

# Enduring Examples of High Range Condition for Reference by Rangemen: with Thanks to the Ordways and The Nature Conservancy

**E.J. Dyksterhuis**, with much taken from an article by Jay Henrichs in *The Nature Conservancy News*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1981.

When Miss Katharine Ordway died in June, 1979, she left a system of grassland preserves in five states that totaled 31,000 acres. Her gifts and pledges totaled over \$42 million.

In 1959, she also had set up a charitable trust with John G. Ordway, Jr., her nephew, as one of the trustees. This is the Goodhill Foundation, in which he is active. The largest Goodhill project thus far, is the Niobrara Valley Preserve in northcentral Nebraska, where \$11 million has been pledged to set aside 54,000 acres of Tallgrass Prairie, Mixed Prairie, and Sandhill rangeland. Here, too, are remnants of forest species from the western, northern, and eastern forests of the USA, isolated now in localized microenvironments along the breaks of the Niobrara, where they survived the shift to prairie climate during geologic time.

While on a tour of a proposed South Dakota preserve, originally promoted by Range Conservationist Tom Pozarnsky of the Soil Conservation Service, Miss Ordway asked a Conservancy staffman if there were not four species of sedge (*Carex*) on the upland. He gathered four specimens but she asked if two were not the same species and he was off again to find another.

Well informed in natural resource matters, she was partial to prairie tracts, tracts that had never been plowed and contained the native grasses and flowering forbs. Reared in Minnesota, in a prairie portion I presume, she graduated *cum laude* in land planning from the state university. She believed that our entire country might be altered by development and determined to save some examples of the original land. Through her attorney, Raymond A. Carter, she contributed anonymously to land conservation and other causes.

The proposed South Dakota tract was acquired by The Nature Conservancy with funds anonymously given by Miss Ordway; 7,600 acres in the northeastern part of the state, it was later named in honor of her cousin, who introduced her to the conservation cause. It is now known as The Samuel H. Ordway, Jr. Memorial Prairie.

*About the author:* Dr. Jerry Dyksterhuis spent a lifetime career in range management in the plains states with the Soil Conservation Service and Texas A&M University. Now, in retirement, it is his hobby. He served as the 21st president of the Society for Range Management in 1968.



SCS photo by Tom Pozarnsky

View of the Samuel H. Ordway, Jr. Memorial Prairie in the spring of 1963 after range had been rested throughout 1962 under careful management of then owner, Tom Boylan, on the horse. Boylan treasured a natural mulch of old growth for snowcatch and rainfall infiltration.

His 1953 book entitled *Resources and the American Dream*, 55 pages, Ronald Press, should not be overlooked by this readership. Of it, Paul B. Sears, ecologist of Yale University, wrote, "I think Ordway has gone right to the heart of a problem which is basic to modern civilization"; and, Stanley A. Cain, School of Natural Resources, University of Michigan, wrote, "The questions Ordway raises, and the conclusions he reaches, should be pondered by thinking people everywhere." Rangemen will be pleased to know that this example of True Prairie rangeland in the 15-19" Precipitation Zone, with vegetation in the Excellent Range Condition Class on several types of sites, is named for this man.

Finally, as her attorney has said, it is good that Miss Ordway and The Nature Conservancy found each other. She wished to donate money for land preservation and The Nature Conservancy was seeking donations of natural areas and needed money to buy unspoiled land.