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R. CLARKE. The St. Mary's Falls Canal will reopen for the new season on March 25th. The end of the 1995 season was fraught with difficulties, all sorts of ice problems being encountered in various areas, but especially in the St. Mary's River, and the value of keeping the icebreaker U.S.C.G. MACK-INAW in service again was proven. The deeper West Neebish Channel was kept open with difficulty until January 11 for downbound traffic, but then it had to be closed and two-way traffic routed through the shallower Middle Neebish Channel. The Interlake 1,000-footer JAMES R. BARKER was in Lake Nicolet at the time, and her fleetmate ELTON HOYT 2nd had to be called to lighten the BARKER and bring her up five feet so she could clear Middle Neebish. On January 3rd, INDIANA HARBOR had grounded in West Neebish while battling the ice, and put a large hole in her port bow, causing flooding in the forepeak.

After years of operating with existing tugs, most of them being rather venerable steamers repowered with diesel engines quite a few years ago, the Great Lakes Towing Company will soon begin to operate newly-built tugs of the "tractor" type. TugZ, a Great Lakes Towing affiliate, will take delivery during 1996 of two 95-foot harbour tugs to be built in Louisiana and designed in Seattle from prototype "tractor tugs" originally intended for West Coast escort and ship-handling duties. The tugs will be twin-engined and equipped with Z-drive steering and propulsion units and will be suitable for use both on the Great Lakes and in Florida waters. It would appear that TugZ may order as many as four of the new tugs in a fleet expansion that may cost approximately \$14 million.

A report carried in the Christmas Day edition of the "Chicago Tribune" indicated that on January 17th, the historic former Boblo Island ferries COLUMBIA and STE. CLAIRE would be sold at auction to satisfy claims against their previous owners, as per an order made by U.S. District Judge Dennis Page Hood. We do not, however, have any report as to whether the auction generated any interest in the steamers. The two steamers were originally built for the Detroit, Belle Isle and Windsor Ferry Company but spent most of their lives running between downtown Detroit and the Boblo Island park, and they survived the closing down of the ferry company's cross-river services in 1938 after the opening of the Ambassador Bridge and the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel. The steamers were last operated by the International Broadcasting Corp., of Minneapolis, which retired them at the close of the 1991 season. Boblo Island Park itself was closed in the autumn of 1993. The 200-foot COLUMBIA was designed by Frank E. Kirby and was built in 1902 at Wyandotte, Michigan, by the Detroit Shipbuilding Company, Hull 148, while the 181-foot STE. CLAIRE was built in 1910 as Hull 116 of the Toledo Shipbuilding Company.

An unusual cargo transfer operation was put into effect late in the 1996 season by the USS Great Lakes Fleet Inc. The tug/barge combination PRESQUE ISLE was operating on only one of her two engines from October 18th onward, and a full transit of the St. Mary's River by PRESQUE ISLE would have required the use of another tug to assist. On November 26th, the downbound EDWIN H. GOTT met the fleet's smaller self-unloader CALCITE II at the former Lime Island fuel dock and unloaded part of her ore cargo into CALCITE II. The balance of the GOTT's cargo then was unloaded into PRESQUE ISLE, which headed downbound to deliver the load after the transfer was completed. A similar transfer operation had taken place off Pipe Island in the lower St. Mary's River, with EDGAR B. SPEER transferring cargo into MYRON C. TAYLOR and PRESQUE ISLE. Pending the availability of replacement parts for her port engine, PRESQUE ISLE spent most of the autumn hauling ore out of Escanaba to Gary, and stone from Rogers City to Buffington. Final repairs were to be done during the winter at Sturgeon Bay.