



Kettle Falls Gazette

National Park Service
Voyageurs National Park
Kettle Falls Visitor Destination

A Portage into the Past

VOLUME III

KETTLE FALLS HOTEL AND DAM, EST. 1910 - 1914

OPEN MAY - SEPTEMBER



Photo: The Manitowac docking at Kettle Falls (ca 1910 - 1920), NPS.

A CROSSROADS OF HISTORY

THE Kettle Falls Hotel is a witness of time and lies at a crossroads of history.

the land, and those who called it home.

It is here, in what is now Voyageurs National Park, that a collection of stories played out over time. These stories tell of the industries that came and went, the people who braved

Most importantly, these stories reveal the hope for a better way of life and the struggle encountered along the way.

A Stopping off Place

KETTLE Falls lies between two major lakes of travel, Namakan Lake and Rainy Lake. It is here that people came to conduct business, to rest, to converse, to fish, or to just pass through.

also grew in shallow bays near the falls, and rocky outcrops grew vast amounts of blueberries.

The prehistoric native people, followed by the Ojibwe Indians, were the first recorded presence in the vicinity. They probably came for the abundance of food located near the two waterfalls that flowed from Namakan into Rainy Lake. A multitude of fish species such as lake sturgeon, walleye, and whitefish were abundant in the shallow moving water below the two falls. Wild rice

The first European to see Kettle Falls may have been explorer Jacques de Noyon in 1688, and others soon followed. 1731 to 1840 - the peak of the fur trade - brought the colorful French-Canadian canoemen through Kettle Falls on the way to Lake Athabaska. These canoemen, known as voyageurs, named the falls Chaudière Falls, which means to boil or bubble. These men often had to portage, or haul, canoes and trade goods overland around the impassable falls.

In 1893, with the discovery of gold on Rainy Lake, more people soon came to the area. As a stopping off place for travelers due to the necessity of portaging around the rapids, Kettle Falls became a bustling place.

Steamboats loaded with passengers and supplies would depart at Harding, now Crane Lake, for the one-day trip to Kettle Falls. After portaging around the rapids they would board yet another steamboat for the journey to the gold fields. The gold rush ended by 1901 but the Kettle Falls area continued to be a hub of activity for many.

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All ads in this paper were replicated from the International Falls Daily Journal, Circa 1935, to match the original ads as closely as possible.



A STOPPING OFF PLACE

(Cont'd from page 1)

EVENTUALLY, men and equipment necessary for the building of the pulp and paper industry in International Falls and Fort Frances started to pass through the area.

In 1910, lumber baron Edward W. Backus began construction of two dams (Kettle Falls and Squirrel Falls) to control lake levels that would aid his paper making industry. Upon completion in 1914, the dams would insure adequate water not only to move logs to the mills, but also supply water for the production of paper.

Prior to the 1920s, Kettle Falls was an important stopping off place for commercial fishermen. These men sold their catches to bidders who lined the docks at Kettle Falls. Once the fish were sold, men would load crates brimming with fish onto wagons and transport their catches across the portage road to boats waiting to take the fish to market.

In the mid 1920s, numerous logging camps sprang up on the Kabetogama Peninsula, resulting in massive log drives of white pine. Most logs made their way to the Kettle and Squirrel Falls, then were sluiced through the dams on their way to

sawmills in International Falls, Minnesota.

Early on the French-Canadian canoemen were contracted by Europeans to fulfill the demand for furs. Towards the late 1800s the demand for beaver waned and the fur trade became a part of history. Gold seekers realized their fortune was not to be had here and either moved on to Alaska or homesteaded the area. Lumberjacks had removed what pine they could easily reach along the shorelines and logging slowed in northern Minnesota.

Along with the lull of logging, commercial fishing in many lakes became prohibited by the State of Minnesota

In the mid-to-late 1930s, things began to change at the hotel. The type of customer the hotel attracted in its early years was soon replaced by a new one.

By the late 1930s, fishermen were bringing their families and "vacationers" were coming to Kettle Falls and using the hotel as a stopping off place. Tourists replaced the voyageurs, miners, lumberjacks, and commercial fishermen of the past.



Photo: Oliver and Annie Knox home at Kettle Falls. Oliver hewed the logs for the house which had 6 bedrooms, summer and winter kitchens. The Knox's fed people who came through the area such as lumberjacks. On the front porch is Annie Knox, Mary Knox, Mary Bowser, & Ethel Sullivan, 1917, NPS.

Come to Kettle Falls
The **Most Picturesque Site** on the **Canadian Border**

Spectacular Scenery
See the waters of the enormous chain of Canadian **lakes** rushing through the International dams at **Kettle Falls**, dropping 20 feet into the marvelous **Rainy Lake.** (Circa 1935)



Photo: Portaging around Kettle Falls via Rainy Lake side, NPS.

THE EARLY YEARS

DURING the early years the amount of travelers stopping off at Kettle Falls grew.

Until 1920, about 50 commercial fishermen operated in the area, selling their 70-pound iced catches to bidders at a dock managed by the hotel owner. As many as 5,000 boxes of fish passed over the portage at the peak of each fishing season. Often

crowds of up to 300 people gathered at the dock.

To accommodate the influx of people, businesses sprang up to meet the demand. A post office operated at Kettle Falls from 1912 - 1913. While the hotel supplied basic food and drink for its patrons, a trading post was established to provide more goods.

Kettle Falls Hotel

Located 50 Miles from Ranier, Minnesota

Marvelous 50 mile boat trip on Rainy Lake from Ranier - or 24-mile thrilling trip from Gappas Landing on Lake Kabetogama.

Did You Know?

Voyageurs National Park staff reproduced the original collection of hotel guest registers.

Take a closer look, perhaps you might recognize a name or two.

Registers are located in the hotel lobby.



A Timeline of Kettle Falls

- 1730 - Ojibwe Indians are the primary residents
- 1789 to 1793 - Fur trader Alexander Mackenzie passed through, observing Indian people spearing sturgeon
- 1897 - Tent lodging at Kettle Falls available for travelers headed to the gold fields on Rainy Lake
- 1909 to 1914 - E.W. Backus built two dams at Kettle Falls
- 1910 to 1913 - William E. "Big Ed" Rose constructed hotel
- 1914 - Chris Monson became the first damkeeper
- 1918 - Bob Williams purchased hotel for \$1,000 and 4 barrels of whisky
- 1919 to 1933 - Prohibition of alcohol
- 1950 - Herb Williams became the second damkeeper (no relation to owners)
- 1956 - Bob Williams died
- 1961 - Lillian "Lil" Williams died (Bob's wife) and Charlie (Bob's adopted son) and Blanche Williams operate the hotel
- 1965 - Herb Williams died and Charlie Williams became the third damkeeper
- 1971 - Voyageurs National Park authorized
- 1975 - Voyageurs National Park established
- 1977 - Charlie and Blanche Williams retired and sold Kettle Falls Hotel to the National Park Service. Mike Williams (their son) became first concessionaire and fourth damkeeper
- 1982 - Chuck Williams (son of Charlie and Blanche) replaced Mike Williams as the fifth damkeeper
- 1986 to 1987 - Hotel closed for renovation by the NPS
- 1992 - Charlie and Blanche Williams died
- 1992 - Darrell Knutson became concessionaire
- 1996 to present - Rick Oveson became concessionaire



Kettle Falls being renovated, 1986-87, NPS.

Changes Come to the Kettle Falls Area

MANY people were now coming to the North Woods as cabins were springing up on area lakes.

By 1964, widespread talk of a national park being created on the Kabetogama Peninsula had started. Support for this proposed park grew.

In 1971, Congress and President Richard M. Nixon signed Voyageurs National Park into law as the 36th national park. In 1975, Voyageurs was established.

In 1976, the Kettle Falls Hotel was recognized for its significance and entered into the National Register of Historic Places.

The hotel was sold to the National Park Service in 1977, but continued to operate with concessionaires. Upon purchase of the hotel and grounds, the park began to make improvements.

During this time, park staff realized the hotel needed a complete renovation. Over the years, the hotel's foundation settled and caused the building to take on a "sagging appearance," rolling floors and skewing windows and door frames.

The renovation included the replacement of the foundation and the porch, stabilization of the floors and walls, construction of a new kitchen, and the repair of architectural features. Where replacement was necessary, new material matched the old in design and color to keep the existing appearance and function.

The bar room retained its historic features including the sloping floor. The remaining rooms were altered to meet current lodging and safety standards and most of the first floor was made accessible.



Photo: Wa-gi-ma-wub (Chief "Wake-em-up") at Kettle Falls, circa 1920s, KCHS.

Did You Know?

When standing at the Kettle Falls overlook and looking towards the falls and dam, you are looking south into Canada.

Wilderness Glory
Untouched Beauty
at Your Back Door
On waters teeming with
Sportive Fish.

"Not a Sneeze on the Border"

Because of the purity of the sun-washed pine scented air, hay fever victims find welcome relief at the Kettle Falls Hotel. Freedom from noxious weeds and dust makes the Border Country the Hay Fever Victims Sanctuary.
(Circa 1935)



A STRUGGLE BETWEEN TWO WAYS OF LIFE

IN the first decade of the 1900s, most of northern Minnesota was wilderness. However, as the years went by, development efforts were becoming more visible. The pine of the North Woods was being cut for lumber, and water power from large lakes was needed for the development of industry.

In 1925, paper and lumber magnate, Edward W. Backus proposed more dams in the

Rainy Lake watershed. These seven dams were intended to create a more efficient, controlled power source and a storage basin for the hydroelectric power in International Falls.

Critics of the proposal, including long-time lover of the North Woods - Ernest Oberholtzer, pointed out the shorelines in the area, now known as Voyageurs National Park, would be flooded -

some by as much as 80-feet.

In 1927, Oberholtzer spearheaded a movement to stop Backus from building his intended dams by developing an alternate plan for the region and by testifying and lobbying before the United States Congress. Oberholtzer's persistence led to the passage of the "Shipstead-Newton-Nolan Act" of 1930. This legislation, based largely on Oberholtzer's alternative

plan for the region, was to "preserve shore lines, rapids, waterfalls, beaches, and other natural features in an undisturbed area.

This act eventually led to the establishment of the Superior National Forest and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

Did You Know?

In 1910, construction of the hotel began. It was completed and opened for business in the summer of 1913.

It is rumored the famous Madam, Nellie Bly, helped finance the construction.

The hotel was sold to Robert Williams in 1918 for \$1,000 cash and four barrels of whiskey.

Did you Know?

Kettle Falls was named for the naturally formed kettles in the bedrock below the falls. These kettles were formed by hard rock being swirled around soft rock over thousands of years.

Water Levels Today

Prior to installation of the Squirrel Falls and Kettle Falls Dams, all of the lakes in the Rainy Lake Watershed existed as natural bodies of water.

The watershed is now controlled by a privately owned hydropower dam at the outlet of Rainy Lake as well as by regulatory dams on the two outlets from Namakan Lake that supply Rainy Lake.

Over the past several years, studies by Voyageurs National Park officials determined that fish, wildlife, water quality, and human uses of the lakes within the park are all affected by fluctuations in water levels. Because of this, water-level management is a significant natural resource

issue for park officials and adjacent agencies.

Today, water levels are regulated to fulfill multiple uses including: power generation, recreation, and protection of natural resources.

Because these lakes are international border waters, the International Joint Commission (IJC) has the authority to regulate the water levels and set water-management practices. These practices are commonly referred to as rule curves, measures of allowable high and low-water levels throughout the year (see graph to left).

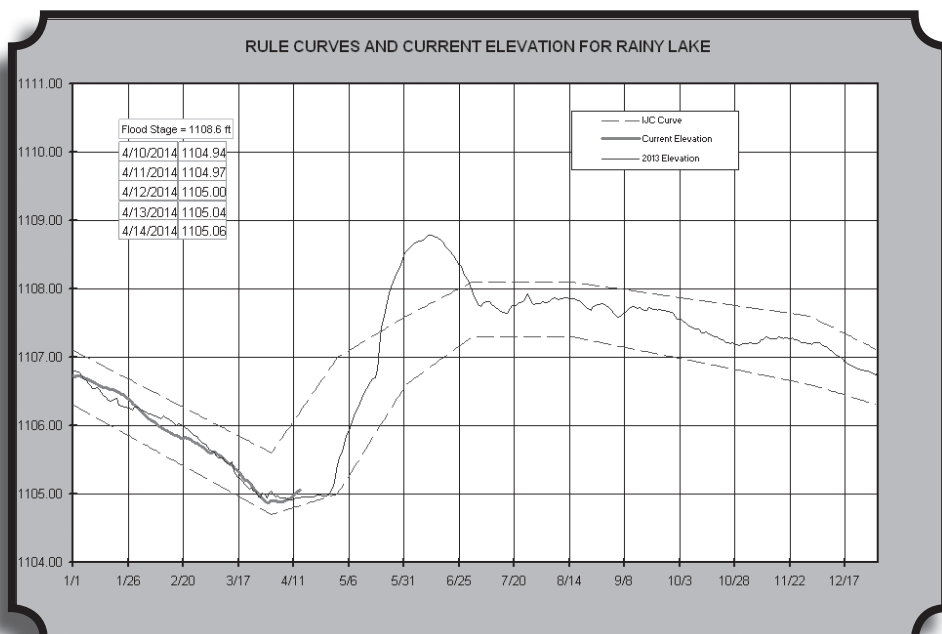


Photo: construction of the dam, 1910 - 1914, NPS.

Photo: Sluicing logs through the dam at Kettle Falls, circa late 1930s, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS).





HOTEL FACILITIES

THE original Kettle Falls Hotel was built with 18 guest rooms. After renovation by the National Park Service that addressed fire codes and accessibility, the historic hotel now has 12 charming rooms that take you back in time.

There is no television or Wi-Fi to distract from the reality of being in the North Woods. The rooms do offer double or single beds and are reminiscent of the hotel's earlier days with shared facilities. To accommodate more overnight guests to the area, the National Park Service built villas that can be rented through the concessionaire.

Visitors to Kettle Falls often stop by the bar, if nothing else, to check out the sloping floor and play the nickelodeon.

The foundation the hotel was first built upon was mainly clay soil. This soil type often accumulates water build-up and can become "mushy" over time, sinking into the Earth. The hotel's foundation did indeed "sink", creating a sloping floor for the entire bottom level of the hotel.

When the National Park Service renovated the hotel in the 1970s, they preserved the bar room floor. Today, the National Park Service and the concessionaire work together to maintain the eclectic look and feel.

Photos: top - Hamm's Beer print taken from the Kettle Falls Dam looking toward Rainy Lake, ca1950s, NPS. Bottom - nickelodeon with photo of Jack Dempsey above, 1942, NPS, Williams Family.



Did You Know?

The Hamm's Brewing Company filmed beer commercials at Kettle Falls. Do you remember the jingle?

From the Land of Sky Blue Waters,
From the land of pines' lofty balsams,
Comes the beer refreshing,
Hamm's the beer refreshing.

Hotel Furnishings

WHILE changes at the hotel have occurred over the years, some things have stayed the same. Many of the furnishings in the hotel came from Williams' Night Club or home in Ranier, Minnesota.

Bob Williams owned and operated his night club before he purchased the Kettle Falls Hotel. The hotel was, as far as Bob was concerned, secondary to his Ranier night club and often times supplied

with castaway items. The furnishings of the hotel soon became eclectic as they were either second-hand, given to the Williams', or brought back from their many vacations.

The original furnishings stand as a testament to the past.

Can You Locate These Items?

Below is a description of some furnishings that can be found in the hotel or bar and are significant to the history of the hotel. Test your knowledge by locating the item in the hotel or bar that best matches the description given below.

- This item was used to hold bread dough while it was rising.
- This item was used as a hideaway bed in the Williams' home in Ranier and was brought to the hotel pre 1932.
- This item is a Garland brand #1402. It was made by the Lowell Manufacturing Company in Erie, PA.
- This item was installed in 1927 and offered popular piano music.
- This item was simply constructed of darkly-stained plywood on a pine frame with a maple trimmed counter top.
- This item's label states "no springs honest weight".
- This item's manufacturer's label dated 1917 and still plays 78 rpm records.

- This item is an Irving Kaye table. It found its way into the hotel in the 1960s.
- This item is rustic cedar, circa 1920s - 1930s, and was named after "Big Olie".
- This item is mounted on green felt.





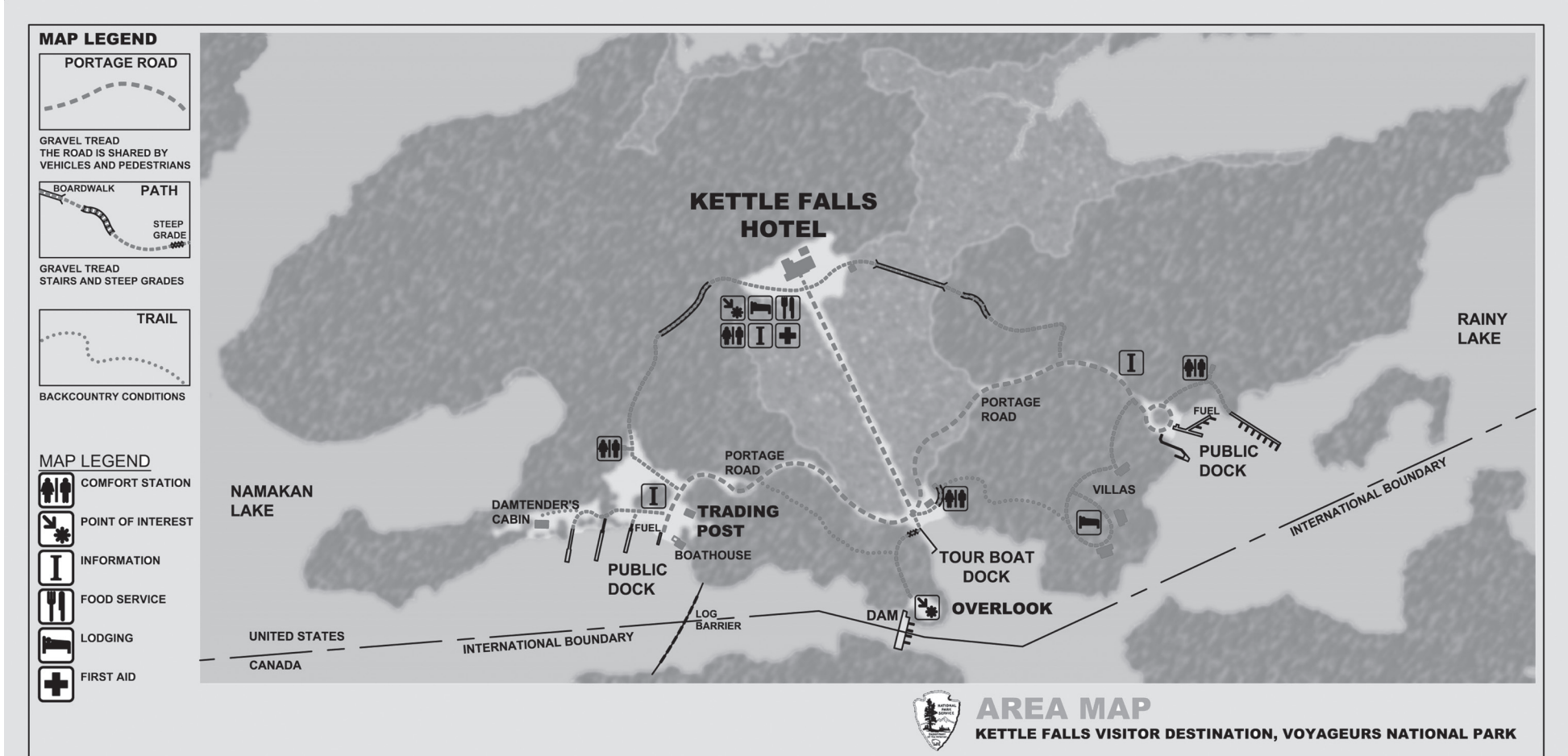
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www.nps.gov/voya

Kettle Falls Hotel
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 12977 Chippewa Trail
 Kabetogama, MN 56669
 (218) 875-2070
www.kettlefallshotel.com



Photo: Aerial view of Kettle Falls, Hotel, Dam, and grounds, sometime between 1981 and 1987, NPS.