

An overview of Vestur-Íslendingar of the Laxamýri family

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Reykjavík, June 1998



Laxamýri

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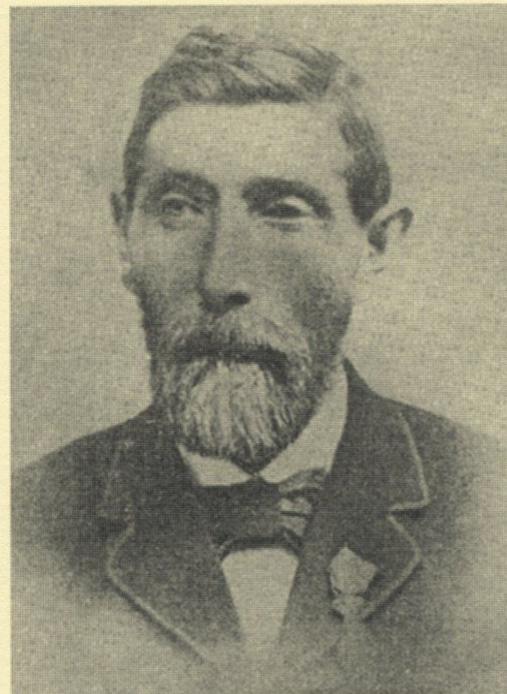
How we are related

We are both of the Laxamýri family; our common ancestors are Jóhannes Kristjánsson and Sigurlaug Kristjánsdóttir who lived at Laxamýri, which is near Húsavík in Suður-Pingeyjarsýsla. The name Laxamýri (“Salmon Marsh”) is derived from the nearby river, Laxá, an excellent river for salmon angling. Laxamýri was owned by the family for 90 years, from 1838 to 1928, when it was sold.

Among the children of Jóhannes and Sigurlaug were Sigurveig and Sigurjón, your great-grandmother and my great-great-grandfather¹. Their lives, although very different, were in many ways characteristic for their generation in Suður-Pingeyjarsýsla; Sigurjón became a prominent landowner, whereas Sigurveig emigrated west just before the turn of the century, as did most of her children.



Sigurveig Jóhannesdóttir



Sigurjón Jóhannesson

Being the descendants of Jóhannes Kristjánsson, we are also descendants of Iceland's first settler, Ingólfur Arnarson!² Along with his blood brother, Hjörleifur Hróðmarsson, he settled in Iceland around 870.

¹ See Appendix: Family tree #1.

² See Appendix: Family tree #2.

The Vesturfarar

In Icelandic, America was often referred to as *Vesturheimur* ("Western world"). The word *Vesturfari* ("West-goer") is a person that emigrates to America, and *Vestur-Íslendingur* ("West-Icelander") is an Icelander, or an individual of Icelandic ancestry, living in America.



A group of Vesturfarar disembarking from Keflavík

The first Icelandic Vesturfarar were Mormons, leaving Iceland in 1855, settling in Utah. In 1863 six Icelanders emigrated to Brazil, and more followed in 1873. That year was also the first time several hundred people emigrated to America. Most of them disembarked in Québec and then continued westwards, both on the US and Canadian side. The largest and best known Icelandic settlement, Gimli, near Winnipeg, dates from 1875. For the next thirty years there was a steady stream of Vesturfarar, peaking in 1887, when close to two-thousand Icelanders emigrated west in a single year.

In these decades the rural population in Iceland was dwindling. There was a shortage of land throughout the country and the weather was unusually harsh. In some winters the ice front surrounded the whole island, and in 1875 there was a large eruption in the volcano Askja, in Suður-Pingeyjarsýsla. The agricultural technology had hardly changed for centuries, as opposed to rapid advances in fisheries technology, where sailing ships were replacing the smaller rowing boats. The people in southern and western Iceland moved to the booming Reykjavík and other southwestern towns, as well as Ísafjörður and Vestmannaeyjar islands.

The people in northern and eastern Iceland, on the other hand, were used to farming and had little experience of fishing at sea. Suður-Pingeyjarsýsla, in the north, was significantly more developed than, say, Rangárvallasýsla in the south. The extensive road network and a higher standard of educational level are examples of this. These people read newspapers containing letters from the Vesturfarar and they were dissatisfied with the progress in the struggle for national independence. As a result, most of the Vesturfarar were people from the countryside in northern and eastern Iceland.

The typical Vesturfarar were young people who yearned to cultivate their own land. Often their children, aging parents or other relatives followed some years later. The age distribution of Vesturfarar did not differ substantially from the nation in general, although the age groups 15–30 years were conspicuous, and there were slightly more females than males. Popular ports of call were: Winnipeg, Québec, Halifax and Portland, usually via Scotland or Denmark. An example of the transport vessels is *Camoëns*, an 808 t steamship which carried Helgi Þorsteinson and Dagbjört Dagbjartsdóttir in 1887, on their way to Winnipeg.

Biographies

Jóhannes Kristjánsson of Laxamýri ~ Sigurlaug Kristjánsdóttir



Jóhannes Kristjánsson

Jóhannes³ was born 1795 at Halldórsstaðir in Reykjadalur, the son of Kristján Jósefsson (1770–1840) and Sesselja Bergsdóttir (1765–1818). The family was poor, but when Jóhannes was 24 years old he had seven sheep and a horse. In 1820 he married Sigurlaug Kristjánsdóttir, born 1800, the daughter of Kristján Andrésson and Sigurlaug Jónsdóttir. After years of rewardful farming at Breiðamýri, a land formerly owned by the father of Sigurlaug, Jóhannes bought three eighths of Laxamýri in 1838, a large albeit deteriorated land owned by several farmers. He became well known for being an industrious farmer and a successful businessman. Apart from buying the rest of Laxamýri, he acquired Mýrarsel, Héðinshöfði and Hrísey island. Jóhannes and Sigurlaug had 16 children, 8 of which lived to bear children. Sigurlaug died in 1859. One year later, Jóhannes married Hildur Eiríksdóttir, a widow.

Jóhannes died in the fall of 1871 and was buried at Ljósavatn. During the winter, his son Sigurjón (my great-great-grandfather) repeatedly dreamt his late father and remembered his wish to be buried at Húsavík. In the following summer, Sigurjón and his brother Kristján dug up the coffin and moved it to Húsavík.

Sigurveig Jóhannesdóttir ~ Egill Halldórsson, Þorsteinn Snorrason



Sigurveig Jóhannesdóttir

Sigurveig was born 1832 at Breiðamýri, the daughter of Jóhannes Kristjánsson and Sigurlaug Kristjánsdóttir. In 1849 Sigurveig married Egill Halldórsson, born 1819, the son of Margrét Egilsdóttir and Halldór Ámundarson, who served as priest of Melstaður in Miðfjörður. Egill was a farmer at Reykir in Reykjabraut, a carpenter, local administrator and a poet. Thirteen months after their marriage, Halldór Jóhannes (b. 1850), the first of their five children, was born. The others were Konráð (b. 1851), Jónas (b. 1854), Arnór (b. 1856) and Margrét (b. 1861). Jónas died before he reached the age of six, and Margrét also died young. Around 1861, Sigurveig and Egill separated. In the following years she worked as a housekeeper around Tjörnes, to feed her three boys. In 1869 Egill married Ingibjörg Árnadóttir, a widow, with whom he had the son Hjálmar Egilsson. They lived at Reykir.

³ See Appendix: Family tree #3.

In 1869 Sigurveig gave birth to Kristín Þorsteinsdóttir at Mýrarsel, and in that same year Þorsteinn Snorrason⁴ moved to Mýrarsel. He was born around 1837 at Stórabrekka in Hörgárdalur, the brother of Skáld-Rósa ("Poet Rose"). They were the children of Snorri Guðmundsson and Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir, both from farms in Hörgárdalur valley in Eyjafjarðarsýsla. In 1870 Sigurveig and Þorsteinn moved to Jódíssarstaðir in Skriðuhverfi and a year later they married. There, Jóhanna (b. 1871) and Snjólaug Guðrún (b. 1874) were born. In 1874 they moved to Langavatn in Helgastaðahreppur, and in 1876 to Brekknakot in Reykjahverfi, where Þorsteinn died in 1879 "after sustaining cranial pain". In the following years Sigurveig worked at Laxamýri (until 1890), Árbót (until 1892), Garður (until 1893) and Árnes in Húsavík (until 1896), before going west with Jóhanna in 1896. Sigurveig died in 1899 in Argyle, Manitoba.

Halldór Jóhannes Egilsson ~ Margrét Jónsdóttir



Halldór Jóhannes Egilsson



Magrét Jónsdóttir

Halldór was born 1850 at Laxamýri, the son of Egill Halldórsson and Sigurveig Jóhannesdóttir. Halldór spent some of his childhood years in Þingeyjarsýsla but was mostly raised in Húnnavatns-sýsla. Before leaving Iceland in 1887, he was living at Mosfell in Húnnavatnssýsla with his wife, Margrét Jónsdóttir. She was the daughter of Jón Guðmundsson and Jóhanna Jónsdóttir, whose ancestors were from Eyjafjarðarsýsla and Skagafjarðarsýsla, respectively.

⁴ See Appendix: Family tree #4.

Halldór stayed in the Icelandic settlement in Pembina County, North Dakota, for three years before moving west to Mouse River, North Dakota, where he lived for nine years. He left North Dakota for Álftárdalur (by Swan River, Manitoba) in 1899, along with a group of Icelanders, and settled twelve miles west therefrom (on the Saskatchewan side). The railroad then reached Cowan, and the surrounding terrain was difficult to traverse. These years were meager for Halldór, and since he was feeding six young children, he could not afford an ox for the first two years. In 1923, four of the children were married and one son, Jón Jóhann, was a widower:

1. Egilsína Sigurveig ~ Sæmundur Helgason
2. Jón Jóhann ~ Hildur Stefánsdóttir (d. 1921)
3. Arnór Konráð ~ Þórunn Salóme Oliver, from Selkirk
4. Helga Sigurrós ~ Jóhann Björnsson
5. Kristján Halldór
6. Jónas ~ Ethel, in Álftárdalur

When Halldór was 72 years old he was cheerful and fit as a fiddle, although Margrét had lost her sight some years before. Along with three of his sons, Jón Jóhann, Arnór Konráð and Kristján Halldór, he was cultivating a square mile of rich soil. The house was of the highest quality, heated with warm water and lit with electricity. They owned a motor saw and a carpenter's plane, operated by his sons, to saw and split lumber for building houses. Much of the material in the house was prepared at home. Their agricultural machines were also of modern design.

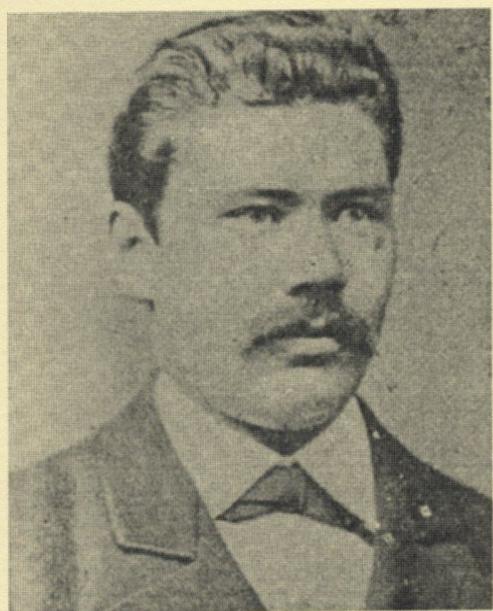
Halldór was fond of books, owned a noteworthy collection of books and was the Reading Club's librarian. He worried about the people's diminishing interest in Icelandic literature, and insisted that his three grandchildren in their house should learn Icelandic. He was an inspired storyteller and his memories of Iceland were clear, when he lived north in Húnavatnssýsla although he participated in fishing from the south coast. Going on foot across the land in the middle of the winter had been demanding, and so were the trips on the open boats. That kind of experience became valuable for a settler.

Halldór's half-sister Snjólaug lived nearby in 1923, as did his sons-in-law, Sæmundur Helgason and Jóhann Björnsson. Sæmundur had ancestors in Langanes but was raised in North Dakota, leaving that state at the same time as Halldór. Jóhann Björnsson had ancestors in Bóndastaðir in Flíótsdalshérað. He moved to Álftárdalur in 1917, where he bought a piece of land not far from his father-in-law.

Konráð Egilsson

Konráð was born in the year 1851, the son of Egill Halldórsson and Sigurveig Jóhannesdóttir. Konráð left Akureyri in 1873, boarding *Emma*, his occupation being logged as shop assistant. After that, not much is known of his fate, except that he died in America before 1913.

Arnór Egilsson ~ Valgerður Ósk Ólafsdóttir



Arnór Egilsson

Arnór was born in 1856, the son of Egill Halldórsson and Sigurveig Jóhannesdóttir. Arnór became a photographer and a farmer at Bjarnarstaðir in Vatnsdalur, and later a local administrator of Sveinsstaðahreppur. In 1882 he married Valgerður Ósk Ólafsdóttir, born 1857, the daughter of Ólafur Jónsson, farmer at Beinakelda.

Arnór and Valgerður had three sons: Ólafur Ingimar (b. 1883, merchant in Reykjavík, one son with Vigdís Hólmfríður Ingimarsdóttir), Halldór Egill (b. 1889, photographer in Akureyri, two children with Steinunn Gróa Bjarnadóttir) and Björn Magnús (b. 1891, merchant in Reykjavík, six children with Guðrún Ólafsdóttir). Arnór Egilsson died in 1900 and Valgerður Ósk in 1933. Their grandchildren live in Reykjavík.

Kristín Porsteinsdóttir ~ Ásmundur Kristjánsson

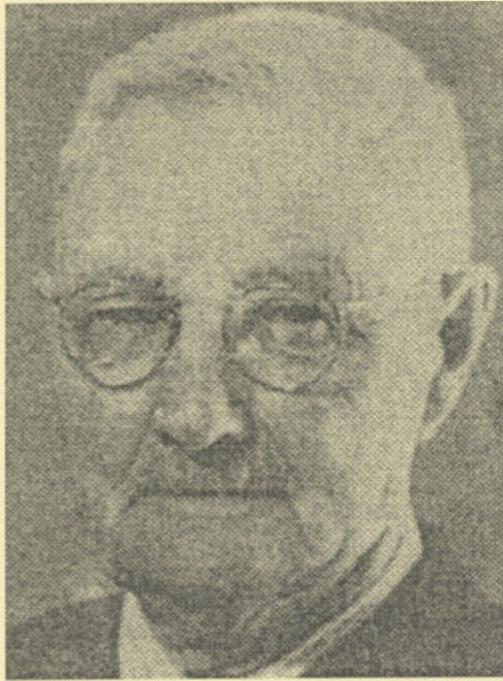
Kristín was born 1869 at Mýrarsel by Laxamýri, the daughter of Porsteinn Snorrason and Sigurveig Jóhannesdóttir. Kristín emigrated west in 1889, along with Ásmundur Kristjánsson from Máná in Tjörnes, who was then a 28 years old carpenter. They departed from Húsavík and sailed on the *Magnetic*, heading to Winnipeg. In 1890 they got married. Ásmundur was the son of Kristján Ásmundsson and Guðrún Andréasdóttir, and among his five siblings was Guðný Aðalbjörg Kristjánsdóttir, married to Kristján Jóhannesson in Markerville, Alberta.

In 1893 Kristín and Ásmundur had a daughter, Sigrún Ásmundsdóttir. They moved from Winnipeg, where he had been working as a house carpenter, to Argyle, Manitoba, where they lived for three years. In 1900 they moved to the Icelandic settlement in Alberta and started farming, but in 1907 they moved to Edmonton. After a brief stay on the Pacific coast, which Ásmundur did not appreciate, they returned to Alberta to live in Markerville, where he opened a butcher shop and transported mail between Innisfail and Markerville. In 1913 their living children were four, in addition to Sigrún there was Vilhjálmur, Laufey Jóhanna and Arnór Edward. Ásmundur died in 1925. Kristín's second husband was Ófeigur Sigurðsson, an Icelandic farmer in Alberta. Kristín died in 1941.

Jóhanna Þorsteinsdóttir ~ Magnús Pórðarson



Jóhanna Þorsteinsdóttir



Magnús Pórðarson

Jóhanna⁵ was born 1871 at Jódíasarstaðir in Skriðuhverfi, the daughter of Porsteinn Snorrason and Sigurveig Jóhannesdóttir. Jóhanna sailed with her mother to America in 1896, and in 1901 she married Magnús Pórðarson. Magnús was born 1869 at Borg in Skutulsfjörður, the son of Pórður Magnússon (1829–1896) and his second wife, Guðríður Haflidadóttir (1840–1902). The land Pórðareyri, by Skötufjörður in Norður-Ísafjarðarsýsla, is named after Pórður Magnússon, as he was the first farmer there.

Magnús emigrated west in 1893 with his parents, living in Baldur, Manitoba, where his father died three years later. In Baldur, Magnús worked as a farmer and installing railroad tracks until 1902, when he moved to Blaine, Washington. There he worked as a clerk until 1915 when he managed his own store for the next twenty years. Jóhanna and Magnús had seven children:

1. Sigurveig (1902–1926), graduated as a teacher from Bellingham Normal School. Married Robert Taylor, a mechanic, in 1925.
2. Thordur (b. 1904), graduated as a B.A. from a university in Washington, taught in a school and later became a schoolbook publisher in Seattle. Married Vera Rogers (d. 1952), and later Dorothy Goodwin, a teacher.
3. Ella Magnúsdóttir (b. 1905). Married to Gunnlaugur Thorsteinsson, owner of Crystal Water Beach, Point Roberts.

⁵ See Appendix: Family tree #5.

4. Matthildur (b. 1907), graduated as a teacher and taught for a while. Married Edwin Graham, a schoolmaster in Aberdeen, Washington.
5. Kristín (b. 1910), a teacher. Married Erling Ólafsson, schoolmaster in Westport, Washington.
6. Sigrún (b. 1911). Married to Bert McDowell, they managed stores in Juneau and Haines, Alaska. Later she worked as an accountant in the State courthouse in Juneau, Alaska.
7. Margrét (b. 1912). Married Thomas Bingman, a carpenter in Seattle, Washington, whose line of work was bridge construction.

Jóhanna Porsteinsdóttir died in 1918. Eight years later, Magnús married María Porbjörg Þorleifsdóttir, born 1884 at Bollastaðir in Laxárdalur. She had emigrated west in 1907 and to Blaine in 1920. Magnús was a member of the town council 1926–1932 and was one of the founders of the Free Church in Blaine, managing its finances for some time. María died in 1952, and in 1961 Magnús died at Stafholt, Blaine.

Magnús had at least two siblings that emigrated west. Ella (Abigail) Þórðardóttir (1879–1963) married Charles Wesley Wells, a merchant, and later adopted Marian Kristín [see below]. Matthildur Þórðardóttir married Halldór E. Johnson, a priest.

Snjólaug Guðrún Porsteinsdóttir ~ Robert Dennison

Snjólaug was born in 1874 at Jódíasarstaðir in Skriðuhverfi, the daughter of Porsteinn Snorrason and Sigurveig Jóhannesdóttir. Snjólaug emigrated to America on board the *L. Huron*, destined for Winnipeg. She had a son in 1897, Konráð Kristinn Johnson, in Selkirk, Manitoba. In 1913 she was living in Saskatchewan with Robert Dennison, her English husband, not far from her half-brother Halldór Jóhann.



Konráð Kristinn Johnson

Konráð, Snjólaug's son, was adopted by Jörgen Jónsson and Guðný Davíðsdóttir. He studied in Winnipeg before he joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1915. He sailed to Europe in May that same year and fought at Ypres, Belgium, where he suffered concussion due to artillery bombardment. He joined the Royal Air Force and became a lieutenant. He returned to Canada in 1919.

Helgi Porsteinsson ~ Dagbjört Dagbjartsdóttir

Helgi was born 1859 at Höfðabrekka in Mýrdalur, Vestur-Skaftafellssýsla, the son of Þorsteinn Jónsson (1836–1903) and Guðrún Guðbrandsdóttir (1834–1899). In his infancy the family moved to Skammidalur where Helgi grew up. Between the age of 12 and 28, Helgi lived in Vík in Mýrdalur, where he married Dagbjört. She was born 1862, the daughter of Dagbjartur Hafliðason and Gróa Magnúsdóttir, but raised by Gunnlaugur Arnoddsson and Elsa Dórotea Pórðardóttir in Vík, who had a prosperous farm.

Helgi and Dagbjört emigrated west 1887 to Victoria, B.C., via Winnipeg. In 1894 they moved to Point Roberts where they acquired 40 acres of land, and later bought 20 more. The land was covered with dense forest, that Helgi cleared and cultivated, in addition to raising cattle. Dagbjört enthusiastically participated in a reading club; she owned a substantial collection of Icelandic and West-Icelandic literature and had an elegant handwriting. Dagbjört died in the year 1941. Helgi and Dagbjört's children:

1. Gróa (1891–1947), married Kolbeinn Sæmundsson (b. 1888 in Reykjavík), a postman, and later a priest in Seattle.
2. Guðrún (b. 1897), married Pórður Ben Pórðarson, a merchant in Point Roberts.
3. Gunnlaugur (b. 189⁷), owner of Crystal Water Beach, Point Roberts. Married Ella Magnúsdóttir.
4. Jónas Þorsteinn (b. 190⁰) a mechanic in Point Roberts.
5. Elsa, a teacher (b. 1903), married Finis Piper, a chemist in St. Louis.

Sigrún Ásmundsdóttir, Marian Kristín, Ella (Abigael) Pórðardóttir



Sigrún Ásmundsdóttir



Marian Kristín



Ella (Abigael) Pórðardóttir

Sigrún Ásmundsdóttir was born 1893 in Winnipeg, the daughter of Kristín Þorsteinsdóttir and Ásmundur Kristjánsson. Sigrún married Norman Plummer in 1914, an engineer, but their marriage was short-lived. In 1915, a daughter was born, Marian Kristín.

Marian was adopted nine months old by Ella (Abigael) Þórðardóttir, Magnús' sister, and her husband Charles Wesley Wells. She grew up in Blaine, Washington, and in 1937 she wrote an essay about Iceland at the University of Washington. In 1939 she married Morris William Irwin. In 1949 they had a son, Charles Wesley Irwin, in Hamilton, Ontario, who later moved to Marysville, Washington. Sigrún graduated as an M.A. in psychology from the Central Washington College in 1961 and during that summer she visited Iceland.

Ella Magnúsdóttir ~ Gunnlaugur Thorsteinsson

Ella was born 1905 in Blaine, Washington, the daughter of Jóhanna Þorsteinsdóttir and Magnús Þórðarson. Ella had worked in a store and as a secretary in a bank, before 1931, when she married Gunnlaugur Thorsteinsson, born 1907 in Point Roberts, Washington.

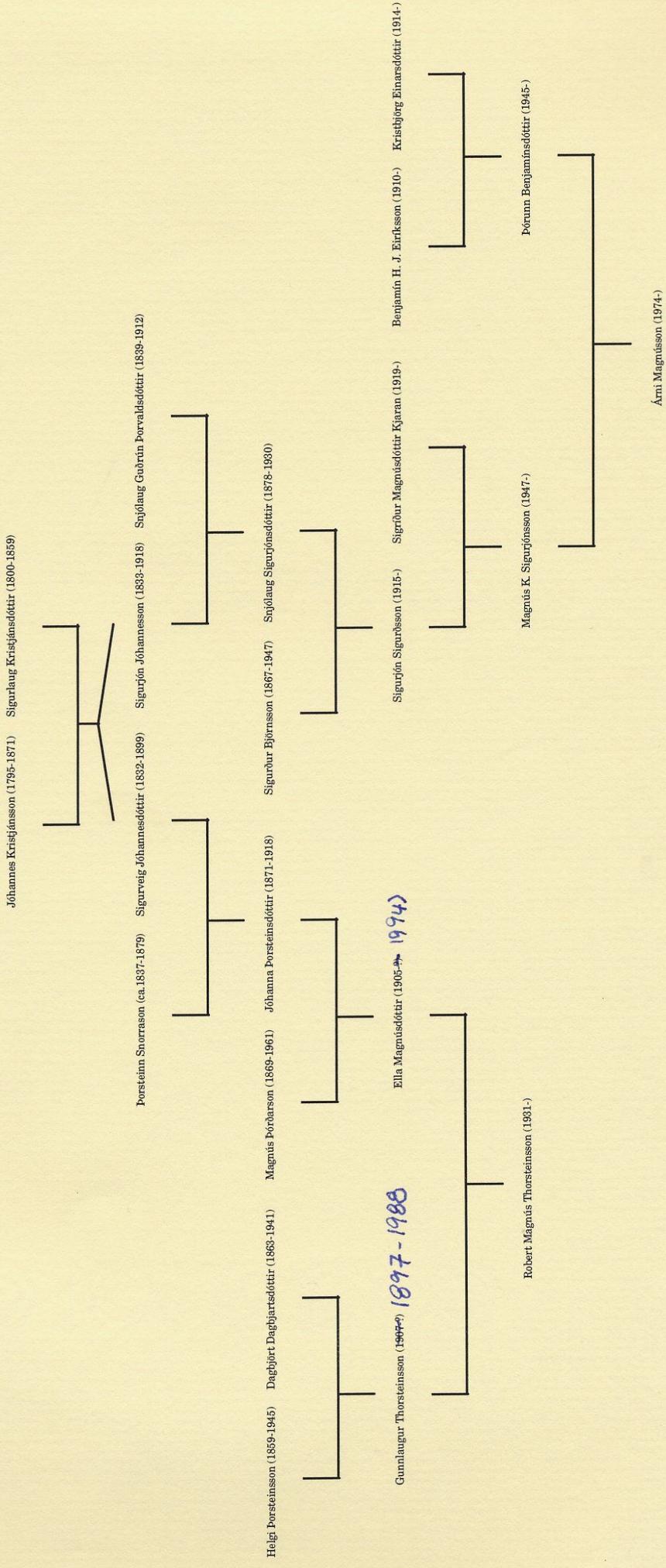
Gunnlaugur finished high school and studied navigation in Seattle, Washington. He was a skipper in the years 1919–1935, and later farmer at Crystal Water Beach, Point Roberts. Occasionally, he angled in Alaska, and in 1963 he visited Iceland. Gunnlaugur and Ella had two children:

1. Robert Magnús, born 1931, a factory manager at Pacific American Fisheries, Bellingham, Washington.
Married Pamella Rae Martens.
 2. Sylvia Dagbjört, born 1931. Married Roy Schonberg, a veterinarian. Their children: Thor Erik (b. 1954), Kristian Karl (b. 1955), Paul William (b. 1956), Laurie Lynn (b. 1958), Julie Ella (b. 1960) and Kurt Robert (b. 1963).
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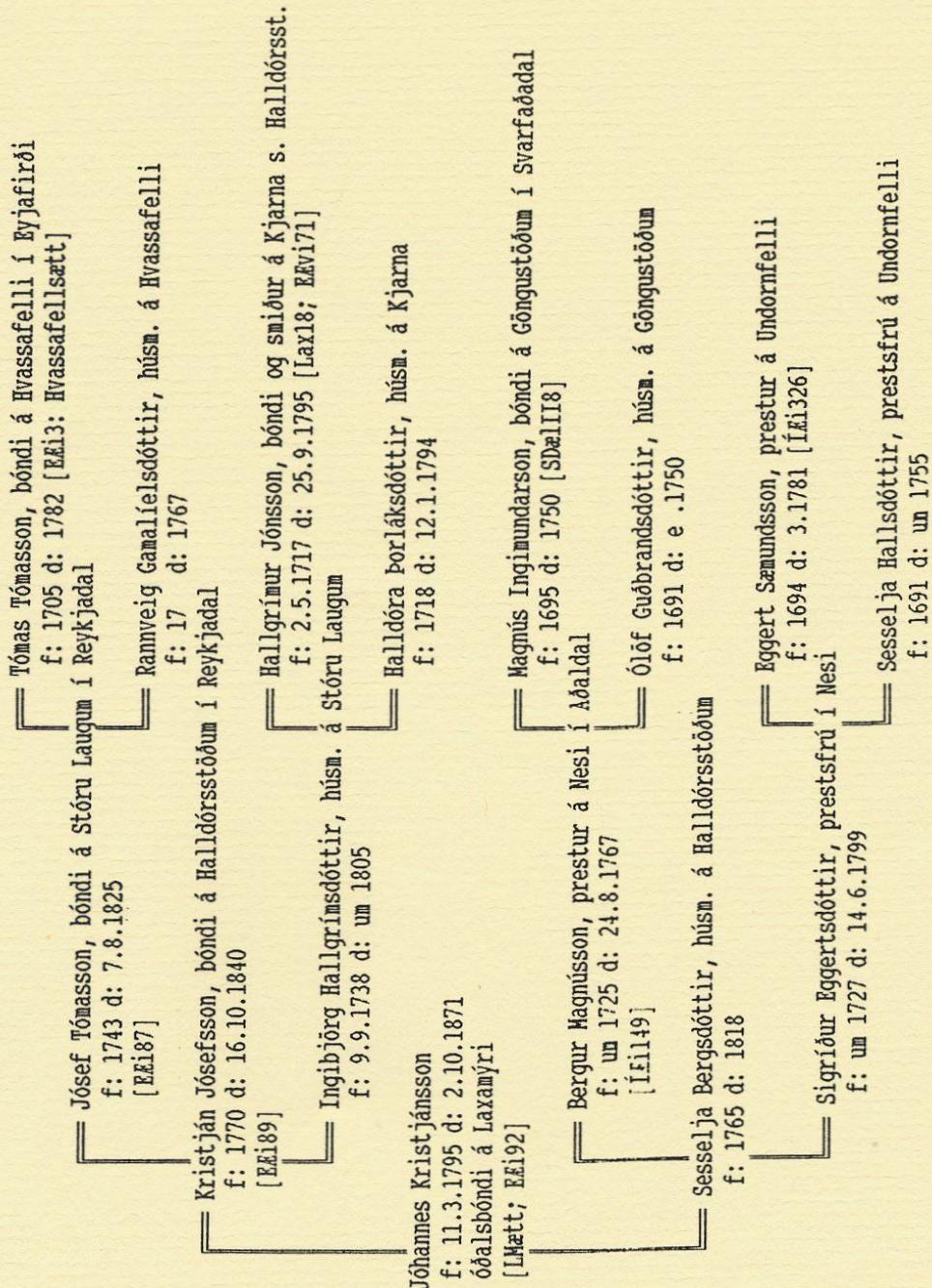
Family tree #1. Our ancestor trees merged



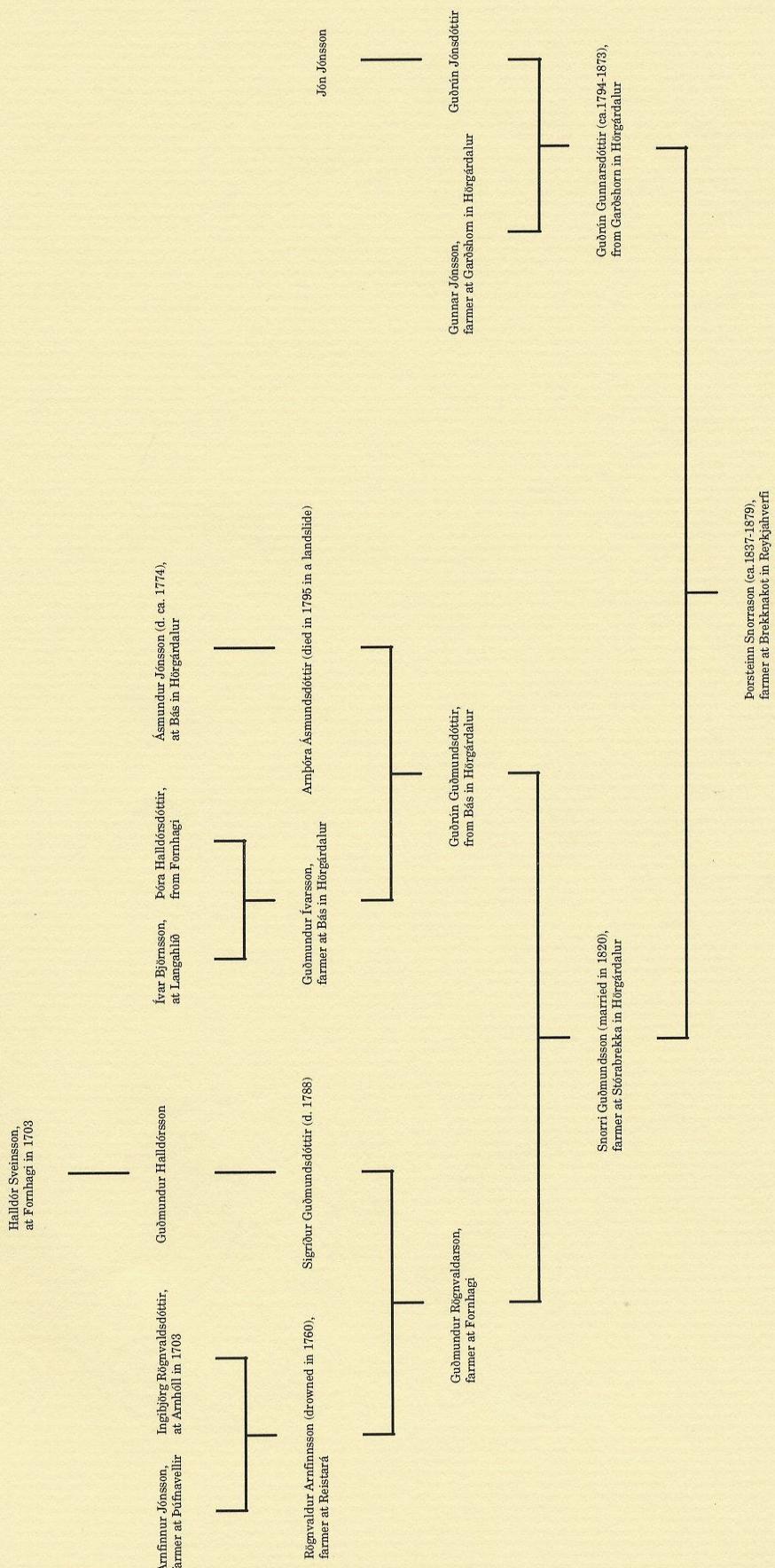
Family tree #2. Laxamýri family traced back to Norse Vikings.

- 0 **Ingólfur Arnarson**, f. um 849, landnámsmaður í Reykjavík, d. um 900 [SRvk30].
- 1 **Þorsteinn Ingólfsson**, f. 9. öld, gekkst fyrstur manna fyrir þinghaldi, d. um 950.
- 2 **Þórhildur Þorsteinsdóttir**, f. 10. öld.
~, f. 1. öld.
- 3 **Ketill Porkelsson**, f. 10. öld.
- 4 **Haukur Ketilsson**, f. 11. öld.
- 5 **Ingveldur Hauksdóttir**, f. 11. öld, húsmóðir á Skarði.
~ **Húnþogi Þorgilsson**, f. 11. öld, bóndi á Skarði.
- 6 **Snorri Húnþogason**, f. 12. öld, lögsögumaður á Skarði, d. 1170.
- 7 **Narfí Snorrason**, f. um 1135, prestur á Skarði, d. 1202 [ÍÆiii486].
- 8 **Snorri Narfason**, f. um 1175, SkarðsSnorri, prestur á Skarði á Skarðsst., d. 13. sept. 1260 [ÍÆiv305].
- 9 **Narfí Snorrason**, f. um 1210, prestur á Skarði; Kolbeinsstöðum Hnapp., d. 1284 [ÍÆiii486].
- 10 **Snorri Narfason**, f. um 1260, lögmaður á Skarði, d. 9. mars 1332.
- 11 **Ormur Snorrason**, f. 14. öld, lögmaður og hirðstjóri á Skarði, Skarðsst., d. 1402.
- 12 **Guðmundur Ormsson**, f. 14. öld, sýslumaður Skarði [-fæ].
- 13 **Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir**, f. 14. öld, húsm. á Höli, d. 3. des. 1431.
~ **Guðni Oddsson**, f. um 1390, lögrm.?? á Höli Bolungarvík, d. 11. des. 1431.
- 14 **Snælaug Guðnadóttir**, f. um 1430, húsmóðir á Urðum.
~ **Eyjólfur Arnfínsson**, f. um 1395, bóndi í Urðum í Svarfaðadal, d. 1475 [ÍÆi448;SDii61].
- 15 **Kristín Eyjólfssdóttir**, f. 15. öld, húsm. á Grýtubakka [Galt55;Garð56,vi66].
~ **Magnús Porkelsson**, f. 1440, sýslumaður á Grýtubakka, Svalbarða ov, d. 1518 [ÍÆiii464].
- 16 **Jón Magnússon**, f. 1480, rfski, lögrm., Svalbarði sifðar Rauðuskriðu, d. 1564 [ÍÆiii216;Lrmt310].
- 17 **Sólveig Jónsdóttir**, f. um 1520, húsmóðir á Svínavatni.
~ **Filippus Þórarinsson**, f. nl. 1500, lögrm. á Svínavatni á Ásum, d. 1548 [Lrmt143].
- 18 **Pétur Filippusson**, f. um 1545, bóndi í Sigluvík á Svalbarðsströnd.
- 19 **Árni Pétursson**, f. 16. öld, bóndi á Svalbarði.
- 20 **Halldór Árnason**, f. 17. öld, bóndi á Hróarsstöðum.
- 21 **Gamal sel Halldórsson**, f. 1657, bóndi á Hróarsstöðum í Fnjóskadal [EÆi319].
- 22 **Rannveig Gamalfelsdóttir**, f. 18. öld, húsm. á Hvassafelli, d. 1767.
~ **Tómas Tómasson**, f. 1705, bóndi á Hvassafelli í Eyjafirði, d. 1782 [EÆi3: Hvassafellsætt].
- 23 **Jósef Tómasson**, f. 1743, bóndi á Stóru Laugum í Reykjadal, d. 7. ág. 1825 [EÆi87].
- 24 **Kristján Jósefsson**, f. 1770, bóndi á Halldórsstöðum í Reykjadal, d. 16. okt. 1840 [EÆi89].
- 25 **Jóhannes Kristjánsson**, f. 11. mars 1795, óðalsbóndi á Laxamýri, d. 2. okt. 1871

Family tree #3. Jóhannes Kristjánsson's ancestors.



Family tree #4. Þorsteinn Snorrason's ancestors.



Family tree #5. Jóhanna Þorsteinsdóttir's parents, siblings and children.

