

Of Whale Oil and the Spirit of Adventure: American Seamen in Japan, 1846-1850

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要約

本稿は、幕末日本に滞在したアメリカ人の日本観と同時期の日本側の記録との比較、相互観を要約したものである。

太平洋に於いて操業していたアメリカの捕鯨船が日本近海で難破した際に避難した乗組員たち、あるいは捕鯨船の劣悪な環境から逃げ出した逃亡者たち、または日本を知りたかった冒険家など、1846年から1850年にかけ日本に滞在したアメリカ人船乗りたちの日本観を論じる。

1846年6月、日本の択捉島の近くで嵐のためアメリカ捕鯨船 Lawrence 号が難破し、乗組員7人がボートに乗り択捉島に上陸、島内の勤番所にはぼ1年間監禁された。その後連行された長崎でも、寺の部屋に監禁され、何度も奉行所で詳しい取り調べを受けた。その間に1人が死亡したが、その死因はアメリカ人の記録と日本の記録では異なっている。翌年アメリカ人6人はオランダ船に乗り、ようやく日本を出ることができた。

1848年、アメリカの捕鯨船 Lagoda 号から逃亡した15人の乗組員が松前藩の領土に上陸した後捕らえられ、数ヶ月後長崎に連行、寺に監禁され奉行所で取り調べを受けた。2、3人が長崎にいる間に繰り返し逃亡を試み、監禁はその度に厳しくなっていた。それに関連して2人が死亡し、ほとんどの者が病気になるなどの苦難を強いられた。

その間に、別の捕鯨船で日本近海に来たもう1人のアメリカ人ラナルド・マクドナルドは、大胆な冒険家として捕鯨船から小さなボートに乗り利尻島に上陸した後捕らえられ、宗谷や松前経由で長崎に連行された。彼も奉行所で取り調べを受け、数ヶ月間長崎の寺に収監された。1849年4月、アメリカの軍艦 Preble 号が来て、Lagoda 号の乗組員たちと共に日本を後にした。

これらのアメリカ人たちが「鎖国時代」の日本に於けるそれぞれの経験について残した記録を読み、当時の日本、オランダ商館の記録と比較し、その共通点と相違点を分析する。それらの記録の中の「真実」はどこにあるか、どのようにお互いの文化を解釈したのか、それらの相互観を論じる。

“If that double-bolted land, Japan, is ever to become hospitable, it is the whale ship alone to whom the credit will be due; for already she is on the threshold.” Herman Melville ⁽¹⁾

The Japanese whaling grounds were said to be discovered by a captain of an American whale ship out of Nantucket, Massachusetts in 1820. The number of ships engaged in whaling in the seas around Japan, primarily American and British, gradually increased and there were a number of instances of sailors from these ships landing illegally on Japanese soil. These incidents prompted the shogunate to issue a harsh edict

to repel all foreign ships (except Dutch and Chinese) without even a 'second thought' in 1826, which was in effect until 1842. From that year, foreign ships that approached Japanese shores were to be supplied with provisions and merely encouraged to depart Japanese waters. Whale ships were told not to 'fish' in the seas near Japan.

Nevertheless, during the years from 1845 to 1850, the American whaling fleet based in New England and New York reached its greatest tonnage and number of ships when 680 ships were active in one single year. Hundreds of these ships could be seen yearly sailing the waters off Japan. The unexpectedly 'friendly' reception of the American whaler *Manhattan* in 1845 that returned a large group of Japanese waifs to their homeland, was seen as a possible signal that its rigid isolationism was beginning to weaken somewhat.

The American fleet also reached its greatest production of whale oil during this period with estimated annual production of 330,000 barrels that was worth about \$2.50 a gallon retail. In addition, with so many potential profits at stake, owners and outfitters were in constant litigation during those years with captains, shareholders, and creditors over the partnership returns from these whaling voyages.⁽²⁾

The development of the petroleum industry would eventually seal the fate of the whaling industry by providing a cheaper and better oil for illuminating and general use. Its decline was also hastened by other events such as the California Gold Rush that began in 1849 when whalers offered cheap means of reaching San Francisco, where many erstwhile sailors deserted their ships to quickly head for the mines in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. In fact, desertions were so numerous that many ships were left abandoned by officers and sailors.

The main focus of this article will be to reexamine and reevaluate the experience of confinement of two groups of victims of shipwreck and deserters from two different American whalers, and that of one bold adventurer from a third ship, in the forbidden empire of Japan.

The Seamen from the American Whale Ship *Lawrence*

These were seven men who claimed to be the only survivors from the whaling ship *Lawrence*, which, they alleged, had been whaling in the seas off Kamchatka and was subsequently caught in a storm and sunk on either May 27 or 28 in the Pacific ocean, about 300 miles from the coast of Japan. They said they had sailed from Poughkeepsie, New York, under the command of a Captain Baker on July 19, 1845.

Second mate George Howe was the leader of the group. His very critical account of their long incarceration in Japan was first printed in the Singapore Free Press on January 6, 1848 and afterwards widely reprinted in other English language newspapers and official government records. The following narrative is drawn from both this account and Japanese official records, which confirm the main parameters of their stay in Japan, but often differ significantly in their particulars.

Japanese records state that they first landed on the island of Etorofu on the evening of June 4, 1846. The local Ainu quickly reported them to the Japanese military officers stationed nearby, who came the following morning to investigate. They noticed that the leader of the group seemed ill. Using gestures, they found out that the intruders had been shipwrecked and seven others had drowned. But the guards could not determine their nationality. The castaways were given food and told that they would be furnished with provisions, fuel, and water if they would agree to leave. But the latter pointed to their small boat, indicating that it might

capsize at sea. So the soldiers took them to a nearby military garrison at Rubetsu and cared for them there, maintaining a strict watch over them.

In his account Howe alleged that the Japanese guards were “very suspicious of their nationality,” and thought they must be English—“the enemy nation, along with Portugal, Russia and Spain.” The guards reportedly made the throat-cutting gesture, which he took to mean that the seamen would all be killed if they turned out to be any of those enemy nationalities. He said that the guards made themselves understood by signs and principally by drawing on paper, at which they were very “expert.” They were thus questioned at great length about their country, religion, and every other conceivable detail.

By the time orders for their removal to Ezo (Hokkaido) had arrived in the island of Kunashiri immediately to the south, owing to the lateness of the season, the crossing could not be made safely, and so the Americans were kept confined in the guardhouse in Rubetsu until the following spring.

Howe complained that during these eleven months they were never once let outside. Every day they were fed an allowance of rice, fish and given water, and once even Japanese *sake*. “We drank it and it naturally revived us and made us feel a little more cheerful,” he commented.

After drinking it Howe reported that “...they then again examined us and took down our deposition in writing, thinking perhaps that under the influence of the liquor we would give them whatever information we had before endeavored to suppress.”

Howe reported that at about this time all the men, including himself, fell ill and owing to the “miserable situation” they were in, and the “bad treatment” they received from their guards, “...who frequently struck us and insulted us in every possible way they could, we gave up all hopes of ever getting out of our prisons alive.” However, he reported that their condition later improved and Japanese records corroborate that they had regained their health by about mid-July.

In the spring they were told that they had to go to “Yedo [Edo] where the emperor lived.” This was obviously a misunderstanding as Edo was a city that was strictly closed to all foreigners, except for the quadrennial visits by a few Dutch traders from Nagasaki.

Finally, on May 31, 1847 they were put on board of a large junk and, in accordance with shogunal policy, taken to Nagasaki, where they arrived on August 19, a voyage of some two and a half months. Howe complained that they were stowed in the hull, “...a dark and filthy place, and during the time we were in her, some three or four months, not a single moment were we allowed to step on deck to breathe the fresh air or see the light.”

However, on one day they were made to wash themselves and given clean clothes and they were conducted into a cabin that was beautifully decorated with silk and gold ornaments. They were given a carpet to sit upon and allegedly told that they had arrived in Matsumae (actually probably Hakodate) and that the emperor’s “son” was coming on board to meet them. They were made to “kowtow” like all of the Japanese around them when the prince arrived with his numerous suite. They were “examined” again for about an hour and questioned this time by a Japanese interpreter speaking Dutch who communicated with one of their men who spoke a smattering of that language.

This was when they at last began to feel that they were being treated more kindly by their hosts. In the evening they received a box of sweetmeats from him. He was said to be "...a very young man of handsome appearance, and on the whole seemed kindly disposed towards us." However, on the next day they continued their voyage and were again allegedly "...left to the mercy of their jailers."

Howe's account of the itinerary they followed then becomes even more confusing. He quotes the interpreters telling him that "...when they get to Nagasaki" but the details he provides indicate that they are, in fact, already located in that city.

"We then arrived at another city (Nagasaki) when we were each put into a box, the lid of which was fastened down upon us, and in this way we were carried to the town-hall; here we underwent another examination, the questions being put to us by the same interpreter who acted in that capacity at Matsumae; their chief object in this, as all the examinations we went through, was to find out whether we were not really Englishmen, and I am of opinion that had we confessed ourselves of that nature we would all have been killed."

Furthermore, the interpreter allegedly warned them "...to beware how we tried to mislead them, as they would find out who we were when we got to [Nagasaki]." But, in fact, they were already in Nagasaki.

According to Japanese records, the following day, the seven waifs were taken ashore and were interviewed by the Nagasaki magistrate (*bugyo*) Hiraga Shinano- no-kami, with the aid of a group of Japanese interpreters of Dutch, including Moriyama Einosuke. It was again stated that one of the seamen, Murphy Wells, understood a little Dutch, while the interpreters had only a slight knowledge of English.

Before the audience with the magistrate, Howe claims that they were told to put their feet on a print of the "crucifixion" and when they hesitated to do so the guards reportedly drew out their swords and threatened to kill them, and so they forced them all to "trample on the print and spit upon it." However, Japanese records, as translated by Sakamaki, merely state that all of the men complied with the order to step on the tablet (*fumie*), and make no mention of spitting on it or of any such threats by the guards.

They were also allegedly shown two sets of naval officer epaulettes—one English and one American—and told to say which one belonged to their country. They were then returned to 'prison'. However, this was not a prison for common criminals, but a temple building on the outskirts of Nagasaki [Ryokura-an].

When they were again summoned to the magistrate's office, they were surprised to see a man in European dress sitting among the Japanese officials. This was Joseph H. Levyssohn the Dutch factor (*opperhoofd*), who had been requested to assist at the interview by Hiraga owing to his knowledge of English. Levyssohn then questioned them regarding their country, family, religion and the circumstances of their shipwreck, and their answers were interpreted back into Japanese and carefully noted down. As a result much was learned about the nationality, and family background, etc. of the men that had not previously been known to the Japanese authorities. Two of the men had been born in Portugal, but after being subjected to close interrogation, Hiraga finally accepted their repeated avowal that they knew nothing of the "religion of Portugal" having moved to

New York when very young. It was probably at this point that the Japanese officials were at last satisfied that the men were Americans, as they claimed to be, for Levyssohn then told them that he was somewhat hopeful that they would all soon be liberated.

While arrangements were being made for their release to the outgoing Dutch ship that fall, Japanese records state that one of the men died of dysentery on September sixth. This is corroborated by Levyssohn, who stated that the man had long suffered from an illness and eventually succumbed to it.

However, according to Howe's account, despite this hopeful note, after they were all taken back to their 'prison,' or temple lodging, one of their number tried to escape, and, was "...inhumanly murdered by the Japanese." Howe reported that he had made his intentions known previously and that they had all tried their utmost to dissuade him from his purpose, but he insisted that "...he would rather die than suffer so much any longer."

Overall, Howe describes the experience of their long captivity in Japan very negatively, up until their reception by Levyssohn on Deshima and their subsequent departure on a Dutch trading ship bound for Batavia on October 27.

"At last, after seventeen months in all of close and strict confinement and ill-treatment, we were liberated and sent to the Dutch factory. Here we were received by the director of the factory, Mr Levyssohn...to whose active and humane exertions we were indebted for our release—not only for this, but also for the kind, generous and hospitable treatment we met with at his hands during the rest of our stay in Japan, are we under deep and lasting obligations to him."

He also noted that they received the best possible treatment and attention on board the Dutch ship until they arrived in Batavia and were delivered to the American consul there.

He does not mention in his deposition, and in fairness, he may not have been told that the surviving six seamen were given a present of twelve bags of rice for their voyage to Batavia, by the Nagasaki magistrate, as well as ten bags of rice for the captain of the Dutch ship, along with the request that he treat the castaways well and secure their early repatriation from there. ⁽³⁾

The Deserters from the American Whale Ship *Lagoda*

This account of the stay in Japan of fifteen seamen from the whale ship *Lagoda* in 1848-9 is drawn from the sworn depositions of the seamen taken on board the US sloop-of-war *Preble* on April 30, 1849, shortly after their departure from Japan, as well as from official Japanese records and the same book by the Dutch factor Levyssohn. ⁽⁴⁾

According to Japanese records, on June 7, 1848 fifteen foreigners were reported to have landed in three small boats near a village in southwest Ezo (Hokkaido). Soldiers hurried there from nearby Matsumae, but the men had already gone back out to sea.

The longest and most detailed of the depositions was given by Robert McCoy and it served as the basis for all the other accounts. Any mention of the circumstances owing to which these men chose to desert their whaling ship and take to three small boats in the seas off Japan, notorious for its being a country closed to foreigners, was omitted.

According to his account, on or about the fifth of June 1848 the fifteen men left their ships in the straits of Tsugaru and made a small island in the straits. On the following day [June 7] they made the main island of Ezo and landed at a small village, [Koisago] where they were given water but no food. They spent the night at another village [Ishizaki] about three miles distant. Here Matsumae guards and troops learned through gestures that they were whalers. On the third day soldiers appeared and erected screens around them and prevented them from going any farther into the country. They sent them three bags of rice and three bundles of wood.

On the next day when more soldiers appeared they put to sea and reportedly returned to the previous village. However, Japanese records indicate that it was a different village, called Eramachi. Soldiers hastened there and ordered them to be off, but the latter pointed to their boats and indicated it would be foolhardy to go out to sea in such small craft. The seamen gave the soldiers to understand by gestures, etc. that their whale ship had sunk and twenty of their crew mates had drowned. and that they wished to remain where they were. The soldiers agreed that it would be perilous to go out to sea in small boats and so assigned them a house in Eramachi, where they were given food and water and kept under strict guard while their case was reported to the local authorities.

By the fifth day their movements began to be restricted, their possessions were taken out of their boats and brought to the house where they were staying and they were thus prevented from going out to sea again in their boats. After a few days they were moved to another house which they perceived to be a sort of prison. They were constantly guarded and not allowed to walk about. They were supposedly promised to be given a large junk after twenty days in which they could go out to sea freely. Howe claimed that during this time they remained quiet and patient. However, at the end of that time some officers came to say that they had no junk as yet but would have one in twenty more days. But at the end of that time period, they were told that they would be given the junk in January and be allowed to go away. By this time they had lost confidence in the promise of a boat, and asked for their own boats. They refused to give them their own boats and at this point the men began to despair of ever being allowed to leave Japan.

On July 2 orders were dispatched from Edo for the men to be sent to Nagasaki, following the same procedure for that of the *Lawrence* seamen the year before. Nevertheless, around mid-July McCoy and John Bull cut through the roof of the privy and escaped with the intention of making their way to the straits and taking a Japanese boat and cruising around in hope of meeting a whale ship. However, they were quickly recaptured. McCoy made another escape on July 25 with John Martin, by cutting through the roof of the large house. Their escape was quickly discovered and they were soon recaptured again and taken back to the place of their confinement. It was after this second attempt that the three men were put into 'cages' and fed through a hole just large enough for a cup to pass through.

They were allegedly told by an officer at this time that in eleven days they would be taken to Nagasaki, where their boats would be given to them and they would be allowed to make their way to [K]orea. However, this must also have been a misunderstanding as they would soon discover.

After ten days they were taken out of their cages and put on board a junk, where they were also put into a cage which had only one small window for ventilation and in the warm weather they reportedly “almost suffocated.” McCoy also claimed that one of their number was taken out of the cage before they boarded the junk, tied to a post and beaten with ropes in front of them before they forced them to stop by stripping off their clothes in protest. According to Japanese sources, Bull, Martin and McCoy were placed in separate confinement on the junk to Nagasaki. When they asked to be forgiven, vowing that they would never again misbehave, the officials reportedly allowed them to rejoin the others. The seamen were then placed in a large building and treated with kindly consideration.

Sailing down the coast of Japan, they arrived in Nagasaki on September 2. On the next day the Japanese interpreter Moriyama Einosuke came on board the junk with some officers and asked them if they were well and what country they came from. The Japanese wanted to take them ashore but they declined to go and asked to be given their own boats so that they might go out to sea. However, the officers said they could not give them their boats, insisting that they had no such power to do so, without first writing to the “emperor” (shogun). They told them that they would put them in a good house on shore and that in a month and a half they would be put on board the Dutch ship and taken to Batavia. They were then taken to the “town- house” (*bugyosho*), each one riding in a separate palanquin (*norimono*). There they were made to trample upon a crucifix (*fumie*) that was made of brass or some composite material, and allegedly told that they would be put in an “iron house” if they did not do it and never let out again. After this ceremony they were all made to squat down in anticipation of the arrival of the “governor” or magistrate (*bugyo*) and told that they must bow their heads down on his arrival. However, he claims that all of them refused to bow down to the ground as requested.

Here the Japanese record states that the names, ages, places of birth and residence of the men were duly recorded. The magistrate [Ido Tsushima-no-kami Satohiro] questioned them in regard to their reason for coming to Japan and they told him that they had been cast upon the shores of Japan as a result of shipwreck. They were subsequently carried to a small house on the grounds of a temple [Kofukuji] at the foot of a mountain about a mile outside of the central part of the city and incarcerated there. This is where they would spend the next several months.

They were interrogated again at the magistrate’s office on the second day after this regarding their reasons for coming to Japan and gave the same answer as before. McCoy noted that the “interpretations were very incorrect.” On the following day, they were taken again to the same office and this time questioned by the Dutch factor Levyssohn. He asked them why they had come to the seas surrounding Japan and they answered that it was in pursuit of whales. He asked them if they had not also come to spy out the country. They replied that they had only come for whales. When asked if they ate them, they said that they only made oil out of them.

They were questioned again the next day [September 6] as before without the Dutch factor being present. The Japanese interpreter supposedly told them that he doubted their story and believed that they were “mere spies” and “nothing else.” They were nonetheless promised that the shogun would be consulted about their leaving on a Dutch ship and were then taken back to their temple “prison.” A few days later Levyssohn sent

them presents of coffee, sugar, gin and wine, and also some cotton cloth for one of their number who had no clothing. McCoy attested that they waited “patiently” in their “prison” until the promised period had expired. They then received a letter from the Dutch factor explaining that the promised permission had not arrived and that the Dutch ship would anchor in the roads for twenty-five days, before departing for Batavia. This letter also advised them to behave themselves as quarreling would only aggravate their situation. The Japanese record states that they seemed to receive this letter in good spirits. However, in reply to this letter they stated that they could “...place no confidence in the Japanese” and requested that he write to some American consul, who would then request an American warship to come and rescue them. In the meantime, they became very upset and despaired of their seemingly hopeless situation. They were told by the Japanese that they expected an answer any day. However, in six more days, one not having come, about the first of November (October 23), McCoy escaped alone, and tried to reach the Dutch ship still anchored in the roads, but was soon discovered and captured. He was put into a palanquin, his hands were bound tightly, and he was taken back to their prison and placed in stocks and in solitary confinement. Japanese records state that he begged forgiveness and through the generous indulgence of the officials was allowed to rejoin his fellows.

The next day McCoy was taken to the magistrate’s office and interrogated again, and asked if he was not a spy after all. He was then separated from his companions and put in what he calls a “common prison” in the middle of the city. There he spent about three weeks, feeling increasingly despondent that the Dutch ship had sailed. He was in despair and refused to eat for three days. On the fourth day he was taken to the magistrate’s office, where he met his shipmates, and the Dutch factor. Levyssohn explained that the Dutch ship had already waited five days beyond its appointed period and could not delay any longer. He said that the ship would carry his letter to the American consul in Batavia. Despite this hopeful news, McCoy insisted that he would rather die than stay any longer in Japan, and confessed that he had lost all hope. At this point, Levyssohn told them all to “cheer up” and assured them that they were “...not among savages and not to be afraid.” They were then dismissed and went their separate ways.

Levyssohn had also promised to interfere on his behalf and have him restored to his shipmates. After four days this was done. Since his escape, his companions had not been allowed the liberty of the yard. Despite the now concrete prospects that they would soon be rescued by an American warship, three of the “white people” went to extraordinary lengths to escape once more on the night of December 14. Japanese sources state that they burned a hole through the veranda and fled into the mountains where they hid in a farmer’s house. This time they succeeded in reaching the seashore, and attempted to reach some Japanese boats moored on the other side of a bay, but as they made their way through a village they were driven back by a barking dog. They were soon captured again and this time their hands and arms were bound so tightly that the skin was broken and the arms trussed up high above their heads. They were then put into stocks again and they lay in the courtyard all night without any covering and became wet through with dew. The next morning when they were taken out of the stocks they could barely walk.

Before going to the magistrate’s office, McCoy reported that they told the Japanese that “...if the Americans should ever hear of our cruel treatment they would come here and punish them. They told me that the year before, [sic] at the city of Yedo [sic] a common soldier had knocked down [sic] (pushed back) an American commodore and that the Americans had taken no notice of it; then why should they take any notice of us, we

being but poor sailors?"

McCoy then admits that "This circumstance was only understood by me, I suppose; I alone understanding Japanese. But I immediately mentioned it to my shipmates."

Under interrogation, their answers were said to be "insolent" and the magistrate judged them all to be spies and accordingly ordered all of them to be taken to the "common prison" with the three escapees being separated from the others. The cages in which they were placed were said to be "very offensive, filthy and full of vermin" and the mats were "full of lice." They had only a small tub for washing their hands and faces, and could not wash their clothes. They were denied use of their combs, and no fires or lights were allowed. It was on the night after being placed in this prison (December 17) that one of the natives of the Sandwich [Hawaiian] Islands allegedly hanged himself in his cage.

McCoy was called on to interpret. He boasted that he was able to understand nearly everything said to him in Japanese and to have better knowledge of that language than the Japanese interpreter Moriyama knew English.

The Japanese did not take away the body until two days later, on the evening of December 19, and reportedly denied them permission to bury him themselves.

As the weather turned colder, one of the Americans, Ezra Goldthwait, fell ill and finally became delirious. The Japanese guards were said to have denied their requests to bring him warm clothing, until it was too late. He died on January 24 after having suffered for a few weeks. When the guards came to take away the body on the next day, they again asked for permission to bury him. They were said to deny the request and even to "ridicule the idea" of it.

Sometime afterwards, perhaps in March, early in the morning about sunrise, McCoy reported that "...the Japanese guards told us that our heads were to be cut off, and, seeing some strange soldiers assembled, we thought the threat was true." Shortly afterwards a Japanese prisoner was brought into view, and then taken away. A scream was heard and then a boy was seen passing along with a head of a Japanese in his hands.

All of the other five surviving Americans swore to the accuracy of this general account, while adding some new details about specific incidents and their own comments. According to the deposition of John Bull (aka John Brady), "On being taken out of our stocks, we told the Japanese guards that their cruelty to us would be told the Americans, who would come here and take vengeance on them. Our guards replied, sneeringly, that they knew better, and that the Americans did not care how poor sailors were treated; if they did, then they should have come and punished Japan at Yedo, where a Japanese soldier had insulted an 'American chief' I was told this on other occasions afterwards by the Japanese guards. I never before heard of the circumstances referred to by the Japanese guards."

As for the incident of the Japanese prisoner being decapitated, Bull's testimony closely resembles that of McCoy: "...about March, our Japanese guards came to the cage early in the morning, and told us that our heads were about to be cut off. I heard the guard say so. Shortly afterwards, I saw some soldiers leading along by the front of our prison a Japanese with bound hands and blindfolded." After he heard someone cry out "Oh!"

he asked the guard what the cry meant. He said that they had cut off the head of a Japanese.

"Under favorable circumstances," he boasted, "I can understand a good deal of Japanese." Yet in this case both he and McCoy had clearly not understood for they all kept their heads on after all. In addition, he claimed that as he was supposed to be the "chief" of the group, he was in particular singled out and forced to perform "the attitude of humiliation" (kowitz) whenever he was brought into the presence of the "higher Japanese officers."

Jacob Boyd in his deposition claimed that upon their initial arrival in Nagasaki that Moriyama had promised that they would have their boats in three days, and that, furthermore, they "would be saluted from the Dutch ship and the [Japanese] forts" on their departure.

He also repeated the story of the alleged conversation with their guards after being released from the stocks. They told the Japanese that if the Americans heard of their cruelty to them they would come to Japan and punish them. "The Japanese said that if the Americans came here they would serve them as they did the American chief at Yedo. They said that if the American ships did come, they would blow them away by aid of their priests." He also said that the Japanese guards "jeered at the very idea" of Americans coming to take revenge on the Japanese for their alleged 'insult' to Biddle.

As for incident with the *Lawrence* sailor who was allegedly "inhumanly murdered," it was stated again that the American had escaped. When the Japanese tried to capture him, he resisted, "...striking one of the chiefs on the head with a stone." He was finally overpowered, but not until he was "almost cut to pieces" by the swords of the Japanese. He died two days later in prison and no one had gone to treat him or dress his wounds. John Waters testified that it was only after his shipmates had stopped giving him the medicine prescribed by the Japanese doctors that he began to recover. When he was sick the guards allegedly told him that his "coffin was made" and his "grave was dug" and that they had appointed a day to bury him. He stated that he believed that the "Japanese intended to poison me."

Finally, Melcher Biffar, stated that the Japanese had told them that if they did not step on the crucifix they would think they were Portuguese and they would be reported to the governor. He agreed that the Japanese officials were always trying to get the Americans to bow in a Japanese way, with their heads to the floor, but they said that it was not the American custom to do so and so they would not do it. "We always treated them with respect, after the manner of our own country." He confirmed that they were always particularly concerned to have John Bull bow down to them in that way when the Japanese officials came to the prison to visit them as they considered him to be the "chief man" among them.

He also thought there was "something wrong" about the death of Goldthwait. They all thought he had been poisoned. He had been a healthy man up to the moment he fell ill, and lively. The Japanese put his body in a "box" and carried it away. They were supposedly "making merry on the occasion."

When another shipmate became ill in the same way, he was prescribed medicine by a Japanese doctor. After two weeks of administering the medicine, his condition continued to worsen. When his shipmates stopped giving it to him, he was said to begin to recover.

Sometime during March McCoy was told by one of the Japanese guards that another American was a prisoner in Nagasaki. He was warned not to mention it, lest he lose his head as a result.

The American Adventurer Ranald MacDonald

“...and low-lying, endless, unknown archipelagos and impenetrable Japans” Herman Melville ⁽⁵⁾

Now we come to the story of that ‘other American’ held prisoner in Nagasaki and whose experience of imprisonment and treatment at the hands of his Japanese hosts almost forces us to doubt that he was from the same country and also *in* the same country as that of his compatriots and fellow whalers. After being virtually ignored by historians for more than a century, his exploits have recently begun to garner the recognition they richly deserve. Here I will only give the barest sketch of his life in order to better understand the significance of his great adventure in Japan.

Born on February 3, 1824 at old Fort George (now Astoria, Oregon) on the south bank of the Columbia river, to a Chinook Indian princess and an emigrant Scottish fur trader, Ranald MacDonald spent his boyhood and was educated in frontier outposts in northwestern North America.

He had first come to think of Japan as a boy growing up in the Columbia River valley and the northwest of North America as the neighboring country on the other side of the Pacific ocean. However, the fact that Japan had for over two hundred years by its own laws been closed to the outside world save for a few Dutch and Chinese traders allowed to visit and reside in Nagasaki under strict regulation and supervision was a fact that he attested was “...well known to us of the Hudson’s Bay Company in the Columbia.” They also knew that it was supposedly forbidden to any other foreigners, or even to any Japanese who for whatever reason had been



Ranald MacDonald daguerreotype, ca.1853.

Figure1 The American adventurer Ranald MacDonald, circa 1853

to any foreign land, to land upon its shores, on “penalty of death, sooner or later.”

He alluded to the few instances when the Company had had to deal with Japanese drifters who had been cast ashore on North America. He had heard many tales of Japan in his youth that that made a deep impression on his “naturally receptive mind” and he developed an intense curiosity about its people and their way of life. Finally, he recalls: “I resolved, within myself, to personally solve the mystery [of Japan] , if possible, at any cost of effort-yea life itself.”

He explained that “My plan was to present myself as a castaway; and with all seeming confidence—without seeming to court it—to rely on their humanity. I could not believe them wholly lost to it. It would have been cowardice to have done so.”

He saw his main difficulty in disguising his true motive, that is, to learn about them and their country and to teach them about the outside world. He knew that their aversion to Christianity was more to Roman Catholicism, and as he was a Protestant Episcopalian, he was not so concerned on that score. He limited his collection of books to an English Bible and prayer book, a dictionary, a grammar, and books on English history and geography—all in compact form.

He knew that such possessions for a mere castaway from a whaler would seem suspicious, but he had a story ready. The Japanese, even the lower and middle classes, were said to be very literate, so he might pass on this score.

He admits that “I was not a man of learning, but always a lover of books: of these I was master enough for my purpose.” His books would later prove to be a crucial factor in his employment as a teacher to a group of Nagasaki interpreters. “In fact it was *that* that saved me: for seeing me ever reading, a man of books, they drew to me: the books magnetized them, *and they* (books and Japanese) made me their teacher!” ⁽⁶⁾

So in 1845 when just twenty-one years old and “in the freedom of manhood, with full vigor of youth” MacDonald made his way, presumably on foot, as he had no money by his own admission, west to the Mississippi river. There he found work as a boat hand on one of the “palace steamers” and from there it is only mentioned that he eventually made his way to New York. There, on December 6, 1845, he shipped on the whaler *Plymouth*, Lawrence B. Edwards, captain, for the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), where he expected to find work on a whale ship bound for the seas off Japan. ⁽⁷⁾

A shipmate in a contemporary account describes MacDonald as “...a man of about five feet, seven inches; thick set; straight hair and dark complexion...He was a good sailor, well educated, a firm mind, well calculated for the expedition upon which he embarked.”

While in China and on his way to Japan, he had heard a rumor that one of the men of the whaler *Lawrence* had been killed by the Japanese for attempting to escape while confined by them. Without knowing the details, even so, he characteristically asserted that “It did not frighten me.” ⁽⁸⁾

He ended up serving as a crew mate on the same whaling ship he had arrived on, having succeeded in convincing a reluctant Captain Edwards to agree to certain conditions which would permit him to leave the ship in a fully-provisioned small boat at a time and place of his choosing off the coast of Japan. Edwards probably thought that he would never have to fulfill his part of the bargain.

On June 27, 1848, the ship being full of oil, and lying off the coast of Japan, about five miles from the nearest island, MacDonald asked the captain to let him leave the ship. The latter consented with great reluctance, according to the previous agreement.

MacDonald was but twenty-four years old and had no knowledge of the Japanese language. What he did have, however, was a fearless and forthright attitude, a basic sincerity and intelligence which would greatly impress his Japanese captors and induce them to treat him with kindness and respect.

Deposition of Ranald MacDonald

In this section, I will summarize MacDonald's experience in Japan, using as a basis, his deposition, taken on board the US sloop-of-war *Preble* on April 30, 1849,⁽⁹⁾ fleshing out its often skeletal outline with material from his own posthumously published Narrative, in particular where significant contradictions or omissions have occurred.

After giving the details of his date and place of birth and age, McDonald confirmed that when off the coast of Japan, he left the whale ship *Plymouth* of his own free will, according to a previous understanding with the captain. The latter had agreed to furnish him with a boat and all necessary supplies, and drop him off the coast of Japan, "under favorable circumstances for reaching the shore."

After losing sight of the *Plymouth*, he sailed his little boat skillfully while skirting around reefs and surf surrounding one small island, and then passing through a channel in a reef and anchoring in the sheltered bay of a nearby small island (Yagishiri). He was accompanied by a herd of sea lions most of the way, and tried out his pistols by shooting one of them. The first island he landed on was supposed to be inhabited, but he did not find anyone living there. Here he performed a premeditated experiment to see if he could capsize and right his boat again. He was satisfied with the result. In order to prolong his absence from it, and thereby lessen the suspicion that he had voluntarily sought Japanese shores, he spent two nights in the sheltered bay of this island.

On the third day he again put to sea in order to reach the inhabited island of "Timoshee" (Rishiri) which he took to be about ten miles away, but was actually around forty-five miles distant. When located about five miles from the island, he intentionally capsized his boat, "...making no effort to save anything but my chest, which I wanted for ballast..." He also let his rudder go. After righting his boat, he again set sail for the island. He saw a ship that evening pass by to the north.⁽¹⁰⁾

He spent the night in his boat. The next morning early (July 2) he approached the land and saw smoke. When day broke, he saw some native Ainu launching a boat and then row it towards him. When they came within 100 meters of him, he beckoned for them to come closer, which they did so timidly. He then jumped into their boat, fastening his boat to theirs, and made signs for them to take him ashore.

In his narrative, MacDonald adds that as the Ainu approached to within about 100 meters, he pulled the plug on his boat and let the sea flow into it until it was almost half full of water. He then described their elaborate greeting ritual that included raising their arms and stroking their beards repeatedly, which seemed to him like a "respectful salutation." He in turn greeted them with a friendly frontier American "How do you do?" raising his right arm in salute. He reported that they seemed to take it as a compliment.

He confirmed that as soon as they reached him, he fastened their boat to his and jumping into their boat, signaled that he wished them to bail his boat and also row him to shore. One of them did so while the other three continued to greet him. He attested that “They did not seem to be afraid of me; but to be wonder struck as to who or what I was.”

The Narrative states that they rowed him to the village (Notsuka) as he had indicated, where he was greeted by about a hundred men, women and children sitting cross-legged on the beach. He further deposes that upon landing, two Ainu men gently took hold of his wrists, one on either side, put sandals on his feet and led him up a steep rocky bank to a house. Here they fed him their “best breakfast” and also gave him some dry clothes to wear.

From his Narrative we may learn that on approaching the house they were met by a Japanese official with the typical shaved head and wearing costume to indicate his status. The official soon provided him with a repast of boiled rice, some good broiled fish, ginger, preserved shell fish and a variety of pickles. Before and during the meal his host several times offered him a drink of something he called “grog- yes.”

Being a teetotaler, MacDonald did not take a drink but by its smell found it to be very like whisky. (It was Japanese sake.) The name “grog-yes” puzzled him and he later learned that it came from the fact that stranded survivors of the crew of the shipwrecked whaler *Lawrence* had replied: “Grog? Yes! fetch it on” when sake was offered to them.

In his deposition, no mention was made of this first “kindly” Japanese samurai that he encountered, nor any details about this “best breakfast” that he was first offered, nor about the puzzling pidgin English that he heard. It also omits any mention that during this initial period, MacDonald was permitted to walk outdoors, although under close surveillance.

When he returned from his stroll, he found that his “kind host” had provided him with a soft bed and bed clothes to wear. He attested that he slept “most comfortably.” Meanwhile they brought up his sail, anchor, kegs and chest to the house. His clothes were washed in fresh water and dried at his request. All communication was said to be by sign language.

In this way his first few days of captivity set the pattern for his comparatively privileged, if not, ‘royal’ treatment over the course of the next ten or months of his captivity in Japan. The only thing that he was not given was his freedom, until the day of his departure from Japan on an American warship.

MacDonald also states in his narrative that his belongings were thoroughly inventoried by the two senior officers (*oyakata*) on the island, one of whom then went to report his presence to the nearest military garrison at Soya on the main island of Ezo. He remained where he first landed on Rishiri island for about ten days under what he called “...hospitable restraint, with the privilege of rambling in the immediate vicinity.” ⁽¹¹⁾

He mentions that one of the officers in charge of guarding him, named Tangaro, was “very intelligent” and his “constant companion.” He also had an intense desire to learn English, and would point to all manner of objects in view and ask the English names for them. As MacDonald was just as eager to learn his language, he

insisted on his giving him Japanese, or whatever was his vernacular, for his English, on the principle of “fair reciprocity.” MacDonald made a quill pen and began to write down a vocabulary of his words, a practice which he continued off and on, during the course of his imprisonment. He was soon told that it was contrary to law and custom for him to compile a written vocabulary of Japanese, but he managed to continue doing so at intervals.

He was examined by a group of officers who had come from Soya and in answer to their questions about his name, his ship and the reason he had left it, he repeated what he had told Tangaro, to the effect that he did not agree with the captain and so he had left the ship and it had sailed for home port. His belongings were again minutely examined and his physical dimensions measured. He was found to be the equivalent of some 172 centimeters in height, with very broad shoulders and large chested and muscular. This made him a giant among his hosts, who he estimated to be no more than about 160 cm or less.

After this a procession departed for the capital of the island Hontomari, in which he marched between two Japanese officials and two lines of Ainu. In Hontomari he was led to the main building and to a room about twelve feet square. It was an ordinary dwelling and clean. As he affirmed in his Narrative, “Being well fed, kindly attended, and amply supplied with all conveniences, with the luxuries of tea and tobacco *ad libitum*, I had no reason to complain of my quarters.”

In contrast to all of the above details, in his deposition, he merely stated that he remained in that first house for eight days, when four Japanese officers arrived from the town of Soya, at the very tip of the island of Ezo (Hokkaido). They took him to the capital of the island, and confined him in a small room. After he remonstrated, they later enlarged it by removing the partitions. Thus, after only about a week in Japan, he was already able to ameliorate some of the conditions of his confinement.

After remaining thirty days in Hontomari, he was taken to Soya, at the far northern tip of the large island of Ezo (Hokkaido), and was placed in a prison there. After about twenty days in total spent there, he boarded a large junk bound for the regional capital city of Matsumae located at the southwestern corner of the island. In his Narrative he adds some important details about his own feelings and those of his Japanese hosts on the occasion of his parting. He left Hontomari on a beautiful day in early August, “...without regret and with high hopes that in a month or two, I would be released and be at liberty.” He offered his hand to one of the *oyakata* who had been in charge of him on Rishiri, and told him “Sionara” [sayonara] which he had picked up. He observed that he seemed to be “much affected” by his using the Japanese word to take leave of him.

He suffered a lot of pain from having to sit in a hunched position and cross-legged in the small covered portion of the junk that took him to the military outpost at Soya. After lunch, he was allowed to go in and out as he pleased. When any ships were seen off the coast his guards would point and say “American ship!” but he could easily see that they were not American and would say “No!” and shake his head.

In Soya he was taken to the government house and saw the commandant seated on the mats, but no words were exchanged. He was led to a “newly built prison” consisting of two rooms, one for himself and one for his guards. In answer to their inquiry, he told them that a prison was not good for him and that he would not make “compliments” to anyone through bars or gratings.

At the end of his brief stay in Soya he testified that he had received “every attention” from the officers there. They had supplied him with such luxuries as tea, sugar, tobacco and pipe without his even asking. Moreover, he was allowed to read his own books, although they kept the key to his chest, they said, to ensure that the “common people” did not see what was inside.⁽¹²⁾

When the time came for him to leave, there was a tearful parting from the official from Rishiri who had been acting as his interpreter. He told him he was sorry he would never see him again, and they shook hands warmly, saying again “sayonara.” His place was taken by a boy with only a slight knowledge of English, who had been assigned to George Howe, and his shipmates from the whaler *Lawrence*.

When it came time to board the junk that would take him to Matsumae, he reported that all of the officers and soldiers who had been in charge of him came to him one by one to bid him farewell, telling him “sayonara,” a word whose meaning had become very familiar to MacDonald by then.⁽¹³⁾ He was allowed to walk about the rear section of the vessel. After a passage of fifteen days, the junk arrived in Matsumae on September 6th.

He remained incarcerated there until October 1. While there he learned that he had been preceded by fifteen other Americans, who had made two attempts to escape. He was even given a rude spoon that one of their number had fashioned and left behind. He testified that he was given sweetmeats (candies) and treated in all other respects very kindly there.

While his deposition only gives a skeletal account on his stay in Matsumae, his Narrative provides many interesting and significant details. Once his junk had arrived in the harbor of Matsumae, he waited in his room while two distinguished officers and their numerous suite had assembled on the deck. Then just as he was expecting to be called out, the partitions were suddenly removed and he was dramatically exhibited to the assembled officers. This manner of doing so annoyed him, but feeling that he had to do something by way of salutation, he rose with all the dignity he could muster on one knee and waved his hand respectfully to the audience of Japanese officers, who seemed to receive it stoically.

The officer on his left appeared to be the chief one, and his first exclamation was: “Nipponjin!” MacDonald claimed that he didn’t know what the word meant at the time. This officer must have noticed a resemblance in MacDonald’s facial and bodily features to the Japanese, which he had inherited from his native-American mother. After silently regarding him for a moment longer, this officer turned towards and nodded in the direction of the group of subordinate officers and said: “Nagasaki-go away...”

From that MacDonald inferred that the officers so addressed were to head the party that would take him to Nagasaki. One of the inferior officers was then directed to serve as interpreter, and he slid on his knees to a position beside MacDonald. This officer, the latter recalled, “...by odd words of English and signs made himself understood to me.” He first said the word “carpenter” and then made the sign of holding a nail in his left hand and hitting it with a hammer held in his right hand and said “ship”. By this sequence of words and gestures it was understood that they would repair (or perhaps build) a ship for his transportation to Nagasaki some thousand miles away by sea.

MacDonald then asked: “Why take all that trouble? Why not allow me to remain among you?”

After this was interpreted to him, the officer laughed loudly and declared: “No, No! —Nagasaki—go away.” Given the very primitive level of interpreting ability in English in Matsumae at the time, evidenced by this description, it is likely that misunderstandings may have occurred between the American seamen who preceded him and the Japanese authorities there.

In contrast, MacDonald was not impatient to be repatriated and not in a hurry generally. He “whiled away the time” by smoking his Japanese pipe and tobacco, talking to his servant boy (Musko), pacing his room and sipping tea, and thereby keeping his servant busy. The room was small, and the weather was sultry, but they had removed one of the doors to give extra ventilation. As MacDonald attested: “In regard to creature comforts I certainly had no reason to complain, but on the contrary, they were, all...and ever kindly to me.” When he went ashore in Matsumae he was carried in a palanquin (*norimono*) through the streets past crowds of people holding lanterns, all straining to get a look at him. “They gazed at me as if I was a wild beast, I could not stand it.” And so, as much as he might have otherwise desired to see the country he passed through, he retreated into his palanquin in order to avoid being stared at. This unpleasant incident certainly seems to indicate that, notwithstanding the spontaneous remark blurted out by the officer on board the junk, MacDonald must have still looked very exotic and foreign in the eyes of the Japanese. He was taken to a house in the village of Eramachi, and led into a room where the commander of the company of soldiers was sitting alone. The soldiers retired and the commander then came over and took MacDonald by the hand in a friendly way and led him to the other end of the room. He then indicated by signs that he should sit down on a short bench. On the wall MacDonald noticed two English letters J and C written with charcoal. He speculated about what they might mean. He also noticed that a patch of new boarding had been placed over a hole about eighteen inches square in the roof. His host then took him to the stanchion in the middle of the room and showed him the English names written thereon with a lead pencil—Robert McCoy, John Brady and John—the rest of the third name and the other names were indecipherable.

His friendly host then managed to convey by “ingenious signs” and by saying the word “America” that fifteen [sic] Americans had escaped through that hole and then been caught and hand-cuffed, dragged back and “had their throats cut,” which he indicated by drawing his larger sword and making the sign of cutting the throat. He also pointed to the iron bludgeon hanging in the guard room, mentioned the name “McCoy” and made the sign of striking.

All of this made MacDonald reflect and recall the reported “murder” of one of the members of the *Lawrence* crew. He believed that his fifteen predecessors had shared the same fate. However, he later learned that, in fact, this was the same group of American seamen from the *Lagoda* that were released to the American warship in Nagasaki at the same time as he was. Thus, it is obvious that the frequent and notorious ‘throat-cutting’ gesture was not always to be taken literally, even if it was meant to be.

In Eramachi he was given a bamboo spoon carved by one of the crew of the *Lagoda* and left behind. He had actually learned how to handle chopsticks before he got to Soya. Even so, he relates that being solicitous of his comfort they had made a spoon and fork for him of brass when he was there. Yet his supper was thoroughly Japanese: “...nice fish, pickles, and boiled kelp.” There were also four or five waiters and in addition a “taster” who tasted all of the dishes before he ate them and wore a distinguishing costume. In his Narrative, MacDonald stated that he also said grace before meals, in the Christian manner, in their presence, with no interference from them.

Yet he was nonetheless the object of their intense curiosity. "Whilst I devoured the viands they devoured me with their eyes, just in simple curiosity, and with a kindly look of approval, rather than otherwise." ⁽¹⁴⁾ After his meal the local magistrate gave him a present of Japanese clothing, and also a pair of knives, and a box of confectionary with a presentation card. The present of knives shows the extraordinary degree of trust that they seemed to have in him.

On the next day he asked for his chest to be opened so that he could get at his books. It was first denied but when he made a sign of worship and said "kameni", at the same time saying "God!" they brought him his Bible. At his request they made a special shelf for it. He testified that they seemed to respect it as they paid their usual compliment to books of "good character" by bringing it up to their forehead.

He attested that "...in all matters, they treated me with very great kindness and gentle delicate consideration." Yet they would not tell him the name of the place where he was kept.

All were said to express their regrets on his parting. He did not consider his hosts to be "barbarians" but on the contrary, very civilized and with refined manners and full of consideration for foreign guests such as himself.

On October 1 he left in another large junk for Nagasaki. At the start of the long voyage by sea he remonstrated against being confined in a small cabin with grated windows. On the following day the captain ordered the grating to be removed. Yet he was told not to go on deck. The junk arrived in Nagasaki on October 15, and he remained on board for two days.

In the Narrative a description is given of the preliminary interview with Shirai Tatsunoshin, one of five officials who assisted the Nagasaki magistrate (*bugyo*) and another unnamed official, which took place on board the junk on the day of its arrival. These two officials sat in the middle, flanked by two secretaries and two interpreters. The latter were said to be Uemura Sakushichiro, who was described as a "very old gentleman" with a benign countenance, and the 28-year-old Moriyama Einosuke, who would become his most intimate and esteemed companion among all of the Japanese officials there. ⁽¹⁵⁾

MacDonald was asked the usual routine questions about his name, place of birth, nationality, family, his ship and reasons for leaving it in a small boat. In reply to the last question MacDonald merely said that he had had some "difficulty" with the captain. Moriyama didn't understand the word 'difficulty' and asked MacDonald to show him the word in the Dutch- English dictionary he handed to him. Fortunately, the Japanese officials seemed to believe him.

On the 17th he went ashore and was taken firstly to a small room adjoining the magistrate's office. His Narrative adds many more interesting details to his bare- bones deposition. For instance, MacDonald immediately noticed that the people in Nagasaki were not so curious about him as those in the north of Japan had been. Nevertheless, he was taken by palanquin to the magistrate's residence past thousands of spectators. He was brought to a sort of shed that was covered with dirty matting. The walls were decorated with caricature and writing and seemed to him to be "altogether a filthy place." After a while he was asked if he

wanted to eat; he refused, but they brought in and spread out some dishes for him anyway. He had no appetite, but he ate—to show that he was not afraid.

The Narrative states that half an hour later, Moriyama came to tell him that in another half an hour he would appear before the magistrate to answer questions submitted to him. He told him not to be afraid and to “take courage” as he would interpret for him and would be sworn.

He also instructed him to place his foot on the image on a metal plate in front of the door to the audience chamber which showed the “Devil of Japan,” which was an image of the Virgin and Child, or Christ on the Cross. Being a Protestant, MacDonald told him he would do so because he did not believe in images. Moriyama said, “Very good! Very good!” and then retired. The deposition corroborates this ‘image-treading’ ritual, but omits any mention of MacDonald’s conversation with Moriyama concerning that subject.

In the audience hall he was requested to kneel, in the Japanese fashion, on the mat. He tried getting down on one knee only, but after they insisted that he get down on both knees, he finally agreed to do so. Shortly after he heard a hissing noise, and was told by the interpreter that the governor was coming, and that he had to make “compliments” to him, which consisted in bending low and not looking up. Here McDonald deposes that “I made a low bow to the governor, though not before I had taken a look at him.”

The Narrative says that he noticed that all of the Japanese officials were located on platforms and seated on fine clean mats, but for him, on the courtyard itself there was only a “shabby dirty old mat” to sit on. This difference in treatment irritated him, but he kept silent. But when told to sit on it he refused, kicking at it, saying that he saw no chair or seat for himself. Moriyama requested that he sit as they did, kneeling on their haunches, and he eventually complied, with the interpreter showing him how. ⁽¹⁶⁾

Moriyama then told him that he must not look at the magistrate when he entered the chamber, but bow his head low. However, MacDonald was still feeling angry about being compelled to sit Japanese-style when not accustomed to doing so and while in his European sailor’s uniform. He says that he did not and simply would not “kowtow” to the magistrate.



Figure2 The Japanese interpreter of Dutch, Moriyama Einosuke (depicted on left)

In the Narrative this first face-to-face meeting with the Nagasaki magistrate, while basically in agreement with the deposition, is described much more dramatically and vividly. In brief, MacDonald and the magistrate reportedly “in dead silence” stared at each other.” After a long pause, the magistrate leaned towards MacDonald and addressed a few words to him which he took “not to be unfriendly.” Moriyama translated these words as simply: “You must have a great heart.”

According to the deposition, the magistrate then inquired as to his name, place of birth, and port from which he had sailed. In regard to the second question, he replied Oregon, New York and Canada in the hope that if an American or English ship arrived, either would take an interest in him. He wished not only to be restored to his own liberty, but to inform the people of the United States that “...some of their countrymen were imprisoned in Japan, and in all probability would remain in prison for life.” The seamen from the *Lagoda* themselves despaired of this eventuality to their detriment.

When asked again about his motives for leaving the ship, he simply repeated that he had had “some difficulty with the captain.” For obvious reasons, telling the truth in this case would have involved great risk for him.

They finally asked him about his religious beliefs and he gave the only answer that a devout Christian could give, that is, that he believed in the “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” In contrast, his deposition merely states that when questioned, he affirmed that he believed in a God in heaven, and that that answer satisfied them.

The Narrative states that MacDonald was asked again if he believed in a God in Heaven. He said yes and when asked to be more specific he said that he believed firstly, “...in One God, and that He was constantly and everywhere present.” Then, Moriyama, as if not satisfied, asked what he believed in respect to God in Heaven. MacDonald began by reciting from Apostle’s Creed in his English prayer book, having been brought up an Episcopalian. But when he said “And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, born of the Virgin Mary”, Moriyama suddenly stopped him, whispering to him quickly “that will do! that will do!”⁽¹⁷⁾ He then proceeded to translate his answer, or rather as much of it as he thought necessary, refraining from any mention of the “Virgin Mary” or “Jesus Christ” MacDonald later recalled that “In that he was my friend, indeed!”

In place of what MacDonald had actually said, Moriyama is recorded to have ‘translated’ as follows: “There are no gods, nor buddhas. [I] merely cultivate mind and will and reverence heaven in order to obtain clear understanding and to secure happiness.”⁽¹⁸⁾ This urgently whispered caution of Moriyama and his friendly but ‘incorrect’ interpretation are not included in the deposition.

In the Narrative it was stated that after the magistrate, Moriyama and some of the other assembled officials had conferred, the magistrate announced that a house would be prepared for him. He was told that: “If I was good, I should live better and better.”

Upon hearing this, by way of showing his gratitude to the magistrate, MacDonald relates that: “I, thereupon, in thanks, salaamed to the Governor, on my knees, and when on my feet, also bowed. His Excellency, however, did not return the compliment.” As a rule, the magistrate did not utter a syllable except to put

questions. He was observed to conduct himself throughout the proceedings with great dignity.

MacDonald deposes further that he was told that he had permission to leave the hall, and was then taken in a sedan-chair (*kago*), accompanied by a number of soldiers, to a sort of temple, or priest's house. He remained in this 'prison' up to the very end of his stay in Nagasaki. During that time he was interviewed two more times by the magistrate at the same audience hall and was also questioned several times at his place of confinement. On the day after being placed there, he had asked to be given his books, in particular his Bible, which were kept under lock and key in his chest. Moriyama cautioned him urgently "...not to speak of the Bible in Japan; it was not a good book." In his deposition it is not mentioned that he was later given his Bible, and allowed to read it, and a special shelf was made for it.

Furthermore, during these interviews it seemed to MacDonald that the object was to determine if he had any "influential friends" in America who would search for him. "If I had, they would send me away; if I had none, then they would imprison me for life in Japan." In fact, because of his inestimable value as a teacher of English and American culture, it was likely that MacDonald himself stood in more danger of being incarcerated in Japan for the rest of his life than the less educated, and much more troublesome *Lagoda* seamen.

From the Narrative we learn about the actual conditions of his imprisonment. He was incarcerated in an old but newly-repaired house, and confined in a room with ordinary size straw mats, about seven by nine feet, with another small room for washing and bathing with hot and cold water. There was nothing in the room but mats, a brazier, tea pot and cup. On the following day a small table was brought for him, without his asking. He said he felt lonely without his books and his Bible. Moriyama assured him that "If you are good, the Governor will give you every thing you want."

At this time he was closely guarded night and day and his room was always kept locked. He was treated coolly; even Moriyama seemed distant. At first there were nine interpreters, besides Moriyama and Uemura, who came by turns, one each day. No conversation passed between them. When he wanted something, they referred to their Dutch-English dictionary and it was given to him.

About twenty days after his first 'trial' he was again taken to the 'court' and examined before Shirai and another official. They asked especially about the object of leaving his ship with a quadrant if his aim was not to survey the coast. MacDonald emphatically denied any such intention. They again told him he must have a "great heart" to leave his ship in a little boat. He smiled at the compliment given, and believed in "all the sincerity of their good nature."

Two weeks later another "examination" took place in his own 'house' as the magistrate called his 'cage.' They asked about the course the ship had taken, what ports they stopped at and about those places. He told all he knew and they seemed pleased.

They inquired in particular about whaling, and the number of ships engaged in it. He suggested delicately that Japan would be a good place for supplies and that if Japan would furnish them there would then be no need to go to Hawaii or Hong Kong for them. He asked them if English, Americans, French or Russians wanted to open trade with them, would they consent.

Their answer was an emphatic “No!” They explained that “No ship can approach the coast or enter our harbors. It is against the law.”⁽¹⁹⁾ Moriyama especially emphasized that fact. He often spoke on the subject after that but his answer was always the same. He gave the cause as the revolutionary conduct of Portuguese Christians early in the 17th century.

At each interview his answers were carefully compared with those written down on previous occasions. The officials seemed satisfied.

A few days later he was again questioned at the magistrate’s by Levyssohn. His questions were only a repetition of previous ones. The factor told him that the Dutch ship had sailed and so he would have to wait a year for another one. MacDonald said nothing. Levyssohn disapproved of the captain letting him leave the vessel under such circumstances. MacDonald said it was his wish. After this last examination, the Japanese officials were said to be more friendly. Moriyama and Uemura were with him almost every day and were very inquisitive on several subjects. MacDonald told them all he knew.

He was more kindly treated after the last examination with Levyssohn. He had literally everything he wanted, just as the magistrate had promised, except his freedom to go outside. They even gave him his Bible and seeing how he “made a God of it” they built a neat shelf at a corner of the room to put it on as a place of honor. They also even violated their own religious prohibition against eating meat by providing him with pork every seventh day. He called his pork day Sunday. He was by nature and habit a meat eater, like nearly all Americans at that time. He knew the Dutch raised pigs and ate pork, and was probably told that this special treat came courtesy of them.

“The only thing I complained of was the smallness of my cage, but in this I got no satisfaction; not even a reason for the refusal. It was, according to their ideas...good enough for a single man, who had to be watched as an intruder; and, as I afterwards learned I was better off in this respect than other foreign prisoners then, in the same city, in confinement.”⁽²⁰⁾

No one told him about the presence of other foreign prisoners in the city. But in the course of conversation with his guards and visitors, he would sometimes hear them use sailor slang which he suspected they must have picked up from British or American sailors held there. They would ask him the meaning of these slang terms, for by this time he could speak a sort of ‘pidgin’ Japanese, or at least had that reputation. Many of the terms he could not literally translate, such as, ‘shiver my timbers’ so he would paraphrase them as best he could out of politeness.

Arrival of the USS Preble in Nagasaki Harbor

On the evening of the 17th of April, about half an hour before sundown, the American seamen heard a long distant gun. A few moments later one of their guards, with whom McCoy had become intimate, told him that he thought it meant that some foreign ship was approaching the harbor. When they next heard several more warning shots fired from the Japanese forts surrounding the entrance to the harbor, it was certain that it did indeed signify the approach of a foreign ship.

MacDonald also heard signal cannon being fired. He was secretly told by his guard that these guns announced the arrival of the yearly Dutch ship and called in troops from the neighboring districts.

The next morning he saw his guards holding sheets of paper, which they explained were lists of the names of soldiers who had recently arrived in Nagasaki. They gave him additional information about the total number of soldiers who had come, compared with the usual number. MacDonald thought that it was an “extraordinary force” that had been called up.

Then, on the afternoon of the 24th, the official Shirai Tatsunoshin accompanied by the interpreter Moriyama Einosuke paid him a visit in his ‘prison.’ They told him that as a new magistrate and several other officials had arrived from Edo, they had decided to give him up to the Dutch factory. He didn’t yet know the reason for this (unlike McCoy’s claim to have known) and so they told him that an American ship had come to Nagasaki. It had sailed from New York originally, the very same port that MacDonald had reported that he had sailed from. Shirai and Moriyama told MacDonald that the commander of the ship had asked for his liberation. Strictly speaking, it was not him, but the crew of the *Lagoda* that he had come for. They also said that on the next day he would go to pay his respects to the magistrate.

On the morning of the 26th an interpreter (presumably Moriyama) came to his ‘prison’ and showed him a letter, translated into English, that was addressed to the commanding officer of the *Preble*, James Glynn, requesting him to leave the harbor as soon as the fifteen men had been received.

Moriyama wished him to give the relative rank of the commander of the ship by count in the order of succession from the highest chief in the United States. “First, I gave the people, which they could not comprehend, then the President of the United States, the Secretary of the Navy, commodore, post captain, and commander. This rank appeared to be sufficiently elevated to excite their surprise.” Then he was carried to the magistrate’s office in a palanquin. He saw the new magistrate and realized that he had immediately come to visit him incognito in his room. While he was waiting in the ‘shed’ thirteen American seamen were brought in. They had on their ordinary sailor dress. They appeared very pale and thin. MacDonald attested that “We all appeared at the same time, before the Governors. They made me kneel apart from the rest.”⁽²¹⁾

The deposition did not state that he was taken to the audience hall again, but in the Narrative, it says he met the *Lagoda* sailors there. The magistrates then informed them all officially through the interpreters of the arrival of the American warship and that they had after consultation decided to allow them to depart on her.



Figure3 The USS Preble (from a lithograph by A. Hoen & Co)



Figure4 The dining table at the Dutch factor's house on Deshima in Nagasaki in a modern reproduction (Photo by author)

However, it would first be necessary for them to go to the Dutch factory on Deshima. The Americans then reportedly thanked them.

When their audience with the magistrates had ended, each man was borne in a palanquin through crowded streets, while the seamen sang a cheerful ditty. They crossed a covered bridge to the little artificial island of Deshima. They were searched at the far end of the bridge.

Taken before the chief factor Levyssohn, they were told not to kneel. "This is a Christian house!" he declared. Then, in his house, and at his table, they were treated to a good dinner with knives, silver table service, chairs, pork, and bread, etc. All of which MacDonald affirmed they "duly relished," including a parting cup of the best Dutch Java coffee. After amusing themselves for a while on the island, while the boats were prepared, the men, singing the same cheerful ditty, embarked on the "good ship" *Preble*, where they were "warmly welcomed" by her "noble Captain" and "right good crew." The following morning, they set sail for "freer and more genial shores."

This Deshima dinner must indeed have seemed like a veritable banquet, especially to the *Lagoda* men, who had been subsisting on the standard Japanese fare of rice, and fish, sweet potatoes, seaweed, and weak tea without sugar. Yet for the physically larger, and customarily carnivorous Americans that had been meager fare indeed. ⁽²²⁾

Discussion: where does the truth lie?

History is essentially the story of the past, told from one particular point of view only, or encompassing different perspectives, and so perhaps different stories, too. And like any 'story' it can be true or not true, partly true or partly made up, and as significant for what it omits as for what it includes. Reading these original sources from over 150 years ago today, one is struck by the Rashomon-like way in which the American version of 'what happened' contrasts so sharply with the Japanese and Dutch versions. This poses a real

challenge for the contemporary historian who seeks to determine 'what really happened' so long ago.

While one may be moved to feel compassion for the suffering in Japanese captivity of the seamen from these whaling ships for so long and so far from home, it is important to note that their suffering did not begin when they arrived uninvited on Japanese shores. The men of the *Lawrence* especially had already been suffering from malnutrition, dehydration and exposure to the extreme cold when after three days in open boats they landed on Etorofu in the far north of the Japanese archipelago. One of their number was reported to have died on the third day after leaving their ship and was buried at sea. Considering firstly the seamen from the *Lawrence*, there is no doubt that the men suffered greatly under the conditions of their long incarceration, but the crucial question for our purposes is to try to assess how much of the responsibility for that can justifiably be assigned to the alleged 'cruelty' of their Japanese hosts and to what degree to the conduct of the men themselves.

There is something of a mystery surrounding the voyage of the *Lawrence* for none of the usual written records of it, either in the form of shipping lists, newspaper articles or logbooks, have been found to exist. For this reason it has been speculated that these men may also have been, like the men from the *Lagoda*, deserters who had concocted a story of shipwreck in order to avoid censure and garner sympathy.⁽²³⁾ Howe's twice-stated opinion that they would all be killed if they were discovered to be Englishmen was based on irrational fear and outdated notions about Japanese persecution and execution of Christians. They did not know that according to a recent edict of the shogun, all foreign victims of shipwreck were to be taken to Nagasaki, and after examination, once it was determined they had not come deliberately to spy out the country, sent on a Dutch ship to Batavia for repatriation. Indeed, in the later case of the seamen from the British whaler *Edmund*, which had been shipwrecked at Mahiru on the east coast of Ezo, on February 3, 1850, and whose crew included fifteen Englishmen, this is exactly what was done.⁽²⁴⁾

Yet among the most serious charges of 'cruelty' and 'inhumanity' directed against the Japanese authorities, was the accusation that they had 'inhumanly murdered' one of the seamen. Some of the *Lagoda* sailors in their depositions also stated that it was as a result of an escape attempt, in which the American had resisted recapture and attacked one of the Japanese guards and was then 'cut down' and later died of his untreated injuries. If that was indeed the case, then no fair-minded American officer could reasonably characterize his death as 'murder'. In America it would have been said that he 'died as a result of resisting arrest' and the police would be considered to have been merely discharging their duties as law officers. Moreover, the semantic inconsistency inherent in the idea of someone being 'inhumanly murdered' when 'murder' is itself an act of supreme 'inhumanity' (as if being 'humanely murdered' was an actual moral alternative) calls into serious question the credibility and objectivity of his account. It seems rather like a deliberate attempt to demonize and dehumanize the Japanese. Both the Japanese records and the book by the Dutch factor state that he died of an illness. These accounts may also be an attempt to 'cover up' what really happened. What seems safe to say, however, is that it is very unlikely that, even judged by American standards, he could have been intentionally 'murdered' by the Japanese guards. If that were the case, they would have risked being punished themselves. So it would not have been in their interests to do so, nor in the interests of the Japanese authorities generally, who were mindful that foreign warships might arrive to exact revenge and did not want to invite such an undesirable outcome. This desire on the part of the Japanese authorities was recognized by

Commander Glynn himself in his subsequent report when he surmised that the new Nagasaki magistrate was eager to "...rid himself of so undesirable a visitor as a foreign ship of war." ⁽²⁵⁾

The American whaler *Lagoda* was in contrast a well-documented ship. It was also one of the most profitable whale ships in the entire history of the American whaling industry in the 19th century. However, in order to earn such large profits, it was necessary for the ship to remain at sea for long periods until its hold was full of whale oil and bone, etc. As a result, the health of the crew may at times have been sacrificed. Indeed, MacDonald himself wrote in a letter just after leaving Japan that whale ship captains are "...loath to leave the whaling ground when there is an opportunity of killing even at the expense of men." Indeed, an outbreak of scurvy on the *Plymouth* was said to have occurred after he had left it. ⁽²⁶⁾

The fifteen men from the *Lagoda* had throughout their stay in Japan falsely represented themselves as victims of shipwreck. It was only after they had been taken on board the *Preble* that they admitted that they were in fact deserters. Why had they deserted their ship? The editors of MacDonald's posthumous Narrative stated that it was: "On account of the alleged harsh treatment of the captain. . ." ⁽²⁷⁾

That their treatment was indeed 'harsh' seems likely as it drove them to consider leaving their ship in three small boats and seeking notoriously unwelcoming shores a better alternative.

While the men of the *Lagoda* complained bitterly about their alleged 'cruel' and 'inhumane' treatment at the hands of the Japanese authorities, not once did they mention the harsh treatment and abuse that they also must have been subjected to in order to induce them to desert their ship and seek refuge in the famously inhospitable shores of 'forbidden' Japan.

Commander Glynn, to his credit, did at least note in his official report after leaving Japan that the men had deserted on account of their "ill-usage" on the whale ship, but then made no further mention of it. Instead, he focused all his indignation on the Japanese authorities for their supposed "cruelty" and "gratuitous mendacity" in deluding the seamen in various respects during their prolonged incarceration. Glynn seemed to accept at face value the credibility of their accounts, judging by the "conviction" and the "straight-forward manner" in which they were told to him.

Glynn admitted that the men of the *Lagoda*, especially those few who repeatedly escaped and brought harsher restrictions upon all of them were "blameable" for their actions, but stated that he would "not judge the conduct of these imprisoned men in their natural desires and attempts to be free, very strictly." Yet, strictly speaking, the seamen who attempted to escape were violating Japanese law. MacDonald, who valued his personal freedom as much as his compatriots, nevertheless accepted the necessity for his confinement under Japanese laws and made no attempts to escape. The fact that he was treated well by the Japanese authorities, was mentioned by Glynn, but the obvious link to his exemplary conduct not explicitly made. "Though confined, he was treated kindly at [Matsumae.] Moreover, Glynn stated that he was "provided with a lodging in a temple" in Nagasaki, but does not mention that the *Lagoda* men were also originally 'lodged' at a temple. ⁽²⁸⁾

In my view, the complaints by the men of the *Lagoda* about their imprisonment in Japan appear to be

primarily based on various kinds of linguistic and cultural misunderstanding, which were compounded by an overweening confidence in their own degree of understanding of Japanese language and laws, customs and rituals, etc. Because communication between the Americans and Japanese must have occurred mostly only through a mixture of pidgin English and/or pidgin Japanese, combined with various signs, gestures, and drawings, the potential for misunderstanding was great and much of what was reported as 'factual' and often assumed to be so even by some modern writers of history, is more likely to be 'fictional' and so should be taken with a hefty 'grain of salt' or else discounted altogether.

For example, McCoy's comment that Moriyama's interpretations were "very incorrect" implies a competence in Japanese on his part that would be highly unusual for someone who had spent but three months in the country up to that time and then mostly in the far north where the spoken dialect was quite different. It also betrays an ignorance of the fact that this "incorrect" translation could have been a deliberate tactic to ensure that the official record was not unfavorable to the interpreters or magistrates or even perhaps to the foreigners being interrogated. When Moriyama purposely did not translate MacDonald's confession of Christian faith, he did him a great favor, as the latter later acknowledged. Moreover, Glynn's observation after having conducted intense negotiations concerning the release of the captive American seamen on board of his ship with Moriyama, that he "...understood only as much as he wanted to" suggests that there is much more to the art of interpreting than simply mechanically conveying the meaning of what is said in one language into another without regard to its potential consequences.

Much was made of the American seamen being forced to tread on an image of the virgin and child or crucifixion (*fumie*). This ritual was by then a historical relic that had originally been used to ferret out Japanese hidden believers of the Roman Catholic faith, not Protestants, as MacDonald rightly perceived. (The Dutch traders on Deshima were Protestant, not Catholic, and were thus allowed to remain in Japan.) Even though the threat of Catholic missionaries attempting to enter the country had long ago ceased to be an actual one, through bureaucratic inertia and the weight of 'ancestral law' the practice continued as a mere formality. If a Christian foreigner refused to tread on the image, he could be physically forced to, and then be recorded as having done so in order to avoid the necessity of punishing him severely.

As for the Japanese custom of bowing low to the ground to one's superiors, such a practice of 'kowtow' was of course anathema to Americans, but it was not the act of personal 'humiliation' that they imagined it to be. Rather it was the recognition and acceptance of one's place in the rigid and complex social hierarchy that was feudal Japan. There the harmony of the larger society was considered to take precedence over the freedom of the individual to disrupt it.

Considering their accusations of Japanese intention to 'poison' them, given the primitive state of health care and the scant knowledge of Western medicine at the time it would not be surprising if their illnesses were misdiagnosed or that the medicines prescribed did more harm than good. However, this does not mean that the Japanese deliberately meant to 'poison' them. This sort of accusation maligns the humanity of their Japanese guardians and ignores the fact that it would not even be in their interest to do so. There is no reason to suppose that Japanese of that time, had a lesser share of 'humanity' than did Americans. Indeed the experiences of other foreign captives such as Captain Golovnin, and Ranald MacDonald are testimony to the essential humanity and kindness of the Japanese, although their zealousness in enforcing some of the harsh

shogunal restrictions sometimes created the opposite impression.

One of the best examples of how historical fiction may come to be treated as historical fact is the supposed retelling by the Japanese soldiers guarding the men from the *Lagoda* of the exaggerated rumor about the alleged 'insult' done to an American 'chief'. Their guards were said to even "jeer" or "sneer" when they were warned by their resentful charges that American warships might come to exact revenge for their "cruel" treatment at their hands.

However, given the complexity of these reported conversations it is doubtful that a mixture of pidgin English and Japanese and non-verbal signs, such as gesturing and pointing, drawing and so on would have served to reliably facilitate mutual understanding. Despite this obvious handicap, American scholars often seem to regard the reported content of these conversations as simply a 'matter-of-fact', as if both sides had complete mastery of the other's language.

This sort of disregard of the fallibility of such reported conversations has a long history. As the first biographer of Commodore Matthew Perry, W. E. Griffis was to comment in this regard some forty years later, "The snowball of rumor in rolling to the provinces has become an avalanche of exaggeration."⁽²⁹⁾ He was referring specifically to the rumor that Commander Glynn had heard from the missionary Bettelheim in Naha in Ryukyu (Okinawa) on his way to Nagasaki about "the Japanese victory over the American big ships" under the command of Commodore James Biddle while anchored off Uraga in July 1846.

Glynn himself reported that he had "...learned that very exaggerated reports had reached the islands of the chastisement which had been inflicted upon an American officer who had visited [Uraga strait] in a 'big' ship..." When Glynn further heard from his "informant" that it was his "impression" that it was for this reason that the Japanese officers on the island were unwilling to "accommodate" the demands of American naval officers, he resolved to adopt a more uncompromising and demanding stance in the forthcoming negotiations in Nagasaki.

Biddle himself described the incident and attributed its probable cause to "bad translation" in order to forestall such false rumors from being spread. In this he was apparently unsuccessful. Unfortunately, the unfounded notion that the Japanese of the time may have belittled the threat of American naval power as a result of this unfortunate incident, still enjoys some currency among modern writers of history. Yet Sakamaki states unequivocally that he "...has been unable to find any Japanese evidence that substantiates a notion popular with Western writers that the Biddle incident caused Japanese to regard Americans thereafter with scorn."

In regard to the alleged 'suicide' of one of the natives of the Sandwich Islands, based on the available evidence, albeit scanty and circumstantial, and the probabilities determined by human nature, I believe that the allegation that he died of strangulation as contained in the Japanese report to be the more likely cause of death. This is also the view of the American historian Foster Rhea Dulles.⁽³⁰⁾ This would help to explain the report that the Japanese did not take away the body until two days later, and reportedly denied them permission to bury him themselves.

Finally, there was the repeated report of the Japanese prisoner being decapitated in front of their prison.

McCoy claimed that "...the Japanese guards told us that our heads were to be cut off..." Bull confirmed this and added confidently that "*I heard the guard say so.*" But what they 'heard' was either different from what was 'said' or it was only meant to frighten them because in fact they all kept their heads on their shoulders. There could not have been any real intention on the part of the guards to do what they supposedly 'said' that they would do. There may however have been the idea to make them think so, in order to impress upon them the necessity for better behavior on their part. This is also what Glynn concluded: "...the guards to scare them intimidated strongly that such might be their own fate."⁽³¹⁾

Given the lurid and sensationalist nature of their accounts, the *Lagoda* whalemens seemed to think that Japan was some sort of savage and semi-civilized country, rather than a highly cultured nation of established laws. Levyssohn especially reminded them of this fact when he interviewed them at the magistrate's.

Aftermath and Conclusion

At the beginning of our story, California still formally belonged to Mexico. By the time that the *Preble* carried away the *Lagoda* seamen and MacDonald, California had become American territory. Within several months of leaving Japan, Glynn had sailed the *Preble* to San Francisco and while the ship was anchored in nearby Benicia in February 1850, he had time to write a long and thoughtful letter to the owners of an American steamship line about the "melancholy narrative" of the *Lagoda* sailors in Japan and his thoughts about how their unhappy experience there might be exploited to further the larger goal of American commercial expansion into the Pacific and the transformation of Japan into a friendly nation that would support that purpose.

"The *facts* [italics added] of that case are of a character to excite the indignation of the people of the United States; it was attended with some circumstance of wanton outrage upon the feelings of the men that will waken the strongest sympathy for their abuse and suffering...*we have a good cause of a quarrel...* [italics added] we could convert their selfish government into a liberal republic in a short time; such an *unnatural system* [italics added] would at the present day fall to pieces upon the slightest concussion. But it is better to go to work peacefully with them if we can."⁽³²⁾

As I hope to have shown in this article, the 'facts' of the case, are not quite what they seem. Glynn, by accepting uncritically the accounts of the *Lagoda* men, and downplaying the official Japanese report given to him in Nagasaki, which emphasized the repeated escape attempts and general unruliness of some of the men as the main reason for their gradually harsher conditions of confinement, manufactured his own 'facts' and then tailored them to suit his purposes. He had not had an opportunity to inquire about the willingness of Japanese officialdom to treat with America in regard to opening ports and trade relations. He himself had ambitions to lead an American naval expedition to Japan. He saw his role in the rescue of the *Lagoda* sailors as an opportunity to make his case, and at the same time to argue for American intervention in Japan's affairs. This could (and would) be justified by characterizing its traditional policy of exclusion of foreigners and restrictions on their freedom in Japan as violating the common standards of humanity. That is why the 'right' of the Japanese authorities to imprison American seamen in Japan was not actually recognized, despite the stated

principle of adhering to Japanese laws. Hence, the repeated, but futile, attempts of the *Lagoda* sailors to escape—in obedience to the principle that Japanese laws don't apply to Americans.⁽³³⁾

Sharing that conviction, that was probably why Glynn was so lenient in his judgement of their repeated escape attempts, and also perhaps why he did not report the results of the Japanese investigation into the death of the Hawaiian sailor, which concluded that he had probably died of 'strangulation.' Instead, he simply repeated their claim that he had 'hanged himself' as a fact. To do otherwise would have damaged their credibility as innocent victims of abuse at the hands of the Japanese authorities.

All foreign attempts to open Japanese ports to trade by returning Japanese drifters in the guise of 'humanitarian' concern for them, had heretofore failed. Now, the imprisoned American sailors in Japan, although rescued by their country, seem to have then become pawns to be similarly exploited in the geopolitical chess game being played out in the Pacific. Their confinement and alleged 'abuse' in Japan can thus be seen as a provocative move by the shogunate that awaited an American response.⁽³⁴⁾

In this context the subsequent case of the three American seamen who were marooned on Sahalin in July 1849 when their mother ship the whaler *Trident* went back out to sea deserves mention. The following year the new Nagasaki magistrate Naito commented that "...it would be tantamount to deliberately letting men die, to leave them behind in this manner, without making any effort subsequently to rescue them. *And even foreigners are not without human feeling* [italics added]. Did not a warship of the American nation come a great distance last year merely to get shipwrecked seamen?"

From this we may conclude that as much as the American sailors had tried to paint their Japanese jailers as 'cruel' and lacking in human feeling, the latter were probably thinking the same about them. To the Japanese officials, it was the men of the *Lawrence* and in particular the *Lagoda*, who were the real 'barbarians.' Indeed, in Japanese records the latter are described as being "rude" and "vulgar" (as opposed to MacDonald appearing "well-mannered" and "polite") as well as very troublesome.

Naito requested and received permission to send the men out quickly on his own authority on the next Dutch ship, if he determined that they had not landed with an 'ulterior motive' such as to survey the country. Once this was done, they were put on the ship *Delft* on October 24, 1850, bound for Batavia.⁽³⁵⁾

The expeditious dispatch of these three marooned Americans shows that the shogunate was already learning from its recent experience with the unruly and troublesome men from the *Lawrence* and *Lagoda* and was taking measures to avoid any repetition of their unfortunate fate and to forestall the coming of more foreign warships to Japanese ports. But this would be in vain.

The great waves of indignation set in motion by the *Lawrence* and *Lagoda* accounts, and billowing ever higher by the reports of Glynn, and others, would crest and roll through the halls of Washington D. C. over the next few years and impel the dispatch of a large American naval expedition to Japan.

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Notes

- (1) Moby Dick, Chapter 24, The Advocate
- (2) Ranald MacDonald, Narrative, p. 135; Wildes, pp. 215, 220
- (3) George Howe, newspaper article reprinted in Executive Document 59, pp.70-73; MacDonald, Narrative, pp 161-2; Sakamaki, p.37-43; Levysohn, Bladen over Japan, p. 47, 48
- (4) Executive Document 59, pp. 9-25 depositions of the sailors from the Lagoda—Robert McCoy, 9-18, John Bull 18-20, Jacob Boyd, 20-21, John Martin, 21-23, John Waters, 23-24, Melcher Biffar, 24-25; Sakamaki, pp. 50-55; Levysohn, pp. 52-55
- (5) Moby Dick, Chapter 111, The Pacific
- (6) Ranald MacDonald, Narrative, p. 121, 131-33, 151
- (7) The voyage of the Plymouth was very successful. Its cargo of whale bone and whale oil was worth \$71,000, among the largest returns for that year (1849) and one of the most profitable voyages in the entire history of the American whaling fleet. MacDonald's share was several hundred dollars but he never received any of the money that was owed him after he had bought the boat and provisions from captain Edwards
- (8) Narrative, pp. 44, 162

- (9) Executive Document 59, pp. 25-28
- (10) This might have been the whaler *Uncas*, whose crew, seeing his rudder floating in the ocean, assumed that that he had been lost at sea, which was later reported in the *Seamen's Friend*, and eventually became known to his father in Canada, who believed it. MacDonald later learned of this report and commented that: "Thus to my family and friends I was for while...as one dead." Narrative, pp. 156-7
- (11) Narrative, pp. 158, 161, 162
- (12) Ibid., pp. 166, 173
- (13) Ibid., pp. 174, 176, 178, 182
- (14) Ibid., pp. 191, 192, 193 , 195, 199
- (15) Ibid., pp. 200, 201
- (16) Ibid., pp. 214-5, 217
- (17) Ibid., pp. 214-5, 218, 220
- (18) Sakamaki, p. 47
- (19) Narrative, pp. 220, 222,223, 224
- (20) Ibid., pp 233-4
- (21) Ibid., p. 246
- (22) Ibid., p. 247; Executive Document, 59, p. 57
- (23) Frederick Schodt, Native American in the Land of the Shogun, p. 244
- (24) Sakamaki, p. 70
- (25) Executive Document 59, p. 57
- (26) Schodt, p. 192
- (27) Narrative, pp. 196-7
- (28) Executive Document 59, p. 50, 52, 54, 56
- (29) W. E. Griffis, Matthew Calbraith Perry, pp. 277-8
- (30) Sakamaki pp. 35, 54; Dulles, p. 35
- (31) Executive Document 59, pp. 55, 66, 76-77
- (32) Executive Document 59, p. 62. Letter addressed to Howland and Aspinwall, written at Benicia on February 24, 1850 (not 1851 as printed erroneously)
- (33) Wildes, pp. 234, 241
- (34) Wildes, pp. 199, 200, 234, 241
- (35) Sakamaki, pp. 48, 60-71