



## **Demolition of Mack Laing's Baybrook and Shakesides Homes - the last vestige of Comox heritage**

Thirty three (33) years ago, in January 1982 Mack Laing passed away at the age of 99. He generously donated to the town of Comox the remaining parcel of his land where his second home Shakeside stands. His last Will asks, in trust to the town of Comox, that his home be turned into a Natural History Museum with modest accommodations for a student/naturalist/ caretaker.

He also left a generous sum of money, about \$55,000. At that time one could purchase an average home for \$40,000. Mack's home was in good repair, fully furnished and full of art, bird and other specimen collections, scientific articles, letters and reprints. We also know that up until then many of his collections and articles had been sent to and still are in museums in the USA, Ottawa, Victoria. Some reside in the small Comox Museum.

The town of Comox appears to have neglected for 33 years the dying will of an old and generous man, a notable Canadian, a Comox man of distinction and a historical figure worthy of international, national and local recognition. He was a Naturalist, Artist, Expeditionist, Scientist-Collector, Teacher, Environmentalist ahead of his time, a Pioneer and Orchardist in the Comox Valley. Mack Laing's biography has been documented by a notable Canadian historian Richard Mackey, "Hamilton Mack Laing Hunter Naturalist". His home has been rented for profit and neglected by the town of Comox for these 33 years. The money from his donations, sales of possessions and rent from his home, donated for a Natural History Museum have been circulating in the Town of Comox coffers, neither strategically invested, nor quite to be accounted for.

Now the Mayor and Council of the town of Comox have declared Mack Laing's Shackeside home "in bad repair" and have slated it for demolition. There are no regrets or shame for the unfulfilled dying man's Will and trust in his elected officials.

Further to this indignity we add the last nail to the coffin. Over two years the Mack Laing Heritage Society, a not-for-profit organization, has worked tirelessly. They worked with many pro bono professionals, historians, artists, naturalists, Mack's contemporaries, residents of Comox and the Valley, to prove to the Town of Comox Council that at least Mack Laing's first pioneer home, Baybrook can be repaired and repurposed. This could fulfil his Will and at no cost to the beneficiaries of Mack's generosity, the Comox and the Valley tax payers. This home and the land it sits on are also in the position of the Town of Comox. The Society's tireless, honourable effort was also brushed aside with a single stroke, unanimous vote from the Comox Council last Wednesday, Feb 25, 2015.

Baybrook, Mack's first pioneer home in Comox, where he spent most of his productive life and which the citizens of Comox and the Valley could take pride in, is also deemed not worthy and is to be demolished.

Are we afraid of "rowdy" museum goers, children's laughter while exploring and learning, visitors curious to find out more about our natural and civic history while visiting the Town of Comox and the Valley? What is it that our Town and Council stand for? Where is the sense for honouring our heritage and conserving for future generations?

We are Canadians, proud of our heritage and that of others - but ashamed of our Town and Council.

- MLHS Directors