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# **Guide to the William Downie Papers Relating to Exploration of British Columbia**

**WA MSS S-2490**



by Kathleen T. Burns

July 2006

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library  
P. O. Box 208330  
New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
(203) 432-2977  
beinecke.library@yale.edu  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

**CALL NUMBER:** WA MSS S-2490

**CREATOR:** Downie, William, 1819-1893

**TITLE:** William Downie papers relating to exploration of British Columbia

**DATES:** 1858-circa 1906

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 3.43 linear feet (4 boxes) + 1 broadside folder

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** Papers consist of diaries, correspondence, writings, printed works, photographs, maps, and other materials that document William Downie's life, interest, and travels in the Northwest, particularly during the 1850s and 1860s. The papers offer evidence of early exploration and mining operations in British Columbia, particularly in the Quesnel Forks area by the Quesnelle Mining Company. Downie's interest and encounters with indigenous inhabitants are recorded.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.downie>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.downie>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to [beinecke.images@yale.edu](mailto:beinecke.images@yale.edu).

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box  
f. folder

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Kenneth R. Graham, 2003 and 2004. Gift of Graham C. Boettcher and Lindsay A. Boettcher, 2005 addition. Gift of Graham C. Boettcher, 2006 addition.

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## Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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## Conditions Governing Use

The William Downie Papers Relating to Exploration of British Columbia are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

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## Preferred Citation

William Downie Papers Relating to Exploration of British Columbia, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

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## Processing Information

The William Downie Papers Relating to Exploration of British Columbia were processed in 2004. An addition to the papers was accessioned in 2005. Folders for the additional materials were added (Folders 9-26) and interfiled as appropriate. Alphabetical qualifiers were used to indicate where materials were interfiled among the original eight numbered folders. An addition to the papers was accessioned in 2006 (Box 4).

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## WILLIAM DOWNIE (1819-1894)

William Downie was born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1819. He worked as sailor before joining the Gold Rush in San Francisco in 1849. He mined near Sacramento and along the Yuba River in California, in British Columbia (where he studied Canadian Indians and made reports to the Canadian government about the topography of the land around the Skeena River and the British Columbia coastline), and in Panama. He founded the California town of Downieville, California's first state capitol. A volume of his reminiscences, *Hunting for Gold*, was published in 1893 by the California Publishing Company in San Francisco. He died in San Francisco in 1894.

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## Scope and Contents

The William Downie Papers Relating to Exploration of British Columbia consist of diaries, correspondence, writings, printed works, photographs, and other material that document William Downie's life, interest, and travels in the Northwest during the 1850s and 1860s. The papers offer evidence of early exploration and mining in British Columbia, particularly in the Quesnel Forks area, one of the oldest mining camps in the Cariboo district. Downie's interest in, and encounters with, British Columbia's indigenous inhabitants are also recorded.

[Series I. Diaries](#) is comprised of seven manuscript diaries that document Downie's travels in British Columbia and the Northwest. The earliest volume, recorded in an 1856 Union Diary, was mainly kept by Downie during the summer and early fall of 1858 while in Nanaimo. A diary dated 1859 Sept 10 to Sept 20 relates an exploratory canoe journey along the Skeena River, with comments about geography, mining prospects, Indian traveling companions, and local Indian customs. Loose notes from 1860 Apr 16 to Apr 20 relate a Nass River prospecting trip, and record impressions of William Duncan and his mission at Fort Stimpson as well as descriptions of several Indian village. These notes, originally discovered in the 1859 diary, are foldered separately.

A bound volume, titled "Family Register", bears an inscription to Downie from James Duneau, 1860 Jan 3. The volume contains Downie's dated diary entries from January to November 1860, as well as two

sketched maps: one of the "South Channel" and Kitimat Village; another of Pitt Island and Gull Island. The diary entries, which record Downie's traveling arrangements and his observations, are written from Victoria, Fort Rupert, Fort Simpson, Nasse, Bellacoola, Knight's Inlet, and other British Columbia sites.

Two diaries from 1861 Jul 4 to Aug 9 describe Downie's and Alexander McDonald's joint exploration of British Columbia's interior, beginning at Bute Inlet and following the Homathko River, in an unsuccessful search for a route that would link the Pacific coast to the Fraser River. A printed 1866 diary completed in manuscript records Downie's stay in Portland, his steamer voyage to San Francisco and return to Oregon, and his subsequent travels through Washington State and B.C.'s Okanagan Valley. The latter part of the diary records difficult working conditions at Wild Horse Creek in the East Kootenays where Downie set up camp to mine gold alongside Chinese miners.

[Series II. Correspondence](#) consists of 8 letters to and from friends, officials, and business associates, documenting Downie's mining and business interests, his political opinions, and his relationship with the Canadian government as an independent explorer and a participant in British Columbia's gold mining industry. A letter from the editor of Downie's memoir, Chris M. Waage, describes work on the volume.

[Series III. Writings and Other Papers](#) includes manuscript documents concerning placer mining in British Columbia, infrastructure of the Queen Charlotte Island mines, an 1870 duel involving a member of the Know Nothing party in Downieville, California, and the Pioneer Association of B.C. A manuscript map of property leased in 1881 by the Quesnelle Mining Company, showing the site of a proposed dam on the Quesnelle River, and a manuscript ledger (528 p.) with most entries dated 1863 are present.

[Series IV. Printed Works](#) consists primarily of materials concerning British Columbia and the province's mining industry.

[Series V. Visual Materials](#) is organized into three subseries: Drawings, Photographs, and Postcards. The Photograph subseries includes photographs of individual Native Americans, including one indigenous youth in a military uniform, as well as a portrait of a group prepared for potlatch, and a portrait of William Downie.

The 2006 Addition (Box 4) consists of correspondence, photographs and printed material relating to William Downie and the Downie family.

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## Collection Contents

### Series I: Diaries, 1859-1874

0.11 linear feet (.25 box)

Series I. *Diaries* is arranged chronologically.

b. 1, f. a	<a href="#">Diary</a>	[1858?] Jan-Sep
b. 1, f. 1	<a href="#">Diary</a>	1859 Sep 10-Sep 20
b. 1, f. 1a	<a href="#">Family Register, manuscript diary</a>	1860 Feb 17-Nov 26
b. 1, f. 2	<a href="#">Diary</a>	1860 Apr 18-22
b. 1, f. 3	<a href="#">Diary</a>	1861 Jul 4-21
b. 1, f. 4	<a href="#">Diary</a>	1861 Jul 22-Aug 29
b. 1, f. 5	<a href="#">Diary</a>	1866

**Series II: Correspondence, 1861-1893***0.11 linear feet (.25 box)*Series II. *Correspondence* is arranged chronologically.

b. 1, f. 5a	Young, William A. G., Colonial Secretary's Office, Vancouver Island Concerning Downie's application for a naval vessel to protect his partners, prospecting along the Northern Coast	1861 Jan, May
b. 1, f. 6	ALS to Colonel E. Bulkeley, Victoria, B.C.	1865 Apr 7
b. 1, f. 6a	Schofield, R. J., Umatilla, Oregon Encloses two notes from Schofield: an order to "Miss Hett" for an oil colour box, and an ALS to Alex Hett of Kent, England, introducing Downie	1865 Nov 26
b. 1, f. 7	ALS to the "Editor of the Leader," Downieville, California	1874 Feb 5
b. 1, f. 7a	Hunter, Joseph, Nevada, California Description of lease property located by the South Fork of Quesnell Mining Company, B.C.	1881 Dec 21
b. 1, f. 7b	Robson, John. Minister of Mines, Victoria, B.C. Acknowledgement of receipt of 1886 Aug 6 report on gold mining operations in B.C.	1886 Aug 11
b. 1, f. 7c	Douglas, P. B., Assistant Secretary, Department of the Interior, Ottawa, Canada Enclosing memorandum dated 1886 Sep 15 from George M. Dawson, Acting Director of the Geological Survey regarding Downie's offer to assist in exploration of the B.C. coast	1886 Sep 20
b. 1, f. 7	Waage, Chris M.	1893 Jun 25

**Series III: Writings and Other Papers, 1859-1870***1.4 linear feet (1.25 boxes)*Series III. *Writings and Other Papers* is arranged chronologically.

b. 1, f. 7e	Downie, William. "Memos. referring to mining in British Columbia," manuscript	1859 Apr 5
b. 1, f. 7	"Rules and registers of the Queen Charlotte Island mines," manuscript draft	1859 Jul 27
b. 3, f. 7g	Ledger, manuscript, kept by John Shofer and for the accounts of Booth and Company Half of ledger used as scrapbook	1863-[19??]
b. 1, f. 8	MacDonald, Calvin B. "The Bloody Code: The Story of a Duel near Downieville in July 1855," manuscript	1870 Nov 20
b. 1, f. 8	"Plan of ground leased by the South Fork of Quesnelle Mining Co.," manuscript map	[1881?]
b. 1, f. 9	Pioneer Association of B.C. "Constitution," manuscript	n.d.



**Series IV: Printed Works, 1859-1884***0.1 linear feet (.25 box)*Series IV. *Printed Works* is arranged chronologically.

b. 1, f. 10	British Columbia. Laws, statutes, etc. <i>Proclamation</i>	1859 Aug 31
b. 1, f. 11	<i>The Occasional Paper. Two letters from the Bishop of Columbia to the Rev. E. Cridge and Bishop Demers</i>	1860
b. 1, f. 12	Forbes, Charles. <i>Prize Essay. Vancouver Island: its resources and capabilities...</i>	[1862]
b. 1, f. 13	Waddington, Alfred. <i>Bute Inlet Wagon Road Company Limited</i> , prospectus	1863 Dec 7
b. 1, f. 14	Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition. <i>Vancouver Island: exploration, 1864</i>	1864
b. 1, f. 15	<i>The Footlight</i> , Virginia City, Nev. leaflet	1876 Sep 2
b. 1, f. 16	<i>The South Fork of Quesnelle Mining Company</i> , prospectus and bill	1881, n.d.
b. 1, f. 17	Canada. Dept. of Agriculture. <i>Province of British Columbia: Information for Intending Settlers</i>	1884
b. 1, f. 18	MacDonald, Calvin B. <i>Echoes of Wartime</i> , handbill	1884

**Series V: Visual Materials, 1868-1909***0.21 linear feet (1 box)*

Series V. *Visual Materials* is organized into three subseries: Drawings, Maps, and Postcards. Each subseries is arranged chronologically.

Drawings		
b. 2, f. 19	"Mt. Seymour Queen Charlotte Isl. from Congitz Cove," pencil drawing Verso: "Cacutyah," "Cutyah," and "Scailus, Petty Chief", sketched pencil portraits	1868 Jun
Photographs		
b. 2, f. 20	"Major Downie of Downieville, Cal."	n.d.
b. 2, f. 21	"Potlatch - Alberni," group portrait of 17 Native celebrants Verso caption: "E. C. Brooks, Nanaimo, B.C."	n.d.
b. 2, f. 22	Cartes-de-visites of Native Americans	
Postcards		
b. 2, f. 23	"Buffalo Bill's Wild West," fold-out	1908
b. 2, f. 24	Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition	1909
b. 2, f. 25	"Eskimo Belles and Sled Reindeer, Alaska"	n.d.

**2006 Addition, 1859-1906***0.42 linear feet (1 box)*

The 2006 Addition consists of correspondence, photographs, printed material, and one manuscript relating to William Downie and the Downie family. Correspondence consists of a letter of introduction for William Downie from Allen Francis, U.S. Consul in Victoria, British Columbia, and letters from the California State Library to Flora Downie Plantz. Undated (nineteenth century) photographs depict unidentified individuals. Printed material includes a heavily annotated Bible, two issues of *The Rural Californian* (Los Angeles, California), and newspaper clippings from San Francisco and Victoria, British Columbia in the 1880s and 1890s. Also included is a manuscript on quartz mining regulations by William Downie (1859).

b. 4, f. 27	Correspondence	1866, 1906
b. 4, f. 28	Photographs	undated
b. 4, f. 29-33	Printed material	1861-1893, undated
b. 4, f. 34	"Mining regulations," manuscript	1859 March

**Oversize**

*1.3 linear feet (1 box)*

b. bsd, folder 26 Plan of ground leased by the South Fork of the Quesnelle Mining Company

[1881?]

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## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### Subjects

Chinese -- British Columbia  
Dueling -- California -- Downieville  
Gold mines and mining -- British Columbia  
Indians of North America -- British Columbia  
Mines and mineral resources -- British Columbia  
Columbia

### Geographic Names

British Columbia -- Description and travel  
British Columbia -- Discovery and exploration  
British Columbia -- Politics and government  
Downieville (Calif.) -- Politics and government  
Fort Alexandria (B.C.)  
Fort Simpson (N.W.T.) -- Description and travel  
Fraser River (B.C.) -- Description and travel  
Haida Gwaii (B.C.)  
Kootenay Region (B.C.) -- Description and travel  
Newcastle (Calif.)  
Okanagan River Valley (B.C. and Wash.) --  
Description and travel  
Port Essington (B.C.)  
Portland (Or.) -- Description and travel  
Quesnel River (B.C.)  
San Francisco (Calif.) -- Description and travel  
Skeena River (B.C.) -- Description and travel  
Washington (State) -- Description and travel

### Genres / Formats

Account books -- California -- Newcastle --  
19th century  
Diaries -- British Columbia -- 19th century  
Maps (documents) -- British Columbia --  
Quesnel River -- 19th century  
Photographs -- British Columbia -- 19th century  
Scrapbooks

### Occupations

Explorers -- British Columbia -- 19th century  
Gold miners

### Names

Bulkeley, E.  
Downie, William, 1819-1893  
Duncan, William, 1832-1918  
Lippincott, Charles E.  
MacDonald, Calvin B.  
McDonald, Alexander  
Tevis, Robert  
Waage, Chris

### Corporate Bodies

Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition (1909 Seattle,  
Wash.)  
Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show  
E.H. Booth and Company  
Pioneer Association of B.C.  
Quesnelle Mining Company