

A TRIBUTE TO BOB MILLS

June 22, 1917 – January 25, 2011

by Jim Richards

I first had the pleasure of meeting Bob Mills in 1967. The City of Oshawa had formed the Oshawa Fish & Wildlife Advisory Committee a few years earlier. Bob was a rep on the committee as he was then the President of the Oshawa & District Sportsmen's Association (OFAH Zone 5). When I was appointed (as President of the Durham Region Field Naturalists) I seem to recall that Bob was serving as Chair.

I grew to admire his ability to listen, to understand, and to act in any matter that involved the well-being of wildlife and natural habitat. The topic of Second Marsh and its foreseeable demise at the hands of the Federal government due to a proposed harbour expansion scheme came up often at our meetings. Shortly after making a number of delegations to the City, urging them not to sell the wetland to the Federal Government, the Committee was dissolved by the City.

It was at that time, in the early 70's that I assembled a number of local naturalists to form an organization designed to fight City Hall. Immediately, I thought of Bob, and invited him to join, and join he did. Bob was an enthusiastic and energetic member of the group that was formed; the Second Marsh Defence Association (SMDA). While I was able to garner support for our struggle through the many 'naturalist' clubs throughout the Province, likewise, Bob brought an army of support from the federated hunting/fishing and conservation clubs.

Because of his 'people skills' and his always being a true gentleman, we immediately elected Bob as our Chairman, while I served as Executive Director (a position I held until 1997). This was a position Bob held from about 1973 through 1994.

It was then, after major battles with the City, with the Province and certainly with the Federal Government, that we finally won the battle to 'Save Second Marsh' in 1984. It was a good time for Bob to retire from a long stint of battles and negotiations. However Bob remained and offered his guidance for 10 more years. After the government in Ottawa abandoned its plans for the dredging of the marsh to create a deep-sea port, they turned the lands back to the City of Oshawa; something Bob and I had insisted on for years.

The SMDA changed their name to Friends of Second Marsh in 1993, and we immediately began to make plans to rehabilitate Second Marsh along with the City and Environment Canada, as it had been neglected and degraded at the hands of the Federal Government and their counterpart locally, the Oshawa Harbour Commission. Throughout the early years of the restoration efforts, Bob remained on Friends' executive and continued to play a vital role. I dare say that without his dedication, his unwavering devotion and his leadership, perhaps Second Marsh would not have survived to this point.

We all owe a deep debt of gratitude to this true environmentalist and conservationist. He was a visionary and a man I was proud to call my 'friend'.