

Bookplates and Their Owners

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In conjunction with AU HERM 512, and the University of Calgary, Archives and Special Collection

Introduction

Bookplates, also known as ex-libris (Latin for: 'from the library/books of'), are decorative labels pasted inside book covers. They can be highly stylized, such as armorial and coat of arms designs, to reflect artistic trends, or they can be as simple as a person's name and mailing address. There are no rules governing what can appear on a bookplate. Ex-libris have traditionally been used to denote ownership in case of loss or theft, hence having a person's mailing address on the inside of the book. Many modern-day variations of ex-libris are miniature works of art.

Similar to fashion trends, society dictated new design styles of ex-libris. As armorial plates fell out of fashion, newer trends emerged - Jacobean, Rococo, Chippendale, and artistic representations of people, places, and objects, seen here in the project.

This project begun on January 1, 2015, was undertaken to investigate the various types of bookplates found in the University of Calgary library. The main objective was to research the variety of bookplates in the Rare Book collection, and a secondary objective was to curate an exhibit.

Curating an Exhibit

The exhibit consisted of twenty-six bookplates that encompassed a selection of Canadian designers, and some which belonged to a number of Canadian personalities. The plates' selected fit into three themes; 1) eight plates chosen because the designers were Canadian, including some by J.E.H. MacDonald, notable for his Group of Seven connections; 2) six plates chosen because they bear the names of famous Canadian personalities - Lord Beaverbrook, W.O. Mitchell, Eric L Harvie; and 3) ten plates to demonstrate the variety of plates in the university collections. These plates showcased nautical themes (J.E.H. MacDonald), puns (Edward Crane) and allegorical themes (Dennis Wheatley), and that simplicity can be just as unique as a complex coat of arms (Rules and Regulations for Teachers, and noted Arctic explorer Canadian Vilhjamer Stefansson's bookplate that indicates his mailing address). The exhibit ran from May 1st to June 30th, 2015.

Two plates from the exhibit



Reading Bookplates

The design of bookplates takes a variety of forms. Some are simple and straightforward - a name and an address. Some are exclusive to family names, such as armorial and coat of arms plates. Still others are highly complex artworks, representing many facets of an individual's life.

In this example the plate belongs to Gilbert McCrea Eaton (1915-1985), the fourth son of Sir John Craig Eaton, and was designed by William Walker Alexander (1870-1948). W.W. Alexander was born and raised in Canada, and studied engraving and lithography in Canada before proceeding to Philadelphia and then later on to England, to further his knowledge and skill. Alexander, recognized as the foremost expert of armorial design in Canada, was commissioned to design Sir John Craig's plate, the youngest son of patriarch Timothy Eaton, and the second president of the Eaton Company. Gilbert's plate is very similar to his father's plate, however the placement of the motto and helm is different, and an additional charge has been added to the shield.

Bookplates bearing family mottoes and coat of arms are read from the bottom up.

The **shield** has four **charges**: 1) the **harp** signifying Timothy Eaton's Irish ancestry, 2) and 3) **three maple leaves** and **two beavers** representing Canadian connections and roots, and 4) a **martlet**, a fictional creature without claws or feet, denoting fourth son status. The martlet is authorized by The College of Arms, the official heraldic authority in England and Commonwealth countries, to be used to denote a fourth son.

The helm is closed on Gilbert's plate, whereas on his father's plate it is open. A closed helm signifies association with the peerage, which Sir John Craig was elevated to in 1915, but his sons did not receive this honour. Also, the motto has been moved for Gilbert. W.W. Alexander chose to place it at the top of the coat of arms, whereas Sir John's is on the bottom. This was Alexander taking artistic liberty.



Research Outcome: Amending Finding Aid

While reviewing bookplates from the Hugh Anson-Cartwright collection, Archives and Special Collections at the University of Calgary, two plates stood out. The first one, belonging to Hudson Ewbanke Kearley, was because of the graphic artist's initials. The second one, belonging to Gilbert McCrea Eaton was because of the family name. The information on the finding aid for these plates did not list the graphic artist, but artist initials were enough to elicit questions.

The plate belonging to Hudson Ewbanke Kearley (1856-1934), 1st Viscount Devonport, was believed to have been designed by the graphic artist Alexander Scott Carter. Scott Carter was part of a group of graphic artists in the early part of the 20th century, living and working in Canada. This group of eight men was strongly influenced by American designers, who were departing from coat of arms representations and experimenting with artistic expressions for ex-libris. All, informally associated with the Canadian Revival Period (1890-1930), were also strongly influenced by the Group of Seven painters, who were in turn influenced by the natural beauty of Canada. Artistic liberties were taken, but they still adhered to their formal graphic art training, which is evident in strong and clean lines.

On Kearley's plate, the initials ASC appear in the bottom right hand corner, and are strikingly similar to Scott Carter's trademark initials, however, the initials on the plate read ASG, and are attributed to Alexander Scott Scott-Gatty (1847-1918), Garter King of Arms, College of Arms, London, England. The *London Gazette*, which has digitized thousands of earlier versions, has an announcement which was made on April 21, 1904, that Scott-Gatty was granted Garter King of Arms by Royal decree. He held the post until his death in 1918. Also, the College of Arms website lists past Garters', and Scott-Gatty is named here. The plate was designed in 1903, a year before Scott-Gatty was appointed as Garter King of Arms.

The second plate, Gilbert McCrea Eaton's, did not list graphic artist information on the finding aid. A general search on Google for major bookplate collections in the country returned the *Philippe Masson Ex-Libris* collection, housed at McGill University. This collection has been digitized, and includes designer information, where applicable, for all plates. The *Philippe Masson* collection contains the exact bookplate for Gilbert Eaton, among others for the Eaton family, and lists William Walker Alexander (1870-1948) as the designer for the Eaton plates.



In Closing

This was a massive undertaking and the quick four-month turn around between the start of the course, and the opening of the exhibit resulted in rushed research. Some exhibit labels had incorrect information, which were changed approximately two weeks after the opening, while others were more completely fleshed out. Feedback from visitors, which was overwhelmingly positive, was provided informally. Most visitors were unaware of the history of bookplates, and the various styles housed at the University of Calgary.

Lastly, the information uncovered from research on Gilbert McCrea Eaton's plate, and Hudson Ewbanke Kearley's plate, was used to amend the finding aid for the Hugh Anson-Cartwright bookplate collection housed at the University of Calgary, Archives and Special Collections.

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