

Okusa "European House"

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Introduction

Sakamoto International Cemetery was established in 1888 after the closure of the old cemetery for foreigners in the Nagasaki neighborhood of Kawakami-machi. The latter, known today as "Oura International Cemetery," had been opened in the early 1860's and was conveniently located near the foreign settlement, but by the mid-1880's it had run out of space for new burials. In response to a request for a new cemetery from the foreign consuls, the Governor of Nagasaki Prefecture granted a plot of land in the suburb of Yamazato-go (present-day Sakamoto-machi), and burials began there in October 1888. After the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, Nagasaki experienced a dramatic increase in foreign residents and visitors and a surge in its activity as an international trade port. As a result, the space originally allotted for Sakamoto International Cemetery reached capacity within little more than a decade, and an addition had to be opened across the road. After the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, however, the foreign population of Nagasaki decreased rapidly and the demand for burial space also dropped off.

Today, there is a total of 442 people of 16 nationalities buried in Sakamoto International Cemetery, but the vast majority of these people lie here forgotten by their relatives at home and unknown to the citizens of Nagasaki. A certain amount of information about them and about the circumstances of their life and death in Nagasaki can be found in the obituaries carried in English-language newspapers. But for people buried after 1928 — the year that the *Nagasaki Press* folded — and even for many who were buried before that date but did not gain notice in the newspapers, the only readily available source of information is the inscription on the gravestone, which usually consists simply of the name, death date and place of birth. Similarly, except for a small handful of well-known foreigners like Thomas Glover, Wilson Walker and John Davison, there are very few existing photographs of these people, their families and homes.

Research on the people buried in the international cemeteries of Nagasaki is thus greatly hampered by a lack of resources. Occasionally, however, a breakthrough occurs in the form of unexpected communication from descendants

overseas. In this paper, I report one such breakthrough. The persons in question are Swedish-born ship captain Bernhard Lundholm, who died in Nagasaki in 1918 and was buried at plot No. 59 in the addition to Sakamoto International Cemetery, and his Japanese wife Matsumoto Hiro, a native of Nagasaki who died here in 1947 at the age of 80. I present this new information along with a description of the house that the Lundholm-Matsumoto family occupied in the Nagasaki Prefecture village of Okusa.

Stockholm and Shanghai

Bernhard Lundholm was born in Stockholm, Sweden on 12 February 1854. He received his early education in Stockholm and as a young man took to sea, working as a sailor in the waters near Sweden. In 1881 he traveled with his sister Theodolinda to Shanghai, where the latter married a Swedish ship captain named Gustaf Oberg. With the help of his brother-in-law, Bernard found work as an officer on tug boats in Shanghai Harbor and later commanded sailing ships along the coast and on regular lines to Japan. His captain's license was issued on May 11, 1885 by the Swedish Foreign Office. In 1886, he worked as a pilot apprentice on the Yangtse River between Shanghai and Hankow, and during this period of training he made charts for navigating the river at night. By 1890 he had purchased a ship of his own and was working regularly on the Yangtse River. In 1892 he returned to Europe for the first time and was reunited with his parents, who described him as "thinner but recognizable since 1881." But Bernhard did not stay long in Sweden; in the summer of the same year he returned to Shanghai and resumed his former occupation. In 1894 he obtained a pilot's license and, with the lucrative income from that job, purchased what he described in a letter home as the "fastest and most beautiful boat in Shanghai." During the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 he continued to work as a pilot and on one occasion rescued an English tea ship caught in a channel full of mines.

In a letter sent to his niece Linda Oberg in May 1913, Bernhard stated that he had been living with a Japanese woman named Matsumoto Hiro for 24 years, which means that their relationship dated back to at least 1889. Nothing is known about the circumstances of their encounter, but in view of the economic disparity at the time and the extreme rarity of international travel by Japanese people, particularly women, it is unlikely that Hiro went to Shanghai independently. Bernhard perhaps met her in Nagasaki while visiting the port in the course of his duties as a ship captain. In any case, only conjecture is possible on this point.

The first concrete mention of Matsumoto Hiro in family records is a letter sent to Sweden by Bernhard at Christmas 1899, in which he enclosed a photograph of himself sitting with Hiro in their home in Shanghai. In a letter dated March that same year, Bernhard's sister Theodolinda reports that he "has a house in Nagasaki in which he has done the interior design after his own taste" and that "he is planning to live there 'when he gets old'." Unfortunately, Bernhard Lundholm's name does not appear in the annual directories of foreign residents of Japan at the time, and so there is no way to determine the location of the house referred to in the above letter. It seems likely, though, that he had already purchased the plot of land on the seashore at Okusa, Tarami-cho where he would indeed later retire, and that the "house in Nagasaki" is none other than the large Western-style building where Bernhard spent the last years of his life with Matsumoto Hiro.

Peace and Quiet at Okusa

During the Edo Period and early Meiji Period, Okusa was an isolated hamlet populated by a few hundred people leading a life of quiet self-sufficiency, surrounded by the pristine beauty of Omura Bay on one side and steep, lushly forested hills on the other. The port of Nagasaki could only be reached by an arduous journey by sea or over mountain paths. According to the Nagasaki Prefecture *Shomuka Shishigakari Jimubo* (Ledger Book of the Nagasaki Prefecture Commercial Division) dated May 1885, the population of Okusa was 1,077 and there were 242 households, 239 of which were engaged in farming. Despite the coastal location, not a single family was engaged in fishing as an occupation and only three ran commercial enterprises. The main products of the village also reflect its rustic character: rice, barley, chestnuts, soy beans, oranges, timber and firewood.

The extension of the Kyushu Railroad from Moji to Nagasaki in November 1898, however, brought a surge in activity and a great change in atmosphere to Okusa. Tracks were laid through the village, at a point where the Nagasaki Main Line took a circuitous route around mountains and emerged briefly on the coast of Omura Bay, and a station — one of only five between Isahaya and Nagasaki — was established in the village to provide a loading place for merchandise headed to urban centers in Kyushu and overseas via the port of Nagasaki.

Nothing in available records suggests that Hiro, who was a native of the Dozomachi neighborhood of Nagasaki city, had any family connections in Okusa, and so this does not seem to be the reason for the choice of Okusa as a place to build a house. It is reasonable to assume that Bernhard Lundholm and Matsumoto Hiro

were among the first passengers who gazed from the train windows at the breathtaking scenery of Omura Bay and that they simply fell in love with the area and decided to build a house there.

This conjecture is further supported by their selection of a site between the railroad tracks and the ocean, which was clearly motivated by Bernhard's desire to be right on the water and to have a place where he could enjoy his hobbies of yacht building and sailing. Houses in the old village of Okusa were invariably built as far away from the water as possible to avoid the danger of typhoons and high waves, and, as mentioned earlier, the fishing industry was all but nonexistent here, and so it is unlikely that the Okusa natives shared Bernhard's enthusiasm for the sea or desire to live right beside it.

Before the construction of the house itself, a promontory with stone embankment walls was erected over the natural contour of the shoreline, and a level foundation was created for the house and garden. The total area of the property was about 593 *tsubo* (1,960 square meters). The wooden house, which apparently reached completion in 1902, borrowed from the styles of the gracious residences for foreigners in the Nagasaki European concession, with features such as brick chimneys and coal-burning fireplaces, painted clapboard walls, first and second-story verandas, tall windows with shutters, and wood floors ready for carpets. Bernhard also built a dock to moor his yacht and a narrow slipway where he could pull it up in bad weather. In view of the fact that it was constructed almost simultaneously with the abolition of the European concessions in 1899, the house is undoubtedly one of the earliest examples of Western-style residential architecture in a rural Japanese setting.

After the move to Nagasaki Prefecture from Shanghai, Bernhard Lundholm continued to work as a captain and pilot on European ships plying the ocean routes between Japan and China. In 1905, his sister Theodolinda visited Nagasaki with her niece Thida, and she mentions Bernhard and Hiro as follows in a letter back to Sweden dated 27 June: "We left Shanghai on Saturday and arrived in Nagasaki Monday morning. Ehrhardts was onboard the ship. Bernhard was pilot. O-Hiro came on a visit in Nagasaki — she sent her card first calling herself "Mrs Lundholm" — well, well! Diamond rings and rings of marriage. Very pretty and sweet — she took a very admonishing tone with Bernhard. We were at the Nagasaki Hotel for one day."

The rather disparaging attitude toward Hiro is no doubt due in part to Theodolinda's knowledge that Bernhard and Hiro had not officially married despite their long cohabitation and obvious commitment to each other. In a letter to his niece Linda Oberg, daughter of Theodolinda, written in Okusa on 17 May 1913, Bernhard

expresses congratulations on Linda's marriage engagement and brings up the question of his own marital status: "So you have decided to take the leap, and there is one sure thing, whatever trouble you are going to have in the future, you would have more not married. . . Hiro gives you her kindest regards and she thinks you are doing the very right thing to get married — a dig at me who does not like to get married."

It was not until 1916, six years after his complete retirement from work at sea, that Bernhard officially married Hiro. He not only married her, in fact, but also took the unusual step (for a Westerner) of relinquishing his Swedish citizenship and becoming a naturalized Japanese national. Clearly, he was now totally committed to his life with Hiro in Okusa and had given up any intention to return to Sweden. He was now perfectly content to spend his time tinkering in his garden, sailing his yacht on Omura Bay and relaxing beside the fireplace in the house.

Bernhard's love for Okusa — and his affiliation with his Japanese neighbors — is underlined by the fact that he participated actively in the improvement of the village. In 1912, two years after his retirement, he even donated funds to build a stone bridge over a stream crossing the Okusa road near his property. Although it does not exist today, the bridge — which was named after Bernhard in commemoration of his donation — is mentioned as follows in the "Hundred Year History of Okusa Primary School:"

When the road above the [Lundholm] house was still a narrow village path, there was a small stone bridge that bore a plaque saying 'B. Lundholm, Sweden' and an inscription showing the name of the builder, Nishimura Yoshisaburo. The invitation to the ceremony to celebrate the completion of the bridge reads as follows: 'You are cordially invited to attend the inauguration of the B. Lundholm Bridge, to be held tomorrow from 10:00 a.m. at the site of the bridge in Motogama. [Signed] Yamaguchi Yasumi, Mayor of Okusa Village, August 12, 1912.' [translated from Japanese by the author]

In 1918, only months after officially marrying Matsumoto Hiro and taking Japanese citizenship, Bernhard Lundholm was diagnosed with cancer of the liver at the Nagasaki Medical College. Rather than lingering in hospital, though, the former ship's captain retired to his house in Okusa, and he died there in his wife's arms on September 20, 1918. He was 64 years old at the time. The next day an obituary appeared in the English-language newspaper *Nagasaki Press*, reporting the death and providing the following outline of his career:

The late Captain Lundholm, who was a Swede by birth, came to Shanghai on a Swedish sailing vessel about thirty years ago and remained with the ship in the China coast service for some time. He then became a pilot, first on the upper Yangtse and later on the lower reaches of the river. Subsequently, he was engaged for several years in piloting the N.D.L. and P.M. liners in the China Sea, before he retired from active sea life about eight years ago. Since then he resided at Okusa and there lived a comparatively quiet and secluded life.

Hiro carried Bernhard's remains to Nagasaki by train and participated in a funeral service at the "Seaman's Home" in Oura, an institution which Bernhard had apparently frequented while still alive. After the funeral, Hiro had the remains cremated in the Japanese fashion and buried in the cemetery for foreigners in the Urakami district north of central Nagasaki. The fine, foreign-made gravestone that she erected for her deceased husband still stands today on its original site in Sakamoto International Cemetery.

The "European House"

Matsumoto Hiro lived alone in Okusa after the death of her husband, but in 1920 she legally adopted the 17 year-old daughter of her older sister Sen. The girl, whose name became "Matsumoto Fuyo" as a result of the adoption, had apparently been a favorite of Bernhard's since she was a small child and had visited the Okusa house frequently. Fuyo also used the Swedish name "Anna," which was probably a childhood nickname given to her by Bernhard. She commuted from the house in Okusa to Kwassui Women's School in the Higashiyamate neighborhood of Nagasaki, and during the first years after Bernhard's death, Hiro continued to live in Okusa. But after Fuyo's marriage, the family moved to Doza-machi and kept the Okusa house as a second home.

In November 1942, eleven months into the Pacific War, the Mitsubishi Nagasaki Arms Factory purchased the Okusa house from Hiro. Established in 1917 as the first civilian weapons plant in Japan, this factory had produced the torpedoes used in the raid on Pearl Harbor, and it had undergone a dramatic increase in production since the outbreak of war. The sudden need for additional factory personnel had created a severe housing shortage, and the Okusa house was acquired as part of efforts to alleviate that shortage. According to descendants of Matsumoto Fuyo, the sum of money that Hiro received for the house was so meager

that the transaction was tantamount to forcible requisition. The building was used subsequently as a dormitory for mobilized female laborers, and about 20 young women took up lodgings there while working in the factory in Nagasaki or the Mitsubishi facilities in nearby Dosaki.

After the war's end, Hiro attempted to buy the house back but was unable to do so. She died in Nagasaki on March 13, 1947, no doubt deeply grieved about her failure to regain the house that her husband Bernhard had loved so much.

Matsumoto Fuyo buried her mother's ashes along with Bernhard's in the grave at Sakamoto International Cemetery and carved an inscription in English saying, "Also the widow of the above, Hiro Matsumoto, who died March 13, 1947 aged 80."

On July 1, 1951, Nagasaki Mitsubishi Precision Instruments — the postwar reincarnation of the Mitsubishi Nagasaki Arms Factory — was amalgamated by the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Nagasaki Shipyard, and as a result the former Lundholm residence in Okusa became the possession of the shipyard. The company designated the house as "Okusa Club" and used it as a recreation facility for employees of the shipyard. As the years passed, it became an odd and somewhat mysterious landmark, referred to by people in the area as the *Seiyokan*, or "European House," but remembered by few as the former residence of Bernhard Lundholm.

In June 1964, part of the property was acceded to Nagasaki Prefecture to allow the widening of the prefectural road running parallel to the train tracks. In 1971, the "B. Lundholm Bridge" over the stream behind the property was removed and replaced with a modern structure called "Terahata Bridge" that is so well incorporated into the road that it is invisible to people in passing cars. Finally, in April 1978, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries abolished the Okusa Club and tore the building down, thereafter constructing a small boat house for members of the Yacht Club at the Mitsubishi Nagasaki Shipyard and allowing the elderly citizens of Okusa to use the site of the former house as a field for recreation.

Today, aside from the unchanged vista of Omura Bay, all that remains of the former Lundholm residence is the slipway built by Bernhard and parts of the stone embankment and dock. The railroad tracks still carry trains past the property, but the section of the former Nagasaki Main Line including Okusa is now a detour that, except for a local train about once an hour, is by-passed by the trains on the new Nagasaki Main Line cutting through tunnels straight down the peninsula. Although quiet most of the day, Okusa Station is still in operation on its original site, and passengers with time enough to take the local train can enjoy the same beautiful views that captivated Bernhard Lundholm and Matsumoto Hiro a century ago.

Across the World's Oceans

On November 14, 1987, Matsumoto Fuyo died in Fukuoka at the age of 84, and her ashes were interred along with those of her step-parents in Sakamoto International Cemetery. Her inscription — carved on the side of the gravestone by her children — gives her name as “Anna Matsumoto Fuyo,” combining the Japanese and Swedish names. At the top, above Bernhard Lundholm's name, the gravestone is embellished with a carving of a globe, a fitting symbol of Bernhard Lundholm's long career on the world's oceans, of his international love affair with Matsumoto Hiro, of his Swedish birth and Japanese nationality, and of the contributions that he made to his beloved second hometown of Okusa, Tarami-cho, Nagasaki Prefecture.

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