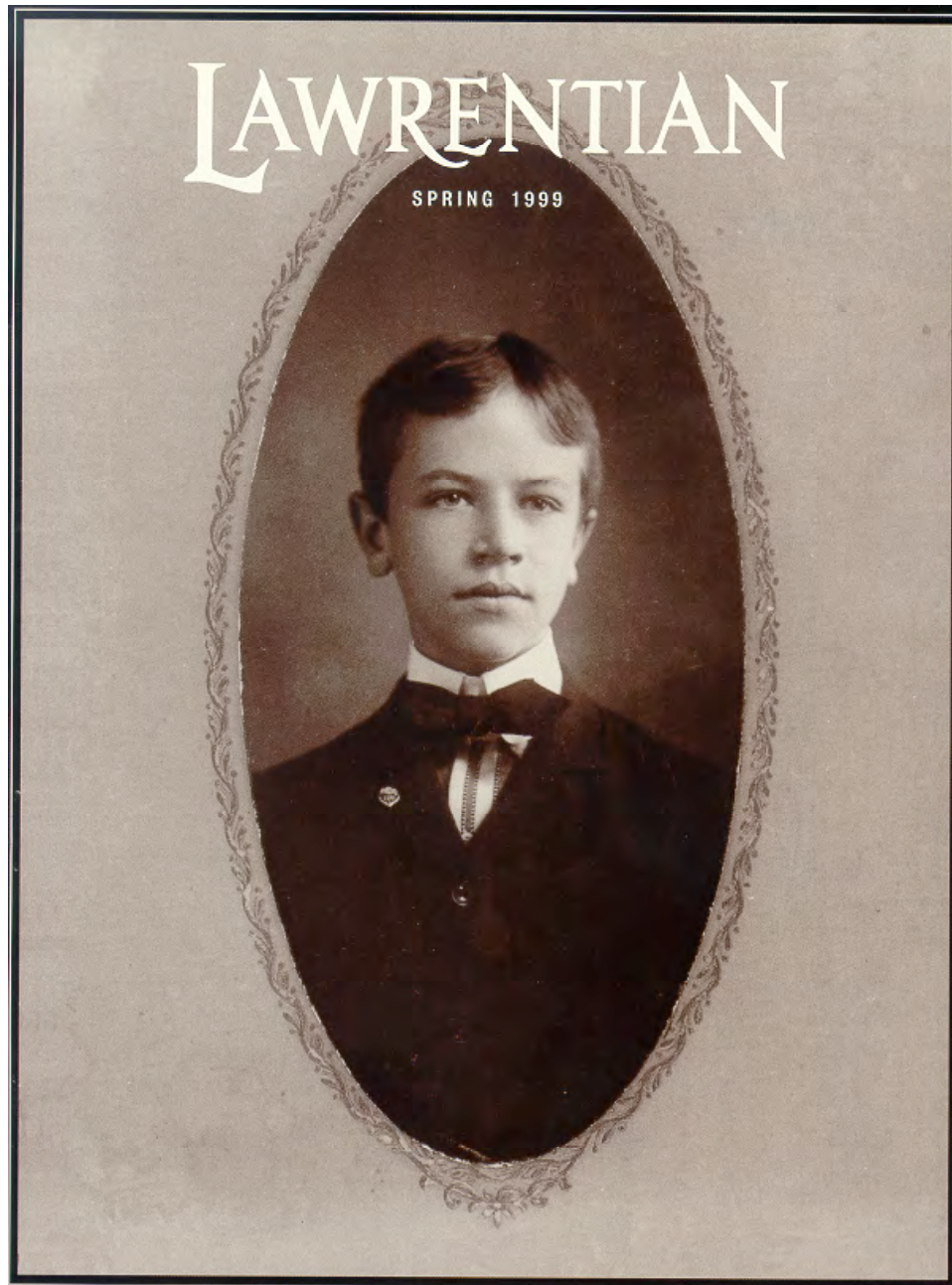


When My Turn Comes

Selections from Aldo Leopold's Lawrenceville Letters and Journals



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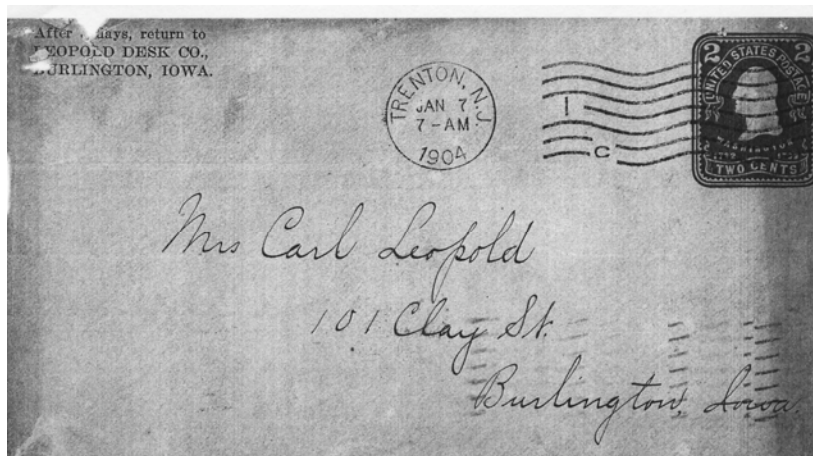
Cover Image: Front page of a Spring 1999 Lawrentian that included an article about Aldo Leopold's time at Lawrenceville. All images in this text are provided courtesy of the Aldo Leopold Foundation (www.aldoleopold.org) and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives.

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I am very sorry that the ducks are being slaughtered as usual, but of course could expect nothing else. When my turn comes to have something to say and do against it and other related matters I am sure that nothing in my power will be lacking to the good cause.

Aldo Leopold, 21 March 1904, age 17

Excerpted from letter to his father Carl in which he responds to reports of over-hunting of ducks



Envelope from a January 1904 letter from Aldo Leopold to his mother
(a transcribed January 9th 1904 letter is included below)

Foreword

It has been written that Aldo Leopold's correspondence was his reprieve from schoolwork, his literary training ground, his naturalist's notebook, and his private connection to his family. This selection of his letters home, written from The Lawrenceville School, expresses his real life experiences in the natural world, and his ability to explore and express his absorbing relationship with nature.

Leopold's natural inclination to make maps and sketches helped him to connect with places. Map making is a valuable tool and helped Aldo develop a kind of literacy and understanding - a bonding with the natural world.

Throughout Leopold's life, his engagement with the natural world gave him not only peace of mind but also a remarkable ability to articulate and to interpret what he saw. His letters express his sense of joy as he worked to understand the remarkable inter-relationship of the natural system and the sheer delight in being alive in a beautiful, mysterious, bountiful world.

Basic to Leopold's letters home was his unrelenting love of his family. Recounting his experiences in the field became an expression of his warmth and fondness for his family. His sense of awe and respect for nature and his ability to express it is evident throughout his letters home.

The culmination of Aldo Leopold's correspondence and his thinking throughout his life is his statement:

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

Nina Leopold Bradley
Baraboo, Wisconsin
April 2007

Preface

A prerequisite to studying science is the ability to question, observe, and describe nature. Aldo Leopold, a member of Lawrenceville's class of 1905, was a renowned ecologist whose observations and descriptions of nature have greatly influenced modern day ecology, conservation, and land management. The Lawrenceville School is fortunate to have copies of letters written by Leopold during his time as a student here that demonstrate his understanding of Ecology at an early age. The following collection of Leopold's letters and journal entries is primarily intended to serve as an example to current Lawrenceville students of how to observe, meaningfully connect with, and then scientifically report on one's surroundings.

Another reason I prepared this document is to provide Lawrenceville students with a sense of the history of the school and the region. While reading through these documents, I was transported to a different era, and I hope you will find yourself on a journey back in time as well. In Leopold's time, for example, the region had a decidedly different look and pace of life. With the rich clay-sand soil that extends through central New Jersey, farming dominated the area, and Lawrenceville was a small rural outpost between Trenton and Princeton. Trains were the main mode of long-distance travel, and they brought Leopold on his journey to Lawrenceville from Iowa. Horse and buggy were still in use for local transportation, as suggested by Leopold's description of "chemical engines" (fire trucks) that were "drawn by beautiful horses."¹ Other writings from this time and region may provide similar historical snapshots, but his letters, field notes, and wildlife journals give an unparalleled look at the biodiversity of central New Jersey, perhaps one of the best of any references of the area from this time period. Finally, Leopold's letters provide interesting insights into how the school operated a century ago - with some characteristics such as Saturday classes still in place but other policies such as lights out at 9:30 p.m. long since changed.

The historical documents presented here are copies of originals from the University of Wisconsin-Madison archives, including selections from his field notebooks and journal notes which he began keeping in 1903.² The Bunn Library has copies of these and of correspondences from other family members to Leopold, as well as digitally transcribed copies of Leopold's letters. Any spelling errors that Leopold made in his original documents were kept if transcribed digitally. Finally, copyrights for all biographical material of Aldo Leopold belong to the Aldo Leopold Foundation (www.aldoleopold.org). A non-profit organization located in Baraboo, Wisconsin, the Leopold Foundation was founded by the 5 children of Aldo Leopold in 1982 and is dedicated to educating the public about Leopold's legacy. I encourage anyone interested in learning more about Aldo Leopold to visit this website.

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¹ 3/21/1904 letter to mother

² To differentiate between my writing and that of Leopold's transcribed letters in the four chapters that follow, all of my own writing is in italics.