

CRUISING THE GREAT LAKES

As difficult as it may be to believe, the last of the traditional Great Lakes overnight passenger boats disappeared three decades ago. The last Canadian boats, KEEWATIN, ASSINIBOIA, TADOUSSAC, RICHELIEU and ST. LAWRENCE, plus KEENORA on Lake Winnipeg, stopped carrying passengers (and all but one stopped running altogether) in 1965, while on the U.S. side, SOUTH AMERICAN made her last trip down, and then out of the lakes, in October of 1967.

Since then, there has been much talk about cruise services coming to the lakes, and there have been a few small ships running in occasionally from the coast, incorporating a lake section into their travels. WORLD DISCOVERER ran on the lakes in 1974, but apart from the small CANADIAN EMPRESS, which confines her operation to the Ottawa and St. Lawrence Rivers, no local vessel has ventured into the trade. There have been a number of rumours of major deep-sea passenger ships coming to the lakes, but none of this ever has come to fruition. It now looks, however, as though things will change for the better in 1997.

Germany's Hapag-Lloyd is presently having built at MTW Wismar the 472-foot passenger vessel COLUMBUS, latest in a long line of German ships to be given this name, and she is to be commissioned during the summer of 1997. She will be powered by four Wartsila diesel engines with a combined 14,630 Horsepower, and driven by two propellers, and she is designed to carry 420 passengers and 169 crew. Of relatively small dimensions as current cruise ships go, she will have passenger facilities on five decks. She will be fitted with both outside and inside cabins, full dining and lounge facilities, and pool and gym equipment, and she even will have a "traditional" palm garden forward on the Sun Deck.

After she has been broken in to deep-sea service, COLUMBUS is scheduled to run on the lakes in the autumn of 1997, and with the necessary Seaway clearances having been obtained, we are now at liberty to announce to our members the details of the four lake trips COLUMBUS will make. There will be three ten-day trips, but unfortunately they will only be marketed in Europe. It also seems unfortunate that they will not be run when weather conditions would be at their best in the height of summer, but the timing is dictated by the ship's delivery from the shipyard.

Cruise 1 will be September 17 through 27, 1997, from Montreal to Chicago via Thousand Islands, Toronto, Port Weller, Port Colborne, Windsor, Tobermory, Parry Sound, the Soo, Mackinac Island, Beaver Island and Milwaukee. Cruise 2 will run September 29 to October 9, from Chicago to Port Colborne via Milwaukee, Beaver Island, Mackinac Island, the Soo, Thunder Bay, Apostle Islands, Isle Royale, the North Channel, Parry Sound and Windsor. Cruise 3 will be October 11 to 21, from Toledo to Montreal via Mackinac Island, the Soo, Traverse City, Beaver Island, Little Current, Tobermory, Parry Sound, Toronto and Kingston.

These are very interesting itineraries indeed and we wish that the trips were being sold in North America. One COLUMBUS trip will, however, be sold on the local market, that being an overnight positioning "cruise" from Port Colborne to Toledo, October 9-10, 1997. Fares likely will be in the range of Canadian \$230 to \$486 per person, and will include coach transfer from Pearson International Airport or downtown Toronto to Port Colborne, and from dockside at Toledo to Detroit Metropolitan Airport. Air inward to Toronto or outward from Detroit will have to be arranged separately by passengers. Full marketing arrangements have yet to be announced.

We wish COLUMBUS well in her planned lake travels, and we congratulate T.M.H.S. member Christopher Wright whose firm, The Mariport Group Ltd., of Cambridge, Ontario, has provided the impetus and advisory services required for Hapag-Lloyd to bring a major passenger vessel into our lakes.