

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

February 2023

Steve Johnson, Editor

Inside this issue: International Events When Alcatraz Was a Fort, Part II

Board Meeting on February 11

We will have our next board meeting via Zoom on the morning of Saturday, February 11, 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 by mid-week.

Living History Day at Fort Point

On Saturday, February 25th, 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. This event was postponed from an earlier date. Members of the 20th Maine and of the National Civil War Association 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, and if the weather is good hundreds of visitors are expected. FOCWA members who are coming should contact the editor if they plan to attend to get more info.

International Events During the era of Fort Alcatraz, Part II, 1860-1865

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 broader events that were happening during the Civil War.

1860 Nightingale Opens School for Nurses After her experiences in the Crimean War tending the sick and wounded soldiers, Florence Nightingale saw the need for trained nurses, so she founded a school in London to teach prospective nurses the importance of sanitation, nutrition, ventilation, and cleanliness. Her ideas inspired the work of the U.S. Sanitary Commission during the Civil War.¹

1861 Fort Sumter Fired Upon Most people in the North did not believe the South would go to war over the issue of slavery, and were shocked at the news of the attack on Ft. Sumter in the harbor of South Carolina on April 12, 1861. Within days Lincoln called up troops and declared the seceding states to be in open rebellion. The news reached San Francisco by Pony Express 10 days later. General Albert Sydney Johnston sent most of the arms at Fort Point to Fort Alcatraz for better protection against any attempt to seize them by secessionists in San Francisco.

1861 A Blockade is Proclaimed Lincoln proclaimed a blockade of Southern ports the same month, forbidding all foreign trade with the states in rebellion. Under international law, a blockade is a tactic employed by two belligerent nations, but only the Confederacy considered itself to be a nation. To

Dates to Remember

Saturday, February 11
Board Meeting
10 am on Zoom

Saturday, February 25, 2023
Fort Point Living History Day
10 am - 5 pm

¹ Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence_Nightingale

avoid conflict with Lincoln's government, European nations declared themselves to be neutral, though blockade runners from Britain and Jamaica were sometimes successful in getting through. The blockade even affected San Francisco, where federal agents blocked arms going to Mexico which might have ended up going to the Confederacy instead. A major consequence of the blockade was that Britain turned to Egypt for its cotton, dashing hopes of the South that Britain would go to war with the United States over cotton and become their ally.

1861 The Trent Affair In

November, the U.S. warship *San Jacinto* under the command of Charles Wilkes stopped the British ship *Trent* on the high seas and took off by force two envoys from the South who were on their way to Britain to plead for recognition of the Confederacy. To many in Britain this was an insult to British sovereignty and the bellicose Prime Minister Palmerston put troops in Canada on a war footing. But Prince Albert suggested giving the Americans a way out of the debacle by repudiating the action of the American captain, which is what Lincoln did. (Lincoln reportedly said, "One war at a time") This is the closest Britain came to war with the United States during the Civil War.²

1863 Maximilian Becomes Emperor of Mexico Napoleon III, emperor of France, took advantage of the civil war raging in Mexico to install Maximilian as the ruler of the country, ostensibly to recover debts owed to the French government. Though displeased, there was little the American government could do because of its own civil war; also, at the time Lincoln did not want to antagonize Napoleon who might throw his support to the Confederacy.³ In 1867 France withdrew its troops, and Maximilian was finally deposed and executed by the Mexican government.

Militias in the Bay Area: The Wolfe Tone Guards by Steve Bogart

The unit was named after a man named Theobald Wolfe Tone (Bhulf To'n in Irish) who was a leader in the Irish Rebellion and known as the Father of Irish Republicanism. He was captured at Lough Swilly in Donegal and executed by the British in the 1798 Irish Rebellion.

The unit wore the regular Union uniform with green facing, red trousers and the regulation hat with green feathers in it. They were well known by their uniforms as well as by their outstanding military bearing and thorough precision in doing drills. They were at Camp Allen, did quite well, and were admired by all and complimented on for their appearance and military skills. They continued to do parades and military escort duties at numeral inaugurations but were mustered out in 1866. They were



Envoy from the *Trent* being transferred to the *USS San Jacinto*.

Painting credit: www.bridgemanimages.com

² American Civil War Roundtable, UK. <https://www.acwrt.org.uk/post/britain-views-the-american-civil-war>

³ Office of the Historian, U.S. Dept of State <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1861-1865/french-intervention>

immediately re-organized as Company C. 1st. Infantry Battery, 2nd. Brigade of the California Militia. They performed parade duties and drilled for the next year and were again mustered out and later re-organized in February 1868, becoming Company C, First Infantry Battalion of the California National Guard. In Feb. 1971 they were transferred to Co. C., (Irish) Inf. Regiment, 2nd Brigade, California National Guard.

In 1876 there was a fire at San Quentin and they were called to duty during this event. In October of that year there was a riot against the Chinese immigrants in San Francisco and they were one of a number of National Guard companies called to service and helped to quiet things down during the disturbance. In July of 1877 they were called out in service to help quell the riots, again against the Chinese. By September of 1889 the unit had 83 men. The company during the following years drilled and performed in parades and were re-organized a couple of times, and by the time they were eventually disbanded they were in the 3rd (Irish) Infantry Regiment, Company E.

Thanks for Your Membership

So far 26 members have renewed their FOCWA membership, and the board is grateful for your support. If you haven't yet renewed, please continue to support us by filling out the membership form found here http://www.friendsofcivilwaralcatraz.org/MembershipApp_2021.pdf and send it in along with your check. Thank you!

Previous Living History Days at Fort Point

