

Dissecting ownership

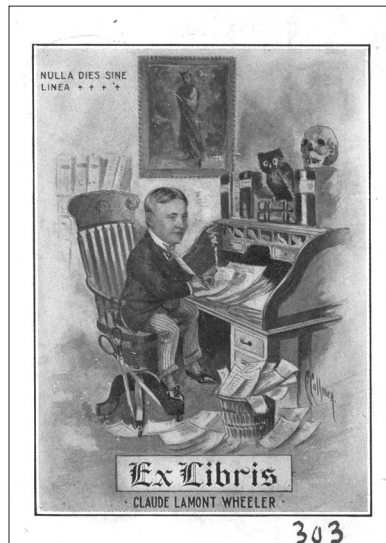
ONE OF THE DELIGHTFUL THINGS about bookplates is how much their tone and imagery reveal about their owners in a limited space. This caricatured self-portrait hints that the owner of the *ex libris*, Claude Lamont Wheeler, was a man of great charm with a flair for the dramatic and a well-developed (and perhaps rather self-deprecating) sense of humour.

Best known as the editor of the *New York Medical Journal*, Wheeler was born in Montreal on March 5, 1864.

The son of Dr. Thomas Brown Wheeler and Anne (Shaw) Wheeler, he was also a nephew of William Wheeler, a former governor of Rhode Island. Wheeler received his B.A. degree from Laval University and his medical degree from McGill University in 1889. After a year interning at the Royal Victoria Hospital, he moved to the United States, where he practised medicine in Burlington, Vermont, for a short time before moving to New York City.

Wheeler was an ophthalmologist with the Manhattan Eye and Ear Hospital and the New York Polyclinic Hospital prior to becoming assistant editor of the *New York Medical Journal* in 1902 and editor in 1911. An obituary in the medical journal *The Lancet* noted that “[w]hile his medical knowledge was extensive, his literary gifts were even more conspicuous. He possessed the literary instinct, which was supplemented by a high degree of culture.”

Wheeler was versed in several languages, including French, Italian, German and Spanish, in addition to having knowledge of Greek and Latin. *The Lancet* also noted that “as a writer [Wheeler] was concise in language and distinguished in style” and “was an excellent judge of the writings



of other people.” His work as a writer and an editor takes centre stage in his bookplate. The caricature of Wheeler sits at a rolltop desk, quill pen in hand, scribbling away at a manuscript. An oversized pair of scissors, a playful nod to his position as editor, leans against his chair, and the Latin motto *Nulla dies sine linea* (“Not a day without a line”) speaks to a strong work ethic.

Outside of his professional work, Wheeler’s interests included literature, music, and the dramatic arts. A member

of the Players’ Club, Wheeler was an amateur actor, a well-trained vocalist and an accomplished pianist. The skull resting atop a large volume on his desk may refer to his medical training or perhaps Shakespeare and a certain Danish prince.

A man with “a fine presence, engaging manners, and great tact,” Wheeler was president of the British Schools and University Club, a fellow of the College of Physicians, and a member of the Canadian Society and the Legion of Honour. After battling failing health for a year or more, Wheeler died of bronchial pneumonia on December 30, 1916, at the age of 52, leaving behind his wife, Agnes Mary Mitchell, and daughter, Faith.

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The Rare Books and Special Collections Bookplate Collection can be accessed from the UBC Library Digital Collections and Services site, <http://digitalcollections.library.ubc.ca>.