

Skills Carried Across the Pacific

Wakayama Charcoal Traditions in British Columbia

For thousands of years, Salt Spring Island has been home to the Hul'q'umi'num' and SENĆOŦEN-speaking Coast Salish peoples, who steward its forests, shorelines, and waters as part of a living cultural landscape.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Indigenous people and settlers, including Japanese immigrants, were engaged in the Fraser River fishery. Strong demand for cordwood and charcoal from salmon canneries created off-season work for Japanese fishermen. They travelled to nearby Gulf Islands for logging, woodcutting, and charcoal production, some settling there. Fishermen from Wakayama, a region renowned for high-quality charcoal, applied their knowledge of kiln building to produce charcoal in their new environment.

The Tasaka Family & Charcoal Kilns

In this park, you will find the remains of two charcoal pit kilns built by Isaburo Tasaka. After moving to Salt Spring in 1905, he and his family lived in Ganges village until 1929. Tasaka fished and operated a salted salmon business in Steveston during the salmon season, and made charcoal in the winter months. Tasaka shipped his charcoal off-island to soap factories and canneries, while also supplying charcoal to local blacksmith W. A. McAfee, the owner of what is now parkland.



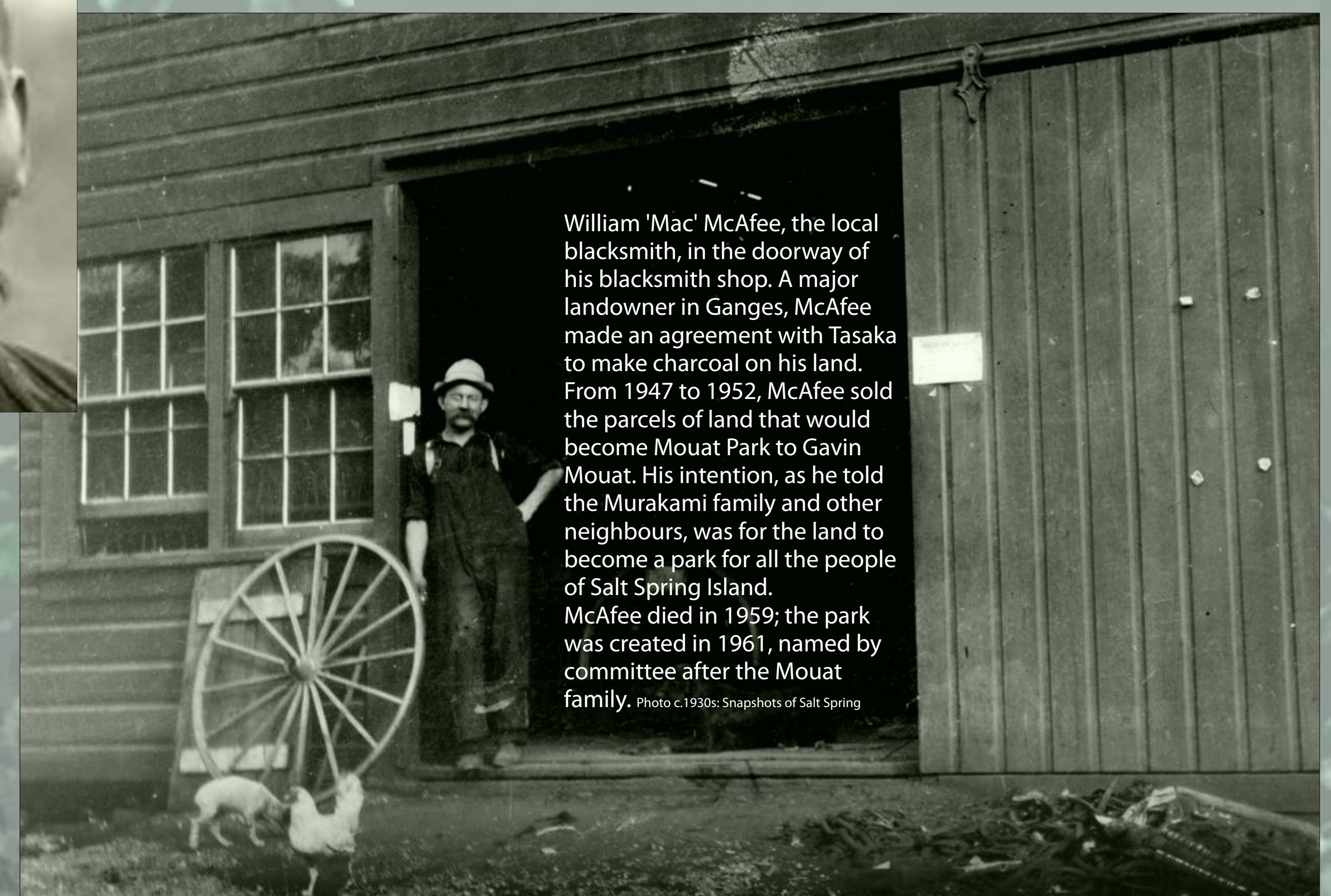
Isaburo Tasaka



Table-top charcoal stove with the soldering iron. The same style as is visible in the cannery photo below.
Photo: Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society Archives



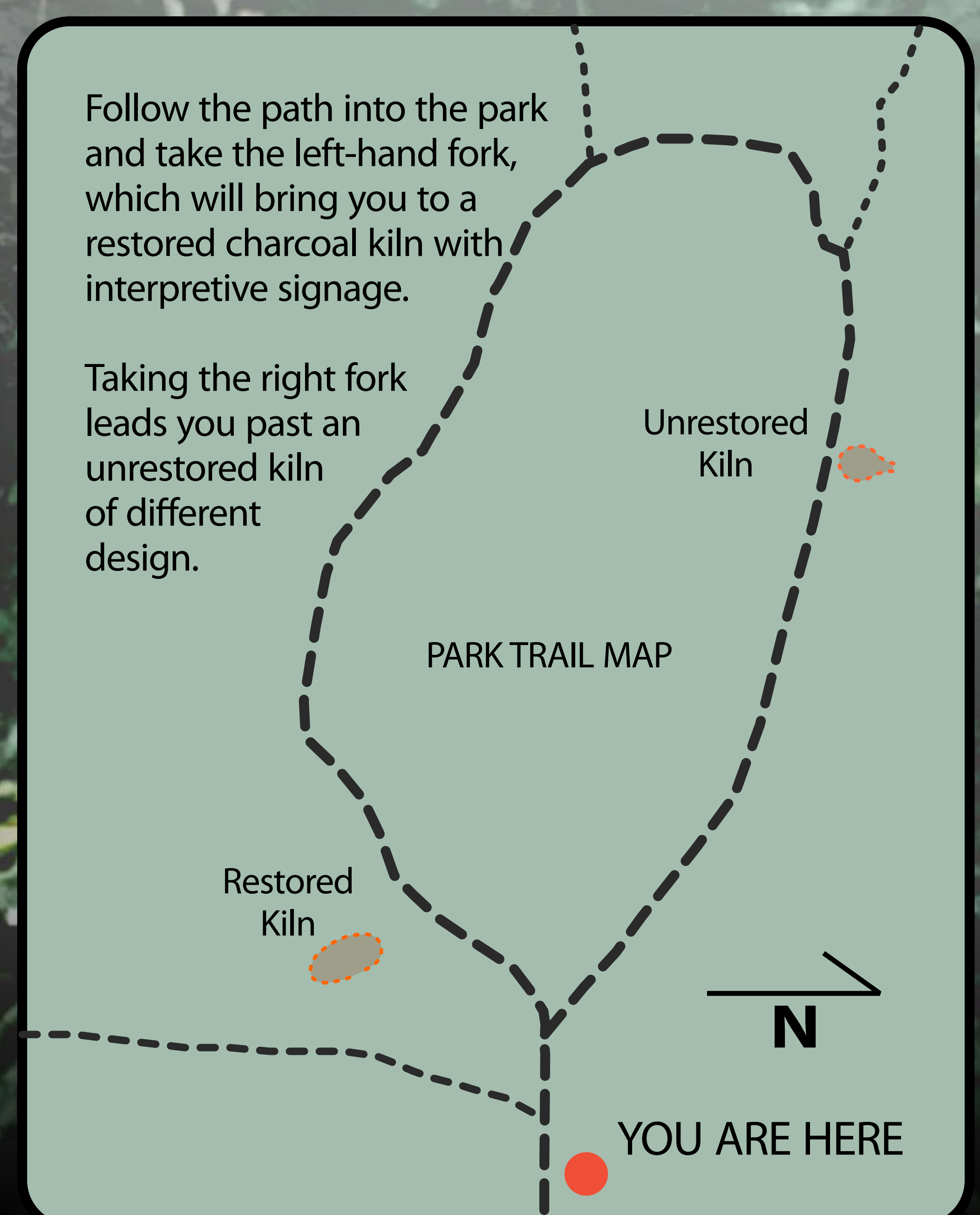
The Imperial Cannery in Steveston, circa 1913. Charcoal was burned in small tabletop stoves to heat soldering irons for sealing the steam vents on the tops of the cans after they were boiled. About 150 bushels of charcoal were needed for every 1,000 cases of salmon. A single firing of a kiln could yield about 60 dollars worth of charcoal, a considerable amount of money in the early 1900s.
Photo: Royal BC Museum and Archives E-02999



William 'Mac' McAfee, the local blacksmith, in the doorway of his blacksmith shop. A major landowner in Ganges, McAfee made an agreement with Tasaka to make charcoal on his land. From 1947 to 1952, McAfee sold the parcels of land that would become Mouat Park to Gavin Mouat. His intention, as he told the Murakami family and other neighbours, was for the land to become a park for all the people of Salt Spring Island. McAfee died in 1959; the park was created in 1961, named by committee after the Mouat family. Photo ©1930s: Snapshots of Salt Spring



Charcoal pit kiln shed in Japan. Immigrants from Wakayama brought this knowledge to British Columbia; the Mouat Park kilns would have had similar protective roofs.



These interpretive panels commemorate and keep alive the legacy of the Japanese Canadian pioneers of the Southern Gulf Islands, located on the unceded traditional homelands of the SENĆOŦEN and Hul'q'umi'num' speaking Coast Salish Peoples.

A collaborative project of the Japanese Garden Society of Salt Spring Island, the Galiano Club and the Mayne Island Lions Club, produced in conjunction with the book, *Island Forest Embers - The Japanese Canadian Charcoal Kilns of the Southern Gulf Islands*. With support from BC | Canada 150: Celebrating BC Communities and their Contributions to Canada Fund, the SSI Parks and Recreation Commission, the National Association of Japanese Canadians and the aforementioned groups.

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