



Minnesota's "Mr. Environment"

Long known as "Mr. Environment," Willard Munger left his mark as the father of the state's Environmental Trust Fund and an architect of virtually every major piece of environmental legislation enacted in the last three decades. Willard Munger truly left this state and Earth a better place than he found it.

Pioneer Press editorial (July 13, 1999)

Documentary Program

During the late 1990s, television crews followed State Legislator Willard Munger on his rounds through the Minnesota State Capitol and Duluth. The exclusive footage will form the core of willard munger/EARTH STEWARD, a documentary for public television and other media.

Support the completion of this inspiring program with a tax-deductible donation through WDSE-TV.

Friends of willard munger/EARTH STEWARD

The following have donated grants or in-kind services, footage or materials:
 St. Paul Foundation, Belcomb Technologies, WDSE-TV, KSTP-TV News, Minnesota Power, Excel Energy, Virginia Dwan, Question Club/Grant Merrit, Sierra Club, Minnesota Land Trust, Wallace C. Dayton, Pat Munger Lehr, Governor Elmer L. Andersen.

CONTACTS:

Jeff Strate, producer/director
 952/949-8980
bukumi@infionline.net
 15021 Summerhill Drive
 Eden Prairie, MN 55346

John Helland, associate producer/
 historian 952/944-1443
johnhelland@yahoo.co.uk



See Page 3 for more information on donating.

willard munger/EARTH STEWARD

Willard Munger understood the profound link between the environment and the human condition. As a long time Minnesota State legislator, Willard Munger successfully fought for the well being of both. Through his example, this documentary will remind us how difficult and necessary it is to care for the earth and inspire those who would fill Willard's shoes.

The hour-long program will portray Mr. Munger's life and accomplishments through his own voice and the voices of the people who knew him. The program will visit the landscapes and enterprises that shaped his character and values from a depression era farm and a lake near Fergus Falls, to a World War II ship building yard and a family store/gas station in Duluth and to the corridors and hearing rooms at the State Capitol.

Willard Munger helped craft every major Minnesota environmental law during his 43 years in the House of Representatives. From the banning of DDT to protecting critical tracts of wilderness and inaugurating curbside recycling, sewage treatment districts, wetland preservation laws, alternate energy sources and river and lake clean-up programs, Willard Munger was recognized as one of the nation's most effective environmentalists.



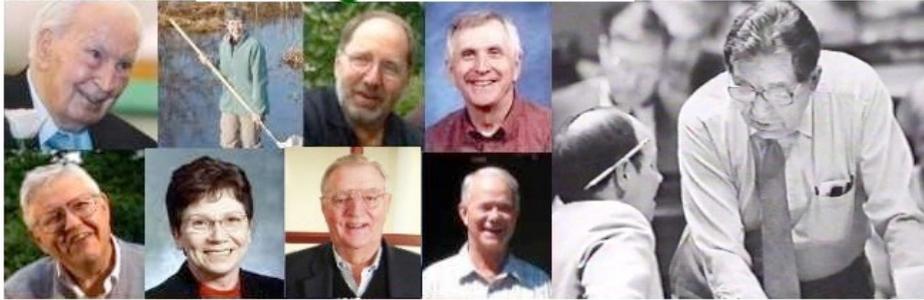
Moving Forward

Production for the program began in 1998 and continued for a few years with the critical support of WDSE-TV, public television in Duluth. Fundraising for and work on the project resumed in February 2008. When completed, Willard munger/EARTH STEWARD will be offered to WDSE and Minnesota State Park interpretative centers.

Although nearly 90% of the videotaping has been completed, archival video and photographs, music and professional fees and post-production expenses must be funded. Please contact John Helland or Jeff Strate to learn how to make a tax-deductible contribution through WDSE-TV, the project's fiscal agent.

A preview video of the program can be viewed from
www.willardmunger.org

willard munger/EARTH STEWARD



a documentary

Appearing in the program are (clockwise from upper left) Governor Elmer L. Anderson; Judy Helgen, MN Pollution Control Agency; Willard Munger, Jr., community leader; Dave Zentner, environmental activist; Grant Merritt, environmental attorney/advocate; Vice President Walter Mondale; Representative Alice Hausman; Alden Lind, environmentalist.

Become a Friend willard munger
EARTH STEWARD

Support the completion of this inspiring program with a tax-deductible donation through WDSE-TV, Public Television in Duluth-Superior.

Donation checks should be made out to "WDSE-TV" and earmarked on the memo line for "Munger TV Project."

Mail checks to: Allen D. Harmon, General Manager
WDSE-TV, 632 Niagara Court, Duluth, MN 55811-3098

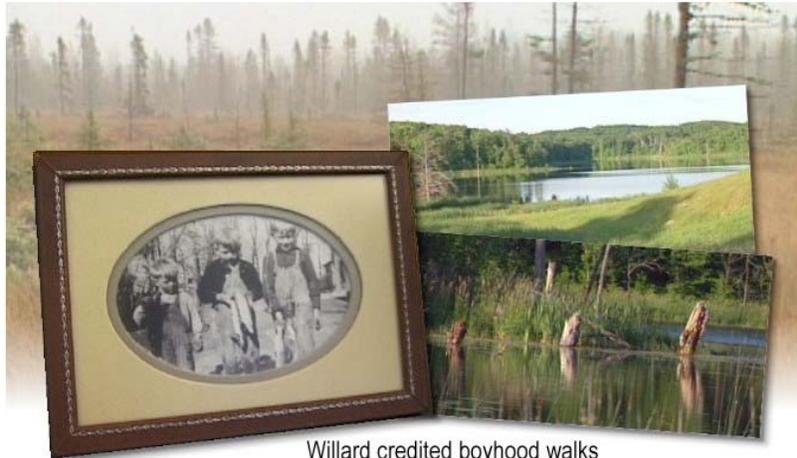
WDSE will send you a receipt for your donation.

If you have questions, please contact:

Jeff Strate
Producer/Director
952/949-8980
jstrate@earthlink.net

John Helland
Co-Producer/Historian
952/944-1443
johnhelland@yahoo.co.uk

Allen D. Harmon
WDSE General Manager
218/724-8567
email@wdse.org



Willard credited boyhood walks with his grandfather Lyman to Mule Lake for his environmental ethic.

"You've gotta realize, when you walked through the woods, half the time you were thinking and half the time you were talking," Munger said. "You couldn't talk all the time because you had to admire the beauty. It made you feel like you're in heaven. It made you feel, why in the hell do I want to destroy this kind of beauty? Why do people want to destroy something like this, so beautiful? "That's been in my system ever since." Munger occasionally walks the path to Mule Lake in his mind before falling asleep at night. He is still carrying out the mission his grandfather assigned him. And he intends to continue doing so."

Daniel Bernard, Duluth News Tribune (5/2/1999).



Campaigning in the 1950's (Duluth) ...

and the 1990's (Hawk Ridge).



Willard Munger, 1911-1999

Transcript of Bob Kelleher story on Minnesota Public Radio

Minnesota Public Radio, July 12, 1999

MPR Announcer

Minnesota's oldest serving lawmaker died Sunday. Eighty-eight-year-old Duluth DFLer Willard Munger was diagnosed with liver cancer this spring, in the middle of his 43rd year in the Minnesota House. No House member has served longer. Widely acknowledged as a leading state and national environmental leader, Munger was also deeply respected for his support of people and social issues.

Bob Kelleher: Willard Munger's legacy can be seen across Minnesota - in undeveloped wetlands, woods allowed to grow to old age, and lakes and rivers abundant with fish and wildlife. Duluth State Senator Sam Solon says Munger's reputation grew beyond the state's boundaries.

Solon: You can go anywhere in this county, you mention the name Willard Munger and it is recognized anywhere in this country where the environment is concerned.

Kelleher: Munger's first bid for office was an unsuccessful 1934 run for the Minnesota House on the Farmer-Laborer party ticket. He lost another in 1952, finally earning a House seat to represent West Duluth in the 1954 election. He left the House for two years after an unsuccessful bid for the state Senate in 1964. He said it was his grandfather who got him interested in environmental protection.

Munger: He used to get me so wrapped up and dedicated, that I used to become quite angry at what was going on way back when I was a kid.

Kelleher: And it was his grandfather who encouraged Munger to use political office to stop the clear cutting and stream degradation that was already evident early this century.

Munger: And he says, "the only way that you can correct this sort of thing and protect the environment for future generations, because if you don't protect it now, then when you grow up there won't be anything left for you; the only way you can do it you've got to sometime get elected to the Legislature when you can pass laws to protect the environment."

Kelleher: His political accomplishment include a ban of the pesticide DDT in Minnesota before a national ban was enacted; creating sewage sanitary districts, rivers and wild land protection, recreational trails, & legislation that created the state's Environmental & Natural Resources Trust Fund.

Munger's defense of the environment may have been born where he was raised among western Minnesota farmlands, but was honed in a wooded Duluth neighborhood on the banks of the St. Louis River. By the 1950s, the St. Louis had come to carry the heavy burdens of industry. Paper-mill effluent, coal tars, and toxic waste from steel production were choking all life from the lower St. Louis River. People were warned to stay out of the water. Mike Janis, a close friend from Duluth, says Willard Munger set out to restore the river and preserve the region he calls "God's Country".

Janis: To defile some of that land, and waters, was just an abomination to him. He basically single handedly led the fight to clean up the St. Louis River. And now to see people out there walleye fishing, boating, ice fishing and all that is quite a treat for him.

Kelleher: Friends knew Munger to spend hours, just gazing at the river from his waterfront home on Duluth's Indian Point. Munger's Willard Motel stood across the street from one of his pet projects: the Lake Superior Zoo. Munger took an early interest in the zoo, which became known to his fellow legislators as "Willard's Zoo." It was well known that Munger was willing to trade support for other lawmaker's projects for those who supported state funding for the Lake Superior Zoo.

Janis, the Zoo's director, says it's hard to believe where the zoo would be without Willard Munger. What was once a menagerie of animals in small cages, has become a regional center for modern animal exhibitry, conservation and preservation - all under the leadership of Willard Munger.

Janis: And in a way, he put some money where his mouth is, you might say. He represented us well in the Legislature to bring funds to the zoo. Over the last, say 12 years I'd guess, he's brought in over \$10 million to the zoo.

Kelleher: The Zoo is honoring its favorite sponsor by naming it's new animal care clinic, which is now under construction, for Willard Munger. While Munger's closely identified with the environmental movement, his political training was on social issues. When still in high school, Munger supported the openly socialist Non-partisan League. Partisan League founder A.C.Townley became a close friend. Munger campaigned for Farmer-Laborer Governor Floyd B. Olson, a confessed radical who sprung

from Partisan League roots. Munger admitted a sympathy for socialists like Norman Thomas and Eugene V. Debs. Munger worked closely with Hubert Humphrey when Humphrey reformed the struggling DFL party in the early 1950s. Munger was a social activist; described by friends as a people person. Janis points to Munger's support of labor unions and working people, and says Munger believed supporting people was closely related to supporting the environment.

Janis: You need to give people an honest wage for an honest day's work, and to give them the land that is out here for them to enjoy.

Kelleher: Another close friend, environmentalist Aldin Lind of Duluth, says Munger supported social justice, equity and quality of life.

Lind: What good was social justice and equity if you were ruining the world around these people, if you were depriving their children of an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors and enjoy a clean environment? And, he never saw that those were distinctive concerns. But, what ties them all together is that, from his point of view, they've never been self-serving. He never saw them as self-serving.

Kelleher: Munger was respected by his West Duluth neighbors for his adherence to principals, and for taking counsel from constituents. Lively, but informal, political debates, would erupt every Saturday morning in his West Duluth motel and cafe. A core of political activists and environmentalists became regulars, known to some as "Munger's Kitchen Cabinet," but known among themselves as "The Grumpy Old Men." The tradition moved to Munger's home on the St. Louis River when he turned the hotel over to his son two years ago. Lind was one of the Grumpy Old Men. He thinks Willard Munger's legacy will reflect Munger's renowned honesty.

Lind: His most enduring legacy will be just the presence of an honest person and the example he sets, and the model that he presents to people.

Kelleher: Willard Munger's health began to decline last spring. He was diagnosed with liver cancer when hospitalized for dizziness and confusion in February. He briefly returned to the House floor late in the session, but has spent many of his last months under hospitalization. When Munger died Sunday at the age of 88, he was believed considering another run for the House District 7A seat in 2000. Munger was preceded in death by two wives, losing Martha in 1960, and Frances more than a year ago. He's survived by a son and daughter and several grandchildren.

In Duluth, I am Bob Kelleher, Minnesota Public Radio.

Photo Credits

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