

# Newsletter



## Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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### October 2021

By Paul von Goertz – KRHCC Board Member

### NOVEMBER 11 IS VETERANS DAY:

The Veterans Memorial in Knife River (KR) was set in place on July 5, 2021, and so this year will be the first time people can visit the memorial on a Veterans Day. Make it part of your day's plans.

Image right: Memorial at night



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### FROM THIS....TO THIS IN 30 MONTHS



Depot before  
Photo credit: Todd Lindahl



Depot today  
Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

# Newsletter

*Editor's note: We need to remind ourselves that history is being made every day and so I am recording here how the depot and freight house was saved and restored - and how the whole KRHCC concept came together. All KRHCC newsletters are being archived for future generations to read. Please take the time to read what will be a bit of KR history!*

## HOW IT WAS DONE

### **The power of an idea:**

Before we get into the story of the restoration, we need to thank **Randy Ellestad**, owner of the adjacent KR Campground, for saving the depot and freight house from being bulldozed.

Randy became owner of the depot when he bought the campground in 2003. The depot had always been sold with the campground, although the land under it was owned by the DM&IR and later the St. Louis & Lake County Regional Railroad Authority (RRA). For 16 years the RRA and Randy tried to find a way to make the depot a viable enterprise.

Just as the situation began to look hopeless, KR was gifted the fish tug CRUSADER from the Lake County Historical Society. They had been stewards of the boat with a long KR history for about 34 years when they realized their plans to restore and display it at Lighthouse Point in Two Harbors would probably never materialize.

It then became the idea of Randy and **Larry Ronning**, who had done a lot of restoration and maintenance work on CRUSADER both paid and unpaid over the years, to make the depot and CRUSADER the centerpieces of a heritage center at the depot site. Randy agreed to sell the depot to the KR community for \$1. Since then he has worked with KR historian **Todd Lindahl** to research and write a thorough history of the depot.

The idea for a center featuring the depot and CRUSADER was bounced off the community over three meetings held during the winter of 2018. With a vote of confidence in the idea, the KRHCC applied for a nonprofit status the following summer and in November it received a coveted IRS 501(c3) nonprofit certification.

### **The KR Rec Council provided the launch pad:**

By January of 2019 we were putting our funding plan together. A party from KR learned about it and offered a \$20,000 challenge to the community to match it. The

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KRHCC took the challenge to the Rec Council, as after several Julebyens, they had the local funds to match it – and match it they did! Suddenly we had \$40,000 to buy materials and use as match money for grants that required anywhere from 20 – 100%.

## **The three-legged stool:**

The challenge to restore the depot and freight building was daunting. Over the course of the 30-month restoration, it became clear it was accomplished by a three-legged stool comprised of **Larry Ronning, Dave Grong and Todd Lindahl**. If one of those individuals (legs) was not committed to the project, we for sure would not be where we are today.

Larry was a recently retired general contractor with a specialty in restoring old buildings (and boats). He was also born and raised in KR and had many memories of riding the train from the depot.

Larry and his volunteers did an amazing job in racking the depot back into a square shape with plumb walls, raising the building and pouring a concrete slab/floor under it, applying a steel roof, making period correct windows, applying siding - and putting the depot agent's "bump out" back to where it was in 1896.

During the first year of reconstruction, Larry gave us full use of his construction trailer packed with every tool we needed. His Kubota back-hoe/loader was invaluable for the excavating necessary to pour the depot slab.

Once all that was accomplished, Larry asked to step back and leave the interior work to those of us who consider ourselves DIYers, but agreed to oversee all we did, including restorations of collection items.

At this point the second leg of the stool appeared and that was **Dave Grong**, originally from Marshall, MN, but now retired with Linda and pretty much full time KRer.

Dave has an engineering background and is a skilled wood hobbyist who took over both leading and doing the actual carpentry to complete the depot interior and freight house exterior. He worked with Larry to form and pour more than 26 yards of concrete for the depot apron and footings for the flagpole and veterans memorial. Dave also helped with the restoration of the Express Wagon and order board pole.

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Dave spent at least one morning a week during the building season at the depot site since spring of 2020. During the winter he built depot interior components.

The third leg was **Todd Lindahl**, KRHCC historian. Todd had the vision for how the depot and freight house should look once restored. He was able to tell us exactly how every detail of the building should appear, where it should go, material to use, and color of paint - being true to how our depot and similar depots looked in 1900.

As a reader of this newsletter, you have read how I have praised Todd for each of his “finds” that complete the historical items found in a 1900s depot. To name a few: order board pole, order board levers, ticket counter cages, express wagon, period clock, period phone, period signage inside and out, coal stove and cabooses stoves, scales, milk can, spittoons and ticket validator.

Todd also wrote the copy for our four outdoor interpretive displays and sourced all the photos.

We have, or will have, one of the most accurately replicated 1900s depots in the country (my opinion and several others more knowledgeable than I).

## **The three-legged stool relied on the talents of those behind the scenes:**

A three-legged stool can only rest on a solid foundation and for that we had many to thank.

Our financial footing was assured when **Mona Linden**, with a career in things financial, agreed to be our Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and serve on the board as well.

Please understand that a nonprofit status is not easy to achieve and once awarded the IRS monitors the recipient very judiciously. Knowing that, Mona got the software to set up our record keeping in a format that would provide all the info required on our Federal 990, which we have to submit on a yearly basis.

Mona also had to secure an alphabet of federal and state registrations including DUNS, EIN, SAMS, TIN, sales tax exceptions required by suppliers and tax exception forms to all who made donations. In addition to all that, Mona helped glaze and paint our nine period-correct windows.

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A nonprofit needs a strong communications program to reach both donors and volunteers, as we're dead in the water without either.

The KRHCC newsletter is very effective in reaching these audiences as well as our many stakeholders, including: the KR community, the KRRC, the Regional Rail Authority, North Shore Scenic Railroad and the Two Harbors American Legion Post. The newsletter also goes to local government officials and all those foundations and state and federal agencies that can provide financial support.

**Anne-Lù Hovis** of KR/Larsmont produces the newsletter from my ramblings and adds graphic support to create a newsletter that is fun and easy to read.

There are more than 300 names on the newsletter email list and so with pass-along readership, perhaps 500 people are reached by it monthly. So far no one has asked to have their name removed! I take that as an endorsement of my writing style and humor(!?). By the way, the newsletter mailing list is not shared with anyone.

**Bob Entzion** has a wealth of experience in university administration and business. He and Sheryl own the Island View Cabins. A strong strength of Bob's is long-range planning and fund raising, which makes him a valued member of our board. Bob helped identify our three phases of work that will create the KRHCC and advised on the wise use of grant opportunities. Bob also heads the soon-to-be KRHCC Foundation.

**Duane Madison**, a board member, was helpful in capturing the genealogy of several generations of KR families, which helped in compiling KR's history and any impacts on depot details. Health issues and COVID-distancing limited Duane's active participation in the restorations, but happy to say he is in good health once again and splitting wood.

I would be remiss if I did not mention **Bob Manzoline** as a very import behind-the-scenes advocate for the KRHCC. Bob is the executive director of the RRA and reports directly to the RRA board.

Bob was quick to grasp our vision and relate it his board comprised of three St. Louis County commissioners and two from Lake. Bob attended to all the details of our lease and its provisions, which we considered reasonable. When the question of what we would pay to lease the land, we suggested \$1.00 a year and with a straight face. Bob

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was agreeable to that as what we intended to do was something the RRA had wanted to do for years. In hind sight, maybe we should have suggested \$.50.

Bob was a good source of information on funding sources and successfully went to bat for us when funders balked at “site-control” issues, because we do not own the property on which our buildings rest.

Most recently Bob was instrumental in opening new funding doors for the KRHCC by responding to the KRHCC’s request to convert our five-year renewable lease to a 20-year. With the RRA board’s approval that followed, we hope we don’t have any more questions on “site control.” It’s great to have a landlord like Bob and the RRA to support our vision.

## **Dozens of volunteers!**

We had at least a couple dozen volunteers over the 30-month build period and what a great group! I will not list them for fear of forgetting one or more, but suffice to say they were enthusiastic, hardworking and most important – reliable!

On the last pour of the concrete apron that surrounds the depot, I put out a call for at least eight people to help pour and smooth the seven yards of concrete. Eleven showed up!



Our four painters took advantage of every good painting day. We painted a lot of material before it was put in place. Our woodworkers were never delayed waiting for something to be painted that was to be put in place the next day. KRHCC volunteers are the best!

John Safstrom was one of the most reliable and enthusiastic volunteers we had – and at 87 years old! John died suddenly in February of 2020 while he and Gail were wintering in Mexico. John was a very active volunteer in any project that involved the KR community. His death was a great loss to the KRHCC and KR.

## **Volunteers with special skills and experience:**

Along with **Larry Ronning**, we had several who volunteered special construction-related skills.

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**Randy Ellestad** can really whip a Bobcat Skid-Steer around. Randy did a great deal of the site prep which included moving the freight house 16 feet to the north – no easy task. Randy also collaborated with historian Todd Lindahl in finding and restoring some of the historical treasures we have. Randy is a KRHCC board member.

**Brad Ronning** used his electrical experience to do a lot of the prep work for a licensed electrician, which helped reduce our electrician costs.

We did all our own concrete work with the exception of finishing the depot slab. Many thanks to the **Reitan brothers, Scott and Brad**, for donating their time to giving the depot building slab a first class finish!

**Matt Morris** volunteered his time to cut a path through the old depot apron so we could run and bury electrical conduit to both the depot and freight house.

**Lee Bujold** spent her career in community and economic development. With a very acute marketing mind, she saw an opportunity for a fundraiser selling the “Best Sweet Corn Ever,” from a farmer near her hometown of Ashland, WI. It was a great hit at past KRRC “Community Night Out” dinners and continues to be. She and Jim donated 60 dozen ears of corn to the KRHCC with all sales going to the KHHCC. Two of these fundraisers produced \$2,500 for the KRHCC.

We would have been at a total loss with how to safely (and cheaply) raise our flag and order board poles. A well-placed call to Lake County **Coop Light & Power** resulted in a team of skilled professional who lifted and deftly placed our poles in their footings.

## **All professional services were local:**

All outside services were local businesses and they all did excellent work and in prices ranges we estimated. Among them were;

**Silver Creek Signworks – Dick Bohrer**

**Silver Creek Electric – Mike Rousseau**

**Humble Hands Handyman Services – Matt Durward**

Depot floor tile and freight house metal roofing

**Ostman Trucking & Landscaping – Mike Ostman**

Site work and removal of old depot apron

**Burton Forge – Dale Burton** donated two steel ticket counter cages

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## **L. J. Ronning Construction – 11 period-correct custom windows**

### **Many sponsors step up to the plate:**

Even though we are rookies at fund raising, we knew enough to offer people something meaningful to sponsor. Response to these opportunities has been amazing. One item had three willing sponsors with 24 hours of notice.

Sponsorships have included: 11 period-correct windows, four all-weather interpretive displays (IRRR financial match), flag pole, veterans memorial, flag pole lighting, memorial lighting, Express Wagon, and depot stove.

### **Grants covered about a third of costs to date:**

It's been my observation that many think the KRHCC is funded largely by grants, and this is not true. A little less than one third of what has been raised to date has come from grants. There are several reasons for this.

First, grants, whether public or private are highly competitive. Grantors demand good projects that meet their funding guidelines before they invest in them. The KRHCC has been very fortunate that every funder we have approached, whether private or public has seen merit in what we are doing – although we have not always been awarded the amount requested.

Second, many grants require a 1:1 local match. So if we request \$10,000, we have to dip into our reserves. As a result, match grants limit what we can request.

Third, COVID placed tremendous pressure on grantors, many of whom changed their funding focus to helping the many people who were suffering financial and emotional hardships as a result of COVID. We supported that redirection as human needs will always take precedence over a building project.

### **What's next....**

With Phase I complete (restoration of the depot and freight house) we can begin Phase II which calls for building shelters for CRUSADER and for up to 60 picnickers. We are actively seeking funding to cover cost of materials and labor.

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At this point it appears we may only have funding for the boat shelter. The depot interior is complete and for the time being can suffice for keeping groups out of the weather. Shelters will not be built by volunteers, but we will need help with site work.

Our plans call for pouring the slab for the shelter in 2022 and the superstructure in 2023. More on the boat shelter in future newsletters.

Many, many thanks to all who bought into the vision of the KRHCC and actively supported it with hundreds of volunteer hours and tens of thousands of dollars!

## **WHY SHIPS WERE NATURALLY ATTRACTED TO KR, AND THEIR DOOM**

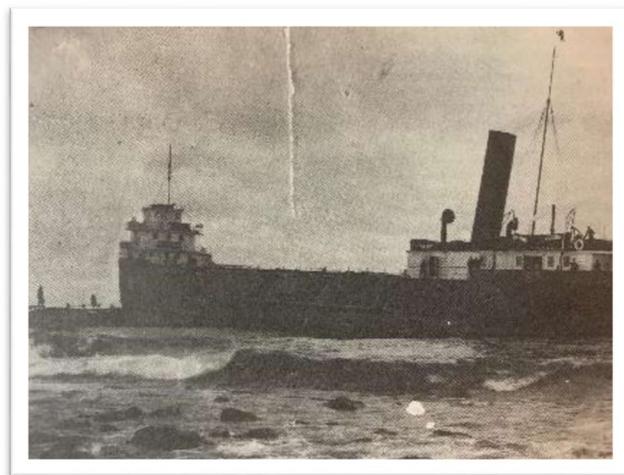
In the March issue of the KRHCC newsletter we told you about in 1908 a lighthouse was proposed for Knife Island. The idea was later dropped, but KR was still a natural attraction for ships, primarily because of magnetism in the KR area that could throw off compasses.

### **Mother Superior pulls a nasty Halloween trick...**

This strange phenomenon, perhaps complicated by a blinding snowstorm and strong NE winds, pulled a mean Halloween trick on Captain Edgar Recor of the 286' steel bulk carrier THOMAS MAYTHAM on Halloween eve in 1926.

The boat was light (empty) and heading for Duluth when it apparently hit the shoal off the east end of Knife Island as a result of poor visibility, or faulty compass reading caused by magnetic deviation along the north shore.

Photo credit: LAKE SUPERIOR SHIPWRECKS by Julius F. Wolff Jr.



But, there could have been another reason. Because she was light and underpowered with only an 800 HP engine, she could not maintain a steady course in the high seas and wind. Regardless how she came between Knife Island and the mainland, the northeast beached her bow near the base of the west side of the Lake Dock (aka "Coal

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Dock”) and the northeast then blew her stern nearly parallel to the agate beach. The photo (above) gives the impression of the bow hitting the Lake Dock on the west side, when in actuality it is just grounded near it. Note the KR people on the coal dock. Must have been a lot of excitement for the small town to see this 286’ leviathan nearly on the beach.

Mike Ojard recalls his grandfather, Hans Sr., saying he saw the debacle about to unfold and raced down to the Lake Dock with lantern in hand to warn the MAYTHAM of impending disaster. But, by then the northeast was in charge.

Salvagers had her off in two days, but she sustained injuries of more than \$50,000 with a lost rudder and shoe and a ravaged propeller together with hull damage. That damage could have occurred when she hit the island (most likely), when she grounded, or both.



The MAYTHAM was in the shipyard in Superior for more most of the following month, only to sail into more grief in subsequent years.

A rare photo (left) of the MAYTHAM taken from the Lake Dock (Coal Dock). The MAYTHAM nearly hit the west side of the dock, but grounded before it hit.

Photo credit: Randy Ellestad collection.

*Thanks to Mike Ojard for contributing to this story and speculating on the likely path of the MAYTHAM to where it grounded.*

## **THE LITTLE-KNOWN “KR CCC CAMP”**

*By KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl, edited for the KRHCC newsletter by Paul von Goertz*

Not too many people are aware of the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) camp at Palmers on Stony Point because it existed only from March of 1933 through the end of 1937.

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CCC camps were created by the federal government to create jobs, mostly in infrastructure, during the Great Depression. The work was under the supervision of what is now MNDOT.

The CCC employed mostly young men and in northern Minnesota they built several wayside rests, all made of local stone. Examples of work near KR are the Stony Point and Buchanan waysides. When their work was done along the North Shore, many were transferred to Jay Cooke State Park.

Although the KR camp was officially known as the “Lake Shore Wayside Park Camp,” it was often referred to as the “Knife River CCC Camp” because it used the KR post office.

Another reason why it was not well known is that it was occupied by men mostly from the Twin Cities. For the years it was in existence, a portion of the men’s payroll ended up in KR businesses. Joanne Lind remembers many CCC men were served healthy home cooked meals at her parent’s Riverside Inn in KR.

The camp itself was located near what remains of the wayside rest at Stony Point. **About the only thing that remains of the camp is the 14-holer outhouse tank, which is the answer to last month’s question “What is this?”** The tank was probably made by CCC workers as workmanship is something less than a Kohler toilet. There is another tank like this at Jay Cooke State Park.



Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Hard to believe up to 14 men would need to use the latrine at the same time. A good opportunity to make a new friend.

Another CCC camp is at Gooseberry. Some of the men’s work remains. Stonework for both the KR area and Gooseberry camps were from local rock quarries. The quarry near Stony Point was in existence until the late 1890s.

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The former Stony Point CCC campsite is now on private property and so be content by imagining the site as you drive past the remnants of the wayside on Stony Point Drive.

## **CREATE A FAMILY HOLIDAY TRADITION WITH THE NSSR's FIRST "CHRISTMAS TREE TRAIN"**

Earlier this year Josh Miller, the NSSR's general manager bounced the idea of a "Christmas Tree Train" to KR off the KRHCC board. Idea was to take families from Duluth to the KRHCC site to select a Christmas tree from a broad selection, and shop for wreathes and garland. Trees selected would be wrapped and placed in a boxcar and brought back to the Duluth Depot. The train would run one day only, Saturday, November 27 and be in KR for a couple hours in the morning.



The KRHCC thought it a great idea with the one provision that the supplier of the trees and greener be from Lake County. We suggested the provider be a family from Two Harbors, John and Lynette Hanel owners of Northern Connections. The Hanel had supplied all the decorative greenery for past Julebyens, and donated a lot, too. We consider them good friends of KR.

Photo Credit: Dave Schauer - Christmas train approaching KR.

The Hanel and the NSSR have all the details worked out and can be found at: [www.duluthtrains.com](http://www.duluthtrains.com) Click on "Christmas Trains."

The tree site will be open to locals after the train leaves about noon. The depot will be heated and open all Saturday. Larsmont Trading Post will be serving food and hot beverages. With Holiday music and décor, the day will surely get you in the spirit of Christmas!

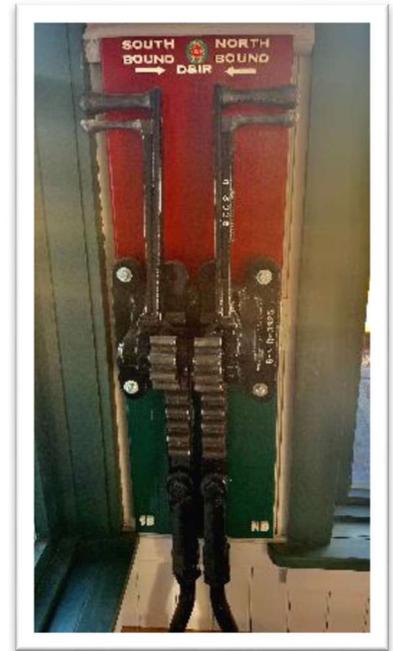
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## YOU CAN STILL SPONSOR THE ORDER BOARD PULLS

The order board pulls/levers that move the signal boards on the order board pole are still available for sponsorship. These pulls are a rare find for the KRHCC and we probably paid too much, but the seller knew their value as did our shrewd price negotiator, Todd Lindahl. So he choked and paid asking price.

The levers are available for sponsorship for \$600. Like other items sponsored, the sponsor's name will be engraved into a 1" x 4" brass plaque and placed near the sponsored item. To sponsor, email: [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org). Your sponsorship is tax deductible as the KRHCC is a 501(c3) non-profit.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



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