



Nordic News

240 Sparks Street, PO Box 55023, Ottawa, ON K1P 1A1



*New Year's Eve in Reykjavik - Gleðilegt nýtt ár!
Also, Onnellista uutta vuotta, Godt nytt år and Godt nytår!*

Iceland's New Ambassador to Canada, Pétur Ásgeirsson

The Canadian Nordic Society welcomes to Canada Iceland's new Ambassador Designate, Pétur Ásgeirsson. Ambassador Ásgeirsson presented his credentials to the Right Honourable Julie Payette, Governor General of Canada, on November 20. Ambassador Ásgeirsson joined Iceland's civil service in 1994, first in the Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture, and then, in 1999, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he served most recently as Consul General for Nuuk, Greenland. His educational background includes the study of law and philosophy at the University of Iceland. He graduated as an economist from the University of Sterling, Scotland. Before beginning his career in the Icelandic government, he worked at the Central Bank of Iceland, TOK Computer Services, and at Apple Computer Iceland as Head of Educational Services.

Ambassador Ásgeirsson has been very active on numerous boards and committees over the years, with a heavy emphasis on the arts, computers, and education. He and his wife, lawyer Jóhanna Gunnarsdóttir, have two sons. We are looking forward to meeting the Ambassador and his wife at our Finland 100 Gala Dinner Celebration on January 25th.



Ambassador designate Pétur Ásgeirsson presented his credentials to the Right Honourable Julie Payette, Governor General of Canada at a ceremony at Rideau Hall on Monday 20 November.

Note: If you would like to attend the Finland 100 Dinner Celebration, we do still have a small number of seats available. It will be held on Thursday, January 25 at Les Jardins de la Cité Restaurant, 801 Aviation Parkway. 6:00 PM for cocktails, 7:00 PM dinner. Tickets \$95. Please contact CNS councillor Hanne Sjøborg at marketing@canadiannordicsociety.com

The Nordic Twelve Days of Christmas

I was seated beside CNS President Karin Birnbaum at the CNS Christmas Luncheon, and we chatted a little in Norwegian. This was a bit of a struggle for me as I had spent most of the previous day with my Franco-Ontarian choir friends speaking French, and it takes me a little while to “switch gears.” She asked me where I would be spending Christmas and I told her I would be in Toronto this year, awaiting the arrival of my second grandchild, a boy, who was due on Christmas Day. I was trying to express to her in Norwegian that he was due on Christmas Day itself, and she replied “Altså første jule dag?” - in other words, so the first day of Christmas? And of course she was right. I’m just not used to thinking of it as the first of the 12 days of Christmas. Like many English-speaking Canadians I suppose, I just think of it as Christmas Day, which is the day after my

Norwegian family actually celebrates Christmas. Then we get a few days of Boxing Day sales, finishing up with New Year's Eve parties and the New Year's Day statutory holiday.

Many of us are familiar with the concept of the 12 days only because of the traditional carol of that name. But the 12 days of Christmas are still very significant in many cultures, including the Nordic ones, where the traditions around them evolved as a real mix of Christian teachings and ancient pagan lore.

Early in the 3rd century, the theologian Hippolytus of Rome wrote that Christ was born on December 25. This date was based on the premise that he was conceived on the date of the spring equinox. Many Christian churches, including the Lutheran Church (historically the religion of the Nordic countries since about the 16th century) celebrate "Christmastide", the period between the birth of Christ and the day before he was revealed as divine by the visit of the Magi on Epiphany, which is January 6. So the days from December 25 up to and including January 5 ("Twelfth Night") are part of Christmastide - the Twelve Days of Christmas.

Following the Lutheran tradition, the Nordic countries recognize the 2nd day of Christmas as St. Stephen's Day (not Boxing Day). St. Stephen is honoured as the first Christian martyr. While not statutory holidays, the 3rd and 4th day of Christmas are recognized respectively as the Feast of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist, and the Holy Innocents Day, commemorating the massacre ordered by Herod the Great of the young male children around Bethlehem. The Feast of the Circumcision and Naming of Christ is the 8th day of Christmas, based on the Jewish tradition of circumcising infant boys on the 8th day after their birth. This turns out to be January 1, New Year's Day, and is still retained as the Feast of the Circumcision by the Lutheran Church.

But at least in Norway, there is one more day of Christmas - "Trettende dag jul" (the 13th day of Christmas), which is the official day for "harvesting" the Christmas tree. Traditionally it is on this day that the family takes down the tree and the children collect the raisins and nuts that were placed in the heart-shaped woven baskets. CNS council member Hanne Sjøborg tells me that after all her years in Canada, she still finds herself reluctant to take down the tree before that day.



Despite the strong Christian tradition around the twelve days of Christmas, the way Nordics (and many others) celebrate the period is still connected to the old pagan ways of marking the seasons, known as “Yuletide” in English, and “Juletid” in Norwegian. Yule was a midwinter festival among the Norse that lasted for a few weeks around the time of the winter solstice. According to the Saga of Håkon the Good, Håkon had a law passed establishing that Yule celebrations were to take place at the same time as the Christians celebrated Christmas, "and at that time everyone was to have ale for the celebration with a measure of grain, or else pay fines, and had to keep the holiday while the ale lasted." The narrative continues that toasts were to be drunk. The first toast was to be drunk to Odin "for victory and power to the king", the second to the gods Njörðr and Freyr "for good harvests and for peace", and thirdly a beaker was to be drunk to the king himself. The Hervarar Saga refers to the tradition of swearing oaths on Yule Eve by laying hands on the bristles of a boar, who was then sacrificed. This is thought to be the origin of the custom among some Nordics of eating ham or pork on Christmas Eve, as well as the custom of eating cakes or marzipan in the shape of pigs.



In ancient Scandinavia as well as in many other cultures, there was a concept known as the “Wild Hunt,” a ghostly procession of the dead across the night sky during the winter solstice season. In Nordic cultures it was associated with the god Odin, who has a particular connection with the Yule season. He was called the “Yule father” and is depicted with a long beard, and wearing a cloak and a broad hat. In many regions, when Odin's hunt was heard it was a sign that the weather was about to change, but it could also mean a period of war and unrest was on its way. On the Wild Hunt, Odin was often depicted riding an 8-legged horse named Sleipnir, and accompanied by two wolves. So here we have an image of a man with a long beard and a large hat riding through the air with several animals. Many scholars have argued that Santa and his sleigh are connected to the Wild Hunt.

The Yule goat is another Nordic Yule tradition, with modern representations of the Yule goat typically made of straw. During the 19th century the Yule goat's role all over Scandinavia shifted towards becoming the giver of Christmas gifts. The goat was then replaced by the jultomte or julenisse during the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century, but is still called the Joulupukki (Yule goat) in Finland.

The long, cold, dark nights of the Yuletide season seemed to connect the harvest of the past summer with hopes for a good harvest in the coming year. The last sheaf of grain bundled in the harvest was credited with magical properties as the “spirit of the harvest” and saved for the Yule celebrations. In Norway and Sweden, it is still the custom to put out a sheaf of oats for the birds on Christmas Eve.



(In case you're wondering, my new grandson wisely chose to be born three days before Christmas, on December 22, thus ensuring the proper celebration of his birthday before all the Yuletide commotion begins.)

Distinguished Speaker Series: Andrea Baston on January 17

We recently stumbled across a new book called "Exile Air: World War II's "Little Norway" in Toronto and Muskoka" by Andrea Baston. Our Vice-President, Trygve John Ringereide, contacted Andrea (pictured below) to find out more about her book, and ended up inviting her to speak in our Distinguished Speaker Series. She will be speaking on Wednesday, **January 17** at 7:30 PM at the Army Officers' Mess, 149 Somerset Street West. Andrea will be bringing copies of her book to sign after her talk. The cost of the book is \$30, including tax (cash or cheque only). Members free admission, non-members \$5. All welcome.



Annual Winter Celebration

The annual winter celebration is back on **January 27** from 12:30 PM to 4:00 PM with the new Governor General, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Julie Payette, hosting for the first time. The Danish Ambassador and Embassy staff will once again be at Rideau Hall to read to the children from the enchanting fairy-tales of Hans Christian Andersen, and you can be sure the other Nordic embassies will be represented as well!

Contributions to Nordic News

We appreciate receiving your articles and news to include in the *Nordic News*! Please email them to the editor, Hilde Huus, at communications@nordicsociety.com

Canadian Nordic Society Co-ordinates

Our website is www.canadiannordicsociety.com, and you can contact us by email at info@canadiannordicsociety.com.

The CNS council list, including email addresses and phone numbers, is available at: <http://www.canadiannordicsociety.com/council.html>

And the CNS has its own, very active, [Facebook](#) page.

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You can join CNS or renew your membership online, by mail, or in person. We encourage you to pay online using PayPal. This is the quickest and most efficient method.

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To pay online, go to the CNS website (<http://www.canadiannordicsociety.com/join-cns.html>) and complete the membership form . Payment may be made through PayPal.

Note: it is not necessary to have a PayPal account.

By mail

Please print and complete the membership form below, enclose a cheque payable to the Canadian Nordic Society and mail to:

Canadian Nordic Society
240 Sparks Street
Box 55023
Ottawa, ON
K1P 1A1

In person

You can pay in person when you attend one of our luncheons or speaker events. Please speak to any one of our Council members.



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240 Sparks Street, PO Box 55023, Ottawa, ON K1P 1A1
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