

Guide to the John T. Downey Papers

GEN MSS 2125



Compiled by Quin DeLaRosa

October 2023

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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: GEN MSS 2125

CREATOR: Downey, John T., 1930-2014 , author

TITLE: John T. Downey papers

DATES: circa 1927-2014

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 3.88 linear feet (8 boxes)

LANGUAGE: Chiefly in English; a small quantity of correspondence and printed material is in Chinese.

SUMMARY: The papers document the life of John T. Downey spanning his days as a Yale College student, his subsequent 20-year captivity in China as an American prisoner of war (POW), and later activities regarding his personal life and career in public service. Collection materials consist chiefly of printed material and personal correspondence, dating mostly from the time of his capture in 1952 onwards. Much of the correspondence comprises letters between Downey and his friends and family – mostly with his mother, Mary Downey – during captivity. Printed material extensively covers Downey's captivity within the larger context of Sino-American Cold War-era relations, though also comments substantially on his activities post-captivity. Present in smaller amounts are some photographs and awards, in addition to limited Chinese-language documentation seemingly related to Downey's 1983 visit to China with his wife and son.

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

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.downey>.

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.

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

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Audrey Lee Downey, 2023

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research

Conditions Governing Use

The John T. Downey papers is 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.

Preferred Citation

John T. Downey Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

This collection received a standard level of processing, including rehousing and limited organization.

Information included in the Content Description section is drawn from information supplied with the collection and from an initial survey of the contents. Almost all folder titles have been devised by staff. Any of the creator's original folder titles present in the collection have been transcribed and enclosed in brackets.

These materials have been arranged and described according to national and local standards. For more information, please refer to the Beinecke Archival Description Processing Manual.

Biographical / Historical

John T. "Jack" Downey (1930-2014) served as a member of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), an American prisoner of war (POW), and government official for the state of Connecticut. He attended Choate Rosemary Hall before joining Yale College's graduating class of 1951, after which Downey was recruited into the CIA.

Downey's career in intelligence would lead to his aircraft being shot down over Manchuria amidst a botched CIA operation during the Korean War. Downey and his co-pilot, Richard "Dick" Fecteau, were taken into custody by Chinese authorities in 1952. While Fecteau would be released in 1971, Downey would remain a captive of the People's Republic of China until 1973. His eventual release was secured as a product of bilateral negotiations led by then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on behalf of the Nixon administration. Downey is the longest-held American POW known to date.

Following his repatriation to the US, Downey served as commissioner of the Department of Public Utility Control for the state of Connecticut from 1979-1981 and 1984-1987. He graduated from Harvard Law School in 1976 and was appointed as a judge of the Connecticut Superior Court from 1987-1997. In 2003, the New Haven Juvenile Court was renamed to John T. Downey Courthouse in recognition of his tenure. Downey has been the recipient of numerous awards, including, in 2013, the CIA's Distinguished Intelligence Cross. Upon his death in 2014, Downey was survived by his wife, Audrey Lee Downey, his son, Jack Lee Downey, and brother, William Downey.

Content Description

The papers document the life of John T. Downey spanning his days as a Yale College student, his subsequent 20-year captivity in China as an American prisoner of war (POW), and later activities regarding his personal life and career in public service. Collection materials consist chiefly of printed material and personal correspondence, dating mostly from the time of his capture in 1952 onwards. Much of the correspondence comprises letters between Downey and his friends and family – mostly with his mother, Mary Downey – during captivity. Printed material extensively covers Downey's captivity within the larger context of Sino-American Cold War-era relations, though also comments substantially on his activities post-captivity. Present in smaller amounts are some photographs and awards, in addition to limited Chinese-language documentation seemingly related to Downey's 1983 visit to China with his wife and son.

Arrangement

The collection's files are arranged almost entirely in the order they were received from the donor. The one exception to this practice is box 3, which retains the few oversize folders present in the collection.

Collection Contents

b. 1, f. 1	Clippings	1978, 2014
b. 1, f. 2	Yale senior student thesis on Downey	2013
b. 1, f. 3	Correspondence, clippings, and awards	circa 1985-2013
b. 1, f. 4-5	Press mentions and Yale College '51 20th anniversary program	1971-1994
b. 1, f. 6	Journal article from <i>Studies in Intelligence</i> 50, no. 4	2006 December
b. 1, f. 7	[Judge]	1997-2014
b. 1, f. 8	Master's thesis on Downey	2004
b. 1, f. 9	Commemoration of Downey by the city of Chicago	2014 November 19
b. 1, f. 10	Clippings and excerpt from Nicholas Daniloff's <i>Of Spies and Spokesmen</i>	2002-2008
b. 1, f. 11-12	Harvard Law School assignments and notes	circa 1975-1976
b. 2, f. 1	Harvard Law School assignments and notes	circa 1975-1976
b. 2, f. 2	Department of Public Utility Control	1979-1981, 1984-1987
b. 2, f. 3	Downey biography typescript by US Trade Representative Robert L. Larson	1989 May-June
b. 2, f. 4	Clippings	1979 March 5
b. 2, f. 5	Award: Albertus Magnus College honorary degree	2013 May 19
b. 2, f. 6	Award: Distinguished Intelligence Cross congratulations	2013 October 30
b. 2, f. 7	Award: Distinguished Intelligence Cross citation	2013
b. 2, f. 8	Photos: Distinguished Intelligence Cross	2013 November 12
b. 2, f. 9	Clippings: <i>Harvard Law Record</i>	1973 November 2
b. 2, f. 10	Photos: Alumni activities	circa 1973-1979, 1999, undated
b. 2, f. 11	Photos: CIA Director's Medal	1998 June
b. 2, f. 12	Photos: Judiciary and speeches	1987, undated
b. 2, f. 13	Photos: Postask fellowship and Veteran's Day	2005, 2011
b. 3, f. 1	Awards: Various organizations	1973, 2005, 2011
b. 3, f. 2	Clippings: <i>Hartford Courant</i>	1978 October 8
b. 3, f. 3	Clippings: <i>LOOK</i>	1960 December 6

b. 3, f. 4	Photos: Yale College	circa 1948-1951
b. 5, f. 1	Photos: Yale College	circa 1948-1951
b. 4, f. 1	Photos: AYA Board of Governors and Ben McAlpine wedding	circa 1980-1990
b. 4, f. 2	Photos: Postask fellowship and judicial portrait	2011-2012
b. 4, f. 3	Photos: Department of Public Utility Control	circa 1979-1987
b. 4, f. 4	Photos: Return to China	1982-1983
b. 4, f. 5	Photos: 1981 Senate race	circa 1977-1982
b. 4, f. 6	Photos: Department of Public Utility Control	circa 1978-1986
b. 4, f. 7	Photos: Law career	1976-1977
b. 4, f. 8	Photos: Downey with Dick Fecteau and Joe Kiyonaga	1975-1976
b. 4, f. 9	Photos: Law school and family life	1973-1980
b. 4, f. 10	Photos: Welcome home day and Distinguished Intelligence Medal	1973-1974
b. 4, f. 11	Photos: Downey at press interview	1973 March 13
b. 4, f. 12	Photos: Journey back home	1973 March 9-12
b. 4, f. 13	Photos: Mary Downey visiting John Downey in PRC prison	1960 August
b. 4, f. 14	Photos: Mary Downey visiting John Downey in PRC prison	1971 November
b. 4, f. 15	Photos: Mary Downey photographed for <i>LOOK Magazine</i> Interview	1964
b. 4, f. 16	Photos: 1952 Japan visit and assorted images from captivity	1952-1973
b. 4, f. 17	Photos: Early captivity	circa 1953-1955
b. 4, f. 18	Photos: Families of American POWs held by the PRC	1957-1959
b. 5, f. 2	Photos: Choate Rosemary Hall	circa 1946-1947
b. 5, f. 3	Photos: Early life and portrait of father	1926-1932, 1944
b. 5, f. 4	Chronology of Downey's life	circa 2014-2023
b. 5, f. 5-6	Correspondence, clippings, and awards	1927-1955
b. 5, f. 7-8	Correspondence, clippings, and awards	1956-1962
b. 5, f. 9	Correspondence, clippings, and awards	1963-1968
b. 6, f. 1-2	Correspondence, clippings, and awards	1963-1968
b. 6, f. 3-5	Correspondence, clippings, and awards	1969-1973 March
b. 6, f. 6-7	Correspondence, clippings, and awards	1973
b. 7, f. 1	Correspondence, clippings, and awards	1973

b. 7, f. 2-3	Correspondence, clippings, and awards	1974-1981 June
b. 7, f. 4-5	Correspondence, clippings, and awards	1980-1986
b. 7, f. 6-8	Correspondence, clippings, and awards	1987 July-2006
b. 8, f. 1-3	Correspondence, clippings, and awards	2006 May-2014 November

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

Cold War
Cold War -- Prisoners and prisons
Judges
Korean War, 1950-1953
Prisoners of War
Prisoners of War -- China
Prisoners of War -- United States
Yale University. Alumni

Geographic Names

China -- Foreign relations -- United States
New Haven (Conn.)
United States -- Central Intelligence Agency
United States -- Foreign relations -- China

Genres / Formats

Photographs

Names

Downey, John T., 1930-2014

Acquired From

Downey, Audrey, donor