

Mr. J. A. Boulter
Correspondence Secretary
Mack Laing Heritage Society
of the Comox Valley

April 8, 2022

Dear Mr. Boulter,

I am surprised and saddened to hear of the inappropriate actions on the part of the Town of Comox in contravention of the requirements and intent of the H. M. Laing Trust regarding his former home, "Shakesides."

Mack Laing was a preeminent naturalist and ornithologist of his time, with far-reaching impact across Canada and, indeed, North America. Here in Manitoba, his early notebooks and writings on the bird and mammal life of the prairies during the early part of the 20th century, when significant portions of wild grasslands remained, are invaluable in interpreting and understanding the ecology of that period. Here at the Manitoba Museum, we have in our archives a series of Mr. Laing's detailed diaries from 1901 to 1915 that have been invaluable in recreating habitats in exhibits and examining distributions of now-rare prairie species. In addition, our collections hold over 30 bird specimens collected by Mr. Laing from the mid-1920s that continue to provide important research materials. There are extensive Manitoban and western Canada holdings of Laing specimens at the Canadian Museum of Nature (over 2500 birds and over 2500 mammals) and, internationally, at the Smithsonian Institution (over 300 birds and several mammals); these have also been used to study prairie ecology. Many of these collections provide important voucher specimens documenting the occurrence of endangered species, often from locations that have now been designated as Important Bird Areas.

In light of Mr. Laing's contributions to natural history, it is important to honour his Trust and maintain "Shakesides" for its original intent. The Comox Valley is located in a wonderful natural setting, with the nearby K'ómoks Important Bird Area delimiting some of the most significant waterfowl wintering grounds on the west coast. It would seem only right and fitting to retain the Laing house for its intended purpose of nature education and as an inspiration for environmental protection.

All best wishes in your efforts to preserve this valuable heritage site.

Sincerely,



Dr. Randall D. Mooi
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