



Appendix

REYKJAVIK'S FIRST REAL POLICEMEN

On 15 April 1803, by a royal decree, Reykjavik became a separate jurisdiction headed by a magistrate, Rasmus Frydensberg, a Danish lawyer, and two Danish policemen were engaged to assist him.

With the establishment of the magistracy, Reykjavik became a fully valid town with special rights and the magistrate took charge of law enforcement. The magistrate was responsible for a very wide range of functions: in addition to being the town sheriff and the agent administering the crown properties, he judged civil law cases in Reykjavik, collected taxes and customs, handled the financial affairs of persons who were not financially competent, judged criminal cases, and was also the head of the police force and the mayor. He also sat in the board of governors of the prison on Arnarhóll.



Photo: Júlíus Sigurjónsson.

In summer 1809, when Jörgen Jörgensen, the "Dog-day King", seized power in Iceland, he had Frydensberg arrested: the magistrate had flouted the order of house arrest that had been imposed on Danish government officials in Iceland and taken his child out for a ride on Austurvöllur. And so it fell to the policeman, Ole Biörn, to take his superior to the prison and lock him up. As it could hardly be expected that Denmark would not try to liberate Iceland and Danish property from the control of the British, Jörgensen engaged a force of eight Icelanders (first called "soldiers" and later "watchmen") and provided them with arms and training in their use. The policeman Henrik Kragh, a tailor by trade, was engaged to make uniforms for them: Jörgensen, who himself wore a uniform, wanted to have his watchmen smart and well-turned-out.

No	Navn	Staðir	Aldur	Ástæða	Stofn	Þingdómur	Ástæða	Ástæða	Ástæða
1	Alex. Svartberg	Þorshöfði	61	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
2	Jonas Jensen	Þorshöfði	31	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
3	Jost. Svartberg	Þorshöfði	27	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
4	Magnús Magnússon	Þorshöfði	20	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
5	Jón Jensen	Þorshöfði	20	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
6	Benjamin Einarsson	Þorshöfði	20	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
7	Jón Jensen	Þorshöfði	20	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
8	Ólafur Ólafsson	Þorshöfði	40	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
9	Ánna Árnadóttir	Þorshöfði	60	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
10	Jón Pólsen	Þorshöfði	22	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
11	Jón Jensen	Þorshöfði	26	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
12	Jón Pólsen	Þorshöfði	45	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
13	Jón Pólsen	Þorshöfði	47	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
14	Svein Sveinsson	Þorshöfði	39	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
15	Kristján Ólafsson	Þorshöfði	28	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
16	Jón Pólsen	Þorshöfði	22	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
17	Þórn Pólsen	Þorshöfði	21	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
18	Ólafur Ólafsson	Þorshöfði	27	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
19	Þorsteinn Einarsson	Þorshöfði	20	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
20	Þorsteinn Einarsson	Þorshöfði	20	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
21	Gudrún Ólafsdóttir	Þorshöfði	38	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
22	Ánna Árnadóttir	Þorshöfði	42	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
23	Þorsteinn Einarsson	Þorshöfði	37	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
24	Þorsteinn Einarsson	Þorshöfði	43	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
25	Ólafur Ólafsson	Þorshöfði	37	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
26	Þorsteinn Einarsson	Þorshöfði	20	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
27	Þorsteinn Einarsson	Þorshöfði	45	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
28	Hilga Þorsteinsdóttir	Þorshöfði	40	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
29	Ólafur Ólafsson	Þorshöfði	40	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...
30	Ólafur Ólafsson	Þorshöfði	40	gott	Stofn	Þingdómur	24. Okt 1807	...	...

Þorsteinn Einarsson d. 24. Okt. 1808

A list of the inmates of the prison in Arnarhöll in 1808. Þorsteinn Einarsson, the prisoner who died as the result of a flogging, is number 19. Photo: Júlíus Sigurjónsson.

Reykjavík's first real policemen

Ole Biörn (b. about 1756) served as a policeman in Reykjavík 1803–14. He had been a subaltern in the Danish army and came to Reykjavík in 1803, together with magistrate Rasmus Frydensberg and Vilhelm Nolte, who is mentioned below.

Ole Biörn was involved in running a "club"; societies of this name were common in other countries at this time. Officially debating societies, they were more frequently known as places of drinking and gambling, and club in Reykjavík was no exception to this. It was founded in 1805 under the direction of Ole Biörn and Jóhannes Zoëga, former chief prison warder. It began purely as a drinking and gambling society and magistrate Frydensberg was very much against it. Later, many of the town's more respectable citizens seem to have joined it and it became a sort of social centre where dances were held.

Early in 1806, the board of governors of the prison on Arnarhóll agreed to engage constable Ole Biörn as a prison warder and also doorkeeper at a salary of 30 ríkisdalir, paid from the prison fund, with free lodging in the prison and free firewood. Ole Biörn undertook to be available at all times

in the prison except when engaged on his police duties or serving summonses, and to maintain order in the prison and ensure that none of the inmates went out into the town without wearing prisoner's uniform.

On Sunday, 10 April 1808, the Medical Officer of Health, Klog, announced that Þorsteinn Einarsson, who had been imprisoned for stealing sheep and sentenced to be flogged and to work for the rest of his life in chains, was on the point of death. Klog had visited him at the request of the prison authorities, and the prisoner told him that his condition was the result of a flogging he had received at the hands of the warder Ole Biörn a few days earlier. An inquiry was held, and the board of governors of the prison met and decided that the death of the prisoner could have been the result of the punishment administered the previous week. It was taken into account, however, that Ole Biörn was nearly 60 and had served as a subaltern in the Danish army for more than 20 years before being taken on as a policeman in Reykjavík in 1803, and had always shown great care in his police work, as a consequence of which he was popular. Both in terms of the regulations and his instructions from the board, he was authorised to punish prisoners for minor offences that could not be referred to the board at short notice, and had been given a length of thick rope

for this purpose. According to the testimony of the prisoners, he had punished Þorsteinn Einarsson on 3 April 1808 after reminding him of his duties on several occasions without result. The unfortunate consequences of the punishment were due to the prisoner's "restless conduct" while it was being administered, which must have resulted in the blows landing on vulnerable places. However, he had said nothing, either to the physician or the chief warder, about pains until four days later, and had in the meantime been put to quarrying work, despite the bad weather, by which time his condition had worsened. But there was not considered to be any reason to suspect that the warder had victimised anyone, and the board's conclusion was that he had not intended to cause the prisoner, who was from another district and had been in the prison for a long time, death or serious injury. Thus, the board's finding was that it was not prepared to believe that the warder had committed a capital offence or one punishable by imprisonment; rather, it was an unfortunate accident. However, because of his good conduct and the difficulty of obtaining good workers for the position, and also the reasonable fear that if the warder were to be prosecuted, and perhaps put in custody, then the prisoners would believe that all discipline was at an end, the board referred the matter to the chancellor.

A public inquiry was held. The conclusion was that this was not a case of homicide, but Ole Biörn was made to pay legal costs, and he also resigned his position as a prison warder.

Vilhelm Nolte (b. about 1758) served as a policeman in Reykjavík in 1803–04. He was a shoemaker by trade and like Ole Biörn he had been a subaltern in the Danish army. At this time there was only one shoemaker working in Reykjavík, and one of the reasons why Nolte was chosen for the police job was that he could make and repair shoes, and he was engaged on the understanding that he would pursue his trade concurrently with his police work. He came to Reykjavík in 1803 together with the magistrate, Rasmus Frydensberg, and Ole Biörn. However, he took to drink immediately and was dismissed after only a year's service and sent back to Denmark. Nolte had good references when he arrived in Iceland and must have disliked the job or the country intensely, as he went off on a massive and prolonged binge straight away during his first year and totally neglected his duties.

Henrik Kragh (b. about 1770) served as a policeman in Reykjavík 1804–26. He was a tailor by trade. He took over from Vilhelm Nolte, and was one of the founders of the club, together with Ole Biörn. Little is known about Henrik Kragh, but he seems to have been reasonably good at his job.

Jón Benjamínsson (b. about 1790) served as a policeman in Reykjavík 1814–15. He succeeded Ole Biörn, and can be said to have been the first Icelandic policeman in the force. He served only one year, from 1 July 1814 to 30 June 1815. Little is known about him save that he had been a shop worker, in Hofsóss and later in Reykjavík. He is believed to have left Iceland after his time as a policeman.

Lars Möller (b. about 1790) served as a policeman in Reykjavík 1815–37. Frydensberg, the former magistrate, was instrumental in having him employed. He took over from Jón Benjamínsson, and was eventually dismissed for drunkenness.

Magnús Jónsson (b. 1771) succeeded Henrik Kragh and served as a policeman in Reykjavík 1826–39. He was from Eiði on Seltjarnarnes and matriculated from the school Hólavallaskóli. He is described as having been poor and having a strange manner.

Þorsteinn Bjarnason (b. 1791) succeeded Lars Möller in 1837 and served as a policeman in Reykjavík until his death in 1865. Earlier, he had been a farmer, local parish director and carpenter.

Hendrich Hendrichsen (b. about 1810) succeeded Magnús Jónsson and served as a policeman in

Reykjavík 1839–56. Stefán Gunnlaugsson, the magistrate at the time, made law enforcement a priority and approached the police authorities in Copenhagen asking them to provide a particularly capable man for the job. The position was therefore offered at a considerably higher wage than the other policeman received; however, Hendrichsen did not prove to be quite of the calibre expected. Concurrently with his work as a policeman, he ran a restaurant under a licence that did not allow the sale of alcoholic drinks, but this did not stop him from doing so. He also held dances, playing the flute to accompany the dancing. He was dismissed from his position for drunkenness.

Alexíus Árnason (b. 1813) was taken on in 1855, when the number of policemen was increased from two to three, and served until 1874 and again from 1 October 1875 to 31 January 1876. His salary was paid from the Land Register Fund until 1856, when the governor, who was also the head of the police force, decided this was not in accordance with the law; he based this view on statements in an open letter of 24 November 1856 stating that the costs resulting from the Act of 15 April 1854, on Shipping and Trade in Iceland, were to be met from the government departments' equalization fund. This was in line with the conclusion reached by the Althingi, which had also discussed the matter; nevertheless



THE HEAD CONSTABLE

...On St Monday, however, there was a tavern quarrel, when one of the strongest men in the town had his face cut open by a stone. We were assured by all that such things are very rare. Yet on the following Wednesday one of the couthless Calibans from the country, whom tangle-leg had made "drunk as an auk," thinking that he was derided by a party of Englishmen, slipped up behind one of them and hit him a rounder, in popular parlance a "regular slogdolager." The Briton, thus unexpectedly assaulted, soon recovered himself, and though the peasant bundled away, rolling like a bolting bear, Mr. A- succeeded in lodging a couple of sound lashes with his horsewhip. A small crowd gathered; of course it took part against the strangers, and a free fight became imminent. This was prevented by the chief constable, whose badge is the tallest hat I ever did see, and who commands a body of three men, armed with the "Northern Star." When appealed to, however, the dignitary distinctly refused to take his fellow-countryman into custody; hence, perhaps, the freedom of the jails from jail-birds, a peculiarity strongly insisted upon by complimentary writers, and quaintly cor-responding with our "gratifying diminution of crime." This is not what we read about Iceland and the Icelanders. It of course will be said that fair time is approaching, and that we are at Reykjavik, a centre of dissipation, where men are eagerly looking forward to the arrival of a grind-organ.

Richard F. Burton (1875)

ULTIMA THULE; OR, A SUMMER IN ICELAND

the policemen who had been engaged earlier continued to receive their wages from the Land Register Fund. Alexíus was regarded as a notable figure, and played a large part in public life in Reykjavík. He was a resourceful policeman with a talent for extracting confessions from thieves. Alexíus was also the assistant magistrate, process server and court witness, and probably Reykjavík's first detective.

In 1857 Alexíus received a written reprimand and a warning that conduct of the type he had shown was quite inappropriate if he intended to retain his position in the police. The background to this was that in 1856 the bishop's residence in Laugarnes had been auctioned; the magistrate wrote to the regional governor asking whether the town council could make a bid for the property and permission had been refused. After the auction there was a lot of bad feeling among the townspeople because of this and they wrote the regional governor a strongly-worded letter; one of the signatories was Alexíus, which accounts for the magistrate's reprimand.

Carl Peter Steenberg (b. about 1809) served as a policeman in Reykjavík 1857-59. On Hendrichsen's retirement, the regional government tried to arrange to have someone engaged as his successor who could also teach physical education in the

Latin School in Reykjavík. In addition to teaching, he was expected to do his police duties, his prison warden duties and act as a messenger for the High Court. He had to meet the requirements for the police position: intelligence, quickness, resourcefulness and reliability, in addition to being reasonably good at writing. Steenberg's background was that he had been a subaltern in the Danish army. He resigned his police position after two years, retaining his other duties and entitlements, which gave rise to a long dispute about the wages and perquisites he received, which the other policemen regarded as pertaining to their positions. Steenberg continued as the physical education instructor of the Latin School until 1877, when he was 68. That year he was awarded the Dannebrog medal.

Árni Gíslason (b. 1833), an engraver by trade, succeeded Carl Peter Steenberg and served as a policeman in Reykjavík 1859-75. It is known that he was skilled in improvising verses and was a passionate temperance campaigner.

Jón Jónsson, known as "Jón Borgfirðingur" ("Jón from Borgarfjörður", b. 1826), succeeded Þorsteinn Bjarnason and served as a policeman in Reykjavík 1865-88. Jón was a book-binder by training, and also well known as a scholar and writer; he collected books and manuscripts that he later



"Jón Borgfirðingur" and the official emblem carried by him, "Royal policeman" from 1865 to 1888. Photo: National Museum, Photo Department.

presented to the National Library. His letter of appointment, the first that a policeman is known to have received, was issued by the regional governor on 8 January 1866. It states that he was to conduct himself in accordance with the instructions already issued, or to be issued subsequently, regarding his job, and carry out the orders of his immediate superiors faithfully and efficiently. Jón Borgfirðingur's own records state that his police job was demanding and poorly paid, with the result that he scarcely had sufficient for basic necessities, even though he lived economically.

For a long time he yearned to give up the job and spend his time doing what he wanted – independent reading, studying and writing – particularly after the town council instructed him to wear a uniform, which he regarded as "military shackles", but dared not resign because he was so poor. He was made an honorary member of the Icelandic Literary Society, as his library had been of great use to its members and had also done much to recruit new members.