

the Landfall *Legacy*

Artists have been drawing inspiration from this historic cottage in Brigus for nearly a century.

Story and photos by Dennis Flynn

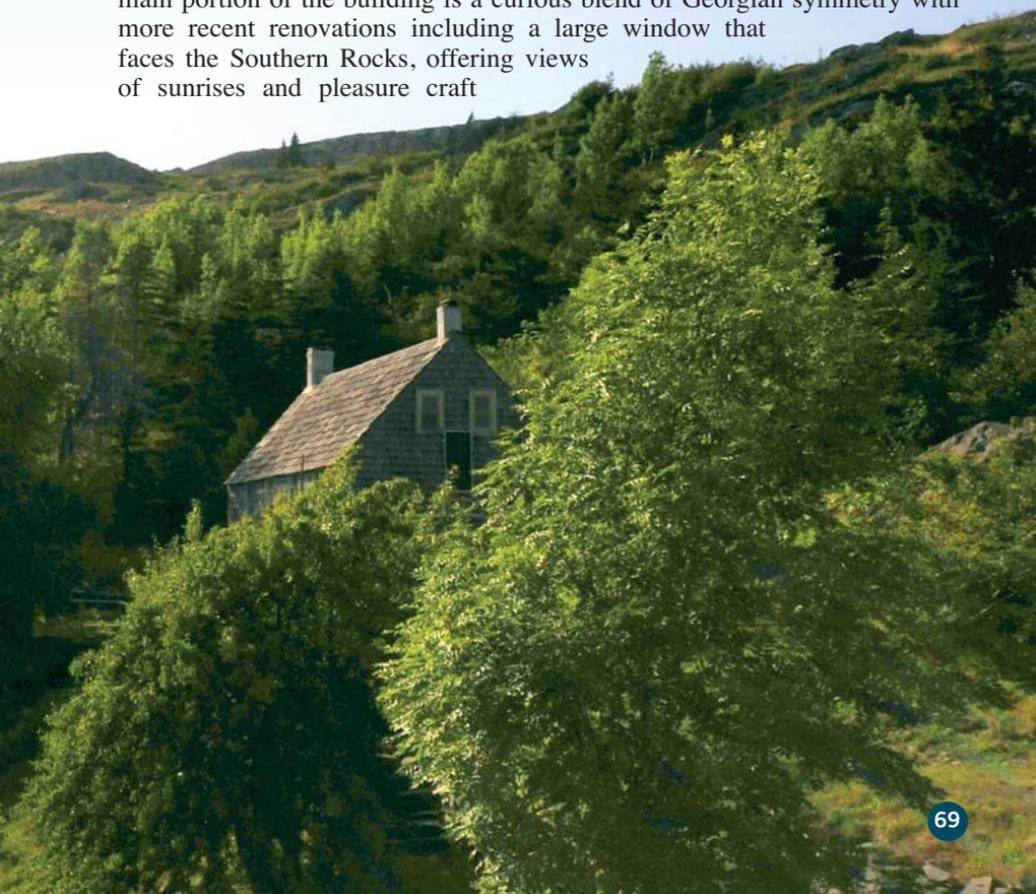


Standing on a Southside headland overlooking Brigus harbour, I watch the setting sun sweep across historic grounds.

The exact date when this town of 800 people was settled is unknown, but locals say Brigus dates back to 1612 when the Spracklin family purchased half the harbour from John Guy, founder of the 1610 colony at Cupids.

Thousands of tourists come to Brigus annually for the Blueberry Festival in August or to visit Hawthorne Cottage National Historic Site (former home of Arctic explorer Capt. Robert A. Bartlett), the Stone Barn Museum, St. George's Heritage Church, the Bartlett Sails monument at Bishops Beach, and the 1860 John Hoskins Tunnel (named after the Cornish miner who supervised the project; the tunnel allowed mariners to access deep water for loading their vessels while in the shelter of nearby Molly's Island).

Gazing towards the red and white iron-clad lighthouse at North Head, I trace a line inland along coastal paths to Battery Road and discover something isolated yet inviting. The two-storey gable-roofed house is cloaked in bone-grey cedar shakes and shingles, set on a patch of green grass amid a hardened landscape of stone and cliffs. At roughly 48 feet by 15 feet, the main portion of the building is a curious blend of Georgian symmetry with more recent renovations including a large window that faces the Southern Rocks, offering views of sunrises and pleasure craft





(Above) Kent Cottage and its surroundings inspire visiting artists. (Right) Andy Crichton, president of the Landfall Trust.

on the bay. Large deciduous trees sway in the summer breeze beside rock walls lining the path to the yellow front door, and a waterfall snakes past the house and trickles down to the ocean.

This intriguing property is called Kent Cottage (or Landfall) and dates back to the late 1700s or early 1800s, I am told by Elsie Piercey of Brigus. The last owner was Bradley Jacob Folsensbee, Jr. (Jake), of Seattle, Washington, who purchased the property (now on 11 acres) in 1953 for a mere \$2,500. Jake (1926-2004) was an American air force pilot who was stationed at Argentina and Fort Pepperell in St. John's. After leaving the forces, he taught in Seattle but spent his summers in Brigus.

Jake was also an artist, photographer, writer and musician. For more than 50 years he invested considerably in Landfall's preservation and acquired adjoining properties to improve its environmental protection.

"Before he died, he donated money



to the Brigus Library to add on the extension we call 'Jake's Room,'" explains Elsie, the town librarian for the past 19 years. "These are all his books and CDs here as well. He shipped all those books up from Seattle before he died. There were 35 boxes of books (more than 1,000 volumes). Jake was a very intelligent man, so most of the books are non-fiction. He really loved the library; he loved the story time and reading programs...There are a lot of paintings around by Jake on display as well. He was only an amateur painter, but he was pretty good at it. I really liked Jake. He was a bit eccentric, but he

had a kind heart...a real gentleman.”

Jake’s generosity extended beyond donating books and building reading resource rooms. Upon his death, Jake’s estate created the Landfall Trust – a not-for-profit organization with the mission to preserve Landfall Cottage, protect the natural environment and conserve the cultural heritage for the benefit of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Part of that vision of the cottage being a centre for lifelong learning, where people and organizations can practise the arts and humanities, involves artist- and writer-in-residence programs.

“Jake was a bachelor with a wonderful command of English and an appreciation for art,” says Andy Crichton, president of the Landfall Trust. “Most of the paintings you see around the place are by Jake, but some very famous artists have stayed here as well.”

During a tour of Kent Cottage, Andy gives me some background about this provincial Registered Heritage Structure. “The Pomeroyes were the people who built this house and their descendants think it may go back to the 1780s,” he explains. “It’s a wood-frame construction. The shingles you see were relatively recent and put there by Jake in the 1950s.”

Long before Jake purchased the property, it was rented to American artist, adventurer and writer Rockwell Kent for a period in 1914 and 1915. But he was asked to leave by the government of the day, who suspected him of being a German spy.

“Only a few things remain from Kent’s time, including the two painted flowers on the door panels in the kitchen,” Andy says. “Many people assume that the cottage gets its name from Rockwell Kent, but that’s not the case. In the 1930s, A.E.

Harris, an English engineer and gifted artist, owned and occupied the property. He named it Kent after his home region in the U.K.”

Other notable visitors at Landfall include Scott Walden in 2005, the first artist-in-residence. The philosopher and photographer authored *Places Lost: in Search of Newfoundland’s Resettled Communities*.

“Since then, famous painter Gerry Squires has stayed a number of times. Gerry has even produced a limited edition giclée print called ‘Kent Cottage at Landfall’ with proceeds to benefit the Trust,” says Andy. “We’ve also had award-winning authors Kevin Major and Eleanor Wachtel stay.

“When the cottage is not in use for cultural and heritage activity, Landfall is available on a weekly basis as a vacation retreat from May to October.”

Gazing through the Landfall guest books, I spot names of other artists including Brian Hoxha, Temma Gentles, Robert Tombs, Sylvia Bendzsa, Cecil Day. One wrote, “I’ve loved staying here. I have drawings I hope for a winter translation into prints (etchings probably). I hope the house may stay as it is – it’s really very comfortable and Jake’s presence is everywhere.”

Jake Folensbee returned to the U.S. towards the end of his life, but he did find a way to be forever connected to his beloved Brigus. When he died on March 17, 2004, his remains were cremated. In accordance with his final wishes, Jake’s ashes were returned and scattered on the cliffs above Landfall. In the end, the artist himself became a part of the landscape and the legacy of the Landfall he loved for more than half a century. 📖

For more information on Kent Cottage and the artist- and writer-in-residence programs, visit DownhomeLife.com and click on “April Hot Links.”