

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

July 2021

Steve Johnson, Editor

FOCWA Volunteers Giving Programs

Members Gary Hormel, Mike Bennett, and Steve Johnson have begun giving walking programs of military history to visitors to the island, with the blessing of the ranger staff. The walking tour includes the origins of the Alcatraz gardens, the historic sally port and its defensive structures, the *Chapman* incident and the imprisonment of Confederate sympathizers in the basement, the cannons on the island, the transition to a military prison, the post exchange building (later the social hall), and the life of soldiers on Alcatraz. We used the “chatter-boxes” which helped amplify our voices through the masks (which are no longer required outside). We typically had about 50 visitors in attendance, who appreciated the more-in-depth history of Alcatraz. The boats are now bringing 350 visitors to the island every hour, and more members of FOCWA will be needed to give programs on the island.

FOCWA volunteer Gary Hormel tells visitors the importance of the sally port in defending Fort Alcatraz

Dates to Remember

Sunday, July 4, 2021
Independence Day



Memorial Day Remembered

On Memorial Day last month, FOCWA members Steve Johnson, Gary Hormel, and Robert Mayer stood at the entrance to the National Cemetery at the Presidio, and saluted the veterans and families who came to pay their respects. This simple gesture was very much appreciated by the visitors, especially by veterans who sometimes just wanted to talk to someone. The highlight for us was meeting a 100 year old army veteran who had been in the Battle of the Bulge, who being driven around the cemetery by his grandson. It was very encouraging to see the number of parents who had come with their young children to teach them the meaning of Memorial Day. That day we were also representing the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, of which we are members as well.

Protecting the Stagecoach Lines

Before the the railroad connected the east and west coasts in 1869, many people traveled to San Francisco by ship, if they could afford it, because they could bring more luggage and goods that way. Ships also brought newspapers from various eastern cities — though the news could sometimes be six months old — to a city starved for information from the east coast. Some travelers, however, chose to take the stagecoach that operated out of St. Louis and New Orleans. The most famous was the Butterfield Stage Line, operated by John Butterfield, whose government contract required the company to get mail from St. Louis to San Francisco - a distance of 2,700 miles - in 25 days. The company took passengers as well, for the price of \$200 (\$6000 in today's money) ¹ The stages travelled day and night, with stops about every 160 miles. The stops lasted no more than 20 minutes; passengers had to learn to eat fast, and to sleep while being jostled and bumped. At several times during the trip, drivers on the eastbound trip would meet the driver of the westbound stage, and they would exchange mail and passengers and head back they way they had come. That way the drivers would be most familiar with a certain section of the route that they continuously traveled.²

Stagecoach travel became fairly routine, but once the Civil War began things changed. Soldiers who had been assigned to protect the stagecoaches from Indian attacks - primarily by the Apaches in Arizona Territory - were now busy skirmishing with Confederates throughout the Southwest. Native tribes used the opportunity to try to drive the white invaders from their land, and the stagecoaches were a prime target. One of the duties of the newly formed California Volunteers units in the Bay Area was to protect the stage lines - and the steadily advancing telegraph line - from further attacks by Indian tribes. They began to escort the stages from fort to fort, keeping the mail and pas-



¹ from Inflation Calculator

² "Stage Lines to California", California State Parks, https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=25066

sengers safe as best they could. Nevertheless, the attacks continued until the stage line route from St. Louis was changed to a more central route, avoiding the Arizona Territory altogether.³ This route went through Nebraska and Colorado, and into Salt Lake City in Utah.⁴ This line was now taken over by Wells, Fargo & Company which continued the service until the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869.

In California the Butterfield Overland Mail entered California in San Bernardino and connected Los Angeles with San Francisco. It generally followed present day State Route 99 through the Central Valley and took four and a half days to travel from San Bernardino to the Bay Area.⁵ One of the stops was at Fort Tejon, a state park which today memorializes the history of the stagecoaches, the Camel Corps, and the Union troops stationed there.

The Wells Fargo stages would arrive at the company's office at Clay & Montgomery Streets in San Francisco, which also was the terminus of the Pony Express (1860 - 1861). The advances in technology doomed both the Pony Express and the stagecoaches, but it is important to note the contribution the U.S. Army and the California Volunteers played in protecting the communication between the two coasts during the Civil War.

Board Meeting Held on June 26th

Board members Gary Hormel, Constance Smith, Frank Avila, Evelyn Mar, John Fitzpatrick, Brad Schall, and Steve Johnson were joined by members Chuck Gardali and Mike Bennett via Zoom for a meeting to discuss recent changes on Alcatraz. Those changes included the resumption of walking tours by volunteers, the dropping of the mask requirement (except on the boat), the increase of visitors (350 people per hour), and the need for more volunteers. Other topics discussed were a membership drive, setting up a new bank account, and printing new brochures and business cards (members: please contact Gary Hormel and tell him how many you want). The minutes of the meeting will be posted soon on our website.

Resources

For contemporary accounts of stagecoach travel, and a more realistic description of it compared to John Ford's movie "Stagecoach", see the article by Jay Sharp "The Stagecoach in the 1860's" on the site Desert USA <https://www.desertusa.com/desert-activity/stagecoach-service.html> It also has an extensive bibliography on this subject

Here is a neat Google Map of the stage stops in California <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1-3xDDMIF76kEIGv-b7YVnvQd9Xw&msa=0&ll=35.242359496811176%2C-118.526775&z=7>

³ The 3rd Infantry Regiment of California Volunteers, mustered in Benicia and Stockton, was assigned to protect this route. See <http://www.militarymuseum.org/CreationNGC.html>

⁴ Frank Root and William Elsey Connelley, *The Overland Stage to California*. Crane & Co., Topeka, Kansas, 1901

⁵ see the article by Kurt Snibbe in the Orange County Register <https://www.ocregister.com/2018/09/13/the-longest-stagecoach-line-through-california-could-become-a-national-historic-trail/>