

"FIRST AMMA"

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The life of Sigurveig Sigurdardottir had not been an easy one. In 1865, on a day when she lay unconscious and low with typhoid, and her children were in various stages of recovery from it, a kind neighbor helped her sons bury their father, her husband, Kristoffer Andresson, who had just died from the disease. Sigurveig survived it and her eight children never ceased to wonder at their mother's endurance and courage. She worked from early morning until late at night, at the same time training them to help as much as possible, in order to give them the bare necessities of life. In the badstofa of their turf house, while knitting, mending, or making skor, the Icelandic shoes made from the thin sheep skins, she taught them to read, write, and commit to memory prayers and hymns.

Her courage must have faltered a little in 1873 when her son Sigurdur left for America, and again ten years later when another son, Hernit, and her daughter Sigurborg decided they, too, would emigrate. In 1879 her endurance must surely have wavered when her daughter Kristveig died after giving birth to a baby girl.

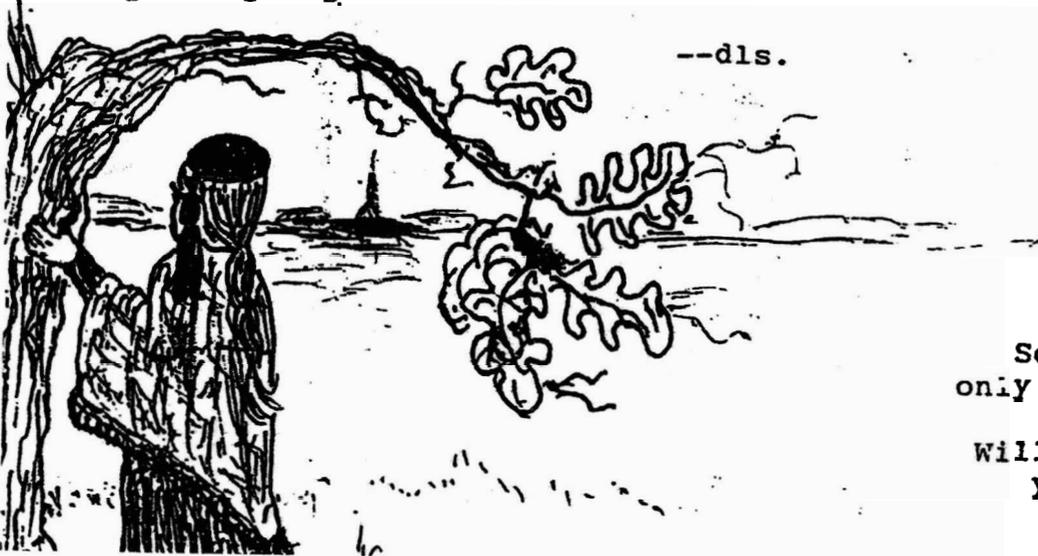
Is it any wonder that in 1893 Sigurveig decided to leave her home, Ytrinesslond, in Iceland, to emigrate to Canada? Her remaining four children --Sigridur, Lilja, Pjetur, and Sigurjon, and their families, including Kristveig's daughter, who was named for her grandmother, accompanied her on that brave voyage--brave because Sigurveig was 80 years old and blind.

When she arrived with her entourage late in August of that year there must have been a grand celebration. It is recorded that "she was so happy and cheerful to be in Canada, and was delighted when taken to the garden to feel the size of the pumpkins and other vegetables". She was interested in everything, especially the oak trees that grew in the bluff at Grund. Can you picture blind Sigurveig running her hands over the rough bark of one of them? feeling the girth of the trunk? It would have been impossible for her to imagine how tall they were, because there were no trees that tall in Iceland at that time.

She came down with a cold during those first days--not unusual in Manitoba, but it developed into pneumonia. Three weeks after her arrival, she died. Her funeral was held outdoors at Grund. The grounds were crowded with people, many of them just over from Iceland and still wearing their Icelandic shawls and caps.

It seems fitting that her funeral was held beneath those oak trees where her last days were spent happily with her beloved children. Today most of the giant oaks are gone, but there is a large one still at Grund and perhaps a few more in the area to remind us of one who was as sturdy as they---  
---Sigurveig Sigurdardottir.

--dls.



So live that  
only the most beautiful  
wildflowers  
Will spring up where  
you have dwelt.