



Dear Flagship Niagara Stakeholder,

The following letters of concern have been collected from Brig Niagara and Erie Maritime Museum volunteers. As you work through this highly challenging and consequential process to determine the future of Niagara, we encourage you to read the concerns, experiences, and feelings of the volunteers who maintain the brig and welcome our guests and community to the world of the historical Niagara. Their concerns are rooted in experience and are very real.

Sincerely,

Ryan Cook

Niagara Volunteer Council, Chair

1/29/2022

I have been a volunteer on the US Brig Niagara since the fall of 2010. During this time I have had the incredible experience of being a part of an organization that truly is remarkable. The Brig represents a part of Pennsylvania and US history that is brought to life by its ability to sail the Great Lakes and take people on board for tours and sails. The uniqueness of the ship is part of its draw to the public. Where else can the public actually experience what it was like in 1813 to be on the deck of a fighting ship and actually sail and hear our carronades roar? The other aspect that the US Brig Niagara brings to life is teaching a new generation of young people about the age of sail. Many who have come on board as trainees have gone on to maritime careers because of this experience. Our ship has won awards as one of the preeminent tall ship sailing school vessels in the USA and world. To have Niagara be a static museum ship would be to lose all this.

One has only to visit Erie to see how deeply ingrained the ship has become in the life of this region. The ship's name and likeness are everywhere on businesses and restaurants. Driving down residential streets you will see "Don't Give Up the Ship" flags flying at many homes. These people expect to see the ship sailing and not permanently tied up to a dock. Most know all too well the fate of the former Niagara that sat on a concrete cradle at the end of State Street. Please, don't let this happen to the US Brig Niagara. Its value to the community, state, and nation must be preserved by its ability to take its story around the lakes for all to experience.

Edward Hale

2/5/2022

My name is Chuck Detzel. I have been a volunteer of the Flagship Niagara since 2009. I have had the honor to sail the Niagara to many Great Lake Ports over the years and represent the State of Pennsylvania and the City of Erie to literally thousands of Tall Ships patrons. I have proudly given short talks on the deck of the ship manning my "station" explaining the operation of the Cannons, Helm, Bell, Capstan and many other functions of a working sailing ship. I have sailed on all of the Great Lakes during my years as a volunteer. I have personally seen the effect that the sailing program has on the life of hundreds of young students that join the crew as student sailors. They all grow to see that becoming part of a crew and working together to accomplish goals will change them in many ways. Many of them become lifelong friends to each other and the Niagara community.

Over the years I have been proud to volunteer and have given many hours to the league. I have felt that the league and the PHMC have teamed up to provide a memorable experience in the Flagship Niagara and the Erie Maritime Museum. Since Walter Rybka left I have felt that we are failing the ship side of the organization. We need a knowledgeable advocate for the only ship being managed by the PHMC. I am convinced at this time that the PHMC is working against the Flagship Niagara student sailing program and wants to see it terminated and the ship confined to dockside operations with minimal crew. This will mean the end of the ship operating as a sailing vessel in short order. The sailing experience is what defines the program, it is that simple.

I cannot believe that I am having to write a letter actually defending one of the best award winning sail training programs in the country. I have been proud to be part of the Niagara volunteer crew over the years and have worked in all of the Tall Ship Festivals since 2010 as a Liaison and the last one as a Co-Chair of the Liaisons. To whoever may be reading this, if you have any power to resolve this issue and continue with the Niagara Sailing Programs and start to work as team mates again please take action.

Please, Don't Give Up the Ship!

Sincerely,

Charles T. Detzel

Flagship Niagara Volunteer

2/6/2022

My Niagara Experience

As long as I can remember, I have been drawn to the sea or lake and to sailing ships. I remember as a child coming to Erie and my grandfather taking us down on State Street to see the Niagara sitting on cement blocks. I am old enough to remember climbing on the ship and even going below decks. As the years passed the condition of the ship had deteriorated to the point where we could only walk around the ship and then finally the sad day arrived when it was deemed unsafe and dismantled.

Fast forward many years and my family had returned to Erie. In the busy years of rearing a family, I did not have much time to think about the Niagara, but I did remember my grandfather and took my children to observe the ship. Then in 2010, I met John and Nancy Giebfried and listened to John's stories of sailing on Niagara. They encouraged us to sign up to volunteer for Tall Ships 2010. Needless to say, I was hooked. When sail training began in January 2011, I quickly abandoned the one one day a week that I could sleep in and hustled down to the Maritime Museum. The classes and working in the rig shop fueled my enthusiasm as I listened to the other volunteers. I could not wait for the shake down sail. I happened to be standing on the deck near Billy Sabatini, who was the Chief Mate at the time. He looked over at me, knowing I was a newbie, and said, "wait for it." The engines shut down and I could feel the ship come alive as the sails pulled her forward and we were sailing! I must say that I "wait for it" each and every time I sail.

The Niagara is living history and the only way to fully experience ship life in the 1800s is to take a voyage on her. Day sails are fantastic, but just give a small glimpse into ship life. Actually living and working on the ship for several days gives one a true appreciation of ship life. The Niagara has some "conveniences" like heads and a galley that follows health department regulations, but all the food is cooked on the wood stove. Standing watch and answering the call for all hands on deck gives you an appreciation of how sailors lived onboard in the 1800s. Adjusting sails and steering the ship are the same as when Niagara sailed to western Lake Erie to meet the British. Having taken part in the reenactment of the battle in September 2013, I was amazed at how close the ships came to each other and could only imagine the sound of the guns firing since it was loud with only a few shots fired. All of these things cannot be fully appreciated on a day sail or on a ship permanently docked.

It is an honor to sail next to professional sailors who are so willing to teach you and show you the safest way to complete tasks. From many conversations with the sailors, the Flagship Niagara League has a stellar reputation in the sailing world for its sail training programs. It attracts the best qualified sailors who vie for positions to spend the summer on Niagara and travel the Great Lakes.

I also work with the school programs where local students are given the opportunity to sail on Niagara and experience the living history. Over the years, it has opened my eyes to see how children who live so close to the bayfront and Niagara have never been to the water or have

never seen the ship. It is awesome watching them listen to the stories and experience what it is like to actually sail a square rigged ship. One of the best parts of these sails is when they have everyone lie down on the deck and turn off all the power. One can experience what it was like before engines and generators on ships and just listen to the sound of the wind in the rigging and the creaking of the deck. It is awesome when the sail is over and the students leave thanking everyone for the awesome experience.

When I have worked at the Tall Ship Festivals, I am always amazed at the people who travel great distances to actually climb on board Niagara and walk her decks and hear her stories. People see Niagara on her voyages and come to Erie to visit the museum and spend more time on deck than is allowed at the festivals. When Niagara sails the Great Lakes, she truly is Pennsylvania's ambassador, bringing people to Erie, PA. The Erie Tall Ships Festival has the reputation of being the biggest and best on the circuit. I fear that if Niagara is not allowed to sail the Great Lakes and participate in the other stops as the ambassador for Pennsylvania, the Erie Tall Ships Festival will cease to exist.

Sailing and working on the Niagara is very dear to my heart and I am always encouraging others to come down to the museum and join the volunteers. I truly hope that Niagara will be back in the business of sailing and sharing the history of the Battle of Lake Erie again this summer.

Linda Mang

My Jim Hall Observation

I have never personally met Jim Hall, the administrator of the Maritime Museum. I went with a group of volunteers on a Saturday in December to help decorate the museum for the Christmas holiday. One of the volunteers, Gary Dudenhoefer, had secured permission from Jim Hall to put up a Christmas tree. The group proceeded up to the third level of the museum and discovered a treasure of decorations. We had been told by Gary that we were supposed to put up one tree since the museum was only open two days a week, but we ended up bring down three trees.

In the process of bringing decorations down three tall flights, I noticed a man that I did not recognize speaking with the docents on duty. I continued to see him throughout the time we were decorating. It was in the days after that I happened to see a comment from Jim Hall on a Facebook post. I looked up his picture and much to my surprise, it was the man that I saw chatting with the docents.

About the same time, the Niagara Volunteer Council was informed that Jim Hall had sent a scathing email to Gary stating that he had given permission for one and only one tree. He said that he was in charge and his directives were to be followed and he wanted the situation rectified quickly. Interestingly, Jim Hall decided the tree that we put up in the bubble could stay, but the one on the gun deck needed to be removed. Gary did go and rectified the situation.

This situation to me showed poor management skills. I have always been taught that when I see a situation that is not going according to plan, to pull aside the person involved and speak to them quietly. Somehow I do not see where a person watching the whole episode would wait until everyone had gone home to send a scathing email exerting his position and the power of his position.

Linda Mang

1/29/2022

"As a citizen of the city of Erie, a resident of Erie county, a Pennsylvanian and a volunteer, I am deeply concerned about the future of the US Brig Niagara. My concerns come from the authoritarian and negligent behavior of the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC) in regards to the Flagship of Pennsylvania, the US Brig Niagara. To put it bluntly, the ship has not sailed for 2 years, the Erie Maritime Museum has lost most of its docents and is barely able to stay open, the volunteer program has been neglected, and PHMC has repeatedly undermined and ignored a perfectly good working relationship with Flagship Niagara League (FNL).

PHMC officials first approved the removal of the winter cover on Niagara in April 2021. This cover had been placed on Niagara in October 2019. In spite of diligent efforts by FNL to safely navigate through COVID-19, PHMC then abruptly told the captain to stop the removal just as crew and volunteers were in the process of starting the removal of the cover. That decision led to Niagara remaining covered for a second year throughout the hot summer months until September 2021. Niagara also was in great need of repairs that could only be done at the shipyard. The trip to shipyard was delayed by the cover removal, resulting in a transit to Cleveland on Lake Erie in October 2021 and a return transit back to Erie in December 2021. That's right...crossing from Cleveland to Erie on Lake Erie in December, due to the negligence of PHMC. Add to that the need to put the cover back on Niagara in January 2022, in snowy, sub-freezing conditions. To me, this alone demonstrates that officials of PHMC, when left to make their own decisions, have no clue about what is involved in maintaining a wooden tall ship. Take that into account when people like the site administrator, James Hall, tell you that they want the US Brig Niagara to sit at the dock permanently. Wooden ships rot when they sit at dock.

In Title 37 of the Consolidated Statutes of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, subsection 705, the PHMC is given

“...the power and duty to: (1) Cooperate with the Department of Military Affairs, the United States Navy and other appropriate organizations in commemorating significant events of our naval and maritime heritage. (2) Sail the United States Brig Niagara, within the means at its command, to various ports of call and commemorative events as the official sailing ambassador for Pennsylvania. (3) Charge whatever fees are necessary to maintain the vessel and to encourage private financial support as appropriate in order to support the United States Brig Niagara and its sailing program,”

Clearly, PHMC's attempts (past and present) to prevent Niagara from a sailing season that includes sailing to other ports as an ambassador for Pennsylvania is in direct violation of PHMC's duties regarding Niagara. Additionally, their continual discouragement of a proven and financially strong relationship with FNL is in violation of their duty to work with private financial supporters.

The status of the Erie Maritime Museum, since the departure of Walter Rybka as site administrator, is an additional area of negligence or mismanagement. Under the direction of James Hall, the current site administrator, the museum has lost most of the experienced museum docent volunteers. They have left for various reasons, mainly stemming from lack of support from Mr. Hall. With many volunteers gone, one would think that there would be a push to recruit and train new volunteers. However, with the departure of Charles Johnson (the PHMC employee who was given the task of coordinating volunteers during the pandemic) for military duty, Mr. Hall has stated that he is too busy writing reports to deal with volunteers. In spite of offers from FNL and volunteers who had been involved with coordinating and training volunteers in the past, Mr. Hall has taken no initiative to recruit or train new volunteers. Here is one personal example of his disconnect from volunteers. Several other volunteers and myself, who were working on getting the cover back on Niagara, were told to shovel snow off of a sidewalk so that a forklift could be sent around to the entrance of the museum to move a freezer Mr. Hall was having delivered. He came outside, watched as we shoveled, and said not a word to us. Not an offer to help, not a word of thanks, not even a greeting. This is typical of how he interacts with volunteers, many of whom have no idea who he is. To this end the Erie Maritime Museum (EMM) has not been open more than 2 days for most of the past 8 months. Without efforts to recruit new museum volunteers, this is the bleak future of the museum, which use to be open 7 days a week (April - October) and 3 days a week (November - March).

Another personal experience I had involving access to the EMM was during September 2021 when FNL conducted a STEM program for area school students. The program was called B-WET (Bay Watershed Education and Training). Under Mr. Rybka's administration, FNL programs worked in conjunction with the EMM to present students with learning opportunities about the local environment and the maritime history of the Erie area. Mr. Hall refused to allow the school groups to come into the EMM or on the property for the B-WET program, forcing the program to be held just a few hundred feet away. With no access to the displays inside the museum, we as volunteers, had to bring in our own large photos of significant historical events and use a Power Point presentation for the history segment of the program. Imagine our surprise to see that the same time that we were refused access to the museum, Mr. Hall was promoting in the local news that a different group of students from PA Reach Cyber School had visited the EMM (see Erie Times New, September 24, 2021 - "Hands on Learning at the Maritime Museum").

I hope you can see why my concerns about the future of the US Brig Niagara are so high. PHMC has not clearly stated their intentions for Niagara's future. They claim to support the Brig yet their actions do not match their words. After decades of being responsible for the Niagara they are still clueless about what is involved in sailing the ship - how hiring qualified and experienced crew is a process that starts in the early months of the year, how the ship must be rigged by a qualified and experienced crew with the help of volunteers, and how a sail training program benefits youth in our community and leads to more qualified crew. They are clueless about the timing, planning and impact that the Tall Ships festivals have on not only the Erie community, but on the teaching and experiencing of history for people in all the places that the Tall Ships Festivals occur. PHMC has not even been able to negotiate a contract with a partner group that out-funds them when it come to the US Brig Niagara. It's time to start demanding some detailed answers from the organization that is tasked, by taxpayers, with making sure our Flagship of Pennsylvania fulfills its mission as a sailing ambassador and world-renowned sail training vessel."

Ginny Sivak

1/28/2022

I have been a very active volunteer with the Flagship Niagara League for about four and one half years. From day one, I have been told many times that the main mission of the Niagara is to maintain its' sail training program and its' place as a world class school. There are many who have gone on to captain ships that began on the Brig. In order to do so, the yearly Great Lakes sail training conducted each summer, needs to continue.

Of all the ship volunteers, I have probably spent more time with Jim Hall than anyone. Overall, he has treated me well, but it seems only when he has a need. The first time I met him, he had heard of my heading up a lot of the painting projects and immediately asked me to tackle painting railings inside and later outside the Maritime Museum. I gladly did so, as I have stated, for the greater good.

I also conduct monthly interviews for our newsletter and did one with him. My average time spent with a subject is twenty or so minutes. He spoke for ninety, mostly telling stories with the answer intertwined. I took about eight hours prepping, conducting and editing the article. I forwarded it to him and he said he wanted to edit more. Six weeks later, he has never sent it to our editor and missed being published.

When Niagara came back from Cleveland, I went to greet them and help. I did the transit up but could not do the return. I expected Mr.Hall to be there. He was not.

The last time I saw him, he came down while we were working and asked us to accept a freezer delivery. After shoveling a path for the jitney, we took the delivery into the museum. Not then or after did he ever thank us.

Unlike Captains Sabatini and Cusson, who always thank us for our efforts, Mr. Hall has not once thanked me.

When the vast majority of volunteers feel the same way, there is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Sincerely, Bill Masiroff, Volunteer of the Year, 2019.

1/31/2022

It breaks my heart, not only as a volunteer but as someone Who remembers not being able to go on and tour the rotting relic of the Niagara sitting on State Street for many many years, to see anything that is a positive community effort, something that brings people together above and beyond themselves to work for the betterment of the community, being destroyed by government action or nonaction. I started volunteering with the Niagara and I state the Niagara because I worked on the ship. It did not matter at the time to me, or most others who was the 'boss'. The only person in charge was the crew member handing out your duties for the day, and yes sometimes you would like to forget what your job was! The purpose of volunteering was to make sure the living breathing historical Niagara was repaired and made safe for sailing as well as visitors from the museum. What was special about the volunteer community was/is A safe place for people of all walks of life, thoughts, ideas and many diverse backgrounds came together to work for one common goal. We might not agree with each other all the time on any number of things, when it comes to the good of the Niagara and the Maritime Museum we can put those differences aside and get the job done that needs to be done.

Hopefully lessons will be learned and things can get back to saving the Niagara and letting her sail to be the ambassador to the state of Pennsylvania as well as quite an attraction on any Great Lake she sails.

Mary Jo Cook

1/31/2022

Here is my letter of concern about the fate of the US Brig Niagara.

I have been involved with Niagara since the late 1960's during the sesquicentennial, was on the first volunteer crew in the 1990's and many years a proud Niagara volunteer. Niagara should be an active Great Lakes sail-training vessel which gives Erie and Pennsylvania a world class program and a huge amount of free advertising. She should be at minimum a day-sailing and short excursion vessel and definitely not a rotting, static museum ship...the kiss of death for such fine vessels like her.

Timothy P. McLaughlin

1/31/2022

Upon retirement, I joined my husband as a volunteer crew member about 10 years ago. The experience has been life-changing for us both. A whole new avenue of education and growth opened up to me in learning through well-taught classes and hands-on instruction. Traveling 5 hours round trip from Pittsburgh became a semimonthly event to attend classes and have the unique opportunity not only to learn but to put the class material into action while actually sailing on the Niagara and helping to maintain this amazing ship. History, maintenance, knot typing, nautical terms, and functions all come together once you set sail.

Friendships grow among volunteers as you work together and sail with one another. As you participate in this unique experience, you feel as if you are part of a team, sharing joy and adventure as you climb aloft, steer the ship, become look-out, practice safety drills, and constantly learn new skills. I think my husband actually made it through a serious illness due to his love of being on the ship. I know I have developed a deeper understanding of history and have challenged myself in learning new skills as a volunteer on the ship as well as working hard in the rig shop.

Erie has become a special place for us because of the Niagara and the crew. After Captain Rybka retired I have seen changes that are quite alarming for the future of sailing on a tall ship, and I am deeply concerned. I want others to have the opportunity that I have had and, as you probably have heard many times, I join in and plead that you "Don't give up the ship"....keep her sailing, please.

Nancy Hale

2/1/2022

I began volunteering with the Brig Niagara after volunteering for a Tall Ships Erie event in 2008, and have been volunteer for more than 10 years. I love history and the Brig Niagara is central to the history of Erie and this region. Prior to my recent retirement, my volunteer time was a bit limited. While I was working, I looked forward to Saturday morning Sail Training and the opportunity to crew for Niagara and more recently the Lettie G. Howard. Sail Training taught me a whole new skill set with instruction provided by some of the most talented and rare folks--Tall Ship Sailors! There is always something new to learn.

"School Sails" were always special. To see Erie area middle and high school students aboard Niagara or Lettie provided them with an experience few people can claim. Literally, they were sailing history in the case of Lettie, and learning a part of their history aboard the Brig Niagara.

I have a whole Niagara ""family"" that has developed over the years. We work hard, play hard, and appreciate the camaraderie and fellowship volunteering provides. The connection you feel to the shared commitment to maintaining and sailing the Brig Niagara and Lettie are unique. Every January we usually welcome new volunteers for sail training, we look forward to cover-day, rigging the brig, and welcoming back familiar professional crew for shake-down cruises and the summer sailing season.

Volunteers are essential to both the success of the EMM and the Flagship Niagara. Pre-COVID, trained volunteer docents staffed the EMM and told the story of the Brig. Thousands of volunteer hours supplement the professional crew in sailing the Brig locally and throughout the Great Lakes. Stated simply, no volunteers no museum or Brig!

Erie's future is on the Bayfront. The Erie Maritime Museum and the Brig Niagara are prominent features to that Bayfront. More than drawing tourists--which they do, they are central to Erie's past and future."

Please do all you can to "Keep the Brig Niagara Sailing." Insist the Brig Niagara remain an active sailing vessel as required by PA Code!

Rod Troester

Niagara Volunteer

2/1/2022

To Whom It May Concern:

When my husband and I moved to Erie in the mid-1970's, the Brig Niagara was sitting on blocks beside the public dock, surrounded by Cyclone Fencing. It saddened me to see her in that condition and when we moved from the area a few years later she was still sitting there. It looked, at that time, as if this historic Ship was destined to be lost. We moved back to Erie 12 years ago and I was delighted to see that this monument of living history was once again alive and sailing the Great Lakes.

My family and I attend the Tall Ships Festival in 2010 and I became determined to find a way to become involved with the Ship. I learned more about the history of the Brig Niagara and how this latest replica came to be. In 2012, I attended a meeting to become a volunteer for Tall Ships 2013 and was approached after that meeting by a Niagara volunteer who was looking for volunteers to work at the annual Christmas Tree Ship event, which quickly became one of my favorite Ship-related activities. That winter, 2012/2013, I signed up for Winter Sail Training and never looked back.

The Ship is of great historical importance to the United States and to the State of Pennsylvania, as I am sure you are well aware. Niagara is an Ambassador for the State, the City of Erie and our Country across the Great Lakes and Canada. People come from all over the United States, Canada, and other countries to see her under sail, learn about her role in our country's history, to witness her under sail, and sail on her as crew, daysail student, sail training student, and volunteer. Tall Ships Festivals draw visitors from all over the country and other nations and generate many dollars for the local economies in which they take place, including for the City of Erie. Working as a volunteer at the 2013, 2016 and 2019 Tall Ships Festivals in Erie was an incredible experience and I met visitors from all over the United States, Canada and beyond.

In addition to historical importance, the Sail Training program operated through the Flagship Niagara League, has trained people of all ages and is world renowned and respected by all. In order to continue this program, Niagara needs to continue to sail. Niagara is not meant to be a static display, a simple tourist attraction sitting in a marina, never moving on the water. To make her a static display would be to sign her death warrant. A wooden ship is meant to be sailed. Left sitting in the water in one place causes rot and she would soon be sitting on blocks dockside again, behind a fence.

Personally, as a volunteer, Niagara has been a wonderful experience. I have met and worked with volunteers and paid crew of all ages, from all walks of life, from around the world who have become friends. I have learned the "Niagara Way" of ship's maintenance, which means doing things the right way the first time, from sanding and painting, without leaving brush marks, to working as a volunteer crew member on Niagara and on the Lettie G Howard. The experience is confidence building, as volunteers learn new skills not only in the Rig Shop, but also on the ship. Who would have thought that this person who is afraid of heights would be able to climb above the deck to the Fighting Top during Aloft Orientation! History is also an important part of maintenance and sailing and being able to relay the Ship's history to Day Sail Students and local school students and help them help us sail the Ship is an indescribable experience.

I have also served as an elected member on the Niagara Volunteer Council (NVC). I resigned from my position last year due to family obligations and feel that I must give kudos to the current and past NVC members. The NVC was formed to help enhance the volunteer experience. This group has worked hard, especially during the past two years, because of the limitations with COVID19, to keep volunteers

invested and involved through a multitude of socially distant activities conducted mostly via ZOOM that included starting a book club, a summer kayaking club, an ongoing Trivia contest, knot tying classes and other fun activities.

Kudos also need to go to Captains Sabatini and Cusson for all the work they have done to keep things going with the ships and with the volunteers under some very trying circumstances. Captain Cusson is the most visible for volunteers as he has continued, via ZOOM, to hold weekly Musters with the volunteers, online Winter Sail Training, and other educational programs with regard to the Ship and sailing.

Lastly, it can't go without saying that the US Brig Niagara, Lettie G Howard and the Erie Maritime Museum have operated for many years with a great amount of assistance from the Docents who work in the museum to the Ship Volunteers who work hard even with seemingly minor chores such as sanding and painting to assisting with the uprig and downrigging of the Ships every Spring and Fall to the assistance provided in the actual sailing of the Ships. Thousands of hours of time are donated by volunteers annually to keep the Museum and Ships operating.

We are all looking forward to Niagara sailing the waters of the Great Lakes and participating in the Tall Ships Festivals this summer and for many years to come. To remain alive, Niagara needs to sail!

Don't Give Up The Ship!

Sincerely,

Terri Freebourn, Niagara Volunteer

2/3/2022

"To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this in support of the Flagship Niagara League continuing to manage the operation and maintenance of the U.S. Brig Niagara. By now, the reader of this document has received many letters of testament extolling the virtues and obligations (as per sec. 37 of the Pennsylvania Museum Code) of having an ongoing sailing plan for the Niagara. Their views and reasonings are many and valid so I agree with all of them. Therefore, I will not restate the statements of my friends and colleagues, however, I would like to add this element to the discussion. The Flagship Niagara League was created to manage the operation and maintenance of the Niagara as an active sailing ship at a time when the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania greatly reduced its financial support of the museums in Pennsylvania. With a mandate to make her homeport Erie Pa., and to be an ambassador of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to other ports and to participate in tall ship events, the Flagship Niagara League has developed into a well organized entity with more than ten years of experience in raising funds to support the Niagara, operating her by employing exceptional crew personnel, and maintain her with extremely knowledgeable and skilled craftsmanship. Having done so for this many years has enabled FNL to develop contacts and experience that have culminated in Niagara being one of the most highly respected and admired sailing operations in the tall ships community.

My understanding of the current situation is that PHMC wants to take over the operation, hiring, and maintenance of Niagara. If this were permitted to take place the costs incurred by the Commonwealth would be greater than it would be willing to pay. Also, the costs of hiring professional crew, the myriad of details needed to keep Niagara maintained in sailing condition, all currently being managed by the FNL would now be born by the Commonwealth, and my belief is that the ship would ultimately languish into a state of decay that would ultimately preclude her from sailing.

For more than ten years, the Niagara has been able to sail keeping its mandate, by the capable and talented workings of the FNL, which has saved countless dollars for the Commonwealth, and the Pennsylvania taxpayers. The wealth of knowledge gained by the FNL having been managing Niagara is priceless and would be lost if divorced from Niagara's maintenance and operation.

The current arrangement between FNL and PHMC keeps Niagara sailing and greatly reduces costs to the taxpayers of Pennsylvania, which leads me to say " If it isn't broke don't fix it".

Finally I would like to address the following, why go to all this trouble at all, why not tie Niagara up to a dock and leave it at that? The best way I can answer that is to quote a passage from the introduction of the book "Perry's Lake Erie Fleet After the Glory" by David Frew "With respect to Erie's role in the war of 1812, while there are few remaining local land shrines to the conflict-forts, battlefields, or other structures- there is the seemingly eternal brig Niagara. Unlike docent tours of Gettysburg's battlefields, where one is left to imagine the events of those days, Erie's most senior citizen, Niagara, sits at her berth near the downtown Erie Maritime Museum, constantly reminding us of the event that took place here. And if the dockside presence of Niagara is not enough to bring images of the war of 1812 to life, when the brig is untied and slips into Erie's Presque Isle Bay to go sailing, it is impossible for even the most oblivious to fail to notice the presence of this apparition from another time."

The Niagara is a living history, a unique entity within all of the Commonwealth's holdings, with the ability to bring history alive, and to introduce countless numbers of visitors to the unique charm of Erie, to sailing, and the ethereal beauty of the maritime history of the Niagara and Erie.

The FNL has done a remarkable for more than ten years making all of the above happen. I respectfully see no reasonable arguement for changing the agreements that have been in place for these many years.

Respectfully submitted, Harold "Dutch" Noll"

2/5/2022

"I have been a volunteer at the brig Niagara since 2017, at the age of 71 years, after retirement. I was unaware that the relationship between the PHMC and FNL had soured to the point of putting in question its survival as a sail-training vessel. I have worked with the crew handling the sails during a 2-week voyage to Toronto and Buffalo and one-day sails in Erie introducing sailing to groups of high school students, volunteered for the last tall ships festival in Erie, have worked on the maintenance of ropes and woods by painting, tarring and scraping in the fall and winter when the sailing season was off. I'm not alone in this devotion, there are many volunteers that do the same as I do and contribute monetarily to its preservation as it's shown by the thousands of dollars the FNL receives during the Erie Gives Day in August. As I write this letter volunteers have been helping the covering of both the brig Niagara and schooner Lettie G Howard in frigid temperatures. It's rightly said that without volunteers the Erie Maritime Museum is not staffed and the brig does not sail.

I understand that there are conflicting visions for the role of the brig in the Maritime Museum. A static museum moored and open for visitors will mean the death and rotting of the vessels. Having only short one-day sails will make very difficult to get a dedicated young professional crew which is necessary to go up to the mast and yards and handle the sails. Certainly, having a presence in the Great Lakes is the most appealing and one that will introduce the maritime Erie's history along the places visited.

Lastly, I would like to comment on the behavior of the PHMC/Erie Maritime Museum Site Administrator, Jim Hall. For what I've been told, he appears to be a control freak that resents the success of FNL and faces it as a threat to his authority. Even there is disagreement on the issues at hand, there is no need for anyone to trample over people that have different ideas and belittle their proven achievements.

Sincerely,

Joao Tavares "

2/8/2022

"Since 1989, the current replica of the US Brig Niagara as had a profound positive influence on the Erie Community. The ship is not only is a tribute to the past but also a constant reminder of the perils and sacrifices which helped to shape our nation. I have sailed and volunteered on the Brig Niagara and have witnesses the excitement, joy and learning which was experienced by high school students, out of town visitors and local guests. In addition, the Brig was instrumental in supporting sail training classes and in showcasing the Brig Niagara at numerous Tall Ship Festivals. I believe that any options to make the ship a static museum, curtail sailing classes or day sails would have a detrimental effect on the future of the Niagara. Any decisions need to be well thought out with not only a focus on maintaining the Niagara but also aggressively promoting the Niagara as a flagship of the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commision.

I remain committed to preserving the Niagara and would appreciate the opportunity to provide additional comments on any specific questions or options.

Sincerely,

Marc Bryant

814-450-1022 "

2/9/2022

"Dear Representative,

I would like to share the positive impact the Brig Niagara's current sail training model has had on me an individual and on those around me. To reduce a ship like Niagara to a static museum or day sail ship is to lose the connection to her history. In short it is the death of a ship.

Niagara is unique. I have visited static museum ships in the past multiple times while visiting Independence Seaport Museum in Philadelphia or others. I would casually stroll by either on school trips or with family and no more than glance at them. They sparked no curiosity in me, either for the mechanics of sail or the history. However when I stepped on board Niagara the first time, I felt the *life* of an active tallship. In a cliché way of putting it... it felt like history come alive. I noticed the bustle on deck, the wind in the sails, the lines under strain. I knew this vessel made long overnight voyages in a way that connected you to the history of the golden age of sail. And I wanted to try it, not just on a day sail but to live and work and learn on the ship for weeks, for the ship and the crew.

I joined the Niagara community in 2017 and remained active until 2021. I lived in Pittsburgh and would make the 2hr one-way commute to volunteer for just a day at a time. That's not even the farthest volunteers traveled. I would not do that for a static ship, nor would as many others. From what I have seen Niagara's community is one of the strongest in this industry. I have no doubt that the community can maintain the current sail training and voyaging model.

I no longer an active part of the community. I lived in Pittsburgh for the duration of my PhD studies in Chemical Engineering at CMU and have since moved away. Yet I have continued sailing on other ships using the experience gained with Niagara.

There are not many active voyaging square-rig tallships left in this world, and still less those as welcoming and well supported by the community as Niagara. It is a difficult financial model and the age of sail is over. But the true gem here is how people from all walks of life and ages are brought together by a common passion to learn. That would not happen in just any museum setting.

Therefore I urge you support a voyaging sail training model for the Niagara.

Kindly~ Olga Vinogradova"

My husband and I have been active volunteers of the US Brig Niagara since 2014. We first came up from Pittsburgh for a Tall Ships Erie in 2013, and then came back for a daysail. Both days were wet, cold, and miserable- and I was immediately hooked. That January, we joined the winter sail training class & volunteer program and started making the four-hour round trip every other week. We still come up on a regular basis, and we're not alone in the commute- a number other regular volunteers also hail from Pittsburgh, as well as Ohio, New York, and Ontario.

I realized we were lucky early on in our volunteer experience. We were lucky to have the Niagara within driving distance- there are only so many tall ships in the states, let alone in the Great Lakes, let alone ships like the Niagara. And without knowing it, we were luckier in our access to the Flagship Niagara League's trainee and volunteer program.

We may not sail the ocean, but the Niagara trainee program has a reputation for discipline and skill. There is nothing inherently safe or easy about sailing large wooden boats. This is especially true of the Niagara, in her size and complexity. In an industry where reckless decisions or careless upkeep could literally cost lives, the captains of the Niagara have always held to an extremely high standard of safety, seamanship, and cooperative work. I have never once felt unsafe on the Niagara or under our captains' command, and I know that not every sailor can say the same about their experiences on other ships. Their education and experience, combined with the leadership and mentorship of Captain Rybka, have made the Brig Niagara a name synonymous with traditionally skilled, square-rigged sailing and a leader in the tall ship industry. It would be a great loss if the Niagara did not continue as a sailing school vessel- a loss to Erie, in its tourism and pride at having the working flagship on Pennsylvania in its historic port; a loss to Pennsylvania, in having a thriving maritime program cut off in its prime; and to the tall ship industry at large, of which the Niagara is an integral part.

It never occurred to us that we would find ourselves still sitting on the dock under winter cover for a second year while we watched other ships adapt to sailing safely. Under the guise of the Coronavirus, the entire Niagara community found itself caught in the PHMC staff transition- receiving permission to sail in 2021, which was then revoked; having to rescind desirable job offers to potential and returning crew; unable to have volunteers on site or take off the winter cover, which never required specific PHMC permission previously. Everyone was trying their hardest to navigate the pandemic safely and the new rules respectfully, but only found confusion, a lack of transparency, and constantly changing goal posts from the PHMC leadership. The Erie community has been watching and needs to know when the Niagara will sail again.

I strongly urge you to:

- Accept the proposed agreement by the Flagship Niagara League, to continue maintaining and sailing the Niagara as a sailing school vessel to pre-COVID program standards;
- To agree to the Brig Niagara's continuing participation in the Tall Ships Challenges in the Great Lakes and at Tall Ships Erie, in 2022 and beyond;
- To allow the FNL to continue community-building, educational and volunteer programming at the Erie Maritime Museum as occurred before the change in administration;
- And to prioritize furthering the volunteer program for both museum and ship volunteers, in tandem with the FNL, for the betterment of both programs.

Volunteering on the Niagara has literally changed my life. I have found lifelong friends who live throughout the country and sail around the world. I've travelled the eastern seaboard and launched

opportunities because sailors at port recognized my Niagara gear. I have learned traditional seamanship skills that I have put to use on my farm, on other boats, and on every camping trip since. I've climbed aloft, sailed on voyages, stood lookout in the middle of the night, and got more tanned, tired, and dirty than you would think possible. It changed my life. I wouldn't trade these experiences for the world. I owe those experiences to our captains, to the Flagship Niagara League, and to the Niagara herself. In continuing the agreement with the FNL to sail the Niagara, you are making those experiences possible for others.

The best way to keep history alive is to live it. Please commit to keeping this piece of history alive and active on the Great Lakes.

Sincerely,

Rashell Bailey
Ordinary Seafarer & Niagara Volunteer
Tarentum, PA



The crew and volunteers posing in front of the US Brig Niagara after the 2019 Shakedown Sail. The author is seated in the bottom row, third from the right, in a sweater that reads "Don't Give Up the Ship".

5 February 2022

To whom it may concern:

Pennsylvania Consolidated Statute, Title 37, § 705 *United States Brig Niagara*, item (b) (2) states: “The [Pennsylvania Historical and Museum] commission shall have the power and duty to: ... Sail the United States Brig *Niagara*, within the means at its command, to various ports of call and commemorative events as the official sailing ambassador for Pennsylvania.” To comply with this law, and to fulfill *Niagara’s* mission, control of the ship and management of her sailing schedule must continue to reside with the Flagship Niagara League (FNL) in Erie, Pennsylvania.

Niagara is more than just an icon of Erie, as one of the most authentic wooden square-rig sailing ships in the world (replica or otherwise). She is an important link to our past. Furthermore, *Niagara* is the largest US Coast Guard inspected wooden square rigger in America that regularly takes people to sea. As an accurate reproduction of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry’s victorious flagship from the War of 1812’s Battle of Lake Erie, the ship represents both Pennsylvania and her homeport of Erie in ports throughout the Great Lakes.

Under FNL management, the ship currently offers three distinctive educational programs to the public. These include educational day sails, an individual trainee program, and for-credit high school and college programs. The day sail program allows the public to sail for an afternoon or evening and experience the life of a sailor. The individual training program integrates trainees into the regular crew for two to three weeks. Finally, *Niagara’s* institutional partnerships with schools have linked the vessel to some of the most prestigious educational institutions in the country. Students receive full credit for being onboard and are taught by accredited faculty from their respective institution. All students and trainees can expect a highly authentic onboard living experience, including sleeping in hammocks and meals cooked on a woodstove.

High school students, college students, and (for some programs) any interested person can sign up for one-week or two-week voyaging programs. It is during these programs that *Niagara* visits numerous ports and fulfills her mission as the Flagship Ambassador of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Life aboard ship is much as it would have been in the 1800’s. Crew members stand watches, eat meals together, and live in spartan conditions which have little

accommodation for personal space or privacy. These voyages are yet another way that *Niagara* preserves and teaches the history of traditional sail. Volunteers are often welcome on these voyages to make up a full crew. Program participants and volunteers alike learn the arcane marlinspike skills of tarring, seizing, loosing and furling sails, and countless other skills that would be lost to history if not for programs like those presented by *Niagara*.

The ideal size for a full crew on *Niagara* is 45 persons. In addition to the professional crew, trainees and volunteers make up the remainder of the crew. Not only do volunteers possess the knowledge to sail *Niagara*, under watchful guidance from the professional crew, they bring with them a love of the ship and passion for *Niagara's* history. Volunteers are essential to fulfilling *Niagara's* mission to preserve and interpret the history of the War of 1812 and the Battle of Lake Erie. A day sail on *Niagara* teaches guests, by actual demonstration, the conditions under which sailors in Perry's fleet lived, worked, and fought. Watching the crew handle sails, follow orders, and demonstrate the gun drill are the same actions that the crew of 1812 would have taken during the battle. *Niagara* must sail, both on day sails and voyaging programs, to preserve and interpret this important history.

Since 2009 FNL has been an exemplary steward of *Niagara*, having control of all phases of the ship's operation and maintenance. Under FNL's guidance, *Niagara* is recognized as one of the premier square-rig tall ships in the United States and in the world. *Niagara* has twice earned the prestigious "Sail Training Program of the Year" awarded by Tall Ships America. Erie, Pennsylvania was honored by the same organization as "Port of the Year" for Tall Ships 2019.

Currently the legal documents (associate agreement and maintenance agreement) which define the roles and responsibilities of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) and FNL are expired. Negotiations of new contracts have been protracted and difficult. PHMC proposed an agreement which would place complete control of *Niagara* under PHMC, acting through the Site Administrator of the Erie Maritime Museum and US Brig *Niagara*. This arrangement is unacceptable.

PHMC has neither the experience nor the knowledge to manage *Niagara's* sailing season, hire crew, and execute contracts for port visits. Sailors with the required Coast Guard licenses and traditional ship sailing experience are hard to find. The community of traditional ship sailors is

close-knit, and everybody knows everybody else. This is one reason that *Niagara* has always been able to recruit top talent for the professional crew. Due to FNL's excellent management of *Niagara*, and the stellar reputation of Captains Rybka, Sabatini, and Cusson, sailors who are offered paid positions are usually eager to accept.

PHMC has stated, or strongly implied, that its intent is to have *Niagara* primarily as a dockside attraction. If this were the case, it would make hiring professional crew who hold the required license, difficult if not impossible. Most traditional sailors are looking for positions that offer time at sea (sea miles) to maintain their current license or to move up to a higher-class license. To meet the Coast Guard requirements for a Sailing School Vessel (SSV) of its size, *Niagara* must be staffed with a Captain, four mates, four able-bodied seafarers (ABs), and four to six ordinary seafarers (OSs). If *Niagara* were to only offer day sails out of Erie there would be very little opportunity for professional crew to accrue sea miles.

In short, under FNL's competent and caring management of *Niagara*, the ship has taken her place among the world's most pre-eminent traditional wooden sailing ships. *Niagara* is one of the most easily recognized and eagerly anticipated ships in the Tall Ship community. FNL must, undoubtedly, be empowered to continue the excellent management of *Niagara*, so clearly demonstrated over many decades of operation.

Don't Give Up The Ship!

Respectfully,
Gary Dudenhoefer

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing this in support of the U.S. Brig Niagara and her role as Pennsylvania's sailing ambassador. Full disclosure, I now work for the Flagship Niagara League, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and Associate's Group of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and have held a permanent position with the Flagship Niagara League since August of 2021. I wish to express in the strongest possible terms that my words in this letter represent my personal views as both a former volunteer and a taxpayer of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and should in no way be interpreted or construed to be an official statement from the Flagship Niagara League. Simply put, I speak for myself and no one else.

I have lived in Erie for over three decades now, and one of the things I'm proudest of is the fact that this beautiful ship has her home port here. Wherever she goes, she brings with her the spirit of Erie, and does so in an exceedingly elegant way, as there are few things on this planet more breathtaking than a tall ship under sail. I wasn't alive when the Niagara was sitting on blocks at the foot of State Street, and frankly, the thought of that being her fate fills me with disgust.

Ships are made to be sailed. It's only by sailing them that you can keep them in good condition and preserve them for generations to come. A static display invites rot and decay, while a ship that is actively sailed is a ship that is actively maintained. It has to be, for to keep the souls on board her safe. But more to the point, Niagara is a hallmark of our city, and all our citizens deserve to see her on the open water. Likewise, as a reconstruction of Perry's relief flagship, her importance as a historical envoy to other Great Lakes ports of call cannot be understated. The Niagara makes history come alive, in a way that only a tall ship can. These are machines from a different era, from a time where the only way ideas traveled long distances was by sea. You can't get that from a static display.

On a personal note, I credit Niagara with getting me through some tough times. I was unemployed in the summer of 2019, and one of the things that kept me from dwelling on that was sitting at Dobbins Landing and watching Niagara and Lettie G. Howard sail around the bay. I made the decision then to become a volunteer, and signed up for Winter Sail Training in January of 2020. Then the pandemic hit, the lockdowns happened, and I can say without hyperbole that the thought of being able to sail on Niagara after all this was over was one of the main driving forces keeping me going. As you can imagine, Niagara not having a sailing season in 2021 was personally devastating.

As stated above, I was not alive when Niagara was a static display, and I have no desire to ever see her as such. We have a unique asset here in Erie, one that has garnered praise the world over. To waste that, and relegate her to a permanent dockside exhibit instead of using her to spread her historical message and pass on the traditions and skills of marlinspike seamanship would be such a monumental waste of potential as to be utterly reprehensible.

Niagara, specifically Niagara under sail, is an important symbol of Erie. We should be doing everything possible to keep her sailing so that our children's children's children can be inspired by her the same way that I have.

Respectfully,

Hank Wiest

Dear Niagara Stakeholder,

I am not an expert on tall ships. I am not an expert on museums. But I have spent six years as a volunteer on the Brig Niagara. I also hold a degree in history and have spent more time than most in museums and libraries. I know what a good tall ship program looks like, and I know what a good museum looks like, and I know what good leadership looks like. And I can tell you that Captains William Sabatini and Chris Cusson have run the best tall ship and volunteer programs it has ever been my privilege to be a part of. Unfortunately those programs have been under attack ever since the departure of Captain Walter Rybka from his post as Site Administrator of the Erie Maritime Museum.

It seems ridiculous even now that the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission would undermine the most successful Tall Ship program in the country. It is entirely irrational. However, permit me to explain what has been done and it will be clear that, intentionally or not, this is what has happened.

The story of the current Brig Niagara starts in 1820. The gallant soldiers, sailors, and craftsmen who had built the US Lake Erie fleet and won control of the Upper Great Lakes in the Battle of Lake Erie no longer had need of the brig and Niagara was sunk in Misery Bay, to be preserved in the cold water of the lake against future need. There she sat for nearly a century until 1913, when she was raised and rebuilt for the 100-year anniversary of the Battle of Lake Erie. After this, the age-old problem of historical tall ships raised its head: how do you maintain a vessel built to be manned by hundreds on a budget for historical preservation? In 1917 the Niagara was transferred to the City of Erie, who transferred it in 1929 to the newly-formed USS Niagara Foundation. At this point the ship had been badly neglected and needed considerable restoration. The Great Depression prevented this organization from raising the needed funds and the state of Pennsylvania acquired the ship two years later, funding the ship's restoration from 1931 to 1938 under the Flagship Niagara Commission. The rebuild was never completed before Niagara was transferred yet again to the Pennsylvania Historical Commission. At this point the Niagara had the good fortune to be included as a Works Progress Administration project under the New Deal.

With this funding source, respected naval architect Howard Irving Chapelle was contracted to restore the ship. He found that little of the original Niagara remained. Nonetheless he set to work and the bare hull of Niagara was relaunched in 1943. The Pennsylvania Historical Commission was merged into the new Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in 1945, but Niagara was left as a bare hull sitting at a dock. That lasted until 1951, when the hull was lifted out of the water and set on concrete blocks. It was found to be filled with dry rot and in need of yet another restoration. Once again the historical tall ships conundrum had ruined Niagara. Without a devoted crew and funding the tall ship could not be maintained.

In 1963 the PHMC fitted the rotting hull of Niagara with cannon and rigging for the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Lake Erie. In 1973 Niagara was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The fortunes of Niagara changed in 1981 with the formation of the Flagship Niagara League. The FNL was formed to reconstruct Niagara once again, but this time to operate her as a living piece of history instead of an outdoor exhibit that would inevitably be neglected and left to rot. The PHMC and the FNL worked together to restore the ship. The project was led by respected naval architect Melbourne Smith starting in 1986, and the ship was launched in 1988 and completed in 1990. Timbers from the former Niagara were included in the new ship where possible. The Niagara was designated the state flagship of Pennsylvania by the General Assembly in 1988, with her purpose being to act as a “sailing ambassador” for the Commonwealth.

Under her first Captain, Walter Rybka, Niagara was exactly that. Captain Rybka fully understood the historical tall ships conundrum and he had a plan to keep the Niagara operating. He cultivated a robust volunteer community to supply the labor needed to maintain and sail the ship and began a process of supplementing state and FNL-raised money with sail training income. This necessitated a variety of safety improvements to the ship, but in 2005 Niagara was certified as a Sailing School Vessel by the US Coast Guard. Now the Niagara was able to be the sailing ambassador of Pennsylvania and train the men and women who would be sailors and caretakers for the historical tall ship fleet of the nation.

In 2009 the PHMC decided to cut \$250,000 from the Niagara’s budget, rendering her unable to sail. FNL stepped up, and after lengthy delays from the PHMC a public hearing was held, which resulted in the FNL being given permission to operate Niagara. The FNL has had control of operating Niagara since that time on behalf of the Commonwealth and has done an excellent job by any standard. The FNL’s sail training program was recognized as the best in the nation in 2010 and 2015 by Tall Ships America, and Tall Ships Erie was equally recognized as the best in the nation in 2019. The Niagara continues to train many of the sailors that go on to crew the nation’s tall ships, as well as offering a life-changing experience for the trainees that pursue other careers.

The Niagara went into shutdown along with the rest of the world in March of 2020. Site Administrator Captain Walter Rybka retired that year. Given that Captain Rybka was and is the foremost expert at establishing and operating a living tall ship sail training program, this was a serious loss. Unfortunately the PHMC apparently saw this as an opportunity to change a volunteer-driven living tall ship program into a standard museum with paid staff, and went for it. Among the most egregious was Interim Site Administrator Tyler Gum taking immediate action to bar FNL staff from contacting volunteers without explicit permission. This was during the shutdown, when Niagara Captain Chris Cusson ran a series of regular virtual get-togethers and training events that were critical to the emotional health of many Niagarans who were otherwise cut off during shutdown.

The PHMC also selected James Hall to be the next EMM Site Administrator. Based on my direct experience, a more unsuitable candidate would be hard to find.

My exposure to Mr. Hall began in August 2021 when one of the museum docents asked to attend a meeting of the Niagara Volunteer Council. The NVC was formed for the purpose of giving volunteers a voice and was initially elected with ship volunteers. The Erie Maritime Museum docents had their own system at the time. However, that docent had alarming news: Site Administrator James Hall was driving off our volunteer docents. The NVC immediately looked into this and we found it was true. The EMM had lost active docents during the COVID shutdown and many of our most experienced docents found volunteering under Mr. Hall to be intolerable. I found a third of the remaining docent core had left the EMM and were now active at the Hagen History Center. Our docents are not easily replaced. They are generally very experienced older men and women with years of training in the EMM and often sailed on Niagara before becoming docents. They are loyal, dependable, and to hear that they were being driven off was terrible.

I followed up with a meeting with our Museum Educator Charles Johnson, whom I hold in respect. That meeting was interrupted by Mr. Hall and became a meeting between myself and Mr. Hall, with Mr. Johnson sitting in. I made a record and summary of that meeting in the days immediately after. (Please see Appendix) I was gobsmacked by the degree of hostility and suspicion Mr. Hall displayed in that meeting toward the Flagship Niagara League and to me. I was accused of being an agent of the FNL, he repeatedly belittled the volunteer council, expressed that he (Mr. Hall) had all the power and that the council had none, issued a threat to me personally, accused the FNL of fraud, and repeatedly returned to his grievances against the FNL in spite of every effort I made to create a constructive meeting focused on the volunteers. Mr. Hall's demeanor during that meeting was hostile, insecure, paranoid, bullying, and unbecoming of the PHMC.

The volunteer council had a subsequent group meeting with Mr. Hall that was more cordial. However, that meeting did not improve conditions at the museum. When asked about what the loss of Mr. Johnson would mean for volunteers, Mr. Hall explained that he was not a volunteer coordinator and would not be "getting in the weeds" of dealing with volunteer issues. He also spoke about the time he spent writing and submitting reports to PHMC leadership. I asked him explicitly whether he would be willing to devote his time to volunteer issues if it resulted in running the museum at full-week, pre-COVID levels. He answered that only he could make reports to Harrisburg and that even if the museum was successful and running at full capacity it would not matter if no reports were filed with Harrisburg. I feel that position fully expresses Mr. Hall's concerns as a Site Administrator.

Mr. Hall also stated at that time that anyone who wished to help lead volunteers or communicate with the volunteers needed to accept and adopt his understanding of the EMM, which was that he was in charge and had all the power, that all volunteers were PHMC volunteers and the FNL could not have volunteers, and that Niagara was a museum facility of the EMM and nothing more. He particularly emphasized that Niagara was not separate from the EMM in any way. This of course flew neatly in the face of reality. The reality is that the work of maintaining and sailing a tall ship is entirely different from the work done at a museum and is organized and carried out differently. It also requires different people with different skill sets and physical abilities. Finally, it

also ignored that the EMM had been created in support of the 1981 vision of Brig Niagara as the Flagship and Sailing Ambassador of Pennsylvania.

The past months of crisis between the PHMC and the FNL have been par for the course since I became aware of the problem back in August 2021. I have personally observed the FNL Executive Director William Sabatini entering the museum to meet with Mr. Hall only to later hear Mr. Hall state that Mr. Sabatini was not communicating with the PHMC. I have also heard him state other falsehoods regarding the FNL and his interactions with the FNL. At this point Mr. Hall has no credibility with the majority of the Niagara volunteer community that have interacted with him. He may possibly be a manager but he is in no way a leader and does not understand how to lead volunteers or work with associate nonprofits.

There is an unbroken chain of command from Executive Director Andrea Lowery to Director Melissa Mann to Western Division Chief Charles Fox to Site Administrator James Hall. There is always a possibility that Mr. Hall is not accurately reporting some things, but that chain seems to be aware of what is going on at the EMM. It is certainly aware that the EMM is only open two days a week. It is also aware and responsible for refusing to negotiate with the FNL on a new management agreement or a new associate agreement. It is aware and responsible for depriving Erie of Niagara's 2021 sailing season, and for Niagara's drydock visit in Cleveland being delayed until the end of the year. This in turn exposed Niagara to the risk and danger of a December passage through Lake Erie. This is a time of rough, freezing weather which has sunk many Great Lakes ships - or at least the few that still operated that late, given that almost all historical sail ships were in overwinter ports so late in the year. Their captains and owners knew better than to be on the lakes in December, and the PHMC's decisions that put Niagara out there put culpable risk on the ship, crew, and volunteers.

That culpable risk extends to preparing Niagara for the winter. The Niagara's winter cover is massive and requires many hands and many days to move, assemble, secure, and cover with canvas. It is hard work during the fall which is when it is normally put on, but to delay it until the depths of winter is outright inviting injury. I personally suffered a broken hand when I slipped on a small amount of snow while moving a heavy ridgebeam into place. That was in spite of multiple safety precautions and careful preparation - putting on the cover is simply less safe to do in winter snow than in the fall. Aside from my own slipping, I lay this injury directly on the PHMC. Their actions increased the danger to the ship, crew, and volunteers.

The PHMC vision for Niagara is not sustainable. The ship must be active to survive. I acknowledge that the PHMC has not publicly stated a vision for Niagara to become a static display. However, there are other forms of communication that PHMC has utilized since Captain Rybka's retirement. Most of these have been provided by Site Administrator James Hall. All such points can be supported by the records of meetings or direct testimony.

Whereas:

-James Hall demanded that all volunteers who worked for him accept that Niagara is nothing more than a museum facility;

- James Hall has stated that FNL thinks of and treats Niagara as its private sailing club;
- After the legislators got involved, a member of PHMC leadership asked that Niagara be restricted to daysails and short excursions in 2022;
- James Hall gave permission for Niagara to take her cover off in 2021, then rescinded that permission with PHMC backing or at PHMC direction, which prevented Niagara from having a sailing season;
- James Hall stated later that FNL had been very irresponsible for wanting to take Niagara to drydock in the spring, and that by refusing permission to go to drydock he had saved the expense of having to go to drydock twice (the fall drydocking being for the stern rebuild) while entirely ignoring that this cost savings came at the expense of Niagara's 2021 sailing season;
- James Hall has repeatedly stated that there is no public benefit or benefit to the museum or its mission from public sails on the Lettie G. Howard;
- James Hall has told FNL that sailing operations will be restricted to the hours the museum is open, again seeing no benefit to sailing aside from its direct benefit in driving traffic to the museum;
- James Hall stated that there is no need for the FNL because if James Hall was given the money that went to operate Niagara he could hire a captain and crew himself;
- PA General Assembly Consolidated Statutes Title 37 legally requires Niagara to operate as a sailing ambassador for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; thus, PHMC cannot and will not admit that they are pursuing a course of action that will result in Niagara being a static museum ship;
- Niagara relies on the income from sailing trainees and port visits to fill her operating budget;
- Niagara especially relies on income from Tall Ships Erie, and without Niagara sailing to the ports of other tall ships during the season it is unlikely that these ships will attend Tall Ships Erie in the same numbers they currently do, and this will inevitably reduce visitor attendance and revenue from an event that comprises a substantial portion of Niagara's income;
- There are a limited number of tall ship sailors and running daysails and short excursions as a square-sailor will make Niagara a significantly less desirable work destination, requiring more money to hire sufficient crew if they are available at all;
- Sailing restrictions will make Niagara less interesting to volunteers focused on sailing operations, leading to a drop in volunteer hours;
- These factors will result in more money being needed from PHMC to fund a daysail/short excursion Niagara;
- PHMC is unlikely to allocate increasingly levels of additional funding each year under the post-2009 reduced budget, which will push Niagara into a death spiral of deferred maintenance until she is no longer safe to operate with passengers, at which point her income will fall further and she will lose more crew and volunteers, resulting in less maintenance being done, eventually resulting in dry rot in the hull, being lifted out of the water, placed on concrete blocks, and rotting away as a static museum display;

The PHMC's actions and staffing have thus been leading towards the creation of a static museum ship despite any claims to the contrary.

Given all this and considering the legal obligation incurred under Title 37 I don't think it's any exaggeration to characterize PHMC's actions as a dereliction of duty towards the Niagara and the Commonwealth. However, I do believe that the severity of this crisis has created an opportunity for the PHMC to re-imagine its relationship with the FNL and the Erie region for the betterment of the Commonwealth and the PHMC. The seeds of this crisis were sown long before it occurred. Now is the time to discard the fruit of those unhelpful seeds and plant the seeds of success for all parties involved.

First, I recommend that the PHMC acknowledge the special expertise of the FNL in operating a successful Tall Ship program based around an actively sailing Brig Niagara and sign a new Management agreement that provides the FNL with the autonomy it needs to continue operating one of the world's most successful Tall Ship programs.

Second, a new EMM Site Administrator must be appointed who will support the Niagara program and repair the damage done to the EMM's operations since Captain Rybka's retirement. This person should either be a respected member of the tall ship community or a local who understands the importance of Niagara to the Erie region and can regain the trust that has been lost. The FNL and volunteers must be part of the process to hire this new Site Administrator and have a veto, so as to prevent the current cycle of mistrust and hostility from repeating itself.

If this proves impossible, the best alternative would be to remove Niagara and the EMM from PHMC oversight and localize operations and funding. However, this would remove Niagara from the oversight and direct support of the Commonwealth and is thus not ideal for the state Flagship. It does maximize local investment and control of Niagara and the EMM, which is of very high value.

With the proper stakeholder buy-in, either solution will secure Niagara's future for more generations of Pennsylvanians to enjoy, learn from, and be inspired by. It's time to set aside recriminations and disagreement in favor of cooperation. It is time to begin anew.

Sincerely,

Ryan Cook

Appendix:

Summary of August 24, 2021 Meeting with PHMC EMM Museum Educator Charles Johnson and PHMC EMM Site Administrator James Hall, by NVC Chair Ryan Cook

Note: I did not record the meeting so I do not quote the exact words of the attendees, save for when I place quotation marks around a phrase that was so memorable that my recall of the exact statement is 100% accurate. All other wording accurately relates the statements of the person making them but does not attempt to quote word for word. Furthermore, the meeting went from 0900 to 1130, covering ground, circling back, repeating itself, and jumping around. I do not attempt to include multiple mentions of the same thing in this summary, so while the content is accurate, the chronology of topics is only approximate. Please also bear in mind that this is a meeting summary. The content of the meeting is accurately summarized, but whether or not what was actually said is truthful is another question entirely and outside the scope of this summary. Some details during the two and a half hour long meeting were certainly omitted, but the main points are well-covered and accurate.

Meeting Summary:

I scheduled a meeting with Chuck Johnson at the EMM in response to a report from a docent from the Niagara Volunteer Council August meeting raising alarm about the state of the docent program at the EMM. The report stated that the docents had been reduced in number from 70 pre-Covid to approximately 20 currently. The causes were attributed to some leaving out of dissatisfaction with Edd Tonkin's firing in Spring 2020, then about half the remainder being unwilling to complete the unnecessarily complicated Mandatory Child Abuse Reporter online training that PHMC began requiring them to do this year, and finally docents leaving one after the other in protest to new EMM policies and actions. These included requiring the use of Timecounts, taking away the docent's table by the museum entryway where docents had been able to sit together, not being allowed to talk to one another, and personal disagreements with James Hall.

I arrived at EMM at 0900 for a scheduled meeting with Chuck Johnson. James Hall decided he wanted to be part of this meeting so the three of us met in his office.

The meeting began with me saying that I was there because the Museum docent program was in crisis and that it should never have gotten to the point where I had to come in to have a meeting about it.

At this point James Hall stopped me and informed me that I was under the misapprehension that I had any standing to effect change at the EMM. He explained that the Niagara Volunteer

Council (he actually called the NVC the "Niagara Volunteer Council or Coalition" throughout the entire meeting, despite being repeatedly told the name was the Niagara Volunteer Council) was not a real organization, that it had no standing, that it was harmful to the EMM because it provided a place for volunteers to talk and share their concerns. He further stated that the only venue for volunteer concerns were Mr. Hall and Mr. Johnson, and anything else was pointless, harmful, and unnecessary. Additionally, he said that the Niagara Volunteer Council was "a joke," that he laughed when he read Niagara Volunteer Council meeting minutes, and that much of the information the NVC had about what was happening at the EMM and Niagara was false. He stated that only he and Chuck actually knew what was going on and that NVC was spreading lies that made his job more difficult. He also said he did not know what the NVC did and that it had no status with PHMC, and that all policy at the EMM came from his authority under his contract with PHMC.

I explained what the NVC did and that we functioned under a charter with the FNL and signed by Captain Chris Cusson, at which point I was informed that the FNL had no right to do that, did not have volunteers, and that all Niagara volunteers belonged to PHMC. He spent some time explaining that the PHMC assumed legal liability for volunteers and thus all volunteers were PHMC volunteers, not FNL volunteers. He waved a stack of papers he said were contracts and told me that everything he had been told and the legal contracts he had said that the FNL had no standing or authority to have Niagara volunteers, that the FNL was a "friends" organization whose sole and exclusive purpose was to support the needs of the EMM. He explained that the FNL's contract with the PHMC had lapsed and not been renewed because the FNL was refusing to agree to the PHMC contract.

I suggested that as a someone trained in mediation, that the PHMC and the FNL would benefit from a professional mediator, someone other than myself. He said that I was an agent of the FNL and that the FNL had gone to court and that there were no negotiations happening because the FNL's only choices were to sign the contract as presented or to dissolve itself. I stated I was not an agent of the FNL but rather a concerned volunteer invested in the success of Niagara. He then spent some time stating that the NVC was an illegitimate organization and asked what authority I thought I had to try to change anything. I explained that my authority was nothing more than moral as a long-time volunteer and that the NVC spent the vast amount of its time conducting activities for volunteers, and had only acted as a voice for volunteers on two occasions. The first was speaking with Mr. Johnson about the Mandatory Reporter online training which many volunteers had a problem with, and the second was this meeting with Mr. Johnson on behalf of the docents. Mr. Hall repeated that the NVC had no standing to do anything and stated that if a volunteer had a concern that he or she needed to come see Mr. Johnson or Mr. Hall. I explained that not all volunteers were comfortable doing that. He then accused the NVC of providing an illegitimate outlet for volunteers to voice concerns and said that this was one of the reasons that lies kept circulating, because if the volunteers only came to Mr. Johnson or Mr. Hall that the volunteers would learn the truth, because only Mr. Johnson and Mr. Hall had the truth of what was happening and what the EMM was doing. (Mr. Hall repeatedly raised this statement at multiple points throughout the meeting, stating that the NVC was illegitimate, had no authority, and was damaging his efforts and the EMM). I believe it was

during this explanation that Mr. Hall suggested that I should not get involved in what was going on between PHMC and the FNL, and I would regret it if I did. (I was shocked by being threatened, but unfortunately I do not recall the exact words used. I did tell Mr. Hall that he had essentially told me to “check myself before I wreck myself” (my words to him to describe what he had told me) later in the discussion and he did not dispute it.)

At some point we were able to return to a discussion of the docent problem. I said that according to what I was told, that of the 70 docents from pre-Covid only 20 remained and then Mr. Hall stated that that was entirely wrong and a lie and an example of how the NVC's existence helped lies and false information spread. At that point Mr. Johnson stated that the actual current numbers were 63 active docents on the docent list, with 30 taking part in the museum floor shifts and 28 of those being active regular docents that made up the vast majority of the daily museum shift docents. Mr. Johnson also said that he had been active in recruiting new docents and had enrolled 21 new docents into the program this year. I asked how many docents had left because of the new policies, chiefly the table being taken away, and Mr. Johnson estimated 10 had left.

Mr. Hall then explained that he was going to contract a builder to install an information desk in front of the museum entryway over the winter that would provide lockers for docents to store personal effects during shifts. He said that he had gotten complaints from guests before of the docents sitting at the docent table talking to each other and that it made some guests feel uncomfortable, and he felt the table was unprofessional and that is why he removed it and would not return it. He said that there was a table for personal effects now provided where docents could not sit and talk, and that there were chairs spaced out in the museum that docents could sit. He also said that he doesn't mind if the docents pull chairs together to talk to each other. Mr. Hall also said that museum visitor attendance was at a high daily level this summer (100 a day, compared to half that pre-Covid) and that docents didn't have time to talk to each other with that many guests coming through. He said that he thought that many of the docents from pre-Covid who didn't come back were likely aging out of being active volunteers and that Covid was a convenient excuse for them to stop volunteering, and he was fine with them using it as an excuse to save face. He also stated that volunteer organizations across the state were all having difficulty finding enough volunteers once Covid restrictions were relaxed in 2021, and the loss of volunteer docents in 2021 was in line with what the other volunteer organizations were experiencing. Finally, he stated that if docents decided that socializing with other docents (at the table) was more important than serving EMM guests as a docent (continuing to volunteer under Mr. Hall's policies) that the museum was better off without them, and that that he didn't need the docents who had left.

I at some point in this stated that the Niagara and EMM were fundamentally volunteer-powered entities and that it was critical that this continue, and asked if the new policies were worth the loss of volunteers. This segued into the amount of time Mr. Hall and Mr. Johnson had spent working the museum floor to keep the EMM open three days a week and how they couldn't keep doing that, which was why Mr. Hall went to two days a week. I asked if the loss of volunteers had anything to do with that and he said it did not and he needed to hire four

part-time staff to be docents in order to open the museum (either five or six days a week as I recall) more. He then said the FNL had recently held a fundraiser as part of Erie Gives in which they raised approximately \$40,000 and that this money would be enough to hire these part-time docents. He said he had approached the FNL with this proposal but they had thus far refused.

I again pointed out that the Niagara community was volunteer-driven, that in pre-Covid operation it had been able to be fully open with volunteer docents, and that the money the FNL raised would likely be needed to return Niagara to sailing shape after two years tied up.

Mr. Hall then explained his problems with the FNL. He stated:

- that the FNL abandoned the EMM overnight without telling him despite him wanting the FNL to stay at the museum,
- that there were empty offices at the EMM and plenty of space for the FNL to operate there,
- that the meeting I was having with him was more time than he had spent with FNL director Billy Sabatini in the entire time since he had been hired,
- that this was because Mr. Sabatini was deliberately avoiding him and his invitation to meet, instead opting to go to court and lie to everyone to try and make Mr. Hall and the PHMC look bad and the FNL and Mr. Sabatini look good,
- that the FNL wanted things to go back to the way that they were before with the FNL running most things because the previous Site Administrator was lax,
- that he had disbursed around a million dollars to the FNL, that the Niagara was not operating and he had not gotten a single receipt from the FNL to account for where that money was going
- that Mr. Sabatini was spreading lies and Mr. Hall (repeatedly) said he wondered where that money was going because the Niagara didn't need much money tied up at dock (there was an implication in Mr. Hall's statements that Mr. Sabatini was embezzling that money, though this was not outright stated),
- that the FNL had no legal standing outside of the PHMC and it had no chance of winning in court and that there's "going to be a reckoning" for the FNL,
- that the FNL only cared about sailing the Niagara and didn't care about the museum but that he was hired to run the museum and cared about everything,
- that when he was being interviewed he told the interviewer that he was "not a tall ship guy" and if that's what they wanted the interview should stop right then and there, but he was assured that that is not what they wanted,
- that his predecessor had not been as energetic and hands-on as himself and now he was in charge and everyone was finding out what that meant and that the FNL not happy now that someone who took charge of everything was Administrator because it meant that they couldn't run their own show like they used to when PHMC authority was not being exerted like it legally should have been,
- that he secured \$300,000 from the State to repair Niagara's stern in drydock,
- that he stopped the FNL from taking the cover off the Niagara in the spring of 2021 because the FNL did not have an approved plan from Mr. Hall,
- that the FNL just decided to take the cover off without him approving it and that he put a stop to it as soon as he learned what was going on,

- that he would not have approved taking the cover off then anyway because the FNL wanted to take the Niagara to drydock in the spring and then take Niagara to drydock in the fall as well, and that it was not fiscally responsible to take the Niagara to drydock twice in one year and that the FNL was not being responsible because all they cared about was sailing the ship,
- that Niagara was strictly an amenity of the EMM, to serve the goals of the EMM,
- that he wanted Niagara to sail in 2022,
- that he had given permission months ago for the Niagara cover to be removed but the FNL refused to do anything to remove the cover,
- that he didn't see any way in which sailing the Lettie G Howard furthered the mission of the EMM in any way, (I explained how it did and he said the same thing later)
- that Lettie wasn't even sailing from the EMM,
- that the FNL was acting like a rogue organization outside of the EMM in sailing Lettie during 2021,
- (upon me asking him what his goals and vision were for the EMM and Niagara) that all decisions, authority, and vision for anything the EMM and Niagara did came from him and his office under his contract with PHMC.

After this I brought up the issue of Chad Demyanovich, who had recently been rejected by the EMM as a volunteer and banned from being on EMM grounds as a volunteer or FNL employee. Mr. Hall explained that he read that Mr. Demyanovich had been fired from FNL the previous year for getting into a confrontation with law enforcement and that Mr. Demyanovich's self control was too lacking for PHMC to be willing to take the risk of letting him come onto EMM grounds. I stated that I had known Mr. Demyanovich for years, that the incident was an isolated one, and asked if Mr. Hall felt someone should be judged on their worst moment. Mr. Hall replied that Mr. Demyanovich would have to face the consequences of his lapse of control and Mr. Hall would be willing to reconsider Mr. Demyanovich as a volunteer if he were to apply again after 5-6 years of excellent service as a volunteer at another organization. I asked if Mr. Hall would be willing to read letters attesting to Mr. Demyanovich's character so that he would have more than just the firing incident to refer to but Mr. Hall said that Mr. Demyanovich had other outbursts in his file and Mr Hall's mind was made up.

We also discussed Mr. Johnson's upcoming year-long deployment and the necessity of finding a temporary replacement for his position until he returned from his year of naval service. In this all agreed that Mr. Johnson would be missed and it was critical for PHMC to approve someone to do his work while he was away.

Finally, I offered to encourage the FNL to contact Mr. Hall. He encouraged me to cease any activity by the NVC and support him. That concluded the meeting and I was escorted outside by Mr. Johnson.