

It falls our duty each year at this time to perform a task which is at one time both joyous and also rather sad. In every December issue, we set aside a few moments to reflect upon the navigation season which is just drawing to a close, and to pass along Holiday Greetings to all of our members. There is much joy in the season but also there is a sadness, not only because of current economic conditions but also because the holidays signal the passing of yet another year, and they seem to be passing by so very fast. Ye Ed. has been wishing greetings of the season to our members in these pages for twenty-two years, and we have seen many things during that time. We hope that we will be here to bring you our comments on the shipping scene for many more years to come.

As your Editor is preparing these lines, it hardly seems as if the Christmas season could be approaching. Although we are into the second half of November, the weather is abnormally warm. We have had a true "Indian Summer" day, with brilliant sunshine and temperatures well up into the twenties (Celsius), but we have a strong feeling that we will have paid dearly for this beautiful weather before you, the members, read these words in print. (Late Note: we have paid, and paid dearly, indeed.)

There has not been much good news on the Great Lakes this season, what with accidents and the deepening economic recession highlighting the news. Accordingly, this has been yet another year when our pleasure in preparing "Scanner" for the members has come mostly from the researching and writing of historical features rather than the coverage of current events.

On the United States side of the Great Lakes, the steel business remained strong, and the various fleets operated almost every vessel that was available for service in 1990. Several older, marginal steamers that were reactivated in 1989 remained in service during 1990 and were quite busy. After many years of idleness, the bulk carrier JOSEPH H. THOMPSON returned to service late in 1990, operating now as a barge which is pushed by a tug built out of the severed stern of the former steamer. The venerable cement carrier LEWIS G. HARRIMAN also returned to operation, albeit briefly, as a barge. There seems the likelihood that several other idle carriers might also return to service in coming years unless the business recession forces a revision of plans for the fleets involved.

For the Canadian bulk fleets, the 1990 navigation season has been bordering on economic disaster. There was a fairly reasonable grain movement in the spring, which held up until mid-July, but then many of the bulkers, and particularly the straight-deckers, went into lay-up. It looked as though there would be no autumn grain rush at all, because even though the harvest on the prairies was bountiful, the Canadian Wheat Board refused to be drawn into the vicious circle of grain subsidies and price cutting which was dominating the world grain trade. In late October, however, a major grain sale was concluded, and the ships rapidly began to fit out and head up the lakes for grain cargoes. With the rush only getting under way in November, however, it seemed unlikely that most of the recently reactivated ships could manage more than a few trips before the end of navigation.

About the only positive note for Canadian operators was the strength of the ore movement from the St. Lawrence River into the lakes. The consortium of straight-deckers from the Algoma Central and Upper Lakes Shipping fleets was busy hauling ore up to the Dofasco plant at Hamilton. However, labour unrest which shut down the Algoma Steel plant at the Soo, and also the various Stelco plants, adversely affected cargo movements from August into November.

Shipyard activity remained sluggish on the lakes during 1990, with no new construction of major lake vessels on the order-books. There was lots of repair and routine drydocking work available for the various shipyards, however, which kept them relatively busy. One major reconstruction project