

-It Would be Easy to become a Pessimist, but Human Nature Compels Us Not to Be.

As one drives along the road into Bamberger Ranch Preserve one comes to a small wrought iron fence enclosing what appears to be a tombstone. For anyone who has spent any time along country roads in Texas, it appears to be the grave of an early farmer or rancher or even an early settler. But if you stop to read the inscription on the tombstone, it will read:

In Memory of Man

2,000,000 BC--20??

He Who Once Dominated the Earth

Destroyed it With His Wastes

His Poisons and His Own Numbers

The author of the book about the Bamberger Ranch, "Seasons at Selah: The Legacy of Bamberger Ranch Preserve," Andy Sansom, who is a longtime friend of J. David Bamberger, wrote about the above inscription:

"Standing at the iron fence and reading the bleak inscription, I have a hard time getting my head around the fact that this stark view of the future was erected by quite possibly the most optimistic person I have ever known."

And it is certainly true, that anyone spending the years, no decades, of constant sweat and toil to convert the worst run-down piece of land you can imagine into a jewel of healthy, beautiful native habitat as J. David has done, has got to be an eternal optimist, as anyone who has heard him talk will attest.

Rereading the inscription on the tombstone and Sansom's quotation above reminded me of some of my favorite quotations from Aldo Leopold:

Leopold said: "One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone with a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise".

"Twenty centuries of 'progress' have brought the average citizen the vote, a national anthem, a Ford, a bank account, and a high opinion of himself, but not the capacity to live in high density without befouling and denuding his environment."

"Why is it that the land we die for in time of war is freely looted of its fertility, forests, water and wildlife in times of peace? "The answer, I think, is quite simple. Land, to the average citizen means the people on the land. There is no affection for or loyalty to the

land as such, or to its non-human cohabitants. The concept of land as a community of which we are only members, is limited to a few ecologists. Ninety-nine percent of the world's brains and votes have never heard of it."

I hope that 20 years of study qualifies me as at least an amateur "ecologist," and I certainly understand and generally agree with what Leopold wrote some 80 years ago. And I can understand the thoughts that caused J. David Bamberger to put up that tombstone.

Anyone who cares so deeply about the future of this land, but sees the rate of loss of rural property to "development," the increasing amount of land subdivided into many "ranchettes, who notes the projected population growth and warmer temperatures expected in future decades, can easily become pessimistic about the future.

But when I think of all that, I also have to think about all of my friends and many people I know who are doing work to help improve certain properties or to educate the public on the need for better land management.

Some of these friends are fellow Master Naturalists or volunteers for Riverside Nature Center, or Native Plant Society of Texas chapters, and other nature related NGOs. Some of them work for government agencies such as AgriLife Extension, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas Forest Department, or USDA/NRCS.

And there are countless other folks involved in teaching children as well as adults about the importance of the natural world to their lives.

While it is true that much damage has been done to the land since Leopold's time, it is also true that there are these countless educators, organizations, and volunteers that Leopold didn't have in his time, all working to minimize the problems of today. And there is always hope that the younger generation will do a better job of taking care of our land than we have. If you want to help in many these efforts, make a donation to Riverside Nature Center.

Until next time...

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