

smays.com preservation and succession plan

Prepared for Steve Mays on August 7, 2026.

Executive judgment

The goal should not be “digital immortality.” No domain, host, company, or file format can honestly promise that. The defensible goal is graceful survival: keep the original URLs working for as long as practical, preserve the complete underlying record in several independent forms, and make recovery possible even if WordPress, the current host, or one custodian disappears.

The best design has two operating states:

- 1 **While Steve is publishing:** WordPress remains the working site, but a tested preservation package is refreshed on a schedule.
- 2 **At a defined final-freeze event:** a designated custodian takes a final snapshot, converts the site to static files, deploys those files at `smays.com`, and stops depending on WordPress, PHP, MySQL, plugins, or unattended comment forms.

The domain is the fragile part. Static files can be copied almost anywhere. A domain requires continuing legal ownership, renewal payment, access credentials, and a human or institution with authority to act.

Facts verified on August 7, 2026

- `smays.com` is an active WordPress site served by Apache.
- The public WordPress API reports **6,569 published posts, 79 published pages, and 4,748 media records**. Those totals will change as Steve publishes.
- The domain was created July 10, 1997. Public registration data shows Tucows Domains Inc. as registrar, Hover nameservers, and a current expiration date of **July 9, 2029**.
- WordPress exposes posts, pages, and media metadata through its public REST API. That is useful for independent exports, but it is not a substitute for a host-level copy of the database and uploaded originals.

- WordPress's built-in export creates a WXR/XML content export. It should be included, but it is not a complete site backup by itself.

The following have not yet been verified and belong in the first audit: the hosting account and renewal arrangement; total file and database size; availability of original media; current backup retention; domain auto-renew and recovery contacts; external embeds and remotely hosted media; private/draft content; copyright restrictions; and existing estate authority.

Preservation objectives

The plan should meet six tests:

- 1 **URL continuity:** existing post and page addresses continue to work.
- 2 **Human readability:** posts, pages, images, captions, dates, categories, tags, and already-published comments remain browsable without WordPress.
- 3 **Recoverability:** a competent person can reconstruct the site from documented, standard files.
- 4 **Independence:** no single host, registrar, account, or custodian is a point of failure.
- 5 **Authenticity:** manifests, checksums, dates, provenance notes, and read-only master copies show what was preserved and when.
- 6 **Legal clarity:** a named person or organization has authority to renew, move, publish, or deposit the archive.

Recommended target design

1. The public site

Keep WordPress in place while Steve wants to publish. Build and test a static copy at a nonpublic staging address now. The static copy should preserve the existing permalink structure and render:

- all published posts and pages;
- category, tag, author, date, and archive pages;
- the Smays Asides archive;
- images and other locally hosted media;
- published comments as read-only text;

- a frozen RSS/Atom feed and XML sitemap;
- redirects for known legacy URLs;
- a custom 404 page and a short preservation/about note.

WordPress-only functions need explicit treatment. Comment and login forms should be removed at final freeze. Site search should either become a small client-side index or be omitted with an explanation. Contact forms, XML-RPC, admin endpoints, REST endpoints, and database queries should not survive the cutover. Embedded YouTube, Vimeo, social posts, maps, or other third-party objects should be inventoried; where copying is lawful, preserve a local copy or transcript, and otherwise preserve the embed URL, title, date, thumbnail, and context so the page does not become an unexplained hole.

2. The preservation master

Create a versioned preservation package for each major snapshot. It should contain:

- a full database dump;
- the complete `wp-content/uploads` tree and other site-owned files;
- a WordPress WXR/XML export;
- REST API exports in JSONL or JSON for posts, pages, media, categories, tags, and comments where accessible;
- normalized Markdown or plain-text copies of posts and pages with stable IDs and original URLs;
- the generated static site;
- a browser-based WARC/WACZ capture for high-fidelity replay;
- DNS records, redirect rules, theme/plugin inventory, and WordPress/PHP versions;
- a CSV inventory of content and media, including hashes and missing-file findings;
- `README`, provenance, rights, and restoration instructions;
- SHA-256 checksums for every preservation package.

Keep the unmodified master read-only. Make any cleanup or conversion in a derivative copy. This matters because a static site is the public presentation, while the database, XML/JSON, media originals, and web archive are the

evidence and recovery layers.

3. Independent copies

Use a practical LOCKSS arrangement—several copies under different failure domains:

- **Copy A, public:** the static site at `smays.com` on a low-maintenance static host.
- **Copy B, secondary host:** the same static output on a separate provider under a provider URL, ready for DNS cutover.
- **Copy C, cloud archive:** encrypted preservation packages in low-cost archival object storage, with lifecycle and billing documented.
- **Copy D, offline:** two verified external drives, held at two locations by different custodians.
- **Copy E, public archive:** regular Wayback Machine captures plus an Internet Archive item containing a documented preservation package when rights and size permit.
- **Copy F, institutional:** offer the collection to the State Historical Society of Missouri and/or the University of Missouri archives. Acceptance must be discussed; it should not be assumed.

Cloudflare Pages is worth testing for the HTML layer, but its current free-plan limits—20,000 files and 25 MiB per asset—mean `smays.com` may need media in object storage such as R2 rather than treating Pages alone as the whole archive. GitHub Pages is useful as a secondary HTML/code mirror, not as the only home for a media-heavy archive. Provider limits change, which is precisely why the preservation package must remain portable.

Domain and succession controls

- 1 Decide whether Steve personally, a trust, an LLC, or another durable legal owner should hold `smays.com`. Have an estate attorney make the domain and archive authority explicit; this plan is technical, not legal advice.
- 2 Renew the domain out toward the registrar/registry maximum. ICANN notes that registrations are typically available for one to ten years; a domain cannot be purchased forever.
- 3 Enable auto-renew, but do not treat it as the control. The payment

method, recovery email, and account owner must also survive Steve. The recovery address should be external to `smays.com`.

- 4 Name a primary custodian and a backup custodian. Give each clear authority, but do not print passwords in the will or public plan.
- 5 Store registrar, DNS, hosting, archive, and password-manager credentials in a reputable password manager with emergency-access or documented recovery. Keep two hardware security keys and sealed recovery codes in separate secure locations.
- 6 Put a one-page “digital executor runbook” with the estate papers. It should name the domain, registrar, renewal date, funding source, custodians, preservation-package locations, final-freeze trigger, and attorney contact.
- 7 Test access annually. An untouched account with a dead phone number is not a succession plan; it is merely a future argument.

Implementation sequence

Phase 1 — Baseline audit (one to two working days)

- Confirm domain ownership, registrar access, auto-renew, recovery contacts, 2FA, and current funding.
- Record hosting plan, renewal date, PHP/MySQL/WordPress versions, plugins, theme, DNS, redirects, cron jobs, and backup tools.
- Measure file and database size; reconcile the 6,569 posts, 79 pages, and 4,748 media records against host files and sitemaps.
- Inventory external embeds, missing media, private/draft content, published comments, and custom content such as Asides.
- Document copyright or privacy exceptions that should not be deposited publicly.

Exit evidence: signed inventory, account/renewal map, risk list, and initial checksums.

Phase 2 — Build the preservation master (two to four working days, longer if media cleanup is substantial)

- Take a host-level files/database backup and verify that it can be opened.

- Produce WXR, REST/JSON, Markdown/plain-text, static, and WARC/WACZ forms.
- Download site-owned media originals and flag missing or remote-only assets.
- Create manifests, SHA-256 checksums, readme, provenance, rights, and restore notes.
- Restore the WordPress backup in an isolated test environment and confirm representative old/new posts, pages, comments, media, and Asides.

Exit evidence: versioned package, successful test restore, and exception report.

Phase 3 — Static-site proof (three to seven working days)

- Generate the static copy without changing the live site.
- Preserve URL paths and redirects.
- Replace dynamic search if desired; disable writes and logins.
- Crawl-test every internal link and asset; compare content counts to the baseline.
- Visually inspect a sample across every year, plus media-heavy pages, AI pages, archives, comments, and Asides.
- Deploy to two independent staging providers and test provider loss by switching the test hostname.

Exit evidence: two working static deployments, link/asset report, count reconciliation, and cutover/rollback instructions.

Phase 4 — Succession and deposit (one to three working days plus legal/institutional lead time)

- Complete the custodian runbook and emergency access test.
- Add domain/archive authority to the estate plan with counsel.
- Prepay the domain as far as practical and establish a small dedicated reserve.
- Submit representative URLs to the Wayback Machine and arrange a full-site crawl if available.

- Upload a documented public archive package where rights allow.
- Contact the State Historical Society of Missouri and MU Archives with a concise collection description before shipping anything.

Exit evidence: acknowledged custodians, funded renewals, verified deposits, and institutional correspondence.

Phase 5 — Ongoing maintenance and final freeze

While WordPress remains active:

- nightly host backup with tested retention;
- quarterly preservation-package refresh and checksum verification;
- annual static-site rebuild and full restore test;
- annual domain, payment, recovery, and custodian review;
- capture a preservation snapshot after major theme/plugin changes.

At death, incapacity, or Steve's chosen retirement from publishing:

- 1 Put WordPress in read-only mode.
- 2 Take a final database/files snapshot.
- 3 Run the preservation and static-build process.
- 4 Reconcile counts, links, media, and checksums.
- 5 Deploy the static site at the existing URLs.
- 6 Keep the old host available briefly for rollback, then retire WordPress only after validation.
- 7 Notify the secondary custodian and refresh public/institutional deposits.

Budget and funding

First measure the archive; do not price it by guesswork. A reasonable planning envelope is:

- domain: roughly \$15–\$30 per year at mainstream registrars, preferably prepaid toward the ten-year horizon;
- static hosting: \$0–\$60 per year for ordinary traffic, with object-storage charges if media exceeds free-host limits;
- cold archive: currently about \$1 per TB-month at AWS S3 Glacier Deep

Archive, excluding requests and retrieval;

- hardware: two replacement external drives every five to seven years;
- stewardship: one or two human hours annually, plus a deeper test every few years;
- legal work: separate, depending on whether an existing trust/estate plan can carry the asset.

The earlier \$1,000 thought is possible only under very low-cost assumptions and attentive volunteer stewardship. A **\$2,500–\$5,000 dedicated reserve** is a more conservative planning range for renewals, replacement media, occasional technical help, and price changes. The estate attorney or financial adviser should choose the funding vehicle and permitted use.

Acceptance tests

Do not call the plan complete until all of these are true:

- content counts reconcile or every exception is explained;
- 100 percent of internal URLs return a valid page or intentional redirect;
- locally owned media are present and checksummed, with missing/external items reported;
- a clean machine can open the static site and the WARC/WACZ archive;
- a WordPress restore succeeds from the preservation master;
- the original domain can be moved by both the primary and backup custodian;
- loss of the primary host does not destroy or strand the site;
- annual renewal and verification dates appear in the executor runbook;
- at least one person other than Steve has completed a supervised recovery drill.

Recommended next decision

Authorize only Phase 1 and a nonpublic static proof first. That produces the facts needed for final host choice and pricing without changing the live blog. After Steve reviews the proof, approve the full preservation build, succession controls, and deposits. The migration to a static public site can wait until Steve chooses to stop publishing; the escape hatch should be built and

tested long before it is needed.

Principal references

- ICANN, "Domain Name Renewals and Expiration": www.icann.org/resources/pages/domain-name-renewal-expiration-faqs-2018-12-07-en
- WordPress, "Tools Export screen": wordpress.org/documentation/article/tools-export-screen/
- Internet Archive, "Save Pages in the Wayback Machine": help.archive.org/help/save-pages-in-the-wayback-machine/
- Internet Archive, "Uploading — A Basic Guide": help.archive.org/help/uploading-a-basic-guide/
- Library of Congress, "Personal Digital Archiving": digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/
- Webrecorder, Browsertrix and WACZ: docs.browsertrix.com/
- Cloudflare Pages limits: developers.cloudflare.com/pages/platform/limits/
- GitHub Pages limits: docs.github.com/en/pages/getting-started-with-github-pages/github-pages-limits
- State Historical Society of Missouri collections: shsmo.org/collections
- University of Missouri Libraries, donating materials: library.missouri.edu/giving/waystogive/donatematerials/