

In his own words: Selections from the correspondence files of Casey A. Wood

Dans ses propres mots : sélections des dossiers de correspondance de Casey A. Wood

Lauren Williams

Volume 59, 2022

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

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1102214ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/pbsc.v59i1.37682>

[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

Williams, L. (2022). In his own words: Selections from the correspondence files
of Casey A. Wood. *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada / Cahiers de la
Société bibliographique du Canada*, 59, 177–199.

<https://doi.org/10.33137/pbsc.v59i1.37682>

Résumé de l'article

Dans le cadre d'un numéro thématique imprimé des Cahiers de la Société
bibliographique du Canada consacré à la vie et l'œuvre du docteur Casey A.
Wood, cet article présente une sélection de lettres, rédigées par Wood,
provenant d'une correspondance abondante préservée dans les collections
d'archives de la Bibliothèque de McGill à Montréal. Les lettres sélectionnées
expriment la philosophie de Wood concernant l'idéale bibliothèque de
recherche en histoire naturelle – son approche quant au développement des
collections, les relations avec les donateurs, et le commerce des livres –, ainsi
que sa capacité de prédire ce qui intéresserait les futurs chercheurs et
chercheuses. Ces lettres, retranscrites et annotées par l'auteure, illustrent le rôle
intégral de Wood dans le développement de la Bibliothèque d'ornithologie
Emma Shearer Wood (ESW) et la Bibliothèque de zoologie Blacker, et offrent
un aperçu de l'esprit et de la méthodologie d'un collectionneur vorace de
livres.

© Lauren Williams, 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/>

érudit

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/>

In his own words: Selections from the correspondence files of
Casey A. Wood

Lauren Williams

Abstract

As part of a themed print issue of the *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* dedicated to the life and work of Dr. Casey A. Wood, this article offers a selection of letters, written by Wood, from the ample correspondence preserved in his archival collections at the McGill Library in Montreal. The letters selected for this article express Wood's philosophy of the ideal natural history research library; his approach to collection development, donor relations, and the book trade; and his ability to predict what future researchers would find valuable. Transcribed and annotated by the author, these letters illustrate the integral role Wood played in the development of the Emma Shearer Wood Library (ESW) of Ornithology and the Blacker Library of Zoology, and provide a glimpse into the mind and method of a voracious book collector.

Résumé

Dans le cadre d'un numéro thématique imprimé des *Cahiers de la Société bibliographique du Canada* consacré à la vie et l'œuvre du docteur Casey A. Wood, cet article présente une sélection de lettres, rédigées par Wood, provenant d'une correspondance abondante préservée dans les collections d'archives de la Bibliothèque de McGill à Montréal. Les lettres sélectionnées expriment la philosophie de Wood concernant l'idéale bibliothèque de recherche en histoire naturelle — son approche quant au développement des collections, les relations avec les donateurs, et le commerce des livres —, ainsi que sa capacité de prédire ce qui intéresserait les futurs chercheurs et chercheuses. Ces lettres, retranscrites et annotées par l'autrice, illustrent le rôle intégral de Wood dans le développement de la Bibliothèque d'ornithologie Emma Shearer Wood (ESW) et la

Bibliothèque de zoologie Blacker, et offrent un aperçu de l'esprit et de la méthodologie d'un collectionneur vorace de livres.

One of my first projects, after taking over the position of Librarian for the Blacker Wood Natural History Collection in July 2018, was to supervise a McGill School of Information Studies student, Sarah Adams, as she organized the Casey A. Wood archival collection.¹ This daunting task involved combing through dozens of bankers' boxes full of documents generated by Wood in his ornithology and book collecting-related second career, including drafts of his publications, research notes, photographs, and travel journals. But above all, these boxes contained correspondence—hundreds upon hundreds of letters, sent to colleagues, family members, book dealers, and the agents Wood employed to source books for him the world over. Each time Sarah thought she had finally reached the end of Wood's correspondence, another box would turn up—stashed away in a closet, buried in a filing cabinet, piled on a shelf. Wood did not write (or even type, on his trusty Corona typewriter) this mountain of correspondence himself—he employed at least one secretary at a time, to whom he would often dictate the numerous letters he sent each day. As a result, we are left with an extensive collection of material from which to glean an understanding of Wood's life and work. The authors of the articles in this journal issue are indebted to Sarah Adams, as her organizational feat made the research for this project possible. And while many of the articles in this issue include quotations from Wood's correspondence, what is offered here is a chance for readers to become acquainted with Wood through his own words.

An attempt to pare thousands of letters down to a few representative examples must necessarily exclude certain important aspects of Wood's personality and work. However, I have attempted to provide selections² that embody his philosophy of the ideal natural history

¹ Finding aid available for online consultation at <https://archivalcollections.library.mcgill.ca/index.php/casey-a-wood-collection-2>.

² All correspondence selections were transcribed by the author. Original punctuation, spelling, and page layout have been preserved where possible. Square brackets indicate words that were unclear in Wood's handwriting and have been supplied by the author. Ellipses between square brackets indicate extraneous handwriting and notes that exist on the original letters but were not reproduced in the transcriptions for this article.

research library, along with his approach to collection development, donor relations, the book trade, and predicting what future researchers would find valuable.

Many of the special collections held at institutional libraries throughout North America were built upon an initial donation of the library of a private collector. Brief descriptions of the collectors or history of the collections can often be found on the websites of these institutions (see, for example, the Dumbarton Oaks Library or the Field Museum of Natural History);³ however, we are not often allowed a glimpse into the process, methods, and collecting rationale of these private collectors. Moreover, many private collections amassed during the early 20th century were collected for the private use of the collectors themselves, and were only donated to an institution after the collector's death (see, for example, the Hill Memorial Library at Louisiana State University).⁴ Wood's collecting efforts, by contrast, were for the express purpose of building an institutional collection for public use. At a time before library collection development policies were fully developed and codified,⁵ and when Wood would likely not have been familiar with general library or collection development discourse, the letters below offer the reader a window into the process and practice of private book collecting for public use in the early 20th century. This glimpse, in turn, may provide a better understanding of other private collectors and collections built during this period.

Wood's collecting efforts not only built a world-class natural history library, but his enthusiasm for collecting and documentation also led to the creation of his annotated bibliography, *An introduction to the literature of vertebrate zoology* (1931),⁶ which lists all of the

³ The history of the Dumbarton Oaks Library can be found here: <https://www.doaks.org/about/history>. The history of the library collections at the Field Museum of Natural History can be found here: <https://www.fieldmuseum.org/science/research/area/libraryarchives/history-library>.

⁴ The history of the E. A. McIlhenny Natural History Collection can be found here: <https://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/cc/mcilhenny>.

⁵ In a 2004 article titled "Background essay on collection development, evaluation, and management for public libraries," *Current Studies in Librarianship*, vol. 28: 1–2 (2008), pp.19–37, Anh Huynh finds that the earliest comprehensive works on book selection in the US were introduced in the 1930s—well after Wood began building his collection.

⁶ Casey A. Wood, *An introduction to the literature of vertebrate zoology: based chiefly on the titles in the Blacker Library of Zoology, the Emma Shearer Wood Library of Ornithology, the Bibliotheca Osleriana and other libraries of McGill University*,

works he acquired for the Blacker Library of Zoology, the Emma Shearer Wood Library of Ornithology, and the Osler Library of the History of Medicine. While Wood admits, in the preface to the *Introduction*, that the work is “necessarily an incomplete presentation of the subject,” he states that it is intended “to assist students of vertebrate zoology and its bibliography, as well as University and other librarians, in securing a fair knowledge of an important branch of natural science.” However incomplete, Wood’s bibliography remains a standard reference source in the field of natural history to this day for book dealers, collectors, librarians, and scholars, and its longevity demonstrates the impact of Wood’s collecting efforts beyond his contribution to the McGill libraries.

Copies sent to Dr. Lomer⁷ and Mr. Blacker⁸

Apr. 6. 27. Sent Swarth.

Research Libraries in the study of Ornithology⁹

By Casey A. Wood

Nobody more than the present writer appreciates the primary importance of field work for the man or woman who would gain an accurate knowledge of zoology. [...] the study of animals in their native haunts is, par excellence, the most interesting and most accurate method of arriving at the biological relations of any bird or beast. No one, however well-informed in a literary sense, can give an account of fauna life [...] unless he has had first hand contact with his subject. The true student of zoology must fare forth for whatever distant lands

Montreal. McGill University Publications, Series 11 (zoology), no. 24 (London: Oxford University Press, 1931).

⁷ Dr. Gerhart Lomer (1882–1970) was University Librarian at McGill from 1920 to 1947. He also established the graduate-level library school at McGill.

⁸ Robert Roe Blacker (1845–1931) was a Canadian who built his fortune in the Michigan lumber industry. A close friend of Wood’s, Blacker was persuaded by Wood to donate the funds for the founding of the Blacker Library of Zoology.

⁹ While sent as a letter, this piece is more of an essay outlining Wood’s arguments for the importance of research libraries in the study of ornithology and zoology. It exists in handwritten draft form in the Wood correspondence files, but the finished product is lost to history. Nowhere else does Wood so clearly express the rationale and strategy behind building the Emma Shearer Wood (ESW) and Blacker libraries.

call him and braving the discomforts of weather and climate, and the dangers of jungle, mountain and sea, so that he may for himself estimate the character of any particular animal whose acquaintance he may make—how he is born and how he lives and dies. While all this is in every sense true, it is equally important that he knows what other observers and writers interested in the same, or similar subjects, have seen and recorded.

The field ornithologist who has been making a study of Accipitres, for example, or of any genus or species of that order, should acquaint himself with the literature of the subject especially if he proposes to record—as he should—his own observations on any of the birds of prey—and this is, of course, true in any investigation of any of the avifauna.

Our colleague, W. Harry Swarth,¹⁰ has asked for a short account of the collection of works in McGill University on ornithology as well as a brief note about the manner in which it has been joined to a still larger gathering of material on zoology both intended for student and research purposes.

As the writer is unable to present this statement in person he has asked Mr Swarth to read it at the Club in case he finds it of any practical value.

The special libraries referred to are the Blacker Library of Vertebrate Zoology and the Emma Shearer Wood Library of Ornithology in the selection of which the present writer has had, in conjunction with the university librarian, Dr. Gerhard Lomer, something to do during the past five years. It is largely due to the munificence of the late R.R. Blacker and Mrs. Blacker of Pasadena that this student and research library has grown until it now ranks [...] with the collections on vertebrate zoology attached to the larger American and British universities. This result has come about not at all because of an ambition to possess more books and manuscripts on the subject of natural history than any other teaching body, but because of the sympathetic cooperation of Dr. Lomer, who has held of the opinion that there should be located at somewhat regular intervals over the North American continent such collections of material for study and original research as would encourage not only the present and future student body to investigate the wonders of natural life but to afford

¹⁰ Harry Schelwald Swarth (1878–1935) was an American ornithologist who worked at the Field Museum, at UC Berkeley, and at the California Academy of Sciences.

an opportunity for specialists to make themselves familiar with any branch or subject in vertebrate zoology.

[...] It may at the outset be said that the McGill libraries are intended to supply the present and future demand for zoological information to Eastern Canada and the neighboring states from the latter of which, by the way, the university draws a respectable portion of her student body.

At the first blush, looking up the literature of accomplishments in ornithology is, as those who have tried it, not the simple matter it might at first seem. It is true that the main facts in any given case can usually be established by reference to such textbooks, dictionaries and monographs as are generally to be found in many public libraries having a section devoted to natural history, but the student who is not content to have his facts second hand will often be obliged to seek them at their original sources, frequently in periodical literature, in journals and magazines devoted not only to ornithology in particular but to birdlore as a part of zoology or biology. The student should have access, therefore, not only to a rather complete collection of ornithological items but to one composed of works on vertebrate zoology.

What equipment, then, should an ornithological library (as part of a larger zoological collection) present to the information of the university student interested in ornithology, of the special student of that subject and of the highly specialized research worker?

This question is largely answered by an examination of the authorities used by the editor or compiler of any large work on avian life—especially of a system dealing with the birds of the world. For this purpose let us take that monumental work Ridgway's 'Birds of North & Middle America.'¹¹ If such a treatise be consulted it will be noticed the large part played, during the past century or since the earliest ornithological journal (Brehm's *Ornis*, 1824)¹² was first issued, by bird and other animal journals and magazines.

Especially this is true of such purely ornithological magazines as the *Auk*, *Ibis*, *Condor*, *Emu*, *Journal für Ornithologie*, *Revue Française*

¹¹ Robert Ridgway and Herbert Friedmann, *The birds of North and Middle America; a descriptive catalogue [...]* (Washington, D.C.: Govt. Print. Off., 1911–1950).

¹² Christian Ludwig Brehm (1787–1864) was a pastor in Renthendorf, Germany who undertook an intense study of the local birdlife. He collected over 15,000 bird skins to study the morphology and behaviour of various species and published his findings in his journal: *Ornis oder das Neueste und Wichtigste der Vogelkunde*, printed in Jena (1824–27).

d'Ornithologie, Tori,¹³ and other organs of prominent ornithological societies.

The ideal reference library should, therefore, possess complete sets of every journal or magazine in every language that deal solely or largely with serious contributions to our knowledge of zoology. The present writer makes this statement with some diffidence, being well aware of the time, energy, devotion to the cause, and expenditure of money involved in such an enterprise; but, there seems no proper evasion of the issue. As every competent librarian knows, the acquisition of complete sets of journals is a thorn in the flesh not lightly to be borne. It may take years of waiting with a hawk-like eye on lists and catalogs of dealers before the lacking desiderata in the journal department has been filled. And when filled how difficult the task of continuations? In spite of these many trials and difficulties the two McGill libraries have amassed a fairly complete collection of zoological periodicals and hope steadily to add to that number and to fill vacancies. It is fortunate, too, that they are strong in American journals.

Second in value for research purposes are reports of scientific excursions, whether these be travels undertaken and described by private individuals or more elaborate expeditions and surveys under governmental or institutional control. The accounts of such enterprises are usually of great importance and should always form part of a competent research library.

Monographs on special subjects should, as a rule, find a place in a student collection although these works vary much in educational value.

Treatises and textbooks are often valuable for study and the presentation of the facts and connections of the science under discussion. Strange to say, however, few of them have added much original matter or knowledge of zoology.

Catalogs, especially the annotated volumes, indices, checklists, hand lists, dictionaries, synopses, and unusual retrospects are of considerable value and should be carefully collected.

Original drawings and paintings of artist-illustrators reproduced as colored plates or not—often have a decided research value and in

¹³ A journal published by the Ornithological Society of Japan (1912–present); in 1986, it was renamed the *Japanese Journal of Ornithology*.

spite of their greatest and restricted vogue, ought not be neglected. (Here Fiji & Ceylon)¹⁴

Collections of reprints and separates dealing with particular subjects, particularly if bound and properly card-indexed and cross-referenced may be of great value to the student and research worker.

Finally under the caption library luxuries we may place original manuscripts by well-known writers published and unpublished; autograph letters treating scientific questions; books and manuscripts in non-European languages, such as Japanese, Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese, etc. and volumes of personal and sentimental value.

One must not forget here the assistance given the visual memory in the identification of species by colored atlases, albums, supplements and similar collections. They cost a lot of money but should be added to the library when possible.

The present writer is mostly concerned in the prospects of the serious student of zoology but the popular aspects of the subject must not be forgotten in a well-equipped library on Natural History. The public—including those whose attention has not in early life been called to the delights and recreations that reside in a study of American flora and fauna—should be supplied directly and indirectly from our library storehouses of information. Popular magazines and treatises, illustrated pamphlets, colored cards, and other means of preaching the gospel of the outdoor life should be liberally supplied as loan collections to outlying towns as requested. Such expedients will not only awaken an interest in natural history, but, occasionally, inspire some young man or woman who will develop into a naturalist of sorts.¹⁵ The large zoological library owes a continued duty to students

¹⁴ Not one to limit his collecting to books already published, Wood also commissioned several artists, notably William J. Belcher (1883–1949) in Fiji and George M. Henry (b.1891) in Ceylon, to paint the not unknown, but at that time virtually unillustrated, birds of those regions. Belcher's original paintings are held in the Blacker Wood Collection at the McGill Library (elf QL694 F5 B45) and were later published in William J. Belcher and R. B. Sibson, *Birds of Fiji in colour* (Auckland: Collins, 1972). Henry's original paintings are also held in the Blacker Wood Collection (folio ORH60 W13pl Wh) and published in G. M. Henry and W. E. Wait, *Coloured plates of the birds of Ceylon* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1927–1935).

¹⁵ While Wood embodied some of the abhorrent politics of his time (see the articles by C. Lyons and M. Hague-Yearl in this issue), his enthusiastic acceptance of women in science is noteworthy, especially as women, with few exceptions,

of all degrees of scientific attainment and it is certainly derelict when it fails to accommodate any of them.¹⁶

Oct. 11, 1924.

Dear Dr. Richmond:—¹⁷

Last week I had a letter from Dr. Ridgway¹⁸ in which he told me that he was sending to McGill a number of MSS., among them a series of communications from Prof. Baird,¹⁹ all of which ought to be extremely useful to students of the future. I often wonder if I have been able to convey to you (and to others) my peculiar notions about the value of letters, notebooks, Ms. of books already published as desirable additions to a research library.²⁰ As a rule they do not contain any contributions to science or research of any moment. Why, then, try to save them from oblivion and the janitor's furnace? Well, I believe that a century hence these documents will help to create a "literary atmosphere" without which it will not be possible to realize—always a difficult and rarely acquired result—the precise conditions under which our school of zoologists have lived and done their work. We cannot, for example, know Wilson and Audubon and Prince Bonaparte as they were as men and scientists without such literary adnexa as tgeir [sic] private papers. It is in them, if ever, they throw off the mask which social and other conditions oblige us to wear. So, I am gathering them in, not to satisfy an idle curiosity and with the collector's zeal but really in the belief that they will, at some future date, be valuable aids to the earnest student. And that's that.

would not become active participants in the American Ornithological Union until the 1950s.

¹⁶ Original manuscript letter held in the *Naturalist Correspondence Collection* (organized alphabetically, under "Wood," uncatalogued). Blacker Wood Natural History Collection, McGill Library, Montreal.

¹⁷ Dr. Charles Wallace Richmond (1868–1932) was an American ornithologist. He became the associate curator of birds for the United States National Museum in 1894.

¹⁸ Robert Ridgway (1850–1929) was an American ornithologist.

¹⁹ Likely Spencer Fullerton Baird (1823–1887), an American ornithologist, ichthyologist, herpetologist, and curator at the Smithsonian Institution.

²⁰ Wood spent considerable time fostering relationships with active ornithologists and other naturalists in order to acquire their personal and professional archival papers for the ESW and Blacker Libraries.

I have again written to the three men in Chicago and Urbana who were parties to the agreement of last spring, again urging them to continue their good offices in Ridgway's favor. As far as I can see it ought to be consummated before the snow flies. It certainly is a scandal that a man who has done so much for science should be allowed to suffer the pangs of poverty—or something akin to it—in his old age merely because he was not born with the instincts of an accumulator, and because we do not act on Disreali's dictum, "Governments [sic] should reward merit."

[...]

[Casey A. Wood]²¹

May 24th, 1924.

Dear Dr. Richmond:—

On this great holiday—first called the Queen's Birthday, for about 60 years, then dubbed Empire Day for ten more, and now known officially as Victoria Day—leading one to exclaim "aint our British cousins versatile?"—I am answering your very kind and welcome letters. *** [...] I did my part in the matter of the Cory correspondence,²² but have not heard from Mrs. Cory since I went out to her house in Chicago and talked the matter over with her and her daughter (in-law). The latter seemed to have much to say in the disposal of poor C.'s effects. Both referred the ultimate decision as to when and on what terms I might have the letters (scientific only) and some ornith. MSS. to the absent son. I left my address with them but have not since heard anything. I shall write Mrs. Cory again today. I have a real desire not only to have the correspondence, but to help a family in—so far as I can learn—need of help but to place one of the records of a science in a depository where it will be catalogued and made available for students in the future. A sad commentary on this phase of life is that if I seem to be very eager to acquire the

²¹ Original manuscript letter held in the *Naturalist Correspondence Collection* (organized alphabetically, under "Wood," uncatalogued). Blacker Wood Natural History Collection, McGill Library, Montreal.

²² Charles B. Cory (1857–1921) was an American ornithologist and founding member of the American Ornithologists' Union. Wood was working to acquire Cory's personal papers to add to the ESW Library; he was unsuccessful.

material the Corys will—or the son probably will—begin to scent hidden treasure in his Fathers boxes and so delay the negotiations or place such an exalted price on them that I cannot buy. As a matter of fact, I don't care where they find a resting place so long as they are made accessible and are deposited in a fire-proof sanctuary. I would be glad to have them in McGill, of course, but if the Smithsonian or the Field Museum could lay hands on them and give Mrs. Cory more than I can offer I would say “vadre con Dios,” or whatever the proper Castellian orthography may be. **
[...]

[Casey A. Wood]²³

Hotel Belmont
New York City
Oct. 23, 1920

To

Messrs. T. Howard Stewart
and
Walter Stewart
W. C. MacDonald Registered.
Montreal, Canada.

Dear Howard and Walter Stewart:—²⁴

While in Montreal recently I had intended to call on both of you but owing to my short stay there was unable to manage it.

My purpose in writing is to lay before you a project that I think will greatly interest you.

I have made a study of and have contributed—probably much more than I ought to have done—to libraries in Canadian and American universities because I regard books (and plenty of them)

²³ Original typescript letter held in the *Naturalist Correspondence Collection* (organized alphabetically, under “Wood,” uncatalogued). Blacker Wood Natural History Collection, McGill Library, Montreal.

²⁴ Howard and Walter Stewart co-owned the Montreal-based “Macdonald Tobacco Company” from 1917 to the 1960s. The company’s original owner, W.C. Macdonald (1831–1917), donated significant funds to McGill University, where four buildings were named after him.

as essential to a liberal education and because I saw no better or more effective method of doing things worthwhile than giving my time, energies and money to these valuable agents for the diffusion of knowledge.²⁵

It may not be known to you that many subjects in the McGill general library (less so perhaps in the medical library) are woefully defective as sources of information for other students, research scholars or those of the public having access to them. Realizing this fact I presented some years ago a special library to the medical faculty and (more recently) a much needed series on birds. I also induced a friend to do the same for zoology, as set forth in the enclosed clippings from the Montreal Gazette.²⁶ I believe I shall also succeed in persuading two more Canadian-Americans to donate other badly needed special collections; indeed I am quite positive that the whole range of Natural History—including the three libraries mentioned as well as such subjects as botany, astronomy, geology, electricity, etc.—can be covered in this way, so that in the course of the next year or two, McGill will be the fortunate possessor of important special libraries on the whole range of the natural sciences, and will then be in respect of these “literary tools of the trade” as fully equipped as any university in the United States. There will be, I think from a rather careful survey of the feeling towards “giving to Canada” by former residents of this country, comparatively little difficulty in raising money here for buying and endowing these special libraries but the housing of them presents a serious problem which unless solved may wreck the whole scheme; for how can a Canadian-American be approached on the subject when there is no proper shelving on which to place the books asked for? Nobody except a Redpath is likely to provide money for remodeling and adding the additional and badly needed stock-space in the Peter Redpath library; and I for one would not care to solicit such a subscription.²⁷

²⁵ Only a couple of weeks after founding the Emma Shearer Wood Library of Ornithology (on 1 October 1920), which included a gift of many thousands of books along with a significant endowment for future acquisitions, Wood was already working to solicit donations for future library projects from wealthy Montrealers in his social circle.

²⁶ The Montreal Gazette, still in existence today, is the only English-language daily newspaper published in Montreal. Wood is referring to Robert Blacker (see footnote 4).

²⁷ John Redpath (1796–1869) emigrated from Scotland to Montreal in 1816. He owned a construction company that helped build the Lachine Canal, the Notre-

I laid this difficulty before Sir Arthur Currie²⁸—a man of judgment and action, that—and at a recent Committee meeting it was decided to erect, provided funds were forthcoming, an independent Library of the Natural Sciences; with modern reading rooms, offices, and stock-space sufficient to provide for adequate expansion (say 400,000 volumes or more) for the next 100 years. (The recent renaissance of Montreal and McGill justifies this view, don't you think?)

I am enclosing a copy of the (tentative) plans just drawn by the university architect for such a building which, without further ado, I propose to you that you erect, endow and name, in memory of your mother, the:—

MARIANNE HOWARD STEWART LIBRARY FOR
SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH.²⁹

I cannot think of any philanthropy, or any form of giving that will more honorably and effectually preserve the memory of a good woman—one who “stood by the ship in all weathers”—than such a donation. It will be a distinct building, with its own separate staff, reading rooms, research rooms, indexes, stocks, etc., equipped for a definite purpose, just like similar libraries at Columbia University, the University of California and a dozen other institutions, and should bear your mother's name so that it will readily be distinguished from other university foundations.

I suggest your mother's name because in the old days I learned to know and respect her, and I believe such a memorial would be eminently fitting, and would be the one I would choose were I in your place.

Although the cost of such a building cannot be exactly determined at the present writing yet, probably \$400,000 for the building, \$50,000 for equipment, and \$50,000 for endowment (I am enclosing,

Dame Basilica, and a number of the earliest buildings at McGill University. He also founded the first sugar refinery in Canada.

²⁸ Sir Arthur Currie (1875–1933) was a decorated General during WWI, and became Principal and Vice Chancellor of McGill University in 1920.

²⁹ Evidently, Wood's proposal was unsuccessful, as no library by this name exists on McGill's campus. There is a Macdonald-Stewart Library Building, but it was built with funds donated by the elder W.C. Macdonald (see footnote 20). Nevertheless, this letter demonstrates the extent to which Wood was involved in fundraising for the university, far beyond his role in building the ESW and Blacker Libraries. The archival collection at McGill containing his personal papers includes dozens of similar letters addressed to other prominent Montrealers.

however, the architect's memorandum in which the first two of these estimates are further discussed.) (Yearly upkeep, salaries, addition to stock-space, and other constant expenses) will cover it.

If you decide to fall in with this plan Sir Arthur Currie or the general librarian (Dr. Lomer) will of course be glad to give you further details and I am sure the university will gladly fall in with any suggestions you make. The money will not be required in a lump sum; and the endowment not until the building is finished.

In any event this proposal is entirely entre-nous; nobody but you knows that I have written this letter and I need not add that I believe the offer ought to come entirely, solely and directly from you. I do not wish to be known in the affair; I am merely pointing out badly needed remedy for an acute defect in University teaching that is well understood and fully appreciated by all McGill officials.

Hoping you will give it your earnest and favorable consideration,

I remain,

Very sincerely yours,

Casey A. Wood³⁰

Feb 14, 1920.

Dear Dr. Lomer:

In the course of time I shall probably think of all the things I wish to discuss with you—but this one I regard as of great importance: in new binding (especially of periodicals) I would like volumes bound with their original covers and advertisements, for these, in the time to come, will be as interesting and as valuable—if not more so—than the contents.³¹ Of course you know this plan is adopted and has been followed by a number of large libraries, and perhaps the same policy is yours, but I write to emphasize it now.

³⁰ Original typescript letter held in McGill University Archives RG40: "Annual Files, 1920; Wood, Casey A., Colonel." Container 0016. McGill University Library, Montreal.

³¹ Though Wood had no formal bibliographic training, he was remarkably adept at predicting the paratextual elements of his collection that would be of interest to future researchers.

I am making here a local collection of coast avian literature and completing the styles of the “Condor;”³² all of which I will bring with me for the library in Montreal in the autumn. Did the first 16 vols and one 10-year index of the “Condor” arrive (from Gerhard):³³

C.A.W.³⁴

Feb 24, 1924.

My dear Craddock:—³⁵

You remember, perhaps, how I swore to you that I would never buy another book on Falconry or an allied work on the murder of birds for sport (?), but I find that, like the fair one in Don Juan, I swore “I would never consent—and consented” mostly because I believe the purchase of the attached—Latham’s two books, bound in one, 1658; Falconry etc. and his New and Second Book of Falconry, with some of the plates coloured: Six guineas, Ellis, 29, New Bond St., W.1, will gratify our librarian’s bibliographic soul.³⁶ And I assure you he deserves something at my hands, because in trying to order books and keep records of them while chasing all over the globe I have made myself an unutterable nuisance to him and his staff, all of which he (and they) have born with a Christian resignation that

³² *The Condor* (now titled *Ornithological Applications*) is a scientific journal published by the American Ornithological Society, first issued in 1899.

³³ Wood was fervently devoted to the collection of full journal runs. There are hundreds of letters in his archive addressed to book dealers, collectors, and ornithologists, in which he inquires after missing journal issues, working tirelessly to complete each series in the ESW and Blacker Libraries.

³⁴ Original typescript letter held in McGill University Archives RG40: “Annual Files, 1920; Wood, Casey A., Colonel.” Container 0016. McGill University Library, Montreal.

³⁵ William John Henry Craddock (1870–1941) was an antiquarian book dealer based in London, where he worked for the firm of Wheldon & Wesley. Craddock was instrumental in acquiring many highlights of the Blacker Wood collection, including the 938 animal portraits in the Taylor White Collection (see the article by V. Dickenson in this issue).

³⁶ Wood’s correspondence with book dealers often takes on this tone of the reluctant collector who shouldn’t spend more money, but simply can’t help himself. He also often blames his purchases on others.

will surely gain them some sort of martyr's crown.³⁷ I would like to contribute a little gilding for the crown, so that if Ellis has disposed of the copy perhaps you could get another for us elsewhere, as good and as cheap. Always we would prefer to have this and all other items from W. And W.'s stock! Please drop Dr. Lomer and me a card on this Subject. ***By the same mail will you report on the Following:-

Brookes' Natural History, 2 vols. Vol. I. Quadrupeds, London, 1763, pp. 386.

Vol II, A Compleat System of Ornithology Etc., pp. 329, 1774.

Many colored ill. in both volumes.

Although these properly belong to Blacker,³⁸ I will take them, meantime, on my own account, and you may hold them [sic] until I arrive. ***This last sentence leads me to say that if the Americans and Canadians leave a decent cabin for the accommodation of myself, wife and John III,³⁹ we three propose to invade your shores about the first week in June—choosing that date to avoid the nightingale—when we will be able, unless you make your office part of the British Empire Exhibition,⁴⁰ to talk books and business. If the crowds permit we hope to remain in London until Autumn. However you will hear from me more definitely before that date. I am expecting to have a report on the “want list” from your large catalogue. Pls. let me

³⁷ In this passage, Wood is not exaggerating. The correspondence files of Dr. Gerhard Lomer, preserved in the McGill University Archives, contain hundreds of letters from Wood received each year, with multiple letters often sent on the same day. Each letter demands that certain tasks be performed, from ordering books, to compiling account statements, to sending Wood lists of books held in the ESW and Blacker Libraries.

³⁸ The collecting purview of the Blacker Library consisted of works specifically relating to zoology, and the ESW Library was dedicated to collecting works on ornithology. The two libraries were merged, creating the Blacker-Wood Library of Ornithology and Zoology, in 1937.

³⁹ John III was a Yellow-headed Amazon Parrot who was Wood's pet from 1914–1930. He travelled the world with Wood and his wife, Emma, and his portrait was featured on the first bookplate for the ESW Library. The Woods were in Europe in 1929 when a major international epidemic of parrot fever (psittacosis) broke out. Unable to bring John III back to the country with them, or even travel with him from Italy to England, they were forced to have him put to sleep in May 1930.

⁴⁰ The British Empire Exhibition was a colonial exhibition held at Wembley Park, England, from 23 April 1924 to 31 October 1925.

have it at your earliest convenience. ***With best regards to Kirke Swann,⁴¹ Ever yours,

Casey A. Wood⁴²

Mar 2, 1937

Dear Dr. Lomer:

In my opinion and observation less than one-tenth of one percent of the (estimated) 45,000 titles of books printed in the 15th century is of any use to a research student of Natural History, although any or all of them have a varying value in a study of the format, printing, type, binding, printers marks, presses etc etc of these incunabula—and may even interest the earnest searcher after zoological truth. For these reasons and because McGill is—in my opinion also, deplorably week [sic] in both medieval MSS. and 15th cent. printed books—I indulged myself during the depression—in buying some 30 of the latter which I have decided (to employ a euphemism and to cover their inclusion under my name in Miss Stillwell's 2nd survey)⁴³ to deposit as a permanent loan in the Wood library of Ornithology. Hence each book bears this inscription:

One of 29 incunabula. On permanent loan to the Wood Library of Ornithology, McGill University. These titles to be indexed and card cataloged as part of that collection.

A few of these incunables are complete, rare and valuable; others are complete and not very costly while still others would be useful if they were complete. When I first bought them I had a bright idea of

⁴¹ Harry Kirke Swann (1871–1926) was an English ornithologist and author, and at the time of this letter, was also the proprietor of the Wheldon & Wesley Ltd. publishing and bookselling firm.

⁴² Original typescript letter held in McGill University Archives RG40: "Annual Files, 1924; Wood, Casey A., Colonel." Container 0016. McGill University Library, Montreal.

⁴³ Margaret Bingham Stillwell (1887–1984) was an American librarian and bibliographer who published *Incunabula in American Libraries: A Second Census of Fifteenth-Century Books Owned in the United States, Mexico, and Canada* (New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1940).

having the missing ff.⁴⁴ photoed and inserted from complete copies in European libraries (by Miss Kilne who makes an annual tour of them) but this turned out not to be feasible—so I send them to you with their imperfections. (Doesn't Miss Abbott or some other of your assistants wish to do this job, using the American complete originals, catalogued in Miss Stillwell's 2nd survey when published?)

One of the incunables (No. 20) is a very useful Concordance by Conrad of Halberstadt, 1496, that has had very rough usage—or use—but is really complete, though torn and without covers. The fates seemed to have followed this 15th century book: this single volume is too heavy for book post so I am having it separated into two packets. Please have its two parts assembled, repaired, bound (buckram) and charge the Wood ornithological fund. This will make of it a fine incunable.

I am enclosing a private list of these books, which (for most of them) contain dealers' remarks—to assist Miss Abbott (she will have a fine chance to study Hain,⁴⁵ the *Gesamtkatalog*,⁴⁶ etc.] and then when the indexer is finished with them please return them to me. Please show this letter to Miss Abbott and believe me to be sincerely yours,

Casey A. Wood⁴⁷

⁴⁴ I.e., Folios.

⁴⁵ Ludwig Hain (1781–1836) compiled the *Repertorium bibliographicum* (1822), a short title catalogue of incunabula.

⁴⁶ The *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*, first published between 1925–1940 by Karl W. Hiersemann, was the most comprehensive union catalogue of incunabula in Wood's time.

⁴⁷ Original typescript letter held in McGill University Archives RG40: "Annual Files, 1937; Wood, Casey A., Colonel." Container 0022. McGill University Library, Montreal.

ADDRESS from Montreal until FEB. 1st 1927:—

Dr. Casey Wood
SUISSE HOTEL
KANDY, CEYLON⁴⁸

Decr. 11, 1926

Dr. Gerhard Lomer
Librarian McGill University
Montreal, Canada.

Dear Dr. Lomer:—

Herewith I am sending you notes of the remarkable Persian MSS. which, ere this you will have received from M. and K. Davidsen, the Indian Art Importers of New York. Colonel Murray of Simla subscribed \$350.00 towards the original \$2000 at which it was held, in memory of his Father, a McGill Medical student of some 70 years ago. The balance—\$1650—I have advanced in the hope that I may induce the B.'s⁴⁹ (or somebody else) to reimburse me. If the “somebody” does not turn up it can go to the ESW library, as it is the most complete compendium of its kind in existence. I have also reason to believe that the illustrations are better drawn and the text more complete than those of the only other two known copies, in the Bodleian and the Gotha libraries. It seems a big price to pay but ill. MSS.⁵⁰ in Persian or Arabic on Nat. Hist. are catalogued as rarissima. You will note that the original of the NUZHAT NAMA⁵¹ has been lost or destroyed—only these few copies remain. What adds much to the interest of the present copy are the two original MSS., on the same subject, bound with it. Then, you must not overlook the original 15th century cover, a treasure in itself.⁵²

⁴⁸ Between 1924 and 1934, Wood spent considerable time, nearly every year, in India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). For more on his travels in the region, see A. Winterbottom's article in this issue.

⁴⁹ I.e., The Blackers, who donated the funds to build the Blacker Library of Zoology at McGill.

⁵⁰ I.e., Illuminated manuscripts.

⁵¹ *Nuzhat Nama-yi Ala'i* by Shahmardan ibn Abi al-Khayr al-Razi is an 11th-century Persian encyclopedia of the natural sciences.

⁵² I included this letter as an example of Wood's enthusiasm for acquiring Persian and Arabic manuscripts, of which the Blacker Wood Collection now holds over

If you remember, I told you I had engaged one of the officials of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, in Calcutta, to spend 10 days in and about Lucknow to search for oriental MSS., especially illustrated monographs on Medicine, Natural History and, secondarily, such Urdu, Persian and Arabic MSS. as will illustrate the evolution of Mohommedan literature from the earliest times, for the information of students of oriental literature—in particular when, a century hence, McGill will be as large as Columbia (and as rich) and a teeming centre of every form of learning. He (Ivanow)⁵³ returned after a very successful trip, having secured over 250 items of all kinds. There were very few MSS. on Zoology (as I expected), more on Medicine and the great majority dictionaries, poetry, theology (about 50%) astrology, arithmetic, etc. He had an offer of what he calls “a princely MS.,” beautiful chirography, magnificent folio illuminated pages, gold and silver borders, and so on.

Price reduced, after several days bargaining, 265 rupees from 700. I am quite sure Mr. Ivanow got all these items for about one-fifth the price I, or any other outsider, would have to pay. By arrangement with the A. S. of Bengal, I am to take about one-half the finds—including the Medical (which will be sent to Oxford as my contribution to the Osler Library), Natural History (Blacker and ESW) and the students collection to be presented to the General Library of McGill in the name of EMMA SHEARER WOOD. These last will be forwarded in about a month, and each item will have a full description attached or enclosed—by Ivanow—for the cataloguer.

***IF YOU GET A SATISFACTORY MESSAGE OF A FINANCIAL CHARACTER FROM PASADENA, PLEASE DO NOT WAIT TO HEAR FROM ME, BUT OPEN THE PRIVATE LETTER I SENT YOU.⁵⁴

We are having a good time since landing in Colombo; also enjoyed our trip from Manila. We leave for Kandy, where we expect to remain

230. See A. Winterbottom's and A. Salamon articles in this issue for further information on this collection.

⁵³ Wladimir Ivanow (1886–1970) was originally a curator of Persian manuscripts at the Imperial Library in St. Petersburg, Russia, before settling in Calcutta to work for the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. He would continue to work with Wood for many years, and was Wood's main purchasing agent for Persian and Arabic works.

⁵⁴ This sentence refers to a sizable donation Wood was soliciting from a colleague in Pasadena for the McGill Library.

until we sail for England about the 1st of March. ****Happy new year from all of us.

Sincerely yours,
Casey A. Wood⁵⁵

Kandy, Ceylon.
Feb. 12, 1927

Dear Dr. Lomer:—

I have been expecting a letter from you, about the catalogue especially, but as none have come and the day of our departure for England draws near I take my Corona⁵⁶ in hand to drop you a few lines.

Yours of Dec 11th and 23rd, with copies of letters to the Blackers, clippings and a very artistic Xmas card arrived in due time and were much appreciated. I am very glad the Principal has invited the Blackers to inspect their library, and to be his guests. Even if, as is probable, they are not able to accept they will be greatly pleased to have been asked.

I shall not say more about the disposition of the donation, except that I wish some good wind would drive you London-ward this summer. There are so many things we could so much better discuss face to face than by mail—the form and method of bringing out that catalogue, for example.⁵⁷ I am beginning to think that it will be well into 1928 before it goes to press if we do our duty by it! By the way, do not fail to tell me in your next whether you received the CATALOGUE OF THE AYER COLLECTION OF ZOOLOGICAL BOOKS IN THE FIELD MUSEUM, CHICAGO,⁵⁸ in two volumes, quite recently issued? If not, be sure

⁵⁵ Original typescript letter held in McGill University Archives RG40: “Annual Files, 1926; Wood, Casey A., Colonel.” Container 0018. McGill University Library, Montreal.

⁵⁶ The Smith Corona typewriter was an early portable model, first released in 1914.

⁵⁷ Wood is referencing his plan to write a descriptive catalogue of all works held in the Blacker Library of Zoology and the ESW Library of Ornithology.

⁵⁸ John T. Zimmer and Wilfred Hudson Osgood, *Catalogue of the Edward E. Ayer Ornithological Library* (Chicago, U.S.A: Field Museum of Natural History, 1926).

and write at once for it, as it, in a way, will be a sort of rival to ours which we shall have to beat in every particular of paper, make up and illustrations if I have to put my hand in my pocket or—more likely—ask elsewhere for another \$5000 to complete our efforts.

The story is briefly this: Ayer, a rich Chicagoan, said to the Field people, go ahead and buy at any price, all the zoological books anywhere or in any language illustrated by coloured plates and send the bill to me. And they took him at his word, with about 500 items not so illustrated. I need not tell you they have some beauties which I have seen. Now, let us improve on these two volumes! I am SURE WE CAN DO IT.⁵⁹ I am glad that W. is at least taking an interest in the zoological library. He ought to have practical views to furnish if he will only do so.

Ivanow, the expert who is hunting Mahammedan [sic] MSS. for us, is now in Lahore and other places in North India “combing” the possibilities. He is the most indefatigable (and therefore most successful) MSS. sleuth I have ever heard of. I have such faith in his diligence and honesty that I have advised my wife to extend her gift of a Persian-Arabic-Hindustani etc TEACHING COLLECTION to include items for research in these the most important oriental languages, thus to provide (while the providing is good) for the time to come when McGill will have a professor of oriental languages and a class to lecture to.

While I. is delving for representative MSS. in general literature he will also dig for those few and rare works on medicine and ZOOLOGY which will help to make your libraries quite the equal of, if not the superior in practical value to, any other in America. Ivanow will also make a catalogue—like his other *raisonées* that will further add to its value. He has already found several 14th century items. Of course all this will add to the period you have to wait for delivery of the same. DO YOU THINK IT WOULD BE WORTH WHILE TO PUBLISH (in India, of course, where it would be done under I.s supervision) THIS CATALOGUE? ** Shortly I shall send you a fine collection of Sinhalese styli (ca. 1430 A.D. to ca. 1850), some with holders, of various periods. Better hold them until I come

⁵⁹ Wood's insistence paid off; the catalogue was eventually published in 1931 as *An Introduction to the Literature of Vertebrate Zoology Based Chiefly on the Titles in the Blacker Library of Zoology, the Emma Shearer Wood Library of Ornithology, the Bibliotheca Osleriana and Other Libraries of McGill University, Montreal* (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1931). It remains one of the standard bibliographic reference sources for natural history works.

to mount them. ** I am writing out my notes on the Nutzhat Nama. The more I look up that treasure the more I think we were wise to buy it. Expensive, I admit, but one gets nothing of that quality in any place I know of! See Dr. Rosenbach's⁶⁰ articles in the Jan.-Feb. Sat. Eve. Post. Very interesting.

My wife joins me in best regards.

Ever yours,

C.A.W.⁶¹

Biography

Lauren Williams is a librarian in the Rare Books & Special Collections department of the McGill University Library, and the curator of the Blacker Wood Natural History Collection.

Copyright © 2022 Lauren Williams. 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.v59i1.37682>

⁶⁰ Wood is likely referring to Abraham Simon Wolf Rosenbach (1876–1952), an American book collector and dealer whose collection is now housed in the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia.

⁶¹ Original typescript letter held in McGill University Archives RG40: “Annual Files, 1927; Wood, Casey A., Colonel.” Container 0018. McGill University Library, Montreal.