



The Malabar Farm News

A publication of the Malabar Farm Foundation

Fall 2020

Reconnecting

Both Malabar Farm State Park and the Malabar Farm Foundation have undergone many changes due to the pandemic. For the most part the park has been shut down since last March, with only the trails open for the public's enjoyment. In addition, Big House tours and Farm tours have been suspended for the time being. On the bright side, the Gift Shop has re-opened with limited hours. (Please check the official Ohio State Park website, www.ohiodnr.gov, for Gift Shop hours and for any updates to State Park activities.)

The Malabar Farm Foundation has also found it necessary to make some changes in its operation. All fundraising events for this year have been cancelled and I am sure you are aware that this is the first Newsletter we have been able to publish since the pandemic started. At the present moment, we are confident that we can continue to publish this important channel of communication between the Foundation and those of you in the greater community who support our efforts to preserve and promote the legacy of Louis Bromfield and Malabar Farm. Thank you for your understanding and support during this difficult time. You can find updates about the Foundation's future activities at www.malabarfarm.org. Also, please let us know what you think about the Newsletter's new format by sending me an email at thomasbachelder@yahoo.com

– Tom Bachelder, Foundation Board Member



Stepping Out

Exploring Malabar Farm One Step at a Time

During these trying days of Covid-19, with no tours of either Louis Bromfield's Big House or farm being offered, and the Park's and the Foundation's events cancelled, there yet remains an enriching way to experience this wonderful jewel of the Ohio State Park System. Malabar Farm has a wonderful trail and farm lane system waiting to be explored. This new feature will highlight this part of Malabar's nearly 1,000 acres, starting with the farm lane that begins at the barn complex of Malabar's working farm.

You can easily park your vehicle by turning onto Bromfield Road from Pleasant Valley Road and then turning left into the paved parking lot before reaching the barn. As it leaves the barn, this delightful dirt farm lane, approximately three quarters of a mile in length, winds through Malabar's pastureland, grassland, and cropland, and even borders on a forest. Olivet Cemetery is on this lane. Five members of the Bromfield family are buried here, including Louis Bromfield. The oldest stone in the cemetery, that of Sarah Schrack, dates to 1821.

Where the farm lane takes a sharp turn to the left you will find the trailhead for the Junglebrook Trail, a one mile loop through both forest and fen, but that will be a trail for another day.

The Malabar Farm Foundation

Contact Us

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Looking Back...

by Thomas Bachelder

In the last Malabar Farm Foundation Newsletter, I wrote of the little-known connection between Louis Bromfield and Karamu House, an inter-racial theatre and art center in Cleveland. At that time, I had to leave the ending somewhat open, noting that I would update the story if more information became available. In early January Rockell S. Churby Llanos, the Administrative Manager of Karamu House was kind enough to send me the following information, taken from *A History of the Karamu Theater of Karamu House, 1915-1960* by Reuben Silver, former Karamu Artistic/Theatre Director. As with many things Bromfield related, there is more to the story than I originally reported.

Russell Jelliffe [co-founder, with wife Rowena, of Karamu House]¹... had two very interesting, early contacts with Negroes, both of which now seem to have been seminal. Boyd Hicks was a Negro playmate of Russell's in Mansfield, Ohio, and when at about the age of twelve, after having shared numerous playing and living experiences, Russell was accepted as a member in a Y.M.C.A. boy's club and Boyd was not, the event made a strong impression... Russell Jelliffe remembers it as "the first time I ever realized there was any prejudice between white boys and colored boys."² The bitter memory of Boyd Hicks' rejection would not leave Russell Jelliffe...

The second contact was equally important, but more "positive"... There was in Mansfield, Ohio, when Russell was a boy, a Negro cateress, Anna Bradford. As popular and beloved as she was unlettered but intelligent, she was a member and pew holder of the first Congregational, a white church. With a deep love for the learning she lacked, "Annie" Bradford in her will endowed a public library - the first in Mansfield - and it was housed in the Sunday school room of the church basement, though it served the whole town. As Russell Jelliffe grew up, he could see the face of this beneficent colored woman looking out of the steel engraved portrait of her hung on the library wall...³ Another boy who shared that Mansfield Sunday

school, Miss Bradford's portrait, and her books with Russell Jelliffe, was Louis Bromfield, author, and in later years a national sponsor of Karamu. His subscription of \$6000 "towards the [Karamu] theater library room as a memorial to 'Auntie' Bradford"⁴ was his repayment of a spiritual debt owed a woman who "felt that books are a way of life, and this is what I want to do with my money."⁵

Unfortunately, the portrait of Auntie Bradford was lost in the 1942 fire that destroyed both the Congregational church and her library. Russell and Rowena Jelliffe retired as directors of Karamu House in 1963. Russell passed away in 1980, and Rowena in 1992.

End Notes

- 1 Founded in 1915, Karamu House was originally called Playhouse Settlement.
- 2 Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy, *They Seek A City* (New York: Doubleday, Dorn & Co., New York, 1945), pp. 206-212.
- 3 Hibbing, *Daily Tribune* [Minnesota] 18 March 1943; and Rowena Jelliffe. Interview. 16 May 1961.
- 4 *Mansfield News Journal* 23 August 1942.
- 5 Rowena Jelliffe, Interview. 16 May 1961.



An old, undated newspaper clipping with the above photograph was recently discovered in the Bromfield archive material stored in the Big House at Malabar Farm. The caption reads: "Novelist Louis Bromfield was an interested visitor yesterday at Karamu House. . . While he looked on, instructor Marjorie Cast showed Freddie Lee Lovelace, 7, the proper use of a pottery kiln."

.....
But most of all there is the earth and the animals through which one comes very close to eternity and the secrets of the universe.

– Louis Bromfield. *Out of the Earth*

**Listening to the Past and Seeing the Future:
Bromfield's Political Philosophy:
"If it works, do it!"**

by Paul Sukys, Professor Emeritus,
North Central State College

Everyone loves a mystery, right? Well, maybe not everyone. In fact, real life mysteries are often, if not disruptive, at least, inconvenient. Case in point: A few months ago, back when life was normal, Tom Bachelder and I stumbled on a new Bromfield mystery.

Recently, Tom and I have been working on a project for Malabar State Park and the Malabar Farm Foundation designed to organize and catalogue a series of file boxes filled with Bromfield's letters, notes, manuscripts, photographs, articles, books, speeches, radio scripts and so on, all of which had been squirreled away for decades in various hideaways in the Big House.

While digging into one of those boxes we discovered several documents, including Bromfield's French driver's license, French identity card, United States passport, and death certificate. Wonderful stuff except for one anomaly, all four listed Bromfield's birthday as December 27, 1897, not December 27, 1896 which had always been cited as the official date of his birth.

Now this may seem an insignificant discrepancy and indeed it is, except that such an anomaly raises questions, including "Which date is correct?" "Why would Bromfield alter the date of his birth on government documents?" and "Was he trying to appear older to qualify for something (enrollment in Columbia, perhaps) or "Was he trying to appear younger to dodge something (like the draft)."

Before answering any of those questions, however, we needed to determine which date was correct. The initial stop in our search was the Richland County Courthouse which ought to hold Bromfield's birth certificate. Unfortunately, no actual birth "certificates," at least for the years in question, are filed at the courthouse. Instead, the records for births occurring in 1896 and 1897 are found in two places: (1) a handwritten journal with alphabetized list of births for the years of 1891 to 1897 and (2) a box of typed index cards, also placed in alphabetical order.

This meant we had nothing more than a secondary record of Bromfield's birth, that is, one that was copied from another record, probably the real birth certificate. What we needed was a record created at the same time that Bromfield was born. Given that restriction, the only strategy left was to search newspaper records hoping that a notice had appeared

in one of the five papers operating in Mansfield in 1896 and 1897. Four of those newspapers have long since closed their doors, and the one left would not have records from the other four, so our only option was to access the newspaper records at the library.

Within an hour of filing a request with a very capable research librarian, we had a newspaper notice of Bromfield's birth—mystery solved, questions answered, well . . . sort of. Knowing the actual date does not tell us why he lied about his own birthday. After all, it is not likely that he forgot his own birthday, and even if he did, could he have forgotten it four times?

No, this smacks of intent, and it demands an answer, or at least a search for an answer. Of course, the answer may never be found, but, and here is the real point of this column, the search will continue because the records are right there in the Big House. After all, if the errant documents were here, the letter or the note that reveals a solution is here too.

The search will continue as will many other activities, programs, and fund raisers, all made possible because of the mutually beneficial relationship that exists between the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the Malabar Farm Foundation.

It is a 26 year relationship based on the shared goal of preserving the legacy of Louis Bromfield by opening Malabar Farm and the Big House to the people of Ohio through such programs as the Valentine's Day Dinners, barn dances, appreciation dinners, vintage car shows, and research projects like the one described above.

It is a relationship that sees the money raised by the Foundation go to such causes as the art restoration project, the purchase of education displays, the restoration of Bromfield's jeep, and the building of the Visitors' Center (\$600,000 for that one alone) among many others

But most of all, it is a relationship of which Bromfield would approve. Bromfield was rarely a fan of big government. However, he was a fan of relationships that work by empowering the people involved. The Malabar Farm Foundation and ODNR have produced one such relationship and it works very well just the way it is.

Once the COVID crisis is resolved, or at least reaches a stage that allows greater access to the farm, you can be sure that this long-term relationship will continue unabated.

(Oh, by the way, the correct date of Bromfield's birth is December 27, 1896)

Did You Know?

You can support the Malabar Farm Foundation shop on-line at Amazon. Go to smile.amazon.com. Sign in with your Amazon.com credentials. Choose Malabar Farm Foundation as your charity. At no cost to you a percentage of each purchase will be donated to The Malabar Farm Foundation.

You can also support the Malabar Farm Foundation through the Kroger Community Rewards Program. Your Kroger Plus Card can be linked to a charity so that each time you shop for groceries or gas a percentage will be credited to the charity of your choice. If you do not already have a Kroger Plus Card one can be obtained at the Kroger Customer Service desk. Then, go on-line at www.krogercommunityrewards.com, create an account and link your Kroger Plus Card to the Malabar Farm Foundation from the list of charities.



As you may have already guessed, because of the Covid-19 virus the Malabar Farm Foundation *Christmas Open House* for this year has been canceled. Please know that we at the Foundation very much appreciate the past support of our volunteers and the greater Malabar Farm family. We look forward to a better 2021 and wish you all a heart felt *Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year*

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The Malabar Farm Foundation serves to provide funding and resources in support of Malabar Farm State Park and to perpetuate the legacy of Louis Bromfield and his work for a sustainable future. Your membership in the *Louis Bromfield Society* allows the Foundation to provide on-going restoration projects, programs, and education to preserve and promote Malabar Farm's rich heritage.

Tax deductible donations to the Malabar Farm Foundation can be made by cash, check, or credit card.

- Member** - \$50 / year
- Friend** - \$100 / year
- I would like to make an additional donation of \$ _____

Make checks payable to:
Malabar Farm Foundation, Inc.
4050 Bromfield Rd.
Lucas, OH 44843



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