

Newsletter



Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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By Paul von Goertz, KRHCC Board Member

DEPOT STILL ON TRACK TO GREET TRAIN RIDERS FOR JULEBYEN 2019 (DEC. 6 – 8)

We can't be sure just what stage of completion the depot will be in by Julebyen, but we can say folks will have a roof over their heads – and electrical power for light and heat. That was all in place by September 24.

Doors have been installed and, thanks to two individuals who have each sponsored half a window, we now have six of our nine windows paid for. Will we have all nine paid for by Julebyen?

We were sorry to learn that our window contractor will not be able to complete his contract because of a serious illness within his family. However, a second contractor has been selected to make the period-correct windows for the same price and is optimistic they will be ready by Julebyen, albeit with a much reduced time frame.

As it stands with the Julebyen committee at mid-September, some or all of "Troll Village" formerly on the KR Campground site, may flow into KRHCC property. The KRHCC is happy to cooperate with the KRRC as it was their \$20,000 response to a challenge match of \$20,000 in local dollars from a KR resident that allowed the rebuild of the depot to begin in earnest May 13.

Newsletter

A site plan is currently being drawn by the Julebyen committee to incorporate the three properties of festival grounds (ball field), “Troll Village”, (KR Campground), and KRHCC property. KRHCC property will take into consideration space for CRUSADER II, which will be moving to the site this fall.

The KRRC applied for a grant to CPL for “Round-Up” funds to replace all Julebyen decorative lighting with LEDs. The KRRC was very pleased the request for \$1,000 resulted in an award for \$750. They may be able to add decorative lighting to both the depot and CRUSADER II. Festivalgoers who arrive at Julebyen by train will unload and load from the depot. Tickets for “Troll Train to Troll Canyon” will be sold out of the depot. First time since 1962 train tickets will be sold from the depot!



Depot as it appeared at close of workweek September 25. Roof in place with exception of some trim; wainscot and siding on west wall underway. Volunteer Todd Lindahl applies first paint to depot.

Newsletter

Things learned along the way...

Raymond Martinsen: Knife River's WWII casualty



Ray Martinsen grew up in Knife River, the son of Birgir and Ragnhild (Johnson) Martinsen, both Norwegian emigrants. Birgir drowned along with Ragnhild's brother, Gunnar (Birgir's brother-in-law), while fishing north of Hovland on January 14, 1929, as a result of a quick and violent mid-winter storm. Raymond was 12 years old. Ragnhild would then marry Ole Roske, who by coincidence, owned and fished from the property your editor and wife now live.

He was drafted into the army in 1942 and soon rose to the rank of Sergeant. He was sent to Europe in October of 1944. On Christmas day, his landing craft hit a mine off the coast of Normandy, while resupplying Allied invasion forces. He was able to save a shipmate, but not himself. He was 25 years old.

In May of 2018, Steve and Carol Carlson and Paul (your editor) and Mary von Goertz went to Normandy while touring France to find his grave in a U. S. cemetery near the D-day landing site. About 9,300 brave young men are buried there.

The tour bus operator gave us about 50 minutes at the cemetery and so we frantically searched for Raymond's grave. Through Carol's persistence and God's Grace, we were able to find his grave with ten minutes to spare. We are not certain how many people may have visited Raymond's grave but in talking to Martinsen family members, it may only be ten or so, with we being four. In some way, perhaps, we reconnected Raymond with his hometown.

Newsletter

Ragnhild gave one of the stained glass windows in the Knife River Church in memory of her son.



The photo with this story shows the von Goertz's and Carlson's at the grave of Raymond Martinsen. Unfortunately the photo had to be shot into the sun, so detail is missing.

Trench dug for depot electrical power yields secrets

Our history center is actually resting on history! The sharp eyes of KRHCC historian, Todd Lindahl, spotted an object that looked like something other than a stone as Larry Ronning's Kubota dug into the soil to create a trench for electrical power.



Todd cleaned it up and concluded it was iron and probably an axe head. Todd sent it to his friend, Dave Peterson, an expert in identifying archeological discoveries made of iron, who concluded it was axe-like blade made prior to 1840, and could go back as far as the 1600s. It was made by a not-so-skilled European who was able to cover the blade of the axe with steel, using the technique of hand powder-welding.

The axe may have been used in bartering with native peoples or just found useful to early voyageurs.

Newsletter

The type of blade was referred to as a “mast axe” or “ship axe” and used over about a 500-year period.

The blade helps place Knife River in an important historical period of time with the arrival of the white man who learned, like the native people, that the area near the mouth of the Knife River was a good place to set up camp. The Knife River and lake provided fish, the river confluence a place to shelter their canoes and boats, and the island and shoreline protection from SW winds. It is logical to think that white men, while initially pursuing furs and later claims of copper, would interact with native people and barter.

On a historical note, the right to search for minerals on the North Shore was granted in the 1st Treaty of LaPointe in 1842, but mining was not allowed until the 2nd Treaty of LaPointe in 1854 when the land was ceded.

For sure the “axe” will be part of an historical exhibit within the KR depot!

And now for some “skullduggery” – just in time for Halloween!

What else might we find beneath the depot site over which so much human history had passed, including steam locomotives of the Alger-Smith?

We were so all engrossed in Todd’s find of the axe head, that we failed to see Randy Ellestad briefly depart and return, only to look into the trench just dug for the power line, gasp and pull out what appeared to be a human skull! Say whaaaat?!!

There you have it, a Knife River Halloween mystery story for your children and grandchildren.



Newsletter

Wrap your head around these amazing stats of timber flowing from NE Minn. to Duluth

The Alger-Smith logging railroad had 99.8 miles of mainline and hundreds of miles of branches and spurs going as far north as Ely and east to Grand Marais. All this wood went to just two sawmills in Duluth with a lot of it passing through Knife River, exactly how much is not known.

The photo shows a winter storage area in Knife River from 1915. The site is south of the mainline in about the area where the agate beach parking lot is and down America Dock road. When the lake cleared of ice in the spring, the wood would be shipped east from "The Lake Dock," which most of us know as "The Coal Dock." For reference, the Lake Dock can be seen in the far upper right (rail cars on dock).



Photo courtesy of Loraine Ojard.

Newsletter

Duluth Sawmill production stats:

- Combined **daily** production of the two Duluth saw mills would make a 12" wide trail to Hinckley measured in board feet! A board foot measures 12" x 12" x 1".
- The total board feet produced by the sawmills in 1902 would circle the earth at the equator 3 ½ times!

Production totals like this are staggering. While several railroads supplied the sawmills in Duluth, Knife River as the terminus of the Alger Smith's mainline into northeastern Minnesota, played a very important role.

KNIFE RIVER AND ITS LEGENDARY FISH CAKES

For many, Knife River and "fish cakes" are synonymous. And for good reason, the first fish cake dinner was served in 1927 and has been held at least once every year since, to the best of local memory.

In August of 1927, with a predominantly Lutheran population, Mrs. Tom Loining, while attending church in Two Harbors, asked their pastor, Rev. Tetlie, if he would come to KR to preach. He said he would, provided there was a place to preach. At the time, the Presbyterians had the only church (now Knife River Lutheran). They consented to its use and in late September Lutheran services were held.

All went well until a group of ladies wanted to organize a Ladies Aid and Sunday School. The Presbyterians objected to this and so the fledgling Lutheran church began holding services in the town hall, which was across from what was the KR school.

The Lutherans realized they needed their own church and so planned a fish cake dinner to raise money. The first was held on December 10, 1927 with all food and fish donated and everyone pitching in to raise \$112. By 1938, the Lutherans were able to buy the Presbyterian Church for \$350, which is now Knife River Lutheran Church.

Newsletter

Now, by coincidence, you can still partake in this year's fish cake dinner, which will be held Friday, November 1. For those who may not care for fish, you can have secret recipe meatballs. Price is \$12 for adults; children 5 – 7 years \$5.00; and children 5 years and younger free. Meal includes potatoes, vegetable, coleslaw, homemade rolls, apple crisp and coffee. Serving hours are 4 – 7 PM. Suggestion: come early!

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.