



The Hockey Icelanders of Winnipeg's Sargent Avenue

- Researched and written for the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame by John Jameson

Icelanders were the first foreign nationality to establish a settlement in an area that would become part of Manitoba. They established 'New Iceland' along the west coast of Lake Winnipeg between Winnipeg Beach and Hecla Island in 1875. A steady stream of immigration followed with a yearly average from 700 to 2,000 settlers.

By 1881, hardship and disease had taken a heavy toll and many families would leave for southern parts of the province including opportunities in Winnipeg.

A small Icelandic presence already existed in Winnipeg and would help the newcomers settle in. As the rapidly growing city expanded, an Icelandic enclave was established in the city's West End along Sargent Avenue.



By 1897, second generation Icelanders were attending Winnipeg schools and participating in sports. Many started playing ice hockey in Winnipeg as early as 1896.

This was a golden era for Winnipeg hockey. The Stanley Cup winning Victorias were at the forefront with Dan Bain, Tony Gingras, and the Flett brothers thrilling fans with their exploits on the ice.



Hockey's popularity had mushroomed and by the 1898/99 season there were well over a hundred teams in Winnipeg alone. In addition to highly competitive "senior", "intermediate" and "junior" teams in leagues—there were the Icelanders, a Painters League and two teams composed of lacrosse players. There were teams formed by public school students, by newspaper carriers, and by residents of boarding houses.

Like other Winnipeg immigrant communities, the 'white-haired' Icelanders were victims of blatant bigotry and prejudice. Winnipeg's top Anglo teams were composed of players from well-to-do families and refused to play them.

Forced to compete against each other, the Icelanders of Winnipeg were sharply divided into two rival sporting camps, the Icelandic Athletic Club (I.A.C.) and the Vikings.

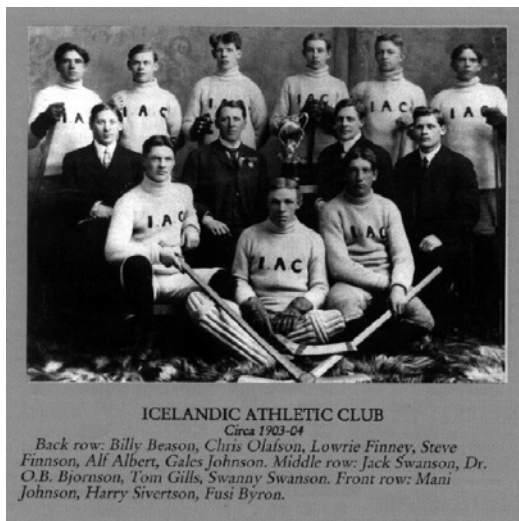


The IAC North-enders resided in the neighbourhood of Jemima Street (Elgin Avenue) while the Vikings were from the wide-open prairie to the west of Sherbrook Street south of Sargent Avenue.

These two teams formed the Manitoba Icelandic League. Games were played at the old Brydon and McIntyre rinks downtown. The Vikings played in red jerseys with large white V's and white pants while the IAC had dark blue sweaters and black pants. It was in this two-team Icelandic league that Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame member 'Cully' Wilson began his hockey career.



Where the John M. King School now stands was the site of the Vikings skating rink. Water was hauled in barrels on small sleighs from the corner of Ellice and Sherbrook. IAC would practice at a rink at Notre Dame Park between Notre Dame and Wellington Avenue.



Their battles were legendary and many times the post-game ice was blood-stained. The Vikings won the Icelandic League championship every year between 1897-1902. After the 1902 season interest had lagged and the league folded.

The Icelandic teams would continue to engage in games and a yearly competition for the Hansson Cup, which included bragging rights for the top Icelandic team in the city. The IAC would compete in the City junior ranks for the 1906/07/08 seasons.

In 1909, the Icelandic boys decided to end their animosity and combine their talents to take on the other leagues

and teams in the city that were rapidly forming. During a meeting at the International Order of Good Templars (IOGT) building at 635 Sargent Avenue, the older clubs merged to form the Winnipeg Falcons.

They would compete in Intermediate hockey between 1908 and 1910. Despite sharing the 1910 title with the Monarchs, the Falcons were denied entry to the City Senior loop the following season while the Monarchs were accepted. Instead, the Falcons joined the rural Manitoba Amateur Hockey Association Senior ranks for the 1910/11 season.

In 1912, Kurt "Konnie" Johannesson, Bobby Benson and Frank Fredrickson joined the team in the Manitoba Independent League where the Falcons would win the Intermediate title.

Winnipeg's top Anglo Senior hockey clubs refused to compete with the 'immigrant squad' until the outbreak of the First World War. The Anglo teams relaxed their snobbery when the Icelandic-Canadians



demonstrated their loyalty to the Empire by enlisting in a battalion comprised largely of Scandinavian-Canadians. Under the 223rd Battalion banner, the Falcon players would finally compete against the top Senior teams in the 1915/16 Patriot League season.

Despite finishing last, goalkeeper Wally Byron, led the league in least goals allowed, and Frank Fredrickson, scored the most goals with seventeen in eight games

The 223rd Battalion would sail for Europe in May, 1917.

When war ended in November, 1918 two members of the Falcons would not return. Frank 'Buster' Thorsteinson and George Cumbers were killed in action. The Falcon players are recognized in the Honour Roll of the First Lutheran Church on Victor Street where many of the team were members.

The Falcons would reorganize in August, 1919. Once again denied application to the City Senior loop they joined with Brandon and Selkirk to form the Manitoba Hockey League for the 1919/20 season.



Defeating Selkirk in the finals, the MHL champion Falcons met the Winnipeg Hockey League champion Winnipeg for the right to represent Manitoba in pursuit of the Allan Cup. It was simply no contest as the speedier Falcons trounced the 'Pegs in a two-game total point affair, 15-1. Red-faced Manitoba hockey officials realized their efforts to deny the Falcons would have resulted in the province's best team not representing the province.

Taking on the Thunder Bay champion Fort William Maple Leafs, the Falcons once again used their speed to breeze to victory with 7-2 and 9-1 wins.



Two weeks later, on March 29th, the Falcons would win the prestigious Allan Cup easily beating Toronto Varsity 8-3 and 3-2 and, as Dominion champions were informed that they would represent Canada at the 1920 Olympics, held in Antwerp, Belgium.

The Falcons had hoped to go home and celebrate with a parade. Instead, they were advised that there was no time to return home and pack. Days later, the team boarded a ship at St. John, New Brunswick and headed overseas with literally the clothes on their

back. While enroute, the team would exercise on-deck and develop new strategies as they would be playing the seven-man game of hockey in the Olympic tournament.

After their arrival, the Falcons dazzled the Europeans with their skills and the team's goodwill left a positive mark on their hosts in their efforts to improve their opponents' training programs.



The Winnipeg Falcons opened with an easy defeat of Czechoslovakia 15-0. Their toughest opponent was the USA. After a slow start the Falcons went up 2-0 and hung on for the victory. With Sweden their final opponent, the Falcons would take Olympic gold with a 12-1 victory. The lone goal that they gave up in the tournament was an orchestrated gift that thrilled the Swedes and their fans. The team that nobody wanted was now World Amateur Hockey champions.

After a brief stop in Toronto where the team was honoured by the city, the Falcons arrived home on Saturday, May 22, 1920 to a massive civic celebration and parade.

Coach Fred 'Steamer' Maxwell, Haldor "Slim" Halderson, Frank Fredrickson, Kurt "Konnie" Johannesson, Christian "Chris" Fridfinnson, Mike Goodman, Robert "Bobby" Benson, Magnus "Mike" Goodman and goalie Wally Byron were all heroes in Winnipeg. Falcons that were not on the Olympic roster but contributed during the season were Harvey Benson, Ed Stephenson, Connie Neil, Babs Dunlop and Sam Laxdal.

Fredrickson and Halderson moved on to pro careers that fall, both would eventually play on Stanley Cup winners. American-born Bobby Benson also turned pro, playing briefly with the Boston Bruins. Mike Goodman turned pro in 1923 and was also a two time Canadian speed skating champion. Other prominent second generation Icelanders were Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame members, Carol "Cully" Wilson and Harry Oliver.

Frank Fredrickson was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1958.

