



NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz



September 2024

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Island News

The boats are full almost every day as we reach the peak of the high season. The crowds have been eager to hear the programs given by the volunteers, though some days only one volunteer might be present. Every program can count on having at least 30 people in attendance, so if you have the time come out to the island. Even if you can't do a program, just answering visitors' questions is very helpful.

We will sadly soon lose Ranger Tom, who will be moving out of the Bay Area. Rarely do we have a ranger who is also a professor of history, and Tom was always willing to share his knowledge with others. We wish him well and will miss him on the island.

Construction on the dock will continue through the fall, so programs would be best to start under the guard tower or in the sallyport, since where the tram now parks constricts the flow of people heading up the hill for the audio tour. Because of this, rangers are doing short announcements and sending small groups on up the hill as arriving groups next get the announcements.

Visitors arriving on the dock. Boats are arriving every 30 minutes



Dates to Remember
Saturday, September 7
FOCWA Board Meeting
10 a.m. via Zoom
Saturday, October 5
8 am - 4 pm
Living History Day
on Alcatraz

FOCWA Board Meeting on Saturday, September 7th

The board of directors will meet via Zoom at 10 a.m. via Zoom. We will send out the Zoom link to all members who are invited to join in the discussions. On the agenda are planning for the October Living History Day, voting for a treasurer, and social media outreach.

Living History Day on Alcatraz on Saturday, October 5th

We hope to repeat the success of the last Living History Day by having many of the same participants as last time. Returning will be the U.S. Balloon Corps, Mother Constance and her dis-

play of 1860s medicines, cannon demonstrations, and more. Please contact the editor if you wish to participate and haven't already been contacted.

Celebrating the Birth of the National Park Service on August 25

As visitors arrived on the island last Sunday, August 25th, they were reminded by the rangers that the date was significant - it was the 108th anniversary of the founding of the National Park Service. The first National Park in the United States (and possibly the first in the world) was Yellowstone, established in 1872 during the term of President Grant. Because of the growing interest in the wild lands of the west and the desire to preserve them, other parks soon followed in the 1890s, notably Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks (1890), Chicamauga & Chattanooga Military Park (1890), and Gettysburg National Military Park (1895). The first park rangers were infantry and cavalry soldiers, and their duties included patrolling for fires and poachers, removing squatters, fighting fires, and building trails. Starting in 1899, U.S. Army Buffalo Soldiers from the 24th Infantry and 9th Cavalry began to patrol both Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks. They would ride from the Presidio to the parks (175 miles!) for the summer, and return in the winter.

By 1916 there were 35 parks and monuments, and Congress that year passed an act creating the National Park Service. The stated purpose of the NPS was "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wildlife [within them] and to provide for the enjoyment [of them] for future generations." Later, in 1933, President Roosevelt signed an Executive Order that transferred all monuments and military parks administered by the Forest Service or the War Department to the NPS. Many of these new park rangers were former rangers in the military who wanted to continue in their role of protecting the parks.

Superintendent of Grand Teton NP in 1936. Note breeches and boots as part of the uniform.



The Park Service was also assigned the task of preserving historic lands under the Antiquities Act of 1906; many of these were Native American sites in danger of being ransacked such as at Casa Grande Ruin in Arizona. That year President Theodore Roosevelt set aside the first National Monument, the famous Devil's Tower in Wyoming. Since that time 130 sites have been included as national monuments, including such varied places as the Statue of Liberty, Mount St. Helens, and Muir Woods -- all under the protection of the National Park Service. During Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, an executive order transferred the management of all Civil War sites from the War Department to the National Park Service.

Under the umbrella of the NPS, there are distinctive units that include - besides the national parks - National Seashores (such as Pt. Reyes), National Historic Sites (such as Fort Point), National Battlefields (e.g., Gettysburg), National Memorials (such as the Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor), National Recreation Areas (such as Golden Gate NRA), National Rivers (such as the American River), and National Scenic Trails (such as the Appalachian Trail). Over all, the NPS manages 431 units around the country and in its territories.

Female rangers were admitted into the park service in 1925 - the first was a rather amazing woman named Marguerite Lindsley. She rode horses and a Harley motorcycle and gave geology tours at Yellowstone.¹ But for most women in the early years, their work was confined mostly to office work or giving out information, since fighting fires or performing rescue work was considered too strenuous for females. In the early 1970s the uniform for female park employees was a miniskirt and go-go boots, reflecting the fashion of the times but hardly a reflection of their capabilities. Finally, through the efforts of a determined group of women and men in Congress, an act was passed in 1978 for women to wear the same uniform as male rangers and for them to qualify for the same jobs as men.

When during President Reagan's term the army was required to cut the number of bases around the country, the Presidio of San Francisco was one of those to close. There was enormous pressure to build apartments and condos on the property, but citizens organized into groups to oppose this and offer an alternative - a national recreation area where all citizens could take advantage of the beauty of the area and preserve its long history. With the strong leadership of Congressman Phil Burton, and the support of President Nixon, an act was passed to create the Golden Gate National Recreational Area in 1972, as a unit of the National Park Service.

At the time the Park Service was undergoing a change in philosophy, seeing the need for large urban parks as cities became more congested. The GGNRA became the first and one of the largest urban national parks in the country. Besides opening the Presidio greenery and coastal lands in Marin and San Mateo Counties to the public, its historic buildings and their histories would be preserved in cooperation with the Presidio Trust and the National Park Service.² Today Alcatraz and Fort Point are maintained by the park service, whose rangers and volunteers tell the stories of the Native People, the Spanish, the Mexicans, the Americans, and the immigrants from around the world who all had a hand in shaping the history of this special place.

The fall is a great time to visit a national park; the weather is generally mild, and crowds are fewer. Yosemite has the changing colors of the deciduous trees, and Death Valley has cooled and provides the best viewing of the nighttime sky. As for Alcatraz, the gardens are still in bloom, it's easier to book tickets, and the rangers and volunteers are there to tell the many stories of the island's history. While there, be sure to thank the rangers for their service in protecting the natural resources and interpreting the long history of Alcatraz.

“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike.” - John Muir



Female park employee uniform, 1960s

¹ Read her story at <https://missoulabound.wordpress.com/tag/marguerite-lindsley/>

² “Creation of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area” <https://www.nps.gov/goga/learn/historyculture/creation-of-golden-gate-national-recreation-area.htm>