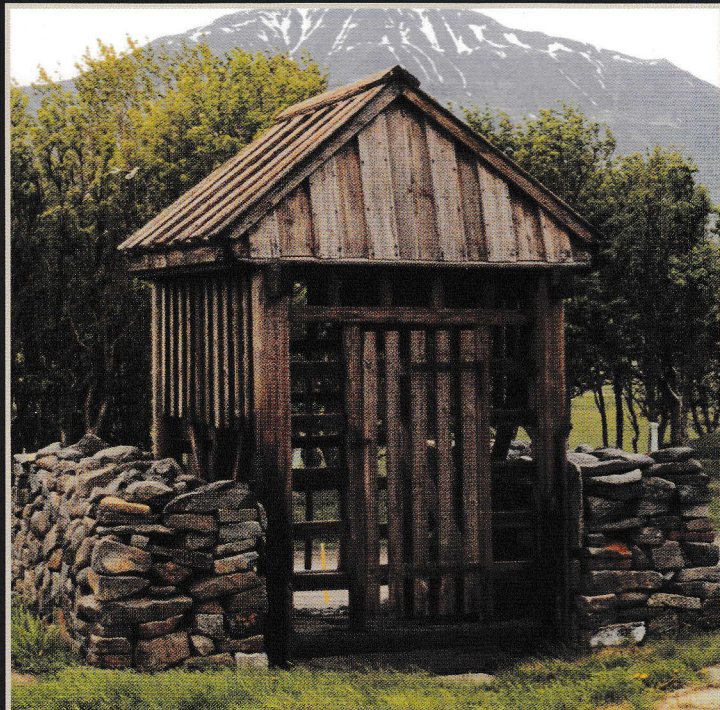




NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ICELAND



*Klukknaort (belfry), Möðruvellir, Eyjafjörður*

National Museum Historic  
Buildings Collection





*Glaumbær, Skagafjörður.*

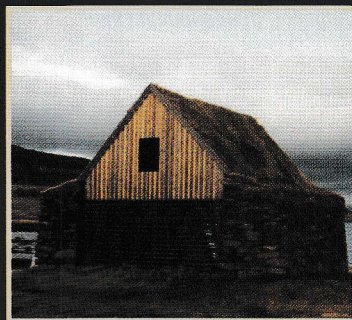
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### Historic Buildings

The National Museum's collection of historic buildings came into being as the museum undertook the protection of old buildings, where this was the only way to save them from dilapidation or demolition. Gradually, a collection of buildings evolved, which now numbers over forty. Although the museum initially acquired buildings in a rather random manner, the collection now comprises an excellent cross-section of the Icelandic building heritage of the past few centuries.

### Turf buildings

The National Museum's collection includes all Iceland's largest and most important turf buildings which remain in their original form.

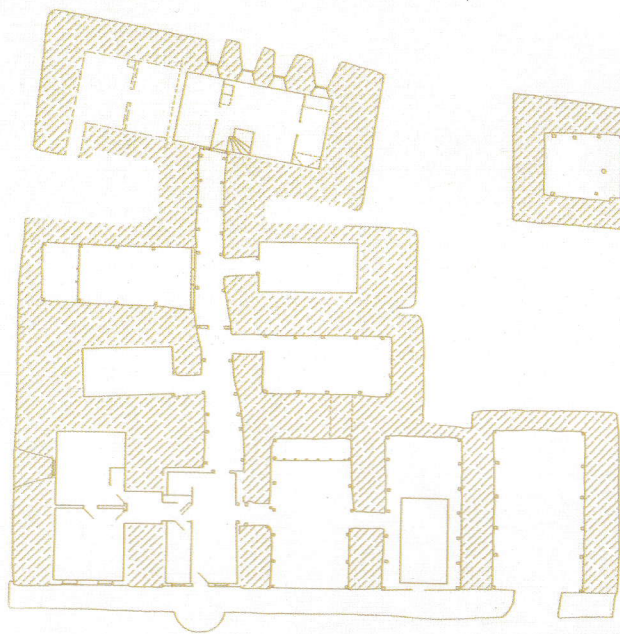


*Hjallur, Vatnsfjörður.*

### Building materials

In olden times, Icelandic houses were built using whatever material was easily available. In the West Fjords, for instance, turf was not readily available for building, while rock was plentiful. Hence the turf farmhouses of this region generally have walls built of rock: for instance the fish-drying shack (hjallur) at Vatnsfjörður, and Litlibær in Skötufjörður. In Skagafjörður and Eyjafjörður in the north, on the other hand, turf of building quality was plentiful, and this may be seen in the turf walls of Glaumbær in Skagafjörður and Laufás in Eyjafjörður. At Grenjaðarstaður in South Þingeyjarsýsla, the local lava rock was the principal building material, and this is typical of construction in highly volcanic areas; the same applies to the farmhouses of Þverá in Laxárdalur, Grænavatn in Mývatnssveit and Keldur in Rangárvellir.





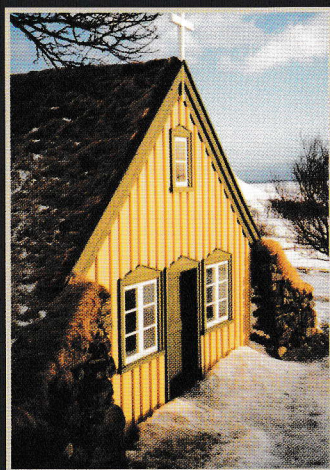
Plan of Laufás, Eyjafjörður.

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The roof of a turf house comprises at least two layers, with wooden panelling, birch twigs or flat stones of some kind between the rafters and the turf roofing. Interior covering varied greatly, both geographically and according to economic status. Houses of high-quality construction were panelled on the inside with wood, while those of poorer quality used a layer of twigs. In certain areas lymegrass grows in abundance, and this was used under the turf roof of the sheep-house (*sauðahús*) in Álftaver, built around 1900. In the rainy southern lowlands, the inhabitants of the ancient farmhouse of Keldur combated problems of leaky roofs by placing flat stones under the turf.

#### *Forms of turf building*

The Icelandic turf farmhouse is a unique tradition, and has not yet been fully researched. It is in effect a cluster of separate buildings linked together by passages. It is quite rare for all the parts of a turf farmhouse to date from the same period. Individual units were built for a specific purpose, and renewed as necessary. Turf farmhouses thus often have a continuous building history, in some cases right back to the early



Hofskirkja, Örfæfi.

years of Iceland's history. Turf farmhouses as seen today are the product of centuries of evolution, and hence it is no easy matter to decide their precise age, although the date of construction of some specific building may be known. Turf houses of varying layout have evolved over the centuries, adapting to climatic conditions and the trends



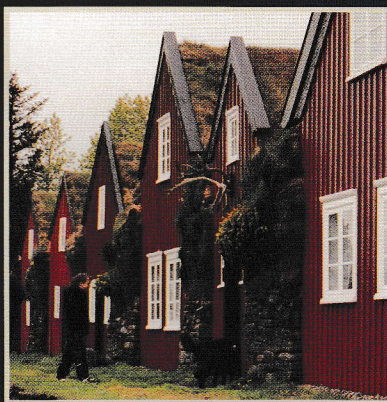


*Selið, Skaftafell.*

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of the time. There are regional variations in types of farmhouse, for instance the "northern type" which is much the same in all the large north Iceland farmhouses, although some comprise more buildings than others. In this type, the gables of all the front buildings face forwards. Behind the entrance building, a passage leads to rear buildings, which are arranged at right-angles. For various reasons, not least climatic, turf houses have survived better in the relatively dry north than the wet south, so that the majority of extant farmhouses are of the northern type: Glaumbær in Skagafjörður, Hólar in Hjaltadalur (Nýibær), Laufás in Eyjafjörður, Hólar in Eyjafjörður, Grenjaðarstaður in Aðaldalur and Þverá in Laxárdalur.

Another type is known as the "southern type," although not confined exclusively to the south. Selið at Skaftafell is a small version of this type, which is characterised by a large number of inter-connected front buildings in parallel, with forward facing gables. The farmhouse at Bustarfell in Vopnafjörður is a hybrid of northern and southern types.



*Bustarfell, Vopnafjörður.*

The third type is named after the farm where it survived, Galtastaðir fram in Hróarstunga. Here the longitudinal wall of the baðstofa (communal living space) faces forwards. The baðstofa is built over the cattleshed for warmth. At Selið, too, the baðstofa is built over the cattleshed.

At Keldur, Rangárvellir, in the south, is a turf house of ancient type, also known as the "Keldur type". Here the longitudinal









*Galtastaðir fram, Hróarstunga.*

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walls face forwards on both sides of the entrance building.

The final form of turf house is known as the "Marbæli type"; this had wooden buildings at the front of the farmhouse. Grænavatn in Mývatnssveit (1913) is of this type, and Arngrímsstofa (1884) at Gullbringa, Svarfaðardalur, is similar. Both buildings are of timber, but with protective layers of rock or turf against the walls.

#### *Turf churches*

The National Museum historic buildings collection includes all Iceland's turf churches which are extant in their original form. These are Grafarkirkja, Höfðaströnd (probably dating from the late 17th century, but all timbers were renewed in 1953), Viðímýrarkirkja in Skagafjörður (1834), Saurbæjarkirkja in Eyjafjörður (1858), Hofskirkja in Örfæfi (1883-85) and the chapel (bænhús) at Núpsstaður (probably from the mid-19th century, possibly older).

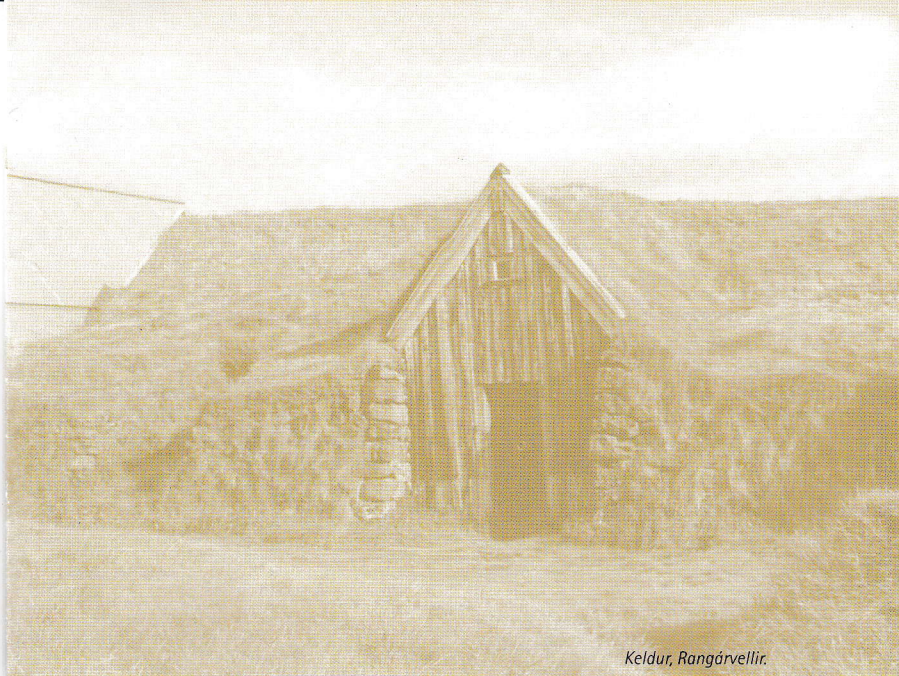
#### *Remnants of turf buildings*

In addition to entire turf houses and churches, the National Museum also preserves various parts of buildings and remnants. At Stóru-Akrar in Skagafjörður, the entrance building (bæjardyr), passage and reception room of a farmhouse built for Treasurer Skúli Magnússon in 1743-45



*Grænavatn, Mývatnssveit.*

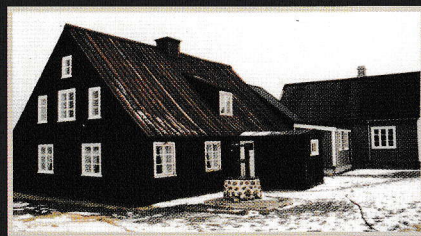




*Keldur, Rangárvellir.*

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have survived. At Reynistaður in Skagafjörður, an entrance building (bæjardyr) has survived, which was part of a farmhouse built shortly after 1758. The two last-named buildings are examples of stave construction, common in Iceland in past centuries, which died out during the 18th and 19th centuries. The stave method is also seen in the interior of



*Húsið and Assistentahúsið, Eyrarbakki.*

Grafarkirkja at Höfðaströnd, in the hall and reception room at Hólar in Eyjafjörður, and at Keldur in Rangárvellir. Traces may

also be seen in various other places, e.g. part of the passage in the Laufás farmhouse in Eyjafjörður.

### Timber buildings

The National Museum historic buildings collection includes a number of wooden buildings. Many of them were originally commercial buildings, the majority of the oldest type of Icelandic timber construction, under heavy Danish influence. These include Húsið at Eyrarbakki (1765), the warehouse (pakkhús) at Hofsó (1777) and Lónsstofa at Skipalón (1824), which have walls of sturdy logs or planks. The method of construction can only be seen on the exterior of the Hofsó warehouse; Lónsstofa is plastered, and Húsið has vertical weather-boarding on the exterior. Smíðahús at Skipalón was built in the mid-19th century, but is of the old Danish-influenced style. The same applies to the house built for the Weywadt merchant's family at Teigarhorn in Berufjörður. These houses were normally tarred, while the last-named was clad in asphalt felt.

Examples of later types of wooden building are Viktoríuhús on Vigur island (c.1860) and Assistentahús at





Pakkhús, Hofsó.

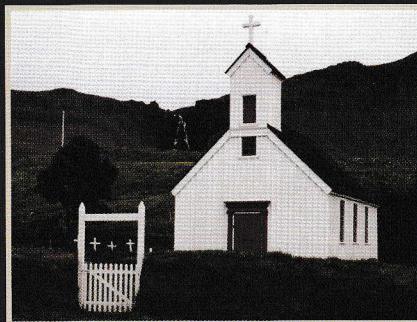
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Eyrbakki (1881), which was built onto Húsið. Adjacent to Víktoříuhús on Vigur is Iceland's only surviving windmill.

#### *Wooden churches*

The historic buildings collection contains several types of wooden church. Sjárborgarkirkja in Skagafjörður (1853), Tungufellskirkja (1856), Krýsuvíkurkirkja (1857), and Hraunskirkja in Keldudalur (1885) are of the oldest type, without towers. The collection now includes three churches with towers. Staðarkirkja in Reykjanes (1864) is an example of the "older towered church design", where the eaves are immediately above the windows, while Kirkjuhvammiskirkja (1882) and Reykholtskirkja (1886) are of the "later towered type", with higher walls, and a longer gap between window and eaves. Reykholt church bears a strong resemblance to Reykjavík Cathedral.

The belfry (klukknaport) at Möðruvellir, Eyjafjörður, is the oldest of its kind in Iceland (c. 1780); such belfries were common in olden times.



Staðarkirkja, Reykjanes.

#### **Stone buildings**

The historic buildings collection includes several stone buildings, for instance Sómastaðir in Reyðarfjörður (1875), a hybrid between stone and turf construction methods, added on to an existing turf farmhouse. The walls were built of uncut stone, using mortar made from glacial clay. The mountain hut (sæluhús) by the river Jökulsá á Fjöllum (1883), on the contrary, was built by stonemasons using stone hewn locally. The rectory at Sauðanes, Langanes (1879-81) and





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Nesstofa at Seltjörn (1761–63) are examples of sophisticated stonemasonry, although built at divergent periods. Both are lime-coated, and hence white in colour. The historic buildings collection does not include any concrete buildings; the first structures in Iceland using this technique were built shortly before 1900.



*Sauðanes, Langanes.*

The historic buildings collection is the heart of the National Museum's collection in the regions. The museum carries out research on the buildings, as well as Iceland's architectural heritage in general, and is responsible for preservation in cooperation with the National Architectural Heritage Board which performs maintenance and repairs.

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