

Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission Announces Plans For Repairs To The US Brig Niagara

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The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC) is pleased to announce its plans for repairs to the Commonwealth's flagship.

"Niagara has played a vital role in Erie's history and is an integral part of its identity," said PHMC's Director of Historic Sites & Museums Melissa Mann. "She inspires Pennsylvanians and draws visitors to the Erie region. PHMC's Erie Maritime Museum staff and professional marine consultants have been working tirelessly to prepare for *Niagara's* upcoming shipyard experiences. We are looking forward to making the repairs necessary to return *Niagara* to sailing on the Great Lakes."

PHMC is consulting with previous *Niagara* captains Walter Rybka and Wesley Heerssen as it develops plans for the ship's repairs and prepares her to transit. Under the guidance of Heerssen and Erie Maritime Museum Site Administrator Jim Hall, a group of museum volunteers and PHMC staff completed the removal of the ship's cover in June.

Niagara needs repairs to her structure, planking, and systems. During the 2023 sailing season, the ship lost one of her propellers. As part of the first shipyard phase, both propellers will be replaced. At that time, PHMC also anticipates making engine improvements. PHMC has been working with the US Coast Guard, as these repairs and upgrades require their review and approval.

The lead time for fabrication of the custom-built, five-blade, variable-pitch propellers puts the start of the first shipyard work at the end of August 2024. That repair work will be done at a shipyard on the Great Lakes, likely in Cleveland. While at shipyard for those repairs, PHMC will engage a certified professional marine surveyor to conduct a below-the-waterline survey as part of an ongoing comprehensive survey of *Niagara's* current mechanical and maintenance requirements. The survey will allow for a scope of work to be developed for a second larger shipyard phase, which is required to address the ship's structural issues. We expect the first round of shipyard work to take one to two weeks.

The second shipyard work will be undertaken in 2024–25. While the scope of this work will be informed by the survey from the first shipyard phase, at a minimum it will include:

- Stabilization of the ship's stem/bow assembly
- Replacement of deteriorated hull planking
- Remediation of wood deterioration above the waterline, including waterway timbers, gun ports, and other planking and framing.
- Replacement of decking as needed and recaulking of the entire deck
- Electrical system upgrades and the installation of new generators
- Plumbing upgrades
- Replacement and upgrade of pumps

All repair work will be completed in time for *Niagara* to be sailing in Erie as part of the Commonwealth's Semiquincentennial celebration.