

The Call to Remember

Newsletter - Vol. III No. 2

EASTLAND DISASTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mar/Apr 2001

EASTLAND DISASTER EMBRACED BY ACADEMIA

Chicago's DePaul University, a nationally recognized academic institution, recently embraced the Eastland Disaster. And while the most intuitive fit would have been in their history curriculum, in fact it was DePaul's Sociology Department that took an interest in the Eastland Disaster. Dr. Susan Fournier (with support from Dr. Rick Schaefer) used the Eastland Disaster as the basis for a class project for her Fall 2000 Introduction to Sociology 101 course.

THE INITIAL INTRIGUE

The seed for galvanizing the Eastland Disaster with sociology was planted in 1998. As Dr. Susan Fournier re-calls: "I was walking on Wacker Drive along the Chicago River when I came upon a plaque telling me about the Eastland Disaster in 1915. Although I was born and raised in the Chicago area, this was the first I had ever heard about the Eastland."

"I asked my husband about it. He also had never heard (of it). *But*, when I asked my 93 year-old grandmother - had she heard of it? - matter of factly she stated, "Oh, yes, my mother had a friend who died on the Eastland - Nannie Shannon."

"As a symbolic interactionist, I study social meaning. Needless to say, I was fascinated."

FASCINATION LEADS TO EDUCATION

Dr. Fournier's fascination with the Eastland Disaster led her to contact EDHS. Upon discussing the possibilities and after agreeing to proceed, plans for a class project were made.

First, Dr. Fournier did preliminary research on the sociological concepts of *collective memory* and *social amnesia*. Class lectures, discussions, and assignments followed.

A 2-FOR-1 DEAL: COMBINING U.S. HISTORY AND SOCIOLOGY

Through the careful planning and instruction of Dr. Fournier, her forty Soc-101 students were able to apply sociology concepts to a real life situation. And by embracing the Eastland Disaster as a class project, the forty sociology students were able to learn the details regarding a little known piece of U.S. history.

WHEN 40 BECOMES 800

One of the early assignments for which each student was responsible was to interview twenty people about the Eastland Disaster. Ten of each set of twenty people interviewed were to be over the age of 60. Each interviewee was asked, "Have you ever heard of the Eastland Disaster?" For those who had heard of the tragedy, the students were instructed to dig deeper by asking questions such as: "What did you hear?" and "How did you learn about it?" Interviewees were also asked, "Why do you think people generally do not know about this disaster?"

IS THAT YOUR FINAL ANSWER?

The responses from the 800 surveys were tabulated. The results showed that, in the under 60 age group, two out of every three people did *not* know of the Eastland Disaster. In the 60 and over age group, a little more than one out of every two people did *not* know of the Eastland Disaster. (Please note that because

this survey used a sample of convenience that was non-random and non-representative, conclusions based upon the results of this survey cannot be generalized and applied to any larger population.)

EDHS GOES ON CAMPUS

Near the end of the class project, EDHS gave a guest presentation to the students and faculty at DePaul.



THE RESULTS

While numerous results were achieved, we would like to highlight two. First, almost 850 people (including students, faculty, and interviewees) had an opportunity to hear and/or learn about the Eastland Disaster. Second, forty college students received a meaningful learning experience by combining sociology with history. Dr. Susan Fournier stated, "From (my students') 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 into my curriculum this Fall was a perfect means of teaching the students how sociology can be used in the real world."

More information, including the students' essays, is available on our web site at www.eastlanddisaster.org/educationalprojects.htm.

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HISTORICAL MARKER UPDATE

The historical marker commemorating the site of the Eastland Disaster (and missing since April 2000) has been ordered, forged, and delivered to a downtown Chicago office. It will be installed/rededicated at a later date. While the replacement marker is now available, its reinstallation is on hold pending completion of the Wacker Drive renovation project between Clark and LaSalle Streets. The timeframe for this could be as soon as October or November of this year.



JUNE/JULY SCHEDULE

Ela Area Public Library (6/14, 7:00p)
OASIS Men's Group (7/12, 10:30a)
Riverside Public Library (7/24, 7:30p)
Stickney-Forest View Public Library (7/26, 7:00p)

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS HELP SHARE THE STORY OF THE EASTLAND DISASTER

More and more organizations are voluntarily linking their Internet web sites to EDHS. These links enhance the credibility of our society and, more importantly, these links expose many others to the Eastland Disaster. Listed below are some of the organizations that have linked their web sites to EDHS.

Genealogical Organizations

- Czech-Slovak American Genealogical Society of Illinois
- Chicago's Italian Genealogy
- Chicago Genealogical Society
- Cook County Illinois
- Cyndi's List (#1 list of genealogy sites on the Internet)
- Roots Web (#1 free site)

Educational Institutions

- John Hersey High School
- Westmont Junior High School
- Lions Park Elementary School
- Illinois Mathematics & Science Academy

Museums

- Museum of Science & Industry
- Michigan Maritime Museum

Media

- Chicago Tribune
- CLTV

Other Organizations

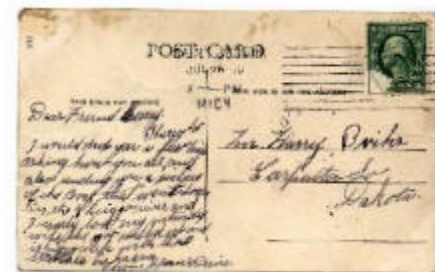
- Illinois State Historical Society
- Mt. Prospect Historical Society
- Illinois State Archives
- Lions Club
- American Red Cross of Greater Chicago
- Telephone Collectors International

POSTCARDS REVEAL TRAGEDY

As postcards depicting the Eastland Disaster are donated to and acquired by EDHS, the backs of the postcards occasionally reveal someone's personal account of their experience.



"10 P.M. Sunday, July 25, 1915. This is a horrible disaster. To see what I have seen is terrible. Had several views of the vessel, was anchored in a launch at cribbing of Clark Street Bridge for half hour within 50 ft. of Eastland. Still working tonight in the vessel trying to recover more bodies. Went through the 2nd Reg. Armory tonight. Such a sight. Walked between rows of men, women, children laying on floor face up. Some with identification tags, others not. Also thru Reid Murdoch. Would estimate I saw between 500 and 600 bodies."



"7 P.M. July 26, 1915. Dear Friend Harry, Thought I would drop you a few lines asking how you are, and also sending you a picture of the boat that went down in the Chicago River and I nearly lost my intended wife. She got pulled up and is now safe with three stitches in her arm. From J. James Davis."