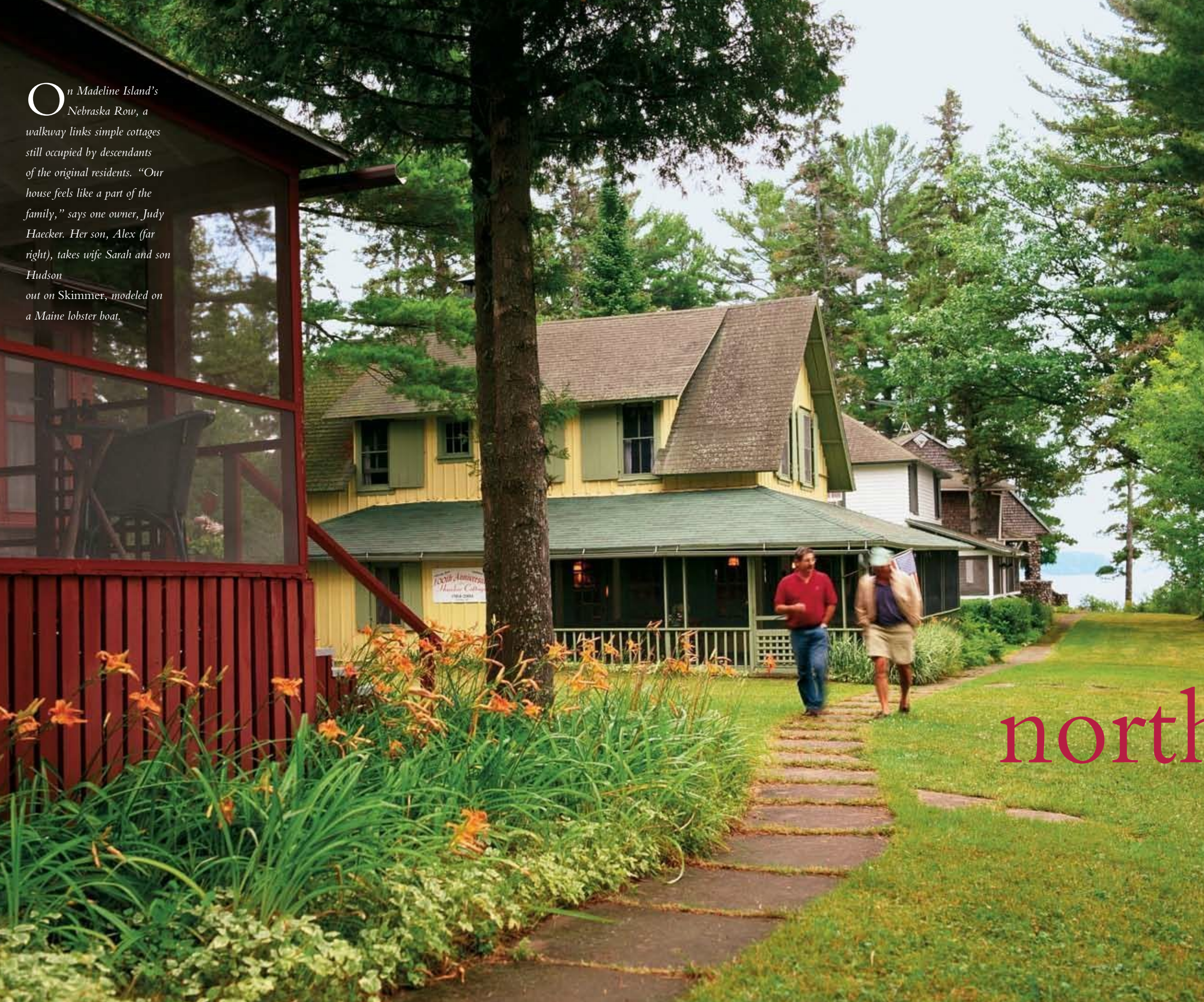


On Madeline Island's Nebraska Row, a walkway links simple cottages still occupied by descendants of the original residents. "Our house feels like a part of the family," says one owner, Judy Haecker. Her son, Alex (far right), takes wife Sarah and son Hudson out on Skimmer, modeled on a Maine lobster boat.



A row of summer cottages draws the Woods clan back to Lake Superior each year.



At what point does an annual pilgrimage become not habit, but tradition? It's hard to say, but certainly one Midwestern family crossed that line long ago. Just as the swallows flock to Capistrano and the Kennedys to Hyannisport, every year the Woodses converge on Madeline Island—as they have for more than a century.

In the 1890s, the first summer houses were built on this island in Lake Superior far enough off Wisconsin's north shore to feel completely insulated from

north woods legacy

TEXT BY JEFF BOOK
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the mainland. In 1899, Colonel Frederick M. Woods of Lincoln, Nebraska, wanted a bowling alley next to his island home, but that was deemed too worldly for his churchgoing neighbors. So he decamped to a pasture on a bluff down the bay. “Father drove a stake into the ground and announced, ‘Here is where I want to build a cottage,’” recalled Helen Woods Haecker, the colonel’s daughter, in 1952.

The simple, two-story house he completed in 1900 became the inspiration for others erected by family members along Nebraska Row, an enclave named after their home state. Like blood relatives, the homes have distinct personalities with shared traits, among them gabled roofs, cozy bedrooms, and screened porches. Most still belong to descendants of Colonel Woods.

When George and Judy Haecker, who own the second-oldest house on the row, decided to throw a party to celebrate its centennial, the Woodses showed up en masse. With four generations in attendance, the gathering proved both lively and reflective. “Someone suggested burying a time capsule for the event, but the house is a time capsule, full of old photos and memories,” George says.

Some things have changed over the years on Nebraska Row. The trees the colonel planted have grown large, and visitors to the row have grown

Madeline Island’s timeless pleasures have become an important part of the family’s collective experience.



*W*ooden stairs connect the blufftop houses to their docks, which serve as launchpads for diving, swimming, and boating. The platforms remain popular hangouts where cousins and friends catch up.





casual. Early on, they dressed up to go boating. Picnics featured linen tablecloths and good silver. “They didn’t rough it here,” says Barbara. “The adults dressed for dinner and all the boys wore sailor suits,” adds Pace Woods, who has been coming to Madeline since 1926, when he was 2. “It was a much slower life. But it’s still pretty slow.”

“We call it island fever,” says Laurie Faulkner, one of the colonel’s great-great-granddaughters. “You get so relaxed you just want to sleep.” She loves seeing her children play the way she did, free to walk into town or bike all over with their friends. “Here on the row, they can knock on anyone’s door and be welcomed,” she says.

Judy agrees, recalling epic after-dinner games of tag that swirled around the house while adults socialized on the screened porch. “Families used to come up for long stretches,” she observes. “Now people have busier schedules, so the number of kids at any given time is smaller, but still enough for them to have fun.” Underscoring the point, several wet, happy youngsters bound up from the docks that double as diving and sunning platforms.

Madeline Island’s timeless pleasures have become an important part of the family’s collective

A birch-bark screen made by George Haecker’s grandfather adds to the house’s layers of history. George calls the homes on Nebraska Row “containers of life”—vessels of memory for future descendants.





The Haeckers' beloved yellow-and-green cottage merited a 100th-birthday bash complete with banner, cake, and refreshments. The party drew several generations of Woodses from their native state of Nebraska and beyond.

Like blood relatives, the homes have distinctive personalities with shared traits, among them gabled roofs, cozy bedrooms, and screened porches.



experience. A loon's cry breaks the silence of an early-morning walk along the shore. A sprinkler throws off long, lazy curls of water that glow in the honey-colored light of late afternoon. Screened porches serve as box seats for showy thunderstorms that rumble and blaze above the lake. The clothes may have changed, but the pastimes are perennial. 🌿

More info: page 198

