



# Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

Editor's note:

*In the May issue of this newsletter, I expressed my frustration with trying to find in our archives any information about women being hands-on working in commercial fishing. This included interviews with four women from Knife River (KR) fishing families. Nevertheless, we did devote one of the five interpretive displays within our commercial fishing exhibit to how women shaped the character of KR.*

*My comments brought a response from Roberta Sve of Tofte, MN. Roberta is a long-time friend of the KRHCC and very involved with the commercial fishing museum in Tofte. She also writes the museum's newsletter. We share stories and information on occasion to better educate the public on North Shore commercial fishing.*

*Anyway, here are Roberta's comments on the role three women from the Tofte area played in commercial fishing.*

## **"THEY PLAYED A PART"**

By Roberta Sve

The big lake, many of us see every day, reminds us of the fishing industry, past and present. We think "fishermen" and evoke images of sturdy, fearless men and their boats facing what Lake Superior has in store: calm waters or rough seas, large catches, or nearly empty nets. But do we think about the women in the lives of these fishermen?

Now, it would be rare to see a woman out in a boat setting or picking nets. But years ago, many women were engaged in fishing alongside their husbands - real partners.

**Following are examples of three of those women. I feel they represent a picture of what the wives of many fishermen did.**

***Gertrude Anderson Osbakken*** was 34 years old when she married Alphonse Anderson and came to the North Shore with her new husband. Alphonse came from Larsmo, Finland, when he was 16 years old and fished commercially up and down the shore and Isle Royale. After serving in the army in WWII, he bought land with his war bonus money and called it Bonus Point. The property is between Two Harbors and Duluth near where McQuade Harbor is today.

Many times, Gertrude went on the lake and helped Alphonse haul up the nets, a hard job pulling the heavy nets and picking out the fish. Other times she would watch for his boat to turn toward shore, put breakfast on hold, and rush to the beach ready to hook the boat to the winch line and crank it up. In rough water it was difficult to place the hook in the eye on the prow of the boat and to keep it from smashing into the rocks.



When the boat was safely winched up to the fish house, Gertrude would run back to the house and finish cooking breakfast, just as Alphonse walked in.

After having twins, Gertrude would carry the newborns to the fish house, baskets under each arm, place them in a corner while she helped clean fish.

Photo: Gertrude and Alphonse Anderson taking ciscoes from a hook line. Photo credit: Roberta Sve

***Ragnhild Jacobson Sve*** grew up in Silver Creek. Her father, Julian Jacobson, a fisherman, emigrated from Blokken, Norway, in 1906. She married Ragnvald Sve in 1926. He came from Norway to Canada in 1921 and to Two Harbors the following year when an uncle told him "It is just like Norway". Ragnvald worked at several jobs: on the blasting crew building a new road around Silver Creek Cliff and on the ore boats. He learned fishing from his father-in-law.

Ragnvald and Ragnhild bought property near Split Rock in 1926 and built a fish house with living quarters above. Together they worked at fishing. Ragnhild rowed while he set the nets and she spent long hours "dressing" herring. When catches yielded boat

loads of herring, Ragnhild cleaned fish long into the night so her husband could get a few hours' sleep before going on the lake again early in the morning.

After babies were added to the family, they were placed on a pillow in a net box in the bow of the boat, the waves rocking them to sleep as their parents worked at the nets. The most dangerous moment for fishermen occurred when putting the 350-pound anchor rock over the side of a 16-foot skiff. Misplaced, it could capsize the boat. Ragnhild once quickly threw overboard the bench she was sitting on when a tangled rope would otherwise have tossed her and her two babies into frigid Lake Superior.

The Sves also developed a business making fish boxes for sale and for their own use. Ragnhild spent many, many hours nailing together the boxes while Ragnvald sawed the lumber on his sawmill. Poplar wood was used for boxes since it did not impart any taste to the fish. Photo: Roberta Sve



Image left: Ragnhild Sve and Esther Lahti filling fish boxes from skiffs loaded with herring.

Photo credit: Roberta Sve

**MARGARET LORNTSON CARLSON** grew up in a fishing family in Beaver Bay. Her grandparents, Martin and Hannah Lorntson were the first Norwegian settlers in Beaver Bay after briefly living in Two Harbors. It was 1896. She began at an early age to engage in work related to fishing. She helped her father, Conrad, make lead weights for the nets and attached them. Her father cut the netting into lengths and twine to attach at each end for corks and lead lines. Margaret's job was to keep the wooden seaming shuttle filled with twine.

## NEWSLETTER

Margaret married Kermit Carlson when she was 17. They first lived in Beaver Bay and in 1957 bought a piece of property near Schroeder close to Kermit's parents, Thor and Matilda Carlson. They were from Norway and fished commercially.

Kermit and Margaret bought a boat from Larry Ronning in Two Harbors and began fishing together. She would row while he set the nets. A few years later, Kermit's father lost his fish house, nets and boats in a storm. The two men then fished together every day, even in winter.

When they were trout fishing, the DNR required a lot of documentation. Was the fish native? Stocked fish had clipped fins. The size and sex of the trout, number of lamprey markings. Margaret did most of the necessary paperwork.

One might think that women helping their husbands on the lake happened in the very early days, but the Carlsons are an example of a partnership that continued for many years.

Image right: Kermit and Margaret Carlson's fish house. Photo: Roberta Sve.



### About Roberta Sve:

#### Editor's note:

*It is my feeling that Roberta is a true North Shore treasure by recording so much of the commercial fishing heritage of the North Shore. I asked her to tell the KRHCC a bit about herself - and here it is.*

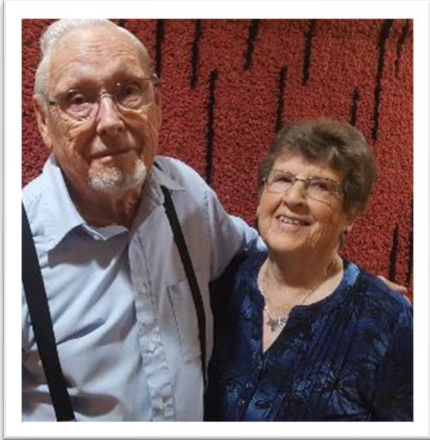


Photo: Floyd and Roberta Sve Photo credit: Roberta Sve

"I came into the Sve family when I married Floyd, the youngest son of Ragnvald and Ragnhild Sve in 1955. Though my husband had been involved with fishing, he was mostly a helper with the commercial fishing. His two older brothers, Leonard and Walter, fished commercially along with their father. Leonard gave it up when he went



to work for Reserve Mining, but Walter continued until well into his 80s as his father had done.

“The many stories about good and bad times on the lake have been heard a multitude of times, but always struck wonder in those hearing them. Wonder why someone would persevere in such dangerous work, wonder why anyone would choose that way of living in the first place, and wonder why the fisherman could simply shrug off a bad experience on the big lake and go out again the next day.

“My father, Axel Johnson, emigrated from Norway where he was a fisherman and soon found his way to the North Shore to fish. Eventually he left the area and worked on larger boats fishing herring in Alaska and sardines in California.

“I grew up on the North Shore and remember many of the “old timers” that I wrote about as writer and eventually editor of the newsletter for the Commercial Fishing Museum in Tofte. Though not in on the initial ideas and culmination of building the museum, I found pleasure in researching and writing about North Shore fishermen, past and present, about historic boats and about early settling and life in this beautiful part of the world.”

## **FIRE DESTROYS 30' BOAT AT KR MARINA**

A boat caught fire at the KR marina Thursday, June 29<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 PM according to the Lake County Sheriff's office. The boat was on the far side of the marina and a second boat in the neighboring slip, but a by-stander moved the second boat before it could catch on fire.

There was no leakage of fuel into the harbor and no cause was immediately given, according to the Sheriff's office. The Two Harbors fire department and the Lake County Ambulance Service also responded to the scene.

The fire, which appeared to start near the navigation station, created a large plume of black smoke. Photo credit: Lee Bujold

A sad day for this boat's owner.  
Image left credit: Paul von Goertz



## VIKING SHIP DRAWS PENNSYLVANIA SCOUTS TO KRHCC

Six boy scouts and two councilors from Hanover, PA, included the Viking Ship as one of the sites they wanted to see during a swing through northern Minnesota during the week of July 9<sup>th</sup>. They stopped at the KRHCC on Friday, the 14<sup>th</sup>.

First stop was the Boundary Waters where they discovered some hybrid Minnesota mosquitoes, then the KRHCC, sites around Duluth and then (horrors) the Mall of America. Said councilor Damien Rodriguez, “the boys put this trip together themselves and the Viking ship was something they definitely wanted to see.”

The ship remains in shrink wrap to the waterline, but the scouts got a good history of the ship from Neill Atkins (second from left), board president of SOS (“Save Our Ship”).

Later the scouts toured the depot and got an update on the rebuilding of CRUSADER II from Doug Hill, boat restorer in residency.

Photo credit: John Vigen



## 47 DEGREES ART & GIFT GALLERY MOVES TO BIGGER SPACES.

47 degrees art and gift gallery has moved to 186 Alger Smith Road where Michelle stands at the entry of the new location (photo below).



The new location is the former home of the Oden Alreck family.

Jeff Peterson and Michelle Gratton said they hit a stroke of incredible luck, when Sue (Alreck) Thomas and her husband Dave, said they would love to see the house take on this new adventure.

Jeff and Michelle transformed the home into a more spacious and light-filled space to display the artwork of more than 50 local artists. They also created a welcoming labyrinth near the entry,

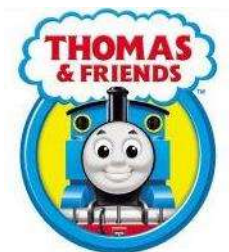
Michelle said the former Riverview Street gallery location is now occupied by Amy DiFranco, who offers massage, reiki, and yoga services.

47degrees art and gift gallery is open June through December, Friday through Sunday 10 AM -5 PM, or by appointment: 218/590-4532.

*Editor's note: Prior to the 2022 Holiday season Michelle made a very generous offer to (1) help the KHRCC achieve its mission and (2) make Holiday gift buying a very pleasant and personally satisfying experience for her customers. It was a big success and greatly benefited the KHRCC. Michelle said she intends to make the offer again this Holiday season. Watch for details in the October issue of the newsletter.*

## "THOMAS AND FRIENDS" COMING TO TWO HARBORS

The beloved storybook character "Thomas the Train" is coming to Two Harbors (TH) August 6 – 8 and 11-13. Billed as a "Day Out with Thomas," there will be train rides, a Bounce House and lots of kids' games in TH, according to Lovin' Lake County, the county's marketing arm.



## NEWSLETTER

Thomas will be passing the KR depot four times as he commutes to TH from Duluth over its two visits. Thomas will need to slow to 10 mph when passing through KR. What a great photo opp this will provide! Photogs will need to stay off the RR right-of-way which is 35' in either direction from the center of the RR track.

The North Shore Scenic Railroad will have Thomas's schedule on its web site [duluthtrains.com](http://duluthtrains.com) Check the train's schedule to plan your photo opp. Usually, a train leaving Duluth passes through KR about an hour after departure. A train departing TH passes through KR 25-35 minutes.



Good luck getting the perfect photo of Thomas (with KR depot in background)!

Photo: Lovin' Lake County

## **KRHCC NEWSLETTER CELEBRATES FOUR YEARS, PLANS BOOK OF PAST ISSUES.**

Hard to believe the April issue of this newsletter completed four years of "e-publishing." Many, many thanks to Anne-Lù Hovis for providing all the graphic design and production for all 48 issues.

In the inaugural issue I stated, "This is the first of at least monthly newsletters for friends, volunteers and anyone interested in the Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center (KRHCC)."

That issue went to about 40 people that I selected for their interest in volunteering, as potential donors or grantors, their positions in local government, and people I consider "opinion leaders." The e-mail list is now approaching 300 and with "pass-a-long" readership it would be more than 400. The growth in circulation is almost all by request! No one has been asked to be removed from the list, other than folks who get two issues somehow.

Patricia Canelake (Great! Lakes Candy Kitchen) suggested at the four-year anniversary of the newsletter that the KRHCC should create a hard cover book to contain all past issues. Better yet, she offered to do all that is involved with "self-publishing" using online software. That sounded pretty good, so Patricia is now on the case.



Goal is to print 25-50 books each in the \$40-45 range and have them available for 2023 Holiday gift giving or sooner. Thank you, Patricia, for the suggestion and offering to stick-handle it to completion.

## **THIS IS WHY WE BUILT A VIEWING DECK FOR CRUSADER II**

KRHCC board member David Grong and wife, Linda, were passing through Cheboygan, MI, recently and saw this fish tug as part of a historical display. We board members are always taking photos of fish tugs on display to see if any have good ideas we can incorporate into our commercial fishing display. This one most certainly does not.

Unless the hull of this one is pickled with some preservative concoction that is not toxic to the environment, that portion of the hull surrounded by pea rock will be dust

at some point. Not only that, but a good portion of the boat is hidden from view in this display option.



Photo: David Grong

Our viewing deck now under construction, will cost many times what the pea rock option cost, but it will not disrespect the boat by burying its lower hull and not allowing visitors to see the whole boat.

## **LOOKING FOR CRUSADER II'S RUNNING LIGHTS**

Somewhere in someone's basement or garage may be CRUSADER II's port and starboard running lights. The left ("port") would be red and the right ("starboard") green. We hope they were removed for safe keeping when CRUSADER II was given a cosmetic restoration in Two Harbors in 1991.

If not found, perhaps someone might have a lead on replacement lights. They would be galvanized metal about 7-9" tall and would look similar in design to the light in the photo



below, which is a combination light. Thanks for whatever you can do! Contact: info@krhcc.org  
Photo credit: eBay

## **KR'S HISTORY WILL BE CELEBRATED WITH COMPLETION OF LAST GROUP OF INTERPRETIVE DISPLAYS**

The last of 11 interpretive displays that present the history of KR in words and images will be celebrated with a dedication planned for early September. For the first time the history of KR, collected from founding fishing families, recognized history professionals and Indigenous tribes will be available to the public.

Full details will be in the August issue.

## **CRUSADER II VIEWING DECK NEARS COMPLETION**

The photos show the viewing deck on July 24.

Besides offering a view into the boat, the deck supports five interpretive displays on KR commercial fishing from indigenous times to the present. It is being built by NorthShor Construction of KR, Alex Happ, owner.

Funding is through the IRRR with matching donations from the Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation and the KRHCC. Our building fund took a hit with this structure and our check book needs to be recharged as a result. Can you help? Contact: info@krhcc.org



Photos: Paul von Goertz

**Memorials:**

*In memory of David Olin:*

Memorials from Steve and Carol Carlson, John Codrea, and Steve and Anne-Lù Hovis. One given anonymously.

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