



CHAPTER 4

Life in Spanish Fork and Other Utah Regions



Letters from LDS Icelanders in Spanish Fork to family and friends in their homeland during the mid- to late-nineteenth century provide an interesting sketch of daily life for these distant immigrants. For example, in 1862, as the American Civil War was in process, Loftur Jónsson wrote to his friend Páll Sigurðsson: “Once more I take the pen in my hand to let you, my noble countrymen, who desire to know of me, know how I or we are doing here in the Salt Sea Valleys. We are doing very well. We live here peacefully and quietly while others here in America . . . kill and destroy one another. We rejoice in the redeeming gospel, which we have received.”¹

Jónsson also writes candidly, though optimistically, about the transition into a new country and gives details concerning provisions and the wages he was receiving in comparison to those of his native homeland:

When I came to this place, where I am now, I had spent all my money I had for myself and other poor folk who could





Fire on Ice

not get here on their own accord, but I hope God will give me life and health, that there may not be many years until I have regained all such and maybe more, because I make my own bread in my own land and make there besides 2 to 3 dollars during the day building things for others. One dollar is worth about 11 marks, 7 schillings. These would be considered a good days wages in our land. If the truth be told, food is more expensive here, but the quality is also much better.²

Three years later in another letter to Sigurðsson, Jónsson wrote of the prosperity of his native countrymen, notwithstanding his concern for local Native Americans in the Spanish Fork region:

All of the Icelanders live in this little town, all of good health, and prosper both spiritually and temporally. . . . The wild Indians are rather restless at this time, which has led to them stealing cattle so we sought to retrieve it from them, which did not go well, a few of the men, both white and Indian, were killed. But even though they are bad, the Indians, one never needs to fear them in the cities, because there they do not usually come when they are restless.³

On Christmas Day of 1869, Loftur again wrote his Icelandic friend, revealing his loneliness, as his wife had recently passed away. His letter also discloses his desire to have intimate companionship with a native Iclander:

I am a widower now. My wife died October 16th, . . . and I have missed her very much. . . . I wish now that one woman from Iceland was here with me to take her place and dispel my sorrow, for though there be many girls and unmarried women, I find they do not suit me as well as one from my





CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS

fatherland, because I feel more love for them than I do the inhabitants of any other nation. But this feeling will not desist unless I go myself to get one, and perhaps they will fear my faith and I would have to return again empty handed, and such a trip would be expensive to risk.⁴

Four years later Loftur returned to Iceland on a mission, and while there he converted an Icelandic woman named Halldóra, whom he brought back to Utah with him in 1874 and married. Unfortunately, this same year he died in an accident near Palmyra.⁵



Halldóra Árnadóttir was introduced to Mormonism by Loftur Jónsson, and they later married in 1874.

Courtesy of the Icelandic Association of Utah

A Valuable Citizen

Another Iclander who paints a vivid picture of life in Spanish Fork during this period is Vigdís Björnsdóttir. As noted, Vigdís arrived in Spanish Fork in 1859. She was well known in the community, due primarily to her medical training previously acquired in Copenhagen, which included a course in obstetrics. Kate B. Carter wrote: "Immediately upon establishing her residency in Spanish Fork, Vigdís became doctor, midwife and nurse, not only among her own people, but to hundreds of other families in this small pioneer community. The medical skill she had acquired in Denmark was put to good use in setting bones, treating . . . diseases and attending to the births of hundreds of infants."⁶





Fire on Ice

In a letter dated August 28, 1866, Vigdís describes to an anonymous Icelandic friend in her homeland the daily routine of farm life in Spanish Fork and gives a glimpse of the economy of a small rural town:

About a year and a half after settling I married a widower named William Holt. He had three boys; the oldest is eleven, but the youngest six years old. We are well off, 20 cattle, 50 sheep, one horse and a great land. . . . We slaughter two pigs annually, and they weigh on average 300 pounds each. We lack nothing but you and my relatives and friends and countrymen. We have such a good garden; in it grow many kinds of apples and sugar cane (syrup is made from it), besides many more kinds of fruit, whose name you know not. Last year we got 350 pots of syrup, and the apples are dried and used all year round. I have 50 chickens and we have eggs both to eat and sell. A dozen eggs (12 eggs) cost 60 shillings. Butter is also at a very high price; at times the pound is at 9 marks. There are four stores in this town, in each of them we can get many necessities, but many things are expensive, but it evens out, because they receive graciously. Coffee costs two dollars and sugar is a little less expensive, a yard (1½ alin) of white linen two dollars, but a yard of mixed colors 80 schillings. Tools and wood working equipment is also very expensive. A day's wages are on average 2 measures.⁷



Vigdís Björnsdóttir, also known as “Aunt Wickie,” received medical training in Copenhagen and was a great aid to the Icelandic Saints who came to Utah. *Courtesy of the Icelandic Association of Utah*





CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS



Spanish Fork Co-op. *Courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society*

A description of the layout of the town of Spanish Fork, and of how news traveled, is also courtesy of Vigdís:

Towns are organized in a way that some streets lay from east to west and others lay across them north and south. On both sides of these streets are straight water trenches. The gardens are watered from them. By the trenches are planted decorative trees to sit under in the sun. Between the streets are square blocks (4 gardens in each block), and the houses stand each in their own corner, which looks simply marvelous. The postman comes three times a week. He brings us newspapers and letters from various countries. There are also a couple of mills in our town, one to grind corn, and the other to saw. Both of them are driven by water. There





Fire on Ice

are two machines here that thresh wheat and they are horse powered. There are six machines here that grind the sugar trees, from which syrup is made, and they are powered by water. There are also machines here that cut grass and wheat, which are horse-powered, and it costs more to get your labors worth from them than it does in those that are water-powered, because a horse and a muzzle are expensive.⁸

Finally, this small, blue-eyed, brown-haired country doctor, known affectionately as “Aunt Wickie,”⁹ concludes her letter with a testimony of her faith:

I am happy and well contented to have traveled from my fatherland for the faith that I gained that the pure gospel was revealed to the prophet Joseph Smith in the latter days and I know with a perfect knowledge that I am not being fooled by men, which have no authority from God, rather I can bear my own testimony that this is God’s true church and no other exists that he recognizes, and these are the latter days and Jesus’ coming is near, for which his pure gospel shall be preached to all nations, and the signs, which he said would be before his coming, are manifest daily. Now, if you my relatives and friends and countrymen, whom I wish everything good, should have opportunity to receive this learning, which those so called Mormons teach, I admonish you to do so, for it is the only way to be saved and there is no other. Many lies have persisted and have been told of this people, for example that those who come here are taken in slavery, but were there as much freedom where you are as there is here, you would love it. All who so wish may dwell here and of whatever faith live undisturbed, and if any may fall from our faith, they may remain here if they want.¹⁰





CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS

The practice of witnessing to the homeland loved ones of the truths of the restored gospel, as well as describing the pleasant cultural symmetry that existed in Spanish Fork during the decade of the 1880s, was not unique to Aunt Wickie. A series of letters by Þorsteinn Jónsson to his friend Jón Jónsson Borgfirðingur,¹¹ who remained in Iceland, confirm this pattern.

True Friendships

Finnur Sigmundsson has noted that both of these men had previously worked together as police officers in Reykjavík and had even been witnesses in the fall of 1879, when two LDS missionaries (Jón Eivyindsson and Jakob Jónsson) were compelled to stand before a city hearing and were told to leave the city. Bishop Jón Helgason referred to Þorsteinn as “a mighty man to behold and very diligent, but he was caught up in the snares of the Mormon missionaries, which came here, and became a Mormon. Shortly he resigned his post and left for Utah.”¹² Excerpts from these varied letters illustrate wonderfully the cultural rhythms of Spanish Fork as well as the deep Icelandic friendships that could not be broken regardless of distance between countries and religious orientation.

The first letter of Þorsteinn to Jón is dated November 4, 1883. Þorsteinn writes of his arrival and assimilation into the new Utah community:

Apart from our seasickness, our trip went exceptionally well, but since we arrived here every day has been better than the other. Everyone has been good to us, both English and Danish, and whomever we have gotten to know. We now have most of what we need of tools to use outdoor as well as in, and overall we feel as good as we did at home when we were at our best, except we have still not gotten ourselves a





Fire on Ice

cow, even though we have been offered some. Apparently it is good for everyone here that bother to work, but others would have nothing to do here. My Sigríður worked for a week harvesting potatoes and got 3 barrels in return as payment, but Stebbi got 3 “skeffur” [measures]. She has 7 chickens and 2 pigs. I have worked for a month doing construction and gotten about a dollar and half per day. For some time, I have been threshing wheat with a threshing machine and got a half a barrel of wheat per day. I wish all poor laborers were come hereto, to this town, Spanish Fork, rather than to all the other towns in the area. . . .

It seems as if the average wage of people here is very good, both in monetary means and well-being, and people here are over all better off health-wise than at home. As far as I am concerned, my Sigríður is feeling much better than she was at home. The Lord has blessed us with many quality means for our bodies and souls since we have arrived I am much better off and am more at peace walking these streets than I was in Reykjavík. I cannot thank the Lord enough for being here and being somewhat prepared for the winter, and I have stopped longing to be back in Iceland again.¹³

The following portion of this letter was written about two weeks later (November 19, 1883), wherein Þorsteinn notes:

We have been aided by the English and the Danish. I could have cried thinking of you at home, where you make so little and where the pay is so low. Our daily sustenance is wheat-bread, potatoes, pork, meat, butter, pork-lard and all sorts of fruits from the trees. . . . There are many here that have two estates, one here in town, but the other out in the countryside. . . . Nobody has a laborer, no matter how rich he is, whether he is superior or inferior, rather they let the horse





CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS

teams work for them, machines, plows and other things like it. . . . Now I am better off here than I was in Reykjavik.¹⁴

The final section of this same letter ends with a sincere plea to his friend Jón, beckoning him to leave their cold native country for a better land in Utah:

I wish you were settled here with your family, and I cannot feel sorry for your sons to be working for you. . . . I am certain that you and your family need to gnaw the ice, as people seem to do in the old country. I come to tears thinking about my poor countrymen, that don't have anything else to tread on but rocks, instead of cornfields and other kinds of vegetation. Oh, that I were about twenty. Oh, you young men; are you going to stand there idle on those frozen rocks, without thought, without action, yes, frozen to the core in both soul and body, and search not out the warmer parts of the world, where you can become men of doing, both for yourselves and for others.¹⁵

Vivid Descriptions and Grand Celebrations

A second letter written several months later provides further details into transportation, communication, and cultural items of interest in the Spanish Fork setting:

There are three shopping areas, two butchers, two bars, one theater, one church, four sawmills, one meal-mill, which is water-powered, and it is used a lot. Then they are building a woodworking machine, which is supposed to be water-powered, that makes windows, doors and all kinds of things. There are two trains that run here, one right below the town, but the other right above it, and the wagons run to and fro on them many times a day, so much so that one can almost





Fire on Ice



An early Spanish Fork pioneer celebration, 1909. *Courtesy of LDS Church Archives*

expect news on the hour, yes, even every minute with the telegraph. [Yet] no one here has any Icelandic newspapers. . . . Seeds are quite expensive here like some of these trees, but we, through the grace of our Lord, have become so well respected, both of the Danish, English, American, and Icelandic, that we have been given all of it. I was amazed at one thing last Saturday night. In a meeting that was held, my testimony from the old country was read verbatim by an American man, which is a counselor to the bishop in Spanish Fork. It is good to do well and to receive a reward for your actions. . . .

I am as content now as I ever can be with my circumstances and I hope that I may live here the rest of my days in peace and trust that I will not have to travel to Iceland ever





CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS

again, rather remain here in peace and enjoy all the blessing of the Lord.¹⁶

In letters from the summer of 1884, Þorsteinn described the festivities of July 24, when Utah Saints celebrated the anniversary of the vanguard company led by Brigham Young that entered the Salt Lake Valley on July 24, 1847:

The biggest celebration of the year is on the 24th of this month. Then everyone will dress up in the costume they brought from their fatherland or mother-earth. Old man Hansen . . . will appear in his uniform and two medallions for his bravery as a general. He is Danish. Then you can see how high people have been in their homeland. I will also appear all dressed in my uniform and claim my respect from the towns people. Do you think I will be proud?¹⁷

In a letter that was written shortly after this holiday ended, Þorsteinn explained in great detail the Spanish Fork July 24 annual pioneer parade which the Icelanders and other Latter-day Saints participated in. This letter reveals his and his wife's great desire to bring honor to their native country. Due to its vivid description, it is included below in its entirety:

There was a great festival held here the 24th of July, naturally the biggest one of the year. Then they call on a few men of every nation to show their national costumes and various traits, to display ones status and crafts, which they brought with them from home. Of the Icelanders they called Þórður Diðriksson to bring six Icelandic persons. He called my wife and I, Gísli Bjarnason and Margrét, the wife of Samuel, Eiríkur Ólafsson and Margrét, who was in the school.

At eight o'clock in the morning everyone was to assemble by the city hall, and there everyone was ordered into groups.





Fire on Ice

First were the English and the American, Swedish, Danish, Icelandic, German, all in wagons, which were decorated with cloths and upholstery of various colors. There were also 24 young men and women on horseback, riding side by side, the boys all dressed in black on gray horses, but the girls on brown horses all dressed in white. This was to represent the 24 days of the month. Then they all rode along the main street, three times around so that all could see, because the sidewalk on both sides was so crowded. Then we went just outside of town to a forest, which was planted for pleasure. There were held speeches and singing, then lunch was served and we ate, and there after we played games. Those who had been officers or lieutenants came in their costumes, each in their own rank that they had held at home. I came in my policeman uniform and it was considered striking. My wife was in her national costume, which was considered the most beautiful costume they had ever seen, and I think most of the people that were present came to look at the costume, it was thought to be so significant. The Icelanders also made a symbol for the group from blue linen, with a falcon on one side, and a Viking ship on the other side, according to Friðþjólfur. This was also considered beautiful. The Icelanders also carried a symbol made out of white linen with big blue inscription, saying: Iceland delights in you, Zion. I wish it were so; however, it meant the Icelanders that are here and all of those who might come. They also showed how they looked when they first arrived, walking with their belongings in handcarts, with their children barefoot, torn and tattered, crying because of hunger and exhaustion. But now they have lands and acres. But those who come now, come like soldiers in covered wagons, but may in return slave for the others, because they've made the lands so expensive that





CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS

you can scarcely buy them. It is not the Lord's doctrine that this should be so. This festival is to commemorate that the restoration of the Church, the 24th of July. The wife and I sought to bring as much honor as possible to our nation. It is considered a great honor to all, irrespective of their nationality.¹⁸

Pride and Prejudice

Although the parade paints a picture of LDS unity irrespective of one's homeland, a bit of cultural conflict still apparently existed, as evidenced by yet another letter Þorsteinn wrote shortly before Christmas of this same year. Among other things, Þorsteinn described his contentions with an Englishman and an American who compared the houses and buildings in the Spanish Fork region with those in Iceland. Apparently he is on the defensive when he writes the following to his dear Icelandic friend Jón: "Thus, I wish I had the latest and most beautiful picture of Reykjavik, because they say there is no log house as ugly as the prettiest house in Iceland."¹⁹ He goes on to express his frustrations:

I didn't like it when the English talked badly about Iceland around the dinner table, saying that they all lived on horse sausages, which they call hot dogs, of course all without exception, yes and seal meat. They say it is a poor people, or as they say "púr pípil." I have often contended harshly with them regarding education in the country, the land it self and the people in general.²⁰





Fire on Ice

Economics

Þorsteinn also confirms the strong determination of himself, his wife and other Icelanders to aid their countrymen: “We are collecting money to aid Icelanders in a group of 14 stranded north of here that wish to get here on account of their faith, which have never had missionaries and have arrived at Helena Montana Territory, after having traveled there on one man’s money, but there they have run out.”²¹

The following spring, Þorsteinn explained to Jón the employment opportunities coming to his hometown: “Yesterday . . . a man came here to this house to recruit people to shear sheep, and he traveled 50 miles to do so, because he had seen sheep that we the Icelanders cut last year, and he thought it was done so well that he wanted the same people to shear his flock.” He further noted, “I will take my Sigríður with me to shear, and we’ll probably be there all of June. There we will get six cents for each sheep. I estimate that I will shear 40 a day. That is 2 dollars and 40 cents a day. And you buy everything for food but meat, which you get free. It is good pay for those who are pretty quick.”²²

As the year ended, Þorsteinn explained to Jón that Sigríður had switched her labors from sheep shearing to shucking corn: “My beloved wife is shucking corn, which is to peel the leaves from the corncobs; she gets one seventh of everything she shucks.” In an optimistic tone, Þorsteinn also includes the fact that “all the Icelanders that I know and are here, are doing well. I know that no one here can help feel anything else but well if he is willing to work, despite the lack of money; everything you do is paid in what you would purchase anyway, if you were paid in money.”²³

As the new year of 1886 dawned, Þorsteinn continued to describe his life in Spanish Fork optimistically: “I live a very





CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS

good and peaceful life; have enough of everything, a good and quaint house. I lack nothing, other than my relatives and friends turned to the right faith and settled here. . . . I can hardly get more provisions into my house than what is already there, and it is even bigger than the one I had in Reykjavik.”²⁴ At the same time, Þorsteinn cautions his dear friend, “You should not believe what you hear or read in the newspapers, because they have piled together such farfetched heaps of lies about this people.”²⁵

Demographics

About two months later Þorsteinn provided a general lay-out of Spanish Fork for Jón:

There are close to four thousand inhabitants in this little town. I don’t know what it was when I arrived, but there were not a hundred Icelanders, but now there are 150 Icelandic persons and a few children half native. There are 12 threshing machines, 2 mills, 3 grocers, 1 butcher, no liquor store, 2 shoe stores, 3 stores that make harnesses, 2 lumber markets, 6–7 saw mills.²⁶

An increase in these demographics increased by fall of this same year, thus impacting the industry of the small Utah town. Þorsteinn noted in a letter to Jón written November 22, 1886:

Many Icelanders have come this summer and have had enough employment until now and some will probably have one all winter. Those who didn’t know much except the country at home have enough for the winter. I think everyone is doing well, and many have arrived despite difficult circumstances.²⁷





Fire on Ice

Þorsteinn was correct in his observation, inasmuch as more Icelanders immigrated to Utah in 1886 than any other year.²⁸ Historian Jónas Thor maintains that more Icelanders immigrated to North America during this year than any other. He attributes the record high immigration of 1886 and for the entire decade of the 1880s to unusually cold weather, which had a serious impact on Icelandic farmers.²⁹

By 1888 Spanish Fork was bulging at her borders. Þorsteinn, writing on New Year's Day, noted the following changes owing to the growth of the area:

Cows have gone down in price, also horses, but all lands and plots increase from year to year and that is due to the many people that have gathered together in these fair weathered valleys. . . . There are about 150 Icelanders in this town, both old and young. Construction has increased a lot since I arrived here. We, the Icelanders, are building ourselves a church out of wood, so we can have services in our own language, for there are many who do not understand English and there could be more coming, but four have been building this house this summer. Many have had good employment this year shearing sheep, threshing, among many other things, for example women have been plucking fruit off trees and other things like it. My wife attended the same plot as last year, and got much more from it than last year, almost 50 dollars. She also sheared and earned about 20 dollars apart from many other things. . . . I spent a month on the highway this spring and went from there, 30 miles, to Nephi, shearing sheep for another month, and again up to Scofield about 60 miles south.³⁰

Such an influx not only required more town construction, but seems to have necessitated that some Icelanders and





CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS



Icelanders and other Latter-day Saints attended the First Ward Chapel in Spanish Fork. *Courtesy of Doug and Susan Barber*

undoubtedly other Spanish Fork citizens secure employment elsewhere. The distance for some required moving to a new location, such as Scofield, as previously noted.

Spanish Fork Icelanders Migrate to Scofield, Utah, and Alberta, Canada

Scofield, which lay in Carbon County, was a magnet not only for Icelanders but also for many other immigrants needing employment in the late nineteenth century. Allred writes, “The necessity of good-paying jobs drove some of the Icelanders to mining towns in the Scofield area. . . . Some worked in the mines and some worked on the railroad, and although these men hadn’t been trained either as miners or railroad workers





Fire on Ice

in Iceland (even today there is no mining in Iceland . . . nor are there railroads), . . . they soon adapted to the work.”³¹ But as Allred notes, “Many did not stay very long, and after 1900 most of the Icelanders had left Scofield and gone elsewhere.”³²

Although correct in determining when most had left this area, Allred omits an explanation for this fact. On May 1, 1900, the Winter Quarters Number Four mine just west of the town of Scofield exploded. One of the worst mine disasters in United States history, it officially claimed the lives of about two hundred.³³ The impact of this explosion not

only advanced decisions for having greater safety for miners, but it also encouraged Icelanders in this mining region, such as Jón Pétur Jónsson, to leave. In addition, other Spanish Fork Icelandic families chose to migrate farther north to southern Alberta, Canada, primarily for better employment conditions. Allred points out such families as Pétur Valgarðsson, Jón Eyvindsson, Águst Ingjaldson, Kristján Guðnason, Jóhannes Kristjánsson, Guðmundur Guðmundsson, Jón Arnoddson, Vigdís Jónsdóttir Árnasson and Jón Pétur Jónsson moved to the towns of Raymond and Taber in southern Alberta.³⁴

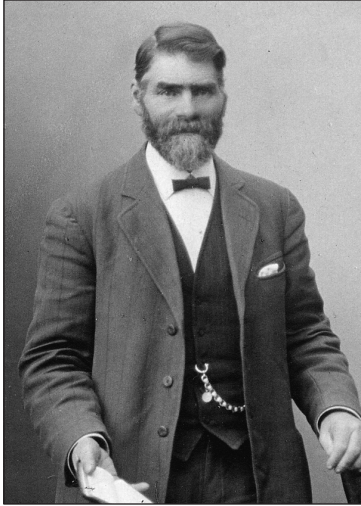


Pétur Valgarðsson served a mission to Iceland in 1882. He moved to Taber, Alberta, Canada, and lived there for a time before returning to Spanish Fork. *Courtesy of the Icelandic Association of Utah*

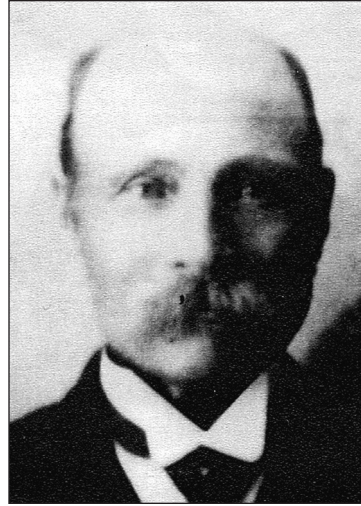




CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS



Jakob B. Jónsson was one of the early Icelandic Saints who moved to Cleveland, Utah. He served two missions to Iceland. *Courtesy of LDS Church Archives*



Halldór Jónsson became a leader of the Icelandic group in Utah and was one of several early Icelandic Saints who moved to Cleveland, Utah. *Courtesy of the Icelandic Association of Utah*

A Cluster of Icelanders in Cleveland, Utah

Other Icelanders also chose to migrate, but most elected to stay in Utah. One preferred destination of choice for a small cluster of migrating LDS Icelanders was a town in Emory County named Cleveland, after President Grover Cleveland. According to historian Edward Geary, Cleveland had its early beginnings in the spring of 1885 when two families, the Algers and the Oviatts, arrived to settle in the area. In the same year Samuel Alger surveyed the much-needed route of the





Fire on Ice

Cleveland Canal, which not only supplied needed water but also attracted workers, and thus more families.³⁵

In yet another letter by Þorsteinn Jónsson in January 1886, he mentions, “Jakob [B. Jónsson] is moved from here to Castle Valley.”³⁶ Jakob B. Jónsson did settle with his family in the Castle Valley region, yet Jakob was not the first Icelander to migrate to Cleveland. Allred writes, “In 1885 Halldór Jónsson moved his family from Spanish Fork to Cleveland, where he purchased a farm. He contributed his labor to the building of the canal, which was finished in 1888.”³⁷ Two other Icelanders moved their families to Cleveland in 1889. In his life history, Einar Eriksón recalled:

In February 1889 I together with bro J.[Jon] J. Thorderson went over to Cleveland to look at that new settled place[.] we left Price on foot in the afternoon but cam to Cleveland next morning at Sunrise. We bargin for 40 acres of land lots of Mr. Clousin for \$100.00 eats 40 without water[.] we then went back to Price on foot and home the same day[.] we sold our home in Spanish Fork for \$400.00. . . . In July 1889 we moved to Cleveland where we started to make us anew home.³⁸

Allred explains that other Icelanders moved to Cleveland during this period, such as Sveinn, the father of Jón J. Þórðarson, in 1890. She adds, “The following year; [Jakob B.] Jónsson, Þórarinn Bjarnason, Þorsteinn Jónsson also settled in Cleveland about the same time.”³⁹

Evidence that Þorsteinn had arrived in Cleveland by the end of 1890, as well as his motive for moving from Spanish Fork, derives from a letter he wrote from Cleveland in late December 1890: “I am still above ground and doing well, but I have moved like the devil a hundred miles west of where I





CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS

was. I had to go somewhere I could buy land because I have so many animals. I bought thirty acres of land for a dollar and a quarter an acre, so I have spent every effort to building a home.” In this same letter he notes that a few other Icelanders lived in the area, specifically Einar [Eriksón] and his son Einar, as well as Jakob B. Jónsson, his wife Sigríður, and three other Icelanders he does not mention by name.⁴⁰

About eighteen months later, Þorsteinn described Cleveland in the early summer of 1892: “Most people like me don’t have a lot of money. The settlement is new and everyone is pretty much starting off fresh, there is no train here thus no paid labor. . . . There is no news of this place, good weather, enough water, because the snow melted late due to an unusually cold spring. The fields look good; . . . sawmills have decreased . . . there should only be two in each county.” He then concluded his letter in a positive tone, declaring, “I am in my age happy to be here and to own a good and beautiful land, filled with animals, good and beautiful cows, good and beautiful horses, and now four beautiful steers, although some are young. This is much more enjoyable than walking the streets of Reykjavík.”⁴¹

Notes

1. Loftur Jónsson (in Spanish Fork) to Páll Sigurðsson (in the Westmann Islands), February 21, 1862, National Library of Iceland, Archives Department, Reykjavík, Iceland; catalogue # Lbs. 487, fol. 1; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim: frá íslenskum mórómum í Utah* (Reykjavík, Iceland: Setberg, 1975), 15.

2. Jónsson to Sigurðsson, February 21, 1862; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 15–16.

3. Jónsson to Sigurðsson, April 27, 1865; catalogue # Lbs. 487, fol. 1–2; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 19.





Fire on Ice

4. Jónsson to Sigurðsson, December 25, 1869; catalogue # Lbs. 487, fol. 1; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 26.

5. Kate B. Carter, comp., “The First Icelandic Settlement in America,” 7:492–93, notes that Halldóra was the “daughter of Arni Asgrimsson from Undirhraun Medallandi, Iceland.” Carter also notes that Loftur died on September 9, 1874 (p. 493).

6. Carter, “The First Icelandic Settlement in America,” 7:495.

7. Vigdís Björnsdóttir (in Spanish Fork) to an anonymous friend in the Westmann Islands, August 28, 1866, National Library of Iceland, Archives Department; catalogue # Lbs. 2679, 8vo, 2–3; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 40–41.

8. Björnsdóttir to friend, August 28, 1866, 8vo, 5–6; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 41–42.

9. Carter, “The First Icelandic Settlement in America,” 7:496. Carter further notes that Vigdís “lived to be eighty-nine years of age, passing away December 2, 1913, at her home in Spanish Fork.”

10. Björnsdóttir to friend, August 28, 1866; catalogue # Lbs. 2679, 8vo, 6–8; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 42–43. My research assistant, Mark J. Sanderson, in an unpublished paper titled “The Old Lutheran Church in Spanish Fork,” 4, has noted that “while several Icelanders left the LDS Church, they maintained close ties with LDS Icelanders, and the Lutheran Church became a community center for Icelanders.” This close relationship has also been mentioned to the author by a number of people who have Icelandic roots and who are currently members of the Icelandic Association of Utah. For information on the history of Lutherans in Utah, see Ronnie L. Stellhorn, “A History of the Lutheran Church in Utah” (master’s thesis, Utah State University). See also Thomas Edgar Lyon, “Evangelical Protestant Missionary Activities in Mormon Dominated Areas: 1865–1900” (PhD diss., University of Utah), 221–55, on contact between Lutherans and Mormons throughout Utah during the late nineteenth century.





CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS

11. Þorsteinn Jónsson to Jón Jónsson Borgfirðingur, February 28, 1886, National Library of Iceland, Archives Department; catalogue # Lbs. 102, fol. B (w-ö), 1–2 provides evidence that it took about three and a half weeks (twenty-four days) for a letter to travel between Spanish Fork, Utah, and Reykjavík, Iceland (see also *Vesturfara skrifu heim*, 93).

12. Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrifu heim*, 13–14.

13. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur (in Iceland), November 4, 1883; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 1–2; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrifu heim*, 53–55.

14. Second part of letter by Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, November 4, 1883 (letter continued November 19, 29, 1883); catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 1–2; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrifu heim*, 55–57.

15. Final part of letter by Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, December 12, 1883; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 1–2; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrifu heim*, 58.

16. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, March 18, 1884; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 2–4; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrifu heim*, 63–64.

17. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, June 15, 1884; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 3; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrifu heim*, 68. Inasmuch as Þorsteinn mentioned this holiday (known in modern times among Latter-day Saints as “Pioneer Day”) was about to occur on the “24th of this month,” perhaps he made a mistake in dating this letter, and it was really written on July 15, 1884. Furthermore, Þorsteinn notes that this was the “biggest celebration of the year.” In a previous letter (the fourth part of the first letter he wrote to Jón), dated December 28, 1883, *Vesturfara skrifu heim*, 59, Þorsteinn wrote to Jón, “They don’t celebrate Christmas here much, except for the Icelandic, but that is because they say the birth of the Savior did not occur that day, and is that true. Some say that it is the 6th of





Fire on Ice

April.” The suggestion that Christ may have been born on April 6, instead of the traditional date of December 25, stems from a book of LDS scripture called the Doctrine and Covenants, section 20, verse 1, which notes that the day the restored Church was organized was April 6, 1830, “one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh.” However, not all LDS Church leaders have agreed with this position. For discussion regarding both sides of this interpretation, see Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary, Book 1* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 349–50.

18. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, August 4, 1884; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 1–3; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 69–71.

19. Letter by Þorsteinn Jónsson in Spanish Fork to Jón Jónsson Borgfirðingur in Iceland, “Monday before Christmas, 1884,” National Library of Iceland, Archives Department, Reykjavík, Iceland; Catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 2; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 75.

20. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, “Monday before Christmas, 1884”; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 2–3; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 109. Þorsteinn tells Jón, “I am always to hold Icelanders to honor, saying that they live in houses on the ground, but not in holes in the ground like Americans say they do, and Sigfús Eymundsson has helped me in that regard by sending me three pictures of Reykjavík.” It should also be noted that Eymundsson’s photographic collection is probably considered the finest for this period in Iceland. It is housed at the National Museum of Iceland.

21. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, “Monday before Christmas, 1884”; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 3.

22. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, May 2, 1885; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 3–4; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 83–84. According to Allred, *The Icelanders of Utah*, 106, Þorsteinn





CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS

was married to an Icelandic woman named Sigríður Jónsdóttir, born in 1846 in Reykjavík. In 1880, Sigríður joined the LDS Church and three years later immigrated with her husband and son to Spanish Fork.

23. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, “The first Sunday of winter,” [late December], 1885; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 3; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfarar skrifa heim*, 86.

24. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, January 3, 1886; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 2; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfarar skrifa heim*, 89.

25. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, January 3, 1886; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 2. Latter-day Saints were receiving much negative press in the United States and internationally due to prosecution for the charge of unlawful cohabitation.

26. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, begun on February 28, 1886. This second portion of the letter was written March 8, 1886; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 4; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfarar skrifa heim*, 96.

27. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, November 22, 1886; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 2; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfarar skrifa heim*, 98.

28. Manuscript History of the Icelandic Mission, December 31, 1886, reveals that 1886 was also the peak year for baptisms in the history of the Icelandic Mission since it had opened for proselytizing in 1851. Allred, *The Icelanders of Utah*, 20, notes sixty-three Icelanders immigrated to Spanish Fork in 1886. The research of noted Icelandic genealogist Bliss Anderson suggests that as many as seventy-eight gathered to Utah during this one year.

29. Jonas Thor, *Icelanders in North America: The First Settlers* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2002), 180–82.

30. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, January 1, 1888; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 1–3; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfarar skrifa heim*, 102–3. From another letter written December 28, 1888, to





Fire on Ice

Jon in Sigmundsson, *Vesturfarar skrifa heim*, 108, Þorsteinn notes still another form of employment for his wife: “Sigríður has started attending bees and raising honey. This is a good job, but difficult. It yields great results if it goes well.”

31. Allred, *The Icelanders of Utah*, 44. Allred further notes that “some of those who finding jobs at Scofield were Olafur Sigurdsson, Gisli Geslason, Julius Jonsson, Jon Peter Jonsson and Ingveldur Carrick and Gudbjorg Davis (whose husband worked in the mines) and possibly others.”

32. Allred, *The Icelanders of Utah*, 44.

33. Alan Kent Powell, “Scofield Mine Disaster,” *Utah History Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Kent Powell (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 491.

34. Allred, *The Icelanders of Utah*, 44. The Raymond, Alberta, LDS Church Membership Records (1901–12), Church Archives, lists the names of a number of Icelanders living in the Raymond Ward during this period. The Taber Alberta LDS Church Membership Records, Church Archives, also lists twenty Icelandic names in the Taber Ward. The term ward is used to describe an LDS ecclesiastical unit made up of a couple hundred people.

35. Edward A. Geary, *A History of Emery County* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, Emery County Commission, 1996), 112–14. For an Icelander’s perspective on the early history of Cleveland, see Parley Thorderson, “History and Human Geography,” unpublished paper, undated, in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT. Thorderson, 2, puts the date of the coming of the Algers and the founding of Cleveland in May 1884, instead of May 1885 as Geary does. However, Geary, 164, maintains, “Family records indicate that the Algers did not arrive in Emery County until later that year.” Further, Geary, 114, points out that a Cleveland post office was chartered in January 1889 to honor President Grover Cleveland, and in





CHAPTER 4: LIFE IN SPANISH FORK AND OTHER UTAH REGIONS

this same year Samuel Alger presided as the LDS branch president over a group of Cleveland Saints who met for church in the cabins of John and William Cowley.

36. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, begun January 3, 1886. This second portion in the same letter was written January 8, 1886; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 1; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 90.

37. Allred, *The Icelanders of Utah*, 43.

38. “The Life of Einar Erickson,” Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU, 30–31.

39. Allred, *The Icelanders of Utah*, 43–44. Allred, 44, additionally notes, “Three or four [Icelanders] came directly from Iceland after 1900 and made their homes in Cleveland, bypassing Spanish Fork. Life was perhaps even harder in Cleveland than it had been in Spanish Fork, since Castle Valley was undeveloped country. . . . A number of their descendants still live in Cleveland.” The Cleveland Ward Membership Record (1890–1941), Utah Valley Regional Family History Center, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, includes the following Icelandic families during the early years of the Church in Cleveland: Einar Erickson and the six other members of his family; Svein Thordurson and five members of his family; Háldor Johnson and six family members. Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1941), 147, indicates, “A meeting house was erected in Cleveland in 1889–90. The saints were organized as a ward Aug. 12, 1890, with Lars Peter Oveson as Bishop.”

40. Jónsson (in Cleveland, Utah) to Borgfirðingur (in Iceland), December 20, 1890; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 1; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 111.

41. Jónsson to Borgfirðingur, June 18, 1892; catalogue # Lbs IB 102, fol. B (w-ö), 2–3; see also Sigmundsson, *Vesturfara skrif heim*, 120–21.



