

The Call to Remember

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EASTLAND DISASTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jan/Feb 2003

IN MEMORIAM



Marie Frances Hrabacka, 91, passed away on Friday, February 21, 2003. Mrs. Hrabacka, daughter of James and Sophia (Strobl) Homola, was born November 21, 1911 in Cicero, Illinois. She resided in the Gobles, Michigan area since 1951 and moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1998.



As a 3-1/2 year old, Marie (Marenka Homola) was with her parents and her younger sister aboard the *Eastland*. They were all thrown into the river when the ship capsized. With chaos all around them, Marie put her arms around her father's neck and held on tight. While Marie and her father survived, the *Eastland* Disaster claimed the lives of her mother and her baby sister.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

We will be presenting at the Franklin Park Public Library, 10311 Grand Avenue, on Thursday, May 22, at 7 pm.

SENIORS' DAY

Wednesday, April 16 (10 am - 3 pm) is Seniors Day at the Chicago Historical Society. Join us at 12 noon as we present a program on the *Eastland* Disaster. You may also tour new sports exhibits, listen to a variety of guest speakers, participate in a sing-along, and view historic films and videos. Admission is free. Lunch is available for \$7 (reservations are required). Call 312-642-4600.

THE EASTLAND CORNER

George E. Schmidt, a popular young man from Baden, Ontario (Canada), was born on July 24, 1879. He left Baden in 1902 for Chicago, where he worked as head bookkeeper at the Western Electric Company. George had planned to spend his 36th birthday elsewhere, but he had been appointed to one of the managing committees conducting the Western Electric employee picnic. Instead of celebrating his birthday, he became a victim of the ill-fated *Eastland* excursion. George's body was taken from the water only ten minutes after the disaster occurred.



In a recent letter to his father he wrote that he expected to spend his vacation with his parents in Baden in August. George's remains were forwarded to his parents' home in Baden, Ontario. He was buried Wednesday afternoon.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

For over four years, we have been working with hundreds of families who have personal/family connections to the *Eastland* Disaster. When we combine our family records/files with the power of the Internet, amazing things can happen.

We recently brought together two relatives - located 1,200 miles apart - after they had contacted us independent of each other.



Wendell Bark (above, left) of Arkansas contacted the *Eastland* Disaster Historical Society (EDHS) back in 2000 regarding his granduncle George Schmidt. (George Schmidt, a victim of the *Eastland* Disaster, is featured in this edition's "The *Eastland* Corner.") Three years later, Bill Gillespie (above, right) of Ontario, Canada also contacted EDHS regarding his granduncle George Schmidt. Much to their delight, we immediately put Wendell and Bill in touch with each other. (We later connected them with another family historian, Karen Gustafson.) Not only did Wendell and Bill obtain information about their granduncle, they were able to "meet" each other over the Internet.

Wendell said, "Thank you for being instrumental in getting (Bill and me) in contact with each other. We are second cousins who have never met. We probably would never have gotten together otherwise."

Bill said, "You cannot begin to know how happy I am...THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU."

Whereas the *Eastland* Disaster separated families at the turn of the century, the *Eastland* Disaster Historical Society is bringing families together nearly ninety years later.