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Bjarni Benediktsson – Sigríður Björnsdóttir – Kanada

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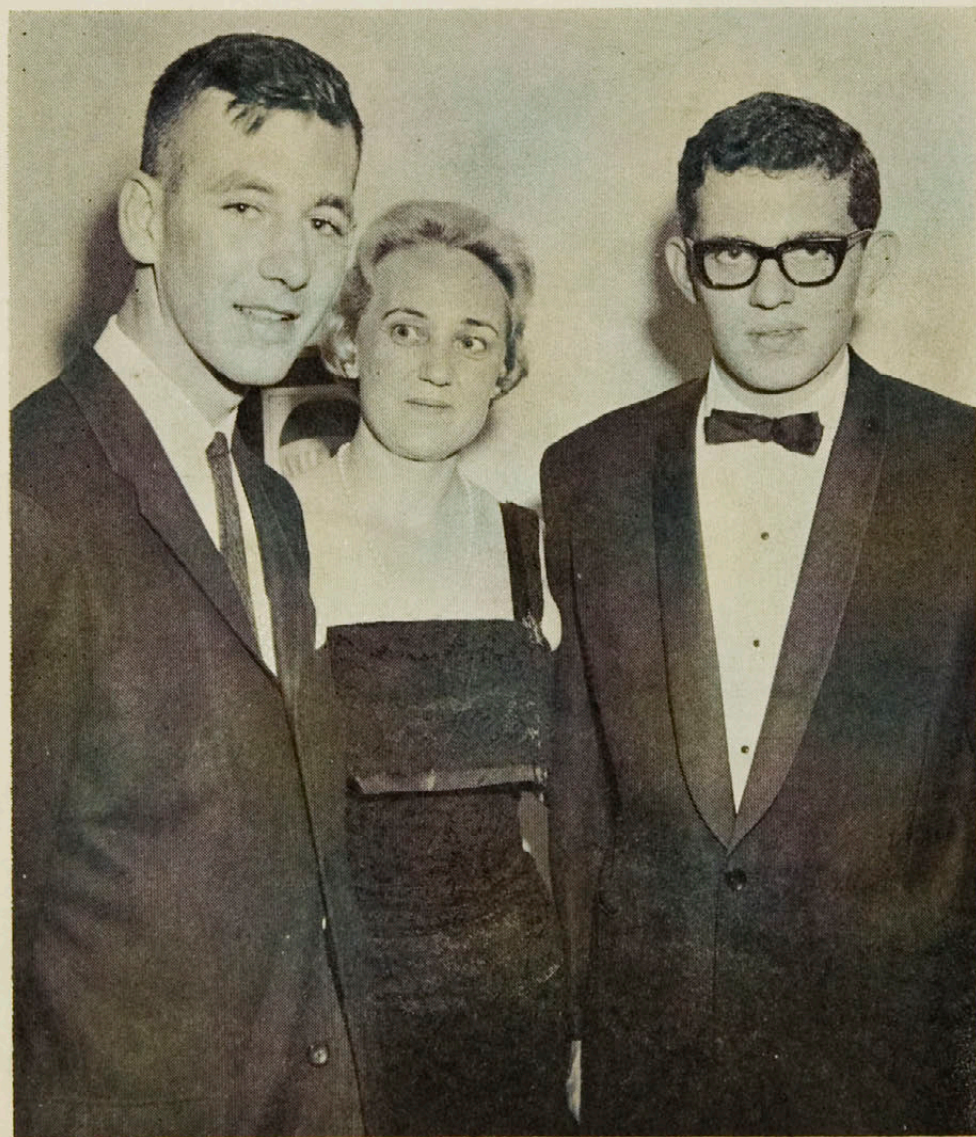
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Autumn 1964

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The Icelandic Canadian

Vol. XXIII No. 1

Winnipeg, Canada

Autumn 1964

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Frú Dóra Þórhallsdóttir IN MEMORIAM

The sad news of the passing of frú Dóra Þórhallsdóttir, the wife of His Excellency the President of Iceland, has just reached us.

The untimely death of Her Excellency leaves all Icelanders and the numerous friends of the young Republic of Iceland with a deep feeling of bereavement. In no small measure does this sense of loss make itself felt among Canadians of Icelandic descent who still cherish the memory of the visit to Canada by the President and his lady three years ago. Canadian Icelanders clearly recall the many occasions in recent years on which warm and generous hospitality was bestowed upon them at the Presidential Home in Iceland. Frú Dóra Þórhallsdóttir always took a keen interest in the descendants of Iceland in North America and along with her husband, she added new strength to the bonds between Iceland and its sons and daughters in the west. Ours is an abiding gratitude for her distinguished service.

Her Excellency was exceptionally well qualified for her high position as "The First Lady of Iceland". Refinement was a personality trait with her and an unmistakable mark of noble origin. All her life she had been in a position where she could virtually feel the very heartbeat of the Icelandic nation. Her parents were Þórhallur Bjarnason, a Bishop of Iceland and his wife frú Valgerður Jónsdóttir. Thus the home of her youth was the bishopric at Laufás við Reykjavík—a home which for a long time was widely recognized for its unique atmosphere of culture and learning. She married the man who at an early age became one of Iceland's leading statesmen and rose to become President of Iceland. Last summer he was re-elected President by acclamation—equally a tribute to frú Dóra and Ásgeir Ásgeirsson.

Our heartfelt condolences go to His Excellency the President, his family, and the Icelandic nation as a whole.

One of the Keys to the English Language

The following is an extract, in translation, from the address delivered by BJARNI BENEDIKTSSON, Prime Minister of Iceland, at the International Inn, Winnipeg, on Wednesday, August 5th, 1964.

All of us, whose roots lie deep in Icelandic soil, have abundant grounds to be proud of our descent.

Actually, it is exceptional that a nation so small in numbers, should be able to maintain an independent and a richly cultural state in a land of such size and adverse elements as Iceland. At the same time it is little short of a miracle that you, west of the Atlantic, in that vastness of nations, should not only have succeeded in sailing your ship of state on a course leading to weal and distinction, but should at the same time have succeeded in maintaining fresh and undiminished a memory of your origin and your former homeland. To accomplish this you have drawn upon your rich store of energy, your courage, your patience and your exceptional faith. Through this, but with due modesty, we have reason to be proud. It is the hope of all that this Icelandic tenacity will be perpetuated in your descendants wherever they may go.

But even if we desire to maintain the distinctly Icelandic traits we must not forget that the Icelandic people are not an indigenous growth. They alone do not inhabit this planet.

It has frequently been stated that western civilization derives from three main root elements, Greek, Roman and Hebrew. Not for a moment would I minimize any of the following: the independence of thought and the arts of the Greeks; the Roman administration of law; the Hebrew background to the Christian religion. But, above all, here in Canada you must not forget the great contribution the north-western part of Europe has made to present day civilization.

In order to appreciate this one need but consider the important role the English language is playing. It is the main language throughout North America, and it is hoped, will increasingly become a world language which every nation will understand alongside its native tongue. **The man who seeks to understand the origins of English will find that no living language can provide a better means for that purpose than Icelandic.**

It is for that reason that a study of the Icelandic language means much more than the mere ability to understand and converse in a language which fewer than 200,000 people use in their daily contacts.

It would be unrealistic to imagine that large numbers of people will either have the opportunity or even the desire to learn Icelandic merely for the purpose of acquiring a better understanding of the essence, the construction, and the evolution of the English language. But men of learning who seek to acquire that understanding, and be in a position to impart that understanding to others, are bound to benefit greatly from a study of Icelandic.

A grasp of Icelandic learning is more than a mere language study; it leads to a literature which is an exceptional product of an ancient culture, and is no less a contribution to western civilization than the three other cultural heritages—the Greek, the Roman, and the Hebrew. We who speak with knowledge, recognize that some of the Icelandic Sagas, and the “Heimskringla” (story of the Norse Kings) compare favourably with the finest literature which was produced at or about that time anywhere in the world. Some acquaintance with the best in that literature should be equally a part of the general store of knowledge as choice selections from the Greeks, the Romans and the Hebrews. This applies particularly to “Hávamál”, the Sayings of the Wise One, Völuspá”, The Sybil’s Prophecy, and also some of the old Icelandic laws.

In that ancient literature one will find examples of that calm of mind and self control which distinguish the Anglo-Saxons from others; also a guide to the democratic process which they, more successfully than any other people, have developed in their forms of government.

It is regrettable that interest in this phase of western civilization appears to be less at present than at other times. That, no doubt, is partly the result of the disrepute of Nazi-German propaganda which presumptuously appropriated that literature to itself and gave it a wholly misleading interpretation. For that reason it is the more important that we take pains that the Norse contribution be not forgotten.

In that field you, Vestur-Íslendingar (Western-Icelanders) have special opportunities and indeed special duties in relation to your Icelandic origin. By maintaining a loyalty to your heritage you not only enrich your own lives but you provide color and variety to the cultural life of your Canadian nation—a nation which has already become and will increasingly continue to be one of the leading nations of the free world.

Extracts from address of Hon. Errick F. Willis

The following are extracts from the speech by His Honour, the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, HONOURABLE ERRICK F. WILLIS, on the 75th Anniversary of the Icelandic Celebration at Gimli Park, Monday, August 3rd, 1964 and excerpts from his remarks at the Banquet in the International Inn, Metro-Winnipeg, Wednesday, August 5th, 1964.

We welcome today the Prime Minister of Iceland, Dr. Bjarni Benediktsson, Mrs. Benediktsson and their son Bjarni. We are honoured they are staying with us at Government House, and each day I learn more about Iceland.

One half of those who left Iceland came to Canada and of those, more than fifty per cent came to the Province of Manitoba.

We acknowledge, with thanks, the great contribution made by these cultured immigrants to Canada.

I am happy to point out that persons of Icelandic descent have achieved many of the most important positions in Canada—in the judiciary, field of medicine, as professionals in the other professions, and also in the field of politics.

In Canada we are all immigrants, or sons or grandsons of immigrants. My people left Ireland at the time of the last potato famine and I think they made a wise choice.

The girls from Iceland were beautiful and the men were aggressive and consequently they were soon assimilated into the fabric of Canada, to the great benefit of our country.

I have been asked today to speak on Canada. The first thing I should like to say is that our best Canadians are those who respect and honour their racial background.

I feel that in the past we have failed to speak out in regard to the fine qualities of our country, and that as a result we are not as well informed as we should be, in reference to Canada.

We are a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations, and as such we become not merely a nation of eighteen million people but, in addition, we form an important part of the Commonwealth of Nations of some six hundred million people.

We have the advantage of being a pioneer nation—for the people of Canada are either pioneers or sons or grandchildren of pioneers. We have not, therefore, gone soft in spite of the fact that we are reasonably well fed and constantly attending banquets. The ability of our people to withstand hardships was well exemplified in the difficult period of the 1930's when our people successfully stood the test of that depression with courage and determination.

Law and order are well maintained in Canada. Our courts, based upon the British system, have the full respect of the people. Our judges are carefully selected and are appointed for a period extending until they reach the age of seventy-five years.

Our people have always been internationalists, and not isolationists. Early in the life of our nation it was

VISIT OF ICELANDS PRIME MINISTER and the Icelandic Day Celebration at Gimli, 1964

Icelanders in the Western Hemisphere have been particularly fortunate in recent years in that they have had the privilege of entertaining first the Chief of State of Iceland, President Ásgeir Ásgeirsson, three years ago and now the head of the Government of Iceland, Bjarni Benediktsson. As a result of arrangements made by the Committee in charge of the annual Icelandic Celebration at Gimli, Dr. Bjarni Benediktsson, Prime Minister of Iceland, his gracious wife, frú Sigríður Björnsdóttir and their son Björn, were the honoured guests at the Icelandic Day (Íslendingadagurinn) Celebration in Gimli and also at other festive gatherings in Manitoba and Western Canada.

Their arrival at Winnipeg's International Airport August 1st saw many of the leading members of Winnipeg's Icelandic community out to welcome them. The Prime Minister's party later proceeded to Government House, where they were guests of His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, Errick F. Willis and Mrs. Willis for the duration of their stay in Winnipeg. This was the first time that a Prime Minister of Iceland had visited Manitoba.

The Prime Minister, his wife, and son attended a religious service on Sunday, August 2nd at the First Lutheran Church. The pastor, V. J. Eylands expressed the appreciation of the congregation for having the distinguished visitors present. Speaking to the congregation, Dr. Benediktsson expressed his pleasure at finding the

Icelandic language still alive among the descendants of the pioneers who first brought it to this country.

On Monday morning, starting at 8 a.m., August 3rd, the Prime Minister's party was taken by motor cavalcade to Winnipeg Beach, where he was taken aboard a boat provided by the Manitoba Yacht Club. With a flotilla of six boats, the last few miles of the historic route followed by the York boats of the original settlers eighty-nine years ago, was retraced. The Prime Minister was shown Willow Island and the Point where the settlers landed.

Hundreds of people were already on hand to greet the Icelandic Prime Minister at the Gimli Pier as he and the official party arrived aboard the "Carlabob J." A ceremony at the dock followed the landing of the official party. Dr. Benediktsson was presented with an honorary membership in the Manitoba Yacht Club by the Commodore of the Club, and was also made a gift of the burgee flown on the Commodore's vessel. In return, the Prime Minister presented the Commodore with the Icelandic split flag which he had flown on board. After the brief ceremony, the official party joined the parade which then moved through the streets of Gimli. The large number of brightly-decked floats helped to make this year's parade a particularly impressive one. As the car bearing the Prime Minister reached the monument to the pioneers, the cavalcade stopped, and the Prime Minister, accompanied by the Fjallkona

Rev. V. J. Eylands, D.D.—Dr. B. Benediktsson—Mrs. Sigríður Benediktsson—Mrs. Eylands—Rev. P. M. Peturson—Mrs. Peturson



for the day, laid the wreath to the pioneers in a brief but impressive ceremony. The party had lunch at the Betel Old Folks Home and had an opportunity to chat with descendants of the original pioneers.

The feature event commenced at 2 p.m. in Gimli Park. Warm sunshine bathed the audience of nearly 3000 as the Fjallkona with her two Maids of Honour was escorted to the special platform. The program opened with O Canada, and Ó Guð vors lands. Presiding was the chairman of the Celebration Committee, Aleck Thorarinson, who extended the welcome of the assembled gathering to the distinguished guests. Reigning over the day's festivities as "Fjallkona" (Lady of the Mountains) was Mrs. Ásgerður Bessason. The "Icelandic" and "Canadian" themes received much attention in the addresses delivered during the course of the afternoon. Canadians have found much of their strength in diversity, said the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba in his brief but witty address in that so many of her people had come from various parts of the world. He pointed out to the largely Icelandic audience that the first settlers in Iceland were Irish (Mr. Willis is himself, of Irish ancestry) and that in later years the Icelanders raided Ireland because the women were "willing and eager". Speaking on behalf of the Prime Minister of Canada, who sent his regrets that he was not able to attend in person, was the Honourable William Benedickson. A part of his address appears elsewhere in this number.

In the feature address of the afternoon, Dr. Benediktsson, speaking in Icelandic, urged his audience to do their utmost to preserve the language of their forefathers. However, this need not diminish their Canadianism. Ice-

land, he said, was proud of the emigrants who had come to the new land and of their achievements therein.

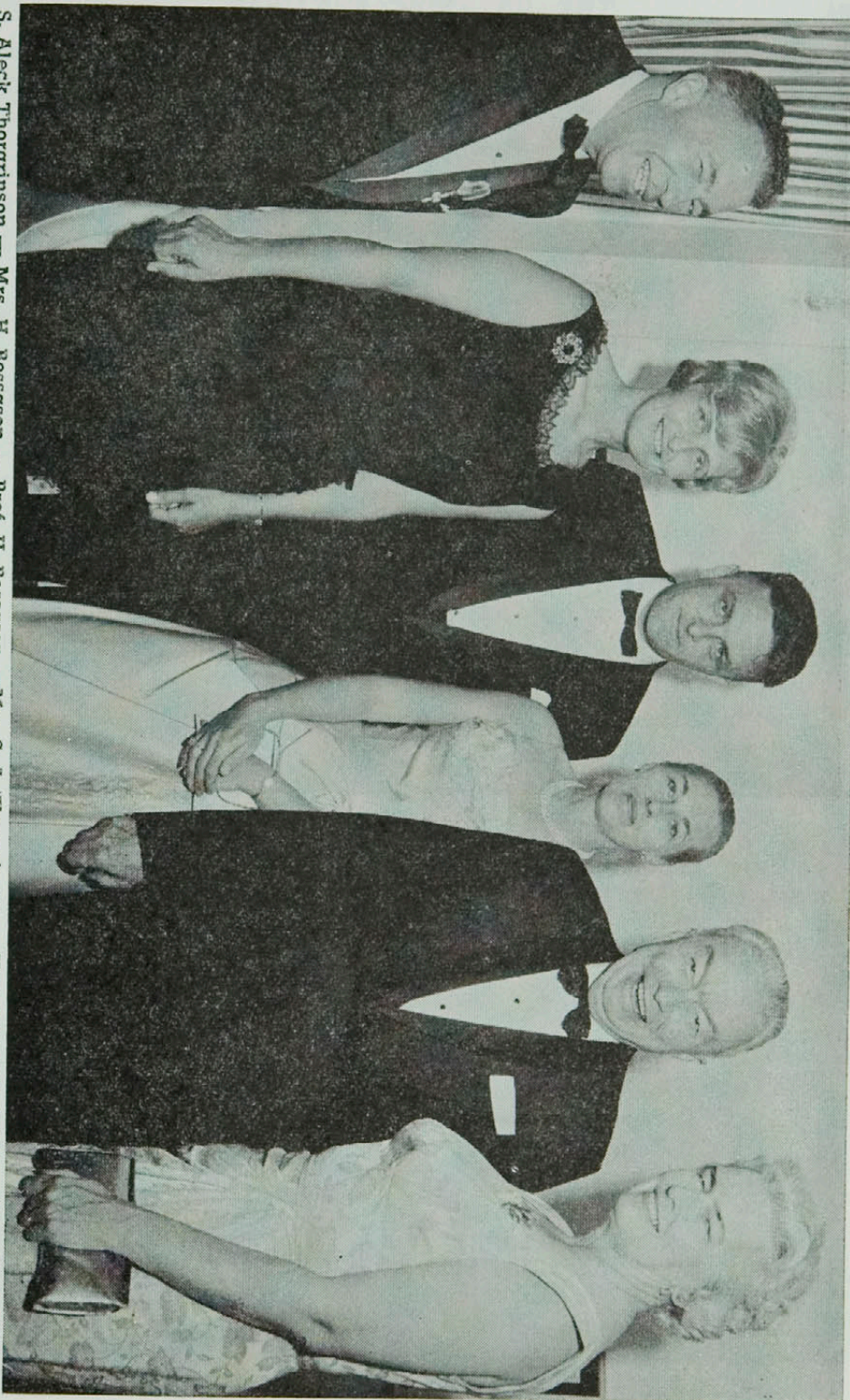
Manitoba's Education Minister, Dr. George Johnson, brought greetings from the Manitoba Government. Other distinguished guests who briefly addressed the gathering were Gimli's mayor, Mrs. Violet Einarson, Rev. P. M. Petursson, representing the Icelandic National League, and Grettir Johannsson, Consul for Iceland in Winnipeg. Representatives of Icelandic organizations on the platform were introduced.

Musical contributions to the program were given by the Gimli Children's Choir (directed by Mrs. Shirley Johnson, Mrs. Gudrun Stevens, and Mrs. Anna Stevens), and the Winnipeg Scandinavian Male Choir (directed by Arthur Anderson; Gunnar Erlendsson, accompanist).

The usual program of athletic sports were held; but special features which added to the distinction of the day included a demonstration of Icelandic "Glima" (wrestling), a special travel movie on Iceland, a sale of "harðfiskur" flown from Reykjavik, and a museum display of some extremely interesting mementos of early days in the New Iceland colony.

Following the afternoon program the Prime Minister was the honoured guest at a small reception held at the home of Eric Stefanson, M.P. At 6 p.m. there was an informal dinner at St. Michaels Parish Hall under the auspices of the Icelandic Day Celebration Committee, which included the honoured guests, the guests of the day and the representatives of the Icelandic organizations. At the dinner the Prime Minister presented S. Aleck Thorarinson, the Chairman, with the Order of the Falcon.

S. Aleck Thorarinson — Mrs. H. Bessason — Prof. H. Bessason — Mrs. S. A. Thorarinson — Hon. Erick F. Willis — Mrs. E. F. Willis





Bjarni Bjarnason — Frú Sigríður Benediktsson — Dr. Bjarni Benediktsson

Following the dinner the guests of honour were driven to Willow Point where they saw the celebrated "White Rock", a landmark since the original landing October 21, 1875. Shortly afterwards the official party left for Winnipeg.

On Tuesday the Prime Minister's party visited another well-known area of Icelandic settlement in Manitoba, the Baldur-Glenboro district.

The major social event of the Prime Minister's visit in the Winnipeg area was the banquet held at the International Inn on Wednesday, August 5th. All of the organizations prominent in Icelandic cultural affairs in the city were represented at the gathering, and spokesmen on behalf of these organiz-

ations passed on their warmest greetings (some in English, some in Icelandic) expressing their appreciation over the fact that it had been possible for the Prime Minister to visit Canada at this time. Extending their welcome for these organizations were the following: Mrs. H. F. Danielson for The Jon Sigurdson Chapter I.O.D.E.; Mrs. Ingibjörg Jónsson, for Lögberg-Heimskringla; Rev. V. J. Eylands, D.D. the First Lutheran Church; Grettir Egertson, the Betel Home Foundation; Dr. P. H. T. Thorlakson, the Canada-Iceland Foundation; Hon. W. J. Lindal, The Icelandic Canadian; Prof. Haraldur Bessason, Dept of Icelandic, University of Manitoba; W. H. Finnbogason, the Icelandic Canadian Club;

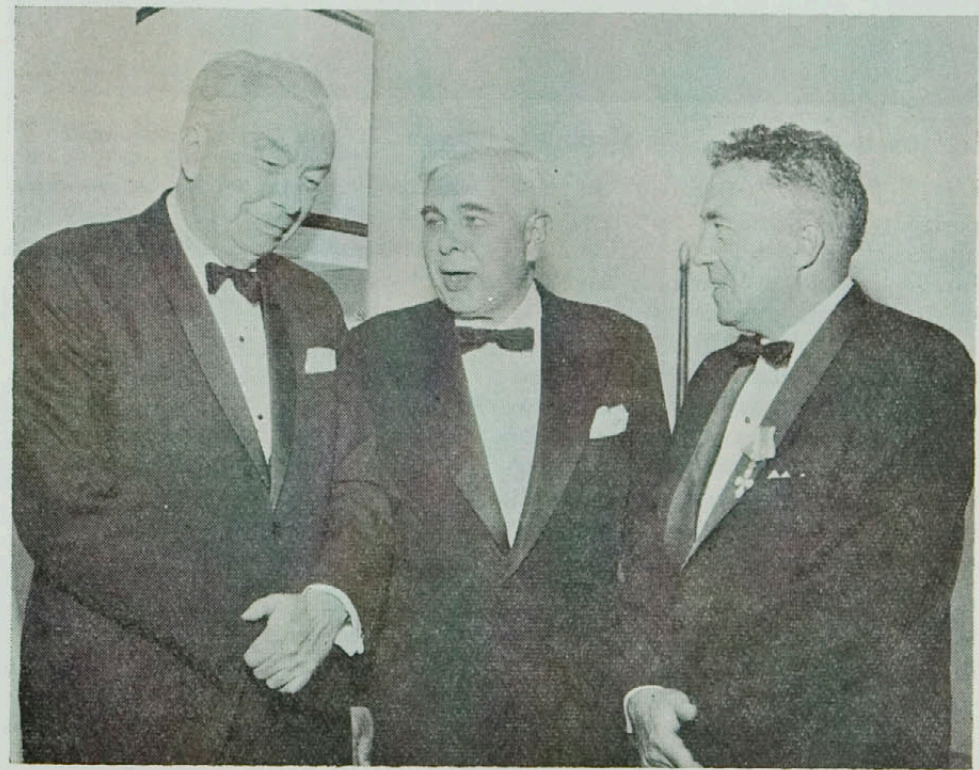
Rev. Philip M. Petursson, President, Icelandic National League and The First Federated Church; Hon. J. T. Thorson, Retired Exchequer Court Judge. Hon. George Johnson, Minister of Education, and William McGarva, City of Winnipeg Alderman, brought greetings from the Province and the City. The Lieutenant Governor, Errick F. Willis, a part of whose remarks appear elsewhere was decorated with the Grand Cross of the Order of the Falcon.

Consul G. L. Johannson introduced the Guest of Honour, Bjarni Benediktsson. A part of the Prime Minister's address appears elsewhere in this number of the magazine.

On Thursday morning the Prime Minister visited His Worship Mayor

Juba, and was made an Honorary Citizen of Winnipeg. At 11 a.m. he held a press conference attended by representatives of the Winnipeg Free Press, The Winnipeg Tribune and the ethnic press of Winnipeg. He was made an Honorary Life Member of the Canada Press Club.

The Government of Manitoba tendered a luncheon to the guests of honour at noon on Thursday, in the Fort Garry Hotel, to which were invited representatives of the Icelandic organizations in Winnipeg. Hon. George Johnson presided and on behalf of the Government made Bjarni Benediktsson a member of the Order of the Buffalo, and presented him with a desk size mounted buffalo.



Hon. Errick F. Willis Dr. Bjarni Benediktsson S. Aleck Thorarinson



Mrs. H. Bessason

Dr. Bjarni Benediktsson

Mrs. Gustaf Kristjanson

On Thursday afternoon an opportunity was provided for all people interested in meeting the Prime Minister to attend a reception tendered by the Government of Manitoba at the Legislative Building. Dr. George Johnson welcomed the visitors on behalf of the government. After the reception, at which tea was served, Dr. Benediktsson laid a wreath at the statue of Jon Sigurdson, which stands on the grounds outside the Legislative Building.

On Friday the Prime Minister's party left for visits to Edmonton,

Markerville, Alta. (the community where the noted poet, Stephan G. Stephansson lived), Banff and, eventually, Vancouver.

Reports on these visits will be added if in time for this issue.

On his way back Dr. Benediktsson accepted an invitation from the President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson to an informal visit at the White House.

Thus ended a most satisfying visit by the Prime Minister of Iceland to Western Canada.

Gustaf Kristjanson



THE LOFTY LOVE OF LAND

Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861)

Stephan G. Stephansson (1853-1927)

Hjálmar Jónsson (1796-1875)

What distinguishes the world poet from others, though of skill and power of expression, is that the ideals he feels and fights for are universal. The object of his love, in itself, is not all important. With mastery of phrase he weaves his ideals into the poem so that it grips the one who reads and brings out the best within, which otherwise might have remained dormant.

When the universal poet selects love of land as the means through which he gives expression to those ideals he rises above the commonplace, above what the word patriotism connotes. The land he loves is lifted above anything mundane. It, in turn, becomes an ideal upon which is lavished the finest within the poet's soul.

Actual locale loses significance; the poet carries his ideal with him wherever he is destined to go. His path may lead to ease or penury; it may lead to the confinement of prison walls.

The acts of those who rule or dwell within that land are measured only in their effect upon his ideal. Whether what they do hurts or provides comfort to the poet himself is of little moment. But if what they do mars that ideal the curses of the poet are reeked upon them.

Universal poetry is not confined to love of land. But it is appropriate at

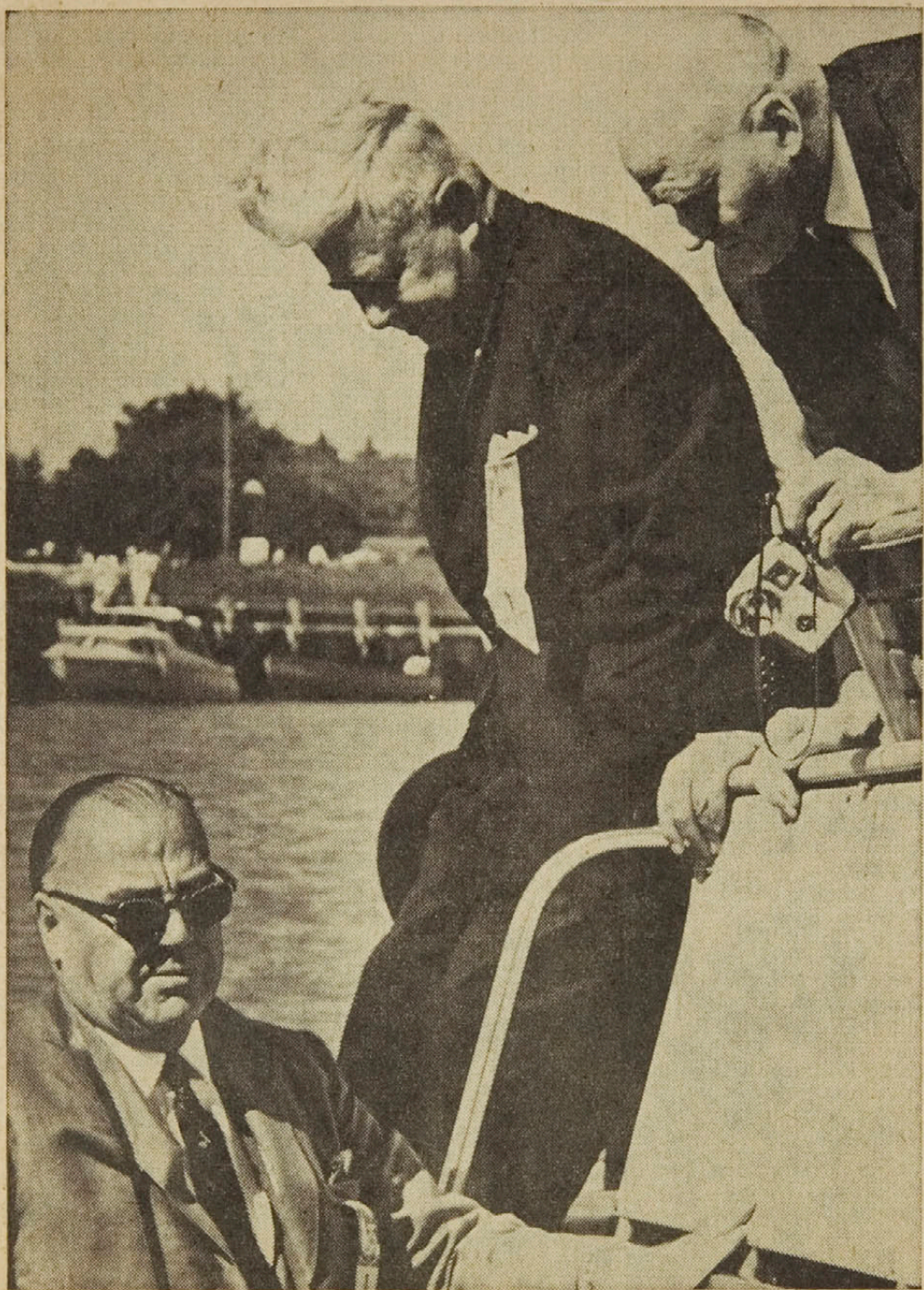
this time to pause for a moment and turn to a universal poet whose ideals oft have found expression in the love of land in its loftiest form. This year happens to be the 150th anniversary of the birth of Ukraine's world poet, Taras Shevchenko.

Two poems from Shevchenko are selected as they appear in "The Ukrainian Poets" by Andrusyshen and Kirkconnell. Both poems logically follow that little gem "An Evening" describing a cottage beside a cherry grove in the Ukraine. The translators repeat that it has been said that if Shevchenko had written nothing else, it would have made his fame.

Two other poets are selected to illustrate the universality of the ideals which find expression in love of land in its purest form. One is Stephan G. Stephansson, a Canadian poet "in the foothills of the Rockies" recognized as one of Canada's "top rank poets". The other is Hjálmar Jónsson, a bard of Northern Iceland.

Wherever Shevchenko may physically have been his Ukraine was always with him, always as beautiful as he painted it in "An Evening". Very fittingly the word picture is followed by a poem the translators have entitled "It is Indifferent".* Far away his Ukraine is present.

* In "The Poetical Works of Taras Shevchenko", just out, the same translators use the title "It is all one to me indeed".



Disembarking (left to right) at Gimli are G. L. Johannson, Icelandic consul, Dr. Benediktsson, and member of Parliament Eric Stefanson.



Members of Winnipeg's Icelandic community greet Iceland's prime minister Dr. Bjarni Benediktsson (centre) and his wife (left) after they arrived

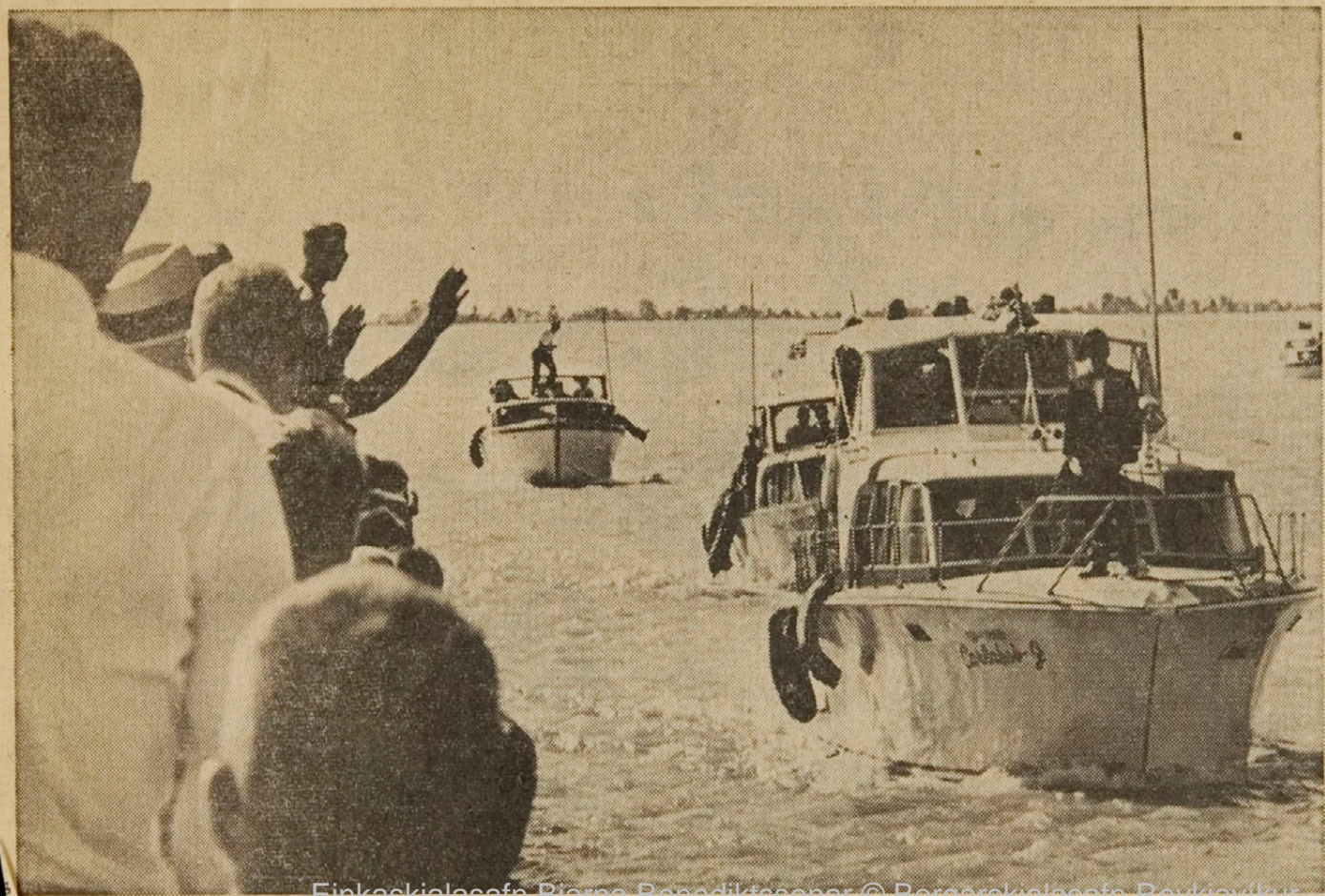
at Winnipeg International Airport Saturday evening. In the background with dark-rimmed glasses is Iceland's consul in Manitoba, Grettir Leo Johannson.



Distinguished visitors to Manitoba

This week the Icelandic communities of Manitoba are welcoming to a number of special events the Prime Minister of Iceland, Dr. Bjarni Benediktsson who arrived in Winnipeg Saturday with Mrs. Benediktsson and their son Eijorn Bjarnason. They are guests at Government House of His Honor the Lieutenant Governor, Errick F. Willis and Mrs. Willis. Pictured there on their arrival are from

left, Mrs. Willis, His Honor, Mrs. Benediktsson, minister of education Dr. George Johnson and Prime Minister Benediktsson. Tours of the city and environs, a river trip to Gimli for national celebrations, trips to several towns, receptions and dinners are on the schedule of activities for the visitors prior to their departure Friday, for Edmonton.



Einkækkjalesafi Þjórni Benediktssonar © Þorgarækjalesafi Reykjavíkur

Iceland's prime minister arrives at Gimli by water, escorted by flotilla of yachts.

1. Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson of Iceland (center) is greeted by President Lyndon B. Johnson when he arrives at the White House August 18. Ambassador of Iceland to the United States Thor Thors is at the left. The Icelandic Prime Minister paid a one-day visit to Washington.

2. President Lyndon B. Johnson accompanies Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson on a tour of the White House grounds after his arrival August 18 for a visit with the President. Newsmen follow the two dignitaries.

3. Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson of Iceland is greeted by U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk (left) after his arrival August 18 at the Department of State for a conference with the Secretary.

4. Prime Minister Bjarni Benediktsson of Iceland stands at attention after placing a wreath at the grave of the late President John F. Kennedy August 18 in Arlington National Cemetery. Major General Frank W. Norris, Director of Army Programs, Office of the Chief of Staff, U. S. Army is at the Prime Minister's left. Ambassador of Iceland to the United States Thor Thors is at the Prime Minister's right.

BANQUET

IN HONOR OF

DR. BJARNI BENEDIKTSSON
PRIME MINISTER OF ICELAND

AND

MRS. BENEDIKTSSON

SPONSORED BY

ICELANDIC CELEBRATION COMMITTEE



AUGUST FIFTH, NINETEEN HUNDRED AND SIXTY-FOUR

INTERNATIONAL INN

PROGRAMME

BYNIGHT

M E N U

ICED FRUIT CUP

ROLLS and BUTTER

INDIVIDUAL TOSSED SALAD

ROAST TURKEY SAVORY DRESSING

CRANBERRY SAUCE

CREAMED POTATOES

BROCCOLI

STRAWBERRY TORTE

BEVERAGE

PROGRAMME

O CANADA

Ó GUÐ VORS LANDS

INVOCATION

Rev. Valdimar J. Eylands, D.D.

DINNER

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Chairman, Mr. S. Aleck Thorarinson

GREETINGS:

JON SIGURDSSON CHAPTER I.O.D.E.

Mrs. Hólmfríður Danielson

LÖGBERG HEIMSKRINGLA

Mrs. Ingibjörg Jónsson

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

Rev. Valdimar J. Eylands, D.D.

BETEL HOME FOUNDATION

Mr. Grettir Eggertson

CANADA ICELAND FOUNDATION

Dr. P. H. T. Thorlakson

ICELANDIC CANADIAN MAGAZINE

His Honor Walter J. Lindal

GREETINGS:

DEPARTMENT OF ICELANDIC
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Professor Haraldur Bessason

ICELANDIC CANADIAN CLUB

Mr. William H. Finnbogason

ICELANDIC NATIONAL LEAGUE
FIRST FEDERATED CHURCH

Rev. Philip M. Petursson

CITY OF WINNIPEG

His Worship Mayor Stephen Juba

GOVERNMENT OF MANITOBA

Hon. George Johnson

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Hon. Wm. M. Benidickson

ADDRESS

His Honor Errick F. Willis, Q.C.

PRESENTATION

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS OF HONOR

Consul Grettir L. Johannson

ADDRESS

Dr. Bjarni Benediktsson

PRESENTATION

Mr. Eric Stefanson, M.P.

Head Table Guests

DR. BJARNI BENEDIKTSSON Prime Minister of Iceland	MRS. BENEDIKTSSON
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