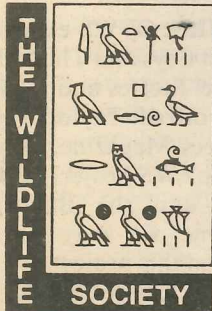


On The Wildier Side



The official publication of
**The Student Chapter of
The Wildlife Society**



Spring Semester, 1987



*Aldo
Leopold*

Artwork by Jim McEvoy

Wisconsin Natural
Resources Magazine

Aldo Leopold



—Clay Schoenfeld, Emeritus Professor of Environmental Studies UW-Madison

Wednesday, April 21, 1948 was one of the first real days of spring in the valley of the Wisconsin. The sun glistened brightly on the swollen river. Frogs croaked incessantly in the sloughs. And in the air was the piquant smell of grass-smoke as the farmers along the Baraboo hills went about the spring burning.

Down by Plummer's Marsh, in Sand County, Jim Reagan's grass fire began to get out of hand. A neighbor, planting young Norway pines nearby, saw the danger and ran over to help. He filled a bucket of water at the farm well and disappeared in the billowing smoke. He never came back.

Yet in a larger sense Aldo Leopold is not gone. Today his figure towers like a veteran oak over a forest of seedling environmentalists seeking that "ecological conscience" Leopold bespoke.

Oddly enough, eight years earlier to a day I had tramped with Aldo Leopold that same Plummer's Marsh where he was to die of a heart attack at the untimely age of 62.

"It is a revelation to walk in the open with the Professor," my field journal reads for April 21, 1940. "Every grass blade is a challenge, every bird a question. High points of the day: a pair of mallards feeding the shack 'front yard', a big hen woodcock flushing near an inky-black pothole, grouse droppings three inches deep under a grape tangle, two deer bounding across the road, Estell's pet squirrel, and Mrs. Leopold's stew."

After a similar inspiring hike with the Leopolds at their sand county acres the next fall, I reported in my column as editor of the University of Wisconsin student *Daily Cardinal* that "Aldo Leopold is undoubtedly one of the great figures in American conservation."

At the time such a statement could stem only from a personal acquaintanceship. While it was true that Leopold was widely recognized then in professional circles, even later, at the time of his death, he was virtually unknown to the public at large. Many of what were to become his most famous essays had already appeared in such journals as *Bird Lore*, the predecessor of *Audubon Magazine*, but a frustrating number of publishers had rejected his *Sand County Almanac* concept.

This is a sentimental visit to the Aldo Leopold I saw for 14 years, to the tints and shadows of a very human being. As H. Albert Hochbaum, one of his perceptive students, once wrote him: "It is only by accepting ourselves for what we are, the best of us and the worst of us, that we can hold any hope for the future." In partial response Leopold was to compose "Thinking Like a Mountain," the single essay that best traces the evolution in his own thinking, up blind alleys and down bright paths. "The important thing," Leopold said, "is to strive." The opportunity to share in his striving is the Aldo Leopold legacy.

I first met Aldo Leopold in the early spring of 1934. He came to the small-town Wisconsin high school where I was a sophomore to organize a "Youth Conservation Club". The activity was typical of the man. Unlike the impression you might draw from *Sand County Almanac*, Leopold was no philosopher-writer operating in an attic, nor a latter-day Thoreau musing beside some Walden pond. He was invariably out on the hustling organizing people. The number of leagues, associations, and societies he fomented, founded, or fostered exceeds a score.

A goodly number of us Lake Mills sophomores volunteered with alacrity for duty with Leopold. The mission was exciting, but it was more than that. Leopold was a born leader in a very physical sense. The studio portraits most people associate with him suggest a sort of benign countenance, befitting a halo. In person Leopold didn't come on like that to me at all. Remember the opening scene in the movie, *Patton*, in which George C. Scott strides out to dominate an otherwise-empty stage? That was somewhat the Leopold I knew. He had what the army calls "command presence", exuding a certain tall-in-the-saddle air. Even his street attire often had a field-campaign flair. Students in his classes were always alerted to his approach down the corridor by the lively "click-click" of the steel plates he wore on the heels of his shoes. Put another way, the Professor could be like a dynamic chamber of commerce secretary, which indeed he actually was for a time in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Or say he had "a courtly quality which simply wowed the ladies," as a contemporary recalls. Unquestionably, in Susan Flader's assessment, he was no introvert; he was "extraordinarily persuasive in personal contact — a master at appealing to diverse interest groups."

Each of us who knew Aldo may recall his personality in different ways, but all of us would agree with Frederick and Frances Hamerstrom that he had a compelling "magnetism." Yet it was no put-on. We would likewise agree with Professor Robert McCabe that here at heart was the epitome of the "kind, sincere, gentleman."

Many of the Professor's essays were initiated as convention speeches or poems. The necessary absence of the convoluted sentence helps account for his marks on modern readability scales; that, and his nice feeling for metaphor, simile, and the alliterative phrase. While in their original form Leopold's writings were often highly topical, their sentiments invariably looked far down the road to the future. The man's sense of vision was positively uncanny. Although "The Land Ethic" did not enter the ken of the general public until the publication of a paperback *Sand County* in 1966, that seminal essay had actually appeared in truncated form as early as 1933 in *The Journal of Forestry*. Today's environmentalists may find it hard to reconcile the thrust of the essay with the official publication of the Society of American Foresters, unless they remember that Leopold was a card-carrying member and contributing editor. Otherwise it is quite likely his unconventional message would not have found acceptance. He must have thoroughly enjoyed pricking the conscience of his colleagues. Indeed, a sophisticated sense of humor was a Leopold trademark, exceeded only by his rare ability to make manifest in compelling words the intrinsic beauty and insidious degradation of "the organism called America," words as pulsing and provocative today as in the years they were honed and sharpened.

Another aspect of Leopold my students try to reject as a momentary aberration is Leopold's role as a hunter. But it can't really be done. By his own admission, as a growing man he had "congenital hunting fever." It is no accident that his *Almanac* includes a sketch called "Red Legs Kicking," the account of the dignified death of the boy Aldo's first black duck. Only a committed hunter would preserve such a

moment.

Yet Leopold ruffed grouse hunt was no search-and-destroy expedition; it was a ceremony, complete with ritual and incantation, as we played the role of substitute for fox or hawk. And the stage setting was an essential part of the drama — a staunch dog, invariably called Flick, forging through "smoky gold" tamaracks or coming on point in a tangle of blackberry "red lanterns." With profound respect we matched the quarry against only light double barrels, and reverently dissected any harvest in a continuing study of food habits, disease, and population dynamics.

Leopold certainly wouldn't have much empathy, either, with some current "environmental education" doctrines; the proposition, for example, that environmental education is some mysterious, existential, affective "process," divorced from tough ecological cognitive content. I know from sharp experience. As a student in his then-unique Wildlife Ecology 118 course at the University in 1940-41, I had a number of papers rejected because my answers to his weekly questions were more platitudinous than precise.

Any hunch that a Leopold course was simply a series of nature essays would be erroneous. There were 99 tomes on his list of required readings, and a weekly quiz that tested our ac-

quisition of what those readings contained. The core of the course was a series of practical field trips on which we were expected to demonstrate clear competence in reading the landscape through ecological glasses.

Yet I do not mean to picture Leopold as a classroom czar; quite the contrary, he was as patient as he was demanding. Art Hawkins vividly recalls how he and the Professor struggled together over a thesis: "On the days I went to his office, he always cleared his desk of personal business, closed the door, and listened to me attentively. Nothing in the world was so important as my manuscript, or so he made me feel. It went through about 13 drafts. In this way he builds confidence in his students. No other teacher I've ever had could compare with him in abilities of this kind." This was the Socratic Leopold who, as Charles Bradley recalls, "never tired of asking the questions that ended up blowing my mind, revealing me to me, and me to him."

That Leopold was a stickler for facts, a generation of his students can attest. But he never assumed that a learned degree necessarily signified knowledge, nor that knowledge could be discovered only in fancy laboratories. He was a great believer in what the ama-

The Shack —The Leopolds' Weekend Cabin

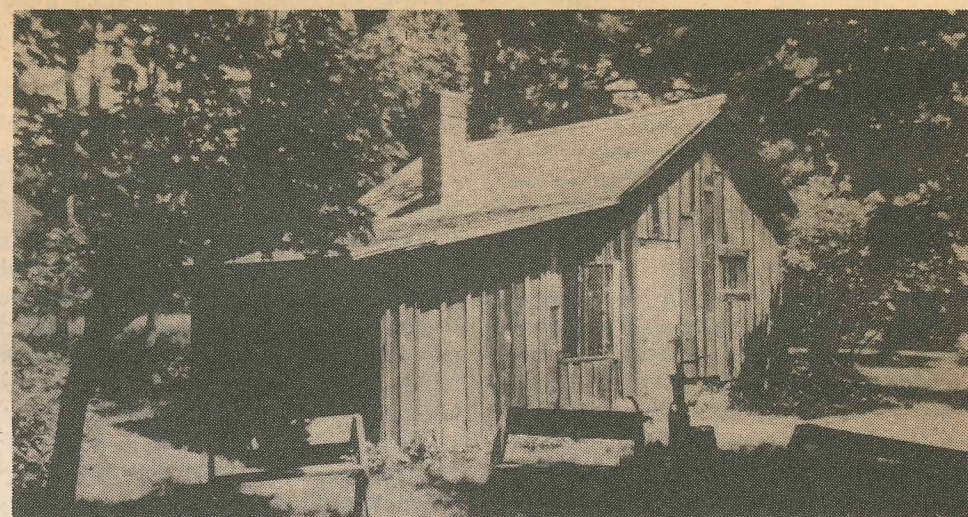


Photo by Chip Hutter

Over a half a century has passed since the humble beginning of the shack. Within the shack and on its surrounding land, Aldo Leopold derived many insights from which emerged his land ethic — the belief that humans are an inextricable part of the land and each individual is responsible for its health. No fanfare announced the beginnings of the land ethic, yet its impact has been felt around the world. Leopold's perspectives have inspired the modern day conservation movement.

In contrast to the many environmental battles fought in our nation's high courts, Leopold's battleground was 80 acres of barren farmland. The shack, an old converted chicken shed, served as shelter, haven, and weekend home for Leopold and his family on this farm in the sand county region of Wisconsin. He wrote in *A Sand County Almanac*, "On this sand farm in Wisconsin, first worn-out and then abandoned by our bigger-and-better society, we try to rebuild, with shovel and axe, what we are losing elsewhere. It is here that we seek — and still find — our meat from God." His daughter, Nina Leopold Bradley, once

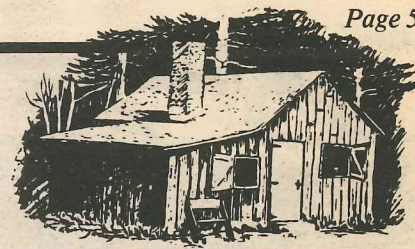
said about the farm:

*Daddy was so excited and so enthusiastic and we all went along with it in a very pleasant way. But we really couldn't figure out why he was so enthusiastic about it until we started with him on reconstructing the old worn out farm. I always will remember our first look at the shack and how really unattractive it was in our (eyes) and how my father saw it in an entirely different perspective. This was his recreation, his scientific laboratory. This is where he could live the most fully, I think. Here was something that he could create and something he could build on rather than starting out with something that was already beautiful. So, it was in the creativity of this land that we all got our satisfaction. But it took us a long time to get our perspective.**

Today, Leopold's shack still stands in the sand county along the Wisconsin River. It serves as a source of inspiration, a symbol of simplicity of living as well as the importance of working to understand the land the reunite humans with it.

*Quote from "A Prophet For All Seasons: Aldo Leopold," a film available through UW-Madison.

"A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity."



The Leopold Land Ethic —by Greg Scheder

One of the main focuses in a discussion of Aldo Leopold is his concept of *The Land Ethic*. That concept is that people must realize that they have a need to respect the earth from which they obtain a living. Through classes such as Wildlife 140 and Philosophy 380 (Environmental Ethics) many of us receive our first exposure to Leopold's ideas through the study of *A Sand County Almanac*. The book details the experiences and ideas influencing Leopold during his formation of the land ethic. At the same time Leopold demonstrates the need for an applied land ethic in modern society. The effect of Leopold's land ethic is reflected in the current environmental movements and by the statements of many people, both in private and public conversations.

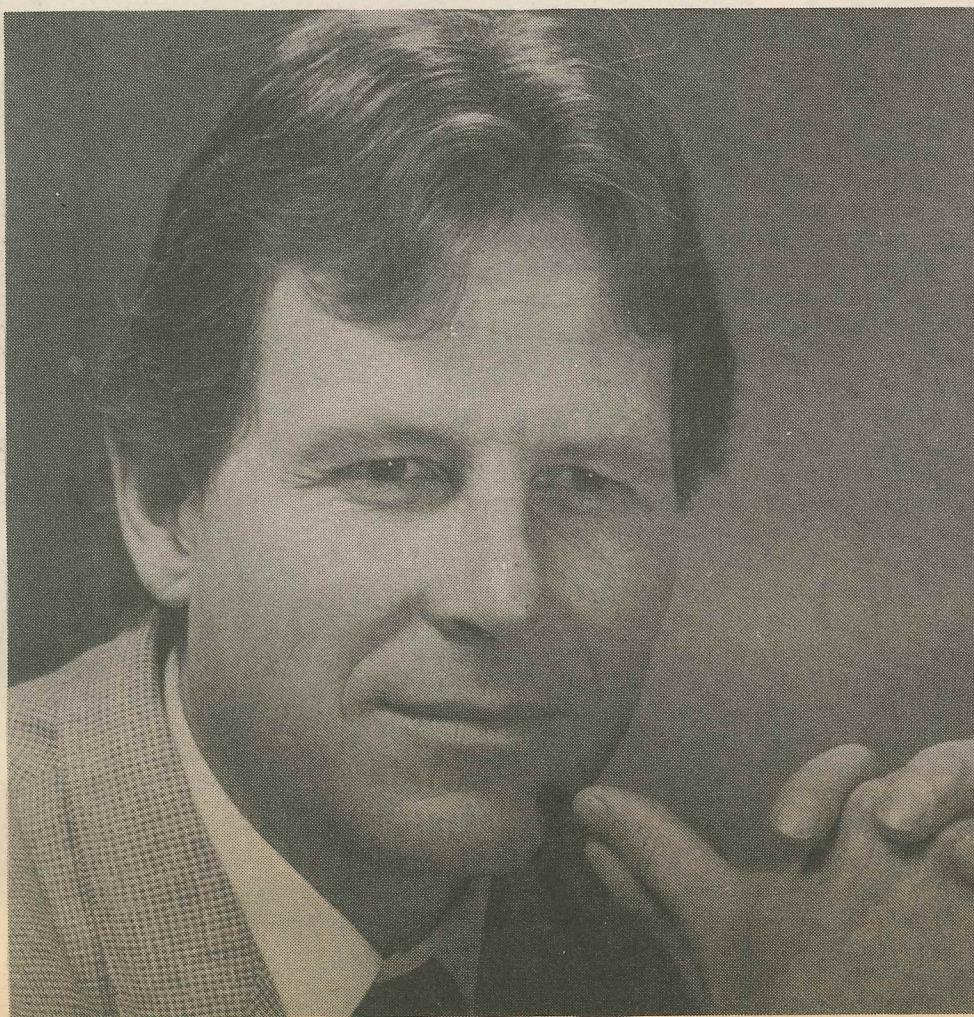
One of the major reasons that *A Sand County Almanac* and the land ethic have laid such a solid foundation for the Environmental movement is Leopold's focus in the book. In a discussion with Dr. J. Baird Callicott, Professor of Philosophy here at UW-Stevens Point, I learned that he felt there were several reasons for the effectiveness of Leopold's essays. The first is that *A Sand County Almanac* provides a tool for the easy dissemination of ideas about conservation.

Increasing concern over the condition of the environment developed during the late 1950's and early 60's. Composed as *A Sand County Almanac* in 1948, the focus of Leopold's combined essays were in accord with the concerns of early environmental activists. People in professional studies who were familiar with Leopold's writing used his book as a source of concepts essential to an environmental ethic. But others, such as Muir and Thoreau, had written about a need for protecting the environment much earlier. Why was Leopold's land ethic used as the inspirational tool?

According to Callicott, the effectiveness of Leopold's writing arises from the fact that his land ethic model "takes the issue of the land ethic out of the abstract realm of the philosopher and places it on concrete footings in the terms of a biologist." Through the description of the land ethic in terms of the biotic cycle Leopold shows that there is a closer relationship between the earth and the human race than previously believed. He doesn't use historical philosophical arguments on a religious basis as have previous environmentalists. What Leopold has effectively done is make the issue of environmental ethics a grass-roots phenomenon.

One of the first points Callicott makes in his paper *The Right Stuff: The Scientific Substance of the Land Ethic*, (soon to be printed in a book he is editing called *Companion To A Sand County Almanac*) is that Leopold's influence does not arise by accident. What makes *A Sand County Almanac* powerful is Leopold's use of what was then the infant study of ecology. "Science talks" Callicott says, and the land ethic "draws its objectivity, universality, authority and power from ecology's conceptual foundations." At the same time, Leopold's ability at descriptive observation draws the reader into the subject. In essence, he makes people a member of the immediate environmental community.

Leopold's development of a personal identification with the environmental community allows society more



Dr. Callicott has written several pieces on Aldo Leopold, and is considered an expert on the land ethic issue.

easily to accept the land ethic. One of the major points in his essays is to show that there is an inherent ability for the biotic community to recover from its misuse by human beings. Although often altered in structure, the local environment rebuilds itself to maintain the diversity which is so important to the proper function of the biotic cycle. In *Shack Sketches*, Leopold shows the way in which his farm has recovered from the abuses of the bootlegger of the previous decade. But the concern is that there is a finite ability for any environment to save itself, and some less than others.

A Sand County Almanac is organized to show that all environments are susceptible to the abuses of the human race. At the same time it shows the increasing alienation of people from the land as a result of technology. Although we live better, there is a decrease-

ing appreciation of the root-source of our well-being. And as the gap increases, it is becoming harder to reorient ourselves through the use of the land ethic. Callicott describes the lesson of the land ethic as "the ripe wisdom of Leopold's life and career". What Leopold's land ethic does is demonstrate the necessity for people to respect and care for the earth by telling what is already gone and warning about what is ready to go. He also gives us a stake in the earth's future by describing our relationship with the earth through the biotic cycle.

Through the use of ecology Leopold shows the relationship which we share with the earth. He describes the processes of life through evolution to show how all parts of the environment are related. From these ideas he forms the basis of the land ethic and how humans need to alter themselves to

accept the land ethic. Yet he doesn't claim that all issues of the earth are negative. In the Spring, 1985 issue of *Wilderness*, Wallace Stegner's article *Living on Our Principle* describes Leopold's position as having "no romantic revulsions against plowing, or cutting trees, or hunting birds and animals, or anything we do to make our living from the earth. He was only against the furious excess of our exploitation." What the land ethic does is define a need to establish parameters to operate within the confines of the biotic cycle.

The environmental movement has now had nearly two decades to develop and gather momentum under the guidance of the land ethic. Evidence of the results of environmental concern can be seen in agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, and private organizations like the Sierra Club and the Isaac Walton League as well as legislation like the Endangered Species Act. Yet environmental problems still exist today, and are rapidly growing. Although the land ethic has broadened that response there is an urgent need to increase its effect.

One of the main weaknesses existing in a general public acceptance of the land ethic, at least in the United States, is the problem of exposing the issue to everyone. Too many interferences exist which prevent people from becoming aware of the substance of the land ethic, interference which only serves to increase human alienation from the earth. Mirroring Leopold's beliefs, Callicott says that the most effective method for implementing the land ethic is "universal ecological literacy". This "literacy" will help people to see the need to care for and protect the environment.

At the same time such an ideal becomes harder to develop because of the competition arising from technological advances. A technology which allows us to increasingly separate our interests from our planet. But technology can be used two ways. Rather than see it as a dividing force, technology must be used to better understand the intimate relationship between the human species and their planet. The encroachment of technology makes the task of establishing the land ethic an even greater challenge for the future.

Land Ethic Resolution —Reprinted from the *Wildlifer*, Fall, 1986

Senator Robert W. Kasten, Jr. (Wis.) and Congressman Robert W. Kastenmeier (Wisc.) have introduced a joint congressional resolution commemorating the 100th birthday of Aldo Leopold in 1987 and recognizing the "Land Ethic" that Leopold inspired. A special committee of The Wildlife Society, in collaboration with the Wisconsin Chapter, worked with other conservation organizations and members of Congress to research and introduce the resolution. S.J. Res. 416 (Senate) and H.J. Res. 725 (House) Congressional Joint Resolution cite Leopold's outstanding professional contributions to resource management, especially as a pioneer in wildlife management and wilderness ecology. The resolution also urges Federal land management agencies to model their activities after the conservation ethic that Leopold espoused.

Following is the edited text from the

19 September 1986 Congressional Record of Senator Kasten's floor statement introducing S.J. Res. 416 in the U.S. Senate:

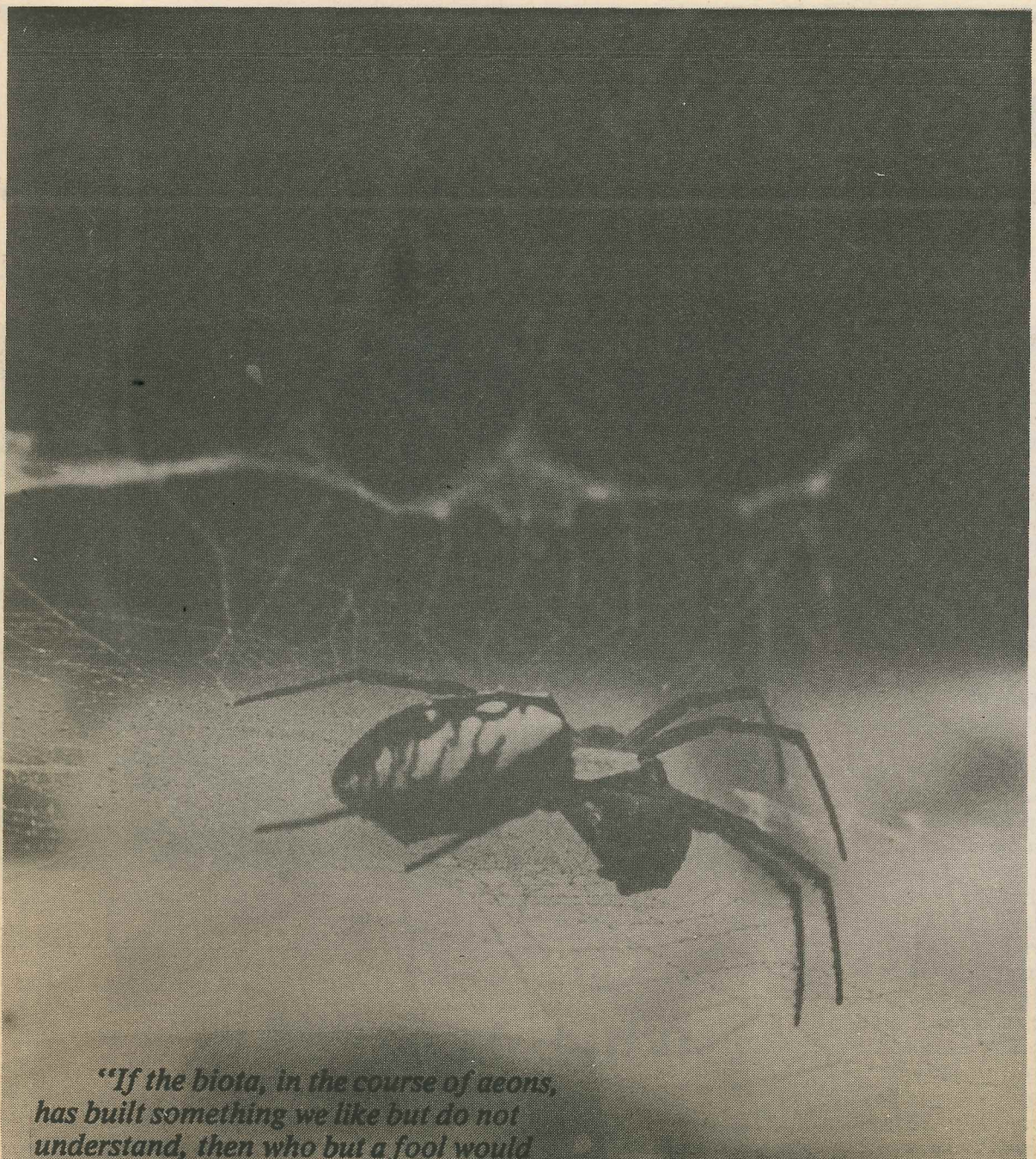
Mr. President, January 11, 1987, will mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Aldo Leopold. Leopold was a man of conviction. He was a tireless advocate for the stewardship of our renewable natural resources. To professionals and laymen alike, Leopold was a titan in the conservation movement. He was more than a man ahead of his time; Aldo Leopold is a legend.

Born in Burlington, Iowa, Leopold spent his childhood years along the bottom lands of the Mississippi River which as then a wilderness unimpeded by levees, locks and other manmade structures. There, with a reverent eye cast toward the sky, he watched unending skeins of waterfowl wing their way south in the fall and return to the

north in the spring. These were formative years for Leopold, who would later mold the concept of scientific wildlife management, pioneer the doctrine of wilderness ecology, and bring life to the word "conservation."

This man has been described as a professional forester, game manager, scientist, teacher, writer, philosopher, and a gentleman. Leopold graduated with an M.F. from Yale University Forestry School. After leaving Yale in 1908, he entered the U.S. Forest Service as a forest assistant in Arizona. He also served as supervisor of the Carson National Forest in New Mexico and as assistant district forester of the southwestern district of the Forest Service. Leopold's experiences as a forest manager sparked his interest in the preservation of wilderness areas and, largely through his determined efforts, he

continued on next page...



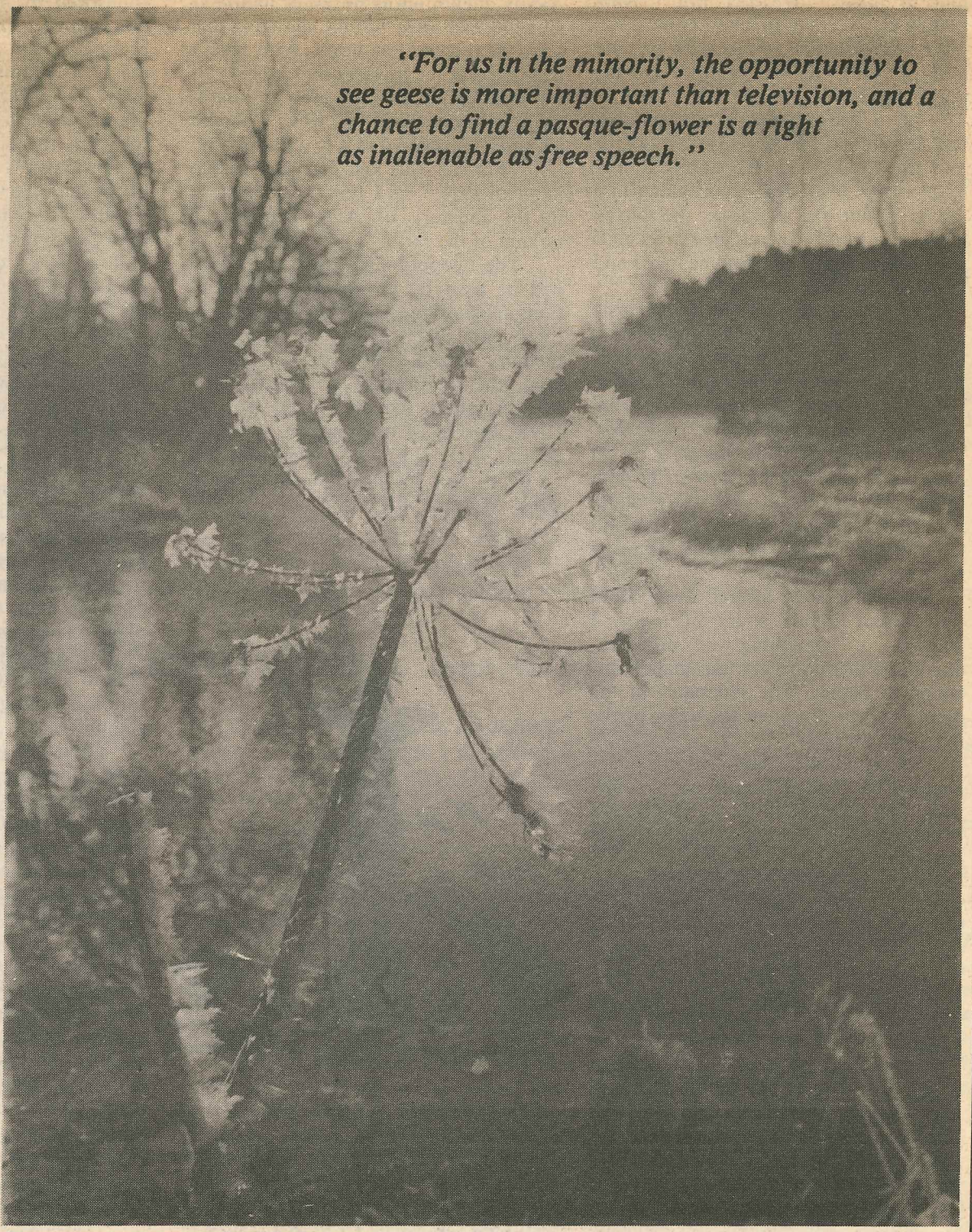
"If the biota, in the course of aeons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering."



"A peculiar virtue in wildlife ethics is that the hunter ordinarily has no gallery to applaud or disapprove of his conduct. Whatever his acts, they are dictated by his own conscience, rather than by a mob of onlookers. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this fact."



"The land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics."



"For us in the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and a chance to find a pasque-flower is a right as inalienable as free speech."