

SAVING AND SHARING THE JOHN HAY WRITING STUDIO

The great naturalist, author, and conservationist John Hay left many things behind when he died in 2011 at the age of 95. First, the land he helped to conserve, including Quivett, Stony Brook, and Namskaket. Second, the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History, which he co-founded in 1955 and led as president until 1985. And last but certainly not least, the 18 books he wrote in his “writing shack” on Dry Hill at his Brewster home. All of his legacies honor the natural world and proclaim the need to conserve it.

Now, the Brewster Conservation Trust (BCT), which occupies Hay’s former home, will preserve his studio and offer it to writers who require a place in which to work on literary projects of their own.

There’s a reason why such places are often called “retreats.” The writing process tends to be a solitary one that demands extended time in a quiet, private, and dedicated space. Because few writers have the luxury of a studio, many are eager to “retreat” so they can write without distraction. Most writing retreats are, however, expensive and distant. The John Hay Writing Studio will therefore be an accessible and affordable alternative for local writers.

Both the preservation and the occupancy of the Writing Studio will honor Hay’s contributions to the Cape’s cultural heritage and support new and lasting enrichment of the region’s arts community.

Further, the project will reinforce the strong connection between the arts and the Cape’s natural beauty. Just as that relationship was at the heart of John Hay’s life and work, so will his studio in the woods of Dry Hill serve as a bridge between nature and literature. Likewise, all presentations and publications resulting from work composed at his studio will celebrate both land conservation and creative expression, broaden audiences, expand outreach, and illuminate shared values.

Although the building is structurally sound and aesthetically accommodating, some modifications and upgrades need to be made to maximize its potential as a three-season writers’ retreat. Before undertaking those revisions, however, BCT intends to “test drive” the studio by running a 16-week pilot program throughout the summer of 2024. Select area writers representing different backgrounds, life experiences, and literary genres will be invited to participate by reserving 1-2 weeks free of charge. BCT plans to incorporate feedback from their experiences into the building’s future upgrades.

The Studio will be closed from September to May. During the fall and winter months, BCT will look to develop a community partnership to administer the writers’ retreat program and seek funding for building upgrades and program overhead.

