

The following is taken from:

**“Life In The Army” by Cynithia J. Capron
(Wife Of Lt. Thaddeus H. Capron [9th Inf. 1867-1887])**

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I shall never forget the Bay of San Francisco as we came through the Golden Gate. The passengers were asked to stand on the deck at the stern, so that the bow would rise above the sand bars as we came through. It was the dry season, and the ground in San Francisco was the color of sand. The live oaks and other evergreen trees made a pleasing contrast. The city was then scattered somewhat over the hills and mountains. The city, the island of Alcatraz, Angel Island, Goat Island, the straits, and bay made a most beautiful scene.

I drove to the Occidental Hotel with a gentleman my husband asked to be my escort while he remained with the troops. He went with the recruits to Angel Island, the recruiting depot, but was allowed to spend part of the time with me at the hotel, where I remained ten days. There were several army officers and other steamer acquaintances stopping at the Occidental, so that I was not very lonely.

Woodward's Gardens were something like Lincoln Park of Chicago, but there was an art gallery, beside several greenhouses, etc. An admittance fee of twenty-five cents was asked at the gate.

My next move was to Alcatraz Island. This island is the most picturesque feature of San Francisco Bay. It rises up almost perpendicularly on all sides from the water. The wagon road up from the wharf has a very steep ascent although it has been cut so that it can be climbed by the few animals kept here. A small steamer made access to the city comparatively easy for those who were allowed to go and come, but as this was a prison for offenders of the army the small garrison was needed on account of the isolation.

The officers occupied the citadel, a large brick building with openings in the thick walls, perhaps ten inches wide but as long as any window. These windows were so narrow and the walls so thick that only a little could be seen from them. The commanding officer with his wife “kept house” in a suite of rooms, and all the other officers messed together. There was a billiard hall in the second or third story.

I was the only lady in the mess but I did not mind it. This was an artillery post and the officers were all artillery officers. Their uniform was blue with red trimmings. The commanding officer, Major Darling, married a Spanish lady from Chile. She was very fond of flowers, and had room for a very small flower garden which she had watered, and everything grew luxuriantly, although it was so cold all the month of August that people wore furs, and they did any time in the summer. When my fire, was not burning well in our fireplace, I was uncomfortable in my room.

Outside in the garden the fuchsias climbed over the top of a high fence. The scarlet geraniums almost as tall as one's head were loaded with blossoms. The pinks were the finest I had ever seen. Alcatraz is in an exposed place where the winds swept through from the Golden Gate. It was not as cold in the city on one side, or at Angel Island on the other.

No money but coin was used on the Pacific coast, and prices were high after the war. We bought furniture for two rooms which was very plain, but "incidentals" had by this time amounted to a considerable sum, and the greenbacks the army was paid with only brought seventy-two cents on the dollar. This was our first "home".

I never saw the prison, but I went up to the top of the lighthouse where the lamp was kept burning at night. There was a fog bell and it was often necessary to warn vessels of the danger they were in when the fogs shut us in, and when things could be seen at all at these times, it was through a mist which sometimes made our surroundings seem unreal, as a ship and a lighthouse without sky or water or land.

Major Capron was sent up the coast with recruits while I was here, and I was invited to take my meals at Major Darling's while he was away. They were very kind to me, and the time finally came when the one who had been sadly missed returned. The eleven days of his absence had been spent in embroidering some slippers for him, and thinking about shipwrecks principally.

Our letters we did not expect to come from Illinois in less than eighteen days. Of course that was overland. I do not think the railroad was begun at this time, although two years from that summer we went east, two weeks after the first train had gone through, over the Central and Union Pacific railroads.

About the first of September our quarters at Angel Island were ready for us, and we went to the headquarters of our regiment, the 9th Infantry. The colonel had been a general of volunteers, and was now called General King. Later congress authorized officers of the regular army to retain the titles given them in civil war times. General King and Mrs. King and a little daughter occupied the commanding officer's quarters. There was a double set of quarters besides, for officers. There were barracks for men, a sutler's store and residence, and a few storehouses for government supplies. There never was a post without a guardhouse, I presume, so there must have been one there. The hospital and surgeon's quarters were over the hill and out of sight of the post. Point Blunt is the name of the part of the island farthest from Camp Reynolds, about two miles and a half distant.