

January 24, 2022

Mr. Jim Boulter  
MLHS Correspondence Secretary

Dear Mr. Boulter:

I am submitting a brief letter, as an ornithologist and historian of natural history, to provide a few recently highlighted examples of the importance of Hamilton Mack Laing's contributions to natural history, in this case in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Several authors have compiled and chronicled Laing's extensive contributions, beginning as a rural school teacher in Manitoba, which leave little doubt of the importance of his early work. This is entirely appropriate because we should not forget the contributions of early naturalists and, indeed, over his long life, Laing's were far-reaching and profound. His legacy should be promoted, not destroyed.

My contribution to this are derived from my recent consideration of some of Laing's contributions while researching the development of Charles Guignet's career as a naturalist in Saskatchewan (second attachment), his early work as a field assistant with Canadian Museum personnel in the Cypress Hills, Saskatchewan (third), and most recently I focused entirely on Laing and his collection and observations of Whooping Cranes in southwestern Manitoba (fourth). Laing is a giant of a collector/naturalist/hunter/chronicler of nature, which one concludes from reading Mackie's biography of him.

Although there was no formal connection between Laing and my institution, the University of Manitoba, and apparently none of his papers are archived there, my interest took me to the archives at the Manitoba Museum, which appropriately houses some of his important papers, as his early field observations were made in Manitoba. I studied these extensively while researching the crane article. The wealth of information contained in his field notes, reveals a degree of diligence in the recording of everything he saw and did, which is seldom duplicated during the current, and different era of fieldwork. These notes are only a minute part of the record of his vast work, however, in that the bulk of his holdings is held in the Royal B.C. Museum Archives in Victoria. The latter provided an additional source of information during the crane research. Conducting this research reminded me that Laing's contributions continue to be relevant and should continue to be highlighted and brought to the public's attention. That one continues to consult his early contributions reveals an important legacy.

One of the most important ways in which Laing contributed to natural history was in his associations with myriad other naturalists and professionals in the wildlife field on the Canadian Prairies and particularly on the west coast, where he soon settled. Accounts are numerous of the assistance he provided others in the field. Because his field observations and elegantly written articles span so many decades, the observations provide baseline descriptions of the fauna and landscapes that have been drastically altered by humans and ensuing climate change. At age 96, Laing (*Blue Jay* 38:96-114, 1980) provided notes on selected species of birds whose changing populations and distributions he had experienced over many decades in Manitoba. These reminiscences were from memory, but his notebooks back them up.

I think the most important point that I can make is that anything that reminds us, the general public, of Hamilton Mack Laing's life and contributions should be cherished, not destroyed.

Yours truly,

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