

KNIFE RIVER HERITAGE



& CULTURAL CENTER

Newsletter

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April, 2025

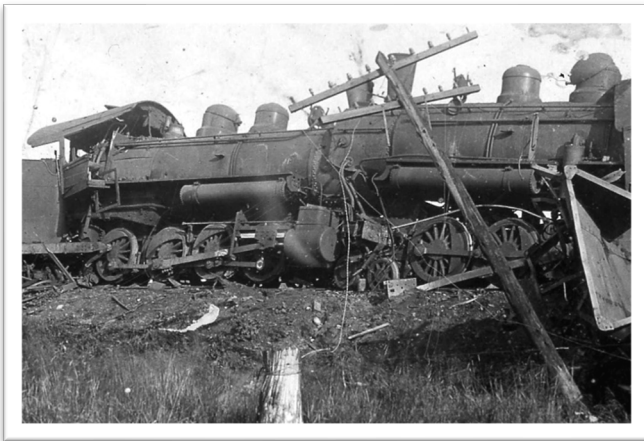
By Paul von Goertz
KRHCC BOARD MEMBER

THE APRIL 3, 1899, KNIFE RIVER HEAD-ON TRAIN COLLISION

By Todd Lindahl, KRHCC Historian & Archeologist
All photos collection of Todd Lindahl

Editor's note:

No photos of the 1899 Knife River train wreck are known to exist, but Todd Lindahl has provided photos of two local similar head-on collisions.



This is the July 22, 1913, Colby, MN (near Hoyt Lakes) head-on where two ore trains collided head-on at night in fog – one empty and one loaded. One engineer and two firemen were killed. Ira Foote was the only surviving engineer. Some of the ore cars were so badly crushed they were scrapped.

A head-on probably in the Two Harbors yard in this undated photo. Engine #59, a Class H Consolidation (2-8-0) is left and a Class K Consolidation on right. Note the trains hit so hard that coal from the #59 tender ended up on the cab roof of the #59.





This is not a head-on collision, but worthy of mention as a train mishap. The undated photo was taken near the powerhouse on Burlington Bay, Two Harbors. A four-wheel “Bobber Caboose” became a runaway and ended up “bobbing” in the lake (far right). The refrigerator box car on the left was owned by Moose Beer of Duluth.

There has been a lot of activity in the area surrounding the Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center depot over a very long time. Almost every time we dig in the ground another old artifact is discovered. The oldest so far is an 1837 American Fur Company (AFC) mast axe used for boat building. It likely was made by an AFC blacksmith assigned to the commercial fish collection station located in Knife River (KR) at that time.

Most of the artifacts found are associated with the Alger-Smith Lumber Company logging activities or its logging railroad officially known as the Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railway. Their extensive rail yard is on the north side of the depot and the Duluth & Iron Range Ry mainline and siding are on the south side. It is a very rare occurrence when an artifact can be linked to a specific date and time. Such was the case the summer of 2024 when a heavy broken iron object was unearthed when a drainage ditch was being dug along our north border with the KR campground.

The object found is a portion of a steam locomotive “pony wheel.” A pony wheel, or more technically known as a leading truck, has two main functions. The first is to lead the locomotive properly into a switch if it is leaving the straight track it is on. The second is to provide stability when the train is moving at higher speeds. Ice, water, or green grass on the rails will make the larger drive wheels slip. The wheels on one side may slip and those on the other side prevent the engine from “waddling like a duck” down the track. The pony wheels prevent the waddling but not the slipping, which can be handled by adding traction sand to the rails.

Portion of the locomotive pony wheel.



NEWSLETTER

Passenger engines will often have additional pony wheels because of their higher operating speed. Yard switchers generally do not have pony wheels since they move around the yard at much slower speeds, minimizing the waddling effect. This is why the “iron horse” has pony wheels. So, what does all this have to do with Knife River?

In 1899 passenger, ore, and freight trains were regulated by a government timetable. This meant that you needed to stick to a strict schedule and try to stay exactly on the time listed until a new timetable was approved and superseded it.

Trains operating on April 3, 1899, were still using timetable #61 that went into effect on December 25, 1898. Four local freight trains would pass through Knife River each day with two going north and two going south. For reasons still unknown today, freight #6 southbound, was 1½ hours late and running fast to try to make up the lost time. It should have passed Knife River at 3:30 P.M. but now it was a little after 5:00 P.M.

The northbound passenger train had cleared Knife River at 3:55 PM and was now past and behind #6 and no longer of any concern. There should have been a clear track all the way to Duluth. However, log trains are not listed on timetables because they have unpredictable car loading and departure times. They, along with work trains and official inspection trains, are run as specials and therefore not listed or regulated.

In April 1899 the Duluth & Northern Minnesota Ry (D&NM) had only one locomotive to handle spotting cars at log landings, move log trains to the Knife River yard, handle freight runs, and perform several other duties. This easily overwhelmed the single engine and its crew.

To make ends meet, the D&NM leased locomotives, log cars, and cabooses from the nearby Duluth & Iron Range Ry (D&IR). As a rule, the D&IR train crews were hired as part of this arrangement. Most of the D&IR employees were laid off once the ore and shipping season ended. There was no such thing as unemployment payments at this time, so many of the men went to the southern states to work for railroads and where it was warmer. This was a problem for the D&IR because if they suddenly needed their men for some unforeseen job, they were far away and unavailable. Winter is the busiest time of year for logging and having these men working locally for the D&NM was a benefit if they suddenly needed them. Plus, the D&IR was getting paid for the leased engines and cars.

Class G and Class H consolidation type engines were popular for logging work because of their lighter weight. From 1884 to 1893 they had been mainline ore haulers and the heaviest locomotives currently available. They had been replaced and downgraded by the more powerful class J mastodon types and were now mostly assigned to freight, switching, and mine service during the summer months.

On April 3rd a leased D&IR class G engine had just entered Knife River yard with a loaded train of Alger-Smith logs. As far as log train engineer J. D. Hayes and conductor D. F. Wetherby knew, freight #6 had passed through Knife River 1½ hours earlier and supposedly on time. They expected no more trains on the mainline until the following day. A brakeman threw the switch so they could pull out onto the mainline and then back the log train into the D&IR siding south of the depot.

Suddenly, freight #6 with engineer George Glydenskog at the throttle and conductor G. R. Smith in charge, came racing around the curve east of the river. Too late to stop, the two locomotives crashed head-on. Eight cars were badly damaged and off the track. Luckily, nobody was injured, except for one passenger, who was riding in the caboose and was shaken up some.

At least one D&IR Class G was involved. These engines had solid pony wheels unlike the class H engines, which had spoked ones. It is unknown what class the second engine involved was, but both were reported to be severely damaged. Pete Rosso, the Knife River depot agent, telegraphed Two Harbors and the wrecking crew was sent to Knife River by 6:00 P.M. only one hour after the wreck happened. From this time on, every timetable had special instructions for trains to approach Knife River at a slower speed and always anticipate that "The mainline *may be* occupied."

Because of this unfortunate accident, we know our broken pony wheel artifact was created at 5:00 P.M. on April 3, 1899, more than 125 years ago. Thank you to the late, late, engineer Glydenskog.

A LOCOMOTIVE SPECTACLE GONE HORRIBLY WRONG

More than 125 years ago, clever hucksters spotted the potential for profit in getting two steam locomotives to smash into each other and charging people to watch. Aging locomotives could be picked up for little money and there was a willing throng ready to buy tickets to watch the calamity.

One of the earliest organized head-on collisions was the "Crash in Crush," a spectacular event that took place near Waco, Texas, in September 1896.

A temporary "town" was built and named after the man who dreamed up the idea for the collision - William Crush. Entrance to the venue was free, but to get there people had to take a train. The fare was \$2.00 from anywhere in Texas. A Ringling Brothers tent and grandstand were erected.

Forty thousand people showed up, making Crush, temporarily, the second largest community in Texas. The locomotives were backed up to their starting points four miles apart. The engineers opened their regulators to a predetermined position and then jumped clear. By the time they reached the collision point in front of the grandstand the two locomotives were each doing about 45 miles an hour. Unfortunately, the organizers failed to anticipate that the boilers, pressurized by steam, might not survive the crash. The resulting explosion showered the spectators with shrapnel, including a significant piece of a drive wheel. A couple people died, and dozens were injured.



The moment of impact. Photographer Joe Deane was blinded in one eye by a flying bolt immediately after taking this photograph.

Photo credit: Wikipedia

Except for the dead and injured and their families, the “Crush Crash” was immensely popular, drawing the biggest single crowd in history at the time. Carnival operators elsewhere in the U.S. soon latched on to the potential of these events and started putting on similar spectacles without, it was hoped, the bloodshed.

LAKE COUNTY NEWS FROM 80 YEARS AGO.

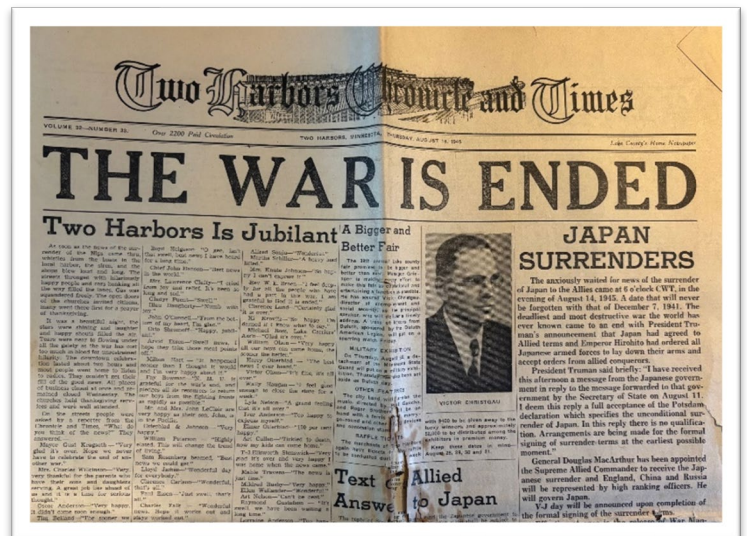
Audrey Carlson, who passed away last fall at age 100, was a dear friend of Mary and mine. She knew the value of recording and reading history and was Knife River Lutheran Church’s forever historian. Stephen Carlson, her son, found copies of newspapers that recorded local and national historical events among her belongings and asked if I wanted them, and “yes,” I sure did.

The photo is the front page of the August 16th 1945 edition. It was fun to page through it. The paper was apparently a weekly and the publisher was George Flowers and editor Georgia Flowers. (“George” and “Georgia”?). The paper claimed more than 2,000 paid circulations as “Lake County’s Home Newspaper.” This issue was eight pages of local and national news, large retail ads from many local stores and classified ads.

The headline “Knife River vs. Merchants, Docks-Section” caught my attention.

Apparently, KR had quite the baseball team in August of 1945, even as the war in the Pacific was still raging. The news story read as if a radio announcer was giving a play-by-play: “Knife River loaded the bases in the last of the seventh on an error by R. Loining’s hit, infield singles by M. Bugge and K. Ojard. Earl Johnson hit too short and Loining was forced at the plate. M. Loining hit to third and M. Bugge was nipped at home by Ralston. Spud Gibbings hit to short, but K. Ojard beat the throw to home by a step and the game was won 8-7.”

What a win! Nice to see so many familiar KR family names on the KR team!



JUST WHEN I THOUGHT I KNEW EVERYTHING ABOUT NORTH SHORE SHIPWRECKS...

When I was diving on North Shore shipwrecks in the 1970s, I became intensely interested in the history of each ship and created a photo library of both those I had dived on to depths of 100 feet, and those lost in deep water. I later copied the photos and made a slide show that got me a lot of rubber chicken dinners as a luncheon speaker at social and service clubs.

A couple summers ago Mary and I took our Texas family to Gooseberry Falls State Park and walked to the mouth. There I found an interpretive display on a wooden ship that had been blown ashore at the mouth and soon dashed to pieces. Included with the display was a piece of steel from the wreck. I had never heard of the wreck and so passed it off as probably insignificant.



In one of Todd Lindahl's Lake County railroad and logging histories I was reading recently, he mentions the ship, which sent me on a search to learn more about it. The wreck is somewhat notable for its tie to a Castle Danger family and so I'll share what I learned.

The wooden steamer BELLE P. CROSS.
Photo credit: Bowling Green State University

The wreck, actually a stranding, was the BELLE P. CROSS. She crashed ashore just south of the mouth of the Gooseberry River on April 29 of 1903. She was built as a sailing vessel in 1870. Length 135' with a draft of 11 ½'. Converted to a barge in 1897 and finally to propeller-driven in 1900.

She was loaded with railroad ties and timber and was enroute from Two Islands, (MN?) to Duluth in gale-force winds and blinding snow when she stranded on rocks. The crew jumped off as the heavy seas began to tear the 33-year-old steamer apart. Her pilothouse came off in one piece and eventually washed up on the property of a member of the Lind family of commercial fishermen at nearby Castle Danger, who built a porch out of it for his home.

Salvagers went to her immediately and were able to recover her boilers, engine, pumps anchors and chains. Only her rudder has been found since.

The ship was owned by the Clow & Nicholson Transportation Company of Duluth and under charter to the Coolidge Supply Company of Minneapolis, MN. She had just been rebuilt after a fire in 1901. She was a total loss for her insured value of \$12,000.

Editor's note: Much of the information on the BELLE P. CROSS was taken from Dr. Julius Wolff Jr.'s book "Lake Superior Shipwrecks." Todd Lindahl also contributed to the story.

KNIFE RIVER'S TIE TO THE MINNESOTA VIKINGS

A claim of a local tie to the Minnesota Vikings may be a bit of a stretch but still has some validity.

One of the founders of the Minnesota Vikings was Ole Haugrud. He owned a 47' (?) boat called the ROSEMAR that literally ended its days in a blaze of glory at the Knife River Marina.

According to Wikipedia, Oluf Roy Haugrud, born in 1899, was owner of the Duluth Eskimos of the National Football League (NFL) in the late 1920s. His signing of Ernie Nevers and having the Eskimos barnstorm around the country, is credited as helping grow the NFL at a critical time. He later sold the team to the NFL.

Part of the deal was that he would have first rights to any future NFL team in the state of Minnesota. Though he passed on a stake in the Minneapolis Red Jackets in 1929 when the NFL expanded to Minneapolis–Saint Paul in January 1960, Haugrud was given 10% ownership. He remained part owner of the Minnesota Vikings until his death in 1976. Haugrud was the senior nominee for the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1973. He was not elected.

Ole Haugrud was at one time a 10% owner of the Minnesota Vikings. Photo credit: Public domain

The Vikings name and team colors are the same as Haugrud's high school, Central High School in Superior. The Vikings secondary logo that is still in use is a modified version of Central's original logo.

I remember seeing the ROSEMAR at Lakehead Boat Basin on 13th Ave on Park Point in Duluth in the mid '50s. It was a classic design of the '20s or early '30s with a stately pilot house forward and a canopy over the salon. In the early '60s I noticed large banners were tied to the canopy uprights that had the name "Minnesota Vikings" and the team logo. I thought that rather odd, as I was unaware the NFL had awarded a Viking franchise in 1960.

I don't know the early history of the ROSEMAR. I do remember my older sister had been given a ride on it as part of a friend's birthday party. As a harbor rat and boat nerd I was very envious. Apparently ROSEMAR ventured out on the big lake on occasion as recorded in a photo with the boat tied to a fisherman's dock across from Knife Island. The dock may have belonged to Paul Nordley who also owned a restaurant and maybe the RoseMar's passengers and crew had stopped for coffee or lunch. Nordley may have moved his fish tug for them as it is tied somewhat precariously to the end of the dock. The photo is undated, so it is not known if Ole owned ROSEMAR at the time. Many thanks to Randy Ellestad for sharing this historic photo.



ROSEMAR tied to what may be Paul Nordley's dock in an undated photo. Photo credit: Randy Ellestad

NEWSLETTER

I lost track of ROSEMAR when Mary and I moved from Park Point to KR in 1972. Sometime in the late '70s I noticed ROSEMAR was at a marina dock. She "looked good from afar, but far from good," as it has been said of many a wooden boat. Several of her ribs had apparently been broken as her hull was visibly rippled.

Ed Drill, an experienced marina operator who had the contract to manage the marina told me a group of divers had bought ROSEMAR as a dive boat. Now, my experience with divers buying an old boat is that it never works out and the boat ends up abandoned. Such was the case with ROSEMAR and after years of dock rent and winter storage in arrears, and with the boat leaking badly, Ed wisely condemned it and pulled it for good.

In April of 1980 I was performing spring maintenance on my wooden sailboat when I noticed a plume of smoke rising from ROSEMAR now on land and isolated from other boats. I ran home and got my camera and caught ROSEMAR in the last stages of being devoured by flames.

As per Ole Haugrud's ancestor's boats, ROSEMAR is sent to Valhalla in flames.
Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



Ed said a gallon of kerosene in the bilge was all that was needed for ROSEMAR to start her journey. Prior to putting ROSEMAR to the torch, Ed and marina crew removed all the hardware and metal components that had value along with a lot of the rich mahogany paneling and doors consistent to the gilded era in which she was built.



What was salvaged from ROSEMAR is now scattered about the Duluth/Superior area and maybe the metro too, as when Ed lost the contract to manage the marina, he actioned off all the boat stuff he had accumulated over maybe 50 years in the marina business.

The wheel from ROSEMAR was salvaged and is now décor in an area home. Photo credit: Anonymous

And that's the story of Knife River's tie to the Minnesota Vikings football team.

DOUG HILL RETURNS!

Doug Hill, the Southern gentleman who was instrumental in restoring the exterior of CRUSADER II in 2023, will return this summer to help bring back the interior which was gutted by a previous owner. “I’m coming back to help finish the job,” said Doug in a recent phone call to your writer. Doug plans to be in KR about two months, starting June 1. He’ll stay on site in a fifth-wheel camper owned by his cousin. Doug, as readers may recall, is the grandson of Helmer Hill, who along with his brother, Reuben, built CRUSADER II in 1938–39.



Challenge to the KRHCC is to find photos of what the interior of CRUSADER II looked like or draw on the memories of those familiar with it. The tug’s coal stove is being restored, and a period-correct engine has been installed.

The KRHCC and all the friends he made while here two summers ago are thrilled he’ll be with us again this summer!

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

LIKE THE NEW LOOK TO OUR NEWSLETTER?!

The KRHCC has developed a new logo that will appear on all our communications as well as signage for the CRUSADER II shelter. We have never had a logo, but now with the shelter completed last summer, it needs signage and the logo will have other uses as well. First use of the logo is in the masthead of this newsletter.

Our board of directors determined what the logo should visually express and suggested some design elements. Most important was our town’s Norwegian heritage and culture which has become more apparent throughout the state with our annual Julebyen Norwegian celebration of Christmas, and now with the Viking ship LEIF ERIKSON on site. The fish tug CRUSADER II is all part of this too, as it honors all the Norwegian immigrants from the late 1800s and early 1900s who came to fish the waters of Lake Superior.

The KRHCC board contracted with Surge Communications in Duluth to work the design elements into a logo that expressed the character and personality of our historical and educational center. We feel they did a very nice job.

Look for the new logo on the west gable end of the boat shelter later this summer. The gable needs to be faced in cedar first.

STILL TIME TO ORDER A MEMORIAL/HONORARIUM TREE FOR SPRING PLANTING AT THE KRHCC SITE!

For info: vongoertzpaul@yahoo.com

APRIL DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS

Donations:

- Susan Olin, Julie Olin-Ammentorp and Sara Olin Codrea donation of a sugar maple for the KRHCC site in memory of David Olin.
- Katie and Todd Monger donation of a sugar maple for the KRHCC site in memory of Steve & Kay Howe.

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