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The SS Eastland Disaster: The History of the Deadliest Shipwreck on the Great Lakes

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures *Includes accounts of the tragedy by survivors, witnesses and rescuers *Includes online resources and a bibliography for further reading *Includes a table of contents “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." – Jack Woodford, writer The Great Lakes have claimed countless thousands of vessels over the course of history, including swallowing up gigantic freighters like the Edmund Fitzgerald, the largest ship of its day to sail the Great Lakes and still the largest to lie below Lake Superior’s murky depths. Given the dangerous conditions and precarious history associated with America’s largest freshwater lakes, it’s somewhat ironic that the deadliest maritime disaster took place in Chicago aboard a ship that capsized while docked to a pier. When people discuss deadly maritime disasters during the second decade of the 20th century in which more than 800 people were killed, they’re often talking about the Titanic or Lusitania, not the Eastland on the Chicago River. However, shockingly enough, on July 24, 1915, a ship full of sightseers out for a day on the Great Lakes capsized while still tied to a dock, sending more than 2,500 passengers into the frigid water. By the time the ship was righted and rescue efforts were completed, nearly 850 people had been killed. As unbelievable as the incident seemed, the Eastland was actually susceptible to just such a problem as a result of its issues with listing, and on top of that, the ship seemed to have all sorts of bad luck in its past, including a collision with another boat and even a mutiny on board. If anything, the safety protocols established after the sinking of the Titanic, most notably the inclusion of enough lifeboats on board for every passenger, made the Eastland even more top heavy and contributed to the disaster. Ultimately, several individuals were charged with crimes in connection with the Eastland disaster, but none would be found guilty. The SS Eastland Disaster: The History of the Deadliest Shipwreck on the Great Lakes chronicles the story of the disaster and its aftermath. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Eastland like never before, in no time at all.

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