

It becomes the duty of your Editor each year at this time to perform a task which is at one time both joyous and also rather sad. In every December issue of "Scanner", we set aside a few moments, and a couple of pages in our newsletter, to reflect upon the navigation season which is just drawing to a close, and to pass along Holiday Greetings to all of our T.M.H.S. members. This is a season of joy, but there also is a sadness, not only because of current economic conditions, but also because the coming of the holidays signals the passing of yet another year, and they seem to be flying by so very fast. Ye Ed. has been wishing greetings of the season to our members in these pages for twenty-three years, and we have seen (and recorded) many different things during that time, some pleasant and others most unfortunate. We hope that we will be here to bring you our comments on the shipping scene for many more years to come.

First of all, we turn our attention to the year's weather, because it is one thing over which we have no control whatever. After a generally cold and grey spring, the weather, at least in the Toronto area, turned incredibly warm and sunny in May and remained that way right into October, with only a few exceptions. Indeed, it really was the classic beautiful, long, hot summer, for in Toronto it was the warmest summer in the 150 years that weather observations have been formally recorded. The early part of November, however, brought a sudden change to record cold temperatures, and a huge storm that swept out of the midwest and into the upper lakes brought conditions reminiscent of the dreaded Armistice Day Storm of 1940 and the Great Storm of 1913. Fortunately, shipping was not adversely affected to any appreciable degree.

There has not been much good news in the Great Lakes area this year, what with a string of serious accidents in the spring months, and the whole area hit hard by an economic recession that shows little sign of upturn despite the optimistic protestations of federal authorities on both sides of the border. Corporations have been forced to trim or streamline their operations, and unemployment levels have soared.

On the United States side of the Great Lakes, the economic conditions hit the steel business as the building trade felt the pinch. Things started out generally strong for shipping in the spring, but as the summer drew nigh, some of the U.S. carriers went to the wall for a bit of a rest. Fortunately, conditions perked up again in the latter part of the season, but several marginal vessels may not survive the recession. Three bright features of the year were the commissioning of the cement carrier ALPENA (rebuilt from the straight-deck bulker LEON FRASER), the passing of her five-year inspection by the steamer E. M. FORD during her 94th year of service, and the partial refurbishing of the long-idle steamer JOHN J. BOLAND in anticipation of an as-yet-unrealized return to operation.

For the Canadian bulk fleets, things were a little better than they have been for several seasons. The grain trade started strong and the straight-deckers remained active longer than usual, not retiring for a summer break until late July or early August - and some of them kept right on going. The grain started to move again in the autumn, but a series of labour disturbances involving grain inspectors, weighers and handlers interfered with shipments out of Thunder Bay in late September and early October. In addition, much export grain was being railed out to the west coast for shipment overseas. Nevertheless, conditions were good enough that two straight-deckers which had been idle since 1989 were reactivated during the autumn of 1991.

This was the first season of operation for Great Lakes Bulk Carriers, the firm which was formed to operate the straight-deckers of the C.S.L., Misener and Pioneer fleets. All in all, both grain and ore movements considered, the season probably was somewhat better than might have been anticipated,