



Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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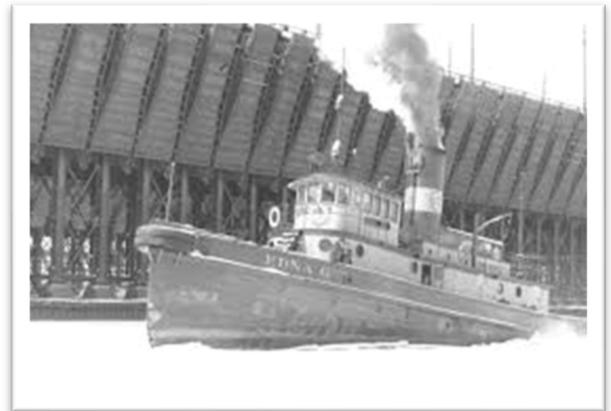
By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

EDNA G. CREW MAKES ICY RESCUE OF KR FISHERMAN

Compiled by Paul von Goertz

It was late afternoon on January 14, 1980 and EDNA G. fireman John Paul (“JP”) Klug was in the last few hours of his 12-hour shift. Normally on a January 14 day the crew of the EDNA G. would be preparing the tug for winter layup, but the mills out East were still demanding pellets and so the season had been extended.

Photo right: EDNA G. breaks ice in the TH harbor. Photo credit: Internet public domain



JP looked down the dock to where the 35’ diesel fish tug SHARON JON had been tied for the last few days and noticed it was not there. The SHARON JON was owned by Frank Johnson, son of long time Isle Royale fisherman, Melford Johnson. The boat was built in the mid-forties by Frank Muhlke of Bayfield for Sivertson Fisheries.



Photo left: The SHARON JON in Duluth, probably at Sivertson Bros. Fisheries. Photo credit: David J. Krause

Frank could usually be found fishing Isle Royal and the North Shore between Two

Harbors and KR. But now ice was settling in, and Two Harbors was a better choice than KR for ice-free water.

JP figured that Frank would have been lifting nets at sunrise and so should have been back by early afternoon. He told Captain Ojard and they agreed JP would call Frank's brother, Melford Jr. As darkness approached Melford called Coast Guard Duluth. They would dispatch the 180' ice breaker/buoy-tender MESQUITE.

The crew of the EDNA G. knew it would take the MESQUITE two to three hours to ready its crew and reach the Two Harbors area, so the crew comprised of Captain Ojard, Chester Bislow, Ivar Peterson, Russell Kutcha and JP Klug decided to head out into the darkness and "sea smoke," the fog created by the bitter cold air meeting the warmer lake water. "It's a seaman's duty," Captain Ojard would later say.

Clearing the Two Harbors break wall, Ojard repeatedly tried to make radio contact with Frank, but without success. But, following each transmission he detected a faint click on his receiver. Several more transmissions confirmed the click was from Johnson's malfunctioning radio. "He could read me, but I couldn't read him," said Ojard.

The weather was now well below zero, a somewhat clear night save for the sea smoke. After about three miles out they turned on the EDNA G.'s powerful search light, knowing that Frank would pick up the light through the dark long before his boat could be spotted from the EDNA'S pilothouse.

They called and called without any response other than a clicking sound.

"We slowly swept the dark horizon with our searchlight and over the radio asked Frank to hit his transmitting button when the light was in his direction," said Ojard.

Then it began to snow, which affects radar and so it was of little use. They continued with code using two clicks of the transmitting button meaning "yes." "Do you think you are in the vicinity of Knife River?" asked Ojard. Two clicks.

They kept moving slowly west through the blackness sweeping and resweeping the horizon. "We didn't want to run into him," remembered Ojard. Several more slow sweeps of the searchlight resulted in two clicks. There! That would be their course heading.

It was now about 10 PM - three hours into the search. The weather began to clear and they could see light along both north and south shores. More important they saw a faint light in open water and decided to head for it. It was Frank.

NEWSLETTER

“We hoped to get Frank on board before we started towing, but the weather was too rough and he could have been killed. So, Frank stayed on board and we towed him back to Two Harbors,” said Adolph

Photo right: Captain Adolph Ojard of the EDNA G.

Photo credit: Adolph Ojard, Jr.



The USCG MESQUITE, notified of the rescue, escorted them in. “We arrived at Two Harbors about 11:30 at night,” stated Ojard.

Due to a faulty valve unknown to Johnson, fuel had been pumped into the bilge and eventually he ran out.

Calling Frank an “old hand at fishing,” Ojard told how Johnson threw out a jury-rigged sea anchor consisting of whatever he could find that would put a drag on the bow to keep the boat headed into the wind and from rolling. But, he had still drifted about eight and a half miles towards Duluth.

Adolph considered it “a seaman’s duty” to attempt a rescue. “None of us thought it was a big deal,” Ojard remarked. However, “...the crew has to be commended on a job well done. They’re all good men. They’re real pros in their line (of work).”

As a result of the rescue, the crew of the EDNA G. received a letter of commendation from B. L. Wagner, then Superintendent of the DM&IR. It reads as follows:

“Messrs:

A. N. Ojard, Sr.	Captain
C. I. Bislow	Chief Engineer
I. J. Peterson	Lineman
R. N. Kuchta	Fireman
J.P. Klug	Fireman

Gentlemen:

At approximately 7 PM on the evening of January 14, 1980, you learned that a fishing boat operated by Frank Johnson of Knife River had not yet returned to port and was long overdue. You embarked on a rescue mission that resulted in Mr. Johnson and his vessel being returned safely to Two Harbors by midnight.

NEWSLETTER

As I understand, the rescue was carried out during bad weather conditions and high seas. I have also been informed that Mr. Johnson's boat was dead in the water and he could not transmit on his radio. The unique method in which you were able to locate Mr. Johnson by using your radio typifies the skills the crew of the EDNA G. displayed time and time again.

I commend you for your timely and courageous action. It resulted in the potential of saving a life.

A copy of this letter will be placed in your personal record file.

Yours truly,

B. L. WAGNER
Superintendent"

Editor's note:

Over the years I had heard bits and pieces of the EDNA G's rescue of a KR fisherman and the novel way by which the rescue was accomplished.

In trying to get the complete story, I pieced together several email exchanges with Adolph Ojard, Jr., information from KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl, EDNA G. historian Tom Koehler, former EDNA G. fireman John Paul (JP) Klug, and Rich Ojard who found a copy of the story about his uncle Adolph's feat in the spring 1980 issue of the DM&IR Railway's newsmagazine RANGER.

Becky Cameron, who wrote the story for the RANGER, credited a Lake County News Chronicle interview with Captain Ojard as the source for her information.

I researched and wrote this story last summer but saved it for this January issue when people could identify with the time of year this rescue was made. Adolph Jr. relied on his memory and I on all the notes I had gathered to make sure the story was retold as accurate as possible.

Very sadly, Adolph Jr. passed away on December 28, 2021 in retirement in Georgia near Atlanta, after a long illness. The KRHCC was greatly saddened by this news and extends its condolences to his family.

Adolph Jr. was a supporter of the KRHCC, born and raised in KR. When, as a board member of the KRHCC, I asked him if he would consider sponsoring the light that bathes the Veteran's Memorial at the KRHCC, he agreed without hesitation. Adolph Sr. served in the Merchant Marine in WWII, a branch of the U. S. military which is recognized on the memorial. A summary of his service can be found at the KRHCC.

JULEBYEN OUTREACH KEEPS GIVING BACK!

In the December issue of this newsletter, I shared “A Knife River Christmas Story” that generated some warm responses from readers.

To refresh your memory, I followed the path of the KRRC’s Julebyen Outreach to the Boys & Girls Club of Duluth, and how over several years it brought the KR community together to give the children a meaningful Christmas experience, and to let each child know how much he or she is valued.



The Outreach is in a “Pause” mode now and will be until the Club can find volunteers to chaperone up to 30 children ages 8 – 12, with one chaperone for every five children.

The Outreach had a balance of about \$600 so those of us who contributed to the Outreach decided to give the balance to the Club to help pay for their annual Christmas party, which was held December 22 at the Northland Dave Goldberg Branch in Duluth.

Photo left: What makes Christmas giving so special.
Photo credit: Emily Burnside (Boys & Girls Club)

For myself and others who contributed to the Outreach, the “Give back” was the happy faces of all the kids who experienced the magic of Julebyen over several years. Here is some more “give back” in the pictures taken at the kids’ Christmas party.

Photo right: The Julebyen Outreach contributed to these smiles! Photo credit: Emily Burnside (Boys & Girls Club)



NSSR RELEASES ITS 2022 TRAIN SCHEDULE FOR KR

The North Shore Scenic Railroad (NSSR) has released its scheduled trains to KR in 2022. NSSR executive director Ken Buehler said that three event trains are already on the “for sure” list based on all three trains being sold out in 2021.

The three event trains are:

- “Picnic Trains”: Every Saturday in June except for Grandma’s Marathon weekend.
- “Christmas Tree Train”: Saturday, November 26. This train ties into the KRHCC’s “Trees. Trains. Traditions” event on the same day. This train may also run on Sunday, the 27th.
- “Julebyen Express Train”: Saturday and Sunday December 2 & 3. These trains bring Julebyen festivalgoers to and from KR. While the trains are here, the NSSR makes them available at no cost to the KRHCC so that folks can take one of five trips into the woods of KR in search of mischievous trolls.

Buehler said that in addition to scheduled trips open to the public, he expects several private party train trips to KR this summer. “We think the restoration of the Knife River depot speaks so well for the community by how volunteers pitched in to get it done, and as an expression of how the town values its history,” said Buehler. “We are very pleased to offer this gem for our riders to experience.”

The KRHCC reminds newsletter readers to order tickets early once posted on the NSSR’s website www.duluthtrains.com as event trains usually sell out.



Photo left: The “Trees. Trains. Traditions.” event at the KRHCC on Saturday, November 27 tied to the NSSR’s “Christmas Tree Train.” “We sold out all 125 seats within days of posting the train on our website,” said Josh Miller, station manager. “We probably could have sold another 125 tickets, but as a first-time train, we wanted to make sure we could handle all involved with wrapping and loading trees onto a flatcar and unloading them directly into their owner’s cars back in Duluth.”

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz.

A LUCKY FIND FOR THE DEPOT – A PLATFORM CANOPY

In the summer of 2020, Carr Hobby in West Duluth (Lincoln Park) ceased business as the owner, Jack Carr, wanted to retire. Many model railroad and boat builders were saddened by the news, as were railroad and boat nerds in general. Jack and father, Marty, had a fabulous collection of railroad and Great Lakes marine antiques in addition to all their hobby stuff.

Jack opted for an online auction and so items sold at very high prices. Good for Jack, but not for the KRHCC as we could have used a lot of what he had to replicate a 1900s depot. Our bidders, Todd Lindahl and Randy Ellestad, left empty-handed.

Weeks later, as store cabinets and displays were being sold off, Randy got a call from the liquidator to ask if we wanted to buy a quarter scale replica of a platform canopy. A platform canopy covered the walkway that ran parallel to the railroad track that people walked to board the train. The canopy was custom built by Tom Gagnon, who worked at the Duluth train museum train shop, for Jack Carr as part of Jack's personal tabletop model railroad.

While your KRHCC board did not have in mind a specific use for the canopy, the price seemed reasonable and so we bought it with hopes we could use it.

Fast forward to last summer. A final pour of concrete was needed for the footing for the Lake County Veterans memorial, a beautiful piece of granite mounted at the KRHCC by the Two Harbors American Legion Post 109. We were facing a significant short-load penalty from North Shore Ready Mix.

Volunteer general contractor, Larry Ronning, suggested we think about where we could use additional concrete and at least get something for the short-load penalty. He suggested something to visually join the depot to the freight building.

Bingo! Use the platform canopy in such a way to visually join the two buildings and at the same time display historical images of the depot! The canopy was not long enough to cover the distance between the buildings, but that was OK as we needed a ten-foot wide-open space with gate so vehicles, like a plow truck, could get to the south side of the depot.

The photo, right, shows the canopy in place and forming a perfect shelter for carolers at Julebyen 2021. A length long shelf and display boards placed between posts will be added in the spring.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

The KRHCC is offering sponsorship of the canopy for \$1,500. Your name or organization's name will be placed on a sign board that will be seen by people





looking at historical material placed between posts, or by those who gather under the canopy as an eating area. Please remember the KRHCC is an IRS-recognized 501(c3) non-profit so your sponsorship is fully tax-deductible.

The delicate filigree in the canopy arches, photo left, is representative of the Victorian period, of which the depot is a part. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Photo right: The D&IR railroad's TH 5th Avenue depot boasted a wide platform canopy in this 1899 photo. Note the load on the baggage wagon in front of the canopy. Photo credit: Todd Lindahl



AND NOW... IN THE DEAD OF WINTER, A SUMMER STORY!

HISTORIC KR GAS BOAT 'JACKIE' LAUNCHED AFTER TWO YEAR RESTORATION



KR's oldest surviving gas boat, JACKIE, was successfully launched into the KR harbor on July 21 after a two-year restoration carried out by cousins Richard "Rich" and Mike Ojard. Rich did the restoration of the hull and deck, and Mike the engine. The original engine was a 2-cylinder Kermath, later to be replaced with a 1952 40 hp. Redwing.

Photo left: JACKIE returns to the KR Harbor after 50+ years. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Members of the Hill boat-building family of Larsmont built the 20' JACKIE in 1936 for Carl Erickson of Knife River, who named it for his youngest daughter, Jacqueline. It was fitted with a net-lifter and side roller, both of which are still in KR.

The Hill brothers would build a second boat for Carl in 1939, CRUSADER II, which is now owned by the KRHCC and is planned for restoration beginning this summer.

NEWSLETTER

Carl fished JACKIE until about the time he took possession of CRUSADER II. His sons-in-law, Ivar Petersen and Hans Ojard, Jr., then began to fish it. Ivar would have the Hill brothers make him a gas boat in 1947, and so Hans Jr. became the principal operator and at times the JACKIE's charter captain.

Hans's dad, Hans Sr., fished the boat too, often with grandsons Mike and Adolph Jr. from about 1957 to 1964. Hans then let his nephew, Rich Ojard, run JACKIE in the early '60s when Rich was still a young teen. Sometime in the late '60s or early '70s Hans gave the boat and all his commercial fishing paraphernalia to Tom's Logging Camp, a few miles west of KR, as part of a commercial fishing display.

For some reason, the owner of Tom's Logging Camp decided to do away with his commercial fishing display and so Mike Ojard retrieved JACKIE in 2003 and gave it to Hans Jr.'s son, Gary, who had intentions of restoring it. When those intentions did not take place, Rich Ojard (Gary's cousin) told Gary he would restore it and so in 2019 Gary gave it to him. From then to now, the restoration of the boat and engine was made.

Photo right: Rich Ojard gets JACKIE settled onto a real dock at the KR Marina, something she never had in the old Knife River harbor. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



JACKIE now joins two other gas boats with long ties to KR. The other two are the IVAR JON, also owned by Rich, and STAR, owned by me, Paul von Goertz. It is hoped at some point in time all three will occupy a shelter for "Historic Knife River Boats" at the KRHCC.



Photo left: Thomas Ojard, Rich Ojard's grandson, takes to the tiller of JACKIE like a pro. Thomas is the sixth generation Ojard to command JACKIE.

Photo Credit: Rich Ojard

PLANS UNDERWAY FOR KRHCC EVENT THAT TIES TO TALL SHIP FESTIVAL

The Tall Ship Festival that will be held in Two Harbors, August 4 – 7 will be the biggest event ever held in Lake County with thousands of people expected to view the 12 tall ships that will tie to the break wall. In years past the event, which takes place every four years, was held in Duluth. This summer the DECC dock face will be rebuilt and so is out of commission.

The KRHCC is planning an event that attracts Tall Ship goers as they travel to and from the festival. We are in discussion with our Viking ship and NSSR friends as to what the event might be, given we have three historical attractions: the KRHCC's 1900s depot, the Viking ship and what the NSSR may have available as a historic rail car.

For our plans to work out we will need volunteers to help in a variety of capacities to cover the four days of the event. Future e-newsletter issues will have more info on the event and how you may be able to help.

Goal #1 is to have fun!

HAVE YOU SEEN THE BOBCAT?!

It's been sighted several times and photographed as well in the area around the marina. It took out our semi-tame bunny living under our mudroom. According to Bill Berg, go-to KR retired naturalist, it'll be here as long as the rabbits and squirrels hold out.

JANUARY DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS

Donations:

Derek and Anne Wright, owners of Larsmont Trading Post - stanchion posts with retractable belt barriers (to protect depot displays).

Peter Geist to KRHCC programs and events that focus on families. *

Editor's note: Pete's parents are John and Lois Geist who for years supported all KR activities that benefited children. John was an ardent tennis player and taught many KR kids and adults how to play and enjoy the game. In recognition, the KR tennis court is named in John's honor.

David and Linda Grong – to KRHCC program and events that focus on families.*

NEWSLETTER

* All gifts received from now through January 31, 2022, will be directed to offsetting costs of KRHCC initiatives that families can enjoy and from which they also learn.

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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