

Newsletter



Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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DECEMBER, 2020

By Paul von Goertz, KRHCC Board Member

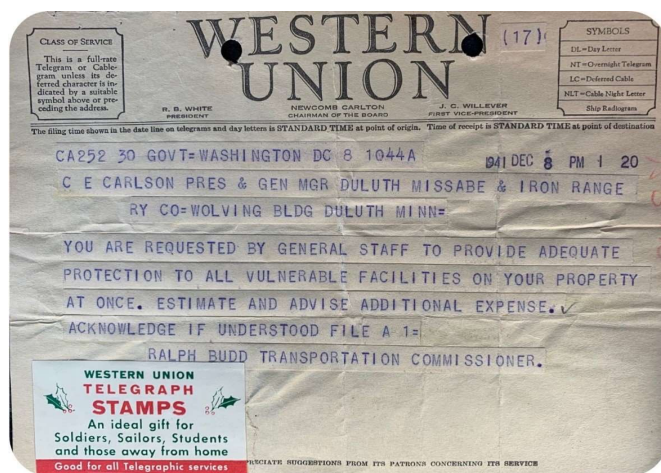
DECEMBER 8, 1941, KR GOES TO WAR

Many of us remember and acknowledge each December 7 as Pearl Harbor Day. On that day in 1941, about 350 Japanese aircraft launched from aircraft carriers descended on Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands in what has been described since as a “sneak attack,” as war had not been formally declared.

Most of America’s Pacific Fleet was either sunk or severely damaged as were scores of aircraft on land. On December 8, President Franklin Roosevelt asked congress to declare war on Japan, as well as its German and Italian allies.

On the same day of the declaration of war, C.E. Carlson, President and General Manager of the Duluth, Missabe & Iron Range Railroad, received a Western Union telegram from Ralph Budd, U. S. Transportation Commissioner, “.... to provide adequate protection to all vulnerable facilities on your property at once.” The concern was for sabotage of our county’s vital railroads needed to feed our country’s war machine.

On December 29, Carlson received a hand-delivered letter from J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI that included more explicit instructions. Included with the 13



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pages was “The extreme importance of maintaining an uninterrupted flow of iron ore from the mines of Lake Superior to blast furnaces in various industrial centers...”

The letter goes on to list specific places to be placed under 24-hour guard including “... that part of the railway system running between Duluth and Two Harbors, Minnesota.”

For KR, instructions were for armed guards 24/7 at the bridge over the Knife River. The guards would be a civilian auxiliary to the military police. Guards appointed were Claude Lusk and Harry Welch. They were provided with a small guard shack and a Winchester rifle. Each shack had a telephone and small coal stove. The men were issued badges and wore an arm band that said “Police.” Their job was to protect from enemy agents to parachute troops, all for \$5.50 a day.

All the protection given the rights of way of railroads did pay off, though, when explosives were found under the track at Waldo. The blasting cap failed to set off the dynamite when a train passed over it. An alert bridge guard spotted the wire to the explosive sticking out of the track ballast and disconnected the charge. Evidence found at the scene indicated someone had been hiding in the brush when the guard appeared and fled. No one was ever apprehended.



KR would not be spared the grief brought to so many small and close-knit communities like KR. Three of its sons would die before the war ended four years later. The stories of the three have been told in an earlier KRHCC newsletter.

Thanks to KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl for providing a copy of the telegram (page 1) that sent KR into WWII, as well as most of the content for this story.

The KR community flag pole was flown at half mast on Pearl Harbor day in observance of our country’s “Day Of Infamy.”

Photo: Paul von Goertz

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KRHCC FLAG NOW LIT AT NIGHT

Thanks to Mike Rousseau, Master Electrician and owner of Silver Creek Electric, and Brad Ronning who assisted Mike, for installing the light that illuminates the KRHCC flag at night as per flag etiquette.

The flag will be officially dedicated to service members of the Albert Wieme family of KR on Memorial Day 2021, which will be observed on Monday, May 31. The Two Harbors American Legion Post will conduct the dedication ceremony.

The Wieme family purchased the flag pole and its 10' x 7' flag for the KR community.

CAN THIS KR NAME-CALLING BE STOPPED?

We have some name-calling going on in KR that needs to be stopped!
Two examples:

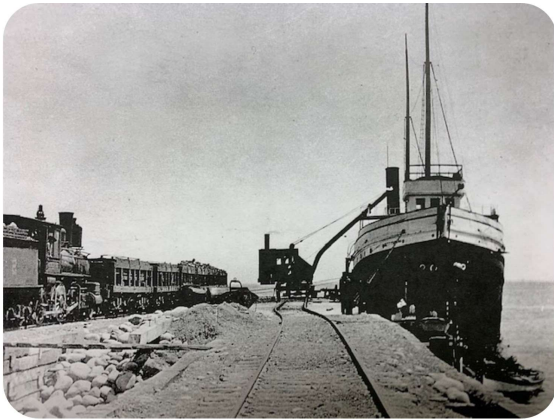
"AMERICA Dock" Road" is miss-named! The road does not lead to where the steamer AMERICA once docked because it never docked at the remnants of the dock we see today. That dock was built in 1909 after a former dock was destroyed by a fall storm in 1908.

The steamer AMERICA never tied to the Lake Dock (aka "Coal Dock"). Docks were few along the rugged North Shore so with a sound of its whistle, fisherman - including those from KR - would meet it offshore to unload fish and bring back groceries, mail and news of the world. This painting by Howard "Bud" Sivertson accurately depicts a skiff venturing out on a frigid winter day. Painting used with permission of Howard Sivertson and Sivertson Galleries, Grand Marais and Duluth.



The Alger Smith Railroad owned most of the boats that used the dock. They unloaded coal from the lower lakes and took out pulpwood. The railroad would never allow a passenger/freight steamer like the AMERICA to disrupt their operations, let alone

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create a safety issue of passengers having to access the dock over the railroad's right-of-way and several spurs.

Image left: The Alger-Smith ship GETTYSBURG unloads coal at the Lake Dock in rail cars that will bring it to the coal storage dock a few blocks inland. Note gas boats tied to dock. Photo: Randy Ellestad collection.

What some people call the "Coal Dock" is also the wrong name! The dock remains we see are from the "Lake Dock." So the proper name for "AMERICA Dock Road" should actually be "Lake Dock Road" because it leads to the remains of the Lake Dock.

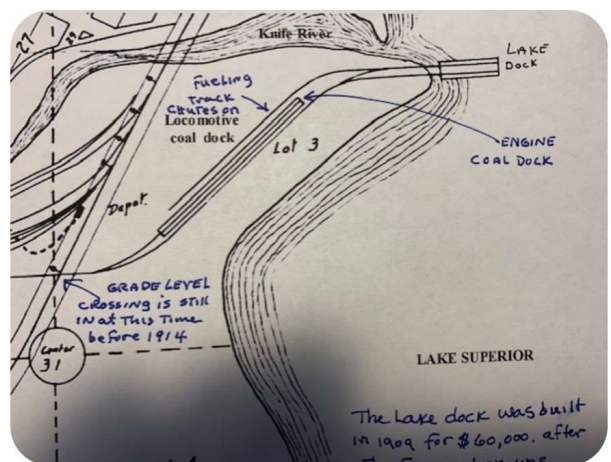
THERE WAS A "COAL DOCK," BUT IT WAS ON LAND AND TRAINS "DOCKED" THERE TO LOAD COAL

The coal that was brought by ship to the Lake Dock from the lower lakes was taken by train to the "Coal Dock" a couple blocks away and stored there in huge bins until needed to fill locomotive tenders. Trains would pull alongside the dock and chutes would open to gravity feed the tenders – much in the same way bulk carriers are filled with pellets at the docks in Two Harbors.

The Coal Dock was a massive structure more than 200 feet long and was about where the KR waste water holding tank is currently. The bins were so large they could usually hold enough coal to supply trains over the winter months when the lake froze over. Additional coal could be stored in the rail cars on the deck of the Coal Dock. If it appeared coal was running out, coal could be run out of Duluth along the Duluth & Iron Range line.

The locomotive coal dock took up a lot of the land where the KR waste water collection building is today. Drawing Todd Lindahl

KR townspeople were able to buy coal from the Alger-Smith Company for home heat. It was once reported that the general manager of



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the Alger-Smith Company, upon seeing a cloud of black coal smoke above KR homes on a cold winter day, made the comment that “We should charge more for coal.”

With the decline of logging, the Coal Dock became obsolete and so was removed in 1923, its white pine timber reused by the railroad elsewhere.

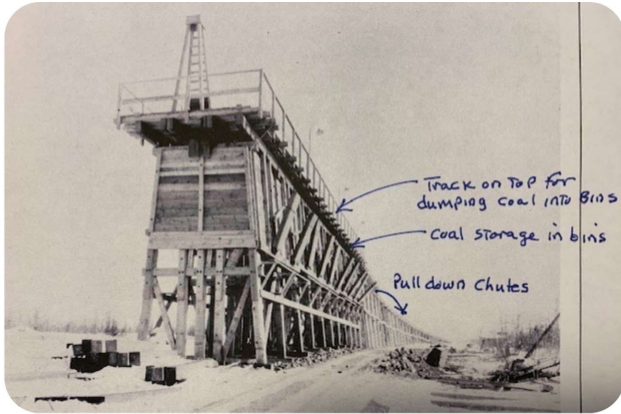


Image left: The coal dock at Cascade in Cook County. It is similar to the one at KR only taller for more coal storage. Photo: Todd Lindahl

So there you have it. I don't suspect the name calling addressed here will stop, but those of you who may want to flaunt your knowledge of local historical trivia, can now correct anyone who incorrectly uses the

term “AMERICA Dock Road” or “The Coal Dock.”

Many thanks to KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl for providing the historical information for this story.

STEAMER AMERICA KEPT KR AND ALL NORTH SHORE COMMUNITIES TO THUNDER BAY AND AROUND ISLE ROYALE CONNECTED TO THE WORLD

The steamer AMERICA, built in 1898 was 183 feet in length and for most of its life provided freight, passenger and mail service to all North Shore communities from Duluth to what is now Thunder Bay and around Isle Royale to 1928. It was owned by the A. Booth Company.

It's whistle signaled long awaited news, mail, groceries, ice, passengers and just about anything else fishing families needed, many of whom were Booth contracted fishermen. Its captain, “Indian Smith,” was adept at bringing the AMERICA close to shore where fisherman could row out to it with their catches and return with needed items.

There were very few docks along the North Shore and so transfers between skiffs and the AMERICA could be dangerous, as depicted in the painting by Howard “Bud” Sivertson, a former KR resident who has been referred to as “The Norman Rockwell of the North Shore.” His paintings accurately illustrate and describe the life of North Shore and Isle Royale fishing families.

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The AMERICA was the North Shore's most reliable link to the world until highway 61 was built in 1926 that connected Duluth to Thunder Bay. It effectively put the AMERICA out of business. It came to a sad demise on June 7, 1928 when Captain Smith succumbed to his third mate's insistence that he could safely navigate the AMERICA out of Isle Royale's Washington Harbor in an early morning mist.

The mate misjudged the distance of the boat from the east side of the North Gap heading out into the lake and struck a rock. The boat immediately began filling with water and so the AMERICA was turned around with the intent of beaching it on what appeared to be a mud bank. Unfortunately, the bank was more of a rock ledge that descended into 93 feet of water. The boat teetered on the ledge until it filled with water and then slid into the depths days later. All 16 passengers and 31 crew got off safely. Photo: Ken Thro collection.



I had several memorable experiences diving on the AMERICA. The most was diving to the stern in 93' feet of water, entering through the lazarette and swimming the length of the boat through the laundry room, over the now exposed triple-expansion steam engine, up the staircase to the dining area, and then to the crew's quarters in the fo'c'sle.

THE KRHCC'S YEAR IN REVIEW

Well, how we started 2020 and how we ended it was certainly interesting. We started with reasonable expectations and while we did not achieve all of them, we did some that were not planned. All in all, with all the challenges COVID dropped on us, it was a satisfying year.

Here are the highlights with one very low point;

January - March:

We spent the time writing grants and working on Phase II Plans – completing depot interior and planning boat and picnic/event shelters. The grants written bore fruit months later when all six requests resulted in a total of more than \$34,000.

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All the grants we applied for were very competitive – particularly this year with so many non-profits requesting funding to address social issues related to COVID-19. We were very pleased so many funders were able to address immediate community needs and still look beyond the pandemic to needs of non-profits such as the KRHCC that fit their grant guidelines.

The low point occurred in February when long-time KR resident John Safstrom passed away expectantly in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, where he and Gail were spending the winter. John was very active in all three KR non-profits and greatly enjoyed working on the depot. A very kind and good man, he was greatly missed this building season.

April - August:

We worked to complete most of the depot interior, restore the order board and begin work on restoring the freight building. Minor depot exterior work completed.

September:

Completed depot exterior painting and installed windows and a door in freight building.

October:

A busy month as Ostman Truck and Excavating was finally able to get to removing the old depot apron and grading the area around it for pouring a new apron. We were able to pour five of 14 planned concrete sections before cold weather set in. We were also able to pour the mountings for the flag pole and order board pole.

The engineering and architectural team of Krech Ojard Associates and SAS & Architects officially began work on designing the KRHCC site with boat and picnic/event shelters. A \$10,000 grant from NOAA administered through the MN DNR and Coastal Zone Management, combined with a 20% required match from the KRHCC (\$2,000) will pay for the design work. Plans will be completed by March 31, 2021.

November:

A break in the weather allowed us to pour the last of fine concrete apron sections planned for this year, and painting of the order board pole.

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On Monday of Veteran's Day week CL&P mounted both the flag and order board poles. Tuesday we finished grouting the flag pole base and by next day we were ready for the "First Flag Raising" ceremony conducted by the Two Harbors American Legion Post 109 and UMD Air Force ROTC Cadets. About 60-70 people attended and witnessed a most moving and memorable ceremony. If you missed



it, you can see the whole ceremony using this link: <https://youtu.be/jLae5Empnrc> If the link does not open, use this title in YouTube "Search": [First Flag Raising: Knife River Heritage and Cultural Center](#)

Pouring sections of the depot apron required many hands and legs and thankfully we had them.

Photo: Todd Lindahl.

December 5:

Flood lamp mounted under west depot eave to illuminate flag at night.

Thanks to all who made the year's accomplishments possible!

KRHCC CAUGHT IN A "CATCH-22" FOR 2021 GRANT REQUESTS

The KRHCC is in an awkward situation with grant requests in 2021. We relied on four different funders to fund the major project for 2020, which was to remove and replace the broken depot apron and make it ADA compliant. The demand for the services of Ostman Trucking and Excavating were so great this summer they could not get to our project until October 3.

As a result, we were not able to complete the apron project within the six-month time frames of many of the funders. That means we cannot apply for another grant with these funders until the slab is complete some time next spring. By terms of the grants received, funders could have asked for us to return their grant. But, thankfully, all understood COVID issues affecting the availability of our volunteers and the demand for contractors. All have given us extensions through next June.

All who support the KRHCC should be aware that many granters require local shares from 20-50 percent. If we are unable to fund the local share, we have to pass on the

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grant opportunity, and this is sometimes hard to do as the grant guidelines are almost a perfect match to the project we have in mind.

If you intend to gift to a non-profit yet this tax year, please consider the KRHCC. As a 501(c3) non-profit, your gift is 100% tax deductible. Send to: KRHCC, POB 240, Knife River, MN 55609. Thank you!

EMAILS WE LIKE TO RECEIVE

The November issue of this newsletter generated this response from Charles ("Chuck") Bugge. Comments like these keep me writing this newsletter and our volunteers motivated and so I share it with you.

"Your newsletter is very interesting and informative. My brother, Paul, sent me the last three issues. It sounds as if you and your organization are making a genuine effort to retain local history and build a sense of community. Nice."

I grew up in Knife River in the 50s and early 60s. Following college, we moved to Oregon and have returned occasionally to visit family. Have not been back since my mother, Anngeline, passed 3 years ago. I would enjoy being placed on your mailing list."

Chuck Bugge

I have a sense there is a lot of "Pass-along" readership of this newsletter. People can certainly have it sent to their own email address by request to: info@krhcc.org Please understand your email address will not be shared with anyone or organization.

MEMORIALS AND HONORARIUMS RECEIVED THIS MONTH

In memory of John Safstrom:

John died unexpectedly in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, in February where he and Gail were wintering. John and Gail have been residents of KR since 1989. A structural engineer by training, John was active in all three Knife River non-profits and loved working on the depot.

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Reminder - COVID-19 is not an Equal Opportunity Pandemic.

While many have experienced little or no hardship, many have been devastated. If you intend to make a donation to a non-profit within the 2020 tax year, please consider giving to help others through your church, Salvation Army or other non-profit with certified administrative costs of 10% or less. Thank you!

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