Couch Family Papers, 1839-1948

Overview of the Collection

Creator  Couch family
Title  Couch Family Papers
Dates  1839-1948 (inclusive)
       1839 1948
       1870-1890 (bulk)
       1870 1890
Quantity  1.5 cu. ft., (2 document boxes, 1 card file box, 1 flat box, and 1 oversize folder)
Collection Number  Mss 952
Summary  Papers of the family of John Heard Couch, one of the original developers of the townsite of Portland, Oregon, and his descendants, including members of the Glisan and Robertson families. Papers include correspondence, legal papers, land ownership records, clippings, family Bibles, journals of John Heard Couch, and papers concerning Couch's wife Caroline and their descendants Caroline Wilson, Clementine Lewis, and Elizabeth and Rodney Glisan. Of special note is John Heard Couch's logbook, 1853-1858, for voyages on the ships *Chenamus* and *Madonna*; and the travel diary of Nan Robertson, 1911-1912, written during a trip to San Francisco and Southern Asia.

Repository  Oregon Historical Society Research Library
            1200 SW Park Avenue
            Portland, OR
            97205
            Telephone: 503-306-5240
            Fax: 503-219-2040
            libreference@ohs.org

Access Restrictions  The collection is open to the public.

Languages  English
Sponsor  Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Biographical Note

John Heard Couch (1811-1870) was an Oregon pioneer, sea captain, merchant, a founder of the city of Portland and founder of an important and influential Oregon family. During the 1840s he sailed ships financed by John Cushing from his home town of Newburyport, Massachusetts, with supplies for establishing a dry goods business in Oregon. In 1845 he claimed a square mile of land on the Willamette River, known as Couch's Addition, in the heart of what became Portland.

Well regarded among his fellow citizens as a fair and knowledgeable man, Couch was rewarded by several public positions, including Oregon Territorial Treasurer, Multnomah County Commissioner, Oregon Port Commissioner, Oregon Port Warden, and U. S. Inspector of Hulls for Oregon. He married
Caroline Flanders (1807-1885), sister of his first mate George Flanders, in 1832. Flanders was also an Oregon pioneer, merchant and Portland founder, becoming a partner in Couch’s Portland land claim in 1850.

John and Caroline Couch had four daughters, three of whom married influential Portland men. Caroline Elizabeth Couch (1833-1917) married Dr. Robert Bruce Wilson, while Clementine Couch (1838-1914) started a family with prominent Portland merchant Cicero Hunt Lewis (1826-1897). Elizabeth Raines Couch’s (1842-1926) husband, Dr. Rodney L. Glisan (1827-1890), the first physician in Oregon Territory, was also an early Portland land owner and was active in Couch’s Addition’s real estate activities after John Couch’s death.

Among Couch’s descendants and relatives was Nan Robertson (1885-1928). She was a sister of Thomas Robertson (1881-1924), who married Kathleen Burns (1883-1970), a great-granddaughter of John Heard Couch.

Content Description

Papers include: Legal documents (1850-1946) such as deeds, warranty deeds, quit-claims, passport, wedding certificate, title abstracts, maps, receipts, water right certificate, tax sale; correspondence (1846-1945) to John H. Couch and others regarding property holdings; personal items, consisting of memorabilia, a Bible from the ship Chenamus, notes, newspaper clippings, and a prayer book. Also included is the travel journal (1911-1912) of Nan Robertson, an in-law of John H. Couch’s great-granddaughter, documenting Robertson’s trip to Australia, New Zealand, India, and Indonesia via San Francisco.

The journal or log book (1843-1858) kept by John H. Couch includes records of his voyages on the ships Chenamus (1843-1844) and Madonna (1849). Included is information on weather, nautical position, and daily events on board. The book also contains poems and water color illustrations of vessels.

Use of the Collection

Restrictions on Use

The Oregon Historical Society is the owner of the materials in the Research Library and makes available reproductions for research, publication, and other uses. Written permission must be obtained from the Research Library before any reproduction use. The Society does not necessarily hold copyright to all of the materials in the collections. In some cases, permission for use may require seeking additional authorization from the copyright owners.

Preferred Citation

Couch family papers, 1839-1948, Mss 952, Oregon Historical Society Research Library

Administrative Information

Arrangement
The collection is arranged in four series as follows:

Series A: Land records, 1854-1935  
Series B: Correspondence and ephemera, 1849-1948  
Series C: Diaries and journals, 1843-1912  
Series D: Publications, 1828, 1860

Acquisition Information

The collection is composed of materials assembled by the Oregon Historical Society from many sources over a long period of time.

Three title abstracts for Couch's Addition: gift of Mrs. Harry Couch, Aug. 9, 1976, Library Accession 13801

Prayer book of Mary Caroline Wilson, and Nan Robertson diary and memorabilia: gift of Mrs. Donald E. Butler, Aug. 23, 1988, Library Accession 18949

Processing Note

Restoration and custom boxing were provided for the John Heard Couch journal, the Bible, and Nan Robertson's diary.

Detailed Description of the Collection

The following section contains a detailed listing of the materials in the collection.

Series A: Land records, 1854-1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/1-3</td>
<td>Glisan and Couch properties—deeds, land claims, titles, general</td>
<td>1854-1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>Deed of property from Couch and Hastings families to Battlen</td>
<td>1862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>Rodney L. Glisan—indexes to deeds and other title documents</td>
<td>ca. 1892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1/6          | Deed of blocks 82 and 93 in Couch's addition to Henry Weinhard  
Photographic copies filed as negatives OrHi 73672 and 73673, Oregon Historical Society Research Library | 1873 |
<p>| 1/7          | Description of blocks on the north and west part of Couch’s addition to the City of Portland | ca. 1872 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bound notebook, property of R. L. Glisan, including details of survey and prices for lots</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Abstracts of title**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box/Folder</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/1</td>
<td>Lot 8, block 140, Couch's Addition</td>
<td>ca. 1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>Block 149, Couch’s addition</td>
<td>ca. 1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>Part of lots 2, 3, 6, block 149, Couch’s Addition (now NE corner of NW 17th Avenue and Burnside)</td>
<td>ca. 1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>Part of lots 2, 3, 6, Block 149, Couch’s Addition (now NE corner of NW 17th Avenue and Burnside)</td>
<td>ca. 1935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Folder-item**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oversize/1</th>
<th><em>Plat of Couch’s addition to the City of Portland</em> (map)</th>
<th>undated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oversize/2</td>
<td>&quot;Notes of survey of part of John H. Couch’s land claim to be conveyed by Mssrs. Couch &amp; Flanders to the Oregon Steam Navigation Co.&quot; Surveyed by Charles W. Burrage; includes map of property</td>
<td>Oct. 6, 1864</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Series B: Correspondence and ephemera, 1849-1948**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box/Folder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/9</td>
<td>Letters concerning the estate of Mary H. Couch</td>
<td>1945-1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Container(s)</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversize/3-6</td>
<td>Letters to John Heard Couch</td>
<td>1846-1850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter from John M. Cushing, regarding the voyage of the ship <em>Chenamus</em></td>
<td>July 14, 1846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter from Benjamin Stark, New York, regarding the barque <em>Hyperion</em></td>
<td>Oct. 30, 1848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter from Benjamin Stark, New York, regarding the barque <em>Madonna</em></td>
<td>Jan. 15, 1849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter from Benjamin Stark, San Francisco, regarding business matters</td>
<td>March 13, 1850</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Box/Folder   | Notes and memorabilia from Nan Robertson's travels in South Asia             | 1911-1912      |
|             | Materials relate to diary of Nan Robertson, box 4                           |                |
| 1/10         | Rodney L. Glisan: papers and clippings                                     | 1860-1890      |
|             | Includes marriage license for Rodney L. Glisan and Elizabeth Raines Couch   |                |
|             | 1863; Couch family genealogy, 1948; memorial book for Rodney L. Glisan,     |                |
|             | Trinity Parrish, Portland, 1890                                            |                |

| Folder-item  | Marriage certificate of Rodney L. Glisan and Elizabeth Raines Couch         | 1863           |
| Oversize/7   | Passport of John Heard Couch                                               | Nov. 30, 1839  |
|              | Includes physical description of Couch, age 29. Original and photostatic   |                |
|              | copy                                                                        |                |

**Series C: Diaries and journals, 1843-1849, 1911-1912**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 3</td>
<td>Logbook of John Heard Couch</td>
<td>1843-1858;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logbook kept by John H. Couch during his voyages on the <em>Chenamus</em> (1843-1844) and <em>Madonna</em> (1849). Information recorded includes date, weather, nautical position, and daily</td>
<td>1843-1849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Container(s)</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>events on board. Logbook also includes poems and several watercolor illustrations of vessels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Box/Folder**

4/1  
Diary of Nan Robertson
Nan Robertson travelled with her family from Portland to San Francisco via train, then by ship to Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, and India. Entries are detailed and descriptive 1911-1912

**Series D: Publications, 1828, 1860-1865**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container(s)</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4/2         | Bible from the ship *Chenamus*  
Bible published by Nahum Haskell and Timothy Bedlington, Boston, 1828; used on ship commanded by John Heard Couch on trip from Newburyport, Mass., to the Hawaiian Islands, 1847. Contains historical references on fly leaf. | 1828          |

**Box/Folder**

4/3  
Prayer book of Mary Caroline Wilson Burns  

**Names and Subjects**

**Subject Terms :**  
Chenamus (Brig)  
Frontier and pioneer life--Oregon--Portland  
Madonna (Bark)  
Pioneers--Oregon--Portland--Diaries  
Real property--Oregon--Portland  
Ship captains--Diaries  
Voyages to the Pacific coast  

**Family Names :**  
Couch family--Archives  
Glisan family--Archives  

**Geographical Names :**  
Australia--Description and travel  
Couch's Addition (Portland, Or.)
India--Description and travel
Indonesia--Description and travel
New Zealand--Description and travel
Oregon--History--To 1859
Portland (Or.)--History

Form or Genre Terms :
Deeds
Estate records
Journals
Letter
Maps
Passports
Receipts
Ships' logs
Watercolors

Occupations :
Ship captains

Other Creators :

Personal Names :
Couch, John Heard, 1911-1870--Archives
(creator)
Couch, John Heard, 1911-1870--Diaries
(creator)
Couch, Mary H.
(creator)
Flanders, George H., 1821-1892
(creator)
Glisan, Elizabeth Raines, 1842-1926
(creator)
Glisan, Rodney, 1827-1890
(creator)
Lewis, Clementine, 1838-1914
(creator)
McLoughlin, John, 1784-1857
(creator)
Robertson, Nan, 1885-1928--Diaries
(creator)
Stark, Benjamin, 1820-1898--Correspondence
(creator)
Wood, Charles Erskine Scott, 1852-1944--Correspondence
(creator)

2004

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License:
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Couch Family Papers, 1839-1948
http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv67038