

John Szarkowski: 1925 to 2007

John Szarkowski has been called, “the most influential person in Twentieth Century photography.” He and Ernest Oberholtzer were friends.

Szarkowski created his own unique photographic statements of place and time, many of which are exhibited at the Pace/McGill Gallery in New York. He was also Director of Photography at New York’s Museum of Modern Art from 1962 to 1991. Three months after Szarkowski’s death, *The Guardian* declared, “Everyone who cares about photography is in his debt.”

“When Szarkowski took over at MOMA, there was not a single commercial gallery exhibiting photography in New York, and the form had still not been accepted by most curators or critics. Szarkowski changed all that.” [*Guardian*] At the Museum of Modern Art, Szarkowski hosted 160 exhibits including some very challenging shows, and he opened the doors to new and sometimes controversial work and photographers.

Szarkowski’s *The Face of Minnesota* (1958) was originally commissioned to commemorate the state’s centennial; it was then re-published for the sesquicentennial in 2008. U of M Press calls it “an eloquent tribute to the people and places of the North Star state.” See Barbara Breckenridge’s story for Mallard Island’s connection to this man and this book. – *Introduction by the Editor*

An Interesting Visitor

by Barbara Ann Breckenridge

In the second week of September, 1955, I was completing three months as the summer cook on Mallard Island, cooking for Ober, Frances Andrews, and whoever else happened to be there. I heard that another guest was expected and, since it was my last week of cooking on the island, I was accustomed to various people showing up at any time; it just meant adding another place at the table. I wasn’t too surprised when a tall, thin young man appeared one afternoon. He commenced to pull a beautiful eggplant out of each jacket pocket, which was great except that I had no idea how to cook an eggplant. I had just turned 19 and was basically a meat and potatoes cook. Not wanting to display my ignorance, I thanked him for them and headed for the cookbooks. I found only one recipe, a fussy stuffed eggplant dish that took a lot of time and was not what Ober was expecting. But everyone graciously ate it without showing their disappointment that it wasn’t simply sliced and fried.

At dinner, our guest was introduced as John Szarkowski, a photographer. He was there to go on a canoe trip with Ober, who explained that they met on a train. In 1951 they were both traveling south from Minneapolis on the Rock Island Zephyr when they were asked to share a table in the dining car. Their conversation continued all evening and ended with Ober inviting Szarkowski to visit his island. This was a common occurrence for Ober—he never drove, usually traveled by train, and invited many casual acquaintances from trains to visit his island. He told me that sometimes people would show up years later saying he’d invited them and he would have no idea who they were. Being the gentleman he was, he always welcomed them as guests.

I didn’t see much of Szarkowski as he and Ober were busily planning the canoe trip. But in 1958 the University of Minnesota Press published a commemorative book about Minnesota for the state centennial. I realized when I saw the book that the photographs and text were by John Szarkowski, the young man I had met on Mallard Island.

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In the words of Ernest Oberholtzer...

1949, Washington DC, from a personal journal

March 1, 1949

The times call for action as never before. If you do it right, you can do it all. One will help the other. That is true. One striking success at this moment would re-orient the whole thing. Be prepared against adversity. So far as you are concerned. They need a shot in the arm, too. Give it to them. Take your rightful place. Steal the show... Write your one story now and write, write, write. If you will but let go, wings are youth. Faith and actions. And more yellow paper.

March 2, 1949

I have already analyzed the missing elements of my situation—faith and courage. And the good sense to use all my functions. Last night after I went to bed, I felt for the first time for many moon-stirrings the direction of a story. I began to work on it confidently and expectantly. I had at last reduced the conflicts and sort of cleared the deck for action. What I should realize is that there could not be a better time than now—the remaining days of this week.

Editor: We recognize that Ernest Oberholtzer struggled within the movement to preserve wilderness, and we thank him for that struggle. We also recognize that he struggled as a writer, and we encourage any who share in this challenge.



John Szarkowski

Dear Readers,

There is a sameness, a continuity to Mallard Island that all enjoy. In many ways, the summer of 2015 allowed those who appreciate Ober's Islands to resume their attachment to this protected continuity. For many, this summer was a tearful return to the place they remembered and to a place they feared might have been permanently changed by the floodwaters of 2014. Luckily and with a thousand extra hours of skilled, hard work, we can say that few damages to the buildings were actually "permanent." Yet at what scale of time do I say that, and what do we know about permanence in these times of change?

What I believe is *permanent* is the spirit with which people step off the pontoon and onto the floating dock near the Waningan kitchen boat. I see continuity in the delicious meals we share in that kitchen, hear it in the laughter that wafts out of screen porches on any given afternoon, or the sound of a body splashing into the lake on a hot August day.

And I often wonder how it is that an 1100-foot rocky island can keep giving us surprises. The archives there are deeper than we think. This summer, we learned more about the maps than ever before, and a few art projects sent us deep into the traces that Ober left on Mallard Island. Together, Ellie Kingsbury and I discovered his 1949 journal from Washington DC—some of the most introspective writing I've read by Ernest Oberholtzer.

So, even though there are still a few lost gardens and scars from last summer's floodwater, I can truly say "we're back" as a natural place, an island study center, a unique little spot among the granite boulders, waters, and white pines of Rainy Lake.

For those of you reading these pages who never expect to travel all the way up to Mallard Island for a week, please know that your love of the place carries us and makes all the difference. Please live vicariously through the voices of those who did spend a few days there this summer. Ober's legacy was not only in buildings, not only in place or policies, but in *relationships*—and you're a part of all that.

-- Beth Waterhouse

Summer Work Volunteers, Mallard Island 2015

Our thanks go to each and every person who lifted a tool on Mallard Island this summer. Projects ranged from routine to utterly amazing; we tackled things this summer that volunteers would seldom undertake. Thanks especially to the following: (in order of appearance)

Don Maronde * Michael Reid * Mairi Doerr * Sue Nielsen * Craig Fernholz * Anneliese Stuh * Jennie Ross * Ross Peterson * Janice Whitney * Doug Kelley * David Donisch *

(continued next column)

Summer Work Volunteers, continued

Colleen Jackson * David Jackson * Charlotte Klesman * Mary Alice Smith * Peggy Anne Smith * Tom Balcom * Barb Balcom * Margo McCreary * Peter Doughty * Jim Fitzpatrick * Mary Swalla Holmes * Emily Larscheidt * Nate Larscheidt * Kate Weyrens * Laura Kelly * Janet Wilkinson * Jennifer Folkema * Fiona Reid * Aubrey Donisch * Justin Ernst.

Thanks to Summer Island Caretakers!

Big thanks to Prudence Johnson and Mairi Doerr, summer program directors. Other weekly caretakers were: Jim Fitzpatrick, Mary Swalla Holmes, Jane Lund, Elaine Thrune, Diane Tessari, Mark Granlund, Emily Larscheidt, Jennie Ross, Danielle Sosin, Kim Knutson and Judy Blais. Tours week caretakers: Nance Kunkel, Richard Paper and Diane Tessari with a visit from Anne Kunkel Christianson and Tony Christianson. Without this group of well-trained and amazing people, the island would simply not be available to all who love and enjoy it.



MALLARD ISLAND

THE OBERHOLZER 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, generally February and October. Cover sketch of Mallard Island is credited to Gene Ritchie Monahan. Send poems, stories or articles to Beth Waterhouse at beth@eober.org

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For more information, visit

www.eober.org

Please think about adding the Oberholtzer Foundation to your estate planning. This is one way to make a lasting difference. We can also and will gladly accept stock donations. To learn more about Ernest Oberholtzer, his stories or his islands, visit us at www.eober.org

Women Witness Test Drilling Sites Near BWCAW

Ernest Oberholtzer fell in love with the Rainy Lake watershed as a young man and spent much of his adult life working to preserve and protect its natural beauty and integrity. Those efforts, and widespread support, led to legislation to protect wilderness and to the creation of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) and Voyageurs National Park – our nation’s most-visited wilderness and Minnesota’s only national park.

With Ober’s life work of loving and protecting watersheds in mind, the Oberholtzer Foundation’s Board of Directors has studied for several years the proposed mining of copper-sulfide ore in the Rainy Lake watershed that holds the above areas as well as our beloved Mallard Island. (Interestingly, hydrologists now say even the first mine proposed – across the divide – might send waters affected by such mining across that divide into the Rainy Lake watershed.) We learned that this type of mining has never been done anywhere without serious effects on the environment. This led to the board’s decision to oppose copper-sulfide mining and to join the national *Campaign to Save the BWCA*. Board member Diane Tessari maintains a close liaison with that campaign.

In a related summer event, from August 20-24, the *Great Old Broads for Wilderness* (GOB) gathered for a “Broadwalk” at the South Kawishiwi River US Forest Service campground – right at “ground zero” in the Twin Metals mining plans. Diane Tessari, also a long-time GOB member, attended the event and returned heartened by the fact that almost 40 women (plus one “great old bro” too) came from San Francisco to Maine and Canada to New Mexico to see our beloved north country with their own eyes and to study the potential effects of mining. The group talked with Brenda Halter, Superior National Forest Superintendent; Becky Rom, National Campaign Director for Save the BW; and Amy Freeman, National Geographic Adventurer for 2014, who, with her husband Dave, just took off (Sept 23rd) for a year’s stay in the BWCAW to call attention to the mining issue. There were many others including area cabin owners, resort owners, and naturalists. A tour of the areas in which test-drilling for minerals has been done showed the damages from even that exploratory activity – barren heaps of rock where nothing will grow, a dead black area at the edge of the woods where green plants should have been growing in abundance, and many sealed red pipes sticking up helter-skelter in the ravaged landscape.

At the end of the event, one attendee said that, of all the GOB events she’s been part of, this mining issue is the most compelling and urgent. We find that heartening.



Toad at Home

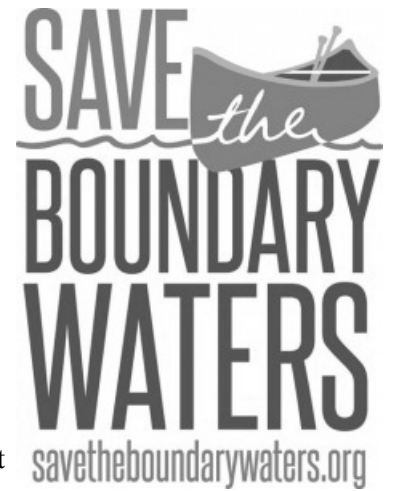
By Don Maronde

In the spring of the millennium, I persuaded my partner in repairs to come to Mallard-- to get off the prairie for a while. Our goal was to replace the roof on Cedarbark House, and maybe do some fishing. Once we got a clear idea of what to do with the roof, it was a fun challenge. We were "big time"-- a dump truck on a barge for all the debris and the barge to haul in our supplies from Northern Lumber. And we had Jean plus Edie and John Rylander as support and kitchen crew. Mike Reid was around some, as a consultant.

We were nearly finished with the roofing, and Dean Nordaune had to leave early to get back to his work in SW MN. John was helping me finish the shingling. After supper on our last day, I went onto the roof to finish some temporary caulk around the fireplace chimney. There were a few loose stones in the chimney, and I had mortared them to stick them for a future project. I saw one more that was nicely placed but looked a bit loose. I reached to test its fastening and I startled, and pulled my hand back. It was soft! My eyes then focused and the stone became a beautiful tree toad of about 2-3 inches girth. It had taken on the color tones and texture of the stones of that chimney-- even a resemblance to the gray lichens that fasten onto all our stones and rock walls. With its eyes shut, it was nearly invisible as a toad. I scratched its plump belly and it did not move, so secure, I think, in its disguise. I left it right there, but immediately climbed down to the wannigan to entice all to come and see. I believe all climbed up the ladder to witness another Mallard miracle.



2015 Photo by Fiona Reid



When I let myself feel the Oneness, knowing that we are all one with spirits living in physical form now and all those who have moved on to another dimension, it felt so powerful that my physical body could not contain it. My pressure valve opened, and the tears were hot, then cool on my cheeks.
 – Mari Jackson



Inukshuk Guards Western Cove.
 Diane Tessari

Time worn rock walls
 and towering pines
 stand their watch
 in reverent awe
 over fractals of light.

- Joel Kroenke



Sunshine on a new rock scallop. BEW

*Cabin Journal Excerpts
 from 2014 and 2015*
 Mallard Island

Sue Nielsen with the Best Lemon Pie Ever.
 Mairi Doerr



Here, Now, Here, Now. Words don't come close to conveying the power, spirit, and presence of this place. Somehow the spirits here make it easy to see the one life we all are. Love to all,
 7-31-15, Tony Rongstad

The island has indeed been full of noises, sweet and forgiving. Our group has tapped the magic, uncapped the rhythms of the light
 8-14-15, Leslie Adrienne Miller



Denny B. Carlson practicing the saxophone in Japanese House. BEW



All experience is illusory or real. If this place is an illusion, I can't imagine one more pleasantly conjured. If this place is real, I cannot imagine one more pleasantly enacted. Whether real or not, this is a supremely pleasant experience, which renders illusion and reality a distinction without a difference, here on the Mallard.

6-7-13, Peter Wahlstrom



Photo by Peter Doughty

Rock workers in May



There is much work to be done. We are the creators. There is a place within all of us that knows the words, that has a voice that the world longs to hear. This week has brought me closer to that voice than I have felt in a long time.

7/31/15 Alex Rongstad

Once again, I had the privilege of sleeping at the tip of the Island surrounded by stillness, birds, the gentle hush or roaring of the winds. Thunder, lightning and inner peace.

7-18-15, Kate Weyrens



The Wannigan raised and gorgeous Mary Swalla Holmes



Rainy steps by Big House NMK

We've had warm days, joyous leaping from the rocks, deer, frogs, a giant turtle visitor, eagles, hummingbirds, muskrats and squirrels. We've paddled, run our hearts and minds along the shires and spines of many books. Ober, we thank you for what you've made and shared. What we keep from here is peace.

8-14-15, Leslie Adrienne Miller



(continued from page 1)

Several pictures were taken on Rainy Lake and even on Mallard Island, including one of my favorite pictures of Ober. I assume many of them were taken that fall of 1955.

Through the years, I have been alert for his name (certainly not a common one) and I've acquired several other books of his beautiful photography. Of course, John Szarkowski went on to a very distinguished career, teaching photography at several universities and serving as curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art. Through the years, I followed his career through newspaper articles, and I've collected some of his books. I enjoy his photography and descriptive text and find myself going back to his books frequently to look for particular pictures or descriptions.

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*Barbara Breckenridge lives in Marshall, Minnesota, and has been a friend of the Oberholtzer Foundation for many years. Barb has volunteered as a scribe in our board of directors' meetings on several occasions and her letters, written as a Mallard Island cook in 1955, are a permanent part of the lore of the island.*

(Cabin Journal Excerpts)

Today is our last day on the Island, for now. Words can't express the gratitude and humility I feel for everything this place IS. Being a small part of it has filled me with total amazement and somehow I can feel connected to every soul that has contributed to the great collective of souls that made it possible for me to be sitting here writing these words. The island lives in all of us. A place to be, for love, for hope, for joy, for sorrow, for separation and for wholeness.

**T**hank you, Ober. Without your spirit, none of this could exist. And not even in your wildest dreams could you imagine the depth of your choices to speak out for what is right and true: for the trees, the animals, for life eternal. Thank you. And thank you, Beth and Prudence for dedicating yourselves to sharing and connecting this place to so many others. Your work echoes through eternity. And yet it's found in the smallest of things like mulching the clivus or a simple conversation over coffee in the morning. Thank you.

*Alex Rongstad 7/31/15*

This was my first time on the island. It reminds me of a cross between Hogwarts and Swiss Family Robinson. I hadn't painted in a while and got re-acquainted with my acrylics as I painted in the Japanese House. I also played Ober's violin some.

*8-30-15, Anita Flowe*



Photo NMK



### To Contact Us:

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### The Ernest Oberholtzer Foundation

**Board of Directors:** Jim Fitzpatrick, president; Mary Swalla Holmes, vice president; Tim Heinle, treasurer; Peggy Anne Smith, secretary. Beth Waterhouse serves as Executive Director. **Board Members At Large:** Jim Davis, Bob Hilke, Pebaamibines (Dennis) Jones, Charlie Kelly, Robin Monahan, Michael Reid, Jean Sanford Replinger, Harry Sweatt, Diane Tessari and Elaine Thrune. **Foundation Emeritus Members:** Marne Monahan (d), Gene Ritchie Monahan (d), Ted Hall (d), Delores DeLaittre (d), Joe Paddock (Ober's biographer) and Douglas Wood who is also our neighbor on Fawn Island. **Honorary Member:** Ray Anderson (d). Note: Charles A. Kelly is also an emeritus member of the board who is currently serving on the board as assistant treasurer.

**In the summer of 2015, our summer program directors were Mairi Doerr and Prudence Johnson. Huge thanks to both women for a successful season.**



## A Warm Hello to All,

Even here on Rainy Lake in the third week of September, it is still warm. Where did the summer go? It disappeared under great weather (no flood), with outstanding and enthusiastic program participants, and with many projects completed up on Ober's Islands.

In May, we were still busy restoring buildings after high waters last summer. Raising the Wannigan 14½ inches under Michael Reid's direction was a huge task. It took most of two weeks, and all went very well. From my perspective, the cooperation and camaraderie of our work-week volunteers is beyond measure.

Our financial picture is bright. We continue to make these improvements on our islands while staying in the black. I will add, however, that our individual donations are down quite a bit from a flood-inspired high, and we are not meeting our current budget goal. Yet we receive so much support (financial and volunteer) and we leverage every dollar. I know we could not accomplish *one tenth* of what we do without our volunteers. This summer sixty-three volunteers gave us a total of 2,293 hours of hard work, *and* they want to return! Meanwhile, our gardens, buildings, and landscapes are in excellent shape.

In June, our book work week volunteers did a wonderful job counting, cleaning, and restoring old volumes and the shelves that hold them. This year they dipped into the map collection also, and we continue to learn more about Ober's maps.

In early September, we held a few island tour days. We enjoyed meeting a number of community and business leaders plus neighbors near to us who help us out every now and then. All are very interested in our mission on these islands—"dedicated to the preservation of Ober's north woods legacy as a source of inspiration..."

Overall revenue continues to come from several sources. Your gifts, along with others, make a big difference. Thanks so much for all that you do. Stay well my friends—seek the joy of being alive. Enjoy the end of the year,

Tim Heinle

Treasurer

Raising the Wannigan—a powerful day!

BEW



## What a Crew!

By Elaine Thrune

**W**onderful things happened on the Review Islands during the week of September 13-20. Much needed vegetation work, tree felling, brush cleanup, trash and old lumber cleanup, and many more tasks were accomplished by Tim Youngquist and his crew of hard workers. Steve and I provided guidance and assistance as caretakers. The weather was great for working—not too hot, light winds, and small waves—important for transporting multiple heavy loads to the dumpster at Bald Rock.

**Most amazing:** A crew of five, working efficiently and safely as a team, created an assembly line to chip mountains of brush and tree tops to transform unsightly mountains of brush into useable wood chips.

**Most worrisome:** Needing to take down two dead jack pine trees west of Big House and take the tops off two more along the trail at Cedar Bark and Library without damaging cabins, gardens, electrical box, docks, canoes, boats, bat houses or people. Successfully done!

**Most exhilarating:** Swimming in 62-64 degree Rainy Lake water!

**Most rewarding:** Several messy, heavy, unpleasant jobs are done! The west end of Hawk Island has no more unsightly brush piles, the area in and around the LP cabin on Gull Island is cleaned of moldy trash and rotten lumber and the dangerous deck on Gull has been removed, extra clutter (broken clay tiles, deteriorating lumber) on Mallard Island is also gone, and several areas have been neatly re-organized.

**Most gratifying:** Being on Mallard Island with a team of individuals who love the islands and work well together. They discussed tasks and strategies, and once they decided how best to proceed, they attacked jobs and problems with vigor, enthusiasm, and skill. Best of all, any job once started was finished and the area carefully cleaned up! Great work by a great crew!



Forestry Crew: (L to R) Kevin and Amber Wagner, Elaine and Steve Thrune, Andrew Wunschel, Mandy and Tim Youngquist, standing on the newly cleaned west end of Hawk Island.



# MALLARD ISLAND

Ernest C. Oberholzer Foundation  
818 Third Ave # 305  
Excelsior, MN 55331

## Seventeenth Annual Oberholtzer Fall Gathering Saturday, October 24<sup>th</sup>

Where? Judson Church, 4101 Harriet Av S,  
Minneapolis MN 55409

When? October 24<sup>th</sup>, Saturday,  
from 2:00 to 6:00 pm

We are happy to invite you, once again, to a Mallard Island Fall Gathering. The event pulls together all who love Ober's Islands, whether you've been there recently or not. Be ready to witness a lot of beautiful art, with a few items for sale. Please come ready to share your memories or talents, or we know you'll simply enjoy an impromptu talent show featuring amazing spirit and talents coming off the summer island weeks.

This year's event is coordinated by Kate Casanova. Light refreshments. Bring art, music, and your island stories!  
**All are invited, come as audience or participant or both!**  
*The program will start about 3:30 pm.*

Friends often 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. (Streets cross Lyndale.) Take the 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue exit off of 35W and go west to Harriet and north to 41<sup>st</sup> Street. ~ Street parking.



Artists at work in Japanese House by Kathleen Olson