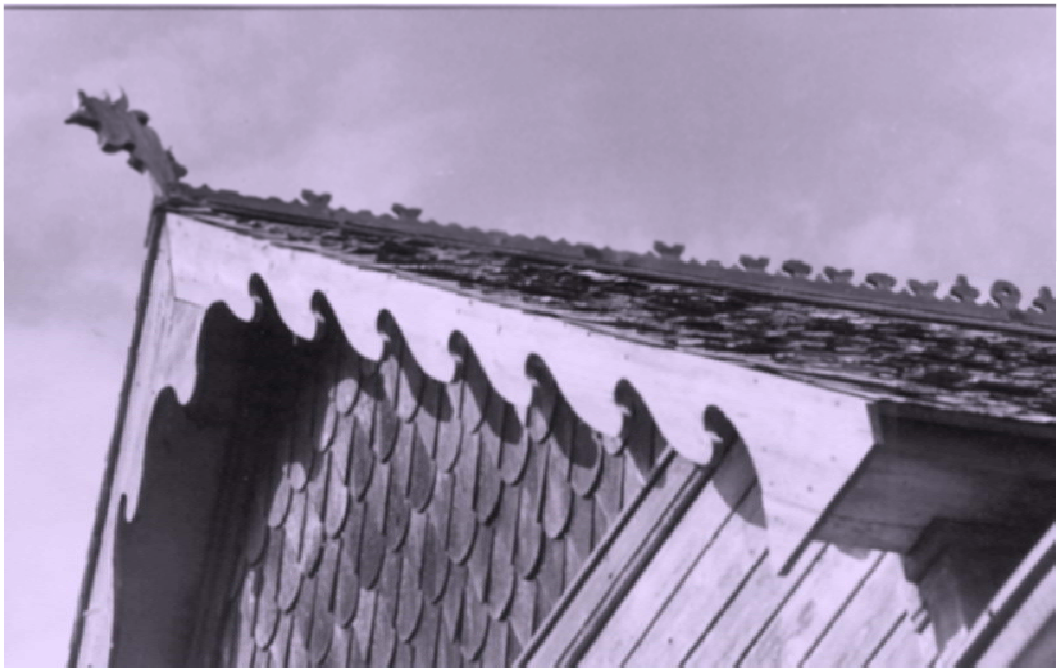
ICELANDIC FARM AND FISHING BUILDINGS

An Architectural History Theme Study



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On the cover:
Image of a traditional Icelandic roof detail at 'Vindheimar' (The Windy Home), near Riverton.

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PREFACE

This booklet has been adapted from a larger publication developed in 1982 by the Historic Resources Branch of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism. That study, *Architectural Heritage. The Eastern Interlake Planning District*, should still be available in public libraries.

That original study was intended to assist various local governments (Rural Municipalities of Gimli and Bifrost and Town of Gimli), formed into the Eastern Interlake Planning District, to gain a better understanding of the architectural heritage of the region, and thus to undertake better educational, tourism, designation and conservation programs. To that end, this original work also contained a substantial selected inventory of buildings in the area, and sections focusing on other aspects of the region's history.

A major part of the study focused on farm buildings, and especially on the prevailing architectural traditions of the most common pioneer settlement group in the region – originally from Iceland. It is that section of the original report that has been adapted here, to enable readers to get a better sense of the traditional architectural styles and forms, materials and construction practices that define this important aspect of Manitoba's architectural history.

There are other areas of the province that have similar Icelandic building traditions, and this booklet, while focused on the area around Gimli, certainly contains information that applies to those places as well.

INTRODUCTION

The architectural heritage of the Eastern Interlake derives much of its value from the different ethnic groups that settled the district. The Icelanders and the eastern Europeans, respectively, constructed houses, utility and public structures that are quite distinctive. Because they are separate groups and because they settled different areas it would be useful to analyze, individually, the architecture produced by each group. In addition, because the two major groups relied to a different degree on the architectural heritage of their homelands for precedents it will be necessary, before describing the development of their buildings in Manitoba, to briefly examine their indigenous architecture in its original context.

ICELANDIC BUILDINGS

Because Iceland was originally settled by refugees from Norway in the ninth century, Icelandic folk architecture had its roots in Norwegian forms (Figure 1). Individual long houses were used for distinct functions and one house could be for sleeping, on for cooking and one for meetings. When, by the fourteenth century, timber had become scarce in Iceland, and new types of dwellings were built, this separation of functions into isolated buildings was modified. The separate and spacious long houses were replaced by subterranean group houses that brought the individual functions into a smaller unit (Figure 2)

Figure 1
A reconstructed tenth century Viking long house. When the outcasts in Iceland arrived they were able, because of available timber, to construct similar dwellings.

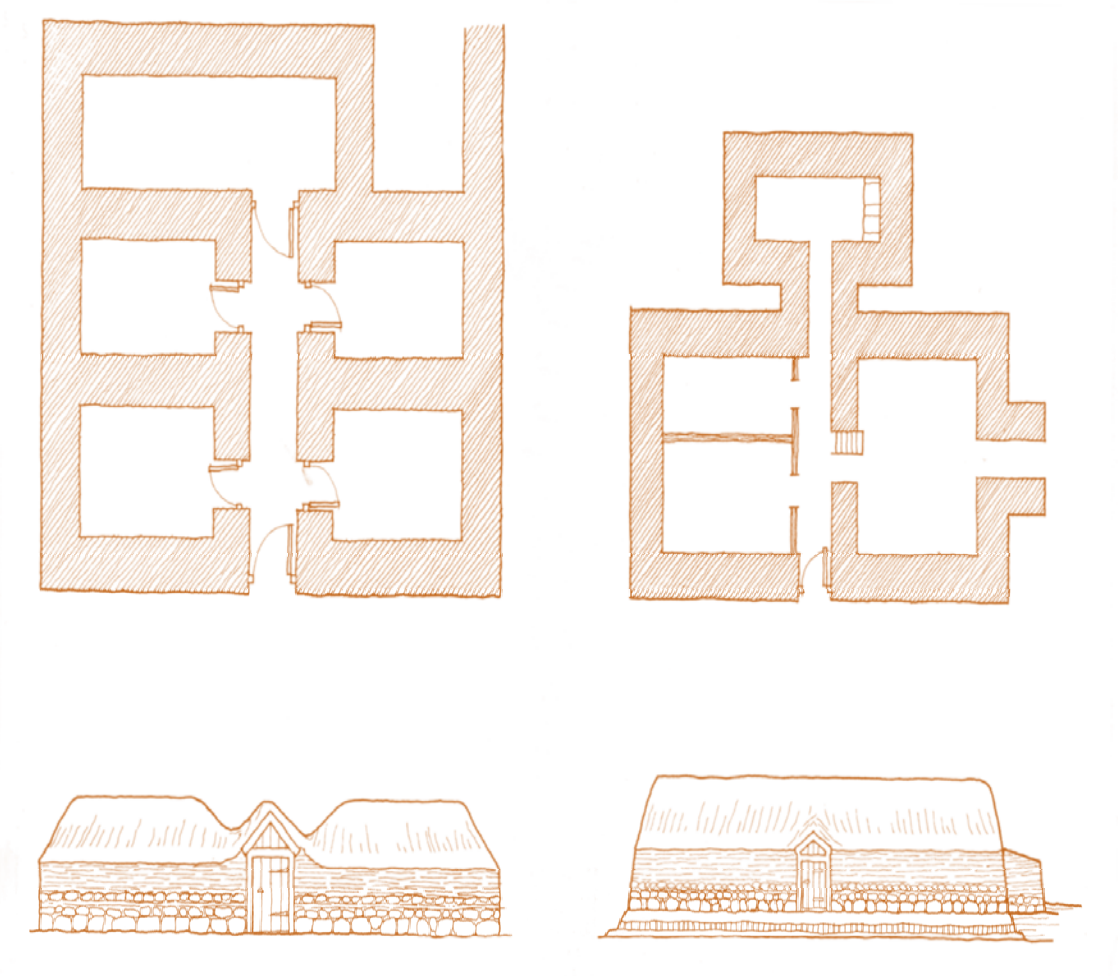


Figure 2
Subterranean group houses were a series of small structures built of stone, turf or sod, with earth floors and grass-covered roofs.

Homes built by Icelanders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries bore testimony to a growing prosperity and better trade. The buildings still consisted of a series of five or six small grass-roofed structures separated by walls banked with earth or sod (Figure 3).

One of these structures was used for a porch, one for guests, one for storage and another for a kitchen. There was also usually a smithy and airy room. Situated at the back of each row of houses, and connected by a long passageway was the 'bathstofa'. This room was, in the first homes, a bath house, but because of a growing lack of firewood in later years, it was eventually turned into the main living room in many houses. It was these multiple dwellings, with their separately-roofed areas that Icelandic immigrants to Canada were most familiar with.

Figure 3
A typical Icelandic farm structure built during the nineteenth century was surrounded by vegetable gardens and hay meadows. Churches, like the one illustrated, were usually found on the yards of larger farmsteads. (I'islandsferd John Coles, Bokatgafan Hildur)

Initial Structures (1875-1885)

When the first group of Icelandic settlers landed on the shores of Lake Winnipeg in 1875 they were unaware of the severity of western Canadian winters were thus ill-prepared and provisioned. The subterranean group structures familiar to them could not be quickly constructed in the frozen ground of Manitoba and while plentiful timber could have provided them with immediate shelters, it was, by the nineteenth century, an unfamiliar building material to them. They were fortunate that a government survey team, sent with them to commence surveying the land within the reserve, showed them how to put together a rudimentary log cabin.

In all, 30 log cabins (the number limited by the number of stoves purchased in Winnipeg) were erected in a joint effort by the settlers. According to Simon Simonson, one of the first settlers, these structures were "12' x 12' in size, man high, of rails which with difficulty we managed to drag to the site." (Simonson, 1946, p. 46). The low walls were surmounted by rafters topped with grass from a nearby low spot. At the corners the walls were connected with a simple grooved or saddle-notched joint (Figure 4).

The doors in some were so low that the occupants had to crawl on their hands and knees to enter. A few had small fixed windows, while others had none. In some cases the wood from the flat boats served as floors for their shelters, but in most cases, the structures were built on flat stones or simply on the hard ground. Each structure not only housed two or three families throughout the first severe winter but also provided shelter for whatever livestock they had brought (Figure 5). None of these crude dwellings have survived to the present.

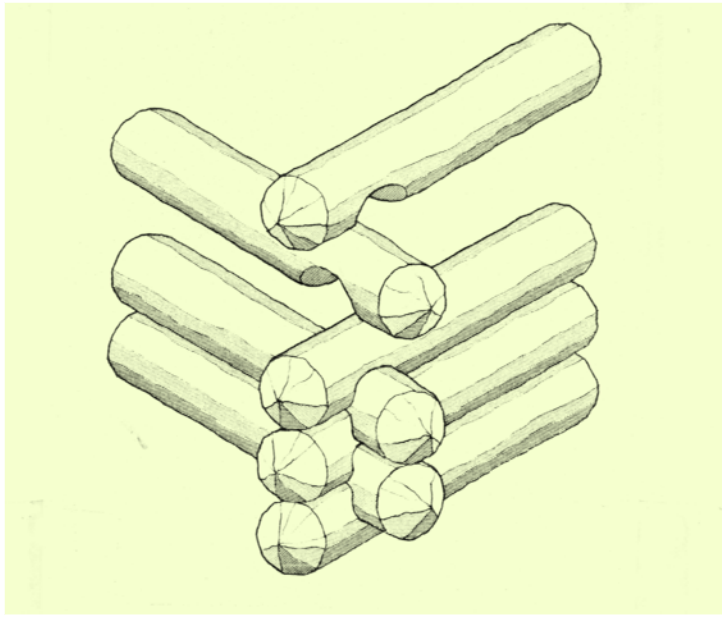


Figure 4
In saddle-notch construction round logs were lapped and, at the corners, curved notches were cut about 300 mm (1') back from the end of the log. The location of the saddle-notch on the bottom of the log was more desirable as it allowed water to drain downwards, reducing the possibility of rain gathering in a top-notch and rotting the joint.

Figure 5
Gimli, 1925. Pioneers of 1875 and 1876 stand before a reconstruction of one of the initial homes on the fiftieth anniversary celebration of New Iceland. Details such as the saddle-notch corners, rails and grass roof, and the crude but Effective door hinge match early descriptions. (Provincial Archives Manitoba)

The houses constructed by the large Icelandic group that arrived in 1876 were not only slightly better than those built at the Gimli settlement the previous year but also began displaying some traditional Icelandic forms (Figure 6).

John Ramsay, a well known local native, taught many of the newcomers how to improve the cabins. With four or five men at work, a more substantial cabin using hewn logs with dovetailed corners and having windows could be finished in two days. The roofs of some of these cabins were constructed of lumber purchased in Selkirk. The interior arrangements of these one-roomed dwellings were simple: a stove was placed in the middle and beds along the side walls. Some houses had sleeping quarters in a loft above the main floor.

With the first five years of settlement being very difficult, simple log structures of this type remained the principal form of housing in the colony until the early 1880s. One of these early homes was only recently demolished (Figure 7).

Another structure fitting the descriptions of these early houses is still located near the village of Hnausa (Figure 8). Long time residents of the area recall that the building was used for a time as a house and later as a blacksmith shop.

Figure 6
These gable-roofed log houses were joined, like their Icelandic predecessors with a narrow gabled entrance.

Figure 7
Constructed in 1876 by Fridjon Frederickson, this log cabin held the honour of being the oldest home in Gimli when this photograph appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press in 1950 .(Manitoba Legislative Library)

Figure 8
The walls of this pioneer log house were chinked with a sand and lime mortar and then white-washed.

Later Log Houses (1885-1905)

During the 1880s, as the economy of New Iceland improved, with the development of the fishing industry, a better form of log house appeared. These structures, though remaining simple in design, were larger and displayed a much greater degree of care and workmanship in their construction than those built during the initial was of settlement.

Most of these structures appear to have been consistent in size and appearance throughout the colony. Generally, 1 1/2 storeys high and gable-roofed, these buildings had up to two rooms, whitewashed walls, and likely an attached storage shed (Figure 9).

The logs used in their construction were hewn, generally on two sides and dovetail notching was used at the corners (Figure 10).

Rough-cut lumber and wooden shingles, available from a sawmill, which started operation in 1882 at Riverton, were commonly used for the floors and roofs of these buildings. By the mid-1880s, doors, windows, construction paper, latches and other fixtures could be purchased in Gimli and Riverton as both communities had regular lake freighter connections with the Town of Selkirk.

Figure 9
Settlers pose for a photograph in front of a typical circa 1890 house that features dovetailed log construction, whitewashed walls, a single stove-pipe chimney and an attached shed at the back of the house. (Provincial Archives Manitoba)

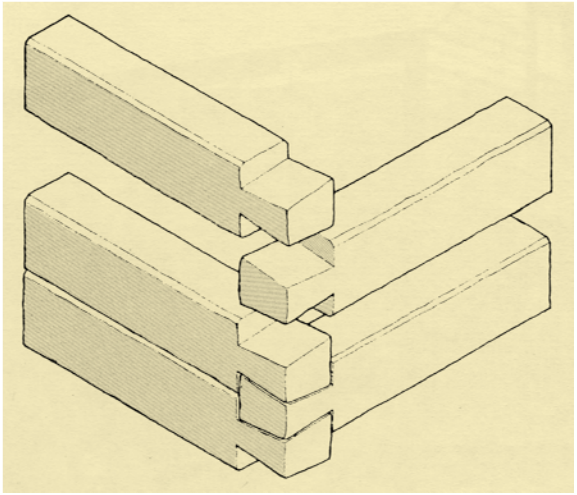


Figure 10
Dovetail construction entailed cutting a wedge-shaped joint at each end of the squared logs. The logs were lapped at the corners and joined in an interlocking system that created a strong net corner and ensured a waterproof joint.

For the first few years, the interiors of these structures were as simple and spartan as the exteriors. The ground floor comprised the main kitchen-work area; the sleeping quarters were in the loft above. The cook stoves were positioned in the centre of the room and iron stove pipe chimneys allowed an even heat distribution. Small root cellars, accessible through a trap door in the floor, were often dug beneath the houses. Furniture was sparse and usually handmade. There was little decoration other than whitewash on the interior and exterior walls to produce a clean appearance and to help preserve the wood.

Over the years, as their economic situation improved and the size of their families grew, a number of improvements were usually made to the settler's homes. The first of these was the construction of a lean-to addition; initially these were of log but were later more frequently of wood frame (Figure 11).

This addition typically became the new kitchen area, freeing the original section to be used as a bedroom or living area. At this time, the cookstove would have been moved into the new kitchen and a brick chimney constructed. In a few cases more substantial additions were made; entire full-sized wings of frame construction were added to the original structure (Figure 12).

Figure 11
Many of the early Icelandic log homes were improved in later years with wood siding on the exterior walls, brick chimneys, and lean-to kitchen additions (Provincial Archives Manitoba)

Figure 12
Although the shed-roofed lean-to was the more common addition, some settlers constructed full storey-and a-half wood frame wings when the original log cabin became too small. (K. Magnusson)

Another typical improvement was the application of wooden drop siding to the exterior walls and wallpaper to the interior walls. Sometimes the interior walls were first covered with a layer of flush board siding before wallpaper was applied. New tongue and groove flooring was often installed over the original rough planking in many of the homes.

Settlers who could not afford new wood frame houses or who were new arrivals from Iceland built log structures as late as 1915. They were generally similar in appearance to those in the older areas, and it was noted that on at least one occasion, an old log house in the Hnausa district was dismantled, transported by team and wagon to the Vidir area, and reconstructed on the new site. However, in the older areas of the colony along the lakeshore, and the Icelandic River as far as Geysir, the era of log construction was generally over by the early 1900s.

Only two log structures from this period of settlement are known to have survived to present day; one is near the village of Hanusa and the other near Arborg. The Hanusa structure closely resembles the descriptions and early photographs of later log homes and is in good condition despite its age (Figure 13).

Figure 13
Sniefeld house, SW 17-22-4E, circa 1890. Originally constructed near the lakeshore on SE 8-22-4E, this building was recently moved 11/2 miles north where it now stands unused. It is one of only two surviving log homes from the 1883-1903 period of Icelandic settlement.

The logs are roughly squared on four sides and are joined at the corners with well-cut dovetails. The spaces between the logs are filled with a sand and lime mortar, and there are traces of whitewash on both the inside and outside walls. The roof is constructed of rough-cut lumber and the roofing material is rolled asphalt. Sometime after the house was built, a single storey, gable roofed log addition was constructed along the west wall and, in later years, a wood frame extension was added to this. At this same time, the entire structure was sheathed with horizontal drop siding, most of which has since been removed.

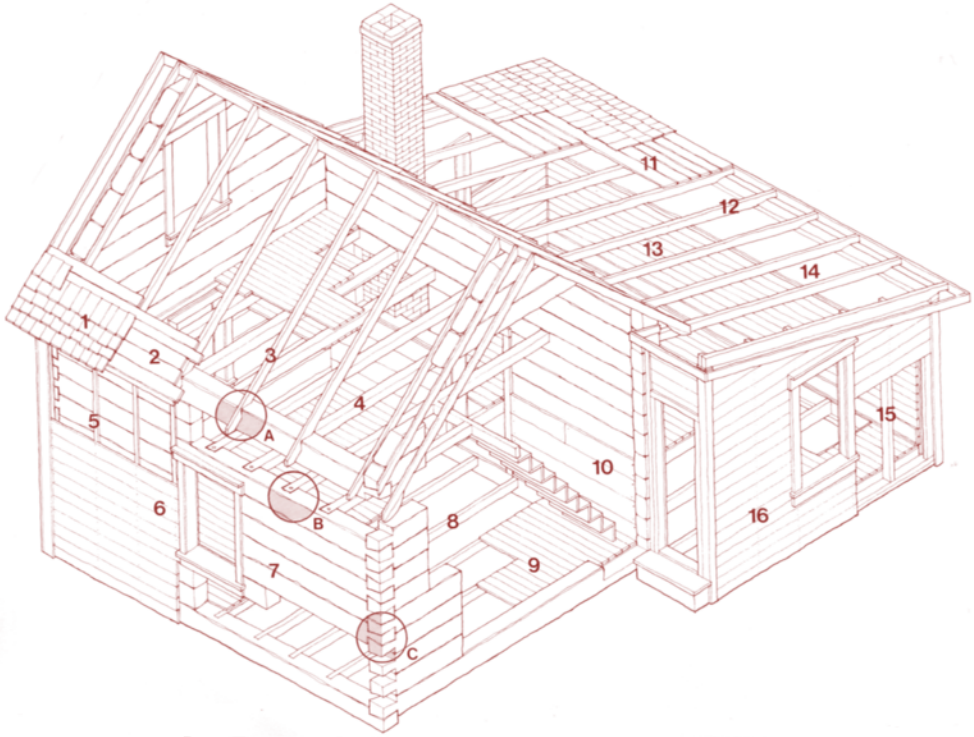
The one other surviving log house of this type, now found near Arborg, was constructed by Gester Oddliefson in 1890 and originally stood near the banks of the Icelandic River in the old Geysir settlement (Figure 14).

This location was immediately to the east of the Borgford homestead depicted in Figure 15, and had the appearance and situation of the structures in this 1903 painting. Although slightly smaller, it is very similar in form and construction to the Sniefeld house. In this case, however, logs extend up the gable end walls to the peak of the roof, and an earlier type of roofing material, split wood shingles, was used (Figure 16).

A typical shed-roofed lean-to of frame construction, added to it in later years, was used as the kitchen. This addition has since been removed and stands a short distance north of the building's present location.

Figure 14
Oddliefson house, SE 19-22-3E,1890.Later improvements to this log structure included a wood frame shed-roofed kitchen addition, wood siding on the exterior walls, flush board siding on the interior walls and two layers of construction paper on the walls and roof of the upper level.

Figure 15
The Borgfjord family homestead in the Geysir settlement, as it appeared around the turn of the century. For 12 years these homes marked the western fringe of settlement along the Icelandic River.



Dimensions

Cabin		Shanty	
Length:	4.7 metres (15½ feet)	Length:	5.6 metres (18½ feet)
Width:	4.1 metres (13½ feet)	Width:	3.0 metres (10 feet)
Ceiling Height:	2.0 metres (6½ feet)	Ceiling Height (rear):	1.8 metres (6 feet)
Total Height:	4.7 metres (15½ feet)	Ceiling Height (front):	2.6 metres (8½ feet)

Building Materials

1) Roofing: split wooden shingles
2) Roof sheathing: 25 mm (1") unplaned lumber; 125-350 mm (5-14") widths
3) Rafters: 65x95 mm (2½x3 3/4") unplaned lumber
4) Ceiling joists: 100 mm (4") square sawn timbers
5) Nailing laths: 25x50 mm (1x2") strips
6) Exterior sheathing: 150 mm (6") drop siding
7) Walls: 200 mm (8") logs, hewn on two sides
8) Floor joists: 50x150 (2x6") planks
9) Floors: 115-165 mm (4½'6½") tongue and groove planking
10) Interior sheathing: 225 mm (9") ship lap
11) Shanty roof sheathing: 25 mm (1") planks; 100-200 (4-8") widths
12) Shanty rafters: 50x100 mm (2x4") planed lumber
13) Wall finish: 90 mm (3½") tongue and groove; over paper and sheathing
14) Wall paper: patterned; over paper and sheathing
15) Shanty wall studs: 50x100 mm (2x4") unplaned lumber
16) Shanty exterior sheathing: 150 mm (6") drop siding

Connections

A) Rafter seat notched into top plate
B) Ceiling joists notched and dowelled into side walls
C) Corner joint: dovetail

Figure 16
Oddliefson house: construction details.

Early Wood Frame Houses (1895-1905)

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, one storey shed-roofed shanties of frame construction began replacing the early log homes in most areas of Icelandic settlement. Small frame lean-tos had been common additions to the log homes in the early 1890s, but within a short time larger versions of these earlier appendages were completely replacing many of the original log structures (Figure 17).

Shed-Roofed Type

Small and simple in design, the popularity of the shed-roofed residence was due to the ease and inexpensive with which it could be constructed (Figure 18). A settler did not have to be a skilled carpenter to build such a house and construction took little time. Early photographs and remaining examples indicate that shed-roofed residences varied in size and plan. Some, such as a now-abandoned structure near Hnausa, were simply constructed single-roomed bachelor shacks that rested on a foundation of loose stone (Figure 19). Others, built as more permanent structures, had several rooms and concrete foundations (Figure 20).

A number of improvements were generally made to these early shed-roofed residences within a few years of their construction. These were similar to those made to the log homes during the same period. The earlier metal stovepipe chimney was often replaced with one of the brick, and the interior walls were sheathed with siding or wallpaper. If the original floor was constructed of rough lumber, it was recovered with tongue and groove flooring. The construction of additions was also quite common (Figure 21).

Eighteen of these early shed-roofed structures remain in the planning district: ten residences and eight farm outbuildings. Five of the residences were found in rural districts. Although the shed-roofed residence was once prevalent throughout the Icelandic portions of the planning district, only a small number remain intact today. Most were enlarged or incorporated into larger residences over the years while others were put to alternate uses, abandoned, or were simply demolished.

Figure 17
This two roomed shanty, photographed in the Vidir area around 1903 was typical of the period. The absence of siding on the rear portion suggests that it may have been a later addition to the house. (Provincial Archives Manitoba)

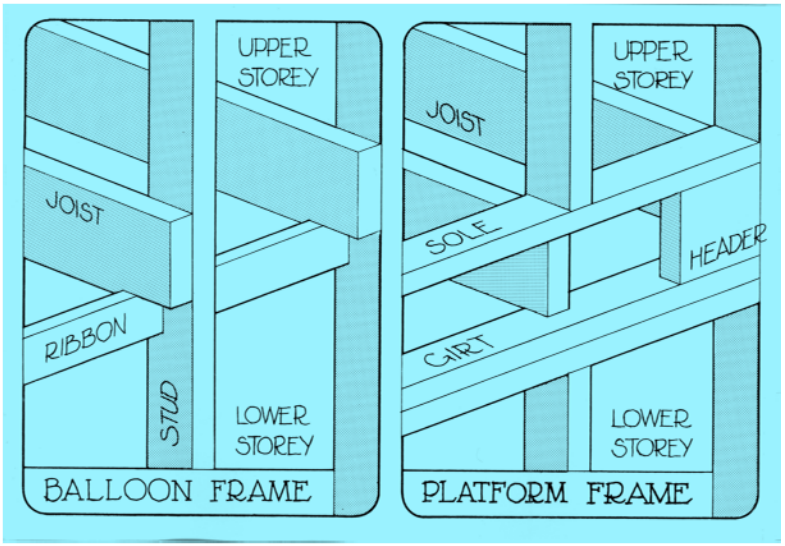


Figure 18
Settlers generally relied on balloon framing, before 1890, for the construction of their houses. After 1890 platform framing became more common.

Figure 19
Around the turn of the century, simple shanties, like this one, now abandoned in the Geysir district, were the standard form of housing for many of the Icelandic settles.

Figure 20
In the foreground of this 1910 photograph of Gimli, which also shows the newly-completed Lutheran Church, are three variations of the shed-roof house.

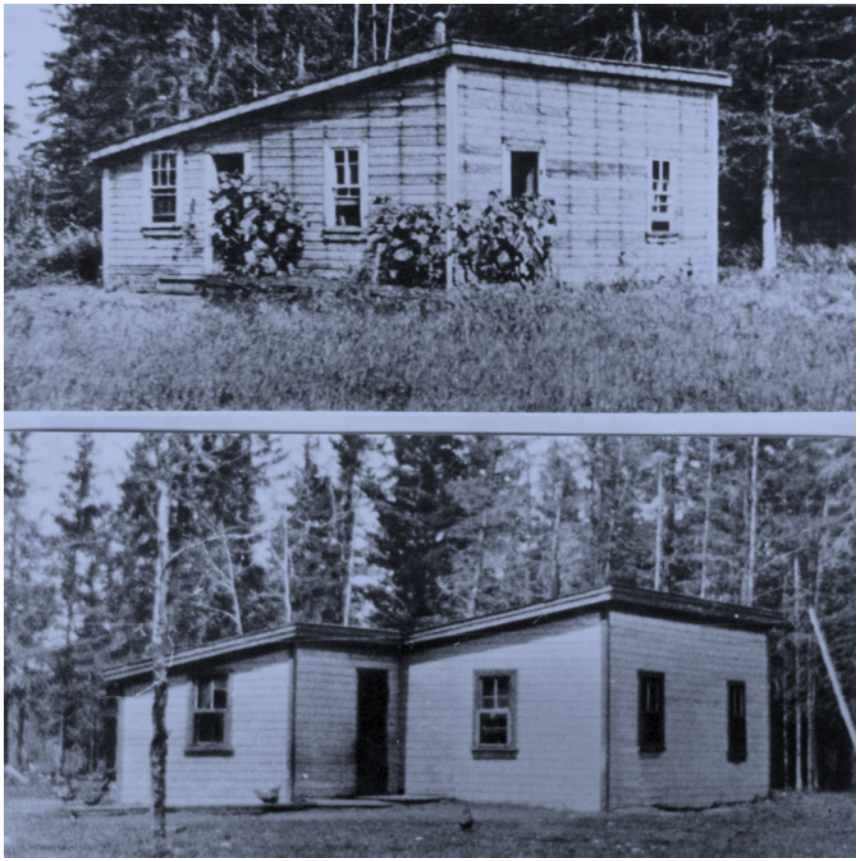


Figure 21
Later additions to the original shed-roofed residences, like this one in the Vidir district, were often shed-roofed as well. (Provincial Archives Manitoba)

Gable-Roofed Type

In addition to the shed-roofed frame residences built in New Iceland, a small number of 11/2 storey gable-roofed frame houses were constructed prior to the turn of the century. Like the shed-roofed shanties these buildings featured balloon framing construction methods; the basic differences then between the two structures involved the internal planning and the roof shape. A residence, located at SW 19-22-3E, one mile east of Arborg, is the most interesting of the three remaining early gable-roofed examples (Figure 22).

Figure 22
Borgfjord house, SW 19-22-3E, ca. 1895.

According to local residents, it originally stood several miles east of its present location on the banks of the Icelandic River. It is one of the oldest wood frame structures in the entire planning district.

Despite its small size (Figure 23), it is solidly built and exhibits a good deal of workmanship. The interior is nicely finished with wainscotting on the lower half of the walls and on the ceiling. Simple wood mouldings surround all the interior windows, door frames and corner joints. There is no chimney in the structure; holes were simply cut in the ceiling and roof, as they were in log houses of this period, and fitted with stove pipes. The upper level walls and ceiling were finished in a similar manner as the main level. The plain exterior of the buildings has some interesting details. The gable ends were decorated with bargeboards, one of which remains, and a small, coloured glass transom was fitted over the entranceway.

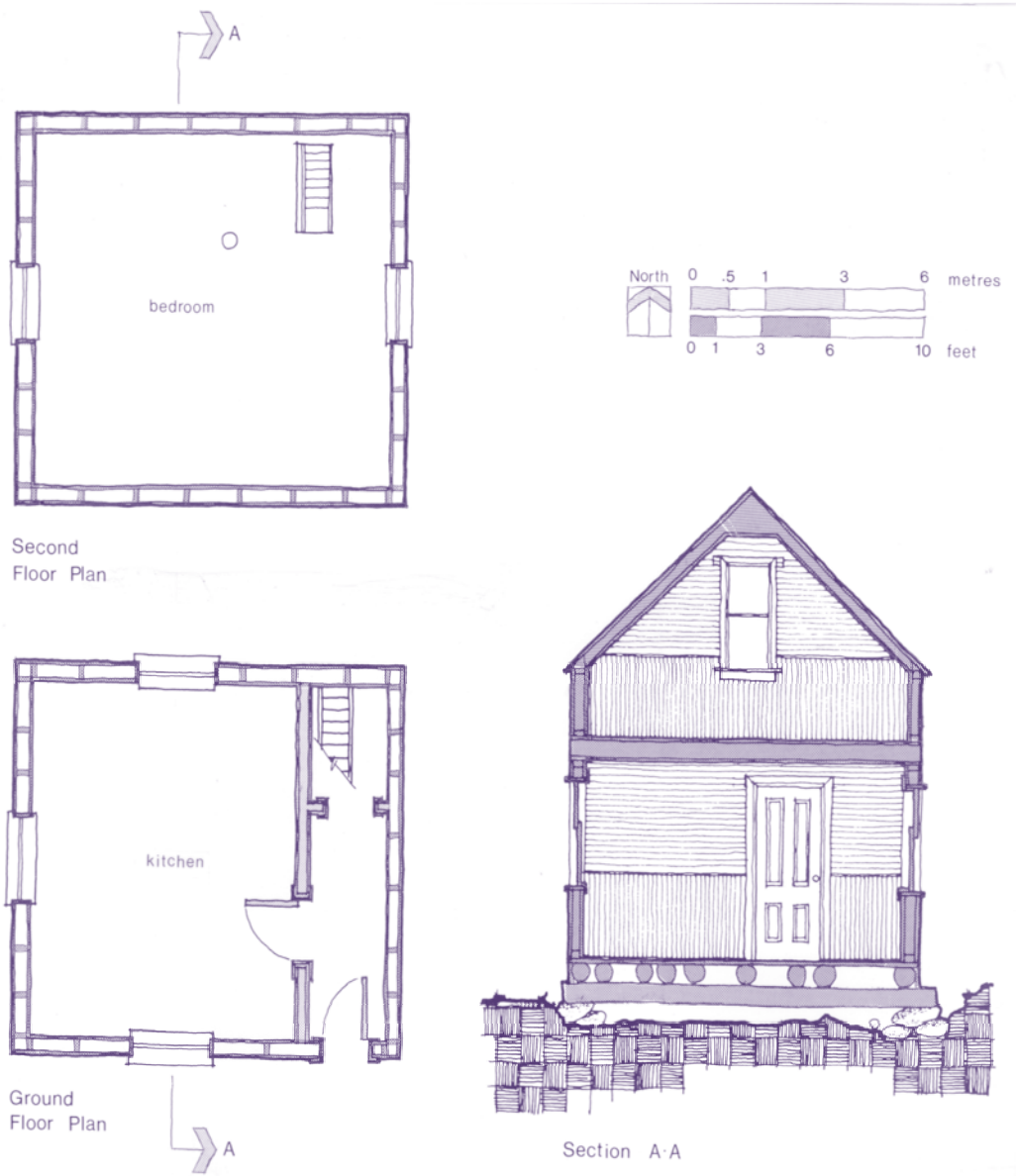


Figure 23
Borgfjord house: floor plans and cross section.

Later Wood Frame Houses (1905-1930)

After the turn of the century the shed-roofed and the gable-roofed house types were often connected. Either the earlier shed was enlarged with a 1 1/2 storey addition or a completely new house, with the 1 1/2 storey section and the shed built at the same time, was constructed. Although the gable-with-shed house was popular is many areas of the province, around the turn of the century, the ones constructed by the Icelanders in the Eastern Interlake had a number of common elements which separated them from the rest and gave them a distinctive identity.

A typical example consisted of a five or six roomed, 1 1/2 storey gable roofed section, with a single storey shed at the rear. This shed portion invariably extended out about 1000 mm (3') to the right side of the gable portion, just enough to accommodate a front facing door. The main entrance of the building was usually located on the right front of the gable-roofed section. Floor plans varied only slightly in the remaining examples. The larger structures had three bedrooms in the upper level, while two bedrooms were more common in the smaller ones (Figures 24 and 25).

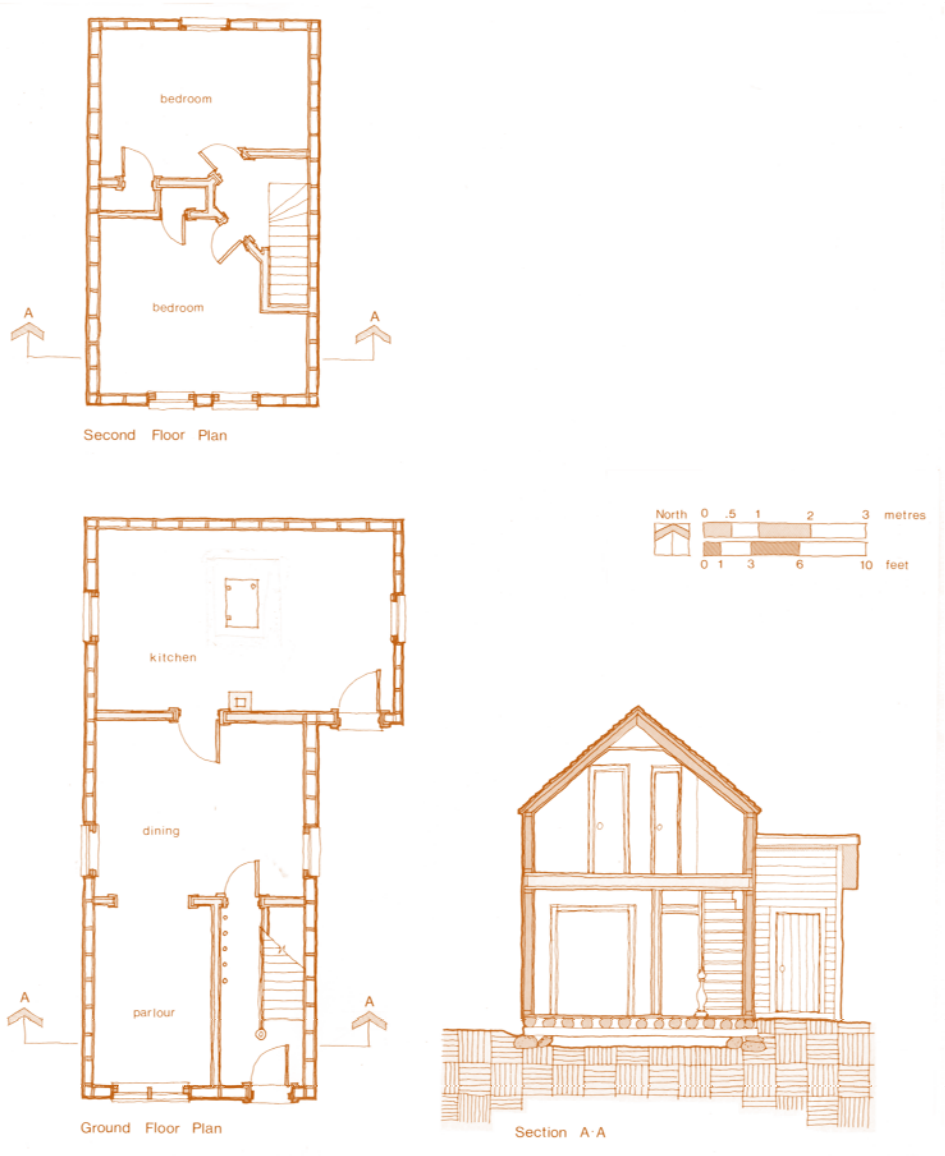


Figure 24
Five-roomed gable roofed house with shed addition: floor plans and cross section.

Figure 25
Six-roomed gable roofed house with shed addition: floor plans and cross section.

Window placement was nearly identical on all of the structures: three windows in the front gable end, two in the second storey, and a double one beside the door, and one window on each of the side walls. Larger houses also featured a small window which lit the upper level of the staircase.

All these houses had similar chimney locations. Buildings constructed in two parts frequently had one brick chimney along with rear wall of the shanty and another along the centre of the rear gable end. Houses built as a single unit had only the latter.

Most of the gable-and-shed residences remaining featured distinctive decorative trim on the gable ends and around the windows. Prominent eave returns were found on virtually all of the buildings; on most this was accompanied by decorative patterns (Figure 26). Decorative wood shingles above the windows on the gable ends were also fairly common, and a few examples with bargeboards were also found.

Figure 26
The sunburst pattern was the most common form of decorative trim found on the gable and shed eave returns. Alternatively several featured an oak leaf motif. In this instance the oak leaf motif is accompanied by a decorative bargeboard cut into the shape of cresting waves.

Like most early houses in the planning district, a number of changes or additions were often made over the years to the basic gable-and-shed form (Figure 27). The construction of a wraparound verandah was often accompanied by a second storey sun deck.

Of the 33 gable-and-shed style residences remaining in the planning district, only 16 are still occupied. As well, a large number have been radically changed by additions and alterations. Only 12 remain in a relatively unaltered state.

Figure 27
This series of early photographs of Gimli show the succession of changes made to a typical gable roofed house with a shed addition.

Cottage-style Houses (1920-1935)

After the First World War the popularity of the gable-and-shed style began to wane, and a new type, known locally as the cottage style, began to appear (Figure 28). During the 1920s and early 1930s, a fairly large number of these homes were constructed, primarily in the district's communities.

Due to its local nomenclature, and the fact that this type of residence did not appear in the study area until after the growth of Gimli as a popular summer resort area, it is possible that this house style was influenced by the style of seasonal houses being constructed in Gimli during this period (Figure 29). However, low profile bungalow homes of this type were also popular throughout the province during the 1920s.

In the planning district cottage houses were characterized by a low-pitched pyramid roof with wide overhanging eaves, one and as many as our dormer windows, and usually a front verandah. By the early 1920s concrete was in common use, and many of the cottage homes were built with full basements. The housing examples constructed prior to the 1920s usually had basements added later. Attached kitchen sheds were also fairly common and, as in the case of the earlier gable-and-shed type of home, the shed portion was often the original structure. Decorative elements were rare. Window mouldings and eave returns on the dormers were found on a few examples (Figure 30), while verandahs were occasionally enhanced with carved pillars and balustrades (Figure 31).

Figure 28
'Cottage-style house, Riverton.

Figure 29
Cottages of this type were being constructed in the Gimli area soon after the railway connection between Winnipeg and the community was completed in 1906.

Figure 30
Decorative elements on the cottage residences included window mouldings and eave returns on the dormer windows.

Figure 31
Magnusson house, Gimli.
This cottage house features a small gable, stained glass transoms on the front window and a wraparound verandah.

Two and 2 1/2 Storey Houses (1905-1925)

As in most rural districts, it was the business entrepreneurs in the Eastern Interlake who were among the first of the early settlers to replace their original log cabins with residences of frame construction. It was this same group who, in later years, could afford to construct themselves somewhat more substantial homes than the average resident.

The majority of these larger homes were constructed during the peak period of the district's economic growth and activity, from about 1905 to 1925. They were usually 2 or 2 1/2 storey frame buildings, constructed from plans purchased in Winnipeg or from available publications. A number of these fine homes have been lost over the years, such as the Sigurdson residence in Hnausa which was destroyed by fire in the 1930s (Figure 32). Approximately ten, however, still survive.

In Gimli, the Tergesen residence has been a landmark in the community since it was constructed almost 75 years ago (Figure 33).

Figure 32
A past landmark in the Hnausa area, "Braedrahofn" (Brother`s Haven), was constructed in 1906 by Johannes and Stefan Sigurdson. It had a large turret, bay window, a sundeck and pillars, steam heating and full plumbing. (Provincial Archives Manitoba)

Figure 33
The H.P. Tergeson residence in Gimli, shortly after its construction in 1908. (Provincial Archives Manitoba)

Figure 34
"Bakka" (On The Riverbank), near Riverton, is one of three homes constructed by Odder Olafson from the same set of plans purchased in 1918 from Eaton's Mail Order.

The following description of this house was written in the *Gimli Saga*:

> Mr. Tergesen's foresight was also evident when he built the stately and beautiful home on Fourth Avenue in 1908, now occupied by his son Joe, and his wife Lara. It was then considered to be far out in the country, but today is one of the finest residential areas. He had it wired for electricity, which he knew would come eventually: 22 years later he was able to turn on the lights. He also installed steam heat and modern waterworks and plumbing system operated by a windmill. The ceiling of the living room and walls of the den were decoratively handpainted by an artist friend, Snaebjorn Palsson, whose work in the den remains clear and beautiful after nearly 70 years. (*Gimli Saga, 1975, p. 751*)

There are also several large, interesting residences in the Riverton area. Three of these were constructed from the same set of plans by Odder Olafson, a local carpenter, who obtained them from Eaton's Mail Order Service for $10.00. The most interesting and original of these homes, known locally by its Icelandic name "Bakka", is located on the banks of the Icelandic River about a kilometre south of the community (Figure 34). An impressive 21/2 storey building, it features a twin-gabled roof with a large shed-roofed dormer, and a large multi-columned verandah. The decorative features of the house include a bay window with stained glass transoms and eave brackets

One of the most interesting of all the Icelandic residences in the planning district is located about five kilometres southwest of Riverton, also along the banks of the Icelandic River (Figure 35 and 36).

Known as "Vindheimar" (The Windy Home), this two storey frame structure was originally constructed in 1914 for Halli Bjornson who was involved in the fishing and freighting business on Lake Winnipeg. A landmark in the region for many years, the house boasted five bedrooms, two staircases, and a large 5000 x 8000 mm (15' x 26') kitchen. The floor plan for this house closely resembles that of the more modest gable-with-shed type of residence (Figure 37).

Although the second storey wing of the Bjornson house occupies what would typically be the position of a shanty, the interior layout is quite similar and even includes the 1000 mm (3') projection on the right hand side for a doorway.

Vindheimar was well known for its Icelandic decorative elements. Stylized wooden dragon heads, like those on early Viking ships, and bargeboards cut in the shape of cresting waves decorated all the gable ends (Figure 38). Of greater interest were the seven hand-painted frescoes which adorned the dining room walls (Figure 39). They were painted directly onto the thick plaster coated walls by an unknown Icelandic artist soon after completion of the house.

Figure 35
'Vindheimar' (The Windy Home), SW 7-23-4E. This photograph shows the large house as it appeared in 1935. (T. Bjornson Photo.)

Figure 36
'Vindheimer' as it appears today.

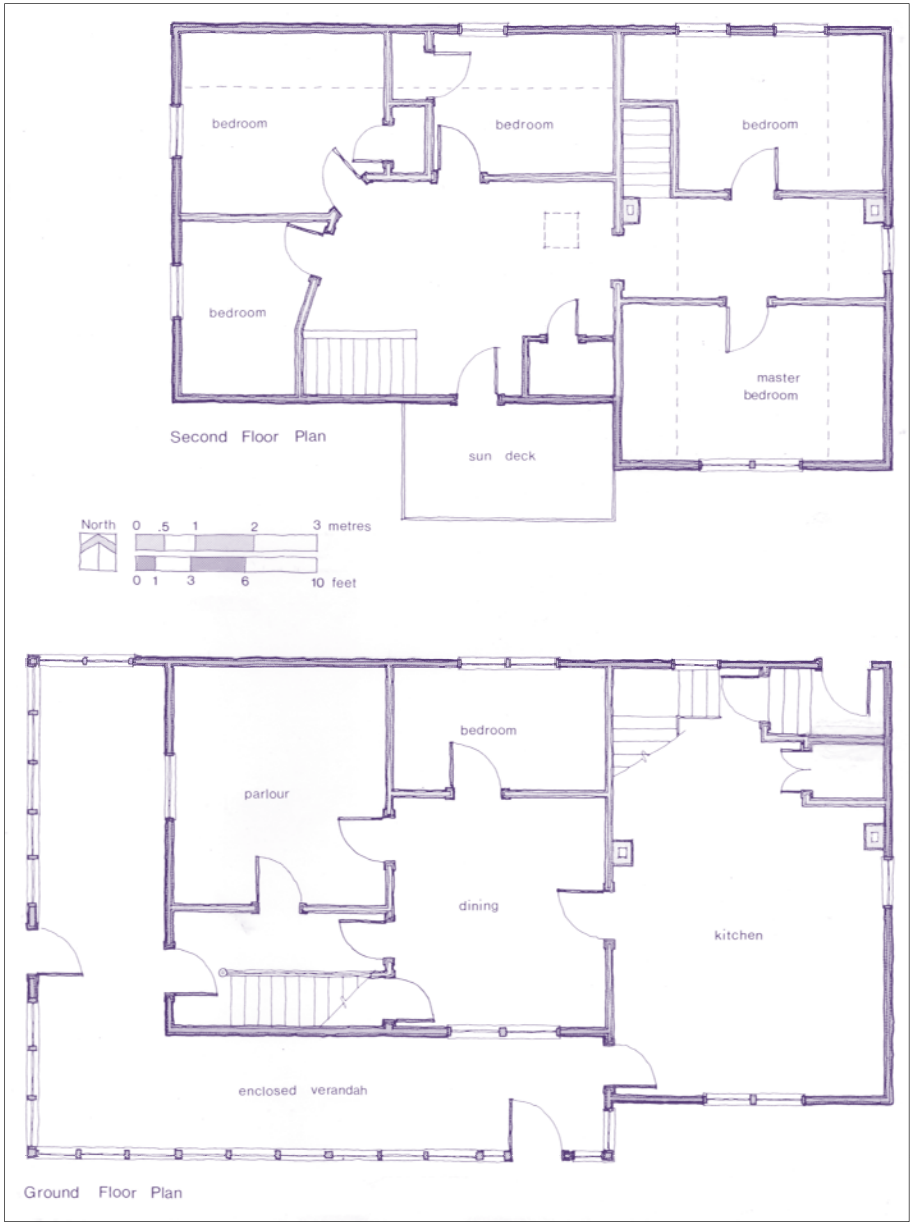


Figure 37
'Vindheimer' floor plans.

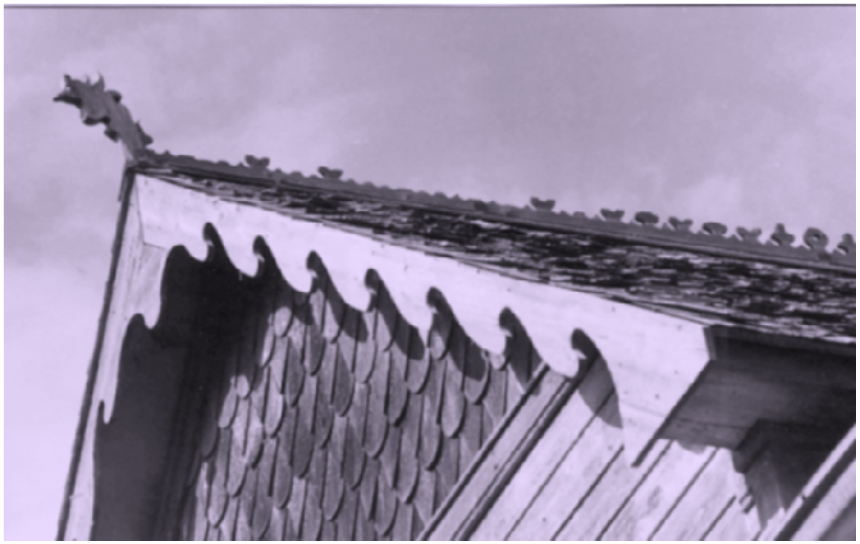


Figure 38
'Vindheimer.' Icelandic decorative elements.

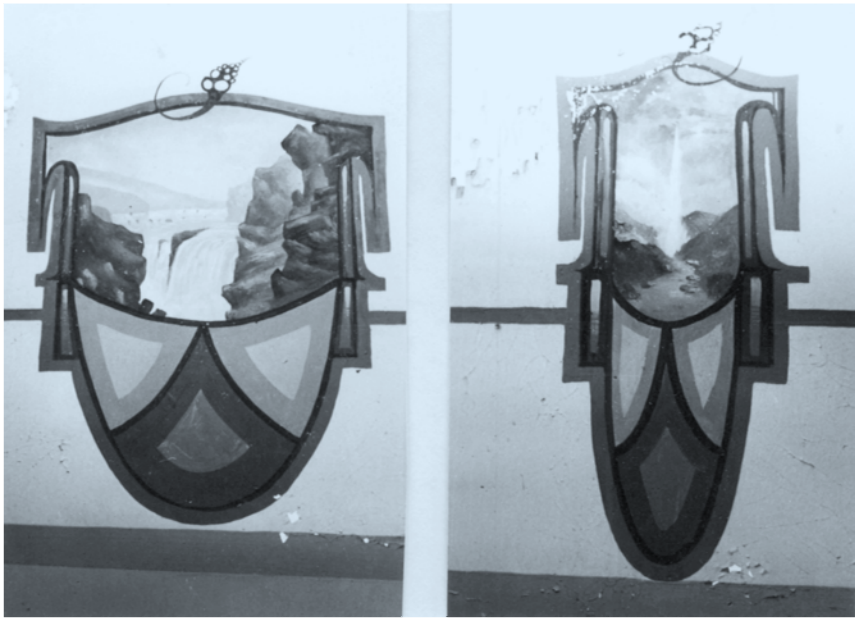


Figure 39
'Vindheimer.' Two of the handpainted frescoes that adorn the dining room walls.

Fishing Industry Structures

Initial attempts at fishing by the Icelandic settlers during the 1870s were largely unsuccessful due primarily to the poorly suited nets and other equipment brought from Iceland. Within a few years however, more successful techniques and equipment were developed and fishing became the main source of food in the colony. Small, two-masted sailboats were used during these early years and the catch was either dried, smoked or preserved in salt for winter consumption.

Very little winter fishing occurred during the 1870s, and only small amounts of preserved fish were sold to markets in Winnipeg. The delivery of fresh fish to Winnipeg merchants became possible when the railroad connection between Winnipeg and Selkirk was completed in 1883. Prior to this time, rapids on the Red River near St. Andrews had prevented direct water transport of goods between Winnipeg and the colony. By the mid 1880s, however, the fishing industry on Lake Winnipeg was growing rapidly and soon a number of foreign-backed companies were established. Steam-powered fish tugs, barges, boats and other equipment were brought in, and a number of fish packing stations were constructed on both sides of the lakeshore as each company strove to gain control over the industry. Local Icelandic-backed interests could not compete with these large operations and soon most of the local fishermen were either employed by these companies or were selling their catches to them.

Catches increased after the turn of the century reaching a high of 31/2 million kilograms (71/2 million pounds) in 1906. After 1910, however, the numbers decreased steadily and the industry began to decline. Companies either ceased operations or were absorbed by the others. The last major fish packing plant, the British Columbia Fish Packers in Gimli, ceased operations in 1969. Presently the industry is controlled by the Freshwater Marketing Corporation.

Few of the fish packing stations constructed during the early years of the industry were situated on the shoreline between Gimli and Riverton because of poor natural harbours. Selkirk and several locations on the west shore were the main plan locations. However, after government wharfs were constructed at these locations. The Hanusa facility no longer exists and the one in Gimli is now a local museum (Figure 40).

Two smaller fish stations were found along the shoreline in the planning district, one at Drunken Point and the other near Arnes (Figure 41). Both appear to be of recent construction, although neither is currently in use.

A number of temporary log fish stations were constructed along the shores of the north basin of Lake Winnipeg and were occupied during the winter fishing season. One such structure from a camp at Loon Straits still stands, now used as a garage and storage shed (Figure 42).

Figure 40
Portions of this structure date back to 1919 when Robbins Incorporated, a Chicago based company, established the first large scale fish processing station in the Eastern Interlake. Since that time the facility has changed hands several times and received a number of additions.

Figure 41
This small fish processing station, located near Arnes, and a similar one near Hnausa, were owned by local Icelandic fishermen, and only recently ceased operations.

Figure 42
Log building from a former fish camp at Loon Straits on the northern shores of Lake Winnipeg.

Many of the local fishermen constructed their own small woodframe, shed-roofed equipment storage sheds, ice and smoke houses. Only a few of these still exist. A building constructed in 1934 for drying and storing nets and other equipment is near Hnausa (Figure 43). Two other small storage structures are located in Riverton (Figure 44). These buildings were apparently constructed prior to the turn of the century and still contain a number of nets and other articles from the early years of fishing on Lake Winnipeg.

Figure 43
Net and equipment storage shed near Hnausa.

Figure 44
This small storage shed, located in Riverton, is still used for storing nets and equipment after nearly 80 years.

Farm Structures

Farming was of much less importance than fishing to the early economy of the Icelandic settlement. Along the lakeshore, the dense forest proved very difficult to clear and the meadow areas were prone to flooding. Settlers who remained on the land raised small herds of cattle. Marketing them was a problem until the government wharf was constructed at Hnausa. Even by 1913, the average farm in the settlement consisted of only 12 hectares (30 acres) of cleared land, a herd of 20 cattle, 15 sheep, and possibly a few hogs and poultry.

Farming was more naturally the primary occupation along the Icelandic River. Stock grazing also developed as the land here was low and often heavily forested. Several types of Icelandic sheep were raised during the early years of settlement in all the areas and knitting developed into a cottage industry for a time. Just after the turn of the century, as the Arborg-Vidir areas were first being settled, dairying developed as a viable farm operation. The Northstar Creamery Cooperative was formed in 1906, and a facility constructed at Arborg. With the arrival of the railway in 1910, the industry grew rapidly. As the land was drained and cleared, the soil proved to be of good quality and farming operations in the Icelandic areas slowly shifted from dairying and the raising of stock to grain production.

Very few pre-1900 farm buildings remain. Only a single building of log construction was found - a shed on the same site as the Sniefeld log house (Figure 45). Small shed-roofed storage structures of this type were often found on the early homesteads.

Figure 45
Sniefeld shed, SE 8-22-4E, circa 1895. Small shanty-roofed storage sheds such as this one were among the first farm buildings the Icelandic settlers constructed after staking claim to their homesteads.

Prior to the turn of the century, when livestock numbers were still quite small, simple log stables were used to shelter the animals (Figure 46). The oldest farm building of frame construction is a barn located just south of Riverton on River Lot 8 (Figure 47). The design is not unlike other barns of the period found in most other parts of the province. The simple gable roof was also found on many of the larger barns constructed during this period, of which there are several examples remaining (Figure 48).

The barns constructed during the 1920s and 1930s were of contemporary design. Most were gambrel roofed central aisle designs, although a few examples with vaulted roofs still exist from this period (Figure 49). Many of the barns at this time had hay slings for filling the lofts.

Most of the barns remaining in the Icelandic areas are no longer used to house cattle. With grain production the main agricultural activity in the planning district, the early barns have been converted to storage facilities. Many are simply unused.

Figure 46
The first barns constructed by the Icelanders were simple gable-roofed log structures. After the turn of the century, when large frame barns were built, these structures were usually demolished. None are known to have survived to the present. (Provincial Archives Manitoba)

Figure 47
Eyolfson barn, Riverton, 1912. This small frame barn, housed about a dozen head of stock .It had a high walled loft for maximum fee storage capacity, and a lean-to addition for the young animals.

Figure 48
Many of the barns constructed during the 1920s were simply longer versions of the earlier gable-roofed barns, such as this Riverton area example.

Figure 49
Gudmundson barn, River Lot 51, Arborg, 1925. With the development of dairying in the Arborg area during the early 1920s, many Icelanders constructed large capacity modern style barns. Very few of these are still in use.