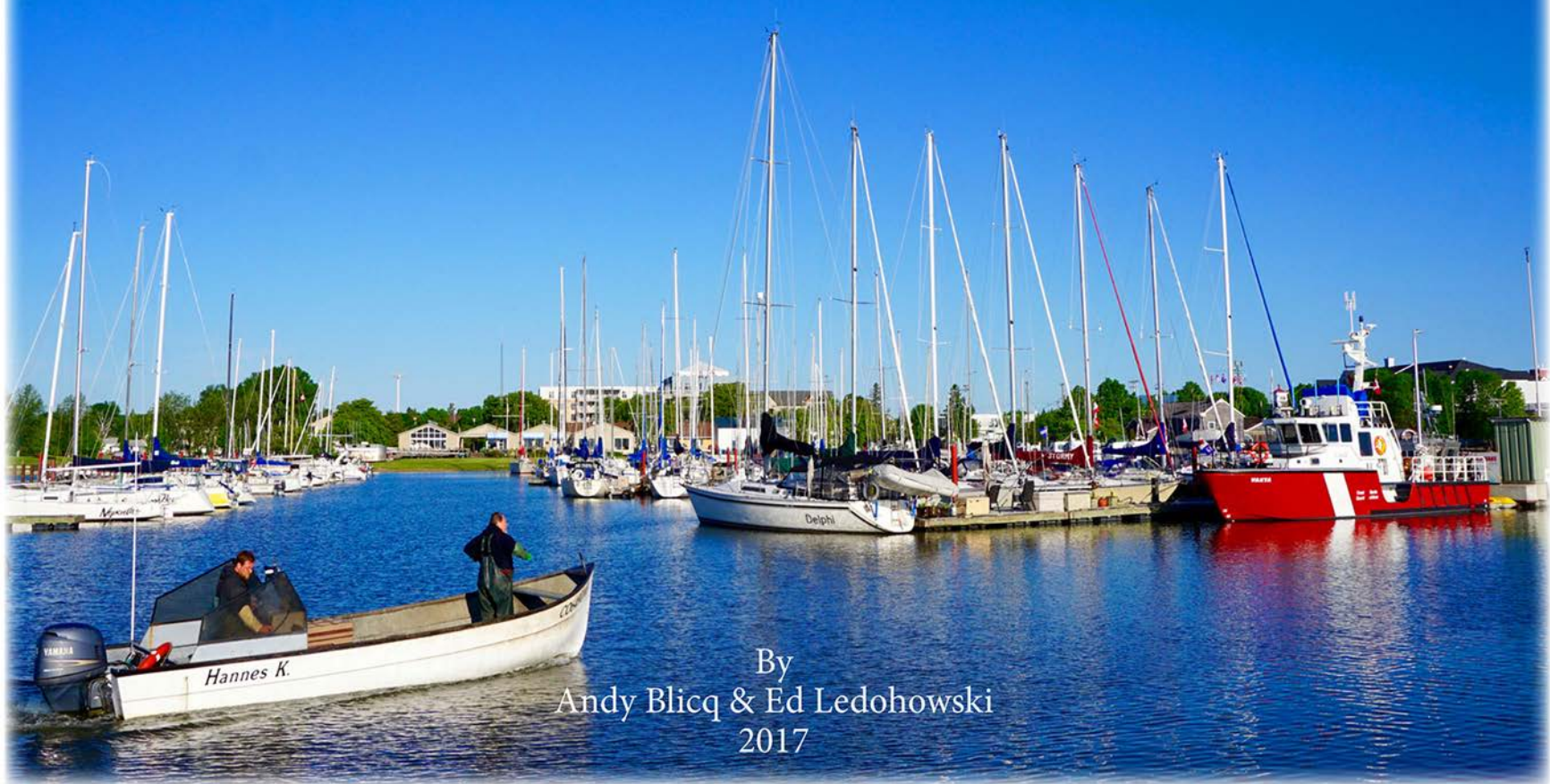


GIMLI HARBOUR & FISHERY

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY



By
Andy Blicq & Ed Ledohowski
2017

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for the

R.M. of Gimli Heritage Advisory Committee

2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This history and celebration of Gimli's harbour and fishery would not have been possible without the assistance of many people. At the top of the list is Wally Johannson who has been the driving force behind making this book possible and who has brought invaluable advice and wisdom to the process. The community is lucky to have Wally - a tireless champion of its heritage assets.

This publication was produced for the R. M. of Gimli's Heritage Advisory Committee. The volunteer committee is appointed by council to advise on heritage matters. This book is a part of a suite of events and commemorative publications being undertaken by the committee and the community to mark Canada's 150th birthday. The members of the Gimli MHAC currently include: Wally Johannson, Ernest Stefanson, Claire Gillis, Rick Lair, Chris Brooks, Don Steinmetz, Stephie Hykawy, Johanne Kristjanson and Councillor Thora Palson.

Thanks also go out to Municipality of Gimli Mayor Randy Woroniuk, Deputy Mayor Peter Peiluck, and Councillors Richard Petrowski, Danny Luprypa and Thora Palson for their support of Gimli's heritage preservation movement.

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The communities along the west shore are blessed to have a long history of writers and history buffs who, over the years, have collected invaluable facts and stories about the people and places that make up the historical record of the district, among them the extraordinary Sigurbjorg Stefansson and the Women's Institute who penned the *Gimli Saga* in the 1970s; Nelson Gerrard's *Icelandic River Saga* in 1985; Wilhelm Kristjanson's *A Manitoba Saga: The Icelandic People of Manitoba* in 1990; Dilla Narfason and Mary Shebeski's *Gimli Memories* in 1982 and Ryan Eyford's *White Settler Reserve - New Iceland and the Colonization of the Canadian West*, published in 2016.

In some places we have drawn content directly from these publications and, in others, we have combined details to weave the story of Gimli's harbour and fishery. In addition, we would like to acknowledge David Olson, Robert Kristjanson, Garry Peterson and their families, and many others from Gimli's fishing community for their time and assistance in making this publication possible. As well, we want to acknowledge former harbour master Gord Gowie for his help.

In a work of this kind, some errors and omissions are unavoidable. Sometimes, the records of historical events are contradictory or incomplete and we regret that the constraints of time and budget have meant that some noteworthy events and people may not have been included here.

Finally, hats off to those who have come before us and who had the foresight to record the remarkable history of our fishing community and the Gimli harbour, and the pioneers who provided us with such rich material. Their courage in the face of hardships has been a constant inspiration.

Andy Blicq and Ed Ledohowski



Andy Blicq Photo.

INTRODUCTION

Just after sunrise on a cold October morning, from the comfort of the living room of our family cottage in Loni Beach, I watch as two fishing skiffs make their way toward the horizon. It is slow-going. A north wind had been blowing all night and Lake Winnipeg is up and running. The telltale is always the horizon - the restless waves raw and jagged where the water meets the sky.

I snap a picture and turn on my laptop. Environment Canada is showing -6 degrees Celsius. Beautiful as it is to look at, there is little romance in a morning spent lifting nets on a day like this one. Our neighbour, commercial fisherman Garry Peterson, once told me that when he is on the water on a fine July day he feels like he should be paying someone to be there. But on a day like this one, and there are some that are much worse than this October morning, he wouldn't wish it on his worst enemy. The lake is a good provider, but she has a wicked temper, too, and must be treated with respect.

The truth is, Garry and all the others must go out in all but the worst weather. That is the nature of their work. To leave the fish in the nets would mean they would spoil and there is no profit or pride to be found in that. And Garry must set his nets wherever the fish choose to make their way in the opaque waters of our 'inland ocean.' On this day, in this fall season, that means travelling far out onto the lake.

I watch as the two sturdy skiffs pound from one wave to the next, until they are barely visible on the horizon. This kind of outdoor work is foreign to so many of us now. Eighty per cent of Canadians live in an urban environment. Work often means spending our days in front of a computer screen. Those who toil in a primary industry like commercial fishing have become a minority.

Commercial fishing on Lake Winnipeg can be hard and dangerous, but a good life, too, if you ask those who do fish. At David Olson's invitation, I join him and his son Liam and the Favell family on a day of winter fishing. It is late January. A bitter wind is blowing. Young Liam and Jordan Favell are working together, cheerfully pulling nets through a hole they've drilled through the ice and plucking the plentiful catch of pickerel from the nylon mesh. Wearing wet woolen mitts at 20 below is just part of the job.

They don't seem to notice.

I ask them what it is that has drawn them to this life, rather than emigrating to the city, like so many other rural young people. Their answer is simple.

"I like being outside," says Liam.

"Every day is different," adds Jordan.

Yes, it is cold and the work is hard, but there is an enviable independence and freedom to a life spent out in nature, working for yourself.

For Liam's dad David it is that too, and much more. At 61, with 43 years on the lake, he is a leading member of Gimli's commercial fishing community and a successful businessman. David followed his late father Paul onto the lake, just as Liam is following him. For the Olsons and so many others here, this business of fishing is steeped in the community's history and memory. And it continues to sustain it today.

"I wanted to fish. It's the greatest life in the world," says David, adding that this life "keeps you real. If you don't produce, you don't eat."

This book is about them and for all of them - a visual collection of photographs and memories that trace the history of Gimli's fishers, their families, our community and its harbour, and the great boats that were once a lifeline to the northern wilderness and the outside world. For my colleagues, Wally Johannson, master researcher Ed Ledohowski and I, it has been a fascinating journey. We remain in awe of the men and women who have lived and worked on the lake over the last 140 years. Courage, perseverance and a love of the lake and the sometimes difficult life it offers have always sustained them.

At this writing, Lake Winnipeg remains an astonishing resource. If it is managed well and the environment protected, it will sustain many more generations of Olsons and Favells and Petersons and all the others who call Gimli home.

- Andy Blicq

**They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business
in great waters;**

**These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in
the deep.**

- Psalm 107

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The Colville taking on wood at Grand Rapids, circa 1880. This superb early photograph features the juxtaposition of three of the principal players on the lake in the 1880s. We find the pre-settlement era of the fishery in the subjects in the birch bark canoe. On the dock, the effects of modern settlement can be seen in the Indigenous workers known as 'Woodhawks' loading cordwood to fire the Colville – the first steamer on the lake and a symbol of the modern era. (*Archives of Manitoba (AofM): Loudon Coll #66.*)

BEGINNINGS

In the centuries before the first Europeans arrived, Lake Winnipeg was a great provider. Its restless waters teemed with fish of all kinds and the wilderness lands along its shores and tributaries supported birds and animals in abundance.

Indigenous people took what they needed for food and shelter. It is easy to imagine a summer evening in camp, where one of the innumerable creeks empties into the lake. Children play on the beach as the day's catch is being prepared over an open fire. A cooling breeze blowing across the open water helps to abate the ferocious clouds of insects that are a part of life here, until the first frost signals the approach of winter.

We are a restless and curious species and that drove these first inhabitants to adopt a marvel of human innovation and engineering – the birch bark canoe. Lightweight and durable, for centuries handmade canoes provided transportation and access to new territories and food supplies. Later, they were used by fur traders. The birch bark canoe is the founding stone of the maritime story associated with Gimli and Lake Winnipeg.

England's Hudson's Bay Company introduced another vessel to the rivers and lakes of the western frontier. Around 1745, the HBC instructed the hardened workers they recruited from northern Scotland's Orkney Islands to build a boat for transporting furs and supplies. The Orkneymen turned to another ancient design, one that finds its roots in the seafaring technology perfected by the Vikings.

The York boat, as it would become known, was constructed of sturdy, overlapping wooden planks. It had a flat bottom and a bow and a stern raked at 45 degrees. A mast could be raised and a square sail set to aid its oarsmen, a great advantage on Lake Winnipeg. It was superior to the birch bark canoe in several ways: it had the same number of crew as a canoe; it could carry three times the weight; its wooden hull was much less prone to damage by ice or submerged rocks; it was safer in a storm.

York boats were named after York Factory, the HBC's post on Hudson Bay and the destination for furs collected all over the Canadian West for shipment to England. For the six to eight oarsmen, traversing great distances over rivers and lakes was brutally hard work in often punishing conditions. Each oar weighed 11 kilograms and the oarsmen were expected to row for up to 16 hours a day.

The past and the future come together in an early photograph taken at Grand Rapids landing in the 1880s, which shows a birch bark canoe and an early steamboat named the Colville.

The Colville was built in 1875 by the Hudson's Bay Company. Her boiler had its own place in history. It came from the Anson Northup, a stern wheeler and the first steamboat on the Red River. The Colville was a 36-metre-long propeller-driven steamer, constructed with sturdy oak planking. It was the Colville that, in September, 1875, transported Lt. Governor Alexander Morris to negotiate Treaty 5 with some of the Indigenous peoples around the lake. And it was the Colville that, a month later, brought the first group of Icelanders to the west shore of Lake Winnipeg, near what is now Gimli.

There are varying accounts of what happened in the days leading up to October 21st, 1875. The Canadian government had granted a group of 285 Icelandic settlers land on the wilderness west shore of Lake Winnipeg. The newcomers had purchased a York Boat and several large, box-like flat-bottomed barges, each about five metres wide and 10 metres long. Up to 60 people would be assigned to each vessel after a roof and a floor were installed and their possessions and supplies loaded. This motley flotilla would transport them and the little they owned, to their new home. Their trip from the docks in Winnipeg to the mouth of the Red River proved to be a challenge, with the boats difficult to manage. Rocks snagged the ungainly vessels and there were delays.

According to one source, the Colville happened to be docked at Lower Fort Garry and the captain took pity on the Icelanders and agreed, with some misgivings, to tow them to what is now the Icelandic River, near Riverton, where they were expected to settle.

Lake Winnipeg can be wild and unpredictable, especially in October. By the time the flotilla reached Willow Point - just south of what is now Gimli and 45 kilometres south of the Icelandic River - the weather was turning sour and the captain decided he could go no further. The settlers used their York Boat to row to shore, towing the flat barges onto the sandy beach, where they spent their first night in what would become New Iceland. We can only imagine what they were thinking and what was said, as they hunkered down in their boats on that beach in the darkness. It was just the beginning: in the months ahead the newcomers would be challenged by tragedy and terrible hardships.

Meanwhile, the Colville successfully operated as a freighter on the lake until June, 1894, when she caught fire and burned while docked at Grand Rapids. It was a sad ending for a steamer that played a key role in the founding of the New Iceland colony.



An Indigenous riverbank campsite in 1889. (AofM: Tyrrell Coll. #7.)

THE EARLY DAYS

After a night spent sleeping in their boats, the Icelanders emerged and began to explore the beach that would become their new home. The records show that travel was difficult. The dense forest came right down to the water and in many places there were marshes and lowlands.

"It was difficult to move along the shore on account of fallen trees that reached out into the lake, so one either had to wade out into the lake or to force one's way through the undergrowth with its fallen trees in order to travel from the landing places to the site of the settlement." So wrote pioneer Simon Simonson, whose words were translated from Icelandic by Wilhelm Kristjanson and published in the Icelandic Canadian magazine.

With winter approaching, the newcomers set to work making shelter. There was no time to waste. Some converted the barges into makeshift accommodation. Others moved into ragged buffalo hide tents borrowed from the Hudson's Bay Company and work began on permanent log buildings.

In November, the lake froze and bitterly cold temperatures gripped the isolated outpost. The Icelanders faced unimaginable hardships. The men had difficulty finding game. They received some help from Indigenous people who supplied them with dried moose meat and frozen milk. And later, they would show the newcomers how to fish and how to gather and use wild rice.

Although the lake teemed with fish and among them were skilled ocean mariners and fishermen, they couldn't catch anything. The mesh on the nets they had brought with them was either too large or too small and they had set them too close to shore.

A five dollar reward was announced for the first person to catch a fish. The records show Kristmundur Benjaminsson took the prize after landing a goldeye, drawing a large and curious crowd.

That first winter took a terrible toll. According to the *Gimli Saga*, a community history published in the 1970s, one third of the settlers perished. Some, it says, may have starved while others contracted scurvy. And they did not have the right clothing to face the sub-arctic conditions of a prairie winter. This was just the beginning of the suffering.

In 1876, a second group, numbering about 1200, left Iceland following a devastating volcanic eruption that dropped about six centimetres of pumice on 4000 hectares of the small, island nation. They arrived in the Icelandic colony, unwittingly bringing smallpox with them. This dreadful, disfiguring disease claimed more than one hundred lives in the colony and hundreds more in the Indigenous communities around the lake.

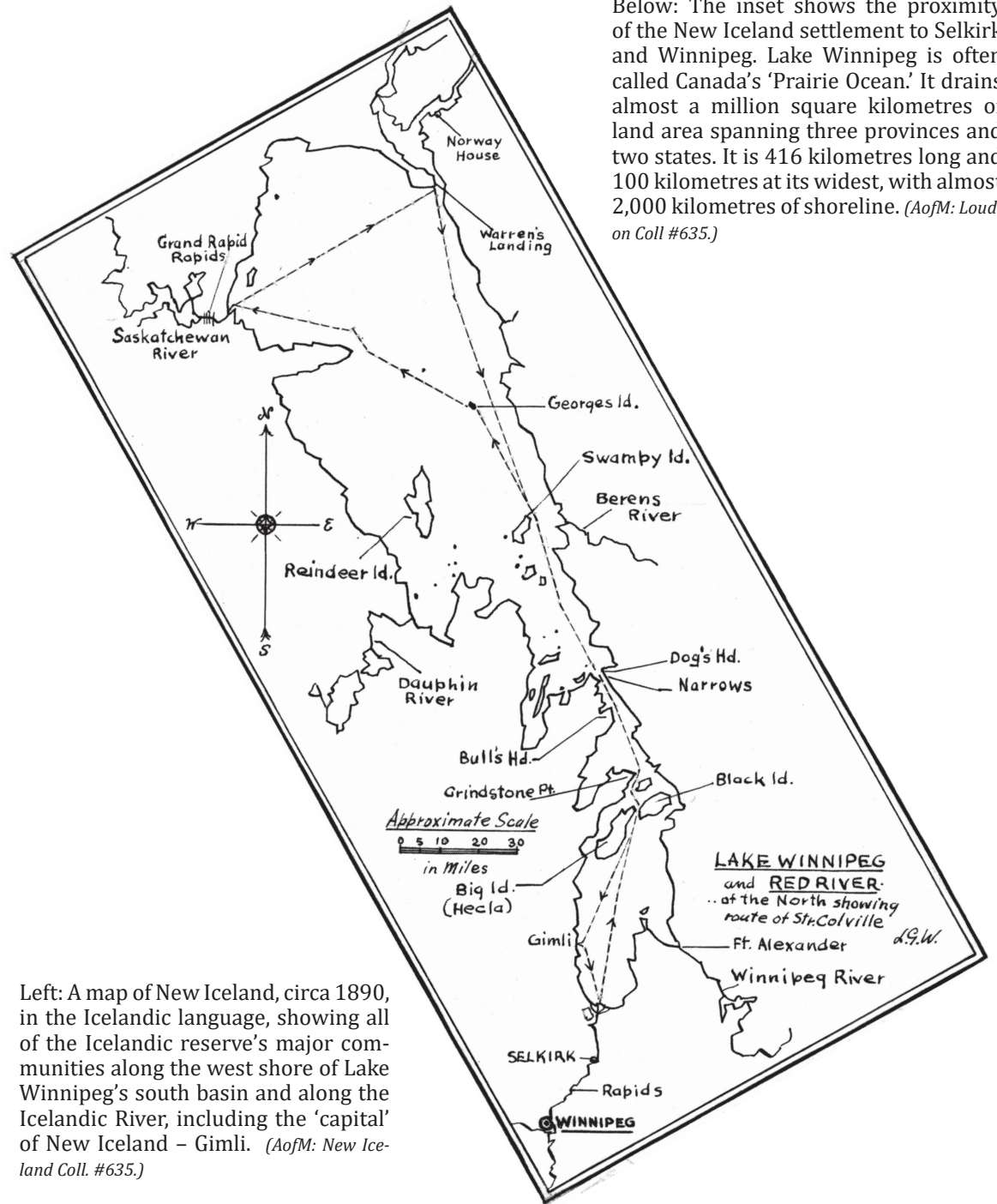
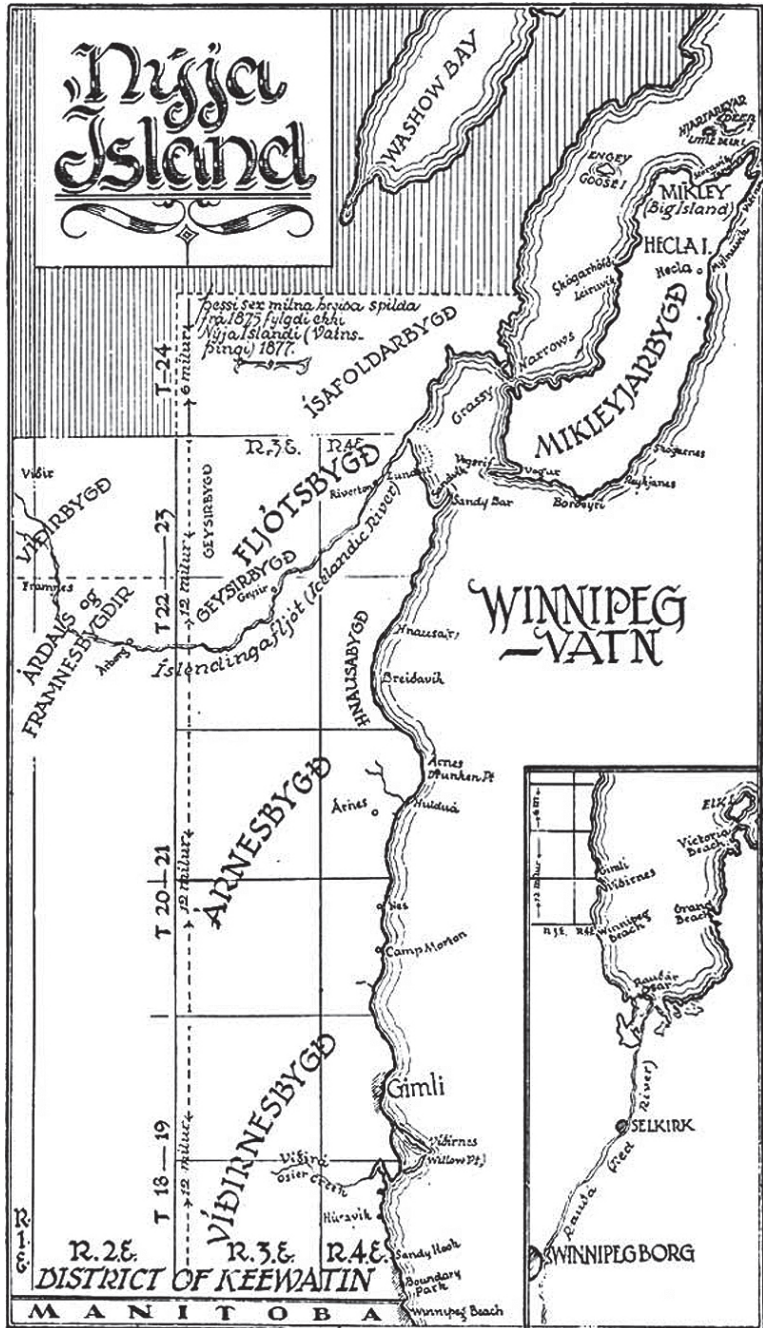
In the years that followed, some became disillusioned and left. The community dwindled to about 200 residents. It looked as though the colony might fail, but some hung on and with the arrival of more immigrants from Iceland, by the turn of the century the population of New Iceland was estimated to be about 2000.



The Landing of the First Group of Icelanders on Willow Point, October 21, 1875 - as envisioned by artist Arni Sigurdsson. (*New Iceland Heritage Museum (NIHM) - A. Sigurdsson painting.*)



The first group in the spring of 1876, as envisioned by artist A. Don Martin in a 1996 painting. In the shelter of a large white boulder the first child in New Iceland was said to have been born shortly after the first group landed. In this painting homage is paid to this local legend. (NIHM: A.D. Martin painting.)



Below: The inset shows the proximity of the New Iceland settlement to Selkirk and Winnipeg. Lake Winnipeg is often called Canada's 'Prairie Ocean.' It drains almost a million square kilometres of land area spanning three provinces and two states. It is 416 kilometres long and 100 kilometres at its widest, with almost 2,000 kilometres of shoreline. (AofM: Loudon Coll #635.)

Left: A map of New Iceland, circa 1890, in the Icelandic language, showing all of the Icelandic reserve's major communities along the west shore of Lake Winnipeg's south basin and along the Icelandic River, including the 'capital' of New Iceland - Gimli. (AofM: New Iceland Coll. #635.)

PIER & HARBOUR VIEWS



By the beginning of the 20th century, Gimli was well-established as a fishing village. Halldor Brynjolfsson built the first freezer to store locally-caught fish at his homestead just north of town. In winter, fishermen brought their catch to the ice house by horse-drawn sleigh, in summer by rowboat.



Above: View towards the north from the roof of the Betel retirement home, circa 1906. (AofM: Beaches Coll:#84.)



Above: View towards the northeast from the roof of the Gimli Public School, circa 1916. (AofM: New Iceland Coll:#84.)

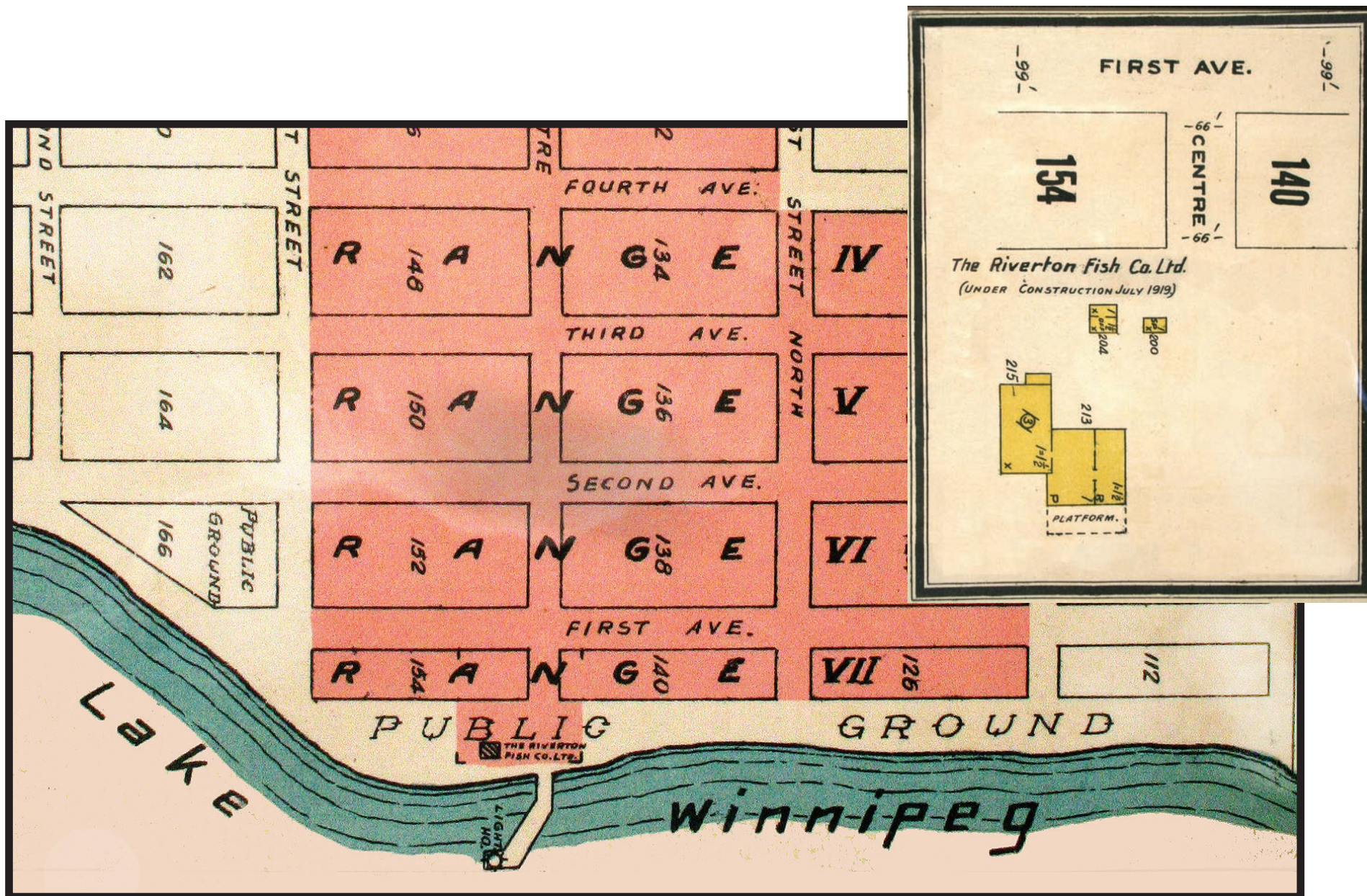


In the early days a windmill down by the lake drew water for the steam-powered trains. A spur line ran down to the harbour where fish could be loaded.

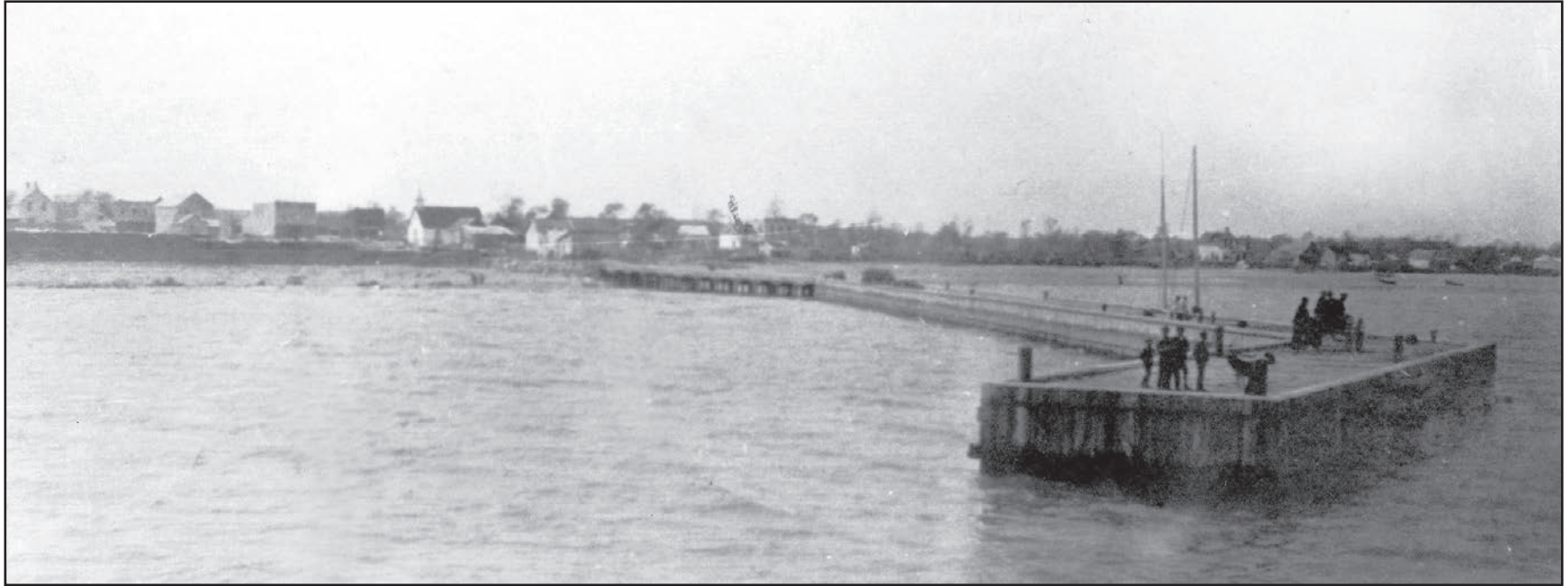
Above: Gimli looking northeast to Loni Beach, circa 1918. (GSM: 566.)



Above: Gimli looking southeast towards Willow Island, circa 1918. (GSM: 566.)



A "Fire Insurance Atlas" plan showing the layout of part of the town and the harbour in 1919. The inset reveals that The Riverton Fish Co. buildings, located just south of the pier, were still "under construction" during the summer of 1919. Note also that by this time, the lighthouse at the end of the pier had already been constructed. (AofM: Fire Atlas Coll. 1919, Gimli.)

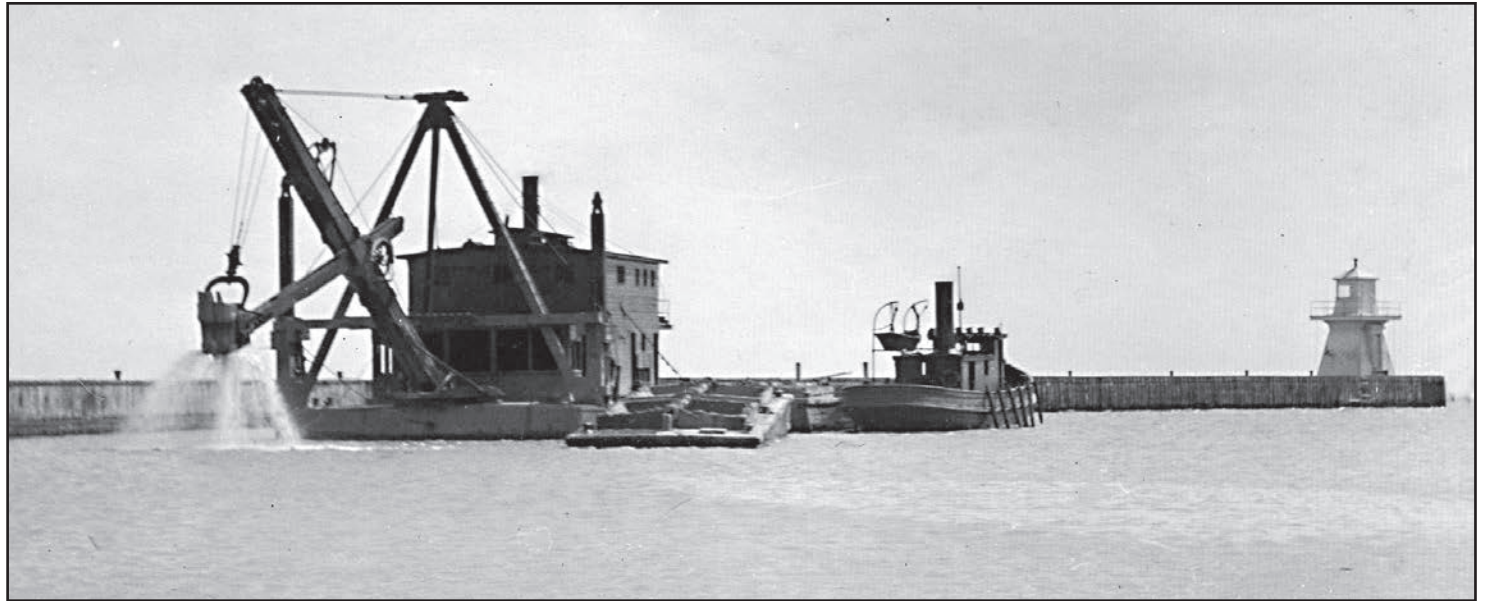


Above: Early attempts at building a log pier were frustrated by the ice, which crushed and swept away those structures. The first successful pier was built around 1900, by Icelandic contractor J.J. Vopni for \$9,000. (*GSM: 176.*)

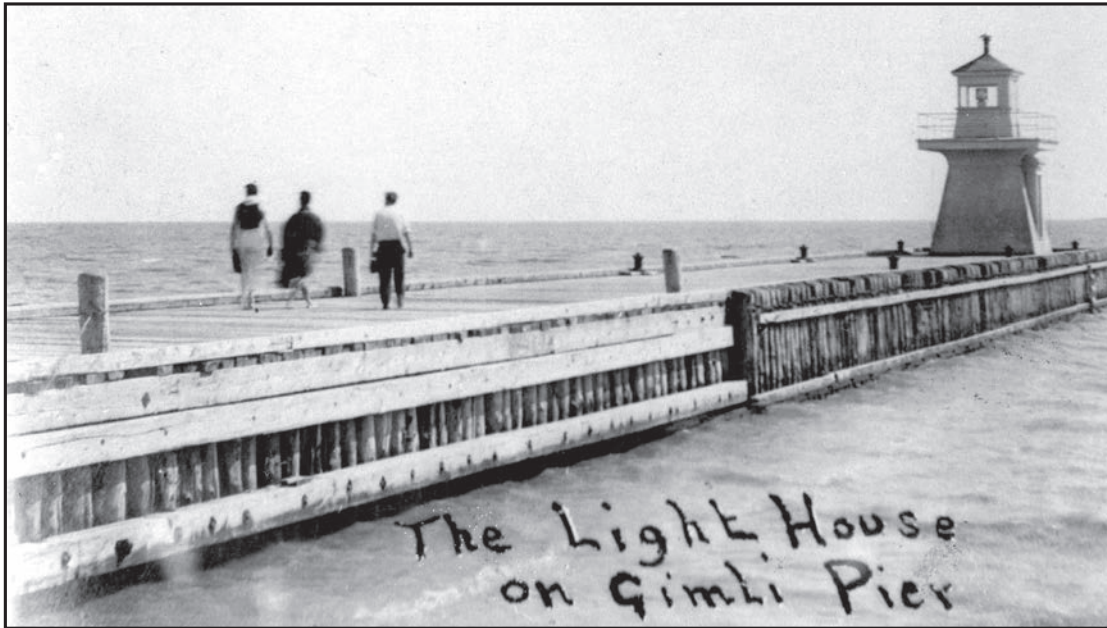


Above: The *Tempest* (on the left) photographed here in 1912, was built by William Purvis for the Northern Fish Company. It was one of the boats that towed the Icelanders' smaller sailing vessels to the northern basin. It was beached in 1925 and broken up at Selkirk in 1927. (*GSM: 176.*)

Right: A dredge working in the Gimli harbour, circa 1915. In many places Lake Winnipeg is shallow. Beginning in the late 1880s dredges were used to dig into the clay bottom so that large boats could navigate through the mouth of the Red River and into harbours. The federal government cancelled its dredging program in 1999. (AofM: Gimli Coll.)



Above: The Winnitoba at the Gimli pier, circa 1912. The Winnitoba was built in 1909 and operated by the Hyland Navigation and Trading Company. It burned in Winnipeg in 1912. (L.R.L.: Lilja Olafson Scrapbook.)



Left: Visitors enjoying a walk on the Gimli Pier during the early 1920s. For more than a century the harbour and its maritime flavour have attracted visitors during the all-too-brief summer months. A stroll on the pier was and remains a tradition for many families. (GSM: 706.)



Above: Visitors on a summer afternoon in 1925. (GSM: 709.)



A 1926 aerial photograph of Gimli and the surrounding district, looking North. Fifty years after the first settlers arrived, the town has become a well-established village and a holiday destination for Winnipeggers. Erosion from wave action is often an issue on the lakeshore. Pjetur Magnusson, assisted by Einar Einarson, is remembered for constructing a breakwater to protect the lakeshore, just south of Gimli's harbour, using two rows of timbers. Willows were bound with wire and placed between the timbers and the breakwater is said to have lasted for many years. *(Manitoba Air Photo.)*

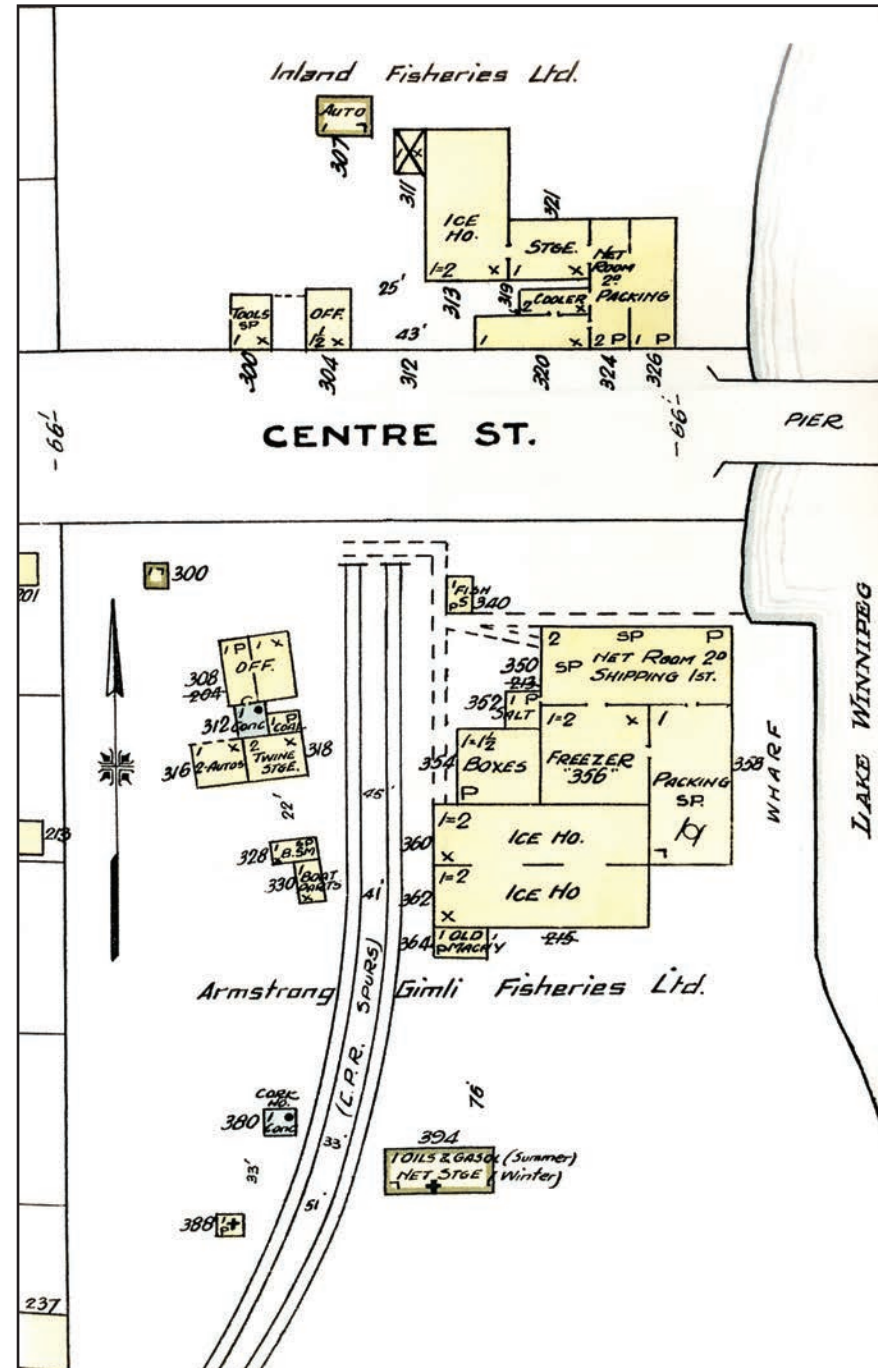
BOATS LEAVE FOR FAR NORTH FOR WINTER FISHING

Two Boats Leave Gimli Crowded With Men, Dogs and Supplies

*Winnipeg, Oct. 27.—Two boats loaded with men, supplies and dogs left Gimli Monday night for the North on Lake Winnipeg. These are the first boats to take the men out for the Winter fishing, it was reported from Gimli. Two boats left last week, taking supplies to the different camps. The boats that went out Monday night were the Wolverine, belonging to the Northern Fish Company and the Goldfield, belonging to the Riverton Fish Company. Over 125 men were on the boats, taking with them about 150 dogs, besides Winter supplies. It is always an important event of the year at Gimli when the fishermen leave for the North and the little bridge was the centre of a spectacular scene Monday, with fishermen loading their supplies, dogs barking and howling, children running about in a state of great excitement.

The Garry, belonging to the Robinson Company, was expected to leave Tuesday night, and other boats will follow. Last year nearly all the boats that went out were caught by the cold weather and were frozen in at the different harbors along the shores of Lake Winnipeg.

Above: An article published in the Brandon Daily Sun on October 20, 1920 describing the 'spectacular scene' at the Gimli harbour. (BDS: 1920Oct20.)



Above: A section from a Fire Insurance Atlas map showing the fishing industry buildings on the Gimli waterfront in October of 1932. (Andy Blicq Coll.)



Whitefish boats in the harbour, gearing up for the season during the 1950s.

"When the fishing boats left for the summer season every kid in town hurried to the dock to see them leave. It was always exciting. Everybody was yelling at everybody else and all was in organized confusion. The gas boats - tied one behind the other - were towed out of the harbour by the "Luana", the 'Lady' or the "Goldfield". The dogs, tied on deck, snarled and barked, adding their unmusical refrain to the general chorus. Out on the lake they steamed and headed north. It was a thrilling sight that we never grew tired of watching. They would return in the first week of August, hopefully in time for the most exciting event of the summer - the Icelandic celebration." - by Kristine Benson Kristofferson. (GMP: 61 and AofM: Loudon Coll #64.)



Spring in the Gimli Harbour, around 1950. The Goldfield and other freighters often overwintered here. During their last trip North in the fall, these boats collected the crews from the fish stations before freeze-up. One year the lake froze early, stranding the fishermen in their camps. Veteran fisherman Robert Kristjanson says some of the men had a long walk out along the shoreline. He recalls that they had to go back later and haul everything out across the ice with sleighs and tractors. (*GSM: 696.*)



Gimli Beach, looking north, sometime in the 1950s. Work and fun are found together here, in the 'gas boats' in dry dock awaiting the beginning of the next fishing season, and in the sun-lovers making the best of a fine summer afternoon. (NIHM.)



The freighter Barney Thomas and a fishing boat find shelter from stormy waters in the Gimli harbour during the 1950s. (AofM: Loudon Coll. #639.)



Above: The Gimli pier under water in September, 1966.
(GSM: 112.)

From the very beginning of the colony, in some years and especially in the fall, high water and flooding have been a problem. Lake Winnipeg is shallow. In a northerly blow, water piles up in the South Basin - a phenomenon known as a 'Wind Tide.'



Above: A wharf in the harbour almost fully engulfed by high water levels. (GSM: 112.)

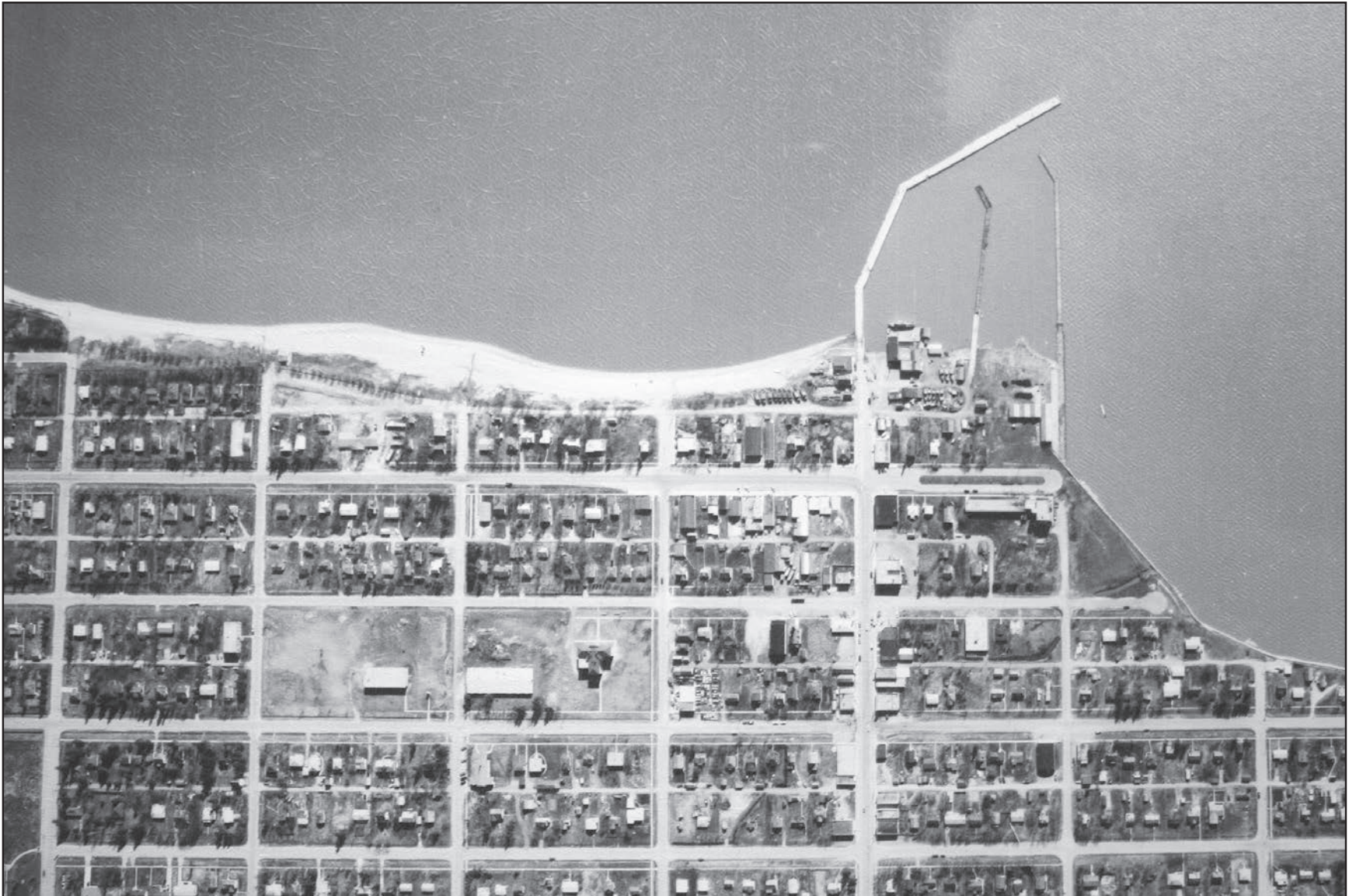
Right: A mishap at the boat launch gathers a large crowd of spectators in the early 1970s. The two storey building seen here and the one partially visible belonged to the Olson family. They maintained a retail fish store at the foot of the pier until the buildings were replaced by the new Lakeview Hotel. (GSM: 712.)



Left: A whitefish boat is out on a summer pleasure cruise. (I.F.B. #3.)



Gimli and the harbour in 1963. By this time the rail line that ran down to the waterfront is no longer in use. The British Columbia Packers Ltd. fish plant and the wharf remain the centre of activity on the waterfront. (*UofMA: Trib. Coll. - Gimli.*)



An aerial view of Gimli and the harbour taken in 1967. In the few years between the image on the preceding page and this one, several important additions to the community were made, including a new school building and a new breakwater. *(GMHC: Heritage Classroom.)*



Above: View of the harbour during the 1967 Pan American Games. (GSM: 496.)

In 1967, the Gimli harbour hosted the Pan Am Games sailing competition and in 1969 the site became the home of the Gimli Yacht Club. The sailing club now has hundreds of members enjoying both dinghies and a large fleet of live-aboard boats. Gimli's well-protected harbour and the lake's excellent sailing conditions have drawn competitors from across Canada and around the world. The club has hosted many regattas, among them the North American Laser (dinghy) Championship, and in 1994 the World Board Sailing Championships. In July of 2017 it was to be the site of the Canada Games sailing competition.



Above: Harbour scene in 1973. (GSM: 1426.)



Above: Launching a competition sailboat during the 1967 Pan American Games. (GSM: 497.)



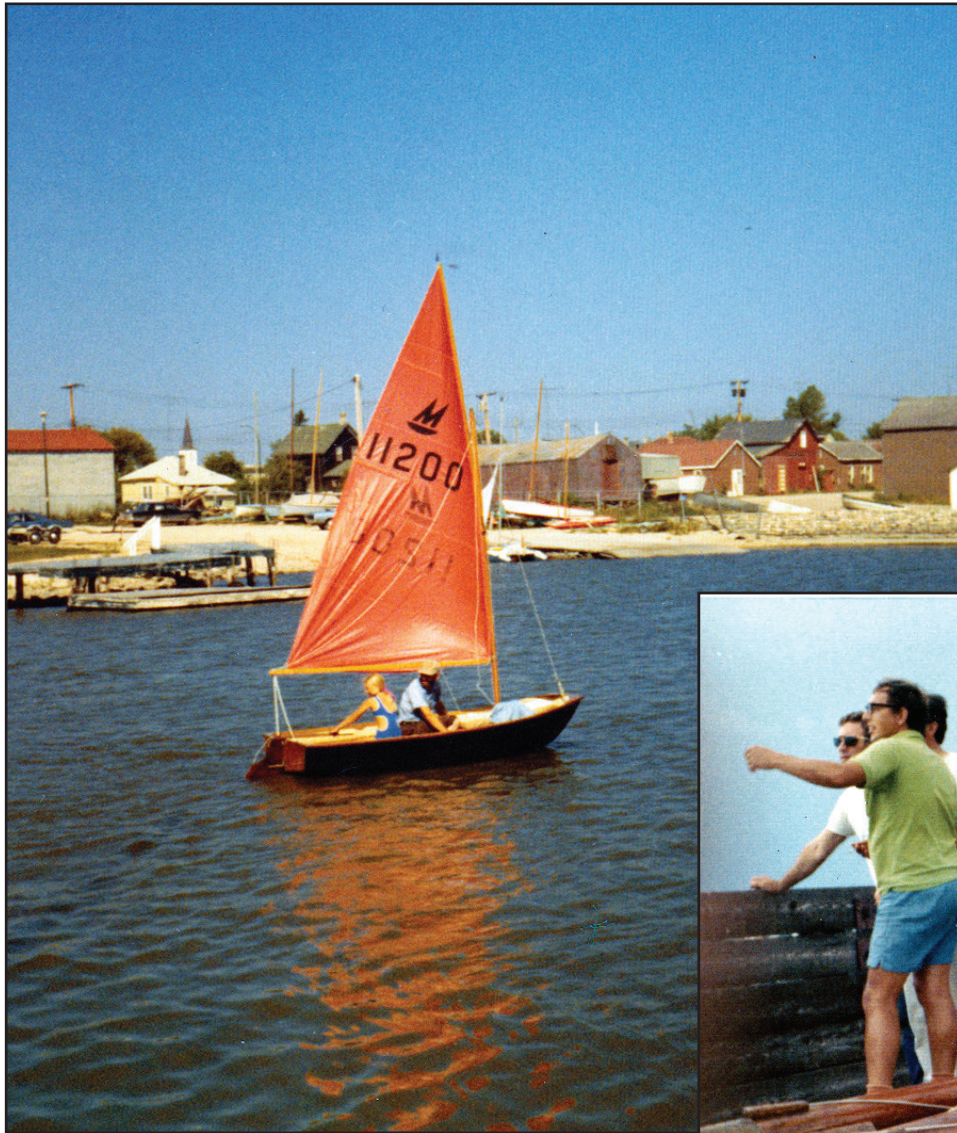
The Triskele in the harbour on July 30, 1971. In the background, the B.C. Packers Ltd. plant. In 1973, the plant was sold to the Gimli Development Corporation and turned into a seasonal museum. (*UofMA: Trib. Col. - Gimli.*)



Above: A fast and rugged Albatross sailboat in the Gimli harbour, in 1972. (*Chapnick Coll.: #16.*)



Right: Sailors preparing their boats for a day on the lake, on the lawn of the Gimli Yacht Club in 1972. (*Chapnick Coll.: #17.*)



Left: A Mirror sailboat in the Gimli harbour. More than 70,000 of these simple-to-build boats have been sailed in countries around the world, including Canada. This one was built from a kit by Phil and Peter Isaac. (*Chapnick Collection: #18*).

Below: Phil Isaac, owner of the sailboat Triskele, prepares its masts on the Pan Am pier in 1972. The pier has since been improved and paved, with slips installed for keelboats. (*Chapnick Coll.: #19.*)





The historic B.C. Packers plant in the summer of 1972. On August 7th, the Winnipeg Tribune reported that the “...fishing plant and dock (are) to be converted into a fishermen’s village museum and beer garden. (UofMA: Trib. Coll. - Gimli.)



The former British Columbia Packers plant in the late 1990s. Only the ice house remains (top). In this picture it is undergoing a renovation and restoration. Behind, the original lighthouse lantern has been placed on a newly-constructed pedestal. A new building was then built (above right) joining the lighthouse and the ice house. Today it houses the Lake Winnipeg Visitor Centre. Leo Kristjanson was the driving force behind a group of volunteers who worked tirelessly to build the centre, which is associated with the New Iceland Heritage Museum on First Avenue. The buildings on the waterfront welcome visitors, provide information about the lake and the fishery and also house the Harbour Master's offices. On display in the Visitors Centre is the last wooden fishing skiff of its kind, which belonged to fisherman J.B. Johnson and inside (above left), one of the last wooden 'gas boats', formerly owned by Marus Brynjolfson, and built by the Riverton Boat Works. (UofMA: Klymasz Coll.)



In summer Gimli's working harbour becomes a place for fun too, such as the event pictured here: "The Great Bathtub Derby, August 9, 1972." A T-33 Jet was placed on a pedestal at the entrance to the harbour to commemorate Gimli's RCAF training base after it closed in 1971. Later, the jet was moved to a new location south of Centre Street. (UofMA: Trib. Coll. - Gimli.)

Right: Chaos reigns at the Icelandic Festival's raft race in 1981. The Icelandic Festival of Manitoba is always held on the August long weekend. The harbour is an important venue for festival events. (LRL: *Icelandic Festival Binder #5: 39.*)



Left: Competitors in the 1981 Icelandic Festival raft race pass the M.S. Lord Selkirk II cruise ship (on the right) and the Blackhawk (formerly the Douglas M.). The Blackhawk is now on dry land North of Gimli. The Lord Selkirk last sailed in 1990. (LRL: *Icelandic Festival Binder #5: 56.*)



Gimli's 300 metre seawall has become a giant canvas for Gimli's Art Club. In a project that began in 1997, volunteer artists have created a series of murals that depict the area's history and its milestone events. The number of paintings has grown from 36 to 72, with volunteers doing on-going restoration work on existing paintings. In 2009, the paintings were turned into a book called *The Gimli Seawall Gallery*. The Gimli Art Club has been a part of the harbour since 1969. (UofMA: Klymasz Coll.)





14 Winnipeg Free Press, Friday, June 7, 1991

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In 1991, the 77-room, \$11 million Lakeview Gimli Resort opened at the foot of the pier, providing badly-needed hotel rooms and a conference facility. Led by the late Jack Levit, founder of Lakeview Management Inc., the construction of the hotel provided jobs for townspeople and added momentum to Gimli's growing tourism industry. (Keith Levit Photo.)



Below: Meeting rooms, suites and condominiums have been added to the North side of the resort.
(Keith Levit Photo.)



Above: The Lakeview Gimli Resort has become a tourism anchor for Gimli. Meanwhile harbour expansion and improvements continue. In the late 1990s, with funding from the federal, provincial and local governments, a new south harbour breakwater was built. The harbour was dredged and green space added. Much of the harbour is owned by the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans and is operated by the local, non-profit, Gimli Harbour Authority. *(Keith Levit Photo.)*

The Gimli Yacht Club offers organized regattas throughout the sailing season. On Wednesday evenings, in the summer months, the club hosts a series of races for its members and an exciting spectacle for anyone out for a stroll on the pier.



Above and Left: Racing action on Lake Winnipeg, near Gimli, circa 2010. *(Linda Vermeulen Photos.)*



Stormy waters buffeting the Gimli pier. Fall gales on the lake are legendary. In this photograph taken at dusk in November, 2016, waves driven by a strong north wind send plumes of spray over the concrete breakwater. Improvements and upgrades to the harbour in recent decades have made it a safe place for both pleasure and working vessels. Rock breakwaters have been added. Entrance to the harbour is made through a relatively narrow opening to the southeast. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*



Above: A power boat being launched in the spring by Lake Agassiz Marine. The Gimli Harbour is a popular spot for power boaters. In winter, Lake Agassiz Marine provides winter storage in a hanger at the former RCAF airbase west of town. *(Andy Blicq Photos.)*



Above: Spring launching of the sailboat Aegir III, owned by Bruce Harmer. This beautiful Alberg 37 weighs 7250 kilograms and, along with several others, requires a large mobile crane for launching. In recent years larger sailboats have become more common in the Gimli Harbour.

GIMLI FISHERY & FISH COMPANIES



Many of the Icelandic newcomers were experienced deep-sea fishermen. But the lake proved very different from what they knew. They had to learn their craft all over again, sometimes with the help of Indigenous people.

By December, 1877, food supplies in the fledgling colony were running low. Fishing in the south basin of the lake was poor, but First Nations people were reporting success in the larger North Basin. The colony dispatched an expedition of three men who travelled by dog team into what would have been for them uncharted territory. They returned later in the month, exhausted and frostbitten, but with hundreds of whitefish. Inspired by this experience, others headed north. It was the beginning of a long tradition that would see the Icelanders travelling to the far corners of the wilderness lake in search of fish and a livelihood.

Storage and transportation to markets were the key challenges for the fledgling commercial fishery. Halldor Brynjolfsson built the first freezer around Gimli to store locally-caught fish at his homestead at Birch Point, about 1.6 kilometres north of town. The facility contained three sections. One stored large blocks of ice cut from the lake in winter and then tucked away in sawdust and straw. According to the Gimli Saga, in another room, the fish were sorted, packed in galvanized trays, and covered in ice and salt - a common method of preservation, before modern refrigeration.

Those trays were then placed in an insulated double-walled third room, until they could be shipped to market. In winter, fishermen brought their catch to the ice house by horse-drawn sleigh, in summer by rowboat. Later, in the North Basin, in the summer the catch was shipped by freighter south to market; in the winter it was shipped by 'trains' of horse-drawn sleighs.

In March, 1878, 6000 whitefish had been netted in the north end of the lake and a total of 150,000 fish of all species had been landed by the colonists in that year. Sometimes the colonists were able to barter their fish for food, brought north by cart by farmers. There was a market for fish in small communities

like Stonewall and Clandeboye, and especially in Winnipeg, but prices were low and getting the catch to the city was a challenge.

"During the fourth winter I left for Winnipeg on one ox with 220 whitefish and 160 tulibeas in a sack. I had difficulty in disposing of the tulibeas in Winnipeg, for no one there wanted them. After a long search I received \$1 for the sack. But I do not remember what I received for the whitefish. However, I returned home with better supplies than I had known of here until then. I walked every step of both ways on bad roads and in heavy frost and I was usually cold."
- Sigurdur Erlendsson, pioneer.

By 1884, some well-equipped settlers were catching 2000 fish in just 10 days and during the bountiful summer of 1904, 1900 men, 900 sailboats and 24 tugs landed a record catch of 2.4 million kilograms of whitefish. Much of the catch was exported to the United States.

From year to year the amount of fish varied widely with some years the lake producing so many fish that nets floated to the surface; yet in other years the lake produced next to nothing. With improved transportation, fresh fish, rather than frozen or a salted product, was shipped to market. Today, pickerel and its close relative, the sauger, and goldeye are the focus for the fishers who work out of Gimli Harbour and who travel to their nets out on the lake in open yawls.

Freshwater fishers in Manitoba often had difficulty getting a fair price from private buyers. After considerable study, in 1969 the federal government established the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation which held a monopoly on the right to process and market all of the region's commercial catch. Incomes stabilized and improved, but in recent times some fishers have become dissatisfied and have successfully lobbied government to allow them to market their own product. Presently in 2017, Gimli's fishers are split over whether this is a good idea. Some look forward to higher incomes in the free market, while others fear a return to low prices dictated by private owners.



Unloading frozen fish at Gimli, circa 1914. In the early days, advances in the fishing industry improved life in the Icelandic communities along the lake. The work provided badly-needed income. There were jobs building boats and wooden crates to carry the catch, and employment on the freighters and in the administration of the fish companies. By 1907, 5,000 people were employed in the fishery. (NIHM: Grund Stevens Coll.)



A 1917 fishing license template used for stenciling fish boxes. It has been carefully preserved by the family of Robert Kristjanson. (*Kristjanson Family Coll.*)

CASH No. 14848

DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND NATURAL RESOURCES

PROVINCE OF MANITOBA

FORM G 2,000-10-41

ORIGINAL

Violation of Fishery Act or Regulations invokes License cancellation and future suspension.

GAME AND FISHERIES BRANCH

LICENSE NUMBER C.F. 8929

CONSERVE OUR FORESTS, FISH AND GAME

COMMERCIAL FISHING LICENSE

Fee: \$10.00

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT B. Larusson

Resident of Gimli Manitoba

having paid the above fee is hereby licensed to fish for saugers

with 1,000 Fathoms of Gill nets and the size of the mesh shall not be less nor greater than 3 1/8 or 3 1/4 inches in extension measure during the winter season

From date 1941 to March 14th 1942 in the Public Waters of Lake Winnipeg

Vicinity Gimli

THIS LICENSE IS NOT TRANSFERABLE

"This License requires strict conformity with the Fishery Laws and with all Regulations made thereunder in default of such compliance the same shall become void and forfeited forthwith, saving, moreover, the penalties imposed by law which involve amongst others seizure and confiscation of the fishing equipment as well as fish illegally caught, together with legally caught fish that may be intermixed therewith.

"Violation of the law or failure to comply with the conditions herein specified or with the directions from Fishery Officers will be a reason to refuse renewal of this License."

The holder of this License is required to have it with him when engaged in fishing.

The granting of this License neither conveys nor implies any right or claim to its continuance beyond the period stated.

LICENSE NUMBER MUST BE PLACED ON ALL NETS WHEN IN USE

Dated at Winnipeg, Man.,

This 13th day of December 1941

A. G. CUNNINGHAM,
Director of Game and Fisheries

Per. [Signature]
Issuing Officer.

A fishing license issued to B. Larusson of Gimli, Manitoba, permitting him to catch sauger between December 13, 1941 and March 14, 1942. (NIHM: Tergesen Coll.)



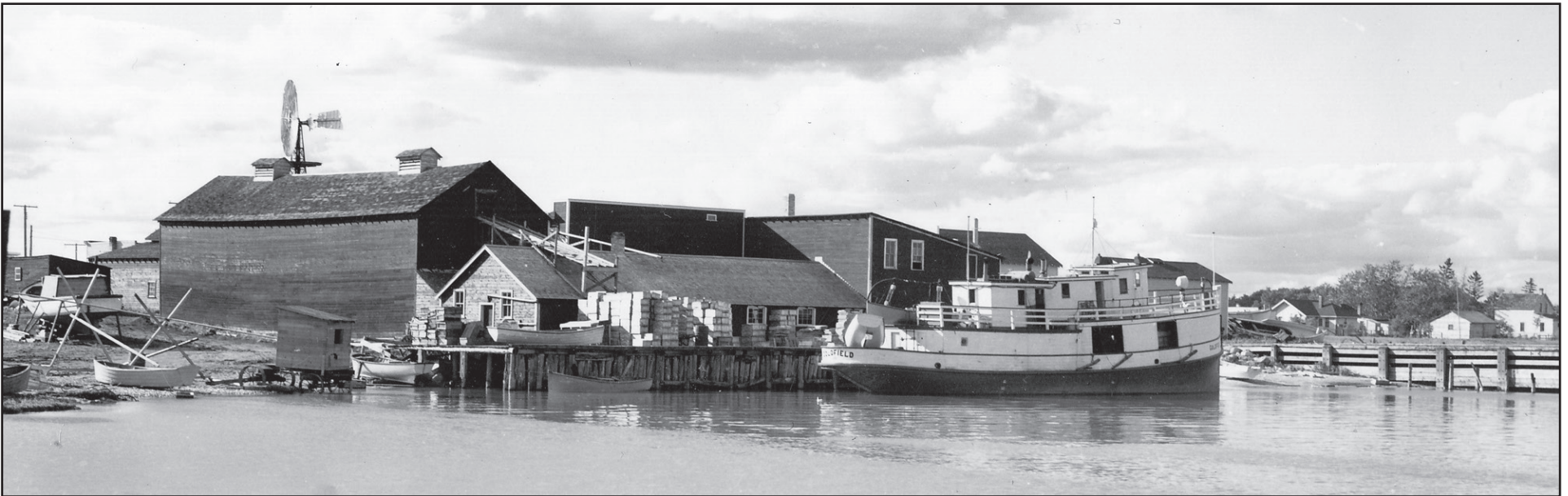
The S.S. Lady of the Lake in the Gimli Harbour in the 1920s. This handsome vessel is well-remembered around Gimli. Capable of carrying both passengers and freight, it was the largest vessel built in that period by the Icelandic newcomers. It is said that the 'Lady' caught the attention of investors and business interests in Winnipeg and improved the economy of the fledgling colony. Constructed in 1897 by brothers Stefan and Johannes Sigurdsson, she changed hands several times before being condemned in Selkirk in 1934. Meanwhile, Johannes Sigurdsson became the Village of Gimli's first mayor. He was instrumental in improving the lives of the growing colony by getting the railway extended to town and travelling to Chicago, New York and elsewhere to market fish and the community's other commodities, including Icelandic wool, mitts and socks. (NIHM.)



Above: The M.S. Luana III tied up at the pier, sometime in the 1950s. (NIHM.)

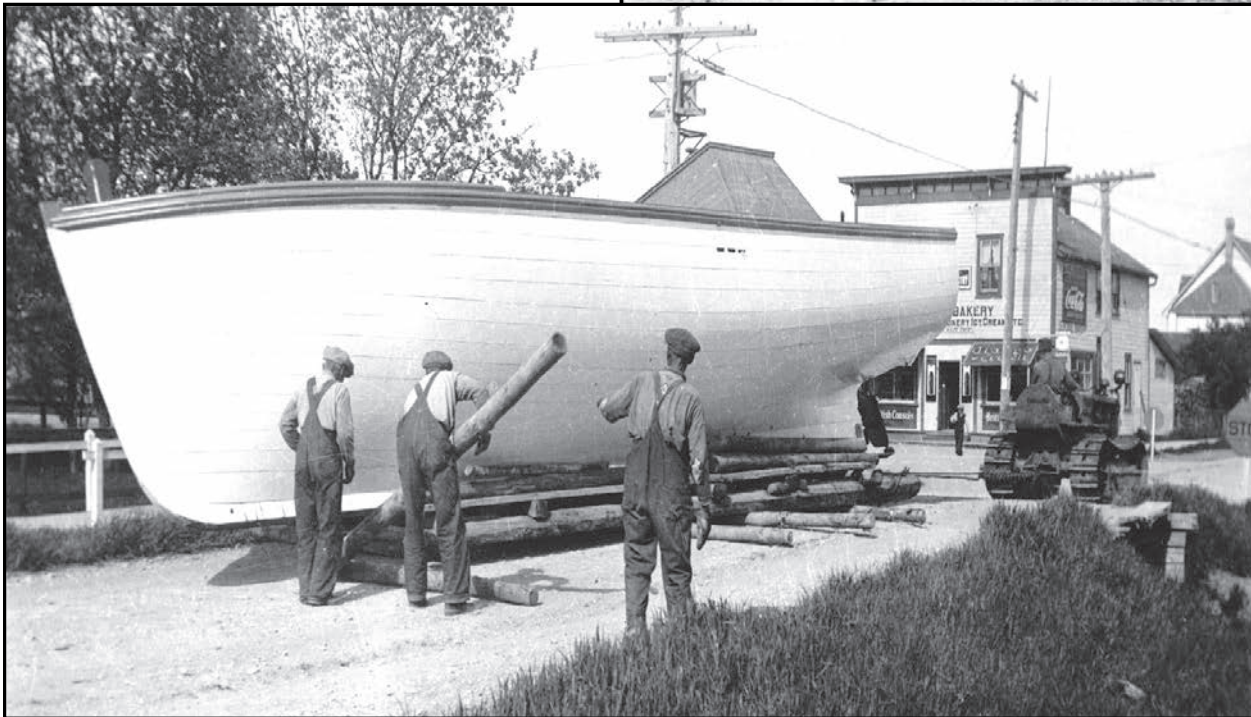


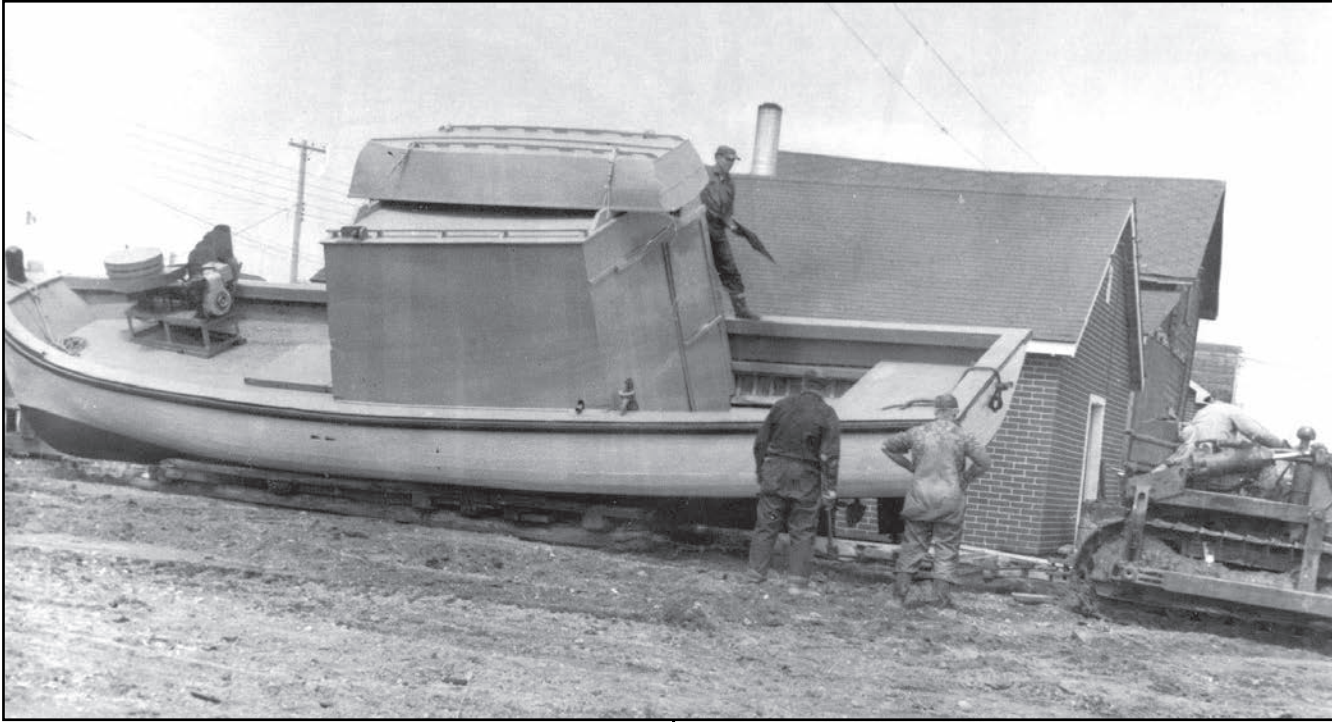
Above: Wooden fish boxes stacked on the wharf in the 1960s. (NIHM.)



Above: Summer in the Gimli Harbour in the 1950s. The B.C. Packers Ltd. plant with the Goldfield. Note the small wooden boats under construction or being repaired on the left. The windmill was constructed by the Canadian Pacific Railway and used for pumping lake water to storage tanks located near the railway station. Within a few years of this photograph being taken, diesel locomotives began to be used and the windmill and water tower were removed. (AofM: Loudon Coll. #640.)

Boats belonging to well-known fisherman J.B. Johnson being hauled down to the harbour for launching, around 1946. The Icelandic community had many skilled boat makers. J.B. Johnson himself photographed this event. A cradle was used to protect the keel and logs, or posts cut into rollers that allowed for these large boats to be moved by tractor, without any damage. (*GSM: 687.*)





Left: A tractor being used to haul a 'Gas Boat' down to the waterline in 1965. Note the innovation on the fore-deck. A gas powered winch for lifting the nets. (GSM: 688.)

Right: Wooden 'Gas Boats', as they were called, used gasoline engines sometimes taken from automobiles. Today's bigger boats are clad in steel or aluminum and reliable and powerful diesel engines are used. (GSM: 386.)

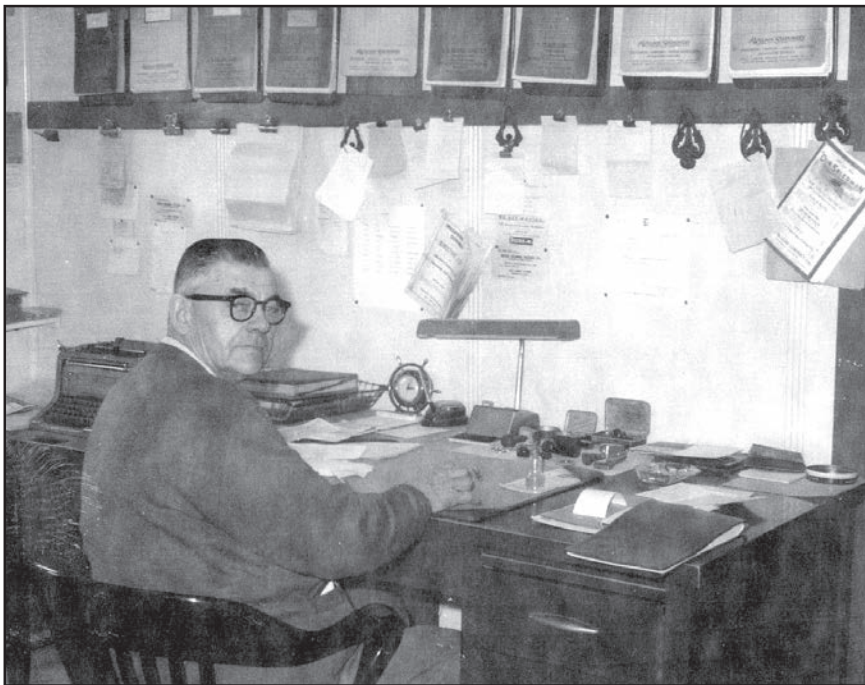




The Goldfield pulling out of Gimli harbour, circa 1955. This fabled freighter towed boats to the fish stations - usually to George's Island or Warren's Landing in the North Basin. Fishermen lived and worked at the stations during fishing seasons throughout the year, including the winter. The northern camps were largely self-reliant. At the start of each season, freighters like the Goldfield would haul everything that would be needed, including staff to do the cooking. Sometimes, families would accompany the fishing crews. In the summer season, the freight boats would arrive with supplies and news from home and to pick up fish. *(AofM: Loudon Coll #262.)*



Whitefish boats getting ready to be towed to the summer fishing grounds in 1956. Fish companies would use large freighters to tow these smaller 'Gas Boats' from Gimli to remote camps around Lake Winnipeg's North Basin. The boats were lashed together in a long chain. A small, wooden 'house' provided some protection from the elements for the boat crews during their journey. These men would spend months in the camps catching and packing fish for southern markets. (AofM: Gimli Fishing #35.)



Above: N.K. Stevens, plant manager. (GSM: 685.)



Above: Newly caught fish. (GSM: 685.)



Above: Filleting. (GSM: 685.)

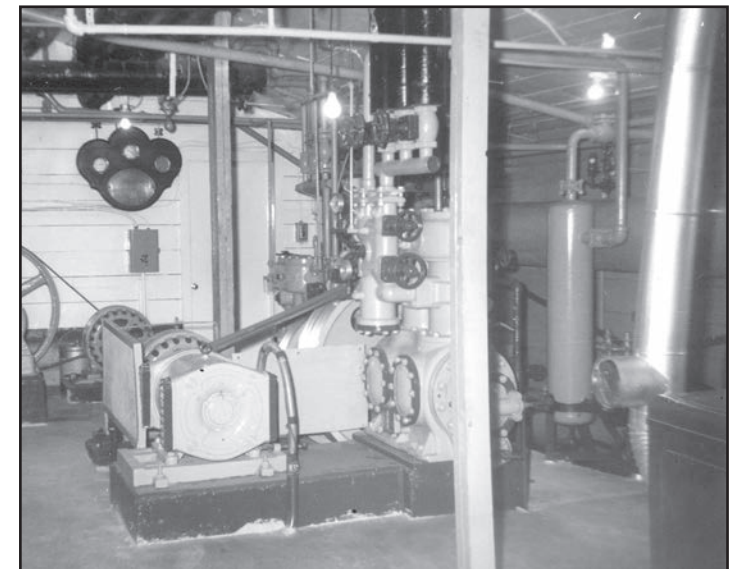
Gimli Fish Plant

The fishery has always been the soul of the Gimli harbour. And the wharf and its buildings the heart of the waterfront. The following is a shortened history of the community's fish packing plant, first told in words and pictures and published in the comprehensive local history, the *Gimli Saga*.

Gimli Fisheries was first established in 1919 by Robbins Inc., a Chicago based fish-processing and sales company. Work done at this early plant was mainly packaging and freezing the fish as it was brought in from the various fishing stations on Lake Winnipeg. In 1930, Gimli Fisheries merged with Armstrong Independent Fisheries of Winnipeg to become Armstrong-Gimli Fisheries. A few years later it was purchased by the Nordic Fish Company of New York, who sold it to the Canadian Fish & Cold Storage Company of Prince Rupert B.C. In 1939 British Columbia Packers of Vancouver bought the company. It remained as the British Columbia Packers-owned Gimli Fisheries until forced to close in 1969 by the Canadian (government's) Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation. This was done to eliminate some of the processing outlets (and) to streamline fish-marketing operations.

In its time, the British Columbia Packers plant was a fully modern and well-equipped fish-processing plant employing, due to the seasonal nature of the work, a varying number of people; but at the peak as many as forty persons were provided with employment. During the early 1960s, B.C. Packers became the first plant of its kind in Manitoba to be Canada Approved, according to the strict laws of the Pure Foods Law under the Federal Department of Fisheries. During the summer and fall seasons, fish was brought to Gimli by the company's freighter, the M.S. Goldfield, after being picked up at the various fishing stations located on the lake. It then was processed at the plant, and about 90% of it was shipped to American markets.

In summer, the northern part of Lake Winnipeg produced whitefish considered to be the finest of its kind in North America. This was dressed at the fishing stations and quick-frozen at the plant for U.S. markets, where it was in great demand for smoking. Fish netted in Lake Winnipeg and other Manitoba lakes, were filleted, packaged and quick-frozen at the Gimli plant and included pickerel or walleye, northern pike or jackfish, and saugers. (GSM: 683.)



Views of the B.C. Packers fish processing plant in Gimli, circa 1960. Clockwise from above: packaging the finished fillets; freezing the packages; view of the engine room showing refrigeration equipment; the crating room. (GSM: 685.)



Above & Right: Photographs taken by Canada Department of Fisheries staff during an inspection visit in 1961. Fishermen tending their nets on a rare calm day on the lake. Labour-saving nylon nets have replaced cotton and linen ones that had to be pulled from the lake every few days and dried. (*L&AC Website.*)



Above: Federal Department of Fisheries photos of filleting operations at the B.C. Packers plant in Gimli, in 1961. In 1969 the plant was deemed to be redundant and closed.





The Goldfield, tied up at the B.C. Packers plant in Gimli, sometime in the 1960s. She served on the lake for more than a century. Three generations of the Stevens family captained this storied vessel. The Goldfield was one of the last freighters operating on the lake, moving fish from northern communities to the end of the road. (NIHM.)



Boats in the harbour during the late 1960s. In 1969, the fish processing plant on the wharf closed down. The early '70s were hard times for Gimli. In 1970, the entire Lake Winnipeg fishery was shut down over worries about mercury contamination. The R.C.A.F. training base just outside town closed, taking with it jobs and income. There were fears that a 100-year-old way of life was coming to an end. But by the following year, the mercury levels had fallen in some parts of the lake and by 1972 the entire lake was re-opened for the commercial catch. (*GSM: 681.*)

Whitefish boats down at the harbour during the 1980s and 1990s. Roy Solmundson owned the steel-hulled Javlyn during this time. The whitefish boats were used to travel to the fishing grounds in the North Basin. *(Roy Solmundson Photos.)*



SAILBOATS, TUGS & FREIGHTERS



Lake Winnipeg has a rich and colourful maritime history. Robert Kristjanson, the 'dean' of Gimli's present-day fishing community, remembers as a young man the constant traffic of freight boats and tugs travelling up and down the lake. He points out that, for the Icelandic newcomers, Gimli's future depended on finding ways to ship the commercial fishing catch south and then bring trade goods back.

"Commerce was the whole thing," he said. "There was nothing else."

In the very beginning it was a challenge. Roads were poor or non-existent. The lake was the only reliable highway in and out of the colony. Some settlers adopted the Hudson's Bay Company's York boats as a rugged and reliable way to move passengers and trade goods, but they were soon buying or building their own sturdy and vessels of all sizes.

According to Nelson Gerrard, a leading expert on New Iceland history, the Icelandic settlers built many small skiffs called 'byttu' and larger, single-masted yawls called 'dallar.' He says "...these small rowboats were used mainly for travelling short distances on the Icelandic River or the lake, but on occasion they were also taken on longer trips - to Mikley (Hecla Island), or across the lake..."

Mr. Gerrard writes that in 1878, Stefan Jonasson, on what is now Hecla Island, built a two-masted sailboat called Bordeyringur that made regular trips south from Icelandic River carrying passengers and supplies.

At first it was all sailboats and steamers, but not all of them were built locally. The sailboat of choice for the crews that worked out of the remote fish stations in the North Basin of the lake were two-masted Mackinaw or Collingwood boats first used on the Great Lakes. These were 10 metres long. Some were double-enders (pointed at both bow and stern) and some had square sterns. They were often crewed by three men and were seaworthy enough for the dangerous and unpredictable weather conditions on the prairie ocean.

For more than half of the 20th century, freighters with names like the ill-fated Suzanne E and the Mikado were the lifeline for the remote fishing stations and communities around the lake. Many were owned by the fish companies that hauled the catch south to where it could be transported to market, and then hauled supplies north to the fishermen who often spent months living and working at the fish stations. The freighters would also haul the smaller boats used to work at the nets, to and from Gimli at the beginning and at the end of each season. The Keenora carried freight and took passengers on excursions around the lake. These vessels also had to be built to withstand heavy weather and the records show that more than a few came to an untimely end - consumed by fire, or swallowed by the lake during a storm.

Winter roads and local airports have all but put an end to the freighting tradition. Today, only a handful of large boats are used to haul fish and freight. But the memories of the prairie ships remain. A few are preserved at the Marine Museum in Selkirk and in the collections of historic photographs of the much-storied ships that worked on Lake Winnipeg in days gone by.

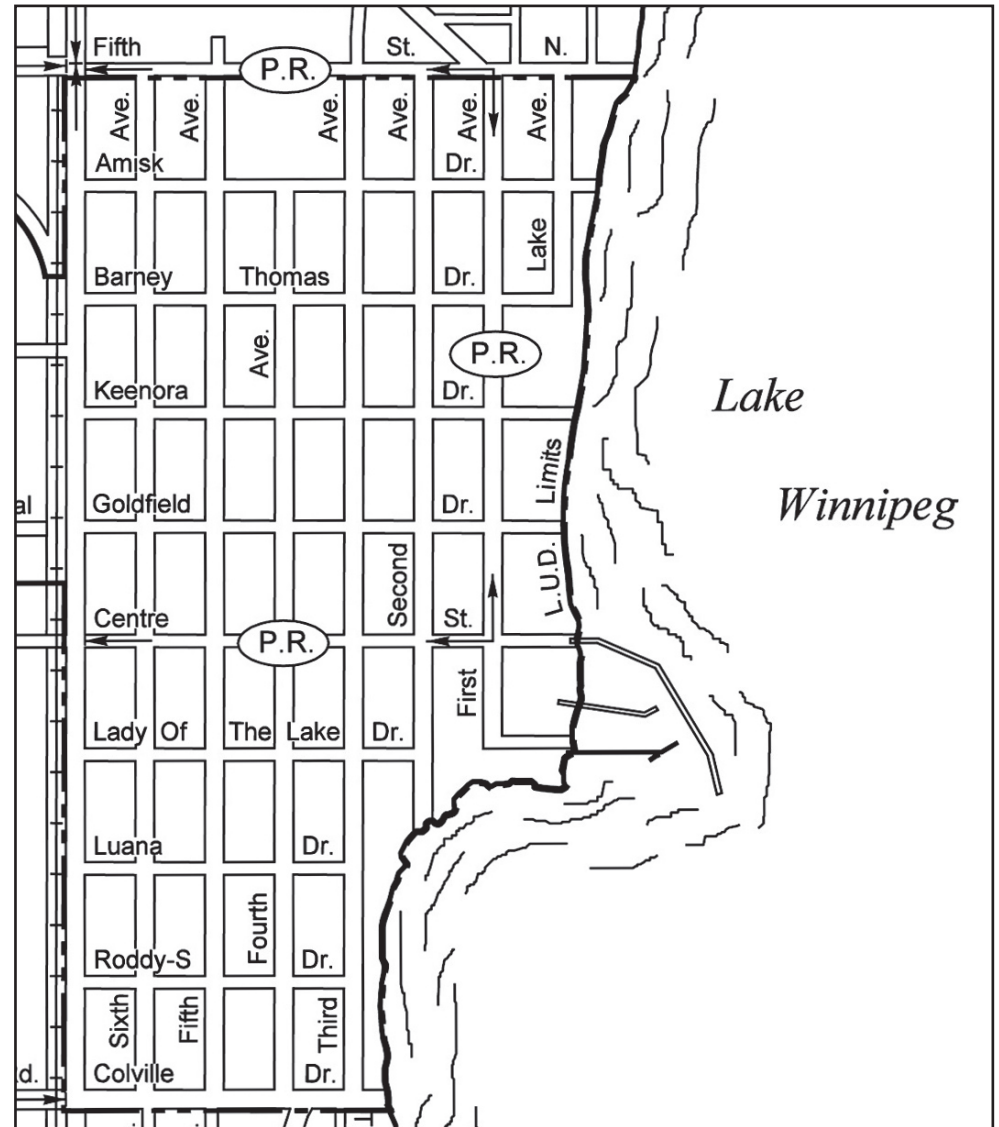
THE MERCHANT MARINE OF MANITOBA

List of vessels, and their registered tonnage, as recorded at Winnipeg Custom House, plying the Red River and Lake Winnipeg district, listed in order of the date of their registry:—

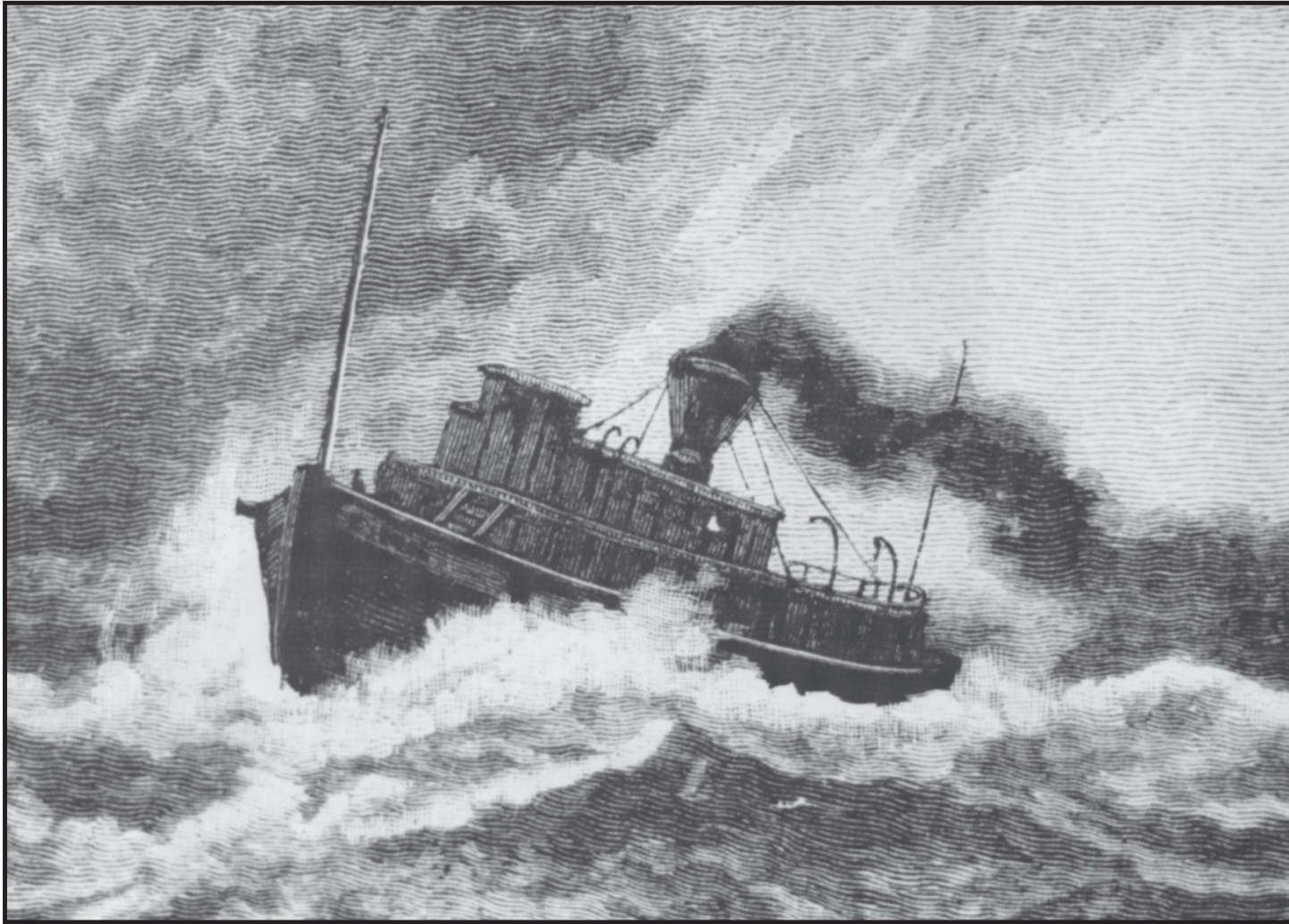
Name	Power	Tonnage		Crew of
		Gross	Net	
Saskatchewan	Barge	225	153	1
Chieftain	Steam	61	28	6
Fisherman	"	44	30	6
Idell	"	54	37	5
Lady of the Lake	"	201	155	11
Mikado	"	242	168	9
Rocket	"	56	21	4
Spray	"	18	12	2
Keewatin	"	20	14	3
Daisy	"	27	8	2
Wolverine	"	278	189	13
Fern	"	18	12	2
Frederick	"	36	27	3
Tempest	"	75	51	5
Togo	Barge	58	59	1
Alberta	Steam	315	214	20
Winnitoba	"	883	556	30
Amish	"	32	21	2
Victoria	"	28	19	3
Sir Hector	"	70	48	5
City of Selkirk	"	293	199	14
Bonnitoba	"	278	175	10
Aylmer	Gas	12	8	3
Winnipeg	Dredge	245	245	5
Lisgar	Steam	26	18	2
Highlander	"	59	39	3
J. M. Smith	"	179	121	5
Keewatin	Gas	20	14	3
Frank Burton	Dredge	94	63	7
Majestic	Steam	64	43	6
Rosamond Billett	"	679	474	8
Fort Alexander	Barge	316	316	1
Friday	Steam	60	40	4
Red River	Dredge (Registry incomplete)	"	"	"
Crane	"	"	"	"
Phyllis Williams	Steam	"	"	"
Hecla	"	"	"	"
Total registered—37		5069	3566	204

Besides the registered craft, the Lake Winnipeg fleet includes over one hundred sailing boats, used by the fishermen, and probably five hundred private boats of all kinds.

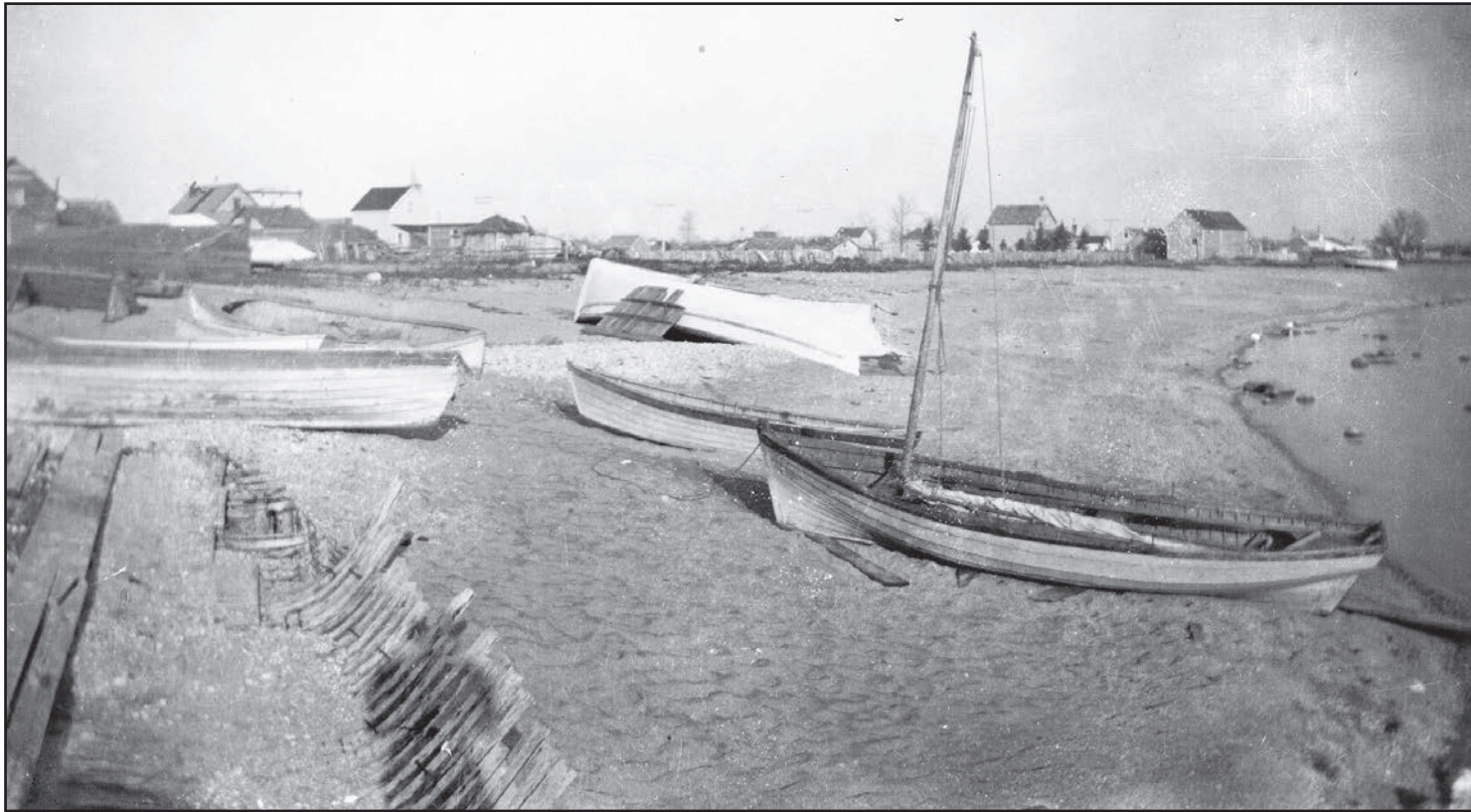
Left: A list of vessels working on the Red River and on Lake Winnipeg, published in a 1912 government pamphlet called: "Farm, Wheat and Dairy Lands in Prosperous Manitoba." (Peel #3771.)



Above: Detail from a 2003 map of Gimli showing east-west streets re-named after some of the key commercial vessels in Gimli's history. (GMHC.)



An artist's conception of the Hudson's Bay Company's steamer Colvile riding out a storm. It was the Colvile that towed the barges carrying the Icelandic settlers to the site of the new colony in October, 1875. The Colvile was built at Grand Forks, N.D. It incorporated the boiler and the engine that once powered the Anson Northup (built in 1859), the first steamboat on the Red River. The Colvile was used primarily as a freighter on Lake Winnipeg, often carrying goods to the community of Grand Rapids for transfer to the steamers that worked on the Saskatchewan River. On June 15, 1894, a fire began in the Colvile's hold while she was docked at Grand Rapids. There was no equipment to extinguish the flames and the ship was abandoned and left to burn. (*Picturesque Canada: 1882, 304.*)



Sailing boats and the wreck of the Viking, on Gimli's beach, near the pier. With the arrival of the railway, Gimli quickly became a tourist destination. On May 25, 1912, The Manitoba Free Press ran a spread extolling the virtues of the town, describing it as "The Beautiful Summer Resort on Lake Winnipeg." Included in the article were this picture and an all-too-common story about how the weather played its part in a calamity that claimed the Viking. (GSM: 710.)

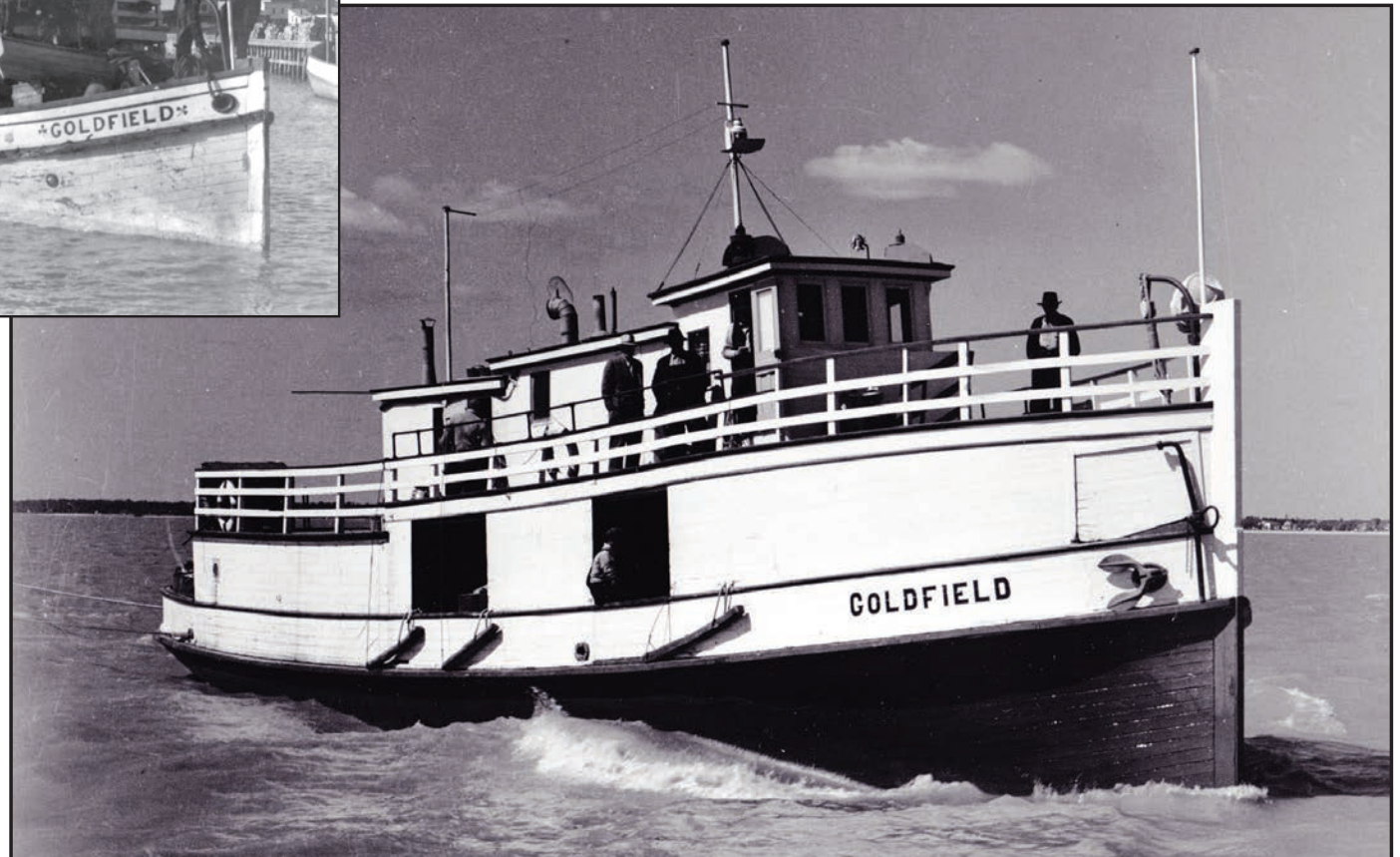
"Lying on the sand near the dock is the wreckage of what was at one time the largest boat plying on Lake Winnipeg. The boat, which was christened the Viking, ran into a furious storm off Gimli on its maiden journey and was nearly wrecked on the shore. The Viking was 50 feet long, and propelled by one of the first gasoline engines in that part of the country. Like all true gasoline engines of that day it was to be depended on to break down at a time when it was most needed, and after beating its way against the strength of the storm up the lake the engine suddenly stopped when the Viking was opposite Gimli.

The wind was blowing strongly inshore and carried the helpless ship with it. Just before it had grounded and when the passengers, numbering fifteen or so, had given up hope of being saved, the anchor caught and held the boat during the long night. In the morning it was seen that they were off Loni Beach, close to Gimli, and as the storm subsided the passengers were taken off in small boats, and later the engine was patched up and coaxed to run.

An ironical coincidence in connection with this incident is told. After the gasoline engine had shown that it was useless for the work, the boat was lengthened by 30 feet, and a steam engine installed. Sometime afterward it was anchored by the Gimli dock, close to where it had had the narrow escape on its maiden trip. A sudden storm came up, and before the vessel could be removed to the other side of the dock, where there was shelter, the wind was too strong. As the storm grew worse the hawsers holding the Viking snapped and she was carried high up on shore by the storm and broken up. There the backbone lies today with a few broken ribs and bit of hull to tell of the vessel that used to sail the lake."



The Victoria was the first steamboat owned by Icelanders on Lake Winnipeg. It was a small paddle wheeler built in St. Catharines, Ontario, in the spring of 1878, and subsequently transported west to the Red River where it operated for two summers. It was purchased in 1881 for \$4,000, by Sigtryggur Jonasson and Fridjon Fridriksson, in partnership with a Scotsman named Walkley. It made regular sailings between the Icelandic River settlement and Selkirk. Fridriksson and Jonasson set up a sawmill and store on Jonasson's homestead at Modruvellir on the Icelandic River. The Victoria was purchased to haul lumber to Selkirk and to return with supplies and goods for the store. The firm then had two large barges built near the sight of the mill at Modruvellir. One was called Laura. It was used to haul consignments of lumber to Selkirk. Sigtryggur Jonasson captained the Victoria and managed shipping operations for the company. In 1886 the mill was moved to a new site on the east shore of Lake Winnipeg, at Manigotagan. The company expanded into fish marketing and the transportation of both passengers and freight, but went out of business in 1891. (*GSM: 1178.*)



The Goldfield is said to be the longest serving freighter on Lake Winnipeg. She survived for more than a century and had her name changed four times. She has a close association with Gimli and its harbour, having called the port home for 50 years. She was built in Selkirk in 1886, named the Frank Burton and put to work transporting families and towing sailboats to remote fish stations around the lake. She began her next life with the name Minerva, hauling freight, for a brick-making company to Manigotagan on the east shore of the lake. In 1905, she was rebuilt and re-named the Goldfield, in honour of a promising gold mine in the Bissett area. She was to go to work hauling freight for the mine, but that venture soon failed. By 1908 she was in the hands of the federal government, where she was put to work on a hydrographic survey of Lake Winnipeg. After that, she again went to work in the fishery after being acquired by Armstrong Gimli Fisheries. She received a diesel engine, which changed her name from S.S. (Steam Ship) to M.S. (Motor Ship) Goldfield. In 1952 she was rebuilt with steel framing and a Rolls Royce diesel engine was installed. In 1969 she changed hands again, having been acquired by Sigurdson Fisheries of Riverton, ending her long association with Gimli. She was given another diesel engine, taken from the J.R. Spear which had foundered in a storm earlier in the year. In 1972, her hull was clad in steel and in 1989 she was acquired by the federal Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation and used to transport fish, until she was retired in 2005 and tied up on the bank of the Icelandic River. She was replaced in 2006 by the Poplar River, a modern barge. (NIHM: Goldfield.)



Left: S.S. Princess at her winter mooring during the 1890s when the vessel was still a steam-powered sidewheeler. (AofM: McFadden Coll.)

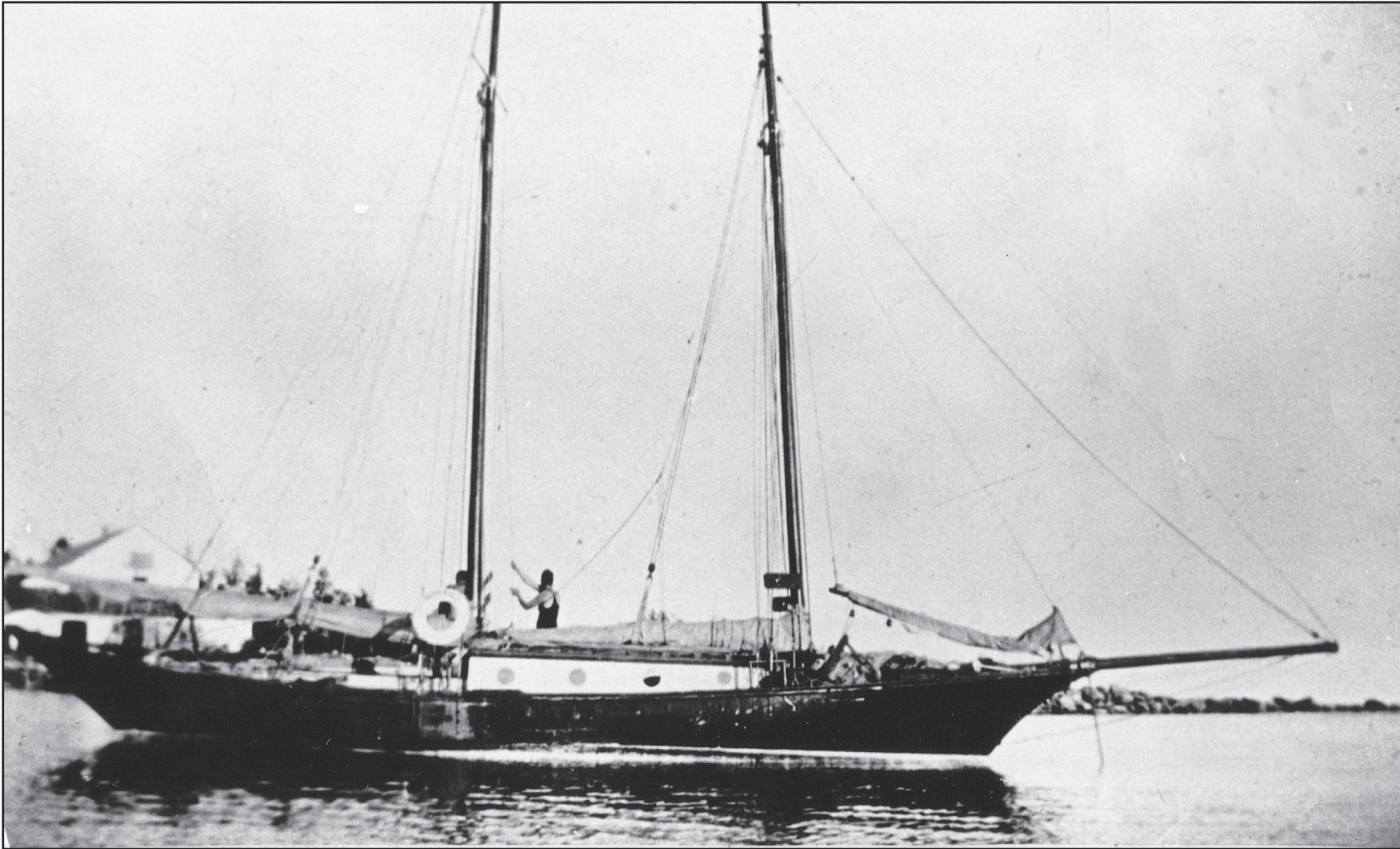
Below: S.S. Princess about 1905 after it was lengthened and converted into a cargo freighter. (AofM: McFadden Coll.)



The Princess was built in Winnipeg during the spring of 1881 for the North West Navigation Company. She was a single-deck, round-stern sidewheeler with a carvel style hull built with oak found in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Renovated in 1882, she had berths for 90 passengers and six state rooms with accommodation for twenty-four. She could take 600 souls on single-day excursions and could carry 363 tonnes of freight. In 1897 the steamer's hull was cut and extended to 49 metres in order to become a bulk cargo freighter for the fishing industry. Her paddle wheels were replaced by "twin screw" propellers. The main deck housing was extended to the bow and cut away aft for nine metres to allow for towing lines. On August 24th, 1906, she sank near Swampy Island during a storm, resulting in the loss of six lives. (AofM: Boats-Princess)



A photograph taken in the 1920s of the Roddy-S, a fishing tug, tied up at the Gimli pier. A street in town is named after her. *(Lyle Olson Photo.)*



The sailboat and motorship Albatross on Lake Winnipeg. The *Gimli Saga* reports that in the '30s, enterprising 'Russians' Captain Ed Rabanick and his brother Herman, the engineer, offered tourists an aqua-planing experience. For the less adventurous, there were trips across the lake for one dollar. (GSM: 308.)



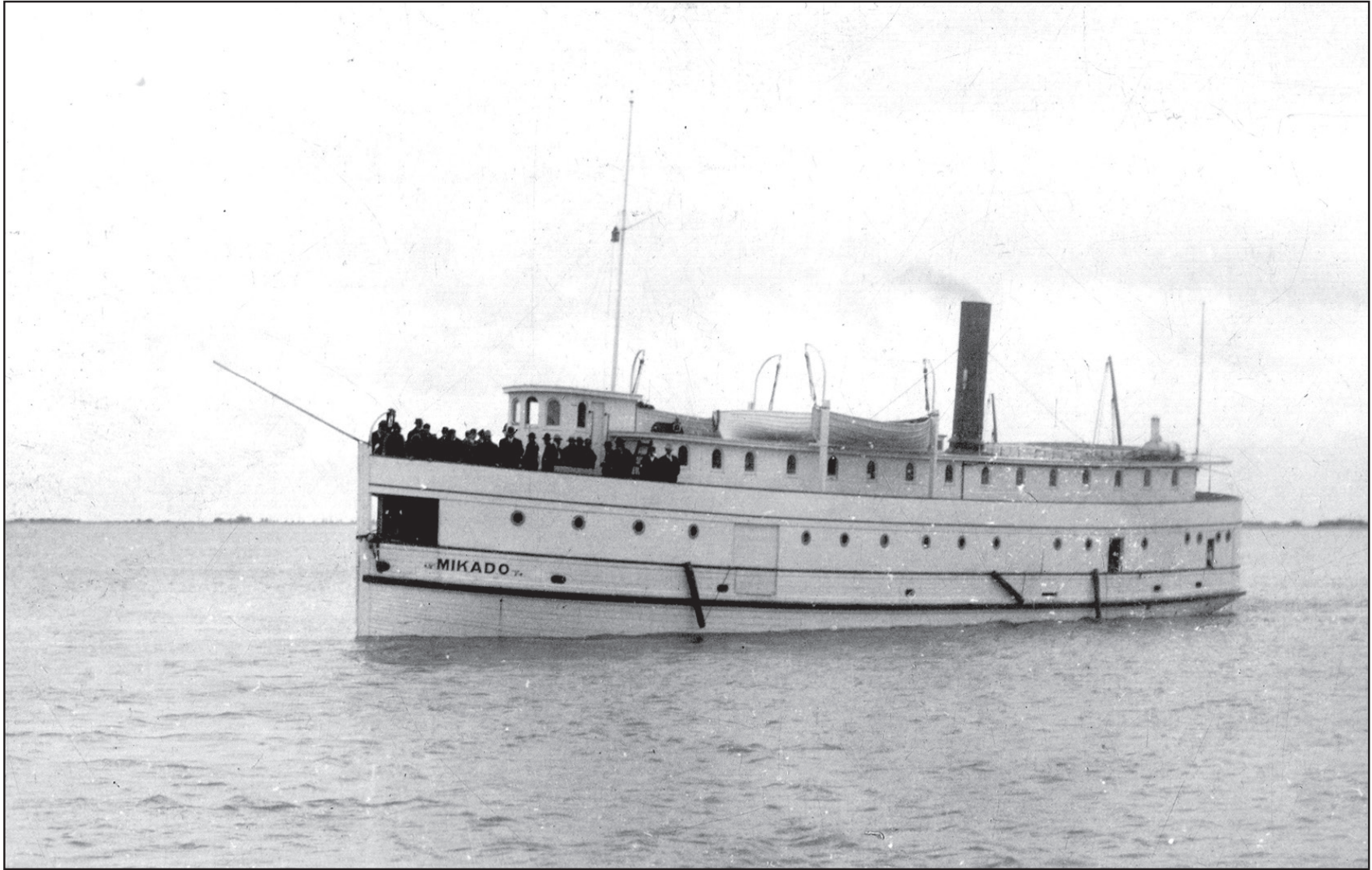
The freighter Suzanne E in drydock, in Selkirk, in 1952. The Suzanne E was a regular visitor to the Gimli Harbour and at the centre of one of the worst maritime disasters on Lake Winnipeg. In September, 1965, the Suzanne E capsized and sank, just north of Grindstone Point, after being caught in a fierce storm. Nine crew members and passengers drowned. Some of their bodies have never been found. The captain, Richard Johnson, and the first mate, Clifford Everett, managed to climb onto the roof of the wheelhouse after it broke free of the ship when the Suzanne E sank. As the storm raged, they floated all night. Around dawn, their makeshift raft made landfall at Black Island. But during the night, Captain Johnson died of exposure. Only Clifford Everett survived, but he was severely traumatized by the experience. Today, the Suzanne E rests at the bottom of the lake. *"The lake, it can be a wicked thing,"* said the late Clifford Everett, in an interview in the 1990s. *"It can change so fast. Never take it for granted."* (AofM: Loudon Coll #4.)



The Lady of the Lake in the Gimli Harbour sometime during the 1920s. 'The Lady', as she was affectionately known, could carry 27 tonnes of fish and about 20 passengers. She mainly served the fishing industry, although during quiet times in the spring she carried sightseers on one-day excursions down the Red River. It was said that her proudest day came in 1910 when she transported Prime Minister Sir Wilfred Laurier to the official opening of the St. Andrews Locks. She was retired in 1930. Seen in the background is the tug Amisk. The Amisk was used to haul barges of firewood and lumber from a sawmill on Hecla Island to Winnipeg. (GSM: 696.)



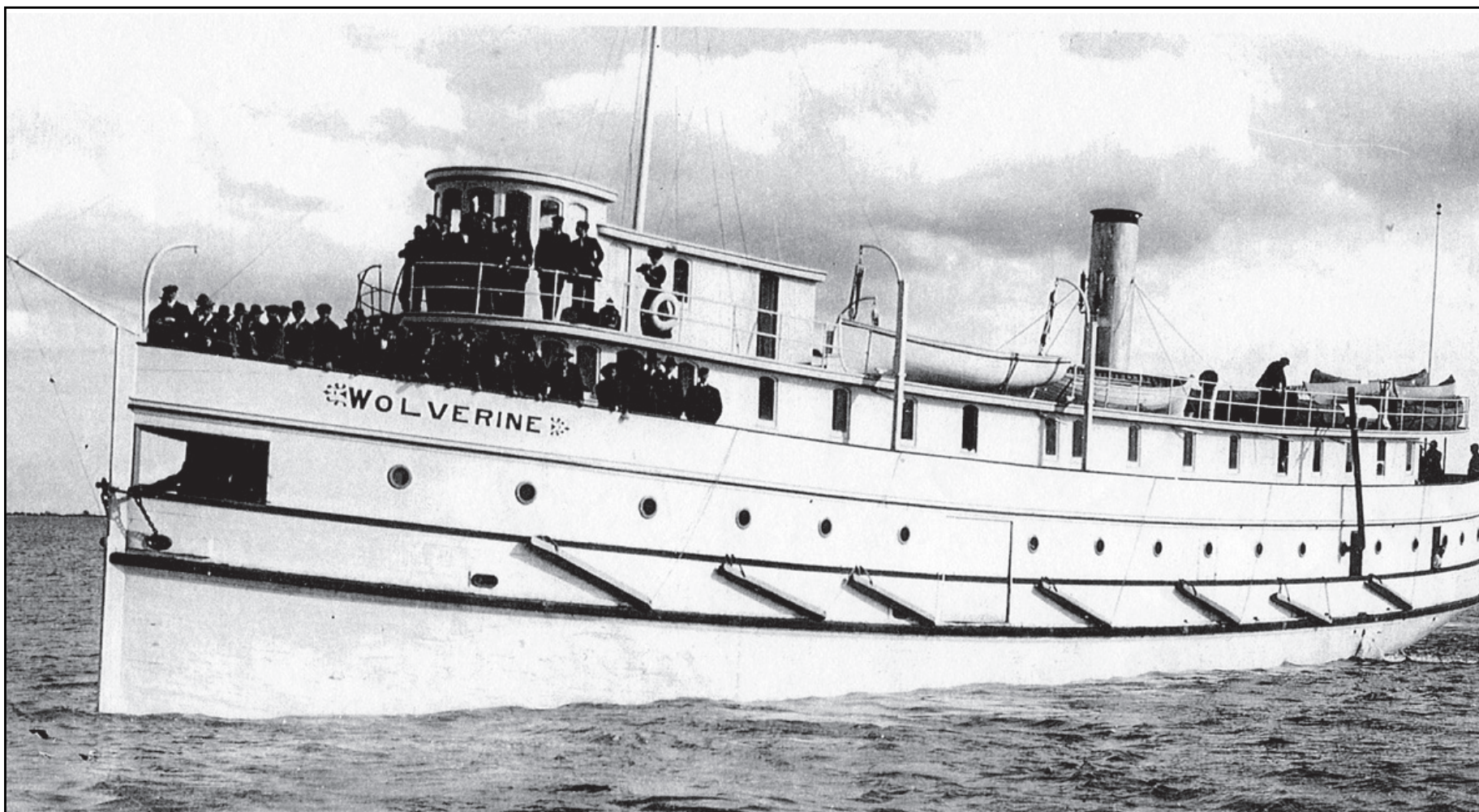
The steamer S.S. Premier in 1900. Built in 1896 for the Reid and Tait Fish Company and then operated by the Dominion Fish Company, she travelled to the farthest points on the lake until August, 1908, when she caught fire at Warren's Landing. The fire claimed eight lives. The wharf and fishing station buildings were also almost a complete loss. Fires, storms and accidents claimed many boats on the lake. The photograph above shows the S.S. Premier with a full complement of passengers enjoying a recreational cruise. (AofM: Garbutt Coll. #184.)



The freighter Mikado was built in 1905 by Selkirk resident and Scotsman Robert Smith. Her first captain was Hugh Black, an early skipper on the lake. In 1913 she was rebuilt and renamed the Grand Rapids and affectionately known as 'The Granny.' According to veteran fisherman Robert Kristjanson, the Mikado was capable of carrying large quantities of fish. She is remembered for surviving many mishaps on the lake, including being frozen in at Grand Marais one fall, along with two barges she was towing. The Grand Rapids was demolished in Selkirk in the 1930s. (LRL: 1981 Olafson Scrapbook.)



The S.S. Keenora is one of the largest and most significant ships that worked on Lake Winnipeg. She survives today and can be visited on dry land, at the Marine Museum of Manitoba, in the city of Selkirk. The Keenora was assembled in 1897, at a cost of \$60,000, just outside of Kenora, Ontario. Her steel hull was built in Clyde, Scotland. The original plan was to put her to work locally, in the gold and silver mining industry. She was to be called the Keewatin, an Indigenous word for 'North Wind', but mariners are a superstitious lot and they worried that that name might be a bad omen. So she became the Keenora. In 1917 she was sold to a group of lawyers who planned to turn her into a floating dance palace. The ship was cut in half and a new six metre section was added to her hull to make room for this enterprise, but it was a failure. In 1923 she went under further renovations after being purchased by the Northern Fish Company. Accommodations for passengers, cold storage for fish and freight, a kitchen, dining hall and crew quarters were added and she began working, hauling freight and passengers on Lake Winnipeg. The Keenora became a fixture on the lake, making stops in Gimli and around the North end of the lake. She was capable of carrying 65 passengers and 227 tonnes of freight. In 1959, her steam engines were replaced by Rolls Royce diesels and modern navigation equipment was installed. But by 1966 she could no longer pass more rigorous safety standards and she was withdrawn from service. She escaped becoming just a memory, when she became the cornerstone of the marine museum's exhibits in the early '70s. (AofM: *New Iceland* #189.)



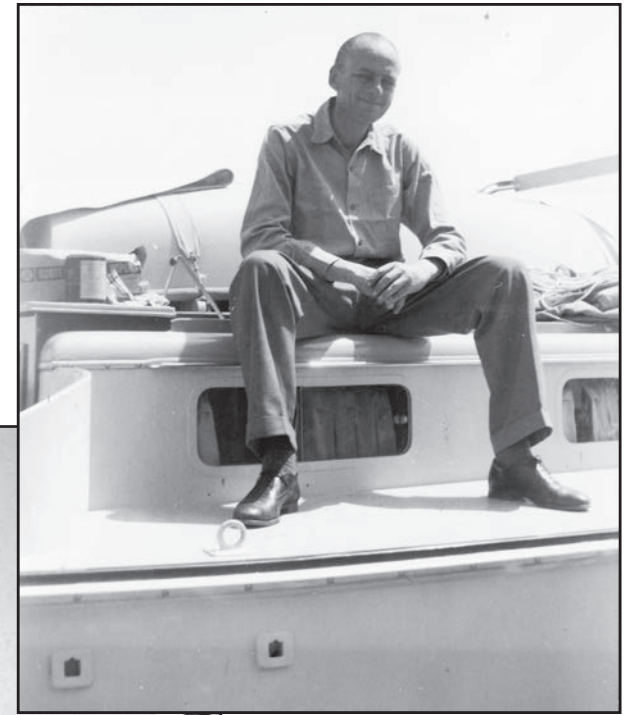
The freighter Wolverine was built in 1903 and operated by the Imperial Fish Company and then, in 1904, by the Northern Fish Company. She was a common sight on Lake Winnipeg and in Gimli's harbour for over three decades before being dismantled in 1936. (AofM: Boats-Wolverine.)



An early photograph of the Bradbury pulling into Gimli's harbour. The Bradbury was built in the Dominion Government Shipyards in Sorel, Quebec and transported to Selkirk where she was assembled and launched in 1915. It is said that 100 families accompanied by two priests, travelled from Quebec and spent 14 months putting the Bradbury together. She took her name from Selkirk's former Member of Parliament, George Bradbury. Over her long career she worked as a fish hatchery; a fishery patrol vessel; a lighthouse and buoy tender; an ice-breaker and a rescue vessel. For the people of Berens River in the remote North Basin, in spring she was always the sign of warmer weather to come. "...although there was ice everywhere, we knew summer was here when we saw the Bradbury break a channel through the ice," wrote D. Paterson in 'Some Ships and Sailors of Lake Winnipeg'. The Bradbury was retired in 1973. Today she can be visited in Selkirk, Manitoba, where she is on display at the marine museum. (GSM: 970.)



The Lord Selkirk II in Gimli harbour, circa 1975. The M.S. Lord Selkirk was launched in 1969 and designed to replace the wooden Keenora as Lake Winnipeg's premiere purveyor of freight and passengers. She sailed for 17 years, frequently making stops in Gimli, before being retired. This steel vessel was 54 metres long and 12 metres wide and could carry more than 200 tonnes of cargo in her hold and in a freezer compartment. She boasted a games room, a dining room and an entertainment lounge, and could accommodate 130 passengers and a crew of 40 in comfort. She took passengers on scheduled excursions around the lake, but increasing access to roads and air travel reduced her value as a freighter. She continued to operate as a passenger ship after being taken over by the Manitoba government and then new investors who intended to run her on the Red River, following extensive renovations. But the number of passengers on existing river cruisers was declining and she was idled. The Lord Selkirk ended her days in the slough, in Selkirk. She was sold for scrap in 2010, but she was deemed to be a total loss, following a fire in 2012 believed to have been started by arsonists. In 2015 she was dismantled. She was the largest ship of her kind between the Great Lakes and the Rocky Mountains. (NIHM #31.)



The Gimli Saga records that Gilbert Eaton, whose family operated the Eaton's department store chain, owned large pleasure boats that were moored in the Gimli Harbour and sailed on Lake Winnipeg. The Penguin can be seen in the top left picture. In 1956 Mr. Eaton acquired the 16-metre Minwassin from an American millionaire and had her sailed from New York to The Lakehead and then shipped by rail to Gimli. He re-named her the Penguin IV. She had every modern convenience and was capable of cruising at 50 k.p.h. Above is the Penguin IV and above right is a portrait of of Mr. Eaton with his boat. Later, the Penguin IV was moved to the Caribbean and The Penguin was sold to CBC TV personality Maurice Burchell. (*GSM: 117.*)



(Sarah Isaac Chapnick Photos.)

The 39-foot ketch Triskele, with her distinctive ochre-coloured sails, was one of the few large sailing vessels on the lake in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She is well-remembered in Gimli, especially by Sarah Isaac Chapnick.

“My favourite childhood memories are on the boat sailing in the North Basin of Lake Winnipeg, anchoring in coves and docking at abandoned fish stations,” writes Ms. Chapnick. *“I spent hours, ‘swinging the compass’ in the channel between the lighthouse of Gull Harbour and Black Island, to chart the compass deviations, to ensure accurate navigation.”*

Some of her father Phil Isaac’s ancestors come from the Isle of Man. He was born in the United Kingdom and is a skilled mariner. The youngest of four, Ms. Chapnick remembers her Dad insisting that the family be completely self-reliant while out on their sailing adventures on the wild North Basin of Lake Winnipeg.

“We didn’t have a VHF radio, and we were equipped to handle breakages and unpredictable mishaps. Dad did not want to be dependent on anyone. We were weather forecasters and navigators. We learned to respect the lake and all she threw at us,” says Ms. Chapnick. *“I loved watching my dad... coiling a rope, splicing a line, writing in the log, or reading by kerosene lamp. I would pour over the charts on the chart table with my dad, learning the names of our destinations like MacBeth Point, Catfish Creek and Granite Quarry Cove.”*

“My mother also created memories for me, by baking bread in the boat’s oven, preparing the stores in the hold for the summer, and tending to the coal stove so the damp bedding would be warmed in the drying cupboard.”

The family’s photo album provides us with a snapshot in time. There are photographs from the ‘70s of abandoned wooden skiffs and decaying commercial fishing buildings in places like Granite Quarry and George’s Island. Many of those buildings are now gone.



Photos, clockwise from above: the Triskele cruising under motor power; at anchor with the entire family: Phil and Lyn Isaac, daughters Jane, Wendy and Sarah and son, Peter; tied up at the dock and underway. Owners Phil and Lyn Isaac are standing on deck. Their son, Peter, is in the rigging. (Sarah Isaac Chapnick Photos.)

The Triskele was the right vessel for shallow Lake Winnipeg. Constructed of wood she had leeboards rather than a deep keel. (Leeboards are wooden planks on either side that are lowered into the water. They keep a boat from sliding sideways while under sail.)

This boat was built in the early '60s by the Saint John's Cathedral Boys School, known for its vigorous outdoor education programs, and sailed on the lake. It was named St. Peter and had a habit of sinking.

The Isaac family spotted her beached on the banks of the Red River, purchased her and spent four seasons converting St. Peter into a family vessel. She was re-named Triskele, which is based on the Triskelion, the sturdy three-legged symbol on the flag of the Isle of Man. The Triskele's home was the Gimli Yacht Club and for many years she was often the racing committee's boat for club regattas. Today she rests in dry dock on the Isaac's property in Camp Morton, Manitoba.

"The sounds of my memories also stand out; the thump of the 33 h.p. Lister diesel engine, the creak of the rigging, and the lap of the water against her hull at night. Triskele was part of our family and my love and memories of her will stay with me always," writes Ms. Chapnick. "She holds a place in the history of boats on the lake and she holds a place in the hearts of those who sailed her."





Seagulls on the Gimli breakwater in the early morning next to the Lake Winnipeg Consortium's research vessel Namao, tied up at the pier. In recent years, the Namao has travelled the lake collecting samples and data in an effort to better understand the ecology of this 'inland ocean'. (Andy Blicq Photo.)



The 17-metre Vakta is a Canadian Coast Guard cutter that operates out of the Gimli Harbour, setting aids to navigation and conducting search and rescue operations. Vakta in Icelandic means "on watch" or "on patrol." (Andy Blicq Photo.)



The Keenora, the Bradbury and other vessels on the grounds of the Marine Museum of Manitoba, in Selkirk. Lake Winnipeg's proud maritime history can be discovered in the museum's displays kept inside these freighters. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*

FISH STATIONS



In the early part of the 20th century, fishermen would travel from the Icelandic settlement to remote fishing stations around Lake Winnipeg's North Basin to catch whitefish. Many began fishing in their early teens. The following is a rare first-person edited account by Gudmundur 'Mundi' Peterson, describing his first year as a fisherman's helper.

This is from the summer of 1913 at Horse Island. We left Gimli at the end of May on the steamer Wolverine in a terrible storm from the north around midnight. By morning we were past Hecla Island and the weather was very nice now, had calmed down towards morning and good all the way north. The boat stopped at Little Bull Head to take on cordwood, then stopped at Berens River and on to Warren's Landing where it lay overnight.

Next morning she pulled out for Horse Island, around a 6 hour run. The stuff and supplies were unloaded and the boat left right after. Now everybody started working, fishermen rigging out the sailboats, which I think had been at the island, and the men had to put them in the water to let them tighten up, which took a couple of days. They were all 'clinker-built', square sterns, and could stand any storm on Lake Winnipeg. They put up the spars, or masts, fitted up the sails, and were ready to set. (NOTE: A clinker-built boat is constructed with overlapping planks. At the beginning of the season, the wooden boats fishermen used were put into the water so that the wood would swell and they would become watertight.)

I worked on the shore that summer, mostly nailing boxes. In those days all the fish was frozen at the station, and winter boxes were used. It was kind of tiresome nailing boxes all day. It was better to be working in the shed, but that was only once in a while.

Tug fishermen were to tow the boats to where they set the nets. Captain John Stevens of Gimli was captain of the fishermen. The tug fished also, and when they were all finished she towed them home to the island. Fishing was very poor that summer. They tried all over.

Towards the end of June the fishermen knew they couldn't possibly get enough fish to pay their expenses, so they were going to stop fishing unless the company would guarantee the wages for the men. The manager of the Winnipeg Fish Company, Tom Jones, came out on the next boat and had a meeting with the fishermen, and guaranteed wages for the hired men, and also for the boat runners, so they kept on fishing...

As a rule the sailboats came in late in the afternoon. Then the fish were dressed and put in bins to be iced and chilled, then taken out and put in a large wooden trough, from which they were scooped out and pan frozen. This work was mostly done after supper. In the morning the fish were frozen solid and when taken out of the pans they were dipped in water and had a nice glaze on, then put in boxes in the freezer. The ice and salt used to freeze these fish was used to charge up the freezer, which was cold enough to keep the fish frozen - a big freezer which held hundreds of boxes. Every time the Wolverine came in, it was emptied.

In July they fished farther out for whitefish, but they didn't find much fish there either.

The Lady of the Lake was the government boat that summer, with Captain Ralph Forrest in command. It came three or four times to Horse Island during the summer. Captain Howell was the chief fish inspector that year, and used to come on some of these trips...

Fishing kept on till the 15th of August. That was the last day you could fish then. Fishing never improved much. The men worked hard, going out at daylight, and had to go 30 to 35 miles out in some cases. They simply tried all over.

When they brought the nets in, they were stripped of corks and leads and dried, and everybody was glad the season was over. The steamer Grand Rapids picked up all the crew. William Simpson was the captain of the Grand Rapids, well known to most fishermen on Lake Winnipeg in later years. I hope I haven't missed anybody, as this is all written from memory after 60 years. The boat runners from Gimli were J. B. Johnson, John Johannson, Marteinn Johnson, Pjetur Gudmundson, Dori Bjarnason, John Stevens, and from Hecla, J. K. Johnson. Bjorn B. Johnson, of Gimli, who years later left his money when he died, to start a fund to build the hospital which still bears his name, Johnson Memorial Hospital, was there too. Eggert Sigurdson of Selkirk fished on his two-masted yawl. I think I have listed all who worked on Horse Island in the summer of 1913.

(Gudmundur Peterson memoirs. GSM: 701.)



Above: Sometimes the nets were up to 50 kilometres away. The men spent 10 hours or more on the water before either sailing or being towed back to camp with the day's catch. They often took crushed ice with them to the nets and would begin cleaning the fish on their way home. Back at the camp, the fish were dressed, placed in a mixture of salt and ice and stacked in wooden boxes in the ice house. As a boy, Robert Kristjanson remembers only Icelandic being spoken at his family's camp.



Left: Part of the Warren's Landing fishing fleet. These boats are 'double-enders'. Others had square sterns. *(L&AC Photos.)*



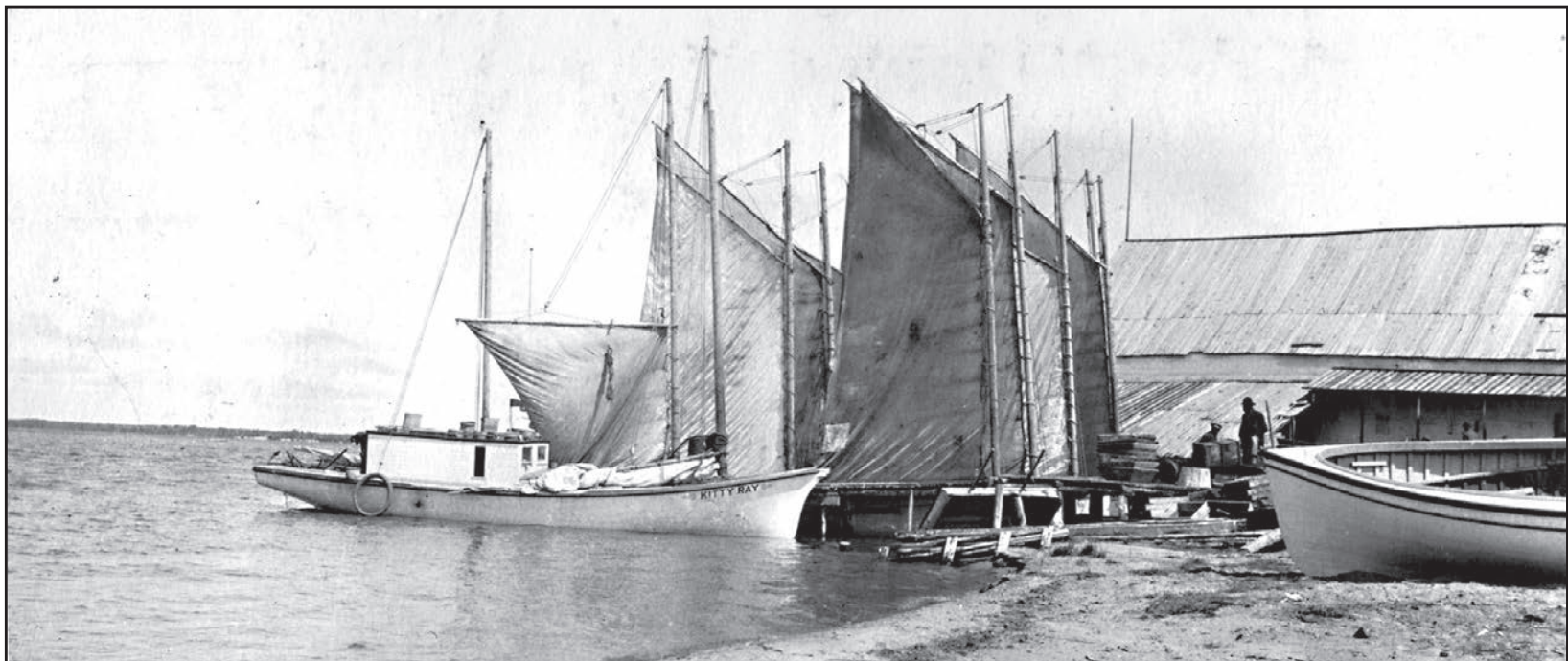
Above: A lighthouse surrounded by net drying racks at Warren's Landing. (HBCA: #83-10.)



Above: Early nets made of cotton or linen required constant attention. Every few days they had to be removed from the water and thoroughly dried on racks, or they would rot. Modern nets are made out of nylon and are important labour-savers. (AofM: Sisler Coll. #7.)



Above: The tug Idell at Warren's Landing in 1927. (AofM: Loudon Coll. #663.)



Above: The Kitty Ray sailboat at Warren's Landing. Note the sails raised on shore for drying. (L&AC Photo.)

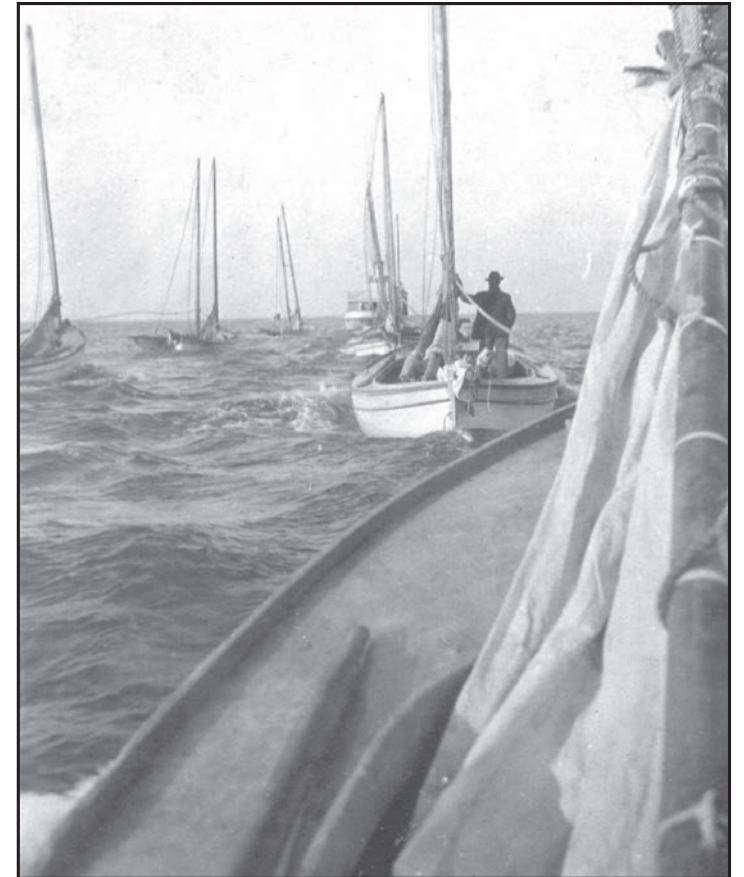


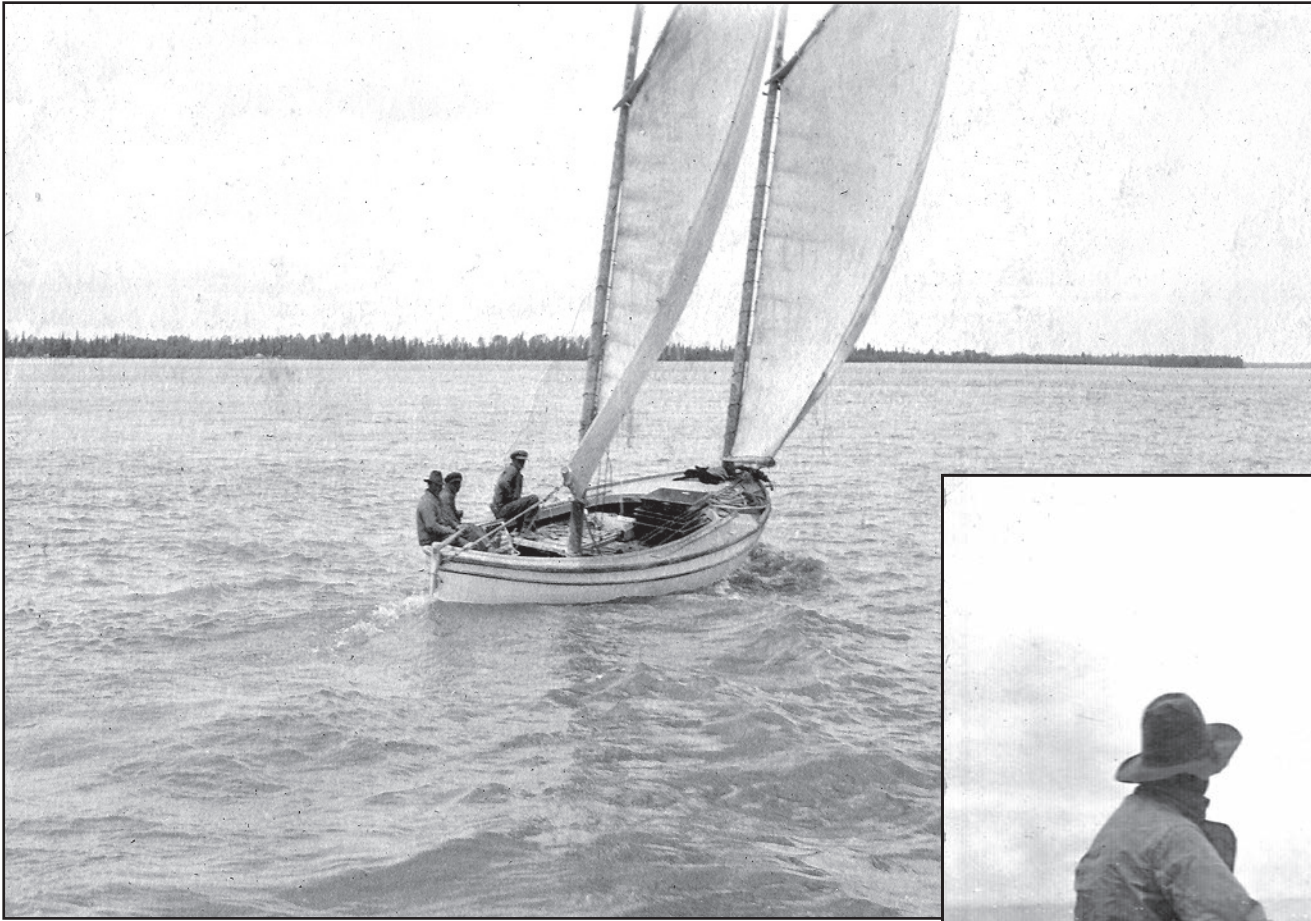
Above: The S.S. Wolverine with fishing boats in tow pulling out of Warren's Landing for a day at the nets, circa 1915. (AofM: Kemp Coll. #41.)

Right: An early morning tow to the fishing grounds in 1922. A view from one of the sailboats. (NIHM.)

Left: View from a steamer of two rows of sailboats under tow. (AofM: Joannidi Coll. #550.)

"When I got my biggest lift I went by the weather, or rather the wind. I set 10 boxes of nets 3 o'clock in the afternoon and I was there the next morning at 8 o'clock to lift it and as soon as I took the buoy, it all floated up. Ten boxes of nets I had and I got 15,552 pounds. That was the biggest lift that ever was caught on the lake that I know of." (NIHM: Book of Life - G. Solmundson.)





Above: "A spanking breeze home with a 725 kilogram catch in 1922." (AofM: Joannidi Coll. #490.)



Above: Hauling in the nets. (AofM: Joannidi Coll. #533.)



Fishermen with their sailboats at Horse Island, around 1920. (GSM: 327.)

Lake Winnipeg was and remains a dangerous place to work. In the early days, the fishing crews headed into the wild North Basin without modern navigation and safety equipment. And they went to work each day without the benefit of regular weather reports. The results were inevitable. Many lost their lives to drowning or, in winter, froze to death or suffered frostbite while out on the lake. One family lost three sons and a grandson. The tally of losses is recalled in the Gimli Saga history book. Here are just a few examples.

In 1930, a boat called the Magnus, after undergoing engine repairs, was leaving the Gimli harbour. School teacher Sigurbjorg Stefansson recalled: “... suddenly there was a tremendous explosion and the Magnus flew into the air in a million pieces, for all the world like a scene on the ocean during the war.” Two men drowned.

Olafur Siggurdsson died after being caught in a blizzard while fishing out on the lake. Ingolfur Thordarson and Franklin Johnson disappeared on the lake near George’s Island. Their bodies were never found.

In the early days of the Icelandic colony, Hjalmar Hjalmarsson and Magnus Magnusson were travelling south on the lake in December. What started out to be a beautiful day turned into a terrible snow storm. The men were stranded out on the lake, but survived. Hjalmar lost half of both feet to frostbite and Magnus lost half of one foot. For three years Hjalmar could only move about on his knees, but early reports say he was still able to clear six acres of land, despite his disability.

The dangers remain, even today. For the wives and families of the fishermen working on this capricious lake there has always been cause for concern. Robert Kristjanson’s wife Sigurros, has a husband, a son, a son-in-law and now a grandson fishing. She says, as a young wife and mother, she worried, but “now as you get older you really worry.”

"Most of the fishermen were really good men, you know. No doubt about that. They never gave in for anything, for cold weather or hardship. They were good that way, all of them. Very hard. And you had to be hard, I'll tell you that, for them times." – Gudmundur (Jim) Solmundson.



Above: Bull Head Fish Station in 1912. (L&AC.)



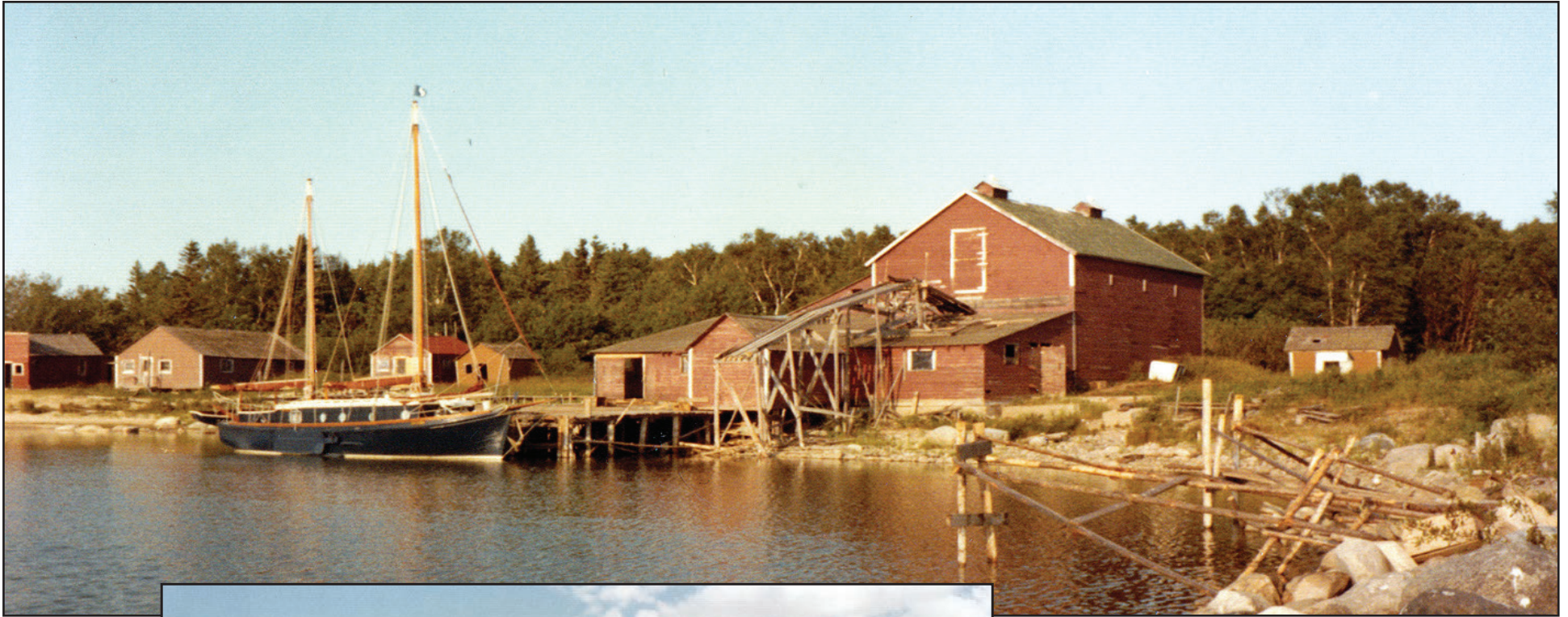
Above: The Snake Island Fish Station in 1934. Fishers lived and worked for weeks and months at these remote stations. In the beginning, camp buildings were constructed of logs. The roofs were made with saplings and hay. The log walls were chinked with clay and in winter, some enterprising crews covered the outer walls with water which quickly turned to ice making a nearly airtight barrier. The larger camps had a bunkhouse and a cookhouse. A cook prepared hearty meals for the crews who worked hard all day in often challenging weather. Down by the waterline, there was often a building for cleaning fish and another for storing ice. (AofM: Loudon Coll. #649.)



Left: A tug, a dredge, fishing boats and a barge at George's Island fish station during the 1920s. (L&AC.)

Right: The harbour at Little George's Island in the 1920s. Fishing families from Gimli had camps at George's Island for decades. Remote George's Island offers a safe harbour, beautiful beaches and high dunes of pure white sand. Sigurros Kristjanson remembers taking her children to the island in July, when her husband Robert Kristjanson was fishing from a station there. The Kristjanson's children, Roberta and Chris, now work in the fishing business. They have fond memories of the summer months they spent in a primitive cabin on George's Island. *"I have nothing, but happy memories,"* says Roberta. *"I dream about George's."* (L&AC.)





The Triskele (above) moored at a George's Island fishing station during the 1970s. Today, few traces remain of many of the buildings left behind in the North Basin by the crews who lived and worked there, when there was a viable market for whitefish. *(Sarah Isaac Chapnick Photos.)*



Fish station buildings and a wooden skiff at MacBeth Point, photographed by the Isaac family during the 1970s. (Sarah Isaac Chapnick Photos.)



Above: Aerial view of the harbour at George's Island around 2010. (*Canada Fisheries Website.*)

Above and below: George's Island fishing station in the 1990s. (*Solmundson Family Photos.*)



Above: MacBeth Point around 2010. (*Canada Fisheries Website.*)

FISHING STATIONS ON LAKE WINNIPEG TO 2007

(From: Karen Nicholson, Historic Resources Branch, May 2007)

- Albert's Point: owned by Freshwater Fish Co. of Gimli; sold to Kristjansons.
- Berens River: Lake Winnipeg, 1937, Sigurdson Fisheries. In 1937 the Kristjanson family acquired the fall fishing station here from the Freshwater Fish Co. of Gimli. It was comprised of an icehouse, a small packing shed and a combined cookhouse and bunkhouse. Also used the station in winter using dog teams, horses, snowmobiles and lastly caterpillars. The station was used by the Kristjansons from 1937-1969, a total of 32 years. By that time they had added a cooler packing shed, another bunkhouse, a kitchen, store, warehouse, and machine shop.
- Big Black River: Lake Winnipeg, Canadian Fish Producers, Hallgrimson Fisheries, Hodgson Trading Company, Booth Fisheries, 1937, whitefish station.
- Big Bull Head Point: Skagfjord Bros, 1926.
- Big George's Island: Lake Winnipeg, Bjornson Bros., Booth Fisheries, Armstrong-Gimli Fisheries, 1937 whitefish station.
- Birch Point: just north of today's Loni Beach, fall fishing station owned by Mr. Brynolfson; rented to S. Kristjanson and J.B. Johnson 1908.
- Black Bear Island: Sigurdson Bros, 1926. Buildings included a cookhouse and horse barn at this fall fish packing station.
- Fox Island: a fall fishing station owned by J.B. Johnson in partnership with Martin Johnson, and after 1939, with Lawrence Stevens. Johnson sold his share in 1960.
- George's Island: Gimli-Armstrong ran this station 1915-1919. Kristjanson Bros. later used it. In use by 1951 with icehouse, cooler, packing and dressing sheds, fishermen's cabins, cookhouse, store and machine shop. In 1996 it was the last whitefish station left on Lake Winnipeg, with only 20-25 whitefish boats on the northern part of the lake for the six-week season.
- Granite Quarry: S. Kristjanson and S. Sigmundson built a fall station here in 1924. This was also the site of the quarry and rock crushing building of the Lake Winnipeg Shipping Co. which operated here from 1914-1915. Their building was three storeys high and painted bright red.
- Horse Island: fishing station 1909-1913.
- Leaf River: Sigurdur Kristjanson and Steini Sigmundson station in 1925; sold in 1928 when partnership dissolved to John Magnusson of Gimli.
- Little Bull Head Point: James Lee, 1926.
- Little George's Island: Lake Winnipeg, whitefish station for Magnusson Bros. 1937.
- Little Playgreen Lake: still exists.
- Kettle Island: three miles inside mouth of Nelson River, 1918, Uning and Fryer of Selkirk for sturgeon; no longer functioning in 1927.
- McCreary Island: Lake Winnipeg, Bjornson Bros. 1937 as whitefish station.
- Poplar Point: Lake Winnipeg, Freshwater Fisheries, Kristjanson station 1905; Gimli Fish Co. 1916; Kristjansons built this station in 1925 and operated it for three years before selling it to Lake Winnipeg Fish Co. Gimli Fish Co. built a whitefish station at Poplar Point about two miles away in 1925. Hector McGinnis 1937; Kristjanson used the M.S. Hercules to transport the packed fish from Poplar Point to George's Island.
- Raymond Island: Uning and Fryer Fish Co. of Selkirk built station around 1916 outside mouth of Poplar River for packing sturgeon.
- Reindeer Island: Armstrong-Gimli Fisheries had a station on island 1921, managed by J.B. Johnson.
- Sheep Island: near the mouth of Berens River, a fishing station.
- Spider Island: Sigurdson Fisheries, H. Thorsteinson, Sigurdson & Sigmundson, Armstrong-Gimli Fisheries 1937 for whitefish.
- Warren's Landing: Lake Winnipeg, Armstrong-Gimli Fisheries, Purvis Bros., Hodgson Trading Company, Booth Fisheries operating in 1937 as whitefish station. In 1940, the station was purchased by J.B. Johnson and his partner Halldor Peterson of Gimli. Station was sold back to Gimli-Armstrong a few years later but managed by J.B. Johnson until 1966.
- Whiskey Jack Point: still exists.
- Yankee Island: near Berens River, a fishing station.

THE WINTER FISHERY



From the very beginning, commercial fishers travelled onto the frozen lake to set their nets. The ice offered a stable platform on which the crews could work. But the winter season had its own challenges. Brutal cold and bitter winds were often their companions and boats could not be used to get the catch to market. Below, well-known Gimli fisherman, J.B. Johnson, provides a vivid account of how the fish were moved south.

Freighting began about midwinter, much of it done by farmers in their off season. The very earliest form was transportation on a simple sleigh pulled by one ox, with one wooden box on the sleigh into which the fish was loosely piled.

The early freighters rarely used horses, most often oxen. Since the oxen were not shod and tended to slip on glare ice the men tried to have them walk on snow. Later they were shod like horses, with two shoes on each foot to fit the cloven hoofs.

Generally, the freighters, after a long day's work in the open, often facing biting winds, strove to reach one of the stopping-places along the lake for the night. These were homes that supplied food and shelter to travellers for a minimal fee. The freighters would arrive at any time of day or night off the roads or the lake. Sometimes both men and teams were exhausted, especially after fighting blinding storms. Generally, the stopping-places supplied hay, water, and shelter for teams for 50 cents a night, and meals for 25 cents, with no charge for overnight lodging of drivers. Freighters often slept on the floor in their own bedding.

More than any other man, Sandy Vance of Selkirk, originally an Easterner, revolutionized lake travel with the introduction of snow ploughs, as early as 1913. His ploughs are described as resembling two field ploughs combined in one, but larger, with square wooden timbers about 10x10 inches, and some

8-9 feet long at the base, and the frame of the timbers 2x6 or 2x8 covered with galvanized steel. At the front were two wing-shaped cutters or plough-shares opposite each other to throw the snow to the sides, and a third at the centre some 6-7 inches up.

With the ploughs horse-drawn transport came into prevalent use on the lake, with heavy draft farm horses of various breeds, among them Percherons and Clydesdales. Three teams of two or three horses would pull the plough according to snow conditions. These were rested by changing horses, generally at noon, and having them pull lighter parts of the freight, such as the caboosie. A freight train might consist of from eight to twelve sleighs, each carrying up to 150 boxes weighing 100-110 pounds each, with a snow plough in front and a caboosie at the rear. The caboosie provided sleeping quarters and meals. On either side of it was a manger into which a horse-tent was packed in the daytime. At night the tents were extended to shelter the teams which were fed at the manger.

About 1928-30 tractors began to replace horses in hauling freight. At first the tractor pulled the plough, but later it was found preferable to have the plough precede the tractor, which pushed it. Since tractors could travel day or night, three or four men would take turns driving.

Vast changes have taken place over the years in transport. Among the vehicles tried were snowmobiles, old Ford cars with an extra wheel in front of the rear wheels, and various types of caterpillar tractors. About 1946-47 came surplus war-machines, such as the snow-tractor or "weasel", and then the bombardiers, which, being able to travel over snow at some 30 miles an hour, have eliminated the need for caboosies, stationary camps and freighting on ice. (J.B. Johnson Memoirs.)



Fishermen on Third Avenue in Gimli heading out onto the lake for winter fishing. Stefan Eiriksson on foot in the foreground 'delivering milk'. (GSM: 707.)



Above: Fish camp on Diner Island and camp cook. (NIHM: Tergesen Coll. A-12.)

Below: Scene at the Mitchell Fish Camp on Black Island.
No date. (AofM: New Iceland #258.)



The following is J.B. Johnson's edited description of the early fishing camps.

Many tasks occupied the fisherman in the few days between arrival and commencement of fishing, the most important being construction of fish camps for living quarters, or repair of old ones. A camp housing one small gang of two or three men might measure about 12x14 feet. Larger ones might accommodate two or three such gangs, of up to eight men. Then a separate kitchen 12x14 feet or more might be built. Sleeping quarters were up to twenty feet in length, with a row of bunks 6-7 feet long lengthwise along the wall and sometimes three to a wall..

Such camps were set on bare ground or rock with a roof of saplings set side by side, covered with hay or straw with clay on top. For insulation they were chinked with moss. Often, to prevent drafts, white paper supplied in rolls like tar paper but thinner lined the inside over logs and moss. Some made a slush of snow and water and

slapped it on the outside walls to form a sheath of ice.

Older camps needed repair, such as re-chinking with moss or mending roofs. If no other shelter was available, the men slept in the open during camp construction. J.B. remembers spending four nights in the open at MacBeth Point.

Oli Josephson remembers a site where no logs were available, but abundance of moss in deep layers. He constructed a camp of saplings placed vertically and thoroughly insulated with the moss.

Other camp details occupied time, such as attention to fishing gear and construction of kennels for dogs. These were long structures, about three feet high and three deep, and partitioned about four feet apart. The front was open and a hay or straw litter supplied. (NIHM: Fishing Families - J.B. Johnson Memories.)



Loading fish into wooden crates, in winter. Location and subjects unknown. Wooden crates were used summer and winter to transport fish south to market. The first job in camp, for boys of 13 or 14, might be building the fish crates. (GSM: 688.)

Lake Winnipeg's commercial fishermen were known to be great dog breeders and handlers. In the early part of the century, Sir Ernest Shackleton approached the New Iceland community, asking if he could acquire 100 dogs for his 1914 ill-fated Imperial Trans Antarctic Expedition.

J.B. Johnson, Sigurjon Isfeld and Jack Castleman accompanied the dogs to Europe where the Icelanders were put up in style and given gold commemorative watches. Shackleton was reportedly impressed by both the dogs and their hardy Icelandic handlers. Shackleton asked Sigurjon Isfeld if he would accompany him on his adventure. So the story goes, Sigurjon wired his wife and asked for her advice. "Come Home," she replied. He and Johnson did. Castleman volunteered to serve in the military during WWI and was killed in action.

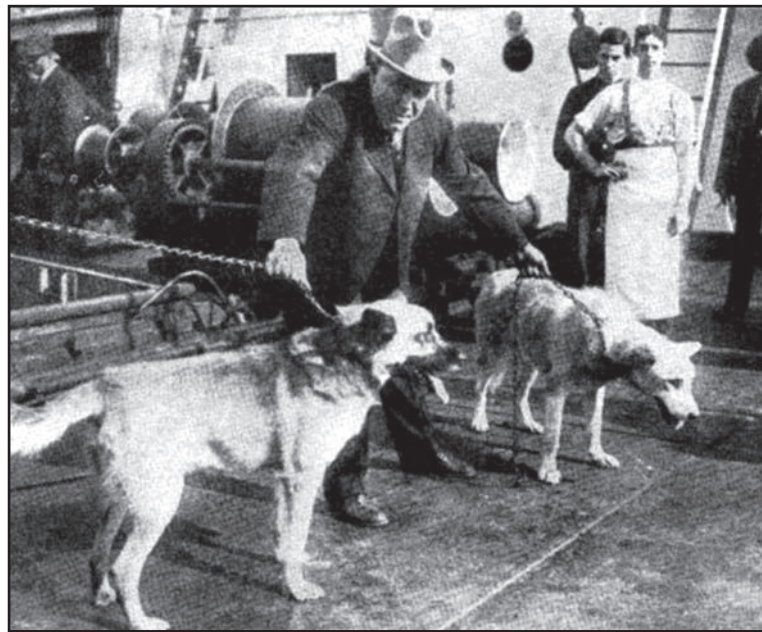
Meanwhile, Shackleton's boat Endurance was crushed in the ice in Antarctica, but in an astonishing act of seamanship, he saved the lives of the crew members with him by sailing a lifeboat 720 nautical miles to safety. Unfortunately, most of the dogs had to be shot when their ship sank on their return voyage.



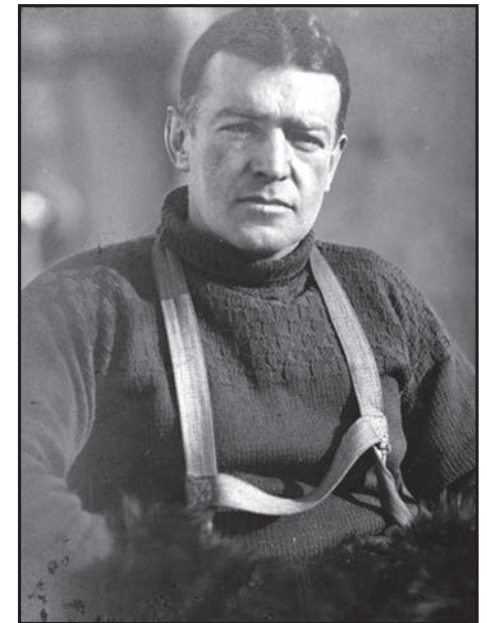
Above: Main Street Gimli, around 1913. Fishermen coming home on dog teams belonging to J.B. Johnson and W.J. Arnason. Left - right are: Baldur Kristjanson, Solli Stefanson, J.B. Johnson, Mundi Johnson on back of toboggan and W.J. Arnason to his left. (GSM: 173.)



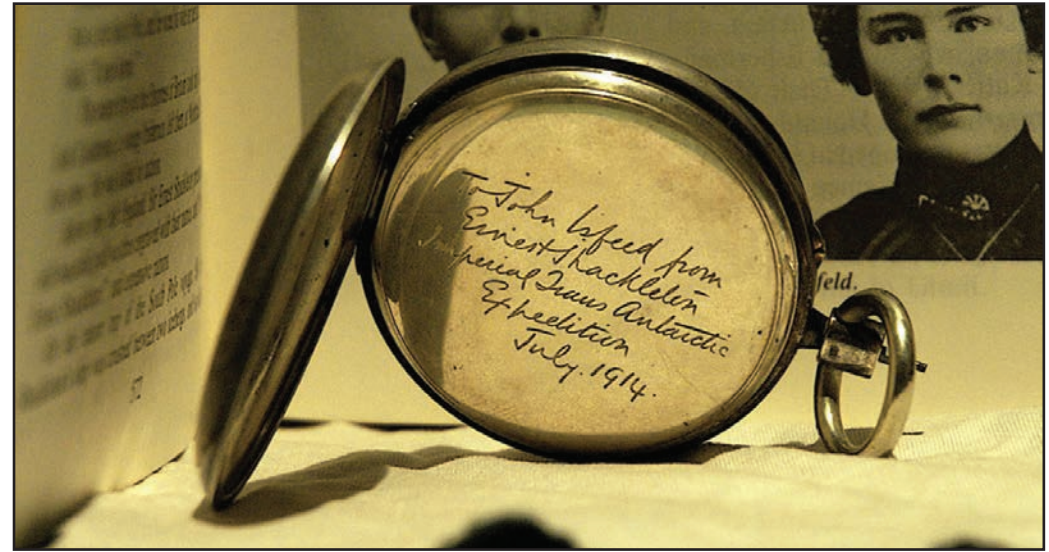
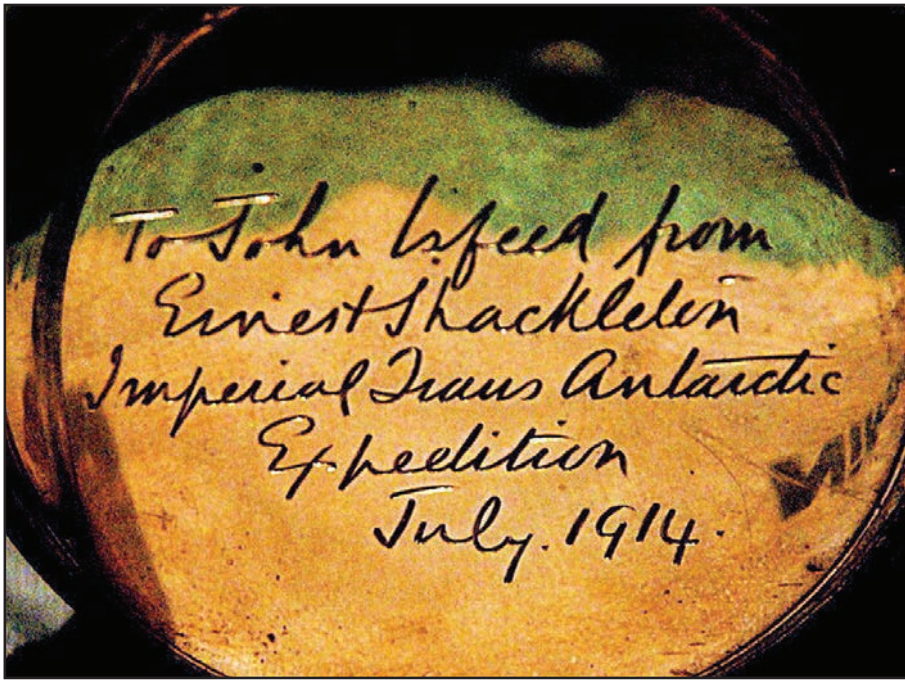
Above: Sigurjon Isfeld circa 1914. (Pbase.com-Shackleton watch.)



Above: J.B. Johnson onboard the cattle-boat, SS Montcalm, in 1914 with two of the 100 sled dogs being transported to England for Ernest Shackleton. (NIHM: Book of Life - J.B. Johnson.)



Above: Sir Ernest Shackleton in 1915. (WIKI.)



Left and above: Engraved gold pocket-watch gifted to John Isfeld by Ernest Shackleton. (Phase.com: Shackleton Watch.)



Above: Life on the ice of the Weddell Sea after the Endurance was abandoned. 1915. (James Hurley Photos.)



Above: The Endurance crushed between floes and sinking, 1915.



Above: Three dog sleds on First Avenue, Gimli, circa 1900. Left to right buildings are: the Lakeview Hotel (later the Betel Home); a drug store and Kristjan Paulson's house. (NIHM: Tergesen Coll - Binder 31, #120.)

For transportation in the early days over Lake Winnipeg, fishermen used dogsleights with runners, about 12 feet long and 3 1/2 feet wide, with a crate, often movable, on top if fish were piled in loose; otherwise fish boxes were loaded on.

Sleigh dogs were of every variety, even including St. Bernard and Newfoundland dogs, and ranging from stocky, low-legged furry huskies with curling tails and perky ears, rather slow but powerful, to high-legged wolfhounds, long, lean, and superior in speed. The rank and file of dogs were trained by placing them at the end of a dog team and coaxing them along. Some would fall docilely at once; the more independent would let the team pull them along flat on the ground for long distances before submitting. A prospective lead dog would be placed behind the leader to learn from him how to obey commands, such as turns, and keep the team in a straight line, untangled. Some had a sure sense of direction; others little or none. A team for either sleigh or toboggan usually numbered five or six dogs and could pull a load of 300-500 pounds or more on ice. J.B. Johnson had one team that with steel runners and clear ice once pulled about 1,200 pounds. - Written by Sigurbjorg Stefansson. (GSP: 226.)

WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

OCT. 3, 1933

RUSH RUSH

JOHN ISFELD JR, GIMLI, MANITOBA

CANADIAN EXPRESS WILL HANDLE PAYMENT THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS FOR TWENTY CRATED DOGS STOP RELYING ON THESE BE AS GOOD AS LAST LOT STOP ESSENTIAL THESE BE SHIPPED OUT OF GIMLI TOMORROW OR AT LATEST THURSDAY STOP ADVISE IF THERE HAS BEEN ANY RABIES IN YOUR DISTRICT IN PAST YEAR

INNES-TAYLOR

Dog teams were very important to the fishermen in the early years and Oli (Isfeld) was very proud of his sleigh dogs. Being among the best in the area, they were chosen for Rear Admiral Richard Byrd's second Arctic expedition in 1933. Oli also took his dog team to Winnipeg to River Park for winter carnivals. He colourfully decorated his sleigh and took people for pleasure rides a mile up the river and back for 25 cents each. (NIHM: Book of Life -Oli Isfeld.)

Left: Text of one of several telegrams received by John Isfeld Jr regarding providing sled dogs for the 1933 Byrd Arctic Expedition.



Above: Written on the reverse of this photograph: "Sigurjon's Son Steve Isfeld with the 1933 Byrd Expedition Team". (NIHM: Book of Life -Oli Isfeld.)



Freighters on Lake Winnipeg, circa 1930s. Two or three teams of horses were normally used, pulling between 8 and 12 sleighs at a time. Each sleigh could shoulder 150 boxes of fish, weighing a total of 7000 kilograms. The train also contained a caboose where the men ate and slept. Conditions were efficient, but primitive. According to Robert Kristjanson, who has spent 70 years fishing on the lake, a tent folded open to make a shelter. The horses were kept on the outside. In the middle there was an area heated by woodstoves that housed a kitchen and bunks for the men. Kristjanson recalls lying in his bunk at night, listening to the horses "*chewing and farting.*" (Nicholson, 2007:31 and AofM: *New Iceland Coll.*)



Freighters on Lake Winnipeg, circa 1924. Fishermen worked in arctic conditions on the ice, without the comforts of modern clothing. The men here are wearing 'Cotton Duck', a canvas outer garment that was pulled over other layers. Cotton Duck, or 'Linen Canvas' is a durable, tight canvas weave, similar to traditional sailcloth. Only leather would have been better for blocking the ever-present wind. According to long time fisherman David Olson, for lunch the workers would tuck a pork sandwich inside their canvas garments. The pork fat was less likely to freeze solid in bitter winter conditions. *(NIHM Photo.)*



Above: Photo of a winter camp out on the ice. Note the snow plow at the left, the empty sleds and the caboose with attached tents for the horses and men. (GSM: 707.)



Above: The caboose folded up and ready for departure. (GSM: 707.)



Above: Snow plow clearing the way on Lake Winnipeg. (NIHM Photo.)



Above: Winter scene at an unidentified fish camp on Lake Winnipeg. There were often long separations and hardships for families. Vilhelm and Gudrun Arnason had nine children. The Gimli Saga records that during the long winter months, Gudrun looked after the children, while Willie worked at a fish camp in the North Basin. Twice each winter, freighters would come and sled the frozen fish south to Gimli over the ice. The only communication between the fishermen and their families might be through those freighters. (GSM: 692.)



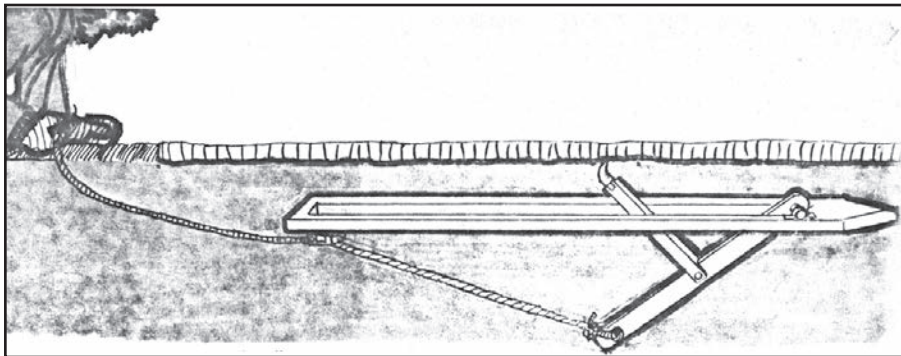
Above: 1954-55, winter fishing with a bombardier, a sled and a caboose. Simbi Josephson, at centre. (NIHM Photos.)

Right: In winter, the nets are set under the ice. In the early days there were no motorized ice augers. The men would use a 'needle bar' (a steel rod with a sharp point) to hack their way through a metre of ice to get to or to set their nets. It was hard and difficult work. According to Robert Kristjanson, the arrival of the bombardier and especially the power ice auger (seen here mounted to the rear of a bombardier) revolutionized the winter fishery. "The auger, he says, "was the best thing that ever came to Lake Winnipeg."






Above: 1950s winter fishing. Left-right: Bogi Kardal, Simbi Josephson and Oli Josephson Jr. (NIHM Photos.)



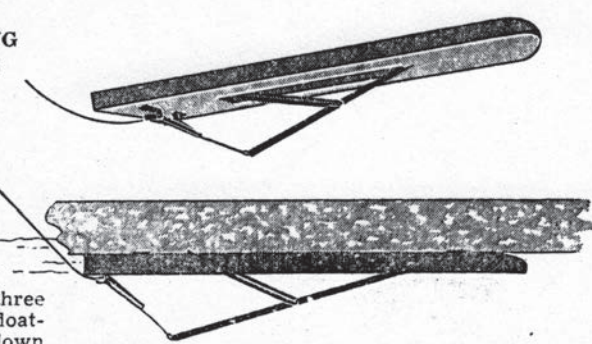
Above: A sketch of one of the various types of ice jiggers, first built by Icelandic fishermen, to help place nets under the ice. (GSM: 698.)

At first, Lake Winnipeg fishermen drilled holes in the ice and used a line attached to a 10-metre-long pole to set their nets. A local inventor is said to have dreamed up the 'jigger' – a simple wooden device, still in use today, that is propelled forward under the ice from one hole to the next. A fisherman stands at the first hole in the ice and pulls on a rope to drive the sled-like jigger forward. A noisemaker is often attached to the jigger so crews can follow its progress under the ice. More recently, electronic tracking devices have been used.

**GUARANTEED
UNDER
HARD
FISHING
USAGE**



ICE JIGGERS



Our Jiggers are made in three sizes only and consist of a floating cedar plank with a slot down the centre. At front end a flat lever hangs from a steel pin. Part way up the iron lever is fastened a floating wooden arm with a steel point which passes through the slot in the plank and propels

the Jigger forward when the line is pulled. A small arm at rear of Jigger acts as a noise maker so that the Jigger can be followed by the noise it makes under the ice.

Above: Advertisement for an ice jigger designed to help pull a line under the surface of the ice. (NIM: Park-Hannesson Ltd. Catalogue.)



In late winter, in the time before modern refrigeration, the lake provided the tools for keeping fish from spoiling. Using large hand saws and a primitive log hoist, large blocks of ice were removed from the lake and hauled by horse-drawn sled to an ice storage building in the Gimli harbour. *(NIHM Photos.)*



Left: Horses were commonly used to move ice during the 1930s. (*GSM: 686.*)



Above: A conveyor belt mechanism powered initially by horses and later by a tractor elevated ice blocks into the insulated storage house. In the weeks and months after, ice was scraped off the blocks and placed in wooden crates along with the fish. These crates were then hauled by wagon to the train station, where they were shipped to market. (*GSM: 686.*)



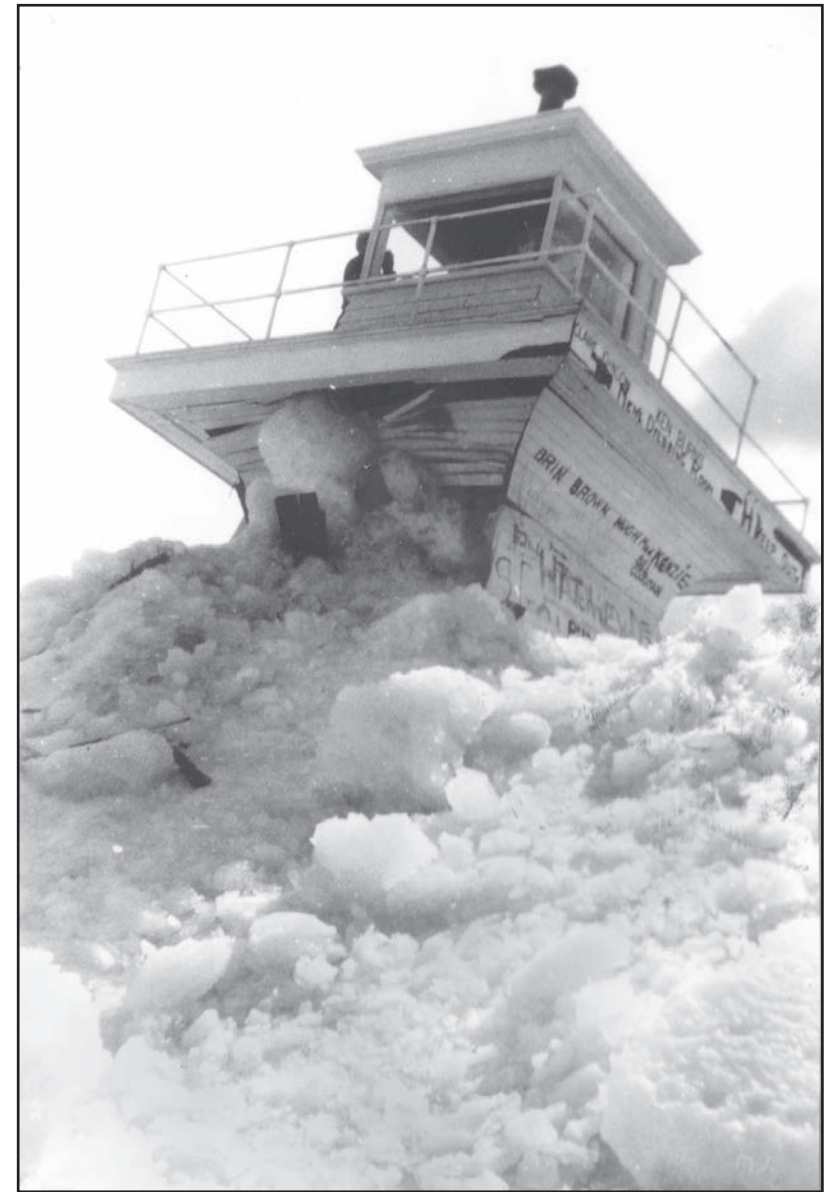
Above: The Amisk and the Goldfield frozen-in, in the Gimli Harbour. (NIHM Photos.)

Below: The Amisk frozen-in again, this particular year with the Lady of the Lake.





Above: Visitors inspect ice forced up and onto the Gimli pier in 1943. (GSM: 114.)



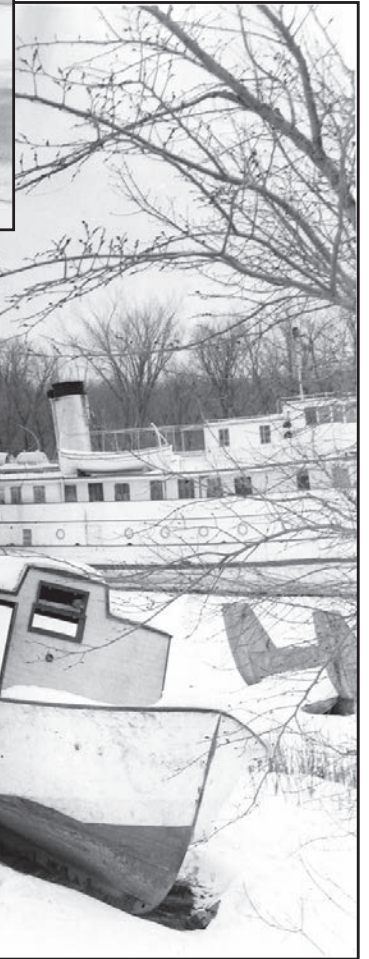
Above: The lighthouse on the Gimli pier, pushed over by advancing ice driven by strong winds on the lake, in 1943. The top of this historic lighthouse can be seen today. It is part of the Lake Winnipeg Visitor Centre complex. (GSM: 114.)



Left: Storm-driven waves in the fall coat the lighthouse in ice, sometime in the 1930s. (NIHM Photo.)



Above: The Goldfield wintering in the Gimli harbour in the 1950s. (GSM: 684.)



Right: Freighters and fish boats in the Selkirk Slough in the 1950s. The slough is just north of Selkirk and is connected to the Red River. It was considered to be a safe place to over-winter vessels. Boats in the slough were protected from moving river ice during the spring break-up. (AofM: Shipley Coll. #59.)





Above: The research ship Namao in Gimli's harbour in February, 2017. Only the very largest steel ships like the Namao can remain in the harbour all winter. The ice would crush fiberglass vessels. Most years, from December until the end of April, the harbour sleeps, locked in ice. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*



Above: Recreational winter fishing has become increasingly popular around Lake Winnipeg. A favorite spot is just outside the mouth of the Gimli harbour, where a village of colourful temporary fish shacks and tents sprout up once the ice becomes solid. Fish caught in the cold water of winter is delicious and a cozy fish shack, heated by a woodstove, is a great place to gather with friends and families. The beauty of an early winter sunset is a bonus. (Andy Blicq Photo.)

FISHING FAMILIES



Sigurjon Isfeld is a colourful figure in Gimli's rich pioneer history. He led a life full of hard work and adventure.

Sigurjon was born in Iceland in 1874, the son of Eirikur Palson Isfeld and his wife Ingibjorg Einarsdottir. They had nine children, one of whom died in infancy. A prosperous fisherman, Eirikur drowned in 1881, while trying to swim to shore from a capsized boat. In 1884 his widow married Thorsteinn Jonsson Mjofjord, and they had one son, Olafur Thorsteinnsson.

The couple emigrated in 1886 from Fjardarkot, Mjoafjardar, in South Mulasysla. They left with six of their youngest children, including Sigurjon, on the steamship "Camoens" from the port of Seydisfjordur bound for Winnipeg. After three years in Akra, North Dakota, they settled in Husavik, near Gimli.

Sigurjon's older brother Pall stayed in Iceland, and emigrated with his wife and family in 1893. Sigurjon married Maria Tofhildur Jonasson, and moved to South Beach where he fished, farmed, trapped, and finally established a mink ranch on the homestead of Maria's father Benedikt Jonasson.

Sigurjon loved his dog teams and was a skilled breeder and handler. He is most famous for travelling to England with 100 sleigh dogs for Sir Ernest Shackleton's ill-fated Antarctic Expedition of 1914. Sadly, most of the dogs had to be shot when Shackleton's ship "Endurance" was crushed by ice and sank. Shackleton's Gimli dogs were commemorated in four stamps issued by the Crown Agents Stamp Bureau for use in British Antarctic Territories.

Sigurjon also provided dogs to Admiral Richard Byrd for his Arctic expedition of 1933. He, along with Capt. Baldi Anderson and Gudjon Arnason, transported dogs to Chicago for a movie. The other two played roles as Indians in the movie, but Sigurjon was considered too big to be cast as an Indian. He was well over two metres tall and weighed about 110 kilograms. A powerful man, Sigurjon won the Glima medal in the wrestling competition at the Winnipeg Icelandic Festival of 1899.



Above: A young Sigurjon Isfeld. (*Pbase.com: Shackleton Watch.*)



Above: Sigurjon and his wife Maria Isfeld. *(Isfeld Reunion Book.)*

Sigurjon, his son Steve and Doddi Thordarsson often took husky dog teams to the Winnipeg Curling Bonspiel and to River Park where they sold rides on the Red River for 25 cents per person.

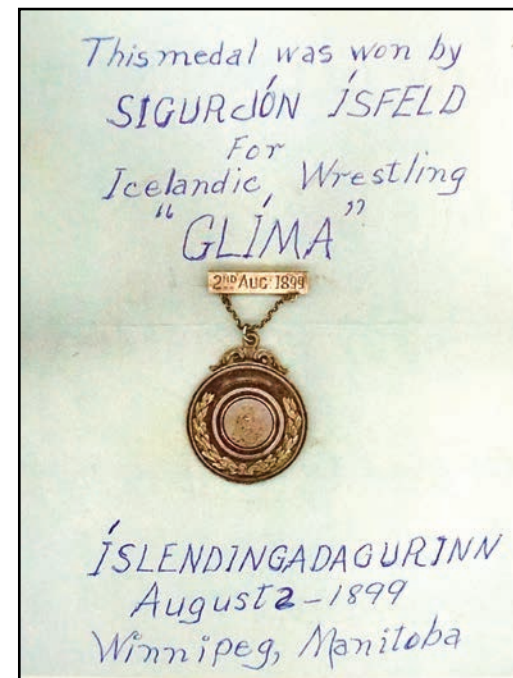
Sigurjon and his sons Steve and John also ran a fish camp on Elk Island until about 1949. John was both a fisherman and mink farmer. His son Allan, the third generation of the family's fishermen, received an award for 50 years on Lake Winnipeg.

Sigurjon was one of the founders of the Gimli Old Timer's Association. At their annual Old Timers' Dance at the Gimli Dance Pavilion, Sigurjon would call off the square dances, while half-brother Olafur Thorsteinson played the violin.

Sigurjon and Maria had four children, Aurora, Steve, John and Emily. After Maria died in 1930 he later married Irene Peterson, and they had two children, Bonita and Aurora. The Isfeld descendants held a 121 Year Reunion at the family homestead in the summer of 2010, and celebrated the occasion by producing a book, *Isfeld Reunion*, written by Holly Franz.



Above: "Shackleton's Dogs" set of four commemorative stamps issued in the British Antarctic Territory. *(Isfeld Reunion Book.)*



Above: Sigurjon's 'Glima' medal. *(Isfeld Reunion Book.)*



Pall Isfeld

The Isfelds are one of the Gimli area's prominent fishing families. Their story begins with Pall E. Isfeld who was born in "Mjoafjordur" Iceland, in 1865. At age 16 he spent a year fishing in Norway. In 1881, his father died and his mother, new husband and Pall's siblings moved to Canada. Pall chose to remain in Iceland with his wife Anna and their children.

In 1893, the family travelled to Canada aboard the SS Huron. Upon arrival, they lived with Pall's mother for a time. In 1895, Pall and Anna homesteaded on "Skogar" in the Husavik district, just south of Gimli, where they began fishing and farming.

Up to that time, Skogar had been occupied by a settler named Björn Jónsson. There were two small houses on this homestead as well as two log stables, some old rail fencing and a clearing of about four acres.

About 1915, the family moved to a lakefront site at "Nyhagi", just north of Gimli, where Pall operated an icehouse for some time. Later, they moved to "Stadarholl", five kilometres north and 1.6 kilometres west of Nyhagi, where Pall fished, farmed and ran the icehouse. Their children attended Nes School.

Tragedy struck the family in 1921, when Pall's sons Eirikur, Fridholm and Arni all caught diphtheria while working on a harvest gang at Portage la Prairie. Only Eirikur survived.

In the late 1920s, Pall and Anna moved to the new summer resort town of Winnipeg Beach where Pall fished and sold fish fillets to visitors and residents.

In Winnipeg Beach, Isfeld family members helped with fish sales and some of the boys became well-known fishermen over the years. Anna died in 1928, at age 60. Pall continued to live in Winnipeg Beach where several of his sons also resided. He passed away in his 83rd year, on October 4, 1948. Pall and Anna's children and their descendants have carried on the fishing tradition.

Olafur (Oli) and Helga had 10 children: Alex, John, Aurora, Fjola, Hilda, Anna, Paul, Laura, Oliver and Edward. Sons Alex, John, Paul, Oliver and Ed all became fishermen and helped their dad with several other ventures. Ed and Heather's son Kristjan is a fourth generation Lake Winnipeg fisherman. Olafur and Helga married in 1920 and went to set up a fish camp at Humbug Bay. Helga ran the cookhouse and fed Oli's crew. As their sons grew up, each in turn helped out.

Oli died in his 86th year, on January 2, 1974. At his request his ashes were scattered by his sons on Lake Winnipeg where he had fished for 67 years.

Einar was born in 1904 and fished on Lake Winnipeg for over 50 years. Over the years he was a fish packer and was also a fine boat builder. Einar and Grace's son Raymond also became a fisherman.

Eyjolfur (Eife) and Margaret's sons Byron, Douglas and Charles all helped their Dad with fishing while they were growing up, while Doug and Charlie fished in partnership. Eife's grandson Mitch Isliedson also became a fisherman.

Sigfus (Fusi) and Lucy's sons Louis and Lawrence both helped their dad fish. Gestur and Bertha's sons Robert and Stephen also helped dad fish while growing up. (NIHM: Book of Life - Pall Isfeld.)

Jon Bjornsson Jonsson – known as J.B. Johnson - is a legendary figure among Lake Winnipeg fishermen. Today, his historic 1930s-era wooden fishing skiff can be seen under a weather shelter on the west exterior wall of the Lake Winnipeg Visitor Centre.

It is in this skiff that J.B. completed his final season on the lake. At age 86, in 1972, working alone, he filled his quota, capping a career that spanned three-quarters of a century. It was an extraordinary life filled with hard work, hardship and adventure. It is said that he was the only man known to have been accidentally drawn under the ice and to emerge alive.

In the 1970s, another legendary Gimli figure, school teacher, writer and historian Sigurbjorg Stefansson, penned J.B. biography for the Gimli Saga. She states that J.B. only missed two seasons on the lake, but in fact, he missed four, choosing to leave his nets idle during a fishermen's strike and once, in 1914, when he helped deliver 99 sled dogs to England for Sir Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic expedition. The following is an abridged version of that biography.

J.B. Johnson, born July 4, 1886 in Vopnafjord, Iceland, came to Gimli with his parents, Bjorn Johnson and his wife Gudrun, in 1892.

J.B. began fishing at the age of twelve, with a net of his own, working with Jonas Johannesson of Graenumork, the owner of a skiff in which they fished off Vigur south of Gimli in summer and fall. J.B. caught enough fish to supply his household the year round.

In 1901 he began winter fishing with Fridfinnur Einarson. J.B.'s father died that spring, so he also had to look after their farm on the Minerva homestead of Myrar. At the age of 15 he was a commercial fisherman and farmer supporting his mother and the younger children. He worked the next two winters with Sigfus Bergman, and then with his half-brother Bjorn, with whom he went into partnership for some 20 years, mainly at East and West Doghead.

In all, J.B. Johnson spent over seventy years as fisherman, foreman or skipper of sail and gas boats, fish packer and foreman or manager of fishing stations on Lake Winnipeg, mainly self-employed, supplying his own equipment and hired men, though often in partnership with others, and frequently engaged in two or three operations at once. Much of the time he fished in all three annual seasons.

J.B.'s last seasons on the lake were in the summer and fall of 1971 and 1972, during which he fished alone in a skiff off Gimli, and caught the full limit allowed. He then retired at the age of 86 having fished Lake Winnipeg for a period of 75 years, missing only the years during which the lake was closed. Now he has donated his skiff to the Gimli Museum, where it will hold an honoured place in reminder of what is likely to remain in an all-time record.

J.B. Johnson married Josefbina (Bina) Josephson, also of the Minerva district, on May 3, 1913. When they had been married six years, they bought the farm called Birkines, or Birch Point, at the north end of Loni Beach, enlarged the house, built a new barn, and proceeded to raise their nine children, and Shorthorn cattle.

Management of the farm was largely in the hands of Bina, for J.B. was first of all a fisherman. The daily tasks of dairy farming...care of their two aged mothers, of hired hands, of



Above: J.B. Johnson photographed during the 1950s and in the 1970s. (GSM: 1308.)



Above: J.B. Johnson's legendary 30's-era skiff. He used this old vessel right until the end of his career. (Andy Blicq Photo.)

their nine children, of a large home, fell to her charge, combined with extensive hospital-ity, community service, and helpfulness to neighbours, in which husband and wife both shared.

Despite his preoccupation with the lake, J.B. found time to become a community leader, taking a vital part in numerous organizations: the Lutheran Church, a member of the council of which he was for many years; the Fisherman's and the Fish Packers' Associations, the Old-Timers' Association and the Icelandic National League. (GSP: 587.)



Ted and Annie Kristjanson in retirement. (NIHM.)

The Kristjanson family has a long and storied history on the lake. Five generations have worked in and played a leading role in the fishery.

Sigurdur “Siggi” Thorvaldur Kristjansson was the first. He was born in 1879 on a farm called Stoppa near Saudarkrokur in Skagafjordur, Iceland. His father died when he was just six and he was raised by Hannes and Ingibjorg Jonsson. He migrated to Canada with the Jonssons in 1888. They settled three miles North of Gimli at a homestead called Skipalaekur.

At age 12 Siggi hired on with the Hannesson Brothers of Gimli to fish at Albert’s Point for 15 a month. For many years he operated a Northern Fish Company sailboat at Warren’s Landing. The summer season then lasted from June 1 to October 15. These were open boats with no cabin, and in October the canvas sails were so frozen in the morning that they were hard to hoist.

In 1900, Siggi and J.B. Johnson rented a fishing station at Birch Point (Pelican Beach) for the fall season with eight men fishing on skiffs.

Among the stories from Siggi’s colourful life is one about three fur buyers who came to Warren’s Landing and got into a poker game with a number of the fishermen whom they regarded as easy prey. Sigurdur, a good poker player, won \$900 from them. The sore losers went to the RCMP in Norway House and claimed they were cheated. The police threw out the complaint.

Sigurdur Kristjanson married Sigurbjorg Thordardottir in 1898. Vesturfarskra

records show that she emigrated from Fremri Nypur, Vopnafjardarhreppur, Nordur Mulasysla in 1878. She emigrated with her parents, Thordur Thordarson, a farmer, and his wife Kristin Thorsteinsdottir.

The Kristjanson’s faced many hardships. The following story appears in the Gimli Saga. *“In 1908, Sigga was in the barn milking the cows and the three children were still in bed. She noticed smoke pouring from the house so she made her way upstairs, carried two children out and laid them in the snow. She went back in, this time crawling on the floor. She was able to save the baby just in time, as the floor collapsed behind them... Siggi was out on the lake fishing at the time.”* (NIHM: Book of Life.)

In 1918, the Fishermen’s Protective Union, representing many of the men on the lake, demanded an increase in the low prices the companies were offering. The fish companies threatened to bring in strike-breakers from the Great Lakes. Most of the fishers backed down, but a small group refused to work, including Sigurdur Kristjanson, J.B. Johnson and A.E. Isfeld of Gimli who stayed off the lake all summer.

In 1924, Siggi Kristjanson and Steini Sigmundson formed a partnership and built a fall and winter fishing station at Granite Quarry. The following year the partners built a pickerel station on the east shore at Leaf River, half way between Berens River and George’s Island. In a small boat they would ferry 50 boxes, each containing 125 pounds of pickerel, across to the Gimli Fish Co. station at George’s Island.

That year Ted took an early summer holiday from school and began his fishing career with his dad Sigurdur. The next year the partners built a pickerel and whitefish station at Poplar Point. The Gimli Fish Co. built a competing station nearby. However, the Kristjanson/Sigmundson station was closer to the nearby reserve, so the aboriginal people, who had no outboard motors or proper-size net mesh, dealt with Siggi and Steini. The partners loaned out 4 1/2 inch nets on a 50/50 basis. The young boys, Hannes and Ted, sent back to Gimli for nets, and soon had four skiffs working for them on a 50/50 basis. Siggi and Steini ended their partnership in 1928, and the following year Hannes and Ted Kristjanson joined their father as junior partners.

The onset of the Great Depression spelled disaster for the Kristjansons. In 1930, poor fishing and a collapse of fish prices resulted in the loss of the Granite Quarry station to the Inland Fish Company.

However, Sigurdur and his boys bought a small fall and winter station at Albert’s Point in 1937, and began with six rower skiffs and no outboard motors. By 1942 they had 30 skiffs, a packing shed and a crew of four. From 1940 to 1965, they sold their catch to the Booth Fish Co., but after that to the highest bidder. In 1950, Hannes and Ted took over the Booth Fisheries whitefish station at George’s Island and operated it until they were bought out by the province in 1968. After that, Hannes and Ted fished out of Gimli on skiffs. Hannes fished to age 82, a total of 70 years, and Ted fished for 59 years. The Kristjansons have had a remarkable record of entrepreneurship and endurance on the lake.

Robert Kristjanson joined his father Ted on the lake, and is still fishing at age 83. He was joined by his son Chris in 1979, and today Devon is the fifth generation of Kristjansons tending nets on Lake Winnipeg. (NIHM: Book of Life - Kristjanson.)



Above: Gottskalk Sigfusson & Holmfridur Jonatansdottir.

The Olson family has been at the centre of Gimli's fishing community for more than 140 years. Their story reaches back to 1876, when Gottskalk Sigfusson, age 42, and Holmfridur Jonatansdottir, age 28, arrived in the fledgling community, with their children, Palina, age 7, and Gudrun Fridrikka, age 2. (The family history also records a Gudridur Anna as one of the children who emigrated.)

They settled at Vidtanga on Willow Point south of Gimli. Unfortunately, they lost an infant first son in the smallpox epidemic of 1876/77. Shortly after, a son, Paul, was born and the family moved to Cavalier, South Dakota for four years. Gottskalk and his family returned and settled on a homestead on Willow Point for 14 years, where Gottskalk began fishing. The family anglicized their name to Olson. Later, with son Paul, Gottskalk established a cattle ranch at Meadow Portage, where Paul met and married Margaret Gislason. Following that, Gottskalk settled on Hecla Island for several years before returning to Gimli.

Pall (Paul) Olson began fishing on sailboats in the North Basin at age of 14 or 15. One winter, on a trip south from Warren's Landing, he raced and handily beat a Hudson's Bay Company dog team. He later sold a team of dogs to Sir Ernest Shackleton who took the dogs on one of his Antarctic expeditions. It was a matter of pride that professional boxer Jack Dempsey purchased one of his dogs.

After Meadow Portage and Hecla, Paul and Margaret moved back to a house on First Ave. in Gimli, where they established their family home. Paul fished for over 60 years, until age 78, and was extremely knowledgeable about the hazards of the lake. He had personal experience with tragedy. His brother Tryggvi Olson died when the freighter Premier caught fire at Warren's Landing.

Paul and Margaret had 10 children and one foster daughter. Paul Jr., Roy and Tryggvi (Ted) continued the Olson tradition and became fishermen. Tragically, Roy died at age



Above: Back row: Paul Jr., David. Front row: Chris, Margaret, Karen and Robert Olson. (Olson Family Photos.)

26 at the Olson fish station on Berry Island. Fridhold (Fred) Olson, born in Gimli April 24, 1886, was the youngest child born to Gottskalk Sigfusson and Holmfridur. He married Jonina Olaf Johnson. After working a few years as a carpenter in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, he spent the rest of his life as a Lake Winnipeg fisherman.

Paul Jr. was born on August 3, 1918, and began going out on the lake with his father at age 10. In 1934, he signed on as deckhand and wheelsman on the Goldfield under Captain Stevens. Appendicitis forced him to suspend his planned career as a lake captain. By age 18, he had his own boat and fished with his father. Paul fished at Catfish Creek, Fox Island, Albert Point and Bushy Point. By 1938 he was fishing by himself.

Paul Jr. married Margaret Paterson, a Gimli teacher, in 1951. For six years the Olsons maintained a fish station on Berry Island. Paul served as the Lake Winnipeg representative on the Royal Commission on Fishing. He succeeded in obtaining unemployment insurance for the fishers. In 1966, the Olsons established Dockside Fish, a processing plant and fish store, which endured until the property was sold in 1990 to the Lakeview Resort.

Paul received the Centennial Medal in 1967. He also served as the first president of the Manitoba Fisherman's Federation, which led to the creation of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Board in 1969. Paul and Margaret had five children, of whom three boys - William David, Robert Warren and Kristjan Andrew - all continued the Olson fishing tradition on Lake Winnipeg. Daughter, Karen Margaret, continues the Olson entrepreneurial tradition within the industry.

Tryggvi (Ted) Olson, the younger brother of Paul Jr., began fishing at age 14. He fished at Black Bear Island, Horse Island and Warren's Landing. In the summer he fished at Warren's Landing and in the fall season he fished MacBeth Point. Ted was the first in Gimli to build a trap net boat, and then built a steel boat in 1971. (NIHM: Book of Life - Olson)



The Petersons are a well-known fishing family. They continue to have a presence on the lake with Garry and his son Patrick working out of the Gimli harbour. Shown here during the late 1930s or early 1940 are brothers Sigurður (left), Guðmundur (centre), who was commonly known as Mundi, and Halldór (right.) Missing is Oli, who drowned on the lake at age 16. (Garry & Isabel Peterson Photo.)

Guðmundur's father, Pétur Guðmundsson, was born in Húnavatns-sýsla, Iceland on Aug. 15, 1866. His wife, Sigríður Þorsteinsdóttir, was born in Ragnárvallasýsla on Feb. 1, 1870. The family journeyed to Canada in 1900 and settled in Gimli. Pétur had been a fisherman in Iceland and shortly after his arrival started fishing on Lake Winnipeg. Pétur died in 1918, and Sigríður followed him in 1934. They had a family of four sons and three daughters. The sons were Guðmundur (Jim) (d. 1994), Sigurður (Sam) (d. 1991 m. Lauga Brands-son), Olifur (Oli) (d. 1931) and Halldór (m. Elizabeth Koch). The daughters were Olavia (Loa) (d. 1994, m. to John Hokanson), Mekkin (Mickey) (d. 1987, m. to Gus Ingimundson), and Victoria (d. 1993, m. to Jack King). The sons were fishermen who operated fishing stations at Black Bear and Spider Islands until 1969. They called their business the "Peterson Brothers."

Jim began fishing as a teenager with his father. He and his brothers spent their summers with sailboats and winters with sleigh dogs. They used horses, tractors, and finally bombardiers. Jim worked on the lake for decades and well knew its hazards, having lived through the grounding of the J.R. Spear on the angry lake.

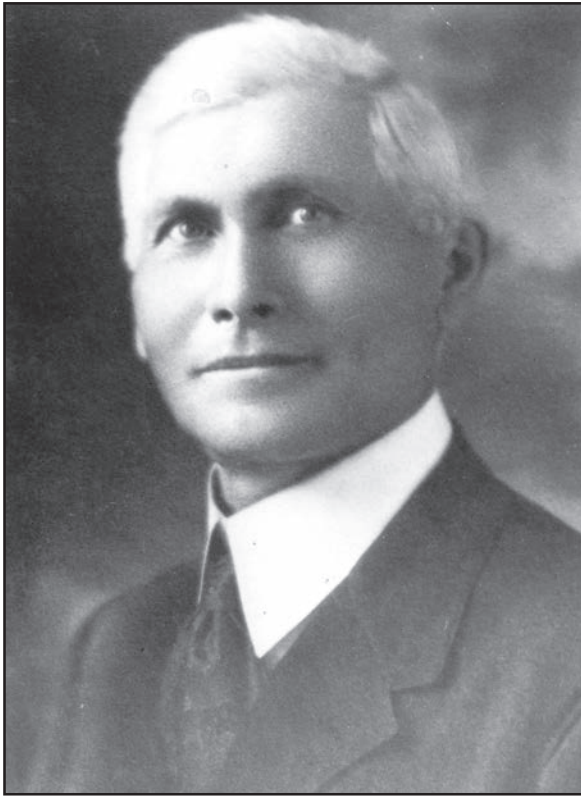
Jim was born in Iceland in 1899. He was a great reader and especially loved poetry, even though he only had a grade five education. After his father died, he devoted himself to his mother and younger siblings. He would often reminisce about the "old days", remembering that it was a big event when they got their first motor in 1928 and could put away the sails. Mundi acted as business manager of the company, doing the bookkeeping, purchasing, hiring, etc. He worked well with, and respected, the many native people he hired and they in turn respected him for his fairness. When doing bookkeeping or other math work, he preferred to think in Icelandic, as felt it was so much easier than in English.

Jim was a strong Lutheran and he loved going to church—he often visited churches when he travelled. He had a very happy retirement. He was active in the Gimli Rotary Club and helped write and publish the club's newsletter.

Jim had one daughter, Helga, from his first marriage to Guðný Sól-mundsson. He later married Rosebjörg Sigurdur. Helga attended Gimli High School and the University of Saskatchewan. She married Ronald Malis of Selkirk. They had 6 children: Denise (Shawn Lynch), daughter Mekkin Elin; Vivian (Garry Painter), daughters Sarah and Stephanie; Blair (Susan), children Emily and Michael; Maureen (Pi-eter Jungen), daughter Freya; John; and Marilyn (Gordon Cunningham), children Marshall, Oliver and Elin.

Helga and Ron spent many years together and lived in several areas of Canada because of Ron's work with Parks Canada. Moving around gave the family a broad vision of the country and perhaps influenced some of the children to settle far from the nest in such places as Boston, Berlin, Ottawa and Nova Scotia.

Helga retired to Gimli in 1997, living on some of the very land that her afi Pétur Guðmundsson had purchased to raise his familyon. Now the fourth generation, Pétur's great-great grandchildren, romp and play on the shores of the lake behind the house. Helga is heavily involved in Icelandic cultural organizations such as the INL, Icelandic Canadian Magazine, and Icelandic Festival etc. and is the Executive Secretary of the Icelandic National League of North America. Guðmundur would be very proud of the accomplishments of all his progeny. (NIHM: *Book of Life - Guðmundur Peterson.*)



Johannes Sigurdson

Johannes Sigurdson was a driving force behind the advancement of New Iceland. His service to the community in politics, business and the fishery is well-remembered.

Johannes was born in Iceland in 1869, to Sigurdur Erlendson and Gudrun Eiriksdottir. The family emigrated to Canada in 1876 and settled at a farm named Kogar on Hecla Island. By age 12 Johannes was helping his brother fish and soon they had their own business on the island called Sigurdsson Brothers Merchants and Fish Dealers. Johannes was just 21 in 1890, when, with brother Stefan, they established a fishing and merchant business, south of Hecla Island, in the community of Hnausa.

In 1893, Johannes married Thorbjorg Jonsdottir (1872-1971). They had four children: Loa, Larus, Stefania (Bunnie) and Jon Johannes.

The brothers' business prospered. They secured a pier for Hnausa in 1896, built the fabled freighter *Lady of the Lake* in 1897 and did a lot of business with U.S.-owned Booth Fisheries in Selkirk. The *Lady of the Lake* was sold in 1901 and in the same year Johannes sold his share of the business to Stefan.

Johannes served as Reeve for the R.M. of Gimli between 1897 and 1899 and again in 1901 and 1920. He was also the first mayor of the town of Gimli, serving from 1908 to 1911.

"He became an outstanding leader in other fields, as merchant, politician, temperance crusader and promoter of railway extension," his grand-nephew, Solli Sigurdson, wrote in the Hnausa local history, adding that Johannes lived a very full life. His business endeavours and public service commitments were very successful. He was instrumental in developing markets for Lake Winnipeg fish in the United States. He travelled widely, was active in the Unitarian Church and he was a staunch supporter of the Liberal Party.

Stefan and Valgerður Sigurdson had a beautiful home, and were known far and wide for generous and bountiful hospitality, even entertaining Premier Rodmond Roblin.

The family owned many well-known freighters over the years including the "*Lady of the Lake*", "*Viking*", "*Goldfield*", "*J.R. Spear*", "*Mikado*", and "*Amisk*". They also operated a fleet of fishing boats, like the "*Baby Spear*," now exhibited in the Lake Winnipeg Visitor Centre.

Johannes maintained a variety of business interests in the district. In 1903 he took Sveinn Thorvaldson as a partner and opened a store in Riverton and in 1906 set up and managed a second company store in Gimli, Sigurdson-Thorvaldson General Merchants. More stores were opened in Arborg, Hnausa and Bissett.

In 1911, Johannes and his family moved to Winnipeg where the children got an advanced education. While in Winnipeg, Johannes continued to run his varied businesses. Johannes and Thorbjorg's son Larus became a prominent doctor, Bonnie attended Columbia University in New York. She never married and returned to care for her sickly sister Loa and her mother. In 1924, while vacationing in Florida, Johannes took ill and died a short time later. Stefan Sigurdson died of a stroke in 1917. (*GSP: 598.*)

The Stevens family has a long and proud history of piloting freighters on Lake Winnipeg. The first generation with ties to Canada traces back to Jon Gudnason, born Oct. 4, 1864, son of Gudni Jonsson and Johanna Johannsdottir, who came from Ytra Leiti, Skogarstrandarhreppur, Snaefellsnessysla in Iceland. In 1876 at age 12, he emigrated to Canada with his aunt Gudbjorg Gudbrandsdottir on the ship 'Verona'.

He settled in Selkirk, and changed his surname to Stevens. In 1887 he married Johanna Hansdottir who had also come to Canada on the Verona in 1876. The ship's manifest showed her as Hansina. The Stevens later homesteaded on a farm in the Minerva area.

Captain Jon Stevens spent 58 years on the lake, beginning as a cook in fish camps, then as mate and finally as a captain for 46 years. He served on the Idell, Premier, Garry, Grand Rapids, Amisk, Red River, Chieftain, Fisherman, Goldfield, Sigmund and Miner. His sons Jon, Bill and Clifford, and grandson Bill served under him. The Canadian Permanent Committee of Geographic Names honoured his profound knowledge of the lake by naming Stevens Point on Berens Island after him. He assisted government hydrographers in mapping Lake Winnipeg's reefs and harbours.

In 1908, his ship "The Premier", then the fastest and finest ship on the lake, was docked at Warren's Landing when fire broke out at 3:30 AM. All passengers on the windward side survived by crawling through windows and jumping overboard where they were rescued by fishermen. The last to leave was Captain Stevens who jumped into the water just as the blazing superstructure crashed through the hull. Eight passengers and twelve dogs perished. However, Captain Jon, the mate and the second engineer prevented the loss of many more lives and were regarded as heroes.

Jon began winter fishing in partnership with Baldur and Th. Peterson, and spent 50 winters on the ice, missing only one season. In January, 1926, he drove a dog team 40 miles through a blizzard from Black Bear to Commissioner Island. His grandson remembered him as a 70-year-old running for miles behind a dog team. Few men could keep up with him.

The second generation of Stevens on the lake began with Jon Hans, the oldest son of Jon Sr. Born May 19, 1889, he began as a shore hand at age 13, nailing fish boxes. As foreman or captain, he sailed out of Warren's Landing for 12 years and later from Horse Island. He also winter-fished before taking over the family farm in Minerva.

"Steamboat Bill", the second son, became a deckhand on the Highlander at age 12. At age 17 he was serving as wheelsman on the Premier when it burned at Warren's Landing. He barely escaped by leaping to the dock. Bill became a permit captain in 1908, achieving his full license in 1924. He spent 46 years on the lake, 38 as captain and commanded numerous lake vessels including the Goldfield, Amisk and Bradbury.



Above: Captain Jon Stevens and his wife Johanna. (GSM: 1334.)



Above: Ranka and Jon Jr. Stevens. (GSM: 1334.)



Above: Lawrence and Runa Stevens. (Steven's Family Photo.)



Above: The Stevens family: BR: Laurence, Ruby, Violet, William (Bill), Flora, Elert. FR: Walter, Jon, Esther, Ranka and Franklin. (Steven's Family Photo.)

He is remembered for rescuing the Keenora, which ran aground along the Hecla shoreline. While trying to rescue fishermen stranded at Rabbit Point late in the fall, his vessel, the Goldfield, was frozen in. He, his crew and Hector McGinnis, the manager of Gimli Fisheries, had to walk 65 miles over the early lake ice to Hodgson. In the mid-1930s he and his brother Robert were lifting nets on the spring ice when their floe broke loose and drifted to the east shore of the lake between Balsam Bay and Grand Marais. He liked the area, bought the land and built a log cabin there. Later he subdivided the property, creating the community of Sunset Beach.

Helgi Stefan Stevens, born April 18, 1897, the third son of Captain Jon Sr., began fishing at Horse Island at age 14. Four years later he worked as a deckhand on his father's boat, the Garry. In the early thirties he lost a team of horses and some equipment through a crack in the lake ice and then had to walk a hundred miles to obtain another team of horses. On one occasion he walked from Snake Island to Riverton, a distance of 65 miles. He left at 8:00 a.m. and reached Riverton at 7:00 p.m. Helgi fished Lake Winnipeg for about thirty years, and captained several boats including the Barney Thomas and the Amisk.

The fourth son, Norman Kristjan Stevens, born July 4, 1902, began winter fishing with his father and brother Bill at age 18. The following year Hector McGinnis hired him as a shipping clerk for Gimli Fisheries. When Gimli Fisheries closed during the Great Depression, Norman worked at George's Island for four years and at Warren's Landing for two years. When Gimli Fisheries became Gimli Armstrong Fisheries, Norman became the manager. He continued in that position under the administration of BC Packers, and spent 45 years with the company under the different owner-ships, retiring in 1967.

From the age of 15, the fifth son, Clifford Johann Stevens, born April 14, 1911, the fifth son, spent 43 consecutive years on the lake, 35 as a captain. He served as quartermaster, mate and captain on many boats, including the Goldfield, the Lady of the Lake and the Suzanne E. Clifford first served on the Goldfield under his father.

Clifford winter-fished for eight years, primarily with his father. He also worked 12 seasons as a fish inspector. Around 1950, Arthur Bristow was severely burned in an accidental explosion at MacBeth Point. Clifford drove his ship through a gale so severe that waves were washing over the Gimli dock and high up on the lighthouse, to get Bristow to medical care. He maneuvered the Goldfield into the harbour with two men on the wheel.

Lawrence Stevens, the second son of Jon Jr. and Ranka, spent many years as a fisherman and fish station operator. Married to Gudrun, the daughter of J.B. Johnson, he was in a long-time partnership with his father-in-law. He operated a fish station at Fox Island for 30 years and fished at Warren's Landing for 32 summers.

Clifford Stevens Jr., born Dec. 4, 1936, the only son of Clifford Stevens Sr., accompanied his father on the Goldfield from age six or seven. He began his lake career as cook's helper on the Bradbury at age 17, and then spent three years on the Keenora as wheelman and mate. He later captained the Goldfield and J.R. Spear.

The Stevens family for three generations and for almost a century captained many of Lake Winnipeg's most famous boats. (Clifford Stevens Jr. and other sources.)



Gudmundur Solmundson. *(GSM: 724.)*

Gudmundur 'Jim' Eyjolfur Solmundson is a legendary figure in Gimli's fishing community. He was born to Solmundur Simonarson and Gudrun Aradottir at Hvitaros, Borgarfjord, Iceland on Nov. 3, 1879. He emigrated from Reykjavik, Iceland, on the steamship 'Copeland', in 1888, at age 7.

The family first settled on Hecla Island, then moved to Winnipeg, and then Gimli, where Mr Solmundson spent most of his life.

'Jim' Solmundson had little formal education. He began work as a "cookee" in a lumber camp on Black Island at age 12, earning \$4 a month, and later cooked on board the freighter Gimli. (In an interview, in 1960, he claimed to have walked from Winnipeg to Selkirk at age 9, and got his job as a cook on the Gimli. The captain was an Icelander, and Jim then spoke only Icelandic.)

Mr Solmundson fished on the lake for 70 years. At age 18, he joined a crew of six on the steamboat Osprey, fishing Lake Winnipegosis during the first season it was open for summer fishing.

Shortly after that he became captain of the Ellen. It was the beginning of a 30-year period during which he would often tow over 20 whitefish boats every summer out to the North Basin. Mr. Solmundson also captained the Goldfield, and the Garry for eight years. When the Garry sank after striking some rocks at Warren's Landing, he chose to leave behind his life as a freighter captain.

Mr. Solmundson had an encyclopedic knowledge of the best fishing grounds in the North Basin and how they would change during the summer fishing season. When the whitefish fishery began in the North Basin, around 1886, Pickerel and Sauger were considered to be rough fish and were thrown away. The whitefish would often be around 16 pounds. In the late 1890s the price of that whitefish was 2 1/2 cents a fish. In those days, fish were dressed, salted and put in wooden kegs.

On October 17, 1901, Gudmundur married Lovisa Petursdottir Buch, who was born in Winnipeg on December 25, 1883. They had 11 children, nine of whom survived to adulthood. Gudmundur and Lovisa were strong Lutherans. They donated the land on which the second church was built in Gimli, in 1907. Mr. Solmundson hauled all the lumber for the church by oxen and by sailboat from Selkirk. He also made a major contribution for the construction of the present-day church building.

Three of Gudmundur and Lovisa's daughters married fishermen. Lily married Herbert Johnson, Ingrid married Travers Johnson. The two brothers in partnership and their wives spent the summer and fall seasons out on the North Basin. Johanna Fjola married Michael Olender, also a fisherman.

Three sons became fishermen. Solmundur married Eleanor Marion Johannson, and their son Edward Roy began fishing with his father. He was the third generation of Solmundsons in the fishery, and is still fishing. Roy married Joan Kuslak of Finns. Joseph Theodore and Benedict both became fishermen.

In 1960, Gudmundur Solmundson received the Order of the Buffalo Hunt from Manitoba's Lieutenant-Governor and was honoured by the Manitoba Federation of Fishermen. *(NIHM: Fishing Families - Binder 14.)*

THE MODERN FISHERY



Today, many of the New Iceland colony's founding families have descendants working in the fishing industry on Lake Winnipeg. Some are now in their fourth or fifth generation and one thing is common among them. Many continue to fish as long as they can – sometimes for 70 years or more. Robert Kristjanson is one. When Mr. Kristjanson was a boy he looked to the night sky and dreamed of becoming an astronomer. There was no better place to see the firmament, than from the remote fishing station in the wilderness of the North Basin of Lake Winnipeg where, in his early life, he lived and worked during the fishing seasons.

But his dream was not to be.

"How do you do it, when you can't spell. That was the end of that. But I always wanted to be where water was, of course," says Mr. Kristjanson. "And that's where I stayed."

He didn't attend school until he was eight. He struggled with reading. In the modern world, he would probably have been diagnosed with a learning disability. *"When I was a young kid I knew where every river flowed, but I couldn't spell the provinces they were in. So I accepted what I had."*

And what he had was a genius for this life. At 83, he has been fishing for almost 70 years. His living memories transport us back in time and bring to life the stories of the men and women from Gimli who travelled to the vast and wild North Basin, in pursuit of the treasured whitefish destined for U.S. markets. That market and that way of life are all but gone now. Most of Gimli's fishers use open yawls to get to their nets set in the South Basin of the lake and return home each night. Today, the markets they serve demand pickerel and sauger fillets.

Mr. Kristjanson remembers the early days as a life connected to nature. *"What more would a boy want? Boats and water," he says. "I had the greatest life of all."*

His career began in 1948 at the tender age of 14, fishing with his father and grandfather at their camp at Albert's Point, where Icelandic was still spoken. As a boy Mr. Kristjanson's afi (grandfather) showed him how the weather turned on the phases of the moon. His afi insisted that he learn how to instinctively find North, without using a compass.

"You must 'feel' North," his elders told him. "Your body must feel North."

On the lake, in the days before good radios and sophisticated navigation gear it was a survival skill – especially in a snowstorm.

"Different guys froze on the lake because they didn't feel North."

In the early days, the fishing seasons opened and closed throughout the year. Mr. Kristjanson remembers the town of Gimli emptying out as many families walked down to the pier and boarded freighters owned by the fish companies. The freighters would take the families to remote corners of the lake, where they would live at the primitive fish stations and the men would fish. The freighters towed a chain of smaller boats from Gimli to the stations. Those boats were used by the men to get to their nets. Twice a week, the freighters travelled north to the remote camps to collect that catch, which was kept in icehouses. In winter, often it was just the men who went to the camps.

There were long separations from family and little contact with the outside world. Fishermen had to travel with dog sleds or horses to their nets, which were set under the ice. The men often worked from dawn until dusk, before returning to camp where the fish were packaged, equipment maintained and animals looked after. The frozen fish was gathered and then transported south by trains of horse-drawn, or tractor-drawn sleds. It was a hard life. It still is. Fishing families have always been at the mercy of the weather, Mother Nature and markets and prices set by others.

The Kristjanson family wouldn't have it any other way. Today, the fifth generation is entering the fishery. Mr. Kristjanson pauses, while working with his son, Chris, preparing their boat The Lady Roberta for the spring launch. He says he has no intention of giving up, although he says this will be his last winter fishing season. As a young man, Chris recalls working with his elders at a northern fishing station, and hearing the stories about the history of the fishery.

"One thing I never heard was they were going to retire," he says. "We are all doing it because we want to do it."



Father and son, Robert (right) and Chris Kristjanson, work together in the fishery. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*



Bruce Johnson, owner of Bruce's Marine and his six-wheel-drive surplus U.S. military truck. Boats like the commercial fishing vessel Lady Roberta, owned by the Kristjanson family, can weigh 8,000 kilograms or more. Special heavy equipment is needed to get them into the lake in spring and out of the lake before freeze-up. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*



Longtime friends and commercial fishing companions Lawrence Sveinson (left) and Pete Isfjord aboard the MS Ruby E. Mr. Sveinson has worked on the lake for 36 years. *"It's pretty much all I've done. My dad, had us working ever since we were little kids. Everybody had a job doing something,"* he says. (Andy Blicq Photo.)

On a frigid January morning, David Olson and his team are up long before dawn and on their way to their winter fishing nets. It will be almost 12 hours before they return.

The day begins with a commute from Gimli around the bottom of Lake Winnipeg and up to Victoria Beach. On the way, David explains that he's been setting his nets on the east shore of Lake Winnipeg's South Basin, where this year there are fewer commercial fishers at work on the ice and plenty of pickerel to catch.

It is a team effort for David, his son Liam, and helpers Johann Benediktson, and Ray, Greg and Jordan Favell. This is the modern face of the commercial fishery where the old ways and the latest innovations merge. This day begins with the old. It is -20 degrees Celsius with a sharp wind, but David's two vintage bombardier snow machines roar to life. They are the mainstay of the winter fishery. These enclosed vehicles with tracks and skis will transport the team to their nets set out on the lake and under the ice. They provide important shelter from the bitter winter wind that blows unchecked out in the open.

These bombardiers have been out of production for years, but David and Gimli's other commercial fishers re-build them and maintain them well. They are essential tools – their reliability is paramount.

With the fish tubs and other equipment stowed, the team heads out in the two bombardiers and on three snow machines. The early morning light paints the snow pink and the bombardiers cast long shadows as the men prepare to get to work. It is beautiful. But with a strong wind blowing from the North it feels as cold as the surface of the moon.

The 20-somethings, Liam and Jordan, will work outside. David, Ray, Greg and Johann will enjoy the relative comfort of something new that David believes will change the way this work is done. It is affectionately known as 'the lifting lounge' - a caboose on skis designed and built by David, complete with a woodstove. Underfoot part of the floor is open. An hydraulic winch draws the nets up and the fish are extracted inside.

For decades, these crews have worked outside, retreating to heated cabooses or their bombardiers for breaks from the freezing cold work. This latest innovation is a game-changer. David has plans for a bigger caboose and he expects others will adopt this piece of gear in the future. And perhaps more people will return to winter fishing.

"This is the prototype," he says. "I'm already thinking about how to make it bigger and better."

Finding new and better ways of working is key to David's success. He is a

strong advocate of the dual marketing system, in which fishers have the option of selling their catch to private interests, rather than through the federal government's Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation.

But the past is always present here, too. David often speaks of his late father Paul, and his grandfather Paul Sr. The long standing tradition of First Nations people and Icelanders working together on the lake is practiced here by the Favells and the Olsons. There is mutual respect and the comfortable banter of men hard at work, together, each confident in the mastery of their fish handling skills.

"These are 'pros', these boys," says David, adding that the Favells have a special instinct for where to set the nets and find the fish.

There are 60 nets set on the lake today. Each will produce about 36 kilograms of pickerel. The ends of each net are marked by wooden stakes set in the snow. Both bombardiers are equipped with ice augers, large motorized drills the team will use to pierce the ice and reveal the nets. Once the holes are drilled David pulls his new caboose over top of his first hole and the extraction of the fish begins. Meanwhile, Liam and Jordan pull their bombardier and smaller caboose upwind of their hole and stretch a tarp between the two to break the north wind while they lift their nets.

As the day progresses, they move from net to net, repeating this process. It turns out to be a good day. The team will return to Gimli with plenty of fish. The following morning, in the Olson's tidy fish shed back in Gimli, the fish are cleaned and filleted. It is a family affair. David's wife, Wendy and daughter Fraser are on the assembly line.

For the Olsons and many others in Gimli, family and fishing go together. *"The names never change. The same families send their sons to the lake,"* says David.

David's grandfather, Paul Sr., spent his life on the lake, travelling by dog sled and earning \$26 to \$45 a month, in a time when whitefish fetched 1.5 cents per pound. David's Dad, Paul Jr., had a fishing station on Berry Island for many years and established Dockside Fish, a well-known retail fish store that operated at the foot of the Gimli pier until the new Lakeview Resort was built on that site.

David's son, Liam, the fifth generation of Olsons on the lake, says his Dad never made him take on commercial fishing. It was something he wanted to do. Young Jordan Favell, working next to him adds: *"My whole family is all fishermen. I like working with the boys, being with the boys."*

It is cold, hard work and it can be hazardous. David recalls scrambling to safety from his bombardier, after it broke through the ice and sank in six metres of water. But there are advantages to the winter fishery, too. In the spring season and especially in the fall the weather and water conditions are often un-

predictable and dangerous. The ice offers a stable platform on which to work and winter offers natural refrigeration. In warmer weather, the nets must be lifted every day, but in winter, the fish can safely remain in the nets for up to six days. This year, they will fish from just before Christmas, until sometime in March.

David says that at one time half of the catch was taken during the winter, but these days fewer fishermen want to contend with the harsh conditions the winter season offers. Sometimes the nets can freeze and break as they come out of the water.

"This is just a brutal fishery," he says. "It's hard on you. It's hard on the machines."

David has been enduring this for more than 40 years, but he wouldn't have it any other way. Many fishers, like his grandfather, remain on the lake well into their 80s and he suspects he will be one of them. His own father fished from age 14 until his 76th year.

"It just seems that when we can't get out here, we choke out," he says.

David says he is fishing '24/7.'

It is always on his mind and although the technology may change, the spirit of those who do this does not. It is a job, yes, but also a tradition and a way of life.



The bombardier (left) and the 'Lifting Lounge' on Lake Winnipeg, at dawn. (Andy Blicq Photo.)



Above: Liam Olson lifting nets on the ice. (Andy Blicq Photos.)



Above: Working inside in the comfort of the 'Lifting Lounge.'



Left to Right: Liam and David Olson; Jordan, Greg and Ray Favell. Behind: Johann Benediktson. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*



Liam Olson pilots the family's whitefish boat. He is the fifth generation of Olsons to fish on the lake. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*



Greg Goodman is 51 and has been fishing since 1984. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*

Below: Dwayne Swaffer lifts a fish tub into the back of his truck. Next stop is his fish shed, where the day's catch will be cleaned and filleted. Mr. Swaffer has been fishing for 25 years. *(Andy Blicq Photos.)*



Above: Joe Bristow and Ingimar Hansen load the day's catch into a truck. Mr. Bristow has been fishing since 1978. "It's an adventure," he says. "Every day you're doing the same thing over and over again, but it's always different. Much better than sitting behind a desk." Mr. Bristow's family has a long history on the lake. His great-grandfather emigrated from England in 1900 and married a first-generation Icelandic woman. Ingimar Hansen (right) is of Norwegian descent. He enjoys fishing, even though his father disappeared 50 years ago while fishing on the lake in the late fall. His body and boat were never found.



Above: Friends Sonny Bjarnason and Brian Favell fish together on the lake. They both began fishing when they were 13 years old. Sonny says he loves the life, despite the fact that his father died on the lake in 1964. *(Andy Blicq Photos.)*



Above: Randy Albertson.



Above: Glenn Magnusson has been fishing the lake for 31 years.



Above: Eric Goodman is among the third generation of his family to fish the lake. *(Andy Blicq Photos.)*



Above: Gord Jacobson, 65, has worked on the lake for 45 years. Four generations of Jacobsons have been commercial fishers. (Andy Blicq Photos.)



Right: Father and son Richard (right) and Mike (left) Bjarnason. Richard has been fishing since 1962. Mike, 28, is the direct descendant of the first baby born following the arrival of the Icelanders in 1875.



Above: Pat Peterson. *(Andy Blicq Photos.)*



Above: Joel Greenberg (left) and Joshua Finnbogason, on the Gimli pier, after a morning of fishing. Mr. Greenberg, 48, has been fishing for 19 years. He says many years ago his great-grandfather used to drive one of the horse-drawn sleigh trains that collected the fish during the winter season. Mr. Finnbogason, 32, has been fishing for 10 years. His grandfather also fished on the lake.



Father and son, Caleb (left) and Rod Reykdal. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*



Above: Samuel 'Relic' Etter has been commercial fishing for 25 years. "You don't have to worry about nothing," he says. "You just go out and get your fish." (*Andy Blicq Photos.*)



Above: David Pawluk, 28, (left) and Simon Reykdal (right), 34, work together on the lake and enjoy the life. "It's freedom," they say. Mr. Reykdal's family has been fishing on the lake for more than a century.



Gene Pischke, 47, is the first generation of his family to work on Lake Winnipeg. He began his career fishing on Lake Manitoba. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*



Rob Olson, 59, is in his 28th year on the lake. He calls himself 'The Fishing Musician'.
(Andy Blicq Photo.)

Right: Leaving the harbour before dawn to tend the nets with an entourage of gulls and pelicans. Fishers often take ice with them to keep their freshly-caught product in top shape. *(Andy Blicq Photos.)*



Left: Returning to harbour after sunrise with tubs full of fish. Fishers usually spend several hours on the lake before returning with their catch, which must be immediately cleaned and prepared for shipment to ensure freshness and quality.

On Garry Peterson's 70th birthday, Mother Nature's gift is a rare, flat-calm day. But she is a bit of a trickster, too, and on this morning covers the lake and Gimli's harbour in a thick blanket of fog - so thick that he and the other Fishers have difficulty finding their nets.

"Mother Nature's just having fun with us," says Mr. Peterson, as he settles in at the bow of his skiff and begins the work of lifting his nets, adding that this is likely to be the nicest day of the spring season.

"This is just beautiful lifting," he says, as he moves from one net to the next. The fog suffuses the light. The still water is a shade of quicksilver.

After a lifetime spent on and around the lake, he'll readily take this calm day - fog and all. Often, he and his son Pat, with whom he fishes, must work in the cold and the rain and in rough waters.

Commercial fishing offers a life where very little is certain. The weather has a mind of its own and so do the fish. Mr. Peterson never knows whether his nets will be filled. As he pulls pickerel, sauger and goldeye from his nets and tosses them into bins, according to size and species, he reflects on what has been a pretty good season.

"Spring can be a finicky season," he says. *We've had springs where you hardly get a thing."*

For Gimli's fishers the spring season begins around the May long weekend. For about 45 days, until the end of the first week in July, they are on the lake and at their nets every day they can be. The early part of the season, when

the water remains cold, usually yields the most fish. As July approaches the fish seem to just stop moving and the catch often declines. Today, there are a surprising number of fish in the nets for so late in June.

We can hear Mr. Peterson's son Pat, who is working in his own boat, nearby. He is invisible on this day, in the thick fog. Pat is the fourth generation of Petersons to turn to the lake for his livelihood. As a teenager, Garry Peterson worked with his father, fishing out of Spider Island at the top of the North Basin of Lake Winnipeg. As a younger man, for a while he had other jobs, but returned to commercial fishing in 1988.

While he works, pelicans and gulls squabble as they try to poach fish from his nets that are close to the surface.

"The pelicans are merciless to the seagulls when there isn't much fish around," he says.

For birds and men, this life was and always will be a struggle. Here, on Lake Winnipeg, Mother Nature calls the shots. But Mr. Peterson and Gimli's other fishers agree on one thing. The independence and the opportunity to spend your days outdoors outweigh the uncertainty surrounding the weather and the whereabouts of the fish.

"It's just such a great lifestyle," he says, *"...if you can tolerate it."*



Garry Peterson on the lake on his 70th birthday. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*



Gulls follow the fishing boats everywhere, hoping for a free meal. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*



Pelicans landing on a rare, flat-calm and foggy morning in late June, 2017. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*



Fishers pay close attention to the weather which can change in a matter of minutes on Lake Winnipeg. *(Andy Blicq Photos.)*



Pat Peterson heads to his nets shortly after sunrise. For the moment, fish are plentiful in the lake and the future looks bright for the harbour and for the fishers who call it home. *(Andy Blicq Photo.)*

IMAGE SOURCE ABBREVIATIONS

AofM: - Archives of Manitoba, 200 Vaughan Street, Winnipeg

GSM: - Gimli Saga manuscript, 1973. Evergreen Regional Library, Gimli

GSP: - Gimli Saga publication, Gimli Women's Institute, 1975

GM: - Gimli Memories, Dilla Narfason and Mary Shebeski, 1982

GMHC: - Gimli Municipal Heritage Committee files.

HBCA: - Hudson's Bay Company Archives - Archives of Manitoba

HRB: - Historic Resources Branch, Province of Manitoba

IFB: - Icelandic Festival Binders, Evergreen Regional Library, Gimli

E.R.L. - Evergreen Regional Library, Lilja Olafson Fishing Scrapbook, 1981

L&AC: - Library & Archives Canada Website

NIHM: - New Iceland Heritage Museum, Gimli

MHS: - Manitoba Historical Society Website

UofMA: University of Manitoba Archives - Tribune Collection, Gimli

UofWA: - University of Winnipeg Archives

Gerrard, 1985: - Nelson Gerrard, *Icelandic River Saga*. 1985

Nicholson, 2007: - Karen Nicholson, *A History of Manitoba's Commercial Fishery 1872-2005*. 2007

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WIKI: - Wikipedia Website

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FAMILY & PERSONAL PHOTO ABLUMS

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Gimli pier, Kristin Johnson, circa 1905