

## The Probable History of Landfall (Kent Cottage), Brigus, NL



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*By Michael Philpott*

**Landfall (Kent Cottage)** was designated a Registered Heritage Structure by Heritage NL (the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador) in 1988 for its historical, cultural, architectural, and environmental values. In 2018 it was reclassified a Landmark property in consideration of its significance as an early planter's residence and cultural site.

The cottage and property is owned today by the **Landfall Trust**, a charity formed in 2005 to care for the property and to continue the legacy of its late owner, Bradley Jacob Folensbee, Jr. Heritage NL staff visited Landfall in 2019 and completed additional research to answer several outstanding historical and architectural questions and to help inform maintenance and restoration efforts going forward.

## The (Probable) History of Landfall

Details of Landfall's construction are elusive. In a 2011 report Shane O'Dea and Philip Pratt asserted that Landfall's form and interior detailing align closely with other "planter houses" examined in Conception Bay dating to circa 1824, however they point out that full studding evident in the original west wall could indicate an earlier date. A late-1700s date would align with two plausible origins.

One account follows that Landfall was built around 1786 by the Pomeroy's (also spelled Pomery, Pomry, Pumroy, and Pommery) who lived there for many years before

converting it into a barn (Schryburt 2017). Given planter John Pomeroy was born around 1777 this early date is unlikely, however a turn-of-the-century date is plausible. A William Pomeroy who died on 1 June 1893 left his “room and plantation situate at Freshwater on the north side of Brigus together with [his] dwelling house and all erections thereon” to his son George Pomeroy (Pomeroy 1894). The bequest was



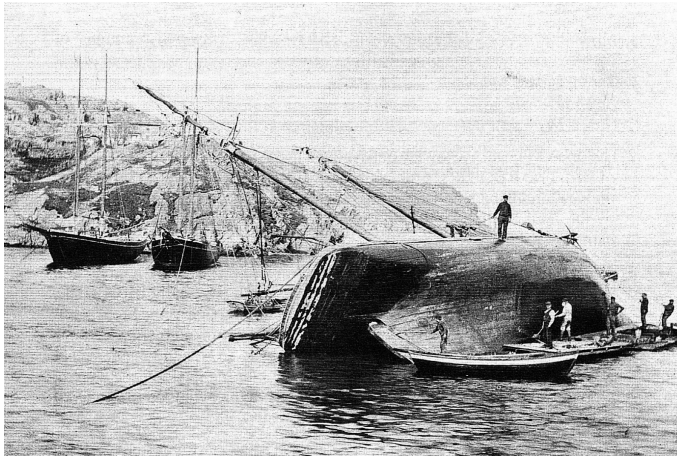
Landfall circa 1930 following restoration by A. E. Harris.  
Source: 12.08.026, Sir Robert Bond Collection (Coll-237),  
Archives and Special Collections, MUN,  
<https://collections.mun.ca/digital/collection/rbond/id/107>.

conditional on George “[supporting] and [maintaining] in a proper and becoming manner as she has been accustomed to live” his mother Ann (Percy) Pomeroy, suggesting that the house was inhabited and in good repair at the time. Ann reportedly lived with family in Brigus following her husband’s death. In this version of events it is likely the house was uninhabited following 1893-94.

This history is complicated by scant evidence of the Pomeroy family’s early years. In his history of the Brigus Methodist Church in 1925, Rev. Charles Lench references a patriarch John Pomeroy of “Freshwater, BDV.” Lench may mean to refer to the Freshwater area of Brigus rather than the nearby community of Freshwater, Bay de Verde, however no Pomeroyes are listed in the 1807 survey of Brigus planters included in the document. The survey instead attributes the northernmost plantation to James and William Norman. In 1817 both a John Pomory and John Pumroy were surveyed in the community (Buchan 1817). Leamon estimates the house was built shortly before 1817 based on family records indicating William Pomeroy’s birth on January 12, 1817, however he does not provide his rationale for believing it was built at this time (Leamon 2019, 99).

A second possibility is that Landfall was built by the Norman family on their northern plantation. Land belonging to James and William is described in the 1807 survey. Lench writes:

James and William Norman bring us to the end of this ancient and interesting [survey]. These men were brothers from Jersey, and inherited this splendid property in 1774 by deed of gift from their Father. The Battery in the days of its glory presented a unique and magnificent appearance. Lord Strathcona was the



A view from Brigus looking toward the Battery. The Norman house is faintly visible in the background. Source: Stone Barn Museum via Leamon 2019.

quest there for some time. The property was 210 yards [192m] East and West, by 198 yards [181m] and bounded in the North by the woods (Lench 1925).

The Norman house that hosted Strathcona was not Landfall though it is possible that the cottage was an earlier planter house of John Norman, their father. These bounds, however, would not have encompassed both Landfall and the site of the Norman's grand house roughly 250m distant.

This leaves open the possibility of a more northerly, unrecorded plantation belonging to the Pomeroy's which Leamon takes for granted. If the Normans did build or own Landfall it nevertheless found its way into the Pomeroy's possession, most likely through the marriage of Ann Roberts, widow of John Norman, "father of Brigus Normans," to John Pomeroy in 1804 (Percey, n.d.).

Landfall was likely unoccupied following William Pomeroy's death in 1893. It was certainly uninhabited by 1914 and had been for a number of years prior when American artist Rockwell Kent arrived in search of a suitable location to work and establish an art school. In Brigus he found Landfall in a dilapidated state which would plausibly follow from 20 years of vacancy:

Somewhat remote and difficult of access from the village of Brigus in Conception Bay there stood a little house, so suited by its location to my needs as I imagined them and, by its un[?]ed dilapidation to, I guessed, my pocket book, that, looking up the owner, I soon rented it (Kent 1914).

In different accounts he either rented or purchased (St. John's Daily Star 1917)<sup>1</sup> the property and set to work restoring or rebuilding it. Rental is most likely given Harris's later purchase of Landfall from the Pomeroy family. Kent studied architecture at Columbia University and was an experienced carpenter and draughtsman having built his own house and studio in Maine years prior. He spent \$1,000 and much of his own

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<sup>1</sup> In an effort to justify his claim to damages Kent may have overstated his investment in Landfall.

labour refitting the cottage for the arrival of his family, adding a studio and second floor bedroom to the west end. On the exterior “[Kent] put a fence about it and a gateway arched over with the rib of a boat. And over the doorway [he] put a maiden carved in wood. She has been the figurehead of an ancient vessel” (Kent 1914).



A painting of Landfall by Kent circa 1915 depicting his studio addition and shed addition opposite. Source: *Vital Passage: The Newfoundland Epic of Rockwell Kent* via ?In Review: Rockwell Kent In Newfoundland,” accessed January 6, 2021, <https://www.incollect.com/articles/in-review-rockwell-kent-in-newfoundland>.

Landfall was something of a muse to Kent and served as the subject of a number of sketches, prints, and paintings. His writings reveal a great fondness for the place, reflecting during his second visit in 1968 that “a most deeply moving experience was the revisitation of the house that, in those earlier years, I had all but actually built in the fond hope – no, more than that, belief – that it should be our family home for years to come.” Despite this fondness Kent was unceremoniously deported as a suspected German spy in 1915, less than two years after his arrival. He did not help his case by adding signs to

the house marking the locations of a “map room” and “bomb shop” or by painting a German eagle on the side of his studio.

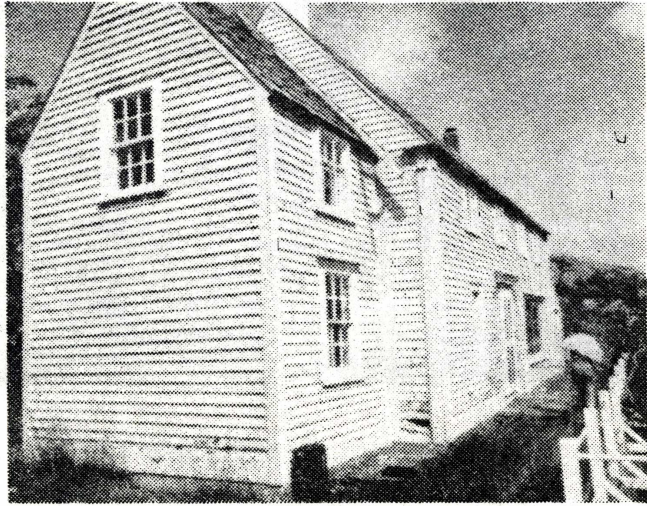
Following Kent’s departure in 1915 Landfall again sat vacant until 1927 when Albert Edward Harris purchased the property. Harris, born in Oxford, England, was an engineer and amateur artist who immigrated to Newfoundland in 1907. He worked first with the Reid Group of England at Bishop’s Falls and later with the Anglo-Newfoundland Development (AND) Company in Grand Falls before retiring to Landfall in 1930. In addition to his body of work which depicts local scenes Harris was a founding member of the Newfoundland Society of Art in 1925.

Harris died in Brigus in 1933 leaving Landfall to fellow AND-man George White who lived there until his own death in 1938. It then passed to Albert Brett who rented it to Albert Pearce for approximately two years (Leamon 2019, 100). The property likely sat vacant for another 13 years until purchased by Rupert Bartlett in 1953. According to



one account Bartlett's wife felt the cliff-hugging house was not suitable for children and refused to live there. Bartlett sold the house a year later to American educator and amateur artist Bradley Jacob "Jake" Folensbee.

Jake summered at the house and documented to the best of his abilities the state and evolution of the house and land. In an effort to protect its idyllic setting he purchased surrounding land to create a buffer. Following his death the Landfall Trust was formed to become perpetual caretakers of the property.



Landfall as it appeared in 1974 following the installation of a picture window but prior to the application of wood shingle cladding. Source: Caroline Stone, "Discovering A. E. Harris," *The Trident* 7, No. 2 (1982): 6.

## Architectural Evolution

Landfall is a two-and-a-half-storey Georgian house with two end chimneys exhibiting a combination of full stud and wood frame construction on a low stone foundation. Its first-floor plan is essentially centre-hall, though the walls and doors of the hallway have been removed. Its second-floor plan is unusual with two perpendicular hallways and a bedroom (now with one wall removed) spanning two bays along the facade. It exhibits an asymmetrical plan with a two-and-a-half-storey addition on the west end, a one-storey shed addition on the east, and a one-storey bathroom addition on the north which connects to the second floor and is accessible from the north-south hallway. Note that while stairs have been illustrated in their present location in all periods there is evidence they were moved, though their exact earlier configurations undetermined.

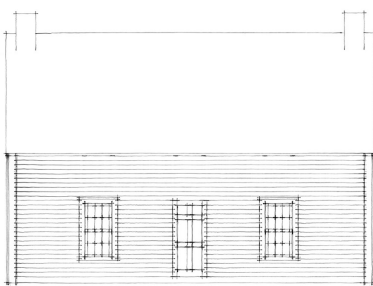
Landfall is clad in cedar shingles with no corner, eave, or foundation trim. It has a thick "cross and bible" front door, thought by Folensbee to be original to the house, with an unusual storm door built by the property's caretaker. The rain cap above the door is thick with dentils while window trim is plain. The house has an eclectic mix of windows including a large picture window on the south side, 3/6 single-hung wood windows on the second floor, several banks of single-pane wood windows on the rear and north

addition, and several six-pane fixed windows. Even among windows of the same type there is variation in construction and period.

Based on our investigation we believe Landfall evolved in several stages: a pre-1824 planter period, a post-1824 planter period, an early-20th century restoration/expansion period, and a late-20th century renovation period.

The illustrations below are drafted based on physical evidence and measurements taken by Heritage NL staff supplemented by previous measurements by O'Dea and Pratt.

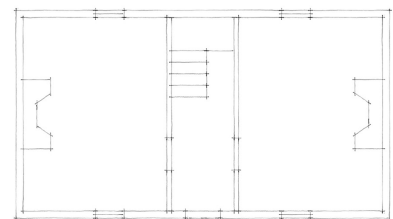
### Pre-1824 planter period



Evidence for the existence and form of Landfall in this period includes the visible full studding of the original west wall, interior trim and structural details, and conjecture based on the presence of planters in the area in the late 1700s. The exposed full studding in the attic indicates the roof of the earlier structure was roughly two feet lower than it is today. It is unknown whether full studding exists in any part of the north or south walls.

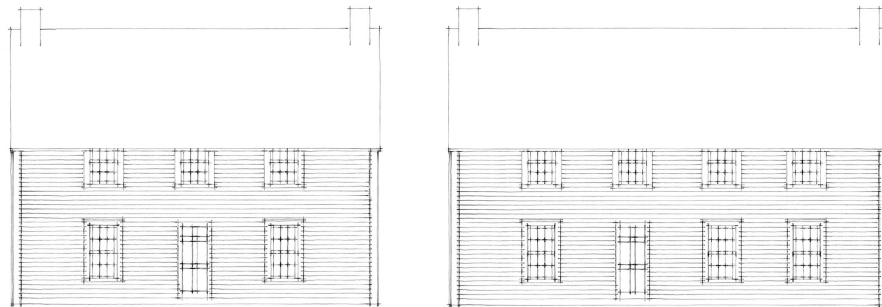
Further investigation may reveal the true footprint of the earlier structure.

Given seams visible in the interior surfaces of the east hall and bedroom we theorize the structure was shorter in the west-east direction in this period. Truncating the house at this seam would produce a typical three-bay Georgian facade.

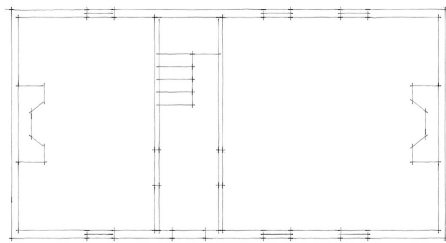


An alternate theory proposed by O'Dea and Pratt suggests the east end was occupied by a large inglenook or settle fireplace. Both could account for the different trim styles and joist details found in the east bay of the house however we believe our expansion theory to be more likely. Future investigation of the foundation could confirm this

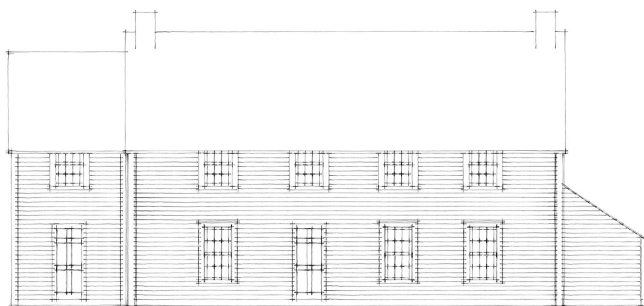
## Post-1824 planter period



Based on decades of research in the Conception Bay North region, O'Dea and Pratt date the present form and certain details to approximately 1824. At some point the roof of the structure was raised and the east end extended (or settle fireplace removed).



## Early 20th century



The early-20th-century was another period of expansion defined by the residency of two notable individuals.

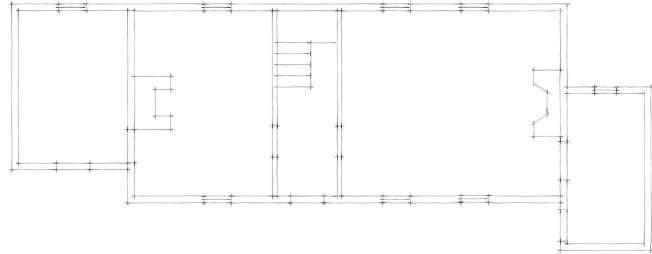
### Rockwell Kent (1914-15)

Kent rented Landfall after visiting Brigus and quickly set to work renovating the house he described as a “wreck” in anticipation of his family’s

arrival (Kent 1955, 280). His most significant contribution to the structure is the addition of a studio and second floor bedroom to the west end. Kent took care to blend the studio with the house, aligning the roof on the rear, matching the roof slope, and matching joist dimensions by laminating small-dimension lumber. A shed addition on

the east end was present during Kent's tenure, though it was likely added prior to his arrival.

It appears the exterior cladding was not painted in Kent's day, possibly a result of his experience in New England, though the trim may have been. Kent painted several doors and mantels in the house and in his writings describes removing much of the wallpaper.



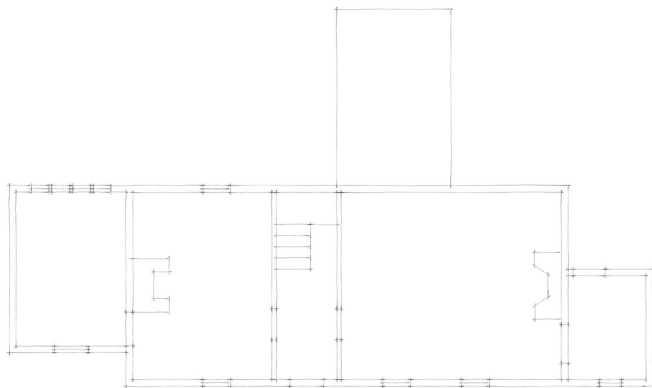
### Alfred Edward (A.E.) Harris (1927-33)



The washroom wing added by A. E. Harris. Source: Michael Philpott, Heritage NL, 2019.

Harris retired to Landfall in 1930, finding it in a dilapidated state once more, and in addition to restoring it made several changes to make the house more livable. He added a washroom on the north side with access from the second floor hallway, several sets of banked wood windows, cabinetry on the second floor, and a wood-fired hot water heating system. It is likely in this period that the

studio door was removed and a 6/6 wood window installed in its place. This is the only hung window in the house and was likely salvaged. It may have been during Harris's tenure that a small and short-lived gable-roofed porch was added to the front of the cottage. Harris painted the house with white corner trim and a light base - possibly yellow.

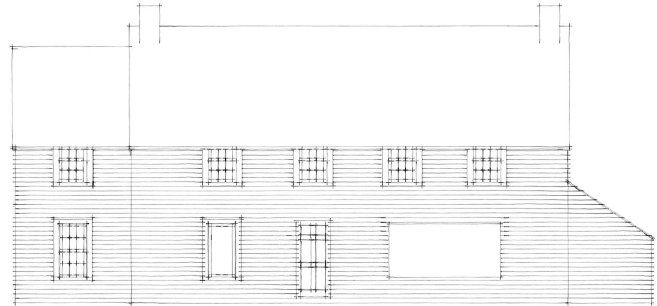




## Late 20th century (1953-present)

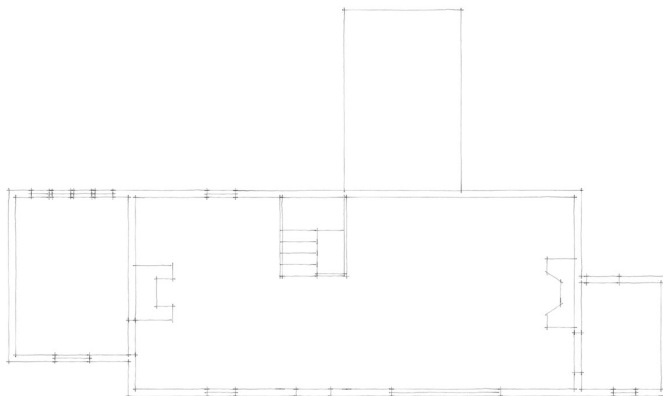
Jake Folensbee made several significant changes to the finishes at Landfall during his tenure. Taking a liberal view of architectural conservation Jake removed or covered much of the house's trim, applied cedar shingle cladding and cedar shake roofing, replaced several sash

windows with fixed-pane windows, and added a large picture window to the façade “to enhance the view of the exterior landscape.” He acknowledged that the large window in



particular was “controversial to some purists.” On the interior Folensbee lined the walls of the kitchen with unfinished wood shingles,<sup>2</sup> removed the walls of the ground floor hall, removed the east (kitchen) chimney, and had the opposite fireplace rebuilt (Folensbee 1993).

Landfall following renovations by Folensbee. Source: Eddy O'Toole, Heritage NL, 2017.



<sup>2</sup> “used because the house has settled and there are few right angles from which to add wall coverings”

## Cultural Landscape

In addition to its historical and architectural value, Landfall's setting also demands recognition. Its earliest inhabitants were no doubt drawn to the site known as Freshwater in part by its namesake fresh water stream. Landfall's rocky perch is also known as the Battery – a name purported to refer to its use as a defensive battery during King George's War (1744-48). Leamon speculated that the area was named by locals as one that *could* function as a defense position rather than as the site of a physical emplacement. In August 2019 John Erwin and Stephen Hull of the Provincial Archaeology Office visited Landfall for a preliminary archaeological survey. They found no evidence of a battery on the site and did not believe the site to be suitable for such a use except for its relative accessibility (Erwin 2019).

Aside from its abundant fresh water, Landfall's location is unforgiving with little level land for gardening and difficult access to the harbour. What does exist was terraced by hand using dry-laid stone walls on several levels. The stream running next to the cottage is partially lined with stone though this may have been completed as late as the 1930s when Harris "cleaned" it. The cottage was the furthest and today is the last of a number of houses that once occupied the area.

While the Pomeroy's certainly had practical reasons for settling at Freshwater later residents were drawn there for much different reasons. Kent was attracted to the "[promise] of quietness" provided by its isolation and his work in the period seems inspired by its sublime setting (Kent 1955, 280). Harris too may have been drawn to the solitude of Landfall though, as a landscape painter and gardener, he was certainly attracted to its natural setting as well. Both contributed to the landscape in their time. Kent "put a fence about [the cottage] and a gateway arched over with the rib of a boat" (Kent 1914). Harris likely left the greatest mark on the grounds since the significant work of terracing:

The property was neatly fenced: retaining walls along the garden terraces were repaired and finely bedecked with rows of flowers and ferns; fruit and shade trees in the sunken front garden were carefully pruned and retrenched; the tiny tumbling stream—the dwelling's water supply behind the house—was cleaned and filtrated; and, as if not to take away from the natural beauty of the place, the garage to house the Englishman's Morris automobile was cleverly, as well as

conveniently, relegated to a spot just outside the main gate close by the Battery Brook (Leamon 2019, 99).

Folensbee undertook repairs to stone walls on the property and collected artifacts found on the property though it is unclear if he made other interventions in the landscape. He was responsible for consolidating land around Landfall in order to ensure the cottage's continued isolation. Harris's garage and specimen trees remain today.

## Closing Thoughts

Landfall is one of hundreds of modest planters' houses that once dotted the shores of Conception Bay. On the verge of complete disrepair it was discovered once by an American artist, again by an English engineer, and once more by an American teacher who each breathed new life into the property. It survives essentially by chance – a reminder of the precariousness of some of our most cherished sites – and only by capturing the imaginations of each of its passionate residents. Under the stewardship of the Landfall Trust the cottage today welcomes artists, writers, and musicians from around the world, a fitting legacy for a property that historically served as a home and muse for professional and amateur artists alike.

This investigation was the first step in reassessing the significance of Landfall and better incorporating intangible and other non-architectural values in its official recognition. We hope this work will be expanded and confirmed or corrected in the future through further archaeological and architectural investigation noting physical evidence as maintenance and restoration work is completed on the property.

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