
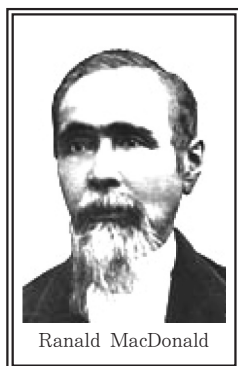


# THE FIRST ENGLISH TEACHER IN JAPAN: RANALD McDONALD

Patrice Pendell

Ranald MacDonald, also written McDonald, has a less than mysterious name. When one says the name *McDonald* the first thing that comes to most people's mind is a hamburger. The McDonald's franchise is known world-wide such that even mentioning the name a clear image appears, and it is as far from adventure as one can imagine. In fact,  is quintessential American cuisine and a way many find familiar in foreign contexts.



Ranald MacDonald

The story of the MacDonald in this paper is quite another narrative. Although Ranald MacDonald (RM) traveled the world, few people know of him. His story has a foreign context and is the chronicle of one person's pursuit to find the unfamiliar. At great risk RM dared to enter Japan in 1848: a country which had been closed to outsiders for over two-hundred years. What all he found is hard to say, but there are remarkable records and reports in English and Japanese of the connections made. Like the ripples formed when a rock is dropped in a pond, his brief adventure to Japan has had far reaching consequences even though the instigation has long vanished. This paper is the story of the first native English speaker to teach English in Japan who was, as it turned out, a Native American, and it is the story of an English teacher's journey to learn about RM.

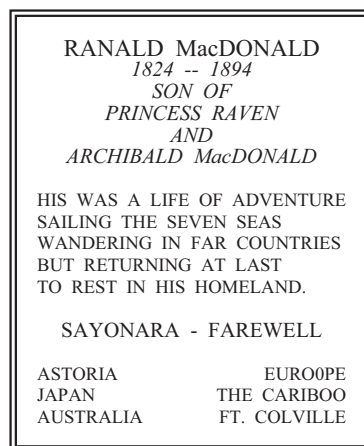
## HOW IT BEGAN

My introduction to RM began with an excursion to the place where RM's ended. In 2001 I was invited by author and historian Betty Deuber (2001) to visit the grave of RM. It was in early August with robin-egg blue skies when we headed north from

my hometown Spokane, Washington.

In northeastern Washington State is the small town of Curlew. The town borders the lands of several Native American Nations and has a rich cultural heritage. Curlew has a population 1,500 with just a few streets. Businesses and houses share one paved street with dirt side streets. Contingency piles of gear, snowmobiles and other sundry items cluttered the houses as evidence of cold winters. We drove through town pausing to let friendly kids with their dogs pass as they played in the street. We continued along the winding Kettle River another ten kilometers to the Ferry County Cemetery at Toroda, which is just few kilometers from the Canadian border.

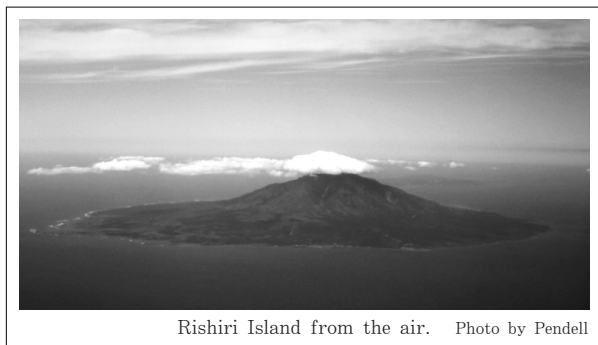
The small cemetery was set on a hill just above a secluded road. An undulating wire fence marked the perimeter, presumably to keep animals out. Grave markers were tilted and worn and most were unreadable save for one polished granite stone which stood straight and was about three-feet tall. It was the grave marker for RM. In this old country cemetery we joined a contingency of twelve Japanese who had made the pilgrimage from Japan. There were also people from the region, as well as representatives from the *Friends of MacDonald* operated through the Clatsop County Historical Society (2009) in Astoria, Oregon, which was RM's birthplace. On this lonely stretch of road with friends and foreigners I learned about RM's story and his impact as the first native English speaker to teach in Japan.



## JOURNEY TO JAPAN

It seemed only fitting that in my first year as an English teacher in Japan and having the opportunity to present a paper in Sapporo that I should travel on to Rishiri Island, which was RM's first landing place in Japan. It was the same season. I would visit the same locations where RM had been some hundred and sixty-one-years ago. Such was the inspiration of my journey to Rishiri: to go where RM had landed; the second mission was to bike around the island.

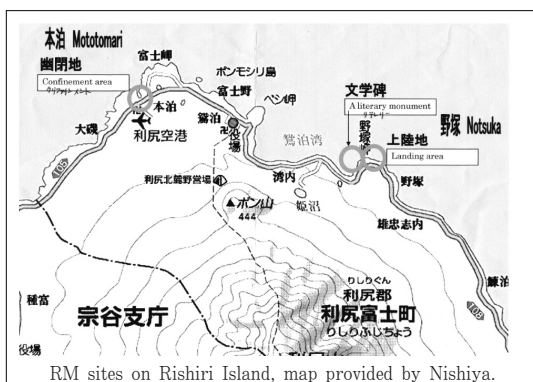
Rishiri Island is located off the northwest tip of Hokkaido. A nearly round island sixty-kilometer in circumference, the landscape is dominated by a volcanic mountain Mt. Rishiri, often referred to as the *Fuji of the North*. A rocky coast with gently sloping peat bogs gives way to a fringe of boreal forest. Then rugged steep slopes of



Rishiri Island from the air. Photo by Pendell

this volcanic peak stretch to a height of 1,721 meters. Various settlements hug the coast as locals survive from long traditions of fishing especially for sea urchin, *uni* and sea kelp, *konbu*. Hot springs and nature viewing including climbing Mt. Rishiri provide a strong if small tourism economy.

The flight to Rishiri, only one-a-day from Sapporo, gave a preview to my journey. As the plane approach Rishiri, the view was of a solitary mountain rising out of a vast sea of isolation. However, I was to find solitude and communal warmth that reflected not only an appreciation of my journey, but of my very presence. And all the while, I couldn't help but imagine these feelings were perhaps a glimpse of what RM took away as well.



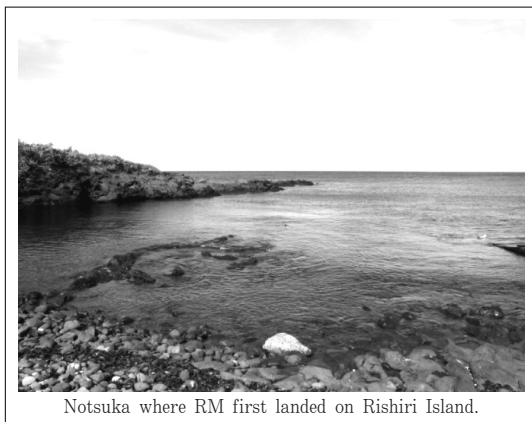
RM sites on Rishiri Island, map provided by Nishiya.



Pendell at RM Monument, Rishiri Island

At Rishiri I was met by the curator of the Rishiri Town Museum whom I had met in Curlew, Washington in August 2001. Eiji Nishiya had led a group of Japanese to visit the grave of RM. With an itinerary translated and map in hand, we proceeded to visit the RM sites: a monument overlooking the sea, the place where he first landed, and the two locations he lived before being taken to Nagasaki. Walking where he walked, picking stones, feeling the warm late summer sun with Mt. Rishiri over my shoulder, there was a sense joy. I could just imagine how RM must have felt: to leave the confines of a whaling ship, no doubt crowded and dirty and live some 40 days in this place. A place of clear water and kelp gardens and a welcoming people who as RM said, *he never heard use a cross*

*word* (Lewis & Murkami, 1923). The local people had met him and welcomed him. RM was free was on Rishiri and stayed for forty days teaching English and learning



Japanese. But RM was a foreigner, and was ordered to be sent to prison in Nagasaki. There for seven months he continued teaching English and learning Japanese. It was during this time, 1848, he taught Einosuke Moriyama along with thirteen other Japanese. Moriyama was later to play an important role in negotiating the Convention of Kanagawa in 1854 with Commodore Perry, which opened Japan to the West

### THE WAY OF ADVENTURE

The underling question remains- why did RM undertake such a bold journey? What were his motives? It has been widely reported that RM was told as a boy his Native American ancestors had come from Japan and this was the seed of inspiration which motivated RM to penetrate mysterious Japan. This story gained popularity from curious coincidence and an oceanic phenomenon. The Pacific currents even in modern times bring Japanese and messages from Japan (Romano, 2003) to the north-west coast of the U.S. So it was for three Japanese sailors who were rescued in Astoria nearly the same time that RM was living there. However in 1834 when the three Japanese sailors were rescued off the Oregon coast, RM was no longer Astoria. Additionally, RM personally reported that he did not know his biologic mother was a Native American until very late in his life, and in fact, found out by accident when he was living at Fort Colville long after he had left Japan (Edgerton, 1969).

It would seem there are other reasons for RM's quest. RM was a man born in adventurous times and people. During the 1800's the entire world was being explored and exploited save for one country, mysterious Japan. Add RM's heritage- the Scottish blood from his Highland father and a Native American birthright and one has the ingredients for an adventurer.

The personal narrative of RM is a mosaic of the world he knew and the adventure he dreamed. RM felt an undeniable urge to seek out the unknown- to boldly go where no one had before. The view to understanding RM's world comes by looking within: at his family as well as the times in which he lived. This paper will consider how the terms of the times and the frame of his family were to mold a man who pioneered puzzling and unfamiliar places.

## THE AGE OF DISCOVERY

The 1800's were times when the mysteries of distant lands were beginning to unfold. It was this era of discovery and of knowledge gained directed by the trappings of great wilderness wealth. Driving this force were men keen on adventure and profit. While there are numerous examples, the scope of this paper will consider the pursuit of the U.S. to secure outposts on the Pacific shore and the fur trade which set the stage for the MacDonald family.

In the early 1800's the U.S. was expanding. President Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) had reviewed accounts of the explorations of the western half of Canada in 1793 from the North West Company who were looking for practical routes to the Pacific Ocean for the fur trade (Mackenzie, 1801). Although an economic route was not found, it was possible to reach the Pacific. In 1803 President Jefferson doubled the size of the U. S. with the Louisiana Purchase. Jefferson knew if the United State did not explore their new territory and lay claim to the Pacific route his dream to extend the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans would never happen. Jefferson was keen to secure the route for future profits and mounted the Corps of Discovery, or more commonly known as the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804-1806). Bound by adventure, men and one woman embarked on a journey that would take two years and would travel 7,500 miles or over twelve billion kilometers. The expedition began with only two fixed points: the longitude and latitude of St. Louis, Missouri; and the 1792 map of the mouth of the Columbia River made by Caption Robert Gray. The accomplishments of the Lewis and Clark expedition were extensive. It altered the struggle for the control of the Pacific Northwest and generated keen interests in the fur trade.

The fur trade had huge profits and rivalries which would soon engage the MacDonald family. At the time fur was an immediate and valuable resource. The lucrative trade had great risks but so were the profits. On the west coast British and Russian ships entered the Columbia River trading rifles and manufactures goods for furs bound for China, which were traded for spices were bound for England. Vigorous competition in the Pacific Northwest fur trade was impacted by several important events. The Treaty of 1818 gave joint rights for resources from the Oregon territories to Ireland, Britain and the U.S. And in 1821 the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) merged ending years of competition. HBC was ready and eager to clear past problems and set ventures in place for profits. Capable, company men were needed to streamline and secure trade for HBC. Additionally, the vast territory needed unique talents which embodied all the independence of an adventurer. One of the first men to take charge in at Fort George (Astoria, Oregon) in 1821 and later in other Pacific Northwest outposts was a young Scottish Highlander Archibald





Their house was an egalitarian setting and seems to have been an engaging environment. There are many reports of the lively debates which occurred including personal accounts from RM of heated political discussions by his step-mother with visitors (McLeod, 1872). Archibald also pursued education throughout his life and of those around him. He set up a school for his wife and children with regular lessons for his most *precious possession, my children* (Schodt, 2003). When Archibald reached his limit as a teacher, he engaged a tutor for RM at Fort Vancouver. In 1836 at the age of fifteen, RM was set to the Red River Settlement in Manitoba to complete his education under the charge of Ermatinger, a family friend. Archibald wrote Ermatinger in March 1839:

*I should like to give him (Ranald) a trial in the way of business, and with this in view, have him bound to yourself, as an apprentice. By spring of '40, you will be able to judge of his conduct and capacity, when I shall you for a full expose of all you think of him. My reply to that letter you will have in the fall of '41, which will either confirm our plan of making a gentleman tout de bon of him, or have him enter on a new apprenticeship at nay trade he may select for himself. You know the Rock on which split all the hopes and fortunes of almost all youth of the Indian country. Ranald, I hope, will have none of those fatal notions. His success in the world must solely depend on his good conduct and exertions.* (Schodt, 2003)

## TUG FORADVENTURE

Upon completion his education RM began a banking job. This was not his calling and in 1841 with just a few possessions RM went to New York. He found adventure in the thriving world shipping trade. RM made berth as a sailor and traveled the next eight years all over the world making several rounding of both the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn.

The only place that remained a mystery was Japan. It seemed this was the last remaining wildernesses which had not been tamed. Closed to all outsiders since 1639, anyone who dared break this barrier soon met with a swift swipe of the *samurai* sword. Tales of be-headings and death to all trespassers was rich fuel for an enterprising adventurer like RM.

In 1845 RM was in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). Easy work was to be found on the numerous whaling vessels which moored there. RM secured berth on the whaler the *Plymouth* with the express agreement that after he had earned his share, he would be set adrift off Japan. In 1845 RM wrote his father:

*I again shipped for another Cape Horn voyage with the intention of being discharged at some of the islands that are on the Spanish Main. These intentions I have altered and as Captain Edwards was going to China and from there to the Japan sea, I have thought it a good opportunity to crown my interventions that if I went with him, I would be discharge (to Japan) before he left the sea. He has kindly undertaken to teach me navigation — he allowed me the choice of boat out of seven—he has also furnished me with a sail and anchor, quadrant and compass, bread, meat, and water — in fact, everything to insure my reaching shore. He tried to persuade me to give up the adventure, but I am going (Edgerton, 1969).*

After two years at sea the *Plymouth* set sail for the Sea of Japan. June 27, 1848, RM was released from the ship. An actual account of his leaving the ship was made by one of his shipmates and published December 1, 1848 in the *Seaman's Friend* at Honolulu, Sandwich Islands:

*All hands had gathered to see the last of the bold adventurer. He took off his hat and waved it, but in silence. The same was returned from the ships company... Everyman on board felt sad to see a shipmate leave the ship under such circumstances. He was a good sailor, well educated, of firm mind, well calculated for the expedition upon which he had embarked. His intentions were to stay at this island and learn some of the Japanese language and from there to go down to Yeddo, the principal city of Nepon, and if the English or American ever open trade with the Japanese, he would find employment as an interrupter (Edgerton, 1969).*

RM knew Japan was a country that was forbidden for foreigners to enter. But he was determined to forge this wilderness despite the danger. His plan was to portray himself a castaway and rely on his circumstances to grant his safe passage.

RM sailed away from the *Plymouth* and arrived at a small island just off Rishiri Island. He spent two days on this small island to maintain the illusion of being shipwrecked and insure the *Plymouth* was far away. Then he boldly set sail for forbidden Japan. Just a mile off shore he capsized the boat (having practiced righting it earlier) in order to lose all his belonging thus adding to his desperate illusion. He waited off-shore and on the morning of July 2, 1848 the local people of Rishiri Island sent boats out to retrieve him. He was brought to the beach where about one-hundred people sat and watched. RM was given dry clothes and food to eat and by his account and the records made by the Japanese was treated well (Lewis & Murkami, 1923). Like the records that RM's father left through his writing, so too the Japanese



have detailed written records of his landing and progress through Japan. Detailed explanations of what was done and a complete inventory of his belongings were made. Here is a sample:

*The foreigner whose landing is here reported out to be examined at Nagasaki. He should therefore, be forwarded to that place...All books in the foreigner passion should be out under seals in the presence of your official and care taken...* (Egderton, 1969).

After forty days of freedom on Rishiri, RM was sent to prison in Nagasaki, the only place where the Japanese would have contact with the outside world. At Nagasaki there were twelve other foreigners, who were American ship-wrecked sailors. But it was only RM who initiated communication through English language classes and pursued cultural exchanges.

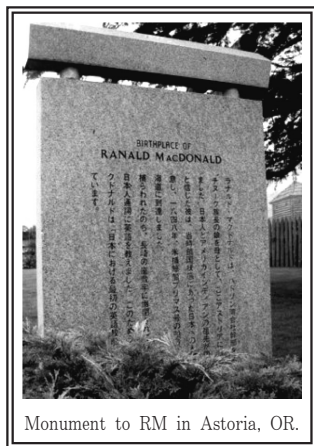
RM was met by Einosuke Murayama in Nagasaki. It seems Murayama coached RM to speak the truth and not to be afraid. The Japanese were curious as the circumstance of his arrival as well as his background. Although given little freedom, he was well treated and met daily with fourteen pupils. Information was shared about the outside world as well and language classes.

True to his mission, his intention to engage the Japanese was realized and to *learn of them* (the Japanese); *and, if the occasion should offer, to instruct them of us* (Egderton, 1969). This speaks to RM's character and intellect. Additional evidence of the relationships made during this time came years later when Moriyama met Commodore Perry. Moriyama asked if Perry knew how RM was and extended his well wishes (Schodt, 2003).

In 1850 an American ship the *Preble* arrived to retrieve the castaways. Captain James Glynn collected the prisoners and set sail for Shanghai. There RM left the ship and wandered widely in Asia, Australia and finally Europe. Eventually he returned Quebec, Canada to see his family. Then he ventured to Cariboo, British Columbia searching for gold. When this panned out, he moved back to Fort Colville in Washington State to live out his days with his niece.

He never married and he never achieved renown, but there was greatness in his life. He traveled the world looking for adventure and when all seemed tamed, he went to the one wilderness left. He seized the day, seized a moment. It would seem that moment was to affect the future of Japan and others. The rock RM dropped in the Sea of Japan was to have lasting ripples, even if RM himself would never know, as

the Japanese say, *ichigo ichie*, one meeting, one moment.



Monument to RM in Astoria, OR.

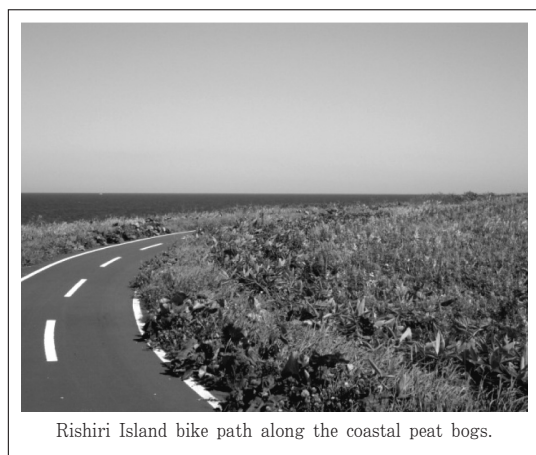
Today there are four markers for RM, but his mark continues to be far reaching. There are monuments to RM at his birth place in Astoria Oregon; on Rishiri Island where he first embarked to Japan; in Nagasaki where RM taught English and continued his cultural exchange; and at Toroda, RM's grave. His



Monument to RM in Nagasaki, Japan.

impact may have been small in the beginning but legacy of his adventure continues to inspire international relations and foster better understandings. The group, *Friends of MacDonald*, operated through Clatsop Historical Society in Astoria Oregon, is an active group which promotes international exchanges. Prompted by RM, Rotary clubs, sister city associations, newspapers, politicians, exchange students, writers, citizens from Japan and the U.S. and, yes, English teachers have been brought together to celebrate RM and been engaged in the adventure of cultural exchange.

It seems clear native speakers convey more than language and these contributions add a valuable connections to communications. Whether we know it or not our actions can have lasting effects. Even a moment may have lasting ripples which affect the future, *ichigo, ichie* indeed.



Rishiri Island bike path along the coastal peat bogs.

Returning to Rishiri Island, the story of RM continues within my narrative and another adventure: a bike ride around the island. I inspected the bike provided by my host Mr. Nishiya: a light-weight Cannondale with grip shift and nice saddle. I set out early to see if we were a team. It was 6 AM as I toured the town of Kutsugata. I headed for the bike trail and came around by the sea. There in the morning light, a lady dressed head-to-toe in

a purple flowered suit was reaching from shore to harvest kelp. As I headed back to



Rishiri bay with fishing boat returning with *uni*.



One of thirty-six views of Mt. Rishiri.

Photos by Pendell

the *ryokan*, I stopped by the hot-spring, *onsen*, hotel. The hours posed were from 2 to 10 PM. So I walked around to view the onsen. Big red and yellowish rocks rimmed a cloudy brown colored pool. As I surveyed the edge, my eyes tracked along the pool rimmed in rock with curving paths. My gaze moved across like a spy glass, moving across the pool to meet another pair of eyes looking back at me. A young man was enjoying an early soak; *Sumimasen* I said with a smile, glad the water was cloudy.

The bike was a good fit; so I headed out on my sixty kilometer trek around the island. The first 24 kilometers was on a bike path. It wound around the coast, through the peat bogs. The evidence of many flowers was there, but a few remained- the last of the season. Occasionally huge boulders and rock

formations stuck out like black animals. The promontories clearly vestiges from a volcanic flow long ago. The path climbed up to a cultural center and into the forest. Birch, cedar and fir cast dark shadows in the hot sun. The smell changed to the sweet richness a late summer forest has ripe with dragon flies, *tombo*, swirling in the air as if to say- hurry soon snow will fall. And all along the way, views of Mt. Rishiri- sometimes a single peak, sometimes a series of jagged edges viewed clearly or peaking behind a cloud or hidden by the trees.

The bike path ended, but the road was wide and there was little traffic. Stopping at scenic views overlooking the sea, rocky cliffs gave way to turquoise and emerald green bays. There leaning out of narrow white boats, people were looking through glass bottom horns scraping off *uni*. Other were hooking long wide, dark green ribbons of kelp to be laid out later on some rocky beach to dry. The clear, clean and cold water of this regional produces some of the finest food in Japan. It was easy to see why people place such a premium on products from Rishiri.

The rhythm of my petal strokes, taking time to stop and talk, look and listen was

shadowed by Mt. Rishiri. And there were other views of people, the sea, sheds with piles of plastic buckets, rock beaches clean and ready for kelp to be carefully laid flat. And at each roadside attraction each sojourn, a new view of Mt. Rishiri. Was this the thirty-six views of Mt. Rishiri AKA Hokusai's Mt. Fuji? My simple trip cannot compare to genius, nor was it a great adventure, but still there was something. Drawn to Rishiri for different reasons than RM, I did share a connection bound to people and place through memory and mountain views. RM, Hokusai and all who dream can see.

## TIME LINE

- 1639 Japan closed to all outsiders- death penalty for violators.
- 1792 The Russians unsuccessfully try to establish trade relations with Japan.
- 1801 Mackenzie reports on a route to the Pacific for the fur trade.
- 1803 Louisiana Purchase doubles the size of U.S.
- 1804 - 06 Corps of Discovery- Lewis and Clark map route to Pacific without a casualty.
- 1818 Treaty shares Northwest Territory resources between Great Britain; Ireland and U.S.
- 1821 North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company merge.
- 1821 Archibald MacDonald arrives in the Pacific Northwest at Fort George (Astoria).
- 1823 Archibald MacDonald marries Princess Sunday (Princess Raven - Koala Koa) daughter of the Chinook Chief Comcomly at Fort George (Astoria, Oregon).
- 1824 RM is born in Astoria; his mother dies; RM left in care of Chief Comcomly.
- 1825 Archibald MacDonald marries Jane Klyne.
- 1826 MacDonald family moves to Kamloops, Canada.
- 1829 MacDonald family moves to Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River.
- 1830 - 44 Archibald MacDonald writes profusely leaving a vivid portrayal of the times.
- 1833 Archibald MacDonald takes over at Fort Colville; RM in school at Fort Vancouver.
- 1834 Japanese sailors are rescued off the Oregon coast.
- 1836 RM attends school at Red River Settlement (Manitoba Canada).
- 1841 RM begins his travels around the world on trading ships for next seven years.
- 1843 First wagon train reaches the Oregon Territory led by Marcus Whitman.
- 1844 MacDonald family moves to Quebec, Canada.
- 1845 RM in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii); joins the whaling ship Plymouth under Captain Lawrence B. Edwards.
- 1846 Henry David Thoreau seeks solitude and adventure at Walden Pond.
- 1846 Oregon Treaty establishes the 49th parallel as the northern boundary of U.S.
- 1848 July 1, RM arrives on Rishiri Island, Hokkaido.
- 1849 August 15, RM begins journey to Nagasaki and his incarceration.
- 1850 RM leaves Japan on the Preble with Captain Glynn.
- 1850 RM travels widely to China, India, Australia, Europe, and British Columbia eventually returning to Fort Colville.
- 1854 Moriyama Einosuke, student of RM, negotiates the Convention of Kanagawa with Commodore Perry opening Japan to the West.
- 1867 Tokogawa Shogunate falls.
- 1868 - 1911 Meiji Restoration.
- 1894 RM dies at Fort Colville; buried at the Ferry County Cemetery, Toroda, WA.

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