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Japan Opens to the West - Part II

Lead: For centuries Japan had kept itself isolated from the rest of the world. That changed on a summer day in 1853.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: For nearly half a century American clipper ships had dominated the oceans of the world. These fast, sleek, and graceful vessels had helped U.S. shippers maintain their lead in transport, but a clipper ship was merely the perfection of a very ancient technology and the Industrial

Revolution had created a new source of power and made possible a more efficient way of shipping goods. By the 1840s British-built coal fired steamships were taking the lead from the American clipper ships on the Atlantic ferry.

In the Pacific Ocean progress was hampered by the vast distances involved. No ship was large enough to hold enough coal to cross the Pacific. Therefore, shippers developed the Great Circle scheme. Ships would go up along the coast of Alaska and down to the markets of East Asia. They could do that by establishing coaling stations at various points along the way. The problem with this scheme was the giant gap in the route along

the Japanese archipelago. Japan refused to allow ships to land or to sell coal from its new discovered deposits.

In addition many American businessmen wanted to exploit the huge markets in China, and Christian mission societies pressed the governments of Europe and America to pave the way for evangelistic efforts. With Russia, Great Britain, France, and Holland all fishing around the waters of Japan, the American administration of President Millard Fillmore, in what may have been its most if not only significant act, determined to get there first. The United States organized an Expedition in 1853 to open relations with Japan. Another attempt, six years before had

**ended in humiliation and was rejected.
Therefore, to insure its success,
Fillmore chose Commodore Matthew
Perry to lead the flotilla. Next time:
The American shogun.**

**At the University of Richmond, this
is Dan Roberts.**

Resources

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