

## Markerville the Early Days



### Markerville c1910.

From left: creamery, hotel, G.E. Johnson's store, Benediktson's store, Fensala hall,

On the river bank: cheese factory.

Second row: Fonsi Sigurdson's blacksmith shop, Livery barn, Lutheran church, library, Methodist church. Other roof tops are private homes.

They left Iceland in 1873. First settling in Wisconsin, then North Dakota, twelve Icelandic families and three single men, 50 all told, moved north to Alberta to homestead along the Medicine River, on land that had previously been scouted for them. The year was 1888. The following spring, 1889, several more Icelanders from Pembina County N.D. came to the area, west of the Red Deer River that would eventually become Markerville. Among this group was the famous poet, Stephan G Stephansson who became a leader in this new settlement. Stephan was instrumental in organizing roads and bridges, schools, a post office and a library. He was also the treasurer for both the co-operatives that formed the Tindastoll Butter and Cheese Manufacturing Association and the Fensala Stock Company. 1917 in recognition of his talent, the Icelandic government received him as a guest. He was posthumously named poet Laureate of Iceland. He was further honoured in 1953 in Iceland, with his youngest daughter Rosa Benediktson unveiling a cenotaph in his memory. In later years Helga, his wife was honoured by the Icelandic government as "First Lady of Iceland."

The early settlers experienced many hardships but were strong of heart and stayed together, persevering even though they were over 100 miles from the nearest railroad with no roads or bridges between.

In 1891 the Ladies Aid "*Vonin*" was organized. Their endeavours greatly enhanced community living. Various activities including a tombola were held to raise money for *Christmas Gladenings* and other projects. .

In 1892 the first post office was established in Johann Bjornsson's home in the Tindastoll district. In 1907 it moved to Benediktson's store in Markerville.

It wasn't long before a cemetery was needed. In 1892 a plot was donated at Tindastoll, about 200 yards east of its present site. After heavy rain in 1900 and 1901 they moved to higher ground in 1903. Every summer families would get together for Cemetery Clean-up Day, everyone brought food to Albert and Phyllis Johannson's near-by home, all the adults went off with their scythes, rakes and trimmers and the children played. Everyone stopped for lunch and then back to work. For the kids – it was a picnic.

The Icelandic pioneers brought with them from the old country, a deep respect for and love of books and reading materials. In 1892, twenty-three men who raise \$20 to buy books and subscriptions to Lögberg and Heimskringla, formed The Literary Society of Iðunn. The books were kept at the Tindastoll post office where the men would meet, debate, read the newspapers and exchange library books. The library was moved to its own building in Markerville in 1907, becoming the first public library in the province.

Hola was the first school built on land donated by Stephan G. Stephansson in 1895. A new building was built in 1904. By 1910 one-room schools were built at Markerville, Heckla, Tindastoll, New Hola and New Centerville to meet the needs of the expanding Icelandic community. In the fifties all the one-room schools were closed and students moved to Markerville.

In 1899 the farmers organized a co-operative, the Tindastoll Butter and Cheese Manufacturing Association, to start a creamery, which would give the farmers an opportunity to keep a few cows and earn some badly needed cash and stay at home working their homesteads. They would no longer have to go work on the railroad or in lumber camps. The creamery also offered a few badly needed jobs.

Woodsmen of The World, Markerville chapter organized on 1901. Besides the social aspects it provided members with life insurance and benevolent help in the community.

In 1902 the settlers organized the Fensala Stock Company and built a community hall to meet the social needs of the community. It was equipped and used as a gymnasium, also as a theatre for community plays and travelling Chautauqua. Politicians, musicians, and magicians made presentations from the stage. The community grieved and celebrated their with funeral teas wedding receptions, anniversaries and birthday parties.

A Lodge of the Order of Good Templars was organized in 1905 and had a large membership for several years. The Woodman of the World, a fraternal order was an active

The Markerville Brass Band organized in 1907. It was very active throughout Central Alberta until it dissolved in 1935.

In 1907 a Lutheran Church was built entirely by donation. Stones for the foundation were hauled all the way from the Red Deer River. Rev Peter Hjalmsjon was the first minister. Predominantly Lutheran and Presbyterian clergy held services over the years until 1963.

The Christinnson Cemetery was registered in 1909. Stephan G was buried there in 1927

On the third day of March 1919, members of the Markerville Literary Society - Iðunn held a meeting at Fensala Hall to discuss the issue of ethnicity in conjunction with the findings of a thirty member committee in Winnipeg. A motion was made, that this meeting declare its willingness to partake in and support as far as possible the Icelandic League whose goal will be to protect and maintain the Icelandic language, literature and art in the Western world, apart from all other matters of dispute. \$15 was donated to send to Winnipeg.



Peter and Annie Thompson  
at the Markerville picnic  
1927

The early settlers organized a picnic, held on August 7 each year. Hundreds of people came, bringing potluck meals. People enjoyed races, ball games and tests of strength and skill including wrestling and tug-of-war. Programs featured speakers from as far away as Winnipeg and the United States, local bands and choirs were much enjoyed. After rain spoiled several picnics, the community changed the date to June 17, another National holiday, but it usually rained on that date too. Still it was a big celebration each year for everyone until the mid thirties when the picnic was discontinued due to lack of interest.



Icelandic Picnic 1920