

Grund and Bru — Two Most Enchanting Districts

Icelanders Played Major Part In Growth and Development

The Grund and Bru in the Municipality of Argyle are enchanting little districts covering an area of approximately 2 townships. They do not lack in historical interest. The founding and settling of this land was mainly due to the work of a pioneer who played a great part in the growth and development of the country, namely Sigurdur Christopherson, a member of the Icelandic delegation that came to Manitoba in 1874 to select a suitable location for the Icelandic colony. First in New Iceland, now Gimli, and then to Argyle in 1880. He named his farm Grund meaning flat country. "Bru" was the name given to Jon Olafsson farm meaning bridge. The successive Icelandic settlers came to this country empty handed but they were hearty, congenial and enthusiastic workers and adhered to a policy of strict economy.

On account of the floods at Gimli and district during the years 1878-79 and 1880 farmers were unable to obtain enough food for their stock. Many to drive their stock to other districts to be fed during the winter.

In July 1880 Christian Johnson and Sigurdur Christopherson set out try and find a more favorable place for the Icelanders to continue farming This was in a southerly direction where we have now the Municipality of Argyle. The reason for this was that Mr. Everett Parsonage who had lived in New Iceland and had moved to southern Manitoba, had written these men about the promising land.

These two men travelled by row boat to Winnipeg and by steam boat to Nelsonville, where the closest land office was. From there they walked to Pilot Mound, home of their friend Mr. Parsonage. It took them three days, sleeping outdoors and camping the best they could.

These three men ventured out in search of suitable land, heading north to 6-13-14 until they came to Oak Creek. There Mr. Playfair was building his first home. They followed Oak Creek to the district we now call Bru.

No buildings were seen, but a tent in the distance on the west side of the creek indicated a little life. This tent was occupied by Messrs Parry and Alf Esplin who had just located on suitable land on 20-6-13. From there they travelled west to 12-6-14 and camped where Helgasons now live. Mr. Parsonage rode his pony south to the hill, (west from the Lutheran Church), turned around and galloped his horse back and told his comrades he had found paradise. Immediately four or five sections were picked out.

They returned to Nelsonville and Mr. Christopherson filed on E 10-6-14, bought a scythe and snath, came back and put up hay, living with Esplin. Kris Johnson decided to go to North Dakota in case he could make a better stake there, but returned and filed on 12-6-14. On Sept. 25th.1880, Skafti Arason, William Taylor F. Frederickson and Halldor Arnason filed on land.

About March 15th, 1881, Mr. S. Arason, wife and two small children, Mr Skuli Arnason with "wife and three children", along with G. Nordman and Sig Christopherson left Gimli for their new homesteads. They had built small cabins on their sleighs which was an added comfort. These sleighs were drawn by oxen. A few cattle were brought with them to start the ball rolling. It was a happy day to arrive at Esplin's on March 31st after travelling for two weeks in very cold and stormy weather. They camped close to Christopherson's hay until the weather turned milder. Now the building began. They pulled out their axes, hammers and nails and built log houses. Later that spring, Mrs. Christopherson with two children, Mr. and Mrs. Hearn, Mr. Halldor Arnason and Mr. Thorstein Johnson, B. Josephson moved to this land of opportunity. This meant that eight families had nestled in this district, prepared to work hard for a comfortable home. Little were they aware of the hardship and struggle ahead of them. These eight families, however, had their land ready for a crop, their homes and stables built and plenty of hay by the latter part of 1881 and looked forward with high hopes to a fine crop the following year.

In 1882 many more settlers came in from the Gimli district and settled on land. Mr. Jones, Mr. Card and Mr. Dale, three successful homesteaders arrived. The settlers broke more land, increased their stock and added to their buildings. The outlook was good as the Municipality of Argyle was formed.

Many Icelanders arrived direct from Iceland in 1883 with practically nothing. Most of them living with friends that winter and building homes. This same year a post office was opened at Grund with Christopherson as post master, the mail carrier from Millford and later from Stockton; also a small store. Up till this time groceries and supplies were bought at Millford near where Treesbank is now located.

Education and religion were established at almost the very commencement of the farming operations. In 1884 the Heckla school was built on 16-6-14. The school district was 12 miles square. The first trustees were Alex Card, Evan Jones and Christjan Johnson. School opened in the spring with Mr. James Dale as the first teacher who taught two terms. The following successive teachers were Miss Campbell from Brandon, Miss Touchburn, Brandon, Mr. Alex MacKenzie, Thomas H. Johnson - later Attorney-General of Manitoba, Miss Johnson, (now Mrs. Magnus Paul in Winnipeg) and Olafas Bjornson later Dr. Bjornson of Winnipeg.

School was open during the summer only until 1889. After that it was open the year around and very well attended by adults as well as children, having an enrollment of 120 in that year. The children sat abreast listening to lectures, on door steps with slates on their laps and on the woodpile with their readers. In time some of these left for higher education. Haroldur Sigmar, Sig Christopherson, Mrs. Lindal, Bru Halgrimson and Rosa Christopherson finished off at Wesley College. Several graduated from Agricultural College. Honorable Thomas H. Johnson became the Attorney General for Manitoba; Rev. B. B. Johnson, Bru, minister of the First Lutheran for many years.

The Bru School was completed in the spring of 1884 with trustees as: follows: Harvey Hays, Harolder Anderson, Bjorn Johnson.

Religion was encouraged. In January 1884 a meeting was held in Bjorn Sigvaldasonars and the congregation was called "Frekirkjusofnudur", referred to as Bru Church. In October 1884 Rev. Jon Bjarnason preached the first sermon and started ministers work. In 1885 this congregation was divided in to two sets. The second was called "Frelsissofnudur", the Grund Church. This went on till 1890.

Rev. J. Bjarnason wrote to Iceland for another minister. In 1888 a letter came from the Theology school in Iceland recommending a minister. Rev Hafstein Petursson was accepted as the first minister for the Lutheran church for Argyle. He came late in 1889 to Winnipeg, was ordained in February 1890, and came to Argyle for four years. In June 1893, he resigned and went to Winnipeg. The Lutherans were without a minister for three years. They tried to get one from Iceland, suggested Arna Jonsson from Thingeyjarsyslu but could not get him. Then they called on Thorkel Sigardsson who had just graduated from Theology School in Philadelphia. He came to North Dakota and was ordained in 1895, took sick and died before reaching Argyle. In 1896 they called Jon Jonsson Clemens from Chicago and he came and preached for several years. In 1896 a church was built for both congregations and officially opened in the summer of 1896. In

1898 the minister organized Young People's Society called the

"Luther League." The ladies of the Lutheran church organized a Ladies Aid and are worthy of great praise for the splendid work they have done for the sick and poor.

The first Methodist minister. Rev. Hoskin, from Baldur came out to preach at Heckla school, which is now Victoria Church in 1884. Those succeeding him were Mr. Gourd, Rev. Wilson. Rev. Darwin, Rev. Waggel, who stayed five years, and Rev. Joslyn. After that ministers from Glenboro preached, namely. Rev. Spence and then Rev. Twayer.

The first picnic in the district took place in 1884 at Jones's Lake. Baldwin Benedickson entertained at stilts Sigurjon Snydal shone in the ox race, and talk about swinging the ladies with their hoop skirts and peak-a-

boo hats under the oak trees; Albert and George Cramer shone there, as well as Hossy and Joe Josephson. Albert Cramer, the popular ladies' man, came to this picnic in a brand ne wagon. Bjorn Anderson remembers escorting his 'water-loo' home hand in hand along the prairie road picking and saying it with flowers. Other sports were baseball, a club had been formed in Heckia School and bicycle riding was popular. The first bicycle road race was won by Siggi Sigmars.

One Sunday at Grund, 125 bicycles were counted. The first bicycle was brought to the district by Frank Flatt, a teacher at Heckla and sold it to Jack Dale in 1886. Knitting was popular, at least at Baldwin Benedictson's wedding. A mitt partly knitted was found lying on hand and picked up spasmodically and knitted by Kris Johnson, Eyolver Snyder, and Joe Sigurdson and Joel Cobb, and before the party was over the mitt was two feet long. Some of Sigurdur Antonius friends sponsored him for the Marathon Race in Winnipeg and he came back with \$50.00 for walking 132 miles in 24 hours in hard leather boots.

After the Municipality of Argyle was formed in 1882 the representatives on the Council Board of Old Argyle were S. Christopherson, C. Johnson, Skafti Arason, Fribjorn Fredrickson and Ami Sveinson.

When the Municipality was changed the successive councillors for

Wards 5:

Bjorn Anderson
Thomas Yoe
Albert Oliver
G. Nordman Jr.
H. Stefanson
Wm. Gudnason
G. Sveinson

Ward 6 were:

Joseph Cobb
Olgeir Fredrickson
Peter Goodman
W. C. Christopherson

In the year of the Red River Rebellion in 1885 the pioneers kept their old shotguns loaded and their battleaxes sharpened in the houses ready for emergencies. There was a young lad started off in March walking, expecting to go with a battalion from Winnipeg. After walking about 15 miles a terrific blizzard started, which lasted for three days and the boy was forced to return, disappointed. It was a great relief when the battle was over.

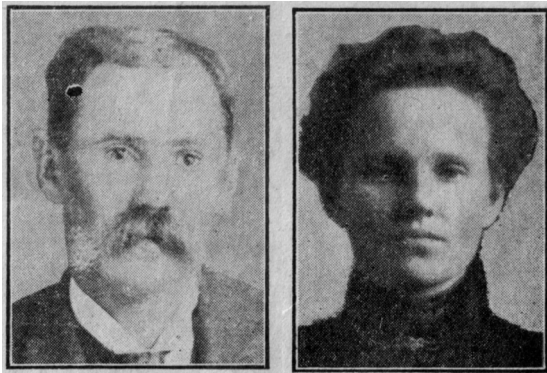
This same year there was great activity in the settlement. The railway was built west as far as Holland so it was quite convenient in comparison to get supplies, new machinery was bought and a lot of land brought under cultivation. Those with binders cut neighbors crops. Allan Card with his horse-power threshing machine did custom work. In 1889 the railroad was built on the south side of the Tiger Hills from Morris to Brandon. Business flourished. People bought more machinery, traded oxen for horses, broke and bought more land, raised more stock and even an Icelandic ponies and sheep appear o the scene, believed to have belonged to Sig. Christopherson. Progress continued until the outbreak of The Great War.

These pioneers experienced all the hardships and difficulties common to the absence of railway and market facilities. In no ways daunted by energy, industry and indomitable will to surmount, all obstacles, they have achieved an unparalleled success, a success that is an instance of what can be accomplished in the Great West

HOMESTEADS OF THE FIRST PIONEERS IN GRUND AND BRU

2-6-14; SE E. J. Snyder, NE Helgi Thorsteinson, SW Baldwin Benidickson, NW Benedikt Gudlaugrur
 4-6-14: SH Evan Jones, NH James Dale
 6-6-14: SE Joseph Davidson, SW Benoni Gudmonson, NW Hernet Christopherson, NE Jon Jonson
 10-6-14 : WH John Badger, EH S. Christopherson
 12-6-14 : SW Christian Johnson, NW Sigurjon Snyder, NE Johannes Sigurdson, SE Christian Sigurdson
 14-6-14; EH Wm. Hearn, NW Johann Johannson, SW Kristen Stefanson
 16-6-14; SE Ami Sveinson, SW Bjorn Josephson, NH James McNichol
 17-6-14; EH A. K. Card, WH A. W. Card
 18-6-14; NH Hough McNichol, SW Samuel Madas, SE John Hamilton
 20-6-14; SH Thomas Hill, NH Edward Blain
 22-6-14: SW P. G. Nordal, SE Magnus Goodman NW Oljeir Fredrickson NE F. S. Fredrickson
 23-6-14; EH John Goodman
 24-6-14; SW Benidikt Einarson SE Johannes Strang Skafti Arason NE Gudney Aradottir
 26-6-14; NH Ami Axford
 28-6-14; NE Fredick Jonson, SE Sigmar Jonson, SW Christian Sigurdson, NW Jacob Helgason
 30-6-14; SE Jonas Jonson. NE John Thofdarson NW Bjorn Anderson
 32-6-14; SW Steve Christie, NH Mr. Gowanlock
 33-6-14; NW Mr. Ward
 EH Mr. Moore,
 34-6-14; NW Mr. Ward, EH Mr. Moore
 34-6-14; NW Mr. McKenzie NE John Dowd, SE Thorkel Erickson
 36-6-14; Wm. Thompson

An able article appeared in the Baldur Gazette in the year 1902 on Iceland and its people and I give one quotation, which may be of special interest to some of the readers. The writer says that, "The Icelanders are staunch Protestants and the most loyal, innocent pureminded people in the world. Crime, theft, debauchery and cruelty are almost unknown among them, and as a people they are lovable and hospitable."



Mr. and Mrs. Christian Johnson and wife.

Mr. and Mrs. Christian Johnson served as Reeve of Argyle from 1896 – 1898 and 1910 – 1918. *See correction on Page 8