

# Newsletter



## Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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

June, 2020

By Paul von Goertz  
KRHCC Board Member

### **LEVERAGING PRIVATE DONATIONS RESULTS IN GRANTS OF \$28K**

See details inside...

### **SINKING OF THE MORRELL BROUGHT TRAGEDY TO KR FAMILY, GRIEF TO KNIFE RIVER**

I heard about the sinking of the DANIEL J. MORRELL when it sank in Lake Huron in November of 1966, but could not remember reading about it, or any of the details. Then it occurred to me, at the time of the sinking, I was in U.S. Coast Guard boot camp in Cape May, NJ, and in a 12-week news blackout. I wanted to learn more about this shipwreck.

In 1993, I was president of the Lake Superior Marine Museum Association and so was able to introduce our featured speaker at our annual dinner that year. His name was Dennis Hale and he was the sole survivor of the MORRELL sinking.



*Photo: Kay Struve*

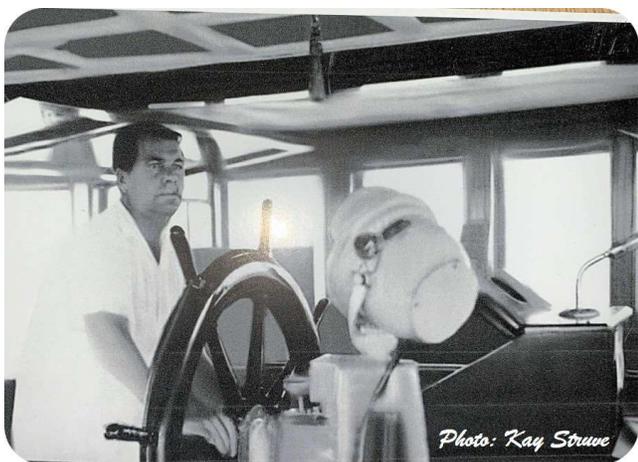
For the first two years of their marriage, Ethel (Bugge) Wieme was able to sail with Albert.

# Newsletter

For many years Dennis declined our invitations to speak to our association, or anywhere else; the memories were just too painful. But, he had remained close to four area families whose loved ones were his shipmate and lost. Finally, he said he would speak to us while visiting these families. One was the Albert Wieme family of KR.

It appeared Dennis did not care to socialize prior to the LSMMA dinner, but many of the details of his ordeal and survival are in his own words, as told to me.

For those from KR who knew Albert Wieme, or members of the Bugge family who can trace their roots in KR back to the early 1900s, the MORRELL story begins with Albert.



Albert as wheelsman aboard the  
WILLIAM H. WOLFE

He was born in Jasper, MN, in 1915 and went to KR in 1934 to work in the CCC camps. Here he met Ethel Bugge and they would marry in 1940. Ethel was born in KR in 1918. From 1938-1946 he sailed as a deckhand, porter and watchman on the WILLIAM H. WOLFE.

Ethel was the only daughter among five brothers born to Peter and Petrene Bugge. Her brothers were Lawrence, Wesley, Woody, Mel, and Palmer. The brothers showed Albert how to commercial fish, which he did on and off for 28 years – at one time having his own boat.



Ethel's five brothers taught Albert  
how to commercial fish out of KR

# Newsletter



Left to right: Polly, Larry, Albert, Denny,  
Kay and Ethel

Albert and Ethel would have four children, Polly, Larry, Dennis and Kay. Many thanks to Polly and Kay for providing the family information for this story. Dennis passed away in 2015 and Larry in 2019.

In 1965 Albert returned to sailing aboard the *LEBANON*, and when it was sold a year later, he signed aboard the *DANIEL J. MORRELL* as a watchman.

The *MORRELL* was built in 1906 and 602 feet long – small by today’s standards. On November 26, 1966, the *MORRELL* left Lawkawanna, NY, light (unloaded) on an almost 1,000 mile trip to Taconite Harbor, MN. On November 30, the ship’s owner, Bethlehem Steel, notified the U.S. Coast Guard that their boat had not been heard from. The news was concerning because gale force winds on Lake Huron had been recorded at 70 miles an hour and waves of 20 – 25 feet.

At 2:00 AM on November 29, *MORRELL* watchman Dennis Hale was awakened by a loud “bang,” followed closely by another. He leaped out of his bunk in the bow and turned on the light, but it did not go on. The general alarm sounded and in the darkness, wearing only boxer shorts, he grabbed what he could - his life jacket and pea coat. He went out on deck where Albert and three others who slept forward with him, were attempting to launch a raft. To their horror they witnessed the *MORRELL* break in half.

It was eight minutes from the first “bang” to when the four men freed the raft and in the pitching 34 degree black water. Their spirits lifted when they saw the lights of what appeared to be a near-by boat, only to discover it was the aft half of the *MORRELL* powering away from them. It would later be discovered on the bottom five miles away.

Of the four men clinging to the raft, all would succumb to hypothermia - save Dennis. While awaiting news of any survivors, daughter Kay (Wieme) Struve said, “We all thought that if anyone would could survive, it would be dad. He was a strong and well-built man and knew how to deal with cold from his years of commercial fishing.” Dennis would attribute his survival to his young age (26 years), ample body fat, and two strange out-of-body experiences. See sidebar story below “DENNIS HALE’S OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES.”

# Newsletter

Dennis would be rescued after 38 hours of drifting in heavy seas, near frozen. All 28 his shipmates had perished.

At the time of his death, Albert was 51 and the four children ranged in age from 16 – 24 years. The family was devastated and KR shocked with the news. Everyone in KR new Ethel's family and grieved with them. The Bugge family was one of the first commercial fishing families in Knife River; immigrants from Norway. The family has contributed greatly to KR in many ways over the years and continues to do so today.

A lawsuit was filed against Bethlehem Steel which helped families of the lost sailors. It was later learned the steel used to build the MORRELL was similar to that used to build TITANIC. The steel had a high sulfur content and when cold became brittle. Social security was available for minor children.

Ethel would seek employment after Albert's death and work at one of the North Shore mink farms and later at Minnesota Woolen in Duluth.

Albert's body was recovered and is buried in Lakeview Cemetery in Two Harbors. Ethel died on May 10, 2009; she was 90 years old. Her remains were placed in Lake Superior near Knife Island.

KR has a long legacy of seafaring going back to native people and more recently immigrant fishing families from Norway. While seafaring and commercial fishing is hard work, it can be a satisfying livelihood. The number of North Shore commercial fishermen who lost their lives, along with seafarers like Albert Wieme, are a stark reminder of the unpredictable forces of nature that can bring tragedy and great human suffering.



Cleaning herring in the original KR harbor built by the KR Harbor Board, a fishermen's co-op.

# Newsletter

## **“DENNIS HALE’S OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES.”**

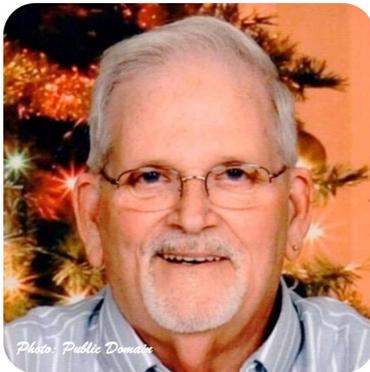


Photo: Public Domain  
Dennis Hale was 75 years old when he died of cancer in 2015.

Dennis Hale had two “out-of-body” or “near death” experiences that he told me personally the night of the LSMMA annual meeting that I found to be quite profound, and which I repeat here.

While clinging to the raft, near death, he was visited by an old man dressed in brilliant white who instructed him how to conserve his declining body heat. He was told how to roll himself into a ball, and not empty his bladder; his warm urine would help preserve core body heat.

Sometime later he found himself at the base of a bridge, and on the other side he could see all his shipmates, all of whom had expressions of peace and happiness. He very much wanted to join them, but as he began crossing the bridge, they told him he could not, as it was not his time. He reluctantly turned back.

I was mesmerized by Dennis’s words. He looked at me and said “I don’t care if people believe me or not, but that’s what happened.” I slowly nodded my head.

*If you would like to learn more about the sinking of the DANIEL J. MORRELL, told from the sole survivor’s perspective, go online and find Dennis’s book “Shipwrecked: Reflections of the Sole Survivor,” by Dennis Hale.*

## **NOW YOU SEE THE ALGER-SMITH TRAIN UNDERPASS. BUT, SOON YOU WON’T.**

Russell Alger, a Civil War general, U.S. senator and Michigan governor, and Martin Smith, an owner of a jewelry store that catered to the carriage trade and who later became a wealthy banker, established the Alger-Smith Logging Company, initially out of Michigan and then moving to NE Minnesota.

In 1897, the company bought a considerable amount of timber along the Knife River, and soon established the Duluth & Northern Minnesota Railroad.

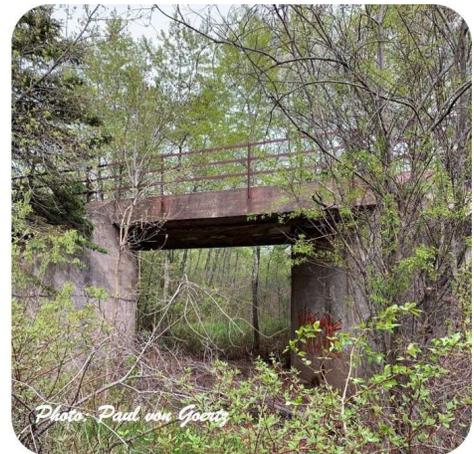


Photo: Paul van Goetty  
The Alger-Smith underpass on the west bank of the river.

# Newsletter

The railroad went north from KR almost a 100 miles to harvest white pine, which was stored by the acre in KR and then transported to Duluth sawmills by the Duluth & Iron Range railroad.

In 1899, the D&NM built a coal receiving dock at the mouth of the Knife River. This dock would be battered by NE winds and in 1909 was replaced by a concrete dock, parts of which still remain. Trains from the north wanting to access the dock had to pass over the NE/SW route of the D&IR mainline, which was not only annoying to the D&IR, but also dangerous.

In 1914, a new concrete tunnel was built under the D&IR right-of-way on the west side of the river. Now D&NM trains could safely access the coal dock. The derail system, crossing signals and an interlock tower were no longer necessary and so were done away with.

Now, 106 years later, failing concrete in the tunnel is forcing the St. Louis and Lake Counties Regional Rail Authority to fill in the underpass, which will be done this summer.

The underpass is still (barely) visible from Scenic 61. Please remember it is surrounded by private property so be content with the view from Scenic 61.

Many thanks to Ken Buehler, executive director of the North Shore Scenic Railroad, and KRHCC historian Todd Lindahl for providing information for this interesting, but fleeting bit of KR history.

## **LEVERAGING PRIVATE DONATIONS RESULTS IN GRANTS OF \$28K (Continued from front page)**

Since the first of the year the KRHCC has been applying to grantors whose grant guidelines match up with our ambitions. We applied to four grantors and all have awarded grants for a total \$28,340.

The most recent grant announced was from the Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation in the amount of \$10,000, for which we are very thankful. This was a very important award because it comprises the largest portion of the money we need to restore/replace the depot cement apron, which has Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) issues. Safety of our guest and volunteers is paramount to the KHRCC's mission.

What is exciting about restoring/replacing the apron is that at the same time the apron is poured, we plan on mounting our 30' order board (signal pole) and 30' flagpole in

# Newsletter

the apron. The flagpole is already paid for thanks to a KR family who wishes to memorialize loved ones.

So...look for some exciting additions to the KR depot by end of building season!

## **WHY THE KRHCC HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL SO FAR IN BEING AWARDED GRANTS....**

There are two good reasons.

One, grantors want to know the level of local support for the non-profit requesting funds. The KRHCC can demonstrate this in two ways:

- Total private donations to date.
- Our ability to meet local share requirements of the grantor. This is a percent of the grant requested and can vary from 20 - 50%.

Because of the great financial support the KRHCC has received from individuals and organizations, we have been able to meet or exceed the required percent of the match requested.

In short, the more local donations we receive, the more we can leverage grant requests.

The other reason, we believe, for the KRHCC'S success in grant awards, is from what we have learned in talking with grant specialists, who are the liaison between organizations seeking funds and the funding body. These specialists tell us the KRHCC has shown to be a catalyst in bringing other non-profits (and in one case a government agency) to join our mission, and by doing so, further their goals and serve the better good of the public.

### Some examples of other non-profits which have embraced the KRHCC:

The St. Louis & Lake County Regional Rail Authority (RRA)

The RAA is the only government agency in this list of non-profits, but I include it as the KRHCC helped the RRA reach a goal it has had since it was organized in 1987. That was to restore the KR depot and the KRHCC achieved that in less than six months. The RRA totally endorses the mission of the KRHCC which is demonstrated, in part, by our five-year renewable lease at \$1 a year.

# Newsletter

## Knife River Rec Council (KRRC):

The KRRC provided the financial launch pad for the KRHCC by matching a \$20K challenge grant from a KR individual, which suddenly provided \$40K in working capital. The council viewed the KRHCC as helping meet its mission statement, which focuses on providing and maintaining recreational activities, but also “.... opportunities serving the residents of the Knife River, Minnesota area.”

## Julebyen Christmas festival:

This annual festival is now the single fundraiser for the KRRC. In 2019 the KRHCC made its depot and grounds available to the festival at no cost, creating much needed additional space and a restored (and heated) depot to welcome passengers from Duluth for the first time since 1956. More than 1,000 people rode the train over the festival weekend Dec. 6-7. More than \$4,000 from train ticket sales went to the KRRC.

## North Shore Scenic Railroad (NSSR):

The NSSR sees KR as an attractive destination option for train riders who wish a shorter ride than to Two Harbors. KR offers a restored 1900s train depot, planned walking trails to remnants of KR’s colorful railroad history, and access to one of the North Shore’s most beautiful beaches.

## Larsmont “Little Red School House Pioneer Days”:

We are in the planning stages with Larsmont and the NSSR for a 1900s day on the North Shore where children grades K-6 can attend school at Larsmont's Little Red School House (circa 1914) in the morning – dressed in period clothing - then take the train from Larsmont to KR where they can experience a functioning 1900s train depot.

“Little Red School House Days” has been a popular event for school children for several years and has been supported by Duluth and Hermantown schools and the North Shore Community School.

## Two Harbors Anderson Claffy American Legion Post 109:

We have engaged the Post in designing and funding (in whole or in part) a granite memorial to Lake County Veterans of the five traditional branches and the Merchant Marine. The Post is the last and only Veteran’s service organization in Lake County and the KRHCC memorial will be the Post's official memorial to county veterans. The KRHCC is honored to be the site for this memorial.

The memorial will be part of a “reflection area” comprised of the granite memorial, a lit 24/7 flagpole, gazebo and interpretive displays.

# Newsletter

**The KRHCC greatly values the relationships that have been created with these organizations and others in the future who view our mission as complementing their own.**

## **KRRC CANCELS JULEBYEN 2020 AS WE KNOW IT; EXPLORING OPTIONS**



At its June board meeting, the KRRC decided to cancel Julebyen 2020 as we have known it, because of the uncertain behavior of the COVID-19 virus in December, and the risk that crowds would potentially pose to volunteers and guests alike.

Dr. Anne Skadberg (Family Practice physician) and president of the KRRC, said “the Julebyen committee is thinking about things that may be done in it's place to support our vendors and contribute to holiday charm.”

Julebyen is the KRRC’s single fundraiser, but thanks to the success of Julebyen going back to 2013, the KRRC is in good financial shape to continue to offer and maintain recreational opportunities for residents of the Knife River area and visitors.

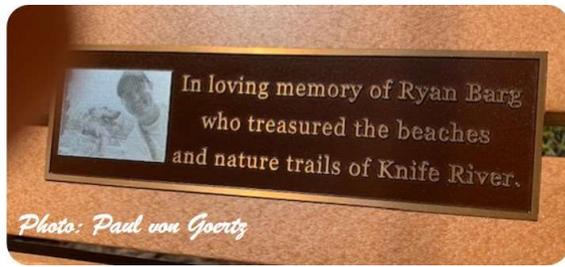
All KRRC recreational facilities are free and open to the public.

## **NEW BEACH BENCH IS A THOUGHTFUL MEMORIAL TO A LOVED ONE**

The KRHCC wishes to thank the Ryan Barg family for the beautiful bench seat given in memory of Ryan through the Knife River Rec Council (KRRC). Ryan loved to watch the lake and hike the trails while he lived in KR. His neighbors described him as a good neighbor who would play catch, kick a soccer ball, rough house and play on the beach with the kids and his dog, Trigger.



# Newsletter



The bench is just a bit north of the path leading from the parking lot to the beach. So sit a spell and enjoy the sometimes tranquility of our beloved lake. Thanks to KRRC members Randy Ellestad and Dave Schломann who provided the Bobcats to move the bench and cement mounting pavers into place, and those who assisted.

Left to right: Steve Carlson, Steve Betzler, Joe Russell, Dave Schломann and Randy Ellestad. Steve Carlson is the KRRC board member in charge of the KRRC's beach property and stickhandled the acceptance of the Barg family's gift and placement of the bench just above the beach.



## NSSR RELEASES 2020 KR TRAIN SCHEDULE

The North Shore Scenic Railroad (NSSR) released its schedule of Duluth to KR trains on June 17<sup>th</sup>.

As might be expected, the COVID-19 pandemic has created its own set of challenges to the NSSR and their guidelines have been carefully thought through to protect passengers, volunteers and crews. See the NSSR website for guideline details.

At this point, the NSSR has scheduled only one "Picnic Train" to KR and that will be Saturday July 18, with the possibility of another on Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup>. Total passengers will be limited to 60. Our own KR "Depot Agent," will give a brief history of KR railroading and show off our newly restored depot whether folks are interested or not.

According the NSSR website, "Upon arrival to the recently remodeled historic depot, guests can choose a walking tour to some historic railroad ruins, walk to the beautiful beach, or visit some of the local shops in Knife River."

# Newsletter

“Tickets INCLUDE a box lunch, which will be served shortly after some recreation time. If the weather is good, there is some time to explore after lunch, or the train will head back to Duluth.”

## Schedule for the trip:

10am – Depart Duluth, attached to the Two Harbors excursion

11am – Arrive Knife River, detaching from the other train.

Explore Knife River, have lunch, and enjoy the day.

12:30-1pm – Depart Knife River for Duluth

2pm – Arrive back to Duluth

## **DO YOU HAVE A MAGNETIC PERSONALITY?**

The KRHCC now has a “salvage magnet” capable of lifting 150 pounds of metal, which is far more than needed to remove hundreds of nails, screws and other metal debris from KRHCC property. Yet the magnet weighs only about five pounds.

All you need to do is walk in overlapping circles around KRHCC property with the magnet on a string until dizziness takes over.

You can tell family and all your friends you were chosen for this job because of your magnetic personality!

## **HAVE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A PAINTER?**

Well...here's your chance. But, the pallet has only shades of gray and the brush is a roller backed up with a 2 ½" trim brush.

We have at least three thousand square feet of depot interior that needs to be painted not once, but twice; undercoat and topcoat.

The painting pallet consists of light grey, medium grey and a slightly darker grey and all will complement each other when applied to ceiling, walls, baseboards, wainscot and chair rail. We have it worked it out so sawdust makers work in the mornings and painters in the afternoon, so both stay out of each other's way and to keep sawdust out of the paint.

# Newsletter

Larry Ronning has delegated painting crew to me (Paul von Goertz) so contact me if you can help at all. Email me at: [vongoertzpaul@yahoo.com](mailto:vongoertzpaul@yahoo.com) or call me on my cell: 218-393-1939

## **MEMORIALS AND HONORARIUMS RECEIVED THIS MONTH**

### In memory of John Safstrom

John died unexpectedly in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, in February where he and Gail were wintering. John and Gail have been residents of KR since 1989. A structural engineer by training, John was active in all three Knife River non-profits and loved working on the depot.

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

©Newsletter copyrighted by Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center. No portion thereof may be reproduced without written consent from the KRHCC. Contact [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org)