

Tay-tah-pah-swe-wi-tang

Compiled by Beth Waterhouse with editing assistance of Billy's family: grand-daughter Nancy Jones and her son, Pebaamibines (Dennis) Jones.

Ober was new to the region and was committed to becoming a canoe explorer and to learning as much as he could learn about the Quetico-Superior area. Billy Magee was a buyer for the Hudson Bay Company and knew about every trapper—and every small lake—in the region and how to travel the area in winter or summer. They met in 1906, and the rest is history.

This article will share, with as much detail as we can find, the life and attributes of Tay-tah-pah-swe-wi-tang or Billy Magee. It is “about time” that we dedicate the cover of an issue of this newsletter to this fine man, adventurer and canoeist. Oberholtzer spent much of his later life trying to learn more about Billy. Here we will share words from some of the people Ober interviewed, including Billy's sister, Mrs. Notaway, of the Seine River region.

Born in the springtime at Grand Portage, Tay-tah-pah-swe-wi-tang was given his beautiful name by his mother. Some say it means “far distant thunder,” and one story interprets it as “the rolling thunder that comes before the storm.” That feeling was put to a name by his mother, Meta-so-bik.

The life of Tay-tah-pah-swe-wi-tang clearly spanned the time from when the Anishinaabe fully lived off the land to the years when they could only partly survive from nature alone. Born around 1861, Billy was four when the family moved from Grand Portage. He lived in the Rainy Lake area to May 1, 1938.

Mrs. Notaway, reminiscing about her younger brother in interviews in the mid 1940s, tells what she could remember. She recalled carrying him on the long journey from Grand Portage. She said Billy loved to swim, and swam well by the age of five (“dog-fashion”)—he was very strong and well as a child. She told of a time when Billy tried to make a snow slide and slid down it all day long on a toboggan. In his early life, he wore buckskin clothing in the winters and <the boys> seldom wore clothes at all during the summertime. Boys never cut their hair, so by the age of 15 or so, they had long braids.

Billy had a strong relationship with his stepfather, Ki-we-an-kosh-kunk. He learned to hunt and trap from him and from his uncles. Billy danced, too, and his sister related that he “danced to his stepfather's song.”

Mrs. Nottaway was the older sister by seven years, and Billy was then six or seven years older than his cousin, Johnnie Whitefish. The cousins knew each other as boys and played together. They had bows and arrows when very small and Billy had a shotgun by about the age of eight. Billy began trapping then, using wooden traps. He learned with wooden traps “so that he could make his own clothes.” They wore rabbit skin coats in the winter, rabbit mittens too. And they slept in rabbit skin blankets at night.

Billy became an excellent canoeist, traveling long distances. He would canoe
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In the words of Ernest Oberholtzer...

Taken from the ending of his “declaration of trust” document. These thoughts were one paragraph of his footnotes to the official documents that set up the Oberholtzer Foundation in 1964.

“Furthermore, whatever contributes toward solving the great problem of the American Indian and of the waste of his human gifts and of his wilderness endowment is pertinent to this Trust and worthy of scrutiny for remedies based on wiser policies. The wasteful and unseemly conflict both in human values and in the use of primitive natural resources is world-wide. Tolerance, understanding, recognition that all races, out of their special genius and experience, have something to give for the common good were never more needed. Therefore any outstanding contribution in the world that seeks recognition of primitive virtues and of their historical physical basis and thus opens new vistas for collaboration between the dominant race and the minority, submerged or outcast race, may to that extent become pertinent to the objectives of this Trust...”



Billy Magee and Ernest Oberholtzer
Courtesy of the E.C. Oberholtzer Foundation

Dear Readers,

The cover of this newsletter has featured friends of Ernest Oberholtzer for some years now. It began with canoeing partners, included friends from the Ranier community and friends who worked with Ober in Washington DC. We wrote about Charlie Friday, Ober's friend and carpenter, a stone-mason, whose spirit is one that guards Mallard Island today. We finally had the good sense to write a three-part series about the life of Frances Elizabeth Andrews—a key companion to Ober and a fellow wilderness preservationist. I am amazed that it took us until now to feature the man who Oberholtzer himself was always trying to study—Billy Magee. Read for yourself if we have learned enough about this man Tay-tah-pah-swe-wi-tang, or if we have just begun to crack the surface of a long, hard life that spanned a time of cultural loss for the Anishinaabe.

As you continue to read future issues of this newsletter, you (and I) will get to learn a few more words of Ojibwe. We can now practice the name of our medicine drum! (See page 3.) Last October, the Foundation Board of Directors strengthened its mission statement and put “indigenous peoples” back into the center of it. I'm honored to be part of an organization that is willing to go all the way back to its founding documents and use its 21st Century eyes and ears to interpret them to what the world is today. This is how an organization stays vibrant. It's akin to how a plant can last forever, given soil and sunshine, by letting its knowledge go into the seed, letting the sun and rain of each year bring it forth again in different patterns, and knowing that the genetic material will slowly change as the conditions ask it to evolve.

Please note in this newsletter several key “facts of life” for the Foundation. The board is in transition—several key members end their terms this year—yet soon three new members join the group. The staffing is like it was last year, with two summer program directors (Prudence and Mairi) joining me (and a great group of caretakers) to cover the island summer. Together we will manage an historic site and about 130 visitors or volunteers. The summer roster features three fine new program weeks, see center spread. And last but not least, we welcome Fiona, our new webmaster.

Thanks for your loyal reading eyes and for joining all who foster this legacy.

-- Beth Waterhouse

Fiona Reid on Mallard Island



Introducing Fiona Reid

Our New Webmaster

Hello! I'm Fiona and I am your new Webmaster! I am a graphic design student at the University of Minnesota Duluth. Art has always been my passion, and I love everything from digital arts to ceramics. I've been up to Mallard Island twice a year for almost my whole life. My parents knew Ted and Roddy Hall and traveled up to Rainy Lake each spring and fall to open or close the island and to do repair work. So I have spent many months of my childhood running back and forth on the island (sometimes tripping on roots), climbing rocks, and embracing it to the fullest. It's a truly special place, and I'm so lucky to have it in my life. Being on Mallard Island has a way of intensifying the creative process; something about being in such a peaceful environment with wonderful people goes a long way.

Fiona helps us maintain www.eober.org. Please visit this site.



MALLARD ISLAND

THE OBERHOLZER 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.

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

There you will find back issues of this newsletter as well as annual reports for the organization, guidelines for summer programs, history and photos of the island, friends and writings of Ernest Oberholtzer, and much more.

Please support this publication, as you are able. Please also think about adding the Oberholtzer Foundation to your estate planning. This foundation has existed since 1964, and it holds four Rainy Lake islands in conservation easement in perpetuity. We can (and gladly will) receive donations of stock. To learn more or to visit the island this summer or a summer in the future, please contact the executive director or a board member.

MINISINAANAKWADOOK

By Pebaamibines

When I first visited the island back in 1988, I was enchanted with the island and all of the spirit inhabitants. The Front House was where I had my first experience with one of the spirits of the island. My Anishinaabe upbringing has protocols that require me to go back every spring to make a spirit offering and to honor that experience. As I continued to grow in my awareness of the spiritual inhabitants of the island, my attention turned to the drum.

I am a member of the Nigigoonsiminikaaning First Nation and my family has relatives in the neighboring community of the Seine River First Nation. Both communities are situated on Rainy Lake. Ober frequently visited these two communities, and in our family stories this is where I heard that the drum may have its origins.

My people have a spiritual connection to the land, and it is through this connection that I decided to find out the origin of the drum. In ceremony I asked “Aandi gaa-bi-onji-ayaad a’aw dewe’igan miinawaa aaniin ezhini-kaazod a’aw dewe’igan?” “Where did the drum originate from and what is the drum’s name?” I was told that the drum has made her home on the island and she belongs on the island. Her spirit name is *Minisinaanakwadook* and denotes where she wants to reside.

The etymology of her name provides insights on her origin and purpose. *Minis* is the Anishinaabe word for island, *aanakwad* is in reference to clouds and the suffix *-ook* denotes that the name carrier is female. The drum then is a grandmother, and her name may translate to the-island-inhabitor-that-helps-us-connect-to-creation-through-the-observation-of-clouds.

This drum is a grandmother spirit and she may be called Nookomis in Anishinaabemowin. She is the true hostess or true care taker of the islands. It is through her that all connections are made. All one has to do is offer her a pinch of tobacco, sit quietly with her and listen to her. It is in quiet meditation that one learns about the connection that we all have with creation.

Pebaamibines (Dennis) Jones serves on the Oberholtzer Foundation board of directors and has hosted language development experiences on Mallard Island since 1988.



Photo by John Ratzloff

DREAMS OF TIME

Our first morning on the island, a book offers itself: *Days Without Time* by the naturalist Edwin Way Teale. Dear Ober, we welcome this emissary of your library, taste a good-hearted bittersweetness in stories of a cat taught to swim on Long Island, a beloved long-lived mud turtle, a hurt merganser nursed back to health in a bathtub.

Books are also dreams of having time to read them. You were a busy man, thanks to whose efforts

this island is not under water. Did you do more than skim this volume among your thousands? Browsing it, we too become keepers of your happiness, that dream of endless time you must have knowingly unpacked with each crate of books, fulfilled, if not in days, in spirit.

—Thomas R. Smith

written in a Poet and Song group in summer 2009.

Mallard Island Program Weeks Summer of 2016

...quotes are from hosts

The summer begins with ceremony this year, and a few days of quiet and fasting. Following that, we welcome volunteers to two weeks of work to ready the island and its gardens for the upcoming summer. Here are this summer's programs:

June 12-18 **Oberholtzer Opera Workshop** – A libretto is nearing completion, and the opera compositions are progressing. The group hopes to explore more deeply the Native American perspective of this opera about Ober.

June 19-25 **Screenwriters** – Accomplished screenwriters are, by nature and necessity, collaborators. “The group aspires to work on newly conceived material and to discuss strategies for successful placement and production of creative screenplays.”



Joel Kroenke, Dalyce Elliott, and Yata Peinovich play music up on the hill west of Ober's House. 2015 Photo by Kathy Olson.



Photo by Kathy Olson

June 26 to July 2 **Archives Week** – hosted by the Foundation. We continue to care for Ober's book collection in a detailed process of inventory, cleaning and repair. This year, volunteers will also focus on the map collection.

July 10-16 **Songwriting** with a specific focus on songs inspired by nature, and with workshops that “allow participants to share ideas and develop musical and lyrical images that bring out the spirit of Ober and his legacy on Mallard Island.”

July 17-23 **Nature/Nurture Women Poets** -- gathering to read, to write, and to build community that endures beyond their island time. These women will pursue individual projects (as poets and educators) and also engage in afternoon workshops, writing together.

July 24-30 **Landscape Architects** An historical landscape architect, with recent experience guiding conservation and development in Voyageurs Park, brings an international group of landscape architects, cultural geographers and landscape historians “to study and document Oberholtzer's delicate yet impressive imprint of landscape architecture on Mallard Island.”



Photo by Nance Kunkel

July 31-Aug 6 **Eco-Artists** This unique combination of artists and musicians also work as professors and curators. They will create, collaborate, and exchange artistic ideas during their week on the island.

August 7-13 **Science and Art: An Intersectional Conversation** “Mallard Island is an *ecotone*, a transition area where different communities meet. This group brings together artistic, indigenous and scientific perspectives on the subject of climate change, with an emphasis on the voices missing from the discussion.”

August 21-27 **Anishinaabe Week** – “Following the new initiative of having more First Nation involvement on Ober’s Island,” this is a week of relationship building and educating First Nation members about Ober’s legacy at Mallard.



Pasque flower by Nance Kunkel

August 28-Sept 3 **Nanaadawi’iwe Nagamo** One intention is to rekindle the connection between plants and humankind. A core group of Ojibwe teachers, a composer, a hospice therapist and a filmmaker host a group to “begin a journey of re-awakening” assisted by the primal life force in plants, “each with its unique song.”



September 4-10 **Individual Artists and Special Projects Week** – hosted by the Oberholtzer Foundation. Artists bring their own body of work; special projects may wish to delve into the archives. Here is a time for newcomers to practice their art, and for those who know Mallard to share stories and creative island time.

For more information, or to apply for a work week or artists’ week, call Beth Waterhouse at (952) 401-0591 or email her at < beth@eober.org >



photo by Beth Waterhouse

Frances E. Andrews Building Endowment Fund

A third anonymous gift has again increased the principal now held in this fund as a way to ensure Mallard Island repair and maintenance dollars for future years. Thank you, from all who honor both Ober’s legacy and that of his good friend, Frances Elizabeth Andrews, for the gift. This endowment fund now equals \$60,000.



(Tay-tah-pah-swe-wi-tang continued from page 1)

—from Rainy to Superior, for instance, “Fifteen days Seine River to Grand Portage,” his sister recalled. Tay-tah-pah-swe-wi-tang was then able to carry 203 pounds, “two hundred-pound sacks and three pounds of lard,” as she remembers. He was known to work in lumber camps, haul stones, and buy furs for the Hudson Bay Company, often out of Fort Frances. He guided, later in life, sharing his knowledge of the rivers and lakes. Ober once called him “famous among the Indians of the north.”

It was Ober’s good luck to meet Billy Magee, even better luck that Billy guided him around the Rainy Lake watershed for some 3,000 miles in the summer of 1909. Ober recalled telling his guide and companion, “Now Billy, I want to see everything. I don’t care how hard it is,” and according to Ober, “we went into places through which I could never have found my way.” With Billy’s steady paddle behind him, Ober captured notable photographs of moose. By 1912, when Oberholtzer dreamed of the far north journey to Hudson Bay, he knew who his companion must be.

Ober knew that he needed Tay-tah-pah-swe-wi-tang in order to attempt the barrenland trip. He needed his strength, his ability to build a fire in any conditions, and his excellence when canoeing rapids. He wired Louis Hamel, trader at Mine Centre, and described (talking through him to Billy) how extensive and grueling this trip might be. “In due time,” wrote Ober, “before I left England, I got his (Billy’s) reply. Louis Hamel wrote and said that he’d explained it all to Billy and that Billy had replied: ‘Guess ready go end earth.’”

This might have been a statement of devotion, or it might have been a statement with an air of resignation. Readers of Ober’s journals in *Bound for the Barrens* (2012) often discuss the nature of this friendship between the two paddlers: Magee and Oberholtzer. What we know is that they needed each other absolutely. Neither without the other would have made it home in early November. It is also quite clear that without Billy’s great strength and willingness to paddle alone at times, Ober could not have captured map notes, journal entries or most of the excellent photographs that came home with them in November 1912.

One account says that Billy’s step-father died when he was paddling with Ober for five months that year. His step-father was a very old man, but Billy thought the same of him as his father, and he felt very badly that the old man had died in his absence. Maybe it was this loneliness, maybe it was the long barrenland journey, but something caused Billy to marry after the 1912 journey and to live a more village-bound life after that. He would visit Mallard Island—he even named the Bird House in 1926—but there were few canoe trips with Oberholtzer in those last decades of the life of Tay-tah-pah-swe-wi-tang.

In the spring of 1938, Billy died at night on the first point west of the portage into Turtle Lake. He had paddled to that point in the spring as soon as the lake opened. He could hardly walk, and for three days he could not talk while there either. Joe Paddock’s biography reports via the Mine Centre storekeeper (Edgar Bliss), that “I judged from the Indians” that Billy had a stroke. He died at midnight, and families of three friends were camping with him: John Boshkegin, Jackpot, and Barney Palmer. There were four days of mourning after Billy died. Two nights they all stayed in the wigwam with his body. Early in May—the ice not fully out—they buried Tay-tah-pah-swe-wi-tang there, precisely because it looks out over the lake.



Resources:

- 1944 journal notes written by Ernest Oberholtzer when he spent five winter weeks on the shores of Bad Vermillion Lake.

- Notes taken at Bad Vermillion in 1948, an interview with Mrs. Notaway.

Bound for the Barrens (2012) published by the Oberholtzer Foundation. Edited by Jean Sanford Replinger with Nancy Paddock (Copies available through the Foundation)

- *Keeper of the Wild* (2001) by Joe Paddock, MNHS Press.

- www.eober.org See Oberholtzer / Address Book / List.

To Contact Us:

The Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation winters at 818 Third Avenue #305, Excelsior, Minnesota 55331 and migrates to Mallard Island each summer. Phone: (952) 401-0591 or cell # (952) 607-6879. Email: beth@eober.org. Visit our web site at www.eober.org. On facebook, enter “Mallard Island in Rainy Lake.” To donate, please send a check to the foundation address or enter Oberholtzer’s name on GiveMN.org. All donations are welcomed and spent wisely.

Thank you!

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 DeLaitre (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.

For the summer of 2016, our summer program directors will again be Mairi Doerr (Cannon Falls) and Prudence Johnson (Minneapolis).

** These five long-standing board members end their terms in June. There are not enough words of thanks for their dedication to this legacy. Our October newsletter will feature the profiles of incoming board members, or watch the website for news.

Dear Friends,

Another great year for the Oberholtzer Foundation. Our financial picture was positive—we ended the year in the black. Thanks so much for all your financial support and for 2400 documented hours of volunteer help. We could not make it without your effort. We know where we stand today—more importantly, we seem to be heading in the right direction.

An old friend once told me that if I saw a new trail that I was not familiar with, I should follow it to the point of knowing its surroundings. In my younger day (a long time ago) I paddled a canoe over 1500 miles to the Arctic Ocean—now *that* was the unknown. Today the Oberholtzer Foundation walks its path with many challenges, so all the friends and assistance are much appreciated.

In 2015, we re-built some floors and walls as we finished cleaning up from the 2014 flood. We even raised the Wannigan! This took amazing effort and again significant dollars, but we are delighted with the results.

The Oberholtzer board of directors also did some thinking and goal-setting late in 2015, and we expanded our mission statement. Our new mission reads as follows:

*The Ernest 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.*

We are proud of this, too. We think it takes us closer to an original intent. And we will follow this mission now, to see where it takes us.

As always, we do have a few big plans for 2016. We hope to re-side Ober's Big House with the cedar slab lumber procured two summers ago. This re-finishes the house just as it was built seven decades ago. It took us some time to find the correct material to mend these walls, and we wanted to do it right. We will also continue to work on the flood-ruined gardens down near Japanese House. On it goes—always something.

It is so rewarding to work with so many enthusiastic volunteers—and our work weeks are already almost full for the coming season. We look forward to the challenges ahead, knowing that the accomplishments will be rewarding.

Stay well, my friends. All the best in 2016. Seek the joy of being alive. We truly enjoy traveling this path along with each of you.

Tim Heinle
Board Treasurer



Photo by Mary Swalla Holmes

2015 Gifts in Honor or Memory of...

Several gifts were given, this past year, in memory of Leo S. Anderson. Thank you to the Coop Educational Service Agency, to Barbara J. Anderson, Judith L. Specht, Kate and Kevin O'Hara, and Vicki and Kenneth Warren.

Bill Schaefer made a donation in memory of Janet Pearson.

Byrne and Carole Johnson gave the Foundation a gift in memory of Ruth Anderson.

George and Ruthie Simmons gave a gift in honor of Tim Heinle.

Sheree Peterson gave a gift in honor of Jean Sanford Replinger.

Thank you!



MALLARD ISLAND

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Tay-tah-pah-swe-wi-tang (or Billy Magee) camping in the Rainy Lake watershed. ~ Ernest Oberholtzer and Billy camped and canoed some three thousand miles in 1909. "Of all the Indians I have known in my life," Oberholtzer said, "with the single exception of his older sister, Billy was the most wonderful." -- Joe Paddock's *Keeper of the Wild* (2001) page 47.

