

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

January 2019

Steve Johnson, Editor

No Volunteers on Alcatraz Due to the ongoing federal government shut-down, volunteers are not to come to Alcatraz because there is no liability insurance or workman's compensation in effect for volunteers. This is true for all GGNRA volunteers, and comes from the administrators. Once the shut-down is over, volunteers will be needed again to help with programs, patrols, and dock announcements. You will be contacted by email with information about returning to Alcatraz.

Fort Point Living History Day is scheduled for the last Saturday of this month, assuming that the National Parks and Monuments will be open again by then. Volunteers will be needed to assist at the FOCWA recruitment table, by answering questions and passing out literature. If you are able to come to this event, please contact Constance Smith.

Memberships Due FOCWA membership forms for 2019 will be sent out soon. Please fill out the form and send it with your check to our secretary, Constance Smith, to the address on the top of the form. More than ever, the Park Service needs our support, so please join or renew your membership.

Board Meeting Members of the board will be meeting on Alcatraz on Sunday, February 3rd, at 10 a.m. Issues to be discussed: changes to the organization's by-laws; recruitment for the FOCWA table at the San Francisco History Days in the Old Mint, the first weekend in March; planning for the next Living History Day in April; ideas for recruiting young people to our organization. All members are invited to come.

Escapes During the Military Prison Era When escapes from Alcatraz- attempted or successful - are mentioned, people of course think of the ones that occurred during the Federal Penitentiary era. But there were a number of escape attempts when Alcatraz was a military prison that reveal that even under supposed tight military control escapes occurred. Here are several of the more interesting ones:

The raft that went nowhere Michael Tracey and Joseph Caulfied were in prison in 1900 for offenses committed while in the infantry; Tracey for assault and Caulfied for disobedience. The two of them were kept in a cell with an unused chimney, which of course they explored and found they could crawl up to the top. They managed to remove the boards capping the chimney and escaped down to the south side of the island, where they found a raft moored at the water edge with large wood shingles nearby. Untying the raft, they used shingles as paddles and started

Dates to Remember

Wednesday, Jan. 16, 2019

Peninsula CW Roundtable
Lecture "Raising the Hunley",
11:30 a.m. at Harry's Hoffbrau,
Redwood City

Thursday, Jan. 17, 2019

San Francisco CW Roundtable
Lecture "A Virginian's
Experience in the Civil War",
6:30 pm Gold Mirror
Restaurant
800 Taraval at 18th, S.F.

Thursday, January 26, 2019

Fort Point Living History Day

to make their way to the city, only a mile and a half away. But as other escapees were to discover, Alcatraz is surrounded by little eddies and mixing currents which make it very difficult to go in a straight line anywhere except for a very brief time at slack tide. As it was, these two soldiers, despite their furious paddling during the night, were not far off the island at daybreak when spotted by a sentry. A few shots convinced them that it was hopeless and they paddled back to the island and were placed “in a dungeon”. *San Francisco Call*, June 2, 1900

A Soldier Ships Himself to the Mainland Private Jesse Adams stuffed himself and an iron bar into an empty packing crate marked “Hospital Presidio” and “Handle with Care”, which was nailed shut with the help of another inmate. It was then left on the Alcatraz dock. The steamer McDowell dutifully transported the crate to the Presidio wharf and it was left there overnight. In the morning the wharf officer was surprised to find the box smashed to pieces. It took awhile solve the mystery, but the prison officers finally realized that was how Adams had made it off the island. Unfortunately for Adams, his tattoo gave him away and he was arrested in Sacramento and shipped right back to Alcatraz. *San Francisco Examiner*, October 5, 1900

Four Men in a Tub Four soldiers managed to break out of their cells and escape over the high fence, using some leftover barbed wire. They made their way down to the bakery where they confiscated a huge butter tub and brought it down to the water. However, the wind and the tide were against them and they soon realized their folly. They were found in an abandoned magazine on the west side of the island, and were then put “in ball and chain”.
San Francisco Call, April, 1906

Resources:

<http://www.peninsulacivilwarroundtable.org>

<http://www.sfgenealogy.org/sf/history/sfoealc1.htm#n2>

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



Noon
roll call
at US
Military
Prison,
Alcatraz