

September 18, 1996

Mark Dunkelman

Dear Mark,

Thank you for the information, letter, and photograph of John M. Irvin and also for the booklet on the 154th's monument at Chancellorsville. Enclosed is the information you requested. I am sorry it took so long to respond, but I had to go to Jamestown in order to find the title, author, etc. because I lost my research notes. The article on John Irvin was found in the following reference book located at the Prendergast library:

"History of Chautauqua County New York and its People" Volume II
John P. Downs, Editor in Charge
Fenwick Y. Hedley, Editor in Chief
Published by the American Historical Society, Inc. 1921
Pages 176-178
Bar Code: 3 1880 0250630 7

I enjoyed the annual reunion very much and hope you invite me to the next one. I was disappointed that I didn't get to meet the person who brought the photo of John Irvin, however.

I am leaving for Florida this weekend (9/21), and on the way I intend to visit the 154th monuments at Gettysburg and Chancellorsville. I hope they aren't too hard to find.

I do not plan to sell the dime (ID disc) at this time, but if I do you will be at the top of my list. You mentioned how amazing it was that I found the dime on the ground and that, by coincidence, a portrait of John Irvin just happened to turn up at the reunion. Well, let me tell you that this dime has been involved in the strangest string of coincidences that I have ever experienced. I think the story behind the dime might make an interesting article.

In 1977, while serving in the Air Force, a friend and I visited his family in a small town in Virginia not far from Washington (I do not remember the name of the town nor have I been able to contact my friend). While walking through a park near this town I spotted the dime lying in loose soil on the ground and picked it up. The dime was badly tarnished and partially covered with dirt. I could see after a little cleaning that it was a very old dime and since I was an avid coin collector at the time, I was very excited by the find. Upon further cleaning it became apparent that the back of the dime had been mutilated. At that time I did not realize the historical significance of the dime, and was rather upset that someone had ruined a perfectly good coin! I tossed the dime into a jar of silver coins and forgot about it for many years.

My interest in the Civil War began a few years ago while watching the Ken Burns documentary on PBS. I began reading several books on the Civil War, mostly general in nature (Bruce Catton, Shelby Foote, etc). Earlier this year I visited a veterans museum in Madison Wisconsin. The museum contained an excellent Civil War exhibit including a computer data base containing the war record of every Wisconsin veteran ever to have served in the "War of the Rebellion." I had a very nice time looking up unknown people and reading about their regiments and the role they played in the many battles they fought in. I envied those who had ancestors who served in the war, since I had none. My ancestors came to Jamestown from Sweden during the

1890's. I recalled the dime and decided at that moment to find out who the owner was, where he was from, and what battles he fought in.

My search began by trying to find information on the 154th regiment. It did not take long to find out that the 154th was part of the Eleventh Corps, Army of the Potomac. After reading about the Eleventh Corps' role in the battles of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg I guessed that John Irvin probably lost the dime while running from battle! I still had no idea where the 154th hailed from or who John M. Irvin was.

I found out that the 154th was nicknamed the "Hardtack Regiment" while reading Brian Bennet's regimental history on Rochester's 140th NY Volunteer Infantry. He listed your book "The Hardtack Regiment" in his bibliography, but made no mention of the 154th in the text.

At the Rochester Public Library, I found a reference book which contained a very interesting 16 page regimental history of the 154th. Unfortunately the book was very old and the library would not allow me to borrow the book or photocopy any of the pages. The book is entitled "History of Cattaraugus County, NY" by Franklin Ellis (1879).

I decided to try a hi-tech approach and found a Civil War forum on America On-Line. I posted a message describing the dime and asking if anyone had information on the 154th. Someone with the screen-name "Chainshot" replied with a brief war record for John Irvin from the State Adjutant General's Report. The record stated that John Irvin enlisted at Charlotte! This was a strange coincidence, since I am from the Jamestown area and several members of my family live in the town of Charlotte. Chainshot offered to purchase the dime stating that he had a collection of Civil War ID tags.

I mentioned the dime and my quest to my brother who, coincidentally, had recently purchased 15 acres in Charlotte. After a trip to the Prendergast library in Jamestown, he phoned to let me know that he had found an article on John Irvin that included his picture. I couldn't believe it! I was even more amazed when he told me that he was driving through the Evergreen Cemetery in Sinclairville, less than 2 miles from his property, and by chance, spotted a grave marked John M. Irvin. The following weekend I went to Sinclairville and took photos of the dime resting on his grave. I have enclosed one of these Polaroids.

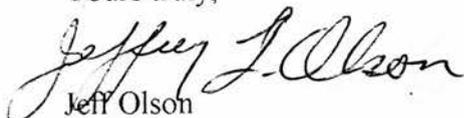
The following day I attended a Civil War battle reenactment at Mumfords, NY. At the reenactment I showed the dime to several people, including William H. Peterson of Rochester who told me that he knows you (his phone number is 716-235-7851). He was very impressed by the id disc and mentioned that he was involved with the 154th regiment.

Later that day while showing the dime to a member of the 140th regiment, I mentioned that I had read Brian Bennet's book, not realizing that he was standing right next to me. During my subsequent conversation with Mr. Bennet, I mentioned that "Chainshot" wanted to buy it. He asked me if I knew who Chainshot was, and I replied that I didn't. He told me that Chainshot was Don Troiani, a man I have admired for years for his excellent paintings!

The last and perhaps the strangest coincidence of all is that my youngest brother lives in a small town near Dalton Ga., very close to Rocky Face Ridge where John Irvin was wounded. In fact, my brother was married on top of Lookout Mountain.

That's the end of the story, for now. I hope you found it interesting, if not amusing.

Yours truly,


Jeff Olson

as flowers to the sunshine, and this is indeed an apt illustration of the manner in which strangers were impelled to make his acquaintance, which was speedily turned into the kind of friendship that does not fail. The occupation he had engaged in brought him into contact with a great many men of every class and type and acquainted him with the motives and springs of man's nature beyond the range of many, making him at once tolerant of his fellows and filling his memory with a thousand tales and episodes. In his home life he proved himself a no less loving husband and father than a true friend, a good neighbor, and a model citizen, and when he died he left to his children and their children the priceless heritage of an untarnished name.

Esther Hilton, wife of David Hilton, died June 6, 1910, after a useful and beautiful life. Of a sunny and happy disposition, she was loved by all who knew her.

ADOLF FREDERICK JOHNSON—One of the prominent younger attorneys of Jamestown, Chautauqua county, N. Y., where he has an office in the Wellman building, was born in the town of Ellicott, Chautauqua county, Aug. 20, 1882, and is a son of Nels P. and Sofia (Hoglund) Johnson, the latter deceased, the former having been a farmer for many years and now living in retirement. Adolf Frederick Johnson attended as a child the local district school and later the high school at Falconer, N. Y., from which he was graduated in 1902, and there he was prepared for college. He then matriculated at Augustana College, where he took the usual academic course and was graduated with the class of 1906, with the degree of A. B. He had by that time determined upon the profession of law, and accordingly entered the law school in connection with the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Mich. He did not complete his long studies at that institution, however, but entered the Albany Law School of the Union University, from which he was graduated with the degree of LL. B. with the class of 1912. He was shortly afterwards admitted to the bar and began practice in the same year at Jamestown.

In 1913 Mr. Johnson removed to Rochester, N. Y., where he continued to practice his profession for about twelve months and then, in 1914, returned to Jamestown and became a member of the present firm of Jude, Blackman & Johnson. This firm is one of the best known and most successful in the city and now does a very extensive legal business throughout this region. Mr. Johnson is also active in other aspects of the city's life. He is a director of the American National Bank, secretary and treasurer of the International Flag Company, and is a member of a number of prominent organizations, including Mount Tabor Lodge, Independent Order of Odd Fellows, the New York Club, the Norden Club, the Swedish Brotherhood, Jamestown Chapter of the American Scandinavian Brotherhood, and the State Night Club.

pastimes and thus takes his recreation. Mr. Johnson has one brother, Victor C. Johnson, who carries on a successful mercantile business at Jamestown, and two sisters, as follows: Olive, who became the wife of Sidney Sprague; Anna, who became the wife of A. Peterson, and Emily, who became the wife of Frank G. Grundin, of Falconer, N. Y.

JOHN M. IRVIN, one of the leading residents of Sinclairville, Chautauqua county, N. Y., is one of the worthy men of Chautauqua county. Of honor and War service, he has since been a useful citizen, producer, independent and responsible, and a worker of definite achievements. He was a farmer for twenty-five years; after which he retired from such laborious work and became a merchant. His record of public service includes eight years as coroner of Chautauqua county, eight years as sheriff of the county, fifteen years as superintendent of Evergreen Cemetery, Sinclairville, and village president, highway commissioner and lecturer. In all, his life has been full of varied activities, and his place in the current history of Chautauqua county has been definitely earned; indeed, his place would have been earned by his name alone in the time of the country's greatest need, during the Civil War, and it has also been earned by his active public life.

John M. Irvin was born in Warrensville, Pa., Dec. 18, 1842, the son of John and Mary (Johnson) Irvin. He is of Irish descent, his father, John Irvin, having been born in County Donegal, Ireland, where he came to manhood and married Mary Johnson. They were the parents of five children at the time John M. Irvin brought his family to America. The passage was made in either 1840 or 1841, and under conditions that would in these days of comfortable traveling be considered impossible; they crossed in a sailing vessel and the passage took six weeks. The chief danger to them was not the sea, but the undermining of health in such congested quarters. Often in those days a passenger ship arriving at American ports reported the death during the voyage of forty or fifty per cent. of the passengers, from smallpox, or what is now termed ship fever, but what is now known to be typhus, caused by unsanitary conditions. One of the five children of John and Mary (Johnson) Irvin died at Lockport, N. Y., while on their way to Chautauqua county, Pa., and the parents were fortunate in getting to their journey's end with four of their children, as conditions of sea travel were in those days it was only the courageous or venturesome who would cross the ocean in desperate need, who would cross the ocean. However, John and Mary (Johnson) Irvin, with their five children, landed safely upon the shore eventually, and soon John Irvin had a family in a comfortable home in Warrensville, Pa., and of existence from his

John M. Irvin
Co. F 154 NYV

