

## Eastland Disaster

People all over the world associate Chicago with the Chicago Fire, the Windy City, the Stockyards and sometimes even Al Capone. Never does anyone think of the Eastland disaster when they think about this great city. The Eastland disaster was quit possibly the greatest tragedy that has ever occurred in Chicago.

It is not only in foreign countries that the Eastland was unknown. I am a born and bred Chicagoan. I have lived in Chicago my entire life. I have attended Chicagoland schools, and have taken many Chicago classes, and not once through my journey had I ever heard of the Eastland disaster. My mother has lived in Chicago for 30 years, and it wasn't until recently that she heard of the Eastland.

It boggles my mind to think that something that was such a calamity could have received such little recognition. I pondered the idea of why this disaster is so unknown. There are many factors that come into play when thinking about the Eastland. The first one is that the boat was filled with company workers, and mostly immigrants at that. It was thought that if the people on the ship were of higher status, the outcome would have been different.

Secondly, it was thought that since there was no television, it was harder to hear about this great disaster. Radios were also not very widespread yet. Newspapers were the main source of information and even those were not as big as they are today.

It was also thought that it would give Chicago a bad name and a bad vibe. No one wants to be walking to work and pass the sight of the Eastland and be reminded of all the

deaths that occurred there. No tourists want to be on vacation, sight seeing, and come across the place where so many people died. It was somewhat a case of social amnesia; people either did not want to remember or were not allowed to remember. It also was an embarrassment to Chicago. The boat was docked in the Chicago River and still 800 people managed to drown.

The Eastland disaster would not be the only case of social amnesia that had ever occurred in Chicago's history. A very common case of social amnesia transpires with plane crashes. There are two main ones that come to mind, American Airline's Flight 191 and United Flight 533. Both left from Chicago and both had a tragic outcome. Many people were killed in these crashes, but they were not remembered by most. It wasn't that they did not receive publicity, like the Eastland, but people choose not to remember the tragedies. Especially in the case of Flight 191, which crashed right near O'Hare. Humans don't want to think about an airplane crash right before they take off to travel.

Some people because it was so unknown, go as far to say that it never happened. Some thought it was an urban legend or myth. They say, "If it really happened why wasn't there a movie made about it?"

The idea that seemed the most logical to me was that it was overshadowed by other events that were going on. World War I was occurring at the same time as the Eastland disaster, and it was a worldwide event, not something that was based in just Chicago. The Titanic also may have overshadowed it. The Titanic was such an unbelievable tragedy because it was thought to be un-sinkable. It was also filled with prestigious people as opposed to the immigrants on the Eastland.

World War I had just begun, and got a lot of attention from people everywhere. I went to my library to try to see if the Eastland got any recognition from the newspapers. I was

unable to find any that dated back that far, but I can almost guarantee that the headlines were all about the war. I would be surprised if there wasn't even an article on the front page about the disaster. I can almost promise you that it was not mentioned in newspapers out of Chicago.

The other major thing that might have overshadowed the Eastland was the Titanic. There were many reasons that this received more attention than the Eastland. First of all it was the world's largest ship, and claimed to be unsinkable. Before it had even set off it had received a lot of publicity. When it sank, it sank in the middle of the ocean, which left no memorials to remind people of the tragedy.

It was filled with high-class passengers that paid great amounts of money to be on that boat. The Eastland was filled with the workers of Western Electric, along with their friends and families. Most of the workers were immigrants, and immigrants at that time were considered less important.

What most people don't realize is that more passengers died in the Eastland than died in the Titanic. While there were 829 deaths in the sinking of the Titanic, there were 841 deaths on the Eastland. There were 22 entire families killed in the Eastland.

There were many wives and children left without a husband and a father, along with no financial support. Although many males were killed, it was mostly women and children that drowned on the Eastland. The Titanic was just the opposite. The women and children were placed in the lifeboats before men were allowed to.

I looked on the Internet to try and find information about the Eastland disaster. When I went to keyword and entered Eastland Disaster, I got a possible 14 sources. Out of those fourteen only two had the Eastland in the title, and only four had anything to do with the

disaster. I then decided to compare it to the websites about the Titanic and realized that for the fourteen Eastland disaster websites, there were 4,051 websites about the Titanic. I then choose to look under World War I on the Internet and found that there were 19,825 websites listed. I was not surprised to find that the Titanic and World War I had much more information written about them, but I was disappointed to see that there was only four true Eastland websites.

When I went on the website, they gave me all the same information. They were only about four pages long, and the information included what happened, and the number of deaths and some names. Nowhere in any of them except for the Eastland society website, was there any mention about the minimal compensation that the people received.

This makes me think that someone was definitely trying to hide something. All the information that was given is the same, and it is very vague. This makes me think that there is more to the story than what we have been told. It could possibly just be the idea again that Chicago didn't want a bad name, but it could be something else. It was thought by a few people that it was a conspiracy and the boat was sabotaged. I don't necessarily think that that was the cause, but I do think there is more to the story than what first meets the eye.

Looking for an answer to the question of why the Eastland was so forgotten through each of the perspectives is very difficult, but I am going to try. I would have to say that a functionalist would probably say that the boat was sabotaged to show how badly lower-class people were treated. Once these lives were gone, many people lives changed. Even though they were only immigrants it did have a big effect on a lot of lives.

The conflict perspective of this disaster might be that because it was a boat filled with immigrants, it did not receive a lot of recognition. They might support their evidence by

saying that the Titanic had fewer passengers killed; yet received a lot more publicity. It is once again showing how the wealthy have an upper hand in society.

Interactionist would probably believe that after the sinking occurred, it was not talked about because it was very traumatic, and too close to home. They would probably say that no one wants to have constant reminders of the day that over 800 people were killed in their hometown. People purposely try to forget about the tragedy so they don't have to think about it.

Whether it be that the Eastland Disaster was over shadowed by the Titanic and World War I or that Chicago did not want to make a bad name for itself, the Eastland did not get the recognition that it deserved. The death of 800 people should have been taken more seriously than it was. In any case the Eastland can be described as "a tragedy lost in time."

## My Research

I spent a lot of time in the Northbrook Public Library looking for information about the Eastland. I was able to watch a movie titled "The Eastland Disaster", but it was not very beneficial to my research. It gave the same information that everything else did. I also tried to look up the newspaper for the day after the disaster. The library did not have articles dating back that far, so I had to make judgment calls on to what I thought might have appeared. In the library there were no book dedicated to just the Eastland. I found it very difficult to get information about this subject.

When looking on the Internet I talked about the unavailability of articles on the Eastland. I did not mention that I looked in Encarta and other encyclopedias type programs, and it was not listed in there either. I got most of my information, from the sheet that you gave us, which was based on the responses from the people who were interviewed.