Descriptive Summary

Title: Downey Historical Society
Dates: 1846-Present
Collection Number: NA
Creator/Collector:
Extent: Three rooms, seven file cabinets, three storage closets
Repository: Downey Historical Society
Downey, California 90242

Abstract: The Downey Historical Society preserves and exhibits documents related to many periods and themes in Downey history. The Society is largely charged with preserving Downey’s history, but has holdings related to other southeast Los Angeles County suburbs, Los Angeles County, and California. Holdings range from eighteenth century maps of Texas, Oregon, and the West, to photos of Latinos in Downey. The Society also holds complete records of Downey-specific newspapers in original copies and microfilm. Holdings also include folders of documents and photos on various topics in Downey’s history.

Language of Material: English

Access
Holdings are stored on-site at the Downey Historical Society. Documents are held mostly in cabinets in the reading room, newspapers are stored in original form in newspaper room, and microfilm copies are stored in the lobby. A microfilm reader is also available for use in the lobby. Researchers from the public are generally allowed access to most resources, but will be asked to become a contributing member of the Downey Historical Society to aid preservation efforts for later researchers.

Publication Rights
Property rights belong to the Downey Historical Society. The Downey Historical Society does not own literary rights, including copyrights. Those are retained by the publishers and their heirs. It is the researcher’s duty to seek permission for copyrights when applicable.

Preferred Citation
Downey Historical Society. Downey Historical Society

Acquisition Information
Donations from community members.

Biography/Administrative History
The Downey Historical Society is a volunteer-run non-profit organization tasked with preserving and displaying the history of our city. Nestled in between Orange and Los Angeles Counties, Downey is home to over 113,000 residents. The community was founded in 1873 as a railroad town on land owned by California’s only Irish-born governor, John Gately Downey. Farmers took advantage of the fertile land near the San Gabriel River and planted alfalfa, walnuts, and small crops from the late nineteenth century until the early twentieth century. Farmers then struck citrus gold, and Downey became known for its fruitful orange groves. By the time Downey incorporated into Los Angeles County in 1956, aerospace companies began building spacecraft parts that would later be used in the Apollo missions of the 1960s. (This is why Downey is known as the “Cradle of the Space Age.”) Metallica’s James Hetfield and Richard and Karen Carpenter grew up in Downey. Once a white-restricted suburb, a 2015 Los Angeles Times article referred to Downey as the “Mexican Beverly Hills” because of its Mexican middle-class makeup. In short, Downey is a microcosm of myriad trends in United States history. The Historical Society accepts and collects documents related to every aspect of Downey’s history. Most documents and collections have been donated at some point by a city body or private individuals. Since the Historical Society is volunteer-run, it is open on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10 AM – 2 PM, except near important holidays. Call to confirm hours near holidays like Thanksgiving, New Year’s Eve, and the Fourth of July. The Society is also open every third Saturday of the month from 10 AM – 2 PM. The Downey Historical Society can be reached by phone at (562) 862 2777 and by email at downeyhistorycenter@gmail.com. Finding aid was compiled by G. Aron Ramirez and Armando Barcena in 2018, with help from Bobbi Bruce and Bob Thompson.

Scope and Content of Collection
Photographs, newspapers, official city documents, maps, film reels, photo slides, real estate advertisements, academic books, nonacademic books, city directories.Collection arranged in order of physical location of items, as grouped by rooms. Many cabinets or physical locations are unmarked. In cases where the exact physical location is unmarked, it can be assumed that the further on the physical location of this list, the further down an item is on the physical cabinet. If unclear,
the staff at the Downey Historical Society will be able to help locate the item. No changes were made to the titles of folders or locations, even if misleading, to best preserve the researcher’s ability to locate the specific item.

**Indexing Terms**
- Pioneers
- Suburbanization
- Mexican Americans
- Cuban Americans
- Southern California History
- Los Angeles County Criminal Justice
- World War II
- Demographic change
- John Gately Downey (1827-1894)
- Downey (Calif.) Police Department
- Downey (Calif.) City Council
- Downey, Calif.
- California
- Los Angeles County
- Aerospace and aviation manufacturing
- Agriculture and citrus farming

Finding Aid