



NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz



November 2025

Steve Johnson, Editor

In this issue: The Woman Behind the Thanksgiving Holiday

Note: No Issue in December

Island News

As of this writing, Muir Woods is open on a trial basis with funds from the Conservancy. The Presidio Visitor Center is open and is staffed by Conservancy staff and volunteers. Fort Point has been open on weekends in October but whether this will continue is unclear. Alcatraz remains open daily thanks to funds from the Parks Conservancy and Hornblower Cruises. Construction on the pier may be completed sometime in November. From statistics compiled by Ranger Siena (numbers rounded): From October 2024 - September 2025, visitors welcomed at the dock: 42,560. The number of Junior Rangers sworn in was 10,710. Visitors attended 818 formal interpretive programs, numbering 40,600. (Note: at least 50 of those programs were done by FOCWA members, such as "Fort Alcatraz", "200 years of Alcatraz History", and "The Life of a Soldier".

Dates to Remember

Tuesday, November 11
Veterans Day at Presidio
National Cemetery
Thursday, November 27
Indigenous Peoples Day

More photos from Alcatraz Living History Day taken by NPS photographer Dave Rauenbuehler



Veteran's Day at the Presidio, November 11

If you are interested in welcoming families into the Presidio Cemetery on Veteran's Day, please show up at 10 a.m. at the front gate. There will be a couple of FOCWA members there, and at 1 p.m. we will retire for a picnic afterward.

Indigenous People's Day

The annual gathering of tribes will take place on November 27 (Thanksgiving Day). If you are coming to volunteer in uniform it is free; otherwise it is \$12. The first boat leaves at 4:15 a.m. in order to be on the island just before sunrise, when the sunrise ceremony begins. A pow wow and circle dance then takes place. A good chance to meet members of many different tribes. Best to get your tickets ahead of time. All people are welcome.

<https://www.cityexperiences.com/san-francisco/city-cruises/alcatraz/programs-and-events/annual-events/indigenous-peoples-sunrise-gathering/>

The Woman Who Urged Lincoln to Make Thanksgiving a Holiday

Immigrants to America from parts of Europe brought with them a tradition of celebrating the fall season when the harvest was in. Called "Harvest Home", it was a festival of singing, dancing, and feasting on the many bounties of the harvest - the corn, the wheat, the fruits and vegetables, etc. The Puritans and other religious sects also took this time to be thankful to God in prayer for all the blessings bestowed on this country. Eventually the two traditions combined and by the 1850s Americans were already informally celebrating "thanksgiving".¹

Sarah Josepha Hale was the popular editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, a journal of articles written primarily for women; she became one of the era's great "influencers" in fashion, etiquette, home maintenance, and social progress.² As editor of Boston's *Ladies' Magazine*, she began to write essays about the need for a national holiday, which would unify the country around the thanksgiving celebration which was already commonplace. In 1847 she began a letter writing campaign to Congressmen to promote this idea, and in 1863 appealed to President Lincoln to create a day of thanksgiving as a national holiday. Lincoln saw the wisdom of this, and in October, 1863, he officially made Thanksgiving a national holiday on the last Thursday of November. As we thank the women who prepare the Thanksgiving feast for us each year, let us also remember the woman who helped make the holiday a reality.



¹ "Harvest Celebrations in Illinois", Lincoln Home National Historic Site, National Park Service <https://www.nps.gov/liho/learn/historyculture/harvest-celebrations-in-illinois.htm>

² Linda Coutant, "The Woman Behind Thanksgiving" <https://www.npca.org/articles/5393-the-woman-behind-thanksgiving>