

# Westford native sailed with Commodore Perry

By GORDON B. SEAVEY  
WESTFORD — With hats in hand, the largest trade mission the United States has ever sent to another nation is now in Japan. It is an effort to stem the runaway American trade deficit.

The group of 120 American business executives, mostly from medium and small corporations, are conducting interviews with Japanese buyers who may be interested in products bearing U.S.A. labels. Commerce Secretary Juanita Kreps heads the delegation, members of which are expected to make some 3,500 contacts.

They feel the time is ripe for American business to increase its imports to Japan, which would boost the value of the dollar in relation to the yen, thereby curbing protectionist sentiments in the United States.

### RELATIONS WITH JAPAN

125 years ago were an entirely different matter. The Japanese so distrusted other countries they had shut themselves off from the rest of the world. Countries who wished to trade with them were foiled as ports were closed to all, decreed by the rulers.

By 1852, Congress had decided that stern action would have to be taken to protect American seamen and property in Japanese waters. Commodore Matthew Perry (brother of Commodore Oliver Perry of Lake Erie fame), in charge of the U.S. fleet in the Pacific, was the man assigned to take on the task of opening Japan to the world.

With Perry was an out-

standing naval officer, a Westford native by the name of Joel Abbot. From a 19-year old midshipman fresh out of Westford Academy, he had risen in 40 years to flag officer of the fleet, succeeding Perry.

For over 250 years, Westford men have served with distinction in several wars, expeditions and skirmishes, starting with campaigns against the Indians up to the unpopular Vietnam War. Because of the make-up of the early local population, mainly farmers and sons of farmers, Westford men were "land people" and few got to receive the smell of the sea.

JOEL ABBOT enlisted in the naval service in the war with Britain in 1812, to be followed shortly by his younger brother. Young men were accepted on and after their 16th birthday. They were members of what was probably the most prominent family in Westford.

The father was also Joel Abbot, a native of nearby Hollis, N.H., who had married a local girl, Lydia Cumings. They raised a family of three boys and three girls in a house which stood until 1914 opposite the Center post office.

Joel was their second child, and born in 1795. He entered the Academy, which stood nearby, at the age of 19. Brother Walter became a lieutenant later on the U. S. frigate Chesapeake and was wounded in the action of that ship with the frigate Shannon in 1813. He died 12 years later from his wounds.

Joel went on to bigger things. After serving as a midshipman, he became aide and signal officer to Commander Rogers of the frigate

President. He later came under the command of Commodore MacDonough, who headed the naval forces on Lake Champlain. For gallantry in that area, he was promoted to lieutenant commander and Congress voted him "a handsome sword."

ABBOT WAS IN COMMAND of the Boston Navy Yard from 1839 to 1842. Furthering his career during the next decade, he was to take a prominent part in the

astounding American expedition in the Pacific which historians like to write about, the opening of Japan to the world.

In the Pacific, Abbot was in command of the U. S. S. Macedonian, and with the fleet, sailed into Toyko Bay on July 8, 1853 with a demanding letter from then U. S. President Millard Fillmore.

By show of force and through tough diplomacy in which Abbot participated,

Japan reluctantly opened its ports of Hakodate and Shimoda, granting trading rights to the United States and other countries.

It is reported that Abbot performed delicate diplomatic duties to the complete satisfaction of the U. S. Government while in Japanese waters.

Later, he supervised the placing of buoys and a light ship in Shanghai Harbor, defining the channels and sail-

ing courses for the first time.

THE OPENING OF JAPAN is deemed one of history's most significant diplomatic achievements, as it not only changed American and European policy toward Japan, but brought about a marked change within Japan itself, which in the years to come would be a great world power.

Abbot is buried in Hong

Kong and there is no record of what happened to the handsome sword which Congress gave him as a young officer. His sash and pistol, however, are in the J. V. Fletcher Library, willed by the late Edward M. Abbot 20 years ago.

A bronze plaque on the "Memorial to All Wars" on the town common reads of the

early exploits of the young naval officer during the War of 1812-15 and activities on Lake Champlain. It mentions that when Commodore MacDonough asked if he were ready to die for his country, young Abbot's reply was: "Certainly, sir, that is what I came into the service for."

Westford men were made of stern stuff!