

Donald A. Cameron

9 March 2011

via e-mail

Re: **Mount Allison Memorial Library**

Dear “Smash”, Allisonians and Friends,

The appended January 28, 2011 letter addressed to the Chair and Members of the Mount Allison University Board of Regents and other Allisonians was sent by e-mail. To date, I have had no acknowledgement from any member of the Board of Regents; others outside the university have responded.

In 1989 Mount Allison considered my contribution to the university to be worthy of an honorary degree, an honour that I accepted with pride and humility. Now, a letter written expressing concerns and negative reaction to the proposed demolition of Memorial Library, a valuable and historic building on campus, is apparently not considered even worthy of recognition of receipt. Therefore, I have not had any answers to any of the questions that I have posed nor have I had any rebuttal to my arguments. It seems obvious that the “game plan” is to ignore submissions and correspondence negative to the Administration’s proposal and thus civil discussion can not possibly occur with those who are trying to save the Memorial Library. Perhaps this is done with expectation that any protest of this decision will thus pass into oblivion.

In response to urging from other Allisonians who had my letter, I am asking the “Smash” webmaster to post the letter addressed to the Board of Regents, (appended), on the “Smash” website. I do so in order that the wider Mount Allison Family may also understand my views.

I have signed the Save the Mount Allison Memorial Library Petition (<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/2/save-the-memorial-library/>) but unfortunately for some unknown technical reason my comments and my class affiliation are not viewable on the website list of signatories. Therefore, I have put comments I had intended there into letters addressed to the Argosy, the Sackville Tribune Post and to her Worship, the Mayor of Sackville. I am asking that those comments also be presented on “Smash”.

There are numerous questions to be answered. Sadly it seems that many of these now have to be asked in a way that may bring negative publicity for Mount Allison.

I continue to urge Mount Allison Regents and Administrators to undertake fully open and honest discussion, to reverse the decision to demolish Memorial Library and to find other solutions for facilities for Fine Art and Performing Art needs at Mount Allison.

Respectfully submitted,

Donald A Cameron

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27 January 2011

via E-mail

All Members of the Mount Allison Board of Regents
Other Allisonians

Dear Friends:

Frustrated Alumni, one a former Board of Regents Member, have phoned recently to express distress at hearsay re a proposed destruction of the Memorial Library. They asked for my reaction. Each urged me to write to the Chair and Members of the Board of Regents stressing why I believed the Memorial Library should be saved. Each caller requested a copy of anything I might write. With no computer and a very poor telephone line and hearing aids, we are often behind in news of Mount Allison. In my ninety- first year, I am now slower on uptake.

Before recording reasons why I am strongly opposed to the demolition of the Memorial Library, I will comment on the present controversy.

Sometime ago, having heard rumours that Memorial Library, one of the most beautiful buildings on campus, was to be destroyed; I spoke to the V. P. Administration. I was told that such was the case – the reasons given: beams in the Memorial Library were showing “fatigue” (a term I had never heard applied to a building) and that it would cost five million dollars less to destroy the Memorial Library and build a new “Cultural Center” rather than remodel the Memorial Library. I did not ask and was not told why such a Center was needed or what it would include.

With the Gairdner Fine Arts Building, the Owen’s Art Gallery, the Marjorie Young Bell Conservatory of Music with the lovely Brunton Auditorium, the Crabtree Building with another fine auditorium, the Wu Center, very acceptable as a lecture auditorium, the Marjorie Young Bell Convocation Hall with facilities with that can accommodate the largest orchestras, choirs, dance and acrobatic stage groups and with a thrust stage provided by the Marjorie Young Bell Endowment Fund Committee for more intimate productions (Dr. Arthur Motyer did produce at least one Shakespeare play on that projecting stage.) - one must ask: Are these not enough “Cultural Facilities”? If not, next door to Convocation Hall is the United Church with superb acoustics and a magnificent organ. Mount A chorale groups have performed there and music student have, for years, used the organ for practice. What new facilities do we need?

In my time as a student a competitive inter-class drama festival with outside adjudicators would pack Fawcett Hall, as would the Mount Allison Performing Arts Series in later years in Convocation Hall. I am told numbers now attending the Performing Arts Series have decreased to the point where many of the performances are held in Brunton Auditorium. Convocation Hall is much under used. With the limited facilities available in Fawcett Hall and in Beethoven Hall we staged major productions in my day e.g. a Shakespeare play and the Barretts of Whimpole Street, etc., with standing-room-only audiences. Faculty directed productions as free will offerings.

I understand the Fine Arts Department has insufficient room in the Gairdner Fine Arts Building and that space is required for heavy machinery in a wood working shop and for a foundry-like facility

for metal work. If so, let them be housed in a separate building built on nearby Mount Allison land but off central campus and so minimize dangers associated with them including toxic fumes, dust and fire.

Would these facilities require additional faculty and maintenance personnel? At a time when governments are investigating cutbacks in university funding would it be possible to share facilities for such classes in the Moncton Community College?

I am very strongly opposed to the demolition of Memorial Library. To date, in no university publication have I seen notice that the Board of Regents had recorded a formal motion to destroy the Memorial Library, no such statement over the President's signature, and no mention of such a plan in the last issue of the Mount Allison Record which bares on the front cover "Celebrating the Year of Culture and Creativity"; regional Alumni gatherings report that there was no presentation advising of impending destruction of Memorial Library, so I conclude, and hope, that it is only a matter under consideration. But, even if only that, why the seeming silence and secrecy? Since cost estimates are available some planning must have taken place. Obviously there has been a tragic breakdown in communications and thousands of Allisonians are still uninformed of the controversy.

But the rumours do raise an unpleasant question for me: Has a lack of respect for the memories of those veterans who paid the supreme sacrifice, indeed for the memories of all veterans, descended to such a low level that we would even consider destroying one of the most historic and valuable buildings on campus, a building built to perpetuate their memories? Have we forgotten that it is their sacrifices and selfless courage that has made it possible for Mount Allison to continue to exist today? To destroy or deface a war memorial elsewhere would result in criminal charges.

For eleven years during my appointment at Mount A I held the glorious title of "Assistant to the President for Campus Development". During that period I studied plans for all new buildings, argued strongly with architects and worked closely with contractors. For each building we developed a Planning Committee from Gown and Town – everything was kept wide open and thereby many potential errors avoided.

One thing I did learn: architects have to be closely watched for they may be guilty of desiring to design new buildings which can be easily recognized as monuments to their own companies whilst forgetting reasonable and practical design. Of course the greater cost the greater their take.

In the present situation one of the most incredible and disturbing things I have heard is that Prof. Emeritus of Engineering, Ron Boorne, a long time Head of our Engineering Department when it existed, had been denied access to see the consultants report on the building which reference the "fatigue" in the Memorial Library, that he has been denied a request to directly see the beams and he has been denied access to architect's report saying that it would cost five million dollars more to remodel the Memorial Library than to destroy it and build a new Center. Open informed discussion is encouraged in university settings as we strive to seek truth. Never loose sight of the fact that criticism, even if negative, can be very valuable. I consider this denial to be insulting. An apology should be issued to Prof. Boorne and all his requests should be granted.

Now I will set forth the reasons why I am strongly opposed to the demolition of Memorial Library. For me, it certainly lived up to the name.

In September 1946, eight years after graduation from high school, I arrived at Mount Allison alongside many veterans. I had been rejected from military service when my three brothers enlisted. During my years as a Mount A student, and for some years after returning to campus on staff, on each Remembrance Day following the main Town- University Memorial Service in a full Fawcett Hall, university administrators, some faculty, and some students (including veterans), would assemble in the foyer and on the stairways of the Memorial Library. A Memorial Service there reminded us of the supreme sacrifice of Mount Allison students. Some faculty, including President Flemington and Dr. Alex Colville were veterans. The President would preside; the Secretary to the Senate would read the names of Mount Allison students who had made the supreme sacrifice. A moment of silence would be observed, a prayer offered and tribute paid to those veterans who had served and survived. On

occasion, at the conclusion of the service, in quiet emotion a veteran would tell the story of a close friend or buddy left behind on the battlefield or under a stormy wave. I do not remember when or why these services were ended

I can appreciate that some present-day administrators, faculty, employees and students will not have similar feelings for the Memorial Library.

They will also not have had the experience of answering the door, as I had, to be handed a telegram advising my brother was seriously wounded in action when fighting as a Can Loan Officer with a British Regiment on the Front or standing with my aunt when the telegram handed to her read: "Your son was killed in action". It is possible that the parents of some of today's academic community did have emotional wartime experiences.

There are other memory reasons why the building should be preserved with appropriate changes incorporated. For thousands of Mount A students the Memorial Library was the academic study center of the university - and social center too. Many students lived in accommodations that would not pass health inspection today. My first year room was in an abandoned army hut. Furnishings were a double decker bunk, two tables (20"x30"), two chairs and no closets. So, one went to the main reading room in the Memorial Library to study. In the evening tables that seated eight or ten would be fully occupied with students from four different years and every discipline taught. In whispers you learned about the stranger sitting next to you. When the library closed at ten o'clock boys would escort girls back to their residences - of course you were not allowed in past the entrance reception area - but enduring friendships developed and some life-long romances. At least one such couple is active on campus today.

Please disregard any consideration for the destruction of the Memorial Library. Please let it stand as a beacon to honour veterans. Please let it endure as a Monument on the Mount A campus - one that also honours the happy memories of many Alumni.

If unwittingly some misunderstanding got us into the present discord, if an architect has started to plan a new Cultural Center: pay for work completed to date, then, as a mature united university community let us consider what is required and reach a positive decision.

I write as a long time supporter of Alumni fundraising. If properly informed and treated with respect Alumni and Friends will rally to the cause. If their voices are ignored it may lead to reduced Alumni financial support and to the cancellation of intended bequests which could easily amount to more than the extra cost that might be involved in remodelling Memorial Library. With an unsolved controversy what about the MacLean's and the Globe and Mail Rankings?

Respectively submitted,

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