

Ask the Archivist: Can I See the Charter?

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

I'm interested in the founding documents of the University. What are they? Are copies available on the internet? How can I see the University charter?—Mark Doehnert '71, Falls Church, Virginia

One could likely designate several founding documents. The “Form of Subscription,” for example, set out the terms of our very first fundraising effort in 1849. The September 1850 *Plan of Instruction* outlined the earliest Rochester curriculum. But most important of all, perhaps, is the University’s charter, for its legal and symbolic value. Granted by New York State on January 31, 1850, and finalized on Valentine’s Day in 1851, the text includes a phrase which resounds to this day: a pledge to establish “an institution of the highest order for scientific and classical education.”

The document itself is a thing of beauty. Intricate gold-leaf borders on each vellum page were probably applied with a stencil. The text and images are the work of calligrapher David Vaughan (circa 1802-1865). Vaughan emigrated from Ireland in 1847 and was quickly hired by the Office of the New York State Engineer and Surveyor in Albany. His work, even when unsigned, can be identified by his characteristic flourishes and his minute, often humorous, drawings. Albany binder A. L. Harrison created a cover that is almost as splendid as the contents. Harrison invented a process to quickly (and thus cheaply) embellish bindings by using a brass stamp to outline designs which were then painted. Our charter sports patriotic red and white banners and an eagle’s head on a blue leather background.

Creating our charter was probably freelance work for Vaughan. A total of \$25 was paid to Harrison for “scribing, illuminating, parchment, and binding,” and was paid

in full on May 1, 1851.

The Archives celebrates Charter Day every January 31, with a display in Rush Rhees Library. If you can’t make it to Rochester, you can see pictures of the charter, its binding, and the promptly paid invoice online at <http://rbscp.lib.rochester.edu/blog/archives>.

My grandmother collected postcards and had one of the Anderson Statue, postmarked July 7, 1926. Can you tell me who the writer was and what she was doing at the University in the summer?—Joshua Jacobs, assistant director for events, Simon Business School

We have many postcards depicting the University in the Archives—some blank and others, like yours, with messages. There are



PERFECT PICTURES: The original location of the statue of first president Martin Anderson inspired postcards (above), while the University’s charter (below) is itself a work of art.

remarkably few that we can trace to students, perhaps because so many early enrollees were local to Rochester.

The card, sent to William F. Deeney of Batavia, New York, reads:

*Dear Dad,
I finally found a key to unlock my traveling bag—a girl from near Boston, Massachusetts had one to fit. To-day has been the warmest we’ve had here, I think. With love,
Your daughter
Gerry*

Geraldine Deeney was not a graduate of the University; she earned her degree from the Geneseo Normal School and spent her career, from 1920 to 1965, teaching in the Batavia school system. So what was she doing living in the Eastman Dormitory in the summer of 1926? Summer school, of course!

She began taking classes during the summer of 1924, and continued her education for the next three summers, returning for the last time in 1939. The description of the summer sessions notes: “While the work offered is primarily of interest to teachers, practically every branch of University instruction will be given. The regular University faculty will be supplemented by experts in various specialized fields. . . .” Deeney chose a wide variety of coursework in biology, English, Greek, history, and of course, education.

The card she sent home is a particularly lovely example. Produced from a photograph using a commercial collotype process, it was issued by the Albortype Company in Brooklyn, New York, and published by Rochester’s own Sibley, Lindsay & Curr. The Anderson statue dominates the scene, with slivers of three campus buildings in the background: Anderson Hall to the right, Kendrick Hall (a dormitory) beside it, and Sibley Hall to the left.

Need History?

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