

# Newsletter



## Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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### **April 2021**

By Paul von Goertz – KRHCC Board Member

### **KR CAN BOAST OF HOSTING LAKE SUPERIOR'S FIRST AMERICAN SHIPWRECK**

Maybe we KRers ("Herring Chokers?"\*) would rather not have this distinction, but we can claim it if we want to.

In April of 1834, the American Fur Company's schooner MADELINE was making a run from the Apostle Islands to Fond du lac in far West Duluth. Its owner was the American Fur Company (AFC) formed in 1808 and a major player in the fur trade in the Great Lakes region. The MADELINE was one of several AFC ships plying Lake Superior since 1834 when the AFC decided to branch out and diversify itself into the commercial fishing business. It created commercial fishing operations in Grand Portage, Isle Royal, Knife River and Fond du lac. In 1847 it would even dabble in copper mining in the KR area.

We don't know what cargo Captain Angus might have had in the hold of the MADELINE, or what he planned for a back haul. We do know the AFC schooners were built for strength and not speed. Schooners around the time of the MADELINE were of the 110-ton size and believed to be about 45 feet in length with a generous beam. This painting of schooner JOHN JACOB



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ASTOR, a near sister ship to the MADELINE, painted by North Shore artist Howard Sivertson and former KR resident, and used with permission OF Sivertson Galleries in Grand Marais and Duluth.

As Captain Angus made his run for Fond du lac, pack ice driven by northeast winds began to form near KR. As the ice threatened to capture the MADELINE in its icy grip, captain Angus headed his ship toward the mouth of the Knife River, hoping the rush of spring run-off would help create a path that would lead, in part, to Fond du lac. Unfortunately, he was stopped just short of the mouth and the MADELINE was soon locked in ice.

Captain Angus knew the pressure of wind-driven ice would crush his ship's hull. He directed his crew to get as much of the cargo and rigging to shore before the MADELINE broke apart – which it soon did. The crew was then forced to walk through the snow all the way to Fond du lac – probably 40 miles or so.

Some of the crushed schooner later washed ashore on Minnesota Point (Park Point in Duluth) so people erroneously thought the demise of the MADELINE happened there. But, the written report of the shipwreck by Captain Angus to AFC officials still exists in storage in New York and supports the story you read here.

Over the years, there have been reports from fisherman and others peering through the clear waters of Lake Superior, that they can see remains of the MADELINE between the island and the Lake Dock (aka Coal Dock), but such reports have always been met with skepticism.

And so, the wreck of the MADELINE goes down in history and in KRHCC archives as the first total loss American shipwreck on Lake Superior. Look for opportunities to pass this bit of KR trivia on to your friends and family.

\*See January 2021 KRHCC newsletter for why KRers were once called “Herring Chokers.”

*Thanks to KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl for providing the historical research for this story.*

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## KRHCC COLLECTS SOME BAGGAGE

The KRHCC's search for artifacts to embellish its site began with our non-profit status nearly three years ago. We are thrilled to announce that one of our most sought-after items – a baggage/mail/express wagon – has been found by KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl, and purchased at a bargain price.

These wagons were standard equipment at every railroad agency station in the country including the original Knife River depot.

“Express” is anything that needs to move quickly by railroad and is handled on passenger trains rather than freight trains. This could include a wide variety of items from crates and parcels to live animals.

Outgoing express, baggage, and U.S. Mail would be loaded onto small hand-pulled wagons before passenger trains arrived. The decks on these wagons were at the same height as the passenger train baggage car floor, making loading and unloading easy. If there were a lot of items to be loaded, additional wagons could be coupled together.

The wagon the KRHCC received had been owned by the St. Paul Union Depot Company (known as “SPUD”), which was made up of and owned jointly by eight different railroads that ran passenger trains to St. Paul. It is thought our wagon dates to the late 1880s and so fits right in to our goal of returning the appearance and function of the depot to one from the early 1900s.

It is interesting that the newspapers in 1899 and 1900 called our depot the Knife River Union Depot because it served more than one railroad, with each splitting the cost of maintaining and operating it. They were the Duluth & Iron Range RR and the Alger-Smith Lumber Company's Duluth & Northern Minnesota RR. Perhaps it is appropriate a former Union Depot wagon ended up here.

### **You can sponsor this great find...**

We are offering a sponsorship of the wagon for \$650 that will cover costs from purchase through restoration. A brass plaque placed on the wagon will identify and thank you. To sponsor: [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org)

Please remember all donations are fully tax-deductible as the KRHCC is an IRS recognized 501(c3).

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Many thanks to KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl for locating our wagon and exercising his skills in price negotiation. Thanks too, to Todd for providing the historical information for this story. In a future issue we will tell you more about express railroads and Union Depots.

Image : Todd Lindahl with the KRHCC's latest treasure. Todd will oversee restoration of the wagon that will be painted in Railway Express Agency colors of red and green and lettered appropriately. Photo credit: Erik Thompson



## **NO DECISION YET ON NEW HOME FOR VIKING BOAT LEIF ERICKSON**

In the February issue of we told you the KRHCC was one of two finalists as a site for the Viking ship LEIF ERICKSON, long a Duluth icon and in need of a permanent site where it could be accessed and seen 24/7 by the greatest number of people.

The KRHCC was very pleased, if not flattered, to be considered as a site for the ship, which has ties to Two Harbors and Knife River. As of late-April no decision on location has been made by the “Save Our Ship” (SOS) organization that has been the ship’s steward since about 1984.



Neil Atkins, chair of SOS, has acknowledged that his organization continues to review in detail the pros and cons of the KRHCC site and one in Duluth.

The KRHCC has provided SOS with engineer drawings that show space set aside for the LEIF ERICKSON and at a prime location for passers-by on Marina Road. Should the KRHCC not be selected as the site, the space set aside

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will be used to build a shelter for up to three local restored “gas boats”, each about 20 feet in length.

Image page 4: The LEIF ERICKSON attracted a lot of attention as it sailed past Knife River en route to Duluth in 1927 and was captured in this photo. Knife Island can be seen in the background. Photo credit: Randy Ellestad Collection

## KRHCC EXPANDS ITS INFLUENCE

Since last fall your KRHCC newsletter writer has been reading the monthly newsletter over Two Harbors (TH) public radio station KTWB 99.5 FM. It has now been given a permanent time slot.

**“News from Knife River” now airs the second Friday of every month at 9 AM, and then repeats the following Sunday at 1 PM. So, mark your calendars now!**

The “News” is usually 20 minutes long, but on occasion goes to 29 minutes depending on programming that follows it. Please let friends and family who may not get the newsletter online, know that the “News from Knife River” on KTWB is an option.



**Web site now live:** [www.krhcc.org](http://www.krhcc.org)

The KRHCC’s web site, long in the making, went live on April 12.

The KRHCC provided the script, suggested navigation and all images to Breakwall Digital of TH, which then created and programmed the site. We were very pleased with our relationship with Breakwall and the quality of their work. The site was designed so the KRHCC can maintain and update it.

The site contains links to the current and past three KRHCC newsletters so folks who may not get the newsletter at their email address, can get it through a link at [www.krhcc.org](http://www.krhcc.org) that appears on the “Current News” page.

We are still looking for someone or business to help with the cost of building and hosting the site for the next year in exchange for a sponsoring credit on the site. The



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sponsorship is \$750 and will be in affect until the site is updated at the time the Center is officially open next year.

Your comments on site are welcome! Some to date:

“Amazing!! Well done.”

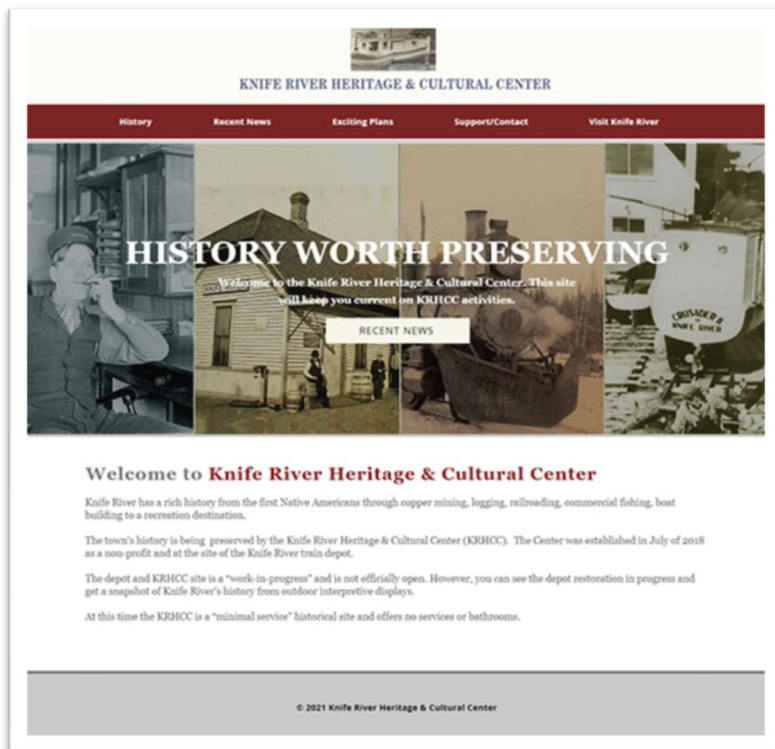
“I read each page – indeed a great start.”

“Very nice. A good support for all of your efforts.”

“Awesome, thanks for the update.”

“Awesome!”

“Nicely done!”



...and the best one – and I did NOT write it:

“The KRHCC website is fantastic! Chocked full of history, photos, current events, local opportunities, and future visions for Knife River - it is hard to imagine what else could be included to these comprehensive internet pages. Kudos to all involved in putting this data together and providing us with a thick slice of Knife River heritage.”

Image: Home page from KRHCC web site at **[www.krhcc.org](http://www.krhcc.org)**

## DEPOT WINDOWS WERE A CHALLENGE – AND MET

When the KRHCC board first assessed the restoration of the depot in the spring of 2019, it was agreed to restore what remained, as opposed to letting it fall down. That meant replicating the windows using remnants as patterns.

Larry Ronning, volunteer general contractor, shopped around for a custom window builder and got bids from \$1,000 per window to more than \$2,000. We took the low

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bid and put out a challenge to people to sponsor a window at \$1,000 each - nine would be needed.

We did not include windows for the freight building as none remained to replicate. It was decided to use manufactured windows that would resemble depot windows.

In less than a month, all nine windows were sponsored by individuals with either a full or a half sponsorship. What a vote of confidence for what the KRHCC was doing!

We waited patiently for the first window to be produced so we could approve it and authorize the remaining eight, but the window never arrived. Numerous calls to the contractor were not returned. When he did call, he apologized for his absence and explained his family had a serious medical emergency and requested to be released from his bid, which we did out of compassion for his family's situation.

We were in an awkward position. We had the money raised at the low bid price that no other contractor had even come close. Then Larry Ronning stepped in and said "I build boats and I can build windows" and offered to build all nine at the low bid price of \$1,000 a window.

I am not sure if Larry regretted this offer or not, and I will not ask. But, I did ask him for purposes of this story to tell me what was involved:

"The material to build the windows was recycled cedar decking from KR homes. The windows were 13 over 2, that's 15 different panes. There are well over 100 pieces in each. Each has 4 mitered stops, there's 60 pieces just in that. Don't forget the transoms, (upper windows) there are two and are more simple, 2 over 2. A complicated mess..."

All I understand from Larry's explanation is the last sentence. See image on right of windows under construction beneath a historic painting of KR. Photo credit: Larry Ronning

Mona Linden, also a KRHCC board member and our CFO, assisted Larry with glazing and painting. We are very thankful to Larry and Mona for replicating our



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depot windows, which greatly contributed to our goal of bringing the depot back to its 1900s appearance.

Image on left of the custom-made windows resembling the depot's original windows. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

We also want to thank the people who sponsored windows and for whom or what the sponsorship was given. A 1" x 4" brass plaque will be placed on the face of each window sill with the following information.

Period-correct window sponsored by:

- Members of the Richardson family in honor of Lloyd Richardson and Margaret Skadberg Richardson.
- Members of the Richardson family in honor of Gunvald (Gunny) and Berthine (Tina) Skadberg and Hugh and Edith Richardson.
- Becky and Doug Pruitt, in honor of the Knife River Community.
- Richard and Anne Tousignant, friends of the KRHCC, and Bill Berg in memory of Terry Berg.
- Dave and Jan Jacobson.
- KRHCC's Marina View townhouse neighbors in appreciation of the Center preserving Knife River's history.
- Duane Madison in memory of Wendell (Skip) Bissell, Knife River friend to all.
- Duane Madison in honor of Joseph Rabey, first engineer on the Alger Smith, D&NMRR.
- In loving memory of Annamarie Peterson by Steve and Karin (Chicki) Harris.  
*Editor's note: Annamarie was a former owner of the depot and a very nice lady.*

## **NORTH SHORE SCENIC RAILROAD TRAINS TO KR THIS YEAR**

The North Shore Scenic Railroad has released its train schedule for 2021, and it includes several trips to KR.

**"Picnic Trains"** - Saturdays in June with exception of Grandma's Marathon weekend June 19.



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**“Christmas Tree Train”**: Saturday, November 27. This train is new in 2021. Riders will be able to select Christmas trees, wreaths and garland provided by Northern Connection Landscape, Wreath and Country Gardens of Two Harbors, and then have them wrapped and brought back to the Duluth Depot. The tree lot will be at the site of the KRHCC. Local people will have the opportunity to purchase trees as well.

**“Troll Train to Troll Canyon”** – These train rides take place during the Knife River’s annual Julebyen Christmas festival held the first full weekend in December. This year’s Julebyen is still in the planning stages and subject to the COVID guidelines in place in December. To learn more about “Troll Trains to Troll Canyon” and Julebyen, go to [www.julebyen.us](http://www.julebyen.us)

Image on right: KR’s “Depot Agent” greets “Picnic Train” riders arriving on the North Shore Scenic Railroad last summer.



## MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR SPECIAL MEMORIAL DAY EVENT IN KR

KR will have a special Memorial Day event on Monday, May 31 (Memorial Day) when the town’s community flagpole will be dedicated to members of the Albert Wieme family at the KRHCC site.



Albert Wieme lost his life in the sinking of the DANIEL J. MORRELL in November of 1966 (see June 2020 issue of the KRHCC newsletter). His son, Larry, was an Able Bodied Seaman (ABS) on the Great Lakes for many years, and Larry’s younger brother, Dennis, was a veteran of the USMC. The pole is also dedicated to the family’s mother, Ethel (Bugge) Wieme.

The flagpole and the large 10’ x 12’ flag that will fly on Memorial Day were both donated to the KR community by the Wieme family.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

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The dedication ceremony will be conducted by the Two Harbors American Legion Post 109. The Post is still finalizing its Memorial Day observances but expects the dedication to begin approximately at 1 PM on Memorial Day.

This is an important date in KR history and all townspeople are invited to attend.

## **RECENT HONORARIUMS AND MEMORIALS RECEIVED BY THE KRHCC**

A memorial in memory and honor of Lyle Northey was received from Paul and Mary von Goertz. Lyle was a lover of history and particularly WWII.

A memorial in memory of June Paschke was received from Joanne Lind. June and husband, Don, were summer residents of KR and loved boating out of KR and our beautiful agate beach.

*The KRHCC is a 501 (c3) non-profit so all donations whether in the form of a memorial or honorarium are fully tax deductible. Your comments and suggestions for this monthly emailed newsletter are always welcome. Email to: [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org)*

*If you have family or friends who may enjoy reading this newsletter, they can access the current and all past issues on the "Current News" page of our website at: [krhcc.org](http://krhcc.org)*

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