

NEWSLETTER

Civil War Room Comes Closer to Reality

Thanks to the efforts of the Civil War Room Committee and the board of directors of FOCWA, the planning of the Civil War room has moved on to the next level - the actual design of the room. Ideas for the design have been submitted to two museum designers, and we are waiting for the second cost estimate; this will be presented at the next meeting of the board on July 15th. At this time the board will review the estimates, consider changes to the design proposals, and begin the process of seeking funding for this project. Head Ranger Marcus Koenen is optimistic that some funding may be available from recreation fees collected by Alcatraz Cruises and the Park Service. We will also be looking into funding from other possible sources, such as the Civil War Trust and the Parks Conservancy. All members are invited to come to the meeting, to be held on Alcatraz at 11 am in the library.

Dates to Remember

July 15 - Board meeting on Alcatraz, 11 a.m.

July 27 - Fort Point Brass Band plays on Alcatraz

August 16 - Fort Point Living History Day

October 4 - Living History Day on Alcatraz

The Civil War from a Lady's Perspective

FOCWA member Constance Smith comes to Alcatraz on a monthly basis, and always does at least two Civil War programs on the island. In her program, Constance talks about an often neglected part of the Alcatraz story - the role of women during the Civil War. It was they who supported the war effort by forming sewing circles (making socks for the soldiers, for example), soliciting funds for the Sanitary Commission (later the Red Cross), and of course volunteering as nurses on the battlefields in the East. Women in San Francisco did essentially the same things, with the exception of field service. If time permits, Constance will also talk about Pauline Cushman Fryer, the actress who became a spy for the Union and is buried at the Presidio National Cemetery. This often leads into the topic of the many women who disguised themselves as men and fought alongside the men in many battles. As for Alcatraz, like any military post, it was the wives of the military officers who provided support and comfort to their husbands who were assigned to a cold and lonely outpost.



Constance Smith of FOCWA in Victorian dress speaking to visitors on Alcatraz about the history of the fort.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

In June FOCWA member John Fitzpatrick gave a revealing background story to Lincoln's Gettysburg address. Lincoln, as it turned out, was coming down with a bout of smallpox. His son Tad was home sick, which caused Mary Lincoln to go into another worried frenzy. The recent battle of Chickamauga had been a costly Union defeat with no end to the war in sight. And yet, with all this going on in his head, Lincoln managed to write the most poignant and enduring speech about why the war was being fought and why the "government of the people" must endure.