

A TRIBUTE TO CHARLES ("Chuck") M. DWELLEY

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER OF  
THE CONCRETE HERALD  
1929 -- 1970

**By Larry Kunzler**  
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## Historical Tribute to Charles M. Dwelley

### PREFACE

Unlike all the other historical papers I have authored that deal with issues like floods, flood control, fish, dams, etc., this paper is intended to be a tribute to an extraordinary man, a giant amongst men, a historian and even a visionary. Clearly this man was one of if not the greatest communicator in the history of Skagit County. That man was Charles (“Chuck”) M. Dwelley, Editor and Publisher of the Concrete Herald, 1929 through 1970.



The Concrete Herald had its beginnings in Hamilton in 1901. In 1912 then Editor and Publisher, Hans Brattle, moved the newspaper to Concrete. Mr. Dwelley became the Editor and Publisher in 1929. (See [6/21/51 C.H.](#))

Never have I been so impressed with the writings and dedication of another Skagit County resident than I have been with Mr. Dwelley. Not only was he the editor and publisher of the Concrete Herald but he was a local activist with respect to bridge building and fishing issues in Skagit County. (See [6/28/45 C.H.](#) [8/31/61 C.H.](#)) He served on the Skagit County Planning Council as the chairman of the sub-committee on recreation. (See [11/7/46 C.H.](#)) Many occasions would find Mr. Dwelley at public hearings testifying passionately on issues he felt strongly about.

I can think of no greater tribute to Mr. Dwelley than to republish a selected few of this master wordsmith’s many editorials exactly as he wrote them. Many of his words are as appropriate today as they were first penned so many decades ago for he spoke only of “honesty and truth”.

*Larry Kunzler*





## Dwelley on Ferry Service

The Skagit River has dropped back again, but ferry service up the river has not yet been resumed on the former standard. After a few weeks of inactivity, they should make every effort possible to give those dependent upon them adequate service, but for some reason, ferries cease to run at six in the evening and do not resume until daylight. The lack of ferry service at night is being felt in Concrete as much as in up-river communities. Why can't something be done to end this inconvenience? [2/12/31 C.H.](#)

It has come to serious state of affairs when it becomes necessary to keep children from school because the county in which you live will not make safe passage for traffic across a river. The ferry system has always been bad, but the past few years has suffered even more from the total lack of interest and glaring incompetence of our duly elected commissioner—our sole “representative” in county government. Although Mr. Carr continues to pass the ferry issue off as trivial, we of the upper valley are growing angry and determined to settle once and for all this daily hazard to everyone who must cross the Skagit. We know what happens when a school bus full of children plunges into deep water. Chelan taught us that last year. We are determined that this will not happen here. The people of Sauk do not ask for a bridge, which is the only permanent solution. All they ask is a safe ferry crossing at this time. To provide this is the duty of the county commissioners and to date they have failed in their duty failed even in accepting responsibility. This is the sort of thing we of the upper Skagit must continually battle and it's time that the true facts are presented to the public. Refusal to send school children into daily danger should bring quick judgment by public opinion. [8/29/46 C.H.](#)

How long would an efficient organization go on paying \$30,000 to \$70,000 a year to maintain old equipment that could be replaced with new minimum upkeep material in a matter of five or six years at the same cost! Well, count the years they have been maintaining our antiquated ferry service at various points along the Skagit River. Then note that in a four-year plan of master-minded road and bridge construction – the bridge that would eliminate three costly ferries is relegated to the “someday” bracket. What kind of economy is this! If any group of roads in the lower valley were costing \$70,000 a year to maintain and were getting worse each year there would be something done – even if it cost every cent the prosperous third district could dig up. But let the same amount be wasted up here and you can't get the commissioners to lift an eyelid. None are so blind as those who will not see. We now must ascertain if they are also deaf. [1/15/48 C.H.](#)

The Faber ferry argument is rather an unfortunate and futile gesture that can do no one any good and do a lot of damage. No one has ever conceded that a river ferry was an ideal method of transportation. It just happens to be the cheapest and the only kind we have. It is also logical reasoning that the county engineers are not going to tempt fate by operating a scow in dangerous condition. A bit of trust in those who must live in fear of an accident on the ferry is a much better trust than that of a sticker placed on the ferry twice a year. A sticker merely says



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that on one single day the ferry appeared to one man to be in good condition. The ferry is no safer now than it was last year or will be next month. It will not be entirely safe until it is ground on the river bank for good. Not a complaint in the world can change the truth of this statement – and that is exactly where the proposition will stand until the bridge is completed. [2/9/50 C.H.](#)

### Dwelley on Impact of Floods and Natural Disasters

The flood nuisance around Hamilton the moment a bit more rain than usual comes along, is getting beyond the stage of being something to bear silently. A road straight along the railroad track should be the next improvement made in upriver roads, there being no good excuse for making traffic detour through Hamilton and thousands of reasons for building the road straight. [12/8/32 C.H.](#)

The accident that occurred Tuesday night near Burlington is the result of pure negligence on the part of officials in charge of our highway. Upper valley residents happen to be used to this sort of thing and this is the only reason no such tragic occurrences have happened in the district. Slides, rocks, places where the road has slid into the river and other hazards are left for days with only a few twigs or a small log to warn away the motorists. No detour signs are ever posted on the roads in time of flood water. No red lanterns warn night travelers of dangers ahead. Instead, the one who travels must take his life in his own hands and rely on his own ability to keep from wrecking his car. The fact that lives must be lost before an awakening is noticed does not make the picture any more maddening, it is only that investigations cannot bring back the dead. [1/31/35 C.H.](#)

Again nature has proved that in spite of the best laid plans of mice and men, she stills holds the power to make her own rules when it comes to storms and floods. Storms are one thing no one claims to control, but floods are too often dabled “impossible” after a few man-made projects are erected to end them. Last weekend proved that when a combination of weather conditions occur at the same time there is no holding back of high water. Luckily these coincidences are spaced many years apart. So we are again warned to respect the Skagit River, and to make our future plans accordingly. It is not yet captive. Every disaster has its bright side. The flood will serve as fuel for conversation in these parts for years to come. Old times of 1909 and 1921, move over! [12/1/49 C.H.](#)

The Skagit River has again served notice that it has a will of its own and can not be controlled by predictions, weather charts, previous performances or power dams. When conditions are right the Skagit will flood, and the county might just as well prepare its defenses. In the lower valley dikes again held off a major disaster. Their move will be better dikes and allowance for even higher water than has been experienced. Communities such as Hamilton may also have to look into diking projects for protection. The upper valley could well use an emergency road system out of the flood areas, something the county could do easily with a few connecting links in the Lyman-Hamilton area. Also needed is a county budget for flood emergency use and a definite working plan for handling such emergencies. The county



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engineer's stepped into the breach and did an excellent job this past week end, but their work could have been greatly simplified if they had funds to work with and rules to follow. Floods may not come often in future years that is true. But there is little reason why they can't be included in our planning and be accepted as part of the weather hazard that must be faced. [2/15/51 C.H.](#)

Disaster usually strikes swiftly, dealing its lethal blow and then departing to leave the victims wondering what happened. Nature seldom gives the kind of performance a great many people were fortunate to witness Tuesday. Before their eyes a powerful unseen force moved with deliberate menace to destroy what most of us would accept as a strong and durable bit of man's ingenuity. Streams of seemingly powdery dirt eroded in a matter of hours what it took many men a great many months to construct. Here for all to see was a slow-motion demonstration of the ravages by the elements of the puny efforts of man. No wonder a number of civilizations have vanished from the earth, leaving only buried remnants of buildings to be discovered thousands of years later. What we saw was a natural phenomena, a demonstration of the irresistible force of many little grains of sand against a firm block of rock-hard material. The monetary loss will be great in this case, yet due to the whim of timing there was no loss of lives that normally would have added to the tragedy. People who witnessed Tuesday's spectacle will talk for many years about "the day time gave the minutes in hours". [5/20/65 C.H.](#)

### Dwelley on Bridges

People of the Rockport community are petitioning the commissioners for better ferry service or those who must cross the river. The county engineer told their representatives that they should have had a bridge long ago but for war time conditions. This is not a condition that was induced by the war. The upper river has fought for bridges for many years and always there was some excuse given. Either there was not enough money or not enough people served by the ferry to warrant the expense. Enough money has been put into new ferrys, repairs and wages for ferrymen to have paid for the bridges over and over. [6/28/45 C.H.](#)

The Rockport ferry accident yesterday again brings to the front the need for bridges across the Skagit River. Perhaps it will be necessary to drown a few citizens before the county commissioners decide to do something besides dole out maintenance for a ferry system that is as antiquated as it is unhandy and dangerous. So far they have successfully used two wars as excuse for not building our needed bridges, World War I and World War II. Make sure the candidates for commissioner this fall understand that we want action before World War III. [6/6/46 C.H.](#)

The new county commissioners will take office on the 16<sup>th</sup> of this month, bringing the county two men who firmly maintain that a bridge across the Skagit near Concrete is of prime importance to the county as a whole. Ferries are rapidly becoming as costly as separate bridges and a few years of operation under present expenditures will not only mean outlay of money sufficient to provide for at least one bridge, but will mean that this money is wasted as far as the



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county is concerned. There are times when spending money means saving money. This is the case in building a bridge in the upper valley. The people of the upper Skagit have two friends to talk to in the commissioner's office this year and should lose no time in calling on them and talking the subject over. No matter how favorable they may be, the upper valley must take the initiative and request immediate action. From then on the commissioners can proceed as our elected representatives. [1/2/47 C.H.](#)

This week our editorial column is reserved for a complete and detailed report of the plans made, financing, outlined, surveys completed and other notable work done on the Skagit river bridge for the upper valley by the county commissioners who only last year were elected to office with the bridge as the number one item in their campaign pledges. The report reads as follows.

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Editor's comment: It has been a long time since we have such an unblemished record presented by men hired to serve the public as top executives. We only hope that these men choose to "stand on their record" next election. [12/11/47 C.H.](#)

Well, there is your bridge. Handed to you on a silver platter by the people of Skagit County. All you had to do to get it was work yourself into alternate states of fury and despair over a period of eighteen or twenty years before someone noticed that a bad situation wasn't getting any better that our wails in the wilderness were of some distress. It takes a lot of time to convince a few stubborn men who don't want to understand, a very short while to convince a lot of common folks. So, when you get around to watching the final steel go into place on that bridge across the Skagit river, make sure that on the inevitable plaque that goes with it's price there are no dedications to glory for the few men whose duty it was to make the plans and buy the steel. Instead, let's have a simple wording of honesty and truth – "This bridge built by the people of Skagit County." I wager folks will come for miles around to see that plaque alone, it would be so unusual. [11/4/48 C.H.](#)



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### Dwelley on Fish Operations at Baker Dam

Someone once stated the saying “poor fish.” After visiting the Baker river dam we say it ought to be revised. In order that the fish may get up the river to spawn, a regular trolley and elevator service is kept in operation carrying fish over the dam into Lake Shannon. The fish coming up the Baker are caught in a trap, lifted into water filled tanks and transported by rail and cable to the lake above the dam, and then towed a mile up the lake before being released. All this keeps a crew of men sweating in the hot sun and then they say “poor fish.” But then every fish has his day. [7/16/31 C.H.](#)

### Dwelley on Taxes

Those of you who consider that your taxes are a bit high should consider the case of the Puget Sound Power & Light company. Since 1930 their tax burden has been increased one million dollars and is now about \$10 a year for each customer. The increase is enough to allow for a 10 per cent decrease in rates, or would allow a one-third increase in all company payroll - that is, if it did not have to be paid to the state. On top of this consider that their competition, public owned plants, pay no taxes. It has been stated that the Coulee dam will sell power at 2 mills per kilowatt hour. The private company pays 2.7 mills taxes on the same amount. The “tax trust” is beginning to grind sand into the wheels of industry. [8/5/34 C.H.](#)

We wish the state government would stop trying to create the idea that taxes can be directed toward a certain segment of our economy without touching the “common taxpayer”. One such myth now being given the dead-pan, pure truth treatment is the proposed inclusion of services under the sales tax. Who will pay the \$75 million that might be raised? You and I, the common tax payer! The fact that the tax will be directed at various service groups merely means that they are to be included in that select group of unpaid tax collectors who gather the money from their customer. In the end, all taxes are paid by the person who has to buy things to live. The cost of any business operation must include the tax burden it carries. If the business cannot collect it from its customers, it will soon go broke. Taxes are as much a cost of operation as the labor and materials, the rent and the merchandise. To extend the sales tax merely adds an extra chore, and even this adds to your purchase price because it costs money to collect taxes for the state in extra bookkeeping, extra help, postage, stationery and penalty in case of error. We would appreciate it if the powers that be would for one honest moment admit that they are not the slightest bit interested how much you pay, but only in the methods used to get it away from you. [4/8/65 C.H.](#)





## Dwelley on Upriver Recreational Area

Talk of making the Baker Lake area into a huge recreational resort has now reached the planning stage. The forest service has the preliminary plotting done with provisions for a lodge on the site of the old Baker Lake fish hatchery, new camp grounds and lease property for private cabins, a ranch resort at Morovitz, development of the hot springs, a ski resort at Schreiber's and eventual development of the Mazama park area a natural ski bowl. All this is as much a part of our resources as timber or mines, and will pay dividends perpetually instead of what's being developed. Tourists are good business. [12/12/46 C.H.](#)

A bit of quiet contemplation of the approaching development of the upper valley as recreation area that will draw tourists from all parts of the country is an interesting hobby for this writer. Our thoughts run far ahead of these now just building logging roads, dams and normal developments based on commercial value. The logging roads become driveways for people who wish to see some of the country now hours away by trail. The dam provides a lake that will be the envy of the state for accessibility and rugged beauty. All that it will take is a little imagination to realize great benefits from the things we now take as a matter of livelihood. In the Baker district two things have occurred to use that seem to have slipped past the planners so far – one is the acquisition of the old Lake Shannon logging road by the county as an alternate route to Baker lake via the new Baker dam. Another is the fact that the formerly deep and cold Baker Lake, which only the hardy found suitable for swimming, will soon have many acres of comparatively shallow water that will conceivably warm up. It's shoreline is well marked and there must be a number of places where a few well-placed truck loads of sand would make fine bathing beaches. These things should not be overlooked. A public resort, the splendid opportunities for horseback trail trips, the many beautiful mountain lakes and streams, the undeveloped hot spring, winter sports all will reach a point of decision in time. Discovery of our assets by those us who live here should come first. [7/30/59 C.H.](#)

The new Baker Lake, promised to be unspoiled and even improved by the new dam, is in danger of becoming a public disgrace. We speak of the driftwood now making the water hazardous to boats and a menace to its usefulness to the public. According to the agreements, the power company is to see that no such condition is allowed to exist. So far they have had a perfunctory contract for sweeping the main debris, but since have ignored sensible suggestions of burning the drift as it please along the shores and low water periods. The lake is now high and the accumulation is at the mercy of the winds. It has been just a year since completion of the dam. We'd hate to see this beautiful lake go the way of Lake Shannon – one reason for all the pre-construction clearing and sweeping agreements. Apparently the public is going to have to get good and mad. Our suggestion is that they do it now, rather than complain periodically over a 30-year period with no results as in the lower lake. The Forest Service has not released the company from their commitments. What is occurring is just plain lack of active compliance. Besides the bad effect on visitors to the lake, condition of the water may cancel Cascade Days plans for boat races. A few well-placed letters might build the necessary fires needed to get immediate action. Delay can mean a long time grind. [7/13/61 C.H.](#)



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The eventual role of the upper Skagit seems to be that of a recreation area. At least in our time we see no huge developments in minerals, such as the crowd here in the 1890's envisioned. Someday, maybe, but not until there is a need greater than that now projected for folks with idle time on their hands. Our highway over the mountain is going to swell traffic of those who come to see. Most will want to come back again for a longer, closer look. Our potential in parks and camp grounds is a long way from fulfillment. The field of commercial food and lodging is almost untouched. Encouragement of more and better roads, development of our forest camps, and some way to interest capital in investment in tourist facilities will be the booster activity needed in the next few years. [4/30/64 C.H.](#)

### Dwelley on More Dams On The Skagit River

If the upper Skagit can stave off another "valley authority" on the Skagit River, it will only be because we were warned soon enough to start working against it. For several years now army engineers have been making surveys of possible power sites and flood control projects that could make the valley above Concrete just a series of ponds. We know that the people of the valley don't want such a thing to happen, but we know also that unless some definite and concerted action is taken to make this fact known we will one of these days find a construction crew on the river banks making ready to put an end to all the hopes and aspirations of those who live in and love this green valley of ours. Too much of the propaganda that calls for despoiling a river is from government agencies themselves whose never-ending greed fattens on more and more "projects" whether needed or not. Power needs are growing, but until present sources are developed to the utmost, no new dams are needed. If upper streams can be utilized, a Faber dam will never be needed for its avowed purpose of flood control. Take warning from the happenings in other quiet valleys. The Skagit is being lined up for sacrifice. [4/7/49 C.H.](#)

The fuss over Faber dam, we predict, will quickly subside under the light of thought and close scrutiny of the basic facts. Unfortunately it is down on paper in a government report and will be raised from the file cabinet each time someone asks for a study of the river for many years to come. We were glad there was a prompt response in the upper valley when the subject appeared in print, but we must admit we were also shocked by the number who believed that our upper valley would be of more benefit to the county under water. But, as one man put it after a quick study of the original report, "None of us knew what we were talking about." The report does not favor a dam at Faber, or Cascade, or Sauk. It merely states that the sites are there and what would be required to develop them. The findings on the latter showed none of the projects as sound investments, and most of them as huge debit items unfeasible except in dire emergency or sudden unlimited wealth. There are more sound and economical ways to end the periodic threat of floods in the lower valley. The thing is, don't relax your vigilance in warding off danger to your valley and your homes. Someone is always ready to offer someone else as a sacrifice. Until we have more voters than the lower valley, we are expendable. [2/9/61 C.H.](#)



### Dwelley on Road Building

While the proposal to build us a new road to Rockport is generally welcomed in the valley, we are not at all convinced that the rumored route on the high level back of the Rockport park is where the future highway is to be located. Our belief is that when a final main arterial is built it will follow the river on a low level that will eliminate the grades over ridges, the bridges and fill over ravines and the ballets with slides and erosion. Our idea of the perfect river road is the short piece below town which proves that the river is no longer a highway problem. Of course, the state men may know more than we do about the future of the valley – maybe the proposed Faber dam is going to flood the valley to Marblemount and force all future traffic up on the side hills. We don't like to think about this ever happening. One of the best ways we know to prevent the dam would be to have a road system that will develop the upper valley to a point where a dam would be impractical. It appears this could best be done with a highway that eliminates our long-standing hazards – Faber Hill, Rockport Hill and so on up the Skagit. We'd hate to have to spend another half century accomplishing this end. [1/17/52 C.H.](#)

### Dwelley on Sternwheelers

The last Skagit river stern-wheeler sits on a sand bar below Mount Vernon while owners ponder whether to junk it or try to salvage it for sale as a dockside eating house. It has become unprofitable to use it for freight on the river. And so another tie with the past disappears. The old paddle wheel boats can't run on our four-lane highways. [3/31/60 C.H.](#)

### Dwelley on Planning for Upper Baker Dam

Good news this week in the announcement that the upper Baker river dam has at last emerged from the tentative stage and is now on the list of things to be done – and with a definite date in mind. The final clincher, of course, will be the day contractors start work. It is a good thing that day is some months away as if there was ever a town unprepared for any sort of a boom, it is Concrete. Our growing pains are going to be very much like the ones experienced during the building of the present Baker dam when there was a tent or shack on every vacant lot, and a temporary town of boards and tar-paper on the East Concrete bench. It was a temporary affair, but somehow the “temporary” shacks seemed to remain behind as permanent residences for many years to the exclusion of any chance of rebuilding with something better. This time a little thought could go into planning for the increase in population if only by zoning out spots for trailer courts, requiring something better than shacks in the residential building areas. Just one of the problems that can face the community soon. We can't say we weren't warned. [8/18/55 C.H.](#)



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One by one the green lights are going up on the Upper Baker Dam and there is now little doubt in a any of our minds that the next three years are going to be busy ones for Concrete and the upper valley. It has been many years since Concrete had a boom in its midst and those that were here at that time can tell you that it makes a complete change in the community. A lot of folks won't like the change. A lot more will take it for an opportunity to get rich and welcome every last penny. Somewhere between the two extremes is the group that will take it as something that had to come and must be made a benefit rather than an inconvenience. This group is going to have to do the planning necessary to make these ideals hold. A lot of thinking must be done, and soon, to bring a lasting benefit to the community. Fortunately we are well equipped with mercantile stores to provide necessities of life in any amount. Our big shortage is in housing, trailer space, entertainment and recreation. Here is where Concrete needs the facilities of the community betterment program, such is now being carried on in other small towns of the state. [10/20/55 C.H.](#)

Now that the upper Baker dam is a reality, the worrisome uncertainty of the future of the valley for the next few years is over. In it's place we have the worry of being able to keep pace. The dam, itself, is just an item of the long list of new projects. It will mean increased logging, a 350,000 barrel order for the cement plant and eventual unlimited possibilities in recreation facilities on the new lake. Elsewhere in the valley the Gorge dam is yet to be completed and the Forest Service is contemplating opening a road into the rich timber above Diablo dam – such road to follow quite closely the route of the long-sought North Cross-State Highway. After many years of waiting and talk the promise of the upper Skagit valley is beginning to come true. As the pieces fall into place it will mean a complete revision of life as it has been. A great deal of the charm of our valley has been its quiet roominess. We've been discovered. The settlers are moving in. [6/14/56 C.H.](#)

### Dwelley on Money

The curse of money is a national problem. The poor are cursed by lack of it, the rich by too much of it, the government by the power of it, the world by our careless use of it. [7/13/61 C.H.](#)

It's all right to fight poverty, but unless we have smart generalship we might lose and join the enemy. [4/30/64 C.H.](#)

### Dwelley on Fishing

Along the Skagit River in these parts, there is a comic opera feud raging between the 'revenueurs' and the 'natives' over salmon fishing. Local fishermen contend that they are being discriminated against by being denied the right to catch a salmon at their door step on hook and line, while at the entrance of the river commercial fishermen catch more in a single night than all the fishermen up here would catch in a whole season. On the other hand the fisheries men feel that a salmon who has escaped the nets and the lures of down-river should be home free when



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they reach here. There is also a difference of opinion on whether or not it is legal to play a salmon on sports tackle if it is turned loose without being harmed. Big fines are sought for law-breakers over the loud protest of those who are hauled into court. The result is a break-down in respect for law on one side and sportsmen on the other. It seems to us that the situation calls for a sensible get together at a public meeting where all angles can be discussed and a compromise reached that will give local anglers some fishing and still keep the fisheries men happy. To continue the feud merely widens the gap of discontent over a bad law. And bad laws are those that can not be enforced with fairness. [8/31/61 C.H.](#)

The state Supreme Court has given the state the right to restrict Indian net fishing, reversing a previous decision that treaty rights still held. As always, past agreements have a way of becoming unworkable when carried beyond the era for which they were inscribed. More and more the theory of law is “what is good for us now.” [1/2/64 C.H.](#)

### Dwelley on The Future of Skagit County

For many years we have been an active booster for all types of development in the upper valley. New roads, new bridges, better stores, bigger industries. In these the valley has made some strides and from indications is continually growing toward that goal of the early dreamers – full development of all the various resources. Yet is all this exactly what we want? Sometimes we have our doubts. With progress comes a number of disadvantages. Roads that make it easy for us to reach a favorite fishing spot also bring a hundred other guys who have more time to fish it out. We find our scenic spots being cluttered with beer cans, our peaceful hideaways filled with sometimes unappreciative strangers. A usual leisurely way of life is being speeded up by urgency of progress. The restlessness of the pioneer is easily understandable – find, build, welcome the newcomers and then realize that what you have sought is lost through your own enthusiasm. Therein lies the charm of the phrase, “the good old days.” We liked it as it was, didn't we? And so we move along, reluctant, to that next bit of promotion. Where to from here? [7/24/52 C.H.](#)

**REST IN PEACE MR. DWELLEY, YOUR WORDS OF HONESTY AND TRUTH  
WILL LIVE FOREVER. ON THIS THANKSGIVING DAY 2005 WE GIVE  
THANKS THAT YOU SHARED SO MUCH WITH THE PEOPLE OF OUR  
VALLEY.**