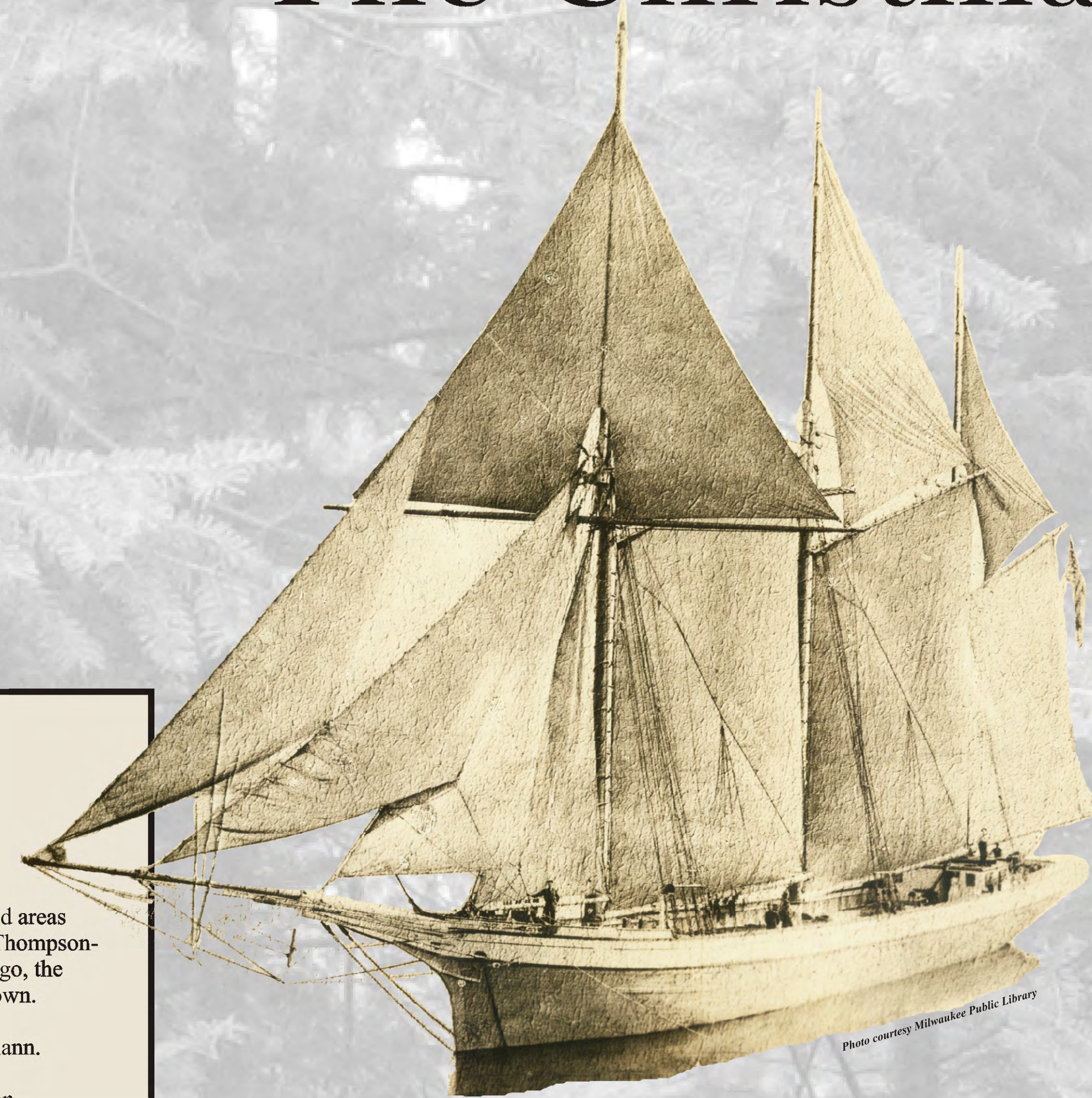


The Christmas Tree Ship

Captain Herman Schuenemann was born in Algoma, Wisconsin in 1865 to German immigrants. He began his career on the Great Lakes at an early age. He married Miss Barbara Schindel on April 9, 1891, and they had three daughters, Elsie and twins, Hazel & Pearl. Captain Schuenemann was well liked and respected in the community of Thompson, a frequent guest in local homes and loved by the children for the treats he carried for them in his pockets.

In 1910, Captin Schuenemann bought an interest in the *Rouse Simmons*. Although this vessel was used primarily to haul lumber, the last trip of the season was reserved for bringing Christmas trees to his home port of Chicago. Nicknamed "Captain Santa", the people of Chicago would line the Clark Street Bridge waiting for their first glimpse of the schooner, which would have a tree tied to the highest mast.

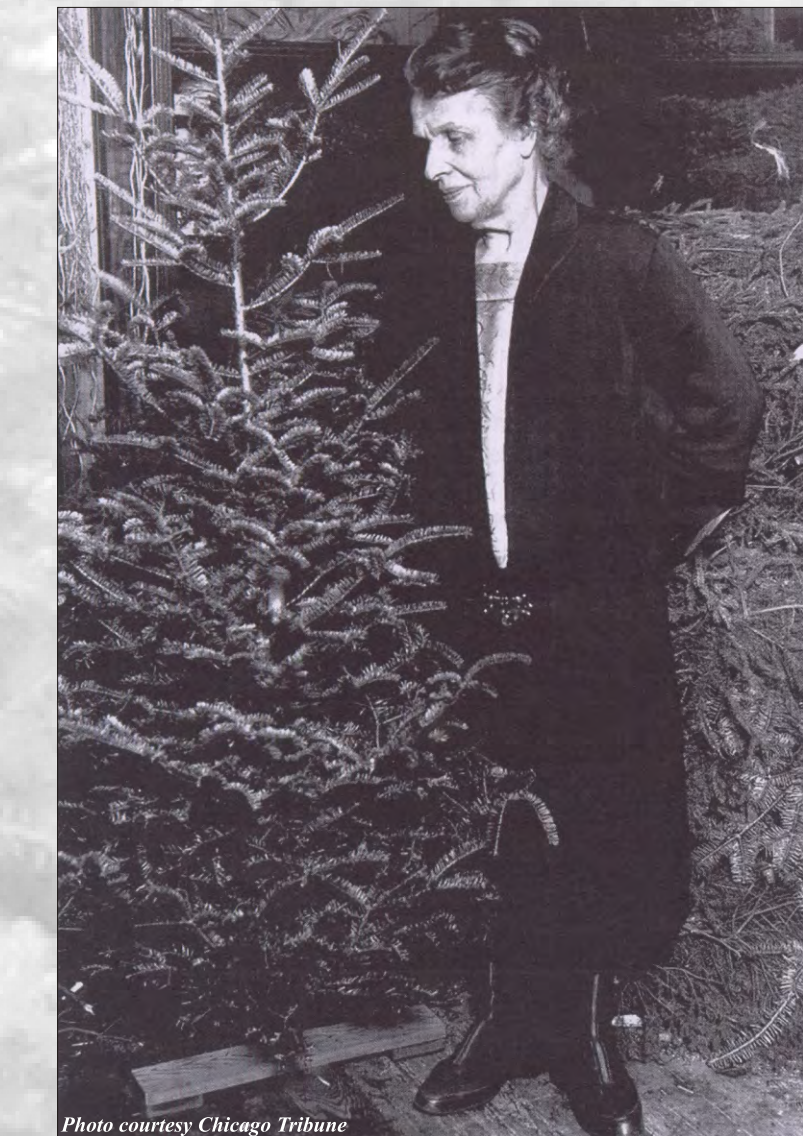
During the late afternoon of November 22, 1912, the Captain gave orders to depart the Thompson docks with the *Rouse Simmons* filled with Christmas trees. The barometer was falling and the winds were rising. Those watching on shore and many of the crew warned the Captain not to set sail. Rats were seen leaving the ship the evening before, yet the Captain pressed on. His decision would prove to be fatal. The *Rouse Simmons* sank off the coast of Two Rivers, Wisconsin. All hands were lost.



Oldest known photograph of the *Rouse Simmons*, circa 1884.



Captain Herman Schuenemann
1865 - 1912



Mrs. Barbara Schuenemann



Miss Elsie Schuenemann



Twins, Hazel and Pearl Schuenemann



Wooden anchor recovered from the *Rouse Simmons*. The schooner was discovered on October 30, 1971 by diver Kent Bellichard, fifty-nine years after she went missing. The anchor, weighing around one ton, was raised to the surface in 1973. It is on permanent display at the Milwaukee Yacht Club in Wisconsin.



In 1999, a fisherman found the wheel in his nets about 1½ miles from where the ship was found. Jim Brotz, a diver who is well known for his conservation of artifacts, worked nearly three years to restore it to its current condition. The wheel went on display in 2003 at the Rogers Street Fishing Museum in Two Rivers, Wisconsin.

This map highlights some of the important ports of call and areas associated with the Christmas Tree Ship story. From the Thompson-Manistique area, south to the Clark Street Bridge in Chicago, the *Rouse Simmons* and Captain Schuenemann were well known.

- Algoma, WI – 1865 – Birthplace of Herman Schuenemann.
- Kenosha, WI – Royal B. Tousley and Captain Ackerman contracted to have the schooner built. Mr. Rouse Simmons lent his financial support for the purchase, and the ship was given his name. His family later went on to start the Simmons Company, famous for bedding and furniture.
- Milwaukee, WI – 1868 – The schooner was constructed.
- Manistee, MI – 1868 – Maiden voyage of the *Rouse Simmons* from the shipyards of Milwaukee to the docks in Manistee for a load of lumber.
- Muskegon, MI – 1873 – Mr. Charles Hackley, a wealthy and noted citizen purchased the *Rouse Simmons*.
- Chicago, IL – Home of Captain & Mrs. Schuenemann and their family. The *Rouse Simmons* would sail to the Clark Street Bridge each November with a load of Christmas trees.
- Kewaunee, WI – 1912 – The crew from the Kewaunee Life Saving Station first sighted the distress flags from the *Rouse Simmons* and radioed the Two Rivers station.
- Two Rivers, WI – 1912 – The Two Rivers U.S. Life Saving Station made a heroic attempt to rescue the crew of the *Rouse Simmons*, but despite their best efforts, the schooner was never spotted.
- Thompson, MI – 1912 – Last Port of Call.

Ship Facts

Built: 1868 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Overall Length: 127 feet

Breadth of Beam: 27 feet 6 inches

Depth of Hold: 8 feet 1 inch

Weight: ~220 tons

Cost to Build: \$17,000

Owners in 1868: Royal B. Tousley & Captain Ackerman of Kenosha, WI

Financed by: Mr. Rouse Simmons

Capacity: The schooner could carry up to 350,000 board feet of timber or 16,000 bushels of grain at one time. It was one of the largest boats on the Great Lakes at that time.

Maiden Voyage: From Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Manistee, Michigan for lumber

Age When it Sank: 44 years

Owners in 1912: Mannes J. Bonner ¼ interest
Herman Schuenemann 1/8 interest
Charles Nelson 1/8 interest

Although the majority of the ship's life was spent hauling lumber, the vessel became tragically remembered for her last cargo, Christmas trees.