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A. The Flagship Niagara - Her History

- A.1.0 In accordance with the provisions of Service Purchase Contract No. 634,897 issued by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the writer visited the Flagship Niagara at Erie on 7-9 November 1979 and again on 13 June 1980 to inspect the vessel unhampered by the cold and snow that made an earlier report incomplete. (See memorandum dated 9 February 1979 - Contract No. 641,021). During the 13 June visit certain portions of the vessel were opened for better viewing. In order to understand some of the conditions now existing in and on the Niagara at Erie a brief outline history of the vessel is in order.
- A.2.0 According to sources that seem reliable, the U. S. brig Niagara and her sister the Lawrence were designed specifically for construction at Erie and use on Lake Erie by the well-known New York shipbuilder Henry Eckford. Work was started on the two brigs by Daniel Dobbins, Sailing Master U.S.N.; he was not a professional shipbuilder but had supervised the rebuilding of his own schooner. The main part of the construction of the brigs was accomplished under the direction of Noah Brown, another New York shipbuilder.
- A.3.0 After serving as Commodore O. H. Perry's second flagship in the defeat of the English fleet on 10 September 1813, the Niagara served as a receiving ship at the Erie naval station until about 1825 when she was sunk for preservation. She was unsuitable for merchant service on the lakes.
- A.4.0 In March 1913 the remains of the Niagara were raised from the bottom of Erie Harbor. The port side existed to the top of the rail for about sixty feet amidships, the starboard side was gone above the turn of the bilge, and there were no decks. The lower structure of the vessel was incorporated into a floating reproduction that was towed and exhibited around the Great Lakes during the centennial celebration of the Battle of Lake Erie. From then until the late 1930s the Niagara remained afloat and deteriorating in Erie Harbor.
- A.5.0 In 1939 the historian and marine architect Howard I. Chapelle prepared a set of plans for a second reconstruction of the Niagara basing his work on an interpretation of portions of the original vessel, the U.S.S. Saratoga built by Brown for use on Lake Champlain, and plans of British lake vessels of 1815. In 1970 he wrote (Nautical Research Journal, Vol. 17, No. 1 - Spring 1970): "I was not very happy about the 1913 reconstruction for the plan made for it did not fit either the remains nor vessels of the War of 1812. Also much of the frame was given away as souvenirs so that by 1939 little of the frames could be found. I must say that in the time I was involved with the vessel I could find very little of what was said to have been saved of the original ship".
- A.6.0 During the early 1940s the hull of a new Niagara was built on land at the foot of State Street in Erie where the vessel is now ex-

hibited. She was built substantially to Chapelle's plans using the original keel of the 1813 brig. Although Chapelle drew plans for the spars and rigging, the 1940 Niagara was not rigged at that time.

A.7.0 In 1963 plans were prepared by Meyers, Krider, Werle and Ellensberger of Erie for repairs to the deteriorating Niagara, and for the installation of masts, spars, and rigging. The rigged vessel now on display in Erie is the result of this work.