

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

July 2018

Editor: Steve Johnson

Angel Island - the Second Line of Defense Angel Island, the largest in the Bay, always figured in the defense of the Bay because any ship headed for the Mare Island Naval Station or the U.S. Armory at Benicia would have to pass right by it. But it wasn't until 1863 that the Army finally took action and sent troops to prepare gun emplacements on the west and south sides of the island. In September of that year Army engineers under the direction of Col. De Russey began to construct the artillery batteries, with the help of the men of Company B, Third Artillery, from Fort Point. At the same time, contractors began building the barracks and officers quarters on a sloping hill - the beginnings of Camp Reynolds. It was named after Major-General John Reynolds

Dates to Remember

Tuesday, July 17, 2018
 Peninsula CW Roundtable:
 see website for lecture info

Thursday, July 19, 2018
 SF CW Roundtable Lecture:
 see their Facebook page for
 updated information

Saturday, August 18, 2018
 Fort Point Living History/Civil
 War Day. Free. 10 am to 5 pm

Note: The cannons at Point Stuart were placed on a high promontory but could not be lowered to fire on ships hugging close to the shore of the island. Thus their effectiveness was somewhat limited.



Note: The Alcatraz gardens furnished fresh vegetables for the troops at Fort Alcatraz

of the Army of the Potomac, a well-loved officer who was killed by a sniper at Gettysburg. For the first year, the soldiers made do with tent living until the barracks were completed in 1864. In November of that year the commanding officer of the Pacific, General Mc Dowell, came to inspect the now 13 cannons on the island; accompanying him were other officers and a young reporter of the *Call-Bulletin*, named Samuel Clemens.

The barracks, located on the north side of the grassy parade ground, are no longer there, but officers' homes dating to the period are still there on the south side. An officer's home built on Yerba Buena Island was brought over to Angel Island in the 1880's and placed at the high end of the parade ground; filled with period furnishings, it is usually open to visitors on weekends. Next to it is the bake house, where local schoolchildren learn to make bread as part of the park's living history program.

The Rodman cannons placed on the island are long since gone but it is possible to see the earthen works where they were positioned at Point Stuart and Point Knox. Point Blunt had its own barracks and officers, who were from Fort Alcatraz (it was easier to boat troops over than to hike them over the roadless island terrain). But after a series of disasters (heavy rains, landslides) the battery here was abandoned in 1865. And like Fort Alcatraz, the soldiers on Angel Island had to fight boredom, monotonous routines, and isolation.

In the 1870's the Camp housed soldiers involved in the "Indian Wars". At one point soldiers nominally headquartered at Camp Reynolds were stationed from Sitka to the Mexican border. During this time the island itself had a population that varied from 100 to 700, including families and other civilians.



Of course the island was never attacked, but every June re-enactors, mostly from the National Civil War Association, put on a mock battle in which Confederate sympathizers "invade" the island and a battle ensues with musket and cannon fire. Visitors to Camp Reynolds get a sense of what a real battle looked, smelled, and sounded like.

Union artillerymen fire the 12-lb. Napoleon cannon

Union troops advance to repel Confederate “invaders” at Camp Reynolds. The large brick structure is the old Quartermaster Building of the Civil War era, where reenactors spent the night. The pilings were part of a small pier where ships could tie up and unload supplies.



Brad Schall Retires from the Board Brad Schall, an Army veteran who had many ancestors in the Union Army, was — along with Fred Bohmfalk — a co-founder of the Friends of Civil War Alcatraz. He has always had a passion for Civil War history, and wanted to make sure that that part of Alcatraz history was always told on the island with consistency and accuracy. He recruited members, helped fund the uniforms and muskets that are used for interpretation, and was the driving force behind the Living History/Civil War Days on Alcatraz. He wanted FOCWA to be a Friend of the National Park Service, to support the rangers in their efforts to tell the story of Fort Alcatraz. Due to family considerations, he has had to resign from the board but will be available for advice and support from home. We all wish him well and will try to faithfully carry on his mission.

Coming Events

Living History Day at Fort Point NHS, August 18

Resources:

Military information on Angel Island thanks to John Soennichsen of the Angel Island Association <http://www.militarymuseum.org/CpReynolds.html>

<https://www.facebook.com/SanFranciscoCivilWarRoundTable/>

<http://www.peninsulacivilwarroundtable.org>