



ERNEST C. OBERHOLTZER FOUNDATION

MALLARD ISLAND

RAINY LAKE, MINNESOTA

Artwork by Gene Kitchie Monahan

WINTER/SPRING 2024 NEWSLETTER

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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

The Deer Island Project

By Beth Waterhouse

In the decade before Camp Koochiching became its main tenant, Rainy Lake's Deer Island had an interesting history. It was William Hapgood of the Columbia Conserve Company out of Indianapolis who first envisioned the "Deer Island Project," and he proposed that Ernest Oberholtzer



take over management of the project in May of 1917. Their intention was to raise "deer, goats, fur-bearing animals, wild rice, and blueberries." By December, however, "after rejecting other plans, we brought in a small experimental flock of sheep—about 40," Oberholtzer wrote in a letter to Hapgood.

The letter is part of the *Deer Island Papers*, a trove of correspondence and other documents brought to light by Deborah Dietrich-Smith of Louisiana, a historic landscape architect and program participant on Mallard Island in 2016 and 2017.

The Deer Island Project, sometimes referred to as a "sustainability project," included many different ideas. Ober and Hapgood hoped to build summer cabins, a general store and farm buildings, thus it was somewhat of a local employment project, with the effort calling for clearing land and construction. Initially, there was even the idea that the Columbia Conserve Company might start a nearby canning factory. The local Anishinaabe were also envisioned as part of Hapgood's desire to harvest blueberries for jam.

The men must have spent some time imagining or designing the project, and their marketing language was bold: "Deer Island was established to make accessible to the casual visitor for rest, recreation and study the wonderful attractions of this virgin region.

(cont. on p.3)

Dear Readers,

Change happens. We have been through so much over the last three years including a pandemic that changed the way we do things such as remote meetings and remote work. I was interviewed for the Executive Director (ED) position in 2020 during the pandemic through a Zoom interview. Who knew that would ever be a thing? I began the transition into being the ED in December of 2020. What was striking to me was that I worked remotely for so many months without a single in-person meeting with the Board. It was such a bright spot when we were finally able to meet in person! Life felt a bit more normal.



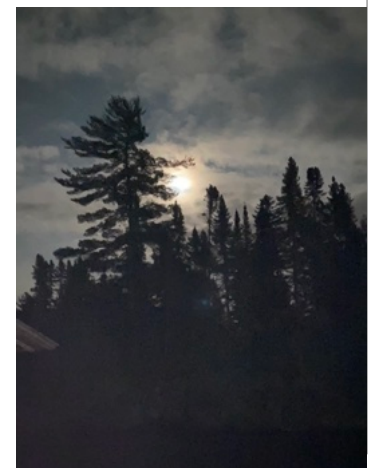
Reflecting on the last three years of work at the Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation, we have made much progress, including modernizing our back-office operations by migrating our financial activities into accounting software and subscribing to a Constituent Relationship Management system, while at the same time building our email list to allow for more efficient communications. We successfully worked through a historic flood on Mallard Island, expanded our fundraising and our base of supporters, grew both endowment funds, and updated our Foundation bylaws and policies – including governance, human resources, and finance. Our cabins have beautiful new mattresses, curtains, pillows, blankets and quilts, and we've undergone many repairs including a complete update of the entire Mallard Island electrical system. We worked toward an updated strategic plan, and expanded our footprint from Mallard Island into International Falls with a future Mallard Island Annex Library and a research/collections storage room!

We were awarded three Legacy grants by the Minnesota Historical Society from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. One was to fund a conditions assessment report for our historic stonework, which has given us a roadmap for restoration work. Another was to fund a collections storage plan for our collections that will be housed in our new Annex Library and work space at the Backus Community Center in International Falls. This new space has allowed us to consolidate storage of all archival items that were formerly in a storage locker in the Twin Cities, and rehouse the books that were moved from the flood-prone library on Mallard Island. In the future, the new space can serve as the Foundation office. It will also allow us to do outreach and education by hosting speakers and holding events there, building support and goodwill in Ober's local community. The latest grant awarded was for just under \$38,000 to outfit our Mallard Island Annex Library with state-of-the-science shelving for our books. We are very excited to make this future space a reality!

During my vacation to Costa Rica right before Thanksgiving, after reflecting on the work and all that we have accomplished, I realized it was time to make way for a new Executive Director to lead the Foundation. The Board of Directors has formed a search committee to find our next Executive Director. I want to thank you all for your support, your guidance, and your kind words. Your support allowed us to accomplish so much.

In Gratitude,

Rebecca Otto
Executive Director



The Deer Island Project (*cont. from p.1*)

It consists of 375 acres of rugged woodland, lying in a sheltered part of Rainy Lake...[with] excellent harbors, a perfect sand beach, many miles of rough trails, and unrivaled views of the lake. In a fertile valley, a small farm has been developed, and the best of vegetables, milk, eggs and poultry fresh from the farm are for sale at a small store, which exists for the convenience of visitors.”

The venture at first offered a lodge, cabins rented by the month, boating equipment and “special arrangements gladly made for any kind of outing.” One could discern Ober’s underlying interests -- and experience -- in his statement that surrounding Deer Island were “the most wonderful canoe-waters in all the world, practically unexplored, are available in Rainy Lake, and our long experience is at your service in planning trips, securing maps, guides, etc.”

Oberholtzer -- a Harvard man who specialized in landscape architecture (and a far-north explorer after an epic canoe journey to Hudson Bay) -- was hardly a farmer, or even a farm manager, but he put his back into it. Sheep raising, especially on an island and in the north country, was not easy. Even Ober’s mother, Rosa, was among her son’s farmworkers, helping with both sheep and poultry. “My mother was called in every once in a while to help with some farm duties, though she’d never been a farmer. She played the piano instead,” Ober explained in an interview conducted by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1964. Together, he and his mother docked the lambs’ tails, in spite of the fact that his mother “didn’t want to do anything that made any animal seem to suffer.” After the docking episode, Rosa is quoted as telling her son: “Never again.”

Later, Ober makes it clear that he never fully took “ownership” over the venture, and Hapgood knew it when he wrote in that first summer of 1917, “I shall not wish you to so tie yourself up that you cannot at any time get free. Your main interest is the one I want you to follow.”

Hapgood was generous, at least on paper, and expressed his own financial interest in the project at a modest percent, saying to Ober that “profits should all go to you and active workers.” Problem was, the profits were few. After just 18 months or so, Hapgood admitted, “I haven’t very much confidence in the outcome.”

“My interest in the farm is to see it self-supporting so that you and another family may derive benefit from it. I want nothing from it except the pleasure of thinking about it and being on it a part of the summer, and winter if possible,” Hapgood wrote in 1919. Oberholtzer, too, was fairly altruistic about the experiment, saying in 1921 that he wanted very little out of it (other than wages due), and wrote in pleasant terms about the joint obligation as “a chance I took.” If not from lack of effort, certainly from lack of capital, the Deer Island Project failed.

By the early 1920s, Oberholtzer had acquired nearby Mallard Island in lieu of back wages, and his attention turned forever away from raising sheep. Deer Island was later known as Grassy Island, and readers may know the history of Camp Koochiching leasing acreage from Hapgood.

By the spring of 1950, however, Oberholtzer was again involved in the preservation of Deer Island. He worked with the aging Hapgood and Miss Frances Andrews, a lifelong friend and companion from Minneapolis, to help Frances purchase the large and beautiful island, mainly to protect it from development. Frances was the proud owner of Deer Island until her death in 1961, when it was returned to Ober in her will. Ober then helped the Camping and Education Foundation acquire the island and preserve it for the uses it enjoys today.

This column was written a few years ago. We reprint it to honor the 100-year anniversary of Camp Koochiching. Deer/Grassy Island remains mostly undeveloped, with the Camp on a small portion of it.

Mallard Island Schedule - 2024

Dates	Summary of Program Week
May 23-June 1	<i>Prepare Mallard Island and cabins for programming</i>
June 2-8	<i>Carpentry/Repairs Work Week - Big House work</i>
June 9-15	<i>Archives/Collections Work Week</i>
June 16-22	<i>Foundation Board Meeting and Drum Feast</i>
June 23-29	<i>Garden Work Week</i>
June 30- July 6	<i>Carpentry/Repairs Work Week - Big House work</i>
July 7-13	<i>Rest Week</i>
July 14-20	<i>Individual Projects Week</i>
July 21-27	<i>Grandmother Drum Week - Host week</i>
July 28-Aug 3	<i>Mallard Island Presents: a group of artists will put together a program that will be shared at the end of the week in International Falls and will be free to the community - Host Week</i>
Aug 4-10	<i>Sowing the Seeds of Interdisciplinary Connections to Water: Literacy, Stewardship and Place-based Learning - Host week</i>
Aug 11-17	<i>Stewards of the Wilderness: a week of teaching Ober's wilderness legacy, his relationships to the Rainy Lake Anishinaabe, and sustainability to college age students - Host week</i>
Aug 18-24	<i>Wi-dibaaJimong (we gather to tell stories): We Gather in Kinship With the Earth – Host week</i>
Aug 25-31	<i>Women and Water: Anishinaabekwe Collaboration Across Water Jurisdictions – Host week</i>
Sep 1-7	<i>Rest Week</i>
Sep 8-15	<i>Foundation Board Meeting</i>
Sep 15-21	<i>Forestry Work Week</i>
<i>You can apply for the Individual Projects Week. Go to www.eober.org and click on Mallard Island tab, then General Programs. Apps are due March 1.</i>	

Gift Designations in 2023

Anonymous in memory of Amelia Di Lucia Carretti
Anonymous in memory of Bob Hilke
Richard Adams and Ross Kylo in memory of Rosalie A. Hall
Shirley Anderson in memory of Bob Hilke
Robert Bass in memory of Bob Hilke
Eddie Blaha in memory of Bob Hilke and Byrne Johnson
Patricia Brophy in memory of Janet Pearson
Nancy Churchill in memory of Clifford E. Knapp
Nicole Colson in memory of Bob Hilke
Lynn Cox in memory of Jerry Cox—*All your many years of "being there" and projects on the island were so special*
Jane Dalldorf in memory of Fred Dalldorf
David Duggan in honor of Beth Waterhouse
Timothy and Marva Fairchild in memory of Tim Heinle
Jim Fitzpatrick in honor of Beth Waterhouse and in memory of Don Maronde
Sue and George Fraik in memory of Bob Hilke
BG Garner in memory of Charlie A. Kelly
Tim and Lisa Gerlach in memory of Marge and Bob Gerlach
John Grate in memory of Tim Heinle
Lee and Carol Grim in honor of Robin Monahan
Tony and Bobbi Guillen in memory of Bob Hilke
Steve and Liz Hams in memory of Bob Hilke
Nick and Ali Hansen in honor of the Rundell family—*some of the most inspirational volunteers I have ever seen*
Julie Manley Hartje in memory of Bob Hilke
Bonnie Haugen in honor of Beth Waterhouse
Helen White Hayhurst in memory of Bob Hilke
Joan Heinle in memory of Bob Hilke and Tim Heinle
Steve and Jackie Henning in memory of Bob Hilke
Craig and Mona Hunter in memory of Dr. Jon Talsness
Kathleen Johnsen in honor of Beth Waterhouse
Bryne and Carol Johnson in memory of Bob Hilke
Guy and Peggy Johnson in memory of Bob Hilke
Julia Joplin in memory of Nellie Harding Gerber
Gayle Knutson in honor of Robin Monahan, Becky Lucas, George Glazier, John Schifsky—*my fellow 1988 Hudson Bay paddlers*
Greg Lais in memory of Billie Magee
Steve and Lorrie Larson in memory of Bob Hilke
Jessie Lauren and Family in memory of Bob Hilke
Nicholas and Carolyn Law in memory of Reverend William Law
Linda Makinen in memory of Bob Hilke
Gary, Sherrie, Adrion, and Shay Mannasau in memory of Bob Hilke
Ward Merrill in memory of Linda Merrill, Bob Hilke and Byrne Johnson
Lynn Naeckel in memory of Charlie A Kelly and Gene Ritchie Monahan
Nahant Marsh Education Center—*in honor of the 2023 Oberholtzer Award Winners*



Message From the Chair

The year 2024 is another year of change and transition. To bring in the Greek Philosopher Heraclitus, “The Only Constant in Life Is Change.”

Interestingly, Heraclitus also goes on to discuss the impossibility of stepping into the same river twice. And we know it’s also impossible to step into the same Rainy Lake twice, or onto the same Mallard Island twice as we learned over the last few years!

Along with the changes to Rainy Lake, Mallard Island, our greater environment, life and time itself, we are also reminded of the fact that the Oberholtzer Foundation changes from time to time too.

Board members time out or move on to other things, and so do staff, volunteers, and now Rebecca Otto, our Executive Director, will follow on the storied path of outstanding executive directors.

Providence must have been with us, our Mallard Island and Foundation, for along came Rebecca just at the right time to take her firm, steady and motivated hand to see us through the pandemic, then when that was finished, on to handling the terrible flood, and now into the serious work ahead as we share Ober’s legacy with the surrounding communities and take a serious look at the landscapes Ober persistently endeavored to create which we all know and love.

Through all this Rebecca was there with us, when we needed her most. Hers will be tough shoes to fill as she leaves us in a far better position today.

And now your Foundation is busy reviewing the many applications pouring in with a committee formed to review and recommend candidates to the Board.

This is also the year we will finalize our five-year strategic plan for the new director, our committees, staff and volunteers to bring it to life. And of course, this also includes all of you who so generously make it happen for us and everyone who loves the north country.

George Glazier
Chair



Letter from the Treasurer



The 2023 season was about rebuilding; holding summer program weeks again, repairing cabins, and replacing mattresses and blankets. Our financial stability is strong with support from our generous donors and with a much improved investing environment for the endowment.

I can't add anything to Board President George's comments about Rebecca. She has been a true agent for change. Her work to modernize our financial records and reporting were an important step for the foundation. I know we will find a worthy candidate to step into her shoes and whoever comes next will benefit from all of the systems she put in place to help the foundation going forward.

Our Fall Gathering at Wargo Nature Center was a big success. Thank you again to former Board Chair Douglas Wood for the musical programming, and to all the donors and bidders on our silent auction items. Besides being a great gathering to connect with old friends and make new ones, and to honor Bob Hilke and Charlene Erickson, the event generated \$10,000 to support our mission and activities. Thank you!



From a financial perspective, we exceeded expectations in nearly all categories of donations while holding expenses to slightly below budget. We budgeted cautiously for individual donations after the outpouring of support we received during the 2022 flood, but you came through for us again in 2023. We received above budget donations, including a gift to the Frances E Andrews Building Endowment Fund.

As you review your finances and work on taxes, please give thought to providing a gift to one of our endowment funds through your estate plan or retirement plans in addition to your regular annual gifts. The main endowment fund earnings provide us with critical general operating funds. Giving a gift gives you a chance to support Ober's Legacy in perpetuity.



If you have questions about how to establish an estate gift, please contact the Foundation office and we will be delighted to answer your questions.

Keir Johnson
Treasurer

Gift designations (cont. from p.5)

Shawn Otto in memory of Bob Hilke
Wayne Potratz in memory of Thomas D Gipe
Judy Rassmussen in memory of Bob Hilke
Jean Replinger in memory of Bob Hilke
Rebecca Rom and Reid Carron in memory of Billie Magee
Carolyn Ruff in memory of Steve Ruff
Edith Rylander in honor of Jean Replinger
Catherine Sandell in honor of Jean Replinger
Marjorie Savage in memory of Bob Hilke
Darrell Schmidt in memory of Bob Hilke
Ed and Sandy Schneider in memory of Bob Hilke
Paul and Sue Schurke in memory of Billie Magee
Dave Siebert in memory of Bob Hilke
Rose Simpson in memory of Dr. Wallace A. Simpson
Linda and Gary Skime in memory of Bob Hilke
Mark Stanley in memory of Lydia Kulesov
Terri Sundberg in memory of Swede Sundberg
Maurice and Julie Titus in memory of Bob Hilke
Mark Trumpeter and Sue Collins in memory of Bob Hilke
Dennis Vohler in memory of Linda Merrill
Beth Waterhouse in memory of Bob Hilke and Don Maronde
Michael Williams in memory of Tim Heinle
Jack and Karen Wilson in memory of Bob Hilke
Darren and Talis Zeman in memory of Bob Hilke



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