

In the December issue each year, we pause for a few moments to reflect upon the navigation season which is drawing to a close, and to pass along Holiday Greetings to all of our members. That we should do so in the third issue of the twenty-first volume of "Scanner" is, perhaps, all the more appropriate in that this volume marks the twentieth year in which the writer has served as editor of this publication. We have enjoyed these two decades of bringing the marine news to you and researching innumerable historical items for these pages, and we hope that it has been as much fun for you as it has been for us. We look forward, with your approval, to continuing the enviable reputation which our "Scanner" has achieved as one of the most respected marine publications in the Great Lakes area, and we hope that you all will be with us to enjoy it.

Nevertheless, it seems that, in recent years, we seldom have good news to pass along when reviewing developments on the lake shipping scene. Business was downright awful for a number of years, and the scrapping of old familiar ships proceeded at an astonishing pace. Things started to improve rather markedly during the 1987 season, and it looked as if 1988 might be one of the best years on record. In fact, speaking charitably, we could probably best describe 1988 as a "Good News - Bad News" type of season!

On the U.S. side of the lakes, the steel business continued its revival and held up well during the year. Several interesting lake vessels were brought back into service, and foremost of these must be the Inland Steel straight-decker EDWARD L. RYERSON, which many observers had thought would never run again. The U.S. grain trade to Lake Erie was not exactly strong, but it did remain sufficiently active to prompt the much-depleted Kinsman fleet to purchase the idle steamers ERNEST R. BREECH and HARRY COULBY, worthy replacements for the aging KINSMAN INDEPENDENT (II) and HENRY STEINBRENNER (IV).

The expectations for a great grain-shipping season on the Canadian side of the lakes, which were firmed on the basis of the good close of the 1987 season, soon were dashed and the anticipated spring grain rush soon petered out, leaving many vessels consigned to an early lay-up. Then, with low water conditions prevalent not only on the lakes but also on the Western Rivers system, barge traffic on the Mississippi River was stalled as a result of the lack of navigable water over treacherous sandbars in the Memphis and Greenville areas. As a result, grain that would have been shipped out by way of barges to New Orleans had to be taken to Duluth and then out of the lakes to the east coast, and with the U.S. lake fleets occupied in the ore trade, Canadian bulk carriers were the only ships available to handle the unexpected traffic. Accordingly, a number of Canadian boats fitted out again in mid-summer to carry U.S. export grain out of Duluth.

Those who might have been expecting an autumn grain rush were disappointed. There wasn't one! With little of last year's grain crop going out for export purposes, and with the 1988 growing season adversely affected by the widespread drought conditions, very little grain moved during the fall. To make matters worse, present prospects for the grain trade in 1989 are very poor indeed.

For yet another year, the outlook was gloomey for what few lake shipyards remained active. There was no immediate prospect of any new vessel construction, and the shipyards were forced to content themselves with repair work and the odd conversion or rebuilding. One more yard closed its graving facilities during 1988, as the Bay Shipbuilding Corporation at Sturgeon Bay officially closed its new construction berth.

Just when one might have thought that there remained so little excess tonnage in the lake fleets that further scrap sales would be rare, even more such disposals occurred in 1988 as overseas scrap prices remained exceptionally high. The American lake fleet, in particular, has been pared down so drastically that one wonders where tonnage would be found in the event of any national emergency such as, unfortunately, has been encountered on se-