

Just for the record, the official closing of the St. Lawrence canals took place on December 28th with the downbound passage at St. Lambert of the tug OCEAN GOLF. At the Welland Canal, the last downbound passage of a salt-water ship was made by CASHIN on Christmas Day. The official last downbound transit was made by the tug SEA EAGLE II and barge ST. MARYS CEMENT II on December 28. Although the canal officially closed on the 29th, the last upbound passage was by CSL LAURENTIEN on the 30th.

At the time of this writing, apart from various tankers, several ore carriers remain in service on Lake Michigan, while CANADIAN OLYMPIC, although beset by ice, along with JOHN D. LEITCH and CANADIAN TRANSPORT, have been running the Lake Erie coal shuttle to Nanticoke.

Ice has also played havoc with ferry operations. NEEBISH ISLANDER II was forced out of her service across the Neebish Rock Cut by the broken ice conditions, while the carferry ONGIARA's service to the Toronto Islands ended on January 16 when she could no longer break the ice and suffered breakdowns of both engines. Ice normally is broken for the ferry by the Toronto firetug WM. LYON MACKENZIE. Island passengers have had to be bused via the Toronto City Centre Airport and then across the Western Gap by the ferry MAPLE CITY.

The reason WM. LYON MACKENZIE could not break ice is because she has been undergoing a repowering. The 40-year-old firetug has been given four new Caterpillar diesels, two for propulsion and two for the auxiliaries. Although she was off the Toronto Drydock before the onset of the ice, the completion of the work has not yet been accomplished.

Another Toronto vessel being repowered this winter is the 1935-built summer Island ferry WILLIAM INGLIS, (a) SHAMROCK (ii)(35). While in winter quarters at the cityside ferry dock, the INGLIS has been receiving her fourth set of engines, a pair of new Caterpillars. Her first engine was a Fairbanks Morse diesel, replaced in 1972 by a Cummins diesel which proved to be unsatisfactory. It in turn was replaced in 1985 by two french diesels (Societe de Moteurs Baudoin) for which parts latterly have been difficult to obtain. The INGLIS normally is the spring and fall boat, and runs to Ward's Island in the summer.

Another Toronto denizen for many years was the excursion sailing vessel ALISON LAKE which, over a period of a number of years, was converted by Norman Rogers from the former tug U.S.C.G. SAUK. ALISON LAKE departed Toronto on September 13, 2003, bound for Cuba and points south. However, on November 25, whilst in the Gulf of Mexico and about 30 miles south of Key West, she reportedly struck a partially submerged object (perhaps a shipping container). Despite her icebreaking hull and five watertight bulkheads, the vessel sank in some 3,000 feet of water. The crew managed to escape in an aluminum boat and all were rescued.

There has been a change in ownership for three vessels reportedly to be used barge service. Recently transferred to Distribution Grands Lacs/St-Laurent Ltee., of Trois-Rivieres, Quebec, are the former ULS bulkers CANADIAN TRADER and CANADIAN MARINER, along with the BARGE LAVIOLETTE, the former CANADIAN EXPLORER. The BARGE LAVIOLETTE and CANADIAN MARINER have storage sugar cargoes at Toronto, while the TRADER is at Trois-Rivieres.

The United States Coast Guard announced recently that the buoy tender SUNDEW which is stationed at Duluth (and was built there in 1944) will be decommissioned in late May. She will be replaced by U.S.C.G. ALDER, which is to be launched at Marinette on February 7th. ALDER thus will become the second of the newly-built tenders to be stationed on the lakes. The first was HOLLYHOCK which, during 2003, replaced BRAMBLE at Port Huron. HOLLYHOCK was not yet broken in sufficiently to participate in the icebreaking efforts required recently in the severe ice conditions on the St. Clair River and Lake St. Clair.