

Stephan G Stephansson Icelandic Society

The Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society was formed in 1974 through the efforts and encouragement of Joe H Johannson. The society has been, since its inception, a member in good standing with the Icelandic National League. The new Society's first goal was to get Stephan's homestead designated a Historic Site by the Government of Alberta. The Homestead Restoration Committee was formed with members from Markerville, Calgary and Edmonton. With inspiration, interest, co-operation and financial assistance of Edmonton and Calgary Clubs, the farmer's group from Iceland, Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism and many interested friends, this was realized. The official designation took place in August 1975 with over 700 friends and relatives, including over 170 from Iceland. The official opening took place in August 1982 and another planeload of Icelanders took part. Approximately 1200 people filled the homestead yard for the ceremony that day. Historic Stephansson House is owned and operated by the Government of Alberta, with Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society providing cooperation and volunteers as needed.

Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society presidents:

Joe H Johannson 1974-1976	Kris Johnson 1977-1988	Evelyn Johannson 1989-1994
George Flake 1995-1998	Bernice Andersen 1999-2001	Bill Birse 2002-2004
Shirley Dye 2005	Helen Johannson 2006 -2008	Marlene Linneberg 2008 -

When the Stephansson House was completed the Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society turned its attention to the Markerville creamery. The creamery had served the community up to 1972. Again, Joe Johannson recognizing the important role the Creamery had played in the development of the area for many miles around Markerville began seeking support to have the creamery restored as a monument to the Icelandic homesteaders and the dairy industry. As soon as it was designated, this time as a Historic Resource by the Alberta government, Heritage Preservation Partnership Program worked with the community to get the old run-down building restored. This project, started in 1984, would be the property Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society this time. Under president Kris Johnson's leadership and with the help and support of the community the creamery was restored to represent 1932, the same era as Stephansson House Historic Site. It was ready for the public to tours in 1986. The official opening took place in 1988 in conjunction with the 100th Anniversary of the Markerville's settlement. Society members searched the province from top to bottom and side to side to find authentic belts, pulleys, engines parts, piping and other needed authentic 1932 artifacts so we could tell the complete story about how a 30s creamery worked. Society members began on a very steep learning curve as they become skilled at operating a museum. Upgrades and new programs must constantly be developed.

The Creamery Museum now employs a full time manager year round to coordinate and plan programs. We also employ up to eight part time summer staff to interpret our history to visitors, and staff the Kaffistofa and Gift Shop. These youth jobs are important in a rural community, as university students can stay with their parents for the summer and maximize their salary. The Creamery Museum offers specially designed programs for students. Every year in May and June, about 2000 students bus from as far away as Calgary to learn Icelandic culture and how the homesteaders were able to improve their pioneer community with the addition of a creamery. Every summer an average of 15,000 folks come 50 kilometers off the main highway to spend time in a serene hamlet, tour the museum, view the other century old buildings and have a typical Icelandic lunch. Tour companies bring busloads of interested tourists to learn about our Creamery Museum and Icelandic culture and heritage.

We hosted Icelandic Presidents Vigdis Finnbogadottir in 1989 and Ragnar Grimsson in 1999. Regularly other Icelandic dignitaries, government officials, dancers, or choirs come to visit Markerville.

By 1999 all the Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society was attempting to do was exceeding their ability to cope. Several strategy sessions were held to determine our future. A business plan and a mission statement was adopted.

*Our mission is: To preserve and interpret history.
To promote culture and community fellowship.*

Everything we do now is measured against these words.

Historic Markerville Creamery Museum is our main focus in preserving and interpreting our Icelandic history along with our 100-year-old church, 100-year-old Fensala Hall, 100-year-old Hola School, the Tindastoll cemetery and Christinnson Cemetery. An on-going project we call Women of Aspenland, is designed to record the work of women in developing the community. Every year women are selected, accomplishments researched, a panel consisting of photos and a brief outline of her contribution is made and added to our display. A binder of information is completed and stored to be available for future historians to use in research. Another project is *Starting Anew*, going into its second year. This involves local student and adult volunteers gathering stories from local people young and old, about their experience moving to our area. Markerville stories will be kept here and copies sent to the Red Deer and District Archives to become part of a regional *Starting Anew* project.

We expand the local focus of our museum by bring in exhibits from out of the area like *The Saga Of New Iceland* created by Stefan Stefanson of Gimli Manitoba.

Cultural components of our mission are met by taking part in Historic Stephansson House events such as an afternoon of poetry reading and writing workshops, craft displays and instruction. We have concerts in Fensala Hall such as a recent well-attended concert by Lowry Olafson. Members of our society have written and produced three plays and performed them around Central Alberta including at an Alberta Museums Association convention. The last play, *A Quilt of Many Cultures*



Wayne Linniberg & Janet Lutz
in a Quilt of Many Cultures

was given an award by Alberta Museums Association for innovative teaching of history. In 1976 the Homestead Committee selected poems the from Stephan G. books he named *Andvökur*, (he published his first of four volume in 1908.) They named the new book, Selected translations from *Andvökur*. A second printing was done in the 80s and a third in 2005. From Fire and Ice is a small book the Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society hired a researcher to write about why the Icelanders left Iceland and their first twenty-five years in Alberta.

In the 60s creamery manager Carl Morkeberg wrote a weekly column called *Markerville Story*, in the Innisfail Province. The community had the columns made into a book as a centennial project in 1967. Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society is supporting the Central Alberta Historical Society in the reprinting the unique tales in the *Markerville Story*. Two cookbooks have been made. The first is recipes the homesteaders brought with them and the second recipes that they adapted to suit the new foods available on their homesteads. A third a cookbook of recipes



Frank Sigurdson show visitors how milk is separated

Cream Day – was Monday in Markerville in the early days. It was the day the farmers brought their milk to the creamery, picked up their cream cheque, got their mail at the post-office, bought groceries, exchanged books at the library and read the latest Lögberg and Heimskringla. It was a day to catch up on news with the neighbours. Everyone referred to Monday as cream day. Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society took that theme for their biggest educational and promotion. Cream Day has attracted around 1000 visitors every summer for the last 20 years, from babes to grandma & grandpa enjoy this day. They can milk a cow, separate the cream from the milk in an old fashioned separator, make butter and eat their butter on a cracker, make ice cream in an old fashioned freezer and eat it too. They can play with farm animal babies in a petting zoo or ride a little train made of butter boxes and cream cans. They can take part in displays of pioneer crafts like spinning or knitting or play games familiar to their grandparents. The young folk are seeing



Megan Sigurdson gives kids a chance to milk a cow

brand new activities and their elders are reminiscing. Everyone eats hamburgers, homemade pie and lots and lots of ice cream. All afternoon music is on the outdoor stage. This event requires 250 volunteers, from start to finish.

The Icelandic picnics began again. In the sixties, Icelanders from Calgary and Edmonton started coming to cemetery clean-up day as a way to pay tribute to their forefathers. Even after a caretaker was hired for the cemetery, the folks from Calgary and Edmonton continued to come and put on a gram in Fensala Hall. The Saga Singers, a choral group from Edmonton were always in attendance for the enjoyment of all. Calgary, Edmonton and Markerville decided to revive the old Icelandic picnic on June 17 weekend. A program of sports, races and tug-of-war and a potluck supper was added.

The Viking Cup Golf Tournament held at Gleniffer Lake started in 2002 as a fundraiser for Fensala, has proven to be so popular it has become an annual event.



The Budvarson's win the Viking Cup

A Fjallkona is chosen each year and crowned at the Icelandic picnic. Edmonton started the tradition and when the picnics resumed, it was decided to have an Alberta Fjallkona, with each club taking their turn selecting the next reigning

Markerville Fjallkonas and Princess

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|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1978 Rosa Benediktson | |
| 1981 Bernice Andersen | Laurel Andersen |
| 1984 Sandee Birse | Willow Birse |
| 1987/88 Donna Nelson | Jocelyn Nelson |
| 1991 Fertha Stephanson | Bonnie & Joy Stephanson |
| 1994 Dorothy Murray | Leah Sissons |
| 1997 Evelyn Johannson | Kyla Johannson |
| 1999 Shirley Dye | Jennifer Hougestol & Cassie Dye |
| 2002 Marie Sveinson | Danae Sveinson |
| 2005 Helen Johannson | Heather White & Cherisse Johannson |
| 2008 Bettie Weigl | Lisa Johnson |



2005 Fjallkona, Helen Johannson and Ron Goodman, president of the Calgary Club at the Edmonton Thorrablot

Christmas In Markerville held every year for 16 years was started in 1992 by a group of local artisans to create a new venue for their art. It now has evolved into a Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society project and a fundraiser with about 3000 shoppers flowing through four sites in Markerville. A big component of *Christmas In Markerville* over the last four years is *Cookie Walk* which now needs nearly 1,500 dozen cookies to meet demand.

In 2004 Fensala Hall was a century old and had to be fixed or torn down! After much research including soul searching, Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society concluded it was feasible to take on another restoration project. \$350,000 and huge volunteer commitment was needed in a very small community. Thanks to Marie Sveinson who headed up a fundraising committee and Ken Sveinson agreed to chair a restoration committee, another impossible dream is nearly completed. Financial assistance came from Alberta Historic Resources, Icelandic clubs in Calgary and Edmonton, the governments of Iceland and Alberta, fundraising projects and donations from hundreds of individuals plus hours and hours of volunteer labour. Markerville and surrounding community now has a hall restored to the 1930s but also an addition housing all the modern amenities folks expect in a community centre in 2006. Fensala is another standing monument to the Icelandic pioneers and is ready to serve the community for a second hundred years. An official opening is planned for the summer of 2006.



Card party at Hola School

Hola School, the first school in the Icelandic settlement was 100 years old in 2004. In the fifties when the school division had no more use for it, the Hola Community Association took over and still use it for card parties, picnics and social events. In 1998, Historic Markerville Creamery Museum expanded their programs for school children to include a one-room country school experience at Hola School.

Markerville Church, now a Stephan G Stephansson Icelandic Society project, is only open in the summer for tourists to visit. It is a popular spot for photographers and amateur painters. Most every weekend you will see someone set up with an easel painting the pretty white and blue church. A huge hail storm of 2006 damaged the badly roof and broke stained glass windows. The church, 100 years old in 2007, is the next monument to our forefathers to receive an extreme make over. Along with Fensala Hall, the church is being promoted as a destination for a country wedding.

In 2008 Stephan G Stephansson Icelandic Society became the owners of Tindastoll Cemetery. It has been cared for by the community over the years and after the church restoration is complete some TLC must be directed to it.



In 2006 the Icelandic Ladies Aid, "Vonin" will have served the community needs for 115 years.

Here Marie Sveinson, Dorothy Murray and Donna Nelson prepare Christmas Gladenings for people in need, as did their mothers, grandmothers, great grandmothers and great great grandmothers

1988 INL Conference, Innisfail Alberta

"An interesting and fun weekend" was the headline in the Edmonton Icelandic Society newsletter regarding the March 25 - 27 Icelandic National League Convention. A spring storm made it a event not to be forgotten. History was also being made as it was the first conference held outside the province of Manitoba. Hosted by the Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society of Markerville, it was held at the Country Lodge in Innisfail.

Nina Campbell recalls; It was a nice spring day when she arrived. All went well during the first day, it was the Saturday evening Thorrablot banquet and entertainment when the storm blow in. The locals were just lucky to get home, including Alberta Bert (Fred Andersen) who was part of the entertainment. Nina awoke the next morning and looked out on the parking lot, all she could see was SNOW, windblown and drifted, completely covering the cars. There was no power. People in the motel nearby had only vending machines for food. At our hotel the wonderful staff fired up a gas stove and fed all, including travelers, (some were families) that the RCMP were bringing in off the highway. The highway was closed - it was impassable. The highlight for Nina was when Solli Sigurdson went to his car, dug out his guitar and before long we were enjoying an old fashioned sing-along. The Logberg reported, "the incomparable Solli Sigurdson entertained far into the night."

Everyone was stranded there for another day. Bob Rennie recalls, the sever snowstorm as well. The Vancouver delegation was ahead of its time, advocating some of the decision making be taken on by the wider membership. He also remembers the president of INL, Oli Narfason did a great job in chairing the meetings and leading the singing.

By Monday the roads were reopened and everyone headed for home. Many women had no winter boots, so the hotel gave them plastic bread wrappers to cover their feet as they waded trough the snow get to their cars. All who attended had an "unforgettable experience!"