

# American Pacific Whaling at Hakodate before the Meiji Restoration

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## Introduction

The conclusion of the Treaty of Peace and Amity between Japan and the United States in 1854 marked an important historical watershed. The treaty simultaneously ended Japan's policy of semi-seclusion, which in turn would undermine the legitimacy of the Tokugawa regime, and, via Commodore Perry's gunboat diplomacy, demonstrated the remarkable growth of US power in the Pacific. Yet despite the symbolic significance of the treaty, it carried only modest benefits to American interests. The treaty provided for a US diplomatic presence in Japan and facilitated the access of American vessels to only two ports, Shimoda and Hakodate, where they could acquire necessary supplies. Free trade was not permitted and neither was US residence in Japan. This much was demonstrated by the failed venture of Reed & Dougherty, US merchants who following the conclusion of the treaty attempted to set up a business in Hakodate selling supplies to US whalers only to be rebuffed by the Japanese authorities.<sup>1</sup> It was not until the 1858 Treaty of Amity and Commerce came into effect in July 1859 that Americans obtained the right to trade and reside permanently (under US consular jurisdiction) in designated 'treaty ports', which in addition to Hakodate now included Yokohama (in place of Shimoda), Nagasaki and three others to be opened in the following years. This second treaty, negotiated by the first US Consul to Japan, Townsend Harris, thus marked another important step towards Japan's opening to foreign commerce.

Numerous studies have examined the American "opening" of Japan.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, for some, Perry was America's first imperialist,<sup>3</sup> and the "unequal

treaties” that followed his expeditions to Japan are viewed as emblematic of a troubled US-Japan relationship in which the seeds of military conflict almost a century later were planted.<sup>4</sup> In countless histories of Japan, and indeed in Japanese school textbooks and historical dramas, Perry’s “black ships” are applied as an essential anchor in the narrative of both the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the rise of a Meiji government which through the restoration of imperial rule sought to remake Japan in order to shake off the threat of Western imperialism.<sup>5</sup> Yet despite the prominence of the “American interruption” in Japan’s historical consciousness, there have been few studies that have examined American visitors to Japan immediately following the conclusion of the treaties.<sup>6</sup>

In this paper I aim to help address this oversight and examine the first wave of American visitors to Japan in the second half of the 1850s and their impressions of Japan. In so doing I focus on by far the most frequent American visitors to Japan in the 1850s, US whalers, and the northern treaty port of Hakodate, which attracted the most visitors prior to the Treaty of Amity and Commerce. This study makes use of reports in contemporary US and Hawaiian newspapers, crew lists compiled by the New Bedford Whaling Museum, as well as the records of the Hakodate Governor (Hakodate Bugyō) and US Commercial Agency in Hakodate.

In the next section I outline the growth of US whaling in the Pacific. This is followed by a section which gives the impressions of early US visitors to the port and highlights that the early wave of American visitors to Japan held divided opinions on Hakodate’s prospects, with some dismissing the port and Japan itself, whilst others envisaged that Hakodate would become an important base for the US Pacific whaling fleet. Though, in the end, Hakodate never flourished as a centre of US whaling these impressions are interesting as they detail the early interactions following the conclusion of the Treaty of Peace and Amity. In the final section I examine data collected on the whalers visiting Hakodate in 1857 and 1859 to provide insights into their movements and crew. The picture that emerges is of an American whaling industry that was still very much an Atlantic Coast endeavour,

though their Pacific operations remained dependant on Hawaii.

### **US Pacific Whaling and the Opening of Hakodate**

Dwindling deep-sea Atlantic whaling catches saw American whalers increasingly turn their attention to the Pacific in the nineteenth century. In 1791 seven ships from Nantucket and New Bedford rounded Cape Horn in pursuit of sperm whales in what was a key watershed for the industry. The impressive returns of these early voyages into the Pacific ensured that a Pacific whaling boom was soon in full swing as US whaling entered its “golden era” (dated between 1815 and 1860 by Walter Tower) with hundreds of American whaling vessels plying the Pacific each year.<sup>7</sup> From the 1820s onwards American Pacific whaling became centred on the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) which served as a crucial hub for wintering and the resupply of ships, as well as a place for recruitment and the forwarding of cargo between whaling voyages.<sup>8</sup> Beginning in the 1820s US whalers began frequenting the seas around Japan and by the 1840s American whaling circuits had extended firmly into the Okhotsk and Kamchatka seas where they sought bowhead and right whales.<sup>9</sup> The catches of US and British pelagic whaling around Japan by this time were already having a negative impact on the catches of Japanese coastal whalers though the link was not made at the time.<sup>10</sup>

The activity of whaling and the processing of whale by-products—in particular whale oil which was used as lighting oil, in soap manufacture and as lubricant, etc.—was a major industry in the US in the first half of the nineteenth century. At peak it was perhaps the fifth largest industry and employed approximately 70,000 people aboard 736 vessels and in various associated industries.<sup>11</sup> Given the importance of this industry it was somewhat inevitable that the US would take an interest in establishing secure ports to resupply its fleet in Japan.<sup>12</sup> Whaling entailed great risks and long, arduous voyages and thus Japan’s policy of closing its ports to foreign vessels was problematic from the American point of view. The interests of the whaling industry were thus a major backdrop to the Perry expeditions

and wider American attempts to engage Japan.<sup>13</sup>

Whaling interests were also a reason why Hakodate, located in Japan's remote and sparsely populated northern island of Ezo (renamed Hokkaido in 1869), was acceptable as one of the two ports to be opened. Indeed, earlier American plans and petitions to open Japan referred to the need for a port in Ezo so that "American whaling ships [...] [could] have the privilege of catching whales off the coast of Japan, and in the different bays of Yeso [Ezo] and the Japanese Kurile islands, without molestation, and of touching therein to refit, or procure wood, water, and provisions."<sup>14</sup> For whalers Hakodate provided ready access to the Japan and Okhotsk Seas and the North Pacific and a port of call with a safe harbour in the vicinity was much desired.

For the Tokugawa Bakufu, Hakodate made sense as a port to open as it was removed from major urban areas and thus the potential disruption caused by an open port could be limited. Also, the Bakufu had directly administered the port previously when it was concerned about Russian visits to the region—returning the port to the Matsumae domain when the threat appeared to subside. Following the conclusion of the Treaty of Peace and Amity, the Bakufu simply reinstated its direct administration of the port.

The opening of Hakodate to US whalers, ironically came when US whaling began a period of decline. In 1846 the US whaling fleet had already peaked at 736 vessels; after which it fell to 514 in 1861, and, as the US Civil War further disrupted the industry, the fleet plummeted further to a mere 330 vessels in 1869.<sup>15</sup> The industry also suffered from the emergence of substitutes for whale oil. In 1859 the first oil wells were opened in Pennsylvania and petroleum-based products soon began to replace whale oil as lighting oil, lubricants, and candles.<sup>16</sup> Demand for whale oil products consequently plummeted. Furthermore, in 1871 a disaster in the Arctic involving thirty-four whaling vessels which became trapped in ice further damaged the industry and added greatly to the cost of insuring whaling voyages.

Hakodate was visited by approximately 160 US whalers in the years between the opening of the port and the Meiji Restoration (Table 1). Initially

**Table 1 No. of US Whaler Visits 1855-1867**

Year	Whaler Visits	Year	Whaler Visits
1855	8	1862	15
1856	4	1863	4
1857	4	1864	7
1858	16	1865	14
1859	36	1866	10
1860	18	1867	9
1861	15	Total	160

Note: the above table likely includes a small number of non-American whalers entering under the American flag.

Source: Hakodateshishi Henshūka, *Hakodateshishi tsūsetsuhen dainikan* (Hakodate: Hakodate-shi, 1990), 162.

the number of visits following its opening in 1855 was quite small with only sixteen visitors in the first three years. The arrival of Elisha Rice who became the resident US Commercial Agent (see the next section) of Hakodate in 1857 likely encouraged more visitors. Having a US representative in port would, in theory at least, be of valuable assistance to ships in securing necessary supplies.<sup>17</sup> In any case the number of visitors rose to sixteen in 1858 and then to thirty-six in 1859—the peak year in US whaler visits. As we shall see in the next section, many of these early visitors saw potential in Hakodate but were quite disappointed with the trouble involved in resupplying their ships. The number of visitors thus tailed off again in 1860 to eighteen and to fifteen in each of the next two years. The disruption of the US Civil War on the whaling industry is also observable in 1863 and 1864 with the number of whaler visits falling to single digits. Though there was a brief recovery after this, US whaling visits never reached even close to the numbers seen in 1859.

### **US Whalers' Impressions and Experiences of Hakodate**

From March 1855 onwards Hakodate was officially open as a port of call to American whalers. The bad press Hakodate got as a result of the obstruction

of Reed & Dougherty's venture probably dampened interest in the port and the first reports coming from whalers visiting Hakodate were unfavourable. The November 1855 edition of *The Friend*, a Hawaii based monthly journal targeting US whalers, carried a letter penned in Hakodate in June 1855 from the first officer of the US brig *Leveret*.<sup>18</sup> The report expressed the frustrations of US visitors towards the Japanese authorities, complaining of "considerable difficulty" in landing passengers and obtaining supplies. The report bemoaned that "you cannot obtain any fresh supplies, and to get your water, you have a deal of trouble. You have to get it off the authorities, and they have been eight days furnishing us with 30 barrels and 200 sticks of wood." The *Leveret's* first officer, perhaps bitter from the difficulties experienced in Hakodate, described Hakodate as "a mere fishing village", with houses "inferior to the native huts at Honolulu." And though he admitted the "harbor is large and commodious," he labelled the Japanese port "the most contemptable place that I have visited during my twelve years cruise in the Pacific," concluding that Hakodate "will never become the resort for whalers." Nevertheless, more positive accounts soon emerged and eventually the presence of an American Commercial Agent began to encourage a greater traffic in whaler visits.

One such positive account appeared in the February 1856 edition of *The Friend* which carried another letter from Japan, this time from W. C. Reed of the ill-fated Reed & Dougherty venture. The letter, which was also printed in the *San Francisco Herald*, provided a detailed description of the newly opened ports of Shimoda and Hakodate. Reed largely dismissed Shimoda stating that it would "never become a popular whaling depot, on account of its bad harbour." Hakodate, however, was praised by Reed as "the finest harbor in the world, with unlimited capacity for ships, well protected or land-locked, good holding grounds, and facilities for hauling down and repairing." The only caveat Reed saw in Hakodate "becoming a popular resort for whaling ships," was the winter weather which Reed himself had not experienced. Reed also felt that Hakodate's "proximity to the whaling-ground [...] only about four days' sail therefrom," rendered it a suitable hub for

American whaling in the Okhotsk Sea. In a reference to his own struggles to establish a firm at Hakodate supplying US whalers, Reed concluded that “as soon as the Japanese become reconciled to the treaty, our whale ships will frequent [Hakodate]”. He anticipated that Hakodate would become “a large commercial place,” because its “natural facilities” which were “not equalled by any other place within my knowledge.” Such favourable geography, Reed concluded, would “force commerce upon” Hakodate.

Reed’s ringing endorsement of Hakodate’s natural harbour and commercial potential was not universally shared by American visitors. The logbook of the New Bedford Whaling Vessel *Eliza F. Mason* gave a derisory account of Hakodate, and made unfavourable comparisons with Chinese ports. The whaling vessel had departed New Bedford on 2 December 1853 and returned on 10 April 1857, travelling to Chile, the Solomon Islands, East China, the Sea of Japan, Kamchatka, the Arctic Ocean, and the Okhotsk Sea. It entered Hakodate on 24 April 1856 and the following day the Captain and his wife went on shore. The logbook describes the local interest in this visit as well as the situation in town:

[The] Capt. and his wife went and had not been on shore more than ten minutes before there were more than a thousand Japanese collected around them. And we ascertained after some inquiring that she is the first white woman that has visited this place. The city is about a mile in length and carries from a quarter to three quarters of a mile in breadth with three principal streets running lengthwise through it. The houses are nearly all of wood and are with but few exceptions one story buildings. It is densely populated and I think ten thousand is a low estimate of the population of the city. The inhabitants resemble the Chinese in their features and dress but the women are not as great and both males [and] females are less reserved. But it [is] almost impossible to trade with them although there is not much here that we would wish to trade for. [...] There is certainly nothing here that will bear comparison with what I have seen in China [...] if we purchase anything,

even a cents worth of fruit, we have to carry it to the custom house let them set the price.

The Eliza F. Mason left a few days later on 29 April 1856. Though its visit went seemingly unreported in the US or Hawaiian press, some reports did start to appear in the papers. The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, for example, carried a letter in its 22 October 1857 edition from Captain Homer of the *Messenger Bird* which concluded that though “the Japanese were quite friendly,” the commercial value of the port was limited as “they had nothing to trade.” Homer also made particular mention of their inability to get fresh beef “as their [i.e. the Japanese] religion forbids the slaughter of cattle.” This situation would, however, soon improve as a US Commercial Agent, Elisha E. Rice, arrived in Hakodate that year, aboard a whaler of course.<sup>19</sup>

After establishing the Commercial Agency in the grounds of Jogenji temple, Rice endeavored to secure the supplies, including beef and coal, that whalers and other ships would require. He was also involved in establishing a pilotage system and a brothel catering to a foreign clientele. As an unpaid US representative, Rice’s livelihood depended on his ability to monopolize the procurement and sale of goods and services to US vessels visiting port. This was a business model similar to Reed & Dougherty’s failed venture albeit with his official position Rice was able to reside in port and bargain more forcefully with the local authorities. As his livelihood depended on it Rice was keen to encourage a large traffic of whalers to Hakodate and he began to contact the US press to inform them of his achievements in securing

Figure 1 Advertisement for Eastr & Co.  
in the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* (3 December 1857)





essential supplies. He also actively advertised the services of his firm Eastr & Co. (later renamed Rice & Co.), particularly in the Hawaii-based papers the *Polynesian* and the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*.

The 11 March 1858 edition of the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* and indeed a number of other papers including the *New York Herald*, carried a despatch from Rice which included a message from the Hakodate Governor, Muragaki, stating that “bullocks [...] from this time [...] shall be fattened in a village near Hakodadi and ready to deliver when you [Rice] shall ask for them,” and that “at no other port in Japan will bullocks be delivered but Hakodadi.” Keen to encourage a traffic of whalers, Rice also talked up Hakodate as possessing a “harbor [that] is not surpassed in the world, and capable of safe anchorage for five hundred ships, with all the facilities that can be asked for supplies and repairs.” Though Hakodate’s natural harbor had attracted such ringing endorsements before, Rice certainly bent the truth when he claimed that “everything that can be had in a New York market can now be had here.” Of the Japanese, Rice stated “the people are very friendly, and show a willingness to furnish everything they have to all American ships, and are very desirous to have them come here.” Although Rice failed to mention it, the records of the Hakodate Governor and US Commercial Agency in Hakodate make clear that in actual fact there had been several difficult discussions in order to secure supplies, etc. Rice probably glossed over this fact in order to encourage visitors.

Rice concluded his despatch by stating, very much in line with his personal business interests, that “the principal benefit” of Hakodate will be “as a depot for supplies and repairs for our American whaling fleet that yearly comes to these waters.” Indeed, he went as far as to suggest that Hakodate might in the future exceed Honolulu as a hub for Pacific whaling as “oil can be stored to much better advantage than at Honolulu,” on account of its moderate climate. In another attempt to boost the number of US vessels calling on Hakodate, Rice also suggested that the US naval depot at Hong Kong be relocated to Hakodate, as its climate would “tend greatly to the health of the squadron and would be a saving to Uncle Sam of many

thousands of dollars.” This, however, never materialized.

Besides the US Commercial Agent, the prospect of supplying and serving a large flow of whalers to Hakodate encouraged others to establish a business there. On 19 December 1857 the *Polynesian* carried an article introducing a Dr. Bates of Lahaina who, it stated, “intends, within a few days, to sail for Hakodadi, in Japan, where he expects to establish himself as a physician and surgeon.” Dr. Bates’ planned to make the trip “on account of the numerous whaleships cruising within a moderate distance of Dr. Bates’ new location [Hakodate], thus affording an opportunity, in case of casualties of life or limb, of consulting, without a great loss of time, a thorough-bred physician and surgeon.” The article makes clear that Dr. Bates anticipated that Hakodate would become an important enough center of US whaling activity in the North Pacific to warrant a US surgery there. Dr. Bates in fact did travel to Hakodate and establish his surgery, but with demand for his services much lower than expected, he left the port after a short time.<sup>20</sup> This speculative action on his part turned out to be a failure, but it was, the article informs us, in keeping with the “migratory spirit” in his family background: “The Dr.’s grandmother was the second white woman settled in the then wilderness of the West, beyond the Cayuga lakes, in the State of New York; his father had been raised in ‘the heart of the Pacific’ [Hawaii] and Dr. Bates himself takes the newly-opened shores of Japan for his future residence.”

The presence of a US Commercial Agent and surgeon had increased the traffic to the port. Yet, visitors still gave mixed reviews of Hakodate. The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* of 30 December 1858 carried a lengthy account of the port gathered from a number of captains who visited Japan. The impressions were mostly “favorable” and “the treatment received from Japanese officers and others with whom they came in contact, was courteous, and in no sense annoying.” But the conclusion was that “the pleasure of a sojourn there [Hakodate] or a visit arises more from the novelty of the scenes met.” In the same article an interesting account from Captain Taber of a New Bedford ship, the *Adeline* was included. It is worth quoting at

length for the detail it gives on the experience of US whalers in Japan:

About twenty minutes after we had anchored, the Japanese officials made us a visit, and I was quite surprised to see such a noble and intelligent looking people. Upon arriving on board, the interpreter introduced himself and his fellow officers, who by the way could not speak or understand English. The interpreter asked, 'What for you come here?' Upon being told that we came in for supplies for our ship and people, he asked, 'What kind of supplies we wanted?' I told him that we should want wood and water, fresh meat and vegetables, together with the products of the country generally. This was made known by the interpreter to the high officer in attendance, who made known to us through the same medium that we should have everything we wanted that the country afforded, and they all appeared much pleased with our visit to their country, and quite as much with their visit on board our ship. We were therefore received with a hearty welcome, and a free pass given to come and go wherever we liked; and I would here say that the government, from the time we arrived until our departure, did as they said they would, all they could to make us comfortable while there, and furnished us with all necessary supplies.

From this account it is clear that by this point the local authorities were largely able to handle US visitors. The arrival of the US Commercial Agent in the previous year may have helped in this regard, although the report itself does not mention him. Captain Taber next described the types and quality of the supplies that were available:

We found that we could obtain most of the necessary supplies that ships stand in need of. First, we got fresh beef, being the first, as I was informed, furnished to any merchant or whale ship. The beef is tender and very sweet, and costs about eight cents per pound. The Japanese do not kill beef cattle to eat themselves, nor do I remember seeing any beef

cooked as food in any way on shore; but when they came on board ship they [the Japanese officers] dropped all scruples they ever had on that matter, and put a great quantity out of sight, as if they owed somebody a spite. Potatoes were also obtained, which were of an excellent quality, though small, and as to quantity there seemed to be an abundance [...] There was also plenty of rice, and some of the best rice I ever saw, at two cents per pound; quite a variety of beans, sugar, rice flour, buckwheat flour. Abundance of fish, of a very nice quality, and fresh cod were caught in the harbor all winter. There was also an abundance of chickens and eggs, and in the winter, venison was plenty.

Captain Taber clearly formed a good impression of the quality of supplies that could be had at Hakodate and like so many other visitors praised the harbor, stating that it “cannot be surpassed for safety” and “is sufficiently large to shelter several hundred sail of vessels.” Nevertheless, he did add a complaint about the exchange of currency in which local authorities took an “average deduction” of “about one-third” which rendered the otherwise reasonable supplies on offer somewhat expensive. He added that:

Until this irregularity between the currency of Japan and that of foreign countries is corrected, in a measure at least, trade and commerce with Japanese ports must be very limited. It is on this account, chiefly, that we think it will be many years before whalers will find it to their advantage to make Japanese ports their places of regular recruiting [of supplies]. As long as they can procure potatoes and beef plenty in their spring visits to Hakodadi, they will find it to their interest to go in there. But the bulk of their supplies cannot at present be furnished there, except at the most extortionate rates of discount on the money or bills tendered in payment.

Another visitor’s account was published in the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* on 3 November 1859. This visit occurred in August 1859, the

month following the opening of the port to trade. The visitor found Hakodate to be a “queer place” to which he “would advise no one to come here to reside.” Though all supplies could be obtained via “the Vice Commercial Agent of the United States who does all the business here,” the currency issue remained. He suggested, having felt cheated by the rate of exchange, that Americans should insist at “receiving their coin at its true value, according to the actual meaning of the treaty,” and that gunboat diplomacy would be the way to bring that about. He suggested that “nothing short of the smell of gunpowder will cause these cheating rascally Japanese to abate the exchange nuisance, and deal honestly with strangers.”

These negative assessments following the opening to trade continued to come in. A lengthy article in the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* (17 November 1859) which sought to end the debate on Hakodate’s suitability as a base for US whalers. It argued that though “[m]uch has been said during the past few years about Japan as a depot for our northern whaleships [...] each year only adds new proofs of its unfitness for the purpose of recruiting ships.” The main reasons given for this unsuitability were that visitors to the treaty ports continued to find them more closed than open as a result of bureaucratic interference.

The article also carried excerpts from a report by one of few non-whaler visitors to port at that time. The account of this visitor, named Reverend Collins, is interesting as it is one not solely geared towards the potential value of the port to the whaling industry, indeed Collins was critical of the behavior of US whaler crew in port. Collins dismissed the potential for importing US products on the basis that the Japanese did not have “the habit of using, or consuming foreign articles” and were for the most part “very poor.” Furthermore, despite the poverty he saw he praised Japanese “ingenuity” which he felt was at a level “enough to manufacture almost anything brought here.” Thus, Reverend Collins felt that with a weak local demand and strong local competition, there was little hope for imports even as “greater freedom to foreigners in the way of trade,” was enjoyed following the coming into effect of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce in July 1859.

The Reverend had been made aware of the “drunkenness, fights, and licentiousness,” among the visiting whaling crew and as a man of the church he lamented that “foreign morals stand very low.” In the original article published in the *Friend* Collins also made note of a brothel catering to foreigners (in which the US Commercial Agent was involved) on which he expressed his disgust. At this point more whalers than other ships, whether merchant vessels or men-of-war, called on Hakodate and thus, he noted, “the chief business” in which foreign residents engaged was in supplying these ships.

After Collins’ account the lengthy newspaper report concluded that in “all probability,” US Pacific whaling “will not hereafter center at Hakodadi,” arguing that “the opinion of most American whalers” is that “the lauded advantages of Hakodadi as a recruiting port for whalers, thus far turn out to be entirely groundless.” It concluded that:

[T]he potatoes, for which principally whalers go there, are represented as being “small” (“about the size of a bullet,”) and unfit to eat. But one or two vessels, that we are aware of, have gone there to spend the coming winter, and we have not heard of a ship wintering at Hakodadi the second season [...] The opinion almost unanimously expressed by whalers is that the Sandwich Islands [Hawaii] cannot be excelled as a recruiting depot by any place in this ocean, and that Japan will hereafter hardly be visited by them, except by such as wish to obtain curiosities. What an old whaling shipmaster said to us a day or two since is found to be the testimony of nearly every one: “We have tried Talcahuano, and Tahiti, we have tried Hongkong and Hakodadi; we have tried San Francisco and every other place in the Pacific, but have nowhere found one half the inducements to recruit cheaply and expeditiously that are offered at the Sandwich Islands.”

This assessment at the end of the 1850s turned out to be correct and in the 1860s US whaling interests in the Pacific entered a period of decline.

## **A Profile of US Whalers Visiting Hakodate**

Though in later years he would prove a very loose keeper of records, the US Commercial Agent at Hakodate, Elisha Rice, was initially very keen to prove his suitability for the post. In the first whaling season of his stay at Hakodate he recorded and sent to Washington a detailed report on US whaler visits which provides insights into their whaling circuits, ownership and experiences in port. A summary of the report is reproduced in Table 2.

The report showed that US whaling vessels for the most part weighed between 300 and 500 tons and that New Bedford was overwhelmingly the main home port of these vessels with fifteen of the twenty vessels listed based there. Of the remaining five vessels three were based at other ports on the US East Coast and the remaining two included a French vessel entering Hakodate under the US flag and a single vessel based at a Pacific port (San Francisco). Clearly the US whaling industry in the Pacific remained a primarily Atlantic endeavour in terms of ownership.

Information on the location of the vessel prior to its call on Hakodate and the destination upon departure are also included in the report. This provides an insight into Hakodate's place in US whaling circuits at the time. It shows that of the twenty vessels calling at Hakodate, twelve had come directly from Hawaii (Honolulu and Lahaina), whilst four came via Hong Kong or seas around China, and two each had been whaling in the Japan Sea or the Okhotsk Sea prior to their port call. This data underlines the importance of Hawaii as a key hub supporting American whaling in the Pacific with the Island Kingdom accounting for the majority of inbound vessels, exceeding even the nearby whaling grounds. In terms of destinations upon departure, eighteen of the twenty vessels travelled next to the Okhotsk Sea (including the Amur) and two others ventured into the Japan Sea to hunt. The overall pattern which emerges is one of East Coast whalers basing their Pacific operations at Hawaii and then calling on Hakodate prior to their hunts in the Okhotsk Sea and, on occasion, the Japan Sea. In this way, Hakodate served briefly as a supplementary port to Honolulu and Lahaina.

The report also showed that except for two ships, *Adeline* and *Rapid*

**Table 2 Details of Whalers Visiting Hakodate Between October 1857 and May 1858**

Vessel (Tonnage)	Period in Port	Home Port	Built	Previous Location	Destination	Other
Adeline (329)	19 Oct. 1857 – 4 Mar. 1858	New Bedford	Newcastle (Maine) 1825	Okhotsk	Japan Sea	1 discharged sick; 2 imprisoned; 1 deserter
Rapid (505)	19 Oct. 1857 – 4 Feb. 1858	New Bedford	Fairhaven (Mass.) 1856	Okhotsk	Japan Sea	3 imprisoned; 1 deserter
Josephine (445)	4 Mar. – 15 Mar. 1858	New Bedford	Fairhaven (Mass.)	1856	Honolulu	Okhotsk
Troup (430)	13 Mar. – 24 Mar. 1858	New Bedford	New York	1833	Lahaina	Okhotsk
Empire (403)	26 Mar. – 30 Mar. 1858	New Bedford	Charleston (Mass.)	1843	Honolulu	Okhotsk
Minerva (408)	26 Mar. – Apr. 4 1858	New Bedford	Charleston (Mass.) 1816	Honolulu	Okhotsk	–
Espanon (375)	26 Mar. – 6 Apr. 1858	Havre	Havre (France) 1845	Honolulu	Okhotsk	French vessel entered under US flag
Milton (388)	31 Mar. – 10 Apr. 1858	New Bedford	Milton (Mass.) 1815	Yellow Sea	Okhotsk	1 discharged sick
Bowditch (440)	2 Apr. – 9 Apr. 1858	Warren	Newburg (Mass.) 1823	Honolulu	Okhotsk	–
Couper (392)	2 Apr. – 13 Apr. 1858	New Bedford	Quincy (Mass.) 1826	Lahaina	Okhotsk	–
Covington (350)	2 Apr. – 14 Apr. 1858	Warren	Warren (Rhode Is.) 1825	Honolulu	Okhotsk	–
Isabella (316)	5 Apr. – 14 Apr. 1858	New Bedford	Bath (Maine) 1844	Lahaina	Okhotsk	1 imprisoned
Wavelet (300)	7 Apr. – 20 Apr. 1858	New Bedford	State of Maine 1853	Lahaina	Okhotsk	–
Kutusoff (415)	6 Apr. – 18 Apr. 1858	New Bedford	State of Mass. 1833	Lahaina	Okhotsk	2 imprisoned
Adeline (329)	12 Apr. – 16 Apr. 1858	New Bedford	Newcastle (Maine) 1825	Japan Sea	Okhotsk	–
Daniel Wood (346)	12 Apr. – 18 Apr. 1858	New Bedford	Rochester (Maine) 1852	Hong Kong	Okhotsk	–
Sheffield (578)	19 Apr. – 21 Apr. 1858	Cold Spring	Cold Spring (N. Y.) 1831	Hong Kong	Okhotsk	–
Rapid (505)	21 Apr. – 22 Apr. 1858	New Bedford	Fairhaven (Mass.) 1856	Japan Sea	Okhotsk	–
Alice Frazier (406)	22 Apr. – 26 Apr. 1858	New Bedford	Richmond (Maine) 1847	China Sea	Okhotsk	–
Sophia (82)	10 May – 14 May 1858	San Francisco	Dorchester (Maryland) 1845	Honolulu	Amur	–

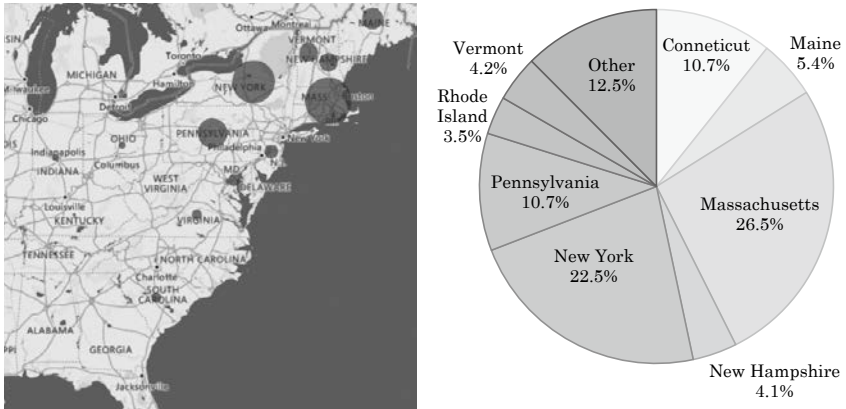
Source: Quarterly Returns of 1858 & 1859, Despatches from U.S. consuls in Hakodate, Japan, 1856-1878 (Available via Gale Cengage Learning, Nineteenth Century Collections Online)



which wintered at Hakodate for several months, all visitations were no longer than two weeks. Sixteen of the twenty visits proved largely uneventful. However, some visits could prove very disruptive indeed. The two vessels which wintered at Hakodate in 1857-58 saw five crew members imprisoned or sent aboard “in irons” for misdemeanours usually related to incidents of theft or drunken violence. Whilst two crew members also deserted from these vessels during the winter sojourn. Two shorter visits in April also saw three crew members imprisoned in a similar way. In such incidents the prisoners were arrested by officers of the Japanese authorities on behalf of the US Commercial Agent. Though in later years such disruptions appear to have been less frequent and severe, the occasional violent incident and desertion continued to occur.

Combining the ships registers that the US Commercial Agent with the extensive crew list database compiled by the New Bedford Whaling Museum, it is possible to obtain a relatively detailed picture of whaling crews visiting Hakodate.<sup>21</sup> Figure 2 and Table 3, for example, present data on the hometowns of crew members which appeared on crew lists for the years 1858 and 1859. During these years the crew lists of thirty-one vessels could be identified and because some of these vessels visited Hakodate more than once they account for forty of the fifty-two American whaler visits in the same period. The data which can be obtained from them confirm that, just like the ownership of the vessels, the north-eastern Atlantic states of the US were by far the most important recruiting ground for US Pacific whaling ventures. Massachusetts and New York State alone accounted for 49% of all crew, whilst Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Maine were also important recruiting states for the industry. Within these states, New London, New York, Boston, New Bedford and Philadelphia were particularly important recruitment sites, with each accounting for between 3.9 and 4.8% of the hometowns of whaling crew.

The crew lists also provide several other insights into this marine labour force. Using the same sample, we can see that crews typically numbered between twenty-five and fifty individuals and the average age of crew stood

**Figure 2 - Home States of Whaling Ship Crew Visiting Hakodate in 1858 and 1859**

Source: Compiled by author using the New Bedford Whaling Museum's Crew List Database ([https://www.whalingmuseum.org/online\\_exhibits/crewlist/](https://www.whalingmuseum.org/online_exhibits/crewlist/))

Note: The above data is derived from a sample of 691 cases from the data base in which the place of residence is listed.

**Table 3 Hometowns of Whaling Ship Crew Visiting Hakodate in 1858 and 1859**

Place of Residence	No.	Share of Total
New London (Connecticut)	33	4.8%
New York (New York)	32	4.6%
Boston (Massachusetts)	27	3.9%
New Bedford (Massachusetts)	27	3.9%
Philadelphia (Pennsylvania)	27	3.9%
Rochester (Massachusetts)	13	1.9%
Albany (New York)	11	1.6%
Easton (Pennsylvania)	10	1.4%
Dartmouth (New Hampshire)	9	1.3%
Fairhaven (Massachusetts)	9	1.3%
Portland (Maine)	9	1.3%
Total of Top 11	207	29.9%

Source: Compiled by author using the New Bedford Whaling Museum's Crew List Database ([https://www.whalingmuseum.org/online\\_exhibits/crewlist/](https://www.whalingmuseum.org/online_exhibits/crewlist/))

Note: The above data is derived from a sample of 691 individual cases from the data base in which the place of residence is listed.

at 23.4 years upon departure. Though the youngest crew member was twelve and the oldest fifty-five, almost four out of five (78%) crew were in their twenties and thus on the whole this was a relatively young and able-bodied workforce.

US Pacific whaling crews were also multi-ethnic. The crew lists include information on the skin colour of individual crew members and although the recording of this information was inconsistent, it is clear that most ships counted at least one or two African American or mixed-race crew members. In this way US whaler visits to ports like Hakodate entailed a multi-ethnic or multi-racial American presence.<sup>22</sup> The crew lists nevertheless are likely to understate the diversity of such crew because they usually provide only a list of the crew upon departure. Voyages into the Pacific often took a number of years at a time and given the dangerous nature of the work, injury or death as a result of accident or illness, as well as desertion among crew, were relatively common occurrences. As a result, whaling vessels were often compelled to recruit additional crew during their voyages and would commonly do so at the ports they visited—Hawaii in particular became an important source of recruits.<sup>23</sup> Additional recruitment made the composition of the crew transnational as well as multi-ethnic. Though we cannot easily know how much of the crew were non-Americans, hints at the transnational composition of the crew are provided by occasional references in newspapers to deaths on board. *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, for example, reported on 4 December 1856 that three crew members on the *Ontario*, the ship which later carried the US Commercial Agent to Hakodate, had died. The deceased were from the Azores, Hawaii and Madagascar. Similarly, the *Polynesian* gave a brief report on 25 October 1862 on the voyage of the *Othello*, which had resupplied at Hakodate that April before heading to the Okhotsk Sea where it was able to hunt thirty whales, producing 1,653 barrels of whale oil and 25,000 lbs. of whale bone. Two deaths occurred on board during the voyage. The first was an Easter Islander who “was crushed to death [...] by a cask of water rolling on him” and the other was a Hawaiian who “died of dysentery.” The reports on such

tragic deaths reveal the international nature of US Pacific whaling's human resources.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In this paper I have sketched the abrupt growth and decline of US whaling visits to Hakodate following the ports opening to such vessels in the wake of the Treaty of Peace and Amity. Though the concerns of the whaling industry were an important backdrop to US efforts to “open” Japanese ports, the industry entered a period of terminal decline within the decade after the treaty. The emergence of petroleum-based substitute products, the disruption caused by the US Civil War and other problems associated with the industry ensured that the whaling era at Hakodate would be brief. These were unforeseen developments and for a brief period after the opening of the port, US whalers called on Hakodate in not insignificant numbers in order to resupply their vessels before hunting in the Okhotsk and Japan Seas. Whilst some maintained high hopes for Hakodate, especially given its fine natural harbour, in most cases US whalers were left frustrated by the bureaucratic nature of the Japanese authorities in port and the currency issue. The presence of a US Commercial Agent from 1857 onwards briefly encouraged a greater traffic but the complaints continued and Hakodate was never destined to become a Honolulu of the North Pacific. Instead Hakodate very briefly became a stopover port for whalers active in the North Pacific and US Pacific whaling circuits remained dependant on Hawaii. Additionally, by profiling US whaling vessels and their crew I have shown that US Pacific whaling remained a reserve of the traditional whaling ports on the Atlantic East Coast though they presented to Hakodate a multi-ethnic and multi-national crew.

### **Acknowledgments**

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For a detailed and excellent study of this first venture: Yamamoto Yūzō, *Karorain fuuto-gō ga kita! Perii to harisu no hazama de* (Nagoya: Fūbaisha, 2017).
- <sup>2</sup> For a detailed study of the “opening” of Japan: Hiroshi Mitani (trans. David Noble), *Escape from Impasse: The Decision to Open Japan* (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2006).  
The official record of the expedition is still often referred to by scholars and is widely available, as is the diary of Townsend Harris: Francis Hawkes, *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan Performed in the Years 1852, 1853 and 1854 under the Command of Commodore M.C. Perry, United States Navy* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1856); Townsend Harris, *The Complete Journal of Townsend Harris: First American Consul General and Minister to Japan* (New York: Japan Society, 1930).
- <sup>3</sup> William Rossiter, ‘The First American Imperialist’, *The North American Review* 182, no. 591 (1906).
- <sup>4</sup> See for example: Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S.-Japan Relations* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).
- <sup>5</sup> For recent accounts that explore, reinterpret, and update the scholarship on the Meiji Restoration from a global perspective see: Robert Hellyer and Harald Fuess, eds., *The Meiji Restoration: Japan as a Global Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Mark Ravina, *To Stand with the Nations of the World: Japan’s Meiji Restoration in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- <sup>6</sup> The journal of Francis Hall (edited by Notehelfer) is a rare exception and gives a useful first-hand insight into American activities though largely focused on the 1860s: F. G. Notehelfer, ed. *Japan Through American Eyes: The Journal of Francis Hall, 1859-1866* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001).
- <sup>7</sup> Walter Tower, *A History of the American Whale Industry* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1907), 47-58.
- <sup>8</sup> Eric Jones, et al. *Coming Full Circle: An Economic History of the Pacific Rim* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 95.
- <sup>9</sup> Tower, *A History*, 52, 59.
- <sup>10</sup> Jakobina K. Arch, *Bringing Whales Ashore: Oceans and the Environment of Early Modern Japan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 71.
- <sup>11</sup> Eric J. Dolin, Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 242; Tower, *A History*, 81.
- <sup>12</sup> Robert L. Webb, *On the Northwest: Commercial Whaling in the Pacific Northwest, 1790-1967* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988), 32-33.
- <sup>13</sup> Prior to the Perry mission several American whalers ran into trouble in and around Ezo. This included seven stranded crew at Etorofu in 1846, fifteen stranded crew in Western Ezo in 1848, two US whaleship calling at Rishiri and Shiranushi (Karafuto)

in 1848 seeking aid or supplies, and three US rescued in North Ezo, most of which were returned via Nagasaki. See: Hakodateshishi Henshūka, *Hakodateshishi tsūsetsuhen nenpyōhen* (Hakodate: Hakodate-shi, 2007), 85-90.

<sup>14</sup> Aaron Haight Palmer, *Documents and Fact Illustrating the Origin of the Mission to Japan Authorized by Government of the United States, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1851, and Which Finally Resulted in the Treaty Concluded by Commadore M. C. Perry, U.S. Navy, with the Japanese Commissioners at Kanagawa, Bay of Yedo, on the 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1854*, (Washington: Henry Polkinhorn, 1857), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Tower, *A History*, 67.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>17</sup> Ivings and Eshack show how the US Commercial Agent tended to favour his own interest above those of his countrymen when it came to trade and sought to maintain a monopoly on access to the resources that US ships visiting the port desired. Steven Ivings and Rashaad Eshack, 'In the Black Ships' Wake: Early American Enterprise at Treaty Port Hakodate', *Pacific Historical Review* (forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> This article makes extensive use of quotations from the following magazines and newspapers. The date of the editions quoted will all be referred to in the text itself.

Available via the Library of Congress Historical American Newspapers Resource (<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>):

*The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*

*The Polynesian*

*San Francisco Herald*

Available via the Hawaiian Mission Houses Digital Collections (<https://hmhamissionhouses.org/collections/show/8>):

*The Friend*

<sup>19</sup> New Bedford Whaling Museum Research Library: Logbook of the Eliza F. Mason (Ship), ODHS 995

<sup>20</sup> Dr. Bates did not stay long in Hakodate and after trying his luck in Yokohama he travelled to China where he died in battle. An obituary to Dr. Bates appears in *The Polynesian* on 17 October 1863 details his background and death in China where he was serving as surgeon and commanding a company in the foreigner-led unit of the Chinese Imperial Army that fought the Taiping rebels and is better known as the "Ever Victorious Army" that fought the Taiping rebels.

<sup>21</sup> Crew List Database, New Bedford Whaling Museum Digital Archive: [https://www.whalingmuseum.org/online\\_exhibits/crewlist/](https://www.whalingmuseum.org/online_exhibits/crewlist/)

<sup>22</sup> Of 684 crew for which we have such information, 359 are described as having "dark" skin and 293 as "light" although it is unclear how these categories are applied in practice. In one letter Rice mentions 'two white & two black sailors' who deserted from the whaleship *Merlin*, offering, probably on behalf of the captain, \$5 for each if they could be "arrested and taken on board tonight without failure". See: United

States Consul to Hakodate Bugyō, 19 April 1866, Hakodate Bugyō Monjo.

- <sup>23</sup> On Hawaiian whaling labour see: Susan A. Lebo, 'A Hawaiian Perspective on Whaling in the North Pacific', *Senri Ethnological Studies* 84 (2013), 54.

Noell Wilson has shown that US whalers also hoped to secure recruits from Hakodate. Though Hakodate did not become a major source of labour for whalers, in a limited number of cases the Tokugawa authorities allowed Japanese to work on US whaling ships as a form of apprenticeship so that eventually a Japanese pelagic whaling industry might be established. Noell H. Wilson, 'Western Whalers in 1860s Hakodate: How the Nantucket of the North Pacific Connected Restoration Era Japan to Global Flows', in Robert Hellyer and Harald Fuess, eds., *The Meiji Restoration: Japan as a Global Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).