

## *Icelandic Pioneers of 1874*

From the Reminiscences of Simon Simonson

Translated by W. KRISTJANSON

On the tenth of September, 1874, at half past one o'clock, the ship moved down the fjord. The wind blew from the north and there was a rough sea, with flying spray. Outside Drangey, the view was dimmed and the seas ran high. Everybody was sea-sick. Early the following morning we could barely glimpse the West Country mountains and they soon disappeared altogether from view. This was on the eleventh, a Friday. Then a direct course was set for Quebec, where we arrived, safe and sound, on Wednesday the twenty-third, although two of the days at sea had been very bad. The ship's speed varied from seventy-five to 265 miles a day. The distance to the St. Lawrence River was 2194 miles.

After a considerable wait, we proceeded to the Immigration shed. Sigtryggur Jónasson met us there, and immediately assumed the role of guide and interpreter. This gave the people a momentary uplift of the spirit.

That night we moved into the coaches, which the majority thought a considerable novelty, so very different from anything at home. We proceeded to Montreal, where we had a meal, and then went on to Toronto. On the evening of the twenty-fourth we moved into the Immigration shed. We had a long stay there. Our fare was good; at least, there was sufficient beef, but it proved unsuitable food, being too heavy, and the people generally became considerably indisposed, especially the children. However, during all this long journey our family was in good health.

A few of the girls in the group went into domestic service in Toronto.

In Toronto we met with some Icelanders who had arrived the previous year, including Friðjón and his wife, and Baldvin. These visited us on occasion, in the evenings.

Presently we learned that we were to move into a district to the north in the province, where a railroad was under construction. There we would be able to support ourselves and our families. During our stay in Toronto, buildings were being erected for our use at a point along the proposed route of the railway.

We left Toronto at night. We had to proceed on foot through the city for about three miles, and carry our luggage. I carried my little Guðrún, but my Guðmundur walked. I thought the buildings so high and the streets so narrow that the street was like a narrow ravine at home in Iceland, but the travelling was different, for the streets were paved with stone. We arrived at the railroad station about day-break.

The railroad ran north, about eighty miles, to Cobocok, where we had our midday meal, at three o'clock.

The town was newly built. The landscape there was becoming much more unattractive and more stony.

October 9, 1874. Before us lay a journey of fourteen miles, by horse-drawn wagons, over stones and brambles and wet ground. That was a trying journey for the children, who were sick or ailing, and for the women. The jolting of the clumsy wagons on the rough road was fearful. Also, the season had been wet, and nights came on pitch dark. Anybody with sense would have known the effects of this journey would be anything but good, and such proved to be the case. Many of the children collapsed, and also some of the grown-ups, chiefly the old folks.

About midnight the people were dumped out of the wagons, under the trees, in darkness such as I have scarcely seen the like. We knew not where to go, and had the sick children on our hands. At last, after a long and distressing