

9 March 2011

Sir,

I am writing this letter not on behalf of the Town of Sackville, but rather as an individual councillor, a Professor emeritus of fine arts and a veteran. I realize that the Board of Regents of Mount Allison University has the authority, with the advice of the administration, to demolish the Memorial Library, but I believe that this would be a mistake. Just because a group has the authority to commit to an action does not preclude them taking a different action. Further, my concern for preserving the library does not mean that I am in opposition to a Fine and Performing Arts Centre; to the contrary. I spent twenty-nine years, nineteen of them as Head, teaching fine arts at Mount Allison and I am very aware that the department desperately needs new a facility, as does the theatre programme. Linking these two issues is a disservice to those of us opposed to the destruction of the Andrew Cobb designed Memorial Library.

Prior to my retirement in 2004 there was discussion of a new arts complex that, under a plan set out by architect Jack Diamond, included the library as a central part of this new building. This use of historic buildings as the basis for new buildings with new uses is not revolutionary. Examples of such usage abound around the world - in fact Mr. Diamond is currently doing just such a project for a theatre in St. Petersburg in Russia. We have been told that the Memorial Library is on its last legs despite its eighty-four year history serving the university and that it would cost too much money to make it feasible as a part of the new building.

Why is the Memorial Library important to me, and I believe to many others of a like mind? First, and foremost, it is a memorial to the campus's war dead and, second, it is an architectural gem well worth preserving in its own right. To my mind, and to those who commissioned and build the building, the Memorial Library serves as a cenotaph. The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines cenotaph as: "...a war memorial, to a person or persons whose bodies are interred elsewhere." This building was paid for in part by public subscription whose donors thought that it would stand for generations as a reminder of the sacrifice of the university's WWI and Boer War dead. Later plaques were added for WW II and Korea. A plaque is still in place in the stairwell of the library that clearly that: "This build stands as a memorial..." Moving the plaques with the names of the war dead to another building does not change the fact that it is the building that is the memorial.

In the eyes of history eight-four years is not a long, but there was a time when Chartres Cathedral was eight-four years old, that would have been 1344, give or take a year if you take 1260 as the year it was completed, and I am glad that the powers that be did not tear it down. In short, buildings only become old if you don't tear them down. Not all old buildings are good buildings that deserve to be conserved. The Andrew Cobb designed Memorial Library is a good building. In fact, it is a jewel of college Tudor Revival architecture, that even if it was not built as a memorial, should be saved. It needs to be the centrepiece of a new fine and performing arts centre.

Others have written much more elegant letters expressing their views on why this building needs to be saved. I hope that the Regents of Mount Allison University will have second thoughts about the destruction of this historic building and find a method to include it in their plan for the new complex. History will thank them for their efforts.

Yours sincerely,

Virgil Hammock,

emeritus of fine arts

and Councillor, Town of Sackville.

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