



Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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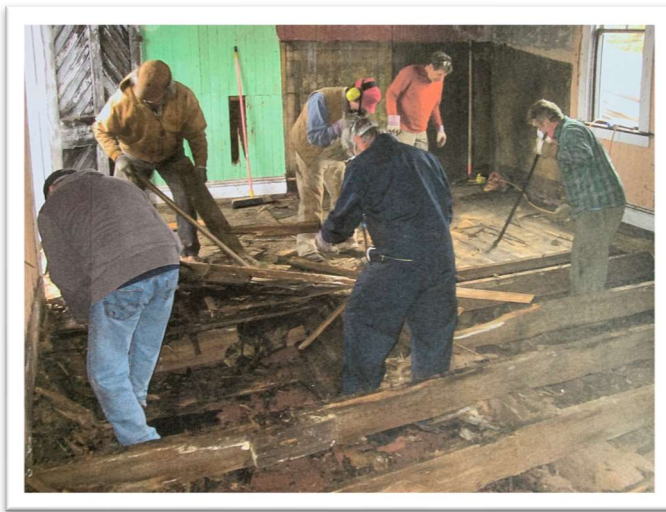
By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

THE MYSTERY OF THE HIDDEN SPITTOON.

By Todd Lindahl

In May 2018, the restoration of the Knife River (KR) depot began in earnest. One of the first acts was to take up and remove the rotted hardwood flooring and sub-floor, which was beyond the point of saving.

The crew of volunteers began in the agent's office area. Larry Ronning was looking under the still intact women's waiting room floor and noticed a spittoon (also known as a "cuspidor") sitting upright under it. A short time later he was able to hook it with a long tool and pull it out. It was one of three cast iron and enamel cuspidors that had been purchased by the railroad for the Knife River depot.



The spittoon was found in the muck under the rotted floor. The depot was supported by wood posts, which had also rotted. Eventually the depot would be jacked up with house jacks and a slab poured under it.

Image: Volunteers remove the rotted floor. Larry Ronning, in back in red shirt, looks like he may have just spotted the spittoon!

Photo: Todd Lindahl

NEWSLETTER

The photo (right) shows the footing for the chimney, which surprisingly was still plumb after all these years. All prep work was done by volunteers. Photo: Todd Lindahl



The mystery was how the spittoon got under the waiting room floor when there was no access from the outside. It must have been thrown under there when the flooring was changed out by the railroad B&B Department (Bridge & Building), or when the chimney was repaired, and a new footing added at some point. These would be the only times there would have been access to the space under the floor.

Who would have done this and why?

The B&B boys had been up to a little more mischief than poaching spittoons if they were in fact the cuspidor culprits. While working in the attic in 2019 the restoration crew found two hidden whiskey bottles. Undoubtedly, they were hidden there while the roof was being worked on. These two P M Regal whiskey bottles were post-prohibition era since they were both embossed with: “Federal law forbids the sale or re-use of this bottle.” This language appeared on every bottle of alcohol from 1933 to 1964.

One thing is clear though, and that is the hidden spittoon is a man’s cuspidor and not a woman’s. Most people today are shocked to learn that it was acceptable for women to chew and spit snuff during the Victorian era (1837-1901). British monarch Queen Victoria chewed snuff and therefore, if it was alright for the queen to do it, then it was alright for any women to do so.

Oddly, it was still unacceptable for women to smoke cigarettes until the 19th Amendment was ratified on August 18, 1920. Women gained the right to vote with this act and the general attitude of the role of women in public rapidly changed.

On Monday, June 18, 1900, Lake County Sheriff Emil Nelson along with Two Harbors Police Chief Yernberg acting as deputy, drove to a place 1½ miles east of Knife River. There they arrested the occupants of a “disorderly house” run by Lizzie Wallace. The place had been in operation only since the past Saturday night.

NEWSLETTER

Arrested along with Lizzie Wallace was Mrs. Blair who claimed to be the cook at the establishment. Their appearance was deceptive, and both could easily have been taken to be about 40 years of age. In court Lizzie pleaded guilty of being the landlady of a "house of questionable character." The two were fined \$5.00 each by the judge, but they had only \$2.00 between them and so remained in custody to serve out their time.

They soon asked the sheriff if they could smoke in their cell. Sheriff Nelson offered them cigarettes, but they refused saying they were "too ladylike for that" and instead requested clay pipes and peerless tobacco.



The restored hidden man's spittoon on left, women's spittoon on right.
Photo: Todd Lindahl

A man's spittoon such as the one found under the depot floor was of the classical hourglass shape. Most spittoons were commonly made of cast iron with enamel coating or brass or glazed pottery. By contrast a women's spittoon is cylindrical with a tapered top and no lip. Men could aim for the center from a distance as women were expected to hold their dress back and lean over the spittoon directly above it and let gravity do the work.

Railroad company records reveal that the Knife River Depot was issued three iron (and enamel) cuspidors. These were stock items that could be purchased from any general store or hardware store. One would have been for the men's waiting room, the second for the depot office, and the third for the women's waiting room. It is unclear if one of them was a women's style or not.

While the Post Office was located in the depot, the mailboxes were accessed from the women's waiting room. This meant that single men would have regularly entered this

space to pick up their mail. Therefore, it is likely the spittoon for this room would have been a man's type, which could be used by either gender if it were necessary.

Before coming to Knife River, the Alger-Smith Lumber Company operated a logging railroad in northern Michigan called the Manistique Railway. This line had been nicknamed the "Myrtle Navy" because so many of its employees smoked this Detroit-based brand of smoking tobacco. Alger-Smith was based out of Detroit.

By the time the company moved to the north shore in May 1898, Alger-Smith began to discourage the use of smoking tobacco products. There were a couple of obvious reasons for this. The company understood that their workers would take too much time to roll a cigarette, light it, and then smoke it. If they were doing this, they were not engaged in cutting or moving logs.

The second reason was because of fire hazard. Most early bunkhouses used straw for mattresses and cigarette ash dropped on it could quickly burn a camp building down. Snuff was sold to the men usually in one-pound crockery jars. Half pound jars were available too, but they were not as popular in this region of the state.

In earlier camps a five-pound or ten-pound jar was kept in the camp office. The clerk had to weigh the amount of snuff requested and charge for it accordingly. Later smaller jars became the standard at half a pound. The jars stayed in the bunkhouse during the day and the men carried an amount needed to last the day in a pouch, or sometimes a birch bark container. Often local Native Americans would make these containers since they could trade them or sell them to the loggers.

With large numbers of loggers coming through the Knife River depot, emptying the spittoons was probably a constant source of irritation for the depot agent. Depots had signs announcing that spitting on the depot platform outside, or in the passenger cars was strictly forbidden.

The restoration of the Knife River spittoon was carried out by Tom Koehler and Todd Lindahl to make it presentable for display. And after being under the floor for about 100 years, it's doubtful that even Sherlock Holmes could catch the cuspidor culprit and solve the case of the hidden Knife River spittoon.

KNIFE RIVER IMMORTALIZED IN NEW ZEALAND POSTAGE STAMP

By Jim Allert

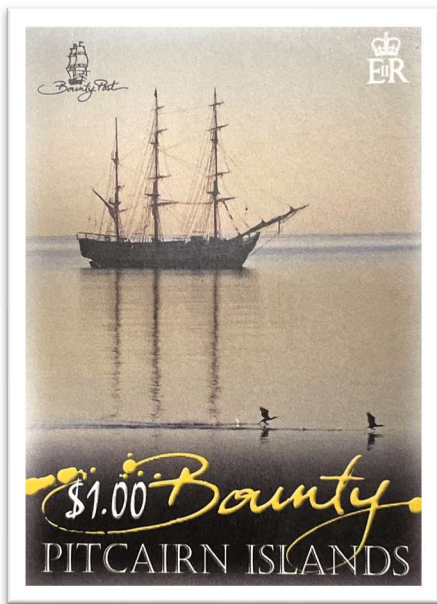
The account of the mutiny on the British sailing ship BOUNTY ends when Lieutenant Fletcher Christian seizes the ship and he and other crewmen ultimately flee to remote Pitcairn Island in the South Pacific. Their descendants are there today.

When some of the ships from the Duluth 2012 Tall Ship festival were in KR for an overnight experience (see August issue of KRHCC newsletter), I got up early and walked up the shore to get a glimpse of the BOUNTY before she left.

Just before sunrise I photographed the Bounty, serenely at anchor off Knife Island, with a laker going by in the distance, and as it happened two birds cut across the frame just as I took the shot.

The result was a nice photo which I subsequently posted to Google Earth. Anyone who used Google Earth to look at Knife River could see the photo of the ship tagged as "HMS BOUNTY photo credit: J Allert".

I did not think many would see the photo, but people at the Pitcairn Islands Philatelic Bureau did, and they liked it. They are the agency in charge of Pitcairn Island postage stamps and they launched a search for this J. Allert.



Our son, Joseph, living with his family in New Zealand, got the first call and referred them on to me. The result was that I granted the Pitcairn Islands permission to use the photo on their \$1 postage stamp (photo left). They cropped out the ore boat, I suppose because it detracted from the South Pacific image their stamps must promote.

There was a front-page article in the Duluth New Tribune on August 18, 2012, about this.

Jim and Deb Allert are long time KR residents.

Photo: Jim Allert

DULUTH NEWS TRIBUNE RECOGNIZES KR'S PASSION FOR COMMUNITY.

I send the KRHCC monthly newsletter to the Duluth News Tribune (DNT) with the chance they might want to expand on a story within it. And so it happened that someone at the paper noticed that KR has demonstrated over time that it is an unusually vibrant community, based on all the initiatives residents have taken to improve quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Some examples: Julebyen, Trail system, Huldrefolk trail, tennis and pickle ball courts, 300 feet of agate beach on Lake Superior with parking, children's playground, and most currently - and most visable - the depot and CRUSADER II restorations.

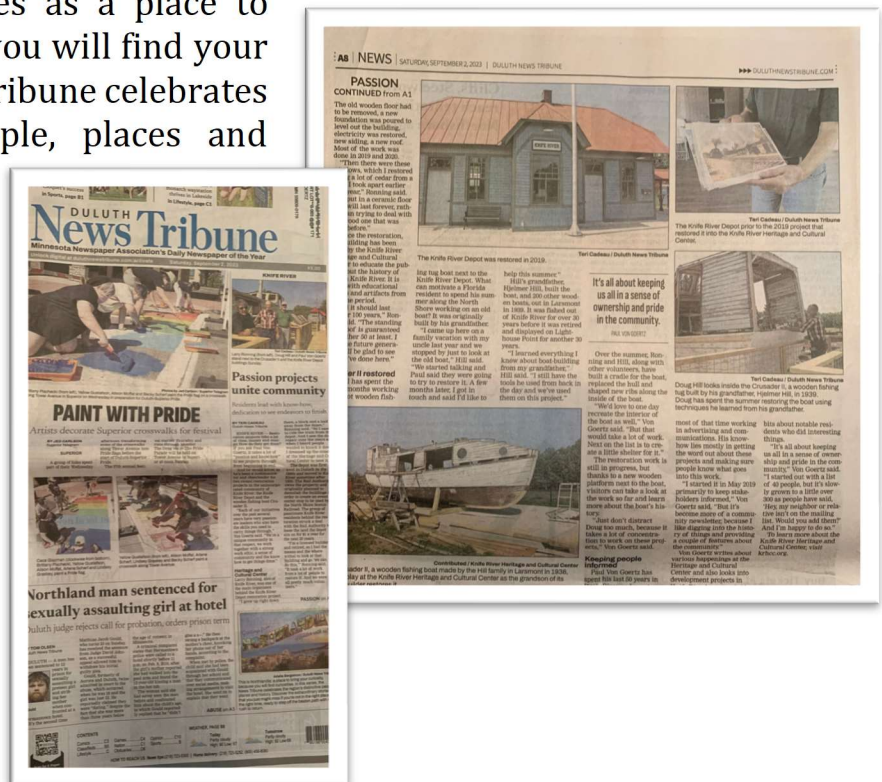
DNT reporter Teri Cadeau called me in late August to ask me on what gives our community so much energy. I knew Teri when she was a reporter for the now defunct Lake County News Chronicle, so was glad to help her. The story she wrote was excellent and was headed with "Passion projects unite community." Sub-head read: "Residents lead with know-how, dedication to see endeavors to finish." The story appeared on the front page and continued on an inside page.

The story was one of a series of stories the DNT is doing under the heading of "Northlandia" which it defines as a place to bring your curiosity because you will find your curiosities. In this series the Tribune celebrates the region's distinctive people, places and history."

That's Knife River!

Images: The story as it appeared in the Saturday, September 2, 2023, edition of the DNT. You may be able to find it on the DNT's website under past issues.

Photos: Paul von Goertz



JULEBYEN CELEBRATES ITS 10TH ANNIVERSARY!



Mark your calendars now for December 2 and 3 for Julebyen 2023.

This year's festival will mark the tenth year of this outdoor family-friendly, small-town, all volunteer, Scandinavian celebration of Christmas.

All details can be found at Julebyen.org

Photo: Marilyn Magnuson, the Viking Lady snapped this image as riders arrive on the Julebyen Express and are greeted by the depot agent.

The KRHCC partners with the Knife River Rec Council, sponsors of Julebyen, by making its site available for the weekend. We also partner with the North Shore Scenic Road (NSSR) by coordinating the NSSR's Julebyen Express that brings festival goers from Duluth Saturday and Sunday, and the three Troll Trains to Troll Canyon on Saturday and two on Sunday. All Troll Trains depart from and return to the Knife River depot. We also sell Troll Train tickets and board and deboard passengers in the same capacity as the original depot.

New this year at the KRHCC site will be a "Winter Farmer's Market," a winter version of the Two Harbors (TH) summer farmer's market. According to Helene Hedlund, Julebyen chair, the market will have a huge 40' x 80' heated tent in which there will be 10 - 16 Two Harbors farmer market vendors.

Julebyen receives financial support from "Lovin' Lake County," Lake County's marketing arm. The festival is free to the public.



CRUSADER II IS STAR OF MARINA ROAD

For those volunteers who work on CRUSADER II regularly, and particularly Doug Hill who puts in 10 to 12-hour workdays and weekends, it is very refreshing to hear comments from those driving by on Marina Road. "Way to go!" "Nice job!" "Looking great!" and, "Really looking good". Such words of encouragement help us realize how supportive the public is of the work we're doing to save and display a North Shore icon.

We assume some who travel Marina Road regularly had noticed how the fish tug looked when first placed on its slab last November. And I would guess many can't pass by without noticing the transformation that has taken place week by week.

Speaking of public support, many thanks to the KR couple who brought a couple of fresh-baked muffins to Doug recently with the comment "We see how hard you work every day and thought you might like a couple of fresh-baked blueberry muffins!" How thoughtful and kind!



Photo: CRUSADER II viewed from Marina Road on September 19, sporting its fresh paint! Photo: Paul von Goertz

"BEST EVER CORN" SALE BRINGS IN \$1,295 FOR RAIN GARDEN CONTAINMENT POND -"SWALE"

Many thanks to Lee and Jim Bujold for again this year donating 50 dozen ears of the "Best Ever Corn" to benefit the KRHCC. And , traveling all the way to Cumberland, WI. and back to retrieve the corn the day it is distributed. Round trip about 250 miles.

All proceeds went to offset the cost of creating a storm water containment pond (or "swale") along the north boundary of the KRHCC site. It was designed by a Lake County Soil & Water soils engineer following state guide lines, and funded by the KRHCC, SOS (Save Our Ship - the Viking ship people), the Regional Rail Authority, and a grant arranged through Lake County Soil & Water.

Many thanks, too, to all those for displaying their support of the KRHCC by buying corn at a suggested donation of \$20 for a dozen ears.

Photo: Children conscripted by "papa" help bag the 50 dozen ears of corn. Left to right, Elin, Soren and Brynn von Goertz. Brynn was also recognized as the "KRHCC Corn Princess" for her work.





Work on the grading plan began on September 19. The grade on the south side of the lot was determined to be level with the slab. It then slopes north at 3-4 degrees to become the swale at the north property line.

Photo left: A dozer backfills the slab to begin the grade to the south.

Several pieces of heavy equipment were used in the construction of the swale. Photo right shows work in progress. The backhoe digs the 200' long swale from 8" deep on west end to 24" deep on east end to allow for adequate drainage while the dozer performs the grading.



Photos: Paul von Goertz



The image to the left shows an active swale in Lake County. It was planted just a year ago with a variety of native grasses, several of which are pollinators, and shrubs.

Photo: Shoreview Natives

ORDER YOUR CHRISTMAS TRAIN TICKETS NOW!

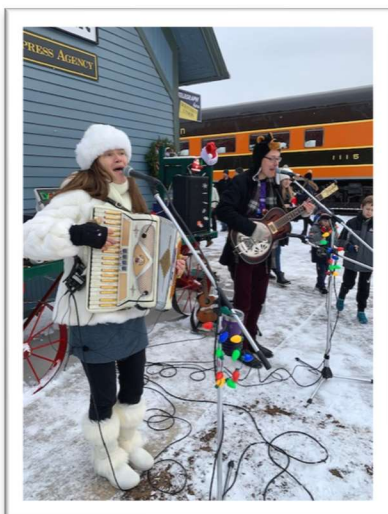
The big excitement of the KRHCC's "Trees. Trains Traditions" event is when the "Christmas Tree Train" arrives from Duluth the Saturday following Thanksgiving. This year the TTT event takes place on November 25th.

The North Shore Scenic Railroad initiated the event two years ago. Idea behind it was for families from the Duluth area to take the "Christmas Tree Train" from Duluth to the KRHCC site to select a Christmas tree from a broad selection, and shop for wreathes and garland. Trees selected are then wrapped, placed on a flatcar, and brought back to the Duluth depot. Families can drive right up to the flatcar and load their tree directly into their vehicle.

The train runs only the one day. The train arrives in KR about 10:30 AM and departs about 12:15 PM. Locals are invited to shop trees after the Christmas Tree departs. The lot will be open until 2 PM.



Christmas Tree Train riders doubled in 2022 over 2021. This year the train will be limited to 130. Tickets are on sale beginning October 1. To order, go to the North Shore Scenic Railroad's website. Last year the train sold out after two weeks of being posted online.



The KRHCC has an agreement with the NSSR that the supplier of trees and greenery be from Lake County, and same for food service. As a result, the Jon and Lynette Hanel family from TH, owners of Northern Connections, will provide the trees as they did last year. Larsmont Trading Post will again serve hot food and beverages.

The depot will be decorated for the Holidays and heated. With Holiday music and décor, the day will surely get you in the spirit of Christmas!

Photos: Paul von Goertz

DONATIONS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS

Donation

- Lee Cohen to general fund.

The KRHCC is a 501c3) 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

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

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