



The sign at the entrance to Malabar Farm State Park.

MALABAR FARM

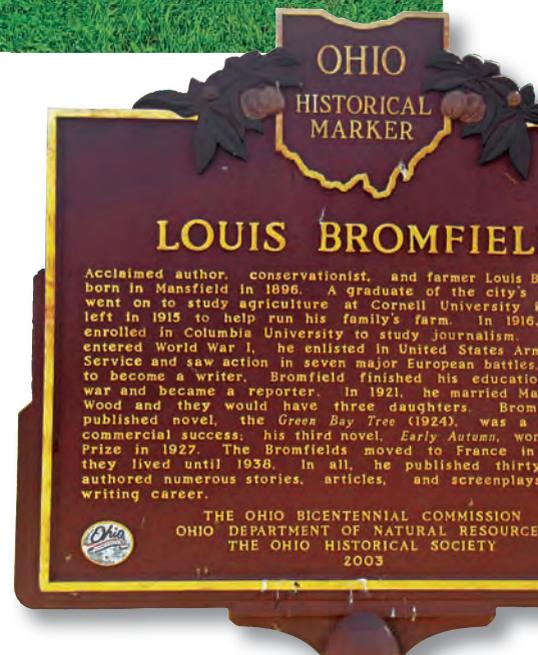
HISTORIC OHIO STATE PARK
AND FUNCTIONAL FARM

By Fred Hendricks

Malabar Farm State Park is located in Richland County, Ohio, near Lucas and the Mohican State Park. Nestled in Pleasant Valley, the farm ground is shouldered by tree-covered hills on both sides.

Built in 1939 by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Louis Bromfield, it served as his home until his death in 1956. Bromfield was raised in Mansfield, Ohio, and became a resident of Pleasant Valley with an agrarian passion. Subsequently, Bromfield developed a technique known as conservation farming. He restored the fertile farmland while preserving the woodlands.

Two long trips to India inspired the prize-winning author to pen one of his most critically acclaimed best-sellers, *The Rains Came* (1937). During those trips, Bromfield visited the Malabar region on India's western coastline. He used the proceeds from the book to turn three worn-out farms into the thriving business known as Malabar Farm. Bromfield said,



Historic marker for Louis Bromfield located between the Malabar Farm visitors center and the farm buildings.

“Nothing could be more appropriate than giving the farm an Indian name because India made it possible.”

In 1958, Bromfield's children gave the farm to a conservation foundation — Friends of the Land — in lieu of debts Bromfield had incurred. The foundation that operated the farm faced foreclosure. Subsequently, in 1972, the deed of Malabar Farm was accepted by the state of Ohio. In 1976, Malabar Farm became one of Ohio's 75 state parks.



Malabar Farm buildings in fall colors. The photograph was taken from across the valley atop Mount Jeez.



The Malabar Farm buildings and the Big House pictured across a lush pasture field.

Farm Focus & Scope

Park Manager Matt Rogers was asked to describe the purpose of Malabar Farm. "The mission of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Watercraft is to provide exceptional outdoor recreation and boating opportunities by balancing outstanding customer service, education, protection and conservation of Ohio's state parks and waterways.

"The purpose of the operational farm is to carry on the history of Pulitzer Prize-winning author Louis Bromfield by maintaining Malabar as a working farm. It is a great place for people to enjoy themselves along with their families. This experience is extra special if they've never lived on or visited a farm before."

Matt said, "The park consists of 917 acres. We maintain a 22-head, cow-calf operation comprised of Angus and Hereford cattle. The pasture fields for the cattle consist of 96 acres. The

farm crew makes hay for the cattle on another 82 acres. An additional 60 acres is rented to a local farmer to raise crops. The balance of the park land is wooded acreage.

"Malabar Farm Park operates with five full-time and 12 seasonal employees. This includes a naturalist, tour guides, gift shop workers and farm employees. Among the park employees the farm crew consists of three full-time and three seasonal workers," Matt said.

Main Barn

The largest building in the complex is the two-story bank barn. This style of barn was very popular in the hilly areas of Ohio because farmers could utilize the terrain to their advantage through its design and construction. By building the



Above/Below: The Malabar Farm's main barn is topped by three masterfully crafted cupolas.





The main barn's upper floor interior. It is available for rent to stage special events including family reunions, dances, weddings, and others.

On April 4, 1993, the main barn at Malabar Farm was tragically destroyed by fire from an unknown cause. This photograph shows volunteers from the Timber and Framers Guild of North America helping to rebuild the barn with funding from the state of Ohio. The new barn was fully reconstructed in September 1994. *Photograph from Malabar Farm internet sources.*

barn into the side of a hill, or "bank," the farmer has two "first floors," resulting in both floors being accessible from ground level. The lower level of this barn houses the cattle. The upper level is normally used for storage. However, the upper level at Malabar is used for various activities, both public and private.

Tragically, on April 4, 1993, a fire from an unknown cause destroyed the original barn. Through the gracious efforts of volunteers from the Timber Framers Guild of North America and funding from the state of Ohio, a new barn was constructed in September 1994.

The staff modified the replacement barn to comply with modern building standards. However, the new structure utilized the same traditional timber framing construction perfected by the early settlers. The stave silo is also not original. It was once used for corn silage but no longer.

At one time, the barn housed a herd of Registered Holstein dairy cattle, but the cattle were dispersed in the late 1980s or early 1990s.



The steps and walk leading to the main entrance of the Big House at Malabar Farm.



The Big House at Malabar Farm blanketed by winter snow.

The Big House

Bromfield fondly referred to his dwelling as "The Big House." He employed architect Louis Lamoreaux of Mansfield, Ohio, to help design the home. Over time, he expanded it from a small farmhouse to a 32-room mansion. Bromfield wrote many of his books from this home.

The structure is a blend of Western Reserve architectural styles and is



Louis Bromfield is shown operating a Ferguson Model TO-20 tractor in the hay field during the 1940s. Photograph from Malabar Farm internet sources

A replica of the Ferguson Model TO-20 tractor is housed in the visitor center at Malabar Farm for children's enjoyment.

designed to appear as if it has been added to over the years. As for interior furnishings, Bromfield used a predominately French style with the original paintings and antiques collected during his world travels. The Big House was always full of local and out-of-town guests. It was also home to various pets, including a rowdy bunch of boxer dogs.

Bromfield hosted many out-of-town guests, including Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, who were married and honeymooned at Malabar Farm.

The farm often hosted celebrities, including Kay Francis, Joan Fontaine, Ina Clair, Mayo Methot and James Cagney.



This Ferguson Model TO 20 is exactly like one of the tractors used by Louis Bromfield and his staff on Malabar Farm from the late 1940s through 1956. Bromfield and Harry Ferguson had an agreement where Bromfield wrote a pamphlet praising the virtues of Ferguson equipment called "The Wealth of the Soil." As a result of the pamphlet's huge success, Ferguson provided Bromfield with an unlimited supply of Ferguson equipment for Malabar Farm.

House tours are available on a predetermined schedule. The house is beautifully decorated during the Christmas

season with docents located throughout for an informative tour, and it's a must-see tour.



This fully restored, 1946 version of the Jeep originally used at Malabar Farm. The Jeep was considered an innovative substitute for a tractor. Louis Bromfield traveled in his Jeep throughout the farm located in Pleasant Valley. The Willys-Overland Co. provided several different Jeeps for the farm's use. Not only could the Jeep take a farmer to town, but it was also used to pull equipment for field work.



This replica of the Willys-Overland Jeep is located in the Malabar Farm visitor center for children's make-believe driving.



Shown is a display of Malabar Farm maple syrup in various size bottles available in the Visitor Center gift shop.



Maple Syrup Festivities

Maple syrup production has been a long-standing tradition at Malabar Farm. Louis Bromfield, with help from family and friends, tapped the same trees that Native Americans had, as did pioneer settlers. A large area on the rolling hillside is covered with sugar maple trees, (aka sugar bush) that surround the shack where the sap is processed.

In his book, *Pleasant Valley*, Bromfield writes about the original sugar camp included in the farm's purchase in 1939. He noted that it was reminiscent of the farm owned by his grandfather. Agri-business people said it would not be profitable to operate. They indicated that it would be cheaper to buy maple syrup rather than gather and process your own. Bromfield ignored

the naysayers and made better maple syrup and sugar than was available to buy.

Maple syrup production continues with the farm as a state park. "We were producing approximately 150 gallons of syrup per year. However, in June 2022, a tornado came through and destroyed most of the sugar bush (maple trees). We are now producing considerably less," Matt said.

Special note: The Pugh Cabin at Malabar Farm stands near the sugar shack. The cabin was used in the movie, *Shawshank Redemption*. Scenes were shot both inside and outside the cabin.

Mount Jeez

Mount Jeez is a scenic overlook above Pleasant Valley and part of

Malabar Farm State Park. The rise above the valley is more of a big hill than an actual mountain. While it may not seem like much, Mount Jeez is accessible by vehicle or a vigorous hike via a meandering dirt road. It stands 1,310 feet above sea level and nearly 200 feet above the Malabar Farm buildings across the valley.

It is one of the higher "peaks" in Ohio. With its elevation and location, it's among the few spots in the Buckeye State that provides a sweeping vista with a 270-degree view for a few miles in most directions.

Originally named Poverty's Knob, it earned its modern day name due to the challenges encountered by local hill climbers. Before the road was installed, those who ascended the hill would stop numerous times, to catch their breath, and exclaim "Jeez." Thus, Mount Jeez became the preferred name.

Visitor Center

The visitor center is a great place to begin a journey around Malabar Farm. There are interactive displays that highlight farming and Bromfield's nonconventional farming practices of his day.

The center also offers educational and informative exhibits where you can learn about the life and legacy of Bromfield, including the conservation practices he employed at Malabar Farm.

While visiting the center, guests can avail themselves of the gift shop. Store offerings include Malabar Farm memorabilia along with maple syrup and related maple sugar treats.

In addition to the areas mentioned above, Malabar Farm State Park also offers guided tours, overnight campsites and hiking trails. For the horse-riding enthusiast, there is a designated location to park horse trailers by the day or overnight. This parking/camping site is at the head of a riding trail that meanders through the woods. And there is more, much more.

To learn more, including upcoming events, contact Malabar Farm State Park located at 4050 Bromfield Road, Lucas, Ohio 44843. You may phone: (419) 892-2784 or reference their website (malabarfarmstatepark.com).

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This graphic display in the Malabar Farm visitor center describes the sugar maple seasons.