

## Response to an 'open letter' to Alumni and Friends of Mount Allison

The Administration of Mount Allison has been overwhelmed with expressions of displeasure at their resolve to destroy the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** and replace it with an Arts Centre; this is certainly no 'world class' option for the university. In an attempt to rationalize this decision the Office of University Advancement, in the names of President Campbell and Chair McCubbin, on April 7, 2011, issued "an 'open letter' to Alumni and friends of Mount Allison", a letter of omission, exaggeration and misinformation.

During the Great War, The Right Honourable Sir Robert Borden, then Prime Minister of Canada, declared that *'a larger proportion of the students of Mount Allison had enlisted in the service of the Empire than from any other College in Canada.'* A blatant omission of the 'open letter' is any recognition of the fact that the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** is a **Cenotaph funded by the families and friends of the 73 young students and alumni who then gave their lives so that Mount Allison can flourish today.** Prominent Canadian military historian Dr. Marc Milner, a native son of Sackville and author of *HMCS Sackville 1941-1985*, provides this provoking thought: *"It is tragic to think that on the eve of the centennial of the most catastrophic event in Canadian history, Mt A is even considering destruction of its memorial to those who died in the service of their country during the Great War."* It would be a shameful act, unbecoming a university with the stature of Mount Allison, to needlessly destroy this Cenotaph.

The 'open letter' reaffirms an urgent need for improved facilities for the Fine and Performing Arts. Few disagree with this objective. They do, however, disagree with the unnecessary destruction of a handsome heritage building in order to build an Arts Centre on that particular site. Made of red sandstone cut from the local Pickard quarry by men of the Tantramar community, the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** was designed by renowned Halifax architect Andrew Randall Cobb, an accomplished artist, a lover of theatre, a founding member of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, a designer of Halifax's Neptune Theatre, and a strong advocate for the Arts.

The Administration admits that their plan has 'generated some concern'. Allisonian Alumni and others interested in Mount Allison have only perchance learned by word-of-mouth of the decision to raze the **Memorial Library 1914 1918**; they have never been fully informed by Mount Allison Administrators. The Alumni Board has also been complicit in this code of silence; they have neither educated the Alumni nor

allowed submitted articles or letters on this subject to be published in the *Record*. Indeed, even the Board of Regents' own Property and Facility Management Committee was not consulted; one member of that committee has now resigned.

Now numbering well over fourteen hundred and originating from 27 countries scattered around the world, the signatories to the online petition to 'Save the Mount Allison Memorial Library' concur that this is a matter of far-reaching significance. These signatories include at least: 31 Professors Emeriti and faculty past and present, 24 Former Members of the Board of Regents, 8 Former Members of the Alumni Board, 5 University Administrators, 16 Architects including several professors of architecture, 10 Lifetime Class Officers and 5 Honourary Doctorate Grantees and hundreds of distraught Alumni of all Classes.

Campbell and McCubbin claim to be 'proud of Mount Allison's record of commitment to preserving its patrimony'. In reality contemporary Mount A administrators have shown a dismal display of 'deferred maintenance' and destruction. In recent decades Mount Allison inherited or otherwise acquired at least eight historic residential properties on Salem and York Streets, adjacent to but not part of the main campus. Four of these heritage homes, Baxter, Sprague, Hillcrest and the French House have now been levelled, victims of neglect and 'deferred maintenance'. The fifth, McGregor House, was removed from the streetscape. The sixth, Colville House, was scheduled for demolition but salvaged by a Good Samaritan. If you walk up York Street today and scrutinize the exteriors of the fine homes of Capt R. V. Bennett and Artist John Hammond, you will find them in a derelict state, again victims of 'deferred maintenance'. 'Deferred maintenance' is the practice of postponing needed upkeep in order to save costs. This is hardly a record of preservation of which to be proud. The 'open letter' states: 'the present value of the deferred maintenance of our academic campus facilities is between \$80 and \$120 million'. If this is indeed so, then surely responsible custodianship of the Mount A infrastructure should be a critical issue about which all Allisonians need immediate and reliable information and on which the Board needs to take urgent action.

The authors write that the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** has been 'inaccurately described as one of the campus's oldest' buildings. In fact, on the main campus of Mount Allison only three buildings are older than the **Memorial Library 1914 1918**: the President's Cottage, Owens Art Gallery and Hart Hall. A heritage building is defined, not by its age, but by the story that it tells. There is no other building on campus with a

narrative like that of the **Memorial Library 1914 1918**. This is indeed Mount Allison's most important historic edifice. The **Memorial Library 1914 1918**, by definition, is the quintessential paragon of what is heritage at Mount Allison University.

Further, the authors indicate that the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** is not really a heritage building because 'the building does not have heritage designation'. One would expect that a university with the traditions of Mount Allison would be proud to procure heritage designation for her valuable historic structures. When the Town of Sackville established a Heritage Board, tasked in 2010 to define areas in the town that merited heritage protection under a newly passed N.B. Provincial Heritage Act, Mount Allison lobbied so successfully to be excluded from having any part of the campus included in the designated area the town finally acquiesced and the campus was excluded. Moreover, and equally unfathomable, when the Tantramar Heritage Trust applied for a Provincial Heritage Designation for the **Memorial Library 1914 1918**, Mount Allison requested an audience with the responsible provincial Minister to oppose the application. The Administration argues there is no 'official heritage status' for the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** but is itself responsible for this situation. The current issue of HERITAGE, the magazine of the Heritage Canada Foundation, describes the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** as an Endangered Place in Canada, clearly a confirmation that the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** is recognized as a significant national heritage building.

The authors of this 'open letter' list the buildings they believe contribute to the 'signature look' of our campus: Centennial Hall; the Flemington Building; the Wallace McCain Student Centre; Colville House; the Bennett Building; the Owens Art Gallery; the Anchorage; and the Black (Hammond) House'. The **Memorial Library 1914 1918** is obvious by omission from this list yet is the first building designed by Andrew Randall Cobb at Mount Allison; is the building that set the character standard for the academic quadrangle; is the building whose spirit is reflected in the design of the first three on this list and is the building which truly delineated the 'signature look' of the campus. Three others listed are not even situated on the main campus. The Owens Art Gallery is quite unlike its original as it was turned 'back to front' about 40 years ago by architect Gustavo da Rosa. The Bennett Building, a federal government building recently acquired by Mount Allison, was built to mimic the adjacent **Memorial Library 1914 1918** but was clad with make-believe stone, hardly a 'signature look'. It was Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, visiting Sackville in 1938, who

declared: "It is the most beautiful campus that I know in Canada." Unquestionably, the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** is the essence of the 'signature look' of Mount Allison.

The current policy of 'deferred maintenance' has assured that the condition of the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** is now such that it 'requires major repairs'. The building needs upgrading and repurposing of the same scale as once did Trueman House. The Administration has said that 'qualified professionals' have advised that the building 'suffers from structural fatigue', but won't share the report or show the evidence. They conclude: 'it would not be prudent to retain this building'. A formal request was made under the 'Right to Information Act' for access to those reports and the Administration still refuses to release them. What is being hidden? As Scott wrote: *"Oh what a tangled web we weave, When first we practise to deceive!"*

New uses for the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** should be explored, with renovation at a cost roughly equivalent to new construction. The administration have offered no evidence for its figure of \$5 million dollars to include the ML in the new Arts Centre, and their claim that the money will have to come from 'tuition of future students' is mere scare-mongering and insults the intelligence. Thirty percent of the yearly operating budget of Mount Allison comes from tuition paid by students; the funding proposal for the new Arts Centre, as presented by the Administration and reported in the Argosy, includes a plan to take a million dollars annually from the operating budget for ten years; this scheme would mean that students will already be paying out of pocket via their tuitions.

If 'qualified professionals' are not able to cost-effectively rehabilitate the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** for Arts, then other solutions and a better location should be found for any new Arts Centre and the **Memorial Library 1914 1918** should be preserved for her original purpose:

**"to erect a library as a memorial to the loyalty and heroism of Mount Allison men and women in the war"**  
where names placed there will:  
**"go down through the years cherished and revered by successive generations of grateful students"**

**Save the Mount Allison Memorial Library Committee**  
for more info visit: [www.eastmarket.com/smash](http://www.eastmarket.com/smash)  
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