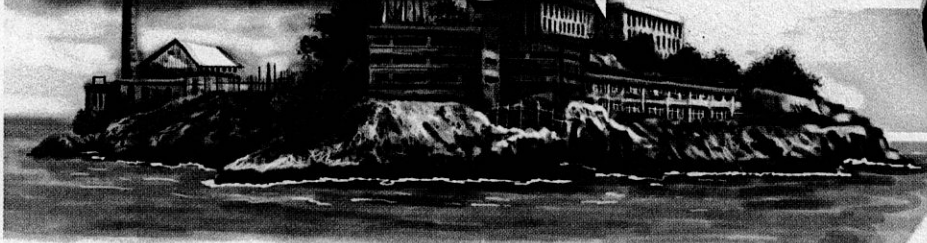


Alcatraz



1. Cold wind, cold churning water, strong currents, heavy mists and the loud, eerie sound from the foghorns on the many ships in the bay, all made the island of Alcatraz a most uninviting place to be. This was especially so for the unfortunate prisoners who were kept there. The coast was not far away and clearly visible, so reaching it and gaining their freedom was a great temptation. Although it was virtually impossible to escape from this prison island, it is not surprising that so many men tried. They were drowned, never seen again, killed or recaptured by their guards.
2. The island is in the middle of beautiful San Francisco Bay, on the west coast of the United States of America. It was given its name, which means 'Island of the pelicans', by the Spaniard who discovered it in 1775. Since then it has been a lighthouse, a fort, a military prison, a federal prison for hardened criminals and now a national park and tourist facility.
3. 'The Rock', as it is often called, has a long, dark history. Alcatraz has been the home of some very well-known criminals. Stories have been written and a famous film, *Birdman of Alcatraz*, made about this terrifying prison.
4. Al Capone, the famous gangster, was a prisoner on Alcatraz. He found it to be a really harsh prison. The wealthy Capone was used to buying favours from his guards, but on Alcatraz he was punished for offering them money. When he finally left the Rock, he was mentally ill and never recovered.
5. Another famous prisoner, Robert Stroud, was known as the 'Birdman of Alcatraz'. He was found guilty of shooting a man in Alaska and was imprisoned in a state prison in Washington. Stroud was a violent prisoner who attacked another inmate and killed a guard. As a result he was sentenced to death, but this was later changed to solitary life imprisonment and he was moved to Leavenworth Prison.
6. One day he found three baby swallows in the yard and took them back to his cell to look after. Despite finding swallows, this was the start of his interest in canaries. He bred and sold them, and even wrote books about looking after them. He raised over 300 canaries and trained some to do tricks. When the prison tried to take his birds away, he was so well known that 50 000 people signed a petition and he was allowed to keep them. But after 30 years, he was finally sent to Alcatraz, where he spent 17 years without any birds.