

The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary,
Columbia University in the City of New York

Union Theological Seminary Archives 1

Finding Aid for

Titus Coan and Fidelity Church Coan Papers, 1830-1848



Portrait of Titus Coan (photographer unknown). Credit to Hawaii Historical Society, retrieved from Hawaii Journal of History vol. 31, 1997.

Finding Aid prepared by: Paul Paulson, November 2016

With financial support from the Henry Luce Foundation and the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation

Summary Information

Creator: Titus Coan, 1801-1882
Fidelity Church Coan, 1810-1872

Title: Titus Coan and Fidelity Church Coan Papers, 1830-1848

Inclusive dates: 1830-1848

Bulk dates: 1830-1848

Abstract: Titus Coan, Auburn Theological Seminary alumnus, Presbyterian missionary and first wife Fidelity Church Coan. Titus Coan was an early missionary to Hawaii. He and his wife Fidelity 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: burkespecial@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 burkespecial@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 1834, 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

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, <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/c-d/coan-titus-1801-1882/>

The Titus Coan Family Papers reflecting much of the Coans' missionary work held at the Library of Congress can be accessed [here](#).

Contents list

The Letters of Titus and Fidelity Coan, 1830-1848

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
1	1	1	Letters of Titus and Fidelity Coan, p. 1- 37. Item level index of all letters in the collection
1	1	2	Letters of Titus and Fidelity Coan, p.38-159
1	1	3	Letters of Titus and Fidelity Coan, p.160- 257
1	1	4	Letters of Titus and Fidelity Coan, p. 258-344
1	1	5	Letters of Titus and Fidelity Coan, p. 345-406
1	1	6	Letters of Titus and Fidelity Coan, p. 407-489