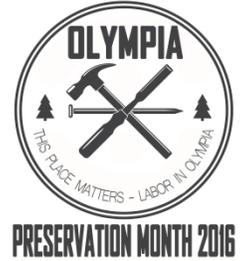




Labor History in Downtown Olympia: A Walking Tour



Site of Sloan Shipyards

Olympia waterfront/Port of Olympia

During the period from 1916 to 1919, Olympia's waterfront teamed with men building ships. The Olympia Shipbuilding Company was established by E. R. Ward in 1916 with local investors. The Sloan Shipyard started construction early in 1917 north of the Ward yard. The yards provided a booming market for local lumber mills with each wooden vessel requiring more than 1.5 million feet of timber.

Both the Ward and Sloan yards built wooden ships to accommodate the shipment of lumber for the Atlantic trade as well as schooners for World War I. At their height, the shipyards employed nearly a thousand men on ten shipways in Olympia. Workers headed by A. J. McCaughan and Gust Patzke formed a Shipwrights', Caulkers' and Joiners' Union, Local 1148, in March 1917. They merged with the Carpenters' Union (Local 956, formed 1889) in 1919. After the Port of Olympia was established in 1922, it used the shipyard for its first piers. The Port filled additional land at the site and constructed wharves here in 1925.

Site of Olympia Canning Co.

Northwest corner of Capitol Way and A Avenue

Increased crop production led the Thurston County Fruit Growers Association to support construction of a local fruit & vegetable cannery. By 1912, George Pelton & W P McCaffery opened the Olympia Canning Company. Over the years, the cannery employed hundreds of women to do the sorting, culling and processing, providing much needed income for local families. World Wars I and II increased demand for canned goods and boosted employment and wages for women until 1959 when the aging Olympia Canning Co. closed.

Site of "Chinook Street"

Northeast corner of State and Columbia

From the arrival of the Hudson Bay Co in the 1830s and American settlers in the 1840s, Native Americans have participated in the Euro-American economy. This part of early Olympia was known as "Chinook St," the site of a Squaxin village. Many members of local tribes including the Squaxin, Nisqually, Chehalis and others worked for wages in and around Olympia clearing land, harvesting timber and shellfish, and later, harvesting hops and other produce. Early building projects and seasonal industries like sawmilling relied heavily on native labor.

Labor Temple/Woodruff Block

119 Capitol Way N

Built by Sam Woodruff in 1887, this building housed a variety of early Olympia businesses as well as fraternal and patriotic organizations over its first four decades. Then, in 1926, the Olympia Building Trades Council led a fundraising campaign to acquire the building on behalf of local unions. It was rechristened the Labor Temple and became the center of South Sound's Union activities ranging from formal meetings to social gatherings. Originally more ornate in style, the building was severely damaged in the 1949 earthquake and in the repair process, given a Modernist facelift.

Site of Crane's Café

West Side of Capitol Way between 4th & 5th

Olivia Moore was a national representative of the waitress and cooks union, one of the first women to be allowed representation at the national level. She filled a vice presidential spot reserved for women in the union as a member of Local 567. Olivia is thought to have worked at Crane's Café (now demolished).

Site of Rabeck's Music House

South side of 4th between Franklin & Adams

On April 10, 1902 local labor unions representing carpenters, brewers, bottlers, yardmen, clerks, printers, cigar makers, barbers and linemen met here and formed the Olympia Trade Council. Thomas P Hollcraft, (1857-1943) an employee at the State Printing Office, was elected its first president.

Site of First Labor Temple

Southwest corner of State & Adams

In 1907 the Olympia Labor Council acquired the historic Thurston Co courthouse built in the 1850s at Legion Way and Franklin St and moved it to this location. After an extensive remodel it opened with much fanfare on February 12 1908 as the headquarters for Olympia's union activities. Dedicated as the Lincoln Labor Temple, it served as the Labor Council headquarters until 1926, hosting many community events and meetings.

Site of Olympia Veneer Co.

Northwest corner of State & Cherry

The Olympia Veneer Co, one of the earliest plywood factories in the Pacific Northwest, opened here in 1921. Founders Ed Westman and JJ Lucas turned to immigrant Swedish Fraternal Lodges for investors. Organized as the first worker-owned cooperative plywood factory, 120 Swedes, Finns, Norwegians

and a few Irish immigrants comprised the investor-workforce. Initially the plant manager received the same wages as those sweeping the floors. After a slow start the plant secured orders to manufacture door panels, drawer bottoms and automobile floorboards as well as sheet plywood and became an important employer in Olympia into the 1950s.

Site of Olympia Theater

South side of 4th between Jefferson & Cherry

Socialist leader, labor organizer and presidential candidate Eugene V Debs spoke at the Olympia Theater on June 20 1902 as part of a western speaking tour. The next day Debs attempted to hold a public rally at Sylvester Park, across from the Capitol building. Debs was met with an order from Capitol security banning the use of the park for political speech, so he attempted to speak in the street. City authorities also blocked Debs who then moved to nearby private property to address the crowd. Debs later co-founded of the Industrial Workers of the World with Bill Haywood, leader of the Western Federation of Miners, and Daniel De León, leader of the Socialist Labor Party.

Former Olympia Knitting Mills (Fish Tale Brewing Co.)

515 Jefferson St SE

The company was begun with four employees and four knitting machines by Sol Meyers, who was a foreman in the Blauvelt Knitting Company of Newark, New Jersey. By 1911, the firm boasted 21 knitting machines and 38 employees. The firm moved to this modern, electrified factory building in 1913, by which time its golf and hunting coats were embossed with "Made in Olympia." Following a decline during World War I, the company came back strong in the 1920s as a producer of knit sweaters, athletic jerseys, and popular swimsuits marketed under the "Wil-Wite" name (after the names of company's president and secretary, G. William Ingham and H. L. Whiting). Many employees of the Knitting Mills were women who were also officers in the Union organized at the mills. By 1939 the company's fortunes had turned and the mills ceased production.

Site of Telephone Exchange Building

217-223 5th Avenue SE

Women telephone operators working here went on strike in the fall of 1917—a part of a larger labor strike movement during the period. Operators received \$1.00/day to start; \$1.50/day after four years and even after ten years their wages remained at \$1.50/day. They were asking \$1.50/day to start; \$2.50 daily after 4 years and \$2.75 a day after seven years. They also demanded recognition of the Union. Leila Chilson was the Secretary of the Union of Telephone Operators in 1917.

Sites of 1930s Hunger Marches

Old State Capitol, State Capitol Campus and Priest Point Park

After an unsuccessful attempt to meet with then Governor Hartley in 1932, a coalition of various unemployed workers' leagues and councils converged on Olympia in January 1933.

Between 500 and 1000 gathered at the Old Capitol seeking unemployment insurance, cash payments, relief for rural families and prohibition of foreclosures or tax sales. Greeted by locked doors, elevators and highway patrolmen in the corridors, the group gathered outside with placards. Although legislators did act to grant aid to the unemployed, marchers again convened in Olympia in March to demand more taxes on the rich as well as for milk and hot lunches for their children. When the marchers arrived, a group called the "American Vigilantes of Thurston County" directed them to Priest Point Park, where they spent the night surrounded by over 800 vigilantes and police. They were ordered to leave the park the next day.

Site of the Eight-hour Day for Women

Old State Capitol

The eight-hour workday for women was enacted in 1911 at the Old Capitol in Olympia. Often called the "Waitresses Bill," it honored the efforts of Alice Lord, who founded the pioneering Seattle Waitresses Union in 1900. Everett representative John Campbell, later dubbed "8-Hour Jack," championed the legislation, presenting a mammoth petition for the bill. However, businesses, chambers of commerce, and even some working women opposed the bill for its protectionist tone as limiting job options and pay for female employees. The compromise bill finally passed, excluding women who worked for food industries dependent on timely processing of perishable foods. Lord continued to fight for a six-day workweek, established in Washington in 1920.

Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Exchange

119 7th Avenue SE

Telephone service in Olympia commenced in 1889 under a franchise granted to the Sunset Telephone Company of San Francisco by the City of Olympia. A toll line was set up to Olympia from the Tacoma area. The company operated out of a number of other buildings prior to the construction of this modern, state-of-the-art facility in 1937. The Fleetwood Building (named for a local exchange) housed the business office, long distance operators and technical and switching facilities. The dial system was instituted for the Olympia area in the Fleetwood Building. Many women worked as operators at a switching panel in the building under strict rules. The building was renovated for transitional housing units in 1997.

Site of Chinatown

Heritage Park

By the 1850s Chinese immigrants arrived in Olympia, forming a key part of the labor force. Railroad construction brought a larger influx in the 1870s. When exclusion laws and violence reduced their numbers, Japanese and later Filipino immigrants arrived to fill the need for labor. Olympia's last Chinatown fronted Water St on this block from 1913 to 1943; bunkhouses also fronted 4th Ave where Japanese Oyster workers lived. Despite harsh treatment by white society, many stayed in the area and remain part of the city's social fabric.