

About The Mack Laing Heritage Society of the Comox Valley (MLHS)

The MLHS was incorporated as a Society in British Columbia on May 20, 2014.

Its mission is four-fold:

- 1) *To fulfill the stated wishes of Mack Laing's 1981 Will and Testament: "that my home be used as a natural history museum", as faithfully as possible*
- 2) *To oversee the restoration and maintenance of Mack Laing's home at "Baybrook"*
- 3) *To maintain and promote the dissemination of Mack Laing's environmental values and legacy*
- 4) *To fundraise annually to maintain a variety of environmental programmes of interest to the general public throughout the Comox Valley and to the Town of Comox*

Fundraising

The first fundraising event, held on August 16, 2014, received broad community support and raised almost \$11,000.

For detailed information about Hamilton Mack Laing, his Will, and the plans proposed by the Mack Laing Heritage Society, please visit the Society's website:

www.macklaingsociety.ca

For enquiries and membership information, please email:

macklaingsociety@gmail.com



"I drifted as naturally to a life on the land as water runs downhill. It seemed the only job I knew that I could be always under the sky receptive to Nature's teachings.

So my work became my play; how very lucky I was!"

Baybrook: Life's Great Adventure - by Mack Laing

Background

- In 2008, the Baybrook property and three adjoining parcels, were purchased through a cooperative agreement between the BC Nature Trust and the Town of Comox, for \$2.1 million. The unnamed park was officially opened to the public in 2011.
- The park is connected to two other natural areas with maintained trails - Mack Laing Park and McDonald Wood
- Hamilton Mack Laing (b. 1883), pioneer, orchardist, naturalist, author, artist, photographer, lived on the estuary from 1922 until his death in 1982 at the age of 99.
- Laing completed building the Baybrook house from an Aladdin Reddi-Cut kit in 1923. This structure comprises the left-hand portion of the house (viewed from the front).
- With his wife Ethel, Mack Laing established a viable nut farm and orchard. Many of the trees remain in the adjoining subdivision and are still productive.
- Laing stated in his 1981 Will that a percentage of the proceeds of the sale of his property and possessions should be used for the creation and upkeep of a natural history museum in his home. This request has not been fulfilled.
- Shakesides, the house in which Laing was living at the time of his death in 1982 (on the waterfront of Mack Laing Park), is in poor condition and cannot be renovated for public access.
- Baybrook is in good condition and is ideally suited for a nature centre/ museum. It is of significance to the environmental and ecological history of Canada because it was visited by well-known naturalists and biologists of the day, and was the inspiration for many books, drawings and scientific observations.
- In June 2013, the Town of Comox proposed to demolish all the buildings on the property. A coalition of nature groups asked the Town to postpone demolishing Baybrook House until a formal structural and historical assessment could be made.
- A report on the professional assessment was presented to Council in September 2013. Council granted a year for the coalition to create an economic plan for Baybrook house.
- In August 2014, the Mack Laing Heritage Society presented an expanded report on the economic feasibility of its 2013 proposal to Comox Council. Reports from Town Staff on this proposal are pending.

Proposal

- That the Baybrook property remain a walk-in nature park, as are the Mack Laing Park and McDonald Wood.
- The house will be open to the public and have wheelchair and disabled access.
- The park will be open to passive, nature-based structured and unstructured educational activities for all ages, as are other parks in Comox. Baybrook House will complement these educational activities with inside displays and information.
- With the support of Comox Valley Nature (The Comox Valley Naturalists Society), Project Watershed, BC Nature Trust, and others, the house will encourage appreciation of our natural world, as Mack Laing wished.
- The Mack Laing Heritage Society proposes to restore and maintain Baybrook as a natural history centre, with all funding for this to be derived from external sources. The Mack Laing Heritage Society will be responsible for all restoration and maintenance costs.
- The Society's interest is solely with Baybrook house. Decisions related to the park property itself are, and will remain, the responsibility of the Town of Comox.
- A qualified resident naturalist, will be on hand to train volunteers, gather environmental data for the site's conservation, and coordinate educational activities.

Consultation

- The Town of Comox is responsible for public notices and consultation, and for addressing any concerns related to any of its public parks, including parking. The MLHS is willing to assist in this regard.
- The Baybrook property itself will be managed by the Town of Comox Parks Department, per agreement with the BC Nature Trust.
- The MLHS proposal concerns ONLY Baybrook house.

Conclusion

It is the intention of the MLHS to work closely with all stakeholders, residents of the Comox and the local neighbourhood.

The Society wishes to ensure that the Baybrook house is publicly accessible to enhance the nature park experience for all residents of the Comox Valley.