



## The School of the Natural Order

### *Around the Place*

December 2018-January 2019

December and January are typically our ‘deep winter’ months — the coldest and darkest days of the year. Snowfalls may not accumulate many inches, but the snow stays around and becomes packed and icy, unless it is scoured away by some of our ferocious winds.

This year is no exception. Our winter rhythm is much more restrained than in warmer weather. Dawn breaks, often with a spectacular light show, far south over the eastern mountains, but we humans tend to wait a few hours before venturing out into winter’s chill. And at the fall of darkness, which occurs in late afternoon, we make sure our indoor woodpiles are stacked and our heaters are set as the moon rises and temperatures sink.

Christmas is usually a quiet celebration, quite different from Thanksgiving’s activity. The Main House was beautifully decorated this year. Festive lights and holiday decorations adorned the dining room, along with pine boughs on the windowsills and a cheerful wreath on the front door. This year’s Christmas tree, actually a specially-chosen sagebrush, was installed in a place of honor and festooned with lights and decorations. These provided a lovely setting for our Home Farm staff and guests to enjoy Christmas dinner together.

Cold winter temperatures have put additional stress on our water lines. Each year in late fall, we do our best to winterize our water system, draining unused irrigation lines, insulating valve boxes, etc. Nonetheless, winter has a way of finding vulnerabilities. This year, a burst pipe in the orchard led to a minor glacier covering the road before the leak was repaired.

A second water event last month meant that the five residences on the hill had no water for over a week. Fortunately we were able to fill one and five gallon jugs from the water lines leading to the rest of Home Farm. Figuring out where the problem lay took the better part of a week. Several holes were dug at the suspected location of the leak (no leak there, but the work crew took that opportunity to upgrade some of the plumbing at that point in the line). Finally the problem was discovered near the far end of the hill water line three feet underground—the water pipe had, for reasons unknown, completely separated, and water was pouring out through that eight-inch gap in the line.

Many thanks to our Home Farm work crew and the Baker Bobcat and backhoe operators who helped find and repair that leak. Indoor running water is a luxury we take for granted until it isn’t there anymore.

Although these water issues have been problematic, they have also served to inform us about how the various sections of our water system fit together and interact with one another. We have a few sections of the water system that date back to when the School first moved here sixty years ago, and other sections, especially in the orchard, date from various updates in succeeding decades. Many of these interconnections have been a mystery to us, since we weren't here at the time that these upgrades occurred. Now we have much better understanding of those older connections. We continue to be grateful for the new water system installed in 2006, which has been a dependable source of abundant and high-quality water since it went online.

Our roads have also gone through some upgrades this winter. The larger rocks have been removed from the road on the hill, and berms have been improved. Recently the county road department worked on Home Farm Road leading from the highway to our cattle guard, blading, rebuilding shoulders and roadbed, and improving drainage. Our dirt roads are good examples of entropy in action, and we, along with our vehicles and their tires, benefit from timely energy input.

Although we humans may not choose to spend time outside on these cold days, Home Farm is filled with outdoor activity of the non-human variety. A herd of deer, led by a buck who keeps his does and fawns close by, often grazes in the pasture and the orchard. The pinion jays argue noisily and fly in blue flocks as they move from one feeding place to another. The crows and magpies perch high in trees or on electric lines, on the lookout for food. And during the night hours we hear the owls calling, sometimes seeing them swoop from tree to tree as they hunt for their next meal. The pine tree on the front lawn of the Centrum is a favorite daytime owl resting place and it is thrilling to look up into that tree and see the unwinking eyes of a great horned owl peering back down. We know that winter's indrawing is a prelude to the burst of activity that springtime brings. These winter days are our respite time.

May the peace and power of the infinite spirit, which passes all understanding, hold us and keep us in the love of the Christed consciousness while we are seemingly separated, one from another.

Susan Wetmore