

"A Tale of Tall Tales of (The Christmas Tree Ship)"

by Florence "Alex" Meron 1995

(Thanks to Clarence Sellman & Joe Van Dyck for their help)

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Over the years I have received many requests for information on the story of the Christmas tree ship. Requests from descendants of the crew who perished in the sinking of the ship in 1912. Research of the persons who believe they are related to the families. This article is a combination of a variety of published items by many writer's who may or may not know the facts.

The information starts with stories by J. H. Van Dyck Sr. and wife Elizabeth. former owners of the Van Dyck Grocery Store, located on the corner of Third and Deer St. The property presently owned by their grandson. Mr. VanDyck was called as a witness for the inquest in 1913, concerning events leading up to the sailing of the ship. The supplies purchased by Herman and Barbara at the store and warnings of danger due to the approaching storm, before leaving Thompson, Michigan on a November day in 1912. Herman and Barbara Schuenneman were not only customers but good friends of the Van Dyck family. While in Manistique they stayed with the Van Dyck's on Third St. on many occasions, and many other families such as the Anderson's.

My interest was peaked when I run across a booklet belonging to my father - in - law former owner of the "Forty Bar". The contents of this booklet, used as a ledger for his business and former owner Pete LaBelle, for whom Cleve worked as a very young man. The booklet contained the names of persons who run a tab at the bar. (illegal but so was moonshine in the days of prohibition) Names such as Savage, Schuenneman, Martin, Sangraw, Tebo, Bouschor, Anderson, Miller, LaLonde patrons from times long ago. Lumberjacks, fishermen and neighbors who spent many hours at the Forty Bar, who besides using his safe to store their winter earnings, and treasures would pawn same for a stake.

I have interviewed and taped many elders who had direct connections with Herman and Barbara Schuenneman. One of these interviews took me to the home of Nel Nelson, who in turn directed me to Bertha Sigrid Harding, daughter of Mr. Anderson. In November of 1912, Mr. Anderson, missed the ship due to a delay in the arrival of the Soo train with the last load of trees for "The Christmas Tree Ship". His orders were to stay until it's arrival

and ride the train to Chicago with the shipment . In our conversation -- Bertha confirmed many of the questions running around in my head. Stories to name a few of working for the Schuenneman family by my mother-in-law Eve, wife of Cleve Meron, his sister Eve Chartier, Hazel Schultz, Bertha Harding and many others. Persons who found a source of earning Christmas money by tying trees at the Thompson docks. All trees were trimmed and tied before loading on the ship.

I am starting the articles by date as published, names of writer, or publication listed if known - this will give a ballpark idea of how the years have treated the story of the--- "THE CHRISTMAS TREE SHIP ".

Item, No date (12/6/1912)

Ship Disappears

The Manistique Pioneer Tribune , dated Friday Dec. 6, 1912

The fate of the Rouse Simmons laden with Christmas trees, and owned by Capt. Hermann Schuenemann, is now practically settled, and that with its crew of seventeen men, and owner sank in the vicinity of Pentwater. The boat in question left this port on November 22 with a cargo of Christmas trees for the Chicago market, and for some time no definite word as to its location or fate could be learned. Shortly after leaving port, severe gales swept over the lakes. Christmas trees and a hatch has come ashore near Pentwater , and as the boat was not equipped with life boats, it is believed the entire crew perished. Capt. Schuenemann has been making annual trips to this port for many years, in quest of Christmas trees for the Chicago market. The captain had many friends here who regret the disaster that has befallen him. The boat in question was not seaworthy. The captain in command of the vessel stated prior to leaving Chicago for the trip North, the rats had left the boat and he was afraid to make the trip.

Little Harbor Breezes, dated 12/15/1891 written by XYZ

Great preparations are being made for Christmas celebrations, with music, dancing, and fine food, all are excited in the anticipation of the celebration to be held at the hall. Many friends were present to see the "The Christmas Tree Ship sail from the harbor with the last load of trees for this season.

November

Was Pier #15 An Unlucky and Haunted Pier

Late November Chicago Tribune- The Christmas Tree ship. At same dock a ship turned over at in June 1915 with the loss of 812 men, women, and children at the Clark St Bridge. -- He had a wife in 1897 who he introduced as his wife Barbara. That year the customers came back to shower the bride with gifts. Babies came ! First Elsie, and in 1900 twins Pearl and Hazel. They lived on Clark St. North, Chicago Ill.

Chicago December 12, 1912 : Every Mariner on the Great Lakes remembers the omen that the rats always leave a sinking ship. -- Hogan Hoganson - haunted by a premonition refused to ship out on the ill fated schooner, his hunch saved his life. The story goes the rats left the ship, Hoganson sensed coming danger before the ship left Chicago for Manistique, Michigan. From a rumor the rats deserted the ship at Pentwater - Capt. Herman Schuenemann owner of the cargo and former lake captain , 1638 North Clark St. Chicago. although the weather was fair on the trip to Manistique, Hoganson was depressed with thoughts of disaster. Hoganson's address was listed as 413 Milwaukee Avenue ((city not listed) the item cut up very bad makes little sense.)

Escanaba Daily Press dated Wednesday December 12, 1912 --

Schooner is lost- Rouse Simmons left Thompson for Chicago a week ago not (unreadable) ____ . Wreckage floated ashore

Pioneer Tribune, Mstq. Michigan dated- 12/20/1912

To Broom Lake- Revenue Cutter Mackinac Searching for Schooner Rouse

On Saturday of last week, the crew of the revenue cutter Mackinac, stationed at the Soo, was given orders to proceed at once to Lake Michigan. and broom the upper portion of the lake for tidings of the schooner, Rouse Simmons, which is believed to be lost. It will be remembered that the boat cleared from this port with a big cargo of Christmas trees for the Chicago market, late in November and has not been heard of since sailing.

Owing to the nature of the cargo the boat would not sink and the government fears that members of the crew may still be aboard the vessel and that the wreck has drifted among islands that have no communication with the main land.

Pioneer Tribune, Mstq. Michigan dated 12/27/1912

Widow Left with Many Tree Unsold

A Chicago dispatch says, "in the gladness of Christmas Time, Chicagoans forgot the family of Captain Herman Schuemann, who with his crew of twenty men went to the bottom of Lake Michigan a few weeks ago, while returning from Manistique, Mich., with a cargo of Christmas trees.

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 sale down on the river bank, and every day the widow and her orphans worked hard 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 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.

The last crew : Capt. Herman , Capt. Chas Nielson, master of the schooner, his wife, Humbolt and North Ave.: Albert Luxtra, cook, 418 Desplaines, Chicago. :Charles Nelson, seaman, before the mast : Frank Carlson, seaman living in Austin, : Gilbert Swenson, seaman, retired, an extra hand , California & Division St. Chicago,:Engwald Neinhame, extra hand, : Jack Pitt, extra hand,: Andrew __ , deck hand, : Philip Larson, extra hand.

April 11, 1924 The Pioneer Tribune

**Wallet Found In Fisherman's Net recalls Story of Loss of Vessel Twelve Years Ago
Pockebook of Captain Scheumann Contains Clippings from the Tribune; Another
Chapter in Sinking of Vessel Rouse Simmons and Death of 17 Men**

Another chapter has been inscribed upon the pages of Greats Lakes history through the finding of a wallet in a fisherman's net near Kewaunee, Wisconsin, and the discovery recalls to the memory of local persons the disaster which befell the package freighter Rouse Simmons which at one time made Manistique a regular port. It was back in the fall of 1912 that the Simmons pulled out of Manistique with a cargo of Christmas trees for Chicago. The schooner never reached her destination but bit by bit the tell tale evidence cropped out and told the fate of the vessel. The finding of the wallet is just another episode in the revelation of facts concerning the vessel's disappearance.

Identification marks show that the wallet was the property of Captain Hermann Schuenemann, well known in this city.

The files of the Pioneer Tribune tell the story of the vessel's disappearance as follows:

"The fate of the Steamer Rouse Simmons, laden with Christmas trees, and owned by Captain Schuenemann, is now practically settled, and that with its crew of 17 men including the owner, sank in the vicinity of Pentwater. The boat in question left this port on November 22nd with a cargo of Christmas trees for the Chicago market and for some time no definite word of the location could be learned. Shortly after leaving port severe gales swept over the lakes. A Christmas tree and a hatch has come ashore at Pentwater and as the boat was not equipped with life boats, it is believed that the entire crew perished.

"Captain Schuenemann had been making annual trips to this port for many years in quest of Christmas trees, and ground pine for the Chicago markets. The captain had many friends who regret the disaster that has befallen him. The boat in question was not seaworthy. The captain in command of the vessel stated prior to leaving Chicago for the trip to the north, that the rats had left the boat and that he was afraid to make this trip."

In the wallet which was picked up only recently were found newspaper clippings, presumably from the Manistique Pioneer Tribune.

The Kewaunee paper tells the following story concerning the finding of the wallet.

On November 23 just before nightfall a vessel in distress was seen off the coast of Kewaunee, Wisconsin. It was during one of the most terrific storms that ever thrashed Lake Michigan. The Kewaunee life saving crew tried to reach the craft but failed, and soon the vessel was lost in darkness.

The day before, there had sailed out of the Port of Thompson, Michigan, the three-masted schooner, "Rouse Simmons, Captain, Hermann Schuenemann, laden with Christmas trees, and bound for Chicago. The schooner had been making these trips for a number of years, carrying Christmas trees to Chicago, reaching there about December 1, and lying at its dock up the river until the cargo had been sold.

But this week the Christmas tree ship was not among the arrivals. It was never seen or heard of after it left Thompson, although lighthouse keepers and sailors reported having seen a schooner resembling it in several places between the head of Lake Michigan and Kewaunee.

As the days passed and the boat did not show up at Chicago, lake men became convinced it was the craft that had been in distress off Kewaunee, life savers, fishermen and sailors searched vainly for a trace of it. All that was found was a number of bundles of Christmas trees on the shores of Lake Michigan and about five miles north of Sturgeon Bay and Lake Michigan ship canal. No trace of the craft or the crew was ever discovered.

Now , 12 years later, when the present generation scarcely remembers the event, comes the only real clue as to where the schooner was wrecked.

A day or two ago, the fishing tug, "Reindeer", Capt Norman Allie, came bringing in her nets to dry. the nets were strung on the reels and the weeds cast aside, Lighthouse Keeper Henry Gattle, who was keeper of the range lighthouse at Baileys Harbor, Wisconsin, at the time the "Rouse Simmons" disappeared, but now at the Two Rivers point light, happened to kick a bunch of these weeds, and disclosed a bill fold which proved to be the property of the former skipper or the "Simmons". That is was surely, his, is evidence by the fact that it contained Schuenemann's personal cards and other data which proved beyond doubt that he had been____(sic)

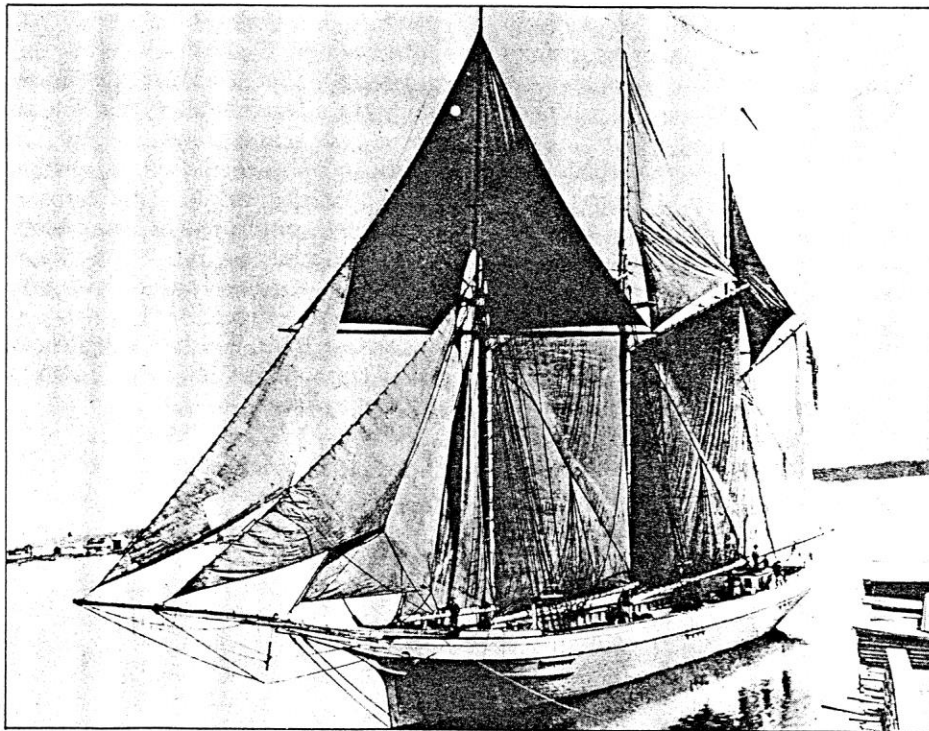
In it were found clippings from a Manistique , Michigan, newspaper which told of the departure of the "Rouse Simmons" with its load of Christmas trees bound for Chicago, memoranda of the Captain's expenses, and recited bills for oilskins, provisions, etc.

The contents of the fold were in a good state of preservation having been pressed together firmly and tied with a cord, which kept them intact.

The place where the nets had been set in the lake is several miles out into the open water off from Two River point, and it is believed that this is the spot where the "Simmons" went down 12 years ago with all hands.

On Friday of the same week, while lifting the nets aboard the fishing tug, "Monitor", of Two Rivers, Captain Manville LaFond found a human skull entangled in the nets. This is the third skull that he has picked up at this point and at one time discovered a human skeleton in the net, but while pulling the net aboard the tug the skeleton broke into pieces and fell back into the lake.

It is presumed that these bones are the remains of the crews of the wrecked ship.



The ROUSE SIMMONS was built in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1868. She was 123 feet long and had a beam of 28 feet. Photo: Manitowoc Maritime Museum Collection – John Mercer, donor.

Memories Fade as the Years Go On

The Story of the Christmas Tree Ship as related in the various papers, comes up with many variations depending on the writer- and over the years accurate accounts fade into fairy tales. How does one separate fact from fiction ?

As for me I am inclined to believe many of the details related to me by the elders' who cut and supplied the trees, galley supplies, and financial support. While doing this article I decided to call Joe the grandson of J. H. VanDyck to request his input on any details he may have heard his dad or grandparents relate on The Christmas Tree Ship. Without hesitation he said I have material in the old store - take a walk over and I'll show you. The results of my walk to the store, convinced me of tales Grandpa Van Dyck related back in 1946-7 when I first came to Manistique, a bride of his grandson Mickey. From the big old store safe came copies of items published by the Detroit Free Press, and The Detroit News. Needless to say, I was thrilled to think Joe preserved so much of his dad's belongs and passed them on to his son Joe. Gladys his daughter in turn sent me her pictures and treasures saved over the years, for me to pass on to her grandchildren and great grandchildren. Gladys, also related to me the friendship of Capt. Herman Schuenemann and her family.

Sea Swallows a Proud Ship Vessel Vanishes with Christmas Tree The Detroit News dated November 27, 1966

Manistique, Nov. 26, -- They call it the Christmas Tree Ship, a nickname that arouses visions of a happy vessel riding the waves like Santa's sleigh on a mission of goodwill.

But the Rouse Simmons was far from a jolly ship and its fame lies only in its end, a tragic shipwreck in which 16 persons died in storm - lashed Lake Michigan.

The three masted schooner was last seen Nov. 23, 1912 as it was flying distress signals off Kewaunee, Wis. The vessel, its crew of 15 and a woman, the wife of Capt. Charles Neilson, were never seen again.

The Rouse Simmons got its nickname due to the fact it was carrying a load of Christmas trees from Michigan's Upper Peninsula to Chicago on its tragic voyage.

Search Fails

The 200 - ton ship sailed from Thompson Harbor, near Manistique on Nov. 22nd a Coast Guard launch from Two Rivers, Wis., put out to try to rescue the crew but failed to reach the ship.

Before its last tragic voyage, the Rouse Simmons had a distinguished career in the lumber trade.

Built in 1868 at Milwaukee, the vessel measured 125 feet length and 27 feet across her beam. Her hold was slightly more than eight feet governed by the depth of navigable rivers, depth of navigable rivers, harbors and channels of that day. She was built for Kenosha, Wis., shipping interests and named for a prominent merchant of that city. During her first five years, the Rouse Simmons plied between Manistee, and Chicago, her hold filled with scantling and her deck piled high with joists and other lumber products.

In 1873 the Rouse Simmons became a part of the shipping fleet of Charles H. Hackley wealthy Muskegon lumberman.

During her career sailed out of Chicago harbor, the schooner was credited with more than a thousand cargoes and some exciting sailing experiences.

Several times she left her cat-head and jib-boom on Chicago River Bridges. In a fog bound collision with another schooner, she narrowly escaped destruction.

Storms and squalls tore her sailcloth, rigging and ratlines, and broke her spars and tackle. Once she sank in the Traverse Bay area but was raised, refitted and sailed again.

Succession of Owners

In her declining years, the Rouse Simmons became a tramp freighter, owned by captains and engaged in hauling lumber, logs and cedar posts.

In the early 1880's August Schuenemann began bringing Christmas trees to Chicago by schooner on the last voyage of the season, in 1898, Schuenemann was killed and a cargo of evergreens was lost off Glencoe, Ill. His brother, Herman, took over the business and began sailing the Rouse Simmons in 1910.

On his final voyage the records indicate that he had chartered the schooner from its owner, Capt. Manus Bonner, of Beaver Island (records show Bonner, Nelson and Schuenemann as owners)

Ominous Sign

Frank J. Lindenthal, employee of Van Dyck's now of Escanaba, recalls that in 1912 he worked in Joseph Van Dyck's grocery store filling a food order for the Rouse Simmons.

Capt. Schuenemann, 41, remarked to the grocer that the crew had cut some fine trees but that he was "a little late this season".

About that time, two sailors came into the store and demanded that the captain pay them off. Enraged, Schuenemann reminded them that they always were paid after the trees were sold in Chicago.

The sailors then said they were not going to sail on the Rouse Simmons because they had seen rats leaving the schooner at Thompson Harbor-- an ominous sign.

Lull before Storm

Returning to Thompson, Capt. Schuenemann watched the unloading of trees from the flat cars of the Manistique - Lake Superior Railroad, long known as "The Haywire Line".

After checking to see whether the cargo was well distributed, Schuenemann took another glance at the threatening late afternoon skies and shouted the order to set sail.

His partner, Cap. Neilson, tried unsuccessfully to persuade him to delay the departure. Just two weeks before the great storm of November 9 had heaped destruction on the lakes and Nelson knew another heavy gale was imminent.

Sailing to the windward of a 60 mile gale blowing west by southwest, the schooner traveled 100 miles of raging, storm tossed water before dawn. By morning the wind had backed into the eastward, and the lake was hidden by a blinding blizzard.

Two Rivers coast guardsmen, in their motor launch, searched for five hours for the distressed ship after being notified by the Kewaunee station that it was in trouble.

During a lull in the storm, they sighted the Rouse Simmons, her canvas slashed to ribbons and her rigging and hull covered with ice.

Bottle with Message

The coast guardsmen headed toward her in their surf boat. But, before they could cover half the distance, the snowstorm set in again. The Rouse Simmons vanished.

Three weeks later, newspapers published a story about the discovery of a bottle along the shore at Sheboygan, Wis. It contained a message written on a page torn from the log of the Rouse Simmons it Read:

"Friday -- Everybody, good by. I guess we are all through. Sea washed over our deck load Thursday. During the night the small boat was washed over. Leaking bad. Ingvald and Steve fell overboard Thursday. God help us" Herman Schuenemann

Monday December 2, 1963

Detroit Free Press

Mystery of Lakes

Christmas Tree Ship Defied 1912 Storm and Lost

Manistique, Michigan. Capt. Herman Schuenemann was buying provisions at the Joseph Van Dyck 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 November 22nd, 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 Dyck, who had more than a casual interest in the subject.

The Manistique grocer had for years financed Schuenemann's operations. He had provided about \$900 worth of food and cash to Capt. Schuenemann while the woodchoppers were cutting spruce in the Schoolcraft County backwoods.

"All right, I think, " replied the tall, black-mustached 41 year old captain. "We've cut some nice trees but we're a little late this season."

Frank J. Lindenthal, now a retired Escanaba newspaperman, was packing the groceries for Capt. Schuenemann when two members of the Christmas tree ship's crew came into the store. The grocery clerk overheard two sailors ask the captain for their pay.

Capt. Schuenemann angrily bellowed: "You know I always pay off the crew after I sell the trees in Chicago."

I'm, not going back with the Rouse Simmons, " one of the sailors bleated. "I saw the rats leaving her at Thompson. I want my pay now."

The Sailors left the Van Dyck store with only a farewell cussing from the irate captain.

Returning to Thompson, Capt. Schuenemann watched the unloading of Christmas trees from the flat cars of the "Haywire Road" -- the Manistique and Lake Superior Railroad.

The Haywire had tracks running from the Thompson dock up north through the wood 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.

The mast of the ship Capt. Charles Nelson who was Schuenemann's partner, was shocked by the order. He tried futility to argue Shuenemann in delaying departure.

Just two weeks before, the great storm of November 9 had cast wide destruction on the Great Lakes and another gale was rising.

But Capt. Schuenemann had chartered the 200 - ton Rouse Simmons from Capt. Manus Bonner, of Beaver Island, and he was anxious to get his cargo to the Chicago market.

The ship soon was out in the open water of Lake Michigan . Abroad was a shorthanded crew of 15 men and the wife of Capt. Nelson.

While the Rouse Simmons was tacking toward Wiggin's Reef, she was sighted by the crew of the steam tug, Burger, which was coming from Seul Choix with the schooner Dutch Boy in tow.

Beating to the windward of a 60mile gale blowing west by southwest, the Christmas Tree ship traveled 100 miles of raging storm tossed water before dawn. By morning the wind had backed into the east ward 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 to ribbons and her rigging and hull covered with ice.

The guardsman headed toward her in their surfboats. But, before they could cover half the distance, the snowstorm set in again. The storm-swept ship vanished from their sight like a phantom derelict. No living person ever saw the Rouse Simmons again.

On Dec. 13, Chicago newspapers printed a dispatch from Sheboygan, Wis. It reported someone had picked up a bottle containing a message written on a page torn from the log of the Rouse Simmons and sighted by Herman Shuenemann.

It read: "Friday--Everybody, good-bye. I guess we are all through. Sea washed over our deck load Thursday. During the night the small boat was washed over. Leaking bad. Ingvald and Steve fell over board Thursday. God help Us."

There have been doubts that the message was authentic since no such name were known to have been connected with the crew.

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

About 12 years later, on April 23, 1924 a wallet which had been Schuenemann's was found washed ashore at Two Rivers Point. Three years later, at about the same spot another bottled message was washed up. It was a note sighted by "Nelson" which read;

"These line are written at 10:30 p.m. Schooner R.S. ready to do down about 20 miles southeast of Two Rivers Point, between 15 and 20 miles off shore. All hands lashed to one line. "Good-bye".

The Shuenemann family had been associated with the Christmas tree business for three decades before the wreck of the Rouse Simmons.

Since the early 1880's the Schuenemanns had brought Christmas trees to Chicago annually by sailing schooners on the closing voyage of the sailing season.

In 1898 August - nicknamed "Christmas Tree Schuenemann" - lost his life and cargo of evergreens when his small schooner vanished in a storm off Glencoe, Ill.

Undaunted, his brother Herman took over the trade. Year after year his schooner would tie up in Chicago harbor with a load of Yuletide cheer.

In 1910, Herman bought an interest in the Rouse Simmons and the doughty craft became Chicago's Christmas Tree Ship.

The Rouse Simmons was built in Milwaukee in 1866 to haul lumber destined for the prairie states.

In 1873 , the Rouse Simmons came into the hands of Charles H. Hackley of Muskegon and remained a part of his fleet for a quarter of a century.

Several times she left her rat-head and jib-boom on Chicago River bridges. In a fog-bound collision with another schooner , she narrowly escaped her own destruction.

Waterspouts, storms and squalls tore her sailcloth rigging and ratlines, broke her spars and tackle.

Once she sank in the Traverse Bay area but was raised, refitted and sailed again. Another time the vessel was dismantled in a violent storm and left helpless in midlake.

When the forests of Michigan began petering out, Hackley sold his fleet. While other lumber barons ran off to greater fields. He stayed behind in Muskegon to rebuild the city's fortune. Hackley left behind schools, a hospital, a library, an art gallery and public park.

In her declining years, the Rouse Simmons was owned by mariners, that is captains who owned their ships. In a sense she was a tramp, picking up a cargo of lumber , logs or cedar posts as opportunity offered.

It appears that the ship was owned by Capt. Bonner of Beaver Island at the time she took her last ill-fated voyage at the Christmas Tree Ship.

Despite the Rouse Simmons tragedy, the Schuenemans had Christmas trees in their N. Clark St. lot in Chicago the following season.

The captain's widow Barbara , continued the business, shipping most of them by rail from the woods near Manistique. With her death in 1933, the family's Christmas tree enterprise also died.

Story by George Matthews- Pioneer Tribune: "Let me supplement your story about the Scheuneman Christmas Tree Ship, in your December 15 issue. In the first place it is not a "LEGEND", but an Historical Fact. (See Webster's Dictionary). When I came to Manistique Sept. 15, 1918, to take the position of cashier for the Soo Line RR Company, in the old wooden building still standing. Mrs. Schueneman was shipping Christmas trees by railway carload freight and I waited on her at the cashier's window writing up the bill of lading and receipting for the prepaid freight charge to Chicago. Mrs. Scheuneman continued for several years after to ship ever year via railroad, and we became quite well acquainted. (See references)

The Pioneer Tribune
dated 5/23/1913

From the Dead

Note Supposedly Written By Member of Crew of Ill fated Rouse Simmons, Found.

A suburban resident of Milwaukee, found a note which was supposedly written by a member to the Christmas tree schooner", the Rouse Simmons, which was lost last autumn between this port and Chicago. The note was in a bottle and reads as follows:

"R. Simmons went to bottom with cargo and crew after jamming sunken ice, crushing front of boat," . The note was signed by Michael Rattary, night watchman. Mrs. Schunemann, widow of the owner of the boat, who lost his life when it sank, says that she does not remember the name of Rattary as one of the crew , but say it sounds familiar.

Pioneer Tribune dated 10-10-1913

HERE FOR TREES- Widow of Capt. Schuneman, who was Drowned, now Conducts Business.

Arriving in the city last week, the wife of the late Capt. H. Schuneman of Chicago, will secure a cargo of Christmas trees to take there. She will remain in Manistique for several more days, and while here, is the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Van Dyck at their residence on North Third Street.

Capt. Schuneman together with the his crew, was lost in Lake Michigan a year ago. At that time the schooner Rouse Simmons , loaded with Christmas trees, floundered while sailing to Chicago from this port, when it was caught in a gale. Nothing was ever heard of either the vessel or those aboard of it when the craft was wrecked.

Since his tragic death, the wife of Capt.. Schuneman has managed the business which he conducted during his life time. For many years, he has made trips to Manistique every fall for the purpose of securing Christmas trees for the big Illinois metropolis, and was well known here.

The Christmas Tree Ship
Pioneer Tribune 1915 (November)
(from files of G. VanDyck Hoholik)

Mrs. Herman Scheunemann and daughter Elsie Take Up Work of Husband and Father

Mrs. Herman Scheunemann and daughter Elsie, who has been in the vicinity for some time buying and shipping Christmas trees to Chicago left for that place Saturday after finishing up the season's work.

Ever since the death of her husband Mrs. Scheunemann has followed his work, which our readers will remember came to an end by the wrecking of his boat on the return to Chicago when he and the crew perished.

The following article accompanied by an illustration of Miss Elsie Scheunemann, appeared recently in a Detroit Paper:

The "Christmas ship" has reached Chicago on its annual visit, but now it is in charge of a woman instead of Capt. Herman Scheunemann, who for many years brought the cargo of Christmas trees and other greenery to delight the hearts of Chicago children.

Miss Elsie Scheunemann has inherited her father's love for the work, and since he was lost three years ago, when the "Christmas ship" and its cargo and crew were lost in Lake Michigan, she has carried on his work of bringing trees from the woods of Northern Michigan to this city.

"Oh, it is splendid!" she exclaimed yesterday when the C.H. Hackley had docked at the Clark Street bridge. "I really don't know which I like better, the lake or the woods. Mother and I go out into the forest and direct the cutting of the trees, and we of course go up and back in the boat-- through of course Captain Sullivan, my father's old friend, directs the sailing of the ship. "and the crew is splendid, too! Why we made this last trip in only 14 days from the Northern Michigan."

**The Manistique Pioneer- Tribune
dated Thursday June 22, 1933**

"Christmas Tree Lady" Summoned

Mrs. B. Schuenemann, Well Know in County, Dies in Chicago

Mrs. Barbara Schuenemann, who gained the title of "The Christmas Tree Lady" following the tragic death of her husband. Captain Scheunemann, when the Rouse Simmons sank in Lake Michigan some years ago, died at her home in Chicago last week. Captain Schuenemann came to Manistique and Thompson many years and took loads of Christmas trees to Chicago., Mrs. Shcuenemann continued the business after her husband's death and on her frequent visits here made many friends.

The Chicago Tribune carried a picture of Mrs. Schuenemann and the following account of her death?

"Mrs. Barbara Schuenemann

The Christmas tree lady, died suddenly last night in her home at 158 Eugenie Street. Death was due to heart disease.

Mrs. Schuenemann was the widow of Captain Herman Schuenemann, who brought Chicago its first boatload of Christmas trees in 1887. In 1912 Capt. Schuenemann went down in a terrific lake storm as he was bringing a cargo of Christmas tree to Chicago on the Rouse Simmons.

" His widow continued his work, taking the helm of various craft to bring trees to the city each Yuletide for many years. Since 1925 trees have been brought by freight cars to her warehouse.

Mrs. Schuenemann is survived by three daughters, Mrs. Elsie Roberts, Mrs. Hazel Gronemann, and Mrs. Pearl Ehling, and two grandchildren. Funeral services will be held Monday morning in St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church."

The Rouse Simmons Inquiry

by Theodore S. Charrney

(in a letter to Florence Meron date January 2, 1967)

Florence Meron
103 North Third St.
Manistique, MI 49854

Dear Mrs. Meron,

Mrs. Weber of your city kindly sent me the clipping from the Pioneer Tribune of December 15 last about the " New Chapter Possible in Yule Ship Legend". The copies you sent are similar, and the copies seem to be copies or copied from stories written years before.

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

If I were you I would not take Mr. Hansen's remarks on the ship too literally. All in all the book on the Chicago River is a fine book, but in the comments on the Rouse Simmons, Mr. Hansen took advantage of the poetic license that author's so often avail themselves of.

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. Herman was 19 and probably did not accompany August at that early stage. Within a few years

Herman doubtless came along with his older brother but it was not until 1892 before Herman 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, Wisconsin. When he foundered in the Thal off Glencoe, Illinois on November 11, 1898 his cargo came from Jacksonport, Door County, Wisconsin.

From the earliest times that Herman operated ships he always came to Schoolcraft Count and usually tied up at Thompson, all though the ship list in the newspapers always mentioned Manistique as the port of departure.

In the beginning (1892) Hermans', 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 , Herman sailed in the Jesse Phillips and then abandoned her and bought the Charles L. Wrenn which he used through 1909. In 1910 he bought a piece (25%) of the Rouse Simmons and used her the next three seasons including the fatal voyage. (I am having trouble with the ribbon on my typewriter. sic)

It is true that the distaff side of the family then took over operations but I have very little faith in the story that the women sailed the ships. Shortly after the tragedy Elsie and the Captains' Widow, Barbara paid a visit to Manistique vicinity to gather what information they could and to have an affidavit signed by the store keeper who provided the ship's groceries. This was necessary to collect on a life insurance policy since there was no corpus delicti. Barbara evidently sounded out prospects of continuing the Christmas tree venture and did come to Thompson in 1913, but by train. As the collecting of the greens progressed a ship came in good time and carried away the cargo and Barbara returned by train, being sure to be in Chicago before the arrival of the ship. When newsmen came aboard to interview her, the impression that she sailed on the voyage was given them. Soon Elsie, the oldest girl who was born on board one of Herman's ship, took as active a part in the venture as Barbara. Every year they commercialized on the tragedy but by 1916, with war approaching their German sounding name did not stand them in good stead and although they continued the business it was soon a much smaller footing. The trees were now brought in by train and transferred to a small ship at the traditional Clark Street Bridge site. By 1920 , the anchorage was taken by another merchant and the Schuenemann women moved up Clark Street a couple blocks north. The development of Wacker Drive soon replaced South Water Street and the city was now too large to have a central market. Merchants all over the city were selling Christmas trees. Soon the Schuenemann women moved up near their home in the Lincoln Park area and always at

Christmas maintained a tree market, but certainly not in the dimensions it was carried on under the captain. Barbara died in June 1933 and was buried in Acacia Cemetery on the northwest side. The girls Elsie and the twins, Pearl and Hazel, had a stone placed on the grave and inscribed with both the father and mother's name and between the two names A Christmas tree is engraved in the stone.

I have been their several times. Elsie passed away 14 years ago and is buried by her mother but has no stone. I met Hazel a couple of times a few years ago. She is a retired gymnasium teacher and must be well up in her sixties by now. Pearl was a housewife and had some history of mental illness. I never met her though I did speak to her over the phone. But Pearl and Hazel are uncommunicative and the information they gave me as to dates etc., are not born out by some vital statistics I have collected on my own.

In your newspaper article you ask that anyone who knows the family should contact you. I dare say some people around your area have done this. If you are a true historian you will have them prepare recollections and then have them neatly typed up and let them sign them. In this way you will have a lasting record and time is a wasting for such oldsters will not live with us long. Should you collect such memoranda I should like very much to have copies of it for my records and will willingly pay to have such copies made and sent to me.

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 on the piling 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 cross the lake to 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 58 hours until the Grand Trunk R.R. 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 sailing on the Great Lakes if I have my own way and with God's help.

Signed- Sincerely,
Theodore S. Charney

The following are dates for requests for information. Over years numerous requests for information, copies of items, found in local and out of town and State papers. Persons who were interested in writing articles for their local papers, stories for Childrens' Story books, poems, and stories true and false, depending on who is the writer. Requests for family genealogy on persons and descendants of the victims who went down with the Rouse Simmons, children and grandchildren of persons related to the many who lost their life. Persons in some way who felt they were connected to the Christmas Tree Ship.

Requests for information to writer's who were doing stage plays, and musical's in Chicago . I can testify to the fact I have the material, heard the stories, items saved this many years from the private collections of Gladys Hoholik, Elsie Nelson, Nels Bouschor, Mrs. Tillman, the recorded tapes of the elder's such as mother of Lois Harding (Mrs. Bertha S. Harding) Call to Lois Harding October 1995 for permission to use her mother's interview I taped, about 15 years ago, of stories she related to me.

1. Liberty Magazine December 6, 1924 - The Christmas Tree Ship by Sidney McNeil Sutherland Mrs. E. Rex - E. Chicago, IND. 19 Feb 1986
2. Harry Hansen who wrote the story Christmas in America- The Christmas Tree Ship.
3. The Milwaukee Sentinel Dec 1967- Yule Tree Ship That Sank in 1912 Still a Legend
5. Pictorial Marine History - Rouse Simmons, Christmas Tree Ship, Floundered.
4. Taped interview with Bertha S. Anderson Harding -Story in Pioneer Tribune.
6. Pioneer Tribune- Memories Jack Orr- Thompson "glory days"
7. Lakes Lore and Lingo- Dec, 1984 The Christmas Tree Ship (poem) by Gerhard Miller
8. The Anchor News- Nov/Dec 1984
9. Picture- Courtesy of the Wisconsin Marine Historical Society (Picture of the Rouse Simmons in dock at Sheboygan, WI.
10. The Detroit News- Nov. 27, 1966- Sea Swallows a Proud Ship
11. Letter to Meron- Fred Newschel Desplaines, Ill 60019 dated July 1988.
12. Escanaba Daily Press- item by Lori Rose Replica of Christmas Tree Ship in family.
13. Milwaukee Sentinel Nov. 21 1987 Good Morning- Tales Ballad tell story of Christmas tree ship by Jay Joslyn.
14. Picture of Thompson Harbor with Rouse Simmons set to sail picture taken in 1896
15. The Chicago Tribune- Why Chicago Misses It's Yule Trees in 1912- By Delos Avery Dec. 24, 1944.
16. Escanaba Press dated 11/28/1987 Holidays stir memories of ill-fated Christmas Tree Ship
17. Letter to Mrs. Meron Jan. 2, 1967 from Theodore S. Charnney ,Chicago Ill.
18. A local Christmas Legend by Katherine LeBrasseur- Christmas tree ship lies beneath Lake Michigan waters- dated 12/24/1973
19. Escanaba Press 12/21/1971 Christmas Tree Ship Wreckage Sighted 12/19/1971 - contributing items- 5/11/1924, 12/4/1975

19. Hulk Recalls Saga of Christmas Tree Ship - Algoma Wis. Dec. 18
20. The Mining Journal , Marquette MI. Dec. 24, 1970 Christmas Tree Ship Still Lost On Lake
21. Post Card to Miss Adeline Wager- from Theodore S. Charnney- who published items on the Ship and Reunions of anniversary of the mishap. Christmas Tree Ship covers, Keepsake Press. Chicago, Ill.
22. The UpBeat - Christmas Custom survived sinking of plucky schooner by Roger LeLievre 12/24/1978

23. Pioneer Tribune - Memories by Jack Orr- 10/12/1978
24. Paper unknown- Christmas- Tree Laden Ship vanished into lake in 1912 by Helen Burrowes- picture from Milwaukee County Historical Society of the Rouse Simmon being towed into port by a tug.
25. Mstq Pioneer Tribune- Jack Orr 11/30/1078 There were Two Christmas ships.
26. Shipwreck- The ghost of Christmas past rests beneath water Lake Michigan- by Suzanne Kautzky Weiss. Sentinel correspondent date Nov. 23, 1989
27. Bottle washed up on shore note from Uncle Herman. by Karen Surratt. Sentinel photo by Ernest W. Anheuser. March 1977
28. Story by Carol Marcella interview of Elaine Hastings. 10/12/1980 picture of ship.
29. 50th Anniversary - The loss of the Rouse Simmons by Theodore S. Charrney 11/24/1962 Postcards and pictures for sale by Charrney.
30. Letter to Meron from Mrs. V. E. Tillman , Gladstone Mi--. Tribune Voice from Dead 8/1913.
32. Tribune- sites article by the Literary Digest on Ill fated ship. Dec. 25th 1924
33. Letter to Florence Meron from Theodore S. Charrney Jan. 4, 1967.
(sent money to receive pictures and material on family- no response- money gone Charrney declared bankrupt) phone disconnected, ? moved not contact possible.
34. Manistique , July 6, 1924 Mystery of Christmas Tree ship solved after 13 years.
35. Film of Southport Video Presents Rouse Simmons The Christmas Tree Ship, taken under water of the Rouse Simmons in 180 feet of water off Two Rivers WI. Undiscovered for almost 60 years.
36. Billy Doyle article- storey by George Matthews - Pioneer Tribune: "Let me supplement your story about the Scheuneman Christmas Tree Ship, in you December 15 issue. In the first place it is not a "LEGEND", but a Historical Fact. (See Webster's Dictionary). When I came to Manistique September 15, 1918, to take the position of cashier for the Soo Line RR company, in the old Wooden building still standing. Mrs. Schuenemann was shipping Christmas trees by railway carload freight and I waited on her at the cashier's window writing up the bill of lading and receipting for the prepaid freight charge to Chicago. Mrs. Scheuneman continued for serveral years after to ship every year via railroad, and we became well acquainted.
37. Story in book "People and Places"- written by Dorotyn Trebilcock. Dec. 16, 1974
38. Sheboygan Press - April 1927
39. Pictures from many friends and items used in Museum displays . Anchor, Milwaukee Yacht Club.

Florence "Alex" Meron 1995
"Schoolcraft County Historian"