

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

July 2022

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Living History Day Details

For those of you planning to participate in the upcoming Living History Day on Alcatraz, here are some details you should know. 1) Read the LH Day link on the Events page of our website; 2) You must register with Steve Johnson by July 15th to be placed on the volunteer list; 3) parking will be at Fort Mason — be there by 7:15 am — where you will be given a parking pass and shuttled to the Alcatraz Pier; 4) or you may park on your own at 55 Francisco St, across from Pier 33 (fee is about \$20 for the day); 5) once on the island you will be given information on the schedule for the day; 6) a box lunch will be provided for you by FOCWA; 7) the rules on mask wearing are always changing, so be sure to bring a mask with you; 8) if you wish to take a tour of the citadel, join one of the tours led by NPS volunteers; 8) we will wind down activities by 3:30 pm and take the 4 pm boat back to San Francisco, where you will be shuttled back to Ft. Mason. For those of you unable to attend, photos of the event will be posted on the FOCWA website.

Dates to Remember

**Monday, July 4th
Independence Day**

**Saturday, July 30
Living History Day**

Alcatraz Notes

Ranger Wendy Solis, the Volunteer coordinator on Alcatraz, has returned from her recent posting at the John Muir House and will resume her duties on Alcatraz. She will do the training for any FOCWA members who want to be a National Park volunteer on the island. Ranger Matthew Connelly has been our liaison on the island and has been very helpful with the planning for Living History Day. At the present time masks are required in all indoor places on the island, though not all visitors comply with this rule.

First Person Accounts of San Francisco in the 1860s

One in awhile, when doing research on the early history, one finds the journals of persons who lived in the San Francisco in the 19th century. A very useful compilation of journals was put together by Malcolm E. Barker in his book, *More San Francisco Memoirs, 1852-1899, The Ripening Years*¹. For anyone wanting to learn what the city looked like in those years, how people got around, where they shopped, what they did for entertainment, and so on, this book provides a variety of viewpoints by San Franciscans living or just arriving there at the time. Particularly interesting are the writings from the 1860s which relate to life in the city during the Civil War. One such memoir was written by Amelia Ransome Neville, who described the rally for the Union at Market and Post Streets in February, 1861. She wrote that 30,000 people attended (mostly men; “women were not expected”) and after Thomas Starr King gave an impassioned speech on the importance of supporting the Union, “there was a wave

¹ Published by Londonborn Publications, San Francisco, 1996

of applause” and “San Francisco was for the Federal Government”.² But not all were supporters of the Union. A popular preacher, Dr. Scott of Calvary Church, invoked a “divine blessing on the Southern cause” and soon after his effigy was hung outside the church. Church officials put him on a ship and sent him packing to New Orleans.³

Most interesting was her description of the *HMS Sutlej* incident. She remembered being awakened during the night by cannonfire.

This British warship — actually the flagship of the British Pacific squadron carrying Admiral Kingcomb — had not received the news that no ships were allowed to enter the harbor between sunset and sunrise. When it appeared through the fog before sunrise it was fired upon by Fort Alcatraz, and when that was ignored a second shot was fired. At that point the ship raised the American flag [sic] and fired a salute of 21 guns. Fort Alcatraz then fired its salute, but with only 20 guns. Captain Connelly of the British ship had been counting the salutes, and demanded the 21st shot. When that did not



The officers of the *Sutlej* in the 1860's while in port in B.C. (Library of Congress)

happen, he informed the fort he would not leave the port until the last shot was fired, and anchored off Sausalito. In the morning, the fort ceremoniously raised the British ensign and fired a proper 21-gun salute. With honor satisfied, the *HMS Sutlej* left the port.⁴ It should be noted that her account is incorrect in an important detail. The cannons of the fort had fired warning shots to merchant vessels during the night who did not know about the nighttime proscription. The *Sutlej* actually entered the harbor around noon on the first of October ⁵, and when its flag was not flying due to lack of wind, the commander of the fort gave orders for the warning shots to ascertain its intentions.

Another interesting story was that of Mrs. Tod Robinson on Powell Street. When General Albert Sydney Johnston resigned his commission and left Fort Point bound for the South, Mrs. Robinson took in the Johnston family as boarders. She also was raising money surreptitiously for the relief of Confederate prisoners held in Union prisons (her son was one of them). She was accused in one newspaper of being one of the conspirators in the Chapman episode (in which Southern sympathizers were going to attack gold-laden steamships off the Mexican coast). She denied any connection to the plot but afterward “there hung a faint halo of martyrdom over her head”.

² “Civil War!”, in *More San Francisco Memoirs 1852-1899*, page 142

³ Ibid, page 143

⁴ Ibid, page 145

⁵ noted by the editor, page 147