

SERCA

Southeast Regional Conservation Association

Newsletter

Summer 2021 Volume 4, Number 2

From the Desks of the Newsletter Co-Editors

Deep Thoughts

By Tracey Johnson and Ephranette Brown

Tracey:

Some of you may already know that I hadn't always intended to enter the conservation field. In fact, I didn't even know about it until I began working at the Georgia Archives over 7 years ago. I partly blame the lack of visibility of preservation efforts at the time, but, if I'm being honest with myself, I should take most of the credit for this blind spot for being hyper-focused on becoming a librarian.

I knew from a young age that I wanted to work in a library. Through childhood experiences with my family in our local public library and various museums, I came to know these as places of transcendence where so much knowledge and so many possibilities awaited discovery. So eager to help others come to the same realization, I dedicated myself to working in cultural heritage institutions and have done so for over 18 years now.

To help achieve my goal, I earned a Master's in Library and Information Science from Kent State University in Ohio. Not truly knowing what else was possible in the field, I focused on metadata and knowledge management with the intention of becoming a cataloger in a public library. I soon found out how shortsighted I had been.

Shortly after graduating, I moved to Georgia and gained a position at the Georgia Archives putting some of my training to use in their reformatting lab. The mundanity of scanning documents and assigning prescribed metadata soon had me wanting more and Kim Norman, the Conservator and Preservation Manager at the time, eagerly took both Ephranette and me under her wing to begin our conservation training. After a few years, I had progressed and was able to put my degree to work in new and satisfying ways.

There is something powerful in harnessing data and molding it into palatable information for others, and the endless applications of data are absolutely fascinating. But I also love working with my hands

and the satisfaction I feel in creating or repairing something that's important to me and/or others is indescribable. With the combination of these passions, I felt I had finally found my calling.

Don't get me wrong, though. The last several years haven't been without their challenges. With the prevalence of formally educated conservation professionals and the heavy emphasis on formal education for emerging conservators to be successful, I have encountered imposter thoughts regarding my alternative path thus far. It took some soul-searching on my part and seeing the celebrated successes of other apprentice-trained conservators, as well as a lovely visit with Nancy Odegaard while she was in town for this year's SERCA workshop, to truly understand that there is more than one way to get into conservation. All paths to this field are valid and necessary to provide the variety of perspectives required to make ethical and informed decisions for all the world's cultural heritage.

*

Ephranette:

Tracey and I like to joke that we are the same person, but her entry into conservation and library background mirrors my own. The library was the center of activity, engagement, and learning for me growing up and I have always wanted to be a part of it. In high school, I took an "intro to library" class as an elective, there, the school librarian really expanded my view of what and where a librarian could be but never mentioned preservation. Even as I had various internships and fellowships in libraries through undergrad, conservation and preservation was never something offered as an avenue to pursue.

After earning a Master's in Library and Information Studies from The University of Alabama, I bounced around from one librarian-adjacent job to another, eventually landing at the Georgia Archives. I intended for the Archives to be a short stop on my way to a bona fide librarian position, but once I was introduced to conservation, it changed the course of my professional career. As I began to do conservation work, I knew I found something that would consistently engage me and if I continued, I would never stop learning; two things I believed only librarianship would give me.


I share Tracey's imposter thoughts, especially being a part of an underrepresented group in the profession. At one point, I thought not pursuing a conservation degree would devalue my point of view and invalidate my work product. I know that not to be true, but it has been hard for me to step into a profession through training alone without the backing of a degree and feel as if I belonged. I am still working on these feelings of being an imposter and continuously embracing there is more than one way into conservation. The field is filled with various training backgrounds and I am getting used to having gone down an unconventional path and view it as an asset and not a drawback.



Five Questions For Jennifer Bullock

Q: How did you choose conservation as a career?

I first learned about art conservation while studying abroad as an undergraduate art history major when we visited the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican. Our guide directed our attention to the dark, sooty squares that the wall paintings conservators had left in a few areas which demonstrated the difference that cleaning had made in the color and clarity of Michelangelo's work. It was astounding! A few years later, as a graduate student, I was introduced to a book and paper conservator and was able to see firsthand the work he was doing in his lab. Besides being impressed with the craftsmanship he clearly needed to do his work, I was excited to learn about the

A vertical strip of marbled paper on the left side of the page, featuring swirling patterns of red, green, blue, and yellow with white speckles.

science behind the treatments he was performing, and I observed that his workspace was more like a science lab than an art studio. As a student I had always felt torn between my love of art and art history and my enthusiasm for the sciences. Discovering that there was a career that required I be fluent in all 3 was so exciting! I knew it was the perfect job for me. After that studio visit, I began taking all the pre-reqs and doing whatever I needed to do to get into a conservation graduate program!

Q: How did you learn of SERCA?

Over 8 years ago I took a huge leap of faith and moved to South Carolina from Eugene, Oregon. When I came here, I didn't know anyone and I didn't have any contacts or colleagues within the conservation community. I found SERCA online while trying to find conservation friends and colleagues, and I am so glad I did. Through SERCA, I have had great continuing education opportunities and have met wonderful people who have given me good advice and kind guidance as I have settled into my professional life here in the South.

Q: What has been your most memorable treatment?


The most memorable treatments for me are the ones that have the trickiest problems to solve. For example: a painting that needed to be re-lined but was too big for my lining table; a large painting that had 30+ tears in it but we didn't want to line; paintings so blackened by soot that I wasn't sure they were even treatable (I have 2 of those in my studio right now); and paintings covered in huge amounts of overpaint, etc. These are the treatments that require the most effort, research, and creative thinking to be successful. Then seeing the client's emotional response when they view the completed work is incredibly rewarding.

Q: What has been your biggest regret professionally?

I was accepted into a UK program before I had finished the chemistry requirements for applying to the programs in the US. I usually tell my conservation interns and technicians that my biggest professional regret is that I wasn't patient enough to wait to get into one of the US grad programs. When I returned to the US after graduating and working in the UK, I felt a bit disadvantaged and awkward because all my conservation connections were in the UK and I didn't have contacts or colleagues in the US. It took me a long time to feel like I had a trusted group of fellow conservators that I could consult with if I had a difficult treatment or was faced with a problem seemingly impossible to solve. At the same time, I am so grateful for my experience and for the things I learned and the people I met that were part of my unique and particular path to being a conservator.

Q: What tool or supply do you still guard with your life?

Really, it is a 4-way tie for my most prized tools/supplies: 1) My magnification loops that I have had since my first year in grad school (which are 100% always on my head); 2) A Tiranti spatula for filling losses that was a farewell gift from my colleagues at the

A vertical strip of marbled paper on the right side of the page, featuring swirling patterns of red, green, blue, and yellow with white speckles.

Victoria & Albert Museum; 3) Any scrap, fragment or even thin strip that I have left of StableTex fabric in canvas colors; 4) My last stash of MS2A varnish. (If anyone has access to more of these last 2 items... PLEASE CALL ME!).

WHO DO YOU WANT TO HEAR FROM NEXT?

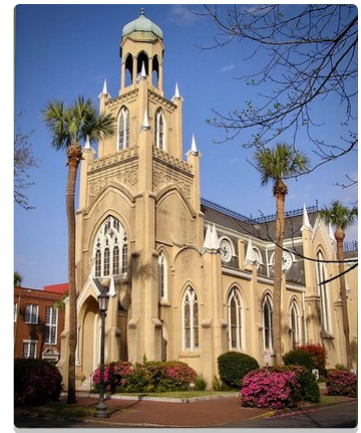
CONSIDER SUBMITTING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE INTERVIEWEES.

SERCA Development Opportunity Grant Update

Treating the Historic Torahs of Congregation Mickve Israel

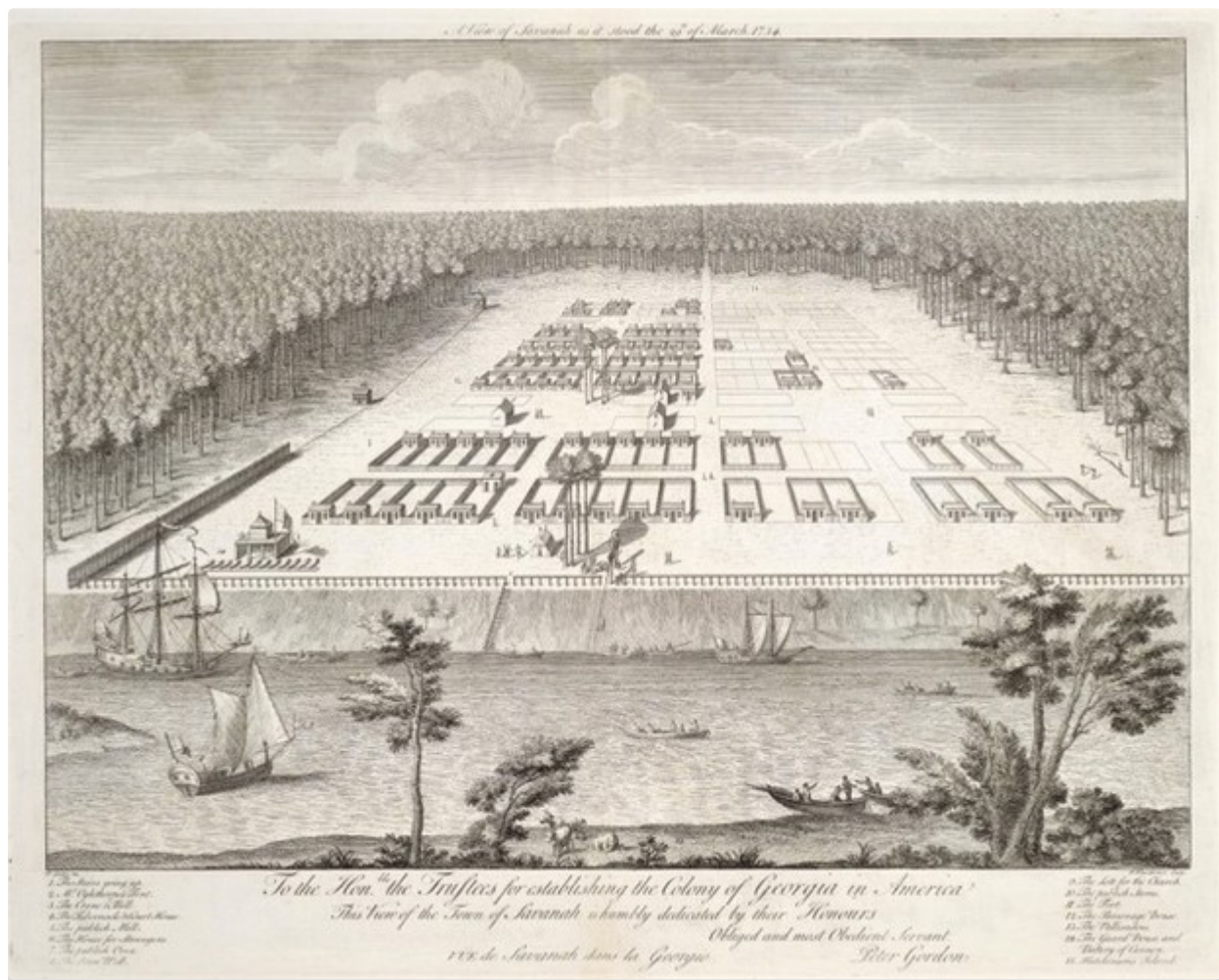
By Kim Norman

*Director, Preservation and Digitization Services
Emory Libraries, Emory University*



In 2012, a visiting rabbi at Congregation Mickve Israel (CMI) in Savannah, Georgia suggested that congregation members contact a conservator about the synagogue's two rare and historic Torah scrolls and what the rabbi thought was a developing mold issue. The discoloration of the leather scrolls was the reason for his concern, and a conservation assessment was advised. CMI members contacted Renee Stein, Director of Conservation at the Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University and asked her to recommend a local conservator in private practice. I was pleased that Renee suggested me for this project.

To begin, CMI and museum board members corresponded with me about the historic Torahs and soon travelled to Atlanta for an in-person interview, sharing the Torah history with me. In 1733, the oldest of the two CMI Torahs arrived in Savannah with a handful of Jewish immigrants who had been living in London after fleeing Northern Spain. The immigrants left London as a group on the *William and Sarah* ship to Savannah, arriving seven months later at the harbor of the Georgia Colony in July 1733. They were permitted to enter the harbor by General James Oglethorpe. With the following arrival of more Jewish immigrants on a later ship, the second historic Torah is believed to have been delivered to CMI in 1737.



Synagogue records indicate that the Torahs were written during the mid-1400s in the northern region of Spain and in an early Hebrew handwriting, now readable by only a few CMI members. Small leather hides were used to create the two scrolls by hand-stitching the panels together. Each Torah has an approximate length of one hundred yards. Because the leather is thin and pliable, it is very likely doeskin, a plentiful and economical resource at the time and in the region.

Next, I visited Savannah for an onsite assessment of the CMI Torah scrolls, addressing the question of a developing mold issue and documenting any physical damage that could be solved with treatment. My condition assessment did not reveal a presence of mold, and in fact, the Torah scrolls were found to be in remarkable condition. Any existing physical damage was due to use and storage of the Torahs and was concentrated on the edge areas. Both a condition and treatment report were submitted to CMI, and their museum board decided to proceed with the necessary repairs.



We arranged for the oldest Torah to be delivered to me in Atlanta. I spent the next few months slowly vacuuming with a Nilfisk and repairing torn, fragile edge areas with strong Japanese kozo tissue in various color tones to match the Torah leather. I used the lightweight and reversible adhesive SCMC (sodium carboxymethylcellulose) to mend from the back (or flesh side) of the leather where it would be less obvious. By the end of 2012, both Torahs were assessed, treated, and returned to CMI for final installation in their newly renovated museum space.



With gratitude to the SERCA Board of Directors, I was awarded a 2020 Professional Development Opportunity Grant. After a pandemic-related delay, I returned to Savannah this year and photographed both Torahs for a longer essay on this project. The essay will be forthcoming in *Suave Mechanicals: Essays on the History of Bookbinding*, Vol. 7, edited by Julia Miller and published by Cathleen Baker of The Legacy Press in Ann Arbor, Michigan.




Health and Safety

Spotlight: Fire Safety in the Workplace

By Laura Garner Hine

Working in the field of fine art conservation comes with a myriad of situations that require problem-solving, caution, and a keen attention to detail. While of course this applies to treatments and the



actual duties conservators perform, health and safety and cognizance of the types of hazards that present themselves in the workplace also requires a strict focus on prevention and problem-solving. While the risk of a fire hazard may be minimal and more unlikely to happen compared to other potential hazards found in the conservation lab, it is a devastating affair should a fire occur. According to the report released on October 30th of 2018 entitled “Stay in Business After a Disaster by Planning Ahead” from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), “About 25 percent of businesses do not reopen after disasters.” There are a number of causes that could lead to a potential fire outbreak which are incredibly pertinent to conservators. First and foremost includes faulty electrical equipment. Statistically, this constitutes the greatest portion of workplace fires and they can happen from a whole range of things that can go wrong. Other common factors that could result in a fire include the use of flammable and combustible materials, heating malfunctions, lack of staff training and a lack of equipment and resources in place, as well as human error and carelessness.

Protecting your lab from the threat of a fire incident begins with prevention. By taking a few extra precautions, the majority of fires that could occur in the workplace can be avoided. The following points are some general measures that can be taken in order to protect your lab, your colleagues, and yourself.


Good Housekeeping

- Assess the unique risks that your facility poses that could potentially contribute to a fire. This is one of the first and paramount steps in mitigating the impact of a fire, if one does occur. Document these risks and work with leadership to resolve them.
- It is best practice to maintain a tidy work environment as free from clutter as possible. Get organized! Cluttered materials can contribute to the growth of a fire by acting as fuel and by preventing access to emergency equipment and to exits. It is also good practice to keep any materials or storage within a 24 inch or two-foot clearance from the ceilings, whether your lab has a sprinkler system or not.
- Maintain and check the condition of fire ladders and escapes. It is also a good idea to continue with routine fire prevention walk throughs and schedule regular inspections with your local fire inspector.

Reducing Electrical Hazards

- Malfunctioning electrical equipment and faulty wiring are one of the most common causes for a fire outbreak in the workplace. It is important to be vigilant and to report any electrical hazards.
- Maintain equipment and machinery to prevent overheating or friction sparks.
- Maintain free access to control panels so that, if the event calls for it, electricity can be turned off safely.
- Do not overload electrical sockets or power strips.

Firefighting Equipment (Emergency Equipment)

- **Smoke detectors** - Although smoke detectors are not always required by regulation, such as for small businesses, it is a smart decision to install monitored smoke detectors to protect your organization, colleagues, and employees.
 - **Fire alarm systems** - As an organization grows, so does the need for a fire alarm system. When working in a large facility, having a commercial fire alarm system installed can alert individuals throughout the building of the potential and growing hazard. A fire alarm system is also an
- 

effective approach in mitigating the disastrous effect of a fire by providing a system that can detect potential fires early and by activating the fire sprinkling or suppression system to stop fires fast.

- **Sprinkler Systems** - Depending on the size of the facility, fire sprinkler systems may or may not be necessary. According to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 13, "all newly constructed commercial buildings that are 5,000 square feet or larger are required to have fire sprinkler systems. Buildings more than 55 feet tall are also required to have an automatic fire sprinkler system installed."
- **Emergency lighting** - According to NFPA Life Safety Code 101, "all commercial buildings are required to have emergency and exit path lighting. The code is updated every three years to ensure new and existing buildings offer the best protection from fire and other related hazards for occupants."
- **Fire Extinguishers** - Extinguishers are always required in a business occupancy. The NFPA defines business occupancies as facilities, buildings, or structures which are "used for the transaction of business other than mercantile" (NFPA 101: **6.1.11.1**). A mercantile occupancy is one that uses its space primarily for the display and sale of merchandise. So, if the primary purpose of your business is to provide a service, then you are a "business occupancy." When it comes to small fires, portable fire extinguishers are extremely effective. It is important to maintain the appropriate number and type of fire extinguishers and provide adequate training in their use. But because small fires can spread incredibly fast, it is imperative that they are installed correctly and with easy accessibility. The label should be facing out, and they should be placed in common areas or where there is easy visibility. It is also prudent to ensure that the locking pin is intact and that the tamper seal is unbroken as well as to verify that the pressure indicator or gauge is in the proper range and in an operable position. Lastly, it is advisable to check that the extinguisher is still full by simply lifting it.

Know the type of fire extinguisher that suits your workspace best! There are five standard types:

- A - ordinary combustibles such as trash, wood, paper, and textiles
- B - flammable liquids
- C - electrical equipment
- D - combustible metals
- K - combustible cooking media

In the event that one must use a fire extinguisher, remember the acronym PASS:

- P - pull the pin while holding the extinguisher away from you to unlock the mechanism
- A - aim low toward the base of the fire
- S - squeeze the level slowly
- S - sweep the nozzle from side to side at the base of the fire

Chemical Safety

- It is prudent to avoid buying chemicals in bulk. Keep flammable liquids to a minimum, and store in flammable liquid storage cabinets. Never allow more than ten gallons of liquid to be outside of cabinets at any time.

- Store compressed gases with valve caps on when not in use, and keep cylinders firmly anchored in place.
- Store incompatible substances in separate areas, keeping oxidizers well away from flammable liquids and gases.
- Do not store flammable liquids in fume hoods.
- Store and use chemicals safely. Employees should familiarize themselves with the Material Safety and Data Sheet (MSDSs) of chemicals used in the facility to determine flammability and other fire hazards. When using and storing these substances, provide adequate ventilation.
- Control the accumulation of flammable and combustible waste materials.
- Keep all chemicals away from any sources of ignition such as heat or sparks.
- Except for when in use, always keep containers closed.
- Maintain adequate ventilation.
- Ground all metal drums and transfer vessels.
- Proper disposal of hazardous waste is crucial. Dispose of hazardous waste in a metal container that has a lid.

Have a plan

- Designate at least one person in the workplace to oversee fire safety and prevention.
- Develop an emergency plan and emergency procedures.
- Have an evacuation procedure in place.
- Plan and execute regular fire drills.
- Use a fire safety checklist.
- Educate employees on fire response preparedness in the event that a fire does occur. The following Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) fire prevention guidelines can help organizations fulfill their duty of care and train employees on fire prevention and safety.
- Clearly articulate all major fire hazards.
- Instruct employees how to properly handle and store hazardous materials.
- Educate employees on potential ignition sources and their control.
- Communicate what fire protection equipment is in place to handle each major hazard.
- Train employees on how to use fire protection equipment.
- Communicate evacuation protocol and how to use your company's [emergency notification system](#).
- Include procedures to control the accumulation of flammable and combustible waste materials.
- Include safeguards installed on heat-producing equipment to prevent the accidental ignition of combustible materials.
- Develop a list that contains the names/job titles of internal fire safety wardens.
- Draft a list of emergency contact phone numbers to use in the event of an emergency. Oftentimes in an intense situation, people will panic. Therefore, having a list of basics such as the company address, phone number, and floor plan is a wise course of action. Having this information posted where it's clearly visible in the workplace is also a prudent move.
- Disasters happen and there is no fail safe or foolproof way to eliminate the potential of one taking place completely. However, as all conservators know, one can start to avoid catastrophe or potential damage through prevention. The approach to utilize when a disaster occurs is very much aligned to the methodology of a conservator: ACT, don't panic...

A- Assess the situation

C- Choose your response

T- Take action

Resources:

National Safety Council (NSC)

The Society of Fire Protection Engineers (SFPE)

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)

Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA)

Accomplishments and Updates



Rustin (Rusty) Levenson, founder of [Art Care Conservation](#), has been awarded the 2021 AIC Honorary Membership award for her outstanding contributions to the conservation profession.

Corinne Bortner has joined Andrew Huot at Big River Bindery, LLC, filling the open Conservation Technician position. Corinne holds a library degree from the University of North Texas and is an Atlanta native. Andrew is excited to have her join the team and is looking forward to having some extra hands in the shop!

[Big River Bindery](#) is a bookbinding and letterpress printing studio for the art of the book located in Norcross, Georgia



Back issues of the SERCA newsletter are now on our website and can be found here: <https://sercaconservation.org/serca-newsletters/>

New issues are still reserved for current members, but PDFs of the Newsletter will be added on a rolling basis as new issues are created.

SERCA Workshop with Nancy Odegaard

In June, the Southeast Regional Conservation Association (SERCA) held the workshop *Materials Characterization Tests for Objects of Art and Archaeology* taught by Dr. Nancy Odegaard at the Georgia Archives' Conservation Laboratory.

This in-person workshop taught scientific methods of identifying various materials found in art and archives collections to aid in conservation treatment decisions. The workshop was attended by a wonderful mix of pre-program conservation students and established practicing conservators in a variety of specialisms. This provided a rare opportunity for those in the conservation field to enjoy the expertise and knowledge of a highly esteemed conservation scientist and practitioner who literally co-wrote the book on the subject.

The Georgia Archives was honored to have been able to share our facilities for such a valuable event!



**L to R: Leah Oliver,
Kayla Moorhead,
Clara Gonzalez**



Brittany Dineen



**L to R: Renee Jolly,
Nancy Odegaard,
Gyllian Porteous,
Clara Gonzalez,
Brittany Dineen**

Membership

Membership Payments Online via PayPal

Renewing your membership is even easier without having to worry about mailing in those pesky checks!! You will also be able to register and pay for workshops online. Please be sure to submit **BOTH** the registration form *and* the payment. If you haven't already renewed, please do so today. And spread the word to your colleagues!

Visit our website for more details: <https://sercaconservation.org/membership/>

Find a Conservator

If you would like to be included on the [Find a Conservator](#) page of the SERCA website, please contact Katie Boodle, Communications Coordinator at kboodle@nedcc.org.

Newsletter Submissions

Working on an interesting project?

Have an internship, job opening, or workshop opportunity to share?

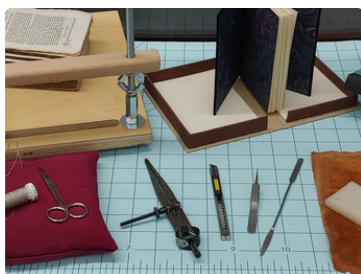
Let us know what's going on in your studio! Items for inclusion in the newsletter should be sent to the SERCA email: SeRegionConservationAssoc@gmail.com directed to both Newsletter Editors:

Ephranette Brown & Tracey Johnson

SERCA's Newsletter is published three times a year in April, August, and December. Please note that articles should be sent at least two weeks prior to publication and should not exceed 750 words. Also, there should be no more than 4 accompanying images in jpeg format. The editors reserve the right to copy-edit to fit available space.

Next issue: December 2021


Deadline for submissions: November 15, 2021




Southeast Regional Conservation Association - SERCA

 @serca_se

SERCA Listserv: serca-l@listserv.cc.emory.edu

 SeRegionConservationAssoc@...

 sercaconservation.org