

Saving the USS Olympia

Contributed by Les Eldridge, Executive Secretary, FOTO, and former chairman, Maritime Committee, State Centennial Commission

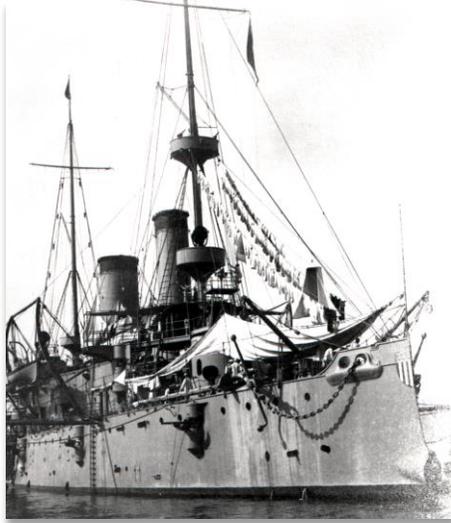
The Washington State Friends of the USS *Olympia* (FOTO) is an organization sponsored by the [South Sound Maritime Heritage Association](#). Its purposes are to memorialize the cruiser USS *Olympia* and her artifacts in Washington State, produce educational programs regarding USS *Olympia*'s place in world history, and contribute to the national financial efforts now under way to preserve and interpret the vessel.

WASHINGTON STATE INVOLVEMENT: Our state's involvement in preserving and recognizing the ship over the last 118 years has been less than adequate. A scathing letter from Admiral George Dewey, in response to an invitation for the ship to visit Olympia, chastised us for ignoring the ship named for our capital city, and prompted our donation of a silver tea service and a plaque to the ship in 1900. We've done nothing since. It's high time we atone, join in the effort to save her, and catalog and interpret her artifacts present in our state.



HISTORY: The *Olympia* is the oldest steel-hulled warship in the world, and was commissioned in 1895 as a protected cruiser. She can justly be termed the symbol of the American Empire and the harbinger of the American Century, as US possession of Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Philippines and Guam all occurred immediately after Commodore George Dewey led her squadron's destruction of the Spanish fleet at Manila Bay, 1898. She subsequently served with distinction in World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the Austro-Italian Confrontation. She transported the body of our first Unknown Soldier from Europe to the USA. She was decommissioned in 1921, and became a museum ship in 1957.



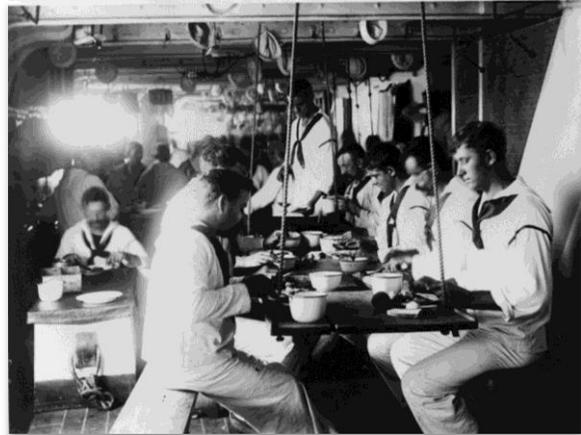


CURRENT SITUATION: [Independence Seaport Museum \(ISM\)](#) of Philadelphia is the steward of the ship on behalf of the Navy. Her hull needs extensive repair. ISM is mounting a major fundraising campaign to save the ship from the scrap yard. They plan to raise \$20 million for hull repair, wooden deck replacement and long-term repair and maintenance. Money raised by FOTO will aid ISM's effort.

INITIAL ACTIONS: We hope to raise a significant sum through Crowdfunding on Indiegogo. Enter igg.me/at/ussolympia

until Oct. 30, 2014. After that, go to navycruiserolympia.com. We have produced a video, a website, and are entering on a publicity campaign. The video was researched with the help of Steve Excell and his staff at Washington State Archives. We are also working closely with ISM staff.

We have already identified more than a dozen artifacts in our state connected with the ship and her squadron, heretofore unrecognized and un-cataloged. We intend to produce a Visitor and Convention Bureau brochure describing these.



Let's make amends for our state's neglect of the ship named for our capital, and help save the *Olympia*!

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Photo credits: Archivist Maggie Cogswell with USS *Olympia*'s silver tea service at the Governor's Mansion; USS *Olympia* transporting body of Unknown Soldier in 1921, Washington State Archives Historical Collection; USS *Olympia*, Washington State Archives Historical Collection; USS *Olympia* crew's mess, 1899 courtesy of Library of Congress