

THE LIGHTSHIP

VOLUME XIII No.2

APRIL 1991

Museum of Arts & History
Mannie Gallery
1115 Sixth St
Port Huron MI 48060

LAKE



LORE

Fr. Pete Van der Linden Editor 1317 7th St. Port Huron, MI 48060
(313)985-9616

MARINE
SOCIETY

THE EASTLAND

1903 - 1948



EASTLAND (US.200031) 1903 Port Huron by the Jenks Shipbuilding Company (Hull #25); 265.0 x 38.2 x 19.5; 1961 gross tons. Capsized in the Chicago River July 24, 1915. Over 812 lives were lost. She was raised and converted to a US gunboat in 1917 and renamed b) USS WILMETTE. She was scrapped in 1948.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DINNER
& PROGRAM

SATURDAY APRIL 6, 1991

1115 SIXTH STREET

PORT HURON, MICHIGAN

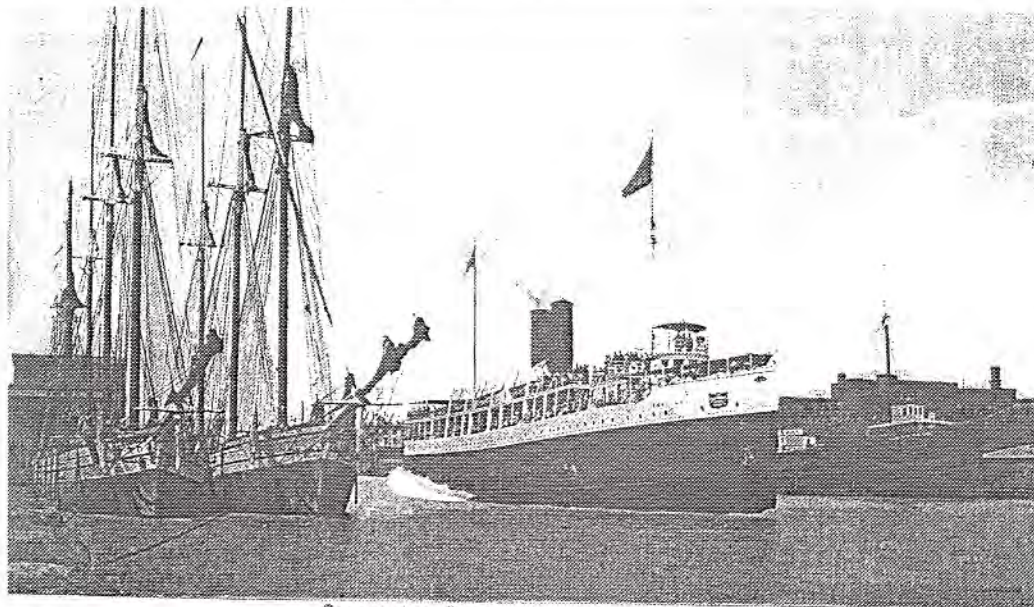
DINNER AT 6:30 P.M.

RAYMOND SHORT OF LUDINGTON

WILL SPEAK AND SHOW SLIDES

ON THE EASTLAND

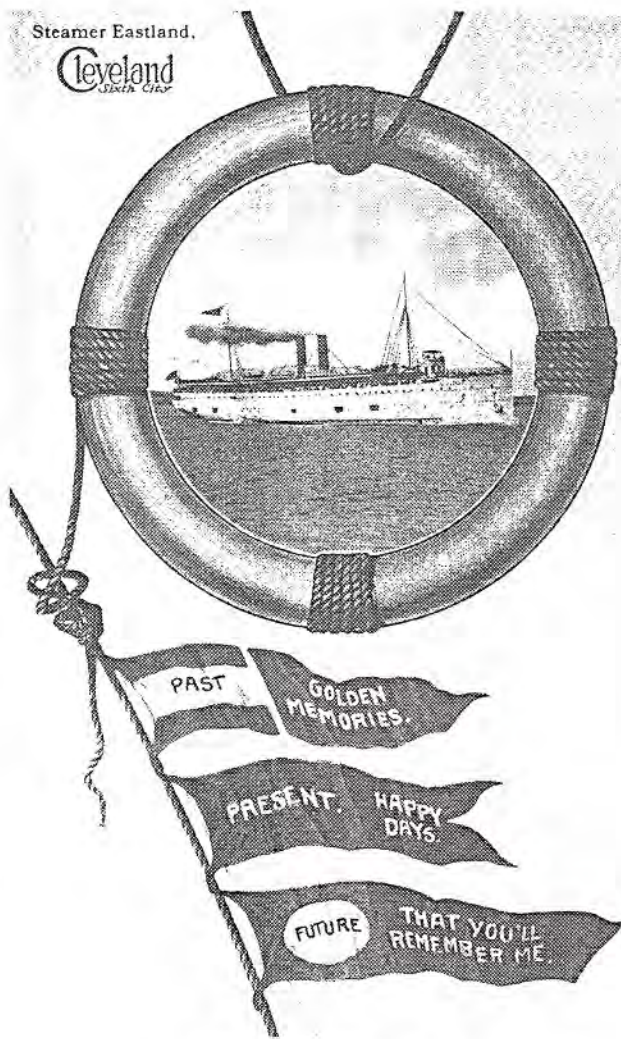
AT 7:30 P.M.



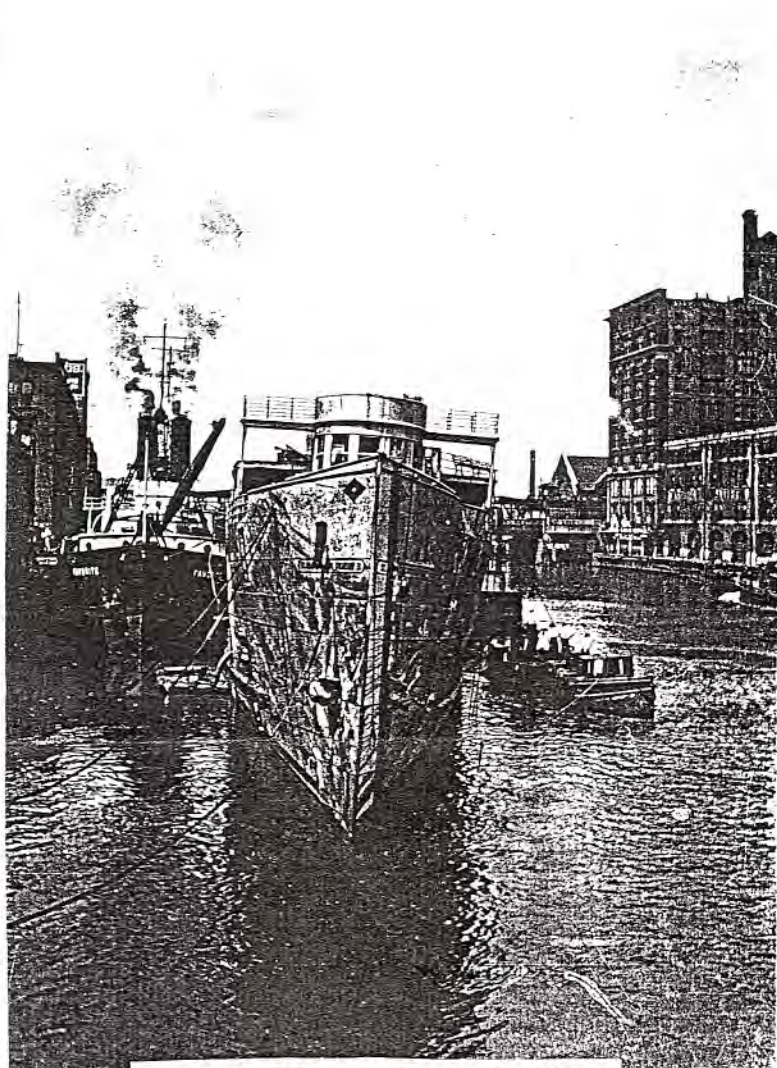
Steamship Eastland and Chicago River.

Steamer Eastland.

Cleveland
Sixth Ave



EARLY POSTCARD



AFTER RAISING THE VESSEL

"The most ill-fated vessel on the Great Lakes" — such words have described this stately passenger steamer because of the monstrous tragedy that befell this ship on the 24th of July, 1915. Early that morning a mass of picnickers jammed the docks to board this and a few other vessels on an annual excursion from Chicago. Instead, death took the holiday.

She had been a truly palatial steamer, a fine ship in her 12 years. Her first and last schedule had been from Chicago to western Michigan ports and resort areas. Sandwiched between had been years she ran from Cleveland to Cedar Point on Lake Erie. It was while she steamed on Lake Erie that a post card was issued extolling her virtues, and the desirability of a cruise on her. Three pennants, on the card, emphasized "Past — Golden memories: Present — Happy Days; Future — That you'll remember (me)." How could anyone forget, after July 24, 1915?

THE DISASTER CHICAGO RIVER JULY 24, 1915

Many stories have been written about this event. Suffice it to say here, that none could completely describe the horror, and the stark catastrophe of the fatal day. Without warning, the ship capsized at her dock after 2,500 souls were safely aboard her (so they thought). The harvest of death is estimated to be between 812 and 835. Some 823 bodies were recovered by the rescuers, and even this count is in dispute. No chance whatever was given to the many men, women, and children who were hopelessly trapped inside the vessel as it turned over, on her port side. For days afterwards she rested on her side on the bottom of the muddy Chicago river, less than 20 feet from the dock, with a great part of her starboard side still above the water. The rescuers worked feverishly, first to aid those still alive, then to retrieve bodies. This grisly task went on many days after the accident.

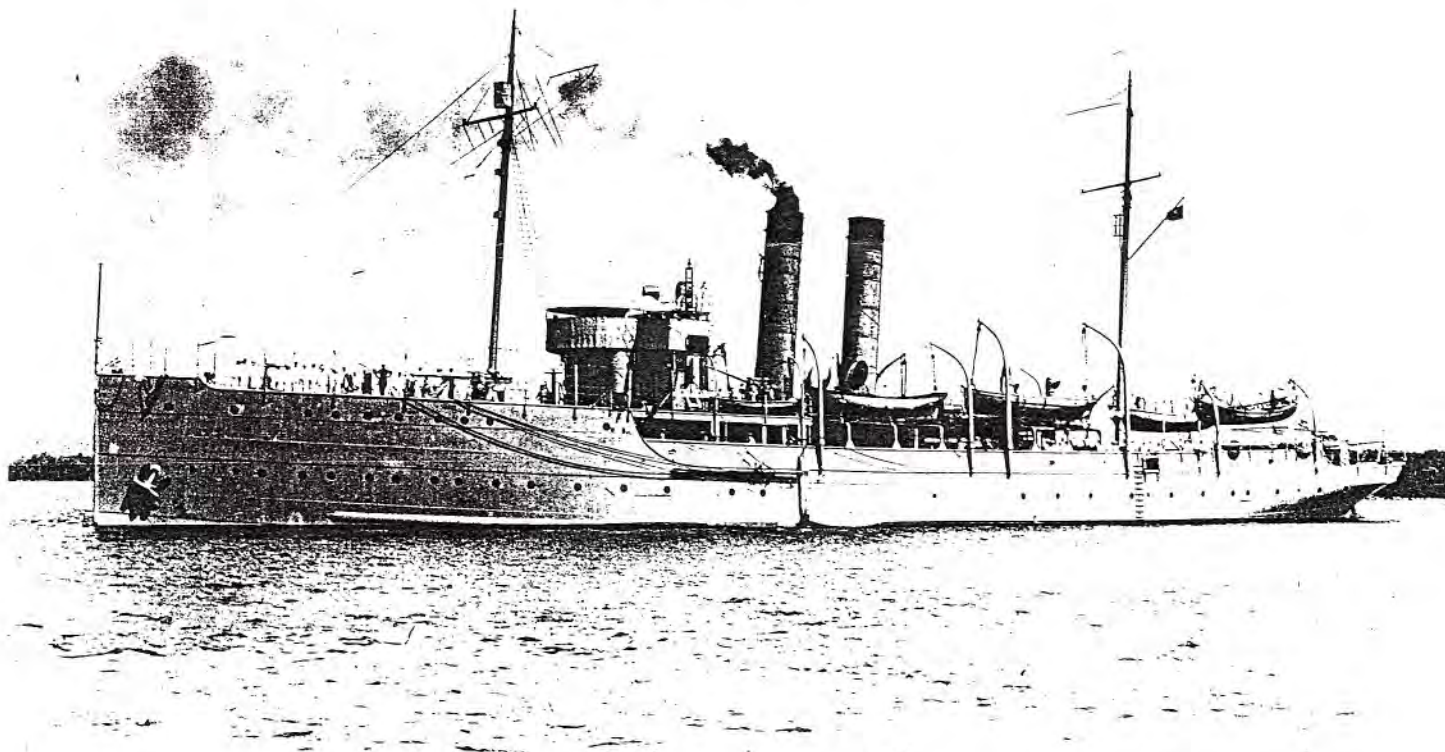


The ship was raised and lay idle in Chicago for two years. No one wanted her. She was a pariah, with the screaming ghosts of drowned humanity in her bosom. The disaster so infuriated the people of Chicago that some of the law suits are still not settled in the courts, to this day. Due to the shortage of ships in World War I, she was converted, for Navy use as a patrol boat, to hunt dreaded U-boats. The war ended before she saw service on

the high seas, and she ended her days in the Navy Reserve, as a training ship for recruits. Her career came to an end under the scrapper's torch, in 1948, and even then she made the front pages of Chicago papers. Her name had been changed in 1917 to USS WILMETTE, but even this disguise failed to stem the hatred for this ship, that was felt in the hearts of the people of Chicago, especially those connected, in any way, with the tragedy.



THE RESCUE



THE USS WILMETTE ON THE ST. CLAIR RIVER IN THE '20's