

# WONDERS

SEEKING THE TRUTH IN A UNIVERSE OF MYSTERIES

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## THE VIKINGS IN THE NEW WORLD

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## & THE KENSINGTON RUNESTONE

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# WONDERS

**SEEKING THE TRUTH IN A UNIVERSE OF MYSTERIES**

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**EDITORIAL**

## **Day and Night**

**The pursuit of the enigma of Vinland has been a happy experience. One encounters a feeling of kinship when consulting all the various writers who have chased the same problem over a period of centuries. Each is giving his advice on how to arrange the pieces of the puzzle. Each has arrived at his own solution, and one can see why they have done so. The result of this mix of viewpoints is that we seem to be getting closer to understanding a difficult and fascinating period of history. It is known to us only by bits and pieces of written records, lengthy sagas subject to various readings, old and usually inaccurate maps, and the silent testimony of archaeological finds. Behind it all there is only one genuine series of occurrences — one history — to be revealed if we try hard enough.**

**The pursuit of the story of the Kensington Runestone has been a different experience, more like a journey by night compared to the day travel of the Vinland problem. The bitterness of the assaults upon the stone in the twentieth century has not been uplifting. One critic of the stone writing in the post-World War II period implied that a German supporter of the stone sounded like a Nazi. What place does such rancor have in an academic dialogue? Supporters of the stone find their competence questioned. Yet they are the ones willing to admit their mistakes along the way, while the critics decline to take their medicine. As Sivert N. Hagen noted in 1950 about Hjalmar Holand, "as far as I know, he is the only one of the parties to the controversy who has ever admitted making any mistakes."**

**The Kensington Runestone has one extraordinary quality that helps to fuel the furor over it. For one hundred years it has stood as rock-solid proof of visits deep into North America long before Christopher Columbus.**

# THE VIKINGS IN THE NEW WORLD

by Mark A. Hall

"Where was Vinland?" is a question that has been pondered for centuries. So much scholarship and time have been applied to this question that it would be passing strange if someone had not already — among the many proposed solutions — hit the answer squarely on the head. It is with great pleasure that I can tell you that I am not going to propose still another solution to the Vinland question. Instead I can recommend and support a solution offered some 80 years ago. Following a discussion of Norse views of American geography including Vinland I will look at some of the artifacts alleged to be associated with the 500 years of Viking experience in the New World. A second article following this one will discuss the history of the Kensington Runestone and its 14<sup>th</sup> century inscription telling of a Viking incursion into the land that would become Minnesota in the USA.

## THE LOCATIONS OF VINLAND

Many proposals have placed Vinland in New England. This is a delightful part of North America with a beautiful landscape and a friendly climate. I am sure that if the Vikings had reached New England easily and had found it uninhabited they would have moved right in. Neither seems to have been the case. When we study the voyages of the Vikings as known from their sagas it seems strange that they would have passed up such lands as Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Maine (saying nothing about them) and gone all the way to Massachusetts or Rhode Island to attempt permanent settlements. And I don't think they did. References in the Viking sagas that some have found to indicate this latitude for Vinland are not precise and conclusive.

The current popular notion has the Vikings reaching the tip of northern Newfoundland and calling it Vinland. But this view might be too cautious and even based on misinterpreting archaeological finds in that area.

There is one proposal that makes sense of the sagas while neither overreaching into North America nor understating the lands reached by the explorers. The basis for this view was published in 1918 and written by a John Hopkins University professor. The work is *The Norse Discovery of America* by Andrew Fossum.

Andrew Fossum starts with the geography of the New World as understood by the Norse and interprets the sagas to show voyages to Vinland as taking place around Newfoundland and the estuary of the St. Lawrence River. Such visits are the next logical steps after the Vikings had visited the stark lands of Baffin Island and Labrador. Let us take Fossum's lead and begin with the Norse views of North Atlantic geography.

## THE NORSE VIEW OF THE NEW WORLD

Modern maps of the world do not give us the perspective that the Scandinavian peoples had one thousand years ago as they traveled the North Atlantic Ocean. To better illustrate their view see Figure 1 for a map of the lands they encountered as they traveled west.

From mainland Europe to islands off the coast they sailed on to Iceland and to Greenland. They found the Irish had preceded them in Iceland when the Norse began to colonize the island in AD 874. Exiled from Iceland for three years Erik the Red traveled westward and explored Greenland and beyond in the years 982 to 985. Some of the old house foundations still detectable in Western Greenland appear to be of Irish origin. (The foundations are detailed by Farley Mowat in *Westviking*.) They give support to the view that traces of habitation Erik found in Greenland were left by the Irish who had moved on.

In 983 he sailed west from Greenland and came to the lands called Vestri Obygd. (These words have been translated as Western Wilds or Western Uninhabited Lands.) Of this country Fossum writes:

My opinion is that Vestri Obygd means Baffin Land. The second summer that Erik the Red was in Greenland he sailed westward and came to Baffin Land. He remained there a long time and gave names to places far and wide. As he had sailed west from Iceland the summer before, he now sailed westward from Greenland to learn whether there were other lands in the neighborhood. The course to Vestri Obygd lay from the West Bygd [Western Settlement]. The distance is about 200 miles and could easily be made in two days in good summer weather. [1]

The Western Wilds were thought by the Greenlanders to be part of Greenland. There was a long-standing belief that lands in the north were all connected in the polar region. The arctic ice prevented this belief from being easily dispelled.

Fossum again notes:

Baffin Land seems somewhat elusive because it has so many names. Bjorn [Jonsson] calls it Vestur Graenlands obygd, Vetus Chorographia calls it Karlbuda, [the geography] Gripla [calls it] Furdustrandir, and the old sagas [call it] Vestry Obygd. [2]

"Furdustrandir" is not a name but simply means "the dangerous strands," as Fossum points out. [3] The mention of Karlbuda (Karl's Booth) is given by Fridtjof Nansen. [4] Farley Mowat in *Westviking* goes over the passage line by line explaining how this is a reference to Baffin Island. Mowat in his work is also identifying the Western Wilds with Baffin Island. [5]

In 986 Erik sailed again to Greenland from Iceland, taking colonists with him. They established farms in the Eastern Settlement just north of Cape Farewell and further north at the Western Settlement near the present-day Godthaab. To the north



**Fig. 1. Voyages across the North Atlantic approached the New World with this perspective. The Vikings first encountered Iceland, then Greenland, and then Baffin Island (known as the Western Wilds).**

the country was known as the Northern Outposts (Nordurseta).

Fossum employs the proper identity of the Western Wilds to help identify the other lands visited by the Greenlanders. "Helluland" is the northern coast of Labrador and "Markland" is the southern coast of Labrador (see Figure 2).

As Fossum observes, "While the Icelandic geographers say that there is a short distance, meaning a narrow sea, between Markland and Vinland, they never mention a sea between Helluland and Markland." [6]

## VISITING VINLAND

Fossum traces the journey of Leif Ericson in AD 1001 around the coast of Labrador and past Anticosti Island. A landfall in Vinland was made on the south shore of the St. Lawrence, either on the Gaspé Peninsula or further west along the St. Lawrence estuary. This coast did not offer the usual and preferred anchorage in a fjord. So Leif sailed up a river into a lake. "Booths" were built. His foster father, "The Turk," went inland and returned with the discovery of grapes. They had reached the northern edge of the geographic range of wild grapes. In the past they grew further north than they do today. From their presence the name "Vinland" was given to this territory.

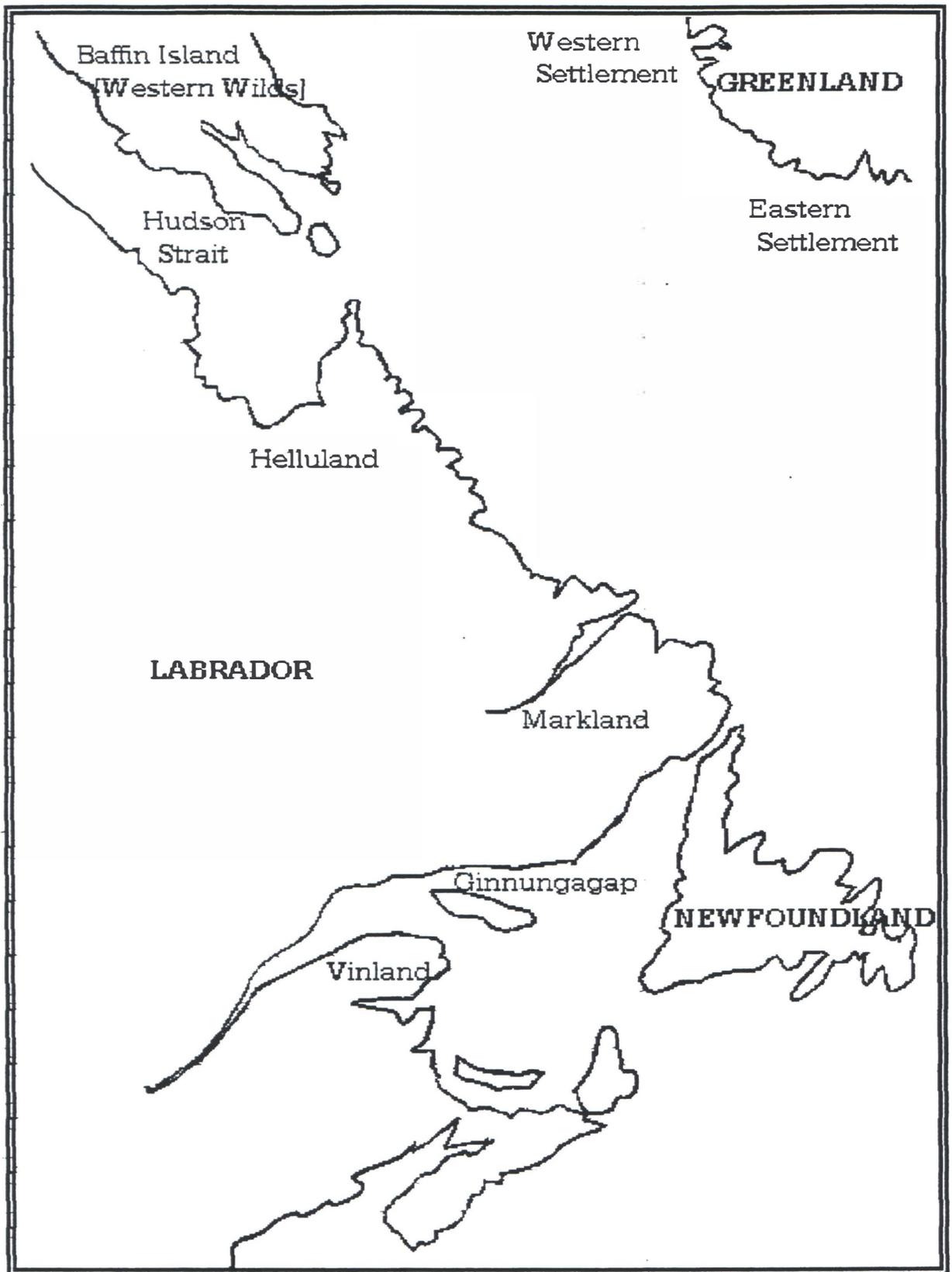
While journeying in the years 1011 to 1013 Thorfinn Karlsefni also found grapes. He visited Newfoundland thinking he was landing on the same Vinland as Leif Ericson. He sent two runners to the south (probably runners who were, in fact, trolls [7]), and they returned with grapes. Karlsefni journeyed south but did not find grapes again. Farley Mowat explains in *Westviking* how in southernmost Newfoundland grapes were found into the eighteenth century. [8] Wild grapevines are not found there today.

In the wake of Leif Ericson others visited his Vinland and used his booths. His brother Thorvald Ericson is thought to have made the journey in the years 1004 to 1006. From the location of Leif's booths Thorvald sent men west by boat one summer to explore the region. As Fossum relates:

They thought the land was fair and well wooded, and it was not far between the forests and the sea and there were long stretches of white sand. There were many islands and it was very shallow. They saw no traces of men or of deer, except that on one of the western islands they found a garnished of timber. Without finding any other signs of people they returned to Leif's booths in the fall. [9]

Fossum thinks "the saga here enumerates six points which tally exactly with the conditions on the south banks of the St. Lawrence river." Perhaps the most significant are the wide and shallow beaches washed at high tide (Fossum: "The natives told me that the incoming tide in places rushes in with such a fury that a horse can barely escape.") and the islands that Fossum points out "begin to appear at Rimouski and become more numerous as one approaches Quebec."

Thorvald sails eastward and is wrecked upon Newfoundland by a storm. The ship is repaired and the old keel is raised upon Cape Norman (thereafter known to the Norse as Kjalarnes), which is land's end in northern Newfoundland. The keel was seen



**Fig. 2. The Greenland colonies of the Norse (known as the Eastern and Western Settlements) were the launch points for many hunting and exploring activities. The colonies were successful for hundreds of years.**

by future travelers.

Thorvald passed on to the east coast of Newfoundland where some natives were encountered. The Vikings killed several of them. The natives counter-attacked in great numbers, firing arrows at the intruders. Thorvald was struck by an arrow and later died. At his request he was buried on a wooded cape that he particularly admired.

The rest of Thorvald's party returned to Greenland to tell the story of their experiences in Vinland.

Fossum describes the next journey to Vinland, the one mentioned above made by Thorfinn Karlsefni. Sailing down the coast of Markland (presumably in the year 1011) he crossed over to Newfoundland and sailed past Cape Norman, observing Thorvald's old keel. At this time he dispatched two runners, who returned with an ear of wheat and grapes. He sailed down the east coast of Newfoundland. Along this coast are the regions he named Straumfjord and Hop where the Karlsefni party hunted and lived.

One of their number, Thorhal Veideman, pleaded that they had missed the Vinland of Leif Ericson. He took one ship with nine men and sailed north and west into the Strait of Belle Isle intending to find Leif's Vinland. At that point a storm blew his ship eastward. His ship was blown all the way to Ireland, where merchants later reported that he died. [10]

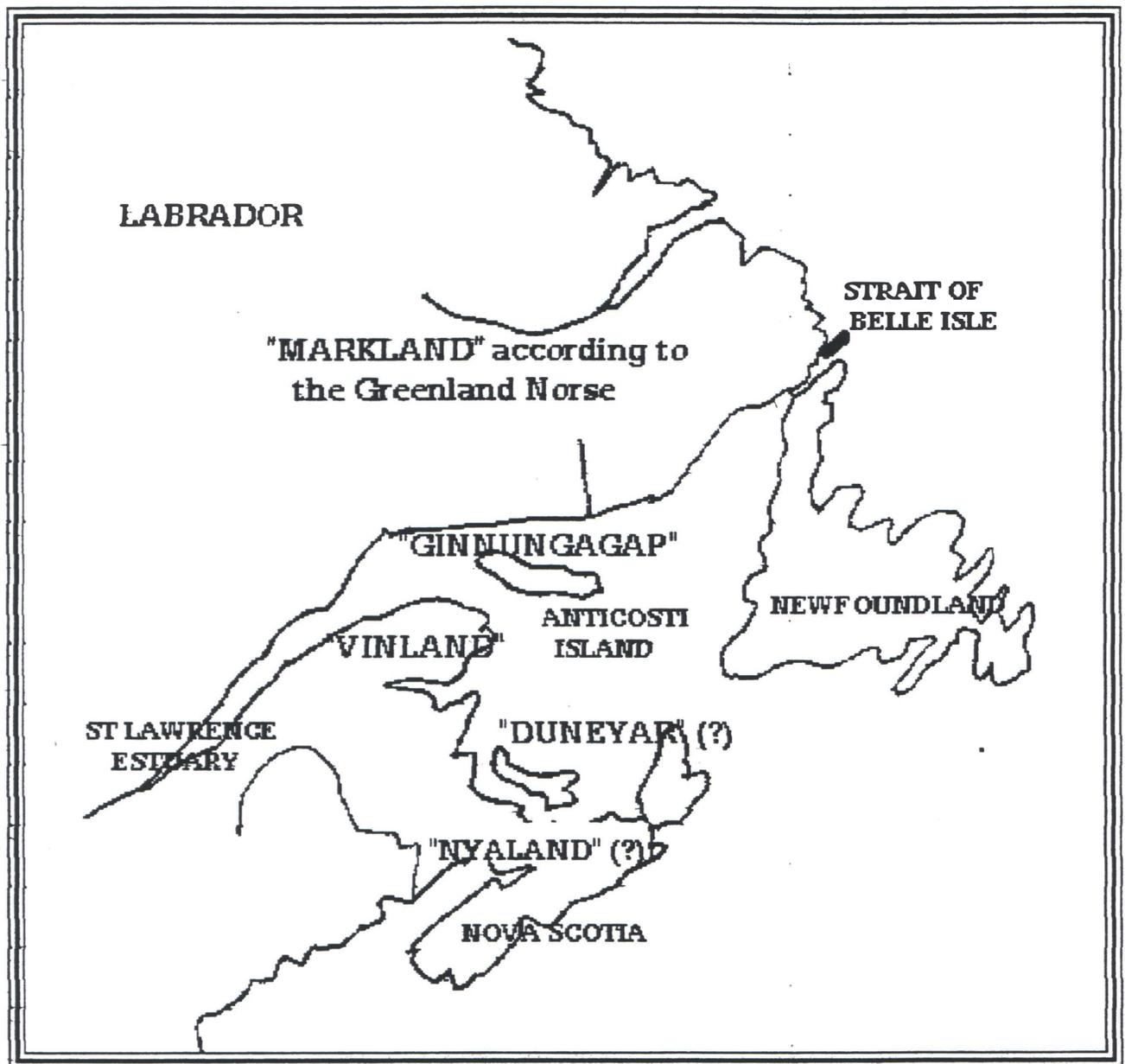
Thorfinn Karlsefni went looking for Thorhal, and so he sailed north around the top of Newfoundland and then down the western coast of the island. There he observed that he was seeing the same mountains that he had seen from the eastern coast. He then returned to the eastern side of the island. There the initial contacts with the American Indians went well. But relations then turned sour, and a battle between the Vikings and the natives left many natives dead and two Norsemen also. The party then returned to Greenland having realized the natives would be a constant nuisance.

When summing up the Karlsefni voyage Fossum writes:

I shall only call attention to the fact that we have in this saga the description of a real land, which we identify as Newfoundland. The northernmost point ends in Kjalarnes, the Atlantic coast trends eastward and west coast line runs north and south. Fish and game abandon the northern part in the fall and remain in the southern part all winter as they did at Straumfjord and Hop. It is plain that the one who has told the story of this saga has had some knowledge of the conditions in Newfoundland.  
[11]

The last voyage to Vinland related in the sagas was led by Freydis, a daughter of Erik the Red, and by two brothers, Helge and Finbolge. It is thought to have taken place in the years 1014 to 1015. They found Leif's booths and were successful. The saga is a long story of deception, disagreements, and murder that takes place in Vinland but does not add to our knowledge of its geography.

From these sagas we find that Vinland was found in the lands immediately to the south of Markland — the south shore of the St. Lawrence and Newfoundland together are Vinland.



**Fig. 3. The Norse names surrounding Vinland. Vinland for Leif Ericson was the south shore of the St. Lawrence estuary. Thorfinn Karlsefni visited Newfoundland, identifying it as Vinland. Markland was visited for wood-cutting. Ginnungagap was the water route from the St. Lawrence River through the St. Lawrence estuary to the Strait of Belle Isle. An expedition in AD 1290 sent by King Erik of Norway attempted to colonize a region known as New-Land (Nyaland) and the Down Islands (Duneyar) which could have been Nova Scotia-New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.**

## WHAT AND WHERE IS GINNUNGAGAP ?

The one thing that pulls together with clarity the Norse views of Vinland is the matter of the identity of "Ginnungagap." Fossum mentions this geographical item in passing but does not make a point as to its identity on the modern map. From his sources and what little is given elsewhere it is apparent that the channel of water called "Ginnungagap" should be equated to the water course of the St. Lawrence estuary, the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and the Strait of Belle Isle. The way to Greenland from Vinland was understood in Norse geography to be by way of Ginnungagap..

It appears as part of the Norse view of the entire world. The Vikings conceived of an ocean surrounding all the lands (Mare Oceanum). This view is illustrated well on the world map of A. A. Bjornbo. [12] One of the passages from the Atlantic Ocean to the all encompassing ocean was Ginnungagap.

Other writers on Vinland who mention the channel have usually equated Ginnungagap with Hudson Strait by default (writers such as Farley Mowat, Paul Chapman, and Hjalmer Holand). That strait lies between Baffin Island and Labrador. James Curran goes on at length about the tides and dangers in Hudson Strait to make a case for it to be Ginnungagap. [13] But the Vikings had a name for Hudson Strait, as Mowat notes, and that name was Skuggifjord. [14] Fridtjof Nansen writes: "What 'Ginnungagap' really was seems never to have been quite clear, different people having no doubt had different ideas about it." [15] Let us see why this incorrect equation of Hudson Strait and Ginnungagap has come about.

Ginnungagap in Norse mythology was a roaring channel of water that connected the hot realm of Muspell with the cold realm of Niflheim. In the cold realm a great cauldron provided the water for twelve raging rivers that flowed into Ginnungagap. [16] The turbulent and icy characteristics associated with this channel came from its place in mythology, not in any surviving Norse geographical description. Since the name is also used in an old Norse geography it seemed necessary to find its equivalent. And Hudson Strait has appeared to many to be the only candidate.

The old record is the key to the modern identity of the strait. Fossum and others have quoted the following passage from the geography called Gripla. In the geography locations are being given in strict order all the way from Bavaria to Vinland.

Now is to be told what lies over against Greenland opposite the bays that are mentioned: the land is called Furdustrandir. There the cold is so intense that it is not habitable, as far as men know; south of it lies Helluland, which is called Skraelingjaland; thence it is but a short distance to Vinland the Good, which some suppose is projecting from Africa; between Vinland and Greenland is Ginnungagap, which comes out of the sea, which is called Mare Oceanum, and surrounds the whole world. [17]

Now if Ginnungagap were Hudson Strait it would have been cited here between Furdustrandir (Baffin Island) and Helluland. But it is not. (Helluland, by the way, in this

quotation combines both Helluland and Markland as was sometimes done.) Instead, the geography tells us that one sails from Vinland by way of Ginnungagap to Greenland, as one sails by way of the St. Lawrence to depart Vinland for Greenland.

Other old geographical fragments quoted by Fossum support this view. They include the phrases "the outer sea enters between Vinland and Markland" and "the outer ocean enters between Vinland and Markland." [18] If we could revive an ancient Viking I think we would find that it was understood that when one sailed around Markland into Ginnungagap the land to the north was Markland and the land to the south was Vinland. The land to the south then was Newfoundland and the south shore of the St. Lawrence. Here is the Vinland of the sagas and the old geography.

The famous strait was also marked on one map. The map of Gudbrandur Thorlaksson dating from 1606 shows Ginnungagap south of Greenland and just north of "Estotiland," where it should be expected. [19] "Estotiland" has come to be recognized as a name for Newfoundland. And Newfoundland agrees with the latitude and the relationship to Greenland shown on this map for Estotiland. Unfortunately when discussing this map R.A. Skelton faults the map-maker (who has gotten it right) and wants to identify "Estotiland" with Baffin Island which is west of Greenland and in a much higher latitude. [20]

When Leif Ericson and those who came after him entered the St. Lawrence they found a tremendous cleft in the continent running south of Labrador for 750 miles from the Strait of Belle Isle to the Isle d'Orleans. They cannot be faulted for thinking they had entered the famous passage between the oceans.

One writer has protested already that surely the Vikings would have determined that the St. Lawrence became a river if one went westward far enough. Over time it is likely that some Vikings would have scouted in this fashion and convinced themselves that this was so. But such individual knowledge might not have easily overtaken the early impression that Ginnungagap had been found south of Markland.

Fossum observes that outlaws and adventurers might have gone to Vinland. They were known to have gone to Labrador and northern Greenland. Their contacts with American Indians might have given the Vikings the knowledge of the manners and traits of the Indians that are found in the sagas. [21]

#### WHY DID VINLAND REMAIN IMPORTANT ?

The early visits to Vinland are told of in the sagas. They showed that Vinland was inhabited by troublesome Indians. Vinland appeared to be unsuitable for Norse colonization such as succeeded in Greenland. We know that Markland was visited for wood (such as a ship loaded with timber that was blown from Markland to Iceland in 1347). We can agree that these regions were probably subject to what have been called "flying parties of woodcutters, remaining at the utmost two or three winters, but never settling permanently." [22] So why did Vinland itself retain importance and notoriety in the time of the Greenland colonies?

Vinland is next noticed by Adam of Bremen around 1075 who tells of Norway, Iceland, and Greenland. And in the same ocean lies Vinland, beyond which there can be found only endless ice and fog. Here is his account of Vinland:

Moreover he [the King of the Danes] mentioned yet another island, which had been discovered by many in that ocean, and which is called "Winland," because vines grow there of themselves and give the noblest wine. And that there is abundance of unsown corn we have obtained certain knowledge, not by fabulous supposition, but from trustworthy information of the Danes. Beyond this island, he said, no habitable land is found in this ocean, but all that is more distant is full of intolerable ice and immense mist.... [23]

But Vinland, though seemingly at the end of the world, does not disappear from history. Bishop Eric Gnuþsson in 1121 is given the title of "Bishop of Greenland and Vinland *in partibus infidelium*" according to John Fiske. [24] Others have not found the source for this so the title might have been "Bishop of Greenland and the adjacent islands." It is a matter of record, however, that the new bishop then set out to visit Vinland. He disappeared and was not heard from again. In 1124 another bishop was named to replace him.

In 1362 Vinland is mentioned on the inscription of the Kensington Runestone. The explorers are identified as coming by way of Vinland around the west. And the stone was carved in a place directly west of what we know to have been Vinland. Why was Vinland a destination for Bishop Eric and why would explorers have used it as a stop on their exploration into North America?

I think the answer lies in the sagas and other sources of that era that support the presence of an Irish colony in the New World. The evidence includes the archaeological finds at L'Anse Aux Meadows in Newfoundland. Several writers (Carl Sauer, Farley Mowat, Paul Chapman) have indicated that the finds there are consistent with the Irish of the time and the radiocarbon dates are not suitable for Vinland. [25]

The Irish colony known variously as Hvíttramannaland (Whiteman Land), Irland Mikkla (Greater Ireland), and Albania did exist. And I think it was found by the Vikings to be in the locations first identified by the Norse as Vinland. The regions were inhabited not only by American Indians but also by the Irish colonists who had already been living in the area for hundreds of years before the coming of the Vikings. The Irish had their own names for this country, as noted above, but the Vikings continued to call the area Vinland.

The Vikings began to come upon knowledge of the Irish even with the exploration by Thorfinn Karlsefni. His saga includes an incident of capturing two natives in Markland on the return trip to Greenland. They were taken back to Greenland and learned to communicate with the Vikings. The captives then related that "on the other side opposite their land was a land where people wore white clothes and carried before them poles with banners and shouted loudly." [26] This has been widely interpreted as a suggestion of the Irish colonizing south of Markland.

Other material in the sagas and sources relating visits to Whiteman Land exist to tell us that the Irish carried on trade with the Greenland colonies in the centuries that followed. But that fragmented history of Whiteman Land is a long story that will require its own examination at a later time.

## PUSHING BEYOND VINLAND

The Norse hunted in the Northern Outposts up the western coast of Greenland and visited the Western Wilds (Baffin Island) and Labrador. Vinland was explored around the edges as told in the sagas. From this territory the Vikings pushed north, south, and west, but the records of these extensions have caused modern disputes of interpretation.

The eastern coast of Greenland was a forbidding region because most of its shore was constantly bordered by a shelf of ice. It was the scene of noteworthy Viking shipwrecks in the years 998 and 1200. [27] In 1019 it was reported that Greenland's highest official, Skald-Helge, pursued some robbers to the fjords north of Scoresby Sound. [28] Some parts of the coast were good for hunting. One party of shipwrecked seamen reported meeting an outcast Greenlander living on the coast. But for incidents of this type, the coast was largely avoided. Prehistoric peoples and the later Eskimos inhabited this coast, but their well-being was tied to any fluctuations in climate and the resulting effect on food sources. The few surviving Eskimos lived a harsh life (described as "stone age") right up to 1900. They were probably saved from extinction altogether by an infusion of assistance from the Danish government. [29]

On the western coast of Greenland the Vikings are thought to have gone as far north as the Kane Basin in the year 1266. [30] Farley Mowat thinks the region reached was the Jones Sound area. [31]

Viking geographical knowledge took a step forward at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century with the discovery of New-Land and Down Island(s) (that is, Nyaland and Duneyar). Several brief references to this discovery are found in the records of Iceland. Upon these many historical fragments speculations have been made regarding the identity of the area discovered.

Arthur Reeves gives the sources for each brief historical notation. [32] Here I will give only the year and the text as conveyed to us by Reeves and also by Nansen. [33]

1285 — Helgi's sons sailed into Greenland's uninhabited regions.

    ("Helga synir sigldu i Groenlandz obygoir")

1285 — Adalbrand and Thorvald, Helgi's sons found New-land.

1285 — Land found to the westward off Iceland.

1285 — Down-island(s) discovered.

    ("Funduz Duneyiar")

1289 — King Eric sends Rolf to Iceland to seek New-land.

1290 — Rolf traveled about Iceland soliciting men for a Newland voyage.

The death of Landa-Rolf, as he was known, was noted in Icelandic records in the year 1295. The final reference to New-Land (cited by both Reeves and Nansen) comes from Bishop Gizur Einarsson's Register for the years 1540-47. There the sailing directions to Greenland are amended to read: "Wise men have said that you must sail

to the southwest from Krisuvik mountain to Newland." Krisuvik Mountain is on the promontory of Reykianess at the southwestern extreme of Iceland.

It is known that Adalbrand and Thorvald were priests. One German scientist writing in 1778 thought this land was in America and that Landa-Rolf had gone to Newland, living there from 1289 until his death in 1295. [34] I suspect he had no better sources than we do and find his speculation that the colony was attempted a good one. But others have not made the same interpretation.

Reeves and Nansen each followed the lead of Gustav Storm by identifying these lands as being somewhere on the eastern coast of Greenland. As explained above such a site is unlikely due to the nature of that coast. And placing a "discovery" in such a well-known territory is improbable. But these gentlemen were all unaware that references to "Greenland's uninhabited regions" could include the Western Wilds (Baffin Island). That explanation came later from Fossum and later still again from Mowat. Baffin Island was the first step on Karlsefni's journey to his Vinland. It could have been the first step by the priests on their journey to a New-Land that was to the west of Greenland..

J. K. Tornoe thinks New-Land and Down Island are explained by Newfoundland and Miquelon Island. [35] He mentions that C. C. Rafn also took this view and had even suggested that John Cabot took his name for the island from the Norse "Nyaland." But Newfoundland already was known as Vinland to the Icelanders and did not require a new name such as "New-Land." So his explanation for New-Land seems inadequate. Tornoe does point out that reaching Newfoundland directly from Iceland is not unlikely by this time in history when the Vikings would have had the compass, which was known in Europe by 1195.

I will now offer my own speculations. Having come upon Vinland with its Indians and Irish colonists, the Vikings might have passed Vinland to other lands. To the south they would encounter Nova Scotia. The reported discovery in 1285 sounds to me like the inevitable and appropriately timed advance to the shores of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. And if any kind of trade relations had sprung up between the Irish and the Norse the latter would have learned from the former that there were certainly other lands to be found beyond Vinland.

The two priests might have gone to Baffin Island and then south to Vinland just as Karlsefni did. Searching beyond Vinland the next land would be Cape Breton Island, the rest of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and the coast of New Brunswick. This region seems to be the reported New-Land (also called the Down Islands) in 1285. Landa-Rolf was given instructions to colonize the region. With the aid of the compass the journey could be made directly from Iceland to Vinland and to the New-Land beyond. His attempted colonization in the years 1289-1295 appears not to have gone well because he died in the attempt.

Have there been any finds to support a Viking presence in this part of North America? As a matter of fact, a Viking axe has turned up in Nova Scotia. Hjalmar Holand describes its discovery in *Explorations in America Before Columbus*. [36] It was "an axe of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, found about 1880 by a farmer while tilling a small field bordering on Cole Harbor, an indentation on Tor Bay, just west of Cape Canso in Nova Scotia."

The axe was covered with clay and rust. When the grime was removed a primitive axe was revealed. Holand compares it with axes seen in Norwegian museums. The axe passed into the hands of William B. Goodwin. It appears to be the same axe illustrated by two photographs at the back of Goodwin's book *The Truth about Leif Ericson and the Greenland Voyages*. [37] His caption reads: "Steel axe found in Nova Scotia — Northmen type, made before 1280 A.D."

The Viking push to the westward is recorded in the Kensington Runestone that was discovered in 1898 in west-central Minnesota. Here was a rune-covered marker for the farthest penetration by the Vikings into the New World. As others had left their markers north of the Greenland colonies, so this stone was intended to show the reach of the Vikings to the west. The inscription bears the date of 1362.

Inadequately studied from the beginning and so wrongly condemned, the Minnesota stone has withstood attempts by doubting scholars to find in its inscription the fatal flaws that would show it was a hoax. Their arguments for such flaws have all fallen. A few are left who argue that their dislike for the stone must be the only possible truth. Their complaints have been reduced to mere quibbles, where other learned opinions hold that the stone appears to be genuine. Also, the 14<sup>th</sup> century advance of the Vikings might have been aided by the larger size of Hudson Bay as shown in Figure 1. The bay has been experiencing a post-Pleistocene isostatic rebound of the land. [38]

#### THE COIN IN MAINE

An old Norse coin was excavated in Maine in 1961. It was identifiable as one minted between the years 1065 and 1080. It could have found its way to Blue Hill Bay, Maine, during that time or in later years. Associated with the coin were finds of chert. These rocks were traded from their place of origin in Ramah Bay in northern Labrador. So the coin might have been traded as well from a point farther north. [39]

#### THE NEWPORT TOWER

The old stone tower at Newport, Rhode Island, has been much discussed as an artifact left by the Norsemen. Many have been persuaded that the tower was constructed in 1675 by Governor Benedict Arnold. And that it was built to replace a wooden windmill destroyed that year by a hurricane. Arnold's will of 1677 refers to "my stone built windmih." As Richard Morgan in a discussion of the tower enigma carefully points out, these words do not distinguish between the two possibilities: either he actually had it built or it was an old tower that he had converted into a windmill. [40]

There are popular misconceptions about this tower that are in need of correction.

The first is that the origin of this "Stone Mill" can be easily determined. An example of this view is found in the 1976 book *Rhode Island: A Historical Guide* where it is noted that "the mortar between the stones here has been shown to be chemically identical with that used in [Governor] Arnold's house." [41] The reason such a finding is not conclusive is that a centuries-old tower is likely to have seen many repairs and restorations. That the 17<sup>th</sup> century owner of the tower should have it mended would not be unexpected.

Another misconception is that stories of a Norse origin for it date only from 1839 when Charles C. Rafn published the Norse view as conveyed to him by Thomas H. Webb. [42] To correct this notion we need to consider an incident related in the journals of John Penn (1741?-1788). He was a lawyer who lived in Virginia and North Carolina and served in the Continental Congress from 1775 to 1780. He was also one of the signers of the American Declaration of Independence. On December 26, 1775 he was in Newport, Rhode Island. It was raining, but despite the weather he traveled across Newport to visit the old stone tower of which he had heard. He noted in his journal that he went to see this landmark because it was thought at the time that the tower might have been constructed by the Vikings. [43]

Since this idea was already current in Newport an important question arises. If the tower was built in 1675, why would there exist such a tradition less than one hundred years after its construction?

A third mistaken notion is that this tower has been determined to be colonial by an excavation carried out at its base. The digging by William Godfrey Jr. in 1949 found traces of five previous excavations. Evidence of colonial activity down to the base of this tower could be explained as the prudent examination of its base by the inheritor prior to making use of it in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. [44] The long-term curiosity of the colonials about this tower might have brought about the removal of any artifacts that predate the founding of Newport. Such found items might have provided the basis for the 18<sup>th</sup> century tradition that the tower had been built by Vikings.

Finally the idea that there is no record of the tower prior to the 1670s has been challenged by the existence of what has been known as the Plowden Paper. In 1632 Sir Edmund Plowden prepared a proposal for a settlement to be called New Albion. It was to be located on Long Island and the mainland north of the island. He listed the inducements for a settlement in this region and suggested a contingent of soldiers be quartered there. The words he used were:

So that 30 idle men as soldiers or gent be resident in a rownd stone towre and by tomes to trade with the savages and to keep their ordinance and arms neate.... [45]

It has been suggested that a reference is being made here to the old stone tower that was already standing in 1632.

In conclusion we can say that the Newport Tower remains a truly mysterious artifact of unknown origin. It would be a mistake to propose with any degree of certainty who built this tower. It might have been the Norse or some other pre-Columbian Europeans such as the Irish. Or perhaps it was constructed early in the Colonial period and then forgotten prior to the settlement of Newport in 1639. There is a map (drawn up in years 1629 to 1634) showing "Old Plymouth" in the Newport area. [46] Hypotheses should be carefully crafted to suit the facts of its structure and history as best we know them. Perhaps more extensive archaeological work would provide more information and even settle some questions.

When we are in quandary over a dry-land tower there is small wonder that the two towers said-to-be-similar and reported underwater off the coast of Rhode Island remain beyond any elaborate discussion. One has been reported south of the Newport Tower at Brenton's Reef and the other off Watch Hill at the southwestern corner of the

state. Both are in locations that would put them above water a thousand years ago. [47]

## SUMMARY

The Viking sagas tell of early attempts to explore and exploit the New World in that portion known as Vinland. The Vikings found Vinland by crossing the Davis Strait to Baffin Island from Greenland. They continued southward past Helluland (northern Labrador) and past Markland (southern Labrador) and discovered Newfoundland and the estuary of the St. Lawrence. Here was Vinland which included the famous channel of Ginnungagap that cut into the continent between Vinland and Markland.

The sagas will be more engrossing to read if one can follow and appreciate the locations where events truly took place. The case made in Andrew Fossum's *The Norse Discovery of America* allows us to do this. There exists an extensive bibliography of Vinland discussions. A good review of the literature for the period of 1705 through 1937 can be found in W. S. Wallace's "The Literature Relating to the Norse Voyages to America" in the *Canadian Historical Review* (1939, Vol. 20, pp. 8-16).

Many books have appeared since then. Most noteworthy among them I find G. J. Marcus' *The Conquest of the North Atlantic* [48] and Farley Mowat's *Westviking* [49]. In the latter there are extensive quotations from the sagas and, of course, Mowat's own event locations that often differ from what has been presented here.

The Vikings probably found a colony of Irish (Westmen) living in the lands they called Vinland. The brief reference in the *Karlsefni* account is accompanied by other sagas and recorded stories that are lengthy experiences of visitors to the Irish colony and have not been discussed here. The site at L'Anse Aux Meadows in Newfoundland is more likely to contribute to our knowledge of the Irish presence than a Viking one.

The Vikings worked their way progressively from Baffin Island to the continent of North America, beyond to Vinland, and then even are likely to have identified the lands immediately to the south of Vinland as New-Land, or the Down Islands, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. New archaeological finds might one day support this view and that of the Irish colony in Vinland. Finally there is good evidence that the reach of the Vikings in the 14<sup>th</sup> century extended beyond Lake Superior into the region that would become Minnesota.

Farley Mowat in *Westviking* gives the revealing background of the unveiling of the L'Anse Aux Meadows site. The story begins in 1929 with W. A. Munn who thought two bays at the northern tip of Newfoundland might have been places where Vikings landed. He was followed by Dr. V. Tanner and Arlington H. Mallery who looked in the area for the same traces. In 1959 Danish archaeologist Jorgen Meldgaard searched one of the bays until he was sure nothing was there. In 1960 Helge Ingstad came along and learned through the local populace of an "old Viking place" on the other bay. The subsequent digging has turned up the most interesting but ambiguous remains that have been described since then from northern Newfoundland. [50]

What efforts and chain of events might reveal still more of the slim remains of New World colonists and visitors will be learned as time goes by. If we have a better idea of where the Vikings truly went and what they found centuries ago, we will have a better chance of narrowing our efforts and eventually finding the kind of solid evidence we would all like to see uncovered and verified.

## NOTES

1. Andrew Fossum, *The Norse Discovery of America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1918), 48-49.
2. Ibid., 62.
3. Ibid., 55.
4. Fridtjof Nansen, *In Northern Mists* vol. 1 (NY Frederick A. Stokes, 1911), 301.
5. Farley Mowat, *Westviking: The Ancient Norse in Greenland and North America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965), 63-6, 329-33, 336-42.
6. Fossum, *Norse Discovery*, 41.
7. Note: The years for the several Vinland voyages are variously attributed depending upon the writer. They agree on the period of years following A.D. 1000. The years given here for the several voyages are those ascribed by Tryggvi J. Oleson in *Early Voyages and Northern Approaches 1000-1632* (London: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), 203.  
The nature of the trolls used as runners is explained in Mark A. Hall, "Homo gardarensis: A Different Kind of Bigfoot." *Wonders* 5(1):3-34 (March 1998). A unique set of bones unearthed in 1926 at the archaeological site of Gardar in Greenland were used by F. C. C. Hansen to define *Homo gardarensis*. The lore of trolls and the Eskimo stories of the Tunnit (the Dorset culture) support the existence of this species.
8. Mowat, *Westviking*, 126-8.
9. Fossum, *Norse Discovery*, 95.
- 10 Ibid., 112-14.
11. Ibid., 119.
12. Ibid, 56; R. A. Skelton, T. E. Marston, and G. D. Painter *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965). 174
13. James W. Curran, *Here was Vinland* (Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario: The Sault Star, 1939). 54-7, 307-13.
14. Mowat, *Westviking*, 466-8, 472.
15. Nansen, *In Northern Mists*. vol 2, 241.
16. John Grant, *An Introduction to Viking Mythology* (London: Quintet Publishing, 1990), 44-45.
17. Fossum, *Norse Discovery*, 54.
18. Ibid., 57.
19. Skelton et al., *Vinland Map*, Plate 18.
20. Ibid., 202.
- 21, Fossum, *Norse Discovery*, 125.
22. Samuel Laing as quoted by John Fiske *The Discovery of America* vol 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), 217.
23. Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, vol. 1, 195.
24. Fiske, *Discovery of America*, vol. 1, 222.
25. Paul H. Chapman, *The Norse Discovery of America* (Atlanta: One Candle Press,

- 1981); Carl O. Sauer, *Northern Mists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Mowat, *Westviking*.
26. Fossum, *Norse Discovery*, 118-9.
  27. J. Kr. Tornoe, *Columbus in the Arctic? And The Vineland Literature* (Oslo: A. W. Broggers Boktrykkeri, 1965) , 35, 37. And unrecorded shipwrecks as noted in G. J. Marcus, *The Conquest of the North Atlantic* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1981).
  28. Tornoe, *Columbus*, 36.
  29. Ejnar Mikkelsen, "East Greenland," in *Greenland* by the Royal Danish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Denmark, 1954), 127-52.
  30. Tornoe *Columbus*, 37.
  31. Mowat, *Westviking*, 298.
  32. Arthur M. Reeves in *The Discovery of North America* (London: Norrcena Society, 1906), 114-16.
  33. Nansen *In Northern Mists*, vol. 1, 285-6.
  34. Tornoe. *Columbus*, 49-50.
  35. *Ibid.*, 48-49.
  36. Hjalmar R. Holand, *Explorations in America Before Columbus 2<sup>nd</sup> ed* (NY: Twayne, 1956, 1958), 93-94.
  37. William B. Goodwin, *The Truth about Leif Ericson and the Greenland Voyages* (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1941).
  38. Mark A. Hall, "The Runestone at Kensington, Minnesota," *Wonders* 5(2):52-63 (June 1998).
  39. Associated Press, 9 February 1979, 17 August 1979; Robert McGhee, "Northern Approaches," *Beaver* 72(3):16 (June-July 1992).
  40. Richard Morgan, "Who Built the Old Newport Tower?" in *Mysterious New England* edited by Austin N. Stevens (Dublin, NH: Yankee, 1971), 266-79.
  41. Sheila Steinberg and Cathleen McGuigan, *Rhode Island: A Historical Guide* (Providence: Rhode Island Bicentennial Foundation, 1976), 220-1.
  42. Morgan, "Old Newport Tower," 268-9.
  43. "On This Day" radio series produced in 1975 by the US Bicentennial Media Group, 2315 East Broad St., Richmond VA 23223.
  44. Charles Michael Boland, *They All Discovered America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 285.
  45. *Ibid.*, 287-8.
  46. *Ibid.*, 286.
  47. Rutherford Platt, *Wilderness: The Discovery of a Continent of Wonder* (Boston: Dodd, Mead, 1961), 55-56; Bertram R. McGrath, "Sunken Stone Structures Off Newport: Tall Tales or Hard Reality?" *NEARA Journal* 14(4):87-89 (Spring 1980); Charles Berlitz, *Mysteries from Forgotten Worlds* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 96-7.
  48. G. J. Marcus, *The Conquest of the North Atlantic* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1981).
  49. Farley Mowat, *Westviking: The Ancient Norse in Greenland and North America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965).
  50. *Ibid.*, 450-2.

# THE RUNESTONE AT KENSINGTON, MINNESOTA

by Mark A. Hall

One hundred years ago on November 8, 1898, one of North America's most remarkable monuments was discovered. To everyone's surprise, and especially so to scholars, a marker left by Viking explorers of the 14<sup>th</sup> century turned up in Minnesota near the community of Kensington. It was a record of a journey by Swedes and Norwegians exploring from Vinland into the heart of North America. A century of discussion and controversy over the stone monument and its runes followed. The end result of this tumultuous debate is that we have every reason to think that this stone is what the inscription declares it to be.

There was runestone found at Kingigtorsuaq in Greenland in 1823. It was a marker for the point farthest to the north that the Vikings had reached at that time (around 1300). It contained peculiar runes (probably intended to mean "ice"), and the stone has since been lost. But its genuineness is not disputed at all. [1] The Minnesota runestone is every bit as reasonable and valid as this Greenland stone. But few people will ever be able to visit Kingigtorsuaq for themselves.

In the case of the Kensington Runestone it is easy to go to the site of its erection and stand there for yourself. You can ponder how a weary band of explorers in 1362 felt as they stood in the middle of a vast and unknown land. (The geographical heart of the North American continent is located 275 miles to the northwest of the spot and 150 miles west of the Red River of the North.) You can consider how logical was their motivation to put up a marker to show the extent of their travels and to serve as a memorial to their fallen comrades who had recently died in this strange place. You can look about you and picture the different terrain that was there in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when hills were islands in a more watery landscape. The farmstead of the stone's finder has been preserved as a Douglas County park. Some miles to the northeast at Alexandria, Minnesota, the runestone itself can be viewed in its own museum.

Here I will review the journey of the Kensington Runestone through the last one hundred years of fame, defamation, neglect, and the struggle to recognize the genuine importance of this monument that astounded and upset so many people.

Then I will examine the journey of the Viking explorers themselves into North America. This will include a record from the library of the Minnesota Historical Society that might shed light on the geographical conditions and happenings in the era when the Vikings came exploring into the land that would become Minnesota in the United States of America.

## .OLOF OHMAN

The modern historical saga of the runestone begins with the Scandinavian farmer who unearthed the relic while clearing trees on that part of his land most distant from his farmhouse. On November 8, 1898, Olof Ohman toppled an aspen tree that was eight to ten inches thick. The tree had grown over a large flat stone which was then clasped by tree roots when the tree was leveled. Ohman's son was the first to notice something carved into the stone. It became a local curiosity as Ohman took it back to his farmhouse and people heard about it and dropped by.

The runes were recognized by Professor O. J. Breda at the University of Minnesota. But he did not know a lot about runes and could produce only a partial translation that did not include the date. Because the word "Vinland" appeared he thought the inscription was intended to date from the era of Leif Ericson. The language used was not the Old Norse of Ericson's time so he concluded that the writing was a forgery. He conveyed this to scholars in Oslo, Norway, and they agreed with him. This unfortunate presumptive and dismissive brand of scholarship was to be in evidence all too often throughout the next century.

Eventually -- nine years later -- a full translation was made by Hjalmar Holand of the writing that appeared in two places on the stone. On one broad flat surface the following appeared:

[We are] 8 Goths and 22 Norwegians on [an] exploration journey from Vinland round about the west. We had camp by 2 skerries one day's journey north from this stone. We were [out] and fished one day. After we came home [we] found ten of our men red with blood and dead. AVM [Ave Virgo Maria] save [us] from evil.

On one edge of the stone these words were inscribed:

[We] have ten men by the sea to look after our ships 14 days-journeys from this island. [In the] year [of our Lord] 1362.

The inscription dated from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, three hundred and fifty years after Leif Ericson's time. These few words on a stone 36 inches long, 15 inches wide, and five and a half inches thick have been the cause of a nearly continuous storm of debate for one hundred years. The stone weighs 230 pounds and clearly had been placed upright like a gravestone with the lower portion buried. Over time it had toppled forward and the whole stone was covered by the normal accumulation of soil. White men next entered this part of North America four centuries later. But the stone was not visible. Another century passed before its accidental unveiling. This part of Minnesota was surveyed in 1866 and settled beginning in 1867. Ohman bought his farm in 1891.

## HJALMAR RUED HOLAND

Hjalmar Holand was a student at the University of Wisconsin in 1898, but he did

not hear then about the reported find of the runestone. In 1907 he was writing a history of the Norwegian settlements in America. He finally got around to Kensington where he was told again and again about the runestone. He visited Ohman. After the universal condemnation by scholars the stone had been relegated to use as a step into Ohman's granery, fortunately with the inscription side down. Holand was told the recent history of the stone and notes in his works that at the time he believed it must be a forgery. But the inscription was artfully crafted, and Holand took it away when Ohman offered the stone to him.

Holand had studied runes, and he soon saw the fallacy in how the stone was rejected. He published articles on what he found. The Minnesota Historical Society then formed a committee to investigate it. The committee included Nicholas Winchell and Warren Upham, two of the most outstanding scholars in Minnesota at that time. The committee accepted the stone as genuine, but no final report was issued.

Holand continued to argue for the validity of the inscription against all its critics for half a century. He wrote several books. [2]

### The Paul Knutson Expedition

Holand called attention to the record of Scandinavians charged with a mission to the New World. King Magnus Erikson wrote a letter in 1354 charging Sir Paul Knutson to go to Greenland to restore the Christian faith. [3]

The stone appears to have a place in the history of the Viking presence in the New World in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. What is known of the Greenland colonists has had to be pieced together from fragments of information in Icelandic records, church records, correspondence, and the like. Even from a runestone such as this one. There are three fragments of this kind that seem to fit together.

The first involves the fate of the colonists in one of Greenland's two primary settlements. The Western Settlement is thought to have collapsed around 1345. Its disappearance and the fate of the estimated 600 colonists are mysteries. The larger Eastern Settlement continued on for almost two hundred years. A combination of distance from trading partners, loss of life and resources to pirates, strife with the Eskimos, and deteriorating climate is thought to have brought about its end.

This surviving historical fragment (put down in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, hence the reference to America) tells that in 1342 the Western colonists had freely forsaken the true faith of the Christians and "turned to the people of America." This is supported by the record left by Ivar Bardsson who visited the settlement around 1350 and did not find any living colonists, only livestock running wild. [4]

After this we have the record of the launch of the formal Paul Knutson expedition initiated in 1354. It is extraordinary that some people claim to see no possible connection between it and the Kensington Runestone with a date of 1362.

### Mooring Stones

One of the frequently cited supports to a true Kensington Runestone has been the presence of "mooring stones" in Minnesota. Holand made much of demonstrating the

route of the Vikings by following such boulders with holes drilled into them. They were said to be temporary mooring sites for a boat. Such evidence must be discarded, however disappointing this might be to some supporters of the Runestone.

The presence of boulders with chiseled holes is a common feature on the Midwestern landscape. One archaeologist has told me of seeing them frequently in the Dakotas. They have been reported from around Minnesota as well. Several years ago Thomas Trow, then an archaeologist with the Minnesota Historical Society, gave a talk before the Minnesota Archaeological Society on his findings regarding them in the Douglas County region.

The drilled boulders have a simple origin. Farmers would drill holes into boulders on their property. Later someone would go around putting powder in the holes and ignite the powder to break up the nuisance into smaller and manageable pieces. This last part was not always completed, leaving an intact boulder with the hole. This was such a trivial part of rural life it was not recorded until Tom Trow bothered asking around about them. He heard one anecdote about the unfortunate dog who accompanied two boulder blasters. The powder was set and ignited, and the two men went in opposite directions. They each called to the dog which was then confused and simply stood his ground. The result was tragic when the powder went off.

If someone wishes to distinguish some of these boulders as genuine "mooring stones" they will have to find a convincing method and make a case that so far has not been made.

### Other Artifacts

Numerous items such as axe heads and swords from around Minnesota and Wisconsin have been put forth as somehow supporting the validity of the stone. Most of them are unconvincing and constitute a distraction from the strength of the inscription and its obvious meaning. These items have included some "tobacco axes" which were imitation battle axes widely circulated to promote and cut strips of tobacco. Holand unfortunately was unable to let go of these imitation axes and used them as part of his evidence.

Any artifact suspected of association with the Kensington Runestone needs to be carefully studied and put forth only when it advances our understanding of how the Vikings came and went from the region.

### The La Verendrye Stone

The discussion of another mysterious stone might seem to be a major digression off the topic of the Kensington Runestone. But the story of what has come to be known as "the La Verendrye Stone" should become familiar to anyone interested in the Kensington Runestone.

Holand pursued any and all records of this stone, even traveling to Europe to try to find the original stone. Its story begins in 1749 when Peter Kalm, a Swedish botanist, was visiting Quebec. He learned from Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Verendrye of his find of stone on a journey in the west (900 French miles to the west of Montreal).

There "they met with a large stone, like a pillar, and in it a smaller stone was fixed, which was covered on both sides with unknown characters." This particular stone was "about a foot of French measure in length, and between four or five inches broad." It was broken free and taken back to Canada. Ultimately it was sent to France. Several Jesuit scholars in Canada had seen it and compared the characters on it with Tartarian characters. [5]

Holand explains and illustrates how their only reference at that time illustrating Tartarian letters shows letter forms that are similar to and some identical to the appearance of runes. We will return to this stone later.

#### SIVERT N. HAGEN

A valuable examination of the Kensington inscription was authored by Sivert N. Hagen in 1950 in *Speculum: A Journal of Mediaeval Studies*. [6] He gives this translation for the Kensington Runestone:

Eight Gotlanders and twenty-two Norwegians on [this] exploration-journey from Vinland over the west. We had camp beside two sheds, one day's journey north from this stone. We were and fished one day; after we came home, found ten men red with blood and tortured. Hail Mary! Deliver us from evil! Have ten men by the sea to look after our ships, fourteen-day journey from this island. Year, 1362.

He observes: "It has been argued that the Kensington inscription is a forgery because its verb forms are 'modern' The answer to this is that insofar as some Scandinavian dialects used singular verbs with plural subjects they were 'modern' already around 1300." And he finds: "Holand has always been right in his main contention that it is a genuine record of a Scandinavian expedition into the very heart of North America in 1362."

Holand and other scholars have replied to the complaints of runologists about the use of language and runes in this inscription. Early on the problem for runologists was that they did not have it in them to declare that they simply did not know that much about the use of runes in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. And what were declared by them to be fatal flaws in the inscription have been found to be valid usage by others. Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as more has been learned, the inscription has been upheld. Now the difficulty for runologists is to repudiate long-standing condemnations of the stone and to admit past mistakes.

#### RICHARD A. HALL JR.

Retired linguist Richard A. Hall Jr. has taken up the cause of the Kensington Runestone and continued to make its case in two books. [7] With the assistance of Richard Nielsen and Rolf M. Nilsestuen he has continued to answer the critics of the inscription point-by-point and will one day be acknowledged as correct.

## THE JOURNEY

The implication of the Kensington Runestone is that a band of Vikings came from the north into Minnesota to the point where the stone was engraved and erected in 1362. Where they came from and where they went afterwards are subjects only for speculation. So this discussion of their journey will contain my speculations based upon the evidence I will be citing.

The thought that the Vikings might have made their way to Minnesota by way of Lake Superior is one that we might consider if they had not written that they left their ships by the sea. The focus turns to Hudson Bay. There has been much written about how they might have journeyed from Hudson Bay up the Nelson River and across the lakes in Manitoba to the Red River and then into the heart of Minnesota. The inscription says they did this all in 14 days. This has been a problem. S. N. Hagen has addressed this by suggesting that the explorers were looking back upon their route and gauging the return trip to the sea, a much faster journey going down-river back to Hudson Bay. I agree that by that time the explorers were probably considering a return to their ships (we will return to this part of the trip later). But I do not think Hagen's solution is the correct one.

We have reasons to think that the terrain of six centuries ago was different than what we see today and what was observed four centuries later. Just as the Ohman farm was an island in a lake, conditions to the north were different for the same reason. Hudson Bay might have extended further south well into southern Manitoba. The dying remnants of Glacial Lake Aggasiz might have existed in the form of marshy channels of water between the higher ridges of land (former beaches of the lake). My reason for suggesting these conditions is that they are described in Ojibway Indian traditions. The Cree Indians as well have told of a time in the past when the barrenlands were inundated with large lakes. Farley Mowat incorporated this lore of the Cree into his book *Lost in the Barrens*.

The slow rising of the Hudson Bay region is a known geological phenomenon. An isostatic rebound is occurring because the area was covered by an enormous ice cap during the Pleistocene.

The record of the Ojibway traditions begins with a passage in *Minnesota: A State Guide* about three mounds in northwestern Minnesota near Roseau:

State [route] 11 cuts through one of the three INDIAN MOUNDS about whose origin early settlers heard an explanation by the Indian, Mickinock. The tale concerns the time when Campbell Beach and the Cypress Hills of Manitoba were islands in a great lake. One autumn a boat was beached by a storm and 14 strange people of fair skin and light hair escaped from the wreck. The little marooned band built three sod wigwams (the three mounds). Famine and illness took their toll, and in the spring only one man and five children were left alive. The Indians on the Cypress Mountains saw the smoke of the white man's fire and came to help. The children intermarried and Mickinock maintained that his auburn-haired wife was a descendant of these white men. The mounds have never been

investigated. [8]

The origin of this paragraph can be found in the papers of Jacob Nelson (1857-?). The library at the Minnesota Historical Society contains his manuscript titled "Forty Years in the Roseau Valley" which is thought to have been completed around 1925. Here is the relevant text. I have included the continuation of his text into another story about the ridges. That material shows that the shipwreck story is not isolated but is part of the Indian experiences for which Nelson found verification.

#### Those Deferred Traditions

Upon enquiry Billy McGillis told me there were many stories concerning the mounds on the sand ridge. The Indians were in the habit of playing upon the credulity of the white people and told them things which had no foundation in fact. McGillis said the mounds were the winter homes of people who lived on the sand ridge when both sides of the ridge were covered with water. The ridge was then a long island in a great lake.

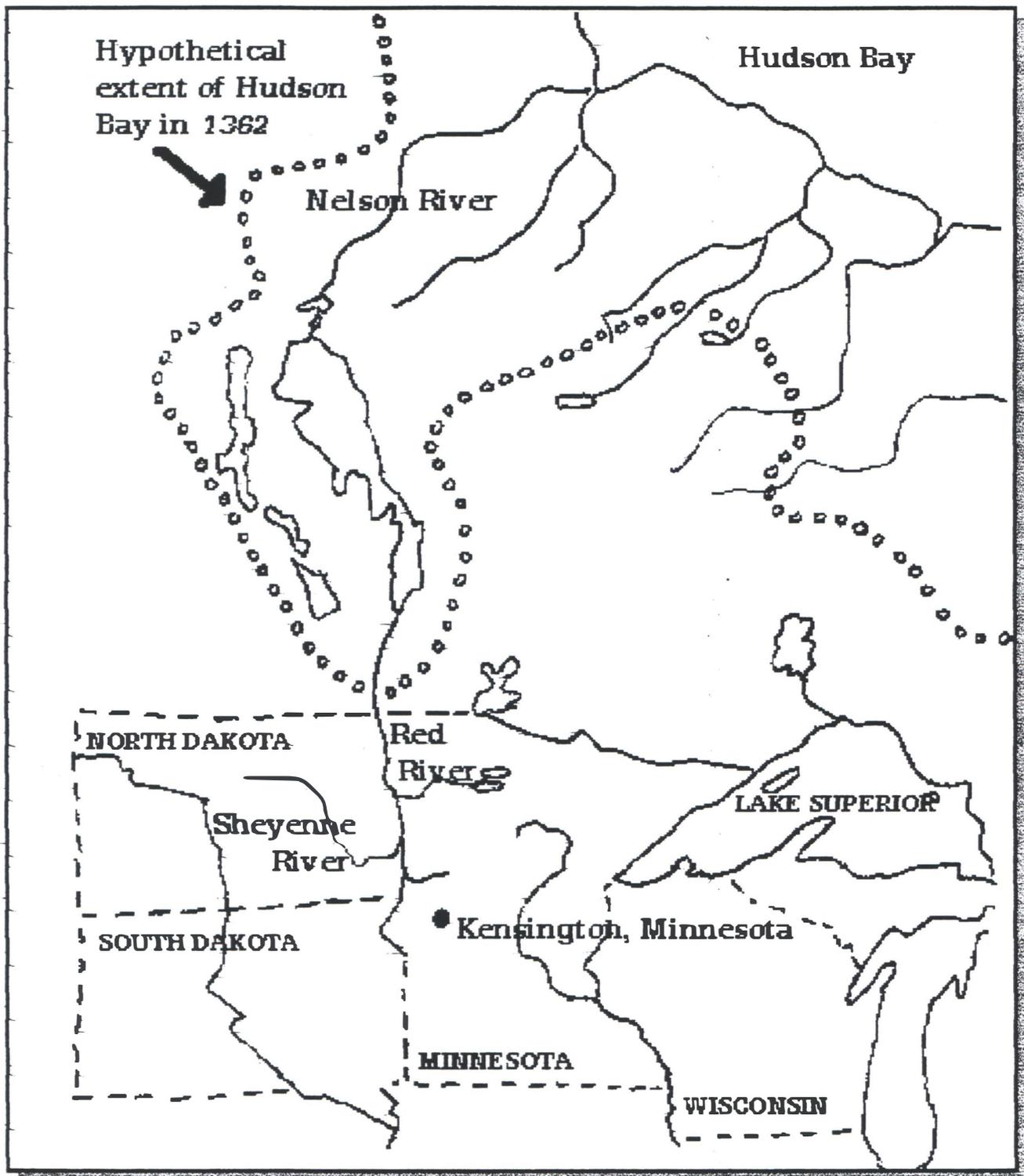
#### Mickinock' s Story

I, and others, had noticed that some of the Indians had hair of decidedly auburn shade. Especially was this true of the Mickinock family. One day I asked Mickinock the reason. At that time my hair was decidedly red. He pointed to my hair and said, "S'pose some time white men, same hair like you, scare my squaw." When he had had a good laugh seemingly at my expense, he told me a strange story.

#### The Story

A long time ago all of the sand ridges were long islands in a great lake. One fall the lake froze early and then a hard wind which broke up the ice followed. During the storm a large boat was driven against the sand ridge east of the Two Rivers Crossing and was hurled to pieces by the ice and wind. From the boat there escaped to the sand ridge fourteen whites, - seven men, two women and five children, - -three boys and two girls. After the storm there came quite a long spell of warm weather during which these people prepared for winter the best they could by building three sod wigwams on the ridge. During the winter their provisions were scant and sickness and famine left only one man and five children alive in the spring.

There were Indians living on the Cypress Mountains, - that high country north of the Roseau Valley known as the Pine Hills. The Indians saw the smoke of camp fires on the sand ridge and went down to investigate. There they found the one man and the five children, so they took them to the Cypress Mountains. The following winter the white man died. After ten years or more the white boys all had Indian wives and the white girls Indian husbands. The white boys wanted to go down to the sand ridge to see those sod wigwams. Due to the rapid disappearance of the water, much of the land was dry, so the Indians and the whites all went down to the sand ridge. They found the wigwams were



**Fig. 1. The Ojibway and Cree Indians both tell of a time when the lands west and south of Hudson Bay were under water. At such a time the ship that foundered on Campbell Beach according to Indian tradition and the ships that brought the Vikings to explore near Kensington, Minnesota, according to the Runestone would have reached the area with ease.**

destroyed, so they smoothed them over and left them as we saw them.

#### Those Traditional White People

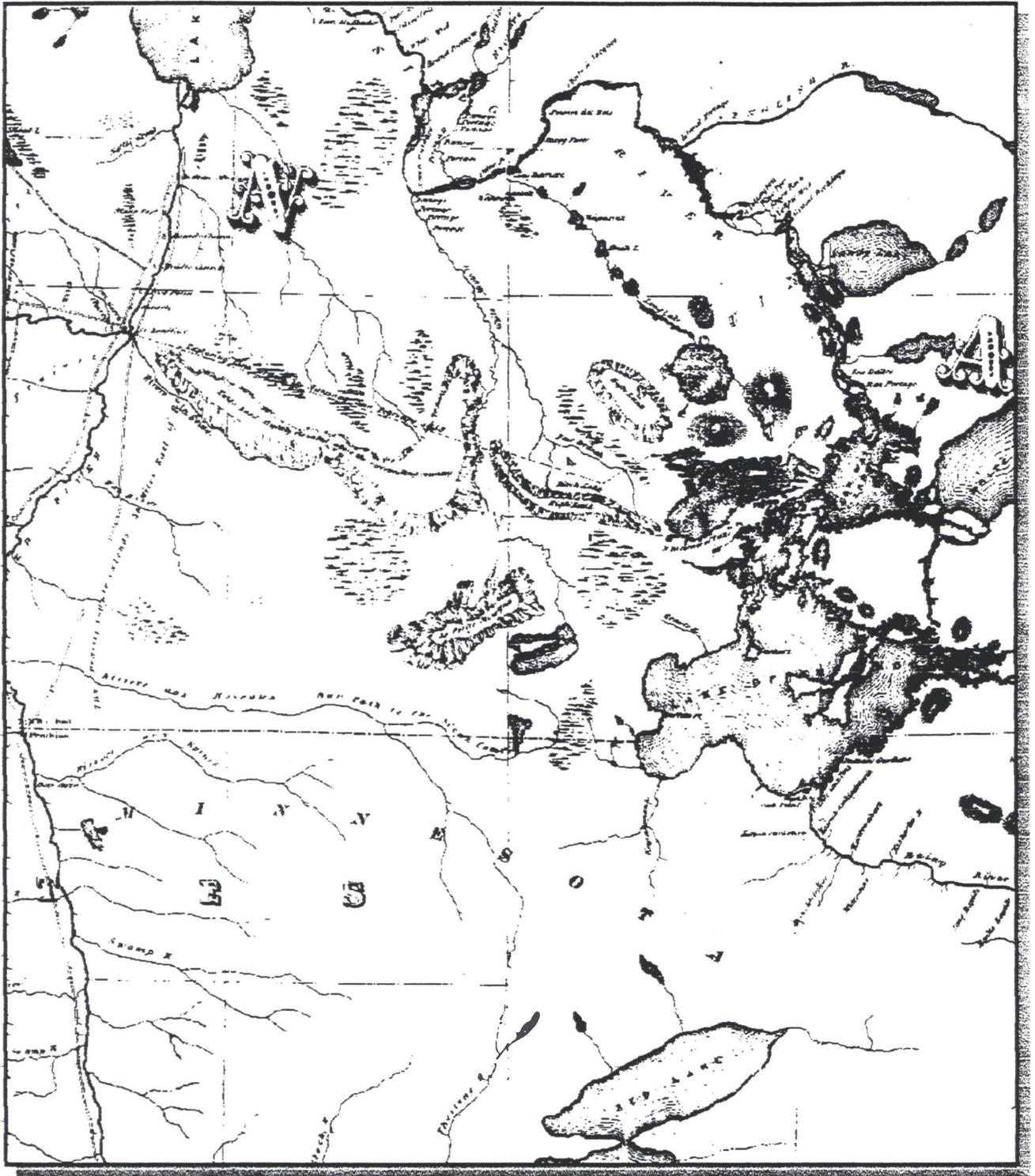
Considering their fair complexions, blue eyes and light hair, Mickinock said those whites must have been Swedes or Norwegians. Their descendants are scattered over this north country living as Indians. Many of them may be distinguished by the auburn shade of hair and traits peculiar to the white race. He said that his wife was a descendant of these people; also he mentioned several other Indians in whom he claimed to see distinguishing features of the white race. It may be just possible that these traditional people were a part of that colony of Norwegians who disappeared from the southwest coast of Greenland several hundred years ago. What happened to the Norse colonists cut adrift in Greenland is one of the world's greatest mysteries. Is it too far fetched to suppose that some of those colonists drifted into the Roseau Valley several hundred years ahead of the Norwegians who have a share in the occupation of the Roseau Valley at the present time?

There are more traditions about those people and those and other mounds, notwithstanding the claims of some of the old pioneers that the Indians have no traditions concerning the origin or purpose of those mounds. Those mounds were here when the first white explorers came into this region; therefore we must depend upon the traditions of the Indians for knowledge concerning them.

Those same old pioneers scoffed at the idea of the Indians ever fighting entrenched, but they scoffed without a due knowledge of history. There is in history authentic knowledge of cases where the Indians used the trench and other artificial defenses which I will later give.

Here begins another story about those traditions of the whites and two other mounds. I will give this story in substance as it was given to me by Mickinock in his broken English, by Aad Cabanas [spelling?], who spoke through an interpreter at the Roseau Lake Indian village, Chief Moose Dung of the Thief River Indians, who also spoke by an interpreter at Nelson Park, Mitchel Marshall of "Hungry Hall" at the mouth of the Rainy River and one other very old Indian from the northeast shore of the Lake of the Woods, who spoke very plain English and upon several occasions visited the Roseau Lake Indian village. All of the men had knowledge of the traditions of these people and closely corroborated Mickinock's statements. The story follows:

After the people had made these mounds they went south down the sand ridge, crossed the Two Rivers and continued down the sand ridge to the Tamarack River. Here they camped on the highest part of the east division of the Mound Ridge. This ridge was divided into two parts about a mile and a half east of Karlstad. These two parts continued south parallel to each other, separated only by a string of marshes, the outlet of which flows into the Tamarack River where



**Fig. 2. Northwestern Minnesota and southeastern Manitoba as shown on "Plan showing the region explored by S. J. Dawson and his party between Fort William, Lake Superior and the Great Saskatchewan River" in 1857 and 1858. In the center is "La Petite Montagne" which is "the Pine Hills" (also known as Cypress Mountains) mentioned by Nelson. From *Report of the Exploration of the Country Between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement and Between the Latter Place and the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan* by S. J. Dawson (Toronto: Legislative Assembly, 1859).**

the two parts of the ridge are a half mile apart. About two miles west of the place where those were camping was the highest part of the visible stretch of the west ridge. That is the ridge forming the eastern limit of the Red River Valley.

One morning these people were very much surprised and excited to see a camp of quite a number of people on the high part of west ridge. Not knowing what to do they began to jump around lively and wave wildly anything they could find and yell as loudly as possible. Soon those other people gathered up their belongings and went south.

On the following day some of those northern people crossed over to the west ridge which was no easy task since the west ridge still remained quite a body of water. Arriving on the ridge they found signs which convinced them that these southern people had been using that ridge as a camping ground for quite some time. Knowing that the invasion of both plant and animal life came from the south, they reasoned that the invasion of men would come from the same direction. They concluded that there must be more people farther south where those people came from, so they began to plan ways and means to prevent invasion of the sand ridges. They struck upon a happy plan of which the evidence still remained intact the last time I visited that neighborhood in July, 1900.

Nelson goes on to describe and locate an artificial mound in the shape of a serpent that the Indians created as a warning to people to the south of them. This was the evidence he saw for himself. I have omitted these particulars because they are of interest only to archaeologists.

The suspicion occurred to Nelson that the "strange people" might have been some of the Greenland colonists in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. There is no date on this story, of course. But the date of 1362 on the Kensington Runestone suggests that the geographic conditions of high water described here were in place both for the visit of the Viking explorers and for the wreck of the large boat. The explorers were able to sail their ships southward, perhaps in a then-existent Manitoba Bay, on water that they identified as "the sea" to a shore far to the south of what we see now. The shore was then located fourteen days of travel north of today's Kensington, Minnesota. Perhaps the Viking explorers were even looking for the desperate refugees told of by the Ojibway.

The journey of the Viking explorers to the south would logically have been upon the Red River of the North, a large tributary into the bay. A turn eastward on the Otter Tail River would have taken them into the area of the lakes between Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, and Runestone Hill where the stone was found. According to the runestone the area was inundated with hills projecting as islands. They might have taken advantage of Inspiration Peak, the highest projection of land in the area, to see what terrain could be viewed.

The fatal encounter with Indians probably had them thinking about returning to their ships. So a marker served both to commemorate their dead and to show for

centuries how far they had reached into the New World.

The return trip would probably have been attempted the way they had arrived, on the Red River. They would have observed the size of the tributaries into that river on their journey south. They might have decided to see what they would encounter on the largest river entering from the west. That would have them venturing up the Sheyenne River into what is today North Dakota.

Here the undoubted historical fact of the La Verendrye stone re-enters our discussion. Peter Kalm was told that the stone was found by Sieur de la Verendrye on a journey he commanded. (His sons were also explorers.) The fact of his being in command means the stone was found when he took a trip across North Dakota in 1738. Fortunately much interest has been taken in tracing the route of that journey. Regrettably, like so many pieces of history, the route is also disputed.

Russell Reid has suggested a likely path for this journey. [9] La Verendrye was traveling from the vicinity of Portage La Prairie to the Missouri River. We are told that the stone was found toward the end of the trip. Reid's route has the French explorer crossing the Sheyenne River east of Harvey, North Dakota. At such a place Viking explorers might have left another marker of their most westerly point reached in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. By the way, this is very close to the geographical center of North America. If the La Verendrye stone or even a copy of its inscriptions is ever found, a translation could prove to be most interesting for its relationship to the Kensington Runestone.

The fate of the makers of the Kensington stone is unknown. Did they travel westward and leave another runestone? Did they ever make it back to their ships? Did any of them return to Scandinavia? No one yet knows. Hjalmar Holand thinks some of them did, but others are waiting for better evidence.

Searches have been made for the La Verendrye stone and have not produced it. I think a modern search for an 18<sup>th</sup> century copy of its inscriptions would be more likely to turn up results. Somewhere on its journey from North Dakota to Montreal to Quebec and on to France someone should have recorded its markings. Here we will see the basis for whole new controversy. Perhaps it too could consume another century with arguments as has the much-maligned but ultimately enlightening Kensington Runestone.

#### NOTES

1. G.J.Marcus *The Conquest of the North Atlantic* (NY: Oxford UP, 1981), 92; Hjalmar R. Holand, *Westward from Vinland* (NY: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1940), 74.
2. See bibliographies in Holand, *Westward* and in Holand, *Explorations* in Note 3.
3. H.R.Holand, *Explorations in America Before Columbus* (NY: Twayne, 1958), 156-7.
4. Carl O. Sauer, *Northern Mists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 148.
5. Holand, *Westward*, 245-51.
6. S.N.Hagen, "The Kensington Runic Inscription," *Speculum* 25(3):320-56 (July 1950).
7. Richard A. Hall Jr, *The Kensington Rune-Stone is Genuine* (Columbia, SC: Hornbeam Press, 1982); *The Kensington Rune-Stone: Authentic and Important* (Lake Bluff, IL: Jupiter Press, 1994).
8. *Minnesota: A State Guide* rev ed (NY: Hastings House, 1954), 355.
9. Russell Reid, "Verendrye's Journey to North Dakota in 1738," *North Dakota History* 32(2):117-129 (April 1965).

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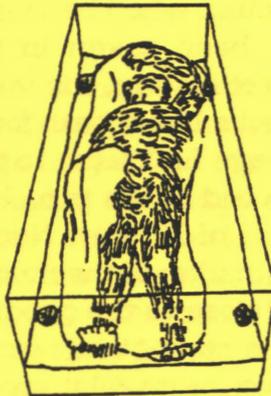


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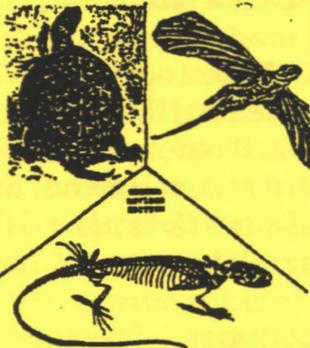
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THE Yeti, Bigfoot  
& True Giants

APPEARANCES	NAMES	TRACKS
	Yeti (Dzongkha Indians)	 9" x 11"
	True Giant (Siyeh Indians)	 10" x 21"
	Sasquatch (Kootenai Indians)	 9" x 20"

An Introduction  
by Mark A. Hall