

**May, 2007**

**442nd Meeting**

**Vol. 28 #9**

*Tonight's Program:*

## **The Civil War Letters of Private Alfred Weedon, 26th Ohio Volunteer Infantry**

Organized in July of 1861 under Colonel Edward P. Fyffe, the 26th Ohio served in West Virginia until January, 1862, when it was transferred to Kentucky and took part in the siege of Corinth and battles of Perryville and Stones River, losing one-third of its men in the latter engagement. It fought at Chickamauga, sustaining fearful loss; and again at Missionary Ridge and Lookout Mountain. The Regiment re-enlisted January 1st, 1864, and joined Sherman's Atlanta campaign, participating in the battles of Resaca, Kenesaw Mountain, Peachtree Creek and Jonesboro. It followed General George H. Thomas north, took part in the battle of Nashville, and pursued the enemy to the Tennessee River. After the war the 26th served in Texas until the 21st of October, 1865, when it was mustered out.

Alfred Weedon enlisted on July 26, 1861 and was mustered out on October 21, 1865 in Victoria Texas. He is buried in Northwood Cemetery in Guernsey County, Ohio.



This photo of the 26th Ohio was taken at a reunion in Columbus, Ohio sometime after 1875, though more likely in the 1880s.

*Tonight's Speaker:*

## **Jon Thompson**

Jon has been a member of the Roundtable for three years. He retired last year after thirty-seven years of teaching English and Civil War history in the Westlake schools. Jon is currently writing a manuscript of the Civil War letters and diary of Alfred Weedon, his great-great grandfather. At the meeting, he will provide background information on the letters and then each member will read and decipher one of the original letters from the collection.

**Date: Wednesday,  
May 9, 2007**

**Place: The Cleveland  
Playhouse Club  
8501 Carnegie Ave.**

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

**Reservations: Please Call  
JAC Communications  
(216) 861-5588**

**Meal choice: Roasted Breast of  
Chicken or Vegetarian Pasta**

# CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

FOUNDED 1957

*President:* **John Fazio** (330) 867-1535  
*Vice President:* **Terry Koozer** (216) 226-7527  
*Secretary:* **Marilyn DeBaltzo** (440) 461-6804  
*Treasurer:* **Jon Thompson** (440) 871-6439  
*Historian:* **Dale Thomas** (440) 779-6454

### Directors:

Mel Maurer Dave Carrino  
Rick Maurer Marge Wilson  
Dennis Keating Phil DiBianca

website: clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com

email: a-bell@adelphia.net

Editor - THE CHARGER - Dan Zeiser

## Cleveland Civil War Roundtable Past Presidents

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2001 William Vodrey	1976 Milton Holmes
2000 Bob Boyda	1975 Thomas Gretter
1999 Dick Crews	1974 Nolan Heidelbaugh
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1997 Dan Zeiser	1972 Bernard Drews
1996 John Sutula	1971 Kenneth Callahan
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1994 Robert Battisti	1969 Donald Heckaman
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1986 Tim Beatty	1961 Charles Clarke
1985 Brian Kowell	1960 Howard Preston
1984 Neil Evans	1959 John Cullen, Jr.
1983 William Victory	1958 George Farr, Jr.
1982 John Harkness	1957 Kenneth Grant

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### MAY, 2007

A story crossed my desk that I believe bears repeating. The last casualty of the battle of Gettysburg died on March 14, 2004, at the age of 92. How, you ask, can that be? Well, here is the story.

The casualty was a fellow named Russell Mowry, of Bedford County, Pennsylvania, who received his injury in 1930. The Mowrys bought a piece of land in Bedford County in 1917. They bought it from a man named Frank Imler, who had bought it from a family named Tomlinson, who had previously lived in Gettysburg. When the Tomlinsons acquired the property they brought with them an artillery shell from the battlefield. It contained a ball as well as powder. They painted it red and used it as a doorstep. When they moved, they left the doorstep behind. When the Imlers moved, they also left the doorstep behind. So the Mowrys sort of inherited it. They knew what it was, but paid no attention to it for years. In 1930 one of them remarked that it was top-heavy with accumulated dirt, grime, dust, etc., and was no longer very effective for its assigned purpose. Russell Mowry, then 18, undertook to clean it while other members of the family were working in the fields. It exploded, of course, but apparently the powder was quite deteriorated because the explosion was low-level and did not kill young Russell, but merely blew off his left hand. His father took Russell to a doctor, but the doctor could not save the hand. Russell continued to farm for the rest of his life despite the loss of the hand and despite the loss of three fingers on his other hand to a corn picker some years later. His death on March 14, 2004, was not due to the explosion of the shell, but it is nevertheless true that he is the last person to die (that we know of) who had sustained injury from ordnance that was used at the granddaddy of all Civil War battles.

I am looking forward to our Treasurer's talk on May 9. Letters from the combatants are a treasure-trove of information about the real war. One of the more fascinating aspects of it is the degree of fraternization that occurred between them and the lengths to which they went to accomplish it. Some of the stories are mind-boggling. This, may I suggest, would be a great topic for one of us to write or speak about or both at some future date.

John Fazio

**CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE  
2006/2007 SCHEDULE**

September 13, 2006

**The 13th Tennessee (Union),  
The Men Who Killed  
The Invader of Ohio,  
John Hunt Morgan**

**Dick Crews**

October 11, 2006

**Images**

Karen Thyer portrays Mother Bickerdyke (1817-1901), Botanical Physician, "Cyclone in Calico," and Don Allen portrays a U.S. Sanitary Commission Inspector, singing songs of the Union and Confederacy

November 8, 2006

**Cleveland CWRT  
50th Anniversary Celebration**



**Lincoln at Gettysburg**

**Mel Maurer**

December 13, 2006

**The Confederacy's New  
Mexico Campaign  
The Battles of Valverde and  
Glorieta Pass**

**Dan Zeiser**

January 10, 2007

**The Annual Dick Crews  
Debate**

*Resolved: That the Institution of  
slavery was the cause of the Civil  
War*

**Moderator: William F. B. Vodrey**

March 14, 2007

**Custer's Last  
Stand**

**Harold A. George**



April 11, 2007

**Ohio's Civil War  
Governors  
William F. B.  
Vodrey**



May 9, 2007

**The Civil War Letters of  
Private Alfred Weedon,  
26th Ohio Volunteer In-  
fantry - A Hands-on  
Lesson in History**  
**Jon Thompson**



June 13, 2007

**The Lincoln-Baldwin  
Conference**

**James Epperson**

## LINCOLN AND HISTORY

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I am of the opinion that major historical events, and some minor ones too, occur only in the fullness of time, which is to say that they occur only when conditions are ripe for their happening. Attempts to accomplish them in inconducive circumstances, or at inappropriate times, will fail. Examples are endless and superfluous, but I shall give one because it is especially relevant to our area of interest.

The Northwest Ordinance, passed by the Continental Congress on July 13, 1787, under the Articles of Confederation, which created the Northwest Territory as the first organized territory of the United States out of the region south of the Great Lakes, north and west of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi River, provided: "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in the punishment of crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted." Observe that the language is virtually identical to that of Section 1 of the Thirteenth Amendment, adopted seventy-eight years later. Clearly, the former was the template for the latter. In 1787, four years after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, circumstances were such that the inclusion of this language in a document that was applicable north of the Ohio River made sense, but seventy-eight years had to pass before its inclusion in another document applicable south of that river would make sense.

This is not to say that men are driven totally by historical circumstances rather than the other way around, because there can be no historical circumstances without men. To put the matter plainly: History makes men, yes, but men also make history. And occasionally, very occasionally, certain men make much and very profound history. The record of our species is replete with the names and deeds of such men - Pericles, Caesar, Jesus, Justinian, Theodora, Mohammed, Charlemagne, Leonardo, Columbus, Luther, Elizabeth I, Louis XIV, Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Washington, Napoleon -- and Lincoln, to name but a tiny number and not to mention post-Lincoln individuals who, for better or worse, left their mark.

Institutionalized slavery had largely run its historical course in the western world by 1860, the year of Lincoln's election. In England, the slave trade was prohibited in 1807 and made a capital crime in 1827. In 1833 and 1834, Parliament outlawed slavery and emancipated all slaves in the Empire, and in 1838 it abolished indentured servitude. Twenty million pounds was paid in compensation to plantation owners in the Caribbean, an example that might have been followed in the United States, but was not. France finally abolished the institution in its Empire in 1848, after prior repeals and re-establishment in some of its colonies. In Russia, slavery was abolished by Peter the Great and serfs were emancipated in 1861 by Tsar Alexander II.

In addition to these major powers, some seventeen other nations had formally abolished slavery by 1860 and another dozen or so would do so in the century following the Civil War,

though the practice persists secretly in many countries, for labor and sex. Its existence in the American South, therefore, was anachronistic, and was thus only a matter of time before it would come to an end, peacefully, as in England, France, Russia, etc., or violently. It ended violently because the regions had grown very far apart economically and culturally, because slaveholders had invested hundreds of millions of dollars in their slaves and believed they could not weather such an economic loss, and because Southern leadership and citizenry could not imagine what they would do with 4,000,000 suddenly free blacks in their midst.

This was the history, then, that would make men. Now let us talk about the man who would make history. Was Lincoln a truly great man? Yes. Was he a truly great President? Yes. Was he a complex man, both good and bad, with strengths and weaknesses? No, there was nothing bad about him and he had no weaknesses worth talking about. Was he, then, a perfect human being? No, because he made mistakes, but to make mistakes is not necessarily to be weak. Was he forced into glory? No, he earned it and paid the ultimate price for it.

Lincoln, and at times it appears only Lincoln, during his period, realized that goals had to be not only praiseworthy, but accomplished gradually, in the fullness of time. Without that acumen and foresight, it is likely that the Rebellion would have succeeded, the United States would have ceased to exist as one nation, and human bondage would have continued in a country whose organic law, i.e., its Constitution, guaranteed it, despite it being anachronistic in the world at that time. Even with the acumen and foresight, this scenario came perilously close to reality. The Federal Government was truly not out of the woods until 1863 and even then might have lost the war if Gettysburg had gone the other way. No one who knows anything about the war can doubt the fighting qualities of the Southern man, the superb generalship the South brought to the conflict, and the tenacity of its people in the face of an adversary that substantially outnumbered them and had substantially more of virtually everything -- gold, railroads, ships, armaments, manufactured goods, lumber, food, etc. -- than they. Despite this lopsided balance in resources, Lincoln would say, in late 1862, that if there was a place worse than hell, he was in it. And why not, after Union disasters on the Peninsula, at Second Bull Run, and Fredericksburg, with one commander who had a chronic case of "the slows," another whose braggadocio and cruelty made Lincoln cringe, and another who did not hesitate to admit that he was unfit to command an army.

Lincoln knew that he could not get too far ahead of public opinion and to try to accomplish too much too quickly would lose the whole game. Thus it was that he could entertain the notion of colonization of blacks, despite, or perhaps because of, his profound sympathy for black Americans and loathing of slavery. Under the then prevailing circumstances, and taking account of the attitude of most whites toward blacks at that time, colonization was not such an outrageous idea. But Lincoln had the good sense to withdraw the suggestion when it was made clear to him by black leaders that they had no interest in it.

And thus it was, too, that Lincoln would resist -- because he had to -- the demands of the abolitionists, the radicals, and the unauthorized liberation of slaves by overly zealous commanders in the field who knew their departments, but did not have the comprehensive overview of the Commander in Chief in the White House. Had he not so resisted when he did, and to the degree he did, one or more and very likely all four of the border states would have joined the Rebellion, and the cause of Union would then have been lost. Indeed, Lincoln felt that the loss of even one of them - Kentucky - would have been fatal to the cause. It is a good thing he knew this, because it appears that no one else of consequence knew it.

So Lincoln was sagacious, more so than any of his contemporaries. He was also perceptive and patient. He also knew a great deal about human nature. He knew what he wanted and how to get it. He would be forceful only when he absolutely had to be, when the success or failure of the cause was in the balance, which is to say when the continuation of the United States as one nation demanded it. Thus it was, for example, that he would suspend the writ of habeas corpus without Congress's constitutionally mandated authority. Thus it was, as another example, that he would order the arrest and incarceration in Fort McHenry of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, as well as several Maryland legislators who were preparing to recognize the Confederacy, as well as Congressman Henry May, rather than allow the nation's capital to be geographically cut off from the states that supported it. And thus it was, too, that there was some interference with free speech and other civil liberties during his administration. These measures were taken not with alacrity, but with much pain, because they offended his love of justice, liberty, and the rule of law, as well as his finely tuned sense of right and wrong.

For the rest, he was the soul of kindness, gentleness, thoughtfulness, generosity, material and spiritual. His Bixby letter is a splendid example, but so are his major addresses as President - the First Inaugural, the Gettysburg Address, and especially his Second Inaugural, which David Lloyd George, a great admirer of Lincoln, is said to have described as the finest thing ever written with a pen. His love and sympathy for humanity was so great, in fact, that it even extended to slaveholders, whom, he knew, had inherited a system not of their making.

His capacity for mercy was legendary even in his own time. Time and again he intervened to save the lives of soldiers who had run afoul of military discipline, charged with criminal negligence, cowardice, or desertion. With a heavy heart, he would defer to the executioners only in the severest cases, i.e., multiple offenders, those who had already received clemency more than once and those who ignored repeated warnings. Time and again he would make himself available to the lowly, to those without status, power, or influence, to those who had only a need. So pervasive and well known were these attributes of his character, in fact, that Robert E. Lee is said to have stated that he surrendered as much to Lincoln's kindness as he did to Grant's cannons. No greater tragedy ever befell the South than the half inch of lead that John Wilke's Booth's derringer sent into Lincoln's brain.

He was a man, too, who knew what pain, suffering and grief were about. He had experienced much, before as well as during the war, which no doubt had a lot to do with his gentle and merciful spirit. In 1850, he and his wife were devastated by the loss of their not quite four year old son, Eddie Baker Lincoln, whom his parents called "a tender boy," to pulmonary tuberculosis. Having weathered that and much else by 1862, the Lincolns were again driven to the edge by the loss of their eleven-year old son, William (Willie), on February 20 of that year, to a typhoid-like disease. His death plunged his parents into inconsolable grief. But grief of a different kind was to follow in that terrible year for the North, with one lost battle following another, culminating in the debacle at Fredericksburg and the Mud March of January, 1863. Lincoln would at least be spared the loss of his third son, Thomas (Tad), who died on July 16, 1871, at the age of eighteen, a death that pushed Mary Todd Lincoln into insanity.

Lastly, a word about one other feature of his personality. It is said that there are only three things in life: God, human folly, and laughter, that we cannot understand the first, we can do nothing about the second, and must therefore make the most of the third. Lincoln would probably agree that God is unknowable. He would not agree that we can do nothing about human folly; he did a great deal about it. But he most assuredly would agree with the value of laughter, which is why, when he was not grieving or despairing, he made much of it and tried to get others to make much of it and often. His sense of humor was as much a part of him as his height and stovepipe hat. He loved a good joke or story and told both often. At times his humor was a bit too earthy or ribald for some, but if he did not always amuse his audience, he certainly had no problem amusing himself. When retiring, he was as likely -- perhaps more so -- to facilitate sleep with Artemus Ward and Petroleum V. Nasby than with government reports.

So what do we have? A very intelligent man, self-taught, who rose from the humblest beginnings to the highest office in the land, a perceptive man, patient, one who could be forceful but preferred to be, and therefore most often was, compassionate, a kind, gentle, thoughtful, generous man, merciful and humble, a man who loved to laugh and make others laugh. In a word, a man who had all the tools necessary to shepherd his country from a largely agrarian and loosely joined federation of semiautonomous states to an industrial and commercial giant that would think of itself and present itself to the world as one nation, indivisible.

It seems probable that no other man of his time could have succeeded in holding the country together, so great were the forces tearing it apart. Indeed, even with the qualities he brought to the task, he came perilously close to failing. When we think of the long train of mediocre Presidents (not to say mediocre men) who followed him, that probability does not appear to be overstated: Johnson, Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland, Harrison, McKinley. To a degree, therefore, history made Lincoln. But to a greater degree, Lincoln made history as only a few others have made it.

## **Battle of Narcoossee Mill**

On a recent visit to Florida, we saw an advertisement for a local re-enactment in the city of St. Cloud called the Battle of Narcoossee Mill. It was a fictional battle, but typical for many Florida skirmishes/battles. We decided to observe the "battle" and were pleased with the excellent presentation. A few hundred participant troops battled for about an hour, with the North winning on Saturday, and the South scheduled to win on Sunday. Several cannon and cavalry as well as infantry were involved and actions were well described by the announcer. The event was sponsored by the local chapter of the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

After the battle, we visited the sutlers' row, which had lots of Civil War related items available. A visit to the camps for the re-enactors allowed us to inspect the 75<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry and talk with a couple of the men. One man in the group actually was considered a Buckeye because he had lived here originally. His name was Hooker and a descendent of the General's brother.

The printed program for the event was insightful as to the continuing activities of Southern veteran organization to insure that their version of the war is maintained. Included in the program was a one paragraph charge given by Gen. Stephen D. Lee in 1906:

"To you Sons of Confederate Veterans, we submit the vindication of the cause for which we fought, to your strength will be the defense of the Confederate Soldier's good name, the guardianship of his history, the emulation of his virtues and the perpetuation of those principles he loved and which made him glorious and which you also cherish. Remember, it is your duty to see that the true history of the South is presented to future generations."

Later in the program, it was indicated that the local unit maintains contact with the local Superintendent of schools and board of education and reports that their position statement was presented and accepted. A booklet titled "Confederate Issues in the State of Florida" has been placed in the school system.

Give them another century and we will have to pay reparations. Or have we already?

Maynard Bauer

**NEXT MONTH: THE LINCOLN - BALDWIN CONFERENCE**  
**JAMES EPPERSON**