



# Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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

March 2024

By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

## **BOAT SHELTER A “GO!”**

### **IRRR AWARDS KRHCC \$30,000 CULTURAL & TOURISM GRANT!**

After 35 years of effort by the Two Harbors community, which rescued CRUSADER II in 1989, and by the KRHCC beginning in 2023, CRUSADER II will finally have a shelter built this summer.

The KRHCC learned Wednesday, March 13, that its application for an Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR) Cultural & Tourism grant had been approved. The agency’s grants are funded *through taxes paid by Minnesota’s mining industry.*



The \$30K grant required that the amount requested be matched by other sources. This was achieved with private donations, a \$10,000 grant from the Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation, \$500 from the LaBounty Family Fund, and a \$5,000 challenge match from Odyssey Resorts which was met by its homeowners for total of \$10,000. Many, many thanks to those who made donations and to the two foundations!

The IRRR is a Minnesota economic development agency located in Eveleth. Its mission is to “invest in resources to foster vibrant growth and economic prosperity in northeastern Minnesota.” The agency’s Cultural & Tourism grant is awarded to applicants whose projects “support arts, culture, history, tourism and recreational activities, enhance the quality of life in the region and attract visitors.”

The successful bidder for the shelter, which includes the boat, adjacent viewing deck with five interpretive displays, was Tim Anderson Construction of Knife River, whose company has an impeccable reputation for design and quality workmanship. The KRHCC is already meeting with Tim to finalize building design, materials, timelines and cost. Some desirable design amenities may need to be dropped to keep the KRHCC from draining its checkbook. Can you help keep the structure from looking like a hay bale barn? Send donations to: KRHCC, POB 240, Knife River, MN 55609. Your donation is totally tax deductible. Thank you.

## KNIFE RIVER AND INLAND SPORT FISHING

By Todd Lindahl, KRHCC Historian & Archeologist

Photos from Todd Lindahl's collection

When one thinks of Knife River and fish what immediately comes to mind is the idea of a lonely fisherman of Norwegian descent out in his wooden skiff on Lake Superior. But there is another different relationship between fish and Knife River that is less well known.

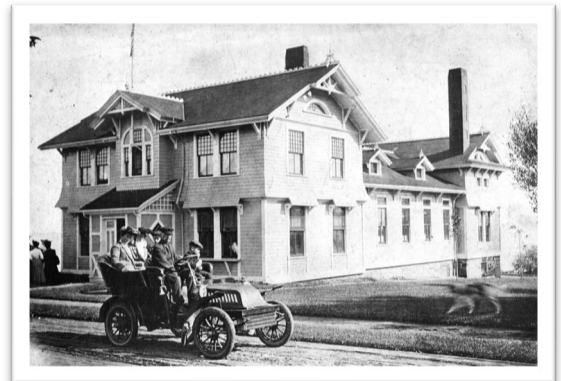
The traditional one dates to the American Fur Company fish collection station that was established at Knife River in 1837. This other association, however, involves inland streams and lakes that were accessed by the Alger-Smith Lumber Company's logging railroad known as the Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railway.



Interest in north shore inland fishing for trout came about as early as June 1886, when the Baptism River Trout Club planted 10,000 young trout in the river. The only government fish hatchery at the time was the one at Lester River built in 1885 (image left). It was concerned, however, only with Lake Superior commercial fishing. The main building is still there today and is owned by the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD).

The unique architecture of the hatchery was worth a stop during a Sunday afternoon drive along the North Shore (image right).

It is unknown where the Baptism River Trout Club got their stock, but it was likely purchased through the federal fish hatchery. The club had plans in 1886 to build a hatchery of its own somewhere on the river, but this plan never materialized. They did, however, purchase a bulldog. A Duluth newspaper questioned how that would aid in hatching fish.



In May 1891, the club was noted as being "a jolly fishing party" that had ventured out from Duluth to fish for some years past and was now about to head out again. They sent a message to their St. Paul members to join them on a packet (north shore passenger boat) for two days on the famous trout stream.



They arrived in a private railroad car attached to the end of the passenger train. Col. C. H. Graves (image left) was the spokesman for the Duluth group. He was mayor of Duluth and a senator. Mr. C. C. Brown, a comedian and musician, provided the entertainment. Access over land to the river was likely over an ancient Indigenous trail since there were

## NEWSLETTER

no roads here at the time. Because of the remote nature of the streams on the north shore, this activity was very much the exception.

The State of Minnesota by 1907 was looking at establishing a fish hatchery or rearing pond of its own somewhere in the area. The Merrill & Ring Lumber Company logging dam at the mouth of the Split Rock River had been abandoned since 1906 and seemed the perfect candidate. Unfortunately, the dam was destroyed by a severe storm in 1908. The cost of rebuilding it was judged too costly and so that plan was discarded.

That same storm had also destroyed the estate of Thomas Nestor which included a railroad dam at the mouth of the Gooseberry River. The Nestor Lumber company, which had built the dam and logging railroad in 1900, decided to close its logging operations in 1909. It left a huge amount of white pine uncut along the Gooseberry and Split Rock River watersheds. Their remaining timber was sold to other companies such as the Alger-Smith Lumber Company and the Virginia & Rainy Lake Lumber company.

The eastern portion of the railroad of the estate of Thomas Nestor crossed Alger-Smith's Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railway (D&NM) at the West Split Rock River and continued northward. The D&NM purchased this and the timber along it and made it into their "Greenwood Lake Branch." They extended the track farther north but never reached Greenwood Lake. The track passed by Langley Lake where they had a small logging camp with about 75 men.

Meanwhile, the Minnesota Game & Fish Commission decided that Langley Lake might make a suitable trout rearing pond. Furthermore, the Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railway mainline paralleled Lake Superior inland and crossed many streams and skirted numerous lakes. This was the perfect setup for planting trout since the roads in these remote areas were crude and at times impassable. The stage road from Two Harbors to Grand Marais had been built in 1899, but it was intended generally just for winter use.

The Minnesota Game & Fish Commission owned a special railroad coach named the *Glenwood* that was adapted to house a crew in one end of the car and transport fish in the other half. There individual cans containing fish had oxygen pumped into them to keep the fish alive to where they would be released. Ice was added to keep the water cold. A D&NM engine would take the *Glenwood* up the Greenwood Lake Branch and set it out on a short spur on the shore of Langley Lake. The fish would be netted and placed in the cans to be moved to their allotted rivers and lakes.

The D&NM liked this arrangement since they could charge the state for every mile it moved the *Glenwood* over its tracks (image right, *Glenwood* a.k.a. Fish car). Better still, the railroad started offering "fish specials" from 1908 on, which became very popular with sport fishermen. Extra passenger cars were leased from other railroads and special timetables were printed and given to everyone who bought a ticket. It showed what time the train would arrive at each river or lake going both northbound and southbound. The engine whistle would be blown about a mile away to alert the fishermen that the train would soon be arriving.



## NEWSLETTER

In 1916, railroad president John Millen died suddenly from a heart attack. He had been a dedicated railroad man and had long term great expectations for the future of the D&NM. His son-in-law, J. W. Bayley, took over then as president, but wanted to get out of the logging and railroad business. In 1917, the Greenwood Lake Branch was abandoned and access to the Langley Lake rearing pond was lost. At this time the state built the French River Fish Hatchery and a second similar smaller one on the Baptism River at Finland.



The D&NM was finally allowed to abandon its mainline track in July 1921, and was taken up in 1923. By this time however the roads had improved substantially, and fish could be transported by truck. These trucks were now loaded with fish from the car *Glenwood* near the Two Harbors depot into the early 1930s.

The dream of the Baptism River Trout Club to have a fish hatchery on the Baptism River finally came true after 31 years and with no bulldog required. In this way Knife River and the D&NM played an important early role in establishing sport trout fishing in the streams and lakes along the north shore. It is a legacy that continues to this day.

Image left: A fine catch of river trout

## RESOURCEFULL SOUTH SHORE FISHERMEN'S RESPONSE TO CRASH OF LAKE TROUT ENDS WITH HEARTBREAKING RESULTS

My dad was born in Bergen, Norway (of German descent), and as a child and young teen he spent a lot a lot of time on the Bergen waterfront watching over his dad's sailboat and older brother's gas skiff, and, I assume, trying to stay out of mischief.

His family would immigrate to southern Minnesota in 1921. He would eventually find his way to Duluth to be near the water, seek relief from his hay fever, and start a veterinary medicine practice.

He soon became enchanted with the south shore, Wisconsin, and its fishing villages of Port Wing, Cornucopia (Corny) and Bayfield. Our family would travel Wisconsin Hwy 13 at least twice a year to enjoy the scenery and to see what activity might be taking place in these villages.

To get the waterfront news from Corny he'd talk to Emory Jones or one of his brothers, and in Bayfield, Halvor Reitan. (See the January 2021 issue of this newsletter under "Recent News" to learn more about Halvor and Emory and the sinking of the fish tug JOHN FRIANT).

Image right: A good day of trolling on Lake Superior before the lake trout crash. Emory is second from left. Photo courtesy of Cornucopia Historic Green Shed Museum





## NEWSLETTER

Both Emory and Halvor were commercial fishermen and with the demise of the lake trout, and because they both owned waterfront property, each created something of a marina. The Jones brothers had built a large barn-like building on their property to support their fishing operations and now found it useful for the needs of pleasure boaters.



One trip in maybe 1955 I saw about a half dozen or more fish tugs 25-35' long rafted two and three feet deep alongside the south face of the barn. They were all gray and weathered and in various degrees of sinking. There was a boy about my age (11 or 12 years old) jumping from boat to boat along the narrow boat decks. That looked like fun and together we inspected each boat.

Two thoughts come to mind: The *first* was, “Why were these boats allowed to sink instead of being pulled from the water?” It could be there was no room on land judging by the photo of Emory’s boatyard in Cornucopia (Image above left: The fishing fleet in winter storage thought to be 1957 but may be earlier. Many would not see water again. Photo courtesy of Cornucopia Historic Green Shed Museum). The *second* thought I had was – “Where were my parents as I was leaping among the weathered and sinking boats?” No such thing as “helicopter parents” back then and that was always fine with me.

In 1956 or early 1957 we stopped in Corny and this time there was big news! Emory, his three brothers, and their 85-year-old father, and with help from friends, were building a large fish tug to sail to the Gulf where the brothers would start their careers as saltwater fishermen. A gutsy plan. But, for a resourceful family that had fished all their lives, there may not have been too many other options for making a living in the Corny area. Across the lake, north shore fisherman also lost their livings with the crash of the lake trout. But they had options of working for the D&MIR or Reserve Mining.

According to the *Ashland (WI) Daily Press*, the boat was 58 feet long with a beam of 17' with height from keel to deck of 8'. It was built to hold 25 tons of fish. The plan was to take it the Gulf of Mexico by way of Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, Chicago, and then through the Illinois waterway to the Mississippi. It was not clear who would comprise the crew. The boat, which would be named the LILLIAN J, under construction. Tom Jones, Sr. had been a fisherman and boat builder all his life and I assume was the foreman. Photo right courtesy Cornucopia Historic Green Shed Museum.



## NEWSLETTER



Image left: Tom Jones Sr., Sonny Johnson, Emory Jones, Tom Jones, Jr., and Robert Jones atop the LILLIAN J. before launching September 1957. Photo courtesy Cornucopia Historic Green Shed Museum

It was fun for me (later to become a boat builder/restorer hobbyist) to see the boat being built with its graceful lines and surrounded by the aroma of fresh-cut wood. Emory's dad's job was to place thousands of wooden plugs in countersunk fastener holes.

It must have been the following spring when our family of six piled into my dad's Roadmaster Buick for our annual spring drive along Wisconsin Hwy 13. As we neared Corny, we strained to see the big boat, but it was gone. We wondered if the Joneses had made it to the Gulf and if the gamble had paid off.

On Sunday, June 30, 1963, my dad wanted to take our annual spring drive down highway 13 to Bayfield. My three sisters and mother had enough of boat talk so just my dad and I went. Three days later, on Wednesday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, my dad died of a massive heart attack at age 56. The shock was nearly unbearable.

I don't know if it was on that Sunday, June 30 that my dad learned from Corny fisherman what had happened to the Joneses, or if it was an earlier drive to Bayfield, but he did tell me what had happened.

The brothers had made it to the Florida gulf and got set up for fishing, only to discover local wholesalers would not buy their fish to protect the interests of their local fishermen. I can see their logic. A great numbers of Great Lakes fishermen put out of business by the sea lamprey relocating to the Gulf states could create an oversupply of fish, drive down prices, and put local fishermen out of business.

It was a nasty twist of fate for the Jones family. First to lose their business to the lamprey, then the investment of time and money in building their new boat, the cost of all the saltwater fishing gear, and then have the market closed to them. There was no alternative but to sell their boat and gear for what they could get and head home.

Emory would eventually sell his property to Dave and Mary Beth Tillman, refugees from the metro who began boating out of Emory's marina and became great friends with him. With hard work they created a full-service marina with haul-out slip and lift. They restored Emory's barn and made a B&B and gift/tackle shop out of it. They retired a few years ago and now their son runs it.

Image right: LILLIAN J. next to the Jones' barn which years later would become a B&B. The boat's cabin would come later as would the engine installation. Photo courtesy Cornucopia Historic Green Shed Museum



I have many boat trips to Bayfield with an overnight at Corny and would tie to Emory's dock and enjoy some conversation with him. He was always critical of how I tied my lines, even though I had been boating since age 12 and was former USCG, but that was OK.

I don't think he ever charged me for an overnight stay. One reason was he loved my boat which had belonged to my father. It was a 31' Norwegian-built motor-sailer with varnished white pine hull and mahogany cabin – a very pretty boat and I think he liked seeing it at his dock.

From what I understand Emory would eventually be placed in a nursing home and I assume from there departed to a place of calm seas and where each lift of a net is filled with lake trout.

*Editor's note: Many thanks to Cornucopia's Historic Green Shed Museum for helping provide content and photos for this story.*

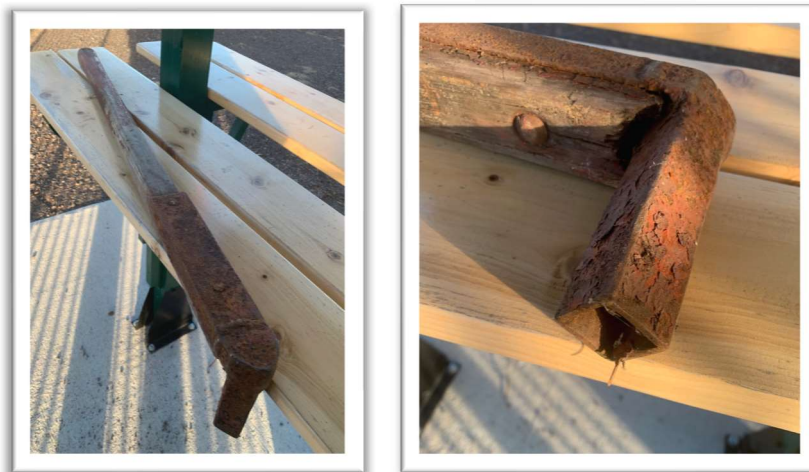
## REBUILD OF CRUSADER II CORRECTS SOME MISCONCEPTIONS

### **CRUSADER II did not use a steering wheel, but a tiller.**

While cleaning out the interior of CRUSADER II last summer, Doug Hill found a tiller. In the bilge. First thought was it might have served as a backup to the traditional wheel should its cable assembly ever fail. But no, CRUSADER II was steered by a tiller, which I thought odd for a 35' boat. But then again, a tiller gives almost instant turning capability and can be moved by a leg or hip leaving hands free.

KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl did some investigating and found a round hole in the wheelhouse deck (floor) that gave access to square stock at the top of the rudder shaft that connects to the rudder. The tiller has a socket that fits into the square stock that allows the tiller to be removed and out of the way of anything being loaded or unloaded through the double doors at the back of the wheelhouse.

Todd's confirmation of the use of a tiller was from Mike Fitzgerald who accompanied his father, Tom, who was an owner of CRUSADER II, on many fishing trips. Mike said they fished out of Port Wing as they felt KR dock fees were too expensive!



CRUSADER II's tiller  
Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

## **CRUSADER II's hull planking is Cypress!**

I will take the blame for starting the controversy over CRUSADER II's hull planking. Everything I had read about the hull said it was made from "cypress," including the interpretive signage next to CRUSADER II when it was displayed on Lighthouse Point in Two Harbors. It was said by locals that cypress was the reason for CRUSADER II's longevity.

My understanding about fish tugs was that cost was a major issue, even to the point where some fishermen had the boat builder just build the hull and the fisherman would install the engine and build the cabin. White pine is plentiful in our area and has good rot resistance. Cypress has superior rot resistance and grows in southeastern states on wet and swampy land. Might higher material cost and shipping outweigh the benefit of its superior rot resistance?

In the fall of 2022, I was working on the depot and two gentlemen approached me. They were descendants of the Hill family of boat builders from Larsmont and wanted to see CRUSADER II, which was yet to be restored. CRUSADER II had been built Reuben and Helmer Hill in 1938-39. My visitors were Bob (age 92 at the time), Helmer's oldest son, and Douglas (age 56 at the time), son of Helmer's youngest son Lowell.

I peppered them with questions about the construction of CRUSADER II and other boats built by the Hills. One question was CRUSADER II's hull planking and Bob assured me quite confidently it was white pine. He added that its rot resistance could be enhanced if it was kept painted and the paint allowed to thoroughly dry.

Bob said the Hills did use cypress when they could take advantage of a natural curvature of its roots that could be used to create a graceful and strong stem, or curved keel at the bow. Ah hah!! I thought, my instincts were right about hull planking. Bob had a lot of credibility with me because as a nine-year-old kid his small size enabled him to clinch nails at the very bow that fastened hull planking to oak ribs.

Last summer Doug Hill, who spent his summer volunteering to restore CRUSADER II, was removing part of the garboard plank that butts into the keel, so had a sample of the hull wood. Doug, who lives in Florida and familiar with cypress, scraped the paint off it and smelled it – cypress!

I told him to give "Uncle Bob" a call and tell him of his discovery, which Doug did. Bob walked back a bit what he said about Hill boats not using cypress for hull planking. Seems the standard hull planking for Hill boats was white pine, but cypress was available as an option. Carl Erikson, who commissioned the Hills to build CRUSADER II, apparently felt the cost difference between cypress and white pine was worth it and so ordered cypress for the hull planking.

As I was writing the June 2023 newsletter "The Real Rescuers of CRUSADER II" I came across some archive photos of the rededication of CRUSADER II following a cosmetic rebuild in 1994. The pictures show Reuben and Helmer at the rededication with an interpretive sign (which we have) nearby which states the hull material is cypress. We can assume the Hill brothers would have read it and called out the error had the sign said the hull was white pine.



## NEWSLETTER

While it is good the debate over hull material is over, the CRUSADER II interpretive display mounted on the viewing deck next to the fish tug says the hull is white pine. It will be needed to be corrected with a Post-It note as cost to correct the display is more than \$2,000.

## FEBRUARY DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS

### Memorial

- Anonymous in memory of murdered chickens

-----

*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)*

*If you have family or friends who may enjoy reading this newsletter, they can access the current and all past issues on the "Current News" page of our website at: [krhcc.org](http://krhcc.org)*

*Newsletter published and copyrighted by Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center. Editor/Writer: Paul von Goertz; Historians/Researchers: Todd Lindahl, Randy Ellestad and Paul von Goertz; Graphic Design and Production: Anne-Lù Hovis.*

*No portion of this newsletter may be reproduced without written permission from the KRHCC. Contact: [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org)*

© KRHCC 2024