



Center for History Expands

As anticipated for several years, the Center for History needed additional space to better serve the public. The Queen Anne structure at 606 North Main Street and the Research Annex at 330 S. Naperville Road were not large enough to accommodate the Center's growing program schedule, exhibit needs and collections. In particular there was a special desire for permanent exhibit galleries.

So the Center for History's Board agreed it was time to expand. An agreement to occupy 6,500 sq. ft. on the second floor of the former Wheaton Fire Station was secured at 315 West Front Street in Wheaton. The home of the Eastland Gallery, along with *Fairways, Greens & Clubs*, a golf exhibit featuring the history of American golf, its people, equipment and courses will be opened there. Additionally, a Hall of Fame featuring some of Wheaton's nationally known citizens such as Edwin Hubble (astronomer), John and Jim Belushi (actors and comedians), Red Grange (football player), Bob Woodward (Watergate author) and Lucky Debonair (Kentucky Derby winner), to name just a few. The extensive collection of artifacts, research and executive offices, and Museum Shop will also be housed at this new location.

Architects, tradesmen and members have been busy planning the expansion and exhibit for almost a year. As with any construction, deadlines come and go. And costs go up. This is no exception. The expense of assembling this new museum is looming around \$300,000. As a museum, we have taken extra care to install a proper temperature and humidity system, along with UV and fiber optic lights that won't damage the precious artifacts and

archival materials that will be on display and in storage. Naturally all of the other mechanics, room construction, painting, flooring, furnishings, and exhibit fabrication added to the cost.

You are invited to support this new museum by making a contribution that will help cover the expenses. A \$150 donation entitles you to become an Eastland Charter Contributor and will be acknowledged with an inscription on a permanent plaque at the museum and in the Eastland coffee-table style book to be published by the Center. The name listing can be your own, a lasting tribute to a loved one, or as a gift to someone. Anyone joining the Eastland Fellowship Authority at the Benefactor level will automatically become included as a Charter Contributor. Donations received by July 1, 2006 will be part of the Eastland Charter Contributor recognition at the Eastland Gallery Opening on July 23, 2006. The form in this newsletter has the details for sending in memberships or donations. The Center thanks you in advance for your gift and helping bring the Eastland story to a permanent home.

At Last - A Permanent Eastland Exhibit Gallery

It took almost 91 years, but 2006 will see the new, permanent Eastland Gallery welcome *Disaster, Courage & Silence*. The exhibit will focus on the magnitude of the disaster, the courage demonstrated by so many and the silence that followed in the homes and communities trying to come to grips with what had to be endured. The Center's Eastland Gallery will be a permanent home highlighting new artifacts in the collection, and featuring stories about individuals, Western Electric, maritime history, and media coverage. It

will be a place where families can reminisce, researchers can ask for assistance, and visitors can learn about the compelling story of July 24, 1915.

The Associated Press recently compiled and published a list of noteworthy maritime disasters. The Eastland disaster did not appear anywhere in that list. How could a disaster of this magnitude not be recognized by the citizens of the world as one of history's notables? Somehow the 844 lives that were lost that day have escaped the recognition they deserve. The Center for History is committed to presenting the complete narrative of the Eastland catastrophe so it can take its proper place in history and never be forgotten.

There's Going to be a Celebration!

After waiting so many years for a permanent Eastland Gallery, the Center for History is going to throw an opening soiree. Mark your calendar for Sunday, July 23 because you'll be receiving an invitation to the grand opening of the Eastland Gallery and its first exhibit *Disaster, Courage & Silence*. You will be among the first to experience the only permanent exhibit gallery that pays tribute to the people of the Eastland - the Eastland Family.

The Titanic Meets the Eastland

In May of 2006 the Titanic International Society will be holding its annual meeting in Chicago. Why the Chicago area, you ask? Well, there are many reasons, one being that Chicago is a wonderful place to be in springtime. But, the most compelling reason they chose our fair city is to learn more about the Eastland disaster.

Members will travel up the Chicago River to the area between Clark and LaSalle Streets where disaster struck in 1915. They will journey to Wheaton to experience the only existing permanent exhibit dedicated to the Eastland disaster, here at the Center for History. They want to understand the Eastland, its stories, and the people who were part of that dreadful day. To help paint a clear picture for the Titanic members, Dave Nelson, board member of the Center for History, will also present an enlightening Eastland program at their dinner

meeting.

The Center is anxious to share gripping stories, artifacts and memorabilia with a group that understands and appreciates the consequences of a maritime tragedy of this magnitude. We expect this event to seal a bond between the Titanic family and the Eastland family as they discover the similarities and differences between these two events and share their common experiences. Anyone wishing to attend all or part of the Titanic International Society events is welcome. Details are available on their website www.titanicinternationalsociety.org. Be sure to mention your connection to the Center for History and the Eastland disaster.

90th Anniversary Remembered in 2005

The Eastland disaster was remembered on its 90th anniversary at Concordia Cemetery. On one of the summer's hottest days, guests celebrated the lives of the Eastland Disaster victims with a dignified graveside ceremony and speakers as part of the Center for History's commitment to keeping the Eastland story alive. Dave Nelson and Glenn Heck, Center for History board members who have personal connections to the Eastland, were among the speakers that also included Gary Neubieser of Concordia Cemetery, Bill Schultz, Center for History Board Chairman, and Alberta Adamson, Center President & CEO.

A tribute to all of the Eastland victims was given graveside of Mary Manthey whose locket bears a picture of herself and her fiancé Justin James. Both lost their lives that day and her locket was part of the display that accompanied the program. Attendees also visited other grave sites in the area before returning to the mausoleum for a continuation of the ceremony.

A luncheon reception followed giving attendees an opportunity to meet and share their stories and memories. Those who attended were happy they withstood the heat and participated in this 90th anniversary program. This year's anniversary recognition of the Eastland disaster will be at the Eastland Gallery Opening on July 23 where a list of the victims will be on display.



Mary Manthey's locket has recently become a permanent part of the Center's Eastland Collection. Through the generosity of Heather and Isaac Lake from Fortuna California, Mary's locket is a gift that will further the Eastland story.

Share Your Eastland Artifacts

Those treasured pieces of memorabilia that you have tucked away in a special place are so important to you and your family. A document, a letter, a photograph or an object each tells a story or serves as a reminder of a time gone by. Maybe once a year, or every few years, they are brought out and shared with a few close friends or relatives.

Consider how proud you would feel if that piece, so dear to you, could be shared with hundreds and hundreds of people in the Eastland Gallery. By donating to the Eastland Collection at the Center for History your precious pieces of history could be used as part of future exhibits in the Gallery. It might be used as an educational tool when Eastland programs are presented to children and adults. Most assuredly it will be safely cared for and preserved for future generations so they can appreciate the importance and impact of the Eastland disaster.

The Center for History's professional staff embrace the history of the Eastland and lovingly care for the over 1,000 Eastland pieces currently in their care. To discuss how to make your memorabilia a part of the Center's collection call Wendy Miller, Collections and Education Director at 630/871-6601.

Uncle Sam Top Hat Preserved

One of the Center for History's prized Eastland artifacts is an Uncle Sam suit with striped pants, star-embroidered jacket with tails, and matching top hat worn by a survivor, Herman Krause. He planned to be in the Departmental Parade and hopefully the winner of the costume contest. Over the last 90 years the hat has suffered from being

handled and is in need of attention. The Center has secured the services of the Chicago Conservation Center whose staff is trained specifically in textiles. They will expertly preserve the top hat by rebinding the flaking paint and stabilizing minor tears on the brim. They will also surface clean the suit. The treatment for both items is not intended to restore them to pristine condition but to stabilize their structural integrity so that there is no potential for further deterioration or loss. Although this is an expensive and time consuming project, the Center is dedicated to giving the finest care possible to items in the museum's collection. The Center has established a Eastland Endowment Fund to help support such preservation activities and encourages you to help build this fund.



Caring for Keepsakes

The Center for History is very proud of its Dave & Rose Nelson Eastland Collection as well as its own collections: Eastland, extensive World War I & II, Civil War, slavery, and golf collections. The museum staff handles each piece with expert care to ensure it is properly preserved and willingly share their knowledge with the public. If you are interested in learning how you can properly care for your treasures, spend a Saturday morning with Collections Director Wendy Miller during our *Caring for Keepsakes* program. You will go home with practical information that can be immediately put to use. This casual and informative program will tell you how to preserve and correctly handle your Western Electric or Eastland photos and documents or any other cherished memorabilia. Items such as diaries, scrapbooks, and textiles can be brought, too, although bringing items is not required to receive advice on their preservation. Storage materials are available for purchase.

Caring for Keepsakes will be held on July 8, 2006. The program is free for Center for History and Eastland Fellowship Authority members, \$5 for non-members. Advance registration required at

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630-871-6601 or info@wheatonhistory.com.



In the Right Place at the Right Time

Twenty-three year old Charles Vileta was an assembler at Western Electric. He tried to convince his friends to take the second boat leaving for Michigan City that morning, but they talked him into going on the Eastland, the first boat.

Perhaps they were looking for some merriment on that

gray, misty morning when they went below deck to the dancing room and joined about 50 other people. Fortunately for Charles, just before the boat capsized he went to look out one of the portholes. When the ship tipped and water poured in, it was that porthole he hung to for dear life. When rescue

came about 30 minutes later only 12 of those 50 people that had been enjoying music and dance just a half hour before remained alive. All of Charles's companions lost their lives in that water filled dancing room. Pictured is the book Charles carried in his pocket on July 24, 1915. Don't you wonder why he would have taken *The Law of Biogenesis* on a picnic?

Charles joined Western Electric on April 7, 1910 when he was 18 years old, and except for a military leave during World War I, worked all of his 48 years at the Hawthorne Works. The 1958 Chicago Tribune newspaper article that announced his retirement told the story of his experience on the Eastland.

