



# Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

PO Box 240 • 180 Marina Road  
Knife River, MN 55609  
info@krhcc.org

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By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

## VIKING SHIP MOVE TO KNIFE RIVER IS HISTORIC EVENT

History is made every day, and with the decision to relocate the Viking ship LEIF ERIKSON to Knife River (KR), a historic moment has taken place, not only for KR, but the North Shore as well. For KR, it is perhaps the most significant event since Crown Prince Olav of Norway Christened fish tug CRUSADER II in June of 1939.

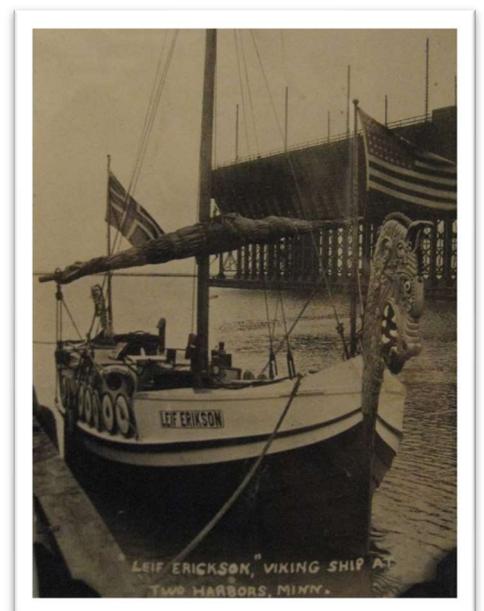
The ship has been mostly out of public view, and perhaps out of mind for almost 30 years, therefore...

**... a refresher of the ship's history is in order:**

The LEIF ERIKSON ship was built in Korgen, Norway, by local boat builders to replicate the type of ship sailed, and the route thought taken, by Vikings in their settlement of North America around 997 A.D. The 43-foot vessel was completed in April of 1926. Captain Gerhard Følgero and his crew of three left Bergen, Norway, for North America on May 23<sup>rd</sup> of the same year.

On the voyage to Duluth, the ship stopped at the Shetland Islands, Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland and landed at St. Johns, Newfoundland, on July 20, 1926. While crossing the Atlantic, the crew encountered heavy seas of hurricane proportions and became ice-locked near Greenland.

After landing in Newfoundland, the crew and ship set

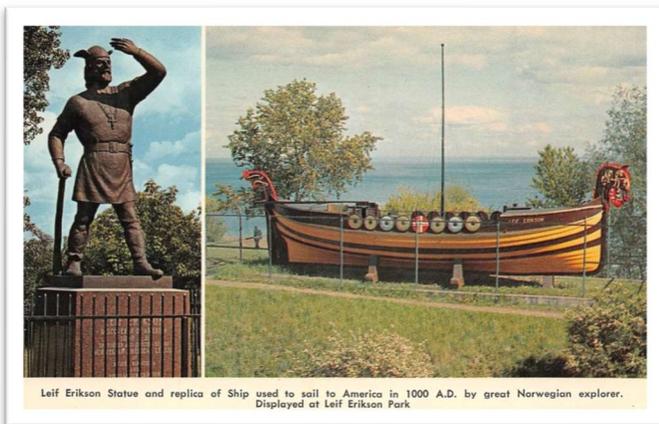


sail for Boston, Massachusetts, and arrived in August of 1926. They had traveled 6,700 miles, the greatest distance for a ship of its size in modern history, logging 10,000 miles. It arrived in Duluth to great fanfare on June 23, 1927. While enroute to Duluth in 1927, the ERIKSON stopped and spent a few days being entertained by members of the Sons of Norway Two Harbors lodge. Photo on previous page - credit: Randy Ellestad collection

The goal was accomplished, reenacting Leif Erikson's route to North America and demonstrating that the Vikings could have traveled the Atlantic to accomplish the feat.

Duluthian Bert Enger, of Enger and Olson Furniture Company, along with his partner Marie Olson, purchased the ship from Captain Følgero and crew soon after the voyage, and donated it to the City of Duluth with the covenant that the city preserve and display the ship, or the family could reclaim it.

The ship was placed on display in Duluth's Lake Park, which was later re-named Leif Erikson Park around 1929. There, the Leif Erikson steadily deteriorated after years of neglect and vandalism.



Postcards (image) from the 1920s going forward through the 70s featured Leif Erickson Park and its namesake in both statue and the ship.

Photo credit: Randy Ellestad collection

## **Burn the LEIF ERIKSON?**

The state of the ship reached a low point in 1980, prompting a former Duluth City Councilor to suggest that the LEIF ERIKSON be burned in the traditional Viking manner of putting a ship to rest.

This suggestion caught the attention of Marie Olson's grandson, Will Borg, to contact his boyhood friend, Neill Atkins, who was also serving on the City Council at that time, to help form a restoration committee. Neill and Will brought together a diverse collection of volunteers to begin fundraising to restore the ship to its original condition.

Fundraising activities began in 1985 with the formation of a non-profit "Save Our Ship" (SOS) organization. Since that year, the SOS Restoration Project has raised more than

a \$100,000 to restore the ship and an additional \$100,000 + for a structure into which to place it. This was all accomplished by dedicated volunteers soliciting donations from corporations and individuals, selling souvenirs, food and beverages at public events, and organizing ten annual Viking Ship Festivals. The Viking Fests were a one-day event featuring Scandinavian food, arts, crafts, and entertainment to help raise funds. The last such event was held in 1996.

Boat builders led by Larry Ronning (now a KRHCC board member) began the actual rebuilding of the ship in 1991. Most of the restoration was completed and the ship moved to the eastern end of Leif Erikson Park in 2000. A protective covering of shrink-wrap was then placed on the ship until a roof structure could be raised to protect it from the elements and vandals.

In 2013 it was decided that the location in the east of the park was too far removed from walking paths and continued to expose the boat to vandalism. It was then moved out of the park to a warehouse at what is now the site of the Pier B Hotel complex; later to the former Superwood site on the waterfront in a secure building.

### **SOS requests the City of Duluth relinquish ownership of the ship.**

In July of 2021, SOS took action to gain control of the ship from the city and aggressively find a suitable home for it. SOS pointed out to Mayor Larson and the city council that while the city had acted in good faith to honor the covenant of Bert Enger to preserve and display the ship, the reality was the ship still did not have a home and the city admittedly had no suitable options. SOS pledged to find a location including investigating options outside of Duluth. City councilors voted unanimously to gift the ship to SOS.

Upon given the freedom to scout locations within and outside of city property, SOS identified one near Leif Erikson Park and one in Canal Park, both on private property, which would potentially conflict with SOS's non-profit status.

### **The KRHCC becomes a viable relocation site.**

It was about this time that Randy Ellestad, KR Campground owner and board member of both SOS and the KRHCC, proposed relocating the ship to the KRHCC, citing several reasons:

Most important, the ship needed to be near Lake Superior and in a highly visible and accessible location, all of which KR offers. The town is also on Scenic 61, a designated National Scenic By-Way heavily traveled by visitors.

Also working in KR's favor was that the town has become recognized in the Upper Midwest as a Norwegian-American community proud of its heritage, thanks, in part, to our annual Julebyen Scandinavian Christmas festival, which draws about 6,000 festivalgoers each holiday season.

Lastly, KR has a significant tie to Norway through the Christening of fish tug CRUSADER II by Crown Prince Olav of Norway in 1939. Both CRUSADER and ERIKSON would enhance the local seafaring and boat-building heritage of Norway, particularly when the boats are placed in shelters that reflect traditional Norwegian post and beam construction.

### **Viking ship finally finds a home where it can be seen and appreciated.**

In November of last year, the KRHCC and the KR Rec Council (KRCC) sent invitations to SOS for LEIF ERIKSON to be a featured attraction at Julebyen 2021. The SOS board voted to accept, and the ship arrived by a "Wide Load" 18-wheeler a few days before Julebyen. The ship was a big hit with festivalgoers. Admiring the ship even though partially wrapped in shrink wrap. Both photo credits: Paul von Goertz



In June of this year grants were awarded to the KRHCC to build a commercial fishing exhibit featuring CRUSADER II. We asked our engineering and architectural firm, in blind optimism over a year ago, to show two locations for boats at the KRHCC and in proximity to one another. One site identified as CRUSADER II and the other "LEIF ERIKSON."

On June 22, of this year, the KRHCC met with SOS and formally asked them to submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) to relocate the ship to the KRHCC.

The SOS vote was unanimous.

## See the Viking ship at the KRHCC during the TH Festival of Sail!

As of this writing, SOS and the KRHCC along with Sons of Norway Lodges in Two Harbors and Duluth, are preparing for an event at the KRHCC that ties to the Festival of Sail in Two Harbors August 4 – 7. There will be “See a replica of the first Tall Ship to land in North America.” Lovin’ Lake County, the destination marketing organization (DMO) for Lake County, awarded the KRHCC a \$1,227 marketing grant to support the event.



At the time of this writing (July 20) plans are being finalized for the event. There will be food and music and Viking ship memorabilia available. The ship will be partially covered in protective shrink wrap (until it is placed under a shelter at a later date), but its distinctive dragon head and tail will be on display along with interpretive displays. The depot will be open throughout the weekend at no charge to visitors. Photo credit: Randy Ellestad collection.

Since the decision to relocate the ship to KR, SOS has been actively pursuing designers and builders of traditional Nordic post and beam open-sided boat shelters. If all goes well, the shelter slab could be poured yet this year and the ship placed on it, which would eliminate the trailer upon which it now rests and give people a much better view of the ship.

More about plans for the Viking ship’s new home in future newsletter issues.

## **CRUSADER COMMERCIAL FISHING EXHIBIT FULLY FUNDED, GROUND BROKEN**

Thanks to grants awarded, and to private donations that provided grant matching funds, the vision of the KRHCC and many KR fishing families to restore and display CRUSDADER II, is finally taking place.



Grants from the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation and the Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation provided three-fourths of the cost and the KRHCC the balance. Two small grant requests remain outstanding, but whether they are awarded or not, we have sufficient funds to complete the exhibit.

Special thanks to the seven businesses along the KR Scenic 61 corridor for responding to the KRHCC's request to submit letters to the IRRR expressing their support for the fishing exhibit.

Cost for what will be accomplished this building season is budgeted at \$60,000. This will be needed to cover cost for site prep for a 48 x 23 slab, 4' x 72' sidewalk, electrical feed to slab, viewing deck into the boat's interior running the length of the boat, and four interpretive displays.

Post and beam roof framing and metal roofing will be added in 2023. Our intent, depending upon funding, is to work with the North House Folk School in Grand Marais to have their students build the components of the framework at the school, and erect it on the KRHCC site in 2023. Initial drawings for the framework have already been completed and reflect a traditional Norwegian open shelter design.

Leaving the boat uncovered this year will give volunteer boat restorers full head room and access to the boat's topsides and cabin. Want to help and learn something about boat restoration? Email: [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org)

We are particularly pleased that "SOS" (Save Our Ship) is also considering a shelter framework for LEIF ERIKSON that would have a similar Nordic flare as the one for CRUSADER.

The groundbreaking at KRHCC has begun and KRHCC board member, Dave Grong, watches the dozer make quick work of clearing and leveling the slab site. Dave produced the drawings and specifications for the exhibit.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Visit the KRHCC to see the progress that is being made.





Image left: Slab footprint with sidewalk from interpretive displays to the slab.

Image right: The dirt work required to bring slab to grade and serve as slab base required 100 cubic yards of clean coarse sand.

Both photo credits: Paul von Goertz

### **KRHCC "MATCHING FUNDS" NEEDS HELP**

Some of the grants for which we make requests requires the KRHCC have some skin in the project to show local support. This can vary from 20% to 50% of a project's total cost. For example, the IRRR grant we were awarded required a 1:1 match. We were awarded \$30,000 so we had to come up with another \$30,000, half of which was covered by a Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation award of \$15,000. The KRHCC and some smaller grants we hope to receive will provide the remaining \$15,000 in match funds.

Match funds fuel the KRHCC's grant requests. When you make an undesignated gift to the KRHCC, it goes into our match fund, which will need to be recharged after this year's building project. Can you please help? Every dollar you contribute gets us another dollar. Remember the KRHCC is an IRS recognized 501(c3) so your gift is 100% tax deductible.

## TODD LINDAHL'S ARCHEOLOGICAL FIND FALLS FLAT

On Thursday, July 14, ground was broken for the KRHCC commercial fishing exhibit which will include CRUSADER. Once the sod was stripped from the site along with about a foot of sandy loam, KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl was on the scene to see what secrets laid beneath the sod.

The site was once the home of Pascal (Pete) Rosso who was transferred by the Duluth and Northeastern Railroad from his job as Postmaster in Drummond north of KR, to KR in May of 1900. He would serve as depot agent in KR for 36 years until his death in July of 1936.

For agent Rosso the amount of railroad activity to and from KR in the early 1900s came at great personal loss to him. On January 30, 1907, his eight-year old son was standing on the depot loading platform with a group of loggers while a D&NE log train was passing. One of the loggers had a large pack on his back and suddenly turned, knocking the boy onto the track. The boy lost his arm, but lived.

The D&NE built a home for Rosso and his family just west and next to the depot, which is where ground was broken for the KRHCC fishing exhibit. On the night of May 16, 1928, a chimney fire caused the home to burn to the ground. The family barely escaped and everything but the clothes they were wearing was lost. There was no insurance on the house, which was owned by the railroad. It was never replaced. The Rosso family was able to recover from the loss and stay in KR. Several Rosso descendants live in KR today.

So what did Todd discover? As might be expected, there was wood ash, some square nails, broken glass and coal pieces.

Todd's big find was a flattened and bent spoon!

Not enough people know this, but Todd is a recognized and respected archeologist, as well as railroad historian, so with that mindset, he went about trying to learn about the spoon and in its flattened state. Was it a spatula of sorts? Todd had the mystery solved within a few hours and called to tell me the story.



Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

First, it was not sterling silver, but stainless steel and made in – Taiwan! In case you're wondering, Taiwan has been a nation for 110 years. Todd deduced the spoon had been flattened by having been placed on a rail by a local urchin and run over several times by passing locomotives. Did his/her mother ever wonder why her tableware was short one spoon?



While this “find” of Todd’s is not particularly notable, it has a fun and interesting story attached to it.

The Rosso family lived next to the depot which can be seen to far right next to boxcar on railroad siding. A drawback living so close to the track was the snowbanks left by railroad plows.

Photo credit: Todd Lindahl

### **Speaking of finding tableware in historical places...**

This spoon story reminded me of an enterprising man who owned a SCUBA diving supply store in Duluth in the early 1960s, when sport diving was just becoming popular.

The wreck of the SAMUEL P. ELY which lies, in part, under the west breakwall in Two Harbors, was an easily accessible and popular wreck dive site. The dive shop owner had a boat and so, after fitting out future Mike Nelsons (TV series SEA HUNT starring Lloyd Bridges) to the tune of several hundred dollars each, he would take them to the dive site.

Frankly, I have dived on the ELY and it is pretty boring as all that remains from the 1896 wreck are wood timbers hardly recognizable as a ship. Anyway, to keep interest in the wreck, and the dollars flowing, the shop owner would periodically “salt” the wreck site with silverware from a thrift shop. I know all this as he told me himself many years later, and with a twinkle in his eye.

I guess this story all ends well because divers were thrilled with their diving discovery and the bragging rights that go with it, and the shop owner helped grow sport diving. See what you can learn from reading this newsletter?

## STRANDED ON STONEY

The Fourth of July 2022 weekend for the owners of a 43' trawler heading for Duluth from KR to watch fireworks, ended abruptly when the boat hit an uncharted rock just west of Stoney Point. The accident, that happened early afternoon on Saturday, July 2, left the boat impaled on the rock with a list to starboard and water in her hull. Not in danger of sinking, at the moment.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



The U. S Coast Guard Duluth station removed those on board and a plan began to take place to remove it before wind and waves could cause any more damage or move it into deeper water.

It was fortunate that Wren Works, a heavy construction, and marine construction company in Poplar, WI, had a push tug and barge in the Duluth-Superior harbor at the time and was at the scene within 24-hours.

While perhaps a 100 or more spectators watched intently from Stoney Point Road, the Wren crew put on a show of professionalism as they pulled along side the stricken boat, dropped two spuds to hold the barge in place, and sent divers down to place lifting straps under the hull, fore and aft. The straps were then attached to cables dangling from a very serious crane, and after a period of adjusting the slings and clearing a path for the lift, the lift began. In less than three minutes the boat was lifted free and placed on the barge, all without incident. Applause was heard from the on-lookers! The boat was then brought to Duluth for repairs.

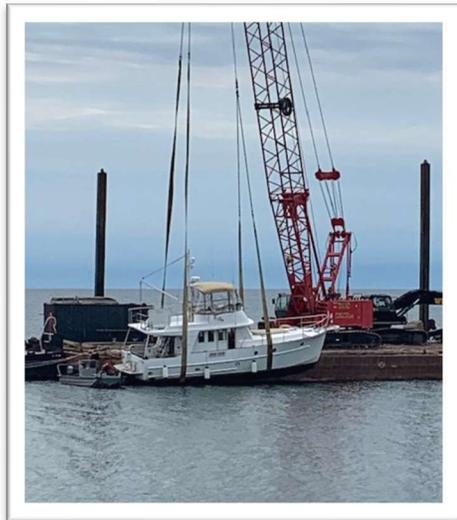


Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Bob and Virgene Trygg lived on Stoney Point for several years before moving to KR; they now live in Duluth. Their grandson was involved in the salvage operation and told them about the accident and so they were on the scene to watch the removal. Bob made a very fitting comment about the whole incident: "Charts just tell you where the chart maker thinks there are rocks, not where they are."

## **Strandings on Stoney Point not uncommon...**

While we suspect many strandings on Stoney Point have gone unreported to save the reputation of the boat operator, one that took place on December 3, 1903 was the 124-foot 383-ton coastal steamer C. W. MOORE. She hit hard and it took 11 days to free her and two days in Duluth shipyard before she could resume her schedule to Grand Marais.

In the early 1900s the entire North Shore coastal population depended upon water transportation. It was important that these smaller coastal packets sail until the ice closed them in.

The MOORE probably regularly paused in front of KR to deliver mail, news and gossip, and supplies, just as did the steamer AMERICA. The AMERICA would share a similar fate of being stranded, but in her case, she would slip from the rock into deep water and today is the most popular wreck dive on Isle Royale.

A complete history of the stranding of the MOORE compiled by Todd Lindahl will appear in a future issue of this newsletter.

## **TODD LINDAHL PLAYING WITH HISTORY... ... his latest toy.**

I must admit that when KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl said with much excitement that he had finally found enough parts of a velocipede to make one a complete one, that I had no idea what he was talking about. When Todd told me, the best I could describe it as sort of a one-person railroad pump car/bicycle.

Through much work and help from friends, Todd was ready to peddle one down the track, but by doing so he learned it would mean going to jail as such a contraption on a Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) designated track is prohibited. *To understand why, see accompanying drawing.* The best Todd could do was place the velocipede on the KRHCC's concrete apron next to the NSSR mainline and go through all the motions of operating it.





For now, the velocipede is being stored at the KRHCC in hopes Todd can find some private rails upon which to place it. The velocipede will be on display at the KRHCC tie-in event to the Festival of Sail August 4 – 7 in Two Harbors.

In next month's newsletter Todd will enlighten us on this unique means of rail transportation.

Todd Lindahl enjoying today what he hoped to find under the Christmas tree years ago.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

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

### Donations

- Bruce and Pixie (Lindberg) Wright undesignated donation.
- Greg and Elizabeth Murray undesignated donation.

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