

A Boston Merchant Trading for the Dutch at Japan in 1800

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Introduction:

Fifty years before Commodore Perry forced the secluded Japanese to open the ports of Simoda and Hakodate to United States trade, several American merchant vessels visited Nagasaki in southern Japan around 1800 as ‘neutrals’ trading for the Dutch based in Batavia. New light has emerged on these voyages, including a ‘new’ account whose observations on the trade and on the Japanese pre-date those by the main Dutch writers. This article reviews those voyages, and provides a context for a previously unidentified account of Japan in 1800 by this unknown ‘Boston Merchant.’

In 1921 the doyen of American maritime historians, Samuel Eliot Morison, summarized this early United States-Japan trade as follows:

‘Japan first saw the American flag in 1791, when the famous Boston sloop *Lady Washington*, Captain Kendrick, accompanied by the *Grace* of New York, Captain Douglas, entered a southern Japanese harbor in the hope of selling sea otter [skins]. But the natives knew not the use of [that] fur, and no business was done. ... For almost two centuries the Dutch East India Company had enjoyed the exclusive right of sending one ship a year from Batavia to trade at Nagasaki, when, in 1795, French arms and propaganda transformed the Netherlands into the Batavian Republic, an ally and vassal to France. Fearing capture of its vessels by British warships [in the China trade], the Dutch East India Company for four successive years chartered American vessels for the annual cruise.

‘The first apparently to have this honour was the ship *Eliza* of New York, of which there is a contemporary Japanese painting, showing her being lightered off a rock in Nagasaki harbour, in 1798 by several dozen small [local] boats. In 1799 the Perkin’s ship *Franklin* of Boston was the lucky vessel; and of her voyage from Batavia to Japan and back we have a full account from Captain Devereux’s clerk, George [sic-William] Cleveland. On entering Japanese waters she hoisted the Dutch ensign, fired prescribed salutes of seven to thirteen guns each on passing seven different points, and another on anchoring in Nagasaki harbour. The Yankee officers had to bend almost double when the Japanese officials came on board, and to comply with minute and rigorous harbour regulations during their four months’ stay. But they were allowed, carefully guarded, to visit the town, and to bring back private adventures of cabinets, tea-trays, and carved screens, which are still treasured in Salem homes.

‘In 1800 the ship *Massachusetts* of Boston received the annual charter for the colossal sum of \$ 100,000, it was rumoured; and in 1801 the ship *Margaret* of Salem pulled off the prize [the charter from the Dutch]. She was apparently

the last American vessel to be received in a Japanese harbour [for trade] until Commodore Perry broke the isolation of Nippon [in 1854.]ⁱ

Each of these voyages can be elucidated further now, not least because journals survive kept by Captain Devereux on the *Franklin* from 1798 to 1800, and by William (not George) Cleveland on the *Massachusetts*. It seems however from the above, and particularly from the prescribed arrival salutes, that the records of the voyage that Morison used in 1921, were not the same as the following account which was written by a ‘Boston Merchant’ in 1827. This voyage occurred after 1799, but ‘not in the [nineteenth] century,’ which would identify it as in 1800.ⁱⁱ This seems to be the voyage of the *Massachusetts* in 1800.

The name of the writer is not clear either, but it seems very likely that he was ‘Erasmus Doolittle,’ which may be a pseudonym, while the published book was edited by Silas Pinckney Holbrook from “letters originally from the *New England Galaxy, and Boston Courier,*’ and also ‘the journal of a friend.’ Pinckney Holbrook was born in 1796 so he could not have been The Boston Merchant in Japan in 1800. The author says that by 1827 he had been for many years a school teacher, but his identity remains unknown. (However, see Epilogue.) The only hint of where he taught may lie perhaps in his description of his home ‘republic’ with Boston as the head, Worcester the heart, and Northampton the backbone.ⁱⁱⁱ His prose is clear, light-hearted, and often spiced with good-humoured satire of practices at home in Massachusetts. A few of his often-perceptive comments on the Japanese and Japanese society are summarized below following his comments on trade and shipping.

‘Recollections of Japan’ in 1800. Shipping and Maritime Trade:

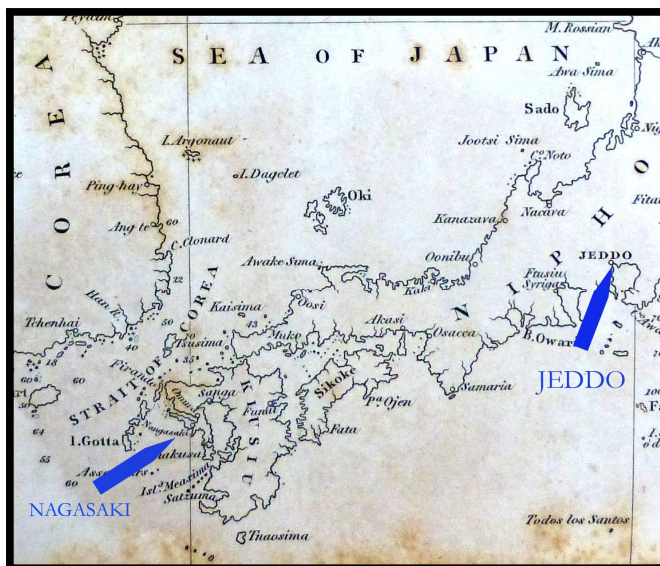


Figure 1 Detail showing Nagasaki and Jeddo on chart of the Sea of Japan from *Oriental Commerce* by William Milburn. London: Black, Parry and Co., 1813

‘Early in the present century, I sailed from Batavia for Nagasaki in Japan... in July we arrived at our port. On passing the South Cavallos, an island at the mouth of the harbour, we saluted with nine guns; then at Papenberg, [Takaboko-jima,] which made the larboard point of the bay, we gave the Japanese nine more, where we were boarded by the Upper Banjo [bansho-shu, or senior Customs inspector.]

We were surrounded by an incredible number of small boats.... Two miles higher,

we passed the Emperor’s watch, two small forts on each side of the bay, and there we burnt powder for eighteen guns, nine from each quarter. Two miles further is where we let go the anchor, and having roared with our mortar thirteen times more, the [prescribed] stately ceremonial [welcome] was over.

‘The [gun] powder was taken from us to [disarm us, and to] be carried on shore, and we were also deprived of our boats. The roll was called and an account taken of us all. Having undergone the strictest search, I was permitted to go on shore, where I was searched again, and a third time at the entrance of the Waterport, on the island of Decima, [Deshima] where I was led to the Dutch Governor, who gave me his welcome and the port regulations in Dutch.

‘A large group of *Tallars* [‘talkers,’ or interpreters] came also to the governor to ask the news of Europe; the questions were asked with shrewdness and the answers written down for the Emperor in Jeddo, [Edo, now Tokyo.] ... When these strange looking interpreters had gone, I walked around the island [Decima, or Deshima, built by the Portuguese from 1634 to 1637, and occupied thereafter by the Dutch as a restricted trading station covering under half an acre.] It is artificial, but ten feet above ordinary tides, and surrounded with a wall ten feet high, with only two gates, one to the waterport, one to a bridge to the city.... The island is now built over, with several large and commodious stores.... The houses are built low and strong from fear of earthquakes; the doctor told us that in 1799 there were thirty shocks in one day.... And three thousand died in a large town ten miles off....’

‘The Dutch factory has a garden, with vegetables, good peaches, and sour grapes. There is an *uperhoft*, or director, who has a private secretary; a pack-house master and three writers, a doctor, a carpenter, and a steward. This makes nine whites, but they have a great many Japanese servants, some of whom speak and write Dutch with precision. The pay of the Company’s officers is not so great that the offices are much sought; the governor himself longed to return to Batavia, though he had been here but a year. They have but five percent on sales in Japan, and as much on return cargo; of this the director takes 60%, the pack-house manager 20 %, the secretary 10%, while the three writers and the doctor share the other 10%. The steward and carpenter have low wages and nothing more. However a good table and low monthly wages [for local staff] are furnished at the expense of the Company.

‘A few years before we came [alone], when three or four large [Dutch] ships arrived, the commission [earned] was respectable, and the director had little desire to go to Batavia....

‘The rent paid to the Japanese Government yearly for the island is ten thousand rix dollars.’ [Another source, Siebold, said 55 kan, or about 260 kg of silver.] ‘The ship is guarded day and night by two armed boats. Nothing is landed, nor is anyone allowed to go on shore, but on the strictest examination.’^{iv}

‘The Japanese ships are inferior even to the Chinese. To diminish the probability of the dreaded intercourse, their ships are obliged by law to have such low sterns that they could not live in any [rough] sea; they are unsafe even in creeping along the shore. The navigation about Japan is so difficult that it is good training for their seamen; and the Japanese are excellent sailors, conducting their miserable craft with great skill....’^v

‘At Nagasaki there were seven Chinese junks from Amoy, a large town in the province of Fukien, on the straits of Formosa. Fourteen commonly arrive in a year, and each junk takes away thirteen hundred chests of copper, for there is a restriction that no more shall be taken. Their other lading consists of a few sharks’ fins, and in lacquered wares. These junks are not of the largest class, and considering the model it is amazing that they should ever reach Japan. They would be but queer tubs in the Bay of Biscay. They seem capacious, like a Dutch galliot, but that is only because they are so high forward and aft, for they are shallow in the water. Their sails are of mats and the anchors are of wood, for the Chinese are too proud or bigoted to old usages to copy the light model of European ships. On the largest junk mast is a square sail of about half an acre (more or less). There is no reefing this kind of canvas, but there are small apertures, like doors, in the middle of the sail, which are opened and shut.

‘The Japanese bestow certain hospitable attentions upon their friends, the Chinese; that is, they pen them up like sheep, and haul the junks high and dry ashore. The Chinese have a natural aptitude for smuggling...There was an affray between the officers of the revenue and the crew of a junk, over contraband.... [punished] with forty thousand lashes.

‘The *Upper Banjo*, or chief officer of customs,.... permitted me to read the invoices of the articles brought from China, which were sugar candy, silks, clothes, porcelains, hard-ware, cardamom seed, betel-nut, gold in bars, liquorice root, and sandal wood.... [In exchange,] all the metals of Japan are of the best quality; the copper is excellent, and as to the steel, the best tools I ever had were brought from Japan.’^{vi}

A Yankee’s Observations on the Japanese and their Customs in 1800:

‘At first I thought these Japanese people a sort of Dog-Chinese, but more known, I rated them higher: They are more affable, polite, brave, and kind, than the Chinese, though it is hard to rate their relative honesty.... They have a steadiness of purpose, contempt of death, and what is more, of pain....They are a very polite people.... They have no terms of abuse, and cannot in words abuse another, unless by figure of speech. They incline however too much to ceremony....

‘While at Nagasaki, I was permitted several times to go freely and unattended into the town, where I was treated with the utmost kindness. There was an alacrity to show me what I desired to see.... The dress of the people is uniform, and has been so for ages.... The houses are built of wood, and sometimes covered with flags, with wide dread of fire.... Even the poor people, with but ten rods square, have miniature gardens.... In no country are baths so universal, where they are in every private and public house.... They sleep on a coverlet on a plank, with a billet of wood, with a place cut for the head, as a pillow.... Their houses are not as furnished as in Europe, and the beautiful varnished tables and boxes so much admired there, are found rather

in their cabinet than their parlours. The Japanese are hard of bearing the cold They have no such snug quarters as a chimney corner... in some houses though there is a mound raised in the middle of an apartment, like a blacksmith's forge, whereupon they make a fire, the smoke of which ascends through the roof.... Their porcelain is good, the paintings are brilliant and gaudy.... They make no use of the flesh of animals...but eat all that the sea produces....'

The writer then describes many facets of Japanese life and culture in considerable detail, only a fraction of which can be included here.

'There is a high code of honour... to offend the Emperor is death.... Japan is so populous that little land lies fallow: What think you of 5000 people to the square mile.... Jeddo, they say, has ten million, and I think it can have little less.... This gives a town of about one hundred and forty times as large as Boston. Meaco, the holy city, [Miyako] is a small town in comparison As it has only two million, six hundred thousand people There are many poor, and the beggars are a body so large that it seems strange they do not rob....

'The empire is divided into sixty-eight provinces.... Some of the governors come up to Jeddo with a train of fifty thousand people.... The roads are excellent. There are many coaches, drawn by horses or oxen.... It seems that the people, being restricted in their roving tastes from quitting Japan, gratify themselves by constant motion at home; for there is no country where the ways are so thronged with travellers. There is much trade from one province to another, and more pilgrimages.... There are a great many monks and religious recluses who live in celibacy, perhaps in chastity, and endure severe penance from choice countless number of priests, devotees and pilgrims.... and festivals One, before which all debts are paid, is a feast of lights, in memory of dead friends....[The Festival of Lights, held on 1 September 1800.] Another for the god of war.... They have a great many warm springs, each with the power to wash away a particular sin. The consequences are that there are a great many bathers, at high prices.... In the temples, there are huge idols.... [on one] six men can sit on the palm of his hand.'

Some Reflections upon these Recollections:

Ultimately one has to question how much of this clear perception of Japan and its traditional culture was obtained from personal observation during his visit to Nagasaki over three months, and how much could have come as hearsay from other sources. The writer does mention questioning the Company doctor, [Herman Letzke] who had lived at Nagasaki for eight years, and had visited Meaco and Jeddo to convey the Company's presents to the Emperor, but he found the doctor 'rather shy in his communications. I was sufficiently inquisitive, but all the Company's [Dutch] servants seemed jealous of us, and were unwilling to speak of Japan.'^{vii}

This same query led to an examination of what other sources of information about Japan were available at that time. The writer refers twice in passing to 'Koempfer,' but the work of that eminent Dutch doctor was published in 1691! It was first

published in English in 1727. Another account, written by Dr Thunberg in 1775, is said to be ‘more amusing, but less instructive.’ The next early accounts were by Isaac Titsingh, a Dutchman who learned some Japanese whilst he was the Opperhoofd in charge at Deshima twice between 1769 and 1793, but his ‘*Memoires et Anecdotes sur la Dynastie Regnante des Djogouns, Soverains du Japon*’ were not published, in Paris, until 1820, and his ‘*Illustrations of Japan*’ in London in 1822. (See Endnote xiii.) Subsequent observations by Dr Doeff, written in 1830 as ‘Herinnerungen uit Japan,’ were not published until 1833. The first widely acclaimed account, ‘*Manners and Customs of the Japanese*’, was published in London in 1841 by Dr. von Siebold, who had been stationed at Deshima from 1823 to 1829. The relevance of listing these writers is to note that so few of them preceded our anonymous Yankee whose observations were made in 1800, written by 1827 and published in newspaper instalments that were later brought together and republished in January 1830. His eyewitness reports, along with accurate information he apparently obtained from the Company’s Japanese staff at Deshima, ‘some of whom speak and write Dutch with precision,’ pre-date the better known of these widely spaced Dutch commentaries! Whoever this writer was, he was a perceptive observer well ahead of his time.

This friendly cooperation extended by the Japanese to the Dutch merchants, and to the American captains chartered by the Dutch, was a stark contrast to the cautious, bureaucratic and inflexible treatment shown by the Japanese to the Russian Ambassador von Resanoff in 1804 and 1805. Captain Krusenstern was directed by Tsar Alexander I to deliver the Ambassador and his delegation to Japan to open friendly relations and trade with Russia. They reached ‘Nangasaki’ on 7 October 1804, where the Japanese readily provided free ample food and timber for repair. But they steadfastly refused to allow any trade, and scarcely any contact with the shore, or with the Dutch at Deshima. The Russians waited six long, tedious and frustrating months, as the Japanese officials refused to act in any way without written authority from the office of the Emperor in Jeddo. Only after six months of delays, postponements and re-verification did the Japanese officials finally agree to receive the Russian Ambassador. Moreover they did so only to tell him that the Emperor had declined to establish friendly contacts and trade on the grounds that the Dutch merchants were already providing all the foreign goods and luxuries that Japan wanted and would receive.

Captain Krusenstern and the naturalist von Langsdorf recorded meticulously all the details of their visit, or ‘imprisonment,’ at Nagasaki. However since they scarcely ever were allowed on shore, or to talk freely to the interpreters who knew Dutch, the sum total of the information they recorded about Japan was minimal and limited to protocol and the intransigence of the Japanese hierarchy. Their stay of six months until April 1805 only confirmed that the Japanese refused to trade with anyone except the Chinese and the Dutch merchants.^{viii ix}

Other American Visits to Japan before Perry :

Since Morison’s summary in 1921, more can be added about most of these early American visits. There are two contemporary reports written by the Japanese of the short visit made by Captain Kendrick in the *Lady Washington* in May 1791 to tiny Oshima Island, off Kii peninsula in the present Wakayama Prefecture.^{x xi xii} These differ in detail but both indicate it was a very perfunctory visit, with communications

limited to notes written in Japanese and Chinese characters. There was little if any trade, not even of the sea otter furs that Kendrick was still carrying because the Chinese Emperor had prohibited their sale at Canton in March 1791 in the mistaken belief that all sea otters were taken only by his Russian enemies.

The first ‘neutral’ American vessel hired by the Dutch at Batavia was indeed the *Eliza* of New York, Captain Stewart, in mid-1797.^{xiii} ‘Her appearance at once aroused Japanese suspicion,’ which the Dutch governor only allayed with great difficulty. ‘Upon his second voyage, the following year, [1798,] Captain Stewart met with an accident when the *Eliza*, ‘laden with her return cargo of copper and camphor, struck upon a rock, filled, and sank.’ This was in Nagasaki Bay in November, 1798.^{xiv} After much debate, a humble Japanese fisherman called ‘Kiyemon’ devised how to have her lighted off so she could be ‘discharged and repaired.’^{xv} This was on 5 March, 1799.^{xvi} The ‘contemporary Japanese painting showing the *Eliza* being lighted off a rock in Nagasaki Harbour in 1798,’ mentioned by Morison in 1941, has not yet been located. At the Essex Peabody Museum in Salem is an unsigned painting, attributed to Shiba Kokan, that shows two Western vessels, apparently the *Eliza* and the *Franklin* ‘entering Nagasaki Harbour in 1799.’^{xvii}

When reloaded, the *Eliza* sailed on 29 June 1799, but was dismasted in a storm, and had to return again to refit. Vessels normally left Batavia for Japan in June and returned in December on the next monsoon, but apparently Stewart did not appreciate the limitations of contrary monsoon winds. On 19 July 1799, while off Nagasaki, Captain Devereux wrote in his journal: ‘At midday saw a ship under jury mast which proved to be Captain Stewart from Japan bound to Batavia, who lost his mast in a gale off Fumosa.’ [Formosa, now Taiwan.] Also at the Peabody Essex Museum is an unsigned and undated but apparently contemporary Chinese oil painting captioned ‘The Distress’d Situation of the Ship *Eliza* in a Typhon [sic] in the Gulph [sic] of Japan.’^{xviii}

‘The following year, [i.e. in May 1800] Captain Stewart again made an appearance at Nagasaki but in a different vessel, [the brig *Emperor of Japan*,] and under a different character [sic—charter.] He [said he had] still had not reached Batavia, and he told a piteous tale of shipwreck, and the loss of his own all, as well as of his whole Dutch cargo, ending with his having been kindly enabled by a friend at Manila to buy and freight a cargo for sale to discharge his debt to the Dutch for the repair of the *Eliza*.’ But the new Dutch governor suspected his story, and found items supposedly lost with the *Eliza* now on the Manila brig. So he had Stewart’s cargo sold to pay off the debts ‘but he procured no return cargo for the brig, seized Stewart and had him sent to Batavia.’ There Stewart escaped, but reappeared at Nagasaki in 1803 ‘under the American flag, with a cargo of avowedly American property, brought from Bengal and Canton. He solicited permission to trade, and also to supply himself with fresh water and with oil. The first request was refused, the second granted, and he was compelled to depart. Captain Stewart now gave up his interloping scheme as hopeless.’^{xix} The Manila brig had apparently been suitably re-named the *Emperor of Japan*, but to no avail.^{xx xxi xxii}

In 1799 Captain Devereux brought the Boston ship *Franklin* into Nagasaki. His ship’s journal for her voyage is now held by the Peabody Essex Museum’s Phillips Library. (Devereux 1799.) This shows that the *Franklin* arrived off Nagasaki on 18 July 1799,



Figure 2 Ship FRANKLIN. From *Old-Time Ships of Salem*. Salem: Essex Institute, 1922.

sappan wood (for red dyes), nearly half a ton of ‘elephant teeth,’ 2,000 pieces of chintz cloth, and other sundries. He was then to return to Batavia with 250,000 cases of copper and 11 tons of camphor, and ‘1,700 empty boxes,’ (used here apparently as stowage to balance the heavy copper cargo.) For this service, the Dutch were to pay Captain Devereux ‘30,000 piastres’ in coffee, sugar, pepper, cloves, indigo, cinnamon and spices.^{xxiii xxiv}

These papers also reveal that the compliment of the *Franklin* was limited to 17, being the Captain and 14 crew, plus a young Dutch merchant, Hendrick Doeff, and his Malay servant. Doeff was later to become the opperhoft, or resident manager, at Deshima intermittently from 1803 to 1817, and to write a book on his experiences, which was published in 1834. Also on board the *Franklin* in 1799 was Samuel Hill, whom Doeff befriended and took to live ashore at Deshima for three months, and to visit the city of Nagasaki, probably the first American to do so.^{xxv}

A few further references to the visits of the *Eliza* and the *Franklin* in 1799 survive in a short ‘daybook’ kept by Willem Ras, the ‘bookkeeper/scribe’ who was then the Dutch merchant in charge at Deshima. While primarily a trade record for his employers in Batavia, this diary also mentions that Captain Devereux careened the *Franklin*, that Captain Stewart had to unload the *Eliza* in August to repair a serious leak and to replace his masts (which required no less than 22 tall trees procured with much difficulty), and that several Chinese junks were also trading there until September. Willem Ras was much relieved when the *Eliza*, carrying Stewart and Doeff, left for Batavia on 22 November: ‘May Heaven grant that this luckless ship reach Batavia safely.’ Ras sent his daybook to Batavia on the *Franklin* which departed from Deshima separately four days later.^{xxvi}

Captain Devereux in the *Franklin* was the first to bring a cargo from Japan home to America, arriving in Boston on 20 May 1800.^{xxvii} He presented a collection of Japanese ‘curiosities’ to the newly established East India Marine Society which are

completed successfully the requisite elaborate sequence of ceremonial salutes stage by stage, and was received formally by the Japanese authorities and then by the Dutch merchants stationed at Deshima. Unfortunately the journal has no further details, but accompanying papers specified the terms of the *Franklin*’s charter. In short, Captain Devereux was charged to take from Batavia to Deshima about 57 tons of sugar, 5 tons of tin, 1 ½ tons of cotton yarn, a ton of pepper and a ton of

now in the Peabody Essex Museum and are reviewed and illustrated in a large bilingual catalogue published in Tokyo in 1999.^{xxviii}

In 1800 the big 600 ton Boston ship *Massachusetts*, Captain William V. Hutchings, undertook for the Dutch the annual charter which, it was rumoured, was ‘for the colossal sum of \$100,000.’^{xxix} The original charter, in Dutch and English, is in the Dutch archives in the Hague.^{xxx} The *Massachusetts* was chartered to take to Deshima ‘750 English tons’ of tin, sugar, sappanwood, pepper and cloves, and to carry back to Batavia an equal cargo of copper and Japan wares. For this service, Captain Hutchings was guaranteed about \$ 112,500 which was to be paid at Batavia in coffee, pepper and sugar. The *Massachusetts* was to carry 55 men, plus 13 Javanese sailors and five officers of the Dutch company, including Willem Wardenaar, the new *opperhoofd* [Director] at Deshima, Ditmar Smit as supercargo of the *Massachusetts*, and Hendrik Doeff who was now on his second trip to Japan.

This was the unnamed voyage that carried ‘the Boston Merchant’ described above to Deshima from July to November 1800. For a discussion of the possible identity of the ‘Boston Merchant’, see Epilogue. His recollections, written nearly three decades later, provide insight and depth, but lack the immediacy and vigour of the day by day journal entries made by another American then on board the *Massachusetts*. This was William Cleveland, the captain’s clerk, then aged 24. His journal, now in the library of the Peabody Essex museum, has been transcribed, annotated and published by Madoka Kanai.^{xxxi}

William Cleveland’s journal is alive with the comings and goings of the American, Dutch and Japanese traders, and conveys much about their practices and transactions. Most of the entries refer to his shipboard duties, but these included loading at least 6,000 cases of copper in small bars, weighing probably over 35 tons, plus some pig iron, camphor, lacquered boxes and other Japan wares. Cleveland also provides excited descriptions of the Festival of Lights, and of the state visit on 29 September when the Governor of Nagasaki came on board to inspect personally the *Massachusetts* and her crew. (This major event was not even mentioned by the Boston Merchant.) Cleveland describes the dress of the ‘Japanders,’ a group of musicians, their watercraft and the people in them and on shore nearby. He thought the Japanese coolies very strong and “handsome,” and that contrary to the tales conveyed by the Dutch in Batavia, the locals were polite, co-operative and friendly. ‘Good nature seems to be depicted in the countenance of the Japanders generally.’

But for all his youthful enthusiasm, Cleveland conveys few other insights about Japan. This was largely because, to his evident chagrin, he spent almost all of their 4 ½ months anchored off Deshima, from 16 July to 28 November 1800, not on shore, but restricted to his ship duties aboard the *Massachusetts*, which he found tedious and boring. In all that time, he was ashore at Deshima only twice until early November when he spent three very frustrating days at the ‘Cram,’ the only booth or shop available to crewmen, haggling urgently to complete a few purchases of lacquerware, pictures, fans, silks and curiosities to take home privately. In fact the only time Cleveland got ashore outside Deshima was on 21 November to a little fishing spot abreast of the ship, which proved dirty and very smelly, and the next morning to a small village [Fukahori] where over 200 friendly villagers showed the foreigners their houses, temples and graveyards.

The *Massachusetts* left for Batavia on 28 November, apparently carrying the now imprisoned Captain William Stewart, whom earlier Cleveland had mentioned frequently throughout his journal. Marten Bolan and Abraham Seaman were the first and second mates on the *Emperor of Japan* which left for Batavia, via Manila, a few days earlier.^{xxxii}

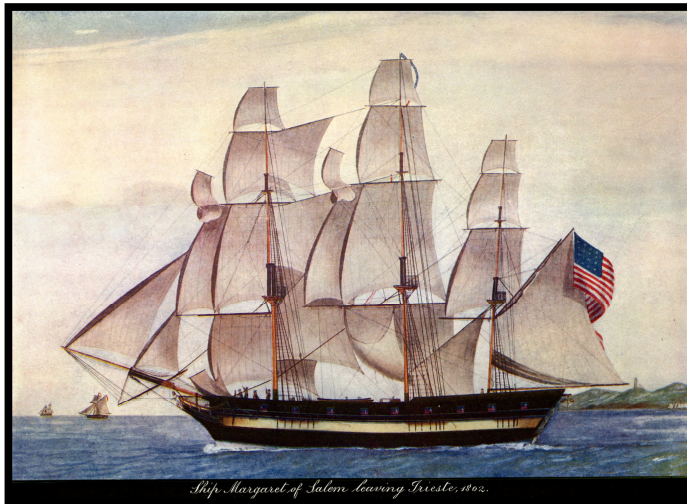


Figure 3 Ship MARGARET Painting by M. Corne from Old-Time Ships of Salem. Salem: Essex Institute, 1922.

In 1801 the ship *Margaret* of Salem, Captain Samuel G. Derby, undertook the annual charter for the Dutch for \$ 45,000. Moreover Derby persuaded the Dutch to allow him to trade with the Japanese at Deshima using a cargo of pepper, coffee and sugar collected at Sumatra, plus \$50,000 of his own in specie.^{xxxiii} A personal account of this voyage,

kept by George Cleveland, a brother of William, provides further evidence that details of the Japan trade were becoming well known among the merchants of Salem. George, who was then aged 20, recorded that the ship *Margaret*, newly built and a fast sailer, left home on 25 November 1800, visited Table Bay near Capetown, Sumatra and Batavia, and reached Desima on 19 July 1801.

‘Captain Derby, Mr West [acting first officer] and myself [‘captain’s clerk’] carried several articles of merchandise on our own account.... Nothing could exceed the minuteness [with which the Japanese] examined everything.... Delivering those adventures was a great affair.... [taking] a number of days.... which would not have been an hour’s work in Salem.’

‘On the 20th September [1801] we went into the city of Nangasacca. The first place we went was Facquia’s, an eminent stuff merchant. Here we were received with great politeness and entertained as we little expected. We had set before us for a repast of pork, fowls, meso, eggs, boiled fish, sweatmeats, cake, various kinds of fruit and sacky and tea. The Lady of the House was introduced, who drank tea with each of us as is the custom in Japan. She appeared to be a modest woman.” George Cleveland then described ascending at least 200 stone steps to see the forecourt of a busy temple, ornate tombs, an ancestral temple, a small glass house, and ‘a lac ware merchant’s.’ They dined at a Tea House, entertained by dancing and tumbling. In the dusk, they returned to Decima through narrow, ill paved and very crowded alleyways with many flights of stone steps, and each street with gates that were locked each night. “It was with difficulty we could get along. The number of children we saw was truly astonishing. The houses are of two stories, built of wood; the exterior appearance is mean, but within they are very clean and neat. The

floors are covered with mats, and it is considered a piece of ill manners to tread on them without first taking off the shoes.’^{xxxiv}

After a long description of the clothing of the Japanese ‘Banyos’ or officers, the priests, the rich and the poorer classes, and the coolies or labourers, and the clothes and fashions of the Japanese women, George Cleveland describes their fasting and the candle-lit Festival of Lights.

First they loaded the cargo of the Dutch East India Company, ‘principally copper in small bars, camphor, soy, saacky, porcelein etc, etc’. Next:

‘we began to receive our returns from the interior, brought many hundreds of miles. These consisted of the most beautiful lacquered ware, such as waiters, writing desks, tea caddies, knife boxes, tables etc etc. These were packed in boxes so neat that in any other country they would be considered cabinet work. We also received a great quantity of silks, fans in large quantities, a great variety of porcelain, and house brooms of superior quality..... On the prescribed day early in November we sailed for Batavia, where we arrived safely after a passage of one month.’^{xxxv}

Some 59 years later, the *Salem Gazette* of 8 June 1860 noted:

‘The first American vessels that ever visited Japan were the *Margaret* and the *Franklin*, of Salem, in the year 1800. It is not a little remarkable that we have one of the survivors of that expedition still living among us in health and vigour.... Mr Lincoln Stetson now in his 86th year.... went in the ship *Margaret* as carpenter, with Captain Samuel Derby, on a voyage to Japan.’

(Captain Derby donated Japanese items and curiosities generously to the collection of the East India Marine Society, and these too are illustrated in the catalogue published by Takeuchi and Monroe in 1999.)

In 1802 the charter was awarded to Captain G. Stiles in the *Samuel Smith*, and in 1803 to Captain James Deal (or McNeile) in the *Rebecca* of Baltimore. ‘Incredibly, once again in 1803 the persistent Captain Stewart, again independent of the Dutch in Batavia, arrived at Nagasaki for his fourth visit, this time aboard a vessel variously called *Frederick* or *Nagasaki Maru*, flying the Stars and Stripes. He is reported to have brought gifts to the Emperor including a camel, an Indian buffalo and a donkey, and is said to have petitioned specifically to establish an American trading port at Nagasaki.’ It was reported too that he had been fitted out by English merchants in Calcutta, and was using the name ‘James Torey’ as well as Stewart.^{xxxvi} But again Stewart failed to obtain trade access independent of the Dutch.^{xxxvii xxxviii xxxix}

Japanese archive records show that the *America* under Captain Henry Lelar arrived at Nagasaki in 1806 under charter from the Dutch in Batavia. The *America* was accompanied by the *Visurgis* of Bremen.^{xl} Doeff, while the Governor of the Dutch factory at Deshima, noted that an American ship had arrived there in 1807, ‘professedly in distress between Canton and the western coast of America, and prayed for wood and water.... Whether she was really in distress, or was thus prevented from endeavouring to trade, the factor did not ascertain.’^{xli} This was the *Eclipse* of Boston, Captain Joseph O’Cain. They were re-provisioned, but not allowed to trade.^{xlii}

Archibald Campbell, an English seaman on the *Eclipse* described their visit in June 1807, the elaborate port procedures, and the help offered by the Dutch ‘Ambassador.’ Water, wood and vegetables were provided free by the Japanese, but the *Eclipse* set out after only three days as the Japanese would not allow them to trade.^{xliii}

During 1807 the Dutch at Batavia chartered the *Mount Vernon* of Philadelphia, Captain John Davidson. But after leaving Nagasaki in October 1807, the *Mount Vernon* was caught in a storm and had to go instead to Macao. There, in March 1808, she unloaded to the Dutch factor about three hundred tons of copper, six tons of copper plate, and various silks.^{xliv xlv}

No American ship visited Japan in 1808. An American vessel, the *Rebecca*, which had made the charter in 1803, sailed from Batavia and Manila in early 1809. But before she reached Japan, she was captured by a British warship off Macao on 24 May 1809. She was declared a prize of war and sent under escort to Calcutta.^{xlvi xlvii xlviii}

In the Japanese archives ‘no American ships are known to have visited Japan in the years 1808 to 1837.’^{xlix}

During the decade after 1820, British whaleships began frequenting the coast of Japan in considerable numbers, prompting the Japanese to issue in April 1825 a ‘shell and repel’ edict. This warned, in Japanese only, that intrusions by any foreign interlopers, such as ‘ignorant whalers... and rude and crude pirates,’ would not be tolerated, not even just for wood and water. The American whale fleet was then engaged on a massive expansion from Hawaii towards Japan. American whaling captains soon knew to expect this unfriendly welcome at Japan. However in mid-1825 when Captain Seth Coffin in the *Aurora* of Nantucket rescued nine survivors and three dead men from a wrecked Japanese junk drifting some two thousand miles east of Japan, he took them home: ‘In running in to Jeddo to land them...the people were put on board a fishing schooner off the harbour of Jeddo, and the *Aurora* continued her voyage.’¹ (Other American whaleships had contact with the shore, perhaps most notably the *Lawrence* of Poughkeepsie in 1846, as a well-illustrated Japanese scroll survives showing the trials and tribulations of her captured crew, several of whom were blacks.)^{li lii}

Yet another attempt to open up the Japan trade was made in July 1837 when an able linguist, and former missionary doctor, Rev. Charles Gutzlaff, sailed from Macao. This was ostensibly to return home some shipwrecked Japanese, but in fact the venture was financed by ‘American merchants in Macao.’ But Gutzlaff too was unable to break through the barriers of the Emperor’s seclusion, and the Dutch retained their lucrative monopoly.^{liii}

Conclusion: American Experience of Japan before 1854:

The ‘imperfect knowledge’ of Japan among the English and their merchants trading with China has been reviewed by King with notes on the gross inadequacies of contemporary European charts of Japan.^{liv} When in 1854 Commodore Perry wrought the long awaited change, his actions were not based on a lot of political knowledge of Japan, but were undertaken in the sure certainty that Japan had ample riches that Americans could trade profitably at home and around the globe. It seems that through

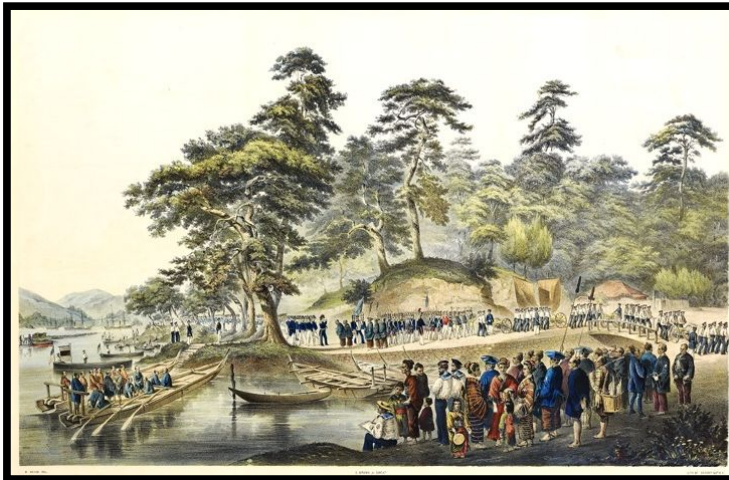


Figure 4 William Heine. *Landing of Commodore Perry, Officers and Men of the Squadron to meet the Imperial Commissioners at Simoda, Japan, June 8, 1854.* (New York: Sarony and Co., 1855) Hand-colored lithograph.

these earlier merchant captains from Boston and Salem, the practical experience of the Americans of how to conduct foreign trade with Japan was probably second only to that of the Dutch, which helps explain why it was the Americans rather than the Europeans who finally ‘opened Japan to foreign trade.’

Epilogue:

So, Who Was the ‘Boston Merchant’?

While this remains an unanswerable question, a close scrutiny of the journal kept by William Cleveland reveals much about the men of the *Massachusetts*, and who among them might have had the opportunity to learn so much about Japan and the Japanese. Cleveland names 25 officers and crew, of whom at least 13 spent time recovering their health in the spartan ‘hospital’ at Deshima. A close analysis of the to-ings and fro-ings from ship to shore reveals that by rotating shore leave, eventually practically everyone had been permitted a day or two ashore, even the large black cook, Peter Guss, and the lowly cabin steward Prince Grant. Three of the seven officers spent the first week of September ashore at Deshima, and the others had several days there later in November. But none spent very long ashore and as far as is known, none but the captain went beyond Deshima.

At first the officer most likely to have been the highly literate ‘Boston Merchant’ might seem to have been ‘Mr Ingersoll.’ Cleveland noted that Ingersoll made some creditable drawings of local ships and ‘a chart of Nangassacky Bay and Harbour,’ which ‘much pleased’ and impressed the courtly *Upper Banjo*. He returned later to call upon Ingersoll ‘to see his Book of Charts, and some loose Charts,’ over which he ‘payed much attention and asked many questions.’ But Ingersoll was very seldom ashore as he acted as the Chief Officer while Captain Hutchings was living ashore,

sharing a house with Mr. Smit more or less continually from 8 August to late in November.

From this, it seems that the person on the *Massachusetts* in 1800 who subsequently wrote under the aliases “Erasmus Doolittle” and The “Boston Merchant,” was highly likely none other than Captain William V. Hutchings himself. Moreover this suggestion seems confirmed by an early reference in his text, namely that on his arrival at Deshima, the writer was “led to the Dutch governor who gave me his welcome and the port regulations in Dutch.” Similarly, he later mentions that “the Upper Banjo permitted me to read the invoices of the articles [that the Chinese junks had brought] from China.” Given the protocols involved, both events must have involved either the captain, a senior officer or the supercargo. The latter on this voyage was the Dutchman, Mr. Ditmar Smit. Captain Hutchings was the only officer to spend much time living ashore. Since the unknown writer was “permitted several times to go freely and unattended into the town of Nagasaki,” it seems highly likely that it was Captain Hutchings himself who wrote the main text quoted above. His use of aliases was perhaps as a smokescreen to cover his good humoured satire of certain practices at home in Massachusetts.

Moreover there is the question of dates. William Hutchings was born in 1767, was aged 33 when he was at Deshima in 1800, he was 63 when the ‘*Recollections of Japan*’ were published in 1830, and he did not die until he was aged 85 in 1852. So, until there is evidence to the contrary, Hutchings may be regarded as probably the author who wrote under an alias as ‘*A Boston Merchant*.’

ENDNOTES

- ⁱ Morison, Samuel Eliot *The Maritime History of Massachusetts 1783-1860.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1921) 182-183
- ⁱⁱ Anonymous *Sketches by a Traveller.* (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1831) 219, 222
Presumed Editor, Silas Pinckney Holbrook. Some sections attributed to ‘Erasmus Doolittle,’ apparently a nom-de-plume, and some to ‘A Boston Merchant,’ apparently the same.
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.* 251
- ^{iv} *Ibid.* 219-222
- ^v *Ibid.* 235
- ^{vi} *Ibid.* 229-230
- ^{vii} *Ibid.* 223
- ^{viii} Langsdorff, G.H. von *Voyages and travels to various parts of the World.* (London: H. Colburn, 1813) 212-217
- ^{ix} Krustenstern A.J. von *Voyage round the World....* (London: Printed for John Murray, 1813)
- ^x Plummer, K. “Captain John Kendrick, the First American in Japan,” *The East.* Tokyo. Vol. XXVI. No.6 (1990). 34-37, 52
- ^{xi} Malloy, Mary “The *Lady Washington* at Oshima Island, Japan, in 1791,” *The Quarterdeck.* Astoria, Oregon. Vol.18.no.1 (1991). 10.
- ^{xii} Sakamaki, S. “Japan and the United States 1790-1853,” *The Asiatic Journal of Japan.* Tokyo. Transactions. Vol. XVIII (1939): 5
- ^{xiii} Captain William Robert Stewart in the *Eliza* in 1792 had been the first U.S. vessel to take seal skins at Mas-a-fuera. These 38, 000 skins he took to China in March 1793, but at Canton he was fined \$500 for having tried to gauge the market there whist his vessel had remained at Macao. His skins were then sold for only \$16,000, the lowest price recorded thus far. He left Canton and Macao in April 1793 with a cargo of sugar for Ostend and Holland. But en route at the Isle of France (Mauritius), the *Eliza* was seized and embargoed from 10 July 1793 to February 1794. Stewart and Delano sold the leaky old *Eliza* and her owner’s cargo for about \$25,000. They then bought the *Hector*, a big 1,400 ton Dutch prize which they took through a hurricane to Bombay. So some of Stewart’s stories of former distress were perhaps true. (Delano 1817 pp.196-199; Toussaint 1954 p.72; Clarke 1887 p.401; Richards 1994 p.16.) In the Japanese archives are contemporary comments that Stewart was then aged about forty, gently spoken but courageous and resourceful. (Sakamaki 1939 p.8.)

Stewart apparently retained the shipping papers from the old *Eliza*, and re-used them for the vessel he took to Japan, with a crew of fifty, ten or more of whom were lascar seamen from India. (Cleveland mss:Kanai 1965 p.21.) He may well have had assistance from the English in India. (Fetchko,1999 p.60.) The slender knowledge the English had of Japan, and their optimism for opening trade there in parallel with their interests in using India as their base for obtaining sea otter skins from the North West Coast of America for trade with China, came from Isaac Tilsingh, formerly of Deshima. Tilsingh maintained 'frequent contact with English friends' and merchants at Calcutta while he was later in charge of the Dutch factory nearby at Chinsura from 1785 to 1792 before retiring to London. (Furber 1976 p.328; King 1997 p.20.) English merchants of the Honourable East India Company in India and Canton used their positions as much to promote their private interests as those of their Company.

(Furber 1976.) They financed privately several semi-clandestine speculative voyages in the sea otter trade under various flags of convenience, and may also have supported William Stewart unofficially to try to open what they were sure were 'fabulously wealthy' markets in Japan. If as seems likely Stewart 'had been fitted out by English merchants in Calcutta,' it would have been essential for them that he sailed under a neutral, American, flag. Thus, whatever their financial backing, Stewart's voyages to Japan were definitely 'American.'

^{xiv} Vialle, C. and Blusse, L. "*The Deshima Dagregisters 1790 -1800*," Leiden. Institute for the History of European Expansion. Vol. X, 1997.

^{xv} Siebold, P.F. *Manners and Customs of the Japanese in the Nineteenth Century from Recent Dutch Visitors....* (London. John Murray, 1841). 259-60, 268-271

^{xvi} Sakamaki, *Japan*, 6

^{xvii} Fetchko, Peter "Salem Trading Voyages to Japan During the Early Nineteenth Century," *American Neptune*. Vol. XLVI, no. 1 (1986): 52

^{xviii} *Ibid.*

^{xix} Siebold, *Manners*, 271

^{xx} Hildreth, R. *Japan As It Was And Is*. (Boston: Phillips,Sampson and Co., 1855). 449

^{xxi} Fetchko, *Salem*, 53

^{xxii} Sakamaki, *Japan*, 8

^{xxiii} Franklin Papers "Franklin Papers." Mss. Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem. (n.d.)

^{xxiv} Sakamaki, *Japan*, 6

^{xxv} Mary Malloy personal comment

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- xxvi Vialle and Blusse, *Deshima*
- xxvii Fetchko, *Salem*, 3-54
- xxviii Takeuchi, M. and Monroe, D. 'Worlds Revealed : The Dawn of Japanese and American Exchange. (Edo-Tokyo Museum, and Peabody Essex Museum: 1999).
- xxix Morison, *Maritime*, 183
- xxx Kanai, Madoka. *A Diary of William Cleveland, Captain's Clerk on board the Massachusetts.* (Quezon City. Institute of Asian Studies, University of the Philippines. Monograph Series, no.1, 1965) 10a and b
- xxxi Kanai, *Diary*, 1-43
- xxxii Cleveland, W. *Journal of the ship Massachusetts.* Mss. (Salem, Ma.: Peabody Essex Museum, n.d.)
- xxxiii Phillips, J.D. *Salem and the Indies.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947) 227
- xxxiv Allen, J.F. "First Voyage to Japan: Mr Cleveland's Journal," *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute.* Vol. II, no.4. August. (1860). 166-169.
- xxxv *Ibid.*
- xxxvi See endnote xiii
- xxxvii Hildreth, *Japan*, 449
- xxxviii Sakamaki, *Japan*, 9
- xxxix Fetchko, *Salem*, 60
- xl Sakamaki, *Japan*, 9
- xli Siebold, *Manners*, 271
- xliv Takeuchi and Monroe, *Worlds*, 211
- xlvi Campbell, Archibald *A Voyage Around the World.* (New York: Broderick and Richard, 1819). 19-22
- xlviii Cole, A.B. "The Mount Vernon's Voyage." *American Neptune*, Vol. 5 (1945): 255-265.
- l Morse, H. B. *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China 1635-1824* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926). Volume 2: 66
- lxvii Cole, *Mount Vernon*, 255
- lxviii Morse, *Maritime*, 109
- lxx Richards, Rhys. "United States Trade with China," *American Neptune*, Vol.54. SpecialSupplement (1994): 58
- lxxix Sakamaki, *Japan*, 150
- l Richards, Rhys. "Honolulu and Whaling on the Japan Grounds," *The American Neptune*, Vol.59. no.3 (1999):193
- lii Sakamaki, *Japan*, 37-42
- liii Gallagher, R.S. "Castaways on Forbidden Shores," *American Heritage*, Vol. XIX, No. 4. (1968): 34-37
- liiii Siebold, *Manners*, 271
- liv King, R.J. "A Regular and Reciprocal System of Commerce— Botany Bay, Nootka Sound and

the Isles of Japan," *The Great Circle*, Vol.19,
no.1 (1997): 19-21

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