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Jon Jonsson (Jón Jónsson) and Ingveldur Eiríksdóttir Jonsson (Ingveldur Eiríksdóttir Jónsson) family, date unknown. Photograph courtesy Frances Hatch and Marian P. Robbins, great-granddaughters of Jon Jonsson.

Jon Jonsson: Icelandic Mormon Poet and Translator

Fred E. Woods and Kári Bjarnason

Jon Jonsson (Jón Jónsson), a catalytic Icelandic convert to Mormonism, was a gifted poet and translator whose literary work focused on the theme of salvation. Perhaps his most valuable contribution to Mormon history is that he is the first known person to translate a portion of the Book of Mormon into Icelandic. He completed a translation of the First Book of Nephi in 1881.

Jon Jonsson was born at Hjálmholt, Hraungerði, Árnessýsla, Iceland, on October 30, 1828.¹ His father, Jon Bjarnason (Jón Bjarnason), was born in 1799 in Torfastadur-parish (Torfastaðasókn), the son of Bjarni Thordarson (Bjarni Þórðarson). Jon's mother was Thuridur Eilífisdóttir (Þuríður Eilífisdóttir), born in 1807 in Undirfell (Undirfellssókn) parish, the daughter of Eilifur Jonsson (Eilifur Jónsson) and Helga Eyjólfsdóttir (Helga Eyjólfsdóttir). Jon also had a younger sister, Margaret (Margrét), born in 1830.²

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KÁRI BJARNASON (kari@vestmannaeyjar.is) received a BA in philosophy, a BA in Icelandic literature, and an MA in old Icelandic literature all from the University of Iceland. From 1989–2006 he was a manuscript specialist at Iceland's National and University Library. Since 2007 he has been the director of the library in Vestmannaeyjar. In 2011–2012, he was a visiting scholar at BYU, where he was sponsored by the Charles Redd Center.

The authors are working together on a four-year project (2011–2015) dealing with Icelandic Mormon history in Utah, 1855–1914.

At a young age, Jon Jonsson learned the trade of a weaver at the “King’s Copenhagen.”³ He was sent to Copenhagen (Denmark ruled Iceland) as a result of an eight-year sentence, later reduced to six years (1849–1855) by the high court, for stealing sheep and horses. While serving his sentence, he learned the weaver’s craft, it being the custom that rich men could borrow prisoners and teach them a craft and have them work for free. Jon later became so skilled in the craft that he was called “the king’s weaver,” although it is not known if he actually ever worked for the king. He returned to Iceland where he lived for the next twenty-six years (1855–1881).⁴

Jon married Gudridur Thorgrimsdottir (Guðriður Þorgrímsdóttir) on November 26, 1856. She was born October 21, 1832, the daughter of Thorgrimur Thorleifsson (Þorgrímur Þorleifsson) and Thorbjorg Gísladóttir (Þorbjörg Gísladóttir), both of whom apparently died sometime between 1846 and 1850. With the death of her parents, Gudridur and her sister Gudrun (Guðrún) were raised by strangers.⁵

Jon and Gudridur Jonsson were the parents of two children—Thorbjorg Helga Elin (Þorbjörg Helga Elín), born July 27, 1857; and Gudrun (Guðrún), born March 24, 1860.⁶ Little is known about the couple or the family, but records show that Jon and Gudridur eventually divorced and the family dissolved.⁷

Conversion to Mormonism and Immigration

Jon Jonsson converted to the Latter-day Saint faith and was baptized on his fifty-second birthday by Elder Jakob B. Jonsson (Jakob B. Jónsson) at Mosfellsbær, Iceland (eight miles from Reykjavik, Iceland’s capital), on October 30, 1880.⁸ Heeding the call to come to Zion, he immigrated to Spanish Fork, Utah, in 1881. While on board the ship *Camoens*, he met Ingveldur Eiríksdóttir (Ingveldur Eiríksdóttir), one of twenty-two Icelandic converts who embarked from Reykjavik on July 7, 1881.⁹ They married soon after their arrival in Utah, on November 17, 1881. Ingveldur’s father, Eiríkur Ólafsson (Eiríkur Ólafsson, also known as Eiríkur á Brúnum), was also a passenger on the *Camoens* voyage. Eiríkur, a well known nineteenth-century author, wrote about the experiences of these Icelandic converts on their voyage from Iceland:

On the evening of the 8th of July, 1881 I went on board the ship *Camoens*, a horse transport ship of Kockkels, after I, with some effort, a scuffle, and some tribulation of soul and body, was made to protect my grandson, of 14 months old, before 10 sturdy men of Reykjavik, who intended to attack my daughter and tear the child from her bosom at the command of her child’s father, who then wished to be such, but would not acknowledge the boy when newborn.¹⁰

Poetry and Song

In Utah, Jon Jonsson compiled three known psalm books in Icelandic, one in 1887, another in 1897, and one whose date is not known. The 1887 volume is unique in that the title page notes that these psalms or hymns were written by Jonsson and that they were to be sung in Icelandic gatherings by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Further, the lyrics of these psalms were composed by Icelandic Latter-day Saints, although most of them were to be sung to the tune of well known Lutheran hymns. The third psalm book is missing the title page (hence the unknown date), but it appears that it was written in the late nineteenth century, since the handwriting is certainly that of Jonsson. In addition, we know that this book was part of the Icelandic Literary Society and Library, established by Icelandic convert Magnus Bjarnason (Magnús Bjarnason), who immigrated to Utah in 1857. Magnus asked his fellow Icelanders to donate books and contribute funds to purchase others, which amounted to over three hundred volumes, including sagas and poetry.¹¹

The third psalm book in Jonsson's collection is divided into eighteen different groups, including an appendix, a part of which is written in different handwriting. Such a division is not common in Icelandic poetry manuscripts. The various sections are as follows:

1. God's being and character
2. God's providence
3. Atonement
4. Birth of Jesus
5. The resurrection of Jesus
6. The governing of Jesus's Church
7. God's spirit and words
8. Happiness in another life
9. Holy thinking and behavior
10. Love and trust in God
11. Love to our self and others
12. The life and teachings of Jesus
13. God's word and prayer
14. Funeral psalms
15. Psalms for the different parts of the year
16. The gathering of Israel
17. The Second Coming and the renewal of all things
18. Evening Psalms

Some of the divisions are similar to what one would find in the Lutheran psalm books, such as the evening and funeral psalms, and psalms for differ-

ent parts of the year. However, other sections, such as the gathering of Israel, appear to be influenced more by Latter-day Saint theology.

In each of these books, musical notations designate which tune the lyrics should be sung to. It is very interesting to note that many of them specify traditional Lutheran hymns that had been sung for centuries, whereas very few come from English hymns. In addition, inside the 1887 psalm book, as well as the undated psalm book compiled by Jonsson, we find as composers some of the main protagonists in Icelandic Mormon history, such as Gudmundur Gudmundsson (Guðmundur Guðmundsson), one of the first Icelandic Latter-day Saint converts and missionaries to Iceland.¹² Others include Eirik Hansson (Eiríkur Eiríksson), Bjorn Runolfsson (Björn Runólfsson), and Thordur Didriksson (Þórður Didriksson).¹³ There are also some of the most beloved poets of the old Lutheran church—Hallgrimur Petursson (Hallgrímur Pétursson), Valdimar Briem (Valdimar Briem), and Sveinbjorn Egilsson (Sveinbjörn Egilsson). Some of these poets were very much opposed to the Mormons, like Helgi Halfdanarson (Helgi Halfdanarson). The psalms in the 1897 psalm book, written between the years 1883 and 1890, were all written by Jonsson himself.

Jon Jonsson contributed to a number of the published Icelandic hymns. Evidence of such publication is found in a small Icelandic collection of hymns titled “Psalms of the Latter-day Saints in Iceland,” published in Reykjavik in 1903. Although it does not state the name of the compiler, evidence suggests that this was Jon Johannesson (Jón Jóhannesson)—not to be confused with Jon Jonsson—because he wrote more than a third of the booklet (more than any other writer) and was also a missionary in Iceland at this time (1900–1903).¹⁴ Further, it appears that Jon Johannesson selected these particular psalms because they were some of his favorites and perhaps some of the most popular among the Icelandic Latter-day Saints.

Two of the hymns in this 1903 compilation were written by Jon Jonsson, one of which is loosely translated here. It is worth noting that none of the poems are given a title:

All the host of heaven praise you dear Father of Ages and the Latter-day Saints here where your holy word grows in the hearts of all the humble and all that can understand because the Spirit pours out wisdom over those that are near and far away.

O how prosperous are those who are given the Holy Spirit and know better and better the power that He gives. Forever he shall not die because after death he finds life if in faith he perseveres until God calls him.¹⁵

Jonson also wrote a number of other poems, including a poem-letter that appears to be written in 1897 to his half-brother Gunnar Einarsson (Gunnar

Einarsson), who was living in Selfoss.¹⁶ The following contents of this letter are translated from Icelandic to English:

A letter (poem letter) to my brother Gunnar in Selfoss

Dear brother I offer you a small and insignificant poem. It shall be my pleasure to pull it together [vs. 1].

My poor brain thinks how shall I get the tools to compose like this. The weak man is repaying you the letter he received over Christmas [vs. 2].

Little news I bring you, four children and a wife are now as before, I can work nothing [vs. 3].

The wife is in everything, makes care of all things, under her protection are all things. I must be patient even though I am tired [vs. 4].

Her son is helping out; he is sixteen years of age. Mine is fourteen years old [vs. 5].¹⁷

Your namesake is rather aggressive. He is now in his third year. He often tries to overcome his father. He is well known in the world, just like Kári [vs. 7].¹⁸

He finds pleasure in hearing poetry, and I wish him to be a great poet [vs. 8].

The old man when he starts making his poetry he can well do like his young son. There is joy in what I am doing [vs. 9].

O I wish I had plenty of money so that I could put your name's sake into school so that he could be tested [vs. 10].

Inga is the name of a young lady. She helps her mother quite a lot since she is brought up well [vs. 11].

I have two cows and another young cow that is in the pasture and one hundred trees in my garden that carry fruit [vs. 12].

[I] have forty birds that are constantly laying new eggs [vs. 13].

[But] fruits and eggs are of little value. No man gives me anything for my burden [vs. 14].

Now I have counted all my belongings; they are many with old Jon [vs. 15].

My wife that spices everything with her love, she is like the salt of the world as it is spoken of in the Bible [vs. 16].

I cannot thank God enough for such a wife and the daughters and sons I have with her [vs. 17].

She puts sugar on my troubles and she soothes my stiffness in life. She is among the best and the finest of all women in the world [vs. 18].

Many a man wanted her back in Iceland, but the Lord preserved her for Jon [vs. 19].

You may give your greetings to Simon the good son of Noah.¹⁹ All the best is wished from an old friend [vs. 20].

My wife and my children ask the same also to your wife and to your friends may all yours be blessed [vs. 21].

Give your wife the best greetings from both myself and my wife and also the same from Bjorn and my children [vs. 22].

How I wish you had crossed the ocean and had come here to this country before all kinds of plagues destroy Iceland [vs. 23].

We are coming into the last days and people should be on their guards. As our prophet tells us [vs. 24].²⁰

May you live all the days of your life well, my dear brother. How I wished that you were prepared for dying [vs. 25].

May you leave in the peace of the Redeemer. I pray that His spirit will help you in all ways [vs. 26].

This is how the hungry Jon constantly speaks. He behaves like a roaring lion over a dead corpse [vs. 27].

The sea is calming and I have had some moments of happiness in doing this [vs. 28].

I present here the poem and in it I speak of the true faith, and I cannot keep silent about the eternal words of salvation [vs. 29].²¹

I put this light high up, my dear brother, in the hope that it will illuminate you into the spirit [vs. 30].

Not only do Jonsson's poems reflect his thoughts on salvation, his dreams also evidence that his mind often manifest thoughts concerning the spiritual realm.

“Few Dreams”

The following comes from a composition Jon Jonsson simply titled “Few Dreams”:

The first dream I had happened a half of year before I entered the Church. and it went like this: I thought I was traveling somewhere in a great fog and came to a certain

house that was big, beautiful and I looked inside and I saw it was illuminated and I thought that in the middle of the house there was an illuminated throne and on that I saw a man sitting and I knew it was Jesus Christ and I saw a great number of people stand around the throne and they were all dressed in bright, white clothing and sang Him praise with beautiful sounds. I knew [they were] his chosen ones. I stood by the door and was about to enter when a man came towards me and stopped me. I knew that this man would be the Apostle Peter. I [spoke] to him and I asked him if I could enter, but he said no, you may not enter until you have washed yourself. I felt sad over this and went back into the fog and began searching for water to wash myself and then I woke up.

The second dream I dreamed happened after I was baptized and began to come across persecution and outrage. Then a man came to me in very very red vestments and his countenance was like fire so I was half afraid because I knew it was the angel of the Lord, but he said to me, do not be afraid because I shall be with you as I was with Moses, the servant of the Lord in ancient times. And then I woke up and thought I saw him pass out of my room.

The third dream that I dreamed after the local authorities judged me to pay thirty-three dollars to them before I could marry a woman and then I dreamed that a man came to me and said, “do not be surprised that even though you are harshly judged because the world goes into what is evil, but be assured that the faith is correct and follow it.”

The fourth dream that I dreamed a little later is as follows: I thought I was back in Iceland and came to a certain house that was big and white and I walked into it. Then I thought I saw Magnus the son of Andreas the Bishop’s scribe and other priests, candidates [to be priests] and he sees dignitaries inside. And they began immediately to talk to me about Mormonism and all the heretical theories of Joseph Smith that he had lied and preached, saying that the Book of Mormon was one big lie as is the Doctrine and Covenants and I could not speak in defense of me for my faith because they did not want to hear anything and threw me out and were about to stone me to death. But then I began to cry God to help me that they could not over power me. But when they had thrown me out of the house, then I thought I saw a man standing next to me that I thought had descended from heaven and he said, “Do not be afraid, I am with you. They shall not be able to do you any harm and they shall know that the faith of the Mormons is true and that Joseph Smith was a true prophet sent by God and the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenant is holy truth.” But when the man said this, they stopped harassing me and became disgraced and were in stone silence, but he disappeared and I woke up.

The fifth dream that I dreamed happened in the early beginning of January of this year. I thought I was back to Iceland and I was out at sea, then I looked around me and I saw a man on a boat with no oars and the boat was just floating there in the sea. And I thought it was Thorarinn (Þórarinn) Magnússon the saddler in Vorhus, a friend of mine. I felt my boat was much better than his boat and I offered him help, but he acted as if he didn’t know whether he should accept it and then I woke up.

The sixth dream I dreamed around the same time and is like this: I thought I was speaking to Brynjólfur (Brynjólfur) the book binder in Reykjavik about the faith.

And I thought I saw three bibles there: The Icelandic one, the English one and the Danish one and that I could read all of them. I said to him that these three books said the very same thing and that the Book of Mormon bore the same testimony because he doubted that fact.

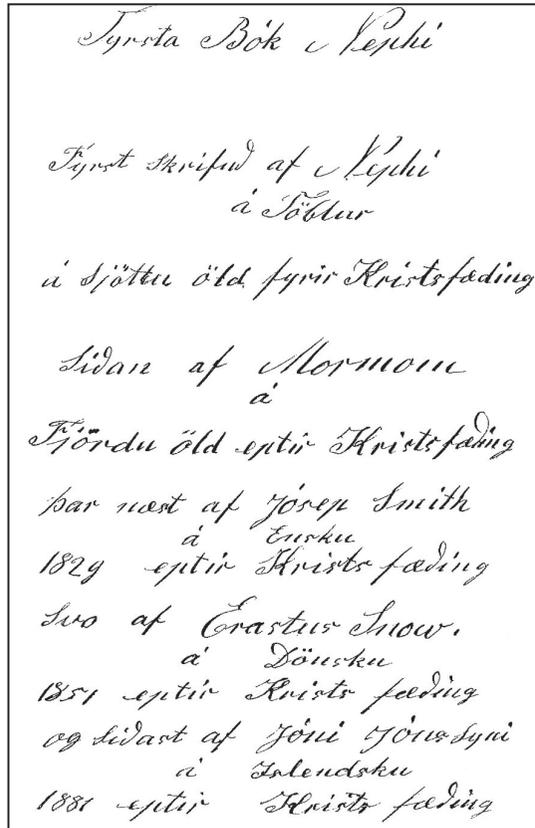
The seventh dream. I thought I was by a certain river in Iceland and that they were baptizing many people there and that I myself was also baptized, but when I came out of the water I felt I was naked. Then I saw a man that came and put his arms around me and I felt that he said that he needed to go up to the rural district to collect his lambs.

Translation of the First Book of Nephi into Icelandic

In addition to his religious poems and dreams, Jon Jonsson also translated the First Book of Nephi from the Book of Mormon into Icelandic. He completed his translation of this book in 1881, a century before the full Book of Mormon was translated into Icelandic.²² From the title page of his work, it appears that he intended to translate the entire book, but may have discovered after completing the first chapter that this was too arduous a labor to perform alone. The title page notes the following: “First Book of Nephi[.] First written by Nephi on tablets in the sixth century before Christ’s birth[.] Then by Moroni in the fourth century after Christ’s birth[.] Then by Joseph in English 1829 after Christ’s birth[.] Then by Erastus in Danish in 1851 after Christ’s birth and last by Jon Jonsson in Icelandic in 1881 after Christ’s birth.” The following page notes the contents of the book: “The material is about how a few Jews moved from Jerusalem to America in the first year of Zedekiah, the king of the Jews and then about God’s commandments, revelations and prophecies in the sixth century before the birth of Jesus Christ, to those who moved there. How they built America first, about a conflict among themselves, the chapters of Esajas [Isaiah] the prophet and more[.]” At the conclusion of his translation (pp. 3–123) he adds a note to the reader of his work (pp. 124–125):

To the Reader: Dear countrymen, here I have tried to translate into Icelandic the First Book of Nephi which is the first in the Book of Mormon. I wanted you to be able to see it and understand it in your own language if it could encourage you to look more closely into these sacred writings. I ask you to please read between the lines and understand everything that is not correctly written. I have always been true to the translation of the Danish book[.] [meaning the Danish translation of the Book of Mormon] though it may be that this [translation of Jon Jonsson] sometimes uses fewer words on the same material as it is repeated again there [meaning in the Danish translation] because I did not believe it was necessary because it is not as if this should be printed.

I ask you dear countrymen in the name of God and our Redeemer Jesus Christ to ponder on these few lines because they are godly truths. I urge you to pray to God



Title page from Jon Jonsson's Icelandic translation of the Book of Nephi, which reads as follows:

First Book of Nephi
 First written by Nephi
 on tablets
 in the sixth century before Christ's birth
 Then by Moroni
 in
 the fourth century after Christ's birth
 Then by Joseph Smith
 in English
 in 1829 after Christ's birth
 Then by Erastus Snow
 in Danish
 in 1851 after Christ's birth
 and last by Jon Jonsson
 in Icelandic
 in 1881 after Christ's birth

that He will make known to you by His spirit whether or not what you have read is the truth because it is real truth that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself said: "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and you will find, knock it shall be opened unto you." So in the end I present to the good Lord all of you that will hear His voice and those will ponder on this matter to their own salvation. The writer Jon Jonsson.

The Danish translation of the Book of Mormon was prepared under the direction of Mormon Apostle Erastus Snow, most of the translating work being performed by Peter Olsen Hansen and a Miss Mattisen, a Danish language instructor. Snow also later assisted carefully by checking the translation.²³ Jon Jonsson used the Danish 1851 Book of Mormon edition, rather than the 1830 English version. Jonsson also created a verse-by-verse translation, rather than translating by paragraph, as attested in the Danish translation.²⁴ A few examples from a segment of 1 Nephi demonstrate the uniqueness of Jon's translation.²⁵ The words in italics reveal those words which are distinctive to his translation:

1 Nephi 1:1—Jonsson adds, "*Therefore I write the most important things I have done.*"

1 Nephi 1:3—Jonsson adds an additional word, "I make it according to my *best* knowledge."

1 Nephi 1:4, 9, 11–12—Jonsson's work and the Danish translation use only the word *og* (and) rather than the ancient Semitic phrase "and it came to pass," which is used in English. However, the modern Icelandic translation of the Book of Mormon uses "and it so happened."

1 Nephi 1:5—Jonsson adds, "*Lehi was godfearing and a good man.*"

1 Nephi 1:7—"He walked home to Jerusalem" is used here (as in the Danish translation), but the modern-day Icelandic and the English read, "He has returned home."

1 Nephi 1:9—Jonsson uses the word *beauty*: "His *beauty* was above that of the sun." The word *bjartar* is used in modern Icelandic Book of Mormon and the Danish (1851). The English uses *brightness* and *luster*. In the old Icelandic the word for beauty is *feegur*, whereas Jon appears to be looking at the inner beauty of Christ, which surpasses the beauty of the physical sun, even when it is at high noon.

1 Nephi 1:10—Jonsson uses the word *feegur* to express the beauty of the twelve apostles, whereas the other translations do not.

1 Nephi 1:11—Jonsson does not write that the Twelve came down, but rather that they walked on the earth.

1 Nephi 1:13—Jonsson's translation is singular in using "abominations and *ungodliness*."

Conclusion

Two decades after Jon Jonsson completed his Icelandic translation of the First Book of Nephi, he passed away and is buried in the Spanish Fork Cemetery.²⁶ Though he died without much fanfare, his literary works, including compilations of Icelandic Mormon poetry and hymns, and especially his efforts to begin translation on the Book of Mormon, should be recognized as contributing factors in nineteenth-century Icelandic Mormon history in Utah.

Notes

1. See <http://histfam.familysearch.org/getperson.php>. His marker at the Spanish Fork Cemetery also gives the date of his birth as October 30, 1828.

2. See <http://genforum.genealogy.com/cgi-bin>. For additional information on the marriage of Jon Bjarnason (Jón Bjarnason) and Thuridur Eilífisdóttir (Þuríður Eilífisdóttir), see n. 13.

3. David H. Ashby, *Icelanders Gather to Utah, 1854–1914* (Spanish Fork, UT: Icelandic Association of Utah, Inc., 2008), 76.

4. See “Þingbók Árnessýslu 1848,” 140–42, unpublished manuscript, National Archives of Iceland; also Jon Helgason, *Íslenzkt Mannlíf IV* (Reykjavík, Iceland: Íðunn, 1962), 40–41. It was said that he was the last outlaw to hide in the mountains of Iceland to steal sheep. See Ólafur Briem, *Útilegumenn og Auðar Tóttir* (Reykjavík, Iceland: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1983), 135.

5. See Icelandic Census, 1835, 1840, 1845 for the region of Húnavatnssýsla.

6. See <http://histfam.familysearch.org/getperson.php>.

7. Following the divorce, Gudridur lived out her life in the same county. The 1890 census lists her as a widow, which may indicate she got remarried.

8. “Manuscript History of the Icelandic Mission, 1851–1914,” October 2, 1880.

9. “Manuscript History of the Icelandic Mission, 1851–1914,” July 7, 1881, gives the names of seventeen of the twenty-two LDS Icelandic passengers. Ingveldur was born on January 17, 1854, to Eiríkur Ólafsson (b. November 19, 1823; d. October 14, 1900) and Runveldur Runólfsdóttir, or Runveldur Runólfsdóttir (b. May 17, 1823; d. 1881), at Heiði, Reynir í Mýrdal, Vestur Skaftafellssýsla. Jon and Ingveldur had five children: John Nephi (b. 1883), Renold Hyrum (b. 1885), Ingunn Olavia (b. 1888), Inga (b. 1890), and Gunnar Seth (b. 1895). See <http://histfam.familysearch.org/getperson.php>. See also Ashby, *Icelanders Gather to Utah*, 76. The second edition of this book, co-authored with Fred E. Woods and Kári Bjarnason, is being written and will be published in both English and Icelandic.

10. Vilhjálmur Gíslason, *Eiríkur á Brúnum* (Reykjavík: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja H.F., 1946), 116, translated for the author by Darron S. Allred. According to Allred, Eiríkur was born by Eyjafjöll, in Iceland, November 14, 1824. “He was married to Runveldur Runólfsdóttir. He was a rancher and also operated a restaurant in Reykjavík. He was a writer and published a book which is still read in Iceland today. In 1881 he was baptized into the LDS Church, and shortly after, he and his wife, their daughter Ingveldur, and her son Thorbjorn Thorvaldson, emigrated to Spanish Fork, Utah. They traveled by train from New York, but at North Platte, Nebraska, Runveldur died of heat exhaustion. . . . In 1883 Eiríkur returned to Iceland on a mission for the LDS Church. After his return, he moved to Independence, Missouri, in about 1890. In 1891 he went back to Iceland, where he married

himself to Gudfinna Saemundsdottir. He died in Iceland.” LaNora P. Allred, *The Icelanders of Utah*, reprint (Spanish Fork, UT: n.p., 1998), 110.

11. Allred, *The Icelanders of Utah*, 31. Allred further noted that during the final forty years of the library’s existence, the books were located at the home of Sigurdur and Johannah Jonsson, who served as librarians to the Icelandic communities. “A record was kept of all books loaned and returned. . . . Some of these were purchased in Iceland, but some were obtained from Winnipeg, Canada, where there was a large colony of Icelanders. The two Johnsons often served . . . to deliver invitations to the library association meetings to the individual Icelandic homes. Members of the association were assessed dues.” The Icelandic Literary Society and Library was active until the early twentieth century, and the remains of the library’s collection (153 books) were eventually donated to the Brigham Young University, Harold B. Lee Library. Appreciation is expressed to BYU librarian Richard Hacken for assembling an online database of these 153 books. See <http://www.refworks.com/refshare?site=027751135918800000/1284846/Icelandic%20Reading%20Society>. Former BYU professor Hugh W. Nibley arranged to have Brigham Young University purchase this Old Icelandic Library in Spanish Fork. See Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 238. Further, in a letter to Lucien Goldschmidt, Nibley notes, “Did I tell you about my good luck in finding an immense trove of Old Icelandic books in a village just south of here? Spanish Fork is the oldest Icelandic settlement in the western hemisphere, and most of the community still speaks Icelandic more or less; the old woman who keeps the books is the veritable Edda, who knows all the sagas by heart and speaks, I am told, flawlessly. She wanted to give me the entire collection when she found out I knew something about it, but I finally induced her to sell it to the school instead. I still think it was wrong to give up Old Norse studies, so popular in this country fifty years ago, just because they seemed to be leading nowhere. . . . The rural life of Utah is astonishingly ‘Nordic’; a combination of farming, stock-raising, hunting, and trading fits perfectly with a state of mind and manner of speech of the sagas, in the light of which much of our behavior may be explained.” Hugh Nibley to Lucien Goldschmidt, June 3, 1947 [1948], 2, Boyd Jay Peterson Papers on Hugh Nibley, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. The Icelandic woman Nibley refers to in this letter appears to be Johannah Jonsson, the librarian noted above from Spanish Fork. In another letter Nibley wrote to Paul Springer a few months later, it is readily apparent that Nibley is quite serious about his study of Icelandic: “This week it is Old Norse again. There is much more in the sagas than has reached the eye of the saga-scholarship, devoted as it has been to the literary and historical aspects of the texts. I am beginning to detect a faint light gleaming through the massive indiscriminate coagulation of saga-literature, a light not from the sagas themselves but from the world on the other side of them: they screen more than they reveal, and their contents first take form as darkly tangled silhouettes that are still waiting to be untangled.” Hugh Nibley to Paul Springer, fall 1948, 2, Peterson Papers on Hugh Nibley, Perry Special Collections.

12. For more information on Gudmundsson, see Fred E. Woods, “Fire on Ice: The Conversion and Life of Gudmundur Gudmundsson,” *BYU Studies* 39, no. 2 (2000): 57–72.

13. Ashby, *Icelanders Gather to Utah*, 76.

14. Jon Johannesson (Jón Jóhannesson) was born June 2, 1862 at Ospakstadir, Stadir i Hrutafirdi, Vestur Hunavtun, and became a Latter-day Saint in 1894, the same year he gathered to Utah. Upon arrival, he settled in Cleveland, Utah, and later served a mission in Iceland from September 1900 until June 1903. At this time there were sixteen members of the Church in Iceland, along with twelve children who had not yet been baptized. Jon was also the author of the Icelandic missionary tract titled *A Call to the Kingdom of God*.

He married Johanne Marie Jensen and died on February 17, 1930. See Ashby, *Icelanders Gather to Utah*, 75.

15. *Salmar theirra sidustu daga heilogu a Islandi*, vol. 1 (Reykjavik, Iceland: n.p., 1903), 12.

16. The letter is undated, though we believe it was written in 1897 because Jon noted in his letter that he had a son in his third year (Gunnar Seth), born in 1895. Gunnar and Jon shared the same mother, Thuridur Eilifsdottir. Gunnar Einarsson was born November 11, 1838, and lived at Selfoss from 1855 to 1910. Gunnar is evidenced in the Icelandic census from 1840, 1845, 1850, 1855, 1860, 1870, 1890, 1901 and 1910. He died on August 20, 1918, and is buried in the Laugardaelir Church Cemetery in Selfoss. See www.findagrave.com. According to the 1835 census, Thuridur Eilifsdottir (mother of Jon Jonsson and Gunnar Einarsson) was twenty-eight years old and living at the Selfoss farm as a householder, and had one child named Margret (five years old), who was born in 1830. According to this census, it appears that when Thuridur divorced Jon Bjarnason (sometime between 1830 and 1835), Jon Jonsson lived with his father, but Margret, his sister, moved with her mother to Selfoss. In the years between 1830 and 1835 the mother and father of Jon Jonsson divorced. Thuridur Eilifsdottir moved to Selfoss with her daughter, Margret, then age five, and it appears the father (Jon Bjarnason) became a worker in various places in the county of Arnessyla. It appears Jon Jonsson then became an orphan under the guidance of some very old people named Gudmundur Eyjolfsson and Helga Didricksdottir. It further appears that he left the county of Arnessyla when he was about the age of twenty. This information is according to the census records of 1835, 1840, 1845 and 1850. See also Gudmundur Kristinnsson, *Saga Selfoss 1 Frá landnámi til 1930* (Reykjavik, Iceland: Selfosskaupstadur), 82–83.

17. Verse six is not numbered in the text.

18. Kári is a character in the most well known Icelandic saga, *Njáls*.

19. Here Jonsson seems to be referring to Simon, the foster son of Gunnar, his half-brother.

20. Millennial language is used in verses 24–25 by Jonsson as a voice of warning.

21. Here, Jonsson may be alluding to a passage in Jeremiah 20:9, wherein Jeremiah speaks of not being able to keep silent in speaking about the Lord.

22. The Book of Mormon was prepared for translation from 1977–1981, and published on June 2, 1981. “It was translated by Halldor Hansen a pediatrician in Iceland and by Sveinbjörg Gudmundsdottir the Translation Supervisor of the Church in Iceland. They also did the doctrinal reviewing of each others work. The linguistic review was done by Jon Fridjonsson a professor in Icelandic at the University of Iceland.” See “Scope Statement: Scripture Update Project Icelandic,” Reykjavik Branch Records, Reykjavik Iceland, n.d. In an interview Sveinbjörg Gudmundsdottir stated: “I assigned him [Halldor Hansen] to translate Alma . . . and I did the rest. And that’s how we did it. And then he would read my work and I would read his and compare and discuss. And after that . . . to [the] university to scholars to review. And I didn’t tell them the true translators.” Sveinbjörg Gudmundsdottir, Interview by Fred E. Woods, May 31, 2004. Following Gudmundsdottir’s successful translation of the Book of Mormon, she also translated other Latter-day Saint scripture, the Doctrine and Covenants as well as the Pearl of Great Price. See *Church News*, November 6, 1982, 3.

23. Concerning the translation of the Book of Mormon into Danish, Erastus Snow wrote: “About the fifth of January 1851, I issued the first sheet of the Book of Mormon in the Danish Language. I had a contract with Mr. Bording a printer of Copenhagen, for the paper and printing of 3000 copies for the sum of one thousand dollars Danish. . . . Miss Mattisen a Danish lady, Teacher of Languages came to our meetings, purchased an English book of Mormon, believed it and proffered her aid if [*sic*, of] its translation. Find-

ing her well acquainted with the English I employed her to carefully examine and correct the Manuscript after Bro. [Peter Olsen] Hansen. But having become myself by this time, as I thought sufficiently acquainted with the Danish to detect any errors in sentiment or doctrinal points, I made a thorough examination & corrections a third time with Bro Hansen, sentence by sentence [*sic*] until I felt satisfied to allow it to go to press. . . . On the 20th [May 1851] I completed the Manuscript of the Book of Mormon for the Press, and on the 22nd the last sheet was issued from the press and turned over to the printer, and we all felt much relieved from a long and tedious Job and were much rejoiced in its accomplishment, it being the first time it has been published in a foreign tongue." Erastus Snow, Journal, 19–21, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. Peter O. Hansen noted that Mattisen's father "was a pastor in Elsinore, and she was well educated and made her living by teaching English, German and French. She had joined the Church and now she sneaked around and tried to get Bro. Snow to believe that Hansen was not able for the task of producing a good translation and that he had better employ her." See Peter Olsen Hansen, *An Autobiography of Peter Olsen Hansen 1818-1895* . . . *Translator of the Book of Mormon into Danish*, Leland Hansen Ashby, comp., 2nd printing (1988), 82.

24. The 1830 English edition of the Book of Mormon does not have division of verses. There were no divisions of verses in the English edition until 1852, which are really more like numbered divisions by paragraph. I appreciate Russell Taylor, librarian in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, for his assistance with this issue.

25. The authors intend to publish a more substantial work on the Jonsson's Icelandic translation of the First Book of Nephi.

26. Jon Jonsson died on July 13, 1902. Following his death his wife, Ingveldur, married an Englishman by the name of Jones. She died on March 30, 1930. See "Jon Jonson," unpublished biographical sketch, Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Museum, Spanish Fork, Utah.