



The Malabar Farm News

A publication of the Malabar Farm Foundation

Winter
February 2025

Malabar Farm Welcomes Hannah Gilbert to its Interpretive Staff

Hi everyone, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Hannah Gilbert and I am the new seasonal Naturalist.



After six long years at OSU pursuing my Zoology degree, I graduated at the tail end of Covid. With how the world changed those couple of years, my life geared away from nature related careers. I never would have thought that my once “dream job” would be an option for me so close to home after being graduated and now working in my family’s business.

This little journey of mine started after meeting Mark Sommer at a November leadership meeting in the Pugh Cabin. He gave a such a nice presentation and was so warm and kind, I started asking him how he came to be a Naturalist at Malabar. That led me to meeting Jim King

for becoming a volunteer. One conversation led to the next and on my first day as an official State Park Volunteer Mark introduced me to Mathew Rogers and I was on my way to this amazing opportunity as a new seasonal Naturalist.

My full-time job is with my father at our home exteriors company, American Homestead Exteriors, which we began in April of 2023. I am also on the board of Richland Young Professionals and value my time and experience spent bettering my community. I have a real passion for learning and conservation and would love to meet every one of you to speak about the farm and how I can go above and beyond in my new role.

A Generous Donation

Last Summer Mr. Greg Gunder of Cutler Bay, Florida visited Malabar Farm. In a conversation with Park employee Mark Sommer he mentioned that his father Charles (Pete) Gunder had worked for Louis Bromfield at Malabar Farm in the early 1940s. During Pete’s employment there his wife Betty kept a scrapbook (actually a large wallpaper sample book) that she filled with photographs and news-clippings about Louis Bromfield and Malabar Farm during the time her husband worked there. She continued to add to this material even after they left the farm. The book, measuring 13.5” x 17.5”, contains 156 pages of wonderful photographs and fascinating information.

Mr. Gunder inherited the scrapbook when his mother passed away, and was interested in donating it to an organization that would make it readily available for future researchers and anyone else interested in Malabar Farm and Louis Bromfield. The Mansfield-Richland County Public Library’s “Sherman Room” is dedicated to Richland County history. This room holds a collection of Louis Bromfield-Malabar Farm related material.

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Mr. Gunder agreed that this would be an ideal home for his mother's book.



On October 26, 2024, Mr. Gunder and several family members met with Ms. Chandler Taylor, the Sherman Room's research librarian to officially donate the scrapbook to the library. It had since been placed with other materials in the Louis Bromfield collection and is available for viewing. Thanks you Mr. Gunder for your generous donation.

Planting Seeds For Students

In the spring of 2023, Jody Johnson, a professor at North Central State College (NCSC) in Mansfield, approached the Malabar Farm Foundation with a grant request of \$580 to purchase gardening equipment for a proposed organic garden at the college dedicated to the legacy of Louis Bromfield, founder of Malabar Farm and an outspoken advocate for soil conservation and sustainable and environmentally sound agriculture. The Foundation approved \$600 for the project, declaring that this was exactly the kind of community-based project Louis Bromfield would have approved of.

The inspiration for the NCSC organic garden evolved out of Professor Johnson's idea that trading crops at "Crop Swaps" locally with one another was the first step in sustainable self-sufficiency. Starting in her neighborhood, she inspired opportunities for backyard organic gardeners to share in the bounty of their harvests. She then branched out in the community at ten different sites, including Gorman Nature Center, Apple Hill Orchards, and Malabar Farm. Each of the Crop Swaps also included speakers on

such related topics as Building Organic Soil, Container Gardening, Bees and Honey, and Hydroponics. Professor Johnson further expanded her efforts by making connections with the North End Community Improvement Collaborative (NECIC). The NECIC is a "nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life and economic landscape of Mansfield's North End." The NECIC Urban Farm located at 311 Bowman Street in Mansfield is part of the organization's effort to increase community access to fresh food, and to promote community connectedness. The Urban Farm became another of the Crop Swap sites.

When sharing ideas about community gardening at Crop Swaps it was suggested that an organic community garden be established at NCSC. Daniel Hardwick, a former County Commissioner, suggested sharing the idea with the Malabar Farm Foundation. NCSC had recently joined the "Go Green Initiative," and with the support of Dr. Moses Rumano, Assistant Dean of Liberal Arts at the College, and the Malabar Farm Foundation, the idea became a reality. The program was named "Planting Seeds For Students."

In considering the long-term benefits of the organic gardening program at NCSC professor Johnson wrote the following.

This is not just about raised garden beds at a college. It's a change in the mindsets of all who think they are incapable of growing their own food. It is a change in the mindsets of those who have been eating processed foods to experience what it's like to eat organically grown food. It's also about those who have stopped to read the sign at the garden, and to witness the transformation of what they helped plant. It's inspiring those who want to make a difference when they learn that there are others with the same goal in mind.

We are striving to cultivate a community of individuals who support and rely on the talents and passions that different generations, together, bring to the world. By sharing our gifts and creativity with future generations of gardeners, we can build camaraderie, while preserving food security. Through the establishment of community gardens and trading with one another, we foster a sense of connection with nature, allowing us to tap into all its abundance. Our community has a unique heritage in organic gardening.

The Malabar Farm Foundation is pleased to have contributed to this excellent program, and we thank Mr. Hardwick for suggesting that Professor Johnson contact us. We are sure Mr. Bromfield would whole-heartedly approve. See page 4 for photographs of the new organic garden at North Central State College.

**-Coming Soon-
Maple Syrup Festival
A Malabar Farm Tradition**



Saturday and Sunday
March 1st and 2nd
Saturday and Sunday
March 8th and 9th
Noon to 4:00pm each day.

Louis Bromfield began making maple syrup at Malabar Farm in the 1940s. In 2025, you can visit Malabar Farm to experience this “sweet” tradition for yourself.

Louis Bromfield – Activist

In the early years of his career as a novelist Louis Bromfield considered his role as a writer to be an observer of events. However, by the mid-1930s he had become more and more disturbed by the political and social turmoil that was spreading across the European continent. For Louis the Spanish Civil War was the tipping point.

In 1932, after centuries of oppression, the Spanish people managed to elect a progressive Republican government that quickly initiated a series of political, land, and religious reforms. Such moves angered the military brass, the entrenched hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and large land-owners who saw their estates being divided among poor peasants.

An anti-government Nationalist front soon formed and in 1936, initiated a violent civil war. In what many historians see as a precursor to World War II these Nationalists were supported by both the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy.

The Republican government sought and gained the support of the Soviet Union, that country secretly desiring a communist government to be installed in Spain. Soviet involvement quickly undermined and divided the Republican government. By April of 1939, the bitterly fought war had been decided in favor of the Nationalists. Republican reforms were quickly reversed and a dictatorship established across all of Spain.

As part of their effort to spread communism to Spain during the first year of the Civil War the Soviets had called for an international brigade of volunteers to come to the aid of the Spanish Government. Eventually some 50,000 volunteers from 53 nations answered the call. Nearly 3,000 of these men came from the United States; 800 of them died and many others found themselves prisoners of war in Spanish jails. Some of these American volunteers were communists; however many were young idealists intent on defending a democratically elected

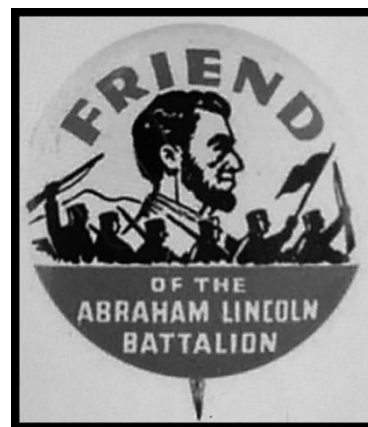
Spanish government, and not a few were simply drawn to the excitement of war. These young Americans soon became known as the **Abraham Lincoln Battalion**.

Even before the war officially ended it was obvious that the Republican cause was lost, and Spanish refugees began flooding across the Pyrenees Mountains into France. At this point Louis Bromfield took a lead in efforts to secure the release of Americans held prisoner in Spain, and to repatriate other members of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion held in French jails after crossing the border.

While many Americans thought of these men as communists deserving of whatever happened to them, Louis Bromfield saw it differently. “These are American boys . . . who volunteered for service out of an idealism which is innately American.”¹

An Emergency Committee for the members of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion was formed, with Louis Bromfield elected its chairman. Louis worked diligently as a mediator between the French government and the American colony in Paris, and the Emergency Committee was eventually able to secure the repatriation of 1,107 Americans.

As late as June 8, 1939, Louis, now living at Malabar Farm, received a letter from David McKelvy White, national chairman of Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion.





White informed Bromfield that 71 Americans being held in Spanish jails had recently been released by exchange. However, 14 more men remained in Spanish prisons. White requested that Bromfield write a letter on their behalf to the newly appointed Spanish ambassador. A follow-up letter dated June 27, 1939, suggests that Bromfield promptly complied with the request, White writing that, “I must congratulate you on the excellence of your letter . . . I think it is by far the best of the many letters, copies of which were sent to us.”

1 - The *Herald Tribune*, May 26, 1939



This Organic Garden was made possible by Malabar Farm Foundation, Richland Co. Crop Swap, NC State and all who aim to continue the principals of organic, sustainable agriculture.



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