

GREETINGS OF THE SEASON

It has become a pleasant tradition that, at this time each year, we take a few moments to stand back and reflect upon the navigation season that is rapidly drawing to a close, and to pass along Holiday Greetings to all of our T.M.H.S. members. We have been doing this for each of the 24 years during which this Editor has been behind the "Scanner" typewriter, and if we look back over some of those past season reviews, we see some very interesting things recorded. We hope that we will be able to comment on many more marine developments in the years ahead.

We usually begin our review by commenting upon the weather which ship-watchers have encountered during the year. However, do we dare say anything about the weather in 1992? The spring was late coming and below normal in temperatures, at least in the Toronto area. And summer never came - at least not the type of summer most people appreciate. It was the coldest, wettest, greyest summer in recent memory, with the fewest hours of sunshine since records of that type have been kept. Toronto experienced fifteen consecutive weekends of rain! The autumn was no better; it was windy, grey and wet. This definitely was not the sort of year to please the marine photographer!

If the weather was gloomy, economic conditions throughout the area were even worse. The depression (yes, even the politicians have begun using the "D-word" instead of "recession") has not yet shown any substantial signs of upturn and recovery that were forecast, and nobody seems to know when things may improve or what it will take to start that process. Corporations (those that have stayed in business) have cut back even further in an effort to trim costs to the bone. Unemployment levels have continued to soar, and folk who still are working have not had the money to spend on frivolous things that might otherwise take their interest. Goods cost more than ever, and we are taxed beyond comprehension while government deficits continue to rise.

For the U.S. ship operators, the season was not too bad. The ore carriers were busy for most of the season, with only the "fringe" boats remaining idle or going to the wall during the summer. The cement boats were moderately busy, while the grain trade into Buffalo was sporadic at best. The one really happy event of the year was the return to service of the American Steamship Company's 39-year-old self-unloading steamer JOHN J. BOLAND after almost a decade of idleness.

For the Canadian bulk fleets, the season started off reasonably well, with a lot of grain to be moved to fill Russian purchase orders. The grain boats ran well into mid-July, but then troubles began, as the Russians couldn't pay the cost of shipping the grain overseas and, in consequence, the St. Lawrence River elevators were full. Things got better again for a while and then collapsed almost completely, as most of the grain ships were laid up by early autumn. During October, Seaway Bulk Carriers received a contract to haul some U.S. grain down the lakes, and that consortium began to fit out its vessels. Great Lakes Bulk Carriers also saw a bit of activity toward the end of the season, but not nearly enough to make full use of its ships.

The Canadian self-unloader fleets also felt the pinch during 1992, with insufficient cargo moving to keep all of the available boats running. Canada Steamship Lines' self-unloaders were busy feeding the Stelco plant at Hamilton because there now are no shore facilities there for unloading straight-deckers. All of the major steel producers, however, were experiencing problems due to the economy, and shipments were not up to normal levels.

The lake shipyards again busied themselves as best they could with repair work or regular survey and inspection tasks, but again no new orders for major commercial vessels were received. The one ray of sunshine came with the completion by Port Weller Dry Docks of the new Pelee Island ferry JIIMAAN, which entered service during July. Peterson Builders, at Sturgeon Bay, continued to turn out small vessels for the U.S. Navy.

Scrap metal prices remained low, and the world's scrapyards were far from busy. The long-idle and boomless self-unloader HOCHELAGA remained in Toron-