

# KNIFE RIVER HERITAGE



## & CULTURAL CENTER

July 2025

By Paul von Goertz

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### Most weird craft ever to launch at KR Marina.

One of the advantages of living near the Knife River (KR) Marina is the chance to see some really weird stuff – like the launch of this homemade submarine sometime in the '80s.



Image above: Ready for its debut.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

I really have no information on the sub or its builder ("Ben") as I arrived too late to ask questions. I must admire the builder as a submarine is a complicated piece of machinery, starting with ballasting to dive, and displacing ballast to rise to the surface.



A quick look at the sub told me some thought had gone into the design and the workmanship (welding) looked to be good order. But curiously, the sub had no diving planes to assist with diving or rising. Then there was the photo (image left) I took of the wife (?) apparently kissing her husband (?) "Good Luck!" ("Good-Bye?").

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Last I saw of the sub it was heading towards Knife Island with an entourage of small boats and divers. It may have been heading to see the remains of the tug NIAGARA sunk off the east end of the island, down about 80 - 100 feet. I did not see it attempt a dive.

I have no knowledge of whatever happened to the sub. If any reader has any info on history of the sub or its builder, please email me: [vongoertzpaul@yahoo.com](mailto:vongoertzpaul@yahoo.com) I hope the builder achieved at least some part of their dream.

Image right: Heading out for a trial dive.  
Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



## What's your guess?

On Saturday, June 28, while Mary and I entertained guests on our deck and later around our dinner table, a critter was busy – and quietly - tearing up a section of a buried foundation drainpipe. What a surprise when our guests left! The critter had dug up about 6' of plastic pipe, throwing dirt about 12' as it dug up the 4" diameter hose. Moreover, the pipe was neatly chewed into about 4" increments. Who and why?

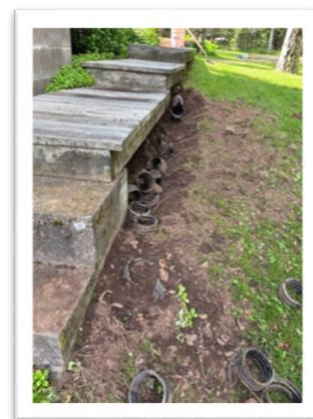


Image left: The dug trench and destroyed drainpipe.

Let's start with the "why." My guess is a predator was after a bunny or squirrel that had taken refuge through the exposed end of the drainpipe. While the terrorized mammal hid in the pipe, the critter systematically approached his hiding spot by destroying the pipe 4" at a time.

Now the "who." Some clues: apparently a predator, very strong legs and long claws that could throw sod and dirt with ease, sharp teeth that could quickly sever plastic pipe, not nocturnal, and not afraid of nearby humans.

Image right: A chewed section of the drainpipe. Sharp teeth made quick work of dissecting the pipe.



A quick email to Bill Berg, retired NE MN DNR wildlife specialist and go-to guy on any wildlife question – and an all-around good KR guy – provided the probable answer. For his informed guess, see last page of newsletter.

Photos courtesy of Paul von Goertz.

# How Independence Day Opened a Path to Knife River

By Paul von Goertz, KRHCC board member  
and member of Knife River Lutheran Church.

Knife River Lutheran Church is in the process of calling a pastor following the retirement of Pastor Susan Berge, May 25. In the meantime, Sunday services are being conducted by lay people and guest pastors. I was asked to present the message on Sunday, July 6, to tie to Independence Day. Following is the message.

On July 4, 1776, a new nation was born and in the following years it fought to establish and define itself. Vast amounts of land lay to the west for the country to grow into, but many questions arose as it was occupied by Indigenous People, and European nations had claims to it as well, specifically the French, British and Spanish.

With the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the French pretty much sold their interests in North America except for a colony that would become Quebec. They sold the Louisiana Territory primarily because Napoleon Bonaparte needed funds for his European wars and he feared that the territory would be easily lost to the British, in any case. He saw the sale as a tool to weaken Britain by strengthening the United States. The purchase accounted for about the middle third of our nation today.

British influence diminished following their defeat by the new nation in the War of 1812. As a result, they moved north into what is now Canada. With the end of the war, Native Americans could no longer count on Great Britain to shield them from the flood of white settlers headed west. Settlers came in droves by the Erie Canal or through the Cumberland Gap. The next 75 years saw a rapid decline in the Native Americans' way of life.

Spain and later Mexico ceded their interests in the American West because of the Mexican American War, fought from 1846 to 1848. It was a conflict primarily over territorial expansion, with the US ultimately gaining vast territories that now form the American Southwest as far as California.

The westward expansion was fueled by a concept known as "Manifest Destiny." It was the **19th-century belief that Americans – meaning white people - had the divine right/blessing to expand and settle into the western North America region towards the Pacific Ocean. It was also believed that** the American expansion was inevitable and preordained by God.

The **idea of Manifest Destiny resulted in extensive territorial expansion in North America, with Americans systematically displacing the French, English, Spanish and Indigenous peoples.** Many Americans believed that it was an expansion predestined to happen. They **strongly believed that God wanted Americans to spread the capitalist and democratic ideals throughout North America.**

Manifest Destiny also taught that the natural resources of the West were to benefit the new nation including rich farmland, forests, minerals, herds of bison and other game, and waters teeming with fish. Indigenous and Negro peoples were not part of this destiny and were simply pushed aside or ignored. Manifest Destiny was a dark period in American history and unfortunately, not well known by many Americans.

In the Great Lakes region, with the British now pushed north into Canada, the American Fur Company, or AFC, took over their fur trade. Fur had become a major commodity in Europe, and Indigenous people in North America became a major supplier. During its heyday in the early 19th century, the AFC dominated the American fur trade and grew to monopolize the fur trade in the United States and by 1830 became one of the largest and wealthiest businesses in the country.

In 1834, the AFC realized fishing was more profitable than furs. Salt and barrel-making skills enabled its workers to preserve big catches, allowing fish to be sold on a larger scale. The AFC established a fish collection station on the east side of the mouth of the Knife River in 1837. Knife River was a fertile fishing ground and the sandy beach a good place to land a canoe without damage by sharp rocks. The Ojibwe named the area “Mookomaani-ziibi,” eventually becoming the English “Knife River.”

Like other fish collection stations, the Knife River station had at least one trader and a carpenter with laborers to make skiffs for the Ojibwe, who did the fishing. The AFC also provided nets. In exchange for their labor, the Ojibwe received cash, salt, flour, traps, guns, and other necessities. It was a good partnership.

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples shared the activity of fishing. However, Ojibwe people value their relationships to the land by regarding plants, animals, and other-than-human-beings as relatives, in contrast to “resources.” Non-Indigenous people emphasized commerce and capitalism.

The Indigenous presence in Knife River would lead to a summer village on Granite Point at the west entry to the Knife River Marina. An elder in 1879 told Captain Anderson, recognized as the “father of Knife River,” that he had been born in the village eighty to ninety years earlier, which would place the village on Granite point to as late as 1800.

A significant factor that greatly influenced the Minnesota North Shore was the Treaty of LaPointe in 1854. The treaty was an agreement between the United States and the Ojibwe (Chippewa) people of Lake Superior and the Mississippi. In this treaty, the Ojibwe ceded a vast amount of land in present-day Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan to the U.S. government. In return, the Ojibwe gained reservations, annual payments, and the right to continue hunting and fishing on the ceded lands.

The treaty spurred rapid growth in the Lake Superior Region. First were those looking for copper which had been found by Indigenous peoples and later Europeans outcropping on Isle Royale. It was also found on Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.

It was thought that copper vein in the Upper Peninsula could surface on the north shore, so copper exploration brought Europeans to the Knife River area. Some was discovered, but not in quantities to make it profitable to mine.

Meanwhile, logging on the UP was thriving and when that was gone, many of the loggers, of whom many were of Finnish descent, came to the North Shore with a concentration in the Knife River area. This was because of the Alger Smith's logging company having a railroad that ran about 85 miles into the woods north of Knife River. Jobs in logging and railroading were plentiful.

From the time the Alger-Smith logging company began operations in the late 1800s when it closed in 1919, Knife River was the busiest railroad town on the north shore because it was the only place two railroads intersected: the logging railroad running north and south and the iron ore railroad running east and west between Duluth and Two Harbors.

With the departure of the Alger-Smith logging railroad, it was feared Knife River would become a ghost town. But many people wanted to stay here, work for the one remaining railroad and make a living, or supplement a living, with commercial fishing, which had exploded when a wave of Scandinavians arrived in the late 1800s.



Image left: Norwegian family homestead. Driven to emigrate by overpopulation, unfulfilled nationalism, and a fractured economy, hundreds of thousands of Norwegians came to Minnesota Territory, and then to the state of Minnesota, between 1851 and 1920. Photo credit: Minnesota Historical Society.

Many were fishers recruited by ads placed in Norwegian newspapers by the A. Booth & Sons Packing Co. of Chicago, wholesale dealers of fish. Some, responding to the ads, built their own boats, relying on skills passed through their Scandinavian ancestors. By the early 1890s, 78% of the nation's herring came from Lake Superior, of which a significant portion was contributed by fishers in the Knife River area.

With a labor force, railroads and later refrigerated railroad cars, fish could be harvested in quantity and sold to distant markets.

In 1947, Knife River's resourceful Scandinavians formed a cooperative to dig a harbor at the site of what is now the Knife River Marina, doing much of the work themselves. The harbor opened in the early 1950s, but soon trout populations dwindled due to predatory saltwater lamprey eels. By the late 1950s lake trout fishing had all but collapsed. But, through lamprey control, the end of mining waste rock discharged into the lake, and careful fish management, stocks of lake trout can now support a modest commercial fishing industry as well as sport fishing. Herring boats continue to fish out of the Knife River Marina.

Knife River has been able to survive economic downturns because of its access to rich natural resources: copper, timber, iron ore and the railroading that goes with it, and lake trout and herring. While these resources are still available, it is apparent the next economic phase of



Knife River will capitalize on our access to year-round outdoor recreation fueled by high-speed internet, which allows people to work/live while their employers are physically located elsewhere.

**And isn't outdoor recreation part of the reason we are all here, following a path that opened on July 4, 1776?**

**A final thought...** The westward movement of our new nation and the hardships settlers experienced were just required eighth-grade American history to me until I was deeply moved by an inscription on a weathered tombstone I saw in an old cemetery near my grandparents' home in Elmore, in central Minnesota, just a few blocks from the Iowa border and off I-90. It read "LITTLE GIRL PASSING THROUGH ON WAGON TRAIN."

These words greatly saddened me and left me with many questions. Why wasn't she named? She apparently was not stillborn as she was referred to as "little girl" as opposed to "baby." How did she die? Why no date of birth or death? Where was her family going? I can only conclude the grief-stricken family wanted their daughter to be buried in a Christian cemetery. It may have been the wagon train could/would not stop for a proper burial, so they lovingly gave their little girl to townspeople of Elmore for a Christian burial. Somehow her name was lost - but known unto God.

As I've thought about this little girl over the years, passing through on a wagon train, and how I pray for our own six granddaughters – and one grandson - I take great comfort in the verses of the hymn "Children of the Heavenly Father." It was written by Karolina Wilhelmina Sandell-Berg in 1855. She was a Swedish immigrant and the daughter of a Lutheran pastor.

Please pray these verses with me for all of God's children around the world and as we remember the lives of all the precious little girls lost in the recent flooding in Texas.

Children of the heav'nly Father  
Safely in His bosom gather;  
Nestling bird nor star in heaven  
Such a refuge e'er was given.

God His own doth tend and nourish;  
In His holy courts they flourish;  
From all evil things he spares them;  
In His mighty arms He bears them.

Neither life nor death shall ever  
From the Lord His children sever;  
Unto them Hims grace He showeth,  
And their sorrows all He knoweth.

Tho' He giveth or He taketh;  
God his children ne're forsaketh;  
His the loving purpose solely,  
To preserve them pure and holy.

Amen.

## Inaugural “TOE-TAPPING TUESDAY” a big hit!

One of the first things the new board of the KRHCC pledged to the community back in 2018 was to provide space the community could use for various activities and for all age groups.

So it was the first entertainment gig held was “Toe-Tapping Tuesday” on Tuesday evening, July 22. It was an outstanding success with seven musicians and about 30 faithful attendees who were undaunted by the thunderstorm that took place an hour before.

The music was provided by a no-name eclectic group simply referred to as “Sir Ben's Celtic Night Jamming Group” in reference to the group’s frequent appearances at Sir Benedict’s Tavern on the Lake in Duluth. Lee Cohen, from KR and a group member, made the arrangements for the group to appear. Randy Ellestad, also from Knife River, displayed his talents on his Irish Button Box accordion.

Music selections included Celtic and old-time music and even a Schottische and a polka. Fans loved it all! The KRHCC has already asked the group back for another performance in August.

The KRHCC board wants to see more activities at the KRHCC throughout the year limited only by the KR community’s imagination: kite-flying contest? Flea markets? Easter egg hunt? Farmer’s Market? Cutest dog contest? Any activity endorsed by the Knife River Recreation Council (KRRC) would be welcome.

Have a suggestion?

Email: [vongoertzpaul@yahoo.com](mailto:vongoertzpaul@yahoo.com)

Image right: The KRHCC site proved to be an excellent venue for toe-tapping old-time music.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



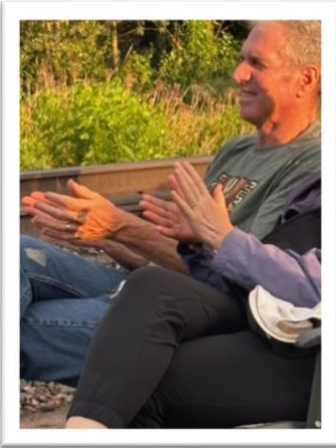


Image left: Fans responded to the music with spontaneous toe-tapping and clapping!

Image right: Lee Cohen came prepared for rain, but his high-water boots didn't stop him from a few fancy dance moves.

Photo credits: Paul von Goertz



## Still looking for a sponsor for Legacy Tree pedestal display.

On the KRHCC site will be a pedestal display consisting of a map with locations of Legacy Trees, tree species, tree sponsors and the names of those memorialized or honored. 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 spring and 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](mailto:vongoertzpaul@yahoo.com)



Image left: Example of Legacy Tree pedestal display.

Photo credit: Pannier Graphics

## IRRR visits Knife River

On June 30, representatives of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR) visited Knife River on the invitation of Rich Sve, our district's county commissioner, and Pat Meyer, president of the Knife River Recreation Council (KRRC).

The purpose of the meeting was to share future needs and opportunities for the community, whose citizens have prioritized a new and larger multipurpose community building. Included was a tour of the KRHCC to show what community volunteers and IRRR



and other grantors have been able to achieve in restoring the Knife River depot and fish tug CRUSADER II.

“Save Our Ship” (Viking boat organization) was able to show the progress they have made in creating a home for LEIF ERIKSON and describe the shelter that will be built over it this building season. IRRR contributed \$200,000 in legislatively appropriated revenue bonds to support project renovations, along with a \$25,000 Culture and Tourism grant to help build the infrastructure needed to house the historic Leif Erikson ship at the Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center site.

Image right: From left are guests Whitney Ridlon, IRRR Director of Community Development, Ida Rukavina, IRRR Commissioner, Senator Grant Hauschild, Minnesota District 3 Senator, Rich Sve, District 5 Lake County Commissioner, and members of the boards of the KRHCC and SOS along with Christine McCarthy, Director of Lake County Environmental Services, second from the right.



Photo credit: Courtesy of IRRR

## **After nearly 100 years, Viking ship LEIF ERIKSON will have a roof over it.**

Work is underway at long last to build a protective shelter over the Viking ship LEIF ERIKSON, which was relocated to KR from Duluth in November of 2021. At the date of this writing (July 22) materials for the post and beam construction were on site, ready to be assembled.

A shelter for the ship along with interpretive displays has long been the dream of “Save Our Ship” (SOS) since the non-profit was formed in 1984. Many can remember the ship being on display (and in disrepair) in Leif Erikson Park for many years, and then for another 12 years in storage as the City of Duluth, its then owner, and SOS searched for a more suitable and permanent home. The ship had been an icon of Duluth since its arrival in Duluth in 1927.

In the summer of 2021 SOS requested the City of Duluth gift the ship to SOS, which now owns it. The ship is historically significant as it helped to establish Leif Erikson as the first European to discover North America by sailing the same westward route thought to be taken by Leif Erikson about 1000.



John Vigen, a SOS board member, said he expected the shelter with red metal roof to be completed by the end of September.

Most of the funding for the shelter was from the 2024 Minnesota legislative session and is being administered through Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation (IRRR).

Image left: Post and beam materials on site ready for assembly. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

## **Doug Hill is back to complete the restoration of CRUSADER II.**

Doug Hill, the Southern gentleman who was instrumental in restoring the exterior of CRUSADER II two summers ago, has returned to help bring back the interior which was gutted by a previous owner. Doug will be here for the months of July and August. Doug, as readers may recall, is the grandson of Helmer Hill, who along with his brother, Reuben, built CRUSADER II in 1938-39.

The challenge to the KRHCC is to determine what the interior of CRUSADER II looked like or draw on the memories of those familiar with it. The tug's coal stove and hand-operated bilge pump have been restored and a period-correct engine installed. A net lifter was found in the weeds surrounding a KR home and is being restored for mounting in CRUSADER II.

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

Image right: Doug Hill peers through one of the cabin doors where fish nets were run and fish picked.



Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

## More recollections of Gordon Lightfoot.

The story on Gordon Lightfoot's brief stop in Knife River that appeared in the June KRHCC newsletter brought several responses from readers. A lot felt an attachment to him and his music. One was Bruce Von Riedel. Bruce is a longtime friend and was co-owner of Dodges Log Lodges just west of KR. He and his wife, Sandy, now own Siskiwit Bay Lodge in Cornucopia, WS.

Bruce and I were admirers of Lightfoot and at least two occasions took in his concerts in Duluth with our spouses. Following is his remembrance of meeting Lightfoot.

Reader comments on stories appearing in the KHRCC newsletter are always welcome.

*"A few years ago, he (Lightfoot) was scheduled to play at the Big Top Chautauqua in Bayfield and I casually mentioned it to my nephew, Adam, who is a musician and big fan. He asked me to PLEASE get us tickets, and I said I think it's sold out (plus I've seen him 6 or 8 times), but I'd try. The only tickets were in the back of the tent but at least we were in!"*



*Even though he was pretty old, the show was great because of his talent and the timeless tunes he has written, so we had a great time.*

Image left: An older Gordon Lightfoot still entertaining.  
Photo credit: Internet public domain.

*As you know, the performers have access to the little log cabin by the tent to rest and prep for their shows and that's also where the show sponsors get to have their 'meet and greet.'*

*Adam brought along Gordon's very 1st album hoping to get it signed and wanted to wait by his bus until he was leaving. Since it was already 10pm and I had to get up early for work, I suggested we go stand outside the cabin with the real sponsors and maybe we could finagle our way in.*

*So, we wandered over and talked to the folks and showed everyone the teenage Lightfoot album which they loved! His manager was watching us with a wary eye, but since we were mingling with the sponsors he was hesitant to say anything, even though we were the only ones without the sponsor lanyard.*

*The door opened and we just marched in with everyone...under the watchful eye of the manager. We formed a semi-circle for the greet and we were about the 6th and 7th ones in line. The manager told us he would be right out after he catches his breath (more likely having a few smokes) and that we should be brief as 'he's really tired.'*

*I started thinking of something to say besides "I really like your music" or something else that everyone else would say and thought of Knife River and the GOLDEN GOOSE! When he got to*

*us, I told him I remembered him when I worked at the Knife River Marina and he sailed in with the Sundowner boat. His face lit up and he was excited to hear the connection. He asked about how I knew the song connection, have I sailed and a few other things - then asked if we wanted a picture, and then he saw his 1st album! What a great moment! "*

*He offered to sign it (we were waaaaay past "brief" by now) and we talked a little more and thanked him for coming to the Big Top. At this moment the manager looked at us and said in a loud voice 'Alright you two...you've had your fun, now get out!'*

*We smiled and said it sure was fun to meet Gordon! And left with a fun memory! Thought you might enjoy the rest of the story!"*

## **And more about Knife River Lutheran's "Music Ministry....**

Delores (Nelson) Jackson offered some more information about the Knife River Lutheran Church youth choir that I mentioned in the May newsletter. I had written *"Sometime in the early 1960s, Shirley Entzion directed a children's choir. There were about 8-10 children, and they met one night a week. They had maroon robes with white starched collars that had to be taken home, washed, starched and pressed for each service. At some point Lillian Eskola became choir director."*

According to Delores, it was in the early '50s when Shirley Entzion was choir director with Lillian Eskola and Evelyn Ojard accompanying on piano. Choir members were Ella and Susan Hanson, Delores, Carolyn and Louise Nelson, Bonnie and Margaret Hietala, Corrine Loining and Darlene Bissell.

As Delores recalls, the choir walked in from the back of church singing "Holy, Holy, Holy" every Sunday.

Thank you, Delores, for the additional memories!

## **Upcoming Larsmont Community Club programs**

**All programs are held at the Little Red Schoolhouse and free to the public. Snacks and beverages provided.**

Wednesday, August 6, 6:30 – 8:00 PM:

- John Finkle, president of the Nóatún Community Wooden Boat Works that has relocated from Duluth to the former wastewater treatment plant in Knife River, will speak on how the non-profit is teaching 1000 century Norwegian boat building skills using period techniques and materials.

Thursday, September 4, 6:30 – 8:00 PM:

- Gabe Sweet, geologist, will talk about the geology of our region - our rocks!

## What's your guess?

(Continued from page 2)

### The probable answer...

While my guess was a wolverine, a very ferocious and nasty meat-eating predator, Bill Berg said “no” as wolverine sightings are very rare in northern Minnesota, although people think they have seen one. Bill said it was probably a fisher, a relative of the wolverine and more common to northern Minnesota.

A quick check of the MN DNR website described fishers as “... a member of the weasel family, resembling a very large mink. It weighs as much as a red fox but has much shorter legs. Fisher are extremely agile and active predators.

Excellent tree climbers, they can out-climb marten and red squirrels. They prey upon snowshoe hare, mice, and squirrels. Fishers will also eat insects and berries. It is one of a very few animals that can kill a porcupine. Despite its name, the fisher does not catch or eat fish.

Adult fishers are 24 to 30 inches long, including their long, bushy tail. Female adults weigh 6 to 8 pounds, and males weigh up to 18 pounds. The fur of a fisher is a grizzled dark brown, blackish on the rump and tail, with a white or cream-colored bib on their chest.”

Image right: Because of their feisty personalities, fishers are best left to themselves. Photo credit: MN DNR



## JULY DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS.

### Donations:

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

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