

# Newsletter



## Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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By Paul von Goertz, KRHCC Board Member

### **KRHCC ON SHORT LIST AS FUTURE SITE OF VIKING SHIP “LEIF ERICKSON”**

The Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center (KRHCC) is one of two remaining sites under consideration for displaying the iconic Viking ship, LEIF ERICKSON, according to Neill Atkins, president of the Save Our Ship (SOS) organization. The other site is in Duluth. The SOS organization has been the steward of the ship since the late '80s, said Atkins.

In a letter received by the KRHCC last fall, Atkins asked the KRHCC to enter into a dialogue with SOS to bring the ship to Knife River, provided the move would serve the missions of both non-profits. The KRHCC board of directors voted unanimously to begin a dialogue that has been ongoing ever since.



*The LEIF ERICKSON sailing past Knife River en routeto Duluth,  
Knife Island can be seen in the background.*

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*Photo credit: Randy Ellestad Collection*

The Viking boat LEIF ERICKSON has been a City of Duluth icon for much of the past century, but has been without a home since 2013, according to Atkins. It's now wrapped in shrink-wrap and in private storage.

Duluth history records show the boat was built in Korgen, Norway, by local boat builders and sailed from Bergen, Norway, on May 23, 1926. It re-traced the course from Norway to North America thought to be taken by Norwegian explorer Leif Erickson in 997 AD. It arrived in Duluth on June 23, 1927, to much fanfare and after logging more than 10,000 miles. Duluthian Bert Enger then bought the boat and gifted it to the City of Duluth.

Atkins said a stipulation Enger placed in gifting the boat was that the City of Duluth would agree to maintain and place it where the public could easily view it.

“Over the years we negotiated with several city administrations to find a suitable location in Duluth, with the expectation the city would pay for costs under the original covenant with Bert Enger,” said Atkins. “But no real progress was ever made. So, last summer we decided to include a site outside of Duluth and informed the city of our intentions. We have now acted on that, once we realized the potential for relocating the boat to Knife River.”

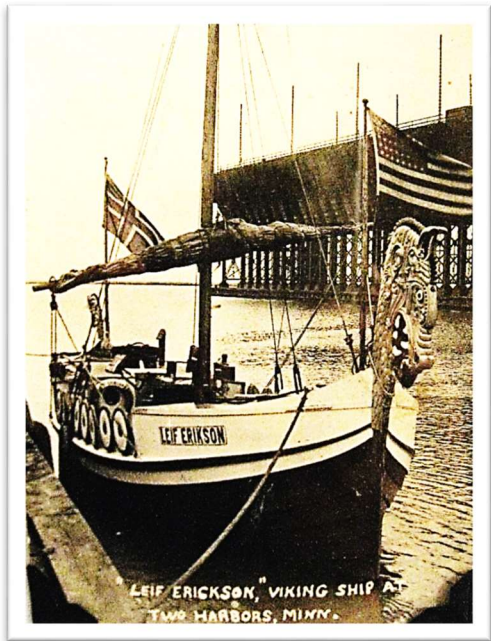
Randy Ellestad, owner of the Knife River Campground and Vice Chair of the SOS committee, also serves on the KRHCC board. “From my position on both boards, I could see bringing the Viking ship to Knife River would be a good fit.”

“First of all, the boat needs to be near the lake and visible from a road with high visitor traffic. Second, it needs some freshening up after being in storage for 12 years. Knife River has a strong Scandinavian heritage and continues to have boat builders/restorers living here. Knife River native Larry Ronning directed an extensive rebuild of the ERICKSON in 1993.”

Atkins said the boat was the centerpiece of Leif Erickson Park from the mid-1920s through when it was moved offsite for its rebuild. It was then brought back to the park and placed by the city where it was not fully visible to the passing public, or safe from vandalism. Recognizing the site was unsuitable, the ERICKSON committee moved the boat to its current secure offsite location.

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## THE VIKING SHIP HAS TIES TO TWO HARBORS AND KNIFE RIVER



According to Ellestad, the LEIF ERICKSON has historical ties to Two Harbors and Knife River. While sailing to Duluth along the North Shore, it stopped in Two Harbors for a three-day celebration hosted by the Norwegian-American community there (*Photo credit: Randy Ellestad Collection*). Upon departing, the ship was becalmed off Knife River about mid-morning and in danger of being late for the gala celebration planned for its arrival in Duluth later that day.

Knife River commercial fishermen, Christ Lee and Hermann Hanson, saw the LEIF ERICKSON's sails droop off Knife Island and towed the ship two miles until her sail filled with a much appreciated northeast wind that propelled the ship to the Duluth

Canal where 10,000 folks waited its arrival.

KRHCC president Paul von Goertz said that for now the KRHCC will continue to study how the LEIF ERICKSON would complement the KRHCC's mission and vision, as well as encourage comment from the community.

A KRHCC site plan currently being developed by Krech Ojard & Associates and their architectural partners, SAS Architects & Associates, shows separate boat shelters, one for LEIF ERICKSON and the other for CRUSADER, a 35' fishing commercial fishing tug with long ties to Knife River.

Persons wishing to comment on the possibility of bringing the Viking ship to Knife River may email [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org)

## KRHCC AND BAYFIELD HERITAGE ASSOCIATION WILL COLLABORATE ON SHARING HISTORIES

The sharing of historical information between the KRHCC and the Bayfield Heritage Association (BHA) that resulted in the story of the sinking of the THOMAS FRIANT in the January issue – a story that garnered more comment than any KRHCC newsletter

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story – has resulted in both historical centers agreeing to share information and resources for the benefit of our respective audiences.

For some apparent reason unknown to this writer, there seems to be little exchange of history between north and south shore fishing communities, although they have much in common – particularly ethnicity and the natural resources of fishing and logging.

One common link though, has been boat building.

Robert Nelson is a BHA historian and also president of the Bayfield Maritime Museum ([www.bayfieldmaritimemuseum.org](http://www.bayfieldmaritimemuseum.org)). He recounts that his grandfather, Frank Muhlke, built three 35' fish tugs for KR fishermen. One was the NELS J. built in 1944 for Ken and Bill Ojard, KNIFE ISLE built in the mid-'40s for Laurence Bugge, and the NOR SHOR built for George Torgerson, also in the mid-'40s

The BHA is a well-established historical association and the KRHCC just a babe, so the sharing of info will initially be a bit lop-sided. The BHA has an attractive web site that carries BHA news and offers links to their very excellent newsletter and access to their monthly programs via online links. The KRHCC at this time can only offer our newsletter, but as our programming develops, we will place videoed programs on our web site, which we will finally have this spring.

To access the activities and resources of the BHA, go to their website: [www.bayfieldheritage.org](http://www.bayfieldheritage.org) If you enjoy the resources the BHA offers and call the Bayfield peninsula one of your “Happy Places,” consider supporting the BHA. They do not charge membership fees, but rather rely on donations to help cover operating expenses. It requires only a few clicks to donate.



## **MORE ON THE DANGERS OF LAKE SUPERIOR WINTER FISHING**

In the January newsletter, we told the story of the sinking of the 95' fish tug THOMAS FRIANT and the incredible survival of her crew while attempting winter fishing.

In this issue we address the loss of another boat while winter fishing and sadly, a survivor cannot tell the story.

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Brothers Magnus and Birgir Martinson emigrated from Norway to Duluth in 1909, with Birgir later choosing to live in Knife River. Magnus took the last name "Martin" and Birgir kept "Martinson" to avoid confusion between the two. Together they commercially fished Lake Superior.

Birgir would marry Ragnhild Johnson, also a Norwegian emigrant on May 6, 1916 and they would have a son, Raymond, born on February 28, 1917.

During the winter of 1928-29, Birgir and his brother-in-law, Gust Johnson, who was Ragnhild's brother and living in Duluth, decided to winter fish out of Grand Marais.

On January 14, Birgir and Gust, in an open skiff, were caught in a violent snowstorm with sub-zero temperatures near Hollow Rock, close to Hovland.

The newspaper clipping shown here, which apparently was written within a few days



of their disappearance, offered this glimmer of hope: "The only hope of their possible escape from certain death by freezing lies in the thought that they made their way to shore and are camped in some sheltered inlet." Neither the men nor their boat were ever found.

Tragedy would strike Ragnhild again when on Christmas Day, 1944, Raymond would die when his boat hit a mine in the process of resupplying Allied forces following the D-Day Normandy invasion. Ragnhild later gave a stained glass window in the KR Lutheran Church in memory of her son.

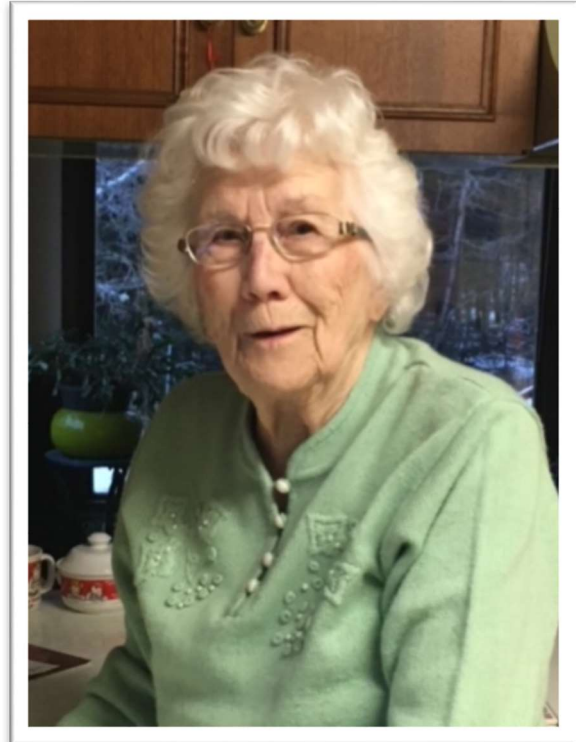
Pictured in the news story are left to right: Birgir Martinson, Gust Johnson and Magnus Martin. Magnus also commercial fished, mostly from Isle Royale.

Once again, many thanks to Randy Ellestad for the effort to research this story and share the newspaper clipping.

*Editor's note: Ragnhild would marry Ole Roske following Birgir's death. Together, and with Raymond until 1932, they lived on property where Mary and I now live. The net house Ole built remains, only the interior has been converted to a play and bunk house for our grandchildren.*

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## HAPPY BIRTHDAY AUDREY CARLSON!



Happy Birthday to KR's youngest nonagenarian! Audrey Sandwick Carlson celebrated her 97<sup>th</sup> birthday on February 18, 2021. If you're not familiar with the term "nonagenarian," it refers to a person in their ninth decade of life. In truth, I had to look that up.

Audrey is one of KR's most loved elders and has lived all 97 years in KR and within a few hundred yards of where she was born.

Her father, John Sandwick, came to America from Sweden by way of Finland in 1892 when he was four years old. Her mother, Gertie, was from near Wisconsin Rapids and Swedish.

Her father took up commercial fishing and like so many lived by the Lake – just a bit west of where the CN railroad bridge crosses over Scenic 61. He would later work at the water plant in Two Harbors and the D&IRR water tower in KR.

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Audrey attended school in KR and after graduating TH High School went to work as a “Rosie the Riveter” in Rockford, IL, where she worked from August 1942 until March of 1943 at Woodward Governor inspecting engine governors for military aircraft of all kinds.

She married Bertil (Bert) Carlson in 1943 while Bert was home on leave from the US Army European Front. Bert was also Swedish and living in Two Harbors. The couple had four children, Carol (Cookie), Stephen, Gary, and Julie. Bert died in 1991.

Audrey was a homemaker for many years before going to work for Sears in women’s fashions department, retiring in 1981.

Of particular note to readers of this newsletter, is Audrey’s appreciation for history and that of the Knife River Lutheran Church for which she has been recording its history “forever” (since 1945). The undisputed matriarch of KRLC, she can often be seeing wearing Minnesota Viking clothing on Viking home game days. But please, do not ask her how she feels about Brett Farve!

Audrey has been a true blessing to KR for all her volunteer work, her family now spanning five generations, her church family and all who love and admire her for her positive, upbeat and independent nature.

Looking forward to your gala 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, Audrey!

*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 receiving it, please forward to them, or send their email addresses to above email address and they will receive their own copy.*

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