Two Sagas from New Iceland

Reference and Allusion in *Gimli Saga* and *Icelandic River Saga*

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ABSTRACT: When Manitoba's Icelandic settler community composed its local history books two of the titles included the term saga: *Gimli Saga* (1975), authored by The Gimli Women's Institute, and *Icelandic River Saga* (1985), authored by local historian Nelson Gerrard. By using the term saga, these local histories are set within and evoke an extended Icelandic historiographical tradition. This article introduces the Icelandic saga as a literary form and surveys the history and practice of local history writing, focusing particularly on the genre's significance in Canada. The central argument draws on a comparison between select episodes from the so-called Vínland sagas (*Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*) with scenes from *Gimli Saga* and *Icelandic River Saga*, the latter selected for their apparent textual references and allusions to the aforementioned medieval sagas.

RÉSUMÉ: Lorsque des membres de la communauté islandaise du Manitoba ont rédigé des ouvrages sur l'histoire locale, deux d'entre eux portaient le titre de saga : *la saga de Gimli* [Gimli Saga] (1975), écrite par le Gimli Women's Institute, et *La saga de la rivière islandaise* [Icelandic River Saga] (1985), écrite par l'historien local Nelson Gerrard. En utilisant le terme saga, ces histoires locales s'inscrivent dans une longue tradition historiographique islandaise et y font référence. Cet article présente la saga islandaise médiévale en tant que forme littéraire et étudie l'histoire et la pratique de l'écriture de l'histoire locale, en mettant particulièrement l'accent sur l'importance de ce genre au Canada. L'argument central s'appuie sur une comparaison entre certains épisodes des sagas appelées « sagas du Vinland » (*Grœnlendinga saga* et *Eiríks saga rauða* [La saga des Groenlandais et La saga d'Eirik le Rouge]) et des scènes de *La Saga de Gimli* et de *La saga de la rivière islandaise*, cette dernière ayant été choisie pour ses références textuelles et ses allusions apparentes aux sagas médiévales susmentionnées.

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> "Local history is a sort of benchmark to which all more generalized and specialized kinds of history must come back to, for verification, as a point of reference."
>
> — Lewis Mumford,
> "The Value of Local History," 1927

> "Nine centuries had passed from the time of Leif Ericsson's Vinland discovery when the Icelanders again felt the urge to take up the trail to the West and immigrate to America."
>
> — Thorstina Walters,
> *Modern Sagas: The Story of the Icelanders in North America*, 1953

When Icelandic settlers in Manitoba's Interlake region composed two of their local histories, they used the term *saga* in the titles: *Gimli Saga* (1975), authored by The Gimli Women's Institute,[1] and *Icelandic River Saga* (1985), authored by Nelson Gerrard. By using the term saga, these authors appropriately set their local history books within an extended Icelandic historiographical tradition with roots in medieval Icelandic saga-writing, which commenced in the latter part of the twelfth century and continued through the remainder of the medieval period.

In this article, we introduce the Icelandic saga as a literary form and then survey the practice of local history writing, focusing chiefly on the genre's significance in Canada. We then analyze selected episodes from the two so-called Vínland sagas, specifically *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða* [The Saga of the Greenlanders and Eirik the Red's Saga]. Next, we describe the two local histories noted above, compare specific episodes from them and their own Icelandic-language forerunners to episodes in the Vínland sagas, revealing an association between the two sets of texts that has been cultivated by the modern local history authors.

The Vínland sagas describe the lives of Norse merchant-explorers who travelled along the eastern shores of what is now North America, c. 1000 CE, when they briefly settled and encountered an unfamiliar landscape inhabited by an unfamiliar people.[2] Near to nine hundred years later, in 1875, Icelandic immigrants arrived and settled in what is now Manitoba's Interlake region (at that time part of Canada's Northwest Territories), after an arduous journey of their own. Like their medieval predecessors, these nineteenth-century settlers encountered a landscape they had never visited that was inhabited by people they had never met. Unlike the Norse explorers, who departed the so-called Vínland settlements shortly after contact with Indigenous people, the Icelanders in 1875 settled the Interlake permanently. The settlers called their settlement *Nýja Ísland*—New Iceland.

The stories of the Icelandic settlers in the Interlake are recorded in local Icelandic newspapers and annual almanacs published in Canada as early as 1877 (see, e.g., *Framfari*; *Almanak Ólafs S. Thorgeirssonar*), and then later, during the first half of the twentieth century, book-length Icelandic texts were composed to record the history of the early years of Icelandic settlement in North America. Þorleifur Jóakímsson Jackson's *Brot af Landnámssögu Nýja Íslands* (1919), a key text in the New Iceland historiographical tradition, is the first attempt at a comprehensive history of New Iceland. The work consists of written memories of early settlers in the region, accompanied by short biographies. Another key source is Þorsteinn Þ. Þorsteinsson and Tryggvi Oleson's five-volume *Saga Íslendinga í Vesturheimi* (1940-53), volume 3 (1945) of which focuses on New Iceland.[3] While these and other Icelandic language texts are foundational for Icelandic heritage communities in Manitoba's Interlake, not to mention other Icelandic settler communities in North America, it is the translation of the community's early history into English in local history books during the 1970s and 1980s that is the focus of the present article.[4]

Gimli Saga and *Icelandic River Saga*, like the texts on which they are based, include episodes that allude to narrative sequences from the Vínland sagas. Due to the accessibility of *Gimli Saga* and *Icelandic River Saga* in local and family libraries in the Interlake, their contents continue to be significant for English language readers in the community. We highlight these textual references, indicate their earlier Icelandic-language sources, if any, and conclude that these modern texts make use of the medieval past and selectively interpret the more recent past. As a result, these texts inform the community's identity as settlers with deep historical attachments to what is now North America. How a community narrates its relationship to peoples and lands in its historiographical tradition is an act of making history, so we scrutinize the selected historical texts, how they have been made, and ask what alternative histories or episodes might have been omitted.

Introduction: What Is a Saga?

In Icelandic, the word saga is a feminine noun in the nominative singular form. The noun is related to the verb *segja*, which means, among else, "to say" or "to tell." One primary meaning for the noun form saga is thus what is said or what is told. As a literary form, the saga can be considered a narrative that focuses on people and their actions and combines dialogue with narration. Medieval Icelandic sagas are often considered to be stories that mix fiction and fact, invention and tradition, though early saga audiences could very well have interpreted the depicted events as historically accurate retellings. Another primary meaning for the noun form of

saga is "history," so the duality of story-history or invention-description is embedded in both the word and the narrative form.[5]

Among the intentions of saga authors was documentation of the settlement of Iceland, c. 870 to 930, and the subsequent patterns of land ownership. Sagas also affirmed or consolidated a family's historical claims to influence in district and island politics and they frequently narrate events connected to the conversion to Christianity of the Icelandic population, c. 1000. Sagas served to entertain readers, and continue to do so, drawing from accounts of saga-age characters and an abundance of interpersonal and regional conflicts. Some sagas might have been formed orally, perhaps in outline form, during the period between the time of represented narrative action and the time of authorship, but it is likely that the versions of the sagas as we now have them were determined by authorship. When the anonymous saga authors wrote the sagas into parchment manuscripts during the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, not to mention the many paper copies made in subsequent centuries, any number of liberties might have been taken with the inherited source material, such as adjustments to align with authorial intention, preferences of the manuscript patron, or to bring the action into alignment with Christian values, for the Catholic Church was a significant presence in Iceland from the eleventh century onward.[6] The temporal gap between the time of represented action and the time of authorship for the Icelandic sagas is summed up well by Theodore M. Andersson: "It goes without saying that saga authors in the thirteenth century could not reproduce anything resembling the truth from the Saga Age, but they and their listeners must have thought they could" (2008, 9). Put another way, Andersson adds: "the sagas were considered to be truthful, that is to say, they were considered to stand in a narrative continuity from some original truth" (12).

In English, the loan word saga retains one of its Icelandic meanings, which refers to an Old Norse-Icelandic prose narrative that recounts the history of saga-age Icelandic families, Norwegian kings, Icelandic bishops, as well as narratives that tell stories about a large inventory of legendary characters, sometimes loosely based on historical or legendary figures from European continental traditions. In English, the word saga is also often used colloquially to refer to a long and complicated account of a series of events.[7] *Gimli Saga* and *Icelandic River Saga* are titled as sagas for a specific purpose: the inclusion of the noun saga in both titles positions these local histories as a continuation of the Icelandic saga-writing tradition.[8] Not only do the titles of the narratives indicate their connection to the medieval Icelandic saga tradition, their accounts of Icelandic settlement in the Interlake represent specific versions of that process: the versions presented and likely believed to be truthful, or "considered to stand in a narrative continuity from some original truth"

(Andersson 2008, 12), by the local history authors and their audiences in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the present article, we limit ourselves to the analysis of selected episodes in two groups of texts—the Vínland sagas and two local history books from Manitoba's Interlake region—that represent contact between Norse or Icelandic settlers and Indigenous peoples in what is now North America. The selected episodes, which we argue are comparable, demonstrate the use of direct reference or indirect allusion by the modern authors to the medieval Icelandic sagas. The saga episodes, we conclude, served as inspiration for the early-twentieth-century Icelandic language texts that were subsequently adopted and translated into English by the modern local historians. Before we compare the selected episodes from the two sets of texts, we first outline the origins and practice of local history.

The Local History Genre

Local history writing is a popular format for public memory for communities in North America, as it is elsewhere. Joseph A. Amato writes "Local history carries with it the potential to reconstruct our ancestors' everyday lives" (2002, 3). Local histories, often focused on community ancestry, hold the potential to be deeply personal texts for community members.

In Manitoba, there are hundreds of local history books, written not only to commemorate the founding and growth of towns, neighbourhoods, regions, and cities, but also to document the circumstances of families, farms, churches, and other types of institutions.[9] Many local histories are authored by amateur historians and are sometimes labelled as vernacular histories. Other terms for local history, most frequently used by non-amateurs employed in academia, include microhistory, community history, social history, heritage studies, and public history. Whether considered amateur or professional, local history might be defined as "the opposite of national or international history," the key term "local" denoting geographical scale (Dymond 2011, 27). John Beckett writes that local history is a key factor for public memory, though it remains difficult to define: "Today, local history is practised in one form or another by so many different individuals and groups, that offering any sort of definition will doubtless offend someone" (2007, 2). Beckett hazards a definition, however: "the study of a place, whether it is a house, a village, a town, a county, or a region, or even a nation . . . and the people and communities that lived in them" (2). This definition for local history matches quite well with the above definition for saga.

Local history writing itself has medieval roots. Beckett points to the Anglo-Saxon chronicles from the twelfth century as early examples: William of

Malmesbury's *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (1125) and Gerald of Wales' *Topographica Hibernica* (1187) ["Deeds of the Bishops of the English" and "Topography of Ireland," respectively] are two examples he cites as predecessors to modern local histories, but he states that even though these works focused on local people and places, they were not part of a tradition of local writing. When so-called chorographies began to be written in England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a more systematic genre arrived that led subsequently into county histories which developed into what is considered the local history tradition in England today. Chorographies, writes Beckett, "were studies of places. They brought together history with genealogies, antiquarian collections, and topographical description" (2007, 8). The chorographic tradition was practiced from the fourteenth through eighteenth centuries in England, with more focused county histories emerging in the late sixteenth century, specifically in William Lambarde's *A Perambulation of Kent* (1576): "the reader was guided through the county, and current institutions were discussed as the journey proceeded" (16). Beckett adds: "Lambarde set an agenda for county histories, in which the study of antiquities was combined with topographical description, and current information" (16). By about 1700, according to Beckett, the unit of the county had become the acknowledged area of study for a local history. Taken together, these many local histories (i.e., county histories) added significantly to the collective history of Britain.

For twenty-first-century academics, however, the concept of "local history" does not simply refer to a precise, methodological inventory of a region's physical, economic, and genealogical characteristics intended to inform past, present, and future residents about their area. The term has undergone a slow process of linguistic broadening since its inception, with works now including "newspapers and newspaper clippings, magazines, letters, diaries, records . . . photographs . . . [and] 'self-generated' material of oral histories, reminiscences, and autobiographical writings," alongside maps, family trees, and descriptions of antique architecture (Cosson 2017, 50). It can be argued, then, that the list of academically reputable forms of local history has been expanded over time to include works that incorporate the aforementioned materials. This expansion can partially be explained by the introduction of technology that better preserves historical artifacts in their original forms. Without the ability to record the human voice, for instance, it would be impossible to preserve oral histories without first transcribing them into written accounts, which cannot fully capture the dialectical nuances, inflectional quirks, and physical or vocal mannerisms present in a live recording.

The growing popularity of technology that *could* preserve these features, then, alongside a burgeoning interest in the life of the everyperson, likely provoked a reframing of the established conventions for collecting and

analyzing local histories. Over time, "history has become more inclusive by dealing with the whole spectrum of society . . . [many local historians seek] to broaden the scope of . . . histories . . . beyond their traditional fixation with the lords of the manor" (Dyer, et al. 2011). Such a reframing would have made room for artifacts like photographs, video interviews, audio recordings, old postcards, family correspondences, and more—the types of media now concomitant to many modern local history collections. These media, the types of relics that "enable the researcher to move away from state and official records and narratives, from the manor house to the terraced house, from the parsonage to the factory" (Cosson 2017, 50), are integral to the study of local history as it relates to the Interlake's Icelandic community.

Works of local history serve to provide Canadians with concrete evidence of their cultural heritage—provincial, national, or otherwise. According to Jean Lock Kunz and Stuart Sykes, "Canada's multicultural diversity is a product of three cultural drivers: Aboriginal peoples, the English and French 'Charter' groups, and immigrants from around the world" (2007, 3). With such an ethnically diverse population, it is no wonder that local histories play an important role in the formation of Canadian identities. Canada's local histories "[connect] individuals to wider social memories and practices and [serve] as a means of sustaining place identities through times of change for both long-term and newer residents" (R. Wheeler 2017, 481). They provide comfort and relative stability for diverse residents of established communities by anchoring them somewhere within their area's cultural and physical landscape, thus affording them a bulwark against time. This facet of local history scholarship certainly casts the field in golden light; however, any merit gleaned from the genre's ability to provide cultural durability for a region's inhabitants is challenged by its inherent connection to settler colonialism in Canada. Within these histories, three archetypal figures come to the fore: "the colonist, the pioneer, and the settler . . . . These three figures are associated with different meanings and values. A settler is a founder of political order, and both the colonist and the pioneer can be understood as historically specific versions of a settler" (Hjorthén 2018, 63-64). New Iceland—formerly the Icelandic Reserve in what is now Manitoba's Interlake—was initially established as an ethnic settlement reserve for Icelandic immigrants only (Eyford 2016, 47), so early key figures were in fact colonists, who were accompanied and followed by many pioneers who worked to transform the landscape of the area. Hjorthén adds: "Settlers, whether colonist or pioneers, are part of the literal construction of new societies, breaking ground and building cities in places previously described as wilderness" (64). The settler in North American local history almost always comes into contact with Indigenous people who inhabited and traversed territories prior to the settler's arrival: "Sites of settling are contact zones between European colonists and indigenous populations. They are the locus of

stories about encounters, figuring—although in decidedly different ways—in the imaginaries of settler nations and in the mythologies of indigenous peoples" (Hjorthén 2018, 70-71).

Gimli Saga and *Icelandic River Saga* exemplify how, in part, younger generations of Icelandic settlers in Manitoba reflect on their ancestral contact with the Indigenous people of Manitoba's Interlake. Fittingly, to explore this ancestral first contact, the writers of these local histories translate into English earlier Icelandic narratives of contact between Icelandic settlers and Indigenous people in the Interlake. These earlier sources—specifically those mentioned above by Þorleifur Jóakímsson Jackson (1919) and Þorsteinn Þ. Þorsteinsson (1945)—drew thematically from the much earlier stories about contact between the Norse and the Indigenous people in what is now North America. Like their generic cousins the sagas, local histories often exist in a gray area between objective fact and fiction. The medieval Icelandic saga tended to combine known or suspected historical events with sensationalized details and narratives, creating a work that was neither nonfiction text nor a wholly invented one. Similarly, since many local histories are comprised of materials that were not always created with the intention of immortalizing objective historical truth (letters, diary entries, oral histories, ethnic histories, etc.), it is fair to assume that there is some degree of fiction or embelishment within most local histories, especially the ones originally created with the intent to entertain. Thus, on a scale with "fiction" and "historical fact" serving as the two extremes, both "saga" and "local history" would be placed somewhere between the two ends, existing together as narratives that are neither objective historical retellings nor fictitious stories.

Critiques of local history writing generally revolve around the genre's aforementioned factual ambiguity; specifically, it is often the intrinsic bias present in many source materials that provokes a raise of the scholarly brow. As author Glenn Sigurdson affirms in his semi-autobiographical account of life in the Interlake, "who you are and what you do are so vitally intertwined that you [as a writer of local histories] are in a unique position to have each inform the other" (2014, 20). Bits of local lore found in letters, diary entries, and oral histories are not likely to be left untouched by the experiences, motivations, morals, and relationships of the local history authors who use these source materials, just as settler-colonial justification for occupancy in *Gimli Saga* and *Icelandic River Saga* is certainly influenced by the authors' identities as inheritors of an appropriated land. This concept as it relates to omission and distortion of Indigenous stories in the local history texts will be explored in the final section of the article. Before focusing in on these modern texts, we travel back in time to the saga age, where we will explore selected episodes from the Vínland sagas.

The Vínland Sagas

In chapter 4 of *Grœnlendinga saga*, Þorvaldr Eiríksson, son of Eiríkr rauði Þorvaldsson [Eirik the Red], reaches Vínland with a group and locates his brother Leifr Eiríksson's camp, built by Leifr when he previously explored Vínland. After having stayed in Vínland for two winters, while exploring lands to the east of Leifr's camp, Þorvaldr and his companions see: "á sandinum inn frá hǫfðanum þjrár hæðir ok fóru til þangat ok sjá þar húðkeipa þrjá ok þrjá menn undir hverjum" [three hillocks on the beach inland from the cape. Upon coming closer they saw they were three hide-covered boats, with three men under each of them] (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935b, 255; Kunz 1997b, 25). The settlers capture eight of the nine Indigenous people and kill them, with one Indigenous person managing to escape. Shortly afterward, "Þá fór innan eptir firðinum ótal húðkeipa, ok lǫgðu at þeim" [A vast number of hide-covered boats came down the fjord, heading towards them], and the Indigenous people "skutu á þeim um stund" [shot at them for a while], with one arrow mortally wounding Þorvaldr (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935b, 256; Kunz 1997b, 25). The action we highlight from this episode—in anticipation of our identification of allusions in the set of local histories below—is what we term communication from boats.

In chapter 6 of the same saga, Þorfinnr Karlsefni settles in Vínland with a party. After the first winter has passed, the group becomes aware of Indigenous people, who emerge from the woods, become frightened by the settler's bull, and run off. Next, however, the natives "snúa til bœjar Karlsefnis ok vildu þar inn í húsin; en Karlsefni lét verja dyrrnar. Hvárigir skildu annars mál" [headed for Karlsefni's farm and tried to get into the house there, but Karlsefni had the door defended. Neither group understood the language of the other] (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935b, 262; Kunz 1997b, 28). Following this, the two groups—settler and Indigenous— trade goods, but Karlsefni forbids the settlers to trade weapons. At the beginning of the settlement party's second winter in Vínland, the Indigenous people return in a larger group and trading occurs once again. However, during this second visit an Indigenous person is killed while attempting to take weapons from a Norse settler's servant. The remaining members of the Indigenous trading group depart, but Karlsefni expects them to return with a still larger group. The Indigenous group does return for a third time: "Nú kómu Skrælingar í þann stað, er Karlsefni hafði ætlat til bardaga. Nú var þar bardagi, ok fell fjǫlði af liði Skrælinga" [The natives soon came to the place Karlsefni had intended for the battle. They fought and a large number of the natives were killed] (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935b, 263; Kunz 1997b, 29). Ultimately, as a result of the hostilities, the settlers abandon the Vínland settlement and return to Greenland. The action we highlight here is the initial encounter between Karlsefni's group and the Indigenous group, the latter attempting to enter Karlsefni's house without invitation.

The plot of *Eiríks saga rauða* is similar to that of *Grœnlendinga saga*, though there are some differences. In chapter 10 of *Eiríks saga*, after Karlsefni and his group have arrived in Vínland, we read: "Ok einn morgin snimma, er þeir lituðusk um, sá þeir mikinn fjǫlða húðkeipa, ok var veift trjám á skipunum, ok lét því líkast sem í hálmþúst, ok var veift sólarsinnis" [Early one morning they noticed nine hide-covered boats and the people in them waved wooden poles that made a swishing sound as they turned them around sunwise] (Sveinsson, and Þórðarson 1935a, 227; Kunz 1997a, 15).[10] Snorri Þorbrandsson, a settler, interprets the communication from boats as follows: "Vera kann, at þetta sé friðarmark, ok tǫkum skjǫld hvítan ok berum at móti" [It may be a sign of peace; we should take a white shield and lift it up in return] (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935a, 227; Kunz 1997a, 15). The two groups then meet and interact before the Indigenous people depart in their boats. In *Eiríks saga*, the waving of poles in boats replaces the shooting of arrows from boats that occurs in *Grœnlendinga saga* upon initial contact between the Norse and the Indigenous inhabitants of so-called Vínland. Both actions constitute communication from boats.

In chapter 11 of *Eiríks saga*, the following spring, this sequence is repeated: "En er vára tók, sá þeir einn morgin snimma, at fjǫlði húðkeipa reri sunnan fyrir nesit, svá mart sem kolum væri sáit fyrir hópit; var þá ok veift af hverju skipi trjánum" [One morning, as spring advanced, they noticed a large number of hide-covered boats rowing up from the south around the point. There were so many of them that it looked as if bits of coal had been tossed over the water, and there was a pole waving from each boat] (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935a, 228; Kunz 1997a, 15). The settlers raise a white shield, as before, and trade ensues, until a bull owned by the settlers scares the natives away. The natives do not return for three weeks. But: "En er sá stund var liðin, sjá þeir fara sunnan mikinn fjǫlða Skrælinga-skipa, svá sem staumr stœði. Var þá trjánum ǫllum veift andsœlis, ok ýla upp allir mjǫk hátt" [After that they saw a large group of native boats approach from the south, as thick as a steady stream. They were waving poles counter-sunwise now and all of them were shrieking loudly] (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935a, 228; Kunz 1997a, 15). Instead of raising a white shield and engaging in trade, as the settlers did in the two earlier encounters with the Indigenous group in *Eiríks saga rauða*, they pick up their red shields and combat ensues. The Indigenous people have two weapons that function as projectiles in this battle: *valslǫngur* [catapults] and a large *knǫtt* [ball] that was raised on a pole and projected at the land. The latter weapon scares the settlers so severely that they retreat from their battle position. This confrontation ultimately leads to the withdrawal of the settlers from Vínland back to Greenland. As in *Grœnlendinga saga*, the Indigenous people approach the settlers in canoe-like boats, but instead of immediately shooting at the settlers with arrows, in *Eiríks saga rauða* they communicate by moving poles in certain

directions, either sunwise or counter-sunwise. When the Indigenous people approach the settlers for what the settlers perceive to be peaceful trade, the poles are waved sunwise; but when the Indigenous people approach for what the settlers perceive to be conflict, the natives wave the poles counter-sunwise. In both sagas, projectiles are launched from the natives' boats at the settlers: arrows in *Grœnlendinga saga* and catapults and large balls in *Eiríks saga*.

In both sagas, there is a scene in which the natives come into contact with a metal axe for the first time. In chapter 6 of *Grœnlendinga saga*, after a battle between the natives and Karlsefni's group, the following action unfolds:

> Einn maðr var mikill ok vænn í liði Skrælinga, ok þótti Karlsefni, sem hann myndi vera hǫfðingi þeira. Nú hafði einn þeira Skrælinga tekit upp øxi eina ok leit á um stund ok reiddi at félaga sínum ok hjó til hans; sá fell þegar dauðr. Þá tók sá inn mikli maðr við øxinni ok leit á um stund ok varp henni síðan á sjóinn, sem lengst mátti hann.
> (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935b, 263-64)

> [One of the men in the natives' group was tall and handsome and Karlsefni thought him likely to be their leader. One of the natives then picked up an axe, peered at it awhile, and then aimed at one of his companions and struck him. The other fellow was killed outright. The tall man then picked up the axe, examined it awhile, and then threw it as far out into the sea as he could.]
> (Kunz 1997b, 29)

In chapter 11 of *Eiríks saga rauða*, divergently, after the battle between Karlsefni's group and the Indigenous group, an axe appears as part of the action: "Þeir Skrælingar fundu ok mann dauðan, ok lá øx í hjá. Einn þeira tók upp øxina ok høggr með tré ok þá hverr at ǫðrum, ok þótti þeim vera gersimi ok bíta vel. Síðan tók einn ok hjó stein, svá at brotnaði øxin, ok þá þótti þeim engu nýt, er eigi stózk grjótit, ok kǫstuðu niðr" [The natives also found one of the dead men, whose axe lay beside him. One of them picked up the axe and chopped at a tree, and then each took his turn at it. They thought this thing which cut so well a real treasure. One of them struck a stone, and the axe broke. He thought a thing which could not withstand stone to be of little worth, and tossed it away] (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935a, 230; Kunz 1997a, 16). These comparable instances in both sagas constitute what we refer to as natives' encounter with a settler's axe.

The differences in the accounts of the Norse-Indigenous contact in so-called Vínland demonstrate that the saga narratives existed in divergent versions. In both of the Vínland sagas the Norse arrive in Vínland, and in both sagas Indigenous people communicate with the settlers from boats, sometimes trading ensues but ultimately in both sagas conflict follows contact: In

Grœnlendinga saga, the natives shoot arrows from their boats upon first contact with Þorvaldr Eiríksson's party—the initial Indigenous-settler encounter in that saga—whereas in *Eiríks saga rauða* the Indigenous people wave poles from their boats to communicate with the settlers, peacefully at first. In *Grœnlendinga saga*, the Indigenous people attempt to enter Karlsefni's farmhouse without invitation. In both of the Vínland sagas, there is a scene that depicts the natives' encounter with a settler's axe, though the specific action connected to the axe diverges in the two accounts, but in both cases the axe is ultimately discarded. These three actions—communication from boats, attempted entry without invitation, and an encounter with an axe—also appear in *Gimli Saga* and *Icelandic River Saga*. In the local histories, the scenes and characters are different than in the Vínland sagas, but through the use of literary allusion, the modern accounts connect the Icelandic community in Manitoba's Interlake with the Norse explorers of the saga age.

Two Sagas from New Iceland

In his foreword to *Icelandic River Saga*, Nelson Gerrard draws a direct link between his work and the work of medieval Icelandic historiographers. Specifically, he writes:

> Like the settlement of Iceland between AD 875 and 930, the settlement of New Iceland in 1875 marked the beginning of a new page in history, and just as the names and landclaims of those who first populated Iceland's remote fjords were recorded in the mediaeval chronicle Landnámabók (The Book of Settlements) – penned some eight centuries ago by 'Ari the Learned' and 'Kolskeggur the Wise' – an attempt is made here to account for each and every pioneer whose landclaim lay within the bounds of the Icelandic River and Ísafold Settlements of New Iceland.
> (1985, iv)

This description draws an explicit connection between the work of *Icelandic River Saga* and *Landnámabók*. The latter survives in five versions, three of which are from the Middle Ages and two from the seventeenth century. The earliest writers of *Landnámabók*, generally accepted to include Ari inn fróði [Ari the Learned] and Kolskeggr inn fróði [Kolskeggr the Learned], were actively compiling the book during the early decades of the twelfth century (Benediktsson 1986, cix-cx).[11] The work details the settlement of Iceland c. 870 to 930 by the original settlers and their descendents. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards note that *Landnámabók* foregrounds how "the early settlers of Iceland

were people who, by breaking away from their original societies, had shown themselves to be more than averagely independent" (1972, 8).

Gerrard also directly correlates the migration of Icelanders from Iceland to America with the earlier Norse explorations of what is now North America, some of the details of which have been discussed above. About the late-nineteenth-century migration, Gerrard writes:

> Reports filtered back to Iceland, and as letters, articles, and accounts of other Scandinavian settlements in America began appearing in Icelandic newspapers a few individuals and small groups began to venture west across the seas – to the land their ancestral hero Leifur Eiríksson had once named Vínland.
> (1985, 16)

Gerrard indicates that emigrants from Iceland in the nineteenth century found inspiration for their journeys in the Vínland sagas, or at least that there is a stated pair of precedents for the nineteenth-century migration: specifically the emigration of people from Norway westward to Iceland in the ninth and tenth centuries, followed by the westward explorations made by the Vínland settlers during the early years of the eleventh century. Relatedly, in the fifth issue of *Framfari*, published 10 December 1877, in the cover article titled "Ferðir íslendinga til ameríku" [Journeys of Icelanders to America], we read an early statement correlating the migration of the Icelanders to North America in the nineteenth century with the migration of Norwegians to Iceland in the ninth century:

> Jeg vil sem fæzt geta mjer til um, af hvaða hvötum Íslendingar fyrst fóru að flytja til muna af Íslandi. Má vera að nokkrir hafi illa þolað margbreyttar, ófyrirsynju, álögur, og ýmislegan ójöfnuð af hálfu yfirmanna sinna, á líkan hátt og forfeður þeirra í Noregi, fyrir rúmum þúsund árum. Svo er heldur eigi ólíklegt, að óblíða tíðarfarsins á Íslandi hafi átt nokkurn þátt í mannflutningum þaðan. Getur og verið, að nokkrir hafi íhugunarlítið ráðist til brottferðar, ef til vill með þeirri hugmynd, að þurfa ekki neitt að hafa fyrir lífinu framar. Hverjar sem nú orsakirnar hafa verið í fyrstu, þá er nú svo komið, að á nálægt 6 árum, eða síðan 1871, hafa nærfellt tvær þúsundir manna flutt frá Íslandi til Ameríku, en mjög fáir munu hafa flutt til annara landa.
> (Briem 1877, 1)
>
> [I want to mention as briefly as possible the reasons which first impelled Icelanders to emigrate from Iceland to any extent. It may be that some found unendurable the many kinds of blunder, burdensome taxes and other unjust treatment on the part of the

> government, just as their forefathers in Norway, about a thousand years ago. It is also not unlikely that the inclemency of the Icelandic climate affected emigration from there. It may also be that some people emigrated without giving the matter much thought, perhaps under the impression that all their problems would thereby be solved. Whatever the reasons may have been at first, within approximately six years, or since 1871, almost two thousand people have emigrated from Iceland to America, but very few have probably gone to other countries.]
> (*Framfari: 1877 to 1880* 1986, 43)[12]

This early example of discourse within the Icelandic community in North America associates Icelandic migration to North America with the movements of people in the saga age.[13]

There were two groups of Icelandic migrants who arrived over a period of two years in the Interlake, which at that time fell within the boundaries of the North-West Territories. The first group (1875) arrived after a journey that brought them from the Kinmount and Toronto areas in Ontario, where they had attempted settlement in 1874. On their journey to the North-West Territories, they were joined by 13 Icelanders who were at that time living in Wisconsin (Kristjanson 1965, 29). The Icelanders who immigrated to the North-West Territories in 1875 were a group of about 285 in total. A much larger group followed the next year (1876), made up of 1200 to 1400 Icelanders. For a variety of reasons, including a smallpox epidemic (1876-77), a flood in 1879, and religious division within the community, the population of New Iceland had dwindled to some 250 settlers by 1881 (Wolf 1992, ix).

The association of the nineteenth-century Icelandic migration to New Iceland with the eleventh-century Norse explorations of so-called Vínland has been a longstanding feature of not only local and ethnic histories within Manitoba's Icelandic community but of Western Icelandic literature on the whole.[14] Kirsten Wolf argues that this identification—of Icelandic settlers in Manitoba with the eleventh-century Norse explorers—was a key feature of the settler community's identity formation within a multicultural Canadian framework that, though multi-ethnic, tended toward assimilation:

> For each generation of Icelandic-Canadian writers, Vínland and Leifr Eiríksson took on different meanings. Regardless of what motives are ascribed, however, common to each generation of writers is that Vínland stood at the center of a created and shaped mythos of origins and inherited traditions that gave definition to and serves as a rallying point for cultural identity.
> (2001, 218)

Wolf's assertion of the centrality of Vínland for Icelandic immigrant identities in North America is well-founded, as from 1883 to 1886 there was a weekly newspaper published in Winnipeg titled *Leifur*, after Leifr Eiríksson. Twenty years later, during the first decade of the twentieth century, there was a monthly Icelandic language newspaper published in Minnesota titled *Vínland*. By the time *Gimli Saga* and *Icelandic River Saga* were composed, Vínland and the medieval Icelandic sagas that were set there served as long-standing inspiration for Western Icelandic storytelling. Wolf adds: "Leifr Eiríksson has come to stand as a symbol of romanticized self-imaging that creates a superficial or surrogate link to a motherland that is itself part of the symbolic construction" (2001, 217).

In the first part of *Gimli Saga*, there is a section titled "The First Encounter with Indians" in which we read that after the settlers had spent their first winter at Gimli:

> Three families went northward to the banks of the Icelandic (formerly Whitemud) River, near the present site of Riverton. This led to the first encounter with Indians, who doubtless considered this their territory. While the first log hut was under construction on the north bank of the river, an Indian named John Ramsay tried to prevent the Icelanders from continuing with it. He pushed their boat away from the bank, till one of the three advanced with lifted axe. He then desisted and rowed away at great speed. During the day the Indians rowed up and down the river shooting at birds, but sometimes apparently into the air, possibly to frighten the settlers' families.
> (1975, 17)

The settlers' axe persuades John Ramsay to grudgingly permit the settlers to land on the north side of the river and to continue to build their cabin, in territory the Indigenous people considered to be theirs by right. After being galvanized by the "lifted axe" and in response to the settlers' encroachment on their territory, some Indigenous people patrol in boats, shooting from the boats, not at the settlers, but at birds and into the air. This patrol action and gunfire serves to communicate displeasure with the settlers in a form that combines action observed in the Vínland sagas, where the Indigenous people shoot arrows from boats in one saga and wave poles that make sound in the other (not to mention launching objects from catapults), thus communicating from boats. The shots fired in *Gimli Saga* are issued as warnings, like the poles that are rotated counter-sunwise in *Eiríks saga rauða* before the major confrontation between the Indigenous group and Karlsefni's settlement group.

This scene is followed by a vocal confrontation in *Gimli Saga* during which Indigenous people enter the settlers' hut, and then "Ramsay entered with an Indian interpreter, to demand that they leave, stating that the Icelanders'

colony extended only to the Icelandic River, and that they were encroaching on the lands of the Indians" (17-18). As in *Grœnlendinga saga*, Indigenous people attempt an uninvited entry into the settlers' home in *Gimli Saga* (though the attempt was unsuccessful in the medieval saga). Even though Ramsay insisted that Indigenous people maintained rights to their lands north of the river, the settlers eventually receive a favourable though controversial decision from the local Indian Agent determining that their land does extend into the disputed territory. *Gimli Saga* claims, however, that "thereafter there was no further dispute, and Ramsay became a friend and helper of the settlers, with several other Indians" (1975, 18). At the beginning of *Gimli Saga*, there is a bibliography (vii), which includes one of the key Icelandic sources mentioned above, Þorsteinn Þ. Þorsteinsson's *Saga Íslendinga í Vesturheimi*, which we recognize as *Gimli Saga*'s source for the above episode.

In volume three of *Saga Íslendinga í Vesturheimi*, we find an extended account of the passage from *Gimli Saga* narrated above.

> Meðan bjálkahús Ólafs var í smíðum, bar það við morgun einn, að þegar landnemarnir þrír róa bát sínum yfir kílinn til vinnu sinnar, stendur Ramsay reiðilegur við lendinguna og hrindir bátnum aftur frá landi. Hann talaði litla ensku, en gerði þeim það ljóst með bendingum, að hann bannaði þeim landtökuna. Þeir láta sem ekkert hafi í skorist og leggja að landi í annað sinn. En það fór á sömu leið og fyrra skiftið, að hann hratt bátnum frá. Þá gengur Ólafur fram í bátinn með öxi sína og segir hinum að róa að landi. Hörfaði þá Ramsay frá, en landar náðu lendingu og ganga til smíða sinna.
> (Þorsteinsson 1945, 19)

> [While Ólafur's log cabin was being built, it occurred one morning that as the three settlers rowed their boat across the creek to their work, Ramsay stood angrily at the landing and pushed the boat away from the shore. He spoke little English, but made it clear to them with gestures that he prohibited them from landing. They made out that nothing had been refused and came up to land a second time. But it went in the same way as the first time, that he pushed the boat away. Then Ólafur stepped forward in the boat with his axe and he told the others to row to land. Ramsay then fell back, and the settlers reached the landing and went to their work.][15]

After some more information about Ramsay, the narrative continues, referring to the observations of three Icelandic boys who were nearby, Friðrik, Gunnlaugur, and Pétur. According to the account given: "Heyrðu þeir þá skothvelli og sáu rétt á eftir hvar Rauðskinnar fóru upp fljótið á kænum sínum, og voru að skjóta fugla á flugi, en stundum virtist drengjunum þeir skjóta úr byssum sínum út í loftið, og hugðu að með því vildu þeir hræða Íslendinga"

[Then they heard a gunshot and saw just after where the Redskins were travelling up the river in their canoes, and were shooting birds in flight, but now and then it seemed to the boys that they were shooting their guns into the air, and they thought that with this they wanted to intimidate the Icelanders] (Þorsteinsson 1945, 19).[16] At the beginning of this particular episode in *Saga Íslendinga í Vesturheimi*, there is a footnote that directs the reader to Thorleifur Jóakímsson Jackson's *Brot af Landnámssögu Nýja Íslands*, the earliest source to include description of this encounter between the Icelandic settlers and John Ramsay, a key text which was used as a direct source for *Icelandic River Saga*.

In *Icelandic River Saga*, specifically within the section titled "Encounters with the Swampy Crees," Nelson Gerrard translates Friðrik Sveinsson's narrative of the initial encounter between Icelandic settlers and Indigenous people at Icelandic River. The account by Friðrik Sveinsson, who is one of the boys referred to above in *Saga Íslendinga í Vesturheimi*, was first published in Thorleifur Jóakimsson Jackson's *Brot af Landnámssögu Nýja Íslands*, so Gerrard's work in fact draws from the original source material, translating it directly into English in print for the first time. In the following passage, Sveinsson states that at that time, "a few families of natives were living in tents"[17] at Icelandic River, and that shortly after the settlers' arrival, "Ramsay soon began to make his presence felt to these white men who were responsible for driving the natives from their lands" (Gerrard 1985, 34).[18] Gerrard then translates from *Brot af Landnámssögu Nýja Íslands* at length, noting that for a while nothing of any significance transpired between the settlers and Ramsay:

> One morning, however, things took a turn for the worse when the three settlers rowed across the creek to their work. Ramsay was awaiting them with an angry look, and when they attempted to land he pushed the boat out again, making it clear by his actions that he was forbidding them to step ashore though he knew very little English. The three put in to shore a second time, and once again Ramsay shoved the boat away, but the third time Ólafur walked to the bow with his axe and instructed the others to row in. They then succeeded in getting ashore and proceeded in their work on the house. Ramsay, obviously enraged, jumped into his canoe and rowed off down the river.
> (1985, 27)[19]

Gerrard's quotation from *Brot af Landnámssögu Nýja Íslands* continues, the narrator Sveinsson stating that he and two others were:

> around that time . . . on a little boat a short distance down the river. We heard several gunshots downstream and saw a number of birchbark canoes fully manned by Indians. They were shooting birds

> on the wing, and would occassionally fire shots at nothing – likely to strike fear into the hearts of us Icelanders.
> (1985, 27)

As in the Vínland sagas, the Indigenous people communicate from boats, in both cases resulting from the arrival of the settlers. In Vínland, the communication from boats was ultimately followed by conflict and settler retreat to Greenland. In the Interlake during the 1870s Icelandic settlement had support from the Government of Canada, so there would be no retreat back to Iceland—or to anywhere else—by the settlers. The narrator, Sveinsson, continues:

> We boys hurried home as fast as we could to tell the news. The Indians appeared within a short time, and landing their canoes near our temporary home they filed up the bank and walked in uninvited. Seating themselves in a semi-circle just inside the door, their guns in hand, they indicated to us – who were at the other end of the room – that they did not understand English. The two groups then stared at each other for a good while, and the younger children became terrified by this unexpected intrusion.
> (Gerrard 1985, 27)

The Indigenous people, as in *Grœnlendinga saga*, attempt to enter the settlers' house without invitation, though in *Icelandic River Saga* the uninvited entry is successful. Ramsay arrives and communicates through an interpreter that the settlers have encroached on the Indigenous people's land. The settlers then approach the local Indian Agent, who judges that the Icelanders do have rights to the land north of the river. Both of these sagas of New Iceland—like the earlier key Icelandic sources they are based on—insist that the two groups got along well after that.

The accounts in the local histories analyzed here—which are the earliest detailed published accounts in English of the initial encounter between Icelandic settlers and Indigenous people at Icelandic River—are selective.[20] Anne Brydon, who has thoroughly researched Ramsay's correspondence in public archives, argues that rather than accept the Indian Agent's judgment that the natives had no rights to the land north of the White Mud River (which the Icelandic settlers renamed Icelandic River), in fact "Ramsay did not give up his quest to retain his land. Correspondence amongst various government representatives indicate that Ramsay attempted at first to regain his land and then, when that appeared impossible, to seek financial restitution" (2001, 172-73). In fact, according to a letter written by Dr. J.S. Lynch and addressed to the Indian Commissioner J.A.N. Provencher:

> [Ramsay] has lived on the point of land at Sandy Bar for twenty-five years, and was born on Big Island [later called Hecla Island, after the famous Icelandic volcano], only a few miles distant. . . . Ramsay had a farm, where he had tilled several acres for twenty years, on the North side of the River. There was a good house on it, in which he and his family always lived in Summer, returning to their winter house in the wood at the Bar only when the winter was approaching and the fishing season began.
> (quoted in Brydon 2001, 173-74)

Ramsay's longstanding efforts to regain his land and receive compensation for it were unsuccessful. That part of the story is omitted from the sagas of New Iceland. Another omission from these local histories relates to further conflicting claims over the lands that would become the Icelandic Reserve. Winona Wheeler, whose research is also based on archival documents, writes about the allotment of the lands to the Icelandic settlers:

> It was a travesty of justice. The Icelandic delegation arrived in Winnipeg on July 16th [1875] and made their formal request for these lands on 5 August 1875. The Cree delegation [from Norway House] made their formal request in June of 1874 and the day after the land was handed over to the Icelanders, they were told they could not have it, despite their earlier support from the North West Council.
> (2010, 217)

Wheeler adds that after the denial of their sought-after lands at Grassy Narrows—the same area where the confrontation between the Icelandic settlers and Ramsay would occur in 1876—the Cree people of Norway House who intended to move to the area were provided a reserve at Fisher River, a site north of the Icelandic Reserve, which, Wheeler notes, "was of far less value and quality" than what they had requested at Grassy Narrows, lands which were granted to the Icelandic settlers (220).

Ryan Eyford's research, much of it also based on archival documents contemporary to the settlement of the Interlake, further challenges the narrative of happy coexistence that the sagas of New Iceland and their sources assert followed the initial confrontation at Icelandic River. Shortly after the encounter narrated by the sources above, a smallpox epidemic broke out in the area. At this point in time, according to Eyford, "friendly exchanges between the two groups appear to have ended. Ramsay later reported to Dr. James Spencer Lynch that the Icelanders had refused to offer assistance to his people when they became ill and even demanded payment for helping to bury the dead" (2016, 106). Eyford does add, however, that several Indigenous people did assist the settlers during the early years of their settlement, Ramsay included (118).

Conclusion

Geraldine Barnes writes that both *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*:

> tell the story of the loss of a desired object. Initiated by the exemplary figure of Leif Eriksson, who takes no part in subsequent expeditions, the Vínland story as related in both sagas is a tale of greed, brutality and failure, in which the Norsemen kill indigenous people without provocation and squabble among themselves.
> (2011, 143-44)

Gimli Saga and *Icelandic River Saga* represent the recovery of the desired object, at least in part: settlement in the west, in this case in New Iceland. Within these two local histories, texts which are themselves based on earlier Icelandic-language sources, the narratives represent the settlers interacting with Indigenous people in similar circumstances as their ancestors did in Vínland. These interactions, as narrated in both the medieval and modern sources, involve communication (and occasionally hostility) from boats, uninvited visits by Indigenous people to settlers' homes, and Indigenous people's encounters with a settler's axe, an object that confounds them in Vínland but persuades them to desist in Manitoba. We contend that the modern authors—both those of the local histories and those of the Icelandic-language sources for the local histories—have artfully used the literary device of allusion to represent the nineteenth-century episodes.

The local histories analyzed above are no less tales of greed than their Vínland predecessors, but the greed is not necessarily, or at least solely, on the part of the Icelandic settlers. The Dominion of Canada denied contested lands to Indigenous people in the Interlake region and elsewhere, granting the same lands instead to settlers, and it is no surprise that Indigenous people resisted settler encroachment. The local histories, composed in English in the 1970s and 1980s and still read today in the twenty-first century, rationalize the settlement of the region at the expense of the region's Indigenous inhabitants. The sagas of New Iceland—like the medieval sagas—are selective records and serve to emphasize the claimed legitimacy of the settlers' occupation of the region. The inclusion of narrative sequences that allude to narrative sequences that appear in the Vínland sagas signifies the settlement of the Interlake as a continuation of a process that began with the short-lived settlement in so-called Vínland.

The omission of certain details in *Gimli Saga* and *Icelandic River Saga*—for instance, John Ramsay's determination to reclaim his land—solidifies these works' identities as proper members of the local history genre, while simultaneously reminding readers of the aforementioned critique commonly

afforded to the genre by its skeptics. By replacing Indigenous people's fervent desires to repossess their homeland with the ever-popular "helpful native" trope—the idea that many Indigenous people were "inherently and essentially good, that is moral, upright, worthy, humane, and just . . . —and happy with their lot" (Warner and Grint 2012, 970) thanks to their distance from corrupt society—the authors of the local histories and their sources (perhaps inadvertently) allow their own biases as inheritors of a colonized homeland to influence their works.

The inevitable intrusion of personal bias into local histories and their factual ambiguity makes reaching a concrete conclusion about the exact details of the Interlake's early Icelandic history effectively impossible; it is therefore fortunate that the value of these sources does not lie within their ability to relay objective truth. In fact, the state of the local histories' verity is of little consequence to this investigation. The real merit of these texts rests on their ability to implicitly communicate precious information about a group's values, beliefs, and cultural identity via their storytelling conventions. For instance, due to *Gimli Saga*'s omission of John Ramsay's efforts to reclaim his homeland, readers can better understand the possessiveness the Icelanders felt over the Interlake region, predicated on the historic arrival of their ancestors to that land in the late nineteenth century.

An instructional narrative strategy is used in these two sagas of New Iceland to connect the Icelandic settlers in the Interlake to the Norse of the Vínland sagas (and to the original settlers of Iceland who migrated westward from Norway beginning in the late ninth century). This connection is palpable when the episodes depicting intercultural contact in the two sets of sources are analyzed together; such comparison invites readers to speculate that the local history authors embraced the literary allusion evident in their source material as a means of emphasizing their claim to the land. This use of allusion implies that Icelandic settlers in the 1870s advanced a process their Norse ancestors initiated, settlement of land in the west, and were thus returning to Vínland/America to complete a long-delayed journey. The nineteenth-century New Iceland settlement had the full support of Canadian imperialism, so rather than retreat after contact and conflict, Icelanders established a community, later integrating into Canadian society while retaining elements of their Nordic heritage, including the saga-writing tradition.

NOTES

1. *Gimli Saga* has recently been re-issued in a second edition, published 13 June 2024 at Gimli, Manitoba. About The Gimli Women's Institute and the publication of the first edition of *Gimli Saga*: "In its 50th year, the Institute decided to work on a community history and while they did not complete it for

the anniversary (and Centennial year) they did publish a small booklet of 43 pages complete with 68 pictures of Gimli past and present. It contained a condensed history of Gimli and pictures dating back to 1900. . . . That small booklet provided the impetus for their more detailed 'Gimli Saga,' a community history" (*Great Human Heart* 1980, 92). In the front matter to *Gimli Saga*, the Gimli Women's Institute's History Committee is listed, including Ethel Howard (chairman), Hilda Greenberg (vice-chairman), Margret Stevens, Gwen Cronshaw (treasurer), Diane Hall (secretary), and Sigurbjorg Stefansson (1975, vi).

2. *Eiríks saga rauða* survives in two medieval manuscripts: Hauksbók (AM 544 4to) from the early fourteenth century and Skálholtsbók (AM 557 4to) from the fifteenth century. *Grœnlendinga saga* survives in one medieval manuscript, Flateyjarbók (GKS 1005 fol.), from the late fourteenth century. Both sagas were likely composed, at least in some form, prior to the age of their manuscripts.

3. Þorsteinn Þ. Þorsteinsson was responsible for volumes 1, 2, and 3; Tryggvi J. Oleson was responsible for volumes 4 and 5.

4. Wilhelm Kristjanson's *The Icelandic People in Manitoba: A Manitoba Saga* (1965) deserves recognition as an early English language publication that narrates much of the Icelandic community's early history in Manitoba, though its scope is much wider than the local histories of the Interlake. An even earlier English language publication, Thorstina Walters' *Modern Sagas: The Story of the Icelanders in North America* (1953), has an even wider scope.

5. For definitions of Icelandic terms, see, e.g., snara.is or ordsifjabok.arnastofnun.is.

6. For an authoritative definition of the Old Norse-Icelandic saga, see Clunies Ross (2010, 14-23).

7. Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.

8. It would be possible to compare *Gimli Saga* and *Icelandic River Saga* to sagas which describe the early settlement of Iceland, for example *Landnámabók* (The Book of Settlements), a comparison we do consider, though briefly. Instead, we primarily compare selected episodes from these local histories to comparable episodes found in the Vínland sagas, because these two sets of texts—medieval and modern—both provide accounts of settlement in what is now called North America, including descriptions of early contact between Indigenous peoples and Norse/Icelandic settlers.

9. The Manitoba Local Histories Project provides online open access to many, though not all, of the local history books composed about Manitoba communities and institutions.

10. AM 544 4to indicates that there were a large number of hide-covered boats spotted by the settlers (*mikinn fjǫlða*), whereas AM 557 4to states that nine boats were spotted (*níu*) (Halldórsson 1985, 428).

11. Cf. Sverrir Jakobsson, who recognizes Ari inn fróði as an early writer on the settlement of Iceland but remains cautious as to whether Ari's "work consisted of an entire earlier version of *The Book of Settlements*, or only in part" (2017, 91).
12. Note the phrase in the second sentence of the original quotation, "af hálfu yfirmanna sinna," could be translated as: "on the part of their superiors"; this broader translation encompasses not only the government, as the provided translation denotes, but also, e.g., landlords, employers, or other social superiors.
13. For an example of another settlement trope with an identifiable parallel in medieval Icelandic historiography, see Katelin Marit Parsons, who in a recent article notes the association in Icelandic historiography between Mormon Icelandic immigrants to Utah, who began to migrate westward in the 1850s, and the *papar*, early Christian settlers in Iceland, who, according to both *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók*, were present in Iceland prior to the arrival of the first Norwegian settlers but played no part in subsequent events and departed from the island (2024, 363, 379).
14. *Vestur-Íslendingur* (pl. *Vestur-Íslendingar*) translates to Western Icelander, which from the late nineteenth century onward was frequently used within Icelandic-language discourse to refer to Icelandic immigrants to North America and their descendents. The term simultaneously denotes connection to Iceland but also separation from it. See Ólafur Arnar Sveinsson (2023).
15. Translation by the authors.
16. Translation by the authors.
17. Cf. Friðrik Sveinsson: "Nokkrar fjölskyldur villimanna bjuggu þá meðfram fljótinu og höfðust við í tjöldum" (in Jóakimsson Jackson 1919, 34).
18. Cf. Friðrik Sveinsson: "og fór hann brátt að amast við þeim hvítu mönnum, sem frumbyggjar landsins hafa alt af þurft að hrökkva undan" (in Jóakimsson Jackson 1919, 34).
19. Cf. Friðrik Sveinsson: "En svo var það einn morgun, að landarnir 3 fóru á bát sínum yfir kílinn til vinnu sinnar, að Ramsay er þar fyrir og all-reiðilegur og hrindir bátnum frá landi, og gerir það ljóst með bendingingum, að hann banni þeim lendingu, því hann kunni mjög lítið í ensku. Þeir lögðu að landi í annað sinn, en það fór á sömu leið, að hann hrindir út bátnum. Þá gengur Ólafur fram í bátinn með öxi sína og segir hinum að róa að landi; ná þeir þá lendingu og halda áfram smíðinu við húsið" (in Jóakimsson Jackson 1919, 34).
20. Another local history, Steinn O. Thompson's *Riverton and the Icelandic Settlement*, does not describe the encounter in any great detail; instead Thompson provides the following assessment of John Ramsay's reaction to the arrival of the Icelandic settlers: "At first he was disturbed by these new arrivals and made known his displeasure but when it was explained to him by his Indian agent that his hunting grounds had really been granted to these new immigrants, he accepted the order without further demur and did all in his power to render help whenever he could" (1976, 86).

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