetically (sic) it shall be good or ill depends much on what he brings with him (hereditary), but somewhat also on how he is received and developed (education and environment). Recent discoveries in biology show that in the long run heredity is far more important than environment and education, for though the latter may develop, it cannot create. There never was a great man who did not receive his greatness from some one who went before. Nature is on the side of virtue and good stock, and is bound to tell. "Blood will tell" has more science in it than we at one time knew. Witness the weak faces of certain of our immigrant people who have back of them a long history of degradation; and the strong faces of others who come from a noble and hard combine (sic) to form a people. By law of heredity the good and the bad of these crop out in the descendants. "No Bismark could grow in a Fagin's den" (*Free Press*, 7 December 1912).

The ranking of different immigrant groups was fairly consistent across sources. According to Woodsworth, the first are the British, specified as English, Irish, Welsh and Scots, although he points out the undesirability of the English newcomers relative to the other, as they are of the lower class of urban dwellers (Woodsworth 1909: 51). Woodsworth's typology continues from most to least desirable: Americans, Scandinavians (including a special note on Icelanders), Germans, French, Southeastern Europeans, Austro-Hungarians, Hebrews, Italians, Levantines, "Orientals" (including Hindus), and finally the Negro and "Indians" (First Nations) together.

The *Cosmopolitan Winnipeg* series ranked the Icelanders at the top because "they, like ourselves, are a mixed race of Irish and Norwegian" (*Free Press* Nov 12, 1912).

Scandinavians, considered to be a cultural group, that is an amalgam Norwegians, Swedes and Finns, were ranked next. Following this were Germans who were considered to take naturally to urban life, excelling as businessmen and professionals (*Free Press* Dec 7, 1912). Hebrews were noted as excellent scholars and voracious readers, if nevertheless suspect for religious reasons. Latin peoples (French, Italians, Spanish and Romanians), were noted for their “industry, thrift and willingness to do any kind of work (and yet are) contented and happy; pliable and easily influenced” (*Free Press* Jan 18, 1913). Italians in particular were not fit for farming, but do well in “the pick and shovel brigade” (Woodsworth 1911: 133-134). At the bottom, were Sifton’s “stalwart peasants”, Slavonic peoples (Eastern Europeans). It should be noted that Icelanders did not always hold their top-ranking position. The article argues that

No people came into Canada under greater difficulties; and none met more intense prejudice. . .

Arriving in Manitoba they were met with a prejudice equal to that shown toward orientals—minus the latent pity we all feel for the Chinaman. A labour delegate twelve years ago proposed to the government that a \$500 tax be placed on the Icelandic immigrant, when the Chinaman was entering the country at \$50 per head (*Free Press* 12 Nov. 1912).

It is curious that such attention would be paid to an ethnic group that comprised in 1911 less than 3.6% of the population.

Most of the various cultural groups themselves shared with Anglo-Canadians a belief in ‘racial’ distinctions. Many had either left behind a beloved nation, or were being

pushed out of a homeland by other cultural groups in the process of nationalisation. In either case, racial determinism gave tacit support to the existence of cultural differences. Popular writing, and the social scientific tracts gave foreigners a public forum to express their cultural difference. That is not to say that some groups were not denigrated for their 'peculiar' or 'extravagant' ways, only that the logical space existed for the expression of cultural differences. The organisation of social clubs, church congregations, parochial schools, self-help committees and newspapers developed and entrenched 'ethnicity'.

The social composition of early Winnipeg was like a jigsaw puzzle that had been bought by the Winnipeg bourgeoisie and Dominion government (the state) from Europe, and then handed it over to civil society to arrange into a pleasing picture. Unfortunately, no one had checked to see if the pieces were of the same puzzle, or if the picture might actually be pleasing. And when it was brought to the attention of the bourgeoisie that not enough table had been provided to build the puzzle, the bourgeoisie called in the state to cram the puzzle together at gunpoint.

## **4 The Ethnographic Literature on Icelanders and Western Icelanders**

### **4.1 Iceland in the Late 19th Century**

The bulk of emigration from Iceland to North America took place between 1870 and 1905. Previous to this time, Iceland had been victim to over a century of natural disasters, including volcanic eruptions, harsh weather, and epidemics affecting both humans and livestock. It had also been a colony of Denmark since 1397, and under its trade monopoly since 1605. Iceland in the 19th century was in a tributary mode of production with Denmark (Durrenburger 1996: 178), with an internal social organisation based around the farmstead and domestic group. With the environmental disasters of the 18th century, the population had declined from 50,358 in 1703 to 47,186 by 1800. By 1860, it had recovered to 66,987, but the land could not be considered to have re-acquired significant productive capacity.



The majority of farmers (including both the independent farmers and tenants) were extremely poor which meant that their economies were especially susceptible to catastrophes and “bad years”. It has been estimated that with the level of farming technology of the 1860s and 1870s, the agricultural production could not have sustained more than 50,000 people, provided that all arable lands were in use which seems to have been the case (Pétursson 1990: 20).

The main modes of production were transhumance, and fishing, but Denmark had “created the Icelandic class of (landowning) farmers with their own entrenched interests and power to defend them against fisheries” (Durrenberger 1996: 178). It was customary for the Church to sell available land at fair prices to young couples, and there was also a system of tenancy farming. Farms produced the wool, tallow and cheese desired by the Danes.

On the farm, the domestic group consisted of the landowning couple, their children, and often additional workers. Men tended to be responsible for outdoor work—tending to sheep, haying, and maintenance of the turf buildings. Women tended to be responsible for cows and dairy-related activities, food preparation and the carding and spinning of wool. Both men and women knit to produce clothing. The head couple organised labour but often spent as much time at labour as other household members.

Most of what was produced went to subsistence of the domestic group. The surplus items could be traded with Danish merchants only, exchanged for barley, rye, coffee, tobacco and the like. Until 1870, goods including fish could not be traded between

districts without going through Danish merchants (Rosenblad and Sigurdur Rosenblad 1993: 36) so there were no peasant markets. Even after changes to this law, markets did not emerge as farms were too isolated and there was too little specialisation in production.

On the farmstead, meal taking and sleeping arrangements showed little discrepancy in status. The entire domestic group ate at the same table, if there was one. The household members slept in the same room, the *badstofa*, although the bed area of the head couple might have doors or a divider forming a sort of private cupboard. The *badstofa* doubled as the indoor work area; the beds were placed end to end along the outside walls, with cupboards above or between bed for dishes and work tools.

Technologically, Iceland was not very advanced. Houses were of sod, with wooden roofs and floors, and sometimes of stone, as wood was scarce on the island. Wool was the main source of materials, knitted into socks, mittens, underwear, sweaters and shawls, or woven to form a dense fabric for coats, breeches and skirts. Shoes were moccasin-like, made from sheep skin. Ploughs were not used to till the land, and there was no system of irrigation or land drainage. Waggons and other wheeled vehicles were not in use, as there were few roads (Pétursson 1990: 21). Iceland itself owned no long distance seagoing vessels.

In 1860, 79.9 % of people were engaged in subsistence farming, 9.4 % in fishing, the other 10% in services, construction and commerce. By 1900, farming was in decline,

comprising 68.1%, and fishing had gain slightly to 11.7%. The faint beginnings of skilled trades and professional occupations were developing. The predominant trades were in woodworking, carpentry and related building trades.

The rise in fishing, trades and commerce posed a threat to the older social order. Under the 'traditional' system, by which Denmark had vested power in landowning farmers, there was a hierarchy of political power. Parish priests, often Icelanders who had studied in Copenhagen, were responsible to the Danish Church and government for collecting statistics on births, marriages and the like, but had other duties as well such as the sale of church lands. Most importantly the pastor was charged with overseeing the moral behaviour and education on the farmsteads. These included the responsibility of the head male to his workers to model 'Christian behaviour', carry out regular bible readings, ensure the education of all children in the domestic group, and the fair treatment of workers. The pastor also oversaw the respectful treatment of workers to the head of the household. The pastor was charged with punishing misconduct, through fines, jailing and corporal punishment, and could remove children from an 'un-Christian' home.

Sharing similar power and responsibility with the priest was a body of landowning farmers called the hreppr. The hreppr was a self-help organisation, but also responsible to the poor. It collected insurance moneys yearly from its members, who could draw on the fund in case of an accident on the farm. It was also the responsible for finding work

for workers born in the parish but had no placement on a farm, or tenant farmers who had been unable to pay rent. In other words, if someone in the a landowning farmer's parish was without means, the landowners were required by law to support that person by taking him or her into the household.

In spite of the hierarchy of political power, there was little possibility of any significant economic stratification—in fact many clergy and secular officials needed to work their own land “as peasants” (Pétursson 1990: 23). In addition, landownership was not a guarantee of status; it was not uncommon for smaller landowners to have to turn to their districts of origin to seek poor relief in bad years, along with tenant farmers and workers who were simply not needed in the last household.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, this became problematic. The existing laws required workers to contract for a full year to landowners. After 1850, with the rise in population (but no intensification in production methods) and the lack of available lands, the number of poor also increased. This was due to the fact that most landowners could not afford to feed and educate the growing families of their own workers, as they were required to do by law. In addition, poor relief proved to be a burden on landowners given the general material conditions of country.

In the latter half of the 19th century social restrictions were greatly relaxed. It seems that landowners could not support their contract workers and were no longer benefiting

from the contract labour system. In some districts, workers and the poor were sent to work for fishermen in winter months, rather than remain with the farmers to assist with the manufacture of tallow and woollen goods (Pétursson 1990: 20-21). It became common for workers to buy themselves out of contracts, and to be released from contracts ahead of time. When the law regarding contracts was repealed in 1894, it had long since ceased to be followed.

In the cultural realm, few visual arts, such as painting and sculpture were practised, primarily due to the paucity raw materials such as wood and pigments. Decorative wood-working and embroidery were more common. By far the most widely practised creative endeavours were literary. Iceland had achieved universal literacy in 1780, nearly one hundred years earlier than the rest of Europe, due to the church-based push towards home schooling supervised by the local pastors. During the evening work period or kvöldvaka the entire household gathered to work wool and perform other tasks, while one member read aloud from a wide variety of texts

The most popular books read aloud during the vaka were *Njála* (*Njáls Saga*), *Piltur and Stulka* (a contemporary novel), the Icelandic sagas, the sagas of the kings of Norway, folktales, and *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights*. Ballads (*rímur*) were also very popular, as were the poems of Thorlakur, Bjarni and Jonas, many of which were learned by heart. The sermons of Bishop Jón Víðalín and Mynster were considered good religious writings, and many knew the Passion Psalms from cover to cover as these were sung during lent. People enjoyed singing and good poetry, and many were quite proficient in these arts (in Gerard 1985: 10).

Not every farmstead would own all of the above books, and but books were frequently traded between farms and copied by hand. Toward the late 19th century, farmers founded literary and cultural societies, where newspapers and books from Iceland and abroad were readily available, read and discussed.

The political organisation in Iceland itself was far from statehood. It certainly did not have the state run schools, police force, national media and so on that Althusser would refer to as Ideological State Apparatus. It did however have a hierarchy of moral supervision, even if that system divested control into the jurisdiction of the parish priests and landowning farmers. But there was no aristocracy or monarch, no large scale commercial ventures, no universities or monasteries, no army, navy or guardsmen, not even a system of tartans that might represent the ancient clans –in short, little of national importance and that could be distilled into a national symbol. Its history over the previous five hundred years had no great battles or heroes that could be molded into a narrative behind which all Icelanders could unite.

And yet by the mid-nineteenth century, Iceland was in the process of becoming a nation. The movement can be traced to an earlier renaissance of poetry, literacy and efforts to construct a pure form of the *langue*. Influenced by German Romanticism, the New Golden Age of Literature (1750-1835) was inspired by two university students in Copenhagen, Bjarni Thoraresen and Rasmus Kristjan Rask, a Dane. Rask's interest was

spark by the popular belief that, for northern Europeans, the Icelandic language was a remnant of a glorious past. As such, the sagas were popularly considered to contain a purer form of the Germanic languages (Durrenberger 1996). The New Golden Age of Literature worked with the "purist" Icelandic, glorifying the landscape and its effects on the Icelandic soul in poetry.

It was the clergy, who were often Icelandic born and if not united through kin ties, had met at the university in Copenhagen, who disseminated the Romantic ideas of the landscape and the Icelandic soul, as well as the political ideas in the next century. Because the clergy served as the primary mechanism of the Danish state, such as it was in Iceland, they had strong, well-established systems of communication and the trade of written material. They set up reading societies in many districts to educate and involve adults, be they landowners, tenant farmers or workers, in the social movement. The reading societies were especially strong in the north east of Iceland, an area that was particularly affected by environmental problems, and from where the majority of immigrants to Canada would leave.

In the nineteenth century Iceland began to seek economic and political independence from Denmark, and especially the exploitive trade monopoly. In the process of Iceland's emancipation, landowning farmers began to lose their elevated social status, which had been bolstered by Danish political control, to fishermen, merchants and city dwellers in

Reykjavik. Meanwhile, the sagas were being elevated as the great history and art-form of Iceland. As the ancient settlers of Iceland had set up independent farmsteads, the hreppr and parish system, nineteenth century independent rural life could be symbolically located as a direct continuation of the ancient and glorious saga-times. This re-asserted the importance of the nineteenth century independent farmsteads. It was this 'traditional culture' that was used to give Iceland its political right to statehood.

One particular interpretation of the sagas served as the ideological foundation of Icelandic beliefs about their ideal social organisation, which Durrenberger identifies as the "democratisation of elite status" (Durrenberger 1996: 177). He writes

Because the nationalist and independence ideology conflated medieval and modern history to democratise elite status to maintain the doctrine of egalitarianism and superiority at the same time, every Icelander can see himself or herself as an aristocrat, a chieftain, a descendant of a Norwegian king (Durrenberger 1996; 176).

The medieval Icelandic Commonwealth, with its 'parliamentary system', the Alþingi, is popularly referred to as the first European democracy. The saga narratives focus on landholding farmers; goðar, the pagan priests and holders of political office are secondary but influential figures, and workers and slaves play minor roles. An egalitarian relationship can be drawn between the main characters of the sagas, and the main characters can be symbolically identified as the ancestors of all Icelanders. This was used to unite all Icelanders as an independent people, unjustly oppressed by the Danes. As opposed to



Danish society, Icelandic society was idealised as egalitarian—it helped that there was no state system which reified a highly stratified social structure, and what state bureaucracy there was was largely Danish. As the descendants of the original settlers and members of the Alþingi, it could be envisioned that Icelanders had in their blood the strength of will and the oratorical, intellectual and strategic capacity to defeat the Danish colonisers through political measures.

Independence for Iceland also meant establishing its own national administrative system. In the realm of politics, the leading figure was Jón Sigurdsson, who like Thorarensen, had had an opportunity for study in Copenhagen and had knowledge of the growing ideas about the politics of nationalism in Europe. The Alþingi was reestablished as an advisory body to the Danish crown in 1845. In 1874 it gained further rights in taxation and legislation. In 1904, the Danish government set up a Minister for Icelandic affairs who had his seat in Reykjavik and was responsible to the Alþingi. In 1918, Iceland signed an Act of Union with Denmark, and gained complete independence in 1945.

Thus the struggle was a long but peaceful one, and had economic, religious and literary connections. It promoted a cultural ideology which conflated the individual with the nation, and hence the importance of independence of the individual, egalitarianism, and as being of aristocratic lineage, nurtured over the centuries by the unique landscape of Iceland.

While some Icelanders sought to improve conditions in their homeland, others sought a better life elsewhere. Those who left brought with them the ideals that called for the rejuvenation of the Icelandic culture, and attempted to create a New Iceland in Canada. In considering the historic influences on the culture of Icelanders in Canada, or “Western Icelanders”, the culture of Iceland at the time of emigration, the ideologies that served the invention of the new nations history and modern Icelandic culture, and the experiences of Western Icelanders in New Iceland and in Winnipeg will be briefly reviewed.

## **4.2 The Sagas**

The sagas were written down in the 13th century, and consist of the oral history of the westward movement from Norway and settlements in the northern reaches of the British Isles, to Iceland. The stories themselves date from approximately 800 AD–1300 AD. They chronicle the Viking journeys, including those to Vinland, now recognised as L’Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, and the settlement of Greenland and Iceland, by tracing the heroic deeds in the lives of individuals, a lineage, or a region.

A central theme in almost all sagas is the blood-feud. Today it is debated that perhaps the sagas were cautionary tales, but for the time period of study the saga ancestors were considered adventurous, honourable, hardy, cheerful, intelligent and shrewd. A recurring

theme, and one that marks a man as a hero, though he may lose his life in battle, comes from strophe 76 in *Hávamal* in the *Poetic Edda*

Kinsmen die, cattle die  
the self must also die.  
but glory never dies  
for the one who is able to achieve it (trans. Larrington 1996: 24).

Strength of character is summarised in strophe 42:

Silent and thoughtful a prince's son should be  
and bold in fighting;  
cheerful and merry every man should be  
until he waits for death (trans. Larrington 1996: 16).

A further recurrent theme throughout the sagas is an emphasis on generosity, and the equality of all men in spite of material wealth or lack thereof. These and other themes are useful to explain Western Icelandic behaviour, and will be revisited throughout this dissertation.

Of course, the blood-feud could not become a guiding principle in 19th century Iceland, or in Canada. The sagas provide another model that is perhaps more useful. Soon after settlement of Iceland, the landowners devised a governmental system in which men and women were represented through the *godar*, or chieftain-priest, of their choosing. The *goðar* met annually in summer in an assembly known as the *Alþingi*. The *Alþingi* included a legislative assembly, and judicial body. The court system is best described as a court of mediation. Like the blood feud, retributive justice was the order of the day,

brought about through a system of fines and degrees of outlawry. Conciliatory measures, however, were the ultimate goal of the court cases. Men skilled at law represented parties to the conflict, organising negotiations or presenting cases to the *goðar* for judgement. These lawyers are considerable prestige in the sagas, and much attention is given over to their oratory and argumentative skills. In addition, the knowledge of the law and the logic of interpreting it are a major theme. This skill in and of itself made certain men, not necessarily *goðar*, the most prestigious and influential persons in a saga, if not in the actual community itself. This trait would be used as a model for Western Icelandic discourse.

It will become evident that themes in the sagas are reinterpreted by Western Icelanders and serve to guide their efforts to adapt to their new home. It is no accident that the land grant colony was called New Iceland, and that its districts were not named *sysla*, as in 19th century Iceland, but *byggjar*, the medieval term for districts. As Icelanders became urban dwellers, and influenced by British-Canadian culture and society, the sagas remained popular, and came to serve as inspiration for individual morality and behaviour.

### **4.3 Western Icelanders (*Vestmenn*) in New Iceland**

Iceland's struggle for independence informed the immigrant experience in no small way. The major waves of emigration began in 1873, and from the beginning Icelanders sought a colony where they could reassert their heritage. In 1873, the 30 or so Icelandic immig-

rants in Milwaukee held an Icelandic festival, at which a certain Reverend Jón Bjarnason preached “Rise up again, Icelandic people, and, with the power of Christianity, work at your rejuvenated tasks of destiny. Be once more a light, though a small one, among the nations, a bright star in the sky of history” (Lindal 1967: 98). Rev Bjarnason would become a highly influential in the Icelandic colony settlement in Manitoba, or New Iceland, and then in Winnipeg until his death in 1914. His career in Winnipeg and the influence of the church will be taken in up in the a later chapter.

The immigration of Icelanders was lead by Sigtryggur Jónasson. The objective was to obtain enough land for a settlers’ colony. In 1875, after several false starts, Sigtryggur, with a party of six others including an English Methodist lay preacher, made a brief exploration of land along the Red River and west side of Lake Winnipeg. Finding the west site to their liking, they applied for a land grant. The Dominion Government had a policy of offering block land grants to large groups of immigrants from Europe. Although this had not been granted for groups migrant within Canada, the Governor General, Lord Dufferin, held Icelanders in high esteem and intervened on their behalf. They received the land grant, and a loan for transportation and provisions.

The Icelanders scattered throughout Ontario, and the United States, about 285 in all, gathered and travelled to ‘Nýja Ísland’, on the western shore of Lake Winnipeg, arriving in October 21, 1875. There was no chance to establish sufficient homesteads, and as the

group had only 30 cook-stoves, only 30 buildings could be used as housing. Many of the settlers walked to Winnipeg to find work in the winter and spring. There women commonly worked as domestics and men as labourers, digging sewers and in the building trades. By spring, about 100 settlers were left in the colony, and of these about one-third would die of scurvy and malnutrition (Simon Simonarsson diary). The following August, over 1200 new settlers would arrive directly from Iceland, again with the financial assistance of the Dominion Government. In the autumn, a smallpox epidemic broke out, and the settlement was quarantined. About one-fifth of the population was affected, resulting in over 100 deaths. The quarantine brought food shortages, and there was no work in the settlement. There were further deaths from scurvy and malnutrition. The quarantine was lifted late in June, too late for planting crops, and many settlers again went to Winnipeg for work. The third winter there was no opportunity for government assistance, and settlers once again worked in Winnipeg to make ends meet.

That winter, two pastors arrived in New Iceland: Rev Páll Thorlaksson, an Icelander trained by the Norwegian (Lutheran) Synod in the United States, and Rev Jón Bjarnason. The argument between them would begin the first of several religious debates which would ultimately help shape Western Icelander's self-image. Some factionalism emerged, fuelled by the fact that Rev Páll made efforts to acquire provisions for his congregations from Norwegian Synod charities. Rev. Páll's application for assistance gained the notori-

ous and shameful moniker the ‘Begging Letter’. It was considered a great affront to the community leaders, violating the new cultural value of financial independence, a state Sigtryggur and Rev. Jón had hoped to realise for the colony. According to Rev Jón, the Viking spirit of independence and hardiness was best nurtured by hardship and suffering (Houser 1990: 150). The debate of the third winter spilled over into the next, and was carried on primarily in the colony newspaper, *Framfari*. The end result was that Rev Páll’s congregations, about one-third of the settlement, went to the United States. This incident marks the origin of attaching great shame to the request and acceptance of financial assistance among Western Icelanders.

There are several ways that the founding of New Iceland can be interpreted as mimicking the saga narratives of the founding of Iceland itself. The first is the social formations in which people emigrated. In the saga times, when Norwegians left for Iceland, they often took their cousins, friends and workers with them to the new land. Kristinsson’s (1983) compilation of emigration records shows that many people left Iceland for Canada as a domestic group. Those named as leaving a farmstead together include the individuals relationship to the most senior man or woman. It is not uncommon to see a nuclear family accompanied by one or several *vinnumaðhur* or *vinnumkona*—workman or workwoman. These should not be considered servants, like those who might accompany a British upper class family; they would be the farm workers. Second, in the sagas, it is not un-

common for a former landowner to grant portions of land claimed by him or herself in Iceland to his or her workers and thralls. This is roughly paralleled by the system used in New Iceland. On arrival in the colony, land was claimed by individuals according to the Homestead Act. That is, it became property of the man or woman who cleared and farmed it for two years. In this way, all men and women were eligible to claim a farm of their own.

By 1880, the settlement population had been reduced to about 250 people. Most, including Sigtryggur and Jón Bjarnason had left for better prospects. Nevertheless, Sigtryggur, and the settlement's main merchant and sometimes postmaster, Friðjon Friðriksson put together a business—a sawmill at Riverton and a fleet of lake freighters. The settlement was rejuvenated when large numbers of settlers arrived in 1886–1888. The area continued to be dominated by Icelandic immigrants and their descendants into the next century. New Iceland and the Interlake would become a symbol of Icelandic achievement in Canada, especially in the Icelandic Canadian histories of the ethnic group as a whole, and in the sagas of individual towns, written from 1960 onwards (Thompson 1960, Kristjanson 1965, Lindal 1967, Gimli Saga 1975, McKillop 1979, Gerrard 1985). It is, in a way, a (second) motherland (see Brydon 1987).



#### 4.4 Western Icelanders in Winnipeg

That first winter in Manitoba, approximately fifty Western Icelanders remained in Winnipeg. These first Icelandic Winnipeggers were periodically joined by settlers from the rural areas and as such the population of Winnipeg Icelanders was very much in flux in the first decade, ranging between 500 and 600 persons (Kristjanson 1965: 162). The employment was menial; women worked as domestics and men as common labourers. At the end of their first decade in Winnipeg, Icelanders had several small businesses, namely, 'twelve Icelandic dressmakers, twelve merchants, ten carpenters, four printers, three painters, and one blacksmith' (Kristjanson 1965: 171).<sup>7</sup>

As Icelanders as a group gained social status, their area of residence shifted. At first, Icelanders lived in 'Shanty Town' along the banks of the Red River, but soon some acquired houses in the Point Douglas area. These became rooming houses and sometimes served as community meeting halls. My research indicates that a dense community of residences and businesses grew along Ross and Elgin Avenues between 1890 and 1910.

But the West End the area between Portage and Notre Dame Avenues, and west of

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<sup>7</sup>There are several English language histories of Icelanders in Manitoba. These include Kristjanson (1965), Lindal (1967) and McKenna (1986). Kristjanson's work relies heavily on Icelandic sources, notably Thorsteinsson (1935, 1940) and Oleson (1955), supplemented by reports from Icelandic newspapers. It is the most thorough source of information, and Lindal and McKenna use it as a primary source, which they supplement with anecdotal observations of their own experiences (Lindal) or extensive English language recollections of the Winnipeg community (McKenna). Matthiasson is primarily analytical in nature, (although see Matthiasson 1992). Unless otherwise noted, the summary of Icelanders in Winnipeg is from Kristjanson (1965).

Balmoral to St. James Street, would become the area of Icelandic residential concentration (Kristjanson 1965: 212), with Sargent Ave nicknamed Icelandic Main Street. The pattern of growth in the West End is described as snaking westward, the eastern end following the westward front over time.

In the winter of 1876-77, the first school was established to teach adults English. At first few children attended school, because of the tradition of homeschooling and the requirement for them to help at home or earn money (Kristjanson 1965: 156). Between 1880 and 1884, a school for children was established, but its attendance never exceeded 20 pupils (Kristjanson 1965: 175). Before 1900, some children did attend the English public schools, by no means all (see Salverson 1939). Nevertheless, some of the first generation of immigrants attended Wesley College at the University of Manitoba, and the second generation students really excelled in university.

Literary activities were of considerable importance to Icelanders in North America, as in Iceland, and must be considered ethnic markers. Just two years after the first settlers arrived in New Iceland the newspaper *Framfari* was set up, and published for nearly three years. The colony leaders felt that it was crucial to Icelandic progress, cohesion and cultural identity that a newspaper exist. The next paper, *Leifur* was published in Winnipeg, 1883-1886. By 1900, there were two secular papers, *Heimskringla* and *Lögberg*, the religious journal *Sameiningin*, and the periodical *Almanak* published out of Winnipeg, and

the feminist magazine *Freyja* in Selkirk. During the 1910s, other journals and newspapers would appear for several issues but not last more than a few years. The variety of published writing ranges from emotional and symbolic short stories, poems and exhortations, to logical debates about social and political issues.

There are two areas of social life where Icelanders appear to have joined forces with the dominant culture. The first is the realm of politics. The first Icelandic member of the legislature, Sigtryggur Jónasson (Liberal) was elected in 1896. Between 1910 and 1920, Icelanders ran as both Liberals and Conservatives. Thomas H. Johnson, son of an Icelandic suffrage pioneer, trained in law and very much involved in real estate dealings, held several offices in the Liberal provincial party. When women official received the vote January 27, 1916, the third reading was moved by acting Premier Johnson, who gave a lengthy supporting speech (in Kristjanson 1965: 375). As Minister of Public Works in 1916 he initiated the Fair Wages Act. He was the Attorney-General for the Province of Manitoba 1917-1922, during which time he is noted for lobbying for prison reform. Icelanders would run for several different parties, including the CCF, Labour, and Social Credit.

By 1900, some Icelanders had made considerable social gains. Between 1900 and 1920, approximately twenty Icelanders, including one woman were called to the bar (Kristjanson 1965: 170). Prior to World War I, there were more than thirty Icelandic

building contractors in the city, building houses, apartment blocks and office buildings. Icelandic labourers had gained in stature and become tradesmen. The Henderson Directory lists many Icelandic women as clerks and secretaries in prominent offices. Nursing and teaching were also common pursuits for women. Although the Ross and Elgin area had had Icelandic stores, Icelandic entrepreneurs took on a greater variety of enterprises after 1900.

In 1912–13, The Manitoba *Free Press* wrote a series of articles called “Cosmopolitan Winnipeg”, on Winnipeg’s various “races”. The Icelanders were the first to be profiled, and were considered the best of all foreigners. The article blends quotes by anonymous Icelanders describing their culture with the author’s observations, as such it is a blend of ideological stances. One quote in particular speaks to how Icelanders saw themselves as members of Canadian society.

We are all keen on politics and generally opposed to separate schools, because we believe the public school is the best agency Canada has for making one united people of the many races coming in. Besides, we don’t think it is a square deal to spend our money for sectarian schools (*Free Press* , Nov. 16, 1912).

The speaker positions himself as a Canadian, not a foreigner, with a right or even duty to contribute to the formation of Canadian society, giving advice on the assimilation of other races. This demonstrates several things commonly attributed to Icelanders in this time period. These include their civic-mindedness, their sense of patriotism and desire to

assimilate and excel in British Canadian culture, their focus on education, a broadminded approach to religion (noting the three different church congregations) and a careful use of money. Above all, it mentions the financial success of several Icelanders. It states that “you will find them prospering in all callings, from labourer to the . . . merchant and professor” (Manitoba *Free Press* 23 Nov. 1912). I will return to the article often throughout the dissertation.

The rise of the position of Icelanders within Winnipeg’s social structure up to 1920 can be summarised as follows. Icelanders arrived in Winnipeg in the earliest days of its settlement, before the entrenchment of class and ethnic rankings. They came with the recommendations of the Governor General of Canada, and continued to receive accolades after their arrival. As a group, they tended to aspire to literary and educational excellence in general, a fact not lost on the British middle and upper classes in Manitoba. Indeed, the characteristics attributed to Icelanders, specifically income, education and temperance work, are those associated with the middle class. By 1910, Icelanders became positively stereotyped as an ethnic group, although perhaps for their ‘middle classness’ rather than ethnicity. They seemed well aware of this status. Icelanders were keen to become part of Canadian society, but at the same time they strove to maintain the Icelandic culture (Lindal 1967). This was perhaps a form of resistance to the emerging dominant ideologies of racial determinism, the ranked status of ethnic groups, and nativism.

Evidence that the West End had a strong Icelandic presence can be found on buildings in the area. There are still small businesses owned and frequented by Icelanders, some carrying Icelandic family names. Indeed, Murray Peterson has mapped out a walking tour through the area which visits several important sites (Peterson 1997). Well into the latter half of the 20th century both Icelandic newspapers were housed in the West End, as were various book publishers and stores over the years. What is now a bingo hall was once home to the two temperance chapters of the International Order of Good Templars, Hekla and Skuld, and continues to bare their names. The First Lutheran Church on Victor Ave to this day has as resident pastor someone born and educated in Iceland. Finally, several apartment blocks in the area have Icelandic names, such as Hekla, Hrefna, Vesta and Valhalla.

#### **4.5 Canadians of Icelandic Descent: Ethnicity in Manitoba Today**

Today, people of Icelandic ancestry celebrate their heritage annually in the August long weekend festival, *Islendingadagurinn*, in Gimli, Manitoba. The festival attendance is one of the largest summer ethnic festivals in the province, yet the display of Icelandic culture is noted as being markedly absent (Brydon 1987). That is, there are few visual ethnic markers. This is due in part to the continued emphasis on literature as the hallmark of Icelandic culture. But what further hides Icelandic culture is that Icelandic Canadians

are involved in many middle-class voluntary organisations, such as the Shriners. The participation of these groups' motorcades and floats dilutes the few Icelandic spectacles, such as the beautifully dressed Fjálkona (an honorary position given to a mature woman for her life long community contributions), a few marauding vikings, and teams of Icelandic horses. Icelandic foods as ethnic markers are limited. Of course, except for the wonderfully strong coffee and ubiquitous *vinmaterta* (a version of Viennese torte brought with the earliest settlers from Iceland and maintained in Canada, but not Iceland), 'traditional' foods, such as fermented shark and blackened sheep's head are not usually available. Anne Brydon (1987) argues that today there are two sets of discourse surrounding what is authentic in Icelandic ethnicity and ethnic identity. One centres around the private experience of the Icelandic extended family life, where memories of the settlement of New Iceland are kept alive in oral narratives, and the milk based foods of Iceland are still consumed. The other focuses on the middle-class tendencies of the public face of Icelandic ethnicity, as manifest in the speeches of dignitaries (perhaps an echo of the ritual of the Alþingi) and sing-a-longs of the final day (Brydon 1987: 88–91).

The distinction between public and private ethnic display among Icelanders in Canada is not a recent phenomena. The issue is also discussed by John S. Matthiasson (1983, 1989), a second generation Icelandic immigrant. Matthiasson's auto-ethnographic work focuses on the Icelandic community in the West End of Winnipeg, the neighbourhood

where he grew up, and as such reflects back as far as the 1940s. He argues that urban Icelanders shunned the idea of being ethnic until late in the public movement in Canada to celebrate multiculturalism. He suggests historical reasons for this. As some Icelanders settled in Winnipeg in 1875, and many more came as migrant wage labourers, their introduction to British Canadian culture began 25 years before the mass immigration that took place between 1896 and 1914. As such, in the first two decades of the century, Icelanders were far more acculturated than most other immigrant groups. Over 70% were naturalised citizens by 1916. They were widely regarded as the best of the foreign (i.e. non-British) immigrant groups, and though residentially cohesive, did not reside in the ethnic quarter of Winnipeg's North End. Matthiasson and others (Kristjansson 1965, Lindal 1967) point out that, in the early decades of the 20th century, many Icelanders were well-educated and served as politicians, doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses and entrepreneurs as well as working in the skilled trades and white collar jobs. They easily and proudly fit in with the English speaking population in the city, and made public efforts to avoid being viewed as foreign (Lindal 1967: 377-381).

But in homes and in the many volunteer societies and church groups, Icelandic was the language in use, Icelandic folksongs and hymns were sung, Icelandic foods and traditionally made coffee were served, and debates and oratory flourished. The residents of many homes often had a cousin of sorts as a boarder, and were open to those travelling



from the Interlake. Most importantly, an emphasis on Icelandic medieval literature was passionately maintained, as was the ability to compose poetry, short stories and novels. Although by 1960 most Icelandic journals and newspapers were published in English, the existence of such literature devoted to Icelandic culture (in the popular sense), intellectual debates in letters and editorials, and news continued to unite Icelanders throughout the Canadian Prairies and American Plains areas, as they had done before the turn of the century. There is today a tendency to pass books from household to household; at the many committee meetings, which also serve as informal social gatherings, one can often arrange to borrow Gúðrun's book from Sessilja, after Sessilja gets it from Einar.

John Matthiasson writes the Icelanders always claimed they were not ethnic, but the West End was an enclave as much as any of those in the North End (Matthiasson 1994: 59). His cousins and childhood friends have remarked to me that everyone they knew was Icelandic, and foods and other customs that they thought everyone had, they now understand to be particular to Icelanders. For adults, voluntary associations became a focal point of interaction with other Icelanders. Matthiasson argues that it was less the actual work of promoting Icelandic ethnicity than the tendency of the voluntary associations to foster debate that allowed them to draw the community together. That is, the Icelandic cultural preference for argumentation and oratory as both a laudable intellectual exercise and a form of entertainment did not simply create factionalism. Matthiasson argues that

the tendency of Icelanders to create and debate two sides to every issue is part of a culturally specific psychological trait that he refers to as dualism. The trait has emerged from the symbolic culture used in Icelandic collective identity: the land of fire and ice, the Vikings as both marauders and poets, adventurers with a keen sense of *utþra* (tendency to look outwards and explore the world) and the desire for an independent and pure culture, and so on. He argues “the debates satisfy psychological needs in addition to keeping individuals interested and engaged in the community. Thus the sense of community was not a response to outside pressures” (Matthiasson 1989: 168).

There is no doubt that aspects of the culture have remained alive, and some can be traced to customs in Iceland at the time of emigration, while others appear to be reinvented from the sagas. My own participation in the Icelandic community in Manitoba in recent years has allowed me to recognise many of the traits documented by other researchers. There is a continued reverence of the saga literature. Oral and written poetry is celebrated, as is writing, especially of history and fiction is still valued. Western Icelandic literature as a genre includes authors from both Canada and the US.

Today there are several ethnic institutions promoting the culture here and connections to Iceland itself. Those participating in these associations are of varying income or occupation, which is pointed out to support claims of a sense of equality among Icelanders. There is also a strong sense of independence of the committees from the Canadian society

at large. This is especially the case in financial matters, wherein a tremendous amount of funding comes from the Icelandic community itself, rather than government grants.

In spite, or perhaps because of, the ethic of egalitarianism, there are tensions around having money. It has long been the case that Icelandic entrepreneurs were viewed with mild disapproval—they have after all made profits from other Icelanders. While capitalism itself, especially as associated with democracy, does not necessarily promote ideals of inherent inequality between individuals, the economic stratification found in Winnipeg's capitalist society is not compatible with the Western Icelandic sense of egalitarianism. The tension between ethnic ideal and the socio-economic structures within the early Winnipeg Icelandic community is a core issue of the dissertation research.

## **Part II**

### **Composition of the Winnipeg**

### **Icelandic Community**

## 5 Ethnic community

Icelanders totalled less than 3.6 percent of the population of Winnipeg, and were not distinctive enough to warrant their own ethnic category in official censuses. Yet they had garnered enough attention to be considered the best of the foreigners in the popular press. As a collective, they opted to remain distinct from other Scandinavians. To what extent do they fit models of an urban ethnic group as proposed by Breton and Dreiger?

To answer this, the density of Icelanders in two locations will be examined, the Ross and Elgin blocks in Ward 4, where many Icelanders resided until approximately 1910, and then the West End. The pattern of migration into this area will be belaboured here to set up a background for later discussions of the Icelandic involvement in real estate and the building industry.

Subsequently, an overview of ethnic institutions—newspapers, businesses, churches and voluntary associations—will be discussed, as will the private schools and university classes. These institutions will be examined in greater detail in subsequent chapters, but

are introduced here in order to give the reader a sense of the West End as the Icelanders' neighbourhood.

Several sources have been used to gather the information to be presented. The Henderson Directories (HD) were used in two different ways. One was to conduct a street by street survey of the city in order to establish the location of Icelandic residence within Winnipeg. The second method made use of a sample of 125 Icelandic surnames, to conduct a census of the number of persons per household, and the occupation of household members. Surveys and censuses were taken from the HD for the years 1900, 1905, 1910, 1915, and 1920. The HD were most accurate in gathering the street by street survey material, and the number and occupation of adult males.

My 1915 HD census recorded slightly less than half of the population of Western Icelanders recorded 1916 government census. My control group tests indicated that the HD routinely under reported on children, and women who were not heads of households in its address section—the section from which I took my census. The 1916 government census found approximately 1154 Icelandic males, and reported that 39.6% of the total population was under the age of 20. If the age differentiation was consistent across all ethnic groups, it would be expected that there would be 698 Icelandic men over the age of 20. My HD census found 754 males, so statistics on this sample may have some degree of accuracy. However, my HD census found only 336 females, where the government

census recorded 1543 females. Given the inaccuracy of my original source data, an in depth statistical analysis of the Icelandic population is not feasible, with the possible exception of the data on adult males. This will be examined in some detail in relation to occupation and economic stratification.

First though, a general summary of statistics on Icelanders as can be gleaned from government census data will be reviewed. The 1911 federal census enumerated people living in the City of Winnipeg who were of Icelandic birth, finding 1640 persons, of which 746 are male, and 881 are female. The 1916 Census of the Prairie Provinces gives more detail, recording a total of 2785 people residing in Winnipeg who are of Icelandic ancestry. It breaks this into several categories, as shown in table 5.1.

Also of interest is the ratio of Icelandic males to females in Winnipeg. In the general population, a greater number of males than females is indicative of the unequal sex ratios that were the result of immigration processes that favoured young able-bodied men (Artibise 1977: 199). In the 1916 census, the ratios are more alike, as many men were at war in Europe. Icelanders were only enumerated as a category in the 1911 Federal Census and 1916 Census of the Prairie Provinces. Their female to male ratio is the opposite of that of the general population. I have adjusted the numbers for statistical comparison in table 5.2.

Table 5.1: People of Icelandic Origin: Winnipeg and Surrounding Area 1911

Canadian-born people of Icelandic origin	Wpg Centre 1074
	Wpg North 56
	Wpg South 127
	total 1337 (585:752)
American-born immigrants of Icelandic origin:	85
Foreign-born people of Icelandic citizenship	naturalised 1020
	alien 340
	total 1360 (569:791)
	males under 21 years of age 47
	(ratios are male to female)



Table 5.2: Icelanders by gender and origin: Winnipeg 1911–1916

	year	per females	males
General Population	1906	1000	1271
	1911	1000	1207
	1916	1000	1018
	year	per females	males
Icelandic Population	1911	1000	834 (born in Iceland)
	1916	1000	719 (born in Iceland)
	1916	1000	778 (parents Icelandic)

The reversed sex ratios among Western Icelanders in the earlier years may be indicative of the tendency for women to come from rural areas to find work in the city. The following discussion of women's wage labour is gleaned from evidence given by Icelanders; unfortunately the official census does not break down occupation by ethnic background, or vice versa. The migrancy of women may be due in part to a continuance of cultural values and social patterns from Iceland. Western Icelanders emphasised the importance of literacy for both boys and girls, and in Iceland, young men and women often worked away from the natal home. Anecdotal evidence suggests that rural Western Icelandic women and men worked as migrant labourers in Winnipeg in different seasons. This may count for the discrepancy in numbers.

## **5.1 Patterns of Residence**

Two locations of Icelandic residence will be scrutinised in detail. The first is in Ward 4, where there was a concentration of Icelandic residents on Ross and Elgin Streets until around 1910, and the second is the West End neighbourhood in Ward 3. The reason for the inclusion of the Ross and Elgin area is that it became the site of a railway shunting and loading yard, and sale of the homes in the area contributed to the rise of some real estate agents. A Western Icelander who grew up in the West End told me that when he was young, there was a disparaging remark that certain wealthy people had been "on the right

side of Ross Avenue”. The Western Icelandic involvement in the real estate business will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

### 5.1.1 Ross and Elgin Avenues

The homes on Ross and Elgin Avenue, between Isabel and Tecumseh, in Ward 4 homes are among the oldest in the city. In many cases, data about their original construction is lacking as building permits were either not issued or not archived. According to the Henderson Directories (HD), Icelandic households, discerned by surname, total over 40% of all households. All of the businesses but one were Icelandic, and the First Lutheran Church, Gráni and the Icelandic Unitarian Church were located one block north, at Nena and Pacific. The newspaper *Lögberg* was located at 1-2 306 Elgin. *Heimskringla* shared the presses of *The Voice*, the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council’s newspaper, edited by W. J. Puttee, located on Main St. between James and Rupert Aves.

About half of the homes on the blocks in question are still standing, the rest having been demolished when Midland Railway built a spur track there in 1909–1910. Unlike any other railway into Winnipeg, the Midland track came from the United States. Although originally expected to carry passengers, Midland Rail instead built a main track with several offloading spurs to serve warehouses and light industrial. Only those houses

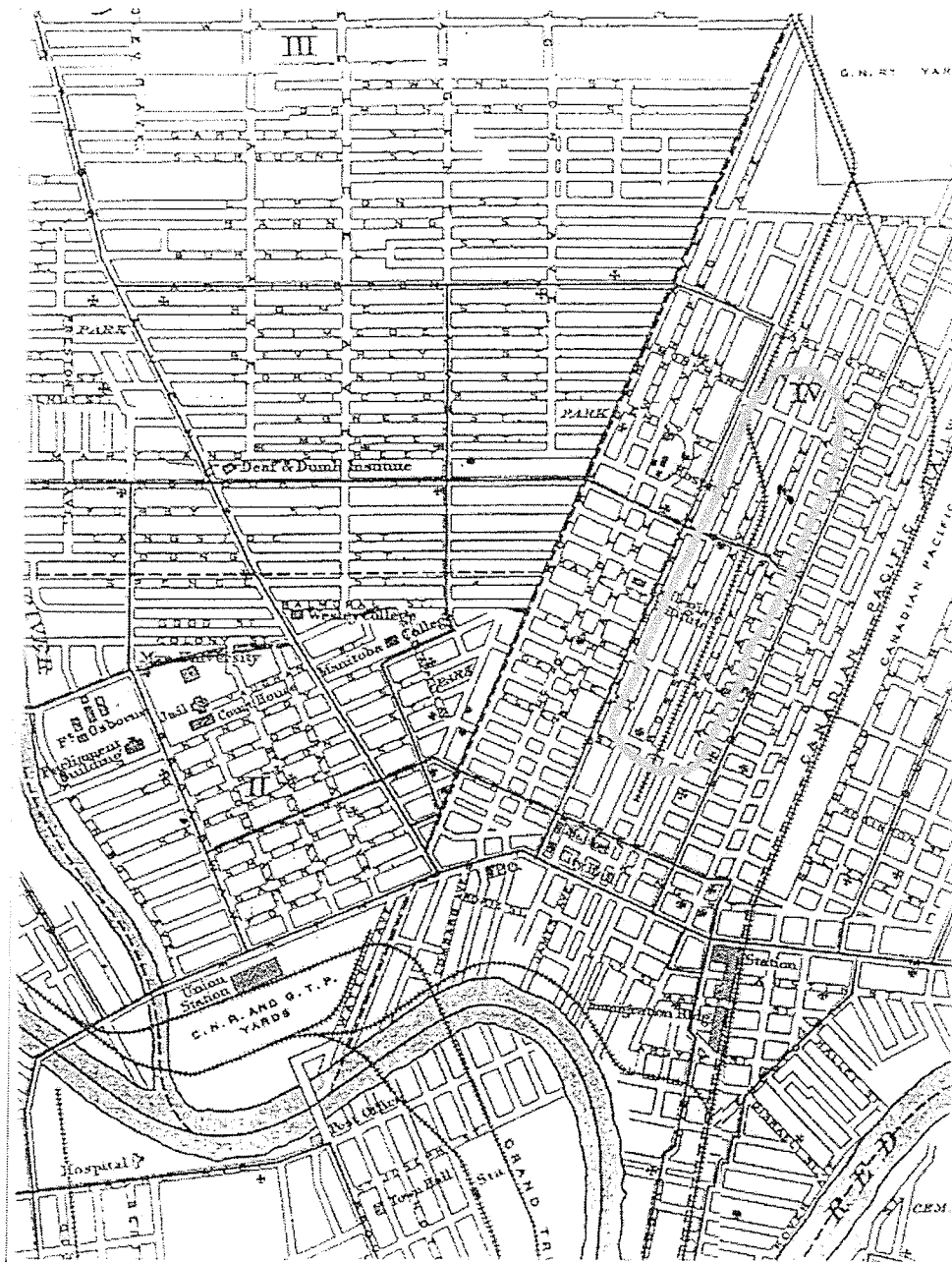


Figure 5.1: Winnipeg Ward Three and Four: 1910

directly on a main line or spur route were bought up and removed. The area became a mix of residences, shunting tracks and warehouses.

A visual inspection of the remaining homes can be made. In spite of the fact that the houses have stood less than 30 metres from the Midland Rail tracks for over 50 years (the tracks were removed in the 1970s), the original merits of the houses can be discerned. In general, these houses are two stories in height, and have at least seven or more rooms. Most appear to have some foundation, although residents today report that these amount to little more than a crawl space. In many cases the lots allow for two or more metres between houses, such that the houses have an adequate light source from the outdoors from each direction. The lot size varies between 25' x 112', and 49.5' x 132'. The maps of the time indicate that the four blocks inhabited by Icelanders were longer than any other in the area. Further, it seems that Ross Avenue had a centre boulevard; Midland Railway successfully applied to City Council to have it removed to widen the space for its tracks (City Council Minutes 1914).

A common economic strategy among Winnipeg's poor was to crowd several single men and women into each bedroom of a house, or rent out one bedroom per family. Thus the number of people resident in each house, as shown in census material and tax assessments can be used as an indicator of poverty.

The raw data of the government census of 1901 provides a very specific indicator of the inhabitants of households.<sup>8</sup> In Icelandic residences families with up to eight children occupied a house, in addition to usually one to three, but up to ten, boarders. The occupations of boarders range from labourer (of both sexes) and student to physician. The non-Icelandic neighbours show a similar large number of people per house, but the make-up is somewhat different. It is more common to see two families living together, or a large number of adults, but not a family with adult boarders. The tendency of Icelanders to take in other Icelanders arriving from the rural settlements or from overseas is commonly known among people of Icelandic descent in Winnipeg today, and discussed by Gillespie's interviewees. Thus it can be generally concluded that the Icelandic household frequently consisted of a nuclear family and one or more boarders.<sup>9</sup> Gillespie's interviewees report that the homes seemed crowded, but that the presence of a boarder helped make ends meet.

The houses occupied by Icelanders on Ross and Elgin are of the same general quality as other houses in the surrounding neighbourhood. The tax assessment records for 1905

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<sup>8</sup>Raw data is not available for subsequent census years.

<sup>9</sup>In early Winnipeg in general the nuclear family occupying a single home would have been unusual. The reasons for this differ depending on class. Among the working and lower classes the lack of housing and the high cost of renting or purchasing a house made overcrowding endemic. In the North End it was not unusual for two or more families to share a house. A middle class household, supported by a professional or successful entrepreneur, generally had a servant girl to assist the wife with housework. The upper class household generally included many domestics.

indicate the Ward 4 houses did have a higher value. Icelanders were living in good housing for working class people. It can be safely said that there was little discrepancy in housing values between distinguished Icelanders and more anonymous persons.

While Ward 4 may have been a comfortable neighbourhood in its early incarnation, by 1913 the railway tracks and an increase in housing density brought a decline in the general atmosphere. According to the tax assessment roles, property values in the area dropped and most houses were rented to several adults. After 1910, the houses left standing were inhabited primarily by residents with British names. The exception to this is Elgin Avenue, where several homes were still occupied by Icelanders, though used as boarding houses.

The density of Icelanders in the Ross and Elgin residence area was in some blocks over 50%. This concentration of community leaders, associations and shops by and for Icelanders suggests that Ross and Elgin area fit Breton's and Dreiger's classification as an ethnic enclave neighbourhood. Indeed, Thorsteinsson's commentary on the demise of that neighbourhood, which he attributes to both the burial of homes beneath the railway spur and the 1908-1912 building boom, carries a wistful tone (Thorsteinsson 1935b: 175).

The HD censuses indicate that, like Icelanders leaving Point Douglas, many of those leaving Ross and Elgin were moving into the West End. Yet a significant number stayed in Ward 4, moving to areas around the General Hospital and along Bannatyne and Mc-

Dermott, near Nena. The houses tended to have a higher tax assessment value than those occupied by Icelanders in both Wards 3 and 4.

### **5.1.2 The West End**

'The Prairie' grew slowly as a suburb, dotted with respectable two-story wood houses along unpaved streets. Its development as a residential area was made possible by the advent of trolley lines running west from the downtown business and industries. Within any neighbourhood, the most common mode of transportation, travel on foot, had an influence on the location of community establishments. This is demonstrated in the relocation of Icelandic churches.

As the area of Icelandic residence shifted from the Ross and Elgin area, first south of Notre Dame, then westward, the location of churches became inconvenient. In response to the first shift, the First Lutheran and Unitarian Churches both moved their congregations from Pacific and Nena to Nena and Bannatyne and Sherbrook and Sargent, respectively. By 1920, both congregations would move further west to locations just off Sargent, one on Victor, the other on Banning. It is of note that it was both financially costly and emotionally difficult for people to leave behind the sacred spaces they had struggled to create (Kristjanson 1965: 342). Yet the distance moved is in no instance more than 2 kilometres. The need to travel on foot (made more inconvenient



by both summer and winter climatic extremes) made this distance a significant factor in church location. Thus available modes of transportation must be taken into account when density is considered as a factor or predictor of the effectiveness of ethnic institutions in maintaining the ethnic group.

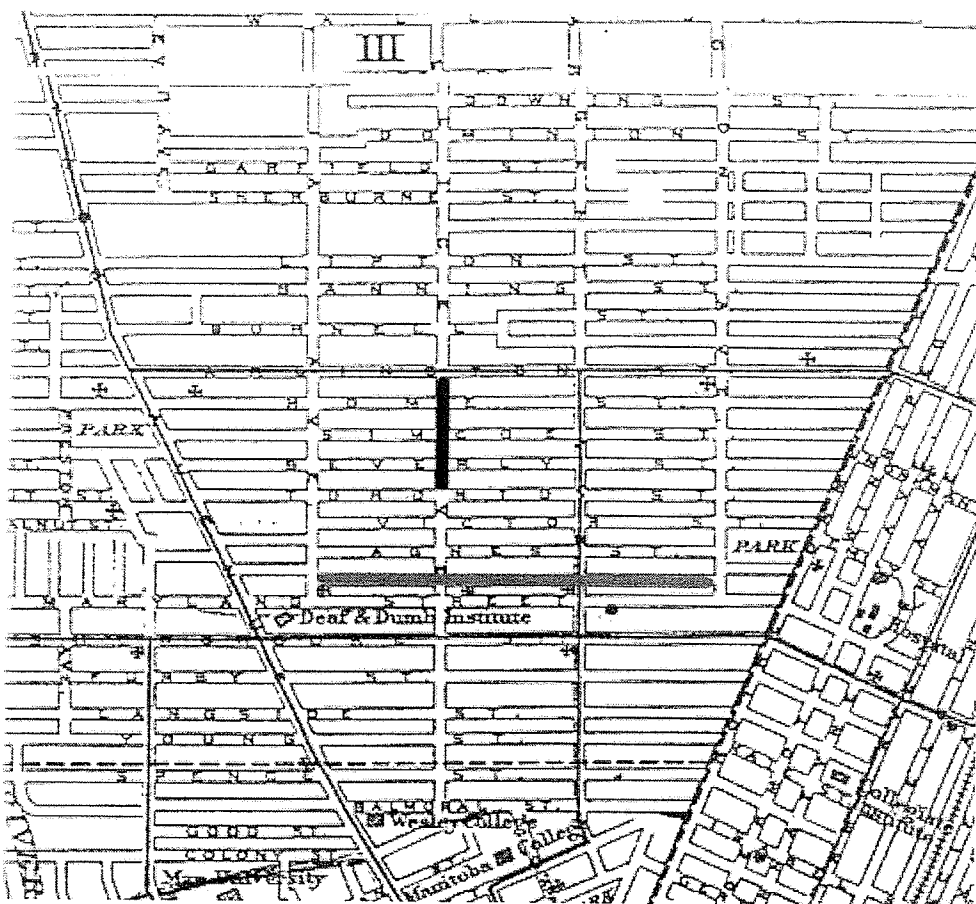


Figure 5.2: Icelandic Residential Density: 1900

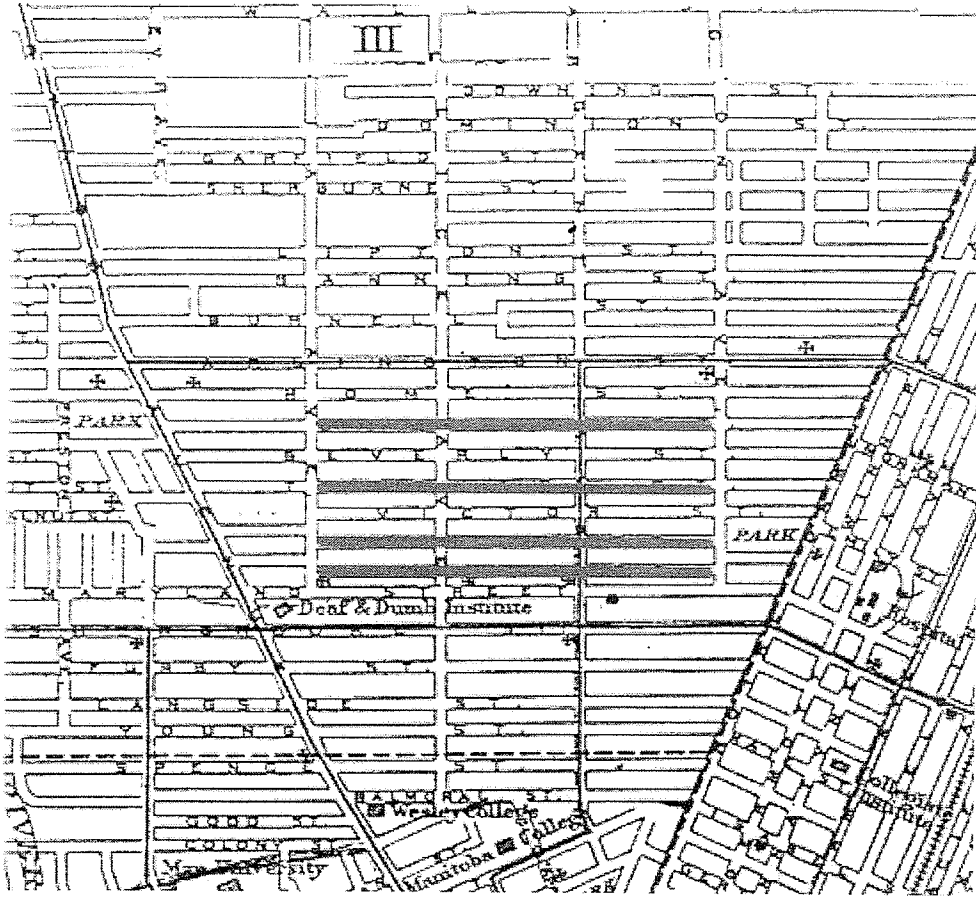


Figure 5.3: Icelandic Residential Density: 1905

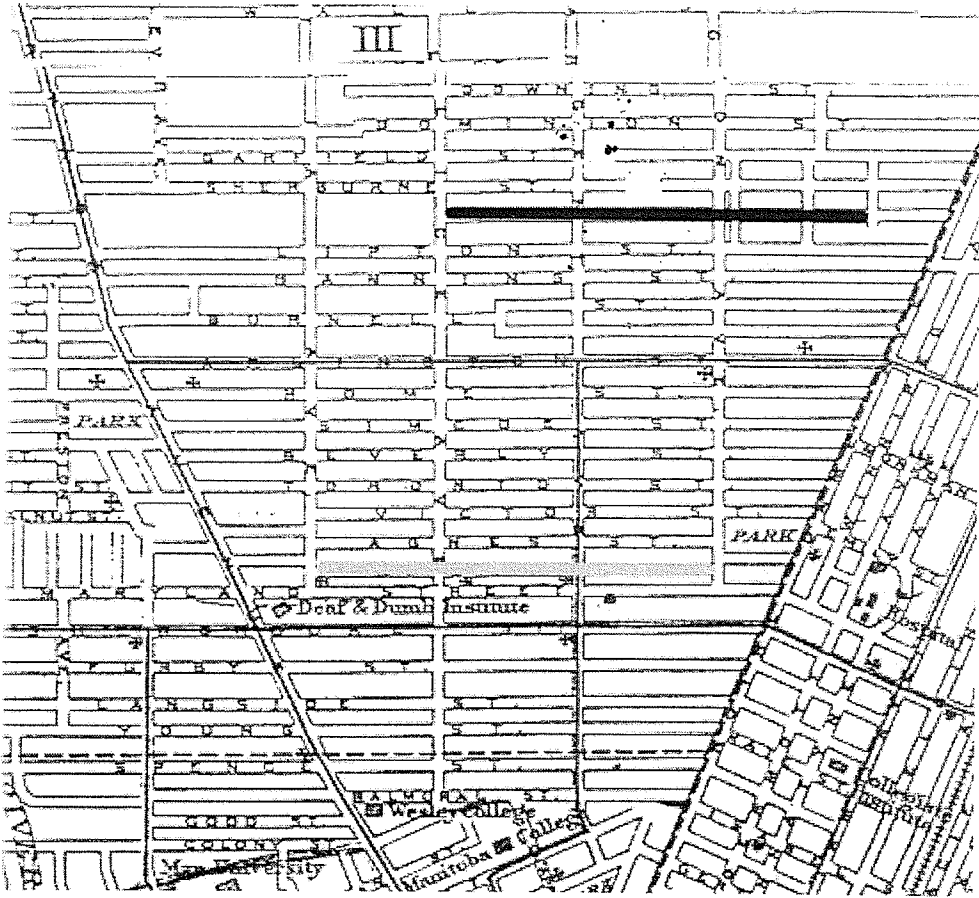


Figure 5.4: Icelandic Residential Density: 1910

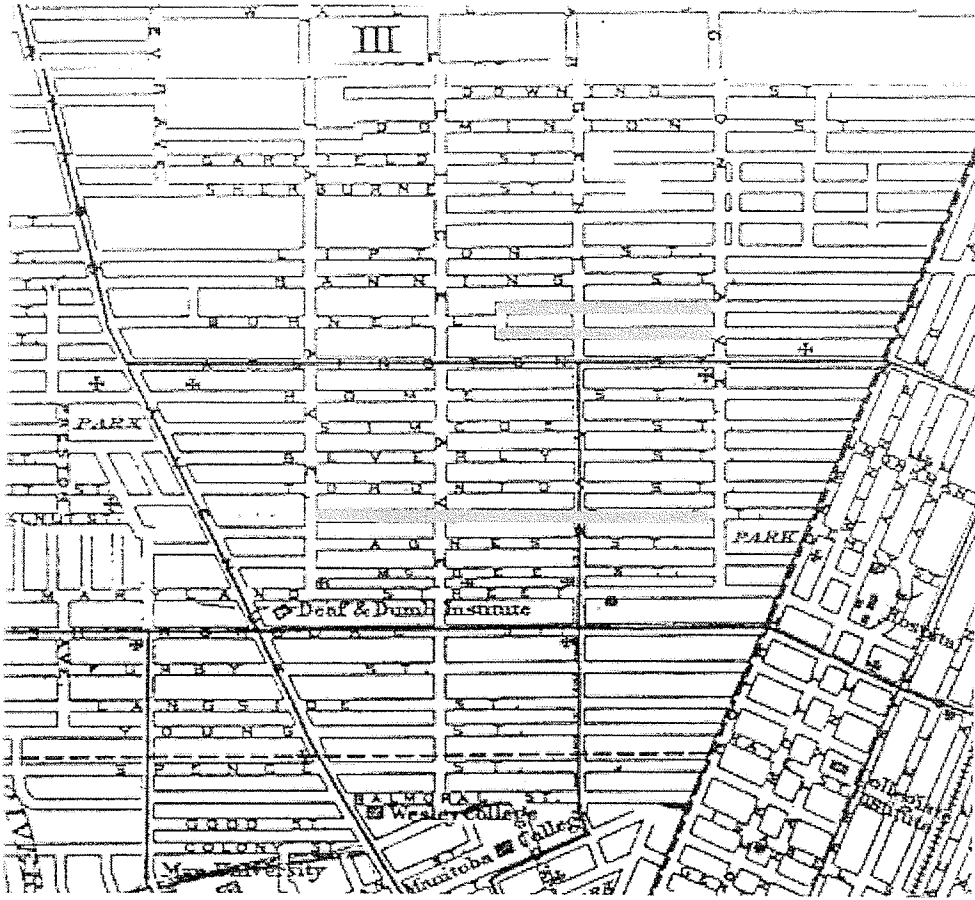


Figure 5.5: Icelandic Residential Density: 1915

In examining the migration of the Icelandic population within the city using my HD survey and census some generalisations are obvious. Those who lived in Point Douglas after 1895 left that area for the West End (Ward 3), rather than Ross and Elgin. Most of the residents of Ross and Elgin also moved into the West End, particularly after 1905, and especially after 1910. However, the density of Icelanders relative to other ethnic groups was quite low in the West End, although the patterns of initial settlement suggest that close personal ties affected their choice of location

The electoral district of Ward 3 ran west of Spence to the St. James Street, and north of the Assiniboine River to Notre Dame. The portion of Ward 3 south of Portage Ave became home to some of Winnipeg's most affluent professional and business people. This was not happenstance; city council passed by-laws regarding the quality of homes to be built in the area (Artibise 1975: 168). Very few Icelanders lived in this area; probably more Icelandic women worked there as domestics.

The patterns of residential growth are of some interest. The 'West End' developed as a residential area, separated from the downtown industrial and business core of Winnipeg. In surveying the HD, it is evident that the area within Ward 3 into which Icelanders were moving is only that portion between Portage and Notre Dame Avenues. But they appear to be moving into the western fringes of the city, and perhaps into new housing.

For example, in 1900, on Ellice between Toronto and Arlington there are 9 addresses listed, and all 9 names are Icelandic. On McGee, of the 18 listed, 8 (44%) are Icelanders. Moreover, if the area is considered block by block, several streets, such as Victor and Home, are seen to have no Icelanders. Overall, Icelandic names are listed as residents in 86 of the 433 dwellings, or 19.9% of the total.

In 1900-1905, Icelandic residence was concentrated in the area along McGee, Agnes, Toronto and Simcoe Streets. On each of these streets over 50% of the houses show an occupant with an Icelandic name.

By 1910 there is a decline in the density of Icelandic residences relative to those of other ethnic groups. In this year, Ingersoll is one of the furthest streets west on which there are houses, and here 83% of the occupants have Icelandic names. On McGee, the highest density of Icelanders on a block by block basis has fallen to 14.3% between Sargent and Wellington. As in previous years, the streets furthest west have higher densities of Icelanders. The number of Icelandic households in the area has increased from 145 to 263, and comprises only 7.6% of the total inhabited residences.

The pattern continues throughout the next decade, with Icelanders occupying almost all homes on the western edge of the area, and their relative, but not actual number decreased in what was then the middle areas of the West End. In 1915, the density of Icelanders reached a dispersal pattern that would remain stable for decades. The streets

most densely populated by Icelanders are Burnell, Alverstone, and Victor. In terms of raw numbers, the number of Icelandic houses in the area is at least 315, or 5.6% of the total. By 1920, the sheer number of homes on blocks throughout the West End had increased from 5 to between 35 and 55. But the total number of Icelandic households in the area was over 455, or about 8% of the total. On no street is the density higher than 25%.

What this means is that, if my survey results are accurate, the West End Icelanders would not qualify as being 'residentially segregated'. Data collected in the 1970s (Dreiger 1977) would find 20 percent of the homes to be occupied by Scandinavians. However the low percentage in 1900-1920 raises the question of whether the neighbourhood could properly be considered an ethnic enclave.

Overall, the West End was less crowded and more peaceful than Ward 4, as well as being more modern. Building permits are available, and list the amenities of each new residence. Sewer hook up to mains, and running water were commonly found in new homes. Most new houses built in the area after 1908 were heated by "central air", using coal or wood. In larger homes and apartment blocks, heating is listed as "steam", indicating a system of radiators in most rooms. Some smaller homes continued to be heated by wood stoves, however. Olafson's Wood Yard (which may have been both a lumber yard and wood lot) on Sargent at Toronto was still in existence in 1920.

Most houses built before 1914 did not have electricity, or even the wiring. When electricity became available in the West End, the proper wiring was almost immediately incorporated into new houses, many of which were being built by Icelanders. It is of interest that the Icelandic city councillor Arni Eggertson—the father of Winnipeg's electricity—was a real estate agent, and rented out over one hundred homes in the developing area. Eggertson also employed building contractors. Some Icelanders moved from homes without electricity to homes which had it, and this was likely one of the factors which encouraged the western movement of the Icelandic community as a whole. In other instances, wiring was hastily put into existing homes, running along the floorboards to a lamp, or up the wall and along the ceiling, with light fixtures left dangling (Ragnar Gislason, Gillespie interview C1676-1680).

Telephone service was available in Winnipeg at the time, but it is difficult to determine how many Icelandic homes had telephones. From advertisements it is evident that most Icelandic businesses did, and some more prominent members of the community had telephones in their homes. Minutes of the voluntary associations occasionally discuss the use of the telephone as one means of communicating with other organisation members, but it is evident that not all members could be contacted by phone. Generally, mail services and even more frequently the Icelandic newspapers were used. In the case of



needing to make immediate contact, a runner might be sent to summon the required party.

One further aspect of the residential features of the neighbourhood is worth noting. That is the presence of numerous stately brick and stone apartment blocks, many dating from between 1911 and 1914. This type of residential accommodation is of some interest to the development of 20th century urban living. Such buildings began making their widespread appearance on this continent after 1905, but did not appear in Winnipeg for another 5 years. Thus the apartment buildings in Winnipeg usually had the modern amenities, and Winnipeg elite could boast that the city did not have the slum tenement sanitary problems that existed in European cities.

The increase in the West End population after 1908 was fairly rapid, but did not result in the dense and crowded conditions of North End. Interviewees recall that the area had far fewer houses than today, and while it was not as heavily treed there were many green spaces between sets of houses. That the lots were left vacant was fortunate as the width of the lots is, for the most part, no larger than those of the North End (i.e. from 25–33 feet and 100 feet deep). Vacant lots not only resulted in a lower population density, they were used by the community, not avoided as if they were private property. Children played there, the occasional garden was grown, and it is likely that it was these areas served as the

daytime pasture for cows and other livestock that continued to be kept as food sources (Margaret Frederickson; Gillespie interview C1672-1975).

### 5.1.3 Businesses

Like Icelanders homes, businesses were dispersed within a restricted area. Two streets in particular were candidates for Icelandic business concentration. The first was Sherbrook Street, which ran between the old and new neighbourhoods, on which a few prestigious establishments were located. These include the Bardal Block, Columbia Press, and the offices of Drs. Brandur Brandson and Olafur Bjornson, physicians who had worked for the community for decades. Other businesses included C Olafson, Insurance, a bakery, and Háldor Bardal Confections.

But it was Sargent Avenue that was known as Icelandic Main Street, a name it would keep into the late 1950s. In 1910, there were perhaps<sup>10</sup> seven Icelandic establishments, on Sargent Avenue between Young Street and Victor, including a grocers, butchers, a hardware store, jewellers and a shoemaker. By 1915, a printer, barber, tailor shop and pool hall could be added to the list. But it should be noted that there are also British-owned businesses (totalling 26), as well as Italian (4), Chinese (3) and Jewish (1). By 1920, the number of Icelandic business on Sargent had begun to shift in concentration to the

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<sup>10</sup>Again the issue of the name Anglicisation of names makes precise determination difficult.

blocks between Agnes and Toronto. It had grown in number to 13, with one notable addition—the Wevel Cafe at 692 Sargent.

The Icelandic businesses were not large and some, such as the Bardal Funeral Home, were family run. While there is evidence that these businesses tended to hire Icelanders it is difficult to ascertain just how many in total and on average these businesses employed. According to the HD census Central Grocery on Wellington Ave owned by J. J. Bildfell employed 11 people, and 13 are listed as working for the *Lögberg* Publishing Company.

The dispersal of businesses, coupled with the difficulties inherent in the mode of transportation raise questions as to how effectively the businesses and clubs could draw together the Icelandic population in the West End. While the Ross and Elgin area was undoubtedly an ethnic neighbourhood, to what extent did the West End fulfil the same functions?

## **5.2 An Ethnic Community**

If the geographic setting does not contain people in close proximity to one another, something else must contribute to the maintenance of a sense of 'community'. The first space for public interaction is not geographically fixed, and that perhaps is one of its greatest strengths. What I am referring to here are newspapers. The Icelandic language newspapers were widely distributed and read. While much of their news coverage was on world

events from Canada, the United States and Europe, editorials and letters raised issues and debates important to the Icelandic community itself. This material came from Winnipeg as well as the Interlake and smaller communities. The papers carried announcements regarding most church and club meetings, and sometimes reported on the progress of these meetings or the planning of special events. They described at length events such as music recitals and the consecration of churches, and carried biographies and obituaries of prominent individuals. Advertisements were primarily for Icelandic businesses in Winnipeg, although non-Icelanders occasionally advertised here as well. In short, they contained a narrative of Icelandic life in North America, and served and created a community that was not limited to Winnipeg.

Newspapers were read in most homes, and their content was discussed during evening visits or over coffee. Thus the information was not just privately digested, but served to feed informal conversation. As such, the papers were instruments of collective discourse and functioned to align people's ideas about the issues they presented. When ideological cleavages developed over political, religious or community events, community divisions correlated with newspaper readership, residential area, religious denomination, temperance lodge affiliation and political party affiliation (Kristjanson 1965: 253). Those who read *Heimskringla*, lived to the west and south areas of the West End, attended the Unitarian or Tabernacle church, the Hekla Lodge, and voted Conservative. Those who read

*Lögberg* lived north and east, attended the First Lutheran Church, the Skuld Lodge, and voted Liberal. But the news papers were concerned with similar events, at times portrayed with differing biases, but also also contained information from rural Icelandic settlements. Thus the community that can be imagined through the newspapers exists in a much greater geographic space than the West End. Was the West End experienced as an Icelandic neighbourhood in everyday life?

### 5.2.1 A Child's View

Carl Bjarnason Dahl, who resided there as a boy, from 1910 to 1920, writes “Winnipeg’s West-end was pretty much an Icelander colony in the days” (Dahl 1980: 12). The recollections of Lawrence Gillespie’s interviewees who were also children during the 1910s are closer to what might be expected from the population statistics. The neighbourhood is remembered as an ethnic mix—as one man put it “the League of Nations”. Those who lived on Simcoe, Lipton and Ingersoll remember their neighbourhood as including Italian, Jewish, Scots, Irish, Polish and Ukrainian kids, but dominated by Canadian-born and immigrant British families. In the interviewees recollections, there might have been only one or two Icelandic families on a block, but a higher percentage on Victor Street.

Regardless of density, families of different ethnicities generally got along well with each other. Yet in the world of children, especially boys, ethnicity could be an impetus

for the usual friction and slights of childhood. Boys got into fights when they were picked on by British kids because they were “foreigners”. (British Canadians did not distinguish between various cultural groups.) Girls were occasionally excluded from group activities, perhaps because of their “foreignness”. None of the interviewees report being particularly intimidated by being among non-Icelanders in the public schools.

Icelanders might also pick on other Icelanders for their non-Britishness. One woman remembers being teased as a child by an older Icelandic boy for her accented pronunciation of some words—she had not begun to speak English until starting school. All interviewees stressed that ‘racism’ was not a significant issue in the neighbourhood. To bridge the multiple cultural differences, the children all spoke English when playing with friends, even though Icelandic was spoken at home. It would seem that, as the HD survey suggests, the children of the 1910s were not living within an ethnic enclave. That is, as children they did not perceive themselves as living primarily within a collective of Icelanders.

Icelandic parents by and large put a greater importance on their children’s education than did some of their non-Icelandic neighbours, according to Gillespie’s interviewees. It appears boys and girls attended public school and any private lessons, such as language classes, in equal numbers. At home, school work took priority over other tasks or chores,

but most teenagers stopped going to school when it was no longer free after grade 10 or 11.

The schools mentioned as being attended by Icelandic children were Principal Sparling, on Sherburn, John M King on Agnes and J B Mitchell School (later General Wolfe) on Banning. There were Icelandic teachers at Principal Sparling, and also at Laura Secord School on Wolseley, in Ward 3 south of Portage Avenue, but no mention of what affect their presence had on the curriculum has been found. There were no Icelandic classes held as part of the regular curriculum. The effects of Connor's and Woodworth's ideas of assimilation through education are obvious in the following example. Carl Bjarnason Dahl writes that he loved English history, in particular the invasions of 1066.

[I] didn't know and Miss Steer . . . hardly would have pointed out that invaders like tall Harald Harada, Canute, William of Normandy were (my) Northmen who in overturning England became England. What terribly men [I] thought, and went on singing England's national anthem (Dahl 1980: 13).

But on top of attending the public schools, some children also attended Saturday language schools, at the 'Goolie Hall', the International Order of Good Templars Hall (IOGT Hall). Similar schools were run by the Unitarian Church in the evenings (though perhaps in the 1920s and not 1910s). Instruction was given in conversational Icelandic, reading in Icelandic and grammar. The interviewees said they did not learn 'a heck of a lot', and resented this distraction from their playtime. Overall it is hard to ascertain what immediate impression the classes might have had in counteracting the state approved edu-

cation of the public school system. Most of the interviewees could speak some Icelandic at the time of the interviews, and said that when they were older they did appreciate and put to use what they had learned as children, and in turn passed it on to their children.

There was also a private Icelandic school, open to Icelandic and non-Icelanders alike. As early as 1887, Jón Bjarnson and subsequent others made plans and gathered funds for a “Lutheran Academy”, which would teach standard elementary school subject, such as English, mathematics and geography as well as Icelandic and Bible Studies. Other steps were taken in later years, but it was not until 1913 that the school actually opened, the year before Rev Bjarnson’s death. The Jón Bjárnason Academy taught elementary school children, where instruction in Icelandic was an important part of the curriculum. The school also taught higher grades not offered in the public schools. Lutheran Sunday school teachers received instruction at the Academy (Lindal 1967: 337):

Classes were held first in the Skjaldborg Church (1913 -1915), then at 720 Beverley (1915 -1923), and tuition fees were \$20.00 a year. The instructors at the school included Sára, Jón’s nephew, Rev Runolfur Marteinnson (principal), Rev. Hjortur J. Leo, Johann G. Johannsson and Miss Emma Johannesson. The majority of the approximately 35-40 students in the upper grades came from rural areas to attend each year (Kristjanson 1965: 391-94). Unfortunately, none of Gillespies interviewees attended the early incarnations of the Jón Bjarnson Academy. ‘J. B Academy’ remained open until 1940.



At Wesley College, nearly 50% of the 48 Icelandic students earned medals of achievement between 1907 and 1911, a fact that was noted by the Winnipeg *Free Press* (Lindal 1967: 218). Though education and scholastic excellence was considered a means of achieving acceptance in Canada, Icelanders did not want an education in British subjects only. The push to have Icelandic taught at Wesley College succeeded. Professors Rev Friðrik Bergmann and Rev Runolfur Marteinson were from the Winnipeg community, which also paid their salaries. Classes in the language and literature began in 1901, and included Icelandic Grammar and Syntax, and modern and ancient literature. Literature classes included *Njáls Saga*, and the poems *Völuspa* (*Seeress's Prophecy*) and *Hávamál* (*Sayings of the High One*).

The Icelandic educational institutions aimed to provide several mechanisms for cultural maintenance. One was the education of children in Icelandic. A second provided a training ground for more educators, so that the teaching of the cultural traditions would be more widespread. The third was the establishment of Icelandic studies as a university worthy subject, making it on par with English literature, for example. This final move positioned Icelandic literature as valuable in its own right, independently of any special 'racial' or ethnic categorisation.

### 5.2.2 Icelandic Main Street

Interviewees almost unanimously report that their parents associated exclusively with Icelanders. My evidence shows that many Icelanders worked for non-Icelanders, at Eatons, for example, but this is not what is being discussed by interviewees. Rather, their emphasis was on leisure and community activities. Homes visits were a common form of evening pastime, with coffee and *pönnukökur* served, events of the day discussed, Icelandic whist and other card games played, and perhaps a little singing and poetry recitation. Holidays and special events, such as *sumardagurinn fyrsti*, (the first day of summer on the Icelandic Calendar) were organised by Icelandic voluntary associations, as were picnics and other outings. Trips to Gimli or Riverton were not unusual and would be spent with Icelandic friends and relatives. Tombolas (games nights often held for fund-raising purposes) and evenings of dancing, or concerts and plays were frequently held at the Goolie Hall by various community groups. The minutes of community organisations such as the IOGT indicate that Icelandic was the language spoken at these entertainments (see also Kristjanson 1965 and Lindal 1967). Events were well attended, even though not all of those attending supported the cause. For example, there are reports of a few people imbibing at Temperance events. It would appear rather that the attraction of the events was the entertainment and fellowship with other Icelanders. Leisure activities and

community organisations, then, may have created a sense of community beyond the cause at hand.

In spite of the issues of business concentration, the Icelandic business section on Sargent between Agnes and Toronto Streets must be considered in greater detail because of its perceived, and by extension, its implicit symbolic importance to the Icelandic community. Agnar Magnusson (Lawrence Gillespie interview C1705-1706), discussed “Icelandic Main Street” on Sargent Avenue. In his recollection, along Sargent there were the two newspapers; the printer and publisher Olafur S. Thorgeirsson; the Wevel Cafe; and next to which was a pool hall which changed ownership a few times, and sometimes also served as a barbershop. Further along was David Bjornsons bookstore, which imported books from Iceland, a wood yard, a lady who sold hats, and the Good Templars Hall—not to mention the two churches just off Sargent, one on Victor, the other on Banning. The bookstores, newspapers and publishers had Icelandic signs in the window, that advertised the latest books or newspaper headlines. Other Icelandic shops used primarily English signs, in order to serve clientele from all ethnic groups. Similarly Icelandic was the language of business between Icelanders, but not so that other ethnic groups were excluded.

Mr. Magnusson’s recollection seems to be from the 1920’s, as the church on Banning was not established until 1920. However, the milliner listed in the HD for 1910’s is

named Anna Goodman, likely an Icelander, and after 1920 the milliner is listed as Sarah Duncan. Nevertheless, the composite suggests something of the range of Icelandic shops in the area. Moreover, his discussion reflects what seems to have been commonly held perceptions of the nature of businesses in the area, specifically that Icelandic businesses dominated the stretch.

But, as Dreiger predicts, because of the low population density, men and women did not meet in Icelandic Main Street regularly and year round. With long workdays and seasonal employment, men in particular did not always have a chance to visit with friends. Laura Goodman Salverson recalls her father's utter delight to be able to spend his one free day a week walking the neighbourhood and talking with friends (Salverson 1939: 51-55). And although there were several grocers in the area, many women had groceries delivered, as was standard practise. Still they may have made trips to the dry goods stores for fabric, or to O. S. Thorgeirsson's for a new book, or perhaps to the milliners. The British shops were frequented as well. Interviewees note that in those days whenever Icelanders met they stopped to chat, sometimes at length, in Icelandic. Curiously, adults addressed each other using the British titular system, as Mrs. Sigurdsson and Mr. Vopni, rather than by first name as was common among rural Icelanders. The importance of this central meeting space in the business district suggests that the spacial factors of residences and working conditions for both men and women kept them somewhat isolated from

most other Icelanders, but the tendency to frequent the Icelandic establishments allowed people a better chance to 'run into' each other. Important community establishments drew Icelanders to Sargent and Victor on a regular basis.

Churches also served as crucial meeting places for adults and children. As discussed, pastors were in many respects community leaders. The four Icelandic churches spread throughout the neighbourhood between 1913 and 1919 served Lutheran, New Theology and Unitarian congregations. The First Lutheran Church was located at Bannatyne and Nena from 1904–1919. The second, smaller First Lutheran church, Skjaldborg, on Burnell south of Victor (1913–1923), served the growing population in the westerly portions of the community. The ostentatious Tabernacle Church was on Victor, just south of Sargent from 1913–1920. The Unitarian Church, like the senior congregation of the First Lutheran, was closer to the old neighbourhood, on Nena/Sherbrook at Sargent. Built in 1904, it would serve until 1920, when its congregation united with members of Tabernacle to form the First Federated Church (Unitarian), and moved their location further west to Banning near Sargent. The Tabernacle building then became home to the amalgamated congregations of the First Lutheran Church.

The IOGT Hall was another formal centre of Icelandic community life. Built in 1906–7, it is an impressive stone building with two large meeting halls. Several smaller rooms housed the effects of other Icelandic associations. The temperance unions themselves put

on frequent dances and tombolas, and hosted several of the national annual conferences of the IOGT. It served as the site of various events important to cultural maintenance and expression. These included the aforementioned Saturday language classes, and concerts and plays by local Icelanders and the occasional performer from Iceland. As an all purpose meeting place for the community, it served formal voluntary associations as well as social and cultural events.

In contrast to the IOGT Hall was the less formal Wevel Cafe. Although its best known location was at 692 Sargent Avenue, near Victor, Agnar Magnusson recalled that there had been an earlier cafe of the same name on Sherbrook near the Bardal Funeral Home. The Wevel Cafe first appears in the Henderson Directory in 1915 at 559 Sargent on the north side between Langside and Furby. According to Ragnar Gislason, the Wevel Cafe, run by an Icelandic woman named Gudrun (Runi) Stephens, served both Icelandic and more common British-Canadian fare (Walz 1998: 57). The menus were in English, though the Icelandic foods, such as *aspönnukökur* and *vínaterta*, were also listed in Icelandic. In terms of fare, coffee (*mollakaffi*) was likely the main attraction. According to legend, it was prepared the traditional Icelandic way, and drunk the standard way, sipped from the saucer through a piece of lump sugar held in the teeth.<sup>11</sup> The Wevel Cafe was primarily staffed by Icelanders; the most famous of whom is Kristin Solvadóttir, an Icelandic im-

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<sup>11</sup>This technique is more widely used by men than women, in part because it prevents wetting a moustache. The heavy beard and moustache had been common among Icelandic men for centuries.

migrant woman in her early 20s reputed to be the inspiration for the animator, Charlie Thorson's, creative contributions to the Walt Disney character Snow White (Walz 1998). But it seems what is remembered most about the cafe is the conversation and debate often fuelled by newspaper opinion pieces and editorials, and most likely carried out in Icelandic as at most community gatherings. According to Ragnar Gislason, the Wevel Cafe was the haunt of "labourers and old-timers and the temporarily unemployed (who) would gather there to reminisce, tell stories and argue about politics and religion" (Walz 1998: 57). Agnar Magnusson describes the clientele as "the learned and not-so-learned", who included Dr. Siggi Jul Johannesson, a prominent physician, poet and newspaper publisher very much at the fore of several social causes, an editor of *Lögberg*, and all the businessmen. Some women say that it was not a nice place, and generally avoided by young women (Agnes Comack, Gillespie interview C1661-1663). If Gene Walz's has accurately captured its boisterous character during Charlie Thorson's time—and indeed Thorson himself would have lent it a particularly roguish atmosphere—then this is likely accurate.

Of lesser renown, and esteem, were the pool halls on Sargent, within the vicinity of the Wevel Cafe. There seem to have been two or three in different time periods, with different owners. Ragnar Gislason's father, Hjalmar, an avid socialist and contributor to the newspaper *Voröld*, owned a pool hall in the late 1910s or early 1920s. Ragnar

frequented the place, and considered it a fairly rough establishment. Like the Wevel Café, men came in to read the paper and argue, but also shoot pool and place bets. Although alcohol was not sold there, (as it would have been open during prohibition) men usually brought their own, and Hjalmar had no issue with that. Fights often broke out, but Ragnar reports that Hjalmar had enough regular friendly customers that he and the establishment were protected, and there was no need for the police to come around (Gillespie interview C1676-1680).

Thus while the West End did not have the concentration of Icelanders and Icelandic businesses of the Ross and Elgin area, the dispersal of businesses and the apparent inconvenience created by having to travel on foot, it seems that 'ethnic community spirit' continued to exist. Sargent Avenue clearly had symbolic importance because of the types of establishments—the churches, meeting hall, cafe and stores—located along it. The location of newspapers and book publishers and their Icelandic signs on Sargent is of special significance. Literature is the primary marker of Icelandic ethnicity. It was also *The Voice* of the community, its main forum for discourse and as important as any meeting hall, and unaffected by geographic dispersal. The printers and Icelandic signs on full display on Sargent Avenue signalled both the Icelandic presence in the neighbourhood and the importance of the space to the Icelandic community.



The ideological roles the different institutions played in maintaining community will be examined in more detail in the third part of the dissertation, however, some cursory comments will be made in summation here. The churches remained bastions of Icelandic culture, although as will be discussed, they had different views of just what were the proper religious and cultural ideals. The 'institutions'—the IOGT, the Wevel Cafe, and the pool hall—none of which was explicitly devoted to maintaining Icelandic culture, but became *de facto* community meeting places. The establishments had different levels of respectability and moral value, which might indicate the rank and /or ignominy of the clientele. The largest of those space, the IOGT Hall, home to a secret society, was the paradigm of a middle class civil society association. However, the population of the West End was primarily working class and the IOGT Hall was not an exclusive club. The entertainments at the IOGT Hall were reportedly well attended, and that would mean that attendance was not restricted to distinguished or middle class Icelanders. The Wevel Cafe may have been the haunt of men more so than women, but it too was frequented by men of various status. The pool hall seems to have been antithetical to the veneer of middle class respectability projected by other Icelandic institutions. But still the meeting spaces were frequented by the members of both sides of the religious and political split, and it is telling that the IOGT Hall was built through the cooperative efforts of the two factions.

## 6 Economic Stratification

Problematically, there is no way of ascertaining clear measures of class distinctions among Western Icelanders. There is no record of wages, and no census information that breaks down occupation by ethnic group. Further, within the building industries there is evidence of contradictory class positions. That economic stratification is abundantly evident from a survey of Icelandic homes, and correlates with occupation. In order to ascertain this information evidence of occupation was collected from the Henderson Directories (HD). To assess living conditions, fire insurance maps were surveyed, as these indicate the lot size, and all buildings on the property, including outdoor toilets, chicken coops, cow sheds and the like. Building permits provide information about the the cost of the building foundation and frame of the housing, and specify the amenities provided. Tax assessment records are available, showing the value of the land and building(s), the number of occupants and the owner of the buildings. With this information, a visual inspection of a sample of the houses occupied by Icelanders was made. This can only reflect the

variances in the standards of living in the community, and to some extent accompanying economic status.

## 6.1 Occupation

The most useful statistics would be those that compare the number of individuals in broad categories of skilled and unskilled labour, professionals, entrepreneurs and so on. My own census is derived from an inaccurate source. It is therefore difficult to build a clear picture of the stratification of the Winnipeg population. I have used broad categories to discriminate between types of work. My statistical analysis must be considered an approximation of some general distinctions. It is useful though insofar as it indicates some glaring discrepancies.

The HD supply an occupation for most names listed. In order to construct broad classifications of workers, I used the following categories: working class, consisting of labourers, tradesmen, and low level white collar workers;<sup>12</sup> and middle class—managers; professionals; and entrepreneurs. Those employers who might count as bourgeoisie are not distinguishable from the available information, nor are the contradictory categories of semi-autonomous employees and small employees. Statistics were generated for 1910, 1915 and 1920. One notable category was entrepreneurs and professionals, who ranged

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<sup>12</sup>Those Icelanders listed in the HD as retail clerks are almost exclusively women.

between 17 and 19 percent of men over the three dates. The other notable category is the working class, which, in 1910, 1915 and 1920 made up 74%, 56%, and 59% of Icelandic males. The percentages of working class, and not other categories, vary with the boom and bust years of the building industry. Thus the larger number in the 1910 census likely indicates the presence of migrant labourers taking advantage of plentiful work. A further analysis of occupations within the working class will contribute to the overall picture.

Again using statistics generated from my census of the HD, some general comments can be made about the numbers of men working in building construction. These figures are crude at best, yet they are different enough in some respects from the general averages calculable from the government census to be of interest. The statistics generated by the HD indicate that in 1910, approximately 35 % of Icelandic males were involved in the building industry. In 1915 this number fell to 23 % and by 1920 was just 16 %. The government census information finds that for Winnipeg in general, in 1911, approximately 21% of working males worked in construction, but by 1921 the total was down to 8.4%. This indicates that Icelandic men were overrepresented in the building trades, but that their numbers fell in a similar pattern to of the general Winnipeg population.

The railroads employed the highest number of men in the province. The 1916 census indicates that within the city of Winnipeg, the ratio of railway workers to building tradesmen and labourers was 1:5. Among Icelanders in 1915, the ratio was 1:7.8. It would be

expected that, given the length of time of Icelandic residence in the city, many Icelandic men would have been able to acquire the training for a variety of skilled trades. This is not the case however.

The numbers of carpenters to labourers varies significantly between Icelanders and the general population. In 1910, about 34% Icelandic construction workers were listed as carpenters, another 35% listed as labourers. The government census of the Winnipeg population shows 25% were carpenters, but only 34% of construction workers as labourers. While in 1915 the number of Icelandic carpenters in the HD census remains nearly the same (down from 77 to 72), carpenters constitute nearly half (45%) of all construction workers, while labourers make up approximately 26% of the total. In 1920, again Icelandic carpenters make up half of the total workers, and labourers make up just over one-quarter. But in the 1921 government census of the general population, carpenters constitute 40%, and labourers 12% of the total construction workers. This means that in the Icelandic population, carpenters are overrepresented. The rise in the percentage of carpenters is deceiving, as their raw numbers remain unchanged. The percentage of Icelandic labourers declines along with the decline in construction activity and number of labourers in the general population. There is no indication that Icelandic labourers shift into some other category of work in the city. If labourers were migrant workers from

rural areas, they may have worked in later years on farms, in fishing or logging, or on railroads outside the city.

In summary, it is safe to say that more than half of Western Icelandic men in the West End, working class, and among them, construction workers were over represented. However, the fluctuation of labourers suggests that some of these men were seasonal or migrant labour. Further, Icelanders do not branch out into other trades, suggesting that the structure of the labour force was being reproduced within the ethnic group. This suggests that a further investigation of the construction industries is in order—it will be undertaken in a subsequent chapter.

It also raises the question as to how it was that Western Icelanders came to occupy the West End, when most working class men and their families, including unionised British tradesmen, lived in the North End. The answer to this will be discussed when the domestic group is examined in more detail.

However, just as women worked outside their own home in Iceland—often on someone else's farm—it was not uncommon for women and children over the age of about 12 to be involved in wage labour and other economic pursuits. But adult men were the primary wage earners, working long hours in construction, or for the railroads, as skilled labourers in the summers. In winter months many men had no secure employment; some took odd jobs such as clearing snow and cutting wood in winter (Jón

Bjarnason, Gillespie interview C1655-1656), while others went to the Interlake area to fish. Many housewives took in laundry or sewing, or worked seasonally in retail. It has been suggested that women failed to mention that they were married in order to attain work in retail in the autumn. With the number of Icelandic women working, and the tendency for people to get jobs on the suggestion of other workers, it is likely that marriage status was not a serious impediment to women's employment. Older children were also encouraged to work at odd jobs, and boys could be apprenticed at the age of 14 (Dahl 1980: 16).

As women were literate and had a good command of English, they were frequently employed in retail and wholesale establishments such as Eaton's and Robinson's department stores in the fall, when farmers placed orders for goods after selling the harvest. Women also worked in offices, and light manufacturing. Common occupations for women as indicated by the HD is as Eatons as retail clerks for Eaton's and Robinson's Department Stores, garment factory work, and teachers. Women's work that supplemented the household income may have helped working class families to avoid the North End.

## **6.2 Housing**

Unlike the Ross and Elgin area, the quality of housing in the West End varies considerably. The houses are almost exclusively wood, and range in size from modest one and a half

stories to two and a half stories, with verandas and ornate woodwork, and garages. Older shanties had only a crawl space, and no indoor plumbing. Few shanties remain, and cross-checking properties with building permits indicates that most have been replaced. The occasional brick houses are large elaborate affairs. A newspaper article from 1909 puts the range of purchase price from between \$150.00 to \$200.00 for shacks, up to \$3000.00 for cottages and houses (Artibise 1975: 168). According to the building permits sampled (1910, 1915 and 1920), houses range in cost from \$300.00 to \$3500.00. On material conditions alone, the area appears to be in the middle of the extremes of the North and South Ends—suggestive of the rise of a middle class in Winnipeg.

On any given street between Spence and Lipton Streets, the size of the houses varies. However, west of Toronto, it is not uncommon to find 4 to 10 houses side by side that are nearly identical, suggesting that at a certain point in time in the growth of the West End, builders began producing several houses at once, as an early type of housing development.

Within the neighbourhood, the homes of a few individuals stand out in their grandeur. The spacious brick buildings have decorative exterior woodwork, turrets and verandas, and building permits indicate they had running water, indoor plumbing, steam heat and a full basement when built. These homes are more suitable to areas south of Broadway and even south of the Assiniboine River. For the most part, these are the homes of Icelandic physicians, clergymen, and a few entrepreneurs. Some are scattered throughout the West



End, and a few are south of Portage. Notable, however are four homes in a row on the north end of Victor, just south of Notre Dame. One block east and just north of Notre Dame on Emily were the homes of the well-to-do Icelanders who had remained in Ward 4. As the grand brick homes of these families are interspersed with regular two-story wood frame houses, one does not get a sense of an exclusive upscale zone, but these homes were certainly within a five minute walk of each other. This suggests that 'distinguished Icelanders'<sup>13</sup> chose to remain in the vicinity of other members of the ethnic group, in spite of their financial ability to live elsewhere. The families belonged to the Unitarian, Tabernacle and Lutheran Congregations.

Over all, visual inspections revealed that Icelanders as a group did not live in homes that were markedly better or worse than those of the general neighbourhood. Although there were uncharacteristically large homes owned by Icelanders in the area, the majority resided in the more common two-story houses, cottages and occasional shanty. Differences in the quality of houses in which Icelanders resided indicates that a definite stratification in material circumstances had developed. When housing is compared to occupational status, as might be expected, it is evident that the occupants of shacks tend to be labourers and their families. But not all labourers live in shacks. Many resided with other adults and children with whom they did not share a family name, indicating that

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<sup>13</sup>The term 'distinguished Icelanders' was used in newspapers to describe a select group of people in 1920. How they became part of that group is the subject of the next section of the dissertation.

families continued to keep boarders to make ends meet. Finally, as by 1910 there were very few new immigrants from Iceland to Canada, it cannot be assumed that the shanties and cottages were indicative of the homes of newcomers who would graduate to better housing as they became acculturated.

What is clear is that somehow the movement of Icelanders from Point Douglas and the Ross and Elgin areas to the West End was either accompanied by, or resulted in, socio-economic stratification within the cultural group. The data on occupation is useful only insofar as it is an indication of the trades found among Icelanders, broad class categories. The difference between the shanties and cottages and turreted brick houses suggests that the discrepancies in material wealth are not as extensive as the socio-economic divide in the greater Winnipeg society, but marked nevertheless. While economic differences based on external criteria alone are recognisable among Icelanders, objective differences in social opportunities, attitudes and behaviours would support a stronger argument for the existence of classes. Such differences would include differential access to education, variance in social ideals and aspirations, and exclusive social circles. The potential for this latter category has already been noted already in the respectability of the IOGT, Wevel Cafe and pool hall, and the issue will be examined in more detail in Section 3.

## **7 Kinship and Domestic Group**

### **7.1 The Household**

In Iceland, kinship shows strong patterns of cognatic structures and ego-centred practises (Rich 1989, Tomasson 1980). In Canada today these same principles are manifest. Many Icelandic Canadians know of a relative who has kept track of genealogical information, and who can trace the family back to the first settlers (up to 5 or 6 generations). That the kinship reckoning traditions continue to exist in forms similar to those used today in Iceland suggests that in the 1910s those traditions were important.

Kinship influenced domestic group composition in 19th century Iceland, and the domestic group was the main social unit for organising labour, and enculturation and education. On the farmstead, all group members worked at similar tasks according to gender. The head of the household was legally responsible for overseeing the education of all children, nightly religious observances, and ensuring the good moral conduct of all household members. Landowners were supervised only by the local pastor.

In the urban centres of industrialising state societies, most families do not have access to the means of production, and the tasks of domestic group members are no longer of the same co-operative nature as on the farmstead. Wage labour, performed by one or two household members provides money which supplies the needs of the entire household. Household members still do many tasks to meet the needs of the family, such as sewing, food processing and building furniture. But reproduction of the wage earning labour force is taken out of the control of the family, and placed in the hands of state schools and training systems. Similarly, the tasks of enculturation—the reproduction of the cultural group—is shared by institutions of civil society. The church, public school and clubs such as Boy Scouts are ideological apparatuses of the dominant culture. Thus the dominant and ethnic culture are in competition. The effect of schools has already been discussed, attention will turn to the efforts of the family in the following discussion.

Kinship continued to be important to survival of Icelanders in Manitoba, who could use these ties to find work, room and board, or in the case of orphans, a new household. What is problematic is the possible breaking of generational and lateral ties through immigration. Although all existing records of emigrants from Iceland have been compiled and are readily available (Kristinsson 1983), the naming system in Iceland makes it difficult

to trace kin ties through these records.<sup>14</sup> As discussed however, it is clear that most people left Iceland as a nuclear family, sometimes accompanied by farmworkers.

There is little documentation about the influence of kinship patterns on community level social organisation in Winnipeg, or in the Interlake, for the matter. However, it is discernible from both Laura Goodman Salverson (1939) and Carl Dahl (1980) that kinship was strategically used by Icelandic immigrants to provide a support system external to the household. Salverson's father's sister, a trained midwife with her own home for unwed mothers, assisted the family, as did Laura's cousins, aunts and uncles. Dahl and his mother were assisted by relatives in both Winnipeg and the Interlake. In addition, relationships between community leaders suggest that kin ties were acknowledged, if not useful in networking. For example, the pastor at the Skjaldborg Church, and the principal of the Icelandic school the Jon Bjarnason Academy, was Rev. Runolfur Marteinson, nephew of Rev Jon Bjarnason, and brother-in-law to Arinbjorn Bardal, an undertaker and temperance leader.

There is considerable evidence that marriages were arranged strategically as in Iceland, although not always for the alliance of two kin groups. Relatives and friends often suggested marriage possibilities for the benefit of those to be married. For example, Laura

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<sup>14</sup>That system is one wherein one's surname consists of the father's first name and 'son' or 'dóttir' added as appropriate. Women did not take their husbands name upon marriage. When Icelanders arrived in Canada, every member of the family was given the fathers surname.

Goodman Salverson's father suggested that she marry a close male Anglo-American friend, who had begun to make the arrangements with Laura's father. Her father's reasons were in part economic (Salverson 1939: 397-398). Carl Dahl's spinster aunt Gerda agreed to become a housekeeper to a widower with six children, a situation arranged by a mutual friend that resulted in marriage. The arranged marriage is often referred to in fiction (for example, *First Love, Last Forgotten* in Framfari March 6, 1879, trans: Houser). The in-law relationship between men established by the marriage of a male ego's sister to his close friends seems have been important. The relationship is noted as a happy one (Bergmann 1992), and was in real life the relationship between early settlement leaders Sigtryggur Jónasson and Johann Briem.

In Winnipeg, the domestic group to some extent resembled the form found on Icelandic farms—in both cases consisting of adult workers residing with a nuclear family. In addition to taking in boarders, the fostering of children was not uncommon. When one or both parents died, or when the family was in dire straits, relatives and friends took in one or more of the children.<sup>15</sup> Such children became full members of the family, of equal status to other children. On rare occasions, there was a teenage girl or young woman whose primary role was to help the mother, although the term servant would

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<sup>15</sup>It appears that kinship played a minor role in fostering orphans, but probably because kin ties were severed due to immigration, households needing more hands or having available space would take in children regardless of bloodlines (see for example Gudlaugson 1958: 42-44; and Margaret Frederickson, Gillespie interview C1672-1675).

not be accurate here. As in Iceland, hired help worked alongside other members of the household, and dined at the same table (Aurora Thordarson Gillespie interview C1738-1740).

Boarders can be considered a necessary factor in the household. The practise of boarding was for the home owners not simply a extension of generosity, though it was that. Migrant residents of Winnipeg, such as men coming from the farms to work in construction for the summer, and young women working in restaurants and retail shops, and students, often boarded with families. Agnar Magnusson told Lawrence Gillespie that many people took in boarders specifically to make ends meet. Boarders were important to the domestic group because of their contribution to the overall household income.

Many families also took in new immigrants. Aurora Thordarson reports that while her parents did not take money from new immigrants, her father trained the men to work in the construction industry, and of course hired them himself. This is an even closer approximation of the domestic group in the homeland, particularly as men like Mrs. Thordarson's father would continue to work along side the men he had trained.

As discussed previously, most homes in the West End did not have more than three bedrooms. In most cases all children of the same sex shared a room, and often slept two to a bed. Margaret Fredrickson, orphaned at the age of 14, and came to Winnipeg to work at Paulin-Chambers candy factory. Boarding with an aunt, she shared a double bed

with her female cousin who was slightly her junior. One migrant labourer reports that he shared a room with the older boys of the household where he boarded in the summers. In other cases, children were moved into a single room, so that a boarder could have a private bedroom (Gillespie interviews). In some instances a single mother might rent a portion of a house for herself and child (Dahl 1980: 15).

More than one interviewee describes the conditions as crowded. Extra-familial household members were almost exclusively Icelandic, suggesting that the institution of the extended household was a private, cultural phenomena. The sharing of accommodations served as a culturally based self-help strategy. However, the nuclear family with its attached workers was a custom deliberately abandoned in New Iceland in order to create a more independent and egalitarian society. The extended domestic group in Winnipeg must be considered an adaptive strategy to urban living, rather than a custom maintained out of preference. It provided homeowners or principle tenants with an additional income to make ends meet, just as additional labour on the farm in Iceland resulted in greater production. It may also have fostered ties of mutual reciprocity; the obligation of the homeowner to the less fortunate fulfilled. Moreover, it likely prevented Icelanders from having to move to cheaper accommodations, such as those in the North End.

The number of children in a family cannot be determined satisfactorily because of the unavailability of both census and anecdotal data. Although the 1901 census indicates that



families with as many as ten children were not rare, Salverson's memoirs suggests that even among Icelanders the mortality rate of children under five years of age was quite dramatic. Tax assessment records for the years of this study regularly show 4 to 6 children per household. This of course gives little indication of the number of children per couple who survive into adolescence or adulthood.

## **7.2 Childhood and Enculturation**

Icelandic parents by and large put a greater importance on their children's education than did some of their non-Icelandic neighbours, according to Gillespie's interviewees. It appears boys and girls attended public school and any private lessons, such as language classes, in equal numbers. None of the interviewees report being particularly intimidated by being among non-Icelanders in the public schools, though many did not speak English until they attended school. At home, school work took priority over other tasks or chores, but most teenagers stopped going to school when it was no longer free after grade 10 or 11.

I have observed and heard of several aspects of adult-child interaction that have had continuity over time, and seem to be characteristic of Icelanders. One is the tendency for parents to encourage children to solve their own disputes with their peers, rather than

turn to an authority to intervene. Parents seemed to let their children play unsupervised as well. As Dahl writes of his own childhood

When he would take his clamp skates his mother left it to him to be careful. She could have thought what the daughter of Kjarval, Irish king . . . told her son Sigurd digri when apprehensive of certain Scots I'd have brought you up in my wool-basket had I known you expected to live forever. Fate governs a mans life, not his coming and goings. The boy went on down to the fog shrouded shore, skated, careful not to cut the Indian fishing-lines (Dahl 1980:15).

Just as adults did not supervise and interfere in children's lives, they were not always considered to have authority over children by virtue of age, especially when it came to knowledge. Adults ranging in age from 35 to 70 have told me of getting in trouble for talking back to non-Icelandic adults. For example, many teachers do not like to have their pronunciation of Leifr Eriksson corrected (British pronunciation is Leaf, in Icelandic it is Layvr). When teachers speak to parents, most parents will argue that they have taught their children to be forthcoming and truthful, and that the 'offending' child has done nothing wrong. Thus children are taught to engage adults and superiors in discussion and debate from an early age.

Icelandic cultural traditions place a great emphasis on self-reliance. Children are taught to speak out for themselves, and to look out for themselves. They are given considerable independence, and told to be responsible for their own safety. It was not unheard of for girls under the age of 16 to set out on their own. When asked who made the decision

for Margaret Frederickson to come to Winnipeg to find work when she was orphaned at 14, she answered almost indignantly, 'Me! Who else would?' (Gillespie interview). The feminist Margret Benediktson left Iceland for the United States on her own accord at the age of 13 (Kristjanson 1965: 372), and once in North America worked her way through college and business school.

### **7.3 Domestic Life and Labour**

The Icelandic household in Winnipeg shows the maintenance of some forms of domestic co-operation from the old country. However, labour for wages had usurped the domestic group's ownership of land vegetation and livestock as the basic necessity for subsistence. In this respect the Western Icelandic household was quite similar to the British middle-class model, insofar as food and clothing preparation, and the raising of children were managed by the housewife, while the husband pursued economic activities such as wage or salaried labour, or some entrepreneurial project. However, in the Winnipeg Icelandic household, the sexual division of labour was generally less strictly observed, and gender-based status eschewed the British-style male dominance. In addition, the emphasis on the male-bread winner and stay-at-home wife, central to construction of masculinity in British society (Bercuson 1990: 199), was not a cultural ideal shared by Icelanders. While there was a sexual division of labour, neither role was valued over the other.

Due to the amount of labour required by women to sustain the household, it was preferable for mothers to be stay-at-home homemakers (George Asgeirson, Gillespie interview). Women seemed to be responsible for the management of the household, but were not solely responsible for the labour. Women's work included general cleaning and laundry, the cooking and preparation of food, and making clothing. Many husbands did help out with most types of work when they had time, but also had their own sphere of work. More commonly, an older daughter, or the wife's own younger sister or sister-in-law was the main assistant, but help could also be found in the neighbourhood. Female relatives often assisted each other, especially after the birth of a child or when a wife was ill. Girls and women who assisted the housewife were not generally treated as inferior members of the household. (Aurora Thordarson, Gillespie interview C1738-1740).

Laura Goodman Salverson describes the daily routine from her adolescence (circa 1902) as follows:

An occasional visit . . . was the highlight of endless days that seemed to me just an eternal round of stupefying washings. To begin with, you washed yourself, or were washed. Then your sister was washed. Then the breakfast dishes. Then the baby, the baby's bottles, and the baby's clothes, including a million diapers to be hung in the sun, or the air at least. The lamp chimneys had to be washed and polished. Then the kitchen floor. By which time the dishpan was full again, thanks to the noonday porridge, flatbread or pancakes. Well, now one might breathe a little in dryness and comfort, you would think. Oh no! This was a fine time to wash out the new stockings that mama had knitted, or to turn out the cupboards or launder papa's shirts. After which, of course, one had coffee to sustain the spirit, and provide a bit more work for idle hands. Which left an interlude for taking in the diapers, to be folded

corner-wise, and for scorching flour for the baby's buttocks. Well! well! now it was high time to wash the potatoes for supper. Just barely time in fact, before the baby had to be washed again for the night, together with his bottles (Salverson 1939: 273-274).

Although this describes the housework from a young adult's point of view, it is probably a fairly accurate description of a woman's work day. It neglects to mention the mending and knitting frequently undertaken in the evening. Salverson points out elsewhere that such cleanliness was made more difficult when one had to haul water from the corner pump, but this would not have been necessary for most in the West End.

Food acquisition and preparation was mostly the domain of women, though here again men sometimes assisted. Some Icelanders preferred to deal with Icelandic businesses (Magnea Hannesson, Gillespie interview C1684-1686) and groceries could be bought from Icelandic stores on Sargent, Ellice, and Wellington. In the West End, many grocery stores delivered; Magnea Hannesson recalls that in the 1910s, a G. Johannesson came around to the house to take grocery orders, and delivered the food the next day.

Overall, Icelanders in Winnipeg adapted their eating habits to suit the foodstuffs available to the working man's wages. As such, the staples of the Winnipeg Icelanders diet consisted mainly of starchy foods prepared in an Icelandic tradition. The mainstay of the daily diets was flatbread (made of wheat and oatmeal), rice (cooked into a porridge, unsweetened but with milk), oatmeal porridge, and soup containing a joint of beef, pota-

toes, turnips and onion (Salverson 1939: 216). One of the benefits of living in the sparsely populated West End was the availability of pasture land for cows. As milk had been the mainstay of the diet in Iceland, milk products (skyr; mysuoster) were a welcome addition to the Winnipeg diet. Those who kept cows made milk products for their own households, and for sale in the neighbourhood. It should be noted that as Icelandic food traditions in the Iceland itself were pastoral, it was the animal milk products that were consumed, not the animal itself, as might be the case in most other Europeans.

The fare most familiar to non-Icelanders was perhaps the coffee, renowned for its rich aroma and taste. Icelanders bought coffee green—partly because it was least expensive in this state, and roasted it in the bake oven close to the time of use. Coffee was not boiled or perked the English way, but hot water was poured over it as it sat in a cotton bag or kaffipoka, as we commonly filter coffee today. Coffee is to Icelanders as tea is to the British, perhaps. Afternoon coffee or *aftanskaffi* was a customary daily pause, accompanied by slightly sweet breads, such as pönnukökur (a crepe-like pancake rolled up with a little sugar), *kleinur* (sour cream donuts), or simple flatbreads (a flour and oat cake with little leavening). Although a standard daily meal, *aftanskaffi* was not as substantial as the English high tea. It was, though, a social affair, not necessarily held at home. Women often visited each other at this time, and men frequented a café.

Many customs associated with food, and indeed the food itself changed, primarily for economic reasons. This is particularly the case with meat. Sheep heads were often obtained from the slaughter houses in Winnipeg and blackened in backyard fires in the traditional manner. This unusual activity disturbed some non-Icelandic neighbours, and Walz reports that Charlie and Joe Thorson would have to “fight their way home from school” after their mother performed the “strange satanic rite” (Walz 1998: 30). In Iceland, blackened sheep’s head was considered a delicacy. In Winnipeg it came to provide a welcome source of inexpensive meat and was not just a treat (Salverson 1939: 111). Other meat dishes, commonplace in Iceland, were limited to special occasions because of the cost of the cuts of meat and spices. Hungakjöt (smoked mutton), rúllupylsa and láfrapylsa are mentioned as being such treats. Unlike the blackened sheep’s head, these Icelandic meat dishes became important at celebratory dinners, such as Christmas and *sumardagurinn fyrsti*, but were no longer eaten regularly. Thus economic factors seemed to influence what foods might come to be considered ethnic markers.

Supplying the family with clothing was for the most part the exclusive domain of women, but traditional clothing styles were not maintained. Some outer clothing was purchased, as were shoes, but women made many items of clothing from store bought fabric. This fabric was often used and reused as was almost universally common for the times. Worn adult sized coats became children’s wear, children’s wear was made into

quilts or braided rugs. Decorative traditional embroidery was still practised, to enhance the appearance of clothes and home decor.

Many Icelandic women, married and single, appear in the Henderson Directory as dressmakers. Salverson herself worked as a dressmaker before and after her marriage. Her services seemed to have been required by the well-to-do ladies, whose extensively detailed fittings she describes, as well as those of lesser means from whom she simply took orders for the clothing. In the Winnipeg household then, sewing would have had fulfilled functional, decorative and economic purposes.

Knitting was more universally practised than sewing. Even in the city, some mothers spun their own wool purchased from Icelanders in the countryside (Magnea Hannesson, Gillespie interview C1684-1686; Walz 1998). Spinning wheels were often brought from Iceland, and were passed off frequently to those in need when the original owner gained economic stability. The spinning and carding of wool, it seems, was excess labour that was done away with as soon as possible. The knitting of sweaters, socks, mittens, scarves and underclothing was also time intensive, and was shared by all members of the household, including husbands. It is also not unusual to hear of boys who were skilled at knitting, darning and embroidery, or became so if they tended to be sickly and less suited to outdoor labour. Knitting was a family activity, often done in the evenings, and the practise of having a family member read aloud while others knitted and did other chores



continued in a few homes into the 1920s (Magnea Hannesson, Gillespie interview C1684-1686).

Men's responsibility to the household seems to have been to bring in money, in addition to tasks in the household. The majority of men in my census were involved in seasonal wage labour. When full-time work was available, men might spend such long hours working that there was little time for any major undertakings or projects at home. In the off season, there was more time for building furniture, and repairing or painting the house and out buildings for those who had the inclination or training. Fathers were also likely to be involved with raising children, spending time teaching Icelandic reading skills or trade skills when at home. The amount that men participated in women's domestic duties varies, however. Most interviewees reported that their fathers did assist with housework to some extent, but not all men or boys cleaned or did dishes, for example.

The home was also a place for entertainment, especially storytelling literature and music. All interviewees mention being read to by one or both parents. This practise was recommended by community leaders as a way to teach the culture of Iceland—not unlike the methods of homeschooling in Iceland itself. Many parents knew the stories by heart, or made-up tales on the spot while chores were being done. Often these were pieces of sagas and eddas, or stories of ghosts and huldufolk. Icelandic books from Iceland, and by

Western Icelanders such as Johann Magnus Bjarnason, were purchased at Fred Johnson's on McDermott, or David Bjorson's on Sargent, and traded among homes. Short stories and especially poetry were frequently published in newspapers, religious magazines and other journals.

Many parents recited poetry and occasionally composed it themselves. The poet Guttormur J. Guttormson referred to Icelandic society in Winnipeg as *Eldorado Leikskaldanna*, the Eldorado of Bad Verse (Neijmann 1994: 111), because so many people attempted, read and had published poetry. However, according to interviewees this seems to have occurred less frequently than some contemporary writers would have argued. Perhaps the discrepancy lies in the ages of interviewees and the time of life of their parents.

Well Dad was a hard working man, and ah, when he came home at night to the family, (we) kept him pretty busy. We weren't regimented or anything as children, but we had a pretty strict schedule, and when it came time to go to bed I think that was when he sat down by himself and Mother and did some of these things (such as writing poems and short stories for their own amusement).

Indeed, biographies of most of these writers, especially Salverson and Stephan G. Stephansson, note that they had to steal time at the end of the day to compose stories and poetry. This would be the case for many working people, and if poets were as common as Guttormur suggests, many people were spending what little extra time they had in this pursuit.

According to Gillespie's interviewees, music also played a significant role in family life. Icelandic lullabies were the first songs a child might ever hear, but Icelandic folk songs, psalms and popular British-Canadian tunes were sung, for example, as dishes were being washed, or in some homes only after chores were complete. A few of the first generation immigrants were known to chant rámur, an ancient form of extended verse. Singing together was done as a family activity or with visitors in the evening. Of course, there were also church choirs and soloists, and an all male choir seems to be a favourite among Icelanders. Notes of voluntary associations indicate that music recitals were sometimes held as post-meeting entertainment. Although musical instruments were rare in Iceland,<sup>16</sup> in Winnipeg, many families saved to buy a piano, and send children to Icelandic music teachers, even in the most restrictive economic circumstances. For example, Carl Dahl's mother and aunt were both single and worked in a garment factory, and were therefore likely quite impoverished. But he wrote about his own musical training

(Aunt) Gerda gave him his first violin, his mother paying for lessons from an Icelandic teacher, at his home, fifty cents the half hour. He showed up one day for the usual wearisome exercises, pulled from his music case Missouri Waltz and Tipperary, asked to learn to play them. Solemnly Mr. Johnson took him through them, then went on with the exercises (Dahl 1980: 13)

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<sup>16</sup>Violins were available, as were the odd church organ. There is a unique Icelandic string instrument, the langspil.

The valuing of music and musical ability may have been a continuity of Icelandic customs, even if the instruments and selections enjoyed were not exclusively Icelandic.

When it came to passing on cultural and linguistic skills, all interviewees said they were encouraged to enjoy the literature, try the language, and as with music and academic work, and many did. Both parents played a role in passing on traditions, but fathers spent long hours away from home at wage labour in the city, and may have been out of town for extended periods of time altogether. Men seem to have played a dominant role in public life, but the household was traditionally the woman's sphere of power, and she would have been the dominant parent. Thus it is difficult at this juncture to assess the forces behind cultural continuity, although adults today refer to the 'amma imperative', an allegiance to one's grandmother to uphold Icelandic cultural values.

## 8 In Plain Sight

In examining the parameters of the historic Icelandic community in Winnipeg, some trends come to light, as do some discrepancies. First, there is a lower percentage of Icelanders in the West End than sociologists would consider necessary for the maintenance of a cohesive ethnic group, and yet Icelanders were recognised as one of the many races in Winnipeg. Second, there was a prevalent notion that Icelanders were prosperous. My census indicates, however, that more than half were workers, and according to the social surveys of the time, workers were not earning a living wage. Third, Icelanders seemed to have been fitting in to the dominant culture quite well, yet domestic life indicates that some important features of cultural knowledge were being passed on to the next generation.

Breton's and Dreiger's studies indicate that after 1960, Scandinavians did not have a strong ethnic community because of the lack of institutional completeness resulting from the low population density of Scandinavians living in the West End. My census data

indicates that in the years between 1901 and 1921, there were even fewer Icelanders relative to other residents in the West End. Since there were so few Western Icelanders in Winnipeg, it is not surprising that whatever electoral ward they resided in, they would not appear to comprise a large percentage of the residents. That their business district was recognisable at all indicates an ethnic presence, and a deliberate maintenance of culture. Even while the shopkeepers catered to both the general Anglophone population they had a loyal ethnic customer base. Moreover, the popularity of the Icelandic meeting places in the business district and the use of the newspapers indicates a spirit of camaraderie.

The interviews for the *Cosmopolitan Winnipeg* series and the reports of successes of the Wesley College students paint a particularly positive stereotype of Icelanders. Icelandic leaders were complicit in perpetuating this image. For example, the speaker interviewed for the *Cosmopolitan Winnipeg* article in 1912 made some puzzling comments. He reported that Icelanders were not interested in sectarian schools, claiming it was a poor use of funds. Six months later, the J. B. Academy opened, although the work to get it started had been on going for decades. The speaker also said that there were no suffragettes among Icelanders. Yet a forty-page feminist magazine, *Freyja*, had been published monthly from 1898–1910. Margret Benediktsson, the editor, had founded the Icelandic womens suffrage society in Winnipeg in 1908. Delegates attended meetings and rallies held by

Nellie McClung and other British-Canadian women throughout the decade. Indeed, Liberal MP Thos. H Johnson, was the son of an Icelandic suffragette.

The comments made by the interviewee could not have been a mere mistake. Icelanders were too few in number and too interconnected for some one knowledgeable enough to be chosen as an ethnic representative not to know of the importance of the school and women's organisation. As suggested previously, the *Cosmopolitan Winnipeg* article paints Icelanders as middle class, and the information given by the anonymous Icelandic(s) about the community panders to that ideal. The result is that the Icelandic community seems akin to, if not very much a part of, the West and South End middle class British-Canadian society, or social strata.

But what is particularly curious is the comment made by the reporter that Icelanders, from the *labourer* to merchant and professor, were prosperous. Given the wages documented by social workers, it is difficult to imagine labourers or even skilled tradesmen as well off.

My survey of occupation and housing demonstrates that there was a definite discrepancy between the wealth of working people, and professionals and entrepreneurs. Laura Goodman Salverson wrote *Confessions of an Immigrants Daughter* to record the true struggle experienced by Icelandic immigrants (Salverson 1939). Her accounts vividly portray the careful balance of resources that had to be kept by working people. Her descriptions of

her first twenty years (1895–1915) document a life wherein the budget for food in general, never mind a varied or nutritious diet, was often threatened by the requirements for other necessities—like fuel, clothing, furniture, medical bills, and funeral services. Indeed economic necessity seems to have influenced the domestic group composition. The consequence of failing to balance the economic budget was death, often of one's children, but also of oneself. Salverson writes of the deaths of her young siblings, adult friends and co-workers, and her and her family's own close calls brought on by malnutrition and exhaustion. Her father was a skilled labourer, and she herself contributed to the family income with a variety of jobs, as a domestic, a drug store clerk and a garment factory worker in Duluth, and as a dressmaker in Winnipeg. The family did not seem to take in boarders. Her family's financial situation would be typical of perhaps half of the Icelandic population in Winnipeg.

Yet, Icelandic labourers did live in the West End, and the infrastructure of that neighbourhood alone would give workers a better standard of living than that of their North End counterparts. For anyone with a better wage, the availability of fresh eggs and milk products from neighbours who could pasture animals in the West End probably enhanced nutritional status. As well, the inclusion of the extra household residents—boarders—likely increased total household income. And of course, Icelanders had been in the city for over 35 years. They may not have had savings, but they would have had years to



accumulate durable products, like furniture, dishes, clothing and the like, which the new immigrants would still need to purchase. Icelanders then probably had a little more money available for rent or even the purchase of housing due to the length of time in the country, and the composition of the household.

The length of time of Icelandic residence in Manitoba and Winnipeg no doubt lead to a greater degree of acculturation than was found among those who had arrived during the time of mass immigration. Further, as Iceland boasted few cultural spectacles, such as sculpture, dancing or special costuming, Icelanders in Winnipeg had few distinctive "exotic" customs to display. The most telling characteristic of foreign-ness would have been perhaps an Icelandic accent. While Icelanders in Winnipeg still eat skyr, mysuostur, rullupylsa, and of course vinnaterta, with the exception of the latter even today these are not well known outside Icelandic ethnic circles. Embroidery continues to be practised, and in the early 20th century would have been considered genteel by the British-Canadian culture where ladies of the day also practised embroidery. Icelandic woodworking, used sparingly to decorate the home, was ornate but not garish or exotic to the British-Canadian eye. Many Icelanders perhaps spoke English with an accent, but most spoke English, and were naturalised citizens. Thus Icelanders in the West End likely appeared well assimilated. Yet Icelanders did cherish a crucial source of culture.

The emergence of the saga literature as an ethnic marker, rather than foods, dances or costumes, has served to entrench of cultural ideals while effectively hiding cultural differences. The sagas are about the Vikings—the well known scourge of England in medieval times, no less. In the newspapers of 1900–1920, and beyond, references to the behaviour of individuals in the sagas are ubiquitous. This trend was rooted in the nationalist discourse of late 19th century Iceland, but did not produce the same ideological focus there. In Iceland, attention focused on the promoting the excellence on the literary style, and in terms of social references, the spirit of law and self-government. The cherishing of Viking characteristics is a North American phenomenon.

The popularity of the sagas in Canada was facilitated by both their style and subject matter. The language of the sagas is very similar to the Icelandic written today; linguistic change has been minimal over the centuries. Further, the stories are told in a straight forward and highly objective manner, with little descriptive embellishment about emotional states or the beauty of nature. As the central narrative focus is blood-feud, these are tales of adventure, filled with fierce and heroic characters. In addition, though some sagas are hundreds of pages in length, they are episodic, and can be related in stages. As such, they are easily accessible and entertaining stories.

The sagas are uniquely tied to the landscape of Iceland. Landmarks, especially waterfalls or mountains, are described in the sagas. Locations where many events took place are

still recognisable in Iceland, and photographs of the areas have appeared in the Icelandic newspapers in Canada since the earliest publications. Descriptions of the family farmsteads in Iceland in relations to the sagas have been passed on through generations of Icelandic Canadians. I was told by one man, whose family had been in Winnipeg since 1900, that on the family farmstead in Iceland there was a particular mound in the hayfield that was the grave of the outlaw Gréttir. This connection to familiar places provides the literature with a sense of immediacy. The landmarks become, or perhaps remain, symbols of the temperament of Iceland and Icelanders themselves, and a direct connection to the (mythic) lives and history of their ancestors.

It is of note that if families had had servants, or could purchase more goods rather than having to work together, the mechanism of disseminating certain ideologies—those of the sagas—may not have continued. No special time was needed to be made for this study, as the narratives were used to break the monotony of household chores as was customary in Iceland. However, in Iceland the sagas were not the only narratives used to break the monotony of the evening work period; folktales, ghost stories and contemporary novels were also read. That a greater emphasis was placed on the stories of the Vikings and sagamenn among Western Icelanders than among those in Iceland would explain why the Viking is today an ethnic marker in Canada but of little importance to Icelandic nationalism.

That the saga narratives emerge as particularly important to the early Winnipeg Icelandic residents is not simple happenstance. Although the various church ministers no longer had a supervisory role over the education of children as they had had in Iceland, one minister was particularly popular and charismatic. Rev. Jón Bjarnason served the Winnipeg Icelandic community from 1884 to 1913. He was friends with many influential Icelanders, and extremely active in the community. As the president of the Icelandic Lutheran Synod, he set out teachings for all Icelandic Lutheran churches. When speaking in Sunday schools or to youth groups, he frequently fascinated his listeners with the saga tales and descriptions of the landscape where the events took place. His charisma undoubtedly lent the narratives a greater sense of excitement.

But it is unlikely that it was the witty remarks of one who had been hacked with a halberd and was about to die that the pastor meant to convey to his audience. Blood-feuds occur and centre on the honour of the sagamenn, their courage in the face of adversity, fate and destiny. The heroes, and especially the outlaws, do not shirk from duty, fear, and difficulty. The sagas make a point of emphasising the abilities and qualities of each individual, regardless of his or her social station. The sagas portray nobility and honour as attainable characteristics, all the more valued if asserted in the face of the worst of fates and circumstances. It is not difficult to make the connection that if the ancestors could be

honourable in the face of bloodshed, one should uphold certain standards of behaviour in the modern world, no matter how difficult.

The saga events and their characters were also used in other written formats. The newspapers in particular drew frequent references and analogies to the sagas, comparing the behaviour of community members to that of the sagamenn. In doing so, those who had access to the means of production and dissemination of ideas could turn attention to a wealth of morality tales and cultural values that could and would be explored in the private homes.

It should be noted that newspapers were not just a venue for their editors and writers. Letters and lengthy arguments between Icelanders were also published. The exchange of stories and news fosters a sense of connection to others, and the Icelandic newspapers were a forum for interaction and discourse. The seemingly mundane activities of reading Icelandic newspapers, visiting and debating over coffee, and the apparently ubiquitous, but awkward efforts at writing cannot be underestimated as facilitating communication of ideas among Icelanders throughout North America. And, after 1900, the Viking ideal was commonly found in this form of public discourse. This will become evident when the rhetoric of the voluntary associations is examined in more detail.

But on the other hand, the clear lines of dissemination of information and ideology which had existed in Iceland were being unravelled and fragmented. Most children atten-

ded the public school system, which challenged the 'truth' of informal lessons in Icelandic history as noted by Carl Dahl. Moreover, while in Iceland the Lutheran pastors were the authority on cultural knowledge, in Winnipeg the religious organisation of Icelanders had dissolved, with different pastors contending for the allegiance of the factioning congregations. Added to this was the fact that at the IOGT Hall and the Wevel Café, if not also the pool hall, men and women completely outside the sphere of the churches were putting forth other moral and social ideals; about temperance, socialism, and politics. The IOGT events and Wevel Café were well known for the debates they hosted. Here, who won the debates depended on the argumentative and charismatic behaviour of the participants. A new group of leaders was arising, many of whom were financially successful. They would assume new roles of influence in the West End community, through a range of forums from their positions as employers to their activities in the voluntary associations. It was these new leaders who, over time, would turn an assemblage of Icelanders into an ethnic group.

## **Part III**

# **Ethnicity in Action: patterns of public interaction**

## 9 The Building Trades and Industry

My 1910 census shows an over-representation of general labourers, carpenters, and contractors among Western Icelanders in Winnipeg. In addition there is an increase in several related trades, such plumbers, painters and stonemasons, as well as real estate agents. These occupations, taken together, suggest that Icelanders as a group had all the necessary skills and business contacts to create an ethnic economic enclave. This is supported by anecdotal evidence in short articles (Thorarinson 1967, Peterson 2000) and the interviews with Laurence Gillespie. In the decades following 1910, the construction industries employed hundreds of Icelandic men, some permanently, and some as migrant labourers from the Interlake area.

Before 1900, Icelanders worked as labourers in construction, along with other menial and casual jobs. Though some were trained as cabinet makers, they did not pursue carpentry as the wages were so low (Thorarinson 1967: 24). Most worked as excavators for sewers and buildings. But by 1900, a few Icelanders had undertaken construction projects



of their own (Peterson 2000: 280). Their efforts included the brick, turreted home of Gisli Olafson, built in 1895 by Olafson himself, and the three story, brick Bardal Block and Columbia Buildings built in 1904.

In the meantime, Icelandic men had gained an excellent reputation among Anglo-Canadians as workers in various trades. McIvor (1908) spent his summers working at various work sites in Winnipeg, and wrote his master's thesis on the fitness of different ethnic groups for employment. The thesis is highly subjective, but does seem to represent the common consensus of Anglo-Canadian employers in the matter. He describes Icelandic workers first in terms of appearance, noting their large size and strength. In his opinion they are hardworking, reliable and able to work for long periods of time without tiring. He also notes that they are quiet, honest, and intelligent, and moreover, not prone to drinking (McIvor 1908: 8-11).

So it was that Icelanders found themselves in a unique social and economic position vis-à-vis other ethnic groups when the building boom of 1908—1912 occurred. Because they possessed the skill set and business contacts, Icelanders could act as real estate agents, and hire Icelandic contractors, who in turn hired Icelandic workers for the assortment of tasks required to build houses and apartment buildings, thus forming an ethnic economic enclave. Icelanders were also acculturated enough to understand the workings of the economy, the city bureaucracy and the potential for growth of the city, and to

collectively put this knowledge to good use. It would allow them to take advantage of the building boom brought about by the extraordinary population growth in Winnipeg.

However, the boom and bust of Western Icelandic building activity does not coincide with the 1908–1912 boom and bust of the general Winnipeg economy. The reason for this seems to be the source of funding. Most contractors financed their building activities themselves. After 1908, it appears that they gradually acquired the capital to build more extensively, and continued building at a frenetic pace through 1914. Icelanders seemed to function in a separate economic sphere as well as at a cultural remove from other Winnipeg builders.

It is abundantly evident that participation in the construction industry made some men extraordinarily wealthy, while most earned a passable living. While the whole endeavour united and likely benefited many Icelandic men and their families, it was the source of economic stratification within the community. How this affected social organisation, social statuses and power relations must be inferred from the anecdotal remarks from many sources. As those who were outstanding in their endeavours are those most frequently mentioned, evidence points to both admiration and resentment towards the wealthy. However, these individuals remained in the community, and undoubtedly influenced Western Icelanders as a group.

## 9.1 Sources

As Thorarinson remarked “quite surprisingly, I have not been able to find any material of consequence of the subject (of Icelandic builders)” (1967: 24). My primary sources were primarily the Henderson Directories, building permits, tax assessments and fire insurance maps. Oleson’s history *Saga Islendinga í Vesturheimi* (1950, 1953), provides biographies of wealthy contractors and real estate agents, focusing on their ancestry and community service. The transcript of Thorarinson’s luncheon discussion (1967) provides personal insights into the characters and relationships of contractors and their employees. Peterson (2000) examines the architecture of homes and apartment blocks built by Icelanders in the West End.

Some comments should be made about the use of city records to ascertain the extent of activities by Icelanders. Although surveys of the Henderson Directories were made for the years 1900, 1905, 1910, 1915, and 1920, a survey of building permits could not be made for the same years, as the required material was unavailable. The ledgers of building permits were unavailable for the years 1904–1905 and 1910. Tax records for 1915 have been misplaced. Therefore, new survey years were chosen at 4 year intervals, which correspond to boom and bust years. They were 1908, 1912 (boom years) 1916 (bust year) and 1920. As research progressed, it became evident that the years 1913 and 1914 were unusual years for Icelanders, and the permits for these years were surveyed as well.

Tax assessment records were used to trace the real estate holdings of specific individuals. The years for the surveys matched those of the building permits 1912 and 1916.

Several sources build an aggregate account of the Icelandic activities associated with the building industry in Winnipeg. Building permit ledgers and the city tax assessment rolls pinpoint locations and specify the values and building costs of properties and buildings. This provides a framework for understanding the rise of individual builders, and the development of these entrepreneurs as a aggregate. Not only can the increase and decrease in the number, size and cost of the projects be observed, but the names of owners, builders and architects provide clues as to the social interactions of those in the upper echelons of the business.

It should be noted that building permits list the owner, architect and builder of the project. The owner is frequently listed under the heading of builder, and often as architect, especially when the owner of a single lot is having a home built or repaired. The owner then contracts a builder, but the builder is not named in the ledgers. Unfortunately there are builders mentioned by Oleson and Thorarinson who were quite successful, but never appear in the building permits or even the tax assessment records.

## 9.2 A Contractor's Career

What is strikingly evident in all of the above sources is that the period from 1900-1920 was a financially turbulent time for most men involved in the building and real estate industries. In many instances, building was a stepping stone to real estate ventures. For these builders and entrepreneurs it was literally a time when fortunes were made and lost. Several did not enter the 1920s with their fortunes intact. Many who did would be severely hurt by taxation issues in the mid 20s, or the stock market crash and the depression. Nevertheless, the contribution of Icelanders to the architecture of the West End is tremendous (Peterson 2000).

Icelanders specialised in building houses and interestingly, apartment blocks. It was after 1905 that apartment buildings began to be built across North America, and in Winnipeg they were a particularly popular form of residence building. More apartment blocks were built in Winnipeg than in any other Canadian city between 1899 and 1914, in spite of Winnipeg's relatively small population (Peterson 2000: 281). Apartment buildings ranged in size and style, from the small and functional to the grandiose and ornate. Icelanders would become especially involved in their construction.

A final comment should be made about the location of Icelandic building activity. There is no evidence in the building permits or tax assessments of building activity or ownership of property by Icelanders in Wards 2, 5 or 6, that is, the city centre and North

End. The *Cosmopolitan Winnipeg* article does note that the North End YMCA was built by Icelanders, but no name is given. There is some evidence of residential construction in the South End, but these are not for the homes of the elite. Almost all construction was done in the West End.

To orient the reader to the ebbs and flows of contractors' careers and place in the Icelandic community, I will begin with a brief narrative of the rise and fall of one builder, and his contributions to the community. His story is more dramatic than most, but not atypical, of the larger scale, or bourgeoisie, Western Icelandic contractors.

Thorsteinn Oddsson was born in Iceland in 1864, and was a cabinet maker by trade. He came to Canada in 1888, settling in Winnipeg in 1901 (Oleson 1940: 309). According to family legend, when Thorsteinn arrived in Winnipeg, he thought he might try selling bicycles, and approached George Ashdown, a very successful wholesaler and eventual mayor of Winnipeg, with a proposition. Ashdown had other plans, and invited Thorsteinn into his office, whereupon he asked Thorsteinn if he might try selling a house instead. Thorsteinn, believing he could sell anything, agreed to sell 461 Simcoe. He received a \$10.00 commission for his success (Olga Skafffeld, Gillespie interview C1730-1731).

By 1904, Thorsteinn had teamed up with Skuli Hansson, who had also been active in real estate for many years. The third member of their group was Jón J. Vopni, a longtime

resident of Winnipeg who had been an active member of the Icelandic Labourers Union and had had extensive dealings in real estate. The company, Oddsson, Hansson & Vopni built many houses, including, during the recession year of 1907, a six-story apartment block worth about \$75,000 (Oleson 1940: 302).

By 1910, however, the Henderson Directories shows Th. Oddsson and Sons, Thoroldur, (who seems to have been Thorsteinn's brother), and Leifur, his son, in business, without Hansson or Vopni. For the next few years Thorsteinn would be successful enough to become a member of the Winnipeg Real Estate Exchange, one of only two non-British members of this exclusive group. Th. Oddsson and Sons primarily built apartment buildings, but building permits indicate they also built a few modest dwellings.

Thorsteinn Oddsson had a bit of a reputation for being able to pick the next area of city expansion. His trick was to ride the streetcar to the end of the line to observe the areas there. The street car lines allowed those who worked in the city centre to travel more conveniently to work, while escaping from industrial and crowded downtown areas. Thus the end of the line in some places would have been an ideal spot for new development. The streetcar tracks would also allow workers to get to work sites easily.

The company Th. Oddsson and Sons, built at least 8 apartment buildings in the boom years (Oleson 1940: 309), and the costs of some of them are staggering. In 1911, three apartment blocks were built on St. Paul's Avenue in the West End at about \$30,000

each. In 1912, the prestigious architect D. Bellhouse, designed the Coronado Apartments on Furby for the company. The building itself cost \$90,000. During the same year, Thorsteinn bought the land for, and built, the Skjaldborg Church on Burnell, which he then donated to the congregation (Oleson 1940: 310). The company's biggest project was the Thelmo Mansion at 629 Burnell, a stately 78 suite building, taking up 6 lots and costing \$236,000. The permit for this building was taken out in 1914, just on the cusp of the real crunch for the Winnipeg building industry. Although the building was completed (Thoroldur and Leifur lived there in 1915, and it stands today), it may have been the partly responsible for Thorsteinn's economic demise.

Thorsteinn ran into financial difficulties in 1914, due to the war, and lost most of his property (Thorarinson 1967: 25). Surveys of 1916 and 1920 building permits show no further activity by an Oddsson. According to Oleson, Thorsteinn left Winnipeg for California in 1924, where he apparently made and lost another fortune (Oleson 1940: 308).

The demise of Thorsteinn Oddsson during WW1 is one of the few clues as to the sources of capital for builders. Thorsteinn had access to capital investment from several banks. To secure it, he had liens on the various apartment blocks he had built, likely intending to pay off the debts with rents received. At the beginning of WW1, banks involved in financing the war effort — that is the larger banks — called in the liens, and



Thorsteinn was unable to pay them off (Olga Skafffeld, Gillespie interview C1726-1729). Indeed the 1916 tax assessment records indicate that the property on which Skjaldborg was standing had been reclaimed by the First National Investment Company. The tax assessment records for 1916 show that Thorsteinn had 18 properties (including 7 apartment blocks), worth \$180,470.00 with 288 tenants. In 1920, he still owned at least five rental properties, valued only at only \$37,070.00.

Thorsteinn had a particular commitment to the Icelandic community, and is reputed to have been "a very generous man (who) helped Icelandic people with work and other assistance" (Thorarinson 1967: 26). A brief discussion of his involvement with the church and one other matter is evidence of this. According to Oleson, Thorsteinn began to seek influence in the community in about 1913 (Oleson 1940: 308), and to this end proposed to build a meeting house, called Alþingi, to house all Icelandic clubs. He intended to finance the endeavour himself, having each club pay fees which would, over two and a half years, amount to \$260,000 of the estimated \$300,000 costs (Oleson 1940: 308). Nothing became of the idea, perhaps because the IOGT Hall on Sargent Ave could already fulfil the same purpose.

Thorsteinn's contribution of the Skjaldborg church seems to have arisen from a similar motivation. As the Icelandic community extended further west, First Lutheran congregation members were inconvenienced by travelling the increasing distances on foot or

street car to their church at Nena and Bannatyne (Oleson 1940: 310). By all accounts, Skjaldborg was built to resolve this problem, and was not at odds with its parent Lutheran congregation. Thorsteinn himself lived at 448 Sherbrook (near Sargent), and it is known that he had attended Tabernacle for a time (Kristjanson 1975: 351), the rival to the First Lutheran Church. Once Skjaldborg was built however, he did become a member of its congregation and was its financial mainstay (Oleson 1940: 309). Thorsteinn was generous with the use of the building as well. For the academic years 1913-1914 and 1914-1915 the church housed the Jón Bjarnason Academy. Although the school had some staff on salary and did charge a fee to its students, the Skjaldborg Church, apparently at Thorsteinn's behest, received no financial remuneration (Oleson 1940: 308).

Thorsteinn's story illustrates several things about Icelanders in the construction business in the early part of this century. The first is that of the rapid financial rise and fall of individuals. The second notable characteristic is the emphasis on the construction of apartment blocks. Icelanders built a relatively large number of apartment blocks, particularly in the West End. The third is the Thorsteinn's contribution to the community. Most Icelanders who made financial gains continued to give back, economically and of themselves, to their fellow countrymen.

### 9.3 Economic Overview

In 1908, few Icelandic names appear in the building permits. Those which appear are listed as builders for British owners, and in some instances as partners as owner/builders on a few houses. Most men named have been in the business for a considerable length of time. It seems that Icelanders were not immediately involved in the building boom.

In 1912, Icelandic builders were caught up in the economic boom. The activities of a few builders were outstanding in scope. For example, Háldor Háldorsson built 35 homes and one apartment block, with a combined total cost of \$139,300.00. A movie theatre was built at the south west corner of Pembina and Corydon, by J Jónasson, costing \$8000.00. S Brynjolfsson and Co built the Graduate Nurses residence on Wolseley Avenue, the school now known as J B Mitchel, an apartment building and two warehouses, all with various individuals both Icelandic and British listed as the owners, for the total cost of \$210,500.00. The highest cost single building owned by an Icelander was an apartment owned by a G Sveinsson, using a design by Brown & Wallace, and costing \$100,000.00. Th. Oddsson built a \$90,000 apartment block and the Skjaldborg Church. Icelanders are listed as owners for at least 21 new apartment blocks that year, totalling \$601,000.00. This is more than one-quarter of the total apartment blocks built in the city that year.

Table 9.1: Cost of Building in Winnipeg

	<b>Icelandic Totals</b>	<b>Wpg City Totals</b>
1912	\$601,000	\$20,563,750
1913	\$380,000 (-36%)	\$18,503,350 (-10%)
1914	\$1,064,000 (+280%)	\$12,160,850 (-34%)
1915	—	\$1,826,300 (-84%)
1916	\$17,000 (-98%)	—

In 1913, the world depression reached Winnipeg. Icelanders are listed as owners for only 8 apartment blocks, with total costs of \$380,000.00, or 63% of the previous year's costs.

But 1914 saw a revitalisation in apartment building activities for Icelanders. There were 17 apartment buildings constructed by Icelanders, with total costs of \$1,064,000.00, or 174% greater than the 1912 costs. By far the biggest project was Th. Oddsson and Sons' \$256,000 Thelmo Mansion on Burnell, but there were others. S. Brynjolfson and Co. are listed as owners and builders for apartments totalling \$125,000.00. Visual inspection reveals these apartment buildings are more ostentatious than those built previously.

By 1916, however, only 14 listings in the building permits ledgers can be linked to Icelanders. These are for repairs or additions to existing buildings, and new sheds, garages,

stables, a blacksmith shop and the Royal Templars Hall. The total cost of all work done by Icelanders is \$17,300.00. Familiar names of the auspicious apartment builders are absent.

The 1913 downturn in global markets did not spell the end of the building boom for Icelanders. WW1 changed the focus of life in the city as many men went to war. This eased the dire need for housing in the city. The decrease in property values, the lack of demand for new houses and a severe drop in what could be charged as rent took their toll on the building industry and real estate industry (Thorsteinsson 1935: 176). Given that the sale of newly built houses and revenues from rent were the major sources of capital for Icelanders, funds for new construction had dried up.

Thus, two trends are discernible from the building permits in regards to the timing of Icelandic participation in the building boom. The first is that, in 1908, Icelandic builders, although perhaps well prepared in experience to undertake the construction of dwellings and apartment blocks, did not move swiftly to build large projects. The second is that the stringency which cut off moneys to very large scale projects, such as the building of the farm implements factory by an American firm, and prevented their being built, did not affect Icelanders in the same way. It was not until 1916 that there was a drastic slow down in Icelandic construction. The reason for the slow reaction of Icelandic builders to both circumstances suggests that Icelandic builders financed the projects independently.

Carpenters and other workers were also affected by the vagaries of the building industry. The number of labourers, possibly migrant workers, fluctuates with the boom and bust years. Kristjanson suggests that the demise of the Tabernacle Church congregation after 1917 came about in part due to the migration of tradesmen of Winnipeg as work became scarce (Kristjanson 1965: 355-356). Some of these men left with Haldor Haldorsson and Haldor Sigurdson who got contracts in growing rural settlements. Haldorsson continued to build homes, and Sigurdson typically built schools and churches.

#### **9.4 Structure of the Enclave**

The building industry, as an ethnic economic enclave, was comprised of men involved in diverse and stratified occupations. Icelanders primarily worked for each other, but some contractors continued to take contracts from British-Canadians as in the past. The class relations within the enclave are somewhat confusing due to the Marxist pattern of categorising class position.

Part of the problem is that, among Marxists, there is less agreement about what the middle positions are. Artisans, shopkeepers and independent professionals are usually considered the 'traditional petty bourgeoisie.' Those holding positions as professionals, technicians, managers and some white collar workers are generally described as the middle class or 'new petty bourgeoisie' (Wright 1980: 326-328). Wright proposes that

the problem of clarifying the class position of petty bourgeoisie is resolved if their control of money capital, physical capital and labour is specified. What this also does is specify the contradictions each middle class position has in relation to the proletariat and bourgeoisie. Thus, Wright refers to each of the following subcategories as 'contradictory locations within class relations.'

Contradictory locations are of three main types. Managers and supervisors hold a position between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Like the proletariat they have no control over money capital, but rather more control over physical capital, and much more control over labour. How much control varies with the position; higher management is closer to the capitalists, and foremen are closer to the proletariat. The second contradictory location is the small employers, who occupy a position between capitalists, in that they control labour, and the petty bourgeoisie in that they must labour themselves and do not control sufficient labour to accumulate large masses of capital. Finally there are semi-autonomous employees, who do not control money capital or the labour of others, but have real control over the physical capital of production. Just as these are grey areas between each of the major class positions, there are variances within each contradictory position. Wright breaks this down further, by specifying how much control artisans, craftsmen, professionals and others have over each of the three main factors, but that goes beyond the purposes needed here.

The following series of short biographical sketches will illustrate the diversity of interlocking positions within the Icelandic construction related activities.

While many workers were likely wage labourers, even general labourers seemed to work on contract, supplying their own horses, tools or machinery. Magnus G. Gudlaugson began as a labourer, excavating basements. According to the Manitoba wage recommendations, excavators would receive the lowest wages and work the longest days of all workers. After much experience at this, Magnus accepted a job on contract to dig a cellar for a private individual. To do so,

I hired a man with a horse team, plow and scraper to scrape out the main part of the cellar, and then I would finish the digging with a shovel . . . I found that I could make a little better than wages at this work, so I got a team of my own and shortly after that I went into partnership with the late Mr. Haraldur Olson. . . (Gudlaugson 1958: 84–85).

Magnus primarily worked on subcontract for larger Icelandic and British contractors. That he had formerly been employed as a wage labourer by these contractors helped secure his contracts with them. Most jobs involved private dwellings, but he also dug sewers and the basements of a few larger buildings, including the First Lutheran Church. During the winters, when the ground could not be excavated by hand, Magnus took his team of horses out to haul fish and timber on Lake Winnipeg. He stopped excavating when farmers began getting in on the business in the building boom. He argued that as farmers could feed themselves and their teams from the farms, they could undercut the



price of urban dwelling excavators, and he could no longer make a profit if he matched farmers' prices.

Fred Swanson was involved with interior decorating. He was trained as a painter in Iceland, and advertised himself as a sign painter in English and Icelandic language newspapers and city directories. As a general construction worker, he painted residential interiors, and hung wallpaper. This type of work could be done year round. Swanson was particularly talented, and is best known to have decorated the interior of many houses in the West End with traditional murals of Icelandic landscape. His most famous work is found in Bjorn Péturson's home on Alverstone, where he was assisted by Charles Thorson. Thorson would go on to be an animator credited with creating the prototypes of several well-known cartoons, including Snow White and Bugs Bunny (Walz 1998). Swanson also did not restrict his activities to the construction business. He painted greeting cards, and his landscapes were the mainstay for the backdrops of the Icelandic Festivals, as well as many dramatic plays.

Like Magnus Gaudlaugson, many carpenters also drifted into contract work, rather than wage labour. Many of the smaller builders began with one or two houses, sold or rented them, and reinvested the capital. Hjalmar Gislason got his start by first building two small cottages, one in which the family lived, the other which he rented out. After a time he sold them with enough profit to put a down payment on the Connaught

Block (Ragnar Gislason, Gillespie interview C1676-1680). Thorarinson speculated that “in these years a builder could by good management and hard work build a house or an apartment building for almost the amount of the mortgage, but only by working at and supervising the construction himself” (Thorarinson 1967: 25). Jón T. Bergman also began by building small cottages, and renting, then selling them (Hrefna Borgford Gillespie interview C1659-1660). He did “pretty well, until the Depression” in the 1920s, but usually worked long hours late into the night, even as the builder/contractor. In the case where houses were rented out, they “almost always produced modest steady annual returns on the initial investment” (Peterson 2000: 280–281). However, the tax assessment records indicate that most small builders did not keep many dwellings as rental properties.

Another strategy was the formation of partnerships to build a house or two for sale. During boom years, some partnerships dissolved as each man took on projects individually during the boom years. In other cases, the partners took on larger projects. An article and photo in the *Free Press* praises the success of the owner/builder, Albert Johnson, and architect Paul Clemens for the Pandora Block on Winnipeg Avenue, and other apartments of such grandeur (*Free Press* April 5, 1913). The building permits indicate though that as times became tough in the city after 1912, partnerships once again became a form of mutual assistance.

By 1912, houses were being 'mass produced' by Icelanders, in an undertaking that appears to be the forerunner of the way that subdivisions are built today. For example, partners Bergman and Sveinsson bought several lots side by side on Lipton, Toronto and Homes Streets between Portage and Notre Dame, building approximately 18 dwellings with a total value of \$29,700.00. Haldor Haldórsson also used the 'housing development' strategy. However, he often took out more building permits than there were lots. For example, on lots 36-41 on Banning (totalling 6 lots) he built 8 dwellings with garages, for an average cost of \$3000.00. A visual comparison indicates that the houses are two story, seven room dwellings, not significantly different in size to other houses. However, the buildings are separated by less than one-half of a metre. Tax assessment records show Haldórsson kept these as rental properties.

Contractors and subcontractors existed who do not appear in the building permits. Clues to the methods and activities of contractors are haphazardly evident in various sources. Skuli Hansson is an individual who is well known among Icelanders, in part because he served as an officer (major) with the Fort Garry Horse during WW1. As well, he was involved extensively in real estate and house building, and had an office for many years in the *Tribune* Building. His advertisements for "Skuli Hansson Real Estate and Investment Brokers" can be found in the various English language papers, such as the *Tribune* and *The Voice*, and the telephone books and Henderson Directories, as well as the

Icelandic papers. His ad in the January 1909 issue of *The Voice* reads that “\$25.00 in cash and balance in small monthly payments buys a cosy cottage.” Other Icelanders, such as Jón J Julius, Jón Tryggvi Bergman and Jón J. Bildfell operated in the a similar manner. These men are listed among the successful real estate and building contractors in Oleson’s works, but relatively few building permits can be found in their names.

The building industries were comprised of many class gradations. Only a few men, such as Thorsteinn Oddsson, Háldor Háldorson, and Arni Eggerston could be considered to be capitalists. They had men in their employ who occupied a contradictory class position; their supervisors or foremen, who controlled labour but not money or physical capital. These men also had wage labourers. But many builders could not extract themselves from the work-site and their work-crew for lack of capital. These would be be considered small employers, as they controlled labour, and to some extent physical capital, but their access to money capital was somewhat restricted. Finally there are the subcontractors, who although they are not wage earners, as Wrights model of semi-autonomous employees specifies, they did control physical capital and their own labour, but were paid on contract for the job done.

Thus the organisation of the ethnic economic enclave as a whole is not delineated by a capitalist linear hierarchy, because of the contradictory positions occupied by many small employers and contracted labourers. This pattern is, at first blush, reminiscent of

the relationship between landowners and their workers in Iceland. However, had a landowner got rid of a worker for inadequate performance, the welfare of that labourer would fall on the hreppr, and ultimately involve the landowner. But in Winnipeg, both capitalist and small employers could fire wage labourers and contractors for inadequate work, and therefore were afforded greater power over labour than the landowners in Iceland.

## 9.5 Working on the Construction Site

In the *Cosmopolitan Winnipeg* article, an unidentified Icelander in discussing carpentry, is quoted as saying, “Our people kind of naturally take to carpentry. It is a trade that keeps the mind employed as well as the body” (*Free Press* Nov. 16, 1912). Other trades were represented among Icelanders notably painting, stone-masonry and plumbing, the former two traceable to men trained before immigrating to Canada, and the latter to early immigrants’ experiences in Winnipeg. Thus it appears that at least until 1920, trades training for Icelanders in Winnipeg came from other Icelanders, and not from the wider ethnic spectrum. Thus ethnic group reproduced its own labour force.

When Icelanders came into a position to act as builders and contractors, they tended to hire Icelandic labourers and tradesmen—men who were often kin relations (Thorarinson 1967: 28). The language on the job site was Icelandic. While this was likely to be

merely a habit born of convenience, ethnic language use is a phenomenon which serves as a barrier to members of other ethnic groups. It is unlikely, therefore, that Icelandic contractors would have had non-Icelanders, even as labourers, in their employ.

Table 9.2: Males in Construction

	<b>Icelandic</b>		<b>Winnipeg</b>
1910	35%	1911	17.6%
1915	23%	1916	—
1920	16.6%	1821	7.3%

The large numbers of labourers in construction could reflect the tendency of Icelandic contractors to try to assist their unskilled kinsmen. As immigration from Iceland had nearly ceased, these men had to be migrant workers from the rural areas, or young untrained urbanites. Given the economy and need for labour, it is not likely that Icelandic contractors were the only employers willing to hire new immigrants as labourers, especially when Icelanders had gained a positive reputation as workers. We might then enquire as to why Icelandic workers would prefer to work for their countrymen.

There may be several reasons. One may be a sense of allegiance to their own kin, coupled with the ease of working in Icelandic and with Icelandic trained tradesmen. Although schooling in New Iceland was in English, many New Icelanders continued to speak Icelandic in the home and on the farm. Some may not have been proficient in Eng-

lish, as it is said, “you don’t need English to talk to the cows.” The language in the urban Icelandic workplace may have dissuaded migrant workers from New Iceland from learning English, and thus being able to work with other ethnic groups. Another factor might be that Icelandic bosses treated their kin better than did bosses from other ethnic groups. Finally, the location of Icelandic construction may have been a contributing factor. As most workers would not have owned their own transportation, it would be convenient to work in their own neighbourhood. And indeed most Icelandic construction took place in the West End.

The first two reasons given above, ethnic allegiance and better treatment, should be explored in more detail. Thorarinson was himself a builder, as was his father, and comments that the hiring of kin was a mutually beneficial relationship, insofar as workers were assured of work, and builders could trust the quality of workmanship (Thorarinson 1967: 28). Aurora Thordarson (Gillespie interview C1738-1740) related that her father, Jonas Johanneson thought Icelanders would get on better in Canada and encouraged them to come out from Iceland. He helped as many new immigrants as possible, she said, by teaching them the building trades and hiring them himself. Some boarded in the family home. When asked if her father ever received payment, Aurora Thordarson replied, “No, he was always the hard worker.”

Thorarinson (1967: 28) relates that a mark left by Icelandic workmen on woodwork joints was a pinch of Copenhagen snuff, suggesting that these workmen took pride in their work. If Icelandic workers did work conscientiously and with pride for their employers, it can be surmised that they felt a responsibility to their kin, just as contractors showed a general commitment to their kin and community—as in Iceland.

As on the Icelandic farm, the working conditions on construction sites brought employers and contracted employees together. Anecdotal evidence supports the idea that the relationship between boss and work crew was one of camaraderie. Thorarinson recounts several stories which shed light on the relationship between builders and their workmen. For example, one afternoon, Loftur Jorundsson left his crew of workers for some refreshments at the Leland Hotel. The workers continued on, but ran out of material. When Jorundsson didn't return to order more material, the workers went down to the Leland Hotel to get him. Loftur, apparently quite drunk, ordered "Champagne for everybody." Work was resumed in a day or two (Thorarinson 1967: 27). Needless to say, workers less loyal to their boss would have simply slowed down the job so as to take a break and not run out of material, while still getting paid.

Jón T. Bergman was contractor who not only built apartment buildings but was extensively involved in real estate and property rentals. Like many contractors, he worked alongside his men on construction sites. While building the Tabernacle Church on Vic-



tor Street, he “liked to have his own way” on the site (Thorarinson 1967: 27). Given Bergman’s ventures and successes elsewhere, it might be expected that he would be the authority at the site, and that it is remarked that he acted “the boss” suggesting that this authoritative behaviour was not considered appropriate to Icelandic foremen. Bergman is considered by Thorarinson to be, after all, good-natured and humorous about his own proclivities, noting Jón’s joke “það er einginn vandi að vinna með mér ef jeg fæ öllu að ráða” Thorarinson 1967: 27). (It’s easy to work with me as long as I’m allowed all the advising).

Some contractors were less respected by their foremen and workmen, however. Thorarinson again relates the situation where one foreman would routinely send the workers off with the words “Get to work boys, here comes hell” when Thorsteinn Oddsson would arrive to inspect the proceedings. The foreman would then turn to Thorsteinn with a smile and friendly words, and engage his employer in ‘respectful’, and perhaps flattering conversation for some time. When Thorsteinn left, the foreman would remark “I have to say this, boys. We will now have it as we thought. You know the wisdom the old man has since he once forged a piss pot in Iceland” (Thorarinson 1967: 26, trans. mine). It is interesting that the insult is specific to Thorsteinn’s supposed lack of building expertise (he was trained as a cabinet maker), rather than his social standing or personal characteristics. This suggests that for Thorsteinn to have adequately gained

the respect of his workers, he should have demonstrated his expertise, rather than simply have the status of “boss.”

But in tough times, builders could pay wages that were felt in the trades to be “unconscionable” (Thorarinson 1967: 28). Thorarinson relates a poem written about Haldór Haldórsson, when during the depression he paid labourers 12.5¢ per hour and carpenters 25¢ per hour (translation mine):

Kvad er að frjetta um Haldórsson?  
Já, hann er að láta vinna  
og gefur líka góða von  
að geta borgað minna.

What is the news about Halldórsson?  
Well, he is letting me work  
and gives me hope  
that I can get my pay.

It would seem that the social and material conditions under which Icelandic men worked could have resulted in a complex of various tensions. On the one hand, during the building boom, their kinsmen, true to Icelandic cultural values, provided men with work. On the other, even if employers were generous with wages above and beyond the average for the city, tradesmen, and to a greater extent labourers, were working at physically gruelling jobs, for long hours at wages which still barely provided for a comfortable living. The arrangement of the domestic group is evidence of this. Moreover, migrant labourers from the farms may have been able to work at cheaper rates than urban

dwellers, because the farm would provide them through the winter months, and this may have introduced competition among workers.

If contractors like J. T. Bergman and A. P. Johannsson worked alongside their men, this would likely be the case on most job-sites. Most contractors would be categorised as small employers. The visual comparison of housing indicated that in the 1910s most contractors were not living an affluent lifestyle. If contractors and carpenter own the same technology, and worked together under the same conditions, there would be little difference in their subjective experience of the social relations of production.

The patterns of interaction on the job-site had several important social consequences. First, there were likely vestiges of paternalism between the 'boss' be that a small employer or foreman, and workers, as there had been on the Icelandic farm. This would have likely resulted in friendly relations in the boss took into consideration the workers needs', and if the workers performed well, which according to Thorarinson, it seems they did. There would also be an onus on the foremen to direct the acquisition of skills and appropriate moral behaviour.

As it has been found that the skill set among Icelanders was restricted to those possessed by immigrants from Iceland, or picked up in the early years of Icelandic settlement, it can be surmised that more senior Icelanders taught their skills to the younger generation. In this way the reproduction of the labour force was not so much the purview of the state

school, as much as it was passed from generation to generation within the ethnic group. At the same time, ethnically appropriate behaviour could be inculcated in the younger generation of men on the job-site.

Thus the ethnic economic enclave is directly responsible for economic stratification within the Winnipeg community. But it also gave many men who would have been wage labourers a more autonomous position, or allowed them to become small time entrepreneurs; it allowed them to move up within the class structure. It trained men in work skills they may not have had a chance to acquire elsewhere, and it maintained ethnic group cohesion. However, this is not to say that the relations between employers and employees were not exploitive. Whether they were recognised as such is a possibility that should be clarified by issues raised during the General Strike.

## **9.6 Unionisation?**

Evidence for Icelandic participation in unions is conflicting. They had formed the Icelandic Labourers Union in 1887–1890, and gone on strike against their British-Canadian employers. The strike was led by J. J. Vopni and Jón J. Bildfell, who were newspaper editors thirty years later during the Winnipeg General Strike, and spoke out vociferously against the later labour movement. In 1894, when the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners local number 343 was recruiting members, it held meetings at Icelandic meet-

ing halls on Jemima Street (in Point Douglas) and on Elgin Street and signed only 10 members (Berkowski, Reed, Reilly and Smith 1995: 24). Then, during the 1899 carpenters' strike even non-union Icelandic workers supported the action.

“One matter that has often been approvingly mentioned during the strike is the unhesitating stand the Icelandic carpenters took. As not many of them were in the union, they have always been looked upon as an element of weakness, but recent events have settled that doubt most emphatically” (*The Voice*: May 19, 1899)

At this time, most Icelanders would have been still working for British Canadian employers.

In the summer of 1912, 4000 carpenters in Winnipeg went on strike for approximately 6 weeks, winning most of their demands. While the number seems large, census data from 1911 indicates there were nearly 11,000 carpenters in the city at the time. In the *Cosmopolitan Winnipeg* article, it is remarked that there was a carpenters' union (*Manitoba Free Press* Nov. 16, 1912). However, no evidence can be found for an independent Icelandic carpenters' union, and the 1910-1920 rolls of the carpenters local do not contain any names that are clearly Icelandic. No mention is made of whether Icelanders had gone on strike that summer against their Icelandic employers. Whether Icelandic construction workers participated in the 1919 General Strike cannot be concluded from their past actions.

## 9.7 Real Estate

With so much Icelandic involvement in building industry, especially in the construction of housing and apartment blocks, it is not surprising that some men became involved in real estate. The two most notable were Arni Eggertson and Thorsteinn Oddsson, the only two members on the Winnipeg Real Estate Board with non-British names.

Tax assessments recorded the ownership of properties in each ward, and whether the properties were rented out, had buildings on them, or were vacant. The most notable real estate activity took place in the second decade of the century. In the 1912 tax assessment records, only 5 individuals appear to have significant real estate dealings. In 1916, they number about the same, but with a few changes in the players. Real estate was not taken up by nearly as many individuals as was the building industry itself. In 1920, even fewer men had multiple properties. Those who did had several properties: Jón J. Bildfell owned apartment buildings and a grocery store, totalling \$55,860.00; Haldor Haldorson had 32 properties, assessed at a total of \$94,910.00; and Arni Eggertson owned 28 properties totalling \$161,654.00.

However, all of the men involved in real estate and rentals had been directly involved in the building industry. Most became involved in real estate independently of outside ethnic assistance. Their business was not limited to the Icelandic community, but most rentals properties were in the West End. By cross checking the tax assessment records

with the occupants listed in the Henderson Directories, it is possible to discern patterns of sales and rentals between ethnic groups. In all, only about half of the homes listed as being owned by the four real estate agents in 1912 appear to have been lived in by someone with an Icelandic name. Arni Eggertson in particular managed rental properties south of Assiniboine River, none of which was occupied by anyone with an Icelandic name. In 1916, less than one-quarter of the houses rented out by these men were occupied by Icelandic tenants.

The real estate agents who had the most property volume were Jón Tryggvi Bergman, Jón J. Bildfell, Arni Eggertson, and Háldor Háldorsson, although Thorsteinn Oddsson was certainly competitive financially. It might well be asked what made these men nearly unique in business. There is no indication that any of them came from moneyed families, and none was born in Canada. However, events surrounding the demise of the Ross-Elgin community directly involved Icelanders in the workings of the real estate markets.

Here we come to the origin of the joke about people who were well-to-do having been on “the right side of Ross.” The saying clearly plays on the phrase “the right side of the tracks.” The history of the negotiations between Midland Railway of Minnesota, the company responsible for the Great Northern Railway in Manitoba, the City of Winnipeg and the residents of the Ross and Elgin area sheds some light on what was clearly a lesson in real estate for Icelanders.

When the Midland Railway of Minnesota first negotiated with the City of Winnipeg for rights to build tracks within the city, it promised to build a “commodious and beautiful (passenger) station” (Manitoba *Free Press* March 12, 1910) at the terminus at Ellen St. After 1905, Midland began purchasing lots in the area, and due to real estate speculation the prices of lots increased (Bellan 1958: 164). The building of the tracks did not proceed on schedule. In 1910, Midland Rail asked the City for permission to build a level track to run down the back lane between Ross and Elgin, which would terminate in freight sheds at Ellen. The company proposed to provide subways under the tracks for Tecumseh and Nena Streets. Land values decreased accordingly (Bellan 1958: 216). In written correspondence to City Council, Midland Rail claimed to have already spent millions of dollars to buy the property on the north side of Elgin and south side of Ross between Ellen and Isabel. The City, however, was unwilling to allow freight yards to be built any further east than Nena.

Moreover, approximately 250 residents, of which 20 were Icelanders and at least 5 were businesses, from the blocks surrounding the proposed tracks, took up a petition to City Council against the incursion. Their complaint against Midland Rail was of the noise and pollution the spur would bring, and the lowering of the general quality of the neighbourhood, thus lowering property values. Few of the petitioners lived on the



blocks directly affected by the tracks. The matter was referred to a special committee on railroads.

In June, the committee received another petition, in support of the railroad company's project. A. G. Johnson, O. J. Bildfell and Arni Eggertson signed both petitions (against and for). This second petition noted that approximately 70% of the assessed value of lots already purchased was paid out. Some individuals (all Icelandic) own more than one piece of property, including Arni Eggertson, J. J. Vopni, A. S. Bardal and H. S. Bardal. The largest settlement was for \$10,560.00 to a G. Johnson for three lots which included the Icelandic dry goods store.

The 1915 HD survey indicates that the north side of Ross was taken up exclusively by the GNR sheds from Isabel to Nena. The completed spur did not run between Ross and Elgin, but between Ross and Pacific. There is no indication that the houses on the south side of Pacific were bought up or demolished. Similarly the houses on the north side of Ross from Nena to Tecumseh remain. These, and the houses on Pacific, would have backed onto the tracks. In 1915, the vacancy rate along the south side of Ross is 40% between Isabel and Nena, and 33% between Nena and Tecumseh, and those named as residents are not those of 1910. Finally, some people who were bought out, remained in their homes.

Thus to have been “on the right side of Ross”, derived from the fact that homeowners on one side of Elgin and/or Ross were offered a buy-out by Midland Rail, whereas those on the other received no compensation. The HD shows that those on the wrong side of the road, so to speak, did move out later, when the general condition of the area declined, along with prices in housing. Thus the demise of the neighbourhood, lamented by some, was a benefit to others. This is not simply a matter of having been bought out a high or low price. The fortuitous incursion of the railroad spur provided an opportunity for some Icelandic businessmen, already involved in real estate and building, to acquire significant capital. Arni Eggertson was one such agent.

The career of Arni Eggertson was lengthy and gained him prestige on many levels. The son of farmers, he came with his parents to Canada in 1887. Oleson (1953) recounts that Eggertson’s formal education was not extensive, but that he was progressive in his thinking and a very driven man. The 1900 HD indicates that Eggertson, residing at 753 Ross, was an insurance agent. In 1904, he and Jó J. Bildfell formed a real estate agency, and quickly began to turn a profit. In 1908, Eggertson is listed in the building permits as owner for 11 dwellings total of \$32,000.00 in costs. The 1910 HD indicated that Háldor Háldorsson was in Eggertson’s employ as a contractor. By 1912 Eggertson owned or managed as many as 44 properties. In Ward 3 alone, these were assessed at \$79,750.00.

The houses he rented out ranged in value from \$750.00 to \$2400.00, indicating the buildings ranged from shacks to two and a half story modest middle-class homes.

Eggertson was involved in the sale of houses to Midland Rail. Magnus Gudlaugson, the excavator, worked for Eggertson one summer, and writes about the strategies of real estate agents to profit from Midland Rail's need to purchase the land on Elgin, Ross and Pacific.

There were several agents in on these buying deals, among them being Eggertson and a company manager . . . I was living in the Eggertson home at the time and knew the district well, and was sent, among others, to buy up these buildings. Some of these houses had had "For Sale" signs on them for a long time and these were picked up first at the prices the owners asked for. Pretty soon the people began to tumble to the fact that something was up and they began to raise considerably, the prices of their properties. Instructions, therefore, went out from the agencies that we should quite buying and not show any interest whatever in the property around there for a while (Gudlaugson 1958: 93).

Arni Eggertson himself did not issue the instruction, but did not dissuade the action.

Gudlaugson writes that Eggertson was "straight and honest" in his dealings, and that he "maintained that it never paid anyone, in the long run, to put through a crooked deal" (Gudlaugson 1958: 92).

Eggertson was also involved in city politics and was elected as a Liberal in 1906. He was particularly active in promoting the development of a hydroelectric dam, and became known as 'the father of Winnipeg's electricity'. He was a driving force behind

the Icelandic Millennium Celebrations in 1930<sup>17</sup> and received the Order of the Falcon in 1939. He was instrumental in establishing the Western Icelandic funding of the Icelandic shipping company Eimskip. During WW1 and until 1921, Eggertson was the financial minister from Iceland to the United States, residing in New York (Oleson 1953: 286). According to Thorarinson, Eggertson, in partnership with Asmundur Johannsson, another extremely wealthy contractor, organised the shipments of food to Iceland during WW1 (Thorarinson 1967: 28).

Oleson describes Eggertson as a most hospitable man, and the life and soul of the party (Oleson 1940: 285). He was, like Thorsteinn Oddsson, a “friend to the poor” (Gudlaugson 1958: 92). The tax assessment records show that his house at 120 Emily (since demolished) was home to 12 people. Only 5 of these are children; there were likely 5 adults who were not part of Eggertson’s nuclear family. Eggertson seems to have opened his home to others, like Gudlaugson, perhaps kinsmen who were migrant workers, students or new immigrants.

Perhaps the most interesting development to arise from the construction industry was the Union Loan and Investment Company. In 1912, Olafur and Hannes Pétursson, along with a third brother Séra Rognvaldur, the minister for the Icelandic Unitarian Church,

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<sup>17</sup>At this time several hundred Western Icelanders returned to Iceland for the celebration. The funding for the trip is considered to be the last great divisive debates among Western Icelanders, as one group accepted funds from the Canadian government, while the other refused. The debate was so heated the two groups travelled in different ships.

formed the financial company. Their original funds amounted to only \$3500.00, but the company grew slowly and steadily (Thorarinson 1967: 27). Eventually, the Union Loan and Investment Company would own 8 apartment buildings and manage several others.

The family held considerable prestige in the community. Rev Rognavaldur Peturson was honoured by the Icelandic government, as well as being an important religious figure as a Unitarian minister in the Winnipeg community. Both Bjorn and Hannes had been school teachers, and were involved in the editing and publication of newspapers and journals. Bjorn was considered to be particularly wise in business, and willingly gave advice and guidance in such matters. The company as a whole would also help find men employment in the building trades, as reported in interviews, and in this way was an active community organisation, not just a financial institution.

Of those who parlayed an involvement in construction business into one in real estate, most had had the advantage of having some exposure to the machinations of financial dealings. But all of the men were newer immigrants; Eggertson was the only one to come to Canada as a child. With the exception of Haldorson, none had any post-secondary education. All were driven to make money, but considered generous by the Icelandic community. Like most of the British Canadian Winnipeg elite, they were self-made men.

## 9.8 Discussion

The real estate business and to a lesser extent the construction industries are the activities which, more than any other sphere of business, generated wealth in the Winnipeg Icelandic community. Available evidence indicates that men such as Eggertson, Oddsson and Háldorson held assets that would put them in league with some of the British Canadian Winnipeg elite. At the same time, Icelanders working within the enclave were employed at the lowest paying jobs of any male labourers. There is nothing to indicate that Icelandic labourers were better paid than men in other ethnic groups, and there is evidence that the above mentioned capitalists paid their Icelandic workers "unconscionably" low wages at times. When Icelanders gained the expertise to participate in all levels of the real estate business and building industries, by recruiting other Icelanders into various positions, they created economic stratification within the community.

Icelanders filled positions from bourgeoisie capitalist to proletariat, and, if migrant workers are concerned, sub-proletariat. Yet the hierarchy of class was not neatly ordered. There were only three to five men who could be considered true bourgeoisie. These men hired foreman and other workers for wages on large projects, and may have also had subcontractors perform certain tasks. But there appears to have been many who undertook projects of their own initiative, and worked alongside their own workers. These small employers, were not under the direct control of the bourgeoisie. Their

projects ranged in size from single dwellings to apartment blocks and the Tabernacle church. Even the tasks of the lowest paid wage labourer were taken on contract by men who owned their own means of production. Thus the hierarchical organisation was not one of direct vertical responsibility and command from capitalist, managers, supervisors, tradesmen and labourers.

The development of the enclave was not without its benefits to the community. It employed many Icelanders, who may have been disadvantaged on British Canadian work-sites. While urban dwelling Icelanders may have spoken clear English, that may not have been the case for newer immigrants or migrant workers. At any rate the language on the job-site was Icelandic. In addition, Icelanders were inclined to train and therefore assist in the acculturation of other Icelanders, rather than simply relegating the untrained to the most menial tasks. Training resulted in promotions with the job-site, and may have allowed individuals to become independent contractors.

The enclave likely contributed to ethnic cohesion in both positive and restrictive ways. The men worked long hours, and for the most part seemed to develop a sense of camaraderie and pride in their accomplishments as Icelanders. This is a powerful atmosphere in which skills and values can be inculcated and reinforced. Poetry was obviously composed, and not simply to elevate the beauty of the city scape. Thorarinson knew of the ditty about Háldorson's low wages nearly forty years after Háldorson had left Win-

nipeg. On the other hand, the job-site could effectively restrict Icelanders from working elsewhere. As Icelandic was the language on the job-site, men were not getting a chance to learn better English, preventing them from working outside the ethnic enclave.

But the power of employers went beyond peer pressure. If McIvor's (1908) stereotype of Icelandic workers as quiet, sober, hardworking, untiring, reliable and intelligent had any basis in truth, this characteristic was likely collectively modelled on the job-site, where peer pressure would influence some men to conform. While wage labourers could be fired for inadequate performance, contractors and subcontractors did not have any greater security. Due to the size of the Icelandic community, and the fact that many larger employers knew one another, a contractor who did poor work, or exhibited a negative attitude was unlikely to find continuous work. Thus economic stratification established a power structure that had a real material basis to back it up. That power could be used to ensure good workmanship, and good behaviour as envisioned by those of higher economic status.

While Icelandic workmen and businessmen were afforded considerable respect and approval by the British Canadian dominant culture, their physical accomplishments stood as a reminder of that character. Icelanders built a significant number of apartment blocks in the West End, most of rather ostentatious quality. They also built their own churches and the temperance hall. They did not build or own beer halls or hotels as other ethnic



groups did. Thus the buildings served as a symbol of Icelandic ability, respectability, prosperity and good moral conduct both to Icelanders, and other ethnic groups in the West End. Even if many of the men who worked on the buildings were labourers and tradesmen, the ethnic symbols they created presented an image of middle class distinction.

## 10 Churches and Pastors as Community Leaders

The elite or leaders of an ethnic group in a nation such as Canada have at best weak forms of dominance, such as providing employment, to control ethnic group members. In the first few decades of Icelandic immigrant settlement in Canada, the Icelandic churches were the key ideological apparatus for Western Icelanders in Winnipeg. Several of the ministers were charismatic, inspiring the devotion of their congregations as they engaged each other in debate. In addition, the ministers and organisers were often the head of secular organisations, such as the cultural society and temperance organisations. The Lutheran church in particular linked theological precepts with the Icelandic language, culture and temperament.

However, the relationship between the different congregations was quite divisive, fuelled by debate between the pastors. On its face, this situation is paradigmatic of Dreiger's re-generational pluralism, insofar as the pastors were charismatic leaders. Kristjansson notes that they were eloquent speakers, some more passionate, another more intellec-

tual, but exhibiting those qualities lauded in the saga orators. Their teaching played off a love of Iceland, her unique beauty and her history. Moreover, they developed competing ideological theses, arguing between themselves on theological and cultural issues. This, according to Dreiger (1977), and Matthiasson (1989) turns the attention of ethnic group members inward as they follow the conflict as they followed the conflicts.

I argue however, that while maintaining ethnic group cohesion, the competitive behaviour of the ministers weakened their power over the ethnic group. First, divisions in the congregations meant that a singular version of ethnic group ideals was not being communicated. Morality, values and behavioural norms were no longer under the control of a single ideological apparatus as they had been in Iceland. Western Icelandic society was undergoing the changes in ideological mechanisms that Althusser argues accompanies the diversification of ideas with the rise of the state society from feudal society.

But moreover, in the arena of religious debate, the behaviour of the clergymen modelled divisive argumentation and challenges to authority. This opened up an arena for moral and political debate, where the beliefs of those with better oratory and argumentative skills came to guide community ideologies. This debating behaviour was taken up by other individuals vying for prestige and influence, if not power, in the West End Icelandic community. The atmosphere created by the ministers allowed for new ideas, and more importantly new kinds of leaders and ideological apparatus to arise in ethnic civil society.

After 1914, the controversies between pastors gradually died down. Voluntary organisations became the first site of co-operative endeavours between members of the different congregations. This eventually led to the formation of the Icelandic National League, which included ministers from each congregation and worked to create a more cohesive ethnic group. The following discussion of the discord between religious leaders focuses primarily on social and cultural tendencies rather than theologies.

## **10.1 The Churches**

Before discussing the religion based associations, a synopsis of religious activity and its relation to Icelandic nationalism will contribute to an understanding of the role the religious leaders and their congregations in New Iceland and Winnipeg.

In Iceland, the clergy were practically the only form of ideological apparatus, supervising homestead based education of children, the conduct of landowners and workers, distributing books and of course preaching and tending to the usual pastoral duties. The movement for nationalism and independence from Denmark was begun by the Icelandic intelligentsia, primarily the clergy. Love of the homeland (Íceland) was inspired by German Romantic style poetry and other literature. Back in Iceland, these clergy, being the sole source of ideological dissemination, spread the ideas to the populace throughout the country (Pétursson 1990: 91).

The clergy participated in this political struggle by arguing for the separation of church and state. In the 1880s, in spite of the status act of 1871, which recognised Iceland as having special national rights, the Lutheran Church was still under the direct control of the Danish Government. Since local clergy were Icelandic, the problem was considered to be with the church leadership in Denmark (Pétursson 1990: 142–143). However, once Iceland gained full independence from Denmark in 1943, the church was then loosely linked to the Icelandic government, and the separation was no longer of much importance.

It was from early struggle to free church from state that the settlers to New Iceland and their ministers came in 1875. In the new land, the preservation of the language, literature and independence of Icelanders would become uppermost for some community leaders. The first big quarrel between Rev Jón Bjarnason and Rev Páll Thorlakson, the pastors in New Iceland, was precisely on the question of independence—above all financial independence—of the Icelandic Lutherans from other Scandinavian and German Lutherans. The problem was ostensibly over control of doctrinal matters, but the key focus of the argument was on the written request and acceptance of financial aid by Rev. Thorlakson for his congregations. Rev. Thorlaksson's letter would gain notoriety and is known as the "Begging Letter." A second 'tradition' arose from this competition, and that was the tendency of factions within Western Icelandic communities to back

one or another of the proponents in these debates. In New Iceland, the backers were referred to as Jónsmenn or Pállsmenn, in the manner of the saga followers of certain goði. When Rev. Thorlaksson and his congregation returned to the United States, Rev. Jón Bjarnason was left the victor and seemed to gain a dedicated congregation. His beliefs about ethnic pride, financial independence, protection of the purity of Icelandic culture, the need for hardship and endurance for Icelandic spiritual growth, and the occurrence of strenuous debate which are said to characterise Western Icelanders (cf Lindal 1967) originated in the first years of the New Iceland settlement. These would become core ethnic ideals, while the group's baptism by freezing cold, malnutrition, poverty, disease and community discord became an origin myth of Western Icelanders, and distinguished them from Icelanders in the old country.

The debate between pastors and fractiousness between congregations was especially prevalent in the first fifty years after Icelanders arrival in Canada. Historical writings highlight these contests, because they are said to be characteristic of the keen Icelandic intellect and love of debate (Kristjanson 1965), the paradoxical nature of the culture (Lindal 1967), or a cultural propensity towards a psychological characteristic of dualism (Matthiasson 1989). I propose that the debates are spectacles that first push the competitors to the forefront of social interest. The rhetoric of the debates then clarifies and articulates positions lying somewhat latent within the community. The positions become public when

they are printed in newspapers or enunciated from the pulpit, and as discussed previously, are picked up and debated among community members. In this way, the debates of community leaders open up a general discourse about community and cultural tensions.

Unfortunately for my research, the discussions over coffee can never be revisited. The histories, focusing as they do on individual achievements, make it difficult to build composite pictures of those siding with particular ideas. Nor are economic, occupational and social status discussed in the histories.

What I want to do in the discussions in this chapter and the next, is illustrate the way in which individuals gained social status, and the prestige which allowed their voices to be taken seriously. The arguments they raised hint at undercurrents within the Western Icelandic community; if the ideas were not meaningful to the populace, the competitors would not gain supporters. It should be noted though, that supporters change allegiance with the social issues. I will try not to overburden the reader by clarifying who belonged to what faction in which argument; the work of Lindal (1967), Kristjanson (1965) and the Icelandic writings of Oleson (1935–1940) and Thorsteinn Thor Thorsteinson (1935) document this quite fully.

Rev. Bjarnason severed his connections with the Lutheran Church in Iceland because it did not move quickly to sever its connection with the Icelandic parliament (Pétursson 1990). The separation of the two was confirmed when, under Rev. Bjarnason's guidance

the Icelandic Lutheran Synod of America was established in New Iceland in 1879. The Synod united all the Lutheran congregations in North America, and Rev. Páll Thorlakson sat on the Executive. The synod established matters of biblical interpretation and faith, but also directed the operation of congregational life, such as the need for Sunday schools, and published a church periodical, *Sameiningin*.

Rev. Bjarnason argued vehemently for the social segregation of Icelanders in religious matters, and pushed for the maintenance of the language. It became an oft repeated creed that Icelandic Lutheranism and the Icelandic language were the two cornerstones of the Icelandic culture in North America. Rev. Bjarnason had argued as early as 1874 that “faithfulness to the religious and cultural values of the race, with a clear realisation, however, that loyalty to traditional values, was essential in order that the people best meet the demands of the new land” (Kristjanson 1965: 217). He later claimed that “it is my conviction that the theology training in Iceland does not adequately meet the demands which church life in this country, with its struggles, makes on the potential leaders of our congregations.” (Kristjanson 1965: 222-223). For many years, only ministers ordained in America practised within the Icelandic Lutheran Synod of America. Most of those participating in its annual meetings prior to 1900 were not ordained (there were only 4 Icelandic pastors in North America), but were delegates of local congregations. Never-



theless, Rev. Bjarnason would engage in arguments with American-trained pastors, and the congregations themselves would be split in several ways.

Rev. Bjarnason took up his post in Winnipeg in August, 1884, and his influence on people of Icelandic descent in Winnipeg has been profound. In spite of his split with the church in Iceland, his love for Iceland cannot be in doubt. Rev. Bjarnason shaped Western Icelanders' perception of their progress to a large extent through the metaphors of the sagas. When the First Lutheran Church was built in Winnipeg in 1887, it was given the name Gráni; the name of magical horse chosen by the god Odin for the Old Norse hero Sigurd the Dragon Slayer. The Reverend instilled in many of his parishioners a love and respect for the country and its medieval culture. For example, when the young peoples' society (Bandalag) meetings got underway after 1898, the Rev. Bjarnason was a frequent contributor.

His topic was often chosen from the field of Icelandic history and literature, it being his delight to discourse on the Icelandic sagas, and he was able to describe graphically various localities that formed the settings of the sagas. Many of his younger hearers owed to him most of what they ever learned about Iceland, and to no small extent such warmth of interest or regard as they had for the land and its people (Kristjanson 1965: 227-228).

Clearly, the image that many children of Icelandic parents had of society in Iceland included a knowledge of the sagas.

In addition to giving Sunday services, Rev Bjarnason established a parochial school for all ages, which had an enrolment of 399 by 1891 (Kristjanson 1965: 184). The total

Icelandic population in Winnipeg was probably less than 1000 people, so it is evident that Rev Bjarnason's following was significant, and that he himself was highly charismatic. He also seemed to follow the sagas' idolatry of the vengeful Viking.

In his adherence to 'traditional' Icelandic values—those that were taking hold in the nationalist imagination when he left Iceland—Rev Bjarnason, could be considered a 'traditional intellectual.' In this respect, the views he espoused were geared to the maintenance of the status quo of Icelandic culture. This potentially isolated Western Icelanders from other ethnic groups and the dominant British-Canadian culture of Winnipeg society. Given the ideology of racial determinism, which Rev. Bjarnason's rhetoric supports, circumscribing the cultural boundaries in this way would not be problematic. Moreover, some aspects of his message were quite compatible with middle class values, including financial independence, a cheerful approach to hard work, intellectual pursuits and sobriety. His ideologies, if they influenced Western Icelandic behaviour, would have helped locate the group as a well-behaved Other in the eyes of the dominant culture: an Other that did not pose a threat to the British Canadian social order.

However, Rev. Bjarnason's temperament contributed to divisions within the Icelandic Lutheran Synod of America. A second Lutheran congregation in Winnipeg was formed around 1893 when Rev. Hafsteinn Pjetursson, a long-time minister from Argyle, came to assist Rev. Bjarnason during a lengthy illness. The congregation met in various facil-

ities in the West End, rather than at Gráni. With the approval of the Lutheran Synod, a church was constructed at Furby and Sherbrook, with the aid of the congregation's own carpenters (Kristjanson 1965: 239). Unfortunately, this time ideological differences had begun to develop between the West End (Ward 3) residents and those remaining in Ward 4 near Gráni. When Rev. Bjarnason regained his health, he found many of the congregation preferred for both reasons of convenience and personal preference to continue to follow Rev. H. Pjetursson.

Rev. Bjarnason was highly critical of this situation, and the new congregation voted to leave the Lutheran Synod in 1895, taking the name Tabernacle (Oleson 1940: 81-82). The first Lutheran Synod published a resolution which warned Lutherans away from the new Tabernacle congregations, adding the Tabernacle's more liberal teachings "leads to a division in our church and must at the same time be harmful to the work of Christianity among our people in America" (in Kristjanson 1965: 241).

Rev. Fridrik J. Bergmann, who would become a long standing minister at Tabernacle, arrived in North America at the age of 17. He studied at Luther College in Iowa, and undertook theological training in Philadelphia and Norway. He soon became a close colleague to Rev. Bjarnason. While serving as the vice-president to president Rev. Bjarnason in the Icelandic Lutheran Synod, he began his own magazine, Breiáblik, and to preach the New Theology from Iceland. He was becoming increasingly liberal in his

thinking, urging freedom of thought in religion; as summarised by Kristjanson, "there should be freedom of thought for Loki as well as Thor" (1965: 353). Common ground was to be found in Christ's life and teaching. By 1909, a serious religious debate again occurred, this time between Bergmann and Bjarnason. Kristjanson summarises Bjarnason's position as follows.

Bjarnason claimed the gulf between the New Theology and the Old was much greater than the gulf which separated Lutherans and other Protestants from the Roman Catholics at the time of Reformation. He held that New Theology was an enemy of Christianity, following exactly in the same direction as Unitarianism, but more dangerous because it assumed a disguise. Bergmann felt that Bjarnason had become more conservative. . . . (Kristjanson 1965: 353).

The result of this debate was a split in the Synod, wherein throughout Manitoba, 2000 of the 7000 members left with Bergmann. In Winnipeg, by 1914, the money had been secured to build the Tabernacle Church for Bergmann's congregation on Victor, south of Sargent. This building is by far the grandest of the Icelandic church buildings. There is conflicting information about the funding for the church. Kristjanson writes that it cost \$60,000 to build, and that "the small congregation was without a single man of wealth among them" (Kristjanson 1965: 354). Rev. Eyland, who was the pastor at the time of his writing, and had access to financial records, reports that the building cost \$49,598.83, and was built "with the assistance of several financially able and interested members" (Eylands

1945: 193). The ostentatious nature of the building itself as well as those officiating at its opening suggest the latter is more likely.

In either case, the congregation was comprised of a significant number of construction workers and contractors (Kristjanson 1965: 239, 355). Some particularly well-known contractors were associated with the Tabernacle administration, including Haldor Haldorson, Jon Tryggvi Bergman, and S. Brynjolfsson. J. T. Bergman not only donated money to the building of the church, he supervised, and as discussed laboured alongside the other workers on the church (Thorarinson 1967).

After the split with Bjarnason, Rev. Bergmann was not again involved in controversy. He strengthened ties to Icelandic New Theology, and some, but not all members, (see below) of the congregation were compatible with the Unitarian movement. When Rev. Bergmann died in 1918, his congregation drifted away. Kristjanson writes that this was partly because a portion of his flock were tradesmen who left town in search of work during the unemployment of 1918 – 1919. A minority of the congregation maintained control of the building and amalgamated with the First Lutheran congregation. However, most of the congregation remaining in Winnipeg joined with the Icelandic Unitarians in 1921 to form the First Icelandic Federated Church (Kristjanson 1965: 355–356). Unitarians ministers in Winnipeg were largely supportive of the trade unions in the late teens, and perhaps this was a drawing point for members of the Tabernacle congregation.

The idea of freedom of thought for Loki as well as Thor, combined with Rev. Bergmann's noted warmth and tolerance (Kristjanson 1965: 355) would have created a more open atmosphere at Tabernacle Church than at the First Lutheran. Yet Rev. Bergmann did not stray far from Icelandic ways. The New Theology was a movement within the state church in Iceland, so in some ways he strengthened ties with the old country.

In 1913, another congregation split off from the main First Lutheran Church, although not over theological matters. The Skjaldborg Church at Ellice and Burnell was built, in part, to serve the westward moving population. It was financed by Thorsteinn Oddsson, who had recently left the Tabernacle congregation and wished to rejoin the First Lutheran congregation. He also offered the use of the church building for the long planned Icelandic Academy, which was then named in honour of Rev. Jón Bjarnason. The first pastor of Skjaldborg was Rev. Bjarnason's nephew, Runolfur Marteinson, from 1913–1919, to be replaced by the ageing Rev. Runolfur Runolfsson, who retired in 1921. The congregation was served by lay ministers for the next two years including Oddsson, until he moved to California in 1923.

Rev. Bjarnason worked as pastor of the First Lutheran Church in Winnipeg until the year before his death in 1914. The American trained Rev. B. B. Jónsson would take over from then on. With Rev. Jónsson's tenure, the friction between the First Lutheran

and Tabernacle congregations ceased. When Oddsson left Winnipeg, the Skjaldborg congregation united with the larger First Lutheran group to take over the Tabernacle Church building, which remains the Icelandic First Lutheran congregation to this day.

Notable members of the Lutheran churches were Dr B. J. Brandson (professor of surgery, University of Manitoba, chief surgeon, Winnipeg General Hospital), the Bardal family (undertakers, Paul Bardal becoming Acting-Mayor of Winnipeg), J. J. Bildfell (grocer, realtor and editor of *Lögberg*) and Dr. Siggi Jul Johannesson, (physician and editor of *Lögberg*). These names will re-appear through subsequent chapters.

The history of the Icelandic Unitarians is somewhat less complex than that of Lutherans. Unitarianism was first brought to Winnipeg by Bjorn Pjetursson and Jennie Elizabeth McCaine Pjetursson in 1891. In 1892, the first Unitarian church was built across from the Lutheran Church, and was nicknamed Gráni's colt. This was the first Canadian Unitarian congregation west of Toronto. Pjetursson's ministry was cut short by his death in 1893. About the same time, Rev. Magnus J. Skaptason, the Lutheran pastor in Riverton, had had a divergence in his beliefs. At Easter of 1891; he preached a sermon that quickly brought about a split in the rural Lutheran congregations. Rev. Skaptason and 5 of the 23 congregations of the Lutheran Synod seceded. Rev. Skaptason would take over the ministry of the Winnipeg Unitarian congregation from 1894 to 1899.

For the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Unitarians in Winnipeg would be lead by Rev. Rognvaldur Pétursson. Rognvaldur Pétursson's intellectual associates and achievements position him as a man of outstanding ability. He was born in Iceland in 1877, and with his family, immigrated to Hallson, North Dakota in 1883. He was friends and neighbours with Stefan Geir Stefansson, (poet and socialist) and Viljalmur Stefansson, (explorer, anthropologist and atheist). Pétursson attended Wesley College in Winnipeg from 1896 to 1898. He received his Bachelor in Divinity at Meadville College in Pennsylvania, thus establishing the first ties to an Anglophone Unitarian organisation. Pétursson also received a Perkins Scholarship, which enabled him to attend Harvard, where he studied theology and Ancient Norse and German Studies. Friends from Hallson, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Thorvaldur and Thorberger Thorvaldson (PhD. Harvard) were also at Harvard in the time of Pétursson's studies (Kristjanson 1965: 356). The Thorvaldsons and Pétursson co-operate in directing aspects of religious life of Winnipeg's Icelandic Unitarian community thereafter. Rognvaldur's brother Bjorn was the editor and publisher of *Heimskringla* for a time, and also owned the Viking Press, while Hannes was involved with editing church journals. Kristjanson summarises Rev. Petursson's approach as follows

He found a basic unity in all religions, despite much diversity and many contradictions. All people were travelling to the promised land. The essence of religion was for him a search to reconcile belief in God and an awareness of the material world. (Kristjanson 1965: 356)



In 1906, the cultural society, Menningarfélag, was organised in Winnipeg with Skapti Brynjólfsson (a building contractor, active at the Tabernacle) as president. Although the Winnipeg Menningarfélag used the Unitarian church facilities, its membership was open to all regardless of gender or religious affiliation. Lecturers included businessmen, labour leaders, physicians, artisans and journalists. Synopses of the lectures were published in the Icelandic weekly papers, and the society maintained its own paper, *ár.* (Eggert Arnason, editor). The society ceased to function during the First World War.

A journal *Heimir* was also published by those associated with the Unitarian church, including Reverend and Hannes Petursson, Gisli Olafson (wholesales and building contractor), Rev. Gudmunder Arnason, Fred Swanson (the painting contractor). Contributors to the publication, which was primarily of a literary nature included: Stefan G Stefanson, Dr Siggi Jul Johannesson, Th. Th. Thorsteinsson (publisher, historian and building contractor), and Sigfus B. Benediktsson (husband of suffrage pioneer Margret Benediktsson).

In 1905, the congregation moved to a new building, on Sargent and Sherbrook. The building was designed by the Fred Swanson, based on the Unitarian church in Baltimore. The cost of about \$13,000 was acquired with the aid of a loan from the Unitarian Association in Boston. Reverend F. S. Southworth of the Meadville Theological Seminary delivered the dedication ceremony.

In celebration of the raising of the new Unitarian Church, Rev. Bergmann's nephew, Hjalmar A. Bergman (Tabernacle), added the acceptance of this loan to the sins of those Icelanders who took money from sources outside the ethnic group, as Rev. Páll Thorlaksson had done in New Iceland. "Boston money" became synonymous with the shame of the Begging Letter. This reaffirmed the idea that any monies accepted from elsewhere "dropped in dignity if not in value" (Lindal 1967: 321).

Over the years, members of the congregation included two editors of *Heimskringla*, Jón E Eldon, and Einar Olafsson; Sigfus G. and Margret J. Benediktsson (feminist and publisher of *Freyja*), William (Gudmunder) Anderson (secretary of the Trades and Labour Council), Thorsteinn Borgfjord (a vice-president of McDiarmid Construction), and Joseph P. Skaptason (son of Rev. Magnus Skaptason, husband of IODE founder Johanna Skaptason).

The church fractiousness of the congregations in Winnipeg was common to interactions among all Western Icelandic congregations. But in Winnipeg, much of the tension was fuelled by the oratory and literary fire of Rev. Jón Bjarnason. The multiple religious controversies discussed in the Icelandic histories are depicted as debates between pastors. However, Rev. Bjarnason is a participant in each incident. His involvement within the community is evident in many written sources, and from the beginning in *Framfari*,

the newspaper of New Iceland, his rhetoric is rich with allusions to the sagas and eddas.

Kristjanson refers to him as follows:

He was strong in his faith and he engaged in strenuous controversies, first against those he considered reactionary . . . later those he denounced as agnostic and enemies of the true faith. . . . (Some regarded him as) a wrathful warrior, but he was highly respected by the community and revered by his large following (Kristjanson 1967: 344).

It seemed that Rev. Bjarnason not only promoted the sagas, but to a considerable extent he manifested the Viking temperament.

In Winnipeg, the split between First Lutheran Churches, the Tabernacle, and Unitarians has been described as resulting from disagreements between the ministers (and their congregations) on the basis of the liberalness of teachings (cf Kristjanson 1965, Lindal 1967). The First Lutherans were the most rigid, and Tabernacle more liberal, following the Icelandic Lutheran New Theology, and the Unitarians being by far the most open in their interpretation of the Bible. The historical writers, Kristjanson and Lindal, focus on the debates between ministers as central to the development of the Icelandic Canadian ethnicity. Lindal describes this as one of several paradoxes of the Icelandic mind. He argues that there is among Icelanders a conservative tendency that is "something deep down. That unconscious urge that genuine feeling of obligation and gratitude to parents" (1967: 214), and a sense of *útprá*, and yearning to reach out. Matthiasson describes these as paradigmatic of the dualism of Icelandic culture and culturally specific psycholo-

gical characteristic. Problematically, these authors conflate cultural tendencies and mental faculties. Having thus explained culture, they have no need for further social analysis.

However, as I have indicated, there were three separate religious denominations in Winnipeg, not two, in this time period. Moreover, the religious debates are not simply clashes of opposing ideas, nor are they evidence of paradoxical or dualist cultural constructions. They are evidence of the particular social processes of forming social alliances.

The evidence does support the notion that religious beliefs were hotly contested by church leaders. That, in and of itself, is not remarkable, but division between the congregations becomes somewhat more meaningful given its social context. In New Iceland, there was no state to educate and guide the populace—the pastors and church were the ideological apparatus. In Winnipeg, Rev. Bjarnason, through the Icelandic Lutheran Synod in America, proclaimed his version of Icelandic Lutheranism to be, along with the language, the only means of maintaining the Icelandic cultural heritage, even though it had split from the church in Iceland. The Synod isolated itself from all other North American Lutheran congregations, and in a very positive way encouraged and fulfilled a desire to uphold and create anew the ‘golden age’ of Icelandic culture. Rev. Bjarnason believed that a parochial school was necessary to the preservation of the Icelandic culture, and did his best to instill a love and knowledge of Iceland and its ancient saga (mytholo-

gical) history in his young congregation members. Some community members must have found in him a cultural pillar, himself that beacon of light to guide the way.

Rev. Bjarnason is an exemplar of the charismatic leader described by Dreiger (1978). Not only did he delight his audiences with the saga 'history' of Iceland, he framed the life and tasks of Western Icelanders in North America in light of his interpretation of Viking culture and honour. This glorification of the Viking is characteristic to this day of the Western Icelandic ethnic mythology. His popularity made him a highly prestigious and influential leader, and had a lasting effect on Icelandic Canadian culture. Many of his works, such as the J. B. Academy and the independent First Lutheran Church remained intact for generations. He was able to influence thought and behaviour in a profound way, without the multiple forms of ideological apparatus of the state and civil society.

When Rev. Bergmann split with the Lutheran Synod to form the Tabernacle congregation, he actually reintroduced a theological connection with Iceland. His adherence to Iceland and its culture was perhaps even greater than that of Rev. Bjarnason.

Those associated with the Icelandic Unitarian Church were less isolationist, and interacted with Anglophones in religious matters to a greater extent. Their affiliated cultural organisations were open to all Icelanders and Winnipeg residents. To facilitate this inclusiveness, less emphasis was put on the use of Icelandic. This is not to say that church members were less interested in maintaining Icelandic culture; Fred Swanson's annual

paintings at Islendingadagurinn were a very public edification of the Icelandic landscape. And moreover, the broadmindedness of the Unitarian approach is considered to be characteristic of the Icelandic mind (cf. Lindal 1967).

Different theological approaches were not the only divisions between the Lutheran and Unitarian congregations. The split in the church congregation was said to be a reflection of a developing ideological split in the community. Residents in the old Ward 4 tended to vote Liberal, read *Lögberg* and attend the Skuld temperance lodge. The Liberal political party attracted ethnics with such policies as the Manitoba Public School Act, and later the Fair Wage Act. The West End residents tended to vote Conservative, read *Heimskringla* and attend the temperance lodge Hekla (Kristjanson 1965: 237–238). Indeed *Heimskringla* carried reports on the completion of railways, as well as other national issues, including strikes. Both newspapers supported cultural maintenance, however, and both lodges supported temperance. Both of the major political parties supported ‘classless’ politics and the National Policy—what Brodie and Jenson (1980) refer to as bourgeoisie politics. Perhaps the biggest differences between the Winnipeg Unitarians and Lutherans was the willingness of the first to build intellectual and financial connections to the Anglophone society, and the more isolationist tendency of the second.

The economic status of members of the First Lutheran Church provides an insight as to why financial independence was part of the ethic taught by that church. The wealth-

iest men among Icelanders in North America, specifically Árni Eggertson, Asmundur P. Johannson (a building contractor), Jón J. Bildfell, Thorsteinn Oddsson, Arinbjorn Bardal (the undertaker), and the Liberal MP Thos. Johnson were members of the First Lutheran Church. Other men of considerable wealth, notably Jon T Bergman and Hjalmar Bergman (lawyer), joined the Tabernacle Congregation, but re-united with First Lutheran after Rev. Bergmann's death. The wealthy members of the Tabernacle were those who made the return of that building to the Lutheran congregation possible, through legal actions taken in 1918-1920 (Oleson 1940: 90-115).

These same men created economic ties to Iceland as well. In 1913, Eggertson, Johannson, and J. T. Bergman in particular canvassed for, and gave of their own money, the start-up capital for the Icelandic shipping company Eimskip. Most of the above mentioned congregation members were connected to this venture in one form or another. Eimskip is probably the most successful business in Iceland to date.

Unitarian Church members were not as outstandingly wealthy as those of the First Lutheran congregation. As discussed, Rev. Pétursson and his brothers set up the Union Loan and Investment Company, a bank which tended to support those working in the building industry. It is of note that the congregation was made up of many labourers, tradesmen and building and related industry contractors. Thus the Unitarian church congregation may have contained many of the men involved in the ethnic economic enclave.

Of course, members of the Tabernacle congregation were also involved in the construction industry. This is not to suggest the theological position of the Unitarian church encouraged business, only that the social connections with Anglophone civil society may have created economic and occupational opportunities for the congregation. Nor does this suggest that the outward looking tendency of the Icelandic Unitarians was in any way simply a cultural reaction to the isolationist tendency of Lutheranism. The benefits of belonging to the Unitarian Church (and perhaps Tabernacle) were different from those of the First Lutheran.

When the different religious denominations, newspapers and their political views are examined in relation to the strike, the economic status of the congregations leaders must now be included. As leading proponents of the church denominations are tied to the editorial boards of the newspapers, they had the authority to generate certain ideologies and access to the major means to disseminate them; the pulpit and the newspaper.



## 11 Voluntary Associations

Early ethnic institutions are often recreational, self-help or educational endeavours that function primarily for the benefit of their own members. The more aspects of personal, social and symbolic cultural life addressed, the more 'complete' the institutions are, and the better the chance they will satisfy the needs of ethnic group members and thus maintain the group (Breton 1964). Ethnic institutions frequently attend to religious needs, assistance for new immigrants, ethnic group decorum, and forms of self-help and insurance, as well as cultural activities which celebrate the homeland and often reified traditions, such as Oktoberfest among Germans.

As the urban social life offers alternatives and other forms of interference to ethnic institutions, Dreiger (1978) argues that 're-generational pluralism' can bolster group cohesion and interest in the institutions. Re-generational pluralism was epitomised by the behaviour and teaching of Rev. Jón Bjarnason, but that does not preclude others from taking his place in other voluntary associations.

While other ethnic groups in Winnipeg manifest fairly high institutional completeness in the 1910s, Icelanders did not. A summary of German ethnic activity as discussed in the "Cosmopolitan Winnipeg" articles will serve as an example. German peoples considered to include Austro-Hungarians, by British Canadian writers of the time, began immigrating to Canada before the turn of the century, and made up about 11% of the population of Winnipeg in 1911. While the ethnic group was not generally considered impoverished, most of their institutions were located in the North End. By 1912, among German immigrants, there were 18 pastors serving 20 churches, mainly Catholic or Lutheran, but also Baptist and Free Churches. Church-based societies, often women's groups, assisted new immigrants. There were also Sunday schools for children, and choirs and musical bands comprised of members of the congregations. Through the churches, but not strictly devoted to worship, were six schools for children, which provided general education, and a number of meeting houses. The German Catholic Club had an impressive hall, within which there was a theatre auditorium, bowling alley, beer counter, billiard room, school rooms, a piano organ and church meeting rooms. There were also secular ethnic clubs, which, in addition to maintaining traditions from the homeland, served as self-help groups. These provided sick benefits, funeral help, insurance and mutual assistance to its members. These clubs maintained their own buildings and meeting halls, separate from

the churches and church meeting halls. Finally, there was a German union of brewery hands; brewing beer being a common form of ethnically organised wage labour.

As with any other cultural group, soon after arriving in North America, Icelanders established clubs and societies for their own well-being, and in order to pursue religious, artistic and intellectual endeavours. As such associations were based on the deliberate maintenance or production of culture, these are the beginnings of what might properly be called ethnic activities. While the four churches continued to serve the Icelandic population exclusively, by 1910, there was only one other group that had as its express purpose the maintenance or practise of Icelandic culture, and that was the Icelandic Student Society. The others were sports clubs, secular charitable or community betterment institutions. This chapter will discuss the Student Society, the International Order of Good Templars (IOGT), and the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE). The latter two were associations set up for the betterment of society, and they were British in origin.

The dominant culture in state society usually has its own set of voluntary organisations, ranging from unions to social reform groups, reading societies, and exclusive sports or dinner clubs. On their face, the voluntary associations found among Icelanders were quite similar to those organisations found among the 'middle class'. Middle class organisations are typically charitable or fund-raising groups associated with church congregations, sports

clubs, secular charities, and movements for social reform (Blumin 1989). Because of the nature of middle class occupations, for example managerial positions, entrepreneurs, and professionals; middling people tend to work alone, rather than in teams or gangs. The clubs provide for occupational networking as well as recreational socialisation, but rarely provide any financial assistance or insurance to members. Clubs that contribute to the betterment of the middle class itself are often sports clubs or debating societies, wherein one can socialise with people of like occupational status while developing one's physical health and/or intellect.

Middle class charitable associations, such as the Salvation Army or temperance associations often have as their purpose the amelioration of the situations of others or society as a whole. These sorts of associations reflect early middle class values of nation building, dedication to the betterment of society, and selflessness. These character traits are evident in the biographical dictionaries of the late Victorian age, which emphasised an individual's contribution to society over his professional or entrepreneurial status (Dintenfass 1998). Given that the Icelanders in Winnipeg were living in what appeared to be the origin of a middle class neighbourhood, these organisations were a potential platform for the dissemination of class or ethnically based values, or both.

From membership lists, it appears that voluntary associations were most commonly attended by wealthier Icelanders. As has been discussed previously, there was some re-

sentiment in the Western Icelandic community towards the wealthy. At the same time, Thorsteinn Oddsson's church, Skjaldborg had a congregation, and the excavator, Magnus Gaudlaugsson, spoke highly of Arni Eggertson. At best it can be concluded that a higher economic status did not automatically bring prestige and respect. However, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, wealth allowed for individuals to undertake community service. This did two things: it gave them a platform for self-aggrandisement, and through the activities of the voluntary organisations, influence in the community. If handled properly, increased public recognition and activism could result in higher prestige for the wealthy.

For the voluntary associations to be discussed, a cursory overview of activities will be provided, highlighting activities that shed light on the social goals and influences on the community. The behaviour of higher ranking Icelanders in these institutions will be examined to illustrate the means by which influence and prestige was gained by these individuals. In addition, the associations' relations to Anglophone society will be discussed, as this provides a measure of the social location of Icelanders as an ethnic group.

## **11.1 Sources**

Both Kristjanson and Lindal have written extensively on Icelandic associations, as the achievements of Icelanders in Manitoba is the focus of their histories. Other histories of

the associations have been published by the groups themselves. However, there is a lack of primary source material available on the Student Society. Some of the minute books of the IOGT chapters Hekla and Skuld are archived in the Icelandic Collection at the University of Manitoba; the minutes of the overarching IOGT Grand Lodge of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories are nearly complete. By far the most complete set of minutes are those of the IODE, kept by the chapters archivist. The histories outline the overall activities of the voluntary associations, to which the meeting minutes have little more to add. What the minute books do offer are verbatim accounts of the arguments between members, and a look at the style and more mundane activities of the meetings.

## **11.2 The Icelandic Students' Society**

The Icelandic Students Society was officially formed in 1901, and continued in various forms into the late 1920s. The minutes of the Icelandic Students Association appear to have been lost. But Walter Lindal, himself a student in those years, discusses of the students' activities and attitudes (1967: 205-224). The Icelandic students did exceptionally well academically at Wesley College, a phenomena noted in the *Free Press* (May 10, 1907 in Lindal 1967: 218). writes that several things contributed to their success. They not only felt the need to gain respect for all Icelanders through their accomplishments, but had a sense of inferiority generated by their lack of knowledge of British urban culture.

But moreover, Lindal writes, their lack of money prevented them from participating the new and exciting social circles. It is further suggested that friendships with non-Icelandic students were limited, because the Icelandic students “were backward, lacked the amenities of city life, in many cases spoke English with an accent” (1967: 219). Consequently, Icelandic students “stayed at home in their rented rooms and studied” (Lindal 1967: 219).

Lindal discusses the Students’ Society’s official and unofficial objectives. These included the provision of financial assistance to Icelandic students, the spread of Icelandic literature among Canadians, and acquainting Icelanders with Canadian and non-Icelandic literature. In later years, it would be made explicit that the Students’ Society must strive to raise the reputation of Icelanders in the eyes of English-speaking people. This maxim was to be found even in the more recreational aspects of the society.

Over the years, the students put on oratory contests, music recitals and plays for the Icelandic community at the Good Templars Hall on Sargent Ave. In 1911, a play written by medical student Jóhann P. Pálsson, entitled *Hún iðrast* (She Repents) contained the refrain

Since we are all Icelanders, we know that it is true  
We always match the English speaker, I and you.

Lindal makes much of the refrain, as it illustrates what he considers to be endemic among Western Icelanders, that of wanting to match or equal the best (Lindal 1967: 221). Those

'best' were the British-Canadians, possibly envisioned as being akin to Lindal's middle class fellow students.

The purpose of joining societies and organisations was not simply to imitate British establishment. In addition to highlighting the Icelandic desire to be equal to the British, Lindal's account gives no sense of relatedness or shared experience to other 'foreigners'. There is an emphasis on the belief that the British were the paradigm of good and successful Canadians, with whom Icelanders had not yet attained parity.

Of all the secular associations, this is the one which fits the category of 'ethnic institution' the best. What situation made this association seem so necessary to the students? Perhaps it was that they had moved from an ethnic social enclave into a rarefied British Canadian culture—that of the university. Their society, like those of new immigrants, would provide a haven of familiar traditions and language use. In spite of Lindal's recollection of feeling inferior, the Student Society did not hide its ethnicity. After a time, it came to be a vehicle to educate not only Icelanders but the Anglophone student population of the value of Icelandic literary culture. The Student Society helped maintain pride in the Icelandic heritage.



### 11.3 International Order of Good Templars

The first Temperance Society was established among Western Icelanders in 1883. The impetus seems to have come most vociferously in the newspaper *Leifur* from men in the community, including Bjorn Pjeturson (Unitarian) and Rev. Jón Bjarnason. The Temperance Society had between 50 and 100 members divided equally between the sexes, although primarily women and children attended the meetings. A special committee worked with other temperance groups in the city. In 1887, new Icelandic immigrants who had been in the upper echelons of the International Order of Good Templars (IOGT) in Iceland (an organisation founded in New York), organised chapters among Icelanders in Winnipeg. IOGT chapters already existed among the British in Winnipeg; the first had been organised in 1873, and was known as the "Fort Garry" (Thomasson 1993: 74). Very soon two Icelandic lodges developed; Hekla, associated with *Heimskringla* and the Tabernacle and Unitarian congregations, and Skuld associated with *Lögberg* and the Lutherans (including Jón Bjarnason himself, and successive editors of *Lögberg*). The two lodges frequently joined in membership drives, and jointly sponsored a youth lodge.

But most importantly, they worked together for several years to build a shared hall on Sargent at Victor. The Good Templar Hall was opened in 1907. The 75 by 40 foot two story building still stands, bearing the names Hekla and Skuld in the stonework. The building came to serve a wide array of community events, many of them artistic, such as

plays and concerts, others social, such as dances, tombolas, and card playing nights. Many of the events were sponsored by the individual lodges themselves in order to recruit new members. To become a member one underwent a course of study, and took a pledge to abstain from all alcohol. Successive degrees allowed for movement into the upper echelons of the secret society. The Icelandic lodges were quite successful in furthering the temperance cause, being two of the largest lodges in Western Canada.<sup>18</sup> They were also responsible for a subsequent proliferation of Icelandic temperance lodges in rural areas. This is likely what earned Icelanders a reputation for sobriety (McIvor 1908: 10, Woodsworth 1911: 80, *Free Press* Nov. 16, 1912)

But the IOGT Hall, or 'Goolie Hall' also served as a crucial drawing point for Icelanders. Geographically, it was central to the neighbourhood. It was in a fortuitous location being just blocks from the homes of some of the most prestigious Icelandic men, on the street where most of the Icelandic shops existed, and within a block of the Tabernacle. Almost directly across the street from the Goolie Hall was the Wevel Cafe, and beside Goolie Hall was the pool hall.<sup>19</sup> In spite of potential variance in status associated with these meeting places, they were close neighbours. One could scarcely have a

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<sup>18</sup>In classic Icelandic fashion, the Icelandic Day celebrations in Gimli, held on the August long weekend would later become known as the Temperance day off, as it was apparently not uncommon for Good Templars to enjoy a drink—perhaps a toast to Iceland.

<sup>19</sup>The pool hall, barbers and *Vörld* Press were housed in what was originally the Sveinsson block (according to photographs) built by Sigurdur Sveinsson. It later became known as the Connaught Block.

drink in the pool hall, or coffee at the Wevel Café, without observing the comings and goings at the Goolie Hall. Alas, the temperance hall doors were up a flight of stairs, and it had no front windows.

Icelanders from the Skuld Lodge entered the ranks of the IOGT Grand Lodge of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories as early as 1888. The Grand Lodge oversaw all lodges, but tended to wrestle for political control with the Winnipeg District Lodge, which ostensibly supervised all lodges in Winnipeg. The Winnipeg District lodge was also situated in Ward 3, and was attended almost exclusively by British-Canadian members. By 1905, Icelanders were moving up in the ranks of the IOGT, and tended to by-pass the District Lodge, as they made up the majority of the Executive of the Grand Lodge. Part of the problem was that members of the Grand Lodge should have passed the course of instruction at the District level before taking the Grand Lodge level exams. Such was the exclusive nature of the IOGT.

True to the model of middle class voluntary associations, British members of the IOGT were also members of other exclusive secret societies, such as the Orange Lodge and Knights of Columbus. As members of the Grand Lodge in particular, Icelanders were in close contact with the British middle class in Winnipeg. Descendants of some temperance leaders report that their forefathers were anxious to make further connections to other societies, and through attending temperance activities throughout the city probably

did. Their activity in the Grand Lodge of the IOGT actually gave Icelanders a measure of status above that of the British. According to the Grand Lodge minutes for the years 1910–1918, the District Lodge seemed to be plagued by financial difficulties, and thus held a losing hand in the power struggle with the Grand Lodge. As such, the Grand Lodge was the de facto organising body for both the city of Winnipeg and all territories to the west and north in Canada.

As the IOGT was to be a secret society, the British in particular prevented it from taking any political action. The most common of these were motions made to associate the temperance cause with the suffrage movement, which were repeatedly voted down.

The minutes of 17 Feb. 1914 Annual Meeting read

Motion was made from (a rural lodge), and endorsed by Brother J. that "Equal suffrage rights of women in all departments be endorsed." Sister L. reiterates the previous ruling, stating we could not take up this questions. . . it being considered political. Sister Buason substantiates (by referring to the IOGT articles on political matters).

However, a representative was sent to the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Eventually, a special committee found that in the case of suffrage, because women overwhelmingly supported temperance, their vote for the right government would help ban the sale of alcohol. It was therefore in the interest of the IOGT to support suffrage. A letter to this effect was sent to the Liberal party.

The combined Icelandic membership of all Winnipeg lodges was likely over 600 at its height in 1906, but many others joined only for a short time. After 1910, the membership of the Executive of the Grand Lodge was predominantly Icelandic. Although temperance tended to be a middle class phenomenon, given the sheer number of Icelanders who attended, it cannot be considered exclusive to the middle class among Icelanders.

Minutes of the lodges indicate that they frequently put on entertainment nights with coffee and other refreshments. The activities including card game nights, although gambling became a contested issue, plays, musical concerts and Hekla at least put on dances. As will be discussed, there was a question of propriety of dancing among the Skuld members. Interviews indicate that most the people were aware that large factions of the community were against drinking, but did not connect temperance 'propaganda' with the many enjoyable evenings (which were officially dry) spent at the Goolie Hall. One informant who frequently acted in plays as a teen denied knowing that the lodge with which she associated had anything to do with temperance.

The influence of the lodges stretched far beyond Winnipeg. In 1914, the 'local option' was instituted, and Gimli became the first dry municipality in Manitoba. Icelandic sobriety, especially among workers, was noted by several authors of the time.

But, as lists of membership are not included, it is difficult to ascertain all attendees. Names of the wealthiest Icelanders do not appear in the executive lists. Most names are re-

cognisable from biographic sketches of entrepreneurs as recorded by Oleson (1950, 1953). Arinbjorn Bardal, who with his brother-in-law Rev. Runolfur Marteinson (Skjaldborg, J B Academy) assumed leading positions in the Grand Lodge at an early date. All of the pastors seem to have attended the lodges, as well as a few physicians, the most outspoken being Dr. Siggi Jul Johannesson. Women of note were Mrs. Jóhanna Skaptason, who would found the IODE chapter with Mrs. Gudrun Buason, also an IOGT Grand Lodge member and frequently its secretary.

A. S. Bardal was perhaps the strongest supporter of temperance, and most influential. Bardal joined the Templars in 1890, and would be the Grand Templar for Manitoba and the Northwest Territories for over forty years. Mr. Bardal arrived in Winnipeg 'with twelve dollars in his pocket' (*Free Press* Nov. 16, 1912), and by the turn of the century established himself as a successful entrepreneur. His business was comprised of a livery and undertakers, in an ostentatious brick building on Sherbrook near the Winnipeg General Hospital. He lived near Rev. Bjarnason and Arni Eggertson, and like Eggertson made some profit from the sale of houses to Midland Rail.

Mr. Bardal appears in many photographs a distinguished, stern and serious individual. But he frequented the Wevel Café, where he appears in the NFB short film 'Iceland on the Prairie' (Mrs. Gudrun Parker), arguing vigorously with Dr. Siggi Jul Johannesson and two other men. He is known to have greeted people in the street with a hearty "How's

your liver?." It is also said that he often told the story of how he had drowned, and while lying unconscious on land was given two ounces of whiskey by his son Paul, which promptly revived him. Mr. Bardal worked tirelessly for the temperance cause, serving at various times as the liaison between the Grand Lodge and the Social and Moral Reform League, and the Grand Chief Templar. He was also the delegate to Ottawa in 1918 during prohibition period in Manitoba (1916–1920), when labour unions put pressure on the Federal Government to allow the sale of alcohol. He continued the fight against alcohol the rest of his life, frequently, as in 1918, spending much of his money to travel and organise meetings.

Bardal was determined and tireless in his mission. That he frequented the Wevel Cafe and engaged in debates there indicates that he took his message where he believed it was needed. His style of leadership seems to have included a sense of humour—one that could be self-deprecating at that—and there is no indication that he was considered a fringe element in any way. Rather, he was a respected community leader, a 'distinguished Icelander' who was willing to associate and engage the 'common man' in discussion. He seems to have been quite successful in his mission.

Perhaps what the IOGT minutes best demonstrate is the propensity of the new secular community leaders to engage in debate or pontificate on a point at length. This seems to be a continuation of the behaviour modelled by church ministers, and one that is geared

to increasing one's prestige and winning over followers, thus gaining influence. How this was recorded in the minutes varies with the secretary, and there are several telling examples in English from the Grand Lodge, and especially at the annual conventions of all lodges in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories—where the vast majority of members were Icelandic.

In 1910, Bro. Elgin, Grand Chief Templar of the Grand Lodge read into the minutes a warning of sorts on the way the convention discussions should proceed:

I consider it my duty to call the attention of the members to a very serious question, a problem that does more to destroy the harmony that ought to exist between Lodges than anything I know. Often mere trifles cause discussion, and disputes arise that ought never to exist, and would not if members would show a more brotherly spirit toward each other. . . (minutes of annual meeting 1911).

An example of such behaviour is partially recorded at the 1916 Annual Convention General Session. In the morning session which lasted from 9:30–12:40, two related issues were discussed. These were whether voting could be done by proxy if a representative was not present but had nominated a replacement, and the question of the number of voting representatives that could stand from the Skuld and Hekla lodges (these having by far the most members). The minute taker remarks that a “very earnest rejoinder from Mrs. Buason” was made regarding the Skuld and Hekla lodges. Finally the issues were put to a vote. In the afternoon session, lasting approximately from 1:30–3:30, the legality of the vote was the only topic for discussion. The matter was still not dropped. In a



later session, "Bro. B. makes a motion to have new Grand Lodge executive go through all material for the last seven years and print for distribution all by-laws made by this Grand Lodge." There is no mention of a second to this motion. In an even later session, Sister Buason makes a motion that "a Grand Lodge Executive Officer absenting himself or herself for three consecutive meetings without a valid excuse" be relieved from office and office declared open. The motion was carried.

Mrs. Gúdrun Buason comes across in the minutes as a particularly knowledgeable and powerful woman. She was quite willing to take a stand in the many debates. She was particularly aware and skilled in using the IOGT regulations to make a point, and to keep opponents on track. Although she did not hold a position of Grand or Vice Chief Templar, Mrs. Buason travelled to Europe on more than one occasion at the behest of the Grand Lodge. Unlike A. S. Bardal, she did not seem to have the means to fund the trips herself, though she held a professional position as a certified accountant. The Grand Lodge undoubtedly trusted her ability to powerfully enunciate its positions.

In the same annual report as above, the issue of the moral value of allowing dancing at lodge entertainment drives was raised by the Skuld representative before with the Executive of the Grand Lodge, as the members of Skuld could not resolve the matter themselves. The secretary notes that there was a long discussion on dancing, and that "Bro. Rev. Bjarnason spoke at some length, explaining some of the Evils that might

result from Dancing.” The irregular use of capital letters is unusual for this secretary, and he, or she, may have been inserting a hint of sarcasm into the minutes. The issue was not put to a vote.

What this incident demonstrates is the weakening power of Rev Bjarnason. Rev Bjarnason, who seems to have supported the ban on dancing, could not resolve the issue in his own lodge. Although he was given time to speak at the general meeting, no motion, for or against, was put forth in recognition of the issue. It was not that Rev. Bjarnason was in a social context where his ethnic community status would not be recognised. Men such as A. S. Bardal and Siggi Jul Johannesson were present at the meeting when this incident occurred, and active in the First Lutheran Church.

Those who were influential in the IOGT were a new set of community leaders, in some sense identifiable as organic intellectuals. They were not esteemed for the older Icelandic values of piety and learning. Few had religious or liberal university education, though they were of middling or higher income, and professional or entrepreneurial status. Those who played roles in the upper levels were persuasive speakers. Contests to get issues recognised gave these speakers a platform from which to demonstrate their abilities. But eloquence was no longer enough; individuals had to demonstrate a knowledge of association rules, a sense of relevance of the issues, and a sense of discipline and decorum rather than fervent and impassioned appeal.

The IOGT had become an organisation, that, although dominated by Icelanders, no longer recognised the authority of the church in all matters. Secular and middle class associations were gaining authority in the Icelandic community. In spite of the fact that members such as A. S. Bardal and Siggi Jul were members of the First Lutheran Congregation, the ideas they espoused were those of the British Canadian middle class. The IOGT was an ideological apparatus that pushed the state to legislate social reform, that would effect the working class more than any other. In this way, middle class civil society served the bourgeoisie need for a reliable workforce. Yet there were few Icelandic bourgeoisie, so the Icelandic chapters of the IOGT cannot be considered self-serving in that respect. Rather, sobriety among Icelanders was most useful in supporting the image of respectability.

#### **11.4 The IODE, Jón Sigurdson Chapter**

World War I broke out on August 4th of 1914, and the *Free Press* announced that foreigners had “made themselves scarce” (*Free Press* Aug. 5 1914). By then two Icelanders had signed up, and by the end of the year about 30 had enlisted, joining units organised at McGregor Armoury in the North End (Lindal 1967: 227). The war effort was strongly supported by many community representatives, including Thos. H. Johnson, MLA, the newspapers *Lögberg* and *Heimskringla*, the ministers of the First Lutheran Church, Dr. B.

B. Jonsson, and of the Unitarian Church, Dr Rognvaldur Pétursson (Kristjanson 1965: 381). In 1915/16 the Canadian government gave authority the recruitment of over 200 battalions by private citizens.

In Winnipeg, permission was given to recruit a Scandinavian Battalion, the 223rd. Icelandic lawyer H. Marino Hannesson soon became the commanding officer, and its officer corps contained several lawyers, and a few smaller scale building contractors. The raising of a battalion was often done at the expense of the commanding officer or the officer corps. The price of recruiting a battalion of 900 men averaged \$13,384.00 (Morton and Granatstein 1989: 31). Although approximately 1300 Icelandic men would enlist, the 223rd recruited just over 200. Training took place in Canada, and when men were shipped overseas they were sent to different British battalions at the front.

The war was not without its detractors. Some Canadians criticised the idea that Canada had duty to fight for Britain in a European war. Labour unions, especially in the West saw the war as a bourgeoisie game, played at the expense of the proletariat. However, in the early months of the war Canadian men of all skill levels enlisted, caught up in the excitement, and the Trades and Labour Congress took no action to oppose the war efforts (Morton and Granatstein 1989). Conversely British immigration increased, as antiwar tradesmen came to Canada to replace enlisting tradesmen going overseas.

In the Winnipeg Icelandic community, physician and editor of *Voröld* Siggi Jul Johannesson was particularly opposed to war, and critical of the suspicion which fell on many Eastern European and German immigrants. Other Icelanders were also opposed to the war, and particularly disturbed by conscription. Conscription was discussed by the Dominion Government as early as 1915, but did not come into effect until 1917. It was primarily British-Canadian working men who were conscripted. Those labelled 'enemy aliens' who had not been interned often filled the jobs left behind by conscripts.

The Dominion Government had called upon women in general to contribute to the war effort in many ways; through buying war bonds, rationing food, folding bandages and sending care packages and letters to the front. Most importantly, as the war wore on, women were called on to encourage their menfolk to enlist.

In Winnipeg, the International Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE) had taken on the role of building hospitals for returning wounded soldiers. The Jón Sigurdson Chapter of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire was formed in 1916. Mrs. Jóhanna Skaptason and wife of Captain J. B. Skaptason, was a member of the Unitarian Church, and had first joined a British Chapter of the IODE. Upon realising other Icelandic women were also anxious to contribute to the war effort, she organised the Icelandic chapter.

In the opening address of the Chapter, Mrs. Skaptason included the following sentiments:

It does not make the least difference who takes the chair, the important thing is that we work together as one and patiently do our part in lifting the load cast over our land and people by this terrible war.

We all know the part our men are taking in the war. Surely we have as much strength, ability and courage as our men. I do not see that we are inferior to them except perhaps in our eloquence when we are called to the platform, and then we make up for that at the coffee tables. . . . Our task is to inspire love for this land and its people. I am sure that we women will soon come to love and to help those who are in pain and trouble. Our work will be especially among the (wounded) Icelandic soldiers. . . . We should lend a hand to the soldiers' wives in their loneliness and anxiety, for often a friendly visit means more than money (Jon Sigurdson Chapter IODE, 1941: 10).

This portion of the speech speaks to the need to re-examine the roles of Icelandic women in relation to the state. While she first speaks of 'our land and people' Mrs. Skaptason then proposes that women must build the support of the whole community for the war, by 'inspiring love for this land and its people'. Like the rhetoric of the IOGT, this reiterates the position of the the British Canadian dominant ideology. But this is not just an issue for the middle class, this is the cause of the British Empire. This rhetoric once again frames Icelanders not as foreigners but as citizens.

The second message is much more personal. Given that Mrs. Skaptason's husband was overseas, she must have been keenly aware of the emotional toll a husband's, father's or brother's absence took on the families at home. Other members were also in the same position. Thus when she specifies that a "friendly visit means more than money" she

is encouraging women to carry an emotional burden, and assume that responsibility on behalf of the whole community.

Yet the speech begins by addressing a tendency that seems to have been endemic to the Western Icelandic community, and that is the propensity to debate issues big and small. The J. S. Chapter existed independently of Icelandic personal politics, insofar as it brought together women from every church congregation. In spite of the battles between the male leaders of the churches, membership in J. S. Chapter including Mrs. Lára Bjarnason (widow of Rev. J Bjarnason of the First Lutheran Church), Mrs. R. Péturson (wife of Rev. Rognvaldur Péturson; Unitarian), Mrs. F. J. Bergmann (wife of the pastor of Tabernacle Church). This was not happenstance, but a conscious endeavour. The motto of the chapter was "United We Stand." It is not that Icelandic women normally avoided debates; the capabilities of Mrs. Gúdrun Buason, who sat on the J. S. Chapter Executive, were evident in her interaction in the IOGT.

There is evidence that the society was generally a very co-operative one. An early discussion occurred around whether the opening prayer should be said aloud or silently, perhaps related to the different church allegiances of the Executive and membership. The problem was resolved however by a decision to open with the standard IODE prayer, at least for the duration of the war. No other mention is made in the minutes of the meetings to discussions regarding rules, or lengthy debates about the course of action. Minutes of

the J. S. Chapter meetings support these assertions in the 1919 Annual Report to the National Chapter, which comment on the “charming personality of the two regents” and the “splendid harmony which has always existed among members of the Executive of the Chapter as a whole.”

The general Icelandic membership shows an almost exclusive representation of the wives and daughters of successful entrepreneurs, primarily those associated with the building industries, as well as lawyers. While membership in the national IODE is not based solely on financial means, it does tend to be a rather exclusive society; its membership is drawn from the more genteel of the middle classes. This may have been the case historically due to the burden of work in the home for women of lesser means, and for Icelandic women, work outside the home, and consequently their lack of time and energy for charity work.

The composition and interaction of the group demonstrates the rise of the middle class among Icelanders. Not only were these women's menfolk working in (British) middle class occupations and profession, earning middling salaries, the women themselves were adopting British middle class values and activities. The IODE connection made Icelandic women, and effectively their husbands, visible to British-Canadians in like social positions.

The Chapter's venues not limited to Icelandic community buildings. It began by meeting in Icelandic homes. As membership grew meetings were held in the Icelandic



Unitarian Church, or the Icelandic Tabernacle Church. The churches were not likely ideal, given the discord between the various congregations. The John M. King School at Sargent and McGee was the meeting place of choice during the war. Although the IOGT Hall was a hub of activity for Icelanders, it was not at first used by the IODE for charity drives, dances or bazaars. Dances and dinners were held at the Royal Alexandra Hotel, the Fort Garry Hotel, the Columbus Hall, Kensington Hall and the Manitoba Hall, all grand and prestigious venues. In 1918, the IOGT hall was used for a time as a meeting place, but deemed too expensive given the dwindling attendance at IODE meetings. It was not until 1920 that it was used for a dinner and dance.

In the Western Icelandic community, membership in the IODE placed the Winnipeg women in a position to organise Icelandic women's war efforts throughout Canada. These endeavours did not discriminate on the basis of the churches' separation of the congregations, and men's religious and political fractiousness. It also gained for women a vantage point from which to direct community affairs, the greatest of which was allegiance to the state in support of the war effort. Their elevated social status to community leaders did not come prior to the IODE, it came about as a result of the formation of the J. S. Chapter.

The appeal of the Canadian state was to come to the aid of Empire, and the IODE in general responded to state's request. The Jón Sigurdson responded by working with and

for their own ethnic group almost exclusively. The first two annual reports discuss this.

In the report dated 1918, the following reasons for this are given

Our members are all Icelandic, our entertainments are patronised almost wholly by them, and it is our main source of revenue. We also felt that we needed some definitive plan to work on, and that this would could be done to the best advantage by us.

In the second report, the closing paragraphs praise the generosity of the Icelandic people and businesses in Western Canada. It includes the phrase "where Icelandic boys are concerned who respond to Canada's call, the pocket books of the people, as well as their hearts, are open."

The J. S. Chapter maintained a distance from other chapters, and this perhaps to its advantage and the advantage to those they served. For example, in July 1916, just six months after its inception, the J. S. Chapter had provided the funds to furnish a ward in the McKenzie Military Hospital. In November of the same year, the overarching Provincial Chapter sent a letter requesting aid in collecting funds so that the combined chapters might raise enough to furnish a ward in the same hospital. The J. S. Chapter replied that as it had already done this itself, it declined to donate further for the time being. A second letter from the Provincial Chapter was sent in December, saying that it had not intended to request funds from those who had already contributed to such a project.

The J. S. Chapter also declined to provide funding to the Municipal Chapter for the furnishing of rooms in the Boyd Building on Portage Avenue to be used for IODE work, on the grounds that most J. S. Chapter members lived in the western part of the city and would find it "very difficult to attend meetings in the Boyd Bldg" (minutes Oct. 3rd 1916). Most British Canadian IODE members within the city would have lived in Crescentwood or the Armstrong Point area, and would have likely had to travel as far to the Boyd Building as the West End Icelanders. In addition, the Boyd Building was closer to the West End than Eaton's and Robinson's Department stores where many Icelandic women worked. Undoubtedly the Icelandic women did not have the means of personal conveyance as the British Canadian women did, making their journey a more difficult one. And as their ability to raise money indicates, the Icelandic women seem to have been more thrifty than their British counterpart, and would have found the money ill-spent.

During the war years, as many as 175 Icelandic women were members of the IODE. Not all women attended all meetings; the highest number recorded is sixty-five. The tasks they took on were extensive, and included selling candies and baked goods, hosting dances (or 'socials'), knitting circles, hospital visits and game nights, home visits, letter writing and the packaging of hundreds of care packages to be sent overseas. They assisted casualties' families with both monetary donations and by offering a comforting presence

and general assistance in a young widow's home, and by creating a special fund to help the family of returned soldiers in need. Fund raising alone gathered \$8000.00 during the war. But from the amount of funds and goods gathered by the J S Chapter, it appears that these women must have "done their bit."

The J. S. Chapter became a conduit for Icelandic women's volunteer work throughout North America. Icelandic Ladies' Aids of various sorts in the rural areas contributed to the efforts of the IODE. For example, the Dorcas Society, in Selkirk, knit many pairs of wool socks, an endeavour for which the J. S. Chapter supplied the wool. In the District of Keewatin, ladies aid formed for the express purpose of aiding the J. S. Chapter, but did not seek any further affiliation with the IODE. Even when the J. S. Chapter did not canvas directly for funds, Icelanders outside of Winnipeg did contribute funds to them, such as a Mrs. Holm from Nebraska, who sent \$100.00. Thus the J. S. Chapter became a general organ for the women of the Icelandic community in North America.

However, the J. S. Chapter was not a body that worked through community consultation. The executive were the *de facto* decision makers on how funds collected from the community should be spent. The minutes indicate that when decisions were made to undertake a project, a special committee was struck, and the fund-raising and other work began. Votes were not at first taken to decide how money was spent or which project should be pursued. This is not to suggest that the executive overrode suggestions from

the general membership, only that the executive took it upon itself to lead. Choices to pursue one course of action rather than another were made and they would not have been easy choices. For example, more funds were allocated for furnishing hospital wards and outings for recuperating soldiers than on financial aid to war widows. Thus the J. S. Chapter acquired the authority to service those community needs as it saw fit.

The war had brought an increase in British-Canadian nativism, along with a greater suspicion of foreigners. But the formation and activity of the Jón Sigurdson Chapter of the IODE promoted several images that would deflect negative sentiments. Through their activities the ladies highlighted their status as both a 'foreign' people and a people loyal to the British Empire. The image they presented of Icelanders was one of middle or upper class patriotism. It demonstrated that Icelanders as a group were financially independent, and were, moreover, capable of managing the well being of their own community by taking on the type of civil society duties that helped build Canada as a nation. In dedicating their work to Icelandic soldiers, the message to the rest of Winnipeg's society was that the Western Icelandic community as a whole was 'doing its bit.'

The final activity of the IODE in relation to W.W.I was the compilation of the biographies of all those who served in the First World War. In 1923, *Minnigarrit Íslenzkra Hermanna*, the memorial book was published. In it are over 1200 short biographies of Icelandic enlisted men and women, usually with an accompanying photo. The collection

of this information had been hampered by the diaspora of Icelanders throughout North America, and the Anglicization of names, and the book is considered to be likely incomplete. The book is still considered today to be an Icelandic-style monument to those who served.

## 11.5 Discussion

While the Student Society is a paradigmatic model of an ethnic institution, the IOGT and IODE chapter were not. Nor could any of the higher ranking members be said to be charismatic, or draw on historical symbols and ideological mythologising of the past—this was not a case of re-generational pluralism. Yet ethnicity was central to the membership, patronage and activity of the organisations, even as the organisations served the state and dominant culture. So, were the voluntary organisations ethnic institutions or middle class associations adopted by an ethnic group? Part of the answer to this question is how they function in the Winnipeg Icelandic community.

Each of the groups contributed in its own way to the social and cultural life of the Icelandic community. But for a group of people that at the turn of the century appeared to be led primarily by the churches, and in that first decade was seemingly undifferentiated in terms of secular authority, how did the IOGT and IODE gain the influence they did? And moreover, who gained authority and be what means?

The Student Society was set up for the enjoyment of the participants and the entertainment of the audience. Ethnicity was the basis of membership. The Student Society deliberately strove to foster pride in Icelandic culture, and in the abilities of Icelanders as artists and academics in any field. The success of the students in academic work was evidence that Icelandic culture was equal to the best. These endeavours no doubt contributed to ethnic pride, and can be seen as a means to contest the dominant ideology that non-British 'races' were of lesser worth.

However, the IOGT and IODE have more complex and long reaching social import. Both were formed with the intent of affecting social behaviour and attitudes. As new social structures they introduced a greater secular control of behaviour, while simultaneously generating a higher social status of those who became leaders in the organisation. This introduced elements of class ethics, specifically middle class ethics, into the community.

The IOGT and IODE were classic forms of state apparatus, inculcating standards of behaviour and ideological belief that would ultimately benefit the state and the bourgeoisie elite. In Winnipeg, and for that matter, in the Canada in general, private industry and the state were tightly allied. The aims of the IOGT and IODE were the cessation of drinking, and support for the war effort, respectively. Given the membership of the two organisation, some informal overlap in ideologies was likely. Temperance benefited em-

ployers by providing a sober and more reliable work force. The IODE generated support for the war effort, and took on a share in the provisioning of troops.

But both groups had an impact on the behaviour and social organisation within the Icelandic community beyond their explicit goals. The IOGT will be discussed first.

Like other middle class organisations, the IOGT was a secret society. Membership allowed privileged contacts with other middle class men and women. This in itself was an incentive to join the IOGT. At the local lodges, Hekla and Skuld men and women could socialise with other Icelanders of similar religious and political persuasion. But as lodge business was conducted in Icelandic, the lodges isolated themselves from other ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the whist nights, music recitals and dances were excellent reasons to spend an evening with friends.

Part of the rhetoric of temperance organisations was that prohibition would prevent men from “drinking up the pay-cheque” and contribute to a more harmonious family life. The control of family life and the proper education and socialisation of children is after all considered an important method for developing a compliant citizenry. In Iceland, this had been the purview of the pastors. In Canada, message of temperance was promoted by middle class social reformers, and usually targeted at workers. That drinking was recognised as a class-based issue by workers is evident in the union protests to the federal



government against prohibition. However, the private industry elite tended to stay out of the fray of temperance work, in spite of the potential benefit to their companies.

To bring workers into the fold, Icelanders did not have to missions in other, working class neighbourhoods. Temperance advocates could encourage workers to come to them, by hosting 'dry' entertainments in the centrally located Goolie Hall. Even if Icelanders could not be induced to 'take the pledge' time was spent away from taverns.<sup>20</sup> As the events were well attended, and Icelandic workers were known for their sobriety, the tactic obviously worked.

The entertainment evenings also presented an opportunity for Icelanders of 'all levels' to intermingle. While it might be assumed that workers were under the critical gaze of the temperance advocates, the interaction of 'the unemployed, the knowledgeable and not so knowledgeable' in venues such as the Wevel Café suggests workers were not likely cowed. The Icelandic social process required advocates to do their work more directly, through persuasive discussion and good humour—or at the very least an entertaining debate—at these gatherings.

The success of the movement indicates that it had real influence over the community. Temperance advocates thus gained social prestige because of the success of their organisations. Individuals could gain status within the IOGT by dedicated and consistent attend-

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<sup>20</sup>Even if some attendees imbibed at these events, as is rumoured, the drinking was likely kept to a minimum.

ance and work, the passing of exams and through their own persuasive and inspirational abilities. Thus men and women had new methods of gaining prestige, in spite of their wealth and lack of 'traditional' prestigious attributes, like university education. The temperance union provided a platform from which to demonstrate their personal abilities at persuasive speech, skills in organisation, and dedication to the cause.

In the 1910s, pressures were put on members by British Canadians to reduce competitiveness, and focus on the task at hand. Instances of fervent argumentation by highly respected Icelanders were in some instances ignored. Thus members of the IOGT came to conform to British Canadian forms of 'proper decorum,' as well as ensuring sobriety within the ethnic group.

The IODE Jón Sigurdson Chapter encouraged support for the war and offered assistance of several kinds to the community. It did not employ the social method of direct confrontation. Argumentation would have been antithetical to their mission of compassion. References are made in the minutes and reports of the conscientious avoidance of confrontation and competition for power within the chapter. The distance the chapter kept from the British Canadian chapters suggests that harmony was not sought because of explicit directions from the dominant culture, it was a method deliberately chosen by the Icelandic women themselves. The result was a co-operative and very fruitful form of social action.

The ladies of the IODE J. S. Chapter gained renown through their charity and compassion to those in Canada and overseas. Prestige and decision making powers accrued to the executive which met diligently, and organised and headed up committee after committee to take on the myriad of tasks the chapter performed. The extraordinary work load that is documented in the minutes indicates that the J. S. Chapter members did not themselves have surplus funds to, for example, furnish an entire hospital ward—a task which the provincial chapter attempted to accomplish by drawing on all sub-chapters. Rather, they pooled the community to raise the funds and in doing so, must have personally contacted many Icelanders, and thus raised their own profile in the process.

These voluntary associations gained an influence in the Winnipeg Icelandic community in part because they were the only Icelandic ethnic institutions. The Students' Society, the IOGT and IODE social events were culturally relevant forms of entertainment. But the IOGT and IODE were also institutions that emerged as 'action sets', that is, they were formed to carry out very specific missions. This supports Dreiger's argument that a social cause can keep ethnic group members allied to the ethnic group. That these causes were simultaneously British Canadian middle class causes and contributed to the nation building activities of the state and bourgeoisie does not detract from their relevance as ethnic causes. It suggests rather that certain segments of the Winnipeg Icelandic

population themselves sought conformity to the dominant culture, if not the assimilation, of all ethnic group members.

Argumentation is only one type of social interaction found among Icelanders. The examples set by men like A.S. Bardal's congenial persuasion and the IODE co-operative efforts suggest that these were also common form of social process. But direct argumentation can pose a challenge to authority. At the same time, winning an argument can establish authority. When a challenge to a dominant ideology is made and lost, the dominant ideology gains validity. This is the process of hegemony by which certain ideologies gain legitimacy. Both friendly persuasion and argumentation appear to be methods used by Icelandic social reformists to win over others to their cause. Though the style may be different, the methods used by Icelanders are no less effective than edicts posed from a superordinate classes on others.

So then, when Icelanders co-opted British Canadian middle class forms of social interaction were Icelanders bringing their ethnic group any closer to amalgamation with British Canadians? Evidence of the experiences of the Student Society suggests not. Yet even as their civil societies adopted British Canadian ideologies of good citizenry, Icelanders remained "foreigners." What kept them separate was the ideology of racial determinism, to which Icelanders themselves adhered.

## 12 Reconfiguring Community Factions

In Part 3, three seemingly disparate activities have been examined: the building industry, the ministers and their congregations, and secular voluntary associations. These social activities are aspects of culture associated with class differences; economic status, social organisation and groups, and ideologies pertaining to the role of social strata and institutions to society as a whole. In the Icelandic community the same individuals or their kin are found occupying the higher ranks in areas of social interaction. That is, economic wealth correlates with social rank and influence. Distinguished Icelanders included Thos. Johnson, Arni Eggertson, Thorsteinn Oddsson, A. S. Bardal; Rev B. B. Jónsson, Rev Rognvaldur Pétursson, Dr. Siggi Jul Jóhannesson, Mrs Jóhanna Skaptason and Mrs Gúdrun Buason. The evidence points to class differences between the distinguished Icelanders and the rest of the community, but are these differences sufficient enough to produce class formations?

The building industry and real estate ventures, while drawing Icelanders together, produced dramatic differences in wealth and occupation. Moreover, those Icelanders who became wealthy profited from other Icelanders. Some got ahead through the buying and selling of properties to Midland Rail. Others made money when wages paid to workers allowed the contractors and builders to profit through the sale of the product—houses and apartment blocks. This second situation is one that would have been realised by workers, given the socialist rhetoric in Winnipeg in the latter 1910s.

The practise of training one's workers and/or boarding new immigrants and migrant labourers from the rural areas, mimicked the paternalistic relations on the farmstead. In Iceland, landowners had control over both their workers' labour and moral behaviour. In Winnipeg, wage or contract workers could be denied a job on several pretexts, as labour laws were quite lax. Thus, in addition to the control of labour and morality, employers gained a form of physical control over their workers that they had not had in Iceland. Differential power was most apparent in the buying and selling of labour.

The second area of investigation was the churches. Religious life among the New Iceland settlers had been fractious from the start over theological issues, and issues directly related to the future of the ethnic group. It also seems that one pastor in particular was in competition for larger congregations.

There is no clear evidence that any particular church was patronised by the wealthy, although the wealthiest of the distinguished Icelanders attended the First Lutheran Church. Moreover, one very wealthy individual built a second chapel for the First Lutheran congregation and offered the facilities to the J. B. Academy. The First Lutheran Church members emphasised independence in both religious and financial matters, and insisted that the Lutheran faith and Icelandic language were the cornerstones of the culture. Among congregation members the ethic of ethnicity may have fostered the ethnic loyalty of employers and employees, contributing to co-operation of various levels of occupation in the building industries.

In the Tabernacle congregation, it was the kin of the pastor who helped, financially and through physical labour, to build the church itself. Other members of the congregation who were also construction workers assisted in this endeavour. When the Tabernacle lost its pastor, the wealthy and professional members of the congregation rejoined the First Lutheran Church. Tradesmen are reported to have joined the Unitarian Church.

The Unitarian Church was not without its wealthy patrons. These included the Brynjólfssons, who were frequently contracted by British Canadians, and Fred Swanson who advertised for both Icelandic and British Canadian business. Fred Swanson also designed the church and made its stained glass windows. Moreover the pastor and his brothers started Union Loan and Investment company that had dealings in real estate and

housing development. The benefit of networking through the Unitarian church were greater contacts and association with British Canadians, contacts that might provide jobs, access to secret societies and other clubs, but also support for the labour movement.

The possibility that church membership was related to class differences is not at all likely. If anything, in the realm of secular relations, it appears that those in the higher levels of church administration and participation were at an advantage within the mixed economic status congregation. They associated with a co-operative and reliable Icelandic congregation that could be drawn on for workers, and could network with contractors who performed complimentary tasks in the building industries.

The relationship of the very wealthy Icelanders to their churches was not just one that benefited their particular businesses. These Icelanders gave of their own money, earned through the labour of the Icelandic workers, to the building and support of the churches and their spiritual and educational work. In this way, profits were recycled back into the community.

Beyond disseminating theology and cultural forms, symbols and aesthetics, the conduct of the pastors modelled a form of social behaviour that encouraged social change and work for the betterment of the community. That is, well considered debates became legitimate exercises for questioning the values of community leaders. The divergence of beliefs between Rev. Bergmann and Rev. Bjarnason arose when Bergmann, the junior



of the two, could no longer agree with the leading authority. This pattern of intellectual challenge opened a forum for new, unschooled participants in the contests for community leadership. However, only those with the money, time and energy could become heavily involved in the secular organisations. So again, economic status became an important enabler for taking on leadership roles.

Opportunities for community leadership opened up as the new experiences of urban life created situations that needed attention beyond the scope of the churches. Although the pastors attended the temperance meetings, they did not direct them. Pastors were excluded from the work of the IODE based on gender, and were not needed for sports and cultural clubs.

All indications suggest that those who directed secular associations were privileged in some respect, either through having a modicum of wealth, or being academically gifted. Larger scale building contractors and members of their family were especially visible in the growth and maintenance of community organisations. Several businessmen have been described as the pillar or mainstay of a club or church; some were involved in teaching while others contributed financially. Wealthier men and women had more time, and through their volunteer efforts, a better ability to disseminate their views. Thus the influence on community coherence of contractors and businessmen extends beyond the economic sphere into domains which reach a greater diversity of individuals and issues.

Thus even if there was resentment towards the wealthy, the wealthy were gaining control over the Icelandic community in both the working world and the social and ideational realms.

In order to track the wealthy in their community service careers, I have used secondary sources. Although genealogy is an important means of denoting status among Icelanders, the lineage of most distinguished Icelanders is omitted. Instead, these sources record the achievements of the individuals in relation to the organisations to which they belonged. Thus any social status individuals may have gained, arose from their volunteer work itself. Prestige did not exist for the participants prior to their involvement in secular organisations.

The social work of the IODE and IOGT was done through direct contact with individuals in the community. Thus the wealthy were dealing on a personal basis with those of lesser means. In the IODE, many of the tasks involved financial and emotional support to wounded soldiers and their families, and the families of the deceased soldiers. Male relatives of many IODE members were also overseas, so there was much to be shared between the ladies of the IODE and those they supported.

The role of the IOGT was of a much more persuasive nature, and members' task was to influence the beliefs and action within the community. Few could back up their point of view with anything other than reason and argument. There was however a pos-

sible stronger social force behind the temperance message, that being the unwillingness of employers to hire a heavy drinking worker. But there were of course exceptions to this rule—such as Loftur Jorundson and his crew—which suggests a strict authoritarian position on the matter of alcohol consumption was not endemic to the Icelandic community.

The evidence does not indicate there was a split between distinguished Icelanders and a subjugated working population in the Winnipeg Icelandic community. Of course, a class formation would not appear without some form of antagonism, such as protracted negotiations over wages in several occupations. In such a case, it would be likely to see members of the working class acting in concert, but not necessarily a middle class coalition. The next part of the dissertation will discuss the impact such an event did have on the Icelandic community.

Finally, volunteer work appeals to both middle class cultural values and traditional Icelandic ones. British Canadian middle class values were those of anonymous social duty for the betterment of all members of society (Dintenfass 1998). Middle class clubs supported the improvement of their members, while middle class reform associations advocated temperance, charity and moral improvement of those 'less fortunate'. While this work was not to be boasted about by oneself in either Icelandic or middle class culture, it nevertheless contributed to the one's prestige in both.

## **Part IV**

# **The Winnipeg General Strike**

## 13 Prelude to a Strike

The tensions between labour and capital, and British Canadians and 'foreigners', heightened during and after the war. Labour became more pronounced in its open support for socialism, while the employing classes became fearful of the potential for a Bolshevik armed conflict. This tension was reflected in the Icelandic newspapers. A new paper, *Voröld*, edited by the fervent champion of social causes, Siggi Jul Johannesson, took the position of labour. He would engage both *Lögberg* and *Heimskringla* in debate. The rhetoric of the arguments reveal undercurrents of resentment towards the wealthy, and a significant misunderstanding of the labour movement.

By the end of the war, living conditions had become increasingly difficult due to war rationing, and the rise in food prices. Real wages had been dropping since 1913 (Sutcliffe 1972). British Canadians, Ukrainians, Russians and Finns had been active in forming political parties, but had been disenfranchised if they were naturalised after 1902. Indeed, the formation of several new political parties in Western Canada were linked to the la-

bour movement, including the Independent Labour Party, the Dominion Labour Party, the Socialist Party and the Progressive Party. Not surprisingly, given the labour leaders' international outlook, the formation and progress of Bolshevism in Russia was observed with interest, especially through the Trades and Labour Council's (TLC) newspaper, *The Voice*.

Although labour was better organised and increasingly aggressive in its strategies after W.W.I, the circumstances of the war had exacerbated potential ethnic divisions within the working class. As soldiers returned, the unity of different ethnic groups of workers was temporarily undermined. Returned soldiers found that not only were few jobs available, but those that were available were held by the very "enemy" they had been fighting. Understandably, returned soldiers were also skeptical of the international socialist outlook of labour leaders, which was becoming increasingly evident. In December 1918, labour leader R. B. Russell publicly attacked the negative propaganda in the press about Bolshevism and the Soviet Government. In January 1919, a memorial service was organised by the TLC to commemorate the lives of socialists Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, who had been killed in the postwar struggle for control of Germany. The service was disrupted by 200 returned soldiers and had to be called off. However, the reality of the wage issue, and the realisation that there was strength in numbers—and that

the inclusion of 'foreigners' increased these numbers—went a long way to resolve this division.

The drive towards the organisation of the OBU, and push for political education of workers had ramification for the social structure of the working class. Participation in the labour movement, and indeed the movement itself, was open and 'visible'. Labour rallies, and educational and motivational talks were often held at the Walker Theatre, hailed as 'Canada's finest theatre', or outdoors in Victoria Park. Thus the working class voice and 'community' was not restricted to places of employment. Further, the Trades and Labour Council's newspapers and networks throughout the west allowed for ongoing communications and organisation between different trades and geographic areas. The particular structure of the labour movement in Western Canada created the social organisational preconditions and ideological justifications for general strikes.

In 1918, the conventions of the British Columbia and Calgary Federations of Labour had each passed resolutions in favour of general strikes (Masters 1950: 127). In Winnipeg, in May a near general strike was held which lasted 3 weeks. It began with civic workers, who were supported by railway workers of all trades. City businessmen and lawyers formed the Committee of 100 to deal with anticipated negotiations. The committee was considered to be neutral, and was sympathetic to the plight of labour. The arrival of Hon. Gideon Robertson, the federal minister of labour, and a conservative trade unionist, as

chief negotiator quickly settled the strike before any further sympathy strike action could take place. Civic workers, the main striking force, won the right to form unions and negotiate collectively, and an increase in wages.

However, *The Voice* did not wholly support the strike, precipitating a division within the TLC. There were enough radical members to form a separate faction within the movement, which published its own paper, the *Western Labour News*. Early in 1919, the movement to popularise the One Big Union gained strength, particularly in BC and Alberta. Trades and occupations represented included civic workers, building industry workers, garment workers, miners, railway workers and even hotel and restaurant employees.

### **13.1 Impact on the Western Icelandic community**

Prior to May 1919, the increasing tensions between labour and the bourgeoisie, and the intensification of the scrutiny of 'aliens' were reflected in the debates between the Icelandic newspapers. It is at this time that the strongest representations of class-based and ethnic ideologies were made, somewhat ironically, between two distinguished Icelanders.

I will turn to the salient points in this debate following a discussion of the political and religious affiliations of the papers.



The newspaper *Heimskringla* was associated with Conservatives politically, and the Unitarian Church, which in turn had many ties to the English speaking West End community. The paper had an editorial board, with Rev F. J. Bergmann, Rev. Magnus J. Skaptason and Rev. Rognvaldur Pétursson, all actively involved between 1915 and 1920. The editor in 1917–1919 was Olafur Tryggvi Johnson, also of the Unitarian Church. The English denominations of the Unitarian Church had ties to the labour movement. Two English ministers, Horace Westwood and Salem Bland were involved in the labour movement and were dismissed for that reason. Their congregations had joined the Labour Church. The Icelandic Unitarian Church could not be said to be wholly in support of the labour cause; Stefán Jónasson (personal communication) argues that many were suspicious of the aims of organised labour. Important players in the Icelandic community who were members of the Unitarian Church included of course, Rev Rognvaldur Petursson, one of three brothers who established the Union Security and Loans, Fred Swanson, the painting contractor, Thorstein Borgfjord, of vice-president of McDiarmid Construction, and also William and Victor Anderson, a father and son who were active in various areas of labour politics.

*Lögberg* was long associated with Liberal politics and the Icelandic Lutheran Synod. The Synod was said to be founded on two cornerstones: the Lutheran faith, and the Icelandic language. Jón Bildfell and Dr. Síggi Júl. Johannesson were both members of the Synod, as

were the Bardal family, Arni Eggertson, and Thorsteinn Oddsson. The provincial Liberal party brought in prohibition and the vote for women. While it was generally favourable to labour interests, it also responded to its middle class and rural constituents. Thomas Johnson, an Icelandic MLA instigated the reformation of the Fair Wages Act in 1916. This however did not go far enough, and by 1917, the TLC no longer considered the Norris government co-operative. The reciprocal annoyance of the Liberal government with the labour movement is reflected in *Lögberg*

The third paper, *Voröld*, was only published from 1917 to 1921. It was edited by Siggí Jul Johannesson, after he vacated the position as editor of *Lögberg*. The paper was produced with financial, authorial and logistic support of Hjalmar Gíslason. The two men were avid socialists. The paper carried articles about the general news of the day culled from English language papers about the Bolshevik Revolution, as did *Heimskringla* and *Lögberg*, but unlike the other two followed strikes in England and the United States, and biographies of prominent socialist individuals.

The papers often acted as a public forum for their editors and subscribers. In 1918, J. J. Bildfell and Siggí Jul Johannesson, editors of *Lögberg* and *Voröld* respectively, had a long and heated debate through their editorials on several issues, ranging from personal topics to those of ideology and ethnicity. The topic of ethnicity will be addressed in detail in the next chapter. At this point, the rhetoric of insult and ad homonym argumentation

is particularly interesting because it illustrates the latent resentment towards the wealthy, and evidence about status, prestige and the use of wealth among Western Icelanders. *Heimskringla*, for its part, shied away from engaging in this argument, but did carry an ongoing report of the exchanges.

The differences between Jón J. Bildfell and Siggi Jul went back several years. J. J. Bildfell was an early immigrant to Winnipeg, and had played an active role in the activities of the Icelandic Labourers Association in 1887. Siggi Jul had arrived in Canada from Iceland in 1899, a trained physician with a history of political activism, and became well-known in the Winnipeg Icelandic community for his fervent support of many social causes. Between 1914 and 1916, Siggi Jul was the editor of *Lögberg*. The details of his departure are somewhat confusing, but became fodder for later debates in 1918 between the two men.

Prior to the federal election of 1917, Siggi Jul, still editor of *Lögberg*, tendered a letter to the board of directors stating that if the Liberal government came to power in the upcoming federal election, he could no longer support the paper's policy of support for that government. His specific problem was the Liberal policy of conscription. In spite of the implementation of conscription, Siggi Jul retracted his resignation. Meanwhile, the *Lögberg* board of directors had dismissed him without notice but with severance pay.

The result was that Siggi Jul began publishing *Voröld*. A literary debate quickly arose between J. J. Bildfell and Siggi Jul. The first salvo seems to have been fired off by Siggi Jul, who accuses Bildfell of 'wearing two pants', the equivalent of the English phrase, 'wearing two hats'. Siggi Jul's specific accusation is that Bildfell was not only the driving force behind Siggi Jul's dismissal from *Lögberg*, but that Bildfell had engineered it in order to take over the editorship himself. Thus on one level, the debate can be considered to be a struggle between the two men to heighten their own prestige and gain community supporters.

The course of the argument throughout the summer months of 1918 then moved ostensibly to the topic of the preservation of the Icelandic language, an issue originally raised by the two men at the Icelandic Lutheran Church Synod. Siggi Jul proposed the setting up of an organisation to teach and maintain the Icelandic language, to which Bildfell objected. The subsequent argument in the papers includes an exchange of insults referring to the use of wealth and its validity as a form of community support.

Bildfell's arguments were peppered with accusations that Siggi Jul (and occasionally Hjalmar Gislason) were "Bolsheviks" of the most heinous kind, and that this political ideology was embedded in the context of the *Voröld's* articles. Moreover, *Voröld* is repeatedly accused of spreading Rhine gold, (in English, German gold), a phrase that will be explained shortly. The following selection of quotations from two articles will illustrate

the logic and tone of the arguments; I have selected the most inflammatory and closely related remarks from each.

Bildfell had argued at the Synod meeting and in *Lögberg* that efforts to preserve the language should not be undertaken while the country was at war, as it would be contrary to patriotic duty. In *Voröld* on July 9, 1918, Siggi Jul defended his proposal to set up the language classes. He writes,

The Canadian Government rightly deserves to be reproached for many things [...] The war is the cause of many afflictions [...] However I am sometimes shocked when the war is blamed for something it has got nothing to do with. . . the truth is that this (matter of preserving the language) has nothing to do with the war [...] But besides the stupidity and ugliness of such a theory—that we must commit a cultural suicide in order to support the war—the *Lögberg* article is so childish that it is difficult to believe that it came from the pen of a sober man” (*Voröld* July 9, 1918)

Bildfell replies that Siggi Jul’s article

is from the beginning to the end swollen with Bolshevik ideals, those which have spread among all other nations where they have been allowed to enter, with Rhine gold, in order to divide the Allies and their progress in war. . . (and we cannot see that this position towards the war has any validity in the British domain” (*Lögberg*, July 18, 1918).

I have presented here comments from Siggi Jul that can be most closely associated with Bolshevism and treason; it is evident that, in relation to what was actually written, these charges are hyperbole, rather than factual. Rhine gold refers to the treasure earned by Sigurd the Dragon Slayer for killing the dragon Fafnir in the *Saga of the Volsungs*. The

gold is cursed and brings about what is for all accounts and purposes fratricide driven by deceit and greed. How this relates to Bolshevism becomes clear through the *Free Press* rhetoric about the General Strike the following year. Bildfell would use the same rhetoric, in Icelandic, in his editorial on the strike ( *Lögberg* June 5, 1919). The interpretation I am about to set forth was probably used in discussion among the ‘citizens’ of Winnipeg before it made its way into print.

The Bolsheviks were considered to have seized power in Russia, such that one class held for themselves all the power, money and public utilities (see *Heimskringla* Jan 1, 1919; *Lögberg* Jun. 5, 1919). Like Fafnir, who had killed his father to take possession of a horde of Rhine gold, the Bolsheviks were hoarding such wealth due to their greed. Other allusions to Siggi Jul being like Fafnir occur, such as the description of Voröld’s contents by Lárus Gudmundsson that it contained nothing but beginnings and endings. There is the head, “then comes a space, space long line \_\_\_\_\_ until there comes a tail... like that on the long Worm” (*Lögberg* Dec 5, 1918) ‘The long Worm’ is a common kenning for Fafnir.

But Siggi Jul also uses economic circumstances to insult Bildfell. His key complaints are that Bildfell is dishonest, slanderous, and that as a real estate agent he has profited greatly from the sale of land in the Transcona fields and the ‘Midland Hills’ and grown

fat off his business dealings. Siggi Jul plays on the prevailing cultural disapproval of entrepreneurs as persons making profits at the community's expense.

Bildfell's rejoinder to these remarks are that, while some forms of poverty may be virtuous, this is not the case for Siggi Jul. Rather, Bildfell argues, Siggi Jul has never been able to accumulate wealth at anything he tries, not for lack of intellect and trying, but due to his "goofiness". What is meant by this is simply that Siggi Jul is generally inept. Bildfell continues that because of Siggi Jul's inability to make money, Siggi Jul has never and will never make a vital contribution to the community. Siggi Jul's reply to this is that he "supposes that Jón's money has come from Christian charity"

J. J. Bildfell was a real estate agent and newspaper editor. He does not appear to be active in temperance work, nor do any female kin appear to be involved with the IODE. His paper was more successful financially and in terms of circulation, and would outlast *Voröld*. He is seldom mentioned in the histories or interviews.

However, it is well known that Siggi Jul worked long and hard hours as a physician, often treating patients for free, wrote beautiful and inspiring poetry, and was heavily involved with the prohibition movement. Moreover, in 1918, it is Siggi Jul who was arguing for the maintenance of the Icelandic culture by upholding the second building block of the Icelandic Lutheran Synod—the Icelandic language. Though Siggi Jul was not a lawyer, he championed the rights of the common people. On at least one occasion he

addressed a gathering sponsored by the Trades and Labour Council. Ragnar Gislason says of Soggi Jul that "he was always of the working class" (Gillespie interview C1676-1680) Soggi Jul's prestige has outlasted that of J. J. Bildfell. He continues to be spoken of today as a kind and honest man, who cared for all people, by Icelanders interested in the values of the past.

After November of 1918, the argument seemed to settle down between the two editors. *Voröld* then began in earnest to publish a series of essays on Bolshevism, written by Hjalmar Gislason. These essays closely followed Marxist theory, and the ideas of the TLC. *Lögberg* did not respond to these articles in relation to their political content, although Gislason was accused of cowardice when his initials were accidentally omitted from one portion of the essay.

*Heimskringla*, which may have been the paper of choice for the tradesmen of the Unitarian and Tabernacle churches, published a lengthy critique of *Voröld's* Bolshevism. It argues in one part that as the Bolsheviks had taken over Russia and had spent the riches they had confiscated,

The only hope of help seems to lie in its attempt to charm under their influence, the "workers" of other countries, and in that way with time, get more commercial power from other parts of the world. Many of its members are Jews, which even though they might be idealists in one way, are of course very knowledgeable in all trading tips and business profiteering. . .

*Voröld*, which now follows Bolsheviks so firmly, lays stress on the statement of some "Mr. Blumenberg" [the Alderman for Ward 6], that the Bolshevik government was a government of the working class, that the work-



ers control the most . . . But isn't that a class government, where one class of the country has all the major power, some kind of absolute rule? (*Heimskringla* Jan 1; 1919)

While the rhetoric of insults between distinguished Icelanders demonstrates that there may not have been class formations among the Winnipeg Icelanders, there were certainly strong ideological divisions linked to the class-based politics in Winnipeg. The tone of the *Heimskringla* article adds to the confusion of trying to delineate class allegiances in the Icelandic community. The division between the living conditions and wealth of Winnipeg's elite and the workers was horrendous. The Winnipeg elite did consider the Bolsheviks to be a heinous menace, and waited in fear lest the IWW or OBU take up action on behalf of workers. Workers no doubt resented Winnipeg's elite for their privileged position paid for with cheap labour. But the standards in living and wealth were not so dramatically different in the West End. Why did class-based discourse invade the arguments between distinguished Icelanders?

As will become evident in the next few chapters, the resentment of the wealthy was a subtext in many ongoing social processes in the Winnipeg Icelandic community. There were indeed many workers whose struggles were not recognised and who did not have access to a means of making themselves heard. Siggi Jul recognised this, and his paper provide a forum for that voice. It seems however that only a few of the more articulate individuals, such as Hjalmar Gislason, Victor B. Anderson, and a Thorgils Asmundsson

made use of that space. The first two men were active in the labour movement, and assisted with the publication of *Voröld*. They were also considered 'distinguished Icelanders'. There is no information available on Asmundsson. It may well have been that working people did not have the time and energy to do the intellectual work needed to engage in debates. It may also be the case that they were well aware that setting forth one's opinion of *Voröld* could draw heavy criticism—as it seems to have for most writers. Thus while the ideological apparatus was there for the dissemination of the 'organic intellectuals' voice, that voice was rather silent.

Bildfell, like Thorsteinn Oddsson, A. S. Bardal and others, had spent considerable amounts of money for the Western Icelandic community, and probably provided a wage for many workers. This seems to be a philanthropic use of revenues from capitalist endeavours, but its moral valuation was obviously not shared by all, even within the ethnic elite.

## 14 The Winnipeg General Strike

Although the decade leading up to the Winnipeg General Strike had been plagued by labour unrest, this Strike was perceived by the employing classes and other 'citizens' as revolution: the violent overturning of the capitalist status quo by workers and especially "foreign" (i.e. non-British) members of society. Masters argues that "From the beginning most of the members of the citizens' committee were firmly convinced that they were confronted with no ordinary strike but an incipient revolution, directed in reality from Moscow" (1950: 65). 'Foreigners' were a vital link in the international 'conspiracy'. Convinced of the threat of a socialist revolution, the city elite and employing classes summoned both hegemonic control measures and measures of domination, that is, the use of physical force to quell the strike.

The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 began with strikes in two major industries. Building industry workers had struck in early May. Contract iron workers in Vulcan Ironworks, Dominion Bridge, and Manitoba Bridge and Iron Works had struck in order

to bring working conditions and wages up to the standard of iron workers in the railroad industry, and to secure their rights to collective bargaining. Due to the overarching organisation of the Trades and Labour Council, a general strike vote was taken on May 13th, with over 11,000 for and only 500 against. The General Strike officially began at 11:00 am on May 15th. Workers of every stripe peacefully walked off the job, including railway workers, garment workers, restaurant and hotel staff, telephone operators, retail clerks (including the women at Eaton's), postal workers and policemen. Surprisingly, many returned soldiers sided with the strikers.

Although the movement was lead by recent immigrants from Britain, men and women of other ethnic groups were active and included in the organisational work (Masters 1950, 33). The extent of their participation in the General Strike is not well documented. There were certainly no new immigrants in the TLC leadership. Bercuson argues that the organisations among the larger ethnic groups—Russian, Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians—“were either subordinate or totally independent in rallying the ethnic community to the Trades Council’s cause” (Bercuson 1990: 126). Bercuson argues that non-British ethnic groups likely responded very favourable to the strike.

”(Ethnic groups) could easily recall the anti-foreign prejudices whipped up throughout the war by overly zealous patriots, the orders-in-council banning their languages and newspapers, the Wartime Elections Act which disenfranchised many thousands of them,

the interments, registration and parole, and the use of those systems to oppress legitimate trade activity" (Bercuson 1990: 127).

The demands of workers were simple. As published in the Strike Bulletin they were "(1) The Right of Collective Bargaining. (2) A Living Wage. (3) Reinstatement of all strikers." The Bulletin also wrote "What We Do Not Want," which included "(1) Revolution, (2) Dictatorships. (3) Disorder" (quoted in Masters 1950: 49). Strikers were instructed by the Trades and Labour Council to "do nothing and stay out of trouble." Demonstrations and parades were not to be held, as such disturbances would be a target and quelling them would effectively end the strike. It was the strike leaders' intention to seriously inconvenience the city, without creating havoc. The long standing organisation of the labour movement allowed for the formation of an ad hoc government, which saw to the maintenance of such necessities as bread, milk and ice deliveries, and a minimum of running water and postal distribution.

Those not of the working classes responded rapidly. 'Neutral' citizens formed the Citizens' Committee of 1000, whose primary public objective was the maintenance of public services and utilities that had been curtailed due to the strike. It was to take no part in the negotiations with labour leaders. That the Committee headquarters were in the Board of Trade Building on Main Street, was, if nothing else, symbolic of the Committee's pro-business and industry stance. While the names of members were to be

guarded from public knowledge, presumably because they feared possible reprisals from the Bolsheviks, the committee was comprised of merchants, building contractors, real estate men, financiers, grain brokers and professionals, and chaired by A. K. Godfrey, a grain and lumber merchant (Bercuson 1990: 121). General H. D. B. Ketchen, general officer in command of Military District 10, worked closely with the Citizens' Committee, and the committee maintained "strong and usually secret ties with all three levels of government" (Bercuson 1990: 123). The committee was assisted by volunteers, including white collared workers who were underpaid themselves, but were not influenced by the labour rhetoric. These workers identified with the employers and professionals of the committee (Masters 1950: 63-65).

The *Free Press* (22 May 1919) argued

There is no doubt as to what was in the minds of the strike leaders. They had no intention of depriving the city entirely of food and milk, light and power. No, their intention was to take over—that is to commandeer, which is the very essence of sovereignty—those necessities of life and distribute them according to their pleasure, thus making an invincible weapon of the possession of these essentials

This argument was made of course to the employing classes, whose knowledge of the living conditions and aims of working classes had been gleaned not through personal experience—the Winnipeg geography prevented almost all contact between neighbourhoods—but through news reports of the more extreme arguments of labour, such as those regarding the OBU, and of the violent strikes and associated bombings in the United

States. The irony of the statement specifically regarding the control of necessities—that this became a weapon when in the hands of workers, but not the elite—could hardly be lost on the Marx inspired socialists and strike leaders.

Thus the mass participation in the General Strike enabled the working classes to gain some access to a form of domination, one traditionally held by industry and government elite in capitalist society. As the suspension of public services and the cessation of production were the strikers' main weapons, the Citizens' Committee was effectively an opposing force to the labour movement, and was partly successful in undermining the early impact of the strike (Masters 1950: 65). Nevertheless it is clear that the possible shift in control of essentials was not merely undesirable to the elite, but quite frightening.

This was not, therefore, the only form of domination to come into play in the strike. General Ketchen was called upon by the city elite, attending the first meetings of the Citizens Committee, and contributing to the planning of its operations. Ketchen also trained over six thousand volunteer troops, obtained through the Citizens' Committee, from the business class and under the command of regular force officers. In addition, returning troops from various military units were not de-listed until after the strike, and the 27th Battalion of infantry, returning home by train were put on notice of the potential need for their service in Winnipeg. In addition, Ketchen had Ottawa add twenty Lewis machine guns to the returning soldiers baggage. Ketchen had in total 800 fully trained

troops consisting of infantry, motorised infantry, and mounted infantry, with two units stationed at Fort Osborne Barracks, and one at Minto Armoury in the West End.

These were not the only men ready to take up arms to protect the citizens of Winnipeg. The regular police force, like other civil servants, had voted to go on strike, but remained at their regular duties at the behest of the Strike Committee. Nevertheless, the nervous city council began enlisting special forces, armed primarily with billy clubs but also small weapons. Horses were borrowed from the dairies, department stores and bakeries so that some of the special forces could be mounted—calvary being particularly effective against foot soldiers.

Finally, because the strike was considered to be 'directed from Moscow', increasing action was taken, as ordered directly from Ottawa, against 'foreigners' and 'enemy aliens.' On June 6th, an "Act to Amend the Immigration Act" was introduced and rushed through the federal parliamentary procedures, making it effective that same day. It gave greater powers to arrest and deport anyone born outside Canada even if he or she was a British subject or naturalised Canadian, if the person could be considered an enemy of the state. By June 10th, plans were made in Winnipeg to arrest the strike leaders and other foreigners. The arrests began on June 17th, and included city aldermen A. A. Heaps and John McQueen, Revs J. S. Woodsworth and Wm. Ivens, and others of the Strike Committee. The Strikers Bulletin was classified as seditious. The original plan had been



to deport the men; however, they would later be tried and sentenced to jail for sedition and treason. The arrests would signal the gradual defeat of the strike.

The extent of the effort to enlist and train men prepared to defend the 'citizens' of Winnipeg is difficult to explain without postulating that the elite were either genuinely frightened and/or utterly unconcerned with the welfare of the working classes, and viewed labour as a commodity rather than a human activity (Bercuson 1990: 189-90). The supposed connection to Moscow, and the deportation laws speak to the same issue. The rhetoric used by the employing classes clearly indicates that they interpreted the action led by avowed socialists and involving workers on such a grand scale was the beginning of a revolution. The TLC's ability to organise and take over much of the operations of the city as described by the *Free Press* provided evidence of such a take over.

The propagation of the belief that the strike was a Bolshevik Revolution is evident not only in the newspapers—the media—but from other sources. For example, on May 27, when Mayor Gray and Alderman Sparling asked the regular police force to sign a pledge that they would not shirk their duties to protect citizens from the strikers, he reminded them that the “strike was a Bolshevik attempt to overturn constituted authority” (Bercuson 1990: 150). At least one of the federal government's mediators, Gideon Robertson, also interpreted the strike in this way, claiming it was nothing more than an attempt at revolution (Bercuson 1990: 135). The upper echelons of society had a very

different understanding of socialism than did the strikers, though both factions agreed at least on the basic premises of the political organisation.

The strike was brought to a close through a variety of circumstances. In June, the veteran soldiers began parading down Main St., which, as the strike leaders feared, brought about violent opposition by the special forces. Two strikers died in a clash on Bloody Saturday, June 21. The strike leaders themselves had already been arrested on June 17th. As the *Western Labour News* editor, Rev. Wm. Ivens was arrested along with the others, Rev J. S. Woodsworth and Fred Dixon took over publishing, until Woodsworth was arrested and the paper banned, at which point Dixon continued to publish the paper in secret, until he too was arrested. While the suppression of the parades and arrests of the strike leaders are clearly forms of domination, they also wiped out any means of propagating the ideologies that had held 30,000 strikers together. But perhaps more than anything, the 'invincible weapon' of the strikers—the cessation of production—turned against them, as strikers desperate for wages returned to work.

The above is the narrative of the events of the strike, and the actions of its major players. The location of the homes of the strike leaders indicates that they were not residence of the immigrant quarter of the 'North End'. Some resided further north in the more middle class Kildonan area, but none resided in the West End. The leaders of the Citizens' Committee resided south of the Assiniboine River in what is now Crescent

Wood, still a wealthy and prestigious area of the city (Bumsted 1994). Although it can be assumed that those members of the North and South Ends would fall on either side of the strike, the West End neighbourhood is a kind of grey area. It is known that there was a carpenters union local, number 343. Its membership lists from the time period indicate that the overwhelming majority of members were British, and most had joined the union in Great Britain. The lack of non-British names adds to the uncertainty about the actions of ethnic groups during the strike.

#### **14.1 Western Icelanders and the Winnipeg General Strike**

Lawrence Gillespie was able to interview Icelanders from the West End who recalled the strike. Some of the most detailed information came from Ragnar Gislason, who was the then 13 years old. He was the son of Hjalmar Gislason, who aided Siggi Jul in publishing *Voröld*, and Ragnar's stepmother was a garment worker. While Ragnar assisted his father in mailing out *Voröld*, Ragnar intimates that the strike itself was something that took place in the world of adults, and it did not affect kids. He does say that he recalls going downtown with 'an older gent' in time to see the streetcar overturned. In response to questions about Icelandic participants in the labour movement, Ragnar replied that there were some, but that there were also many people who were anti-union. He elaborated that many people were conservative in their beliefs and supported

the status quo of the community and the “way things were running.” Moreover, he said he could not specify that there was a certain “class that were pro-labour,” or anti-labour, as “political sentiments came from all levels of the community.” In pursuing this issue, Gillespie asks if there were people who felt that Icelanders were not being given a “fair shake.” Here Ragnar answers in the negative, attributing this to Icelanders’ extensive engagement with politics, and that most were “quite rapid in defence of their own political outlook.”

Aurora Thordarson, the daughter of building contractor Jónas Johanneson went downtown with her older sister. She reports

it was awful. We saw them. . . they had a parade of strikers, down at Portage and Main and people used to go down to see how many were parading. And you wouldn’t believe how many were. . . (My sister said) ‘don’t say anything, to anything or anybody so that you don’t get mixed up in anything that you don’t know anything about.’ (Gillespie interview C1738-1740)

Mrs. Thordarson reported that some of those who were marching carried small firearms. She also saw some friends of her brother’s marching. These men were likely soldiers as her brother had been, if they were marching they were likely strikers. However, the friends may not have been Icelandic, although they were likely from the West End.

There were also community members who may have assisted the Committee of 1000. One interviewee’s grandfather, an entrepreneur was eager to assist and join the middle class British-Canadian component of Winnipeg, and was heavily involved with social

reform organisations. The interviewee believes his grandfather was likely involved with the Committee in some capacity, along with other well-to-do entrepreneurs in the West End Icelandic community. A newspaper article supporting a politician remarked on the hypocrisy of Icelanders who went on strike, then worked for the Committee of 1000 for \$6.00 a day.

Most interviewees had little direct knowledge of the strike; this is not surprising as most were children or teenagers when the strike occurred. As Ragnar Gislason reported, it was an adult event, and not an issue for a child's world. Moreover, as the strike began in May before the intense activity of the building season got underway, and the the main strategy had been to simply 'do nothing', that there was anything unusual about the lack of work may not have registered with children. Further, the marches and parades took place on Main Street, rather than in residential neighbourhoods. Thus the lives of children in the West End neighbourhood were unlikely to have been severely disrupted. Mrs. Thordarson was attending Success Business College, and reported that her courses were not disrupted in any way.

Some Icelandic workers in some industries stopped work during the strike. This included garment industry workers, telephone operators, and Eaton's workers. *Voröld* reported that Eaton's worker had gone on strike and were attempting to form a union. Masters relates two separate actions taken against Eaton's replacement workers. One took

place on Sherbrook Street, when the horse was unhitched from the delivery cart, and the cart toppled. The driver walked the horse before trying to mount it to escape, but was thrown from the frightened animal, and spent three weeks in hospital recovering from his injuries (Masters 1950: 58). A driver of an Eaton's truck had his tires cut (Masters 1950: 58). And finally, once the marches proceeded down Portage Ave, Eaton's and the *Free Press* were especially subject to jeers (Masters 1950: 89).

It is frequently reported in Gillespie's interviews that two policemen, Sam and Jón Samson both lost their jobs permanently for refusing to put down the strike. In addition, Clara Rumery's father lost his job at the post office, and the family thereafter suffered long term financial hardships. On the other hand, while Magnea Hannesson does not recall the strike itself, she remembers her parents' discussions. Her father John Einarsson, who was a section foreman with the CNR, was against the strike, and felt that employment conditions were satisfactory. She reports that he didn't understand why workers were making demands for better wages and working conditions.

Of primary interest to this study, however, is the way in which the strike affected the building industry. It is telling that individual workers responded quite differently to the situation. While in any year, many general labourers would have been migrant workers from the Interlake area, Gudmundur Peterson reported that several men went to Winnipeg to look for work because of the strike. In Winnipeg he was hired by

Háldor Sigurdsson. Mrs. Thordarson's father, the contractor who worked alongside his men and taught them carpentry skills, did not join the strike, and according to Mrs. Thordarson, neither did his workers "(My father) didn't have much to say about (the strike), he wouldn't go in the strike for anything because he looked after his carpenters. And he was building these houses that he had to finish (as) he had promised. . . (His men would not go on strike) if he could keep them working—that's what they said."

This allegiance may have outlasted the strike; Gudmundur Peterson reported that Háldor Sigurdsson took his workers with him to various construction sites in rural communities in subsequent years. There he built schools and churches as he had done in Winnipeg.

This behaviour within the building industry makes sense if many of the workers were semi-autonomous employees on contract or small employers with a few wage labourers. In addition, the paternalistic relationship wherein a small employer had trained and housed his workers likely obscured power relations,

A most telling report of strife among Icelanders comes from Hrund Skulason. Miss Skulason arrived in Winnipeg from Iceland during the strike. She was 12 years old at the time, but remembers the event and the stories she heard afterwards. J. J. Bildfell collected the family from the CPR Station on the east sign of Main Street, with conveyances borrowed from the Bardal funeral home. The crowds were tumultuous through the

downtown area and threatened the vehicle, because "the strikers were mad at Jon since he was driving people around, you know, and they didn't want (people) to get anywhere (as the streetcars weren't running)." Miss Skulason reports that rather violent actions being taken against J. J. Bildfell; a bottle was smashed through a vehicle window. Miss Skulason notes that at least in the case of Jon Bildfell, many members of the community were angry that he would take a stance against the strike. He had after all been a leading figure in the Icelandic Labourers' Association. Siggi Jul was also threatened, resulting from being "in the wrong place," and "I think they were going to shoot the old fellow."

In the first weeks *Lögberg's* coverage seemed to maintain considerable objectivity, reporting on the events that had taken place in the previous week. It was however, somewhat more concerned with the employers' issues and actions. Its first articles discuss the impact the strike has had on "the city," enumerating what infrastructural services, such as water, electricity and communication systems are and are not available. It also describes the difficulty of obtaining basic food supplies, noting that people had to walk considerable distances to purchase groceries, which were no longer being delivered. The first article gives a real and immediate sense of the isolation and inconvenience experienced in the city as a result of the strike. It also reports that the strike began when the various ironworks (which are not named) refused to allow their workers the right of collective bargaining, and that the TLC called for a strike vote from other unions in support of the



iron workers—an accurate portrayal of events. At no time is any mention made of the possibility of a revolution, or even of Bolshevik ideals.

On 5 June 1919, *Lögberg* published an editorial discussing the General Strike, as well as a second editorial which examined the overall logic and effects of the General Strikes. In the first article, Bildfell agrees with the workers' right to collective bargaining, a living wage and the right to strike for that. He acknowledges that prices have increased substantially throughout the war, while wages did not at all keep pace, and that this has created much labour unrest. Bildfell then took the Dominion government to task for having full knowledge of the labour and industry issues, as the problem was nation wide, but doing nothing at all to address the situation.

Finally, while recognising the right of the iron workers to strike because management was in the wrong in its treatment of its workers, Bildfell argues that the actions of the labour leaders in bringing about a general strike were wrong. There were several reasons for this. It victimises women and children, and others who had no relation to the iron workers or foundry management. The second problem is 'the taking of civic power by union leaders from those who rightfully have it, according to the laws of the society' (trans. mine). Moreover, such a situation has not occurred in the country before, and Bildfell expressed the hope that, as the workers now have this power, whatever road they

choose for the future will not lead to general lawlessness. He intimates that most strikers and labour leaders are not extremists and the situation will not come to a destructive end.

By the time this article was published, the *Free Press* had begun its claims of the strike being directed by Bolshevism. Bildfell, like A. S. Bardal, may have been involved in the Committee of 1000, or would at least been aware of the British bourgeoisie activities, beliefs and ideological position about the strike. Yet his paper makes no mention of the Committee of 1000 or Bolshevism. This is surprising as less than six months previous, the Bildfell had repeatedly accused *Voröld* of Bolshevik propaganda and expressed a strong disapproval for socialist thought and ideals.

An article follows the first editorial which takes a more general approach to the issue of strikes. In this article, Bildfell (or the author) argues that 'strikes are a double-edged sword' (trans. Carol Mowat). The crux of this argument is that while they improve wages, this increases the cost of production, which in turn increases the price of goods, thereby driving up the cost of living. He concludes that especially in times of inflation, strikes really do more harm than good for workers and society as a whole. He argues that workers lose wages during a strike, but that that money could be better spent, if for example, it was used by workers to set up production facilities which they would control themselves.

Here Bildfell is probably referring to the success of co-operatives in the Icelandic town of Arborg in the Interlake area. Arborg had been founded around 1903, by Icelanders who had been resident in the United States, and had brought with them an American model of co-operatives. Arborg had set up worker owned dairy co-operatives that processed milk products, logging co-operatives, and co-operatives for grain storage and transportation, and the sale of these products in the Interlake area and Winnipeg. This is likely what Bildfell had in mind for the workers.

On 19 June 1919, just after the strike leaders had been arrested, the layout of *Lögberg's* front page signals the paper's allegiance to a bourgeoisie position as much as the articles' content. About two-thirds of the page is taken up with an article consisting first of a statement from the managers of the ironworks about their interpretation of collective bargaining. In essence, this amounted to the right of workers to negotiate with the management in their place of work directly. A greater portion of this article is dedicated to a series of biographies of the negotiators themselves, including photographs. In the upper right-hand corner of the front page is a much smaller article announcing the arrests of the General Strike leaders and other prominent unionists accused of intimidating workers.

The article comments on the federal government's action as follows:

But at first sight it seems it was luckiest for us to have let time and the workers feelings of justice make these men outlaws from their society. And as soon as workers saw that the kind of leaders they had acquired were leading them

astray, (they saw fit to) punish them for their crimes” ( *Lögberg*, 19 June 1919; trans. Carol Mowat).

On 26 June 1919, *Lögberg* published a description of the riot on Bloody Saturday (June 21) in which it reiterated its position that the strike was illegal because it took over control of basic necessities from the civic authority, and as such acted against the whole of society. The article also claims that the soldiers had most of the strikers ‘tight in hand’, or ‘by the hand’, and that the soldiers’ aggressive stance is what initiated the bloody confrontation.

Thus it appears that *Lögberg* plays to its readership’s ‘common sense’ regarding the right to strike, then increasingly reports on and sides with the bourgeoisie interpretation of the event. Given that there was an editorial board, and the paper’s reportage and editorials were not Bildfell’s alone, it can be assumed that there was a middle class bourgeoisie faction within the Icelandic community associated with publishing, and perhaps reading, the paper.

*Voröld*, the ‘Bolshevik’ paper, reacted quite differently. Just before the strike, *Voröld* published an article of no more than one hundred words stating that the TLC and unions were preparing for a major strike. This article also mentions that “Eaton’s workers form a union and demand raises” (trans. Gunnur Isfeld). This is the best evidence that Icelandic workers were involved in the strike, and in this case, it is likely that it was predominantly women who were unionising.

*Voröld* then ceased to publish until 1 July 1919. Why Siggi Jul might have chosen to do this is not clear. On the one hand, as he sided with labour, it would be expected that he himself would continue to publish some sort of bulletin, in the style of *The Voice* perhaps, even if he had agreed that his employees should take part in the strike. On the other hand, as his paper had published Hjalmar Gislason's articles on Bolshevism, and Siggi Jul and the paper had so often been accused of Bolshevism, he may have had real concerns about the possibility of his own arrest and deportation. Even if few English speaking 'citizens' could understand the language and read the articles, the word 'Bolshevism' is the same in Icelandic as in English, and it had appeared frequently in the previous year in the exchanges between Siggi Jul and Bildfell. Given this, it would be conceivable to Siggi Jul that *Voröld*, like the Ukrainian social democratic party paper, *Robochy Narod*, could be banned as a seditious paper. There is another possible reason for suspension of *Voröld*. Unlike *Heimskringla* and *Lögberg*, *Voröld* was mailed to its subscribers, rather than sold in various community establishments such as the Wevel Cafe. It may simply have been the case that the paper could not be delivered, except by strike breakers. A combination of any or all of the above factors were reasons for suspending publication.

When *Voröld* began publishing once again on 1 July 1919, its position was readily obvious from the terminology it employed. The two sides of the strike are referred to as workers and capitalists. The elite are clearly demarcated: "Finally all governments joined

forces, all the large papers, all the wealthy men, all the armed forces with all ammunition, all prisons, and all supplies, won the fight this time in the way described here" (*Voröld* 1 July 1919 trans. Gunnur Isfeld).

*Voröld* explains the strike by quoting a telegram sent by Mayor Gray to the provincial government asking for mediators a few days after the beginning of the strike. The telegram is used because *Voröld* considers it "clearly outlined, unbiased, not from any member of the strike committee, but rather from the city's highest authority, before (he) was influenced by the Committee of 1000 and the government" (*Voröld* 1 July 1919 trans. Gunnur Isfeld).

It seems that Siggi Jul, in spite of his previously expressed socialist sympathies, was also trying to demonstrate some sort of objectivity about the city leaders. Like *Lögberg*, *Voröld* uses the same technique of proclaiming the correctness of a person's or group's original stance, then attributing later actions as being influenced by extremists. This appears to be a rhetorical move designed to first demonstrate the paper's broadmindedness and willingness to take into consideration all sides before finally building an argument and drawing conclusions condemning the person or group. Yet any reader who regularly followed the papers would know in advance what side either of these papers would take with regard to the strike.

The tone of *Heimskringla's* early coverage of the strike was, like *Lögberg's*, impartial, highly objective and restricted itself to the facts of the previous week's events. But unlike *Lögberg*, its tone is that of a report of events occurring at a distance. It frequently uses the phrase 'here in the city of Winnipeg' throughout its articles, giving a sense that the writer is in Winnipeg, but reporting at some remove from the social and political situation, to readers also at some remove from the situation. It uses the English language dailies and *The Voice* as sources of information, although there is little evidence that it makes use of the *Citizens Bulletin*. It reports the difficulties faced by both employers and labourers evenly, giving no indication that it sides with either. Nor is there anything in the layout of the paper articles that privileges or gives greater importance to either side. However, it makes no mention of the Citizens' Committee of 1000; its discussion revolves around the negotiations, or lack thereof. A sample section is as follows.

After all negotiations had failed the sympathy strike was urged to begin May 15th, and was accepted by most of the city's trade unions. Around 30,000 trade union members then stopped working, among them firemen and city workers from all trades.

Enough manpower was still available after that date so that the city did not need to be without water or light, and police constables were not called out (to strike) . . .

On Saturday the postal service and letter carriers were sent an announcement from management's which intimated that if employees had not returned back to work around midday of next Monday, they would be fired. This did not produce great results, as few went back to work (*Heimskringla* 28 May 1919, trans. mine).

It is of note that this same article begins by pointing out that the Winnipeg dailies had stopped publishing, and that *Heimskringla* itself may be affected by the cessation.

The paper did not stop publishing, however. It continued to report on the negotiations, with a somewhat greater emphasis of the deliberations of the Strike Committee. It also reported on that sympathetic strikes were occurring in other cities in Western Canada (*Heimskringla* 10 June 1919)

The tone of *Heimskringla* is measured and sober without the inflammatory tone of the English papers. No mention is made of Bolshevik plots in any of the *Heimskringla* reports or editorials. In one report it does compare the organisation of the delivery of goods as managed by the Strike Committee to the Soviet Government, adding that this has taken place peacefully (*Heimskringla* 28 May 1919). With equal equanimity, the employing classes are not described as capitalists or bourgeoisie, or even simple greedy. The articles make little attempt to justify either sides' position. Mention is made that all right thinking people in this world would have to agree that labourers have the right to a living wage, and would not consider their demands in this case excessive.

A printed letter (*Heimskringla* 4 June 1919) disagrees. The letter is a report on the writer's experiences of life in Kenaston, a common form of letter in all the Icelandic papers. However, in it, the writer reviews the current information available on the wages and wage increase demands of the various trades. In his opinion, the wage demand ex-



ceeds fair pay, and are simply greedy on the part of workers. He considers the offer by employers to be “respectable and passable” (trans. Elva Jónasson). He refers to the workers rejection of the offer as “damned Bolshevism,” without giving any clarification as to how this refusal is specifically Bolshevik; a common tendency in much of the newspapers’ discourse. The letter’s author also states that the strike “includes more than half the households in Winnipeg,” which may be an exaggeration. However, if the author perceived that discontent affected so great a percentage of the population, the letter taken as a whole illustrates a particular social distance between the author’s lifestyle and that of the majority of the city. Finally the printing of the letter lends credit to the perception of fair reportage on behalf of *Heimskringla* publishers.

*Heimskringla*, like *Lögberg*, did print one lengthy editorial piece printed entitled “Harmless Observation on the Strike,” (*Heimskringla* 18 June 1919) which begins with the observation that much inflammatory rhetoric is being spoken and written on both sides of the strike, and that the situation is one wherein an individual is not allowed to remain neutral. The article reviews the reasons for the strike, emphasising that the owners of the ironworks refused to allow collective bargaining; an option the article considers a basic right of all workers. The author considers the stance taken by employers, government, military forces and English language newspapers, that the strike must be first physically suppressed before any negotiations can be made, to be extremist and wrongheaded. It then refers to

the rhetoric of strike leaders at the TLC, *The Voice*, and in the fervent speeches at the Labour Temple, which encourages the strikers to hold out and 'do nothing', as zealous, and not in the workers best interest. The author is critical of the seemingly fanatic belief of labour leaders that the strikers can hold out forever, when in actual fact the lack of pay is forcing many into dire financial straits. Yet the author also quotes, from the *Free Press*, an anonymous labour strike leader, who intimated that the TLC did not imagine at first that the strike would hold out as long as it had, and that the events had deviated somewhat from the original plan. In the *Heimskringla* author's opinion, the strike is coming to an end, because of the lack of wages it entails, forcing workers to seek employment, and the increasing possibility that striking workers will not ever be rehired.

The article considers the strike to be a social experiment by the labour movement in Canada as a whole, taking into account that sympathy strikes had occurred in Brandon, Edmonton and Calgary. That it became a general strike with such widespread participation the paper considered indicative of a real nationwide problem that is important to all of society.

It then moves to consider possible solutions to the strike, noting that it is clear that the ironworks owners refuse to negotiate still, and that strike leaders are equally determined to hold their position. It is noted that the law, as it now exists, cannot compel employers to accept a settlement arrived at by a third party. Further, it has been demonstrated that

in this instance, workers, most recently civil servants, are willing to lose their positions rather than return to work, and as such the law is powerless to compel strikers to go back to work. The article reasons that the workers, though in command of the city, cannot make laws. Therefore it is incumbent on the government to make laws that workers and employers can live with, and the article hopes that this might be a positive result of the strike.

The article has some criticisms of the labour movement in general. The first is that in recent times it has been quite hostile to industry and the various levels of government. The article suggests that labour's criticisms of industry and government are powerful, but that labour leaders offer few solutions. While in meetings and through their newspapers, the labour leaders are critical of capitalism in the abstract, and often teach the virtues of socialism, they offer few practical ways of implementing socialism. Finally the article laments that the labour movement has made little effort and progress in establishing a labour based political party, and getting members elected into the various levels of government.

The author of the article appears somewhat more familiar with the labour movement than the employers' group. This is most evident in the lack of discussion about the efforts of the Citizens' Committee, which purported to attend to the running of the amenities for the citizens.

While it would seem that the Kristjanson's (1965) and Lindal's (1967) histories, and the several shorter first person accounts would have covered all the events of interest that took place in the life of Western Icelanders in Winnipeg. In many ways they do, as the Winnipeg General Strike, while a significant event in the social history of Winnipeg, seems to have had, generally speaking, a carefully muted response within the ethnic community. There clearly existed the potential for intense factionalism headed by distinguished Icelanders, given the ideological positions of Jon Bildfell and Siggi Jul Johannesson and the propensity for their papers to stir up community debate. It is tempting to explain this as the reaction of a 'foreign', but well respected ethnic group attempting to maintain their status by not attracting attention to themselves at a time when the mainstream Anglophone media were stirring up anti-foreign sentiment. If this was the case, then the Icelandic newspaper opinion pieces could have found fault with the strikers, and fed off the news published from by the *Free Press* and the *Winnipeg Citizen*. That the Icelandic papers used the English language papers is evident, but they did so selectively. Moreover, Icelanders lived in a geographic area where there would have been considerable sympathy for the non-striking citizens—especially as white collar workers sided with the employing classes. But there were also British union members in the same trades as Icelandic skilled labour. Thus both the Icelandic papers and non-Icelandic neighbours were potential influences on any factioning among Icelanders.

It is telling, however, that even those Icelanders who appeared to have considerable rancour on precisely the politics behind the strike remained very measured, though biased, in their coverage of the strike. Both *Lögberg* and *Heimskringla* agreed on the illegality of the strike, and blamed the Dominion Government for not doing more for workers. While *Lögberg* did discuss the issue of the working class improperly commandeering public utilities, class was not mentioned in *Heimskringla*, which instead referred to the actions of workers and the TLC.

Notably, neither supported the idea that the city was in the midst of a Bolshevik-type revolution. Had the Icelandic elite really felt that Siggi Jul was a hindrance to the community, the strike would have been a perfect opportunity to have him deported, for example. He and Hjalmar Gislason had written articles in the months leading up to the strike that were very close in opinion to some of the more inflammatory rhetoric of the labour papers. But during the strike, neither *Heimskringla* nor *Lögberg* mentioned *Voröld* or its political stance. Opportunities existed for men such as Arinbjorn Bardal and quite possibly Jon Bildfell himself to participate in the the Citizen's Committee, and cast aspersions on Siggi Jul from this perspective. However there is no evidence to suggest this was the case, or that Siggi Jul and Hjalmar Gislason were ever under suspicion as possible Bolsheviks. It must be concluded that the argument of the previous year, in spite of the seeming intensity of the rhetoric, was not fractious.

## 14.2 Discussion

During the Winnipeg General Strike the ideologies set forth by the leaders of the main factions—strikers and citizens—put all ethnic groups in a difficult position. Labour leaders called for the participation of all workers, regardless of union affiliation, ethnicity or gender. The city elite however whipped up fears of a revolution directed by or through ‘foreigners’, and enacted laws that could put non-British residents in danger of arrest and deportation.

Icelandic civic workers, Eaton’s workers and garment industry workers all went on strike. In the months following the strike, Jon Samson would accuse some workers of taking advantage of work for pay for the Committee of 1000. However, the extant evidence suggests that Icelanders in the building industry continued to work alongside Icelandic employers. This may have been due to deals made between contractors and workers. Or it may have been in part due to the fact that migrant construction workers were from rural areas, and by and large the strike was not supported by rural politics.

It would be expected that the Icelandic newspapers would embarked on another extended quarrel. But although *Lögberg* and *Heimskringla* did demonstrate that they favoured a particular side, they did not engage each other or *Voröld* in debate. Moreover, both carefully avoided the inflammatory rhetoric carried in the English papers that a Bolshevik revolution was in progress. That Siggi Jul and Hjalmar Gislason were not taken to task for

their socialist politics suggests a fairly strong allegiance between 'distinguished Icelanders'. Why *Voröld* ceased publication cannot be satisfactorily answered. This will be given fuller consideration in light of two developments in the Icelandic community to be discussed in the next two chapters.

## 15 The Formation of the INL

The earliest talk of forming an organisation especially for the purposes of promoting Western Icelandic culture and bringing together those of Icelandic descent throughout North America began in Winnipeg as early as 1916. In Manitoba, the year 1916 marked the imposition of prohibition, thus it would seem the intense and far reaching activities of the IOGT had met their goals. This year was also the year of the formation of the IODE Jon Sigurdson Chapter. But progress towards the formation of the INL was intermittent due to the war and then the outbreak of the Spanish Flu. As the attendance and work of the IODE diminished after 1918, another social vacuum was created in the realm of overarching ethnic associations.

It can be surmised that there was also a feeling urgency behind the formation of a new organisation which could bring harmony to the Winnipeg Icelandic community in spite of its "differences of opinion and the graded divisions of society" (*Heimskringla* Jan 15, 1919). During the war there had been conflicts of opinion about conscription, the case



against voiced repeatedly by Siggi Jul, and also mentioned seventy years later in Gillespie's interviews. The post war years 1918 and 1919 marked increased class tension and division in the city of Winnipeg in general. As the debate between Siggi Jul and Bildfell in the summer of 1918 suggests, there were tensions within the Icelandic community between the wealthy and not so wealthy residents.

The apparent meat of the debate between Siggi Jul and J. J. Bildfell was about the methods of maintaining the language. According to Siggi Jul, nothing should stand in the way of the preservation of culture. J. J. Bildfell's position was that 1918 was not the time for such actions. Bildfell may well have been influenced by an awareness of British Canadian nativism in its several manifestations, including the withdrawal of the franchise for immigrants naturalised after 1902, the banning of several 'foreign' language newspapers, and the resentment of returning soldier who found that their previous jobs had been taken on by 'enemy aliens'.

The acrimony of the debate between Siggi Jul and J. J. Bildfell settled down in the fall of 1918, although all three newspapers began to carry conflicting arguments on a more intellectual level issues about capitalism and socialism. In January of 1919, the first meetings were held to discuss the formation of a þjóðræknir. Translation of this word into modern Icelandic is inexact, as it is a compound word that makes use of words that suggest patriotism to a nation, but were in use before the idea of the nation and patriotism came

into existence. The English name of this organisation is the Icelandic National League (INL), and I will use this term throughout. The origin of the terminology was discussed by participants in the general discussion, and I will review that in turn.

The Winnipeg General Strike was another factor that again interrupted the organisation of the INL. But following the strike, the Icelandic National League began its work as a committee devoted to cultural maintenance. The clearest and most profound statements about the maintenance of ethnicity were made at the August *Islendingadagurinn* festival, and these will be considered in some detail.

## **15.1 The Formation of the Icelandic National League**

In *Heimskringla* on 5 December 1918, a letter appeared, written by “S. Sigurjónsson” that spoke of a generally expressed need for a Icelandic cultural group of some sort. The author says that this idea had been discussed as early as 1916, and a draft of the league’s goals and potential activities had been drawn up. Dr. Siggi Júl Jóhannesson was present at that meeting, and (as he was Grand Chief Templar of the IOGT) offered the use of the Good Templars Hall on Sargent Avenue. It was decided however that no further action should be taken because of the war. Sigurjónsson calls for a meeting as soon as possible, and tellingly adds, “Everyone should unite and drive away egoism (egotism) and selfishness” (trans. Kristín Jóhannsdóttir). This admonition speaks to the propensity for

'debate' among Icelanders, but frames it in such a way that it is an individual tribute of simply being quarrelsome.

A committee of thirty people was established to begin organising more chapters and taking up the work specified in the above resolutions. The chair of the committee was Rev Runolfur Marteinson (Lutheran Church, pastor at Skjaldborg, professor at Wesley College, instructor at J. B. Academy), the treasurer Asmundur P. Johannsson (building contractor) and secretary, Rev Gudmundur Arnason (Unitarian pastor). Among the other thirty members were Jón Bildfell, Dr. Siggi Jul Johannesson, Hjalmar Gislason, Jóhanna Skaptason, Fred Swanson, Dr. Brandur Brandson, Thorstein Borgfjord, and Rev. Rognvaldur Péterson. The first official slate of officers was Rev Pétursson (president), Jón Bildfell (vice-president), Siggi Jul Johannesson (secretary) and Asmundur Johannsson (treasurer). These men and women were newspaper editors, entrepreneurs, lawyers, physicians, and the wives, daughters and sons of these families. Given the occupations of the members, it was a 'middle class' endeavour. However, within the Western Icelandic community, these people were the most prestigious in the country, and some, but not all, quite wealthy. They were described by Mr. Sigurjónsson as "the most distinguished Icelanders on this continent." The names should be familiar as they represent that same cohort which took part in the various middle class voluntary associations, and sat on the church directory boards and newspaper editorial boards. But where the IOGT had at-

tempted to control behaviour, the INL was specifically approaching the task of developing a new ethnic ideology.

The reports of the meetings were transcribed by the secretary and copies given to each newspaper for print as a public message. In addition, 400 handbills were printed with the same report, to be distributed by mail to individuals in remote districts or towns without access to the newspapers. The first meeting began with an impassioned call to celebrate the Icelandic heritage, focusing on the language and literature, but omitting any other cultural customs. As an expression of dominant ideology, it is worth quoting at length.

We want to give (our descendants) the language . . . that contains a world of thoughts of the Icelandic national life from the earliest time to our days; that describes the Nordic thoughts, the Nordic individuality, the Nordic understanding of the demands and purposes of home-life, that, in our opinion, is higher and more perfect than the understanding of some nations. We want them to be given an easier access to the literature of our nations, which, even though small, is the only nation in the world that owns classical middle age literature in a living language; literature which is considered by scholars equally clever, if not more clever, than the best in the literature of the middle ages. This among other things we desire can become the permanent property of our descendants on this continent, and a loved treasure with which they can enrich the growing national life, so that it may be more powerful and more beautiful. . . Now it is the holiest duty towards this country and the growing nation, that they who have inherited noble ideals and a strong culture, which they have imported here, invest this inheritance of theirs, and protect those ideals from destruction (trans. Kristín Jóhannsdóttir).

There are several themes which may have been undercurrents in past work of Icelandic civil society that are clearly articulated here. The first is the insinuation that there is something special about Nordic home life, and in order to maintain that, Icelanders must

conscientiously recall the culture of Iceland itself. Where the influence of the IOGT had a residual affect on home-life, the INL demands certain practised be revived in the home. Second, the discussion very clearly elevates the medieval literature, that is the sagas, above the literature of most other countries. This precept would become important to future discourse on the value of Icelandic culture to Canada. The third pronouncement of note is that Icelanders have a holy duty towards the growing nation to contribute the culture and knowledge of Iceland, presumably because Iceland had been such a superior nation historically. These themes are repeated and embellished upon as the movement got underway.

The second report discussed the meeting and Winnipeg members, but also spieled out the three goals of the new association. They were:

1. To work towards having the Icelandic language taught in as many universities that Icelanders go to on this continent as possible, and that funds created to give prizes to students in Nordic Studies.
2. To work towards co-operation and solidarity between Icelanders here on this continent and the nation back home.
3. The strengthen those progressive companies that could become an honour and useful to Icelanders here as in other places ( *Voröld* Feb 12, 1919. trans. Kristín Johansdottir).

These aims would seem to benefit only a few Icelanders, given what has been shown to be the economic status of the majority of the community. It is unlikely that most young men and women even had the opportunity to complete high school before they

began working, and those who did go on to post secondary education often took business training, medical school and law school, rather than a liberal arts degree. In addition, given the precarious nature of wage labour and small time contracting in Winnipeg, the idea of increasing one's own company's contact with Iceland would have been out of the question. It would appear that these goals were dreamt up by the elite in the Icelandic community, with little consideration as to how the majority of Western Icelanders in North America could participate in or benefit from such an endeavour. However, letters of commentary and ideas were requested from Icelanders across the continent. After the next series of meetings Mar. 25-27, 1919, *Voröld* printed a set of revised goals:

1. To make this city (Winnipeg) the stronghold of Icelandic on this continent
2. To promote the Icelandic language and culture.
3. To strengthen relationships and ties to our brothers back home.

The idea of erecting a statue as a memorial to fallen Icelanders was also raised, but not considered a fitting tribute. The aesthetics of cold, rough, concrete and stone were considered a distasteful way to remember the lives of those of flesh and blood ( *Heimskringla* Feb 26, Mar 5, 1919, *Voröld* Apr. 1, 1919).

For those who advocated the 'development' of Icelandic culture and language, there was a problem of how to disseminate it. As culture was inextricably tied to language in many of the discussions, it was suggested that the means of spreading the message was through the printed word. One letter argued that the newspapers were a well-established mechanism for distributing information, and that it should be incumbent on the editors

to use the best of the language, publish poetry and other aspects of culture. Thus another suggested more Icelandic books would also be an asset.

Lárus Gudmundsson (*Heimskringla* Mar 26, 1919) suggests that it should be taught in the home or at special schools, such as in the Good Templars Hall. Gudmundsson also advocates the publication of children's magazines and books about life in Canada, as the literature coming from Iceland show a life so different from what is lived here as to be uninteresting to the youth of the day. A second suggestion was that it was incumbent upon mothers to take the time to teach their children to read Icelandic before they were of school age, as had been done in Iceland. Given the composition of the urban household, this would be an onerous task. This same author encouraged the development of university programs in Icelandic as well.

On Feb 27, 1919, *Lögberg* printed a letter which seems to be directed towards J. J. Bildfell, and perhaps Siggi Jul. It argued

Our nationalism issue is so sensitive that it may not endure any criticism. It must be, and continue to be, the central issue on this side of the sea—one issue with no suspicious (dealings), and no dualism. . .

The nationalist issue as it now stands. . . demands extreme work, the cost of which is self-evident, it is not wealth but the need to give all other (forms of) sincere co-operation (trans. Carol Mowat).

But there were further disagreements and suggestions on the matter. Three letters in particular from individuals who lived or had lived in the United States argued that such cultural isolation would be dangerous given the immediate circumstances of nativism in

the dominant culture, and to the progress of Icelanders in becoming full citizens in North American society.

Einar Johnson's letter ( *Heimskringla* Mar 26, 1919), intimated that nationalism, and even the teaching of the Icelandic history from the sagas, in and of itself was dangerous, insofar as it could lead to fanaticism and possibility of Icelandic patriotism of the kind seen recently in Germany.

Johnson's position is mocked and dismissed by Thorgils Asmundsson in *Voröld*, April 22, 1919, by the accusation that what Johnson means is "that Iceland may declare war on the US one fine day", and that "Mr. Nationalist will become the Icelandic leader and take the US by conscription". Asmundsson also replies to Arni Myrdal in this same letter, but on much more intellectual grounds.

Arni Myrdal's letter was published in *Heimskringla* 26 March 1919, warning of the push to ban all foreign language newspapers, schools and church services. Like Johnson, he is concerned about Icelandic nationalism isolating Icelanders from the progress of their new nations. He argues Icelanders are capable as individuals to carry on the culture, and the best approach would be to

... try to take the best from our literature, to think about it, with the goal of constantly widening our horizons, as well as entertain, educate and draw attention of the people here, to what is good and noble in our nationality, and thus make it famous without any classification (trans. Kristín Jóhannsdóttir).



Myrdal argues that all Icelanders have the ability to demonstrate the glory of their nation

Everyone is born with it, high or low, to try to show and prove that he is of good descent, no matter how he may be himself (in wealth and fortune). The genealogy charts are a good mirror of that" (trans. Kristín Jóhannsdóttir).

Against this Asmundsson argues that the children of immigrants know little of the homeland, and that in teaching them, Icelanders would not be isolating themselves. Asmundsson agrees with Myrdal's argument that Icelanders are all of good descent, and takes it one step further, by arguing that as each Icelander is of equally good descent, and that it is the duty of each person to develop this. He then introduces into the discussion that to be the best citizen in the new country, they must come to know the history of the land of Iceland, its form of government and legal foundation. What Asmundsson is referring to here would become a common theme—that the Icelandic Commonwealth was the first and most noble democracy in the world. The spirit of that nation is the heritage of all Icelanders, and it serve the modern world well to understand that spirit.

But at least two individuals saw through the rhetoric of the nationalists, and decried it as a false construct. An unknown letter writer argues ( *Lögberg* Jan 23, 1919) that national ideas are "fanciful stories and day dreams". Further, he argues that the each nation's character is made up of the same types of "stories, art, genealogy, and personal

characteristics". He also states many nations claim that "geographical position is the cause of their greatness" and that language is used as "the primary mother of nationalism."

A second, unsigned letter, printed in *Voröld* Apr 1, 1919 argues

Those who have come here from Iceland were only Canadian and nothing else: about the Icelandic nation there was nothing said, it did not exist, least of all here in this country, and since Icelanders were not Icelanders, they could not have any national character. . . ." (trans. Carol Mowat)

The letter continues with the complaint that "the Englishman is always trying to drill us over and over again" that there are peoples such as the Germans and the Galicians, and numerous other groups. The author goes on to argue that the old books (sagas) were nothing special, and there was no special characteristic of those who came from Iceland, or even of Iceland itself. He uses the following metaphor for the actions of Icelanders in Canada in relation to the development of the spirit of the Mountain Woman or motherland/nation.

But the little girl, the mountain woman as a child, stood rather not in intensive fire of passion such as she is shown by these iron strengthened Canadian men. . . From the written text, she chose without thinking, and the berserker watched sneering, and triumphant, and she was stretched out on the floor—and there she still lies, I think.

This metaphor fuses two key symbols of nationalism—the *sagamenn* (berserkers are especially ferocious fighters) and the Romantic notion of the motherland. The argument is that the image of the beauty of the natural landscape as it inspired poets and ennobled

the soul of nationalists when she was still young but promising, should never have been married to the sagas with their blood-feuds and violence. That beauty which could have developed as part of the Icelandic temperament has been destroyed with the incessant quarrelling among Western Icelanders.

Lárus Gudmundsson (father of author Laura Goodman Salverson) also disagrees with the supposed vibrancy of Western Icelandic culture. He is aware that his opinion will not be taken well, stating, “If I were honest, as I always want to be when I hold a pen, then I would be despised and dishonoured, because I say as Njál about his son Höskuldur: ‘I see death signs, but not life signs’ in our Icelandic nationality, no matter how beautiful and lovely people sing”. He argues that the use of the Icelandic language—“our dear old language and all the wealth which it stores in our literature”—is fading with the young generation of Icelanders and that the goals of the INL do nothing to promote it. He closes by asking “that no one gets angry at me for this opinion of mine, even though they may have another one” (*Heimskringla* Mar. 26, 1919 trans. Kristín Jóhannsdóttir).

There are then, two arguments against the formation of the INL. One was made on the basis of the possible danger of making a spectacle the ethnic group during a time of nativism. This argument continued though that Icelandic culture need not be set apart at all—that it could stand on its own merits. This argument traded on the ‘melting pot’ model; that the cultures would over time blend together and the best, which presumably

included Icelanders, would rise to the top. The rebuttal to this was that the full heritage would die out if not nurtured. The other objection was that there was no national culture, that it had never come into existence, or that it was dying out on this continent. The speeches at the summer festivals would answer this argument

The one assertion that was not challenged was that the language, poetry and literature of Iceland had a unique beauty, and that learning and knowing this literature enhanced many aspects of life. What seems to be most prevalent in the discussion of what must be preserved is the language of farmers who have lived closest to nature, whose spirit is pure, and whose poetry can uplift and ennoble the soul, give hope and truly communicate life's joys. At least two authors make an argument that to learn the Icelandic language is awaken the souls to the beauty of life, and that without this sensitivity "book learning would lie in ashes". (That is, it not would have passion or flame, as as noted in reference to the mountain woman above.)

Along with these arguments can be found a sense of distaste and a warning about misspent wealth. Thorgils Asmundsson in *Voröld*, Mar 18, 1919, writes "Some people are so unintelligent that all that is not possible to reckon by the intake of dollars and cents today cannot have any value tomorrow."

An unknown author argues

Despite irrefutable truth about the value and culture of the beauty of allusion and poetry there are in existence men in the wide world who look after every

cent, who would not defend the subsidisation of authors and artists. . . , the underlying teachings of all the strength of life and soul. . . In order to support some other cultivation of theirs, which comes from wheat, pigs and cattle ( *Lögberg* Feb 13, 1919).

Later in the article, the author softens his criticism with the story of a farmer who would refute the above claim. The farmer said,

The Haying Verses of Steingrímur have repeatedly freshened the minds of young men and brought them into a good mood, that even idlers cleared a piece of grassland for milking, and there you can see that I have straight forwardly profited from the #\$\$%\* poet!" (trans. Carol Mowat)

There was one final area of contestation, and this comes again from Thorgils Asmundsson. Asmundsson was concerned that the proposed organisation, which positioned Winnipeg as the head of an international organisation from which smaller chapters took their lead and to which they paid their dues (i.e. the same organisational form as the IOGT) was inappropriate. Its state-like quality he referred to as the "great Western Icelandic Empire", which was not true to the Icelandic spirit of governance and harmony. His taking exception is telling as it points out how far Winnipeg Icelanders had co-opted British Canadian styles of civil society leadership. He proposes instead an Allsheryjarthing, or a people's committee that was run locally and independently, but had connections to all groups throughout the continent.

The discourse on the patriotism to the Icelandic culture died down during the Winnipeg General Strike, and the next important discussion were at the Icelandic Festivals in August.

## 15.2 Articulating Ethnicity

By August 1919, community focus had once again shifted back to the issue of establishing a 'þjóðræknir'. Speeches were made specifically about the INL goals and progress at the annual Icelandic Festivals (Íslendingadagurinn) held in Arborg (August 2) and Winnipeg (August 5). The festivals normally contain speeches praising the past year's good deeds, and presenting directions for the next. That summer, both speeches developed ideas of the nationhood of Iceland itself. This made use of common national rhetoric, including the beauty of nature, the effect of the landscape on the peoples' character, the delineation of high culture, the purity of language, and the historic existence of a unique and singular culture. The content of the speeches were republished in all the newspapers. Stephan Einarsson's speech in Arborg conjured up images of the landscape to arouse patriotic sentiment.

We have often seen the Mountain Woman from here. We have seen her in the green summer cloak and remember the flowers, with which nature decorated that cloak, the flowers we played with when we were children. We have seen her dressed in a mild summer fog, down to the middle of the mountains. We have seen her on a clear winter evening, covered with snow, the ice lit with stars and the sky glowing in the northern lights. We have

seen the harsh look on her majestic face and we have seen the kind smile on her lips. . . a beautiful landscape awakens the poetic and artistic feeling of men. . . If we tear the pictures away from our minds and wipe out the images that we store from there, I'm afraid we can't just say we have stopped being Icelandic but, we have in a way, lost some of the better thinking which lives in our souls. . . (trans. Kristín Jóhannsdóttir).

Einarsson suggests one possible activity to teach children the language would be a nightly reading aloud. Another strategy would be to make available itinerant teachers, who travelled from home to home, teaching the children the language and literature for several months at a time. Both of these strategies are nearly identical to the system of home schooling that was commonplace in Iceland in the 19th century. He further advocates that the Icelandic language should be included in the regular school system, as it is as important to the founding of English and Germanic languages as is Greek and Latin. This was a common belief among Germanic and Scandinavian nations in the early twentieth century, that while some aspects European civilisation originated in ancient Greece, the great Aryan aspects originated further north. Einarson further argues that the value of the literature is found in the window it opens on the historic formation of Icelandic nation, especially its political system.

He argues that

the old parliament (of the Icelandic Commonwealth) had awakened the personal feeling of independence that had been the main national characteristic in the saga age; that it had with its official legislation and justice system, given the nation an education that was not otherwise easy to forget, but that had

caused the individuals to establish a living connection with the nation; the parliament was first and foremost a school for life—can nothing be learned (today) from that? (trans. Kristín Jóhannsdóttir)

Einarsson continues that through the saga literature, Icelanders today have a better connection than most modern nations to their forebears. He claims that like the men and women of the saga age, freedom, progress and independence still live. He warns that if these characteristics do not work in harmony, Icelanders will find themselves, as they have been recently, in the Sturlunga Age. This time period, recorded in the last of the sagas, was one of intense and bloody strife which so weakened the nation that it became vulnerable to outside domination for the next several centuries.

The second Icelandic festival was held in Winnipeg on 5 August 1919, and the talk was given by Unitarian Rev. Rognvaldur Pétursson. He discusses the origin of the word “þjóðrækni” which is a relatively new, having first come into use in the early 19th century.

“The word comes from þjóð (nation) a word that everyone understands, and the verb “rækja”, (to pursue). But to pursue something, in the old language, was the same as to practise it, and remember it. The word then really meant to practise that which is good for the nation and to remember that which can be its honour (trans. Kristín Jóhannsdóttir)

Rev Pétursson then speaks of Jón Sigurdsson, the man who dedicated his life, through politics to Iceland’s nationhood.



He didn't only have a perfect memory for what was good for the nation, but also for what would be for its most honour. He was hardworking at strengthening its interests outwards and inwards. He worked on awakening its knowledge of itself, its history and life.—The most necessary educational condition for being taken as a man. He worked towards its independence so that it could rule itself and be the one to decide its fortune. He worked towards providing it with free trade, which was the same as giving it the authority to control its own money. But at the same time he worked towards its honour in everything, and first and foremost by showing himself in all his behaviour and life that he knew what honour was. He was its spokesman, its agent, outward amongst foreign nations, its son; from him its honour had to grow or diminish, from him it would be judged.

It is that word (*thjóðrækni*), that Jón Sigurdsson explained with his life.

As in other discussions of the need to unite as an ethnic group, Pétursson makes specific reference about the tendency towards argumentation. “On discord nothing can grow but ignoble characters and slanderous rumours. But by forming a stronger unity ... a brotherhood is formed, that builds on patriotic relatedness, common history and language, and kinship.”

Rev. Pétursson frames Icelandic heritage in the precise formulation used by nationalists in Europe, and within the British Empire. It is far removed from the Romantic nationalistic style. These are not the lofty idealistic notions of a ‘rejuvenating task of destiny... (for Icelanders to be) once more a light ... a bright star in the sky of history’ (Bjarnason in Lindal 1967: 98). This suggests that dominant cultural ideals of the nation had had some influence on the Icelandic formation of its ethnic identity. This discus-

sion is much more specific, while still honouring the Icelanders' goals. Rev. Pétursson concludes with praise for the characteristics of the Icelandic nation.

And yet this land (Iceland) is one of the most powerful in the world of the spirit, the deepest in law, the freest and most independent for many ages against the encroachment of domestic and foreign tyranny and oppression. Is it not to our honour to have a relationship or a connection to this country?

This is not merely the rhetoric of nation building, but contains within it the moral elevation of the Icelandic people above other ethnic groups, perhaps even challenging the superiority of British.

The speeches are perhaps the best articulation of Icelandic ethnicity. Many of the ideas can be discerned from newspaper articles, letters, literature and poetry, but they are not expressed as clearly as they were that summer. The speeches are the result of profound ruminations about a national culture and the 'racial' identity. The argument being made is that Icelandic culture and identity originated 1000 years earlier through the deliberations and philosophies of the men and women who founded the nation—and that the forebears' ideals had been available for further analysis to all who could read Icelandic. Moreover, the nationalist rhetoric of the late 19th and early 20th centuries promoted the belief that culture evolved and was molded by its surrounding landscape. These two speeches equate the landscape, the nation and the individual, and the saga literature, taken as factual history, as the inspiration and model for Icelandic culture. The only way to manifest such culture is through the social and individual practises of everyday living.

No living individuals are mentioned in the speeches. No lawyers, professors, physicians, teachers, nurses or businessmen are held up as an example to which Icelanders can aspire. The message is rather that the honour of each Icelander is his or her inheritance. In no sense can a recent example of nobility be cited. Icelanders had been oppressed for six centuries by the Danish crown, and were far removed from any place in the British aristocracy. Thus the argument is that Icelandic nobility and honour must be ascribed as inheritance from the ancestors, it is the birthright of every Icelandic man or woman. Further, honour and nobility could not be gained through education or money, they must be demonstrated as one lives out one's life.

Those traits are illustrated in the speeches in relation to both nation and the self: freedom, independence, hardworking, progressive, educated and open to new ideas, thoughtful and knowledgeable of oneself, one's history and one's life, having control of one's own finances, a respect for kinship and home-life, and above all, honour. Yet the speeches also carry a warning that too much emphasis on independence and freedom can bring about discord and ignoble behaviour.

Given the undercurrent of resentment towards the wealthy, especially those who got rich from the 'Midland Hills', or who (supposedly) measure everything, including their cultural heritage in dollars and cents, or who took the side of the citizens in the General Strike, Rev Pétursson could not hold up any men or women as exemplars for twentieth

century Icelanders to emulate. That no distinguished Icelanders are mentioned not only deflects resentment towards them, it implies that since all have the same ancestral heritage each individual is responsible for his or her own lifestyle and achievements. This effectively negates the idea that one's success in life might be acquired because of prior economic status, social status, prestige or influence. Following this logic, any failure is the individual's responsibility, his or her own peculiarity and not explainable by social or life circumstance.

It would appear that every Icelander concerned with establishing the INL had had some say in the matter, that this had been truly a collective effort, since many letters were printed in the paper. Be that as it may, it was only the INL committee of thirty distinguished Icelanders, primarily from Winnipeg, who were privy to the INL meetings. Only a few had access to the pulpit, and to writing longer articles or editorials in the newspaper. The INL became the singular organ for disseminating dominant ideologies about being Icelandic. Unlike the IOGT and IODE, there were not open gatherings where INL members could freely associate and argue with other community members. *The Voice* of the INL appeared in print, thus INL committee members faced no immediate rebuttal. The INL could ignore discord within the community by not publishing letters. At the same time it commanded that certain behaviour and characteristics be exhibited by all Icelanders. Whether it would be successful over the years is another story.

In the autumn, articles again began to appear regarding nationalism, and most took up the emphasis on the Icelandic character. From this emerged a theme that resolved tensions between being true to one's ethnicity, and being a good Canadian. The reasoning was that if one was a good Icelander, one had much to offer Canada, and would therefore be a good Canadian citizen. This attitude is still prevalent today.

Not all Icelanders did agree with the sensibilities of the INL. There were many who still worked long hours at menial jobs, whose children could not afford to finish high school (the final grades were not free) or go to university and so on. The world was entering a post-war depression, and times were hard. The lofty ideal of the INL were perhaps less meaningful than continuing the political action begun in the General Strike. To that end, another collective venture was undertaken by another small group of Icelanders, and that was getting a candidate elected in the civic election.

## 16 The Civic Election

On November 28, 1919, a civic election was held, which was the final overt act of contestation between the 'citizens', represented in politics by the Citizens' League and "radical-labour", the supposed stance of the Dominion Labour Party. Although both sides disclaimed affiliation to the leading elements of the General Strike, the Citizens' Committee of 1000 and The Trades and Labour Council, the same persons who had been active in those bodies were active in the election as candidates or campaigners. In spite of a bitter campaign and reports of 'rowdiness' and heckling by labour supporters, the lead up to the election was without further disruptive social action. Nevertheless the Citizens were concerned that radical-labour could take a majority of the Wards and the mayoral position if citizens were apathetic about voting as in previous elections. Major Charles Gray did retain his position, beating S. J. Farmer by 3266 votes (a 12 percent margin). Wards 1, 2, 3, and 4 voted in the citizens' candidates, and Wards 5, 6, and 7 elected labour party candidates.

The Dominion Labour Party was formed from an aggregate of unionists, labour and socialist parties. It had women running in both school trustees and alderman positions. Its headquarters was the Labour Temple. Its platform was clearly stated, and included

1. the right to organise and freedom of association for all civic employees
2. the reinstatement of all civic employees dismissed during the strike
3. the exemption from taxation for those who owned buildings (not including land values) under \$3000.00

The Citizens' League was organised in August; its headquarters in the Board of Trade. The executive and campaign assistants were business and professional men who lived in the "high and middle income areas of the city, for the most part in the South End" (Artibise 1977: 142). A women's auxiliary was also formed, but no woman citizen ran for either aldermanic or school trustee position. The citizens' campaign focused on the defeat of 'radical-labour' and the maintenance of the status quo. The Citizens' League countered the labour arguments with the following logic:

1. Civic employees already had the right to organise; the right to association really referred to the right to affiliation with unions in the private sector. This further meant that civic employees would be at the mercy of 'radical-labour' organisation, the O.B.U. (*Free Press* Nov 13, 14, 1919)
2. Exemption from taxation would make use of an arbitrary number, and would be easy to avoid. For example, someone who held several rental properties each under \$3000.00 would not be taxed, while one who owned a \$3500.00 house would be taxed. The Citizens' proposed taxes be levied on income, as they then stood (*Free Press* Nov 20, 1919).

3. Electing 'radical-labour' would immediately diminish the national and international credit rating of the city and her businesses to zero, and financial and business activities would cease to function (*Free Press* Nov 20, 1919).
4. 'Radical-labour' was introducing "class politics" into the fabric of British (Canadian) society. If they were elected, Winnipeg would be dominated by a single class, who were ready and willing to use access to public utilities as a weapon to control the citizens (*Free Press* Nov. 8, 13, 24, 1919).

The citizens, as spoken for by the *Free Press*, were particularly concerned about the voting in Wards 3 and 4. Early on the concerns presumably arose because of the numbers of working class individuals in those areas who had the franchise. The nervousness about the Ward 4 contest was eased as door-to-door campaigning encountered great support for former mayor F. H. Davidson. Ward 3 was especially problematic, as there were two citizens' candidates who might split the vote, allowing the labour candidate to win the seat. In mid-November, Fred Hilson dropped out to support Adl. George Fisher. Still, residents living south of Portage Ave. were reminded to vote, but a "particular effort was made to bring out every possible citizen voter in the district north of Portage Avenue" by Fisher's campaigners (*Free Press* Nov 25, 1919). More than any other candidates, Fisher's and Davidson's public speeches were reported in the *Free Press*, and their rhetoric influenced the paper's own arguments for the Citizens' League.

The Dominion Labour Party candidate in Ward 3 was an Icelander named Jon J. Samson, who with his brother Sam Samson had been a policeman for 16 years, until



the two were dismissed during the General Strike. In 1915, *Heimskringla* published a biographical sketch of the two, describing them as tall and well-built, noble and kind, honest, reliable and fair. They are noted as being proud to say they were Icelandic, and had a love of that country. Moreover, they were said to be among the most thoroughly Icelandic men in Winnipeg. The article noted that Sam was a prison guard in the city, and that Jón had been the chairman and secretary for the policeman's organisation. The two are well remembered by informants today as upstanding policemen.

During the General Strike, Jón was the representative of the policeman's union to the TLC. Although he had been active in labour movement within the unions, he had no other political experience. His political career began on August 22, 1919, when a "borgarafundur"—literally "city meeting", or town hall meeting—was held at Skjaldborg Church. The purpose of this meeting was to strike a committee to support an individual to run in city politics as *The Voice of Icelanders* (*Voröld*, 26 Aug. 1919; *Heimskringla*, 27 Aug. 1919). The individual was to run for Ward 3, and for that reason those officiating and voting at the meeting had to be residents of Ward 3. The meeting was attended by about 60 men and women, some of whom were from Ward 4. In fact, the first nominee for chair of the meeting was A. S. Bardal, who excused himself as he lived in Ward 4. Several men and women declined to chair the meeting, until Gunnlaugar Johanneson, a building contractor, who had just arrived and was still happily greeting friends, was

voted to chair the meeting. Fredrik Swanson served as secretary. Gunnlaugar himself had advertised the meeting, and reminded those in attendance that it was necessary for all to respect the ward boundaries in their vote in order for the proceedings to be valid.

The first speaker was Jón Samson, who advised the assembly on the proper proceedings of such meetings, as he had been attending similar meetings that week among English speakers in the ward ( *Heimskringla*, 27 Aug. 1919). He himself was a member of the Dominion Labour Party, and would run on that platform. At the Skaldborg meeting, he was elected to run for candidacy in the Dominion Labour Party, with the assistance of Dr. Soggi Jul Jóhannesson, Arngrámur Johnson, Fred Swanson, Sigrídur Swanson, Jónas T. Bergmann, Gunnlaugur Jóhannsson, and Gunnar Goodmundson. Fred Swanson, Jónas Bergmann and Gunnlaugur Jóhannsson were all at one time or another entrepreneurs or contractors. Soggi Jul Jóhannesson was a 'working class' physician, poet, newspaper editor, temperance leader and a member of the First Lutheran Church. Fred Swanson had been a long-time, loyal and active member of the Unitarian Church. Of the others there is little information.

These men would be considered petite bourgeoisie according to Marxist terminology, although perhaps middle class is the best descriptor given the social organisation to be explored in this chapter. Jón Samson would have been part of the State apparatus in neo-Marxist terms, although in the particular formation of the social relations of production

in Winnipeg during the General Strike he might be considered working class. In looking for ethnic representation, these men first overlooked religious differences, and second, turned to the labour party. This is a particularly interesting move for the Lutherans (and the church where the meeting was held was after all a First Lutheran affiliate) given the support of the Lutheran-Liberal- *Lögberg* group for the Citizens' Committee of 1000 during the strike. Moreover, from the newspaper reports of the meeting, it seems that the decision to put forth a labour candidate had been a forgone conclusion. The presence of such men as Bardal, and those from other wards, suggests that there was considerable interest in the meeting, though not necessarily support for the candidate.

*Voröld's* coverage of the meeting focused on portions of Samson's speech to those present ( *Voröld* Aug 26, 1919). Samson seems to have repeated the platform of the labour party as reported elsewhere, specifically that working class parties were gaining strength in city councils, state governance and international unity. He discussed his career with the city police, and their treatment by the city during the strike. He berated Icelanders who had apparently joined the Special Forces, saying that it was a sorry time when Icelanders had been lead so far astray as to be prepared to train to take up arms and shoot at soldiers who had come home from the war. He went on to say that if elected he would intelligently and faithfully serve the real needs of the people. He finished by saying the

workingman's council (TLC) would supported him if he was appointed. The article closes with a discussion of the formation of the candidacy committee.

Later in the campaign, *Heimskringla* (Sept 19, 1919) published an article of support for Samson. A reference to the Dominion Labour Party in made, but not emphasised. Its author, Sigurdur Vilhjamsson spoke to a "Black Spot" in Samson's "karatjer". The black spot is that Jón Samson was fired from the police force. Vilhjamsson defends Samson as being strong and honourable ('drengskapur'), of taking the right action due to his own belief and conviction. In *Heimskringla*, the conduct of those Icelandic workers who went on strike only to work for the Committee of 1000 is specifically targeted. It is not that they are traitors to a cause, but that they were so unthinking as to work in opposition to their own well-being and the general welfare of all workers. Samson, Vilhjamsson argues, was capable of making the right decisions, and of acting honourably and could not be 'bought-out' during the strike. The article is written in support of Samson's candidacy, and in addition to attesting to his character, argues that although he had been a policeman, he has not been tainted by the less than upstanding tactics of the city political scene. The author immediately thereafter refers to Samson's belief in freedom of the people of a nation, perhaps to remind the reader that those involved in the strike were not Bolsheviks controlled by Moscow. The term socialism does not appear in the article, and this is

perhaps calculated to the same purpose. The article closes by discussing the number of working men in the ward, and that Samson would benefit from their support.

*Voröld* published a longer article (Oct. 7, 1919) in support of the Labour Party platform in general. In its discussion of Jón Samson, ethnicity is played up, but equal emphasis is placed his personal characteristics. The article then instructs the reader to take several steps to ensure the win of Samson. These include ensuring readers themselves are on the voters list, telling others to vote, talking about Jón's good character (details are supplied), spending an hour or two a day influencing other through kindly persuasion (*italics mine*) to vote for Jón, and to be sure to vote. It is interesting that this strategy is at the 'grass roots' level, just as the IOGT had spread its message. *Heimskringla* and *L'ogberg* did not mention such tactics.<sup>21</sup> On November 25th, *Voröld* carried further support and information on Labour Party platform, but no new discussion of Samson.<sup>22</sup> Although *Voröld* always reminded its readers that Samson was a good Icelander, but that was not its only focus. Samson's platform is given as synonymous with that of the Labour Party.

While *Heimskringla* gave some coverage of Jón Samson, as discussed above, it would on Nov. 19, 1919 issue an editorial cautioning against the Labour Party. The first half of the article agrees with the labour platform; that labour parties can and do participate

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<sup>21</sup>Interestingly enough, the *Free Press* reported in the weeks before the election that many ward 3 voters were not on the electors lists. It later gave instruction on how to ensure one was on the voters list.

<sup>22</sup>This article is not available for translation.

in all levels of politics, and that civic workers should have the right to assembly and so on. It then reminds the reader of the dangerous lack of public utilities during the strike, and points out that many of those forming the labour party were heavily involved in the Strike Committee. It closes by saying that no good can come from these men being in power. On November 26, *Heimskringla* encouraged its readers to go out and vote, and gives short biographies of all candidates running in the city.

*Lögberg* makes no mention of Jon Samson in its coverage of the election, not even in the voting results. Nor does it explicitly discuss the many speeches of the ward 3 and 4 Citizens' League candidates, except to run their advertisements on Nov 20. Rather, on Nov. 27, the *Lögberg* editorial attacks the position of "verkamannafélagsheildin" the term the paper used in the summer to refer to the Trades and Labour Council. The article argues against the Labour Party platform, discussing the problems of the taxation policy at length. A second contention is the danger of allowing the diligent civic employees to fall under the command of the TLC. It also discusses the dangers of letting the TLC run the city, when the organisation is willing to use the public utilities as a weapon against the citizens. There is nothing particularly new in the article, rather it seems to summarise the arguments made by *Free Press* editorials in previous months.

The Icelandic newspaper coverage is as to be expected given the historic political stance of the each paper, and its editors at the time. The election becomes more interesting though when the speeches of the British Citizens' League candidates are reviewed.

Jón Samson's opponent in Ward 3, George Fisher, emphasised the danger of electing a labour majority which would result in one class only running the city. After all, he argued, the Citizens' League represented all classes. Other dangers played up by Fisher were the threat to the city's credit, and the potential ruin of the school system. The labour party was once again painted as radical-labour, and the problems incurred by the strike reviewed. Newspaper reports do not discuss anything that Fisher may have promised to do for the citizenry, but did link him to Mr Davidson in Ward 4.

In spite of the *Free Press* and Citizens' League's accusation that 'radical-labour' was trying to turn the election into a class war in order to create a class autocracy (*Free Press* Nov 24, 1919), ex-mayor Davidson played the class card. He set up his argument by talking about his career first as a journeyman, then a contractor before entering politics. He argued his track record in politics produced ample evidence of his sympathy and actions on behalf of 'sane labour'. But he felt that 'radical-labour' was prepared to deal unfairly with other elements of society if elected. He argued "We are a buffer between the two—labour and capital. It is time for the middle class to assert itself" (*Free Press* Nov 24, 1919). He went on to claim that his five years as alderman and two as mayor gave

him the experience to deal more effectively with the Shoal Lake Aqueduct issue, the city's financial position, and the issue of taxation.

On Nov. 25th, the Citizens' League ran a special bulletin in the *Free Press* which included an article of the injured innocent bystander in the General Strike—the salaried man. Four testimonials of the inconveniences suffered by those non-unionised citizens such as the 'book-keepers, the salesman, the shoe, hardware and grocery clerk', were presented. Three of the four interviewees lived in Ward 3. The sole cause of the troubles of the 'man in the middle' was argued to be the actions of 'radical-labour'.

In a city that had been so long polarised by labour—capitalist conflict—after all there had been 60 strikes in the past decade—as well as the geographic and ethnic divide, those who were not protagonists in the conflict were finally given a name: the middle class. And this middle class moreover had a role to play in city politics. Following the defining of the middle class role, the *Free Press* encouraged the residents of Ward 3 living south of Portage Ave. to expand their "community clubs and other civic institutions" to include those north of Portage Ave and Notre Dame Ave, in order to bring these people into the citizenry of Winnipeg (*Free Press* Nov 26, 1919).

The relationship between Davidson and the distinguished Icelanders of Ward 4 is not known. However, for Icelandic professionals and entrepreneurs, this alternate perception of themselves was one that married up fittingly with the form of ethnicity they were



trying to promote through the IOGT, IODE and more recently, the INL. The message would have been heard equally by residents of both Wards 3 and 4.

In Ward 4, however, Davidson beat Flye, the labour candidate by only 602 votes. Ward 4 stretched along the south side of the CPR railyards, from Point Douglas to Weston. At all polls, except Fire Station No 1, Flye either surpassed Davidson, or lost by a slim margin. At Fire Station No 1, Davidson received 601 votes to Flye's 80. Fire Station No 1 is located just north of Notre Dame near Nena/Sherbrooke—in the epicentre of well-to-do Icelanders, and judging from housing values, the wealthy families of other ethnic groups as well. How the Bardals, Eggertsons and Olafsons voted cannot be known, but it is unlikely that they suddenly switched allegiances from their church, newspaper and traditional political party to a group they opposed during the General Strike a few months earlier. This vote is in keeping with the middle-class values expressed in the aims of the INL ten months earlier.

The election results in Ward 3 show that Jón Samson was crushingly defeated, receiving 2579 votes to Fisher's 5719, a difference of 3140 votes. However, he did receive more votes than there were Icelanders in the ward, and at the polling station at Principal Sparling School (attended by many Icelandic children) he marginally won over Fisher. There was, evidently, a labour favouring component to the Ward 3 area, and some of that would have been Icelandic. Mr. Samson would soon join the Manitoba Provincial

Police, and then the RCMP. As no mention is made in the histories before the election, it seems his candidacy vaulted him into the ranks of distinguished Icelanders. He would be the longest serving president of the Islendingadagurinn Committee.

It is obvious that some factions among the Western Icelandic community supported a working class ethnic. Moreover, they knew labour relations well enough to understand that 'radical-labour' was not as the 'citizens' presented it. Thus, just as there were those considered distinguished Icelanders, there was a group of people who supported the labour movement. And sometimes those persons were one and the same.

In the following and final chapter, attitudes towards wealth, the General Strike, the INL and the election will be analysed in greater detail.

## 17 Consciousness for Community

Sometime between 1916–1920, Western Icelanders, men and women then considered ‘distinguished’ Icelanders, came together to make a consistent, and eventually successful move for a large scale committee that would unite and represent people of Icelandic descent throughout North America. The goals of this committee were the maintenance of the language, the elevation of the status of its culture, and increased economic prospects. While being consistent with middle class goals, these ideas are not dissimilar to those of nation building. These men and women were seeking to develop among Western Icelanders consciousness for community.

There is no doubt that consciousness of community had existed for many years previously. The desire to maintain contact through the newspapers, to socialise at the IOGT hall, and argue at the Wevel Cafe are all testimony that Icelanders enjoyed a sense of fellowship. Icelandic businesses catered to both Icelandic and non-Icelandic customers

but served as a marker of the Icelandic presence as one the few ethnic groups in the neighbourhood.

Almost from their arrival in New Iceland until after 1910, Western Icelanders were especially united through the churches. This would be appropriate to the society they had left behind. Iceland was barely a state, and as Althusser argues the religious elite are the disseminators of the dominant ideology in European pre-state society. In Canada, not only did the pastors retain that power, but the churches were often the main meeting places for all community affairs. The early pastors, while not opposing Canadian ideologies, struggled long and hard for the maintenance of Icelandic culture. They established a model of an Icelandic community leader's persona in their arguments and long term efforts at building loyal congregations. Although they actually shared goals for the maintenance of culture, their arguments threatened to split the community. They may have been conscious of their ethnicity, but did not seem interested in building a single united group.

The economic plight of new immigrants helped keep ethnic group members together, as well. It seems that most residents chose to live in the West End, but needed financial assistance to pay for their own accommodations. Here the boarders—other Icelanders—brought in extra income to the household. This appears to be a reinstitution of the farmstead domestic group in Iceland. But it should be remembered that those working conditions, and specifically the dependence of the boarder on the householder, were to

be left behind in Iceland, according to the new ideology set forth by Rev. Bjarnason which emphasised economic independence. That Icelanders moved to the West End may have had much to do with the economics of their own building industry as it did with accumulated wealth within the group.

The ethnic economic enclave—the building industry and real estate business—seemed to benefit many. While a very few became quite wealthy, many others may have made a better earning than they would have working for non-Icelandic employers. In addition, it seems that the contract labour practises gave workers—even labourers—a sense of independence from their employers, and a better earning potential. The economic enclave was a benefit to the maintenance to Icelanders in other ways. While skilled workers trained newer immigrants and unskilled workers, they would have also attempted to inculcated Icelandic values in their trainees. That Icelandic men earned reputation for being hard working and sober that was likely true, and no doubt learned at the job-site. On the other hand, the language on the job-site was frequently Icelandic, so migrant Icelanders were not particularly well suited to working for other ethnic groups. Therefore, Icelandic bosses were not in competition with the British contractors for Icelandic workers. The training practises provided a partially closed source of labour and employment. Finally, the ethnic enclave was a source of economic stratification that was so evident in the differences of housing and the necessity for some of taking in boarders.

Thus the ethnic economic enclave was really developing and reproducing the Icelandic social relations of production—not workers for the general Winnipeg work force. Those who were being trained not only learned the trade, but social practises as well. But they were not likely learning English. The varied moral status of the IOGT Hall events, the Wevel Cafe conversations and the atmosphere of the pool hall, belie differences in behaviour that would be commonly associated with class. The IOGT Hall primarily was a middle class endeavour, but that it opened its doors to all members of the community was not a contradiction to its main function. The betterment of the lower classes was very much a mainstream British-Canadian endeavour. This same sense of duty is reflected in the IODE. The pool hall, with its drinking and occasional brawls was a working man's place of association. That its proprietor was a distinguished Icelander, albeit a socialist one speaks to the incomplete separation of classes within the community.

The churches, IOGT, IODE and Icelandic work sites can all be considered Ideological Apparatus. They inculcated ideas of correct moral beliefs and actions among Icelanders. Some of these ideals may have been closer to Canadian ideals than those of Iceland, such as volunteering to go to war. Others, such as the reverence for Vikings, are Western Icelandic invented traditions. Thus civil society within the ethnic group expounded a dominant ideology that was very much a hybrid of Canadian, Western Icelandic, and Icelandic ideals.

Finally, the IOGT and IODE gave rise to the social position within the community of the secular leader. Here we find the inculcation of cultural practises and ideologies which serve the community as a whole. As the secular leaders were also some of the business elite, better behaviour served their needs as discussed above. But most importantly, it is these leaders, who may have acted as wrathful warriors to originally gain their positions, coming together in the INL to create conscious for community. To do this, they had to somehow override the increasing socio-economic divisions in the community—divisions that were exacerbated by the debate between Siggi Jul and J. J. Bildfell, and the post strike election.

During the Winnipeg General Strike, two groups in the Winnipeg populace actually became class formations; the working class and the bourgeoisie. Some members of the middle class did choose sides, enhancing the numbers in each camp. As the aforementioned *Heimskringla* editorial noted, the event was so widespread and emotionally charged that individuals felt it their duty to take sides. Icelanders of different levels pursued a variety of socio-economic related strategies and actions.

Informants argue that there was little conflict between Icelanders during the General Strike. The inactivity may in part be due to the socialist rhetoric used by the British-Canadian labour leaders. Their brand of socialism drew distinctions between capitalists and workers. Very few men in the Icelandic community could really be described as

capitalists, and those who had had that kind of financial and physical capital, and controlled labour did not keep that power beyond WWI. The two wealthiest capitalists, Thorsteinn Oddsson and Arni Eggertson were both described as 'friends to the poor'. Moreover, they were not the employers of all workers in the economic enclave. Many of those actually doing the building did not fall neatly into the category of wage labourers, or the proletariat. Some workers and their employees occupied contradictory class positions, as semi-autonomous employees or small employers. Thus, the British Canadian socialism did not speak to all workers in the enclave.

Outside the enclave, Icelanders working for British employers. Some did have grievances with capitalists, as expressed by the strike of garment workers and the organisation of a union of Eaton's retail clerks. Thus there was real conflict involving Icelanders and their employers; but the employers were not part of the ethnic group.

Thus the reported lack of conflict among Icelanders, in spite of differences in socio-economic status, makes sense. The middle class or upper levels of Icelandic society were not in direct contact through the social relations of production with those who were workers. As the strike focused specifically on the rights to collective bargaining and better wages, the conflict was not between Icelandic workers and employers.

Nevertheless, the situation in the city must have highlighted the differences in economic status within each of the two Icelandic religio-political groups. *Heimskringla* and



*L'ogberg* had a difficult line to walk, as neither supported the labour movement wholeheartedly, and their readership included everyone from labourers to the middle class and the very wealthy. *Lögberg* supported an upper class reading of the situation, but unlike the Anglophone papers, did not consider the strike a Bolshevik uprising. It also avoided any discussion of the work being done by the Committee of 1000. *Heimskringla* began by pointing out the inflammatory rhetoric, and carefully avoiding it itself. Among other things, it suggested a better way to deal with labour issues was through greater political action. Both papers' editorials attempted to present moderate arguments that the strike was not an appropriate strategy.

The civic election continued what the Winnipeg General Strike brought into focus—class differences. That some distinguished Icelanders should take up the cause of labour in the civic election is not surprising – those involved had stated their positions clearly in articles written before the strike and published in *Voröld*. *Heimskringla* also supported the involvement of labour in politics. Jón Samson, the Dominion Labour Party candidate was known as an upstanding individual among the Icelandic population. The TLC would have likely seen these qualities as well, but he was good choice for a candidate for other reasons: he was 'ethnic', but from a respected group of foreigners, and he had no political record, and therefore would not be perceived as 'radical-labour' supporter.

However, the location within the social relations of production of many in the West End, their class status, included the petty bourgeoisie; the professional, the small entrepreneur, the white collared, salaried employee and those with contradictory class positions of the semi-autonomous employee and small employer. The strike had little resonance for this class. In fact the middle class did not get noticed until the civic election when ex-mayor Davidson specifically called for its participation in the betterment of city society by forming a bridge between the elite and workers. The bourgeoisie also found a use for the middle class, when it could point to the 'salaried worker' as the innocent victim of 'radical-labour'. Most residents of Ward 3, or the West End, were middle class, and indeed most of the 'innocent' victims described in the papers were from that Ward.

But the formation of the labour campaign and the INL with their more apparent class-based ideologies were not created *sui generis*. Both projects originated from the social concerns of distinguished Icelanders. Further, the origin of the different levels of Icelandic society and their increasing distance can be traced over the previous decade. It would be inaccurate to say that class differences existed but were disguised, as informants talk of 'different levels' of Western Icelanders. Rather the differences are best described as carefully avoided in social intercourse by both the distinguished Icelanders and the wage labourers and 'not-so-learned'.

The incessant recurrence of certain names, noted as distinguished Icelanders, who work together but were often at odds, suggests that these individuals acted as a fairly exclusive cohort within Western Icelandic society. Despite the acrimony of the dispute between J. J. Bildfell and Siggi Jul in the newspapers over the summer and fall of 1918, they still worked together in the Icelandic Lutheran Synod, and later the INL. The two IOGT Lodges, Skuld and Hekla also worked together on projects.

Several factors hid, disguised and obscured real socio-economic differences in the Western Icelandic community in the decade before the General Strike. These include general self-perceptions about the Icelandic nature, the prevalence of other factions, the means of disseminating ideologies, as well as external ideologies from the dominant culture.

First, Ragnar Gíslason's comments about the social reaction to the General Strike should be revisited. As he was the 16 year-old son of Hjalmar Gíslason and helped his father in the newspaper business, he would have had privileged access to any group that took up the labour side, or debated the anti-labour side with his father. His observations can be assumed to be an accurate description of community perceptions. Gíslason said he could not specify that there was a class that was pro- or anti labour, and that most people were 'quite rapid in defence of their own political outlook'. If this statement is considered against prevailing ethnic ideologies a bias can be detected. The Lutheran Church had laid

heavy emphasis on independence. The INL stressed that Icelanders should strive to embody all that is Icelandic, and reiterated the importance of independence. Those who bought into this rhetoric would be unlikely to diagnose groups of people who shared similar views as being a faction in society. Political views would be considered personal expressions of opinion. Icelanders would have been less likely to perceive the existence of factions which had roots in economic or social condition. Thus the ideological emphasis on independence obscures the real commonalities between Icelanders. It would likely appear, as Gislason claims, that “political sentiments came from all levels of the community”. After all Siggí Jul and Hjalmar Gislason were among the distinguished Icelanders. But Ragnar’s statement belies the existence of socio-economic stratification when he speaks of ‘all levels’ of the community, as well as the contradictory perception that political opinion was an individual thing.

Social organisation and the factions among Icelanders diverted attention from differences in status between the distinguished Icelanders and other Icelanders. The most commonly referred to cleavage is the divide between the *Lögberg*-Lutheran-Skuld-Liberal supporters, and the *Heimskringla*-Unitarian (Tabernacle)HeklaConservative group. Each camp had members of ‘all levels’ of Icelanders, from the labourer to the wealthiest and best educated. My research found that most of the richest families attended First Lutheran Church. It has been said that the *Heimskringla* group, and more specifically the Unitarian

and Tabernacle congregation contained many tradesmen. That may be the case, but it also had wealthy lawyers and entrepreneurs, and the Unitarian Reverend was a partner in a bank. Thus the religio-political split is not an indicator of class alignments as suggested by Kristjansson. It is instead an indication of the alignments of common folk with certain of the distinguished Icelanders. These community divisions supposedly reflected profound differences between individual distinguished Icelanders and their followers over community issues, when in fact they were closer to patron-client allegiances related to employment and financial issues.

No doubt the argumentation between church ministers, and later other prominent Icelanders created a spectacle and entertainment, and kept the onlookers interested in the intrigues of the ethnic community. It probably also created alliances between distinguished Icelanders and other community members such that there appeared to be competing interest groups, not unlike the Jónsmenn and Pállsmenn in New Iceland. But what gives the lie to these supposed divisions between distinguished Icelanders is the frequency with which they worked together on community projects, such as the building of the IOGT Hall, and later the INL. But the loyalty of the 'common people' to individual leaders in the the religio-political split diverted attention from the socio-economic differences between themselves and the cohort of community leaders.

The method by which cultural and ideological messages were disseminated also did much to hide the combined influence of the distinguished Icelanders. For example, the ideological apparatus to disseminate the temperance message was a secret society. One could join, take the pledge and pass a series of tests to gain status in the organisation. But anyone could attend the social events. The message of temperance was conveyed at these, and in informal environments such as the Wevel Gafe. In these spaces, temperance advocates engaged people in direct conversation. As argumentation was an accepted means of discourse, the question of drinking could again be cast as personal opinion. Those arguing for temperance must have been convincing. Even if they did not change the particular opponent's view, they may have influenced those within ear shot. While the process of hegemony is usually used to describe the relations between states or classes, the argumentative process can be thought of as a micro-scale hegemonic manoeuvre. The temperance movement as a whole was effective, and it was not the only area of argumentation; there are reports about arguments regarding conscription, politics, whether donations should be accepted for certain projects and many other subjects.

There is still another area where close personal relations disguised power relations. In both the home and the work site, the relationship between the household and boarder, and boss and employees, appears to be one of paternal benevolence. But appeals for good behaviour could always be backed up with eviction or firing. Even relations between

landlord and house renting tenant provided a measure of power for the four or five men who had extensive real estate holding and rental properties. Thus mild forms of dominance had developed between the well-to-do Icelanders and the not so fortunate.

However, it was not only the distinguished Icelanders whose class position was hidden. The existence of the working class was not apparent for several reasons. The first is the connection of the church congregations and newspapers with support for the national political parties. If many Western Icelanders did take an interest in politics, and followed the Conservatives and Liberals, they would be enmeshed in the national and provincial dominant culture ideology which denied the importance of class as a social and political construct. These parties did not ignore the working population; they in fact courted the labour vote. The Manitoba Liberal party had been on good terms with the TLC until 1917–18. Moreover, it was the Icelandic Liberal Thos. Johnson who initiated the Fair Wages Act in 1916. For this reason, Icelanders, perhaps more than other ethnic group, had reason to believe that the so-called classless politics of the national parties was acceptable, and reflected the needs of all levels of socio-economic status. It follows from this that there was no need to make occupational differences political, and thus class-based. This comes very close to being straight forward false consciousness.

Finally, the prevailing national and provincial politics enhanced the collective bonds of 'race', as did the popular press and social work. The division of society based on race was

hegemonic. 'Races' were accepted as real and important categories by British Canadians, French Canadians and other ethnic groups. As the distinguished Icelanders in particular enhanced the social image of the group, and presented that veneer of middle classness, it would have been in the best interest of others, including those 'prosperous labourers' to maintain a sense of fraternity with members of all levels of Western Icelandic society. After all, the nationalist rhetoric argued, were not all Icelanders of noble and honourable descent, as mirrored in the genealogy charts?

Although it was based on the best science of the day, and therefore we might call it a justified belief, the ideology of race and the great chain of being is a prime example of false consciousness. It was one that the best educated Icelanders believed, and convey to all Icelanders. The rhetoric at the Icelandic Festivals seemed even to elevate Icelanders above the British, by using criteria similar to that of learned Britons. The hardiness of the race of Norsemen and the high artistry of their literature was offered as proof of the Icelandic race's superiority. At this point, Icelanders seemed to be vying for the top position of the Great Chain of Being.

Hegemony was also at play among Icelanders. Argumentation made it appear that members of all levels of the community had a voice, or say, in matters. However, those actively participating in the higher ranks of the voluntary association made the decisions and took action. Thus the process of hegemony—specifically the acceptance of



argumentation—disguised differences in power relations in the community for ‘all levels’ of socio-economic status.

The INL continues to be the largest Icelandic organisation on this continent, with clubs throughout Canada and the United States. Annual international conventions are held, where information on upcoming lectures, visits from Icelandic scholars and dignitaries, musicians, and other artists is exchanged. Plans for the co-ordination of charter flights to Iceland, student and teacher exchanges, writing workshops in Iceland and other ‘ethnic’ activities are discussed. But what was the reason for starting an ethnic organisation in a time of nativism, when Icelanders could have surely avoided a negative stereotyping and treatment by embracing assimilationist moves on the part of their British Canadian middle class neighbours?

Men like Bildfell did not suppose an elevated social status would be based on their having wealth. Rather they could argue that wealth made the most vital contribution to the Icelandic community, since if dispersed appropriately it ameliorated the conditions of all Icelanders. It was not to be hoarded like the Rhine Gold. The proper Icelandic use of wealth was for the building of churches and community halls, and the support of community reform and charity efforts. Icelandic use of wealth differed from that of the British Canadian elite, who delayed the development of an inexpensive hydro-electric system and running water for decades, subjecting the city population to squalid

living conditions and typhoid. The Icelandic acquisition and use of prestige served the community, not merely the class.

Thus the mechanisms that hid socio-economic differences, and eventually class differences appeared early on in community discourse. That they would function to hide class was not a pre-planned political move on the part of those who had gained influence through their community involvement. Those who gained power, and espoused the inherent nobility of all Icelanders, probably believed it. Eager to form a national group they probably also thought it a personal duty to improve the character of those individuals who did not live up to the birthright that came with Icelandic identity or ethnicity.

Thus it would seem that ethnicity can be a means of resisting both economic and ideological oppression from the larger society. But at the same time, ethnicity seems to employ the same rhetoric and strategies as the nation-state to unite its members, and deflect issues of class difference. False consciousness was found among Icelanders, even those intellectuals who succeeded in arguing that their culture was as great as the dominant culture. Hegemony was found to be at work, disguised as the camaraderie of debate. Weak forms of domination could come into play as socio-economic differences increased. And lastly, outright class distinctions evident in coexisting occupation, economic status, social status and ideology were not seen, in spite of being in plain sight.

## 18 Epilogue: The Falcons

The story of the Western Icelandic amateur hockey team, the Falcons, indicates that Icelanders were shut out of British Canadian society, not because of inadequacy, but ethnicity. There were amateur sports and athletic clubs among Icelanders from the start, and hockey had been played competitively since 1896. As British Canadian society excluded 'foreigners' the religious/political factoring in the Icelandic community was fortuitous, as it provided for two teams in most sports. The members of the Icelandic hockey teams, The Vikings were recruited from the Tabernacle congregation, and the Falcons, from the First Lutheran church. The Winnipeg teams also played against rural Icelandic teams from time to time, as well as in the Winnipeg junior ranks. The Winnipeg senior ranks were comprised of only three hockey teams, all of British Canadian players. Although the Icelandic teams excelled in the lower ranks, it is said they were denied access to the senior rank because they were Icelandic. In 1920, a single team was formed, called the Falcons.

This team was allowed a place in the senior league in 1920, and joined in the competition to represent Canada at the Olympics in Antwerp 1920.

As will be discussed shortly, the Falcons' original exclusion from the Senior League was not likely based on ability. That they were included in the 1920 season may have had more to do with the post-General Strike class and ethnic politics, and the outcome of the 1919 civic election. As discussed in relation to the election, the Anglophone newspapers and the Citizens' League encouraged the ward residents south of Portage Avenue to extend their community clubs to include residents north of Portage Ave. The purpose of this was to bring members of the northern areas into the middle class fold, and out of the ideological reaches of the labour movement.

The Falcons did not expect to go to the Olympics. First, they had to beat out the Winnipeg Senior League teams. In the first games against the title holders, the Falcons scored a total of 15 to the opponents 1 goal. The Falcons proceeded to Toronto, where they again won the series, with a total of 11 to 5 goals. This made them the Canadian representatives, but according to legend, they did not have the travel fare, enough changes of clothing, or enough uniforms. The Toronto hockey teams donated the required gear. In Antwerp, the Falcons played a total of 3 games. They scored a total of 29 points, but only gave up 1 goal to the opposing teams (Lindal 1967: 235–241).

When interviewed by a *Free Press* reporter afterwards about the team's attitude off the ice, Konnie Johannesson the team captain replied, "The atmosphere was excellent. We were one team on and off the ice. In the dressing room it was quiet, no loud talking." Lindal interprets this last comment to mean that there was no drinking in the dressing room (1967: 239). These men were not noted members of the temperance unions, and five of the seven had been away at war during much of prohibition, where they were allowed to drink. It seems the IOGT had a long reach.

Upon returning to Winnipeg, the IODE put on a large celebratory dinner and dance for the team, and gave each player a gold watch. Across the country editorial pages in newspapers praised the team. The *Globe and Mail* commented that "The winning team plays exceeding fast and very clean hockey and undoubtedly gave full credit to Canadian sportsmanship" (in Lindal 1967: 240). As international sporting events are an important aspect in the construction of nationalism, it would seem that the Icelandic men had done their bit in this endeavour for Canada.

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