



Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

PO Box 240 • 180 Marina Road
Knife River, MN 55609
info@krhcc.org

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By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

WINTER RAILROADING

By Todd Lindahl - KRHCC Historian & Archeologist

Images from the Todd Lindahl Collection

Winter was the busiest time of the year on Alger-Smith's Duluth & Northern Minnesota Ry. Some of the logging operations were dumping sleighs loaded with logs on the ice of frozen lakes, ponds behind dams built across rivers, and on the sides of steep high hills where logs could be rolled down into the water after the spring thaw.

These locations were where summer log car loading occurred at log hoists. This enabled the company sawmills to run throughout the year and not be just seasonal. The other part of the logging operations loaded log cars at landings along the many spurs and branch lines scattered all over northeastern Arrowhead Region of Minnesota. Without the frozen ground and snow, heavy logs were nearly impossible to move in the woods. Warm winters with little snow spelled disaster for the Alger-Smith Lumber Company.



On the other hand, too much snow was just as bad and impeded both logging and railroad operations alike. In the logging camps men sometimes spent all night plowing the ice roads with wedge plows (image left) pulled by a large horse team. This had to be done so the water tank sleigh could sprinkle water on the road to freeze. A rut cutter then cut two ruts in the ice for sleigh runners which enabled large loads to be moved.

On the D&NM from 1898 up until 1901 clearing snow was handled by a butterfly snowplow mounted on the front of engine #1. If blizzard conditions happened and clearing track became too difficult, they could always lease the nearby Duluth & Iron Range Ry single-track push plow known affectionately as the "snowbird."

Then in 1902 Alger-Smith bought out the Mitchell & McClure Logging Company including their huge sawmill on Grassy Point in West Duluth, and their logging railroad. In this sale they received among

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other things, two locomotives, 83 Russel cars, and a very nice large push plow like the snowbird. This and a smaller flanger could handle just about any adverse snow conditions along the D&NM mainline, branches, and spurs. This was the railroad's front-line snow-fighting assault weapon until March 19, 1913.

The Estate of Thomas Nestor Railroad, another logging line based out of what is today Gooseberry Falls State Park, ended its logging operations prematurely in 1909. It left leaving a lot of standing timber known as the Stang tract mostly along the upper Gooseberry River watershed. This timber was acquired by the Virginia & Rainy Lake Railroad (V&RI), which laid track on much of the recently abandoned Nestor Railroad mainline.

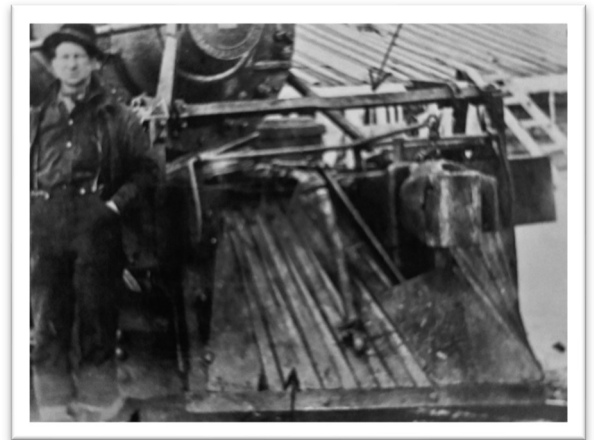
The V&RL received running rights over the Alger-Smith line so they could move their log trains south from Buell on the D&NM at milepost 24.75 to York Transfer yard at milepost 17.40. There was a yard with four tracks that provided access to the Duluth & Iron Range Ry. The D&IR would move the V&RL log trains to Endion station at Duluth where they would be taken to the V&RL sawmill also on Grassy Point.

The V&RL moved trains over the D&NM for five years from 1909 to 1913. On a March day in 1913 a severe snowstorm hit and the D&NM crew was sent out from Knife River to clear the line. Their orders read that they were to stop just short of the yard switch at York Transfer and wait for a V&RL log train to enter the yard before proceeding.

Unfortunately, a lot of snow was flying up from the wedge plow obstructing the view of the track ahead. The D&NM plow train went past the switch and ran head-on into the southbound V&RL log train eight car-lengths past the switch. D&NM conductor Dennis Ratford, who was inside the plow, suddenly found himself flying through the air. He did a complete flip while airborne and landed on his back in the swamp beside the track. Conductor Ratford suffered several bad bruises and a broken collarbone. His injuries were treated at the Budd Hospital in Two Harbors.

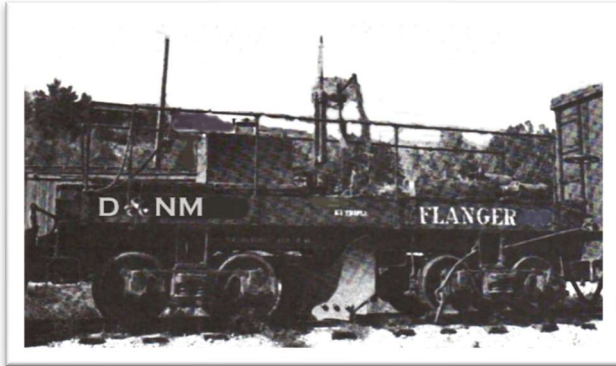
The Virginia & Rainy Lake train headed by engine #19, was under the direction of conductor S. Chamberlain and was badly wrecked. The D&NM snowplow was sadly reduced to a pile of splintered wood and twisted metal. The other members of the two train crews luckily got off with only minor injuries.

The wreck left the D&NM without an effective snow fighting weapon. They decided on a novel idea to transform engine #2, the former D&IR Three Spot, into a sort of unique steam plow. The "Frankenplow" came out of the D&NM roundhouse machine shop in the winter of 1913/1914. Gaps in the cowcatcher (image right) had been plated over with narrow strips of plate steel. Behind this makeshift plow were flanger blades that would scrape rails clear of snow. Blades could be raised or lowered by a lever in the cab. Power was provided by a brake cylinder mounted on the running board.



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Eventually a bad snowstorm with high winds hit the north shore and a snowdrift soon formed under the new trestle on the track to the locomotive coal loading dock. The Frankenplow was called into action to clear the track, which was preventing locomotives from getting coal for their tenders. With



as much speed as the crew could coax from their engine, they rammed into the offending drift with great force and momentum. But directly under the trestle the Frankenplow spun its wheels and shuddered to a stop. Snow dropped in behind the blade preventing any chance of backing out. The crew dropped the fire and emptied all the water so it would not freeze and do some real damage. Image left: The Flanger car with blades that could be raised or lowered as needed to expose the rail.

The company hired many laborers from an employment agency in Duluth to hand-shovel the engine out the next day. Like Frankenstein in the movie, this experiment came to an inglorious end. The D&NM converted two former wooden D&IR ore cars into push plows with V blades on the front. They filled the interior of the ore cars with scrap metal for added weight. These ore cars had both been built by the Illinois Car Company in 1899 for the D&IR and had been purchased from the D&IR in 1908. A flanger car was acquired to handle that necessary work since a cab was needed for an operator to ride in. Engine #12 with a flanger car and 4-wheel "Bobber" caboose in front (image right). The Bobber would normally be behind the engine when flanging. Flanging cannot be done while backing up because snow would get behind the blades. Apparently, the train is backing up over a distance as there is a canvas that covers the back of the cab to keep out cold air.



The Duluth & Iron Range Ry also made use of butterfly snowplows on their engines when snow conditions were manageable. At Knife River the siding track by the depot was very close to agent Pete Rosso's house just west of the depot. Unfortunately, when the D&IR plowed this track, it piled the snow up against the south wall of the house. It was then up to the agent and his family to remove the snow against the wall by hand.

Image left: When trains got really stuck, the only answer was hand shoveling. Here a crew from a logging camp hand-shovels snow in front of the engine.

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For many people at Knife River involved in logging, railroading, or commercial fishing, winter could be either a blessing or a curse. And it could switch between the two in an instant. Image right: Snowbank left by train plow at entry to Pete Rosso's home. Rosso was both depot agent and KR Postmaster.



Please note:

In our February issue of our newsletter Todd will discuss "Snowplowing on the Alger Line."

2024 WAS A YEAR OF ACCOMPLISHMENT AT THE KRHCC

In 2024, the KRHCC accomplished the goals it had established when we created our own 501(c3) six years ago in 2018. In brief, it was to restore the depot and CRUSADER II and make them ready for display to the public. Sounds simple, but it was a lot of work by a dedicated board of directors and many volunteers. Following are some of the details that had to be addressed along the way and were accomplished in 2024.

Conditional Use Permit (CUP)

In April/May County Planning & Zoning required a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to establish rules and regulations for events held at the KRHCC. This included items such as parking, garbage collection and removal, hours, visitor conduct, and a KRHCC contact during events. Two hearings were held where KR residents were given the opportunity to speak to the CUP request. Through orderly and productive discussion, rules & regs were established that were acceptable to the KRHCC and nearby property owners.

Drainage Plan

Several meetings were held with County Soil & Water in the spring to develop a drainage plan for the KRHCC site. The plan was necessary to level the site and drain run-off to the north to a swale (wide shallow ditch) that would run to the north border between the KRHCC and the KR Campground. From there, fines in water would be filtered and/or absorbed by vegetation and filtered water dispersed into a wooded area. The cost to implement the drainage plan was developed by a county soils engineer with cost shared by the KRHCC, the Viking ship organization, and a state grant applied for by County Soil & Water.

IRRRB Boat Shelter Grant Award



In January a request was submitted for a Cultural & Tourist match grant of \$30,000 from the IRRRB. Thankfully, we had the match from other smaller grants and donations. The grant was awarded and with funds now in place, we were able to build the boat shelter using Tim Anderson Construction from KR as low bidder at \$70,000.

Image left: Completed boat shelter minus some embellishments that will be added in 2025. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

A period engine for CRUSADER II

Thanks to Randy Ellestad, we acquired a 2-cylinder 20 HP 1920-era gas engine from the Lake Superior Marine Museum Association on a 20-year lease arrangement. The engine once powered a 26' KR fish tug. The engine was retrieved by Randy and Matt Morris and installed in CRUSADER II in November.

Diorama of the north end of the KR Railyard

Todd Lindahl, KRHCC historian & archeologist, gave us the loan of a detailed diorama he built of the north end of the KR railyard. The diorama complements the diorama of the south end that had been on display at the Lake County Historical Museum in Two Harbors, now on loan from Todd and displayed at the KR depot. The detail on these dioramas that measure about 3' x 4'-5' is amazing. Todd's north end diorama has a functional model turntable children love!

A generous gift from Odyssey Resorts and Odyssey homeowners

KRHCC board member, David Grong, secured a challenge match grant from Odyssey Resorts in Larsmont whereby Odyssey would match up to \$5,000 in donations for the KRHCC from Odyssey homeowners. The homeowners took on the challenge and the match was met resulting in \$10,000 for the KRHCC! Thank you, Dave, Odyssey Resorts and Odyssey homeowners!

Coolidge Family display

While KR is most thought of for commercial and sport fishing, the KRHCC wanted to create awareness for KR as a mini-technology center by focusing on the problem-solving talents of the Coolidge family in designing and manufacturing metal-working processes for a variety of Midwest industries. They also designed, manufactured and sold nationwide a deep diving trolling plate that automatically released when a fish hit the bait attached to it. While the patent on the plate has expired, the concept has been replicated by many companies and can be found in almost any fishing tackle store.

Memorial/Honorarium Tree sponsorship

The KRHCC began a memorial/honorarium tree sponsorship program in 2024. Approximately 12 hardwood trees were made available for planting long the north and west boundaries of the KRHCC site. Trees are approximately 12 feet high and are purchased, planted and maintained by Anderson Greenhouse in Two Harbors. Four trees were sponsored and planted early last September. The balance we anticipate will be sponsored and planted this spring. Cost is \$600 per tree in the ground. To sponsor a tree: info@krhcc.org

Helping our friends

- SOS ("Save Our Ship")
Among other reasons, the drainage plan was necessary to drain water from around the planned Viking ship slab, which is an impervious surface. We partnered with SOS ("Save Our Ship") and County Soil & Water to complete the plan and allow a 26' x 60' slab to be poured last fall. A shelter for the ship is planned to be built on the slab next summer.
- Nóatún Community Wooden Boat Works
The school relocated to KR from Duluth this spring thanks to the efforts of Randy Ellestad in securing the unused KRLSD maintenance building for their school that builds, and teaches how to build, 1100s-era Norwegian faering boats. The KRHCC allowed the non-profit to use the

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east end of the KRHCC site to store tools and materials while their new home is being remodeled.

- **KR Rec Council**
With the completion of the drainage plan, we were able to make a large flat barrier-free surface available for the 40' x 80' Winter Farmer's Market that took place during Julebyen 2024. The KRHCC has an arrangement with the KRRC that they may have full use of the KRHCC site during Julebyen in exchange for a split on Troll Train fares.
- **Supporting Lake County businesses -**
Almost all the activities that took place under the direction of the KRHCC in 2024 took advantage of Lake County business. These included Tim Anderson Construction, North Shore Lumber, Seagren's Hardware, Anderson's Greenhouse, Shoreview Natives, Mike Ostman Trucking & Excavating, Northern Connection Wreath Company and Larsmont Trading Post.

And on a personal note...



I would like to thank the KRHCC board of directors and the many volunteers who helped make 2024 such a successful year, and without me being able to swing a hammer. I have prostate cancer that so far is being successfully managed by an Essentia oncology team that has prescribed some wonder drugs. But, the drugs have side effects that have compromised my strength, balance and cognition. Or is it just old age?! However, I can still peck away at a keyboard and will keep pumping out the newsletters and requests for grants and donations!

Best wishes for a Happy and Rewarding New Year!

Paul von Goertz

Board Chair - KRHCC

Photo credit: Marilyn Magnuson, the "Viking Lady."

MONA LINDEN THE GLUE THAT HOLDS THE KRHCC TOGETHER

Talk to any small business owner and they will tell you that the one who “handles the books” is nearly indispensable. I found that out as soon as my partner and I founded an advertising agency in 1975. We were both near clueless on how to run the business side of our agency and made our second hire a young woman just out of high school who was working at an accounting firm. “Cheryl” was with us for 30 years up to when we sold the agency. She understood our biz top to bottom and eventually became a partner.

The KRHCC has a counterpart to Cheryl on the non-profit side, and that is Mona Linden. Board member Larry Ronning recommended Mona to us when we received our 5-year renewable lease from the Regional Rail Authority in 2018. She lived in Castle Danger, had spent her entire career in financial services, was retired, and agreeable to volunteering at what I described to her as challenging and meaningful work. Through some mumble-jumbo (“When in doubt, mumble”) I implied this could be a paid parttime position at some point (never happened).

Mona went right to work setting up a home office, updating her computer, purchasing the necessary record-keeping software and office supplies - all at her cost. Probably the most challenging aspect of her “job” has been keeping current with all federal and state regs pertaining to non-profits. Unfortunately, some organizations have taken advantage of non-profit status for gain which has resulted in the feds scrutinizing the books of non-profits.

Photo right: Mona Linden in her home office with her assistant “Kelzy,” a Shih-tzu. Photo credit: Larry Ronning.



Mona has been a big help to me as I write our grants. The KRHCC has applied for both state and federal grants where the financial info requested has seemed a bit much, yet Mona has suffered through it and produced what was requested. She also helps me with budgets and tracking expenses against line items.

Another important aspect of Mona’s job that relates to pleasing the feds and state is recording donations and sending donors properly completed tax exemption forms as the KRHCC is a 501(c3) non-profit.

Mona was made a KRHCC board member and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) by unanimous vote at the KRHCC board in 2019. Having her on the board has freed up other board members to concentrate on what they do best.

One last thing. Mona has been one of the largest private donors to the KRHCC, the funds of which have provided badly needed matching funds required by certain grantors. Mona has been most generous with her time and donations, both of which have greatly contributed to the success of the KRHCC.

“CHRISTMAS TREE TRAIN” BECOMING A TRADITION

I would guess many of you still have vivid memories as a child of where your family got its live Christmas tree. It could have been from a tree lot, nursery, or maybe you cut it yourself on a tree farm, or by permit on county land. However it was acquired, it was a pretty exciting and much-awaited event.

For this Christmas and the past three, families have had the opportunity to make a special memory or continue a new tradition by taking a North Shore Scenic Railroad train called the “Christmas Tree Train” to KR to select a tree from a tree lot filled with trees, wreaths and greenery by the Jon Hanel family of Two Harbors, owners of Northern Connection Wreath Company. Trees are wrapped and placed on a flatcar where they are brought to the Duluth depot to be picked up by their owners right off the flatcar. This year as in past years, the train was a sell-out.



The KRHCC dovetails the “Christmas Tree Train” with our “Trees. Trains. Traditions” event to create a special kick-off to the holiday season. KR locals may also select trees and join in the festivities. And this year we even had snow!

Food for both adults and children was served from the depot by Larsmont Trading Post. Holiday music was provided by Dance Attic. Depot greenery was also provided by the Hannels.

“Christmas Tree Train” tickets go on sale online in early November at duluthtrains.com. Suggest you buy early to assure your family a seat. The event takes place the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

Photo: Christmas Tree train riders make their tree selections.
Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

START THE NEW YEAR WITH A SPLASH!

It was New Year’s Day and the temperature was 19 degrees F. with the wind out of the NW that produced a wind chill of 6 degrees F. Nevertheless about 20 people chose to take a plunge in the lake off the KR agate beach. Water temperature may have been in the mid-30s.

Mary and I walk almost daily and noticed several cars parked in the beach parking lot and smoke drifting upward from the beach. As you can see by the photo (right), it was rather a bizarre scene.



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People flinging themselves in the lake, then actually standing about until disappearing into heated “Sauna Tents” now available to the hearty.



We talked to one young man heading for the group with towel in hand. He said this was not an organized event like a Polar Bear Club, but rather a group of friends who decided to start the new year with a splash. “Different strokes for different folks.”

Photo left: A “splasher” emerges from the lake. I was a few seconds late with the photo to catch her frolicking in the lake.
Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

COMMUNITY FLAG FROZEN IN PLACE

I received a couple comments on why our community flag at the KRHCC was not lowered in respect to the passing of President Jimmy Carter. There were some technical difficulties, let me explain.

We specified internal halyards when we ordered the pole to eliminate any annoying “halyard slap” on windy days. If you are in the area of the marina on windy days you can hear halyard slap among all the sailboats. *A halyard is the rope used to raise and lower a flag on a flagpole.*

When we raise our flag about 27 feet of halyard drops through the hollow center of the pole into the very bottom of it, which extends about five feet below ground level. This area fills with ground water and freezes the relaxed halyard in place. When we mounted the flag, we tried to dig a recommended six-foot hole for the sleeve that supports the pole, but at five feet we hit bedrock with ground water flowing over it. So, in freezing weather, the only way to thaw the halyard would be to pour copious amounts of boiling water through the 2” x 4” access port into the pole. Any volunteers?



Speaking of volunteers, I have been lowering and raising the flag on recognized state and federally recognized days since the flagpole was mounted in 2021. I feel it is my patriotic duty, and as a veteran, I don’t mind doing it, but we should have a succession plan.

We have a large summer flag and a smaller winter flag that are both religiously replaced as needed by Krista (Sannes) Mosby. Thank you, Krista! The larger flag is more expensive than the smaller one and takes more of a beating from wind and sun so with care we can get two summers out of it by resting it for winter months. Please email info@krhcc.org if you would like to be a caretaker for our community flag.

Photo right: Knife River community flag in all its glory.
Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

PASTOR SUSAN BERGE ANNOUNCES HER RETIREMENT



In an email dated January 5, 2025, Susan Berge, pastor of Knife River Lutheran Church informed the church council and the congregation of her intention to retire from active ordained ministry effective June 1, 2025.

In her letter she wrote “Dear Friends in Christ, I am writing to let you know of my decision to retire from active ordained ministry as of June 1, 2025. Serving in this congregation has been the highlight of my nearly 39 years of ministry, and I am so profoundly grateful for what we have done together, guided by God’s Spirit, to bless our neighbors and glorify our Lord.

“The Knife River congregation is a vibrant and warm congregation that has effectively lived out the Gospel for so many decades and will continue to do so into the future! It has been a joy to serve among you!

“There is certainly sadness in this transition for me, but also, I look forward to a new chapter in my life. Likewise, while there may be sadness in the congregation at this change, there will also be exciting opportunities for visioning and moving forward in the most impactful ways possible. Rest assured that our Northeastern Minnesota Synod will guide the congregation through every step of this journey, and that God is in the mix to bring about blessings. Respectfully and with love, Pastor Susan Berge.”

I was on the call committee that interviewed applicants for pastoral services, following Pastor John Reppe’s retirement in 1990. Pastor Susan and Pastor Phil applied as a team as we were a two-point parish with Bethlehem Lutheran in Two Harbors. After interviewing the Berges, call committee members from both Bethlehem and our church unanimously and enthusiastically agreed to call the Berges!

The Berges began their duties in October 1991, with both serving both churches, which left parishioners wondering who their pastor would be on any given Sunday. In September of 2004, now with two young children, Pastor Susan expressed her desire to serve one church on a less than full-time basis and chose Knife River Lutheran.

As a member of Knife River Lutheran, I can state that our association with Pastor Susan over 34 years has been nothing short of a blessing. While Pastor Susan would never take credit, our church has experienced continuous growth in membership, many forms of congregational engagement, and outreach initiatives that have been regularly recognized by the Northeastern Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Pastor Susan and Phil have earned their retirement and with much love we wish them many happy and memorable retirement years.

Photo: Courtesy of Pastor Susan Berge

UPCOMING PRPROGRAM BY TODD LINDAHL

Whenever we get enough notice, we like to tell folks of upcoming programs by Todd Lindahl.

Wednesday, February 12
"The Rise and Fall of Whiskey Row"
6:30 arrival; 7:00 program
At the Topsy Mosquito" – 1st Avenue, Two Harbors

JANUARY DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS

Donations:

- In memory of John & Lois Geist to general fund by Peter Geist
- Anonymous to the general fund.
- Allen and Ramona Potter to general fund
- James and Julia Widen for Scandinavian embellishments to boat shelter

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

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