



ERNEST C. OBERHOLTZER FOUNDATION

MALLARD ISLAND

RAINY LAKE, MINNESOTA

Artwork by Gene Ritchie Monahan

## FALL NEWSLETTER 2023

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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*

## Discovering Ober

by Erin Ruffin



It was my first night on Mallard Island. We had finished dinner in the wannigan, said our goodnights, and I'd wandered to the edge of the lake as the setting sun soaked the sky in citrusy oranges and pinks. Loons called their eerie songs, bats dive-bombed, a turtle slowly surfaced for a drink of air, and a wild idea invaded my thoughts. Was I actually... dead? Had I somehow died unexpectedly and passed into the next life? Because Mallard Island at that moment was as close to any kind of heaven I had ever imagined: secluded and quiet, fertile, diverse in flora and fauna, spiritually rich, rustic, full of books, maps, and art. My phone hadn't buzzed in hours. I could feel my nervous system catching up to itself. I couldn't remember the last time I'd felt this at ease.

My crazy thought was eventually quelled when I got a bar of cell phone service and checked in with my daughter back at home in Los Angeles. Ok, I'm still alive and this place is real.

I arrived on Mallard Island at just the right time. It was June this past summer during the Writer's Week when I had the great privilege of staying in this special place. As an Iowa native and a reader of many environmentalist writers, I had come across the name Ernest Oberholtzer, a fellow Iowan, but was vague on any details of his life. What I thought was going to be a week writing in nature became a week of writing in

(cont pg. 3)

## Dear Reader,

What a joy it was to be able to hold program weeks this summer on Mallard Island after last year's historic flood. We started the spring with putting cabins back together, installing new mattresses, and moving the other 3/4 of the book collection from the old Library building to the new space in the Backus Center.



### Thank You!

I want to thank all of you who have shared your time, talent, and treasure with the Ober Foundation! Your financial donations helped us through a difficult year. So many volunteers shared their skills to help us repair, repaint, recover, and put our flooded cabins back together. Thanks to a generous donor, we were also able to complete the rewiring of all the buildings on Mallard Island. This work makes our cabins safer and gets rid of the need for many extension cords.

### Program Weeks

I'm so pleased with all the meaningful program weeks we had this year! We hosted a group of Indigenous women working on water laws in both Canada and the US; the Stewards of the Wilderness week; a week for professors working on sustainability and psychology; a week for leaders from the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy; and an Individual Projects week that included a terrific group of artists, an academic from LSU who was working on a piece about Mardy Murie, and a journalist who was completing his manuscript for the Minnesota Historical Society Press on a book about the Boundary Waters, which will come out in May. I was so pleased that we could provide all of these people time on Mallard to connect, engage in their creative work, and inspire others.

### Join us for the Fall Gathering!

Our Fall Gathering is a fun chance to reconnect and support the work of the Foundation. It will be held at Wargo Nature Center from 2-4:30 on October 28. I hope to see you there! After putting out a call for quilts for our new beds on Mallard, we received many handmade quilts, which we will display at the Fall Gathering. Our special musical guest will be Doug Wood. We'll have a silent auction, light snacks, and many wonderful and interesting attendees. Come see old friends and new! Beth Waterhouse will be there to honor long-time foundation family member and 15-year board member Bob Hilke, who passed away this summer. If you cannot attend, we hope you will still participate in the online silent auction at <https://bit.ly/ober2023> or by using the QR code at right starting Oct 22.

Rebecca



**(Discovering Ober**, from pg. 1)

nature *and* getting to know this person, Ober, through his books and photographs, through the stories that are told around the communal dinner table, through the cabins and building structures so thoughtfully constructed *into* the island instead of on top of it.

My background as a writer is a long and winding one. I grew up in the countryside near Iowa City, reading voraciously, filling pages and pages of journals, a dedicated pen pal to my fellow letter writers. Despite my deep connection to the Iowa landscape and the little patches of wilderness I could find still standing between the vast fields of agriculture, I left as soon as I could to attend college in New York City. Later, I moved again to London where I founded a travel magazine called Boat Magazine. This work took me all over the world, from Sarajevo, Bosnia to Kyoto, Japan to Torshavn, Faroe Islands. I wrote and edited stories about the culture, art, history, and politics of these places, put them into magazines that were sold internationally, and then moved onto the next location and did it all over again. From London I moved to Los Angeles, where I currently live, work and raise my daughter. A lot has changed in the past few years, including the core of my work. It's gone from being fixated on far-flung places to more local, fine-detailed, and environmentally focused.

The week I was able to spend on Mallard Island was a serendipitous moment in my life, hence the immediate existential question it provoked. Coming from Los Angeles, a city that feels to me at dangerous odds with the natural world, landing in this refuge was instant nourishment to my overstimulated self. I settled into my temporary home—Ober's room in "Big House"—which I chose because of the sheer number of books inside. I spent my mornings writing, and in the afternoons, I would take a break to look through the books in Ober's collection. This gave me a sense of who he was and what he cared about. I noticed many naturalist writers, volumes of history, books on indigenous cultures, and a lot of poetry. I pulled Ober's beautiful copy of *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman off his shelf and read it cover to cover for the first time ever. I read a collection of Emily Dickenson's early letters. I read a book by Dorothy Brett about her friendship with D.H. Lawrence, focused on the years they spent building a creative colony in New Mexico which struck me as an interesting parallel to the way Ober inhabited the Review Islands with friends and artists moving through, building unique and inspiring spaces for them all to stay. I sensed that Ober had a relentless intellect, inherent creativity, a profound love of the natural world, and a complicated relationship with humans. I sensed that, as a white Iowa-born man, he was drawn to the spirituality and connectedness to nature that he saw in the Ojibwe people who, as the story goes, first saved his life, and then completely changed it. I know I barely scratched the surface in trying to understand who Ober was, and that I could be very far off base in my early sketch of him. But I took some comfort in the feeling that if my outline is even somewhat accurate, I really really relate to him.

“Coming from Los Angeles, a city that feels to me at dangerous odds with the natural world, landing in this refuge was instant nourishment”

My time on Mallard Island kickstarted my writing again, after a few tough, very fallow years. For that, I am incredibly grateful to Ober and what he has sown there for people like me, and to the foundation and everyone who contributes to the preservation of this magical place. It has me thinking about how we all have a chance to leave something behind that can offer comfort and inspiration even long after we're gone.

*Erin Ruffin is an award-winning producer, editor and writer. A guest on Mallard Island in 2023, she is also the newest member of the Oberholtzer Foundation's Archives/Collections Committee.*

# Thank you Volunteers!



### Opening Week 1

Eric and Lucy Rundell  
Kelly Rundell  
Pam Rundell  
Erica and Nick Zubich

### Opening Week 2

Teghan Grulkowski  
Steve Grulkowski  
Grant Kahlstorf  
Elaine and Steve Thrune  
Rick and Bill Thrune  
Mairi Doerr  
Shawn Otto and Jake Otto



### Carpentry Work Week One

Michael Reid  
Mairi Doerr  
Amy Nakamura  
Sherry Rovig  
Prudence Johnson  
Wyman Weinbeck  
Doug Kelley  
Craig Fernholtz  
Annelise Stuh  
Richard Paper  
Brian Klawiter  
Jerry Williams  
David Harrington



### Carpentry Work Week 2

Michael and Anne Reid  
Wyman Weinbeck  
Ken Simon  
Bill Forsyth and Karla McCray  
John Besse and Ellen Saul  
Eric and Lucy Rundell  
Matt Rundell  
Alyssa Ralidak  
Alli and Nick Hansen  
Rose and Summer Hansen



Matt Schneeman  
Rochelle Jansen

### Gardening Work Week

Angela Anderson  
Tom and Barb Balcom  
Jon Erickson  
Vickie Heggen  
Carol Inderieden  
Prudence Johnson  
Nance Kunkel  
Mary Alice Smith  
Peggy Smith



### Archive/Collections Week

Sue Carver  
Kristen Eide  
Connie Ghinazzi  
Nancy Haarmeyer  
Laura Kerr  
Tom McCann  
Aaron Mosley  
Beth Waterhouse



### Forestry Work Week

Elaine and Steve Thrune  
Bill Thrune & Gerry Thrune  
Nance Kunkel  
Dave Rolloff  
Laura Pawlaczyk



### Carpentry Work Week 3

Michael Reid  
Prudence Johnson  
Sherry Rovig  
Barbara Crow  
Craig Fernholz  
Doug Kelley  
Janice Whitney  
Amy Nakamura

### Communications

Nance Kunkel  
Shawn Otto  
Elaine Thrune  
Beth Waterhouse



### Closing

Eric & Lucy Rundell  
Pam & Darrell Rundell  
Kelly Rundell  
Chris & Cathy Schneeman

### Annex Library

Shannon Monahan  
David Monahan  
Jean E Kelly  
John Glazier

# Summer Program Memories



## Message From the Chair



Bob Hilke was an educator by profession, both in the workplace, and for those who knew him. He was the consummate mentor on a great many subjects in life. Mark Granlund and I visited Bob during the last week of his life. We updated him on the goings-on at Mallard, the weather, flood restoration, the good work of our volunteers, and what staff and board members were doing to keep Ober's legacy alive. He shared

a bit about his cancer treatment possibilities and he shared he was not afraid to die, but had just a few more projects to continue on with before then.

He was one of those rare individuals who could open a window into the past and make it come alive as if it were today. He made a purposeful difference in our lives and invested heavily in the lives of young people. One day when I was conducting research on the author Bert Stiles, whose book "Serenade to the Big bird" figured prominently in Ober's vast collection of books, I asked Bob about Bert.

Bert was an aspiring young man of words and passion who spent time on Mallard in the late 1930s and early 1940s. He wrote beautifully on the things which figured prominently in his life at the time, life's adventure, girls, the angst present within what we term "the greatest generation", and later about his experience as a B-17 and P-51 fighter pilot in World War II.

I asked Bob about what he knew about Bert Stiles. Bob spoke about his time with Ober during the 1950s and Ober would talk about Bert often, and how he thought the world of him. It was pretty evident to Bob during these discussions, Bert Stiles' death in November 1944 during a dogfight near Hanover, Germany affected Ober immensely, of the grief and sadness when a life eminently worth living was suddenly ripped away, and the tremendous loss to the world of the gifts which might have been given had he been granted grace to live a full life.



Bob helping cut ice on Mallard Island



Ober holding Bob Hilke as a baby

Sometimes in life those we love are indeed suddenly ripped away from us - these things do happen as we all were reminded again recently. In our search for meaning in this life, sometimes the loss of someone dear serves as a prompt to cherish, to ask questions of, to spend precious time with each other, to spur us on to make the most of our gift of life. We are lucky and blessed to have known Bob Hilke who served our community in so many ways during a long productive life, and of grace allowing him to live long and pass on his gifts to us.

George Glazier

## Letter from the Treasurer

We knew 2023 would be a year of rebuilding, and it certainly has been. We rebuilt our summer programs after two years of pandemic followed by the historic flood of 2022. We rebuilt, cleaned, and improved our physical infrastructure, to be sure everyone coming to Mallard could marvel at Ober's Northwoods home and legacy. As always, thanks to the many volunteers who managed everything from replanting flooded flower beds to rebuilding the deck on Big House. And thank you to all our wonderful supporters who stepped up with financial donations last year to support the work of the volunteers.



Like most small non-profit organizations, we count on contributions for the largest share of our budget. Program fees are kept low and are supported with scholarships. For every dollar we raise in program fees, we need to raise almost \$7 of contributions and grants.

Our Fall Gathering October 28 at Wargo Nature Center in Lino Lakes will be a great opportunity to share the Mallard Experience with friends and to show your support for Ober's legacy. We will have food, story telling and auction items. If you would like to make a special donation in support of the Gathering, make a memo on your check or add a comment to your online donation. Our theme is "The Next Generation" and you will have a chance to meet some of our newest Board Members, who really do represent our future. We will also be honoring the solid foundations of the Ober Board with a memorial tribute to one our friends and 15-year Board member, Bob Hilke.

Please consider setting up a recurring, monthly gift to support our operations, either by using the "Donate" button on our website, or by creating a recurring scheduled payment directly from your bank account. Our expenses are heaviest in the spring and summer, so your predictable support throughout the year has a huge impact.

Please also consider a larger gift to our Endowment. Many of our supporters have chosen to make the Oberholtzer Foundation a direct beneficiary of a retirement account, or under their trust or will. In that way, your support for Ober's Legacy can continue for future generations. We strive to be good stewards of Mallard and Ober's collections, but we are also stewards of your financial gifts to our endowment. If you have questions or would like to discuss estate strategies, please either contact me or Rebecca Otto at [info@eober.org](mailto:info@eober.org).

Keir Johnson



Scan the QR code to view or bid in the silent auction

### JOIN US!

**What:** Fall Gathering: The Next Generation

**Where:** Wargo Nature Center 7701 Main St Lino Lakes MN

**When:** October 28 from 2:00-4:30, lower level

**Musical Guest:** Doug Wood, former Board Chair

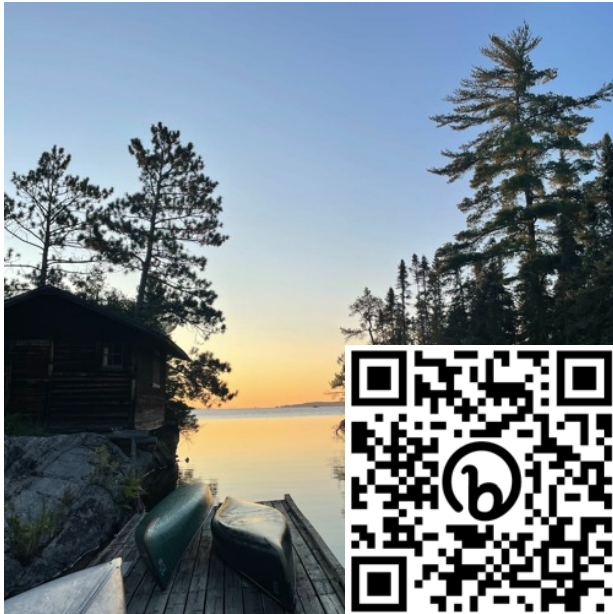
**Honoring:** Bob Hilke, 15-year Board Member, dear friend

**RSVP to:** [info@eober.org](mailto:info@eober.org)



## Ober and Mallard featured on a new Boundary Waters Podcast

Learn more about Ober and Mallard Island in a brand new special episode of the Boundary Waters Podcast. Listen at <https://bit.ly/bwca-mallard> or scan the QR code (below) to get there.



Thank you from the Oberholtzer Foundation Board of Directors!



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