

# NEWSLETTER

## Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

January 2023

Steve Johnson, Editor

*Inside this issue: International Events When Alcatraz Was a Fort*

### Christmas Eve on Alcatraz

You might think that there would be few visitors to the island on Christmas Eve, but as it turned out every boat was booked and hundreds of visitors came to the island on December 24th. It so happened that there were only two rangers on duty, but two intrepid FOCWA volunteers, Steve Johnson and Constance Smith, were there to assist by providing walking tours for the visitors. Each tour had approximately 60 people and 5 tours were provided. The visitors were grateful for the balmy weather (60°) and for the chance to hear the larger story of Alcatraz. They also heard how Christmas was celebrated on Alcatraz — the inmates had a big baked ham dinner with all the trimmings, while the officers and their families met in the social hall for a Christmas dinner and celebration. In later years the children sang carols outside the prison to the inmates inside.

### Dates to Remember

**Saturday, January 14**

Board Meeting  
10 am on Zoom

**Monday, January 16**

**Martin Luther King Day**

**Saturday, January 28, 2023**  
**Fort Point Living History Day**

### Board Meeting on January 14

We will have our next board meeting via Zoom on the morning of Saturday, January 14th, at 10 am. We request board members to attend, and all FOCWA members are invited. Subjects to be discussed: activities for 2023; Living History Day at Fort Point; membership renewals. The link to the Zoom meeting will be sent to all members.

### Living History Day at Fort Point

On Saturday, January 28th, the rangers at Fort Point will welcome military and civilian re-enactors to bring the old fort to life, portraying life there in the 1860s during the Civil War. Members of the 20th Maine, and of the National Civil War Assn., will be there to do military exercises and cannon drills. Also present will be the Fort Point Brass Band and the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. Members of FOCWA are requested to help man the FOCWA information table; this is the premier event to attract new members. FOCWA members who are coming should contact Gary Hormel for further information.

### International Events During the era of Fort Alcatraz, Part I, 1850-1860

It might be useful to consider what was going on in the larger world during the time Alcatraz was being built and in its early years as a military post. These are some of the events that were happening, some of which had an effect on San Francisco.

**1848 Establishment of the Oregon Territory** For years Britain and the United States had been negotiating over the border line between British North America and the U.S. The American government wanted the line to be at 54°N latitude, Britain wanted it to be at the Columbia River.

In 1846 President Polk - who was facing war with Mexico - compromised in the Treaty of Oregon to have the border at the 49th parallel. The Oregon Territory included today's states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.<sup>1</sup> Troops from San Francisco were sent to protect settlers in these areas in the 1850s.

**1853 The Gadsden Purchase** In this treaty, the U.S. acquired additional land from Mexico which became the southern border of Arizona and New Mexico. The U.S. wanted this land as a favorable route for a railroad from San Diego to Texas. The chief negotiator was James Gadsden, a fervent slave owner who hoped such a railroad would allow slaves to be shipped easily into California; he put enormous pressure on Mexican President Santa Ana to accept the deal. Santa Ana, who ironically needed the money to build up his army against American intervention, agreed to the sale.<sup>2</sup> This was the beginning of Southern ambitions to expand into California.



**1854 The Kanagawa Treaty with Japan** Commodore Perry visited Tokyo Bay in 1853 with a message and gifts for the emperor (who at the time wasn't the actual ruler of Japan). The ostensible reason was to secure protection for shipwrecked American sailors and refueling stations for American ships. The real reason was to establish diplomatic relations with Japan to expand American trade and influence in the area. The first Japanese diplomats stopped in San Francisco in 1860 on their way to Washington to sign a treaty of commerce.<sup>3</sup> This was the beginning of Japan's acquiring Western technology to become an industrialized nation; it also began the American fleet's expanse into the Western Pacific.

**1854 U.S. Attempts to Annex Hawaii** To offset the growing European interest in the islands, King Kamehameha III decided to ask protection from the United States. In 1851, the King formally applied to the United States Congress to become a protectorate of the United States. A treaty was drawn up in 1854 but the king died before it was adopted and Kamehameha IV ended all negotiations.

**1859 Treaty of Tianjin** The U.S., Britain, France, and Russia signed this treaty with the Chinese government which gave them most-favored nations status in trade, with low tariffs and access to the country's interior.<sup>4</sup> This made San Francisco an important port in the China trade. Since the treaty gave major concessions to the Western powers at the expense of China, it became a source of resentment among the Chinese people, leading to later conflict.

<sup>1</sup> "The Treaty of Oregon" Northwest Power and Conservation Council <https://www.nwcouncil.org/reports/columbia-river-history/treatyoforegon/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gadsden\\_Purchase](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gadsden_Purchase)

<sup>3</sup> "Japan in the Bay Area", Bay Area Economic Institute <http://www.bayareaeconomy.org/files/pdf/JapanIn-TheBayArea.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> "The Opening to China, Part II, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/china-2>

**1859 “Pig War”** The 1848 Treaty of Oregon did not settle the water boundary between the U.S. and British North America within the San Juan Islands. In particular, San Juan Island was claimed by both nations and both had troops stationed there. Tensions rose when a pig from the British side was killed by an American settler, and the British responded by threatening to remove all Americans from the island. This prompted Brigadier General Haney of the Department of Oregon to send Captain George Pickett (of later Civil War fame) with troops of the 9th U.S. Infantry to protect Americans on the island. Both sides began to call for reinforcements as tensions continued to mount. Finally British Rear Admiral Lambert Baynes arrived and said he “would not involve two great nations over a squabble about a pig.” Cooler heads prevailed, though the island remained under joint military jurisdiction for another 12 years. Finally, in 1871 a European commission set the international boundary north of the San Juan Islands; these islands then became part of the state of Washington.<sup>5</sup>

### **Time for Renewal of FOCWA Membership**

By now you have received your membership renewal letter in the mail. Please return it soon to membership chairwoman Evelyn Mar so we know what our budget for the year will be. 100% of our operating budget comes from membership dues and donations, which goes to fund living history days, printing & postage costs, maintaining the Alcatraz cannon, and purchases of army uniforms and equipment for Alcatraz. If you are new to our organization and wish to join, go to the membership section of our website to find information on how to do this.

### **New Volunteer Coordinator on Alcatraz**

Ranger Roger Fang has been with the GGNRA since 2017, and has worked at the Golden Gate Bridge Visitor Center as well as Fort Point, the Presidio, and Muir Woods. He is currently working as the night ranger on Alcatraz. He is taking over the duties from Ranger Wendy, who has moved to the John Muir House in Martinez. He will be doing the training for new volunteers, coordinating activities that involve volunteers, and supporting FOCWA with our living history days. He is also sending out a periodic newsletter for volunteers. In the latest issue, he asks volunteers not to do any behind-the-scenes tours after 2:30, so as to not interfere with the night program of tours.

### **Lincoln on the Meaning of the War, 1861**

A few writers and historians have written that Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 to make the war a moral issue and therefore gain more support for the Union cause here and abroad. But in his address to Congress in July of 1861 Lincoln summed up the reason the war was being fought:

“This is essentially a People's contest. On the side of the Union, it is a struggle for maintaining in the world, that form, and substance of government, whose leading object is, to elevate the condition of men -- to lift artificial weights from all shoulders -- to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all -- to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life.”

This tells me what Lincoln had always believed - that every man, whether black or white, should have the same chances in life, and that the government should help make it so. He saw it, then, as a fight for fairness for every man. Right from the start.

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<sup>5</sup> “Pig War” San Juan Island National Historic Park, NPS <https://www.nps.gov/sajh/learn/historyculture/the-pig-war.htm>