

**04 March 2011**

**To: The Chancellor, President and Regents of Mount Allison University**

As Rabbe Burns reminds us, "The best-laid plans o' mice and men gang aft aglae."

To build a handsome and much-needed new home for the Fine and Performing Arts programmes at Mount Allison was and remains a worthy goal.

To conclude that an iconic element of the campus, widely valued for its architectural, educational and memorial associations, must be razed to make room for the new building seemed hasty and short-sighted.

To pronounce that decision without a clear, concomitant vision of what suitable memorial to the University's war dead would be erected and dedicated in its place was insensitive and probably unwise.

I personally favour retention and re-purposing of Cobb's original Memorial Library structure. However, I also believe that a genuinely open dialogue, informed by a full disclosure of the arguments for and against demolition and coupled with a renewed commitment to honour past sacrifices, could have channelled the conversation in a more positive direction, regardless of the final outcome.

Because that process was not adopted, a large and growing number of members and friends of the Mount Allison community - over 1,230 at the time of writing - have elected to petition for reversal of the decision. Many signatories have added thoughtful and heartfelt comments to their names.

Their common theme is this: in the interest of wise stewardship, heritage conservation, communal memory, aesthetic consistency, and cultural continuity, please reconsider.

The use of e-petitions is a new phenomenon but one that is spreading rapidly. While it may seem easy to dismiss, many jurisdictions, including the Scottish Parliament and the German Bundestag, have formally acknowledged this "teledemocracy" as a legitimate medium of interaction between governments and those on whose behalf they govern. The process is still in a state of flux; yet, to a growing extent, this form of grass-roots participation is shaping matters of public and private policy.

Choosing to dismiss such a powerful expression of opinion by so many individuals who care deeply about Mount Allison cannot serve the University well. The longer the community remains divided over this issue, the more grievous and long-lasting will be the harm.

I urge you, as stewards of a great institution, to reconsider, to revisit your decision, and to find a way of serving the future that will not dishonour the past.

Sincerely,  
J. Alexander Burnett

c.c. Alumni Board