

Stewards of the Wilderness

Seven college students spent the week of August 11-17 on Mallard Island. Before coming, they read Ober's biography, Keeper of the Wild, by Joe Paddock, as well as Anton Treuer's Everything You Wanted to Know About Indians but Were Afraid to Ask. With this background, they tackled the three main goals of the week, which their host (and project designer) Daniel Andersen named: (*) Learning about Ober (*) Learning about Anishinaabe traditions, and (*) Learning about living sustainably on a tiny island.

One impressive discussion followed their search for things that showed them what Ober valued. No one, not even the 30-year volunteer or our own trustees could have said it better than these students. Isaac said that Ober valued "the untouched, the unknown and the unspoiled-- that it was clear he valued family if he transported a piano to the island for his mother!" Kyla could tell that Ober valued "a sense of discovery and innovation through architecture." She also noticed how Ober must have loved capturing the images of children and families in everyday life.

Alex could tell by all the books that Ober valued knowledge. She also expressed that Ober enjoyed a "sense of connection and a sense of equality." Etienne sensed that Ober held a desire for adventure, and Etienne articulated values of fluidity and creativity expressed in Ober's architectural design. Devlin said that the paths teach us—that Ober valued bringing people together and integrating with Nature. Devlin could see that Ober was not only building for humans but also *for Nature*.



Miranda Wood teaches us using Ober's photos.

Please see the group photo on page four for the full names of this first-ever group, the Stewards of the Wilderness .

In the words of Ernest Oberholtzer...

"We are in a period of profound transition. New values are emerging. New human satisfactions must be provided. Health and happiness depend only in part on man-made goods. It is no time to apologize, to speak in whispers. The hour has come to call out in ringing tones. Our young people will be the final answer."

Written while planning for the Quetico-Superior region, ca. 1933.

Miranda studied Ober's photos in some depth, and she noticed "a dynamic intensity yet intimacy" in his work. She could tell that through his photography, Ober was teaching all of us exactly what needs to be seen and saved. She could also tell that he valued traveling on water and sensed that "Ober's intention was always the journey." Teghan noticed how Ernest Oberholtzer was always positive. Even when talking about his own illness or his rough journey to Hudson Bay, Teghan said his journals were always positive. Miranda added that Ober clearly valued relationships with people who were different from him—that he learned and grew and developed empathy. "He's so relatable," said Miranda.

But these students didn't just sit around and talk with each other—they swam and sunned, hiked and paddled and worked. The newly "uncovered" basalt rocks on Gull Island are cleared of all debris, thanks to these Stewards. They benefited from time in the teaching lodge and with Don Jones and the drum, and they hosted local Anishinaabe leaders from across Rainy Lake. The Foundation wants to thank the visionary and host: Daniel Laurence Andersen, his friend John Robertson who was a good help and teacher, and our caretaker, Kelly Sassi who was "best ever" in that busy role. Special thanks to Don Jones of Nigigoonsiminkaaning for a time of ceremony.

Dear Readers,

It is with a great deal of humility that I try to pull this issue together and recap our eventful summer and autumn seasons with this organization and on Mallard Island.

Of course, I wasn't present for all of the diving discoveries or jokes or songs or tear-filled small group writing sessions on the island this summer. Our summer program directors: Mairi Campbell Doerr of Cannon Falls and Prudence Johnson of Minneapolis also serve as site-managers, and our thanks goes out to them for four weeks each of their careful assistance.

The island then hosted six NEW summer program weeks, some more popular than others, but most brought newcomers this year that accounted for 32% of our total of 132 visitors or caretakers on Mallard this season. It felt like capacity.

In three of the new programs, writers worked long hours inspired by time and quiet and the intimacy of space. Witness the Ober-inspired poem written by Allison Monahan Kohler on page -3-. Allie and Ray spent their honeymoon in gardening week (!) while they upheld a Monahan family tradition.

You can benefit from my notes from the *Stewards of the Wilderness* week, featured on the cover. Our intention to purposefully introduce Mallard Island to college-age men and women has worked out well so far, and we hope that the Stewards all went home with stories, sunburns, sore muscles and new inspiration. I'm pretty sure about the sunburn.

We know that we all benefited from Prudence Johnson's fine reputation in MN as a vocal artist when she invited other such fine artists and they came together in late summer to share their talents with the towns across the waters. Our thanks to all of the artists in the last full week of August for their great show and gallery. Their hard work and talents were rewarded with Northern Lights as they made their way home that Friday evening—no moonlight, but shooting green rays reflected on the dark waves.

Applications are available for hosted weeks for next summer; visit our web site to contact me. And please join us October 26 – see page eight for details.

Finally, I add a special word about the Anishinaabe teachings and ceremonies that added depth and meaning to so many of the 2019 weeks on Mallard. Special thanks to Dennis (Pebaamibines) and Don Jones (and their mom) for all they bring in the area of these ancestral traditions. You give many of us kindred spirits much to ponder and imagine about human life on a finite planet. May we all be even half as generous and patient as the Anishinaabe have been across the past hundred years in our shared America.

Beth Waterhouse

Our thanks to these summer caretakers

In order of first appearance:

Mairi Doerr, Jennie Ross, Prudence Johnson, Nance Kunkel, Paula DeMars, Jane Lund, Elaine and Steve Thrune, Barb Draper, Judy Blais, Kelly Sassi, Mark Granlund, and Mary Swalla Holmes.

To Contact Us:

Mallard Island is currently being put to bed with the invaluable help of volunteers Darrell and Pam Rundell, (a newly retired) David Markwardt, Elaine and Steve Thrune, Bill Thrune, Gary and Gaila Olsen, Jennie Ross, Bob Hilke, and Mairi Doerr.

Our capable **Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation Trustees** are:

- Bill Forsyth, Minneapolis, MN
- George Glazier, Devens, MA
- Mary Swalla Holmes, Polk City, IA
- Pebaamibines Jones, Minneapolis, MN
- Shannon King, Fort Frances, Ontario
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- Ward Merrill, International Falls, MN
- Bob Norbie, Great Falls, MT
- Michael Reid, St. Paul, MN
- Dave Rolloff, Sacramento, CA
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Please visit our beautiful web site at < www.eober.org > and you'll find that it is easier than ever to contact the Foundation with your questions. Click on "contact" and you'll go directly to the office email of our executive director, Beth Waterhouse.

Please consider adding the Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation to your annual giving process or to your estate planning. We can receive gifts of stock. Given to a Minnesota nonprofit that has been active for forty years, your planned gift will carry your environmental legacy forward to upcoming generations. We are more sure of that than ever.



MALLARD ISLAND

THE OBERHOLTZER FOUNDATION

The Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation maintains Ober's legacy and North Woods island home as a source of inspiration, renewal, and connection to Indigenous Peoples, kindred spirits, and the natural world.

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Please support this organization (and this newsletter) as you are able. To learn more about this Foundation, please contact Executive Director, Beth Waterhouse, at < beth@eober.org > Mailing address: 4370 Brookside Court, #205, Edina, MN 55436. (952)-401-0591.

Thank you!

Ober, I Wonder

By: Allison Monahan Kohler

I wonder if Ober ever stopped in his tracks
While walking to the Japanese house in June
So he could admire the scent of the pale purple flowers
On the freshly opened lilac blooms.

I wonder why he chose *this* island
Of the many other scattered around.
A place unlike any, a place to call home
On this one-and-a-half-acre rock that he found.

I wonder if the white-throated sparrow
Sang as loudly then as he does today,
Or if the colorful warblers passed through for the summer
For they are never truly here to stay.

I wonder if Ober thanked the cedar
As he cut it down to build his home,
And if the trees were as abundant across the horizon
In any which way you roam.

I wonder if he was mesmerized by the sun
As she rose to spill her colors across the land,
Or if he smiled at an evening campfire with friends
A mug of hot chocolate in his hands.

I wonder if the curious northern pike
Broke the still glass pane of the water,
Or if a rippling trail could be seen in the distance
Made by the brown, sleek body of an otter.

I wonder if Ober smelled new paint and wood
When he went into the library to read one of his books,
Or if the wonderfully dusty aroma was there
As ancient as the little building now looks.

I wonder if, on a cool rainy day,
He sat by a warm fire with a blanket on the floor
While the sweet smell of crackling pine filled the house
And the scent of petrichor swirled around outdoors.

I wonder if the blueberries were just as blue
And if the birch leaves were the same shade of green,
Or if the delicate flight of the dragonflies
In every direction could be seen.

I wonder if the loon's echoing lullaby
Put Ober to sleep at the end of the day,
And if he arose in the morn to the chatter
Of two red squirrels out his window at play.

I wonder if he sat down to take a lesson
From the old rocks and the towering trees,
Or if he ever was lost and sought direction
From the flowing water and the howling breeze.

I wonder if the cold, blustering winters
Filled his heart with sorrow and despair,
Or if he enjoyed watching the snowflakes
Softly choose their landing spots with care.

There are many trees here that know the answers
For they have been standing through it all.
But they guard their secrets deep inside their thick bark
During their life and even after they fall.

The chilled water will rise, some days it will fall,
Always holding hands with the shore.
The mystery, beauty and tranquility of this place
Will remain—undisturbed—evermore.

The plants will keep growing...
Clouds rolling, flowers showing...
For as long as your heart can see.

Ober's legacy will live on...
Atop this island on Rainy Lake...
Through people like you and like me.



In June, Allie and Ray Zifko spent their honeymoon in the Front House (a Monahan family tradition) and both poetry and island gardens got their attentions as well! Here, Allie reads the featured poem.

Photo by Peggy Anne Smith.



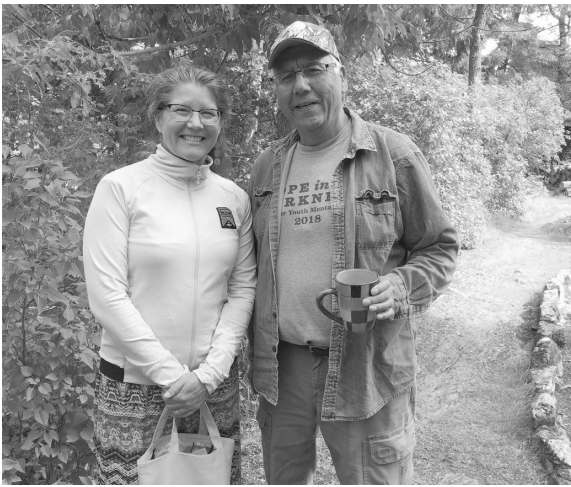


Marian Moore singing in concert Backus Center Auditorium.

Stewards of the Wilderness after working in the yard west of Bird House:
Left to Right: Kyla Minster, Alex Guest, Isaac Montano, Teghan Grulkowski, Miranda Wood, Devlin Patton and Etienne Chenevert. Students represented: Macalester College, Bemidji State University, and Northland College.



There are quiet energies that flow under everything that happens on Mallard island, and here you see two of them: Kelly Sassi (caretaker) and Don Jones. Don came again and again this summer to offer examples of traditional Anishinaabe teachings. Here they stop on the trail after an August ceremony in Ober's drum room.



The Summer in Pictures!



Some projects are messier than others! Mairi Doerr and Craig Fernholz are still smiling here after assisting as chimney sweeps down in Front House, late May.

Duluth carpenter and our volunteer, Sherry Rovig, seems pleased with her latest finished project restoring the archway that surrounds the door to Ober's root cellar.
Photo by Mairi Doerr.





We welcomed Pat and Larry Wahl back after 25 years! Now as then, they left the island a better place.



Musical energy pours into the Backus Center Auditorium on August 30th, here from Dan Chouinard, Prudence Johnson and Claudia Schmidt. These performing artists and several more helped the Foundation give back to the International Falls community. Photos by David Harrington.



Laura Ann Kelly wins the unofficial prize for who-traveled-farthest, since she came all the way from the country of Bulgaria for her July week on Mallard Island!



Bird House showing off the newly restored balcony!!

Photo by Mairi Doerr



Here's one spot guaranteed to grow flowers and not food for our resident deer. Thanks to David Markwardt for the sturdy and beautiful new front dock installed in May.

New Trustees Join the Legacy

The Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation has a working board and a very small staff. We are in a growth phase, and we recently welcomed three new trustees, now numbering twelve. Welcome Shannon, Nance, and Ward. Hear their voices:

Shannon King

I am an Anishinaabe Ikwe (Ojibwe woman). I was adopted into the Nigigoonsiminikaaning community when I was 16 and I now call it my home. My culture, teachings and teachers are invaluable to me. I first visited Mallard Island shortly after the teaching lodge was built and I immediately felt connected to the spirits and energy of the Island. I spent a week there in June—gardening week, and I learned even more about the connection the island makes to others and how much work and planning goes into not only the upkeep of the island but also to its authenticity. I love the opportunity to give back to our area by getting involved in the Oberholtzer Foundation and helping continue the legacy of inspiration, renewal and connection to Indigenous Peoples, kindred spirits, and the natural world.

Nance Kunkel

Since 1993, I have come to Mallard Island nearly every year. I have planted flowers, dug out roots, trimmed bushes, painted acres of Rockingham Green, hauled a lakeful of water, chased bats and red squirrels, eliminated my share of mosquitoes, participated in soirées, washed a million dishes, arranged and rearranged living spaces, cleaned books, swept away flood debris, and cooked meals on the deck (also after the flood). I have done all of this knowing that Mallard Island has given me such a gift I can never repay—time coming here with my mom, and having uninterrupted time together with my daughter when she was old enough to come. I bring a desire to see this Foundation and this Mallard survive and thrive into the next generation.

Ward Merrill

As a board member, I bring my background in “community” work as Community Education Director in Blackduck, and as the (soon retiring) Executive Director of the Backus Community Center. My roots are in International Falls dating to the early 1920s when both sets of grandparents moved to the area. I also bring a love of reading with a personal library of several thousand volumes. I have a passion for history and the preservation of nature and historic places after childhood summer vacations spent on Rainy Lake, building our own log home, deer hunting on Black Bay, and as a teacher looking forward to the last day of school with our vehicle loaded for a trip into the BWCAW or Quetico. I will use whatever skills and connections I’ve developed to help build a more local presence and community link with the Foundation and its mission.



Trustees left to right: Nance Kunkel, Bob Norbie, Ward Merrill, Bill Forsyth, Shannon King, Peggy Anne Smith, Diane Tessari, George Glazier, Dave Rolloff, Mary Swalla Holmes, Michael Reid, Pebaamibines (Dennis) Jones.

Letter from the Treasurer

Dear Friends of the Oberholtzer Foundation,

Let's take a breath, ponder a few things, feel a little gratitude, and think of the possibilities. Some of us do this with the help of a canoe and a paddle on a wild lake or river.

When we talk of Ernest Oberholtzer's "Universities of the Wilderness," I really believe his concept of outdoor learning can happen anywhere, not just on his islands. For those who've had the privilege of experiencing this in the North, whether on Mallard Island, paddling in the Quetico / BWCAW or anywhere in the Rainy River watershed, this happens almost effortlessly. Many of us have spent much of our lives enjoying these gifts and nurturing a close relationship to the natural world. This is what I believe Ober professed to his core, and it's why many of us celebrate his efforts.

The foundation in Ober's legacy, its gracious donors and dedicated program hosts have also made it their mission to reach out and make connections with a wide variety of people. They have recently drawn in college youth who share the same ideals as Ober-- those who have made time in their busy lives to join in programs that are all about conservation (see cover story). Our friends understand that bringing a new generation to Mallard Island is the spark that fires passion in many individuals.

The foundation is fortunate to have several insightful benefactors whose gifts have enabled us to help young adults come to the island. This has made a big difference, particularly this last summer, in attracting a new population and what we hope will become just the beginning of support for other outreach and imaginative efforts. This is a new generation of programming at Mallard; it'll be exciting to see what comes on the horizon in 2020.

Another initiative that was exciting to see evolve this summer was the continued effort in building relationships with the neighboring girls camp (Camp Ogichi Daa Kwe) and boys camp (Koochiching) with the lead of our First Nation 'ambassador,' Dennis Jones (Pebaamibines). His coaching and consulting efforts have educated campers for several years now. Initiatives for next year will not only continue to include the teaching lodge on Gull Island but possibly a new sweat lodge on Crow. This kind of Anishinaabe outreach is so important to Ober's cross-cultural legacy.

Meanwhile on Mallard Island, our buildings are in a constant state of reconstruction. Our attempts are mostly supported through several dozen skilled volunteers, but on occasion things need to be addressed by professionals. This year we faced a sudden collapse of supporting posts on the Cedarbark cabin. This required some urgent attention from our staff and volunteers to get through the remaining summer programming, and the house will need more immediate attention from a contractor who can replace its underlying support structure. This will likely come at some great expense beyond our standard maintenance budget. We are looking for monetary support and connections to engineering and professional services, so please reach out to me personally or to our director, Beth Waterhouse, if you can help. Ober left us unique problems to solve, but hopefully the right steps can be taken by our local contractors before next year's programs begin.

Thank you all for your continued support of this foundation. We on the board of trustees have never felt more excited about the future—its new programming and focus. We ask yet again for you to find a way to support us. If you are able to make an additional contribution this year with an emphasis in supporting youth, Anishinaabe efforts, or building projects, we would certainly love to hear from you.

With sincere thanks,

Michael Reid

Treasurer,
Ernest Carl Oberholtzer Foundation

Michael Reid balances on the ladder as he works with a crew to install the newly restored balcony onto the east side of Ober's Bird House. Michael currently serves both as facilities management chair and treasurer of the Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation.



Photo by Mairi Doerr



MALLARD ISLAND

Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation
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Ober Exhibit at MNHS through November

Currently, and for the first time, Ernest Oberholtzer's life and work are on display at the St. Paul MN History Center: in the foyer of the **Gale Family Library, second floor**. At no charge (other than your parking) you can study items in five cases dedicated to Ernest C. Oberholtzer. The exhibit is open through November. Please visit the History Center and seek out these displays! Our thanks to Paula DeMars and Jen Huebscher for transporting so many items after the archives week on Mallard Island, and for designing and setting up this comprehensive exhibit.

In lieu of the “normal” fall gathering, we are inviting you to a reception at the MN History Center on **Saturday, October 26**. The reception will be held in the ***Fraternal Congress Classroom*** on the 2nd floor of the History Center (345 Kellogg Blvd. West) just off the lobby of the Gale Family Reference Library. Time: 2:00-4:30 p.m. Light refreshments will be served. Come to share Ober stories and to meet up with your Mallard Island friends.



Trustees and volunteers for the Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation have been organizing and preserving items that were his: books, maps, papers, and photos—for four decades. Ober's correspondence is mostly held at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul, available on micro-film, and of course Mallard Island is a “living museum” with Ober's archives depicting his lifestyle and values.