

## SCANDINAVIANS

The Norsemen were the first Europeans to come to Canada—after the Inuit and before the French.

There is solid evidence that the first ones came to Canada at least 1,000 years ago—vaguely worded accounts in Norse sagas, the map drawn by Stephanius long after the event, scattered relics, most of which proved to be fakes but a few of which seem authentic. The best proofs are the map of Vinland dating from 1440 and the excavations of nine buildings by Helge Instad at L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland.

Today there are more than 400,000 Canadians of Scandinavian descent—Norwegians, Swedes, Finns, Danes and Icelanders.

The period of the greatest immigration for the first three groups was in the 1920s when over 70,000 arrived, more or less evenly divided.

## THE ICELANDERS

In 1872 Sigtryggur Jonasson, age twenty, became an immigration agent, working for the Ontario government. In 1873 he arranged the brief settlement of 100 of his fellow Icelanders at Rosseau and a larger group at Kinmount. Neither colony worked out very well, and in the spring of 1875 he went west to look at the Red River Valley and found a likely strip on the shore of Lake Winnipeg. The main group at Kinmount moved to Manitoba in September 1875 and founded the town of Gimli. They were remote from any responsible government and they set up their own Republic of Iceland, made up of four districts with a council. The council presidents met as the *Tingrad* and were the *de facto* government. They offered no resistance when Manitoba took over in 1887.



Photo: Provincial Archives of Manitoba

# September/Septembre 1983

**CANADA**  
TODAY / D'AUJOURD'HUI

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