

Aldo Leopold: A Fierce Green Fire, by Marybeth Lorbiecki. Helena, MT: Falcon Press, 1996. ix, 212 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$19.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PATRICK NUNNALLY, UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Aldo Leopold has assumed a central place in the history of twentieth-century American environmentalism. His *Sand County Almanac* is a staple of public discourse. A scholarly biography appeared in 1988. There are at least three book-length studies of his ideas, and his work has been the subject of countless articles, talks, and video productions. With all of this recent activity, the question is inevitable: why another study of Leopold? Marybeth Lorbiecki's illustrated biography is an excellent popular history that makes Leopold's life and thought accessible to a broader audience than specialists in the field.

Popular history such as this book serves two masters, and the task is not easy. On one hand, the writer must demonstrate the analytical rigor and critical distance that create the authority and reliability of sound scholarship. On the other hand, the work must be presented in a way that is accessible, that attracts and retains the attention of readers who are not specialists, and may not be scholars. Lorbiecki's heavily illustrated, entertainingly written volume eschews the arcana of scholarship, which may frustrate readers wishing to know the source of a particular fact or quotation. The author lists the Leopold Papers and other primary source collections among her references, though, and there is no reason to believe that accuracy has suffered for the sake of a good story.

And Leopold's life is a good story. Lorbiecki presents Leopold as a complex, passionate man whose life entailed much more than the public work for which he is justly famous. His patrician German upbringing in Burlington, Iowa, at the close of the nineteenth century gave him a classical education, a rigorous attention to detail, and a passionate love of the outdoors. His tenure with the U.S. Forest Service in the Southwest was pivotal for Leopold. There he met and married Estella Bergere, who was to be the center of the rest of his life, and saw firsthand the land destruction that accompanied unrestricted use. Chafed by the Forest Service bureaucracy and debilitated by a bout with nephritis, Leopold left the Southwest in 1924 for a job with the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin. Unsited to a laboratory life, he quit within five years and began a series of tenuous consulting jobs. Out of that work he created a textbook, *Game Management*, and a profession. In 1933 the University of Wisconsin offered Leopold a position on the faculty, and the future of his work was established. Over the next fifteen years, he amassed a

growing national and international reputation as a writer, teacher, and dedicated public spokesman for ecological conservation and resource management.

Lorbiecki humanizes Leopold. Her biography does not provide new insights on the development of his ideas, or the succession of public causes that made him famous. We see another side of Leopold in this book: the devoted family man, beloved "Professor," and all-too-human figure who struggled with illness, professional uncertainty, and fatigue his entire life. These dimensions of Leopold's character enrich the reader's understanding of, and admiration for, this exemplary figure. Aldo Leopold's dedication to his family and his work, his ability to be rigorous without becoming solemn, and passionate without falling into self-righteousness, all make him a model for committed public figures. Lorbiecki's volume highlights the multiple dimensions of his character, and, as such, merits a prominent place on the crowded shelf of Leopold books.

American Farms: Exploring Their History, by R. Douglas Hurt. Exploring Community History Series, edited by David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing, 1996. xiii, 165 pp. Illustrations, appendix, bibliographical essay, index. \$24.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY THOMAS K. WOODS, OLD WORLD WISCONSIN

American Farms: Exploring Their History is the second book in Krieger's Exploring Community History series, the successor to the acclaimed Nearby History series, published by the American Association for State and Local History. The series is designed to guide local historians and students in researching and writing the histories of their communities. Series editors David Kyvig and Myron Marty are experienced hands at preparing helpful guides for local historians and students; together they authored *Your Family History: A Handbook for Research and Writing* and *Nearby History: Exploring the Past around You*.

R. Douglas Hurt is an excellent choice to author a how-to book on researching the history of farms. Currently director of the graduate program in agricultural history and rural studies at Iowa State University, Hurt has worked as an administrator at both the Ohio and Missouri historical societies. He is also a prolific author of both scholarly and popular books on agricultural history. As a scholarly researcher, Hurt knows his subject well; as a writer, he is sensitive to the needs of particular audiences. He is right on target with *American*

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