

## ICELANDIC LITERARY SOCIETY

### "BOKMENTAFELAG ISLENDINGA i ARGYLE"

*("Acquisition of knowledge through books" club)*

"Bokmentafelag Islands", was an organization apparently begun by the first Icelandic settlers in Argyle Municipality, and which eventually died out. At a meeting on Jan. 8, 1893, at Einar Sigvaldason's home, a new organization was established, using the few books left by the original club, to start the new library. They took the old name for a time, then in 1895, called itself "Lestrafelag Islendinga i Argyle". The following was taken from the April 25, 1901, Baldur Gazette and explains fully the aims of the club:

#### "Island Society"

It has been the privilege of the Gazette to come into touch with the above society quite recently, and to glean considerable information of an interesting nature in connection with its founding, objects and workings. The Island Society was established in the year 1893, at Grund with seven members. The object of its promoters was a most worthy one - the supplying of literature to those who might not otherwise be in a position to procure it, and thus tend to educate and elevate all, by the perusal of the highest classes of literature. From its commencement, the society has met with marked success and in 1896, they built what is commonly known as the Grund Hall, in Icelandic, 'Skjalbreid'. Other help was of course given the society, though today they own the largest share of the building in which their library is kept. The library is open every Saturday from November 1, until the last of April, from 12 to 4 o'clock, for the changing and procuring of books. In regard to the method of purchasing and choosing books for their library, a committee is appointed that only wholesome and healthy reading may be procured. The whole list is made up chiefly of works of standard authors and dramatic works - Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish, and English, a goodly sprinkling of the latter being noticeable, such as Scott, Drummond, Haggard, Bunyan, and Shakespeare and others.

The society at present time have about 400 volumes of works in the library, valued at \$600. They also carry \$100 insurance. Owing to the increasing size of the library, it was found necessary to have catalogues printed, 110 of the same having just been received by them from the Gazette Office. That the information of the society was a noble impulse, has been proven by the good it has done, as settlers were not in a position to purchase, and have made good use of it.

Its membership runs from 40 to 60 members. Gifts of books are sometimes made to the library, which are always acceptable, including works in English.

The officers from the present year are as follows: President - Sigurjon Christopherson, Secretary - G. Steffanson, Treasurer - P. Vigfusson. Honorary members are Rev. J.J. Clemens and the poet Sigurbjorn Johannson.

A few names of those who have been active workers and been chiefly instrumental in bringing the 'Island' Society to its present flourishing condition are Peter Christopherson,

Hosea Josephson, Jno. Sveinbjornson, Arni Johnson, H. Magnusson, S. Christopherson, Hernit Christopherson, Jno. Bjornson and E. Sigvaldason."

On Jan. 9, 1907, at a meeting at Sigurjon Christopherson's home in Baldur, it was decided to form a Baldur Branch of the club, to be called "Lestrafelag id Island". President Sigurjon Christopherson; Treasurer - Asmundur Asmundson; Secretary - A.T. Isberg; Librarian: Andress Helgason. Andress explained the division of books - half of the books from Skjalbreid (119) were brought into Baldur and kept at Andress's home until a permanent place could be found for them. In 1911, the Literary Society bought a building to be used as a library. The library spent its final years on the Lutheran church grounds.

Earlier, some of the best Icelandic books had been sold to a visiting gentleman from Iceland. He was a great lover of books as well as a publisher. He reproduced many of those books which might otherwise have been lost for all time. Today they are used in university libraries as reference books on the history of Icelanders and particularly those in North America.

In 1968, the remaining books were sold. Some of these, along with private libraries, have been donated to the University of Manitoba as well as the University of Victoria, B.C. The small building was sold and the money from these sales was turned over to Immanuel Lutheran Church.