

Paranormal Activity Spurred by the Eastland's Sinking

Few people outside of Chicago know of the S.S. Eastland calamity. Even more are unaware that the disaster is the greatest single loss of life of any ship on the Great Lakes.

The horrific event occurred when the Eastland, rolled over on its side while docked on the Chicago River. Hundreds of men, women and children on board drowned within minutes of the ship rolling over. Not long after, the area of Chicago's Clark and LaSalle Streets report ghostly activity.

It Was a Beautiful Day for a Picnic

In the early morning hours of July 24, 1915, the S.S. Eastland, docked between Clark and LaSalle Streets, waited for its passengers to arrive. The Western Electric Company had chartered the Eastland to transport employees, some entire families, to a company picnic in Michigan City, Indiana.

The S.S. Eastland Steamer had Problems from the Start

The S.S. Eastland steamer, built in 1902, had the capacity for only 500 souls. Designed for lake excursions and transport produce on the return trips to Chicago, the Eastland had design flaws. The top-heavy Eastland steamer listed frequently when overloaded. Employees of the Western Electric company bound for the festivities that day, knew nothing of the ship's instability.

War raged in Europe but on the morning of July 24th excited passengers pushed their way up the gangplank of the Eastland. Upper decks became crowded within minutes and the rest of the passengers crammed the decks below happy to be out of the morning chill. By 7:10 am, over 2,500 passengers filled the ship.

Just after 7:15 am, the crew became concerned as the boat started to list to port facing away from the pier. Water pumped into ballast tanks could not stop the list. and the vessel continued its alarming roll.

Panic and Terror

On the upper deck, panicked, adults, many holding onto children and infants, spilled into the water. Others jumped for their lives. Onlookers were horrified as hundreds of people began to drown. Panicked passengers below deck climbed out of gangways and windows on the starboard side as the ship continued to lean toward port. Other passengers found themselves trapped inside by water. Additionally, pianos, heavy bookcases and tables slammed into adults and children killing some instantly.

Just 58 minutes after boarding had commenced, the Eastland rolled over on its side settling into the shallow river bottom. Not surprising, a few onlookers jumped into the river to assist those floundering in the water. At the same time, nearby boats also rushed to help but by then it was too late to save scores of victims. To add to the chaos, screams heard inside the hull prompted rescue workers to clamber aboard and attempt to cut through the Eastland's thick plating with torches. When the hull was finally breached, only a handful of passengers were still alive. The happy news was that one entire family was rescued due to the worker's valiant efforts.

Writer Jack Woodford, who witnessed the disaster, gave a first-hand account to the *Herald and Examiner*, a Chicago newspaper.

...and then movement caught my eye. I looked across the river. As I watched in disoriented stupefaction a steamer large as an ocean liner slowly turned over on its side as though it were a whale going to take a nap. I didn't believe a huge steamer had done this before my eyes, lashed to a dock, in perfectly calm water, in excellent weather, with no explosion, no fire, nothing. I thought I had gone crazy.