

## Rosa Carl Oberholtzer...

As told by her son and compiled by the editor.

*Rosa Oberholtzer most definitely loved her son, Ernest. Her life was not an easy one, with a divorce in 1891, and the death of her second son, Frank, also that year. Rosa went to live with her parents, Sarah and Ernest Carl, at their home on Sixth and Perry Street in Davenport, Iowa. Grief played a role in her life, of course, and often took Rosa to Oakdale Cemetery. She later followed Ernest to Harvard and, by 1915, north to Rainy Lake. In this article, we learn more about Rosa and this mother-son relationship. The long quotes from Ober are taken from oral histories conducted in the 1960s by Lucille Kane of the Minnesota Historical Society. Italics are the editor's.*

Ernest Oberholtzer is speaking:

“We were on Atsokan Island that summer of 1916, camping out all season. I had had a bad year because I had overestimated how much I could do, evidently, and a heart specialist thought I should give up living up there, and that was the last thing I wanted to do.” Ober encouraged Dr. Douglas Head, of Minneapolis, to let him try to stay.

*Apparently Rosa had arrived on Rainy the previous summer, 1915, and Ober says, “We had no habitation yet, but I had rented a cabin over on the Canadian side from Dr. Dunsmore of Minneapolis... They offered us an old boat and an outboard motor, one of the earliest outboard motors (none of which ever were very reliable.) And when my mother came up by train... that same afternoon we started over for this [Dunsmore] cabin.”*

**M**y mother was in a white dress. It was a nice summer day, but it was blowing very hard from the south, and very warm. We got our supplies... It was seven miles over to this cabin, almost directly out into the lake with nothing surrounding it. We hadn't got very far across... when the motor stopped. The boat was clumsy and couldn't be rowed back, and we went with the wind, with more and more signs of thunder... lightning occasionally as evening approached. Finally we had to land on a little island and make up our minds to stay there all night. My mother in her white dress. Well, I was pretty well prepared for it. I put up a little tent, and I assured her that she'd be all right there. But that was hard for her to believe. She'd never stayed out overnight before. So she sat bolt upright all night in this tent as the lightning flashed in all directions. And she imagined every moment that the tent would burn up, at least, if *she* didn't—or both of us. She was more concerned about me because I was her only relative, and she didn't want to lose me. She'd always been very devoted to me, but never an affectionate mother. But I knew that she thought I was worth preserving.”



Photo: Oberholtzer Foundation Archives

Ober continues, “I don't think my mother had ever kissed me in her life, unless she did it when I was a baby and didn't know it... But that was a certain reserve she had, and it was just more or less peculiar to our family. And quite different from some distant relatives who kissed at every possible moment. When they'd come to visit us, there would first be quite a kissing match, and I would run up into the attic to avoid it. < ! > And so, we had to spend the night there (on that little island), and my mother afraid... but she got through the night.”

*(continued on page 6)*

## Dear Readers,

Perhaps the biggest lessons within this organization, this winter, have to do with the archives—lately Ober’s photographs, but also the oral histories, now over 50 years old. It’s like all the stories and images are held in a deeper well, almost a bottomless one. Paula DeMars writes about the photographs on page three.

One of my inner questions, last summer, was about Rosa Oberholtzer’s character, so I spent some time on that for all of us. What a stalwart woman she must have been—embedded in the culture of an old river town in Iowa, yet willing to travel to the far north and engage in what she once determined to be “this northern nonsense.” The shores of Rainy Lake were quickly becoming the adopted homeland of her son, and she came north for both of their sakes.

Speaking of far north-- I think you’ll also enjoy the story on page three, which came in from Saskatchewan as I was pulling articles together. It was simply too good to miss in this issue, as you’ll see. Sometimes, I swear Ober has a directing hand in all of this. Our thanks to Les Oystryk for that one.

Lastly, and from this chair, I’d like to add that all is well with the Oberholtzer Foundation. Yes, we still miss Tim Heinle. Yes, we are looking for new board members. And yes, we have all committed to a summer that we’re calling a “year of reflection and renewal.” When it all came together at the end of 2017, it was time to slow down and take a deeper look at our place, our mission, and our messages.

There are still a few spots open in Individual Artists / Special Projects Week, as I type this. (possible other weeks, also) Do contact me if you want to discuss options on Mallard within the summer of 2018. (Please review the summer schedule on page five.)

Finally, thanks for reading these pages. We know your mailboxes are full, but I’m so glad that you still enjoy this old-fashioned paper newsletter. I enjoy editing it, with Nance’s help, and we imagine you at your kitchen table, learning about Rosa!

-- Beth Waterhouse



### 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](mailto:beth@eober.org)

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**For more information, visit**

[www.eober.org](http://www.eober.org)

On our website you will find back issues of this newsletter as well as 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 2018. 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, or to visit the island this coming summer, contact the executive director or a board member. Thank you!



# Pictures Worth a Thousand Words

By Paula DeMars

As we've worked on the Ernest Oberholtzer photograph collection this winter we have uncovered and counted over 80% of the original collection of 35 mm slides. The slides were donated to the Minnesota Historical Society some years ago, and on a mild January day, Beth Waterhouse and I were joined by MnHS curator, Jennifer Huebscher, in counting and tallying the large slide collection. What we found were some amazing photographs. The "ooo's" and "ahh's" were frequent as each of us took our finds to the light table for a better view.

Ober probably obtained a camera that could take 35 mm color slides sometime around 1945. He used slides as a common medium for recording his canoe trips, friends, trips across country, and especially nature in all its forms through the 1960s. Early on, it seems that Ober processed and formatted the slides himself. Later, commercial processing becomes more standard in his collection.

Early photo curator, Ray Anderson (International Falls, 1920-2008), gave order to the slides that tell a wonderful story of Ober's life during this period. In 1946, Ober took canoe trips to photograph damage in the region caused by logging. No longer was there a threat to build dams, but the logging companies were doing plenty of damage, and Ober was there recording it. His photographs supported his promotion of a belt of untouched shore along the edge of lakes and rivers. Protecting shoreline was a large part of his later conservation work and led to the establishment of wilderness areas through the 1964 Wilderness Protection Act. Ober led a canoe trip with Wilderness Society members in 1956, after their stay on the Mallard.

Ober also became involved in the construction of the highway through Grand Portage during this period. He made many trips to the North Shore and Grand Portage in the 1940s to early 1960s. Ober's more distant trips took him to the Grand Canyon, Jasper National Park, the Olympic Mountains, and also to Alaska in 1963 to capture Mount McKinley. Ober was very partial to photographing the Havasupai Falls in the Grand Canyon.

Wilderness comprises the greater share of the 35mm slides taken. The photographs tell a story of dozens of canoe trips, multiple trips every year, with many different paddlers. Trip photos begin in 1945 with "loading canoe." In 1946, Ober was at White Otter Lake, took photos on Big Turtle River and Little Turtle River, camped on Eltrut Lake, Robinson and Clearwater Lakes.

He revisited these places many times through the 1950s and early 1960s. Throughout the decades, he returned to help his Indigenous friends at ricing times, and took pictures of many summer campsites. Ober was always fond of taking photographs of nature and his gardens as well as butterflies, birds, and small mammals.

*Paula DeMars is an Archivist / Historian / Researcher, to be working in 2018 with the Foundation.*



Photo: Ernest C. Oberholtzer

## To Contact Us:

In a couple of months, the Oberholtzer Foundation will plan for its spring migration up to Mallard Island. Somewhere in April we begin to watch a web-cam for Rainy Lake ice conditions. Enjoy it at [[www.rainylakeonestop.com/rainy-lake-cam](http://www.rainylakeonestop.com/rainy-lake-cam)].

**The Ernest Oberholtzer Foundation Board of Directors:** Peggy Anne Smith, president; Bob Norbie, vice president; Mark Granlund, secretary; Michael Reid, treasurer and Charles Kelly, assistant treasurer. At Large Board Members are: Jim Fitzpatrick, George Glazier, Bob Hilke, Pebaamibines (Dennis) Jones, Denise Lajimodiere, and Diane Tessari. We also honor our Trustees Emeritus.

If you would like to discuss joining this board of directors, please contact Bob Norbie at < [bnorbie@gmail.com](mailto:bnorbie@gmail.com) >. We are a self-selecting board and always renewing membership. Your history with the island and our programs is important.

**Staff:** Beth Waterhouse, Executive Director; Mairi Doerr and Prudence Johnson as Summer Program Directors; Paula DeMars as contract Archivist / Historian.

**The Foundation address changed during 2017. Please take note:**

**Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation**  
4370 Brookside Court, #205  
Edina, MN 55436  
(952) 401-0591 / (952) 607-6879  
[beth@eober.org](mailto:beth@eober.org)

Special thanks to the cadre of **Mallard Island caretakers** who will again help with the summer: Daniel Laurence Andersen, Judy Blais, Paula DeMars, Mairi Doerr, Barb Draper, Jim Fitzpatrick, Mark Granlund, Mary Swalla Holmes, Prudence Johnson, Kim Knutson, Jane Lund, Kara Olson, Jennie Ross, Danielle Sosin, Diane Tessari and Elaine Thrune. If you've dreamed about being a caretaker, please contact Beth Waterhouse at the email address above.



## Historic Photos Live On in the Far North

Les Oystryk is a retired conservation officer and historian living in Saskatchewan. In 2012, he helped us organize a centennial return-tour to several far-north communities, ones that Oberholtzer and Billy Magee had passed through in their epic journey to Hudson Bay. Les and Oberholtzer Foundation board member, Bob Hilke, took that return trip in March of that year.

Last summer, Oystryk posted images or articles about Oberholtzer on a Facebook page that he manages, called “Reindeer Lake History.” One day he posted one of Oberholtzer’s photos of a 1912 photo of Alphonse Dzeylion along with three young girls and an older woman, and some wonderful responses ensued:

**Phil Umpherville:** Les, I have seen this photo before. It certainly is possible the girl identified as Eugene is in fact Catherine, for the reasons you stated. But whose daughter was Eugene? I’ve heard that Eliza, shown here, did not have children, though she raised some.

**Les:** Having looked at both of the photos again, it certainly looks like it is a young 11-year-old Catherine Cook standing next to her auntie, Eliza, who was Marie (Marisis) Cook’s sister. I recall from reading Michelle Tracy’s thesis, *A Bread Basket of My Own—the Beadwork of Metis Artist Philoemene Umpherville* that there was a Eugene Cook who was a daughter of Marie and Joseph, but her age does not seem to be established or known. I’m glad that we are able to further determine these identities with your expert family help.

**Marc Lapensee:** I was just looking at that photo yesterday and wondering the same thing about Catherine.

Next, Les Oystryk posted this 1912 photo of a woman standing in front of her home with six children. This was a photo with characters that had not previously been identified, and now, thanks to Phil Umpherville, we now have the names of six people. Some of their descendants are living in the Reindeer Lake area today.

**Phil Umpherville:** Hello Les. Thanks for sharing these photos. This one is particularly interesting—the earliest photo I’ve seen of my Brochet family. This group of seven people, I’m sure is of my great-grandmother, Marie Cook. From L-R #1: Possibly Solomon Cook, b. 1898; #2: Charlotte Cook, b. 1906, d. 2006; Her resemblance to her daughter, Gladys from a later photo (circa 1930) is uncanny. She married Olaf Olson. #4: (baby) Angelique Agnes Cook b. 30 June, 1912, she would have been almost a month at the time of this photo on July 27, 1912. She married Jack Lundy. #5: This was my great grandmother Marie Cook, nee Linklater, b. 1870, d. 1943, married Joseph Cook b. 1869 d. 1931. #6: Elise Cook, b. 1895, d. at Wollaston Lake SK, married Pascal Benoune. And #7: Catherine Cook, my grandma, b. 1901, d. 1988, buried in Plantagenet, Ontario. She married Adolph Lapensee, b. 1881, and d. 1961.



**Marc Lapensee:** Hi Phil, are you saying that Grandma Catherine is in the back near the door?

**Phil:** Hello Cousin Marc, Yes, the girl on the right, near the door is Grandma. Take care. Good to hear from you.

**Marc:** Wow!!! This is amazing stuff!

*Amazing stuff, indeed. It is heartening to know that these century-old images can find identification and “home families” even after a hundred-plus years. We are grateful for the responses from these families and for the efforts of historian, Les Oystryk, in getting images out to the Saskatchewan public. – E. C. Oberholtzer Foundation*

## Mallard Island Summer of 2018

### “A Year of Reflection and Renewal”

**S**ensing that the time is right for some slowing and renewal, the Oberholtzer Foundation board of directors has declared this theme and interpreted it into a shorter, yet high quality, summer schedule for 2018. From a planning document: “In our years with Mallard Island, we have systematically shared Ober’s trails, gardens, landscapes and buildings. And we have carefully restricted the use or ‘borrowing’ of this tiny island to a dozen people at any given time, identifying that as the Island’s *ecological carrying capacity*. However, we have in recent years stretched the summer to about as long as is physically possible (ice to ice) and we have lived right up to and pushed against the limits of that human carrying capacity. ~ It is time for renewal.”

Here is the basic outline of the Mallard Island summer of 2018.

May 29 to June 2, 2018	<b>Opening days of Reflection</b> , Fasting, and Indigenous Drum Ceremony as we open the season. Flexible to weather, schedules, and water system.
June 3-9, 2018	<b>Land and Buildings Work Week:</b> With a dual focus on both carpentry and gardens. Michael Reid, coordinator. The group will assess needed repair projects while others renew the island’s many garden spaces.
June 9, 2018	<i>Spring Oberholtzer Foundation Board Meeting (Saturday)</i>
June 10-16, 2018	<b>Renewal Focus Group Week:</b> A mixed group of board members and non-board friends of the island will examine the various structural “systems” or messages that bring people to the island. We’ll open the week to options for dialogue with local community members.
June 17-23, 2018	<b>Archives Week:</b> This year’s focus is on the Oberholtzer collections other than his library. Intention is to improve the inventory and location systems for both maps and photography.
June 24-30, 2018	Designated REST Week
July 8-14, 2018	<b>“Artists in these Times,”</b> a program week hosted by Mayme Donsker of Pasadena, California. Group will explore contemplative practices that affect themselves and their creativity, examining themes of equanimity, compassion, and interdependence.
July 15-21, 2018	<b>“Women Poets”</b> hosted by Katie Rauk and Brett Elizabeth Jenkins. The group settles deeply into the Nature and spaces of Mallard Island, declaring that the island encourages both solitude and communion. They all actively seek and write poetry during their island days.
July 22-28, 2018	Designated REST Week
July 29 to August 4, ‘18	<b>“Turning the Pages of History,”</b> hosted by Andrea Carlson who will bring together “artists and writers who are researching / revising history and turning its pages to a new, richer or more complete understanding of the land and its people.” Indigenous and non-native participants.
August 5-11, 2018	<b>Island Caretakers’ Training Week</b> , coordinated by Beth Waterhouse and Mairi Doerr, to expand the group of annual volunteers.
August 19-25, 2018	Designated REST Week
August 26 to Sept 1, ‘18	<b>Individual Artists and Special Projects Week:</b> hosted by the Foundation to encourage individuals with either an artistic project coming out of their own body of work, or a special project that calls upon the island archives. Spaces are available, as of mid-February.
September 2-8, 2018	<b>Board Visioning and Planning Days:</b> To evaluate the summer renewal focus and its impact on systems, messages, and the island itself. Also to look forward and to revise our strategic planning goals for the next three years. Culminating in a fall board meeting.

*(continued from page 1)*

*As you can see, this surprising story not only tells us about Rosa Oberholtzer, a reserved and cultured woman from Davenport, stuck out of sheer determination and love in a tent on an island in Rainy Lake in a thunderstorm, but it also reveals Ober's story-telling style. After a few more wild and windy trips across Rainy Lake that summer, Ober noticed that his mother simply was not comfortable, and one evening he finally felt he had to challenge her:*

“After supper, I said to her (I’d been thinking about it): ‘Now I think when there is a perfectly still day, not a ripple on the lake, that I’ll go to Ranier and I’ll take you with all your things.’ She said, ‘well why—why are you going to do that?’ ‘Well, because I don’t think you’re the person to come up here. You’re too much afraid. You can never stay up here on this lake and enjoy it. You’re going to suffer every minute you’re here.’

‘Ernest, I’m not a bit afraid,’ Rosa replied. ‘Well, you acted like it today,’ And I said, ‘I just feel that a person who is so timid about the lake shouldn’t be up here.’ Well, she continued to insist that she was not a bit afraid, and that was the beginning of her training to exist in an area like that. She finally got so that she never complained under any circumstances when she was on the lake, no matter what happened...”

*Rosa was “game” sure enough. She helped Ober in the pre-Mallard years, over on Deer Island (now known as Grassy) where there was an experimental “farm operation,” raising sheep and poultry. In this interview, Ober is distracted about the farm project for a time, but then refers back to his mother, “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.” Mother “didn’t want to do anything that made any animal seem to suffer.” After one tail-docking episode with the lambs, Rosa is quoted as saying, “Never again.”*

*One final story really needs to be put in print again, after having been in this oral history transcript and occasionally told on Mallard Island but with less Ober-detail. Once again, here are the words of Ernest Oberholtzer:*

**T**hen there was another incident when we had to deliver sheep in town. We had a large barge that we rented for the purpose, and we put these sheep in the barge. And I said to my mother, ‘Now, somebody will have to be in the barge.’ As a tranquilizer, you see, so they wouldn’t all jump overboard, because if one jumped over, they all would. It wasn’t very high, and it would have been a terrible thing, you know, to have all those sheep in the lake. So there she was. And my motor wasn’t running right—a four cylinder motor—a big boat and about 200 feet of rope on behind, you see, and we were going to go down the lake to International Falls with these sheep. So there she was. The boat would stop every once in a while, and I’d have to kneel down and work on it, and I finally got it going on about three cylinders and thought I was lucky. It was going along pretty well—limping. And I was just congratulating myself on the fact that I had it all going, and I turned around, and the barge was gone. I didn’t know where it had gone! I didn’t know. I was all alone, you see. But it had moved out among the islands, toward Canada. It was going north with a south wind, you see. So there was my mother alone with all of these sheep.

It just happened so suddenly and it drifted right out in this strong south wind and got somewhere on the other side of those islands—just where I didn’t know. After a little exploring, I got out where you could look on the north side of the islands, and there I could see my mother on this barge, standing on the front, waving her hand, like this, you see.”



*Thus the oral histories help us to develop this major character in the life story of Ernest Oberholtzer. Rosa certainly stuck by her son. As Joe Paddock, biographer for Oberholtzer, recounted, “When he went to Harvard, Rosa was there; when he went to Europe, she was there. Rosa was perhaps the most powerful bond in Ober’s life.”*

*She must have conquered her fears about choppy water. We know she cooked “lavish” meals for Ober and their Rainy Lake friends, in a floating kitchen that sometimes leaked. We know she summered in what we now call “Cedarbark House.” We believe she wintered in Davenport at 35 Oak Lane during these years, and we know she had a large base of friends there. She was patient. She was creative. She was determined to keep her sometimes-ailing son alive. Without her, Ober’s life story would have been a far shorter one. Rosa Oberholtzer (1862-1929) died at the height of Ernest’s career and then he carried on without her. Our thanks to you, dear Rosa!*

Photo: Oberholtzer Foundation Archives; probably taken by Ober.

## Letter from the Treasurer

One of the most wonderful aspects of living in the North is that we sometimes get a small respite from the activity that surrounds us, particularly when it's 14 below zero or the streets are impassable from a foot of snow. Suddenly the intensity of the city simply slows down and lets us all take a breath.

“Slow” is particularly true of the Review Islands, now enveloped in ice and snow with only a few creatures making tracks down the trails on Mallard. Nature becomes the protector during the winter, slowing every heartbeat and preserving this place for our pleasure the next season—conservation at its best!

So many of you have also become guardians and protectors over the years, making generous commitments to assure that others can experience and witness what it means to be a protector. Your gifts and volunteer efforts have allowed others to slow down and take that breath. It is particularly true this year—a year of renewal—where we are intent on listening to each other to understand how our mission might be even more focused.

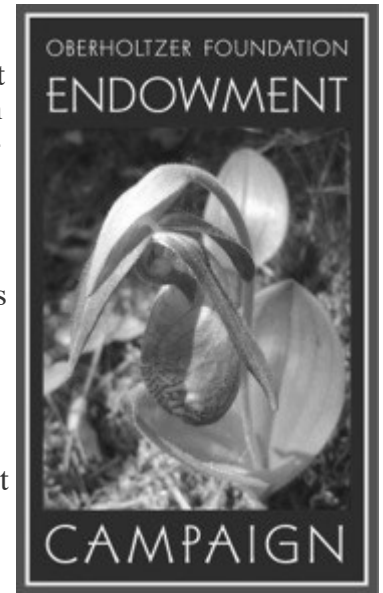
As we move to complete our endowment campaign, I can't say how much I appreciate seeing this new resource grow, giving us much promise that we will not only *sustain* but continue to fully *support* our mission. We are not done yet though, still 15% away from our goal, and I know this can be accomplished soon, so if you're so inclined please consider joining the rest of us and adding your pledge to the endowment campaign!

In the last few months, we have also received several grants that will support not only operations but projects related to archiving Ober's rich history. There seems to be no end to his accomplishments and our discoveries of them. We will all be the beneficiaries of these efforts as we have with several other projects that have cleaned up our forests, maintained our buildings and preserved history.

As we approach yet another exciting year, we look forward to your participation whether far or near in working toward fostering great opportunities for others to experience the offerings of the Oberholtzer Foundation. Thank you again for your help; we couldn't do it without you.

Sincerely,

Michael Reid  
Treasurer



Every day, we remember the life of friend and former treasurer, Timothy M. Heinle. His long-term impact on this organization is undeniable. All who foster Ernest Oberholtzer's fine, Rainy Lake legacy would like to thank the following individuals who donated generously this year to this Foundation, in memory of Tim Heinle.

*Thank you*

Patti Ballan  
Eddie Blaha and Bob Hilke  
Judy Blais  
Lynn and Carol Belanger  
Dale Callaghan  
James Chalfant  
Claudia Christiansen  
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Fred & Eleanor Winston  
Andrew and Georgiann Wright





## MALLARD ISLAND

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

### **Other 2017 memorial gifts made to Ober's legacy:**



- \*Joe Bennett and Kathy Kirschner in memory of Elizabeth and Larry Doyle
- \*Phyllis and Dale Callaghan in memory of Elizabeth and Larry Doyle
- \*Ann Cathcart in honor of Bob and Elaine Waterhouse
- \*Mairi Doerr in memory of her parents, Henry and Katherine Doerr
- \*Barb and Dave Fisher in memory of Dr. Mary Ghostley
- \*Jack and Mary Hickerson in honor of Phillip Dacey and Leo Dangel  
“friends and colleagues”
- \*Craig and Bunnie Hunter in memory of Jim Cowgill
- \*Paul and Kay Larsen in memory of Melinda Larsen
- \*Ann and Barry Sampson in memory of Melinda Larsen
- \*Barbara LaValleur in memory of her sister, Sharon Henneman
- \*Joe and Nancy Paddock in memory of Janet Pearson
- \*Patricia Brophy in memory of Janet Pearson
- \*Daniel Tiffany in honor of Jean Replinger, “a great teacher”

Photo credit to Dick Niemi, taken of Ober in 1964