



# Christmas comes to Markerville



PHOTO: LAUREL ANDERSEN-CORBIERE

**Annette Gray**  
Markerville, AB

Starry nights, crunching snow, church bells and luminaries. It is the spirit of Christmas which brings people flocking to the Christmas Eve service held each year in the Markerville Lutheran Church. As they have done for over 100 years, friends and neighbours of all denominations gather here at seven o'clock to sit in wooden seats, blend their voices in ancient carols and listen to the story of the Christ Child as told in children's skits, musical selections and Bible readings.



PHOTO: BERNICE ANDERSEN

"Hark! the Herald Angels Sing." On such a night as this, the words of the carol take on new meaning, for surely the angels have visited this little church in the smiling faces of these good neighbours, shaking hands, hugging and wishing each other peace and joy throughout the festive season.

Indeed, this warm friendly spirit never leaves Markerville. Nestled on the banks of the Medicine River, the town dates back to 1888, when a colony of Icelandic settlers homesteaded in this area. The church itself was built in 1907 and rededicated a century later for the church's centennial celebrations. Originally constructed as a Lutheran Church, it is not open on a regular basis. Yet the large white doors open for special services: weddings, funerals and seasonal events. It also serves as an attraction for tourists each summer who flock to the heart of the community – the Historic Markerville Creamery Museum.

The Museum, which was declared an historic site in 1974, was a working creamery serving the farmers in the community for 73 years from 1899 to 1972. Now it operates as a very modern museum, endorsing the concepts of "showing, rather than telling." You will not find many items behind glass here.



PHOTO: BERNICE ANDERSEN



PHOTO: BERNICE ANDERSEN

**Left: Markerville Church, more than one hundred years of Christmas Eve services; bottom left: Candle light and a reading of the Christmas story by Larry Kjearsgaard, a community member; Above: Historic Markerville Creamery set in a blanket of snow and right: the story told to children through a puppet show, an annual Christmas Eve tradition**

Summer visitors are treated to a delightful tour, seeing first hand the authentic models of butter making and pasteurizing equipment used in yesteryear. The Creamery Museum is operated under the auspices of the community-based Stephan G. Stephansson Icelandic Society. Besides offering walk-through tours and educational school programs, the museum hosts a variety of special events, and during the summer the staff operate a coffee shop where hungry visitors are treated to Icelandic delicacies.

A measure of the museum's success can be seen in the thousands of tourists it attracts annually. Many of these are return visitors. Although the tourist season is limited to six months, from May 15th to Labour Day, there are other activities during the winter months, such as daily

morning coffee for all who care to drop in, Winterfest in February and Christmas in Markerville in November. As well there are pot luck suppers meetings, entertainment and money making events where neighbors come en masse to enjoy homemade food and good company. Campground facilities, located on the banks of the Medicine River, give summer visitors a quiet place to relax, either as picnickers or overnight campers.

Summer or winter, Markerville seems always at peace, both in its setting and in the old-fashioned neighbourly atmosphere which prevails here. "Oh little town of Markerville how still we see thee lie," a true oasis in a busy world – a place where neighbours care for neighbours, and the Christmas spirit abides 365 days of the year.



# English Service is held at Hallgrímskirkja every year

**Kent Lárus Björnsson**  
Reykjavík, Iceland

**T**hough the date has not been officially announced for this year, one of my regular church visits is the annual English Church Service at the largest church in Iceland, Hallgrímskirkja. The Embassies of USA, UK and Canada take turns organizing the event. It is held Sunday afternoon about a week before Christmas and I expect it to be December 18th this year. So if anyone is visiting Iceland at that time they have to check it out. I expect it to be the British Embassy that sponsors it this year.

The service involves some scripture reading and the Embassy arranges who does the reading. Canada organized the event two years ago so I was one of the fortunate people to be asked to read a few lines. Each year they have done the *Nine Lessons and Carols*, which means nine readers. Each of the Ambassadors read and then the Embassy delegates the remaining readers. This program originates in England way back to Christmas Eve 1880

and is still celebrated annually at Cambridge. There is very good attendance at these services. It is a very broad spectrum of people, and multi-denominational. The Ministers who are Icelandic do a very good job though English is not their mother tongue. The ministers the last number of years have been Sr. Bjarni Þór Bjarnason and Sr. Birgir Ásgeirsson. The very popular Mótettukór (Motet Choir) sings a few carols and that is always fabulous, hearing them and the fantastic organ music. Hörður Áskelsson is the conductor and organist and he is fantastic. I feel it is an honour being a part of the program on a regular basis.

Those who know me know I am not a regular in church but this is something of a tradition now. I guess I have to say that my dedication to the English service began with a service that I attended just a day or two after September 11, 2001. It was a moving event and now the English Christmas service has become a must attend event for me.

Following the service everyone is invited to the host Embassy for coffee or hot chocolate.

Last year we were invited to the US Ambassador's residence. While I was there I was caught by one of the ornaments on the Christmas tree. *Merry Christmas Eh!* I asked about this and learned that his previous posting was at the US Consul in Vancouver.

From Wikipedia: *The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols* is a format for a traditional Christmas service. The story of the fall of humanity, the promise of the Messiah, and the birth of Jesus is told in nine short Bible readings from Genesis, the prophetic books and the Gospels, interspersed with Christmas carols, hymns and choir music.

The format was based on an Order drawn up by Edward White Benson, later Archbishop



PHOTOS: KENT LÁRUS BJÖRNSSON

**The annual English Church service, held at Hallgrímskirkja, is hosted, turn about, by the Embassies of Canada, US and UK. Below: This Christmas decoration at the residence of US Ambassador to Iceland, Luis E. Arreaga, is a memory from the Ambassador's previous posting as the US Consul in Vancouver.**

of Canterbury but at that time Bishop of Truro, in Cornwall, for use on Christmas Eve 1880. Tradition says that he organized a 10 p.m. service on Christmas Eve in a temporary wooden shed serving as his cathedral and that a key purpose of the service was to keep men out of pubs on Christmas Eve.

The original liturgy has since been adapted and used by other churches all over the world. Lessons and Carols most often occur in Anglican churches, but also in some Roman Catholic, Lutheran parishes, and Presbyterian institutions.

However numerous Christian churches have adopted this service, or a variation, as part of their Christmas celebrations. In the UK, the service has become the standard format for schools' Christmas carol services.

The best-known version is broadcast annually from King's College, Cambridge, on Christmas Eve. It features carols sung by the famous Choir of King's College, Cambridge. Groton School of Groton, Massachusetts, has performed the festival longer than any institution other than King's, holding its first Lessons and Carols in 1928.