



FROM THE QUETICO-SUPERIOR FOUNDATION • WINTER 1980-81

A REPORT FROM OBER'S MAGIC ISLAND

by Ted Hall

For a half century the Mallard Island was the home and touchstone of Ernest Carl Oberholtzer, the trail-blazer for that remarkable band of men and women whose foresight and tireless battle spared the Minnesota-Ontario boundary lake country the final conquest by loggers and dam builders and awakened thoughtful citizens of both nations to the heritage of living wilderness they shared along their friendly border.

During that long and sometimes tiring battle "Ober's" island became the touchstone, too, for those who gave talent, effort and money to the cause of preserving this living wilderness for the future generations that would need it even more than we. Fred and Don Winston and Charles Scott Kelly and Frank Hubachek and Sig Olson and Arthur Andrews and Sewell Tyng and Peavey Heffelfinger were among those visiting warriors who met the magic of Ober's Mallard Island and never completely shed its spell.

All over this country and all over the world are men who touched this stone and who at every decisive turn in their lives can feel the strength of that granite spine underfoot and hear the conversation of the lake with a shoreline it will someday conquer.

— *The Rainy Lake Chronicle.*

The battle to spare the living wilderness is now living history and the men who fought that battle are among our quiet legends. Ober's little island awaited its new mission, and Ober himself spoke of his dreams for its future. He saw it as a place for musicians, artists, writers and teachers to come for refreshment of tired souls. He saw it as a continuation of its role as a special place to his Ojibwa Indian friends, the home of friendly spirit families. He saw it as a living island much as he saw his

beloved boundary waters country as a living wilderness.

These are the dreams he told to friends, but he did not set them to legal document, and when he died in June of 1977, he had left the fate of his beloved island, as he left his postponed writing, unfinished. It was assigned no role in the foundation he had established and activated a dozen years earlier, the Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation. In fact, the Mallard Island — along with the two adjacent islands acquired by Ober to protect the Mallard's setting — was lumped with his residuary estate and subject to sale to accommodate distribution of the residuary estate among a dozen and a half heirs. Ober's dream was in trouble.

Four of the heirs, however, accepted the three islands, Ober's library and Indian artifacts in fulfillment of their share of the estate and then through the generosity of other friends of Ober arranged for the donation of the islands, library and artifacts to the Ernest C. Oberholtzer Foundation. The plan was hanging fire \$6,000 short of the pur-

chase price, and Ober's dream for his island was still in trouble.

Then, as though out of that company of his old warrior-friends — from the Quetico-Superior Foundation — came the decisive \$6,000 gift that made possible the acquisition of islands, library and artifacts by the Oberholtzer Foundation. The gift was formally accepted during a meeting of the Oberholtzer Foundation on the Mallard Island August 23, and Dr. Robert H. Monahan, president of the Oberholtzer Foundation since its establishment fifteen years ago, announced that purchase of the islands would be completed within two days.

After Dr. Monahan requested to be relieved of the presidency of the Oberholtzer Foundation, Charles A. Kelly was elected president and Thomas R. Tarbox was elected secretary-treasurer. Other members of the Oberholtzer Foundation, in addition to Dr. Monahan, are James C. Davis of International Falls, Jim Boshkaykin of the Seine River Reserve and Robert H. Monahan III of St. Paul.

"Ober"
His friends rallied
once again.



Photo by
Virginia French.



OBER'S BIG HOUSE
Photo by Ray Anderson



Ober and dog "Snippy" Kitchen Houseboat,
Mallard Island 1932.

Oberholtzer Foundation members and other friends of Ober and his Mallard Island are now assigned to explore possible uses for the island, its library and its tradition as a touchstone for those awakened to the value of our wilderness. The aim is to perpetuate the instant of sanity that brought Winstons, Hubacheks, Kellys, Olsons, Heffelfingers, Dalldorfs, Tyngs to the island.

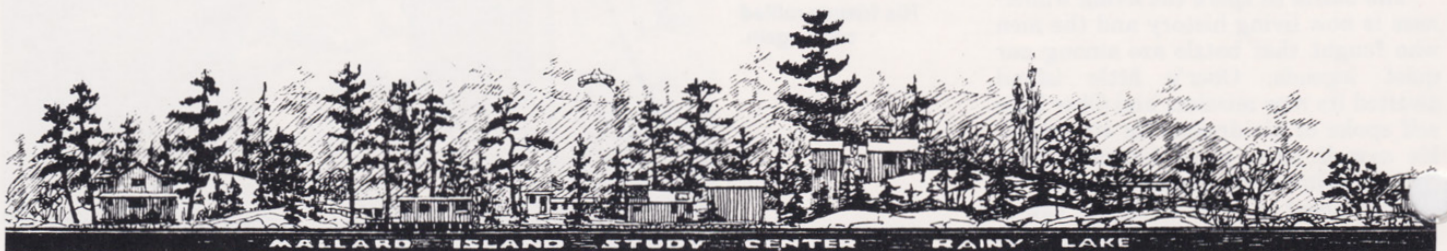
OBER'S BIRDHOUSE
It has a future again.

It was a glorious instant and it made a spark that glows into the instant that followed. He said that the wilderness has a message for men when they pause in their labors. He said that we were living dangerously in our reckless harvest of forests and ore and water. He was challenging an ethic and a dream that conquered the last friendly frontier on this planet. He was saying that glutony would do us in.

Today the planet is telling us these things firsthand and we are sitting up and paying attention. Some will remember that a messenger passed this way a half-century ago, crying the warning few wanted to hear.

This little island may be the pivot point where man turned to make peace with his planet.

—The Rainy Lake Chronicle.



Rainy Lake artist Gene Ritchie Monahan, one of the heirs who donated a share of the island to the Foundation, designed this 'pictograph' for E.C.O. Foundation stationery. Shows all buildings on Mallard Island.

JUDGE LORD RULES FOR THE CANOE COUNTRY

On May 2, U.S. District Judge Miles Lord heard a lawsuit filed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and State of Minnesota which argued that the BWCA Act passed by Congress in October of 1978 deprived the state of its authority to exercise control over 250,000 acres of state-owned waters and land within the million acre BWCA. The lawsuit actually consisted of three lawsuits, one filed by the DNR and two filed by a group of Northeastern Minnesotans represented by Texas attorney Ben Wallis who challenged the 1978 law.

On the evening of July 24th environmentalists learned the good news:

Judge Miles Lord dismissed all three lawsuits. Lord ruled that the BWCA Act is constitutional and he thereby blocked the DNR's attempt to lift motorboat restrictions on thirteen lakes at the edge of the BWCA. DNR Commissioner Alexander said that Lord's decision would be appealed to the U.S. Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis.

Lord said, "The essence of my decision is that the defendants (the federal government and environmentalists) have prevailed on all things." He added, "The new act does not divest the state of jurisdiction over the surface waters in the wilderness." Judge Lord believes

that the BWCA Act gave both the federal government and the state active and complimentary roles in administering the area. "Nothing in the Act divests the state of its authority to regulate mining in the BWCA," said Judge Lord.

Brian O'Neill, an attorney for the Sierra Club, said that Judge Lord's decision was "A sweeping victory for the environmental community in Minnesota and for the state. We are happy with it in all respects." O'Neill emphasized, "Judge Lord also makes it clear that the state's right to control mining is inviolate. The state got what it wanted and we got what we wanted."

Environmentalists and the federal government had good reason to celebrate this decision.



PRELIMINARY PLAN FOR VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK

In early August, state and federal officials said that they had agreed on a plan to resolve management of Voyageurs National Park, nearly a decade after the park was formally established. The recommendation, if adopted, will become the new master plan for the park.

The plan calls for the National Park Service to transfer 1,000 acres in the Black Bay area to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, which in turn will exchange state-owned land on the periphery of Voyageurs to provide better public access to the park. The DNR would allow duck hunting in the Black Bay area, a plan supported by many area residents.

Less than half of Voyageurs National Park, but nearly three-fourths of its land area, would be designated wilderness if Congress adopts the preliminary recommendation. The wilderness designation proposal would assign 92,000 acres of Voyageurs as wilderness area. The park covers 219,000 acres, including more than 80,000 acres of water.

No waters in the major lakes, Rainy, Kabetogama, Namakan, and Sand

Point, are proposed for wilderness. Nearly all of this water is used by motor powered boats, floatplanes, and snowmobiles.

An overland snowmobile trail across Kabetogama Peninsula providing an east-west and north-south route is part of the proposal. The trail will follow the "old winter road" wherever possible, and will provide snowmobile access to Shoepack, Cruiser, Oslo, Brown, Beast, and Mukooda Lakes. The proposal calls for floatplane access to these lakes and also motorboat use on the lakes.

The proposal was generally praised by multiple use advocates and not enthusiastically endorsed by environmentalists. Environmentalists expressed surprise that their groups were not included in discussions on the Black Bay agreement. They felt that cutting off a thousand acres of Black Bay could represent a threat to the integrity of the boundary of the park for special interests in the future. If such action continues, a much smaller park might finally result.

Voyageurs National Park Association members have remained flexible

and open on a solution to the Black Bay duck hunting issue. The association felt that would be preferable to consider a National Park Preserve Status for the National Park portion of Black Bay plus a Wildlife Management Area for the whole of Black Bay. The Voyageurs National Park Association has always felt that floatplanes, motorboats, and snowmobiles should not be allowed on the interior lakes of the Kabetogama Peninsula. At the same time, Nelson French of the Voyageurs National Park Association emphasized that his organization has never taken a position to oppose snowmobiles and motorboating in the entire park. They have opposed such use strictly on the Kabetogama Peninsula.

Open hearings on the proposal were held in Minnesota in September. Written comments were accepted until October 15, at Park Headquarters. Lawmakers are scheduled to receive the final bill next spring after comments have been accepted on the draft proposal. The final proposal will then be made to the President and the Congress.

IN MEMORIAM

John C. Savage, a leader in Hennepin County civic affairs, died at his home on August 9. He was 70. A life-long resident of Minneapolis, John was a man of many interests and considerable achievements. After graduation from Princeton University and Middlebury College (MA), John taught mathematics, English and German at Blake School. He later joined Cargill, Inc. and served in a number of capacities, reaching the position of Division Vice President, Administration.

John served as Chairman of the Board of the Minneapolis and Hennepin County Chapter of the American Red Cross from 1960 to 1966. He was the General Co-Chairman of the first United Fund Campaign in 1961. He served as Committee Chairman of the Citizens League. He was past president and a member of the Board of Directors of KTCA Channel 2, and Chairman of the Normandale Junior College Advisory Board.

John joined the Board of Quetico Superior Foundation in 1965 and served continuously on the foundation board until his death. He loved the canoe country and strongly believed in the need to protect the wilderness character of the BWCA. He always supported the active protection of the BWCA from exploitation. John was a gentleman of the finest order. On the board we shall miss his enthusiasm, fine counsel and friendship.



John C. Savage

BWCA PUBLICATION AVAILABLE

A pamphlet which summarizes the seventy-year struggle to set aside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area is available without charge simply by writing Quetico Superior Foundation, 2400 First National Bank Building, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402. The two-page pamphlet has several color photographs of the BWCA. It was prepared by the Wilderness Society through a grant from Quetico Superior Foundation.

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Vice President..... Charles A. Kelly
Asst. Secy.-Treas..... Walter E. Pratt

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QUETICO-SUPERIOR FOUNDATION
c/o DOROTHY DORSCHNER
1307 FOSHAY TOWER
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