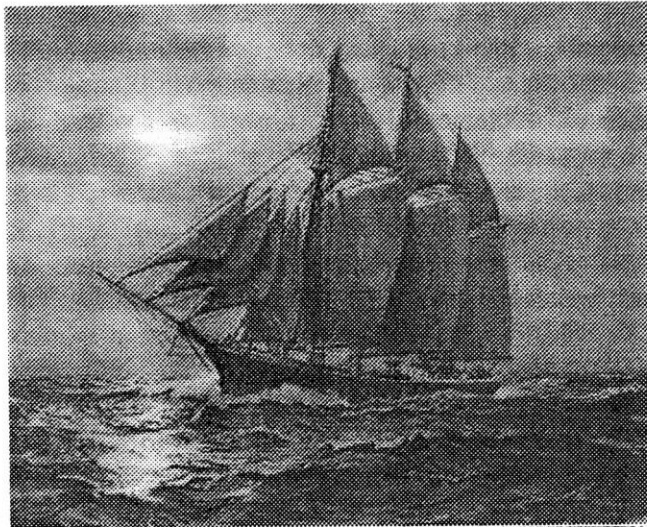


## **The Christmas Tree Ship** **Marie Sellman**

A family relative lived in Thompson and worked tying the tree branches. She was also on Marquette TV 6 documentary, Nel Nelson. So was Fred Hinkson Sr. of Manistique and Mrs. Hasell Osterhout. They also assisted the *Green Bay Press Gazette* in their research. Katherine LaBrasseur has done research and written on this subject. Mrs. Sigrid Harding, whose father was employed by Mr. Schuenemann had an article in the *Pioneer Tribune*.



Brief background on the Christmas Tree Ship:

“On November 23, 1912 the ‘Rouse Simmons,’ halfway home to her haven in Chicago harbor, was sighted of Kewaunee, Wisconsin, flying distress signals. The Kewaunee Coast Guard phoned down to Two Rivers Station when a 34 foot power launch was available to intercept the stricken ship and give her what aid they could. For five hours the guardsman searched thru twilight mists and murky darkness but the ‘Rouse Simmons’ was never sighted. Grudgingly, the lake gave up some evidence of the tragedy. For a quarter of a century, Two Rivers fisherman pulled up their nets, after stormy weather and found waterlogged evergreens fouling their catches. Thirteen years later the Captain’s wallet still wrapped with oilskin and rubber band intact, was cast up on shore some miles south of Two Rivers.”

(Marie shares this article about the Christmas Tree Ship by Katherine LeBrasseur taken from the *Pioneer Tribune*, December 24, 2998. Kate was also a “Senior Writer.”)

### **Christmas tree ship lies beneath Lake Michigan waters**

(Manistique Pioneer-Tribune, Friday, Dec. 27, 1912)

#### **Widow Left with Many Trees Unsold**

A Chicago dispatch says, “In the gladness of Christmas time, Chicagoans forgot the family of Captain Hermann Scheunemann, who with his crew of 20 men went to the bottom of Lake Michigan a few weeks ago, while returning from Manistique, Michigan with a cargo of Christmas trees.

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After it was established that the captain and his crew had perished, the wife and daughter of the master of the Christmas ship attempted to fortify themselves against want by bringing a new cargo of Christmas trees to the city. They were set up for the sale down the riverbank, and every day the widow and her orphans worked making wreaths and arranging other stock.

Many of the customers came and bought, but not nearly all of the "regular" remembered to buy. And only a few new customers came. So tonight, when darkness fell and the last hope of another sale had passed, the family found itself still in possession of considerable unsold stock. But still the widow was plucky.

"I don't want charity," she said. "I'll fight it out. Next year we'll sell trees again and maybe business will be better then."

Latest Chapter:

The most complete answer has come from Theodore S. Charney of Chicago, Ill., on a letterhead reading, "The Rouse Simmons Inquiry."

Mr. Charney wrote to Mrs. Hebert as follows:

"Mrs. Frank Weber of your city kindly sent me the clipping from the Pioneer-Tribune of Dec. 15 about the "New Chapter Possible in Yule Ship Legend."

"As you probably have gathered from this letter head, I am making a study of the entire ship's history from its construction in Milwaukee in 1868 through its final voyage in November of 1912. I have about 17 three-ring binders full of manuscripts material and am in the process of writing a book (full length) on the subject.

"The Schuenemann's actually brought trees into Chicago as early as 1884, and I have little doubt even earlier, but I cannot substantiate prior to the date given. In 1884 August was the head of the enterprise and was about 33 years old at the time. Hermann was 19 and probably did not accompany August at the early stage. Within a few years Hermann doubtless came along with his older brother but it was not until 1892 before Hermann began bringing in his own cargoes.

"August butchered his trees along what was known as the Christmas Tree Coast, but actually the Michigan shore of Door County, Wis. When he foundered in the "Thal" off Glencoe, Ill., on Nov. 11, 1898, his cargo came for Jacksonport, Door County, Wisconsin.

"From the earliest times that Hermann operated ships he always came to Schoolcraft County and usually tied up at Thompson, although the ship list in the newspaper always mentioned Manistique as the point of departure.

"In the beginning (1892) Hermann's ship was the "Josephine Dresden" and a year or two later he shipped in the "Maggie Dall" although he did not own her but merely chartered for the voyage. By 1896 he owned a fine three sticker, the "Mary Collins," and traded with her until the fall of 1900, when he accidentally ran her aground at Point Aux Barques, about 12 miles south of Manistique, when he mistook a light in a house on shore for the light at Thompson harbor. It was early in October and he continued to collect a cargo of greens while his friend Captain Charles Nelson came up in his ship, the "Ida" to bring them back to Chicago.

"In 1901 and 1902 Hermann sailed in the "Jesse Philips" and then abandoned her and bought the "Charles L. Wrenn," which he used through 1909. In 1910 he bought a piece (25 percent) of the "Rouse Simmons," and used her the next three seasons, including the fatal voyage.

“There is little I do not know about the “Rouse-Simmons.” I am still trying to fill in on two important episodes in her career. Once in October 1903, she was scuttled intentionally to keep her from breaking up in the pilings when a fierce Nor’easter struck rapidly. This happened at Torch lake in the Grand Traverse area, she was raised, wintered at Charlevoix and then crossed the lake at Sturgeon Bay to be refitted.

“But the next October she was dismantled in Lake Michigan while carrying a load of slabs from Beaver Island to Milwaukee. She wallowed helplessly in the storm for 38 hours until the Grand Trunk car ferry enroute from Milwaukee to Grand Haven took her in tow and brought her to port (Milwaukee). She was refitted and refloated and carried on as valiantly as she had since her building. She was a fine ship and will tell the story of the great age of sail on the Great Lakes if I have my own way and with God’s help.”

His letter also tells how the Captain’s widow and children carried on the Christmas tree business for years in Chicago, having them shipped at first by boat, then later by train. Their dealings in Christmas trees eventually ended when Barbara, the Captain’s widow, died in June 1933.