



The Malabar Farm News

A publication of the Malabar Farm Foundation

Winter
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2021

Down On The Farm

Unfortunately there still isn't much to report concerning activities at Malabar Farm. Due to the ongoing Covid 19 Virus pandemic Big House tours remain canceled and Park programming has been suspended until at least May 31, 2021. However the Gift Shop was open for weekends and for the Christmas season. Please check the official Ohio State Park website at www.ohiodnr.gov for current Gift Shop hours and for updates to Park activities.



Don't forget that trails remain open and a walk through a snow blanketed woodland can be a quite wonderful experience.



Special Thanks to McCready's Interiors A Generous Friend of Malabar Farm

On December 15, 1940 the *Mansfield News Journal* published an article titled "Novelist Completes His Dream Home." The article, complete with numerous photographs, offered a detailed description of Louis Bromfield's newly completed Big House at Malabar Farm. Included in the description was the reporter's first impression as he entered the house.

Entering the house by the main entrance you come into a hall that makes you say "Ah-h-h-h" because it's the kind of a hall you might see in a movie set. . . There are two twin stairways of walnut and ivory. On each side of the hall are twin davenports [settees] of rosewood from Mrs. Bromfield's girlhood home. They are upholstered in cherry and white striped satin. . . There is a big concert grand piano in the hall.

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The Malabar Farm Foundation

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Special Thanks... continued

The twin settees described above, along with the Steinway parlor grand piano, have been the primary focal points of the Big House entrance since the house was built. At some time in the early 1970s the upholstery on the settees was replaced with fabric that displayed stripes that were much narrower than those seen in the original. Unfortunately, this change meant that the settees no longer looked as they did in Louis Bromfield's day. In the years since then both the replacement fabric and the rosewood frames of the settees suffered significant damage.

However, this year in cooperation with the Malabar Farm Foundation, Julie McCready of McCready's Interiors in Ontario, Ohio generously donated her time, the cost of new fabric, and the assistance of her staff to restore the settees to their original Bromfield era look. Restoration of the settees marks the second time that McCready's Interiors has restored upholstered furniture in the Big House at Malabar Farm. The Malabar Farm Foundation looks forward to working with McCready's Interiors again in the future. Thank you, Julie and staff.

Malabar Farm Spinning and Weaving Guild Has New Home

By Victoria Cochran



The Berry House, Malabar Farm State Park

Just in time for their thirtieth anniversary celebration the Malabar Farm Spinning and Weaving Guild is realizing their long-time dream of settling into their own home. The over fifty member fiber arts group have shared a basement with farm staff for many years. Over three years ago when the Hostel closed, guild members approached park management requesting a move into the empty building. Over the years guild members cleaned out the house and property anticipating

an invitation to move. In 2019 ODNR decided to make a major investment in the Berry house (the re-named Hostel). An assessment called for safely removing bats, roof and soffit replacement, painting inside and out, new windows, and other revamping and repair projects.

While finishing the repairs state representatives presented a proposed lease to the Guild board for consideration. Negotiations were finalized in September and guild members started packing. By late October members and volunteers had all their treasures moved across Bromfield road. Ten weaving looms and material storage will grace the basement. The first/main floor will offer a retail area, rotating demonstrations featuring different types of fiber work, a member meeting work area, fiber prep and spinning corner, business office, library, sewing room, kitchen and dining area. Every inch will have multiple uses. In warmer months members may be found on the porch or under a tree.

Members are dedicated to preserving and teaching fiber arts. They enjoy quilting, sewing, knitting, crocheting, rug hooking, embroidery, basketry, rug braiding, needle felting, and paper crafts, along with the spinning and weaving. The membership includes children all the way up to those in their nineties. There are many men who are active participants.

Besides the education component, generous hands create hundreds of projects for Hospice, veterans, the homeless, chemo patients, challenged children in summer camps, and nursing homes.

The new year will slowly bring our world getting back to normal. In their new home classes will be offered in various disciplines. There will be demonstrations during park events for the public. Regular hours for visiting will be set. Please stop in.



Mary Bromfield and daughters Hope and Ellen on the lawn of the house that is now the new home of the Malabar Farm Spinning and Weaving Guild, summer 1940.



Listening to the Past and Seeing the Future:

The Mystery of Bromfield and Voltaire

By Paul Sukys, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Law,
and Literature at North Central State College

Anyone who has taken a tour of Louis Bromfield’s Big House at Malabar Farm has undoubtedly seen the bust of the French philosopher Voltaire that sits in the bay window behind Bromfield’s desk. Moreover, most visitors have been told that Voltaire held a special place in Bromfield’s heart, a claim made plausible Bromfield’s claim that Voltaire was his favorite philosopher.

The difficulty with this part of the Bromfield legend is that Bromfield made few references to Voltaire in his writing. Moreover, the three most popular biographical studies of Bromfield’s life, those by Morrison Brown, David Robinson, and Ivan Scott, fail to make a case for Voltaire’s influence on Bromfield. In fact, when Voltaire is mentioned in any of these books, the message is brief. For example, Scott reveals that Bromfield’s political mentor, Thomas Jefferson, may have had a short encounter with Voltaire while in France, but also adds that the incident may be fictitious. By the same token, the existing scripts from Bromfield’s radio show, contain only one reference to Voltaire and in Bromfield’s unpublished memoirs we find but a single mention of the French philosopher.

Of course, Bromfield’s attraction to Voltaire may have nothing to do with his philosophical beliefs. In fact, his fondness for Voltaire may be more directly related to Bromfield’s love of all things French. From his earliest days, Bromfield maintained a sympathetic view of the French. In fact, Bromfield once labeled them the most democratic people in the world.

However, if Bromfield’s regard for Voltaire was connected only to the writer’s French heritage then Bromfield’s affection was sadly misplaced because Voltaire was no friend of the French government or the French aristocracy. In fact, on more than one occasion, Voltaire faced imprisonment or exile for offending a marginal member the aristocracy or a minor political functionary.

Given this evidence, Bromfield’s fondness for Voltaire may have had nothing to do with his philosophy. Instead that fondness may have emerged because Bromfield saw in the ancient Frenchman, a kindred spirit whose slow loss of innocence and whose ultimate disillusionment with life mirrored his own.

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Finishing The Story

In the last issue of the Newsletter we continued the story of Louis Bromfield’s connection to Karamu House in Cleveland. That story also told of Louis Bromfield’s connection to the First Congregational Church in Mansfield and to a black church member named Auntie Bradford, who had donated money to establish Mansfield’s first free library within the church. The story ended with the disastrous 1942 fire that destroyed both the First Congregational Church building and Auntie Bradford’s library. It was at that time that Louis Bromfield contributed \$6,000 to Karamu House to establish a theater library room in Auntie Bradford’s name. Fortunately, the story of Auntie Bradford and her library didn’t end there. The First Congregational Church was rebuild in 1951 and Auntie Bradford’s earlier generosity was remembered and honored with the re-establishment of her library in the new church building where it is “doing very well” to this day.

You can find historic photographs and the inspiring story of the Mansfield First Congregational Church at www.mansfieldfcc.com/history.

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Any writer worth his salt must change and experiment; otherwise he succumbs to atrophy and boredom and eventually falls into obscurity.

– Louis Bromfield

Did You Know?

You can support the Malabar Farm Foundation shop online 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 online at www.krogercommunityrewards.com, create an account and link your Kroger Plus Card to the Malabar Farm Foundation from the list of charities.



Malabar Farm circa 1942

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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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