

Marine observers received a pleasant surprise during June when work began on the conversion to a cement carrier of the former U.S. Steel "Super" LEON FRASER at Fraser Shipyards, Superior, Wisconsin. The steamer, with her stack painted all black and the name obliterated from her hull, was taken into the drydock on the morning of June 6th. Work was begun immediately on the scrapping of a 120-foot, five-hatch section of the FRASER's hull amidships, and on June 21st the two remaining sections of the hull were pulled back together. Then began the job of rejoining the sections to form a vessel 520 feet in length, and the FRASER was able to leave the drydock on August 1st. Work on converting the FRASER to carry bulk cement will now get under way and the vessel is expected to be ready for service in the summer of 1991. Fraser Shipyards owns the steamer, but on completion she will be acquired by New Management Enterprise Inc., of Alpena, Michigan, which is a newly-formed subsidiary of Inland Lakes Management Inc., the operator of the "Huron Cement" fleet for the Lafarge Coppee interests. Much to the delight of historians, the FRASER will not be made over into a barge but rather will be self-propelled with her existing steam machinery. It has been suggested that she might be renamed ALPENA when she is recommissioned, but as yet we have no confirmation of the rename.

Another recent development of interest concerning the Huron Cement fleet is the decision to reactivate the fleet's venerable steamer LEWIS G. HARRIMAN, (a) JOHN W. BOARDMAN (65), during August of 1990. The HARRIMAN last operated in 1980, and since then has been used as a storage hull, originally at Alpena and latterly at Green Bay. Plans called for the HARRIMAN to be towed by a tug until her long-idle steam machinery could be got back into operating order.

On Sunday, July 29, 1990, during a dense fog, the USS Great Lakes Fleet Inc. self-unloading steamer JOHN G. MUNSON was attempting to enter the port of Ontonagon, Michigan, in order to load a cargo there. Unfortunately, the ship found rocks rather than her dock, and she tore out her bottom in the area of the first three ballast tanks. With all three tanks flooded, the MUNSON was taken to Fraser Shipyards at Superior, where she went on the drydock following the refloating of LEON FRASER. The MUNSON was expected to be on the dock for about two weeks to repair the extensive bottom damage and also to undergo her five-year survey and inspection, the date of which was moved up in view of the fact that the ship would be on the drydock anyway.

Back on November 28, 1942, the Upper Lakes & St. Lawrence Transportation Company Ltd. steam cannaler JUDGE HART foundered in Lake Superior after striking Simon's Rock in Ashburton Bay, shortly after leaving Fort William with a cargo of grain. The badly damaged vessel had been held on the rocks for two days to prevent her from sinking until the crew could be rescued, which was safely accomplished with the help of the company's steamer JOHN ERICSSON. Thereafter, however, the HART slipped from the rocks, drifted away in a snow-storm, and sank. The exact spot where the ship foundered was not known until June 16, 1990, when two sport divers from the Duluth area found the HART. She apparently is lying in some 200 feet of water off the Coldwell Peninsula and near the Fitzsimmons Rocks and Barclay Islands, but the divers are refusing to identify the exact location in order to protect the wreck from souvenir hunters. As a result of her immersion in the cold water, the HART apparently is in pristine condition, with all of her equipment intact, and the divers who found her want to keep her that way.

At long last, the Purvis Marine barge CHIEF WAWATAM, the former Straits of Mackinac steam carferry, entered service during June. All painted up black, with her name boldly carried in large white letters, and outfitted with the deck winches which previously served aboard SEWELL AVERY (now a dock at the Soo), the WAWATAM was downbound from the Algoma Steel plant on June 23rd, in tow of ANGLIAN LADY and carrying a cargo of steel for Windsor. The WAWATAM was able to make several more trips before the Algoma Steel plant was idled on August 1st as a result of labour troubles. The barge still has her steam engines in her because her heavy old car deck would have to be cut open to remove them.