



A Greeting from the President of Iceland, Guðni Th. Jóhannesson

The migrations of people from Iceland to North America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were an important chapter in the country's history, opening up new opportunities for those who took the step of settling in a new land. At the same time, they were largely triggered by the difficulties that people faced in Iceland during the period.

Most Icelanders take a special pride in the fact that many of their cousins in the New World are keen to stay in touch with 'the old country' and many people in Iceland are also interested in making sure that the bonds between families and these nations remain intact. Thus, the Snorri West program, which was aimed at cultivating this unique relationship, was welcomed on both sides of the Atlantic.

The origins of the program go back to 1999, when nineteen young people of Icelandic descent in North America spent a few weeks staying with their relatives in Iceland. Under the program, more than three hundred have since followed in their footsteps.

The Snorri West program was established in 2001, enabling young people from Iceland to spend a few weeks visiting the parts of Manitoba where the Icelandic pioneers in Canada put down roots. To date, I believe, about 90 young people from Iceland have now made use of this opportunity.

Exchange programs of this type have great value: they increase understanding between nations, reminding us of our origins and perhaps also of what we can learn from history.

Eliza and I had the good fortune to visit the Icelandic communities in Manitoba earlier this summer and we greatly enjoyed meeting many people of Icelandic descent and hearing about the fortunes of their ancestors who took the decision to emigrate from Iceland in those difficult years.

I also recall pleasant occasions when, as a lecturer in History at the University of Iceland, I taught young people in the Snorri West program Icelandic history and talked to them about contemporary Iceland.

It is a pleasure for me to congratulate all those who have been involved in the Snorri West program on this occasion and to note the success they have attained in stimulating and strengthening contact between us in Iceland and our relatives and friends in North America.