

On the Jagged Shores of Japan: The Story of the Walker Brothers

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When the Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK) steamship Takachiho-maru pulled up anchor in Nagasaki Harbor on the evening of May 10, 1891, Captain Robert N. Walker's three oldest children Annie, John and Robert Jr. were standing in front of the customhouse on the Sagarimatsu waterfront and waving in the hope that their father would catch a glimpse of them from the window on the bridge.

The three-masted, iron-screw steamship had been built in England in 1873 as the Lotus, purchased by the Japanese government and consigned to the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company in 1877 for use as a transport vessel during the Satsuma Rebellion. It had then been transferred to NYK at the inauguration of that company in 1885, and after refitting and renovations at the Mitsubishi Dockyard and Engine Works in Nagasaki in 1886, had been put under the charge of Captain Walker and used exclusively for the regular service from Kobe to Vladivostok via Nagasaki and the Korean ports of Pusan and Gensan.

Tonight the Takachiho-maru was carrying 500 tons of general cargo, \$40,000 in coins and notes, and about fifty passengers including Frederick Ringer—Nagasaki's most prominent foreign businessman and an old friend of both Captain Walker and his brother Captain Wilson Walker. On any other occasion the ship would dodge Kasaboko Island as it steamed out the bottleneck entrance to Nagasaki Harbor, take a bearing at Takashima and veer north, skirt the coast of Tsushima Island shortly after dawn and then take a straight course into Pusan Harbor. But this time the ship encountered heavy fog around 4:00 a.m. and an hour later slammed into rocks, quickly sinking in shallow water off Cape Tsutsu where the southwestern shore of Tsushima thrusts a long jagged finger out into the Japan Sea.

Students of the Ocean

Robert Neill Walker was born in Maryport, Cumberland, England on April 27, 1851, the second son of William and Ann (nee Donald) Walker. A master mariner, his grandfather Wilson Walker had been washed overboard on the Atlantic in the early nineteenth century, before the birth of Robert's father William. William had also become a master mariner but later established himself in Maryport as a ship repairer and Chandler and went on to become one of that city's most prominent businessmen.

Robert and his older brother Wilson (born in 1845) were obviously influenced by this family history, because both took to sea at a young age and became master mariners. Wilson's name is absent from the Maryport census register for the year 1861, which means that he had left for sea no later than the age of sixteen. Robert is listed as a "scholar" in this census but is absent in the 1871 register, suggesting that he followed in his brother's footsteps and began an early apprenticeship in the art of ocean navigation.

The author of Wilson Walker's long obituary in The Nagasaki Press sketches his adventures as a young man, probably on the basis of information from the family or from conversations with the master mariner himself.

His early experiences included voyages on sailing vessels in the South American trade and service on a steamer employed as a transport in the war between Paraguay and the Argentine Republic and

Brazil. His first trip to the Far East was made on the steamer Filipino, which had been built at Dumbarton for Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America. The collapse of the Civil War, or the intervention of the British Government, threw the vessel on the market and the builders sent her to Manila in the hope that the Spanish Government would purchase her as a mail steamer for the Hongkong - Manila service. The voyage was very eventful and on Captain Walker, then little more than twenty years of age, devolved the duty of taking the vessel from Batavia to Singapore, the captain, chief mate and more than half the crew being sick with fever. When Manila was reached the Spanish Government declined to purchase the vessel as the guaranteed speed of twelve knots could not be obtained. For about a year the Filipino ran between Manila and Amoy, afterwards proceeding to Shanghai and Tientsin. From the latter port the vessel was ordered to Japan as it was thought that a sale might be effected in this country. Nagasaki was reached in 1868, and from that time until his death the fortunes of Captain Walker were intimately associated with Japan. He left the Filipino at this port and was appointed to the command of the Naruto, a steamer owned by Messrs. Glover & Co. of Nagasaki. In 1869, he was ordered home to bring out a steam collier which Mr. Glover wanted to carry Takashima Coal to Shanghai. On arrival in England, however, he found that things had not gone well with the Nagasaki firm and no vessel could be purchased, so he obtained the position of chief officer on a barque which was being built for Messrs. Holme, Ringer & Co., also of Nagasaki.

According to the obituary, Walker returned to Japan in 1871 as chief officer of the Holme Ringer & Co. ship and then proceeded to Kobe where he was hired by Iwasaki Yataro the founder of what today is Mitsubishi Corporation to serve as chief officer on a ship called the Tsuru purchased by Iwasaki's fledgling company.

It was this event that initiated Wilson's friendship with the Iwasaki family and marked the beginning of the Walker brothers' deep involvement in the Japanese shipping industry.

The Mitsubishi Connection

The son of a low-ranking samurai of the Tosa Clan (present-day Kochi Prefecture), Iwasaki Yataro had made two prolonged stays in Nagasaki as a clan representative. The purpose of the first visit, a six-month sojourn from immediately after the opening of Japan's doors in the summer of 1859, was to gather information about foreign countries and the possibilities for trade. The second visit was a two-year stay from 1867 after being appointed head of the clan's foreign trade agency in this port. During both visits, the young samurai associated closely with William Alt, Thomas Glover and other foreign merchants, and he gained hands-on experience about ships, shipping and Western trade practices that would serve him well later when he established one of Japan's most successful commercial and industrial empires.

Recognized for his success in Nagasaki, Iwasaki was transferred to the clan's agency in Osaka—then the financial center of Japan—in 1869. In October the following year, while still under the auspices of the clan, he established a Western-style company called the Tosa Kaisei Shosha, taking charge of the clan's three foreign-built ships—the Tsuru, Yugao and Momijinoga—and launching a transportation service from Tokyo to Kochi via Osaka and the Seto Inland Sea. Wilson Walker, whom he had probably met in Nagasaki when Walker first arrived there in 1868, was the man he hired to serve as chief officer on the Tsuru. With two hectic years of reorganization behind it since the Meiji Restoration, Japan was finally breaking out of the shell of feudal isolation and taking its

first steps as a modern nation, and Walker was one of the first foreigners to guide Japanese hands grasping the rudder in this great adventure.

The long period of national isolation (1641-1859) had been a peaceful hibernation for Japan, a safe greenhouse inside which traditional Japanese culture could flourish without any outside interference or contamination. But vibrations from the industrial revolution in Europe—and insistent knocks from foreign powers—began to rattle the closed door, and the country soon embarked on a project of modernization that would startle the world.

Knowledge was lacking or nonexistent in the whole spectrum of Western-style government, industry, education and science, and so Japan naturally turned to Europe and North America for advice and enlisted a veritable army of professionals in the respective fields during the early years after the opening of the country. Since the passage of its citizens abroad had been strictly prohibited, shipbuilding and ocean navigation were two areas in which the lack of experience was particularly critical. Ships began to frequent the ocean routes to Japan soon after the opening of national doors in 1859, but the captains were invariably seasoned European and American mariners working for either established companies like Pacific Mail Steamship Company or local foreign-run businesses like Glover & Co.

The first Japanese to successfully contest this monopoly was Iwasaki Yataro. His Osaka company, Tosa Kaisei Shosha (renamed Tsukumo Shokai in October 1870), grew quickly after the abolition of the old feudal clan system in 1871, acquiring more ships and undergoing further name changes from Tsukumo Shokai to Mitsukawa Shokai and then to Mitsubishi Shokai in March 1873.

However, it was an event in early 1874 that catapulted the company into a period of rapid expansion and set the tone for its phenomenal growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That was the so-called “Formosa Expedition.” On the pretext of retribution for the murder by aborigines of 54 Okinawans washed ashore on Taiwan in 1871, the Japanese government ordered a punitive expedition to Formosa (Taiwan) in February and asked the Pacific Mail Steamship Company to provide ships. The company’s involvement was foiled, however, by the U.S. declaration of neutrality in the conflict, and so the government hurriedly purchased ten foreign-made vessels and commissioned Mitsubishi Shokai to operate them in carrying troops and munitions to Formosa. Iwasaki moved his head office to Tokyo in April, a period that coincides exactly with government preparations for the expedition.

The Japanese forces met little resistance from the aborigines but found an unexpected enemy in Taiwan mosquitoes, as shown by the fact that 561 of the 573 deaths among Japanese soldiers were due to malaria and other tropical diseases. In subsequent negotiations with the Qing Dynasty court in Beijing, Japanese representatives won a 500,000-tael indemnity from China and the return of the Okinawa islands to Japan.

The foray to Formosa was significant for several reasons. It marked the resurrection of Japan’s interest in its Asian neighbors and, by extension, the first step in its long march down the road to World War II. It gave hundreds of young Japanese men a taste of adventure on the open seas and instilled in the collective consciousness at home the first inkling of the benefits derived from military victories abroad. It was also the first large-scale military movement by Japanese troops since Toyotomi Hideyoshi sent his armies on an unsuccessful expedition to Korea in the late sixteenth century.

For Iwasaki Yataro, meanwhile, it was a windfall because the Japanese government gave the company the ten imported ships as a reward after the settlement of the conflict. It also established a link between Mitsubishi Shosha and the Japanese military complex that would gain tremendous strength in subsequent years, and it resulted in a government decision to provide protection to the company that virtually ensured its future success.

Mitsubishi records for 1874 (the year of the Formosa Expedition) list Wilson Walker as commander of the Horai-maru, a 663-ton iron screw steamer built in Scotland in 1870 for the Higo Clan (Kumamoto Prefecture) and sold to Mitsukawa Shokai in 1873. R.N. Walker appears for the first time in this 1874 record as chief officer of the same Horai-maru, strongly suggesting that he had been scouted for the job by his older brother.

Although the Horai-maru did not apparently sail beyond Japanese waters during the Formosa Expedition, there is little doubt that Wilson Walker as one of Iwasaki's key advisors on matters related to navigation played a vital role in its planning and execution. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that he was chosen from among the twenty-seven foreign captains employed by the company and appointed to the position of "superintending captain" when it changed its name from Mitsubishi Shokai to "Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company" later the same year.

The Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company of course took a keen interest in the international routes which, as mentioned above, had been monopolized since the opening of Japan's doors in 1859 by foreign shipping firms. In January 1875, it started a weekly steamship service between Yokohama and Shanghai, using its four best ships: the Niigata-maru, Tokyo-maru, Kanagawa-maru and Takasago-maru. This was Japan's first regular service overseas, and it marked a great stride forward in this country's efforts for international viability. The captain of the flagship Niigata-maru—and supervisor of this first service—was Wilson Walker.

The Pacific Mail Steamship Company did not take it lying down. It also dispatched four ships the Costa Rica, Oregonian, Golden Age and Nevada to compete on the Yokohama-Shanghai route and gave itself an advantage by slashing fares. The competition continued until later that year when, bolstered by a huge loan from the Japanese government, Mitsubishi bought the four ships from Pacific Mail and took over the company's shore facilities as well.

Next it had to deal with and Peninsular and Occidental Steam Navigation Company (P&O). The famous British shipping company entered the fracas in February 1876 by starting its own regular service between Shanghai and Yokohama. But again Iwasaki Yataro fought back, cutting the salaries of his employees (as well as his own). He also launched what may be the country's first press blitz, ordering a comparison of the performance of his Hiroshima-maru against that of the P&O steamship Bombay and distributing the results widely for publication. These were carried prominently in the Yokohama English-language newspaper The Japan Herald and copied in the Rising Sun and Nagasaki Express.

. . . the Hiroshima Maru, although full of cargo (we are informed that she had to shut out some at Kobe), managed to beat the Bombay at every stage of the passage, although the former still kept schedule time: . . . The Bombay left Shanghai over 12 hours ahead of the Hiroshima Maru, and arrived in Nagasaki over 9 hours behind; difference about 22 hours. The Bombay left Nagasaki 4 hours ahead of the Hiroshima Maru, and arrived at Kobe over 3 hours behind the Hiroshima Maru, although the

latter was delayed at Shimonoseki; a difference about 7 hours. The Bombay left Kobe 8 hours 40 minutes ahead of the Hiroshima Maru, but arrived at Yokohama 1 hour behind; difference about 10 hours.

The contest smacks of shogi (the Japanese version of chess in which a player can recycle pieces taken from his opponent) in that the Hiroshima-maru was the Pacific Mail Steamship Company's Golden Age purchased and renamed only the previous year. But whatever the origin of the ship, the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company won out and succeeded in driving P&O off the route by the end of 1876 and in establishing itself as the leading presence on Japan's international sea routes.

In 1877, Wilson Walker and his mostly Japanese crew sailed the Niigata-maru to England for refitting. Although by its very nature the trip exposed Japan's lack of adequate shipbuilding facilities, it attracted considerable attention in England if only because of the curiosity of a Japanese ship commanded by a native son.

A fine ship called the Niigata Maru, Captain Walker, has arrived in the Thames from Japan. This is the finest vessel bearing the Japanese flag which has entered the Port of London. Though built as a steamer, she has made this long passage round the Cape under sail, occupying fourteen days. The crew consists of 34 men, all of whom, with three or four exceptions, are Japanese. The Niigata Maru brings a cargo of about 1600 tons, chiefly rice, and is likely to be the first of a series of regular traders. Captain Walker reports that the Japanese sailors behaved admirably and in any emergency were always ready to do their part. The Niigata Maru is to be refitted with boilers and machinery and will then return with the same crew to Japan. Captain Walker is a native of Maryport and has been in the employ of the Japanese Government about ten years.

Wilson's younger brother Robert had received his captain's license from the Japanese government the previous year and was serving as commander of the Heian-maru, a 450-ton steamer built in New York in 1870 as the Kathleen and later sold to the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company. Thus while Wilson was enjoying the trip back to England, Robert was busy carrying cargo as part of Mitsubishi's assistance to the government in quashing the Satsuma Rebellion, another military-related endeavor that filled the company's coffers.

It was around this same time that R.N. Walker met Fukuda Sato, a native of Tokyo who was barely twenty years old when she bore his first child in 1878.

The following year, we find Wilson in Yokohama leading Mitsubishi efforts to establish a regular service between that port and Hong Kong. The Niigata-maru made the first run on October 4, 1879, arriving in Hong Kong on October 12 amid considerable fanfare. But during the voyage Wilson's thoughts were probably occupied not by the future of commercial exchange between Japan and Hong Kong but by his future wife, Charlotte Noordhoek Hegt, daughter of Dutch merchant and Yokohama resident J.B. Noordhoek Hegt (1821-1894). Charlotte remembered her first meeting with Wilson in her memoirs.

In April [1879] General and Mrs. U.S. Grant (the President of the United States and suite) came to Japan. A number of parties were held in their honor both in Tokio [sic] and Yokohama, to all of which we were invited. . . . In the autumn, the Norwegian

sailing ship “Nega” arrived and remained in port a few days. Among the passengers were Professor Nordenskold and several other men of science. A ball was held in their honor and it was there that I danced for the first time with my future husband.

A little before Xmas, I went to Tokio to stay with a Dutch doctor, Dr. and Mrs. Beukema, my husband followed me there, and on Xmas Eve, at a dinner, my engagement was announced. On May 18th, 1880 we were married at the British Consulate and Christ Church. We spent 15 very happy years in Yokohama and six of my children were born there.

Nippon Yusen Kaisha

Mitsubishi continued to prosper in the late 1870s and early 1880s, expanding from shipping to a variety of other business activities such as foreign exchange, insurance, railroads and mining. This situation was condemned as unfair by rivals who claimed that the company, while receiving government support and protection, was neglecting its original mission as a shipping enterprise. In 1882, the Japanese government ordered Mitsubishi to concentrate on shipping and to divest itself of interests in other activities. But the fact that this order had no substantial effect—and that the government continued nevertheless to provide protection—shows just how great the company’s power had become.

In January 1883, Mitsubishi’s opponents joined to form a part-governmental, part-private shipping concern called Kyodo Unyu Kaisha. Fierce competition for business immediately erupted between the two companies, escalating to the point that fares were reduced by as much as 90% and some of the ships strained so hard to outstrip their rivals that they arrived in port with their funnels glowing bright red. Distress over this situation may have been too much for Iwasaki Yataro, who died of stomach cancer on February 7, 1885 at the age of fifty and left the fate of Mitsubishi to his younger brother Yanosuke.

It soon became clear that the competition was going to undermine both companies. With government encouragement—albeit amid intense opposition from Mitsubishi’s adversaries—Kyodo Unyu Kaisha and the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company merged in September 1885 to form Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK). The merger spelled the demise of Kyodo Unyu Kaisha, but for Mitsubishi—which changed its name to “Mitsubishi-Sha Ltd.”—it was merely the detachment and reinforcement of one of the arms of its growing sprawl of activity.

Wilson Walker had served continually as superintending captain of the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company and commander of the Niigata-maru until 1882, when he had taken over the Nagoyamaru on the Yokohama - Hong Kong route. Robert N. Walker had served as commander of the Heian-maru (1877-78) and Urada-maru (1879-81) and was commanding the Hiogo-maru at the time of formation of NYK in 1885.

In March 1886, after arriving in Nagasaki from Korea on the Hiogo-maru, Robert received orders from the NYK head office to take over command of the Takachiho-maru, which had just undergone renovations at the Mitsubishi dockyards in Nagasaki and had been earmarked for use on the new Nagasaki - Vladivostok route planned by NYK.

This appointment ties the story of R.N. Walker and Nagasaki together for the first time. Before the end of the year, Walker had purchased the Western-style house at No.31 Minamiyamate overlooking

Nagasaki Harbor and had brought his wife Sato and children to live in this port, probably assuming that Nagasaki would be his hub of activity for many years to come. The Takachiho-maru set sail for Vladivostok on March 20, 1886, and by the time it made its fiftieth voyage in October 1889, Captain Walker had become a prominent resident of the Nagasaki foreign settlement as well as one of the most respected master mariners working on the Japan Sea.

The career of Wilson Walker meanwhile veered away from the ocean because of beer (not the consumption but the production thereof). Still a resident of Yokohama, Wilson became intimately involved in the establishment of the Japan Brewery Company Limited, predecessor of present-day Kirin Beer Company Limited. On July 8, 1885 he was a member of the provisional board of directors that decided the name of the company, set the capital at \$50,000 dollars to be raised by the sale of 500 shares among residents of foreign settlements in Japan, and stipulated that a qualified German brewer would be enlisted to supervise production. When the share list was compiled in September the same year, Wilson was the leading stockholder with 100 shares (his closest rival had only 30). Unexpected complications and expenses, such as the need for adequate refrigeration equipment, forced the company to regroup and to increase its capital to \$75,000. This was accomplished through the participation of a number of Japan's most prominent businessmen at the time—including Mitsubishi's Iwasaki Yanosuke—and the brewery's much-awaited product appeared on saloon counters in Yokohama, Kobe and Nagasaki in the latter part of 1889.

After the establishment of NYK, Wilson continued to command the Nagoya-maru on the Yokohama - Hong Kong route. In 1888, however, he was sent to England to take charge of a new ship called the Saikio-maru built in Glasgow for the company. He sailed this back to Japan via Bombay and Singapore, arriving in Nagasaki on August 8, 1888 only to have the local newspapers call it "a very good combination of a cargo and passenger vessel, but, so far as external appearance is concerned, she is by no means the large, fine looking ship that it would be expected a Company holding the position of Nippon Yusen Kaisha would build for their principal mail and passenger line. . . ." Wilson commanded this ship on the Yokohama - Shanghai route until July the following year when he decided to retire from his position at NYK and to accept the position of secretary at the Japan Brewing Company, an enterprise over which, financially at least, he wielded considerable sway.

The exact reasons for Wilson's involvement in the brewery are unclear, but his long-standing friendship with Thomas Glover was undoubtedly important. Glover had played a central role in the effort to found the company and to drum up interest in it among both foreign and Japanese businessmen, and he had served as president during the first years. Also closely involved was the NYK secretary W.H. Talbot, provisional secretary to the Japan Brewing Company during the months of preparation and, perhaps more importantly, the husband of Wilson's sister Ann. Still another possible connection is Wilson's father-in-law J.B. Noordhoek Hegt, who had operated one of Japan's first small-scale breweries in Yokohama from 1870 to 1875 and who undoubtedly provided spiritual if not financial support for his son-in-law's huge investment. Wilson devoted himself full-time to the Japan Brewery Company for four subsequent years, watching over the introduction of the now-famous brand name "Kirin Beer" and reaping tremendous rewards from the success of the enterprise.

Catastrophe

Sailing was not as smooth for Robert N. Walker. The voyage of the Takachiho-maru—and the life

of Captain Walker and his young family—took a tragic turn in the early hours of May 11, 1891 when rocks off Tsushima Island tore into the hull of the ship and threw its still-sleeping passengers out of their cabin beds.

Everyone on board luckily managed to get into lifeboats unharmed, and the money and mail bags were saved. Captain Walker spent the next two and a half months at the scene of the wreck, trying unsuccessfully to raise the ship from its watery grave. Then in late July he proceeded directly to Tokyo to attend the court of inquiry into the cause of the accident. Held in two sessions in August, the inquiry proved inconclusive, Captain Walker, his chief officer Mr. Howard and some of the crew members giving contradictory accounts about the events leading up to the grounding of the ship. One of the crucial points was whether or not Captain Walker had issued a standing order during the previous voyage from Vladivostok for the whistle not to be blown in foggy weather, and whether or not it had been sounded before the accident.

Matsumoto Hisakichi, quartermaster on the Takachiho-maru, testified that he had “heard the whistle two or three times during my watch [from 4:00 a.m.]. The chief officer sounded it.” But L. Harlow, the chief engineer, said: “After the accident, Mr. Howard told me in answer to a question as to why he did not blow the whistle, that the Captain told him not to blow it. I took it for granted that it was a standing order that he had received. I never heard a sentence from anyone but Mr. Howard that there was an order not to blow the whistle in fog.”

Near the end of the proceedings Captain Walker submitted a statement that was examined by the members of the court and then handed over to reporters.

I wish to say that after leaving Vladivostok [on the previous voyage], the only persons on board the ship to whom I spoke about the sounding of the whistle was the second officer. I did not speak to the chief officer on the subject at all. What I said to the second officer was that he need not sound the whistle at that time; and my reason was that at that time there was no fog sufficient to render it necessary to sound the whistle. I never gave any order to the chief officer, or to any other officer on board the ship, not to sound the whistle in a fog, or said that it was unnecessary in these waters. Also, had the whistle been sounded, as stated by the quartermaster, on the night of the accident, I should certainly have been awakened thereby.

Announcing its decision at the Marine Bureau of the Communications Department, Tokyo on August 17, 1891, the court declared the chief officer responsible for the accident and gave him a three-month suspension, and it found Captain Walker guilty of neglect of duty as commander of the ill-fated vessel and suspended his license for six months.

The anguish and chagrin experienced by Captain Walker and his family as a result of this devastating turn of events is hinted at by the fact that Sato packed up all the family belongings and, with her now seven children in tow, left Nagasaki for Yokohama only one week after the court decision. Then on September 8, a small article appeared in the Nagasaki newspapers announcing the sale of the house at No.31 Minamiyamate.

Walker apparently decided soon after this upheaval to leave Japan and to return to England. He had no way of knowing, however, that another crushing tragedy was waiting for him in Maryport or that he would be back in Nagasaki before the end of the decade and settled in a new role as a

businessman here.

On May 22, 1894, Sato Walker died in Maryport at the young age of thirty-six. Her obituary in The West Cumberland Times of May 26, 1894 (copied in The Rising Sun and Nagasaki Express on July 18, 1894) says simply: “[Died] At 98, High Street, Maryport, On May 22nd, 1894, Sato Walker, beloved wife of Capt. R.N. Walker (late of Nippon Yusen Kaisha), aged 36 years.” But the death certificate preserved in Maryport city archives attributes her death to “heart disease and general dropsy,” a condition that may have been caused or at least aggravated by the trauma of being yanked out of her happy life in Nagasaki and then required to raise her seven children plus two babies born after the move in a city where no Japanese person had ever lived before.

Prosperous Once Again in Nagasaki

Although riding a wave of success as a result of his investment in the brewing industry, Wilson, like his brother, suffered a setback that drastically altered the fate of his family. Charlotte Walker describes the events of the mid-1890s in her memoirs.

When the children reached an age for school, we decided to go to England . . . We booked passages aboard the Canadian Pacific Mail Liner “Empress of Japan” en route to Shanghai on her maiden voyage. At that time a financial crisis was affecting the whole world. Banks went smash, and through the failure of the O.B.C. and Bank of China, where we had our money, we were almost penniless. The trip to England was canceled and we started all over again . . . My husband was fortunate in passing his examinations and securing the post of Inland Sea Pilot through the kindness of Baron Iwasaki Yanoski [sic], and Iwasaki Yataro, the Head of the Mitsu Bishi S. S. C. for whom my husband worked for many years. Later we had to move to Kobe and I was absolutely heartbroken, leaving dear old Yokohama, my family and numerous friends. Ill luck followed us there. We lived in a house where three deaths of typhoid pneumonia had been recorded. After a few weeks three of my children were taken ill of the same complaint . . . Things were in a fearful state. I lost my baby-boy Willie at the age of 2 years and 2 months on June 1st, 1884 from the disease. One of my twins, Lily, was at death’s door . . . After the recovery of my children, we all went to Nagasaki for a change. I liked it so much better there that persuaded my husband to move over entirely. This we did, and we lived in Nagasaki twenty-eight years.

Not long after Wilson’s move to Nagasaki, Robert N. Walker returned to Japan with his children to make a new effort at life in this country. The move had undoubtedly been encouraged by Wilson, forever Robert’s closest friend and mentor. But it may also have been motivated by the grounded mariner’s restlessness in his hometown, by thoughts of opportunities left behind in Japan and by difficulties that his children experienced in blending into the uni-racial fabric of a northern English port town.

He was back in Nagasaki in 1897, negotiating with his old friend Niels Lundberg about the purchase of the latter’s business as a stevedore and landing agent for foreign ships calling at this port. A deal was soon effected, and on February 28, 1898 the two announced the change of ownership in a prominent newspaper notice. Thus began R.N. Walker & Co., which was to prosper for four subsequent decades and to survive longer than any other business in the European settlement when Japanese militarism cast its dark shadow over Nagasaki.

Robert bought the Western-style house at No.7 Higashiyamate, up a flight of stone steps from the Methodist mission school Kwassui Women's College where he sent his daughters. Every morning he descended these steps, passing the stone wall beside the French Consulate and emerging onto the Bund (waterfront street) where he turned left and walked to his office facing the harbor at No.42 Sagarimatsu. As he walked he perhaps thought of his father William, who had also gone on from a career as a master mariner to establish a successful ship chandler's business in Maryport, or conjured up images of the elegant Takachiho-maru anchored out on the harbor with its sails lowered and a slip of smoke rising from its funnel. But he could not think of either Maryport or the ship without remembering the accident in 1891 and suffering still another pang of grief over the death of his beloved Sato—to whom he would remain faithful for the rest of his life.

Wilson Walker and his family were living in a spacious two-story house across the Oura Creek at No.12 Minamiyamate, just up the hill from Robert's office. In 1899, Wilson finally abandoned life at sea for the last time and bought the Cliff House Hotel, a large Western-style hotel situated right beside his house at No.10 Minamiyamate.

The brothers could not have chosen a better time to establish businesses in Nagasaki. The port was experiencing an unprecedented boom. Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and acquirement of Taiwan had brought various advantages to Nagasaki as the closest Japanese port to the continent. The American acquisition of the Philippines as a result of victory in the Spanish-American War of 1898 brought additional benefits, in particular a dramatic increase in the number of steamers and warships calling at Nagasaki to take on coal. The city was also becoming a popular venue for tourists drawn by the unique history of the port, by the romantic images of it created by travelogues and stories such as Pierre Loti's best-selling novel *Madame Chrysantheme* (soon to inspire the opera *Madame Butterfly*), and by the cool pine air of nearby Unzen where wealthy foreign residents of Shanghai and Hong Kong were already seeking refuge in summer.

Business was so brisk during the years around the turn of the century that Wilson had to turn visitors away from his hotel and Robert had to mobilize dozens of Nagasaki businesses, shops and workers to keep up with the tasks of loading and unloading cargo from ships, arranging for coaling and repairs, supplying tons of water, vegetables and fish, and catering to all the needs of people coming and going.

In December 1904, Robert established the "Banzai Aerated Water Factory" at No.44 Sagarimatsu. He had purchased the sturdy brick warehouse on that lot earlier the same year and had moved his office to the adjacent building. Using equipment imported from England, he began mass production of ginger ale, lemonade and a number of other soft drinks in great demand from the ocean liners visiting Nagasaki and from the numerous Western-style hotels that had popped up in the European settlement to accommodate the throngs of visitors.

Departure

Walker perhaps chose the word *banzai* (which means "ten thousand years") in the hope that his success—and the soaring prosperity of Nagasaki—would continue indefinitely. But Nagasaki's glory was already starting to wane when the governor of Nagasaki issued a permit for the opening of the soft drink factory on December 1, 1904. As a result of the Russo-Japanese War, which had been raging since February that year, the passage of ships on the lines between Japan and the continent had dropped off sharply, causing an economic slump from which Nagasaki would never

fully recover. After the war, the focus of business activity shifted irrevocably to the more convenient ports of Yokohama and Kobe, and an increasing number of foreign residents of Nagasaki moved away in search of better opportunities.

R.N. Walker also turned his eyes abroad. In July 1906, he filed notice with the Nagasaki Local Court, naming his son Robert Jr. manager of R.N. Walker & Co. Then in February 1908 he signed a new partnership agreement with Robert and his longtime colleague David Jamieson, keeping a financial interest but in effect relinquishing control of the company to his son. In April, he placed an advertisement in The Nagasaki Press for the lease of the houses at No.7a and 7b Higashiyamate, and on April 29—the very day that he left Nagasaki—an auction was held there to sell the family furniture.

Captain Walker's children were already starting to leave the nest by this time. In 1900, Annie had married Elwood G. Babbit of Boston, later American consul at Yokohama and United States trade commissioner. Margaret had also married an American: Oscar Watts, United States army quartermaster in Nagasaki from 1904 to 1911. The eldest son John was unpredictable, irritating his father by doing occasional work on the coal barges in Nagasaki Harbor and drifting from place to place without settling down. But he was present in Nagasaki in the spring of 1908 when the family gathered there to bid R.N. Walker and the four youngest daughters farewell.

R.N. Walker had decided to move to Victoria, British Columbia, probably not only to securely invest the huge nest egg he had built up over the past decade but also to ensure marriage and work opportunities for his children that were scarce in Nagasaki. On April 29, he sailed out of Nagasaki Harbor on the German steamship Yorck with Kate, Maude, Violet and Gladys amid a noisy, tear-stained send-off by all the family friends and colleagues in Nagasaki.

The author of an article entitled "The Decline of Nagasaki" published a month earlier in a Kobe newspaper had reported R.N. Walker's intention to leave the city.

The next few weeks will witness the departure of no fewer than 35 foreign residents of Nagasaki. Of these not more than eleven are going on furlough, so that none of the others are expected to return. Two of the best-known of those that are leaving for good are Mr. John H. Shaw and Mr. Clark, who have just severed their long connection with the Mitsu Bishi Shipbuilding Yards. Considering the recent advances that have been made there under their supervision it is not easy to see how their services can be dispensed with; but this is probably one more indication of the movement in Japan towards doing without the assistance of foreign experts in modern industries . . . Mr. R.N. Walker, who has been for many years a prominent business man of Nagasaki, is also moving with his family to Vancouver, B.C.

The author goes on to blame this exodus on the Nagasaki customs officers, who he says insist on opening and inspecting all the luggage of visitors and thus discourage them from landing at the port. But of course the reasons for the decline ran much deeper. During the first decades after the opening of Japan's doors in 1859, Nagasaki had not only been the closest Japanese port to China but also the only place with contemporary Western residents and so had naturally provided a secure foothold for visitors from abroad. During the decade spanning the turn of the century, meanwhile, it had experienced a boom because of the increase in shipping and tourism in the Far East. But now, changes such as the abolition of extraterritorial rights for foreigners in 1899, the easy obtainability

of passes for inland travel and the completion of extensive railroads were pulling away the curtain of mystique surrounding the Japanese “interior” and making Nagasaki a less and less necessary stopover, a trend bolstered by the improved speed and range of international ocean liners like the Canadian Pacific’s “Empress” series. In short, the reason d’être of the Nagasaki foreign settlement was diminishing.

Moreover, as the author of the above article mentions, Japan—with its national confidence and economic prosperity mightily reinforced by victory in two international military campaigns—was shaking off the girdle of dependence on foreign experts and pressing forward with its own industrial and diplomatic objectives. The fact that the tonnage of domestically built ships surpassed that of imported ships for the first time in 1908 tells everything about the mood of Japan and Nagasaki the year that R.N. Walker decided to leave.

After the departure of his brother, Wilson Walker continued to run the Cliff House Hotel and to serve as an elder to the dwindling population of the foreign settlement. His eldest daughter Jeannie had married Albert Taylor of Shanghai where they rented a house in the French Concession.

Wilson died after a brief illness on November 4, 1914 in the family home at No.12 Minamiyamate and was buried in the international cemetery in present-day Sakamoto-machi. Charlotte Walker operated the Cliff House Hotel until 1922, when she declared Nagasaki “too expensive to live in and rather quiet for my daughters,” sold all the family property and moved permanently to Shanghai. Purchased by a Japanese physician, the house was used for many years as a hospital until being dismantled and rebuilt on a different site in Minamiyamate to make way for a souvenir shop. It now houses the “Minamiyamate Historic Preservation Center,” quite an irony considering that it was removed from its original location and lost most of its historic atmosphere in the process.

The death of his uncle and the departure of his aunt and cousins gave Robert Walker Junior the lonesome distinction of being the only Walker family member left in Nagasaki. His determination to stay, however, is reflected by the fact that he applied for naturalization and was officially granted Japanese nationality on June 2, 1928. Now his legal name was not Robert Walker but “Uoka Robato.” On the other side of the Pacific, by contrast, Robert’s sisters and brother Wilson had married Canadians and Americans and blended into North American society—and were probably striving to leave their Japanese heritage behind as anti-Asian sentiments mounted around them.

In June the following year, R.N. Walker apparently returned to Nagasaki for the last time. His reason for making the trip, now 77 years old, was to sign a resolution transferring all his interests in R.N. Walker & Co. to Robert Jr. and, undoubtedly, to visit his brother’s grave, to meet his few surviving friends here and to have a last look at the harbor and city that had played such an important part in his colorful life. He died in Victoria on April 24, 1941, just three days shy of his 90th birthday, and was buried under a simple grave stone in the city’s Royal Oak Cemetery.

Robert Jr. had closed the Banzai Aerated Water Factory in 1917 and sold all the manufacturing equipment to a Japanese company, and in 1929 he had moved his office to the former premises of the German Consulate (closed since World War I) on the Bund at No.11 Oura. While the number of foreign residents continued to decrease in the 1930s, he concentrated on the stevedore business, supplying foreign vessels with provisions and undertaking “survey reports” (evaluation of the condition of the import cargo on arriving ships) and other tasks commissioned by Nagasaki companies like Holme, Ringer & Co. and Sawayama Shokai. There had also been a significant change in his

personal life: he had married a British-Japanese native of Nagasaki named Mabel Shigeko McMillan in 1937.

But dark clouds were gathering on the Nagasaki horizon. The atmosphere was growing increasingly tense as Japan's military actions in Manchuria and China pulled the country closer to war and compelled local industries to prepare for the production of munitions. In particular, the construction from March 1938 of the gigantic battleship *Musashi* at the Mitsubishi Nagasaki Shipyard—and the strict security surrounding the project—made life very difficult for the remaining European and American residents whose houses, offices and consulates looked out on the harbor. By the autumn of 1941, almost all the foreign residents had chosen to close their businesses and depart overseas. As a naturalized Japanese, Robert was able to remain behind without threat of internment, but on December 8, when news of the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor reached Nagasaki, the *kenpeitai* military police forced him to close his office and to take down the R.N. Walker & Co. sign because it was written in the language of the enemy.

During the war years Robert and his family patiently endured the harassment of the military police and the cold attitude of their neighbors. He was putting the finishing touches on his hand-dug air-raid shelter in the garden at No.28b Minamiyamate when a light like the flash of a colossal magnesium flare illuminated the hillsides and, a few seconds later, an explosion like a thousand simultaneous bolts of thunder pulverized the city and blew the ceramic tiles off the roof of his house. A witness from a distance of only four kilometers, Robert was one of a small number of people who saw the atomic bomb explosion from the ground and survived unharmed.

After the war Robert and Mabel settled into quiet retirement with their sons Albert and Dennis. Robert became somewhat of a recluse, abandoning his hope to revive R.N. Walker & Co. and associating with only a few trusted friends. He spent many hours sitting alone on the veranda of his house and gazing at the ships in Nagasaki Harbor—just as his father had spent his sunset years looking out over the Strait of Juan de Fuca in Victoria. His death on August 22, 1958 at the age of 77 was not even mentioned in the Nagasaki newspapers.

Mabel and her sons built a new house on the Minamiyamate property in 1974, and part of the old house was restored in 'Glover Garden' when the Nagasaki city government built that tourist facility nearby. The house is still there today, but the only information about the Walker family is a small sign stating that R.N. Walker had been a "ship's captain."

Mabel, who was 23 years younger than Robert Walker Jr., followed her husband on December 2, 1996 at the age of 92, leaving her son Albert and his family as not only the last Walker descendants in Japan but also the last vestige of the European community that once thrived on the waterfront and hillsides overlooking Nagasaki Harbor.

Brian Burke-Gaffney. "On the Jagged Shores of Japan: The Story of the Walker Brothers." *Crossroads: A Journal of Nagasaki History and Culture*, no. 5 (Autumn 1997), 59–86.