

EASTLAND DISASTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

27 January 2001

Dear Friends,

As you read this annual report, one theme should become readily apparent – *growth!* The Eastland Disaster Historical Society experienced growth in every aspect of its business including the number of new members, revenue generated, and growth even in terms of physical office space. More importantly, the number of people with whom we shared the story of the Eastland Disaster grew exponentially, largely due to the overwhelming success of the joint Titanic/Eastland Disaster exhibit at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago.

While I admit that this summary is somewhat lengthy, I do ask that you take a few moments to print this and read through it. Upon doing so you should then see the transition that we are making from being a family making a difference in the community to an innovative, forward-thinking, not-for-profit organization.

Thank you for the support you gave the Eastland Disaster Historical Society during 2000. During the coming year, it is my pleasure to invite you to join our growing society, and help us to continue advancing the awareness of the Eastland Disaster.

Regards,

Ted Wachholz
President and Director

EASTLAND DISASTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2000 - A Year Of Great Success

1. EDUCATION

- ✓ We visited two schools and gave presentations in their classrooms. The feedback we received was very positive.

“Your program was exactly right for our upper school study of the Millennium. In addition to telling us about a very important but little known tragedy, it provided us with some insight as to how individuals can preserve and keep alive important events of the past. The students thought so, as well. We followed up the several different presentations we had during the month, asking students' views of the various programs we offered during the month. They rated your program among the best and most interesting. They commented that your visuals were especially helpful, as well, and made the event very interesting and relevant.” Ron Solberg, Science and Arts Academy, Des Plaines, Illinois.

“Thank you very much for your excellent lecture in my Introduction to Sociology class. It was so well presented, organized and informative! And your photos and video were a wonderful asset, as well as the detailed depiction of the events leading up to the actual sinking of the Eastland. An immensely interesting lecture, overall.” Dr. Susan M. Fournier, Department of Sociology, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois

- ✓ We acted as a resource and assisted several students who chose to enter Eastland Disaster projects into the Chicago Metro History Fair.
- ✓ We established a scholarship with the Chicago Metro History Education Center. This new scholarship is for **“academic excellence expressed in a research project, the topic of which directly relates to the Eastland Disaster of July 24, 1915.”** The scholarship - the *Ken Rabe and Grace Rabe Nilsen Eastland Disaster Scholarship Award* – was named in memoriam after brother Ken and sister Grace, two survivors of the Eastland Disaster, both of whom passed away during the year. The first scholarship award was presented during the annual History Fair awards ceremony to Miss Phary Yoeun, then a senior at Lane Tech High School.

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- ✓ In the academic environment, we extended the reach of the Eastland Disaster beyond the history curriculum by partnering with the Sociology Department at DePaul University. DePaul's Intro to Sociology class based their Fall class project on the Eastland Disaster, researching and trying to understand why the story of the Eastland Disaster is *not* part of our collective consciousness. The theme for the quarter was, "*The Eastland Disaster - What Happened and Why Haven't We Heard: A Case of Social Amnesia?*" EDHS went on-campus and presented to the class of forty-five students. As part of their project, each student interviewed twenty different people, asking them questions and providing them with information about the Eastland Disaster. Thirty students forwarded their research papers to EDHS, many which will subsequently be published on our Internet web site as a resource for others. The feedback we received from the class was, again, very positive.

"I was quite moved by your presentation. And I am grateful that you were willing to be a part of my class and my students' learning experience in sociology. From their comments after your lecture and at the end of the quarter, I can tell you that they were both intrigued and fascinated by the Eastland phenomenon. The inclusion of the Eastland Disaster this Fall was a perfect means of teaching the students how sociology can be used in the real world. In this case, to assist in uncovering the social meaning of the Eastland Disaster, then and now. Your participation in this course definitely sparked their sociological imagination!" Dr. Susan M. Fournier, Department of Sociology, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois

"In my course evaluations, quite a few students explicitly stated that the Eastland project was the high point of the class for them." Dr. Susan M. Fournier, Department of Sociology, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois

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2. RESEARCH/DOCUMENTATION

- ✓ We continued to add names to our Eastland Disaster Passenger List, and to substantiate the information. Our one-of-a-kind Eastland Disaster Passenger List, the only one known to exist in the world, now has 1,773 passengers (substantiated plus unsubstantiated).
- ✓ We continued to open new file folders upon our initial contact with families who have one or more ancestors or relatives with a connection (survivor, victim, rescuer, bystander, crew) to the Eastland Disaster. We now have folders representing 319 families in our records cabinet.
- ✓ We partnered with ABC/WLS-TV Channel 7 to professionally videotape interviews with survivors Marie Hrabacka, Libby Hruby, Ken Rabe, and Grace Rabe Nilsen.
- ✓ We contracted with a free-lance videographer in the Southwest to professionally videotape an interview with survivor Aida Woods.
- ✓ We obtained a copy of an audio taped interview made in 1989 with then-living survivor Marie Linhart (courtesy of Louis Benes).
- ✓ We obtained a copy of a hand-written personal account made shortly after the Eastland Disaster by then-living survivor Jenny Peterson (courtesy of Dorothy Kief).

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3. PUBLIC AWARENESS – Museum Exhibit

- ✓ For the eight months from mid-February through mid-October, the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago showcased **TITANIC: The Exhibition**, a 25,000 square-foot exhibit. Within this exhibit was a 1,000 square-foot exhibit dedicated entirely to the Eastland Disaster. EDHS was the exclusive partner to the Museum in designing the Eastland Disaster exhibit.
- ✓ The Eastland Disaster exhibit effectively shared the story of the Eastland Disaster with the general public. Approximately 800,000 visitors toured through TITANIC: The Exhibition and the Eastland Disaster exhibit! The exhibit was very well received by the public, as evidenced by this sampling of unsolicited testimonials.

“My family and I have made two trips to see the Titanic exhibit at Science & Industry, and we also spent a lot of time looking at the Eastland tragedy on display. I think it was very appropriate that the Eastland be included with the Titanic. The Eastland disaster happened right here, and Chicago is able to share its sorrows among those many visitors from all over who are visiting the Titanic display. I would hope that Science & Industry would reserve a special place for the Eastland memories. It is because of organizations like you that we can continue to keep the memory alive for our children and grandchildren. Thank you for educating me as well.” M. A. of Illinois

“I was at the Museum of Science and Industry to see the Titanic exhibit today. I had never heard about the Eastland, but many of the nursing home residents I was with had. I must have watched for 15 minutes while tons of people looked at the small exhibit and almost all had never heard of the Eastland.” N. R. of Chicago

- ✓ EDHS partnered with ABC/WLS-TV Channel 7 and the Museum of Science and Industry to produce a 4-minute video on the Eastland Disaster (the photographs used in the video were obtained from the Chicago Historical Society). Narrated by ABC’s Ron Magers, the video was shown continuously in the Eastland Disaster exhibit. Because of the work done by EDHS, the Museum estimated that it was able to save \$10,000-\$70,000 in video production costs.
- ✓ We helped organize a cocktail reception in February at the Museum of Science and Industry for fifty guests. Our guests were the families who loaned artifacts to the Museum to help make the Eastland Disaster exhibit the success that it was. The cocktail reception included a private “sneak-preview” of the Titanic and Eastland Disaster exhibits.

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- ✓ The Eastland Disaster exhibit was very well received by the media, as evidenced by this quote from the Chicago Tribune.

“What turns out to be the show's most informative part for many has nothing to do with the Titanic. It is the section devoted to the SS Eastland...There is an excellent video, narrated by WLS-Ch. 7's Ron Magers, and enough pictures (including one dramatic shot of a morgue housing many of the bodies), poignant personal accounts and other memorabilia related to this event to make it -- for some -- the highlight of the entire exhibit.” Mike Conklin, Chicago Tribune

- ✓ To commemorate the 85th anniversary of the Eastland Disaster, EDHS hosted a respectful observance of Chicago's greatest tragedy. The event, sponsored by *Lucent Technologies*, was held at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry on the evening of Saturday, July 22, 2000. Over 300 people with personal connections to the Eastland Disaster attended. Guests enjoyed a fantastic dinner, a spectacular one-hour long program, and a private showing of **TITANIC: The Exhibition** (including the Eastland Disaster exhibit). Special guests for the evening included: survivors Marie (Homola) Hrabacka and Libby (Klucina) Hruby; Bill Braden, Chief Executive Officer, American Red Cross of Greater Chicago; and Bob Jerich, Midwest Director of Media and Philanthropy, Lucent Technologies. Because of Lucent's generosity in sponsoring this event, the evening raised nearly \$10,000. Here are comments from just a few of those who attended:

“Thank you once again for a truly special evening. It was an experience we'll never forget!”

“The food was great; the program was professionally done. I was moved to tears on several occasions.”

“I don't have the words to describe Saturday's event -- life-transforming comes to mind.”

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4. PUBLIC AWARENESS – Internet Web Site

We added the following new sections to our Internet web site:

- An explanation of the effort required in righting the Eastland out of the Chicago River.
- A *Personal Accounts* table that depicts small photos of those who were passengers, crew, heroes, as well as anyone who had a connection to the Eastland Disaster.
- A page describing the UC-97, a German World War I submarine that was sunk in Lake Michigan in 1921 by the USS Wilmette (formerly the SS Eastland) during a naval training exercise.

We also added an *Information Resource Center* to our web site. This section is packed with information including:

- Schedule of public and private presentations.
- Schedule of public displays of our Eastland Disaster “*Collection of Artifacts.*”
- Previously issued newsletters, press releases, and announcements.
- Merchandise available for sale.
- Student projects.
- A list of past special events.
- A small selection of the many guest testimonials that we receive.
- Internet links to other related web sites (e.g., the Chicago Historical Society).

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4. PUBLIC AWARENESS – Other

- ✓ We prepared, edited, and issued quarterly newsletters as well as two special releases. Our newsletters and all other documents are sent electronically and via the U. S. Postal Service to people in 42 states and 10 countries.
- ✓ At the end of the year we had 61 members, 495 subscribers to our electronic newsletter, and 250 subscribers to our paper newsletter.
- ✓ With the help of Frank Suerth (grandson of survivor Joseph Suerth), we produced a short, 3-minute video. This video is a collage of 84 photographs of people who were personally connected to the Eastland Disaster (survivors, victims, heroes, or those who assisted during the aftermath). The background music that accompanies the photo collage is a song written in 1915 about the Eastland Disaster.
- ✓ We partnered with ABC/WLS-TV Channel 7 and the Museum of Science and Industry to produce a video that played continuously in the Titanic and Eastland Disaster exhibits. This video was produced in part by the Chicago Historical Society.
- ✓ We produced a 90-minute video capturing our special event, the “Eastland Disaster Commemorative Family Night 2000.” (See a description of this event above in the “PUBLIC AWARENESS – Museum Exhibit” section.)
- ✓ We averaged two public presentations per month, sharing the story of the Eastland Disaster in person with nearly 1,200 people.
- ✓ We displayed our Eastland Disaster *Collection of Artifacts* in glass-enclosed cases at libraries throughout the Chicago area including Rolling Meadows, Mt. Prospect, Cicero, Palatine, Arlington Heights, Schaumburg, Prospect Heights, Chicago (Lincoln-Belmont Branch), Des Plaines, and Barrington.
- ✓ We collaborated with the author of “*Ghost Stories of Illinois*,” a recently published soft cover book that includes a chapter on the Eastland Disaster. Our involvement ensured the historical accuracy of the chapter on the Eastland. The acknowledgements page credited EDHS and included our mailing, web, and email addresses. This gives those who read the book the opportunity to contact us to find out more about the Eastland Disaster.

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- ✓ We developed a suite of promotional merchandise to help others share the story of the Eastland Disaster. Merchandise now available in our on-line “Eastland Disaster merchandise store” includes a baseball cap, mug, videotapes, CD-ROMs, and high-quality shirts (in a variety of colors and sizes).
- ✓ We continued to gain the interest and support of the local media to draw attention to the Eastland Disaster. As a result, the Eastland Disaster was featured numerous times throughout the year on many local TV and radio stations, as well as in many newspapers. The support that we have earned from the media is critical to our success for two reasons. First, we do not allocate funds for advertising (which we feel would not be good use of our hard-earned membership and grant dollars). Second, the media (particularly that in the Chicago area) reaches millions of households. As testimony to the impact that EDHS is having in raising the awareness of the Eastland Disaster through the media, a local radio station announcer commented in July that the “*Eastland Disaster was becoming well known as of late.*”

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5. FAMILY/PERSONAL

- ✓ Ken Rabe (survivor) contacted his local newspaper, the *Eustis (Florida) Daily*, and appeared in an article featuring the Eastland Disaster.
- ✓ Jack Nilsen and his mother, Grace (Rabe) Nilsen (survivor), appeared in an article featuring the Eastland Disaster in their local newspapers, *Elm Leaves* and the *Northlake Herald-Journal*.
- ✓ Carol Gilchrist (daughter of survivor Marie Hrabacka) gave an Eastland Disaster presentation in May and October to groups in Kalamazoo, Michigan.
- ✓ Joan Schroeder (daughter of survivor John Rylands) gave an Eastland Disaster presentation in November to a group in Berwyn, Illinois, and in December gave presentations to two 3rd grade classes.
- ✓ Frank Suerth (grandson of survivor Joseph Suerth) sat with Mary Ann Childers and Jay Levine at the morning news desk on CBS. Frank shared his family's personal story, and showed his ancestors' photographs.

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6. VIRTUAL MUSEUM – *Collection of Artifacts*

- ✓ We accepted as donations:
 - A coroner's star awarded to William F. Corbett (courtesy of Robert Dorgan).
 - The dollar bill that was removed from victim Benjamin Haertel, Jr. upon his identification (courtesy of the Haertel/Becker family).
 - An original photograph of the Eastland Disaster (courtesy of John Oldenburger).
 - A set of 14 postcards of the Eastland Disaster (courtesy of the Grey Warnner family).
 - Original *Cicero News* newspapers dated Sunday, July 25, 1915 and Monday, August 2, 1915 (courtesy of the family of John Rylands).
 - An original *Chicago Tribune* newspaper dated Sunday, July 25, 1915 (anonymous contributor).
 - An original *New York Times* newspaper dated Sunday, August 1, 1915 (courtesy of the CUNY Maritime College).
 - Six rolls of 35mm nitrocellulose film, contents currently unknown (courtesy of Dick Hucker).
 - The Eastland Disaster exhibit (courtesy of the Museum of Science and Industry and the Chicago Historical Society).
 - A postcard of the Eastland Disaster with writing on the back describing the tragedy. The postcard was sent to Mr. Heise in North Dakota and is dated August 3, 1915 (courtesy of Ms. Lois Goleas).

- ✓ We added to our Eastland Disaster *Collection of Artifacts*:
 - Twenty-one original postcards of the Eastland and the Eastland Disaster.
 - A watch fob depicting the S. S. Eastland on the front.
 - A small S. S. Eastland officer's pin.
 - The September 1915 issue of *Popular Mechanics Magazine*, which includes an article on the Eastland Disaster.

- ✓ We also received:
 - A copy of two photographs of the Eastland after being righted and while docked in the North Branch of the Chicago River (courtesy of Carey Williams).
 - A copy of the funeral ledger records of eight victims (courtesy of Dave Moravecck, Ivins Funeral Home).

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7. CORPORATE/FINANCIAL

- ✓ Due to the continued growth of our mailing list, it became cost-advantageous for us to apply for an annual not-for-profit bulk mail permit. Our newsletters and other announcements are now mailed at the \$.155 rate per piece, less than half the standard \$.34 rate.
- ✓ We implemented a toll-free number in July. This number handles both voice calls as well as faxed documents. Handling an average of 15 calls (voice and fax) per month, the total cost for the benefit of offering toll free service was only \$4.06 for the year.
- ✓ We opened a commercial checking account, a commercial money market account, and established a commercial credit card. Even though all three are commercial accounts, which typically carry monthly and other fees, the bank accounts and the credit card are free (none carry a monthly fee).
- ✓ Our quarterly newsletter was named *The Call To Remember*, which is now printed in color and is mailed to over 250 families (in addition to the 495 who receive it electronically).
- ✓ We expanded and upgraded our home office to accommodate our growth. Now occupying 200 square feet, we obtained used or donated office furniture and equipment including a color copier, a credenza, multiple filing cabinets, and a computer.
- ✓ We purchased a hi-resolution, hi-lumens computer projector to increase the quality and flexibility of our public presentations.
- ✓ We received a \$5,000 grant from the John W. Anderson Foundation¹, Valparaiso, Indiana. The approved use of the grant was for the purchase of a computer projector, for the establishment of one or more scholarships, and for membership dues to several societies with which EDHS maintains a working relationship (e.g., the Chicago Historical Society and the Historical Society of Cicero).
- ✓ We received \$15,000 from Lucent Technologies to fund the Eastland Disaster Commemorative Family Night 2000. Over 300 people, nearly all having personal connections to the Eastland Disaster, gathered in Chicago for this event. The event raised over \$10,000. (See a description of this event above in the “PUBLIC AWARENESS – Museum Exhibit” section.)

¹John W. Anderson was the founder of the Anderson Company, manufacturer of ANCO windshield wiper blades in Northwest Indiana. He founded the John W. Anderson Foundation shortly before his death in 1967.

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2001 - A Sneak Preview

- ✓ The commemorative plaque that has marked the site of the Eastland Disaster for more than ten years (and has been missing for over six months) will be replaced.
- ✓ The Eastland Disaster exhibit, showcased to over 800,000 people at the Museum of Science and Industry during 2000, will be moved to and displayed at a new museum for six months during 2001.
- ✓ An Eastland Disaster display of photographs and artifacts will permanently be established in Chicago.
- ✓ The *Ken Rabe and Grace Rabe Nilsen Eastland Disaster Scholarship Award* will be presented again in 2001 in conjunction with the Chicago Metro History Education Center. One to three additional scholarship awards will be established with new academic institutions.
- ✓ The Eastland Disaster will be featured on local cable TV and local network TV.
- ✓ The Eastland Disaster will be featured on a local radio program.
- ✓ The six rolls of 35mm nitrocellulose film will be treated and developed.
- ✓ A corporate logo will be created.
- ✓ Our archival and preservation techniques and processes will be improved.
- ✓ Our Eastland Disaster *Collection of Artifacts* will be on display at libraries in the Chicago-area throughout the year.
- ✓ Our 30-minute presentation on the Eastland Disaster will be given at various public locations in the Chicago-area throughout the year.
- ✓ The distribution of our quarterly newsletter will be changed (increased) to bi-monthly.