

January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011

The Argosy,

Letter to the Editor:

In the form letters the Mount Allison administration sends to those who have problems with the destruction of the Memorial Library, the building itself is always referred to as 'the Student Centre'. And while it's true the building has had several personas through the years, demonstrating its usefulness, it has always been a memorial building and perhaps the original sin was to disregard this fact. These form letters are classic offerings, rigid, with neither emotional intelligence nor concession to any other opinion, and styled in that pat-on-the-head manner of the technocrat, implying people smarter than you have decided, so go stuff yourself, and thanks for writing.

This is Standard Operating Procedure for this university administration, quite full of its own righteousness and the technocratic zeal its president has brought to sweet little Sackville. How else can one explain the proposed destruction of the most precious and beautiful building on the campus?

Nevertheless, for the university's alumni association to ignore the argument so many Allisonians have about the dedicated aspects of the building is a greater sin, as it knowingly withholds a balanced perspective of a building the alumni love. These people who have invested some of their life and some of their funds in Mount Allison have been shut out of any discussion that might stir resentment and anger that a defining part of their life and education should be destroyed. There has been no open discussion other than a set script from the university, with no mention at all of the building's historical stature within the university as one of its most beloved buildings.

When this building was dedicated as a memorial library, a principle was established. A principle is different from a law. There are many ways to deke laws and get what you want. For example, you can hire lawyers who will take your problem to, say, the U.K. for passing as law, as did U.S. lawyers recently in the case of Lehman Bros, resulting in complete disintegration and bankruptcy and the ensuing recession. Caused a hell of a problem for everyone, didn't it? It was legal, it was law. Put into hockey terms, law is the blue line, the red line, the crease and the penalty box. Principle is the rink itself.

You can't get around a principle with a smart lawyer. You can't escape from a principle, pass it off as nothing or profess it expired as is done tacitly in the case of the Memorial Library. A principle has emotional qualities and can invoke emotional penalties.

A principle is profound. Someone else established it in good faith, you now have responsibility for it, and you can't ignore it. You must either keep its power or break it, in which case you have abrogated your responsibility to it, and in effect this not only lets you believe yourself insincere, it makes you insincere. No self-respecting university wants to be in this situation.

For the sake of this university and its offspring, please, reconsider the Fine and Performing Arts project to be themed with the Memorial Library so the university's inspiring conversation can continue in a principled fashion.

What will be gained is respect from all those who love Mount Allison, especially its alumni who may, after time, resume donating to its cause. All that will be lost is hubris, which actually weighs little and leaves no wrecking crew rubble.

Graham McTavish Watt