

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

September 2023

Steve Johnson, Editor

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Island News

The parking spaces we have been using at Pier 31 are still accessible by going into Pier 29 and going through the inside gate to Pier 31 using the same lock combination. This will be the case on Living History Day as well. Rangers Matt and Roger have been very helpful in coordinating the October event, and all chairs and tables will be set up in advance. The island is now receiving tourists on their fall vacations and weekend boats are fully booked. I recently gave three walking tours, each with over 50 visitors. One 7 year old girl said I was wrong to say the fake heads made by the inmates who escaped in 1962 were made from soap; she said they were made from papier mâché. I thanked her for the information (though my research says it was soap) and offered her a job as a guide. I complimented the mother for encouraging her child to delve into history. Perhaps in time we'll have a future park ranger.

Dates to Remember
Saturday, September 9
Board Meeting
10 am (Zoom)
Saturday, October 21
Living History Day
on Alcatraz

Living History Day on Alcatraz

The date for the next Living History Day on Alcatraz is now set for Saturday, October 21st. If you are planning to attend, please contact the editor so you can be placed on the boat list. We are pleased that the Third Artillery Band will be attending. We will provide lunches for all volunteers who help out that day; help is needed to maintain the information & display tables.

Board Meeting on September 9th

Our next board meeting will be on Zoom on Saturday, September 9th, at 10 a.m. All members are invited to join the board as they discuss uses for the large donation we received, planning the Living History Day, and preparing for elections for 2024. The Zoom link will be sent to all members.

Western Territories of the United States, 1850 - 1865

The United States had acquired vast territories due to the Louisiana Purchase (1803), the Oregon Treaty (1846), The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848). The Southern states were hoping to spread slavery to these new lands, and the abolitionists and "free soilers" were just as determined to not let that happen - leading to the great tensions of the 1850s. The history of Alcatraz is tied to the history of these territories, because many of the troops trained and housed at Fort Alcatraz were sent to these territories to protect the stagecoach lines and settlers, put down rebel insurgencies or invasions, and suppress Indian uprisings. It would be instructive to know about all the principal Western territories and their place in the Civil War years. It should be noted that to achieve statehood, a territory had to go through three stages; 1) receive a governor, secretary, and three judges appointed by Congress to rule temporarily; 2) adopt a constitution; 3) vote to request membership. Congress

would then vote to admit a state by a majority vote.¹ (How soon Congress voted to admit a state often depended on the the political climate of the time).

New Mexico Territory (1850) Since the 1600s Santa Fe was the main trading post for much of the Southwest. It was captured by Gen. Stephen Kearny in 1846 during the Mexican-American War, and in 1850 its citizens organized the territory, which included present day Arizona. At the beginning of the Civil War the area was annexed by the Confederates, but in March 1862 the Texas army was defeated at the Battle of Glorietta Pass, thanks to troops from California and Colorado.² From



The fight around Pigeon's Ranch in the three day Battle of Glorietta Pass, the largest battle in the West.
Credit: Battlefield Trust

then on the Southwest remained in Union hands. In 1853, Arizona was carved out of the New Mexico Territory and made a separate territory. There were at least 8,000 men from New Mexico who served in the Union Army. Companies of the 1st and 5th California Volunteer Regiments served at Fort Cummings to protect the Overland stagecoaches from Apache attacks.³

Utah Territory (1850) The United States acquired this area from Mexico, and since 1848 the Mormons had established a settlement at Salt Lake. The Mormons had applied for statehood as the state of Deseret, whose boundaries went from Oregon to Mexico. These boundaries were denied by Congress, but the territory of Utah was approved, with Brigham Young as the governor. California troops were sent to keep an eye on the Mormons (who might join the Confederacy) and to put down an uprising by the Ute tribe, whose land was being overtaken by settlers. The 3rd California Volunteer Infantry was stationed at Fort Douglas, located near Salt Lake City. In 1861 the land was partitioned to create the territory of Nevada.

Washington Territory (1853) Settlers began arriving into what was called Columbia in the 1840s and after Britain ceded the lands south of the 49th parallel the inhabitants requested territorial status. At first the area (which included parts of present day Idaho and Montana) was to be named Columbia, but it was decided to name the lands Washington Territory. In 1861 Justus Steinberger, an agent for the steamship lines, was appointed a colonel and was given authority to raise a regiment. Having little success in the territory, in March of 1862 he opened a recruitment office in San Francisco. Here he raised four companies of California troops who became part of the 1st Washington

¹ <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/northwest-ordinance>

² <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/civil-war/battles/glorieta-pass>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Cummings. Located west of Las Cruces; today only adobe walls remain

Territory Infantry Regiment. They were sent to Fort Vancouver, mostly to counter any threat by foreign powers to seize the territory.⁴

Nevada Territory (1861) The big silver strikes at Virginia City in 1858-1859 brought hundreds of newcomers to the territory, who did not want to be part of the Mormon government, so they applied to be the separate Territory of Nevada, which was granted. Of greatest concern in the new territory were the attacks against the stage coaches and settlers by the Paiute tribe, so Captain Joseph Stewart (the first commander on Alcatraz) was sent along with California Volunteers to build Fort Churchill along the Carson River; he became the first commander of that fort. In 1864 the population - mostly miners - voted to join the Union as a free state, and Nevada became one of two states that were admitted during the Civil War. (Can you name the other one?)

Colorado Territory (1861) In 1858 gold was discovered in what was then Kansas Territory. Settlers and miners formed the Territory of Jefferson, but at the time Congress didn't want to partition Kansas and didn't recognize their petition. Nonetheless, the local convention went ahead and created a constitution and government for the state of Jefferson. Congress superseded this by creating the Territory of Colorado and sending a governor to administer the region, because the gold and silver mines would be a great asset to the Union. While there were many secessionists in the territory, over 4,000 men joined the 1st Colorado Infantry; they were instrumental in the victory at the Battle of Glorietta Pass.⁵

Arizona Territory (1863) Most of the inhabitants of this area had migrated from Texas, so in 1861 they held a convention to secede from New Mexico Territory and be incorporated into the Confederacy. After the Texas army's victory at the Battle of Mesilla (in August 1861), the area was declared a Confederate territory, and these troops continued to rout the small Union forts and camps in the territory. But after the Union victory at the Battle of Glorietta Pass and Picacho Pass in 1862 (involving the California Column of cavalry) the remnants of the Texas army retreated back to Texas, leaving the Union in control of the territory.⁶ In February 1863 the U.S. Congress created the Territory of Arizona, with its capital at Prescott. California troops remained in this now U.S. territory to maintain federal presence and to protect settlers from Indian attacks. Companies of the 4th California Volunteers manned Fort Mojave, and the 1st California Cavalry and 1st California Infantry were posted in Tucson.

Resources

Michael Varhola, *Life in Civil War America*, Chapter 1 "North and South: One Nation, Two Peoples"

⁴ There was such a plan by the governor of British Columbia. Read the very interesting story of Washington Territory during the Civil War in the article by James R. Jewell, "Thwarting Southern Schemes and British Bluster in the Pacific Northwest", seen at <https://content.ucpress.edu/chapters/12840.ch01.pdf>

⁵ For an overview of the territory during this time, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colorado_Territory_in_the_American_Civil_War

⁶ Alvin Josephy, Jr. *The Civil War in the American West*. Chapter 3, "Gettysburg of the West", pp. 61-92