

Letter to the Editor

Postscript to the Saga of the Memorial Library

On Tuesday last I received a call from Gloria Jollymore of Mount Allison. Out of courtesy she was calling to inform me that the Board of Regents had met that weekend and had a full discussion on issues related to the proposed new Arts Centre. The Board reached a consensus to incorporate features of the old Memorial Library in the new structure as an echo of what had been. The following day David Stewart informed me that the University had decided to spend several million dollars to proceed with the preparation of architectural drawings for a new 30 million dollar Arts Centre based on the destruction of the Memorial Library. I asked him if the Board had made a motion to that effect last weekend. His answer was that the Board had approved such a motion last May. My reaction was that I was involved in a game of deception. For the last four months David Stewart has been telling me and others and the media that a decision had not yet been made. I would think that Students and Alumni and the Public would react in much the same way as myself.

Surely the important issue must be the conservation of the Memorial Library. It stands proudly on the campus today in memory of those who made the sacrifice to allow Mount Allison to exist as we know it today. In a recent mass email to the university community no mention is made of the significance of this fine old edifice, the powerful role it plays in defining the place we know as Mount Allison, the handsome design by the Michelangelo of Maritime architects Andrew Cobb, the singular building on campus whose memory dwells in the hearts of all Alumni living today. To any other university it would be sacred.

There are several ways to conserve the Memorial Library. The proposed plan violates the Master Plan and should be revisited. It is obvious that a 30 million dollar building program is too much for Mount Allison. The program must be divided into two parts, Fine Arts and Performance Arts, and each planned on its own. These are parts that prefer to be apart. And then there are several possibilities to deal with each part. These should be explored and programs revisited. The University Centre could be renovated with some major changes to the existing structure to become a new Performing Arts Centre. Theatre Arts is there now. Additions can be made to the existing Fine Arts without interrupting present teaching spaces. Fine Arts students are leery of the sterile long-corridor technical-arts-institute look of a new building and would prefer a more intimate atmosphere. These projects can be done at different times to simplify funding. These last two proposals could also save over 10 million dollars to put back into the pockets of Students and Alumni.

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