

**Fact and Fiction:  
The Eastland Disaster, and the Bestselling Novel it Inspired**

**Friday, September 1, 2023**

**2:00pm**

**Chicago Maritime Museum**

**1200 W 35th St, Chicago**

**Presented by:**

**The Eastland Disaster Historical Society  
and Jocelyn Green, Author of *Drawn by the Current***

**The Eastland Disaster: An Unparalleled Tragedy**

Early on the morning of Saturday, July 24, 1915, a light rain fell, yet the air was filled with anticipation and excitement. Thousands gathered along the Chicago River for Western Electric's fifth annual employee picnic. But the day quickly turned tragic, resulting in Chicago's greatest loss-of-life tragedy. Find out what happened during a presentation given by the Eastland Disaster Historical Society, featuring the two granddaughters of survivor Bobbie Aanstad.

**Program Details**

This joint program between Christy Award-winning novelist Jocelyn Green and the Eastland Disaster Historical Society (EDHS) will share insight into the research and writing of ***Drawn by the Current***, which revolves around the Eastland Disaster.

The program also features:

- the three recently discovered motion picture videos taken in 1915; dozens of photographs; compelling firsthand narrative delivered by descendants of a survivor;
- a brief video with ABC's Ron Magers interviewing several survivors;

- animation depicting the listing of the Eastland while passengers were boarding, and the moment the ship capsized;
- a brief video revealing how George “Papa Bear” Halas arrived too late to board the Eastland (a fortunate bit of fate that guaranteed the future of the Chicago Bears and the National Football League).

Our adult program will answer the following questions: Why was the picnic so highly anticipated? What happened? How did it happen? What was the impact? What was the response? Was it avoidable? Who was held accountable? What damages were awarded? What amount of relief funds were raised? And what does an author do with that history in the making of a novel?

The program will include time for Q&A as well as the opportunity to purchase ***Drawn by the Current*** and have your novel signed by the author.

### **About the Presenters**

**Susan Decker** and **Barbara Decker Wachholz**. Co-Founders and Vice Presidents Eastland Disaster Historical Society

As youngsters growing up in the Chicago area, sisters Susan Decker and Barbara Decker Wachholz listened to their grandmother tell them her story of staying afloat in a compartment between decks for hours while surviving the Eastland Disaster. Years later, Susan and Barbara co-founded the Eastland Disaster Historical Society, and thereby assumed their grandmother's former role of storytelling. Of course, the stories that Susan and Barbara tell today are the stories of the thousands of people whose lives intersected on the day of the Eastland Disaster. In a matter of a twenty short years, Susan and Barbara have shared the story of the Eastland Disaster with several million people. The personal warmth and compassion that they naturally add to everything they do has resulted in the development of an international community of people interested in and connected to the tragedy. This community has enabled the Society to gather, archive, and share names and stories from over 2,000 families with direct connections to the tragedy.

**Ted Wachholz** Executive Director and Chief Historian Eastland Disaster Historical Society

Ted Wachholz took a nearly century-old, obscure tragedy and from it spawned

the Eastland Disaster Historical Society (EDHS). Now in its twentieth year of operations with Ted as the Executive Director, the Eastland Disaster Historical Society has shared the history and stories of the Eastland Disaster with millions of people in the Chicago metropolitan area, across the country, and around the world. In 2005, Ted authored the third book ever written about the Eastland Disaster. Published by Arcadia Publishing and now in its 6th printing, the book combines captivating images with compelling narrative taken from firsthand accounts of families of victims, survivors, responders, and others directly affected by the tragedy. Ted's passion and interest in the Eastland Disaster was sparked by his personal connection to the tragedy: His wife's grandmother, Borghild "Bobbie" Aanstad, survived the tragedy as a young teenager.

### **About the Eastland Disaster Historical Society (EDHS)**

EDHS passionately preserves and shares the legacies of the tens of thousands of people who were affected by the tragedy, connecting people today to these personal stories and the history of the tragedy. EDHS is the chief steward of the history of Chicago's greatest loss-of-life tragedy. Organized in 1998, the initial seeds for the Society were planted decades earlier when the co-founders' grandmother, Borghild "Bobbie" Aanstad, told her harrowing story of survival in the Chicago River that morning 100 years ago. The Society has worked to legitimize the importance of the history of the Eastland Disaster, and they have altered the collective historical consciousness of society by sharing the story of the Eastland Disaster with several million people.

### **Jocelyn Green**

Author of ***Drawn by the Current***

Jocelyn Green inspires faith and courage as the award-winning and bestselling author of 20 works of fiction and nonfiction, including *The Windy City Saga*, a three-book series set in Chicago during three of the city's most seminal events. Her books have garnered starred reviews from *Booklist* and *Publishers Weekly*, and have been honored with the Christy Award (***The Mark of the King, Drawn by the Current***); the gold medal from the Military Writers Society of America; and the Golden Scroll Award from the Advanced Writers & Speakers Association. She graduated from Taylor University in Upland, Indiana, with a BA in English, concentration in writing. Jocelyn lives with her husband, Rob, and two children in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Visit her at [www.jocelyngreen.com](http://www.jocelyngreen.com).

## **About the Chicago Maritime Museum**

The Chicago Maritime Museum, located on the River Level of the Bridgeport Art Center at 35th Street and Racine Ave., opened in July of 2016. Designed by renowned architect and CMM chair emeritus, Dirk Lohan, the 10,000-square-foot museum serves as a window into Chicago's maritime history.

The museum offers visitors a chronological walk through local maritime history including the eras of French fur traders, sail and steam-powered vessels, modern commercial Great Lakes frigates, recreational sailing and the Ralph and Rita Frese Canoe Collection.

The Eastland Disaster exhibit at the museum honors those who perished in the catastrophe with a memorial wall. The exhibit also features a dive suit said to be used as part of the recovery effort. In addition, on loan from the EDHS are personal belongings of passengers including a wallet, a pocket watch and a dollar bill.

Guests at the Eastland Disaster presentation will enjoy a guided tour of the museum by CMM curator Dylan Hoffmann.

For more information, visit us at [chicagomaritimemuseum.org](http://chicagomaritimemuseum.org).