GET WITH THE DAM PROGRAM: A DOCUMENTATION PROGRAM PROPOSAL INFORMED BY THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY

by

MARY SAILLE SCOTT SEVIER

(Under the Direction of Katie Marages)

ABSTRACT

Climate change, specifically flooding, causes loss of cultural heritage. Not every resource can be saved through physical measures, so documentation of communities before they flood is necessary. The Tennessee Valley Authority intentionally flooded dozens of communities during the twentieth century using dams to create electricity and provide flood control in the Tennessee Valley. This thesis examines the documentation of three of those communities through archival research and investigation of government documents, using the research to create a documentation program proposal for flood-prone communities today. The proposed program contains a triage system for determining the order of communities to be documented and draws from the National Park Service's existing documentation programs.

INDEX WORDS: Climate Change, Documentation, Tennessee Valley Authority, Historic Preservation, Historic American Buildings Survey, Documentation Programs, The New Deal, Flooding

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DEDICATION

In memory of my four grandparents, each of whom resided in the Tennessee Valley during Roosevelt's New Deal.

Mary Saille Scott Corlew

Robert E. Corlew

Nancy Curtis Reichardt

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My grandfather Robert E. Corlew (1922-2011), chair of the Tennessee Historical Commission and the "Dean of Tennessee Historians", would have been especially interested and helpful in this endeavor. I thank him for his scholarship and time spent with me on our farm, both of which inspired my research interests.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In September 2024, Hurricane Helene brought catastrophic flooding to the American South. Coastal areas saw typical damage from hurricanes; wind and rain devastated communities. Much more atypical, however, was the extreme flooding that occurred in the mountainous regions of western North Carolina and East Tennessee. As climate change continues to increase the strength of storms and natural disasters, preservationists must consider alternative methods to physical preservation. This project looks to the past to preserve the present and inform the future. It includes analysis of the documentation of three Tennessee Valley Authority dam projects: Norris, Watts Bar, and Wheeler. Coinciding with the creation of these dams was the beginning of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and a change in the American approach to preservation, particularly documentation, that continues to affect the field today.

Acknowledging and learning from the shortcomings of documentation techniques and resources of the 1930s, this thesis proposes a documentation program to preserve the cultural heritage of communities at risk of flooding. The program identifies these communities by refining and improving techniques in place at current National Park Service documentation programs. Preservationists must widen their scope of work and vision; physical preservation is not possible for some historic resources and documentation is the only way to preserve cultural heritage. The proposed documentation program accepts that many buildings will be destroyed by climate change and intends to document them before that occurs.

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was created in 1933 as one of the so-called "alphabet agencies" of the New Deal and still provides electricity and flood control for the Tennessee Valley region today. Currently, the TVA is publicly funded, and its operation is overseen by a board of directors. Its initial purpose, which continues to be its charge today, was to help control flooding, create electricity, increase navigability, and improve quality of life for people of the region. It accomplishes these goals through the creation of dams that hold water in reservoirs which is released as needed throughout the year. Some of the electricity created by the dams is sold to municipalities.[1] The reservoirs also provide recreational opportunities for valley dwellers and visitors.

The scholarship on New Deal programs such as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Resettlement Administration, the Subsistence Homesteads Division, and the Farm Security Administration suggests varying degrees of success, but over 90 years later, the TVA and its physical embodiments remain, particularly in the middle part of the South. North Alabama and Southeast Tennessee were impacted the most heavily during the New Deal by the TVA, as eight dams were constructed between 1933-1940 in the area.[2] Many people had trauma associated with having to leave their homes and communities.[3] Tenant farmers had an especially difficult time with new farming policies, as these policies were designed primarily to help

[1] "Tennessee Valley Authority," accessed December 31, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/money/Tennessee-Valley-Authority.
For more information about the activities of the TVA, see the article in Encyclopedia Britannica. "Tennessee Valley Authority," accessed December 31, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/money/Tennessee-Valley-Authority.
[2] Benita J. Howell, "The New Deal for Tenant Farmers: Government Planning and Indigenous Community Development on the Cumberland Plateau," *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association* 3 (1991): 83-84.
[3] Howell, "The New Deal for Tenant Farmers," 84.

landowners.[4] After being displaced to new locations, former valley residents established new lives.[5]

African American residents of the valley found themselves facing harsher resettlement experiences than white individuals. There is no doubt that the Tennessee Valley was a desolate place to live for nearly all its inhabitants, but this was especially true for African American residents.[6] While the dam projects brought a semblance of prosperity to a region devoid of electricity and job opportunities, the TVA's segregation policy meant that African Americans benefitted less from mitigation efforts than their white neighbors. African Americans struggled harder to obtain assistance from the TVA's relocation efforts because of systemic federal government racism.[7] Additionally, African Americans typically began the process with fewer resources than white Americans and thus relocation was even more difficult for them. TVA policies and procedures were part of this systemic discrimination during these years.

At its inception, the TVA differed substantially from other government agencies. While it had similar goals and purposes as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in terms of damming rivers, TVA had unprecedented power as a federal agency, which it continues to enjoy today. The TVA was incredibly influential and powerful in people's everyday lives. Because there were only three people on the TVA's board, those individuals had extraordinary power.[8]

Understanding the region TVA serves is an inherent part of any study of the agency. The Tennessee Valley encompasses parts of Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi

[4] Howell, "The New Deal for Tenant Farmers," 83.
[5] Howell, "The New Deal for Tenant Farmers," 90.
[6] Melissa Walker, "African Americans and TVA Reservoir Property Removal: Race in a New Deal Program," *Agricultural History* 72, no. 2 (1998): 420.
[7] Walker, "African Americans and TVA Reservoir Property Removal," 418.
[8] Daniel Schaffer, "Managing the Tennessee River: Principles, Practice, and Change," *The Public Historian* 12, no. 2 (1990): 12, https://doi.org/10.2307/3378685.

and Georgia.[9] Managing, protecting, and increasing navigability of the Tennessee River, especially finding the appropriate level of federal involvement in such matters, is an issue that has plagued the United States since the 18th century.[10] In fact, after the famous *Gibbons v. Ogden* case that deemed riverways public property, navigability was considered the primary objective of managing rivers. With TVA's founding, flood control and hydroelectric power became equally vital for the first time.[11] Indeed, it was necessary for the agency to focus on each of these goals. The area's income was about 50 percent of the national average, and 75 percent of the residents of the Tennessee Valley lived in rural areas.[12]

At the time of the Great Depression, the Norris and Wheeler areas in East Tennessee were some of the bleakest places in the valley. In north Alabama, about one third of people who lived within a mile of the river had malaria.[13] Hydropower was an essential goal for alleviating some of this poverty and improving the quality of life. However, managing the environmental concerns to improve farming standards was what impacted people the most after being displaced. Flooding was a problem that had affected the valley for decades. It prevented people from being able to reliably plant crops and predict water levels generally.[14] The difficulties and eventual successes of managing the river affected valley residents in the 1930s and beyond. The TVA brought much-needed prosperity to every resident of the valley, which today includes a mix of large cities, small towns, and rural communities. Their residents have built a variety of

[9] "Tennessee River | Map, Valley, Length, & Facts | Britannica," accessed December 31, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/place/Tennessee-River.
[10] Schaffer, "Managing the Tennessee River," 13.
[11] Schaffer, "Managing the Tennessee River," 13.
[12] Schaffer, "Managing the Tennessee River," 18.
[13] Schaffer, "Managing the Tennessee River," 19.
[14] Schaffer, "Managing the Tennessee River," 19.

industries and enjoy substantially improved living conditions compared to the early twentieth century.

Documentation of sites flooded by the TVA provided some information about how people lived and worked. However, this documentation of sites was not a comprehensive report of each building and landscape in the flooded communities. Notably lacking is the spatial documentation necessary to know exactly where and how people conducted their day-to-day lives, even though personal surveys filled some of this void. Going forward, tools like drone footage or drawings of city blocks can help preserve the cultural heritage of places where relocation will be necessary due to flooding.

In this thesis the term "preservationist" refers to any professional who manages cultural resources, including the public and private sectors. "Cultural resources" and "cultural heritage" are used interchangeably, and both refer to tangible aspects of culture. While intangible cultural heritage can be impacted by flooding, this thesis focuses only on tangible cultural heritage.

The risk of flooding to many communities, both coastal and inland, is imminent. Coastal communities are clearly vulnerable. National Geographic predicts: "By the end of the century, chronic flooding will be occurring from Maine to Texas and along parts of the West Coast. It will affect as many as 670 coastal communities, including Cambridge, Massachusetts; Oakland, California; Miami and St. Petersburg, Florida; and four of the five boroughs of New York City."[15] However, communities near rivers and lakes are also at risk. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has estimated that about 39 percent of the American population

[15] "Sea Level Rise Will Flood Hundreds of Cities in the Near Future," Pages, July 12, 2017, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/pages/article/sea-level-rise-flood-global-warming-science.

lives in coastal areas, and many more live near rivers, lakes, or other water sources.[16] Preservationists must expand their efforts to encompass damage from inland flooding as well as that associated with rising sea levels.

The American South receives the brunt of rain and wind from hurricanes that make landfall in the Gulf of Mexico, but the 2024 flooding event in the mountains of Carolina and Tennessee is atypical. The risk might become a new normal for many Americans, however. According to NPR, hurricanes in the United States are not becoming more frequent in recent years, but they are more powerful.[17]

The consequences of this flooding will force relocation in some affected communities. Relocation of citizens and structures is a recognized strategy among some preservationists in the face of climate change. However, it cannot be the primary mitigation action.[18] Relocation is the most disruptive choice for the citizens of communities, and building relocation is often prohibitively expensive.[19] One American example of forced community relocation due to climate change is Tangier Island, Virginia in the Chesapeake Bay. This small island has a population of less than 500, and crabbing is its primary industry.[20] While the flooding of communities by the TVA happened rapidly, it was no secret. For different reasons, the same is true for Tangier.

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[16] Sharon C. Park, "Sustaining Historic Properties in an Era of Climate Change," *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology* 49, no. 2–3 (2018):44.
[17] Rachel Waldholz, "Are Hurricanes Getting Worse? Here's What You Need to Know," *NPR*, October 8, 2024, sec. Climate, https://www.npr.org/2024/10/08/nx-s1-5143320/hurricanes-climate-change.
[18] Park, "Sustaining Historic Properties in an Era of Climate Change," 39.
[19] Park, "Sustaining Historic Properties in an Era of Climate Change," 39.
[20] Casey B. McCormack, "America's Next Refugee Crisis: Environmentally Displaced Persons," *Natural Resources & Environment* 32, no. 4 (2018): 8–12.
"The Official Web Site of Tangier Island: Tangier Island Virginia - A Chesapeake Bay Island Bed and Breakfasts, Restaurants, Transportation, Marina, Airport, Accommodations," accessed October 13, 2024, https://www.tangierisland-va.com/.

Scientists have been sounding alarm bells about Tangier for many years now. Marine biologists believe that the entire island will be underwater in just a few short decades.[21]

As both a physical place and a culture in danger of disappearing, Tangier Island is intriguing from a preservation perspective. Culturally, it is unique not only for its reliance on the bay for sustenance but also for aspects such as the residents' recognizable dialect. Only one third of the original island remains as of 2022, and it is predicted to be completely unlivable by 2051.[22] Water seeps into buildings, and houses are being raised to stay dry.[23] Tangier represents the American future, one wherein millions of people will fight to stay dry in their own communities or be forced to leave. The Army Corps of Engineers has proposed a method to slow the rising water, but its price tag of $30 million and its inability to solve the underlying issue makes it impractical.[24] The unfortunate truth about Tangier is that its sinking cannot be saved. Preservationists must therefore be involved in preserving its cultural heritage through documentation of buildings and structures. Much like those who lived in the Tennessee Valley during the flooding of TVA projects, relocation is necessary for the people of Tangier.

Flooding in larger cities is a risk for the American South as well. Miami already experiences flooding frequently, and city leaders and residents have tried to address the ongoing crisis. One of the most promising solutions, canals that direct water to the ocean using gravity, is starting to fail as high storm surges render the canals completely ineffective.[25] There are

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[21] *The Island Soon To Be Underwater: Climate Change's Impact On Tangier Island*, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMB6FWUS41U.
[22] *The Island Soon To Be Underwater*.
[23] *The Island Soon To Be Underwater*.
[24] McCormack, "America's Next Refugee Crisis," 11.
[25] Union of Concerned Scientists, "Encroaching Tides in Miami-Dade County, Florida: Investing in Preparedness to Manage the Impacts of Rising Seas" (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2016), https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17285, 5.

countless examples of these mitigation efforts leading to short-term fixes rather than solutions throughout Miami and the rest of the country. Understandably, residents would like to continue using mitigation measures to prevent relocation. However, storm intensity and sea levels will only increase in the coming decades. Preservationists must help citizens of both rural and large urban areas understand that their current built environment should be documented extensively before the pressures of relocation make such work impossible.

In Charleston, South Carolina, flooding is a problem that has occurred for decades and has worsened in recent years. The city enjoys the oldest historic district in the country, and its historic preservation commission is well-versed in design guidelines. It recently amended its guidelines to include the possibility of raising houses to mitigate the effects of flooding.[26] Some homeowners in the city have elected to perform this onerous operation, which takes many months and costs hundreds of thousands of dollars. This dynamic in Charleston crystallizes the issue of preservation and flooding in America. Only wealthy and visionary homeowners can afford this option, and raising a home some number of feet in the air does not protect the home indefinitely. Sea levels will continue to rise, coming up over the battery and the improved seawall in Charleston. Preservation can only outrun floodwaters for so long. Eventually, only a small number or perhaps no homes will remain above the water. Charleston serves as the canary in the coalmine for the flooding crisis in American preservation. A national framework designed to document buildings and prepare for this worst-case scenario of structural and communal obliteration must be implemented quickly.

[26] Richard Fausset and Christopher Flavelle, "In Charleston, S.C., Saving Historic Homes Means Hoisting Them in the Air," *The New York Times*, July 24, 2021, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/24/us/charleston-sc-flooding-climate-change.html.

Methodology

I chose to examine the TVA for this project because it is a historic example of flooding with documentation. The TVA's intentional and contained community flooding presented an extraordinary opportunity to document the inundated communities. Each of the three communities was documented similarly, and I examine the reasons why there was limited physical documentation in chapter three of this thesis. I chose three dam projects for this research: Norris, Watts Bar, and Wheeler. I also performed archival research at the Atlanta branch of the National Archives.

These three dam projects span the Tennessee Valley geographically. Norris is in northeast Tennessee, Watts Bar is south of Norris in East Tennessee, and Wheeler is in north Alabama just east of Muscle Shoals and Florence.

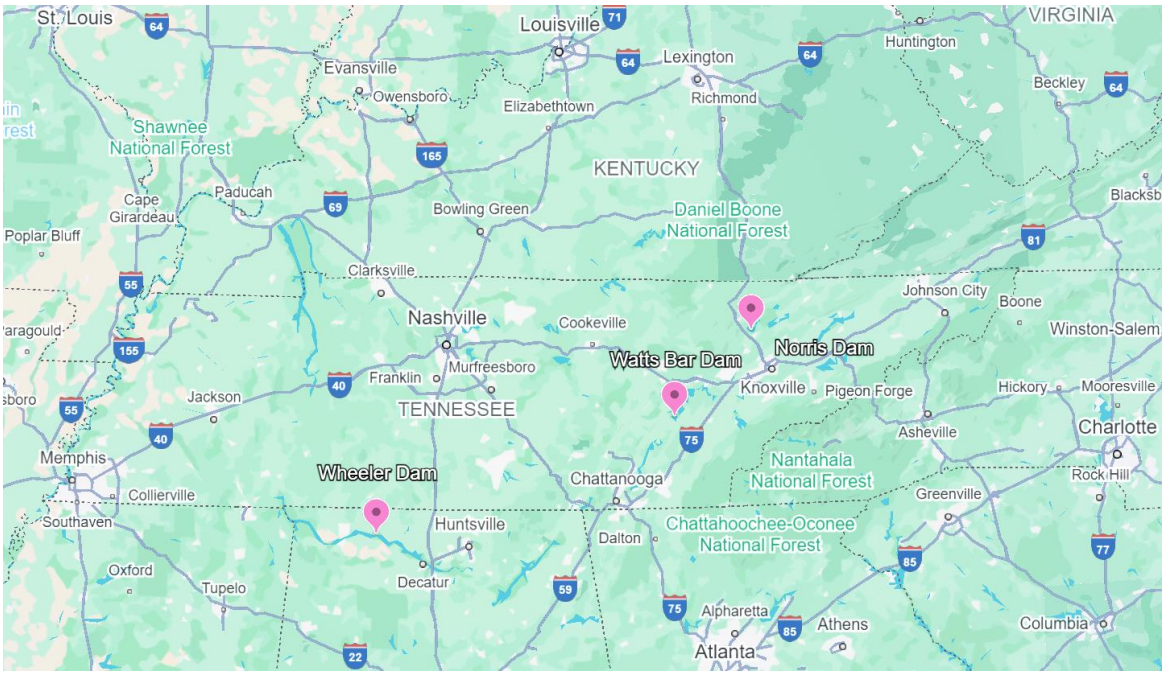

Figure 1. Map of Selected Dam Projects: Norris, Watts Bar, and Wheeler. Screenshot from Google Earth, March 2025.

The dams were all built in the early years of the TVA (between 1933 and 1939) in the depths of the Great Depression. Each of these dams and their documentation provide unique circumstances and depth to this project. The documentation of Norris, the earliest dam project, illustrated the political climate and public opinion not only on TVA's creation as part of the New Deal but also on the unusual step of obliterating towns and farms to form the necessary reservoirs. The story of Wheeler as told through its documentation shows the impact of its location in north Alabama, a region that was deeply impacted by the Tennessee River. Before the creation of reservoirs, navigability issues plagued north Alabama due to Muscle Shoals, and the TVA navigability mission resonated here. Finally, Watts Bar adds the perspective of an isolated community turned reservoir with the additional feature of a nuclear power plant.

The three projects vary somewhat in the amount of documentation of their cultural heritage. Since it was the first project, Norris has the most documentation and literature written about it. There is a museum and visitors center at the dam that contains limited information about the area before flooding. Wheeler and Watts Bar do not have museums on site like Norris does nor do they have books written about them. The intention behind selecting these three projects was to examine dam projects which were created at the same time but were documented with varying levels of research. The variation in the amount of documentation, published scholarship, and geography of the selected sites allows for a diverse study of TVA projects constructed during the New Deal.

Another research method used in this study is archival research. The National Archives at Atlanta houses TVA records for many dam projects, including Norris, Watts Bar, and Wheeler dams. The information on dam projects includes correspondence among TVA social workers and

other employees about people who were displaced, descriptions about the creation of the family removal sections for each dam project, and statistics about the families who were displaced.

In addition to examining government documents, this thesis draws parallels between The New Deal era's economic crisis and today's climate crisis through current literature about climate change. Just as many Americans felt direct effects of the Great Depression, Americans are currently facing the widespread, detrimental effects of the climate crisis. Additionally, the shift in preservation methods during the New Deal to documentation such as the Historic American Buildings Survey and the use of photography to record the built environment provided the option of documentation instead of tangible preservation alone. Today, the climate crisis calls for a similar preservation mindset. All physical, historic resources cannot be saved in the face of uncontrollable and unpredictable forces like strong storms. However, many of these historic resources can be documented using preservation expertise.

This thesis proposes a documentation program based on National Park Service existing techniques combined with a triage system based on climate change predictions. The Historic American Buildings Survey offers an existing framework upon which I draw to propose a new documentation program that contains pertinent aspects of historic structure reports and cultural landscape reports. The program selects communities to be documented according to their risk of flooding.

Studying the documentation of communities flooded as part of the TVA provides opportunities for modern preservations to avoid past mistakes. Examining the three TVA communities from pre-flooding through relocation provides an opportunity to refine best practices in documenting the potentially lost communities and in relocating displaced citizens in areas threatened by climate change. Places like Charleston, Miami, and Tangier could certainly

find themselves in a situation like Norris, Watts Bar, and Wheeler in the coming decades, and their citizenry will have to decide how best to use their resources. Documenting their communities is the only way to be sure that the tangible heritage is preserved.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three fields of scholarship pertain to this thesis. First is the literature about the TVA's inception, its political motivations and effects, and the displacement that occurred during dam construction. The TVA is a complicated government agency that both helped and harmed the people it served. Understanding the TVA's impact on communities and its documentation efforts is necessary for this project. Second, this project will discuss other instances of documentation in American history, primarily the Historic American Buildings Survey and its application to sites impacted by rising sea levels. Finally, this chapter will explore the literature about climate change on cultural resources, focusing primarily on flooding. The following review combines literature regarding the Tennessee Valley Authority, climate change, and documentation so that the past may inform the present.

In today's climate crisis, some resources need to be documented rather than attempting to save them through physical preservation. By examining historic use of documentation, this thesis will recommend measures to document existing areas that are high-risk for flooding. It fills a current gap in the scholarship and examines how to preserve tangible cultural heritage in a world where water threatens to destroy the built environment, alter the natural environment, and scatter the inhabitants of both. Several scholars note ways to manage these issues in a world of unpredictable weather, but they rarely acknowledge that preservationists must now address the growing probability that many communities will no longer exist. The physical reminders of that existence will disappear and should be documented now.

These three fields of literature have not been brought together before. The New Deal and the TVA offer dozens of potential case studies of communities that were flooded. Examining the documentation performed on these now submerged places gives present-day preservationists a toolkit to document current places at risk of flooding. Climate change has only increased the risk of extreme flooding for countless places in the United States. Understanding these risks is essential for today's preservationists, as coping with increased destruction is and will continue to be one of the field's most pressing challenges.

The Tennessee Valley Authority

In *The Public Historian,* Daniel Schaffer writes about managing the Tennessee River. His article is a synthesis of a report created by the TVA in 1988-1989 to reevaluate its reservoir management program.[27] The Great Depression's most important goal was increasing economic prosperity, and the TVA delivered better circumstances for many individuals and families. Public opinion regarding the TVA's intervention into lakes skewed to the positive.[28] However, as the twentieth century marched on, the "ugly brown scars" on lake shorelines created by lowering water levels to create electricity increased public distaste primarily in East Tennessee, perhaps because natural recreational opportunities in the area diminished both in quality and quantity.[29]

Knowing that public opinion of the TVA has changed over the nearly hundred years since its inception puts the original positive reception into context. It is not as if the TVA was glorified as a savior for the poor throughout its existence, but there was certainly public appreciation for the opportunities afforded to the Tennessee Valley's residents. The organization built on that

[27] Schaffer, "Managing the Tennessee River," 7.
[28] Schaffer, "Managing the Tennessee River," 9.
[29] Schaffer, "Managing the Tennessee River," 9.

appreciation with its own promotion as well. Scholars have written of propaganda in the age of the New Deal and its effects on people's perceptions of the government, and the TVA was certainly one of the beneficiaries of these campaigns.[30] Over time the impacts of these programs began to change the public opinion of New Deal. This complicated public opinion must be considered to properly understand the effects of the TVA.

In the mid to late 1930s, the removal of families for the construction of TVA dams was a commonly discussed problem among scholars. Harry Satterfield writes in *Social Forces* in 1937 about the relocation of some of the families from the Norris and Wheeler areas. Interestingly, he includes information about the counties to which the displaced residents moved. As telling as his information, including his description of family questionnaires, is his characterization of relocation as a policy. Calling relocation "One of the most important sociological problems encountered by the Tennessee Valley Authority,"[31] Satterfield's views of the questionnaires provide insight into what contemporaneous scholars thought of relocation. The family surveys were designed to obtain information about the property the families lived on or owned, including the house type, size, financial situation of the family, and their hopes for relocation.[32] Although the purpose of the surveys was sociological, the documentation also provided vital data for preserving the tangible aspects of communities.

In *TVA and Black Americans*, Nancy Grant writes about the black experience with the TVA. In the Wheeler Dam area of north Alabama, more than 80 percent of black residents were

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[30] For more information on propaganda during the New Deal, see Elisha Hanson, "Official Propaganda and the New Deal," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 179 (1935): 176–86.
[31] Satterfield, "The Removal of Families from Tennessee Valley Authority Reservoir Areas," 258.
[32] M. Harry Satterfield, "The Removal of Families from Tennessee Valley Authority Reservoir Areas," *Social Forces* 16, no. 2 (1937): 258, https://doi.org/10.2307/2570529.

tenant farmers/sharecroppers. Their economic status made black Alabamians more vulnerable to the effects of displacement brought on by the TVA.[33] Tenant farmers did not receive compensation for the land they were forced to leave as they did not own that land. African American residents of the valley likely had a different opinion than the one widely publicized, as they did not receive the same financial benefits that white residents did. In *The Greater Good*, Laura Beth Daws and Susan L. Brinson write that newspapers aided the public image of the TVA, Newspapers would include information about how the TVA helped farmers in the area but leave out the effects on tenant farmers who did not receive compensation from land. Newspaper coverage and the aid brought to farmers in the area kept public opinion of the TVA high.[34] The TVA was not without critics, however. In *TVA's Public Planning: The Vision, the Reality*, Walter Creese writes that some thought of the TVA as a "socialistic land grab" rather than an experiment in forming the environment to better the lives of Americans.[35]

Today's Climate Crisis and Preservation

Scholarship on climate change and historic preservation generally focuses on how to strengthen historic resources against the effects of climate change. Preservationists often want to save as much historic fabric as possible, regardless of cost or effect on the livelihood of individuals. While appealing, this approach fails the areas in imminent danger of rising sea levels

[33] Nancy Grant, *TVA and Black Americans : Planning for the Status Quo* (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1990), http://archive.org/details/tvablackamerican00gran, 77.
[34] Laura Beth Daws and Susan L. Brinson, *The Greater Good: Media. Family Removal, and TVA Dam Construction in North Alabama* (The University of Alabama Press, 2019), 110.
[35] Walter L. Creese, *TVA's Public Planning : The Vision, the Reality* (Knoxville : University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 145.

and increased rainfall since the vast amount of affected historic fabric makes such an initiative impractical.

Some historic preservation literature discusses triaging historic resources to more practically address climate change. World Heritage USA warns of the "inevitability of loss" of some historic resources due to climate change. It advocates that preservationists focus monetary resources on historic resources that are more likely to survive rather than pouring resources into empty causes.[36] Preservationists should consider this practical view. However, they must also distinguish between preserving resources that are already historic and documenting ones that have yet to become historic. This thesis focuses on documenting communities that are likely to be flooded regardless of the age of their cultural resources.

The scholarship on climate change and cultural resources indicates that preservationists' relationship with historic fabric will change drastically because of climate change. Much like the flooding of communities by the TVA, rising sea levels could cause people to be displaced from their communities in the coming decades, and the built environment of these places will disappear. In "Sustaining Historic Properties in an Era of Climate Change," Sharon Park writes that there are three approaches to handling flooding in historic areas. The first approach is to relocate communities when necessary. The second is to modify buildings architecturally, and the third is to put up barriers or other protective measures to mitigate the effects of flooding.[37] She also writes that relocating communities is costly and disruptive, as seen in the relocation that occurred during the New Deal era. However, many cultural resources will not be able to be saved. People will have to leave their homes in areas where water levels are rising.

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[36] "Climate Change and the Inevitability of Loss," *World Heritage USA* (blog), October 11, 2017, https://worldheritageusa.org/climate-change-and-the-inevitability-of-loss/.
[37] Park, "Sustaining Historic Properties in an Era of Climate Change," 39.

Preservationists must determine what can be done now to preserve communities that will one day be overtaken by water. In this determination, preservationists should consider documentation as a means other than only using physical preservation. Park also writes that NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) has estimated that about 39 percent of Americans live in coastal areas, not counting communities near rivers or other water features.[38] As sea levels continue to rise, many people in these coastal and inland areas will need to relocate, leaving their communities behind.

A noticeable omission in Park's work is the analysis of resources that cannot be saved. As flooding increases, it will be more difficult to save places. This void exists not only in the literature but also in the physical preparation for an evolving climate. Documenting tangible cultural heritage before it is affected by climate change is, in some cases, the only way to preserve such cultural heritage. Preservation professionals and scholars lack a necessary sense of urgency and a practical, sustainable approach for the loss of historic resources due to flooding. A framework that combines efficacy with efficiency is crucial to mitigate the complete physical loss of some resources due to climate change.

In a journal article calling climate change "the challenge of our lives," Mark Thompson Brandt and Cory Rouillard write about prevention, mitigation, and adaptation strategies for historic resources. They define prevention as a set of ways to decrease carbon emissions to zero, mitigation as ways to decrease the effects of carbon emissions on historic resources, and adaptation as a set of actions to alter historic resources so that they will need less mitigation.[39]

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[38] Park, "Sustaining Historic Properties in an Era of Climate Change," 44.
[39] Mark Thompson Brandt and Cory Rouillard, "Climate Chaos and Heritage-Conservation Values: The Urgency for Action," *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology* 51, no. 1 (2020): 38.

Each of these concepts is clearly quite important for the climate crisis. However, many resources in the next decades will not be able to be preserved through these efforts. Because physical structures and landscapes will be lost to rising water levels and other climate related issues, preservationists must begin to seriously consider and plan for possible methods of preservation that extend beyond the preservation of physical buildings and spaces.

Chesapeake Bay's Tangier Island is a glimpse into the future of many American communities. The small island is rapidly being taken over by the ocean. Barbara Minguez García writes in her article "Resilient Cultural Heritage for a Future of Climate Change" about Tangier and other communities that will likely need to relocate at some point. García writes that Tangier brings up a loaded problem for preservationists: "how to decide what is saved and what is surrendered to the sea because we lack the time, money, and technical means to save every place."[40]

In 2018, Casey McCormack described climate change in *Natural Resources and Environment* as America's next refugee crisis. She explains the concept of "environmentally displaced persons," as individuals made to leave their communities because of climate-related risks to their ways of life.[41] McCormack asserts that the hurricanes that occurred between 2005-2016 caused widespread devastation to people through forced relocation.[42] She also discusses the impact of the first Trump administration on climate change, as the regime rolled back Obama-era climate policies. For example, Trump erased limits on carbon dioxide emissions from personal

[40] Bárbara Mínguez García, "Resilient Cultural Heritage for a Future of Climate Change," *Journal of International Affairs* 73, no. 1 (2019): 113.
[41] McCormack, "America's Next Refugee Crisis," 9.
[42] McCormack, "America's Next Refugee Crisis," 10.

vehicles and from power plants. He also removed protections in place for wetlands across the nation.[43]

Finally, McCormack engages with two pertinent communities impacted by flooding over the last decade: Tangier Island in the Chesapeake Bay and Isle de Jean Charles in south Louisiana. The residents of Isle de Jean Charles has already been relocated due to climate change. Sixty Native American individuals received a grant from the federal government for their relocation which cost $48 million in total.[44] This relocation is reminiscent of when residents were relocated from towns flooded by the TVA. The continued flooding in Isle de Jean Charles was due to both natural and human consequences.[45] The TVA flooding was man-made, but part of its impetus was the flood control benefits of the reservoirs. The federal government provided some assistance in both situations as well, with a grant for Isle de Jean Charles residents and the resettlement administration's assistance for those who lived in the valley. Isle de Jean Charles created an important precedent in the federal government's involvement in the climate refugee crisis. The government gave these people assistance to begin their lives in a new location, just as it did when the communities were flooded in the Tennessee Valley.

Documentation in the 1930s

One of the most fundamental documentation efforts in American history is the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). Catherine C. Lavoie describes the creation of the HABS in "Architectural Plans and Visions: The Early HABS Program and Its Documentation of

[43] Nadja Popovich, Livia Albeck-Ripka, and Kendra Pierre-Louis, "The Trump Administration Rolled Back More Than 100 Environmental Rules. Here's the Full List.," *The New York Times*, October 16, 2020, sec. Climate, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks-list.html.
[44] McCormack, "America's Next Refugee Crisis," 10.
[45] McCormack, "America's Next Refugee Crisis," 10.

Vernacular Architecture." HABS was chiefly created to take a proactive step in mitigating the endangerment of historic buildings.[46] During the New Deal, the concern was not climate change, but rather real estate development, fire, and neglect. In her article, Lavoie also discusses the broader goal of HABS, saying that the program was designed to identify each historically or architecturally significant building in America and eventually document it.[47] Those buildings in greatest peril of disappearance were documented first.[48] The great flaw in this design for preserving communities threatened by climate change lies in the significance requirement. If only the architecturally or historically significant buildings are documented, then posterity loses a broad understanding of these communities. Documentation of today's communities requires prioritization of those buildings that are endangered rather than prioritizing the so-called "significant" buildings.

In "The Role of HABS in the Field of Architectural Documentation," Lavoie writes about documentation and culture. She states: "When undertaken properly, documentation can communicate cultural values by illustrating and explaining the manner in which buildings were used and the architectural and historical contexts in which they were created and evolved."[49] Lavoie argues that sufficiently documenting architecture in a community includes telling the story of a place, including cultural aspects. This was true for HABS, since it was not documenting communities that would be swept away. However, for areas at risk of flooding, documenting cultural aspects as well as architecture is important.

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[46] Catherine C. Lavoie, "Architectural Plans and Visions: The Early HABS Program and Its Documentation of Vernacular Architecture," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 13, no. 2 (2006): 16.
[47] Lavoie, "Architectural Plans and Visions," 16.
[48] Lavoie, "Architectural Plans and Visions," 16.
[49] Lavoie, "The Role of HABS in the Field of Architectural Documentation," 20.

CHAPTER 3

DOCUMENTATION AND THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY

Today preservationists have examples of both the professional documentation of displaced individuals and relocation methods and effects. The documentation of the three selected dam project watersheds, Norris, Watts Bar, and Wheeler, reflects the preservation sensibilities of the time. United States professionals lacked the preservation infrastructure and desire to document the humble homes and towns that were flooded by the TVA. However, since Norris Dam was the first project undertaken by the TVA, its novelty was enough to inspire an extensive book on dam construction and the people it affected. The other two projects' documentation is quite sparse, almost exclusively relying on the reports published by the TVA. Coinciding with the creation of the TVA was a change in how preservationists approached endangered buildings and their documentation. As the United States grapples with the increasing destruction of historic resources due to flooding, looking at past documentation of these sites will provide insights on best practices for documentation of cultural resources and for potential relocation of people due to climate change.

Documentation at Norris

The records of the Tennessee Valley Authority include surveys about the living situation of residents, maps of land tracts which include the names of owners, and various correspondence. Each project was also documented by an extensive government report that primarily included technical information about the topography of the selected site and the

construction and operation of the dam. The government report published after the creation of the Norris Reservoir indicated that its purpose was "giving to the engineering profession the important and useful facts about the planning and construction of the Norris Dam and Reservoir on the Clinch River, in eastern Tennessee, by the Tennessee Valley Authority, an agency of the United States Government."[50] It documents the natural resources of the floodplain quite thoroughly and gives a detailed description of the dam site including geology and flood control.[51] The report is technical and puts the focus on the dam site and does little to document the buildings and towns that were destroyed in the flood.

Much of the report's Social and Economic Studies section reported revenue changes for the land and property that the TVA purchased. It discusses the loss of tax base for each of the five counties where land was purchased for the reservoir and notes that nearly three thousand families were required to move from their property in preparation for the flooding of the reservoir.[52] The Social and Economic Studies section of the report did contain some information based on the surveys given to each family in the area set to be flooded. The report stated that purpose of the surveys was threefold:

1. To secure information that would be the basis for the assistance to be given to individual families in solving their relocation problems.

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[50] Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Norris Project: A Comprehensive Report on the Planning, Design, Construction, and Initial Operations of the Tennessee Valley Authority's First Water Control Project* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940), 1.

[51] For more information on the details of the Clinch Basin's topography and geology, please see the introduction of *The Norris Project: A Comprehensive Report on the Planning, Design, Construction, and Initial Operations of the Tennessee Valley Authority's First Water Control Project.*

[52] Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Norris Project*, 59-65.

2. To provide the basis for future studies which would determine the relative conditions of these same families after resettlement.

3. To gather basic data of a definite area which would be available for use in the planning activities of the Authority.[53]

The expressed purpose of the survey was not to create an archive or to document the lives of people in the Norris Dam watershed for the preservation of cultural heritage.

The survey asked the number of people in the family, their ages, education attained, whether the family rented or owned their home, acreage of cultivated land, and attitudes regarding relocation, number of families who had work experience in a city, and if the family received newspapers of magazines.[54] Further, the report contains information from the surveys about the homes in these communities such as average number of rooms, whether or not they were wired for electricity, what their water source was, and how many acres the farms were. The rest of the information in this section relates to the distance from schools and trade centers, whether the families owned automobiles, and the cash value of property owned by families. It contains averages and medians of all this information. [55] While we have records of people's attitudes regarding the creation of the reservoir, we know very little about where these people lived or what their communities looked like. Had the documentation been conducted with this

[53] Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Norris Project*, 65.
[54] For more detailed information on the questionnaire provided to families including the full survey results please see pages 59-68 of *The Norris Project: A Comprehensive Report on the Planning, Design, Construction, and Initial Operations of the Tennessee Valley Authority's First Water Control Project.* It is important to note that the report done on the Norris Reservoir area also includes dam and powerhouse design, access roads and employee housing, construction plant and river diversion, dam and powerhouse construction, reservoir activities, initial operation and related development, and costs. These chapters all point to the purpose written in the introduction, which is to provide assistance to engineers.
[55] Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Norris Project*, 67.

goal in mind, it would be much more valuable for understanding the built environment. The report highlights the poverty experienced by residents of the Tennessee Valley, explains why the Norris reservoir was needed in this area, and demonstrates how much its reservoirs positively impacted the region. However, the data does little to create a full, physical understanding of the communities flooded. Instead, it reflects the documentation priorities of the early twentieth century.

The survey conducted by the TVA on these residents and the technical aspects are only a small part in the tapestry of documentation at Norris Dam. The book *TVA and the Dispossessed* aims to examine the construction of the Norris Dam from a grassroots perspective. It includes interviews with individuals who were displaced and gives a picture of life in the Clinch Basin before it was flooded. *TVA and the Dispossessed* is the most thorough documentation of the Norris reservoir area in terms of the cultural heritage of the area that was flooded. It contains information from the surveys issued by the TVA on living conditions of people in the Norris Basin, while also interpreting it and combining it with interviews. The book writes about the social structure of the basin, which was primarily based on church attendance.[56]

The visitors center at Norris Dam includes a small exhibit about the construction of the dam. It is mostly about the inception of the TVA, the government-planned town of Norris, and the transformation of the valley through the TVA's dam construction. It seems the exhibit's greatest goal is to portray the TVA's success, describe the benefits for residents of the Tennessee Valley, and outline its goals of prosperity for the region (see figures 2 and 3).

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[56] Michael J. McDonald and John Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 114.
[56] For more information on the social habits of residents of the Norris Basin, see *TVA and the Dispossessed*, particularly the chapter entitled "Norris Basin Reconstructed"

The Norris Museum is mostly about the town of Norris that was created for people to live in after they were removed from their homes by the TVA. However, there are some displays about life before the flood. The book of land tracts that has people's names and which land they owned are very useful for documentation of the built environment. This record demonstrates the different amounts of land that people owned. However, simply having the names of owners and where their land was located leaves out the renters' names and information about that land they farmed. The maps also do not include the layout of people's property, or a map of where each building in the town was located. To properly understand the built environment of these communities, having a proper layout of where the buildings and open space were located is necessary.

Figure 2: Exhibit at Norris Visitor's Center: The Creation of the TVA. Photograph by Mamie Sevier, 2024.

Figure 3: Exhibit at the Norris Visitor's Center: The TVA's Functions Today. Photograph by Mamie Sevier, 2024.

Documentation at Wheeler and Watts Bar

A similar government report reveals data about Wheeler Dam in North Alabama including the dam's construction, site selection, and other information pertinent to the river control. The stated purpose of this report was to give "the engineering profession and to others interested in river-control projects the important and useful facts about the Wheeler Dam and Reservoir located on the Tennessee River in northern Alabama and constructed by the Tennessee Valley Authority, an agency of the United States Government."[57] The report does not include the complete contents of the government reports. It does, however, include some information regarding the farming practices, educational attainments, and the average income of families.[58]

The report on Wheeler contains similar information to that of Norris's report. It states that the average farmhouse had three rooms, only one farm had electricity, and only 3.3 percent of homes had water in the house. Almost half the residents in the Wheeler were black. As with Norris, the Wheeler report primarily focuses on the building of the dam rather than visually documenting the communities before they were flooded.

The Watts Bar project acquired land from primarily rural areas, but the town of Rhea Springs is located completely under the reservoir, and parts of four other towns - Spring City, Kingston, Harriman, and Loudon - were lost as well.[59] The report also states that 832 families were displaced and that they were typically involved in some sort of farming.[60] Finally, the

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[57] Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Wheeler Project: A Comprehensive Report on the Planning, Design, Construction, and Initial Operations of the Wheeler Project* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940).
[58] *The Wheeler Project*, 30.
[59] *The Watts Bar Project : A Comprehensive Report on the Planning, Design, Construction, and Initial Operations of the Watts Bar Project* / United States Tennessee ... v.1.," HathiTrust, accessed October 4, 2024, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112018293735?urlappend=percent3Bseq=3.
[60] *The Watts Bar Project*, 45.

report states that much of the economic impact would be offset in each town affected by the flooding because the dam project would bring many new jobs to the area.[61] Unlike Norris, Watts Bar does not contain an area for visitors. There is simply an overlook of the reservoir and an original turbine on display with a plaque.[62]

While there were some photographs taken of the floodplains, there was no large-scale documentation effort designed to preserve the culture and way of life of the people who lived there. It is important to note that the culture was not in danger of dying out due to the flooding. There were many other communities nearby with similar cultural practices including farming practices, architectural types, and religious habits. Through written and photographic documentation done in these areas, even before the invention of Historic Documentation Programs as federal programs, scholars can gain quite a bit of information about those communities and the communities lost due to the TVA projects. Preservationists today can learn from the shortcomings of the documentation done by the TVA to ensure that communities impacted by climate change are better documented.

The surveys given to residents of dam areas preserve some of the cultural heritage associated with the Tennessee Valley. It gives people today a sense of the living and economic conditions in the area before the dams were built. However, the goal of this documentation was to make the valley seem very impoverished and in need of a government agency like the TVA to step in and improve the conditions. Today, preservationists have more technology and techniques at their disposal to thoroughly document communities at risk of flooding. Future generations can

[61] "The Watts Bar Project," 45.
[62] Sevier, Mamie. "Photograph of original turbine at Watts Bar" (2024)
Sevier, Mamie. "Photograph of informational plaque at turbine at Watts Bar" (2024)

learn more about once-extant communities from thorough, visual documentation than from averages and medians of demographic information.

The Importance of Documentation

The documentation undertaken before the flooding from Norris, Watts Bar, and Wheeler Dams demonstrates the lack of documentation infrastructure that the United States had at the time. It also highlights the focus on portions of the built environment that are deemed important due to the criteria for significance at the expense of more representative, modest buildings, structures, and landscapes. Finally, the 1930s presented a shift in preservation and documentation. Americans became concerned about new development encroaching on historic buildings and how to balance a need for growth against a desire to learn from historic fabric.

Documentation of the built environment leads to a greater understanding of a community once it is no longer extant. Buildings that are documented reveal the social expectations of the people who occupied them.[63] The arrangement of buildings within a community, as well as the open space, tells us about how people moved and worked in that space. Documentation of the built environment reveals what is important to a society as well as behavior of people in everyday life.[64] Documentation also can show patterns of circulation and spatial relationships among buildings that are not available when simply being in the built environment. Even in communities that are not flooded or wherein people are not forced to relocate, the plan view can tell scholars about the relationships people have with the built environment around them. This documentation is even more important for communities that are expected to be destroyed in the next century or so.

[63] Lavoie, "The Role of HABS in the Field of Architectural Documentation," 20-21.
[64] Lavoie, "The Role of HABS in the Field of Architectural Documentation," 19.

Documentation in the 1930s

There was a clear shift in American documentation throughout the 1930s. The push for more documentation was motivated by an urgency to save buildings that were being destroyed for real estate development. While the National Historic Preservation Act was more than thirty years away from being passed, the idea that buildings needed to be documented or protected from impending development and natural disasters was an essential step in American preservation. It paved the way for more extensive documentation later in the twentieth century. The 1930s represents a tipping point in preservation. While the architectural styles of the day favored progress and new materials, there was also a look to the past to preserve high-style historic buildings.

The Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographs taken in the 1930s are recognized as the country's first attempt at creating a photographic record of the United States.[65] The project served as much-needed employment for struggling American photographers, but its record-keeping was also political as it was distributed throughout the country to show the living conditions of America's impoverished.[66] In fact, the impetus for the FSA project was political in nature. The documentation was intended to document unhealthy living conditions for Americans to highlight the effectiveness of the New Deal and encourage citizen support for such programs.

The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) was created to document many current buildings since other historic ones had been destroyed or had deteriorated over the years. It was the first federal preservation program, as other attempts had all been regional or local.[67] The

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[65] Michael L. Carlebach, "Documentary and Propaganda: The Photographs of the Farm Security Administration," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 8 (1988): 8, https://doi.org/10.2307/1503967.
[66] Carlebach, "Documentary and Propaganda," 8.
[67] Lavoie, "Architectural Plans and Visions,"15.

attitude behind the creation of HABS was similar to that of today with climate change; If architectural resources are going to be destroyed, they must be documented.[68] The program was officially founded by the National Park Service, the Library of Congress, and the American Institute of Architects.[69] Charles E. Peterson, who was a young architect in the 1930s, is generally considered the figurehead for the creation of HABS, and he continues to be one of the most influential American preservationists, especially in the subsection of documentation.[70]

Peterson wrote the proposal for HABS, which indicates its reasons for establishment, but he moved on from working for HABS shortly after writing the proposal.[71] The proposal for HABS reads that the reason for the survey is the recent destruction of cultural resources through natural disasters and real estate development.[72] Natural causes of destruction, therefore, have been at the forefront of federal documentation efforts for nearly a century. Peterson pioneered the sense of urgency taken by HABS in its early years. There was a belief that if the resources were not documented, cultural value of the built environment would severely diminish.

HABS went about its documentation using three distinct methods: "measured drawings, black-and-white photographs, and historical reports."[73] Before HABS could begin its work, it had to determine which buildings were significant enough to warrant documentation. The program elected to use endangerment as its primary way of determining which buildings should

[68] Lavoie, "Architectural Plans and Visions," 15.
[69] "About HABS - Heritage Documentation Programs (U.S. National Park Service)," accessed November 9, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/heritagedocumentation/habs.htm.
[70] "In Memory of Charles E. Peterson, 1906-2004," *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology* 37, no. 1 (2006): 3.
[71] Lavoie, "Architectural Plans and Visions," 18.
[72] Lavoie, "Architectural Plans and Visions: The Early HABS Program and Its Documentation of Vernacular Architecture," 15.
[73] Lavoie, "Architectural Plans and Visions: The Early HABS Program and Its Documentation of Vernacular Architecture," 15.

receive documentation.[74] These approaches contributed to the early successes of HABS, which included the documentation of culturally significant buildings. However, HABS also created a standard language used in architectural history for documentation and discussing parts of buildings. There were no architectural history programs, so HABS created a dictionary of terms through its descriptions regarding the buildings' parts and styles. The terms had a snowball effect, being applied to more and more buildings, until it became standard.[75] This collection of reports was invaluable at the time for creating the disciple of architectural history. It led to another early success of HABS, which was the research and attempted publishing of the *Outline of the Development of Early American Architecture*. The early HABS leaders wanted to publish something that told the story of early American architecture, but that goal was not entirely met. Instead, the research and reports that went into that goal were used in other smaller publications. Without this high goal, the report would have been a random collection of documented buildings rather than a connected record and narrative.[76]

There was not a systematic means of documenting these places before they were flooded. HABS was created in 1933, which is when Norris Dam was built and when Wheeler Dam was begun. Watts Bar was not completed until 1942. It is reasonable to assume that HABS would not be used for the Wheeler and Norris projects, as it was just getting off the ground that same year. However, why would HABS not consider the communities flooded by the Watts Bar Dam to be worthy of documentation? They were clearly in danger because the plan was to destroy them. The answer lies in another aspect of HABS's goals and reflect the bias of the time; HABS'

[74] Lavoie, "Architectural Plans and Visions," 16.
[75] Lavoie, "Architectural Plans and Visions," 16
[76] Lavoie, "Architectural Plans and Visions," 16

objective was to document what was deemed architecturally significant. These communities were small and agricultural, rather than having grand and opulent homes or civic buildings.

Much of the cultural heritage of these communities was, therefore, lost as their residents were relocated. Sometimes, the residents who moved away had their own unique culture in those new communities. The most striking example of this culture is in the town of Norris. While valuable to study how displaced people adapted and built new cultural heritage, many families were not able to all move together to a new town. They were dispersed throughout other towns, and in some cases throughout other states. Had the federal government taken steps to document these communities that were not deemed architecturally significant, scholars today would have a greater ability to study their lives before relocation. Today, we can take the lessons learned from the lack of documentation of communities flooded by the TVA and ensure that communities that are currently endangered are properly documented. There is another opportunity with today's climate refugee crisis to document communities before they are flooded.

Comparison of the 30s to today

Like in the 1930s, Americans' cultural heritage is in danger, and documentation of it will allow it to be studied in the future. There is sometimes a need for the destruction of culturally significant buildings. Growing populations require that older buildings be destroyed to make room for ones that better suit society's needs. However, HABS was created with the idea in mind that there are many significant buildings in danger. With climate change today already wreaking havoc on American communities, there is a renewed need for documentation. But instead of only documenting the older buildings that are considered important by architectural historians, more widespread documentation of communities is necessary today. The early success and establishment of HABS demonstrates that the federal government can take seriously the

endangerment of cultural resources, and there is infrastructure in place to create another legitimate documentation program that better addresses the concerns of today.

Documentation of the built environment leads to a greater understanding of a community once it is no longer extant. Buildings that are documented in terms of building plans reveal social expectations of people who occupied them.[77] The arrangement of buildings within a community, as well as recognizing negative space, tells us about how people moved and worked in that space. Documentation of the built environment reveals what is important to a society as well as behavior of people in everyday life.[78] Even in communities that are not flooded or wherein people are not forced to relocate, the plan view can tell scholars about the relationships people have with the built environment around them. This documentation is more even important for communities that are expected to be destroyed in the next century or so. Like in the 1930s, Americans' cultural heritage is in danger, and documentation of it will allow it to be studied in the future.

HABS's Operations Today

HABS is part of the Historic Documentation Programs (HDP), which also includes the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) and the Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS). The Historic Documentation Programs are a part of the National Park Service, and they establish the guidelines for documentation of historic resources.[79] The actual surveying comes from three places:

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[77] Lavoie, "The Role of HABS in the Field of Architectural Documentation," 20-21.
[78] Lavoie, "The Role of HABS in the Field of Architectural Documentation," 19.
[79] National Park Service, "Heritage Documentation Programs: HABS/HAER/HALS Photography Guidelines," November 2011, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/heritagedocumentation/upload/HDP-Guidelines-Photography_508.pdf#:~:text=HDP percent20establishes percent20the percent20standards percent20for percent20the percent20production percent20of,Engineering

1) HDP has offices that perform surveys in the field, and the teams are made up of students.
2) Individual states document resources as part of efforts to comply with Sections 106 and 110
3) Members of the public are eligible to send in documentation of resources they believe are worthy.[80]

Once those surveys are completed, the information and photographs are held at the Library of Congress for use by the public either electronically or by hard copy.[81]

HABS has various standards for its documentation practices. Photography continues to be the primary way that resources are documented, as do measured drawings. The guidelines state that film photography is the preferred method in terms of longevity and clarity. There are certain views required of architectural structures, including the surrounding landscape and the individual details such as chimneys.[82] For engineering and industrial resources, photographs of the construction of the apparatus are more salient. Cultural landscape documentation requires context, structural elements, and any vegetation present.[83] There are various guidelines for print photography and labeling the prints.[84]

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percent20Documentation percent20 percent28hereafter percent20referred percent20to percent20as percent20Secretary percentE2 percent80 percent99s percent20Standards percent29.

[80] National Park Service, "Heritage Documentation Programs: HABS/HAER/HALS Photography Guidelines."

[81] National Park Service, "Heritage Documentation Programs: HABS/HAER/HALS Photography Guidelines."

[82] National Park Service, "Heritage Documentation Programs: HABS/HAER/HALS Photography Guidelines."

[83] National Park Service, "Heritage Documentation Programs: HABS/HAER/HALS Photography Guidelines."

[84] For more information about the HDP programs and their guidelines for photographing, formatting, and cataloging, please see the National Park Service's website:

The use of this documentation process on communities flooded by the TVA would have provided information about how people lived and worked. And while that information cannot be provided for those communities now, modern preservationists have a chance to learn from the lack of documentation. Just as in the 1930s, we know that today's communities will be flooded and destroyed within the next century. A new approach to documentation of these communities that includes aspects of HABS, a systematic documentation program, will be essential to preserve the cultural heritage of at-risk communities.

The early years of HABS brought with them a new philosophy of photography and documentation. Walker Evans, an American photographer with a commission from the FSA, created guidelines for the rest of the photographers in the program to use. His photographs were the culmination of work that photographers had been creating for decades, creating a systematic approach to photography of architecture.[85] Now, nearly one hundred years later, photographs can be used to document in the face of another crisis that threatens to destroy American cultural heritage. Photography could serve as the most accurate documentation of buildings and, along with measured drawings, will demonstrate an understanding of the built environment in communities that allows future scholars to study them effectively.

The early conditions of HABS, which included a national crisis that wiped out crop yields and caused extreme, widespread poverty, are somewhat like today's threats in America. Climate change threatens to destroy entire communities, force people to move from their homes, and wreak havoc on the food supply as weather patterns become more and more unpredictable.

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https://www.nps.gov/subjects/heritagedocumentation/upload/HDP-Guidelines-Photography_508.pdf

[85] Jesús Vassallo, "Documentary Photography and Preservation, or The Problem of Truth and Beauty," *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 11, no. 1 (2014): 28, https://doi.org/10.5749/futuante.11.1.0015.

The climate crisis is an opportunity for restructuring and creating a framework for how preservationists document the built and natural environments.

Physical Preservation vs. Documentation

In preservation theory and practice, physical preservation is the first line of defense for an endangered historic building that is still structurally viable. In some cases, physical preservation is a more appropriate approach to take rather than relying simply on documentation. If preservationists only rely on documentation as the primary method of preservation, it promotes complacency and apathy toward the physical preservation of the built environment. However, in many cases where historic resources are subjected to flooding due to climate change, physical preservation is not an option now or will not be soon because of the scope and cost of extreme measures which only prolong the inevitable. Documentation in this case is not only an acceptable outcome but the best option and required for the preservation of the cultural heritage. It is also conceivable that a combination of physical preservation and documentation would be appropriate in cases wherein the future of an area is unknown as it relates to climate change.

CHAPTER 4

DOCUMENTATION PROGRAM PROPOSAL

This chapter will recommend a documentation program to assist communities today at risk of flooding in preserving their cultural heritage. To accomplish this, the program will use lessons learned from the documentation of communities flooded by the TVA in the 1930s. The communities that will be documented using the new program will be determined through a formula that combines risk of flooding and amount of historic fabric. The program will include the best elements of existing documentation programs and efforts in the United States.

The type of community for which this proposed documentation program is intended is one in which some form of relocation is expected in the next century, such as the previously discussed Tangier Island or some neighborhoods of Miami. The documentation should be performed with the idea that most if not all the existing infrastructure, buildings, and landscapes will be inundated by flood waters such that no sort of rehabilitation or physical preservation will be useful. The documentation's purpose is to gain a broad understanding of the community including its primary building types and styles, historical background, and landscape features. Emerging tools such as virtual reality could be used to recreate aspects of communities that are no longer extant. Once detailed documentation, including measurements, photographs, and drone footage is taken, that information can be used in virtual reality or future technology. The documentation lasts forever, unlike the community.

Many aspects of the current documentation frameworks established by the National Park Service do not lend themselves well to the documentation needs of these places. Therefore, a

new program established by the National Park Service is necessary to properly document the places that will be lost to flood waters. Documentation of communities at risk for flooding should be extensive. It should include some of the research techniques of the National Parks Service including Cultural Landscape Reports and Historic Structure Reports. Ideally, every resource would be documented in detail. However, this approach is not realistic, and a survey-like approach would be more useful.

Much of the preservation work that occurs today is ad-hoc. Interested citizens band together to create private groups that seek to educate people on their local historic resources. This type of preservation can be effective, but seeking to broadly document entire communities that will be nonexistent requires a more organized approach that should be conducted in the public sphere rather than the private. Having the federal government engaged in documenting the communities that will be flooded reaffirms that cultural heritage is an important part of risk management due to climate change. The National Park Service also already has documentation strategies that are used frequently for a variety of historic resources.

In the early 1930s when the TVA first began selecting communities to flood, preserving the cultural heritage of those communities was not at the forefront of the federal government's goals. There were more pressing matters including improving the economy, creating electricity, controlling flooding, and mitigating malaria infections. However, even with the limited documentation performed on these communities, there is still a significant amount of cultural heritage that was preserved. We do not know the exact layout of communities or the historical uses of landscapes and properties. However, the information gleaned from oral interviews gives some insight into how people lived and worked. The proposed documentation program to address communities threatened by flooding due to climate change will fill gaps left by the

TVA's documentation by providing more extensive information for future scholars studying lost communities.

The rest of this chapter will explore the existing documentation strategies used by the National Park Service and set up a new documentation program that can be used as a framework for the communities impacted by today's climate crisis.

Current Documentation Programs: Strengths/Weaknesses

The National Park Service (NPS) has oversight of the documentation programs described in chapter three as well as the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, they have research strategies that are used by preservationists frequently to study historic resources. Nominations to the National Register of Historic Places should not be pursued as a first course of action for communities at risk of flooding. Primarily using the National Register as a means of documenting these communities would prioritize only the resources that are deemed significant based on the Secretary of the Interior's standards rather than a more systematic documentation of a variety of resources in the community. In this context, significance refers to that of the National Register of Historic Places. For the National Register of Historic Places, significance appears in properties.

A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
B. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
D. That have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.[86]

[86] "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation," n.d., https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NRB-15_web508.pdf#:~:text=To percent20qualify percent20for percent20the percent20National percent20Regis-ter percent2C

This idea of significance is limiting. It requires that each property meet a set of conditions to be worthy of being documented, whereas the new documentation program is seeking to broadly document communities at risk of flooding, regardless of their ties to significant historical events or figures. Rather, these communities are important to document because of their attachment to everyday life for Americans. Another reason why National Register nominations are inadequate is their potential to be rejected. While quality nominations are thoroughly documented, they are not guaranteed acceptance to the register. If rejected, the information is not often officially stored and made accessible.

Instead, the documentation of resources threatened by climate change should focus on other tools made available like Cultural Landscape Reports (CLRs). The purpose of a CLR is to "help guide the future management of cultural landscapes".[87] The NPS describes CLRs as:

> Typically interdisciplinary in nature, the CLR includes documentation, analysis, and evaluation of historical, architectural, archeological, ethnographic, horticultural, landscape architectural, engineering, and ecological data. It analyzes the landscape's historical development, evolution, modifications, materials, construction techniques, geographical context, and use in all periods, including those deemed not significant. Based on the analysis, it makes recommendations for treatment consistent with the landscape's significance, condition, and planned use.[88]

The interdisciplinary nature of CLRs contributes to their functionality in documentation. They include physical landscape features as well as historical information that makes them effective at conveying many aspects of a community. A featured example of a CLR on the NPS website is the Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site. The report is 180 pages for an area of about 181

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percent20a percent20property,properties percent20associated percent20with percent20that percent20aspect percent20of percent20the percent20past.

[87]"Landscape Report Types - Cultural Landscapes (U.S. National Park Service)," accessed October 17, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/culturallandscapes/cl_documentation_types.htm.

[88] "Landscape Report Types - Cultural Landscapes (U.S. National Park Service)."

acres where Eleanor Roosevelt resided for about 30 years before her death.[89] The general purpose of the report is to give treatment recommendations that restore the landscape to the character of the late 1950s and use the area to reflect Mrs. Roosevelt's values.[90]

Not only does the report denote clear boundaries for the landscape, but it also recommends which vegetation to encourage, how to enhance the historic character of roadways and walkways and provides specific tasks to accomplish each of its recommendations.[91] Some portions of the cultural landscape report framework will prove useful for climate change-related documentation. The clear boundaries of a landscape are helpful for determining where historic themes are conveyed in a community, and the treatment recommendations for items like vegetation provide detail on what sort of plant matter is important historically. However, treatment recommendations for preserving historic character will not be necessary for documentation of at-risk communities. The length of report for one small area will also not be necessary in the documentation efforts of communities impacted by climate change. Where CLRs demonstrate a deep understanding of one area, the new documentation program will seek to provide a broad understanding of an entire community.

Many aspects of the CLR do not apply to the new documentation program. The purpose of a CLR is to make evaluations on the management of the site. In this case, we are more interested in creating usable information for current and future scholars to study a community that no longer exists. In addition to treatment and management recommendation, a CLR provides

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[89] John Auwaerter and Laura Roberts, "Cultural Landscape Report for Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site" (Boston, Massachusetts: Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, 2013), https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/469245, 1.
[90] Auwaerter and Roberts, "Cultural Landscape Report for Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site," 19.
[91] Auwaerter and Roberts, "Cultural Landscape Report for Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site."

information on boundaries and history of site's uses. For this documentation program, the components of CLRs that will be used are the history of the site and detailed descriptions of its physical characteristics.

Historic Structure Reports (HSRs) should be pursued as a means of documentation, but not for each building. Doing so would require too much time and would not fit into the scope of the new program, whose purpose is to create a broad overview of communities. HSRs typically include a summary of information about the building, including its existing structure and its historical information. It is an incredibly detailed type of report. They seek to provide a deep understanding of a building or structure. For the Old Fort Rosalie Gift Shop in Natchez, Mississippi, the report also includes treatment recommendations and a chronological inventory of its uses.[92] The maps including the context of the building also assist in providing historical information of the use and function within its neighborhood.[93]

This type of report functions well if a structure is eligible for to be addressed by the standard treatments which the Secretary of the Interior recommends including restoration, preservation, and reconstruction. The historical and structural information is useful for determining the craftsmanship of the building, but the treatments are not relevant for this type of documentation that prepares for disaster. Historical and structural information as presented in an HSR will be included in the documentation program designed for communities impacted by climate change. The detail required for an HSR, however, is cumbersome and unnecessary when attempting to gain a broad understanding of a community.

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[92] Tommy H Jones, "Natchez National Historic Park: Old Fort Rosalie Gift Shop Historic Structure Report" (Natchez, MS, June 2006), https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/481959.

[93] Jones, "Natchez National Historic Park: Old Fort Rosalie Gift Shop Historic Structure Report."

The National Park Service has a program for local governments to become Certified Local Governments (CLG). These municipalities receive benefits from the NPS through grants and technical assistance. They must demonstrate that they have a commitment to preservation and enforce policies at the local level.[94] The CLG program is worthwhile and provides valuable assistance to some municipalities across the United States; It does not aid in achieving the goal of preserving cultural heritage threatened by flooding due to climate change. Frist, the program is only for areas that lit within a municipality, leaving out rural areas or unincorporated communities. Second, the program requires these city governments to demonstrate that they are dedicated to historic preservation. A community should not have to have the means or training to be dedicated to preservation to receive documentation.

Recommendations

Triage System

The first step in this proposed documentation program will be to determine which communities need documentation. The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) has a tool that predicts flood risk for counties and individual census tracts.[95] FEMA assigns each county and census tract a number from 0-100 that indicates its risk of flooding. This number is called the National Risk Index (NRI). The NRI includes factors such as social vulnerability, community resilience, and expected annual loss. The higher these aspects, the more at-risk the community, and therefore the higher the NRI. For example, Harris County, Texas (Houston) has an NRI of 99.97.[96] It is these types of areas that are most vulnerable for loss

[94] "Certified Local Government Program - Historic Preservation Fund (U.S. National Park Service)," accessed March 25, 2025, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/historicpreservationfund/certified-local-government-program.htm.
[95] "Map | National Risk Index," accessed March 23, 2025, https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/map.
[96] "Map | National Risk Index."

in a flood. According to the NRI, “loss” means more than just loss of physical materials. The loss refers to monetary loss of infrastructure and of individuals as well. As a federal agency, it is important for the NPS in its new documentation program to include metrics that are established by other federal agencies like FEMA in its decision making about which communities need to be documented. Since the FEMA mapping tool works on a county level, it is easy to see exactly which areas are most at-risk and in need of documentation.

The FEMA tool provides several options to view the risks presented to counties and census tracts. One can select coastal flooding, for example, and view the NRI for counties or census tracts on the coasts.

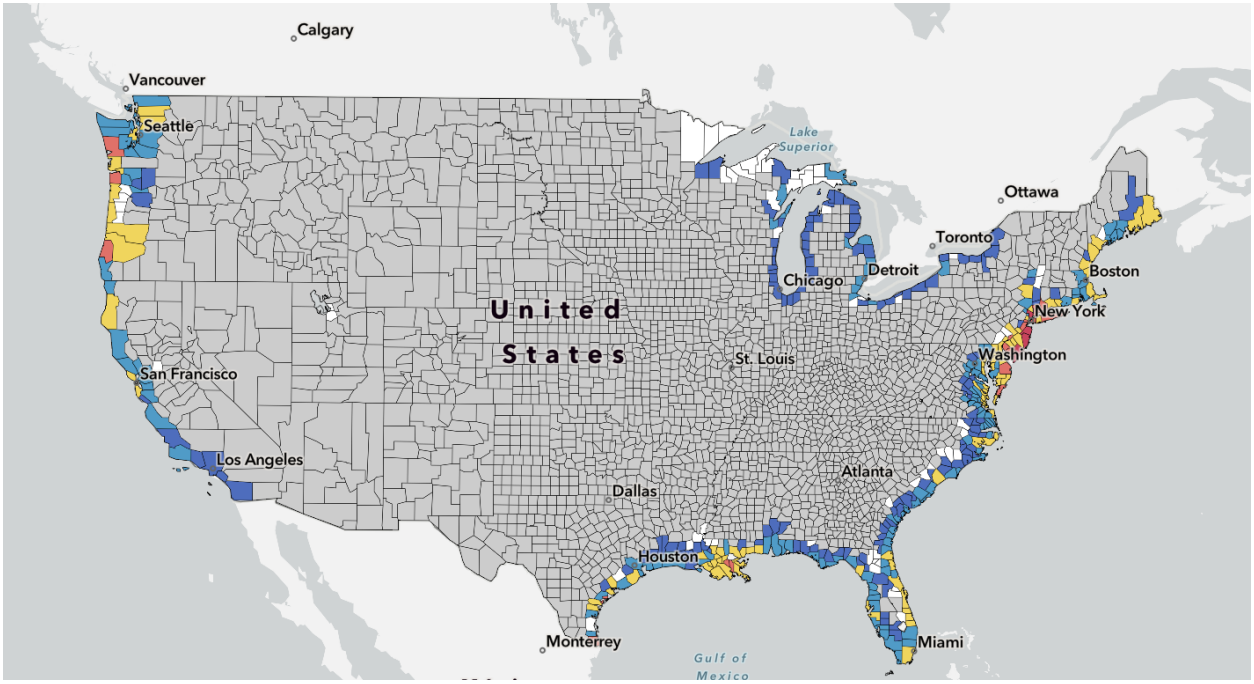

Figure 4: Red and Light Red Counties at Great Risk of Coastal Flooding. Screenshot from Federal Emergency Management Agency, March 2025.

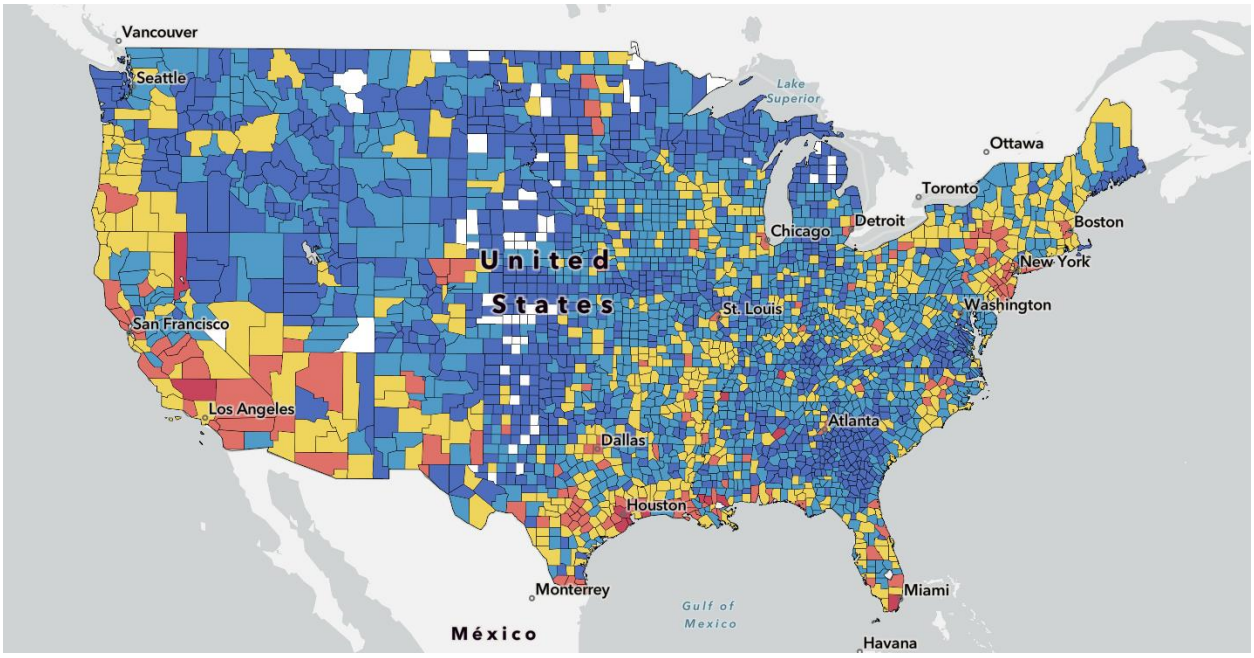

Figure 5: Red and Light Red Counties at Great Risk of Riverine Flooding. Screenshot from Federal Emergency Management Agency, March 2025.

This proposed documentation program will look at communities on a county level. FEMA assigns risk categories to each county based on NRI: Very High, Relatively High, Relatively Moderate, Relatively Low, Very Low, No Rating, Not Applicable, or Insufficient Data. Documentation teams will document counties that have a very high or relatively high risk of coastal flooding. There are 26 counties in the United States with this indication. FEMA also assigns an NRI for riverine flooding. One hundred and fifty-seven counties in the United States have a relatively high or very high NRI for riverine flooding. Some of these overlap with the 26 counties at increased risk for coastal flooding. Each of these counties will receive documentation, and the program will apply the same way for counties affected by coastal and by riverine flooding.

Ideally there will be at least three documentation teams working at a time. The teams will work county-by-county, state-by-state. This method ensures that teams do not have to travel back and forth across the country throughout the process. Moving generally east to west, these three teams will document each county with a relatively high or very high risk of coastal or riverine flooding.

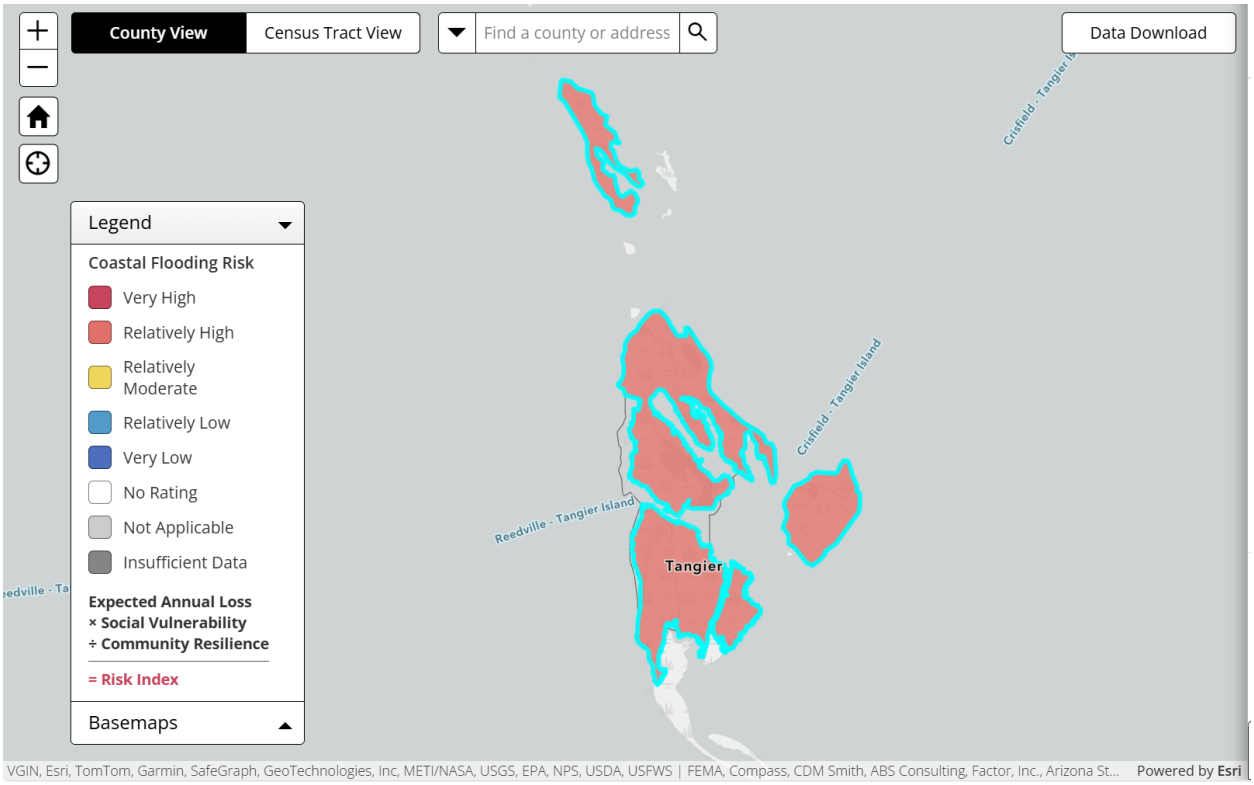

Figure 6: Map of Tangier Island: Relatively High Risk of Coastal Flooding. Screenshot from Federal Emergency Management Agency, March 2025.

Tangier Island in Virginia is one of the most threatened communities in the United States by flooding. The coastal flooding risk is indicated by FEMA as relatively high for the island. Tangier Island's national risk index for coastal flooding is 94.8, and the island has been experiencing flooding for decades. While residents do not know exactly when the ocean will swallow Tangier, rising sea levels present a great risk of flooding to Tangier. It is the residents' choice to pursue measures to block flooding, such as a sea wall or elevation of structures. This

documentation program seeks to preserve some of the island's cultural heritage if the seawall fails or does not come to fruition. It serves as more than the documentation provided by the TVA for those inundated communities, including visuals and detailed reports on buildings and landscapes.

Documentation Program Aspects

A new documentation program is required for places at risk of flooding due to climate change. The program will be similar to HABS but will focus on coastal areas and communities that are in floodplains near rivers or lakes. Parts of both HSRs and CLRs will be used in this program. By using pieces of existing tools, documentation can occur quickly and easily rather than having to learn an entirely new program. Finally, drone footage should be taken during this process. Once flooding occurs, the drone footage can be taken again and compared to when the resources were extant to measure the extent of rising sea levels or storm damage.

The setup of the proposed documentation program will be like that of HABS/HAER/HALS. There will be full-time employees, architects, architectural historians, historians, and landscape architects who create architectural drawings and maps using survey data. The surveying will be conducted primarily by student interns who have a background in architecture, historic preservation, or landscape architecture. Survey work will be conducted during the documented area's driest time of year. That way, proper surveying can take place that is unobstructed by flooding. Throughout the rest of the year, full-time employees will put together the reports and maps that synthesize all the information collected through surveys. The students will gain experience in surveying, particularly surveying at-risk communities, which is becoming increasingly important for the field of preservation. Their survey will include drone usage to take footage of communities and creating unique reports that take various aspects

of CLRs and HSRs. By pairing interns with full-time employees, the next generation of preservationists becomes trained by experts on the job. That next generation will then have an increased awareness and expertise in documenting communities that are being damaged by climate change.

Before beginning documentation in a county, teams should meet with community members. These potential stakeholders might be elected officials, local preservation organization staff, and business owners. Together, community members and federal documentation staff will come up with examples of buildings and landscapes to be documented. The categories presented in this recommendation are starting points for these individuals to consider when determining which resources to document.

For a visual overview of the community in need of documentation, drones will be crucial. As early as 2009, there was an unmanned helicopter called DRELIO that took images of coastal areas.[97] DRELIO could capture high-resolution images to give information about changes in topography from weather events.[98] Drones simplify photogrammetry even further. In East Texas, a team using drone footage to capture information about an archaeological site found that matching current drone footage with aerial photos led to an accurate depiction of the elevation changes in an area.[99] For documenting communities at risk of flooding, depicting elevation changes is important, but not as much as the documentation of the built environment. The layout of a community, including road patterns, groupings of houses, or even house shapes give information about how people live, work, and move in a space.

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[97] C. Delacourt et al., "DRELIO: An Unmanned Helicopter for Imaging Coastal Areas," *Journal of Coastal Research*, 2009, 1489–93.
[98] Delacourt et al., "DRELIO."
[99] McKee and Yuan, "A High-Resolution Multi-Scalar Approach for Micro-Mapping Historical Landscapes in Transition," 205.

Drone footage taken over time will also be necessary. If the flooding is occurring because of rising sea levels, drone footage yearly of the rising water will be taken through the NPS program. However, much of the catastrophic flooding that has taken place in 2024 has been sudden and due to unprecedented storms, particularly in parts of North Carolina, Tennessee, and New Mexico. Drone footage is vital for those areas as well, but more to document what stands today in case it is unexpectedly wiped out. The documentation program undertaken by the NPS would use this drone footage to create maps of the community, and in the case of rising sea levels, point out what the ocean swallows over time.

For the proposed NPS documentation program, sections used from typical HSRs are the history, description, and condition reports. To determine which buildings to document using this method, the following categories of buildings will be used:

1) Residential Buildings
    - 1.1 Stand-alone houses
    - 1.2 Townhomes/apartments
    - 1.3 Trailer parks
2) Civic Buildings
3) School Buildings
4) Religious buildings
5) Commercial Buildings
6) Recreational Facilities
7) Industrial Buildings

The layout of the report will be as follows for each building:

1) Chronological report of its use from earliest date known to today. Newspaper research, deed research, and oral interviews will be useful for this section.
2) Physical description of interior and exterior including
    2.1 Materials
    2.2 Types of windows
    2.3 Framing
3) Condition Reports. Condition reports will help future researchers determine weathering patterns or common issues in buildings in these areas.[100] The condition reports will rate various areas of the building in excellent, good, fair, or poor condition.

This report will feature these portions of an HSR, but usual HSR treatment recommendations would not be appropriate. The reports will be conducted for at least one building in each category named above, and this breadth of coverage will give a detailed sense of the types of buildings across various sectors of community life.[101] This plan is devised primarily for small communities up to mid-sized cities. However, if a large city were to need documentation, more than one building from each category would need to be documented as deemed appropriate by the documenters.

Landscapes will also be documented using this new program. Categories of landscapes are attuned to their uses, as the goal is achieving a broad overview of life in these communities:

1) Cemeteries or Burial Grounds
2) Academic Campuses

[100] It is important to note here that not all (if any) of the buildings documented using this method will be historic.
[101] The example will be chosen at the documentation team's discretion, and more than one can be chosen if they find it necessary for an understanding of the community.

3) Athletic and Recreational Facilities
4) Natural/Unmanicured Areas

As with the building reports, at least one landscape from each category should be represented in the documentation. Some communities may have none of these landscapes. The point of these reports is to create community-specific documentation, so one or more types of landscape lacking from certain communities is appropriate. The report must include the following:

1) Clear description of boundaries
    1.1 Aerial photography of the site
    1.2 Marking of the boundaries on the photographs
2) Lists of buildings and structures on the site
    2.1 Description of uses
    2.2 Photographs of elevations
3) List of water sources/ their types (lake, river, ocean, etc.) with photographs
4) Common vegetation with photographs
5) Description of common human activities to occur on the landscape
6) Each historical use of the landscape, with dates when possible
    6.1 List and explanation of any historic events or association with historical figures that took place at the landscape

It is important to note that unlike a CLR, these types of reports do not need to be generated simply because the landscape is significant as the NPS defines it. For this program, the community does not need to be recognized by the NPS as historically significant to receive documentation.

In the future, after the teams of preservationists document some of the communities, they may determine that the categories of tangible cultural heritage should be weighted in a particular way that gives preference to some aspects. Potentially, the teams may be approached by communities in need of documentation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Climate change and historic preservation, particularly flooding, will become increasingly intertwined as the years pass. The time for action, however, is now. Preservationists cannot control leaders' or corporations' responses to climate change, and they certainly cannot control the weather, but they can decide to document cultural heritage today that is likely to be destroyed by water.

The literature in the three fields of the Tennessee Valley Authority, climate change, and documentation have not been brought together in previous scholarship. Studying the politics surrounding the creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority and of the creation of the Historic American Buildings Survey amidst a shift in American perspectives on preservation, this project compares the 1930s to the present day. The Great Depression brought a crisis to the nation much like climate change does today.

There is an opportunity today much like in the 1930s for preservationists to change how they approach the daunting task of preserving while facing a climate crisis. Instead of attempting to lift homes above water, build expensive seawalls that will eventually fail, and relocate buildings away from their physical contexts, preservationists should accept that not every piece of historic fabric will be preserved. Documenting what stands today does more to preserve than pouring resources into potentially ineffective stabilization measures.

The flooding of communities by the TVA provides a historical example of destruction of cultural heritage that preservationists can study. The limited documentation of these places

before they were intentionally flooded preserved some of the cultural heritage, but more documentation would have assisted in preserving more cultural heritage. Preservationists can improve upon the documentation efforts of the communities flooded by the TVA in areas today that are at risk of flooding.

The proposed documentation program in this thesis features existing techniques that the National Park Service uses to document buildings and landscapes. Taking the relevant parts of these programs to suit this project, I create a framework that can be applied to communities today at risk of flooding. The program features aspects of historic structure reports and cultural landscape reports, as well as aerial photography. The triage of communities that are at risk of flooding is particularly important as preservationists have limited time and resources to document areas at risk. As scientists continue to learn more about climate change and flooding, the order of the communities to be documented may change as risk assessments are updated.

Future Directions

The framework in chapter 4 could be expanded to other natural disasters that are increasing in frequency and/or severity, including wildfires. As wildfires become more common and destructive, they present a similar problem as flooding does to the protection of cultural heritage. Taking the techniques and triage system in this proposed program and using them for fire-prone communities could aid in documenting and therefore preventing the loss of tangible cultural heritage.

The United States Army Corps of Engineers flooded and therefore relocated many communities across America throughout the twentieth century. Examining the documentation done, whether officially or not, in these areas may yield other techniques to improve upon the proposed documentation program.

With the new Trump administration, preservationists have concerns regarding the availability of funding for government programs that preserve cultural resources. If funding becomes scarce, documentation programs like the one proposed here may need to be restructured to become more grassroots or ad-hoc rather than government-sponsored and administered.

The Tennessee Valley Authority presented an extraordinary opportunity to document communities that were going to experience flooding. Today is not so different. While we do not know the exact days flooding will occur or how high their water levels will be, preservationists can expect cultural heritage to be destroyed by water. There were many reasons why the communities flooded by the TVA were not documented, but preservationists should take today's extraordinary opportunity to preserve communities for future generations to study.

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