

A brief history of Shakesides

The last residence of Hamilton Mack Laing, Naturalist (1883-1982)

Shakesides is situated on the shore of Comox Bay in what is now Mack Laing Park. Mack settled in Comox in 1922 and built his first home, Baybrook, in which he and his wife Ethel lived; she died in 1948. Thereupon Mack bought the adjoining forested acreage to the east and sold Baybrook.

By 1950, Mack had completed construction of Shakesides and moved in, living there until his death in February 1982. Shakesides was a custom design by Mack, incorporating features of Baybrook and oriented at a different angle to capture the spectacular views. Mack claimed to have driven every nail in Shakesides himself and said that it took him 6 weeks to split the shakes.

In 1973 Mack, at 90 years of age, decided to leave his property and home to the Town of Comox. A legal trust documents was written, which stated that he could live there until his death, that the property was to be left in its natural state, and that Shakesides and any future buildings would be for public enjoyment only.

In 1981, Mack updated his Will and left, to the Town of Comox (his Trustees) approximately \$50,000 in cash with specific instructions that a portion be used to create a “natural history museum” in Shakesides. The remainder was to be invested, the interest “earned thereupon to be applied towards the annual operating expenses”. In 1982, that sum would have purchased a modern home in the area.

One month after Mack's death, after his belongings had been removed, Shakesides became a rental property. The rental income went into General Revenue. Shakesides was rented for 31 years. During that period the house received very little maintenance and was allowed to deteriorate.

As for the money in the purported Trust Fund, it was spent freely on other projects. An accountant has calculated that had the portion of the money been invested as instructed in Mack's will, it would now total \$203,000.00.

In 2001, the legal secretary who typed both the Will and the Trust Agreement, wrote to the Town of Comox and pointed out that the terms agreed to had not been adhered to by the trustees, the Town of Comox. The Town, however, continued to rent Shakesides for another 12 years, until late 2013.

In December 2015, an engineer's report for Shakesides by Bates Engineering, states that the building is structurally sound and any problems were easily remedied. A Statement of Significance was produced by Elana Zysblat and John Atkin in August 2016.

The Mayor and Council, June 2016 voted to demolish Shakesides, stating that it was in poor condition and that there was not enough money. In August 2016 Council began an appeal to the Attorney General of BC to have the Mack Laing Trust changed to allow the destruction of Shakesides.