

Ports and Portholes

November-December 2024

Volume 2, Issues 11 and 12



Thankful

Thankful for the
mariners at sea,

Thankful for ports of
peace and safety.

Thankful for the
prayers from the
shore,

That bring the
mariners home once
more.



Voyaging to Maritime Thanksgivings At Sea and Ashore

Over the centuries, mariners and their friends and families on shore have celebrated Thanksgiving in way as individual as ships and waves. Riding the waves on a voyage in and out of past, present, and future Thanksgivings gives us a glimpse of both tragic and happy Thanksgivings and Christmases and renewed gratitude for our own holiday. celebrations.



Welcome aboard the Bonhomme Richard for our voyage through Thanksgivings and Christmases of the past, present, and future.

Two Hundred Plus Years and Two Months Before Thanksgiving

Welcome aboard the Bonhomme Richard, which will take us on our voyage through Thanksgivings. The original Bonhomme Richard, christened Duc de Duras, in her early life was built in France in 1765, by the French East India Company for trade between France and Asia. As American Revolutionary War allies against the British, the French renamed her for Benjamin Franklin who at the times served as the American Commissioner of Paris. His Poor Richard's Almanack had been published in France as Les Maximes du Bonhomme Richard. King Louis XVI of France transferred the fortunes and command of the Bonhomme Richard into the hands of John Paul Jones on February 4, 1779, after French shipping magnate Jacques-Donatien Le Ray had loaned the ship to the United States.

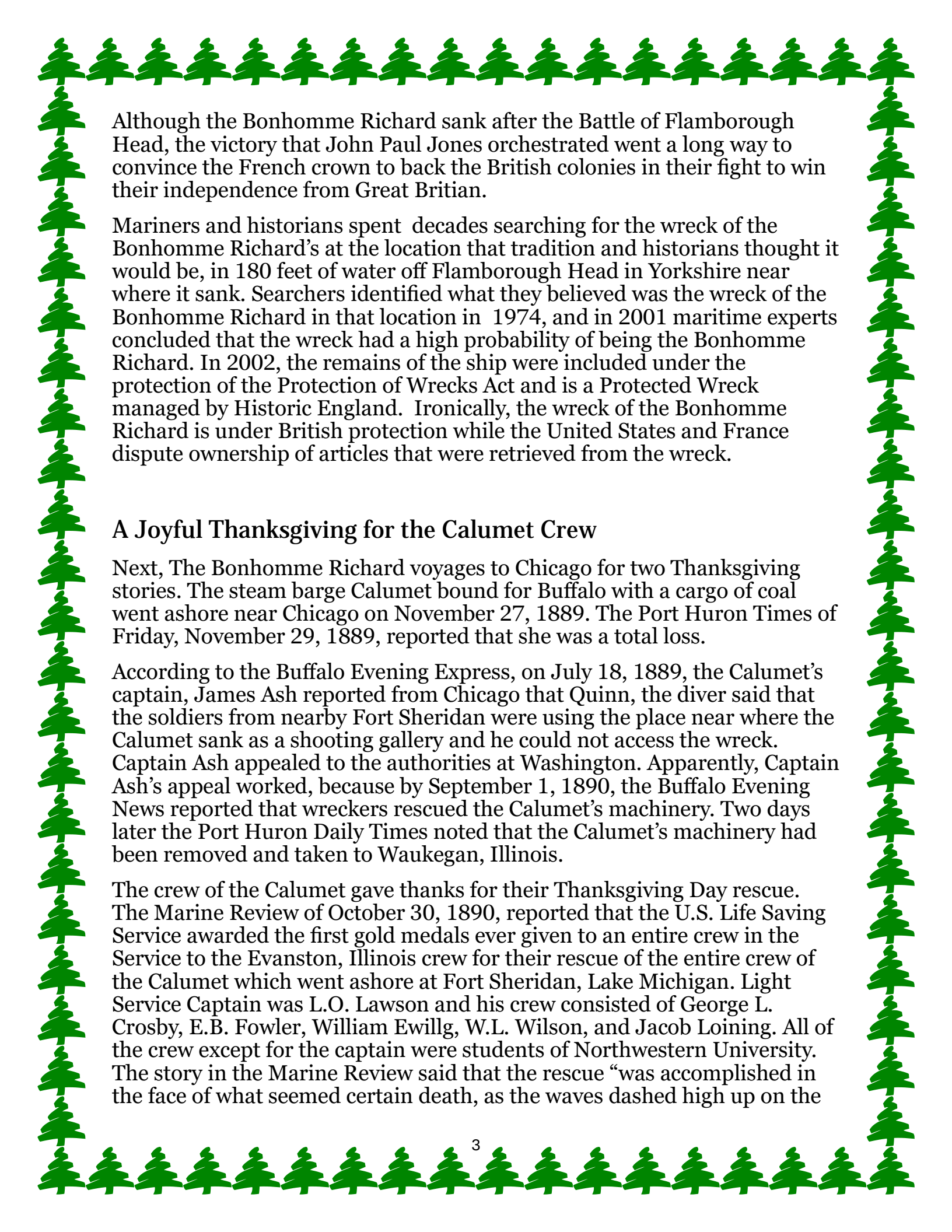
On June 19, 1779, Bonhomme Richard sailed from Brittany in western France alongside the USS Alliance, Pallas, Vengeance and Cerf, with troop transports and merchant ships to Bordeaux and on to engage the British in the Bay of Biscay, and the North Sea, taking sixteen merchant vessels as contraband.



On September 23, 1779, the Bonhomme Richard and her convoy encountered the Baltic Fleet of 41 sail protected by the convoy of the HMS Serapis and the hired armed ship Countness of Scarborough near Flamborough Head on the Yorkshire Coast of England. After a fierce four-hour long battle between the Bonhomme Richard and HMS Serapis in which nearly half of both of the crews of the Bonhomme

Richard and HMS Serapis died, the British commander of the Serapis demanded that Jone Paul Jones surrender. Jones answered, "Sir, I have not yet begun to fight!"

Eventually, John Paul Jones managed to lash the dueling ships together which made the Serapis unable to maneuver effectively and allowed him to use the larger size and more numerous crew of the Bonhomme Richard to defeat the Serapis. The British captain surrendered at about 10:30 p.m. but his surrender did not save the Bonhomme Richard from sinking. Badly damaged, burning, and leaking the crews efforts to save her were unsuccessful and about 36 hours after the Serapis surrendered at 11:00 a.m. on September 25, 1779, the Bonhomme Richard slipped beneath the waves. John Paul Jones sailed the Serapis to the Dutch United Provinces to be repaired.



Although the Bonhomme Richard sank after the Battle of Flamborough Head, the victory that John Paul Jones orchestrated went a long way to convince the French crown to back the British colonies in their fight to win their independence from Great Britain.

Mariners and historians spent decades searching for the wreck of the Bonhomme Richard's at the location that tradition and historians thought it would be, in 180 feet of water off Flamborough Head in Yorkshire near where it sank. Searchers identified what they believed was the wreck of the Bonhomme Richard in that location in 1974, and in 2001 maritime experts concluded that the wreck had a high probability of being the Bonhomme Richard. In 2002, the remains of the ship were included under the protection of the Protection of Wrecks Act and is a Protected Wreck managed by Historic England. Ironically, the wreck of the Bonhomme Richard is under British protection while the United States and France dispute ownership of articles that were retrieved from the wreck.

A Joyful Thanksgiving for the Calumet Crew

Next, The Bonhomme Richard voyages to Chicago for two Thanksgiving stories. The steam barge Calumet bound for Buffalo with a cargo of coal went ashore near Chicago on November 27, 1889. The Port Huron Times of Friday, November 29, 1889, reported that she was a total loss.

According to the Buffalo Evening Express, on July 18, 1889, the Calumet's captain, James Ash reported from Chicago that Quinn, the diver said that the soldiers from nearby Fort Sheridan were using the place near where the Calumet sank as a shooting gallery and he could not access the wreck. Captain Ash appealed to the authorities at Washington. Apparently, Captain Ash's appeal worked, because by September 1, 1890, the Buffalo Evening News reported that wreckers rescued the Calumet's machinery. Two days later the Port Huron Daily Times noted that the Calumet's machinery had been removed and taken to Waukegan, Illinois.

The crew of the Calumet gave thanks for their Thanksgiving Day rescue. The Marine Review of October 30, 1890, reported that the U.S. Life Saving Service awarded the first gold medals ever given to an entire crew in the Service to the Evanston, Illinois crew for their rescue of the entire crew of the Calumet which went ashore at Fort Sheridan, Lake Michigan. Light Service Captain was L.O. Lawson and his crew consisted of George L. Crosby, E.B. Fowler, William Ewillg, W.L. Wilson, and Jacob Loining. All of the crew except for the captain were students of Northwestern University. The story in the Marine Review said that the rescue "was accomplished in the face of what seemed certain death, as the waves dashed high up on the



perpendicular clay cliffs, down which the lifeboat was lowered by the soldiers of the fort.”

A Sad Thanksgiving Day for Mrs. Emma Smith

The Detroit Free Press of November 30, 1900, told the story of how Mrs. Emma Smith, the wife of William E. Smith, the Mate of the Maumee Valley spent Thanksgiving. Mrs. Smith’s joyful Thanksgiving Day preparations turned to sorrow when she learned that husband William, the Mate of the Maumee Valley, which had grounded at Peele Point in Lake Erie had perished with the rest of his shipmates.

Later Emma would learn that the crew had lashed themselves in the rigging to try to keep from being swept away by the powerful waves, but all of them had frozen to death waiting for help that could not reach them, Captain Hackett in the Canadian tug Home Rule had made several unsuccessful attempts to rescue the crew.

Mrs. Smith had not seen the dispatches or heard the story of the Maumee’s sinking. She spent the day before Thanksgiving anxiously pacing from window to window of their house at 402 Chicago Avenue West, watching for William and listening for the sound of his joyful homecoming welcome. When she heard a step on the stairway, she ran to open the door with a welcoming smile on her lips. She smiled for a stranger who gave her a tragic message. Her husband’s ship had gone down with no survivors. Instead of celebrating Thanksgiving with William, Emma Smith spent her Thanksgiving grieving while kind neighbors cared for her.

Born in Leland County, Michigan into a farm family, William had run away to sea at age eleven. He shipped as an ordinary seaman in the days when navigation on the lakes matched the cruelty of salt water press gangs and he bore the evidence of that cruelty from head to foot. He had scars on his body from head to toe administered by ferocious and not always sober officers wielding their belaying pins.

Mate William Smith saved many sailors from wrecks and nearly starved himself at least two times while he perched on the rigging of a disabled ship waiting rescue as he had with fatal results on the Maumee Valley. In the terrific storm in 1881 which wrecked the Edith L. off Mackinac Island

he swam three miles to land. He was the only surviving member of the crew.

Although Emma's husband William was only 35 years old when he died, he had spent 24 years following a sailor's life. He spent the last three months in Toledo, Ohio, and Buffalo, New York sailing with his old captain Henry Scanlon, who had talked him into leaving Chicago.

A few weeks before his death, William had written a letter to Emma telling her that the Maumee Valley would arrive in Toledo on Sunday and that he would be home Wednesday afternoon or night to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday. The Smiths had no children, so they planned to enjoy a landlubber holiday for two, and Emma had been busy preparing a Thanksgiving feast for William's return.

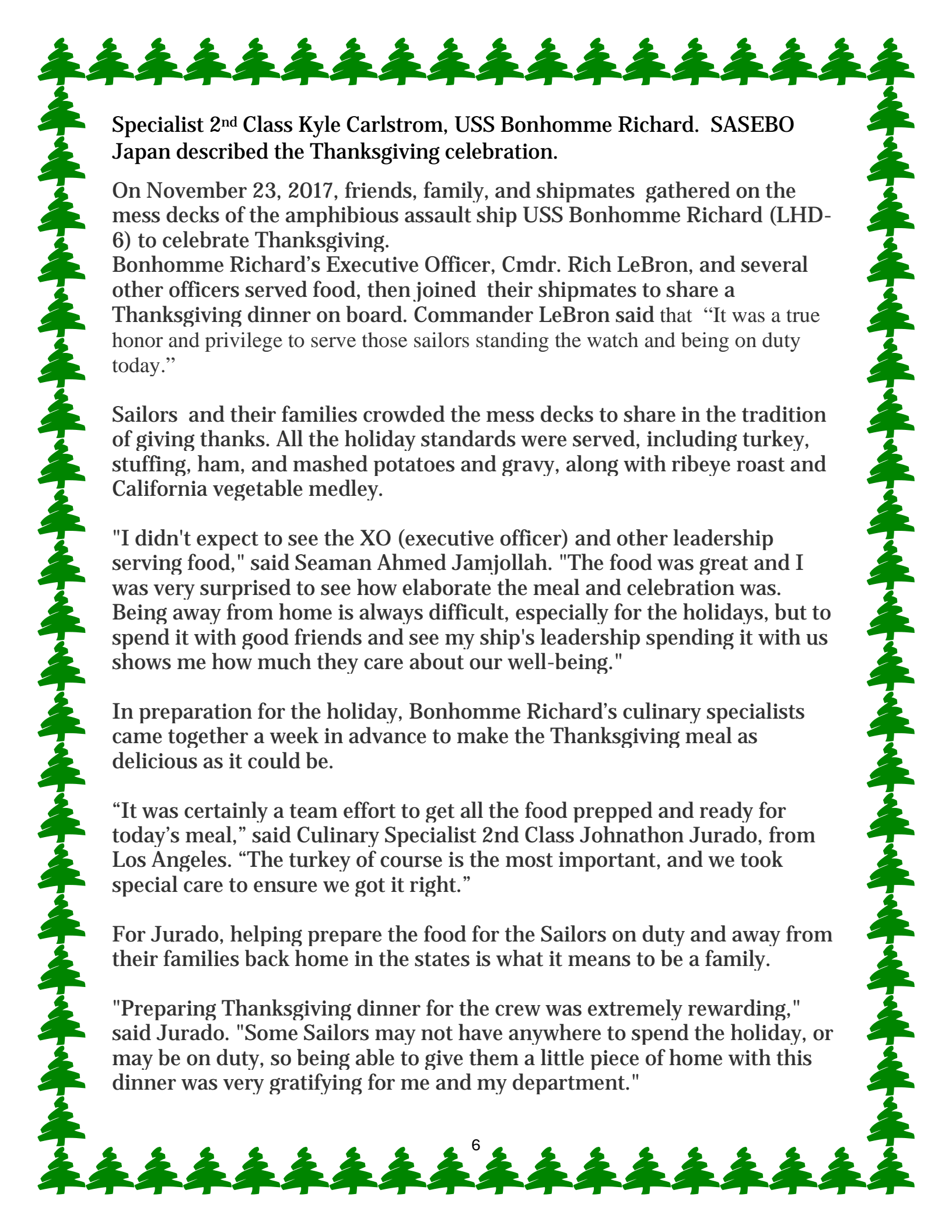
Ironically William Smith and Miss Emma Warren, daughter of a farmer from Dodge County, Minnesota, had met aboard a schooner. Emma left home in 1890 to visit relatives in Chicago. Then twenty-year-old Emma was suffering from poor health and her father bought her passage on a sailing vessel, thinking that a lake trip would improve her spirits.

Twenty First Century Bonhomme Richard Sailors Celebrate Thanksgiving



The patriarch Bonhomme Richard sailed through seas of time to meet one of its descendants on November 23, 2017.

A report based on a story by Mass Communication



Specialist 2nd Class Kyle Carlstrom, USS Bonhomme Richard. SASEBO Japan described the Thanksgiving celebration.

On November 23, 2017, friends, family, and shipmates gathered on the mess decks of the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD-6) to celebrate Thanksgiving.

Bonhomme Richard's Executive Officer, Cmdr. Rich LeBron, and several other officers served food, then joined their shipmates to share a Thanksgiving dinner on board. Commander LeBron said that "It was a true honor and privilege to serve those sailors standing the watch and being on duty today."

Sailors and their families crowded the mess decks to share in the tradition of giving thanks. All the holiday standards were served, including turkey, stuffing, ham, and mashed potatoes and gravy, along with ribeye roast and California vegetable medley.

"I didn't expect to see the XO (executive officer) and other leadership serving food," said Seaman Ahmed Jamjollah. "The food was great and I was very surprised to see how elaborate the meal and celebration was. Being away from home is always difficult, especially for the holidays, but to spend it with good friends and see my ship's leadership spending it with us shows me how much they care about our well-being."

In preparation for the holiday, Bonhomme Richard's culinary specialists came together a week in advance to make the Thanksgiving meal as delicious as it could be.

"It was certainly a team effort to get all the food prepped and ready for today's meal," said Culinary Specialist 2nd Class Johnathon Jurado, from Los Angeles. "The turkey of course is the most important, and we took special care to ensure we got it right."

For Jurado, helping prepare the food for the Sailors on duty and away from their families back home in the states is what it means to be a family.

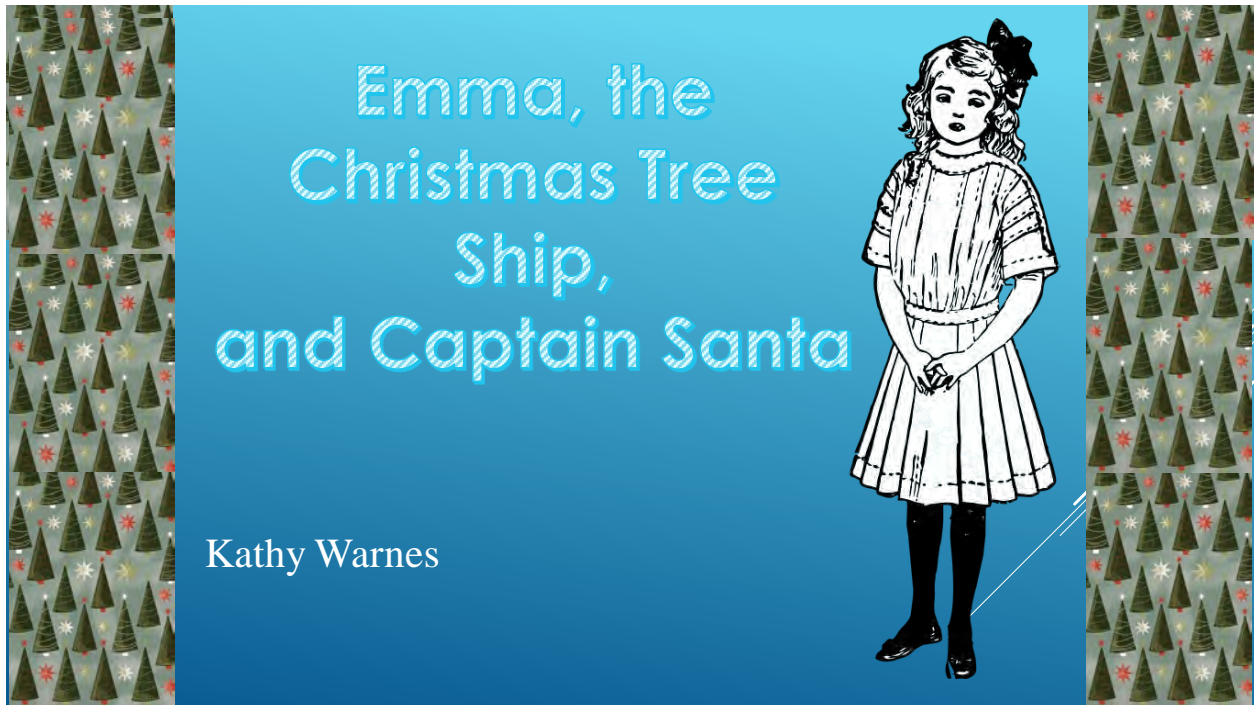
"Preparing Thanksgiving dinner for the crew was extremely rewarding," said Jurado. "Some Sailors may not have anywhere to spend the holiday, or may be on duty, so being able to give them a little piece of home with this dinner was very gratifying for me and my department."

Christmas Cheer

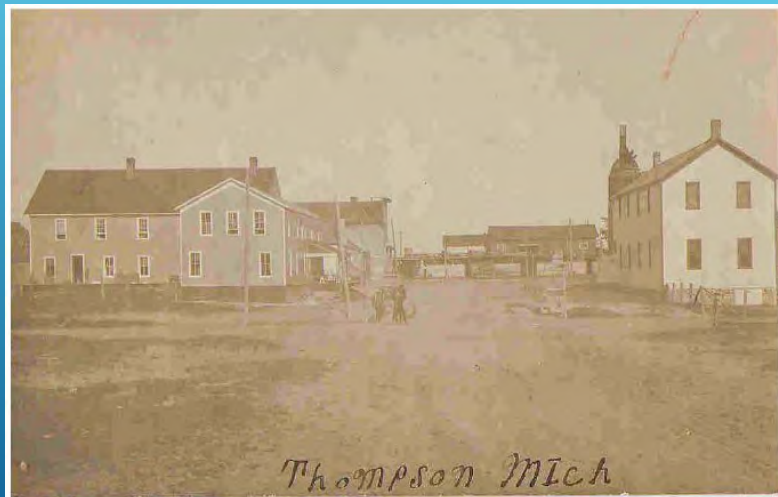


The Lake Erie. wind and snow,
Join forces and dance and blow,
It's the time of the year
To celebrate Christmas cheer.
Forget the storm of whys,
Shake the snow from your eyes,
Tell people asking what the harm,
Of Christmas cheer where it's warm.
That Christmas is a state of mind,
You can create it any place and time.

Emma, the Christmas Tree Ship and Captain Santa



November 1911,
Thompson, Michigan



Yip Yap! Spotty jumped up and down at Emma's feet, dancing like the snowflakes in the air. Splat!! The November snowball that Emma aimed at her brother John hit his elbow with a satisfying smack. Emma watched John bend down and grab a handful of snow. She admired the flash of his red mittens as he molded the snow into a return snowball, and she ducked as he threw it at her. It landed on top of a pile of evergreen trees stacked high on the wooden dock walking into Lake Michigan.



► A three masted schooner with a nameplate that said the Rouse Simmons was tied up next to the pile of Christmas trees. John and Emma stood at the edge of the dock, staring at the pile of Christmas trees. She imagined a wooden star like the one on their Christmas tree at home rested in one of the trees, poking pointed fingers against the sky.



The Christmas Star, a symbol of hope,” Emma said, hugging Spotty.



John stuck out his tongue at her. “The star’s at home in our tree. There’s nothing in the air but snow!” Spotty barked again, chasing the snowflakes whirling through the air. Emma blinked. There was no star, but the pile of evergreen trees hadn’t been there yesterday. “The Christmas tree ship! John, Captain Santa’s here! Maybe he heard something from Papa!” Emma shouted. Emma and John came down to the Thompson dock every day looking for Papa’s ship, the Ruby, which had disappeared on Lake Michigan nearly a year ago.





► After awhile, Mama had stopped coming to the dock, especially during the winter blizzards, but Emma and John came down to the dock every day. This Michigan November blizzard had frosted the dock like Mama’s white sugar frosting on her chocolate cakes and piled up drifts along the wooden boardwalks in Thompson. Thwack!! This time John’s snowball hit Emma, smacking her arm so hard that it hurt. John’s blue eyes blazed at her and his brown hair stuck up like the needles of a Christmas tree.

“You know Papa’s never coming back. The Ruby disappeared, remember?”

Emma rubbed her arm and stuck out her tongue at John. Spotty licked her sore arm. “I know. But Mama says not to give up hope and I’m not giving up hope. We put the wooden star we painted on our Christmas tree, remember? We painted it blue and red and green and yellow so everyone will see it and feel hope, remember?”

John punched Emma in her snowball arm. “You might as well face the truth, Emma. Papa’s not coming home. We have to be realistic.”





“Who told you that, John?”

“Nobody told me. I figured it out. Lake Michigan is big and deep and when it swallows a ship the ship stays swallowed.”

Emma gulped and her heart sank. “What happens to the people on ship?” “

“Paul says they stay on the bottom with the ship until the waves grab them and push them home.”

Emma scowled. “I don’t care what Paul says and I don’t care how many Christmas trees he cuts! He’s not our Papa and he never will be!”



The Christmas tree on top toppled off and hit the water with a splash, but instead of sinking, the Lake Michigan waves snatched it and it rode the waves in flashes of green. “Paul says it won’t happen. He says Papa is gone for good.”

“Papa will be like the Christmas tree, and the wooden star that you and Papa made together. Don’t you remember making the star?” Emma said. “If we have hope and faith, Papa will ride the waves and come home to us.”



“You’re just being a stupid girl!” John threw another snowball at Emma and she threw one at him, hitting him in the back. Then she started to run away with John following her, another snowball in his hand. Spotty dashed along behind them. Suddenly, thud, whack! Emma ran into a soft surface with hard edges.



Captain Santa had buttoned up his navy pea coat with brass buttons over his trousers and shirt to keep out the chill November winds sweeping up and down Lake Michigan and swirling around the dock. Emma hugged Captain Santa’s pea coat. She hugged Captain Santa’s hard metal buttons. Emma hugged Captain Santa. Captain Santa bent over to hug Emma and she felt the tickle of his soft brown moustache. “Captain Santa, you’re back! Did you find Papa?”





“I searched Chicago for him, but I cannot say for sure that I have found him. I will keep hoping and searching,” Captain Santa said.

“Did you ask your daughters Elsie and Pearl to help you look?” Emma asked him.

“Ahhh, my daughters Elsie and Pearl,” Captain Santa said proudly. “Elsie is pretty as a Lake Michigan sunset and faithful as a Christmas star.”

Pearl has as much energy as a violin, and she is pretty as a Christmas tree. They went down to the dock with me for weeks and we checked the crew of every ship that arrived. Your Papa has not come into port yet, but he might arrive tomorrow or even today. Now hurry and get your Mama!”



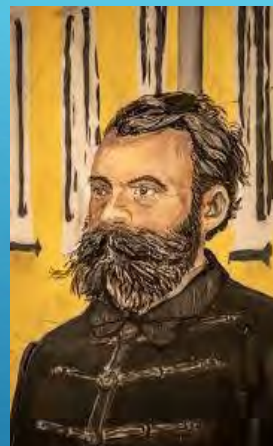
“Will you tell your daughters I said thank you? And I thank you, too.” Emma hugged Captain Santa again, so hard that his cap fell off his head, landing in a snowbank.

Laughing, the Captain picked up his hat, brushing the snow off of it. “Emma, run home to your Mama and tell her I have something in my Christmas tree ship for her to see. Tell your Mama to come quickly down to the dock!”

Emma jumped up. “I’ll tell Mama you are bringing us more hope.” Captain Santa smiled. “I might be bringing you more than hope. Now hurry and get your Mama!”



Captain Santa plowed his way through the snow making his way over to the pile of Christmas trees and Emma saw three men come from the Christmas tree ship and start loading the Christmas trees onboard the Christmas tree ship. One of the men had brown hair, a brown beard and a long nose that pointed down at the end. Emma blinked.





The man's hair and nose looked like Papa's hair and nose. Emma picked up her skirts, shook the snow off of them. "Come on Spotty, it's time to go home and tell Mama I saw a sailor that looks like Papa."

John shoved Emma and ran ahead of her. "Papa's not coming back. I'll tell Mama it's time to marry Paul."

Emma scrambled up and picked up Spotty and put him inside her coat. She ran after John. "No, you won't and no she won't!"

Emma and John ran through Thompson, hurrying toward their cottage on the outskirts of town. They ran past the general store with the wooden barrels of flour in the window. They ran past the Catholic Church, the barber shop, and down and then off the boardwalks in front of two saloons. As they reached the edge of town they ran past the Thompson house where E.L. Thompson, president of the Delta Lumber Company, lived with his family





He only charges 25 cents to 50 cents for them when he sells them,” Emma said. “He charges his wealthy customers more. I’ve seen him charge them as much as \$2.00 for a Christmas tree,” John said. “We don’t have many wealthy customers in Thompson,” Emma said. “Mr. Thompson is wealthy,” John said. “That’s why he owns the lumber company.” “But we aren’t wealthy. We have to pay Mr. Thompson rent,” Emma said. “That’s why Mama takes in washing and does sewing for rich ladies.”

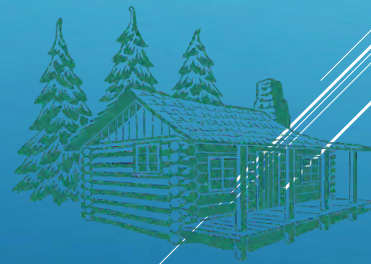
John sighed. “She doesn’t make enough to pay the rent every month. She needs somebody to help her.”

“I’ll help her,” Emma said. “I’ll do washing in the harbor for rich ladies. I’ll sell Christmas trees all year around. Spotty will help me. I’ll do what it takes to help Mama pay the rent.” “She can marry, Paul. He will help pay the rent.”

“Emma stopped running right in front of John. John bumped into her, nearly knocking her over. She stood with her right hand on her right hip, her left hand holding Spotty close to her heart. “Do you really want Mama to marry Paul to pay the rent?” she demanded.

John sighed again, shaking his head. “I just don’t want to live in the woods. Mr. Thompson built some shacks for his Christmas tree cutters. I stayed in a shack with Papa before he sailed on the Ruby for the last time. Remember that weekend Papa and I spent in the woods?”

“I remember that Mama and I cleaned the entire house while you two were gone and I helped her make chicken and dumplings for dinner. That’s Papa’s favorite.”



“The wind blew through that shack like smoke blowing from the train engine when it comes through Thompson. We had fish for breakfast, midday meal, and supper. The only way we kept warm was making a wooden star for the Christmas tree. I was so glad when Papa decided to come home that I ran most of the way. I was so cold that I shivered most of the way.”



John shivered. "I'm cold now. Let's hurry home."

Emma shivered too. "How did Papa keep warm?" "Papa told me he has a warm heart, that's how he keeps warm. Hurry up, Emma. It's cold out here."

John started running again, and this time Emma kept up with him. They reached the red front door of the small cottage perched at the edge of the pine forest. A square of evergreen trees filled up most of the backyard. As she sped by, Emma saw the tired, thin cornstalks and the wilted tomato vines left over from last summer's garden and then she noticed that the square of evergreen trees behind the garden had been cut in half. "What happened to the Christmas trees?" Emma asked.



The red door opened and Mama stood there shaking in the cold. "The men cut them while you were at school. Hurry inside and close the door, children. It's cold out here." Mama pulled her yellow wool shawl more snugly around her shoulders and patted her black hair more snugly around her ears. "I told Captain Santa he could have these special trees in honor of Papa and the men cut them and took them down to the dock yesterday."

"But Mama, I put the special star on the biggest tree!" John said.

Mama patted his shoulder. "What special star, John?"

"The special star that Papa and I made at the lumber camp. We made it out of wood before he went away."



“The star is still there,” Mama said. “It will help Captain Santa find your Papa.”

“Captain Santa!” Emma said. She remembered the urgency in Captain Santa’s voice “Tell your Mama to come quickly down to the dock.”

“Captain Santa said to hurry down to the dock right now,” Emma told Mama.

“Captain Santa said to come as fast as you can,” John said.

Mama threw off her yellow wool shawl and pulled on her red wool cloak. She drew the hood over her head and pulled on a pair of black rubber boots that Emma knew belonged to Paul. Emma scowled at the black rubber boots and made it a point to step on the toe of the right black boot. She also made it a point to tuck Spotty under her coat.

“Ouch!” Mama said. “Please watch your step, Emma.”

“Why are you wearing Paul’s black rubber boots, Mama?”

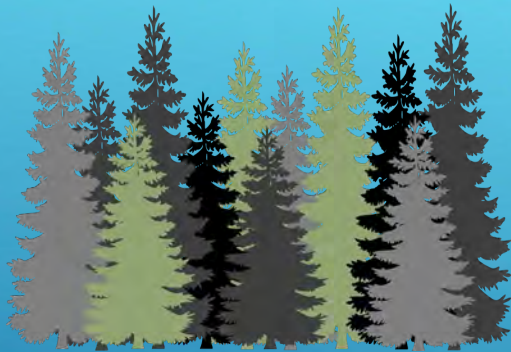
“He left them here the other day. I’m just using them to keep my feet warm and dry. John can take the boots back to him tomorrow. Let’s get to the dock!”




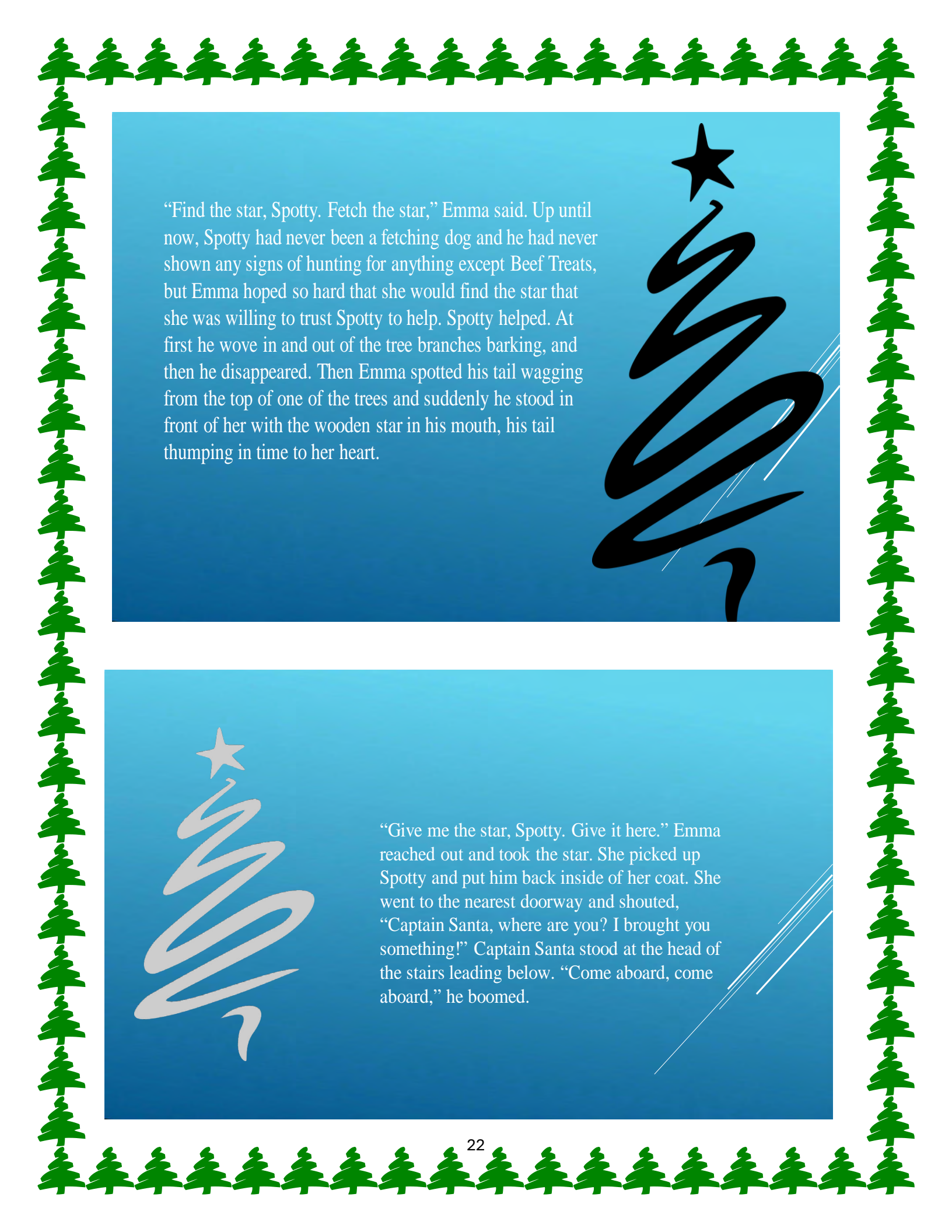


Mama slammed the front door behind them and she and Emma and John hurried back through Thompson toward the dock. Emma saw that Mama ran slowly because the boots were too big for her and kept falling off her feet. Mama had to stop and pull them back on several times. Just a few paces ahead of them, Emma raced to the Christmas tree ship. “Captain Santa, Captain Santa, we hurried back as fast as we could hurry. Here we are!”


Captain Santa appeared on the deck of the Christmas tree ship, his moustache waving back and forth in the wind. “It’s Michigan blizzard cold out here,” he said. “Come aboard and we’ll sit in front of the heating stove and talk.”



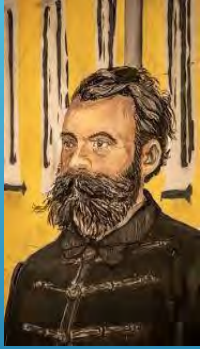
Mama and John hurried aboard and disappeared below deck with Captain Santa. Emma lagged behind them on deck. She had to find their Christmas trees and the wooden star ornament. She stared at the stacks of Christmas trees. “Where should I start looking?” she asked Spotty, who worked his way out of her jacket and landed on the deck with a thud. Spotty didn’t answer. He just ran over to the nearest pile of Christmas trees and started to travel through them. Emma watched his spots making a colorful pattern against the backdrop of green trees.



“Find the star, Spotty. Fetch the star,” Emma said. Up until now, Spotty had never been a fetching dog and he had never shown any signs of hunting for anything except Beef Treats, but Emma hoped so hard that she would find the star that she was willing to trust Spotty to help. Spotty helped. At first he wove in and out of the tree branches barking, and then he disappeared. Then Emma spotted his tail wagging from the top of one of the trees and suddenly he stood in front of her with the wooden star in his mouth, his tail thumping in time to her heart.



“Give me the star, Spotty. Give it here.” Emma reached out and took the star. She picked up Spotty and put him back inside of her coat. She went to the nearest doorway and shouted, “Captain Santa, where are you? I brought you something!” Captain Santa stood at the head of the stairs leading below. “Come aboard, come aboard,” he boomed.



“I didn’t ask you to bring me anything. I told you I might have something for you,” he said. “I brought something for your daughters Elsie and Pearl,” Emma said. She held out the star to Captain Santa. Captain Santa took the star and put it in the pocket of his pea coat. I’ll call your Mama and brother to come and join us. And where is that noisy dog of yours? Emma reached inside of her coat for Spotty. She held him out for Captain Santa to see. “Good! I want all of you here to see if I got the right gift.” Captain Santa turned and shouted, “Ahoy down there. Come up for a talk.”



Emma watched the doorway and soon John and Mama pant their way onto the deck and stand next to Captain Santa. Captain Santa smiled at them all. Then he turned and shouted down the hatch, “Come on up now!” Spotty wriggled in Emma’s arms and barked furiously. A man appeared in the hatchway of the Christmas tree ship. Emma saw that it was the same man she had seen earlier on deck, the man who had brown hair, a brown beard and a nose that pointed down at the ends like Papa’s nose. Spotty jumped from Emma’s arms, ran over to the man, and jumped in his arms. Spotty gave the man a face washing with his tongue. “I remember you. You’re Spotty,” the man said

Emma couldn't believe her eyes, but her heart told her the truth. The man with the brown hair and curled down nose pulled a huge red bandana handkerchief from his pocket to wipe Spotty's kisses away.

Mama threw her arms around his neck and the man wiped away her tears with his handkerchief. John threw his arms around the man's legs. Spotty jumped out of the man's arms and ran back to Emma. He tugged at her coat, pulling her toward the man.



Emma couldn't move. She stood in her spot on the deck like she had grown roots as deep as a Christmas tree. She forced a question around the huge lump in her throat. "How did you find him?" she asked Captain Santa. "He found us at Spider Point Lighthouse. He asked if he could work his passage back to Thompson and I was glad to have an extra hand to help with the Christmas trees." Emma frowned. "Didn't you know he was our Papa?" she demanded.



Captain Santa pulled out three deck chairs, one for Mama and one for Papa and one for Emma. “Sit down and we’ll have the story,” he said. “John, you can find you a chair. Emma, you don’t look like you want to move yet and Spotty, you must be very tired. Why don’t you sit on Emma’s lap when she sits down?”

“I want to know why you didn’t know our Papa. Captain Santa knows everything.” Emma persisted.



“My heart knew, but my head had to be sure. He told me that the Ruby sank near Beaver Island and he washed ashore, nearly dead. The waves smacked him against the rocks and cut his head bad. The inside of his head was hurt too because he couldn’t remember who he was for a long time. “ Captain Santa pulled his moustache. “He remembered that he had a wife and two children and that he lived in Thompson, Michigan, but other details were still hazy.



“I remember Spotty,” the man said. “Pesky dog.” He smiled. “I remember my family, too.” “Where have you been all of this time, Papa?” John asked. “At the lighthouse,” Papa stammered. “The keeper and his wife helped me.” Mama put her arms around Papa. “I don’t care how you got here, Albert. You’re here. That’s all that matters!” John hugged Papa’s legs so hard that Papa gasped, “Take it easy, Johnny.” Emily walked slowly over to Papa. “Welcome back, Papa,” she said, closing her eyes as she hugged him tightly so he couldn’t get away a second time. “The Christmas star is a symbol of hope,” she whispered against Papa’s shoulder as Spotty danced around their feet.



Later that day, Captain Santa and his Christmas tree ship set sail from Thompson’s dock bound for Chicago with a load of Christmas trees. Emma, John, Mama, Papa and Spotty stood together on the dock. Emma watched the tall pine on the very top of the load of Christmas trees. She saw the wooden star on top wobbling back and forth with the movement of the Christmas tree ship, the sunlight glinting on its red, white, blue, and yellow colors that she and John had painted with hope. She waved until the Christmas tree ship disappeared over the Lake Michigan horizon.

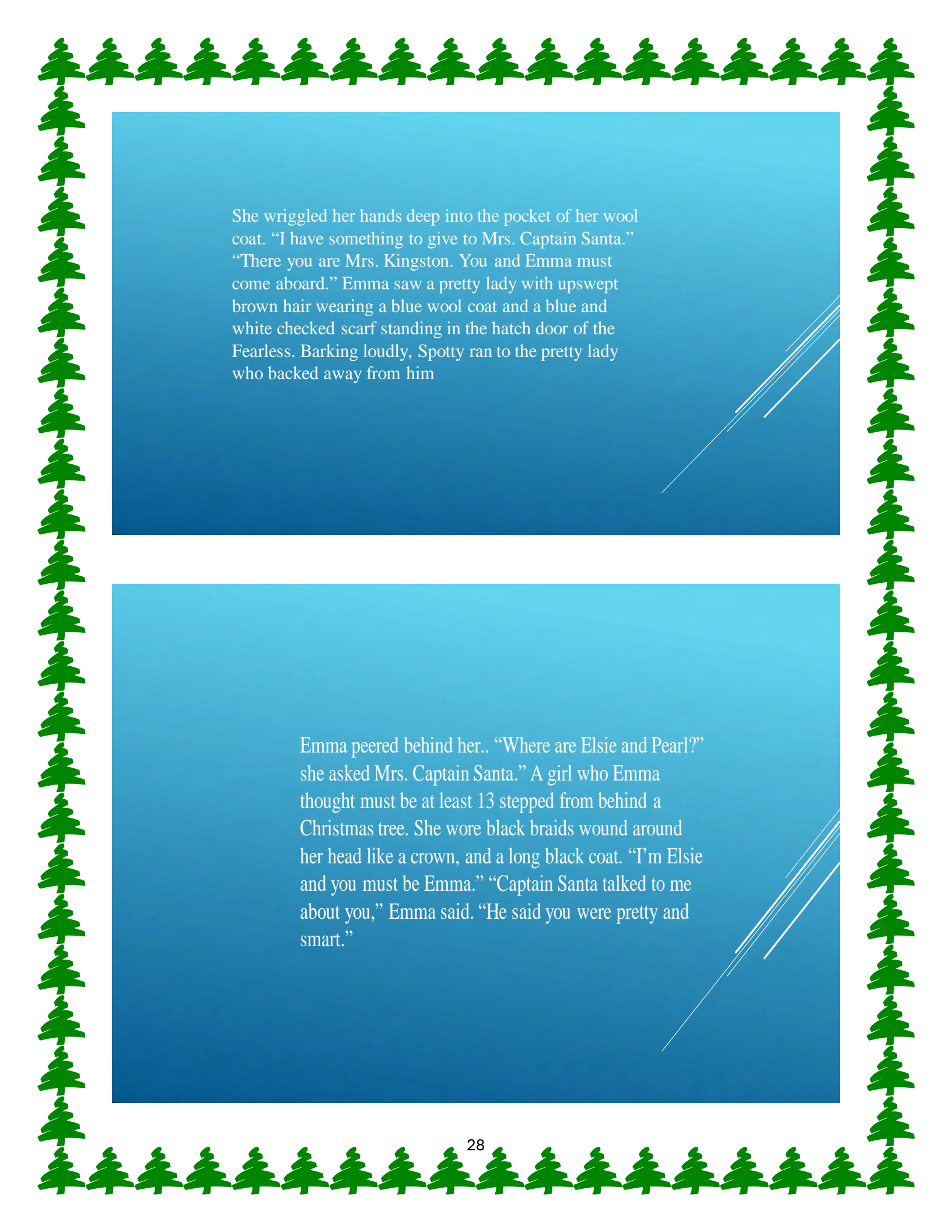


November 1913

One November later, Emma, Mama, and Spotty stood on the Thompson Dock watching John, Papa, and several other men loading Christmas trees into a three-masted wooden ship. “Her name is Fearless,” and her Captain and crew are fearless to match,” Mama said. “Mrs. Captain Santa is the captain and her daughters Elsie and Pearl are among the crew.”

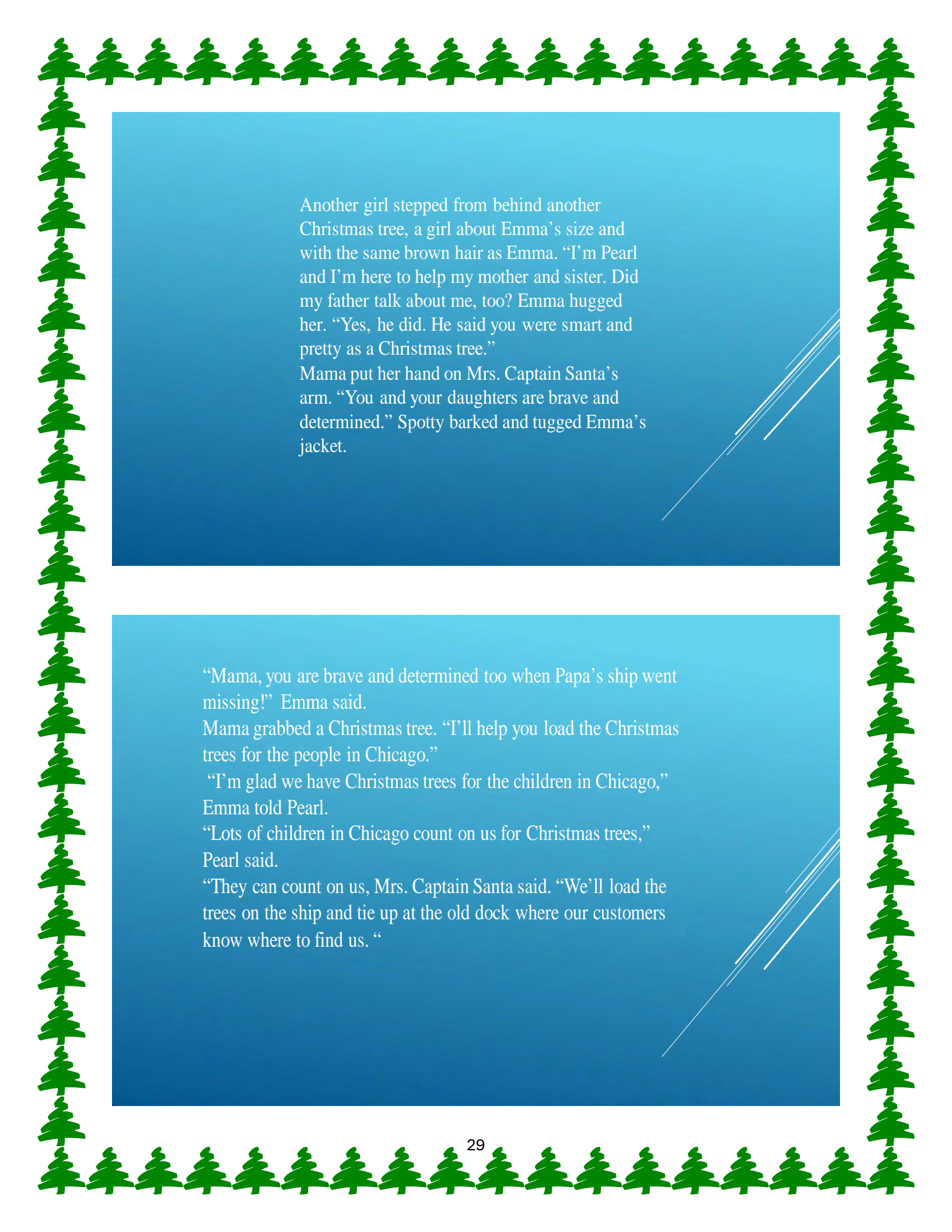
Emma danced up and down, partially with excitement and partially to keep the wind’s sharp teeth from biting through her coat. “I can hardly wait to see them!”

“Wait right here, Mrs. Captain Santa. I have to run home and get something for you.” Emma slipped and slid back to the house. Without taking off her coat, she rushed into the kitchen, snatched a wooden cookie cutter star from a cupboard drawer, and ran out of the door and down the hill again. Emma turned onto Mill Street, passed the North shore boarding house and the lumber mill and got to the dock just in time to find Mama and Mrs. Captain Santa deep in conversation.



She wriggled her hands deep into the pocket of her wool coat. “I have something to give to Mrs. Captain Santa.” “There you are Mrs. Kingston. You and Emma must come aboard.” Emma saw a pretty lady with upswept brown hair wearing a blue wool coat and a blue and white checked scarf standing in the hatch door of the Fearless. Barking loudly, Spotty ran to the pretty lady who backed away from him

Emma peered behind her.. “Where are Elsie and Pearl?” she asked Mrs. Captain Santa.” A girl who Emma thought must be at least 13 stepped from behind a Christmas tree. She wore black braids wound around her head like a crown, and a long black coat. “I’m Elsie and you must be Emma.” “Captain Santa talked to me about you,” Emma said. “He said you were pretty and smart.”




Another girl stepped from behind another Christmas tree, a girl about Emma's size and with the same brown hair as Emma. "I'm Pearl and I'm here to help my mother and sister. Did my father talk about me, too? Emma hugged her. "Yes, he did. He said you were smart and pretty as a Christmas tree."
Mama put her hand on Mrs. Captain Santa's arm. "You and your daughters are brave and determined." Spotty barked and tugged Emma's jacket.

"Mama, you are brave and determined too when Papa's ship went missing!" Emma said.
Mama grabbed a Christmas tree. "I'll help you load the Christmas trees for the people in Chicago."
"I'm glad we have Christmas trees for the children in Chicago," Emma told Pearl.
"Lots of children in Chicago count on us for Christmas trees," Pearl said.
"They can count on us, Mrs. Captain Santa said. "We'll load the trees on the ship and tie up at the old dock where our customers know where to find us. "

“Captain Santa’s Christmas Tree ship may be missing, but we aren’t. We are here and we will bring Christmas trees to Chicago.

Emma slipped something into Pearl’s hand. “From Captain Santa,” she said.

Emma and Pearl helped the crew load Christmas trees onto the Fearless. They loaded the last tree on deck and Mrs. Captain Santa and Elsie and Pearl stood at the rail and waved goodbye as the Fearless sailed out of the harbor.



A wooden star like the one on their Christmas tree at home rested in one of the trees, poking a pointed outline against the sky. “The Christmas star is a symbol of hope,” Emma said as she waved goodbye to Pearl, Elsie, and Mrs. Captain Santa. Spotty barked two short barks that sounded like Merry Christmas.



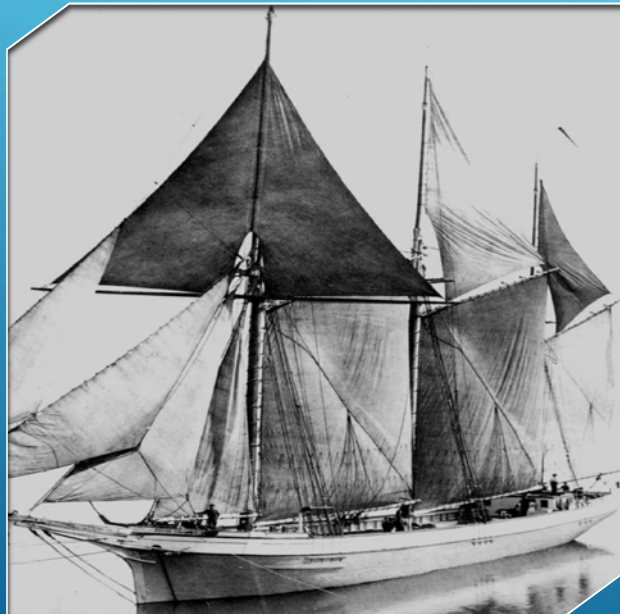
End Note

Although this story is fiction, it is based on a real ship and a real family. Captain Herman Schuenemann was the real Captain Santa who disappeared with his crew and ship, the Rouse Simmons, during a Lake Michigan storm on November 23, 1912. Captain Schuenemann and his brother August before him carried loads of Christmas trees from the woods of northern Michigan to Chicago for over 25 years before the Rouse Simmons sank.

The Rouse Simmons left Thompson, Michigan, a small Lake Michigan port, on November 22, 1912, bound for Chicago's Clark Street dock to sell the load of Christmas trees piled in its hold and high on its deck. It never reached Chicago. A year after the Rouse Simmons sank, workers loaded another ship, the Fearless, in Thompson, Michigan. Captain Schuenemann's wife Barbara and his daughters continued the Christmas tree ship tradition and carried Christmas trees to the Clark Street Dock in Chicago after Captain Schuenemann went down with the Rouse Simmons.

In a newspaper interview, Barbara Schuenemann said, “We’ll load the trees on the ship and tie up at the old dock, and our customers will come to us as they have in former years. They know where to find us. The Rouse is gone, her captain is gone, and her crew is gone, but Christmas will find the survivors still on deck and Chicago will have her Christmas trees, as long as the Schuenemann’s last.” Although schooners carried the final shipment of Christmas trees in 1920, Barbara Schuenemann and her daughters continued shipping Christmas trees from Northern Michigan and Wisconsin by rail and selling them to eager Chicago buyers until her death in 1933.

In 1971, Milwaukee scuba diver Gordon Kent Bellrichard discovered the wreck of the Rouse Simmons near Two Rivers, Wisconsin.



“I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In”

The modern lyrics are from an 1833 version by the English lawyer and antiquarian William Sandys, and consist of nine verses.



I saw three ships
come sailing in
On Christmas day,
on Christmas day;
I saw three ships
come sailing in
On Christmas day in
the morning.

And what was in
those ships all three,
On Christmas day,
on Christmas day?
And what was in
those ships all three,
On Christmas day in
the morning?

Our Saviour Christ and His Lady,
On Christmas day, on Christmas day;
Our Saviour Christ and His Lady,
On Christmas day in the morning.

Pray whither sailed those ships all three,
On Christmas day, on Christmas day?
Pray whither sailed those ships all three,
On Christmas day in the morning?

O they sailed into Bethlehem,
On Christmas day, on Christmas day;
O they sailed into Bethlehem,
On Christmas day in the morning.

And all the bells on earth shall ring,
On Christmas day, on Christmas day;
And all the bells on earth shall ring,

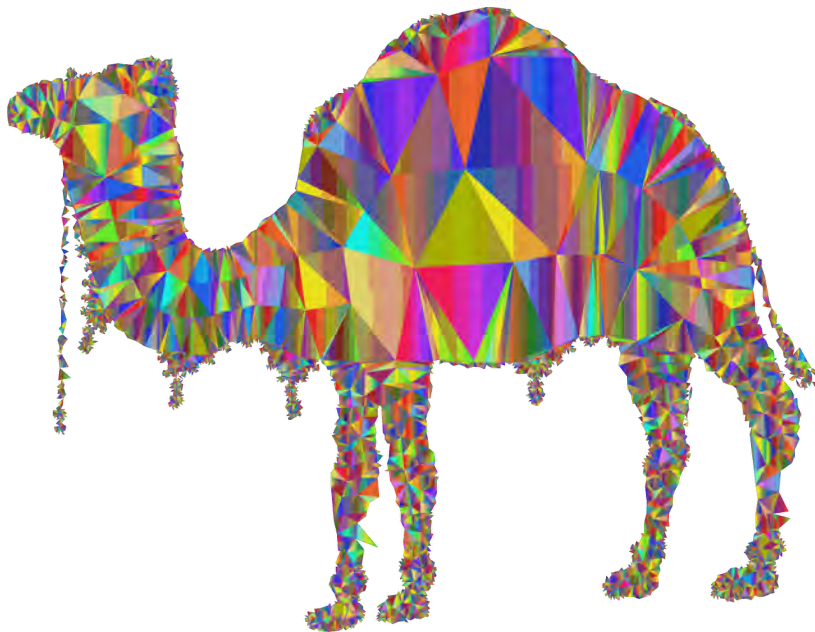
On Christmas day in the morning.

And all the Angels in Heaven shall sing,
On Christmas day, on Christmas day;
And all the Angels in Heaven shall sing,
On Christmas day in the morning.

And all the Souls on Earth shall sing,
On Christmas day, on Christmas day;
And all the Souls on Earth shall sing,
On Christmas day in the morning.

Then let us all rejoice a main,
On Christmas day, on Christmas day;
Then let us all rejoice a main,
On Christmas day in the morning.

The lyrics mention the ships sailing into Bethlehem, but the nearest body of water is the Dead Sea about 20 miles away. The reference to three ships is thought to originate in the three ships that bore the purported relics of the Biblical magi to Cologne Cathedral in the 12th century. Another possible reference is to Wenceslaus II, King of Bohemia, who bore a coat of arms "Azure three galleys argent". Another suggestion is that the ships are actually the camels used by the Magi, as camels are frequently referred to as "ships of the desert".



Pinney Dock



Dietrich, Sr.

Pinney Dock Back in the Day

Pinney Dock 2024 Photo by Mark



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Happy Holidays and a Safe Voyaging New Year