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Open Letter to the Premier of New Brunswick

Re: Mount Allison Alumni Memorial Library 1914-1918 and Heritage Issues

21 September 2011

The Hon. Mr. David Alward,
Premier of New Brunswick
c/o New Brunswick Legislative Assembly
Fredericton, N. B.

Dear Mr. Alward:

On August 12, the Hon. Mr. Trevor Holder, Minister of Wellness, Culture & Sport, advised Tantramar Heritage Trust President Dr. Geoff Martin that he was reneging on his decision to list Mount Allison's Alumni **Memorial Library** as a "provincial heritage place" - thereby lifting protection from demolition, under the Heritage Conservation Act, of this architecturally significant Cenotaph. Mr. Holder explained that he was reversing his earlier decision "after hearing from the property owner" and another unnamed party. Dr. Martin reported: "*He commented... the building is not of provincial heritage significance... the architect, Andrew Cobb, was not a New Brunswicker and there are other examples of his work in the province... the Royal Canadian Legion is 'soft' on this building and they do not regard it as a cenotaph.*"

Consider these points:

1. Facts supplant Legion opinion. The 26 Nov. 1918 Minutes of the university's Board of Regents read: "*this Board most heartily endorses the proposition of erecting a Library Building as a War Memorial in honor of Mount Allison students who have made the supreme sacrifice on behalf of our country*". At least 17 of the 73 Allisonians lost in WWI and remembered here have no known grave. Additional dedicated plaques commemorate soldiers who died in WWII and other conflicts. **Memorial Library** is registered as number 13002-004 on the National Inventory of Canadian Military Memorials. This is THE Cenotaph at Mount Allison.
2. True, Architect Andrew Cobb was a Nova Scotian. So was Architect J. C. P. Dumaresq. Many examples of Dumaresq's fine architectural work exist in New Brunswick. Nonetheless, this same Ministry has seen fit to declare the Dumaresq-designed N. B. Legislative Assembly as a "provincial heritage place".
3. Mt. A. Pres. Dr. Robert Campbell, who is leading the plan to demolish **Memorial Library** and replace it with a Fine Art and Performing Arts building, is neither a Veteran, an Allisonian nor a New Brunswicker. The architect Campbell has engaged for the new building is also not a New Brunswicker.
4. Mr. Holder's 10 August letter stated: "*Acknowledging that the building exhibits heritage value, it has been determined not to be at a provincial level of significance.*" This statement is unfathomable.

26 WWI lost Allisonians, New Brunswickers representing 20 communities, died fighting for Democracy. The other 47 of WWI originated from across Canada and Britain. We should be celebrating their sacrifice not razing the memorial that their kith and kin donated generously to create. This Cenotaph is of such heritage significance it was named to the Heritage Canada Foundation's 2011 Top Ten Threatened Heritage Buildings in Canada List (<http://www.heritagecanada.org/eng/EPTop%2010ListEnglish.pdf>). It warrants National Historic Place designation.

5. The Ministry has refused to identify the petitioners against heritage status and rebuffed a request for details of evidence presented - testimony so compelling it convinced Minister Holder to renounce his earlier decision. Without public explanation Mr. Holder has made a decision that will now allow Mount Allison to demolish the university's singular War Memorial. Call for demolition tenders were published via a misleading ad wherein **Memorial Library** is referred to only as the "old university centre" (Chronicle Herald, 020911pF4).

Mr. Premier, the Sackville Tribune Post (310811) quoted you: "*Free access to information is vital for a healthier democracy and a more effective government*" and "*A more open and transparent public sector will help us grow a stronger New Brunswick*". Surely the inconsistency is obvious. Your Ministry has been neither open nor transparent in respect of heritage status for the Mount Allison Alumni **Memorial Library**.

If evidence presented to your government is so cogent, then it behoves your Minister to present the details so all citizens will understand his reversal. Failing that, this province will never have a "healthier democracy and a more effective government". New Brunswickers are being cheated of unambiguous and honest process. Indeed, what New Brunswickers have is but an autocracy.

The most honourable action your government can undertake is to "come clean" and to immediately designate the Mount Allison Alumni **Memorial Library** as an official New Brunswick provincial heritage place - which is truly merited.

Honour McCrae's admonishment: "*To you from failing hands, we throw / The torch; be yours to hold it high. / If ye break faith with us who die / We shall not sleep, though poppies grow In Flanders fields...*".

Yours truly,

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