Remarks by Thomas F. Campbell
Upon the Occasion of
NEWTON D. BAKER's
Induction into the City Club's Hall of Fame
May 18, 1987

In 1912 Mayor Newton D. Baker was the principal speaker at the organizational meeting of the City Club. While he welcomed the formation of a club devoted to the discussion of municipal affairs he stressed that the members needed to maintain a non-partisan spirit in their discussions of public matters. It was good advice because many other city clubs across the country withered and died in the arid soil of narrow partisanship.

Yet such advice surprised some Clevelanders because of Baker's well-earned reputation as a very partisan Democrat. But they didn't understand that Baker wanted the City Club to become an educational, not a political, forum. His model was Mayor Tom L. Johnson's famous tent meetings where, in Baker's opinion, Clevelanders became the best informed citizens in the country.

Baker, who had studied political economy under Woodrow Wilson and who was deeply influenced by Thomas Jefferson, shared their views that democracies could not survive if their citizens were not well informed on the issues of the day.

When Baker came to this city in 1899 he was quickly drawn into its social and political reform circles. For several years he lived and worked as a volunteer in Goodrich Settlement House. Our present Juvenile Court system, Legal Aid Society and

Consumers League are part of the heritage that Baker and other social reformers bequeathed to us. But politics was his forte, and during the first decade of the 20th century Cleveland was in the foreground of progressive reforms. Baker met Tom L. Johnson in 1901 and these two transplanted southerners became the leading spokesmen and architects of a crusade that was to earn Cleveland a national reputation as the most progressive, best governed city in the nation.

When Baker became Mayor in 1911 he not only developed the Municipal Light Plant and a three-cent car fare but he played a major role in securing a Home Rule Charter that was a model of its kind. The debates on these first steps toward municipal independence took place right here at the City Club. Baker believed that a city should be as noted for its cultural assets as well as for its municipal waterworks and he got the city to support a local symphony and fought unsuccessfully for a municipal university.

In 1916 President Wilson called upon this scholarly "pacifist" to be his Secretary of War. Within a year Baker was responsible for organizing an American fighting force of over 4 million and mobilizing our industrial resources to supply them with munitions and transportation. It was a major tribute to Baker's administrative and political skills that this massive mobilization was successfully achieved and without a taint of scandal.

When the Great War ended in 1918 there were over two million

men in France. Some generals who were of the Grand Old Duke of York School -- he marched them up to the top of the hill, and he marched them down again -- wanted to drill the men until they fell down with fatigue. Baker had a different and more creative Influenced by the educational impact of the Johnson tent meetings, he wanted to give the idle soldiers an opportunity to study, so he organized the University of the American Expeditionary Forces. As a result over 141,000 men took advantage of the fully fledged colleges and correspondence schools that were set up in France and elsewhere. The sight of these citizen-soldiers eagerly learning a variety of academic subjects so impressed Baker that he became in the 1920's a leading national advocate of adult education programs. the prime force that persuaded Western Reserve University to establish its famous downtown, but now sadly defunct, Cleveland College.

In 1921 Baker, financially and physically exhausted after two decades of strenous public service, returned to the firm he had established in 1916. Within a few years the firm, popularly known then and now as "Baker, Hofstetler" had earned a national reputation and there is little doubt that Baker would have immense pride in that firm's continual growth in size and reputation.

In the remaining 16 years of his life he continued to promote the Wilsonian dream of a League of Nations. Indeed, it was this unrepentant internationalism that destroyed his chances

of securing the nomination of the Democratic Party for President in 1932. William Randolph Hearst, deadly afraid that Baker might get the nomination, threw his support to F.D.R.

In the last few years of his life Baker grew increasingly uncomfortable with the direction of Roosevelt's policies and impatient with the arrogance of some New Deal Administrators, yet he could never desert the Democratic Party even as it appeared to him to be moving away from the ideals of his own presidential heroes, Thomas Jefferson and Woodrow Wilson.

As a man of common sense and as an idealist Newton D. Baker served this city and this nation in an extraordinary fashion in times of peace and war. Ralph Hayes said of Baker when he died on Christmas Day 1937 that for forty years Baker had "been to this municipality, counselor, guide, and friend. That's why we honor him tonight."