



ERNEST C. OBERHOLTZER FOUNDATION



“The minute you launch your canoe in any of these lakes, you are conscious that you are living in the past. The very air you breathe seems not to belong to the modern world; it is too full of the fragrance of forest and lake.”

Ernest C. Oberholtzer

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



Our Board



BACK ROW

**Jerry Williams, Nance Kunkel, Tom O'Rourke, Ward Merrill, Laura Kerr, Eric Rundell,
George Glazier, Keir Johnson, Teghan Grulkowski**

FRONT ROW

Dave Rolloff, David Harrington, Erika Bailey-Johnson

NOT PICTURED

Bill Forsyth

**The Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit private operating
foundation incorporated in 1964**

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Executive Summary

Tom O'Rourke
Executive Director

As I reflect on my first full year as Executive Director of the Oberholtzer Foundation, I find myself considering the nature of change. While Mallard Island can feel timeless, almost as though Ober departed yesterday, it is, like all living places, in a constant state of change.

This past year marks an important one for the long-term stewardship of the island. We are nearing completion of a comprehensive Historic Structures Report and Cultural Landscape Study. The results of this work will provide a clear and thoughtful roadmap for how to care for Mallard Island and its one-of-a-kind buildings. It will also help ensure that our decisions about the island are grounded in historical integrity and long-term sustainability, while also attending to the needs of our summer programs and ongoing mission delivery.

In many ways, this effort reflects the broader arc of the Foundation itself. Each generation of Foundation leadership is called upon to steward this unique place and organization, yet our responsibility is not simply to treat it like a time capsule. It is to continue to thoughtfully engage with the islands and our programs so that our work and Ober's legacy remain as relevant and meaningful as possible.

I believe conservation, cultural exchange, artistic expression, to name but a few of our values, are more important and urgent than ever. I'm proud that Mallard Island, and the work of the Oberholtzer Foundation, serves as a catalyst for reflection, inspiration, and deep connections for an array of kindred spirits.

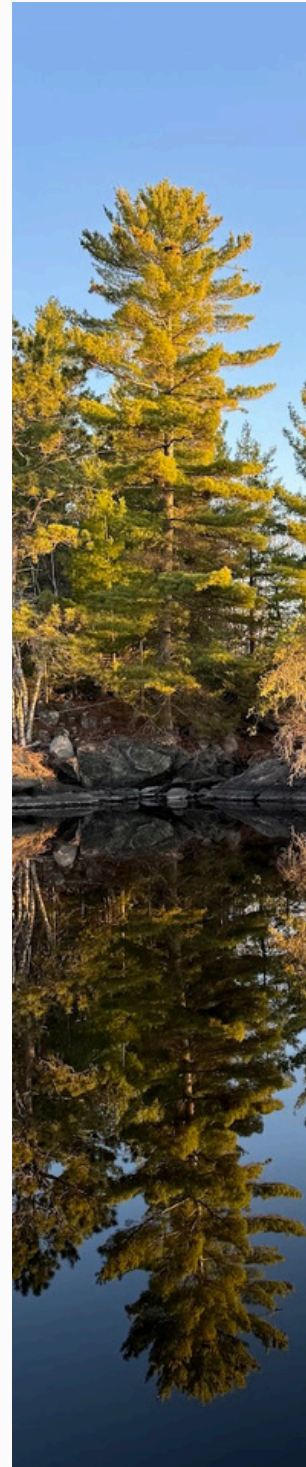
This labor of love is made possible by a remarkable community of supporters, past and present. Passionate volunteers give of their time and considerable skills to care for the islands. Generous donors at all levels sustain our programs and operations. Partners and participants bring the island to life each season, and the artistic or spiritual sustenance they find on Mallard eventually ripples outward into the broader world.

We are deeply grateful for your support. If, in the following pages, we have inadvertently made any errors or omissions in recognizing your contributions, please know that they are unintentional and in no way reflect the depth of our appreciation.

Thank you for being part of this ongoing story.



Tom O'Rourke



Board Chair



Your Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation had a great year and summer season on Mallard Island with full-time Executive Director Tom O'Rourke, who continues to run our Foundation with enthusiasm and the sophistication of well-seasoned non-profit experience.

Over the winter we received a partial review from the Historic Structures Report, conveying the island structures are basically sound and well maintained. However, there were concerns surrounding the stone bridge to Japanese House and the area called "Little Iowa," which is on the southeast end of Mallard showing serious signs of disrepair.

So, in short, we need to keep our Facilities Committee and volunteer crew at work doing what they do best and make some decisions one way or another about how valuable these two areas are to the Foundation and Mallard experience.

Recent board-committee changes include Erika Baily-Johnson taking chair of the Inaakonigewin Committee, and Laura Kerr as chair of the Archives Committee. Both board members have taken the lead of their committees and are setting ambitious agendas supporting our mission as the new year begins.

Board member departures include Peggy Smith, a former board chair and long-time Foundation supporter, and Pebaam, Dennis Jones, Inaakonigewin Committee chair, drummer and Elder in Residence. Both plan to stay busy on Foundation committee work, a long-standing tradition among former board members.

New additions to the board include Sheila Hart, and the return of Bob Norbie, past board chair. Both bring vast well-rounded experience in non-profit work, leadership, international experience, wilderness travel and exploration, and most of all deep understanding and passion for the Foundation's mission!

I would like to end my column with a great feeling of gratitude to our volunteers, staff, and supporters, and all who have sacrificed for the Foundation to support our mission to preserve Ober's legacy, and develop an appreciation for the wilderness and its Indigenous Peoples for future generations.

- George Glazier



PROGRAM AND PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHT

Boozhoo!

My name is Hillary Olsen (she/her), Indigenous Partnerships Program Manager for Conservation Corps Minnesota and Iowa (CCMI) and a longtime admirer of Mallard Island.

In my early twenties, my dad and I began the tradition of joining a Mallard work week each June. Those visits left a lasting impression on me—sharing meals, stories, and laughter with the Mallard community, and falling asleep to the sound of waves beneath Cedarbark.

Those experiences, along with many Boundary Waters trips growing up, helped shape my love of the outdoors and ultimately led me to my work at CCMI. As a nonprofit and AmeriCorps grantee, CCMI engages hundreds of young people each year in projects that expand access to outdoor recreation, restore habitat, protect waterways, and respond to community needs. Our mission is to cultivate emerging leaders in service to people and the planet.

It was especially meaningful when the Oberholtzer Foundation welcomed our Maajii-akii-gikenjigewin crew to spend a stewardship week on Mallard. The program—developed in partnership with the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa—creates opportunities for Indigenous young adults to gain hands-on experience in natural resource stewardship and conservation.

Last September, the crew worked alongside the vegetation management committee on Mallard and Crow Islands. Projects included reducing wildfire fuel by cutting and grounding dead or downed trees, removing small ash trees near Ober's Big House, splitting firewood, moving logs and brush from Crow Island, and clearing sections of the Crow Island trail.

Beyond the work, the week included shared meals, exploring the islands, and quiet moments watching sunrises, sunsets, and the Milky Way. It was rewarding to see the crew settle into Mallard's rhythm and feel connected to the island.

Miigwech to the Mallard community for welcoming the crew so warmly. We look forward to returning for another week of stewardship work this September.



The Maajii-akii-gikenjigewin forestry crew

Program Impacts

“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.”

“I’m so very grateful. This place and opportunity are a treasure!”

“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.”

“The experience brought up ideas/feelings/memories I want to continue to work with when I get home.”



Stewards of the Wilderness



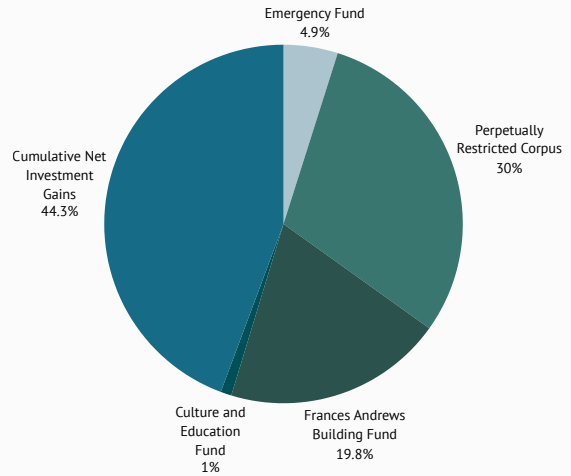
**Learning more about Voyageurs NP,
Stewards of the Wilderness**

Finances

Fund Balances

Emergency Fund \$90,000
 Perpetually Restricted Corpus \$551,714
 Frances E Andrews Building Fund \$364,647.45
 Culture and Education Fund \$18,102.79
 Cumulative Net Investment Gains \$815,077.66

Total: \$1,839,541.90

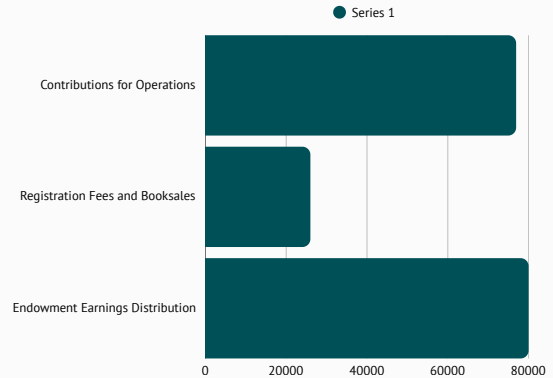


Income

Contributions for Operations \$76,914.28*
 Registration Fees and Book sales \$25,985.23
 Endowment Earnings Distribution \$80,000

*An additional \$35,000 was contributed to the Frances Andrews Endowment

Total: \$182,899.51



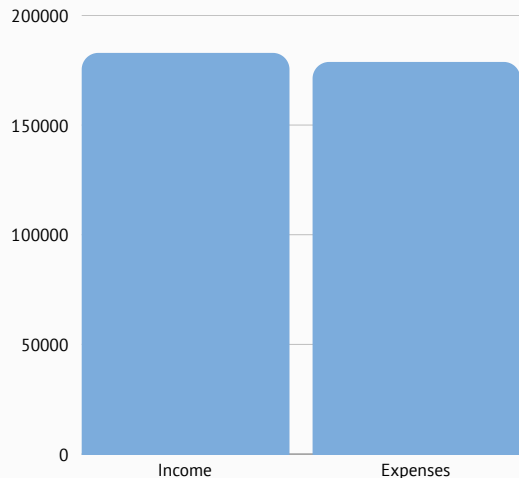
Program and Operating Expenses

Total: \$178,777.43

Income:
\$182,899.51

Program and Operating Expenses
\$178,777.43

Net Income
\$4,122.08



Essential Volunteers

Little happens at the Foundation without the help of our dedicated and growing family of volunteers who share their time and talent. They provide thousands of hours of labor each year, helping us to further the vision and mission of the Oberholtzer Foundation, and we are so grateful.

Opening, Closing & Forestry

Cal Clough
Mairi Doerr
Ryan Golz
Jenn Hall
Nick & Alli Hansen
Sheila Hart
Prudence Johnson
Jane Lund
Laura Pawlacyk
Mckeeon Roberts
Eric, Lucy & Adam Rundell
Kelly Rundell
Pam and Darrell Rundell
Danielle Sosin
Clarissa Spicer
Elaine & Steve Thrune
Rick, Jerry & Bill Thrune
Hillary Olsen & crew

Building Repairs

Cal Clough
Mairi Doerr
Rob Donisch
David Ernst
Fiona Ernst
Justin Ernst
Stacy Ernst
Craig Fernholz
Nick, Alli, Rose, and Summer Hansen
Olivia Hansmeyer
Prudence Johnson
Doug Kelley
Luke
Madison
Amy Nakamura
Anne Reid
Sherry Rovig
Eric and Lucy Rundell
Ryan
Ken Simon
Clarissa Spicer
Anneliese Suht
Janice Whitney

Annex Library

Keir Johnson
Laura Kerr
Bob Marquardt
Eric Rundell
Beth Waterhouse

Archive Work Week

Susan Carver
Kristen Eide-Tollefson
Connie Ghinazzi
Nancy Haarmeyer
Laura Kerr
Tom McCann
Aaron Moseley
Gordon Paquette
Ted Tollefson

Fall Gathering

Erika Bailey-Johnson
Keir Johnson
Jean E. Kelly
Laura Kerr
Aaron Moseley
Eric & Lucy Rundell
Beth Waterhouse
Pete Widin
Jerry Williams
Theresa Morrison
Pebaaam Jones

Gardening Work Week

Mary Elder
Jon Erickson
Sheila Hart
Carol Inderieden
Jyl Josephson
Nance Kunkel
Hillary Olsen
Richard Paper
Laura Pawlacyk
Peggy Smith

In-Kind

Rolf Anderson
Chapman & Cutler, LLP.
Mairi Doerr
George Glazier
Keir Johnson
Prudence Johnson
Jean E. Kelly
Nance Kunkel
Bob Marquardt
Karen Petersen
Michael Reid
Eric Rundell
Douglas & Kathy Wood

Caretakers

Daniel Andersen
Mark Granlund
Jenn Hall
Sheila Hart
Nance Kunkel
Jane Lund
Laura Pawlacyk
Tanya Piatz
Michael Reid
Danielle Sosin



**Longtime gardeners
Mary Alice and Peggy**



**Sue and Connie repairing
books, Archive Work Week**

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Mark & Kathleen Mortenson
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William Meadows & Sally Brooks
LeeAnn & Ronald Meer
Ward Merrill
Anne & Robert Molyneux
Michael Morton
Tunie Munson-Benson
Aaron Moseley
Lynn Naeckel & David McKee
Richard Niemi



**All smiles at
the Fall
Gathering**

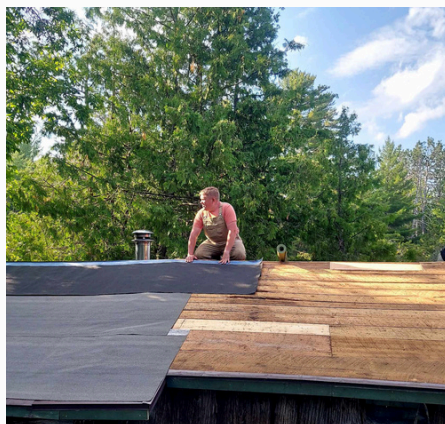
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Pam Peterson
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Phil & Sheree Peterson
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Roselyn Ann Rezac
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G. Barton & Trina Slepser
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Mary Alice Smith
Peggy Smith
Ruth Solie
Mary Springer
Brenda & David Sproat

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Mark Stanley
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Sweatt Family Fund
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Beth E Waterhouse
Janice Whitney
Jerry Williams
Mike & Mary Williams
Eleanor & Fred Winston
Calvin or Lorilee Wright
Art Yood
Thomson Yood

Foundation Gifts

Arrowhead Regional Arts Council
Camping and Education Foundation
Dancing Winds Sustainable Living Fund
Grand Casino Mille Lacs
The Longview Foundation
Mortenson Family Foundation
Winter Wheat Foundation



Eric re-roofing the Ice House

Gifts in Memory of...

Carl Haag
Tim Heinle
Bob Hilke
Charlie Kelly
Don Maronde
Gene Ritchie Monahan
Jean Sanford Replinger
Sally Ireland Robertson

Gifts in Honor of...

Kathy Dix
Keir Johnson
Bob Norbie
Ranger's visit to Mallard
Sam White Jr.
Peggy Smith



Window work, Carpentry Work Week

Board and Staff

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BOARD OFFICERS

President: George Glazier, Devens, MA
VP: David Rolloff, Sacramento, CA
Treasurer: Keir Johnson, Northfield, MN
Secretary: Nance Kunkel, Pine River, MN



BOARD MEMBERS

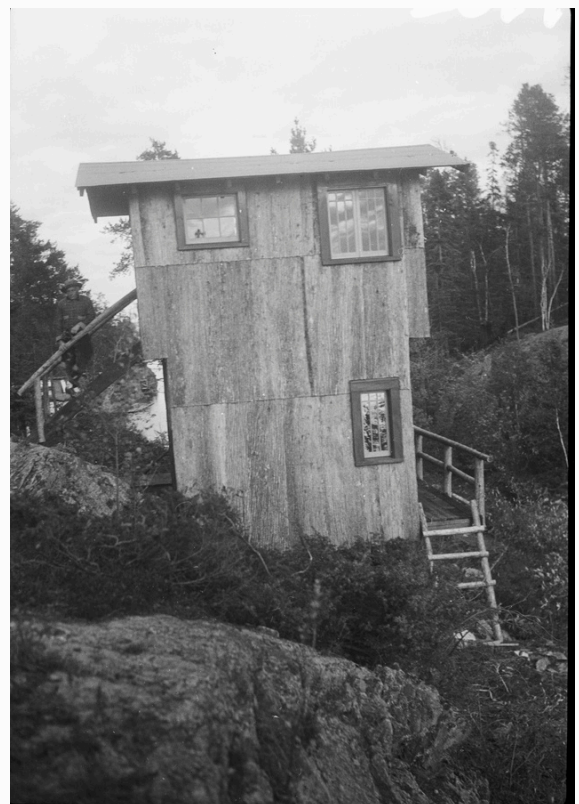
Erika Bailey-Johnson, Bemidji, MN
David Harrington, Bemidji, MN
Sheila Hart, International Falls, MN
Laura Kerr, Iowa City, IA
Teghan Grulkowski, Duluth, MN
Ward Merrill, International Falls, MN
Bob Norbie, Great Falls, MT
Eric Rundell, Grand Rapids, MN
Jerry Williams, Rochester, MN

STAFF

Mairi Doerr: Summer Program Director
Prudence Johnson: Summer Program Director
Randi Lembke: Office Manager
Tom O'Rourke: Executive Director



A quiet moment in the channel, Forestry Work Week





2025 Annual Report

OUR MISSION

The Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation fosters Ober's legacy and north woods island home as a source of inspiration, renewal, and connection to Indigenous Peoples, kindred spirits, and the natural world. Gi-bezhig-oomin (We are all one).

Learn More at EOBER.ORG



ERNEST C. OBERHOLTZER FOUNDATION

MALLARD ISLAND

RAINY LAKE, MINNESOTA

Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation
1215 West Victoria Street
Duluth, MN 55811