

GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



GEORGIA  
BUSINESS HISTORY  
INITIATIVE

*Sharing the Stories of the Businesses that Built Georgia*



H  
HOLDER





## **HOLDER CONSTRUCTION**

### A PROFILE IN GEORGIA'S BUSINESS HISTORY

Holder Construction Company has spent the last 64 years making a name for itself in the construction industry. The company's team approach has resulted in countless successful projects and a robust internal workforce. Serving clients across the country out of eight regional offices helps to guarantee that their customer relations are as sound as the buildings they construct, ensuring that Holder Construction is ranked one of the nation's top 100 contractors year after year.

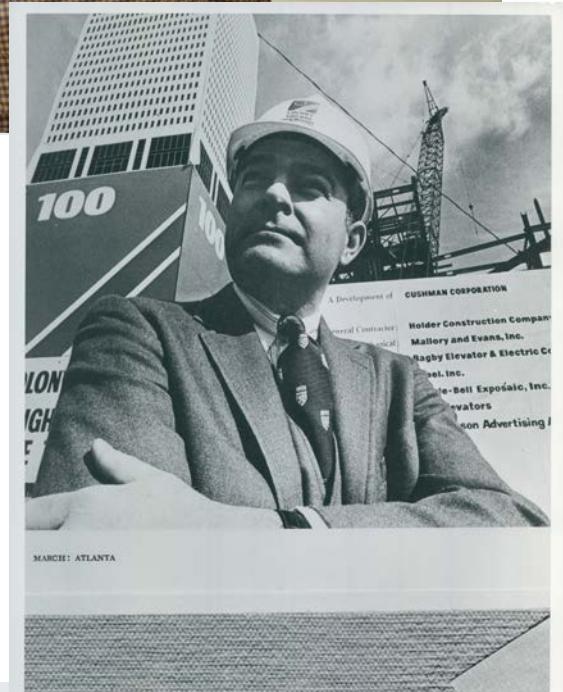
# HOLDER CONSTRUCTION

BUILT FROM THE GROUND UP



## The Foundation

Out of the nearly 800,000 construction companies in the United States, what makes one rare? What guarantees longevity and a steady stream of work? After 64 years in the industry, Holder Construction Company knows what it takes not only to survive, but also to succeed.



Robert Holder founded Holder Construction Company in 1960 in downtown Atlanta, Georgia.

## The Framing Members

Taking a “**team approach**” project method, Holder Construction focuses on excelling in commercial construction services at a national level. However, its reputation is in part due to the culture it has cultivated. From the very beginning, Robert Holder wanted to ensure that his projects endured, and, more importantly, that his employees thrived. Thus, Holder Construction focuses its energy on four objectives: *profit, people, reputation, and excellence*.



Holder Construction Company invests in each employee, both financially and personally, recognizing that employees are a direct reflection of the company's core values and beliefs. Consequently, when the employees thrive, so does the company. The employees at Holder use the phrase, “Builders at Heart,” to instill a sense of purpose and pride in the everyday work

employees do both inside and outside the office, as many of Holder's personnel are equally invested in local community organizations.

*“Our people determine the degree to which we achieve the standard of excellence for which we strive.”*

– Robert Holder

- Explain the importance of each of the four objectives of Holder Construction.
- Collectively, how can these objectives ensure the success of a business?

A company's culture includes the values, behaviors, and goals that make up the work environment.

Holder's culture is noted as being comprised of teamwork, performance, and service. Excellence is at the core of Holder Construction and the company culture it has built. This standard of excellence is **ubiquitous**. It overflows into every company objective and forms the foundation for relationships built on trust and confidence, helping to reassure clients that all Holder projects will excel.



*"We value relationships established on a promise and cultivated with trust. Our most valuable resources are our people who carry forth our traditions, values, and long-standing reputation for performance."*

– Holder website

Trust and confidence have to be earned, and Holder's status within the construction industry was built over time. In 1966, their Phipps Plaza project in Atlanta, Georgia, put the Holder name on the map, due to the site's landmark location. The company's new popularity would help secure the contract for Colony Square, also located in Atlanta.



Top: Holder staff on a worksite. Bottom: Colony Square. *Photo by David King.*



## PRIMARY SOURCE INVESTIGATION: Construction Site Signage Images

Look at the 1968 image from the Adlers Department Store ground-breaking ceremony. Did you notice the sign on the right-hand side of the picture that says, "Future Home, Adler's for Quality, Oglethorpe Mall"? Often, construction sites will have a sign for the business that will be located there as well as the construction company and/or contractors undertaking the work. This is a form of advertisement for both entities. Compare the picture of Adlers Department Store with Holder Construction Company's pictures from the Boyle-Midway Division American Home Products Corporation site.

- What are some similarities and some differences that you notice between the photographs?
- What can you learn about Holder Construction from the sign?
- With modern technology and the internet, do you think signs still hold the same purpose at construction sites? Why or why not?



The Colony Square project involved the construction of a new multi-use complex. This modern plan **epitomized** the idea of “live-work-play,” including office space, condominiums, restaurants, and retail space. Unfortunately, the owners were unable to procure enough tenants to lease the available spaces and costs began to mount. The endeavor ultimately led to the largest Chapter XI **bankruptcy** of its kind in the United States.

When the client could not finance the project, the consequences flowed down to all **entities** working on the project, including Holder Construction. With no money coming in, it meant that it could not pay the **subcontractors** working with them, or their own employees.

*“They (Colony Square) owed us \$1 million. The Company was worth \$1 million and there was no new business. There were 100 employees, and we laid off about 50.”*

– Robert Holder

Robert Holder settled with the subcontractors involved for 30 cents on the dollar. However, after recouping more than expected, Mr. Holder personally paid the subcontractors an additional sum. After the bankruptcy, it was evident that the company needed a fresh start, but it was equally apparent that Robert Holder’s gesture solidified a company foundation that upholds and respects all relationships.

As the decade ended, several opportunities, which included some important **joint ventures**, put the company back on the path to success.

## Constructing a Future

The late 1970s and 1980s were defined by the construction of Delta’s Corporate Headquarters, the T-gate at Hartsfield Airport, Atlanta City Hall, and the Coca-Cola complex. Being local to the Atlanta area proved beneficial for Holder, as did a joint venture partnership with H.J. Russell & Company. This partnership became an enduring personal and professional relationship that would last for years to come.



Herman Russell and Robert Holder.

While the 1990s were full of **trials and tribulations** related to the economy, 1994 would indicate the light at the end of the tunnel. Holder would build a UPS data center in Alpharetta, Georgia, which gained the attention of other big-name companies, like AOL and FedEx.

Robert Holder's son, Tommy Holder, became CEO in 1989. Tommy Holder brought a new energy that would propel the company further ahead of the competition. The company landed the FedEx World Headquarters, the State Farm complex in Illinois, then the Philips Arena in Atlanta shortly after. Next came more projects for Delta and Hartsfield airport, now known as the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. With each successful project, Holder Construction's solid reputation continued to grow along with its portfolio.

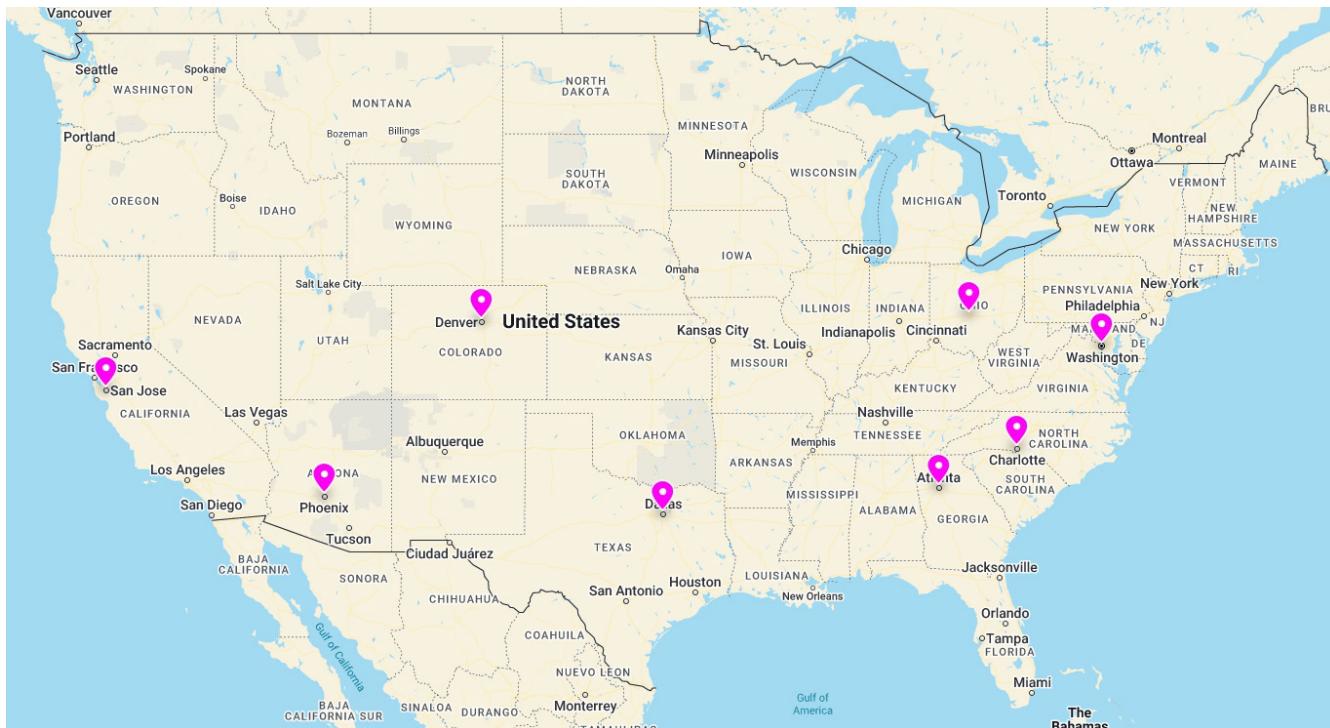


Tommy Holder.



Top and right: Construction at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

While its employees now occupy eight regional office locations, this was not always the case. Its initial Georgia office was in Atlanta, in the Fulton National Bank building on Marietta Street. It slowly expanded to locations in which it was needed, ensuring that the company was available to support its clients throughout the country. In 1998, it established an office in Washington, D.C., and soon after, it would open another location in Phoenix, Arizona. By 2012, Holder also had offices in Charlotte, North Carolina; Dallas, Texas; and San Jose, California. It would open two more offices in the coming years, in Denver, Colorado; and Columbus, Ohio; bringing the total to eight.

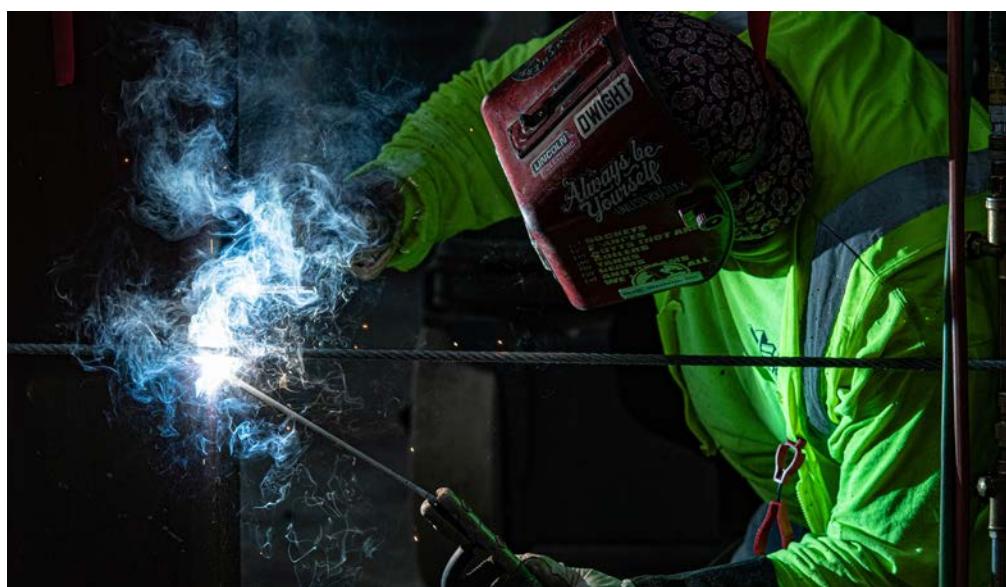
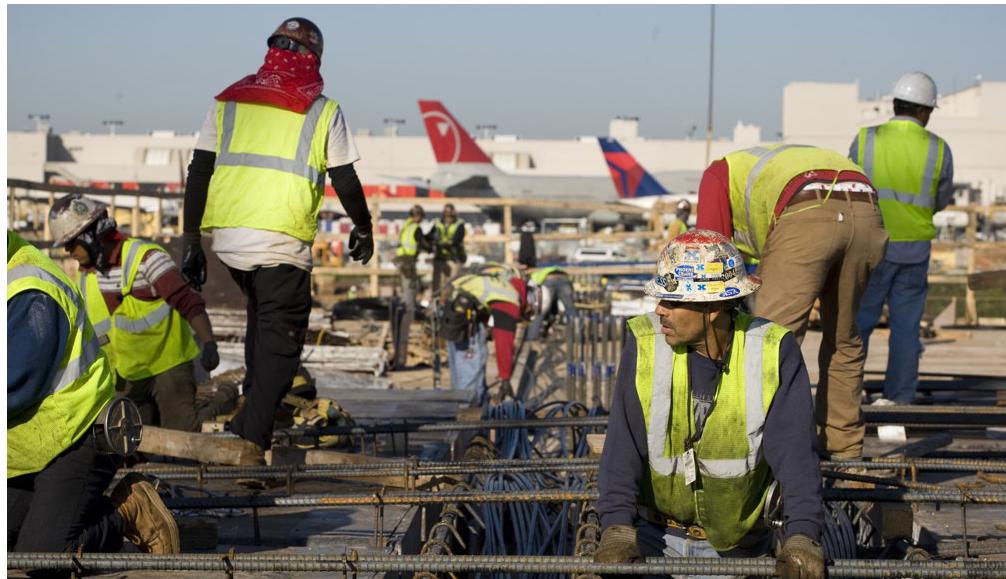


Although Holder Construction has grown significantly, its core values have remained the same. What began as a small, local company focused on warehouse and light commercial spaces, has grown into a company serving international clients. Through it all, Holder Construction has not lost sight of its identity or what matters at the end of the day: the individual behind the employee, the coworker, and the client.

## CASE STUDY: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Construction companies like Holder Construction play a major role in the overall **workforce** not only of Georgia, but also in every state in which they build. They provide jobs and opportunities for thousands of individuals who call these places home.

The Georgia Department of Labor performed an analysis of the long-term employment projections in the state of Georgia through 2028. It determined that in the state of Georgia alone, "Construction jobs will grow by 7.2 percent over the projection period as construction of buildings, trade contractors, and heavy and civil engineering construction continue with infrastructure improvements to roads and bridges." With more jobs being created, more individuals will be employed in this industry. Therefore, "construction and extraction occupations are expected to grow at a rate of 0.8 percent per year and add over 14,000 jobs over the projection period." The uptick in the development, and redevelopment, of the built environment requires a larger workforce, and a larger, healthier workforce is beneficial to our collective economy.



## ACTIVITY:

Locate Georgia on the map at <https://meritshopscorecard.org/>, created by Building America, “The Merit Shop Scorecard.”



- How did Georgia's Construction Environment rank in the Scorecard? How does it compare to the overall ranking of other states in the southeast?
- What did Georgia score on its implementation of Workforce Development?
- Name three states that have a greater annual growth rate for construction jobs than Georgia.
- What are Right to Work laws? How many states have adopted Right to Work laws and how has it impacted their overall economic growth?

## But what is workforce development?

Workforce development is a means by which to address the needs of staff. While employees benefit, so does the company, as workforce development enhances overall efficiency and competitiveness.

It is a way to invest “in the company’s and community’s future, aimed at building a pipeline of skilled workers and increasing the organization’s overall human capital. It often involves assessing skill gaps and addressing them through high-level community planning programs and internal company initiatives.” – Upwork Global, Inc.

## What is a skill gap?

A skill gap is when an employee or group of employees is lacking in a certain skillset.

There are many different types of workforce development as it often depends on the type of company and what skill gaps are evident. However, there are two factors that remain consistent: *training* and *education*.

*“We support local workforce development initiatives, scholarships, and construction management programs across the US. Together with our industry partners we are creating opportunity - bringing together skilled training, advanced education, job opportunities, and access to a better living wage.”*

– Holder website

## What is upskilling?

Upskilling is defined as a way “to acquire more advanced skills through additional education and training.”

According to an article published by Upwork Global, Inc. on workforce development, there are many different types of training and education that can be implemented to facilitate workforce development such as:

- Certifications
- Postsecondary education
- Upskilling
- Professional development courses
- Mentorship programs
- On-the-job training
- Apprenticeships

## How does Holder define its ‘Workforce Development’ program?

Holder Construction’s workforce development aims to “recruit, train, and develop.” The company wants to ensure that each employee is not only adept at their designated position but is continuously expanding their knowledge and understanding of other trade and professional positions within the Holder company.

Holder’s workforce development plan involves three major initiatives: HolderRISE, college recruitments and internships, and external partnerships.



## HolderRISE

HolderRISE gives high school students an opportunity to experience a career in the construction industry. Each selected student is partnered with a field supervision associate and follows an individualized course. The student's time during the internship is not limited to one area, as they shadow safety, quality, surveying, and planning departments, thus ensuring the most comprehensive experience of the construction industry possible.



## College Recruitment and Internships

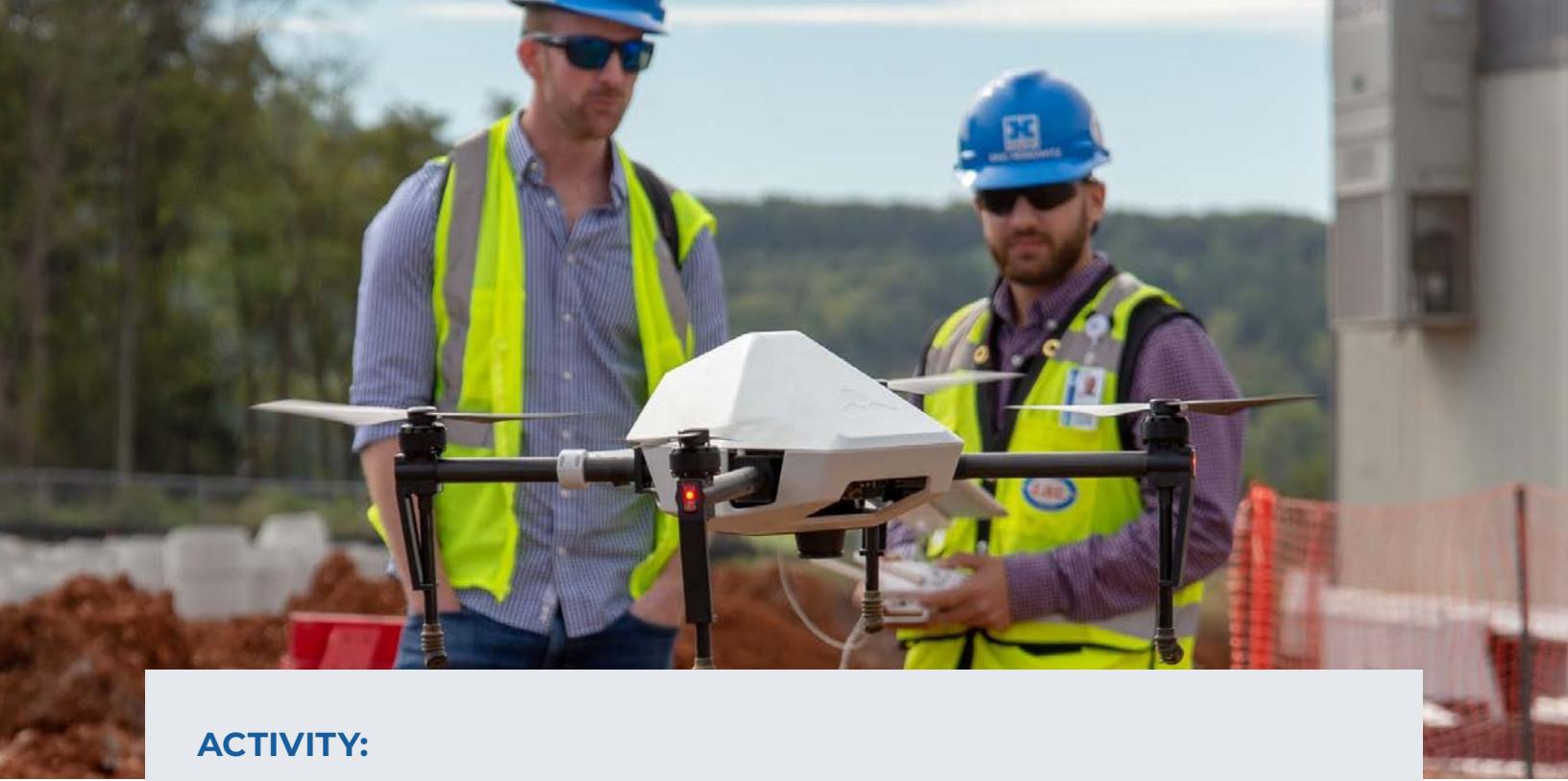
While recruiting is the main objective of the college program, both Holder Construction Company and college students ultimately benefit from this initiative. This program is made possible due to the relationships that Holder fosters with colleges across the country. According to Holder Construction their employees "serve on advisory boards,

participate in information sessions, facilitate one-on-one interviews, and teach classes with the intent of bringing the construction industry into the classroom." This ensures that Holder Construction, and the construction industry as a whole, is at the forefront of students' minds as they plan their careers. During the 8-12-week program, Holder provides college students with the chance to experience what life is like for construction associates, while gaining general professional experience that will be beneficial regardless of where they are employed in the future. The students are even given the freedom to explore diverse roles and responsibilities within the company, maximizing the overall impact of the internship.

## External Partnerships

The impact of Holder's generosity is not bounded by educational institutions. Holder Construction Company also works with community organizations to train unemployed individuals and advise them of construction opportunities in the area. Holder says that the information they provide, "helps direct work-sourcing efforts and connects individuals to the construction industry. Not only does the program feed the trades, but it also feeds into Minority and Small Business Enterprise (MSBE) firms."

Holder Construction prioritizes its employees and culture through its workforce development, which has contributed to its solid foundation and the ability to meet and overcome challenges throughout its history.



## ACTIVITY:

Let's hear from a few of Holder Construction Company's current employees about how the company's workforce development has impacted their careers!

John: In my time with Holder, I've been able to obtain certifications that have furthered my development, including a commercial drone license and LEED and STSC certifications, all covered by Holder. Additionally, Holder hosts weekly training sessions on a wide variety of topics, from CPR and First Aid to personal finance and retirement planning.

Emily: Holder has created core skills sheets for each position within the company and does a great job of setting expectations and guidelines to advance your career. They are always ready to let you take on more responsibility to get you exposure for the next step.

Based on the above excerpts from an interview with Umesh Patel for the University of Georgia's Career Center, answer the following questions:

- What specific workforce development items did John list? How do these support work in the construction field?
- Why is it important to set expectations and guidelines for each employee?
- Emily describes how Holder creates individualized career plans for each employee. Why is this important?
- Do you think recognizing each employee individually and acknowledging their strengths and weaknesses has been beneficial for Holder Construction Company? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

**Bankruptcy** - The quality or state of being bankrupt; utter failure or impoverishment.

**Entities** - An organization that has an identity separate from those of its members.

**Epitomized** - To serve as the typical or ideal example.

**Joint venture** - An arrangement where two businesses come together to form a temporary partnership to undertake and complete a specific project.

**Subcontractors** - An individual or business firm contracted to perform part or all of another's contract.

**Team approach** - Encourages cross-departmental collaboration by emphasizing relationships between teams and colleagues, rather than separating departments under a single authority.

(Definition from *USC Annenberg, School for Communication and Journalism: Team-Based Structures: Examples From the Best Companies in History* | University of Southern California)

**Trials & tribulations** - Difficult experiences, problems, etc.

**Ubiquitous** - Existing or being everywhere at the same time; constantly encountered; widespread.

**Workforce** - The number of workers potentially assignable for a purpose.

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All definitions are from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary unless otherwise noted.

## Georgia Standards of Excellence

### Economic Understandings

SS8E2 Evaluate the influence of Georgia-based businesses on the State's economic growth and development.

### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

L6-8RHSS7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts

### Information Processing Skills

SSIPS7 Interpret timelines, charts, and tables.

SSIPS11 Draw conclusions and make generalizations.

SSIPS12 Analyze graphs and diagrams.

SSIPS14 Formulate appropriate research questions.

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All images are courtesy of Holder Construction Company unless otherwise noted.



The Georgia Historical Society is the premier independent statewide educational and research institution responsible for collecting, examining, and teaching Georgia and American history. Founded in 1839, the Georgia Historical Society is the oldest continuously operating historical society in the South and one of most prestigious in the nation.

Making the past relevant to the present is at the core of our mission. Through our award-winning public programs, publications, teacher training, and research services, we aim to use the power of our shared history to offer all Americans new and deeper perspectives on the past and present.

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### **What We Believe**

We believe in the value of history.

We believe that public knowledge of our past is fundamental to our future.

We believe our shared history is what binds us together as Americans.

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Each year the Georgia Historical Society selects iconic companies in our state to be honored through the Georgia Business History Initiative.

By showcasing these companies, GHS seeks to teach Georgia students, citizens, and tourists alike about the pivotal role of Georgia's leading businesses in the economic, cultural, and social development of Georgia and the United States.

