

In many ways Hurricane Sandy was unexpected. While we had been warned, we never realized or believed how bad it was going to be. I think this was the case in the towns on the bayshore of Monmouth County. We were used to hurricanes and flooding and we would just get out the mop, clean up, and go on with our lives. Sandy came as a shock.

Monmouth County has over 40 small historical organizations. They are run by volunteers, mostly older retirees, with little or no budget. They are not professionally trained archivists and do not know proper preservation practices. Why would they? They are residents who take pride in their town's place in history and want to preserve that for their kids and grandkids.

Keansburg Historical Society was formed for that reason in 1995, and opened their

museum in 1999. It was located a block and a half from the water, and at the end of that block was the Amusement Park, seen as a buffer. On display were postcards and photographs and some memorabilia, but their pride were the steamboat models.

Sandy flooded the museum with 50" of water, and pushed over the display cases that housed the steamboats. Very little had been removed prior to the storm. Other items had been stored in an adjacent unheated trailer that had also flooded. They had no insurance on any of the items, and it will take about \$12,000 to restore the models.

UPDATE: All items have been moved into the trailer, including the two models, and the keys to the trailer were given to the Borough. They've applied to FEMA and were granted "a couple thousand." The Borough, which owned

the museum, has only given its Police Dept money to rebuild, but the Society is appealing that decision. The Society is apparently at a standstill due to disagreements within, and the president has resigned. They are currently holding meetings in the Fire House. They had been inquiring into using a room at the public library but were turned down due to space restrictions.

Keyport Historical Society's Steamboat Dock Museum was located within feet of the bay. They knew all too well about flooding and had red dot stickers on their more important artifacts. During storm warnings, they would move these marked items out to members' houses, and this is what they did when warnings began with Sandy. With over 4,000 items, not everything could be moved. They did take their accession records, but left their 20+ boxes of documents and manuscripts. Some of their items

were brought to local churches and fire houses. What remained in the museum was washed away.

They would soon have to remove their items from the churches and fire houses to make room for people who needed shelter. The nearby Matawan Historical Society offered them space on the second floor of a storage shed on their property.

A borough resident opened up their back building as temporary storage. This property was on the market and the Historical Society would have to vacate once the property was sold.

Our Museum Curator arranged for a van to pick up some of their items and bring them to our storage facility.

UPDATE: Better news for Keyport. They are currently in talks with the owner to purchase

the entire property which includes the storage building and the historic house which sits at the front of the property. They've applied for a \$350,000 New Jersey Recovery grant to acquire the property, and will put up \$50,000 of their own towards it.

They are currently still assessing their collections, and are installing satellite displays in local storefronts. They call it their "Mobile Museum." They recently had a fundraiser that netted \$3,000.

They are holding their regular meetings at the Senior Center which is in an old school building, and continuing their evaluation of what is missing, and sorting the damaged items.

Disasters are not only acts of nature – sometimes they are man-made. The Middletown Township Historical Society was recently evicted from their museum when the township-

owned building was condemned. They had a week to box up their stuff and vacate.

I suggested they view this as an opportunity to tighten their mission and collecting policy. They had a lot of material that was unrelated to their township. After discussion, they decided to focus more on meetings and history rather than exhibits.

They are currently in talks with the township to store their items at another township-owned building until a more suitable home can be found. They are holding their monthly meetings at another historic site in the area.

While disasters are tough for those who know what should be done in a crisis, they can be completely overwhelming for the lay person. There is a fear for these smaller organizations that larger organizations want to swoop in and take their stuff. That we do not

value them or even believe they should exist. They isolate themselves and become almost obsessively protective.

Actually, these smaller organizations need to be embraced because many times they can provide specific information that a larger organization just can't. They have value for the community and add to our collective memory. So how do we help them better protect and preserve their collections?

The League is composed of over 200 organizations that share information and ideas. They offer meetings and workshops.

AASLH provides support for their members through programs and advocacy.

CAPES provides assistance by evaluating and making recommendations for their archival materials.