

In past years, summertime passenger and auto traffic on the ferry service between Tobermory and South Baymouth was such that prospective riders had to reserve well in advance and still could face long line-ups at the dock. In fact, traffic had become so heavy that the 1974-built CHI-CHEEMAUN could not accommodate all of the traffic in peak periods, and so the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission acquired a Spanish-built ferry, renamed NINDAWAYMA, to assist during the high season. However, during 1992, the bubble burst as the effects of horrible weather and the continuing economic depression combined to decrease patronage of the ferry crossing by almost 15 percent from the previous year. Accordingly, in 1993, while summer fares will be increased, ticket prices in the spring and autumn will be cut by 15 percent. More disturbing, however, especially in respect of employment in the Owen Sound area, is Ontario Northland's decision that CHI-CHEEMAUN will be the only boat running in 1993. NINDAWAYMA will be held in reserve and, although Ontario Northland's announcement indicated that she might be "leased out" in 1993, it did confirm that she will be returned to the Manitoulin Island service when traffic conditions return to more acceptable levels that warrant two boats on the route.

In the December issue, we noted that the venerable, former Bob-Lo Island ferry steamer COLUMBIA had been observed on the Nicholson drydock at Ecorse, Michigan, during mid-October, and we wondered whether this could be an indication of plans for the boat to run again sometime in the future. On December 19th, the "Detroit Free Press" commented upon the fact that, in October, a Fowlerville, Michigan, firm called Capital Gaines Inc. had taken over management of Detroit harbour's Baja Beach Club, the nightclub operation aboard the former railferry LANSDOWNE, and hoped eventually to buy the complex. Steven Williamson, representing Capital Gaines, was quoted in the same report as indicating that the company also was hoping to buy COLUMBIA and her former running-mate STE. CLAIRE from Baja's owner, Larry Spatz, and had already spent considerable money on repairs to COLUMBIA (something that one would be unlikely to do unless a purchase or charter of the boat were imminent). Capital Gaines apparently hopes to refurbish COLUMBIA and STE. CLAIRE, have them recertified by the U.S. Coast Guard, and run them on dinner and entertainment excursions on the Detroit River. Williamson indicated that tickets for COLUMBIA's inaugural luncheon cruise, tentatively scheduled for May, 1993, would be given away free to the first 2,500 persons attending the New Year's Eve party at the Baja Beach Club. Dare we hope?

At about 9:45 p.m. on Monday, December 14th, the Great Lakes Bulk Carriers' motorvessel WINNIPEG, (a) RUHR ORE (76), (b) CARTIERCLIFFE HALL (88), downbound from Thunder Bay for Quebec with a cargo of grain, ran aground close to the northeastern tip of Belle Isle as she was heading down into the Detroit River from Lake St. Clair. Heavy fog was prevalent in the area at the time the mishap occurred. Tugs summoned to the scene were unable to pull WINNIPEG from the grasp of the muddy bottom, and lightering operations to remove part of her cargo began on Wednesday, the 16th, and continued until WINNIPEG was refloated at 12:10 a.m. on Friday, the 18th. Doing the lightering was the Purvis Marine crane barge PML SALVAGER, which just happened to be in the area, having delivered a load of Algoma Steel product to Windsor, while the tugs AVENGER IV, PATRICIA HOEY, GAELIC CHALLENGE, COLORADO and NORTH CAROLINA assisted. WINNIPEG, once freed, reloaded her cargo from the barge in the Ojibway Anchorage and then departed downbound early on December 19th.

Another late season grounding, although not nearly so serious, involved the Pringle Transportation Company's river-class self-unloader WILLIAM A. ROESCH which, on Sunday, December 6th, while inbound at Holland, Michigan, with a cargo of slag, grounded on a recently-formed sandbar located just outside the piers of the channel into Holland's Lake Macatawa from Lake Michigan. The ROESCH was not damaged, and was able to free herself several hours after the grounding.