

BUT TIME HASTENED AWAY ...

Exhibition to mark the eightieth anniversary of the death of writer and parliamentarian Guðrún Lárusdóttir
Opening on May 9th 2018

National and University Library of Iceland

Guðrún Lárusdóttir was born at Valþjófsstaður in the East of Iceland on January 8th 1880. Her parents were Kirstín née Guðjohnsen and the Rev. Lárus Halldórsson. She was the third of their seven children and the eldest of four that reached adulthood. Guðrún grew up in Eskifjörður and then Reyðarfjörður. The family moved to Reykjavík in 1899. The children received a home education with their parents in academic subjects and music.



In 1902 Guðrún married theologian Sigurbjörn Ástvaldur Gíslason. They had ten children, three of whom died in infancy. Two daughters, Guðrún Valgerður and Sigrún Kristín, were drowned with their mother in the river Tungufljót on August 20th 1938. The five children who survived their mother were Lárus, Halldór Ástvaldur, Gísli Sigurbjörn, Friðrik Baldur and Kirstín Lára.

In late 1906 the family moved into a house they had built and named Ás after Sigurbjörn's childhood home, Neðri-Ás in Hjaltadalur in Skagafjörður. The house is situated at 23 Sólvallagata in Reykjavík. Earlier, Guðrún's parents had built the house at 25 Sólvallagata which they called Hof after the childhood home of the Rev. Lárus in Vopnafjörður. The household at Ás was large and hospitable.

Guðrún died in a car accident on August 20th 1938 only 58 years of age. A car in which she was a passenger crashed into the river Tungufljót, and she was drowned - together with her two youngest daughters.

Writer And Translator

Guðrún was young when she started writing. At the age of 15 she started the periodical Minerva, a handwritten leaflet.

At the age of twenty she had translated from the Danish *The Prophecies of Jesus* by J. G. Matteson and the following year her translation from the English of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe was published. She was constantly writing - novels for young readers and adults, short stories for children - she made translations and wrote articles for newspapers and magazines. Some of her books were translated into other languages, such as Faroese and Danish.

Guðrún wrote twelve novels, seven of which were first published in book form, the others as newspaper serials. Her collected works were published in 1949, edited by her son Lárus Sigurbjörnsson.

Á heimleið (Going Home), probably her best-known book, was dramatised by her son Lárus in 1939, and it was staged by the Reykjavík Theatre Company in 1940.



Upper row from left.: Halldór Ástvaldur (1905-1983), Gísli Sigurbjörn (1907-1994), Kirstín Pjetursdóttir Guðjohnsen, mother of Guðrún (1850-1940), Friðrik Baldur (1911-1988), Lárus (1903-1974). Lower row: Kirstín Lára (1913-2005), Guðrún Lárusdóttir (1880-1938), Sigrún Kristín (1921-1938), Sigurbjörn Ástvaldur Gíslason (1876-1969) and Guðrún Valgerður (1915-1938).

The Public Figure

Although Guðrún was active in many fields her main concerns were religious and humanitarian issues.

Together with her family she joined the temperance league on moving to Reykjavík. She joined the women's league Hvítabandið in 1902 and was a board member from 1906 to 1910.

The Women's Missionary Society was founded in her house in 1904. She was its president from 1926. She was on the board of YWCA from 1928 onwards and the president of the Reykjavík Housewives' Association from 1935 to the end of her life.

Guðrún´s husband, Sigurbjörn Ástvaldur Gíslason, helped to establish the Grund retirement home. Guðrún´s name is often mentioned in connection with this work – at parties held for the elderly she would give talks or read from her works.

Town Councillor And Member Of Parliament



Guðrún Lárusdóttir was varied interests and was very active. She was elected town councillor in 1912 from the women's list and served as such until 1918. She was a member of the social assistance committee and the education committee, work on both committees being very time-consuming. Guðrún was in charge of social assistance in Reykjavík from 1918-1921 and again from 1930 to the day of her death.

Guðrún was elected member of Parliament in 1930. She was always a member of the Upper House, for eleven sessions in all.

It was noted that Guðrún published her own manifesto in an address to voters in May 1930, before the parliamentary elections. There Guðrún enumerated the issues that she intended to advocate if she was elected:

Christianity, which she considered of paramount importance.

Social security law, which she felt had to be thoroughly revised.

Electricity and the need to bring electric light to the countryside as well as towns, not least for the purpose of alleviating the hard work of housewives.

Customs and tariffs; import duties on necessities should be lifted.

Women's rights, which indirectly are on the agenda of Parliament, session after session.

She also mentioned issues concerning alcohol consumption and deplored the end of Prohibition in the country.

In Parliament she was an advocate for the matters that had always concerned her, that is humanitarian issues of various kinds. Among these can be mentioned an institute for the mentally deficient, pedagogical establishments for difficult children and a sanatorium for alcoholics. She was also an advocate for the improved education of housewives and women in general.

Guðrún was a discerning judge of people and affairs and an excellent public speaker. Although modest and unassuming and willing to cooperate with others, she always spoke up for her own point of view with dedication and determination.

FULLVELDI ÍSLANDS

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Author of exhibition and text: Málfríður Finnbogadóttir.
Translation: Steinunn Einarsdóttir.
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