

**“Dear brother-in-trouble” Casey Wood's Enduring Presence in  
the Osler Library of the History of Medicine**  
**Mon obscur compagnon : la présence notable de Casey Wood à  
la Bibliothèque Osler d'histoire de la médecine**

Mary Hague-Yearl

Volume 59, 2022

Rare Birds and Rare Books: Casey Albert Wood and the McGill  
Libraries

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1102213ar>  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/pbsc.v59i1.36663>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Bibliographical Society of Canada/La Société bibliographique du Canada

ISSN

0067-6896 (imprimé)  
2562-8941 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Hague-Yearl, M. (2022). “Dear brother-in-trouble” Casey Wood's Enduring Presence in the Osler Library of the History of Medicine. *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada / Cahiers de la Société bibliographique du Canada*, 59, 151–175. <https://doi.org/10.33137/pbsc.v59i1.36663>

Résumé de l'article

Quand Casey Wood devint le premier commis clinique de William Osler à l'Hôpital général de Montréal, en 1877, il aurait alors été impossible de prévoir l'impact que cette association aurait sur le développement des collections de la Bibliothèque de l'Université McGill. M. Osler inspira la bibliophilie de M. Wood et guida ce dernier dans ses efforts de catalogage, ce qui donna lieu à la constitution de collections très spécialisées, sur l'ophtalmologie d'une part, au sein de la Bibliothèque médicale, et sur l'ornithologie et la zoologie d'autre part, au sein de la Bibliothèque de l'Université McGill. Bien que, de son vivant, les dons de Casey Wood à la Bibliothèque Osler aient été restreints et triés sur le volet, après sa mort, la collection ophtalmologique fut transférée à la Bibliothèque Osler d'histoire de la médecine, conjointement à d'autres pièces du domaine de la médecine. Du fait de ces ouvrages, et d'autres documents figurant dans certains fonds d'archives de la Bibliothèque Osler, il est évident que la présence de Casey Wood à la Bibliothèque Osler fut notable. Si les livres évoquent le patrimoine laissé par M. Wood à l'Université McGill, les documents d'archives, quant à eux, témoignent de son tempérament : un homme déterminé et engagé, dont les vues traduisaient cependant des penchants racistes et des sympathies fascistes.

© Dr. Mary Hague-Yearl, 2023



Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

**é**rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

---

“Dear brother-in-trouble”<sup>1</sup> Casey Wood’s Enduring Presence in the Osler Library of the History of Medicine

Dr. Mary Hague-Yearl

---

**Abstract**

When Casey Wood became William Osler’s first clinical clerk at the Montreal General Hospital, in 1877, it would have been impossible to foresee the impact that pairing would have on collections development at the McGill University Library. Osler inspired Wood’s bibliophilia and guided him in focusing his collecting, resulting in the establishment of specialized collections: on ophthalmology, within the Medical Library, and on ornithology and zoology, within the McGill University Library. Although Casey Wood’s gifts to the Osler Library were limited and carefully selected during his lifetime, after his death the ophthalmological collection was transferred to the Osler Library of the History of Medicine, along with other works relating to medicine. Because of these books, together with documentation contained in a number of archival collections at the Osler Library, it is clear that Casey Wood’s presence in the Osler Library has truly been an enduring one. As the books speak to part of Wood’s legacy at McGill, the archival documentation speaks to his character: as a man who was determined and focused, but who also expressed racist views and fascist sympathies.

**Résumé**

Quand Casey Wood devint le premier commis clinique de William Osler à l’Hôpital général de Montréal, en 1877, il aurait alors été impossible de prévoir l’impact que cette association aurait sur le développement des collections de la Bibliothèque de l’Université McGill. M. Osler inspira la bibliophilie de M. Wood et guida

---

<sup>1</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, 2 April 1931, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1929–31), W. W. Francis Fonds, Osler Library Archives, McGill University (hereinafter “WWFF”).

ce dernier dans ses efforts de catalogage, ce qui donna lieu à la constitution de collections très spécialisées, sur l'ophtalmologie d'une part, au sein de la Bibliothèque médicale, et sur l'ornithologie et la zoologie d'autre part, au sein de la Bibliothèque de l'Université McGill. Bien que, de son vivant, les dons de Casey Wood à la Bibliothèque Osler aient été restreints et triés sur le volet, après sa mort, la collection ophtalmologique fut transférée à la Bibliothèque Osler d'histoire de la médecine, conjointement à d'autres pièces du domaine de la médecine. Du fait de ces ouvrages, et d'autres documents figurant dans certains fonds d'archives de la Bibliothèque Osler, il est évident que la présence de Casey Wood à la Bibliothèque Osler fut notable. Si les livres évoquent le patrimoine laissé par M. Wood à l'Université McGill, les documents d'archives, quant à eux, témoignent de son tempérament : un homme déterminé et engagé, dont les vues traduisaient cependant des penchants racistes et des sympathies fascistes.

In 1877, a young Casey Wood became the first clinical clerk to William Osler at the Montreal General Hospital. At the time, neither man could have guessed that the friendship that developed between them would have a long-lasting impact on the development of special and specialist collections at the McGill University Library. Wood's initial relationship with Osler centred around their common profession of medicine. Although this remained a mutual interest, over subsequent decades the focus of their attention turned away from medical practice to the collection of key works representing the history of medicine.

Osler was instrumental in Wood's formation as an ophthalmologist and, later, as a fellow bibliomaniac. Osler's guidance of Wood as a bibliophile reportedly began during conversations the two had on a transatlantic steamship voyage, ca. 1899–1900. Four decades later, Wood recounted to the first Osler Librarian, W. W. Francis, how much he and his wife had enjoyed a ten-day crossing with the Osler family. He describes having discussed all manner of things with William Osler and singled out his mentor's advice with respect to book collecting: "Prof. Osler advised me henceforth to concentrate"<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Emphasis in the original. This applies throughout the chapter, as Wood often used underlining or capitals for emphasis in his manuscript and typewritten letters.

on ophthalmology and medico-historical items, and not to spread myself too thin over this and that, hither and yon. This advice (if you will include ornithology) I recognized as of the best and I have since followed it as well as I could.”<sup>3</sup> Although this passage refers most specifically to the ophthalmic collection that Wood created for McGill’s Medical Library, it holds clues both to Osler’s own collecting and to Wood’s focused involvement in realizing the vision of the Osler Library. Osler and Wood continued their conversation a few years later. In 1905, the Woods joined the Oslers on the *Caronia*, as the latter were moving from Baltimore to Oxford upon William Osler’s appointment as Regius Professor of Medicine. Wood wrote to McGill’s medical librarian, Margaret Charlton, that he had conversed with Osler about the Medical Library and had been reassured that the library was a fitting place for his collection, as Osler had agreed it was “among the best in the country.”<sup>4</sup>

Such was the impact of Osler’s tutelage that in a memorial piece titled “Osler’s Influence on Medical Libraries in America,” Casey Wood was singled out as one of three major contributors to American medical libraries who had been inspired by Osler.<sup>5</sup> Highlighting Wood as a major contributor to (North) American medical libraries speaks to a less obvious aspect of the Wood-Osler partnership: they were part of a larger trend that saw physicians actively involved in the development of medical libraries in North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During their transatlantic crossing on the *Caronia*, Osler had just completed his term as the second president of the Association of Medical Librarians (now the Medical Library Association), an organization of which he had been an enthusiastic founding member.<sup>6</sup> The timing of Wood’s conversations with Osler

<sup>3</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, 30 June 1941, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1936–42), WWFF.

<sup>4</sup> Casey A. Wood to Margaret Charlton, 3 January 1906, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Correspondence 1905–1914), Medical Library Archives, Osler Library Archives, McGill University (hereinafter “MLA”).

<sup>5</sup> John Ruhrah, “Osler’s Influence on Medical Libraries in America,” in “Sir William Osler: A Memorial Edition,” ed. Maude E. Abbott, *Bulletin IX, International Association of Medical Museums*, 2nd printing (Montreal, 1927), 346.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Connor, *Guardians of Medical Knowledge: The Genesis of the Medical Library Association* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 90–94; Michael R. Kronenfeld and Jennie Jacobs Kronenfeld, *A History of Medical Libraries and Medical Librarianship, from John Shaw Billings to the Digital Era* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2021), 39–46.

placed him firmly within the context of medical men who influenced the direction of their associated libraries for decades to come.

While Osler did influence Wood, the archival record at the Osler Library demonstrates that Wood forged his own path and adopted a distinct approach to building up the collections that interested him. In the decades prior to Osler's death, in 1919, the two men communicated about their respective visions. Although Wood obtained a few items for Osler's Library, his primary objective was to build his own complementary ophthalmic collection, also destined for McGill. The items in the published *Bibliotheca Osleriana* that came from Casey Wood were, with few exceptions, donated after Osler's death. Wood's enduring presence within the Osler Library today came primarily by way of McGill's Medical Library. The story told here begins with Wood's engagement with the Medical Library in regard to an ophthalmology collection that was transferred to the Osler after Wood's death. From there, it highlights the presence of Casey Wood in the Osler Library today, and considers archival records that document Wood's collecting habits while revealing a great deal about his character (his letters to McGill's medical librarian Margaret Charlton and her successor Jean Cameron, for instance, show him to be persistent and demanding).

Wood left his greatest mark on the Osler Library in the variety of sources that he either donated or helped to procure for the Medical Faculty. Where Sir William Osler's focus lay in the foundations of the medicine he practised (i.e., in the European tradition), Casey Wood's contributions add a different perspective as he contributed foundational works on medicine written in Sinhala, Persian, Arabic, and Chinese.<sup>7</sup> In his travels around the Indian subcontinent, he acquired or had copies made of a number of texts on Ayurvedic

---

<sup>7</sup> See: Adam Gacek, "Persian Manuscripts in McGill University Libraries," *MELA Notes* 77 (2004): 1–9; and Pamela Miller, "Eyes, Birds and Books on Display," *Osler Library Newsletter* 88 (1998): 4–6. Wood himself wrote: "In the libraries of the Medical Faculty may now be consulted most of the important island Olas (book-manuscripts) in Sanskrit, Pali-Sinhalese and Sinhalese dealing with medical topics." See: "Ayurvedic medicine in ancient and medieval Ceylon," *Annals of Medical History* 8, no. 4 (1928): 435–45. Typescript sent to Andrew Macphail, June 1933, P145, box 360, Casey A. Wood Collection, Osler Library Archives, McGill University (hereinafter "CAWC"). Much of the Islamic language material now at the Osler Library came via connections with ophthalmologist and scholar Max Meyerhof; there are some references to him in the Wood correspondence, but more directly between Meyerhof and Francis: P155, box 132, folder 34 (Meyerhof), WWFF.

medicine, including a substantial Ola (palm-leaf) manuscript containing the complete *Yogaratnakara* (see figure 1), about which he wrote an effusive letter to Lady Osler in 1926, expressing the hope that it might earn a place in the Bibliotheca Prima, the list, within William Osler’s wider library classification system, of seminal medical historical works.<sup>8</sup>

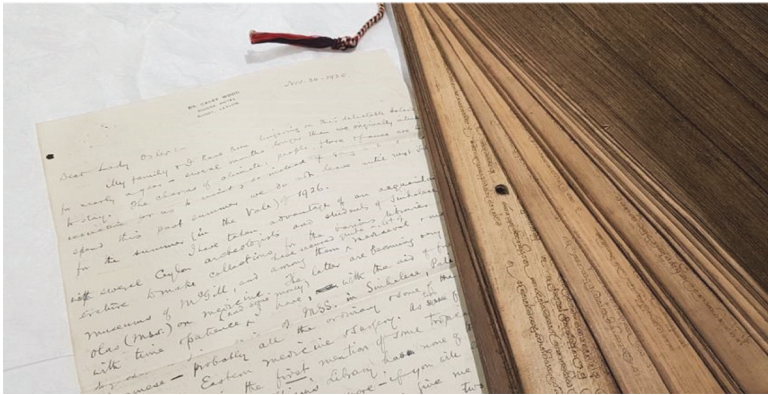


Figure 1. Casey Wood was thrilled to obtain a complete copy of the *Yogaratnakara* and hoped that it would be recognized in the Bibliotheca Osleriana as a foundational medical work. Photo: Mary Hague-Yearl, courtesy of the Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University.

Wood’s active engagement with the Osler Library began in earnest after Osler died, in December 1919. Wood did not influence the formation of William Osler’s library, but he did act as a donor and benefactor when working with the first Osler Librarian, W. W. Francis. When Wood went on his travels, he pursued items matching the various subject areas that he was collecting for McGill. His substantial correspondence demonstrates that Wood did not simply donate books; he discussed them, sought feedback to avoid duplication, and bartered with bookdealers. The detail he provided regarding the works he donated is extensive and, indeed, should

<sup>8</sup> Casey A. Wood to Lady Osler, 30 November 1925 and 11 January 1926, housed in box containing a manuscript copy of the *Yogaratnakara* (B.O. 7638, created ca. 1719). On the latter work, see: <https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/252330946>.

be regarded as an important part of the gift.<sup>9</sup> There are notes on provenance, historical significance, and the process of production.

The close collaboration between Wood and Francis comes out in the correspondence as having developed into a peculiar comradeship—one in which they teased each other over implied political differences and where, in one instance, Wood wrote to Francis as his “brother-in-trouble,” a reference to their mutual affliction by bibliophilia and the extent to which their relationship with books was all-encompassing.

The folders of correspondence at the Osler Library provide testament to Wood’s commitment to McGill over nearly four decades. In the years that followed his death, in 1942, the Osler Library became a permanent home to a much larger corpus of material from Casey Wood; many of the journals and rare works relating to ophthalmology were transferred from the Medical Library to the Osler. Moreover, the Osler Library is home to a small number of artifacts, hundreds of pamphlets, and the correspondence and library records that document Wood’s focused and deliberate attention to building McGill’s collections. The result is that Casey Wood’s presence at the Osler Library exists not only in the items he collected and donated, but also in the records of those transactions. From those records, and the personal letters that he sent to his friends, one gains an impression of Casey Wood, the man. Although this picture provides an important context for his many gifts, it raises troubling questions about his attitudes and politics. Wood comes across as an unabashed racist and colonialist with fascist sympathies; while these were not uncommon at the time, the discomfort expressed by Francis, among other correspondents, demonstrates that Wood’s views should not simply be dismissed as reflecting the time. His interactions with Margaret Charlton and Jean Cameron, trained librarians in charge, successively, of running McGill’s Medical Library on a daily basis, hint at paternalism. As was the custom at the time, a male physician sat atop the library hierarchy as Honorary Medical Librarian; his extensive correspondence with the Medical Library shows that Wood wrote to the (male) honorary medical librarian when he did not receive the response he wanted from the (female, professionally trained) medical librarian.

The pages that follow provide an overview of the material that is available at the Osler Library, while taking note of certain papers that may be examined to develop a more intimate sense of Casey

---

<sup>9</sup> Miller, “Eyes, Birds and Books,” 4–6.

Wood as a character. There is little doubt that Wood achieved his ambition, expressed in letters in the Osler Library’s holdings, to build a “historical collection worth talking about”<sup>10</sup> as part of a larger commitment to “make the McGill Library one of the best in the country.”<sup>11</sup> This investigation reveals his approach in realizing his goal and does not shy away from considering information that will inform a thorough interrogation of Casey Wood and his presence as reflected in the materials and archives at the Osler Library of the History of Medicine.

### **The Beginnings of the Osler Library and the Ophthalmic Collection**

Casey Wood’s direct involvement with McGill arguably began in 1905, just as his medical degree from Bishop’s College was about to be recognized as a McGill degree, with the amalgamation of the institutions’ respective medical faculties. On 24 April of that year, he wrote to McGill’s medical librarian, Margaret Charlton, indicating that he would send “the first seven volumes necessary to complete your set” of the *Ophthalmic Record*. He added, “I would like to present these (to be bound at my expense) to your library; I presume I might be able to say our library, if the amalgamation between Mc Gill [*sic*] and Bishop’s takes place.”<sup>12</sup> This letter would set the stage for Wood’s involvement with the McGill Medical Library, documented in voluminous correspondence. He asked Charlton to make a list of books she wanted for the library, “so that when I am ‘browsing’ among the second-hand bookstores abroad, hunting for additions to my own ophthalmological library, I may also be able to acquire some more presents for yours.” In a postscript, he added questions that would come to typify his interactions with the libraries to which he donated his material, asking, for example, which editions of the *Annals of Ophthalmology* the library lacked and whether the

<sup>10</sup> Casey A. Wood to William Osler, [January 1912], acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1905–1914), MLA.

<sup>11</sup> Casey A. Wood to Herbert Birkett, 20 May 1914, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1905–1914), MLA.

<sup>12</sup> Casey A. Wood to Margaret Charlton, 24 April 1905, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1905–14), MLA. Accompanying this letter is a later note dated 1969, signalling that this represents the first entry for Casey Wood in the accession book, thus identifying it as his first donation to the Medical Library.



library had a certain new French encyclopaedia of ophthalmology. His questions reveal his willingness to make purchases for the library, while also indicating strong opinions about which items should be represented.<sup>13</sup> Wood proved himself a dedicated donor to McGill, coordinating his efforts to build libraries of current and historical works that reflected his personal and professional specialties and interests in ophthalmology and ornithology. His correspondence, from that time on, was considerable, but the bulk of his engagement with the McGill Medical Library began in 1911.<sup>14</sup> The letters reveal Wood to be a hands-on donor, sharing thoughts and making demands upon all matters, from book collecting to the furniture he desired for the library.

The gift records within the Medical Library Archives for 1911 contain fourteen letters from Wood.<sup>15</sup> This was the start of a prolific period of correspondence, with anywhere from ten letters to twenty letters a year, up to 1914. The number is impressive, especially when one considers that the turnaround time for mail meant he would have sent some of these before receiving a response to previous ones. Wood's correspondence provides a record of his priorities during the first years in which he was actively building up the Ophthalmology Library within the McGill Medical Library, and in spurts thereafter; he was also active in 1920 (thirteen letters), 1934 (twelve letters), and 1935 (ten letters).<sup>16</sup> When Honorary Medical Librarian C. F. Wylde wrote about McGill's Medical Library in 1934, he described Wood as: "one of the greatest of the Library supporters. He gave his own collection consisting of more than 4,000 volumes to the Library in 1912 and endowed the ophthalmological section with the sum of

<sup>13</sup> The works in the collection Wood donated to the Medical Library fell into two basic categories: medical materials on ophthalmology, and historical items (many, but not all, of which were on ophthalmology). Wood wished McGill to have a top-calibre reference library for ophthalmology; to support this goal, he provided funds for ophthalmological journals.

<sup>14</sup> Martha Benjamin, "Dr. Casey Albert Wood and the McGill Medical Libraries," *Oster Library Newsletter* 5 (1970): 1-3. Martha Benjamin counted over four hundred letters sent by Wood to the Medical Library between 1905 and 1941, a count which clearly includes letters beyond the selection considered here.

<sup>15</sup> Note that included in this count are only letters that were clearly authored by Casey Wood. MLA, acc. 544, B13, Gifts, Casey Wood, 1905-1935. My thanks to Victoria Owusu-Ansah for helping to tabulate the number of letters sent by Wood.

<sup>16</sup> Casey Wood Correspondence, 1905-35, acc. 544, B13, MLA.

\$3,000.”<sup>17</sup> Just as the timing of his initial donation, in 1905, may have been no coincidence given Wood’s new status as a McGill alumnus, Wood’s first major donation of rare ophthalmological works came in the same year as Osler’s official commitment to leave his library to McGill. Wood’s donation came in April 1911, six months before Osler signed his deed of gift, on 1 October 1911—but the two had corresponded for years about their respective plans and priorities for book collecting (see figure 2). Osler had encouraged Wood to develop an ophthalmic collection for McGill and Wood thus assumed a personal interest in Osler’s project.



Figure 2. Photo portrait of Sir William Osler from 1912. Osler and Wood swapped photos in the year after they signalled their respective intentions to donate significant book collections to the McGill Medical Faculty. In a letter from the same time (29 June 1912), Osler reaffirmed his focused approach to book collecting. P145, box 362, CAWC. Courtesy the Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University.

<sup>17</sup> C. F. Wylde, “A Short History of the Medical Library of McGill University,” reprinted from *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 76, no. 5 (1934): 146–53, P155, box 140, folder 57 (Wylde–Wynde), WFFF.

In the early years, many of Wood's letters were directed to the medical librarian, Margaret Charlton. To her, he outlined his vision of the Ophthalmic Library as its own entity in a dedicated room. On 23 October 1913, Charlton wrote to Wood and thanked him for his "splendid generosity" to the library and outlined a proposition. She noted that she had finally secured a room to store his books, but that she would require new cases to hold them. She suggested that since she had not used all of the funds he had previously donated for books, she could put some of that money toward the cases and for framing portraits to hang in the room.<sup>18</sup> Wood responded without delay: "Now that we have a special ophthalmic library room I will do my best to help you out. Inasmuch as the fund for buying journals, textbooks, etc., on the eye is not very large, I propose to pay for the extra cases, framing of the pictures, etc., and suggest that the purchasing fund for books + magazines be not disturbed. Go ahead and buy what is necessary for the new room and let me know the amount."<sup>19</sup> In early November, Charlton again pressed her case, suggesting that he allow her to spend some of the money "lying idle in the bank" to furnish the Ophthalmic Library with dust- and air-proof cases that cost around two hundred dollars.<sup>20</sup>

Wood demonstrated his direct involvement by taking the discussion about the cases above Charlton, to the honorary medical librarian, Herbert Birkett. Wood offered to sell some of his duplicates and make up the difference to fund the cases, and ultimately made good on that promise.<sup>21</sup> In keeping with Wood's note to Osler the previous year, delineating his goal for "an historical collection worth

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Charlton to Casey A. Wood, 23 October 1913, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1905-14), MLA.

<sup>19</sup> Casey A. Wood to Margaret Charlton, 27 October 1913, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1905-14), MLA.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Charlton to Casey A. Wood, 4 November 1913, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1905-1914), MLA. Charlton later wrote to Wood, in February 1914, that the cases were more expensive than anticipated: \$375 for two pyramid cases and \$75 apiece for flat cases with a base. Margaret Charlton to Casey A. Wood, 11 February 1914, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1905-1914), MLA.

<sup>21</sup> The following spring, Wood donated \$175, which he had obtained by selling duplicates, and Birkett agreed the funds would "be donated towards the fitting up of a room which will contain your valuable old works on Ophthalmology." [Birkett] to Wood, 6 May 1914, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1905-1914), MLA.

talking about,”<sup>22</sup> he wrote to Birkett words that constitute something of a theme in the correspondence: “I want to feel that Mc Gill has the best ophthalmic college library in the country—arranged in the latest fashion for research and study.”<sup>23</sup> Not only did Wood provide what he judged to be a top ophthalmic collection, he was also concerned about funds to sustain it. Nine years after his initial donation to the McGill Medical Library, Wood again revealed his hands-on approach in a letter to Birkett of 1 June 1914, wherein he described, in precise detail, his idea for fundraising for the library. He suggested that the library inaugurate a program whereby donors would purchase and donate specific books from a predetermined list. He closed: “the larger number of influential donors to head the list the better, before appealing to the rank and fyle [*sic*], I believe the fact that we are trying to secure a small number of rare accessions to the library, for a special purpose, will appeal to some who would not subscribe to a general fund. What do you think?”<sup>24</sup>

Just a few days later, on 5 June, Wood again wrote to Birkett with a similar intensity and inclination toward personal involvement. Margaret Charlton had made a hasty departure from McGill and Wood offered: “if I can be of any use in setting the Library upon its feet and of pushing forward the work, please regard me as a private in the ranks ... It is quite evident to me that McGill must have a first-class reference and research library ... and I can assure you that I feel as much interest in that matter as any one can.”<sup>25</sup> After Charlton left for Toronto, Wood took up his correspondence with the librarian who replaced her, Jean Cameron. He impressed upon Cameron his intent to install the ophthalmic collection to aid student research. He expressed his desire to “do this without interfering with your regular routine and without expense to the faculty,” and again revealed his personal involvement by suggesting that the Library hire someone who could work jointly under Cameron and Wood to implement his

<sup>22</sup> Casey A. Wood to William Osler, [January 1912], acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1905–14), MLA.

<sup>23</sup> Casey A. Wood to Herbert Birkett, 14 November 1913, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1905–14), MLA.

<sup>24</sup> Casey A. Wood to Herbert Birkett, 1 June 1914, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1905–14), MLA. As an aside, it is also one of the letters in which current events made a casual appearance: in the postscript, Wood apologized for the many corrections, noting that he and his typist were both upset by the sinking of the *Empress of Ireland*.

<sup>25</sup> Casey A. Wood to Herbert Birkett, 5 June 1914, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1905–14), MLA.

plan—especially, he noted, since he would likely send many more boxes of books.<sup>26</sup>

The shipments of books were steady. On 3 April 1915, Wood wrote to Cameron: “Although the war has interfered so much with all medical affairs yet I have not lost interest in the library.

Recently I have acquired a number of works on the eye and am anxious to present to the Library.”<sup>27</sup> On 21 April 1915, Wood wrote to Cameron that he was sending, by express, more books for the Ophthalmic Library. He closed with the sentiment: “Hoping this terrible war will soon be over”<sup>28</sup>—likely a response to Cameron’s admission that, “the war has, of course, seriously interfered with the work in the Library—our collection of foreign journals, especially the German, has dwindled sadly.”<sup>29</sup> Two years later, another letter from Wood to Cameron reiterated his singular focus: “My sole purpose is to make certain that the ophthalmic portion of the library is in working order for research students ... The next consignment of books may go forward within the next ten days, and I shall be obliged if you will keep them unopened with the others until my arrival.”<sup>30</sup> Though the war was not a major subject in Wood’s correspondence, it was a consistent one. Wood’s colleague and collaborator on a few ophthalmic publications, Dr. Thomas Shastid, asked the library on 4 May 1918: “Will there ... be any difficulty in getting German books across the Canadian border?”<sup>31</sup> In response, Cameron reassured Shastid that the restrictions seemed to apply only to works printed or purchased in Germany since the start of the war.<sup>32</sup> The war caused disruption on many fronts. In an update sent to Wood on 14 June 1919, Cameron relayed that the income from a \$150 donation had been accumulating during the war, due in large part to her inability

<sup>26</sup> Casey A. Wood to Jean Cameron, 2 May 1917, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1915–20), MLA.

<sup>27</sup> Casey A. Wood to [Jean Cameron], 3 April 1915, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1915–20), MLA.

<sup>28</sup> Casey A. Wood to Jean Cameron, 21 April 1915, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1915–20), MLA.

<sup>29</sup> Jean Cameron to Casey A. Wood, 15 April 1915, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1915–20), MLA.

<sup>30</sup> Casey A. Wood to Jean Cameron, 25 April 1917, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1915–20), MLA.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Shastid to Casey A. Wood, 4 May 1918, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1915–20), MLA.

<sup>32</sup> [Jean Cameron] to Dr. T. H. Shastid, 14 May 1918, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1915–20), MLA.

to procure certain foreign journal titles. She affirmed her intent to resume orders “now that conditions are becoming more normal.” She included, for reference, a list of journal subscriptions that the Casey Wood Fund had paid for prior to the war.<sup>33</sup>

Given Wood’s tendency to direct from afar, it should be of little surprise that his relationship with the Medical Library was not entirely smooth. On 26 August 1920, Wood wrote a rather testy note addressed: “Official in charge, Medical Library, McGill University.” In the note, Wood said: “I presume the vacation season explains the matter, but as the manifest and other needed documents for the Customs were sent Miss Cameron long ago will not somebody look after this matter at once.”<sup>34</sup> Writing back on 1 September, “P.M.C.” (identified as a desk assistant) explained that an “express receipt and statement received from you on August 3rd, were sent over to the office for attention ... I have just telephoned the office regarding this matter, and they tell me that the information supplied was not sufficient to satisfy the American Railway Express Company, and that they had written to your secretary for fuller detail.”<sup>35</sup> The matter was resolved, but the exchange serves as one example among many that betray a sense of mutual impatience.

### Wood and His “Brother-in-Trouble,” W. W. Francis

With Osler’s passing, in 1919, Wood cultivated a friendship and working relationship with Osler’s second cousin W. W. Francis,<sup>36</sup> who was charged with finalizing the catalogue for Osler’s Library and establishing the Osler Library of the History of Medicine within the university’s medical faculty. The close professional bond that developed between the two over the twenty years they worked together to secure items for the Osler Library is evident in their

<sup>33</sup> [Jean Cameron] to Casey A. Wood, 14 June 1919, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1915–20), MLA.

<sup>34</sup> Casey A. Wood to the Medical Library, 26 August 1920, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1915–20), MLA.

<sup>35</sup> P.M.C. to Casey A. Wood, 1 September 1920, acc. 544, B13 (Wood Dr. Casey Corresp. 1915–20), MLA.

<sup>36</sup> There is speculation that Francis might have been Osler’s son. See: C. S. Bryan and J. R. Wright, “Sir William Osler (1849–1919) and the paternity of William Willoughby Francis (1878–1959): Review of the Evidence,” *Journal of Medical Biography* 27, no. 4 (2019): 229–41, doi:10.1177/0967772019853197.

correspondence. Primarily, the Wood-Francis letters outline the professional transactions that took place, but within those transactions are glimpses of familiarity, revealing hints of Wood's personality and politics. Though Wood usually addressed his letters to "My dear Francis," he also used such salutations as "Amico mio"<sup>37</sup> and "Brother-in-trouble."<sup>38</sup> There was also a degree of humour between the two: Wood addressed one envelope, of 2 February 1932, to: "Mon cher Monsieur." Beside the address (also in French) typed on the letter, Francis made the following note: "I had objected to him addressing me—on the envelope—in German!"<sup>39</sup> Then, on 4 February 1932, Wood teased Francis further, beginning his letter "Dear Wilhelm."<sup>40</sup> Of the salutations, "brother-in-trouble" best encapsulates Casey Wood's relationship with Francis, and also with McGill. His letters show a commitment to a shared mission, a distinct persistence and determination, as well as a sense of mischief.

As Wood went about collecting for his own library projects, he kept an eye out for items suitable to the Osler. Much of his correspondence was to inquire whether the library had particular volumes or otherwise to discuss the book trade, such as a 1929 telegram in which Wood asked Francis: "Have you Albertus Magnus. Hain 546,"<sup>41</sup> to which Francis replied in the affirmative.<sup>42</sup> The letters also provided information about the other collections for which Wood was buying: the Medical Library figures most prominently, but at times he also noted works that he had given, or was planning to give, to the Blacker Library (later known as the Blacker-Wood Library of Ornithology and Zoology). In a letter dated 20 January 1929, Wood expressed impatience with the Medical Library while maintaining his links to the Osler Library, which was preparing for its grand opening a few months hence: "If Wylde [the honorary medical librarian] ignores my hint to buy a 15<sup>th</sup> century *Ortus sanitatis*, what

<sup>37</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, 3 June 1932, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1932–33), WWFF.

<sup>38</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, April 2, 1931, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1929–31), WWFF.

<sup>39</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, 2 February 1932, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1932–33), WWFF.

<sup>40</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, 4 February 1932, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1932–33), WWFF.

<sup>41</sup> This refers to Ludwig Hain, *Repertorium Bibliographicum* (1822), which was an early effort at creating a comprehensive catalogue of incunabula.

<sup>42</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, 5 January 1929, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1929–31), WWFF.

do you say to that? Despite the Chief's apparent indifference to the *Garten der Gesundheit*<sup>43</sup> I think it is one of the priorities that ought to be in at least one of the McGill collections -- + why not yours?"<sup>44</sup> Later in the same letter, he inquired as to the progress installing the Osler Library, adding, "I look *mit Spannung*<sup>45</sup> to the appearance of the Catalogue."<sup>46</sup>

The relationship between Wood and Francis developed further following the 1929 opening of the Osler Library. When corresponding about specific acquisitions, Wood and Francis also discussed the book trade. Wood scoffed at a work from 1589 that was offered for sale with a "contemporary" binding that was not, in fact, contemporary to the book. Rather, he noted that the book had been rebound in "choral vellum" the previous year; in other words, it was a sixteenth-century book rebound in modern times using a page from a sixteenth-century manuscript inscribed with choral music (see figure 3).<sup>47</sup> In response, Francis recounted his own horror story. He quipped: "Your venal monasteries are not as bad as the old Dean of York Minster in the 18th century who was very fond of showing visitors the library (from which, by the way, they have recently been selling incunabula to get funds for restoring the Minster). When any visitor admired a fine illuminated initial the old Dean would cut it out and present it on the spot."<sup>48</sup> The remainder of his letter consisted mostly of a systematic commentary upon works about which Wood had written to him.

<sup>43</sup> This is the German title of the work. It is more commonly known as *Hortus sanitatis*.

<sup>44</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, 20 January 1929, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1929-31), WWFF.

<sup>45</sup> From the German: "with anticipation." Wood seems to have enjoyed dropping a few words of German, Italian, and occasionally French, into his letters.

<sup>46</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, 20 January 1929, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1929-31), WWFF.

<sup>47</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, 14 April 1930 (Francis notes that it should be 1931), P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1929-31), WWFF. Notwithstanding, Wood himself gave to the Medical Library a nineteenth-century reproduction of the ophthalmological works of Arnald of Villanova and other medieval authors, which was rebound in "choral vellum" by the book dealer H. W. Belmore.

<sup>48</sup> W. W. Francis to Casey A. Wood, 29 April 1931, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1929-31), WWFF.



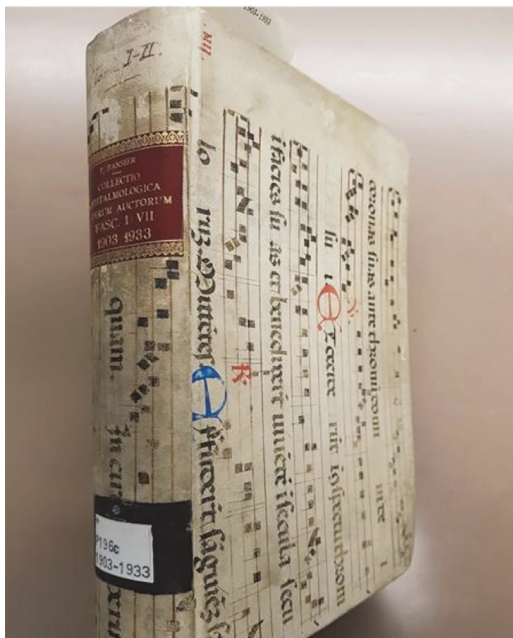


Figure 3. Wood's criticism of contemporary rebinding of works in "choral vellum" (vellum sheets inscribed with choral music) pertained to the dishonesty of booksellers who described such bindings as "contemporary" when in fact they had been rebound in modern times using historical materials. Wood himself chose the same type of cover for some of the journals he donated to McGill. Within the cover of this ophthalmological periodical, Wood noted: "Bound by Belmore of Rome in old (corale) [*sic*] velum [*sic*], Ca. 1450 A.D."

Photo credit: Greg Houston, McGill University Library.

As the global depression of the 1930s continued, its impact on the economy barely registered in the Wood-Francis correspondence apart from a few comments about a lack of finances. In November and December 1933, Francis had confused currencies in a quote sent to him by Wood, to which Wood responded: "I am forced by the falling U.S. dollar to draw your attention to the fact ... that item 347 ... is priced in Swiss francs and exceeds several fold the limit (1000 lire) I felt obliged to placed [*sic*] upon my proposed donation to the O.L. [Osler Library]."<sup>49</sup> He recounted his attempt to haggle with the

<sup>49</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, 26 November 1933, P155 box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1932–33), WWFF.

dealer, who impressed upon him the book's rarity and that, in good times, he would easily have been able to obtain double his final asking price. Wood concluded with a reference to his “impoverished state.”<sup>50</sup> Wood's financial—and political—concerns were a longstanding and common theme. In 1939, he regretted that he could not “afford to ignore your (Osler) offer to come to the now bankrupt Fund—never very large—I started years ago in the M.L. [Medical Library].”<sup>51</sup> He noted that he had “spent several thousand dollars on McGill Libraries in the past year and am feeling the financial effects of the squandering, wasteful, loud-mouthed, lunatic administration in the U.S.A.” He expressed a hope to rejuvenate the fund. In the same letter, he also complained mightily about “New Deal idiocies” that annulled tax credits on donations made to Canadian educational institutions.<sup>52</sup> Despite his claims to poverty over the years, he continued to give generously.

While many of the letters served simply to confirm library holdings, other negotiations were more protracted. Between 1934 and 1936, Wood and Francis attempted to secure a copy of Casserius's *De vocis auditusque organis historia anatomica* (1600–01) for the Osler Library. Their correspondence about the work was extensive and provides a glimpse of Wood's and Francis's differing attitudes to current events and the global economy. Notably, Wood's residence in Italy during this period inspired commentary upon tensions between Italy and Britain and, more generally, upon the purpose of the League of Nations. This exchange illustrates how global events—and personal attitudes thereof—were woven into broader dialogues about book collecting. On 25 November 1935, in a letter otherwise about

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, 18 March 1939, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1936–42), WWFF.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. See also the Medical Library archives and ledger notes from the Wood Fund, as well as Wood's correspondence about it (acc. 544, 38/65/F/48, MLA). This letter was in response to one that Francis had written to Wood on 3 March 1939, indicating that the Osler Library had paid for some ophthalmic journals destined for the Medical Library, because the fund that Wood had created did not cover them. Francis further noted that he would ask the Osler Library curators to approve this one-time expenditure, but that the Library's funds were not inexhaustible. He added that if the Curators disapproved of the Medical Library journals being paid for by the Osler, then Francis would have to bring those journals to the Osler, “where there is no more room!” W. W. Francis to Casey A. Wood, 3 March 1939, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1936–42), WWFF.

Casserius, Francis remarked to Wood: "Though I don't like your cynical Italianized view of the League, I hope our sanctions wont [*sic*] make Rome too uncomfortable for you." He poked at Wood's statements about American neutrality and his claim not to support either side: "But your Uncle Sam seems to be getting involved too. In spite of his aloofness, he usually comes up to the scratch after all. I remember Popsy Welch<sup>53</sup> remarking that the U.S. didn't join the Red Cross till 10 years after every other civilized nation."<sup>54</sup>

In another extended discussion that took place parallel to that about Casserius, Wood pushed Francis to accept a number of photostats of ophthalmic manuscripts that were unavailable for sale but which Wood thought should exist in the Osler Library. Repeatedly, Francis declined the offer. The discussion about photostatic copies also brought political frustrations to the fore. Following his explanation outlining his reluctance to take the photostats, Francis uttered a further exasperation with the political situation, demanding: "Can't you put the brakes on il Duce? Your hot-headed Italians and their abominable war fever aren't popular here. Damn politics, domestic and international."<sup>55</sup> To this, Wood responded at length in his next letter, arguably pursuing his self-appointed role as provocateur and defender of Mussolini: "As Americans absolutely neutral, we (having naturally close-at-hand impressions) regard with amused interest the antics of that cage of simians, the League of Nations, mouthpiece for the manufacture of diplomatic hot air by Britain + France; and we marvel at the extreme tenderness suddenly manifested by the former for the 'defenceless' Ethiopians. It reminds me of the tender regard for the 'neutrality of poor Belgium' so successfully utilized as propaganda prior to our entry into the trade war of 1914-18. Gott sü [*sic*] Dank there seems no chance of our again joining in any more European messes."<sup>56</sup> Wood's appreciation of Mussolini was an undercurrent in his correspondence and is confirmed by his description of the Italian

<sup>53</sup> William Henry Welch (1850-1934), first dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and founder of the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. Along with William Osler, William Stewart Halsted, and Howard Atwood Kelly, Welch was one of the four founding physicians of the Johns Hopkins Hospital.

<sup>54</sup> W. W. Francis to Casey A. Wood, 25 November 1935, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1934-35), WWFF.

<sup>55</sup> W. W. Francis to Casey A. Wood, 20 September 1935, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1934-35), WWFF.

<sup>56</sup> Casey A. Wood to W. W. Francis, 1 October 1935, P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1934-35), WWFF.

leader as a “Guiding Spirit,” at the beginning of a personal travel scrapbook from 1933 (see figure 4).<sup>57</sup>



Figure 4. Wood selected this photo of Mussolini as the first image in a scrapbook detailing his family’s tour through northern Italy in September and October of 1933. P145, box 359, folder 6, CAWC.

### **Beyond McGill: Wood’s Worldview as Shared in Letters to Friends**

Casey Wood’s presence in the Osler Library is reflected in the materials he donated to McGill’s Medical Library and the related correspondence, but his mark goes beyond those professional dealings.

<sup>57</sup> Scrapbook of an automobile trip around northern Italy taken by Casey Wood and his family with Mrs. Howard Wilson (Graham), unprocessed acquisition, P145, CAWC.

Wood's strong opinions were not limited to the building of his library; he included remarks that reveal his worldview. In correspondence with W. W. Francis, world affairs were usually a side note, but there were indications of mutual frustration as tensions rose near the end of the Interwar period. Wood was forthcoming about blending commentary on global political turmoil into his discussions of books. Though his strongest views came through with regard to developments leading up to the Second World War, this was not the first time that his correspondence revealed attitudes that are unacceptable in the twenty-first century. His comments were not singular instances of indiscretion; he repeated his opinions with such frequency that they cannot be dismissed. For one thing, they offer a perspective on Wood's attitudes toward the creators of items he gave to McGill. As the primary donor of non-European material to the Osler Library, his personal attitudes are relevant to scholars who may wish to consider his gifts in a deeper context.

Early in 1921, Wood's secretary sent to Maude Abbott, Burton Chance, and others a description of Wood's travels: "We saw every variety ... of West Indian life, savage, barbaric, and civilized."<sup>58</sup> About the dangers of the water buffalo, he wrote that they are "more dangerous to white people in their undomesticated state than lions or tigers. A 'carabao' unaccustomed to the odor or sight of a white man will charge and gore him to death in short order although he is practically harmless and will obey his coffee-colored owner (even a small boy in the family whom the buffalo knows) armed only with a switch."<sup>59</sup> He provided similar observations in his 1925 typescript, "On the banks of the Hydaspes: A summer in Kashmir." In that bound work, he variously described those he met as "expert liars," observed that "a Kashmiri rarely does think effectively," and described a river trader as having an "utterly depraved, indeed hopeless, social and moral status" (see figure 5).<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Cora Raymond to Burton Chance, 1 March 1922, P116, box 259, folder 6/8, Burton Chance Fonds, Osler Library Archives, McGill University (hereinafter "BCF").

<sup>59</sup> Casey A. Wood, "Dear Friendly Folks," Christmas 1920, pp. 1–3, acc. 515, P111, box 259, folder 1 (Letters about Dr. Casey Wood, 1920–21), Maude Abbott Collection, Osler Library Archives, McGill University.

<sup>60</sup> Casey A. Wood, "On the banks of the Hydaspes: A summer in Kashmir," 1925, pp. 7, 10, bound typescript, P145, box 359, folder 6, CAWC.

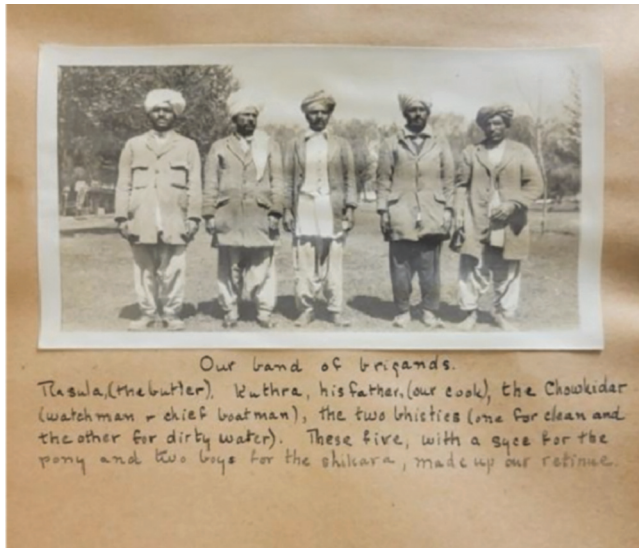


Figure 5: A page from Wood’s 1925 account “On the banks of the Hydaspes,” with a photo taken by his niece, Marjorie Fyfe. Though his title for this photo may not have raised eyebrows among his white contemporaries, his “othering” and lack of respect for those who helped on his voyage is clear to the twenty-first-century reader. P145, box 359, folder 6, CAWC.

More than a decade later, Wood felt compelled to write about the tensions brewing between the English and the Italians. In the early months of 1936, he wrote a four-page letter to friends outlining his experience of the situation in Italy and laying claim to the neutrality conferred by his American nationality. Behind the façade of objective observation, however, he accused the British of fearmongering and negative propaganda while defending Italian policies. He commenced by referencing the many inquiries that he and his wife had received regarding their well-being within Italy and their thoughts about the potential war. He cited his family’s extended residence in England, Italy, and the Near East as evidence that they were not “unreasonable partizans of any country or faction.”<sup>61</sup> The theme of impartiality was a recurring one, yet his own commentary undermines this claim. He began his summary by saying that life in Italy went on as usual,

<sup>61</sup> Casey A. Wood, undated letter to unspecified recipients, [1936], P155, box 140, folder 56 (Wood, Casey, 1936–42), WWFF.

other than a decline in the number of “needlessly alarmed” American and English tourists. He called the League of Nations “discredited” and argued that its sanctions “have created one sentiment in Italy; even individuals and associations formerly opposed to Fascism have enthusiastically combined with Mussolini to form a united, determined and patriotic league sworn to fight to a finish for what they deem their rights in Ethiopia and elsewhere.”<sup>62</sup>

He further defended his Italian hosts by noting that he had detected “very little active hostility shown to English-speaking visitors in Italy.” He moved to declare: “Reports about starvation; signs of defective nourishment, beggary and privation widely prevalent in Italy, are mostly English propaganda.”<sup>63</sup> He recounted to his friends a letter to the London *Observer* of 15 January 1936, refuting that paper’s account of the impact of sanctions upon the Italian people: “Now, I am an independent American (at present living in Italy but holding no brief for the Fascist Government) who has recently travelled all over the country and I have failed to find any such conditions as described by the writer. On the contrary, I venture to assert that there are at this moment proportionately more underfed, ragged, unwashed and unkempt men, women and children in England than in Italy, just as there are ten times as many beggars ... on the streets of London and Liverpool as can be found in Naples and Rome.”<sup>64</sup>

He later expressed views that were likely shared by some of his friends and rejected by others. He cited the “pro-Italian feeling in England” of prominent figures including Rudyard Kipling and George Bernard Shaw. He demanded: “Who, then, if not Italy, will clean up the indescribably filthy, mephitic Ethiopian towns and villages? Who will segregate the multitude of lepers? Who will treat the many cases of malaria and venereal disease? Who but Italy can be depended upon to act the part of a wise ruler and guardian of these degraded, backward, colored races?”<sup>65</sup> He went further in his staunch defence of Italy’s colonialism, underlining

the hope which barbarian, brutally governed, slave-ridden Ethiopia has of acquiring some measure of civilization from the successful and enlightened policy Italy has adopted in all her colonies ... The scheme of colonial reconstruction includes the military

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

control and policing of the country the reduction of poverty and beggary, the abolition of slavery and the provision of the telephone and telegraph stations, lighting, sewer and other sanitary plants, hospitals; clinics and nursing facilities. It embraces the building of bridges, making good roads, erecting houses, schools; churches and fine government offices. The Italian scheme of colonial expansion also comprises teaching native peasantry modern methods of agriculture; arboriculture and reforestation.<sup>66</sup>

Despite his claim to be a neutral American, he attacked what he identified as foreign propaganda: “There is no foundation whatsoever for the myth that one must talk in public with bated breath and use mysterious phraseology when speaking of the Duce and Fascist policies.” He drew to a close with a warning about Germany that suggested that he relished the idea of having foreseen an impending conflict: “Unless all signs fail the Germans will be fully rearmed next year [1937] when they will probably demand (*inter alia*) the return of their ‘mandated’ and other ‘occupied’ colonies. Then the fat will be on the fire!”<sup>67</sup>

Concurrent to Wood’s discussions with the Medical Library (which ceased in 1935) and Francis (which continued until Wood’s death in 1942) are letters that he sent to his friend and colleague in Philadelphia, Burton Chance. Less intensely focused on collection building, Wood’s letters to Chance had a more personal tone than those exchanged with Francis. Though he mentioned books, this correspondence was about Wood’s life and travels, and his various translation and book-related projects; they also provide a rich source of information about Wood’s personal opinions and worldview, which he often blended with his bibliophilia. In one letter, he remarked upon a decorated Persian manuscript he had purchased in Lucerne before turning to politics, again touting American neutrality:

I am glad we are preserving a strict neutrality in this affair altho’ I deeply sympathize with Mussolini’s efforts to find a place in the colonial sun. In the diplomatic poker game now being played by our late allies he holds the winning card and despite the wily use in her own interests of that factory of hot air—the League of Nations—England has been caught napping ... Thank Heaven we have sense enough to keep out of this European mess and

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.



I hope will in future steer clear of any foreign entanglement. Our experience and reward for pulling the Allied chestnuts out of the German fire in 1917–18 ought to satisfy us for several generations—the time it will take us to pay off the war debts our honorable allies solemnly promised to reimburse us, and then repudiated.<sup>68</sup>

Six months later, Wood continued to impress upon Burton Chance his interpretation of world events and yet again emphasized American neutrality: “Contrary to all predictions, the Italians are ‘wiping up’ Ethiopia and they MAY complete the job before the June rains ... One thing we, as neutral Americans, are interested in: are we going to keep out of the dirty mess? or will we be foolish enough to take part in the oncoming conflict? Unless all signs fail, there will be another debacle sometime in 1937.”<sup>69</sup>

Wood’s references to the turmoil in Europe, presented through the lens of a purportedly neutral American, continued as war broke out. In 1941, Wood wrote to Chance about librarian friends from London who were guarding collections elsewhere in Great Britain for the duration of the war. He remarked: “What a gorgeous employment are two very important members of the dominant white races engaged in! If they keep it up long enough and succeed in destroying our modern civilization, the browns and yellows, will be given a chance to rule the world; and the fear expressed by the former Emperor of Germany of a ‘yellow peril’ may have some foundation.”<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

In his seminal biography of William Osler, which came out in 1925, Harvey Cushing referred to Wood as “an ophthalmologist who had been Osler’s first clinical clerk in Montreal and was introduced to bibliomania by him during a transatlantic crossing, [who] spent his retirement mailing to the Osler Library gifts of books and manuscripts on Hindu and Arabic medicine and ophthalmology collected from

---

<sup>68</sup> Casey A. Wood to Burton Chance, 14 September 1935, P116, box 259, folder 8/8, BCF.

<sup>69</sup> Casey A. Wood to Burton Chance, 5 March 1936, P116, box 259, folder 8/8, BCF.

<sup>70</sup> Casey A. Wood to Burton Chance, 19 May 1941, P116, box 259, folder 8/8, BCF.

the far corners of the world.”<sup>71</sup> Casey Wood did have a palpable impact on the Osler Library of the History of Medicine, which W. W. Francis brought to fruition in the decade after Osler’s death. Initially, Wood’s involvement with the Osler Library was channelled through engaging correspondence with his “brother-in-trouble,” W. W. Francis. In time, however, as a significant proportion of his gifts to McGill’s Medical Library were posthumously transferred to the Osler Library of the History of Medicine, his place within the library that bears his mentor’s name was solidified. As is evident in the many donated books and artifacts, as well as in the archival record, Casey Wood truly achieved an enduring presence in the Osler Library, and it is in the archives of that library that one can get to know Casey Wood, the man, beyond the books.

## Biography

Mary Hague-Yearl directs the Osler Library of the History of Medicine and is an Associate Member of McGill’s Department of Social Studies of Medicine. She completed graduate studies in the history of medicine before turning to archives and special collections librarianship. In the past, she studied the interplay between medicine and religion in the pre-modern period, and more recently she has given her attention to the representation (or lack thereof) of marginalized groups in historical medical texts.

Copyright © 2022 Mary Hague-Yearl. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of a *Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License*.

<https://doi.org/10.33137/pbsc.v59i1.36663>

---

<sup>71</sup> Michael Bliss, *William Osler: A Life in Medicine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 489.