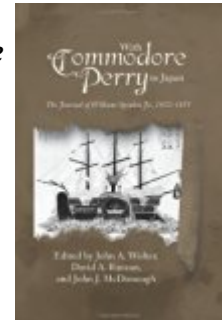


John Amadeus Wolter, David A. Ranzan, John J. McDonough, eds.. *With Commodore Perry to Japan: The Journal of William Speiden Jr., 1852-1855*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013. 320 pp. \$39.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-61251-238-9.



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With Commodore Perry to Japan: The Journal of William Speiden Jr., 1852-1855 is divided into two volumes; the first includes daily entries from March 9, 1852, to July 2, 1854, and the second covers the period from July 6, 1854, to February 16, 1855. The author of this diary was William Speiden Jr., who was traveling with his father who had been hired as purchaser for the US frigate *Mississippi*, the “black ship” commanded by Commodore Perry that would arrive to open Japan diplomatically and commercially to Western nations. Beginning in 1852, when the *Mississippi* left the Navy Yard of Philadelphia, the sixteen-year-old William describes the adventure in a youthful but rather reserved way. He describes wherever possible the endeavours of the ship, the officials on board, and major events that took place. In the first volume, the *Mississippi* travels to Boston, Baltimore, and Brooklyn to arrive in the North Atlantic waters close to Halifax, where the young mariner addresses the conflicts that arose between English and American fishing vessels. A theme throughout the diary, however, is the de-

gree of cooperation and civility demonstrated between the captains and crews of the Western nations (British, French, and American mostly) in international waters, who visited each other's ships, helping in difficult situations as well. The *Mississippi* followed the Atlantic route from the Norfolk Islands to Madeira and from there to St. Helena Island, both places where the young Speiden spent time and observed the lifestyles of his acquaintances (in Madeira) and historical places such as the residence and tomb of Napoleon (on St. Helena Island), both places worthy of his kind comments. But he does not consider only relevant European historical figures; in Cape Town he relates the status of at least two Kafir chiefs, who had been rebels against the Western powers and were made prisoners but allowed to live in white towns according to their circumstances and lifestyles.

The arrival of the *Mississippi* in the harbors of Singapore, Macao, and Victoria (Hong Kong) as well as Shanghai allow the reader to realize the interconnectedness of the early twentieth-century maritime world in terms of Western powers shar-

ing colonies, but also maritime routes, to extract needed materials, in this case coal for steamships, in their ruled territories and mercantile as well as religious settlements. The Chinese world of Macau and Hong Kong as well as the harbor of Whampoa near Shanghai is revealed through the eyes of a Western-educated young sailor as a mercantile and piratical world, dangerous and exotic as well. The arrival of Commodore Perry's ships in Naha, Ryukyu's main harbor, on May 26, 1853, shows how the Ryukyu Kingdom, still under Japan, was rather open to maritime travelers who landed there. Speiden's description of the arrival of the American ships in Japan in Edo Bay from July 8 to 17, 1853, reveals just some of the hardships that the American officers and crew faced in delivering the letters from the American president to open the commercial harbors of Yokohama and Shimoda. Speiden carefully describes not only the physical features of each place but also the characters of the inhabitants and their rulers. Although the description of the negotiations that took place is based on second-hand information he tries his best to reveal what was said or done and the parties who had the main role in those events. In 1854, during the second landing of the American flagships in Japan, Speiden writes of the smoothness with which all the reports were returned and the treaty signed on March 31; he does not say if there was any unequal trial of strength, perhaps with an implication that American power symbolized by the steam ships was so far unparalleled, unlike Edward Yorke McCauley, who also traveled with Perry to Japan and wrote about it in a diary as well.[1] Speiden also had no knowledge of the civil unrest that the American arrival had thrown Japan into. The Japanese political system was already decaying from within due to the lack of strong shoguns, when the arrival of Perry threw Japan into a political crisis as the shogun and his senior councillors, instead of making a decision on the issue of opening the ports, requested the answer of all the *daimyo* of Japan, opening up the government to an unprecedented level of crit-

icism and conflict.[2] Speiden rather observes the local population and their reaction to the visits of the sailors in the villages as well as people's reaction to his requests and also convivial jokes.

The second volume is a series of entries from the return trip that would bring the *Mississippi* back to American waters via Honolulu—where Speiden relates his enjoyment of that place and how he was able to meet King Kamehameha III—and from Honolulu back to San Francisco and California to circumnavigate South America (the Panama Canal had not yet been built) via Chile, where the entries abruptly end with the death of one of the dogs that had been given as gift to Commodore Perry by the emperor of Japan.

The diary of William Speiden provides a careful account and to a certain extent one based on class if compared with the diarist genre of more common sailors of the time.[3] It is certainly useful if read in connection to American history or even world history or twentieth-century Japanese history, as it relates the degree of international liberalism that the Americans projected abroad with their reliance on postal communication and coaling ships extracting resources in colonies ruled by Western powers. Common features in Speiden's entries, besides the harbor stops, are the various invitations and balls and the welcoming aboard of people with long pedigrees or mercantile affiliations and of course diplomats and captains.

The editors do a great job of informing the reader of the various characters and American as well as other nations' vessels that were circulating on the maritime routes described in the diary. The maps and place names (often different names than are used today) were useful in navigating the geography of the diary itself. The chronological organization as related by Speiden is often a bit cumbersome, but it does reflect the entries, while perhaps the official communications that circulated among the ships would have been better included in footnotes instead of appendix A. Also a

great deal of Japanese domestic historiography is lacking from the text, which means that readers not acquainted with Japanese history of the nineteenth century will perhaps not understand some of the crucial moments that are recorded, such as the domestic events that led up to the signing of the treaties and the civil war and politicking that followed it. Including this history would have been very appropriate, as the title of the book reflects the importance of the purpose of the voyage: to open Japan to the West commercially and diplomatically. However, the diary does not highlight Japan any more or less than other locations that were visited; perhaps a better historical background to introduce the significance of such treaties for both America and Japan would have given a deeper relevance to the text. Overall, however, it is a good book and would be a great companion to world history textbooks.

Notes

[1]. Edward Yorke Mc Cauley, *With Perry in Japan: The Diary of Edward Yorke McCauley*, ed. Alla B. Cole (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1942), 98-99.

[2]. Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 279-286.

[3]. Jennifer Creighton, *Rites of Passage: The Experience of American Whaling, 1830-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2012).

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