

A Brief History of the Southcott Awards

by Conor O'Dea

It may be assumed for various reasons that most readers of the trident are familiar with the annual Southcott Awards, held every St. John's Day in the E.B. Foran Room, City Hall. What is not so certain is whether or not the history of the Awards is as well known. This article will attempt to provide a concise history of the Southcott Awards,

from their inspiration in the characteristic architecture of nineteenth century Newfoundland to their institutionalisation in the mid 1980s, to their continuation in the present day.

Why "Southcott"?

A good question. Why was the name "Southcott" applied to the Heritage Preservation Awards? The origins of this moniker are to be found in the 19th century Newfoundland contracting firm of J. & J.T. Southcott.

James Thomas Southcott was a carpenter, builder and architect who was born in 1824 in Exeter, England. In 1847, his brother John and he were asked, along with many other West Countrymen, to aid in the reconstruction of St. John's after the devastating fire of 1846. Though many of their fellow workers returned to England, the Southcott brothers stayed in Newfoundland and established an architectural firm which was to have the greatest influence on the island's architecture for the next half-century.

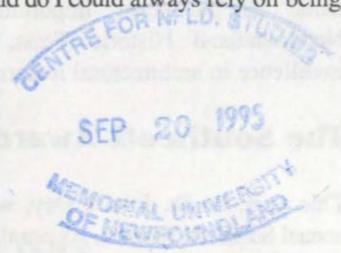
There is little record of the work that the firm undertook in those early years. Their first known projects were completed in the 1850s: Gower Street Methodist Church (1856) and Hope Cottage (1857), both of which have been demolished. These structures were indicative of the incredible stylistic and technical range of the Southcott brothers. Though they had been originally trained as carpenters, their buildings are evidence of their abilities

as bricklayers, stonemasons, general contractors and architects.

The firm's position as the major contractor in Newfoundland was confirmed in 1866, when they became associated with the Anglo-American Telegraph Company and were commissioned to construct the Cable Office and Staff Houses at Heart's Content, the site of the first transatlantic cable.

As time passed, the Southcott name and Newfoundland architecture became virtually synonymous, the firm expanded as the colony matured. In 1875, the Southcott firm was contracted to build David Stirling's elaborate Ruskinian Gothic design of the St. John's Athenaeum, a testament to both the firm's influence and the colony's growing cultural sophistication. However, it wasn't until the torch was passed from James Thomas to his son John Thomas that the style we now know as "Southcott" actually emerged. Under John Thomas, the firm acquired the Warne estate in St. John's, which is now the Rennie's Mill/Monkstown Road area. Between 1883 and 1887, he built six Second Empire style house on this tract of land. "Second Empire style" has subsequently become known as the Southcott style in this province, and is the characteristic architecture of our capital city.

Though the great fire of 1892 ended the undisputed reign of the Southcotts, their influence can still be felt and their work can still be seen, particularly in the Mansard roofed houses in the downtown of St. John's, in the picturesque streets of Harbour Grace, and in numerous other communities across the island. But the Southcotts are not remembered merely for their designs and their buildings; they are also celebrated because of their dedication and skill with which they approached their work. As a contemporary once said of James Thomas Southcott: "[he] was hard but honest, he would not drive a nail free but what he said he would do I could always rely on being done."



1983-1986: the Southcott Awards are born

At an Executive Meeting of the Board of the Newfoundland Historic Trust on October 31st, 1983, it was decided that the "awards program for property owners and architects should be reinstated."

In 1984, the Newfoundland Historic Trust began a new programme of Awards for quality restoration in the preservation of Old St. John's. The 1984 Awards committee, consisting of Tim Houlihan (chair), Chris O'Dea, Beaton Sheppard and Mary Devine, reviewed some twenty restoration projects which had been carried out over the previous two years.

Taking their inspiration from the now-defunct St. John's Heritage Foundation, Tim Houlihan and other board members started on the road which would eventually lead to the Southcotts.

The first Southcott ceremony took place at City Hall on June 22nd, 1984. There were originally two streams of awards. Heritage Awards, which were specifically for structures, were given to 67 Queen's Road, Victoria Hall, Gower Street United Church, 22 Monkstown Road, the Anglican Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, 96 Duckworth Street and the LSPU Hall. The first Southcott Awards, aimed at recognizing the people involved in restoration work, were presented to Phillip Pratt, for his design of the infill housing projects at Dick's Square and William Street, to Charles Cullum for his dedication to the preservation of St. John's over the course of many years, and to Bill MacCallum in recognition of his remarkable work on Victoria Hall.

On October 25th, 1984, at the Annual General Meeting of the Trust, the Southcott Awards were firmly instituted as a annual ceremony. The bronze plaque and Southcott award certificate, both designed by Beaton Sheppard, were shown to Board Members by the Awards Committee Chairman Tim Houlihan, and were unanimously approved.

By 1986, the Southcotts had absorbed the Heritage Preservation Awards, had assumed the role of those Awards as well as continuing their own, and had encompassed "the built Heritage of Newfoundland communities" rather than that of St. John's alone. In two years, the name Southcott, once associated with the most important architectural style of the island, had become the name of the most important ceremony of the Newfoundland Historic Trust, and the symbol of excellence in architectural restoration and preservation.

The Southcott Awards Today

This year, on St. John's Day, we celebrated the 12th annual Southcott Awards. As usual, the awards recipients were outstanding examples of care and dedication to the built heritage of this province. In St. John's, Marilyn Porter & Bill Earle received an award for their beautiful restoration of Bannerman House; and Strat Canning and Pamela Hall were honoured for their efforts in restoring

36 Monkstown Road, which they have most appropriately renamed Canning Hall. In Trinity, Coup de Grace, owned and restored by Randy and Ginny Bell, was likewise honoured. Jerry Dick's impeccable restoration of Garrison House in Harbour Grace also received a Southcott. Parks Canada managed to glean two Southcott Awards this year; one for Hawthorne Cottage in Brigus, and one for the Ryan Premises in Bonavista. The spotlight was not Parks Canada's alone for either of these projects, as both were cooperative efforts. The Newfoundland Historic Parks Association was a major force in the rehabilitation of Hawthorne Cottage, and the completion of restoration work on the Ryan Premises could not have been reached without the participation of the Eastern Community College. Unique among the list of award recipients this year was the Battle Harbour Trust. Their award was received for their tireless efforts in restoring many of the invaluable historic structures in Battle Harbour, Labrador.

While it is right to congratulate these people for their achievement, we must also recognize our indebtedness to all of them for their dedication to and consideration of the historic resources of the province. It is their efforts that make the work of organizations such as the Newfoundland Historic Trust worthwhile. All Southcott winners, past and present, should be recognized for what they have done to preserve and ameliorate the cultural heritage of our province.

The 1995 Southcott Awards were generously sponsored by:



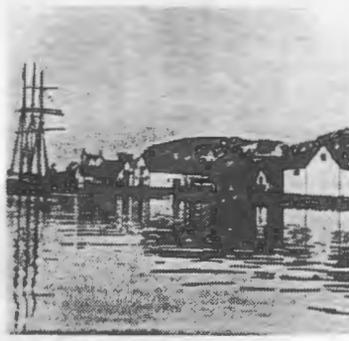
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Bannerman House
St. John's



Battle Harbour
Labrador



Coup de Grace
Trinity

1995 SOUTHCOTT AWARD WINNERS



Hawthorne Cottage
Brigus



Canning Hall
St. John's



Ryan Premises
Bonavista



Newfoundland Historic Trust



The 10th Anniversary of the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador

The Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador commenced operations in 1985 for the purpose of recognizing and preserving the province's built heritage. Over the past ten years, we have designated approximately 126 structures throughout the province as Registered Heritage Structures.

Once a building has been designated a Registered Heritage Structure, it is eligible to apply for a grant that can cover up to 50 per cent of the cost of restoration of specific heritage features. The grants are administered on a 50/50 cost shared basis up to a maximum of \$10,000. The Foundation also places a plaque on the structure indicating its historical significance.

At the last meeting of the Heritage Foundation Board, held in April of this year. Eight buildings were designated as Registered Heritage Structures. They are: the Adam Mouland House and the William Ellis Saint House in Bonavista; Winter Home in Clarke's Beach; the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Ferryland; the Loyal Orange Lodge # 9 in Green's Harbour; and the Martin McNamara House and the Masonic Temple in St. John's.

Designation and grant application deadlines are September 1st and March 1st of each calendar year. For further information and/or designation and grant applications, please call our office at 739-1892, or fax us at 739-5413.

The Newfoundland Historic Trust

Membership fees for 1995-1996 are \$10 per person, \$20 per family, and \$35 for groups, institutions and organizations. Please complete the following form and mail with a cheque payable to The Newfoundland Historic Trust to:

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