

# NEWSLETTER

## Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

September 2018

Editor: Steve Johnson

**FOCWA Meeting Held on August 12** Enough members were present to have a quorum, so members John Nevins, Steve Johnson, Gary Hormel, Constance Smith, and Evelyn Mar conducted a meeting in the library on Alcatraz. Several important decisions were made, among them to hold an election for officers, accept nominations, and to mail out ballots to all the members. Members would be asked to return by mail their ballots to John Nevins, who will count them and send the results to secretary Constance Smith, who will record and announce the results by email. Other decisions were to do active recruiting at the upcoming Living History Day by having a FOCWA table there; to have more regular meetings; and to reach out to ROTC groups and history groups on college campuses. Minutes will be placed on the FOCWA website.

**Last Alumni Day** After the meeting our members stayed around on Alumni Day to listen to the former correctional officers, inmates, and adults who were children on Alcatraz. It was a bittersweet day as we realized we were not likely to see many former inmates or officers again on the island (though inmate Bill Baker and officer Frank Divencenzi still come to the island from time to time to sell their books). Among the many stories we heard were from three women who as little girls were in lockdown in their apartment during the riot of 1946, terrified as the sound of gunfire filled the air; and the teenaged boy who hated living on Alcatraz but ran a business by charging friends to come over and take his tour of the island.

**Fort Point Living History Day** FOCWA members Jeffrey Vaillant, Ken Felton, Gary Hormel, Constance Smith, and Steve Johnson all participated in the Fort's bi-annual Civil War Day, joining about 50 re-enactors in bringing the fort to life as it was in the 1860's. While Steve and Constance conducted tours and activities, Gary, Jeffrey, Ken, and Evelyn greeted people at the FOCWA table — and signed up 3 new members! One of them is a re-enactor who portrays Harriet Beecher Stowe and gave a lecture as Stowe at the fort. There was a steady stream of visitors during the day, with about 2,000 people attending altogether.

### Dates to Remember

**Tuesday, Sept. 18, 2018**

Peninsula CW Roundtable  
Lecture, "Jean Lefitte and the  
Battle of New Orleans" by  
Howard Jones 11:30 a.m.

**Thursday, Sept. 20, 2018**

San Francisco CW Roundtable  
Lecture: "Berdan's Sharp-  
shooters" by Bernie Quinn 6 pm

**Saturday, October 6, 2018**

Alcatraz Living History Day





← Member Constance Smith demonstrates how to use flour

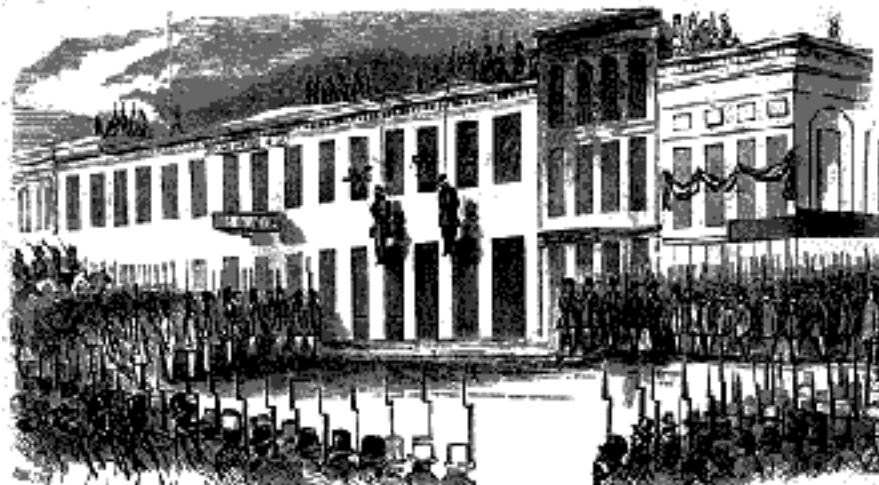


New member Michelle Hall portrays Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” →  
 More photos of this event can be found on the “Activities” page of this website  
 Photos courtesy of Dave Rauenbuehler

**William Tecumseh Sherman in California, Part II** Sherman returned to the east coast and served for awhile in the commissary department in the Army, stationed in New Orleans. While there he was approached by a friend, Major Turner, who was going to open a bank in San Francisco in partnership with a man named Lucas. He asked Sherman to be the manager, and offered him “a very tempting income”. After some deliberation, Sherman decided in 1853 to resign his commission, and return to California, along with his wife and little girl. Upon arriving in San Francisco, after settling his family, Sherman’s first task was to erect a building for the bank. He chose a spot on the corner of Jackson and Montgomery Streets, and supervised the construction of a three-story brick building, which is still there.



The site of the Turner, Lucas & Co. Bank, here from 1854 - 1857, managed by William Sherman. The building was soundly built and survived the earthquake of 1906, though it was so damaged the third floor was removed. It also survived the fire when a Navy ship brought hoses ashore and sailors saved this district from the approaching fires. Some suspected at the time they were really trying to save nearby Anson Hotaling’s warehouse, full of barrels of whiskey. The former bank building currently houses a fine architectural bookstore.



## EXECUTION OF JAMES P. CASEY & CHARLES CORA,

... BY THE ...

Vigilance Committee of San Francisco, on Thursday, May 22nd, 1856, from the windows of their Rooms, in  
SACRAMENTO STREET, BETWEEN FROST AND DAVIS.

It was during this same period that lawlessness was rampant in the city, leading to the formation of the Committee of Vigilance — composed of citizens who wanted to mete out instant justice to criminals without the bother of courts or trials. In 1856 a mob assembled outside the jail where two men were being held for murder, James Casey and Charles Cora; the crowd then took them out of the jail, held a secret “trial” and hanged the men. This outraged the governor of the state, who appointed Sherman

as the head of the California State Militia with orders to suppress the Vigilance Committee. But when Sherman went to Benicia to request arms from General Wool, the general for whatever reason refused the request, even though he had previously promised Sherman the weapons. At that point, Sherman became disgusted with California politics, and resigned from the militia. He later wrote: *As the [Vigilance Committee] controlled the press, they wrote their own history, and the world generally gives them the credit of having purged San Francisco of rowdies and roughs; but their success has given great stimulus to a dangerous principle, that would at any time justify the mob in seizing all the power of government; and who is to say that the Vigilance Committee may not be composed of the worst, instead of the best, elements of a community?* -Memoirs, Chapter 5

The next year brought a severe depression throughout the country, causing banks to close. Sherman made sure all the depositors at his bank got their money returned, but it too had to close because of losing profits. Sherman returned East, and received an appointment as president of the Louisiana Military Academy. Perhaps he thought the rest of his life would be one of quiet academia, but events in the country were to overtake him and millions of others. Once Louisiana seceded, Sherman returned north and on to his destiny as a great general in the Union Army. But his experiences in California taught him much about human nature, politics, and his own strengths and abilities.

### Resources:

Sherman’s complete memoirs can be found, thanks to Project Gutenberg, at this link:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4361/4361-h/4361-h.htm#ch5>

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

<http://www.peninsulacivilwarroundtable.org>