Condition Assessment :: August 2016

Shakesides - 1431 Comox Avenue - circa 1950
Plan 3387 District Lot 87 Lot 2 - Comox District, British Columbia

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Condition Assessment for Shakesides

District Lot 87 Lot 2, Comox District Plan 3387

Description of Historic Place

Shakesides is a mid-century vernacular bungalow constructed circa 1950 by noted naturalist, ornithologist, collector and writer Hamilton Mack Laing. The house is situated on the edge of the Comox Estuary in Mack Laing Nature Park, near the western boundary of the Town of Comox in the Comox Valley Regional District. The house, built and named by Laing, is associated with the later half of his career, a productive period of writing, study and mentoring.

The building's intentional and sensitive placement illustrates the builder's awareness of the property's natural environment and historical land uses. It was designed for its shoreline location turned broadside to the bay, to accommodate the rare instances of flooding, and to provide views to Mt. Arrowsmith and the Comox Glacier aka Queneesh (Kwénis).

Shakesides is a hand-built, side-gabled vernacular cottage created from locally sourced materials. It is clad in part with cedar shakes that were hand-split on the property and was specifically designed for its challenging location on the shoreline. The high concrete foundation lifts the house above the level of any occasional flooding while the dyke wall protects the property from erosion and storm waves.

Materials and Condition

Shakesides is constructed with a high concrete foundation which creates an above ground basement, the first floor is hand split cedar shingles and the gable ends are clad with cedar board and batten. The exterior cladding appears never to have been painted.

Interior Condition

Basement: The basement is dry, though there are indications that water has entered the house. The log posts are solid and dry with no evident moisture damage. Wooden platforms remain in the basement used by the owner and tenants to raise appliances and work surfaces above any potential flooding.

The concrete appears solid with a crack on the north wall running diagonally through the small window east of the entrance. The crack can also be seen outside in the same location. There is a crack on the south wall running diagonally through a small window and can be seen outside in the same location. The rest of the concrete appears to be in good condition.

In a few of the basement beams there is evidence of powder post beetle activity (small bore holes and some sawdust) but the wood, when probed, felt solid.

First Floor: The floors are level with no perceptible settling. Overall the rooms were intact and showed little damage apart from the kitchen and bathroom floors with the expected wear and tear of a high trafficked area, the linoleum floors had reached the end of their material life.

Rooms retained their trim, mouldings, flooring and panelling, all of which was in good condition considering the age of the building and its general lack of maintenance. The windows are original and those that were accessible appeared to be in good condition. Putty was was strong and unbroken, window panes were secure. The wood frames showed no signs of rot, though some staining on the inside woodwork was evident, a result of condensation on the glass.

Water damage was seen in the ceiling of one room in the north side of the house where the fibrous ceiling panels showed signs of staining. Some ceiling panels had been removed but the Gyproc wool batts appeared in reasonable condition.

Second Floor: The upper floor of the house is an unfinished work space with exposed studs and rafters. There is no insulation or wall coverings, though the east wall had a floor to ceiling plastic sheet attached to the studs. The roof rafters, walls and floor were dry and there was no sign of water stains on the woodwork. The dormer windows retained original panes though the casements showed signs of prolonged exposure to the weather.

The west wall showed signs of repair with new materials chosen to match the existing construction. There were some small gaps in the roof where exterior shingles had failed on the roof ridge.

Exterior Condition

The concrete foundation appears to be in good condition with one crack on the north side of the house and a crack through the foundation on the south side under the porch. Like the north side crack, this one is associated with a window opening. Above the basement, the house is clad in hand split cedar shingles above the basement foundation. On the north, west and south walls they appear to be in reasonable condition given their age and exposure to the elements. Some splitting and warping can be seen. On the east wall, the weather side, the shingles are thin, cracked and in need of replacement after years of exposure to the elements.

The gable ends are clad in board and batten. On the west gable repair work can be clearly seen, but the work has been done to match the existing cladding. Once weathered it will be indistinguishable from the original. On the east gable the board and batten cladding appears in good shape with some minor decay visible at the end of the boards above the shingles.

The porch is in reasonable condition given its exposure and lack of maintenance. There is rot visible on western and south facing facias. Underneath the porch deck the beams and flooring appear to be in good shape.

The roof shingles are thin, cracked and warped and there is moss growth between the dormers. The two gutters on the north and south sides appear clogged with organic material and plant growth can be seen.

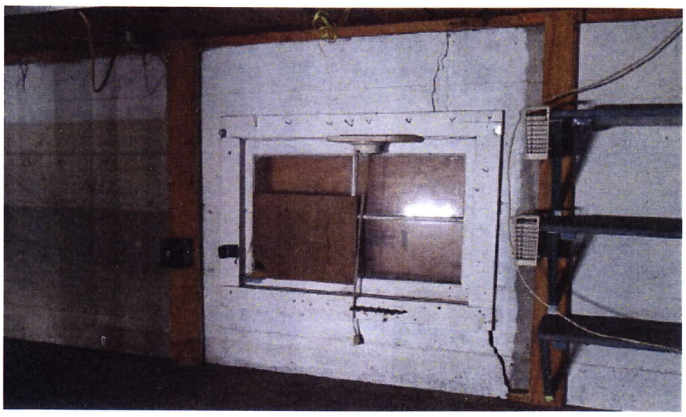
Conclusion

It is useful to remember that the the house was designed by its builder specifically for its location and the possibility of occasional flooding was taken into account in the design.

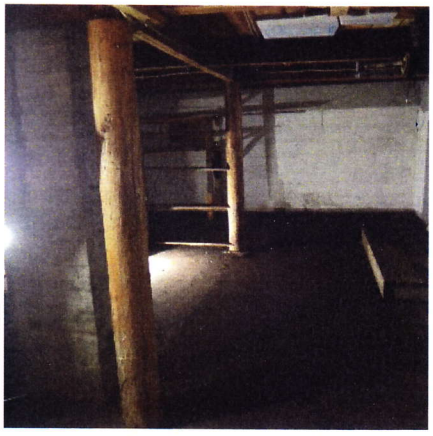
Given the location of the house, its exposure to the elements, the materials used in the construction and its age, the house is in reasonably good condition overall. Much of the visible damage is due to the weathering of the cladding materials. The foundation cracks do need to be assessed to determine if the foundation is still moving or if this is an old but stable situation.

Like any heritage property the house will require some intervention to repair the damage and upgrade it to the required codes. This can be accomplished while maintaining the overall character of the house as defined in the August 2016 Statement of Significance.

Photographs

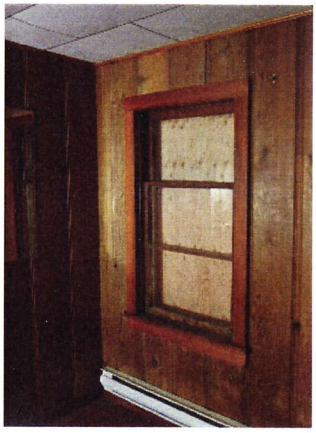


The cracks in the foundation. Inside south wall, exterior north wall



Basement with log posts and platform for washer and dryer.

The front room.



Window and panelling

Upper floor

West wall with shingles, board and batten showing the gable repair

Shingles on the east wall showing weather damage

Water stains on the ceiling tiles and exposed insulation batts

High concrete foundation

Some rot in the front porch

The house overlooking the bay