

The Call to Remember

Newsletter - Vol. V, No. 2

EASTLAND DISASTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mar/Apr 2003

EDHS RECEIVES AWARDS

EDHS received two awards¹ from the Illinois State Historical Society (ISHS) at the annual awards ceremony sponsored by ISHS. Held in Nauvoo, Illinois on April 26, EDHS received a *Superior Achievement* award and a *Best* award, the two highest levels of award in each of the two categories.



(ISHS President David Scott presents awards to Barbara and Ted Wachholz)

EDHS received a *Best Web Site* award, the **first ever** best web site recognition issued by ISHS. The ISHS Awards Committee declared, "*The site is informative, easy to navigate, and engaging. The inclusion of primary sources and secondary analysis is useful.*"

Later in the program, EDHS received a *Superior Achievement Award* for the exhibit "S.S. Eastland: America's Great Maritime Disaster." This 12-month exhibit in South Haven, Michigan was a fine collaborative effort between EDHS and the Michigan Maritime Museum. The ISHS Awards Committee stated that, "*This is a fabulous exhibit! A remarkable opportunity to educate thousands in regard to the disaster and to continue to make connections with families whose ancestors had a connection to it.*"

The awards received this year were the second and third state awards received, adding to the award received in 2001.

If any reader knows of another organization that would like to sponsor the exhibit, please contact us. (See below.)

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The stock market is down. The economy is down. Interest rates are down. Philanthropic gifts are down.

At a time when most everything has been spiraling in a downward direction, the level of energy and enthusiasm at the *Eastland* Disaster Historical Society is way up! Here's why.

The *groundwork* that was laid the past few years has resulted in a *groundswell* of activity and events this year, each of which is very exciting and will help to keep us moving forward. This includes:

- a new and highly capable and committed Board of Trustees;
- the historical marker rededication ceremony and reception (see article in this newsletter);
- a new corporate program that includes live performances by up to 13 actors;
- a new book (see article in this newsletter);
- a "Road Scholars" speaker/program on "Immigrants in Illinois";
- a benefit performance of "The Christmas Schooner";
- plus other special events.

And of course, we are continuing to make great progress in all of our core areas of focus: historical research; family information; web site development; public programs; public displays; and new collaborations with other organizations.

So keep watching this newsletter for announcements of special events!

¹The 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.



EASTLAND CORNER

Charles "Charlie" Hart was working at the Dunham Towing and Wrecking Company the morning of the *Eastland* Disaster. The Dunham plant was located on the north side of the Chicago River just a few blocks west of where the *Eastland* was moored.



When word of the *Eastland* Disaster reached him, Charlie and two others immediately left their work and ran down to the dock near their plant. Here they commandeered a tug, the *Rita McDonald*, with Charlie taking the wheel. On their way to the tragedy they picked up two construction rafts. They successfully maneuvered the *Rita McDonald* to an area of the river where the mass of people struggling to stay alive was the thickest. They pulled 50 to 100 people from the river.

CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

We will present at the Blackstone Branch of the Chicago Public Library, located at 4904 S. Lake Park Avenue on Monday, July 21 at 7:00 pm.

Want to see us at your local library? Call your library's adult program director!

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BOOK BEING WRITTEN!

Walt Disney once said, "All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them." No truer words could be spoken regarding our collaboration with author Jay Bonansinga: After two years of seeking a publisher, an agreement has now been reached. The following press release was recently issued:

Chicago, IL. For immediate release: Internationally acclaimed Chicago author, Jay Bonansinga, recently signed a deal with Kensington Publishing to write a non-fiction narrative book on the *Eastland* Disaster. The book, as yet untitled, will be released in a hardcover edition across North America in August 2004.



(Above: Jay takes a momentary break from reading the hundreds of family folders on file with EDHS.)

Author of seven published books and a web serial, Jay truly has the story of the *Eastland* Disaster in his heart. This trait, combined with Jay's gift of vividly describing what he wishes his readers to see, smell, taste, and feel, makes for the perfect combination to write the story of the *Eastland* Disaster. As he writes each chapter, Jay's perspective will be that of what the people experienced as the tragedy unfolded. In his own words Jay says that he is "not writing about what happened but instead about what it was like."

The book will share the compelling story of the *Eastland* Disaster, focusing on the human drama associated with it.

Jay's book will nicely compliment the fact-filled book, *EASTLAND: Legacy of the Titanic*, written by Professor George W. Hilton in 1995.

(For those who currently do not own a copy of George W. Hilton's *EASTLAND: Legacy of the Titanic*, this book is available through the *Eastland* Disaster Historical Society. Simply complete and mail the enclosed merchandise order form, or call us and we will process your order over the phone. [See below.]

When Jay first started on his research in 2001 he told us: "Since I started working on this project, I have a felt a strange kind of magic -- I know it sounds silly -- almost like I'm destined to write this story." Now that Kensington Publishing has committed to publish his book, it appears that Jay will achieve this destiny.

MARKER REDEDICATION

The historical marker that commemorated the site of the *Eastland* Disaster for over 10 years disappeared in the spring of 2000. A replacement marker (see photo below) was quickly reordered and has been in storage since December 2000.



With the completion of the 20-month, \$200 million *Revive Wacker Drive* project last November, we will

be able to rededicate the historical marker this summer near the site of the *Eastland* Disaster. The rededication ceremony will be held Thursday morning, July 24 (the 88th anniversary of the tragedy). Following the rededication ceremony, we are planning a reception with light snacks, drinks, and several guest speakers. Details will be made available later via a special announcement.

The original marker, erected by the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA) in conjunction with the Illinois State Historical Society, marked the site of the tragedy from 1989 through 2000. The marker was suggested by students from the academy who wondered why such a marker had never been erected previously.



The replacement marker, a near-replica of the original, was co-funded by the *Eastland* Disaster Historical Society and the Chicago Public Art Program of the Department of Cultural Affairs.

For more information about the marker rededication ceremony and the reception to follow, please contact the *Eastland* Disaster Historical Society. (See below.)