



Ill-fated Rouse Simmons, loaded with Christmas trees, at Chicago dock after a luckier trip

Mystery of Lakes



Christmas Tree Ship Defied 1912 Storm and Lost

1912

Special to the Free Press

MANISTIQUE, Mich. — Capt. Herman Schuenemann was buying provisions at the Joseph Van Dyke grocery store for his last trip with a cargo of Christmas trees to the Chicago market.

The three-masted schooner, Rouse Simmons, was being loaded that morning of Nov. 22, 1912, at the dock in Thompson, a few miles to the west on the Lake Michigan shore.

"How's the Christmas tree business?" inquired Van Dyke, who had more than a casual interest in the subject.

THE MANISTIQUE grocer had for years financed Schuenemann's operations. He

well cussing from the irate captain.

RETURNING to Thompson, Capt. Schuenemann watched the unloading of Christmas trees from the flatcars of the "Haywire Road"—the Manistique and Lake Superior Railroad.

The Haywire had tracks running from the Thompson dock up north through the woods country as far as Shingleton.

After checking to see whether the Christmas tree cargo was well distributed on the 125-foot schooner's deck, he took another glance at the threatening late afternoon skies and shouted the order to set sail.

west by southwest, the Christmas Tree ship traveled 100 miles of raging, storm-tossed waters before dawn. By morning the wind had backed into the eastward and the lake was hidden by a raging blizzard.

On Nov. 23, the Rouse Simmons, halfway home to her haven in Chicago harbor, was sighted off Kewaunee, Wis., flying distress signals.

The Kewaunee Coast Guard telephoned the Two Rivers Station, where a 34-foot power launch was available. For five hours the Coast Guardsmen searched through the twilight mists and murky darkness.

During a lull in the storm, they sighted the Rouse Simmons. She presented a sorry sight with her canvas slashed

connected with the crew.

However, Christmas tree washed ashore and other fouling fishermen's nets were good evidence of the fate that befell the Christmas tree ship.

ABOUT 12 YEARS late on April 23, 1924, a wall which had been Schuenemann's was found washed ashore at Two Rivers Point. Three years later, at about the same spot, another boat message was washed up.

It was a note signed "Nelson" which read:

"These lines are written 10:30 p.m. Schooner R. ready to go down about miles southeast of Two Rivers Point, between 15 and miles offshore. All hands

