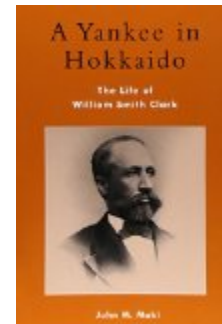


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John M. Maki. *A Yankee in Hokkaido: The Life of William Smith Clark*. Lanham and New York: Lexington Books, 2002. xviii + 306 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7391-0417-0.

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Published on H-US-Japan (August, 2004)



## “Boys, Be Ambitious!”

William Smith Clark’s main claim to fame, outside of his home state of Massachusetts, derives from his nine-month tenure in 1876-1877 as the first president of the Sapporo Agricultural College. This school later developed into the famous University of Hokkaido, and Clark is still fondly remembered on campus. A students’ amenities building bears his name, and busts and statues of him can be found on the university campus and elsewhere in Sapporo, usually inscribed with his famous parting words, “Boys, be ambitious!”

William S. Clark was born in Massachusetts in 1826 as the only son of a country doctor. In his youth, he developed a keen interest in minerals and botany. After graduating from the local Williston Seminary, he went on to Amherst College, and graduated from there in 1848. During his college years he experienced a sudden, conversion from a skeptic to a true believer, but apart from that single experience, there is nothing to indicate that he was anything more than a “routine” Christian until his stay in Sapporo almost thirty years later.

After graduating from Amherst College, Clark spent two years as a teacher in his old secondary school, Williston College, but then he decided to go to Goettingen in Germany to get a doctoral degree. This took him two years, and when he returned to Massachusetts he became a professor of “analytical and agricultural chemistry,” as well as an instructor in German, at Amherst College. A year later, he married the daughter of his former headmaster, Harriet Williston, and settled down in a house bought for the young couple by his father-in-law. Mr.

and Mrs. Clark eventually had eleven children of whom seven survived to old age.

When the Civil War broke out in 1860, Clark enthusiastically reported for officer’s duty, fought bravely, as a gentleman should, and managed not to get himself killed. Having made it to the rank of Colonel, he resigned his commission and went back to Amherst. There he continued another six years in his position as a professor at Amherst College, but in February 1867 he was appointed as the first professor in the newly established Massachusetts Agricultural College (MAC). When the president resigned a few months later, Clark became the new president—just in time to receive the first students to enroll in the college. He served in this capacity from 1868 to 1879, interrupted only by his stay in Japan from 1876 to 1877.

The first four chapters in the book deal with Clark’s life before he was invited to Japan. The story is based on personal letters and other contemporary sources, and the frequent quotes from his letters help the reader get a feeling for what kind of man Clark was. We see his strong will to overcome difficulties, his somewhat despotic leadership style, and we get an intimation of the lack of financial management skills that had such a tragic outcome at the end of his life. A hyper-active person, Clark tended towards being a restless planner marked by incurable optimism and great rhetorical skills, which he used to persuade other people to participate in his projects. Nevertheless, the book’s numerous and lengthy comments on all the many persons Clark came into contact with or was

related to, makes the reading rather heavy, and the enormous gallery of people will probably fail to capture the interest of any reader who is not already well-versed in the social life of Amherst in the mid-nineteenth century.

Chapter 5 finally launches into the description of Clark's connection to Japan. It begins with an overly detailed account of Japan's opening and the years following it, and it tells of the convoluted processes by which Clark happened to be the person chosen to start off the new Sapporo Agricultural College (SAC). One factor in the decision may have been that MAC had already begun to accept Japanese students, the first of whom was a protege of the later Minister of Education, Mori Arinori.

After a great deal of negotiation and the signing of a rather elaborate contract with the Japanese government, Clark could finally set out for Japan with two handpicked colleagues, David P. Penhallow and William Wheeler. The latter two had signed on for two years and both succeeded Clark as principals of the school for some years. Clark, however, had only felt able to commit himself to be away from MAC for one year. With his usual self-confidence, however, he claimed that he could easily do two years' work in one year.

Among his many achievements during his brief sojourn in Sapporo were the selection of pupils and the start-up of the school, designing the curriculum and distributing the teaching among the teachers, including, of course, himself. He also managed in very short time to get permission to build a model farm attached to the school, and on the farm he built a genuine New England barn, of which he was very proud. Last, but not least, his contribution lay in the tremendous moral and religious influence he exerted on the students in the first year of the school's existence—an influence which stretched into the second-year intake of new students as well, even though Clark had already left Japan when they enrolled.

In spite of Clark's complete lack of Japanese language skills, there is no doubt that he was a very charismatic and dedicated teacher. He required his students to take notes from his lectures, and afterwards he corrected the students' notebooks. He took them on field trips, told jokes, held bible discussions and prayer sessions, and he told his students anecdotes from his time in the Civil War. He made both students and teachers sign a pledge to abstain from alcohol, drugs, tobacco, gambling, and swearing while connected with the college.

He also drew up a "Covenant of Believers in Jesus," which spelled out the tenets of his faith. The covenant

has many similarities to the "confession of faith" used in many Protestant churches, but it was greatly elaborated by Clark to emphasize moral precepts for daily life. On March 5, 1877, thirty-one students signed the covenant, and the students who entered the year after signed it as well. Even though Clark had not left America with any thoughts of becoming a missionary, he found himself using Christianity to build a sound moral foundation in his students. Almost all the students from the first two years converted to Christianity and were baptized in September 1877, a few months after Clark had left. It was with some pride that he could write to his wife that he now considered himself "a successful missionary" (p. 179). One of Clark's students later wrote about his missionary activities that "it was practical religion, unlike that taught by other missionaries. It was religion without the odor of religion" (p. 178).

Of the students who were baptized in 1877 about half later left the faith. The rest formed what became known as "the Sapporo Band," and it included people like Uchimura Kanzoo and Nitobe Inazoo, who were from the second class of students. In 1914, ten of these students created a fund in order to build the William S. Clark Memorial Church. They managed to raise 60,000 Yen, and the church was opened in 1922.

In general, Clark had a very favorable impression of the Japanese—they were gentlemen and ladies, they never indulged in dancing, never walked with a servant girl, never got too drunk, and never got into fist fights. In later speeches, he often compared them favorably to his own countrymen.

Before he left, Clark submitted a number of plans for the future of both the school and for Hokkaido's further development to the Japanese colonial office, and for at least three years after he had returned to America, he kept in contact with his Japanese students and friends and sent books, advice, machinery, seeds and samples to Hokkaido as he had promised before leaving.

Clark's year in Japan was the pinnacle of his career, and there is no doubt that he was very happy there and that the people he associated with had the greatest respect for him and for his work. When he was about to leave, there was talk of his returning to the school later, but—unfortunately for Clark—this suggestion never materialized.

The last third of the book deals with Clark's life after Japan. He returned to a college in deep financial trouble, caused partly by Clark's inability to manage the budget in

the preceding years. The newspapers were quite aggressive in their attacks on Clark, but before anyone could actually get around to asking him to give up his presidency, he resigned of his own free will. The reason was that he had gotten caught up in a venture called “The Floating College”—a big project of sailing around the world with students and teachers. It was called the “Woodruff Scientific Expedition around the World,” but despite good progress in the beginning, it was never put into practice. When the ship was finally ready, not enough students had signed up, and on May 8, 1879 the project was officially abandoned. Its creator, Mr. Woodruff, died shortly thereafter, and Clark tried unsuccessfully to revive the project.

Eventually, Clark decided to use his geological skills to enter into the mining business. He set up a mine-owner’s company together with a somewhat seedy character by the name of Bothwell and persuaded family, friends and acquaintances in Amherst to invest in their mines. Within less than two years, the company was bankrupt, and Clark saw not only his own investments, but also those of his investors, disappear down the drain. He was sued by his uncle and almost lost his house, and from then on his health went downhill until he died of heart disease in 1886.

Thus the man, who had, in effect, started two agricultural colleges that were both destined to grow into major universities (MAC is now the University of Massachusetts), ended his life in misery and poverty. His legacy lives on in the close connections between Hokkaido and Massachusetts, which are now sister states, just like the Universities of Hokkaido and Massachusetts are sister universities.

The author of *A Yankee in Hokkaido*, Professor John M. Maki came to the University of Massachusetts in the

early 1970s. A few years later, he visited the University of Hokkaido in connection with the preparations for its centennial in 1976. Having already explored the archives in Massachusetts, Professor Maki was delighted to find even more material about Clark in Hokkaido. With all this material at hand, he decided to embark on the writing of a biography of William S. Clark. It was intended to be ready for the University of Hokkaido’s centennial, but the translation into Japanese took longer than expected, so the Japanese version was published by Hokkaido University Press in 1978. After this, Professor Maki tried to find a publisher for the English version, but did not succeed in doing so until 1996, when the president of Hokkaido University decided to support the publication.

The difficulties in getting an English version published perhaps illustrate how narrow the target group of English-language readers for a book of this kind would be. With the great influence Clark had on the development of Hokkaido, a number of people on that island and elsewhere in Japan can be expected to be curious to learn as much as possible about what kind of man he was before he came to Sapporo and what happened to him later. Outside Japan, however, Clark would seem to be just one among many excellent educators, and the detailed story of his life—even his important travel to Japan—is unlikely to attract a large audience. To the present reviewer, the highlights of the book are the middle chapters about Clark’s stay in Japan, whereas the very detailed account of Clark’s childhood, youth, career in Amherst, as well as the protracted story of his catastrophic investment in mining companies fail to capture my interest. In his homeland, Clark was a rather ordinary, gifted educator, who ended up badly in the last years of his life. But in Japan, Clark was a brilliant, charismatic figure, with unlimited ideas for improvement and with an enormous influence over the young men he worked with—and through them on the further development of Japan.

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**Citation:** Kirsten Refsing. Review of Maki, John M., *A Yankee in Hokkaido: The Life of William Smith Clark*. H-US-Japan, H-Net Reviews. August, 2004.

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