

A natural disaster hits home for NARA

In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita last year, NARA acted as “First Preserver” in assisting officials in the affected Gulf states in their efforts to save records that were vital to the hurricanes’ victims.

Now, it seems, we have become our own “First Preserver.”

The recent heavy rains in the Mid-Atlantic region have produced flooding that has caused some serious damage to Archives I, our flagship building on the National Mall in downtown Washington, requiring us to close the building to the staff and public for several days.

On Sunday night, June 25, the heavy rains clogged storm drains along Constitution Avenue, and water entered Archives I through the east and west driveways. And because of a power outage by the local electric utility, PEPCO, which also affected a number of other Federal buildings in the area, our pumps were not able to remove the water as it came in.

As a result, there has been water damage in the moat, the sub-basement, and some parts of the basement level of the building. The William G. McGowan Theater also suffered significant damage by flood waters, as high as the stage and the first few rows of seats.

Emergency power remained on in the building, and the sprinkler and security systems continued to operate as emergency crews pumped out the sub-basement, so the electrical equipment located there could be restarted to restore our air handling system throughout the building.

Although preliminary inspection showed that there appeared to be no water damage to any records at Archives I, our key con-



servators were on the scene quickly, making preparations for continued on-site monitoring to assure protection of records in the building. They have placed devices throughout the building to keep track of

the temperature and relative humidity and to monitor the environment inside the building.

We are confident that the Charters of Freedom are safe and have not been adversely affected.

We are also bringing in outside experts to help us assess the conditions inside the building and deal with any water damage.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to the facilities and security staffs (and other NARA staff) who remained at their posts throughout the night and well into the next day to contain the damage. Their continued efforts are helping to make the building safe not only for the vital records stored there, but also for staff, researchers, and visitors.

Although our staff responded quickly to this situation, it will likely take some time to fully assess the damage and the impact to our daily business of preserving and providing access to public records as well as to our wide variety of public programs.

In the meantime, we must carry on with our daily work, as best we can, while we

perform our duty as recordkeeper for the nation.

I will keep you updated as soon as possible of further developments regarding Archives I. Also, please check our web site, *Archives.gov*, and our hotline, 301-837-0700, for up-to-date information.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allen Weinstein". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

ALLEN WEINSTEIN
Archivist of the United States

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