

What the Land Is, What it Was, and What It Ought to Be:
Conflict and Collaboration in the Founding of the University of Wisconsin Arboretum

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*“We have written this editorial before. We will probably write it many times more. It is about something in Madison that is wonderful and beautiful. It will be wonderful and beautiful next year, and still more so a hundred years from now. **It is the Madison arboretum.**”*

—— The Editors of the *Wisconsin State Journal*, ca.1960s

Walking in the woods along the southern shore of Lake Wingra, in Madison, Wisconsin, it's easy to feel that one has stepped into a pocket of old wilderness, miraculously preserved as the city grew up around it. In many areas, the only immediate evidence of other humans is the well-trodden path. If you were to look closely, though, you might notice that many of the surrounding trees are rather young—less than 100 years old. Most of the oldest trees date back no further than the 19th century. If you knew a bit about Wisconsin forests, you might be confused—most of the trees here are more characteristic of a northern ecosystem. The woods combine old and new, indigenous and introduced, in a decidedly human landscape, rebuilt upon a grazed oak forest. This is the University of Wisconsin Arboretum, a 1,260 acre landscape of restored ecosystems created and managed over the last century.

The knowledge of this human impact may be enough to turn off some visitors—why attempt to turn back time once the hand of western civilization has destroyed the original wilderness? Why attempt to reverse human influence by exacting further influence on the land? But human influence on the shore of Lake Wingra did not begin with the arrival of Europeans—Wingra Woods is built atop layers of civilization and human impact.¹ Before Wingra Woods, and before the oak forest that the Arboretum's founders encountered in 1932, this land was an oak savanna, an ecosystem once common throughout the American midwest. The Indigenous people of the midwest maintained these landscapes with fire, increasing their usefulness as

¹ The University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Arboretum occupy Teejop, the ancestral land of the Ho-Chunk nation. The Ho-Chunk have lived on this land since time immemorial, but starting with the treaty of 1832, the state and federal government attempted to remove them from their land in 13 documented ethnic cleansing attempts. Additionally, as a land-grant university, UW-Madison continues to benefit from the sale of Menominee and Chippewa land in northern Wisconsin (<https://www.landgrabu.org/universities/university-of-wisconsin>).

A settler map indicates that the Ho-Chunk had a village on the southern shore of Lake Wingra where the Arboretum is today and there are three remaining groups of effigy mounds within the park's boundaries. The story of how the Arboretum's founders understood the Indigenous history of the land is so complex that it could not fit in this paper—I wrote another one.

habitat for game. The deep, sturdy roots of the prairie plants survived and flourished after the burns, and the resilient bark of the oak trees allowed them to outcompete other species. When settlers forced the land's stewards out and prevented naturally-occurring fires, those less resilient species grew up around the oaks, creating shade that killed the prairie plants. This shift in human management created the wooded ecosystem that the Arboretum's founders encountered in 1932.

In the early 1930s, a group of university men and prominent Madisonians established a mission: "To reconstruct, primarily for the use of the University, a sample of original Wisconsin — a sample of what Dane County looked like when our ancestors arrived here in the 1840s."² Some envisioned a living museum for Madison's children to learn their shared natural history. Others imagined an outdoor laboratory for botanists, foresters, and landscape architects. Still others hoped for scenic drives, nature walks, and wildflowers for the city's nature-loving elite. A few, including beloved ecologist and writer Aldo Leopold, planted the seeds for a radical experiment — one of the first large-scale attempts at ecological restoration. Leopold and other early restorationists observed the rapid destruction of "untouched" wilderness across the country. They began to wonder whether the science of conservation could be used to recreate whole ecosystems, returning them to their pre-settlement state. This was a radical idea at the time, but today, about one mile south of the University of Wisconsin campus, anyone can see the results of Leopold's experiment.

In the Arboretum, botanists, foresters, and landscape architects became restorationists before the field had a name. Restoration ecology is the science of ecological restoration, the

² Aldo Leopold, "What is the Arboretum?" September 20, 1934, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 4 Folder 4, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin, 1. This speech has been misidentified and filed as Leopold's Arboretum dedication speech, but is actually a different speech given to the Nakoma Women's Club. David A. Greenwood discusses this misattribution in "Making Restoration History: Reconsidering Aldo Leopold's Arboretum Dedication Speeches," *Restoration Ecology* 25, no. 5 (August 2017): 681-688.

practice of altering a landscape to return it to some former state, often to restart or improve ecosystem services such as water management, erosion control, or wildlife habitat. Ecological Restoration can be conceptualized as a compromise between the long-standing split between preservation and conservation.³ At the time of the Arboretum's founding, these two camps of environmental thought were already well-established. Preservation, associated with romantic outdoorsmen such as John Muir, works to set land aside and minimize human impact—for example, in our national parks. Conservation, on the other hand, encourages human management. This perspective is associated with Gifford Pinchot, the first head of the U.S. Forest Service. This agency manages our national forests, which, while protected, are carefully stewarded by humans and open to logging and other extractive industries. Ecological restoration involves active human management, but not necessarily for the purpose of traditional extractive industries. While visitors may “extract” enjoyment from visiting the arboretum, many restored ecosystems are repaired simply to return them to a prior state.

To return to the question of my theoretical wilderness-loving Arboretum visitor—why attempt to reverse human impact? Wouldn't it be better to put those resources towards preserving the actual pristine wilderness that remains? The trouble with wilderness, as environmental historian Bill Cronon wrote, is that it is an entirely human concept describing untouched landscapes that do not exist:

The removal of Indians to create an “uninhabited wilderness”—uninhabited as never before in the human history of the place—reminds us just how invented, just how constructed, the American wilderness really is. [...] There is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness. It is entirely a creation of the culture that holds it dear, a product of the very history it seeks to deny.⁴

³ For more on this, as well as on the question of the Arboretum as “the birthplace of ecological restoration,” see Laura Martin, *Wild by Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022).

⁴ Bill Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), 79.

The modern idea of wilderness draws from the dichotomy of nature and culture that has permeated western thought for hundreds of years.

Scholars such as Yrjö Haila and Fábio Valenti Possamai have argued that the nature/culture dualism arose from Cartesian dualism, which identifies two fundamentally different metaphysical entities: thinking things (*res cogitas*) and matter (*res extensa*). During a time of rapid industrialization and expansion of human domination of the landscape, “thinking things,” or human culture, could be seen as the antithesis to the unthinking, material, natural world. This 17th century dichotomy impacts how we view nature and culture today—we often think of humans as a contaminating factor, only capable of spreading their ‘cultural’ influence—that is, their development and pollution. Haila wrote,

We would like to distinguish between “nature by herself as a standard” and “nature modified and polluted by humans”. This, however, cannot be done. Humans are creatures of nature; consequently, discriminating between phenomena of nature as “natural” and phenomena of culture as “unnatural” does not make sense at all. Furthermore, as nature changes continuously due to natural processes, the fact that human actions change nature cannot be a diagnostic feature of their “unnaturalness.”⁵

Cronon, Haila, and Possamai urge us to understand that humans are a part of nature, rather than a fundamentally separate, contaminating force. When we refuse to glorify an imagined, inhuman, wild past, we can picture a future where human impact restores ecosystems.

Ecological restoration allows us to repair our relationship with the land and its other inhabitants, reorienting human impact from extraction towards thoughtful, sustainable use. We are beginning to deconstruct the stratification of nature and culture in the way of Aldo Leopold’s land ethic—the understanding that “land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy

⁵ Yrjö Haila, “Beyond the Nature-Culture Dualism,” *Biology and Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (March 2000): 158; Fábio Valenti Possamai, “Nature and Culture: Genesis of an Obsolete Dichotomy” *Philosophy Study* 3(9): 836-842.

flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals”—including humans.⁶ If my imagined visitor wants to turn their nose up at this restored ecosystem, fine! Across the world, ecologists are rediscovering the place of indigenous humans in so-called wilderness, from the gathering of sweetgrass to the ancient stewardship of the Amazon rainforest.⁷

The Arboretum continues to serve as an outdoor laboratory for research and teaching and receives thousands of visitors each year. The Arboretum’s managers still strive towards many of the initial goals for the space, but other aspects of the original vision have been left behind over the years. Visitors will not see a reconstructed sample of every single ecosystem in Wisconsin as some founders originally intended.⁸ They also won’t find reconstructed wigwams or a Ho-Chunk canoe placed on the shore, as Arboretum Committee member Charles E. Brown hoped.⁹ More recent managers have abandoned first director G.W. Longenecker’s plan calling for views of the neighboring golf course.¹⁰ Many people have contributed to the Arboretum vision throughout its history, and they did not always agree on what the space should become.

So, then, how did the Arboretum come to be what it is today? In Leopold’s words, what *is* the Arboretum?¹¹ Researchers have conducted groundbreaking studies in the space over the past 100 years, but it is also a popular recreational park for Madison residents—many of whom have no idea that the space is also a laboratory. In the Arboretum project, the ideas of zoologists,

⁶ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 228.

⁷ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013); Steiner et al. “Indigenous Knowledge About Terra Preta Formation,” in Woods et al., ed., *Amazonian Dark Earths: Wim Sombroek’s Vision* (Dordrecht: Springer Dordrecht, 2008): 193-204.

⁸ Virginia M. Kline, “Long Range Management Plan,” 1992, University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum Collection, UWDC, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin, 1.

⁹ Charles E. Brown to Joseph W. Jackson, November 27, 1933, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 4 Folder 6, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹⁰ Sasaki Associates, Inc. and Ken Saiki Design, “Physical Development Master Plan, University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum,” 1994, Arboretum Research Library Collection, Madison, Wisconsin, 19.

¹¹ Leopold, “What is the Arboretum?”

botanists, conservationists, and community members came together to create an unprecedented landscape. In this thesis, I will explore the conflict and collaboration of the Arboretum's founders to investigate how the Arboretum became a groundbreaking ecological experiment and a beloved park. My research builds upon the work of Arboretum historians Nancy Sachse and Franklin E. Court, who wrote comprehensive narratives of the space's history.¹² The Arboretum brought people with varying academic and social backgrounds together to work on an unprecedented project. One might expect that the founders' differences—contrasting visions of recreation, research, and education—led to conflict. However, I argue that the combination of the founders' differing goals and thoughtful collaboration created the singular Arboretum we know today.

“What is an Arboretum?”: The earliest conceptions

To understand our exceptional Arboretum, we must first understand its origins. Historians agree that landscape architect John Nolen made the earliest call for a University Arboretum in his 1911 report, *Madison: a Model City*.¹³ He made many suggestions for the growing city and university, including, “a good sized arboretum, say, 200 acres.”¹⁴ As a city planner, Nolen had the interests of the Madison community in mind, even when considering projects for the University. To Nolen, “the most serious lack [of the university] is that of garden and landscape features.”¹⁵ Along with his Arboretum, he suggested an aquarium and pleasure

¹² Franklin E. Court, *Pioneers of Ecological Restoration : The People and Legacy of the University of Wisconsin Arboretum* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012); Nancy Sachse, *A Thousand Ages: the University of Wisconsin Arboretum*, (Madison: Regents of the University of Wisconsin, 1965).

¹³ Court's fantastic monograph, *Pioneers of Ecological Restoration*, provides more details on this report and many other moments in the Arboretum's history.

¹⁴ John Nolen, *Madison: A Model City* (Boston, 1911), ch. 3, 87.

¹⁵ Nolen, *Madison: A Model City*, ch. 3, 87.

garden.¹⁶ In Nolen's view, these 3 features all fit in a similar category of university resources that could benefit the public.

To Nolen, and most of the general public at the time, an arboretum was an outdoor museum, a collection of labeled trees epitomized by the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University. These arboreta served as beautifully landscaped recreational spaces and educational resources for non-experts to learn about different varieties of trees. They could not be mistaken for wilderness, by any definition. Nolen's recommendation inspired a prominent Madison attorney, Michael Olbrich, to make the first push to establish an Arboretum.¹⁷ Olbrich adhered to Nolen's vision for a recreational and educational space and acquired the first parcels of land for the project.¹⁸

When Olbrich died in 1929, the project briefly stagnated until it was revived by Col. Joseph W. "Bud" Jackson in 1931.¹⁹ Jackson was arguably the Arboretum's most enthusiastic and dedicated supporter. While his interest in the park arose from the traditional vision, he understood and adapted to the other founders' experimental ideas and worked tirelessly to garner public support in the form of land and money. While Jackson is not as well known as many of the other founders, their groundbreaking work in ecological restoration would never have been possible without him.

The driving force behind the Arboretum's groundbreaking experiment in restoration was noted forester, conservationist, writer, and philosopher Aldo Leopold. Known best for his beloved work of environmental philosophy, *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold came to Madison

¹⁶ Pleasure gardens were public areas intended for entertainment and recreation and could contain, for example, performance venues.

¹⁷ Court, *Pioneers of Ecological Restoration*, 6.

¹⁸ Court, *Pioneers of Ecological Restoration*, 6.

¹⁹ Alvin Gillette to Col. J.W. Jackson, Aldo Leopold, et al., October 29, 1931, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3 Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

as a forester in the 1920s. In 1928, when Michael Olbrich spoke to the Madison Rotary club about his vision for an Arboretum, both Leopold and Jackson were in the audience.²⁰ Under Leopold's influence, the Arboretum project quickly became much more radical than Olbrich's original vision.

John Nolen's traditional vision for the Arboretum was not entirely forgotten, however. Today, the public can walk through the Longenecker Horticultural Gardens and the adjacent Wisconsin Native Plant Garden to learn about species from both far and near. The namesake of the Horticultural Gardens, G. William "Bill" Longenecker, is the third founding figure that I will discuss in this paper. Longenecker served as executive director of the Arboretum from 1933 to 1966 and came from a more traditional botany and landscape architecture background than Leopold. His legacy is associated with the less radical, more public facing aspects of the Arboretum—those intended to educate the general public. Today, the Arboretum's landscaped gardens are advertised as "a place where people of all ages participate in land care and learn about native plants, restoration, pollinator conservation, and ecological relationships" and "a key teaching resource that demonstrates landscaping with native plants."²¹

The founding of the Arboretum brought together these three men and three seemingly conflicting missions—research, recreation, and education. Readers might begin to imagine that the three men disagreed on many aspects of the Arboretum's direction. Indeed, multiple ecological historians have argued that Leopold's radical restoration vision conflicted with other early intentions for the space. To explore this further, let's first return to Bud Jackson.

²⁰ Court, *Pioneers of Ecological Restoration*, 14.

²¹ "Gardens," Visit, UW Arboretum, accessed April 30, 2023, <https://arboretum.wisc.edu/visit/gardens/>.

Joseph W. Jackson: “Thanks, Bud.”

A 1935 character sketch in the *Madison Shoppers Guide* parodistically summarized Col. Joseph W. “Bud” Jackson’s involvement in the Arboretum project succinctly: “The Arboretum? I am the Arboretum.”²² Despite his ubiquitous presence in early Arboretum history, Bud is not as well known today as Longenecker, Leopold, Gallistel, Curtis, and many key Arboretum figures. Newspaper clippings from his lifetime show that the Madison public knew of his efforts—the *Wisconsin State Journal* wrote, “Jackson needled and nagged, bargained and traded, harassed the enemies of the plan, bored its friends [...] the *Wisconsin State Journal* knows this because he was on our doorstep almost every morning, on the telephone every afternoon.”²³ A member of a prominent Madison family, Jackson had connections with the city’s wealthiest residents that allowed him to raise crucial funds for the project and generate essential publicity. However, as a businessman, rather than a scientist, Jackson played a unique role in the development of our “outdoor laboratory.”

In an undated²⁴ chronicle of the Arboretum’s early history, Jackson envisioned three purposes for the space:

1. To acquire and disseminate useful knowledge of trees, shrubs, plants, flowers, vines, mosses, game, birds, fish, Indian lore, pioneer history, and their kindred subjects.
2. To provide an outdoor study ground—a research laboratory—and demonstration area.
3. To provide enjoyment and cultural recreation that comes through knowledge of and association with outdoors.²⁵

²² “Character Sketches,” *Shopper’s Guide*, Madison, Wisconsin, October 17, 1935. A character sketch was a humorous parody of a person’s personality. This joke implies that members of the elite Madison social scene heavily associated Bud Jackson with the Arboretum.

²³ Editors, “One Man’s Gift to Madison,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, no date, Jackson-Stevens-Morris Family Papers, 1773-1968, Box 32, Folder 10, Wisconsin State Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin. This clipping is filed among Bud’s papers from the 1960s, so it is likely from the same period.

²⁴ I place this document somewhere between 1934-1940.

²⁵ Col J.W. Jackson, “University of Wisconsin Arboretum and Wild Life Refuge,” Jackson-Stevens-Morris Family Papers, 1773-1968, Box 32, Folder 10, Wisconsin State Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin, 6.

Jackson's list looked quite different from Aldo Leopold's, written around the same time, which did not mention any public use.²⁶ While they both mention education, Jackson envisioned education for amateur nature lovers, rather than technical instruction for professional conservationists.

To fulfill these goals, Jackson suggested useful additions to the space. He estimated a need for 25-50 signs and markers and a building to house museum and exhibit rooms, a library, dioramas, relief maps, mounted specimens, and Indian relics.²⁷ It appears that he imagined this park as an interdisciplinary nature center, with outdoor gardens and indoor educational space. He also hoped to incorporate some features more common in traditional city parks. "Undoubtedly," he noted, "there will be some demand for picnic grounds."²⁸ For the sake of "beauty, grace, and general attractiveness," he recommended that they acquire a large white swan for the duck pond.²⁹ Bud knew what the city of Madison wanted—the Arboretum duck pond was one of the most popular areas in the park's early years.³⁰ His poetic vision may be best summarized in his own words: "An outdoor art gallery, with nature's symphony of colors at its best; an outdoor museum of nature's best exhibits—an outdoor University of Wisconsin—permanent—for all time."³¹

Jackson used this vision to garner support in his social circles, convincing wealthy, amateur nature-lovers that the city would benefit from this project. As the *State Journal* noted, he worked tirelessly to publicize the Arboretum's appealing qualities. In 1935, the *Capital Times*

²⁶ Aldo Leopold, "Wild Life Management Plan," Oct. 25 1933, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

²⁷ Jackson, "University of Wisconsin Arboretum," 38.

²⁸ Jackson, "University of Wisconsin Arboretum," 40.

²⁹ Jackson, "University of Wisconsin Arboretum," 42.

³⁰ G.W. Longenecker, "The University of Wisconsin Arboretum and Wild Life Refuge," December 9, 1937, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

³¹ Jackson, "University of Wisconsin Arboretum," 50.

wrote of a “woodland paradise” developing near the city, with “shelters and fireplaces, two and a half miles of footpaths, signs and markers designating Indian burial mounds and food passes and shelters for wild game.”³² Many of the other founders opposed shelters, fireplaces, and conspicuous markers.³³ Contrast this popular coverage with a UW Bulletin from two months later highlighting conservation experiments, which described the space as, “one of the world’s largest outdoor laboratories for carrying on experimental work on problems of re-forestation and the propagation of wild life.”³⁴

It is easy to imagine that these mixed messages created some confusion about who this outdoor laboratory was for. One early visitor, self-titled conservationist Walter Bubbert, complained of damage to his car from the Arboretum’s bumpy road, saying, “until you can convince tourists Madison can care for scenic drives and not just tourist revenues you should encourage tourists to utilize the Whitnall park arboretum of the Milwaukee county park system as the outdoor laboratory for southern Wisconsin.”³⁵ The distinction between the educational use of a traditional arboretum, such as Whitnall, and the research aims of the UW Arboretum was difficult for most amateur conservationists to understand. Walter appears baffled that the Arboretum’s planners had not put more thought into the design of a road that was to get “heavy traffic,” but Leopold was “strongly opposed” to a pleasure drive running through his laboratory.³⁶

³² Sterling Sorenson, “Giant CCC project to Mean Woodland Paradise Near City,” *Capital Times*, October 16, 1935.

³³ Aldo Leopold to Charles Brown, June 2, 1936, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

³⁴ “New 190-Acre Gift Makes U.W. Arboretum Largest in World,” *University of Wisconsin Press Bulletin*, December 23, 1935.

³⁵ Walter Bubbert, “Bumpy Roads at the Arboretum,” clipping from unknown newspaper, September 1, 1934, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

³⁶ Aldo Leopold to G.W. Longenecker, January 5, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

Readers may now see Bud Jackson as a thorn in the side of Leopold and the other founders invested in the experimental Arboretum project—only useful for funding. Franklin E. Court characterizes Jackson this way, saying, “it seems likely and understandable that Jackson, the strongest supporter of the Arboretum, after Olbrich, now had a difficult time coming to terms with the realization that the Arboretum was no longer his progeny. Nor was it to be either the city of Madison’s showpiece.”³⁷ However, I believe Jackson’s story is more complex.

In 1962, Grant Cottam, botany professor, restoration ecologist and Arboretum Committee Chairman, thanked Jackson, writing, “I seem to find that every time I learn a new bit of Arboretum history, you had a hand in it.”³⁸ Jackson acknowledged his lack of expertise throughout the Arboretum planning process, deferred to the scientists, and, while he made many suggestions, asked for very little.³⁹ Theodore Sperry, who lead the Arboretum prairie project from 1936 to 1941, recounted Leopold and Jackson’s relationship in a 1981 oral history, saying,

Jackson was something of a classicist in his look on what the Arboretum should be like and hadn’t quite got onto the idea of natural areas, under natural appearance. But Leopold was very persuasive in his very gentle way, in persuading him that this is what was really needed. And Jackson went along with it. As far as I know, there wasn’t any outright disagreement at all.⁴⁰

Far from disagreement, it appears that Leopold and Jackson developed a close relationship through their collaboration on the Arboretum project.

After Leopold’s passing, Jackson spoke at the dedication of the Leopold Memorial Pines. Leopold’s widow, Estella, wrote him gratefully: “Your talk was so appropriate and so beautifully expressed, and I am sure that nothing would have pleased Aldo more than the dedication of those

³⁷ Court, *Pioneers*, 47.

³⁸ Grant Cottam to Col. J.W. Jackson and Mrs. Jackson, Oct. 16 1962, Jackson-Stevens-Morris Family Papers, 1773-1968, Box 32, Wisconsin State Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

³⁹ Jackson, “University of Wisconsin Arboretum,” 1.

⁴⁰ Theodore Sperry, interview by William R. Jordan III, 1982, University of Wisconsin-Madison Oral History Project, 395, 17:29.

beautiful pines to his memory, a living memorial, and your wonderful understanding of him, and his philosophy and foresight.”⁴¹ Despite Jackson’s lack of academic training, elite background, and initial traditional vision for the Arboretum project, he developed a “wonderful understanding” of Leopold’s work and its importance.

Bud had a keen ability to acknowledge and advocate for the ideas of many different parties during the founding of the Arboretum. In his own chronicle of the project’s early history, he wrote, “the question of the use by the general public of the Arboretum and Wild Life Refuge has already been discussed and will continue to arise. There will probably be considerable difference of opinion on the subject.”⁴² Bud took it upon himself to coordinate these many different opinions, but we might wonder what his own hopes for the project entailed. Bud thoughtfully considered the conflict between the sources of funding for the Arboretum project, saying, “This is a public enterprise [...] it will be very largely tax supported. Even though originally quite largely a gift of various private individuals.”⁴³

Given his support of Leopold’s radical idea, Jackson understood the need for limitations on public access, writing, “unrestricted use by the public would defeat many of the purposes of the project.”⁴⁴ However, he acknowledged the Madison community’s crucial role in acquiring land and funding for the project, and thus, acknowledged their interests: “Its purpose is largely to educate—not only students—but the entire public. The public will be anxious to see and know it.”⁴⁵ Ultimately, Jackson wrote that “some where between prohibition of public usage and

⁴¹ Estella Leopold to Col. J.W. Jackson, June 22, 1953, Jackson-Stevens-Morris Family Papers, 1773-1968, Box 32, Wisconsin State Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁴² Jackson, “University of Wisconsin Arboretum,” 46.

⁴³ Jackson, “University of Wisconsin Arboretum,” 46.

⁴⁴ Jackson, “University of Wisconsin Arboretum,” 46.

⁴⁵ Jackson, “University of Wisconsin Arboretum,” 46.

unrestricted public usage would seem to be the answer.”⁴⁶ He had faith in the ability of the community to understand the Arboretum’s mission, writing, “the assistance of a well informed, interested, and appreciative public will be invaluable in the maintenance and development of the undertaking.”⁴⁷

Bud Jackson did request one thing for himself in the Arboretum. In a letter to a few other founders, including Leopold and Longenecker, he wrote, “If it would be appropriate and fit into the general program of restoration and development of the Arboretum, I would undertake to finance the establishment of a wild flower garden.”⁴⁸ He hoped to name this after his mother, Syndonia, “who loved most in life children, flowers, and birds,” and to whom he attributed his love for the outdoors. Even in this small request, he deferred to the scientific purpose of the space, writing, “I would want you men to agree that such a wild flower garden would be wholly appropriate and in line with what you conceive as the proper development of the project. In other words, in passing judgment you will leave me personally entirely out of consideration.”

There is no Syndonia’s garden in the Arboretum today, but G.W. Longenecker makes reference to a “Lyndonia Wild Flower Garden” in a 1937 talk. It is unclear what happened to this piece of Arboretum history.⁴⁹ Regardless, Bud Jackson remained an enthusiastic supporter of the Arboretum throughout his life and was acknowledged by the dedication of the Jackson Oak in 1963.⁵⁰ While it would be easy to write Bud Jackson out of the Arboretum’s history as a wealthy, out-of-touch amateur supporter and a necessary nuisance, the true story is more

⁴⁶ Jackson, “University of Wisconsin Arboretum,” 46.

⁴⁷ Jackson, “University of Wisconsin Arboretum,” 47.

⁴⁸ J.W. Jackson to Aldo Leopold, G.W. Longenecker, et al., February 18, 1938, Jackson-Stevens-Morris Family Papers, 1773-1968, Box 32, Wisconsin State Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁴⁹ G.W. Longenecker, “The University of Wisconsin Arboretum and Wild Life Refuge,” 3.

⁵⁰ Court, *Pioneers*, 188.

complicated. All those who love the Arboretum today would do best to remember this note from the Capital Times:

This one man paid his debt to his community with interest compounded. In all the years ahead, when the quail whistle and the lilacs bloom, Madison will collect new dividends.

Thanks, “Bud.”⁵¹

Aldo Leopold: “For research, rather than for amusement”

Bud Jackson’s crucial work brought administrators, researchers, and public supporters together in support of the project, but it was Aldo Leopold who envisioned the Arboretum as something groundbreaking. Perhaps best known for his inimitable work, *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold initially trained as a forester and first moved to Madison in 1924 to work for the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory. By 1933, he joined the University in an appointment as both a Professor of Game Management and the Research Director of the Arboretum. His involvement in the Arboretum project first stemmed from his need for a place to study game and conduct conservation experiments.

Leopold’s initial vision for the Arboretum as a strictly research-oriented space, and given his influence, this idea permeated many initial plans for the landscape. In a 1934 speech, Leopold explained the difference between the UW Arboretum and other arboretums in the country. Ordinarily, he says, an arboretum is, “a place where the serious-minded citizen can learn, by looking at them, the differences between a white and a black spruce, or to see in person a Russian olive.” He continued, “some advanced institutions arrange their tree-collection as natural associations, rather than taxonomic groups. [...] Such exhibits are called “ecological groupings”

⁵¹ Editors, “One Man’s Gift to Madison,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, undated clipping in Jackson-Stevens-Morris Family Papers, 1773-1968, Box 32, Wisconsin State Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

and represent “advanced thought” in Arboretum management.”⁵² Leopold told his audience that the Madison Arboretum would have all these things, but its main focus would be something new—to reconstruct a sample of original Wisconsin.

Leopold further articulated this vision in the Arboretum’s 1933 Wild Life Management Plan:

The Arboretum may serve as:

- An educational exhibit of wild life and of management methods.
- A place for research.
- A place to conserve remnants of rare species.
- A source of “outflow” of surplus wild life population.

Of these four possible functions, the first is by far the most important.⁵³

In that first, most important point, “management methods” describes what we would today call ecological restoration, a field that did not yet exist. When he says “educational exhibit,” Leopold does not mean that school children could come to learn about flora and fauna. Leopold saw an opportunity for cutting-edge research, a project unlike nearly anything seen before, to educate the next generation of professional conservationists. Notably missing from Leopold’s vision is any kind of recreational access—a problem, given the investment of community members expecting something similar to Olbrich’s vision.

Leopold discouraged use of the Arboretum that did not contribute to conservation research and training. In a 1934 speech to the women’s club of Nakoma, a wealthy suburban neighborhood bordering the Arboretum, he said, “obviously, [...] it will be done for research rather than for amusement, and for use by the University, rather than for use by the town.”⁵⁴ In

⁵² Leopold, “What is the Arboretum?” 1.

⁵³ Aldo Leopold, University Arboretum Wild Life Management Plan,” October 25, 1933, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin, 1.

⁵⁴ Leopold, “What is the Arboretum?” 2. In the written version of the speech, Leopold made some handwritten edits. The version quoted in my text is with his adjustments, but the typed copy says, “obviously, too, it is research

1939, Leopold pushed back against parks administrators' attempts to appropriate research funds for the construction of public facilities.⁵⁵ Given the large amount of public support for a traditional Arboretum, where Madison's elite residents could stroll amongst the trees or observe wildflowers in bloom, Leopold may have felt it necessary to manage citizens' expectations for public use.

Indeed, concerns about public perception came up in Leopold's early game experiments. An application to take pheasant specimens in 1936 stalled because of concerns about shooting in what the public perceived to be a wildlife refuge. Leopold wrote to the director of conservation acknowledging the complexity of the situation and offering a solution:

The possible public misunderstanding of shooting on the Arboretum has of course worried us also, and it is our intention to take these birds quietly by .22 rifle in the patches if we can. This, I think, should largely avoid the probability of having to explain things to outsiders who know the Arboretum is a refuge, but who do not know that it is a research area.⁵⁶

Leopold fought for limited public access because it would have interfered with conservation research, which he saw as a crucial task for the public good. In the Nakoma speech, he spoke of the dangerous impacts of extractive, extensive agriculture to explain the Arboretum's purpose: "the tools wherewith we are building our civilization are so powerful, and their use has such complex and unexplained consequences, that we are tearing down about as fast as we are building up."⁵⁷ His files include pages and pages of data on pheasant populations and response to

rather than amusement, and the use by the University, rather than use by the town, which we are giving first consideration."

⁵⁵ Aldo Leopold to Paul V. Brown, February 10, 1940, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁵⁶ Aldo Leopold to H.W. MacKenzie, August 27, 1936. Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁵⁷ Leopold, "What is the Arboretum?" 5.

different food sources, all geared towards restoring a key game species.⁵⁸ Over time, though, as his work transitioned away from the hard science of conservation and toward ethics and education, his opinion on public use of the Arboretum changed.

Most of the sources utilized so far show Leopold's vision and work during the first decade of Arboretum history. Leopold remained involved until the end of his life, however, even as he dedicated more time to writing his *Almanac*. In 1948, weeks before his death fighting a wildfire, Leopold wrote to the Arboretum Committee with a new vision: "The present Arboretum area is very small from the standpoint of a student who needs a "walk in the woods" with some degree of solitude. This function, in my view, is ultimately the most important of all Arboretum functions."⁵⁹ A few weeks later, he "pointed out the desirability of having an Arboretum naturalist whose principal duty would be to conduct tours of the area for groups of the general public" at a technical committee meeting.⁶⁰ Was this a change of heart, a reconsideration of man's place in nature brought upon by his later philosophy? Is his famous Land Ethic, which urged humans to return to nature and reconsider their relationship with the landscape, inconsistent with his vision for the Arboretum? I don't believe so.

To investigate these questions, we must look closer at *A Sand County Almanac*. Readers who are already familiar with Leopold's famous work may have been intrigued by this paper's discussion of his radical experiments in ecology. Leopold is much more well-known for his works of environmental literature and philosophy than his research career. A Sand County

⁵⁸ Aldo Leopold papers, series 9/25/10-5, Box 1, Folders 3 and 4, UWDC and University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin, <https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/AldoLeopold>.

⁵⁹ Aldo Leopold to Arboretum Committee, March 8, 1948, Aldo Leopold papers, series 9/25/10-5, Box 1, Folder 4, UWDC and University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁶⁰ Arboretum Technical Committee Notes, March 22, 1948, Aldo Leopold papers, series 9/25/10-5, Box 1, Folder 4, UWDC and University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin, <https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/AldoLeopold>.

Almanac was finished shortly before Leopold's death and published in 1949. Leopold's words appealed to a small group of elite amateur conservationists around the country who delighted in the book's romantic natural descriptions and were inspired by its call to get back to nature. Rather than appealing to the sort of elite Madisonians who patronized the horticultural gardens of the Arboretum, *Sand County* initially attracted more "serious" nature-lovers. In *Sand County*, Leopold encouraged the protection of natural areas and specified that some should be allowed to remain in their "natural state" so that humans can experience the value of connection to one's food source through hunting, solitude, and that je-ne-sais-quoi of being in 'the wild.'⁶¹ His conservationist readers felt that value is directly tied to the lack of human impact in an area: in Leopold's words, "It is footless to execute a portage to the tune of motor launches, or to turn out your bell-mare in the pasture of a summer hotel. It is better to stay home."⁶²

This mindset was connected to the rise in "environmental tourism" in the late 19th century. Elite men would take trips to "untouched" areas to reconnect with their masculinity and enjoy nature as they thought they should—with minimal human contact. By the 1940s, though, the advent of the automobile had increased the accessibility of the national parks and the other remaining pockets of "wilderness." To elite conservationists attempting to experience true wilderness, this diminished the quality of those natural spaces — Leopold wrote, "The greater the exodus, the smaller the per-capita ration of peace, solitude, wildlife, and scenery, and the longer the migration to reach them."⁶³ As valuing nature became mainstream, nature became less valuable.

⁶¹ Leopold, *Sand County*, 240.

⁶² Leopold, *Sand County*, 270.

⁶³ Leopold, *Sand County*, 280.

In the 1970s, a paperback reprint of *Sand County* brought Leopold's words to a new audience of nature lovers. This edition was published by Ballantine Books, which advertised "books for those who feel deeply about wild, unsettled places."⁶⁴ Many mainstream readers stopped there—finding the words to explain why nature should be left alone was enough. Speaking of her first time reading *A Sand County Almanac*, writer Lauret Savoy explained, "what appealed to my fourteen-year-old sensibilities were the intimate images of land and seasons in place."⁶⁵ Today, a lot of environmental activism still relies on an assertion of romantic, inherent value in untouched nature. Those who are able still seek out the feeling of isolation in nature that the earliest elite conservationists fought to preserve for themselves. That these environmentalists claim to have learned from Leopold shows that they have not truly understood the land ethic. This popular perception of Leopold minimizes the radical nature of his writing, leading us to understand his ethic only in terms of romantic appreciation of untouched nature.

Leopold's work is not incompatible with his early research or his later encouragement of public access to the Arboretum. The land ethic is more than just an appreciation for nature—it is a new way of understanding our relationship with the landscape. Leopold wrote that "no important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions."⁶⁶ Recognizing that economic self-interest fuels most land-use decisions, informed by the extractive causes of the dust bowl that he worked to combat as a conservationist, Leopold offered his land ethic as a way for farmers and other stewards to reshape their relationship with the land into one of mutual support. Leopold saw a

⁶⁴ Leopold, *Sand County*, 297.

⁶⁵ Lauret Savoy, "Alien Land Ethic: The Distance Between" in *Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape* (New York City: Counterpoint, 2015), 31-48.

⁶⁶ Leopold, *Sand County*, 246.

desperate need for conservation research that could aid in the restoration of degraded farmland across the midwest—this is what sparked his interest in restoration at the Arboretum. I believe that his initial discouragement of public access was simply to minimize disruptions of his experiments, not to maintain any perceived wilderness quality of the Arboretum.

Over a decade before the publication of *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold described something very similar to the land ethic at the Arboretum dedication: “Ecology tells us that no animal—not even man — can be regarded as independent of his environment. Plants, animals, men, and soil are a community of interdependent parts, an organism. [...] It may flatter our ego to be called the sons of man, but it would be nearer the truth to call ourselves the brothers of our fields and forests.”⁶⁷ Addressing a crowd of scientists and public supporters alike, he connected this to the Arboretum’s mission:

If civilization consists of coöperation with plants, animals, soils and men, then a university which attempts to define that coöperation must have, for the use of its faculty and students, places which show **what the land was, what it is, and what it ought to be**.⁶⁸ This Arboretum may be regarded as a place where, in the course of time, we will build up an exhibit of what was, as well as an exhibit of what ought to be. It is with this dim vision of its future destiny that we have dedicated the greater part of the Arboreum to a reconstruction of original Wisconsin, rather than to a “collection” of imported trees.⁶⁹

To Leopold, what the land *was* and what the land *ought to be* are two different things. He did not believe that the entire country should be restored to its pre-settlement state. He did not seek to recreate a perfect “original Wisconsin” and shut the public out. The Arboretum exists today as a living demonstration of the land ethic, open to all, as Leopold intended.

⁶⁷ Leopold, *Sand County*, 209.

⁶⁸ My emphasis

⁶⁹ Leopold, *Sand County*, 210.

G.W. Longenecker: “If we work with foresight and do a little dreaming, we can develop something worth while”

Despite Leopold’s influence, there is an area of the Arboretum that looks more like Nolen’s original vision for the landscape: the Longenecker Horticultural Gardens. This “collection of trees” is both an educational resource and a beautiful garden, but it is definitely less relevant to the Arboretum’s research goals. For this reason, many have associated the garden’s namesake, G.W. Longenecker, with the more traditional vision for the Arboretum.⁷⁰ Longenecker was appointed as the Arboretum’s first *executive director* on October 2, 1933.⁷¹ However, Aldo Leopold actually served as the first *director* of the Arboretum for 50 days prior to Longenecker’s appointment due to a brief period of bureaucratic confusion.⁷² Franklin E. Court provides a clear and descriptive account of this conflict in his excellent Arboretum history, *Pioneers of Ecological Restoration*, but I will summarize it here.

When the College of Agriculture was working to hire Leopold as a Professor of Game Management, some involved with the Arboretum project worked to add “Director of the University Arboretum” to his job description. However, the Arboretum Committee, which had ultimate authority, was still considering what the directorship would look like. Longenecker had recently graduated from the Landscape Architecture program and was working in UW Buildings and Grounds and teaching in the Horticulture department. Court writes that Arboretum Committee members from the more traditional landscape and botany departments, such as E.M. Gilbert, supported appointing Longenecker because of his background. So, when the College of Agriculture overstepped, there was a 50 day period where Leopold served as director. Soon,

⁷⁰ For example, Martin, *Wild by Design*, and Philip J. Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁷¹ Court, *Pioneers*, 63.

⁷² Court, *Pioneers*, 59,

though, the situation was rectified and Longenecker was appointed Executive Director and Leopold moved to Research Director.⁷³

Some authors have used this brief mix-up to demonstrate conflict between Longenecker and Leopold.⁷⁴ Of the co-directorship, biological historian Philip J. Pauly wrote, “disagreements arose immediately over issues of plant choice. Longenecker envisioned a landscape park containing systematically and ecologically ordered displays.”⁷⁵ By Pauly’s telling, the botany and landscape architecture departments envisioned an educational space where “visitors to the arboretum would be inspired to beautify their own properties.”⁷⁶ Historian Laura Martin wrote that Leopold and Longenecker “immediately clashed,” and that “neither Leopold nor Longenecker would compromise on his vision for the arboretum, and in 1934, the university gave each responsibility for half of the property.”⁷⁷ Even Court, who otherwise avoids framing Leopold and Longenecker as enemies, highlights a quote from Gilbert about why he supported Longenecker:

He worried, under the new policies that he saw developing by June 1933, that the Arboretum—“our project,” he called it— would “develop into something quite different from the beautifully . . . landscaped areas” distinguishing other arboretums.⁷⁸

This certainly gives the impression that Gilbert, and thus, Longenecker, supported a more traditional vision for the Arboretum. I wish to investigate these claims about the co-directorship more thoroughly.

Let us return to Gilbert’s “worried” quote. In this June 8, 1933 letter to George W. Mead, a member of the Board of Regents, Gilbert wrote that Phelps Wyman, a landscape architect, had

⁷³ Court, *Pioneers*, 63.

⁷⁴ Court, *Pioneers*, 63.

⁷⁵ Pauly, *Fruits and Plains*, 191.

⁷⁶ Pauly, *Fruits and Plains*, 191.

⁷⁷ Martin, *Wild by Design*, 86-87.

⁷⁸ Court, *Pioneers*, 58.

expressed interest in the directorship. Gilbert said that he had admired much of Wyman’s work, but continued,

I am not certain that he would make an ideal director for our arboretum and wild life refuge. I trust that our project here will develop into something quite different from the beautifully (?) landscaped areas of so many of the arboretums of the country.⁷⁹

He goes on to recommend Longenecker, “one of our very capable young men,” for the position.

If Gilbert was concerned that the project was developing into something different from a traditional arboretum, why would he reject Wyman, who worked for Milwaukee County parks as a landscape architect?⁸⁰ Gilbert was not expressing concern, as Court claims; He *supported* a more radical, “quite different” vision for the Arboretum, and thought Longnecker ideal to lead it.

So, then, what was the relationship between Longenecker and Leopold? Did they “immediately clash,” as Martin claims?⁸¹ In all of the Arboretum correspondence and documents that I have reviewed, I found nothing to indicate a conflict between Leopold and Longnecker. We already know Martin's claim that “the university gave each responsibility for half of the property” does not exactly reflect the true story of the directorship debate. Martin only cites Pauly when making this claim, so where did Pauly get his idea that “disagreements arose immediately”?⁸² Pauly cites nothing from Longenecker—only two of Leopold’s speeches that give no indication of Longenecker’s perspective.⁸³

If we actually examine Leopold and Longenecker’s work and communications, it becomes clear that the men worked closely together and developed a strong mutual vision for the

⁷⁹ E.M. Gilbert to George W. Mead, June 8, 1933, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin. The purpose of the question mark is unclear to me.

⁸⁰ Wyman may have worked on the Whitnall Park Arboretum in Milwaukee, of which our friend Walter Bubbert was so fond.

⁸¹ Martin, *Wild by Design*, 86-87.

⁸² Martin, *Wild by Design*, 85n90, 86n91.

⁸³ Pauly, *Fruits and Plains*, 191n63.

landscape. When the mistake with the directorship arose, Bud Jackson noted that Leopold “expressed a very high regard for Longenecker,” and asked, “that he be given a proper title and understanding of the work he is to do as soon as possible.”⁸⁴ Pauly interpreted Longenecker’s vision for “ecologically ordered displays” to mean a more traditional Arboretum, in conflict with Leopold’s radical reconstructive vision. However, Longenecker stated the opposite in a 1933 letter to conservationist and AC member Raphael Zon, writing, “I should like to see the Arboretum developed as you have suggested by the planting of fairly large naturalistic groupings.”⁸⁵ He reiterated this vision in a 1937 talk, saying “Most of the plantings in the arboretum are being done from the ecology view point, which is the placing of plants as nearly as possible in their natural environment.”⁸⁶ But, as a landscape architect, did Longenecker do any of the early ecological restoration himself?

John T. Curtis, the famous ecologist who oversaw much of the development of the Arboretum between 1934 and 1961, wrote in his 1951 Master Plan for the Arboretum pine forests that,

The supervision of all these plantings with respect to species choice and spacing of plantings has been given by G.W. Longenecker. His extraordinary skill in these matters has resulted in a forest which closely approaches the natural forests in appearance⁸⁷

⁸⁴ A.F. Gallistel to E.M Gilbert, 1933, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁸⁵ G.W. Longenecker to Raphael Zon, May 9, 1933, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁸⁶ G.W. Longenecker, “The University of Wisconsin Arboretum and Wild Life Refuge,” talk given at W.I.B.A, December 9, 1937, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin. Longenecker also reiterated his commitment to ecological groupings in a letter to Bud Jackson on March 21, 1934, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁸⁷ John T. Curtis, “Arboretum Master Development Plan: II Vegetation Management Plan for Pine Forests in the southwest portion of the Arboretum,” 1955, Arboretum Research Library, Madison, WI, 9-10.

It appears that Longenecker led restoration efforts throughout the Arboretum, for example, designing an ecological grouping of American Larch and bog plants.⁸⁸ He also seems to have agreed with Leopold's early plan to limit public access. In a 1937 master plan report, he noted, "since recreation is not a primary motive for the establishment of the area, large crowds will not be in evidence except in unusual instances."⁸⁹ This mindset impacted early designs, for example, acknowledging that "the public will demand some place to prepare lunches," Longenecker selected an area "where picnicking will be least objectionable and encroachment upon the scientific and aesthetic purpose for which is the Arboretum stands minimized to the greatest degree."⁹⁰

Though Longenecker oversaw much of the development of the Arboretum, he wrote to Leopold for advice on many occasions. In 1941, Longenecker wrote to Leopold about the issue of rabbits in the Arboretum, asking, "It is imperative that something drastic be done about the high rabbit population. [...] What would you recommend doing?"⁹¹ Longenecker was independently concerned about ecological issues, writing Leopold in 1936 about the loss of crucial data in the Arboretum:

It is very imperative that we get as much of the original data from the Arboretum as possible. [...] Every day we are losing valuable information. What has happened on the area the past 4 years? There has been a decided change in the flora of the fields from annual weeds to perennial grasses.⁹²

⁸⁸ G.W. Longenecker, "American Larch and Bog Association," January 4, 1939, Map #104, Arboretum Map Collection, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁸⁹ G.W. Longenecker, "Report Accompanying the Master Plan," January 31, 1940, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁹⁰ G.W. Longenecker, "Report Accompanying the Master Plan."

⁹¹ G.W. Longenecker to Aldo Leopold, April 9, 1941, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁹² G.W. Longenecker to Aldo Leopold, November 28, 1936, Arboretum records, 1932-2015, Box 3, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, Wisconsin.

The Arboretum records contain pages upon pages of evidence of Leopold and Longenecker’s mutual vision for the landscape and long-term collaboration. Longenecker not only supported Leopold’s plans—he was his partner. Ted Sperry, the Arboretum prairie ecologist, said that it may have arisen from conversations with Leopold. In a 1981 oral history, he said, “between them, they came up with this idea of sort of a wildlife area, a natural area, which is not strictly an arboretum at all.”⁹³ The exceptional nature of our Arboretum did not arise from the vision of one man, but from many different visions interacting with each other on one landscape.

Conclusion

“A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

— Aldo Leopold, *The Land Ethic*⁹⁴

It is difficult to understand the full extent of human relationships just by examining letters and publications. We may never understand the full story of how the Arboretum came to be what it is today. Many more people helped to found the Arboretum and construct its landscape than just Bud Jackson, Aldo Leopold, and Bill Longenecker. Even more have cared for it and managed its lands over the past 100 years. However, I believe that the urge to uncover conflict between Leopold, Jackson, and Longenecker stems from our perception that Leopold’s radical vision was incompatible with Jackson and Longenecker’s humanistic work towards recreation and education. If one believes that the goal of restoration ecology is to create wilderness, which is incompatible with humans, then this conclusion makes sense. But this is a misunderstanding of

⁹³ Theodore Sperry, interview by William R. Jordan III, 1982, University of Wisconsin-Madison Oral History Project, 395, 3:30.

⁹⁴ Leopold, *Sand County*, 236.

restoration ecology and the Arboretum project. It is impossible to recreate pristine wilderness — it doesn't exist. Ecological restoration allows us to utilize human impact to restore our relationship with the land. As Leopold said,

We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man, nor for us to reap from it the esthetic harvest it is capable, under science, of contributing to culture.⁹⁵

Through their work on the Arboretum project, Leopold, Longnecker, and Jackson blurred the distinction between nature and culture—perhaps unintentionally.

So, then, what is the Arboretum? So many different visions and ideas went into the project that the exact nature of the space is elusive. Recounting the founding in 1981, Ted Sperry said, “in fact this place should never have been called an arboretum, except they didn't have any other name for it.”⁹⁶ The University of Wisconsin Arboretum is not just an arboretum, not just a museum, and not just a park. It's all three at once, and more. An outdoor art gallery and an outdoor laboratory in one, “an outdoor University of Wisconsin—permanent—for all time.”⁹⁷

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⁹⁵ Leopold, “Foreword,” *Sand County*, xxii.

⁹⁶ Theodore Sperry, interview by William R. Jordan III, 1982, University of Wisconsin-Madison Oral History Project, 395, 3:30.

⁹⁷ Jackson, “University of Wisconsin Arboretum,” 50.

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