

# The Call to Remember

Newsletter - Vol. III No. 4

EASTLAND DISASTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jul/Aug 2001

## GOD BLESS AMERICA

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families of *all* who were affected by the terrible events on Tuesday.



(Photo courtesy of R. Ferguson and C. Clayton.)

## EASTLAND CORNER

As husband and wife, Ralph and Christine Harmon have one thing in common that only a very few couples today can claim: Ralph's ancestors AND Christine's ancestors both were involved in the Eastland Disaster.

Ralph's family story is one of fate. His Great-granduncle, [Walter Lucas](#), and his Grandmother, [Eleanor Pycz](#) (Walter's niece) both avoided tragedy by not being on board the Eastland when it rolled into the Chicago River. Walter had nicked himself while shaving and he also scorched his collar as he ironed the shirt he would wear to the picnic. These events delayed Walter from arriving early at the wharf downtown and, as a result, he missed boarding the *Eastland*. Eleanor, meanwhile, was standing on

a nearby bridge and watched the tragedy unfold before her. Eleanor remembered later how the laughter and gaiety all turned into a moment of silence before the chaos began.



Christine's family story, conversely, is one of tragedy, sorrow, and loss. Her Great-great-granduncle's *entire* family was completely wiped out. Lost in the tragedy were George Sindelar, Sr., 38; his wife, Josephine, 37; and their five children, daughters Adella, 15; and Sylvia, 13; and sons George, Jr., 10; Albert, 8; and William, Jr., 5. Also lost in the tragedy was Josephine's sister, Regina Dolezal. Of the more than 650 families that lost at least one member, the Sindelar family lost more than any other.



*The Sindelar caskets outside of the Masonic Hall during the funeral.*

Today, over 85 years and four generations later, Christine proudly possesses the watch worn the day of the tragedy by her Great-great-grandmother Josephine. The watch was linked to a chain and worn by Josephine around her neckline.

## HISTORICAL MARKER UPDATE

We recently spoke with City of Chicago personnel regarding the scheduling of the commemorative ceremony for the rededication of the marker. At this time we have learned that the LaSalle through Clark section of Wacker Drive will not be ready or available until the April/May 2002 timeframe. The sidewalks will not be poured until then and, of course, the sidewalks are an obvious prerequisite to installing the marker and conducting a ceremony. While disappointed with this recent delay in plans, we remain positive knowing that the City of Chicago [Department of Cultural Affairs](#) – specifically the [Chicago Public Art Program](#) – is doing what they can to make the right thing happen in a timeframe that will work best for everyone. A new scheduled date for the ceremony will not be established until early next year.

## EDHS RETURNS TO DEPAUL

As described in detail in the [March/April 2001](#) edition of our newsletter, EDHS worked closely throughout last year's fall semester with DePaul University's Department of Sociology. This fall we are returning to DePaul University. EDHS will be working with Anna Waring, Assistant Professor of the DePaul [Public Services Graduate Program](#). The Public Services Graduate Program promotes effective management of nonprofit organizations and government agencies, and it fosters development of sound public policies affecting the delivery of social services. Stay tuned - results from this exciting academic opportunity will be published in a subsequent issue of our newsletter.

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## THE EASTLAND DISASTER ON WTTW/CHANNEL 11

When was the last time you were able to turn on your television and watch a 30-minute feature program on the Eastland Disaster? For those in the Chicago viewing area, your first ever opportunity will be later this fall. "The Eastland Disaster," scheduled to premier on WTTW/Channel 11's *Chicago Stories* series, is being written and produced by two local network TV stalwarts, Harvey Moshman of WTTW/Channel 11 and Chuck Coppola of WGN/Channel 9. Harvey and Chuck initiated the idea for this undertaking because, in their own words, "Although we may never be able to answer *why* such a compelling story like the Eastland Disaster has been relegated to near obscurity, we feel that Chicago's worst tragedy has gone overlooked and underreported long enough."



EDHS staff members have been active and diligent in assisting Harvey and Chuck, working to ensure the best program possible. EDHS has been the primary advisor in providing hundreds of personal accounts and photos from descendants of survivors, victims, firemen, policemen, undertakers, and others who assisted with the rescue and recovery efforts.



Harvey Moshman and Chuck Coppola interview Ralph Harmon.

## EDHS RECEIVES GRANT IN SUPPORT OF ITS MISSION

EDHS received a \$5,500 grant from the John W. Anderson Foundation<sup>1</sup>, Valparaiso, Indiana. The approved uses of the grant were for the purchase of a laptop computer and for the establishment of several collegiate scholarships. The laptop computer will be used for the public presentations given by EDHS, for transposing research information from library archives, and for scanning family photos and other documents while visiting remote locations. Schools will be selected during the year for the *Ken Rabe and Grace Rabe Nilsen Eastland Disaster Scholarship Awards* (see the summer edition 2000 newsletter for complete details).

<sup>1</sup>John 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.

## EDHS MEMBER UPDATE

The following supporters recently began or renewed their [membership](#) with EDHS:

Diane Adams (new)  
Georgiana Becker (renewal)  
Louise Benes, Jr. (new)  
Carol Bennett (new)  
Patricia Goyette-Gill (new)  
Denise Granger (new)  
Anita Jaszka (renewal)  
Alice Kroman (renewal)  
Jim Mathews (new)  
Jack Nilsen (renewal)  
George Nuyttens (new)  
Randall Rabe (renewal)  
Sandi Blumenthal Root (new)  
Evelyn Schroeder (renewal)  
Annette Tivy (renewal)

## PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS - SEP/OCT/NOV

Please join us: Thursday, September 20, 7:00pm, Trinity Lutheran Church; Saturday, October 13, 11:00am, North Riverside Public Library; Monday, October 15, 11:00am, Niles Senior Center; Saturday, November 10, 3:00pm Highland Park Public Library; or Sunday, November 11, 2:00pm, Indian Trails Public Library (Wheeling). Our schedule of public and private presentations is available at [www.eastlanddisaster.org/irc](http://www.eastlanddisaster.org/irc).

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

We are frequently asked if the USS Wilmette (formerly the SS Eastland) was deployed as an aircraft carrier during its thirty-year service as a naval training vessel. The answer is *no*, it was not. However, the passenger steamers SS Seeandbee and SS Greater Buffalo were converted into aircraft carriers. Named the USS Wolverine and USS Sable, respectively, they were the only aircraft carriers to ever serve on Lake Michigan. Called "flattops," they were not fully staffed or fully equipped for aircraft carrying duty. Many pilots perfected the fine art of carrier takeoff and landing from these flattops. Those who were unsuccessful wound up on the bottom of Lake Michigan.



A pilot struggles as he practices his approach to land on the USS Wolverine in the shadow of the Chicago skyline. (Art courtesy of Stan Stokes.)