

Miss Whitney's Challenges and Achievements:
An American Woman's Life Discovered
from
The *Shoso'in*-related Documents in the Meiji Era

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Introduction

Discovering by chance a name of an American lady several years ago in the applicant list for admission to the *Shoso'in* Repository of the year 1889, the author gave detailed researches on what kind of life she had had in Japan. This paper is, therefore, to explain the process the author took to disclose her identity and accomplishments.

More specifically, the author first explained the origin and value of the Repository in the Japanese history. After referring to what the Meiji Government did to make the most of the treasures preserved in the *Shoso'in* from the 8th century, she also analyzed the meaning of the existence of an American woman in the applicant list the year 1889, and then revealed her identity, her life and achievements in Japan.

First of all, the American lady was Adelaide Whitney. She was the youngest child of a family who came to Japan in 1875. To this date, the life of her brother, Willis Norton Whitney, medical doctor and interpreter for the American Legation in those days, was known as his wife wrote his biography

with the help of his sister, Clara. Clara herself was also quite well known as she married the third son of Kaishu Katsu (1823–1899), a famous Japanese politician in the late-19th century.

Adelaide Whitney's life was, however, not well analyzed in spite of her cultural, educational, and Christian contributions to Japan. In particular, she was the very person who started the Scripture Union of Japan, a British-origin group of daily readings of the Bible. At the same time, the real reason and passion of her visit to the *Shoso'in* Repository drew the author's attention. What Adelaide did thus came to the fore of this paper.

1) What is *Shoso'in*: Its Origin and Value

During the Nara Period (710–784), the system of centralized government based on the Chinese legal structure was established in the capital of Nara. The Japanese word of *Shoso'in* (正倉院) first signified large granaries, or warehouses to store rice or other threshed grain, paid in kind by the people as taxes. Major large temples in each province had such warehouses as they were built by the central government.

Unfortunately, all disappeared for some reasons up until today, except the one at the Todaiji Temple in the Nara Park. Located in the northwest of the Great Buddha Hall, this *Shoso'in* is approximately 33 m in length, 9.4 m in depth, and 14 m in height. It was built before October 756, as there still remains a document dated of that month, referring to the deposit of some medication into the warehouse.

The treasures stored inside enhance the value of the warehouse as a whole. After the death of the Emperor Shomu (701–756), who was famous for his dedication to constructing the Great Buddha of the Todaiji Temple, approximately 700 items from his private and official belongings as well as

sixty kinds of medicines were first offered to the Temple, with an official list with a detailed explanation for each item, to pray for the repose of his soul. His robes, musical instruments, arms and armors, glass vases, were also donated to the temple from his palace.

Therefore, the Temple stored these treasures in the main warehouse of the Temple, currently known as the *Shoso'in* Repository. Since then, a wider variety of other valuables such as artifacts exclusively used for Buddhist ceremonies and rituals at the Temple were added in the warehouse, and there are now 56 mirrors, more than 170 masks, 70,000 glass beads, and several hundreds of thousands of pieces of textiles. In other words, the Repository is a container for the antiquities with official provenance.

The rarity and the authenticity of this repository could be further augmented by the fact that it was imperially sealed for centuries. This sealing system has a close relation with the huge respect towards the Emperor Shomu and the religious devotion by his descendants in later days. The opening of the door of the Repository demanded imperial permission or orders by the emperor of the time, and a piece of white paper with privy seals was used to wind an imperial lock.

Since the 8th century, several restoration works were given to both the exterior and interior of the warehouse, and some precious items were moved to other places on an occasional basis by the powers of those days. The Repository was, however, basically under the stringent supervision of the Todaiji Temple, and that is why the whole treasure including the building itself and items inside were best-reserved for more than one thousand and two hundred years.

2) *Shoso'in* in the Meiji Period (1868-1912)

After the Meiji Restoration (1868), the control of the Repository was transferred from the Temple to the new government, which vertiginously altered the supervisory agencies of the warehouse. They even distributed among several ministries, such as the division of the control, in the year of 1881 among *Kunaisho* (宮内省 The Imperial Household Agency) for the door-opening of the warehouse, the *Naimusho* (内務省 the Ministry of Home Affairs) for management of documents, and the *Noshomusho* (農商務省 The Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce) for maintenance of housed items. At any rate, the Temple was deprived of the control of the whole warehouse. And it became the government that decided how to preserve or maintain the treasures.

Major politicians of the newly-established central government noticed the merits of the treasures without delay as political tools to improve Japan's national status as well as their cultural values. The authorities thus decided to use them as proofs to show the excellence of the Japanese traditional handicraft, and even aesthetic senses that imperial ancestors had. The central government had detailed researches done by experts, including photograph-taking of the treasures already in 1872 (Yonezaki, 2005).

This was partly an effort for the search of proper items to be exhibited at international exhibitions held in European countries in those days such as the Wien Expo in 1873. Those exhibitions were considered as ideal occasions for showing Western nations that a small Asian country which appeared late into the global setting had elaborated highly sophisticated culture for centuries.

Similar efforts to enhance the status of Japan, or the government themselves were continued by offering a glimpse of the authentic treasures to foreign visitors at the Repository, if there were such occasions. For example,

when a grandson of the German Empire came to Japan in 1879 or an imperial member of the Kingdom of Italy did the same in 1880, they were invited to Nara to have a chance of looking at the treasures firsthand in the Repository.

The authorities never forgot chances to show Japan's superiority. That is why Hirofumi Ito (1841-1909), a famous politician, imported glass-made show cases from Germany and put them inside the Repository in 1880. Then, in 1889, they started the "Repository Opening to the Public" system while airing valuables in the month of August, by which a limited number of people with adequate eligibility were allowed to enter the house to have the honor of looking at them closely. The details of this will be explained in the next chapter.

Interestingly, hundreds of non-fragile pieces among such imperial treasures were displayed as the prime exhibits of the Nara Expositions in 1875, 1876, 1878, and 1880, all of which were held in the Great Buddha Hall of Todaiji Temple. All these expositions gathered quite a number of people, but it was reportedly a real pity that they did draw attention of only local citizens, due to the lack of adequate methods of public relations activity and the insufficient public transportation system from urban areas in those days (Nakamura, 1929).

3) The Commencement of Repository Opening during the Airing (曝涼)

In one sense, the Meiji Government implemented dichotomous strategies. They tried to maintain the quality of both the stored items and the building itself as much as possible through carefully-arranged checking-up works both at Nara and even at Tokyo (Yoneda, 1999). But at the same time, they made the most of those cultural assets to highlight Japan's artistic origins with splendid and exquisite examples.

Annual airing in mid-summer was a traditional effort to check the

condition of fragile items in Japan since the ancient times, as airing gives them good ventilation and removes moisture from them. In the past, it was the Todaiji Temple that did airing of imperial treasures in 787, 793, 811, and 856, respectively.

The Meiji Government followed this tradition, and recommenced regular check-ups in mid-summer month of August from 1883. The Repository was open for one month in August. But in later days, the period was shortened to only fourteen days in the month of November (Matsuoka, 1935). In 1889, the Government decided to permit people to go into the Repository so they were able to have a closer look at the treasures during the airing. This is the beginning of the Repository-Opening Event.

4) Application Procedures for Admission to *Shoso'in* during the Meiji Period

The Imperial Museum of Tokyo (Today's Tokyo National Museum), which was under the control of the Imperial Household Agency in those days, was designated as the supervising agency of the treasures in July 1889. That is why the Museum still stores micro-filmed documents related to the Repository as well as the opening procedures of those days.

One of such documents, dated October 2, 1888, tells us how they started the Opening system. It says that the authorities requested two newspaper companies; one in Tokyo and the other in Kyoto, to carry the announcement of how to apply for the admission (see Figure 1).

Thus, both newspapers ran an article on how to apply for the admission on July 13 of 1889, which says as follows (the article was translated from Japanese into English by the author. Refer to the Figure 2):

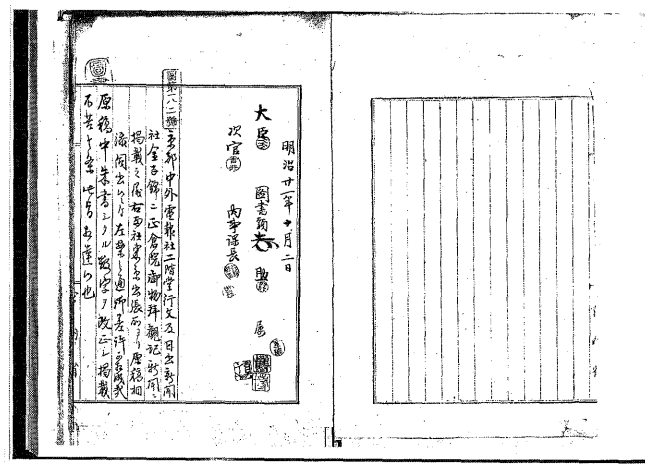


Fig. 1 Document of October 2nd, 1888

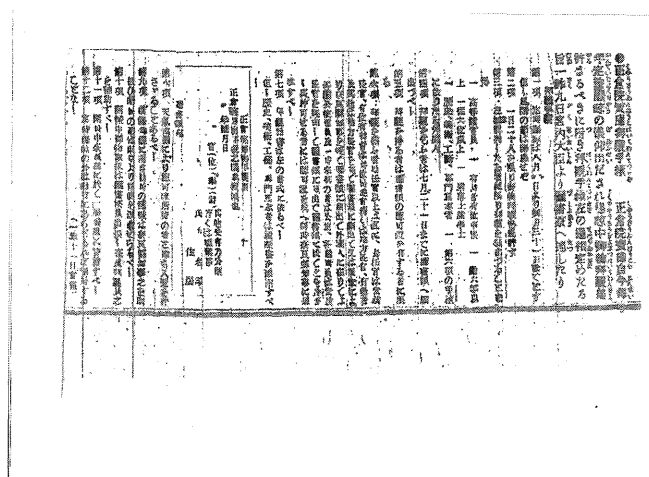


Fig. 2 Article on *Shoso'in* Opening from *Hinode-shinbun*, July 13, 1889

The Process of Applying for the Admission to the *Shoso'in* Repository

The Imperial Minister sent a notice on July 9th which says that they would permit several persons to go into the *Shoso'in* Repository to see the imperial treasures during airing as the bill of starting the annual airing of the Repository has been issued. The procedures for admission were determined as follows:

Procedures for Admission

1. The regular airing would be from August 1st to 31st of the same month. The doors won't open in case of bad weather.
2. The admission would be up to twenty persons a day.
3. The eligibility:
 - (1) Public officers with higher ranks.
 - (2) Titled persons
 - (3) Highly decorated persons (higher than the order of the rising sun)
 - (4) Those with doctorate or bachelor's degrees
 - (5) Experts in history, art, handicraft, or benefactors (they should also submit their résumés).
 - (6) Foreigners followed by the procedures mentioned in the article 6.
4. The application should be sent before July 21.
5. The admission should be permitted only to those with appropriately submitted applications and duly obtained the permission as such.
6. The application should be sent via a member of his legation staff for the case of foreigners, via the minister in Japan in case of temporary visitors, or via the head of proper authorities in case of specialists employed by the government.

In case of foreigners, in particular, they must have had several difficulties to obtain the admission before the due date. First of all, they needed to be able to read and understand this announcement in Japanese. Next, it is presumably very much troublesome to send the formal in Japanese within one week via adequate procedures. At the same time, foreigners in those days were required to get travel permission before making a domestic trip in Japan because of the extraterritoriality admitted by several treaties established during the *Ansei* era (1854-1860).

5) What Applicants' Name Lists Tell Us?

When analyzing “the List of the Applicants for the Admission to *Shosho'in* to Look at the Imperial Treasures (正倉院御物拝観願人名簿) of the year 1889, the author noticed that the list had eight foreign applicants, and six of them have small seals (捺印) under their names (see Figure 3).

Unlike Western countries where official documents need signatures of the related parties, stamping seals means that one person acknowledges liability for some activities in Japan. The author thus questioned herself what these seals meant and investigated other documents in search of their meaning.

Fortunately, there still remains a log made by clerks who actually worked at the Repository during the airing period in 1889. According to the log, the clerks received six foreign visitors during the airing, although they did not mention any of their names.

However, the author read several other related documents to find what happened to Mr. “レーマン (Lehmann?)”, the last person on the applicant list. The author was lucky enough to find a telegraph which says that application for admittance to *Shoso'in* Repository from Mr. Lehmann was not accepted, and the reason was that his application was made too late after the deadline.

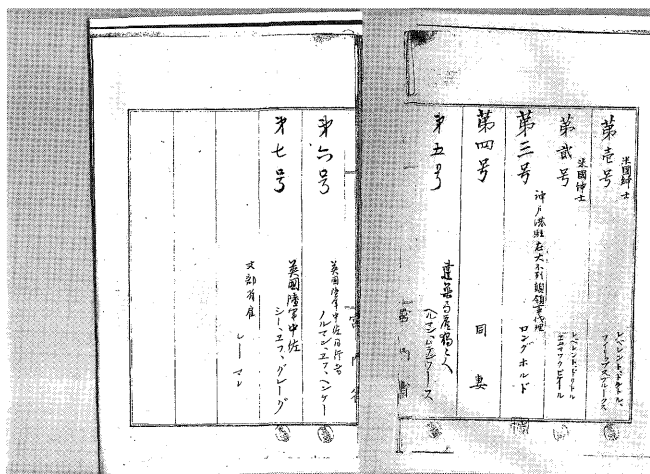


Fig. 3 The List of the Applicants for the Admission to *Shoso'in* to Look at the Imperial Treasures of the year of 1889, pages of foreign applicants, Nos. 1-7

Therefore, it is natural to conclude that Mr. Lehmann did not have the seal under his name because of the fact that he was not able to appear at the Repository.

In other words, seals below applicants' names on the list meant that those six persons actually came to see the inside of the Repository but the spouse of Mr. “ロングホルト (Longholt?)” did not come to Nara.

6) On Female Applicants

As already mentioned, those who have small seals near their names were analyzed as actual visitors to the *Shoso'in*. The first applicant list of the year 1889 has eight foreign applicants, and one of them is mentioned as the wife of Mr. Longholt whose occupation was mentioned as deputy consul to the Great Britain in Kobe. His spouse was referred to as an individual person using a full

column and proper numbering, although her name was not written.

Meanwhile, no foreigners or wives of the Japanese were mentioned on the list of 1890, but the applicant list of 1891 has several interesting points. First of all, among about 240 Japanese applicants, 18 applied with their wives, and one even with his mother (see Figure 4).

For example, on the Figure 4, three males, No. 7, No. 9 and No. 10 applied for admission with their mother or wives, additionally in smaller and weaker letters with no names. From No. 12 to No. 18 persons applied with their wives in smaller letters with their own individual names. However, none of those female applicants had seals near her name, and even worse, the names of spouses from No. 12 to No. 18 have straight lines, most probably signifying that their applications were cancelled later. Like this, all the female applicants, 18 in total, appeared to have been withdrawn before they actually came to Nara.

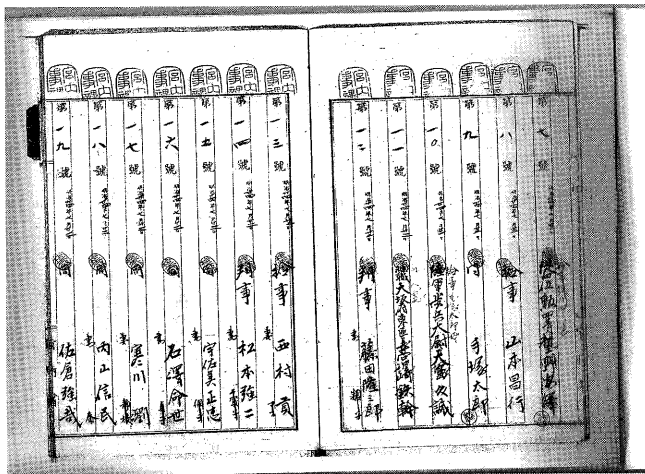


Fig. 4 The List of the Applicants for the Admission to *Shosho'in* to Loot at the Imperial Treasures of the year of 1891, pages of Japanese applicants, Nos. 7-19

Meanwhile, in the foreigners' section of the 1891 list, thirty people applied for the admission, and four of them were females although two of them were not properly accounted for (please refer to Figures 5-7).

More specifically, No. 10 “ミッス・ホイト子ー (Miss Whitney)” on Fig. 6 is accounted for and mentioned with a full column, but No. 16, Mr. “フォサリユウ (Fossarieu?)” applied with his wife additionally with him and she was just mentioned not by her name but only as his spouse in smaller letters next to him (Fig. 6).

The list has two other female applicants, as already mentioned. One of the remaining two, No. 22 on Fig. 7 is fully accounted for by her name, “ミセス・ジー・ペー・モーワ (Mrs. Moore?)”, while the other, No. 2 on Fig. 5 is not accounted but only as the spouse of Mr. “ゼー・ケー・グードリッチ (Goodrich?)” in smaller letters. Neither of them have seals near their names.

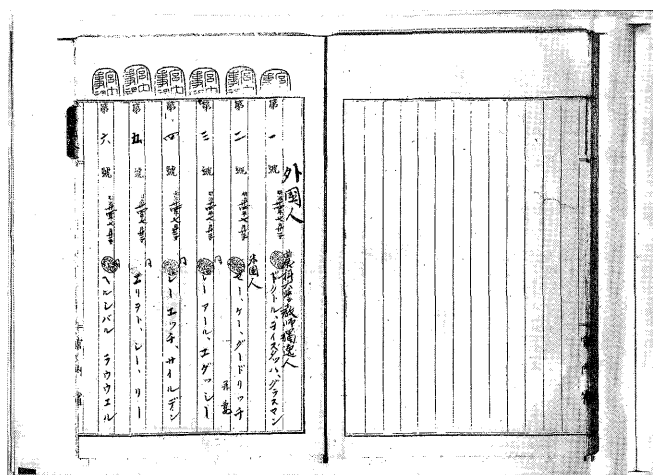


Fig. 5 The List of the Applicants for the Admission to *Shosho'in* to Look at the Imperial Treasures of the year of 1891, pages of foreign applicants, Nos. 1-6

[illegible]

Fig. 6 The List of the Applicants for the Admission to *Shosho'in* to Look at the Imperial Treasures of the year of 1891, pages of foreign applicants, Nos. 7-19

[illegible]

Fig. 7 The List of the Applicants for the Admission to *Shosho'in* to Look at the Imperial Treasures of the year of 1891, pages of foreign applicants, Nos. 20-30

identify D. Whitney. He was Doctor Willis N. Whitney (1855–1918), son of Mr. William C. Whitney (1825–1882). William came to Japan in 1875 with his family (wife and three children) to teach modern bookkeeping in Tokyo. Furthermore, the fact that both Dr. Whitney and his wife have a name seal respectively on their names indicates that the couple actually came to the Repository.

Willis had two younger sisters. The older sister was Clara A. N. Whitney (1860–1936), who married the third son of Kaishu Katsu in 1886, and became quite famous with her diary in later days. It is thus impossible to call Clara “Miss Whitney” as of 1891.

Willis has another sister, who was Adelaide Norton Whitney. She was born in 1869, and came to Japan with her family when she was only six years old. Clara sometimes referred to her sister in her diary. For example, on February 28, 1879, there is an anecdote on Adelaide that a foreign woman praised her,



Fig. 9 Willis, Clara (in the middle), and Adelaide Whitney

saying that she (Adelaide) was the most beautiful girl that the woman had ever seen. On the same day, Clara herself referred to her sister as a very active girl. On March 1 of the same year, Clara wondered how much Adelaide would continue to grow up in height even at the age of ten.

8) Adelaide, Founder of the Scripture Union in Japan

The most interesting episode Clara wrote in her diary about Adelaide was as follows:

Addie has started a branch of the London Scripture Union in Japan. It now numbers about seventy members or more, and it is hoped it will be the means of encouraging the study of the scriptures more than ever among Japanese Christians (Tuesday, November 20, 1883).

Thus, Adelaide established this collaborative movement to read the Bible together when she was only fourteen years old. This was to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther (1483–1546). According to Clara's diary, the movement further developed to hold a gathering of more than one thousand people next April.

This Scripture Union was a British-based mission movement, and it started a system of encouraging children for daily Bible readings in 1879. As the Whitney family left Japan in January 1880 and William died in London in 1882, Adelaide most probably learned this activity while she was there.

The Scripture Union of Japan's List of Reading for 1895 tells that the young girl, a member of the British Headquarters, had established their Japan branch and issued the booklet called “聖書の友.” (see Fig. 10)

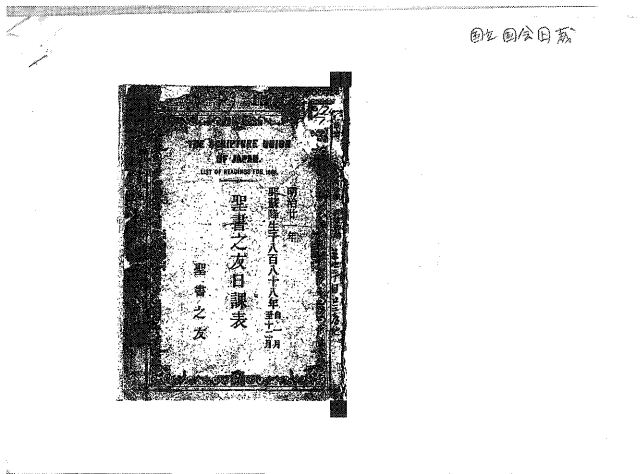


Fig. 10 Front Page of “聖書の友” 1888

**This photograph was obtained from the website of the
National Diet Library of Japan, digital archives**

At first, Adelaide tried to follow the British sample and make a similar activity for the Christian youth in Japan. But Sen Tsuda (1837–1908), father of a Japanese pioneer in education for females, Umeko Tsuda, volunteered to be a caretaker of the movement. He insisted that such movement could be for those who were not only physically but also mentally young. He is said to make this remark, because the ban on Christianity was lifted in 1873 and thus only ten years had passed since the Japanese people obtained official permission to express Christian beliefs (Shibuzawa, 1981). In this sense, Japan was still young as a Christian nation.

The List of Readings for 1888 which the Scripture Union of Japan issued showed that their office was at the same address as where the Whitney Family lived in Hikawa-cho, Tokyo in those days (please refer to Fig. 11 and Fig. 12).

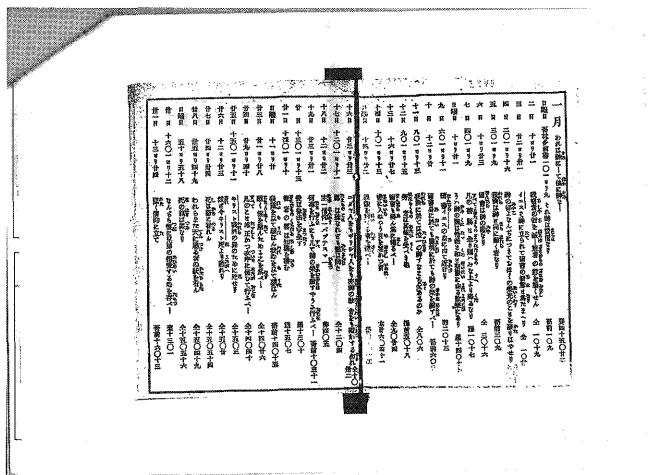


Fig. 11 Passage for Daily Reading for January 1888 of “聖書の友”
The two photographs of Fig. 11 and Fig. 12 were obtained from the website of the National Diet Library of Japan, digital archives

9) Advantage for Adelaide Whitney

Some readers might still have doubts that it is impossible to identify “Miss Whitney” on the 1891 Applicant List as Adelaide. But we can name several other advantages for Adelaide. Firstly, we should not forget about the fact that foreigners in those days were usually demanded to stay in special settlements for foreigners and needed to have permits from their legation or consulate as well as from the local governments of their itinerary, for making a trip for any reasons in Japan. And in case of American travelers, Dr. Whitney was the person whom they had to consult on. In other words, Willis was in charge of issuing such permits to his compatriots (Whitney and Kaji, 1995). This was of great advantage for Adelaide to obtain this permit smoothly.

Furthermore, her parents had already died before 1889, and her older

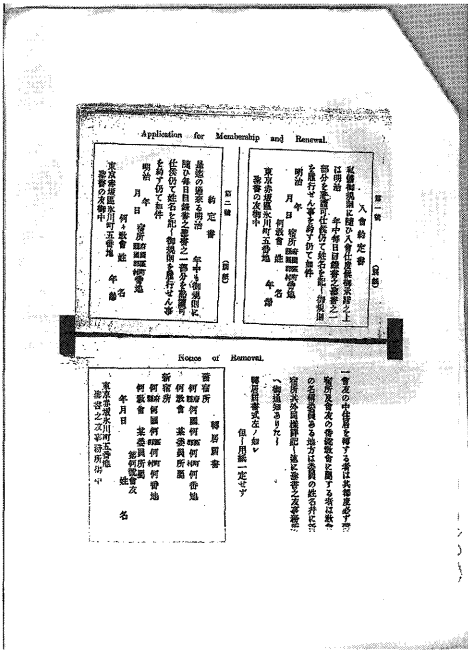


Fig. 12 Last page of “聖書の友” 1888

sister, Clara was quite busy having a third child in 1889. Her brother, Willis, was also busy working for the American legation. Adelaide was independent from her family, and there must have been no one who stopped her trip to Nara.

It is also possible to presume two other reasons. How could she afford the trip to Nara, and why did she want to visit the *Shoso'in*? The author found answers to these questions in Clara’s writing. Clara wrote in her letter of October 11, 1891 to her friend, Umeko Tsuda that Adelaide seemed to be getting along as an English teacher at *Kazoku-jogakko* 華族女学校 (Fukuda 2009). The date of the letter is about fifty days after Adelaide visited Nara.

Kazoku-jogakko was a school exclusively for girls of the nobility, established in 1885 in Tokyo. Clara also mentioned that Adelaide earned twice as much as Clara did, although both were working for the same hours in a month.

Thus Adelaide was a rare woman who was able to provide for herself in those days. At the same time, if the school was for daughters of the aristocracy, the *Shoso'in* visit was a perfect occasion for Adelaide to learn more about the cultural background of her students. Unlike Willis or Clara, who had various occasions to associate with the upper class in Japan while their parents were alive, Adelaide was too small to have chances of getting glimpses of the Japanese social circles.

Considering all these factors together, "Miss Whitney" on the Applicant List of the year 1889 must be Adelaide Whitney. She was able to get a permit to make the journey to Nara easily from her brother. She was active enough to put her ideas into action. She had a good cultural motive to learn more about the origin of Japanese culture, especially the one related to the Imperial Family. She had a financial resource to afford a trip from Tokyo to Nara.

Incidentally, the increase of female applicants in the year 1891 might have a relation to the fact that *Minatomachi* (currently Namba) and *Kashiwara* (city at the foot of Mt. Shigi along the Yamato-gawa River, and the east end of Osaka Prefecture, or closest to the entrance of the Nara Prefecture) were connected by train in 1889. Then, Ohji (the western end of Nara basin at the foot of Mt. Shigi) and the center of Nara were connected by another rail in December, 1890. Before the train appeared, rickshaw was the ordinary method to pass through the Nara basin, and the hardship which foreigners had suffered by using traditional transportation system such as *kago* (駕籠) or rickshaw was vividly described in memoirs of John Mckim, an American missionary in Nara in later days (Hamada, 1966).

10) Adelaide after *Shoso'in* Visit

During her dedication to the activity of the Scripture Union, Adelaide might have become acquainted with British missionaries. Anyway, she married Rev. David Marshall Lang (1862–1946), a descendant of Robert Lang of Paisley, Renfrewshire, on January 17, 1893. The couple then moved to her husband's place of appointment, Hakodate, in Hokkaido.

Unfortunately, however, Adelaide died during childbirth in October, 1896. After her death, Willis decided to send the baby boy back to London so that Lang's family could take care of him (Kaji & Whitney, 1995).

11) Adelaide Accomplishments

Adelaide had a short but meaningful life. She lost both parents in her teens. But she dedicated herself to Christianity as the founder of the Scripture Union of Japan. She had experiences to live on her own by working as a teacher. She was active enough to apply for the *Shoso'in* visit promptly and to go to Nara, leaving her name in the official document as the first woman who entered the *Shoso'in* Repository.

Scripture Union of Japan continued to expand its activity to encourage the youth to read the whole Bible even today. The *Shoso'in* Exhibition gathered 290,000 people during 20 days in 2010, and 240,000 people during 17 days in 2011.

Last but not least, Burk's Landed Gentry in Scotland said that the baby of Adelaide and Rev. David Marshall Lang, was also named David Marshall Lang, and lived the life of a professional military man. He left a son, who later became a researcher of philological sciences and worked in the academia as a professor of Caucasian Language and the honorary secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society (1962–1964). The author considers that all these are achievements of Adelaide

and that people should pay much more respect to her for her contributions as a pioneering working woman and person devoted for the religious and cultural pursuits.

The chronological table of the Early Meiji era related to the *Shoso'in* Repository and Nara based on “Modern Chronology of Nara”

1874 (Meiji 4)	July 10	The Declaration to Preserve Ancient Vessels and Ancient Items was issued
1875 (Meiji 5)	August	<i>Shoso'in</i> Treasures were checked and photographed
1875 (Meiji 8)	February	Responsibility to control <i>Shoso'in</i> Treasures was transferred to the Internal Affairs Ministry
	April	The First Nara Exposition was held at the Great Buddha Hall and some <i>Shoso'in</i> Treasures were exhibited.
1876 (Meiji 9)	March	The Second Nara Exposition was held at the Great Buddha Hall and some <i>Shoso'in</i> Treasures were exhibited.
	Apr 18	Nara Prefecture was merged into Sakai Prefecture.
1877 (Meiji 10)	Feb. 8	Emperor Meiji came to Nara and see <i>Shoso'in</i> Treasures
	June	<i>Shoso'in</i> Repository bought the surrounding area
1878 (Meiji 11)	March	The Third Nara Exposition was held at the Great Buddha Hall and some <i>Shoso'in</i> Treasures were exhibited.
1880 (Meiji 13)	February	Kofukuji Temple ground and neighboring Kasugano area was designated as Nara Park as a whole.
	March	The Fourth Nara Exposition was held at the Great Buddha Hall and some <i>Shoso'in</i> Treasures were exhibited.
	May	The authorities set showcases inside the Repository for more convenient display. They also decided to do annual airing from 1883.
1881 (Meiji 14)	Feb 7	Sakai Prefecture was abolished and Nara was merged with Osaka Prefecture.

1883 (Meiji 16)	August	Ernest Fenollosa did a survey of Kofukuji Temple with Tenshin Okakura
1884 (Meiji 17)	April	A police booth (for six policemen) was built in the <i>Shoso'in</i> Repository ground.
1885 (Meiji 18)	April	Ernest Fenollosa did a survey of Horyuji Temple and Yakushiji Temple.
1887 (Meiji 20)	October 29	Nara became independent from Osaka Prefecture and returned to Nara Prefecture.
1889 (Meiji 22)	May 14	Osaka Minato-machi and Kashiwara were connected by JR line.
1890 (Meiji 21)	Dec. 27	Ohji and Nara were connected by JR line.
1891 (Meiji 24)	March 1	Ohji and Takada were connected by JR line.
1892 (Meiji 25)	Feb. 2	Osaka Minato-machi and Nara were connected by JR line
1894 (Meiji 27)	March	The management of <i>Shoso'in</i> Repository was transferred from the Internal Affairs Ministry to Nara Prefecture.
1895 (Meiji 28)	April	Nara Imperial Museum was open to the public.

Adelaide's Life

1869	June 17	Born in the U.S.A.
1875	August	Came to Japan with her family
1878	December	Her family moved to Katsu's residence
1880	January	Left Japan
1882	August	Father died
1883	April	Mother died
1883	May	Brother Willis started to work as an interpreter for the U.S. Legation
1883	November	Started the Scripture Union
1885		Brother Willis married
1886	May	Sister Clara married
1891	August	Went to Nara
1891	October	Working as a teacher for Kazoku-jogakko

17, 1893	January, 17	Married
1896	October 1	Died while giving birth of a son

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要約

ミス・ホイットニーの挑戦と成果：明治期正倉院 関連文書にみる一人のアメリカ人女性の生涯

大 西 比 佐 代

正倉院は厳重な勅封制度で奈良時代の宝物を今に伝える建物であるが、近代の一時期、毎年夏の曝涼期間に合わせて規定に従った申請をすれば一般人でも建物内部で宝物を拝観できる制度があった。本稿は、その制度を活用して正倉院の内部に入った最初の女性が、アメリカ人 Miss Adelaide Norton Whitney (1869-1896) であることを指摘したうえで、短い生涯の中にも関わらずキリスト者としても大きな実績を上げた彼女の生涯を概説するものである。

正倉院は奈良公園内の東大寺大仏殿の北西に現存する建物で、大仏を建立した聖武天皇（701-756）の遺品を中心に各種の宝物を保管している。古代より収蔵品は天皇の名のもとに厳封されるという勅封制度で保管され、江戸時代末期までは東大寺がその実際の管理を担ってきた。

明治維新以降に管理主体となった明治政府は、明治5年（1872年）に正倉院を開封して内部を点検し、その所管を宮内省など各省に分担させたうえで、収蔵される宝物のさまざまな「活用」を開始した。たとえば明治16年（1883年）には年一回収蔵品を曝涼する制度を復活させ、さらに明治22年（1889年）からはその時期に合わせて一定の資格を備えた希望者に正倉院内部での拝観を許可している。

そこで拝観願人名簿などの記録を精査したところ、明治22年の初年度から女性の拝観申込みがあったものの、実際に一個人として正式に申請を行い正倉院内で宝物を拝観した最初の女性が、「ミス・ホイットニー」Adelaide Norton Whitney というアメリカ人女性であることがわかった。

彼女は5歳の時に家族で来日、27年の短い生涯のほとんどを日本で過ごして

いる。また1882年に父を、1883年には母を失うという悲劇に見舞われた。しかし十代の半ばという若さにも関わらず、当時イギリスで始まった聖書の読書運動の流れに呼応し、日本支部である Scripture Union of Japan を立ち上げるという実行力と指導力を発揮した。

そこで筆者は、当時の正倉院関連の文書や、さらに医師兼在東京アメリカ公使館通訳としても働いた実兄の Willis Whitney の妻や勝海舟の息子と結婚した実姉 Clara の残した日記、さらには当時の新聞記事などを分析し、Adelaide が一人の女性として達成した先駆的な業績の数々をここに紹介する。