



Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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August 2023

By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

HUGH RICHARDSON AND HIS “TIN LIZZIE.”

By Todd Lindahl, KRHCC historian

When the Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railway (D&NM) abandoned passenger service from Knife River (KR) north to milepost 73 at Wanless station, Hugh Richardson provided an answer.



On May 14, 1923, Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railroad engine #21 left Cloquet with a passenger coach and five flatcars. Their task was to start tearing up Alger-Smith Lumber Company's Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railway's track from milepost 73 at Wanless station south to Knife River. This was the last gasp in the life of the most colorful and important logging railroad in northeastern Minnesota.

Image: A colorized Tin Lizzie. Note the brooms to sweep the track clean.

Photo credit Todd Lindahl

It all began in May of 1898 when the D&NM began building northward from Lake Superior to timber tracts it had previously acquired. Early plans were to build a huge sawmill at Knife River and develop a harbor, docks for shipping, and a government

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lighthouse on Knife Island. This plan changed when they purchased the G. W. Knox sawmill and later the former Mitchell & McClure sawmill on Grassy Point in West Duluth. Both sawmills were individually the largest in the world for a short period of time. For many years the Alger-Smith Lumber Company with its railroad and sawmills was the largest employer in Duluth.

Its railroad was established as a common carrier, which meant that it could carry passengers and freight for the public at a fixed rate per mile in accordance with government regulations. It also carried vast quantities of logs and other forest products for numerous companies, not just for its own sawmills.

Homesteaders were encouraged to buy cut-over lands “ready for farming” with the promise that the D&NM would “be there forever” to provide transportation and services. “Forever” turned out to be 23 years—a tad bit short of eternity.

Alger-Smith had tried to abandon its operation as early as 1917, but the Minnesota Railroad & Warehouse Commission would not allow it since the railroad was still providing a service to the public. Its logging operations ceased in 1919, but the passenger service continued until July 21, 1921, when the company was allowed to abandon the railroad. Several groups investigated buying the railroad but given the cost of repairing the line and maintenance, the profit margin was not there.

Former D&NM employee Hugh Richardson converted a model T Ford “Tin Lizzie,” with railroad wheels, into a contraption called the “Jitney” and continued to carry passengers up and down the track until May 1923. Image right is Hugh Richardson at the “throttle.”

Photo credit: Todd Lindahl



The remaining Alger-Smith timber in far-off Cook County was sold to the Weyerhaeuser companies of Cloquet. Their logging railroad, called the Duluth & Northeastern, was assigned the task of tearing up the track to Knife River, a job they completed on December 3, 1923.

Many predicted doom for the community of Knife River, but this resilient little community proved way more permanent than the powerful Alger-Smith Lumber Company’s Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railway.

KR WAS PART OF “THE GOLDEN AGE OF BOATING.”

I've written a lot about KR's commercial fishing tugs in this newsletter, but to give that some balance, let's look at KR's history of pleasure boating, beginning with “the golden age of boating.”

It started in the 1920s but was interrupted by World War II, only to return after the war and continue into the mid-sixties. That's about the time the beautiful mahogany runabouts and cabin-cruisers that were so admired began to be replaced with the near maintenance-free fiberglass varieties. KR was part of this golden age.

As I have mentioned in previous issues, for many years we lived next to Lyman and Serona (Kendall) Slotness. Serona was the daughter of Bill Kendall, founder of Kendall's, and loved telling us tales of old KR. One of the real treasures Serona gave us was a VHS tape made from several old Super 8s of Kendall family life during the late 30s through the war years and a few postwar years. What may be the best part of the video was Serona's narration interrupted occasionally by Lyman.

A lot of the video shows the Bill Kendall family enjoying the Lake from KR to Two Harbors (TH). I attempted to copy some of the video frames and at best these images are very poor, but will give you some idea of the good times the family experienced.

The ISLE ROYALE and CLIPPER were classic runabouts.

The family operated two boats. One was a Chris Craft, the ISLE ROYALE, so named because at one time it ran mail from Grand Portage to Isle Royale. The other was possibly a Gar-Wood, called the CLIPPER. Both boats were built of mahogany and finished with multiple coats of varnish. I don't know what they had for power, but it was enough for Serona to “water ski” on planing boards the Kendall's made themselves.

For a while the Kendall's had a dock in the Lake on their property across from where the store is now. But a more practical location was in the river near where Emily's restaurant once was. The KR harbor was not built until 1953. The harbor would later form the footprint for the KR marina built in 1973.

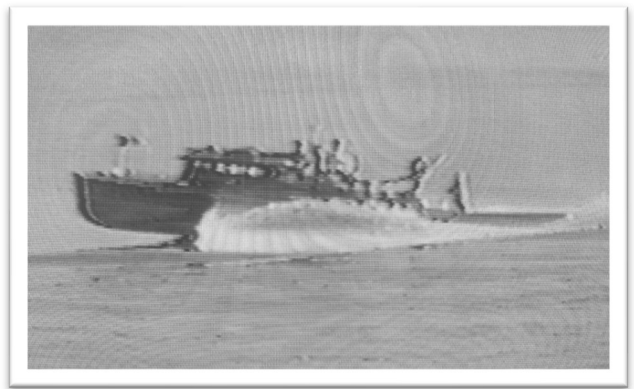


It was up to the boat owners to keep the river mouth open, dredged to a minimum depth of at least three feet, and keep the landing in good repair. Boats as large as 35' docked at the river landing.

The ISLE ROYALE on the right, and the CLIPPER at the Kendall dock. Photo: Randy Ellestad collection

The river landing was a busy place.

From the river landing the family entertained their many friends and family members, offered fishing charters and boat rides. Serona remembers one charter of Standard Oil Company managers that required "almost every boat in Knife River." The boats were out almost all day and needed to be constantly supplied with "beverages" and ice. "Punk" Coolidge, one of the Coolidge Bros., provided bum boat service from his boat, the LOUSE. Photo: Kendall family video



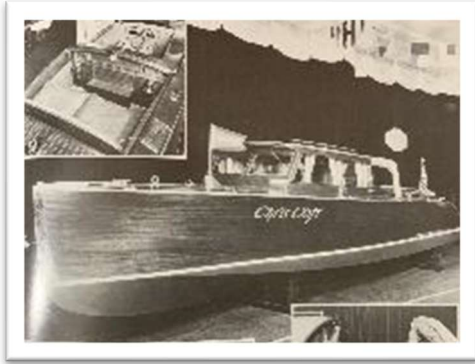
TH was a favorite destination for the Kendalls for a warm Sunday afternoon, where they would hawk boat rides. Some poor soul was conscripted to wear a sandwich board and walk past the depot and along 1st Avenue to drum up business.

Photo credit: Kendall family video

Earl Kendall behind the wheel of ISLE ROYALE at the river landing.

Photo credit left: Kendall family video.





The ISLE ROYALE may have been a Chris Craft Custom Commuter first introduced in 1928. The boat was 30 feet, which would have been a desirable length for a mail boat that ran the open stretch of Lake Superior between Grand Portage(?) and Isle Royale. It was powered by a 200 hp. Chris Smith & Sons engine and was equipped with a toilet and roll-down windows.

Photo: "The Legend of Chris Craft" by Jeffrey L. Rodengen

Lowell Kendall's CLIPPER. Most likely a Chris Craft but may have been a Gar- Wood. Photo credit: Kendall family video



Family and friends fished and swam from their boats and even did an early version of water-skiing using planing boards they built themselves. This photo shows Serona on a board departing Two Harbors.

Photo credit: Kendall family video

TALL SHIPS PUT ON IMPROMPTU PRIVATE SHOW FOR KRers

In late July of 2010 Duluth hosted a Tall Ship event. While many struggled to see the ships along the DECC waterfront under very controlled conditions, we in KR were treated to our own Tall Ship event at no cost or under any conditions. How did this happen?

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Seems one of the ways Tall Ship organizers merchandized the Duluth event was to offer an overnight cruise from Duluth to – KR! We in KR had no idea such a “cruise” was available and were knocked off our pins when at least three and maybe four sailed into the somewhat protected area between the agate beach and island in the late afternoon on July 31.

Replica of HMS BOUNTY anchored off Knife Island. Photo: Paul von Goertz



The idea for a cruise may have been a last-minute decision by event organizers based on favorable weather and wave conditions. The ships spent the night and left by 10 AM the next day.



We who had boats in the marina were able to see the crew raise the anchor by hand the following day, using a windlass with many “spokes,” each one turning the windlass when pushed by a grunting crew member. It was a scene right out of pirate movies. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

My favorite photo taken by Bruce Lovold. That’s my restored Maine-built lobster boat in the foreground, filled with family and friends. (I know, there are no lobsters in Lake Superior.)

Photo credit: Bruce Lovold



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Ship crews were very friendly and talkative—probably happy to be out of the fishbowl at the DECC. We were able to see them go about their daily routines including a dive into the lake for a refreshing start to the day. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

The pictures shown are all of HMS BOUNTY, probably the most photographed ship of the Tall Ship Fleet, which was comprised of about a dozen ships. BOUNTY was tragically lost a few months later when its captain misjudged the path of a hurricane as it sailed to the southeast states for the winter months. The captain and one crew member were lost with the ship.

If anyone has pictures of the Tall Ships at anchor shot from shore, please email to me at: info@krhcc.org so they can be shared with our readers. You will be given a photo credit and a “Thank you!”

SITE GRADING AND DRAINAGE PLAN WILL BE COMPLETED YET THIS YEAR.

Over the past several months Save Our Ship (SOS), the KRHCC, and the Regional Railway Authority (the property owner) have been working with Lake County Soil & Water (S&W) to develop a drainage plan for the KRHCC site.

The plan is needed to direct site run-off north and east along the north property line that separates the KRHCC from the Knife River Campground.

A S&W engineer designed a plan that drains water to a swale that runs parallel to the north property line. A swale is a shallow water channel that captures and absorbs water. The swale will be 15–20 feet wide and up to two feet deep with native vegetation favorable to diverse wildlife, discourage invasive tansy, and create usable open space for community events. Plants and shrubs will be planted and sprayed with deer repellent in areas where privacy screening is desired. Soil removed from the swale will be used as fill in site low areas.

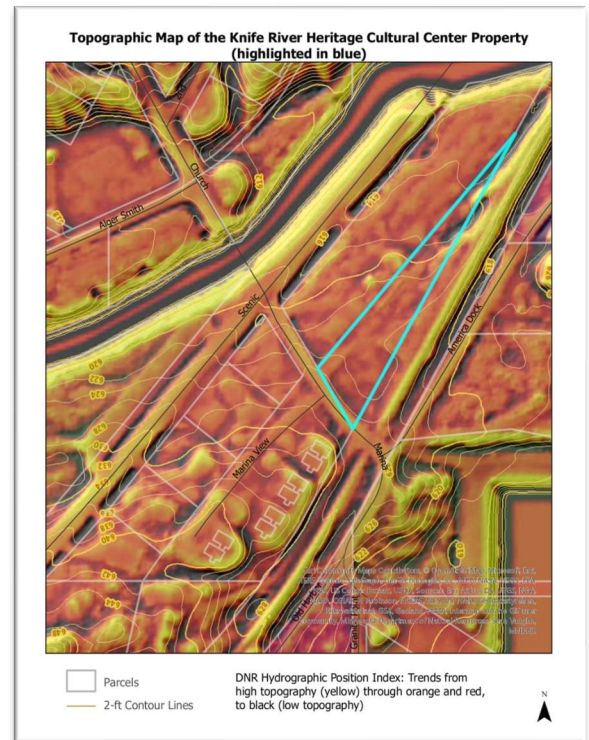
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In practice the swale will reduce risk of unwanted storm water migration to the Knife River and water intrusion into the KR Campground. It will also help determine the location of the Viking ship.

Cost of the grading and drainage plan is being shared by a grant arranged through Lake County Soil & Water, SOS (Viking ship people), the KRHCC, and the Regional Rail Authority. Contractors are Ostman Trucking & Excavating and Shoreview Natives for swale creation and plantings.

This computer-generated image provided by Lake County Soil & Water shows trends from high topography (yellow) through orange and red, to black (low topography)

Image credit: Lake County Soil & Water



TIME TO GET REALLY SERIOUS ABOUT CRUSADER II'S SHELTER

It was the intention of the KRHCC to build a shelter over CRUSADER II yet this building season, but we could not raise the match funds required by a potential \$30,000 IRRRB grant. Total project cost with match funds is expected to be about \$60,000.

Lack of match funds was discouraging as it has been the goal of both Two Harbors and KR since 1994 to provide a shelter for the boat.

The boat has never been sheltered since it was launched in 1939. It has only survived this long through good care by its original owner, Carl Erickson, from launch through 1953 when he died, and later by the Lake County Historical Society.

We had relied heavily on grants from other sources for the match, but that did not happen. Problem may have been that grantors like to support good ideas that need

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help getting started. We assume that was the logic that got the KRHCC off to such a strong start in 2018 and for which we are very thankful.

Over my business career I sat on three non-profit boards that reviewed grant applications. We favored those initiatives that needed help getting off the ground. As the grant recipients began to bloom and achieve a degree of self-sufficiency, we gradually reduced our financial support.

The KRHCC has enjoyed five years of support from several grantors and while they still support us, fund requests are now less than hoped.

What all this means is we need to rely on private or corporate donations to provide the match to build our shelter. The open-sided design of our shelter will protect the boat and visitors from rain. It will also deflect wind, which is a big issue.

When we placed CRUSADER II on its shelter slab last November, we were very careful to be sure its keel was parallel to the edge of the slab. Surprise! This spring we discovered wind had moved the bow of the boat, which was resting on jack stands, nine inches to the north. Very fortunate the boat was not blown over.

Earlier this summer when Larry Ronning and Doug Hill assessed the boat cabin for the rebuild, they were surprised that in its deteriorated condition, winds had not scattered the cabin all over Marina Road and the yards of red townhome owners.

CRUSADER II is being restored with the understanding **it will have a protective shelter**. The same woods used to build the boat are being used to restore it – no fiberglass sheathing that protect wood decks today. The metal-roof shelter will protect it long into the future. If the boat were to be left uncovered, it would need periodic maintenance, and we cannot rely on people with the skills of Larry and Doug to attend to that in the future.

So folks, it is up to us who love the lake and its lore—and the boat that has been such a big part of it—to pony up match funds to build the shelter next spring. Recent donations have been encouraging. The KRHCC will continue to apply for grants. This newsletter will keep you up to date on how we're doing.

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The viewing deck was completed by NorthShor Construction, a KR company, in late July. The photo shows the state of the CRUSADER II rebuild on August 20.



Photo credits: Paul von Goertz

STEALTH PASSAGE

What was hoped to be an opportunity for a historic photo was dashed when “Thomas & Friends” made a stealth passage through Knife River on August 2. It was on its way to Two Harbors for the big “Day Out with Thomas” event held August 6–8 and 11–13.

It was hoped that Thomas would be “pulling” the train and the iconic photo would be Thomas in the foreground and our depot in the background. Well, it didn’t work out that way. The Thomas cars were sandwiched between other cars with big black tarps that covered their “faces.” Thankfully, I was able to get a picture with enough of the depot to prove that Thomas once passed through KR.

Photo: Paul von Goertz



CORRECTION

In the July issue I stated that Roberta Sve lived in Tofte, MN. This was incorrect. She lived in Little Marais, MN, and now lives in Two Harbors. Your writer regrets the error.

HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS

Donations:

- Gary Stenson to general fund
- Mona Linden to general fund

Memorials:

- Scott and Anne Jasperson in memory of David Olin.
- David and Jo-Ann Rossetter in memory of David Olin.

Honorariums:

- In honor of Mary von Goertz on her July 23rd birthday by her sister and brother-in-law, Kathy and Erling Nervick.

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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