

# Newsletter



## Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center

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**OCTOBER, 2019**

By Paul von Goertz, KRHCC Board Member

### **Countdown to Julebyen 2019**

With just weeks remaining until Julebyen, depot work crews are checking off remaining tasks that will allow the depot to be used for both Troll Train ticket sales and waiting area, and for sales of children's books of Norwegian mythology, and vintage Christmas ornaments.

Most important is restoring the depot ceiling that will be accomplished using refurbished tongue and groove boards, existing boards and new wood.



The KR depot as of October 30. Mike Plimi hands a wainscot panel to Dave Grong as the Agent's Bay bump out nears completion.

With the ceiling in place, the ceiling/attic can be insulated and ready to hold in-floor heat when an electric boiler is installed in the first or second week of November. Only two of the four depot walls will be insulated, as we do not have access to the interiors of the other two.

Exterior of the depot is nearly complete, with the return of the original Agent's Bay bump-out being very labor intensive – but the effort is worth it both aesthetically

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and in keeping with the original design. With any luck, we will have at least two days of temperatures this fall that will allow us to finish exterior painting.

The North Shore Scenic Railroad's siding that will run parallel to the mainline and allow trains to pass one another may be laid down as soon as next spring. That means the freight depot building needs to be moved north about 20 feet to make way. This will be done by first week in November. Also during the same week, marina crews will be moving CRUSADER II to a temporary location north of the depot.

It is fortunate or unfortunate our little town has so many worthwhile activities going on right now, and so the demand for volunteers is great. There's the KRLC fish cake dinner November 1, new KR trail to open up, Julebyen and our own KRHCC depot.

Thanks to all who volunteer their time to make KR the "can do" community of Lake County!

## **Things learned along the way....**

### **KR'S ETHNICITY – A REAL MELTING POT**

In the booklet "MEMORIES OF KNIFE RIVER" written in the 1970's by descendants of some of the early settlers of KR, an attempt was made to make some sense of KR's strange mix of ethnic family names.

Best way to understand this is by following the progression of the discovery of the area's different natural resources, and the nationalities that were attracted to them.

The progression goes something like this:

Furs – French Canadians, Michiganders and English

Copper – Michiganders, English and American Easterners

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Early years of logging – French Canadians and folks from the northeastern US states

Later years of logging – Finns and Eastern Europeans (Yugoslavians, Hungarians, Austrians and Bulgarians)

Commercial fishing – Norwegians and Swedes

After the collapse of logging in the mid-20s, many left KR, but some remained and their ethnic names are still represented here. But the ethnic group that remained steadfast to the area was the Norwegians. Until the collapse of commercial fishing in the early 50s, families could still make a living at it.

And so we have the KR melting pot!

## ***Did you know?***

### ***An outdoor amphitheater for Knife River?***

*In the early 1970's, the state closed all open landfills, including KR's. It was located just above the ridge on the east side of Hawk Hill Road.*

*An idea came from a summer KR resident with ties to the metro arts community to build an outdoor amphitheater on the landfill site that would depict the history of the North Shore. The proposal included a large moat upon which a Viking ship could be floated. Funding would come from a federal EDA (Economic Development Administration) grant and the local share represented by the value of the land, owned by the county. This was similar to the funding mechanism that allowed the KR Marina.*

*Locals initially viewed the idea as a curiosity, and then became skeptical given the short summer season, impact of Lake Superior weather, bugs, a site that was a former landfill, and what use might become of the theater if the historical play did not draw projected numbers?*

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*The editor of the Lake County News Chronicle liked the amphitheater idea and gave it his overwhelming editorial support. Locals eventually took issue with the whole idea, which originated from outside interests, and became vocal in their opposition.*

*The Minneapolis Star got hold of what was brewing and did a story that apparently got the attention of then Governor Wendell Anderson, who sent his Lt. Governor, Rudy Perpich, to Two Harbors to preside over a hearing on the proposal in the court house. Locals packed the room and were vocal to the point where Perpich interrupted and proclaimed that if KR did not want the theater, it should not be forced upon them – and that the proposal should be dropped. And so it was.*

The above story is as your editor recalls it from 45 year ago. If others have a different recollection, please send to: [info@krhcc.org](mailto:info@krhcc.org) and I will print it in the November issue.

## **CRUSADER II MOVES TO ITS' NEW HOME!**

After nearly three years tucked away in a corner of the KR Marina property, CRUSADER II will finally find its permanent home at the KRHCC when it's moved on site about the first week in November. We greatly appreciate the KR Marina for allowing an extended stay of the CRUSADER II on their land, which has stretched out to nearly three years. Original agreement was to store the boat until we found a suitable location – never thinking it would take this long.

Plans are to place the boat at a temporary location north of the depot and parallel to it. Here it will be near the depot for electrical power, out of the way of Julebyen activities, and gives us some options for permanent placement with an open-sided shelter.

The Julebyen committee will be illuminating Troll Village, which this year is being relocated from the KR Campground to the KRHCC, with decorative holiday lighting. We hope the lighting will be extended to the depot and CRUSADER II. Make sure you see the new Troll Village during Julebyen December 6 – 8.

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## HELP US CLOSE OUR BARN DOOR!

With the nearing completion of the exterior of the depot, we are beginning to plan the restoration of the freight building (“freight depot”) adjacent to the depot next spring.

This fall we will move the building north about 20 feet. This is to make room for a siding that will run parallel to the depot and extend about 100 yards in either direction alongside the mainline. It is also being moved to give a clear site line east from the depot Agent’s Bay, which we have rebuilt at its original location.



“Freight depot #26” is in relatively good condition having been built in 1904 in Brimson. In June of 1910 it was moved to Palmers (three miles west of KR) to serve as a freight depot there. In 1959 the Palmers site was abandoned. In the same year, the DM&IR installed the first dial telephone system on the DM&IR and so moved the Palmers freight depot to KR to contain the phone equipment as well as serve as a flag passenger stop and freight

station. In 1962, the building was finally abandoned. Passenger service on the DM&IR had ended a year earlier, although a small amount of express freight kept it open until 1962.

Original drawings of the freight depot from 1904 show only one “barn door” with two doors enclosing an opening of about six feet. The configuration of the building today is two barn doors. We will restore it to its original door configuration of just one.

Right now, our barn door is open and we need financial help to close it. See the photo. We estimate a replicated custom built door with frame and hardware at \$1,200. We also need custom made windows on both east and west sides – each \$1,000. Help us zip up these needs! Your donation is 100% tax deductible.

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## **WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY CLOSING.**

Earlier this year we presented a challenge to nine people to each contribute \$1,000 towards the purchase of one of nine windows needed for the depot. We are thrilled to say the response to the challenge was so great we have only one window left looking for a donor. Someone please take advantage of this window of opportunity!

## ***Things learned along the way...***

### **KR WITNESSES TO EPOCH U.S. HISTORICAL EVENTS**

This bit of interesting info of two KR men who witnessed epoch US historical events as gleaned from KRHCC historian, Todd Lindahl:

#### **Captain Charles Anderson**

Anderson served as an officer in the US Navy during the Civil War. He was on blockade duty aboard the USS Cumberland in Hampton Roads, Virginia, when it was attacked by the ironclad CSS Merrimac, which quickly sank the wooden Cumberland. About a third of the crew drowned.

The next day when the Merrimac came to finish off the wooden Union warships, it was met by the ironclad USS Monitor. What took place was a pivotal point in naval history as wooden warships would become obsolete. The two ironclads fought all day, but the victory went to the Monitor when the Merrimac withdrew and never returned.

Following the battle, Anderson became part of the Monitor's crew and was onboard when the Monitor began leaking during a storm off Cape Hatteras and sank like a rock in December of 1862. Again, Anderson miraculously survived.

After the war, Anderson captained sailing ships on the Great Lakes and probably became familiar with Knife River through a connection with the commercial fishing industry. He would later become a large KR property owner, owned several businesses in KR and became quite successful.

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For many reasons he has often been referred to as “The Father of Knife River.” In future newsletters, we will describe his life in KR in more detail.

## **Sam Woolen**

Sam witnessed the aftermath of General George A. Custer’s defeat at the hands of Lakota and Cheyenne tribes at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in eastern Montana on June 25/26, 1876.

While not a member of Custer’s infamous 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry (fortunately), Woolen, was a member of General Terry’s column, which was one of three columns responsible for finding the tribes and returning them to the reservation. The other two columns were led by Custer and General George Crook.

Terry’s column was first to find the remnants of Custer’s cavalry a day after the battle. Woolen stated the bodies were naked and horribly mutilated. Woolen along with others identified the bodies as best they could and buried them in shallow graves.

Woolen began work as a brakeman on the Duluth & Iron Range RR in 1904 and retired as a conductor 20 years later. He died in his home in KR in 1926 at age 74, with his wife, Sarah, at his side.

## **“Don’t tell Larry”**

These are words heard on occasion at the depot site, usually after a gap in wainscoting or siding is found to be more than ¼”. Or when a can of paint blows off a ladder. Or when someone has forgotten to properly clean a paintbrush and it is now rock hard.

Our volunteer General Contractor, Larry Ronning, is a man of great patience, accepting of the limitations of his volunteer helpers, and a great teacher in how to do things right and not be wasteful of time and materials. Larry has also made all the tools in his tool trailer available for depot use as well as his Kubota backhoe/front end loader.

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Larry has a passion for the depot project and gets the best efforts from his volunteers as we witness his work ethic, planning and organizational skills, and attention to detail.

Thanks to Larry for bringing the depot exterior to near completion in just six months and under budget! And we're happy to tell Larry that!!!

## **CORRECTION**

In the September newsletter, I stated that as far as I knew, Raymond Martinsen was KR's only casualty of WWII. I want to correct that. Further reading of reliable KR history, I learned there are two more heroes. They are:

Vernon Norgren – born in KR in 1913 and graduated THHS in 1934. Entered the service in 1943 and trained as a tank driver. Killed in action on January 22, 1945. Buried with full military honors at an American cemetery in Belgium.

John Minahan – Born in KR and graduate of THHS. Serving as a marine, he was killed at his gunner post on the battleship USS New Mexico on May 12, 1945.

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.