

What is a living history legacy?

By Paula DeMars, historian and archivist

Ernest Oberholtzer arrived in the border region a young man looking for a life that would sustain and excite him. In 1906, he arrived in the north country eager to learn what it meant to explore and to make connections with local Anishinaabe. To keep this in context, by the time Ernest came of age the frontier had passed his home country by and moved far to the west. But the far north was yet unknown and he wanted to make a mark on history.

It's clear from his correspondence and journals that after Ober and Billy's 1912 expedition to Nuelin Lake and Hudson Bay, Ober sought a life of continued adventure. He wanted to go back and explore more of the Barrens land—to get to know the people and the way they lived in the far north. He sent letters to a few of the most well-known ethnologists of the day, inquiring about opportunities for his own ethnographic studies of the people of the Barrens. He wanted to share his knowledge with the professional world, but the ethnologists of the time told him that he was not trained to do so. Despite this setback, over the years Ober documented many stories, legends, the language of the local Anishinaabeg, and other subjects that indicated he had dedicated a large part of his life recognizing the importance of the knowledge and lifeways of the Indigenous people he met. This, as much as his later work of advocacy for wilderness, became Ernest Oberholtzer's legacy.

A legacy is what a noted personality leaves behind to share his or her accomplishments with future generations. Early in his career, Ober recognized the changes that took place over time. Ober's early canoe travels to photograph and document the regional watershed of Rainy Lake and the Quetico were designed for the railroad to attract settlement in the west. This work set him on a path in life that allowed him to imagine what his legacy would become.

What makes Mallard Island so special and unique as a living history legacy is that when Ober finally left the Island to live his remaining days on the mainland, he took with him only what little he needed to lead a simple life there. Most of his personal collection, his books, journals, and papers from almost fifty years in the north country remained where he last set them. Many people dedicated enormous amounts of time to coordinate his correspondence. Ober's good friend, Gene Ritchie Monahan (1908 to 1994) went through piles of papers and journals in anticipation of their donation to the Minnesota Historical Society where they have been microfilmed and are available to anyone. Jean Sanford Replinger (founder of Mallard programs) and cohorts devised and established a fabulous cataloging system, which allows the books to be located on shelves where Ober kept them.

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In the words of

Ernest Oberholtzer...

About the Program in the Quetico Superior region: (mid-1930s)

“It contemplates setting aside the border lakes and streams from Rainy Lake east to Lake Superior together with their tributaries in both countries and maintaining them inviolate for all time for the health and delight of the people of both countries.”

“We are in a period of profound transition. New values are emerging. New human satisfactions must be provided. Health and happiness depend only in part on man-made goods.”

“It is no time to apologize, to speak in whispers. The hour has come to call out in ringing tones. Our young people will be the final answer. The same spirit... will command its universities of the wilderness.”



Photo by Paula DeMars

Dear Readers,

A fine Mallard Island summer was shadowed by deep August and September sorrow. When I took this job with the Foundation, after having fallen completely in love with an island and its beauty and buildings and stories, I would never have guessed that I'd be working with a board member like Tim Heinle. Some not-for-profit organizations struggle with the idea that the board of directors, not the staff, raises the budget. To Tim, this was his job and his calling. Though I assisted him continually, I always knew what his intentions were, and he excelled at the basics of relational fundraising. And beyond the financial stuff, Tim taught me a lot about life. He'd laugh at that, but it is true, and every day I think of more life-lessons that came from Tim Heinle. Thanks, Tim, for all of it.

Meanwhile, we can't forget what Tim also loved and what motivated him—the work on Mallard. It continued this spring, and we repaired, replaced, and strengthened as always. In May we saw a whole new wall of “like old” cedar-slab lumber go into place—the north wall of Ober's Big House. It looks beautiful, yet it looks like it was always there.

And then the island program weeks rolled out. See pages 4 and 5 for more details, for images and poems and stories of the love of a north woods place.

Now, with the busy summer behind us and thoughts about the year ahead, we find ourselves talking of change—talking about a year of renewal and reflection on the tiny spit of rock called Mallard Island. Stay tuned as this idea is fleshed out, but one thing is clear—2018 will not look the same as always, and plans will serve to renew and replenish the spirit of the island that we love.

-- Beth Waterhouse

Hare

There is a pillar of sunlight
dusted with pollen, reflected
and blinking, like shards
of broken glass in some parking lot.
You hop, just then, from the
shadow of Juniper,
and I'm forced by your
form to consider: ears.
The monarchy of sound.
Your flanks ripple in dew
and your stare the look
of all prey – prey that never
has the luxury of knowing peace,
and instead just knows
alert and more alert.



Not one, but two or three hares made their homes on Mallard this summer. Photo by Mary Swalla Holmes

MALLARD ISLAND

THE OBERHOLTZER FOUNDATION

The Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation maintains 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.

This newsletter is published twice per year, generally February and October. Cover sketch of Mallard Island is credited to Gene Ritchie Monahan. Send poems, stories or articles to Beth Waterhouse at beth@eober.org

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For more information, visit

www.eober.org

There you will find back issues of this newsletter as well as the annual reports for the organization, guidelines for summer programs, history and photos of the island, friends and writings of Ernest Oberholtzer, and much more.

Please support this publication or our organization, as you are able. Send a donation for general support or mark your check “endowment” to pledge to that campaign, ongoing in 2017. Meanwhile, think about adding the Oberholtzer Foundation to your estate plans—this is a long-standing organization upholding solid preservation and conservation values and maintaining four beautiful islands in Rainy Lake. We can receive gifts of stock. To learn more contact the executive director or a board member. Thank you!

My harmlessness means nothing
neither does my love.

Just as suddenly, you disappear
a magician's trick, varying the old
theme. The visible made invisible
sleight of hand
right before my eyes.

By Larry Gavin.
Part of his Island Tryptich. 2017.

The Deer Island Enterprise Revealed

By Deborah Dietrich-Smith
Written September 2017

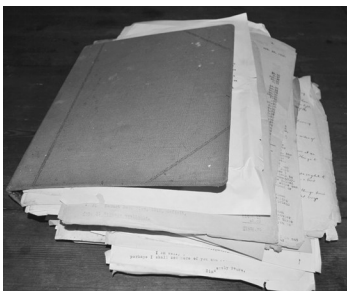
Until recently, few details have been known about the Deer Island Enterprise between William Hapgood and Ernest Oberholtzer. (Some now know Deer Island as our neighbor, *Grassy Island*.)

During the summers of 2016 and 2017, preservation professionals took up residence on Mallard Island to document its cultural landscape. David Driapsa brought these groups together after first visiting the island in 2010, and subsequently preparing a Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS) of the island and submitting it to the Library of Congress. During the first summer, the group discovered a stack of documents in the musty storage room adjacent to Ober's office in Old Man River House; however, it wasn't until the summer of 2017 that the research value of these papers was fully understood.

For the past year, Driapsa and I as his research partner, Deborah Dietrich-Smith, have worked together continuing the documentation of Mallard Island and Ober's adopted world of Rainy Lake. During this period we have extensively researched the Ernest C. Oberholtzer collection housed in the archives of the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) via inter-library loan. Because of our knowledge of the MNHS collection, we realized the importance of the Deer Island papers, which tell a fairly untold portion of Ober's story.

The Deer Island papers span the period from 1917 to 1922. The earliest document is a letter from William Hapgood to Ober, dated May 10, 1917, with Hapgood writing, "I would be pleased to furnish the capital if you would manage the venture." The latest document is a letter from Ober to Hapgood, dated June 5, 1922, with Ober writing, "I thank you for the acknowledgement of payment on the Mallard." Additional correspondence and business documents detail day-to-day operations of Deer Island Enterprise, financial and personal burdens it created upon both men, and strains it placed upon their friendship. We've known, all along, that without the Deer Island sustainability project, there would have been no Mallard Island for Oberholtzer.

It is remarkable that these Deer Island papers have remained on Mallard Island for the past one hundred years. As we discovered, Mallard Island holds many mysteries and reveals itself gradually. The Deer Island papers are a real treasure find, and we are convinced the island may yield more discoveries giving new light to Ober's story.



To Contact Us:

The Oberholtzer Foundation migrates home each autumn to the Twin Cities, after carefully sharing Mallard Island in Rainy Lake. Visit our web site at www.eober.org. On facebook, enter "Mallard Island in Rainy Lake."

The Ernest Oberholtzer Foundation Board of Directors:

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Trustees Emeritus are remembered and honored for their significant contributions of time, energy, expertise, talents, assets and skills to further the mission of the Oberholtzer Foundation:

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Note: Charles A. Kelly was also named an emeritus member of the board, and he is currently serving as its assistant treasurer.

Staff: Beth Waterhouse, Executive Director, and Summer Program Directors: Mairi Doerr and Prudence Johnson. We welcome Archivist / Historian Paula DeMars as contract staff this year.

Contact Numbers: Home office: (952) 401-0591. Beth's cell: (952) 607-6879. Email: beth@eober.org. To contact other staff or specific board members, please give Beth a call.



Our neighbor, Tim Gerlach, managed to capture this double rainbow from a perfect perspective over on Jackfish Island.



Grandmother Drum,

adorned with your beaded skirt
of red trumpet flowers, blue squash blossoms,
waiting for time to pass, waiting to wake up--
she feels a little cradled: a patient, swaddled cloud.

What muscle made this lightness?
What darkness made the jubilant music of island morning?

It's an endless rhythm century after
century, a drumbeat following the deer's
milky tail as it brightens in the underbrush.
Drum beat, heart beat, beat of the island, propelling
boats, pushing soft currents of water, hear this!

We come to you with gratitude and humble offerings
that you may teach us to not let the earth go dormant

nor our spirits, for lack of reverent use!

And teach us, Grandmother, the beat of the lake's
heart, that we might find a true rhythm.

Let us learn to listen to your language,
which is the language of this land.

Every supple animal

Every wild gesture,
and that far-reaching cry.

*Compilation poem by a group of women poets
on Mallard in July.*

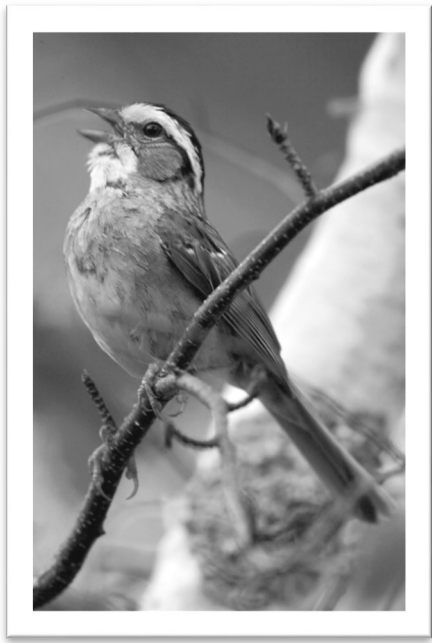


Nancy Jones and her great-grand-daughter Sequoia
Photo by Beth Waterhouse 2013



Caretaker Jennie Ross paints the Wannigan porch in late May.
Photo by Nance Kunkel





Most happenings on the Mallard have the white-throated sparrow as music in the background.

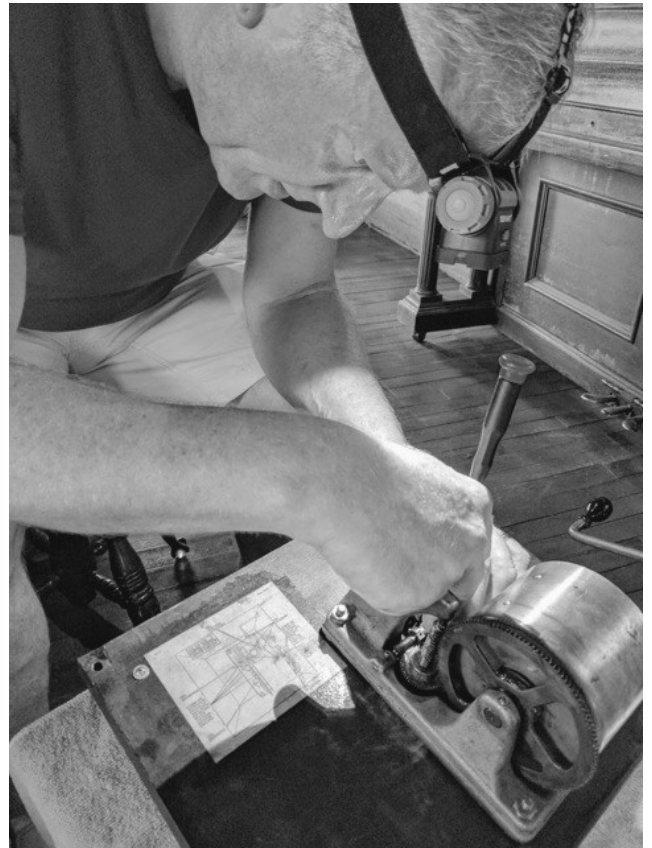
Photo by David Astin



Food on Mallard – always amazing, and this abundance created a unique late summer meal. Photo by Dick Isenhart, who also ate the meal!



Mark Granlund caught this sunrise shot. Believe it or not, Mark is not always fixing something while on the island.

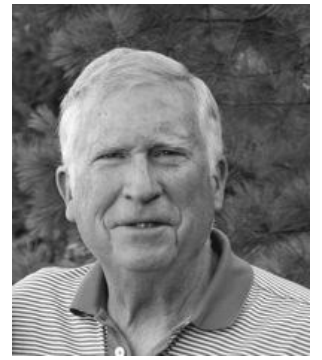


Not every day that you find someone who can fix a Victrola! Here, Ron Oveson of *Time-Warp Clockworks* installs the guts back into the Victrola. Did you know that a Victrola has two, 17-foot coils of steel hand-calibrated just right?? An amazing project. And done by a man whose great-uncle, Harry Oveson, worked for Oberholtzer.



In Memorium: Timothy Mudge Heinle, 1939 to 2017

Tim's life was one of giving—of his time and of his strength. He joined the Oberholtzer Board of Directors in 2004 at a time when he might have been slowing down from all his years with Camp Koochiching on Rainy Lake, but he came to us with energy, enthusiasm, and business skills that have bettered our organization.



Tim was born in Cincinnati, and he first attended Camp Koochiching at the tender age of twelve. Sports and the camp became paramount in his life, and both tennis and canoe trips were carried to the end, in daily life or lore. Tim once played tennis on Michigan's NCAA championship team. And he and several friends canoed into the far north in 1961—a once in a lifetime effort, and one that taught Tim the value of teamwork. He often spoke of that trip as a defining event.

Tim took over the management of Camp Koochiching at a time when they needed his help, and he dedicated a big part of his working career to the camp. By 2002, Tim also helped establish Camp Ogichi Daa Kwe, a now-successful wilderness camp for girls. Tim was always very proud of both Rainy Lake camps.

After all was said and done, Tim's knowledge of Rainy Lake and the community were a perfect match to the Oberholtzer Foundation as it began a new phase of its organizational life. Tim soon began to talk about an endowment campaign, and the Foundation caught up with his dreams in 2015 when our campaign was announced. Tim was glad to know that we are now approaching 80% of the goal in that campaign, one that will help to maintain Ober's island legacy.

Caretakers on Mallard Island know the sound of Tim's runabout boat and motor. He would stop at least weekly, just to say hi to the caretaker in charge and ask "anything you need?" He usually drove on after quick assurance. We came to know that Tim got more accomplished by 10 AM each morning than most of us manage in a full day's time—and with such friendship.

From all of us at the Ernest Oberholtzer Foundation—an enormous farewell and *Miigwech* to Tim Heinle for all the years he gave us and for the accepting and caring spirit that he shared with us every single day.

What is a Living History Legacy

(continued from page 1)

Each step along the way, folks have worked to preserve this legacy in its exceptional environment, emulating the way they thought that Ober wanted his legacy built.

Since 2000, the structures on Mallard Island have been designated as Historic Structures with the National Register of Historic Places, and the language of this designation supports the idea of this living history legacy. The NRHP evaluator comments that, "The island remains remarkably evocative of Oberholtzer's presence as the buildings retain all his possessions including his roughly 11,000 books, furniture, artwork, music, and photographs." With these statements, the registrar highlights the significance of the island legacy that Ober chose to impart to future generations.

It is clear that the process of forging a legacy began during Ober's lifetime while he pondered what would become of his beloved home and personal property. By 1957, when he needed to move to the mainland, Ober had in mind the creation of a Foundation to administer his estate after his passing. He had considered several options for preserving his Islands and he declared that he wanted his closest associates to maintain the island in his vision of how a Foundation may share what he created. Ted Hall writes, "Ober saw his place as a living island, much as he saw his beloved boundary waters country as a living wilderness."

Through the years, the Foundation has tried to ascertain what Ober intended to be his legacy, and to care for it. The buildings and personal property have an indeterminate future on these rocky shores, where preservation over the long-term is constant challenge. Focus has centered for many years on maintaining the structures by installing new roofs, rebuilding the stone fireplace, rebuilding walls and foundations so that structures continue to stand. Nature has put forth greater challenges with floods, falling trees, and always the dangers of fire. It is remarkable that Mallard Island continues to stand and to thrive.

Beyond the buildings, Ober's books, music and photographs were at the center of his everyman identity. He was a man of culture in this northern land. He was interested in the world and what could be learned from it or shared among a community of like-minded individuals. These are the keys to Ober's world – his living history legacy.

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Letter from the Treasurer

As fall descends on Rainy Lake with as much bluster as expected, we all begin to enjoy the cool nights and peacefulness that engulfs this wonderful land.

Together we are so fortunate to have had all sorts of experiences on this granite island—Mallard Island—this past summer, drawn to it for different reasons but prepared to leave it better than expected. I write this letter in absolute gratitude for those who care for this sacred place and work passionately to protect the delicate environment, and hopefully to nurture themselves in the process. To that end I can't say enough about one of the most committed men I've ever had the pleasure to meet and whose letter I write on his behalf. Tim Heinle would have written this letter to you readers and he would have thanked all who have contributed, whether monetary or with skill, thoughtfulness or passion, all needed to keep a small foundation and a tiny island here for many to participate and share with others.

For all of you that tirelessly lifted great weight, fixed something broken, planted something beautiful or wrote something fitting, thank you. The island brought photographers, architects, painters and musicians. Whatever it might have been that brought you, we hope that Mallard Island taught you well. As the newly appointed treasurer, I'll attempt to fit into Tim Heinle's shoes and continue the work that he started, realizing that those shoes crossed many paths with boundless energy, something I wish I had a fraction of. The Oberholtzer Foundation has lost a great man who left this land (and this organization) in better shape than he found it, helped us understand what it took to keep the fires burning and to never neglect those that have brought us this far. If you ever had the pleasure of talking with Tim, you know that his gentle art of persuasion would make giving easier than you thought and instill an absolute trust that your gift would be carefully managed. The endowment that we all have contributed to has been his recent passion, and it makes this delicate balance in keeping Ober's mission easier to foster, something I'll continue to do for you. Let's all find some of Tim's passion in ourselves and continue this legacy. As pressure on our lands mounts, we need it more than ever to protect these gifts for future generations.

Michael Reid



What is a Living History Legacy (continued from page 6)

For some years now, the Foundation has encouraged preservation of the many books Ober left to be shared. Archives Week volunteers have dusted, aired, repaired, and preserved his personally valued collection of titles. And by the by greater interest in expanding preservation has developed with this dedicated group. The love of the Island and keeping it as a legacy increases the interest in the intrinsic components of Ober's life. Additionally, the depth of the archives is surprising. There are many telltale gems of lore and history tucked away, yet to be discovered on Mallard Island or about Ober.

As we continue to engage this living history legacy of Ernest Oberholtzer's life, we find stories in his woolen shirts hanging in the closet or the pile of coal in the bin still waiting for use, the canoes tucked in the rafters or the patterns of book titles shelved (seemingly randomly) throughout the historic buildings. Mallard Island whispers its tales of history through the people who come to share in its legacy and live, if only for a short time, in these structures that awaken so much interest in the world as it was known in Ober's time.

* * *

We welcome Paula DeMars to the staff of the Oberholtzer Foundation. As Archivist ~ Historian ~ Researcher, Paula will be working part time to help with many archival projects in this "living legacy."

Britta L. Bloomberg. "Oberholtzer Historic District Koochiching County, MN". National Register of Historic Places. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service: 2000, Section 7, Page 2.
Ted Hall, (1921-2003) lifelong friend and founding board member. Editor, *Rainy Lake Chronicle*, et cetera.



MALLARD ISLAND

Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation
4370 Brookside Ct. #205
Edina, MN 55436

Nineteenth Annual Oberholtzer Fall Gathering Saturday, October 28th

Where? Judson Church, 4101 Harriet Av S,
Minneapolis MN 55409

When? October 28th Saturday,
from 2:00 to 6:00 pm



Martha Greene Phillips

Please come! Join together to share your memories of another fine summer, to read your words or sing your songs! Bring memories, artwork, photos, and your checkbook—to buy the new notecards, more beautiful than ever. Plan to take part in the impromptu talent show held at about 3:30, which always reflects the island that we call “magic.” The true magic is in laughter, creativity, slowing down to meet nature’s rhythm, and finding new friends!



Come and meet Martha Greene Phillips who will speak about her new book: *Border Country: the Northwoods Canoe Journals of Howard Greene 1906 – 1916*, University of Minnesota Press. We will also have time for words reflecting on the life of our good friend, Tim Heinle, who died in September. Light refreshments will be served.

Directions to Judson Church: Judson is south of downtown Minneapolis. Directions: Take the 46th Street exit off of 35W, travel west on 46th to Harriet and north to 41st Street. Or take Lyndale to 41st and east to Harriet.