

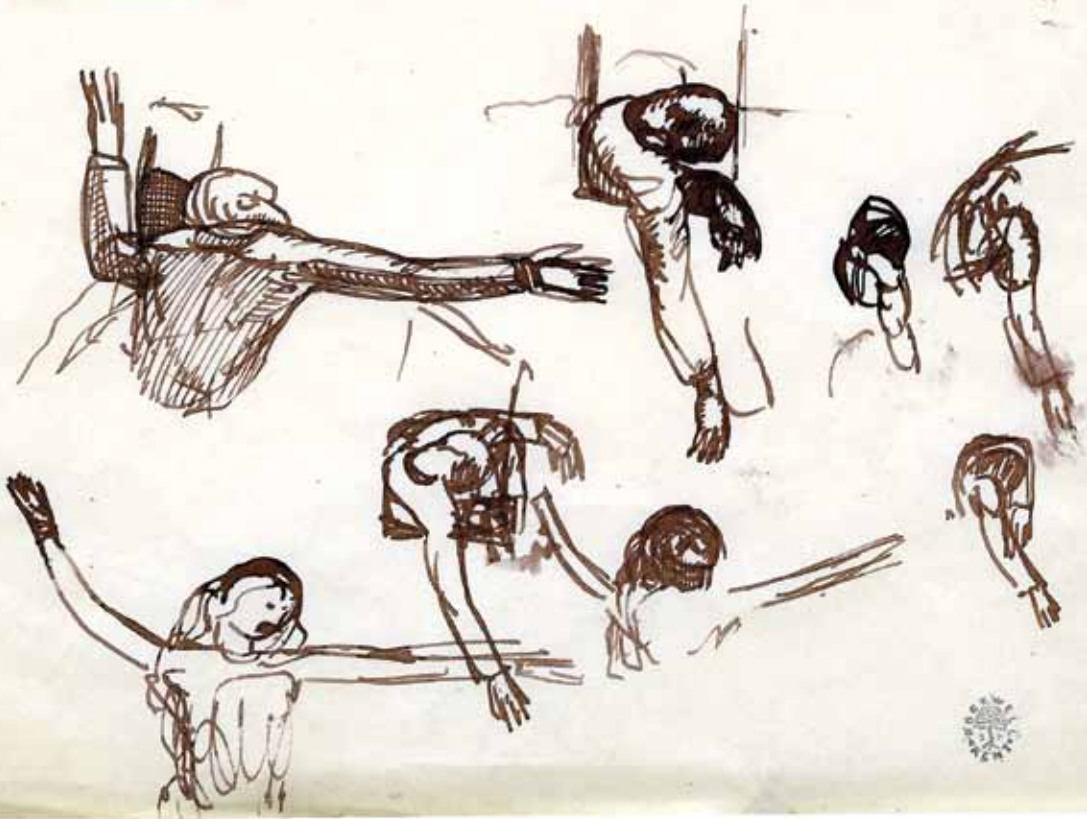
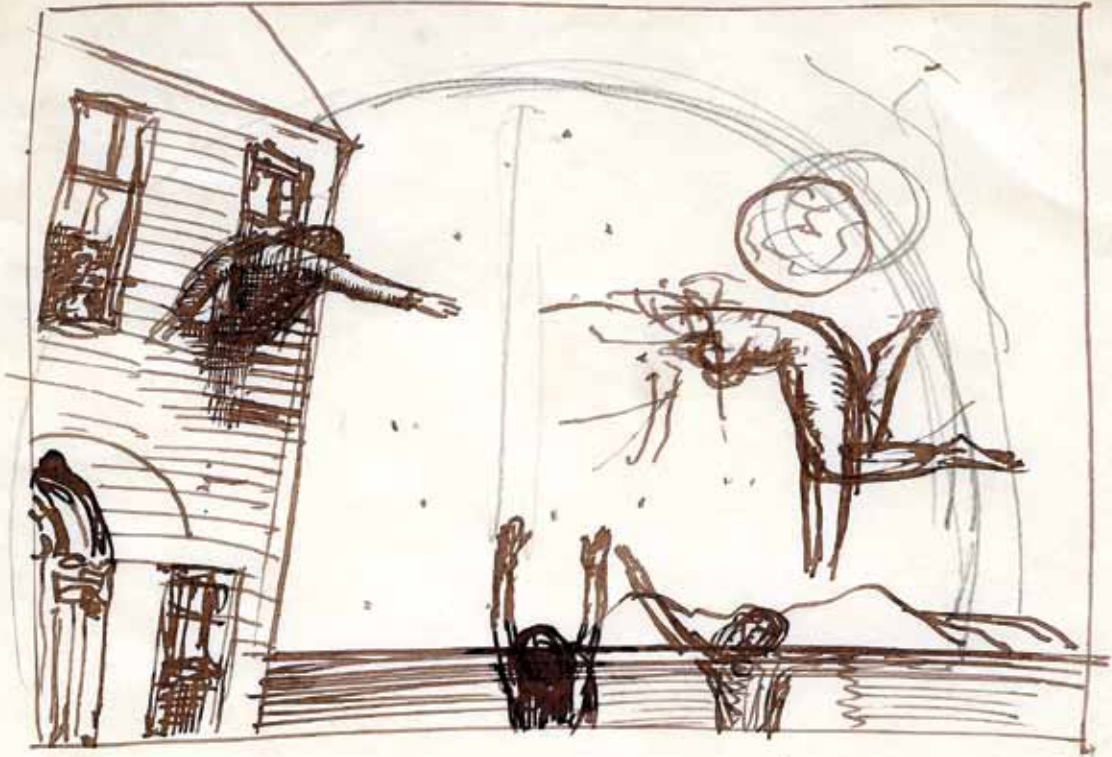
# ROCKWELL KENT REVIEW

PLATTSBURGH STATE ART MUSEUM

SPRING 2014 / VOLUME XL / NO. 1



Plattsburgh  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



# ROCKWELL KENT REVIEW

PLATTSBURGH STATE ART MUSEUM

SPRING 2014 / VOLUME XL / NO. 1



Founded as The Kent Collector  
by George and Gladys Spector in 1974

A tri-annual journal devoted to the life and work of Rockwell Kent (1882–1971) and to American art of the first half of the twentieth century, published under the auspices of the Plattsburgh State Art Museum, SUNY Plattsburgh.

*Museum Director* Cecilia M. Esposito

*Editor* Don Roberts

*Art Director* Sarah Richard

*Circulation* Connie Nephew

#### Submissions:

We welcome proposals for articles as well as exhibition press releases and auction/sale announcements. Please contact us at the address below.

#### Advertising:

Subscribers are entitled to free advertising, space permitting.

#### Annual Subscription:

\$24.00 (Domestic First-Class Mail)

\$34.00 (Overseas Mail)

Some back issues are available at \$10.00 each.

#### Rockwell Kent Review

Plattsburgh State Art Museum

State University of New York

101 Broad Street

Plattsburgh, NY 12901

Telephone: (518) 564-2474

Fax: (518) 564-2473

E-mail: [ceil.esposito@plattsburgh.edu](mailto:ceil.esposito@plattsburgh.edu)

Copyright ©2014

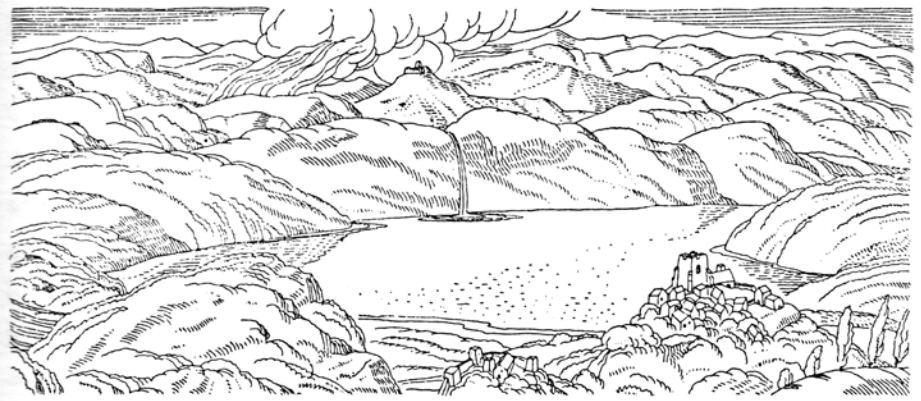
Plattsburgh State Art Museum

State University of New York

Library of Congress No. 78-646561

*Cover:* Rockwell Kent, *House of Dread*, 1915, oil on canvas, 27¾" x 37¾". Plattsburgh State Art Museum.

*Frontispiece:* From the "Pointed North" exhibition, *House of Dread (Study Sheet I)*, c. 1914–15, pen/brush and ink (sepia) and graphite on paper, 10½" x 8" sheet. (Private Collection.)



## THE VIEW FROM ASGAARD

This issue presents the interesting insights of three Rockwell Kent scholars. David Traxel and Frederick Lewis are refreshingly forthright in recalling their experiences in bringing his life to print and film, while Richard West delves into the provocative influence of one artist on another.

Congratulations to Robert Rightmire for the publication of *The Greeting Cards of Rockwell Kent*. I've already reached for it numerous times in answering questions we receive at the museum. I would also like to recognize Don Roberts and Sarah Richard for their superb work in seeing this publication through its 39th year.

It is once again subscription renewal time. We count on your friendship and support, and hope you'll join us for another year!

Best wishes,  
*Cecilia Esposito*

## IN THIS ISSUE

Next Year in Newfoundland: The Kent Centennial Celebration .....	3
The Dark Side of Monhegan / Richard V. West .....	4
The Greeting Card Art of Rockwell Kent: Part XVI / Robert Rightmire .....	10
David Traxel in Conversation with Frederick Lewis .....	13
Moby-Dick: The Anatomy of a Page* .....	20

#### Departments

Dateline 2013 .....	2
Kentiana: In Print and At Auction .....	17
Faithfully Yours .....	21

\*A production error resulted in the misprinting of this page in the Summer 2013 issue.

## CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT RIGHTMIRE has researched Kent's greeting card art for almost two decades, generously sharing his discoveries with our readers. Although this issue marks the conclusion of that centerfold series, it also heralds its debut as a book. He is the first to admit that a collection is never complete, and so his quest continues.

RICHARD V. WEST's curatorial career spans nearly five decades as well as the continent from coast to coast. It was he who organized "Rockwell Kent: The Early Years" at the Bowdoin College Art Museum in 1969—the last solo exhibition within the artist's lifetime—and the traveling retrospective "'An Enkindled Eye': The Paintings of Rockwell Kent" at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 1985.

And ROSEMARY RANCK, the photographer whose portraits of her husband David Traxel have graced the jacket of each of his books.

## The Kent Collection

Encompassing more than 5,000 items, the Rockwell Kent Collection at SUNY Plattsburgh is the most complete and balanced collection of the artist's work. It began as a gift from Sally Kent Gorton of the Rockwell Kent Legacies and continues to grow through donations and acquisition.

Our holdings represent every facet of Kent's life and career: paintings, drawings, prints, commercial and political ads, books, trademarks, bookplates, greeting cards, stationery, fabrics, ceramics, photographs and memorabilia. The collection traces Kent's growth as an artist as well as his accomplishments as an adventurer, author and political activist. For scholars of 20th-century American art, Feinberg Library and the Kent Gallery are an unrivalled resource for research and discovery.

The Kent Gallery is but one facility of the Plattsburgh State Art Museum. The Burke Fine Arts Gallery presents a complete program of historical and contemporary exhibitions, while the Winkel Sculpture Court displays more than forty pieces of sculpture by Nina Winkel in an atrium setting—the largest exhibition space in New York State devoted to a woman artist. The Myers Hall lobby serves as a gallery for student art exhibitions. Throughout the campus, art works on permanent display comprise the Edward and Bette Brohel Museum Without Walls. In addition, the Regina Slatkin Art Collection Studies Room provides a visual and hands-on resource for the college community.

Rockwell Kent Gallery  
Feinberg Library  
(518) 564-4813  
Burke Fine Arts Gallery

Winkel Sculpture Garden  
John Platt Myers Fine Art Building  
(518) 564-2474

Regina Slatkin Study Room  
John Platt Myers Fine Arts Building  
By appointment: (518) 564-2474 or  
(518) 564-2178

Gallery Hours  
Daily 12:00 noon – 4:00 pm  
(Closed Major Holidays.)



## DATELINE 2013/2014

**July 31, Kiev, Ukraine.** “Nearly Absolute Beauty,” an exhibition of landscapes by Rockwell Kent opened at the Khanenko Museum of Art, which holds Ukraine's largest collection of his works. Taking its name from Kent's description of Greenland as “a land of nearly absolute beauty,” it was curated by Olena Zhyvkova. Among the ten works on display were *Parry Harbor: Tierra del Fuego* (1922-25), *Whiteface Mountain Under Clouds: Adirondacks* (1952) and *Hilltop Graves: North Greenland* (1932-33). Closed October 20.

**August 30, Monhegan, Maine.** The Monhegan Historical and Cultural Museum Association received a grant of \$25,500 from the National Endowment for the Humanities. It will enable the museum, working with preservationists, to address environmental issues that threaten the conservation of its collection.



Bette and Ed Brohel (SUNY Plattsburgh)

**September 17, Plattsburgh, New York.** SUNY Plattsburgh's Museum Without Walls was renamed in honor of Edward and Bette Brohel in a ceremony at which University President John Ettling presided. It was Ed Brohel who created the wide-ranging exhibition of art that changed the face of the campus, inside and out. During his three decades as director of the Plattsburgh State Art Museum, the university collection grew from 500 to more than 8,000 pieces, including hundreds of the works that constitute the Kent Collection. Bette Brohel enjoyed an equally significant career with the university as an academic advisor.

**September 21, Newcomb, New York.** The Adirondack Interpretive Center hosted its second-annual Rockwell Kent Day with filmmaker Frederick Lewis as keynote speaker. The day ended with readings and conversation focusing on the artist's political and social perspectives by Paul Hai and Marianne Patinelli-Dubay of the Northern Forest Institute.

**November 3, Bellingham, Washington.** The traveling exhibition “Vanishing Ice: Alpine and Polar Landscapes in Art, 1775–2012” opened at the Whatcom Museum. Ninety artworks representing twelve nations “trace the impact of glaciers, icebergs and fields of ice on artists' imaginations as well as the connections between generations of artists,” all within the context of climate change. Rockwell Kent is represented by *Resurrection Bay, Alaska*, ca. 1939, from the Frye Museum in Seattle (see page 15). Other notable artists included are Frederic Edwin Church, Ansel Adams, Joseph M.W. Turner, Thomas Hart Benton and Albert Bierstadt. Continuing through March 2. Next stop: El Paso Museum of Art, June 1 – August 24.

**December 12, Juneau, Alaska.** Alaska Public Media affiliate KTOO announced the debut of “Writers Showcase,” a new radio series. It features Alaskan writers reading from their work as well as actors presenting works by such writers as Rockwell Kent. Each installment is thematic, recorded before a studio audience and broadcast statewide, beginning Dec. 15.

**December 24, Washington, D.C.** In her *Washington-Post* review of the motion picture “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,” Ann Hornaday wrote: “One scene in particular—involving the David Bowie song ‘Space Oddity,’ an errant helicopter and a mad dash for redemption—looks for all the world as if [Mitty's] flying directly into a Rockwell Kent painting.”

**January 6, Beijing, China.** *Rockwell Kent: The Art of the Bookplate* by Don Roberts, with an introduction by Will Ross, was published by Gold Wall Press. Chinese translation by Zian.

# The Kent Collection

## Recent Acquisitions

Cecilia M. Esposito

**January 17, Evanston, Illinois.** “The Left Front: Radical Art in the ‘Red Decade,’ 1929–1940” opened at Northwestern University’s Block Museum of Art. The exhibition focuses on a group of left-leaning activist artists, including Rockwell Kent, who were instrumental in organizing the American Artists Congress. Continuing through June 22.

**March 1, Washington, D.C.** Following an acclaimed four-year international tour, the landmark “Made in the USA: American Masters from the Phillips Collection, 1850–1970” opens at its home galleries. The more than 200 masterworks by more than 120 American artists is the most comprehensive presentation of the museum’s American art treasures since the nation’s Bicentennial. Highlights include Rockwell Kent’s *The Road Roller*. Phillips was an early patron of Kent’s work; he acquired *The Road Roller* in 1918. Continuing through August 31.

**May 30, St. John’s, Newfoundland.** “Pointed North: Rockwell Kent and Newfoundland” opens at the Rooms Provincial Art Gallery. The premier event of the summer-long Rockwell Kent Centennial, it continues through September 21.

**June 25, Winona, Minnesota.** In conjunction with the Great River Shakespeare Festival, the Minnesota Marine Art Museum presents a second installation of Kent’s Shakespearean character studies from the Ralf Nemecek Collection. Continuing through August 3.

### FOR THE RECORD

In my review of the “Jamie Wyeth, Rockwell Kent and Monhegan” exhibition in the Fall 2013 edition of the *RKR*, an important citation relating to the 1954 dispute between Kent and the Farnsworth Art Museum should be added: Eliot Stanley’s very comprehensive analysis and discussion, “Awash In Red,” *The Kent Collector*, Summer 2006 (Vol. XXXII, No. 2), pp. 4-10. This is by far the most complete and fair analysis of the issues and personalities involved, which should be required reading for anyone interested in the complex claims and counterclaims that still continue to be voiced about the affair. I regret the omission.

—Richard V. West

**T**HE ROCKWELL KENT COLLECTION of the Plattsburgh State Art Museum continues to grow year by year, acquisition by acquisition. Our pursuit of Kent’s art began upon the passing of Sally Kent Gorton in 2000, when the university received her bequest of more than 4,000 drawings, prints, ceramics and paintings, 6,500 photographs and 3,500 books from Asgaard, the Kent home in Au Sable. This was already the largest and most extensive collection of the artist’s work anywhere; but Kent was an amazingly prolific artist, and his personal holdings were far from complete.

Over the intervening years, we’ve steadily worked at filling the gaps. Acquisitions come to us from individual donors as well as purchases funded by copyright/permissions revenue and the Sally Kent Gorton Endowment. However, our mission as a university museum goes beyond research, acquisition, classification and conservation: It is to make Kent’s work accessible to the public—to the art lover as well as the scholar—and every addition to the Kent Collection is cause for celebration.

### Printed Textiles

Charlie Green and Rebecca Reges Green have generously donated a large textile piece in memory of his parents and her grandparents, George and Gladys Spector, founders of the *Kent Collector*. Named “Harvest Time” and extremely rare, it is one of four drapery fabrics manufactured from Kent’s designs in 1950. We have also purchased a variation of “Harvest Time” with brown sheaves from a London dealer. These two items join “Pine Tree” and “Deer Season,” leaving only “Waves of Grain” unrepresented in the museum’s collection.



Rockwell Kent Design, Bloomcraft, Inc., Harvest Time (Green), 1950, printed textile, 357/8" x 56". In memory of George and Gladys Spector.

(Continued)



Rockwell Kent, *Girl Running*, gouache on board, 12¼" x 10½". Museum purchase.



Rockwell Kent, *Girl Jumping Rope*, c.1942, gouache on board, 7¾" x 5½". Museum purchase.

## Drawings & Paintings

The most esteemed elements of any collection are those works that are unique. *Around the Christmas Tree*, a generous gift by Linda Dubay, joins *Christmas* from the Estate of Sally Kent Gorton. Both of the small panel paintings were intended for greeting cards and signed "XX" when Kent felt he had been double-crossed in their commissioning.

From time to time, original works become available at auction. We were fortunate in acquiring the inscribed drawing *Entrance to Parry Harbor*, as well as *Girl Jumping Rope*, the gouache study for a Sharp and Dohme Vitamins advertisement, and a Hogarth Jr. gouache work titled *Girl Running*.

The sketch called *Sally* remains something of a mystery. It is a familiar image of Sally Kent in profile, a pose that appears in *On Earth, Peace*, the 1944 mural commissioned by the Air Transport Association for the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. It complements our oil painting *Mural Study for On Earth, Peace: Sally*, a gift of Sally Kent Gorton.



Rockwell Kent, *Sally (Mural Study)*, c. 1940, pencil on paper, 00" x 00". Museum purchase.



Rockwell Kent, *Around the Christmas Tree*, 1954, oil on board, 8" x 12". Gift of Linda Dubay.

(Continued on page 20)



Dennis Flynn

# House of Dread, House of Joy

Mildred Brown

In the spring of 1977, as a young mother with “cabin fever,” I handed my baby daughter to my husband and went for a bicycle ride in the scenic and historic community of Brigus, Newfoundland.

This was my first encounter with Kent Cottage at Landfall, and I was drawn to sit in its shelter, with my face held up to the sun. I, like many others before and since, fell completely under its spell. When the property was bequeathed to the Landfall Trust and, between artist residencies, opened for rental by mere mortals such as I, my fate was sealed. I began renting it, and each summer I “go home.” The rest of the year, as a volunteer on the Landfall Trust Board of Directors, I help organize the programs that fulfill the Trust’s mandate.

One hundred years ago, the American artist Rockwell Kent came to live in Brigus, Newfoundland. He chose an enchanting dwelling to rent as a home for his family, and he produced a number of spectacular pieces of art in his time there. The cottage he rented is now known as Kent Cottage<sup>1</sup> at Landfall, and it belongs to the Landfall Trust. But when the Pomeroy family first constructed that house snuggled into the shelter of the cliffs on the north side of Brigus harbor, did their building plans include the magic spell that has enchanted so many of us over the last two hundred years? Could they have known that their home would become a treasure in Newfoundland’s inventory of cul-

tural and heritage assets?

One of the oldest structures of this type remaining in the province, the cottage was designated a registered heritage structure by the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador in 1988 because of its historical, environmental and aesthetic values. It was described as an “oasis in a desert of cliffs” by CBC journalist Azzo Rezori in 1990 and is now the last remaining structure in the area known as Freshwater, where schooners used to take on water from the stream flowing from the hills behind, past the house, over the cliffs and into the ocean.

While many have been drawn to the cottage since the early nineteenth century, it is its twentieth-century residents who have brought it fame. It has long been a retreat for artists and writers. Rockwell Kent, its most notorious occupant, stayed there in 1914-15. His beautiful but achingly sad oil painting *House of Dread* depicts the much-beloved cottage in a mood that differs starkly from the joy experienced by those who followed. These include Albert Edward Harris, an English artist, who came to Newfoundland to manage a paper mill and retired to Landfall in 1929, and Bradley J. (Jake) Folensbee, Jr., who acquired Kent Cottage at Landfall in 1953 and made an annual pilgrimage from Seattle to Brigus almost every summer for over fifty years. Thanks to his legacy, artists and writers continue to enjoy residencies at Landfall each summer.

What happened to change Kent’s feelings about the cottage from joy to dread? As he stated in his autobiography, he had come to Newfoundland in high expectation: “I loved it as a chosen land, a land to live in, work in, make my own. The aura of possession lighted it.”<sup>2</sup> He

was warmly welcomed. “It’s men like you,” said Sir Edward [Premier Edward Morris]... artists, that we want to encourage to visit our beautiful country.”<sup>73</sup> Advised to go to Brigus, he fell under the spell of the cottage.

Kent found it “so suitable to our needs and limited income and, by its isolation from the village, so promising of the quietness that we liked and that was necessary to our work, that I immediately went to see the owner and, for a small rental, took it. Next day I started to work.... It was of consistently diminutive proportions, the low ceilings of the interior—they were but a bare six feet—being in happy harmony with the smallness of the rooms: clearly, it could be made a cozy home.”<sup>74</sup> He was impressed by the placement of the house on its site: “Long, low and narrow it clung to the hillside like an outcropping of the native ledge, or, like a frightened thing, shrank from the perilous edge of the scant terrace upon which it stood until its rear was buried in the hill. Let wind, rain, hail and avalanche of snow beat on this house! They’ve beaten hard throughout the years; they’ve torn and shaken it, and seamed its sides. It stands. The house belongs there; it has style.”<sup>75</sup>

Writing in his Kent biography *An American Saga*, David Traxel described the care with which Kent renovated it: “The house was not only tiny, it was dilapidated. Hiring a local carpenter to help, he quickly began the rebuilding job. The walls were stripped bare, rotten wood replaced, holes patched, then repainted. There were only four small rooms, so the artist built an attached studio that was just big enough to hold an easel, table and chair.

He found, neglected in a yard, an old figurehead from a sailing ship. Receiving permission, he restored her faded beauty and set her above his cottage door, eyes gazing out to sea toward the horizon.”<sup>76</sup> When Kent’s work was completed, he saw “this sweet little house that, rooted on the stark and wintry hillside, had in its old age flowered again....”<sup>77</sup>

It is clear that Kent loved Newfoundland, he loved the cottage, and he loved his family. “Now let the family come. By train to Sydney, boat to Port au Basques they came; and I awaited them. And as the steamer neared the wharf and I could see them all, all four along the rail—my heart was near to bursting.”<sup>78</sup> Kathleen and their three children arrived (the fourth was to be born in Newfoundland), and the family’s new life started happily enough. “Quick to welcome us into the community, they made it not long before we felt ourselves to be at home in Brigus, participating in its upper social life and taking part to the full extent of our gifts in whatever communal activity was afoot.”<sup>79</sup> It seemed that he had everything he could want, so when and how did his joy become dread? What was the cause?

Dennis Costanzo, Associate Professor of Art History at SUNY Plattsburgh, felt that “the transformation of this hopeful, lovely little house into the focus of misery and despair it becomes in *House of Dread* was surely a complex and personal process.”<sup>80</sup> It is clear that

Kent was a complex character, within whom warred many internal conflicts.<sup>11</sup> He grew up in the shadow of wealth, beholden to his rich aunt after his father died young, but was well educated, living a cultured life. He was drawn to study art, but forced by the practicalities of earning a living and supporting his family to be a draftsman and carpenter—the beginning, perhaps, of his socialist (if not communist) sympathies and disdain for establishment? His voracious love of life and seemingly manic energy fueled his ability to simultaneously churn out brilliant paintings and illustrations, renovate houses and consume relationships with gusto, often in sublime ignorance (if not disregard) of the needs of those he claimed to hold dear. According to Henry Adams, Professor of American Art at Case Western Reserve University, “Kent’s biography is a slightly exhausting experience. He was always on the move, often engaged in manual labor, seemingly always building a house or a boat, and generally involved in complex relationships with more than one woman at a time.”<sup>12</sup> He created uncomfortable beds for himself to lie in on numerous occasions, and his time in Brigus was a prime example.

Admittedly, as explained by Costanzo, “the sheer number and variety of miseries that Kent experienced in Newfoundland were truly daunting: from the global (a horrific world war) to the regional (the *Southern Cross* disaster)<sup>13</sup>; and from the

local hostility of his community to the personal tensions in his marriage. It all must have been almost too much to bear, particularly as it led to the realization of the utter failure of his plans to establish his artistic career in what he had hoped would be an ideal location. Rather than reflecting any one of these grim experiences, it is more likely that *House of Dread* encapsulates the oppressively cumulative effect of all of them.”<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, several of these miseries were of his own making.

Some of his problems began in innocent events. For example, he was frantic at the loss of his precious toolbox when the ship transporting it to Brigus ran aground and sank; he ordered an unusually large amount of coal delivered to the remote cottage; he and Kathleen adored German music, and he performed it publicly. The combination evoked an unease that he did not understand. Kent had chosen to come to Newfoundland, a sparsely-populated dominion in the British Empire,<sup>15</sup> remote, isolated and far enough east in the North Atlantic to be of strategic war interest, but he did not register Newfoundlanders’ burning patriotic devotion to England, nor their burgeoning fear of newcomers behaving strangely in their midst—the war was on their doorstep, and there were real enemies to fear.

Newfoundland historian Edward Roberts set the context for Kent’s problems: “These events occurred during the early months of the war, as Newfoundlanders were gearing up to do their part for King and Country. The first five hundred—the “Blue Puttees”—sailed for England early in October [1914]. Young men flocked to the colors that fall, many to join the Newfoundland Regiment and more, the



Rockwell Kent, *Newfoundland Home*, c. 1914-15, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine.

Royal Navy. As 1915 went by, the British Admiralty became increasingly concerned that German submarines might be operating in the waters off Newfoundland. By late May, the concerns had become a full-fledged spy scare.<sup>16</sup> It wasn't until years later that Kent put it all together himself: "Living there in Newfoundland, continuing to live there as for years I'd lived, in blissful ignorance of anyone's affairs but ours, I was as unprepared in June of 1914 for the consequences of that shot<sup>17</sup> as were the vast majority of the one hundred million people of the United States and the two hundred and fifty thousand Newfoundlanders."<sup>18</sup>

As Traxel phrased it, "discretion had never been Kent's strong point and the bandwagon was not his favorite mode of transportation."<sup>19</sup> Kent wore his welcome thin. Kent enthusiast Will Ross noted, "...as happened a lot through his life, RK brought a lot of this upon himself. He was a great believer in large-scale and quite elaborate practical jokes, with which he often poked fun at the people he considered his 'lessers'."<sup>20</sup> He had already gotten himself into legal trouble by threatening a Brigus resident who had objected to Kent building a tennis court. He moved on to taunt the locals when they started to express suspicion over his unusual behaviors. In hindsight, he recognized the consequences of getting his back up and mocking the people whose goodwill had charmed him when he first arrived. "That would explain it all: that land's-end house, remote from neighbors; the workshop that I'd built and that no callers were admitted to; my wandering around the harbor hills, looking and noting down; and those suspicious seven tons of coal: fuel for a submarine! And, most damaging of all, that padlocked chest I'd been so desperate to retrieve. Chart room, wireless station, bomb shop: so ran the tale. I took a board and neatly lettered on it what my workshop was supposed [by others] to be.<sup>21</sup> I painted a German eagle on it. And I nailed it on my workshop door."<sup>22</sup>

Traxel pointed out the problem with Kent's behavior: "Small provincial towns don't take easily to strangers at the best of times. Kent's personality, a combination of charm and abrasion, had made him friends in Brigus, but he had also alienated a good portion of the population. Now he was seen not only as a roughneck and a bully, but also someone with decided sympathies for an enemy civilization."<sup>23</sup> Kent, with his strong pro-German and antiwar beliefs, was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and his negatively spiraling mood was reflected in his art:

Yet to any pretense that my prevailing mood in wartime Newfoundland was one of cheer, my paintings give the lie. Compelled, by the nature of the weather and the difficulty of going far afoot, to work indoors and in the narrow confines of my studio, forced to reflect and, by reflection, thrown upon the harsh realities of a wartime world, my work was in no degree an outpouring of delight in visible nature but, rather, a continuous wail of lamentation of man's tragic, solitary

lot in the vast and soulless cosmos. The war, the senseless sacrifice of lives, the hatreds war engendered; and, on us, the foul suspicions so at variance with our true, innate integrity: these facts oppressed me to a degree to which I only let my work give utterance. *Ruin and Eternity, The Voyager Beyond Life, Newfoundland Dirge, Man of the Abyss, The House of Dread*: such were the titles when I later showed the work.<sup>24</sup>



"Private / Chart Room / Wireless Station / Bomb Shop"

There is a difference, though, between *House of Dread* and the other works Kent listed. As Costanzo pointed out: "...while these other works are fundamentally symbolic in content, *House of Dread* is direct and personal.... The figures are Kent and Kathleen."<sup>25</sup> Kent described it thus: "Upon a bleak and lofty cliff's edge, land's end, stands a house; against its corner and facing seaward leans a man, naked even as the land, and sea, and house; his head is bowed as though in utter dejection; and from a window leans a weeping woman. It is our cliff, our sea, our house stripped bare and stark, its loneliness intensified. It is ourselves in Newfoundland, our hidden but prevailing misery revealed."<sup>26</sup> Costanzo emphasized that "...one of the most disturbing features of the painting is the emphatic separateness of their suffering.... The only connection between them is the house... a place of dread."<sup>27</sup>

It is probably no surprise that Kent deemed *House of Dread* "the most successful of the pictures, to my mind—if the conveyance of a mood of despair may be termed success."<sup>28</sup> Although Kent's own explanations for his mood focused on the time and the place, it probably had more to do with his self-centered nature. His personal despair, epitomized by the house, had much to do with his relationship with Kathleen. That relationship had already been jeopardized by an affair Kent had had just four months into their marriage, with far-reaching consequences. In 1911 Kent had become the father of two children, one with his wife Kathleen, the other with his mistress Jennie Stirling, delivered close to the same time. Kent and his wife decided to put all their savings toward a trust fund to support Jennie's child, but that was not the end of that painful experience for Kathleen. As Costanzo explained, "In 1915 Kent was summoned to appear in court in Boston, to testify in a case involving his former mistress, now Jennie Whibley, and the trust fund that had been established with Kent's money at the time of the birth of that child in 1911. The sickly boy had died five months later, leaving Kent torn between grief and sympathy on the one hand, and a desperate need to get his and Kathleen's savings returned. Jennie and her new husband had refused to return anything, and the issue had finally landed in court in 1915. In May of that year, just as Kathleen was about to give birth to their fourth child, Kent left Newfoundland for several weeks to testify along with Jennie in a Boston courtroom."<sup>29</sup> Kathleen, left on her own with three small children and expecting another, in an increasingly suspicious and hostile environment with no support from her absent and unfaithful husband—the painting is probably an accurate representation of the state of affairs between them.

Kent wanted it all—the place, and the freedom to do as he pleased there and to take of life what he wanted. It didn't work that way, not with Newfoundlanders, and not with Kathleen. Kent's dream about Newfoundland ended when he was asked to leave; though, of course, the rumors of him being a German spy came to naught. His marriage to Kathleen would not survive, either. But in 1968 Kent and his third wife, Sally, came back to Newfoundland at the invitation of then-Premier Joseph Smallwood. He was welcomed and treated well. All was forgiven, and he was taken to see the cottage once more. "What hopes of happiness had been built into that house! Yet had I in my years of absence—recalling tenderly the wooden-maiden figurehead that had

If I should meet thee  
After long years,  
How should I greet thee?—  
With silence and tears."<sup>30</sup>

in our time graced the doorway—had I then lovingly apostrophized the little house and her it might have been in Lord Byron's touching words...

As for the painting, according to Costanzo, "beyond being regarded by Kent as the most successful of the Newfoundland paintings, this work seems to have held a distinctly personal importance to the artist as well. For, while most of the other Newfoundland paintings eventually were sold, Kent kept *House of Dread* for the rest of his life. When asked about the painting in an interview two years before he died, he simply stated: "I'll never, never sell it."<sup>31</sup> Nor did he, and the painting was bequeathed to the Plattsburgh State Art Museum, where one can view it today.

But what of the real wood-and-nails Kent cottage? Although a casualty of Kent's symbolism in *The House of Dread*, it too lives on, under the loving care of The Landfall Trust, a Canadian registered charity, established in 2005 through the legacy of Bradley Folensbee and committed to preserving the land and historic buildings at Landfall. Each year, the Trust hosts artist and writer residencies, workshops and special community events. In 2011, the Trust erected interpretive signage at the entrance to Landfall, commemorating the contributions of three artists who have lived there: Kent, Harris and Folensbee. The Trust was the 2012 recipient of the Manning Award for Excellence in the Public Presentation of Historic Places, created to recognize individuals, communities and organizations for their work in preserving and presenting this province's history and heritage. Those who love Landfall, and work to preserve it, understand that we need not try to rewrite the sad history of Kent's time there nor reject his masterpiece, but we can celebrate the place as the serene haven and house of joy it has always been.

## NOTES

1. Research indicates it might have been named so coincidentally by a subsequent owner, artist A.E. Harris, in honor of the English county of Kent where his family resided.

2. Rockwell Kent, *It's Me O Lord: The Autobiography of Rockwell Kent* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1955), 208.

3. *Ibid.*, 208.

4. *Ibid.*, 280.

5. Rockwell Kent, "The Home Decorator and Color Guide" (Sherwin-Wil-

liams Co., 1939), 21.

6. David Traxel, *An American Saga: The Life and Times of Rockwell Kent* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 83.

7. Kent, *It's Me O Lord*, 282.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, 284.

10. Dennis Costanzo, "House of Dread," *The Kent Collector* 26, no. 3 (2010): 6.

11. Author's impressions were spawned by viewing *Rockwell Kent, A Documentary* and through personal conversations with its producer Frederick Lewis and with Cecilia Esposito, Director, Plattsburgh State Art Museum (2013).

12. Henry Adams, "Rockwell Kent: An Appreciation," delivered at Rockwell Kent in Winona: A Centennial Celebration, February 9, 2013.

13. The *Southern Cross* sank in 1914, with the loss of all hands. Several of its crew of 170 were from Brigus.

14. Costanzo, "House of Dread," 8.

15. Newfoundland and Labrador did not become a Canadian province until 1949.

16. Edward Roberts, "Reflections on Rockwell Kent in Newfoundland: The Brigus Spy," *The Kent Collector*; 38, no. 2 (2012): 22.

17. Gavril Princep shot Archduke Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, leading to WWI.

18. Kent, *It's Me O Lord*, 284.

19. Traxel, *An American Saga*, 87.

20. Will Ross, "Some Thoughts on the Great German Spy of Brigus," *The Kent Collector*; 38, no. 2 (2012): 11.

21. The sign read: CHART ROOM, WIRELESS STATION, BOMB SHOP.

22. Kent, *It's Me O Lord*, 297.

23. Traxel, *An American Saga*, 88.

24. Kent, *It's Me O Lord*, 289.

25. Costanzo, "House of Dread," 7.

26. Kent, *It's Me O Lord*, 290.

27. Costanzo, "House of Dread," 8.

28. Kent, *It's Me O Lord*, 290.

29. Costanzo, "House of Dread," 7.

30. Rockwell Kent, *After Long Years* (Ausable Forks, NY: Asgaard Press, 1968), 18.

31. Costanzo, "House of Dread," 8.



Illustrated letter from Kent to his young son Rockwell III, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

# A Tragedy of Newfoundland

Rockwell Kent  
Arlington, Vermont



Rockwell Kent, *Woman Kneeling*, c. 1915, Plattsburgh State Art Museum.

*Hecuba:*

Priam, mine own Priam.  
Lying so lowly,  
Thou in thy nothingness,  
Shelterless, comfortless,  
See'st thou the thing I am?  
Know'st thou my bitter stress?

*Leader:*

Nay, thou art naught to him!  
Out of the strife there came,  
Out of the noise and shame,  
Making his eyelids dim,  
Death, the Most Holy!  
— *The Trojan Women*

BRIGUS, NEWFOUNDLAND—1914

“**B**ELOVED,” reads my letter from a thousand miles away, “A winter storm is raging in New York and we are terrified who think of you there in the frozen north. The few feet snowfall here and zero cold that make such suffering, mean mountains of snow and ice for you and wind and cold, intenser than we’ve any knowledge of. Be careful of yourself, clothe yourself warmly— Be sure to put the bed socks on and the woolen cap I made for you to wear at night.”

Ha! I sit in sunny sheltered warmth on the doorstep by the house I am rebuilding and read these loving cautions—smilingly. The last of February—and in one day, spring! The low sun shines almost from six to six. Daily it melts the snow and softens the brown earth. The brooks are full and fill the air with their murmuring. Seabirds are singing. On my snug hillside facing south, the spring has surely come!

His mind is free whose work is with his hands, I ponder as I drive the saw on the forbidding glamour of the legendary north, the north of never ending ice and snow with barrier of legends, sinister as the ancient myths of ocean that kept the timid mariner at home. Someday,

ah, Newfoundland, I’ll tell the world of your mild, equitable temper. And as I work the warm sun shining on me, it seems to me again how sweeter than any shade from summer’s heat is the caress of the hot sun itself in early spring.

Each day of March was like the first but maybe fairer. The sun dried the earth and brought out the green shoots of the grass in the west lands. I left off my heavy hide boots and danced about in lightshod. The house was nearly built and it was pretty to behold. I put a fence about it and a gateway arched over with the rib of a boat. And over the doorway I put a maiden carved in wood. She had been the figure-head of an ancient vessel. Her hair was as black, her throat as white, and her cheeks as round and red as those of the fairest maiden of Newfoundland.

Men from up the harbor had come almost daily to visit me. Old men they mostly were, for the youth of the whole country were gone to the ice fields. They stood with me on the warm hillside and thought perhaps of their own youth, and told me what a place it was for courting in the springtime. “Wait till the byes come back from the ice; with them and the girls you’ll have company enough. This is the first place

for dandelions—do you like them? Ah, 'tis a great sight they are, stretching everywhere right down to the water!" My house stood out of the town and looked somewhat back upon it over the harbor. I could see the schooners still quiet at their winter moorings, where the bustle of preparation for the Labrador would soon begin. Across the water I could see the counterpart of the hills on which I stood, but bleaker, for they faced the north. Among the rocks of mine were bits of meadowland and on the pastures grew wild berries. There'd be crowds of youngsters to pick them when they ripened. My callers were



Rockwell Kent, illustration for *N by E*, 1930.

kind and solicitous for my comfort. One brought me bread and cake and a rum-bottle full of cow's milk; another, two goat skins for mats on the floor; and a third, having heard that I slept on the bare boards while my bedding had not come, brought me, on his head, a feather bed and pillow wrapped in a spare sail. I'm a wretched infidel but Sunday nights I find myself comfortably at the church of the Methodists with Robert Percy, the carpenter, my friend. After all, if one likes to go, why not? It is friendly there and the old hymns warm the heart.

**S**UNDAY NIGHT the twenty-ninth of March I went with Robert Percy to the Church of England, the church of my childhood, whose rector had officially called on me the day before and claimed me. This church was cozier than the great cold tabernacle of the Methodists but it was awfully dull. It may be that the return of the young men from the ice fields will bring life to these services. We went out from the little church into the profound night. It was cold and the sky was brilliantly starred. Over our left shoulders hung the new moon just setting. I thought it was wonderfully beautiful. "That's a bad moon," said Robert Percy. "We'll have weather, for you can hang a powder horn on it." Sure enough the slender crescent lay almost fair upon its back. I couldn't believe in the ill omen and questioned him. "I never knew it to fail," he answered.

At his house we found the grandmother sitting alone in the kitchen. One child had gone to bed. The eldest was at church with her mother and the youngest, Grace, with dark hair and deep red cheeks, lay on the couch asleep. The grandmother made room for us before the stove. She is a singularly impressive woman. When she heard of the new moon that lay on his back she became serious. Robert Percy's wife soon returned and made us tea. I feasted of an evening at her house; her bread is *so good!* and to my unfinished home a baker has yet to come.

Monday night as I went up the harbor I saw again, over the hill, the new moon. The air was even clearer than before but in spite of it there was an aura about the crescent. The whole body of the moon was visible, faintly illumined by the earth-light. I thought again of the omen of the hanging powder horn and it seemed incredible. We'll see, I said, and stepped into the long shadow of the hill. Wordsworth's "Strange fits of passion I have known" flashed to my mind.

I wake at six. I stick my nose and eyes out of my blankets and peer over the bulge of the featherbed to enquire the quality of the day. Through the upper sash of the little window, close beneath the eaves,

I see the land across the harbor. If it be fair, I know it before my eyes can focus on the faraway illumined hills and houses for my room will be flooded with reflected sunlight. Tuesday morning, the last day of March, I looked, at six o'clock, through the three small panes of the upper sash into dull, blank grayness. I could only after a moment distinguish faintly the hills. Between, there fell a curtain of snow. I rose and lighted my fire and brought in coal, wood and water against the coming storm. The air was damp and icy cold; a strange wind had risen and was blowing the fine snow in gusts about the yard. My

house is under the hill; no normal wind from north or east or west can touch it but in broken blasts. But, as the wind rose today and swept fiercely over the hills behind, it sought out every sheltered nook and, where it could not blow directly, penetrated by refraction. I could hear it from within doors about the chimney top; at first it made the fire roar, but finally entered the flue and blew the soft-coal smoke in clouds about the room. For an hour I stood it and then, taking from the mantel shelf my toothbrush, my razor, this tablet upon which I'm now recording the event, and a volume called *Old Faiths in New Light* which the Methodist parson had advanced to me for my conversion and, stowing all the rest away from the reach of soot, I went up to the harbor. Along the road I began to realize the gravity of the storm. The snow was already deep and drifting heavily. The wind at my back hurried me along recklessly, plunging me into drifts and becoming actually dangerous where the road hung on the cliff side over the harbor fifty feet below. Near the town I saw a man coming toward me in the storm. He waited in a sheltered nook of the cliff. It was the shoemaker; he carried me my mended shoes done up in a red bandana. I suspect that the trip was undertaken as much with a view to a chat as for the delivery of the goods, so we talked for a quarter of an hour in the cleft of the rock. This man mended shoes, nets, barbered, did any sort of light work and got little for it. He showed me his pocketknife dented when he had fallen on a rock a year before and sustained the hurt that had driven him to mending shoes. I spent the greater part of the day up harbor. My dinner I had with Robert Percy and his family and repaid a bare spoonful of it by chopping up spruce boughs for the cow's bed. I returned to my house for a while in the afternoon though they begged me not to. Already the storm had risen to such height of fierceness that there was dread in everyone's demeanor and a desire to keep men indoors. It was a battle to reach the place. The wind took the breath from my nostrils and stung my face with driving snow. Look into it I could not, but glimpses I caught abroad, beyond the very track I strove to follow, were of whole banks of snow in midair carried by the gale. At the house I lit my stove but put it out again in haste for the kitchen had blown full of smoke. I abandoned the house and returned up the harbor before the wind. This was better. I looked as I went for the brooks that had murmured so pleasantly in the spring days just passed. They lay smothered under six feet of drifted snow.

I stamped and swept my feet in the Percys' hall. The people cried out with relief as I entered. To them all storms are ocean storms and

they are terrible. I had never realized till that moment in the room that storm spells always death for some of the family of the followers of the sea.

In sealing, fortunes have been made. Towns have been built and have flourished with the dollars that the wooden fleets of old brought from the ice fields. They have decayed since steel and steam ruined their invested capital and built up the fleet of the merchants of St. John's. Men no longer take ship in their own harbors, but follow their captains to the metropolis to serve under them or where they may. Of the sailing fleet of St. John's were the steamers *Florizel* and *Stephano* of the Red Cross Line, the *Belleaventure* and the *Bonaventure*, the *Eric* that had been with Peary to the north, and the



Rockwell Kent, "Newfoundlander," illustration from *N by E*, 1930.

*Terra Nova* of the heroic Captain Scott, Shackleton's *Southern Cross*, the *Neptune*, *Viking*, *Newfoundland* and others. The ships are many but they can't hold all the army that journey to St. John's. By rail, by boat, afoot, in hundreds they pour into the city. The streets are crowded with booted seamen. Berths are in demand. Tickets secured are marketable, and have been sold for five, for ten, for fifteen dollars. And I spoke with a man who, taken sick after securing his berth, had sold it for thirty-five dollars. This is half of all a man can make in his month of sealing. I had stood in the cable office at St. John's wiring to New York for my chest of tools. A seaman was there. He handed his message to the operator to be counted—"Mrs. John Burns," was read, "I have berth on *Southern Cross*, sail tomorrow night." "You're allowed one more word." "Then put 'Goodbye'," said the man.

I have not been to the ice but I believe all men's work the world over is alike in wearisomeness, for men are not braver nor stronger here than there. For pay they receive a small part of the value of their labor, for their risks nothing. So the dangers are never counted. The fields of ice that float each spring through the gulf of St. Lawrence and the Atlantic east of Newfoundland, are the hunting grounds of seal killers. In early morning the crews are set upon the ice. They wander the day long in quest of seals. Miles separate them from their ships. A man may break his leg in the rough going, he may fall into the sea in crossing an open space, the ice field splits and opens a gulf of water that bars return, or a snow storm rising shuts everything from view and leaves the man alone and lost. The deaths in eighty years of sealing have been many hundreds.

I stood in the kitchen and Robert Percy spoke,—"The *Southern Cross* passed Channel Monday." This struck the keynote of the tension in this household; there was a murmur of sorrow. I looked at them and felt at once the gravity of the tidings. "This morning she passed St. Pierre and Michelon. It's a hard chance she's got in this." The gale was terrible; the frosted panes had darkened the room and shut the storm from view, but the wind howled dismally in the flue and the old house creaked in its timbers like an ancient ship. We all huddled about the stove, no thought but of the storm and of the *Southern Cross*. The grandmother was remarkable. She had accepted the ship as lost from the first tidings of her. The nobility of her mien had always impressed

me. She was Grecian now in the austerity of her prophecy and grief. At tea time a man entered with news from the cable office. It was merely that no word had been heard of the missing ship. "It will pretty well clean out this place," he said. The grandmother rose with a cry of pain and left the room.

That night I got up to go, but they would not hear of it. An old woman that I had never seen knew of my being there the afternoon. "Don't let that man go home," she said. I am but a new friend but had I gone that night the woman would not have slept. Nor would they let me lie on the couch in the kitchen. I went to bed with Robert Percy and saw and admired his old rose-colored, home-knit drawers. A lamp burned all night on the hall floor and cast its light

equally into all our rooms. In the hall the old clock struck the hours and half hours as the ship's bell sounds them.

Wednesday morning the wind blew unabated, but from the Westward. The aspect of the day was the same as yesterday; we could only guess that above the gray and drifting clouds of snow there was a fair sky. I went to find my house. It was there, of course, but hardly to be seen from far. The drifts upon the way were beyond belief, and at the house so coated were the windows as to make it dark within, almost to need of lamplight. And my brook! Even the sloping valley sides were gone, filled even with the land above. One day had plunged us into deepest winter. Without water I could not comfortably live, so again I returned to the harbor. As I came up the road toward Percy's house I saw a knot of men about the door. The horror of the news they told, my God! I shall never forget. Last night the entire crew of the steamer *Newfoundland*, one hundred and sixty men, had frozen to death on the ice.

We can know little of such a death. At the store later that morning a man told this story. In 1898 he had gone to the ice. They had good luck and were the first to break for home. They entered the harbor of St. John's exulting in the sure hope of first arrival. But there before them at the wharf stood the tall masts of a sealer, and they were beaten. They came to anchor and sent ashore the bos'n and a small crew. The speaker was among them. As they neared the wharf he saw it to be crowded with men and that some carried their arms or legs in bandages. From the ship there were being borne frozen corpses. The bodies were mostly naked, stripped at death to save their comrades. They were in all attitudes, crouching, doubled up and straight, wide-eyed as if living, and grimacing. They were being chopped from a pile of ice aft on the vessel's deck. Forty-eight had perished from this ship—the *Greenland*.

Wednesday night I slept again with Robert Percy. It blew a gale and the night was thick with snow. I would have returned to my house for I had tried the road. But people were unnerved by now. Thursday and Friday and Saturday passed. The weather was still severe. I dug into the drift and found water. I was out of coal and dragged a sackful laboriously over the snow from town. All day of every day the cable office up the harbor was crowded with people. The reports

were posted as they came; children acting as messengers copied them and carried them back. Survivors were proved to be of the *Newfoundland* and the list of perished fell to half the number of the first report. It was still appalling beyond belief. But still of the *Southern Cross* no news was heard. The St. John's papers published a list of her officers and crew; they numbered upwards of one hundred and seventy. One pointed out to me the homes of some of these. The dread of the loss of this steamer had passed almost to certainty and the mention of the house, the wife, the children, the hopes and ambitions of any one of those on her became as tragedy. The drama written in the loss of a hundred men is a world story. It includes all; mother-love, the tale of courtship, of youth, of marriage—

it touches the whole gamut of emotion in ten thousand lives. The pastor visited the wife and daughter of the master of the *Southern Cross*. The wife had cried to exhaustion and the girl lay in half delirium calling for her father. This household was demoralized and little food had one tasted the week. On Tuesday, the house had been swept and made ready for the father's return. That was the day that others knew that it would never be. There was another seaman's house where little food had been tasted those many days for poverty. A mother lay sick in bed of the birth of a seven months' child, that she had borne unattended. She had many small children and no grown person with her. The loss of the *Southern Cross* would drive her insane, it was said, for her mind was weak and wandered even at childbirth.

The news that came on Saturday night was of a three-masted ship seen in Placentia Bay and thought to be the *Southern Cross*. The message came privately to the druggist who was told to hold it until confirmation. So it flew like wildfire through the town and to the stricken homes. Before an hour it was contradicted, for the sighted ship was not the *Southern Cross*. The news was brought to us at the Percy home. On the *Southern Cross* they had no near relation, but grief among these people is not alone for those they are connected with. The mother had gone at the first news to the master's wife and child. She returned crestfallen. There had been many at the house and though the callers soon learned of the denial of the rumor, they had left the poor wife clinging to her hope. As the evening wore on and no word came she again began to fear again and wept, begging to be told the truth. How terrible false hopes can be! Another woman, we were told, clung in her extremity to her belief in the unseen spirit of the dead. She cried, "I can't believe it for I have seen no token!" Can there be truth in tokens? In 1872 the *Village Bell* was at the ice. One night the wife of a man aboard her awoke. She heard the tramp of men on the street from the shore. They bore on their shoulders her husband's chest. At her gate they put it down heavily. She sprang from bed, went to the door and opened it. The night was empty of men and of sound, and no chest was there. That night her husband and seventeen others perished on the ice. Another woman whose husband was lost returning from the Labrador longed for a token. She rose each night and taking his clothes from the chest went about the house calling to him. "Would you speak to your husband if he came that way in the night?" asked someone among us. "I'd be afear'd to!" said Robert's young wife, tensely. They spoke



Rockwell Kent, *Rescue in Newfoundland (Newfoundland Sealing Casualty)*, c. 1914–15, Philadelphia Museum of Art, purchased with the Lola Downin Peck Fund from the Carl and Laura Zigrosser Collection, 1971.

again of the unhappy wife and daughter and asked the grandmother, who was of distant kin, if she would visit them on the morrow. "No," she answered. "I called today. I told the girl she had lost as fine a father as there ever lived, but 'twas the will of God."

**I**T IS MONDAY, the sixth of April, and the sun shines at last with the balm of returning spring. I stood naked out of doors in the sunrise and felt its warmth, while my ears were filled with the sound of dripping snow. In a few days the last traces of this second winter will have disappeared from the land; the grass will resume its growing, the ancient lilac bush its budding, and one may look forward to the promised dandelions of June. The town across the harbor will appear again as

serene and beautiful as on the spring morning of a week ago. Through the seasons forever it will turn its weather-beaten face stolidly seaward and show, save in the gradual decay of its might, nothing of the calamities that struck its heart.

The coasts of Newfoundland are bleak and comfortless. Wind, fog and ice invade its summer, and happiness is blighted by the dumb lament of poverty and widowhood and the unspoken plaint of maidens that walk alone on the flowering hillsides where youths were wont to do their courting in springtime.

---

*Our appreciation to Robert Rightmire who located this manuscript among the archives of Carl Zigrosser. To Newfoundlanders, the Sealing Disaster of 1914 remains an epic tragedy—within a matter of hours hundreds of lives were lost at sea and on the ice floes. Kent penned his eyewitness account of its effect on the village of Brigus in the days that followed. Sometime between 1919 and 1925, when he resided in Arlington, Vermont, it was typewritten in manuscript format for publication and given the title "A Tragedy of Newfoundland." Lines from a translation of the Euripides tragedy The Trojan Women were added as a preface, and the short closing paragraph was inserted. Kent's revisions, printed in ink on the manuscript, are accompanied by more numerous penciled edits, which were clearly made by someone other than the author. In 1930, Kent included the original version as a chapter in his memoir N by E.*

*There is no evidence of the previous publication of this "Arlington" version. Here, we have followed Kent's revisions, but ignored the penciled edits that significantly altered the text. Spellings and punctuation generally conform to those used in N by E.*

*Learn more! Jake Wien brings to your attention "I Just Didn't Want to Die: The 1914 Newfoundland Sealing Disaster," an excellent 21-minute documentary by the National Film Board of Canada. You can view it online at [www3.nfb.ca/objectifdocumentaire/index.php?mode=home&language=english](http://www3.nfb.ca/objectifdocumentaire/index.php?mode=home&language=english).*



# POINTED NORTH

Rockwell Kent in Newfoundland & Labrador

Caroline Stone

If minds can become magnetized, mine was:  
its compass needle pointed north.

—Rockwell Kent<sup>1</sup>

ROCKWELL KENT came to Newfoundland and Labrador four times in his long life. In 1910 he visited Port aux Basques and the Burin peninsula, scoping out the possibility of establishing an art school there and going on to the then British colony's capital city of St. John's. One hundred years ago this year, he and his family settled in the Conception Bay village of Brigus, on southeast Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula; his fourth child, Barbara, was born in St. John's. In 1929, Kent was on his way to Greenland in the small sailing boat *Direction*, when it sheltered briefly on the coast of Labrador. And in 1968, nineteen years after Newfoundland became Canada's tenth province, Kent and his third wife Sally were fêted in St. John's at the invitation of Premier Joseph R. Smallwood.

"Pointed North: Rockwell Kent in Newfoundland and Labrador" encompasses all these visits through a diverse sampling of paintings, drawings, prints, reproductions and books. Several key works are shown in the original, including *The House of Dread*, on loan from the Plattsburgh State Art Museum, and *Newfoundland Dirge* and *A Young Sailor* from private collections (all c. 1914-1917). Other works inspired by Kent's Newfoundland experiences are reproduced on panels so that the full range of this period can be appreciated.

Kent scholar Jake Milgram Wien commented: "*A Young Sailor*, its study drawing in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the later wood engraving *Masthead* exemplify the stylistic advances Kent made in Newfoundland, which resonated throughout the course of his artistic career. Together, they provide a basis for better understanding the breadth of his versatility among various media."<sup>2</sup>

*A Young Sailor* is a rich and loosely painted oil on canvas, in

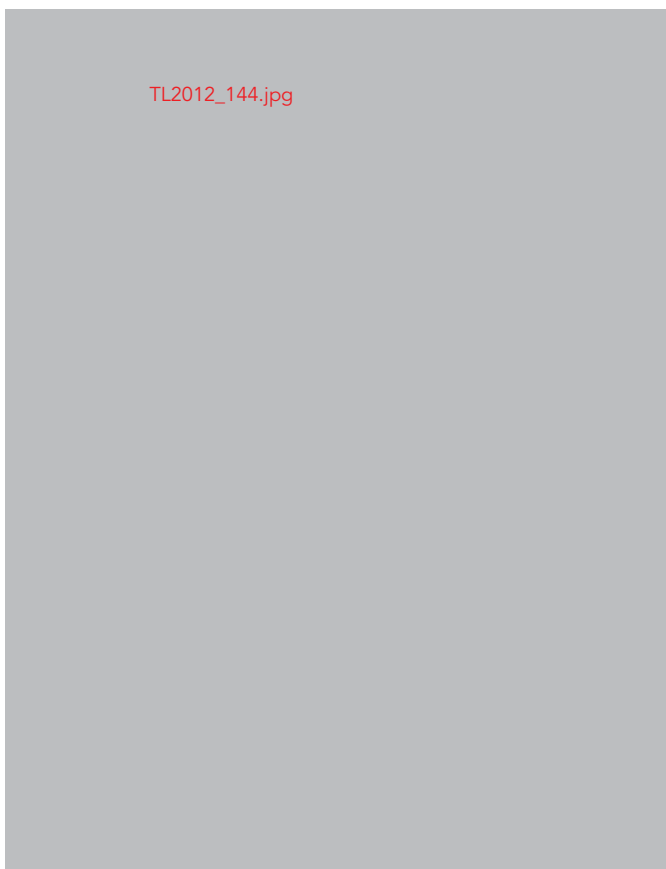
which a naked male figure clings to what one assumes is a mast, his large, bright eyes staring at the viewer, his body silhouetted against a simplified harbor scene in blues, rust and purple. The dislocation of his head contributes to a sense of unease. Is the ship beneath him sinking? The second mast, behind the boy, evokes a Christian cross, while a third balances the composition. Is the youth symbolic of the dangers of the sea, and perhaps also the sacrifices of war?

Also included in the exhibition, because of a connection to Newfoundland and Labrador through provenance, are images of Alaska and Greenland, and examples of Kent's commercial work, permitting a wider exposure to the artist's production. Providing further evidence of local interest in this American artist are archival Newfoundland government records about Kent's suspected activities as a German spy, other artists' views of the Kent home in Brigus, and Kent's and Joey Smallwood's autographs on the same slip of paper, collected by a Girl Guide during Kent's 1968 visit to St. John's!

Additional highlights are the first-time publication of a catalogue raisonné listing of Kent's Newfoundland works by Jake Milgram Wien, the presentation of the Newfoundland section of Frederick Lewis's documentary *Rockwell Kent* throughout the summer-long exhibition and two screenings of the film in its three-hour entirety.

Whenever I get an opportunity to visit the Brigus house where Kent and his family stayed, I experience

a frisson of déjà vu. The view from the main room out across Brigus Harbour is the one he painted, the hills behind are where he roamed. And I think again: Rockwell Kent got it absolutely right.



Rockwell Kent, *A Young Sailor (Man on a Mast)*, c. 1914-17, oil on canvas, 36" x 30". Collection of Christopher Huntingdon and Charlotte McGill, Riverport, NS, Canada. (Photograph: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia)

NOTES

1. Kent's description of how he first set out for Newfoundland, *It's Me O Lord: The Autobiography of Rockwell Kent* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1955), 204.

2. Wien's comment on *A Young Sailor* from e-mail to CS, Feb. 13, 2014.



Rockwell Kent, *Masthead*, 1926, wood engraving on paper, 8" x 5½". The Rooms Provincial Art Gallery Collection, St. John's, NL, Canada.



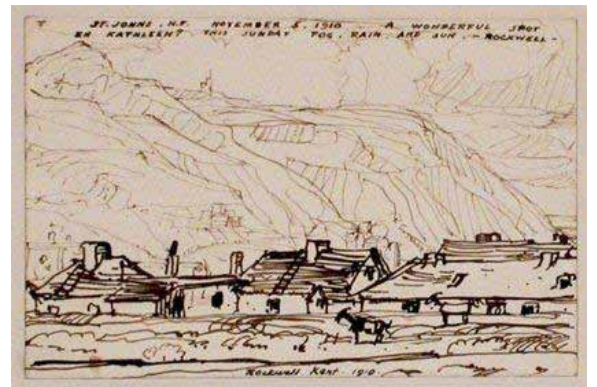
Rockwell Kent, *Newfoundland Dirge*, c. 1914-17, oil on canvas on panel, 34¼" x 44". Private collection.



Rockwell Kent, *Newfoundland Harbor*, 1911, pen/brush and ink on paper, 11¾" x 11¾". Collection of Ian J. Bruneau, St. John's, NL, Canada.



Rockwell Kent, *Blue and Gray, Newfoundland*, c. 1914-15, oil on panel, 8" x 10". Private collection.



Rockwell Kent, *St. Johns, N.F., November 5, 1910*, 1910, ink on paper, 3¼" x 4¾". The Rooms Provincial Art Gallery Collection, St. John's, NL, Canada.

# Origin Stories: Rockwell Kent Painting in Focus

Jake Milgram Wien

*When and where a painting was conceived and completed are elements of its life history. Accurate “origin stories” are essential, as they have a bearing on the art historical significance of a painting, its viability and placement in an exhibition, and its appreciation by connoisseurs and the greater viewing public. These stories, and much more, are what comprise an artist’s catalogue raisonné—a massive scholarly endeavor often years in the completion. As Kent’s painting oeuvre is not yet the beneficiary of a catalogue raisonné, investigations such as the one rendered here are offered to shed light on paintings whose life stories have hitherto been obscure.*

The Frye Art Museum, under the direction of art historian and Rockwell Kent scholar Richard V. West, acquired its first painting by Kent from an auction of American paintings at Sotheby’s in New York on May 20, 1998.<sup>1</sup> Before its appearance at auction, the oil on canvas had not been previously referenced in American art scholarship nor exhibited publicly for a few generations, if ever. Since its acquisition by the Frye, Kent’s painting has been exhibited and referenced as *Resurrection Bay, Alaska* (c. 1939). Its fascinating lineage outlined below is equal parts American and Alaskan state history. These historical asets, coupled with a quiet beauty intrinsic to the greater Pacific Northwest, made the painting a compelling addition to the collection of the Seattle-based museum.

The painting’s known history begins in 1966 when Ernest Henry Gruening (1887-1974), in his second term as U.S. Senator from Alaska, wrote Kent about acquiring one of his Alaskan paintings. Enclosed with his reply Kent sent a color photograph of a painting in his studio. After Gruening approved of the selection, which he deemed “beautiful,” the sale was consummated in late November 1966. Kent then prepared a plywood box to ship the painting, and an invoice in which he referenced the painting descriptively as “RESURRECTION BAY FROM FOX ISLAND.”<sup>2</sup> Kent offered Gruening a deep discount (\$5,000 less 90%) as he was excited and gratified to sell the painting to such a prominent admirer of his work and a like-minded foreign policy

advocate. One of the most vocal Senators to criticize the American military engagement in Vietnam, Gruening proudly hung Kent’s painting in his office on Capitol Hill for the remainder of his term; he was not reelected in 1968.<sup>3</sup>

Gruening and Kent shared a passion for the wilderness of Alaska and the acquaintance of many lifelong friends, among them Elmer Adler, James N. Rosenberg, Lee Simonson, Colston Leigh, Carl Ziggrosser, Caroline O’Day and Heywood Broun. Each had formed a strong bond with Joseph (“J.J.”) Ryan, the youngest son of financier Thomas Fortune Ryan. J.J. Ryan had been Gruening’s pilot in the early days of his governorship of Alaska (1939-1953) and was Kent’s foremost patron in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> But Kent and Gruening likely knew one another far earlier, through Gruening’s sister Martha. Martha Gruening, a graduate of Smith College and New York University law school, studied with Robert Henri at the Modern School, was a progressive intellectual active in the labor and civil rights movements, and authored a review of the exhibition of Kent’s Alaska paintings at Knoedler Galleries.<sup>5</sup>

The Frye’s Alaska painting (the “Gruening painting”) presents the largest and most detailed view Kent ever painted of Bear Glacier—a spectacular slowly moving, frozen river of ice flowing into Resurrection Bay. Situated some six miles west of Fox Island, Bear Glacier could not be seen from the island’s northern half where Kent’s cabin was situated, because Caines Head, a distant point across Resurrection Bay, eclipsed its view. (Caines Head is depicted in brown at the far right of the Gruening painting.) However, from Fox Island’s southern half where Sunny Cove was located, Kent could gaze across the bay and spot the icy mass. He described the glacier as “a broad, inclined plane, spotless white, with the tallest mountains rising steeply from its borders.”<sup>6</sup> It appears as a distant, small white mass just above the distant shoreline in several of his Alaska paintings: *Bear Glacier* (private collection), *Resurrection Bay* (Portland Museum of Art) and its counterpart *Father and Son* (Curtis Galleries), as well as the two paintings of frozen falls that are in the collections of the Art Gallery of Hamilton



Rockwell Kent, *Resurrection Bay, Alaska*, c. 1939, Frye Museum of Art, Seattle, Washington, and photo postcard image of Bear Glacier by John E. Thwaites, c. 1918.

and the Plattsburgh State Art Museum.

The Gruening painting's clear and precise vision of Bear Glacier was undoubtedly shaped by the maritime photograph John E. Thwaites took of it while cruising the coastal waters of the Alaska Territory on mail steamers.<sup>7</sup> Kent made the acquaintance of Thwaites on his very first day in Seward—August 24, 1918, and soon thereafter acquired at least two of Thwaites's photo-postcards of Bear Glacier.<sup>8</sup> He immediately sent one to Carl Ziggrosser, his good friend and confidant working as gallery director of Keppel & Co. in New York. On its verso, postmarked Friday, August 30, 1918, Kent wrote: "This glacier is only a short distance from my island. I'll send you a copy of the chart of this bay so you may envy me the more and think of us often."<sup>9</sup> And the other he retained and evidently referenced when he painted, with significant artistic license, the Gruening painting.<sup>10</sup>

Kent longed to visit Bear Glacier, a symbol of primordial nature and northern extremity. He wrote his wife Kathleen that he hoped to "get a tent and go camping with [his son] Rockwell over near the Bear Glacier and at other spots and do some painting from there.... Rockwell has been crazy to do it."<sup>11</sup> But this and other adventures planned for late April or May 1919 were cancelled when Kent cut short his painting expedition to return home to Kathleen who was caring for the couple's three young daughters. Kent remarked at the time with considerable regret, "I can't help realizing with some disappointment that all my plans for Alaska have so suddenly been cancelled." Bear Glacier lingered in his memory, so much so that the Gruening painting represents a "virtual expedition" to the site of his unrequited dreams.



Rockwell Kent,  
*Three Stumps*, 1919,  
Terra Foundation  
for American Art.

When did Kent conceive and complete the Gruening painting and how should it properly be dated? Although it was originally thought that Gruening acquired the painting in the late 1930s during the early days of his governorship of Alaska, the correspondence between Kent and Gruening reveals that it left Kent's possession only in 1966. That the painting is mounted on board suggests it is one of the original paintings Kent commenced on Fox Island in 1918-19, removed from its stretcher, rolled up for shipment, and mounted on board in his studio at some later date. The overall composition of the Gruening painting is loosely based on one of Kent's twenty-two Alaska Impressions exhibited at Knoedler Galleries in 1920 (shown above).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, a close reading of the Gruening painting suggests that its various passages might have been painted at different times, perhaps with many years, or decades, intervening.<sup>13</sup> Until a detailed forensic analysis of the painting and the weave of its fabric support is conducted, which might reveal through X-radiography or infrared reflectography an overpainted artist's signature and/or date or reworking of the paint film, the painting might best be dated "no date" ("n.d.").

## NOTES

Items from the Rockwell Kent Papers in the Archives of American Art of the Smithsonian Institution are cited as RKP.

1. The oil on canvas is signed lower right without date or annotation, is backed by board (plywood), and measures approximately 28 x 44 inches.

2. Typed invoice from Rockwell Kent dated Dec. 1, 1966. RKP, reel 5188, frame 224.

3. Kent evidently sent the painting to Gruening in one of his characteristically simple painted wood frames. Gruening then had it reframed as the reverse of the painting bore a Washington, D.C., framer's label. The Frye replaced the Gruening frame with one whose style resembled the frames that Kent chose for paintings he sold in the 1930s. Richard V. West to Wien, e-mail dated January 5, 2014.

4. RKP, reel 5188, frame 269. Gruening had been a crusading reporter and, in 1917, managing editor of the *New York Tribune*, the newspaper which in 1922-23 reproduced a yearlong series of lighthearted essays by George S. Chappell that Kent illustrated as Hogarth, Jr. For five years beginning in the summer of 1934 Gruening served in the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as Director of the Division of Territories and Island Possessions in the Department of the Interior. These were the years of Kent's brief trips to Alaska and Puerto Rico to research the murals he completed for the new U.S. Post Office building in Washington, D.C., installed in the fall of 1937.

5. Martha Gruening, "The Freedom of Wilderness," *Freeman*, April 28, 1920: 165-66. She acquired a distinctive, illustrated card of modernist design Kent conceived in 1915 in Newfoundland, which she donated to Smith College in 1932. Kent drew the illustration in ink on the back of one of his early professional cards as an architect. The drawing is reproduced in Jake Milgram Wien, *Rockwell Kent: The Mythic and the Modern* (Hudson Hills Press in association with the Portland Museum of Art, 2005), fig. 33, p. 47.

6. Rockwell Kent, *Wilderness*, (G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1920) 209.

7. A century later, with global warming, Bear Glacier has retreated two to three miles inland so that it no longer meets the coastline.

8. RKP, reel 5203, frame 201.

9. Carl Ziggrosser Papers, Archives of American Art, reel 4626, frame 303-304. Kent's *Chart of Resurrection Bay*, 1918, does in fact include Bear Glacier in its bottom right corner.

10. The photo-postcard can be found in box 87 of the RKP.

11. RKP, reel 5203, frame 26. Kent's letter is mistakenly dated February 15, 1918 rather than 1919.

12. The 12 x 16-inch panel painting was acquired at Sotheby's on December 3, 1998, by the Terra Foundation for American Art. It had formerly been in the estate of Laura Ziggrosser, and was inscribed on the back of the panel with her husband's name. The painting acquired the descriptive title *Three Stumps* and was included in the traveling exhibition *Distant Shores: The Odyssey of Rockwell Kent* (2000).

13. Kent may have commenced working on the Gruening painting on Fox Island during the winter of 1918-19. The dimensions of the Gruening painting match those of *New Fallen Snow* as documented in Kent's correspondence at the time of its exhibition in the traveling exhibition "Know and Defend America" that opened at Wildenstein Galleries in February 1942 (catalogue number 1). Unfortunately Kent forgot to provide a narrative for *New Fallen Snow* that would help to identify it. A painting with that title also appeared in the following exhibitions: (1) the Arts Club of Chicago in March/April 1924 (cat. no. 19); (2) the Wildenstein exhibition of Kent's paintings in April 1924 (cat. no. 20); and (3) an exhibition at the Art Alliance in Philadelphia in November 1925 (cat. no. 34). If the Gruening painting was originally the painting formerly exhibited as *New Fallen Snow*, then Kent would have conceived it on Fox Island and dated it 1919-24, the year it was completed and first exhibited. (The Alaska painting *Otter* has a similar history: Kent conceived it on Fox Island, completed it for exhibition at Wildenstein Galleries in 1927, and consequently dated it 1919-27.) The dimensions of *New Fallen Snow* eliminate it as one of the two Alaska paintings Kent gave to the peoples of the Soviet Union around 1960.

Stylistically, the mountainous shadow of the Gruening painting meets the luminous water with a serrated darkened edge that recalls Kent's treatment of reflections in his paintings from Tierra del Fuego, many of which were completed for exhibition in 1924 at Wildenstein. The distant snowy peaks with shadowed recesses are handled with a softness characteristic of Kent's early paintings from Alaska. To the Gruening painting Kent may have added later touches, perhaps of a significant nature, such as the creamy lavender foreground which grounds the lifeless, seemingly floating, stumps. Significant reworking might have obliged Kent to overpaint his early signature and add a new one. The upward sloping signature on the Gruening painting bears some of the hallmarks of a late Kent signature. (Occasionally, to alert the viewer of discontinuous work on a painting, Kent would leave vestiges of his original signature while brushing a new one on the opposing lower corner.) Finally, it should be noted that Kent did not incorporate significant photographic images, like the Thwaites photo-postcard of Bear Glacier, into his compositions until the late 1930s, and then only rarely.

# KENTIANA

## IN SEARCH OF

### Rockwell Kent Postcards

Researcher seeks information, photo scans or direct purchase of any Kent postcards published prior to 1971. (The Russian postcards from 1963–66 are not needed.) Contributors to this research will be cited when it is published. Please contact Robert Rightmire at grayroads@me.com.

## AT AUCTION

### September 22, Fairfield Auction, Monroe, CT

**Lot 104:** *The Lovers*, 1928, woodcut, 6½" x 10" image. Edition of 100 (DBJ 23). Pencil signed and dated.

Auction History: \$7,200\* (Skinner, 2013); \$6,000 (Rachel Davis, 2010); \$5,200 (Old Master Through Contemporary Prints, 2003).

*Est.*: \$2,000 to \$3,000. *Sold for* \$4,800.

**Lot 105:** *Eternal Vigilance is the Price of Liberty*, lithograph, 1945, lithograph, 13¾" x 10". Edition of 100 (DBJ 135). Pencil signed. Auction History: \$1,200 (Skinner, 2010). *Est.*: \$800–\$1,000. *Sold for* \$600.

**Lot 106:** *Heavy Heavy Hangs Over Thy Head*, 1946, lithograph, 9" x 12". Edition of 100 (DBJ 137). Pencil signed and inscribed "To Tom – 1946."

Auction History: \$400 (Doyle, 2008); \$1,100 (Soullis, 2006); \$250 (Smith & Benjamin, 2003).

*Est.*: \$500–\$750. *Sold for* \$500.

**Lot 190:** Junior Art Patrons of America, woodblock mark, 12½" x 11¼". Signed in plate.

*Est.*: \$200–\$300. *Sold for* \$225.

### September 22, Burchard Galleries, St. Petersburg, FL

**Lot 1293:** Chase Copper Humidor, 1935,

6½" x 5¾" x 1½". Hinged lid with Bacchus holding grapes and leaping goats in the distance, cedar-lined interior. Incised RK on lid. Insert missing.

Auction History: \$462\* (Christie's, 1992)

*Est.*: \$400–\$600. *Sold for* \$125.

### October 3, Sotheby's, New York



**Lot 20:** *Alaska Impression*, 1919, oil on panel, 12" x 14". Signed and dated, with signature and number on the reverse. From the collection of Harry Douglas Smith.

*Est.*: \$20,000–\$30,000. *Sold for* \$43,750\*.

**Lot 22:** *Yendegaia Bay*, undated, ink on paper, 7" x 9". Inscribed "(T.d.F.)" and signed. From the collection of Harry Douglas Smith.

*Est.*: \$8,000–\$12,000. *Sold for* \$18,750\*.

### October 10, Waddington's, Toronto

**Lot 126:** *Duke of York*, 1936, lithograph, 9" x 6½". Illustration for *Henry VI* from *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. Pencil signed.

*Est.*: Cdn\$400–Cdn\$600. *Sold for* Cdn\$240.

*Note:* This is, in fact, a photomechanical reproduction of a crayon-and-ink illustration.

### October 19, Rachel Davis Fine Arts, Cleveland, OH

**Lot 91:** *Sea and Sky*, 1931, wood engraving, 10" x 6½". Edition of 150 (DBJ 85). Pencil signed.

Auction History: \$900 (Concept, 2006);

\$1,900 (Swann, 2006); \$3,400 (Swann, 2005).

*Est.*: \$1,500–\$2,500. *Sold for* \$2,400.

**Lot 92:** *Mountain Climber*, 1933, wood engraving, 7⅞" x 5⅞". Edition of 235 plus 15 (DBJ 93) for the Print Club of Cleveland. Pencil signed.

Auction History: \$1,200 (Concept, 2008); \$1,800 (Rachel Davis, 2006); \$1,600 (Rachel Davis, 2006); \$1,700 (Rachel Davis, 2005); \$1,500 (Swann, 2005).

*Est.*: \$1,000–\$2,000. *Sold for* \$2,100.

### October 27, Clarke Auction Gallery, Larchmont, NY

**Lot 2:** *Reader*, 1933, 5¼" x 3½". Edition of 150 (DBJ 102), Pencil titled and signed.

Auction History: \$1,600 (Treadway, 2010).

*Est.*: \$600–\$900. *Sold for* \$375.

### October 30, Swann Auction Galleries, New York

**Lot 325:** *The Lovers*, 1928, wood engraving on paper, 6½" x 10⅞" image. Edition of 100 (DBJ 23). Pencil signed.

Auction History: \$4,800 (Fairfield, 2013); \$7,200 (Skinner, 2013); \$6,000 (Rachel Davis, 2010); \$5,200 (Old Master Through Contemporary Prints, 2003).

*Est.*: \$4,000–\$6,000. *Sold for* \$7,500\*.

### November 5, Leslie Hindman Auctioneers, Chicago

**Lot 382:** *Fifty Years, 1884–1934, A.B. Dick Company*, 1934, folio, gilt-lettered blue cloth, gilt endpapers. Printed by Lakeside Press, Chicago.

*Est.*: \$100–\$200. *Sold for* \$160.

### November 10, Thomaston Place Auction Galleries, Thomaston, ME

**Lot 631:** *Starlight*, 1930, wood engraving, 5¼" x 6⅞". Edition of 120 (DBJ 52). Pencil

inscribed "Rockwell to Tatyana."  
Auction History: \$2,250 (Concept, 2008),  
\$7,500, (Swann, 2005).  
*Est. \$1,800–\$2,400. Sold for \$3,100.*

**Lot 632:** *The Bather*, 1931, wood engraving,  
5¼" x 7⅞". Edition of 120 (DBJ 63). Pencil  
inscribed "Rockwell to Tatyana." Tear and  
stain lower left.

Auction History: \$2,100 (Treadway, 2012);  
\$2,100 (Rachel Davis, 2010); \$1,700 (Case,  
2008); \$2,600 (Swann, 2006); \$3,600  
(Swann, 2005).  
*Est. \$600–\$800. Sold for \$300.*

**Lot 633:** *And Now Where*, 1936, lithograph,  
20¼" x 16¼". Unlimited and unsigned  
edition published by the American Artists  
Group (DBJ 110). Pencil inscribed "To Irene  
and Adolphe from an old friend of them all—  
Rockwell Kent, 1936."

Auction History: \$650 (Clars, 2013); \$300  
(Rachel Davis, 2012); \$20 (Best of West,  
2012); \$200 (Kimball, 2010); \$400 (Skin-  
ner, 2008); \$425\* (Rachel Davis, 2007);  
\$150 (Clars, 2006); \$210\* (Rachel Davis,  
2006); \$400 (Creighton Davis, 2004); \$411\*  
(Skinner-Bolton, 2002).  
*Est. \$800–\$1,200. Sold for \$1,100.*

*Note: A small number of proofs were printed  
for Kent's personal use.*

**Lot 634:** *Greenland Hunter*, 1933, litho-  
graph, 14" x 12". Edition of 120 (DBJ 94).  
Pencil inscribed "Rockwell to Tatyana."  
Small tear, upper corner.  
Auction History: \$700 (Rachel Davis,  
2010); \$600 (Skinner, 2008); \$300 (Rachel  
Davis, 2005).  
*Est. \$700–\$900. Sold for \$750.*

### November 13, Augusta Auctions, New York

**Lot 15:** "Harvest Time," 1950, beige cot-  
ton print, 46" x 14 ft. 3". Manufactured by  
Bloomcraft.  
*Est. \$400–\$600. Sold for \$700.*

### November 17, Skinner, Boston

**Lot 393:** Christmas Seals, 1939: window  
card, 15" x 11", and proof sheet of Christ-  
mas seals, 10½" x 8¼", number 82 of 100  
and signed by the artist.  
*Est. \$1,000–\$1,500. Sold for \$1,200.*

**Lot 394:** Five Proofs for LP Record Jackets,  
1960s to 1970s, 15" x 11". Vanguard Re-  
cording Society. Includes The Three Ravens,  
The Wraggle Taggle Gipsies and Erich Kuns  
Sings German University Songs (Vol. 1–3).  
*Est. \$1,000–\$1,500. Passed.*



**Lot 395:** Endpaper Proof for *World Famous  
Paintings*, 1939. 11½" x 17". Single illus-  
trated sheet, not creased.  
*Est. \$700–\$900. Sold for \$3,000.*

### November 20, Jackson's Auction, Cedar Falls, IA

**Lot 646:** *Supplication*, 1926, wood engrav-  
ing, 3" x 4¼". Edition of 1,500 (DBJ 8).  
Pencil signed.  
Auction History: \$900 (Rachel Davis, 2011,  
unsigned).  
*Est. \$500–\$750. Sold for \$425.*

### November 21, Pacific Book Auction Galleries, San Francisco

**Lot 188:** *Candide*, 1928, Random House,  
hand colored in the artist's studio, original  
morocco-backed decorative cloth, publish-  
er's slipcase. Number 56 of 95 colored cop-  
ies from a run of 1,470 copies printed on rag  
French paper by the Pynson Printers. Signed  
by Kent in the colophon.  
*Est. \$1,200–\$1,800. Sold for \$1,100.*

**Lot 210:** *Memoirs of Casanova*, 1925,  
Aventuros (London), twelve volumes, each  
with frontispiece by Rockwell Kent. Num-  
ber 818 of 1,000 copies.  
*Est. \$200–\$300. Sold for \$100.*

**Lot 349:** *The Canterbury Tales of Geoffrey  
Chaucer*, 1930, Limited Editions Club, two  
volumes. No. 102 of 999 copies. Signed by  
Rockwell Kent.  
*Est. \$200–\$300. Sold for \$180.*

### December 1, Cordier Auctions, Harrisburg, PA

**Lot 136:** *This Is My Own*, 1940, Duell,  
Sloan and Pierce. Signed "to Dick from  
Rockwell, Christmas 1940."  
*Est. \$50–\$100. Sold for \$40.*

### December 5, Christie's, New York

**Lot 28:** *Greenland (Spring)*, c. 1934-35, oil  
on canvas, 28" x 34".  
Auction History: \$115,000 (Christie's,  
2007).  
*Est. \$80,000–\$120,000. Passed.*

### December 5, Pacific Book Auction Galleries, San Francisco

**Lot 459:** *Memoirs of Casanova*, 1925, Aven-  
turos (London), twelve volumes, each with  
frontispiece by Rockwell Kent. Number 637  
of 1,000 copies. "Uncommonly fine."  
*Est. \$300–\$500. Sold for \$275.*

### December 7, Treadway/Toomey Auctions, Oak Park, IL

**Lot 751:** Group of five framed color wood-  
cuts: *The Empty House*; *The Full Pitcher*;  
*O World, O Life, O Time*; *Many More*; and  
*Sorrows of the World*, each 9½" x 6". Signed  
in plate.  
*Est. \$500–\$700. Sold for \$305\*.*

*Robert Rightmire describes this lot as "pho-  
tomechanical reproductions of drawings,"  
which originally composed a portfolio  
commissioned by Schering Corporation of  
Bloomfield, New Jersey, in 1943. Schering  
presented them as "for use in a series of  
promotion pieces ... conceived as an ex-  
pression of the mental symptoms of various  
diseases."*

### December 7, Rachel Davis, Cleveland

**Lot 224:** *Waldo Pierce*, 1928, lithograph,  
9¾" x 7¼". Edition of 200 (DBJ 30). Pencil  
signed.  
Auction History: \$325 (Rachel Davis,  
2006); \$353\* (Skinner, 2004).  
*Est. \$300–\$500. Passed.*

**Lot 225:** *Beowulf: Beowulf and Grendel's Mother*, 1931, lithograph, 13½" x 10". Edition of 150 (DBJ 74). Pencil signed.

Auction History: \$140 (Rachel Davis, 2013); \$110 (Rachel Davis, 2012), \$220 (Rachel Davis, 2011), \$250 (Treadway, 2010), \$350 (Rachel Davis, 2009), \$300 (Skinner, 2008), \$325 (Rachel Davis, 2007), \$280 (Rachel Davis, 2006), \$130 (Rachel Davis, 2005).

*Est. \$250–\$350. Sold for \$220.*

**Lot 226:** *Good-Bye Day (The Water Carrier)*, 1946, lithograph, 13¾" x 9¾". Edition of 150 (DBJ 139).

Auction History: \$800 (Kaminski Auctions, 2013); \$700 (DuMouchelles, 2013); \$400 (Hindman, 2005); \$350 (Skinner, 2005).

*Est. \$800–\$1,200. Sold for \$950.*

### December 9, Arthaz, New York

**Lot 26:** "Sketch for Ticonderoga Painting," date unknown, ink, 3¾" x 3¼". Rockwell Kent estate stamped. Provenance: Estate of Alexander Raydon, a Manhattan gallery owner.

*Est. \$400–\$500. Sold for \$265\*.*

**Lot 37:** *Memory*, 1928, lithograph, 14½" x 19¾", signed. Edition of 100 (DBJ 28).

Provenance: Raydon estate.

Auction History: \$550 (Rose Hill, 2008); \$250 (Skinner, 2005).

*Est. \$600–\$700. Sold for \$1,100\*.*

**Lot 52:** *Starry Night*, 7" x 5". Edition of 1,750 (DBJ 103). Pencil signed. Provenance: Raydon estate.

Auction History: \$700 (Fletcher, 2013); \$660 (Skinner, 2013); \$350 (RR Auction, 2013); \$1,000 (Skinner, 2013); \$240 (Rachel Davis, 2012); \$600 (Swann, 2010); \$400 (Treadway, 2010); \$700 (Treadway, 2007); \$550 (Hindman, 2006); \$850 (Rago, 2005).

*Est. \$400–\$600. Sold for \$510\*.*

**Lot 175:** Equestrian Lithograph, date unknown, 8½" x 5¾", Merrymount Press, Boston. Rockwell Kent estate stamped.

Provenance: Raydon estate.

*Est. \$500–\$600. Sold for \$772\*.*

**Lot 176:** Nathan G. Horwitt Bookplate Sketch, pencil drawing, 6" x 3½". Rockwell Kent estate stamped. Provenance: Raydon estate.

*Est. \$500–\$700. Sold for \$643\*.*

### January 23, Swann Auction Galleries, New York

**Lot 135:** Endpaper for *Candy*, pen, ink and wash illustration, 1934, 9¾" x 12¾" sheet, with pencil study for *Canterbury Tales* illustration on the verso. Unsigned, but with a note in the artist's hand. Includes letter of authenticity by Jake Wien.

*Est. \$6,000–\$9,000. Sold for \$5,600.*



**Lot 136:** *Of Man's First Disobedience*, pen and ink illustration depicting the six stages of life, not dated, 11½" x 9½" board. Signed "Hogarth, Jr."

*Est. \$3,000–\$4,000. Sold for \$4,200.*

**Lot 137:** *Saturday, July 12th, Eighth Day at Sea*, pen and ink illustration for page 117 of *N by E*, 1930, 4⅜" x 6¼". Pencil signed.

*Est. \$3,000–\$4,000. Sold for \$3,400.*



### February 9, Pacific Book Auction Galleries, San Francisco

**Lot 185:** Bookplate for George Henry Corey, 1941, 3¾" x 2" printer's proof on 8½" x 5½" sheet. Pencil signed.

*Est. \$200–\$400. Sold for \$250*

\*Buyer's premium included. Otherwise, hammer price can be assumed.

## PATRONS

*Subscribers are the lifeblood of this publication, and we are grateful to those who generously contribute over and above the annual subscription:*

Albert Baca

Robert Blais

Geraldine Branca

Dr. Joseph Burke

By the Book, L.C., Phoenix

Stephen Cesareo

Paul Clark

Robert Dance

Edward Deci

Ted Ellis

Gerald Escott

Roderic Giltz

Kurt Hemr

Bryan Jones

Gregor Kent

Douglas Lehmann

William H. Loos

Anne Mackinnon

Kay Mackinnon

Barry Madden

Penny McGill

Edward Ogul

Robert H. Rawson, Jr.

Will Ross

Mark Schlesinger

Raymond Shepard

Upshur Spencer

Dr. Robert Stahl

Erik Torm

James Underwood



Rockwell Kent, Illustrations for *Canterbury Tales*, c. 1930, ink on paper mounted on board. Museum purchase. Shown clockwise: *The Prioress*, 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ "; *The Man of Laws (The Lawyer)*, 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ "; *The Squire*, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ "; *Sir Thopas*, 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ ".

## Book Illustrations

Last year, the museum took advantage of the rare opportunity to purchase four of Kent's original illustrations for *Canterbury Tales* (1930): *The Prioress*, *The Man of Laws (The Lawyer)*, *The Squire* and *Sir Thopas*. Rendered in pen/brush and ink, and mounted on artist's board, these works had been sold to a private collector by the Weyhe Gallery in about 1938 and had remained with the purchaser's family ever since. They join *The Nun's Priest* from the original bequest.

## Fine Art Prints

We continue to work toward achieving our longstanding goal: a complete set of Kent's fine art prints as enumerated in *The Prints of Rockwell Kent: A Catalogue Raisonné* by Dan Burne Jones (1975) and its 2002 reprint with additional material by Robert Rightmire.

In recent years, we've added the wood engravings *To Frances!* (1930) and *Starry Night* (1933), as well as the lithographs *Foreboding* (1926), *Bringing Home the Christmas Tree* (1928), *Waldo Pierce* (1928), *Boatman* (1929), *Sledging* (1933), *Mala* (1933), *Greenland Hunter* (1933) and, from the illustrations for *Beowulf* (1931): *Funeral Pyre*, *Hand Holding Sword* and *Colophon*.

Two noteworthy items that belonged to renowned illustrator, book designer and typographer T.M. Cleland have also come to us: *Bringing Home the Christmas Tree* (1928), one of only six that were printed on silk, and Kent's final drawing for the lithograph *Portrait of T.M. Cleland* (1929).

Kent's series of six prints commissioned in 1941 by the United States Pipe and Foundry Company are very rare. In recent years, we've acquired *Big Inch* and another known as *Laying Pipe Section over a Bridge*. They bring our holdings to three, and we hope to add the others as they become available.



Rockwell Kent, *Bringing Home the Christmas Tree*, 1928, lithograph on silk, 12 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Museum purchase.



Rockwell Kent, *Big Inch*, 1941, lithograph on stone, 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Museum purchase.



Rockwell Kent, *To Frances!*, 1930, wood engraving, 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Museum purchase.

# Faithfully Yours

Chronicling the life and times of Rockwell Kent through his collected letters in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## 100 Years Ago

*Kent traveled to Newfoundland during the winter of 1914 with hopes of relocating his family there. From St. John's on March 2, he wrote to his wife:*

Dearest Kathleen,

Today came the first mail and your letter. The enclosed note from Rockwell [their son] was perfectly lovely Tell him how delighted I am with it and that I love him very much too and wish that he could be here with me. No, I think I must write to him myself so that he may learn to read.

Some time today I'll get you a map and send it to you. Then you can see where it is that I am traveling. Unless my plans change I shall start tomorrow for Brigus and see what it is like there. Then return a little way to Brigus junction and continue north to Lewisport. There I drive 40 miles over the ice to Twillingate. This is an old settlement, I am told, with many buildings over a hundred years old. The country thereabout is said to be beautiful and of just the rugged character that I'm looking for.

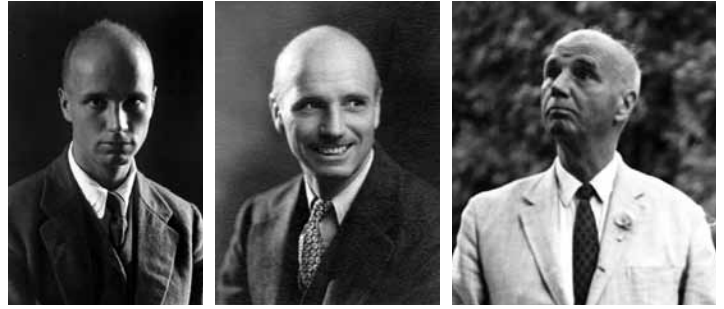
Yesterday afternoon a few minutes before two I started to walk to a neighboring town called Petty Harbor. It is nine miles there. The road climbs way up into the highlands and then descends steeply to the village. It crosses several ponds, is snow covered, the entire way little trodden and in some places quite icy. I got back after exactly four hours of walking and sat down to six o'clock supper. Wasn't that a quick eighteen miles? No one would believe it at first and I had to describe the place. As I entered Petty Harbor I passed a funeral procession coming up the hill to the grave yard. About a hundred men struggled along forming the procession.



I wish continually that you were with me and yet it would have been difficult to settle you here.

Lovingly,

*Two weeks later, he rented the house in Brigus that he described as a "mansion" and began making plans for Kathleen and the children to join him there.*



## 75 Years Ago

*That winter and spring, Kent lived in Manhattan, painting his mural for the General Electric Pavilion of the 1939 World's Fair. It was all work and no play, as he focused entirely on its completion, ignoring correspondence and stepping away from political activism. In early May, he received a letter from M. Horwitz of the City Central Committee of the International Workers Order. On May 11, he replied:*

Dear Brother Horwitz:

I have come back here to my farm, three hundred and fifty miles from New York City, and, but for two days next week – scheduled long ago – I'm not going to leave here again for months to come. I've got to work. I am sorry not to be able to help this time, but it will be simply impossible for me to be one of the judges in the Beauty Contest at the June 25th picnic, much as I would like to.

Fraternally yours,

*Horwitz represented the Picnic Committee, and that summer's event included a contest to select what he had described as "the prettiest girl of each of our 12 Language Sections."*

## 50 Years Ago

*In late February 1964, Rockwell and Sally Kent traveled to the Soviet Union. Both ailing, they were sent from Moscow to the Barvikha Sanitarium. From Kent's unpublished later memoir:*

"Sally's birthday, of whose permitted celebration by two patients we had felt some doubts, was marked the world around as though in tribute to her by that exact equality of day and night termed in our almanacs as the March equinox—and, in my thoughts, St. Sally's Day. But at Barvikha it was marked far more substantially, a truly fabulous party there in our suite! Yet until the last moment it was kept such a surprise to us that, seeing a big table set up, chairs brought in and flowers put into everything, we could only guess that our rooms were being borrowed for an evening not for us. We were at last alerted, told, at least, to "dress." Happily, and just in time, we did—to welcome Mme. Furtseva [Soviet Minister of Culture], Mme. Krushcheva [wife of the Soviet premier], Tamara [Mamedova, former cultural attaché] (of course) and others, all to embrace Sally and wish her Happy Birthday and, in life, all blessings. And what sweet, happy hours followed! What food we ate! What toasts we drank! What wishful, hopeful talk of Peace on Earth!"



---

Plattsburgh  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK