

# NEWSLETTER

## Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

April 2019

Steve Johnson, Editor

**New Member Orientation** Anyone who joins FOCWA has the opportunity to become a VIP — Volunteer in the Park. Recently a new member, Mike Bennett, joined me on Alcatraz and followed me around as I did dock announcements, gave a Fort Alcatraz walking tour, and met with families for whom I did a behind-the-scenes tour of the chapel and catwalk. Once the paperwork is completed, a new volunteer is given a Park Service orientation (usually a day on Alcatraz with Ranger Wendy) and then is given a VIP uniform. Volunteers become extra eyes for the rangers, and are given radios so they can report any problems; they are also given keys for giving behind-the-scenes tours. Perks include a limited number of boat tickets for family members, an annual volunteer luncheon, and sometimes a special trip just for VIPs. Plus we can give tours of the citadel (with training), the chapel, and the infirmary — normally closed-off areas. Of course, our specialty is Alcatraz during the Civil War, so we have Union uniforms available to volunteers who want to appear in uniform to give talks on Fort Alcatraz. With training, volunteers can also do cannon drills for the public. If you know of anyone who might be interested in volunteering, please contact the editor at [parksvolunteer425@gmail.com](mailto:parksvolunteer425@gmail.com)

### Dates to Remember

#### Saturday April 6

Junior Ranger Day

#### Tuesday, April 16, 2019

Peninsula CW Roundtable Lecture  
“Civil War Letters” by Nick Adams,  
11:30 a.m. at Harry’s Hoffbrau,  
Redwood City

#### Thursday, April 18, 2019

San Francisco CW Roundtable  
Lecture “Away at War” by Nick  
Adams, 6:00 pm Gold Mirror  
Restaurant, 800 Taraval, S.F.

#### Saturday, May 11, 2019

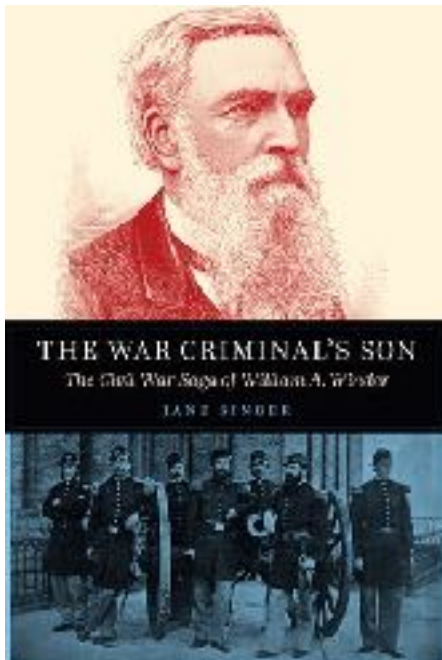
Alcatraz Living History Day 9 am  
to 4 pm

#### Sunday, May 19, 2019

Board Meeting, 10 am, Alcatraz

### The War Criminal’s Son — the Civil War Saga of William A. Winder by Jane Singer

A Review by Steve Johnson



For those of us who work and volunteer at Alcatraz National Park, the name of Captain Winder is quite familiar. After all, he was the commander of Fort Alcatraz when two major events took place in 1863 — the firing on a British warship by Alcatraz cannons and the detention of Confederate sympathizers on Alcatraz for their plot to attack Union gold shipments. Both these events are well described in *The War Criminal’s Son*. But this is only a small part of Captain Winder’s story, for his life was full of incredible journeys, conflicts, transformations, and a passionate desire to avoid the tarnish brought to the family name by the actions of his Baltimore family, all Confederate supporters. His father John H. Winder, in fact, became the general in charge of Confederate prison camps, including the infamous

Andersonville prison. Had he lived past the war he would have been tried as a war criminal. William Winder's other relatives were Confederate officers or rabid supporters of slavery. Cut off from his family, and wanting to serve as an officer in the Union Army, Winder was constantly trying to prove his loyalty despite the suspicions of some in Washington and California that he was really a Confederate sympathizer, such as when he approved the taking of photographs of the fortifications on Alcatraz in 1864. He did this to show off to the public all the improvements that had been made on the island to protect the harbor, but to the higher command this was seen by some as aiding the enemy. These suspicions persisted despite William Winder's courage displayed in the Mexican-American war, and the time in 1853 when he helped rescue many of his fellow soldiers when their transport ship ran into a storm and eventually sank.

After his military service Winder became a doctor and ministered to the needs of the citizens of San Diego, and eventually became an Indian agent in California and South Dakota, helping to distribute land to tribal members. In recounting Winder's story, the author ably details the background and key figures behind each event in his adult life. Her description of early San Diego, for example, is fascinating when it was a small town mixed with Anglos, Mexicans, and Californios, where bear baiting was popular, local tribes were under siege (Winder was a fervent supporter of Indian rights), and the biggest controversy was whether Old Town or New Town was going to be the future city. The endurance, persistence, humanity, and dedication of this remarkable man certainly came through in Singer's narrative, and the book gives a much richer portrait of a man who was more than an Army captain — he was indeed a war criminal's son but a man who made his own way in the world and who made it a better place.

**Note: Copies of this book will be available for sale on Living History Day, with a discount for FOCWA members, the Ranger and Conservancy staff, and re-enactors. Checks or cash only.**

**Living History Day on Alcatraz** There is no better way to tell the history of Fort Alcatraz than to provide Union soldiers, a military band, cannon drills, and fort tours — and all of this happens on our bi-annual Living History Day in the spring and fall. This spring's event will be held on the island on **Saturday, May 11th**. Lunches provided for FOCWA volunteers and for re-enactors. For details, please go to the activities page on our website.

**Board Meeting** The next meeting of the FOCWA board will be on Alcatraz at 10 am on Sunday, May 19th. All members are invited and encouraged to attend. A cannon drill will be demonstrated to the public and members who'd like to learn the drill can participate. Also, we all need to be re-certified to give Citadel tours, so this would be a good day to come for that.

### **Resources:**

<http://www.peninsulacivilwarroundtable.org>

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

“The War Criminal's Son” by Jane Singer, 2019, published by University of Nebraska Press