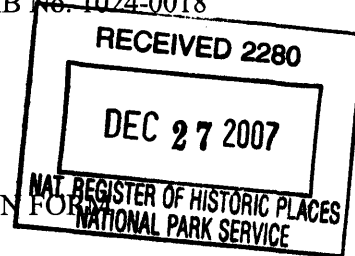


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property **Rocky Island Historic District**

Historic Name **Rocky Island** Other Names **Rice's Island, Ironwood Island, Sinsibakwado Miniss**

2. Location

Street & number **Rocky Island** not for publication ☐  
City or town **Town of La Pointe** vicinity ☒  
State **Wisconsin** code **WI** county **Ashland** code **003**  
Zip code **54850**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this **X** nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. ( ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Joe Wallis*  
Signature of certifying official

**JAN 23 2008**  
Date

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property **X** meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
( ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Michael J. [Signature]*, **SHPO 11/26/07**  
Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

☒ entered in the National Register Elson H. Beall  
See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
See continuation sheet.  
☐ removed from the National Register  
other (explain):

for  
Signature of Keeper

7.3.08  
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

☐ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☒ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

☐ building(s)  
☒ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>15</u>	<u>11</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>5</u>	<u>6</u> structures
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>25</u>	<u>17</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

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6. Function or Use

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

**CATEGORY**

**Agriculture/Subsistence**

**Domestic**

**Recreation and Culture**

**Commerce**

**SUBCATEGORY**

**fishing facility or site**

**camp, secondary structure**

**outdoor recreation**

**business**

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

**CATEGORY**

**Recreation and Culture**

**Domestic**

**Vacant/not in use**

**SUBCATEGORY**

**outdoor recreation**

**camp, secondary structure**

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

**Other: Utilitarian, balloon frame buildings**

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Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation **WOOD, Log, STONE**

roof **ASPHALT, METAL, OTHER-tar paper**

walls **WOOD, METAL, ASPHALT**

other 

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Narrative Description (see continuation sheets, page 7)

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8. Statement of Significance

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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

  X   A

Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

       B

Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☒ B removed from its original location.

☐ C a birthplace or a grave.

☐ D a cemetery.

☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ F a commemorative property.

☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

MARITIME HISTORY

ETHNIC HERITAGE-European

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1931-1958

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates N / A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder Edwards, Olaf; Hadland, Christian; Benson, Charlie; Benson, Fred;  
Nelson, Julian; Erickson, Mel; Erickson, Martin; et al.

Narrative Statement of Significance (See continuation sheets, page 16.)



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9. Major Bibliographical References

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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

☒ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

☐ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☒ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Name of repository: **Apostle Islands National Lakeshore**

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property 13.7

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Easting	Northing
Northernmost Point:	677294.2039319993	5212690.57395999
Southernmost Point:	676834.234459999	5211764.02627

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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11. Form Prepared By

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Name/Title **Christine C. Baker, Cultural Resource Management Specialist (Current park contact)**  
**Robert W. Mackreth, Cultural Resource Management Specialist (retired)**  
**Katy E. Holmer, Seasonal Historian (no longer at the park)**

Organization **Apostle Islands National Lakeshore** Date 5/30/2007

Street & Number **415 Washington Avenue** Telephone **715-779-3398 x221 (Christy Baker)**

City or Town **Bayfield** State **WI** Zip Code **54814**

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Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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Property Owner

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to Keeper, National Register of Historic Places, 1849 "C" Street NW, Washington, DC 20240.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 7

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

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## Narrative Description of Property

### Summary

The Rocky Island Historic District encompasses a complex of dwellings and other structures along the eastern shoreline of Rocky Island, within the Apostle Islands archipelago. These properties are now owned by the U.S. National Park Service, but all either are, or have until recently been, occupied by the families and descendants of Norwegian-American commercial fishermen who established the small cluster of fish camps in the early 1930s.

After only a few years, the dominant use of Rocky Island began to shift from the commercial fishery that had supported these immigrant families, to the tourism/recreation emphasis that characterizes the region today. This change accelerated in the decade following World War II, as the parasitic sea lamprey entered Lake Superior and depleted its fish populations. Though a minimal level of commercial fishing associated with these properties continues to take place, the shift in primary focus to recreational use was essentially complete by 1958.

This shift mirrors in microcosm a larger transformation of the northern Wisconsin economy from a resource extraction base to a tourism and recreation base. However, with the establishment of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore in 1970, followed closely by Federal acquisition of the properties, further development of the island was halted. The island residents, retaining use-and-occupancy agreements, maintained conditions essentially unchanged from those existing in the last years of the commercial fishing era.

### District Boundaries

Lake Superior provides the eastern boundary for the district. The district shares a boundary with the Gaylord Nelson Wilderness, which surrounds it on its northern and western sides. The southern boundary of the district is the southern boundary of the Erickson property. These boundaries encompass those portions of the historic district that retain a high degree of integrity.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 8

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

---

### **Physical Setting**

Rocky Island is located within the boundaries of Wisconsin's Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. The Apostle Islands are located northeast of the Bayfield Peninsula, and along the southwestern shore of Lake Superior. Rocky Island is a 1,100-acre, dipper-shaped landmass that is north-centrally located within the archipelago. The historic district is located along the eastern shoreline of Rocky Island, where the island's fish camps were located. Rocky Island is located in LaPointe Township, in Ashland County.

The Apostle Islands were formed as a result of a series of geological events that began approximately 1.2 billion years ago, when a mid-continent rift developed that created the Lake Superior Basin. The volcanic rocks that remained from this event eroded and were deposited as a type of sandstone known as the Oronto Group. Streams deposited additional sands in the basin, resulting in three sandstone types that make up the Apostle Islands. The sandstone deposited in the main channels of these streams was more massive and less likely to erode than the sandstone that was deposited outside these channels. Later streams began to carve away at the less massive sandstone, eventually leaving behind landmasses that would later become the Apostle Islands.<sup>1</sup>

While Rocky Island has exposed bedrock outcrops along its northern shore, the island's name is derived from the cobbles and pebbles that line the southernmost and northernmost portions of the islands. Rocky Island's western shoreline, exposed to Lake Superior's winds and waves, has sheer bluffs. The Chequamegon Sandstone bedrock that underlies the island is covered mostly with glacial till. Geological evidence indicates that Rocky Island and its eastern neighbor, South Twin Island, were a single island at one time, with a deep bay along its southern end. Today, the water between the northern portions of these two islands is still less than ten feet deep in some places.<sup>2</sup> Rocky Island's fish camps were located along the island's eastern shore, where it was protected from the harsh lake winds and waves by the remains of the bay it shares with South Twin Island.

### **Land Uses and Activities**

Like many of the Apostle Islands, Rocky Island was used as a base where commercial fishing

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<sup>1</sup> Nuhfer and Dalles 1987.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 9

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

could be conducted farther out in the lake. This activity began on Rocky as early as 1888, then continued as a dominant use until about 1960, when the Booth Fish Company quit its pickup of fish from the island fish camps.<sup>3</sup> Other factors contributing to this change were the availability of faster and more powerful motors for fishing boats: fishermen no longer needed to stay so close to their nets, so, most fishermen fished out of Bayfield rather than from the island fish camps. Most important, though, was the general collapse of the Lake Superior fishery due to over-fishing and the advent of the parasitic lamprey; fishing was no longer a viable means of livelihood for a significant population.

As commercial fishing declined in importance, Rocky Island land owners followed a common regional pattern, shifting focus to summer recreation. Some operated trolling excursions for sports fishermen, while one family opened a small-scale resort and restaurant, which operated until 1974.

One other land use had significant impact on the island's landscape: Rocky Island was actively logged from 1928-1931. The current forest composition bears witness to this logging activity, and one building within the district was originally built as part of the island's logging camp.

### **Patterns of Spatial Organization**

Lake Superior, topography, and vegetation influence the spatial character of the Rocky Island historic district. The lake was important to the fishermen not only as for commercial fishing opportunities, but also a significant means of transportation in the region. Additionally, the lake serves as one side of the district's boundary and most of the buildings found within the district are oriented towards the lake.

While the historic legal boundaries of the properties extend inland, most of the buildings and other significant cultural landscape features are found within 100 feet of the shoreline. Buildings directly connected to commercial fishing tend to be located near the docks, along the shoreline with open vegetation. The sleeping cabins are generally found abutting the wooded area and the privies tend to be placed at a higher elevation in the wooded areas. The overall circulation pattern of the historic district is linear, based on the main pathway, which generally runs parallel to the shoreline.

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<sup>3</sup> Neuman 1993a.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 10

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

While Rocky Island follows the grid pattern of the land ordinance system, the properties on Rocky Island are long and narrow lots, similar to those found along rivers in former French territories. This arrangement ensures that each property owner has lake frontage.

### **Response to Natural Environment**

The placement of fishing cabins on an island is an obvious response to the need to be near the lake for fishing activities. The old logging camp structures on Rocky (one of which still exists today) were also located near the lake for ease of transportation of logs and equipment across the water/ice. Similarly, the siting of the buildings and docks was in response to the lake. Like many buildings in the northern part of Wisconsin, the siting of the buildings also relates to the wind patterns. With the exception of a few former structures that were located at the southern end of the island, all of the Rocky Island buildings were situated along the eastern part of the island.

Since Rocky is one of the outermost islands, it has greater exposure to the northwestern winds coming off the lake than do the other islands. Only Devils Island is found northwest of Rocky, which offers little buffering, since it is much smaller than Rocky. The northeastern peninsula/panhandle of Rocky and the apparent "connection" of Rocky and its eastern neighbor, South Twin, provide some protection from the north. The waters between Rocky's peninsula and the northern end of South Twin are especially shallow, resulting in a decrease in wave action from the north, thereby creating a harbor between Rocky and South Twin islands.

### **Circulation Networks**

The primary method of transportation to and from the island is by boat, which can be tied up at the docks located on the Erickson, Nelson, and Benson properties. There is some documentation of airplane/seaplane landings in the past: for a brief period there was an airstrip at the northern end of the island that was to be connected via railcar to the Nourse's Air Haven resort. Reportedly, only one plane ever landed on the airstrip before the project was abandoned. Neighboring South Twin Island also had an airstrip.

Bayfield, the mainland town closest to many of the islands, is connected to the larger region via state highways and railroads. During especially cold winters, it is possible to cross the ice by

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 11

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

---

foot or snowmobile.

On the island itself, a pathway links the Rocky Island properties to one another and connects to a National Park Service (NPS) trail at the southern end of the district, which leads to the NPS dock and campsites. The main pathway also serves as the chief means of movement among the buildings. In addition, pathways lead to privies which are primarily located up a slope through wooded vegetation, to afford privacy. As an alternative to the main pathway, one can walk along the beach from the Rocky Island historic district to the south to reach the NPS dock or to the northeast to reach the Hadland property. A wooded dirt path connecting the Hadland site to the rest of the Rocky Island historic district was used during storms. Historically an open pathway, now balsam fir, white cedar, yellow birch and red maple have encroached onto the trail.

### **The Fish Camps**

Without question, the most significant character-defining feature of the Rocky Island cultural landscape are the fish camps: clusters of small, relatively easily transportable structures, seasonally occupied by the commercial fishermen and their families. An important characteristic of these structures is their mobility: many were moved to Rocky Island from other locations. The nucleus of the settlement was formed when several families moved their operations, buildings and all, from neighboring South Twin Island, after a dispute with the island's land owner. Several were afterwards moved one or more times on the island.

The camps, which will be individually examined in geographic sequence from north to south, are commonly known as:

1. Hadland Fish Camp
2. Benson Fish Camp
3. Edwards Fish Camp (or "Chapin property")
4. Nelson Fish Camp
5. Erickson Fish Camp

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 12

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

**1. Hadland Fish Camp**

The Hadland fish camp is the northernmost camp on Rocky Island, located at the narrowest portion the island. Unlike the other Rocky Island fish camps, it has a southern orientation because of the beach's easterly curve. The longest-used camp on the island (1938-1988), the Hadland property is distinguished from the neighboring properties in two paradoxical respects: it is the only camp on the island currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, yet ironically, it possesses the least integrity among them.

The first occupant of this site appears to have been one John Fried, a Swedish-speaking immigrant from Finland, who was first of the South Twin Island fishermen to move to Rocky Island. Arriving on Rocky in 1931, Fried initially stayed in the old lumber camp paymaster's office (now the Ericksons' storage shed).

Within the next year, Fried built the small cabin that stands today: a single-story, one-room, gable-front structure.<sup>4</sup> The gabled ends of the cabin are unique in that hand-trimmed logs are placed vertically, side by side, rather than horizontally. The side walls are frame construction with horizontal tongue-and-groove wooden siding. A smokehouse and storage shed have been added to the rear gable end.

In 1938, Christian Hadland purchased the property from Fried. Hadland, born in Norway in 1884, came to the U.S. in 1905. He entered the commercial fishing business, working first as a hired man on Sand Island, then setting up his own operation on Outer Island some time around 1912.<sup>5</sup>

Hadland's sons, Harvey and Clifford, began fishing with their father in 1943. Harvey and Clifford continued to use the site on Rocky as a base for their fishing operations until their retirement in 1988. The Hadland brothers continued to use Fried's original cabin as a summer residence following their retirement.

Upon purchasing the Rocky Island site, Christian Hadland moved at least one small cabin from his Outer Island camp. This structure, built in the early 1920s, was destined to be readily transportable, made with short logs for easy dismantling.<sup>6</sup> On Rocky Island, it served as hired-man's quarters. Near the dock was a storage shed used for fishing equipment. Both of these

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<sup>4</sup> Neuman 1993a.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> H. Hadland 2003.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 13

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

structures were listed on the National Register nomination (buildings C and D), but collapsed in the early 1980s.<sup>7</sup>

The only other standing building on the Hadland property is the privy (non-contributing). The two-hole privy has no door, but an opening that is the width of one door on the southwestern side. It has a shed roof covered in tarpaper. The walls have unpainted, wood boards.

The Hadland family cabin (building B on the National Register documentation) no longer stands. It was built by Christian Hadland in 1938 and was used as the family's island home until 1965, when the brothers shifted to the Fried cabin. The building collapsed in the early 1980s and its remains are overgrown by vegetation today.

Hadland also constructed an ice house at the Rocky Island fish camp. The ice house, listed as E on the National Register documentation, was taken out by wave action prior to 1993.

Besides the Fried cabin and the ruins of the collapsed building, the remains of other objects contribute to the cultural landscape of the fish camp. The net reel yard was included in the 1977 National Register nomination; several vertical support posts remain standing. The 1977 nomination also lists a float drying platform: a few boards are all that remain of this object. An old wooden skiff (built in 1941) lies in a moldering state near the remains of the float drying platform. Boards nailed into place on wood pilings are used as a breakwater in front of the Fried cabin. A simple, wood bench is also located along the shoreline, just southwest of the Fried cabin. Currently, the Fried cabin, net drying reel remains, and float drying platform are the only three contributing resources still recognizable as a building or objects and were previously listed on the National Register.

The site been unoccupied since 1998, when the Hadland brothers vacated.

## **2. Benson Fish Camp**

Charlie Benson was the last of the South Twin Island fishermen to move to Rocky Island. Benson was nearing retirement, so preferred not to relocate, but finally decided the situation on South Twin was intolerable and made the move in 1936. He fished from Rocky until the fall of 1942, and died the following year. None of Charlie Benson's children followed in his footsteps, but they continued to use the island cabins for recreation.

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<sup>7</sup> Personal communication, Harvey Hadland.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 14

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

When Benson took up residence on Rocky, there was already a cabin standing on the property. This structure had reportedly been built by the Bayfield Fish Company in the 1920s. Benson moved the cabin from its location near the northern end of his property to the southern end; later his son, Bernard, added an enclosed porch.<sup>8</sup> Now known as "Bernard's cabin," the 360 square foot, side-gable building is of wood-frame construction and covered with white clapboard siding. The roof is covered with green tarpaper. The enclosed front porch has a shed style roof.

The main Benson family cabin was built the year that Charlie moved to Rocky Island.<sup>9</sup> Much of the material used for the construction of the cabin was salvaged from a building on Broad Street in Bayfield.<sup>10</sup> The approximately 360-square foot cabin is of wood-frame construction and has white clapboard siding. The gabled roof is covered with tarpaper. An enclosed front screen porch looks out upon the lake. It has a shed style roof with doors on each side, rather than on the front of the porch. An interesting detail of this cabin is the notching found along the bottom, reportedly showing their origin as floor beams from the Bayfield building.<sup>11</sup> Another unique feature is the beadboard door with a diamond-shaped window on the front porch. Like many of the structures on Rocky, the cabin appears designed to be moved easily, and is sitting on vertically standing logs.

Shortly after moving to Rocky Island, Benson built a small fish house near the dock.<sup>12</sup> Painted bright orange, this 15' x 14' wooden building is highly distinctive in appearance. Its side-gable façade faces south onto the beginning of the dock. A lean-to sauna is attached to the eastern wall of the fish house.

The building known today as "Mildred's cabin" was built in the mid-1930s and was used as a hired-man's quarters until Benson retired from fishing in 1942. Unlike the other Benson buildings, it is a front gable building. It is nearly square, and faces south. Approximately 255-square feet in size, the wood-frame structure is covered with white clapboard siding and a tarpapered roof. There is a small summer kitchen addition along the western half of the northern end of the cabin. This addition is covered by five-inch wide boards painted white, and has some horizontally-laid beadboard along the bottom and between the cabin and addition.

In the 1940s, Fred Benson, Charlie's son, built a cabin for use as a summer cottage.<sup>13</sup> The wood

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<sup>8</sup> Benson 1979; Neuman 1993a.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> H. Hadland 2003.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Neuman 1993b.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 15

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

---

frame cabin is approximately 255-square feet in area. The side-gabled building is covered with white clapboard and the roof is tarpapered.

Three privies are found on the Benson property. The northernmost privy (contributing) has horizontal wooden boards painted white, with evidence that it was previously painted red. The shed roof is covered with asphalt. The middle privy (non-contributing) is fairly new, has unpainted wooden tongue and groove siding, and the shed roof is covered with a corrugated plastic material. The southernmost privy (non-contributing) is found behind Bernard's cabin. Clad in a "brick" pattern metal siding that is painted orange, the privy has a metal roof and a wooden door.

The Benson complex also includes a dock, which has been well-maintained and is in good condition. The massive logs under this dock, as well as the Erickson dock further south, were reportedly salvaged from lumbering operations: they were used as "boom logs," chained together to enclose the huge log rafts that were hauled across the lake during the logging era.<sup>14</sup>

Objects found on the Benson property related to fishing include three wooden skiffs. One is placed upside-down and located over vertical logs to create a sheltered space. This has been mostly used as a covering for the woodpile and a variety of objects one might find in a shed. The second skiff is located along the western side of the fish house. A third skiff is located under a small cluster of trees near the footpath as one enters the southern end of the property. This skiff is resting upside-down on the ground in a moldering condition. Another fishing-related element that is found on the landscape are the fish net drying reel ruins in the woods near the shore between the Hendrickson ruin to the north and Fred's cabins.

### 3. Edwards Fish Camp (or "Chapin property")

The first cabin on this site was built in the 1930s by fisherman Olaf Edwards and his sons, Hjalmer and Willis, for the boys to use when they fished with their father.<sup>15</sup> Later, Julian Nelson purchased the land. In 1966, Nelson subdivided his land and transferred this portion to John Chapin, a family friend.<sup>16</sup>

The one-room cabin is 250 square-feet. The cabin is of wood-frame construction with wooden

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<sup>14</sup> Erickson 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Neuman 1993a.

<sup>16</sup> Neuman 1993b; Tract Files.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 16

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

clapboard siding painted red; it has a gable roof covered by tarpaper. A lean-to covered porch with a shed roof that had been covered in tarpaper was added later.

The privy (non-contributing) is fairly new and is covered with bare plywood walls that are slightly weatherworn. It has a shed roof and is good condition.

Immediately south is the structure known as "Norman's cabin," a small (224 square feet) front-gable building of wood-frame construction resting atop a cedar post foundation. The exterior is draped in red faux brick tarpaper over planking, and the trim is painted white. The roof is covered in black tarpaper.

This small wooden building has been moved many times in more than a century of existence. It was originally constructed by the Booth Fisheries Company some time in the 1880s or 1890s at Anderson Bay on Stockton Island. By 1903, it was occupied by the Norwegian immigrants John and Andrea Nelson. In 1920, John Nelson relocated the cabin on Stockton Island to a site near Julian Bay. In 1947, his son Julian moved the cabin to Rocky Island, to a spot north of its current location.<sup>17</sup> It made one final move to its present site in 2001.

In 2001, a pre-fabricated, metal storage shed was moved from the former Nourse property to the Edwards camp. It was placed north of the Chapin cabin, facing towards the lake. It is in good condition, though it does not contribute to the historic integrity of the site.

#### **4. Nelson Fish Camp**

The complex known as the Nelson Fish Camp has the most complicated history among the island sites. In 1932, Norwegian immigrant Olaf Edwards paid \$400 for approximately 40 acres on Rocky Island.<sup>18</sup> Like many other Rocky Island fishermen, Edwards had first based his operations on Stockton Island, then moved to South Twin, then finally to Rocky.

In 1947, Edwards sold the property to Julian Nelson, who fished from what had been his father's camp on Stockton Island.<sup>19</sup> Seeking a more sheltered harbor than the Stockton Island site

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<sup>17</sup> Neuman 1993b.

<sup>18</sup> Neuman 1993a.

<sup>19</sup> John Nelson was born in Norway in 1878 and immigrated to Bayfield in 1899. After working for Booth Fisheries and as a hired man for other fishermen, John started fishing for himself on Bear Island in 1909. He moved his camp to Stockton Island in 1919.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 17

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

afforded, he moved his operation to Rocky Island. In the process, he brought along two cabins.

Nelson subdivided his land in 1966, parceling out portions to his sister and brother-in-law, Olive and Robert Jones, and a family friend, John Chapin.<sup>20</sup> The Joneses and Chapin had used the properties for several years before each holding was legally deeded to them. At the same time, Nelson transferred the remaining portion to his children, Robert and Heidi. Both have life-long use-and-occupancy agreements with the National Park Service, and use the buildings in the summer.

There are eight buildings on the Nelson property: the Nelson cabin, the Edwards cabin, the Jones cabin, the Nourse cabin, two storage sheds, a shower/sauna, and a privy.

The main cabin, or "Nelson cabin" was built by Olaf Edwards in the early 1930s after he moved to Rocky Island. The 408 square-foot, side-gable, wood-frame building rests on a horizontal log foundation. There is a 228 square-foot open porch deck along the front (east) side, overlooking the lake. The cabin is covered with wooden clapboard siding painted white, with two-over-two windows. The gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles and has a wood stove chimney. A lilac bush grows near the southeast corner of the cabin.

The Edwards cabin, just south of the Nelson cabin, is also known as "Olaf's hired-man's shack." Olaf Edwards built it on Stockton Island about 1910 on Stockton Island, then later moved to South Twin and in 1931 to Rocky. The 12' by 15' cabin is of wood frame construction, with walls and roof covered by red tarpaper. The door is asymmetrically placed at the gable end (northern). Just above and left of the door is a small, circular metal screen window. A small gable roof that extends from the building shelters the stoop that leads to the front door. Along the western side of the cabin is a small, lean-to addition that might be a smokehouse.

The structure known as the Jones cabin has been moved three times since the Bayfield Fish Company built it on the Michigan Island sandspit in the 1880s. John Nelson, Julian's father, transported the cabin to Stockton Island in the early 1930s. Julian added a front porch and new siding to the cabin in 1940, then moved it to the north end of his Rocky Island property in 1947.<sup>21</sup> In 2001, the cabin was moved to its current location.

The Jones cabin is a 360-square foot, gable-end structure of wood-frame construction sits atop a cedar post foundation. The exterior is covered with shiplap siding painted white with gray trim. It has a low-pitched gable roof is covered by tarpaper. The 240 square foot front porch is

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<sup>20</sup> Tract Files.

<sup>21</sup> Neuman 1993b.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 18

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

screened along its upper two-thirds, has a shed roof, and has a center front door. The porch does not extend completely across the width of the cabin and it is not centered.

The Jones privy (non-contributing) has wood clapboard that has been recently painted white. The shed roof is covered with rolled asphalt. An interesting feature of the privy is a two-over-two window. The privy was relocated from the Jones property in 2001; a sign above the door states that it was built in 1949.

At the south end of the Nelson camp is the Nourse cabin (non-contributing). It is not affiliated with the Nelson family nor is it related to the historic fishing district. The cabin was built in the 1940s as a sleeping cottage for the Nourse family's "Rocky Island Air Haven," the small resort that was located about a half-mile to the south. Following NPS purchase of the resort in 1974, Laurie Nourse, Jr. moved this cabin to a site at the southern edge of the settlement.<sup>22</sup> In 2001, after the Nourses' use and occupancy agreement had expired, the family purchased the building from the government and received permission to move it to the Nelson property in 2001. The cabin is approximately 384 square feet with a 128 square foot porch. A new 4' x 7.5' addition has been added to the southern gable end of the cabin since 2001. The side-gable cabin is of wood frame construction and is covered by 2' x 4'-6' fiberboard panels that are like white acoustical tiles. The front door of the cabin has stained glass framing its window. The gable roof is covered with black tarpaper. The enclosed front porch has a shed roof and seven windows across the front (east) that have nine panes each. The porch is covered with white painted wood boards.

The Nourse privy (non-contributing) is fairly new and in good condition. It is located up hill, behind (west) of the Nourse cabin. A simple staircase from the old Nourse property is used to ascend the hill has plywood walls that are painted white and a shed roof with corrugated metal.

Near the dock is a 12 by 14 foot wood frame tool shed, built by Olaf Edwards during the 1930s. The front-gabled shed is covered by a faux orange-red brick metal siding and roofed with black, corrugated metal.<sup>23</sup>

A wooden storage shed is located along the path between the Erickson and Nelson properties. It was Olaf Edwards' storage shed and was originally located near the beach. Julian Nelson moved it farther from the water and rebuilt it. It has a shed roof that is covered with corrugated metal. Three of the exterior walls have wooden planks, which range from approximately 6 to 8 ½ inches

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Neuman (1993a) referred to this building as the tool shed in her thesis and noted that the NPS Tract file it has different names: "net house," "boathouse," and "storage shed."

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 19

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

wide. The wood is not painted or varnished. The back wall is covered with tarpaper.

Island residents have found creative ways to adapt to island life without electricity and plumbing. During the 1980s, Julian Nelson built a shower/sauna (non-contributing) on his dock. The small building has a gable roof that is covered with black shingles. The exterior walls are covered with vertical wood board and batten siding. The shower house takes advantage of the readily available supplies of water and wood with a recently installed innovative water heating system. The water is heated by wood, which also simultaneously draws up more water from the lake to the shower house tank. The privy (non-contributing) is located in the woods, uphill behind (west) the Nelson cabin. It has horizontal, unpainted wood boards with a shed roof.

The dock is 87.5 feet long and 10.4 feet wide. New decking covers the three rock-filled cribs. The shower house is found on a fourth crib near the land end of the dock.

The remains of a net reel yard are found in front of the Jones cabin. It appears that there were at least two net reels, since three vertical posts run parallel to the trail. An intact net reel rests on the middle and northern poles.

A smoky smell greets visitors as they enter the southern end of the Nelson property near the net reel. Upon closer examination, they might see black marks on an old refrigerator located next to the southwestern corner of the wooden storage shed. In another example of the islanders' resourcefulness, the refrigerator is used as a smokehouse.

Next to the eastern side of the orange-red colored shed is a boat launcher (non-contributing). The boat launcher is a large ladder-like structure lying on the beach. It is made mostly of wood logs, with wooden boards as rungs. It is in good condition.

## **5. Erickson Fish Camp**

The southernmost fish camp has a diverse history. In 1928, J. H. Deniston and Eli LaPointe developed a contract with the Frenzel Land Co. of St. Paul, which owned Rocky Island, to log hardwood trees on the island for railroad ties and veneer. LaPointe planned on building a logging camp immediately so they could begin winter logging operations, which continued through 1931.<sup>24</sup> Constructed in 1928, the logging camp included a dock and four buildings: an office, a horse barn, a blacksmith shop, and a cook shack.<sup>25</sup> Evidence of the dock is submerged

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<sup>24</sup> "Eli La Point Will Log Rice's Island," *Bayfield County Press*, 9 August 1928.

<sup>25</sup> Neuman 1993a.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 20

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

---

just north of the crib located near the southern end of the Erickson property.<sup>26</sup>

The only logging camp building that remains is the paymaster's office, which is now used as a storage shed. In 1931, after the logging operation ceased, John Fried briefly lived in this building. Shortly afterwards, Olaf Edwards purchased the land that included the office, which he then rented to Fried for a short period of time. Around 1935, Louis Olsen bought the remainder of the logging camp and used the cook shack as his living quarters. Jack Erickson noted that the other lumber camp buildings (cook shack, etc.) were quite large and located from the edge of the Erickson property toward the southern edge of the settlement. Over the years, these buildings were scavenged for lumber and dismantled.<sup>27</sup>

Olsen eventually sold the land which included the paymaster's office to Martin Erickson, and his son, Melvin (Mel). Martin and Mel fished from Rocky until Martin's 1948 retirement, when Mel bought him out.<sup>28</sup> The Ericksons used the office as a sleeping cabin when they stayed on the island.

Around the time of Martin's 1948 retirement, Mel and Martin, with the assistance of Laurie Nourse, Sr., built a newer, larger cabin on the property. At the same time, they moved the old paymaster's office several feet northwards to improve the lake view from the new cabin.<sup>29</sup>

Mel Erickson retired from fishing in 1963. Mel's son, John (Jack) fished from Rocky during the 1960s and used Julian Nelson's net reels. Jack Erickson no longer fishes, but still stays on Rocky Island during the summers. During the summer his children Brenda, Martin (Marty), and Sharon also spend time with their family and friends on the property. Alone of all his generation of Rocky Islanders, Marty continues to make his living as a commercial fisherman.<sup>30</sup>

The Erickson cabin is set approximately 250 feet back from the shoreline on a ten-foot rise, which is unusual for the Rocky Island historic district. The location of the building reflects a new approach toward use of the island: its site was selected to provide a good view of Lake Superior from its large picture window. For the first time, esthetic and recreational considerations took precedence over the functional requirements of fishing operations.

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<sup>26</sup> H. Hadland 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Erickson 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Cota 1981; Neuman 1993a.

<sup>29</sup> Erickson 2000; Neuman 1993a; Tract Files. There is some uncertainty over the precise date of construction. NPS tract files on the Erickson property list the date of construction as being around 1952, while Mel Erickson said it was built in 1949. Jack Erickson reported the 1948 date, relating his memory to the year he graduated from high school.

<sup>30</sup> Erickson 2000.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 21

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

The side-gable cabin, approximately 525 square feet in size, is of wood frame construction. The front (eastern) façade is asymmetrical, with the door located near the northeastern corner. A small addition is located between the front door and the northeastern corner of the building. The exterior walls of the cabin are covered with shiplap wood siding that is painted white. The roof is covered with brown asphalt shingles.

The wood-frame logging camp paymaster's office, now used as a storage shed, is 16.5 x 20.5 feet in size, and rests on concrete blocks. The back (western side) of the shed was placed into the slope of the hill. The exterior walls are vertical, unfinished wooden boards. The gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The gable-front (eastern side) is asymmetrical, with the door near the far left and a nine-pane window on the right. Simple wooden plank steps lead up to the door. Two 2 x 3 pane windows along the southern side have screens. The northern side has a nine-pane window like the front (eastern side), but its vertical dimension is longer, while the front window is horizontally longer. There are no windows along the western side.

Located next to the southwestern corner of the storage shed is the generator shed, an approximately 8' x 8' wood-frame building. It has a shed roof that, along with the walls, is covered in a faux brick rolled asphalt. Unpainted wooden boards attached to the southeastern exterior corner of shed are used to support two lights that can illuminate the yard. The shed is in good to fair condition.

The privy (non-contributing) is located approximately 50 feet north of the cabin, along the edge of the upper plateau. The privy was built during the summer of 2004, as the old privy fell apart after the Ericksons attempted to move it. The new privy is covered with unpainted wood and has a shed roof covered with corrugated plastic. The privy is in good condition.

The dock is relatively large and elaborate. The massive Sitka Spruce logs used in its construction were originally "boom logs," chained together to enclose rafts of timber that were hauled from harbors on the North Shore, across Lake Superior to mills in Ashland.<sup>31</sup> The dock is approximately 140 feet in length, with the first portion of that (43.5 feet) consisting of the decking over the beach. Most of the dock is just slightly more than twelve and a half feet wide, though it narrows to eight feet over the beach. The last fifteen feet of the total length has no decking; rather, it consists of large boulders piled up to a level higher than the decking to serve as a breakwater.

Near the dock is a wooden flagpole. Two stairways are located between the northeastern corner

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<sup>31</sup> Erickson 2000.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 22

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

of the cabin and the generator shed. The steps are made of cinder blocks and landscaping lumber that is placed into the hillside, with thin log hand railings running along the eastern side of each set of stairways. Both sets begin at the same point on the lower elevation. The more southern set leads up to the front porch of the cabin, while the second leads in the direction of the privy. The southern set originally led directly to the stairs for the front stoop but, with the addition of the deck, they no longer lead directly to the porch stairs. The newer northern stairway, built after the 1970s, is non-contributing. Wood boards serve as a sidewalk between the cabin and the privy.

A small structure is located near the southern edge of the property, near the trail. It is about the size of a doghouse, is covered with wood boards that have weathered white paint, and has a shed roof that is covered with the same light brown shingles as the cabin. It houses a one-cylinder International engine that Mel Erickson used to pull up the pound net stakes out of the water at the end of the fishing season.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Nourse 2004.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 23

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

---

## Narrative Statement of Significance

### Summary

The Rocky Island historic district is significant under National Register Criterion A as a maritime landscape reflecting the commercial fishing culture along the shores of Lake Superior, and the mid-twentieth century regional shift to an economy heavily reliant on tourism and recreation.

The structures and landscape features of the historic district reflect an economic and cultural system that once was a dominant factor, not only in the Apostle Islands archipelago, but in much of the Lake Superior region: small-scale commercial fishing operations practiced by Northern European immigrants and their extended families. The majority of the Rocky Island fishermen were Scandinavian immigrants, primarily from Norway, and the district retains many characteristics of this ethnic heritage.

As the lake's fish population declined, many fishermen retired or shifted their efforts to the tourism industry. Former Rocky Island fishermen and their families became involved in operating a resort and restaurant, and as guides for sports fishermen. Cabins that once served as bases for commercial fishing operations transitioned to summer homes for the children and grandchildren of the fishermen who erected them.

Frozen in time by acquisition of the island by the National Park Service, the landscape and structures of the Rocky Island historic district reflect this mid-twentieth century process.

### Character-Defining Elements

The cultural landscape on the east shore of Rocky Island conveys a clear and cohesive impression of distinct time and place: Great Lakes fish camps in the twilight years of the industry. Whereas the National Park Service has removed similar structures from other islands, and comparable sites elsewhere have undergone character-altering development, the Rocky Island historic district retains a high degree of integrity.

Specific elements contributing to this impression include:

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 24

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

**Setting:** The historic district occupies a distinctive spot on one of the outermost islands of the Apostles archipelago. The particular location afforded the fishermen convenient access to their fishing grounds on the open lake, while also providing a docking area with a degree of protection from storms.

**Spatial Organization and Landscape:** The historic character of Rocky Island is characterized by both built and landscape features that developed during the first half of the twentieth century. Views of and access to Lake Superior are the most significant large-scale landscape features of the settlement. The island residents continue to maintain this historic viewshed that reflects the openness that was needed when working with fish nets, as well as the ability to see approaching boats. Small-scale features reflecting the district's fishing heritage abound: docks, net reels, drying platforms, sheds, and boats.

**Design:** The historic district has a sense of cohesiveness among the properties with similar vernacular building styles. Most of the buildings located in the district are of balloon-frame construction. The structures are mostly set upon log piers, which help reduce flooding risks and might also help reduce rotted wood and small mammal damage. The cabins found on Rocky Island all have gable roofs, while the privies, small sheds, and cabin additions often have shed roofs. The main cabins tend to be side gable buildings, with lean-to front porches. The smaller cabins and sheds often have a front gable design.

An important and distinctive feature of most of the structures is that they were designed to be readily mobile. Several of them were originally built on other islands (Stockton, Michigan, Outer, and South Twin) and were relocated to Rocky because of the need to change fishing locations, as well as for personal reasons: the conflict with Lenus Jacobson on South Twin, the Nourse's desire to be closer to their neighbors. (See below.)

**Workmanship And Materials:** The contributing properties within the historic district retain a high degree of integrity, both in workmanship and materials.

Virtually without exception, the structures on Rocky Island have been built in a deceptively utilitarian manner. Though the workmanship projects a rustic character, the quality of construction can be seen in their durability in a notably harsh environment.

Most of the vernacular-style buildings are built of sawn lumber, though several are made of logs. As might be expected in an island location, there has been considerable recycling of material. Lake Superior has provided a share of material as well: some docks and cottages were built from

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 25

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

---

pulp logs lost from rafts towed across the lake from Minnesota and Canada.<sup>33</sup>

**Ethnic Heritage:** Most of the fishermen on Rocky Island were immigrants from the Nordic countries, especially Norway. The majority came from the coastal town of Egersund, located in Rogaland, near the southern tip of Norway. Many of the Rocky Island immigrants had been fishermen or fisher-farmers in the old country. Their fishing tools and techniques were combined with those of other immigrants in the communities surrounding Lake Superior.

Today, evidence of this ethnic heritage is visible throughout the district: Norwegian rosemale decorations, traditional names bestowed on buildings, heirlooms from the old country placed on display. One especially arresting sight conveys the aspirations of a Norwegian immigrant with power and poignancy: a large sign that greets visitors arriving at the Nelson dock with a message in mixed Norwegian and English:

*Ya vi har det godt en Amerika.*

And it could be better

“Yes, we have it good in America, and it could be better” ...an immigrant’s gratitude, and a dream of upward mobility.

**Period Of Significance**

The period of significance for the Rocky Island Historic District ranges from 1931 to 1958. This period begins with the migration of commercial fishermen from South Twin Island, forming the nucleus of the district, and ends with the decline of commercial fishing and the shift to recreational use. Within this span, the district underwent a transition from the extractive industry of commercial fishing to recreation and tourism.

Rocky Island’s landscape reflects this transition period: throughout the district, structures, circulation patterns, and landscape features originally established as elements of a fishing camp have been adapted to recreational use. The early development of Rocky Island is represented by buildings that had been built by lumber and fish companies, along with small, readily transportable cabins built on other islands, and moved here in the nineteen-thirties and forties. Other structures were added as the fishermen’s focus shifted to recreation, and their siting and appurtenances reflect their purpose.

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<sup>33</sup> Hadland 2003.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 26

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

**Regional Historic Context**

The Apostle Islands have been a fishing center since the earliest recorded times. In 1665, the founder of the region's first mission, Father Claude Allouez, noted that the waters around the archipelago provided sustenance for the Native American inhabitants:

At the point of Saint Esprit, Chagaouamigong (Chequamegon), where the Outaouaks and the Hurons live, there are caught at all times of the year great numbers of Whitefish, Trout, and Herring. This manna begins in November, and lasts until the ice comes; and, the colder the weather becomes, the more fish one catches. These Herring are found in every part of the Lake on the South side, from Spring down to the end of the month of August; and a full list of all its fisheries would require a complete enumeration of all the caves and all the Rivers of this Lake.

It is thus that Providence has provided for these poor peoples, who, in default of hunting and of corn, live for the most part only on fish.<sup>34</sup>

With the arrival of Euro-Americans, large-scale, commercial exploitation of regional fisheries began. Over the years, the industry emerged from a small, unorganized trade, into a relatively substantial industry, becoming one of the earliest commercial enterprises to achieve success in Wisconsin. The rich spawning areas of Lake Superior provided large numbers of skilled fishermen with a livelihood during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>35</sup>

The earliest attempts at establishing a commercial fishery in the archipelago began with the efforts of the American Fur Company. As the fur trade declined, the Company experimented with fishing as a way to supplement its revenues and provide employment for otherwise idle voyageurs and trappers. While the success of this endeavor was limited, due to rudimentary preservation technology and lack of nearby markets, the company's Madeline Island headquarters assumed a role as the fishing and warehousing center for the entire Lake Superior and Upper Mississippi region by the mid-1830s.<sup>36</sup>

For the next several decades, the fishing industry remained a small, but significant part of the

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<sup>34</sup> *The Jesuit Relations, Vol. LIV*

<sup>35</sup> Wyatt 1986.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 27

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

---

local economy. Shortly after the founding of Bayfield in 1856, the Methodist preacher James Peet noted,

I counted 23 fishing boats on the Bay this morning. They are getting very good hauls, I understand.<sup>37</sup>

The industry experienced a dramatic expansion beginning in the 1870s, spurred by the intersection of several factors: a growing Midwestern population which provided expanded markets; the establishment of rail transportation which provided timely access to those markets; and the arrival of immigrant groups (first French-Canadian, then Scandinavian) with strong cultural ties to commercial fishing. By 1870, the Bayfield Press reported that fishing provided full-time employment for 250 men.<sup>38</sup>

Ominously, however, disturbing portents were noted even at this early time. In 1872, the U.S. Commissioner of Fish and Fisheries issued "An Inquiry Into the Decrease of the Food Fishes," investigating declining production in the lower Great Lakes, and raising questions about the long-term viability of the industry. The trends identified so early on would later have catastrophic effect on the livelihoods of the Rocky Island fishermen.

As the twentieth century progressed, the Great Lakes commercial fishery experienced a long and painful decline. Lake Superior's most productive year came in 1915, when nearly 10,000 tons were recorded at Duluth alone. As one study noted,

The catch dwindled after the 1920s, so that many fishermen were forced to find other sources of income. Whitefish dwindled in numbers in the 1890s, and were supplanted by lake trout in the commercial fishery. Predatory lamprey eels and over-harvesting nearly wiped out the trout in the 1950s. Finally, sports fishermen successfully lobbied for legislation that was unfavorable to the commercial fishing industry. A 1975 government report indicated that there were 137 full-time commercial fishermen in the Great Lakes and 2,800,000 sports fishermen.<sup>39</sup>

The 1970s brought another crucial change to the Chequamegon Bay region: the establishment of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, and the subsequent National Park Service purchase of virtually all the archipelago, save Madeline Island.

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<sup>37</sup> Peet diary, December 7, 1858.

<sup>38</sup> Fritz 1982.

<sup>39</sup> Labadie, 1997.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 28

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

---

### Early Island History

The Ojibwe reportedly called the island *Sinsibakwado Miniss*, or “Sugar Maple Island.” Government Land Office maps from the 1850s show it as “Ironwood Island.” It was acquired from the United States Government by Senator Henry M. Rice of Minnesota in 1868. For several decades, the island went by his name, but by 1898, Ashland County plat maps describe it as “Rocky or Rice’s Island.” In 1917, the county plat map only lists the name “Rocky Island.”<sup>40</sup>

After Rice’s widow died in 1906, her children sold Rocky Island in 1909 to the Carver-Quayle-Nourse Land Company in Bayfield. This company quickly sold the island to the Frenzel Land Company of Minneapolis; Rocky Island remained in possession of this firm until the early 1930s. The island was logged during their ownership (1928-1931).<sup>41</sup>

Fishermen began to use the island as a base of operations during the years of Henry Rice’s ownership; about 1888, Booth Fisheries established a fishing operation near its southeastern point.<sup>42</sup> In 1895, newspaper editor Sam Fifield described this complex:

The harbor is one of the most important fishing stations of the Booth Packing Company. There is a dock and warehouse, while scattered along the sandy beach is a number of rustic huts, the homes of the fishermen. This station is occupied all the year round, in winter by gill-netters, who fish on the outside reefs, using dog teams with which to haul in their catch.<sup>43</sup>

As early as 1899, individual fishermen were also using Rocky Island for their camps, Booth Fisheries appears to have ended operation there around 1908-10. Market conditions and changes in technology (notably the shift from sailcraft to gasoline-engined boats among fishermen) induced the company to discontinue stationing boats and employees on the islands, and begin to focus its efforts on collecting and purchasing fish from individual fishermen.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Neuman 1993a; U.S. North Central Field Committee, 1965.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Fifield 1895.

<sup>44</sup> Neuman 1993a.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 29

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

**Evolution of the Historic District**

The story of the Rocky Island historic district cannot be fully understood without discussing the history of its closest neighbor, South Twin Island. At one time Rocky and South Twin Islands were connected at their northern ends by a narrow isthmus, forming a large bay between them. This strip eroded away, but the water between the northern tips of the two islands remains very shallow: in places less than ten feet.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to a shared geography, Rocky and South Twin islands share a history of fishing. Though the latter island had belonged since 1868 to a family named Willey, in the early years of the twentieth century, it became the site of numerous fish camps occupied largely by Norwegian immigrants. Accounts differ as to whether the fishermen simply squatted on the land or paid the Willey family a nominal rent, but whatever the details, this convenient arrangement came to an end in the 1930s.<sup>46</sup>

In 1931, one of the fishermen, Lenus Jacobson, perhaps more ambitious or astute than his neighbors, contrived to buy the island from the Willey family. Upon concluding the transaction, he informed his neighbors that henceforth he would expect more reimbursement than the previous landlords: depending on the account, either imposing rental fees for the first time, or increasing the minimal payments previously charged.

This edict from one of their erstwhile peers did not sit well with the independent fisherfolk. Resentment grew when Jacobson attempted to assume the role of arbitrator, telling his new tenants where each should be setting their nets. Some recall that he affected an imperious manner, changing to dress clothes when the Booth boat arrived, and sitting by, smoking his pipe, as his hired man loaded the fish. Behind his back, the fishermen called him "King Lenus."

Rather than suffer further indignity, John Fried, who had been on South Twin since 1910, took decisive action and quickly shifted his base across the water to Rocky Island. He did not move any buildings, but set up in the paymaster's cabin, recently left behind by loggers.

Olaf Edwards followed in 1932, purchasing land that included the logging camp where Fried was staying. In the course of his move, Edwards tried to bring two of his buildings across the strait. The outhouse did not make the journey from South Twin intact; but his hired-man's shanty did

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<sup>45</sup> Nuhfer and Dalles 1987.

<sup>46</sup> The history of the migration from South Twin to Rocky Island is taken from Neuman 1993a.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 30

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

survive the trip. This was not the first migration for the structure: built on skids for easy mobility, it began its existence on Stockton Island in 1910, only later making its way to South Twin. The cabin still stands in what is now the Nelson camp, occupied most often by Jim Edwards, grandson of Olaf.

The last of the South Twin fishermen to move to Rocky Island was Charlie Benson. Close to retirement age, he was reluctant to pull up stakes, but by 1936 decided that the situation with Jacobson had become intolerable, and joined his former neighbors on Rocky.

Through the 1930s and 1940s, other fisherman joined Fried, Edwards, and Benson on Rocky Island. Some purchased land on the island, including Louis Olsen, Christian Hadland, Julian Nelson, and Martin Erickson; others like Phillip Winslow, Ole Olsen, and Ted Nies stayed with other fishermen or simply built cabins on land they did not own. This influx ended in or around 1947.<sup>47</sup>

### **Fishing For Tourists**

While some of the original members of the Rocky Island historic district began retiring in the 1930s, the area remained focused on commercial fishing through the end of the Second World War. In 1938, however, a portent of an approaching ecological disaster was seen in the waters off Marquette, Michigan: the first sea lamprey caught in Lake Superior. This invasion of this parasite to a lake already suffering from overfishing devastated the commercial fishing industry. By 1960, when the Booth Company closed its Bayfield Office, the Lake Superior fishery was all but dead.

Events on Rocky Island followed a pattern repeated across the Great Lakes. Those of the older fishermen who could afford to retire did so; younger men gradually took up new lines of work. Mel Erickson became caretaker at the Raspberry Island lighthouse, Julian Nelson went to work as a ferryboat captain. Those fishermen who persisted in the field forsook their primitive island fish camps; with better and faster boats, they could operate more efficiently from the mainland, without sacrificing modern conveniences for weeks at a time. By the mid-1970s, only the Hadland brothers, Harvey and Cliff, continued to fish from their camp on Rocky Island. Mel Erickson's son and grandson, John and Marty, continued to fish; but based their operations at Little Sand Bay at the northern tip of the Bayfield peninsula.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Cota 1981; Erickson 2000; Rice 1988; Neuman 1993a.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 31

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

With the burgeoning of the local tourist economy, it was inevitable that some former fishermen would attempt to take advantage of the island's attractions for commercial purposes. Most successful in their endeavors were the Nourse family, who began their association with the island in 1938. Laurie Nourse, Sr. had been a commercial fisherman for several years before he began to use Rocky Island as a base camp. In 1941, Laurie, Sr. and his wife, Grace, purchased property on the island, south of the historic district, where the NPS ranger cabin and dock are now located. One of the first buildings the Nourses erected on the property was a cabin that they moved from the mainland; it had belonged to Laurie's mother, but suffered damage in the catastrophic Bayfield flood of 1942.<sup>49</sup>

Besides his commercial fishing activities, Nourse took sports fishermen on trolling excursions. Trolling was once such an important part of the Bayfield economy that the local high school sports teams are still called the Trollers. Though the business declined dramatically with the advent of the lamprey, Laurie Nourse's son and grandson remain among the handful of trolling charter captains still active.

It was not long before the Nourse family branched out into a second, related line of business. During the early 1940s, the Booth Fisheries boat-of-all-work, the *Apostle Islands*, would use the Nourse's sturdy dock as a central point to collect the catch from all the island's fishermen. Tourists riding on the boat often complained about the lack of refreshments available on the island. Sensing an opportunity, the Nourses began by serving coffee and pie to the passengers, but a January 1945 newspaper article showed that their ultimate plans were ambitious. Having purchased the northernmost point of Rocky Island, they had begun clearing the land to develop a landing strip for a seaplane base. The facility would include, "fueling facilities, floating docks, tie-downs, and other features needed for the care of visiting planes." The article also mentioned that the Nourses had already planned on constructing a restaurant building and rental cabins in 1945.<sup>50</sup>

The proposed seaplane base never came to pass; the Nourses cleared a landing strip, but it appears to have been used only once. However, the overall plan was considerably more successful: by 1946, the family converted a net house into a restaurant and offered full meals to tourists who were traveling among the islands on several excursion boats. Eventually, they developed a sophisticated system whereby boat captains would radio passengers' meal orders to the restaurant, and the dinners would be ready as they arrived.

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*; Nourse 1981.

<sup>50</sup> "Local Men Bid for Tourist Business as Airplane Shrinks Time and Space," *Bayfield County Press*. 31 January 1946, p. 1

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 32

Rocky Island Historic District  
name of property  
Ashland County, Wisconsin  
county and State

Hunting parties offered another opportunity for tourist revenue. The fishermen who moved to Rocky in the 1930s noted an expanding deer population on the recently-logged island.<sup>51</sup> By the 1950s, deer were so plentiful that the island gained a reputation as a prime hunting destination. Around 1954, the Nourses added sleeping cabins to accommodate hunters.

Calling their business the name Rocky Island Air Haven, the family operated the resort until 1974, when the National Park Service bought the property. The reputation of the business had spread so widely that the original Master Plan for the National Lakeshore proposed continuing the operation as a concession:

“...the small restaurant on Rocky Island (will) continue to serve its famous Lake Superior fish dinners.”<sup>52</sup>

However, this plan fell through, and the business closed at the end of the 1974 season.<sup>53</sup>

During the winter of 1978 the NPS and the Nourse family agreed to a plan that allowed the Nourses to move one of their cabins from the old Air Haven resort to an area adjacent to the historic district.<sup>54</sup> The National Park Service removed the deteriorated remains of the Rocky Island Air Haven in the nineteen-eighties and nineties.<sup>55</sup>

### Summer Retreat

By the 1950s, tourism and recreation had become the largest source of employment and income in many northern Wisconsin counties. One often-overlooked component of this phenomenon is

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<sup>51</sup> Cliff and Harvey Hadland said that their father had tried to grow potatoes on the island but the deer ate them. Once, their mother was soaking clothes overnight and deer came along and drank the soapy water (Hadland and Hadland 1992.)

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in 1974 memo from Apostle Islands National Lakeshore superintendent to Regional Director, in park files.

<sup>53</sup> Nourse 1981. In Grace Nourse's November 1981 interview, she says that she received her business license to operate the restaurant in 1946. A January 1945 newspaper article mentions that the restaurant was expected to be operating in the summer of 1945 (“Local Men Bid for Tourist Business as Airplane Shrinks Time and Space,” *Bayfield County Press*, 31 January 1946, p. 1). The same year the Rocky Island Air Haven restaurant was established, two returning veterans Carl Moe and George Englund purchased South Twin Island from Lenus Jacobson) and opened a restaurant and fishing resort there. This venture failed in 1951, as the sea lamprey began to make inroads into the fish population. (“Fine New Boat Added to Fleet as Contribution of Otto L. Kuehn,” *Bayfield County Press*, 14 February 1946, p. 1; Neuman 1993a).

<sup>54</sup> Nelson 1982; NPS land acquisition files for APIS Tract 16-111.

<sup>55</sup> Neuman 1993a; Nourse 1981; Nourse 2000.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 33

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

the development of the second-home phenomenon: private cottages were among the four largest contributors to the recreational component of the state's economy, contributing more than one-half billion dollars per year to the economy.<sup>56</sup>

This trend had been noted in the Chequamegon area as early as 1916, when the demolition of Bayfield's once-grand Island View Hotel elicited this comment in the local newspaper:

There was a time when this hotel was popular with the hay fever sufferers and others who sought the cool breezes of lake Superior during the summer months, but in late years the cottage in the shady nook by the beach comes nearer to the outer's ideal as a place of rest and hundreds of them can now be found on Madeline and numerous other islands as well as on the mainland shores.<sup>57</sup>

Once again, Rocky Island mirrored regional trends. While the Nourse family devoted their efforts to running a business on the island, most of their neighbors were content to use their properties as summer homes once they left the fishery. Today, landscape features reflect a transitional stage, with picnic tables and barbecue grills scattered among decaying net reels and winches.

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<sup>56</sup> Thompson 1988, p 291.

<sup>57</sup> Bayfield County Press: October 27, 1916

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 34

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

## Criteria Considerations

### Criteria Consideration B: Moved Properties

Several of the cabins within the Rocky Island historic district have been moved, either before, during, or after the period of significance. (Some at all three time periods.) This does not negate the eligibility of the Historic District, or of the individual buildings themselves.

While any relocation of a historic structure subsequent to the period of significance has a negative impact on historic integrity, sufficient mitigating factors apply in this limited instance to preserve the overall historic integrity of the properties. Guidance can be found in the National Register Bulletin, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*: "A district in which only a small percentage of typical buildings in a district are moved" is not disqualified from eligibility.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, the relocated cabins individually meet the standards for "properties designed to be moved." It has been shown that the structures were designed to be readily moved from island to island, and that this was done repeatedly by the fishermen in pursuit of their fishing activities. The peripatetic structure known as "Norman's cabin" has occupied four sites in its existence: two on Stockton Island and two on Rocky. Most compelling of all is the awareness that the very existence of the Rocky Island historic district originated with a procession of boats crossing the strait from South Twin Island, cabins and shacks teetering on their decks.

In this instance, the applicable guideline requires, "A property designed to move or frequently moved during its historic use must be located in a historically appropriate setting in order to qualify, retaining its integrity of setting, design, feeling, and association."<sup>59</sup>

A number of the cabins that have been moved clearly meet this standard, including Norman's cabin, mentioned above, and the Jones cabin, moved in 2001. Both were designed to be readily moved, had been moved among the islands during the period of significance, and came to rest in settings that preserved their integrity of setting, design, feeling, and association, compensating for any diminution in their integrity of location. These should be considered contributing structures. Conversely, the Nourse cabin was built on Rocky Island and never moved until after the period of significance, but its origins are not related to commercial fishing district of the island. While it appears appropriately placed in its setting, and does not detract from its

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<sup>58</sup> USNPS Office of Cultural Resources, 1998.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 35

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

surroundings, the circumstances of its relocation argue against contributing-structure designation.

In sum, the movement of cabins that took place subsequent to the period of significance was done in the absence of proper evaluation. While that is unfortunate, it is also clear that the overall integrity of the district is still intact. Notwithstanding, further relocation of any structures within the district, especially those that were built on the island and have never previously been moved, would adversely affect the historic character of the subject property, and is not to be recommended.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 36

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

---

## Summary of Contributing Elements:

### Buildings (15)

#### Benson Camp:

Bernard's cabin  
Mildred's cabin  
Main Benson cabin  
Fred's cabin  
privy  
fish house

#### Edwards Camp:

Edwards cabin  
Norman's cabin

#### Nelson Camp:

Nelson cabin  
Edwards cabin  
tool shed  
Olaf Edwards shed

#### Erickson Camp:

storage shed (paymaster's shack)  
Erickson cabin  
generator shed



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 37

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

---

**Summary of Contributing Elements (Continued)**

**Structures (5)**

Benson Camp:

dock

Nelson Camp:

dock

Erickson Camp:

dock  
engine house  
southern stairs

**Objects (5)**

Benson Camp:

3 skiffs

Nelson Camp:

fish smoker  
net reel

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 38

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

---

**Summary of Non-Contributing Elements:**

**Buildings (11)**

Hadland Camp:

Privy

Benson Camp:

middle privy  
southernmost privy

Edwards Camp:

Privy  
pre-fabricated, metal storage shed

Nelson Camp:

Jones cabin  
Jones privy  
Nourse cabin  
Nourse privy  
Privy

Erickson Camp:

Privy

**Structures (6)**

Hadland Camp:

wooden bench

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 39

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

---

**Summary of Non-Contributing Elements (Continued)**

Nelson Camp:

simple staircase from the old Nourse property  
shower/sauna  
boat launcher

Erickson Camp:

newer northern stairway  
wooden flagpole

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 40

Rocky Island Historic District  
name of property  
Ashland County, Wisconsin  
county and State

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National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 41

**Rocky Island Historic District**

name of property

**Ashland County, Wisconsin**

county and State

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National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 42

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 43

**Rocky Island Historic District**  
name of property  
**Ashland County, Wisconsin**  
county and State

---

List of Photographs

Note: All photos were taken by Robert Mackreth, August 30, 2004. Negatives are on file at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave., Bayfield, Wisconsin 54814. Photos are numbered on reverse side, and locations are indicated on accompanying site plans.

<u>Number</u>	<u>Subject</u>
1	Hadland fish camp, Fried cabin; looking southwest.
2	Benson fish camp, Bernard's cabin; looking southwest.
3	Overall view of Benson fish camp from lake, showing main Benson cabin; looking west.
4	Benson fish camp, Mildred's cabin; looking north.
5	Benson fish camp, northern privy and skiff; looking south.
6	Benson fish camp, "fish house;" looking northwest.
7	Edwards fish camp, Edwards cabin; looking southwest.
8	Edwards fish camp, Norman's cabin; looking west.
9	Nelson fish camp, showing dock, tool shed, flagpole, and Nelson cabin; looking west.
10	Nelson fish camp, sign on tool shed; looking north.
11	Nelson fish camp, tool shed, looking southwest.
12	Nelson fish camp, open area showing shoreline, net reel, and Erickson dock in background; looking south.
13	Nelson fish camp, Olaf Edwards shed; looking southwest.
14	Nelson fish camp, Edwards cabin (left) and Nelson cabin (right); looking northeast.
15	Nelson fish camp, Nourse cabin, with Olaf Edwards shed and Erickson storage shed in background; looking south.
16	Erickson fish camp, showing generator shed (left) and storage shed (former paymaster's office); looking northwest.
17	Nelson fish camp, dock; looking southeast.
18	Erickson fish camp, Erickson cabin; looking northwest.
19	Benson fish camp, Fred's cabin; looking west.
20	Benson fish camp, main Benson cabin; looking north.
21	Nelson fish camp, Jones cabin, with Nourse cabin partly visible at left, Edwards cabin partly visible at right; looking south.

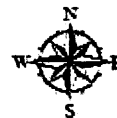
**Rocky Island Historic District**  
Apostle Islands National Lakeshore  
Ashland County, Wisconsin

*Lake  
Superior*

Hadland

*Rocky  
Island*

*Lake  
Superior*







Benson

Edwards


Nelson

Erickson

**Legend**

-  Historic District
-  Fish Camps
-  Trails
-  Rocky Island Boundary

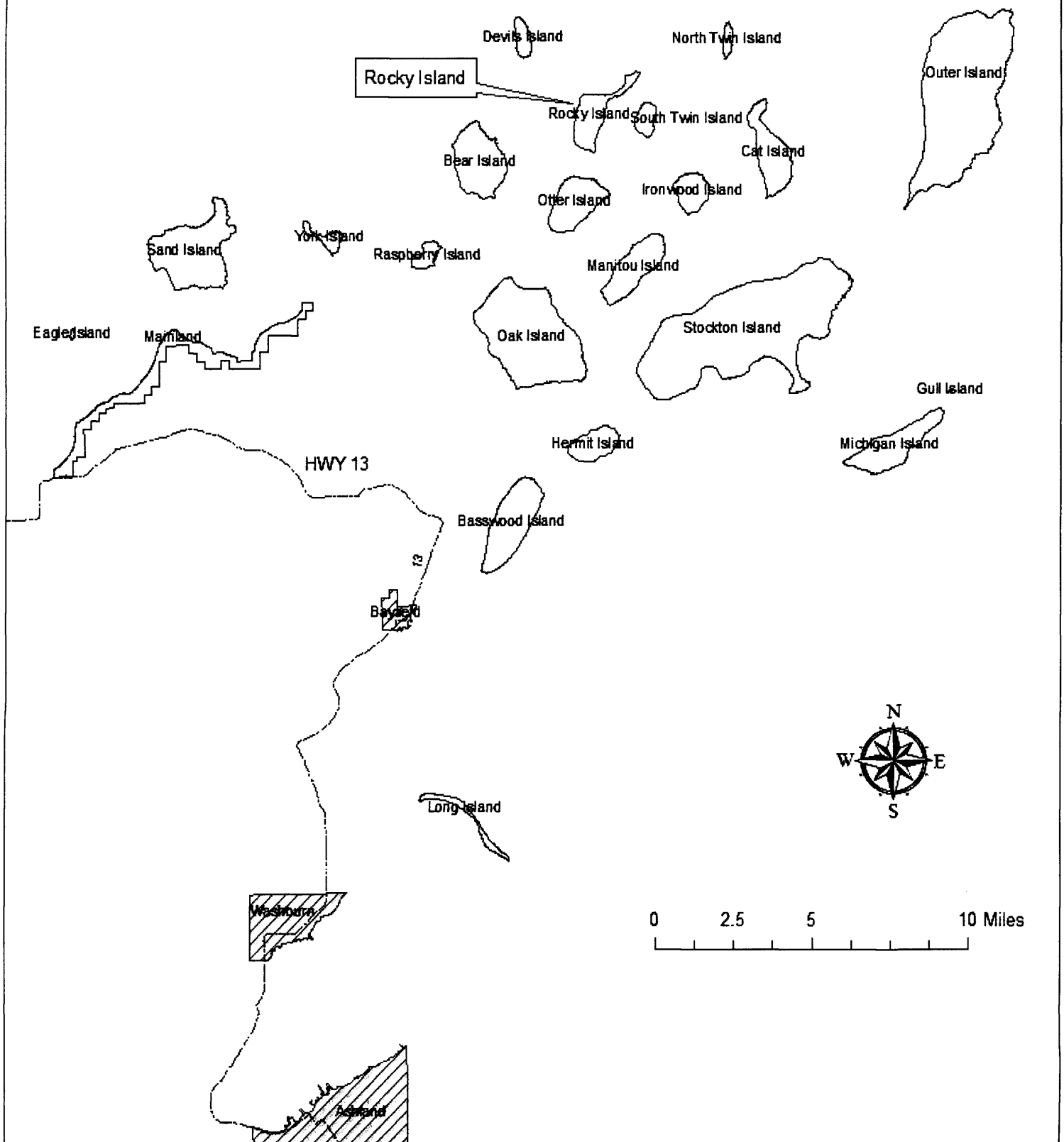
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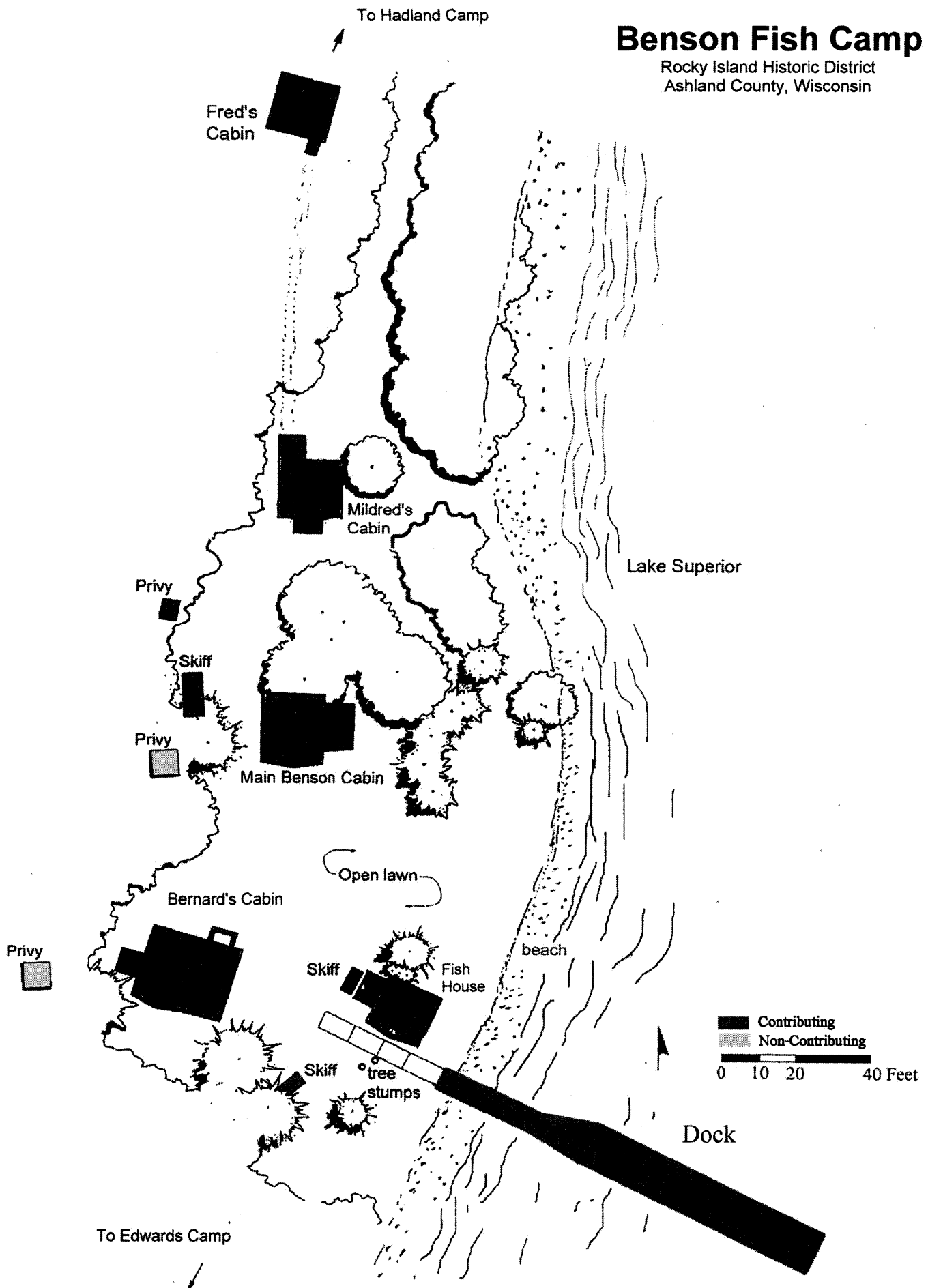
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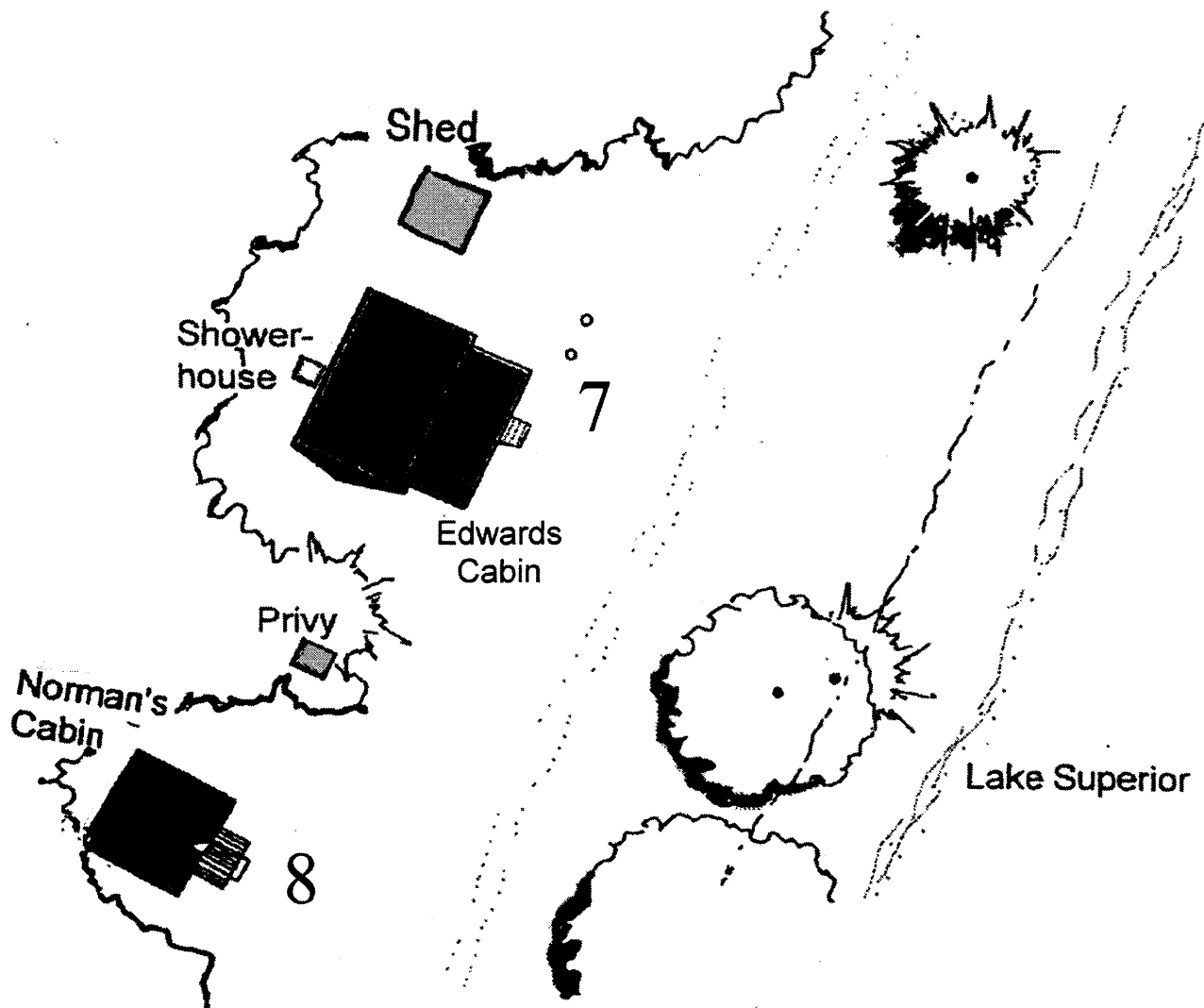
## Location of Rocky Island



# Benson Fish Camp

Rocky Island Historic District  
Ashland County, Wisconsin





## Edwards Fish Camp

Rocky Island Historic District  
Ashland County, Wisconsin

# Erickson Fish Camp

Rocky Island Historic District  
Ashland County, Wisconsin

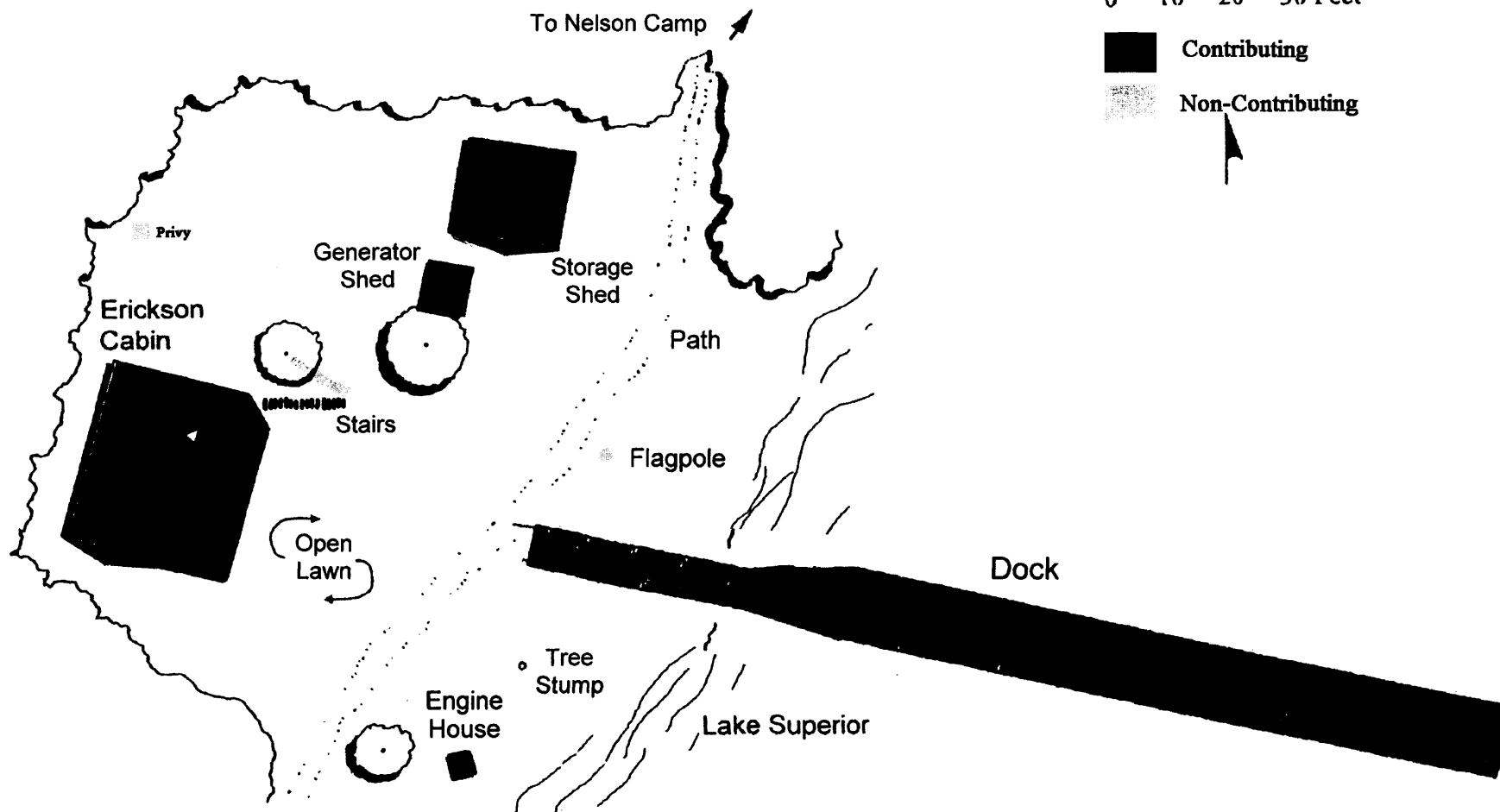
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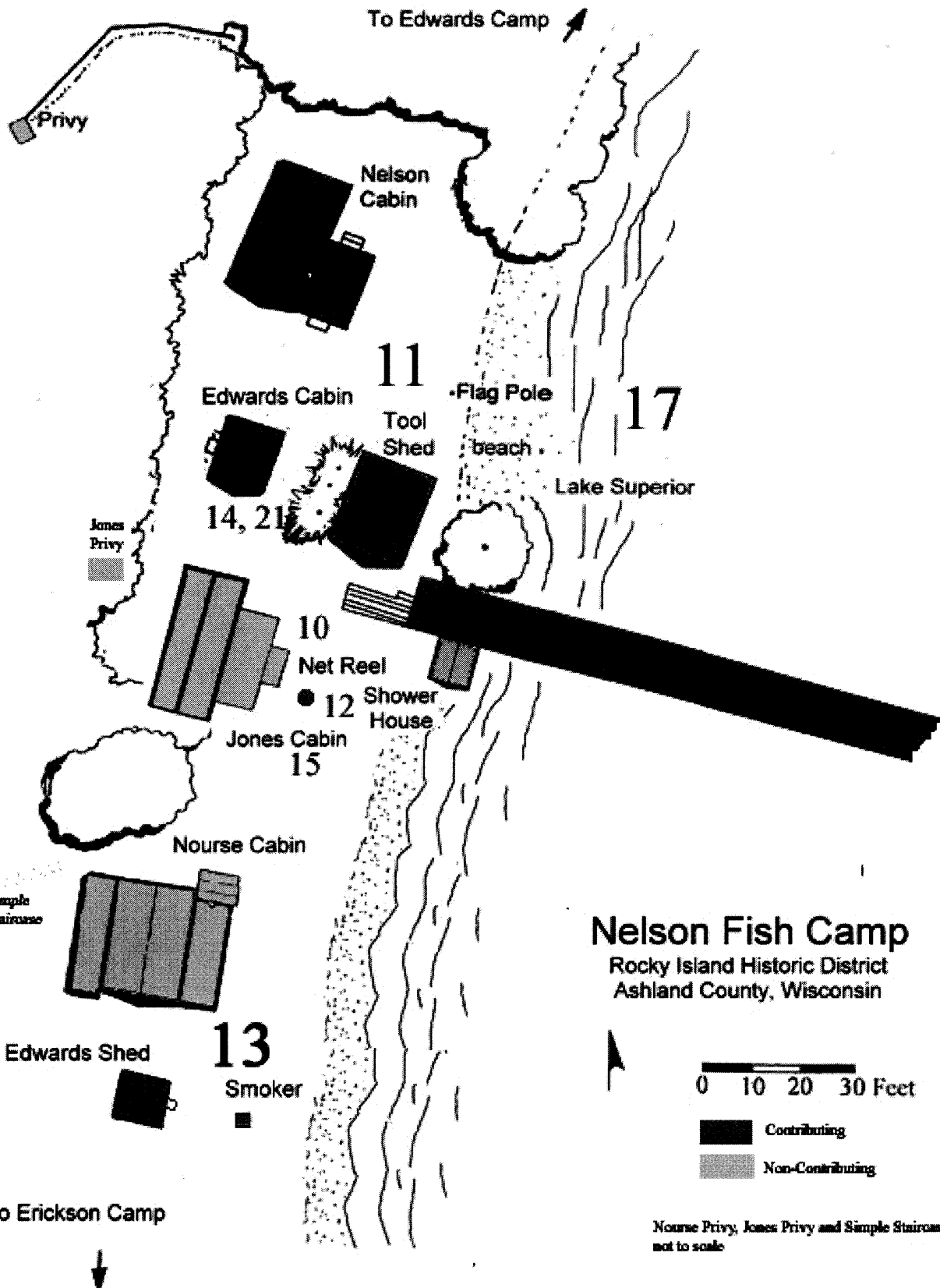


Contributing



Non-Contributing





# **Nelson Fish Camp** Rocky Island Historic District Ashland County, Wisconsin

Nourse Privy, Jones Privy and Simple Staircase  
 not to scale

## List of Photographs

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Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Hodland Fish Camp, Fried Cabin; looking southwest

Photograph No. 1





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

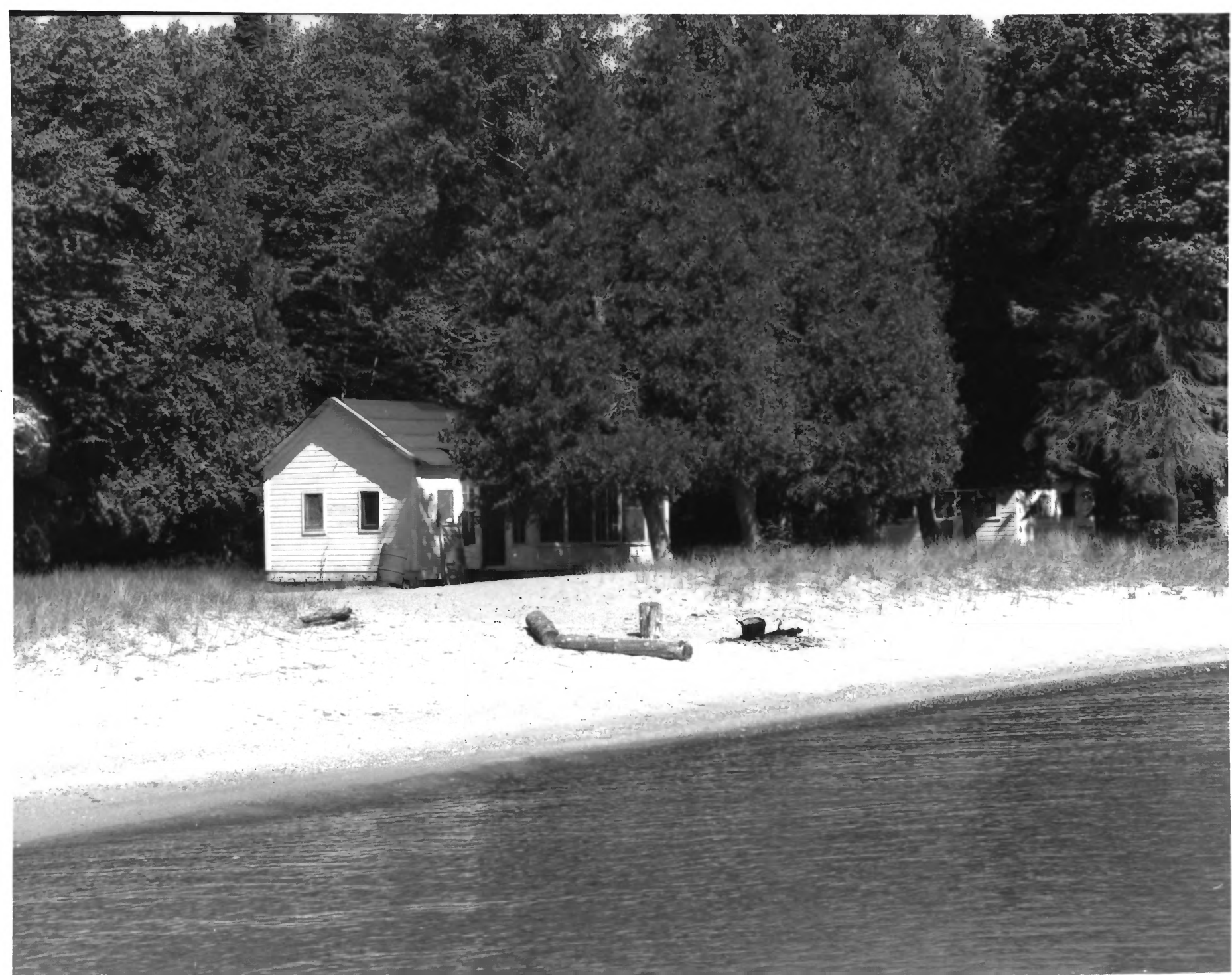
Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Benson fish camp, Bernard's cabin; looking southwest

Photograph No. 2



Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mockreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Overall view of Benson Fish Camp, showing main cabin; looking west

Photograph No. 3





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Benson fish camp, Mildred's cabin, looking North

Photograph No. 4



Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Benson Fish Camp, northern privy and skiff; looking south

Photograph No. 5





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Island National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Avenue Bayfield WI 54814

Benson Fish Camp, "fish house;" looking northwest

Photograph No. 6





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Edwards Fish Camp, Edwards Cabin; looking Southwest

Photograph No. 7





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Edward's Fish Camp, Norman's Cabin; looking west

Photograph No. 8





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Nelson Fish Camp, showing dock, tool shed, flagpole, and Nelson cabin; looking west

Photograph No. 9



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Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert MacKreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Nelson fish camp, sign on tool shed; looking North

Photograph No. 10



Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Nelson fish camp, tool shed, looking southwest

Photograph No. 11





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Nelson fish camp, open area showing shoreline, net reel, and Erickson dock in background; looking south.  
Photograph No. 12



Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Nelson Fish Camp, Diaf Edwards Shed; looking southwest

Photograph No. 13





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Nelson fish camp, Edwards cabin (left) and Nelson Cabin (right); looking northeast.

Photograph No. 14



Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Nelson fish Camp, Nourse cabin, with Olaf Edwards shed and Erickson storage shed in background; looking south

Photograph No. 15





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Erickson fish camp, showing generator shed (left) and storage shed (former paymasters office); looking northwest  
Photograph no. 16



Rock Island Historic District  
Ashland County, Wisconsin  
Robert Mackreth  
August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Nelson fish camp, dock: looking Southeast

Photograph No. 171





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Avenue Bayfield WI 54814

Nelson Fish Camp, dock looking Southeast

Photograph No. 17





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Erickson fish Camp, Erickson cabin; looking northwest.

Photograph No. 18





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Benson Fish Camp, Fred's Cabin; looking west

Photograph No. 19





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert Mackreth

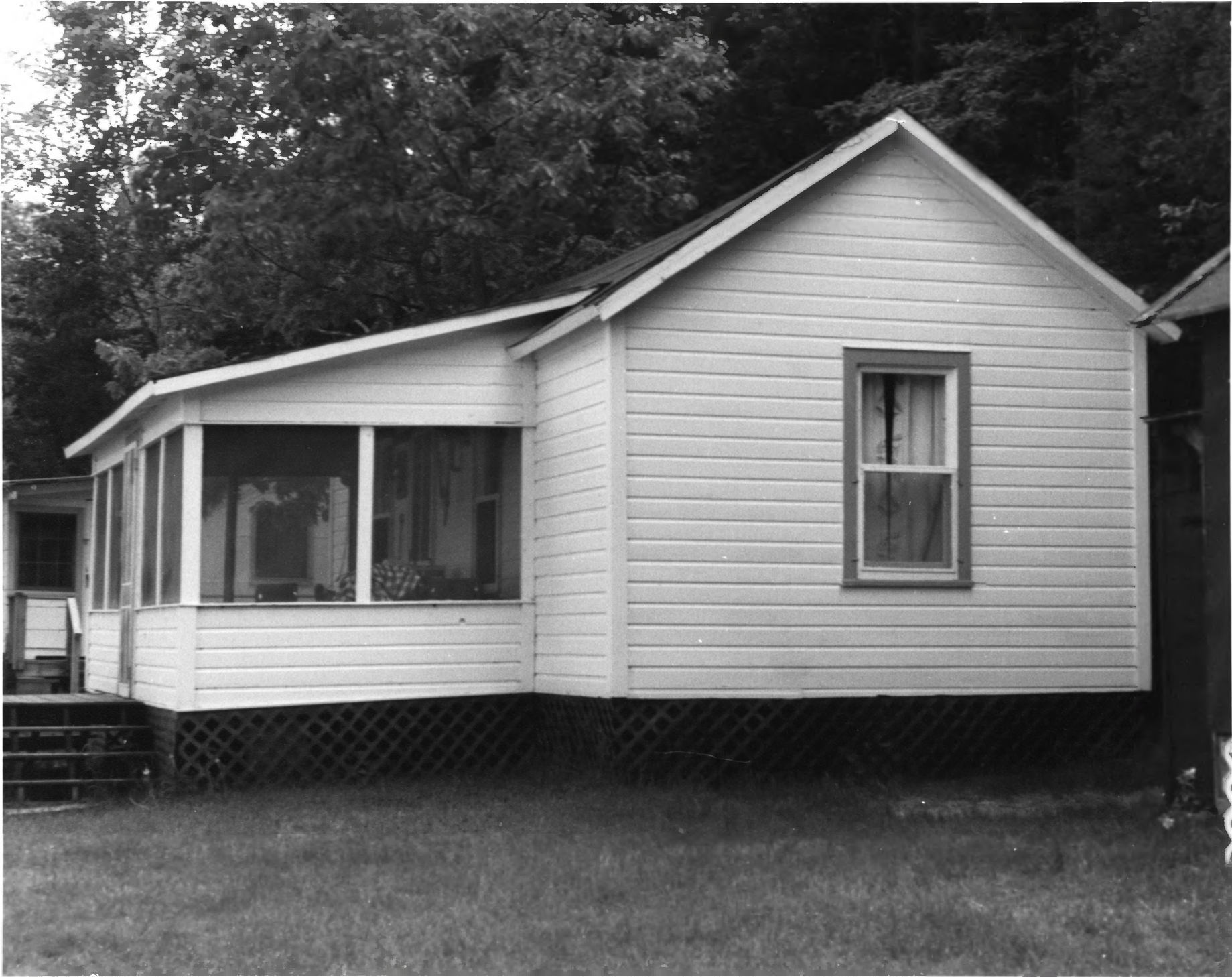
August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Benson Fish Camp, main Benson cabin; looking north

Photograph No. 20





Rocky Island Historic District

Ashland County, Wisconsin

Robert M. Kretsch

August 30, 2004

Negatives located at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, 415 Washington Ave Bayfield WI 54814

Nelson fish camp, Jones Cabin, with Nourse cabin partly visible at left, Edwards cabin partly visible at right; looking South

Photograph No. 21