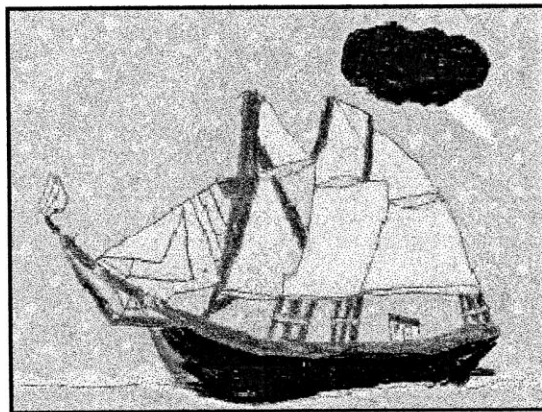




THE TRUE STORY OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE SHIP

by Alyssa and the Big Bay de Noc Elementary School 4th Grade

It was late November in the year 1887 and August and Hermann Schunemann were walking in the woods along Lake Michigan near the village of Manistique, Michigan. The two young brothers were lumberjacks who were trying to figure out what to do with young spruce and balsam trees that were so plentiful. A heavy snowfall the night before had made the branches look like they were frosted with sparkling white flakes. The brothers exclaimed that they would look like Christmas if candles were on them. This gave them the idea that maybe they could sell trees before Christmas.



The city of Chicago had lots of German people who had trees in their homes at Christmas when they lived back in Germany. Perhaps these people would buy trees if they brought them to Chicago a few days before the holidays. This seemed like such a good idea that they got to work right away. They got the use of a three-masted schooner, a sailing ship, and cut many trees to put on it to bring to Chicago. They sailed from the harbor at Thompson, about 7 miles west of Manistique. For several years they brought trees to Chicago to sell from this ship.

By the year 1889, both brothers sailed a separate ship filled with trees to Chicago. In this year there was a terrible storm on the lake. The ship that Captain August was sailing sank and all the crew was lost at sea. Captain Hermann was very sad that he had lost his brother to Lake Michigan, but he had to finish his trip to Chicago to sell the trees. He was feeling so bad that he forgot to say "Merry Christmas" to his customers.

For 12 more years he sailed the schooner "Rouse Simmons" to Chicago with trees. It was a larger ship than they had used before, and it could carry more than 5000 trees. Every year

the people of Chicago waited at the dock for this ship nicknamed "The Christmas Tree Ship" to arrive. The children, especially, were very excited when they saw this ship sail into the harbor.

In the year 1912, Hermann and his crew were sailing toward the city with their load of trees. It became pretty windy, and Hermann remembered the storm that had killed his brother just 12 years before. The temperatures became very frigid and frosty. The sky was charcoal grey and was full of fast-moving clouds. The water was icy cold and very black. The wind howled and whistled and white-caps formed and slapped at the ship. The crew struggled in the wind and cold to keep on course in the storm. It was a losing battle and very tragic.

Captain Hermann thought about his family. He wanted them to know what had happened to him and his crew members. So he wrote a note to his wife and said, "Sea washed over our deck yesterday. I think we are all through. Leaking bad. God help us!!" And he signed his name. He put the note in a bottle and sealed the bottle and threw it overboard. The ship's crew knew they were done for. They all felt a tear come to their eye as they waited for the ship to sink. It was November 22, 1912.

The people of Chicago waited and watched at the dock for the "Christmas Tree Ship" to sail in. It never came. Many articles were written in the Chicago papers wondering what had happened to the ship. On December 13, a man was walking along the beach near Two Rivers, Wisconsin, and saw a bottle. He saw something in the bottle. It was a good-by note and was signed by Hermann Schunemann. Everybody was very sad.

The next year, the people of Chicago were very surprised to see a schooner loaded with Christmas trees pull up to the dock where Hermann Schunemann had always had his ship. They all cheered when they saw a sign on the side of the boat that read, "The Christmas Tree Ship!" Then Hermann's wife, Hanna, and his three daughters stepped out. "Hermann wouldn't want to disappoint all his friends in Chicago," she said. For twenty more years, Mrs. Schunemann and her daughters hired men to cut trees and to sail them to Chicago to sell the trees. The Schunemann family has never been forgotten for the joy they brought each year to the people of Chicago. They are part of a Christmas legend that is told every year in Chicago and in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

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