



Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

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Flagship of the Commonwealth, U.S. Brig Niagara, Returns to Erie to Kick Off Independence Day Weekend Celebrations

Erie Maritime Museum to host a three-day homecoming event July 3–5 featuring public deck tours, War of 1812 reenactments, and live historical demonstrations in celebration of America's 250th anniversary.

Erie, PA – Today, the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC) welcomed the U.S. Brig *Niagara* back to her home port at the Erie Maritime Museum, on time as promised to kick off the holiday weekend. The return marks the successful completion of an extensive \$6.9 million restoration and refit, funded through a Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of General Services (DGS) Capital Project, ensuring the long-term preservation of the Commonwealth's official flagship.

The *Niagara*, a replica of the relief flagship of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry during the pivotal Battle of Lake Erie in 1813, serves as a living symbol of American courage and Pennsylvania's rich maritime history.

"The U.S. Brig *Niagara* is a testament to our shared history and a vital educational resource for all Pennsylvanians," said **Hayley Haldeman, Chairwoman of PHMC**. "This investment in her structural integrity ensures that this historic vessel will continue to tell the history of the Battle of Lake Erie for generations to come. We are honored to have her home in Erie to celebrate America's 250th anniversary."

The comprehensive refit focused on vital preservation work, upgrading the ship's infrastructure to meet modern U.S. Coast Guard safety and operational standards while painstakingly maintaining her historical authenticity. Key milestones of the shipyard project included:

- **Structural Bow Reconstruction:** Shipwrights corrected a centerline shift at the vessel's bow by fabricating and installing new white oak knightheads using varied-angle drift pinning to eliminate structural gaps. Out of an abundance of caution, a metal breasthook was integrated to permanently reinforce the bow and safely distribute the massive downward loads of the reinstalled bowsprit.

- **Hull and Bulwark Restoration:** Crews completed a massive timber replacement cycle, installing 162 new planks, including 1,500 linear feet of compromised bulwark planking and roughly 30% of the hull planking focused heavily on the stern and bow. The work also included meticulously rebuilding 12 sweep port openings, four sections of cap sheer plank, and the ship's gun ports.
- **Waterway System Redesign:** To stop fresh water from pooling and causing wood rot along the outboard seams, the shipyard executed a 70% replacement and architectural redesign of the ship's waterway (gutter) system. Approved by a naval architect and USCG inspectors, the new configuration efficiently sheds water directly to the scuppers.
- **Propulsion System Modernization:** The flagship's outmoded 1992 diesel engines were fully replaced with state-of-the-art Caterpillar C7.1 engines meeting strict Tier 3 EPA emission standards. This upgrade introduces 70 additional horsepower, paired with entirely new gearboxes, and a precision-aligned drive train system to give the *Niagara* the critical speed and power necessary to maintain position safely in adverse weather conditions.

"Preserving a wooden sailing vessel is an immense, ongoing commitment, and this \$6.9 million refit represents the Commonwealth's dedication to our maritime heritage," said **Andrea Lowery, Executive Director, PHMC**. "The *Niagara* does not just live on paper; she is a working, sailing classroom, and we are excited to see her return to service."

To celebrate both the *Niagara's* homecoming and America's 250th Independence Day, the Erie Maritime Museum will host a three-day weekend of public festivities from Friday, July 3, through Sunday, July 5, generously sponsored by Erie Insurance. Visitors are invited to welcome the flagship back with daily deck tours, local food trucks, and scheduled flyovers by Commemorative Air Force aircraft.

"Erie Insurance is proud to collaborate with the Erie Maritime Museum and Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission to welcome home the U.S. Brig *Niagara*," said **Timothy NeCastro, President and CEO of Erie Insurance**. "There is no greater symbol of our city's history and resilience, and we are honored to sponsor a weekend that brings our community together to celebrate the return of our historic flagship and commemorate America's 250th anniversary."

Throughout the Independence Day holiday weekend, the museum grounds and the ship's deck will come alive with immersive maritime history. War of 1812 reenactors will be on-site conducting marlinspike seamanship lessons, cutlass and small arms drills, and demonstrations highlighting historic naval rations. Visitors can also experience live historical demonstrations, including blacksmithing, coopering, and ropemaking, alongside a partner exhibition from Erie Lake Lights.

Public deck tours will run from 12:00 PM to 6:00 PM on Friday; 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM on Saturday; and 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM on Sunday.

About Erie Insurance

According to AM Best Company, Erie Insurance Group, based in Erie, Pennsylvania, is the 11th largest homeowners insurer, 12th largest automobile insurer and 10th largest commercial lines insurer in the United States based on direct premiums written. Founded in 1925, Erie Insurance is a Fortune 500 company and the 16th largest property/casualty insurer in the United States based on net premiums written. Rated A+ (Superior) by AM Best, ERIE has more than 7 million policies in force and operates in 12 states and the District of Columbia. News releases and more information are available on ERIE's website at www.erieinsurance.com.

About the U.S. Brig *Niagara* and the Erie Maritime Museum

The U.S. Brig *Niagara* is a historically accurate reconstruction of the brig commanded by Master Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry in the Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812. Operated by the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission from her homeport at the Erie Maritime Museum, the *Niagara* sails as a sailing school vessel, goodwill ambassador, and a symbol of Pennsylvania's rich maritime heritage. The Erie Maritime Museum is a community gathering place that welcomes audiences of all abilities and backgrounds to gather and experience the maritime history & heritage of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, including civilian activity, innovation, military service, and the contributions of Pennsylvanians to the Great Lakes industry and our environment.

The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission is the official history agency of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Learn more by visiting [PHMC online](#) or following us on [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

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