

## Information Sheet

**R**      **Downing family.**  
**49**            **Downing and Whinrey families, papers, 1837-1929.**  
                  **11 folders, photocopies.**

This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri](http://The State Historical Society of Missouri). If you would like more information, please contact us at [shsresearch@umsystem.edu](mailto:shsresearch@umsystem.edu).

This collection consists of receipts and correspondence of the Downing and Whinrey families of southwestern Missouri. Both families had members who went to California to mine gold in the 1850s, some of whom remained to settle in the West. Most of the collection consists of letters written to relatives in Missouri.

James Downing left Missouri in 1850, bound for the gold fields of California. Six older sons and stepsons accompanied him. His wife, Mary Carlisle Bell Downing, stayed behind at Halltown, Missouri, with the remainder of her family by Downing and a previous husband, Robert R. Bell. After crossing the plains, the Downings and Bells began placer mining near Caloma, California. Lackluster results discouraged the elder Downing, who determined to make the long journey back to Missouri, this time by sea. He did not survive the trip, and was buried at sea.

Some of the Downing and Bell brothers remained in California, but they soon abandoned mining for work as teamsters and farmers. Beginning at Caloma and Cash Valley, they had spread out by the 1880s to Paradise, Visalia, Sacramento, Fresno, Biggs, and Squaw Valley.

Most of the letters in the collection are addressed to Mary Downing by her sons. The earliest correspondence from California includes descriptions of the journey across the plains and of placer mining in the mountains. Letters written in the 1860s and 1870s mention hard economic conditions, the possibility of a military draft in the state during the Civil War, the freighting business, and various local events. The later correspondence generally contains only family news.

There are also a few letters from Elizabeth Shannon, Mary Downing's sister in Tennessee, and from William Clark Whinrey. Whinrey, originally from Rheatown, Tennessee, also tried his hand at mining in California, but soon returned home. He moved to Missouri in 1859, and in 1864 married Elizabeth Ruhama Downing. Mary Downing, Elizabeth's mother, spent the remainder of her life with her daughter and William Whinrey, in whose papers this collection was found.

<i>r061</i>	<i>6 March 1981</i>	<i>Joanne W. Carson</i>	<i>Loaned for photocopying</i>
<i>r168</i>	<i>24 March 1983</i>	<i>Joanne W. Carson</i>	<i>Loaned for photocopying</i>

## Shelf List

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Folder 01: Receipts, 1837-1848

Folder 02: Correspondence, 1850-1859

Folder 03: Correspondence, 1860-1869

Folder 04: Correspondence, 1870-1879

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Folder 08: Correspondence, 1900-1904

Folder 09: Correspondence, 1905-1909

Folder 10: Correspondence, 1911-1929

Folder 11: Correspondence, undated and fragments

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## **REGISTER OF SELECTED CORRESPONDENCE**

### **Folder 2: 1850-1859**

7 Aug 1850      Jefferson County, Missouri. Malinda Washburn to Levi P. Downing  
Cholera in St. Louis and sickness in Jefferson County.

23 Nov 1850      Caloma, California. James Downing to Mary Downing  
Descriptions of placer mining.

5 Jul 1851      Cash Valley, California. Lafayette Downing to William and Caroline Wann  
Talks of father returning to California, and of small size of emigration to the state that year.

31 Aug 1851      Shasta City, California. R. M. Bell to James and Mary Downing  
Bell inquires after his father, and reports discouraging results in mines.

6 Jul 1852      Placerville, California. Franklin Bell to Mary Downing  
Emigration is beginning to reach Placerville, society is improving "with many ladys coming across the plains."

22 Aug 1852      Georgetown, California. W. C. Whinrey to J. Whinrey at Rheatown, Tennessee.  
Contains a description of the trip across the plains to California.

26 Feb 1857      Sacramento City, California. J. M. Bell to Mary Downing; and Calvin L. Coble to Margret Lakey. Reports that crops are beginning to come up, and that miners have done well.

8 Nov 1857      California County, California. Louisa J. Downing to Mary Downing.  
Says the men have gone into the mountains to cut lumber for a house. Long description of the "Lawson Route" to California. Warns new-comers to stay away from Salt Lake, as many have been killed by Indians and Mormons.

29 Nov 1857      Barkerville, California. John S. Downing to Mary Downing.  
Mentions emigrants have had trouble on the plains with Indians. Contains a description of the land around Barkerville.

2 Dec 1857      Sacramento County, California. Louisa J. Downing to Mary Downing  
Some details on finding land, and advice to future travelers. Advises coming only in large groups with guides.

30 Dec 1857      Sacramento County, California. Joseph Downing to "Uncle."  
descriptions of crossing plains, and mentions troubles of some emigrant trains.

24 Jan 1858      Sacramento County, California. Joseph Downing to William Wann and family  
Discussion of labor and prices. "...a person can do pretty well here but a poor person will run tight for a year."

- 16 Mar 1858 California. Joseph Downing to Mary Downing  
Says he expects to go into the freight business, hauling goods to the mountains.
- 4 Apr 1858 Elizabethton, Carter County, Tennessee. William L. Hunt to brother  
Concerns court judgment and finances.
- 20 Mar 1859 Hillsboro, Jefferson County, Missouri. Malinda Washburn to Mary Downing  
Local news.
- 1 May 1859 Sacramento County, California. Franklin L. Bell to Mary Downing  
Mentions going into freight business. News of acquaintances.
- 25 Jun 1859 Sacramento County, California. Joseph P. Downing to Mary Downing  
Notes prices and wages in California.
- 18 Oct 1859 Sacramento County, California. Sarah and Louise Downing to Mary Downing  
Family news.

**Folder 3: 1860-1869**

- 22 Jan 1860 Sacramento County, California. Joseph Downing to James M. Downing  
Remarks on robberies in California. "...I am a noted character for not stealing."
- 28 Jan 1860 Sacramento, California. Sarah M. Downing to William and Tennessee  
Wann. Family news.
- 28 Dec 1861 California. Joseph Downing to Mary Downing.  
Remarks on the Civil War in the Atlantic states, and mentions that the mails were not going through to Missouri.
- 18 Oct 1862 Sacramento County, California. Joseph Downing to James N. Downing.  
Mails to Missouri still questionable. Says that freight business in California is booming. Stock prices still very low.
- 22 Nov 1863 Sacramento County, California. William Downing to Levi and Robert Downing.  
Mentions possibility of being drafted into the Union army from California.
- 29 Nov 1863 Sacramento, California. John S. Downing to Levi and Robert Downing.  
Mentions being enrolled for the army and expecting a draft.
- 14 Apr 1864 Sacramento County, California. William Downing to Levi and Robert Downing.  
Mentions a revival of religion in the county.
- 23 Jul 1864 California. Louisa Downing to Mary Downing  
Reports sickness, baptisms, etc. of family.
- 7 Jan 1865 Sacramento County, California. Joseph and Louisa Downing to Mary Downing.  
Mentions kin in Rolla, Missouri and the hard times in Missouri during Price's raid.
- 24 Apr 1865 California. Joseph Downing to brother  
Mentions the ending of the war and Lincoln's assassination. Mentions also the settling of family estate in Missouri.
- 31 Apr 1865 California. Joseph and Martha Ann Downing to Mary Downing.  
Reports hard times in California. Says people are being forced to leave land or buy it.
- 31 Apr 1865 California. Martha Ann Downing to brothers  
Hard times in California.
- 3 Nov 1865 Land deed. Land in Greene County, Missouri from Eli Paris to William C. Whinrey.
- 26 Jun 1866 St. Louis, Missouri. Concerns a claim against William C. Whinrey.

- 12 Jul 1866 Home, Tennessee. Elizabeth Shannon to Mary Downing  
mentions prospects for good crops. (Elizabeth Shannon was Mary Downing's sister.)
- 5 Aug 1866 California. Joseph and Louisa Downing to Mary Downing  
Mentions crops.
- c1868 Joseph Downing to James and Robert Downing  
Wants to settle family estate in Missouri. Also family news.
- 12 Jan 1868 Crooked Creek, Carroll County, Arkansas. Louisa Wann to Mary Downing  
Family news.
- 1 Oct 1868 Stockton, California. Joseph Downing to Mary Downing  
Settling of family estate in Missouri.
- 20 Apr 1869 Franklin, Tennessee. Elizabeth Shannon to Mary Downing.  
Family news including notes on deaths during the Civil War.
- 9 May 1869 Paradise Valley, California. Joseph and Louisa J. Downing to Mary Downing.,  
Mentions religious news, baptisms, etc., also talks of one "communistic" Baptist sect.
- 28 Nov 1869 Stanislaus County, California. Joseph Downing to Mary Downing.  
Mentions buying land but doubts his ability to pay for it. Money is scarce.

#### **Folder 4: 1870-1879**

- 5 Aug 1870 Paradise, California. Joseph Downing to James N. Downing.  
Mentions crops in California.
- 14 Nov 1870 Visalia, California. Mary J. Bell to Mary Downing.  
Family news.
- 27 Jan 1871 Tulare County, California. Joseph Downing to Levi Downing.  
Times harder in California than ever known in Missouri
- 27 Jan 1871 California. Joseph Downing to Mary Downing.  
Contains dates of birth of the children of Joseph and Louisa Downing.
- 26 Apr 1871 Visalia, California. Joseph Downing to James Downing.  
Gloomy prospects for crops, still expects to be forced to leave land.
- 16 Feb 1872 Visalia, California. Joseph Downing to James Downing.  
Crops will be good; railroad coming to Tulare County.
- 12 Apr 1872 Visalia, California. Joseph Downing to Mary Downing.  
Reports earthquakes throughout the mountain states on March 26.
- 1 Dec 1872 Fresno County, California. Joseph Downing to James Downing.  
Mentions will be moving to Squaw Valley.
- 16 Oct 1878 Biggs, California. Louisa Downing to Mary Downing.  
Family news.
- 23 Oct 1878 Squaw Valley, California. Joseph Downing to Mary Downing.  
Family news.
- 18 May 1879 Biggs, California. William Downing to Eliza Calpurnia Downing.  
Says times are hard. Blames troubles on the fight between capital and labor; says news state constitution will end things.

13 Jul 1879 Hutchins, Dallas County, Texas. To Clarke Whinrey.  
Says money is scarce. Description of crop land. Letter is largely illegible.

27 Oct 1879 Rock Hill, Tennessee. Elizabeth Shannon to Mary Downing.  
Family news.

### **Folder 5: 1880-1889**

c1880 Squaw Valley, California. Matilda Downing to Mary Downing.  
Family news.

18 Dec 1882 Dayton, Washington. W. Hunt to W. C. Whinrey.  
Family news.

9 Jul 1885 Corvallis, Montana. Tennessee Wann to Mary Downing.  
Family news.

10 Dec 1886 Corvallis, Montana. To Joseph Whinrey, Halltown, Missouri.  
"This is the damdest place you ever seen...ten hoars for one decent woman." Describes a fight with a group of ten soldiers.

14 Dec 1887 Home, Tennessee. Mrs. B. J. Johnson to W. C. Whinrey.  
Family news. Mentions prices and wages in Tennessee.

20 apr 1888 Oowala, Indian Territory. Eliza Calpurnia Downing to Mary Downing.  
Good description of Oklahoma, including an account of a purposeful burning of the prairie.

21 Jul 1888 California. Matilda Johnson to Mary Downing.  
Mentions a trip to see the giant redwoods.

### **Folder 6: 1890-1895**

6 Sep 1891 Rheatown, Tennessee. Matilda Johnson to W. C. Whinrey.  
tells of the insanity of a family member.

2 Jul 1894 Odessa, Missouri. Matte C. Jenkins to W. C. Whinrey.  
Concerns a Whinrey estate in Ireland, and the attempts to claim it.

15 Jan 1895 Sunshine Mine, Utah. A six-page fragment to "father."  
Mentions mining in Utah and the politics of silver.

### **Folder 7: 1896-1899**

18 Oct 1896 Oakland, California. L. J. Downing to W. C. Whinrey.  
Mentions William Jennings Bryan and the Silver party.

### **Folder 9: 1905-1909**

25 Aug 1907 Oakland, California. L. P. Downing to Elizabeth Ruhama Downing.  
Family news.

### **Folder 11: undated and fragments**

20 Apr "Elderado County, California." Isham Williams to brother.  
Comments on mining and gambling in California.

20 Jan Wright County, Missouri. Mary Brown to Mary Downing.  
Comments on land clearing and planting.

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