

Farm Structures

Farming was of much less importance than fishing to the early economy of the Icelandic settlement. Along the lakeshore, the dense forest proved very difficult to clear and the meadow areas were prone to flooding. Settlers who remained on the land raised small herds of cattle. Marketing them was a problem until the government wharf was constructed at Hnausa. Even by 1913, the average farm in the settlement consisted of only 12 hectares (30 acres) of cleared land, a herd of 20 cattle, 15 sheep, and possibly a few hogs and poultry.

Farming was more naturally the primary occupation along the Icelandic River. Stock grazing also developed as the land here was low and often heavily forested. Several types of Icelandic sheep were raised during the early years of settlement in all the areas and knitting developed into a cottage industry for a time. Just after the turn of the century, as the Arborg-Vidir areas were first being settled, dairying developed as a viable farm operation. The Northstar Creamery Cooperative was formed in 1906, and a facility constructed at Arborg. With the arrival of the railway in 1910, the industry grew rapidly. As the land was drained and cleared, the soil proved to be of good quality and farming operations in the Icelandic areas slowly shifted from dairying and the raising of stock to grain production.

Very few pre-1900 farm buildings remain. Only a single building of log construction was found - a shed on the same site as the Sniefeld log house (Figure 45). Small shed-roofed storage structures of this type were often found on the early homesteads.



Figure 45

Sniefeld shed, SE 8-22-4E, circa 1895. Small shanty-roofed storage sheds such as this one were among the first farm buildings the Icelandic settlers constructed after staking claim to their homesteads.

Prior to the turn of the century, when livestock numbers were still quite small, simple log stables were used to shelter the animals (Figure 46). The oldest farm building of frame construction is a barn located just south of Riverton on River Lot 8 (Figure 47). The design is not unlike other barns of the period found in most other parts of the province. The simple gable roof was also found on many of the larger barns constructed during this period, of which there are several examples remaining (Figure 48).

The barns constructed during the 1920s and 1930s were of contemporary design. Most were gambrel roofed central aisle designs, although a few examples with vaulted roofs still exist from this period (Figure 49). Many of the barns at this time had hay slings for filling the lofts.

Most of the barns remaining in the Icelandic areas are no longer used to house cattle. With grain production the main agricultural activity in the planning district, the early barns have been converted to storage facilities. Many are simply unused.



Figure 46

The first barns constructed by the Icelanders were simple gable-roofed log structures. After the turn of the century, when large frame barns were built, these structures were usually demolished. None are known to have survived to the present. (Provincial Archives Manitoba)



Figure 47

Eyolfson barn, Riverton, 1912. This small frame barn, housed about a dozen head of stock .It had a high walled loft for maximum fee storage capacity, and a lean-to addition for the young animals.



Figure 48

Many of the barns constructed during the 1920s were simply longer versions of the earlier gable-roofed barns, such as this Riverton area example.



Figure 49

Gudmundson barn, River Lot 51, Arborg, 1925. With the development of dairying in the Arborg area during the early 1920s, many Icelanders constructed large capacity modern style barns. Very few of these are still in use.