

Vermont History

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE
VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



VOLUME XXX NUMBER 3

JULY 1962

MONTPELIER



Vermonters In Gray: The Story of Melvin Dwinell

by HAROLD A. DWINELL

MY great-uncle Melvin Dwinell fought in the Civil War and strangely enough he was the only member of the family who served as an enlisted soldier. True, grandfather Albert served several months with Colonel Pitkin of Montpelier but it was in civilian status. What gave me the urge to find out more about Uncle Melvin was that he did his fighting on the Confederate side. I say find out more about him because I suspect that the fact there was a "rebel" in the family was not easy for this staid, rock-ribbed Yankee family to take. While Uncle Melvin passed on some five years before I came into the picture there was very little talk about him in the family gatherings that I remember. In the days when the school children marched to the cemetery on Memorial Day to place flags on the graves of soldiers, I remember that a flag was always placed on his grave but there was strictly no comment about it. In our young minds it seemed that he must have been nothing less than a terrible traitor.

Melvin Dwinell was born in East Calais, Vermont, July 9, 1825, the son of Israel and Phila Dwinell,¹ in a family consisting of nine sons and one daughter. Of the sons only Melvin and Israel Edson received college educations. Albert attended Peacham Academy (Caledonia County Grammar School) for a term, taught school for a few years, and then went into business. In those days a young man leaving his home during his minority, even for schooling, had to "buy his time," that is, he had to make some kind of financial arrangement or agreement to recompense the father for the loss of services at home. We know this is true of Israel Edson and suspect that this was the case of the other boys.

1. Records of the Vital Statistics Division, office of the Secretary of State.

Melvin prepared for school at the "Academy in Montpelier"² and entered the University of Vermont in 1845. He was graduated in the Class of 1849³ obtaining a master's degree.⁴ From college Melvin entered the teaching profession and taught two years at the Peoples' Academy in Morrisville. This institution was founded in 1847 as a "poor people's Academy." The catalogue⁵ of 1849 shows Melvin Dwinell, A.B., as principal and his sister, Jane P. Dwinell, as assistant principal. The penchant of the family for education is shown by the fact that three members of the Dwinell family from Lamoille County were in attendance. The academy offered the usual classical education of that time while board, room, washing, and fuel were to be obtained for \$1.25 a week.⁶

Now follows a hiatus in the documentation of Melvin's career. It is believed that after his Morrisville service he spent at least a year in Calais.⁷ Then, in 1853, he set out for Georgia. Here he had some teaching experience but where and when is not known. That he should have written letters home seems reasonable but they have not turned up in the Dwinell family archives. The motives for his migration are not clear but Floyd County was new, having been carved out of the old Cherokee country some twenty years before. Rome, where Melvin finally settled was its county seat and there may have been some inducement to seek a fortune in this new area.⁷ Moreover, four classmates went south to take teaching positions.⁸ But we have no real evidence of his reasons for going to Georgia, no information relating to his teaching positions, and no notion as to whether he had preconceived ideas about the South.

Apparently by the end of two years of teaching he had reached the decision that he must do something different, for in 1855 he

2. The Montpelier Academy was established by legislative act of November 7, 1800. See Edward D. Andrews, "The County Grammar Schools and Academies of Vermont," *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society*, IV (1936), 160.

3. Statement of University of Vermont Alumni Record office.

4. *General Catalogue University of Vermont, 1791-1890* (Burlington, Free Press Association, 1890), 55.

5. *Catalogue of the Peoples' Academy*.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Letter to author from Mary Givens Bryan, Georgia Department of Archives and History.

8. *General Catalogue of the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College* (Burlington, Vt.), 88-90.

bought a controlling interest in a struggling weekly newspaper called the *Rome Courier*. Doubtless he left teaching in part because he saw a chance to earn a better living, but probably more because he foresaw the important part that newspapers could or would play in the issues which even then were rapidly developing. Probably he had already formed his opinion that the questions of slavery and abolition should be for the individual states to decide and he wanted a broader opportunity to fight for his beliefs and to influence others. Having anchored himself in business and especially in one so close to the thinking and opinion of the people, it is quite easy to imagine how his loyalty grew to embrace the whole southern cause. In quite short order he acquired full control of the *Courier*. Possibly he was just too aggressive for the former editors. We have all the issues of the *Courier* for the year 1855. The January 2 issue shows S. E. Coburn as editor. The January 9 issue shows S. E. Coburn and M. Dwinell as coeditors. The June 9 issue announces a dissolution of this partnership but the next issue indicates that S. C. Finley had taken Coburn's place. However as early as August the following announcement began to appear:

August 29, 1855

The interest of the undersigned in the ROME COURIER is offered for sale. Its subscription list amounts to about 700 good paying subscribers. One who desires such a location would do well to make a purchase.

Samuel C. Finley.

It is doubtful if a buyer was ever found and it is more than likely that Melvin acquired complete ownership and control soon thereafter. I suspect he became active in political affairs and issues. Immigration was a great issue and he took an active part in the American Party which was opposed to unrestricted immigration and denounced the fact that foreigners were able to come to this country and immediately get elected to office in state legislatures, or even to Congress. Abolition was already an issue and he supported the South in its bitter opposition to the Congress requiring that no slave owner could acquire land in the new states of Kansas and Nebraska. Printed in about five-point type there is enough copy to fill three or four newspapers of the same page size today.

Advertisements and lengthy testimonials of medicines and cure-

alls were spread over all of the pages. If the Federal Food and Drug authorities were as keen then in protecting the public as they are today in banning "Honegar" they would have a job on their hands. Listen to what the Great Southern Remedy or Jacobs' Cordial could do for you:⁹

- 1st- It cures worst cases of Diarrhaea
- 2nd- It cures worst forms of Dysentery
- 3rd- It cures California or Mexican Diarrhaea
- 4th- It relieves the severest colic
- 5th- It cures Cholera Morbus
- 6th- It cures Cholera Infantum
- 7th- It cures Painful Menstruation
- 8th- It relieves Pain in Back and Loins
- 9th- It counteracts Nervousness and Despondency
- 10th- It restores Irregularities
- 11th- It Dispels Gloomy and Histerical feelings
- 12th- It's a tranquilizer and Admirable Tonic

Slave advertisements were also frequently found in the 1855 issues. Many of such advertisements were by administrators settling estates.¹⁰

Time and space do not permit repeating here all the editorial comment of the issues of those pre-Civil War years. Political parties of all kinds had their following. One editorial listed the make-up of the Sixty-Fourth Congress:

Fusion and Freesoil Whigs	95
Pro slavery Whigs	6
Know Nothing Whigs	28
Freesoil Democrats	13
Know Nothing Democrats	8
Adm. Democrats	65
Independents	2
Nebraska	80
Anti Nebraska	127

As Dwinell entered the crucial year of 1860 his editorial comment is interesting to follow. Early in January he noted the econom-

9. *Rome Courier*, Jan. 9, 1855, *et. seq.*

10. For example, see "Executors Sale," *ibid.*, Jan. 16, 1855.

ic expansion of Rome. When a Virginia postmaster refused to deliver the *New York Tribune* (an abolition newspaper) the Postmaster General ruled in favor of the Virginia postmaster and the *Courier* applauded. In February he reported a nonintercourse meeting to pledge against the purchase of goods north of the Mason-Dixon Line. In March he told his readers that a strike in Lynn, Massachusetts, against poor wages had been a result of nonintercourse, while slaves had both protection and comfort. At the same time he had a running editorial battle with the editor of the *Rome Southerner* over the virtues of Stephen A. Douglas as Melvin supported the Constitutional Union idea.¹¹

By October he had embraced the generally accepted Southern point of view that Lincoln's election was the direst calamity that could befall the country and would be an inevitable prelude to the destruction of the Union. "Our constitutional rights," he said, "would be trampled and our homes destroyed, our property taken from us, or rendered worthless or even dangerous to the owner." He was not ready, however, for immediate secession early in January 1861. But when Georgia left the Union, he wrote, "Can the North conquer us? We emphatically answer NO. [We] ask the fanatics of the North, who talk of coercing us back into the Union if they hope to conquer one million of the purest and best blood of the Anglo-Saxon." In February he suggested that Rome would make an excellent capital for the confederacy. Next he denounced Lincoln's inaugural as "flimsy and hypocritical cant," and, at the fall of Fort Sumter rejoiced that the war had gloriously begun.¹² By April his enthusiasm had assumed military form and we find Melvin Dwinell a second lieutenant in the Rome Light Guards.¹³

Dwinell enlisted at Rome on May 18, 1861, for the duration of the war as a second lieutenant but he was not mustered in until June 4, at Howard's Grove near Richmond, Virginia. He was furloughed for thirty days following January 8, 1862, for sickness but was promoted to a first lieutenant February 13, 1862. On July 14, 1863, we find that he was committed to General Hospital No. 4,

11. *Ibid.*, Mar. 3, 1860.

12. *Ibid.*, Feb. 9, 1861.

13. *Ibid.*, Apr. 23, 27, May 19, 1861.

Richmond, following which he obtained another furlough. His resignation occurred on November 16, 1863.¹⁴

When Melvin Dwinell entered Confederate service he left a Mr. Savage as his representative on the paper. The *Courier* soon issued a plea for subscribers to pay their subscriptions, stating that 500 owed money.¹⁵ Shortly afterward the Burlington *Free Press* chanced upon one of Melvin's editorials carrying a proposal to raise an army of slaves to capture Lincoln. In shocked reply the *Free Press* hastened to condemn.¹⁶

And who do you think owns and edits the paper which is so elated with the thought of having Washington taken and the President of the United States "trotted out" by an army of slaves? Why it is a Vermonter—one who from infancy till grown up to man's estate breathed the pure air and drank the sweet water of the green mountains, who learned in school by lessons in Vermont's free schools and was taught philosophy and morals in our own Vermont University.

But he went south to seek his fortune and became the editor of a southern newspaper and now he slanders the land of his birth, the mother who nursed him, and teachers who taught him, by praising slavery, which he knows to be a curse, repeating slanders, about the far North which he knows to be false, and advocating treason which he knows to be a crime.

Melvin's substitute at the office hastened to his defense with a denouncement of Vermont:¹⁷

June 15, 1861

In the absence of the Editor of the *Courier* who is now in Old Virginia gallantly performing the duties of a soldier in the Southern Army we take pleasure in defending him against the above assault of the Burlington *Free Press*. We think, with the Irishman, that the fact a man's being born in a stable does not necessarily make him a horse, and equally preposterous is it to suppose because a man or boy has "breathed the pure air and drunk of the sweet waters of the Green Mountains" of Vermont, that he must of consequence become as blackhearted as the Black Republican editor of the *Free Press*. . . . Mr. Dwinell was edu-

14. "Jacket" of Melvin Dwinell, Rome Light Guards, with enclosures, RG 105, War Department Collection of Confederate Records, National Archives.

15. *Rome Courier*, May 19, 1861.

16. *Ibid.*, June 9, 1861.

17. *Ibid.*, July 13, 24, 1861.

cated at the University of Vermont before the "philosophy and morals" taught at his Alma Mater were so completely "negro-pholized" and demoralized as they are at present, and before the puritanical atmosphere of the N. E. States was so putrid with the poisonous malaria of Abolition as it is now. Having voluntarily cast his lot with the genteel Christian white people of Georgia and thoroughly studied and familiarized himself with the institution of negro slavery, he has become convinced that instead of its being a curse, it is a blessing not only to the black and white races of the South, but preeminently a blessing to the Yankees of New England who have hitherto enjoyed the monopoly of manufacturing our goods out of slave grown cotton. . . . The northern government is now perfect despotism and true Republicanism (not black) exists only in the Southern Confederacy.

Preserved are a few of the letters which he wrote home during the war and immediately after. We prize them for their frankness. One can feel the longing for family affection and reconciliation al-
beit he staunchly maintained his beliefs in the Southern cause.

In camp near Winchester, Va. July 13, 1861

Dear Parents:

It is quite a long time since I have written to you as there are exciting times it is not improbably that you are anxious to hear from me. Our company volunteered for the war and we left home on the 27 of May. The day before leaving I wrote to you and the same day sent my miniature taken in my military dress. I hope you received both. we came immediately on to Virginia stopt seven days I believe in Richmond, were mustered into service—I as 2nd Lieut.—then came to Winchester. The last 18 miles we marched between 10 A.M. and 6 O'Clock P.M.; the first real hardship we endured. I tell you there were many weary legs and sore feet that night in our regiment [the Eighth Georgia]. This was June 6th, on Sunday the 9th we took the cars for Harpers Ferry: remained at that place until Saturday the 21st and then commenced a march in this direction. We marched 12 miles the first day slept in the open air as we had done the two nights previous. The next day Sunday we marched 18 miles in the direction of Martinsburg where we expected to encounter the enemy. camped that night at Bunkersville 8 miles from Martinsburg where Gen. Patterson with 8000 or 10,000 Federal troops was reported to be encamped. The next day Monday we were drawn up in line of battle and thought a fight was certain in less than two hours, but it seems that both armies turned from each other at about the same

time. We then came to near this place where we have remained ever since except on July 2nd. we started again to meet the enemy at Martinsburg where Petterson commanded about 20,000. I cannot tell you our number but this is certain if there was any lack in numbers it was made up in "pluck". We offered them battle for four days which not being accepted we then returned. We marched to within a mile of M. where Pattersons force was, where we settled at noon on the 3rd, marched back on Sunday the 7th a distance of 18 miles. We are encamped in a beautiful grove one mile from Winchester, have good water are well fed, well clothed, lodge in good canvass tents and are in every way as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. This rough life agrees with me finely and I am getting fat at it. If not prohibited I would like to give you some statistics of military strength and preparations in our new republic. I will merely say this much which I fully believe, viz; It would be as easy for Abe Lincoln to reduce the White Mountains to the level of the ocean as to conquer these states and then it would do him quite as much good when accomplished. We are in the valley of Va. the richest farming country I have ever seen. The wheat here is just harvested and is an excellent crop. Give my love to all relatives and enquiring friends and accept my hearts warmest affections for yourselves. If I have relatives in the Federal Army please inform me.

Your aft. son—Melvin

Battle Ground near Manassas Junction July 24, 1861

Dear Parents—

On last Sunday I was in the midst of one of the hardest fought battles that has ever ocured in America—I am without a scratch or even a bullet hole in my clothes—Five of our men fell dead at my side—four were mortally wounded six or eight more severely—It seems a miracle that I escaped unharmed—the Confederate army was victorious and completely routed Lincoln's forces—We took 64 cannon of the best kind, 100 heavy baggage wagons—about 600 prisoners—We drove the enemy back some 12 or 15 miles and would have persued them to Washington but our men gave out from their exhaustion.

Your aft. son,

Melvin

Melvin might ask tolerantly about relatives in the Union Army at the time of the First Battle of Manassas but when he returned to that area a year later his letter to his parents took a sterner tone:

If I should meet any of my relatives on the battle field in Lincolns army they will there be considered as my enemies and treated as such.

upon the Confederacy because of the suffering at Andersonville will prove another failure, provided all the facts can be brought out. The Northern people generally have no idea of the extent of suffering among our own troops and all classes of citizens also, at the time the "yanks" "so-called" were dying rapidly at A. the prisoners had precisely the same kind and amount of rations as our own men in the field—neither did they receive any blankets or clothing *at the time*. The federal army *so far as they could* had destroyed *all the provisions and clothing* in our country both *public* and *private property*, and their motto was "we will *starve out* the rebellion if we cannot crush it by other means"—Andersonville is considered as healthy a locality as any place in lower Georgia and no place further north was safe from incursions of the enemy. An other thing ought to be taken into the count. The confederacy was in its death struggle at the time and there was more or less confusion in all its general plans and many details were imperfectly executed, not through malice or criminal neglect, but even became half palsied with astonishment at the prospect of utter failure to the cause in which they had perilled all.

I have said this much dear Brother, not for the sake of provoking any discussion upon the relative merits of the two sections in the late struggle but in reply to an intimation in Fathers letter and hoping to some extent to disabuse your mind of what seems to be a common error at the north—you see I have great confidence in the high toned honor of the South. In fact I believe there is not a people on the face of the Earth less disposed to meanness than these same impoverished and abolition-hater slaveholders that were.

Albert, I wish you could go through the South, *wherever your Army* went, see the destruction, hear of all the sufferings, and learn what were the *real* and *effective* means used to "crush the rebellion"—It is enough to make the blood of Angels boil. I will just cite one instance. It is 75 miles to Atlanta and between here and there there are not *ten* plantations that are not *completely devastated*. Now, don't you conclude that I am rebellious still, for I am not. I was one of the first to take the *Amnesty Oath* in this county, and I expect to *keep it in good faith*. But when I admire *monstrous iniquities* and *love Devils* I shall approve of the conduct of the Federal Army and not till then you think I have some feeling upon the subject Very likely I have—anything but a rock would have—I had about \$4,000. worth of property destroyed under circumstances that would disgrace any other than savages. But it is not that alone nor mainly that gives tune to my feeling but it is that there was *almost universally* through our own country a *wanton destruction of private property*, and

our soldiers were caused to desert on account of the suffering of their families at home than by all other causes combined. But why should I tear open these wounds and make them bleed afresh.—

While he might fulminate in his paper about Thaddeus Stevens saying, "The tears live in an onion that will be shed when he died," he showed nostalgic interest in the old farm as he inquired of his sister about the sugar season:

Dear Sister Irene—

Some weeks since I received a letter from you and ought to have answered it long ago but being busy most of the time and when not employed, either too tired or too lazy to write I have hitherto neglected this duty of affection—I was delighted with your letter—it contained so much news that was highly interesting—The scenes of my childhood are remembered with a great deal of affection by me and the changes that take place where I first realized life's joys and sorrows are by no means matter of indifference—I care today more about the schoolhouse in Moscow than I do about the capital in Washington and the general appearance of your little villa is more important to me than that of N. York City—you may know then that I am glad to hear who builds new houses or of any other changes that have taken place in the physical appearance of a place still dear to me. The social condition of any of my present or former friends is still more interesting—It would be very pleasant to believe that the bitter curses and denunciations that have been, as I think, wrongfully heaped upon me, have been recalled though I must confess that they do not hurt much so far as I have any notification—

I often think of you all up there in Vt. and try to imagine how you all look and what the scenery now is with, as I suppose, 2 or 3 feet of snow on the ground—I have not seen the ground white yet this winter nor ice thick enough for skating. I would like a good sleigh ride and a skating frolic or two but will hardly be able to get them this winter.

Have you made sugar yet? I believe it is not quite late enough in the season—about the 1st April I think is the time—I would enjoy some of the first "run" very much—Ask Albert if he remembers the old tin basin we used to use at the "biling place" with so much pleasure and satisfaction—those were *sweet* times and I have pleasant recollections of them still—wonder if he has forgotten the time the old fusee went off while he was loading it carrying off the ramrod and *almost* getting his hand—But I can think of more interesting things at the "sugaring place" than I have time to write or you would care to read.

My health is very good and my time very closely employed I have no assistance in the Editorial or financial department of my office and hence my inability to write as many letters to my friends as I would like to.

It may be that I now owe a letter to each one of my brothers—I wish you would ask them to forgive the debt and write again—I send the "Courier" to each of them and that gives them a tolerably good idea of my views and feelings "Freedom of speech and of the Press" are, it is true, nearly obsolete expressions—yet—most men of yankee shrewdness can "guess" what a person means by what he dares, even now, to say,

Give my love to all and tell them to write—I wish some of you would send me Alcander's adress, also Edson's. Write again and often to

—your afth Brother,
Melvin

In August 1867 Melvin made his first visit back to Vermont of which there is any record. Quite certainly it was the first visit since the war. We have a part of a letter which he wrote in September 1867 on his return home from this visit. The feeling of the Southern citizens even two years after the war was one of intense uncertainty and apprehension. His letter reflects his concern for the future.

September 6, 1867

Rome, Georgia

Dear Brother,

I arrived safely at home last Thursday night and found my office in as good condition as I could reasonably expect.

Business has been exceedingly dull here during my absence and people are generally very blue on account of the dark political prospect before us—negro rule seems too inevitable and only those ignorant of his nature and ability expect anything but anarchy or an exterminating war of races as the result. I seriously question whether it would not be better for the South that any man who voluntarily bore arms in the Confederate army should be hung, than to carry out the plan now proposed by Congress. This body has taken a fearful responsibility and one that may result in the early destruction of free government on this continent. The U. S. A. are very powerful but yet they cannot with impunity defy the world by their long continued and outrageous tyranny to the conquered—I verily believe that the bitterest dregs of the poisoned chalice they now present to the South will ere long be forced down their throats. I have said this much not as a southern man but as

a National Patriot. It would not be becoming in the South that has just been so badly whipped to intimate that the victor better not continue to beat and kick her surrendered opponent, from any fear for herself—but then we all know that the nations of the world are very much like the ring around a fight between two men. When one gives up and cries enough then the bystanders will not allow the victor to continue the fight

Following the 1867 visit to Vermont he made a number of trips north. With Alcander coming from New York and Israel Edson from California at the same time, the Dwinell clan usually celebrated with a family picnic. The family has always exhibited a wonderful endurance for that sort of occasion, and perhaps this sort of stamina was never better demonstrated than in August 1884. Uncle Levi's diary has the following entries:

Saturday 9th
Foster picnic
Melvin came
Tuesday 12th
Picnic at sugar house
Alcander came
Wednesday 13th
Picnic at Albert's dooryard
Thursday 14th
Went to Woodbury Pond for picnic
Saturday
Picnic in our yard.

Truly no one ever knew of a Dwinell who starved to death. This same diary carries another item which intrigues me. The entry for Thursday, August 21, 1884, reads:

"Carried Melvin to hear Grant speak." I wish Melvin's reactions could have been recorded.

Melvin enjoyed traveling and always gave the readers of the *Courier* the benefit of a full account of his travels through regular letters describing the travel experiences and the places visited. His command of the English language and his ability to write it, his keen observation and interest in people made his letters extremely readable. His most outstanding adventure was a three month's tour in Europe and the Mediterranean countries in 1876. This tour which

began on May 6 and ended on July 1 included visits to England, France, Italy, Greece, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Germany, and Switzerland. Thirty-three letters were sent back to Rome and published in the *Courier*. Because of the popular demand the letters were published in book form to which he gave the title *Common Sense Views of Foreign Lands*. In the preface Melvin writes:

The substance of most of the following letters were originally published in the Rome, Georgia, *Courier*, and now at the solicitation of many friends they are republished in more substantial form.

No high degree of literary merit is claimed for them. The main object of the author was to note down in a plain and succinct style, such objects of interest as would command the attention of any intelligent American in travelling through the countries visited.

Also included in the book are letters he wrote in 1875 during a month's tour of some of the Western states.

We have only a few letters written by Melvin during the twenty years following his first visit home after the war. Those we have reveal his interests, his enthusiasm for his home country and his affection for his family. One letter reveals that he did have a serious love affair.

Office of Rome Tri-Weekly and Weekly Courier Rome, Georgia
M. Dwinell—Prop.

July 22nd, 1873

Dear Brother,

I received a letter from you a few days since and have delayed answering hoping to be able to fix the *time* when I will start for Vt. I think now that I will be able to leave here between the 10th and 15th of Aug.—my trip will necessarily be a short one allowing me not over 10 days in Vt. I will probably go by way of Charleston and stop there a day or two—I will write you again before I start.

I may conclude to buy one or two fine horses in Vt. and would like for you to be on the lookout for them—I have a friend who wants a fine trotter and I might conclude to get one for myself—Another friend has spoken about getting a pair—I don't wish you to say anything about it further than to find where the horses can be had—*common* horses are enough here it must be fine and fast if I get any stock at all.

If you can drop me a line immediately stating about what a *pair* or *single* fast trotter—say 3 ½ minute horse—would cost—I could let my friends know and they could decide before I leave—and furnish me the

money if they conclude to purchase—and the city is perfectly healthy and the cholera has disappeared from one section.

Your afth brother, Melvin

Office of Rome Tri-Weekly and Weekly Courier— Rome, Georgia
M. Dwinell, Prop.

Aug. 6, 1873

Dear Brother,

I am compelled on account of a large trade now on hand to postpone my visit to Vt. for at least a week and it may be until 15th of Sep—

My partner and myself agreed some months since to buy 4,000 acres for an Iron Co. expecting to have all summer to do it in. Maj. Burns is now away and the trades are obliged to be closed in the next 30 days—I shall close them up as fast as I can but the owners are scattered all over the state and mails are frequently slow—my health is excellent—

Love to all

Your afth Brother, Melvin

P. S. As soon as I know when I can leave I will write again—M

Office Rome Tri-Weekly Courier
M. Dwinell, Prop

Aug. 18, 1873

Dear Brother,

My business is of such a character that at present it is impossible for me to leave home—myself and partner agreed some mts. since to purchase 4000 or 5000 acres of wood land for a furnace co. Burns has since move to Ala and left all the work on my hands—our contract has to be filled before 15th of Sep—The men who own the lands we wish to buy are scattered all over this state and the trading has to be done by writing, and I have to wait for answers—so you see it begins to be a little doubtful about my getting to Vermont this season. But I have not given it up yet—It may be that I can come after Sep. 15th.

Love to all

Your afth brother, Melvin

From Office of the Rome Tri-Weekly and Weekly Courier
M. Dwinell, Prop

Rome, Georgia

May 4, 1874

Dear Sister Irene,

Your very kind and highly prized letter of April 26 came to hand two days since—I am very glad indeed to hear that you are all well and getting along so finely—I had *no reason whatever* for not answering your other kind letter but sheer *laziness* and ought to have been well trounced

for it. However sine I begin to think about it I believe I could work up a wee bit of an excuse on the fear of having nothing of interest to communicate—you can possibly take political dissertation, or a badre [?] on finance, or the probable restoration of iron to its ante panic prices, or anything of that sort. Now if you only knew Florence Patterson and Neamp Yancey it might be of interest to know they were married last week, or if you knew Sammie Cathron and Annie Sullivan I would tell you they are to be married on the 12th, and if you only knew my little duck of a sweetheart, I could try to show you how *sour the grapes are* since she gave me the slips, how she is too light by 20 lbs. for her height, that her hair is colored like flax and then that she has just gotten little sense enought to be completely carried away with that poodle-dog, dandy jim, finesky, bandboxey, shallowfooted wretch—how I hate him—Joe Hardy—and he only a *bookkeeper* at that—Do you understand the grapes are *very sour*? So sour that I fancy my teeth are on edge just from looking at them—well I am pretty much over it now and didn't even look for a "goose pond" or any other lethian resort—and we are *glad of that . . .*

Rome, Ga. Oct. 21, 1887

Dear Brother—yours of late date is received—am glad to learn that Vt. friends are in usual health—I am just recovering from a bad cold but my health is now good. My law suit with Hidell is not yet settled though I bought in the old courier printing material. Business here is good and prospects are better but money is scarce. I have made an offer for this hotel property (\$12,000) and if it is accepted then I would like to keep that money another year—If I do not trade then I will take up the note about Nov. 20. Let me hear from you at once. President Cleveland passed through here last night and I just a glimpse of him and wife—Rome has now a better outlook than ever and I am not disposed to sell property—

Much love to all
Your aft brother—Melvin

Written only two months before his death this may have been his last message to the home folks. He died on December 27. Receiving word of his serious illness, Grandfather Albert and brother Ira left at once for Rome but arrived too late to see him alive. Following a funeral at the Methodist Church in Rome his body was brought north. A second funeral was held at the East Calais Church on January 11, 1888, and he was buried in the East Calais Cemetery beside his parents and not a half a mile from where he was born.

It was some time before Melvin's estate was settled. Grandfather Albert Dwinell was one of the executors. Then Uncle Levi Dwinell bought some of the assets. Members of the family died and the administrator of Levi's estate in 1902 found that the residual property in Rome had deteriorated or had been dissipated by friends or former associates of Melvin. Meantime the dividends from the iron foundry had begun to shrink and the annual reports of the directors showed concern about the future.

Finally the real estate was closed out at just about enough to pay taxes and commissions to the real estate broker. Two or three years prior to the outbreak of World War I the Round Mountain Coal and Iron Works ceased operation. In 1914 it was sold for \$19,000. Taxes and debts used over a third, leaving very little to be divided among the descendants of direct heirs, all of whom had passed away. It was 1918 before the estate was finally closed. We have reams of letters and records showing the effort Clarence made get the business settled.

You might be interested in what happened to the *Courier* after it was sold in 1885 to Colonel William H. Hidell, formerly private secretary to Alexander H. Stevens, Vice President of the Confederacy. The last issue of the *Courier* under that name was issued October 1, 1887. The next day it was reissued as the *Tribune of Rome*. In 1904 the *Rome Herald* was founded but it merged with the *Tribune* in 1908. The *Rome News* was established in 1918 and continued until 1923 when it merged with the *Tribune Herald* and became the *Rome News Tribune*.

Today the *Rome News Tribune* is considered one of the most influential journals in North Georgia. It owns and operates its own radio station, WLAQ.

As a last word about Melvin I will return to Rome where he spent nearly forty years of his life and read the tribute published by the *Rome News Tribune*, the successor to the *Courier*.

DEATH OF CAPTAIN DWINELL²²

In the death of Capt. M. Dwinell there drops from the daily sight of this people an old landmark of Rome. For much more than a quarter of a century, he has occupied in Rome the high and responsible position

22. Captain was apparently a courtesy title as Dwinell left the Confederate Army as a lieutenant.

of a public journalist. He was a pioneer of journalists in North Georgia, when newspapers were at a premium, and it is a genuine tribute to his ability and judgement that he should have managed with such dignity, discretion, and vigor, as make this uncertain business profitable. Capt. Dwinell is probably the only editor in the south, who has amassed a fortune out of a weekly newspaper, and during all the years of his life in Rome, his paper, the predecessor of the Tribune, was a powerful factor in the civilization and development of this great region of country. Although for several years past Capt. Dwinell had retired from active business life he still remained a notable and prominent figure in the life of this region.

The writer did not enjoy his acquaintance sufficiently to speak of those personal traits, which will be better described by those who knew him closest, but there is many a good deed of courage and kindness and devotion set down to the credit of the life which went out peacefully on yesterday. The dead man had no family. He had no ties save those he had woven in his own life, and the few tears of friends knit to him by cords of gratitude and good will.

The TRIBUNE, with the briefest acquaintance, drops this small tribute of respect and sympathy upon the open casket of a fellow journalist who bore well his part in the days of his service, and who falls on sleep with a record of a useful and successful life behind him.

Peace to his ashes.