



ERNEST C. OBERHOLTZER FOUNDATION

MALLARD ISLAND

RAINY LAKE MINNESOTA

MALLARD ISLAND

AUTUMN 2016

## Robert Hugh Monahan Jr and Marian (Marnee) Monahan

### ~ On Friendship ~

*We have been close friends for over forty years, and all my boyhood summers were spent with him at The Mallard. This introduction to Rainy Lake was then responsible for my moving back here and hoping to publish a journal about those years.*

*Robert Hugh Monahan, Jr.*

Friendship is a powerful force. In Ernest Oberholtzer's northern life it was everything. Here was a young Iowan, a Harvard grad come to the Canadian border town of Ranier, a man great with stories but not so good with tools. Living on Rainy Lake he needed his friends, and Ober enjoyed his time with them.

On May 21, 1959, after a visit to Mallard Island, Hugh Monahan typed a short letter of thanks to Ober: "Above all, I want to thank you for your kindness... I enjoyed especially our opportunity for the long conversation and the renewal of old times." And Ober's note to Hugh may have crossed in the mail: "For pleasure, when I'm at the lake, what I'll look forward to is visits like your own for the good of all concerned and with no ugly complications of business. May we have many more, you and yours, half as rewarding as the one just conducted."—Ober.

**R**obert Hugh Monahan, Jr was born February 11, 1914 in International Falls, Minnesota. He was the third child born of Robert Hugh Monahan, and Elizabeth Stevens Monahan, both pioneer medical doctors who established the first hospital in the area. Following high school, Hugh enrolled in the University of Minnesota with the intention of becoming a doctor. He became an eye doctor.

They said Hugh's father didn't particularly like the outdoors, didn't have a lot of time, and loomed large in stature and gruff in voice. So, in this world, Hugh—a young boy who loved the outdoors but with busy professional parents—met Ober. Ernest Oberholtzer loved the wild and loved to teach.

It came to pass that Ober stood with Hugh and Marnee at their wedding altar, and he was a part of their family throughout their married life, though as friends they would often be far apart. Small gifts and visits happened back and forth between them. Later, the "complications of business" certainly entered into the picture as well.

By 1968, Oberholtzer needed daily care but was still living in his own Frigate-home near Ranier. Hugh was one of the friends who kept track of Ober's well-being. Eventually, Hugh Monahan began to coordinate the friends into a meeting about

the future. What would happen to Ober's islands? In 1971, Hugh pulled together a group that included Gilbert Dalldorf (a boy scout in Ober's 1915 troop in Davenport), Russel Goodson (Minneapolis banker), Charles A. Kelly (estate lawyer and also lifelong friend of Ober's), and Mark Abbott, a local lawyer.

Had those early meetings not taken place, had no one taken responsibility for the affairs as well as the end-of-life care of this man called "Ober," a great deal less would have taken place in the name of this legacy. It takes people who care, people who want the footprint and impact of one soul to be remembered. And a beautiful rocky island also called to these men.

**O**ber died on June 7, 1977. By June 20th, Hugh Monahan reflected on this event as he sent word to many others: "All of us were saddened to lose the physical presence of Ober even though the termination of these last

years must have been for him a relief beyond our comprehension..."



Robert Hugh and Marnee Monahan

In part two of this newsletter series, you'll learn more about this time of transition. *Key questions:* do you

save an island or sell it? Do you save a library in its homeplace or do you donate it to an academic institution? Do three islands have value beyond the monetary or tax value, and to whom and for what purpose? As early as 1972, Hugh Monahan was asking such questions, and it's clear that Robert Hugh Monahan's friendship with Ober was fully called upon right up to the month of his own death.

Charles A. Kelly had just assumed the presidency of the Oberholtzer Foundation from Robert Hugh Monahan, its first board president. Charlie sent a September 1980 note to Hugh remarking that he had heard that Hugh had been in the hospital for a bit of surgery, yet the file included no more mention of ill health beyond that. (continued on page 6)

**OBERHOLTZER FOUNDATION  
ANNOUNCES  
ENDOWMENT CAMPAIGN**

See Page 7

## Dear Readers,

There's really nothing all that special about the separate elements that make up a stay on Mallard Island. We can "do Mallard" any time we slow down, take ourselves off the cell phones, walk on uneven ground, stare at the beauty of Nature, study old maps or documents, star-gaze, eat with eleven friends or laugh a lot. What's unique about Mallard Island is that all these elements come together *on an island*, and in the same six days! Still, I encourage you to "do" as many of them as you can at home in any given week. Call it taking back our lives.

Robert Hugh Monahan was one of the first leaders to work hard to try to make something special out of Mallard Island and to share it with the public. We feature Hugh in this issue and also in the next issue in order to begin to fully recognize his family's outstanding commitment to the Oberholtzer legacy. His wife, Marnee, certainly followed in his footsteps in the 1980s. Enjoy the new details here and in the winter issue.

You'll notice that most of the copy on this issue's center spread is in poetry. Hurrah for new poetry written on Mallard! It was poetry that first brought me to the island, and there's nothing like a poem to capture the mystery of a beloved place. If you, too, have a poem or two that relate to our favorite rocky island, send them along.

I dedicate this issue to my mom, who saved them all.

Beth

## Foundation Welcomes New Board Members

**Bob Norbie** was Trustee Emeritus Jean Sanford Replinger's student at Southwest MN State University in the 1970s. Soon he and his wife also followed Jean up to Mallard, where they were among the few individuals who first catalogued Ober's vast library in the summers of 1983 and 1984. Bob also names his own extensive canoe expeditions as adding appreciation for Oberholtzer's and Magee's arduous epic 1912 journey. With frequency in the past 20 years, Bob and Mary Lou find the time to canoe the BWCAW with friends and family. Bob works as President/CEO of Special Olympics Montana where his staff and he and thousands of volunteers serve the needs of nearly 2,400 athletes annually with intellectual disabilities. The Norbies live in Great Falls, Montana.



Bob Norbie and Jean Sanford Replinger at the spring board meeting.



## To Contact Us:

The Oberholtzer Foundation migrates home each autumn to Excelsior, Minnesota after summering on Mallard Island in Rainy Lake. Visit our web site at [www.eober.org](http://www.eober.org). On Facebook, enter "Mallard Island in Rainy Lake."

### The Ernest Oberholtzer Foundation Board of Directors:

Jim Fitzpatrick, president; Michael Reid, vice president; Peggy Anne Smith, secretary; Tim Heinle, treasurer. *Board Members At Large:* Mark Granlund, Bob Hilke, Pebaamibines (Dennis) Jones, Charles Kelly, Bob Norbie, Diane Tessari, and Elaine Thrune. Beth Waterhouse serves as Executive Director. / Ray Anderson, Honorary Board Member.

**Trustees Emeritus** are remembered and honored for their significant contributions of time, energy, expertise, talents, assets and skills to further the mission of the Oberholtzer Foundation. In recognition and with hope for a continued belonging and importance to the organization, we name the following individuals. Some of them have died, but their impact is still very clear, and it is absolutely held in our memories:

Robert Hugh Monahan *	Marnee Monahan
Gene Ritchie Monahan	Ted Hall
Delores DeLaittre	Douglas Wood
Jean Sanford Replinger *	Mary Swalla Holmes *
Jim Davis *	Robin Monahan *
Harry Sweatt *	Joe Paddock (Ober's biographer)

(\*) six new Emeritus members named on September 10, 2016.

Note: Charles A. Kelly is also an emeritus member of the board who is currently serving as its assistant treasurer.

**Staff:** Beth Waterhouse and summer program directors: Mairi Doerr and Prudence Johnson. With special thanks to each of our island caretakers.

**Mark Granlund** first visited Mallard Island as a teacher of botanical drawing in the summer of 2005. He recently said, "I have come to greatly appreciate Ernest Oberholtzer's view of the world and his practice of moving through this world." Mark is a volunteer Mallard caretaker and an artist, teacher, and gardener by trade. He has coordinated the Arts and Gardens Program for St. Paul Parks and Recreation, and has developed a botanical arts certification program at the Como Park Conservatory among countless other active community projects. Mark teaches painting and lives in St. Paul, and he would add that he is proud of his daughter, Maddie, who is now studying performance in Scotland.

New board member  
Mark Granlund with  
some of his artwork.



## Inaakonigewin

It was October 2015. The Ober board of directors had just done a very good thing and were rather proud of it. They had re-written the mission of their organization and had, with full intent, put Indigenous People back into the center of that language.

Now what? some asked. And one answer was a new watch-dog committee. There must be a beautiful word in Ojibwe for “watch dog.” In this case, the word was everything and with a far deeper meaning. Pronounced *in-ah-cone-ih-gay’-win*, it means “to go inward, to go toward spirit to learn what our purpose is in life and to discern the life-steps toward that purpose.” Board member, Pebaamibines (Dennis) Jones says that this is a definition in process—that it is on-going.

**The Inaakonigewin committee** will take a long look at the materials developed by the organization, including our web site. The last issue of this newsletter featured the life of Billy Magee, Ober’s guide and friend and Pebaamibines’ great-grandfather from the Seine River area of Rainy Lake.

Since 2015, we have learned the name of the grandmother drum who is a keeper and guardian of the island: *minis-inaanakwadook*. We are learning to talk more about her (and to her) and to give her more credit for the good things that go on around Mallard. At times there have been and will be ceremonies, and we learn to give gifts in exchange for items in nature that are desired for ceremony or healing. There is a lot of learning that can happen, that will happen, and the organization will slowly evolve inside its stronger mission.



Photo by Maire Doerr

This summer, in August, a new generation of the Billy Magee lineage came to Mallard and made their presence known. We don’t know yet what role any of them will want to play, but here they posed with *minisinaanakwadook*, and they look happy to be in that time and place on Ober’s Island. From left to right: Whisper, Estavon, Laura Pawlacyk, Dennis Jones, Trinity and Sequoia.

Unless otherwise noted, we thank the following for photos in this issue: David and Shannon Monahan and family, Dorothy Zerbe, Nance Kunkel, Mandy Youngquist, Mary Swalla Holmes.  
Endowment logo art by Karen McCall of McCall Design



## On Rainy Lake

Light brown water—opaque mica panes  
beyond Mallard Island, shattered liquid—  
is where I immerse, a self-baptism.  
My skin darkens in tannic dissolve of bark.

Behind me twists spine of granite bedrock,  
each birch and pine familiar, *terra cognita*,  
with cabins and footpaths, shelves of books  
solid, appearing not to hurtle through stars

but still fragile as the loose lily pad floating  
past me, red stem dangling, lost  
from the flotilla of green-heart leaves  
within shallows. This solitaire drifts

into the current where I am not apart from  
but not within, my skin a loose netting  
holding separate my own streams and lakes,  
flesh archipelago, water holding itself in water.

Denise Low Weso  
Aug 7-13, 2016



Wind! Eleven trees came down in as many  
minutes late on July 4, 2016



The new wood storage shed at Winter House completed June 2016

MSH



Architects came to Mallard from all over the nation.

## On the day that I decide to marry poetry or myself

which may or may not mean the same, a delicate or desolate breeze wafts  
over the grass in the shape of Walt Whitman. I'm reflecting on the meaning  
of belief and if you're going to get clear about commitment you're bound to  
summon echoes, a mélange of sound to ripple across land. Nothing has ever  
been so fierce as the patch of orange moss cleaving to this bedrock. You  
look at the calm bay beside the clear sky and you think: no one's ever seen  
two shades of blue so blatant, so earnest, so replete with union.

By Elizabeth Tannen

*Written on Mallard Island in mid-July*





I just returned from a week of songwriting at Rainy Lake. I was deeply inspired by my fellow musicians and the songs of wind, water and birds that wove through the long and fruitful days. In these harsh and heartbreaking times, I am convinced that beauty and sound can remind us of our innate connection with each other and all life.

--Barbara McAfee 7-20-16

## Summer 2016 In Images and Poetry



Mallard Songwriters take a break in the sun during their July week.

DZ

### Full Moon Over Mallard Island

yesterday also has its pine trees  
bird house of word-hoard  
and lip-stream for fawn and deer  
entering the narrow night in front

of you reassuring you  
that the dark hidden presence  
of tree roots  
like the singing enigmas

of wound-mew and valkyrie-crane  
can pull these islands closer together  
than so many cities cinched by roads  
until the rocks settle in

and you can touch the breast-cares of crayfish  
hear a white-throated sparrow  
whistling a last villanelle  
and later still feel the soft uproar

of lake waves beneath your bed  
scrubbing the old stone staircases  
leading down to her long pale robes  
of flying light

Jeanne Lutz

*August 12, 2016*



First Poppy of the summer!!

MSH



Gardeners Janet Wilkinson, Emily Larscheidt, and Laura Kelly repair a scallop messed up by the 2014 flood.



(Monahan Continued from page 1)

At the end of that 1980 file, following some detailed correspondence about various things, the researcher finds a small purple post-it note stating “Robert Hugh Monahan, MD, died Nov 30, 1980.”

By February, the board of directors had found its voice, and one finds a note of thanks to Marnee Monahan and a resolution to remember Hugh’s contribution to the Foundation. She soon stepped in to continue the family connection.

Jean Sanford Replinger, founder of the programs on Mallard Island, wrote about her: “It was at Marnee Monahan’s home that the Foundation held most of its up north meetings in the early 1980s. This is where, in 1983, I first came to know and love Marnee Monahan as we shared time on the board of directors.

“Marnee was clearly a lady. A loving mother and grandmother. Respectful of but not intimidated by a man’s world. At board meetings, it was clear her joyful, warm, welcoming way with each person as they arrived created—and in fact, sustained—fairly calm thoughtful meetings. Marnee not only welcomed but “coffeed” and then graciously fed us delicious meals. Yet Marnee, a clear thinker, also felt free to stop our suggestions by saying, ‘Now how are we going to do that, I want to know.’ Or, ‘I don’t understand the finances on that, so let’s be more specific.’ As her questions came from that genuinely sweet person... so surely a more clear response was forthcoming.

“As Mallard’s first Program Director, on week-ends between groups, often while waiting for the wash to finish (we did linen for the beds then), I would visit Marnee at Gold Shores. My time there in the hottest summer days included donning our swim suits and just sitting in the water and chatting. Our conversations, in or out of the water, were silly, philosophical, probing, insightful... and restorative. Being around Marnee was always restorative.”

~ ~ ~

**F**riendships built us; friendship sustains us. Let this part one of two in a series serve as a tribute to that element of lasting friendship that is tightly woven into the values and processes of the Oberholtzer Foundation. Part II will describe more family details about the Monahans and more about the legal “miracle” that came together as Mallard Island.

*This article was written by Beth Waterhouse with help from the earlier writing of both Alicia Johnson and Jean Sanford Replinger. She stole a sentence or two from Hugh’s son, David Monahan, who has written part two. Please note that Charles A. Kelly again serves on the current Oberholtzer Foundation board of directors.*



## MALLARD ISLAND

### THE 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.

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](mailto:beth@eober.org)

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#### **Layout Editor:**

Nance Kunkel, Blackduck, MN

#### **For more information, visit**

[www.eober.org](http://www.eober.org)

Watch your mailboxes for an invitation to join the **Oberholtzer Endowment Campaign**, and consider pledging for three years. If you love this place, also think about adding the Foundation to your estate planning. This is one way to make a lasting difference. We can also and will gladly accept stock donations. *Thank you!*

## Vigilant Forestry in the Review Islands

We are learning that foresters are key players when one owns and shares a few semi-wild islands! July 4 was one story. Four foresters “just happened” to be on the island for a week of tree “trimming” when straight-line winds snapped eleven trees on Mallard. They spent five days clearing, and careful skills are crucial when taking down fallen trees. We stepped away from that storm with huge gratitude.

Some of the same group of foresters returned September 11-17 for their annual tree-care week. Immediately, they hiked Hawk and Crow Islands to see what damages the July 4 storm had created there, and they report that about 150 trees were down or damaged by that same north-south microburst. The crew worked hard to get trees to the ground where they will decay, and where they are not leaning on healthy, upright trees. From Crow Island, they also saved a wheel from a 190-year-old old-growth White Pine. Well done!

Steve Thrune reminds us, “With any increased severity in storms, it’s obvious that we need to keep a close eye on these four islands and be more vigilant about the care of our trees.”

Many thanks to our great tree crew!

# Your Chance to Endow a Legacy

## *For the Love of a Place...*

Mallard Island is already protected—by a grandmother drum, by a national historic registry, with a conservation easement and by a hundred volunteers. This summer, Mallard Island was host to 138 men and women who came to write words, to write music, to take photographs, to sketch buildings, to study, and even to complete a libretto about Ober's life, soon to become an opera!

Founding board members such as the Monahans saved the islands, and they formed an organization in order to do so. They had some luck raising money, and since that time we have also benefited from Minnesota historic legacy funds to restore the glacial stone fireplace and other grants and gifts to keep the roofs solid and the floors dry. You know we have appealed to you each year for operating support, and we're grateful beyond words for your responses. Now, and for the next few years, there is a new way to support Mallard Island, and one we hope you will welcome.

This newsletter announces the public phase of an endowment campaign. An endowment will help to plan ahead, at last. It's not okay with the current board of directors to be worrying, financially, each time there is a flood or strong wind. Things happen, yes, but we need to know that we're balancing our budget and that we have some way to extend the financial health of the organization to meet unexpected demands.

**W**e also do not run an endowment campaign to stay exactly the same as we have always been. The Oberholtzer Foundation is a dynamic organization willing to look backward to its original trust document and to go forward to strengthen its resolve to work across cultures with new Anishinaabe leadership and friends. This move not only affirms the friendships that Ober held, but it comes with gratitude for the labor that helped to build Mallard Island and for the spirits that have protected it.

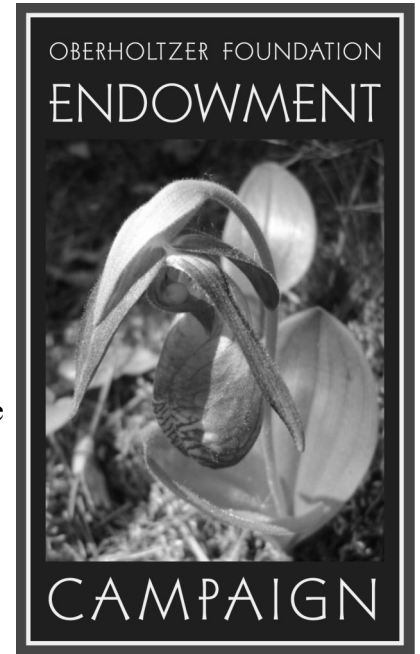
The board of directors has set a goal to raise \$500,000 in endowment funds. These are funds that will not be used up each year, but that will be invested to produce annual earnings in perpetuity. We're building a new source of revenue for future annual budgets. And... Good news! The board has already approached initial donors and together they have raised \$318,000 (pledges to date) toward this goal. This month, we are appealing to you to help us complete the campaign.

The organization that came together with shared inheritances and shared values is growing up a little. We now also have a new strategic plan, finalized in September, that more clearly sets annual goals and ideas to reach those goals year by year.

With the endowment, we will better secure our finances to keep our budgets balanced, as we still commit to live within our means. The endowment will help us plan for roof work, rather than wait for leaks. It will help us pay for authentic local materials, to match our historic buildings, though we will still and always use each piece of wood several times! The endowment will say to the world, in the north country and everywhere, that this organization means to stick around. We are committed to sharing the islands, archives, and values in ways that will continue to make a lasting difference year after year.

Watch your mailbox for a colorful endowment brochure as your invitation to join this campaign. Think about it and reply in any way that you can. You are already part of this legacy, and you have been now for some time. We're grateful for all you've done for Ober's Islands with your labor, your study, your art or your dollars. See what you think about joining this endowment effort as well.

*Thank you!*





## MALLARD ISLAND

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

### **Eighteenth Annual Oberholtzer Fall Gathering Saturday, October 29<sup>th</sup>**

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

When? October 29<sup>th</sup>, Saturday,  
from 2:00 to 6:00 pm

#### **Please Come!**

Bring songs, poems, paintings, photographs or readings—all about (or written on) Ober's Mallard Island! Let's make that island come to life!

You are invited, once again, to a gathering of Mallard souls and creativity. What *happens* on our tiny island? Come hear songs or poems, see paintings or photos inspired by this island, this summer or any year. You'll enjoy the traditional impromptu talent show reflecting the ripple effect of time on Mallard. Come as audience, participant or both! The program will begin 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. Directions: Take the 46<sup>th</sup> Street exit off of 35W, travel west on 46<sup>th</sup> to Harriet and north to 41<sup>st</sup> Street. Or take Lyndale to 41<sup>st</sup> and east to Harriet.*



Gardeners know how to have fun!!

2016 Photo by Jacki Comito