

Montreal Magnate

LUDGER GRAVEL was a prominent businessman, civil servant and collector in Montreal at the turn of the 20th century.

Born in 1864, Gravel was first involved with oil distribution in the 1890s. In 1901 he purchased the hardware business that employed him, Maison P.P. Mailloux, and changed the name to Maison Ludger. He established his own printer, Imprimerie Ludger Gravel, for personal and professional printing in 1904. Then, in 1918, his business interests expanded to include the growing automobile industry with the formation of the auto accessories business Ludger Gravel & Fils. Located on Place Jacques-Cartier, the business advertised vehicle accessories, replacement parts, supplies, paints and varnishes.

Gravel served the city in multiple capacities, including on the municipal affairs committee, the metal workers' committee and the chamber of commerce. His philanthropic involvement included serving as chairman of the board of public assistance and director of the child welfare agency, the Notre-Dame-de-la-Merci Hospital, and the Société Saint-Vincent de Paul. He was also a commissioner with the Montreal Catholic School Commission.

Reflecting his personal and business ventures, Gravel was part of the Society of French Canadian Artisans, which he led from 1910 to 1914. Through the Antiquarian and Numismatic Society of Montreal, which focused on preserving heritage in Montreal (and has the distinction of being Canada's first coin club), Gravel's reach extended to patronage of the famous Château Ramezay.

In addition to his local achievements, Ludger Gravel was also well known abroad—in fact, the Department of Foreign Affairs awarded him a medal during his lifetime. He was recognized by the governments of China and France, receiving

the French medal of honour, the Croix du combattant, and a medal from the Institut historique et héraldique de France. In 1926, Gravel was made a knight of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre—

a Catholic order under the sovereignty of the pope dating back to 1113. The bookplate pictured here features a coat of arms that draws heavily from the order's insignia, including the gold helmet and red Jerusalem cross.

A testament to Gravel's impact and goodwill, the *Montreal Gazette* reported on April 10, 1933, that during his funeral procession, "Downtown Montreal paused in respectful silence" as "hundreds of persons from all walks of life joined to pay tribute."

As a collector, Gravel notably gathered coins and medals, among many other things, which he preserved in his own, somewhat notorious museum. His collection was short-lived, however,

and it was dispersed and sold not long after his death. (The Toronto Public Library holds information on the sale of the medals as well as some of Gravel's larger collection, while the McCord Museum houses the Ludger Gravel Fonds, including

personal and professional documents.) Today, an Internet search for Ludger Gravel is most likely to return collectibles in the form of coins and tokens from his businesses ventures—a fitting tribute to his life's work and passions.

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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>.

