

APPENDIX 10

LETTER FROM MICHAEL HEUMANN REGARDING AUTRY
MERGER WITH THE SOUTHWEST MUSEUM

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January 23, 2008

David M. Attaway
Environmental Supervisor
Department of Recreation and Parks
1200 West 7th Street, 7th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Dear Mr. Attaway:

As President of the Southwest Museum Trustees at the time of the merger with the Autry Museum of Western Heritage and for the prior eight years, I want to share history and insight with you on the events leading up to the merger, and the merger itself.

The Southwest Museum Trustees always sought to preserve and treasure both the Southwest Museum's buildings and its collection. As the oldest museum in Los Angeles, the museum-only use never yielded sufficient funds to sustain operations and led to increasing financial frailty over its 100 year history. In the years leading up to the merger with the Autry, the institution had failed financially so completely, that only by a strategic alliance with another institution has it been given a chance for continued life in the community. The museum-only model had also failed physically because the building structure was inadequate to safely house and display the collection as the collection outgrew storage areas over the years, and museum standards increased.

As early as 1992, the Trustees of the Southwest engaged Harrison Price to study alternative economic and corporate structures to save the Southwest building and collection. The goals of the study included assessing the physical as well as organizational capacities. A summary of the findings:

- Even though the Southwest has a major collection in the largest Native American market in the nation, it is a small and expensive facility, drawing only token audiences.
- Without major rectification, the facility is obsolete for present purposes, economically, functionally & operationally.

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Embracing the need to reinvigorate ourselves, the trustees investigated opportunities to create satellite exhibition areas, in Palm Springs, in Santa Barbara, and created a temporary site at LACMA West. These efforts did not provide lasting success or stability.

By 2001, the economic situation was not improving. The Trustees conducted a further study with the goal to create an affiliation with another organization to create a sustaining financial structure.

In seeking an appropriate alliance, the Trustees were committed to key goals:

- protecting both the Museum collection and physical sites.
- reestablishing fiscal credibility and improving donor relations.
- maintaining the Mt. Washington and Highland Park sites as important resources for the immediate community.
- maintaining curatorial independence and control over the collection.

The alliances investigated included The Pechenga Band of Luiseno Indians, a consortium of California Indian Tribes, The Huntington Library, The Heard Museum, The Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), UCLA, USC, and The Autry Museum of Western Heritage.

Only the Autry was willing to cooperate and commit on all four goals. None of the others were ultimately pursued either because of an unwillingness to care for the historic buildings, or, an inability to raise necessary operating or endowment funds, or, governance issues over staff and collection.

By the time of the merger with the Autry in 2003, Southwest Museum operating funds had been exhausted. While endowment funds were intact at their donated corpus level, all earnings were routinely distributed to support operations. Grants restricted for specific operating purposes were isolated and intact, but credibility with the philanthropic community had been impaired. A small but dedicated staff was stretched thin and there were substantial deferred maintenance projects. As a gesture of good faith and intention, the Autry starting paying Southwest staff January 1, 2003, even though the merger was not finalized until later in the year, so that there would be no interruption in service for the Southwest's dedicated staff.

Since the merger, the Autry National Center has fulfilled the spirit and letter of the merger, its commitment to the buildings, display and care of the collection, independent curatorial expression, commitment to the staff (only three have left since the merger). The Autry has created a concept of operation that achieves fiscal viability within the framework of Lummis's vision. Indeed, this is everything I had hoped for. I remain an active and committed

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Trustee of the Autry National Center, fully supporting the improvements project in Griffith Park and the cultural and educational center at the Southwest's campus in the Arroyo.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Heumann", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Heumann
Managing Partner
of NOSSAMAN, GUTHNER, KNOX & ELLIOTT, LLP

MH/cj