



New Iceland and Beyond: A 175-Year Icelandic-Canadian Saga: Book 1: Icelanders Arrive and Strive: A Manitoba Story

Robert C. A. Frederickson

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A story of a community's hardiness, willpower, and perseverance, New Iceland and Beyond extols the successes of a generation of Canadian settlers.

Robert C. A. Frederickson's *New Iceland and Beyond* is a stirring history of an unsung migration movement and its legacy.

Centering Frederickson's great-grandparents, Fridjon and Gudny, the book uses their stories as a window onto the larger history of Icelandic-Canadian immigration at the turn of the twentieth century. It opens with a panoramic history of Iceland's Norse founders, cycling through tales of courageous adventurers whose exploits and bodies of literature left an outsized impact on world culture.

In the late nineteenth century, the book says, small waves of Icelanders continued the tradition of exploration by seeking new lives in North America, settling along the sparse lake shores and high plains of Canada and the northern US. With help from the recently confederated Canadian government, a band of these immigrants established a fledgling Icelandic colony, New Iceland, on the coast of Lake Winnipeg. Their early years were replete with challenges, including brutal crop shortages, smallpox, and fractures over religious interpretations. And though the colony never fulfilled the ambitions of its founders, it served as a launching pad for later generations of Icelanders who established new lives in Canada while preserving their rich heritage.

There is a strong sense of Icelandic exceptionalism in the book, which goes a long way toward validating that judgment. The profiles of individual settlers—especially Fridjon, Gudny, and their son-in-law, future Manitoba legislature member Thomas Herman Johnson—focus on virtues like hardiness and willpower. Warm outside perspectives validate these positions further, as with that of Englishman John Taylor, who was so smitten by the immigrants' tenacity that he joined their cause. Elsewhere, Governor General Dufferin is remembered for effusing praise for the settlers in a lengthy speech on his visit to the colony.

However, the book is not straightforward in its historical chronicling throughout. Too often, the narrative leans on its documentary sources, sometimes dedicating pages' worth to letters and records with little in the way of artful integration. This choppiness interrupts the book during affecting moments, including with the description of Fridjon's death. And in the middle of an early chapter, the book also slips into a historical fiction mode, complete with dialogue and interior explorations of the characters' minds; the method is abandoned thereafter.

New Iceland and Beyond is a slim, accessible historical introduction to one North American wave of immigration.

ISAAC RANDEL (July 8, 2024)

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