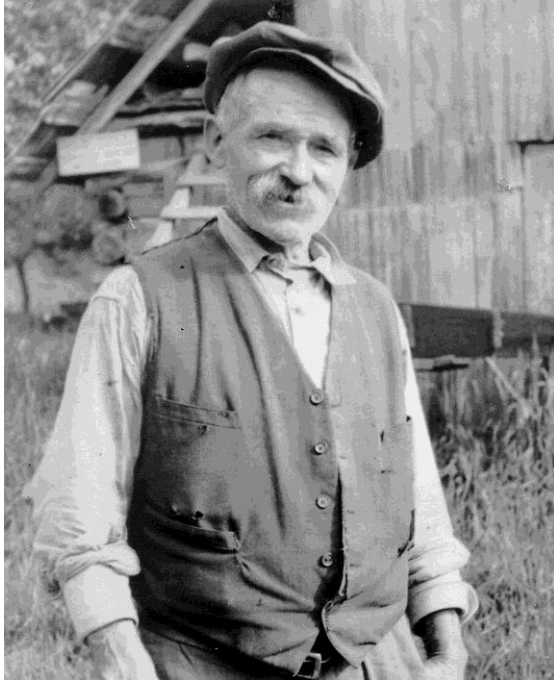


Roesiger Diaries – Part 1



Summer is coming and at some point, Summer means swimming in a Northwest lake. Lake Roesiger is one of the prettiest lakes in this region, easily accessible, and for decades has been a popular swimming, fishing, and boating “destination”. Today, a County park provides public access. In years past, several “resorts” operated on the lake shores. But the lake, and the man after whom it was named, bear a long interesting history that has been remarkably preserved through the years. Elsie Sorgenfrei, a life-long area resident and activist, preserved the handwritten diaries of Richard Roesiger, and recently donated them to the Granite Falls Historical Society for permanent preservation, that the information contained therein could be made available to a wider audience.

Richard Roesiger, ca 1940

Over the next few weeks, we’ll publish some of the summaries of Roesiger’s diaries, in which he kept details of daily life from the early 1890s to the mid-1920s. He mentions neighbors and local residents by name, explaining in detail their relationships, business and personal. He tells of the pioneer life in Snohomish County, of working to survive, of building a home for his family, and of many of the tumultuous financial and political times.

Richard discovered an un-surveyed lake, deep in the heart of Snohomish County, when he was prospecting in the area. He ultimately staked a homestead on its shore, and there made his home. While he originally chose to name it Chain Lake, the name that permanently stuck was “Lake Roesiger”. Having been born and raised in Germany, Dick nonetheless wrote his diaries in English! The following synopsis was provided by Elsie Sorgenfrei.

Roesiger’s fifth full year in the area was 1894, and his first 1894 diary entry was a report of a New Years Day party: “Went to Mauls. Played cards, dancing, singing, and eating. No music.” Mauls were a canoe-trip across the lake to the west shore.

In February, Dick was learning how to doctor the two sick horses traded to him in payment of a loan to his neighbor “CH”. His diary read: “(Jenny) is a 9 year old mare with sore feet. (Prince) is a 6 year old horse. Confound CH, Prince has the heaves. Trouble, trouble – always trouble” moaned Dick for many days. He was not well prepared to care for two horses so he lent them to neighbors in exchange for their food and shelter.

Dick’s weather tracking for the year showed early snowfalls and lake freezing weather into April. He wrote in May: “Everything drowned. My spring is like a river. This is a terrible wet Spring.”

He continued to slash, burn, and clear his claim. Again he planted a large vegetable garden including eight varieties of potatoes to see which did best. Potatoes were his basic table food as well as his chief “cash crop” which he bartered, gave away, or peddled to friends, neighbors, and to several nearby logging camps – Menzels by Granite Falls, and Bucks on Woods Creek.

Dick added 34 more apple trees to his orchard, working off their cost at the Snohomish Nursery. Sweet and hard cider were to become another “cash crop” for him.

In June, lack of money was Dick’s concern when he wrote: “Was lucky to get off without a doctor”, when he was able to get a local mid-wife for the June 23 birth of his first child. Luckily he also had a horse at that time: “Saddled Jenny in a hurry and made her fly over the ground. Rode to Kuehls. Mrs took a long time to get ready and brought her own baby along. WE WERE IN TIME.” His son was named Bruno, after a 15th century monk who was put to death for his belief that the world was neither flat nor the center of the universe: a free thinker of his time. Dick called himself a free thinker of his time on political and social issues.

A day after his Aug 16 birthday, Dick confided in his diary: “Went home without a single penny in my pocket; not in the house or anywhere – for the first time in my life since boyhood - - - and yet, people think that I am well-fixed - - - that I have a lot of money.”

Dick was active in the Populist Party declaring in November: “By Thunder, we’ll show those Reps and Demos that the woods are full of Populists.” The Populists did poorly in the election, “It is a Waterloo for the Populist Party in our country.” [It’s interesting to note that Roesiger’s biography in the 1926 “ “ described him as a staunch Republican.]

He ended his 1894 diary with a report of a Christmas Day party: “Went to Klemz and Thomases. Marsh was there. Had dinner and supper. Smoked and talked. Earlier Dick had written: “I feel downhearted as no money.” But he was able . . . “to buy a horn for Bruno, 8 yards of flannel and a pair of felt slippers for the wife” as Christmas gifts.

Look for additional Roesiger experiences as we extract information and incorporate the Roesiger diaries into the Granite Falls Museum collection.