



# Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

PO Box 240 • 180 Marina Road  
Knife River, MN 55609  
[info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org)

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By Paul von Goertz - KRHCC Board Member

## NOW IT'S CRUSADER'S TURN!

After 83 years of exposure to rain, snow, ice, sun and wind, CRUSADER II is about to get a roof over its head.

Last fall the KRHCC completed restoration of the depot and freight house so now we can turn our attention to Phase II of our long-range plan, and that is to restore CRUSADER II and build an open shelter under which it can be placed.



Photo: Two Harbors volunteers, with the help of Superman, freshen up the paint on CRUSADER II when it was on Lighthouse Point in this undated photo.

Photo courtesy of Lake County Historical Society.

## CRUSADER II IS KNIFE RIVER'S MOST FAMOUS BOAT

For a refresher on CRUSADER II, we need to start with CRUSADER I. In 1930, Carl Erickson of Knife River (KR) commissioned the Hill family of boat builders in Larsmont to build him a 35' cab-over fish tug, which he named CRUSADER. In 1939, he asked them to build another 35' cab-over fish tug, this one with a round bottom displacement hull. It was appropriately named CRUSADER II.

Its Christening must have been the most famous of any fish tug launched on Lake Superior. It just so happened that Crown Prince Olav of Norway and Crown Princess Martha were visiting Minnesota in June of 1939. The prince expressed an interest in seeing the influence of Norwegian/Americans in Duluth and the North Shore.



Photo: Crown Prince Olav (second from left) at CRUSADER II Christening. Hans Ojard Sr. is to the left of the prince in this photo. The small boy second right is Wendell "Skip" Bissell, 9-years old at the time. Paul Nordley, Skip's step-grandfather stands behind him.

Photo credit: Wendall "Skip" Bissell

Someone decided KR would be a good example of Norwegian/American influence and so he was invited to KR for "a deep-sea

fishing trip" but, unfortunately, he was greeted with a typical June North Shore rain and NE wind day. With the trip cancelled and time available, the prince talked fishing with local fishermen. Someone suggested he Christen CRUSADER II, which was ready to be launched. The prince quickly obliged and so it was done!

Carl fished CRUSADER II throughout his life. A few years after his death in 1957, the boat was sold to three couples who did some netting of herring but used it mostly for pleasure. Since the interior was equipped with bunks and a coal stove, it was quite cozy. Under their ownership, the tug was given the seal of a Norwegian Coat of Arms, befitting the royal Christening.

Eventually, the fish tug was sold to a man who planned to refurbish it and sail it down the Mississippi to a warmer climate. Those plans never materialized and the boat sat forlornly at the KR Marina for many years.

In 1994, the boat was acquired by the Lake County Historical Society. With the financial support of several Two Harbors (TH) businesses and the TH Lodge of the Sons of Norway, and with the guidance of boatwright Larry Ronning, the boat was restored. It was placed on a grassy knoll near the TH lighthouse.

## BEST OF INTENTIONS DON'T ALWAYS WORK OUT

Fast forward to fall of 2016. Your writer was asked to speak on the restoration of STAR, a 20-foot gas boat built on the Keweenaw in 1934 and over time fished by five KR fishing families. I was able to restore it only with the help of Larry Ronning and several KR friends. During the course of my talk that day, I mentioned all the boat building talent in KR that made the restoration possible.

Following my talk, Mel Sando, who was then the Executive Director of the Lake County Historical Society, asked me if KR would like to have CRUSADER II returned, given I had bragged about KR's boat building/restoration talent. Mel explained that because of issues related to land ownership, the Society was never able to build a permanent shelter for the boat at the Lighthouse Point site, and weather was taking its toll on the boat.

## PIECES START TO FALL INTO PLACE

Mel said that the gift of CRUSADER could only be to a non-profit. It just so happened that the KRRC board (a non-profit) was meeting that night. I explained "the gift" and asked they serve as steward of the boat until a 501(c3) could be formed to care for CRUSADER II. They agree with conditions that I felt it could be met.

This is where Randy Ellestad stepped in to get the boat back to KR before the winter snow. By just a few days before Christmas, Randy had arranged for the KR Marina to provide a hydraulic trailer, Ostman Trucking for a dump truck, and City of TH a front-end loader to move the boat from the grassy knoll to the road where Ostman could hitch it up. TH police provided a "Wide Load" escort out of town.

Photo: CRUSADER II passing under the CN RR bridge in TH. THPD provided an escort to Scenic 61 and Expressway intersection. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz



## ALTHOUGH WE DIDN'T KNOW IT, THIS WAS THE START OF THE KRHCC

Larry Ronning, Randy Ellestad, myself and Bob Entzion, who is Carl Erickson's grandson, put our heads together on how best to restore and display the boat, starting

with finding a location. When the KR depot became available in late 2017, the idea was borne and later supported by the KR community, to create a Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center at the site of the depot with the two icons of KR, CRUSADER II and depot as centerpieces. By July of 2018 we had our 501(c3) status. We elected to

restore the depot first before it fell down, and by doing so show visible progress to the naysayers, and give the KRHCC some credibility in its mission to record and present KR's history.



Photo: CRUSADER II at Lighthouse Point being readied for move to KR. City of TH donated the frontend loader, Ostman Trucking the truck, and KR Marina the hydraulic boat trailer. Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

## THIS SUMMER'S PLANS FOR CRUSADER II

We are pleased that Larry Ronning, one of the North Shore's remaining true boatwrights, has agreed to provide guidance to whatever level of boat restoration may be decided upon. A true restoration would mean making the boat seaworthy with engine and drive. While that remains in debate, we can still begin work this summer on the hull.

The hull above the waterline needs to be scraped and painted; below the waterline scraped, caulked with cotton, and painted. There is a sprung hull plank at the bow and the stem and gunnel rails need to be removed and replaced, as does stern planking.

Anyone interested in boat restoration and learning from an experienced boatwright is encouraged to help. You can include learning to steam bend in that learning experience, too! Email [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org)

## FUNDING TO RESTORE CRUSADER II AND BUILD A PROTECTIVE SHELTER

A funding plan for Phase II is in place using a combination of grants. If all goes well, we will do the dirt and concrete slab work this fall, and the superstructure in 2023.

All grants require a local match so the more local match we have, the more grant money we can leverage. Please consider the KRHCC in your giving for tax year 2021. The KRHCC is an IRS-recognized 501(c)3 non-profit so all donations are tax deductible. Contact: [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org) Thank you!

In our March issue of this newsletter we will go over the plan for CRUSADER's shelter and update you on grant requests and donations.

**AND LASTLY - NO, THE KRHCC DOES NOT WANT THE EDNA G.! THAT'S TH'S ICON!**

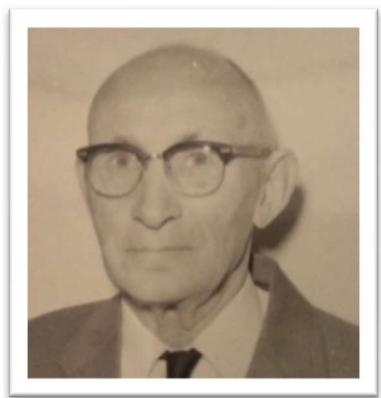
**LARSMONT FISHERMAN REFUSES TO BE "LOST AT SEA."**

By Ralph E. Jacobson (edited by Paul von Goertz)

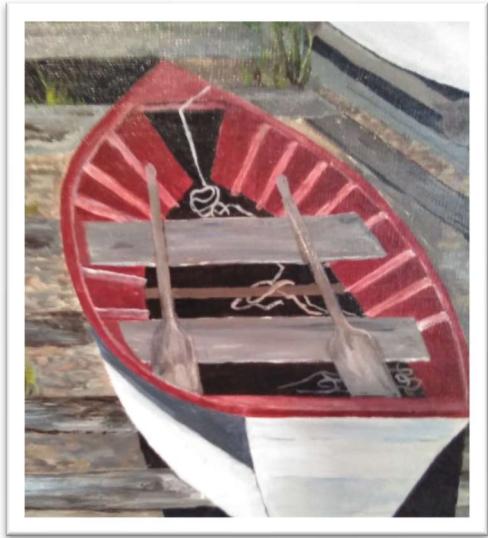
The warm southeast and southwest winds on the Big Lake were giving way to the gusty and often violent north and northwest winds when my dad, Larstmont commercial fisherman, Isak Jacobson, decided to pull his herring nets and call it a season. It was November, 1939.

Photo: Isak Jacobson in later life.

Photo credit: Ralph Jacobson



Skies were overcast and the NW wind was starting to build when Isak pushed his 16' skiff off its skid and into the darkening water. Photo of skiff below. Credit: Ralph Jacobson



Dad began rowing to his nets. The farther from shore he got, the more he realized how violent the wind was.

He tied his skiff to one of the net anchors and began to lift it along with its 5' marker flag. The winds had now reached storm force and dad concluded that to try to board the anchor in now heavy seas was too dangerous. He let the anchor drop back down, untied the skiff from the anchor line, and began rowing back to shore, against heavy waves and strong winds - and now rain and sleet.

After about an hour of rowing and with low visibility, dad found himself right back alongside his net; he had made no progress in reaching shore. Once again, he tied his skiff to the anchor line, and brought the net marker flag on board. He placed the marker in the bow and laid himself against it to keep it in an upright position. The flag would help searchers find his boat, and his body. He would not be remembered as "lost at sea."

My mother, Hannah, became concerned for dad when he was at least an hour late from when she had expected him. She called Carl Erickson, who owned the 35' fish tug CRUSADER II, built by the Hill Brothers of Larsmont. Carl and Roseina Erickson were good friends of my parents and were my Godparents.

Carl had just come off the Lake and was well aware how violent the Lake had suddenly become. Without hesitation, Carl said he would head out the door and find dad by heading east towards Larsmont.

Now, in 1939 there was no Knife River harbor. Carl's boat, like so many others, had to be hauled from the lake on a cradle run up and down on rails. No easy feat to launch or pull a 35' boat in heavy winds and most often by yourself. But, Isak was a close friend.

Photo: CRUSADER II "on the rails" just east of the Knife River, and from where Carl Erickson departed to find his friend.

Photo credit: Todd Lindahl/Randy Ellestad



It was now snowing, making visibility difficult, but Carl knew about where Isak's nets were. Before long, there was the skiff - flagged with the net marker and nearly filled with water and ice.

Carl brought the CRUSADER II alongside the skiff, called out to my dad, but saw no movement, he was encased in ice. Through skillful boat handling, Carl was able to keep CRUSADER II alongside the skiff, chop Isak free, haul his nearly frozen friend into CRUSADER II, and prop him up next to the warm coal stove.

The skiff was now about to sink with only about 3" of freeboard showing. Carl got a line on it and miraculously towed it back.

I was 13 months old and my sister six years at the time. I am grateful to God, mother, and Carl for answering the call for help!

*Editor's note:*

*CRUSADER II is one of two KR icons at the KRHCC, the other being the depot. In 2022 we will start the long-awaited restoration of the fish tug. The priority restoration was the depot as it was in danger of collapsing. That was completed in late November 2021. We will need to rely on donations of time and money to restore CRUSADER II. Can you help? All donations are fully tax deductible.*

## **NORTH SHORE FISHERMEN - BOTH STOICS AND REALISTS**

By Paul von Goertz from a story retold by Richard (Rich) Ojard

Gordon Lightfoot in his ballad THE WRECK OF THE EDMUND FITZGERALD sang "The Lake it is said never gives up her dead when the gales of November come early." This may not always be true. Isak Jacobson may have resigned himself to his fate, but still cared that his family would find his body and have some closure on his loss.

Rich Ojard tells the story of his dad, Kenneth (Ken) who fished Isle Royale during the summer months and returned in the fall, sometimes late fall. On one trip back to KR in a 20' gas boat, Ken and John Miller also of KR, became caught in a nasty Nor'easter and pulled into Grand Marais to sit it out.

Ken knew that the trip from Grand Marais back to KR would be long and so, although he was a non-smoker, he bought a pack of cigarettes to pass the time. Next day the weather looked better and so they headed out only to discover the NE was not done, and now packed a bigger punch than the day before.

There is little shelter between Grand Marais and Two Harbors (Silver Bay and Taconite Harbor did not exist then) and so they were locked in the grasp of Mother Superior. Ken sat by the engine box and worked the engine throttle, and John the tiller to keep the boat out of the trough. Ken told John to keep his eyes forward and not look behind at the huge curling waves that might unnerve him.

Off Split Rock the boat would slide down a wave to where they could not see the lighthouse. It was great relief every time the sturdy boat would rise and let the wave pass under it. We can assume Ken and John were not far offshore when the waves

blocked the lighthouse. This takes on greater meaning when one realizes the light stands on a cliff 120 feet above the Lake.

At this point, Ken remembered his cigarettes and threw them overboard. His body would not be found with cigarettes.

They would eventually reach TH, only to experience true terror. The waves were breaking over the break wall, which was not the one you see today, but an earlier

version not as high. With the break wall engulfed in waves, it was unclear just where the entry was into the harbor. While deliberating just when and where to turn, a monstrous wave picked them up and carried them over the break wall, and into the harbor. Says Rich, "I know that's hard to believe, but he mentioned that every time he told the story."



Image: "Caught Inside The Breakers" original watercolor by Howard Sivertson used with permission of Sivertson Galleries in Grand Marais and Duluth.

And so it is with some men who fish the big Lake. Stoicism to accept the will of the Big Lake, yet with compassion by how they wanted their families to know how they died.

"Oh God, Thy Sea is so great and my boat is so small." Prayer of the Seafarer

## **"WHERE'S THAT BOAT THAT SANK WITH ALL THE CARS ON IT."**

From 1969 until 1976, I actively dove on North Shore and Isle Royale shipwrecks. A friend once asked me to give a talk to his lodge on my experiences and so I did. That led to me being on the rubber chicken luncheon circuit. Invariably, after my talk, someone would ask "Where's the boat that sank with all the cars on it?" The answer was simple: "There never was one."

I remember growing up next to the Lake in the mid-50s where London Road and I-35 join and seeing "straight deckers" upbound with cars. The sun would shine on their windows and the sparkle would tell me it was bringing cars. The only shipping line I can remember that carried cars was Nicolson Transit.

## NEWSLETTER

I think where the story started about a boat sunk with cars is with the stranding of the CITY OF BANGOR off the Keweenaw, just west of Copper Harbor in November of 1926.

Photo: CITY OF BANGOR on the rocks east of Copper Harbor. Photo credit: Ken Thro Collection

The 446' steel steamer was en route from Detroit to Duluth with a cargo of 220 cars, mostly Chryslers and Wippets. Wippets had just been introduced that year and were American's smallest car with just a 100" wheelbase. They lasted until early 1931.



Captain W. J. Macklin encountered heavy seas and turned back off Eagle Harbor intending to find shelter behind Keweenaw Point. But the buffeting was too much for the 30-year old boat. Her steering gear let go and a few cars were washed overboard before she was pitched ashore a half dozen or so miles east of Copper Harbor. Her crew took to the lifeboats and headed for the nearby beach where they tried to keep warm around fires. None were dressed for the cold, and now snow. The next day they slogged through the snow drifts to Copper Harbor, many suffering from frostbite and exposure.

The BANGOR was beyond recovery. Salvors waited for the lake to freeze. Then in March, drove the remaining 202 cars through the ice fields and woods to Copper Harbor. From there to Calument and then by rail back to Detroit for reconditioning. In total, 18 cars were lost. The boat would be later scrapped in place; a few remnants remain. It was owned by Nicholson Transit.

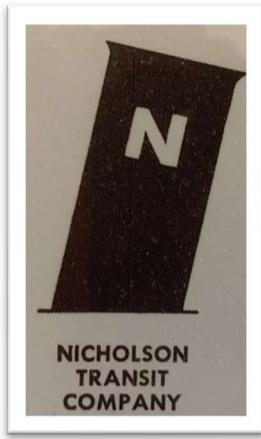


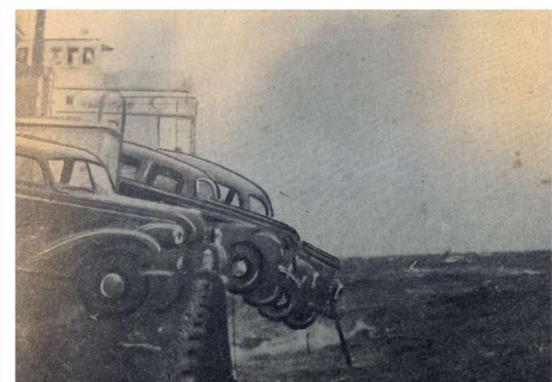
Photo: The Nicholson Transit Company began in 1919 at Ecorse, Michigan. Common cargoes were sand and cars. By 1950 it had a fleet of 14 boats. The company ended operations in 1962. The dad of a friend of mine was the company's agent in Duluth. I always hoped he could get me a ride on one of their boats, but never happened.

*Historical information from LAKE SUPERIOR SHIPWRECKS by Julius F. Wolff, Jr.*

## NEWSLETTER

Now, it is true that cars on occasion would be swept off the deck of a boat. This picture was taken by a crew member of the J.M. DAVIS in 1940 on Lake Superior. Four cars were lost when the boat went into a trough while making a sudden turn to escape seas driven by gale-force winds.

Image: Newspaper clipping from Wendall ("Skip") Bissell scrapbook.



## REMINDER – KRHCC NEWSLETTERS ARE ONLINE!

We launched our website ([krhcc.org](http://krhcc.org)) in March of 2021. That gave us the ability to post the monthly KRHCC newsletter on our site under menu item "Recent News."

We try to post each month's newsletter within a few days of when it is e-mailed to about 250 individuals and organizations. It is sent near the end of each month. If you would like to receive it the day it is released, ask to be placed on the e-mail mailing list by contacting: [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org)

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## NOW THOSE WERE WINTERS...

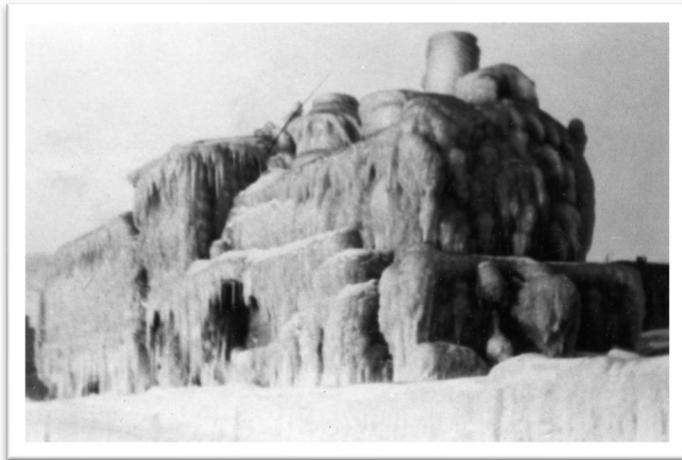
## AND YOU GET UPSET WHEN A SNOWPLOW BLOCKS YOUR SIDEWALK? HOW ABOUT A TRAIN PLOW?

Entry to depot agent's home which was next to the depot (right).

Photo credit: Todd Lindahl



## UNINTENDED ICE SCULPURE



This photo was shot by Ellert Lindahl, Todd Lindahl's father, at the DM&IR's Endion station on 15<sup>th</sup> East in Duluth in 1937. The locomotive, a small logging one, was apparently left on the south track nearest the Lake prior to a NE blow.

## FEBRUARY DONATIONS, MEMORIALS, HONORARIUMS AND SPONSORSHIPS

### Sponsorship:

Rich and Nancy Ojard - platform canopy

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