



# Two Harbors Iron Port



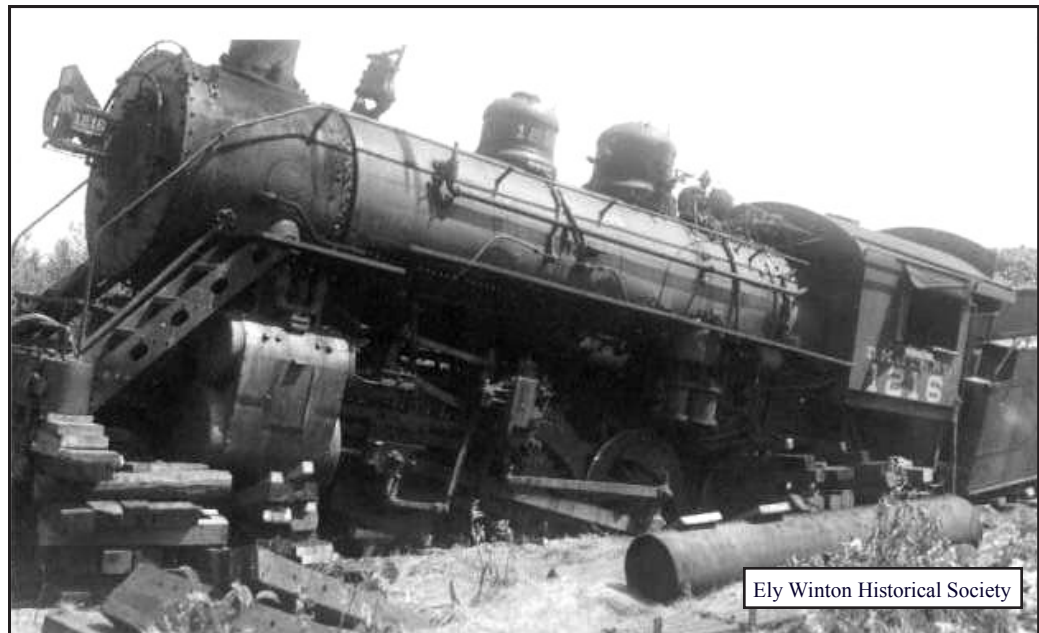
OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE  
LAKE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## BIRDMEN OF THE DM&IR

By Todd E. Lindahl Edited by Mel Sando

*Editors Note: The stories included in this article were collected more than 40 years ago when Todd Lindahl was collecting history and what was then considered curiosities and memorabilia. I borrowed these stories from the script Todd wrote for the collection of archival films we produced called Train Wrecks of the DM&IR.*

On a ordinary day in the summer of 1941 DM&IR locomotive #1216 arrived at Ely with the Ely Local freight train. The crew set out the incoming cars in the yard and then proceeded to the depot where they would pick up their southbound cars for the return trip. There was usually some time to kill before the scheduled departure time and this was normally when the crew would have their lunch. On this day however the Road Master suddenly appeared on the depot platform at the 1216's gangway. He ordered the engineer to take 1216 out to Fortier's sawmill at Garden Lake and pick up several cars there. The engineer informed the Road Master that the track past the abandoned Section 30 mine to Garden Lake was too light and was restricted for engines of the 1216's weight. The Road Master countermanded this order and told them to "never mind that" and "just go get the cars". The crew immediately left for Garden Lake.



Near the abandoned Section 30 Mine, the track is basically floated over a deep bog area. The 1216 made it in to Fortier's sawmill without incident and coupled onto the cars and started back to Ely. Just short of Lake County Highway 16 the 1216 started to slow down.....

*Continued pg 2*

2016

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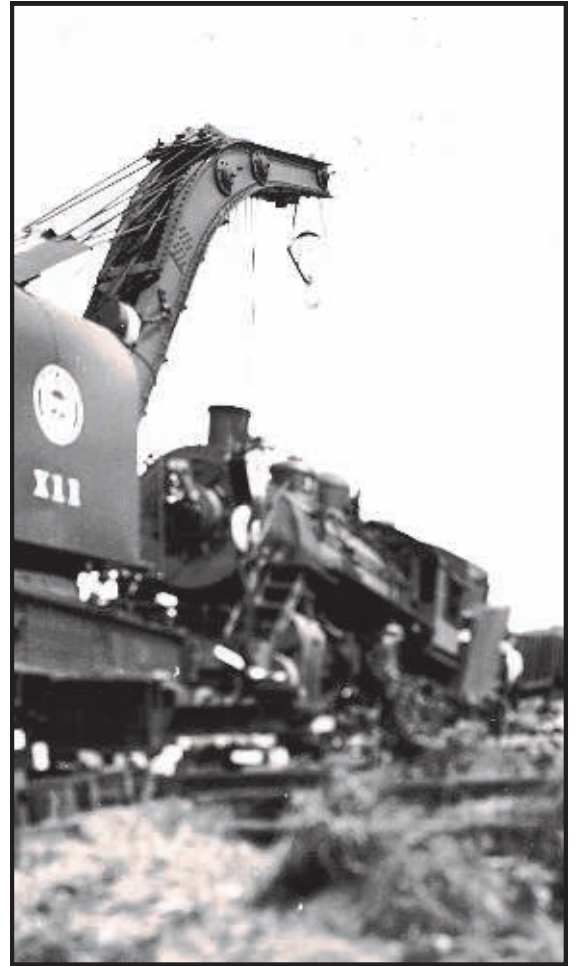
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Wally Setterlund, the fireman, noticed that the engineer was opening up the throttle and applying traction sand, but they were still slowing down. Wally looked out of the cab window and saw that the weight of the engine had broken a rail. That rail had somehow threaded its way up between two of the locomotive drive wheels and was now poking the bottom of the engine's boiler. Wally yelled at the engineer to stop and just as he did so, the 1216 began to lean in the direction of the broken rail threatening to tip over into the swamp. This posed a very serious state of affairs for anyone inside of the cab. In the event of a wreck exposed steam pipes inside the cab could break off discharging deadly high pressure steam in that confined space. The general accepted practice in these situations was to jump as far as possible off and away from the engine. It was what was known in railroading as "joining the birdman club". The engineer and fireman did this and both landed out in the swamp. When they landed, the men instantly sank up to their waists in the bog. The engine continued to slowly tip away from them, but as the angle increased, the locomotive wheels suddenly slipped off of the rails on the high side. The 1216 crashed down onto the railroad ties with over 200,000 pounds of force. The impact caused the track to start sinking further into the bog. Now the engine began to tip in the direction of the mired men and it appeared would soon drop on top of them. In panic they struggled to get free of the swamp's muddy grip. Wally said it was like one of those nightmares where you are being chased by something, but you can hardly move to get away. That is what their ordeal felt like, but in this instance it was for real. Then to their great relief, the engine stopped tipping and remained upright. The men were finally able to get out of the bog. Soaking wet and covered in mud, they walked to the nearest house to call in and report the disaster.



Above: The X-11 crane was light enough to negotiate the tracks. The 1216 outweighed the crane by 14 tons making lifting a challenge. The locomotive had to be raised in small increments and supported with blocks until crews could repair the rails underneath. There was a constant danger of the whole operation sinking into the bog.

Left and Below: Crews blocking up the locomotive to gain access to the broken rails.



This wreck and recovery took place during a particularly hot and humid summer. Crews worked in temperatures sometimes reaching 100 degrees. To make things worse it was a bad year for bugs. Due to the extreme conditions encountered by the wrecking crew this was one of the rare instances when DM&IR officials approved that **cold beer** be included in their supplies.





DM&IR Yellowstone Mallet #225 seemed to have been the "hard luck" mallet since it was involved in a number of serious wrecks including ones at Pettit, Robinson, and Rivers. The 225 survived all of its misfortunes and continued in service until it was donated to the City of Proctor in 1963.



When you put a Yellowstone in the ditch you got real troubles.

It was August 15, 1942 and an ore drag destined for the docks at Two Harbors passed by the Pettit depot near Gilbert. From here it was 2 miles to Jones Junction where the track splits with one line going to McKinley north of the Junction and the other going to Biwabik. Just short of Jones Junction, a locomotive broke down and the train came to a stop. One of the crew headed north walking to McKinley a little over a mile and a quarter away. Once there, he telephoned the depot at Pettit telling the agent to stop any trains until they could get the mainline cleared. As the

agent was receiving this message, Yellowstone 225 was passing the depot with 75 loaded cars on its way to Biwabik. The agent ran outside just as the caboose was going by. He stood there hoping to signal anyone in the caboose if they happened to look back, but they did not.

The 225 came around the curve where Highway 135 crosses the CN today and saw the standing train ahead. It was too short of a distance for them to stop. Engineer J. P. McQuade instantly applied the emergency brakes known as "dynamiting" in a futile attempt to stop. The head brakeman Andrew Egland, who was riding in the cab, jumped up and ran for the door intending to jump before the impact. Fireman Joe Jondal fully understanding what was about to happen, grabbed Andrew and forcefully pinned him down in his seat. This act prevented Andrew from joining the "birdman club," but it saved his life because the engine tipped over on that side. He might have succeeded in becoming a birdman although it would have been a horribly flattened birdman.



The 225 crashed into the rear of the standing train before derailing and plowing up a great mound of earth beside the track. If the collision had happened a couple of hundred feet farther up the line there would have been much worse consequences. There was a bottomless swamp there that the railroad had unsuccessfully tried to fill for many years. Had the 225 derailed there it may well have been impossible to ever recover the engine. It was a small bit of luck on an otherwise fairly luckless day.

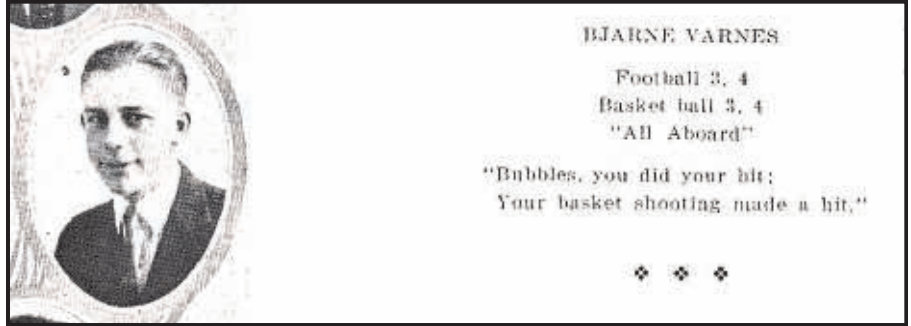
mjs



## Blair "Barney" Varnes

real name Bjarne,  
nickname "Bubbles" known for his  
sarcastic wit, Memoirs Class of 1922  
LCHS Archives

*The following was adapted from an obituary first printed in the Chicago Tribune on April 29th 1999 and brought to my attention by Mitch Costley. We think you sports fans, and I hope every one, may find it interesting.*



Back East, people claim that Hank Luisetti of Stanford shot basketballs first one hand jump shot in New York's old Madison Square Garden in the mid 1930's.

But credible eyewitnesses in Chicagoland, people like Ray Meyer, George Halas, Tony Lawless and Ed "Moose" Krause, reported seeing one hand shooting in the 1920's by Blair Barney Varnes, Ray Meyers high school coach at St. Patricks in 1932 . Varnes was also a star on George Halas' 1926 Chicago Bruins.

"I knew Barney as a player and a coach," said DePaul Hall of Fame coach Ray Meyer. "I knew him as a prominent judge. If he were playing in this era he would be known from coast to coast".

George Halas, before his passing described Mr. Varnes as "virtually a one man scoring machine, he is credited with having pioneered the step in one hand shot."

Former Fenwick High School coaching great Tony Lawless, former Notre dame All-American and Athletic Director Ed Krause, and DePaul University's president Rev. John R. Cortelyou recalled the unusual shooting style of the 6 foot 2 inch Varnes.

"I was accustomed to seeing the underhand shot or the set shot" recalled Cortelyou of his days as a seminary student. "Here comes Blair Varnes with his one handed shot, way ahead of his time, he used the one handed shot from the corner, the middle, or from where have you".

During a 1985 interview Varnes explained why he developed the new shot when he played for YMCA (now George Williams College), for DePaul and later for professional teams. "I did it to avoid getting so many jump balls from the pivot", he explained, "Play was rough in those days. When the ball went inside to center, you have two or three hands slap you and tie up the ball". "The funny thing was people that have never seen the one handed shot before thought I was showing off". "I did it out of necessity. I turned, stepped toward the basket and shot with one hand to get the shot off".

### Two Harbors native

### honored by Chicago award



As a coach Mr. Varnes originated the weave offense where all five players could take part in handling the ball. "Barney Varnes did more for basketball popularity and growth than any player I can recall", said Lawless. "His one handed shot and weave offense actually changed the style of play in this area and was a great influence in the development of the game itself".

In 1925, Mr. Varnes used his one hand shot to score nine field goals and help YMCA College beat DePaul 36-8. He frequently outscored the entire opposing team. "I think DePaul was impressed with me" said Varnes, "they talked me into a transfer, the next year I played for DePaul".

Mr. Varnes was a native of Two Harbors Minnesota. "In high school we had a biology teacher that was listed as 'coach'", said Mr. Varnes."He didn't spend a lot of time coaching us. The coaching sort of fell to me".

He continued coaching and playing professionally as he worked his way through Northwestern Law School. In addition to Halas' Bruins, he played pro for the Ke-Nash of Kenosha and other teams. Mr. Varnes continued to coach youths in the Wheaton area while serving as judge and prosecutor in Du Page County. He retired from public service in 1988.

Mr. Varnes, a basketball pioneer, prosecutor and judge, died in Clinton Iowa on the eve of his 95th birthday.



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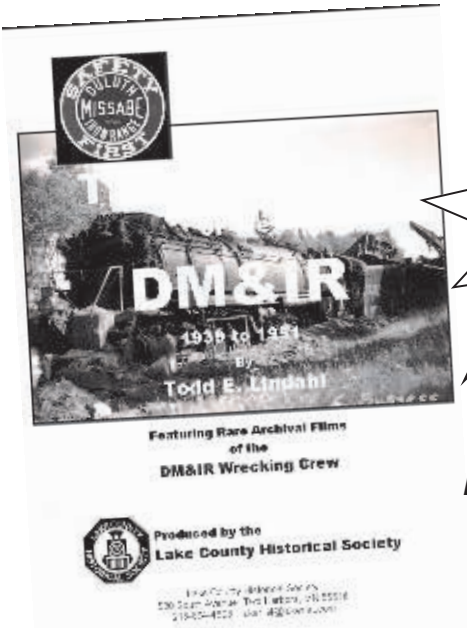
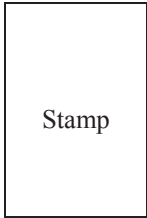
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Mr. Todd Lindahl and the LCHS have finished the new documentary DVD: *Train Wrecks of the DM&IR*. This one of a kind DVD features rare archival footage of the DM&IR Wrecking Crews in action. Covering years 1939 to 1951 it is a must have for the true railfan.

Proceeds from the sale of this DVD go to support the Lake County Historical Society a 501c.3 charitable organization

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Depot 9 AM to 5 PM  
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**Sunday May 15th**

Depot and Lighthouse  
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**Saturday May 21st**

Depot 9 AM to 5 PM  
Lighthouse 10 AM to 6 PM

**Sunday May 22nd**

Depot and Lighthouse  
10 AM to 4 PM

Depot, Light Station, and 3M Museums all open to **Normal Summer Hours** (7 days a week) on **Memorial Weekend** starting **Friday May 27th**.