

MARINE NEWS

It appears that the long-rumoured transformation of HAMILTON TRANSFER from a substitute for an ore-unloading bridge to an operating lake vessel is actually going to happen, but in a very strange manner that will not leave much of HAMILTON TRANSFER, (a) J. H. HILLMAN JR. (74), (b) CRISPIN OGLEBAY (II)(95), in evidence. What will happen is that, sometime in 1998, after the self-unloader conversion of ALGOWEST is completed, HAMILTON TRANSFER and Upper Lakes Shipping's straight-decker CANADIAN EXPLORER will be taken from Hamilton, where both are spending the winter, to Port Weller Dry Docks, where the stern of the EXPLORER will be attached to the hull (minus stern) of the TRANSFER, and a "new", diesel-powered self-unloader, reportedly to be named CANADIAN TRANSFER, will be the result. Now, if this isn't a development guaranteed to confuse marine historians of the future, we don't know what is!

The history of HAMILTON TRANSFER is relatively simple. She was built in 1943 by the Great Lakes Engineering Works at Ashtabula as an L6-S-B1 Class bulk carrier for the United States Maritime Commission and was turned over to the Great Lakes Steamship Company in exchange for obsolete tonnage. Via the Wilson Marine Transit Company, the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company and the Kinsman Marine Transit Company, she made her way to the Columbia Transportation Division, Oglebay Norton Company, and was converted to a self-unloader in 1974. She was acquired by the ULS Corporation and fitted out in 1995 to provide a temporary replacement for a fallen ore bridge at the Hamilton plant of Dofasco Inc.

CANADIAN EXPLORER, however, has a much more complicated history. The tanker VERENDRYE was built by Kaiser Corp. at Portland, Oregon, in 1944, and was renamed (b) EDENFIELD in 1947. In 1961, she became Upper Lakes' (c) NORTHERN VENTURE, rebuilt and lengthened to full Seaway size with a new bow and mid-body. She was rebuilt again in 1983 when the old stern section was cut off and replaced with the stern section of the 1965-built, Clarke Transport package freight and container carrier CABOT. The stern section of the original CABOT will now be powering its third hull when it is joined to the former bow and mid-body of HAMILTON TRANSFER. Upper Lakes will be gaining a small self-unloader capable of servicing some of its contracts (like the Lake Ontario stone run) that do not require a full-sized ship, thus freeing up other tonnage that might better be used elsewhere.

What a tangled web we weave!

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The closing of the lake canals appears to have gone fairly easily this year, as the weather remained relatively benign and there were no major ice problems. The last commercial transits of the Welland Canal occurred on December 24th, as the salty NARRAGANSETT passed downbound, and the laker LOUIS R. DESMARAIS moved upbound. The last actual passage took place on Christmas Day as C.C.G.S. GRIFFON made her way up the canal. In the St. Lawrence Canals, the last upbound transit was ALGOISLE, bound for Hamilton, on December 24th, while the last downbound passage was made by NARRAGANSETT on Christmas Day. The St. Mary's Falls Canal at Sault Ste. Marie closed at midnight on January 15th.

The month of December saw two unusual sugar cargoes arrive at the Redpath plant in Toronto. Both were carried by MELISSA DESGAGNES, (a) ONTADOC (II) (90), and as far as we know, these were her first ever visits to Toronto. She was here December 14-15, and again December 19-20. Redpath has also extended its winter storage operations. In prior years, a stockpile of sugar was kept under tarpaulins on a nearby dock, but last winter, three lakers were laid up here with storage sugar. This year, there are five storage hulls. CANADIAN TRADER, CANADIAN LEADER, ALGONTARIO and GORDON C. LEITCH all brought full loads, while MONTREALAIS has only a part cargo. All, however, are welcome additions to the local scenery.