

At long last, the Columbia Transportation Division, Oglebay Norton Company, announced in March the new names for the self-unloaders SPARROWS POINT and LEWIS WILSON FOY, which it acquired in 1990 from the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. SPARROWS POINT will operate in 1991 as (b) BUCKEYE (III), while the FOY will run as (b) OGLEBAY NORTON. Both names took observers somewhat by surprise. SPARROWS POINT had been rumoured to be going to get the name SYLVANIA, but BUCKEYE is a pleasant choice and recalls two previous Columbia ships to carry that name. OGLEBAY NORTON, however, is a most peculiar choice of name, reflecting the corporate entity rather than honouring one of its founders. It earlier had been thought that the FOY would become ROBERT C. NORTON (III). In any event, with the two newly-purchased vessels added to the Columbia fleet, it is anticipated that the "Maritimers" CRISPIN OGLEBAY and J. BURTON AYERS will not operate this year, although the venerable JOSEPH H. FRANTZ will be in service.

By mid-March, J. W. Purvis Marine Ltd. had completed the formalities of the acquisition of YANKCANUCK (II) from the Algoma Steel Corporation Limited, Marine Division. It appeared that there would be cargo available for YANKCANUCK to move from the Algoma Steel plant at the Soo in early April. It was not clear, however, whether Purvis would be able to negotiate successfully for a reduction in crew size necessary to permit the ship to operate economically, and so it was planned that she might begin her season running as a barge. If that were necessary, a temporary towing frame would be attached to her stern so that one of the Purvis tugs could push her. Purvis does, however, intend to operate YANKCANUCK as a self-propelled vessel if at all possible.

Purvis Marine, meanwhile, has continued to work on the former carferry CHIEF WAWATAM to make her more suitable for the barge operation which she began last summer. All three of the WAWATAM's original steam engines had been left in her when she was cut down, despite their substantial weight, because in order to take them out, the heavy main deck of the barge (the former car deck) would have to be taken up. The decision recently was made, however, to remove the forward engine (which had powered the icebreaking bow propeller) and during mid-March it was lifted out intact. The removal of this machinery should help to improve the barge's towing trim. Presumably CHIEF WAWATAM will still continue to haul Algoma Steel products, when available, despite the Purvis acquisition of YANKCANUCK.

While speaking of Algoma Steel, we should mention that there has been a change in shipping arrangements to the Sault Ste. Marie plant for 1991. In past years, several fleets have shared the float of raw materials to the plant, but in 1991 the entire float will be carried by vessels of Algoma Central Marine. In a time of economic recession, the acquisition of this major piece of business should help to keep the Algoma Central self-unloaders busy through the full season.

After much work by the icebreakers C.C.G.S. SAMUEL RISLEY, U.S.C.G. KATMAI BAY and U.S.C.G. MACKINAW, the ice in the St. Mary's River and Whitefish Bay was broken sufficiently that the Soo Canal was able to open to commercial navigation on March 21st. The first passage of the new season was made by the downbound EDGAR B. SPEER on opening day, but took 4½ hours because of heavy ice that blocked the 1,000-footer's approach to the Poe Lock. The assistance of MACKINAW was required to free the SPEER. The first upbound passages were made by KAYE E. BARKER and PAUL R. TREGURTHA, which were approaching the canal on March 22nd, after having spent the previous night anchored near Lime Island. Meanwhile, the Corps of Engineers has mounted an old steam whistle on the north side of the canal's Administration Building, facing the Poe Lock lower gates. Brought from the Corps museum at Duluth, the whistle is from the old U.S. Steel steamer GEORGE G. CRAWFORD, and will be used to salute the first and last ship of each navigation season. It was used for the first time to celebrate the passage of the SPEER.