

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

August 2022

Steve Johnson, Editor

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Living History A Success

The first Living History Day in three years was held on Alcatraz Island on Saturday, July 30th. We were very fortunate to have many new and long-time FOCWA members in attendance. They included Constance Smith, Ken Felton, Phil Blake, Mike Bennett, Steve Johnson, Evelyn Mar, Glenn Martin, Matt Hess, Robert Mayer, Jeffrey Nibert, and John Ferris. We were also fortunate to have 11 members of the Third Artillery Brass Band in attendance, who treated visitors with music of the 1860's as they got off the boat; many folks stayed around to listen. And as a special bonus, we had three re-enactors who represented important people of the time: Pauline Cushman, Union spy (portrayed by Michelle Atno-Hall), Harriet Tubman, conductor of the Underground Railroad, (portayed by Nancy Whittle), and San Francisco Mayor of 1860 Henry Teschemacher (portrayed by Roy Dooley).

Dates to Remember

Saturday, August 6
Board Meeting
4 pm

Saturday, August 13
Living History Day
Fort Point
10 am - 5 pm



Members of the Third Artillery Regimental Band played as the boats loaded with visitors approached the dock. People were quite surprised to be greeted by a band and to see Union soldiers around the dock. Fort Alcatraz did have the Third Artillery band posted on the island during the Civil War. They would play in the city for special occasions and for visiting dignitaries.
Photo by Matt Helm

There were 3 display tables - one with information about FOCWA/SUVCW, one showing the equipment carried by a Civil War soldier, and one exhibiting the medicines of the 1860s. Members who were also Park Volunteers gave walking tours of Fort Alcatraz and the Citadel, which the public really enjoyed. Lunches for the volunteers and rangers were provided by FOCWA, and by the end of the day everyone was tired but pleased that we had made history come alive for hundreds of visitors to the island. A special thanks goes to Rangers Christian and Matt, who gave great support to the volunteers, NPS volunteer Matt Helm, the Conservancy driver who transported the tables, and to the Park Service for giving the green light to once again have us sponsor living history on the island.

Many of the volunteers were also members of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, who told visitors about their ancestor's service during the Civil War and what life was like for the ordinary soldier during that conflict. Here members of Camp 24 and 23 pose in the cannon room, where visitors were shown how the fort was defended by howitzer cannons. The woman soldier on the right (Michelle Atno-Hall) would explain to folks how women managed to disguise themselves as men so they too could serve in the army. (400 managed to do so).

Photo by Matt Helm



Alcatraz Notes

The ferry service to Alcatraz continues to require passengers to wear masks on the boat, and the Park Service requires them to be worn indoors on the island. We are coming near the peak of the tourist season, and we are seeing many European visitors, especially Britain, France, and Ireland. This is probably due to the Euro being on par with the dollar. Sundays and Mondays are times when volunteers are especially needed, so if you have time to spare, come volunteer!

New Members

The Friends of Civil War Alcatraz received new members recently: Glenn Martin from Walnut Creek, William Jensen from San Ramon, and Jeffrey Nibert from Pleasanton. Plus our old friend Phil Blake renewed his membership so he could help with Living History Day. Welcome one and all, and thanks for going through your initiation by surviving the flies on Alcatraz.

Board Meeting

The board will have a virtual meeting on Saturday, August 6th, at 4 pm. Items to be discussed are the plans for Living History Day at Fort Point, financial reports, the uniform closet on Alcatraz, and a new brochure for our organization. All members are invited and encouraged to attend.

The Army's Woolen Uniform

The typical clothing of the 1850's for men and women consisted mostly of cotton, linen, or wool. Cotton and linen clothing was comfortable, available, and relatively easy to clean. However, these fabrics retained moisture (cotton can absorb four times its weight in sweat) so were unsuitable for military uniforms. Most European armies used wool for their uniforms, since wool will release moisture to the air, and even when wet can retain warmth. Wool is also much more durable and was fairly abundant. In the North there were 1,180 woolen mills, with Massachusetts and Pennsylvania being the biggest producers of woolen cloth. In the South, there were 78 woolen mills; Virginia and Georgia were

the biggest producer of cotton cloth.¹ Predictably, when the Civil War started there was a huge demand for wool for uniforms, hats, shirts, blankets, and coats. According to Army regulations, the U.S. Army soldier was allotted one hat, one forage cap, one cover, two coats, trousers, stockings, flannel shirts and drawers, a blanket, and four pairs of stockings.² The regular Army uniform had been a dark blue jacket, trousers, and cap, but new recruits were now issued light blue trousers to distinguish them from the professional soldiers.³

The Confederate Army also had wool uniforms which were naturally sheep's gray, which over time would become more brownish in color — Union soldiers called the Confederate soldiers "butternuts" because of that color. At the beginning of the war, the Confederacy imported both raw wool and finished uniforms from Britain, which were bluish-gray in color. As the blockade took effect on Southern ports, it became increasingly difficult to import wool from Britain. As a result, Southern armies would confiscate Union woolen uniforms after a battle, boil them in hot water, adding chestnuts to bleach out the blue color.⁴

There was such a rush to increase the supply of uniforms that sometimes the North would buy "shoddy" cloth — that is, cloth made from cast-off woolen clothes, blankets, carpets, socks, etc. These were chopped up, cleaned, and re-spun into wool cloth. However, depending on how quickly it was manufactured, this cloth was much less durable than the original and uniforms made from it could begin to deteriorate rather quickly. Thus any poorly made goods became known as "shoddy".⁵

Despite the blockade, the South still managed to receive shipments of "English Army cloth" from Britain throughout the war. This was a lighter blue than the Union uniforms but it was enough to cause confusion on the battlefield. At the Battle of Chickamauga Lt. Clark of the 125th Ohio told his men to hold their fire because the men on the mountain "at a distance appeared to wear dusty blue". A volley from the Confederates changed his mind.⁶

Peter Tait ran a clothing factory in Limerick, Ireland, and had his own small fleet of blockade runners. One of his ships, the *Evelyn*, arrived in Wilmington on Christmas Eve, 1864. Its cargo of 4400 jackets and pants was sorely needed by the South, but the war would end just four months later. *from the Journal of Military Historians* <https://www.military-historians.org/company/journal/confederate/confederate-3.htm>



From *Harper's Weekly*, August 1861 showing a soldier as the victim of corruption by clothing contractors. Library of Congress

¹ 1860 census: Manufactures in the United States <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860/manufactures/1860c-02.pdf>

² <https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/2012/12/six-questions-with-a-civil-war-material-culture-scholar.html>

³ <https://www.historynet.com/civil-war-uniforms/>

⁴ <http://www.history-of-american-wars.com/civil-war-uniforms.html>

⁵ Tracy Barnett, "Suits of Shoddy" <https://www.civilwarmonitor.com/blog/suits-of-shoddy>

⁶ David Burt "Confederates in Blue English Army Cloth" <https://acws.co.uk/archives-military-anvblue>

San Francisco had its own woolen mill, built in 1862, which manufactured uniforms for soldiers during the Civil War. No doubt soldiers on Alcatraz received some of their uniforms from this very factory. The original building was made of wood, which burned down and was replaced by the present brick structure. The Ghirardelli family bought the old woolen mill in 1893 and moved its chocolate making operations from Jackson Square to this location. (Today the chocolates are made in San Leandro)



The Woolen Mill as it appears today, now a retail shop for the Ghirardelli Chocolate Company



Chaplain's Corner, by member Steve Bogart

“Cheerfulness ” - O God, animate us to cheerfulness!!! May we have a joyful sense of our blessings, learn to look on the bright circumstances of our lot, and maintain a perpetual contentedness.

— William Ellery Channing