

MYSTERY OF ROUSE SIMMONS

HOW A BELOVED SCHOONER NAMED THE "CHRISTMAS TREE SHIP" SIMPLY DISAPPEARED ONLY TO BE DISCOVERED BY CHANCE DECADES LATER

BY JAMES RICHMOND

Various newspaper headlines noting the loss of the ship.



November can be a very difficult time on the Great Lakes. Back in 1912, some extremely violent storms had taken place in October but November 1912 began deceptively mild but for the Schuenemann Brothers (Herman and August) of Chicago, Illinois, November was a time when the company business made most of its profits. The Schuenemanns had an unusual occupation — for the Christmas season they would bring in loads of freshly-cut trees to their dock near Clark Street Bridge in Chicago and then sell the trees directly to eager buyers. This way, the Schuenemanns could cut out the “middleman” and sell to individual buyers. They even had a slogan — “Christmas Tree Ship: My Prices are the Lowest.” At that time, the trees sold between 50 cents and one dollar.

The enterprise was not without its hazards. During November 1898, August Schuenemann was aboard his two-masted 52-ton schooner named S.

By the time it had gained the title of the “Christmas Tree Ship,” the *Rouse Simmons* was considered by most to be a tramp freighter. Painting depicts the ship with a full load of trees on its final voyage.