

= Dongan Charter =

The Dongan Charter is the 1686 document incorporating Albany , New York as a city . Albany 's charter was issued by Governor Thomas Dongan of the Province of New York , a few months after Governor Dongan issued a similarly worded , but less detailed charter for the city of New York . The city of Albany was created three years after Albany County . The charter is the oldest existing city charter still in force in the United States and " arguably in all the Western Hemisphere " , according to Stefan Bielinski , former senior historian of the New York State Museum . In 1936 the United States Congress commemorated the charter 's 250th anniversary by minting a half dollar coin .

= = History = =

After the city of New York received a municipal charter from Governor Dongan the governor came to Albany , at which time the village sent a delegation of prominent men to request a charter of their own . The Patroon , after being encouraged by the governor , finally released all claims to Albany and forfeited a strip of land 1 mile ( 1 @. @ 6 km ) wide and 16 miles ( 26 km ) long to Albany . Albany at the time consisted of about 500 residents living in around 140 houses . In July 1686 a delegation led by Pieter Schuyler and Robert Livingston traveled to New York to receive the charter for Albany ; the charter was signed on July 25 , 1686 and was read aloud to the citizens of Albany three days later . Due to England , and by extension Albany , using the Julian calendar at the time , the corrected date for the signing of the document under the Gregorian calendar is August 1 , 1686 .

During Leisler 's Rebellion Jacob Leisler demanded the charters of Albany and the city of New York be forfeited , and New York yielded but Albany 's mayor , Pieter Schuyler , refused . Schuyler went on to become one of the major leaders in suppressing the rebellion . The next major threat to the charter government came during the American Revolution when the Common Council stopped meeting in 1775 . The local Committee of Safety took over daily functions until 1778 when the Common Council began meeting again .

A Dongan Charter Parade was held in 1936 for the 250th anniversary celebrations , and as part of the ceremonies the United States Congress authorized the minting of an Albany Charter half dollar coin . Tricentennial celebrations held in 1986 included a re @-@ enactment of the signing and awarding of the charter by Governor Mario Cuomo playing Governor Dongan , and Mayor Thomas Whalen playing Mayor Schuyler . Other events during the tricentennial were fireworks , music , the unveiling of a tricentennial clock , a hot @-@ air balloon lift @-@ off from Lincoln Park , and a cake large enough to feed thousands . Mayors from other Albanys around the world were among the visiting dignitaries who were invited to the ceremonies and given a tour of the city by Mayor Whalen .

= = Provisions = =

The charter turned the village of Albany into a city under the name of " The Mayor , Aldermen , and Commonalty of the city of Albany " ; this legally separated it from Rensselaerswyck , a nearby colonial estate . The charter also established Albany 's boundaries and a municipal government , as well as specifically naming the first officers . Certain special rights were put into the charter as well , such as the exclusive right to negotiate with the Native Americans . It also established Albany as the sole market town in the upper Hudson region , with the right to purchase land at Tionnderoge and Schaghticoke .

The mayor of Albany was the executive officer and selected by the Lieutenant Governor . He was also designated as the clerk of the marketplace and the coroner for both the city and Albany County . Two alderman and two assistant aldermen were chosen from each ward and sat on the Common Council along with the mayor and recorder . The mayor , recorder , and aldermen were also justices , the assistants however did not have any judicial powers .

The sole right to issue trading privileges anywhere in Albany County rested with the mayor and

Common Council . Albany County encompassed all of Upstate New York north and west of Ulster County at that time , as well as the state of Vermont . All residents of New York , except those of Albany , were specifically banned from trading with any Iroquois nation , or with any other native tribe to the west , east , or north of the city of Albany , or with native tribes anywhere within Albany County .

= = Amendments = =

The Dongan Charter was first amended on March 21 , 1787 to remove the mayor 's powers to act as the city and county 's sole coroner , and to regulate trade with Indians . It continued to be used with only minor changes until March 16 , 1870 , when it saw major changes by the state legislature in 1870 and 1883 . In the 1870 revision the name of the city was changed from " The Mayor , Aldermen , and Commonalty of the city of Albany " to the " City of Albany " . In 1998 the people of Albany adopted a revised charter as an amendment to the Dongan Charter .

= = Commemorative coin = =

The United States Congress authorized on June 16 , 1936 the minting of 25 @, @ 000 half dollar coins celebrating the 250th anniversary of the Dongan Charter . These were legal tender , though few actually ever circulated . The Albany Dongan Charter Coin Committee was established to approve the design and chose Gertrude Lathrop , an Albany native , to create a design , she would also go on to design the New Rochelle commemorative coin .

All 25 @, @ 013 coins were minted at the Philadelphia Mint , the 13 extra were for the assay commission and were destroyed . Commemorative coins of this period had normally sold for \$ 1 @. @ 00 or \$ 1 @. @ 50 , the Albany Charter Coin however was put for sale at \$ 2 @. @ 00 . The commemorative coin mania that had been sweeping the country in the spring and summer of 1936 had already seen close to twenty other commemorative coins issued that same year , and had abated by the time of this issuing . 7 @, @ 342 coins were returned to Philadelphia and melted in 1943 and between 1 @, @ 600 to 2 @, @ 400 were sold in 1954 by the State Bank of Albany .

As of 2009 the coins can fetch \$ 330 for an uncirculated coin rated as MS @- @ 60 , and \$ 470 for an MS @- @ 65 . Original packaging , which is more rare , included a four @- @ page booklet containing an illustration of the coin , a history of Albany , and slots for one to five coins . Both the booklet and the envelope it came in are highly collectible today . Even scarcer today are boxes designed to hold single coins and inscribed with " The National Commercial Bank and Trust Company of Albany " .

= = = Specifications = = =

The Albany Charter coin is 30 @. @ 6 millimetres ( 1 @. @ 20 in ) in diameter and weighs 12 @. @ 5 grams ( 0 @. @ 44 oz ) , with a reeded edge , and was 90 % silver with 10 % copper . The obverse is a beaver gnawing on a maple branch , which represents the importance that the fur trade had in Albany 's economy , with the maple used since it is New York 's state tree . Seeds of a maple tree separate the words " United States of America " from " Half Dollar " , which are arranged around the bottom periphery while " E pluribus unum " and " In God We Trust " appear in small letters above the beaver . On the reverse are Governor Dongan , Robert Livingston , and Mayor Schuyler standing in front of a pine tree on a base inscribed with the year 1936 . The artist 's initials , " GKL " , are inscribed next to the governor 's feet . The mayor is holding the new charter and shaking hands with the governor . Above the three men is an eagle with the legend " Liberty " . Arranged along the top periphery are the words " Settled 1614 Chartered 1686 " , while " Albany , N Y " arcs across the bottom ; pine cones separate the two inscriptions .