

Ask the Archivist: What's the Weight—Ceremonial and Physical—of the Mace?

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

Each May and June, our department guides the University mace through eight separate commencement ceremonies—beginning with the School of Nursing and ending with the Simon School. The faculty selected to carry it in the procession realize it is an honor, but the burden is both ceremonial and physical. What's its story? Why do we have it? And, frankly, how much does it weigh? —Sarabeth Rogoff '93, assistant director for events, University Event and Classroom Management

On October 4, the three insignia of the Office of the President—the University charter, seal, and mace—will be symbolically entrusted to President Sarah C. Mangelsdorf during her inauguration in the Eastman Theatre.

The mace measures 48 inches in length, weighs 6.4 pounds, and is almost exactly half the age of the University. It was created in 1935 to be used in the inauguration ceremonies for our fourth president, Alan Valentine.

The event was the responsibility of then University Trustee Edward Miner (1863–1955), who determined that the proceedings should be worthy of the status we attained during the presidency of Rush Rhees. That Valentine had been a Rhodes Scholar may also have influenced Miner to look to Oxford and Cambridge for inspiration. The evidence for this can be found in Miner's own handwriting on the flyleaf of a book he donated to our collection, Sir Arthur E. Shipley's *Cambridge Cameos* (1924).

Examined from top to bottom: the head of the mace is in the traditional form of a cup (some medieval examples could detach and be used for that purpose) and bears the University seal on its top surface. The sides of the cup are adorned with four dandelions and their familiar serrated leaves. Along the staff of mahogany is a pair of escutcheons—shields with the names of the University leaders from 1850 to 1983 engraved upon them; at the center is a patterned ring; then another pair of escutcheons engraved with names from 1984 to the present; and finally a “foot-knop” adorned with more dandelions. All the metalwork is silver.

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.

The style of these decorations will be familiar to anyone who has walked around the River Campus. The reasons for this become obvious from Miner's correspondence: architect Philipp Merz, who designed much of the original campus, was hired to devise the mace, following illustrations in *Cambridge Cameos*, which Miner had loaned to him.

Merz submitted his drawings to the firm of Edwd. F. Caldwell & Co. in New York for fabrication. Caldwell was particularly noted for its lighting fixtures and undertook commissions from McKim, Mead, and White, an architectural firm that Merz had worked



MIGHTY MACE: Joan Shelley Rubin, the Ani and Mark Gabrellian Director of the Humanities Center, carries the University mace as the platform party that presides over the College commencement ceremony proceeds across the Eastman Quadrangle.

for and that had also designed the first addition to the Memorial Art Gallery and the Eastman Theatre. The fabrication company's papers are held at the 42nd Street branch of the New York Public Library, which also features Caldwell-created decorations.

Merz was given a budget of \$780 to cover the costs for executing the mace and its smaller counterpart—a baton embellished with dandelions and stars, which Merz convinced Miner should also be made—and to have two medals, each 2.5 inches in diameter, struck showing the University seal. One medal was used on the mace, and its bronze twin was given to Valentine as the second of the three insignia of office.

The names of Valentine and his predecessors were pre-engraved on one of the escutcheons and included three names less familiar to us in this role: Ira Harris, a trustee who was designated as chancellor from 1850 to 1853, before Martin Brewer Anderson was hired; and professors Samuel Allan Lattimore and Henry Fairfield Burton, who served as interim presidents, having split the four years between the departure of President David Jayne Hill in 1896 and the arrival of Rush Rhees in 1900. President Richard Feldman's name will be added to mark his service as president from 2018 to 2019.

Inauguration, convocation, investiture, and commencement: every occasion at which the mace is used is a happy one and an augur of ever better things for those attending the event and for the institution it represents.

To learn more about these emblems of the University, visit <https://rbscp.lib.rochester.edu/blog/ATA-Summer2019>.