

“Waiting for the Coyote’s Call : an Eco-Memoir from the Missouri River Bluff” by Jerry Wilson. Published by South Dakota State Historical Society Press (read on-line/ Early Reviewers)

In a deceptively simple voice Jerry Wilson gives readers a multifaceted portrait of South Dakota. After reading

”Waiting for the Coyote’s Call” we feel we know the man, his family, his countryside.

Beginning with a childhood when he roamed 80 acres of Oklahoma, Wilson lived the ideals of Thoreau, Leopold, Selkirk and others who were both at home in, and inquiring of, the land. An earlier book, “American Artery” (subtitled A Pan-American Journey), details a 5,000 mile drive. This new book covers 25 years of country life, a saga that centers on 140 acres of South Dakota prairie.

Wilson subscribes to Thoreau’s principle, “Beware of all enterprises that require new clothes.” Surely there were times when suit and tie were required, but these he’s managed to keep to a minimum. An afternoon stroll in 1980 set in motion the project that is the center piece of this engrossing book. One wears only workaday clothes when building a Geo-Solar house from scratch!

Its lower floor below ground, the house proved to be full of light : warm and wonderfully livable when finished. The saga of its planning and building is the framework of this endearing book. Wilson’s children and the neighbors, the long ago people who lived in the area, the wildlife present in cycles. . . all interact.

~~~I read the book on-line. My notes cover 8 pages, too many details for a review. I was stunned to read of his being fired, tho a tenured professor at Mount Marty College in Yankton/chapter president of AAUP. “My ideas clashed with those of the new president.” The cash settlement did enable him to buy more land, but. . .

Wilson marks each chapter with apt quotes from naturalists; he introduces readers to his neighbors and the people who had been long ago in the area; he explores the river, argues with crop-duster, marvels at the mystery of deep triangular holes in granite boulders. . . and much more.

~~~This is a book that would find space on my shelf next to John Graves, John Janovy, Thoreau and other nature writers. It is, in many ways, a close kin to “John Goffe’s Mill,” George Woodbury’s account of reconstructing a gristmill . . . both he and Wilson have done what they could never have expected to do, and given us the opportunity to watch them. For this all readers will be grateful.