



NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz



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Island News

Several rangers have moved on to other national parks, and four seasonal rangers are currently in training as the summer tourist season moves into high gear. Construction continues on the north end of the cellhouse and will resume on the south end of the dock area this summer.

Memorial Day

On Monday, May 25th, two members of FOCWA, Ken Felton and Steve Johnson, attended the Memorial Day service at the Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland. About 200 people were



there to remember the hundreds of veterans who are buried at this very large and beautiful cemetery. After the presentation of colors and a very meaningful talk by Air Force Chief Master Sergeant Herrera, this writer gave a talk about the many Civil War soldiers who came to California to settle after the war. Also mentioned were the 17,000 men who joined the Union Army here in California and served to protect federal property, intervene between settlers and displaced native tribes, and be ready in case California might be invaded by a foreign power (namely, the British). The audience was invited to learn more about the Civil War in the Bay Area by visiting Alcatraz, Fort Point, and Angel Island. After the ceremonies, a cemetery docent, Dennis Evanovsky, led a tour of the G.A.R. plot and told stories of some of the individuals buried there, including Obediah Summers, who was born a slave but joined the Union Army in 1864 and later became the first African-American to serve as chaplain for the state legislature. -SJ

Dates to Remember

Saturday, July 11
Living History Day
on Alcatraz

Friday, July 17
Ft. Point Workday

Saturday, August 1
Living History Day
at Fort Point

Living History Day on Alcatraz Island - July 11

The Living History Day on Alcatraz is finally scheduled for Saturday, July 11th. Friends of Civil War Alcatraz will host the event and will lead tours of the island and the Citadel. Participating groups include the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, the 20th Maine, ladies of the

U.S. Sanitary Commission, and the U.S. Balloon Corps. There will be displays of typical equipment carried by a soldier, period medical tools and medicines, and weapons of the Civil War. Let your friends know about the event, which only happens twice a year.



Photos from previous Living History Day, with members of the 20th Maine, and Randall Hawkinson talking to visitors.

From Farm to Table: Feeding the Troops and the People in the Bay Area 1860-1865

Prior to the Gold Rush, most of the open, unfenced land in the Bay Area was devoted to cattle from the rancho days. This changed in the 1850s due to floods and drought, which decimated herds of cattle. Also, land was being sectioned off for newly arrived settlers who were mostly farmers. The Bay Area population in 1860 was around 114,000¹ and there was a growing demand for foods of all kinds. Italians, mostly from Genoa, began small farms in the Hayes Valley and Mission Valley, and around Lake Merced, growing vegetables and potatoes.² In the Santa Clara Valley, fruit orchards were planted, and wheat and grain became major crops. Produce was brought to the city by schooners, wagons along the El Camino, and later by the recently completed San Francisco-San Jose Railroad (1864). In Marin County, the treeless, rolling coastal hills were ideal for dairy cows, and by the 1860s the county was supplying San Francisco with milk, wheels of cheese, and casks of butter.³ In the East Bay, farmers took advantage of the mild climate and good soil to grow acres of wheat and barley in Livermore and Hayward, while along the shoreline hops and asparagus were grown.⁴ Hay was an especially important crop because of all the horses used for hauling, transportation, and individual use.

In short, the Civil War period saw the shift in California from ranching to farming, and an abundance of food brought better nutrition to the residents of San Francisco, including the troops stationed there. The quartermaster of the forts and camps had a variety of sources to choose from in obtaining meat, bread, and vegetables for the soldiers. Of course, it was a different story for the cavalry who, out on the trails, had to rely on salted pork, hardtack, beans, and coffee. These men had to be hardy, resourceful, and used to simple fare.

¹ https://census.bayareametro.gov/historical-data/1860-1940/bay_area

² <https://www.outsidelands.org/forest-fires3.php>

³ https://www.nps.gov/pore/learn/historyculture/stories_ranching.htm

⁴ <https://www.haywardareahistory.org/agricultural-history>