NMHS: A CAUSE IN MOTION

National Maritime Historical Society 2020 Annual Meeting • 8–10 May in Philadelphia

The NMHS Board of Trustees and program chair Walter Brown are delighted to invite members of the National Maritime Historical Society to join us for an informative and entertaining activity-packed annual meeting in Philadelphia. The 57th annual meeting will be held on Saturday, 9 May at Independence Seaport Museum on historic Penn’s Landing along the Delaware River. We will enjoy a continental breakfast during registration, with the business meeting immediately following. Leaders from the local maritime heritage community will then give presentations highlighting maritime history and activity in and around Philadelphia.

We’ll hear from John Brady, Independence Seaport Museum president, on its efforts to restore the 1892 protected cruiser USS Olympia, Admiral Dewey’s flagship from the Battle of Manila Bay. Leadership from the SS United States Conservancy will share some of the ship’s notable stories and the Conservancy’s plans for the future of the famed liner, berthed just down the river at Pier 82. Melissa Black-Simmons, president of the Philadelphia Ship Preservation Guild, will tell us about the 1901 barquentine Gazela Primeiro and highlight some of the Guild’s educational programs. Gazela and the 1902 tug Jupiter are berthed a stone’s throw from the museum along Penn’s Landing. We’ll also hear from Tyler Putman, Gallery Interpretation Manager at the Museum of the American Revolution, and from CEO Philip Rowan of the Battleship New Jersey Museum & Memorial on this impressive 887-foot long, 45,000-ton, decorated 1942 battleship.

After a luncheon in the museum’s ballroom, we will have the opportunity to experience one of the nation’s largest maritime art and artifact collections in North America (see pages 26–27 for details about Independence Seaport Museum). John Brady and museum docents will lead tours onboard US Navy cruiser Olympia and access will be provided to the WWII submarine Becuna, both docked a short walk from the museum. While we are at Penn’s Landing, the Philadelphia Ship Preservation Guild has also invited attendees to come down to see Jupiter from the dock and then climb aboard and check out Gazela.

The fee to attend the annual meeting is $75 per person and includes all of the presentations and tours, and breakfast and lunch.

Following the day’s events, you are invited to celebrate the 125th anniversary of cruiser Olympia’s commissioning at the Independence Seaport Museum 2020 Waterfront Gala where, we are delighted to announce, NMHS president Burchenal Green will be honored with the 2020 Independence Seaport Museum Award for Maritime Preservation in honor of her commitment to protecting America’s historic ships and promoting our maritime heritage. This is a wonderful opportunity to support the critical preservation work that keeps Olympia afloat, and to join in honoring our president. The cost of the gala, discounted for annual meeting attendees, is $300.

Accommodations: We have booked a block of rooms at Hilton Philadelphia at Penn’s Landing, adjacent to Independence Seaport Museum and ideally located within walking distance of all the weekend’s activities. Rooms are reserved from 7–10 May at the rate of $219/night, plus applicable taxes. Garage parking is $35 per vehicle per night. The room block is set aside for reservations under the group name “NMHS” until 9 April, or until all the rooms have been booked. Reservations can be made online by going to www.seahistory.org/annualmeeting2020 and clicking “Accommodations,” or by phone at (215) 521-6537. The Philadelphia waterfront is a popular destination in May, and we encourage you to make your reservations right away.
On **Friday, 8 May**, join us for a short ferry ride across the Delaware River to Camden, New Jersey, where we’ll enjoy lunch on the fantail of the **Battleship New Jersey** and take a tour of the Admiral’s and Captain’s cabins and the warship’s 16-inch turrets and other weapons systems, communications center, navigational bridge, wardroom, berthing areas, and more. The cost of the ferry, lunch, and tour is $40. Finally, on **Sunday, 10 May**, join us for a 10AM guided tour of the **Museum of the American Revolution**, where the ideas, events, and legacies of our nation’s revolutionary beginnings are explored through innovative and interactive exhibits.

NMHS chairman **Ronald Oswald** encourages you to join us in this wonderful city with so many historic ships and maritime cultural sites for the fabulous presentations and activities we’ve planned for the meeting. For the National Maritime Historical Society to flourish and grow, it is important that its leaders and members gather to share ideas to chart the Society’s course into the future. This support and interaction have kept us vital for more than half a century, and it is never more important than right now. For more information and sponsorship opportunities, and to register, please visit [www.seahistory.org/annualmeeting2020](http://www.seahistory.org/annualmeeting2020). We look forward to seeing you in Philly!

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**Preserving USS Olympia**

This was not business as usual. On a spring day in 2010, leaders within the maritime heritage community were called to the Independence Seaport Museum (ISM) for an all-hands effort to save **Olympia** from a fate of being towed out to sea and scuttled. The ISM board could no longer afford to maintain her and fund the restoration the ship desperately needed, and there was a real fear that she could sink at the dock. Just down the street, the Liberty Bell sat in state, an old cracked bell, but an icon of great worth to Americans. Would it ever be dumped into the ocean? **Olympia** would have certainly caused a bigger splash, literally, were she to be scuttled, but it was of paramount importance that this potential travesty be averted and that she, too, be recognized for her importance to US history.

Historic ship stewards and preservationists came from all around the country and brainstormed on how to save her. Should she stay in Philadelphia, or would a different city be able to provide the resources to restore the storied ship?

**USS Olympia** is the oldest surviving steel-hulled warship in the world and the oldest steel American warship still afloat. When the US and Spain declared war on each other in 1898, **Olympia** was the flagship of the Asiatic Squadron based in Hong Kong. The squadron was immediately dispatched to the Spanish-ruled Philippines, where **Olympia** would soon gain worldwide fame from a single engagement with the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay.

It was from **Olympia**’s bridge during the battle that Commodore George Dewey gave the command, “You may fire when ready, Gridley,” which in time became one of the most famous commands uttered in US naval history. The Battle of Manila Bay is considered one of the most decisive naval battles in history and resulted in the end of more than three centuries of Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines. This battle also marked the emergence of the United States as a world power, and Dewey and the **Olympia** became instant national heroes. In 1921 **Olympia** was chosen to carry the body of the Unknown Soldier from WWI home from France; the next year, the ship was decommissioned and soon largely forgotten until she was nearly scrapped in the 1950s—and Philadelphia residents rallied to save her.

In 2010, **Olympia** was once again in peril and the maritime community geared up to save the ship and find her a home. By 2014, after extensive research and feasibility studies were conducted by outside groups, the board of Independence Seaport Museum decided that Philadelphia was indeed the best home for the ship; they set up a program to keep **Olympia** at the museum under the leadership of John Brady. Emergency repairs were made to secure the ship. In 2016 the Flagship Olympia Foundation was created to provide funding for the restoration, preservation, and improvement of **Olympia** in collaboration with the museum, and in 2017, ISM embarked on an ambitious national campaign to raise $20 million to dry-dock the **Olympia** and address waterline deterioration of the hull. A decade after that fateful call to save the ship, she is in good hands. As ships are perishable artifacts, their care is never finished; there is critical work to be done and that requires Americans to step up to support her.

You can read about **USS Olympia**’s role in history and as a museum ship in the 21st century in this issue: see pages 20–25. We encourage you to join us 8–10 May for the NMHS Annual Meeting in Philadelphia to learn more about her firsthand from the museum professionals in charge of her care and then see the ship in person. —**Burchenal Green, NMHS president**