Finding Aid prepared by: Paul Paulson, November 2016
With financial support from the Henry Luce Foundation

Summary Information
Creator: Titus Coan, 1801-1882
Fidelia Church Coan, 1810-1872
Title: Titus Coan and Fidelia Church Coan Papers, 1830-1848
Inclusive dates: 1830-1848
Bulk dates: 1830-1848
Abstract: Titus Coan, Auburn Theological seminary alum, Presbyterian missionary and first wife Fidelia Church Coan. Titus Coan was an early missionary to Hawaii. He and his wife Fidelia provided some of the first accounts of the volcanic activity on the islands as well as a portrait of everyday life in Hawaii.

Size: 1 box, 0.25 linear feet
Storage: Onsite storage
Repository: The Burke Library
Union Theological Seminary
3041 Broadway
New York, NY 10027
Email: burkearchives@library.columbia.edu
Administrative Information

Provenance: The Titus Coan and Fidelia Church Coan Papers were donated to the Union Theological by John K. Wright on behalf of the Society by the American Geographical Society on December 19, 1921. A comprehensive collection of the Coan papers resides at the Library of Congress.

Access: Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to burkearchives@library.columbia.edu, or by postal mail to The Burke Library address on page 1, as far in advance as possible. Burke Library staff is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on archival or special collections research.

Access Restrictions: The collection is unrestricted to readers.

Preferred Citation: Item description, UTS: Titus Coan and Fidelia Church Coan Papers, series #, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Biography

Titus Coan was born in Connecticut in 1801 and educated at the East Guildford Academy. He was ordained by the Auburn Theological Society in 1833 after having been received into the Presbyterian Church at a Charles G. Finney revival in 1828. Fidelia Church was born in Riga, New York in 1810 and went on to study and become a teacher in Rochester.

Fidelia and Titus Coan had been engaged for 6 years when in 1833, one month before they were due to be married, Titus was sent to Patagonia in Argentina on behalf of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Titus returned in 1884, married Fidelia and in that same year they sailed together to Hawaii, then better known as the Sandwich Islands. After a seven month journey they settled in the city of Hilo on the island of Hawaii (the Big Island) and lived there for the following 45 years.

Titus became very successful in converting the local population to Christianity and is celebrated in the Christian community for doing so. Both Titus and Fidelia made scientific observations of the volcanic activity on Hawaii and both wrote extensively on the subject in several publications, including American Journal of Science and Arts. Titus Coan also provided articles for The Missionary Herald and wrote the book Life in Hawaii, recounting his experiences there. In separate trips in 1860 and 1867, Titus Coan made a visiting tour of the Marquesas Islands as a delegate of the Hawaii Missionary Society. Fidelia died in 1872 and Titus remarried in 1873 to Lydia Bingham. Titus Coan died in Hilo Hawaii in 1881. The letters exchanged between Titus Coan and his wife bespeak of an amicable and intimate relationship bounded by the conventions of the time. The letters also describe events and practical concerns of life in Hawaii.

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as Titus and Fidelia Coan experienced them, and also reflect the missionary movement of the
time.

Collection Scope and Content Note
This collection consists exclusively of letters exchanged between Titus and Fidelia Church
during the period of 1830 to 1872 and consist of written exchanges between one another. The
collection represents volume I, 1830-1848. There is no evidence of a volume 2 in existence. The
letters are numbered 1 through 489 and are divided in 6 folders. The copies herein are
described as the first of two copies made. The letters are ‘carefully corrected from the original
letters’ by Titus Muson Coan and Sarah Coan Waters and were created between 1891 and
1897. The letters are mimeographed copies of typed letters and accompanied by hand written
annotations.

Processing
Materials were housed in new acid-free folders and labeled in accordance with the original
arrangement scheme indexed by the American Geographical Society.

Further Sources
Biographical information taken from the Boston College School of Missiology,

The Titus Coan Family Papers reflecting much of the Coans’ missionary work held at the Library
of Congress can be accessed here.

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## Contents list

**The Letters of Titus and Fidelia Coan, 1830-1848**

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