

Newsletter



Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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July 2020

By Paul von Goertz
KRHCC Board Member

“PICNIC TRAIN” RIDERS GIVE CANDY KITCHEN A “MUST VISIT” PRIORITY

On July 18th, the Knife River depot greeted the first of what is now planned to be a total of four “Picnic Trains” that depart The Depot in Duluth. It was originally thought by the North Shore Scenic Railroad (NSSR) that only one Picnic Train would be planned this year, given COVID and social distancing guidelines. **But it was a sell-out!** As a result, three more trains have been scheduled for this summer.

It was a beautiful Saturday and 47 people plus small children from around the state rode the train to learn about KR railroad history, tour the depot, walk to remains of railroad structures, picnic on the beach and – **visit the Great! Lakes Candy Kitchen!**

Riders were about equally interested in all KR attractions, but give credit to those walking the four block round trip to get to the Candy Kitchen. To your writer, this was a determined group who had no fear of “death by chocolate.” Things could have turned really ugly had they been denied!

KR’s “Depot Agent” (that’s me – Paul von Goertz) greets visitors arriving on the Picnic Train July 18th. Photo: Todd Lindahl



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Many young families chose to spend their time on the beach and railroad buffs the depot and remains of railroad structures, all within walking distance of the depot and on MN DNR or St. Louis and Lake County Railway Authority land.



Paul von Goertz (left) explains the three construction phases of the KRHCC using the KRHCC site map. Photo: Scottie Swor

KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl (below) explains the use of the “Order Hoop” or “Fork” to deliver messages to passing locomotives. In a future issue we will describe how this fork worked. WDIO News Duluth covered the first “Picnic Train” of the season and focused on

how the depot was restored through the strong support of the KR community. Photo: Paul von Goertz

Thanks to the NSSR and the Candy Kitchen for making arrangements for riders who could not order online in advance, to buy on site. Special thanks again to the NSSR for patronizing a KR business and also Vanilla Bean in TH that catered 50 box lunches consistent with the quality of food for which “The Bean” has become known.



Ken Buehler, Executive Director of the NSSR, said the social distancing guidelines the NRRS has in place following Governor Walz’s directives, are working much better than hoped and he expects the NSSR to have a reasonably good season, considering restrictions, and that many people from the Upper Midwest will continue to enjoy railroad lore and the beauty of the North Shore.

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Remaining "Picnic Trains will be on the following Saturdays: August 8th, 15th and 22nd. Tickets can be ordered on line at www.duluthtrains.com

KRHCC GIVEN A TALL ORDER!

The KRHCC has been given a 34' tall orderboard pole to replace the one that was once adjacent to the depot, through the generosity of the Lake Superior Railroad Museum.

A private collector donated the actual signal apparatus that rests atop the pole and consists of signal board and lights. Through the efforts of Todd Lindahl, Randy Ellestad and Larry Ronning, parts missing from the signals were scrounged from different sources and the order board will now be ready to be installed at the same time the new cement apron, which surrounds the depot, is poured in August or September.



While the orderboard will be functional, the three signal lights of red (stop), green (go), and yellow (slow) will only show green as the railroad is still a functional commercial railroad and signal lights must still be obeyed.

Todd Lindahl (left) attends to fastening the 34' order board pole to a 28' flatbed trailer that Mike Ojard gave the KRHCC to use – "Thank you" Mike!

Photo: Paul von Goertz

Editor's note: Unless subject to outrage by newsletter readers, headline puns such as above will continue to appear in this newsletter.

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The original orderboard can be seen immediately in front of the Depot Agent's "bump out" in this photo.

Photo: Todd Lindahl/Randy Ellestad

The restored and refurbished order board day and night signals that will rest on top of the orderboard pole.

Photo bombers are Randy Ellestad and Todd Lindahl. Larry Ronning (not shown) also contributed to the restoration of the signals.

Photo: Paul von Goertz



ON MISSED OPPORTUNITIES...

We recently had to pass on some opportunities to purchase a few really neat railroad treasures that would look great in the replicated 1900 KR depot we intend to have. Your KRHCC board of directors is well represented with Norwegian frugality, and so not being sure we would have the funds to buy them, given an expected budget shortfall, we reluctantly let the opportunities go. (Question: Is "Norwegian frugality" an oxymoron?)

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We put together our construction plans with budget for the depot and freight building in January and February, before the full impact of COVID 19. Now, midway through the construction season, we know that funds available from granters have been stretched by the many requests from worthy non-profits, and that contractors are very busy (that's good!) and their prices are not negotiable.

Case in point: We rely on volunteers for everything that does not require work done by licensed professionals to bring to code, or work that requires capital equipment. We recently requested bids to flash the chimney. For those unfamiliar with what that involves, it is galvanized metal or aluminum attached to the chimney and sealed to the roofing. One contractor's price was more than the cost of our metal roofing and another would not give us a price unless we were OK with the work being done the first week in December.

What all this means is we need to continue to rely on donations to complete our construction plans for this building season. Our plans were modest from the start – to replace the cracked cement apron that surrounds the depot and is probably not ADA compliant. It is a safety issue and needs to be addressed this year.

If you can help the KRHCC take advantage of fleeting opportunities to furnish our 1900s depot, you can send checks designated for "Historic Collection." All other checks will go into our general construction fund.

Please send to:

KRHCC

PO Box 240

Knife River, MN 55609

Remember the KRHCC is a 501(c3) non-profit and so donations are fully tax deductible.

NAMESAKES OF KNIFE RIVER

We have three namesakes in Knife River and it is good for those who live here to know whom these men and women are who contributed so much to our community.

They are Oden Alreck for whom "Oden Alreck Field" is named, John Geist for the "John Geist Tennis Courts," and Trygg and Dorothy Peterson for the "Trygg and Dorothy Peterson Park."

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In this issue, we will honor Oden Alreck and in the next two issues John Geist and the Petersons. For those of you who knew either John or Trygg or Dorothy and would like to add a personal comment about them in these future issues, please send to: info@krhcc.org

“Ode” was born in the Woodland neighborhood of Duluth in 1928. He enlisted in the US Army at the age of 17 and served in Texas as a Supply Sergeant. Following military service, he returned to Duluth and began his career as a carpenter and eventual general contractor.

Ode married his sweetheart, Joanne Katherine Skadberg in 1950 and settled in KR, Joanne's hometown, where they raised daughters Randi and Susan. Forming the Knife River Construction Company, Ode built many local residences and commercial buildings.

Ode was one of the last commercial fishermen of Isle Royale, a place that became very dear to him. His love affair with “The Island” began in about 1950 when he first stayed at Joanne's parents' home in Washington Harbor. Joanne's parents, John and Olga (“Ollie”) Skadberg, were a commercial fishing family. In the ‘70s, Ode would fish the license of Joanne's aunt, Elaine Rude, and another widow, Ingeborg Holte, at Fisherman's Home on the SW corner of the island.

In the ‘80s and ‘90s, Ode made many fishing trips with friends and family to Fisherman's Home where Joanne's cousin, Mark Rude, fished. He would often try to fish late into the year until his birthday, October 14. He would be there alone; Joanne and the girls had no idea when he might venture back to KR. Ode once told your writer in a moment of nostalgia, “I should have never left there.” If you have ever been to Isle Royale, you know it has a magic of its own.

“Ode” was one of the founders and earliest supporters of the Knife River Rec Council in 1953, and took the lead in creating three large skating rinks across the street from his home and what is now “Oden Alreck Field.”

KR native Dennis Ojard, recalled how Ode would chop a hole in the Knife River, drag down a gas-powered water pump from his basement, and with about 150 feet of 2” hose, flood three rinks - one for teens and adult skaters, one for small beginning skaters, and one for hockey and broomball. Once flooded, the whole process had to be reversed and water drained to prevent freezing. The rinks covered pretty much all of what is

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now the ball field. Ode used his own concrete basement forms to create hockey boards. "Seventeen degrees is the perfect flooding temperature," he told those who succeeded him in flooding the rink.

Daughter Sue remembers Ode flooding the rinks long past midnight and before long days at work. On non-school days, Sue would help - with wet wool mittens soon frozen to the hose.

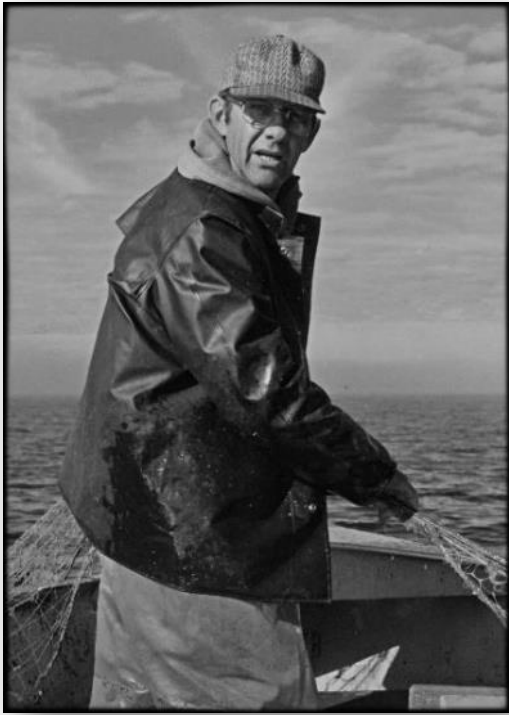
Every skating rink needs a "warming shack," and Ode was instrumental in doing that by building one in the extreme SE corner of the ball field. That was later removed when the current rec building was built sometime in the '90s.

Soon after KR's central sewage plant was installed in the mid- '80s, problems with sewer plant design and confusion over user rates created hard feelings with the sewer board, which was, as it is today, comprised of community volunteers. Frustrated by the engineering firm's reluctance to accept responsibility for their faulty design, and tired of the demands of rate-payers for the board to make progress towards resolution, the board resigned as a group at a well-attended and heated board meeting.

Sensing KR loosing control of managing the sewer district and so deferring to the county, Ode stepped forward and led the board through several years of troubled waters (no pun intended) and to resolution of design issues and user fees. I offered to serve on the board now with Ode in charge and because the sewer issue was tearing KR apart. I could make a pun here about the time I had in the ten years I served on the sewer board, but it would be very inappropriate.

Ode would eventually develop cancer and while in nine days of home hospice, his many friends came to visit him. I saw him just days before his death. He had a plate of fishcakes before him, given by Mark Torgersen, and he offered me one. I declined since I knew others would be stopping by and he should save the remaining fishcakes for them. Ode insisted and I did not need second invitation. Mark makes the best fishcakes.

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It was soon time to leave. I told Ode he was a great friend and neighbor, and I would “see him on the other side.” He gave me a long look, a firm handshake and we said good-bye. He passed away three days later on May 1, 2018 at the age of 89.

Thanks to Joanne Alreck and daughters Randi and Sue for contributing much of the information on this much beloved Knife River namesake.

The photo, left, is a favorite photo of the Alreck family showing Ode checking his nets off the rocky shores of Isle Royale. Photo courtesy of the Alreck sisters.

BE AN EDWARDIAN WOMEN!

Part of returning the depot to 1900 is to re-enact people of the period who might be found at the depot. People willing to do this dress in period clothing and greet visitors arriving in KR on a scheduled North Shore Scenic Railroad train.

We already have our “Depot Agent” in period clothing and now need an Edwardian era (1900-1910) woman who may have been passing through – or perhaps marooned there? Who could this woman be? Ahhh! – a mail order bride left at the depot by a husband-to-be who got cold feet?

If you would like to dress in Edwardian period clothing and be this forlorn woman (or come up with your own scenario on how you ended up at the depot), please email: info@krhcc.org You would need to provide your own period clothing and your compensation would be the fun you would have living in a slice of Edwardian times and interacting with people of today. Photo is sourced from the Internet Public domain.



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We have at least three "Picnic Trains" arriving in August on the 8th, 15th and 22nd. A fall schedule is yet to be determined.

"DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE FOG – IT WILL SOON BURN OFF!"

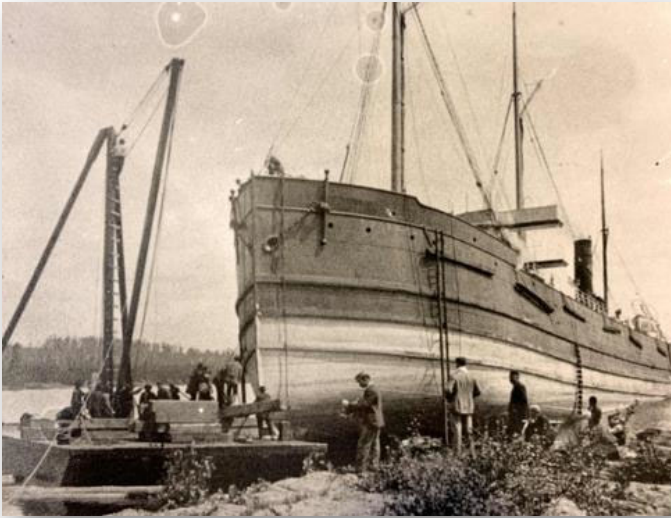


Those may have been the words of the captain of the 246' steel freighter ROSEDALE just before the mate ran it up on the rocks near the mouth of the Knife River at a brisk 11 miles an hour on July 6, 1893.

Fog, plus magnetic deviation of the compass, combined to put the ROSEDALE on the rocks. The ship was upbound light to Duluth for 65,000 bushels of grain. It went so far ashore that fully 40 feet of her bow keel was resting on shore and her stern unsupported in the water. There was no chance she could get her 600 horsepower engine to back her off. Two Inman tugs from Duluth and the 256' 750-horsepower freighter J. EMORY OWEN also got into the act (see photo below).

Salvage involved marine jacks, heavy oak timbers, a lighter to lighten the boat, the two tugs and the OWEN. The combined effort resulted in ROSEDALE breaking free on the night of July 9. She immediately went to Duluth under her own power for dry-docking.

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The wreck and the salvage operation got so much attention that two excursion boats from Duluth regularly brought gawkers to the site over the three days she was stranded in KR.

Built in 1888, the ROSEDALE was only five-years old when stranded. Damage was more extensive than anticipated. She had 30 broken frames and 30 plates needed to be replaced. She left the dry-dock on July 22nd with a \$6,500 repair bill, plus salvage costs.

The stranding of the ROSEDALE as well as other collisions and near misses of Knife Island and adjacent shoreline attributable to fog, magnetic deviation and darkness, led the local maritime industry to petition the federal government to build a lighthouse on Knife Island. More on this lighthouse idea in a future issue.

Photos: Paul von Goertz collection

Historical source: "Lake Superior Shipwrecks" by Julius F. Wolff Jr.

SHOW US TO THE DOOR!

The KRHCC is in need of two early 1900s-appearing matching doors for the depot. The vintage interior doors would separate the Depot Agent's office from the men's and women's waiting areas, which are on either side of his office. The doors should be 30" wide or more and condition needs to be at least restorable. Hardware desirable, but not necessary.

We would like to have the doors donated, but can pay a reasonable price as determined by frugal Norwegians. If you can help, please contact: info@krhcc.org

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JUNE MEMORIALS:

- A gift of money was received by the KRHCC in memory of John and Gary Ellestad.
- Gifts of money were received by the KRHCC in memory of John Safstrom.

The KRHCC is a 501(c3) non-profit. All gifts made as memorials or honorariums are fully tax-deductible.

Correction:

In the June issue of the KRHCC newsletter, the year of Dennis Wieme's death was incorrectly stated. It should have been 2018, not 2015. Your writer regrets the error.

AND LASTLY....

Message left by a painting crew member at the end of a depot workweek.



Your comments and suggestions for this monthly emailed newsletter are always welcome. Email to: info@krhcc.org If you have family or friends who may enjoy receiving it, please forward to them, or send their email addresses to same email address and they will receive their own copy.

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