



NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz



February 2024

Steve Johnson, Editor

In this issue: Inside a Soldier's Haversack

Island News Attendance on the island has been fluctuating, depending on the weather and what football games are being broadcast. FOCWA member and NPS volunteer Constance Smith reports that on her recent day on the island, visitors not only went on the walking tour with her but stayed to go on her tour of the underground citadel as well, so there is a real interest in personalized tours by the staff and volunteers. Bird season starts this month, which means certain areas will be closed so birds can build their nests. This includes the Agave Trail, the parade ground, and the area around the water tank.

Dates to Remember

**Saturday & Sunday
February 3 & 4
Living History Day
Fort Point, 10 a.m.**

Fort Point Readies for Living History Days, Feb. 3 - 4

After many weeks of planning, the schedule for the Living History Day has been finalized. It will be a full day of activities, including music by the Fort Point Brass Band and the Wandering Bow Players, cannon demonstrations and military drills, and tours of the fort. There will be lectures about every half-hour, on these topics: 1860s medicines, California and the Civil War, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" by Harriet Beecher Stowe, the life of a soldier, the Battle of Mobile Bay, and recruiting for the Union Army. In addition, there will be exhibits of soldier's equipment, uniforms, and a cooking demonstration. If you plan to come as a re-enactor, you must show up by 9:30 a.m. You can see the schedule here:



Raising the garrison flag at Fort Point as the National Anthem is played

<https://www.nps.gov/fopo/living-history-weekend.htm>

continued

Board Meeting Minutes

Our last board meeting was held on January 20th and was attended by Frank Avila, Gary Hormel, Steve Johnson, John Fitzpatrick, Matt Helm, and Constance Smith. The minutes were summarized and approved. The financial report has been delayed and will be sent out later in February. The schedule for Living History Day was discussed; some FOCWA members will participate. The March 22 presentation at Bayside School was discussed. Constance Smith and Steve Johnson will participate at that event. The next living history day on Alcatraz has been tentatively set for Saturday, April 13th. Board member John Fitzpatrick announced he will be permanently moving to Pennsylvania to be close to family, and has kindly offered to donate his soldier's kit to FOCWA to be used at living history events. John has been a long-time member and supporter of FOCWA, and we will miss his sage counsel and legal expertise. We all wish him well.

Volunteer Appreciation Party, Saturday March 9, 2024 at Fort Mason

Those of you who have volunteered for the Park Service - including Fort Point, Alcatraz, the Presidio, and the National Cemetery - are welcome to attend the volunteer appreciation party at the General's Residence (just east of the chapel), starting at 10 a.m. Brunch will be served. You must register in advance. https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=urWTBhhLe02TQfMvQApUJ_61a2ShaBNpMJXMS-cXkdUM0RNTzFJNjZYS0xKWUtGQkYzSTINWIYwMS4u Wear your Union Army, 1860s clothing, or volunteer uniform.

Inside a Soldier's Haversack

What would a Union infantry soldier typically carry in his haversack? He could be away from a camp for many days, so these are the things he'd likely carry with him.

woolen socks: fresh, dry socks were the number one thing he'd want to have. The Army only supplied two pairs, which would wear out or get soaked quickly, so soldiers were always writing relatives to send them more.

toothbrush: the handle was carved from wood and the bristles were made of boar's hair, inserted into bored holes in the handle.

comb: was usually carved from wood or hard root and had two purposes - to comb the hair and to trap lice along the trench by the handle.

Lice was a common feature on both sides during the war.

toothpowder: ingredients varied but common ingredients included orris root, powdered cuttlebone (the internal shell of a cuttlefish), sodium bicarbonate (baking soda), calcium carbonate (chalk), and charcoal. Oils of cinnamon, clove, rose, or peppermint were used as flavorings.¹

candles: candles were a necessity for inside the tent at night in order to find things, and they would be lit by using **lucifers**

bible: for the religious soldier (and many were) having a small bible was a comfort and an approved way to pass the time during times of inactivity.



¹ Smithsonian "Oral Care" collection <https://www.si.edu/spotlight/health-hygiene-and-beauty/oral-care>

housewife: was a small cloth bag holding small packets of thread, several needles, and extra buttons for repairs to the uniform or shirt

knife, fork, spoon: were handy when it was possible to sit down for a meal. When in battle, men would sometimes go for days before a proper meal was possible to prepare.

playing cards: most of the time soldiers were sitting around camps, and playing cards was a popular way to spend the time. (cards at that time had no numbers on them)

hardtack: was made from flour, water, and salt, then baked until it was hard as a rock. This kept it from becoming moldy but was called “sheet iron crackers” by the troops because it was impossible to bite into. The men had to crush the biscuits with the butt of their musket and soak the bits in coffee.

coffee beans: were carried in a poke and the beans were crushed as above, placed in a cup and hot water poured over them. Coffee not only was a stimulant but also wasn't a carrier of cholera since the water was boiled.

bandana: had many uses - as a handkerchief, towel, washcloth, protector from sunburn, potholder, and fashion statement.

beans: if water, a pot, and a fire were available, it was easy enough to make a bean soup, adding the dried meat the army sometimes provided.

tin cup: was a necessity for drinking coffee or whatever liquid refreshment the soldier could get (such as the small bottles of whiskey well-meaning relatives would send in the food packages from home)



Book Review: *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* by James McPherson (Oxford University Press, 1997)

Historian James McPherson, author of several books on the Civil War, here tackles the question “Why did men fight in the Civil War?” This is an important question, because thousands of men enlisted long before there was a draft - so what motivated them? We know the prime motivation of the Southerners was to keep slavery in place and defend their “homeland”, but what about the Northern men? To get an idea, McPherson reviewed 25,000 letters and 250 diaries to find the answers. He found a variety of motivations, some universal and some specific to this conflict. As you read through his findings, you wonder - would Americans have the same motivations today to act if our country was imperiled, from without, or within?