

MARINE NEWS

The Welland Canal closed for the season shortly after Christmas. The last upbound salty had been CONSENSUS MANITOU, and all the salties made it out of the system before canal closure. Interestingly, the last regular commercial upbound and downbound passages through the Welland were both made by the same ship! C.S.L.'s LOUIS R. DESMARAIS was the last downbound ship on December 26th, and then returned to make the last upbound trip on the 27th.

However, one other freighter made a partial transit of the canal after the DESMARAIS, although not in the course of a regular trip. We mentioned earlier that CANADIAN TRANSFER, the hybrid self-unloader made from the bow and midbody of HAMILTON TRANSFER and the stern of CANADIAN EXPLORER, had damaged her rudder in an incident at Saginaw, Michigan, on September 4th, less than a month after her commissioning in August. She was towed all the way up to the Pascol shipyard at Thunder Bay for repairs, and stayed at the yard for two months for a complete refurbishing of her steering gear. Re-entering service in November, she enjoyed only a little more than a month of service before she again suffered rudder damage, this time in the River Rouge of the Detroit area. Once again, drydocking was determined to be necessary and CANADIAN TRANSFER was towed downbound en route to Port Weller Dry Docks. The Welland Canal was held open for the tow, and the TRANSFER was downbound on December 28th, with McKeil's ESCORT PROTECTOR on the bow and LAC ERIE and GLENEVIS on the stern. At Wharf 6, above Lock 7, the tow paused while ESCORT PROTECTOR was replaced by JAMES E. McGRATH for the remainder of the tow down to the shipyard. CANADIAN TRANSFER's first season has certainly been less than auspicious, and we hope that she will enjoy a more successful season in 1999.

Another ship with steering problems wound up at Port Weller Dry Docks in late autumn, but she was supposed to be going there for the winter anyway, so her arrival simply was earlier than anticipated. During the autumn months the Port Weller shipyard had been working on the construction of the new bow and midbody for the C.S.L. stemwinder self-unloader J. W. McGIFFIN, the first of five major renewals scheduled for aging C.S.L. ships. Unfortunately, the McGIFFIN suffered damage to her Kort nozzle in a grounding incident, and needed towing anyway, hence her earlier-than-scheduled arrival at Port Weller. It will be interesting to see what the McGIFFIN looks like after her rebuilding; a new bow could not help but improve her appearance.

Once again this winter, the Redpath Sugar plant has five ships wintering at Toronto with storage cargoes. Laying up at the Redpath plant was CANADIAN TRADER, while elsewhere in the harbour are SEAWAY QUEEN, QUEBECOIS, CANADIAN MARINER and CANADIAN VOYAGER. As usual, McKeil Marine was contracted to put two tugs at Toronto for the winter to shift the Redpath storage boats, and like last year, those tugs were to be LAC COMO and ATOMIC. The LAC COMO arrived safely at Toronto, but on Sunday, December 20th, at about 1:00 p.m., whilst approaching the Western Gap, ATOMIC suffered an engine fire which left the tug without power. The Toronto fireboat WM. LYON MACKENZIE was sent to the scene and assisted in extinguishing the fire and towing ATOMIC to a berth just outside the Cherry Street bridge. ATOMIC has since been taken back to Hamilton for repairs and, as of New Year's, LAC COMO remained alone at Toronto. Another McKeil tug is expected to be sent over to assist in winter towing chores.

Local observers wondered whether conditions would support three cross-lake ferry services, such as there were in 1998, and it would now seem that three services were at least one too many. On December 29th, Shaker Cruise Line's LAKE RUNNER was seized while lying in her winter berth at the foot of Yonge Street, as a result of action taken by the Toronto Harbour Commission over unpaid wharfage fees. Newspaper and television reports of the seizure mentioned that other claims, including employees' claims for wages, were also outstanding against Shaker and the LAKE RUNNER. Shaker has operated the ferry from Toronto to Niagara for the last two summer seasons.