



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDER VERTIKOFF, EXCEPT WHERE NOTED



IN HARMONY

With Nature

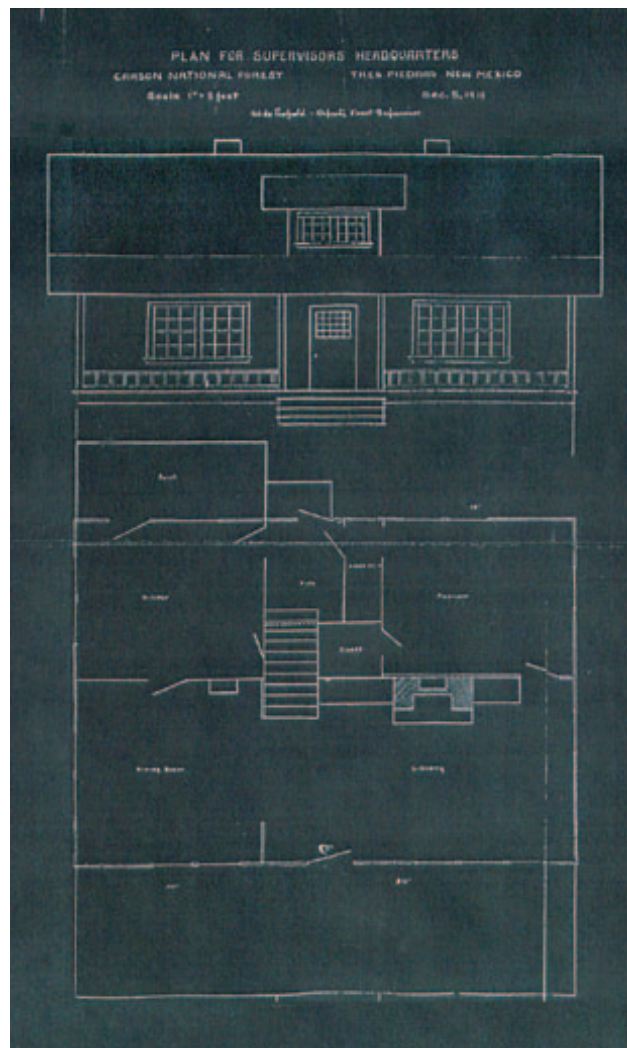
A Pioneer Conservationist's Bungalow Home

BY ROBERT G. BAILEY

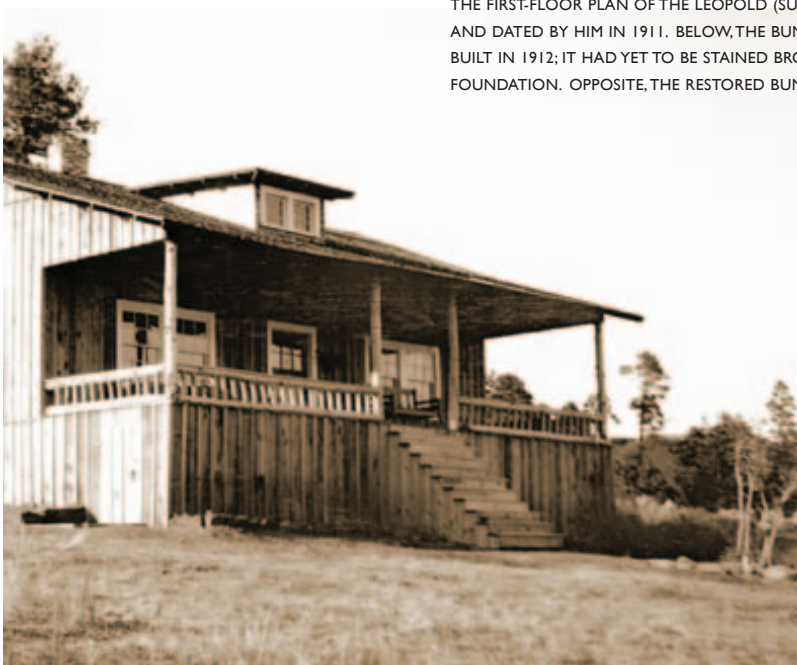
ON FEBRUARY 2, 1912, Aldo Leopold (1887–1948) wrote to his fiancée, Estella Bergere, in Santa Fe that the Forest Service had appropriated \$650 to build a new supervisor’s quarters he had designed at Tres Piedras, New Mexico, northwest of Taos. At the time, Leopold was about to become the new Forest Supervisor of the Carson National Forest in Tres Piedras. Later that year, he built the house, which the newly married couple decided to call “Mi Casita.”



LEOPOLD LOOKING AT THE LANDSCAPE WHILE BOW HUNTING IN THE SIERRA NEVADA ORIENTAL, NORTHERN MEXICO, IN 1938. IT WAS HERE THAT LEOPOLD STARTED TO THINK OF THE QUALITIES OF WHAT HE CALLED “LAND HEALTH.” THIS TRIP HAS BEEN INTERPRETED AS THE PLACE WHERE HE BROUGHT ALL HIS THINKING ABOUT THE LAND INTO ONE GRAND VISION. PHOTO BY A. STARKER LEOPOLD. COURTESY ALDO LEOPOLD FOUNDATION.



THE FIRST-FLOOR PLAN OF THE LEOPOLD (SUPERVISOR'S) BUNGALOW, SIGNED AND DATED BY HIM IN 1911. BELOW, THE BUNGALOW SHORTLY AFTER IT WAS BUILT IN 1912; IT HAD YET TO BE STAINED BROWN. COURTESY ALDO LEOPOLD FOUNDATION. OPPOSITE, THE RESTORED BUNGALOW IN 2014.



With a diverse cultural heritage influenced by Native American, Hispanic, and Anglo-American ways of looking at the world, there is something about New Mexico that inspires people to see things differently. (Take, for example, such difference-seers as artist Georgia O'Keeffe and the founder of American landscape studies, J.B. Jackson.) Part of what Leopold experienced in living and working in New Mexico was undoubtedly the beginning of his seeing conservation in a new way. He went on to become what many consider the leading American conservationist of the 20th century. Several writers have noted that the two years Leopold spent in Tres Piedras were basic to the insights reflected in his now famous



“land ethic” and his many contributions to ecology, conservation, and wilderness preservation.

For years after the Forest Service was established in 1905, it did not have standard ranger-station architecture. Most buildings were simple cabins built with logs. With many design themes in the country to choose from, Leopold chose the Craftsman-style bungalow, whose simplicity would be consistent with his evolving philosophy of the land ethic, wilderness preservation, and the ecological benefits of small-housing living.

The Land Ethic

Leopold was transferred to Tres Piedras from the Apache National Forest in Arizona in 1911. It was here that he started to formulate his land ethic out of his concern for the poor conditions of the Carson National Forest. This region of the upper Rio Grande had supported extensive cattle and sheep ranching for generations, making the watershed one of the most heavily grazed in the country. In the Carson he was faced with unhealthy land: over-grazed meadows, eroding gullies, and a lack of game.

It was at this time that Leopold started to realize that the elements of the land—climate, vegetation, water, soil, geology, wildlife, and people—are integrated in a particular



LEOPOLD WITH ESTELLA (SEATED) AND HIS MOTHER, CLARA, ON THE STEPS OF THE BUNGALOW. THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN SHORTLY AFTER ALDO AND ESTELLA WERE MARRIED IN 1912. BERGERE FAMILY COLLECTION, STATE RECORDS CENTER & ARCHIVES, SANTA FE, N.M. COURTESY ALDO LEOPOLD FOUNDATION.

geographic area that we now call an ecosystem. They don't exist independently of one another; human modification of one affects the others, sometimes negatively. He started to see land holistically and to recognize that this perspective was absolutely essential to its wise management. Today we call this ecosystem management; Leopold referred to it as the land ethic.

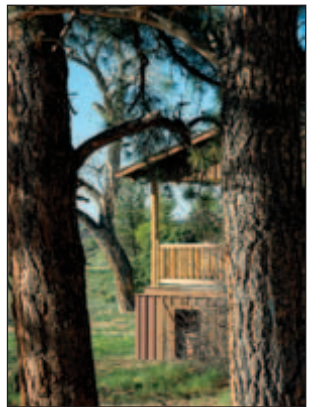
The land ethic is a philosophy that seeks to guide action when humans use or make changes to the land. Prior to Leopold's thinking, land use was commonly based on economic self-interest, with the goal of increasing the direct, short-term benefits for humans. Leopold argued that humans are part of ecosystems they inhabit; their actions should take into account the other elements of the systems. For harmony to exist, humans must respect their fellow members. Leopold understood that our economic well-being could not be separated from the well-being of the land.

Yet during the last half of the 19th century, overutilization of resources and deforestation in particular had been rampant, with associated loss of soil and deterioration of watersheds and water quality. Some species such as the passenger pigeon were hunted to extinction. Killing of predators such as wolves led to overpopulation of deer herds and damage to forest and rangeland vegetation. In 1905, at the urging of President Theodore Roosevelt, Congress established the U.S. Forest Service. Leopold was one of a group of young, Yale-educated foresters hired by Gifford Pinchot, the first chief of the Forest Service, to bring to a halt the unsustainable excesses of the past.

The Leopold House

Leopold's choice of a bungalow design for the Carson supervisor's residence was probably influenced in part by practicality—he was, after all, building a government

RIGHT, BELOW, AND OPPOSITE, VIEWS LOOKING EAST FROM THE FRONT PORCH ACROSS THE VALLEY OF THE UPPER RIO GRANDE TOWARD THE SANGRE DE CRISTO MOUNTAINS (OBSCURED BY CLOUDS).





house with limited resources—and in part by his ecological philosophy. Advocates of Arts and Crafts philosophy of the time, such as Gustav Stickley and the Greene brothers, argued for harmony (rather than accumulation and opulence), natural design, and renewed contact with nature, all of which are embodied in the bungalow. Given his concern for his natural surroundings, it is not unreasonable to assume he opted for a bungalow as his place on the land because it provided a healthy dwelling place, just as a proper land ethic could return health to the land. He was applying a concept of ecological design that was later to be developed on a regional scale by Ian McHarg in his seminal 1969 book *Design with Nature*, which established regional-scale ecological planning as a major discipline.



TOP, LEOPOLD AT LEFT WITH OTHER OFFICERS OF THE CARSON NATIONAL FOREST, 1911. ABOVE, CRAYON-AND-INK DRAWING BY LEOPOLD OF THE BUNGALOW CA. 1911. COURTESY ALDO LEOPOLD FOUNDATION.



THE FRONT ROOMS OF THE LEOPOLD BUNGALOW SHOWING BEAMED CEILINGS AND A MASSIVE FIREPLACE OF NATIVE VOLCANIC STONE. ABOVE IT ARE PHOTOS OF LEOPOLD AT VARIOUS STAGES OF HIS LIFE. THE LIBRARY OPENS SEAMLESSLY INTO THE DINING AREA; ADVOCATES OF SUCH FLOOR PLANS BELIEVED THAT OPEN INTERNAL SPACES FOSTERED HARMONIOUS FAMILY LIFE.

Mi Casita has many of the characteristics of early Arts and Crafts bungalow style. It is a one-and-a-half-story house, small with a wide front porch and a low-pitched roof. The construction is wood frame, with a rustic exterior of wood board-and-batten siding. The porches are also rustic in their use of peeled-log posts and railings and exposed rafter tails. The roof is a side-facing wood-shingled gable with wide overhangs. A small shed dormer is located on the front of the roof; hence the name “shed-roof bungalow.” This bungalow roof type was one of the most popular in the early 20th century. The large, open porch is integrated under the main body of the house and ties the house to the natural landscape. Although the

house in the early days was known around town as “The Big Brown Bungalow,” it was anything but big even by the standards of its era. Its dark-brown color and contrasting white trim was the most popular color scheme for bungalows, although Leopold probably chose it to satisfy his desire to have the house blend appropriately with the colors of the forest.

The interior of the first floor has an open plan of four rooms: library, dining room, kitchen, and bedroom. As in most bungalows, minimal space is wasted on halls; visitors stepped from the porch right into the library, which in turn opens to the dining room. The stairs rise from the library to the second floor, a small, constricted space



THE WILDERNESS ACT

It is a fitting time to renew attention to Aldo Leopold and the rich heritage of the time he spent in the house in Tres Piedras, where he first raised the possibility of setting aside remote areas of wilderness for preservation. In 1924, he convinced the Forest Service to designate the Gila Wilderness in southwest New Mexico as the first wilderness area in the country and the forerunner of today's 110-million-acre National Wilderness Preservation System. In 1935, he and several others, including Olaus Murie, founded The Wilderness Society. (See wilderness.org). This year, America is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1964 Wilderness Act, which established the National Wilderness Preservation System. As part of the celebration, the National Wilderness Conference will take place this October in Albuquerque.

LAKE EDIZA IN THE ANSEL ADAMS WILDERNESS,
EASTERN SIERRA, CALIF.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE DUNLEAVY



beneath the roof and designated a bedroom on Leopold's plans. The house boasted a bathroom with a tub and a kitchen with a sink some 30 years before its water supply was established in a tank atop a granite outcrop behind the house. The ceilings of the library and dining room, as well as the east porch, have exposed beams. The fireplace is of rough stone with flanking built-in seats and wainscoting, all in keeping with the style of the house.

Bungalows are known for their extensive use of natural light, and the Leopold house is no different. Its numerous paired windows blur the lines between the indoors and the surrounding forest landscape of ponderosa pines. Leopold sited the house at the base of a tower-

ing granite outcrop facing southeastward, so that the porch would receive the first sunlight in the morning and be in the shade in the afternoon. The view from the porch across the 35-mile-wide horizon of sagebrush and the great gorge of the Upper Rio Grande to the snow-capped Sangre de Cristo Mountains is as spectacular as any in the country.

Did Leopold consult bungalow plans? Probably. Bungalows were the most popular housing type in America in the first half of the 20th century, giving him numerous sources for acquiring ideas for planning his bungalow. Hundreds of companies offered plans for sale in popular magazines, brochures, and catalogs.



Detailed construction drawings of the house have not been found. All that survives is a white-on-black copy of a drawing that bears Leopold's signature. There is indication in one of Leopold's newsletters, *The Carson Pine Cone*, that all the lumber for the house was milled locally and that three carpenters were brought in to help with the construction. The massive fireplace was built to Leopold's design by assistant ranger Walt Perry of native malpais (volcanic) rock. It seems probable that wood flooring, windows, and plumbing fixtures arrived in Tres Piedras on the narrow-gauge Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad, known as the "Chili Line."

Mindful Restoration and Rehabilitation

By 2000, the Leopold house had undergone significant modifications. The roof pitch had been raised and the dormer modified by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the 1930s to provide more room on the second floor. The porch on the west side had been enclosed. Battens had been removed and covered with clapboard siding. All original windows had been removed and replaced with aluminum. The exterior was painted in a monochromatic off-white. The beamed ceilings were covered with foam tiles. Part of the pine trim remained, but all of it, as well as the fireplace, had been painted over. Kitchen and plumbing fixtures had been replaced



ABOVE, FORMER ENCLOSED REAR PORCH THAT WAS OPENED UP DURING RESTORATION. BELOW AND OPPOSITE, RESTORED INTERIOR GLOWS WITH THE PATINA OF OLD WOOD AND PERIOD COLORS.



ALDO AND ESTELLA LEOPOLD RESIDENCY PROGRAM

This program's purpose is to provide an inspiring retreat for distinguished and emerging writers, thinkers, and artists. The mission is to highlight the relevance of Aldo Leopold's ideas to current and future cultural and environmental issues. Further information on the program can be found on the Aldo Leopold Foundation website at <http://www.aldoleopold.org/Programs/micasita.shtml>. To arrange a tour of the Leopold House, contact Chris Furr, District Ranger, Tres Piedras Ranger District, Carson National Forest at 575 758-8678. To learn more about Leopold see *ALDO LEOPOLD: HIS LIFE AND WORK* by Curt Meine.

with newer, more current models to the point that most traces of the original were gone. All of the original light fixtures had been replaced. Colors, finishes, and doors had been changed or replaced to suit subsequent occupants' tastes. Fortunately, the Forest Service had kept the house's original footprint in keeping with the Arts and Crafts aesthetic.

In 2005, in celebration of 100 years of public-land conservation by the Forest Service, volunteers beautifully restored the house with Forest Service funding. Ben Romero, Tres Piedras District Ranger (now retired), proposed the project and oversaw the work. Using old photographs, the restoration targeted the period from approximately 1912 to the early 1920s. Windows were replaced, the electrical wiring and plumbing were redone, and decades of paint were scraped away. Today the interior glows with the patina of old wood and period colors.

With the exception of the library and dining room, the interior has been rehabilitated to modern standards for use in a newly established writer-in-residence program. (See "The Aldo and Estella Leopold Residency Program," page 88.)

Leopold espoused the idea of a land ethic in which there is harmony between humankind and nature. Bungalows are one expression of this harmony. Today the bungalow in Tres Piedras stands as a monument to Aldo Leopold and the birth of a new vision for conservation. 🏡



NATIVE VEGETATION OF SAGEBRUSH, PINYON, JUNIPER AND PONDEROSA PINE EMBRACES THE BUILDING.

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