

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Public And Private Agencies Working On Restoration Of USVI Cultural Resources, FEMA Says

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Under the leadership of the Virgin Islands State Historic Preservation Office, the Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums, the Council on the Arts, and the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), with help from federal agencies, identification and assessment of damaged historic properties, items and artifacts is well underway, FEMA said Thursday.

Signs of the Virgin Islands' long history have been preserved in architecture and artifacts. Many of these were damaged, in some instances severely, by hurricanes Maria and Irma. But all is not lost. The above-mentioned agencies are collaborating to assure that the islands can restore, to the extent possible, these important cultural resources, FEMA

said.

Hurricane damaged structures that have been inspected include St Croix's Friedensfeld Midlands Moravian Church built in 1854; among other issues, the steeple roof is damaged, downspouts and gutters are missing and siding is extensively damaged. At St. John's East End Schoolhouse which dates from 1862, last year's hurricanes exacerbated deterioration that was already ongoing. In Charlotte Amalie the Enid Baa Public Library and Archives is housed in the Lange Building that was constructed around 1800 as the first fireproof building in town. Its gutters were damaged by wind and fallen debris; there is some interior water damage and the air conditioning system is impaired.

FEMA's Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation, Public Assistance, Mitigation, and Interagency Recovery Coordination programs, as well as the U.S. Small Business Administration, are supporting restoration and repairs of history's USVI footprints.

Other federal agencies involved with cultural resource assessment and support are the Department of the Interior, National Archives and Records Administration, and the Smithsonian Institution. FEMA and the Smithsonian co-sponsor the Heritage Emergency National Task Force, a partnership of 42 national service organizations and federal agencies created to protect cultural heritage from the damaging effects of natural disasters and other emergencies. In addition, a number of private nonprofit organizations and foundations offer grants to restore disaster-damaged cultural resources.

"No question, hurricane damage in the Territory was significant," said FEMA Federal Disaster Recovery Officer Ken Rathje. "To the extent the law permits, FEMA and other federal resources will offer support for restoration of the islands' heritage. Whenever possible, we will also help to improve the ability of the cultural resources to withstand future severe weather events."