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OPENING THE DOOR TO JAPAN; RESOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF TOWNSEND HARRIS IN NEW YORK CITY

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In July of 1986 a delegation of over 100 residents of Shimoda, Japan came to New York City to attend ceremonies they had initiated and paid for connected with the renovation of Townsend Harris' gravesite in Brooklyn's Greenwood Cemetery. Over sixty years before, in May of 1925, an impressive delegation attended an elaborate ceremony at which the City College's preparatory school building was officially named Townsend Harris Hall. In Japan the buildings in which Harris lived in Shimoda and Tokyo are shrines. Plays about him have been written and performed in Japan. Yet, despite the ultimate accolade of having been portrayed by John Wayne in John Huston's 1956 film, The Barbarian and the Geisha, Harris remains little recognized in this country. His life and work are intimately bound up with the mission of the institution which houses his papers.

Townsend Harris was the youngest of six children from the Adirondack town of Sandy Hill. When he was thirteen, in 1817, his father brought him to New York City to work in the dry goods shop owned by an elder brother. By 1828 he was working for another brother, Fraser, who imported china and earthenware and in 1836 became a partner with yet another brother, Jonathan, in the same trade. Harris had little formal schooling but his formidable mother had nurtured his natural aptitude for study and genuine love of literature and history. He taught himself to read French, Spanish, and Italian. By the 1840s he was a well-known citizen of lower Manhattan, active in Democratic Party politics, volunteer fire fighting, and in assisting the homeless boys with whom the City swarmed. In these activities he was known for his powers of patience and persuasion; they would be invaluable to him in Japan.

Until 1898 New York City consisted of just Manhattan, Brooklyn being a separate city and the other boroughs mostly farmland. At mid century New York provided for its children only eight years of free education. Beyond the grammar school, those who wished further formal education had to attend private institutions— at that time Columbia College or the University of the City of New York, as New York University was called. In 1847, when the population of Manhattan had reached half a million, these institutions enrolled only a few hundred students. Harris' business and civic position and political affiliations resulted in his election as President of the newly formed Board of Education in 1846. The new state constitution of the same year made it necessary to reconsider how the income of the State Literature Fund would be used in Manhattan. Harris put forth the idea of a Free Academy or College which would provide education at the collegiate level in the arts and sciences. After lobbying and fierce debate in the newspapers, in which he took the lead, the legislation and local referendum needed to establish the institution were obtained in the spring of 1847. James Renwick, architect of St. Patrick's Cathedral, designed a building modeled after a medieval

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Flemish town hall on Twenty-third Street and Lexington Avenue and the Academy held its first classes in February 1849. To emphasize its status as a college, the name was changed in 1866 to the College of the City of New York and from it developed today's City University of New York.

The establishment of the Free Academy was the first of Harris' two great achievements, yet once it had been realized he did not stay in New York to savor it. His mother, to whom he was strongly attached, had died and there is evidence that he began to drink too much. This part of his life is cloudy and the documentation is scanty. Harris, who in forty-four years had travelled no further west than Ohio, resigned from the Board of Education and in May 1849 sailed around Cape Horn to San Francisco and a new career as a trader in the Far East. Ahead lay years of roaming the Pacific in unconscious preparation for his work in Japan.

In the United States such developments as the annexation of California, the discovery of gold, and the development of steam navigation were making access to Pacific ports where coal could be secured a vital matter. As China had opened to foreign trade, the United States desired protection for sailors who might be shipwrecked off the coast of Japan. On July 18, 1853 Admiral Matthew Perry steamed into Yedo Bay with his "Black Ships". Perry made his demands for a coaling station and a trade treaty and left, returning the following year with a fleet of ten vessels and over 200 men. His first mission under President Fillmore had enjoyed a great deal of personal latitude which had exhibited itself as belligerence; he was now under strict orders from President Pierce and his keen Secretary of State, the New Yorker William Marcy, to negotiate peacefully. The Treaty of Kanagawa (Yokohama), signed on March 31, 1854, provided that Shimoda and Hakodate in the north would be open to ships for purposes of reprovisioning and coaling and that a Consul could reside at Shimoda. At that time Shimoda is said to have been so small and so poor that it could not provision even one ship, much less a fleet. The Consul would be allowed to secure supplies and living quarters only through the Japanese officials. Perry himself set seven miles as the distance this Consul could travel from Shimoda without special permission from the Japanese. But Perry's treaty was only a beginning. A good negotiator would be needed to obtain an agreement which truly opened Japan to trade with the United States and, by extension, the Western powers.

Harris had unsuccessfully tried to join Perry's expedition during his years in the East; he had even wrangled an appointment as Consul General for the U.S. for the Port of Ningpo in China, a post in which he did not serve, having appointed a Baptist minister who was resident there to act as Vice Consul. Learning early in 1855 that Franklin Pierce, an almost forgotten but intensely interesting president, was looking for an envoy to Japan, Harris returned to New York. He was recommended to the President by Perry and by Marcy, his personal friend. His letter to Pierce indicates he was under no romantic illusions as to what awaited him: "I have a perfect knowledge of the social banishment I must endure while in Japan and the mental isolation in which I must live, and am prepared to meet it. I am a single man, without any ties ..."*

The Letters Patent appointing him Consul General of the U.S. for Japan to reside at Shimoda were issued in August and he was also given full powers to negotiate a commercial treaty with the King of Siam. In October he set off on a mission which would entail several years of loneliness, frustration, and even danger—but ultimately success beyond his own fondest visions or those of his government. His years of travel, which

had taken him to India, Ceylon, China, New Zealand, and the Philippines, had equipped him for this job. He had developed tolerance for ways and rhythms of doing things and for ways of thinking which were not his own.

In August 1856 the U.S.S. *San Jacinto* deposited Harris, his young Secretary/Interpreter, Henry Heusken, and five Chinese servants at the port of Shimoda. The primary means of communication with the Japanese would be through Heusken. Since closure to the West in the seventeenth century, the Japanese had allowed the Dutch to maintain a small trading station on Deshima (Desima) in Nagasaki harbor. Heusken spoke in Dutch to those Japanese officials who understood it, then translated Harris' messages from English to Dutch in order for the Japanese to translate them from Dutch to Japanese. Moriyama, who assisted the municipal governors at Shimoda in dealing with Harris, held the rank of Chief Interpreter and actually had much diplomatic experience gained in ten years of attending to the negotiations with the Dutch. He understood English but is said to have tried to conceal this fact, as feigning ignorance of English enabled him to gather much useful information.

By June 17, 1857 Harris had negotiated the Convention of Shimoda, a local agreement consisting of eight articles relating to currency exchange and residency rights for Americans in Hakodate and Shimoda. Trials of Americans committing offenses in Japan were provided for, as well as the opening of the port of Nagasaki. But the United States wanted more. In October the Dutch and Russians signed treaties at Nagasaki which maintained Japanese supervision of trade, but removed restrictions on the annual value, and imposed heavy duties. The Japanese insisted on a detailed mass of regulations which indicated they looked merely to a settlement involving some liberalizing measures but no real changes in the way trade had been conducted at Deshima. Harris rejected these terms for the United States, calling them "disgraceful to all parties engaged in making them." He added that they would not be acceptable to Britain, either, a potent argument because he had previously suggested that conclusion of the war being fought by France and Britain in China might lead to those powers bringing in a naval force to gain the terms they wanted. Indeed, the Treaty of Tientsin (Tianjin) was probably a factor in helping Harris gain the terms he wanted.

In late November Harris was finally allowed to proceed to Yedo where he believed the Emperor lived and was able to gain verbally the concessions he wanted at meetings with the Shogun and the Council of State. His visit had been opposed at Kyoto where the Emperor actually resided and this opposition unified the party supporting the Shogunate and the Tokugawa family who really held the power. Lord Hotta, who held a post somewhat analogous to a Minister for Foreign Affairs, indicated to Harris the bitter conflict going on between those who wished to turn Japan outward and those who wished to maintain the policy of isolation. Turning the verbal agreement he had received from the Council into treaty terms which both sides would accept took a great deal of patience. Harris prepared a draft treaty in February 1858 which contained the important provisions he ultimately obtained: the American Minister Resident would reside in the center of things at Yedo, trade would be free of official restrictions, and tariffs would be low. The privilege of extraterritoriality won locally at Shimoda also was incorporated, and five new treaty ports were scheduled to open by 1863.

There were delays, as Lord Hotta predicted, and while Harris had lamented to himself that American warships had ceased to visit him, he used the lack of such visits as a guarantee of his peaceful intentions. Yet, he hinted, if the treaty was not concluded, he

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*Journal of Townsend Harris, p. 507.*
would have to send for ships! This treaty, finally signed on July 29, 1858, was important not only for the opening it gave to the United States but because it became the model for treaties made by the Japanese in the ensuing months with the Dutch, Russians, French, Prussians, and British. In January 1859 James Buchanan (who had been inaugurated in March of 1857) and his State Department finally answered their Japanese mail and Harris was rewarded by being raised to Minister Resident. In March the U.S.S. Mississippi arrived in Shimoda and Harris cruised aboard it in Japanese waters for four months before settling into his American Legation at Yedo—a former Buddhist temple known as the Shrine of Virtue and Happiness. During the three years of his residence in Yedo, he became an unofficial advisor to the Japanese on international affairs and technology. His correspondence after the signing of the treaty shows that numerous American merchants were eager to make quick fortunes in Japan—a goal he quickly disabused them of—and that missionaries were eager for aggressive ventures.

After serving during three administrations Harris requested his recall on the grounds of the ill health of which he had complained all along; he returned to New York in 1862. The United States then had other preoccupations besides the Pacific and Harris' work did not bear fruit here as quickly as it did in Europe. Receiving his arrears of pay, he purchased an annuity and took up residence near the Union Club, then by Gramercy Park, at which he became a fixture. He remained a bachelor, visiting the Paris Exposition of 1866 and taking an interest in the activities of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He died on February 15, 1878; his grave in Greenwood Cemetery, with its newly installed Japanese lantern and flowering cherry tree, is now a fitting memorial to the man whom Lord Hotta called, more truly than he then knew, "the friend of Japan."

The only substantial portion of Harris' papers to survive him were those relating to his years in Japan. They passed to the safekeeping of his niece and executor, Bessie Harris. In the 1906-07 academic year City College moved from its first cramped quarters to a spacious new home on St. Nicholas Heights. Bessie Harris, now eighty-seven, wanted to provide a secure, permanent home for the papers. Letters in the Harris collection reflect her concerns and at her death, in 1907, the papers came to the College. They remained in the President's Office until 1942 when they were transferred to a safe in the Office of the Chief Librarian—the era of personal guardianship of documents was alive and well at City College. Protected the papers were, but not really accessible until the Archives and Special Collections Division was formed in 1960. A grant from the Japan Foundation in the late 1970s permitted the replacement of the unsatisfactory original microfilm by one of archival quality. The letters and oversized documents were cleaned as needed, encapsulated, and placed in custom-made clamshell boxes. By terms of the agreement, a calendar of the papers was prepared and is available on request. In 1982 the sole loan of the collection took place when the Archives of Yokohama mounted a yearlong series of exhibitions on Japan-United States relations. The Archives carried out its own microfilm project of the collection.

The best known item in the Harris collection is his Journal. The first entry is dated near the west coast of the Malay Peninsula about May of 1855, just before his return to the United States to seek the appointment. It concludes with an entry at the end of February 1858 as he was falling seriously ill at Shimoda. He did not take up the journal again. It was published with extensive annotations by Mario Cosenza in 1930 with a dedication to the "peace of the Pacific" and reprinted in 1959; it is currently out of print. There is also a Japanese-language edition. The manuscript journal is supplemented by five letter books of copies of letters written by Harris, a total of 843, and two series of Letters and Papers addressed to him, another 533 items. Cosenza made typewritten
transcripts of Department of State circulars and miscellaneous papers, and Harris' financial records are also available. There is also an account book. A group of twenty oversize documents [some in Japanese], contemporary Japanese prints of his activities, and a few formal documents in Japanese complete the collection. Except for the Journal, the other documents have not been published. They are available in microfilm on loan from the City College Archives.

These primary documents can be supplemented by two other collections, the richest of which is the Mario Cosenza papers. Born in Naples about 1880, Cosenza was brought to New York as a child and attended the City College Harris had done so much to found. He took a Ph.D. in classics at Columbia and studied at the American Academy in Rome before taking up a teaching appointment at his alma mater. His publications centered on Latin literature and Italian humanism. In 1916 Cosenza became Director of Townsend Harris Hall, the preparatory school for City College, and hanging in his office was a faded flag with thirty stars. This was the first American flag made in Japan. From his initial landing in Shimoda, Harris had laid great stress on raising and lowering the flag each day as a reminder to the Japanese that he was not personally asking favors but that he represented the the United States government. The flagstaff also indicated that he had come to stay until he achieved his objectives. When the original flag was destroyed in a storm, Harris employed local women to make another.

Cosenza became possessed with Harris, the man and his achievements. He delved into the Harris genealogy and corresponded with all the descendants he could find, and with descendants of friends. He obtained photostats of the State Department Archives. He transcribed all the documents Bessie Harris had left to the College and sought biographical information about each person mentioned. He led a group of students each year to place a wreath on Harris' grave. The fruit of his endeavors was the publication of the Journal in 1930, but he kept amassing information afterward. Before he died in 1966, he had prepared two manuscripts on Harris: "Townsend Harris, Friend of Japan" and "Townsend Harris: Our First Minister to Japan." He was unable to find a publisher for these manuscripts. Refusals to publish were based on the conviction that there was a general lack of interest in the subject. These manuscripts, along with the numerous notes, photographs, and miscellany he collected between 1920 and the early 1960s, came to the College at his death and form the Cosenza Collection, an invaluable adjunct to the Harris papers. His meticulous transcriptions of the Letter and Papers have aided many researchers, as have his indexes to the Letter Books and material on the Harris family.

No longer current but still helpful is his bibliography of over 2,500 items on Japan in English as well as miscellaneous volumes on Japanese life and culture, many now unobtainable.

One of Harris' nondiplomatic correspondents was Mrs. Sandwith Drinker, wife of a sea captain engaged in the East India trade, and her adolescent daughter, Kate. Harris had met the Drinkers during his earlier years in the Orient and visited their home in Hong Kong and summer villa at Macao. Kate Drinker, an extremely talented girl, later married the literary journalist, Thomas Allibone Janvier, and both became authorities on Provençal literature. At her death in 1922 Mrs. Janvier willed her papers to the New York Public Library and they include the letters both she and her mother received from Harris. Cosenza's transcriptions of these form part of the Cosenza collection. While portions of the letters are copies of passages found in the Journal, the major portion deals with his personal feelings about his mission and the loneliness he had foreseen in accomplishing it: "You cannot conceive the mental isolation of a solitary being like me; nor can you imagine the void that is created in my soul by the want of some object to
In his work with the Letter Books and Letters and Papers, Cosenza divided the latter into two series and gave them, as well as the correspondence in the Letter Books, numbers which he affixed to the documents with small gummed labels. These labels have not damaged the paper and, on the advice of preservation authority, Carolyn Horton, they were not removed when the collection was treated in 1978.

All of the materials in the Harris collection were calendared as one of the conditions of the grant received from the Japan Foundation. The Calendar is available upon request.

Summary of the Townsend Harris Collection

**Journal** 4 manuscript volumes
**Letter Books** 5 manuscript volumes
**Letters and Papers**
  **Series I**
  **Series II**
**Oversized Papers and Documents** 20 items
**Commonplace Book** 1 volume
**Formosa Notebook** 1 volume
**Government Accounts** 1 volume

Mario Emilio Cosenza (M.E.C) Collection/Janvier Letters

"Townsend Harris: Our First Minister to Japan" (typescript)
"Townsend Harris: Friend of Japan" (typescript)
*Complete Journal of Townsend Harris*
Illustrations, photostats, etc. collected by M.E.C for his edition of the *Journal*
Letterbooks and Letter and Papers (transcriptions by M.E.C.)
Townsend Harris Correspondence (transcripts of all letters arranged in chronological order by M.E.C.)
Correspondence, notes, clippings about T.H.
Townsend Harris letters transcribed from the Janvier Collection in the New York Public Library
**Japan Documents**
**Harris Family Genealogy**
M.E.C. correspondence about Townsend Harris
**Indexes to Harris Papers prepared by M.E.C.**
**Pictures and illustrations of Japan**
**Photographs and photostats**
**Copies of other works by M.E.C**
**Miscellaneous**

*T. H. to Mrs. Sandwith Drinker, 16 July 1868, Janvier Letters and Papers, folder #2, letter #3.