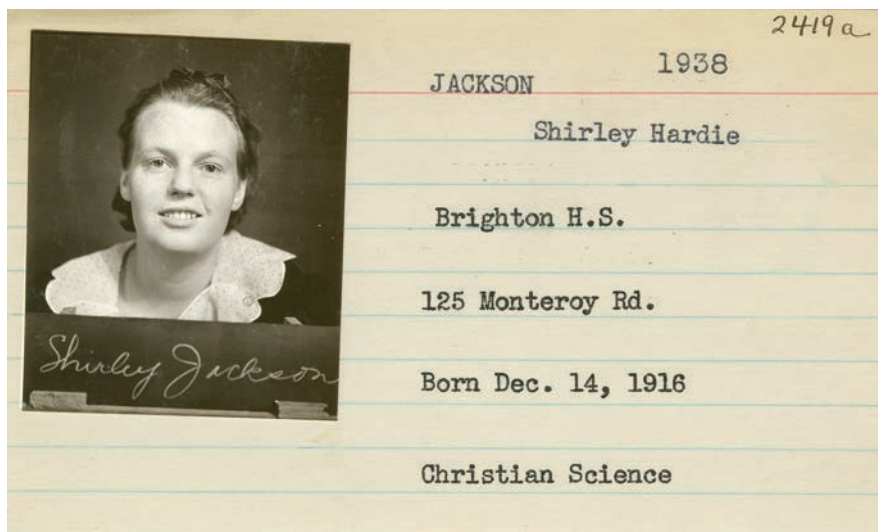


Ask the Archivist: Did Shirley Jackson 'Haunt' the University's Halls?

A question for Melissa Mead, the John M. and Barbara Keil University Archivist and Rochester Collections Librarian.



AUTHOR ID: What may be the first published work by author Shirley Jackson—a matriculated member of the Class of 1938 (above)—appeared in a student-run literary magazine (below).

I am working on a biography of the writer Shirley Jackson, who attended Rochester from 1934 to 1936 but did not graduate. The amount of material available online is truly impressive! However, one thing I was not able to find were any course catalogs from those years. Could you let me know if they are available? I would like to determine the names of the courses she took. —Ruth Franklin, biographer and author of *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life* (Liveright, 2016)

The University Archives are a valuable resource for those researching the accomplishments of our alumni, faculty, and staff.

Jackson is best known for her short story “The Lottery,” and the collections held important details about her youth, although it required casting a wide net to find them.

Sharing University history online is part of the work of the Archives: *Rochester Review*, yearbooks, commencement programs, and the unabridged *History of the University of Rochester, 1850–1962*, by history professor

Arthur May are available at <http://rbscp.lib.rochester.edu/universityarchives>.

For alumni applying for course credit at other institutions, recent *Undergraduate Bulletins* are also available online. The *Bulletin* for 1934–35 confirmed that Jackson’s coursework included freshman English, government, music appreciation, psychology, biology, and French.

Also in the Archives for this period are student applications for admission. Jackson attended nearby Brighton High School, and in her application to the University she writes: “Our house is always overflowing with books.” A native Californian, she describes how her family chose to travel via the Panama Canal to reach the East Coast and

Rochester, where her father took a job with the Stecher-Traung Litho Company.

Jackson anticipated pursuing “law, journalism or literary work” as a career. However, graduation from Rochester was not in the cards: her grades at the end of her sophomore year were deficient, and she withdrew. She received her BA from Syracuse in 1940, and began her “literary work” in earnest; her

iconic story “The Lottery” appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1948. She went on to write the novels *The Haunting of Hill House*, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, and others.

As is often the case, one answer sparks another inquiry, and Franklin responded:

On p. 98 of the 1934–35 *Bulletin*, under “Student Activities in the College for Women,” a few publications are listed: *The Croceus*, which I see online (and in which I found a picture of Shirley Jackson I hadn’t seen before); *The Tower Times*; and three others: *Meliora*, a literary magazine; *In Medias Res*, “a review of campus life and thought”; and *The Blue Book*, a publication for freshmen. Do you know if copies of any of these still exist?

“The Blue Book” was the equivalent of today’s “UR Here,” and provided information about clubs, traditions, activities, and a calendar.

Jackson appears with her classmates at Freshman Camp in the 1936 *Croceus*. Two brief *Tower Times* articles in October and November note that some freshman women, including Jackson, were taking horseback riding lessons.

Through the years, a variety of Rochester undergraduate literary magazines have sprouted up: *Logos* still flourishes, but *The Dandelion*, *The Genesee*, and *Prologue* withered away.

The Cloister, launched in 1921, was replaced by *Meliora* in 1930, and was itself supplanted by *In Medias Res* in 1933. When a January 1934 letter to the *Tower Times* judged that latest effort to be “of the editors, by the editors, and for the editors,” *Meliora* returned, with the assurance that it would be “representative of the entire college and not to be managed and written by the Scribblers Club alone.”

Shirley Jackson’s arrival at the University coincided with this “ever better” *Meliora*. A signed, untitled story—only three paragraphs long—appears in the spring 1935 issue, and is believed to be the earliest publication of her work. The text describes the reactions of various audience members at a violin recital, and its significance is interpreted by Franklin in her 2016 biography, *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life*.

Need History?

Do you have a question about University history? Email it to rochrev@rochester.edu. Put “Ask the Archivist” in the subject line.

