



OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2025

Artwork by Gene Ritchie Monahan

FALL NEWSLETTER

Snapshots of a programming season on Mallard

Mallard Island comes alive in the summer with people, programs and projects. After ice-out in May, familiar families the Rundell's and Thrune's were busy readying boats, structures and systems for summer use. After a deep clean led by Program Director Prudence Johnson, we began our season by hosting a cohort of surveyors, architects/landscape architects/structural engineers. They were taking a Mallard Island deep-dive of buildings, gardens, rock walls, flora and fauna, with the aim of producing an in-depth Historic Structures Report and Cultural Landscape Study, the results of which will guide our Mallard preservation and restoration efforts in the years to come. They were in good hands with caretaker host Mike Reid, who knows every nail, screw, and section of cedar bark siding on Mallard.

The historic structures group marveled at the skill, care, and attention that has gone into all aspects of Mallard, from buildings to books to gardens, all thanks of course to our dedicated cadre of amazing volunteers/caretakers/donors.

Learning the history of Voyageurs NP, Stewards week



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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.

Gibezhigomin.

Caretaker Training

A group of caretakers gathered over the Memorial Day weekend to further ready the island for programs and to review our training manual and protocols. This was a wonderful opportunity to build cohesion, clarify responsibilities, and refresh memories on Mallard's many systems. A highlight included hands-on practice with the fire pump.

Work Weeks

In late May our work weeks began, with carpentry, garden and archive weeks back to back to back. Newcomers and island regulars worked side by side to repair and care for buildings and books, to plant and weed and put our mission of caring for Ober's Northwoods island home into practice. These weeks are invaluable to Mallard and the Foundation, and set the stage for successful tour and programming weeks later in the summer.

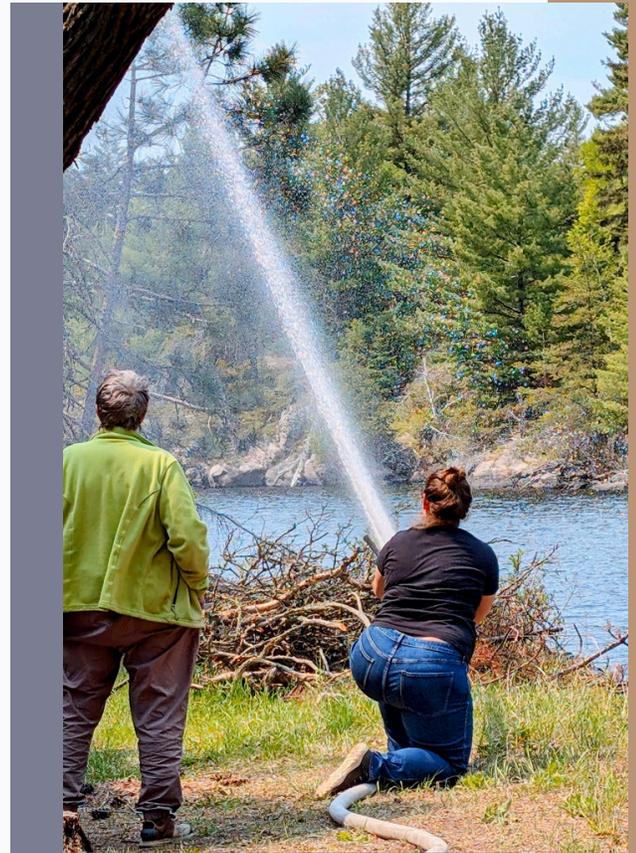
Tours and Outreach

We set aside two weeks last summer for tours and outreach. The goals were to connect new people to Mallard Island and Ober's important role in wilderness conservation. Several cohorts from Ranier, International Falls and elsewhere toured Mallard during these weeks, many exclaiming that they boated past Mallard for years and had always wanted to know more!

Elder in Residence Programming

Indigenous cultural teachings and practices are woven into many of our program weeks, but our three drum weeks—spring, summer and fall—are focused on Grandmother Drum, Minisinaanakwadook. Led by our Elder in Residence, Pebaam, the island hosted guests from far and wide, including from the Seven Generations Education Institute (<https://www.7generations.org/>).

Pebaam and the drum also traveled to four powwows on Rainy Lake throughout the summer, showcasing Grandmother Drum's new skirt (join as at the Fall Gathering to learn more) and deepening the Foundation's longstanding connections with the First Nations communities that were central to Ober's life and legacy.



Testing the fire hose



Michael Reid tending to the 'Clivus'

Program Weeks

Mid-summer is the heart of our programming season. After a fourth of July week that saw Eric Rundell and crew re-roof the icehouse, we embarked on a series of program weeks, including a writing week facilitated by island neighbor Douglas Wood and individual projects weeks that saw novelists, screenwriters, researchers, photographers, painters, and musicians (among others) draw inspiration from spending time on Mallard Island in the company of kindred spirits.

Host weeks this year included our now longstanding program Stewards of the Wilderness, which helps college students and recent graduates better understand Ober's conservation legacy, Indigenous culture, and principles of stewardship and sustainability. We also hosted a group of landscape architects and planners, and an Indigenous-focused writing group.

Prudence Johnson, one of our Summer Program Directors, led a week focused on story and song, which offered day-long master classes for the local community. A snippet of the master class week was highlighted in this recent NPR story:

<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2025/09/22/mallard-island-serves-as-a-place-for-arts-inspiration>.

Here's what a few program participants had to say about their experience on Mallard in 2025:

"I'm so very grateful. This place and opportunity are a treasure!"
"Absolutely divine. Feel so inspired and peaceful."

"So rewarding, productive, inspiring. Thank you!"

"Loved the drum ceremony—we need more of this type of education. It would help the world connect and find peace."

"This is a profound process, mysterious and generous. I am truly grateful for what was revealed."

"I've long admired many environmentalists and visionaries, but I didn't know as much about Ernest Oberholtzer before this experience. I now deeply admire his commitment to preserving Mallard and the surrounding islands, as well as his broader national work to protect wild spaces for future generations. His respect for Native cultures, and his determination to preserve and educate others about them, speaks to a profound understanding of what's at stake if we lose these connections."



Sue Carver & Connie Ghinaazi
triaging books



Mary Alice and Peggy Smith,
garden week regulars



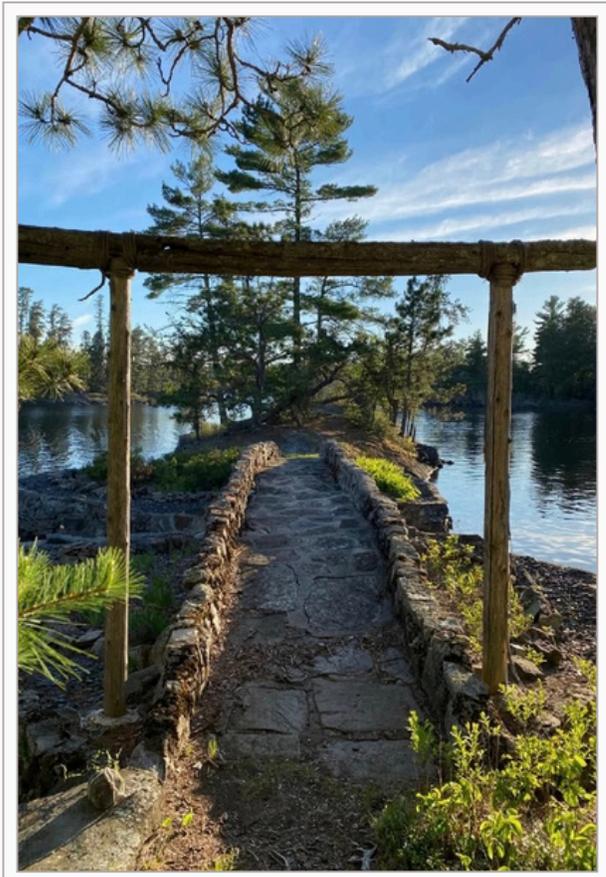
The next generation.
Stewards of the
Wilderness

End of Summer Activities

This year our forestry work week included a group from the Fond du Lac Band through Conservation Corps Minnesota. The crew helped re-open the hiking trail on Crow Island in addition to other work implementing the Foundation’s Vegetation Management Plan.

A final carpentry work week in September, led by Mike Reid, helped us wrap up our construction projects for the season. The Thrune’s and the Rundell’s were back once again to ready the island for the off-season—putting away equipment, getting boats prepped for storage, working through a long checklist to ensure that we are prepared for the coming winter.

Thanks to everyone who makes the magic of Mallard—and the mission of the Oberholtzer Foundation—come to life!



The Oberholtzer board on Mallard in June

The Bridge to Serenity

Message from the Chair

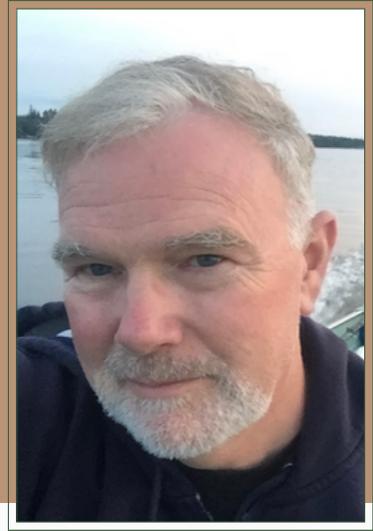
After a great summer season, while the canoes are being put away, the successes and lessons learned from summer programs are tabulated and Foundation committees begin planning activities, events, and programs while waiting for ice-out in the Spring. I think it's also time to reflect on the big picture, where we've been, where we are, and where we are headed. This is much like on a canoe journey where a high hill along the way presents an opportunity for the trip leader and anyone else interested in a hike up to take a look around. I want to provide that hilltop view along our way and tell you what I see from a trip leader's perspective, starting from where we've been.

I remember a long time ago after Ober stepped off Mallard Island for the last time, his friends and neighbors would routinely stop by, have coffee in the wannigan, walk the island and fix things for Ober out of respect for him and his legacy. It was a standing generational habit his friends would continue for a long, long time, and some would say even continues to this day. But in those days Ober's legacy and island home were totally and completely dependent on the generosity of volunteers. They would just show up for coffee, then, fortified by pancakes with Crow Island blueberry syrup, would get to work. This brigade of volunteers with rolls of tar paper and roofing materials, rusty tools found in the old tool shed or boat house, panes of glass from the hardware store in town, and wood from under the Winter House would get to work. They fixed holes, broken glass, doing all the things necessary to maintain the dignity of Ober's Mallard Island Home. This feast or famine went on for years until Tim Heinle came along.

In recent years a single event catapulted the Foundation from being solely dependent on volunteers, donations, and programming revenues: the advent of the Ernest C. Oberholtzer Endowment Fund. This initiative spearheaded by long-time Ober associate and Foundation Treasurer Tim Heinle, created a way to fill gaps in financing needed building repairs, legacy projects, and Anishinaabe experiences supporting the Foundation's mission statement and vision. We were able to hire and retain professional staff and become much more efficient administratively. It created space for us, the space needed for critical thinking, reflection, the professionally guided strategic plan and the ongoing planning and programming pointing the way to mission and vision achievement. Getting at those long-term challenges and opportunities is directly related to being independent from living exclusively hand-to-mouth, affording the board and staff the ability to see downstream and address the opportunities and concerns looming ahead. And you, the friends of Ober made this happen through your generosity.

Looking ahead I see challenges in maintaining the structural underpinnings, rock walls and other existential island home concerns. The Francis E. Andrews Building Fund will likely take on a new role in helping where it is needed most to focus on long-term structural needs on Mallard, not as apparent as broken glass or a new red squirrel nest in the Bird House. This will be a big deal. I also see opportunities to join with other kindred spirits, rejoin Ober's traditional allies and partners from long ago. I believe this kind of inter-dependence is a downstream opportunity to cast a wide net for all people who value and depend on sacred places and the natural world for a living and as a tonic for crowded conscious spaces, the crush and din of civilization. This is an opportunity to structure and work in complementary and synchronized ways with public, private organizations and entities interested in wilderness preservation. In simple terms "so we're all paddling in one direction at the same time." This is the future and everyone is invited on this canoe trip!

- George Glazier



Letter from the Treasurer

What is an Endowment Fund?

Please pause for a moment to reread President George's comments above. In 2005, after a successful corporate and non-profit career, Tim Heinle became the Treasurer of the Oberholtzer Foundation. Tim had previously demonstrated his vision and leadership as Chairman of the Camping and Education Foundation, where he launched the five-million dollar Next Level and Beyond endowment campaign for Camp Koochiching.

During his board service, Tim transformed the Oberholtzer Foundation's finances and dramatically expanded our base of support. In 2015 he launched efforts to create an Endowed Fund for the Oberholtzer Foundation.

Donations to an endowed fund are invested to create future earnings to support the mission of the foundation in perpetuity. The original donations are called the "principal" and are never spent. Only the earnings are used to support program and mission needs.

The Oberholtzer Foundation endowed fund has two main parts. Income from the main endowment is used to support our general operating and program expenses. About 25% of our annual budget is covered by fees charged to summer program participants. The other 75% comes equally from current annual donations and income from the endowment.

The Frances Andrews Building Fund is a separate Endowed fund dedicated to maintaining Ober's Northwoods home. Income from the Frances Andrews Fund Building is used exclusively to maintain and improve the buildings and infrastructure on Mallard Island.

One of the most impactful things you can do is to supplement your annual support for Ober's vision with a future gift from your estate, to add to the Endowment. When Ober wrote his Will in 1965, he made the following gift:

ARTICLE IV

All of the rest, residue, and remainder of that part of my estate which I inherited from Frances E. Andrews ... I give, devise and bequeath to the Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation ... I make this gift in memory of Frances E. Andrews ...

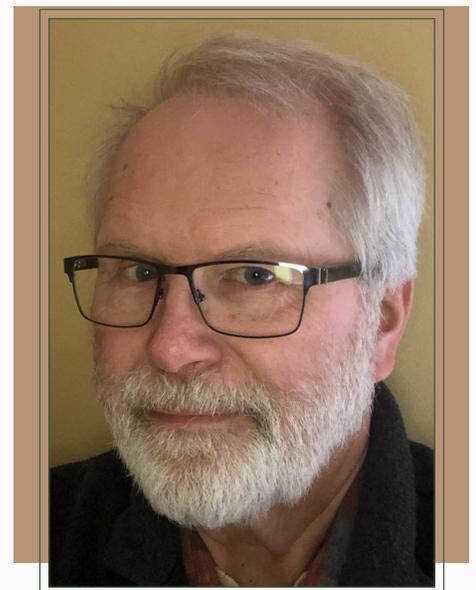
Please consider following in Ober's footsteps by making a similar gift.

The easiest way to do that is to make the Oberholtzer Foundation a beneficiary of one of your retirement accounts. Remember, the Foundation is tax-exempt, individual beneficiaries are not.

Also, please let us know if you have made the Oberholtzer Foundation a beneficiary of your accounts or estate. We will always respect your privacy and confidentiality, but we want to be able to recognize your future generosity, especially if you want your gift to go to a specific purpose.

We have a lot of work to preserve Ober's home as a source of ongoing inspiration and to promote his legacy. While we are all paddling in one direction, your support can take many forms. Thank you!

- Keir Johnson



THE ERNEST
OBERHOLTZER
FOUNDATION INVITES
YOU TO THE ANNUAL



FALL GATHERING

SUNDAY
OCTOBER
26TH

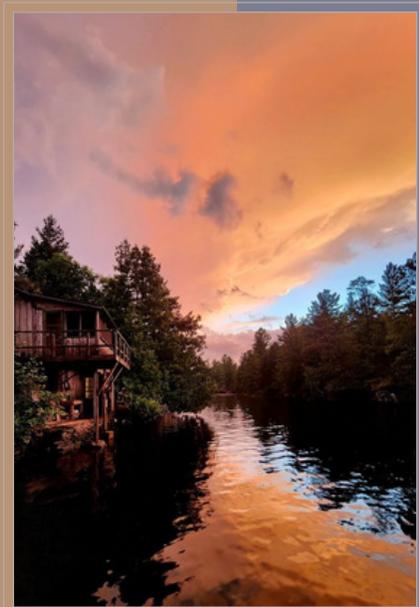
2-4PM

WESTWOODHILLS NATURE
CENTER

8300 W. FRANKLIN AVE.,
ST. LOUIS PARK, MN



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OUR
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PAGE!**



Ober's big house under construction

Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation

c/o Tom O'Rourke, Executive Director
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