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**Early American Contacts with Korea**

by Harold F. Cook

Substantial American contact with Korea began in the autumn of 1945 in the wake of Japan’s surrender. The Korean War added a tremendous new dimension. Misunderstanding and misinterpretation remain, but Korea today is no longer an unknown quantity to the United States and to the American people. It was not always this way, however, and the story which I would like to tell in this article is how the United States first came into contact with Korea. To me, it is a very interesting chapter of both American and Korean history, and one well worth the telling. Above all, it is a story of people. In the limited amount of space available, my presentation will be accurate, indeed apodictic, but not necessarily complete.

One very important dimension, which is totally absent from my consideration, was the domestic political situation in the United States during the time frame under review in this article. As I am sure the reader is aware, however, American people throughout the nineteenth century were normally far more interested in their own domestic affairs than in foreign affairs. There was so little concern with diplomacy that the New York Sun could, and did, editorialize as late as February 1889, for example: “The diplomatic service has outgrown its usefulness. It is a costly humbug and sham. It is a nurse of snobs. It spoils a few Americans every year and does no good to anybody. Instead of making diplomats, Congress should wipe out the whole service.”

Viewed from another angle, the worm-eaten condition of the United States Navy reflected an almost incredible indifference to the outside world. The whole decrepit fleet in the 1870s, for example, reminded discerning, and concerned, contemporary naval observers of the dragons that the Chinese painted on their forts to frighten away the enemy. Not until 1883, and in the face of much apathy and opposition, did Congress appropriate funds for four modern steel ships, the beginning of the new navy that was to cover itself with glory in the Spanish-American War.

All of this, and much more, is tremendously germane to what I will attempt to cover in this article but, perforce, must be put aside. What follows, therefore, is but an introduction; a limited, but hopefully lucid, view of early American contacts with Korea.

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Early American interest in Korea stemmed from a desire to expand American trade in the Far East. Edmund Roberts, a special representative of the United States, returned from his explorations in this area in May 1834 to report to the secretary of state that one advantage in opening trade with Japan was the possibility that it could lead to trade with Korea. Eleven years later, in February 1845, Congressman Zodoc Pratt introduced in the House of Representatives a resolution calling for a mission to both countries to open them to trade. In part, Pratt said: “(T)he American People will be able to rejoice in the knowledge that the ‘star spangled banner’ is recognized as ample passport and protection for all who, of our enterprising countrymen, may be engaged in extending America commerce.” The resolution, however, failed to pass.

American attention again was directed toward Korea after the Civil War. In June of 1866 an American trading schooner, the “Surprise,” was wrecked off the western coast of present-day north Korea. Captain McCaslin and his crew were supplied by the local authorities with necessary comforts and were transported on horseback to the northwestern frontier, where they were delivered to some Chinese officials.

In late August of the same year, another American trading schooner, the “General Sherman,” entered the mouth of the Taedong river with a cargo of cloth, glass, tin plate, and other goods likely to prove saleable in Korea. Three Americans were on board, namely, Messrs. Preston, the owner; Page, the captain; and Wilson, the mate. The magistrate of the area dispatched a letter to the captain of the vessel asking why he had come. When the answer came that the vessel intended to enter into trade with the Koreans, the magistrate replied that this was impossible and asked the captain to go away.

Nevertheless, the “General Sherman” continued to proceed up the Taedong river. Heavy summer rains had raised the water level, and the vessel was able to reach a point upstream just below P’yongyang, the capital of present-day north Korea. When the river suddenly fell, however, the ship became grounded on a sandbar. Further negotiations were unsuccessful, and the crew of the “General Sherman” began to fire at the Koreans along the shore and in small boats nearby. The Koreans, in turn, prepared rafts loaded with brushwood, set them afire, and floated them down the river toward the “General Sherman.” The vessel was soon in flames, and all aboard, attempting to escape, jumped into the water. As they came ashore, they were killed to the last man.

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In the other half of this now-divided peninsula, the “General Sherman” incident is cited today as the first example of both imperialist American aggression against the country as well as the genesis of the uncountable patriotic actions of the direct-line ancestors of the incumbent ruler in the north. The latter’s official biography, for example, includes this entry:

His great-grandfather, Kim Ung-u, was an ardent patriot. When the U.S. pirate ship “General Sherman,” dispatched by the U.S. aggressors, invaded Korea along the Taedong River in August 1866, burning with patriotism, he fought fearlessly in the van of the masses and led them in the task of stretching ropes across the river to block the advance of the pirate ship.

Early the following year, i.e., 1867, Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt of the United States Navy sailed along the Korean coast in the vicinity of the mouth of the Taedong river in an attempt to learn the fate of the “General Sherman.” He met with no success. A second United States Navy vessel fared no better a year later. In the summer of 1868 the American secretary of state authorized his nephew, the consul general at Shanghai, to proceed to Korea to negotiate a commercial treaty. For one or more reasons, however, no action was taken.

In April of 1870, Frederick F. Low, the American minister to China, was instructed by the secretary of state to go to Korea and to negotiate a commercial treaty as well as a shipwreck convention. It was over a year later, nevertheless, in May of 1871, before Low reached the mouth of the Han river just below Kanghwa island. With him were Rear Admiral John Rodgers a fleet of five steamships and a complement of 1,200 men.

The Koreans refused to negotiate and, after several days, fired on a surveying party which had proceeded up the Han river. The Americans retaliated. They made short work of silencing the shore batteries and landed troops on Kanghwa who attacked the fortifications and routed the garrison. Minister Low could get the Koreans neither to negotiate nor to apologize, however, and the Americans were finally forced to withdraw. In his official report, Admiral Rodgers dramatically described certain aspects of this futile attempt at “gunboat diplomacy” in the following words:

On the 1st inst. while the Monocacy, Palos and four steam launches were engaged in surveying, they were suddenly assailed by a storm of missiles from masked batteries on the shore. [page 88]

The Corean Government having failed to make any apology for this murderous attack, on the 10th inst. an expedition.... was dispatched to punish the enemy. The operations of the 10th and 11th insts. Which resulted in the capture of five smaller forts, culminated on the 11th in taking, by assault, the enemy’s stronghold, located in a most formidable position, at a very dangerous part of the river, and desperately defended. Two hundred and forty-three of the enemy’s dead were counted wifhin and around these works, and fifty flags were taken. The works were formidable not only from the natural features of the land, from shoals and violent durrents in the river, but were rendered so by hundreds of weapons, of various kinds, placed by the enemy for their defense. The gallant band which encountered and overcame the perils of navigation, which fought its way, against vastly superior forces, through mud and marsh, over precipitous hills and across difficult ravines, and finally stormed and captured the enemy’s stronghold, is worthy of all praise.

To one and all the Commander in Chief expresses his thanks, and the pride he feels in commanding such a body of officers and men.

Among the honored dead whose loss we deplore, is Lieutenant Hugh W. McKee, who, gallantly leading his men to the assault, fell mortally wounded in the center of the citadel which he was the first to scale.

In February of 1876, Japan succeeded in signing a treaty with Korea and in opening that country to trade, The tactics used by the Japanese were not unlike those employed by American Navy Commodore Matthew C. Perry in opening Japan a little over two decades earlier. Japan’s accomplishment in Korea stimulated the interest of the United States and other Western nations to follow suit.

In April of 1878, Senator A. A. Sargent of California introduced a joint resolution authorizing the president to appoint a commission to negotiate a treaty with Korea “with the aid of the friendly offices of Japan.” The resolution, however, was never adopted.

In December of the same year, nevertheless, Commodore Shufeldt, who had first visited the west coast of Korea a decade earlier, sailed from Hampton Roads on a commercial and diplomatic mission to several countries which brought him to Far Eastern waters in the spring of 1880. [page 89]In part, Shufeldt was instructed to visit “some port of the Corea with the endeavor to reopen by peaceful measures negotiations with that govern-ment” and, in all events, to pursue “a moderate and conciliatory course.” John A. Bingham, the American minister at Tokyo, was directed to solicit Japan’s good offices to facilitate Shufeldt’s mission.

Commodore Shufeldt arrived at Nagasaki, Japan in April. Minister Bingham, however, informed him that the Japanese government declined to commend his mission to the favorable consideration of Korea on the grounds that this “might give rise to some complications whereby the execution of our treaty with that country might be somewhat prevented.” The Japanese did assist Shufeldt, however, by sending his letter to the Korean king via the Japanese minister in Seoul, Hanabusa Yoshimoto. The Koreans, on the other hand, returned the letter unopened because, among other things, it was “improperly addressed.”

In the meantime, however, the Chinese consul at Nagasaki gave Shufeldt an “official invitation, but confidential” from the great Chinese statesman Li Hung-chang to come to Tientsin “to discuss matters.” The two men met on August 26, 1880 and talked for three hours. Shufeldt reported:

After a prolonged discussion, in which the strategic position of the peninsula of Korea with reference to Russia, China and Japan was pointed out, His Excellency told me that I might say to my government that he would use his influence with the government of Corea to accede to the friendly request made by me in behalf of the government of the United States to open negotiations with a view to such a treaty as before mentioned.

If any means can now be found to get beyond the barred gates and to reach the central government, I am convinced that Corea could be made to understand not only the policy of a treaty with the United States, but its absolute necessity as a matter of protection against the aggression of surrounding powers. Corea would in fact be the battlefield of any war between China and Russia or Japan in whichever way these nations might confront each other.

How prophetic!

Shufeldt returned to the United States in the autumn of 1880 for consultations. The following summer, however, he was back in the Far [page 90] East with his daughter as his secretary and with the official title of attache to the American legation at Peking. His principal assignment, however, was to conclude a treaty with Korea.

After several months of fruitless waiting, Shufeldt finally was able to begin negotiations with Li Hung-chang in March of 1882. They exchanged treaty drafts, and Li promised that if an envoy did not come from Korea within thirty days, he would send a Chinese official to Korea with Shufeldt.

Another month dragged on, a third treaty draft emerged, and difficulties narrowed down to the form of acknowledgement of the existence of the traditional tributary relations between China and Korea. At last all was ready.

Commodore Shufeldt left Chefoo, China on the U.S. Navy corvette “Swatara” (1,900 tons; 8 guns) and anchored off Chemulp’o, Korea on May 12. He was preceded by four days by two Chinese officials and three Chinese gunboats. A Japanese man-of-war was also in port when Shufeldt, arrived, Minister Hanabusa having just returned from Tokyo. Meetings of the Korean Chinese, and American officials were held on May 14 and 20,and the “Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Corea or Chosen” was signed at Chemulp’o on May 22,1882. Commodore Shufeldt made the following memorandum:

At 9:30 a.m. Commodore Shufeldt, accompanied by Commander P.H. Cooper land than he goes on to name the officers who accompanied him], and preceded by the marine guard of the U.S.S. Swatara.... left the ship and proceeded to the place previously selected for the signing of the treaty between the United States and Corea, which was on the mainland near the town of Chemulp’o and in full view of the ship at anchor.... He proceeded at once to the tent which had been put up by the Corean authorities, finding there two commissioners on the part of Chosen.... After a little preliminary conversation, the six copies of the treaty, three in English and three in Chinese, were sealed and signed by Commodore Shufeldt on the part of the United States, and by the two commissioners already named on the part of Chosen. As soon as the signing was completed, at a signal from the shore, the Swatara fired a salute of 21 guns in honor of the King of Chosen. Commodore Shufeldt and party then returned on board the Swatara.

The treaty itself was an interesting document, containing fourteen [page 91] articles. Article I,e.g., stated:

There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the President of the United States and the King of Chosen and the citizens and subjects of their respective Governments. If other Powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either Government, the other will exert their good offices, on being informed of the case, to bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings.

This Article I,by the way, was the rock on which Korean-American relations foundered a quarter of a century later when Japan annexed Korea. At that time, Korea chose to interpret it literally, and the United States did not. But this was after the Spanish-American and Russo- Japanese wars. America got the Philippines; Japan got Korea.

Extraterritoriality was included in the 1882 treaty with the provision that it would be abandoned when the “statutes and judicial procedures” of Korea conformed “to the laws and course of justice in the United States.” Other articles provided for the exchange of diplomatic and consular representatives, protection of navigation and United States citizens, trade, and most-favored-nation treatment.

In a separate letter from the Korean king to the American president, the former declared:

Korea is a dependency of China, but the management of her governmental affairs, home and foreign, have always been vested in the Sovereign.... In the matter of Korea being a dependency of China any questions that may arise between them in consequence of such dependency, the United States shall in no way interfere.

The United States—Korea treaty, the first such instrument which Korea signed with a Western power, was ratified at Washington in Feburary 1883,and Lucius H. Foote was appointed the first American minister to the Korean court. Foote was born in New York state in 1826, the son of a Congregational minister. He attended Knox College and Western Reserve but graduated from neither, being of a restless temperament and unable to confine himself to the routine of school work. In 1853 he went to California where he studied law, was admitted to the bar, and served a four-year term as a municipal judge in Sacramento. His subsequent posts included that of collector of the port of Sacramento, adjutant-general of the state of California, and delegate to the 1876 Republican national convention. From 1879 to 1882, Foote served as American consul at Valparaiso, Chile. He was on the verge of assuming another diplomatic [page 92] post in Colombia when he received the nomination as first American minister to Korea.

Minister Foote, his wife, and their party left San Francisco at the end of March 1883 enroute to Korea. The secretary of state, Frederick T. Frelinghuysen, instructed him as follows:

Briefly then your mission is:

1. To exchange the ratifications of the Treaty....

2. To cultivate friendly relations with the Government and people of Corea, to allay jealousy and convince them of the amicable sentiments of the United States.

3. To report fully as to the relations of Corea, China, and Japan that appropriate steps may be taken to secure for our citizens the privileges granted to the Chinese in [their] Com- mercial Regulations.

4. To inform this Department fully as to all matters of political importance or of interest to those engaged in commerce; and you will from time to time send here for publication any information which may promote trade between the United States and Corea.The present being the first mission established by this Government with that of Chosen, there is, of course, no precedent to guide you concerning your diplomatic correspondence, and your own judgement and discretion must therefore be relied upon in the premises. Your former Consular experience will no doubt materially assist you in the discharge of these new and important duties. Special instructions upon important subjects between the two governments, will be sent to you, from time to time as occasion may require.

On the day on which he sailed from San Francisco, Foote replied to the secretary of state: “In the hurry of my departure I have scarcely read this letter of instructions....”

Foote spent two weeks in Japan enroute to Korea. He conferred with American Minister Bingham in Tokyo, had an audience with the Japanese emperor, and obtained such provisions as would be needed during his residence at Seoul. Upon the personal recommendation of Minister Bingham, he also engaged two interpreters, one a Japanese and the other a Korean. The former was Saito Shuichiro, at the time private secretary to the Japanese foreign minister, Inoue Kaoru. He later earned a doctorate of law and became senior secretary in the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce. The latter was the famous Yun Ch’i-ho, who needs no [page 93] introduction to anyone at all acquainted with modern Korean history. In the words of Dr. L. George Paik, in his classic History of Protestant Missions in Korea: “There has not yet been among the Korean people a Christian leader the equal of Yun Ch’i-ho.”

The English language press in Japan, controlled by British interests and critical from the start of America’s Korea policy, made these uncomplimentary remarks:

As to General Foote, from the forlorn sort of way in which he has been sent out by his Government, without interpreters, and himself without any practical knowledge of the peoples of the East, it is not to be wondered at, that by the aid of Mr. Bingham, he should have dropped into the hands of the the Japanese, who of course are only too happy in furnishing General Foote with interpreters, to have the opportunity of learning from them whatever passes between the U.S. Envoy and the Korean authorities, and to act accordingly.... Great Britain and Germany have decided to postpone the ratifications of their treaties until the end of the year. This is a wise move. America’s action was precipitate and will only embarrass negotiations. The Korean Government is ignorant, greedy, and poverty stricken.... Its officials are anxious for foreign trade.... but it requires both time and argument to make them understand the best course to be taken.

Minister Foote and his party sailed from Nagasaki for Chemulp’o on May 8,1883 on the U.S. Navy gunboat “Monocacy” (1,370 tons; 6 guns), one of the five ships which had taken part in the engagement at Kanghwa island twelve years earlier. Of Civil War vintage, the “Monocacy” was one of the navy’s last side-wheeler paddle steamers. Of his overland journey from the port to Seoul, via sedan chairs, ponies, and pack animals, Foote commented:

The women fled at our approach, but the men and children remained to gaze at us, manifesting much curiosity but no animosity.... Long before we reached the gates of the city proper, we were passing through narrow, filthy streets, and after entering the city the same conditions seemed to prevail.

The ratified copies of the Korean-American treaty were exchanged at the newly-established Korean foreign office in Seoul on May 19, and Foote was received by the King in royal audience on the 20th, the first accredited:

[page 94] [The King sent for us in his own carriage], the first and only one in Corea. It is a handsome coupe with a darkbrown body. The upholstering is in heavy green silk brocade, with gold braid trimmings. It was drawn upon this occasion by a span of spirited black ponies in handsome harness; the coachman and footman are Japanese, the Coreans not yet having learned the art of driving. The entire establishment came from Japan. . . . The King [himself] is a man of short stature with a pleasant face and polished manners. . . . His bearing was dignified throughout.

After returning briefly to Chemulp’o to get his baggage and his wife. Foote took up residence in Seoul and opened the American legation there in June. The legation property in Chong-dong, behind the Toksu palace, continues to this day as the site of the residence of the American ambassador. It was apparently the first property in Korea sold to a Westerner and was also one of the very few properties at that time or since which was sold to Westerners but which retained its essentially Korean character. Although the original building was demolished in the mid-1970s, its replacement was designed and constructed in Korean style. Ambassador and Mrs. Richard Sneider were its first occupants, in May 1976.

At the time it was torn down, the original building had been in the possession of the United States government for a longer period of time than any other ambassador’s residence owned by the United States anywhere in the world. Minister Foote paid $2,200 for his original residence. Its modern replacement reportedly cost $502,000.

Minister Footers earliest impressions of Korean affairs are contained in extracts from two reports which he wrote not long after taking up residence at Seoul. The first:

In a former dispatch I expressed the opinion that the Government of Seoul although absolute in its character, had little real strength. Since arriving here this opinion is rather confirmed than otherwise. . . . The common people barely exist by the results of their labor, and any exhibition of wealth is made an excuse for unjust exactions.

and the second:

I find myself and family in the midst of a people, whose ways and customs are totally different from our own, and to whom I am an object of curiosity. . . . Although the Government is well disposed there is a large party opposed [page 95] to what they consider foreign innovations. . . . Whether the Government is strong enough to control this element is a matter which I am not prepared to discuss. The presence of an American man-of-war would be most acceptable and would have a good moral effect upon these peculiar people.

A year later, in early June 1884, Minister Foote’s legation staff was augmented by a young U.S. Navy Ensign, George C. Foulk. Foulk was a remarkable character. Born in the state of Pennsylvania in 1856, he graduated third in a class of 42 at the Naval Academy in 1876. He immediately went on the Asiatic station, where he served during two tours and where he attracted the favorable attention of his commanding officers by reason of his studious habits and his knowledge and execution of his duties. He learned the Japanese language and, if we can believe the record,at least acquainted himself with Russian, French, three dialects of Chinese, Persian, Hindustani, and Sanskrit. In the summer of 1880 he made an overland trip from Kobe to Yokohama along the Nakasendo. In the summer of 1882 he briefly visited both Pusan and Wonsan in the course of a trip which took him from Japan across Siberia by stagecoach and river boat, through Europe by train, and back to the United States via the Atlantic ocean. He wrote detailed accounts of both his 1880 and 1882 adventures, the latter of which was published.

Foulk was in Washington, serving in the naval library, at the time that Min Yong-ik and the first Korean embassy reached that city in September 1883. He volunteered to escort the group while it was in the United States and subsequently was ordered to return to Korea with them. In the course of his assignment, Foulk learned the Korean language, probably the first American ever to do so.

In the December 1884 incident at Seoul, the background of which I have traced in my book on Kim Ok-kyun, Foulk’s house was vandalized and all his personal property stolen or destroyed. A partial listing of his loss helps to give us some better idea of the man and his character: 100 Manila cigars and 1 bronze cigar holder; 1 compass and 1 pedometer; 1 Korean wind bell and 30 Korean fans; 1 ancient Japanese tea caddy and 4 rare Japanese lacquer bowls; 1 extra large tiger skin and 2 small tiger skins; 1 specimen fossil shell; 1 inflatable rubber bath tub; and one copy each of the following books: Korean-Manchu, Japanese telephone directory, Russian dictionary, French dictionary, Aston’s Japanese Grammar, Shanghai Chinese, Arabic (Persian), Sanscrit, Hindustani Phrase Book, Canton Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, Clips from a German Workshop, Origin of Nations, Dawn of History, Manual of [page 96] Handbook of Rome, Handbook of Westminister Abbey, Last Days of Pompeii, Nautical Almanac, Photography Textbook, Rein’s Japan, Huc’s China, Corea: The Hermit Nation, Cookbook, Yokohama Japanese, Japanese Etiquette, Grammarie Coreene, Korean Geographic Names, Upton’s Infantry Tactics, and one complete set of charts of Korean coasts and harbors. No ordinary individual, this erstwhile farm boy from Marietta, Pennsylvania!

When Minister Foote resigned and left Korea in early January, 1885, Foulk succeeded him at the American legation as charge d’affaires. He continued to serve there under various titles until he left Korea in June 1887.

The first American to be offered employment as an adviser by the Korean government apparently was Gustavus Goward. Goward was born in Boston in 1845, graduated from Harvard with the class of 1869, and dropped out of Harvard Law School in 1872. This latter event didn’t seem to tarnish his reputation, however, for when he began service with the Department of State in 1877 he had supporting letters of recommendation from two ex-presidents of Harvard, Thomas Hill and A. P. Peabody.

Goward exchanged treaty ratifications at Samoa, took possession of the harbor at Pago Pago for the United States, and in recognition of his service was offered, but declined, the premiership of the islands. Thereafter, he traveled extensively in Latin America on various special assignments.

By the spring of 1883,Goward was on his way to Tokyo to take up a new appointment as secretary of legation, although he advised the secretary of state: “If possible, I should much prefer to go to Persia as Consul General.” With him, Goward carried the recently ratified United States treaty with Korea.

In his own words, it was not the Tokyo appointment which motivated Goward to set out from San Francisco for Yokohama on March 6,1883:

This appointment might have taken me, as I have been led to suppose, to Corea, had I not been relieved by Minister Footers arrival in Japan. ... It is certainly well known in the Department [of State] that the prospect of taking the Treaty to Corea was the inducing motive which led me to Japan. . . .

Scarcely two weeks after Goward arrived in Tokyo, Minister Foote passed through on his way to Seoul and picked up the ratification copy of [page 97] the Korean treaty. There matters might have stood, as far as Goward and Korea were concerned, had it not been for Kim Ok-kyun’s arrival in Tokyo a few weeks later. For Kim, one of the pioneer advocates of enlightenment and reform in late nineteenth century Korea, this was his third visit to the Japanese capital in a little over a year. The principal object of his visit was to borrow money.

Goward had wanted to go to Korea with the ratified treaty. He failed. Then Kim Ok-kyun came to Tokyo with plans for modernization and reform; plans which required a foreign loan. Goward apparently listened with great interest. He decided that here was his second chance. Only a week after Kim’s arrival in Tokyo, and scarcely three months after his own assumption of duties at the American legation, Goward wrote directly to the American secretary of state requesting sixty days’ leave of absence. His request was approved.

Goward started his leave on September 26,1883 and returned to duty on December 6. In the interim he made “an extended tour of the coasts and parts of the interior” of Korea and “spent three weeks in Seoul.” He was present in the Korean capital during the course of the negotiations of the second British and German treaties with Korea. In Goward’s own words:

While at Seoul I was tendered unsolicited the highest position ever offered to a foreigner by the Corean government. [I declined, however,] because I considered it my duty not to entertain the proposition while holding my present em-ployment, although strongly urged to accept. . . . Even today in Tokio, the Corean representatives are constantly coming for advice and look to America for instruction and support. My last communication from Corea reads “His Majesty has again manifested anxiety as to the American appointments and hopes to hear soon.” At this time, the influence of an American, versed in politics, in that high position would be of greatest benefit to the U.S. Government.

Minister Foote, in commenting on a royal audience which took place just days before Goward’s arrival in Seoul in October, wrote that the Korean King had told him:

I desire the services of an American gentleman; one who can write the Mandarin language of China; to act in an advisory capacityin my Office of Foreign Affairs. . . . I will give to him the second rank in that office.

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It is quite reasonable to conclude that Foote and Goward are reporting here in an identical context. Goward, however, had no familiarity with the “Mandarin language of China.” This fact alone possibly would have disqualified him. More than this, however, Goward apparently had already lost interest in Korea. After a trip to Seoul, he seems to have come to the conclusion that neither Kim Ok-kyun nor Korea was quite what he had been led to expect. In any event, Goward wrote again to the secretary of state in April 1884:

The Representative of the Corean Government here in Tokio . . . desired to take back with him my decision as to entering the Corean service. . . . Personally I am not anxious to exile myself to barren Corea and do service under a foreign flag. ...

And so, although he ultimately chose not to serve, Goward merits the somewhat dubious distinction of heading the long parade of greats and not-so-greats who, over these many years, have offered American advice to Korea.

With the exchange of treaty ratifications and the opening of the U.S. legation in Seoul, it was but natural for American merchants to want to come to Korea in order to have a firsthand look at trading potentialities. As far as can be determined, Captain George B. Mott, originally from New York, was the first American merchant to visit Korea after the exchange of treaty ratifications. With a quantity of stores for trading purposes, Mott left Nagasaki on a small Japanese schooner sometime in June 1883. He was in Korea only a few days, however, when he suddenly took sick and died at Chemulp’o on July 10. His is the first recorded burial in the Inch’on Foreigners’ Cemetery.

The first American merchant to reside in Korea seems to have been Captain Charles H. Cooper, who also came originally from New York. In September 1883, American Minister Foote requested his Japanese counterpart, Takezoe Shinichiro, to permit an American merchant to reside in the Japanese settlement at Chemulp’o inasmuch as there still was no general foreign settlement at that port. The Japanese minister gave his consent and instructed his consul at Chemulp’o, Kobayashi Hataichi, to extend all necessary courtesies. At practically the same time, American Minister Bingham in Tokyo issued Cooper a new passport to facilitate his travel to Korea.

Reminiscing fifty years later, Hisamizu Saburo, one of the original group of Japanese who opened the consulate in 1883, and who subsequently became mayor of Inch’on in the colonial period after 1910, [page 99] recalled Captain Cooper in these uncomplimentary terms:

One American came in December 1883. He lived in a shabby building in front of the gate of the Chinese government office. While living like a beggar, he sold canned goods and Western liquor which he obtained from Nagasaki. He was the first foreign merchant at Inch’on [i.e., Chemulp’o].

Cooper engaged in business at Chemulp’o as the proprietor of a general store, forwarding agent, and auctioneer for the next six years. In June 1884, Minister Foote concluded an agreement with Cooper for the construction of a house, 48 feet long by 42 feet wide, on a lot measuring 164 feet by 164 feet, reserved for the American consulate. Rent was set at $40 per month. The intention was to hold the lot and building for future use as a consulate.

Cooper died on December 13,1889 and, like Mott, was buried in the Inch’on Foreigners’ Cemetery. The United States, by the way, never did open a consulate at Chemulp’o.

American Trading Company, originally founded under another name at New York in 1857 and at one time the largest general American trading house in the Orient, took an early interest in Korea. The aforementioned Kim Ok-kyun became acquainted with American Trading Company in Yokohama and personally brought its first representative to Korea in May 1884. The man was Walter D. Townsend, a young American who was born in Boston in 1856,who had arrived in Japan in late December 1878 to work for the company in Yokohama, and who had moved to Kobe in the latter half of 1880 to open its branch there.

Townsend spent the first few months in Korea getting acquainted. Doubtless he met more than once with Captain Cooper at Chemulp’o. By October, he had made a trip into the interior in order to buy a quantity of rice for resale at that port. Townsend ran into trouble with the local Korean authorities, however, with the result that Minister Foote wrote the following letter on his behalf to the Korean foreign office:

Two junk loads of rice, in which Mr. W. D. Townsend, a citizen of the United States, has one half interest, are detained at Yong Ho, by order of the Governor or Magistreate of the District. This rice was bought in the district of Kim Joi [Kimje] by Choe Han Yo [Ch,oe Han-yo] and Choe Sa Haeung [Ch’oe Sa-hyong], the Agents of Mr. Townsend and others, and was intended for shipment to Chemulpo.

By Treaty stipulations, citizens of the United States have [page 100] the right to purchase produce in the interior of Corea, and to have it transported to the open ports, without being subject to the payment of any tax, excise or transit duty whatsoever. . . . I could therefore ask Your Excellency to direct the Governor or Magistrate by whose order these junks are being detained to release the same, that they may proceed on their way to Chemulpo.

This letter was written by Minister Foote on November 27,1884. Before the matter could be resolved, however, the previously cited December 4th incident occurred at Seoul, and final disposition of Townsend’s rice problem became lost in the pages of history.

As mentioned earlier with regard to Ensign Foulk, Townsend too was in Seoul at the time of the December 1884 incident. A Japanese employee of the newly established Korean postal service,Sugano koichi, wrote an eyewitness account of the incident which included the following colorful reference to Townsend:

Townsend, his Japanese wife, and child lived near the Japanese legation. Since the disturbance on the night of the 4th, they had been staying at the legation. Townsend had a long sword stuck in a sash around his waist, and he carried a rifle. He was guarding the Japanese legation with some Japanese soldiers. On the morning of December 7, he decided to go the American legation. Therefore, accompanied by a Japanese who spoke Korean well, he and his family went to the American legation.

Among the articles pillaged from Townsend’s house at the time of the incident were the following. In the case of Foulk, the partial listing helped us to know more about the character of the man himself. In the case of Townsend, on the other hand, we can get some idea of the contents of the home of a Western foreigner in Seoul in this period of early contact: 2 bags of flour; 1 bags of potatoes; 3 bags of beans; 2 bags of turnips; 24 pints of beer; 3½ bottles of brandy; 3 dozen cans of milk; 2 dozen cans of vegetables; 4 bottles of raisins; 6 tins of jam; 4 tins of butter; 6 cups and saucers; 12 dinner plates; 6 dessert plates; 6 soup bowls; 24 forks, knives, and spoons; 6 glass tumblers; 6 Sherry glasses; 6 Claret glasses; 3 pairs of window curtains; 6 bed sheets; 2 pillows; 6 pillow cases; 5 blankets; 12 towels; 1 rug; 2 umbrellas; 1 revolver; 160 cartriages; 2 lamps; 1 lot of medicine; 1 overcoat; 4 suits of clothes; 3 shirts; 2 pairs of underpants; 1 pair of boots; 12 linen handkerchiefs; 2 dozen cotton socks; 1 horse; and 1 saddle and bridle.

[page 101]

Concerning Townsend, U.S. Navy Ensign George C. Foulk, in his capacity as charge d’affaires at the American legation, reported to the secretary of state in mid-1885:

Mr. W. D. Townsend, Agent for the American Trading Company of Yokohama makes frequent visits to Korea and has executed considerable commission business for the Korean government, such as importing stock animals of the several kinds from America for the Korean government farm, table-ware, furniture, etc. for the Palace, arms and ammunition etc. The business transacted by this company to date will probably foot up to $175,000 paid up in full.

On behalf of American Trading Company, Townsend also contracted for the purchase of timber from Ullung Island off Korea’s east coast. He subsequently discovered, however, that the Koreans had sold the same rights to both Japanese and British interests. Townsend also gets credit for introducing to Korea the horse and dray, a water pumping windmill, and a mechanized rice cleaning mill.

Moving ahead just a bit, in March 1896 the American Trading Company signed an agreement with the Korean government for the right to construct the country’s first railroad, the line between Chemulp’o and Seoul. Ground was broken at a point about two-thirds of a mile from the waterfront of downtown Chemulp’o on March 22,1897 with Townsend supervising a group of “fifty picked coolies” equipped with Amrican wheelbarrows, shovels, and pickaxes.

“Oil for the lamps of China” is an expression well-known to many, but few are those who are aware that it was Townsend, as agent for Standard Oil Company of New York and the Rochester Lamp Company, who pioneered, and profited by, the import of “oil for the lamps of Korea,” marketing not only the oil but also the lamps in which to burn it.

Walter D. Townsend stayed on in Korea for thirty-four years, longer than any other of the first-generation pioneers, and died at Chemulp’o on March 10,1918. Like Mott and Cooper before him, he too was buried in the Inch’on Foreigners’ Cemetery.

American Trading Company Korea, Ltd., which has its offices in Seoul today is the same company which Townsend first introduced to Korea a century years ago.

The first Protestant missionary to take up residence in Korea was also an American, Dr. Horace N. Allen. Born in Ohio in 1858,Allen attended Ohio Wesleyan and earned his medical degree in 1883. He went to China in the same year as a missionary for the Presbyterian Board of [page 102] Foreign Missions. By September 1884,however, he was at Seoul, ana since missionaries were not yet allowed to work openly in the country, he was passed off to the Koreans as the physician to the American legation. Minister Foote, in fact, helped Allen to secure property adjacent to the American legation grounds.

Allen’s earliest impressions of Korea, as reflected in his diary and in his correspondence, were not favorable. With reference to Walter D. Townsend, for example, the man whom I introduced to you just a moment ago, Allen had this to say:

I am staying at a new Corean hotel . . . $1.50 per day and you get nothing to eat unless you furnish it [yourself]. . . . I sleep on a board with my shoes for a pillow. . . . The nights are very cold. . . . W. D. Townsend with his Japanese mistress is also here. He represents the American Trading Co. . . . The morals of the men up here are shocking. All keep mistresses nearly.

With reference to the Koreans, Allen had this to say:

The Coreans squeeze most unmercifully, and for one who does not speak their language it is very uphill work. . . . We cannot use these people as servants yet as they are not educated. . . . [and] are so dirty, lazy and such downright thieves withall, that they can never amount to much. Please send a man out in the spring. These Coreans will carry us away if you don’t. They have already stolen stones from the floors and tiles from the roofs. I tried a Corean watchman and found him a fraud. . . . [Minister] Foote showed me I could not trust them and I got a Chinaman to watch the premises at $10.00 a month—mission expense.

In fairness to Townsend, I might add, Allen wrote in the following fashion twenty years later in 1904, when both men were still here:

He [i.e., Townsend] is a very highly respected man here and good in all things. Stands in Korean circles much as does his brother in Boston circles. . . . [His mother], (o)ld Mrs. Townsend, is the bluest of New England blood. . . . He is the most conservative man out here. . . . His business is flourishing well . . . .

In fairness, or rather unfairness, to the Koreans, I might further add, Allen never completely changed his mind. Again, writing nearly twenty years later in early 1903, and again in early 1904, he had this to say:

The Koreans do get on ones nerves horribly. I wish often [page 103] that I could get away where I would never see a Korean. . . . It has been disgusting for a long time trying to do anything with such an excuse for a government. The people cannot govern themselves. Let Japan have Korea outright if she can get it.

And that’s the way it all began: Rodgers, McKee, Shufeldt, Foote, Foulk, Mott, Cooper, Townsend, Allen . . . and many others whom space does not permit me to mention. They were the pioneers, each in his own way, and theirs are the names to which history has accorded a special place. It has been my pleasure, in this brief article, to introduce them to the reader.

But now, by way of brief epilogue. . . .

The first Western nation to come to Seoul with accredited diplomatic representation, the United States, also was the first to haul down the flag and leave, immediately after Japan forced a protectorate treaty on Korea on November 17,1905; that is, just five years before formal annexation. The last American minister to the Yi court, Edwin V. Morgan, cabled the secretary of state ten days later:

I have informed Korean Minister for Foreign Affairs that in compliance with your instructions I have today placed the property and archives of this legation in the hands of the United States Consul General at Seoul and am about to withdraw from Korea.

Terse and lacking in emotion, is it not? But read now the poetical effusion of the “poet laureate” of the United States Marine guard, which was withdrawn from the Seoul legation at this same time. The more discerning reader will probably regard this anonymous author as a poetaster, rather than a poet laureate. But, if you are at all familiar with the history of this part of the world, it cannot fail to bring to mind all sorts of images.

Remember, if you will, the time element here is the autumn of 1905. The Spanish-American War was an affair then seven years past. The Portsmouth Conference had just brought an end to the very costly (to both sides) Russo-Japanese War. A few months earlier, President Theodore Roosevelt had instructed his secretary of war, William Howard Taft, who was enroute to the Philippines, to reach what might correctly be termed a “balance of power” understanding with Japanese Prime Minister Katsura Taro. In Tokyo, Taft informed Katsura that the United States would not jnterfere if Japanese troops established “suzerainty over Korea to the extent of requiring that Korea enter into no foreign treaties [page 104] without the consent of Japan.” In return, he sought Katsura’s assurances that Japan “did not have any aggressive designs upon the Philippines.” These mutual assurances were incorporated into the remarkable “Agreed Memorandum” of July 29,1905,generally referred to as the Taft-Katsura Agreement. Even the American minister in Tokyo at the time. Lloyd C. Griscom, had no knowledge of this agreement.

But, now the departing Marine’s poem:

Our ship is in the harbour, so we’d better say “goodbye.”

To say we’re pleased to leave, would be to tell a lie.

But now that we have got to go, we ain’t a-goin’ to cry.

And we sail for Manila in the morning.

The “Yellow legs” are happy, to know we’re going away.

The Koreans are at their mercy, and don’t have a say.

They sit and dream and fan themselves, and to their Buddha pray.

But we’ll be on the briny in the morning.

For the Japanese damsels, I have a word to say,

With their pin toes, and their pink cheeks,

They’re all right in their way.

But the maidens in Manila, beat them holler any day.

And we’re going for to meet them in the morning.

We’ve seen the whole of Seoul, and whilst seeing used some paint.

But you must likewise remember, a marine is not a Saint.

But he’s always there when wanted, and never does a faint.

And he goes upon the troopship in the morning.

This is the last farewell, this stab twixt prose and rhyme.

I’ve been hitting up the sake, and am handicapped for time.

The American Guara is sailing, they’ve blown in their last dime.

And are pulling out at high tide, in the morning.

So goodbye to the white folks, that wish for us the best.

It matters not what others think, they can go back and rest.

If ever you need men out here, we’ll come and stand the test.

But we’re sailing for Manila in the morning.

Korea did “need men out here” again . . . and not just the American Marines, but also the Army and Navy and Air Force. They did come back [page 105] “and stand the test” . . . and still are here today. And, although I’ve never been to Manila, I had a year and a half in Yokohama behind me when I too came in those hot, hectic days of early July 1950 . . . and have had Korea on my mind and in my heart ever since.

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