



Two Harbors Iron Port



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE
LAKE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

D & I R W R E C K I N G C R E W S

By Todd E. Lindahl

Little is known about the first wrecking crew on the D&IR. This crew was more than likely run by the General Foreman of the car shop Albert Headley. If a locomotive was involved in the wreck, the Master Mechanic was probably involved too since the machinists were required to go if an engine was involved in the early days.

Wooden wrecking derrick (crane) # 149 was built by the D&IR in 1885 and had a lifting capacity of only 8 tons. This was sufficient for handling most of the wooden cars of this era, but insufficient to lift even the lightest of D&IR locomotives except maybe one end if it was very close to the track. Heavy block and tackle and a second locomotive were needed to right an engine if it were on its side. Wooden combination tender and tool car went with the crane and had a capacity of 800 gallons of water for the boiler and 5 ½ tons of coal. Tools used by the crew were kept in the rear part of the car. A boom car, which is a short flatcar with a cradle to support the derrick's boom while it is being transported, fills out the wrecking outfit. Extra flatcars, bunk cars, or block cars can be added if needed. The derrick is not self-propelled so it needs to be moved by a locomotive. The bunk and dining caboose # 150 was the formerly caboose # 21, which was built by the D&IR in 1883 and served as Charlemagne Tower's private car. It served in this capacity from 1883 to 1887 when it was replaced by the private car *Vermilion* also built in the Two Harbors shops. From 1887 to 1892 it saw service as the Superintendent's known as *Car A* with the *Vermilion* designated as *Car B*. Caboose # 21 had been at the rear of the first ore train between Minnesota Mine (Today called Soudan Mine) and Two Harbors on July 31, 1884. It was not the small four-wheel bobber caboose so often portrayed in paintings of the first ore train. Car # 150 was 52 feet long and more resembled a side-door combination passenger coach than a caboose. In 1892 caboose # 21 was assigned to the wrecking outfit and given the new number 150. It was remodeled to include bunks for 16 men and had a full kitchen for the wrecking crew cook and dining tables for the men at one end of the car. A telegraph set was installed in the cupola so communications could be established between the D&IR offices and wreck site. In later years the telegraph set was replaced by a more convenient telephone. Car # 150 remained in this capacity until July 1920 when it was taken out of service and scrapped.

Dick La Fave was born in St. Paul in 1867 and came to the D&IR in 1887 at the age of 20 to work in the car shop. Just six years later in 1893 he made foreman on the wrecking crew. He served in this position for the next 38 years until he retired in 1931. Dick La Fave died November 9, 1946 at the age of 79. One can only imagine what he may have thought about the horrific wrecks involving a number of the Yellowstone Mallets between 1941 and 1946 as compared to what he had to deal with back in 1893.

It should be pointed out that derrick # 149 and later more modern cranes were used not only on wrecks, but for other jobs requiring heavy lifting. These may include a variety of work such as loading logs spilled from log cars along the mainline, branches, or spurs or being hired by mining companies, logging railroads, and others to do special lifting projects. The work performed could be quite diverse.

Continued...

2015

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From the very beginning a majority of the crew came from the car department since most of the cleanup effort always involved some type of freight car or on rare occasions a passenger car. The Track Department is usually included at the wreck site building a shoofly track so the crane can get close to the wreckage or repairing track after the cleanup, but they are not part of the wrecking crew.

In 1900 the D&IR began to phase out their wooden ore cars and replace them with steel ones. The added weight of these cars in a train soon prompted the railroad to invest in the larger K-class locomotives in 1905 to deal with the increase. Derrick # 149 was now woefully lacking in power to deal with these steel cars and heavy locomotives. The railroad therefore purchased a new wrecking crane from Industrial Works and designated it as crane # 1. It weighed 161,500 pounds and had a lifting capacity of 75 tons, which is 67 tons more than derrick #149. Like the older crane, # 1 was not self-propelled either and had to be moved by a locomotive. Derrick #149 however could still be used for light service tasks and remained in use on the D&IR until May 1922 when it was sold for scrap.

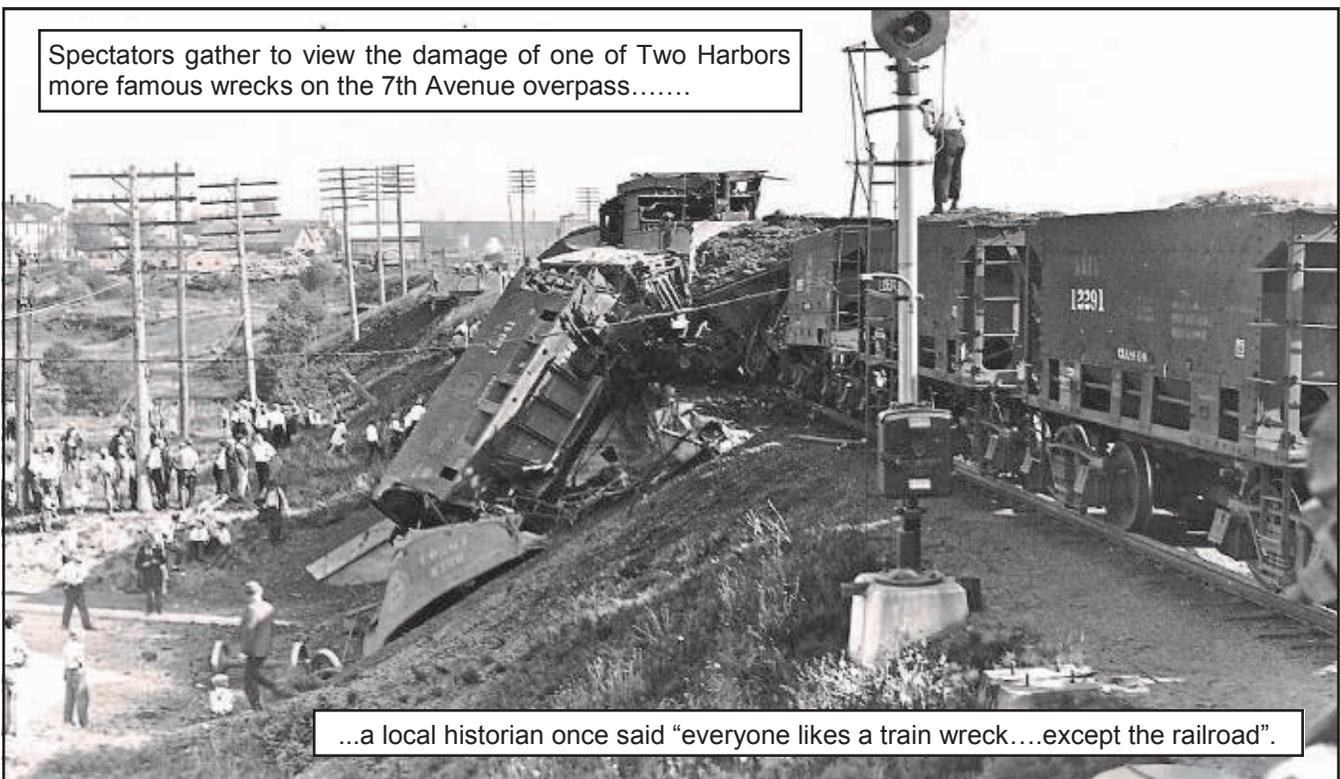
On August 31, 1933 the D&IR private car Minnesota, built in 1895 for President J. L. Greetsinger, became the latest wrecking crew kitchen, dining, and bunk car W-803. This continued a tradition of using former D&IR private cars for the wrecking outfit. It remained in service until 1964 when it was burned at Two Harbors and the scrap metal recovered. Several other old vintage wooden coaches were burned at about the same time.

As the D&IR and later DM&IR cars and locomotives got larger and heavier, so did the wrecking cranes given the chore of cleaning up the occasional train wreck. This progression culminated with the X-7 acquired to lift Yellowstone Mallets in 1941. The X-7 had a lifting capacity of 250 tons, which was 175 tons more than crane # 1 and 242 tons more than derrick # 149. The X-7 was affectionately known as the "little monster" and even had this nickname painted on the side of the cab. Once the steam era was over and the surviving Yellowstones were donated for public displays, there was no need to keep the X-7 powered by steam. The boiler was replaced with a diesel engine in 1960. The boiler was sold to the Ready-mix plant in Two Harbors. Ultimately the Little Monster was sold to a tourist railroad at Spooner, Wisconsin and is still there presently. Today there is no wrecking crew on the former Missabe. Wrecking contractor Hultcher from Iowa is called out if there is a wreck these days. They are on the road within 30 minutes to any location in the Midwest and are on call 24 hours per day and 7 days a week.

Being on the wrecking crew was a desirable, but dangerous job. The pay was good and the chance of overtime was almost guaranteed. The crew received double pay after 16 hours, even if they were asleep and simply riding in the bunk car. When the call came in to get ready to go, the cook went to the grocery store and bought supplies for the meals. The standing order to the store was that the food provided was to be the very best they had available regardless of cost.

continued

Spectators gather to view the damage of one of Two Harbors more famous wrecks on the 7th Avenue overpass.....



...a local historian once said "everyone likes a train wreck....except the railroad".

In 1906 the wrecking crew included the following men:

- Dick La Fave – Foreman
- Robert Dempster – Derrick Engineer
- George McGraw
- Martin Anderson
- James Hastings
- Andrew Sandvick
- Donald Coursolle
- Lester Babin
- John Hazaleus
- Sever Gervias
- G. Provonst
- Frank Irwin



In May 1940 some of the DM&IR wrecking crew included:

- Laumen A. Running – Car shop General Foreman.
- Nels A. Hessen – Wrecking Foreman
- Carl A. Wahlgren – Assistant Foreman
- George O. Olsen – Wrecking crane engineer
- Swan G. Johnson – Assistant wrecking crane engineer
- Louis J. Reinertsen - cook
- Joe A. Widen
- Carl A. Freeberg
- Arthur Dahl
- William H. Reitan
- Tony R. Soderstrom
- And others



The wrecking crew from Two Harbors would also work on the Missabe Division as well as on the Iron Range Division. The work continued nonstop until the task was completed and this might mean being gone for a week or more in some instances. One wrecking crew member told me that he was on a job on the Missabe Division for almost two weeks straight and was very tired and happy to come home. Just before they arrived at Two Harbors Yellowstone Mallett #229, which is now on display here, derailed coming into the yards with an ore drag. They had to go right back to work with no rest as soon as they got to town.

Engine #1216 was derailed and almost ended up in a horrid swamp near the Section 30 mine. It took about a week of hard work to recover the 1216 with the average temperature each day reaching around 100°. In this one rare case, the Railroad Company *unofficially* delivered cold beer for the men along with their grocery order. Apparently they appreciated just how difficult this assignment was. As always, these highly trained men were equal to the challenge and the 1216 was recovered and returned to service.

T.E.L.

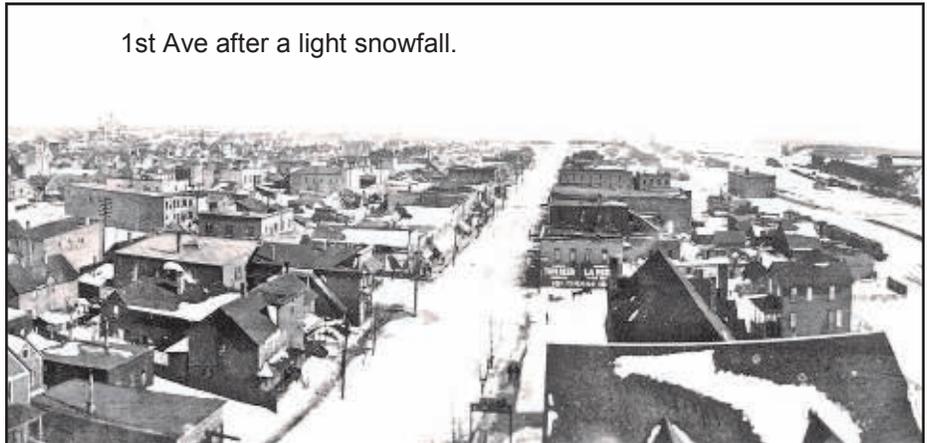
Another of Two Harbors more infamous wrecks. A couple of Duluth Brewing Co. boxcars and a caboos end up in Lake Superior down by the fresh water treatment plant, the cars would all be recovered.



Members of the Class of '63 have coerced me into helping with their beatification / historical photo project to be displayed in the windows of vacant businesses along 1st Avenue. Stay tuned on our LCHS FB page for progress and details on how you can help.

We have also been asked by members of the Knife River community to help erect a plaque on the bridge commemorating the biblical flood of 2012. Again more to come...

1st Ave after a light snowfall.



A Quick Year End Review

This year saw changes in our business operations.

Most notably was the staffing changes we decided upon at the end of last season. This was a difficult decision and merits further review. Many may have noticed that we operated with a short staff. I would like to note that our staff stepped up and carried the business operations through the summer.

Looking at 2016 and Beyond

Often you hear me comment on the insurmountable projects list but I want to share with you that the two biggest obstacles the Society faces in the future are *Staffing* and *Indifference*.

We are all aware of the staffing shortages all businesses face along the north shore. As a part time seasonal employer we have a more difficult time recruiting staff, particularly for the B&B. I will be presenting solutions including adjustments in payroll and hours of operation to the Board to address this challenge.

I use the term indifference to explain the environment that exists in Two Harbors. As the community ages beyond the heyday of railroading young people have become removed from the history of the community. No one person or event is to blame, things simply change. However, this is a situation we need to address. I can't do this on my own. I am asking all our members to please be advocates for local history and perhaps more importantly, have conversations with your children and grand children.

2016 Work Plan (proposed)

(In addition to general maintenance)

This is the section of the newsletter where I usually bludgeon the membership with our Mount Everest of maintenance projects. This year I have decided to stay focused on the projects list one item at a time. My goal this year is to continue the path of 2015 and to move ahead and hopefully finish these ongoing projects.

Depot RFP Basement Water Abatement – Sticking to the Timeline

Depot Museum Lighting

Depot Windows

Depot Exterior Repair and Painting (3 Spot Canopy)

Depot Exhibits

Room 1 DM&IR RR Model – Kid Friendly Exhibits

Room 2 Train Wreck Exhibit

Fix Logging RR Model – Kid Friendly

Replace the last of the plywood Exhibit Walls

Archives/ Contractor / Equipment / Software / Storage / Supplies

Freight Wagon-repair and paint

Sleigh-paint

In Memoriam

We have lost several members this past year.

Most recently we lost Robert Anderson and Gary Aleff.

Bob was a Lifetime Member and received many accolades most notably for his efforts during the Lighthouse restoration.

A Lifetime Member Gary Aleff was instrumental in developing the investment accounts that will become the Society's Endowment Fund when those funds mature. We say thank you for his vision toward the future of the Society.

Donations In Memoriam 2015

- Elsie Kohlberg for V.J. Kohlberg
- Emmert Johnson for Dorothy Johnson
- James and Margie Jumer for D. James Jumer Family
- Jody Zastera for Joe Zastera
- Ken Sandvik for Alfred and Margaret Sandvik
- Maggie King for Richard P. King
- Bonnie Peterson for James Anderson
- John and Dory Pearson for Judy Lindahl Olson
- Lee C. Johnson for Walfred and June Johnson
- Barbara and Joe Russell for Carole Russell
- Phil and Judy Holbeck for Bruce R. and Brandon L. Olson
- Dee Ann Holisky for Vicky Holisky
- Donald J. Olson for Elsie C. Olson
- Judy and John Sellman for Robert Anderson
- Larry, Brad, Craig, Suzie, Todd and Irene Ronning for Robert Anderson
- The Family of Ellen Moore-Anderson for Robert Anderson

Acquisitions

(since the last newsletter)

The following people have donated to the permanent collection. We would like to thank them for their generosity.

Don Norlen

Clarine Northey

Phil Holbeck

James H. Manahan, J.D.

Robert Abrahamson

Lyle Elundsen

Dale and Joan Congdon

Bonnie Hatfield (Nancy Bayle)

Mabel Hoseth

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NOVEMBER
2015

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Waterfront Gallery / Val Doherty
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*LCHS Memberships
make nice little stocking stuffers!*

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Sperling, Robert
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Truscott, Beverly
Wahlberg, Ruth
Woehrlin, Molly
Zastera, Jody

*Have a
Safe and Happy
Holiday Season
Everyone!*

Depot Museum
Winter Hours
Saturdays 11 AM to 4 PM
watch for our
Annual Year End Sale
in the
Depot Gift Shop
before the
*Christmas
Holiday!*
December 5th, 12th, and 19th

Lighthouse FYI:
Sewer Repairs at the Lighthouse totaled a little over \$10,000. Our insurance would not cover any of the repair as it was determined to be "normal wear and tear". Thank you to our members for the support. Without you we would not have had the resources to have this fixed and get the B&B up and running.

THE LAKE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY IS A 501.C.3 NON PROFIT ORGANIZATION
DEPENDANT UPON THE GENEROSITY OF IT'S MEMBERS AND PATRONS.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT

Lake County Historical Society
P.O. Box 128
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Stamp



Photo MRHS

The X-7 "Little Monster" Crane in later years.



Life expectancy for a wooden ore car could be cut short in an instant in 1888.