

# NEWSLETTER

## Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

August 2018

Editor: Steve Johnson

### Important FOCWA Meeting Sunday, August 12 on

**Alcatraz, 10 a.m.** All members of FOCWA are asked to attend this important general meeting to be held on Alcatraz.

Among the issues to be discussed are: 1) nominations for chairman or chairmen of the board, secretary, and treasurer; 2) nominations for other board positions; 3) voting procedures for the election of new board members; 4) the long-range future of FOCWA; 5) ideas for recruiting new members; 6) involvement of members as volunteers on Alcatraz. The decisions we make at this meeting will have an impact on our future as an organization, so everyone's input is needed. Sunday was chosen because parking is easier that day — free street parking can be found on Chestnut, Sansome, Kearney, Bay, and Montgomery Streets. Do not park at any meters, which operate every day for the Port of S.F. Do not leave anything valuable or noticeable in your car. Parking is available for about \$20/day at 55 Francisco Street. You can take any boat up to the 9:30 boat to the island. Make sure you are wearing a volunteer uniform and/or hat. If you do not have either of these contact the editor at 650-355-7173 and leave a message.

**Last Alumni Day, August 12** Also on this day is the last Alumni Day on Alcatraz.. There are fewer and fewer former correctional officers and inmates who have the health, energy, and desire to return to Alcatraz for a reunion, so this will be the very last one. FOCWA members can attend any talks they will be giving, after our meeting.

### William Tecumseh Sherman in California, Part I

Sherman is certainly one of the most well-known and colorful Union generals in the Civil War. His March to the Sea campaign in 1864 brought “total war” to the South and, along with the campaign of his friend General Grant, was instrumental in the South's eventual defeat. What is not often recounted in history books, however, is the time he spent in California prior to the war, which shaped his view of humanity, rebellion, militias, and the importance of forceful action against a foe. After graduating from West Point in 1840, he served in the Third Artillery and at the outbreak of the Mexican-American war, was sent to assist in the American occupation of Monterey. Here he met John C Fremont, who at the time was setting himself up as military

### Dates to Remember

**Sunday, Aug. 12, 2018**

FOCWA General Meeting,  
10 a.m., on Alcatraz

**Saturday, Aug. 18, 2018**

Living History Day, Fort Point,  
10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Tuesday, August 21, 2018**

Peninsula CW Roundtable  
Lecture, “Diary of Mary  
Chestnut” by Abby Eller,  
11:30 a.m.



Portrait of Sherman, 1866, by George P.A. Healy

governor of California, even though recently arrived General Kearney outranked him. Fremont's resistance to giving up his position led to his court-martial (later commuted by President Polk). Sherman didn't think much of Fremont, and years later when Fremont ran for the presidency, Sherman remarked "he is a small man out of whom to make a president. If he is qualified, anybody may aspire to that office."

Sherman was sent to Sonoma to settle a dispute as to who was the alcalde of Sonoma and when he arrived in the little village of Yerba Buena he was impressed — by the howling wind and the desolate nature of the region. The army quartermaster of the town, Captain Folsom, had been privately buying up plots of land and invited Sherman to do the same. In his memoirs, Sherman wrote "I actually felt insulted that he should think me such a fool as to pay money for property in such a horrid place as Yerba Buena". Sherman continued on to Sonoma where he resolved the dispute, and returned to Monterey where he became the adjutant to the new military governor, Col. Mason. In 1848 when continued reports of the gold find in Coloma reached Monterey, and soldiers began to desert to find their fortune, Mason and Sherman traveled to the gold fields to see for themselves the state of affairs. They soon realized the rumors of large finds of gold were true, and it was Sherman who composed the letter for Col. Mason to send to the President, and also suggested they send along an oyster can full of gold dust to accompany the letter. This is what eventually set in motion one of the greatest migrations in American history, once President Polk announced the letter and the sample of gold.

[next: Sherman becomes a banker; the Committee of Vigilance; returning to the Army]

**Fort Point Living History Day, August 18** Readers of this newsletter are invited to attend the Living History Day at Fort Alcatraz's sister fort. Many re-enactors will be there - military and civilian - and FOCWA members Gary Hormel and Steve Johnson will be giving tours of the fort, Constance Smith will be demonstrating 1860's cooking & housekeeping, and Frank Avila will be showing medical practices of the 1860's. Free, 10 am to 5 pm.

### **Resources:**

Sherman's memoirs of his stay in California provide a fascinating look at pre-Gold Rush California, early San Francisco, and the mining camps. They can be found on the virtual Museum of San Francisco website: <http://www.sfmuseum.net/bio/sherman.html>

"How William T. Sherman help Create California" by Joe Matthews, found on Zocalo, a publication of Arizona State University <http://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2016/09/08/william-t-sherman-helped-create-california/ideas/connecting-california/>

Mary Chestnut kept a diary all during the Civil War, and it provided a Southerner's view of the war as it affected everyday life; it also was a remarkable portrait of Southern society in the 1860's. This will be the topic of a lecture at the next meeting of the Peninsula CW Roundtable, August 21st. <http://www.peninsulacivilwarroundtable.org>