

# Newsletter



## Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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**June 2022**

By Paul von Goertz – KRHCC Board Member

### **LATE BREAKING NEWS!**

- **Viking ship organization votes to submit a Letter Of Intent (LOI) to relocate LEIF ERIKSON to Knife River.**
- **CRUSADER commercial fishing exhibit will be built this summer thanks to grants received.**

**More on both these exciting developments in the July KRHCC newsletter.**

### **THE GREAT FLOOD OF JUNE 2012**

Ten years ago this June 19-20, area residents went to bed to the sound of thunder and heavy rainfall. Our three older granddaughters were visiting and wanted to spend the night in our bunkhouse. The bunkhouse had been converted from a net house that Christian Roske had built on what is now our property sometime in the late '30s.

As dark approached, the girls began to lose their courage and asked for an adult to spend the night in the fourth bunk. I drew the short straw and tried to beg off as I was sure there would be nothing but chatter and giggling into the wee hours. I tried to assure them they would be fine alone, but they insisted. That was a good thing, because that night produced nothing but pounding rain and unending thunder and lightning.

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That night over 10" of rain triggered the worst flood in the history of the area resulting in more than \$100 million in damages to infrastructure as it washed out streets, sidewalks and swallowed cars in massive sinkholes from south of Duluth/Superior all the way up the North Shore.

Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) reported that the weather pattern June 19-20th was a classic setup for potential "nocturnal" thunderstorms. It was created by a slow-moving warm front just south, and a warm humid air mass with dew points in the 60s to near 70F riding in from southern Minnesota.

As the storms formed, they moved over the same ground again and again like box cars on a train, each storm dumped its payload of torrential rain over the Duluth area.

The result? A devastating "flood of record" for the Duluth area. The effects of the flood were immediate, severe and unprecedented.

In just a few hours, the flood set many all-time rainfall and flood records for Duluth and surrounding areas as a wide swath of 6" to 10" rainfall came pounding down.

One of the reasons this mega flood happened is the unique "flood geography" of the North Shore. Think of quickly dumping a bucket of water down a steep driveway.

The official rainfall in Duluth on the 19th was 4.14 inches. The thunderstorms finally ended when a strong cold front moved through Wednesday afternoon June 20th, but

not before dumping another 3.11" at the airport. The total official Duluth total rainfall for the event was 7.25." Duluth International Airport broke several rainfall records during this flooding event.



In KR, the banks of the Knife River were quickly overrun, allowing water to flood into homes along the river, over the ball field to a depth of two feet in places and across Scenic 61 into the KR campground. Over the following days, in typical KR fashion, the community would come together to clean up the mess inside the flooded rec building and repair the damage.

Image: The raging Knife River  
Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

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Odin and Joanne Alreck's home next to the river near the Church Road bridge was an island in the flood. Rescuers came by boat to remove them to safety, but Joanne was immobile at the time and they would not leave.

A tree washed down the river impaled in the bridge railing and the damage to the railing remains as a reminder of the power of the flood. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

A sign describing the 2012 flood with a photo of the flood overwhelming the bridge was placed near the bridge by Bill and Terri Berg for the benefit of future generations. But, for all of us who were here in June, 2012, the flood will never be forgotten.



A line of debris indicates the degree the ball field was flooded.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



The waters of the Knife overran Scenic 61 and into the KR Campground

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

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The Marina was choked with debris from the river and culvers that drained into the marina.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

## COULD THIS BE THE ORIGINAL KR SMOKED FISH RECIPE?

In last month's newsletter I wrote how native people harvested the sap from the maple trees on the ridge above KR to make syrup which, in turn, was used to season, smoke and preserve fish. At some point Europeans took smoked fish to a culinary delicacy.

We in KR would like to think the KR smoked fish recipe is the best on the Lake, but where did it come from? I will attempt to answer that question, knowing the answer may lead to dispute.

When we bought our property in KR in 1971, we realized we shared a border with land owned by the Kendall family. Our new neighbors were Lyman and Serona (Kendall) Slotness.

They were wonderful neighbors and always welcome in our home where the conversation often led to Serona's family's early times in KR. Sometime in the 1980s she gave us a spiral-bound book that was a collection of her memories and that of "several descendants of the original settlers." It is called *Memoirs of Knife River* and it is a great read, and no, I will not lend it out. From time to time I will quote from it.

According to "Memoirs of Knife River," there was a man by the name of Davy Lewis who once sailed aboard one of the many sailing boats that plied the Great Lakes. Davy and his family members are purported to have brought the art of smoking fish to Knife River.

Davy and his brother, John, built the first smoke house in the area and used an old Scotch way of smoking fish handed down from their ancestors. It was from this

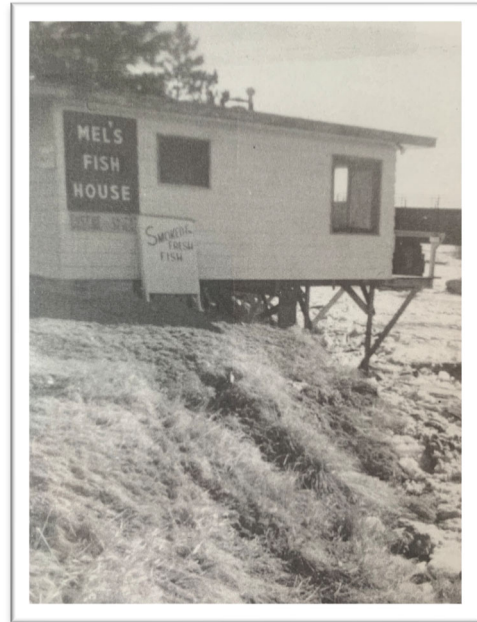


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smoke house that Lowell ("Smokey Joe") Kendall processed the fish he sold on his sales routes to the Twin Cities and Iron Range following the crash of 1929. Smokey Joe was the brother of William T. Kendall. (See story in May issue about the Kendall fire of 2014 which includes Kendall family history).

The Lewis brothers' smoked fish recipe was a big hit and soon other smoke houses sprang up in KR using the Lewis recipe or variations of it. Peter Bugge Sr. and his son, Mel, soon opened a fish stand as did several others. Fish stands soon dotted the highway through KR. Folks from all over would enjoy the scenic drive to KR topped off with smoked fish.

Mel's Smoke House was a typical smoke fish shop and was, in part, canter levered over the Knife River about 100 feet west of what was Emily's restaurant. The building was later moved across Scenic 61 and is part of what today is the Great! Lakes Candy Kitchen. Photo credit: Kay Struve



## THREE YEARS OF KRHCC NEWS



The April 2022 issue marked three years this newsletter has been sent to anyone interested in what's happening at the KRHCC and to some extent KR. Wow! 36+ issues. All are on our website at: [krhcc.org](http://krhcc.org) Click on menu item "Recent News."

This image is the front page of May, 2019 newsletter. The Lead story was an update on how the KRHCC came together in winter of 2018 and what the plans for the depot were that summer. Thirty months later the depot was totally restored. Image credit: Anne-Lù Hovis

As single member of the newsletter's editorial board, I try to write about what I feel is both

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interesting history of the KR area, and that which serves our mission to preserve and present it. Suggestions for editorial content are always welcome.

People often ask me if I will ever run out of news and I can only say I doubt it. Several reasons. First, Todd Lindahl, our historian, is a bottomless well of really interesting info as well as hard facts to back it all up. Secondly, readers suggest stories about family member experiences that give insight to what life was like in KR generations ago, and can provide photos (very important).

Thirdly, we have to remember that history takes place every day and needs to be recognized and recorded. Speaking of “recorded,” the newsletter also serves to supplement the more formal history of KR that has been written by those more qualified than me. At some point all newsletter issues will be archived at the KRHCC. BTW...for the last two years I have been reading the newsletter on KTWH 99.5 FM community radio on the third Fridays of the month at 9 AM and the following Sunday at 1:30 PM.

Lastly and most important, KR has a rich history is a result of the progression of industries passing through from fish and fur trading to copper exploration, logging, railroading, a renewed commercial fishing industry, and boat building. Collectively these industries brought with them a broad mix of ethnicities, cultures and some really colorful characters that created a lush historical landscape for great reading!

**KR's history and future are rooted in its natural resources – greatest of which are its people.**

Our history starts with volcanic action that shaped our shoreline. That, and to some extent, the island, afforded some protection from SW winds. The watershed, later carved by glaciation and erosion, created the Knife River, which conveniently emptied into the lake within the sheltered area.

Native people were quick to realize that a village near the river made a lot of sense, and so established one on the east side of the river and a more protected one on Granite Point, which forms the west entry into the KR Marina.

In the early 1600s, Europeans began trading for furs and fish with native people. By 1830, the American Fur Company (AFC), which was founded in 1808, had grown to monopolize the North American fur trade.

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Interestingly, in 1834, the American Fur Company changed its North Shore focus to fishing as it was more profitable, and now fish could be preserved by smoking and salting. In 1837, the company built fish collection stations in KR and Encampment Island. Native people did the fishing and the AFC provided the nets and boats. As a result, furs and fishing became KR's first commercial enterprises.

The same volcanic activity that blessed the KR area with a protected shoreline also placed large deposits of copper throughout the Lake Superior basin, which is now recognized as the largest concentration of elemental or natural copper on earth.

The Treaty of LaPointe in 1854 ceded native lands to the federal government including the North Shore. Copper prospectors came to KR and did find copper, but not in amounts to make it profitable. Nevertheless, KR copper exploration makes for another interesting chapter of KR history.

When the copper rush waned, business tycoons looked to the forests of white pine. In May of 1898, the Alger-Smith Lumber company established its northern logging operations in KR. By 1919 logging operations ceased and in July of 1921 they abandoned the railroad.

The KR logging days were really the boom times of Knife River. In 1915, as many as 15 logging trains came and left every day, along with several passenger and freight trains. Most of the activity can be credited to KR as being the only town on the North Shore where two railroads intersected. One was the Duluth and Northern Minnesota which brought timber from the north. The other was the Duluth & Iron Range railroad, a freight-passenger service that hauled freight, sawlogs and passengers between Duluth and Two Harbors and ore shipped out of Two Harbors.

Among all the immigrants attracted by the many jobs in logging, mining and railroading were Scandinavians who found the North Shore to be much like their homeland and so applied their fishing skills. As logging waned, commercial fishing experienced a resurgence and became KR's major industry, and with it, to a smaller extent, boat building.

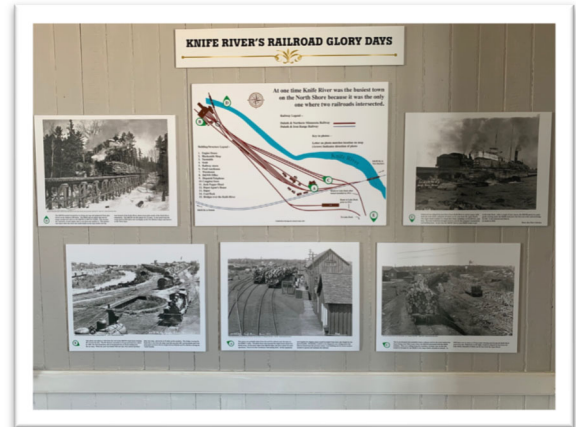
What is really intriguing is what the KR historical landscape will look in the future. A good guess is that it will be connected to the vacation travel industry and those who enjoy the great variety of outdoor experiences that the KR area offers. Your guess?

*Editor's note: Todd Lindahl, KRHCC historian, contributed to this story.*

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## KR RAILROAD HISTORY WALL STILL AVAILABLE FOR SPONSORSHIP

Our railroad history wall is a big draw with visitors. It remains available for sponsorship for \$1,000 donation, which is about what it cost for map artwork, photo rights and enlargements, and mounting of images. To claim it, or for more info: [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org) The KRHCC is an IRS recognized 501(c3) so your donation is fully tax deductible.



The KR Railroad history wall available for sponsorship. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

## PLATFORM CANOPY READY FOR GROUP CONVERSATION.

People ask what the little shelter is between the depot and freight house with most guessing it's a kiosk of sorts. Actually, it is a quarter scale model of a railroad station platform canopy. Train riders may recall that as you walked to your rail car, there was a roof over your head to protect you from rain and snow. That was/is a platform canopy.

The KRHCC bought it from Carr Hobby in Lincoln Park a couple years ago where it was used to display a model railroad. Carr went out of business and we bought it, not knowing at the time how we might use it.



KRHCC board member Larry Ronning suggested using it to visually join the depot to the freight house and serve as a sheltered stand-up conversation and eating area. Its counter could also be used to display items during an event. We thought Larry's multi-use idea was great!

KRer Norbert Norman brought his grandson, Hans, to see and learn about CRUSADER and agreed to pose for this photo.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



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The canopy was finally finished this month and many of the June NSSR Picnic Train's riders gravitated to it to enjoy their box lunches.

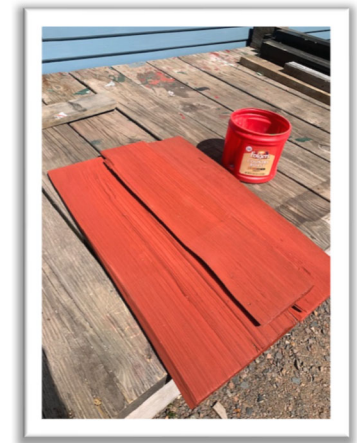
## **Many thanks to all who made the canopy possible:**

- Todd Lindahl and Randy Ellestad for finding the canopy, negotiating the deal and disassembling it for transport to Knife River.
- Dave Grong re-assembler and lead carpenter.
- Painters Lee Cohen, Jan Robertson and Kris Olson.
- Metal roofing installed professionally by Matt Durward of Knife River.
- Special thanks to Rich and Nancy Ojard for sponsoring the platform.

## **COULD YOUR DOGHOUSE USE A HAND SPLIT CEDAR SHAKE ROOF?**

We have about 70 sq. ft of cedar shakes that came with the platform canopy that we stained red to tie to the red metal roofing of the depot and freight house. Then we changed our minds and went with the red metal roofing. The shakes are about two feet in length and various widths. Price of hand-split cedar shakes is astronomical. You may have them for a thoughtful donation to the KRHCC. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Contact: [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org)

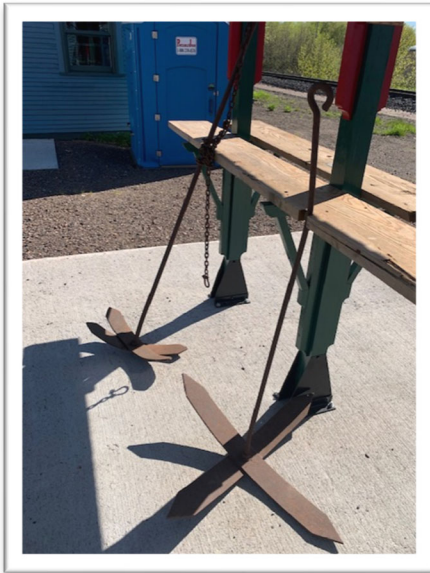


## **WHAT HISTORICAL TREASURES MIGHT YOU HAVE (and not know it...)?**

We were pleasantly surprised this month when we received inquiries for items KR homeowners had that they thought might be of interest to the KRHCC. The answer was an enthusiastic "Yes!"

The first was from Bob Ashenmacher who said he had been given two strange looking anchors from Hans Ojard, several years ago. The Ashenmachers and Hans and Jackie Ojard were neighbors. Bob was doing some yardwork and came across the anchors under some bushes. He decided a better use for them would be to donate them to the KRHCC.

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It turns out these anchors are net anchors with the flukes made from car leaf springs! How resourceful! These anchors tie perfectly to one of the outdoor interpretive displays planned for the commercial fishing exhibit where we call attention to the fishermen's resourcefulness in coming up with their own devices for hauling boats up to 35' or using car frames on runners that were fitted with gas engines to cut lake ice for preserving fish.

Fishermen often made their own net anchors from whatever they could find in case they were not retrievable at the end of a fishing season

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

The second item were photos linked to probably the most famous shipwreck on the north side of Lake Superior – the passenger/freight steamer AMERICA.

For about 25 years it ran from Duluth to what is now Thunder Bay circling Isle Royale enroute. It would pause outside nearly every village along the North Shore, including KR, to deliver mail, groceries and freight, pick up fish, and share news/gossip. It was a much-loved boat and for no other reason was famous for that.

The other reason, of course, is that it hit a rock off Isle Royale and sank in June of 1928. Fortunately, the captain was able to beach it in what he thought was a protected area on the island where it later slipped into deep water. It is a favorite of shipwreck divers, including myself.

Anyway, KR resident Craig Whiting opened an old family book and found several photos of his grandparents, Charles and Agnes Whiting, on board the AMERICA enjoying a Lake cruise. They both grew up in Iowa where Charles was a banker and lawyer, and Agnes a 6th grade teacher. Craig has determined the photos were taken in 1917, soon after his grandparents married. Craig said they both liked to travel and so to be on the AMERICA would naturally be a fun thing for them to do.

Image: Agnes Whiting with chief engineer.  
Photo credit: Whiting family



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Craig and his family members hold the rights to the photos but will allow them to be used for the public good through historical and educational institutions with written permission. Contact: [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org)



Agnes Whiting with good view of the upper deck of AMERICA; Duluth hillside in background. Photo credit: Whiting family



Charles Whiting.  
Photo credit: Whiting family

## PLEASE HELP THE JOHN WHALEY FAMILY



John and Robin Whaley are long time KR residents. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as “ALS” and “Lou Gehrig’s disease,” took John from the KR community June 25. John was an avid outdoor enthusiast. He and Robin enjoyed all that the KR area offers year-round. John retired from WDIO television after many years as a photo-journalist and lead videographer.

As you might expect, they have encountered many unforeseen expenses related to John’s illness over the last year. If you can help, you may contribute at: <https://gofund.me/f998be78> Thank you!

John enjoying two of his greatest loves. Photo credit: Whaley family.

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## MARCH DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS

### Donations:

- Bob Ashenmacher two net anchors fabricated in part from car leaf springs. Obtained by Bob through Hans Ojard.
- Randy Ellestad railroad office cabinet.

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