

Statement on the Obligations of Corporations to Preserve History with Regard to Acquisitions

By the AASLH Corporate History Committee

October 2009

BACKGROUND:

The present economic environment brings to the forefront the issue of preserving corporate history, particularly when corporations are being acquired, merged, and supported with public funding to a high degree. Among the Statement of Values put forward by the AASLH Corporate History Initiative on the AASLH website is the following:

“It is important that corporations commit to making the preservation of their institutional history a priority, not only for their business interests, but also as an act of the public trust for the communities in which they reside and that they serve.”

The Corporate History Committee believes it is necessary to extend this statement to include a note that the acquisition of other corporate entities extend an organization’s “institutional history” and that their ethical obligations to preserve corporate history are necessarily extended to any acquisitions.

Realizing the tactical obligations such a statement applies to the acquiring corporation, the Corporate History Committee recommends guidelines for corporate historians attempting to incorporate new collections into their institutions.

STATEMENT:

The AASLH Corporate History Committee acknowledges the inherent value of preserving corporate history as an act of public stewardship. The acquisition of one corporate entity by another necessarily extends the responsibilities of historic institutional preservation to include all parties involved. The history of the acquired institution, including the acquisition or merger process, becomes part of the history of the acquiring institution and should be treated with equal respect and care. Corporations have an obligation to take steps to preserve the institutional histories of all acquisitions and mergers, including:

- Conducting a good faith effort to incorporate and properly manage acquired institutional history that is relevant to company goals



- Housing collections in secure storage facilities
- Managing acquired collections as a distinct entity, though not necessarily kept in a physically distinct location
- Collaborating with cultural history organizations related to the acquired to ensure that valuable social and cultural history is conserved within appropriate communities
- Providing adequate, continuing financial support to meet the challenge of caring for the historical memory of the acquired institution in perpetuity, including resources for maintenance