

A Lake Superior incident in December could have turned out a lot worse than it did. On December 2, the Zenith Tugboat Company's 1939-built tug SENECA, which the firm bought in 2001, was being towed back to Duluth by the same firm's tug SUSAN M. HOEY, which it had just acquired from the Gaelic Tugboat Company. The tow encountered extremely heavy weather on the big lake, and the towline parted. SENECA disappeared into the storm, and the HOEY just barely made it safely to the harbour at Grand Marais, Michigan, despite a heavy coating of ice that severely limited visibility from the pilothouse. SENECA finally was located on December 5, hard aground in shallow water near Crisp Point, her hull flooded from the waves breaking over her. After much high-level consideration and Coast Guard "assistance", crews from Purvis Marine refloated SENECA on December 23, and the RELIANCE brought her into the Soo late that evening, putting her at the Carbide Dock. SENECA later was taken to the MCM shipyard at the Michigan Soo for her damage to be assessed.

It was reported in early December that, back in July, the research vessel QUEST had located the wreck of the former lake passenger steamer NORTH AMERICAN in 250 feet of water, some 140 miles off the coast of New England. The NORTH AMERICAN had been idle following an ill-starred venture into the excursion trade after the Georgian Bay Line had disposed of her. Acquired by the Seafarers' International Union for use as a training ship, NORTH AMERICAN was being towed to Newport News when she foundered. It was as a result of her loss that the S.I.U. acquired the similar but larger SOUTH AMERICAN from the Chicago, Duluth & Georgian Bay Transit Company, which would have had to retire the latter ship in 1968 anyway as a result of new safety at sea laws. NORTH AMERICAN sank on September 13, 1967, and only one month later, SOUTH AMERICAN was making her famous last trip down the lakes and through the Seaway. (Are we REALLY coming up on the 40th anniversary of the retirement of our last lake overnight passenger steamer?)

A salt water vessel, disabled by engine problems, had to be towed out of the lakes to avoid being trapped for the winter. The tanker CLIPPER TOBAGO, with a load of tallow aboard, was lying powerless at Hamilton. The tug OCEAN HERCULE was dispatched from Montreal late on December 22, left Hamilton with CLIPPER TOBAGO in tow during the afternoon of Christmas Day, and the tow arrived safely in Montreal on December 28.

The "fleet" at the International Marine Salvage scrapyard at Port Colborne was increased by one recently. The handsome wartime-built tug TECHNO VENTURE was towed up the Welland Canal on November 21 by VIGILANT 1, and was deposited at the scrapyard for dismantling. Meanwhile, during early December, I.M.S. began the scrapping of the after cabins of the long-idle straight-deck bulk carrier L. E. BLOCK.

The 1910-built former BobLo Island passenger steamer STE. CLAIRE, moored in Toledo following her Hallowe'en "nautical nightmare" stint, now has a new owner. Previous owner Diane Evon, of Cleveland, finally realized that she did not have the funding to complete the restoration of the ship, and during December, a sale of STE. CLAIRE to Dr. Ron Kattoo was in progress. Kattoo, associate director of the intensive care unit at Henry Ford Hospital, intends to begin restoration of STE. CLAIRE in the spring and have her ready for excursion, restaurant and party service sometime in 2008. Meanwhile, her forlorn former running mate COLUMBIA, supposedly now owned in New York, continues to rot away at Ecorse.

Last issue, we reported that Lower Lakes Towing's MISSISSAGI had gone into early lay-up at Sarnia in late November as a result of engine problems. Two seized pistons had damaged the crankshaft and other engine parts. However, the damage was repairable and MISSISSAGI was back in service in late December.

Even though we didn't think it would happen, the "fast ferry" SPIRIT OF ONTARIO 1 has left the lakes. Although a sale had not as yet been completed, the ferry sailed from her year-long lay-up berth in the Genesee River at Charlotte on December 21, bound for Shelburne, Nova Scotia. She made it down the Seaway but was forced to shelter over Christmas at Matane, Quebec, before continuing onward. Bay Ferries, which operated the ferry for the City of Rochester in 2005, looked after the removal of the ship from the lakes.

Norlake Transportation's tug-and-barge service to and from Wallaceburg was able to continue through the late autumn. To allay native peoples' concerns for the safety of an essential bridge link, the pusher-tug RADIUM YELLOWKNIFE has been assisted through the swing bridge by other small tugs as necessary. It is hoped that the service will be successful.