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## William Wheeler Papers

1900-1910

1 box (0.25 linear ft.)

Call no.: RG 002/3 W54



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["Japan's colonial college," The Cycle \(photocopy\)](#)

Report of an Expedition to Death Valley, California in the Year 1900 (transcribed by Allen R. Anderson)

Order of the Rising Sun, 5th Class

Order of the Rising Sun, 5th Class

Admin info

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Read collection overview

The civil engineer William Wheeler was a member of the first graduating class of Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1871, and was one of its most prominent alumni of the nineteenth century. In 1876, Wheeler joined MAC President William Smith Clark and two other alumni of the college in helping to found the Sapporo Agricultural College in Japan (now Hokkaido University), succeeding Clark as president of SAP from 1877 to 1879. In later life, he was a successful hydraulic engineer and long-time trustee of MAC (1887-1929).

A small, tightly focused collection, the Wheeler Papers consist largely of letters written home by Wheeler while working at the Sapporo Agricultural College, 1876-1880. Typically long and descriptive, the letters include excellent accounts of travel in Japan and Wheeler's impressions of Japanese culture, but they provide detailed insight as well into the work involved in establishing Sapporo Agricultural College.

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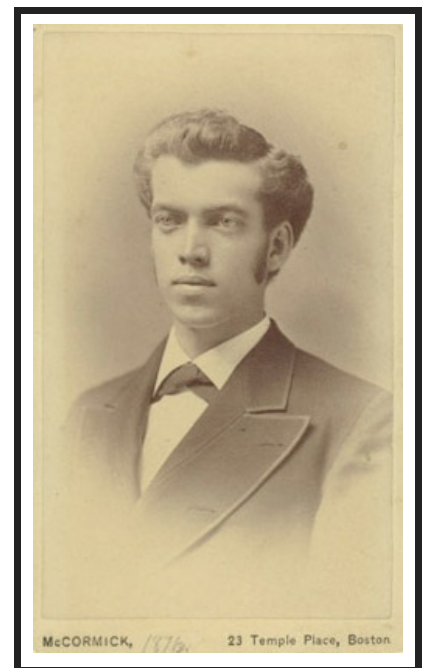
## Background on William Wheeler

The civil engineer William Wheeler (1851-1932) was considered one of the most influential graduates of Massachusetts Agricultural College before 1900, with a long career in service to the College, his native Concord, and the Commonwealth. The fourth of eight children born to Edwin and Mary (Rice) Wheeler of Concord, Mass., Wheeler was not yet 16 when he entered MAC in October 1867, a member of the college's pioneer class. An excellent student from the outset, he pursued an engineering course and although he was the second youngest member of his class, he rapidly became something of a student leader.

Wheeler spent the summer after his junior year occupied in his first engineering job, working as a surveyor on highway construction projects and as engineer for the town of Amherst, and he filled in for Martin Fisk as instructor in Mathematics during the last semester of his senior year. After receiving his degree, second in his class, he worked for the Massachusetts Central and other railroad companies until opening his own firm in May 1873.

Yet just as his career was getting under way, Wheeler's alma mater came calling. The president of MAC, William Smith Clark, had been contacted by the Japanese government in 1875 to help establish an agricultural college on the northern island of Hokkaido, an area being colonized and rapidly modernized. The Meiji emperor sought to adapt western technology and ideas "to invigorate the foundations of imperial rule," and he looked to MAC as a model for progressive agricultural education. Clark, in turn, saw an opportunity to build the prestige of his fledgling college. Granted a year's leave from May 1876 through September 1877, Clark traveled to Sapporo, engaging three MAC alumni to help in the mission: Wheeler and David P. Penhallow (class of 1875), who accompanied him on his voyage, and William Penn Brooks (class of 1875), who followed early in 1877. Jokingly, Clark, Wheeler, and Penhallow called themselves the "triumvirate."

Wheeler's duties in Sapporo included teaching mathematics, civil engineering, and English, but ever industrious, he took on a variety of other projects as need, opportunity, and circumstance arose. As early as September 1876, he set up a small meteorological observatory and began systematically collecting weather data -- perhaps the first such data scientifically recorded in Hokkaido -- and under the auspices of the Kaitakushi (the Imperial Colonial Department), he conducted several surveys in



William Wheeler, ca.1876.

Hokkaido for future transportation routes and oversaw the construction of a canal between Sapporo and Barato, among other projects.

With the agricultural college on a firm foundation, Wheeler was selected to succeed Clark as president in 1877, and his organizational skills and foresight are often credited with ensuring its long term success. During his tenure as president, Wheeler oversaw many of the practical details that transformed the college from idea into reality, including the consolidation of the curriculum and the continued expansion of the model farm. Like his colleague Brooks, he interrupted his stay in Japan for personal reasons, marrying Fannie Eleanor Hubbard in Concord on July 17, 1878. The couple remained in Sapporo for the final year of Wheeler's contract, finally returning to Massachusetts in December 1879.

Resuming his career in civil engineering, Wheeler became widely known for his work on water and sewerage systems and was active in town affairs for many years, serving on a long list of town committees and overseeing a wide variety of civic projects. In 1880, Wheeler filed a patent for a novel form of lighting that he commercialized through the Wheeler Reflector Company, a highly profitable company that was an important manufacturer of street lighting into the middle of the twentieth century. Also in 1880, Wheeler was selected to become the first alumnus to serve on the MAC Board of Trustees, and although he resigned the next year in a dispute over governance, he returned to serve on the trustees from 1887 to 1929. As trustee, he was particularly involved in the development of campus landscaping, overseeing the civil engineering associated with construction of a dam for the campus pond and other improvements to the grounds. He resided in his estate in Concord, Maru-Yama Kwan, named in memory of his stay in Japan, until his death on July 1, 1932.

## Scope of collection

A small, tightly focused collection, the Wheeler Papers consist largely of letters written home by the civil engineer William Wheeler while President of the Sapporo Agricultural College, 1876-1880. Typically long and descriptive, the letters include excellent accounts of travel in Japan and Wheeler's impressions of Japanese culture, but they provide detailed insight as well into the work involved in establishing Sapporo Agricultural College.

The collection also includes photocopies from Hokkaido University of documents relating to Wheeler's tenure as President there, seven letters written after his return to the United States, two biographical sketches, and copies of a journal he kept while exploring Death Valley, California, in 1900. The Order of the Rising Sun, 5th Class, is housed separately.

## Inventory

Biographical materials

ca.1900-1910

1 folder

Folder 1

Wheeler, William: An Open Letter to the Alumni of the Massachusetts Agricultural College

1881 February 19

3pp. (2 copies)

Folder 1

William Wheeler

1929

2pp.

Folder 1

Introduction upon receipt of doctor of laws

Hudson, Woodward: Memoir of William Wheeler, December 6, 1851-July 1, 1932

1933 March 28

31pp. (2 copies), 1p. ALS

Folder 1

Memoir prepared for Social Circle in Concord, Mass.

Watanabe, Masao: "William Wheeler: W.S. Clark's Colleagues at Sapporo." *Kagakusi Kenkyu* ser. 2, 13

1974

31pp. (2 copies), 1p. ALS

Folder 1

In Japanese with English summary.

Wheeler, William: Correspondence from Japan

1876

8 items

Folder 2

Wheeler, William: Correspondence from Japan (typescripts)  
1876  
8 items  
Folder 3

Wheeler, William: Correspondence from Japan  
1877  
13 items  
Folder 4

Wheeler, William: Correspondence from Japan (typescripts)  
1877  
13 items  
Folder 5

Wheeler, William: Correspondence from Japan  
1878  
9 items  
Folder 6

Wheeler, William: Correspondence from Japan (typescripts)  
1878  
9 items  
Folder 7

Wheeler, William: Correspondence from Japan  
1879  
11 items  
Folder 8

Wheeler, William: Correspondence from Japan (typescripts)  
1879  
11 items  
Folder 9

Wheeler, William: Correspondence from Japan  
1880  
2 items  
Folder 10

Wheeler, William: Correspondence from Japan (typescripts)  
1880  
2 items  
Folder 11

Wheeler, William: Correspondence from Japan (envelopes with stamps removed)  
1876-1880  
40 items  
Folder 12

Wheeler, William: Correspondence  
1880-1930  
7 items  
Folder 13

Wheeler, William: Official correspondence from Japan (photocopies)  
1876 March-1871 Dec.  
Folder 14  
Hokkaido University

Wheeler, William: Official correspondence from Japan (photocopies)  
1877 Dec.-1878 Aug.  
Folder 15  
Hokkaido University

Wheeler, William: Official correspondence from Japan (photocopies)  
1878 Sept.-1884 May  
Folder 16  
Hokkaido University

Wheeler, William: "Japan's colonial college," *The Cycle* (photocopy)

1880 June 23

5pp.

Folder 17

Wheeler, William: Report of an Expedition to Death Valley, California in the Year 1900 (transcribed by Allen R. Anderson)

1900

1 folder

Folder 18

Order of the Rising Sun, 5th Class

1924

8 items

Folder 19

Documents associated with award of the Order of the Rising Sun.

Order of the Rising Sun, 5th Class

1924

1 item, 23x18"

Map case 184/5

Order of the Rising Sun, framed outside Chancellor's office.

Gift of Mrs. Wheeler, October 1937

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## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from the Wheeler family, 1921, 1961.

### Processing Information

Reprocessed by rsc, June 2007.

### Related Material

See also the papers of Wheeler's MAC colleagues in Japan, William Smith Clark and William Penn Brooks, and for additional information on American travelers in Meiji-era Japan, see the papers of Benjamin Smith Lyman.

### Bibliography

Tetsuo Takasaki, *Hyōden oyatoi Amerikajin seinen kyōshi: Uiriamu Hoirā = William Wheeler, 1851-1932* (Tōkyō : Kajima Shuppankai, 2004). **Call no.:** (East Asia Library) S417.W43 T34 2004

### Language:

English

### Copyright and Use (More information )

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## Search terms

### Subjects

Agriculture--Japan.

Clark, William Smith, 1826-1886.

Hokkaido (Japan)--Description and travel--19th century.

Hokkaido Daigaku

Japan--Description and travel--19th century.

Massachusetts Agricultural College

Penhallow, D. P. (David Pearce), 1854-1910.

Sapporo (Japan)--Description and travel--19th century.

### Contributors

Wheeler, William. **[main entry]**

Hudson, Woodward.

### Genres and formats

Letters (correspondence).

**Link to similar SCUA collections**

Agriculture

Japan

Mass Agricultural College (1863-1931)

UMass administration



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