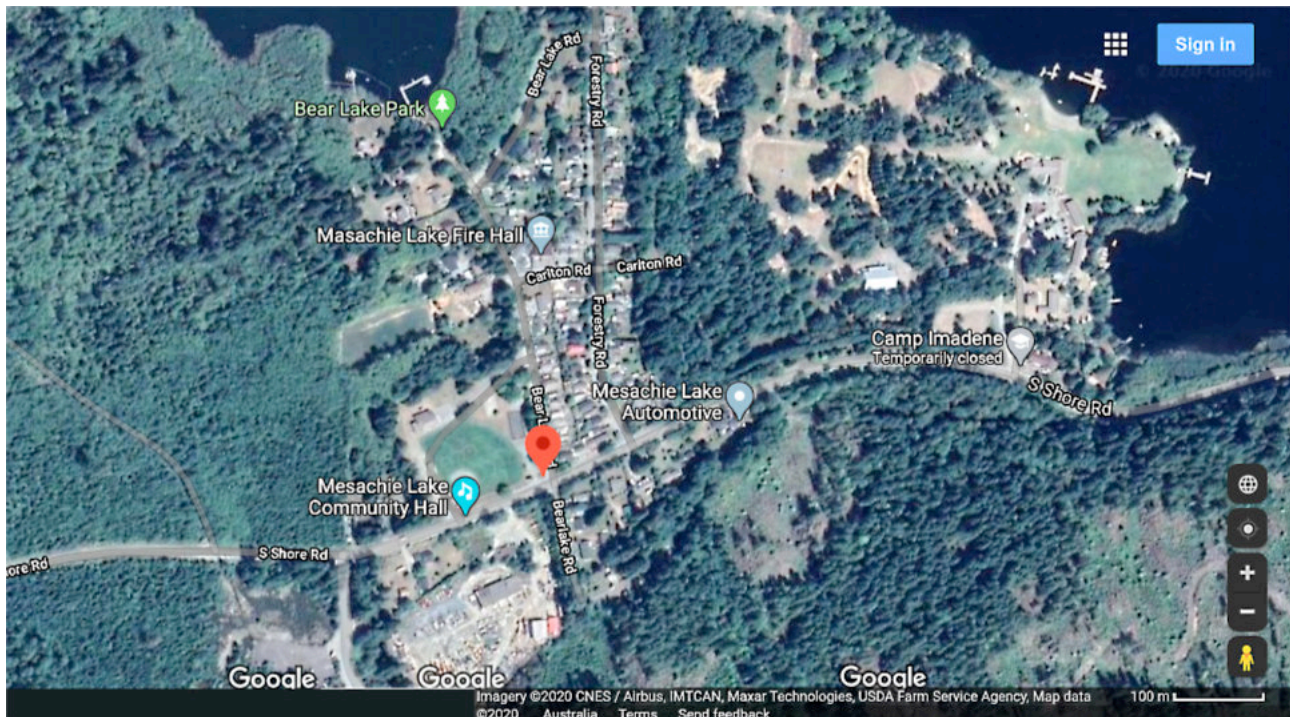


Mesachie Lake: A Brief History



Camp Imadene (above right) is the site of the former Hillcrest Lumber Mill. Photos of the mill with the log dump pond in the foreground were taken from further to the right along S Shore Road.

Mesachie Lake owes its existence to Carlton Stone who created the town to house the workers of his new mill in 1942.

Carlton Stone was born in 1877 in England, immigrating to Canada in 1908 and moving to Vancouver Island in 1910. He built a small steam powered mill near Fairbridge, developing a unique method of moving the logs. Horses were used to pull empty rail cars up to the logging operation and then, by use of a hand brake, the loaded cars coasted downhill to the sawmill. In 1917 he moved the operation to Sahtlam, which gave him access to railway transportation (E&N) and a world wide market. At this time the company was incorporated as Hillcrest Lumber Company. He designed a gas powered form of truck to be used on the rails, instead of the steam locomotive. Within 10 years he was one of the largest companies on Vancouver Island, cutting 45 million feet and employing 225 men in the mill and 100 in the woods. Over time the timber ran out and Carlton was forced to move.

After some amount of searching he decided on the site of Mesachie Lake. This area having been logged off in pioneer times had a substantial second growth forest on it. The acreage had to have room, not only for the mill, cookhouses and logging equipment, but also for a community with houses, church, hall, playing field and school. Over 100 acres were cleaned of new growth and old stumps, levelled and surveyed. Streets were laid out, water mains and sewers put in and power installations built.

The mill plan was completely new in design and allowed for roominess and efficiency. Some of the old machinery was to be used, but new and up-to-date machinery was installed.

In the spring of 1942 the great trek began. The power house was completed and the generators were installed, houses were cut into sections, transported and re-assembled on their designated lots. The mill at Sahtlam finally stopped, machinery was moved and put into its pre-determined place. The first sawn lumber came from the mill in August of 1943.

The power house was able to produce enough power not only for the mill and the community but on occasion supplied the Village of Lake Cowichan when its own plant was over loaded or broken down.

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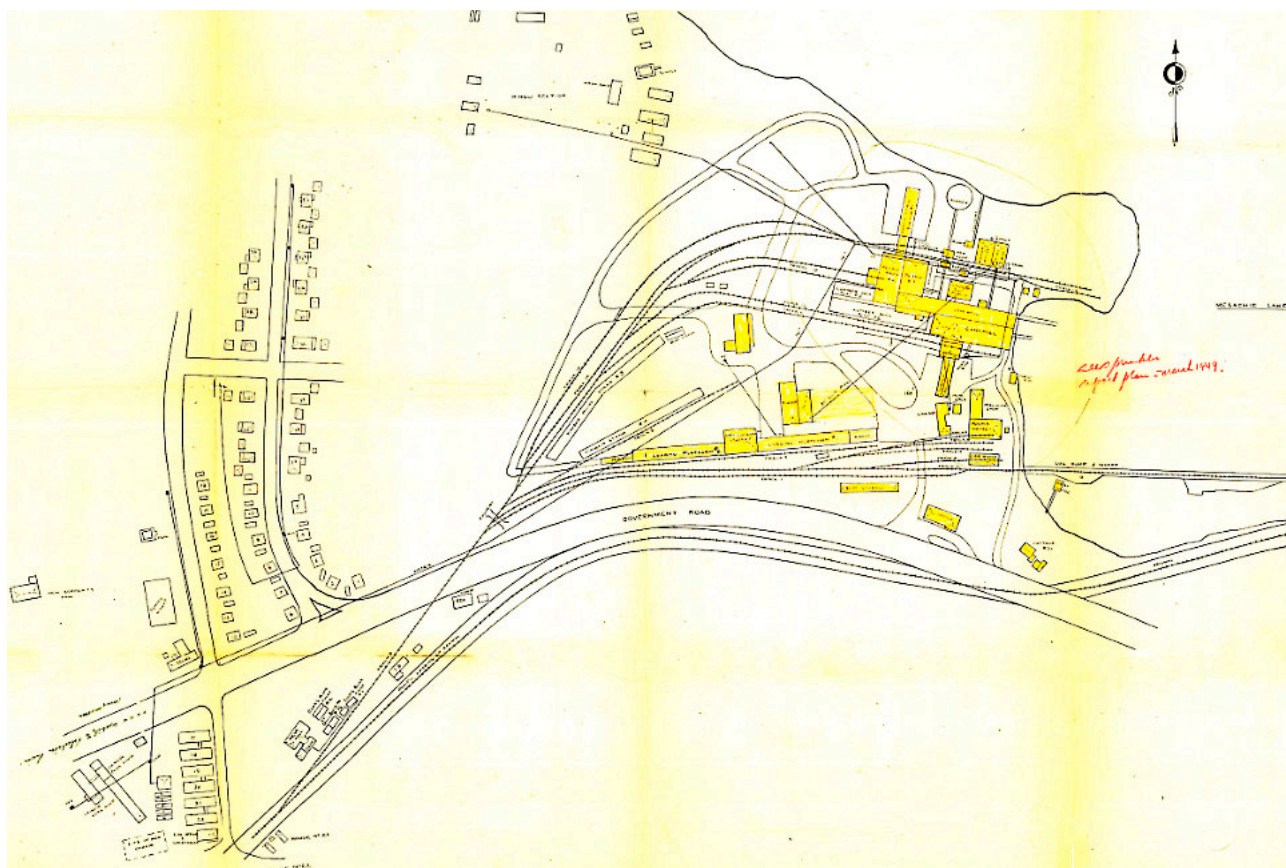
Hillcrest Lumber Company was referred to as a "family operation". Apart from the fact that the members of the family became involved in its operation as they grew older, the relations between the management and employees was always exceptional. A large number of employees had a long record of service to Hillcrest. Mr. Stone was primarily responsible for the building of the hundred houses in Lake Cowichan financed by the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation in the late 40s. He was very involved in St. Peter's Church in Duncan and gave generously to Queen Margaret's Chapel as well as St. Christopher's in Mesachie. Carlton Stone died on October 10, 1950, one day before his 73rd birthday. Mrs. Stone died on July 27, 1959.

Mr. & Mrs. Stone had six children. Hector served as the president and general manager, Gordon was mill manager, Peter was assistant manager, Paul was superintendent of mechanical affairs and Norman was the gang mill night manager. Auriol, the only daughter, married Ted Robertson, son of one of the early pioneers.

Some sixty families lived in the community. The houses were almost all company owned and rented to employees. The last six houses on the east side of the main road (called Forestry Road at the time) and three houses on Bear Lake Road south of the church were privately built. The company took care of maintenance of streets, houses, hall and church; also rentals of the hall and church. There was a water system, both chlorinated and fluoridated, and a sewage system that served the whole village.

The mill continued operating until August 6, 1968 when because of a dwindling timber supply it closed. Approximately 50 men were laid off reducing the mill employees to 200. The gang mill and barker mill were to be phased out by mid September and then after a clean-up the mill would shut down. The mill itself was destroyed in a fire in 1970.

Despite doom and gloom reports that Mesachie Lake village would disappear, the spirit that Carlton Stone brought to it has remained in the residents today and the community continues to thrive.



Site Plan – Hillcrest Lumber Co at Mesachie Lake, Vancouver Island.