



WHS Archives, WHi(X3)45108

*Herb (Jack) Rogers, Asher White, Unknown, Bill Baker, Elizabeth Hull, and Louise Tinsman on the Hull family dock around 1917. The folding camera that dangles from Elizabeth's hands may be a Kodak Autographic.*

# *A Summer Place*

## *Elizabeth Hull's Madeline Island Photo Album*

**By Vickie Lock**

**E**lizabeth Hull was ten years old when she spent her first summer on Madeline Island in 1910; she was forty-six when she left for the last time. Between 1910 and 1940 she created a visual journal of the island's summer community through her camera's lens. Now, her photographs give us a glimpse of a lost time of endless days with family and friends in a special summer place called Madeline Island.

Madeline Island's first attempt at attracting summer tourists failed miserably. The Madaline (*sic*) Island Resort Company published a promotional booklet, *Madaline Island*, written by George Francis Thomas in 1887, promoting the healthful nature and affordability of the island. The Resort Company painted a rosy picture of the island's future:

*That Madaline Island will eventually become a famous summer resort, no one familiar with it will doubt. It has all the advantages of one with practically no draw backs.*

*First, it has natural attractions superior to those of any of the famous Thousand Isles in the St. Lawrence River.*

*It is absolutely free from malaria; and the greater part of it is covered with a forest of pine, hemlock, spruce and balsam, interspersed with fine maple, birch, basswood, ash and elm.*

The Resort Company's efforts to attract investors and resort builders proved unsuccessful, and their plans to build a large resort hotel were never realized. But the dreams of a summer resort community on Madeline would soon become reality. In 1895 Reverend Mr. Thomas Gordon Grassie and John O'Brien built the first summer cottages on the island. Three years later, Edward Salmon of Beloit opened the Old Mission Inn as a summer resort for Congregational ministers and Beloit College professors. By 1910 the mission complex included rental cottages, a large dock, a large dining hall, and the old Protestant church (moved from nearby La Pointe). Regular summer visitors came from all over the Midwest and included Frank Askew and Dr. Albert Gregory Hull, both from Kansas City, Missouri. They soon convinced Salmon to sell mission cottages and land to private owners.

Dr. Hull and his family—wife Cora Abernathy Hull and daughter Elizabeth Abernathy Hull—first visited Madeline Island as guests at the Old Mission Inn. They quickly became summer regulars, and in 1913 the Hulls began construction of their own summer cottage, Coole Park Manor. Local newspapers headlined the construction of the “New \$15,000 Bungalow” designed by architects Wilder and Wight of Kansas City,

Missouri. Work began in May with a crew of twenty carpenters, a cook, and two supervisors from the firm of Pugh and Rundlett. The crew stayed at the Old Mission Inn for the two months of

construction. The house, complete with indoor bathrooms, its own power station for electric lights, and an up-to-date sewage system, would be the finest on Madeline Island. The buildings and grounds eventually included a large dock, tennis courts, and several outbuildings to house laundry, servants, and caretakers. A cottage was added in 1915 for the engineer of the Hull family yacht, the *Zenya*. An elaborate formal garden, planned by Elizabeth in about 1920, held 450 rose bushes, a fountain, and arbors.

From the beginning, Elizabeth spent her summers surrounded by friends and family. Family members always included her grandmother, Mrs. James Logan Abernathy, and a variety of cousins, aunts, and uncles. Childhood friend Elizabeth Nesbit, from Kansas City, spent seven summers on Madeline Island with the Hull family. The Hulls were active members of the Protestant church in Kansas City, where Elizabeth Nesbit's grandfather was pastor. Other Kansas City friends included

the Askew family, who purchased a cottage near Coole Park Manor, and the Marty family, who often stayed at the Old Mission Inn or with the Hull family.

Other lifelong friendships blossomed through associations at the Old Mission Inn. Herbert and Jane Rogers hailed from Minneapolis and began visits to the Mission at the same time as the Hull and Askew families. Their son Herbert John (Jack) was one year younger than Elizabeth Hull. The Rogers family soon became regular guests at Coole Park Manor, and Elizabeth and Jack became great pals. Many years later, in a letter to Jack's son Peter, Elizabeth recalled their friendship: “I have been blessed with wonderful men friends—two of them your father and Leo Capser. Because we were both only children, perhaps Jack and I felt closer than we would have otherwise. . . . They called us the ‘Heavenly Twins’—not because we were good, but



Photo by Elizabeth Hull; WHS Archives, WHi(H91)72

*Leo Capser, founder of the Madeline Island Historical Museum, at his organ on the Old Mission Inn dock, c. 1920.*



Robert Granflaten

*Above:* Today you can still catch a ferry and experience the captivating beauty of Madeline Island.

*Right:* The Hull family's gasoline and sail yacht, Zenya, at the dock at Coole Park Manor, 1914. The steamer Skater, which provided ferry service between Asbland, Bayfield, and La Pointe, is in the distance. According to Elizabeth, "The Zenya was built by Matthew's and Matthew's of Greenwich, Connecticut. It was gasoline powered with a sail. We used to put the sail up in heavy seas, because it steadied her."



Photo by Elizabeth Hull; WHS Archives, WHI(H91)49

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because we both had the same white sweaters, which turned up at the bottom, so convenient to store cookies in. I had a white skirt and Jack ‘white’ pants—the famous ‘strawberry pants.’ . . . We had such fun and in the summers were inseparable. How wonderful to have friends like that!”

Elizabeth Baker, another lifelong friend from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, summered in a cottage next to the Hulls. She and Elizabeth Hull were roommates at Mount Holyoke College in the 1920s. The Bakers sold their cottage to the Hulls, who used the place for picnics and to house guests. The cottage eventually became the summer home of Hamilton (Ham) and Dorothy Ross, who purchased it in 1926 from Cora Hull and named it Starboard. Ham was another member of the summer community who appears often in Elizabeth Hull’s photographs. He spent every summer from the age of eight on Madeline Island and became its most famous historian. His history of the island,



## Elizabeth Hull’s Madeline Island



Map by Kenneth A. Miller

# Hull Beadwork Collection



Photo by Elizabeth Hull;  
WHS Archives, WHI(H91)66

*This man sold the Hull family their beaded yoke and other items at Red Cliff, 1913.*

Elizabeth and her mother, Cora, left Madeline Island for the last time in the fall of 1946. The next year, they sold their beloved summer home, Coole Park Manor, to Thomas and Margaret (Mike) Venum. Neither of the Hull women ever returned to Madeline Island, yet their connections to the place continued through correspondence with island friends, like Leo and Bella Capser.

In 1961 Elizabeth donated several pieces of Ojibwe beadwork, purchased by her family, to the Madeline Island Historical Museum. To Leo and Bella she wrote: “Somewhere among all the pictures I sent you last year, there was a picture of the man at Red Cliff, from whom we bought much of the bead-work. It is a pale film, as it was taken late in the evening, but it shows some if it, at least.” The photograph is one of a series that Elizabeth took during an excursion to a powwow and lacrosse match at Red Cliff on July 4, 1913. Of the match, Elizabeth remarked: “LaCross as played by the Indians was not like the regular LaCross. It was a cross between baseball, football—or rather soccer, hockey & general mayhem—very fast. They were very expert in catching the wooden ball in the stick.”

Later in 1961 Cora Hull donated fifty dollars to the Madeline Island Historical Museum for the construction of a case to house the



Madeline Island Historical Museum, MI1983.237.318

*This fringed yoke is one of the beadwork pieces the Hulls purchased and later donated to the Madeline Island Historical Museum. An outstanding example of Ojibwe artistry, it was worn over a shirt for special occasions and contains thousands of tiny colored glass seed beads. The leaf and floral pattern is boldly outlined and the applied beadwork is especially fine.*

“Hull Collection.” Elizabeth, too, continued her support of the museum, donating money each year, often in memory of her dear Madeline Island friends—James B. Nash, Henry Capser, Leo Capser, Bella Capser, and Ham Ross.





Photo by Elizabeth Hull; WHS Archives WHI(H91)25



Photographer unknown; WHS Archives WHI(X3)45112



Photo by Elizabeth Hull; WHS Archives Lot 4277

**Upper left:** Picnic on Bass Island, 1916. Picnic outings to the Apostle Islands were a favorite pastime of summer residents. Elizabeth remembers them fondly: “What a good time we used to have on our picnics, and how good the steaks, corn and coffee tasted.” This group included, from left to right, Cora A. Hull (in white hat with ribbon, face visible), Herbert W. Rogers, Mrs. J. Austin, Elizabeth Baker, Mrs. James Logan Abernathy, and two Austin children. Mrs. Abernathy, the imposing woman in the chair, is Elizabeth’s grandmother, who accompanied the family to the island each summer. She died at Coole Park Manor on September 21, 1926—her ninety-first birthday. **Above:** Elizabeth Hull (Betty), Elizabeth Baker (Zib), and Elizabeth Nesbit (Lit) on the Hull tennis courts, c. 1915. Elizabeth Nesbit later married Samuel Marty, another family friend from Kansas City. They built their summer home, Mon Repos, next to Coole Park Manor on land given to them by Cora Hull as a wedding present. Elizabeth Hull was honored to be godmother to their daughter, Mary Marty Eberhardt.

**Left:** The Old Mission Inn seen from Lake Superior, c. 1912. The inn and its surrounding cottages started as a summer resort but gradually took on the characteristics of a summer community, centered around the old Protestant church on the grounds. Later in life, Elizabeth recalled the significance of the Old Mission Inn to her sense of place on Madeline Island: “The Mission was founded by professors, clergymen from Beloit, and Sunday evening they had these professors . . . oh, if they were botanists or historians or whatever . . . they would give a talk for one half to three quarters of an hour or so, or we would have the Reeves or Cadottes—old Joe would give us Indian tales. . . . It was a lovely community . . . it isn’t that way any more.”



WHS Archives, WHi(X3)43217

*Basswood Island served as a favorite spot for picnics and lazy summer play for the Hull family and friends.*



Photo by Elizabeth Hull; WHS Archives, WHi(H71)56

*Bill Baker, Ted Dwyer, Herbert (Jack) Rogers, c. 1913. In a letter to Herb's son Peter, Elizabeth offered the following explanation for the image: "The reason the three boys are all dolled up in women's clothes was that they kept after [Betty Hull and other girls] because we missed tennis balls. In those days we wore long skirts and hats, believe it or not . . . so we made the boys wear skirts and hats to play in. The results were hilarious as they kept getting tangled up in the skirts, losing the hats and generally looking like monkeys. At least it made them a bit more tolerant of our handicaps!"*

*La Pointe: Village Outpost on Madeline Island, was first published in 1960 and is still in print. In it he describes how the summer colony spent its days:*

*Recreational life of the time was fairly simple. There were walks in the woods, with the latter's profusion of ground pines and other characteristic flora of the latitude. There were berrying trips to local districts and other islands for gathering wild strawberries, blueberries and raspberries. The fishing enthusiasts traveled to the mainland to whip the small rivers for brook trout. There were sails and expeditions with Captains Charles Russell and Daniel Angus. . . . Some of these cruises consumed several days in the waters of the adjacent archipelago, convincing the visiting city dwellers that they were truly experiencing pioneer life. The novelty of sleeping on sandy beaches which, before morning, converted themselves into beds of unyielding concrete, vividly confirmed this belief. And to spend a foggy night in the whistle house of a lighthouse station! The fog horn, blaring on a definite time schedule, could prove as irritating as waiting for drops of water to fall on one's face. The event was impressive, the memory enduring.*

The Hull family employed caretakers, housekeepers, cooks, captains, and boat engineers. Some of their hired help traveled with them from Missouri or New York. Elizabeth recalled that Mary, the Hull's housekeeper for forty-nine years, spent her summers on the island with the family. The need for extra help was clear, as Elizabeth shared stories of house parties, dinner for sixty, and piles of sheets to be laundered and ironed on the upstairs mangle—Mary's job. Other hired help included Frank Albright, who came to Madeline from Chicago as the engineer



Photo by Elizabeth Hull; WHS Archives, Lot 4277

*The south end of the screened porch at Coole Park Manor, 1914.  
The porch overlooks Lake Superior. The swing and many of the  
wicker pieces remain in the same setting today.*

of the *Zenya* (the boat was wintered in Chicago). He stayed on the island, working for the Hulls, running his own business, and eventually marrying Madeline Stahl (daughter of grocer Tom Stahl). Captain Clarence Russell, an island native, captained the *Zenya* and worked as a caretaker for the family both on the island and in Missouri. Clarence was also a pilot and provided air travel for tourists in his biplane.

As the years passed, Elizabeth and her mother watched the community they knew on Madeline Island change with the times. Old friends married, had children, moved, and passed away. The Old Mission Inn closed its doors in 1941, and the historic church collapsed two years later. The Hull family changed drastically as well. Grandmother Abernathy died in 1926; Elizabeth's parents divorced around 1936; and Elizabeth and her mother moved to a new home in Ridgefield, Connecticut. Many years later, at age ninety-three, Elizabeth reminisced about her days on Madeline Island as she pored over photographs from those happy years. She recalled many stories of island friends and noted that she had refused all invitations for a return visit: "It was a different place, a different time, different people, you can't go back," she wrote. "I don't want to spoil what I remember." ❧

### Resources

Photographic identification for the images shown here was gathered from letters exchanged between Wisconsin Historical Society archivist Christine Schelshorn and Elizabeth Hull in 1974. In the letters Elizabeth identified people, places, and dates and described her memories of summer days on Madeline Island. These letters are in the Society's visual materials archives.

Her memories have also been preserved in letters to Peter Rogers and Leo and Bella Capser. Those letters, other manuscripts, and the beaded pieces she donated are in the collections of the Madeline Island Historical Museum.

At the age of ninety-three, Elizabeth shared her memories of Coole Park Manor with its present owners, Beth and Alan Fischlowitz, and they graciously shared their taped recording of their conversation (which took place in Connecticut on August 15, 1993) and a tour of the home with the author.

The 113 Hull still images in the Society's Archives document about two decades of Elizabeth's experience on Madeline. After that, the still images were replaced by movie film, some of which has recently been donated to the Madeline Island Historical Museum by Barbara and James Rogers.

### *The Author*



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