



Above: volunteers install the new Thompson Township historical marker at the public access site on Lake Michigan. The marker, a project of the Thompson Historical Advisory Committee, describes the history of the township on one side and the story of the famed "Christmas Tree Ship" on the other. The marker, one of seven being unveiled around the state this fall, will be dedicated this Saturday, with a ceremony at the site and a program afterwards at the nearby township hall. A number of dignitaries will be on hand and the public is invited to attend. (Submitted photos)

## Historic marker to be dedicated on Saturday

Everything is set for this weekend's dedication of the newest Michigan historical marker, commemorating the history of Thompson Township and the ill-fated Rouse Simmons, better known as the Christmas Tree Ship.

Volunteers recently installed the marker at its new home: the Lake Michigan public access site, located off of US-2 between Rogers Park and Little Harbor Road.

The marker contains two separate historical write-ups. On one side it reviews the history of the township. On the other, Thompson is honored as the last port-of-call for the Rouse Simmons, which departed from the harbor on Nov. 22, 1912, bound for Chicago with a load of Christmas trees, and sank the next day near Two Rivers, Wis.

The public is invited to attend the marker dedication, which takes place this Saturday, Oct. 21, at 2 p.m.

Among those slated to speak at the ceremony are Thomas Truscott of the Michigan Historical Commission and local residents Meg Wnuk and Char Crosby, both members of the Thompson Historical Advisory Committee, the volunteer group that spearheaded the marker project.

Music will be provided at the ceremony by bagpiper Stu Haskell.

The dedication is only the start of the day's activities. Afterwards, everyone will adjourn to the nearby Thompson Township Hall for refreshments and a special program, which will begin at 4 p.m.

The keynote speaker will be Wisconsin author Rochelle Pennington, who wrote two books about the Rouse Simmons: "The Historic Christmas Tree Ship: A True Story of Faith, Hope and Love" and "The Christmas Tree Ship: The

Story of Captain Santa."

Also on hand will be Dr. Thomas Nolan, Glenn Longacre of the National Archives Great Lakes Museum in Chicago, and local resident Eris Webb, whose grandmother was Kate Squires, a well-known Thompson midwife.

Other attendees will include Upper Peninsula musician and author Carl Behrend, who wrote a song about the Rouse Simmons and a recent novel inspired by the vessel's story.

Honored guests will include William Ehling, the grandson of Rouse Simmons captain Hermann Schuenemann; Kent Bellrichard, the diver who found the wreck of the Simmons in 1971; diver Jim Brotz, who restored the wheel of the schooner, which is now on display at the Rogers Street Fishing Museum in Two Rivers, Wis.; diver Steve Radovan, and Peter Scotland of the Wisconsin Marine Historical Society.

The Thompson marker is one of seven being dedicated around the state this fall.

According to the Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries, new historical

plaques were dedicated earlier this month in downstate Jackson, Marshall and Macomb County. Others will be unveiled in the coming weeks in the Lower Michigan communities of Hartland, Center Line and Imlay City.

The Thompson Historical Advisory Committee has been working on the marker project for several years, carrying out a fund-raising campaign, gathering all the necessary information, and consulting with the Michigan Historical Commission, Department of Environmental Quality and Department of Natural Resources, ultimately winning approval for the marker and the site.

Monetary donations were received from the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians and a number of local residents. Other contributions included labor and materials for the site preparation and installation.

With the marker in place, the committee hopes to continue raising money and making improvements at the access site, some day adding other interpretive signs and amenities.