

Speculation continues to run rampant concerning the probable break-up of the lake shipping fleet of the Oglebay Norton Marine Services Company LLC. A bid for the fleet's vessels in the amount of \$100 million made by Oglebay Norton crew members was withdrawn just before New Year's when it was learned that a competitor was willing to pay almost twice that amount. On January 18, Oglebay Norton announced that it had executed 30-day exclusivity agreements with two unidentified parties for the purchase of the fleet, and that closing of a sale was expected before the commencement of the 2006 navigation season. After the November sale of BUCKEYE (iii), (a) SPARROWS POINT (91), to Buckeye Holdings LLC, an affiliate of K & K Warehousing, of Menominee, Michigan, for conversion to a barge, the Oglebay Norton fleet consists of the 1,000-footers COLUMBIA STAR and OGLEBAY NORTON, together with the smaller ARMCO, COURTNEY BURTON, MIDDLETOWN, DAVID Z. NORTON, EARL W. OGLEBAY, RESERVE, FRED R. WHITE JR. and WOLVERINE. Many observers believe that the most likely purchaser of the Oglebay Norton fleet would be the American Steamship Company, Buffalo, which has participated in a vessel-pooling arrangement with Oglebay Norton since 2002, but we must await a formal announcement to know for sure. Observers are, however, hoping that whoever the purchaser is, the ships will continue to be self-powered and not cut down to barge status.

We previously reported that some sources were pessimistic about the future of the partially-restored former Bob-Lo steamer STE. CLAIRE, but the boat remains moored at Belanger Park in River Rouge, Michigan, and its owner, Diane Evon, of Westlake, Ohio, remains optimistic despite the divorce proceedings between herself and her husband, John Belko. It is to be hoped that STE. CLAIRE will survive and flourish.

Things do not, however, look good for the unrestored COLUMBIA, former Bob-Lo running mate of STE. CLAIRE, still rotting away at the Nicholson Terminal & Dock Company's facility at Ecorse. The Detroit River Conservancy, which has paid the bills for COLUMBIA for the last several years, recently decided that it wants nothing more to do with the 1902-built steamer and that she does not fit into its waterfront revitalization plans. By spring, her maintenance will pass back to the Steamer Columbia Foundation, which is generally impecunious. The COLUMBIA's hull and machinery are "sound", but her wooden superstructure is in abysmal condition, and it is estimated that some \$12 million would be needed to restore her to operable condition.

Work began in early December to remove the grounded drill barge LOUIS J. GOULET from a reef in the Bahamas. The vessel is the former TELESIS and CONISCLIFFE HALL (ii), now reportedly owned by the Liberty Oil Company. In March of 2005, she caused concern in the Exuma area after lying derelict near a national park in the Conception Island area. She then was taken to Walkers Cay and lay there until Hurricane Wilma caused her to break free and ground on a reef near Man-O-War Cay, off the Island of Abaco. The GOULET was sporting a major tear in the steel on her starboard bow but was not, according to the authorities, likely to cause any environmental damage.

Back in 1978, the Toronto Brigantine training vessel PATHFINDER lost the figurehead from her bow in a storm on Lake Erie east of Port Rowan. Unbeknownst to the owners of PATHFINDER, the figurehead, featuring an image of Chingachgook (of James Fenimore Cooper fame), was found by a local who had it in his shed ever since, not knowing from whence it had come. After being discovered by a Port Dover museum, the figurehead has now made its way back to Toronto Brigantine, but it is likely that only a replica will be placed aboard PATHFINDER now.

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Remember to watch for details of our next **Silent Auction** which will be sent with the March issue. We will anxiously await **YOUR** bids.

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