

Yukon miner will be the first Black person to be inducted into Canadian Mining Hall of Fame

Peter Risby remembered as an advocate for inclusion in the industry

[Stephanie Waddell](#)



A young Tara Risby is seen prospecting with her father Peter (Submitted/Tara Risby)

Peter Risby's legacy as a long-time Yukon prospector who advocated for inclusion in the industry is well-known throughout the territory, and now at the national level, with Risby being one of five to be inducted into the Canadian Mining Hall of Fame in 2022.

The induction for the prospector who passed away in 2011 will make him the first Black person to hold the honour.

"We're absolutely thrilled," his daughter Tara Risby said in a Feb. 16 interview as she spoke of her dad, who is "very dearly missed" by many.

Tara, who led the effort for her father's nomination, said she began working on the nomination "as a proud daughter," soon realizing the major impact he had on so many individuals and the mining community as a whole. She's grateful for the work many helped put into the nomination process. Contributing to the effort, she said, were groups like the Yukon Chamber of Mines, Yukon Prospectors Association, Council of Yukon First Nations, Assembly of First Nations – Yukon Region, and the Yukon government.

Early years

It was in the 1950s that Peter began prospecting, but it was the experience of his early years that perhaps informed his role as an advocate for greater inclusion in the industry.

As it was highlighted in a statement by the hall of fame, Peter was born in Kansas in 1931 and to avoid persecution by the KKK, his family fled to Canada and settled in a Cree community in Alberta. At that time, because he was a person of colour in his community, he was forced to attend residential school, an institution he managed to escape from at the age of seven.

As his daughter recalled, though he loved to learn, he had very little formal education. At home his grandmother taught him to read.

It was thanks to a roommate that Peter got his start in prospecting.

“He kind of fell into it,” Tara said.

Peter was working as a heavy equipment operator in Cassier, B.C., and had a roommate who was studying geology. Peter soon discovered his own interest in geology and joined his roommate on days off to go prospecting.

When his roommate headed back to school, Peter continued to prospect and learn more about the rocks and minerals he'd encounter on his adventures.

“He just had a love for it. He had a passion for minerals,” Tara said, recalling her father's incredible memory for rocks and minerals.

As she pointed out, because he hadn't learned how to write in his early years, he relied on his memory to keep track of rocks and minerals he would find.

He eventually made his way up to the Yukon in 1957, quickly falling in love with the north.

Among his early finds were the Risby-Tungsten property in the Yukon and the Lee property in the Northwest Territories, which began his involvement with Welcome North Mines and the subsequent discovery of 80-plus projects that would be optioned to major companies, it was noted by the hall of fame.

In the Yukon, he sold his first claims to Johns Manville Co., then the world's largest asbestos producer. In 1981, Peter began exploring the Indian River Valley near Dawson City. He went on to develop and operate the Indian River Mine, which became a leading gold producer and a major contributor to territory's economy, the Canadian Mining Hall of Fame said in a statement.



Peter Risby spent years prospecting in the North. He will be inducted into the Canadian Mining Hall of Fame.

(Submitted/Tara Risby)

Inclusion and diversity

An advocate for inclusion in the industry, Peter spent several years teaching prospecting and mineral identification courses to Indigenous students and was one of the first to hire women for exploration programs.

“He believed in education,” Tara said.

He was inducted into the Yukon Prospectors Hall of Fame

and named Mr. Miner in 1996, for his technical achievements, economic contributions and "as a trail-blazing advocate of diversity and Indigenous inclusion in Canada's minerals industry."

Those values around diversity and inclusion were also clear to his family at home; not to mention the importance of perseverance.

As Tara pointed out, her father dealt with hardship throughout his life. As well as his experience in his early years, Peter also had his share of health challenges over the years, including heart issues and pancreatic cancer. Throughout the hardships, Peter persevered, teaching his children that if he could do something, they could too, she said.



Peter Risby (Submitted/Tara Risby)

Continuing legacy

In their own ways, his offspring and grandchildren are each continuing his legacy, Tara said, even for the youngest in the family – ages four and one – who weren't able to meet their grandfather.

Tara described her four-year-old nephew as a "chip of the old block" for her dad. The youngster holds a love of rocks like his grandfather and among many facial expressions he has that are similar, there's a look he gets when he investigates a rock up close through a magnifying glass that mirrors his grandfather.

Peter's legacy will no doubt be felt for generations to come as Tara works to continue sharing his stories with the world. She is in the process of working on some children's stories about her father, which she's excited to share with her young nephews.

Along with Peter, other "industry legends who have demonstrated leadership and outstanding achievement in the mining industry" to be inducted into the Canadian Mining Hall of Fame in 2022 include: F. Dale Corman, Maureen C. Jensen, Phillip John Mackey, and Robert Quartermain.

"Mining plays an essential role in driving our economy forward and delivering the minerals and metals needed for a low carbon future," said Pierre Gratton, hall of fame chair and President & CEO of the Mining Association of Canada (MAC). "These five inductees represent the very best of mining excellence and greatly contributed to making Canada the leader in responsible mining."

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