

The 1997 season was a generally good one for the lake shipping industry. The Canadian and U.S. fleets had almost all of their ships in operation, although a number of Canadian straight-deckers went to the wall during the summer grain doldrums, as usual. Straight-deckers continued to operate in the Canadian ore trade, bringing cargoes to the Dofasco plant at Hamilton, their unloading there assisted by the transfer barge HAMILTON TRANSFER. Dofasco currently is building a new ore-unloading bridge to replace the old one that collapsed early in 1995, so it would appear that the bulkers still have a future in this service, ore backhauls up the Seaway keeping them going even when grain cargoes are scarce in mid-summer.

On the U.S. side of the lakes, even the Inland Steel Company's straight-decker EDWARD L. RYERSON operated, this steamer having been idle since January of 1994. Her return to service was welcomed by observers.

The self-unloader fleets on both sides of the lakes were very well utilized and only C.S.L.'s SAGUENAY and TARANTAU remained idle and out of class, both at Toronto. SAGUENAY was sold during the season for use as a transfer barge at Thunder Bay, while TARANTAU remains idle but allegedly awaits refurbishment.

The cement-carrying and tanker fleets remained active, although the 1997 season saw the final breakup of the last remains of the once-large Socanav tanker fleet. Three former Socanav tankers did continue to see lake service in 1997, however, as IMPERIAL ST. LAWRENCE (II) (formerly LE BRAVE), A. G. FARQUHARSON (chartered by Imperial Oil to Desgagnes) and ENERCHEM TRADER (the former LE CHENE NO. 1) traded in our waters.

The lakes saw the usual summer influx of visiting warships "showing the flag" and encouraging recruitment, but amongst other odd visitors were two of great interest. Both of these are sailing vessels from the past. One of them is the film replica of H.M.S. BOUNTY, which spent most of the summer in this area, while the other is MATTHEW, the reproduction of Cabot's little ship that discovered Newfoundland five hundred years ago. MATTHEW is remaining at Toronto for the winter. The former passenger ship CARIBBEAN MERCY was back in the lakes during 1997 for her second visit.

The shipbreakers did not claim any major lake ships in 1997, but that is hardly surprising considering how little excess tonnage presently exists, compared with the large number of idle vessels that abounded in prior years. We did, however, see the sandsucking barge NIAGARA II, built in 1923 as the steam-powered tanker RIDEAULITE for Imperial Oil, sent to the breakers at Port Maitland.

The lake shipyards remained busy during the 1997 season but, unfortunately, there was no new construction of lake vessels. Most of the yards, including Port Weller Dry Docks and Pascol at Thunder Bay, attended to repair work, with Port Weller continuing to do self-unloader conversions and major rebuildings. U.S. yards at Erie, Sturgeon Bay and Superior also handled routine repair and refurbishing work, although Sturgeon Bay has done the conversion of Interlake's steamer J. L. MAUTHE into the self-unloading barge PATHFINDER. The only shipyard doing any major new construction has been Marinette Marine, which continues to turn out two classes of tenders for the United States Coast Guard.

There were a number of accidents on the lakes this year, mostly groundings such as the one that saw CANADIAN MARINER seriously damaged when she found the bottom in the St. Lawrence near Brockville during June. Fortunately, there were no major accidents that would endanger life.

We would be remiss if we did not take this opportunity to extend our sincere thanks to all who have supported the efforts of the Toronto Marine Historical Society during 1997 - the members of the Executive Committee who have attended to the operation of the Society and our entertainment meetings; the