
Guide to the William Downey Papers CEMA 32

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Title: William Downey Papers

Identifier/Call Number: CEMA 32

Contributing Institution: University of California, Santa Barbara, Davidson Library, Department of Special Collections, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives

Language of Material: English

Physical Description: 1.0 linear feet2 document boxes

Date: Late 19th century - 1999

Location note: Del Norte.

creator: Downey, Bill

Conditions Governing Access note

none

Conditions Governing Use note

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Preferred Citation note

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Processing Information note

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Acquisition Information

Donated by Michael Downey, April 21, 1997.

Biographical Sketch

William Downey, known to most as "Bill" was born June 15, 1922 in Ottumwa, Iowa. His family moved to Chicago, Illinois where Downey attended elementary school and early high school. The family returned to Ottumwa following the death of his father. After graduating from high school he enlisted in the Marine Corps to fight in World War II. In 1945, after leaving the Marine Corps, he returned to Iowa where he eventually owned and operated an auto repair shop in Des Moines, Iowa for over twenty years.

In 1965, Downey and his wife visited Santa Barbara and relocated to the community the following year. During this time his wife encouraged him to begin his writing career. Having only a high school education, Downey set out to start a career in journalism. Although he was in his 40's before he began his writing career, it was obvious that he had a natural talent for writing after he published a three-part story about the African-American Muslims in Santa Barbara. The article caught the attention of the *Santa Barbara News Press* and Downey became its first African-American reporter. He worked his way up from writing obituaries to a feature-story writer. Downey was famous for his 'Gone Fishin' columns, which often featured a colorful character 'Uncle Russell,' He also published feature articles in *Better Homes and Gardens* in Des Moines Iowa, *Western Outdoor News*, *American Shootgunner* and *Outdoor Life*.

Downey's career changed after he wrote an article about a boy who was dying of leukemia. Newspapers from around the world picked up the article. He expanded the article into a story and sold the movie rights. The proceeds afforded Downey the opportunity to end his fourteen-year career at the Santa Barbara News Press. After leaving the News Press Downey invested more time writing novels and teaching.

Downey was well respected in the literary community for his work with the Santa Barbara Writers Conference and his writing classes through adult education and UCSB Extension. He was a member of Outdoor Writers of California, Pillsbury Foundation Writing Committee, Adult Education Instructor's Association, and Santa Barbara Continuing Education Association. Downey was the author of the five novels which include, *Tom Bass: Black Horseman*, *Black Viking*, *Uncle Sam Must be Losing the War*, *EDOU*, and *Right Brain: Write On!*

William Downey died on September 1, 1994.

*Please note that the following works are available in the Specials Collections and Black Studies Units: *Right Brain: Write On!* (PN 171.W74 D68 1984); *Tom Bass: Black Horseman* (SF 287.D68); *Uncle Sam Must be Losing the War* (D 811.D663 1982).

Scope Note

This collection is housed in two boxes, containing correspondence files, photographs, and newspaper clippings. The collection is arranged in two series. Series one, Personal/Biographical Information is arranged alphabetically by assigned folder titles. It offers information about Downey's personal life, writing career, and community involvement. Series two, *Santa Barbara News Press* represents Downey's fourteen-year career as a columnist with the *Santa Barbara News Press*. This series is arranged chronologically and provides some insight into how Downey's career evolved.

Personal/Biographical Series 1. This series is one box, which consists of six folders that cover Downey's family history, correspondence, books, and awards. Folder three contains correspondence to his editor that spans 1975-1977. Folders four and five contain photographs of Downey's family, which chronicle the life of African-Americans during the late nineteenth century and the Civil War. Folder six contains an article that offers a historical perspective on the life of Tom Bass.

***Santa Barbara News Press* Series 2.** This series is one box, which consists of twelve folders that span from 1969-1979. These articles are from the *Gone Fishin'* column published in the *Santa Barbara News Press*. The undated articles are in folder one. Folder two contains his first article published by the *Santa Barbara News Press* about the Black Muslims in Santa Barbara.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

African American authors
African American journalists
Correspondence
Photographs

Series I: Personal/Biographical Information late 19th century-1999

Box 1, Folder 1	Biographical Profile 1986-1994
Box 1, Folder 2	Community Activities and Awards 1990-1995
Box 1, Folder 3	Correspondence 1975-1977
Box 1, Folder 4	Family History ca. late 19th century
Box 1, Folder 5	Photographs ca. late 19th century
Box 1, Folder 6	Tom Bass 1999

Series II: *Santa Barbara News Press* 1960's-1979

***Gone Fishin'* Articles**

Box 2, Folder 1	undated
Box 2, Folder 2	1969
Box 2, Folder 3	1970
Box 2, Folder 4	1971
Box 2, Folder 5	1972
Box 2, Folder 6	1973
Box 2, Folder 7	1974
Box 2, Folder 8	1975
Box 2, Folder 9	1976
Box 2, Folder 10	1977
Box 2, Folder 11	1978
Box 2, Folder 12	1979