



MALLARD ISLAND

Oberholtzer Foundation Newsletter

Autumn 2010

Bob & George Marshall: Living into Legacy

by Beth E. Waterhouse

What makes us last long beyond our short, walking life? What is this thing called legacy? Much has been said about the word of late, which tends to dilute the strength of its meaning. Last summer, I asked this and needed to know more about the man, Bob Marshall, and how it came to be that his words were published again and again after his death.

From Bob about the Arctic in 1939:

“It would have been easy to feel: here’s perfection. What more can the world want? But unfortunately, we were only four lucky persons among hundreds of millions in the world to whom this paradise is as attainable as Doonerak was to us. Besides, if the hundreds of millions wanted this sort of perfection and could attain it, the values of freshness and remoteness and adventure beyond the paths of men would automatically disappear. It would be just a green lawn in Prospect Park....

“The world... cannot live on wilderness except incidentally and sporadically. Nevertheless, to four human beings just back from the source streams of the Koyukuk, no comfort, no security, no great invention or brilliant thought which the modern world has to offer can provide half the elation of twenty-four days in the little-explored, uninhabited world of the Arctic wilderness.”

Bob Marshall’s words were written into a small diary, “North Doonerak, Amwak and Apoon,” which was pulled together as a chapbook, inscribed and mailed to Ernest Oberholtzer in August of 1939. Later it became part of a book published in 1956: *Arctic Wilderness*.

But Bob Marshall died a very early death in November of the very year he sent this booklet to Ober. So how was it that his ideals and legacy lived long beyond him, and how was it that a whole big wilderness region was named after him? What or who extended his life story?

Bob Marshall was born in 1901 in New York City, son of a noted constitutional lawyer (Louis Marshall) and grandson of a Jewish immigrant from Bavaria, and Bob would eventually be independently wealthy. Meanwhile, he became a well-known forester and believed in (and helped

From Ernest C. Oberholtzer

In the spring of 1950, Oberholtzer was planning to purchase Crow and Hawk Islands:

If I pass on to the next world soon afterwards, someone else can start where I leave off and dream the larger dreams.... It seems almost unbelievable that, after living on my little acre and a half for nearly 35 years, I should suddenly expand to ten times that size, but then my unofficial family has long more than justified it. We have been flowing over the edges for a long time.

From a letter from Ober to Frances Andrews, March 5, 1950.



See **MARSHALL**, page 6

Bob Marshall with Arctic friends.

Remembering Marnee Monahan, and Marnee Remembering

[b] March 1, 1914 - [d] May 27, 2010

by Jean Replinger, based on Alicia Johnson's interview of Marnee Monahan in her Twin Cities home in 1997.

Hugh Monahan was the Oberholtzer Foundation's first president. Following his death in 1980, Marnee, his widow, joined the Board. It was the Monahans' purchase of Ober's land at Gold Shores—added to parts of the inheritance shares of others—that made it possible to keep Mallard Island as a living legacy. And it was at Marnee's home that the Foundation held most of its first "up north" meetings. There, in 1983, as we shared time on the Board, I first came to know and love Marnee Monahan.

Marnee was clearly a lady, a loving mother and grandmother. She was respectful of, but not intimidated by, a man's world. At Board meetings, her joyful, warm, welcoming way with each person created—and in fact, sustained—fairly calm and thoughtful meetings. Marnee not only graciously welcomed, but "coffeed" and fed us delicious meals. A clear thinker, she felt free to question our suggestions: "Now, how we are going to do that, I want to know?" Or, "I don't understand the finances on that, so let's be more specific." Her questions provoked a clear response.



As Mallard's Program Director, I would visit Marnee on weekends between Island groups—often while waiting for the wash to finish. (The Island provided bed linens for guests then.) On the hottest summer days we donned swimsuits and just sat in the water chatting. Our conversations were silly, philosophical, probing, insightful. Being around Marnee was always restorative.

During one winter visit in the Twin Cities, she treated me to a Schubert Club concert. Then, knowing she was always ready for an adventure, I invited her to the Paul Winter Consort. At intermission, she looked around and with some consternation said, "I don't see any of my friends or people my age here."

I chuckled inside, but didn't answer. Then, after the whole audience concluded the concert with a wolf howl, she said, "I get it. This is a rock concert for adults."

Later she called to thank me, saying she'd made lots of points with her grandchildren for going to the Paul Winter Consort, and asked: "Where are we going next?" She was always ready for an adventure—of thought or action.

But the best way to know Marnee is through her own stories:

Marnee met Ober shortly before her marriage to Hugh Monahan. The occasion was during pre-nuptial plans when Hugh announced Ober would be his best man. Marnee was dismayed, thinking Ober was an awful choice—an old man in her eyes and inappropriate to be her fiancé's best man. But there was history behind Hugh's decision and Marnee was newer than Ober to Hugh's life.

Hugh's father and mother were both physicians in the then rugged International Falls area. Hugh's father didn't like the outdoors, didn't care about little children, and loomed large of stature and gruff of voice. The Monahans and Ober became acquainted, and in this adult world, Hugh met Ober. A young boy, with busy professional parents, Hugh loved the outdoors but lacked a father to teach him

about it.

Hugh was greatly influenced by Ober—and rather than an old man to just grow beyond, considered him a friend he wanted to share with his wife. Ober stood with Hugh and Marnee at the altar and, even when separated by distance, remained a part of their family throughout his life. On frequent sessions around Ober's kitchen boat table, Marnee witnessed "a magnetism you can't describe" surrounding Ober.

Ober's Mallard Island on Rainy Lake was Hugh and Marnee's private Shangri-La for successive summers before and after WWII. For two summers before the war, Marnee's vacation from her nursing job and Hugh's need for a quiet place to study for medical school, brought them to the island's western point. Open to stars and night breezes, Japanese House, private and small, was their place. There Marnee and Hugh planned their future and skinny-dipped after dark—both feeling the thrill of

continued on next page



MALLARD ISLAND

The Oberholtzer Foundation
—dedicated to the preservation of Ober's North Woods legacy as a source of inspiration, renewal, and connection to the natural world.

This newsletter is published twice per year (approximately February and October) by volunteers. Cover sketch of Mallard Island credited to Gene Ritchie Manahan. Send poems, stories or articles to Beth Waterhouse at beth@bethwaterhouse.com.

Text Editor:
Beth Waterhouse, Excelsior, MN

Layout Editor:
Nancy Paddock, Litchfield, MN

Foundation Secretary:
Jean Replinger, Marshall, MN

For more information, visit
www.eober.org

being “naughty.” After the war, as Hugh waited to be placed in residency to complete his medical training, the young Monahans lived again on the island for several summers—always in Japanese house, always at home on Rainy Lake.

Because Hugh dutifully studied, Marnee had time on her hands on the small island. She took to helping the cook, Carrie, every morning, probing her for stories and details of her former life as a madam. As the story goes, Carrie came north to marry a lumberjack, but her young man lay dying in the deep woods as she arrived, and she never saw him alive. Carrie used what she believed to be her only option to survive and she became a prostitute.

As they prepared food in the kitchen for Ober and his many friends and workers, Marnee, a trained nurse, was not easily shocked by Carrie’s stories. In one, Carrie pointed to Duluth as the solution for pregnancy—apparently having gone there more than once for an abortion.

Marnee wondered if the source of Ober’s interest in Indians was his interest in freedom. He lived their lifestyle, but had a different history. Ober’s approach was to simply be among them, rather than extend his culture to them. His talks about appreciation for land and water were for others. The charity he extended to Indians came directly from his hand: clothes, money, food.... He was willing to do anything for them. Even though they were his carpenters and stonemasons, and he ordered them around like a crew boss, he envied their freedom and respected them for their way of life.

Ober’s way of life included music and books. His violin was his friend, Marnee remembered. It went everywhere with him, and each morning he would rise to play classical music that “no one dared tell him they didn’t like. He played to the geese and the bear and the rising sun.”

And he discussed issues as a learned man to other learned men and women, older and younger than he. Privately or publicly, Marnee remembered, no one made fun of his continuous, self-generated intelligence and his passion for the Rainy Lake area. Guests would arrive with books to share with Ober, this man who inspired, educated, and enlightened them. What better gift for an impractical man on an island who offered intellectual stimulus they rarely experienced in their more sophisticated lives? Marnee never saw him read a book during her summer days there, his high season for friends and entertaining, but his notes on the pages of his books suggest his long winters were more contemplative.

Whatever Ober used for stimulus, the result was a fine synthesis of objective knowledge, passion and performance ability that held so many, of their own free will, at his table for so many years. He was a man with a magnetism Marnee Monahan couldn’t really describe. He was a small man who spoke beautifully, and who loved her husband and her children. What she most clearly remembered was that Ober gave her an education. “Timeless!” she said.

In Memory: John “Breck” Breckenridge

John and Barb Breckenridge volunteered on Mallard Island for several years, so “Breck” was known by many Mallard constituents. John died September 15th (in Marshall, MN) of complications of Parkinson’s disease. Both John and Barb are remembered by many with the Oberholtzer Foundation as steadfast friends. As a young woman, Barb was hired as a cook on Ober’s Island—way back in 1955. Recently, Barb has also been the board of directors’ “scribe” for many meetings. Barb and John had four children and six grandchildren.

Dear Readers

One of the surprises this summer was meeting Dorothy Friday, Charlie’s granddaughter. I drove up in the pontoon with other guests, and there was Dorothy, sitting on the front dock. Later, I got to be the one to tell her the details of the story about her grandfather’s spirit held in the rock at the base of Ober’s fireplace. She had heard of the tale and wanted to see the round rock. Circles of life.

And the cycle of activity continues as folks like you begin to dream about hosting or attending weeks on Mallard Island next summer. We have four “open” weeks for new ideas. Send host applications by November 15th.

Or as you dream about the summer of 2011, notify me if you are interested in any of the following experiences:

- two work weeks May 22-28 and May 29 - June 4
- book work week early in June
- bird banding and photography week early in June
- wooden flute week, beginning level, July 31 to August 6
- an individual artists’ week in mid-July or mid-August.

I’ll be happy to send you an application. Also stay tuned via the web site as the 2011 full summer schedule comes on line, probably by the first of this year.

—Beth

PS: See you on October 23rd!



From Gold to Gold

Mallard Island's 2010 Summer Program

by Beth Waterhouse

As I drove south on Highway 6 September 10th, I marveled at the beauty of the roadside ditches—golden grasses and yellow sunflowers, purple and white asters, the curved greens and brown accent of the cattails. I had driven this road on May 22nd, with hopes for the summer Mallard program in my vision, accented by the then-gold tones of springtime. Now I watched the green-golds of early autumn and recalled a hundred amazing details of the summer gone by. What can I capture across the “gold to gold” season in a few words for you here?

Mallard Island is best caught in a few glorious details. So please forgive if I do not write of YOUR amazing detail, but capture only two of the 13 weeks as sample memories to share.

The week was June 6-12. Ober's books on Mallard have been dusted and inventoried annually, but thanks to a patient crew of book care volunteers—again tutored by Kristen Eide Tollefson of Frontenac—our care of the book collection has risen to a new level. Borrowing medical terms all week, the group created a *hospital* (a table in the Big House), an *ambulance* (a cardboard box) and *hospice care* for severely damaged book “patients.”

Lucky for us it rained most of the week, as books were taken off the shelves a few at a time and about a third of the collection was cleaned and repaired. Repairs



Kristen Eide Tollefson

were made by Kristen and a few others who learned about “foxing,” mildew (active or inactive), tacking, tipping, and how to gently set the bone of a weakened book spine.

Another week of note was our “first ever” native wooden flute workshop August 1-7, taught by Jon Romer of Cass Lake. Jon taught nine new flute students playing cedar “G” flutes, starting with a simple song taught by ear. The group went on to learn more traditional songs like the “Red Blanket Song” or the “Ojibwe Love Song,” but they also learned to read music and to play “Ode to Joy” or “Amazing Grace.” How hard the group practiced! Even at night, as we planners had dreamt, flute notes streamed out of the top of Bird House (Ian lived there). And rehearsals were heard down in Front House where three women played and laughed on into the night.

Evening concerts sent notes flying past Japanese House and out across Rainy Lake as the sun set. By Friday afternoon, the group sounded like a real flute choir as it played for four guests from the mainland. We knew Carlos Nakai was listening!



Jon Romer and nine flute students meet in front of Ober's Big House with Jean Replinger who dreamed up the good idea for this workshop. Front row, left to right: Julie Martinez, Leah Thomas, Kathleen Johnson; Middle row: Jean, Cleo White, Lynn Naeckel, Lynn Cox; Back row: Kim Doss-Smith, Dennis White, Ian Smith, Jon Romer.

In short, it was a spectacular summer: from bird banding to storytelling, from powerful Ojibwe meetings held by Rainy Lake leaders to a stellar week of songwriting. And more. In September, 28 individuals enjoyed a day on Mallard and a talk by board members, Bob Hilke or Tim Heinle. All told, 116 individuals enjoyed a six-day stay on Mallard, assisted by a team of 11 trained caretakers. And the caretakers weren't the only volunteers. As always, (but we *counted* them this year) over 50 volunteer book lovers, workers, painters, cleaners, fixers, and roofers donated over 1900 hours of their valuable skills and time to keep the island running smoothly, and to keep all the 1930s buildings upright and looking old and beautiful. All that gifted time—

good as gold!



—photo by David Astin

*Did the loon eggs hatch?
Did the father, rising from
below, weep? Or shout?*

—James Lenfestey



One June morning, Writers' Group members Steve Wilbers, Jean Replinger, Pam Joern, and Connie Szarke were surprised to find they had each brought a banana for breakfast.

Webmaster Needed!

Nope, this isn't a new version of a kitchen mix-master for the Wani-gan. The Foundation needs a dedicated volunteer to act as the organization's web-master. We need someone to call on at certain regular times (or who will call us!) to post images or information for us on our web site. It would be helpful for this person to know "Dream Weaver," the software we currently use. Any takers?? You'd get the "inside scoop" on all the deadlines and happenings for the foundation and its programs on Mallard Island. Call Beth at either phone number.



The "Book Hospital"

Legacy has a lot to do with passion, expression, timing...

the US Forest Service to understand) multiple uses of a forest. Preservation is among viable “uses” for a forest, said Marshall, and not only for timber but for the intrinsic values of wilderness as well. Marshall spent five years of his short life getting a PhD (John Hopkins) in plant physiology. All along, he believed in the idea of public access to wild beauty without regard to wealth.

Some lives just seem tipped at a steeper angle than others. In Marshall’s 39 years, he wrote (to the sacrifice of his love of exploring) two books and 96 shorter writings. *Arctic Village* (1933) became a best seller during the Great Depression. Also in 1933, Marshall wrote: *USFS: A National Plan for American Forestry*, and presented those two volumes to the US Congress. Six more manuscripts were published after his death, however, mostly by his brother, George, and his sister, Ruth.

Aha – so a legacy can be extended by those who are close to the passions you have been preaching, by those who hear you, by those who love you in this planetary life. If one must die at 39, it helps if your brother lives to 96, as George Marshall did (1904 to 2000). It was George who edited Bob’s words into *Arctic Wilderness*.

Legacy, then, has a lot to do with passion, and expression, and timing. Marshall was born into a family that valued the wild. They owned a comfortable “camp” in the heart of the Adirondacks, where Bob spent his first twenty-one summers. His father frequently used his legal knowledge to defend the Adirondack State Park. Bob Marshall lived at a time when the country was starting to realize what it might lose if land-use or timber-cutting policies did not change.

We might ask ourselves: what is *our* time? What is unique about our family or community or the age in which we live? What is *the edge* upon which our civilization now perches?

Many of us work hard to discern and then live into *our* passions—they give us hope and



light and verve. But then, who do we tell? How do we express those loves? Do we dampen them to blend into the modern time-consuming ambiguity that surrounds us or do we dive out there with wild and crazy living ideas?

Bob Marshall didn’t dampen himself when exploring or writing; that is certain. Here’s his voice again, from an article in *Scientific Monthly*, February 1930: “Adventure, whether physical or mental, implies breaking into unpenetrated ground... extending oneself to the limit of capacity, courageously facing peril. Life without the chance for such exertions would be, for many persons, a dreary game, scarcely bearable in its horrible banality.” Four years later, Marshall reflected about the wild: “Modern mechanical ingenuity has brought many good things to the world, but in the long list of high values which it has ruined, one of the greatest is the value of isolation.”

By 1935, Marshall’s values (and his father’s charge to work for wilderness) led him to become one of eight founders of The Wilderness Society (Ernest Oberholtzer was among the eight.) In 1937, Marshall was hospitalized with a vague diagnosis. He thought he had food poisoning; the official word was sunstroke. Yet Bob Marshall continued a fast pace, often hiking 30 or 40 miles per day. Suddenly, on November 11, 1939, on an overnight train ride from Washington DC to New York City, Bob Marshall died. His obituary named leukemia and resulting heart failure.

Marshall died a bachelor with a \$1.5 million estate, yet, in another sign of impending legacy, Bob Marshall had planned ahead. He had already established three trusts in his will, benefiting education, civil liberties, and the preservation of wilderness. The latter trust became the beginning of the *Robert Marshall Wilderness Fund*. George Marshall became a trustee of this fund as well as a board member and officer of the Sierra Club and early president of his brother’s idea—the Wilderness Society.

Bob Marshall imagined and set the stage for his legacy; his brother lived into it. Together, they left us a great deal.

Acknowledgments: *Oberholtzer’s library on Mallard Island.*
• Sarah Knobel of the University of Montana Wilderness Institute, an article: “Bob Marshall.” • James Glover from his book, *A Wilderness Original*, 1986, Seattle. • Roderick Frazier Nash in *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Yale Press, pp 200-206.

The Word from our (Intrepid) Treasurer

Editor's Note: As I type this, Tim Heinle, Don Maronde, Steve Thrune and Thomas Hall are all on the Library roof (well, maybe not at once) getting the last of the beautiful cedar shakes in place before the snow flies up on Rainy! Here is Tim's fall letter to you all:

The summer of 2010 was one of the best ever on the Oberholtzer Islands. Outstanding weather, wonderful people, and great leadership helped make our 16 weeks hum with efficiency. Summer participants felt the Oberholtzer spirit, and they left the islands refreshed... ready to tackle life at home with renewed vigor.

One of the highlights this summer was Jon Romer's first native wooden flute workshop. It ended with a heralded local concert in Ranier by Jon and friends. Other surprises this summer included a hearty new rose garden, an abundant and scientific bird banding week, and seven weeks (!) of blueberries on Mallard, Crow, and Gull Islands. What a summer.

We also accomplished a lot with over 50 volunteers—together spending over 1900 hours keeping our islands updated and in working order. Some of the projects included: new side roofs on the Frigate Friday houseboat, a stone wall repaired on the lower east end of Mallard, new roofs on upper Front House, the kitchen boat *and* the library, and restoration of the front floating dock. In addition, book care was taken to a new level this summer. Most certainly, we would not exist without the help of island volunteers! Thanks to all of you who helped us to continue to "walk the trail."

Meanwhile, we have kept within our budget and I'm confident that we will have a few dollars left over by the end of the fiscal year. An important gift this summer came in the form of a generous grant from the Quetic-Superior Foundation—for capital improvements on the islands. Gifts from friends (such as you) are so

appreciated. Though revenue comes in from several sources, donations from individuals make up the biggest part of the pie. Thanks again for all your generosity.

Stay well, my friends, and plan to come see us next summer. We would love to bring you up to date on our progress.

Seek the joy of being alive,

*Tim Heinle,
Oberholtzer Foundation Treasurer*



To Contact Us:



The Minnesota office of the Ernest Oberholtzer Foundation winters at 818 Third Avenue #305, Excelsior, MN 55331. Phone: (952) 401-0591 or cell (952) 607-6879. E-mail: beth@bethwaterhouse.com.

Island summer programs for natural science research or artistic expression—we welcome as many new visitors to Mallard Island as possible each year. See "Dear Readers" in this issue for a few ways to visit Mallard next *summer*.

The Ernest Oberholtzer Foundation Board of Directors includes: Elaine Thrune, president; Jim Fitzpatrick, vice president; Tim Heinle, treasurer; Jean Sanford Replinger, secretary. Beth Waterhouse serves as executive director. Members At Large: Jim Davis, Bob Hilke, Mary Swalla Holmes, Robin Monahan (on leave), Michael Reid, John Roth, Harry Sweatt, and Diane Tessari. Emeritus Members: Marne Monahan d., Gene Ritchie Monahan d., Ted Hall d., Charles Kelly—also assistant treasurer, Delores De Laittre d., and Doug Wood. Honorary member: Ray Anderson (also deceased).

Donations to the Oberholtzer Foundation—including capital gifts, operating support, or gifts to underwrite the costs of this newsletter—may be mailed to the address above. You can also donate from the web site, using PayPal. Please remember this long-standing organization in your will or estate. We accept stock donations.

Visit us on the web at www.eober.org.

Eleventh Annual Oberholtzer Fall Gathering Saturday, October 23rd

We gather to bring a taste of Mallard Island to the city and to honor each other after a grand summer experience. Please come for an afternoon of re-connection, laughter, and artistic expression. You can set up a display of your art (made on or about Ober's Islands). Please bring a poem, song, or bit of writing to share. New notecards for sale! Will we hear flute music?

All are invited, come as audience or participant!

Where? Judson Church, 4101 Harriet Av S, Minneapolis

When? October 23rd, Saturday, from 2:00 to 5:30 or 6 pm

Program starts about 3:30 pm.

Many then gather in small groups for dinner at various local restaurants.

Directions to Judson church: Judson is south of downtown Minneapolis. Travel either on 35W or Lyndale Avenue southbound. Take the 46th Avenue exit off of 35W and go west to Harriet and north to 41st Street. // Take Lyndale south to 41st Street and go east two blocks. Street parking.

*In a note from Lisa Taylor Lake
(individual artists' week) to her
friend Jim Lenfestey:*

Mallard Island

July 2010

Ripe berries sweeten.
Deep, generous waters baptize.
Sunlit sparrows exult!

Mallard Island was all-
sweetness-baptism-exultation.

My visit there changed
everything.

Eternal thanks for opening
a new kind of heaven (yes!)
for me.

—LTLake



Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation
818 Third Avenue #305
Excelsior, MN 55331

MALLARD ISLAND

