



Smithsonian
*Freer Gallery of Art and
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery*

Robert and Louise Koke Collection

Sadie Ouzts and Ryan Murray

2020

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Biographical / Historical.....	2
Scope and Contents.....	2
Bibliography.....	3
Names and Subjects	3
Container Listing	4
Series 1: Correspondence, 1933-1992.....	4
Series 2: Louise Koke Diary, 1935-1936.....	6
Series : Financial Information, 1936-1947, undated.....	7
Series 4: Newspaper Clippings and Ephemera, 1933-1981.....	8
Series : Photographs, 1935-1946.....	9

Collection Overview

Repository:	Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives
Title:	Robert and Louise Koke Collection
Identifier:	FSA.A2019.05
Date:	1933-1992 (bulk 1935-1949)
Extent:	2.4 Cubic feet
Creator:	Koke, Robert A., d. 1996 Koke, Louise G. (Louise Garrett)
Language:	English .
Summary:	The personal papers of Robert "Bob" and Louise Koke consist of 2.4 cubic feet and document the couple's years traveling and living in Asia before, during, and after World War II. The bulk of the material is from 1935 through 1949 and consists of correspondence, a travel diary, financial documents, and photographs. The papers concern their initial travels through Asia, their time running a hotel in Bali, Bob's military service in Sri Lanka and India during World War II, and their experiences in Shanghai after the war and before the Communist takeover of China, with a small number additional materials from the period following their return to the United States.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Gift of BASAbali.

Processing Information

Processed by Sadie Ouzts and Ryan Murray, 2020.

Preferred Citation

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Biographical / Historical

Robert "Bob" Koke was born in 1910 in Pasadena, California to Neltha and John Koke. He worked in the Production Department at MGM and was a tennis professional. Louise was born Louise Gignoux on May 25, 1897 in New York City. She was a painter. Robert and Louise Koke travelled to Asia in late 1935, touring Japan before visiting China, Singapore, and Bali. The Kokes arrived in Bali in 1936 and decided to stay. They opened Kuta Beach Hotel with Muriel "Manx" Pearson and spent the next five years growing their hotel, living among and observing the local population and their traditions. The Kokes fled Bali on the last boat out of the island in 1941 due to the threat of Japanese invasion.

Shortly thereafter, Bob joined US Army Intelligence and was sent to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where he trained agents in Indonesian languages and culture to go undercover in the Japanese-controlled country. He remained with the military after the war and joined the CIA in 1947 when it was founded. He and Louise were based in Shanghai from 1946 until 1949, when they were forced to leave due to the Communist takeover of the country. Upon their return to the United States, following a brief sojourn in Formosa (modern-day Taiwan) and Japan, Bob continued to work with the CIA until his retirement in the mid-1970s. Louise died in 1992, Bob in 1996.

During his travels, Bob took numerous photographs of local sites, people, and their traditions. His photos of Balinese traditional culture before the island was overrun by tourists are of particular interest. He and Louise also kept up consistent contact with his parents during their time abroad, noting their perspective on aspects of local Balinese traditions, their way of life in Bali, the many and varied guests they had, and local and international happenings of the time.

Scope and Contents

The papers of Robert and Louise Koke measure 2.4 cubic feet and date from 1933 to 1992, with the bulk of the material dating from between 1935 and 1949. The collection consists of correspondence, financial documents, Louise's travel diary from 1935-1936, and photographic material from their travels. The correspondence is mainly between Bob and/or Louise Koke and Bob's family, including his parents, John and Neltha Koke, and sister, Dorothy, or a mixture of the three. Almost all letters are from Bob and/or Louise to Bob's family; the family's responses are not included. Their correspondence is almost exclusively from Bob and Louise's time in Asia, although there are some from when they were in the USA. They spent time in Japan, China, Singapore, and Indonesia, and Bob was in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) during World War II. Finally, they spent the years immediately following the war in Shanghai. Their departure from Asia marks the end of the bulk of the correspondence. The rest of the letters are to or from a mixture of correspondents outside the family. A few poems and short stories written by Louise are also among the correspondence.

Financial documents pertaining to Bob and Louise's purchases abroad and their dealings selling Balinese goods to MGM make up the financial documents series.

Louise's travel diary documents a portion of their travels in 1935-1936, from their arrival in Japan to partway through their time in China.

Photographic material includes photographs taken by Bob in Japan, China, and Indonesia. Most appear to have been taken between 1935 and 1949. They depict local sites, people, and cultural events.

Bibliography

Koke, Louise. *Our Hotel in Bali: How Two Young Americans Made a Dream Come True*. Singapore: Pepper Publications Pte. Ltd, 1982.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Balinese (Indonesian people)
World War, 1939-1945

Cultures:

Balinese (Indonesian people)

Types of Materials:

Correspondence
Photographs

Geographic Names:

Bali Island (Indonesia)
China
Japan

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1933-1992

0.65 Cubic feet

English.

Correspondence includes letters and attachments. Primarily written by Bob and/or Louise Koke to Neltha, John, or Dorothy Koke or a mixture of the three from Bob and/or Louise Koke, sent primarily during Bob and Louise Koke's time traveling and living throughout Asia. Includes some additional correspondence to or from other individuals.

Arranged with Bob and Louise Koke's outgoing correspondence to Bob's family first, arranged chronologically, followed by other correspondence, arranged chronologically. Oversized materials are separated and follow same arrangement.

Box 1, Folder 1	Correspondence, 1933-1936
Box 1, Folder 2	Correspondence, 1937-1938
Box 1, Folder 3	Correspondence, 1939
Box 1, Folder 4	Correspondence, 1940-1941
Box 1, Folder 5	Correspondence, 1943-1946
Box 1, Folder 6	Correspondence, January-June, 1947
Box 2, Folder 1	Correspondence, July-December, 1947
Box 2, Folder 2	Correspondence, January-June, 1948
Box 2, Folder 3	Correspondence, July-December, 1948
Box 2, Folder 4	Correspondence, 1949
Box 2, Folder 5	Correspondence, undated
Box 2, Folder 6	Other Correspondence, 1936-1952, 1992
Box 3, Folder 1	Oversized Correspondence, 1936
Box 3, Folder 2	Oversized Correspondence, 1937
Box 3, Folder 3	Oversized Correspondence, 1938

- Box 3, Folder 4 Oversized Correspondence, 1946
- Box 3, Folder 5 Oversized Correspondence, 1949, undated
- Box 3, Folder 6 Oversized Other Correspondence, 1936

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Louise Koke Diary, 1935-1936

0.05 Cubic feet

English.

A diary kept by Louise Koke, documenting her and Bob's travels in Japan and China in 1935 and 1936.

Single item, unarranged.

Box 2, Folder 7

Travel Diary, 1935-1936

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Financial Information, 1936-1947, undated

0.175 Cubic feet

English.

While living in Bali and operating the Kuta Beach Hotel, the Kokes also began a business purchasing local Balinese goods and selling them to American customers, primarily the props department of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios. This series contains documents related to these transactions, including bills of sale, receipts, shipping information, and inventories.

Arranged chronologically.

Box 2, Folder 8 Financial Information, 1936-1938, 1947

Box 3, Folder 7 Financial Information, undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Newspaper Clippings and Ephemera, 1933-1981

0.125 Cubic feet

English.

Primarily newspaper clippings unattached to specific correspondence. Clippings relate to various subjects, with highlights including Bob Koke's pre-Bali careers in the film industry and tennis and the Kokes brief detention in Japan on suspicion of spying after Bob was observed photographing radishes. This series also includes a brochure for the Kuta Beach Hotel.

Arranged chronologically.

Box 3, Folder 8

Newspaper Clippings, Brochure, 1933-1935, 1939, 1947, 1981

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Photographs, 1935-1946

1.4 Cubic feet

Photographs taken by Bob Koke in Bali, China, and Japan. The photographs document architecture, people, cultural events, and natural environments encountered during the Kokes' travels and residency in Asia. Bob Koke developed an amateur artistic interest in the photographic medium and some images reflect this sensibility. Where given, titles are those indicated in handwriting or labels. Titles in brackets are supplied by archivists, but were generally avoided for individual images.

Arranged by photograph or backing size, thereunder alphabetically by given titles, thereafter untitled.

Box 4, Folder 1	[Bali], undated
Box 4, Folder 2	China's Great Wall, 1935
Box 4, Folder 3	[Japan], undated
Box 4, Folder 4	[Unknown location - garden], undated
Box 4, Folder 5	"Forbidden City" (140), Peiping, 1946
Box 4, Folder 6	"Forbidden City Gate" (139), Peiping, 1946
Box 4, Folder 7	"Temple of Agriculture" (142), Peiping, 1946
Box 4, Folder 8	"Temple of Heaven" (143), Peiping, 1946
Box 4, Folder 9	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 10	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 11	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 12	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 13	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 14	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 15	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 16	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 17	[untitled], circa 1946

Box 4, Folder 18	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 19	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 20	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 21	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 22	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 4, Folder 23	[untitled], circa 1946
Box 5, Folder 1	Bali, 1938
Box 5, Folder 2	Balinese Cremation, 1936
Box 5, Folder 3	Balinese Cremation Parade, 1936
Box 5, Folder 4	Balinese Priest, undated
Box 5, Folder 5	Bangli Temple (Poerah Kihen), undated
Box 5, Folder 6	Barong Dance at Batu Bulan, undated
Box 5, Folder 7	Beggar - Peking, undated
Box 5, Folder 8	Camel Boy - Peking, undated
Box 5, Folder 9	Camel Herder - Peking, undated
Box 6, Folder 1	China Baby - Peking, undated
Box 6, Folder 2	China Merchant, undated
Box 6, Folder 3	Drummer, undated
Box 6, Folder 4	Gelgel Offering, undated
Box 6, Folder 5	Legong Girl at Sempidi, undated
Box 6, Folder 6	Legong Orchestra, undated
Box 6, Folder 7	Offering to the Sea, undated

Box 6, Folder 8	Pot Market, undated
Box 6, Folder 9	Rice Gatherers, undated
Box 7, Folder 1	Tabanan Orchestra, undated
Box 7, Folder 2	[untitled], undated
Box 7, Folder 3	[untitled], undated
Box 7, Folder 4	[untitled], undated
Box 7, Folder 5	[untitled], undated
Box 7, Folder 6	[untitled], undated
Box 7, Folder 7	[untitled], undated
Box 7, Folder 8	[untitled], undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)