

Roscoe Churchill, Mining Foe, Environmental Legend, Dies at 90

story by Al Gedicks, Wisconsin Resource Protection Council; photo from www.protecttheearth.org

Roscoe Churchill of Ladysmith, a dearly loved leader of Wisconsin's environmental movement, passed away on February 9, 2007, in his sleep after a long struggle with prostate cancer.

Roscoe was the grandfather of Wisconsin's grassroots anti-mining movement. For more than 30 years, this retired school principal, part-time farmer, former Republican, and Rusk County supervisor, along with his late wife Evelyn, were the heart and soul of the efforts to stop some of the largest mining companies in the world, including Kennecott, Noranda, Exxon, Rio Algom and BHP Billiton from destroying the land and clean waters of communities from Ladysmith to the Mole Lake Chippewa Reservation near Crandon, and from La Crosse County to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

In the early 1970s, the Kennecott Copper Company tried to develop a copper mine in Ladysmith and Roscoe became concerned that the mine could endanger local groundwater and disrupt the dairy farming economy of Rusk County. During their retirement years, he and Evelyn traveled across the U.S. and Canada, visiting active and abandoned mines and educating themselves about every aspect of mining. Evelyn specialized in Wisconsin's mining laws and regula-

tions while Roscoe did most of the public speaking and debates with mining company officials and representatives of the Wisconsin DNR. He and Evelyn were among the founders of the Rusk County Citizens Action Group, formed in the mid 1970s to oppose Kennecott's proposed open pit copper mine on the banks of the Flambeau River. Local opposition stopped the mine in 1976 but the company tried again in 1988 and after running roughshod over township opposition and covering up the presence of endangered species in the Flambeau River, received permits to mine in 1991. The long and sordid history of Kennecott's interference with local democracy and the courageous resistance by grassroots citizens is recounted in the forthcoming book by Roscoe Churchill and his friend Laura Furtman, called "The Buzzards Have Landed: The Real Story of the Flambeau Mine."

Their discussions around the kitchen table with friends and neighbors led to the drafting and successful passage of the 1998 Wisconsin Mining Moratorium Law, known as the Churchill Moratorium Law within the environmental community, in honor of Roscoe and Evelyn's key role in drafting the original legislation. This law set a strict performance standard for mining permits which required mining compa-

nies to demonstrate successful mining and post-mining without polluting surrounding surface and groundwaters. No mining company has been able to meet this standard and Wisconsin soon earned a reputation within the international mining industry as the least attractive place to mine.

Roscoe's untiring opposition to ecologically destructive mining had nothing to do with "Not in my backyard" sentiment. He traveled across the state to assist the Indian, environmental and sportfishing alliance that formed to oppose Exxon's proposed Crandon mine at the headwaters of the Wolf River. He was an effective public speaker and organizer with the Wolf Watershed Educational Project, one of the principal groups that stopped Exxon, Rio Algom and BHP Billiton from constructing the ill-conceived Crandon mine. Roscoe spoke before town and county boards all over western Wisconsin in 1997-98 when Kennecott wanted to explore for copper in La Crosse, Jackson, Trempealeau, Clark, and Eau Claire counties. All five counties voted to ban mining on public lands. Roscoe and Evelyn's dedication to preserving sustainable economies in Wisconsin received special recognition by several Wisconsin tribes, including the Menominee, Mole Lake Chippewa, Forest County Potawatomi, Lac Courte Oreilles Chippewa and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Roscoe's knowledge, experience, eloquence and fearlessness in the face of irresponsible corporate and bureaucratic power won the admiration and respect of an entire generation of environmental activists. The Churchill farm became a mecca for young people interested in learning from the elders of the Wisconsin anti-mining movement. Even when the ravages of prostate cancer was slowing him down, he continued to give his time, energy and expertise to newly formed citizen groups opposed to Kennecott's proposed metallic sulfide mine in the Yellow Dog Plains of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. "We can't quit fighting, and we're not going to!" As long as there was breath in his lungs he used his voice to speak uncomfortable truths to power and to inspire hope and confidence in the grassroots.

Roscoe and Evelyn's legacy is one of the strongest grassroots environmental movements in the history of Wisconsin.

Funeral services were on Friday, February 16, 2007, at the First Church of Christ, located in Ladysmith. Pastor Donn



Roscoe and Evelyn Churchill

Schroeder and Pastor Ramon Hunt officiated.

In addition, a "Fond Farewell" memorial was held at the Stefan Pavilion, south of Ladysmith, following the burial. There were songs sung in celebration of Roscoe's life, a sharing of memories, dedications by Native American tribal members and a special Eagle Feather Ceremony to honor Roscoe and Evelyn's dedication to protecting the earth.

To help carry on the legacy of these two fine stewards of the environment, memorials may be directed to: Roscoe and Evelyn Churchill Memorial Environmental Scholarship Fund, Wells Fargo Bank, 100 Miner Ave E., Ladysmith, WI 54848.*

Among those present at the memorial was JR Holmes, who represented the FCP Community. He and Jerry Burnett, from Sokaogon Chippewa of Mole Lake, carried two eagle feathers during the drum song and placed them on an eagle staff, which represents a better environment. Prayers were given for Churchill throughout the service. Holmes commented, "Mr. Churchill was a good speaker regarding the many issues of mining and its effects on the environment. I was always impressed with his way of intertwining man and environment into one. He was a kind, caring individual. When he came here to speak against the mine in '84-'85, he was currently going through the same battling process (open-pit mining) in Ladysmith. He had the advantage of knowing this process and gave us advice on how to combat the problem."

Holmes mentioned that a copy of Churchill's book, "The Buzzards Have Landed" was at the service. The book will be available in the spring of 2007.

(The italicized section written by Krystal Staszny.)

*More information from Al Gedicks, Wisconsin Resources Protection Council Executive Secretary, on page 21 concerning mining in Michigan.



Crandon, WI
715.478.1125

Rhineland, WI
715.369.1119

Milwaukee, WI
414.727.2041

800.319.1006

**Business Technology.
Business Results.**

You Want Answers.

You Want Truth.

We'll Give You Both.

**One
prospect**
technologies

www.OneProspect.com

Mine opponent became a leader in movement

Couple helped draft mining moratorium

Feb. 17, 2007

By [Amy Rabideau Silvers](#) of the Journal Sentinel



Roscoe Lee Churchill, who died Feb. 9, and his wife, Evelyn, who died in 1996, fought mining in northern Wisconsin near the family farm at Ladysmith.

Roscoe Churchill was no longer a young man when he took up the fight to stop big mining in northern Wisconsin near the family farm in the Ladysmith area.

That was in the early 1970s. His wife, Evelyn, became the research expert on the team. Churchill became the public face of the movement, tackling public speaking and debating the issues.

They fought for the environment, contending that mining would pollute groundwater and cause other environmental problems. They fought, too, for the sake of farming and a way of life.

"Roscoe was the grandfather of Wisconsin's grass-roots anti-mining movement," according to activist Al Gedicks.

"They were like two huge oak trees that sent thousands of acorns scattering to the earth," wrote Sandy Lyon, another activist, in an Internet tribute. "Those 'acorns' have now taken root . . . They were truly the grandparents of the anti-metallic sulfide mining movement in Wisconsin."

Churchill died of cancer Feb. 9 in a Rusk County nursing home. He was 90. His wife died in 1996.

They were among the founders of the Rusk County Citizens Action Group, formed to oppose plans by the Kennecott Copper Co. to do open-pit copper mining near the Flambeau River.

The Churchills traveled the U.S. and Canada, visiting active and abandoned mines and learning about every aspect of mining, Gedicks said.

They also were active in opposing other mining projects, including Exxon's proposed Crandon mine at the headwaters of the Wolf River.

The couple has been honored by several Wisconsin tribes and tribal organizations for their work to protect the land.

The Churchills did not win all their mining battles - Kennecott won approval in 1991 for a scaled-down version of its original proposal - but they kept trying.

The couple helped draft and win approval of the 1998 Wisconsin mining moratorium law, known as the Churchill mining moratorium in the environmental community, Gedicks said.

"This law set a strict performance standard for mining permits, which required mining companies to demonstrate successful mining and post-mining without polluting surrounding surface and groundwater," he said. "No mining company has been able to meet this standard, and Wisconsin soon earned a reputation within the international mining industry as the least attractive place to mine."

The second to last of 11 children, Churchill grew up on the family farm. He was a teenager when it was lost to economic problems in 1931.

In 1937, Churchill, then 21, earned a two-year teaching degree and took his first classroom job. He also married the former Evelyn Haase.

He later earned bachelor's and master's degrees and worked as a principal. Throughout his career, Churchill especially loved teaching children about nature, including through the "Trees for Tomorrow" program.

In one of the most personally satisfying moments in his life, Churchill was able to buy the old family farm in 1945. They kept it as a working farm, raising beef and dairy cattle and keeping horses.

A fire destroyed the residence there in 1950 but they moved another old home to the property.

Home was where the land was.

Their anti-mining work really "sprang out of their attachment to the land," said son Ed Churchill. "We're going to find a way to continue the farm and keep it in the family."

Survivors also include daughters Arlene Sellereite, Susan and Ann Jerry; another son, George; a brother, Edwin; grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

A funeral will be held at 11 a.m. today at First Church of Christ, 701 Menasha Ave., Ladysmith.

Memorials are suggested to the Roscoe and Evelyn Churchill Memorial Environmental Scholarship Fund, Wells Fargo Bank, 100 Miner Ave E., Ladysmith, WI 54848.

<http://kweenawnow.blogspot.com/>



TUESDAY, JUNE 28, 2016

Letter: A toast to Roscoe Churchill, grassroots activist



"Just grass over a grave" is what the late Roscoe Churchill -- pictured here at the "reclaimed" Flambeau Mine site near Ladysmith, Wis. -- called the reclamation by the Flambeau Mining Co., a Rio Tinto / Kennecott subsidiary. Churchill would have been 100 years old today. (*Keweenaw Now* file photo © Linda Runstrom, Winona, Minn. Reprinted with permission.)

From Laura Gauger*

Today marks the 100th birthday of Roscoe Churchill of Ladysmith, Wisconsin. Let's raise a toast to this environmental legend!

As described in a February 2007 tribute written by Al Gedicks at the time of Roscoe's death: "Roscoe was the grandfather of Wisconsin's grassroots anti-mining movement. For more than 30 years, this retired school principal, part-time farmer, former Republican, and Rusk County supervisor, along with his late wife Evelyn, were the heart and soul of the efforts to stop some of the largest mining companies in the world -- including Kennecott, Noranda, Exxon, Rio Algom and BHP Billiton -- from destroying the land and clean waters of communities from Ladysmith to the Mole Lake Chippewa Reservation near Crandon and from La Crosse County to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan."

If Roscoe were still living today, you can bet he'd be helping the good people who are fighting **PolyMet, Resolution Copper, Back Forty, Twin Metals, Copperwood, Pebble, Tamarack** -- and the list goes on. And you can bet he would have been in the middle of the recent **GTac** battle and would be standing shoulder-to-shoulder with those who to this day are trying to hold Rio Tinto/Kennecott accountable for their misdeeds at **Flambeau** and **Eagle**.

We can also thank Roscoe and Evelyn for how "their discussions around the kitchen table with friends and neighbors led to the drafting and successful passage of the 1998 Wisconsin Mining Moratorium Law, known as the Churchill Moratorium Law within the environmental community, in honor of Roscoe and Evelyn's key role in drafting the original legislation."

So, yes, a toast to this dapper gentleman who, "for as long as there was breath in his lungs, used his voice to speak uncomfortable truths to power and to inspire hope and confidence in the grassroots." (For Al's entire tribute to Roscoe, [please click HERE.](#))

* **Editor's Note (updated):** The author of this letter, **Laura Gauger** (former Wisconsin resident and now of Duluth, Minn.), along with the Wisconsin Resources Protection Council and the Center for Biological Diversity, sued the Flambeau Mining Co. in January 2011 over the pollution of a tributary of the Flambeau River that is now on the EPA's "impaired waters list" because of high copper levels linked to the Flambeau Mine. She won in U.S. District Court, but the decision was later overturned on a technicality. The Court of Appeals did not dispute the fact that the tributary was polluted. Rather, the mining company was pardoned because the Wisconsin DNR had erred by not requiring the company to secure a federally-mandated permit that would have put limits on the amount of copper discharged to the stream. The tributary remains polluted to this day. Gauger and Roscoe Churchill co-authored the book, ***The Buzzards Have Landed!*** -- the story of the Flambeau Mine and their efforts to protect the environment. (See ad for the book in our right-hand column.) [Click here](#) to read about the court's ruling.