



THE ALCATRAZ SENTINEL
The Newsletter of Historic Civil War Alcatraz Island
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Editor: Donald VanAuker

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Brad Schall

Our Co-Chairperson Brad Schall was elected National Commander- in -Chief of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War for 2011. This high honor is well deserved. We congratulate Brad and wish him success as he will be traveling most of the year across the country fulfilling his duties as Commander - in - Chief. As most know the SOUVCW was chartered by Congress as the legal heir to the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic).

Living History Day

The next scheduled Living History Day is May 7, 2011. Each and every living history day on Alcatraz gets better and better. The two held in 2010 were no exception. Visitors to Alcatraz are always surprised to see Union soldiers manning their posts and guarding Confederate prisoners on Alcatraz. As you know the effort it takes to put on such an event is tremendous. If you want to help, contact Fred or Brad. Besides having a great time, the photo opportunities are endless. We hope to see you there! To view photos of past LHD'S visit the FOCWA web site.

If you have any thing that you want to be included in the Alcatraz Sentinel. The news letter of The "Friends of Civil War Alcatraz" please submit it for publication. All articles, photos, or things of interest to our group are always welcome and encouraged

2010 West Coast Civil War Conference

The 26 annual West Coast Civil War Conference was held in San Francisco on November 12, 13, and 14 (Friday, Saturday & Sunday). It was Co-Sponsored by the San Francisco Civil War Round Table & Friends of Civil War Alcatraz and hosted by the American Legion Golden Gate Post 40. The theme was: "Blood on the Ramparts: Civil War Coastal Defenses". Major speakers included, James McPherson, Craig Symonds, Jim Stanbery, Rick Hatcher, and John Martini. Near 150 people attended some or all three days of the conference. The feed back was over whelming favorable. All profits made from the conference will be put to use on the West Coast to the betterment of the Civil War experience. For more information see the Friends of Civil War Alcatraz web site.

The 27th West Coast Conference will be held in Sacramento in November 2011. The theme is: "1861: The First Year". For information go to www.SacramentoCWRT.com

In front of the San Francisco City Hall there is a monument and wonderful statue of President Abraham Lincoln. The next time you visit the "City by the Bay" it is some thing you should see.



Photo by Rebekah Thomas

This is the second of a series of articles about existing structures that were constructed before and during the American Civil War on Alcatraz Island. Two maps Alcatraz Island 1867 and Alcatraz Island 1977 should be referred to as references for this article. Both of these maps may be found in a previous FOCWA Newsletter and were compiled by Erwin N. Thompson and drawn by Ralph E. Wines for the Department of the Interior.

The defensive wall between the guardhouse and the north caponier is the object of this article. Both the guardhouse and north caponier are in existence on Alcatraz island and both are identified as "Civil War period" structures. Both have undergone extensive construction and considerable modification. It is planned that future articles of this series will address both the guardhouse and north caponier then and now.

The original Army plan in the early 1850's was to transform Alcatraz Island into a military fortification to protect San Francisco Bay and the surrounding area. The plan was to utilize the height of almost 140 feet and the nearly vertical wall of approximately 25 feet that existed as the perimeter of the island. Careful defensive strategy for the location of guns and batteries and for the distribution of military personnel would offer the needed protection. The nearly vertical walls would serve as a defensive barrier to those invaders who wished to capture the island. Preliminary studies indicated that minor excavations were needed for a uniform wall. At the base of the wall on the seaward side a small ditch would increase the effectiveness for defense. Construction plans indicated the wall would be erected behind the planned ditch, however, further study of the geological material that made the island would not support an intended wall of almost 22 feet in height and a thickness of at least 4 feet. Additional ground vibrations from the firing of large guns were also considered to be potential problems. The plan was modified to place the base of the wall in the ditch and to construct a granite or concrete foundation for the bottom of the wall. The wall was to be constructed from the north side of the guardhouse to the south side of the north caponier in front of the right flank battery. The length of the intended structure was estimated to be almost 400 feet long. Construction began under the supervision of Lt. Frederick Prime with hired civilian personnel. The wall would follow the right side of the ramp or road that connected the wharf towards the top of the island. That section of the ramp would be used primarily to move troops and equipment on the island and for better protection of troops and equipment an additional several feet were added to the top of the planned wall. The "wall" was now renamed "Defensive Wall" which it is still the reference of today. The northern portion of the "Defensive Wall" fronted the 10 gun battery. That battery is the right flank battery of the north caponier. A construction accident happened on July 9, 1857 when approximately 7000 cubic feet of earth gave way and killed two workers. The two workers were Daniel Pewter and Jacob Unger and they were the first fatalities on Alcatraz. Reevaluation of the wall construction by Joseph Totten, Chief army Engineer, resulted in a change of building materials. Totten decided that concrete would be stronger than brickwork and should be used. At this time the wall was about 10 feet high with a base width of almost 5 feet. Using concrete would require changes in the construction methods but would be cheaper than brickwork. In late 1857 Lt. James Birdseye McPherson, now in charge, informed Totten that the wall was completed. McPherson stated that the Defensive Wall "measured 394 feet in length, almost 22 feet in height and close to 4 feet in thickness". Earth and sod were excavated to fill the space between the wall and the island. On September 18, 1857 the wall was completed, almost no construction changes have been done to that wall since that date. The wall is unchanged from 1857. It is the largest extant Civil War structure on Alcatraz Island. In 1910 an Alcatraz Officers' Club was built on the water side of the wall. Very little, if any, of the wall was changed with that addition. All that

remains of that Club structure is a concrete supporting frame - the exposed wall is now visible and is intact as it was in 1857. From the north end of the Officers' Club, also called Post Exchange, to the south wall of the north caponier, the 20 foot wall has been covered with debris from the bottom to the top. There is no evidence that the wall differs today from the original structure of 1857. The wall is a significant representative piece of Civil War History on Alcatraz.

There are two excellent references for the Post of Alcatraz Island and historical information including activities during the American Civil War. An exceptional reference is: Thompson, Erwin N., "The Rock: A History of Alcatraz Island, 1847 - 1972," Historic Resource Study, U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park, 1979. The other reference is: Martini, John A., "Fortress Alcatraz, Guardian of the Golden Gate".



Can you identify the type of canon and its location on the island

The next time you visit Alcatraz take a moment to look at the replica of the California Bear Flag. It is located on the wall behind the area where the orientation video is shown. The original flag is said to have been destroyed in the great 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Some say the bear looks more like a pig than a bear and have nicknamed it the pig flag. For more information about the bear flag look on the web using the key words: Original California Bear Flag.

The following information and photo of the Sally Port Cannon on Alcatraz was provided by Chuck Gardali.

The Sally Port which houses the 24pdr howitzer is going to get a much needed refurbishing to bring it up to an original state. The cannon will be re vented and other parts that are missing will

be replaced. This includes the gun carriage which needs a missing recoil stop. The carriage will be also repainted a Civil War olive green which will replace the brown that now covers the wood.

Loren Griffith and his crew will be doing the restoration work. Loren is an artificer for CHAS, California Historical Artillery Society. A artificer is skilled worker that repairs and maintains artillery. He has also participated in Alcatraz's "Living History Civil War Days" He is well acquainted with the cannon and has done much research on the piece.

The Friends of Civil War Alcatraz are always looking for improvements and accouterments that will enhance the Sally Port.

The Sally Port will get a power wash to clean up the interior of the room. We hope by the end of April this work will be completed.



With each edition of the Alcatraz Sentinel news letter there will be a short bio of a "FOCWA" officer or member. This issue features Chuck Gardali, Charter Member and member of both the Board of Directors and a 2011 officer as Docent Training.

A native of California, born in Modesto and presently reside there. I always was interested in history and one time thought of becoming a History Teacher. As it happened things didn't work out. I ended up in the printing industry. After some 31 years I retired from Save Mart Stores, Yosemite Advertising division of Save Mart.

People ask me how I got interested in the Civil War. I just can not seem to remember just where it started. It has progressed the past fifteenth or so years to present. I still have a heavy interest in other periods and read as much as possible on other areas.

As a member of Friends of Civil War Alcatraz, I belong to the Stanislaus County Civil War Association, SUVCW General U.S. Grant Camp # 9, belong to Co. G, 1st California Volunteer Infantry of the SVR "Sons of Veterans Reserve" in the 6th Military District and also a member of Friends of Gettysburg. I am currently a National Park Service volunteer at Alcatraz.

Remember send your articles for publication