

The streets we go past in Port Jefferson Station

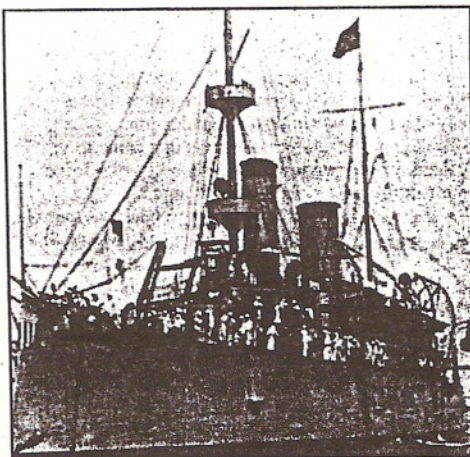
Admiral, George, Dewey and Olympia streets: a tribute to an American hero

BY GEORGE MORAITIS

All my life I have walked, run, and driven from my home to town and back and passed Admiral, George, Dewey and Olympia streets off Hallock Avenue and in my adult life, I finally realized what I was passing. When you put the names of these streets together, you will see that they are for Admiral George W. Dewey and his naval ship, *Olympia*.

I wanted to learn more about him so I purchased two books, *The Life Story of Admiral Dewey: The World-Famed Victory at Manila and The Triumphant Return to America*, by Edward S. Ellis, and *Admiral George Dewey: A Sketch of the Man*, by John Barrett. There are also many other works written about him. This is an article on how proud this area was of him to name these four streets in his honor.

George W. Dewey was born December 26, 1837 in Montpelier, Vermont. He was the son of Dr. Julius and Mary Dewey and a direct descendant of a long family line dating back to the early 1600s when early settlers came from England. He entered the Naval Academy September 23, 1854, graduating near the top of his class. After the Navy attached him to the frigate *Wabash* in the Mediterranean, as a midshipman, he was again the top of his class on passing his final examination. He moved quickly through the ranks of the Navy. In 1862, at the age of 25, Dewey became a lieutenant on

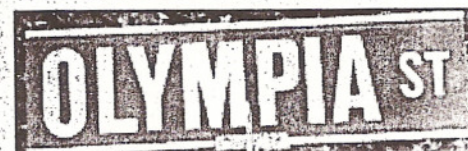


USS Olympia (photograph by William Dinwiddle) in John Barrett's *Admiral George Dewey: A Sketch of the Man*, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899.

the sloop *Mississippi* during the American Civil War and helped capture New Orleans, Louisiana under the leadership of Admiral David Farragut. He moved on to be a commander in 1872, captain in 1884, and commodore in 1896. By 1897, as commander-in-chief, the Navy had given him the Asiatic squadron to command.

When the United States declared war on Spain in 1898, Dewey's squadron was in the port of Hong Kong. His mission was to capture or destroy the Spanish fleet, which was considered "second to none," at Manila Bay in the Philippine Islands. On the orders of then acting Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, Dewey began to prepare his forces. During what was to be one of the Navy's greatest battles, under the shouts "Remember the Maine" — which was destroyed in Havana Harbor — he gave the command, "You may fire when you are ready, Gridley" to the captain of his flagship on May 1, 1898. Under Dewey's leadership, the American fleet was able to destroy the Spanish fleet before noon and without any loss of American lives. Nine American ships destroyed 11 ships of the Spanish fleet. Dewey was made a rear admiral because of this win and helped aid General Wesley Merritt to capture Manila. Dewey became a national hero and was made admiral of the Navy in 1899, the highest rank ever held by an American officer. He later became president of the General Board of the Navy, Court of Inquiry, and chairman of the Joint Army-Navy Board and stayed as such until his death in 1917. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery at the National Cathedral.

After service on many naval ships, one cruiser that came under his leadership and the one that won the biggest fight of Dewey's career was the flagship, *USS Olympia*. The ship was authorized on September 7, 1888, launched on November 5, 1892 and commissioned on February 5, 1895. She took her position as the flagship of the Asiatic Squadron on August 25,



Photos by George Moraitis

The Admiral and his flagship are commemorated in these local streets.

1895. She led the squadron fleet in line of battle against the Spanish fleet and took part in the blockade and capture of Manila. After her tour of duty, she returned to the United States. The ship arrived at Sandy Hook, New York on September 26, 1899. After updating, she was recommissioned for the Caribbean in 1902. She also served in the Mediterranean. After the ship was again updated, she was recommissioned for midshipmen's summer cruises between 1907 and 1909. Again after many changes, the *Olympia* entered World War I as the flagship of the patrol force Atlantic fleet.

During her long career, she served her country in many aspects and at many ports. She had sailed to LeHavre to transport the remains of the American "unknown soldier" for burial in Arlington National Cemetery, returning to the mouth of the Potomac on November 9, 1921. She was decommissioned for the last time by the end of 1922. The *USS Olympia* is the only naval vessel from the American-Spanish War fleet still in existence. She rests at the Independence Seaport Museum at Penn's Landing in Philadelphia. Funding is supplied through the Cruiser Olympia Association.

So, next time you drive down Hallock Avenue (Route 25A), pay homage to one of America's greatest heroes, a man to whom this town paid honor — Admiral George Dewey and his command of the *USS Olympia* — by naming four streets for him. Both man and ship served our country well and came home as heroes.



Admiral Dewey, a photo in Edward S. Ellis, *The Life Story of Admiral Dewey*, Library of Congress, 1899, p. 41.

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NOTICE

The Village of Port Jefferson
will hold a
Public Information Meeting
regarding
Managed Parking In The Village

Wednesday, November 19, 2003 7pm
in the Courtroom, upstairs in Village Hall