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# COASTAL EMPIRE

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# History says we're overdue for a hurricane

**BY MARY LANDERS**

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Cary Mock examines ships' logs, plantation diaries and old newspapers to predict the stormy future of the East Coast.

What he sees for Georgia is that the good luck of the past century, when the state was unscathed by a major storm, can't hold.

"I think we're way, way overdue," said Mock, associate professor of geography at the University of South Carolina.

The information he's gleaning from long-forgotten documents is adding about five decades to the hurricane history of Georgia's coast, making the record here more comprehensive back to 1800. In other parts of the East Coast, including South Carolina, the records stretch back even further.

Much of that comes from commercial and military mariners,

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# Hurricane

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including the British Navy.

"There's a great deal of detail to early ship's logs," Mock said. "They provide a lot of data on extreme weather events. We know every South Carolina hurricane back to 1722 because of the British ship logs."

Mock's work is important, said Al Sandrik, warning coordination meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Jacksonville and himself a hurricane historian.

"By this being added to the hurricane database, it gives us a better feel for the return period for hurricanes and tropical storms on different parts of the coast," Sandrik said. "Every year you can add to it certainly helps."

At the Georgia Historical Society's headquarters in Savannah, Mock combed through the handwritten diaries of Skidaway Island's William Waring. The doctor and

plantation owner noted the weather daily, providing clues to a Georgia hurricane season that was much like the disastrous 2004 season in Florida, when that state was slammed by Tropical Storm Bonnie and hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne

"It was a pretty unique season in 1837," Mock said. "Georgia was impacted by four tropical storms, one or two of hurricane strength. William Waring gave evidence of all of them. Usually he just called them a gale. But sometimes he used the term 'September gale' because he recognized they came in September but he didn't know why."

Waring had a thermometer, a somewhat rare instrument at the time, and his recorded temperatures make his notes even more valuable.

Modern Georgians like to think they're protected from tropical storms by their westerly position on the South Atlantic Bight, the big embayment that seemingly shelters the coast. Mock's Georgian students have

even told him their state doesn't get hit by hurricanes.

That's true only in recent history.

But the bight was just the same in the 1800s, when hurricanes walloped the state at least six times: in 1804, 1813, 1824, 1854, 1893 and 1898.

"Some of those were dead on in Savannah," Mock said.

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