
IN MEMORIUM

IN MEMORIAM: ALEXANDER RENDEK (1932 - 2009)

DIETHER PESCHKEN, 2900 Rae Street, Regina, SK, S4S 1R5.



Alex Rendek guides visitors in the Sanctuary past one of the giant American Elms. June 2003.
Bernie Ryma

Alexander Rendek was born on 16 March 1932 in Middle Lake, SK, and passed away on 31 March 2009. He had four brothers and four sisters and was married to Doreen (née Schmidt) for 55 years. He farmed in the northeast area of Saskatchewan for most of his life. Alex was a very community-minded man and was recognized for many achievements and volunteer services: he received The Melvin Jones Fellowship Award by the Lions International in 1996, the International Year of the Volunteer Award in 2001, the Canadian Wheat Board Recognition Award in 2003, and the Commemorative Medal for the Centennial of Saskatchewan in 2006. Alex served on many local committees, including the Hudson Bay Airport

Committee, Hospital Board, Town Council, and the Wheat Pool Board, and was a School Board Trustee for 35 years.

To lovers of nature, Alex is known mainly as the former owner and then ardent and indefatigable steward of The Rendek Elm Forest. In 1981, Donald Hooper, Les Baker, and Dr. Vernon Harms visited the site and were enthralled with its beauty and ecological value. In 1981, Vernon, Les, Donald, and Patricia Sky conducted a preliminary survey of the flora. In 1986, the Saskatchewan Natural History Botany Tour, under Dr. Jim Jowsey, included a survey in this elm forest. In November 1989, all these activities culminated when Alex agreed to

preserve the area for future generations instead of logging the valuable timber and farming the area. The Saskatchewan Natural History Society (now Nature Saskatchewan) and the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation became owners of the 35.3 acres (14.2 ha), with Nature Saskatchewan responsible for the administration. The sanctuary was opened officially on 21 June 1991 with nature hikes and refreshments and was named The Rendek Elm Forest Nature Sanctuary in honour of Alex.

The Rendek Elm Forest is a peninsula formed by the Red Deer River and the Smoking Tent Creek. A rich soil and frequent flooding nourishes a luxuriant flora. Mature, towering American Elm (*Ulmus americana*) covered about 75% of the area, with Balsam Poplars (*Populus balsamifera*) and Manitoba Maple (*Acer negundo*) concentrated on the east side. An amazing understory of at least 78 plant species includes Ostrich Fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*), which reaches over 2 m, and five plant species considered rare in Saskatchewan. Lichens, birds, and other wildlife are also abundant.

Alex became an enthusiastic and tireless steward of the “park,” as he liked to call it, along with fellow steward Moe Alain. With the financial support of the Town of Hudson Bay, the Rural Municipality of Hudson Bay, and SaskEnergy, Alex put in countless hours creating signage, nature trails, a small parking lot, and a picnic site complete with a rustic table and an outhouse. A brochure, developed in cooperation with the Town of Hudson Bay, extolled the beauty and wildlife of the site. Visitors came by the bus load. Often, Alex acted as tour guide. In 2004, he received the Volunteer of the Year Award from Nature Saskatchewan.

Alex put in an enormous amount of work in keeping the trails open and safe, repairing or replacing signs and the picnic table when hooligans or flood waters and blocks of ice had destroyed them. Work increased when Dutch elm disease was discovered in 1999. The disease spread rapidly. Alex appeared on the front page of *Saskatchewan Naturally* (Vol. 3, No. 3) under the title “Beetle Sleuth. The fight against Dutch elm disease in Saskatchewan.” He tried hard to stem the raging epidemic and to keep the trails safe by having dead trees cut down and the logs moved away from the trails. However, floods, normally welcomed to nourish the luxurious flora, washed many logs back onto the trails. Alex persisted in his efforts, and in 2003, a class of students visited the Sanctuary to learn about natural succession. Even in 2004, *The Hudson Bay Post-Review* still extolled the beauty of the forest despite the many dead elms. Some trees, such as poplars and Manitoba Maple, and tall bushes had begun to fill in the gaps left by dying and dead American Elms. The Sanctuary is currently closed to visitors for safety reasons. The town of Hudson Bay is hoping to reopen it, but this may take several years.

It must have been heartbreaking for Alex to see his beloved elms succumb to the ravages of the disease. Being a frugal farmer, he contemplated salvaging some of the elms for lumber but abandoned the idea when he realized that the logging would harm the understory and hamper succession. Instead he resolved to let nature repair itself.

The Rendek Elm Forest Sanctuary will return to health, albeit with different species, and it will be preserved thanks to the generosity and perseverance of Alexander Rendek.