

9-16-2024

Building Resilience: Three Decades of Cultural Heritage Emergency Preparedness and Response in Georgia

Tina Mason Seetoo
Delta Flight Museum

Christine S. Wiseman
Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Seetoo, Tina Mason and Wiseman, Christine S., "Building Resilience: Three Decades of Cultural Heritage Emergency Preparedness and Response in Georgia," *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 40 no. 1 (2024) .

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance/vol40/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Active Journals at DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

Building Resilience: Three Decades of Cultural Heritage Emergency Preparedness and Response in Georgia

By Tina Mason Seetoo and Christine Wiseman

Abstract

Georgia is a geographically diverse state with a growing population. Its vast and varied natural, cultural, and historic (NCH) resources contribute significantly to the state's economy, yet they are at risk of damage from disasters. The awareness of the need for emergency planning for NCH collections has grown over the past three decades. Federal funding has always played an important part in this effort even if the focus of training has evolved over the years. This need can only be met with support from state and federal agencies, networking, and outreach beyond urban centers in Georgia. Through research, interviews, and personal experience of the authors, this article is an account of efforts in Georgia to increase emergency response & planning training, grow participation in disaster networks, and foster relationships with both local and state emergency professionals. As scientists predict the intensity and quantity of natural disasters to increase with the onset of climate change, the NCH community must continue efforts to raise awareness about the risks and potential consequences of failure and also leverage state resources to build a sustainable model for centralized funding and expertise for disaster planning and recovery.

Introduction

Georgia is the largest state east of the Mississippi River with 159 counties and has extensive cultural resources that are vulnerable to a host of disasters. These sites of natural, cultural, and historic (NCH) significance preserve and document the unique history and culture of the state. This article tracks the history and current developments in cultural heritage emergency preparedness in Georgia spanning three decades through research, interviews, and personal experience of the authors. Through qualitative interviews via email, the authors captured the experiences of cultural heritage professionals active in increasing the level of preparedness at Georgia institutions: Glenda Anderson, member of Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council (GHRAC); David Carmichael, Director of the Pennsylvania State Archives and State Archivist; Ann Frellsen, Head of Conservation, Emory University Libraries (Retired), National Heritage Responder and trainer; Venessa Sims, Director of Emergency Management, Georgia Department of Agriculture and ESF 11 Lead for State of Georgia; and Elaina Gregg, Emergency Programs Manager, Foundation for Advancement in Conservation. A list of interview questions is provided as an Appendix.

NCH sites, including libraries, museums, archives, historical societies, historic sites, state parks, national parks, and performing arts organizations, are critical to cultural tourism. In recent years, a slate of natural disasters—including Hurricanes Matthew, Irma, Michael, Sally, Laura, and Idalia, as well as regional flooding and also tornado activity in southwest and northwest Georgia—has resulted in damage to historic structures, important documentary and artifact collections, and valued cultural resources throughout the state. The 2020 hurricane season was the most active Atlantic season ever with “a record 30 named storms formed, with thirteen becoming hurricanes and six becoming major hurricanes — category 3 or higher on the Saffir-

Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale.”¹ Combining the last ten hurricane seasons, 2013 to 2022, nineteen named storms impacted Georgia. Of these, two were considered major hurricanes (Category 3 or higher) while within state borders. In regards to the previous ten years, 2003 to 2012, only nine named storms impacted the state and none of them were hurricane strength when they crossed state lines.² Scientists predict increases in severity and intensity of hurricanes due to climate change, calling for communities along the coast and inland to focus on resilience.³

The economic impact of disasters such as hurricanes is enormous. The record breaking 2020 hurricane season resulted in over \$40 billion in damage nationally.⁴ Cultural tourism has significant economic benefits to the state and much of this tourism involves visits to the state’s NCH sites. Tourists who visit historic and cultural sites spend about sixty-two dollars more per day than other types of visitors; in addition, they tend to spend more on antiques, art, and gourmet dining than other visitors.⁵ Another study reports that tourists spent more on historic-related leisure activities than on evening entertainment, events, or general sight-seeing activities.⁶ Tourism spending in Savannah continues to increase, demonstrated by a report on the rapid increase in tourism over the past decade generating \$4.4 billion dollars of revenue in 2022 alone.⁷ Natural disasters have closed community organizations important to both the public and economy coping with disasters—such as public libraries and local archives—and can also threaten the economic benefits of cultural tourism. Providing training and information about disaster preparedness coupled with a rapid response after disaster strikes is critical to successfully protecting NCH organizations and collections that are important to the public and the economy.

Today Georgia has a robust community of organizations that cooperate and collaborate to mitigate damage to cultural heritage collections in the event of a disaster, but this was not always the case. Although Georgia did see comparatively minor impacts from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, these disasters had a larger effect among cultural heritage organizations across the

¹ National Hurricane Center, “Monthly Tropical Weather Summary,” NWS National Hurricane Center, Miami, FL 8:00 AM EST, Tues, Dec 1, 2020. <https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/archive/text/TWSAT/2020/TWSAT.202012011251.txt>

² “NOAA Historical Hurricane Tracks,” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), accessed 11/6/2023, <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/news/historical-hurricanes/>

³ “Hurricanes and Climate Change,” Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, accessed 10/30/2023, <https://www.c2es.org/content/hurricanes-and-climate-change/>

⁴ “Lessons Learned from 2020 Devastating Hurricane Season,” Federal Emergency Management Agency, accessed 11/3/2023, <https://agents.floodsmart.gov/articles/lessons-learned-2020s-devastating-hurricane-season>

⁵ Lynn Speno, ed. *Heritage Tourism Handbook: A How-To-Guide for Georgia*. Atlanta (GA): Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 2010, accessed 11/3/2023, <https://www.georgia.org/sites/default/files/wp-uploads/2013/09/GA-Heritage-Tourism-Handbook.pdf>

⁶ Joni Leithe and Patricia Tigue. “Profiting from the Past: The Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Georgia,” *Government Finance Review* (16):2, 2000.

⁷ Erica Backus, “Savannah’s Visitor Economy Thrives, Generating \$4.4 Billion in 2022”, June 1, 2023 <https://visitsavannah.com/press/press-release/savannahs-visitor-economy-thrives-generating-44-billion-2022>

state and the country more broadly. Prior to the devastating 2005 hurricane season, the importance of disaster preparedness for cultural heritage organizations was certainly on the radar in Georgia, but there was little awareness at the state level or focus outside of the galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM) community. While disaster preparedness workshops and training were occasionally offered around the state by various organizations, the Preservation Field Services program at the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET—now LYRASIS), a preservation program funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), was the first program offering consistent training and resources for disaster planning within Georgia.

One of the earliest collaborations in Georgia was between the Preservation Committee of the Atlanta Regional Council for Higher Education (ARCHE), a consortium of metro Atlanta academic institutions, and SOLINET. *Shelter from the Stormy Blast*, published by ARCHE and SOLINET in 1998, was intended to provide cultural heritage and record holding institutions with information “to make thoughtful decisions and informed choices about disaster recovery services and products” in an analog focused, proto-Google landscape with helpful industry terminology, outlines of recovery techniques, and printed resources for creating an institutional disaster plan. In 2007, the Society of Georgia Archivists Disaster Committee revised and converted the publication to an online format.⁸

From 1999 to 2000, SOLINET pioneered a train-the-trainers disaster preparedness and recovery series of workshops designed to provide practical information and hands-on experience to meet the demand for disaster training around the southeast United States. Twenty participants, selected based on their location and training experience, were onsite for three days to learn disaster planning and recovery, including a hands-on collections salvage exercise. The NEH grant-funded project included funding for four additional face-to-face disaster planning and recovery workshops around the Southeast. Within a few years, the new trainers conducted or scheduled additional sessions for hundreds of participants as a result of this training. Trainees also served as local disaster response experts for their regions. This proved to be an effective model that is still employed today by the Foundation for the American Institute for Conservation (FAIC) to train National Heritage Responders.

Around the same time period in 1998, the Southeast Regional Conservation Association, Inc. (SERCA) formed with disaster preparedness as a primary focus. “One chief interest of SERCA is to assist caretakers of cultural property in effectively responding to disasters. The ultimate goal of SERCA is for each collecting institution in the Southeast to have a realistic emergency plan.”⁹ Although SERCA is a regional group covering multiple states, Georgia was well represented by the founding members.

⁸ “Shelter from the Stormy Blast,” Atlanta Regional Council for Higher Education, accessed 9/4/2024, <https://www.atlantahighered.org/collaboration/library-collaboration/shelter-from-the-stormy-blast/>

⁹ “About SERCA,” Southeast Regional Conservation Association, accessed 11/3/2023, <https://sercaconservation.org/about/>

Impact of Hurricane Katrina

The impact of Hurricane Katrina on the cultural heritage community and disaster management itself more broadly cannot be overstated. The damage caused by the 140 MPH Category 4 storm that made landfall in Plaquemines Parish in Southern Louisiana on August 29, 2005 was unprecedented. The storm surge, more than twenty-five feet in some locations, exceeded previous records and caused widespread damage across the region. According to the National Centers for Environmental Information, Katrina remains the costliest Hurricane on record, at an adjusted cost of \$198 billion.¹⁰ In addition, Katrina was one of the deadliest hurricanes to strike the US, with a total of 1,833 fatalities.¹¹

“All disasters are local” is a common phrase used in emergency management to emphasize the important role that local first responders have in helping a community recover. However, their success is dependent on the availability of regional, state, and national resources to tap when needed. Originally founded in 1995, the Heritage Emergency National Task Force (HENTF) was an early leader in cultural heritage disaster planning and response. HENTF was started by FEMA and the private non-profit Heritage Preservation; today it is cosponsored by FEMA and the Smithsonian along with fifty-nine partner organizations with the goal to ensure that libraries, archives, museums, historic sites, and the general public have the tools and resources needed to protect collections from disasters.¹² HENTF played a substantial role in coordinating NCH response after Katrina and continues to provide leadership, training, and informational resources used by heritage responders around the country.

Similarly, to the impact of the 1966 Florence Flood¹³ on the advancement of collection recovery techniques, the destruction of cultural heritage collections and organizations inflicted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 served as a wakeup call in the cultural heritage community across the southeast United States and the nation as a whole. Numerous cultural organizations sustained damage as well as local governments and records centers, including the Biloxi Public Library, the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum, Beauvoir Historic Site, National World War II Museum, New Orleans Museum of Art, and many others.¹⁴ It became evident that although some individual institutions had emergency plans effective in responding to smaller scale events, the community was not prepared for the impact of a widespread regional disaster that could destroy buildings and cause power outages lasting for weeks and months hampering the efforts of the broader NCH community to coordinate a large-scale response. In Louisiana

¹⁰ “Costliest U.S. Tropical Cyclones,” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Center for Environmental Information, accessed 11/3/2023, <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/dcmi.pdf>

¹¹ “Extremely Powerful Hurricane Katrina Leaves Historic Mark on the Northern Gulf Coast,” National Weather Service, August, 2005, accessed 11/3/2023, <https://www.weather.gov/mob/katrina>

¹² “About HENTF,” Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative, accessed 11/3/2023, <https://culturalrescue.si.edu/hentf/about-hentf/>

¹³ Paul Conway and Martha O’Hara Conway, “Flood in Florence 1966: A Fifty-Year Retrospective,” (Proceedings of Symposium November 3-4, 2016), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/fulcrum.08612q99n>

¹⁴ Richard Pyle, “Katrina Ruined Some Cultural Sites,” CBS News, September 7, 2005, accessed 11/3/2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/katrina-ruined-some-cultural-sites/>

alone, forty-two public library buildings were completely destroyed or damaged from the storm and Orleans Parish lost eight of thirteen branch libraries.¹⁵ When asked what raised awareness about NCH preparedness in Georgia, David Carmichael (State Archivist of Georgia from 2000-2012) replied, “Katrina. Period. The devastation along the Gulf coast was difficult to grasp, even in person, and the vulnerability of Georgia’s coast was obvious. Savannah, and other historic locations along Georgia’s coast, held countless historical and government documents that were vulnerable to natural disaster.”¹⁶ Coordination calls of disaster experts across the country and federal responders struggled to plan a response with limited information from within the impacted areas. Institutional staff had dispersed widely and prolonged search and rescue efforts delayed access to areas, complicating matters.

Two weeks after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, Ann Frelsen, Conservator at Emory University, and Christine Wiseman, Preservation Manager at the Georgia Archives, were invited by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History to assist with damage assessment. Frelsen and Wiseman traveled to three coastal Mississippi counties and helped nineteen libraries and heritage organizations assess damage by providing basic recovery information and also documenting and writing reports that went to the State Archives and the State Librarian for future action. “The chaos and lack of everything was eye-opening” said Frelsen. Also, she noted “the experience changed what I had been taught about humidity and mold growth. I was motivated to learn more about that relationship and how to better control the situation when there was no power.”¹⁷

In December of 2005, the NCH community gained further insight into the need for disaster planning and response when a groundbreaking nationwide survey, Heritage Health Index (HHI), was published by Heritage Preservation and the Institute for Museum and Library Services. The HHI was the first survey to assess the condition and needs of U.S. collections held in the public trust. Responses related to disaster planning found that an alarming “80% of collecting institutions did not have an emergency plan or staff trained to carry it out.”¹⁸ Although cultural organizations within Georgia were not severely impacted by Hurricane Katrina, the destructive nature of the storm coupled by the HHI galvanized the community to begin collaborative efforts to increase awareness about the importance of disaster planning in the cultural heritage ecosystem.

Response efforts after Katrina confirmed that cooperation with first responders and emergency managers is critical to mitigating damage to cultural heritage collections in the event of a disaster. Creating a network of disaster assistance among museums, libraries, archives, and

¹⁵ Jeffrey Frank, “The impact of Hurricane Katrina on Gulf Coast libraries and their disaster planning,” [Master’s Thesis, San Jose State University, 2011], p.2. <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.wkbu-cu6k>.

¹⁶ David Carmicheal (State Archivist and Director, Pennsylvania State Archives) email to authors with response to interview questions, March 8, 2023.

¹⁷ Ann Frelsen (Conservator Emory University, retired) email to authors with response to interview questions, April 19, 2023.

¹⁸ Heritage Preservation, *A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America’s Collections*, Washington (DC): Heritage Preservation, 2005, p. 62, accessed 11/3/2023, https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files//publications/documents/hhifull_0.pdf

historic properties that collaborate with emergency managers is a key component of the Alliance for Response (AFR) initiative, as an example. “The goal of the Alliance for Response initiative is to bring cultural heritage and emergency management professionals together at the place where virtually all initial disaster response occurs, the local level. Launched in 2003, AFR remains effective by encouraging institutions to complete disaster plans and train for emergencies, creating cooperative disaster assistance networks among museums, libraries, archives, and historical properties and sites, raising awareness of the importance of cultural heritage in communities, and influencing official emergency policies and plans. Over the past twenty years, over thirty networks have been established.”¹⁹

In 2007, with support from the Fidelity Foundation and sponsored by the HENTF, an Alliance for Response forum was held at the High Museum in Atlanta, one of the first post-Katrina. The Atlanta program attracted nearly one hundred people from the cultural heritage community as well as first responders and emergency managers. After the forum the Heritage Emergency Response Alliance (HERA) was formed, an Atlanta area focused regional disaster network. Today HERA has over one hundred active members as well as a website and active membership network. In 2008 members of HERA responded to a tornado that struck downtown Atlanta damaging the building and contents of the Atlanta Daily World offices, the oldest Black newspaper published in the city. HERA members rallied and over the course of a week packed out damaged files, newspaper issues, photographs, and other historic business records from the building using supplies donated from member institutions. This experience in hands-on recovery provided valuable lessons learned about organizing a response and protecting the health and safety of volunteers.



Figure 1: HERA recovery crew with Atlanta Daily World publisher, Alexis Scott, 2008. Pictured left to right, Julie Newton, Kirsten Wehner, Morna Gerrard, Marie Force, Ann Frellsen, Alexis Scott, Tina Seetoo, Meredith Torre, Christine Wiseman. Photo courtesy of HERA.

¹⁹ Elaina Gregg (Emergency Programs Officer, Foundation for Advancement in Conservation) email to authors with response to interview questions, September 12, 2023.



Figure 2: HERA members, Kara McClurken and Tina Seetoo, packing damaged materials from Atlanta Daily World offices, 2008. Photo courtesy of HERA.

A few years later in 2010, an Alliance for Response Forum was held in Savannah and a second regional network, SHER, or Savannah Heritage Emergency Response was formed in Georgia to aid institutions in low-lying and vulnerable Chatham County.²⁰ These two local area networks are composed of volunteers from public and private non-profit organizations including libraries, museums, archives, historic sites, and parks. Both HERA and SHER have been instrumental in fostering collaboration with emergency managers and the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA/HS).

State and Local Government Cooperation

Savannah and Chatham County are a model example of including NCH knowledge and expertise during emergency operations to expedite economic recovery. Over the last decade, SHER made major inroads into the Chatham Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) planning and response community, leading to designating SHER as CEMA's official voluntary NCH partner. "SHER has designated Primary and Secondary Points of Contact (POCS) within the CEMA staff, and has secured a remote or in-person NCH 'desk' in CEMA's Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Several SHER representatives have been trained in CEMA's EOC procedures and the use of WebEOC software. Specific actions for the SHER entity, as well as for individual NCH institutions, are included in the current edition of CEMA's *Chatham Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), ESF-19 (Emergency Support Function) Annex: Cultural and Historical Coordination*, and SHER representatives were invited to participate in its revision from the previous edition."²¹

²⁰ "Savannah Heritage Emergency Response," SHER Online, accessed 11/10/2023, <https://sheronline.wordpress.com>

²¹ Glenda Anderson (Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council) email to authors with response to interview questions, March 31, 2023.

Modeling the federal planning structure, Georgia’s state level emergency planning is organized into fifteen Emergency Support Functions (ESF). At the state level, NCH organizations are included in the State of Georgia Emergency Operations Plan (GEOP) ESF-11 Annex which is coordinated by the Department of Agriculture.²² Under these primary agencies, support agencies and organizations—including the Georgia Archives, Georgia Historical Society, HERA, and SHER—are included in the plan. These NCH organizations were added during the 2015 update which was the result of years of building relationships with state agencies and first responders. Since then, the NCH community continues to cultivate relationships within the primary and support agencies of ESF-11 to ensure that cultural collections are considered in disaster planning and recovery in addition to the goals of saving lives, protecting property, and restoring essential services.

Key to the success in building bridges between the seemingly disparate parts of ESF-11 are a few individuals that see the value of collaboration. One such collaborator is Venessa Sims, Director of Emergency Management, Georgia Department of Agriculture and ESF-11 Lead for the State of Georgia. When asked what led her to partner with local NCH networks, she noted “NCH organizations play a key role in community stability, are economic drivers, and teachers of art, history, cultural, and natural resources. I have always loved art and architecture since I was a child, with these constant changes in leadership, it forced me to have to learn more about NCH roles in the emergency management space to help share with the new staff that took on roles and allow for continuity during planning, response, and recovery phases. It also helped me in understanding how I can support NCH efforts at the state level. This has led to numerous opportunities to teach and share. I am grateful to have been welcomed into this space to serve as a liaison to GEMA/HS and NCH partners.”²³

Before, during, and after disasters, members of HERA work with GEMA/HS to coordinate pre- and post-landfall situational awareness conference calls with stakeholders across the state to locate and provide assistance to cultural organizations that may have sustained damage. In addition, HERA holds annual training programs, webinars, and participates in GEMA/HS statewide emergency drills. SHER, which merged with the Coastal Museums Association to address sustainability of the network, also holds training programs at the annual meetings of the Coastal Museums Association. They also worked with Chatham County Emergency Management to map and geo-reference over eighty heritage sites across the county to aid responders in locating cultural treasures after a disaster.

Another important statewide initiative was participation in the Intergovernmental Preparedness for Essential Records (IPER) project. In 2007 the Council of State Archivists (CoSA) received funding from FEMA to support the development of the IPER Project to address disaster planning

²² “Planning,” Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency, accessed 11/3/2023 <https://gema.georgia.gov/what-we-do/planning>

²³ Venessa Sims (Director of Emergency Management, Georgia Department of Agriculture and ESF 11 Lead for State of Georgia) email to authors with response to interview questions, March 31, 2023.

needs in local governments revealed after Katrina.²⁴ IPER staff were physically based out of the Georgia Archives, but they trained state and local governmental officials in every state and territory on identifying and safeguarding essential records. Two courses were developed on *Essential Records* and *Records Emergency Planning and Response*, which were delivered as a series of online courses, before online training had become a ubiquitous delivery method. Although this was a national program, records managers, Georgia Archives staff, and local governments in Georgia benefited directly since the courses were piloted locally and offered as face-to-face workshops around the state.

New Initiatives

In 2019 the Georgia Public Library Service, an administrative agency that includes the State Librarian of Georgia, added a disaster planning track to their Facilities Summit, a biennial meeting of public library directors across the state. Summit attendees are embarking on major renovations or constructing new facilities. The two-day disaster planning track involved several HERA members and covered disaster planning, fire protection, risk management, disaster recovery, and navigating the state and federal public assistance programs. Post-pandemic, the 2022 Facilities and Disaster Summit returned with HERA members adding sessions on self-care during disasters and hands-on salvage and recovery of collections. At the time of this article, Summit organizers are planning to reprise this conference every two years.

Despite the progress made in protecting Georgia's cultural heritage, until recently the state lacked a means for quickly identifying NCH sites in areas impacted by disasters, thus impeding response. Having an up-to-date and comprehensive inventory of existing NCH sites is essential to preventing loss of important NCH resources and limiting the financial impact of a disaster. Only with accurate geographic locations of these resources will first responders, emergency responders, and cultural heritage managers be able to work together to expedite the recovery process. Geospatial mapping and pre-disaster planning will enable the state to further protect its cultural and historic properties and resources.

With this in mind, the Atlanta University Robert W. Woodruff Library and partners applied for a 2019 LYRISIS Catalyst Grant to support the development and testing of an openly accessible, publicly editable directory of Georgia's NCH organizations for disaster response. This project leveraged linked data to create an online directory and interactive map with GIS coordinates for each organization hosted on the GaNCH project website.²⁵ By the end of the project over 1,900 records for NCH organizations were gathered, verified, and uploaded to Wikidata, the linked open data platform from the Wikimedia Foundation.²⁶ Previously, locations and contact information for NCH organizations in the state were held in proprietary lists, on outdated

²⁴ "Intergovernmental Preparedness Project for Essential Records," Council of State Archivists, accessed 11/7/2023, <https://www.statearchivists.org/research-resources/emergency-preparedness>

²⁵ "GaNCH: Mapping Georgia's Natural, Cultural and Historic Organizations for Disaster Response," accessed 11/10/2023, <https://ganch.auctr.edu/>

²⁶ C. Landis, C. Wiseman, A. Smith, and M. Stephens, "GaNCH: Using Linked Open Data for Georgia's Natural, Cultural and Historic Organizations' Disaster Response," *Code4Lib* 50, (2021-02-10), accessed 11/7/2023, <https://journal.code4lib.org/articles/15576>.

websites, or were completely inaccessible, which complicated the ability of first responders and emergency managers to disseminate information before a disaster and to coordinate response and recovery afterwards. Upon completion of GaNCH project, the database thus far has been utilized by HERA for communications before and after disasters for eleven instances, reaching nearly 1,400 organizations around the state during the first three years. HERA volunteers drafted standardized emails with links to additional resources for different types of disasters so that messaging can be edited and sent out quickly. Messaging is quickly tailored to create timely communications before and after natural disasters such as hurricanes, severe weather, and flooding. Project partners continue to meet bi-annually for updates on the use of the database, reports on additions and changes to the dataset, and to plan the annual update.

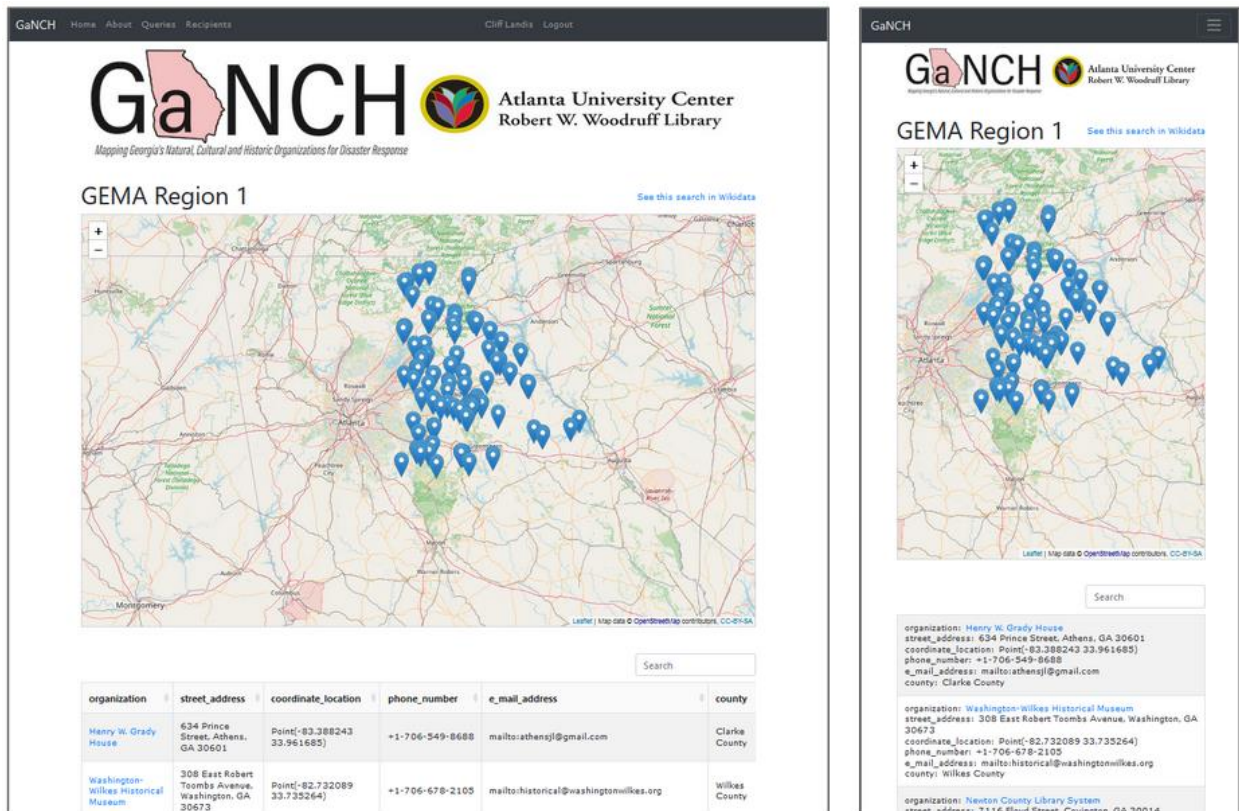


Figure 3: Desktop and mobile view of GaNCH search results.

In 2019, SHER and HERA were invited to participate in a Foundation for Advancement in Conservation initiative to strengthen state and regional AFR networks by holding disaster response training modeled after the National Heritage Responders training. A call for applications in November of 2019 garnered a group of forty well-suited candidates from NCH institutions around the state representing libraries, archives, museums, records repositories, emergency management, and even a zoo. In Fall of 2019, the group took part in online training in preparation for a face-to-face response training in Savannah in April 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic put the in-person training on hold, but participants were able to participate in virtual meet-and-greets and tabletop exercises while waiting for a safe time for onsite training. In April of 2022, Telfair Museums hosted the long-awaited heritage responder training, consisting of lectures from state responders, recovery company practitioners, and preservation experts. Day

Two consisted of breaking into response teams and participating in simulations of disaster scenarios at the Jepson Center, the Telfair Academy, the Davenport House, and Green Meldrim House.

After the Spring of 2022 training, a group of participants and HERA steering committee members began to meet monthly to form a new statewide disaster network with an expanded mission and scope. This new group will continue to have a networking and training focus, while developing a more formalized plan to train heritage responders across the state and share disaster response activities building on the procedures developed using the GaNCH database. In the spring of 2023, the steering committee presented an updated mission and by-laws to the HERA membership, who in turn voted to officially become the Georgia Heritage Responders (GHR) in August 2023.

While the full transformation is in process as of the time in which this article is being written, the GHR Steering committee has identified the following goals, as highlighted via the article authors' personal experience with the group:

1. Continue to train GHRs including those unable to attend the face-to-face training
2. Through a train-the-trainer methodology, grow the number of members that are able to train on response and recovery
3. Identify a contact in each of the eight GEMA regions to serve as a coordinator of response for the area
4. Grow membership in the more rural and underrepresented areas of the state

In November 2023, the newly formed GHR held its first training session, Emergency Heritage Response for twenty-five people, including a half-day, train-the-trainer session at the Georgia Archives.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Although significant strides have been made to advance the level of disaster resilience among cultural heritage organizations in Georgia, there remains work to be done. As Glenda Anderson sums it up, "Perseverance is key. Sustainability is never a guarantee."²⁷ Interest wanes after the initial response to a disaster and attention spans are short. Governments tend to spend money on fixing an existing problem, rather than preparing for an event that may never happen. This issue is even more pronounced in the NCH community where staff are so often asked to do more with less. Or as David Carmichael explains, "Over the long term, the greatest obstacle has always been a combination of denial ('a disaster of that magnitude can't happen to me') and the tyranny of the urgent ('I have more immediate concerns')." He further states, "I can see very little hope of overcoming those challenges except consistent and repeated efforts to make people aware of the dangers and the potential consequences of failure."²⁸ When asked about future directions for statewide NCH planning given the threat of an increase in disasters due to climate changes, respondents spoke of fostering partnerships, utilizing technology, and employing strategies for

²⁷ Glenda Anderson (Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council) email to authors with response to interview questions, March 31, 2023.

²⁸ David Carmicheal (State Archivist and Director, Pennsylvania State Archives) email to authors with response to interview questions, March 8, 2023.

sustainability. Carmicheal spoke on the potential use of technology, “Predictive tools, such as GIS systems used in conjunction with flood modeling, for example, become more important in light of climate change.”²⁹ Anderson recommends an upgrade to WEB EOC technology across the state.³⁰ Emergency Management Agencies (EMAs) should implement the NCH dashboard template developed by CEMA, a tool for real time logging and tracking of damages to NCH institutions during an event.

The challenges of sustainability, maintaining technology, and supporting partnerships point to the necessity that the state of Georgia should invest in a full-time, funded position that oversees historic collections. This position could be similar to the State Historic Preservation Officer’s (SHPO) role in planning, response, and recovery for historic buildings, sites, and communities. As Anderson knows from her work with SHER and CEMA: “Building NCH-EMA partnerships is time-consuming and labor-intensive. Mutual trust and respect do not develop overnight; they are more long-term accomplishments. ‘Stick-with-it-ness’ is an all-important necessity.”³¹ Sims further recommends “having a dedicated liaison at GEMA/HS would be beneficial to sustaining NCH disaster preparedness in Georgia. NCH should have its own Recovery Support Function and having someone in the planning and recovery units to address this unique sector would have value considering the economic footprint NCH institutions bring to local communities from tourism, education, etc.”³² Ensuring the safety of Georgia’s NCH resources from disaster into the future requires a confluence of factors including establishing permanent positions within state government, continued advocacy and collaboration among existing networks, and leveraging new technologies to mitigate risks.

²⁹ David Carmicheal (State Archivist and Director, Pennsylvania State Archives) email to authors with response to interview questions, March 8, 2023.

³⁰ Glenda Anderson (Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council) email to authors with response to interview questions, March 31, 2023.

³¹ Glenda Anderson (Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council) email to authors with response to interview questions, March 31, 2023.

³² Venessa Sims (Director of Emergency Management, Georgia Department of Agriculture and ESF 11 Lead for State of Georgia) email to authors with response to interview questions, March 31, 2023.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

Elaina Gregg, Emergency Programs Manager, Foundation for Advancement in Conservation

- Please provide a brief summary of your experience in Natural, Cultural and Historic Resources (NCH) emergency preparedness.
- Tell us about your journey in NCH disaster prep that led you to your current position at FAIC.
- What was the mission for Alliance for Response early on and has it changed over the years?
- Has the formation of the AFR networks raised awareness about NCH disaster prep at the national level?
- Do you think the communications between the state networks and national groups works well? What could be improved?

Ann Frellsen, Retired, Head of Conservation, Emory University Libraries and current National Heritage Responder and NHR Trainer

- Please provide a brief summary of your experience in Natural, Cultural and Historic Resources (NCH) emergency preparedness.
- What projects or initiatives that you led or were involved in had the most impact in Georgia?
- How did you gain support from state/local officials? (if applicable)
- What obstacles did you encounter and what might have helped to overcome those challenges?
- What direction should future statewide NCH planning take to address threats given the increase in natural disasters due to climate change?
- Please share any other thoughts you might have about sustaining NCH disaster preparedness in Georgia.

David Carmichael, Director of the Pennsylvania State Archives and State Archivist

- Please provide a few sentences summarizing your experience in NCH (Natural, Cultural and Historic Resources) Emergency preparedness.
- What events made you aware of the need for NCH emergency preparedness in Georgia?
- How did you gain support from state/local officials?
- What projects or initiatives that you led or were involved in had the most impact in Georgia? What obstacles did you encounter and what might have helped to overcome

those challenges? Now that you are no longer in Georgia, what other models have you seen that we could replicate here?

- What direction should future statewide NCH planning take to address threats given the increase in natural disasters due to climate change?
- Please share any other thoughts you might have.

Glenda Anderson, Member, Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council (GHRAC)

- Please provide a brief summary of your experience in Natural, Cultural and Historic Resources (NCH) emergency preparedness.
- What events made you aware of the need for NCH emergency preparedness in Georgia?
- How did you gain support from state/local officials?
- What projects or initiatives that you led or were involved in that had the most impact in Georgia?
- What obstacles did you encounter and what might have helped to overcome those challenges?
- What direction should future statewide NCH planning take to address threats given the increase in natural disasters due to climate change?
- Please share any other thoughts you might have about sustaining NCH disaster preparedness in Georgia.

Venessa Sims, Director of Emergency Management, Georgia Department of Agriculture and ESF 11 Lead for State of Georgia

- Please provide a brief summary of your experience in emergency preparedness in general and also specifically related to Natural, Cultural and Historic Resources (NCH) emergency preparedness.
- Tell us about the aspects of your role at the GA Dept of Agriculture that led you to reach out to NCH disaster response groups?
- What obstacles did you encounter and what might have helped to overcome those challenges?
- What direction should future statewide NCH planning take to address threats given the increase in natural disasters due to climate change?
- Please share any other thoughts you might have about sustaining NCH disaster preparedness in Georgia.

Bibliography

“About HENTF,” Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative, accessed 11/3/2023, <https://culturalrescue.si.edu/hentf/about-hentf/>

“Alliance for Response,” American Institute for Conservation, Foundation for Advancement in Conservation, accessed 11/2023, <https://www.culturalheritage.org/resources/emergencies/alliance-for-response>

Backus, Erica, “Savannah’s Visitor Economy Thrives, Generating \$4.4 Billion in 2022,” June 1, 2023, accessed 11/2023, <https://visitsavannah.com/press/press-release/savannahs-visitor-economy-thrives-generating-44-billion-2022>

Bowen, Laurel, Julie Arnott, et. al, *Shelter from the Stormy Blast: A Guide to Disaster Recovery Resources for Georgia and the Southeast*, Atlanta, GA: Southeastern Library Network and the Atlanta Regional Consortium for Higher Education, 1998.

Conway, Paul, and Martha O'Hara Conway. *Flood In Florence, 1966: A Fifty-Year Retrospective*. Ann Arbor, MI: Maize Books, 2018. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/fulcrum.08612q99n>

“Costliest U.S. Tropical Cyclones,” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Center for Environmental Information, accessed 11/3/2023, <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/dcmi.pdf>

“Extremely Powerful Hurricane Katrina Leaves Historic Mark on the Northern Gulf Coast,” National Weather Service, August, 2005, accessed 1/03/2023, <https://www.weather.gov/mob/katrina>

Frank, Jeffrey. *The Impact of Hurricane Katrina on Gulf Coast Libraries and their Disaster Planning*, San Jose (CA): San Jose State University, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.wkbu-cu6k>

“GaNCH: Mapping Georgia’s Natural, Cultural and Historic Organizations for Disaster Response,” accessed 11/10/2023, <https://ganch.auctr.edu/>

“Heritage Emergency Response Alliance,” accessed 11/2023, <https://heraatlanta.wordpress.com>

Heritage Preservation, *A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America’s Collections*. Washington (DC): Heritage Preservation, 2005, https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files//publications/documents/hhifull_0.pdf

“History,” Atlanta Regional Council for Higher Education,” accessed 11/2023, <https://www.atlantahighered.org/about/history>

“Hurricanes and Climate Change,” Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, accessed 10/30/2023, <https://www.c2es.org/content/hurricanes-and-climate-change/>

“Intergovernmental Preparedness Project for Essential Records,” Council of State Archivists, accessed 11/7/2023, <https://www.statearchivists.org/research-resources/emergency-preparedness>

Landis, C., C. Wiseman, A. Smith, and M. Stephens. “GaNCH: Using Linked Open Data for Georgia’s Natural, Cultural and Historic Organizations’ Disaster Response,” *Code4Lib* 50, (2021-02-10), <https://journal.code4lib.org/articles/15576>.

Leithe, Joni and Patricia Tigue. “Profiting from the Past: The Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Georgia,” *Government Finance Review* (16):2, 2000, https://www.novoco.com/public-media/documents/georgia_historic_pres_profiting_from_the_past_111413.pdf

“Lessons Learned from 2020 Devastating Hurricane Season,” Federal Emergency Management Agency, accessed 11/3/2023, <https://agents.floodsmart.gov/articles/lessons-learned-2020s-devastating-hurricane-season>

“Monthly Tropical Weather Summary,” National Hurricane Center, Center, Miami, FL 8:00 AM EST, Tues, Dec 1, 2020, <https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/archive/text/TWSAT/2020/TWSAT.202012011251.txt>

“NOAA Historical Hurricane Tracks,” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, accessed 11/6/2023, <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/news/historical-hurricanes/>

“National Hurricane Center Data Archive,” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, accessed 11/2023, <https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/data/>

“Planning,” Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency, accessed 12/2/2022, <https://gema.georgia.gov/what-we-do/planning>

Pyle, Richard. “Katrina Ruined Some Cultural Sites,” CBS News, September 7, 2005, accessed 11/3/2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/katrina-ruined-some-cultural-sites/>

“Record-breaking Atlantic hurricane season draws to an end,” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, November 24, 2020. <https://www.noaa.gov/media-release/record-breaking-atlantic-hurricane-season-draws-to-end>

“Savannah Heritage Emergency Response,” SHER Online, accessed 11/2023, <https://sheronline.wordpress.com/>

Society of Georgia Archivists, *Shelter from the Stormy Blast: A Guide to Disaster Recovery Resources for Georgia and the Southeast*, 2007, <https://soga.org/resources/Documents/Resources-Disaster%20Recovery/DisasterRecoveryENTIREBOOK2007.pdf>

Speno, Lynn, ed., *Heritage Tourism Handbook: A How-To-Guide for Georgia*, Atlanta, GA: Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 2010, <https://www.georgia.org/sites/default/files/wp-uploads/2013/09/GA-Heritage-Tourism-Handbook.pdf>

Veltman, Chole. “Have an heirloom ruined by climate disaster? There’s a hotline to call for help,” National Public Radio, accessed 11/2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/07/1202637525/climate-change-solutions-heirloom-hotline>

Weaver, M.M., and A. J. Garner. “Varying genesis and landfall locations for North Atlantic tropical cyclones in a warmer climate,” *Sci Rep* 13, 5482, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-31545-4>