

Two and 2 1/2 Storey Houses (1905-1925)

As in most rural districts, it was the business entrepreneurs in the Eastern Interlake who were among the first of the early settlers to replace their original log cabins with residences of frame construction. It was this same group who, in later years, could afford to construct themselves somewhat more substantial homes than the average resident.

The majority of these larger homes were constructed during the peak period of the district's economic growth and activity, from about 1905 to 1925. They were usually 2 or 2 1/2 storey frame buildings, constructed from plans purchased in Winnipeg or from available publications. A number of these fine homes have been lost over the years, such as the Sigurdson residence in Hnusa which was destroyed by fire in the 1930s (Figure 32). Approximately ten, however, still survive.

In Gimli, the Tergesen residence has been a landmark in the community since it was constructed almost 75 years ago (Figure 33).



Figure 32

A past landmark in the Hnusa area, "Braedrahofn" (Brother's Haven), was constructed in 1906 by Johannes and Stefan Sigurdson. It had a large turret, bay window, a sundeck and pillars, steam heating and full plumbing. (Provincial Archives Manitoba)



Figure 33

The H.P. Tergeson residence in Gimli, shortly after its construction in 1908. (Provincial Archives Manitoba)



Figure 34

"Bakka" (On The Riverbank), near Riverton, is one of three homes constructed by Odder Olafson from the same set of plans purchased in 1918 from Eaton's Mail Order.

The following description of this house was written in the *Gimli Saga*:

Mr. Tergesen's foresight was also evident when he built the stately and beautiful home on Fourth Avenue in 1908, now occupied by his son Joe, and his wife Lara. It was then considered to be far out in the country, but today is one of the finest residential areas. He had it wired for electricity, which he knew would come eventually: 22 years later he was able to turn on the lights. He also installed steam heat and modern waterworks and plumbing system operated by a windmill. The ceiling of the living room and walls of the den were decoratively handpainted by an artist friend, Snaebjorn Palsson, whose work in the den remains clear and beautiful after nearly 70 years. (*Gimli Saga, 1975, p. 751*)

There are also several large, interesting residences in the Riverton area. Three of these were constructed from the same set of plans by Odder Olafson, a local carpenter, who obtained them from Eaton's Mail Order Service for \$10.00. The most interesting and original of these homes, known locally by its Icelandic name "Bakka", is located on the banks of the Icelandic River about a kilometre south of the community (Figure 34). An impressive 2 1/2 storey building, it features a twin-gabled roof with a large shed-roofed dormer, and a large multi-columned verandah. The decorative features of the house include a bay window with stained glass transoms and eave brackets

One of the most interesting of all the Icelandic residences in the planning district is located about five kilometres southwest of Riverton, also along the banks of the Icelandic River (Figure 35 and 36).

Known as "Vindheimar" (The Windy Home), this two storey frame structure was originally constructed in 1914 for Halli Bjornson who was involved in the fishing and freighting business on Lake Winnipeg. A landmark in the region for many years, the house boasted five bedrooms, two staircases, and a large 5000 x 8000 mm (15' x 26') kitchen. The floor plan for this house closely resembles that of the more modest gable-with-shed type of residence (Figure 37).

Although the second storey wing of the Bjornson house occupies what would typically be the position of a shanty, the interior layout is quite similar and even includes the 1000 mm (3') projection on the right hand side for a doorway.

Vindheimar was well known for its Icelandic decorative elements. Stylized wooden dragon heads, like those on early Viking ships, and bargeboards cut in the shape of cresting waves decorated all the gable ends (Figure 38). Of greater interest were the seven hand-painted frescoes which adorned the dining room walls (Figure 39). They were painted directly onto the thick plaster coated walls by an unknown Icelandic artist soon after completion of the house.



Figure 35
'Vindheimar' (The Windy Home), SW 7-23-4E. This photograph shows the large house as it appeared in 1935. (T. Bjornson Photo.)



Figure 36
'Vindheimer' as it appears today.

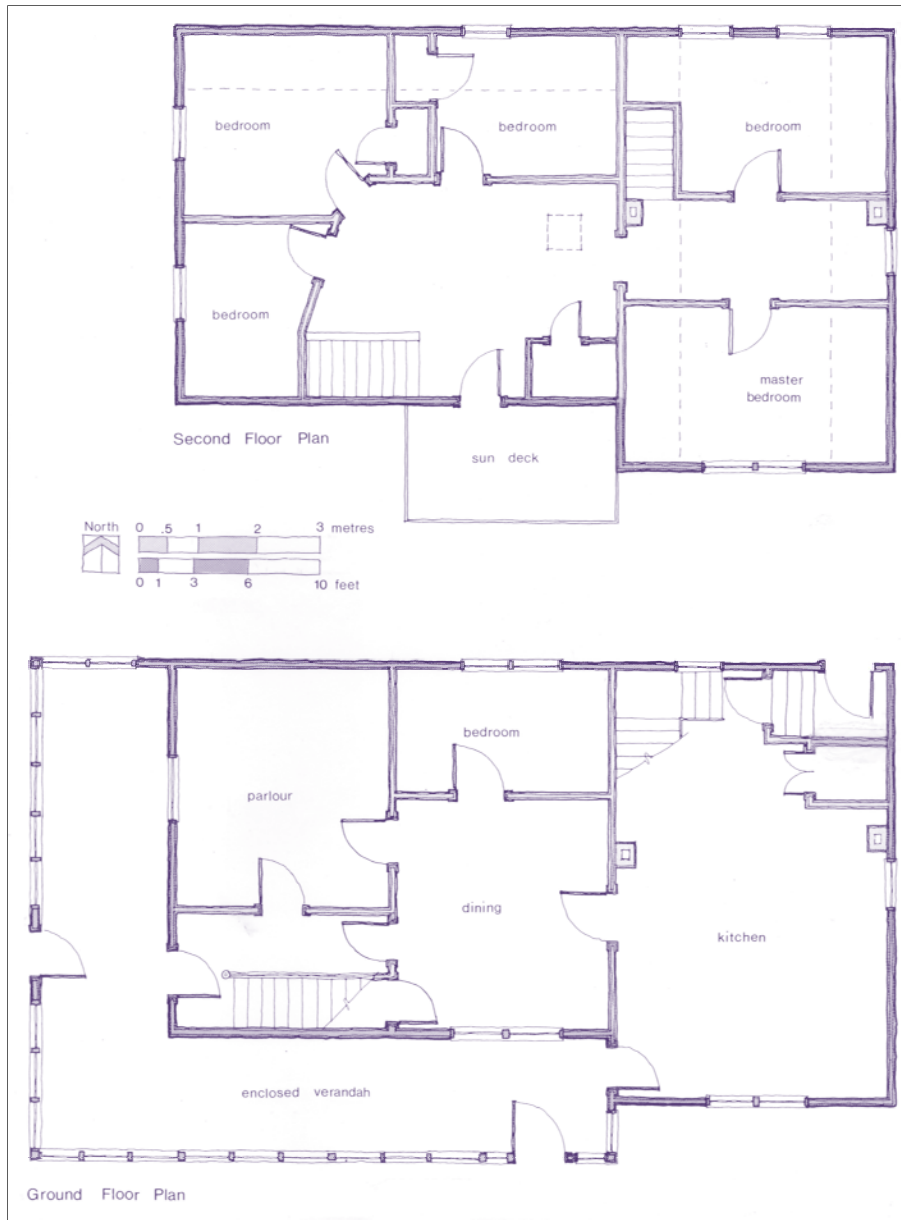


Figure 37
 'Vindheimer' floor plans.

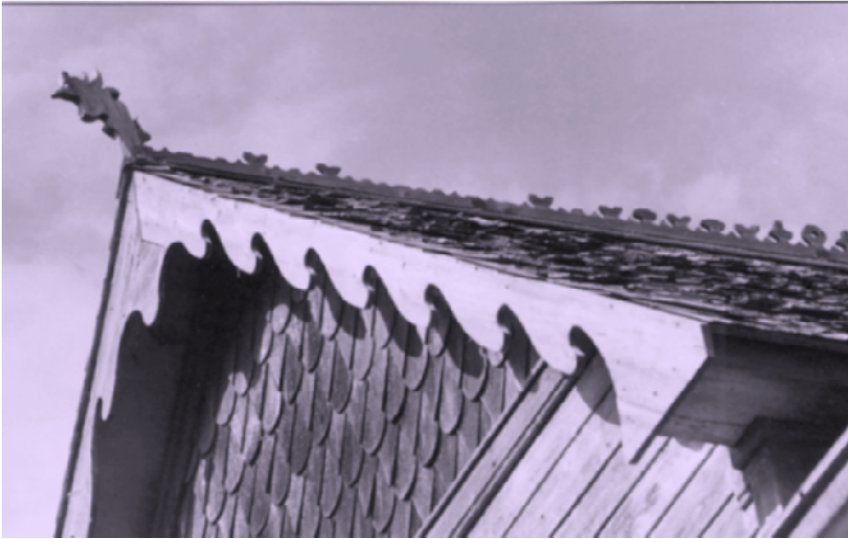


Figure 38
'Vindheimer.' Icelandic decorative elements.

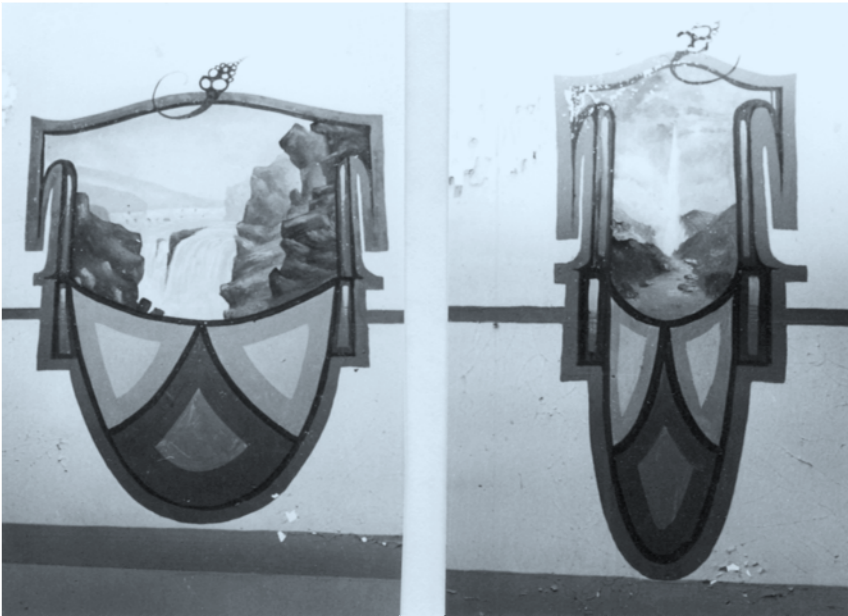


Figure 39
'Vindheimer.' Two of the handpainted frescoes that adorn the dining room walls.