THE ROCHESTER CARILLON

MAYO CLINIC
PLUMMER BUILDING
A carillon (care-uh-lawn) is a musical instrument consisting of at least 23 bronze, cup-shaped bells. The melodious ringing sounds of the carillon are made by bells that do not swing. Instead, the bells are rigidly fixed to supporting beams.

Carillons are generally housed in towers and are always played from a clavier—a keyboard console consisting of a double row of wooden keys (batons) and a pedalboard. The batons and pedals are linked via wires to clappers inside the bells. When the batons and pedals are pressed, the wires pull the clappers against the sides of the bells—creating the music of the carillon.

The bells are cast in bronze and precisely tuned for harmonious effect by paring the metal surface from inside the bells.

The Rochester Carillon is comprised of 56 bells and is twelfth largest in the United States in number of bells. The weight of all the bells together totals 40,000 pounds. Though North America is home to nearly 200 carillons, Mayo Clinic holds the distinction of being the only hospital to own such an instrument.

The Dolores Jean Lavins Center for Humanities in Medicine manages the carillon.
ORIGINS OF THE CARILLON

The art of carillon playing originated over 500 years ago in the area of Europe that now comprises the Netherlands, Belgium, and northern France. The musician who plays the carillon is a carillonneur (care-uh-lawn-nur). This acoustic, mechanical instrument is powered entirely by the force of the performer’s hands and feet. Because the clavier is mechanically linked directly to the clappers inside the bells, the carillonneur can produce a considerable dynamic range while playing.
HISTORY OF THE ROCHESTER CARILLON

Though the Plummer Building’s tower has become a beloved fixture of the Rochester skyline, original designs for the building did not include a tower at all. Late in the construction process, the Mayo brothers decided to donate the carillon as a memorial to American soldiers who served in World War One. The plans were altered, the tower built, and the carillon ordered. Today, the tower is a symbol of the city and a National Historic Landmark.

The original 23 bells, a gift from Drs. William J. and Charles H. Mayo, were cast in the Gillett and Johnston Bell Foundry in Croydon, England, and were consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury before being shipped to Rochester. The largest bell, the bourdon, weighs 7,840 pounds and is almost six feet tall. The smallest of the original 23 bells rings in at 168 pounds. An inscription on the bourdon proclaims that the instrument is dedicated to the American soldier.
In the summer of 1977, the Rochester Carillon became one of the largest in North America with the addition of 33 new bells. Purchase of the new bells, a clavier, practice console, and playing cabin was made possible through gifts from Mrs. Frances G. Sheets and Mrs. Isabella Gooding Sanders, descendants of Alphonso Gooding, a Rochester pioneer.

The new bells, ranging in size from 19 to 130 pounds, were cast at the Petit and Fritsen Bell Foundry in Aarle-Rixtel, The Netherlands. The now 56-bell carillon covers a 4.5 octave range.

From October 2017 to February 2018, the carillon was completely renovated and brought up to modern technological standards. Numerous improvements were made to the instrument, including the updating of the playing action to a directional square system, relocation of the bell frame, and replacement of the old, nonstandard playing clavier to a new, World Standard model.

A variety of music is played during each concert to reflect the diversity of the patients and visitors who come to Mayo Clinic. The Mayo brothers had a vision of innovative treatment for the body. With the addition of the Rochester Carillon, they also provided the tradition of wonderful music to soothe the heart and soul.
MAYO CLINIC’S CARILLONNEUR

Mayo Clinic visitors and employees have enjoyed the outstanding service of four carillonneurs since the inauguration of the carillon in 1928.

Austin Ferguson currently serves as Carillonneur of the Mayo Clinic. He is a native of Longview, Texas, and served as Carillonneur at The University of Texas at Austin from 2011 to 2015.

An active recitalist, Mr. Ferguson has performed guest recitals around the country and has participated in recitals at the annual Congress of the Guild of Carillonneurs in North America (GCNA).

Mr. Ferguson is an active member of the Guild of Carillonneurs in North America, where he sits on the Membership Enrichment and Social Legal and serves as co-editor of Carillon News, the GCNA’s bi-annual newsletter. His primary carillon instruction was done with Lynnette Geary, University Carillonneur at Baylor University.

Mr. Ferguson was named the fourth Carillonneur of the Mayo Clinic in February 2017. He may be reached at ferguson.austin@mayo.edu for any questions or song requests.
FORMER CARILLONNEURS

Jeffrey Daehn served as the third Carillonneur of Mayo Clinic. He studied music at Valparaiso University in Indiana and Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Originally from Chicago, Mr. Daehn moved to Rochester in 1977 to serve as organist and minister of music at Zumbro Lutheran Church. During his 20 years of service with the parish, he met former Rochester carillonneur, Dean Robinson. Mr. Robinson encouraged Mr. Daehn to learn to play the carillon and later provided instruction. Mr. Daehn has traveled to Illinois and Iowa to receive ongoing coaching from well known carillonneurs.

Dean Robinson, a Mazeppa native, served for 46 years as the second carillonneur of the Rochester Carillon, from 1958 until his death in 2004. He studied music at Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio, and MacPhail College of Music in Minneapolis before beginning his career, performing and teaching carillon, organ and piano.

James Drummond was the first Rochester carillonneur. He retired from the post in 1958 after serving for nearly 30 years. He said his aim throughout those decades was to give “peace and inspiration and a lift of spirit to Rochester visitors, which was the intent of the carillon’s donors, Drs. Will and Charles Mayo.”
PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

The music of the Rochester Carillon serenades Mayo Clinic and the surrounding community during “Heritage Rings” every Monday evening at 7 p.m. and at noon every Wednesday and Friday. Additionally, the carillon is played in “Daily Rings” at 4:45 p.m. Monday through Friday. Concerts last around 30 minutes.

Recitals are also given on Memorial Day, Christmas Eve, and for other special events. Guest recitalists from around the world perform each summer in the “Second Summer Saturdays” Carillon Recital Series.

LISTENING TO THE CARILLON

Carillon music is heard best some distance from the source in a relatively open area, downwind, and away from distracting noise. The sound of the carillon is clearest during crisp, cold weather, though music can be heard year-round.

A popular place to listen is the Annenberg Plaza, a pedestrian mall bordered by the Mayo Building to the west and the Plummer and Siebens Buildings to the east. The Plaza features grassy spaces, seating areas and a large mosaic of Italian stone.
For more information, please contact Mayo Clinic Dolores Jean Lavins Center for Humanities in Medicine at humanitiesrochester@mayo.edu