

Each year, in the December issue, we set aside a few moments to reflect upon the navigation season which is rapidly drawing to a close, and to pass along Holiday Greetings to all of our members. As your Editor sits at the typewriter to compose this page, the warm weather which we enjoyed up until a day ago has blown out with a vengeance; it is a frosty night and the first snow is on the ground. It is only mid-November, but it feels like winter, and it puts us in the right frame of mind to think of Christmas.

It has been enjoyable bringing you "Scanner" through the last year, and it is our pleasure to continue doing so in this, our twenty-second volume. We say this despite the fact that much of the marine news which we have had to report recently has been of a downright depressing nature. As a consequence, our enjoyment in the preparation of "Scanner" has come mostly from our work with matters of historical interest and value, and not so much from the daily observation of the shipping scene.

Across the border, on the U.S. side of the Great Lakes, the steel business remained strong and the various fleets were operating almost every vessel that was available during 1989. The season also saw the reactivation by the Kinsman fleet of its latest acquisition, the HARRY COULBY, rechristened KINSMAN ENTERPRISE (II), while the venerable HENRY STEINBRENNER (IV) remained in service despite expectations of her imminent disposal. The Columbia Transportation fleet reactivated two steamers, the "Maritimers" J. BURTON AYERS and CRISPIN OGLEBAY (II), which observers had thought would never again operate. Although she is not yet back in service, the 1989 season brought the unexpected news that the former U.S. Steel "super" LEON FRASER would be converted to a cement carrier, and she presently is lying at Superior, where this work will be done.

On the Canadian side of the lakes, it was anything but a good year. There was some grain movement during the spring, but this trade was severely restricted by the fact that grain production in 1988 had been adversely affected by widespread drought conditions. The majority of the Canadian grain boats were laid up by early summer, and it was only the movement of U.S. export grain that kept any of them running through the summer months, together with the volume of Quebec ore flowing upbound through the Seaway. (In fact, ore, the usual upbound "backhaul", became the main cargo in the absence of grain traffic.)

When the new grain crop began to move in September, most of the ships fitted out again, but their service was short-lived because the St. Lawrence River elevators soon were full and anticipated overseas grain sales did not materialize. A major grain sale got things moving again in November, but by that time there was much red ink on the shipping companies' books and little prospect of rectifying that situation with only a few weeks remaining in the navigation season. We can only hope that things will be more normal in 1990, but then again, the last few seasons have taught us that "normal" is a concept that is very difficult to define!

Shipyard activity remained sluggish indeed on the lakes in 1989, with no new construction of major lake vessels on the books. There was a fair amount of conversion and repair work available, particularly for the Port Weller yard, but the shipyard at Thunder Bay was incapacitated for much of the season as a result of labour difficulties. One major repair job on a Canadian vessel (BLACK BAY) was even awarded to a U.S. yard, Fraser Shipyards at Superior, as no Canadian facilities were available, and this development undoubtedly was also a result of recent improvement in the value of the Canadian dollar in relation to its U.S. counterpart.

Scrap sales continued, as owners of idle vessels took advantage of the high scrap metal prices to dispose of boats for which there was no prospect of further operation. Notable amongst the departures were four Canada Steamship Lines ships which had been held in reserve for many years, and whose sale brought home to many of us just how fast the years are passing and how much the complexion of the lake shipping business has changed in what has seemed