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## Aldo Leopold: An Iowa Heritage

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March is recognized nationally as Aldo Leopold month, celebrated by local reading of A Sand County Almanac. Ames will hold its reading from 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday, March 8, in the Farwell Brown Auditorium of the Ames Public Library, 515 Douglas Ave. I urge you to attend if at all possible.

Reading A Sand County Almanac hooks one for life. National leaders have become conservationists after the almanac experience. It can be read in a night or a weekend, and not a word in the book is hard to understand. It combines the words of a poet with the discerning voice of a scientist - a rare combination.

One of his most famous quotes "a land ethic changes the role of homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members and also respect for the community as such," gives you an appreciation of the book. The capstone chapter of A Sand County Almanac is titled The Land Ethic.

Aldo was born in Burlington to Carl and Clara Leopold, a prosperous family of civic leaders and hunting and fishing enthusiasts. It was only natural that Aldo grew up exploring the bottomlands of the Mississippi and the estate at 101 Clay St. on the river bluffs. At age 18, he entered the renowned forestry school at Yale and graduated in 1909. His first job was doing reconnaissance surveys with the U.S. Forest Service based at Albuquerque, N.M. There he met and married the love of his life, Estella Bergere of Santa Fe and became part of a family embedded in the history, lore and culture of the Southwest. Shortly after marriage, he got lost during a severe blizzard and suffered severe exposure. The effects lingered and he and Estella returned to Burlington to begin a prolonged recovery. He recovered, but never was as strong after the illness, necessitating that he change to office work.

In 1924, he accepted the assistant directorship of the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wis. There he continued to be active in professional conservation issues and was recognized as a leader in his field. He partnered with the powerful Izaak Walton League to get many progressive conservation policies adopted. Four years later he took charge of a regional game survey funded by a consortium of hunting industry representatives. He published the epic Game Management Survey of the North Central States and established himself as a national leader of integrity and vision. At the request of the new Iowa Fish and Game Commission, Also prepared a comprehensive, 25-year plan to guide its conservation activities. He worked with ISU's famed Paul Errington, and with the Pulitzer Prize cartoonist Ding Darling, and gave many lectures in Iowa, including ISU.

In June 1933, the University of Wisconsin established a chair of game management, specifically for Aldo. He became the first professor of game management. He served in extension, teaching, research and other scholarly duties, and lived the life of a true professor, and supervised the formation of the famed Wisconsin Arboretum.

In the winter of 1934, Leopold stumbled on an abandoned 150-acre farm close to Baraboo and adjacent to the Wisconsin River. The land had been completely farmed out. The house had burned down, but a chicken coop remained. Aldo arranged to lease the land, and the family

proceeded to clean the manure out of the old coop, make it habitable for weekend getaways, and plant trees, especially pines to hold down the soil.

The Shack is now a mecca for conservation professionals and volunteers alike.

His workload increased during the pre-World War II days. Issues, such as the extreme overpopulation of deer in northern Wisconsin consumed much time, yet he continued to work on a collection of essays he hoped to publish. Aldo was bothered with a persistent facial pain that affected his productivity. Much of the summer of 1946 was spent at the Shack, polishing the essays. The completed manuscript was sent to prospective publishers in September of 1946.

Aldo's facial pain returned and was even worse. He even resorted to a brain operation to relieve the pain. By spring of 1947, his health had improved and he was able to renew teaching and to visit the Shack. Oxford Press agreed to publish the essays, much to Aldo's delight.

On a warm spring weekend in April of 1947 he wrapped up his Madison business early and went with Estella and his daughter, Estella Jr. to the Shack. After breakfast on April 21, they smelled smoke and realized one wing of a brush fire was headed to the pines. The fire rapidly moved to a nearby marsh. Pleas for help by Estella to the local fire department went unheeded. Aldo, while fighting the grass fire, apparently suffered a massive heart attack. By the time he was found, he was dead.

Estella and his older son, Luna took over editing of the book, and changed the title from A Sauk County Almanac to A Sand County Almanac. It was an instant classic. Estella remained associated with the farm until her death in 1975. It is now the Aldo Leopold Preserve. Nina, the youngest daughter and her husband, Charles Bradley, built a beautiful home on the site, and recently a magnificent educational building. The preserve has expanded to include critical areas close by and is thriving as a regional conservation center.

This remarkable lowan overcame many challenges, formed a new discipline and a new way for us to look at the land. He remains an inspiration for millions around the world.

Much of the biographical material was taken from "Aldo Leopold His Life and Work," by Curt Meine, University of Wisconsin Press, 1988, 638 pp.

Dennis Keeney was the first director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. He retired in 2000.

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