

Niagara Sail Training



An Overview for the Prospective Trainee

Perhaps you are here because you have a deep interest in history, because for you, the Age of Sail is a living thing, and you knew *Niagara's* name and you sought her out. Perhaps, though, you are here for reasons you can only dimly explain: you turned a dockside corner on a moonlit night, and there the ship was, ephemeral, a vision from another age. And as you came closer to this creature of spectacle and majesty, her towering masts danced slightly with the swell as if in latent anticipation. You spoke to some mariner, who said they came here on this ship, and that they would soon go away upon it, that this was something that people did. That you could bag groceries, peddle home insurance, you could take the cross-town bus every day, and provide adequate customer service by phone or instant messenger, instead you could cut a wide blue swath across the wave-trammeled seas. You could practice an ageless craft in an unforgiving element.



“In any pre-industrial society, from the upper Paleolithic to the nineteenth century A.D., a boat or (later) a ship was the largest and most complex machine produced” -- Keith Muckleroy, [Maritime Archaeology](#)

The U.S. Brig *Niagara* is a singularly complex machine. It represents one of the last and most refined expressions of a technology millennia in its evolution. Yet beneath this complexity lies a willful simplicity. A sailing ship is a fugue of simple ideas and simple machines, repeated in subtle and complex variation. And as magnificent as it is, the ship is simply a tool. The purpose of a ship is the practice of seamanship, the craft and the science of making a home and a living in a hostile element. While it is no longer necessary for us to take to the sea in wooden sailing ships for the practice of war or trade or exploration, it remains necessary for us to, from time to time, take the measure of ourselves against the wilderness.

What do we do?

While underway, the U.S. Brig *Niagara* operates as a Sailing School Vessel. This means that we accept paying trainees, who are actively involved in sailing. Trainees eat and live with the crew, onboard the ship. While sailing on *Niagara* can have a classroom component, most of our training is hands-on. By becoming an active part of the crew, *Niagara* trainees learn the skills of traditional square-rig seamanship through sailing, maintaining, and living on the ship. The nineteenth-century maritime environment is far enough removed from our own lives that simply living on board the ship and helping her make her way from place to place is an education in and of itself.



Trainees participate fully in all aspects of the life and work of the crew. This work includes both the romantic and the commonplace: setting and taking in sail, washing dishes, painting, and varnishing, giving deck tours, steering by compass in the gathering dawn, and charging along under a quartering breeze. *Niagara* does not take passengers – she makes mariners.

A trainee berth includes room and board, whether the ship is underway or in port. Trainees sleep in hammocks and stow all their gear in one seabag each. The galley provides three meals a day, all cooked on a wood-burning stove.

Niagara's seamanship program is intended for healthy adults, ages 14 and up. Passports are required on international voyages. Trainees who do not legally reside in the USA or Canada must have both a valid Passport and B-2 Tourist Visa to participate in live-aboard sailing programs.

The US Brig *Niagara* and the Erie Maritime Museum are owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission with the assistance of the Flagship Niagara League, a private 501-C(3) corporation chartered as an associates group by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.



What is *Niagara's* schedule?

Niagara's year consists of four unequal seasons, varying in length from year to year. In the summer, *Niagara* sails throughout the Great Lakes. In the fall, crewmembers and volunteers remove the majority of *Niagara's* rig using methods and technology largely unchanged in the last two centuries. The ship is then covered with a canvas superstructure to protect her against harsh Lake Erie winters. In the spring, the ship is reassembled, or up-rigged, once again using traditional methods and technology.

Throughout the 2022 season, *Niagara* will undertake a variety of educational programs, including high school, college, and adult voyages. Call or email for our most current schedule.

How do I get there?

In some cases, transportation between Erie and away ports can be provided, and, in all cases, we are happy to assist with planning and logistics for your arrival and departure. Dates and destinations are subject to change.

How much does it cost?

Tuition for the *Niagara's* live-aboard sailing programs is \$1,800 per program, per individual trainee. Most programs are two weeks long. Tuition for trainees enrolled in group programs organized by partner institutions (such as colleges and universities) may vary. Room and board is covered; travel to and from the vessel is not.

Trainees who wish to remain onboard after the end of their scheduled sail may do so only with the captain's approval and only when space is available. Returning trainees will receive a 15% discount on tuition during their second season, and a 25% discount if they return as a trainee during any summer sailing season thereafter.

The Flagship Niagara League strives to make our sailing programs as affordable as possible, and scholarships may be available. Call or email for details.

How do I apply?

Go to www.sailfnl.org and find "Voyage Programs" under the "Sail" Tab. We offer an online application process as well as downloadable forms for filling out by hand.

You can also email Marine Operations Coordinator, Hank Wiest, at Sail@SailFNL.org to request a hard copy of all necessary forms, or call (833) 365-7245, Ext. 3 if you have any questions.



Who are we?

The U.S. Brig *Niagara*, homeported in Erie, Pennsylvania, is the reconstructed relief flagship of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry. On September 10, 1813, nine small ships -- six of them, including *Niagara*, constructed at Erie -- defeated a British squadron of six vessels in the Battle of Lake Erie. A pivotal event in the War of 1812, the battle led to the regaining of Detroit, lost at the war's outset, and lifted the nation's morale.

The U.S. Brig *Niagara* is a two-masted, square-rigged sailing vessel. In 1813, she had a crew of 155 men and boys who manned her sails, 18 carronades and two long guns. The crew was organized into two watch sections (port and starboard) for routine duties while underway. More experienced sailors were stationed aloft, while others under the direction of petty officers manned the rigging which controlled the sails from deck. In battle, men also manned the guns and carronades. Boys carried the black powder charges from the magazine to the guns. Marines and soldiers were assigned to the fighting tops on the masts where they could fire their muskets on the enemy ships. Officers directed setting sails, firing cannon, and maneuvering the brig in response to orders from the captain.

On September 10th, 1813, the British under Commodore Robert Heriot Barclay and the Americans under Perry met in battle near Put-in-Bay, Ohio. Perry's flagship, *Lawrence*, engaged the British ships *Detroit* and *Queen Charlotte*, while the *Niagara*, for unknown reasons, did not close the enemy.

After the *Lawrence* was completely disabled, with most of her crew wounded or killed, Perry transferred by boat to the undamaged *Niagara*, hoisted his battle flag – "DONT GIVE UP THE SHIP" – sailed her into close action, broke the British battle line, and forced Barclay to surrender. In the aftermath, Commodore Perry wrote his famous report to General William Henry Harrison, "We have met the enemy and they are ours; two ships, two brigs, one schooner, and one sloop."

The current *Niagara*, the third reconstruction of the original vessel, was launched in Erie in 1988, the 175th anniversary of the Battle of Lake Erie. *Niagara* sails the Great Lakes, preserving and interpreting the story of the Battle of Lake Erie, and acting as an ambassador in her capacity as the flagship of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. As a Sailing School Vessel, her crew of professionals and trainees actively preserve the skills of square-rig seamanship.

The stated goals of the Flagship Niagara League and the Erie Maritime Museum include preserving and presenting Erie's maritime history, and one of the ways this is accomplished is by sailing *Niagara* to various ports. By doing this, we broadcast our message to thousands of people every year. At our port stops, as many as five thousand visitors a day can board the ship and get a glimpse of a world two centuries passed. Our Sailing School Program helps foster a deeper understanding of the same world. Preserving the ship as an artifact is important, but it is just as important to preserve the skills and technical understanding which make it work. At the end of the day, the ship is just a tool. The knowledge and practice of seamanship are the works for which it was built, and are the greater human accomplishment.

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The *Lettie G. Howard* is owned by the South Street Seaport Museum and is operated as a programmatic collaboration between the South Street Seaport Museum and Flagship Niagara League.

