



Courtesy Landfall Trust

ROCKWELL KENT

⌘ Artist and Enigma ⌘

A century after his arrival, Brigus celebrates the renowned American artist's historic, yet notorious, stay in the community.

By Dennis Flynn



Dennis Flynn photo

American artist Rockwell Kent, born in 1882, had a long and varied career. According to the Landfall Trust, he worked as an architectural draftsman, lobsterman, carpenter and dairy farmer, but it was his talents as an artist that brought him fame. Among many esteemed credits to his name are countless world-renowned works of art, including illustrations for the classic American novel, *Moby Dick*.

Born in New York, Kent travelled the world during his lifetime. His artist's soul had a penchant for harsh climates, so his works of art often portrayed the bleak and rugged aspects of nature. To that end he spent time living in Maine, Alaska, Greenland, the Adirondacks and explored the waters around Tierra del Fuego in a small boat. And, for a short time, Kent made his home in Brigus, Newfoundland.

In 1914, Kent settled in Brigus and rebuilt an 18th-century homestead for his family, where he lived and created during his year-and-a-half-long stay. Today the historic homestead, known as Kent Cottage, is a registered heritage structure.

His sojourn in Brigus marked a distinctive period in his art; one of his best-known paintings, "House of Dread," was created there. But in addition to important works of art, Kent also created a mysterious reputation for himself in the rural community. His odd behaviour led many, including local authorities, to question whether Kent might be a German spy. He left Newfoundland under a cloud of suspicion in 1915.

Was Kent really the German spy he was rumored to have been? Or was he a free spirit misunderstood?

It all remains part of the fascinat-

ing enigma that still surrounds Kent, and which the public is invited to explore for themselves this summer as the province celebrates the centennial of his controversial, legendary time in Newfoundland.

Marking the centennial

The Rooms Provincial Art Gallery in St. John's is hosting a series of events to mark the centennial.

"Visitors to The Rooms this summer will have the opportunity to see four of Rockwell Kent's most important Newfoundland paintings in the original," says curator Caroline Stone. Kent's paintings "The House of Dread," "Newfoundland Dirge," "A Young Sailor" and "Nude Family in Landscape" will be on loan to The Rooms from museums and private collections located throughout Canada and the United States.

"Another highlight for me is the participation of local collectors, who are lending a water colour, drawings, wood engravings, lithographs, books, advertising images, a carving and memorabilia from throughout Kent's career," says Caroline. "And it is a chance for us to focus on Rockwell Kent holdings from The Rooms collections, as well." A screening of Frederick Lewis's documentary film about Kent, and



Vince Jones works on a special carving for the Rockwell Kent anniversary.

speakers from across Canada and the United States round out the lineup of events planned for The Rooms this summer, adds Caroline.

Of course, a myriad of events are also planned for Brigus. Mildred Brown of the Landfall Trust Kent Centennial Committee says a symposium happening in Brigus and at The Rooms May 31 - June 1 will see local, Canadian and American speakers present on Kent's art, the history of the period in Newfoundland and the artist's time here.

An especially significant event is taking place on Kent's birthday, June 21. A replica of a wooden ship's figurehead that Kent famously found, repaired and installed above the door of his cottage will be unveiled in Brigus. Over the last century the piece, which appears in some of Kent's paintings, has come to symbolize his time here and is another part of the enduring mystery surrounding the adventurer.

Carver Vince Jones of Torbay is creating the 28-inch-tall replica.

"It is a challenging project, but a great one, and I am really enjoying it," says Vince. "It will be of a woman's torso and head with her hair back in a bun, in a style popular 100 years ago."

Vince carved the intricate figure-head from a dry piece of maple hardwood salvaged from a tree blown down during Hurricane Igor – somewhat reminiscent of Kent's own chance find a century ago.

The flurry of events taking place this summer is a testament to the mark Kent left here. That his legacy continues to influence art, politics and literature around the world speaks to Newfoundland's own intrigue, able to lure such an enigmatic character to our rocky shores so many years ago. 📷

Visit landfalltrust.org for complete event details.