

# NEWSLETTER

## Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

MARCH 2016

EDITOR: STEVE JOHNSON

**FOCWA and Park Ambassadors** The Friends of Civil War Alcatraz has had an active relationship with Jordan Middle School in Palo Alto for three years. Each year our group provides a speaker to visit the 8th grade classes there, and provides guides when they come to Alcatraz on a field trip. This year member Steve Johnson came to the school in an infantry uniform and showed the students what a soldier would typically carry when on a campaign. Thanks to the donation by member Charles Kenyon of a knapsack and haversack filled with period items, the students were able to get a sense of all the essentials a soldier had to carry with him for weeks at a time. They were especially intrigued by the “housewife” — the sewing kit every soldier had to repair socks and clothing. And of course they had lots of questions about the 1861 rifled musket — the most common weapon of the war. The teachers were doing a great job in making the Civil War personal to their students; for example, each student has had to become a member of an 1861 family, and he/she has had to describe how the war is affecting him or her. The classes have also been doing poetry, such as writing about Alcatraz in haiku. Of course the highlight for them was coming to the island, and on February 25th 110 of them came to learn as much as they could about the connection between Alcatraz and the Civil War. The idea was that they were going to be Park Ambassadors by returning to their community and communicating to others the history this national park has to tell. They will be making slide shows, reports, art work, and presentations for the 6th graders and the school’s PTA. In this way they will be following the theme of the National Park Service this year - “Find Your National Park”.

### Dates to Remember

**Thursday, March 24, 2016**

San Francisco Civil War Roundtable Meeting, 6 pm  
United Irish Cultural Center

**Saturday, April 9, 2016**

Living History Day on Alcatraz



Once on the island the students were divided into two groups: one group got a tour of the sally port and did a cannon drill; the other walked up to the cell house and were taken into Cellblock A so they could see the photos and model of Fort Alcatraz. After 45 minutes they switched.



FOCWA members Brad Schall and Steve Bogart showed the students the implements used to prepare and fire a cannon, then picked volunteers to be on a cannon crew. Because the cannon now has an open fuse hole, a friction primer was able to be placed in it. Once the lanyard was pulled, everyone yelled “boom”, and even that was enough to give a small sense of how loud the cannon must have been when discharged.

Photo Credit: Gary Hormel

A student (the tallest one) learns how to sponge the cannon. Notice he does not expose his arms to the cannon, just the fingers. If the cannon should accidentally fire prematurely, he would only lose some fingers on his right hand (and would thereafter be called “lefty”). All the student cannon crews were able to load and fire the cannon in under a minute.

Photo credit: Gary Hormel



Our thanks to Rangers Marcus Koenen and Kathryn Daskal for their support of FOCWA in our effort to reach out to schools. Thanks also to FOCWA members Walter Page and Gary Hormel for volunteering their time to make the field trip go smoothly for the students of Jordan Middle School.

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**General Meeting Held on February 28th** Thirteen members of FOCWA met on Alcatraz for the annual general meeting, and much was accomplished. Officers were re-elected, ways to increase memberships were discussed, articles for the newsletter were encouraged, plans for the Living History Day on April 9th were formalized, and the budget was reported and audited. One item of special interest was to encourage members to come to the island every month, with the last Sunday of each month as the proposed day. The idea is to provide more citadel tours, more Civil War programs, more living history, and more presence on the island. Minutes of the meeting will be posted on the FOCWA website.



Some of the FOCWA members at attendance at the general meeting: Fred Bohmfalk, Constance Smith, Steve Bogart, John Fitzpatrick, John Nevins, Bob Hubbs, Gary Hormel

Photo credit: Jeffrey Vaillant

**The Role of FOCWA Volunteers** Members of FOCWA who wish to volunteer on Alcatraz typically go through a day of training to become a National Park Service volunteer. They receive a uniform and are asked to come to the island several hours a month. Duties include giving dock announcements, doing safety patrols, and showing the public how the cell doors are opened (with training). FOCWA members can give tours of the citadel, do cannon drills, and give a public program about Fort Alcatraz. Members also do research about the island's military history and share this information with the rangers.

MORE PHOTOS



Head Ranger Kathryn Daskal greets the students as they come onto the island. She congratulates them for becoming Park Ambassadors and encourages them to learn more about the Civil War.

Students took pictures of the cannon demonstration provided by member Brad Schall. Students will use the photos for their reports and for presentations to the 6th graders.

