



ERNEST C. OBERHOLTZER FOUNDATION

MALLARD ISLAND

RAINY LAKE, MINNESOTA

*Artwork by Gene Ritchie Monahan*

## FALL NEWSLETTER 2022

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### Mission

*We foster Ober's legacy and north  
 woods home as a source of  
 inspiration, renewal, and  
 connection to Indigenous Peoples,  
 kindred spirits, and the natural  
 world.*  
*Gi-bezhig-oomin*

### Floods Past and Present



*Photo of Frances Andrews and Ober from the Ober Foundation Archive*

June 30, 1950

Dear Miss Andrews:

I am sorry to tell you that the flood situation at the Mallard has become progressively worse. The front cabin, which you had hoped to occupy this spring and through the summer, is not only awash as it was earlier this month when you saw it but now has water standing in the interior rooms. We have taken up the hardwood floor to try and salvage it. The water has soaked half way up the walls, and the front porches are battered in by the waves. An east storm may easily destroy the building completely, substantial though it is.

You already know that all the other buildings on the island, which we use for the service of our guests, have long been entirely

(cont pg 3)

## Dear Readers,

During my first year in this job there was a drought and smoke filled skies. Year two brought a historic flood. After heavy snow falls, and a late ice out followed by heavy rains and saturated ditches/ground, Rainy Lake was inundated with water.



This was not Mallard Island's first flood - there was the 1950 flood and the more recent 2014 flood. During worst of the flood, I read the letter I chose as this issue's lead article, which Ober wrote to Frances E. Andrews about the flooding he was experiencing on Mallard in 1950 and its impact on the buildings. I realized that the same letter could have been written today.

At the worst point of the flood, we had no power, no water filtration and no useable outhouses. Once the waters receded, volunteers got to work on clean up and repair. Our special historic place is slowly coming back to where she was, but there is work left to be done.



We hired Kennedy Electric to rewire the buildings that were impacted by the water and get rid of low lying parts of our electrical system. Our system is now flood resilient and up to state code. Thanks to Kurt for fitting us in so quickly and for your great service!

One big takeaway for us from this flood; old friends and new made donations, offered to help with clean up, and told friends about the flood to get them involved. We could not do what we do without all of you!



We had to cancel our program weeks and we lost an important source of revenue, while paying expenses related to flood damage. This makes our fall gathering even more important this year. And, we have much in store for you!

You can participate in ceremony led by Pebaamibines, enjoy live music, bid on items in our unique and exciting silent auction, which includes books donated by many Minnesota authors, including Garrison Keillor! Garrison got very creative in supporting the foundation this year with his donations! You will hear the status of our flood recovery efforts plus we will reveal an exciting new initiative that the foundation is undertaking in the Falls. Please see page 3 for details on the gathering. Thank you for your support!

Rebecca Otto

(Floods past and present, cont from pg 1)

out of commission. We have no kitchen and dining room, no mechanical refrigerator, no cook stove, and no ice. This situation has already lasted six weeks and is growing daily worse. The present prospect is that the flood will last most of the summer and that in any case none of my buildings for guests will be inhabitable again this year, if ever. And, of course, the gardens where we grew our fruit and vegetables, are many feet underwater.

Very few places on Rainy Lake are now suitable for any kind of use. Neither, of course, are there any docks or landing places. And the lake is dangerous for navigation on account of the huge amount of drift-wood. Neither are there any high-ways for the use of automobiles.

My advice therefore to anyone planning to visit Rainy Lake this year is to keep away. Conditions are not only trying in the extreme but in most cases hazardous or impossible. This is particularly so at my own home, where I have lived these last 33 years. It would not be fair to you or any of my other friends to let you come here now expecting any hospitality, and I certainly could not expect the slightest compensation. I have a whole crew here helping me, but think their time is fully occupied day and night trying to save something out of the wreckage. Therefore I am returning herewith your check of June 27 for \$600.00, which you forwarded as a rental payment for the season of 1950. I am sorry that this is necessary, but of course the circumstances are much worse now than when you offered payment earlier.

If you do come north on account of your Deer Island property, of course I'll do anything that I can to provide some sort of haven for you or to take care of you in other ways; but as a place to come for rest or health or work of your own, it would be difficult to imagine.

Sincerely yours,

Ernest C. Oberholtzer



Join Us  
THE OBER  
FOUNDATION  
FALL  
GATHERING  
OCTOBER 29 2022  
2:00 - 4:00  
WARGO NATURE  
CENTER  
7701 MAIN ST  
LINO LAKES, MN 55038



*Please join us for our fall gathering! It's a time to reconnect with old friends and make new ones. Come enjoy live music, experience ceremony led by Pebaamibines, learn about flood recovery efforts on Mallard, bid on exciting items in our silent auction, and hear about a new initiative we are undertaking in the Falls!*

*Please RSVP at [rebecca@eober.org](mailto:rebecca@eober.org) or at 651-867-4649.*

# Historic Flood of 2022



Cedarbark House - water lapped into the windows



Cooks and Pump House

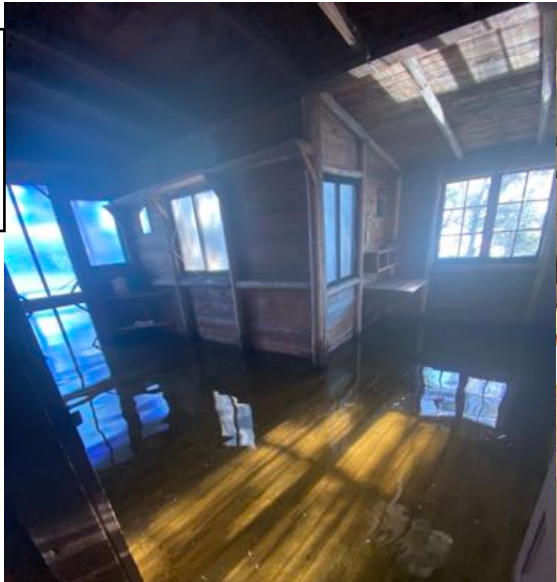


Japanese House - late afternoon light created a beautiful reflection



Cedarbark House firebox full of water

Front House east porch



Wannigan taking on water



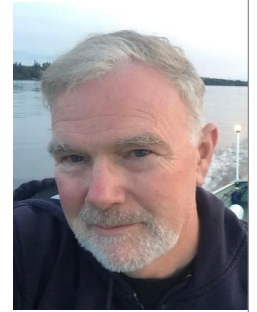
Library/ Book House - it was emptied before the water reached the floors.



Pump House appliances lifted to the ceiling!



Cedarbark House during the flood



## President's Column

The year 2022 is closing fast, and we look forward to the sense of normalcy after the COVID-19 pandemic and the new 2022 flood. When I looked back on my Winter newsletter column, I was reminded of the enthusiasm and excitement we all had about bringing our policies and bylaws up to date, working on our strategic plan and looking forward to 2022; optimistic the next year will be better than ever, the year we would all be back to normal.

Then in April, the lake levels were rising rapidly; all of our buildings took on water except for four. At the worst point of the flood, Mallard was effectively three islands. Our electrical system had to be shut down for safety. Our outhouses were un-useable.

The flood was extremely difficult to watch for those present and to endure. At times we had to just have faith to keep us going, it was tough to see and tougher still to imagine the destructive possibilities; weather, wind and waves from the wrong direction could have a big impact on Mallard.

I am reminded of times on rough rivers and lakes, where the cold weather, wind and waves have a vote in one's existence. What do we do when our canoe swamps in rough water and all seems lost? We keep the canoe straight, head for shallow water and start bailing for all we're worth. We did the same this summer on Mallard.

We were not to be weighed down with doom and gloom! Through the tremendous efforts of our board, Executive Director and staff, volunteers, and supportive contractors, we took prudent action and made a tremendous effort to successfully save a large portion of Ober's book collection and artifacts. We moved forward with ambitious maintenance projects full-speed without a moment to waste.

A couple of weeks ago, Mike Reid took the board around Mallard. We viewed the buildings and all that had been accomplished this summer post flood. Our ED showed us the new flood-resilient electrical system that is also up to state code. We viewed the Wannigan - it was almost ready to support us once again.

That said, we have work to get done to reach our goal; a fully operational programming season next year. We're planning to leverage every committee, volunteer and dollar towards achieving that goal, so we emerge renewed, more capable, and better than we were before.

I would like to thank two outstanding people; we are losing two of our most long-standing board members, whose steadfast presence is like the towering white pines on Mallard. For many, Diane Tessari and Mike Reid were the face of the Foundation; at Mallard landing, in our consciousness, on work weeks, committees, when we admire the craft and capabilities evident in each of our buildings and landscapes. I'm sure there will be lots to say about these two at our upcoming Fall Gathering event...bring your stories!

George Glazier

## Letter from the Treasurer

What an extraordinary year it has been! The transition made in the Rainy River Basin has never been this impactful since Ober experienced it in 1950, where he too had to shut down his operations due to the delicate state of Mallard that summer. We are facing a new reality that this island home is vulnerable, and we will need to adapt.



The resulting flood this year also proved to be a challenge both logistically, financially and in maintaining the mental health of its caretakers. Racing against the clock to protect buildings and their contents, and taking whatever action was necessary to reduce damage, proved to be a stressful time. Many of us monitored the weather, just hoping the winds would not pick up and wash everything away. It was physically and emotionally exhausting. The flood not only drew people from all over to help but it brought us together in protecting a sacred island. I cannot say enough of the volunteers that stepped up in their efforts. Those of you that could not physically join us proactively jumped right in to pay for all those expenses! All we had to do was ask and you saved the day. I know many of you lost much sleep over the events and found the regular social media reports reassuring.



Many of you also saw how remarkably beautiful the resulting photos were during this time and despite knowing enormity of the coming restoration, it didn't disguise just how stunning those islands and waters are, showing us yet another configuration of the land and water scape. Add in the absolute quiet of the lake and you had a new sense of solitude with our natural surroundings.

I write this letter not only as the treasurer but also someone who has had a long relationship with the physical structures that Ober built up over the years. To this end we have been particularly focused on not only the safety of the buildings but also maintaining a nationally recognized historical site, to be kept in a state that looks like it did in Ober's day. Restoring structures requires research and careful reconstruction. As you can imagine, this year we have had plenty of damage and restoration has begun in earnest.

Since my last letter to you, we have faced a significant drop in our investment earnings due to the financial climate, and with programming revenue almost non-existent this year, our budget has been hit hard. This is only the beginning of our recovery effort where we will need support from you. As with many of our former challenges, nothing was as big as what Ober faced in saving not only his piece of granite but the entire Rainy River Basin! Let's keep that and many other memories alive for generations.

Michael Reid

Fall 2022

## Thank You!

### Volunteers

Amy and Alan Boelk  
Ann De La Vergne  
Mairi Doerr  
Rob Donish  
Craig Fernholz  
Tim and Lisa Gerlach  
Danny Gillespie  
Elizabeth Glazier  
John Glazier  
George Glazier  
David Harrington  
Randy and Robin Hilfer  
Prudence Johnson  
Pebaam Jones  
Doug Kelley  
Jean E. Kelly  
Nance Kunkel  
Ward Merrill

Shawn Otto  
Pebaam  
Laura Pawlacyk  
Michael Reid  
David Rolloff  
Sherry Rovig  
Pam and Darrell Rundell  
Eric and Lucy Rundell  
Peggy Smith  
Danielle Sosin  
Jerry Thrune  
Steve and Elaine Thrune  
Wyman Weinbeck  
Jerry Williams  
Nick Zurich

### In-Kind Donations

Chapman & Cutler  
John Glazier  
George Glazier  
Prudence Johnson  
Jean E. Kelly  
Nance Kunkel  
Sherry Rovig  
Peggy Smith  
Diane Tessari  
Steve & Elaine Thrune  
Wyman Weinbeck



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