



NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz



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In this issue: Conscientious Objectors in Time of War

Island News

The boat dock on Alcatraz Island is in serious need of repair - old pilings have to be replaced and the deck has to be refurbished. The time needed to do this is two weeks, though it may take longer if they find more pilings have to be replaced. As a consequence, no boats will be able to dock at the island and boat service will be suspended in early November. Rangers will be re-assigned to other parks during this time, such as Fort Point, the Presidio, and Muir Woods.

Living History Day at Fort Point August 1st

Last month the National Park Service at Fort Point hosted a Living History Day, which included reenactors of the 20th Maine, ladies of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, members of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, and NPS volunteers.



women who played important roles in the war, and period recruitment posters printed out for visitors. Cannon drills, tours, and lectures were held throughout the day. Good weather brought many visitors to the fort, and kept everyone busy until the flag was lowered while "Retreat" and "To the Color" was played by the bugler. The 20th Maine

Dates to Remember

Saturday, October 3
Living History Day
on Alcatraz 9am - 4 pm

Island Closed
Nov. 1 - 14

Monday, September 15
Board Meeting 7 pm

Kevin Knapp portrayed Thaddeus Lowe of the U.S. Balloon Corps, Arthur Hendrick portrayed a U.S. Paymaster with a collection of Union currency, and Mother Constance prepared a stew for the troops. We were fortunate to have a visit by General Ulysses S. Grant (portrayed by Jaxon Brashier) who inspected the troops and gave talks to the visitors. Exhibits included weapons, equipment carried by a soldier, medicines of the period,



reenactors spent the night in the barracks to get the feel of those soldiers long ago who maintained a vigil to protect San Francisco Bay during the Civil War. The next Living History Day at Fort Point will be in February.



The roles of women in the Civil War: nurses, spies, abolitionists, soldiers in disguise, etc.
Weapons of the Civil War: muskets, rifles, revolvers, swords, bayonets
Flag ceremony: honor guard brings the flag to be raised while the troops are at attention



Conscientious Objectors During Wartime

Among the thousands of immigrants coming to the United States were the Anabaptists from Europe and Russia, fleeing persecution for their beliefs. Anabaptists were Christian groups who lived in community, lived simply, were mostly farmers, and were pacifists. They believed in adult baptism (which separated them from most other Christian denominations) and included the Amish, Mennonites, and Hutterites.¹

In 1918 four Hutterite men from a Hutterite farming community in South Dakota were drafted and sent to Camp Lewis in Washington state. There they refused to wear army uniforms or sign induction papers. There was no provision in WWI for conscientious objectors, and the men were treated as traitors for not fighting for their country. They eventually were sent to Alcatraz for punishment. On the island they spent half the time in cells below the main cell house (sometimes called “the dungeon”) where they would be handcuffed to the bars while barely standing on their toes. At other times they were in the main cells but subject to beatings and indignities. After four months the men, in poor health, were transferred to Leavenworth penitentiary; two of

¹ For a description of the Hutterites, click on Hutterian Brethren <https://hutterites.org/>

the men, brothers Joseph and Michael Hofer, died there. These men are considered to be martyrs among the Anabaptists, and from time to time some will make a pilgrimage to Alcatraz to bear witness to their sacrifice.²

During the Civil War, individuals (including war objectors) in the North could pay a commutation fee of \$300 (over \$5,000 in today's money) to hire a substitute to take their place in the military - a real source of friction to those who were drafted and couldn't afford such a sum. Many men of conscience simply fled to the West or to Canada to wait out the war. President Lincoln was aware of the so-called "peace churches" (Amish, Mennonites, Brethren) and said to Secretary of Stanton that unless these people's religious beliefs were respected, the Union could not get God's blessing.³ In 1864 he signed into law a provision in the draft law that exempted members of the above-named groups from military conscription.

There were no known conscientious objectors in California during the Civil War for several reasons. First, there was no draft in the state - it was too expensive to conscript men and to have them shipped 3,000 miles away. All the 17,000 men who joined the army in California were volunteers who willingly joined the army to serve in the West. Second, there were few, if any, members of the peace churches in this state at the time. Third, the men who joined the army wanted to do so either because they were out of work (mostly miners), or because their friends had joined, or simply due to patriotism. And for some men, the war was far away and wasn't a concern for them.

It wasn't until the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 that the government made provision for alternate civilian service for religious objectors, followed by a 1947 law that allowed alternate service for non-religious objectors, under strict guidelines.

Whenever there is a war, there will be those who refuse to fight on moral grounds. Do they deserve to be punished - as happened on Alcatraz - or should they be given the opportunity to serve their country in a different way? This is a question quite relevant today, as our country is drawn into more conflicts.

Living History Day on Alcatraz, October 3

The next planned Living History Day on Alcatraz will be on the first Saturday of October. Please let the editor know if you plan to attend.

Fleet Week, October 4 -12

October 4th begins Fleet Week, with the air show taking place on 9, 10, and 11. Alcatraz is a great place to watch the show. If going, get your tickets weeks in advance from City Experiences <https://alcatrazcitycruises.com/tickets/> For info on Fleet week activities, go to <https://fleetweeksf.org/>

Blue Angels fly by Alcatraz



² For the full story, read "Standing in chains at Alcatraz" by Duane Stolfus in the Anabaptist World newsletter, <https://anabaptist-world.org/standing-chains-alcatraz>

³ Quoted in "The Heritage of American Objectors" at <https://centeronconscience.org/heritage-american-objectors/>