

The Call to Remember

Newsletter - Vol. III No. 3

EASTLAND DISASTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

May/June 2001

SHIPWRECK EXHIBIT

Dozens of ships - from schooners to steamers - sank in Lake Michigan off the coast of Berrien County, Michigan. To share the history of these shipwrecks with the public, the **Berrien County Historical Association** recently opened a new exhibit in St. Joseph, Michigan. This harbor town, located in the northwest part of Berrien County, will feature "Lost on the Lakes: Shipwrecks of Berrien County."



The exhibit will be open from May 25 through November 4. Original artifacts, historical photographs, and memorabilia are featured in the exhibit. More information may be found at www.berrienhistory.org.

EASTLAND DISASTER INCLUDED

Even though the S. S. Eastland did not sink off of the Berrien County coast, it nonetheless is included in the St. Joseph maritime exhibit because of the Eastland's historical significance to St. Joseph: At the time of the Eastland Disaster, the S. S. Eastland was owned/operated by the St. Joseph-Chicago Steamship Company. If you have family or friends in or near St. Joseph, be sure to have them stop in and see the *Shipwrecks of Berrien County* exhibit, including the Eastland Disaster.

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Please join us Tuesday, July 24, 7:30pm at the Riverside Public Library, or Thursday, July 26, 7:00pm at the Stickney-Forest View Public Library. Our schedule of public and private presentations is available on our web site at www.eastlanddisaster.org/irc.

HISTORICAL MARKER UPDATE

The rededication of the Eastland Disaster historical marker in downtown Chicago will *not* be held on July 24th, as the construction of Wacker Drive between Clark and LaSalle Streets will not be completed until the fall. We are now very tentatively planning for the rededication to be held in October. (Wacker Drive as of June 22 is shown below.)



EDHS RECEIVES AWARD

EDHS recently received a *Superior Achievement Award* in public programming/exhibitions. The award, given by



the **Illinois State Historical Society** (ISHS), was for the "Eastland Disaster" exhibit that was shown at the Museum of Science and Industry last year.



(left to right, Rand Burnette, Susan Decker, Barbara Decker Wachholz, Ted Wachholz)

Rand Burnette, President, ISHS said, "The exhibition was the result of a wonderful partnership between a big-city museum and a small local historical society. The well-conceived, planned and executed exhibition tells the story of Chicago's worst disaster that is both compelling and moving." The award, one of only 14 *Superior Achievement Awards* presented by ISHS, was presented at the ISHS annual meeting on April 28 in Lincolnwood, Illinois. The ISHS annual awards serve to recognize and encourage the efforts of individuals, groups and organizations in the collection, preservation and dissemination of state, local, regional, ethnic and specialized history.

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EASTLAND CORNER

Tom Chakinis, a 21-year-old factory worker, fled starvation in Greece in 1911 and immigrated to Chicago. He recalls the morning of the Eastland Disaster vividly.



It was a Saturday in the morning. As we waited for the boat to leave, we sang and nibbled at picnic lunches. While sitting in chairs on the top deck, my friend, Ted Hallas, pointed to the life preservers above us and said, "Grab onto these in case of an accident." I thought little of the comment, for I'd sailed from Greece a few years before with no mishap. The life preservers ultimately mattered little, for when the boat went over, there was no time to grab at anything.

The poor people who were sitting on the other (river) side of the boat slid, like "vroooooosh." I could not swim, but as I slid toward the staircase leading to the lower deck, I lunged for the railing.

I saw hundreds of bodies below me, bodies of people who had been on the lower deck. I was lucky that all of

the people were under me. I remember I was standing on somebody's shoulder so I didn't drown. I was later pulled onto the dock by a fireman. My friend, Ted Hallas, was not so lucky. He was swept away as soon as the boat turned over.

Most survivors returned to work immediately. The people that survived didn't want to hear anything more about it. You tried to forget. But I never really forgot. Years later, I forbade my children from going near the water. And I never boarded a boat again.

VOICES ON THE AIR

The story of the Eastland Disaster was shared with thousands of listeners of "Vantage Point," North-



eastern Illinois University's

weekly radio program. The

program is produced by the Department of Speech and Performing Arts and Dr. David F. Unumb, Professor and Department Chair. The program was broadcast Sunday morning, March 18 on WTMX-FM (101.9). Dr. Unumb's guests for the 30-minute program included Barbara and Ted Wachholz. Coincidentally,



the NEIU campus is located adjacent to the Bohemian National Cemetery (where over 100 of the Eastland Disaster victims are buried).

OPPORTUNITIES TO ASSIST

Many of our readers have asked us how they can help. For everyone's information and benefit, the list below identifies several ways that you may help us share the story of the Eastland Disaster.

1. Become a member. Nearly all of our annual operational expenses are supported by our memberships (including the publication of this newsletter, which now reaches close to 1,000 people every other month).
2. Send an e-mail to your family and friends and encourage them to visit our web site and sign our guestbook.
3. If your family or friends do not have access to the Internet, send us their name and address and we will mail them our informational welcome packet.
4. If you know a small group (church, school, social, business, hobby) who you feel might be interested in our presentation, simply give them our phone number and have them call us. We will do the rest.
5. Individuals, foundations and corporations provide charitable donations and grants. If you know someone who individually (or as part of a corporation or foundation) would like to provide philanthropic support, feel free to put them in touch with us.
6. Contact us about our many volunteer opportunities. If you or someone you know is skilled in graphic design, marketing, web (HTML or Java) programming, copyrights, or writing children's books, please give us a call.