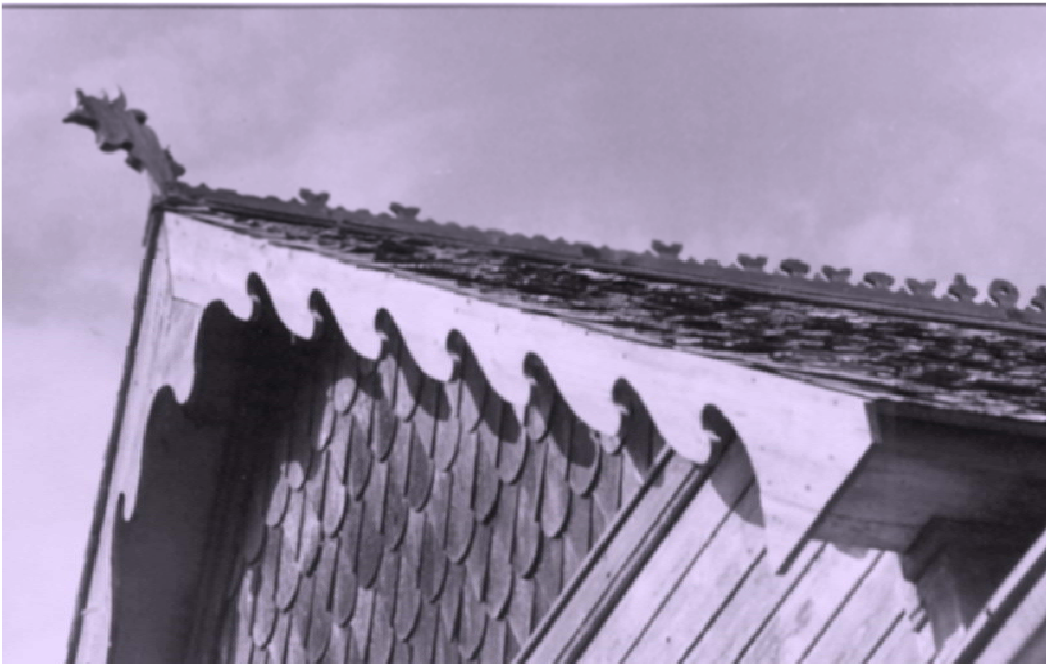


ICELANDIC FARM AND FISHING BUILDINGS

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, one 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.

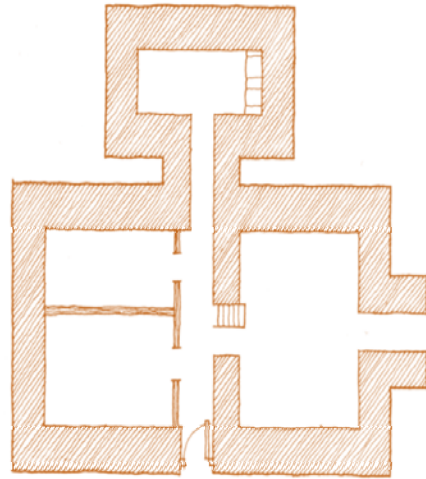
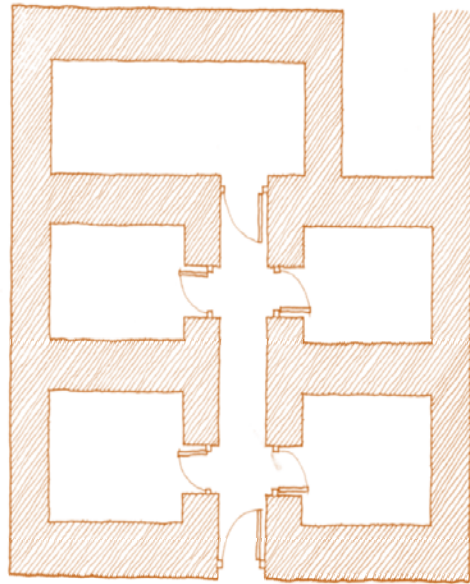


Figure 2
Subterranean group houses were a series of small structures built of stone, turf or sod, with earth floors and grass-covered roofs.

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. (Íslandsferð John Coles, Bokafagan Hildur)