

The 1990 navigation season will see another cruise ship operating regularly on the upper St. Lawrence River. The newcomer will be the former COLONIAL EXPLORER, (a) PILGRIM BELLE, a 1984-built, 192-foot "replica" of one of the Old Bay Line passenger steamers. Last operated by Exploration Cruise Lines, of Seattle, the vessel has had a checkered career and most recently served as an accommodation facility at Valdez, Alaska, for the crews working on the EXXON VALDEZ oil spill. She has been purchased by St. Lawrence Cruise Lines Inc., a U.S. affiliate of Rideau St. Lawrence Cruise Ships Inc., Kingston, which presently runs CANADIAN EMPRESS. COLONIAL EXPLORER will be renamed (c) VICTORIAN EMPRESS for her new duties and will, at least for the present, retain her American flag, most probably using Clayton, New York, as her port of registry. During December, she set out for the east coast, with a refitting stop planned at the Mobile, Alabama, shipyard where she was built, but her passage was delayed by the "troubles" in Panama. VICTORIAN EMPRESS will do seven-day trips down the St. Lawrence to Montreal, Quebec and the Saguenay River, while CANADIAN EMPRESS will continue her regular runs as well as introducing a new service between Kingston and Ottawa via the Ottawa River. There are no plans to put CANADIAN EMPRESS back on her intended route to Ottawa via the Rideau River until federal authorities can guarantee the channel to be free of obstructions such as the rock which caused the vessel to abort her maiden cruise back in 1982.

In the wake of the grounding on December 4th of the U.S. Coast Guard buoy tender MESQUITE on the Keweenaw Peninsula, there has been much speculation concerning the cause of the extraordinary accident. An investigation report released January 12 placed the blame for the occurrence on the ship's commander, who at the time was partaking of a cup of tea away from the bridge, and on a 22-year-old Ensign, who had been qualified as a deck officer for only a week and who was navigating MESQUITE as she left the site of the Pinnacle Rock buoy she had been replacing. It is said that insufficient care was taken to determine the proper heading before the ship got under way. Dispute surrounds the future of MESQUITE, which some interests would like to see sunk as an underwater preserve. MESQUITE was officially decommissioned on January 31st, and the U.S.C.G. has announced that, in April, her sister-ship ACACIA will be reassigned from Grand Haven to Charlevoix to replace her. The move of ACACIA away from Grand Haven has aroused the ire of town officials, who call Grand Haven the "Coast Guard City" and were planning celebrations in 1990 to commemorate the Coast Guard's 200th anniversary.

Sold out of Canadian registry during the latter part of 1989 was the steam-powered tanker COASTAL CANADA (C.194747), (a) B. A. PEERLESS (69), (b) GULF CANADA (84), which latterly was operated in lake, St. Lawrence River and east coast trade by Can-Coast Marine Inc., of Shediac, New Brunswick. The vessel had been laid up at Halifax since January 12, 1989, and was sold for scrapping overseas. She departed Halifax on December 19 in tow of the Russian tug GIGANT, bound for Chittagong. The tanker was built in 1952 as Hull 148 of Collingwood Shipyards Ltd., 601.7 x 68.2 x 34.6, 12638 Gross and 9639 Net. She was powered by three steam turbines built by the John Inglis Company Ltd., Toronto. Over the winter of 1958-59, she was shortened to 521.0 feet, 10900 Gross and 7029 Net, by the removal of her old lake bow and the fitting of a streamlined, salty-type bow by Port Arthur Shipyards Ltd. Originally owned by British American Transportation Ltd., Toronto, she was part of a consolidation into the parent Gulf Canada Ltd. in the mid-1960s. Can-Coast Marine acquired the tanker in 1984. With the demise of COASTAL CANADA, there disappears the last of five sister tanker hulls built for Canadian owners in the early 1950s. In addition to B. A. PEERLESS, there were IMPERIAL LEDUC, IMPERIAL REDWATER and IMPERIAL WOODBEND, all of which were built for the Imperial Oil fleet, and GEORGIAN BAY, which was designed as a sistership tanker but completed as a dry bulk carrier for Canada Steamship Lines Ltd. The Canadian registry of COASTAL CANADA was officially closed on October 27, 1989.