

## ALEXANDER MACKAY and MACKAY ESTATES LIMITED

Alexander Mackay was born in Scotland on January 8, 1856, the second son of George and Maggie Mackay. He married Edith Helen Burns of Nova Scotia in 1890. The Mackays had four children, one son and three daughters: Robert Ferrier Burns Mackay, Edith Margaret Mackay, Eva Mackay, and Dorothy Mackay. The family resided in Scotland.

Mr. Mackay was invested in, and served on the Board of Directors for several businesses in the United States, including the Matador Land and Cattle Company in Texas, the Dundee-Arizona Copper Company, the Belmont Copper Mining Company and the Queen Creek Copper Company, all located in Arizona, and the Mackay Irons Company with offices in New York City and Dundee, Scotland.

Because of his business affairs, Alexander Mackay traveled extensively in the United States. Around 1915, during his travels, he became acquainted with Mr. J. M. Critchlow, a resident of Lake Alfred, Florida. Mr. Critchlow had business interests in the citrus industry, and suggested to Mr. Mackay a piece of property in Lake Alfred that would be a suitable citrus investment.

In August of 1915, Alexander Mackay purchased approximately 128 acres of land for \$21,000, which were lots 2 and 3 of Section 4, Township 28, Range 26, located in Lake Alfred. This land is situated on Lake Rochelle, and is a portion of what is now Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve. He purchased this land from W M Moore of Wichita, Kansas. Mr. Mackay continued to purchase more land in the Lake Alfred area, including adjacent land to the original 128 acres.

The land that Mr. Mackay purchased in 1915 was already planted with young citrus trees, not yet producing fruit. Upon the recommendation of Mr. Critchlow, Mr. J. C. Cox was employed to maintain the grove until Mr. Mackay was able to secure his own person to handle the property.

Mr. Mackay hired John Morley, a botanist from York, England to oversee his property in Lake Alfred. He secured passage for Mr. Morley, his wife and two daughters on the *Baltic* to sail from Liverpool, England to New York City on March 1, 1916.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Morley also had two sons who were both serving in World War I at the time, as was Mr. Mackay's son R. F. B. Mackay. Mr. Critchlow arranged for the rental of a cottage for the Morley family upon their arrival in Lake Alfred.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Morley's salary was to be \$125 per month.

John Morley and his family arrived in Lake Alfred by train from New York on March 18, 1916.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Mackay had arranged for a bank account to be set up at the Snell National Bank in Winter Haven to handle the expenses of the property.<sup>4</sup> There was no bank in Lake Alfred at the time. Mr. Mackay felt that it would be useful to Mr. Morley to have an automobile in order to avoid having to take the train whenever he needed to make the trip to Winter Haven and other cities. Mr. Morley did not know how to drive, so Mr. Mackay paid for driving lessons, and purchased a Studebaker for him in May of 1916.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mackay Estates Limited Records, Box 2, Folder 3, Pages 2 - 3

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Box 2, Folder 3, Pages 11 - 13

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Volume 1, Page 26

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Box 2, Folder 3, Pages 5 - 6

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Box 2, Folder 3, Pages 38 - 39

By the time Mr. Morley arrived in Lake Alfred, Mr. Mackay had already purchased a set of plans from the Craftsman Company to build a house, or 'bungalow' on the property. Mr. Morley was to choose a site for the bungalow, and also to immediately have a tool house built, and arrange for a well and a windmill.<sup>6</sup> The plan was for the bungalow to accommodate both the Mackay family when they visited Lake Alfred, and the Morley family year round.<sup>7</sup> This would involve some alterations to the original plans for the house, and Mr. Mackay hired Mr. Fowler, the architect who had drawn the original plans, to make the revisions.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Fowler was also instructed to visit the property in Lake Alfred in order to fully grasp the changes that needed to be made. The main change was to move the roof garden from the east side of the house to the west, and to add an extension on the east side that would be the full 2-stories, and would give an extra two bedrooms and bathroom on the upper floor. This was to be the wing for the Morley family. Mr. Morley consulted with a Norwegian carpenter by the name of H. A. Wast, who lived in Lake Alfred and had been in charge of building other houses in the area. Mr. Wast was ultimately hired to oversee the building of the house. The actual construction of the house was not to begin until after the war because of difficulties in transferring large amounts of money from Europe to the United States, however it was noted that construction might begin sooner if arrangements could be made in the sale of some of Mr. Mackay's American investments.<sup>9</sup>

While waiting for construction on the bungalow to begin, other out-buildings were erected, including a garage and a pump house. Besides Mr. Cox and Mr. Wast, several other local Lake Alfred men were hired by Mr. Morley to work on the buildings and the grounds.<sup>10</sup> The names listed include F. Isherwood, A. Adams, A. Aslanian, O. Thomas, W. Shopke, F. G. Burton, A. Fromm, and others. Arrangements were made involving Mr. Mackay's American investments and construction began earlier than expected. The first payment for labor on the bungalow was paid to Mr. Wast in April 1917.<sup>11</sup> 16,000 Fistlock bricks arrived by train in May, along with windows and door frames. Construction on the main section of the bungalow was completed November 10, 1917<sup>12</sup>, and construction of the boat house began two days later. Furniture for the bungalow had been ordered from New York and arrived on November 26<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Mackay, his brother John, and a Mr. and Mrs. Lidgeshound along with their daughter arrived for a visit on the 27<sup>th</sup>. On Thanksgiving Day, November 29<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Mackay and his visitors, along with the Morley Family officially took up residence in the new bungalow. The first meal served was Thanksgiving luncheon. Work on the extension on the east side of the bungalow began in January 1918.<sup>13</sup>

Additional buildings and structures were added to the Mackay properties at various times. In early 1918, a terrace wall was built<sup>14</sup> and cement paths were poured south and east of the bungalow.<sup>15</sup> The lodge, what we refer to now as the caretaker's house, was built in 1920.<sup>16</sup> The concrete bridge over the canal was completed in 1926, as well as a brick retaining wall on the south side of the tennis court.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, Mr. Mackay instructed Mr. Morley to inform him of any land that became available for purchase that would be suitable for citrus groves. As a result several other parcels of land in and around Lake Alfred were

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<sup>6</sup> Mackay Estates Limited Records, Box 2, Folder 3, Pages 22 - 30

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, Box 2, Folder 3, Page 1

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Box 2, Folder 3, Page 106

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, Box 2, Folder 3, Pages 46 - 51

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, Box 14, Folder 1, Page 7

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Box 14, Folder 1, Page 21

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, Box 2, Folder 1, Page 48

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, Volume 1, Page 121

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, Box 2, Folder 1, Page 56

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, Box 2, Folder 1 Page 61

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, Volume 1, Page 12

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, Box 2, Folder 10, Pages 65 - 66

purchased, and various types of citrus trees were planted. Mr. Morley also experimented with avocado trees. Eventual income from the groves was expected to cover the expenses that had been incurred in the planting and maintaining of the groves. The first year that the groves produced appears to be in 1920.<sup>18</sup>

Mr. Morley was also involved in planting vegetables for experimentation for the Bureau of Plant Industry, a division of the United States Department of Agriculture.<sup>19</sup> This division was headed by David Fairchild. There is a direct reference to David Fairchild in a letter dated June 7, 1923 from John Morley to Mr. Peter Bisset of the Bureau of Plant Industry: "When Mr. Fairchild or yourself are in the South, just drop a telegram as there is always room and food for you at our place."<sup>20</sup>

Mr. Mackay was extremely supportive of Lake Alfred, and was very interested in seeing it grow and prosper. He was one of the original investors in the Lake Alfred State Bank in 1920, which was Lake Alfred's first official bank. There was also a \$5000 check written to the Lake Alfred Packing House in early in 1921.<sup>21</sup> Mrs. Mackay was a member of the Lake Alfred Woman's Club, and Mr. Mackay donated money towards the beautification of the grounds around the Woman's Club building.

Alexander Mackay died May 23, 1936 at his home in Glencruitten, Oban, Scotland. All of Mr. Mackay's business interests were turned over to his son, Robert Ferrier Burns Mackay. Correspondence concerning Mackay Estates continued between John Morley and R. F. B. Mackay until around 1939 when the outgoing correspondence from Lake Alfred was coming from Jack Morley, John Morley's son. John Morley apparently had retired at this point, and he passed away in 1944. Alexander's son, Robert Ferrier Burns Mackay died at his home in Scotland on February 22, 1940, less than four years after his father's death, from a gunshot wound to the head. There was no investigation into his death, and it was assumed by his business associates that his death was a suicide.<sup>22</sup> Grace Mackay, widow of R. F. B., took over the business interests after her husband's death. In a document titled Corporation Account – Certification to Resolution of Board of Directors and dated December 11, 1970, the following people are listed as members of the board of Mackay Estates, Ltd, located in Lake Alfred: Mrs. Grace Mackay, President; Rosemary A. Mackay James, Vice-President; Susanah Mackay James Pringle, Vice-President; Chancellor I Hannon, Secretary and Treasurer.<sup>23</sup> Grace Mackay died on June 2, 1972 in Glencruitten, Oban, Scotland, and her heirs were left to carry on the business.

## **OTHER SOURCES:**

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<sup>18</sup> Mackay Estates Limited Records, Box 2, Folder 7, Page 15

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, Volume 1, Page 57

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, Box 3, Folder 4, Pages 36 - 37

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, Box 2, Folder 1, Page 8

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, Box 4, Folder 3, Page 21

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, Box 10, Folder 1, Page 47

*Dundee Evening Telegraph*, May 25, 1936

1881 Scotland Census, Angus County, Monifieth Parish, George Mackay – Head of Household

1901 Scotland Census, Angus County, Monifieth Parish, Alexander Mackay – Head of Household

*Dundee Courier*, October 16, 1933

*Syracuse Herald*, May 24, 1936

*Brisbee Daily Review*, November 30, 1919

*The Mining Journal*, June 30, 1936

*Dundee Courier*, December 20, 1933

*Haines City Herald*, March 13, 1920

Lake Alfred Woman's Club Minute Book, 1927 – 1930

Tampa Tribune, June 4, 1972