

Each year, as the Christmas Holidays draw near, your Editor looks forward to having the opportunity to chat with all of our members on an informal basis, and to pass along the extra special wishes which are exchanged amongst friends at this wonderful time of year. In no other issue can we spare the space in the pages of "Scanner" for such ramblings, but because we consider all of the members of the Toronto Marine Historical Society to be one big, happy "family" of friends, we believe that it is very important for us to find the necessary space in the December issue.

This also allows us the opportunity to look back on the year that we have just experienced, and to make a few subjective comments on the various developments of importance that have taken place on the marine scene since last we chatted. It is difficult for us to believe it, but this is the twenty-sixth time that your Editor has penned such holiday season thoughts for the readers. After all these years, we are still doing it, and we are happy that you all are there to read these words.

It is with considerable pleasure that we compare what we have to say at this time to the sad words that we wrote just twelve months ago concerning the state of the shipping business on the Canadian side of the Great Lakes. Last December, we were bemoaning the sorry state of Canadian grain shipments, due not only to a poor crop in 1992, but also to the depressed state of the economy in general and the inability of the Russians to pay for grain shipments to that unfortunate state. Most of the Canadian straight-deck bulk carriers spent the better part of the 1993 season in lay-up, and quite a few of them didn't turn a wheel all year long. How different things have been in 1994!

The year began with the formal winding-up of the operations of GLBC Inc., better known as Great Lakes Bulk Carriers, and the various bulkers of the fleet, which actually were owned by CSL Group Inc., Misener Holdings Limited and Pioneer Shipping Limited, were purchased either by Algoma Central Marine or by ULS Corporation, and thus were added to the Seaway Bulk Carriers consortium which had operated the straight-deckers already owned by those two companies.

It was known that some of the straight-deck freighters now owned by Algoma and ULS would soon be cast aside as uneconomical tonnage destined for the scrapyard, but the spring grain trade ran strong and lasted well into the summer, keeping many of the grain boats running longer than had been expected, and a very strong autumn grain movement started early and meant that many more boats were put into service than had been anticipated, even some of the ULS acquisitions that had been expected to remain idle due to different union affiliations. Photographers were in "seventh heaven" as ships appeared under new names and in various stages of new livery.

As well, Canadian fleets enjoyed strong movement of U.S. export grain, and one of the strangest developments was the movement of grain out of the Canadian Lakehead into Duluth-Superior, something not seen before in recent memory. All indications are that both Canadian and U.S. grain trades will hold strong through to the close of the 1994 navigation season.

Iron ore has been moving up the Seaway this year, but the grain trade has been so strong that many of the bulkers have been returning back up the canals light, rushing to collect another grain cargo, and this is something of a reversal of the trend seen in recent years.

Canadian self-unloaders have seen a rather active year (SAGUENAY being the only major self-unloader not running), as have the cement boats, although tankers have had another so-so season, particularly the Enerchem fleet. The ENERCHEM ASPHALT and CATALYST both have seen periods of idleness at Toronto, while ENERCHEM TRAVAILLEUR has languished at the idle Port Weller shipyard, her owners in no apparent rush to free her from the labour-troubled shipbuilding facility.