

Gimli South Beacher Supplies Sled Dogs for Famous 1914 Antarctic Exploration

written by Holly Frantz



Other than the fact that Sigurjon Isfeld had a wonderful reputation for raising sled dogs, nobody really knows why this early pioneer of South Beach, and Larry Frantz' great grandfather, supplied more than one hundred of the dogs for Ernest Shackleton's 1914 expedition to the Antarctica. Sigurjon Isfeld, J.B. Johnson and Jack Castleman, two other Gimlites, were hired to transport the dogs to England. They were carried in individual crates in three cattle cars to Montreal, and after a 16 day voyage on the *Montcalm*, arrived in England. The dogs delivered, they spent 10 days in luxury, paid for by Sir Ernest, who offered them a week's holiday in Belgium if they wished to return by the *Montcalm*. However when Germany invaded Belgium they were told to leave Britain immediately if they wished to return safely to Canada. Sir Ernest invited Sigurjon to accompany him to the South Pole, and he wired his wife for her advice. She wired back, "Come home": Luckily for Larry, or he may not be here today.

Ernest Shackleton's Trans-Antarctica expedition of 1914 – 1917 is one of the most incredible adventure stories of all time. It is remarkable even for

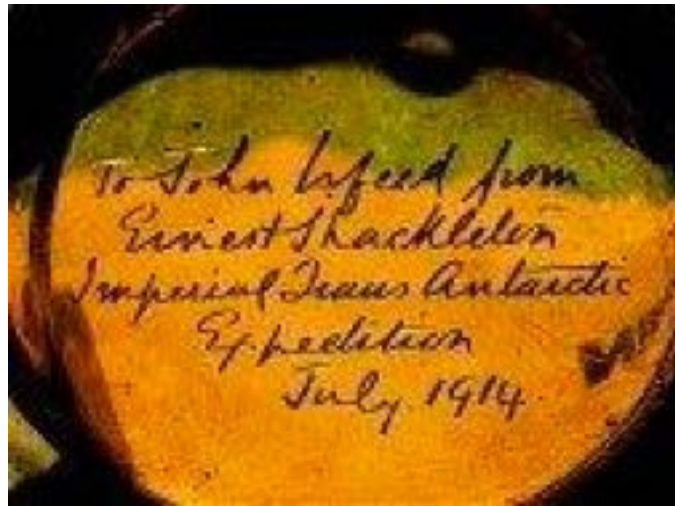
an era and region that already has far more than its fair share of incredible tales of heroism and fortitude in the face of appalling hardships. The intention was to cross the Antarctic continent from one coast to the other via the South Pole. In the event, the expedition never set foot on continental Antarctica. The expedition managed to survive the loss of their ship in the middle of the Antarctic pack ice at a time when there was no chance of contacting the outside world, let alone of being rescued. It is a classic tale of leadership and heroism.

Of the 100 dogs purchased for the *Endurance* expedition, only one perished en route during their shipment to England. Of the surviving 99 dogs, 69 were put on board the *Endurance* as draft animals for the planned trans-Antarctic crossing beginning at the Weddell Sea. All perished following the entrapment of the *Endurance* in pack ice. The remaining 30 dogs were put on board the *Aurora* to be employed as draft animals for the purposes of setting cache supplies along the planned expedition route from the Ross Sea on the opposite side of the continent. Of these only three survived and were later retired to homes and zoos. The dogs weren't any specific breed but were described by members of the expedition as a mongrel mix of half-wild, undefined, half-breeds, not many degrees removed from wolves.



Sigurjon's son, Steve Isfeld with some of the 1933 Byrd Expedition Team dogs

Sigurjon also supplied dogs for Rear Admiral Richard Byrd's second Antarctic expedition in 1933.



Shackleton's gift pocket Watch



Inscription in watch

Four commemorative stamps were issued by the Crown Agents Stamp Bureau for use in British Antarctica Territories. The theme of Shackleton's dogs pays tribute to the men's faithful friends who sadly perished on the expedition. The largest dog, Samson, is also among those featured, together with Shakespeare and Soley.

