

Iron and Water: My Life Protecting Minnesota's Environment

Grant J. Merritt

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Lifelong environmental activist Grant Merritt grew up in a mining family—literally close to the earth. His ancestors respected the land, mining iron ore near the surface instead of burrowing underground.

Merritt's memoir reads like a saga of sorts. He starts with the heart-wrenching story of the Merritt family's relationship with the Mesabi Iron Range, explaining how the family was undercut by John D. Rockefeller, who foreclosed on their holdings. But it was much later in Merritt's own career that he faced another foe, Reserve Mining, a company that was polluting Lake Superior "with sixty-seven thousand tons of taconite tailings per day."

A significant portion of the book focuses on the role the author played, working for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), in the fight against Reserve Mining, putting the heightened awareness of environmental protection into context. The tale Merritt tells about the legal case against Reserve Mining offers a behind-the-scenes perspective on how a government agency can be a responsible steward of the earth.

Clearly, Merritt took more than a casual interest in environmental justice; for almost four decades after he served in the MPCA, he worked on environmental cases and causes. His considerable experience makes his historical assessment of the environmental field all the more relevant. He believes there has been substantial progress since the environmental movement of the 1960s, but he notes, "Even with good environmental review laws in place, it still takes an alert citizenry, as well as a strong and responsive government, to make sure the laws are enforced."

Iron and Water is really about the passionate commitment and valiant effort of a man and his concerned colleagues to ensure that Minnesota's environment is protected. In that respect, Grant Merritt's enthralling story is a model for activists everywhere.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (July/August 2018)

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