

Although the St. Lawrence canals did not open until March 30, and the Welland Canal on March 31st, an early beginning of the Canadian lake navigation season was planned in order to avoid a shortage of coal at the busy Ontario Hydro generating stations at Nanticoke and Lambton. Two ULS International self-unloaders were fitted out for service by mid-March, namely CANADIAN OLYMPIC and CANADIAN ENTERPRISE. It is anticipated that, during the summer months, three ULS self-unloaders will be kept busy bringing western coal down to the coal-fired Hydro plants.

Although the official opening of the U.S. canal at Sault Ste. Marie did not take place until March 21st, the Corps of Engineers gave "selective approval" for the Poe Lock to be available as of March 15 for daylight-only passage of six vessels, identified as the Great Lakes Fleet's EDGAR B. SPEER and EDWIN H. GOTT, Interlake's JAMES R. BARKER and MESABI MINER, and American Steamship's ST. CLAIR and BELLE RIVER. The early opening was a response to low stockpiles of ore and coal at steel mills and power plants. In fact, the first transit of the canal was the U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker MACKINAW which, after a year in lay-up, was recommissioned on March 12 at Cheboygan and proceeded to the upper St. Mary's River for ice duty there. (The Coast Guard's fiscal 1989 budget does contain funding to keep the big MACKINAW in operation.) The first commercial passage through the Soo was EDGAR B. SPEER at about noon on March 15. The upbound SPEER, which wintered at Milwaukee, spent the night of March 14-15 in the area of the Middle Neebish Channel, her passage up the river delayed by a severe blizzard which struck the region.

The Lake Ontario Cement Company's STEPHEN B. ROMAN, which is operated for the firm by Canada Steamship Lines, cleared her winter berth at the mouth of the Keating Channel, Toronto, on the evening of March 12, and on Wednesday, March 15th, the vessel returned to Toronto from Picton with a load of cement. This was the sixth year in a row that the ROMAN was the first ship of the season to arrive at Toronto, and the second time under the command of Capt. John Pace, who was awarded the traditional Harbour Master's Hat in honour of the occasion. (We use this report of the opening of Toronto Harbour as our token "port opening" news item, for we do not have space available to report the details of the start of navigation at each of the many lake ports.)

The first serious accident of the new season occurred on Monday, March 27, when the Interlake Steamship Company's 1,000-footer MESABI MINER grounded in the Middle Neebish Channel of the St. Mary's River. All available tugs were sent to her aid, but it was not until three days later that the MINER was refloated. At the time of this writing, we had no information concerning the extent of damage suffered in the mishap.

Another early-season casualty was the tank barge SCURRY (formerly the ill-starred Halco tanker HUDSON TRANSPORT). On March 29, the barge was being towed by the Sandrin tugs TUSKER and GLENADA, with only one of TUSKER's engines being serviceable. In some manner, the barge managed to go aground in the area of the Crib Light in the lower section of the Detroit River. She was refloated later that day but the following night went aground again in the Detroit River near Belle Isle and was freed on March 30. The two incidents apparently caused considerable concern amongst the authorities in that the barge was loaded with a mixture of asphalt and Number Six fuel oil, and she is a "single skin" tanker (meaning that she does not have separate sealed tanks inside the hull structure, and the rupture of the hull plating itself could cause a substantial escape of cargo).

Since last July, the passenger steamer AQUARAMA has been lying at the "Sidney Smith" dock at Sarnia, awaiting the completion of permanent berthing facilities at Port Stanley (which will not be ready until sometime during the summer). AQUARAMA was to be away from the Sarnia dock by March 31, but Sarnia city council voted on March 17 to allow the ship to stay until May 30, provided that a \$100,000 bond was posted in order to guarantee the eventual departure of the ship.