

# Newsletter



## Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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**July 2021**

By Paul von Goertz – KRHCC Board Member

### **MEMORIAL TO LAKE COUNTY VETERANS SET IN PLACE AT THE KRHCC**

In the spring of 2019, just a year after the Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center (KRHCC) was established as a non-profit, the community began to more carefully study its history.

Among many other things, it learned that several men from Knife River had served in the Merchant Marine. While not officially documented by the government, it is believed that the Merchant Marine lost, as a percent of men serving, more men than any other service branch during WWII - many as a result of German U-boat attacks on North Atlantic convoys.

Also learned was that men of Scandinavian descent built wooden naval escort boats in Duluth, relying on their wood boat-building skills passed down through generations. Many of these men were from Knife River, Larsmont, and elsewhere along the North Shore.

Lastly, the community wanted recognition for the Knife River commercial fishermen who joined thousands of other fishermen nationwide to deliver fresh fish to a country facing meat shortages during our World Wars.

The KRHCC asked the Two Harbors American Legion Post 109 for any help it could offer in creating a fitting memorial for Knife River's contribution to our country's wars, building on its Scandinavian heritage. The Post was established shortly after

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WWI and had a long history of honoring veterans and supporting our nation's core values in Lake County communities.

After several months of discussion with the KRHCC, the Post realized it had shared in memorials to Lake County veterans, but had not dedicated a memorial of its own. It was then agreed the Post would sponsor a memorial to County veterans on its own, with recognition for the special contributions of those from Knife River.

The seals of the six service branches are on the memorial base and the memorial would read as follows:



*Dedicated to the Veterans  
of Lake County  
who served in the Armed Forces  
of the United State with  
recognition to descendants of  
Scandinavian seafarers who  
served in the U.S. Merchant  
Marine and built the wood  
boats to help win the Battle of  
The North Atlantic during WWII*

*This memorial funded by  
Anderson Claffy American Legion Post 109*

The Post accepted the challenge of raising the nearly \$5,000 cost of the granite memorial. In the spring of 2021, the memorial was ordered and installed on July 5, 2021.

A special attachment to a Skid Steer allowed the memorial to be carefully moved into place. Karen Cavallin from Cavallin Funeral Home aligns the pins that join the granite base plate to the memorial. Post 109 Commander Jim Latvalla looks on. (Image right)

Watch those fingers, Jim!



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Jim Latvalla and Alex Cavallin from Cavallin Funeral Home prepare to bond the memorial to the base. (Image left).



The memorial rests alongside a 30' flagpole that was a gift to the community by the Albert Wieme family of Knife River. Albert Wieme was a Great Lakes seaman who lost his life in November of 1966 when his ship, the DANIEL J MORREL, broke in half and sank on Lake Huron during a November gale. The flagpole was dedicated to him and other Wieme family members on Memorial Day, 2021.

Both the flagpole and granite memorial are bathed in light at night. The Wieme family provided the flagpole lighting; the family of Adolph Ojard, Sr., the Veteran's Memorial.

Adolph Ojard served in the Merchant Marine. While in Seattle, WA, after observing his ship load 16,000 tons of ammunition destined for the impending Pacific Island invasions, he wrote to his father "I wouldn't give a plug nickel for my life."

Adolph survived the war and for 25 years thereafter was the captain of the now historic tug EDNA G. of Two Harbors.

*Please view the Lake County Veterans Memorial with respect and reverence for those who gave their lives to preserve the freedoms we Americans cherish today.*

## Memorial statistics:

- *Material:* Cut from granite
- *Weight:* Base: 800 pounds, Upright: 1300 pounds, Total 2,100 pounds
- *Dimensions:* Base: 4' x 16" x 8" deep, Upright: 4' x 30" x 8" thick
- *Footing:* Dimensions: 72" x 40" x 22" deep, Weight: 5,600 pounds (1.4 yards of concrete)
- *Labor* provided by KRHCC volunteers
- *Memorial* provided and installed by Cavallin Funeral Home, Two Harbors, MN.

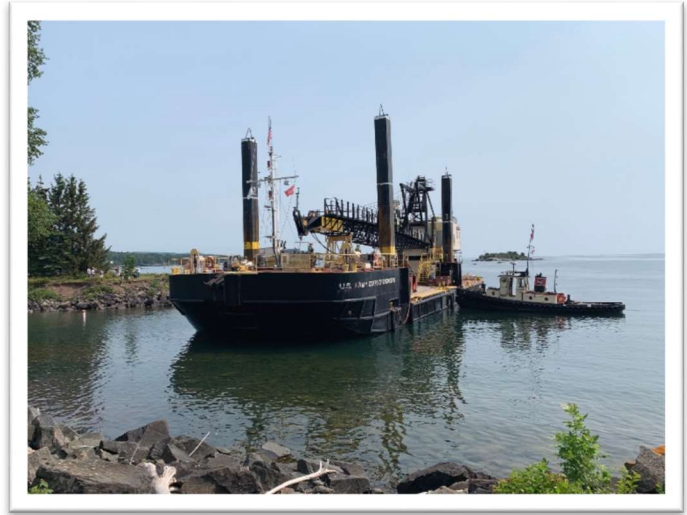
\* Credits to all photos in this section: Paul von Goertz

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## WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

Pictured is a US Army Corps of Engineers dredge actually in the KR harbor being positioned by the Corp tug HAMMOND BAY to remove a large rock that has recently been a magnet for passing deep draft sailboats. Bad NE storms over the past few years may have contributed to moving it from an out-of-the way place.

Marina Manager, Maxwell (Max) Kolodziejczak, said that earlier this season a sailboat had struck a rock in the entry and he promptly marked it with a buoy. Actually, the sailboat had already marked it with a scrape of white paint visible from the surface.



Max contacted the MN DNR for resolution of the problem, and they, in turn, contacted the Corp. Providence prevailed as the Corp had already planned on doing some breakwater work in Two Harbors, so assigned the crew a side job of removing the rock, which was successfully done on Monday, July 12.

Thanks to Max of Barkers Island Marina for his prompt attention to the rock problem, and for the coordination between the MN DNR and the Corps of Engineers for getting it removed. Many thanks too, to KRer Lee Bujold for capturing this moment in KR history.

## OUTDOOR INTERPRETIVE DISPLAYS NOW IN PLACE

The four outdoor interpretive displays that have been in the works since last fall were installed at the KRHCC on July 20 and are already capturing the attention of passers-by on Marina Road, judging by the number of cars seen stopping at the site to view them.

We are quite proud of the displays as in about 150 words and images on each, they collectively tell the story of KR from indigenous peoples through railroading, logging and commercial fishing. The sponsor of each display is recognized on the display.



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Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation also provided funding for the displays through a Cultural & Tourism grant.

Many thanks to Todd Lindahl, KRHCC historian, for providing the text and images for each display, and to Dave Grong and Larry Ronning for installing them.



The displays were provided through Pannier Graphics of Gibsonia, PA, a small family-owned business. They were great to work with and did very high quality work.

Please take time to see the displays!

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

## **JULEBYEN 2021 SET FOR WEEKEND OF DECEMBER 4 & 5**

The “Resume” button has been pushed after a COVID “Pause” and Julebyen 2021 is quickly taking shape.

This year’s chair, Helene Hedlund, said that many of the committee heads from past years are back with innovative suggestions on how to best run the Christmas festival, which for many families has become a holiday tradition dating back to the inaugural Julebyen in 2013.

With COVID still on the radar, some streamlining and safety precautions will be in place in anticipation of what COVID guidelines may be in December. More activities will be outside and the number of tents reduced. The Friday night Julefest and Sunday “Celebration of Music” will not be held this year.

At this point, a decision on the “Live Nativity” sponsored by the Knife River Lutheran Church Sunday morning, is pending depending upon COVID guidelines for children.

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The Julebyen Express Train that brings festivalgoers from Duluth will be running along with the very popular “Troll Trains to Troll Canyon.” Already this year there have been reports of troll sightings in the Troll Canyon area!

Image right: Julebyen Troll Train riders prepare to board a North Shore Scenic Railroad train that will take them to Troll Canyon in search of mischievous trolls. A total of 984 riders road one of the five Troll Trains in 2019.

Photo credit: Erling Nervick



New this year to add to KR holiday festivities will be the North Shore Scenic Railroad’s “Christmas Tree” train that will bring families to KR to select Christmas trees, wreathes and garland at the KRHCC site on the Saturday following “Black Friday.” The John Hanel family of TH will supply trees and greenery. All KRers are welcome to shop for holiday greenery along with train riders.

KR’s Julebyen is great fun for volunteers and festivalgoers alike. If you would like to help with the festival, please email Helene Hedlund at: [Hhedlund.dl@gmail.com](mailto:Hhedlund.dl@gmail.com)

## SHOULD GEEZERS BE ROOFERS?

I hope there is general agreement they should not!

While retirees installed the metal roofing on the depot, it is now two years later and many are further into, or approaching, Geezerhood.



The KRHCC is in a bit of catch-22 dilemma. While we are very proud to acknowledge that all our grant requests to date have resulted in an award, the amount is often less than requested. We are reluctant to take funds for roofing from our undesignated donations as those funds are often needed as a match to a grant which can be anywhere from 20% to 50%.

Photo credit: Internet public domain

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To exacerbate the issue, grants from the four funds that have been most generous to us all remain open, as our projects are not as yet complete. We cannot apply for a second grant until the first is closed out.

We very much want to finish the freight building this building season. It looks terrible next to our beautifully restored depot.

We were lucky enough to have purchased the building siding last fall, before wood prices went crazy. Now, in addition to place the siding, we need to roof it and flash the chimney. Flashing is a collar that makes a watertight fit between the roofing and chimney. We need to flash the depot chimney yet this year as rainwater now runs down it and into the depot interior, which is now almost complete.

Not to tempt fate, but thanks to safety measures, we have had no injuries beyond slivers and wasp stings to date and we want to keep it this way. So we intend to hire the labor to install metal roofing on the freight building roof and flash the chimneys on it and the depot.

We expect labor to be somewhere north of \$2,000. We get many, many compliments on how nice the depot looks, but compliments won't keep a Geezer off the roof! Can you help? All donations to the KRHCC are tax-deductible as we are an IRS recognized 501(c3). Note on your check that it is a donation to "Keep Geezers Grounded." Thank you!

## **KR GARDEN CLUB BRINGS OUT OUR COUNTRY'S COLORS AND AN ARRAY OF OTHERS**

The KR Garden Club is long overdue with thanks for how they beautify the Scenic 61 bridge that passes over the Knife River with flower boxes. I was reminded of this recently when I saw how nice the bridge looked with flowers in full bloom and American flags in celebration of the Fourth of July.

*Those boxes speak so well for the KR community and our values!*

A call to the most recent KR Garden Club president, Angela Carson, gave me info on the club that I now pass on.

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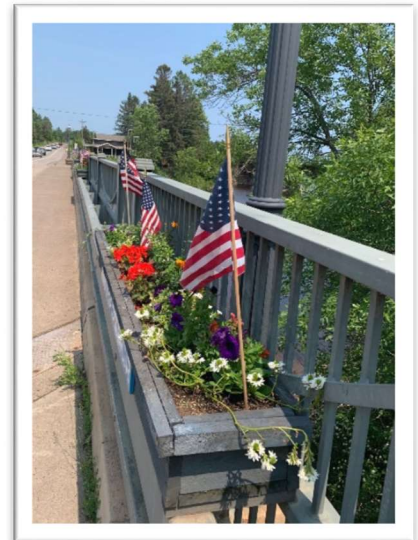
Garden enthusiasts founded it in 2009, primarily for “education” in how to grow flowers and produce in NE MN. The club arranged for monthly speakers, garden tours and occasional seminars, including one sponsored by UMD.

For a community project, they decided they would place flower boxes on the bridge. The eight boxes were built by Frank Burnhardt and have been maintained by Bill Berg. For the past two years, the KR Rec Council has helped pay for plants.

Angela pointed out that watering the flower boxes over a 16-week season is a lot of work, as all the water has to be carried to site. Many thanks to spouses and significant others who help garden club members’ water!

When COVID hit last year, the club followed CDC guidelines and did not meet. As of now, a core group of members rotate watering the flower boxes. If anyone would like to help with watering and maintaining the flower boxes – and perhaps learn a little bit about caring for plants - please contact Angela at 218-834-3571 or email her at: [gardengal55609@gmail.com](mailto:gardengal55609@gmail.com)

Image right: American flags adorn bridge flower boxes during patriotic holidays. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



## **JULY 15 WAS A SAD DAY FOR KR 100 YEARS AGO**

*By Todd Lindahl, KRHCC historian (edited for this newsletter by Paul von Goertz)*

On July 15, 1921, the last train of the Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railroad (“Alger Smith Railroad”) pulled out of KR behind Engine #3 ahead of two passenger cars. This would be the inglorious end to one of most important and colorful logging railroads in northern Minnesota. Its legacy would be that it dramatically transformed the forest in this part of Minnesota forever.

By the 1890s most of the easy to reach majestic white pines adjacent to the shore were gone. Using rivers to send logs to the lake was not an option as most along the north shore were not suitable with high rocky banks and many sharp curves.



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The Alger-Smith Lumber Company out of Detroit, MI, was no stranger to the concept of logging railroads, having built the first one in the U.S. in Michigan in 1868. They first looked at moving their base of operations to Two Harbors, but the ore-hauling Duluth & Iron Range RR let it be known they would not tolerate another railroad in Two Harbors, even if it hauled only logs.

So the Alger-Smith decided to locate in KR and ship logs by rail through their own Duluth and Northern Minnesota RR. Construction into the northern woods started in May of 1898 with more than 200 men swatting black flies and mosquitoes. Many could not endure these pests and so quit.

By the end of the first year only a dismal 7½ miles of track had been completed, but 50 million feet of pine was harvested. Over the next four years 200 million feet were cut.

For the most part, the logging railroad ran parallel to Lake Superior through St. Louis County, Lake and Cook Counties for 99.8 miles of mainline track. Major branch lines added hundreds of more miles of track in addition to the mainline.

It is not very well understood by the general public that the D&NM served many other logging companies and not just their parent, the Alger-Smith. Because they were a common carrier, they also carried passengers, U.S. mail, general freight and logs for many other lumber companies. This volume of cargo, plus the traffic generated by the Duluth & Iron Range RR made KR the busiest railroad town on the North Shore.

The big turning point in the D&NM came in 1916 when John Millen, its president, died of a heart attack while in Duluth. His son-in-law, John Bailey, took over and wanted to get out of the railroad and lumber business and get into the automobile business, partnering with John Millen's son, Russell.

As a company based in Detroit, Alger-Smith had close ties to the automobile industry and so invested in the Packard Car Company. Gradually in 1917 they began to abandon their logging operations even though there was timber to cut and huge profits made.

In 1918, they stopped all track maintenance other than what was considered critical. In 1919 logging operations ceased, leaving a large amount of uncut timber in Cook County. By July 1920, the track was considered barely safe.

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The company began to sell off its engines and rolling stock with only Engine #3 left to handle duties until the last day on July 15, 1921. In 1923, the railroad rails were taken up to be used elsewhere and all that remained was the grade, parts of which are still visible today and used by snowmobilers and cross-county skiers.

Residents feared KR would become a ghost town, but by May 1924 the general store was doing well and people were buying homes. An improved Highway 61 made a big difference, too.

Much of the growth of KR as a community was a direct result of the Alger-Smith making KR its home for logging operations. Many of the company's railroad employees remained and eventually found new employment.

As we look to the forests of NE MN today we see the lasting legacy of the changes brought about by the loggers of the Alger-Smith Lumber Company and its Duluth & Northern Minnesota RR. For better or worse they permanently changed not only Minnesota's "Arrowhead", but a large part of America as well.



Image left: One can get an idea of the amount of pulpwood cut by Alger-Smith crews during just one winter from this photo of pulpwood in storage that extends from south of the mainline to the river and then almost to the Lake Dock (aka Coal Dock). Photo credit: Todd Lindahl

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## **JULY DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS**

### Honorarium:

From Peter Geist for red, white and blue bunting to replace depot bunting torn by July storm. Given in memory of John and Lois Geist. The KR tennis courts are named for John.

### Sponsorship:

From Adolph Ojard, Jr. lighting for Veterans Memorial in honor of Adolph Ojard Sr. who served in the U.S. Merchant Marine & later Captain of the tug EDNA G.

*The KRHCC is a 501 (c3) non-profit so all donations whether in the form of a memorial, honorarium or sponsorship 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)*

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