

History Detectives . . .

Did you ever watch the TV show “History Detectives”? It generally involved some relatively simple question about some celebrity’s ancestor(s), then escalated into a world-traveling multi-stop multi-museum investigation that few normal people could afford. But it was always fun to see the unexpected places in which critical clues turned up!

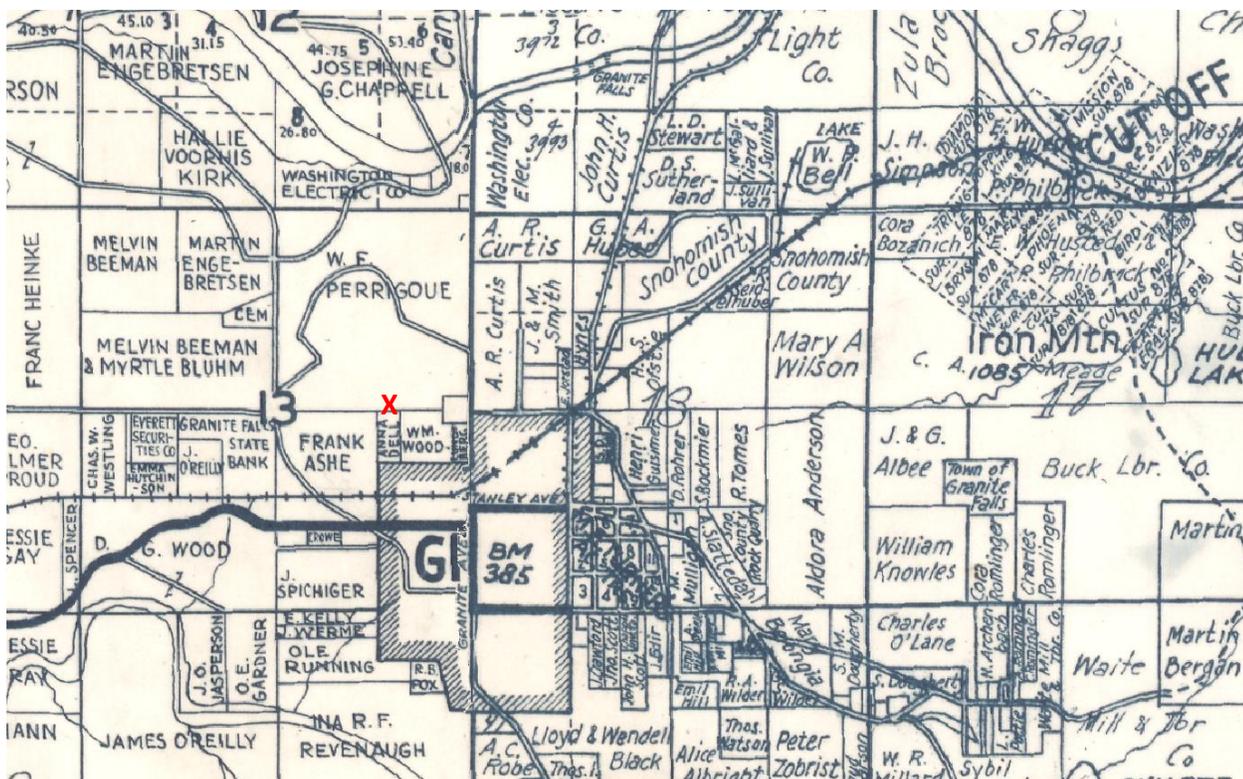
Well, over the holidays a lady left a message on the Granite Falls Historical Museum phone, saying she was visiting from California, but was in town just briefly and not able to visit the museum while it was open. She was hoping to find the property on which her Mom grew up in the 1940s, but she had never been to Granite Falls before. Her Mom’s maiden name was “Jean Roach”, and her Granddad’s name was “Dan Roach”.

Not being able to resist playing detective, we decided to use our newspapers and old maps as the primary tools in trying to find the exact spot. Examining our maps from 1934, 1940, and 1952 seemed to span an adequate period in which we might find the family name on a piece of property. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful – no property near Granite Falls was marked “Roach” – and parcels in town were small enough in those days that they weren’t labeled with owner names.

So, we attempted an electronic search of our newspapers. There were many mentions of Mr. and Mrs. Dan Roach (mostly social column entries), and an even greater number making references to Dan, John, and Rita Roach – but only one mentioning Jean Roach. None of the articles gave any clue about where they lived, until in one “for sale” ad, Dan Roach offered some livestock for sale, and mentioned he was located on the “old Dell place”.

FOR SALE: Two cows; one coming fresh in one week, 4th calf; other cow coming fresh in March, 2nd calf. Also two heifers; one 15 months old, the other one year old. Dan Roach, on old Dell place. 16p2t

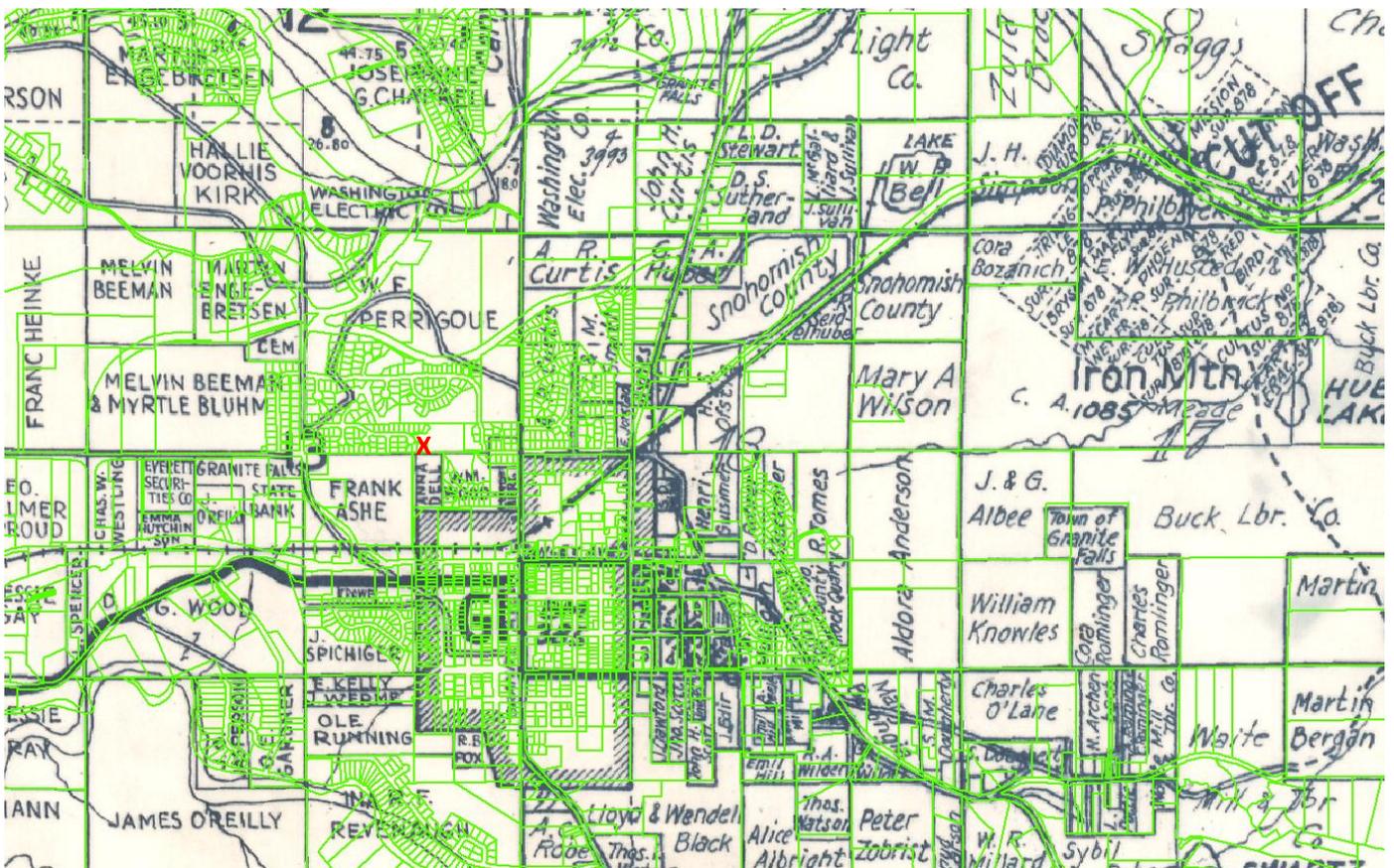
Feb 6, 1947 ad indicates “old Dell place”. So, looking at earlier maps, the only property in the area marked Dell was on the northwest corner of the city. It was about 5 ½ acres and shown in the 1934 map below, just below the red “X”. It belonged for many years to Anna Dell.



Now that we had found a name on the map, we could also check other vintages of maps (1940, 1952, etc.) They all showed that the Dell property was the very first parcel outside the city limits (hence marked with the owner's name) on the northwest side of town. It was about five acres, a couple hundred feet north of Stanley St, with a long narrow piece reaching out almost to Stanley St. It seemed like we'd found the property, but we wanted an independent confirmation, if possible, since the Roach name didn't show on any of the maps (maybe they leased the property, rather than owning it?).

A phone call to a long-time resident uncovered the fact that a mutual friend and museum member was a classmate of John Roach, so an email was sent asking if he remembered where his old friend John Roach lived while they were in school. His immediate response said, "Sure, he lived on a piece of property up on the hill north of Stanley St., across from where McDonalds is located today. They had five or six acres, with a long narrow driveway coming out to Stanley St, east of where the espresso stand is today."

It was fun to send the evidence, along with the expert witness testimony to the lady in California – and she got a big kick out of some of the news articles involving her aunts and uncles, as well as the high school yearbook pages that described her Mom, salutatorian of the Granite Falls High School Class of 1946. We were also able to send a 1948 newspaper article, written by her Mom, published in 1948, called "History of Granite Falls".



The same map can be overlaid with modern parcel lines (shown in light green). You'll notice that while most properties have been subdivided significantly, that particular piece is still intact.

Today, that property is inside the city limits. We can zoom in on it to see it more closely. You can see the long narrow extension reaching southward as far as the old railroad bed.



The “old Dell” property is the 5+ acre parcel in the upper center of the image below, outlined in red. While it’s treed today, it could well have been pasture land sixty years ago.

