

Roesiger Diaries – Part 2

Richard “Dick” Roesiger discovered Lake Roesiger while exploring for coal on behalf of the company for whom he worked. His handwritten diaries were donated to the Granite Falls Historical Society by Elsie Sorgenfrei, to whom they had been given after being discovered in a California storage unit a dozen years ago. Last time, we offered a one-year (1894) glimpse into Dick’s lifestyle and the birth of his first son, after having been settled at the lake for a few years. This time, we offer the first half of a pre-quel . . . a summary of 1887 to mid-1891 at the Lake, graciously assembled by Mrs. Sorgenfrei.

1887 – Dick discovered his lake while on a coal prospecting trip.

1888 – He staked a claim and built a shack on the east shore of the “lower lake” (South Lk.)

1889 - His blacksmith job at the Newcastle coal mines was terminated after a bloody strike and defeat of the Knights of Labor Union. Dick decided, “Ranching . . . is a slow but sure way of getting wealth and reaping benefits for patience and hard work.” He walked 85 miles to the lake, “It is a terror to go to the outlet.”

Hans Anderson, a nearby settler, “Took up a homestead near the lake. In 1898 he sold it and bought 130 acres on the east side of the lake (South Lk).” Vol II, History of Snohomish County, 1926, Whitfield.

Idealist Dick wrote, “We are going to make Heaven on Earth out of this beautiful valley.” He was advised by a fellow settler to look for a better claim as his was too hilly and hard to clear. Dick wrote, “I am troubled about my claim – it may be the worst on the lake without the marsh.”

1890 – “This is the first time in my life I worked for no one. I have been my own boss.” 1890 was his first full year at his lake claim. It was also his tenth year away from his home in Ortrand, Germany.

Dick applied for a post office at the lake to commemorate his 10 years away from his family home and his 10 years in America. He planned to call it Ortrand, WA.

His weather report was of, “The worst winter in Washington seen – 4 inches of snow and walked around the lake. I am ice and snowbound.” He later planted 14 fruit trees to comply with Homestead Act land improvement requirements.

He sounded the lower lake (South Lk) depths, “65 ft – 43 ft – 66 ft”. (70-72 ft depths are currently recorded). Dick reported the weather as, “June and July a horror – rained all day the Fourth. I fired 10 shots in celebration.”

Fifty-one settlers met at Rudd (Machias) to discuss unsurveyed land T29N R7E. A US Official Survey had to be made before Homestead deeds could be issued. Dick was asked to draft a request for the survey at a later meeting.

Pilchuck Jack, a local Indian, claimed his canoe that Dick found and was using. Dick offered him \$2. Jack accepted offer but wanted to use the canoe that day.

1891 – Dick’s idealistic “Heaven on Earth” Common Sense Club was formed of lake settlers. He was elected Recording Secretary. The Club sponsored the first Fourth of July celebration and picnic. Dick wrote, “I was forced to give a patriotic speech. The picnic was a grand success. Bully for the CS Club!”

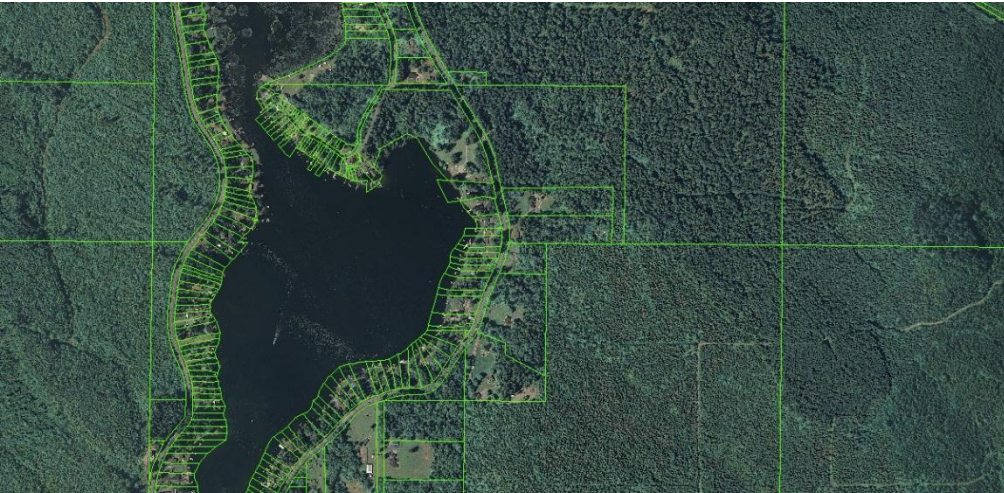
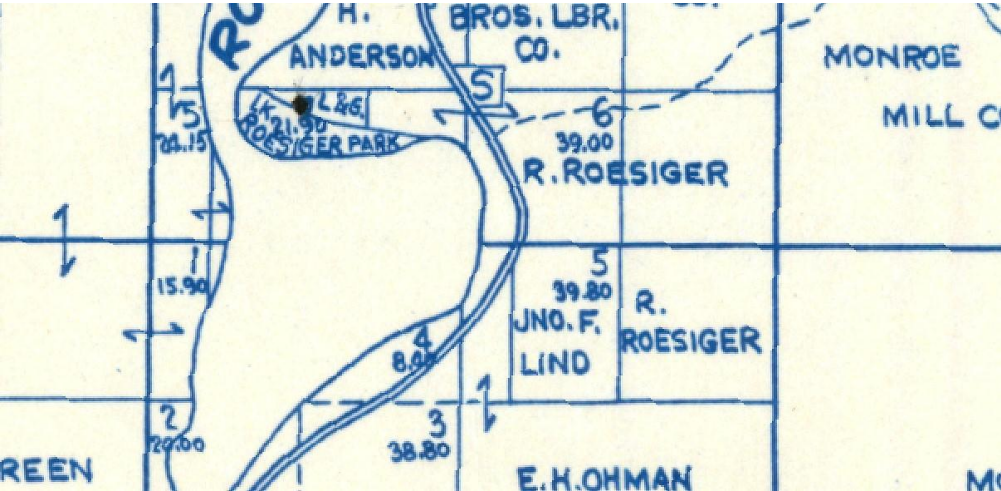
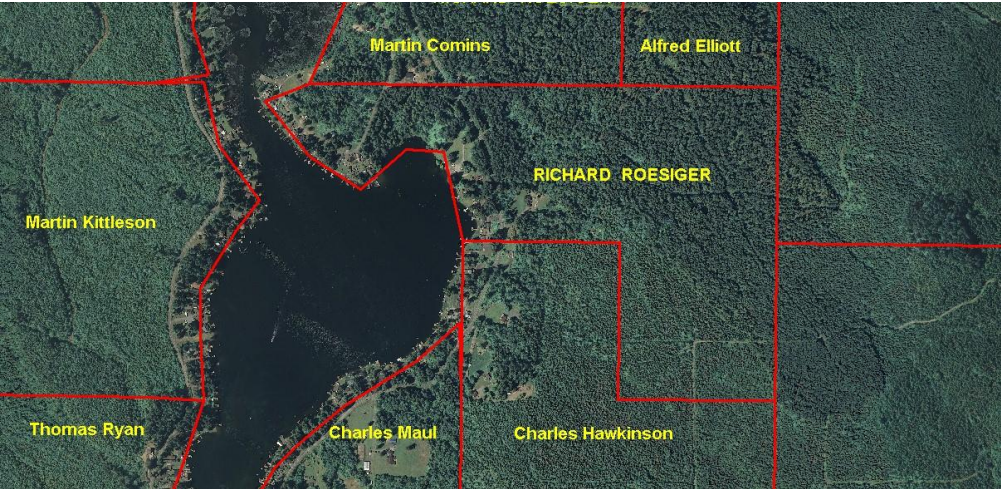
On June 18th, Dick took the Ortrand, WA Post Office oath and started an account with \$106.20 for supplies.

Lake settlers met to decide the location of a school. West lake settlers wanted it on their side, Dick wanted it on the east lake side. A fifty cent piece was tossed to decide on the issue. Dick chose heads, and won. He promised to give 1 acre of land with a spring with building materials on site. His west shore neighbors never really forgave him for winning the coin toss and getting the school house on his “upper 40” site, but they helped build the 26’ x 28’ school house. The one room school had a porch, WC, and a double-ladder fire escape. There were 12 seats and desks. Twenty-three showed up for school. Dick doesn’t tell how many stayed.

- TO BE CONTINUED

The pictures show: 1) the southern portion of Lake Roesiger along with original homestead lines, 2) the same area on a 1924, also showing the school property at the northern edge of Dick Roesiger’s property (right alongside Lake Roesiger Rd., and 3) the same area with modern property lines, showing the incredible development level along the

waterfront (but very little subdivision once away from the lake). The first school was a cedar-slab building, which was later replaced with one of conventional wood construction.



The mapping system at the Museum allows us to look through the years, from original homestead lines to modern aerial photographs. The various images can be overlaid for direct comparison! Look how little the property lines have changed over the years, once away from the lakefront!