

C. J. Cameron
B.A., B.Sc., Cert. M.D., C.C.F.P., C.A.F.C.I., F.C.F.P.C.
c/o 49 Bridge Street,
Sackville, NB, E4L 3N8

6 February 2011

via e-mail to:

Mr. John Brannen,
Submissions Editor, The Argosy

Dear Mr. Editor:

Administrators at Mount Allison University have issued this statement regarding the decision to demolish the Memorial Library: *“The report concluded clearly that it would be imprudent to retain this building for a number of compelling reasons including evidence of fatigue in the main supporting beams.”*

Balderdash!!

In published letters Mt A Professor Emeritus of Engineering Ron Boorne explains that *“this statement is meaningless”*; that *“in engineering terms structural fatigue is always associated with repeated or variable loading.”* The reply he received? *“This is a matter of opinion”*.

I did not study engineering at university. However, I was fortunate to sit in the late Dr. Bill Noble’s physics classes when at Mt A. I remember his lessons.

He taught that structural fatigue results from major repeated loaded forces over time – the type of forces that would occur on a aircraft that is repeatedly landing and taking off, and moving through environments with significant gradations in barometric pressure exposure. Structural fatigue would not occur in a static building subjected to static loading. The beams that support the Memorial Library would not have developed structural fatigue as a consequence of the weight of the 100,000 or so books that I remember were sitting on the library shelves when I was privileged to explore there as a child under the watchful eye of Dr. Ella Smith* who delighted that children should read. Nor would the beams have suffered structural fatigue from forces generated by hundreds of my Mt A contemporaries enthusiastically dancing together in that same “reading room”, known as Hesler Hall.

This stone edifice, erected in 1927, was constructed with special foresight for housing Mount Allison’s valuable collection of books and historical documents. The Vol. X, May 1927 edition of the Record states: *“How often have people who have been interested in the collection of historical documents having to do with the Church or Mount Allison or local history wished for a fire-proof building! Well, they have their wish. The only wood in the structure is in the doors and door casings, the shelving around the main reading room and the tables and chairs. The rest is steel or other metal, concrete and stone from the foundation to the copper ridge-pole”*. Mt A had learned the lessons of destruction by fire (e.g. Academy fires 1866, 1882; Men’s Residence fire 1899; Lingley Hall [gym] fire 1921).

This building, built with care as a Memorial, was surely designed to last for centuries! One sees similar elegant gracious structures in Europe that have stood for millennia. Further, the few wooden components were all constructed from primary growth timber. Surely Prof. Laroque's Mt A tree ring analysis team will agree: old growth lumber is denser and therefore stronger than similar lumber available today and such wood is of itself very valuable. For many reasons the construction of modern buildings cannot equal the construction of older structures. We need to preserve, renovate and rejuvenate where at all possible, even if there is a greater dollar cost.

Not all costs are measured in dollars. The costs of demolishing the Memorial Library may be far greater to the University than the cost of any new structure that any architect might imagine.

Aye for the Garnet and Gold – and the Memorial Library!

Yours truly,

C. Jean Cameron

B.A, Mt. A. '78, B.Sc. Mt. A.'78, Cert., U. Neutachel '79, M.D. Dalhousie '83, C.C.F.P., C.A.F.C.I., F.C.F.P.C.

PS. *Dr. Ella Smith, M.A. Oxford '21, D. Litt. MT A '63, aunt of well know contemporary nonagenarian Sackvillian and another Mt A Honorary Degree recipient, Dr. Frances Smith, was a lecturer in History at Mount Allison '40-'51 and Acting Head History from '40-'46. A colourful personality from Mt A's past, Dr. Smith counted herself, at least in stories told to a wee girl, a veteran - though perhaps war correspondent might have been a more appropriate tag. In the Spanish Civil War (late 1930's) she travelled and slept under either of two passports, used alternatively as connivance demanded. Depending on which side was in control wherever she found herself, she presented whichever passport she deemed the safest to be carrying; she had been an "undercover agent, a spy of sorts" and had great stories to tell. She loved history. She loved books. She loved the little bookstore she ran after she "retired". And she truly loved the Memorial Library!

Read more of these remarkable Allisonians at: http://heritage.tantramar.com/WFNewsletter_37.htm