



# Pickled Fish and Salted Provisions

## Trade With Japan: A Salem Vessel Visits Nagasaki

There is a common misconception that there was no trade with Japan before Commodore Perry's expedition to that country in 1853. The Dutch East India Company and other European countries traded with Japan, and in some cases contracted American ships for this purpose during the early 19th century. On July 19, 1801, the *Margaret*, captained by

Though it was an unusual and fairly unknown practice, there was trade with Japan before 1853 when Commodore Perry went to Japan.

Samuel G. Derby, out of Salem, Massachusetts, arrived at the port of Nagasaki carrying a shipment of cargo on behalf of the Dutch East India Company. Captain Derby was commissioned by the East India Company while he was in Batavia, to take their annual freights of cargo to and from Japan, leaving for Nagasaki from there on June 20, 1801.<sup>1</sup> Though it was an unusual and fairly unknown practice, there was trade with Japan before 1853 when Commodore Perry went to Japan.

The first American vessels to reach Japanese waters were *Lady Washington* out of Boston and *Grace* out of New York in 1791; however, no contact was made due to the content of the cargo. These two ships were carrying sea otter furs, and due to the Japanese's lack of knowledge and interest in the fur trade, no business



A Japanese map of the harbor and town of Nagasaki, c. 1801. This was printed the same year that the Salem ship *Margaret* arrived in Nagasaki Harbor. Library of Congress.

was conducted. Six years later the first American trading ship, the *Eliza*, reached the port of Nagasaki. The Japanese officials originally believed that these English speaking sailors were English, rather than Americans helping out the Dutch traders. Eventually, the Japanese conceded that the crew of the *Eliza* were indeed Americans. Two more American ships, the *Franklin* and the *Massachusetts* traveled to Japan in 1799 and 1800. Neither had any real chance to see Japan, being confined to the boat most of the time dealing with the merchants.<sup>2</sup>

On November 19, 1800, the *Margaret*, with Captain Samuel G. Derby—a nephew of the famous East Indies merchant Elias

Hasket Derby—left for Sumatra. On February 4, 1801 they arrived in Table Bay, Cape of Good Hope, and continued on to Sumatra, reaching there April 10th. The ship continued on to Batavia, where Captain Derby agreed to take the annual shipments to and from Japan for Dutch East India Company. They left June 20, 1801 and arrived in Nagasaki on July 19th at 8 a.m.<sup>3</sup>

Captain Derby's clerk, Mr. George Cleveland kept a journal of this voyage, noting what was brought to and from Japan, what happened, and what they experienced. As the ship's clerk, Cleveland was responsible for keeping track of records and sales. George Cleveland

## From the Editors

Greetings and Happy Thanksgiving!

We hope that you enjoy this new format for our occasional newsletter, Pickled Fish and Salted Provisions. This larger format will, we hope, give us more space for illustrations, while “going green” by saving paper.

This issue features the work of Cultural Resources Management Intern Leanne Connory. Leanne is an undergraduate student in the Art History Department at Salem State, and is hoping to continue studying about Japan in graduate school after she graduates from Salem State in May. Leanne has been a great asset to Cultural Resources over the past few months, and we hope that she will continue her interest in museum management in the future.

As always, we invite submissions from staff, volunteers, and friends of Salem Maritime NHS. This publication is by and for you, designed to assist in the understanding and interpretation of any area of the site's history, be it an artifact, building, person, or event.

Dave Kayser  
Museum Curator

Emily Murphy  
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**The Russians first visited Nagasaki in 1804. This print of three Russians includes one gentleman in civilian clothes, similar to those worn by Capt. Derby and his officers. Library of Congress.**



## Trade with Japan (continued)

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was the son of Stephen and Margaret Cleveland, and, like Capt. Derby, was a Salem native. After being the clerk on the voyage to Japan Mr. Cleveland later became the highly respected President of the Commercial Insurance Company for many years. He was born January 26, 1781 and died March 13, 1840 in Salem.<sup>4</sup>

The cargo going to Japan consisted of sugar, spices, Sapanwood, Sandalwood, rattans, glass and glass ware, cloth, medicines and various other articles. This cargo was not only to trade with, but also included the supplies for the Dutch people living on Deshima.<sup>5</sup>

Japan's officials ordered the ship to fire salutes and change the bunting on the side of the ship before weighing anchor. The merchandise was brought onto Deshima where it was inspected by the Japanese government. Japanese officials examined everything in great detail; the glass wares, for instance, were individually measured, checked for imperfections by running fingers over each glass, and held up to the light to see the color.<sup>6</sup> This happened with every item and reportedly became tedious for the sellers who had no choice but to sit and watch the entire process.

Normally, merchants were confined to the ship or the trading port in Nagasaki, much like in Canton, China. They were never allowed to see more than what the Japanese chose to show them. Unlike the previous American ships that went to Nagasaki, Captain Derby, Mr. Cleveland, and other important members of the crew were taken to see Nagasaki and experience some of its culture.

They were first taken to a merchant's home where they feasted on pork, fowl, miso, eggs, boiled fish, sweetmeats, cake, fruits, sake, and tea. They also had the privilege of meeting the lady of the house who drank tea with each of the visitors as

was the custom in Japan. Next, a temple and the adjoining burial ground was toured; to get to the temple two hundred stairs had to be ascended. They then went to another merchant's house for dinner, where they were entertained with a feast that included a variety of food, dancing, and tumbling.<sup>7</sup>

While in Nagasaki, the Americans observed a feast for the remembrance of the dead. Almost all the ceremonies occurred at night, and lasted for several nights. The first night was dedicated to feasting, and on the second and third nights, the graves were adorned with paper lanterns. On the fourth day, at three in the afternoon, the paper lamps were taken from the graves and brought down to the water's edge. The lamps were put into small straw barques (small ships with 3-5 sails) with paper sails, made just for this ceremony. Food, such as rice and fruit, was put in with the paper lamp and set out to sea.<sup>8</sup>

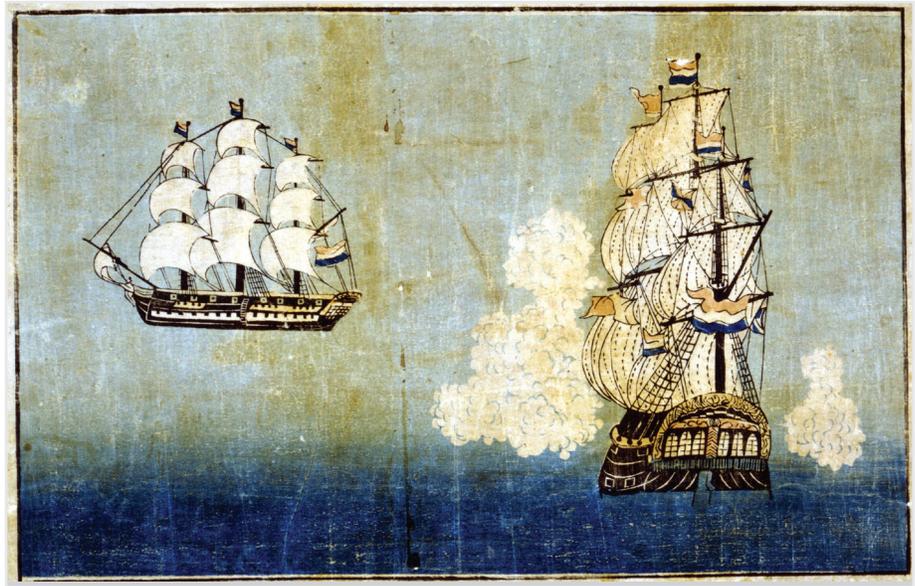
When it came close to the time for the *Margaret* to leave Japan, the Americans began to receive merchandise to take back with them, some of it coming from hundreds of miles inland. The return cargo included lacquer ware, in the form of writing desks, tea caddies, knife boxes, and tables. They also took back silk, fans, and porcelain. All items were packed in elaborately decorated boxes that would be considered fine cabinetwork anywhere else. These items were mostly in return for the merchandise Captain Derby and the others brought to Japan on their own behalf, a practise allowed by both the Dutch and the Japanese. Copper bars made up most of the cargo going to the East India Company, along with sake, soy, porcelain, camphor, and other items. In early November 1801, the *Margaret* left the port of Nagasaki for Batavia, and eventually back home to Salem.<sup>9</sup>

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# A Brief History of pre-1850 Trade With Japan

The Dutch East India Company was allowed regular trade with Japan throughout the 19th century. However, Japan's first contact with Europeans came in 1542 when Portuguese adventurer Fernám Mendes Pinto and his two companions reached Japan. Soon after, Portuguese traders and Christian missionaries flooded the Japanese waters in search of new trading posts and converts. Spanish trading posts were established in the Eastern region in 1602 to compete with the Portuguese posts in the Western region. Their efforts were unsuccessful. Several years later, in 1609, the Dutch succeeded in setting up competitive commercial outposts in Eastern Japan. These trading contacts were successful, and in 1612 English traders also began trade with Japan.

Traditionally, Japanese culture embraces religion, accepting all forms of it with respect. However, Christianity was met with skepticism and suspicion. This most likely stemmed from two things: a Spanish sea captain who boasted that trade and religion would lead to the conquering of Japan like in the Philippines and, secondly, the Shogun's fear that his defeated rivals would use this new religion as a guise under which they could rally a new campaign to try and overthrow the current



**A Japanese print, c. 1850-1900, of a Dutch ship. The print shows two views of the ship, from the rear and the side.** Library of Congress

Shogun. This fear and suspicion led to hostility towards and persecution of Christians under the Tokugawa dynasty.<sup>1</sup>

Shoguns were military leaders who ruled Japan from the 12th century to the 19th century. During this era an emperor still existed, but was reduced to a figurehead who had no real power or authority over the country. While Shoguns controlled Japan there was a great deal of civil war between rival feudal lords, or daimyo, many of whom challenged and fought with the Shogun for control of Japan.

The Shogun realized that trade could continue without the presence of Christianity and forced the missionaries and their followers to denounce their faith, executing them if they refused. An isolation policy was instituted by the Shogun to keep Christian influences out of Japan much like the Chinese did with Canton. In an effort to limit the effects of European and Western values, China and Japan each only allowed Western traders into one port, Canton and Nagasaki respectively. The Westerners were also not allowed to have any contact with the citizens of the country.

By 1636 all traders, with the exception of the Dutch, were either expelled or voluntarily left Japan. Japanese citizens were also no longer allowed to travel outside the country, and if they did they were banished with the promise of beheading upon return to Japan. For the next 200 years, only the Dutch and Chinese traded with the Japanese.<sup>2</sup> However, restriction to a single port was not enough for the Shogun. In order to

further contain Western influence, in 1641 the Dutch were moved to a tiny man-made island called Deshima in Nagasaki harbor. Though the island was connected to Nagasaki by a bridge, the Dutch were not allowed to cross. The Dutch were walled in, much like prisoners, constantly watched by spies and informers, and subjected to humiliating conditions. The Dutch agreed to these conditions for the privilege of sending a few ships to and from Batavia (now known as Jakarta) on the island of Java in Indonesia. Even this eventually was limited to one trading vessel a year.<sup>3</sup>

Notes

1 Tamarin, Alfred. *Japan and the United States: Early Encounters 1791-1860*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.



**A view of the harbor of Nagasaki, c. 1901, with the town in the foreground.** Library of Congress



**National Park Service**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**

Salem Maritime National Historic Site was designated in 1937, the first National Historic Site in the National Park Service system. The nine acre site includes the homes of merchants and mariners, the Salem Custom House in which the famous author Nathaniel Hawthorne worked, and a replica of the three-masted cargo vessel *Friendship*. Today, the rangers and volunteers of Salem Maritime NHS continue to inform and inspire visitors with the maritime history of New England and the United States.

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*Pickled Fish and Salted Provisions* is Salem Maritime National Historic Site's occasional newsletter, written by and for the site's employees, volunteers, and friends. Founded in 1999 by former Park Historian John Frayler, the newsletter presents research on topics related to Salem Maritime, designed to assist in the understanding and interpretation of any area of the site's history, be it an artifact, building, person, or event.

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## Trade With Japan (continued)

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It was clearly a rare event for outsiders to trade with Japan before Commodore Perry's voyage to Japan. However, it did happen. Several European countries managed to establish regular trading outposts in Japan before the national isolation policy went into effect in the 15th century. Other American vessels, besides the *Margaret*, were allowed into Japan in the early 19th century, and they brought back goods that were rare and highly prized in this country. Today, some of the pieces brought back on the *Margaret* are housed in the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem as examples of this little-known trade.

### Notes

- 1 American Seamen's Friend Society. *The Sailors' Magazine and Seamen's Friend*. New York: American Seamen's Friend Society, 1883.
- 2 Tamarin, Alfred. *Japan and the United States: Early Encounters, 1791-1860*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970.
- 3 *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 1860.
- 4 *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 1879.
- 5 *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 1860.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Hurd, Duane Hamilton ed. *History of Essex County, Massachusetts with Biographical Sketches of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men*. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1888.