



MARCH/APRIL 2025



# WINTER/SPRING NEWSLETTER

## Jean Sanford Replinger, 1928 - 2024

"A force of nature." So many people have used that phrase to describe Jean. Therefore, Nature has recently lost a Force... but let's say a little more about that.

There was a daring "can-do" attitude about Jean that could not be denied. If you ever traveled in Europe with her or paddled a canoe with her, you know exactly what that means. On Mallard Island in Rainy Lake, the force of personality could often be felt, and it's clear that, on the island, Jean created a part of her legacy.

Jean saw most all everyday problems as merely bumps in the road, and she enjoyed bringing artists, writers, and friends north to witness the Oberholtzer genius and legacy there, while they commonly also worked side by side with her on some physical project.

cont. on page 3



Jean Sanford Replinger, right, and Nancy Jones.

## Board of Directors

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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.

Gibezhigoomin.

## Dear Reader,

I'm sad not to have met or known Jean Sanford Replinger, but I am grateful for her inspiring life. As Beth so wonderfully captures in her tribute, Jean left an indelible mark on Mallard Island and the Oberholtzer Foundation, from the multi-year process of organizing and cataloging Ober's books to the development of the program model and a host of practices still in use today.

In addition to the above, Jean's greatest contribution may have been to introduce so many other kindred spirits to the wonders and workings of Mallard, many of whom developed their own abiding connections to the island and Ober's important legacy.

A remarkable aspect of Jean's life is that she left a profound and lasting impact at so many other places in addition to the Oberholtzer Foundation—Outward Bound and Southwest Minnesota State University foremost among them. A life of purpose, well-lived!

On the Foundation front, just as it was with Jean (perhaps even instilled into the Foundation's DNA by Jean), the meaningful use and care for the islands, buildings, and archives is at the forefront of our thinking. As Keir outlines in his Treasurer report, we are grateful recipients of funding to engage the services of architects and engineers to work with us to develop a Historic Structures Report/Cultural Landscape Report for Mallard Island. This will be a deep dive into the buildings, built environment, and landscape of the island that we'll use to thoughtfully plan and guide our preservation and restoration efforts in the coming years.

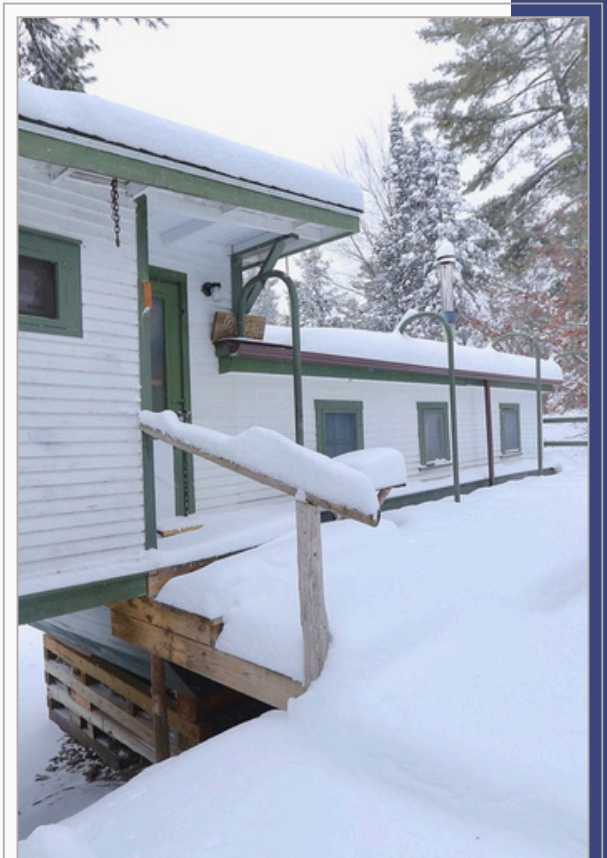
In other news, at our most recent board meeting in Duluth, we approved a new strategic plan and are actively developing an operating plan to support the priorities identified in the strategic plan. This is important and valuable work, and we're excited to share more with you in the coming months.

In the near term, we are guessing on the date of ice-out and busy getting ready for another summer season, when the magic of Mallard comes alive through work weeks and ceremony and a range of hosted programs, including a program in partnership with island neighbor Douglas Wood (see summer calendar on page six).

We offer our heartfelt gratitude to Jean and to everyone who has given of their time and considerable talents to support Mallard Island and the Oberholtzer Foundation's mission.

Warmest regards,

-Tom O'Rourke



Winter Wannigan

Take the books, for example. After Jean was alerted to this "magic island" and witnessed thousands of books in need of order and care, Jean formed a team of friends-- the Marondes (Don and Sandy), the Norbies (Bob and Mary Lou), and her husband, Randy to work for several weeks full time creating a catalog system by house and wall, handling and finding single-shelf space for every book in this new order, and in the process dedicating a boat-house as a new little library. One story was told again and again-- computers were new in the early 1980s, and book by book, the team entered data into a small personal computer brought to the island in 1983.



Randy, Jean, Sandy and Don

During the first night, the computer crashed and they had to start all over. The second time the computer crashed, they started all over. The third time the computer crashed, Jean drove the pontoon to town and purchased all the 3x5 index cards she could find and (for the next two summers) they catalogued 12,000 books by hand. Of course, then she had to find someone to ENTER all that data into a computer (one that would not crash) and she did just that (found a student data-entry person). The end result was an index system that was used for the next 37 years and was the basis for the digital database now in place.

Jean was the person who dreamed up the six-day week, the "clean-off" rules for Saturdays, the meal-pairing and communal meal practice, and the island's "ecological carrying capacity," sustainable principles still in use today. From the mid-1980s to 2005, Jean crafted about six or seven 'program weeks' each summer to make use of this unique and historic place, and to teach everyone the stories of this man called "Ober." And for all those years, Jean volunteered her time. (meanwhile teaching at Southwest State University in Marshall, MN). She was fearless with boats and storms and trees across the trail, and she documented 'systems' for water use, composting, meal-sharing, fire and security that last to this day. Jean was relentless in her manner of pulling in the exact skilled volunteer for the moment, and many wondered if this was Jean's magic or the Magic of Mallard simply working through Jean, but she would somehow find the electrician, the carpenter, the stone-mason, the librarian-- all seemingly at the right moment for the need. If you were the electrician or stone mason using your well-honed skills, you likely left the island happier for the donation you had just made to a very special place. Because every week was full of fun, too, not just a lot of work.

Jean had a love of the "soiree." Her playful side would come out as folks congregated in the Drum Room for a "show," dressed in some home-made costume or playing some drum or flute for the first time ever. And laugh!? The cedar-pole spirits in Ober's Drum Room very likely got to know Jean Sanford Replinger for her spontaneous peals of laughter. Some of that fun came back to her in her last years as caretaker when a group of guests would paint a picture in her honor or make a booklet of stories for her; surely her years on Mallard Island were full of goodness and friendship alongside decades of hard work.

This capturing of a legacy must also mention several important off-island projects that Jean led, and which have advanced Oberholtzer's life story. She worked with Jack Wadsworth to create TOWARD MAGNETIC NORTH (2000), a stunning coffee-table book of essays complete with photos of the 1912 Canoe Journey (taken by Ober and Billy Magee) to Hudson Bay. Jean recognized one of Ober's special



Inuit photos and worked with sculptor, Nancy Erickson to create the beautiful bronze statue, "Old Woman with Sticks." Jean worked with David Pelly as he wrote and published THE OLD WAY NORTH (2008). She supported the creativity and genius of Joe Paddock who wrote the biography of Ernest Oberholtzer, KEEPER OF THE WILD (2001). And in the centennial year of that epic canoe journey, Jean worked with Charlie Kelly, Nancy Paddock and others to create BOUND FOR THE BARRENS (2012), a synopsis of Ober's personal journals documenting nearly every day of that amazing 1912 trip. Jean also partnered with Ann Wilson, Nancy Jones and other early Indigenous leaders on Rainy Lake to incorporate Anishinaabe values and programs into the Mallard Island experience.

Jean Sanford Replinger served on the Oberholtzer Foundation board for three decades, even while acting as staff program director. She passed the program director tasks to Mary Swalla Holmes in 2005 and retired as secretary of the Board in 2016. Jean's influence essentially bridged from the Ober-years and from early leaders such as Ted Hall and Gene Ritchie Monahan or Marnee Monahan who taught her the ropes, to the current organizational model of a board-driven nonprofit organization. Like so many before and after her, Jean probably learned and then taught something in fast succession. But one thing is certainly true. This force of nature left her mark on one unusual rocky island and all those who have come to love it.

- Remembered and written by Beth Waterhouse

## At the Heart of an Island

by Mary Casanova, 2024

a birthday poem for Sheila Hart



At the heart of an island,  
beneath the big house,  
lies a cellar.

In the gathering room  
of the sacred drum,  
you must find the small hatch door,  
nearly indiscernible in the hardwood floor,  
and lift.

The cool, dank air drifts up  
from rock and earth.  
A steep, green stairs beckon.  
Perhaps a storm is coming,  
and you hurry to take shelter  
or risk being swept away.  
Perhaps the chatter of others  
drives you to find a nest of your own,  
a quiet place  
to find what your hurried mind has lost,  
if for a moment.

Open the paned windows.  
Settle on the red-painted chair.  
Your lungs rise and fall,  
air pine bough sweet  
Here, below,  
water laps and flows.  
You remember again,  
you know.

# Message from the Chair

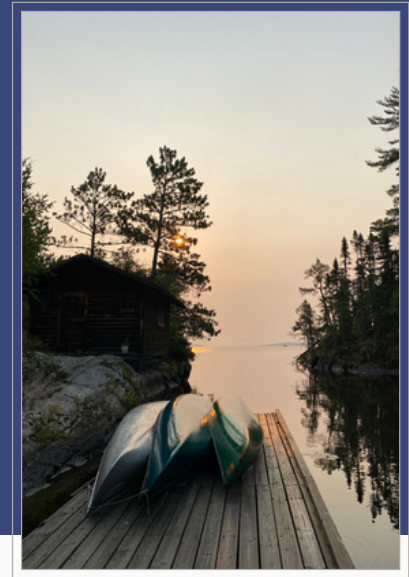
Exactly one year ago we were saying hello to new Executive Director, Tom O'Rourke. We were thinking long and hard about those on the board who were about to term out and who we could bring on. We were "finalizing our five-year strategic plan for the new director, our committees, staff and volunteers to bring it to life." And I'm here today to declare the only thing constant on Mallard is change and the more things change the more they stay the same!

This year's humbling experience was the revelation that the only person who makes a full-time job of thinking and doing all things Ober is our Executive Director, Tom. On the board, in our committees, on staff and within our volunteer community we are limited by life, whether with work, school, or family obligations, we have limited time to work, yet all the things which need to get done, get done and done well. It reminds me of a couple of stories I know about how things change and how they stay the same. See, I believe the spirit of Ober still animates us in our work, it really hasn't changed. Whether some of us see branches that need cutting back, a window in need of reglazing, we can't stop for a second while something is amiss on Mallard. My Grandfather, George Monahan, was a writer at heart during his Army career in the 1930s and 1940s, and in later years, a technical writer working on nuclear submarine operations manuals in New York City. Once he retired and returned to Northern Minnesota, he resolved to finally write Ober's story, a life-long dream. So, the next Spring he and wife Genevive headed out to Obers, and after several productive hours of interviews, Ober just needed some help getting rid of an old tree well past its prime. Then there were some rock walls to shore up, brush to clear, a window to fix...well you get the picture. Ober's life story never got finished that time on account of all the work that needed to be done.

And that's not all, while I was reading the excellent book by Robert Floyd Cooper about the life of author and WWII pilot Bert Stiles, "Serenade to the Blue Lady", it mentions the time Bert spent on Mallard. According to Bert in a letter to his girlfriend, he was feeling at home writing in the Bird House and had visited a lakeside place called "Frenchie's" the previous evening with Ober. He describes his and Ober's return to Mallard by canoe on a still starlit night as hauntingly beautiful, the lake "so untouched, so remote, so clean, so haunting, that he felt pure beauty for the first time and so peaceful that he never wanted it to end. He was fiercely eager to dive out there into that beautiful blue of the night." Haven't we felt that too at Mallard on a still summer evening? Bert continued though in his letters -- there was work to do, board and room were not free. He hauled rock, ferried sand from shore to island for various projects, chopped wood, cleared brush, cleaned fishing gear...

So it was in Ober's time as it is now. I remember one of my early experiences on Mallard. Ted Hall showed up early one morning when I was about ten years old with rakes in hand and got me into clearing and burning brush, not for a few hours, but for a few days! Visions of his thick wiry hair and ever-present pipe swirling smoke and dripping with sweat while the smell of fire and tobacco, the sound of rakes, saws sawing, clippers clipping and fire snapping was magic...and here I am fifty years later working for Ober, and so are we, your Foundation. I look forward to a great season, great lasting memories and "thank you" for all you do on Ober's behalf!

- George Glazier



# 2025 Mallard Summer Schedule

DATES	HOST	WEEK	DESCRIPTION
May 2-4	ECOF	Open Mallard	Summer Preparations (Ice-out dependent)
May 9-11	ECOF	Open Mallard	Summer prep continued
May 11-17	ECOF	Drum/Fasting/Cleaning	Ceremony, cleansing and cleaning
May 18-22	ECOF	Site work for HHS grant	Historic Structures Report site work
May 23-25	ECOF	Caretaker Training	Program preparation
May 26-31	ECOF	Carpentry Work Week	Work on projects big and small
June 1-7	ECOF	Garden Work Week	Weeding and planting
June 8-13	ECOF	Archive Work Week	Book & map care
June 14-15	ECOF	Board Meeting	Foundation board meets
June 15-21	ECOF	Tours and Outreach	Connecting with the community
June 22-28	Craft	Nibi bimaadiziwin	Indigenous women academics, activists, and artists exchange and collaborate to help protect and advocate for nibi (water)
June 29-July 5	ECOF	Carpentry Work Week	Roofing Projects
July 6-12	ECOF	Island Inspirations with Douglas Wood	Discovering, deepening and expressing creativity
July 13-19	ECOF	Drum Ceremony	Elder in Residence Pebaam leads a week of cultural teachings and practices
July 20-26	Froh	Relational Accountability on Design Practices	Architects and other practitioners reflect on values and relationships
July 27-Aug 2	Clayton	Emerging Writers	Encouraging community and confidence in young writers
August 3-9	ECOF	Individual Projects	Island guests work on individual projects
August 10-16	Danforth	Mino-Bimadiziwin: The Good Life	Multi-cultural women’s writing group, broadening understanding of the Ojibwe/Anishinaabe worldview, geography, and sense of place
August 17-23	ECOF	Stewards of the Wilderness	A cohort of young adults study sustainability, climate change and multicultural perspectives
August 24-30	ECOF	Mallard Master Classes	Day-long Master Classes in story, song and music
Aug 31-Sept 6	ECOF	Tours and Outreach	Connecting with the community
Sept 7-12	ECOF	Forestry/Conservation	Ongoing implementation of Vegetation Management Plan
Sept 12-14	ECOF	Board Meeting	Foundation board meets
Sept 14-20	ECOF	Carpentry work week	Projects big & small
Sept 21-28	ECOF	Drum Ceremony	Elder in Residence Pebaam leads a week of cultural teachings and practices
Sept 28	ECOF	Closing Mallard	Another season in the books

# Letter from the Treasurer

Spring 2025 Treasurer Report

The charming, quirky buildings of Mallard Island are the crown jewels of Ober's legacy, and some of the earliest stories I heard as a Board member were about efforts to preserve and protect them, including using old aluminum printing sheets from the Rainy Lake Chronicle for emergency roof repairs.

I am thrilled to report that we have received a very significant Legacy grant of \$178,390 to "hire qualified professionals to create an Historic Structures Report and Cultural Landscape Report for the Ernest C. Oberholtzer Rainy Lake Islands Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places." MNHS press release November 4, 2024. The resulting report will help us focus on the most critical issues for ongoing maintenance including not only the buildings, but other infrastructure such as the stone retaining walls and the bridge to Japanese house.

Of course, having a plan is only the first step. We will still need to seek donations and grants to actually do the work, especially work that requires paid contractors. Fortunately, the Board has taken steps over the years to plan and finance the volunteer led maintenance efforts. Starting in 2013, the Board set aside restricted funds in the Frances E. Andrews Building Endowment. Gifts to the fund and earnings have grown the balance to almost \$300,000, including a very generous recent anonymous donation of \$50,000! Our promise to our donors is that the principal (the amount they gave us) will not be spent but will generate earnings to help maintain the buildings and facilities on Mallard. Fund earnings have helped with things like the rebuilt deck on Ober's big house, dock replacement, and repairs to the water filtration system. The list of maintenance and repair needs is almost endless, so it's important that we grow the Frances Andrews building fund to meet future needs!

If you have reached age 70 ½, please think about making direct contributions from your retirement account to support the Andrews building fund and our preservation efforts. IRS rules say that each taxpayer can exclude up to \$100,000 from income for distributions directly from an IRA to a charity, or \$200,000 for a married couple. The distributions satisfy your minimum distribution requirement for the year, but they do not get added to your taxable income. That means they don't increase the amount of your social security that is subject to tax or trigger other taxes.

Remember to always get competent tax advice to be sure you are following the IRS rules.

As always, thank you to all of our supporters! Whether your gift is \$25 or \$50,000 we depend on you to keep Ober's legacy alive.

- *Keir Johnson*

# Then & Now



*Learn more on our Facebook Page!*

## **Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation**

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