

With neither an El Nino nor a La Nina out in the Pacific Ocean this year, we are having a good old-fashioned Great Lakes winter replete with snow, howling winds, and ice choking the navigation channels. Although the open lakes have been clear sailing, there has been hardly a port or channel that has not had its problems with ice during December. Even the lagoons of the Toronto Islands had a skim of ice by December 1st, and the bay was completely frozen over by Christmas Day. As a result, Canadian and U.S. Coast Guard vessels have been kept busy keeping traffic moving, and many private tugs have also been pressed into ice-breaking service. We won't spend time describing conditions in any detail, because each day brought new trouble almost everywhere.

Despite the ice conditions, the sections of the Seaway were able to close on something close to time. The last upbound vessel through the St. Lawrence canals was CANADIAN VENTURE, which cleared the system on Christmas Day, bound for Toronto with sugar. The last commercial vessel to clear the system downbound was JADE STAR, which got out early on the morning of the 26th, but hers was not a complete transit, as she had been at Mariatown and Morrisburg. The last complete downbound transit made by a commercial vessel was by MARIA DESGAGNES on the 24th-25th. The last saltie to clear the system was LADY HAMILTON (the former Pioneer Shipping "ocean-laker" SASKATCHEWAN PIONEER), which got out on Christmas Day.

The Welland Canal section closed as scheduled on December 24th. The last saltie through was LADY HAMILTON, downbound on the 23rd. One of the last passages was CUYAHOGA, which had a late cargo of salt for Toronto and barely made it back to Port Weller for the call-in deadline. The Welland Canal is scheduled to see much winter work, including lock wall resurfacing which had the east side of the flight locks shut down before the rest of the system. Nevertheless, the canal is scheduled to reopen on March 23rd which, if conditions permit, will be the earliest opening on record.

Over the past two issues, we have reported on the departure from the lakes of the former Owen Sound Transportation Company's "spare" ferry NINDAWAYMA, sold to Verreault Navigation Inc., of Les Mechins, Quebec. Departing her long-time lay-up berth at Owen Sound under tow of POINT CARROLL on October 31st, she arrived at Les Mechins on November 7th. We now have a report that NINDAWAYMA was towed on December 22nd from Les Mechins to Rimouski, Quebec. It would appear that the ferry will be rebuilt as a cable-laying ship for a British concern. We shall await further details concerning this new future for a vessel that spent almost a decade in idleness.

It has been many years since an operative U.S.-registered vessel wintered at Port Colborne, but such is the case this winter. Running under charter to Grand River Navigation Inc., the self-unloading barge McKEE SONS arrived on December 23rd and went into winter quarters facing south at the stone dock at Humberstone, no doubt in anticipation of loading a stone cargo before she departs in the spring. Her tug, INVINCIBLE, is not wintering with her, however. INVINCIBLE went on down the canal and will spend the winter at Hamilton, reportedly to receive work at the Heddle drydock. This will also be the first time in recent memory that an active U.S.-registered ship has wintered at Hamilton. Interestingly, also wintering at Port Colborne will be McKEE SONS' former BoCo running mate, the barge SARAH SPENCER, formerly the steamer ADAM E. CORNELIUS (III).

A vessel that was to winter at a St. Lawrence River port will not now be doing so. ALGOSEA (II), (a) CANADIAN AMBASSADOR (86), (b) AMBASSADOR (00), had been laid up at Trois Rivieres, Quebec, on December 9th. However, her lay-up was of short duration and on Christmas Day she was outbound in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, en route to "The Maggies" (the Magdalen Islands) back in Marbulk service. During the autumn, it had been rumoured that, due to a decrease in tonnage requirements, the Algoma Central charter of ALGOSEA would not continue past the end of the season, and this has now proved true.