



Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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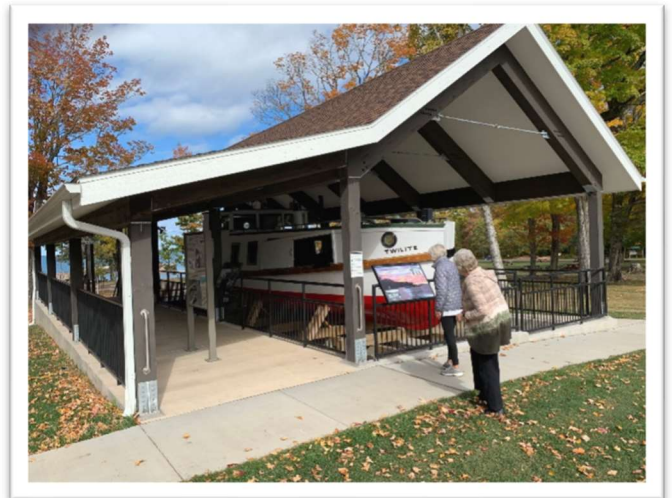
March 2022

By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

WORK BEGINS ON FISHING EXHIBIT THIS SPRING

In the February issue we told you the KRHCC was going to build a fishing exhibit this summer where the 35' fish tug, CRUSADER II, will be placed. At the same time restoration of the fish tug will begin.

We were inspired by the commercial fishing exhibit designed and built by the National Park Service that covers fish tug TWILIGHT in Little Sand Bay of the Apostle Islands National Seashore (image right). The boat is 35' long - same as CRUSADER II. This exhibit was able to take advantage of a sloping knoll to partially recess the boat into a below-grade "bathtub," and so no viewing ramp was needed. CRUSADER will have a decorative fence around it and interpretive displays as you see here. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

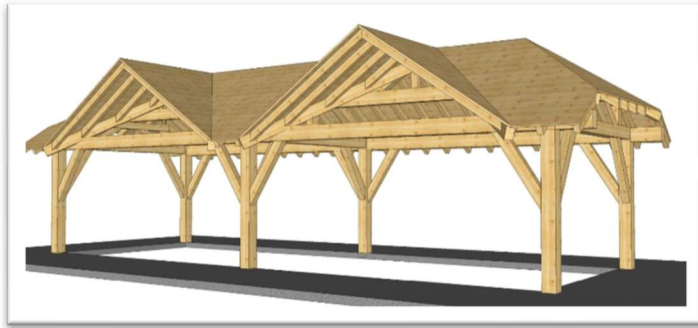


The CRUSADER II exhibit will be left uncovered until 2023 for several reasons.

Leaving the exhibit uncovered will let visitors see a boat restoration in progress. Of particular interest will be steam bending of the gunnel rails and hull planks that need to be replaced. Steam bending is fast becoming a lost art. Once a slab is laid down and CRUSADER II placed on it, a viewing deck will be built along side and parallel to the length of the boat so that visitors can see the interior of it. So, the first use of the

deck will be to provide a safe staging platform for those working to restore the boat. And, without a cover over their heads, workers will have full access to the boat's cabin and topsides.

Timing with our friends at North House Folk School is another reason.



Our plan is to have the North House School Folk House in Grand Marais (northhouse.org) conduct a class in post and beam construction during the summer of 2023, and then erect the framing over the exhibit later in the summer. The image left was designed by the North House Folk School (northhouse.org) and followed the

wishes of the KRHCC for a design with a distinctive Nordic flare and to emphasize the natural beauty of wood in frame construction. Note the dormers to give visitors a better view of the boat's topsides. Image courtesy of North House Folk School

The KRHCC will contract out the red metal roofing to match that of the depot and freight house. Image: Polygon Steel Shade Structures
Lead time for scheduling a class in post and beam construction is two years. In year one (2021) we worked out the design.



We are hopeful grants will provide most of the funding for the exhibit and its cover, but it is all based on the KRHCC having an equal amount of 1:1 match money. Every dollar donated counts twice with a 1:1 match. Please consider helping us build our match fund. The KRHCC is an IRS-recognized 501(c3) so all donations are fully tax deductible.

SPEAKING OF CRUSADER, HERE'S MORE ON CRUSADER I

In last month's issue we gave readers the history on CRUSADER II and touched briefly on CRUSADER I. We have since received more info on CRUSADER I, thanks to Bill Berg, our KR resident naturalist, who has taken a great interest in KR fish tugs and skiffs. Bill sent photos of CRUSADER I that he had copied from Wendall "Skip" Bissell's KR scrapbook. Speaking of Skip, I want to correct a mistake I made in last month's

newsletter with the caption I placed under the photo of Crown Prince Olav of Norway, who Christened CRUSADER II. I identified the small boy in the pic as Skip and being nine-years old. That was not correct. Skip was five at the time. Thanks to the one who called my attention to my error and again proving his mantra "I may not always be right, but I am never wrong."

OK, back to CRUSADER I. The boat was built by the Hill family of boatbuilders in Larsmont in 1930 and delivered to Carl Erickson of KR as an open gas boat and in photos appears to be about 25' long. The North Shore Commercial Fishing Museum has the boat at 35' and describes it as a "cab over." This would not coincide with the history Skip had. We'll leave that question for another time.



Image left of CRUSADER I as she was delivered from the Hill family of boat builders. Very pretty and graceful. Photo credit: Skip Bissell by way of Bill Berg.

Many boats built by the Hill family and other boat builders were delivered as open boats with the idea the owner could come up with his own deck and cabin design. It's been said "A Norwegian could not build a square fish box," and that may be true as I look at the two modifications Carl made to CRUSADER I. Apparently, he wasn't thrilled with his work either, which may explain why he commissioned the Hills to build CRUSADER II in 1939 complete with a cabin. The image right is the CRUSADER I with wheelhouse forward and awning canopy with drop down curtains. Photo credit: Skip Bissell by way of Bill Berg



Comment: I have seen many boats with the same name and with each boat upgrade the owner adds a I, II, III, etc. Best name I saw was "My Last Boat III."

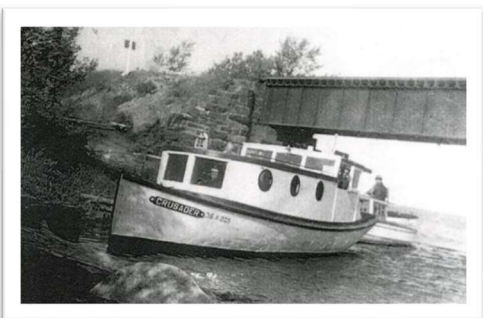


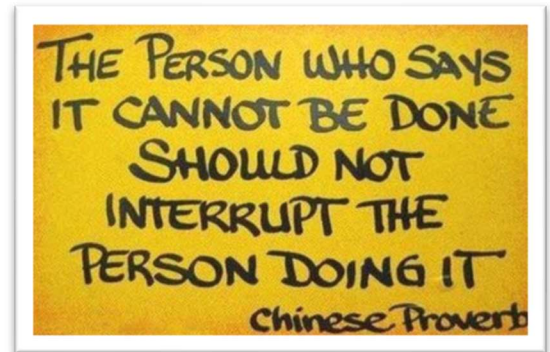
Image Left: CRUSADER with full cabin tied upriver above railroad bridge. My experience in boating tells me a cabin of this size would have made the boat a bit unmanageable in heavy winds and seas. Photo credit: Skip Bissell by way of Bill Berg

**IT'S OFFICIAL!
KRHCC 20-YEAR LEASE SIGNED.
KRHCC GOOD TO 2042.**

Any project the scope of the depot restoration would attract naysayers. A couple of comments we remember are “The Rail Authority will never give you a lease!” Well, they did, a five-year renewable in 2018 at \$1 a year. Then after we started the restoration, we heard “You’ll build it and then they’ll not renew your lease and so they will own it!”.

I think the 20-year renewable lease at \$1 a year we just negotiated settles both those arguments quite nicely. I can hear the next one from the naysayers: “A dollar a year! Are you crazy? What’s wrong with fifty cents!” Good grief...

Image right: A Chinese proverb we could ponder on. Image credit: Public domain.



THE GREAT KR RECORD STEELHEAD HOAX

**“Oh, what a tangled net we weave when first we practice to deceive.”
Sir Walter Scott (with liberties taken)**

I deliberated on whether or not to retell this story as it is a rather bazaar piece of KR history and debatably part of its culture, of which we may not be too proud. But, we must remember that the KRHCC IS the repository for KR’s history AND culture. So therefore, as this story is both history and culture, I feel obligated to record for future generations. To protect those involved, I will give you the dots which you can try to connect to arrive at the whole story.

My sources for the story are the brother-in-law of the one I will refer to as RH (not the initials of the party in question), and the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*.

First, understand KR has a long history of fish poaching, perhaps because early commercial fishermen were frustrated by fishing limits placed on them by state and federal agencies, when they felt fishing stocks were more than adequate. As a result, they relied on “square hooks” placed in otherwise restricted areas to even the score.

And, so it was in the dark of night in the spring of 1974 that square hooks were run across the Knife River near the mouth. Whoever placed it was amazed at the size of the steelhead flopping in it just before he lifted it before sunrise. He wanted to weigh it and so called RH. RH was an enthusiastic steelhead angler, and also had a high school friend who certified scales and so got the lunker weighed. A whopping 17 pounds, six ounces.

From here the story gets a bit more involved. RH couldn't contain his excitement about the big fish and told "a few" steelheader friends about it. Once they saw it, they convinced him that he should claim ownership of it, submit the certified weight to the DNR, and if it was a state record, bragging rights would forever be his.

To support this dubious suggestion, they pointed out the fish had no markings from flopping around in the square hooks, its weight was confirmed on a recently certified scale, and he already was recognized as an accomplished steelheader. So that's what RH did. Surprisingly (I think), the state DNR accepted his documentation, and it was a state record steelhead! So now you know how I refer to RH as RH - "Record Holder."

Since 1974 I would get my yearly fishing license with trout stamp and the rule book that came with it. In the book was the list of all the state record catches and under "Steelhead," there was the weight of the KR steelhead and where it was caught. It was good for a laugh for all of us who knew how the fish was really caught. During the winter of 2002-03, RH, who was now facing a life-threatening illness, told his friend who certified the fish, that he was going to pull his record. He didn't say why, only that "he had been bothered by it far too long." RH died shortly thereafter. I knew RH and he was a good guy.

But... there is more to the story, according to Chris Niskanen writing in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* in May of 2003. In 1980, a man by the name of Scott Thorpe caught a monster steelhead in Lake Superior. It weighed 16 pounds, six ounces, but he didn't bother to register it because the record "caught" by RH was 17 pounds, six ounces. So, he mounted the fish and put it on his wall to remind him of a great day of fishing on Lake Superior. When Thorpe read about the record steelhead being withdrawn by RH (I read about it too, in the *Duluth News Tribune*), he made an attempt to claim the record, only to learn the scale used to weigh his fish back in 1980 had burned in a fire, and the guy who regularly certified fish had retired. So, end of that idea.

In case you're wondering, the state steelhead record today is 16 pounds, six ounces caught in Devil Track River near Cook, also in 1980.

But, we KRers can at least claim the largest steelhead “taken” in Minnesota waters was from the Knife at 17 pounds, six ounces.

And that my fellow anglers, is The Great Knife River Record Steelhead Hoax.

AND, AS AN ASIDE NOTE TO THIS STORY...

It may have been sometime in the early 80s when I was approached by a native KRer if I would object if he ran a 100-feet of square hooks out from our beach after dark, with the assurance it would be pulled before dawn.

I pondered the request and concluded it sounded adventuresome, and I was curious as to how the hooks would be run out and what we might catch. Square hooks were conveniently found in the size for lake trout (2 ½” opening). I had the raft and all was a go for a moonless night. Then, about two days prior to executing our plan, the DNR spread the story through town that the next KRer caught poaching would be fined \$1,000 and placed in the Lake County slammer for three days – period. End of idea.



Steelhead are not native to Lake Superior. They were introduced in the mid-1890s by state and federal agencies concerned about declining populations of native brook trout. They now reproduce naturally and have established a self-sustaining population. Photo credit: NOAA Fisheries

MARTIN CHECKLIN – KR’S MASTER CARPENTER OF WHIMSY

Ever since making KR our home nearly 50 years ago, I have been curious about the architectural detail of certain buildings that resembles something from a fairyland. In short, I’d call it “whimsical.” There are at least three samples of which I am writing.

One is most evident; Martin’s distinctive architectural embellishments (image right) can be seen in Smokey Kendall’s on Scenic 61. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz
The other two are barely visible. The first is the little house across from Kendall’s Fish at the entrance to Kendall Road, and the second the remnants of what appears to be a replica of a lighthouse with an octagonal



top where the light would be. It is on private property and can only be seen from the water along the KR shoreline.

I talked to several of KR's older residents about these buildings and learned Martin Checklin built them about 65 – 71 years ago. The spelling of "Checklin" may not be correct.

Lifelong KR resident, Audrey Carlson, remembers Martin built and lived in the small house across from Kendall's, and she walking past it on her way to the KR school. "I don't remember much about him," said Audrey. "He worked at Kendall's mostly outside and as a handyman. He was old back then and had a long white beard. He stayed pretty much to himself."

"From what I understand, Martin was a skilled carpenter and used only hand tools. My guess he was also a pretty creative guy and perhaps a Romantic, judging by building embellishments right out of some fairytale book."

Lowell ("Smokey") Kendall family members remember that Martin Checklin along with their dad, Lowell Sr., had indeed collaborated on the design and construction of "Smokey Kendall's" some 60-70 years ago, and always used hand tools.



The little house (image) across from Kendall's Fish on Kendall Road was where Martin lived and that building probably is where he let his creativity go unchecked. It remains barely visible and will be gone before too long. It is on private property at corner of Kendall Road and Scenic 61 and can be seen from Scenic 61. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

The lighthouse replica appeared to be somewhat structurally sound when Mary and I first saw it from the water in the early 70s. But the lower section, which supported the tower, has collapsed and only the octagonal light platform (circled in red) is just barely visible through the under growth. It is on private property and can only be seen from the water along the KR shoreline. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



I am hoping readers of this newsletter can give more insight into Martin Checklin. Almost all KR elders with whom I have spoken remember him, but with little or no recall of who he was. Maybe he was just a private romantic and preferred to live in a world of his own.

Anyone with a photo or more info on Martin Checklin, please send to info@krhcc.org and I will include in a future issue.

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Undesignated donation from Mark and Claudia Stenson.

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