

Disaster Planning and Preparedness

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Advanced Projects in Public History - HIST -7994-001  
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Summer 2011

## Table of Contents

**Section 1:** dPlan: The Online Disaster-Planning Tool: Complete Project.

**Section 2:** dPlan: The Online Disaster-Planning Tool: Data Collection Forms.

**Section 3: Process Essay**

**Section 4: Notes and Documents from: Historic House Museum Issues and Operations:** A workshop sponsored by the American Association for State and Local History.

**Section 5: Notes and Documents from ICON Disaster Preparedness Workshop. 2/9/2009.**  
Anita Teague's notes from, "Why Worry? It Won't Happen Here" by Allison Reid.  
"Handy Tips for Disaster Preparedness" by Myers Brown.  
"Disaster Preparedness Workshop" PowerPoint and notes by Bethany Hawkins.  
"Disaster Planning, Preparedness, and Recovery: A Resource Guide." Published by AASLH. By April McCauley and Bethany L. Hawkins.  
"Disaster Planning for County Records" – Author unknown  
"Bats in the Belltower... Mold in the Basement: Recovery and Salvage." By Amber Barfield

**Section 6: StEPs: Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations Workbook,** selections related to Collections Management and Preparedness including resources, glossary, and bibliographical sources

**Section 7: Articles and Research**

James, Robert. Handouts from: Disaster Planning Workshop North Carolina Preservation Consortium, 2008

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**Section 8: Extended Bibliography and Selected Resources**

## **Reflective Essay**

The degree requirements for the PhD in Public History at Middle Tennessee State University require students to fulfill a skill set related to their field and future career paths. As a student of Museum Management I have had extensive experience in various organizations in many different professional positions. Additionally, as a student of the University of Memphis Museum Studies Graduate Certificate Program and Middle Tennessee State University's Public History program I gained knowledge through coursework related to the museum and public history fields.

Workshops and conferences I attend always stress the importance of disaster preparedness and planning for historic sites and museums. These places serve as stewards of history and the keepers of historically valuable artifacts or collections, and the protection of such items should be one of the top priorities for these organizations. Realistically most of these places are also victim to budget cuts, staff shortages, inadequate supplies or resources, and countless other barriers that prevent the organization from fully protecting their collections or preparing for the disasters that could befall the museum, historic site, collections, or even staff.

When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and war tore through Iraq, many historic sites were destroyed, and sometimes unnecessarily. If an organization has at least thought about a contingency plan, many items could have been salvaged or more easily conserved. As a person who hopes to one day have a career as a museum administrator, I believe disaster planning and preparedness to be invaluable skills to have.

The Sam Davis Home and Museum in Smyrna, Tennessee is a small organization with only two full-time staff members: a director and an office and event coordinator. I was offered the chance to serve as interim education coordinator from March 2011 through August 2011, and in addition to my duties within the education department I took on responsibility for disaster planning and preparedness for the institution. Although the historic home and museum are staffed by such a small group of people, everyone works hard and takes initiative to keep the place running and successful. The site remains one of the most treasured historic sites in Smyrna and throughout the Rutherford County community, and because of the respect people have for the site, the home and museum deserve the best protection and planning in case of natural or other disaster.

When school groups were not present and I was not planning for tours and events, I was fortunate enough to be able to use that time to research disaster planning and scenarios. Anita

Teague, the director at the Sam Davis Home, had attended several workshops about historic house and museum disaster preparedness, and we met to discuss what she had learned, and she shared her notes from those workshops. (Notes and slides from these workshops and others are included in this binder).

After discussion with Anita and research, we decided that DPlan software, available for free to nonprofit organizations, was the best planning tool for the organization. DPlan is accessible online and provides associations the opportunity to fill in questions and create a large PDF document that can be printed, as well as stored on the internet. Because the information is stored online, it is accessible from anywhere in case of emergency, and the system also emails a reminder to the director every six months to require updating and training of any new staff. Data collection forms are available for printing, (and are included in this binder) and Anita and I were able to go through those together to gather the information that would be needed for data entry into the completed plan.

As part of my research into emergency and disaster preparedness, I met with police Sergeant Andy Miller of the Smyrna Police Department and with the Lieutenant Public Safety and Education Officer from the Smyrna Fire Department. We discussed ways that the Sam Davis Home can help the emergency teams respond to various natural disasters. These tips included staff identification cards which could be shown in the event of disaster to an officer on duty to protect the site from looters. I created a simple business card sized identification card for each staff member with an official logo and a picture that will allow that staff member access to the property in the event of a disaster and subsequent clean-up projects. Additionally, Anita and a special committee of Board members are creating a list of the most valuable objects from the house, museum, and curatorial storage that the fire department will keep on each truck. In case of emergency, the officers will know where to go first and what objects are the top priorities for salvage.

Once all the information was collected, I began to enter the data into the online database. This was the longest step and the most tedious. Throughout the summer I added the information so the repetition was not overwhelming. After all the data was entered into the forms, DPlan created a PDF document with all that information included. In addition to the data entry that I performed, DPlan included information about emergency services, “What to do if...” scenarios and answers, and other resources related to disaster planning.

This comprehensive binder includes the completed DPlan document, which will be distributed to staff, placed in various places on the property, as well as kept in the executive

director's car and home. Additionally, the information collection forms are included with notes and copies of various documents from the site. Notes, powerpoints, and articles already in possession of the Sam Davis Home that are related to disaster planning and preparedness were also copied and included in this collection of related information. I also included many articles that I researched and read throughout the process to gain more knowledge of gathering pertinent information and other organizations' experiences with disaster planning. Finally, I compiled an extensive bibliography of sources related to planning, recovery, conservation, and emergencies. This bibliography will serve as a reference to the Sam Davis Home in case of emergency, and also when updating the DPlan.

Creating a disaster plan was a longer and more tiresome project than I had originally planned for. It is somewhat trying to spend so much time creating a document that you hope will never be used. In the end, I hope that this will serve as only a cautionary document and never have to be used for an actual disaster; however, should an emergency happen, I believe that this disaster plan will be an invaluable asset for the Sam Davis Home Museum, House, and staff.

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