

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

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Book Review: Antebellum and Civil War San Francisco by Monika Trobits

There have been any number of articles and book chapters about San Francisco before and during the Civil War, but not a great deal of books dedicated to that subject. This latest effort was written by a city tour guide who wanted to connect the 1850's sites on her tour with the bigger story of San Francisco and the Civil War.

Many of the topics Trobits covers are familiar: the political fight over California's admission to the Union, the Vigilance Committee, notable players in San Francisco politics (Broderick, Brannan, Halleck, King, etc.), and the rise of the Republican party. For someone unfamiliar with California politics at the time, this is a good book to start with as it gives a broad view of what was happening in San Francisco, Sacramento, and the U.S. Congress in those turbulent pre-war years.

What makes this book different is the author's interest in theater, so we find out about the history of the theater in San Francisco and its connection to the Booth family (Edwin appeared on stage here before and after the war; Junius Booth lived in the city for years). From her experience as a tour guide, we also learn about landmarks of that time period that can be seen today: the Tadich Grill, The Old Clam House, Sherman's Bank, among others.

There are a couple of facts that are not quite right; the reader is led to believe that the 16,000 California volunteers (actually closer to 17,000) served in the East, when in fact they were all assigned duty in the West. Also, there is no information provided about Mare Island and the role of the Union Navy, which was significant as the war progressed. Nevertheless, the book is a helpful contribution to the study of San Francisco and its relation to the Civil War, and is recommended for anyone who wants a general idea of that story. —SJ

Dates to Remember

Sunday, January 17, 2016

FOCWA General Mtg.
10 am on Alcatraz

Saturday, September 30th

Fort Point Living History Day

