

Newsletter



Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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March, 2021

By Paul von Goertz – KRHCC Board Member

Breaking News!

LIGHTHOUSE CONSIDERED FOR KNIFE ISLAND



See story inside.

Photo: Image Creation by Scott Shelerud

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THE GREAT KNIFE RIVER TRAIN ROBBERY!

Not too many people are aware of the “Great Knife River Train Robbery” because as the investigation into it unfolded, several KR people became implicated. If this ‘inside job’, as it was later called, was to become known to the public, it could have been an embarrassment for our normally quiet and peaceful town.

The robbery, as best I can recall as an eyewitness, took place in late June of 2003. A “Budd car” owned by the North Shore Scenic Railroad, was filled with members of the three Duluth and Superior Rotary Clubs along with their guests. It was en-route to Two Harbors to join the Two Harbors Rotary Club in celebrating the 10th anniversary of their charter.

As the Budd car rounded the turn into KR, the engineer was alerted to a flare burning in the middle of track, about where the depot is. The engineer applied the brakes and



the car came to a stop. Immediately, two masked riders on horseback rode up to the car with at least one of the riders shooting a pistol wildly in the air. The other rider, who appeared to be a woman, acted as lookout. The first rider boarded the car and walked down the aisle gruffly demanding money. One wide-eyed passenger reportedly asked the gunman if his gun was real and the response was “Want to find out?”. Within minutes the robbers had completed their assault on the train riders and rode away with a bag of loot. (Photo credit: unknown).

An investigation of the incident followed and the trail soon led back to an “inside job.” First, the robbers fit the general description of Norman “Butch” Southard, and the woman, his daughter, Sarah “Sundance” Southard of KR. Both were accomplished horse riders and Butch was originally from Chicago, where investigators surmised he learned his trade.

A forensic study of the flare ruminants used to stop the train proved to be a marine distress flare, probably from a KR boat owner. Further investigation revealed that two members of the KR community were members of the Rotary Club of Duluth, (Rich Ojard and myself) and a third (Norman Southard) was a charter member of the Two Harbors Club. It was alleged the three would have known about the Budd car trip, its passengers and its schedule. We also had boats in the marina that would have the

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required USCG distress flares. Things got a bit dicey when I produced photos of the robbery for the Duluth Rotary club newsletter, and so the question arose how I happened to be at the scene. My response was that I was ‘innocently photographing Monarch butterflies in the field around the depot at the time of the robbery’, was met with skepticism.

The story had a happy ending though when Butch and Sundance learned of Rotary’s goal of ridding the world of polio through a global fund raising effort. This resulted in the bag of loot taken arriving at my doorstep, clearly marked for “Polio Plus.” See photo next page. When counted it totaled \$172.

A sidelight to this whole story is that Rotarian Earl Rodgers, who owned the Duluth Travel Agency at the time, was on board with a group of East Block Rotarians whose trip to the U. S. was arranged by Earl. They had expressed an interest in seeing the “Wild West” and they were not disappointed. One was even able to get a photo of one of the bandits. (photo p.2)



So there you have it, the Great Knife River Train Robbery.

Budd car passengers watch the horse riders circle the car. Your writer had photos of the actual riders that were borrowed to the Rotary Club of Duluth for their newsletter, but have since been lost.

Photo credit: Paul von Goertz

Your writer shows off a souvenir of the train robbery, the loot bag that showed up on my doorstep with \$172 in it. Clearly designated to help Rotary rid the world of polio.

Photo credit: Mary von Goertz

Editor’s note: Norm Southard was a good friend to me and many in KR. He died unexpectedly and much too young in 2009. He enjoyed his role in this “Great Knife River Train Robbery” and thought it a lot of fun. I believe he would like knowing the story has been retold here and is now part of KR history



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KRHCC IS GROWING UP – WE WILL NOW HAVE A WEBSITE



Home page of new website. Image credit: Breakwall Digital

Since its inception in July of 2018, the KRHCC has invested time and money into restoring the KR train depot to demonstrate to all the naysayers that we would do it.

So, now that we are taken seriously with a beautiful and accurately restored 1900s depot, we can put some energy into creating a long overdue website. Hard to believe

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that as a non-profit, which depends on donations of time and money, that we could have achieved what we have without a web window to the world.

One of the KRHCC's board's goals for 2021 was to create a website. We will do this with the same Scandinavian frugality we have demonstrated so far in everything we've done. We will create our own site template, write the text, source the images and hire out page design and programming. We will also update it ourselves.

Following our "buy local" policy, we have hired Breakwall Digital of Two Harbors to provide the needed outside professional services and host the site.

We are asking for someone to help with the cost of building and hosting the site for the next year in exchange for a sponsoring credit on the site. The sponsorship would be \$750 and in affect until the site is updated when the Center is officially open sometime next year.

Please help the KRHCC take a giant step into gaining more exposure and opportunities for financial support through this website. The KRHCC is a 501(c3) so all donations are tax deductible. Contact: info@krhcc.org Mailing address: KRHCC, PO Box 240, Knife River, MN 55609

BOBCATS IN KNIFE RIVER!

Yes, that's right – and that is a bobcat in the photo, and deceased (p. 7).

Andy Zaborski from KR saw the cat's body in the median from the southbound 61 express way about a block east of where 61 passes over the Knife River. He told your writer about it and I immediately called Joe Russell, a retired DNR Parks & Trails manager now living in KR. He immediately retrieved it and called a DNR conservation officer. Bobcats are a protected species and the DNR will determine what will be done with it.

I was curious if a bobcat in KR was a rarity or not, so called Bill Berg, retired DNR Wildlife Research Biologist with a field of study in large predators and furbearers, also ruffed and sharp-tailed grouse. Bill also lives in KR and we are very fortunate to have both Bill and Joe for their knowledge of wildlife, the environment and outdoor recreation. "There are a lot more bobcats than you think around here," said Bill. "Every winter, I have a bobcat feeding on the deer carcass I hang in a tree after deer

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hunting season. I never see them, but obvious tracks. Very secretive, they are drawn here by lots of cottontail bunnies and abundant deer. “

“A 20-pound bobcat can ambush and pull down a 100-pound deer with no problem,” said Bill. “There are more bobcats in northern Minnesota now than (probably) ever, mainly due to milder winters and more prey. The converse is true for lynx, with milder winters and fewer snowshoe hares, their main prey.”

Bill went on to say that when he started with the DNR in the late ‘60s, the “main bobcat range” was central Minnesota, particularly Pine and Aitkin Counties - essentially, none or very rare in far northern Minnesota. As winters gradually warmed, bobcats took advantage of more deer and less snow, and now extend into Ontario and especially, NW Minnesota and southern Manitoba.

I asked Bill how a 20-40 pound bobcat could take down a deer many times its size and he said he could tell me, but the details would be a bit gory.

STOP READING HERE IF GORE UPSETS YOU!

“Anyone with a house cat knows how they love to hide and ambush,” said Bill. “And anyone with a pet cat with claws knows what damage even a small cat can inflict.”

“Because bobcats (and house cats) have small feet, they literally flounder in deep snow. In contrast, a lynx with its huge feet is well suited for deep, soft snow, and can chase prey like squirrels and snowshoe hares.”

“But the bobcat usually ambushes its prey. It perches perfectly still on a tree branch above a deer trail, and waits. And waits. When a deer walks beneath the branch, the bobcat drops on the deer's neck, wraps its legs around the neck, digs in its very long claws, and hangs on (goes along for the ride).”

“The bobcat then bites the lower neck, usually piercing the jugular vein, and bleeds out the deer until it drops.”

Bill then went on to say “I have seen a few places where this has happened, but have never seen it actually occur. But, I have seen where blood has squirted 15-20 feet high on trees and brush. Now go have lunch.”

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Thank you Bill Berg for this information and the descriptive manner in which it was presented. I'm feeling a bit faint – think I will lie down for a bit before having lunch.

Photo credit – Joe Russell

It was fortunate the body of the bobcat hit into the median of the expressway above KR was not badly damaged. This will improve its chances of being mounted and used for educational purposes.



KR HISTORY IN 600 WORDS

Last week the KRHCC received from Pannier Displays, a family-owned and operated business in Gibsonia, PA, four 24" x 36" all-weather outdoor displays that collectively present KR history in about 600 words.

The KRHCC ordered these displays last fall so that we could begin our educational program this summer, while acknowledging a formal opening of our center with static and interactive exhibits is still a year away.

So now, when visitors are here this summer, they can get the short version of KR history in about 150 words per display supported with images.

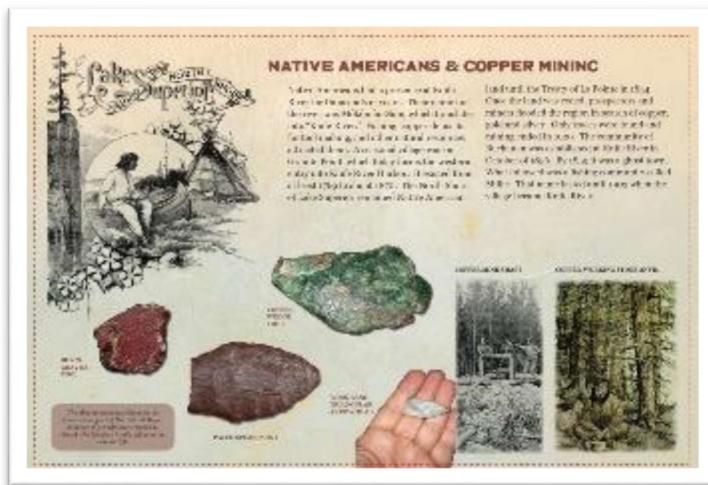
Many thanks go to the four individuals/couples who each responded to a challenge of contributing \$1,000 to cover about half the cost of each display. Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation paid for the other half under a one-to-one funding match.

Thanks also to Todd Lindahl, KRHCC board member and historian, for condensing KR's history into less than 600 words, and for sourcing all images. And finally... thanks to Randy Ellestad for use of his forklift in lifting the displays off the 18-wheeler that delivered them.

The four displays and local sponsors are listed below:

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Native Americans and Copper Mining: Sponsored by Bill and Pat Meyer

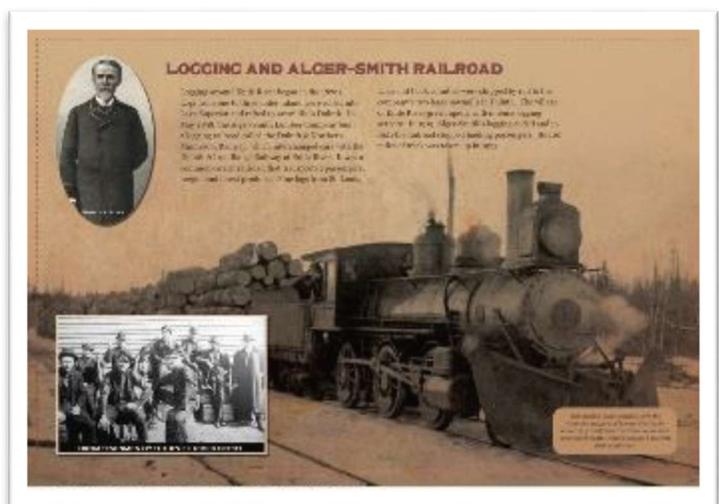


Native Americans had a presence at Knife River for thousands of years. Their name for the river was Mokoman-Subi, which translates into "Knife River." Fishing, copper deposits for tool making, and other natural resources attracted them. A seasonal village was on Granite Point, which today forms the western entry into Knife River Harbor. It existed from at least 1769 to about 1870. The North Shore of Lake Superior

remained Native American land until the Treaty of La Pointe in 1854. Once the land was ceded, prospectors and miners flooded the region in search of copper, gold and silver. Only traces were found and mining ended in 1929. The community of Buchanan was established at Knife River in October of 1856. By 1859 it was a ghost town. What followed was a fishing community called Millie. That name lasted until 1903 when the village became Knife River.

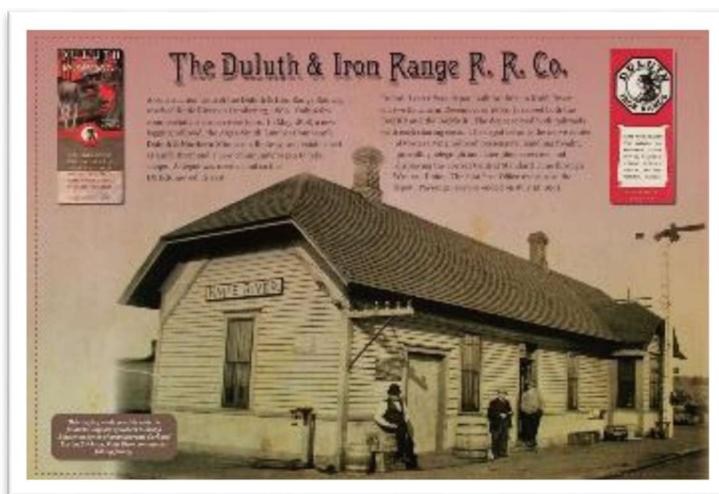
Logging and Alger-Smith Railroad: Sponsored by Mitchell Costley

Logging around Knife River began in the 1870s. Logs from one to three miles inland were rolled into Lake Superior and rafted to sawmills in Duluth. In May 1898, the Alger-Smith Lumber Company built a logging railroad called the Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railway, which interchanged cars with the Duluth & Iron Range Railway at Knife River. It was a common carrier railroad that transported passengers, freight and forest products. Pine logs from St. Louis, Lake and Cook counties were shipped by rail to the company's two large sawmills in Duluth. The village of Knife River grew rapidly with intense logging activity. In 1919, Alger-Smith's logging ended and in 1921 the railroad stopped hauling passengers. Its 100 miles of track were taken up in 1923.



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The Depot: Sponsored by Bob and Sheryl Entzion



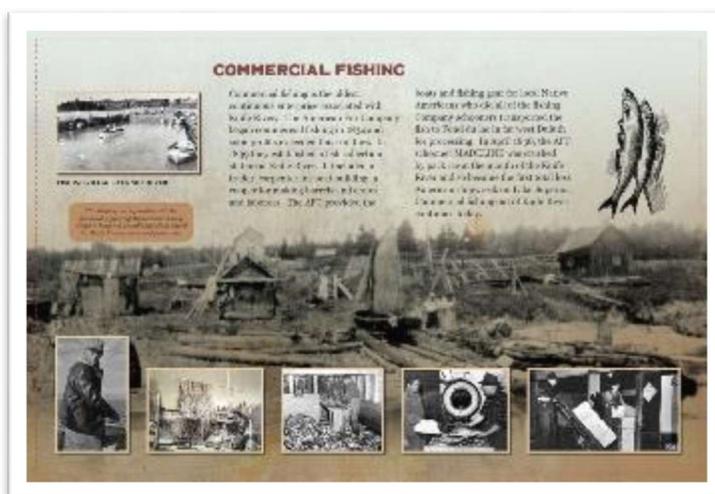
A construction train of the Duluth & Iron Range Railway reached Knife River on October 23, 1886. Only a few commercial fishermen were here. In May 1898, a new logging railroad, the Alger-Smith Lumber Company's Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railway, was established at Knife River and a new community began to take shape. A depot was needed and so the D&IRR moved its east Duluth Lester Park depot, built in 1887, to Knife River on two flatcars in

December of 1899. It served both railroads with each sharing costs. The depot became the nerve center of town serving railroad passengers, handling freight, providing telegraph and later phone service, and displaying the correct Central Standard Time through Western Union. The first Post Office was also at the depot. Passenger service ended on July 15, 1961.

Commercial Fishing: Sponsored by Mike and Nancy Ojard

Commercial fishing is the oldest continuous enterprise associated with Knife River.

The American Fur Company began commercial fishing in 1834 and soon profits exceeded those of furs. In 1839 they established a fish collection station at Knife River. It included a trader, carpenter for boat building, a cooper for making barrels and crates, and laborers. The AFC provided the boats and fishing gear for local Native Americans who did all of the fishing. Company schooners transported the fish to Fond du Lac in far west Duluth for processing.



In April 1838, the AFC schooner MADELINE was crushed by pack ice at the mouth of the Knife River and so became the first total loss American shipwreck on Lake Superior. Commercial fishing out of Knife River continues today.

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MEETING OF VOLUNTEERS TO PLAN 2021 WORK WILL BE LATE-APRIL

The 2021 work plan will have a bit of everything from concrete work to framing and finishing carpentry, to roofing and painting.

There is a fuse on completion of the depot apron. We were not able to complete the apron last year because of demand on our demolition contractor's time, and so concrete work that was to begin in July began in October, just weeks before freeze up.

The grants we had called for work to be completed in six months, but thankfully we got extensions so now we have until the end of June to complete the apron.

I am hopeful new volunteers will join those who have volunteered in the past. Regardless of your skills, or lack thereof, we can use you. Larry Ronning will continue to be our general contractor and is great at teaching and directing work and never yells at anyone. Screw-ups by volunteers are easily dealt with "Don't tell Larry."

If you would like to volunteer for 2021 work, or thinking about it, please indicate so at: info@krhcc.org I will make sure you will be notified of our kick-off meeting to 2021 work.

THANKS TO THESE AND ALL PAST DONORS FOR HELPING THE KRHCC GROW!

Recent Donations to the KRHCC:

- From Craig Whiting and Julie Ponath-Whiting for general fund.
- From Margie Van Cleave and Les Bolen for fencing.

(The KRHCC is a 501 (c3) non-profit so all donations are IRS-approved tax deductible)

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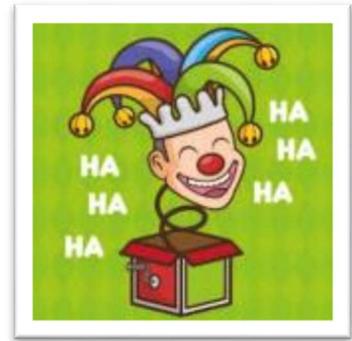
LIGHTHOUSE CONSIDERED FOR KNIFE ISLAND

(Continued from front page)

That is true – but the date was April of 1907, which makes this story...

GOTCHA - APRIL FOOLS JOKE!!!

It was in April of 1907 that the federal government was considering a lighthouse for Knife Island. This was after a long list of shipwrecks in the vicinity of the island: MADELINE in spring of 1834, ROSEDALE in 1893, PENNOBSCOTT 1899, NIAGARA in 1904, and later the THOMAS MAYTHAM in 1926. Magnetic attraction off Knife Island is believed to have been the culprit in several of these wrecks.



Anyway, the government asked Lt. Col. Graham Fitch, Chief of the Army Corps of Engineers in Duluth to study the possibility of a lighthouse on Knife Island. He came out against the idea claiming it was “unnecessary at this time.”

So that was the last heard of a lighthouse for Knife Island, until this issue of the KRHCC news.

Many thanks to KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl for the research behind this story, and proving once again history can be really interesting! Also, thanks to Scott Shelerud for the image creation.

Image Art Credit: Internet rights free

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 receiving it, please forward to them, or send their email addresses to same email address and they will receive their own copy.

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