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GEORGE T. DOWNING PAPERS

Collection 152-1 to 152-3

Prepared by:
George Perry
and
Karen L. Jefferson
July 1989

Scope Note

George Thomas Downing (1819-1903) of Newport, Rhode Island was a successful businessman and noted abolitionist. In New York, Downing operated a catering service. In Rhode Island he operated a catering service and managed his own hotel. He also managed the restaurant in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. for twelve years.

Downing was very active in the abolitionist movement, and worked for civil rights on the state and national level. He was spokesman along with Frederick Douglass in urging President Andrew Jackson to adopt a more liberal reconstruction policy, and worked with Charles Sumner to push for national civil rights legislation. He helped to repeal discriminatory laws in New York and Rhode Island requiring Negroes and Irish to own property as a prerequisite to voting. He fought for the desegregation of schools in Rhode Island, and the abolishment of Jim Crow cars on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. He fought to open the Senate Gallery to Negroes, to end the nine o'clock curfew, and for passage of the public accommodations law (1873) in Washington, D.C.

The George T. Downing Papers total one linear foot and span the period 1840 - 1930, focusing on the 1860's to the 1890's. The papers include correspondence, invitations, programs and memorabilia of Downing and some of his family. Of interest are the items documenting Downing's efforts as a recruiter for colored troops during the civil war. And there are letters and memorabilia of Frederick and Helen Douglass, Charles Sumner, Gerrit Smith, William Wendell Phillips, Charles Reason and Alexander Crummell. Also of note is the patent for improvements on the street-railway switch awarded to Phillip Bell Downing in 1890; and programs for the Sons and Daughters Reunion of Newport, R.I. (1884), and the Reunion of Abolitionists (1889).

Scope Note continued

Sources:

Douglass, Frederick. *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* New York: Collier Books, 1962.

Lester, Charles Edwards. *Life and Public Services of Charles Sumner*. New York: U.S. Publishing Co., 1874.

Washington, S.A.M. George Thomas Downing, *Sketch of his Life and Times*. Newport, RI: The Milne Printery, 1910.

Biographical Data

- 1819 December 30 Born in New York City: son of Thomas and Rebecca (West) Downing.
Attended the old Mulberry Street School in N.Y.C. and graduated from Hamilton College, N.Y.
- 1841 November 24 Married Serena Leanora De Grasse. They had several children.
- 1842 Became a caterer in New York City.
- 1846 Established a summer business in Newport, R.I.
- 1850 Opened a catering establishment in Providence, R.I., while continuing his summer business in Newport.
- 1854 Fall Erected the luxurious Sea Girt Hotel in Newport, R.I. which was destroyed by fire in 1860 (1861?).
- 1857-1866 Led the fight that resulted in the abolition of separate publicly supported schools in Rhode Island.
- 1861-1865 Was instrumental during the Civil War in recruiting soldiers for several colored regiments.
- 1865-1877 Managed the restaurant in the House of Representatives in the U.S. Capitol. Was in contact with leading statesmen of both parties.
- 1866 February 6 Along with Frederick Douglass, urged President Andrew Johnson to adopt a more liberal reconstruction policy. The delegation also urged Sen. Charles Sumner to support the Fourteenth Amendment.
- 1869 Advocated support for both the Republican and Democratic parties at the colored National Labor Convention.
- 1873 Participated in the passage of the public accommodations law in the nation's capital.
- 1883 Broke with the Republicans and supported Northern Democrats.
- 1888 Had become a large real estate owner on Bellevue Avenue, Newport, R.I. where a street was named in his honor.

Biographical Data continued

- 1891 Opposed colonization; predicted that amalgamation of the races was the ultimate solution.
- 1903 July 21 Died at his home, on Bellevue Avenue, Newport, Rhode Island.

Sources: Logan, Rayford W. and Winston, Michael R. *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*: New York: Norton, c. 1982. 680p.

Washington, S.A.M. George Thomas Downing. *Sketch of his Life and Times*. Newport, R.I.: The Milne Printery, 1910. 23p.

Series Description

Series A Personal Papers

Box 152-1 This series contains a few news articles about George T. Downing as well as two brief holograph statements on friendship and benevolence written by him. Other items of interest are Civil War documents authorizing Downing to help recruit soldiers for colored regiments; and a program for the reunion of abolitionist held in Boston, MA September 23, 1889.

Series B Correspondence

Box 152-1 The correspondence in this series is arranged alphabetically by the correspondent's last name. The time span of the material is from the late 1840s to the 1890s. Prominent correspondents include: William Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner and Frederick Douglass.

Series C Family Papers

Box 152-2 The family papers are primarily comprised of memorabilia related to members of the Downing family and their activities. This group of materials is arranged according to name and includes: items related to church activities, invitations, obituary data, notes and drawings. Of special interest is an 1870 certificate of membership in the Howard University Normal and Preparatory Department belonging to Georgania F. Downing; and a patent for a street railway-switch, issued in 1890 to Phillip B. Downing.

Series D Abolitionist and Government Officials

Box 152-2 This series contains texts of speeches by various government officials as well as programs and invitations concerning abolitionist and their activities. Items are arranged by name and include: Alexander Crummell, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, William Lloyd Garrison, Lewis Hayden, Robert Morris, Wendell Phillips and Charles Sumner. Other items of interest are: the text of a speech by the first Black U.S. Senator Hiram R. Revels; and an 1859 broadside by Ichabod Northup who worked with Downing in the successful effort to integrate schools in Rhode Island.

Series E Memorabilia

Box 152-2
to Box 152-3 This series includes admission tickets, business advertisements, calling cards, invitations, newsclippings, programs, and poems. An example of the material in this series is an invitation to the "Ceremonies attending the 16th National Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic", Baltimore Maryland, June 21, 1882. There are also two oversize items: facsimiles of the Declaration of Independence used as business advertisements in celebrating the centennial year 1876.

Container List

Series A

Personal Papers

Box

Folder

152-1

- 1 News articles about Downing
- 2 Writings by Downing - Composition #1; "Friendship" February 16, 1870. (Holograph)
- 3 Writings by Downing - "Benevolence." Washington, 1870. (Holograph)
- 4 Appointment as Honorary Commissioner of North, Central and South American Exposition at New Orleans, La. September 15, 1885. (certificate)
- 5 Chosen by the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island to Office of Notary Public. February 7, 1883. (certificate)
- 6 Civil War Pass (to travel) April 21, 1864
- 7 Special order authorizing G.T. Downing and Peter W. Downing to recruit volunteers for a Massachusetts regiment (colored) March 7, 1864
- 8 Recommendation for position of Brigade Quartermaster (signed by Wm. J. Dale, Surgeon General, Massachusetts)
- 9 Newport Equal Rights Club-membership ribbon
- 10 Downing's Oyster and Dining Saloon- business card, advertisements
- 11 Sea Girt House - receipts, menu, business card
- 12 Annual Clambake September 19, 1865
- 13 Memorabilia citing "Downing's Block" (street in Newport, RI)
- 14 Sons and Daughters of Newport, R.I. Reunion. July 4th, 1884
- 15 Reunion of Abolitionists - Tremont Temple, Boston September 23, 1889 (program)
- 16 "Friendship" poem by Josephine Silone- Yates (written to Downing for his 80th birthday)

Series B

Correspondence

152-1

- 17 Cable, John - October 8, 1875
- 18 Clark, Thomas - December 14, 1857
- 19 Clarke, James F. - February 1
- 20 Clay, Frances - September, 1859
- 21 DeMortie, Louise - July 12, 1880
- 22 Douglass, Frederick - October 6, 1884
- 23 Douglass, Frederick - January 9, 1892
- 24 Downing, Philip B. - October 8, 1884
- 25 Gould, Emily B. - August 2, 1856
- 26 Hastings, Julia S. - January 24, 1875
- 27 Hersey, Lord John - n.d.
- 28 Hutchinson, John W. - November 10, 1891
- 29 Jackson, Harriet - January, 1848
- 30 Julian, Leo - January 19, 1864
- 31 Morgan, E.W. - March 29, 1868
- 32 Phillips, William Wendell - January 8, 1884

Container List

Series B

Correspondence continued

Box

Folder

152-1

- 33 Phillips, William Wendell - January 27, 1884
 - 34 Reason, Charles L. - March 25, 1890
 - 35 Sumner, Charles - July 26, 1863
 - 36 Sumner, Charles - March 2, 1867
 - 37 Sumner, Charles - June 4, 1869
 - 38 Tate, Amelie - March 18, 1875 [wife of Alexandre Tate] - August 22, 1874
 - 39 Wilson, G.H. - December 16, 1861
 - 40 Yermiloff, General - July 20, 18..
 - 41 Response to invitations
 - 42 Greeting cards
 - 43 Envelopes
- Other Correspondents
- 44 Coggeshall, Thomas (Mayor of Newport, RI) to Nall (Warden of State Prison)
December 1, 1886
 - 45 Tappan, Lewis to Douglass, Frederick - January 11, 1866

Series C

Family Papers

152-2

- 1 De Grasse, Georginia
- 2 De Grasse, Dr. John V. [M.D.] (brother of Mrs. G. T. Downing)
- 3 De Mortie, Mark R. (Husband of Cordelia, daughter of G.T. Downing)
- 4 Downing, Cordelia (daughter of G.T. Downing)
- 5 Downing, Georginia F. (daughter of G.T. Downing)
- 6 Downing, Peter John (son of G.T. Downing)
- 7 Downing, Peter William (brother of G. T.Downing)
- 8 Downing, Philip Bell- Patent No 430,118 June 17, 1890 "street railway switch"
(son of G.T. Downing)
- 9 Downing, Philip Bell- writings by him "Walter Scott"
- 10 Downing, Rebecca Medora (daughter of G.T. Downing)
- 11 Downing, Rebecca M.- Correspondence Mrs.Andrews August 17, 1877
- 12 Downing, Rebecca M.- Correspondence Cable, John October 17, 1875
- 13 Downing, Rebecca M.- Correspondence Douglass, Frederick April 19, 1889
- 14 Downing, Rebecca M.- Correspondence Douglass, Helen September 26, 1889
- 15 Downing, Rebecca M.- Correspondence Eloise (cousin) July 16, 1861
- 16 Downing, Rebecca M.- Correspondence Jacobs, Louise May 16, 1870
- 17 Downing, Rebecca M.- Correspondence Louise (cousin) n.d.
- 18 Downing, Rebecca M.- Correspondence Vogelsang, Maria M. DeGrasse (Mrs.)
Oct. 23, 1881
- 19 Downing, Rebecca M.- Correspondence Woodman, R. December 28, 1874
- 20 Downing Rebecca- Greeting Cards

Container List

Series C Family Papers continued

Box Folder

- 152-2 21 Downing, Serena Leanora DeGrasse- Correspondence, invitations (wife of
 G.T. Downing)
 22 Downing, Serena Leanora DeGrasse newsclippings, flyers, notes
 23 Downing, Thomas (son of G.T. Downing)
 24 Wheatland, Marcus F., Dr. (husband of Irene, grand-daughter of G.T. Downing)
 25 Drawings by various family members

Series D Abolitionist and Government Officials

- 26 Crummell, Alexander
- 27 Douglass, Frederick
- 28 Garnet, Henry Highland
- 29 Garrison, William Lloyd
- 30 Hayden, Lewis
- 31 LeBarnes, John W.
- 32 Lincoln, Abraham
- 33 Morris, Robert
- 34 Northup, Ichabod
- 35 Phillips, Wendell
- 36 Revels, Hiram
- 37 Smith, Gerrit
- 38 Sumner, Charles

Series E Memorabilia

- 39 "Home" (poem) by Annie C. Ronseff? 1859 (holograph)
- 40 Poem "dedicate to Aunt Theodocia" May 1884
- 41 "Pockey hat and Feather" (poem- no author no date)
- 42 Admission Tickets
- 43 Business advertisements
- 44 Calling cards
- 45 Programs and flyers
- 46 Invitations
- 47 Greeting cards
- 48 Newsclippings
- 49 Scenes from Newport, Rhode Island (pictures)

Container List

Series E

Memorabilia continued

Item

152-3

One mailing envelope and two oversize posters - facsimile of the Declaration of Independence celebrating the Centennial year 1876; used as business advertisement by Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and Churchill, Gilchrist, Smith & Co. (Dry Goods - Boston).

August 4, 1989

TO: George T. Downing Collection File

FROM: Karen L. Jefferson

SUBJ: Transfer to Omnium Gatherum

The following two items were transferred from the George T. Downing Papers to Omnium Gatherum. The items have no apparent relationship to the Downing Papers and will receive wider accessibility through individual cataloging in Omnium Gatherum.

- U.S.A. Statement of citizenship for Alexander Moore of Baltimore County Maryland, Nov. 16, 1849. (Note on the back of the certificate, denial of a passport to Moore because he is a person of color. Signed "Dept. of State Nov. 17, 1859.")

- A.M.E. Church Pastoral Credentials for Rev. R.H. Miles, June 15, 1891.