

Tales, ballad tell story

By Jay Joslyn

"This is the tale of the Christmas ship

*That sailed o'er the sullen lake,
And of sixteen souls that made the trip,*

*And of death in the foaming
wake."*

Vincent Starrett

Vincent Starrett's many-quatrain "Ballad of the Christmas Ship" appeared in the Chicago Daily News to memorialize the loss of the Rouse Simmons in a Lake Michigan storm off Two Rivers Point on the night of Nov. 22-23, 1912.

For 28 years the family of Capt. Herman Schuenemann, who went down with the Rouse Simmons, took Christmas trees to Chicago to sell

from the Clark St. Pier. After the loss of the Rouse Simmons, the captain's widow continued the Christmas tree service until she died in 1933.

In 1972, divers retrieved the anchor from the Rouse Simmons wreck on the lake bottom. The anchor has been incorporated into a memorial at the entrance of the Milwaukee Yacht Club.

Over the years the Rouse Simmons has been remembered in articles, stories, songs, pictures and an imaginative television film.

The Press of the Rampant Lion at 3358 Bloomingdale Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60639, will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Rouse Simmons' loss by producing an album of 20 post cards including six cacheted post cards mailed on the anniversary dates from the Michigan towns important to the Christmas ship story.

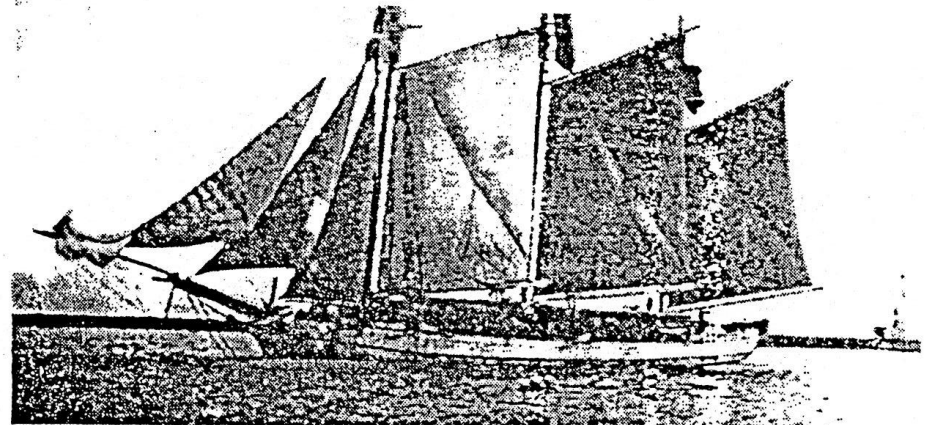
The Rouse Simmons deserves all this attention. The Schuenemann family's activity was more than a business. It was a seasonal tradition that deserved remembrance.

However, the Rouse Simmons was not the only Christmas ship. There were at least three other fishing schooners involved in the trade and one of them disappeared in a cloud of mystery.

According to Great Lakes historian Walter Havighurst, among the schooners that reefed their sails to hazard the deadly November storms to carry Christmas trees from the Upper Peninsula to Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland were the Rouse Simmons, the Charles Hackley and the Thomas Hume, owned by Hackley Hume of Muskegon, Mich.

The Schuenemann family obtained the Rouse Simmons and the Charles Hackley and began its own Christmas tree service in 1887.

In 1898, Capt. Herman



The Rouse Simmons sank in a Lake Michigan storm off Two Rivers Point in 1912.

Schuenemann's brother August, in the Charles Hackley, was lost with a load of Christmas trees just as he left the Schuenemanns' home port of Manistique, Mich.

The mystery involved the Thomas Hume.

The Rouse Simmons, under the command of a Capt. Dane, cleared Chicago harbor one autumn afternoon in 1882 for a run across the lake to its home port in Muskegon. There was a light breeze and Capt. Dane reported later that 20 ships had been sighted in the

Chicago-Muskegon lane that night.

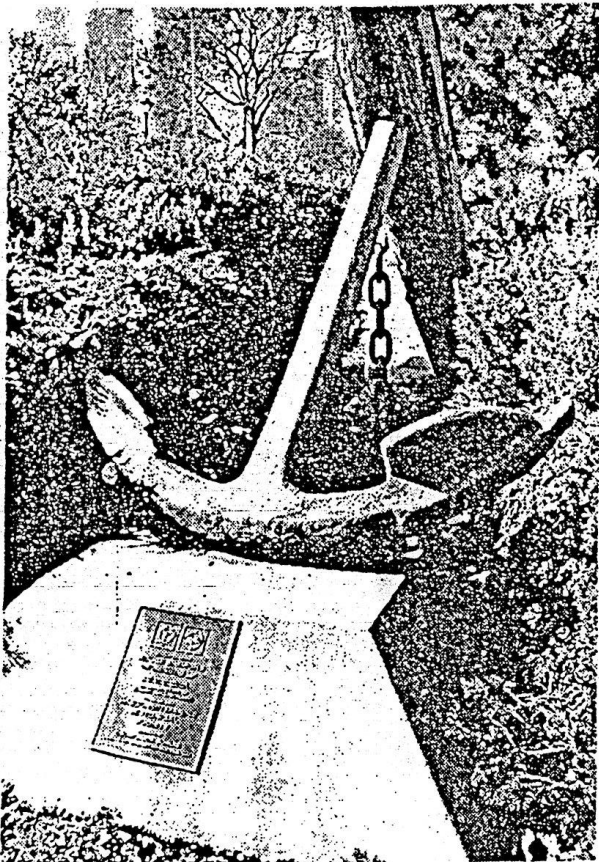
Nevertheless, the Thomas Hume and the Rouse Simmons separated during the night and the Thomas Hume was never seen again.

For several seasons the owners sent Capt. Dane to ports of call seeking information about the Thomas Hume. His quest was without success.

For a time lake harbors were abuzz with the speculation that the crew had captured the Thomas Hume, changed its riggings and

continued to sail on the lakes. However, families of the crew continued living in Muskegon and the missing men never returned.

Mrs. Schuenemann continued the Christmas tree tradition by bringing the trees from Thompson and St. James, Mich., by rail and transferring them to a showcase schooner at the Clark St. Pier. She, her two daughters and other women from the Upper Peninsula ran the shipboard sale and added to their stock by weaving evergreen wreaths and festoons.



The anchor of the Rouse Simmons, retrieved in 1972, is part of a memorial located at the entrance of the Milwaukee Yacht Club.

— Sentinel photo by Richard F. Bauer