

USS MASSACHUSETTS

AQUATIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRESERVE

The 340-foot-long hulk is awash in emerald-green water, partially buried in a white sandy bottom. Explosions and natural deterioration have exposed the ship's internal structures, making them attractive to sea life. After spending 70 of her 100 years in the sea, the battleship has become a giant artificial reef.



On an underwater excursion starting at the gracefully curving bow, one may see almost every type of Gulf marine life. Flounder hide below the skeleton of the forward torpedo tube. White anemones and long purple seafans grace the bow anchor hawser pipes. Sea urchins and giant barnacles live on the foredeck. The windlass house, covered with soft, white sponges, has been displaced to expose four massive steam-driven gears that once retracted the ship's bower anchors.

The two main 13-inch gun turrets rise from the deck, displaced from their mounts, and tilt inward toward the center of the ship. Thousands of cigar minnows rapidly dart from place to place around each turret, creating halos of shining movement. Through gaping gunports, resembling eyesockets, one can see circular staircases inside the turrets, where graceful angel fish and blue tangs have replaced the gun crews. In the center hull, between the two great turrets, lie the broken 8-inch turret assemblies. Armored tubes that fed ammunition to the guns, as well as gears that turned the turrets, are homes for puffer fish, sea cucumbers, arrow crabs, and moray eels.

In reality, the old battleship is no less majestic today than when she first was christened a hundred years ago. Her role has changed from a home and defender of men to a home and refuge for marine life. Many people who visit *Massachusetts* to fish and dive among the decks and armament of a bygone era may be surprised to learn of her illustrious naval career and her role in transforming her nation into a major seapower. Today, she still reflects that American military technology; but she also represents an ecological wonder as a living underwater preserve.



CAUTION: — While diving presents an exciting and interesting adventure, divers should not penetrate the hull, due to structural instability of the bulkheads and the presence of internal cables and wiring.

HOW TO FIND THE SUNKEN BATTLESHIP

The remains of USS *Massachusetts* are in 26 feet of water, a mile and a half south-southwest of Pensacola Pass at Latitude 30° 17.794' N, 87° 18.727' W, in the Ft. Pickens State Aquatic Preserve, which is administered by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The site is easily located because the ship's two main gun turrets are awash most of the time. The wreck also is marked by a red bell buoy, and its location is shown on nautical charts.

Due to currents from the nearby pass, optimal diving conditions at *Massachusetts* are at slack high and low tides. Visibility is best at high tide. Caution should be taken when sea conditions are above 2 or 3 feet, due to increased surge in the shallow water surrounding the wreck. Anchoring at the site should take into account surface currents, wind direction, and anticipated tidal change. Anchoring in the sand at the edge of the site will help to avoid fouling and losing anchors in the wreckage. Minimum diving equipment should include open water scuba gear, a sharp knife, gloves, and a dive flag. A laminated underwater field guide is available from local dive shops to orient divers on a self-guided tour of the preserve.

As with all other historical and archaeological sites on public uplands and submerged bottomlands, USS *Massachusetts* is protected by Florida laws forbidding unauthorized disturbance, excavation, or removal of artifacts. Please help keep the site intact for others.

"Take only photos, and leave only bubbles."

For more information call
850.245.6444
Or visit
museumsinthesea.com



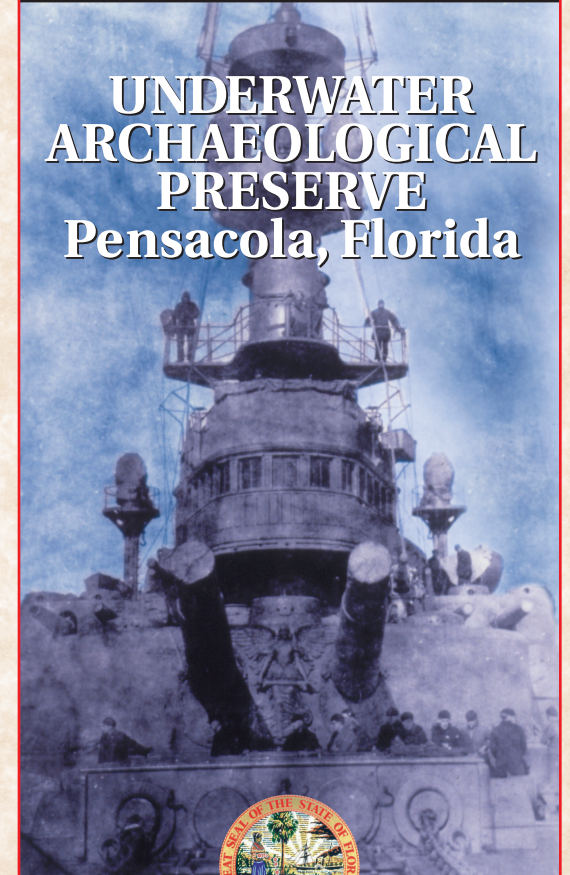
FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Division of Historical Resources
Bureau of Archaeological Research
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USS MASSACHUSETTS

UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRESERVE

Pensacola, Florida



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Division of Historical Resources
Bureau of Archaeological Research

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
Division of State Lands

FRIENDS of the
USS MASSACHUSETTS (BB-2)

USS MASSACHUSETTS (BB-2)

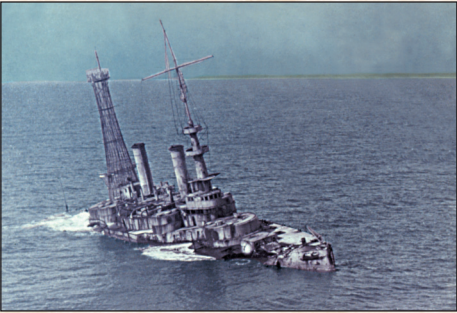
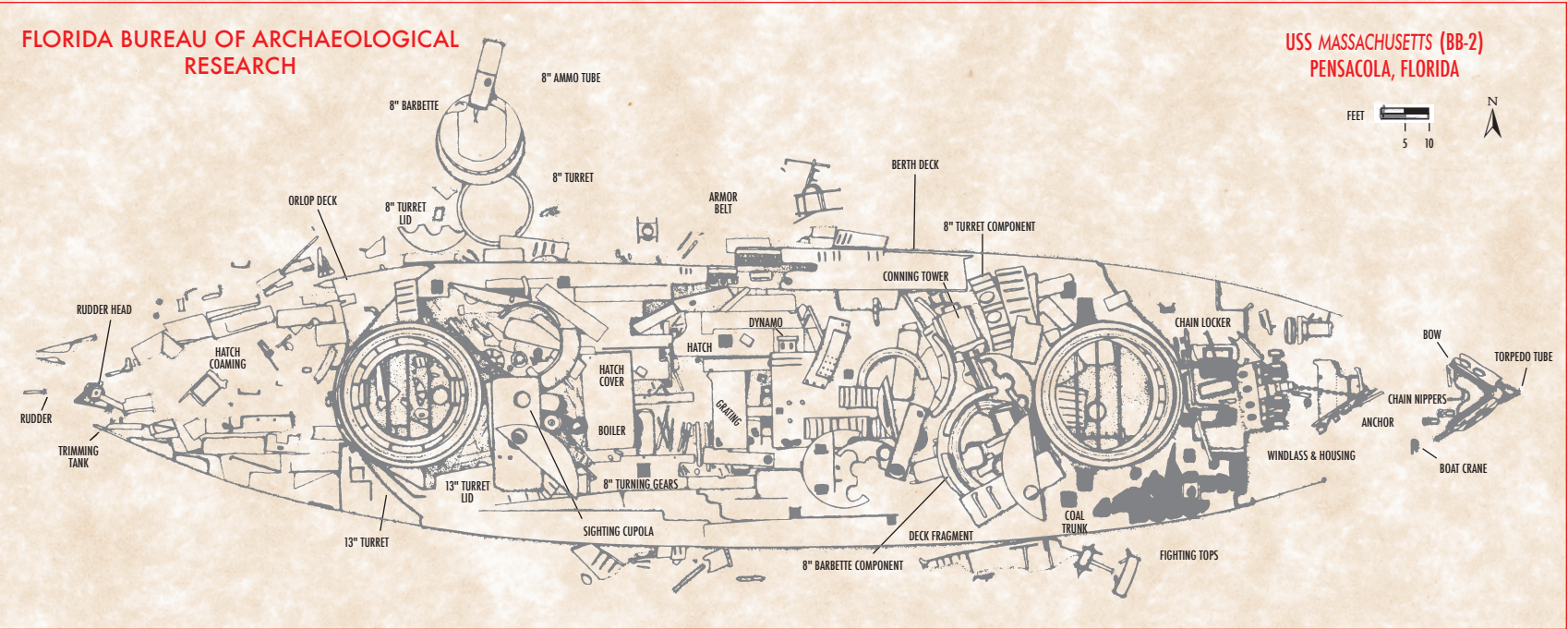
The oldest existing American battleship, USS *Massachusetts* was one of three “Indiana” class battleships authorized in 1890 for the new “Steel Navy.” Among the most powerful ships of their time, *Indiana*, *Massachusetts*, and *Oregon* were the first heavy-caliber, heavy-armor battleships to be built by the United States, and the first to be given hull numbers. *Massachusetts* (BB-2) was built by William Cramp and Sons of Philadelphia at a cost of \$3.4 million; her keel was laid on June 25, 1891 and she was launched on June 10, 1893. Officially commissioned by the Navy on June 10, 1896, she was just over 350 feet long, with a beam of 69 feet, and a draft of 24 feet. The battleship was designed to cruise at a maximum of 15 knots and was armed with two heavy 13-inch gun batteries and four 8-inch secondary batteries, as well as smaller ordnance. The larger guns were housed in two turrets, one mounted forward and the other mounted aft, along the ship’s centerline as opposed to an offset design. This new feature limited the ship’s field of fire but gave added stability to the craft. Eight 8-inch guns were housed in four raised turrets mounted in the midships section to form a citadel. Together with four torpedo tubes and a host of small arms, the ship’s combined firepower was a force to be reckoned with.

To protect the ship, an armored belt up to 18 inches thick ran along the waterline, in addition to side and deck armor plates. Below decks, armored columns extended down from each gun turret to protect machinery, crew, and ammunition supplies. The ship was propelled by vertical triple expansion steam engines driving two shafts at almost 10,000 horsepower. The crew included 32 officers and 441 enlisted men; her first commander was Captain Frederick Rodgers.

The new battleship was assigned to the North Atlantic Squadron. After a Boston parade in her honor in the Spring of 1897, the Secretary of the Navy and the Governor of Massachusetts presented the ship with a bronze turret sculpture of “Winged Victory,” which was mounted on the front of Turret No. 1. With the outbreak of the Spanish-American War *Massachusetts* was called into battle; she sailed to Cuba with the Flying Squadron to help blockade the ports of Cienfuegos and Santiago. On the 31st of May, 1898, America’s second battleship saw her first combat; along with *Iowa* and *New Orleans* she exchanged fire with *Cristóbal Colón*, forcing the Spanish cruiser to retire into the inner harbor of Santiago. She also helped sink *Reina Mercedes* before being ordered to support the occupation of Puerto Rico.

Afterward, *Massachusetts* performed a variety of duties, conducting battle practice in several different ports, including Pensacola. During a 1903 winter cruise, target practice off Culebra resulted in a premature detonation in one of the 8-inch turrets, causing the loss of nine sailors. In 1906, she was decommissioned. Refitted in 1910 with a caged mainmast and other modern hardware, including one of the first shipboard wireless telegraphs, the battleship was placed in reduced commission to serve as a summer practice ship for midshipmen.

The nation’s oldest battleship served as a gunnery practice ship for naval reserve crews after war was declared with Germany. In 1919, she returned to Philadelphia and was decommissioned for the final time. Stripped of her



guns and furnishings, the obsolete ship was towed in January 1921 to Pensacola to be used as a target for experimental artillery, and scuttled just outside the entrance to the bay. The Army brought in guns by rail from as far away as Virginia and positioned the larger ones well inland, north of Pensacola. The battleship served her country for the last time as she was subjected to over a hundred rounds of artillery fire. Scarred and torn, the ship sat peacefully in the Gulf, attracting fish and fisherman alike until 1956, when several scrap companies joined forces to salvage the wreck. With the support of the people of Pensacola, the state filed an injunction to

prevent the salvage, and when the case was brought before the Supreme Court, title to *Massachusetts* was awarded to the State of Florida.

Then, in 1990, the sunken ship was nominated by a Pensacola diver to become Florida's fourth shipwreck preserve. State archaeologists gathered historical data and the ship's plans, recorded the underwater wreckage, and made a formal proposal to the people of Pensacola for a cooperative project to establish the preserve. Once again, the public rallied around the old battleship. The preserve was dedicated on June 10, 1993, on the 100th anniversary of the ship's launching.

