



BICENTENNIAL SERIES

A history of Thompson Twp. & Village of Thompson

Mrs. Hasell Osterhout

*Ullabent
Lefly*

Notes on the Christmas Tree Ship

The Rouse Simmons, an excellent three-masted schooner, was built three years after the Civil War by Alan McClelland for the Kenosha shipping interests in Milwaukee. She was 125 feet in length, 27½ feet across her beam and had a hold of slightly over eight feet.

In her early years, the Rouse Simmons hauled lumber from Manistee to Chicago. The schooner was purchased in 1873 by Charles H. Hackley of Muskegon who added her to his fleet. In later years she was owned by her captains.

The Rouse Simmons was similar to a tramp schooner, picking up cargoes of logs, posts, and lumber wherever she found a hauling job. Once she sunk in the Traverse Bay area and was raised and repaired. Another time she fought a violent gale, lost her masts, and was helpless several miles out in the lake when rescued.

Since the early 1880's, the Schuenemann family had been bringing Christmas trees to Chicago. In 1898 August "Christmas tree" Schuenemann lost his life when his small schooner carrying a load of

evergreens floundered off Glencoe, Illinois.

Herman, his brother, took over the trade and hauled Christmas trees to Chicago. His ship became known as "Chicago's Christmas tree ship".

In early October, 1912, the Rouse Simmons cleared Chicago for the annual trip to Thompson. On November 22, she was ready for the return trip to Chicago. Late in the day after repeated warnings of foul weather, the schooner was towed into the lake by the tug Cisco. Members of the Cisco's crew were Dave Bouschor, captain; Ben Marks, engineer; Nels Bouschor lineman, and Pete Voisine, fireman. The Rouse Simmons was last seen flying distress signals off Kewaunee, Wisconsin.

Captain Schuenemann's widow Barbara came back the next year. She hired trees cut and shipped them to Chicago. Her three daughters came with her. Mrs. Schuenemann continued the business for several years.

The Christmas tree business was very profitable. The only expense was salaries for the men who cut the trees. There were no landowners to be paid.