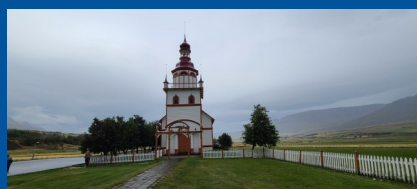




# Connect

*INLUS is 4 Years Old!* Fall 2023



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Connect newsletter welcomes your submissions!

Send your news, ideas, photos, and articles to:

[info@inlus.org](mailto:info@inlus.org)

Connect newsletter is published quarterly.

## Celebrating Iceland

By Dianne O'Konski, INLUS President

Summer gets shorter every year. Hopefully you spent some time celebrating your Icelandic heritage or interest in Iceland. I was able to attend three Midwest celebrations and had a great time at all.

June 17, 2023 was not only Iceland's Independence Day, but it was also the date of the **2nd Annual Nordic Midsummer Festival** in Burnsville, MN. The Icelandic Hekla Club, authors Gay and Tracy Strandemo, and the INLUS had tables offering lots of information about the clubs and the Minnesota Icelandic community. Gay had a good day selling her books as well. It was a wonderful family-friendly day with a Viking encampment, music, Nordic food, and many vendors. ([www.nordicmidsummerfest.com](http://www.nordicmidsummerfest.com))

The very next weekend was the **Scandinavian Festival** in Moorhead, MN. This was the first get-together since 2019 and the crowds turned out! Iceland was the featured Nordic country, and it was well represented. Author Heidi Herman gave three presentations each day and classical pianist Dr. Kristín Jónína Taylor provided two concerts each day. There were many interesting presentations, vendors, and lots of great food! ([www.nordiccultureclubs.com](http://www.nordiccultureclubs.com))

The 124th **Deuce of August** was held in tiny Mountain, North Dakota August 4-6. This celebration marks the date that Iceland received a new constitution from Denmark which marked a step forward towards independence. The town grows from a population of less than 100 to several thousand during the event.

This year, 97 Icelanders attended as well, with many participating in the parade and the Heritage Program on Saturday. ([www.thedeuce.org](http://www.thedeuce.org))

It is mid-August as I write this. September 8-10, Minneota, MN celebrated **Box Elder Bug Days**. This year will include a celebration of native son, essayist, and poet Bill Holm. Bill would have turned 80 this year and some friends are going to make sure he has a celebration. "Bug Days" is a true small-town celebration with a craft fair, local talent, and catching up with your old friends. ([www.boxelderbugdays.com](http://www.boxelderbugdays.com))

Lastly, the INLUS celebrates its fourth year anniversary, and we are gearing up our fall and winter programming to celebrate.

Let us know how you spent your summer! Did you witness the latest volcanic eruption in Iceland? Drop us a line at [info@INLUS.org](mailto:info@INLUS.org).

## 2023 Snorri Program

The Icelandic National League of the United States (INLUS) awarded the four United States Snorri participants a scholarship to help cover their costs for the five week Snorri program in Iceland. Upon return, they share their experiences in the program.

To learn more about the Snorri Programs visit their website at:

[Home | Snorri Programs](#)

## Embracing My Icelandic Heritage

By Jared Hanson

It was 7:00am in the *Keflavík* airport and I had slept just 30 minutes during the flight. Getting off the plane from Minneapolis, I walked with my new friends, Tor, and Julia, towards customs, where we ran into some familiar faces we had only seen over Zoom. Our Snorri Group was finally together in person, and we were all awake from excitement. I was slightly nervous embarking on a five-week trip with fourteen people I had never met, but those nerves swiftly dissipated in that once we were all together. We were in for an amazing adventure.

The first days in *Reykjavík* were dreamlike. We had begun our Icelandic language classes, met the President of Iceland, *Guðni Th. Jóhannesson*, at his home, *Bessastaðir*, toured parliament, had a BBQ at the Canadian Ambassador's home, and explored many other parts of downtown *Reykjavík*. Without the sun ever setting, the first stretch felt like just one day, yet I felt like I had known the fellow Snorris for weeks.

In *Reykjavík*, we continued to practice the language and learned so much about Iceland's history through our time spent at the Museums and with the cultural lectures we had at the university. Additionally, we were able to enjoy local pools, relax in the Blue Lagoon, discover new coffee shops, and I was even lucky enough to experience an Icelandic National Team Football game as they played Portugal. No time was wasted in *Reykjavík*, and suddenly it was time to head to our homestays.

I stayed in *Dalvík*, a town of 1,200 people thirty minutes north of *Akureyri*, with my distant cousin *Villi* and his wife *Lilja*. They welcomed me into their home and treated me like I was their son right from the start. *Villi* and *Lilja* are very active people, and they know every inch of the town and the surrounding area. They made sure I ate as much authentic Icelandic food as possible, including some delicious *Hákarl* (fermented shark), and explored as much of the area as I could in my limited time. I was in the perfect home.

*Dalvík* has some great hiking paths and views of the fjord, and many places that my cousin *Villi* calls "thinking spots." Many of these spots are up in the mountains where you can be all alone with nature and spectacular views. My favorite two thinking spots are called "*Muli*," which is a cliff overlooking *Eyjafjörður*, and "*Kofi*," a cabin located between a couple of mountains



Jared Hanson experiences the Midnight Sun at Muli in Dalvík.

**Continued from previous page:** behind the town of Dalvík. Muli is elevated into the mountains with a view of the never-ending ocean, making it a great place to experience the midnight sun, as well as the perfect thinking spot. Kofi is a tranquil hike through the towering mountains behind town. The only sounds are the river running down and between the mountains, with the occasional sheep walking by to say hello.

Other highlights from my time in Dalvík include a trip to *Grímsey*, an Island in the arctic circle with thousands of puffins, riding Icelandic horses, whale watching, venturing to Mývatn and exploring the surrounding geothermal area, and spending precious time with all of my Dalvík cousins. My time there was remarkable, and I am glad to have a welcoming family there for when I return.

Next, I was bound to stay with my relatives back in Reykjavík for my fourth week. There I was staying with my 23-year-old cousin, *Geir*, and his father, *Aðalsteinn*. I spent the week working with Geir at *Heiðmork*, a park that he works at during his time off from school. This gave Geir and I a lot of time to get to know each other and we quickly formed a strong connection. We shortly found commonalities and ways to make each other laugh as we hauled gravel during the day.

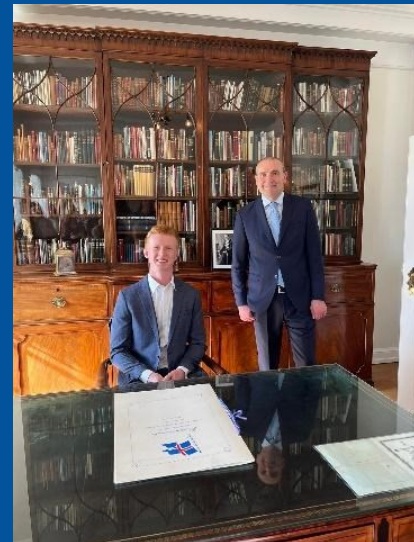
During the week I was able to meet with my other Reykjavík relatives, eat some fantastic Icelandic dinners, and go out on the town with Geir and his buddies. I feel so lucky to have met so many great people in both Dalvík and Reykjavík. Being able to develop relationships with distant family is such a privilege.

The fifth and final week was bittersweet, as we knew our time in Iceland would soon be over. It was great to be back with the Snorri group so we could share all our homestay experiences and enjoy our group adventure tour. The adventure tour included many beautiful experiences, including one unexpected visit to the land where my great grandfather lived prior to moving to North America in 1902.

We arrived back in Reykjavík for our final night as a group and celebrated our Snorri experience. We reflected on our time together and shared our favorite moments from the previous five weeks. It was amazing to see how much this experience had impacted everyone in different ways, and how close we had become as a group.

The Snorri Program curated the perfect opportunity for me to completely immerse myself in the Icelandic experience. I was also blessed with fourteen incredible Icelandic cousins to experience Iceland with. During those five weeks, Iceland felt like home. I cannot wait to go back.

I am so thankful for the once in a lifetime opportunity to strengthen my connection with my Icelandic heritage. I would like to give my appreciation to the people at INLUS and the Snorri Program for making this all possible. *Takk fyrir.*



Jared Hanson meets Iceland President Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, at Bessastaðir.



Icelandic Roots volunteers and residents of Seyðisfjörður on September 3, 2023.

They are celebrating the first installation of four monuments across Iceland honoring Icelandic emigration ports and the people who left from them and the people who remained in Iceland.

## Icelandic Roots Celebrates 10 Years

Icelandic Roots is an Icelandic Organization member of the INLUS. It is a non-profit charitable organization whose mission is to educate, preserve, and promote Icelandic heritage. The organization's main service is its genealogical database of over 790,000 individual records of Icelanders from the settlement period to today. Icelandic Roots also provides a broad array of online social interaction opportunities for its members and the general public. The website is [www.icelandicroots.com](http://www.icelandicroots.com)

By Rob Olason

Ten years ago, on November 12, 2013, Icelandic Roots began operations as an online database of Icelandic genealogy. Sunna Furstenau, Icelandic Roots president and creator of the organization, received the paperwork recognizing the organization as a non-profit, charitable organization.

While the newly declared non-profit status meant the work of Icelandic Roots could officially begin, the prime component of its education mandate, the Icelandic genealogy database, had been developed over the previous two decades in Iceland by Icelandic genealogist, Halfdan Helgason.

Sunna and Halfdan had been collaborating on the database, which had a unique focus on the Western Icelanders component of the Icelandic family tree. North American genealogists including George Freeman, Kristy Marton, Cathy Josephson, Russ and Gwen Lanoway, Dr. Stefan Paul Guttormsson, and many others had also been contributing their research efforts to help build the database.

By 2012, Halfdan felt the management of the database was becoming too much for one person to handle, so he talked to Sunna about her interest in taking on the task. They eventually agreed on terms and Sunna went to work getting the legal paperwork completed. She also started planning out how to run this new non-profit organization with an all-volunteer staff, because given her budget, Icelandic Roots could only survive if it was an all-volunteer staff.

Reflecting on the first ten years, Sunna admitted the first few years were very challenging: managing the database was just as Halfdan described—too much for one person. Add to that coordinating the workflow of the volunteer genealogists, plus recruiting new volunteers, plus constantly promoting the new organization by getting the word out online, in print and in person—and it was clear that she was juggling several full-time jobs.

And there was something else as well. One of her “office manager” tasks was answering the incoming email, which amounted to hundreds of emails daily. The daily volume continued to grow as people wanted to learn more about Icelandic Roots, to become subscribers, or seek help with their own family tree concerns.

As overwhelming as this was, some promising trends were developing. The genealogists were progressively improving and expanding the database, more people were subscribing and many of these new members were offering to help as new volunteers.



One of these new members/volunteers was Dave Jonasson, who had just retired from an IT career. He had suggestions for improving user search functions. He was willing to create samples to test. During the development process he and Sunna would meet to discuss progress of this project.

At one of their meetings Sunna told Dave that many of her days were taken up answering all the incoming emails. Dave offered a suggestion: create a shared email box and all the genealogists could take turns monitoring emails.

Sunna liked the plan and Dave added the shared email box, and the genealogists took turns answering emails and the workload smoothed out.

The organization began to grow and by 2017 programing began to mushroom. Volunteers would make suggestions to Sunna about new projects Icelandic Roots could take on. Sunna would respond "that sounds great, and I support you as you create it!" Sunna attributes the success of Icelandic Roots not only to the daily work of its volunteers, but also to the ideas the volunteers have to improve what Icelandic Roots could be doing for its members.

Icelandic Roots began its tenth year in typical fashion with weekly newsletters, podcasts, webinars, social media posts scheduled and delivered like clockwork. More unique offerings also appeared: a memoir writing workshop, a new monthly program to help database users, Sunna created a photo exhibit for the Rourke Museum in conjunction with the Scandinavian Festival in Moorhead, Minnesota. Icelandic Roots also created a pop-up genealogy center with access to the database at the Icelandic League of North America convention in Banff, Alberta. Icelandic Roots also staffed genealogy centers at the Deuce of August in Mountain, North Dakota and *Íslendingadagurinn* celebration in Gimli, Manitoba. Before the anniversary year is over a children's book about growing up in Iceland called "Mundi-Boy of Iceland's Westfjords" by Bryndís Víglundsdóttir, will be released.

The biggest project for the tenth anniversary celebration was the plan to create a journey to Iceland to dedicate four monuments in four of the emigrant ports of Iceland. The monuments honor those communities and their residents who left for America and those who remained, for the historic roles they played. The project took two years to plan and grew in scope to include planting heritage trees and donating \$500 to each port city to create a park like setting around the monuments.

Ultimately twenty-five volunteers bought their airline tickets and the tour package that propelled the group on a ring road tour, stopping at the port sites to dedicate the monuments along with the planting of some of the trees at the dedication sites. They also took in many of the important Icelandic sites of history as well as the beauty of the Icelandic lands and seascapes.

One of the biggest benefits of this journey was in solidifying connections between the Icelanders who attended the dedication ceremonies and the Western Icelanders who joined them. Many conversations were carried out over a cup of kaffi and a kleinur and pönnukökur, or two. And in the process accomplished one of Icelandic Roots mission goals: to build connections between the two groups. **Story Continues on page 6.**



Icelandic Roots volunteers meet the First Lady of Iceland, Eliza Reid at Bessastaðir, Sept. 1, 2023.

**Continued from page 5:** The first ten years saw phenomenal growth and innovations that led the organization to exceed its goals to educate, preserve and promote Icelandic heritage. Icelandic Roots has developed into a community that not only supports those goals, but keeps developing new pathways to engage its members and the public in celebrating all things Icelandic.

What will Icelandic Roots accomplish in its next decade? If the past is prelude, innovations will continue to drive the Icelandic Roots volunteers to find new directions to take the organization, and its growing membership will embrace the continuing journey.



Participants at the Borðeyri dedication on September 9, 2023

## Leif Eiriksson Icelandic Club of Calgary 's Fall Feast Oct. 14

The LEIC club celebrates Iceland's fall round-up of the highland sheep and horses, which is a festive affair in Iceland, with one of their own.



The Fall Feast evening features a hearty meal at 6 pm on Saturday, October 14, followed by a presentation from the 2023 Snorri participants. Everyone is welcome so if you are in the Calgary area, this is a great opportunity to meet some Western Icelanders and Iceland enthusiasts. You can find out more details or purchase tickets by going to the club website (<https://leicyyc.weebly.com/>) and filling out the contact form. The organizers will provide follow up details.

The club will also be hosting their Yuletide Celebration on Saturday, November 25.

Bob Baker, is retiring as club president. Bob thanks the nearly 200 participants of the INLNA Convention the club hosted in May in Banff, Alberta. Bob is working with Mark Petursson, who will take over the presidential duties after

the club's annual meeting in January.

# Icelandic Hekla Club Turns 99!

By Jody Arman-Jones



The Icelandic Hekla Club participated in the Nordic Midsummer Festival held on June 17, along with INLUS volunteer and author/illustrator Gay Strandemo, and publisher Tracy Wills. It was the second year of this event and was again, fun and very successful.

Hekla Club donated to Scan Fest in Moorhead, Minnesota at which Iceland was the highlighted country at the end of June. Our donation went to bringing Western Icelandic pianist, Dr. Kristin Jonina Taylor to the festival as the featured artist.

Over the summer a representative of Hekla Club met at Háskóli Íslands with the two incoming Val Bjornson scholars who will be attending the University of Minnesota for the current academic year. Our Club has been a big supporter of the Val Bjornson Icelandic Exchange Scholarship since the fund's inception in 1982.



We look forward to welcoming Hákon and Alexander to the Twin Cities and Club events. The University of Minnesota sent one student to the University of Iceland for this current academic year.

September marks the beginning of the organizational year for Hekla Club and we are excited to start our 99th year! Speakers are being scheduled for this year's membership meetings, and planning for special events, such as Jólábarnaball and Samkoma, are in process. Our 100th Anniversary Committee has been meeting for a couple years and ideas to celebrate in 2024 - 2025 are well underway thanks to our special committee and the creation of a dedicated fund for that purpose.

*Know of an event in your area that would be of interest to the INLUS community?*

*Send news, photos and stories to:*

[info@inlus.org](mailto:info@inlus.org)



# Icelandic Klub of Fargo–Moorhead Had a Busy Summer

By Susan Sigurdsson

On June 6, 2023 the club met to plan for the upcoming Scandinavian Festival at the end of June.

On Tuesday, June 20th, The Rourke Art Gallery presented The Icelandic Emigrant Journey Photography Exhibition, created and curated by Sunna Olafson Furstenau.



The story of Iceland spans centuries from the Viking settlement in 870 to the modern day of keeping our Icelandic story alive in North America. In this exhibition, gallery visitors were able to learn more about Iceland and the mass exodus to North America during the emigration years of 1870–1914. The exhibition focused on the Icelanders in Minnesota and North Dakota, and it was on display for one month. On opening day, Sunna Furstenau gave a presentation talking about the Icelandic immigration to North America; the Icelandic Klub of Fargo Moorhead sponsored appetizers for visitors.

On June 24 and 25, Iceland was the host country at the Scandinavian Festival at the Hjemkomst Center in Moorhead, MN. Dr. Kristín Jónína Taylor, guest artist, treated festival guests with music from all the Nordic countries; Dr. Taylor is an accomplished pianist and is a professor of music at the University of Nebraska. She spent some of her youth in Iceland, where her mother's family lives.

Heidi Herman presented programs daily on Icelandic Folklore. She had a reading and crafts about the Icelandic Yule Lads for 45 minutes both days. Sunna Furstenau presented programs on Icelandic Roots both days of the Festival.

The Icelandic Klub members kept busy serving Icelandic foods at the Taste of Scandinavia during the Festival. Popular choices were *rúllupylsa* or smoked salmon spread on Icelandic brown bread, *vínarterta* and *pónnukökur*. The funds raised at the Taste of Scandinavia are used for Student Scholarships and Snorri Scholarships sponsored by the Icelandic Klub.

The Icelandic Klub of FM gave three Snorri scholarships this year. The recipients were Jared John Hanson, Julia Marie Swanson, and Tor Kartenson.







## Looking at Runes

By Dianne O'Konski

The November 2022 speaker at the monthly Icelandic Hekla Club meeting was Loraine Jensen, President of the American Association of Runic Studies. After a very interesting presentation, she invited us to join her on a Rune Round in Denmark in 2023. I thought "Why not?".

Only about 50 runes have been discovered in Iceland while Sweden has the most discoveries (2500), but Denmark has the oldest discoveries (5<sup>th</sup> century). Runes are found in North America as well. A recent discovery in Idaho was dedicated to Thor; the stone's carver thoughtfully included the date – 2021!

Another much older discovery has been made in Canada and will be announced in the near future (I'm sworn to secrecy).

Regarding the tour, nineteen of us met in August in South Jutland, Denmark for a 4-day tour of the local area that included 17 runes.

A rune is a message carved using the Futhark alphabet. We studied runes carved on stone, whale bone, wood, metal, and even part of a human skull.

During those four days, we traveled across South Jutland from the entry to the Baltic Sea to the North Sea and points in between. Two professors from the University of Upsala in Sweden and one from the University of Copenhagen translated and educated us. It was a wonderful experience and I met interesting people.

I'm pretty sure that runes is not a subject I will be studying in depth, but learning more about the culture of the Viking Age was fascinating. The photo above is one of the Jelling stones in which King Haraldur Bluetooth honors his late father, King Gorm, and mother, þyrvé.

We will have an INLUS webinar on the subject of runes coming up this fall or winter, depending on availability of the speakers, so stay tuned!

# Secret Saga Debuts



By Rob Olason

Pacific Northwest writer/illustrator, Ögn Magnússon has just released a magical tale for kids young and old titled, "Secret Saga - How elves became magical and changed the world."



## Next Time...

In the next edition of *Connect* we will feature more reports from the 2023 Snorri participants.

We will also have more online webinars and other INLUS events to tell you about along with upcoming plans the local Icelandic clubs are creating for the winter season. So watch your inbox!

A talented illustrator, Magnússon decided to weave together a story that would capture her Icelandic heritage along with her lifelong fascination with Norse mythology and Viking artwork. Her intricate illustrations weave these elements into the story of *Nonni* and *Unn*, young Viking era elves who are fearful of all the dangers that surround them.

"One night, the beautiful goddess Freya offers to help the elves if they can prove their bravery." How they rise to the challenge leads them on a journey of discovery through this enchanting tale and in the process they help the humans discover a more peaceful way to live together.

Magnússon grew up in the Icelandic settler community of Point Roberts, Washington. She brings memories of the magic Icelandic world she learned about as a child and combines that perspective with her own experiences living among the sagas in Iceland as an adult.

Learn more about the book at [www.ognmagnusson.com](http://www.ognmagnusson.com)



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