

The Cleveland Civil War Round-Table
P.O. Box 18900, Cleveland, Ohio 44118

THE CHARGER

Vol. 19#2

354th Meeting

October, 1997

Tonight's Topic

Lincoln, A friend of the Family

Abraham Lincoln during his new Salem days, was a good friend of Bennett and Elizabeth Abell. Their relatives included Mentor Graham, Lincoln's tutor, and Mary Owens, who turned down his marriage proposal.



Tonight's Speaker

Dale Thomas

Dale is a graduate of Kent State University (BS) and Case Western Reserve University (MA in History); and post graduate work at John Carroll University. Dale currently teaches history at Bay High and does curriculum consulting work for the Western Reserve Historical Society. Dale is a member in good standing of the Cleveland CWRT.

Date: October 8, 1997

Place: The Hermit Club

**Time: Drinks 6 PM
Dinner 7 PM**

**Reservations: Please call
JAC Business Communications
at 861-5588.**

RESERVATIONS ARE A MUST

THE CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUND-TABLE 1957 - 1997



President: **John Moore**
Vice President: **Dick Crews**
Secretary: **Bob Boyda**
Treasurer: **Peter Holman**

Editor of the **THE CHARGER**
Dick Crews
3673 Traver Rd.
Shaker Heights, Ohio 44122
(216) 752-9961 (800) 800-8310

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The Cleveland Civil War Round-Table meets normally on the second Wednesday of each month from September through May. The Round-Table also sponsors a Fall field trip each year to a selected Civil War site.
Dues are \$35.00 per year.
Membership information call Dick Crews (216) 752-9961 or (800) 800-8310

Past Cleveland C.W.R.T. Presidents

1997	Den Zeiser	1977	James Chapman
1996	John Butula	1976	Milton Holmes
1995	Norton London	1975	Thomas Gretter
1994	Robert E. Battisti	1974	Nolan Heidelbaugh
1993	Kevin Callahan	1973	Arthur Jordan
1992	Bob Baucher	1972	Bernard Drews
1991	Joe Tirpak	1971	Kenneth Callahan
1990	Ken Callahan Jr.	1970	Frank Schuhle
1989	Neil Glaser	1969	Donald Heckeman
1988	Martin Graham	1968	Frank Moran
1987	George Vourlojanis	1967	William Schlesinger
1986	Tim Beatty	1966	Donald Hamill
1985	Brian Kowell	1965	Lester L. Swift
1984	Neil Evans	1964	Guy DiCarlo, Jr.
1983	William Victory	1963	Paul Guenther
1982	John Harkness	1962	Edward Downer
1981	Thomas Goechke	1961	Charles Clarke
1980	Charles Spiegle	1960	Howard Preston
1979	William Bates	1959	John Cullen, Jr.
1978	Richard McCree	1958	George Farr, Jr.
		1957	Kenneth Grant

Calendar of Events

October 8, 1997

LINCOLN, A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY

DALE THOMAS

NOVEMBER 12, 1997

THE IRISH BRIGADE

STEVEN J. WRIGHT

DECEMBER 10, 1997

BEDFORD FORREST

BOB BOYDA

JANUARY 14, 1998

THE GREAT DEBATE

"THE THREE MAJOR CAUSES OF THE CIVIL WAR"

FEBRUARY 11, 1998

LINCOLN

ROBERT E. BATTISTI

MARCH 11, 1998

JOHN BUFORD

BOB BAUCHER

APRIL 8, 1998

THE LAST NAVAL DUEL

WILLIAM F. B. VODREY

MAY 13, 1998

FORT SUMTER

DAVID R. RUTH

Mathew Brady covers the War.



*You don't have to suffer.
General Sherman.*

Reservations are a must ! Call (216) 861- 5588.

SILK & GUNS

The Story of the Spencer Rifle

by Dick Crews*

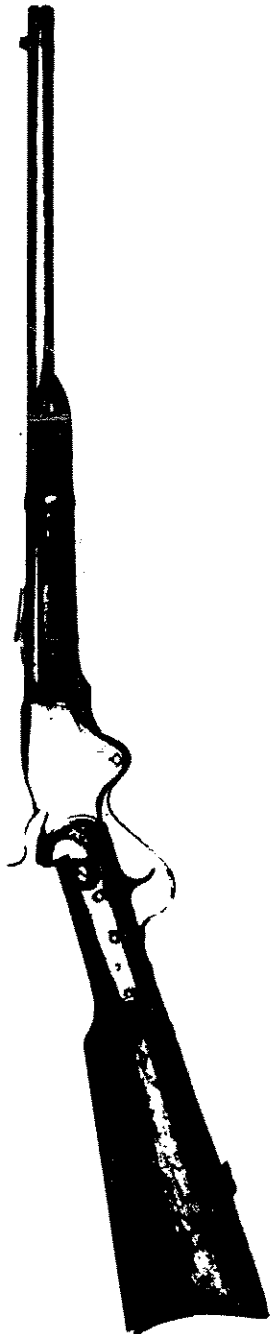
No other weapon in the American Civil War gave the Union Army firepower superiority except the Spencer repeating rifle. The confederates had cannons, pistols, and muskets comparable to the Union. Indeed much of Confederate equipment was captured or stolen from the Union Army. Then why not the Spencer Rifle? Because the South could not produce the ammunition. The Spencer used a rim fired copper jacketed .52 caliber bullet. The South did capture Spencer's but they were worthless without ammunition. This copper jacketed bullet also gave the Spencer another big advantage. In a war where armies were constantly crossing rivers, Spencer's bullets were water-proof. The Spencer had an additional advantage besides its 7 shot repeater; it could be loaded on a horse. The ammunition came in a 7 shot sleeve that could be easily inserted into the butt of the rifle. For that reason the Spencer was largely used as a Calvary weapon. Of the 106,000 Civil War Spencer's 94,000 were the short barrel carbine.

The story of the Spencer goes back to an old Connecticut silk manufacturing family, the **Cheney's**. In Manchester, Connecticut, nine miles east of Hartford, is an area designated a National Historic Landmark District. It consists of the abandon factory buildings of the Cheney silk mill, which was operated by the Cheney's from 1838 to 1955.

During the 1850s, while Frank Cheney mechanical genius and Ward Cheney's business acumen were making the silk mill a success, the events leading to the Civil War will taking place. The Cheney's were strict abolitionists.

Christopher Spencer was born in Manchester, Connecticut in 1833. He served as a machinist under Frank Cheney on and off from 1850 to 1860. He served as a machinist at the Samuel Colt Firearms works in Hartford for 18 months then returned to the Cheney's silk works. In 1859 Spencer finished development and patented his repeating rifle. More important at the time, Spencer patented a special silk spooling machine in 1860.

Spencer Carbine



*Dick Crews is a Stock Broker and Editor of The Cleveland CWRT's *The Charger*.

With the outbreak of the Civil War the Cheneys had The Sharps Arms Company help Spencer to finish his rifle. In May, 1861 the Cheney's agreed to manufacture the rifle and pay Spencer a royalty of \$1.00 for each gun produced.

The Cheneys were friends with Gideon Welles, the Naval Secretary, who obtained a naval order for 700 rifles. The Army said no. The Army had a long history of being against repeating rifles. The Cheneys, started using their power and influence. They hired a lobbyist to work Congress, sent rifles to Union officers for test, and Christopher Spencer was sent to Washington to lobby President Lincoln.

Finally by December 31, 1861, the Cheneys had received enough orders to go into production. They decided to make the rifles in Boston in a building near *The Boston Commons* (the building still stands today). In early 1862 Frank Cheney put in \$132,000 worth of equipment in what now was the Spencer Repeating Rifle Co.

The first major shipment, which cost the U.S. Government \$30.00 for each rifle, was made to The Columbus, Ohio Arsenal on January, 19, 1863. The first major action for the Spencers was in June, 1863, at Hoover's Gap near Chattanooga, Tennessee. The Confederates received such heavy fire from Union troops equipped with Spencers that they thought were outnumbered and retreated.

However the most favorable publicity came when, four days a general, George Armstrong Custer and his Spencer equipped Michigan Calvary, although heavily outnumbered, beat back J.E.B. Stuart on the third day of the battle of Gettysburg.

Some of the Union Army finest moments came using the Spencer rifle. **Franklin, Tennessee**, where six Southern generals were killed, when confederates charged across an open field against Ohio and Indiana units with Spencers. The worst confrontation for the South against the Spencer was when The Georgia State Militia, composed of old men and boys, tried to stop Sherman's *march to the sea*. The Militia with old muskets attacked Indiana units equipped with Sharps and Spencers. The Georgia Militia suffered 1,100 Casualties. The Indiana units had less than 100 casualties. **So much for bravery, welcome to modern warfare!**

After the War business dropped off for the Spencer Rifle Company. The only major orders coming from European countries. In 1867 the company was sold and in 1869 all the equipment was sold at auction. The Cheney's were delighted to get back to the silk business. The new technology of the *Henry* rifle which evolved into the *Winchester* rifle simply made the Spencer obsolete, as the Spencer had made the rifled musket obsolete. **The Spencer Rifle passed into history.**

Dick Crews



Our Cleveland Round-table symbol equipped with a Spencer Carbine.

David Herbert Donald 's

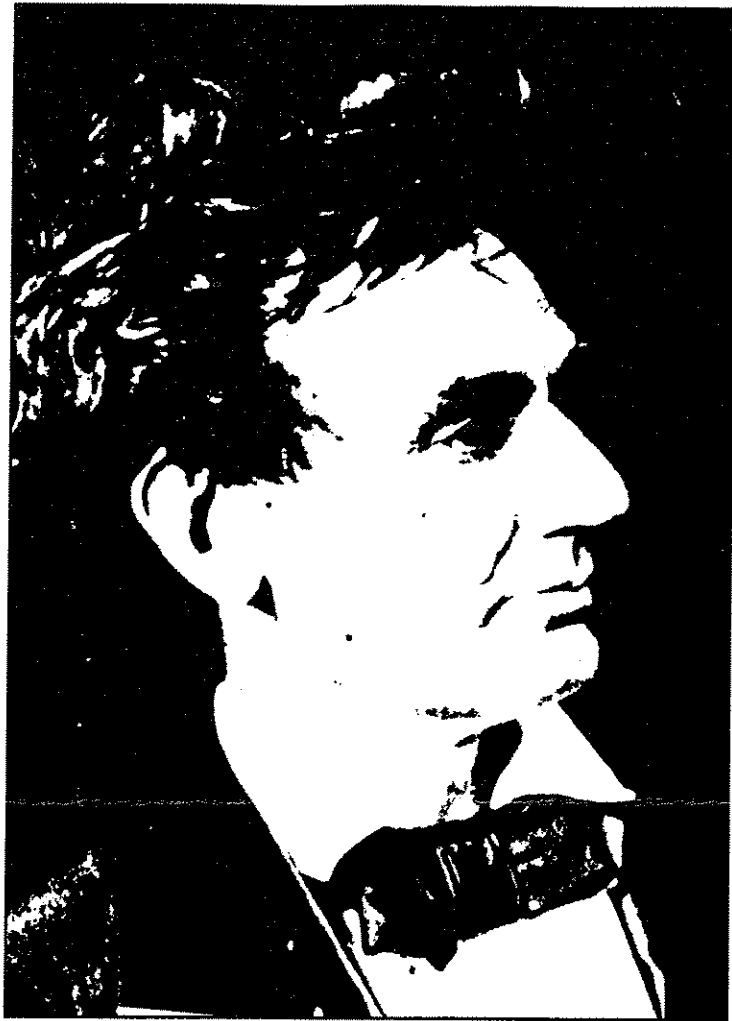
Lincoln

reviewed by William F. B. Vodrey

It's been said that Abraham Lincoln is second only to Jesus Christ as a subject of historical writing. Having spent much of his career writing about those around Lincoln, Harvard historian and two-time Pulitzer Prizewinner David herbert Donald has finally turned his attention to the 16th president himself, and we can be very glad he did.

Donald's *Lincoln* (Simon & Schuster, N.Y. 1995) must be reckoned one of the finest one-volume biographies of Abraham Lincoln, ever. Donald follows Lincoln from the day he was born, on February 12, 1809 in rural Hardin County, Ky., to his death on the early morning of April 15, 1865, in a private home across the street from Ford's 'theater in Washington, D.C. In between, we see Lincoln grow from a rough, untutored country boy ("a peasant," as a mid-1960s edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* infamously described him), to a highly successful lawyer, to a popular but crafty Illinois politician, to arguably the greatest president our nation has ever known. This is Lincoln warts and all: although Donald greatly admires the subject of his book, he shows (among other things) that Lincoln wasn't the best husband in the world, that his children were spoiled rotten, that he paid too little attention to public complaints about his suspension of habeas corpus during the Civil War, and that he too often followed public opinion rather than leading it.

This is the crux of Donald's outlook on Lincoln. Donald insists that Lincoln was essentially



William F. B. Vodrey is an assistant County prosecutor and a member of the Cleveland CWRT since 1995

passive, reacting to what other people did and rarely getting out ahead of where the public was ready to go: on secession, resupplying Fort Sumter, the Emancipation Proclamation, finding the right general for the Union armies, etc. This is not what people think of when they think of ideal "leadership" these days, by any means, but Donald prominently quotes Lincoln's April 4, 1864 letter to Albert G. Hedges, "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me."

Donald strikes a fine balance between too much detail and too little; the book moves along at a good clip but never feels rushed. There is so much in it that I enjoyed, but space only permits me to highlight a few things: the descriptions of Lincoln's early law practice (when traveling in the hinterlands, Lincoln would often have to share a bed with two or even three other men in fleabitten roadside inns); his domestic life both in Springfield and the White House (Mary Todd Lincoln comes off pretty well, in Donald's view, but it's clear that she was as much a help as a hindrance to Lincoln); the president's prickly relations with his generals, until finding U.S. Grant; Lincoln's plans for Reconstruction; and his passionate - almost mystical - devotion to the Union. The author also excels in showing a typical day for Lincoln in the White house, including what the president called his "**public opinion baths**," when he would greet and talk to just about anybody who asked to see him, for three or four hours a day. His aides fretted that he was wasting valuable time, but he insisted that he needed to hear what people had to say.

If pressed, I would have to say that my sole criticisms of the book are that it zips through the 1860 presidential campaign much too quickly (making it almost appear that Lincoln stumbled into the presidency), and that it doesn't explore how Lincoln built the Republican Party so well in so short a time. Few remember that Lincoln, by upbringing and early experience a stalwart Whig, was only the second Republican presidential candidate ever. Yet he built the party into a force that absolutely dominated national politics for more than fifty years, and remains one of the two biggest parties today.

The book reminds me very much of another one of my favorite biographies, McCullough's Truman in its very readable and balanced portrayal of a great American leader. If you haven't read Donald's Lincoln yet, I urge you to.

William F. B. Vodrey

William F. B. Vodrey is an assistant County prosecutor and a member of the Cleveland CWRT since 1995

Erie Honors one of it's own



Strong Vincent

On Labor Day , September 1, 1997, the City of Erie, Pennsylvania honored one of its own, **Strong Vincent**. One of the Union Army hero's of *Little Round Top* during the second day of the great Civil War battle, **Gettysburg**. Strong Vincent was from Erie and is buried there. There is a Strong Vincent High School in Erie.

Under a beautiful blue sky on the waterfront in Erie, with an audience of about a thousand, including three units of reenactors and an artillery unit, a full sized statue of Strong Vincent was dedicated. This culminated three years worth of work by a committee including our friends from the Erie Roundtable. Surprisingly the biggest argument was where to place the statue. Erie like Cleveland is rebuilding it's waterfront front from an industrial wasteland and that site won out. The statue is near the maritime museum and the USS Niagara. The Niagara was the flag ship of Commodore Oliver Perry the hero of the *War of 1812*.

Strong Vincent was born in Waterford, Pennsylvania(14 miles south of Erie) in June of 1837. He graduated from Harvard College in 1859. He then was admitted to the Bar and started practicing law in Erie in 1860. He enlisted in the Union Army after the firing on Fort Sumter. In September of 1861, he was made a Lieutenant Colonel of the Pennsylvania 83rd regiment. He fought at Yorktown and Hanover Court House.

He became the regimental Colonel in June of 1862. Leading the 83rd Pennsylvania at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. His glory was to come later at Gettysburg.

Rushing with the rest of the Fifth Corps. to Gettysburg on the second day of the battle, Vincent took the orders being sent by commanding General George Meade to his superiors. On his own initiative he ordered the 20th Maine, the 16th Michigan, 44th New York, and his 83rd Pennsylvania to take up positions on a little hill that had no name to the Union soldiers. He had the troops dig in below the summit. They took their positions only minutes before confederate General John Bell Hood and five rebel regiments attacked. The savage battle that followed is covered in the Book *The Killer Angels* and the movie *Gettysburg*. In a critical moment in the battle the 16th Michigan started to break. Vincent rushed in to rally the troops. He was struck down mortally wounded. The Union line held with the famous bayonet charge of Joshua Chamberlain and the 20th Maine.



Strong Vincent 1837-1863
Buried : Erie Cemetery
Erie, Pennsylvania

Strong Vincent died of his wounds on July 7, 1863 within site of the battlefield in which he fell. Commanding Union General George Meade requested and received permission from Washington to make Vincent a Brigadier General, however it's doubtful that Vincent knew about his promotion before this death.

As featured speaker Ed Bearss noted, "today's heroes are the people of Erie who made the outstanding effort to honor one of their own, **Strong Vincent.**"

Three cheers for the Erie Roundtable from your friends in Cleveland.

Dick Crews

To see the new statue of **Strong Vincent**: from Cleveland it is only 1 1/2 hours of driving up I 90 to I 79 North. Follow the signs to Bayside the statue will be on the left in front of the Erie Marine Museum and Erie County Public Library on the waterfront. About 100 yards behind the statue is the dock for the *USS Niagara*.

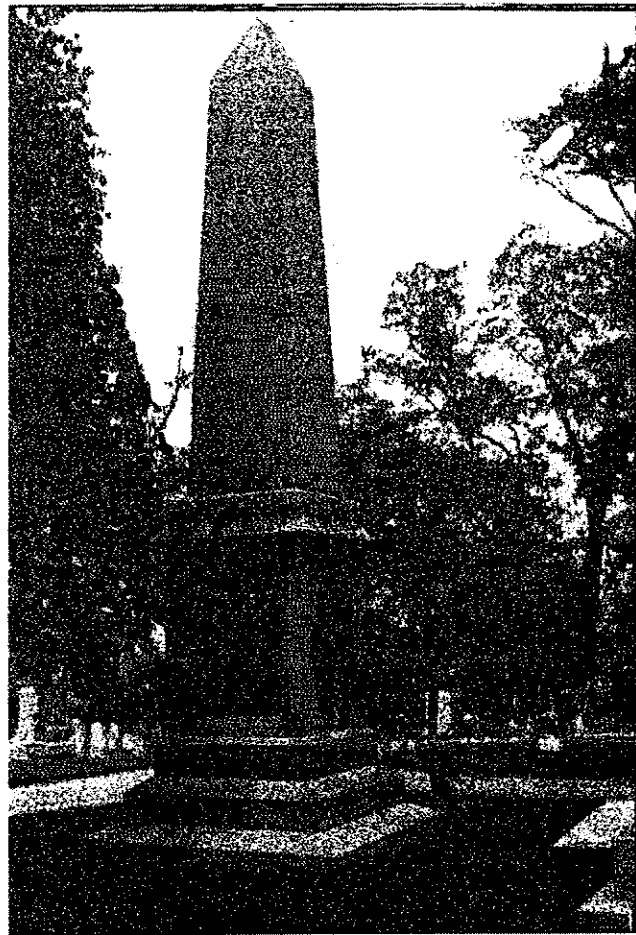
Custer at West Point

*By Kenneth D. Shive
U. S. Military Academy
and Paul Scatena
Queens College, C.U.N.Y.*

THE origins of Custer mythology may predate his arrival at the United States Military Academy, but both his supporters and detractors often start to build their cases there.

To some, Custer was a lousy student who racked up demerits and narrowly missed having his career aborted by court-martial. To others, he was a well-loved cadet, as good at pranks as he was poor at academics, who ingeniously survived where others fell. The bare facts of Custer's student years are well-known, but an examination of the records along with some background information may allow us some insight into

Cadet Custer's stay on the Plain of West Point. We will show here that Custer performed what some have called "brinkmanship," and that this is a much more subtle game than it is usually thought to be. We'll examine his academic performance as well as his conduct records.



Custer gravesite, US Military Academy at West Point

West Point has long had a tradition of the "goat," the term applied to the bottom-ranking member of the graduating class. Former West Point archivist Ken Rapp found that this term did not appear until the late 1880s, but the concept of recognizing the last member of the graduating class has a longer history. In Custer's day the low or lowest ranking members were referred to as "Immortals," probably because although at the bottom they were graduates of the Academy, and thus immortal.

In the nineteenth century class rankings were determined by a strict formula combining academic standings and conduct scores, with the latter tallied by demerits or skins," as they were called in Custer's day. The goat or immortal would be the cadet with the optimal

combination of low grades and high demerits. Many writers have commented that Custer was cheered at graduation, and taken this to mean he was popular; this is certainly true, but cheering the last graduate was itself a long-standing tradition, and so in June of 1861 the applause was no doubt thunderous.

Whether striving for "goathood" or not, many cadets played a game of "brinkmanship:" trying to get either low grades, high demerits, or both, without being expelled. Peter Michie, two years behind Custer as a cadet and later a professor at West Point, tells us that

"Custer said that there were but two positions of distinction in the class head and foot; and as he soon found that he could not be head he determined that he would support his class as a solid base, and though it required great circumspection and much ticklish work he succeeded in his lofty ambition."

But what were the dangers of brinkmanship? In Custer's day, class rankings were available to all cadets on at least a weekly basis, and West Point's system of rigorous daily recitations allowed cadets to fine-tune their grades just short of failure. Custer in particular seems to have excelled in cramming his way out of danger. In addition, cadets found deficient at term-end examinations were permitted to be examined again. A student two years behind Custer, tells of Custer and other cadets sneaking into instructors' offices to steal questions on these critical make-up exams.

Is Custer's brinkmanship merely the mark of someone trying to get by with a minimum of work, and perhaps to pick up a few accolades for having scraped by? The latter factor fits with much that we know about him, but one additional influence may have been at play. In those days graduates were "recommended" for assignments based on rank, with top graduates going into engineering while the bottom men were pointed towards the cavalry or infantry. With small graduating classes, an Army "recommendation" might constrain a cadet's future branch of service. While no one would claim Custer had to hold himself back so as not to study his way into the engineers, as an action-oriented young man he had a good reason to keep his grades low.

Custer's rankings by year and subject are well known, and are summarized on the next page. Two glitches need comment. The annual Official Register lists five years' study, which Custer's class did in four years. With the onset of the Civil War, Custer's "second class," or fourth of five planned years, was terminated prematurely, and his "first class year" was limited to a few months' study. Some of the "second class" standings appear to be based on earlier examinations before additional Southerners resigned; not even

George Armstrong Custer could rank forty- fourth out of thirty-five!

Custer at West Point

Fifth Class (plebe) year, 1857-1858 (68 members)

Mathematics: Class rank 52 th out of 68
English: 57

Class rank: 58
Demerits: 151 for the year

Fourth Class Year, 1858-1859 (60 members)

Mathematics: 52 th out of 60
English: 58
French: 55

Class rank: 56
Demerits: 192 for the year

Third Class Year, 1859-1860 (57 members)

Philosophy: 57 th out of 57
(Natural and experimental philosophy — science)
French: 53
Spanish: 54
Drawing: 45

Class rank: 57
Demerits: 191 for the year

Second and First Class "Year," 1860-1861 (35 graduates)

Ethics: 35 th out of 35
Infantry Tactics: 33
Cavalry Tactics: 44
(not corrected for resigning Southerners)
Chemistry: 35
Drawing: 32

Military Engineering: 34
Ethics: 26
Ordinance & Gunnery: 31

Class rank: 35
Demerits: 192 for the year



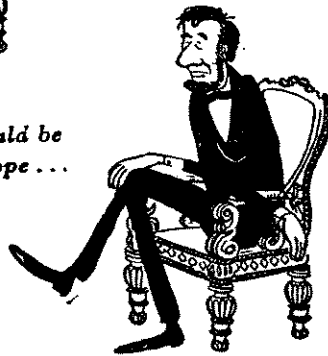
Lincoln's Decision Making.



(1) *It's not that we don't appreciate you, McClellan, but...*



(2) *We just thought you would be happier somewhere else, Pope...*



(3) *How long have you been with us, Burnside?*



(4) *Hooker, it's been nice knowing you....*



(5) *Well, Meade, I don't quite know how to say this, but...*



The Ohio Civil War Association

*We cordially invite you to attend the 2nd O.C.W.A. Regional
Conference to be held on
Saturday, October 11, 1997
at Kent State University*

Hosted by the Cuyahoga Valley Civil War Round Table and Kent State University

Speakers include:

*Dr. Leonne Hudson, Kent State University - Confederate General Gustavus Smith
Dr. Jon Wakelyn, Kent State University - Leadership in the Civil War
Zev Rosenberg - Bishop Polk's invasion of Columbus, Kentucky*

More to be announced!

Book and art vendors! Raffle Prizes! Fun and Fellowship!

*\$30 prior to October 1, 1997 for O.C.W.A. Round Table members. \$35 after October 1st.
\$40 for non-O.C.W.A. Round Table members; \$45 after October 1st.*

*To register, complete the form below, make check out to The Ohio Civil War
Association, and mail to Rex Felton, Treasurer, P.O. Box 209, New Riegel, OH 44853*

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

C.W.R.T. _____



President's Message October 1997

September's meeting proved to be another excellent session for the many members who attended. Dr. David C. Ramano M.D., a member of the Dayton Roundtable, related the progress made in the field of medicine during the Civil War. Many thanks to Bob Battisti, who was instrumental in bringing this program to us.

C.C.W.R.T. member Dale Thomas will present the October 8th session. His topic "*Lincoln, A Friend of the Family*" should prove to be most enlightening. I was fascinated as he reviewed the highlights to me. Clear your calendar, call your friends and plan to attend the October 8th session. Remember, reservations can be made with J.A.C. twentyfour hours a day at 861-5588.

A multifaceted communication system is vital to an organization's growth and service to its members. Ideas must flow in all directions. C.C.W.R.T. has two established communication channels, the executive committee and *The Charger*. September's issue of **The Charger** contained three pieces authored by our members. Matt Slattery, William Vodrey and Dick Crews each made a contribution to our thinking. Well done, gentlemen.

The executive committee gives members an opportunity for input on a one to one basis. Members of this committee are:

BOB BATTISTI
BOB BAUCHER
BOB BOYDA
DICK CREWS
PETER HOLMAN

NORTON LONDON
JOHN MOORE
JOHN SUTULA
JOE TIRPAK
DAN ZEISER

This leadership group and C.C.W.R.T. can profit from YOUR ideas, so please keep in touch!

John W. Moore

Coming in Next Month's November CHARGER

IRISH & GERMANS IN THE UNION ARMY

**LINCOLN TESTS FIRES A SPENCER RIFLE
ON THE WHITE HOUSE LAWN**

UNION RAILROADS

John W. Moore
6967 Gates Road
Gates Mills, OH 44040

THE CLEVELAND
CIVIL WAR ROUND-TABLE
P.O. BOX 18900
CLEVELAND, OHIO 44118

