

# All things Rochester: Rod and Susan Wilson Collection gifted to OU



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For the past 30 years, Rod and Susan Wilson have amassed an impressive collection of Rochester artifacts.

From photos and diaries, to postcards and magazines, the couple's Rochester trove of around 9,000 items was culled mostly from donations, garage/estate sales, antique shops and eBay auctions. Their reputation as prodigious collectors grew over time, turning their home into a community mecca.

"We've been doing tours of our house for close to 30 years," said Rod, adding that the collection started with items from his family.

“We aren’t a lot different from other families,” he said. “When you get to your late middle age and you’re an empty nester, you figure out that items in your family are very important and you want to learn (about them and pass them on).”

To preserve these items for current and future generations, the Wilsons decided to donate the collection to Oakland University Archives. Dominique Daniel, coordinator of OU Archives and Special Collections, says the collection complements the university’s current archival holdings, which include Oakland County tax rolls and records dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

“We are extremely honored and grateful that they’ve entrusted us with this collection,” said Daniel. “These items are pieces of Rochester’s history and will serve as resources for researchers and community members for years to come.”

Among the highlights of the collection is an 1874 photo of the first settlers of Oakland County and a World War I photo of women and children workers at the historic Western Knitting Mills (now Rochester Mills Brewery). The collection even contains a pair of socks made at the Western Knitting Mills, which were found in an Idaho miner’s cabin and sold on eBay.

Also in the collection are personal papers of John J. Snook, a prominent resident of Rochester who owned and operated Overlook Farm, overlooking the Clinton River at the southwest corner of Rochester Road and Avon Road. Snook was a Civil War veteran and a prolific poet, and the collection includes manuscripts of his poems – some dealing with Rochester and Avon, others with the Civil War and his travels.

The Wilsons have deep roots in Rochester, with Susan being a seventh-generation resident of the area. They donated the collection not only to preserve local history, but also to promote OU as a place to explore the cultural heritage of Rochester and surrounding communities.

“We’ve noticed that major universities all have some kind of collection that they promote and are known for,” Rod said. “We thought, let’s donate our collection to OU and maybe they can build not just a Rochester collection, but all the area around and be the place where everyone would want to go to (learn about local history).”

For more information, contact Dominique Daniel at [daniel@oakland.edu](mailto:daniel@oakland.edu) or (248) 370-2478. To learn more about OU Archives and Special Collections, visit the [web page](#).