

# Oh, The Things You Can Learn Stamp Collecting!

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As many of you may know, a major force in my Icelandic stamp collecting interests has to do with my maternal great grandparents (Einar Olafsson & Ingibjorg Petursdottir) being from Iceland. They were from a couple of farm sites near Vopnafjordur (town/bay on the north east corner of Iceland).

Aside from farming, Einar was a mail carrier (1884 – 1888) assigned to the mountain route between Vopnafjordur & Raufarhafnar.\* He made one trip a month (Oct. – May) and depending upon weather & travel conditions it took him six to nine days. He walked (never used a horse) but got someone to help if the mail bag was too heavy. He was known for being a fast walker and earned the nickname “Einar the Fly”.

(Fig. 1 Vopnafjordur postcard)



Vopnafjordur centers around a dispute between local chieftains.

Vopnafjordur became one of Iceland’s major harbors for commerce in the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> century. The fishing industry has grown considerably and today is the largest business sector in the area.

The Kaupvangur museum is located in a wooden house on the harbor and is in remembrance of the thousands of emigrants who left in the great emigration to America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the devastating volcanic eruption of Askja in 1875.\*\*

The museum also commemorates the Arnason brothers who wrote several jazz musicals in the 50s and 60s. Nobel Laureate Halldor Laxness wrote about the struggles of the poor farmers in the countryside surrounding Vopnafjordur in his novel “Independent People” (tells the story of a struggling sheep farmer who lives in poverty in the vast emptiness of the highlands).

My great grandparents were among those who emigrated to America (1889); first to Selkirk, Canada (near Winnipeg), before moving to the southern Minnesota town of Minneota. Thus, finding a cover from Vopnafjordur to Minneota was a happy day in stamp collecting!

The village of Vopnafjordur lies on the coastline of a small peninsula and a range of mountains, creating a lovely scene with its colorful old wooden houses by the sea, surrounded by rocky cliffs. Its history dates back over 1100 years when it was settled by Viking seafarers from Norway. Its name means “**Weapon Fjord**” and derives from the early settler Eyvindur vopni. Vopnafjordur’s icon is the dragon – one of Iceland’s four guardians. (Fig. 2 the four guardians stamps)  
The Saga of





(Fig. 3 Vopnafjordur cover)

(Fig. 4 Minneota postcard)

1909 postcard made in Germany-  
mailed/postmarked in Minneota



\* Google maps shows the distance by current roads to be 137 Km.

\*\* Askja is an enormous caldera & central volcano north of Vatnajokull glacier. During the massive eruption of 1875 approximately 2 billion cubic meters of ash & pumice were emitted; a new caldera was formed and in the following decades has filled with water forming one of Iceland's deepest lakes; Lake Oskjuvatn.

(Fig. 5 Askja ariel view map)

**Green circle shows outer crater ring**

Lake Oskjuvatn - center of crater is about 4.2 square miles & it is over 700 feet deep

