

The Last Ranch:

A Colorado Community and the Coming Desert.

by Sam Bingham. 1996. Random House, Inc. New York.

Fall Comes in Back-Country Vermont

by Robert Penn Warren

(I One Voter Out of Sixteen)

Deader they die here;
or at least

Differently, deeper the
hole, and after

The burying, at night,
late, you

Are more apt to wonder....

Can't help but remember
that if there are only

Sixteen voters and one
dies, that leaves only

Fifteen, and no doubt
you know the story

Of how it began....

The Rio Summit (U.N. Conference on Environment and Development)

The entire rural environment in the drylands of the world continue to deteriorate, adversely affecting the socio-economic conditions of their inhabitants.

Sam Bingham's book, *The Last Ranch*, is based on a

year spent in this/our place, the San Luis Valley. His concern was that "a fresh understanding of nature [e.g. Allan Savory's Holistic Resource Management,...] might save the world from becoming a desert...Such insight could save the world because average people of good heart could put it to work."

He examined this thesis in the ranching community of Saguache County. Striking parallels to the efforts of peoples of Africa were drawn. Most succinctly and lucidly he evaluated the important questions: "How do you make a living off fragile land without degrading it? How do you know when your failing in time to do something about it? What do you do? How do you pay for it? He comments that "in only slightly different words the same questions applied to the oceans, the atmosphere, the forests, and the freshwater supplies of the world."

The personalities (Whittens, Daveys, Wagners, Whites, Kopfmans, Boyces, Lamm, Wheeler, Lamb, Berlinger, Sharma...) and the organizations (BLM; Rio Grande Water Conservation

District, AWDI, Stockman's Water,...) are the actors. The places (South Farm, North Tracy Common Allotment, Baca Grande, the national wildlife Refuges, Valley ranches,...) form the theater. The acts concern ranching; land management practices; politics; water exportation; community organization, linkages, and cohesiveness; and Valley history, which bind and/or threaten the human and natural fabric.

Donnie Whitten is quoted as "The problem is too much history, too many personalities, too many agendas. If it was just the land, it would be simple." To which brother George replies: "And what does it take for a person to care about the land, really deeply care about it enough to risk something to look after it right? Do people not care, or just not know? Or do they care not to know?"

Read this fine, well-written, and thoughtful book. Think about the questions. History, so personal, should not be ignored.

Reviewed by Jerry Freeman