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To: Julie L. Sigall
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Comment:

I am in the process of writing a book on local history, and have spent an unknown number of hours calling, writing and e-mailing publishers. The item in question is a drawing by an unknown artist that was created c. 1950 for a filmstrip that went with a school reader. The original publisher consolidated with another house, then was bought out, then that group was bought out, then pieces of the top group were sold away, etc. For weeks, everyone I communicated with claimed they didn't own the rights, but couldn't tell me who might. I eventually tracked down the publisher who bought the rights to the books in the reader series, but they don't hold copyright on the filmstrip--they think it might be public domain.

My requests for improvement in this process are primarily in two areas. For most publishers, the policy stated that I was to go through the entire process of asking permission to use the image, even though I didn't know whether or not they held the rights. More than once I submitted forms that I couldn't answer in full, waited for days, then was told that the company didn't even own the rights and didn't know who did. It felt like a waste of my time, and the companies made me feel I was wasting their time also. It would have been much simpler if the first step were to establish that they did or did not hold the rights, THEN ask permission. It would also help if the permissions process were somewhat uniform across the industry. Second, could there be a site that explained the consolidation, the buying and selling of corporate names and series? At least then I might have been able to piece together the starting point, rather than simply trying to hit the target with a shotgun. Of course, the ideal would be a searchable on-line database. If we can go to Amazon or any number of smaller sites to find the ISBN, author and other bibliographic info, how hard would it be to add updated copyright information?