

Grits ask about shredding case

By DWE BARTLETT
THE TELEGRAM

It will be up to the courts to decide whether a man who claims to have saved historical documents from destruction will be found guilty of possession of stolen property.

But the provincial Liberals want to know why the documents were being sent to the shredder in the first place.

St. John's antique dealer Gary Murrin is currently on trial in provincial court.

It's alleged Murrin bought more than 200 boxes of 19th-century provincial documents from a security shredding company and then tried to sell them to Memorial University.

"Why are documents which potentially have historic significance being sent to be shredded and who makes the decision as to what documents will, in fact, be destroyed?" asked Liberal House leader Kelvin Parsons.

"There is a three-step process that takes place," answered Clyde Jackman, minister for tourism, culture and recreation. "The (provincial) archivists make the first decision. Then it goes to the (provincial) director (of information management) and then it goes to a specialized committee."

Jackman called the process rigorous.

But Parsons said the process must have failed if the documents that were sent for destruction are worth tens-of-thousands of dollars.

"They're being valued by experts at Memorial University to the tune of possibly a quarter-million dollars," said Parsons.

"These documents, boxes of them, were sitting in this private company to be shredded," he said.

"If this case hadn't happened ... they would have been destroyed."

"There were issues around mould, fungus and so on and so forth," responded Jackman who told the House that he has had a meeting with his staff to discuss the matter.

But Parsons wasn't satisfied with that answer.

"Somebody was going to destroy documents that we know that people at Memorial University were prepared to pay \$122,000 for," he said. "What is the minister going to do to make sure the process does not fail us again."

Jackman said that the situation has been rectified.

As of 2005, there is a new system that's been put in place under the Rooms Act, said the minister. "Prior to that these records were stored in



numerous places. Many of them where damp and mould could collect. As of now, records are much more efficiently taken care of."

Jackman also noted the documents sent to the shredder were preserved on microfilm first.

"We don't look at the monetary value of these. We look at the historical importance of those," said Jackman.

Parsons asked if the documents that are currently evidence in the trial would be eventually returned to the province.

Jackman said he can't comment because the case was still before the

courts.

Parsons wrapped up his questions by asking the minister if in future other groups such as public libraries could have the documents instead of shredding them.

The minister said that was being discussed.

Outside of the House, The Telegram asked Jackman who might be allowed to keep historical documents — would it be limited to institutions such as Memorial University, or would private citizens or even antique dealers, such as Murrin, be allowed.

Jackman says it's too early to say. "The question you're asking there is really advanced as to where the discussion has gone at this particular point."

Clyde Jackman, minister of tourism, culture and recreation, commented on document shredding at Confederation Building Monday. — Photo by Rhonda Hayward/The Telegram

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Kelvin Parsons, Liberal House leader