

## ICELANDER'S EMIGRATION TO THE PACIFIC COAST

Point Roberts, Blaine, Bellingham and Marietta.

A new book in English translation featuring fascinating stories about Icelandic settlers in these four settlements is now available. The original stories in Icelandic were written by Margaret J. Benedictson, one of the first outstanding personalities that emigrated from Iceland. Born 1866 in the Northern part of Iceland she immigrated to the states in 1887 and lived in North Dakota where she married her husband Sigfús Benedictson. They together published the women's magazine, Freyja, for 12 years. They moved to Blaine in 1912 where she published the eight articles between 1925 and 1943 on the first Icelandic settlers. The original articles appeared in the Almanak, published in Winnipeg by O.S. Thorgeirsson.

Three students, in an Icelandic class in Seattle, Ted Beck, Baird Barðarson and Will Larson, and their teacher, Arna Garðarsdóttir, accepted the challenge of translating these articles. Icelanders that also contributed are Árni Magnússon and Sverrir Magnússon. Hulda Emils performed the outstanding service of editing the rough manuscript for publication. These translations will enable English-speaking Icelanders to finally read in English about their ancestor's travels, hardships and successes.

This book takes us through the first settler's travels in their search for a better life on a foreign ground, so far away from their own country. As you read the book you become filled with pride and awe of the courage it took for these people to not only survive but also take on the farming and business of these small towns on the Pacific Coast. They not only came to live but also took on the part of prosperously growing and building the community, giving the streets Icelandic names and putting their own imprint on the towns. Most came by way of Manitoba and North Dakota, some with stories to tell.

The first settlers came to Blaine in 1888 and started clearing for farms and worked in the factories, canning salmon. Originally the US Federal Government had not intended the isolated spit of Point Roberts to be settled but to accommodate a military base. Icelanders commenced settlement in 1893 and soon wrote petitions to Washington and successfully achieved private ownership. The main early industry was canning the abundant salmon that schooled past the spit. Industries in Bellingham employing Icelanders were lumber mills, canneries and shipping. Marietta was a smaller community supported by farming and fishing.

The trio that chose to take on the task of translating these historic tales bring the book alive in such a brilliant way that you understand why we must cherish and keep these stories alive. Today, with succeeding generations, the Icelandic language has for the most part been lost and descendants will thrill to the stories written in English of their ancestors. All in all the Icelandic pioneers prospered and many of their children went on to higher education. The 1990 census indicated that there are some 6000 Icelandic

descendents in Washington State along with newer Icelanders still emigrating from the old country, still making history.

A moving excerpt from the book: "...When Guðrun got there it was her intention to visit a woman friend who had a home in Gardar. She started out late in the day with the children who were six and eight. The conditions were bad. The way was completely covered with snow and slush. The people in Mountain begged her to wait until the next day but Guðrun didn't want to and said that she could make it in a day. The distance was said to be six miles. It is believed that dusk fell and she took the wrong path. She had asked her children to wait for her while she searched for the right way to the farm and cautioned them to go no farther until she came back for them, or someone else came to help. People believe she knew that her days were numbered and she died that night. The day after, a traveler reported that he had seen the alternate route they had taken. The children saw this man and called to him but were not heard. The next day a search party went out and found them all. Guðrun had died but the children who had followed their mother's advice and who had walked back and forth all night were alive and harmed little if at all....."

The book is fantastic! I for one am grateful that these stories were kept alive for all this time. It makes me want to know more and visit all the towns and places where these people lived and worked. I've always been proud of my ancestry but this book clearly underlines what we the Icelanders are made of. Today we still fight to be more and strive to better and grow our community as thus is our nature. Margaret was not only a pioneer she was a visionary and a person who fought for justice even in an unknown country. She writes about all these people with warmth and gentleness, although I think she must have been like so many Icelandic women that emigrated after her, strong, opinionated, industrious, well read and beautiful."

We are happy to announce the book can be bought by writing to:

The Icelandic Club of Greater Seattle  
c/o Sig Johnson  
654 W Olympic Pl. # 302  
Seattle, WA 98119.

Price is \$19.95 plus \$2.00 mailing within the US. For Canada: \$19.95 plus \$4.00 in US equivalent.

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