



## Downing and Whinrey Families Papers (R0049)

**Collection Number:** R0049

**Collection Title:** Downing and Whinrey Families Papers

**Dates:** 1837-1929

**Creator:** Downing and Whinrey Families

**Abstract:** The Downing and Whinrey Families Papers contain photocopies 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.

**Collection Size:** 0.25 cubic foot  
(11 folders)

**Language:** Collection materials are in English.

**Repository:** The State Historical Society of Missouri

**Restrictions on Access:** Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Rolla](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at [rolla@shsmo.org](mailto:rolla@shsmo.org). Collections may be viewed at any research center.

**Restrictions on Use:** The Donor has given and assigned to the University all rights of copyright, which the Donor has in the Materials and in such of the Donor's works as may be found among any collections of Materials received by the University from others.

**Preferred Citation:** [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Downing and Whinrey Families Papers* (R0049); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Rolla [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-Rolla].

**Donor Information:** The papers were loaned for photocopying to the University of Missouri by Joanne W. Carson on March 6, 1981 (Accession No. RA0061). An addition was made on March 24, 1983 by Joanne W. Carson (Accession No. RA0168).

**Related Materials:** Additional materials related to the Downing and Whinrey Families Papers can be found in the following collections:

*Farrar and Caldwell Families Papers* (C2093)

*Basye Family Papers (C2505)*

**Processed by:** Processed by John F. Bradbury, February 16, 1984. Revised by Kathleen Seale, March 27, 2020.

**Biographical Note:**

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 in Halltown, Missouri, with the remainder of her family with 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 the 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.

**Arrangement:**

The collection has been arranged into the following two series:

Receipts  
Correspondence

**Scope and Content Note:**

**Receipts**

This series contains receipts with names and amounts owed. Also include is information on members of the Downing and Whinrey families being elected for local positions. This series is arranged chronologically.

**Correspondence**

This series consists of letters written by and to members of the Downing and Whinrey families. 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. An index of the letters in each folder is available in folder 2.

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. This series is arranged chronologically.

**Container List:**

f. 1		Receipts
Box 001	f. 1	Receipts, 1837-1848
f. 2-11		Correspondence
	f. 2-4	Family correspondence, 1850-1879
Box 002	f. 5-11	Family correspondence, 1880-1929
	f. 11	Correspondence and fragments, no date

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Index Term	Folder
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