



# Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

## KNIFE RIVER ROADS AND TRAILS

By Todd Lindahl, KRHCC Historian and Archeologist

In prehistoric times, all the major rivers along the north shore had trails along them made by Indigenous people. The rivers along the north shore were not usable for canoes, but each provided several other important advantages to early people. There was easy exposed access to types of rock suited for stone tool making. Animals for hunting are attracted to the water and of course there were fish.

In the Knife River area there was copper to be found that could be made into useful tools or used as a highly sought-after trade item. And when using the trails, the water was convenient for drinking or cooking where needed. Stone and copper tools (image right) have been found by the trails along the river. Photo credit: Todd Lindahl



Triangular Woodland (bottom left) era arrowheads as old as 5,000 years and Paleo spear points (bottom right) possibly as old as 11,000 years have been discovered. Prehistoric people had thousands of years to locate the best routes through the region. For this reason, many of the roads we take for granted today follow some of these ancient trails.



Photo credit: Todd Lindahl

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Fur traders starting in the early 1600s made use of the same trails. Musket balls, fire-starting flints, and trade axes among other things have been found on the trails along the Knife River. Northeastern Minnesota remained Native American land until the Treaty of La Point in 1854, when the land was ceded to the U. S. Government. Prospectors hunting for valuable minerals flooded into the region along with government surveyors laying out the land lines and platting locations where communities would likely be located.

Near the Knife River, the town site of Buchanan was platted, and the government land office was built there to register land that people wanted to claim. Ironically, the land office was accidentally built on someone else's land and this problem had to be corrected.

Prospectors were soon building the first-generation roads so they could more easily transport supplies and mining equipment in, and hopefully mineral riches out. It soon became evident that the much-anticipated deposits of copper, silver, and gold were widely scattered and in very small amounts.

For decades, rumors of rich mineral deposits in various locations continued to come up from time to time. One of these was the 1865 gold rush at Lake Vermilion, which had access at the time only by Native American trails. The government wanted to open the region to gold mining and therefore used military funding to build roads to Lake Vermilion. The military was the only government entity that had any money since there was no tax base here. Major T. R. Newsome cut out a crude road using 36 men, 20 oxen, and three horses. 1,500 troops were sent a little later to improve the Vermilion Trail, which generally followed an ancient Native American trail.

Image left is of the 1855 Road. Photo credit: Archive of Todd Lindahl



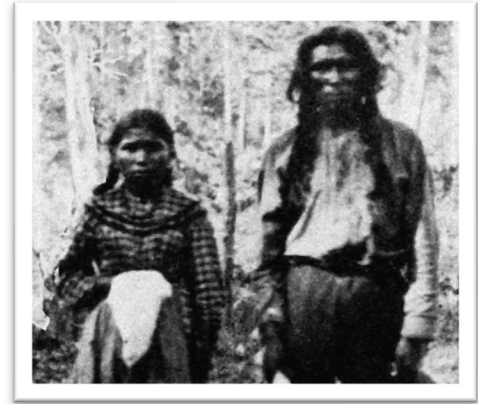
The second military road followed the north shore from Duluth to Beaver Bay. It was built by civilian contractors with no military personnel involved. At Beaver Bay the military road connected to the Wieland brother's plank road to the Lake Vermilion gold fields.

In the Knife River area, the contractor incorporated earlier roads built by the prospectors into their road, saving some construction cost and time. This road, unlike the Vermilion Trail, was intended for winter use only, so it remained crude by anyone's standards. Travel to Beaver Bay was more easily done by boat when Lake Superior was free of ice. The military road followed parts of what are today the West Shilhon and East Shilhon Roads and onto Central Avenue in Knife River. It then turned east on First Street and angled off south toward the top of the hill.

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Dogsled mail carriers followed an old Native American trail up the north shore that paralleled Lake Superior. The military road also used parts of this trail as well, and it was adopted by the dogsled mail carriers when it was completed. The famed John Beargrease joined the mail carriers in 1879. During the summer months the mailmen used rowboats. One round trip from Beaver Bay to Grand Marais to Duluth and back to Beaver Bay took two weeks, depending on the weather.

Image right: John Beargrease and wife. Photo credit: Archive of Todd Lindahl



In 1883 Charlemagne Tower began building the Duluth & Iron Range Railway from Two Harbors (TH) to the Lake Vermilion iron mine that was being developed. Tower also built a stage sleigh road from Two Harbors to Duluth for the movement of the U.S. Mail, passengers, and a very small amount of freight.

The old military road was used from Two Harbors to Knife River, where it continued westward along the shore instead of using the East Shilhon Road. The opening of the stage sleigh road ended the use of dogsleds between Two Harbors and Duluth, but Two Harbors to Grand Marais continued to use dogsleds (image left) until 1899 when a new sleigh road was built between these two points.



Photo credit: Archive of Todd Lindahl

A telegraph line was erected along the stage road to enable communications between Two Harbors, Duluth, and the outside world. Three stage companies ran stage sleighs on the new road, but Barney Lynch's line soon became the only one since it alone was given the winter mail contract. A stage stop was built where the road crossed the Sucker River. Smith Searles ran the station where the passengers could get a hot meal while the horses were being changed.

Image right is of the stage sleighs carrying passengers. Photo credit: Archive of Todd Lindahl.

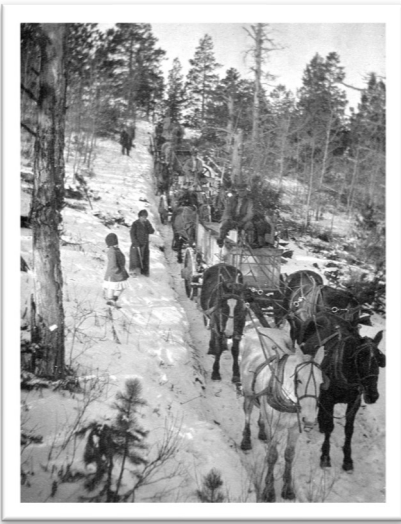


From 1883 to 1887 the railroad and mine payrolls, along with money for businesses, were carried by dogsled from Duluth over the road at night. Paddy McDonald, who was about third in line as the world heavyweight boxing champion, had the task of transporting the money. At times as much as \$16,000 in gold and silver coins was on the sled, nailed shut inside a wooden box. Oddly, the Duluth & Iron Range Ry continued to pay its employees in cash up until 1906. When the railroad was completed between Two Harbors and Duluth in December 1886, the telegraph line was moved next to the track and the dogsled payroll trips ceased.

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The community of Knife River, called "Millie" until 1903, came about with the arrival of the Alger-Smith Lumber Company and the Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railway. Thomas Hillhouse, a New York capitalist, platted the town site of Knife River in April 1899, laying out the streets and avenues as they still are today.

An odd story came from Knife River on December 29, 1903. Three men looking at buying land along the road one mile west of Knife River had just come out of the woods. They had just gotten on their sleigh when a pack of black wolves came out on the road behind them. They whipped the horses getting them to run as fast as they could with the wolves gaining in hot pursuit. When they reached the edge of town, the wolves broke off the chase, much to the relief of the men and horses as well.



In the early 1920s U.S. Highway 61 was built, with parts of the new road again incorporating the earlier Native American trail, military road, and stage road. Today, because of the 1866 military funding, it is still considered a military road. It is known now as "Scenic Highway 61" after the opening of the four-lane highway in the 1960s, almost a century after the original military road.

Image left is a Wagon train - winter months were preferred as bogs and rivers would be frozen. There were no bugs, just wolves. Photo credit: Archive of Todd Lindahl.

### **THE ALMOST FORGOTTEN SHIPWRECK OFF KNIFE RIVER; EDNA G. TO THE RESCUE**

In the early 1970s to 1976 I was a SCUBA diver, mostly on wrecks to 100 feet deep on the North Shore and Isle Royale. In January I attended a program in Two Harbors presented by Jerry Eliason and sponsored by the Lake County Historical Society. Over the last 20 years or so Jerry and his stalwarts Ken Merryman and Randy Beebe, sometimes working out of KR, have discovered nearly all known Lake Superior shipwrecks, thanks in part to side-scanning sonar which Jerry modified for their needs. The technology can scan wide areas of the lake bottom and so is very helpful in locating shipwrecks.

Jerry's program was on three-dimensional images of shipwrecks that he had photographed over the years. During his program he briefly mentioned the wreck of the 120-foot FIRIEN. Made of wood and gas-driven, it caught fire and sank about 18 miles from Duluth. That would be about a mile west of Knife Island.

I felt little embarrassed that I never heard of it as over the years I have given several talks on North Shore and Isle Royale shipwrecks, mostly from my own experiences. I pulled out my go-to book on Lake Superior shipwrecks written by Julius Wolff Jr. Sure enough, there was a brief mention of the wreck.

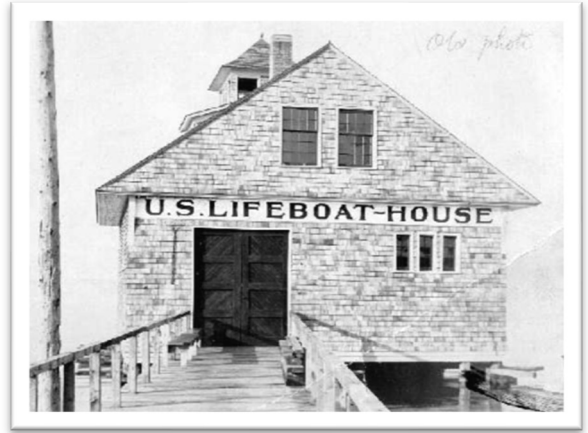
According to Dr. Wolff, Jr. on May 16, 1926, the FIRIEN under Captain Chester Massey of Superior was undergoing a trial run on a Sunday evening after some rebuilding. Suddenly fire broke out with flames fed by the fuel tank. Captain Massey and the three-man crew launched the yawl and were soon picked

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up by the EDNA G. out of Two Harbors, captained by H. F. Brower. I imagine the boat burned to the waterline and then sank – a total loss. The value of the FIRIEN, just eight years old, was not disclosed.

Now, this was not the first time the EDNA G. was called to rescue mariners as well as fishermen. I would expect EDNA G. historian Tom Koehler of Two Harbors would have all that information. What I find interesting is why wasn't the Coast Guard out of Duluth called?

Some time on the internet revealed that in 1866 the city of Duluth donated land on Minnesota Point for a lifesaving service for the Duluth/Superior area. A formal lifesaving station was built in 1894 (Image right, Credit: Public Domain). Apparently for open water rescues commercial tugs, like the EDNA G., were relied upon. Perhaps that was how the EDNA G. got the rescue call. Eventually the lifesaving service was given to the Coast Guard and with that came radio and bigger boats for open water rescue.



### **ODYSSEY RESORTS' CHALLENGE TO THEIR HOMEOWNERS RESULTS IN \$10,000 FOR THE KRHCC**

Through the initiative of Chuck Paton, president of Odyssey Resort Operations, and David Grong, KRHCC board member and a Larsmont Cottages homeowner, the KRHCC recently received a donation of \$10,000. Odyssey challenged their homeowners to match their pledged gift of \$5,000 and the homeowners responded with an equal amount – result \$10,000!

With our letter of thanks to Odyssey and their homeowners, we asked what inspired them to make the gift. The response came from Kirk Schultz, CEO of Odyssey Resorts:

*"Odyssey Resorts is dedicated to uplifting North Shore communities and supporting initiatives that enhance tourism while celebrating our heritage. With a 40-year legacy in the region, we take pride in our role in helping shape the North Shore as a vibrant, community-oriented, and culturally rich destination. Our recent contribution to the KRHCC's CRUSADER II restoration project, made possible with the generous support of Odyssey's homeowners, reflects our collective commitment to preserving local gems and fostering community pride. We are honored to play a role in safeguarding our legacy, engaging the community, and sustaining the allure of the North Shore." - Kirk Schultz, CEO, Odyssey Resorts.*

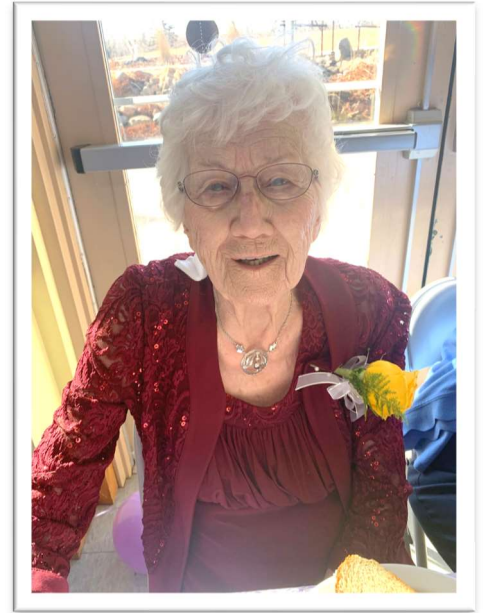


The KRHCC is thrilled that Odyssey Resorts and their homeowners value the history and culture of the Larsmont/Knife River community and have expressed it with this generous gift.

## KNIFE RIVER CELEBRATES ITS CENTARIAN!

Audrey Sandwick Carlson, lifelong resident of Knife River, celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday February 18<sup>th</sup> with a reception held the same day at the Knife River Lutheran Church (Image right, Photo Credit: Paul von Goertz). A huge Viking fan, her family requested attendees wear the Viking purple and gold, and many did!

Audrey is one of Knife River's (KR) most loved elders and has lived all 100 years in KR and within a few hundred yards of where she was born. Her father, John Sandwick, came to America from Sweden by way of Finland in 1892 when he was four years old. Her mother, Gertie, was from near Wisconsin Rapids, WI, and also Swedish. Her father took up commercial fishing and like so many lived by the Lake – just a bit west of where the CN railroad bridge crosses over Scenic 61. He would later work at the water plant in Two Harbors and the D&IRR water tower in KR.



Audrey attended school in KR and after graduating Two Harbors High School went to work as a “Rosie the Riveter” in Rockford, IL, where she worked from August 1942 until March of 1943 at Woodward Governor. Her job was to inspect engine governors for military aircraft of all kinds.

Image: Audrey's High School graduation photo  
Photo credit: Audrey Carlson's Family

She married Bertil (Bert) Carlson in 1943 while Bert was home on leave from the US Army European Front. Bert was also Swedish and living in Two Harbors. The couple had four children, Stephen, Carol (Cookie), Gary, and Julie. Bert died in 1991; Cookie died in 2021 and Gary in 2022.

Audrey was a homemaker for many years before going to work for Sears in the women's fashions department, retiring in 1981. Of note is Audrey's appreciation for history and that of the Knife River Lutheran Church for which she has been recording its history “forever” (at least since 1945 but not so much recently). The undisputed matriarch of KRLC, she can often be seen wearing Minnesota Viking clothing on Viking home game days. But please, do not ask her how she feels about the Packers! Or Brett Favre.

Audrey has been a true blessing to KR for all her volunteer work, her family now spanning five generations, her church family and all who love and admire her for her positive, upbeat, and independent nature. ***We love you, Audrey!***

## MORE NEWS:

### STATE BANKERS CHOOSE KRHCC FOR SUMMER PICNIC

On Wednesday, July 31, the KRHCC will host one of its first big events that brings train riders to KR for a catered meal. The group is BankIn Minnesota. According to its website, "BankIn Minnesota was founded so that its members could band together to bring the truth about community banking to lawmakers at the state capitol and in Washington, DC."



Josh Miller, North Shore Scenic Railroad (NSSR) station manager, said the KRHCC could expect between 250-300 BankIn picnickers. The NSSR and BankIn will handle all the details: set-up and breakdown of 40' x 80' tent provided by Ducettes, tables, chairs, trash receptacles and catering of brats and burgers by B&B Markets Catering and Quality Meats of Cloquet. No alcoholic beverages will be available. Miller said the NSSR will send at least one person before and after the visit to help set up and clean up.

The picnic will be an evening event with the train arriving about 7:30 pm and departing about an hour later.

The KRHCC has offered its Depot Agent to serve as docent for those who want to learn about our community, depot, and CRUSADER II. The KRHCC will be paid a use fee for hosting the event.

### DOUG HILL RETURNS!

Doug Hill, the Southern gentleman who was instrumental in restoring the exterior of CRUSADER II last summer, 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 phone call to your writer. Doug plans to be in KR about two months, probably 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.



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 the KRHCC has a lead on a period-correct engine.

The KRHCC and all the friends he made while here last summer are thrilled he'll be with us again this summer!

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

## **FISH TUGS STILL WORKING OUT OF CORNUCOPIA, PORT WING.**

Bill Berg, KR's good neighbor to everyone, visited Cornucopia (across from TH on the south shore) on February 13, and reported that commercial fishing will most likely continue through the winter (?), thanks to mild temps.

Bill said fishing has been steady at both "Corny" and Port Wing except for the January cold snap. "We watched them (fish tugs) several miles out with field glasses," said Bill. "At Corny the boat we parked next to unloaded 20 of those huge plastic crates, full of herring and some whitefish, onto the forklift. The semi-truck, already full of fish, was waiting for them. That fishery is going strong!"

Thanks Bill, for your report! Many of our newsletter readers travel the south shore along WS 13 to Bayfield for the beauty of the area and quaintness of the fishing villages.

## **MORE ON CHICKEN MURDERS**

The story on the chicken murders in the January newsletter apparently touched a few hearts judging by comments I received. So far, the murderer(s) has not been identified, let alone brought to justice. For those who asked, funeral services for the four chickens were held at an undisclosed Duluth fast food restaurant last month. Col. Sanders officiated.

## **INFLATION DRIVING UP COST OF BOAT SHELTER**

The gift from Odyssey Resorts and their homeowners got us the match we needed for the \$30K grant we applied for from the Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR). That would give us the \$60K we budgeted for building the shelter this summer.

The IRRR required we include three contractor bids with our grant request. The average of the three bids is \$72,000 – so that's our new budget. Unless we find another \$10K we will have to skinny down our shelter design to something more than a hay barn. The KRHCC is a 501(c3) so all donations are fully tax deductible. Send your donation to KRHCC, POB 240, Knife River, MN 55609.

## **JANUARY DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS**

### **Donations:**

- Odyssey Resorts pledge of \$5,000 as challenge match to Odyssey homeowners - to KRHCC fishing exhibit shelter
- Odyssey homeowners meeting Odyssey's \$5,000 challenge match – to fishing exhibit shelter
- Kevin Johnson to Odyssey Resorts challenge match
- Mark & Claudia Stenson to Odyssey Resorts challenge match
- David and Linda Grong to Odyssey Resorts challenge match
- Carolyn Deters to KRHCC general fund.
- Craig Whiting and Julie S. Ponath-Whiting to shelter fund



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### **Memorials:**

- Nancy Bothwell in memory of Mark Bothwell to KRHCC general fund.

### **Correction:**

The January issue stated that a donation was made to the general fund in memory of Steven Ojard by Mitchel Costley. That was not correct. The donation was made to the CRUSADER II restoration fund. Your writer regrets the error.

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*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](mailto:info@krhcc.org)*

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