

KNIFE RIVER HERITAGE



& CULTURAL CENTER

June 2025

By Paul von Goertz

KRHCC BOARD MEMBER

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KRHCC'S "LEGACY TREE" INITIATIVE FAR EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS.

24 loved ones memorialized or honored with 15 trees

43 tree sponsors or co-sponsors

In the summer of 2023, the KRHCC began developing its landscape plan that was triggered by a "swale" along its north property line to capture site run-off. A "swale" is a shallow ditch about 12' wide that is planted with various water-absorbing plants and shrubs.

The plan included hardwood trees to help define property borders, the parking lot and public green space. Initially, six trees were determined for our north border, which we share with the Knife River Campground, and four to help beautify Marina Road, our east boundary.

To fund the trees, the KRHCC created a "Legacy Tree" initiative that encouraged people to sponsor a tree to memorialize or honor a person in a unique and enduring way. It would be a living tribute that grows and evolves, symbolizing growth and resilience. Response was such that we were able to plant 15 trees to help define the entire active perimeters of the KRHCC site. Four were planted in early fall of 2024, and the balance in June of this year.



We worked with Savannah Krech, co-owner of Anderson's Greenhouse in Two Harbors ("buy local") to select hardwood tree species that are proven to withstand the harsh demands of our northern climate, demands that were endured and overcome by Knife River's (KR) original fishing families.

Photo left: The crew from Anderson's Greenhouse that planted the last of the 15 Legacy Trees at the KRHCC in June of 2025. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

The variety of the tree species will create spectacular and vivid colors both spring and fall.

Species included Bur Oak, St. Croix Elm, Hot Wings Maples, Starlite Crabs, Red Splendor Crabs, and Sweet Street Lindens. The Lindens were selected for locations where other hardwoods would not be desirable because of branch spread. At maturity Lindens have a triangular shape (less spread). Anderson's will provide care for the trees through the end of this year's growing season.

The 42 tree sponsors were a combination of residents, part time residents and visitors who have special attachment to the Knife River area. Because of our tree sponsors, the KRHCC will be able to direct its limited resources to other endeavors, such as finishing touches to the boat shelter and site security lighting.

In a forthcoming issue of this newsletter, a map of the KRHCC site will show the locations of the Legacy Trees, tree species, tree sponsors and names of those memorialized or honored. The map and accompanying information will be on a pedestal display. See photo. It will be in a highly visible space between the depot and CRUSADER II shelter and between two Legacy Trees.

We are hoping someone who supports the goals of the KRHCC's Legacy Tree initiative and loves the North Shore's fall color splendor, will sponsor the display. Sponsorship is \$1,350 mounted in the ground. Sponsor of the display will be recognized on it. The sponsorship is tax deductible as the KRHCC is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) non-profit. If you would like to sponsor the display, email: vongoertzpaul@yahoo.com



Photo right: Sample of the pedestal display that will have a map of tree locations, list their sponsors and names of loved ones remembered or honored. Photo credit: Pannier Displays.

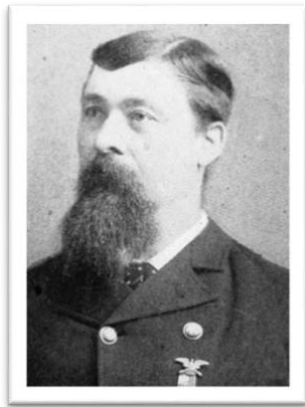
Thanks to all who made the Legacy Tree initiative such an outstanding success!

“FATHER OF KNIFE RIVER” – CAPTAIN CHARLES ANDERSON Part II

**Taken from “Memoirs of Knife River” published by the
“Descendants of the Original Settlers” of Knife River
Edited by Paul von Goertz**

Editor's note: This is Part II of two parts on “The Father of Knife River.” Part I appeared in the May issue of this newsletter online at krhcc.org under “Recent News.” Statements made in “Memoirs of Knife River” were current to when the spiral-bound booklet was written sometime prior to 1975 as it is undated. Mary and I received “Memoirs of Knife River” from Serona Kendall Slotness as a gift around 1975. Serona was a contributor to it.

One of the first permanent settlers to arrive in KR was Captain Charles Anderson. This adventurer, sea captain and Civil War veteran certainly deserves to be called the “Father of the Town of Knife River”. From all the facts and folklore that we can gather, he was really the first European to set down roots and establish the basics for expansion within the townsite.



Captain Charles Anderson (photo left) was born in Oslo, Norway in 1840. His adventurous nature began to surface early in his life. At the age of 15, he somehow was able to gain admission into the U.S. Army. However, this enlistment was terminated when his true age became known, but within three years, he was back. This time he enlisted in the Navy and served during the Civil War.

Photo credit: Todd Lindahl Collection

Following the war, he left New York and moved to Holland, Michigan, where he was married in 1866. Regarding this romance, his grandson Chester's daughter informs us that her great grandfather and his first wife, Serena, first met in Chicago. She also tells us that their first two children were twins: Charles and Sara and that they were delivered by Caesarean section, because they were joined at the hip. However, the attachment was slight, and they were surgically separated without any complications except for a scar.

Meanwhile, he continued to sail on the Great Lakes, purchased a boat of his own, a lumber schooner, and made many trips up and down the lakes between Two Harbors, MN, and Green Bay, WI.

No doubt it was on one of his trips along the lake shore that he discovered the beauty of the little cove at the mouth of the Knife River, for in 1869, he purchased a large tract of land on the northeast side of the river. Here he built a log house and brought his young family to the primitive frontiers of Minnesota. By this time, he had a son and two daughters. At once he began to clear the land and develop the area.

He subdivided his holdings and sold small parcels to the young Norwegian fishers who were beginning to come into the area. The first one was Mons Jensen who later purchased the log house that Captain Anderson first built as his home. This house was later moved near the Carl Erickson residence which was along the shoreline east of the Knife River. As the population grew, Captain Anderson opened the first saloon (photo right) in the Village of Knife River. He built a large, framed home for himself and another close by for his son, Charles, who had just married.

Photo credit: Todd Lindahl Collection





Photo left: Captain Anderson's home on the northeast side of the Knife River.

Photo credit: Todd Lindahl Collection

Charle's marriage presented the good Captain with ten grandchildren, two of which, Clyde and Ralph, still reside in KR along with two of their brother Chester's children, Vivian and Raymond. Ralph,

the eldest lives in the home his parents bought in 1917. The home was built in 1893 by John Bahan. Ralph recalls that his mom also operated a boarding house for two years beginning in 1897.

Ralph is a very friendly person, with a computer-like mind and a great memory bank. He can recall names and dates for years back. To this day, he can tell you what each person's occupation was in the railroad dynasty when the Alger Smith Duluth and Northern Minnesota Railroad was booming. His ability to recall these events of the past 70 years has helped us compile much of the historical data in this booklet.

As the years went by, it became apparent to Captain Anderson that the Volstead Act (The 18th Amendment which established the prohibition of alcoholic drinks) and the collapse of the Alger-Smith Line would ruin the saloon business. Therefore, he began to develop a retirement farm on the banks of the Knife River about a mile southwest of the town. After he lost his first wife in 1902, he married a second time and began raising a second family. Here he received his first real set-back in life.

In the *Memoirs of Knife River*, the writers state that "Three of the children of this second marriage to Marie Bugge were lost in the waters of the Knife River right behind their farmhouse: Roy age 13, Pearl age 12 and Thelma age 10." They all died on August 4, 1918.

Photos below: Grave markers of the three Anderson children. Photo credit: Todd Lindahl Collection



According to the booklet "At first, they (the three children) were thought to have drowned, but that theory didn't seem logical, since some were good swimmers, and the water was really not that deep. Folks still remember the funeral service in the little church that

still stands today (now Knife River Lutheran Church). The sight of the grief-stricken parents and the three small white caskets in the front of the church could never be forgotten.”

Years later a felon whom the good captain had befriended with a job, now living in Ontario, Canada, confessed to a priest on his death bed to the murder of all three children. He told the priest he had an argument with Cap over his pay and drowned the children in revenge. The priest conveyed the confession to authorities in the U.S. who eventually got the information to Anderson family members.

Captain Anderson died in July 1926 at the age of 86 years. Wife Marie (Bugge) died in 1970 at age 88.

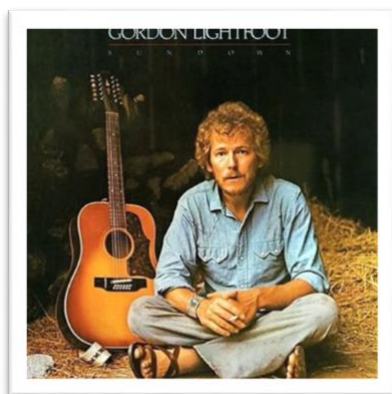
GORDON LIGHTFOOT’S “GOLDEN GOOSE” FINDS ITS WAY TO KNIFE RIVER MARINA.

Mary and I often walk to the nearby KR Marina after dinner on a warm summers' night. So, it was sometime in the '80s or early '90s that we were surprised to see the most beautiful wooden sailboat I have ever seen moored to the service dock. All rich mahogany finished in multiple coats of gleaming spar varnish. The name was GOLDEN GOOSE. I can't recall home port. No one was around so we admired every detail. No cell phones then, so no handy camera to record its beauty. Whose boat and where did it come from?



Photo right: Lightfoot's boat under full sail. Photo credit: Public Domain

Early the next day I stopped by the marina to take a photo of the boat, but it was gone. I asked the marina operator, who was either Ed Drill or Pete Bugge, whose boat it was, “Gordon Lightfoot's!”. This was a bit of a thrill for me as I have long been a Lightfoot fan (and of fellow Canadian Anne Murray as well) and attended most of his concerts in Duluth.



As I recall, Lightfoot (Image left, Public Domain) had played a concert in Duluth in previous days and perhaps planned to have his crew bring his boat to Duluth and then sail it back to the Soo or even into Lake Michigan.

For those not familiar with Gordon Lightfoot, he was a Canadian singer-songwriter who achieved worldwide success and helped define the singer-songwriter era of the 1970s. Widely considered Canada's greatest songwriter, he had numerous albums, and his songs have been covered by many of the world's most renowned musical artists. Genres included folk, soft rock and pop.

Lightfoot's biographer Nicholas Jennings wrote, "His name is synonymous with timeless songs about trains and shipwrecks, rivers and highways, lovers and loneliness". In June 1974 his classic single "Sundown" went to No.1 on the American and Canadian charts. It would be his only number one hit in the United States.

On the personal side, Lightfoot had an ongoing battle with alcohol, was married three times and had six children in and out of his marriages. He died in Toronto, Ontario, on May 1, 2023, from multiple causes at age 84.

About the GOLDEN GOOSE

Lightfoot was a sailor, and after the success of his ninth studio album, "Sundown," he told reporters at the *Detroit Free Press* that he would now like to buy a sailboat. "I would now like to spend more time with each album, each song, and I would also like to get a sailing yacht. Not for competitive sailing, I'm a cruiser. But that's going to take a lot of time. I've got to study navigation and things like that," the article quotes.

"You wouldn't buy a fiberglass guitar, would you?"

According to Lightfoot's website, he owned more than one boat. It was the summer of 1976 when Lightfoot decided it was time to replace his fiberglass boat with a wood boat.

Lightfoot engaged the talents of boat designer Victor Carpenter who had plans for a 45' mahogany hull that he had designed some years earlier but never built. "You wouldn't buy a fiberglass guitar, would you?" Carpenter reportedly shot at Lightfoot as the pair discussed fiberglass versus wood. By the time they were done, Lightfoot had ordered his new sailboat, built of wood, for an "undisclosed sum." The boat would be called Golden Goose. The boat is now believed to be in Europe.

Origin of "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald"

Late in 1975, Lightfoot read a *Newsweek* magazine article reporting on the loss of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, which sank on November 10th on Lake Superior during a severe storm with the loss of all 29 crew members.

The lyrics he wrote for "The Wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*," released the following year, were substantially based on facts found in the article and elsewhere. It reached number two on the United States *Billboard* chart and hit number one in Canada.

He had a special relationship with Duluth/Superior and the North Shore as the sinking claimed the lives of several Northland residents. Lightfoot appeared at several 25th anniversary memorial services of the sinking and stayed in personal contact with the family members of the men who perished.

The Mariners' Church in Detroit (the "Maritime Sailors' Cathedral" mentioned in "The Wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*") honored Lightfoot the day after his death by ringing its bell a total of 30 times, 29 for each of the crewmen lost on the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, and the final time for Lightfoot himself. Additionally, Splitrock Lighthouse, shined its light in honor of Lightfoot on May 3, 2023

Editor's note: Historical content taken from internet public domain.

“One person’s observations....”

By Paul von Goertz, Member Knife River Lutheran Church and Board Chair KRHCC

At the farewell/retirement party for Susan Berge, pastor of Knife River Lutheran Church (KRLC) held May 25, 2025, at KRLC, I finally realized what makes Knife River and surrounding area such an extraordinary place to live, and why KRLC is truly “The Heart of the Community.”

I saw a community at its best bestowing its love and appreciation through word, prayer, music, gifts and fabulous food for its beloved pastor of 21 years. The party was months in planning and involved dozens of church members and non-members with a variety of talents from culinary skills to flower arranging to pull it all off without a hitch.

As I witnessed this whole event, I began to understand how a small community can express its values in such memorable and meaningful ways whether its love and admiration for a retiring pastor, preserving its history and culture with its annual Julebyen, or making so many recreational opportunities available to locals, and unselfishly to guests as well.

It occurred to me that I was witnessing the convergence of two observations I have made in the 53 years Mary and I have lived in Knife River.

Observation #1 - is a strong sense of community going back more than 100 years when Knife River was less connected to Two Harbors or Duluth. We were much more self-sufficient with four grocery stores, two gas stations, a repair garage, school, church, post office (with nickel slot machines in the same building) and a local industry centered around commercial fishing.

People were resourceful, valued a work ethic, problem-solving in daily living, and helping others whether you liked them or not. Adding to this was all that community members had in common whether their Scandinavian roots and culture, Christian faith, strong family values, and livelihoods of commercial fishing or working for the railroad.

This strong sense of community exists today and is highly valued in the third generation of our founding fishing families who choose to live in Knife River.

Observation #2 - is that many of the people who have chosen to live in Knife River and surrounding area (as opposed to having been born here) are retirees who held leadership positions in businesses, trades, or professions, and still have a lot to give to community service through their organizational and people skills. So, if you put observations #1 and #2 together you have the best of two worlds – hard working and caring people, and those who know how to organize and get things done. Certainly, there is overlap and duplication of individuals between my two observations.

The two worlds working together were beautifully displayed at the tribute given to Pastor Susan on her retirement from 39 years in the ministry, and 21 years as solo pastor at KRLC.

* A truly memorable day for the Knife River area and for the KRLC.

KR'S COMMUNITY FLAGS PROPERLY RETIRED ON FLAG DAY.

The KRHCC goes through two flags a year. Even though the flags are described as “weather-resistant,” the ends fray and the flags fade in the sun. We have a smaller flag for the stormy winter months and a larger “ceremonial” flag for Memorial Day through Veteran’s Day.

We are fortunate Krista (Sannes) Mosby, an extended member of the Bugge/Wieme family, has provided the flags since the 30’ flagpole and 24-7 lighting were donated by the Bugge/Wieme family in 2020.

The Two Harbors American Legion Post 109 holds a “flag retirement” ceremony to coincide with Flag Day, June 14, every year at the Veterans section of Lakeview cemetery in Two Harbors. There, after a brief ceremony that recognizes the service of the flags, they are incinerated in a special burner in accordance with flag disposal protocols.

It is comforting to know that the flags that fly above our heritage center are properly recognized and properly retired.

Photo right: Brynn von Goertz, Two Harbors, places a retired flag in the burner. Her dad, Christian, and grandpa, Paul, attended the flag retirement ceremony, which is open to the public. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



JUNE DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS.

Donations

- Sponsors of Legacy Trees will appear in a future issue of this newsletter.

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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