

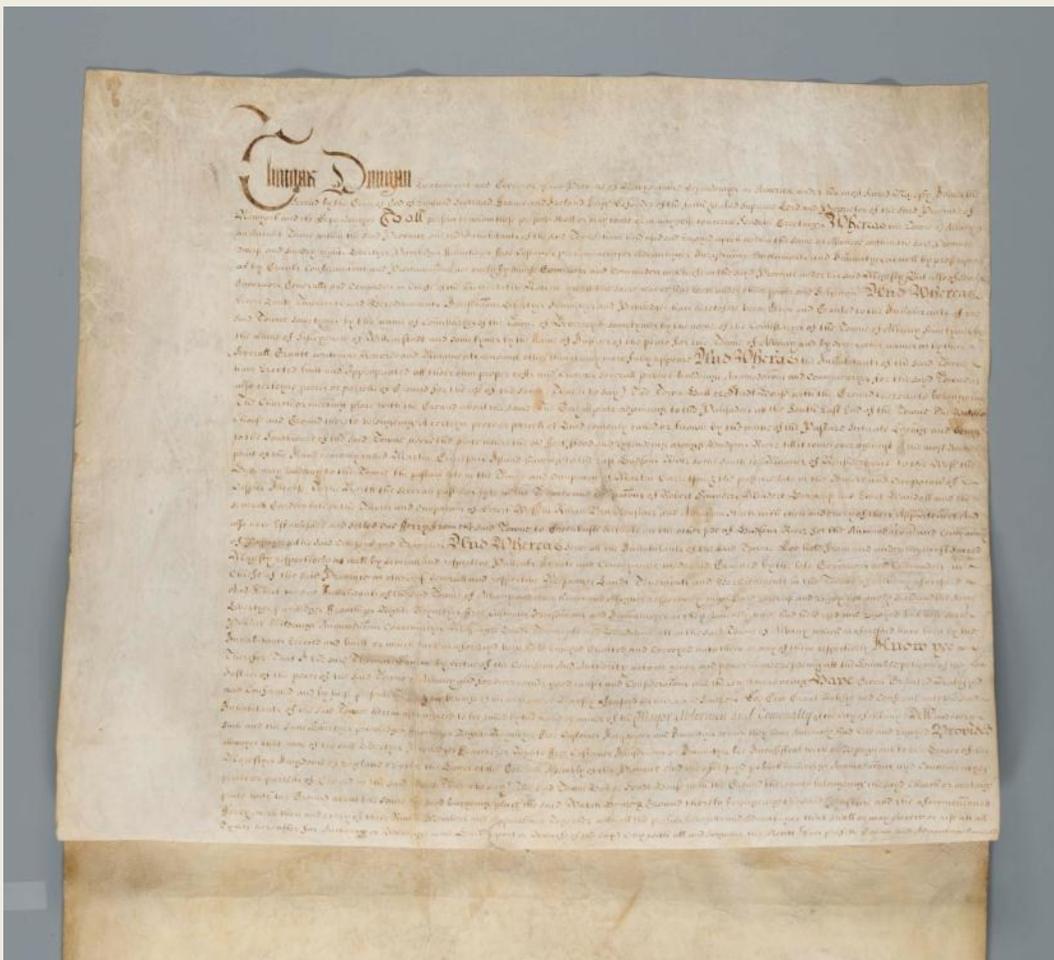
Dongan Charter Day - July 22, 2015

On July 22, 1686, Thomas Dongan, Governor of the Province of New York, granted Albany a city charter. The Dongan Charter united the people of Albany to the British Empire and established the city's authority. It defined city limits, separating Albany from the Manor of Rensselaerwyck which surrounded it:

"...on the east by Hudson's River, so far as low water mark; to the south, by a line drawn from the southernmost end of the pasture, at the north end of...Martin Gerritton's island, running back into the woods sixteen English miles due northwest, to a certain kill or creek, called the Sand-kill; on the north to a line to be drawn from the post...near Hudson's river, running likewise, northwest sixteen English miles; and on the west by a strait line, to be drawn from the points of the said north and south lines."

The Dongan Charter also set up a government and instituted city officers: *"...there shall be forever hereafter, within the city, a Mayor, Recorder, Town-Clerk, and six Alderman and six Assistants...one Chamberlain or Treasurer, one Sherriff, one*

Coroner, one Clerk of the Market, one High-Constable, three Sub-Constables and one Marshal or Serjeant at Mace." Governor Dongan named Peter Schuyler as Mayor, Isaac Swinton as Recorder and Robert Livingston as Town Clerk.



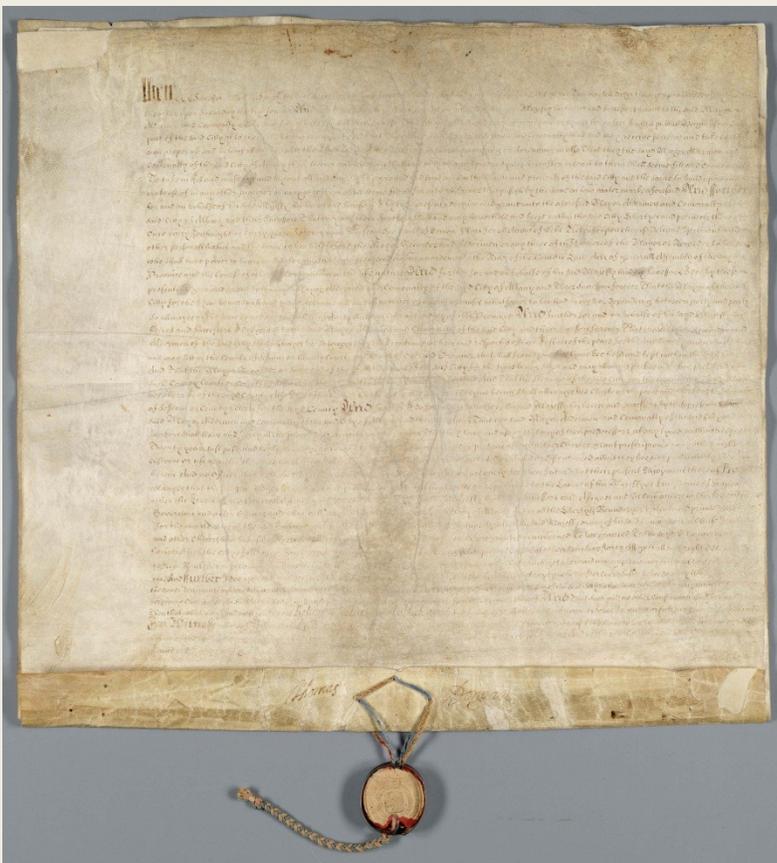
Courtesy of the Albany County Archival Collection.

The Dongan Charter provided for Albany's long-term economic security by granting the Mayor, Alderman and Commonalty of Albany the right to purchase and then patent large acres of land from the Indians at Schaghticoke and Tionnondroge (Fort Hunter); to buy and sell land outside of their dominion and to grant leases. It also designated Albany as a regional marketplace, giving the city the right to set up a public weigh house. The Charter also designated Wednesdays and Saturdays as official market days in hopes of enticing farmers and other people in the greater area to come to Albany to barter and purchase needed goods.

A great deal of the Charter was devoted to regulating trade with the Indians. Trading with Indians could only be conducted within city limits and by freeman who resided in Albany. The Charter also gave the Mayor, Alderman and Commonalty of Albany the authority to prohibit other officials from granting a license to hunt without their approbation. Lastly, Dongan declared that lands, goods and chattel should be used for "pious and charitable" causes and that "no other construction shall be made hereof, than that which may tend most to advance religion, justice, and the public good."

Albany became the second city in New York to receive a charter, preceded by New

York City in April 1686 and succeeded by Hudson in 1785 and Schenectady in 1798. The Dongan Charter remained in force for over 300 years, though issues such as the Indians and trading were no longer relevant. In 1998, Albany adopted a new charter, one containing provisions that centered more on the current needs of the city, yet still integrated the basic arrangement of the original document. The most recent version of the City's charter can be found at <http://ecode360.com/12064948>.



Courtesy of the Albany County Archival Collection

Originally stored in Albany's City Hall, the Charter was transferred to the custody of the New York State Regents in 1911. This transfer was prompted by a fire that occurred in City Hall in 1880 in which valuable documents were destroyed. In 1974, the Dongan Charter was sent to the Northeast Document Conservation Center where the nine rolled parchment pages were flattened and the faded ink partially recovered so that the Charter could be placed in an exhibit frame. In July, 1985, the pages of the Charter were photographed for publication use and for long-term protection. The Dongan Charter was transferred from the New York State Archives to the custody of the Albany County Hall of Records (ACHOR) after their archives was established in 1986. Today, it is stored in ACHOR's environmentally-controlled vault.

July 22, 2015 marks the 329th anniversary of the Dongan Charter. The Charter is the oldest existing city charter still in force in the United States!

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The Archives of the Albany County Hall of Records protects and preserves records documenting Albany County's rich history. Our Search Room is open to the public, Monday-Friday, 8:30AM-4:30PM.