

Great Possessions

An excerpt from the forthcoming biography.

By CURT D. MEINE MS'83

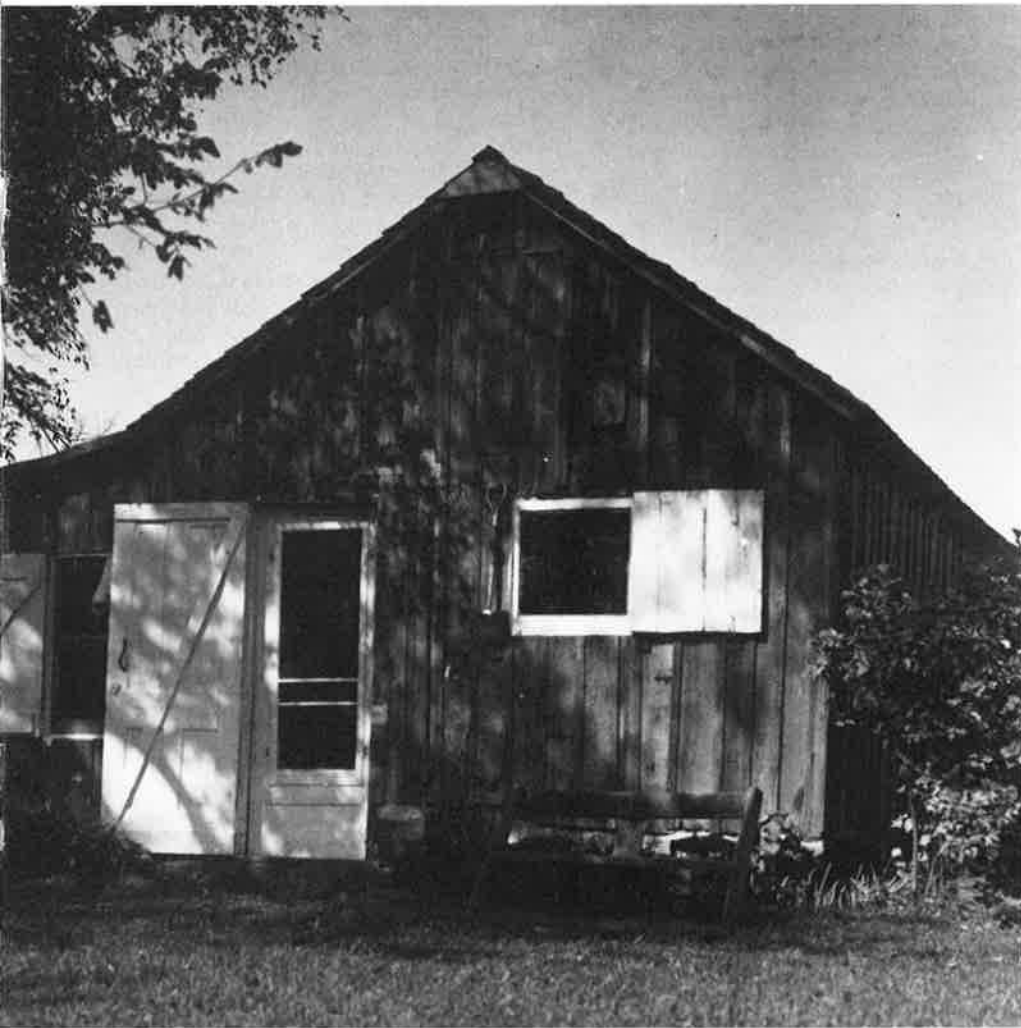
GREAT POSSESSIONS: THE LIFE AND WORK OF ALDO LEOPOLD is scheduled for publication this fall by the UW Press. The author is a grad student in land resources in our Institute for Environmental Studies.

Leopold realized now that there were no miracle cures for the symptoms of "land pathology." The only effective treatment was preventive: the long, laborious task of teaching the public, professional, and layman, to appreciate the dynamics of land. As a teacher himself, he addressed this challenge of conservation education time and time again, beginning in earnest in 1936.

Leopold's approach to education was closely tied to his broadening conception of "land" in the late 1930s. In a book review that appeared in the Audubon Society's

Bird Lore magazine in early 1937, he wrote, "We are embarked on two large-scale experiments. One is premised on the notion that conservation is something a nation buys. The other is premised on the notion that conservation is something a nation learns." Learning conservation meant something more than learning the names of plants and animals. He drew a distinction between "static" natural history and "dynamic" ecology. In his view, a conservationist who knew only the names and habits of species was akin to a politician or economist who had a wide circle of acquaintances but no knowledge of business: "Both lack an 'inside' picture of the struggle for existence. Ecology is the politics and economics of animals and plants. The citizen-conservationist needs an understanding of wildlife ecology not only to enable him to function as a critic of sound policy, but to enable him to derive maximum enjoyment from his contacts with the land." As he struggled to define his own sense of the land, Leopold was always striving for realism. He resisted the nationalistic appeals that he had witnessed in German conservation. He made no sentimental references to "the heartland." Conflict, paradox, and irony were part of conservation's "authentic human drama"; without them, he said, conservation "falls to the level of a mere Utopian dream." Education was the necessary means of conveying this reality to the citizenry.

In his own field of wildlife, the rise of interest around the nation was threatening to inundate what few competent training programs existed. Leopold warned that the boom market for wildlife managers was liable to dilute the quality of instruction. Already universities were rushing into the field with hastily built programs and with personnel who, as he put it, "arrived on the previous train." If the trend continued, the likely result would be an oversupply of mediocre managers, a shortage of well-trained researchers, and a neglected non-professional public.



Leopold *continued from page 14*

to think independently; it addressed "the social causes for misfortune, rather than merely describing the misfortune or feeling sorry about it."

Leopold kept a relatively loose rein on his graduate students. By the spring of 1937, six were under his tutelage. Logistics alone demanded their self-reliance. In the early years, he required them to live on and assume responsibility for a demonstration area, acting as game managers while conducting research. At any given time, half of them were away at Faville Grove, or the Riley farms, or Prairie du Sac, or at Elkhorn. Once a semester, more often if necessary, Leopold met each one individually, in his campus office, to offer suggestions, encourage interpretation, and bring up deficiencies in their data.

Every so often Leopold visited them in their study areas. Art Hawkins remembered this as "a high point in the scholastic life of his students." Leopold often brought along other students and professors on these outings, "which were, more than anything else, a contest in perception. . . . The field trip became a test of observational skills among all participants. There were no losers; everyone learned through this process."

He was concerned foremost with the accuracy of his students' data and its clear exposition in well-written scientific papers. Every student was required to produce a publishable thesis, and most came away with stories of the dozen revisions these went through before Leopold deemed it publishable. In the spring of 1937, Leopold's first four students received their degrees. Leonard Wing earned a doctorate for his work on wildlife cycles and went to work for the Tennessee Valley Authority. Harry Anderson took a master's in zoology and game management after studying the avifauna of the UW Arboretum. Ellwood Moor, a forester on leave from the New Jersey Conservation Department, finished his master's and returned east. Art Hawkins took his master's and decided to stay with Leopold for further research into game foods.

As an educator, Leopold was facing a disconcerting but challenging dilemma: the need for education was increasing even as the subject matter was growing more complicated. In a report to WARF, filed in June 1937, he confessed that, while his program was making headway, "if anyone hoped for research to produce a set of simple formulae which could be blindly followed by laymen, that hope is gone glimmering." He pointed out, though, that wildlife management was opening up "entirely new vistas of cultural value," and predicted that "the time is coming when education which omits to picture man's indefinitely delicate symbiosis with land will not be considered education." □

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The Smithsonian

is Coming to Town

(See story on p. 24.)

Smithsonian Week

May 27–June 1

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION/TIME
Wed., May 27	Treasures of the Smithsonian <i>Lecture: \$3</i>	Union Theater 7:30–8:30 p.m.
Thur., May 28– Sun., May 31	Native Americans in U.S. History <i>4-Day Seminar: \$295</i>	Historical Society 9 a.m.–4 p.m. daily
	Space Exploration: Recent Past and Near Future <i>4-Day Seminar: \$295</i>	Astronomy/Space Science Dept. 9 a.m.–4 p.m. daily
	Diversity in Nature: Challenge in the Great Outdoors <i>4-Day Seminar: \$295</i>	Arboretum 9 a.m.–4 p.m. daily
	Antarctic Adventure: Unraveling Geological Riddles <i>Lecture: \$3</i>	Brogden Hall 7:30–8:30 p.m.
	25 Years of Manned Space Flight <i>Lecture: \$3</i>	Humanities Bldg. 7:30–8:30 p.m.
NOTE: According to publicity, each of the four-day seminars has a capacity of "about forty people." Tickets for <i>all</i> events <i>must</i> be purchased directly from the Smithsonian. Send check or money order to: Smithsonian Institution, Lecture and Seminar Program, 1100 Jefferson Dr. SW, Washington, D.C. 20560.		
Fri., May 29	Making Tracks: A History of American Railroading <i>Lecture: \$3</i>	Humanities Bldg. 7:30–8:30 p.m.
	Diplomats in Buckskins: 19th Century Indian Delegates <i>Lecture: \$3</i>	Humanities Bldg. 7:30–8:30 p.m.
Sat., May 30	Education Nationwide: A Workshop for Teachers and Museum Educators: \$10	State Historical Museum 9 a.m.–5 p.m.
	Shells as Homes <i>Workshop: \$5</i>	Madison Children's Museum 9 & 11 a.m., 1, 2, & 4 p.m.
	Photographing Nature: A Closer Look <i>Seminar: \$20</i>	Madison Art Center 10 a.m.–1 p.m.
	The Magical World of Minerals and Gems <i>Workshop: \$10</i>	Weeks Hall, Geology Museum 1–4 p.m.
	Music in My Pockets: American Folksongs and Ballads <i>Concert: \$3</i>	Old Music Hall 7:30–8:30 p.m.
Sun., May 31	Grand Illusions: Hollywood Portraits of the 1920's and 30's <i>Lecture: \$3</i>	Elvehjem Museum of Art 2–3 p.m.
	Working Americans: Expressions in Song <i>Seminar: \$20</i>	State Historical Museum 1–4 p.m.
	Beyond the Ocean, Beneath a Leaf <i>Narrated Film: \$3</i>	7:30–8:30 p.m.
Mon., June 1	Abstract Expressionism in America, 1945–1960 <i>Lecture: \$3</i>	Madison Art Center 7:30–8:30 p.m.

Surprise Party

Aldo Leopold probably never dreamed he'd be so important on his 100th birthday.

By RON SEELY
Wisconsin State Journal
Regional Reporter

Aldo Leopold, said to be a very modest man by those who knew him, would have squirmed in his chair and tugged mightily at his collar had he been there to hear all the praise.

The occasion was his 100th birthday. It was celebrated one day late—he was born January 11, 1887—at the State Department of Natural Resources, a government agency that owes him much of its guiding philosophy in conservation and environmental matters.

At the luncheon-hour reception, which kicked off a year of events honoring Leopold, more than 100 jammed a basement room to view a slide show about him and to listen to several speakers, including his daughter Nina Leopold Bradley ('41); DNR Secretary C. D. Besadny ('51, '56); and Curt Meine (MS'83), Leopold's biographer.

Leopold would have been surprised, no doubt, at the size of the crowd. But then he'd have no way of knowing that since his death in 1948 he has become practically the patron saint of conservation in this country or, as Besadny put it in a recent newsletter, "one of conservation's most visionary and revered leaders."

Leopold is best remembered for his *Sand County Almanac*, a collection of poetic essays about his resurrection of a ruined farm in central Wisconsin. He wrote lovingly in the book of everything from the wild call of the Canada geese to the satisfaction of cutting good oak for his fireplace. But most importantly, he set forth his "land ethic," a philosophy which "enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals."

There were many references to the *Almanac* on this occasion, and even several readings from its pages; Leopold would have been gratified to see so many dog-eared paperback copies of his book.

But he would have been most touched

at his daughter's memories. Though all of the other glowing things said about him were true and sincere, it was Mrs. Bradley's brief presentation that brought the man alive. She had with her several of his most cherished possessions, including his hand-made hunting bows, a pair of worn Zeiss binoculars, a leather-bound journal and a rifle.

Ironically, it was the rifle that may have done more than anything else to lead Leopold toward radical new thought on game management and creation of an ecological conscience. His daughter simply described the weapon as the rifle with which her father shot "the wolf." No other explanation was necessary.

This was the rifle that Leopold used to shoot the wolf he would later write about in his essay, "Thinking Like a Mountain." He wrote that while hunting in the western mountains he shot a timber wolf and arrived at the dying animal's side in time to see "fierce green fire dying in her eyes." He wrote that he was young and full of trigger-itch at the time and that he believed in killing wolves because wolves killed deer. Fewer wolves, he reasoned, meant more deer.

But watching the light go out of the wolf's eyes, Leopold wrote, he realized that "neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view."

So it was with this story in mind that many in the audience went to look closer at the rifle after the reception. Young and old, they bent over and peered at it. And they ran their hands across the stock, across the teethmarks that Nina said were from the very wolf that died on the mountain.

Leopold would have found this very strange indeed, all of these people studying his rifle so intently. In fact, he would have found the entire affair discomfiting. He would, of course, have been honored and very pleased. But he probably would rather have gone for a walk in the woods. □

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Leopold's beloved "shack," here shown in a 1941 photo, is now part of the 1400-acre Leopold Memorial Reserve amid the Baraboo hills.



UW Archives