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AUTHOR’S NOTE

This is a revised and updated edition of Japan Society 1907–1982: 75 Years of Partnership Across the Pacific by Edwin O. Reischauer. I have redacted Reischauer’s original text by about 40 percent and picked new illustrations. The entire latter part of the book, on Japan Society since 1982, is newly written using a variety of sources, including interviews, annual reports, in-house memoranda, and newspaper articles.

I am grateful to a large number of people for their time and support. Those who kindly consented to interviews included David Rockefeller, Paul Volcker, Pete Peterson, Ambassador Motoatsu Sakurai, Michael Sovern, William Clark, Henry Cornell, Gerald Curtis, David Heleniak, Merit Janow, John Jeffrey, Richard Lanier, James McDonald, Robin MacNeil, Jun Makihara, Sir Deryck Maugham, Alexandra Munroe, Jiro Murase, Satoru Murase, George Packard, Hugh Patrick, Justin Rockefeller, Hideyuki Takahashi, George Warnock, and John Wheeler.

At Japan Society I am particularly indebted for their help to Richard Wood, Kendall Hubert, Daniel Rosenblum, Ruri Kawashima, Mari Eijima, Cynthia Sternau, Maria Oda, Hiroko Kusano, Chris Poston, Betty Borden, and Christina Chin.

Any mistakes or misinterpretations are solely my fault.

MICHAEL R. AUSLIN, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, YALE UNIVERSITY
INTRODUCTION

One hundred years of history is both a landmark of the past and a touchstone for the future. To do full justice to Japan Society’s long and rich history would require an ongoing series of volumes, for while the mission has been a constant, the Society’s work is continually in progress, moving and changing with the ebb and flow of U.S.-Japan relations, and in this age of globalization, the world at large.

Published on the occasion of the Society’s centennial year (1907–2007) this volume builds on Edwin O. Reischauer’s Japan Society 1907–1982: 75 Years of Partnership Across the Pacific, which was published for the Society’s seventy-fifth anniversary. Reischauer’s work has been adapted and expanded into the present time by Michael R. Auslin of Yale University. New illustrations have been selected from the Society’s archives, and a detailed chronology of Society activities throughout its 100 years is included as an appendix.

At the time of the Society’s beginnings in 1907, little could the first founding directors have known what a broad-sweeping and enduring enterprise they were creating. The “long and successful health” wished upon the Society by General Baron Tamesada Kuroki at the founding luncheon on May 19, 1907 has been translated into 100 years of cultural and intellectual interface between the United States and Japan. Throughout periods of economic growth and harmony, and then economic depression, enmity, and war, the Society’s work has always reflected a deep and mutual respect for each other’s nations and peoples. That the Society was preserved through the good graces of a few dedicated men during those dark years, and subsequently, under the leadership of John D. Rockefeller 3rd, rebuilt into an organization of international import is nothing short of a miracle.

At the opening of the Society’s permanent headquarters in 1971, Japan House architect Junzo Yoshimura wrote, “I hope that the House will play its full role in promoting understanding between the United States and Japan.” The ample expression of Yoshimura’s hope is evident in the years of growth that followed, as the Society came to be both a leading New York cultural and educational institution and a public forum for discussions by both Japanese and U.S. business leaders on the changing economic relations between the two countries, and the world.

On the occasion of the centennial, it gives me great pleasure to introduce this book to friends old and new, and to the generations to come who will continue the Society’s long-standing work. May the next 100 years see even greater contributions to mutual understanding.

Special thanks to the centennial book team: Mari Eijima (archives and timeline); Christine Knorr (design and production); Maria Oda (archives); and Cynthia Sternau (editorial, archives, and timeline). Cynthia, in particular, deserves special gratitude for the many hours she gave to this project.

RICHARD J. WOOD, PRESIDENT, JAPAN SOCIETY
Background: 1853-1907

Japan Society was born in May 1907. The newspaper accounts of the time make the event spontaneous and casual, but it was no mere happenstance, for a long history lay behind its founding. The formation of such an organization, with a distinguished and well-balanced group of leaders and an initial membership of more than 100, does not take place overnight.

The year 1907 was a time of transition in Japanese-American relations. For most of the preceding half century these had been sunny, but by 1907 storm clouds were looming on the horizon. From the start, the Society reflected both the high promise and the frictions between Japan and the United States. Throughout its history it has continued to play a dual role, fostering mutually beneficial relations between these two cross-Pacific neighbors and at the same time seeking to mitigate the misunderstandings and conflicts that have arisen between them.

Significant contacts between the United States and Japan started in 1853-54, when Commodore Matthew C. Perry led into Japanese waters a naval expedition, in order to expand the island nation's foreign intercourse, which had been tightly controlled by the ruling Tokugawa bakufu for the previous 200 years. The objective was fully achieved when in 1858 Consul General Townsend Harris persuaded the Japanese to sign a full commercial treaty. Both Perry's expedition and the mission dispatched in 1860 by the shogun's government to Washington to exchange ratifications of the Harris treaty stirred up a great wave of popular interest in Japan. Everywhere the Japanese envoys went in 1860 they drew curious throngs, and Walt Whitman composed "A Broadway Pageant" to commemorate their visit. Already in its August issue of that year, Harper's Monthly remarked that the Japanese "seemed to have an aptitude for acquiring the civilization of the West to which no other Oriental race can claim."

Despite this promising start, the outbreak of the American Civil War pushed Japan out of the consciousness of Americans for the next several decades. Official relations between the two countries, however, remained cordial, and individual American teachers, missionaries, and an occasional businessman, together with persons from other Western lands, devoted themselves to the instruction of the Japanese in science, technology, and Western ways of doing things. The Japanese proved eager pupils, particularly after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which brought to power an innovative new government under the titular leadership of the ancient line of emperors. Except for the missionaries, Japan's Occidental teachers were largely "employed foreigners," hired by the Japanese government at great expense.

On the whole, the Japanese found the more compact, traditional monarchies of Europe better adapted as models for their needs than the young, loosely organized, and sprawling United States. Americans, however, were the most numerous of Westerners in Japan, and many of them left a lasting impact on the country, which showed an eager desire to absorb much that was best in the liberal American tradition. Americans joined with other Westerners in forming in Tokyo the Asiatic Society of Japan, the first learned society devoted to the country. Its Transactions, which started in 1872, is still being published. These American intellectuals in Japan were in touch with leading Japanese intellectuals, such as the group that formed the Sixth Year of Meiji Society (Meirokusha). From their scholarly interests emerged the first serious attempts to write accounts of existing conditions in Japan and surveys of the political and cultural history of the nation, thereby contributing to a broader knowledge of Japan in the United States. These pioneers included William E. Griffis (The Mikado's Empire, 1876) and Edward Sylvester Morse (Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings, 1885; Japan Day by Day, 1917). Such books figure prominently in the first bibliographies circulated by Japan Society and contributed greatly to the early American consciousness of Japan as a nation that was "awakening" to a new day.

Another source of popular American awareness of Japan was its enthusiastic participation in international expositions held in the United States. At the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia, Americans were fascinated with the novelty of Japan's first major exhibit in this country. This triumph was
exceeded by a far more ambitious and elegant effort, the Japan building at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. This spectacular display was followed in turn by a Japanese exhibit at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904.

Most Americans who were at all aware of Japan approved enthusiastically of its rapid adoption of Western technology and customs, but there was a certain ambivalence in the attitude of those who knew Japan best. They admired Japan’s modern achievements, but at the same time they harbored unease that massive Western influences might impair traditional Japanese cultural forms, particularly in the visual arts. Such ambiguous attitudes have persisted throughout the history of U.S.-Japan relations.

Another and more important ambivalence in American attitudes toward Japan had developed by 1907. On the one side, Americans had gone in greater numbers to Japan as missionaries, travelers, and businessmen than had the people of any other Western nation, and a sizable trade had grown between the two countries. No Western country had been more unambiguously friendly toward Japan than the United States or had welcomed with greater sincerity its rapid progress and its achievement of a status of equality with the lands of the West. The average Japanese, for his part, was more aware of the United States than of any other Western country. Many were fascinated by America and saw in it the models of life they most wished to imitate. The Japanese government might look to Europe rather than the United States for its models, but it was America that captured the imagination of the Japanese masses.

Sharply contrasting attitudes, however, began to appear in both countries around the turn of the twentieth century. Japan was proving uniquely successful among non-Western nations in modernizing itself and in the process was developing into a modern military power. This it proved by its easy victory over China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. Recognizing the changing situation, Britain led the way among the Western countries by signing a treaty in 1894 that relinquished in 1899 the unequal treaty rights of the Western powers. Japan became the first of the non-Western nations in modern times to gain legal equality with the nations of the West. In the following decades, Japan became recognized as one of the globe’s great powers, especially after its defeat of Tsarist Russia in 1905 and its colonization of Korea in 1910. Within just a few decades of its “opening,” Japan had joined the ranks of the leading imperialist states.

In the meantime, the United States was becoming more involved in Pacific affairs than ever before and was itself emerging as a leading Pacific power. In 1897, it annexed Hawaii, and in 1899, the Western Samoan Islands, where it had had the rights to a naval base at Pago Pago since 1872. The Spanish-American War of 1898 and the conquest of the Philippines plunged America militarily into the Western Pacific and gave it its own half-wanted empire in the Far East. Japanese and American military expansionism were thus beginning to impinge upon each other.

Meanwhile, the seeds of rivalry were being planted in another way. The United States, now emerging as the leading industrial power in the world, was assuming the traditional British role as the champion of free trade, particularly in China. In his “open door” notes of 1899 and 1900, Secretary of State John Hay tried to codify the concept of a China open to the trade of all comers. This put America’s China policy at cross purposes with that of Japan, which, as a late arrival to the game of power politics, was eager to extend its sphere of influence and increase its special privileges on the nearby continent. Thus, as two expanding military powers in the Pacific and as proponents of differing approaches to the China trade, the United States and Japan were becoming rivals more than friends.

Japan had become America’s only serious naval rival in the Pacific and the chief potential obstruction to the “open door” policy in China. As a newly risen, vigorous military power, Japan showed all too clearly that it might become the chief challenger of the status quo in the Far East, which the United States sought to maintain.

During these same years another problem clouded Japanese-American relations. During their early contacts, Japanese and Americans had accepted their difference in culture and race as a matter of course, but as Japanese immigrants began to flow
into the United States, both sides became more sensitive to matters of race. The earliest Asian immigrants had been largely Chinese and had helped lay the railroads of the western states. Unprotected by a strong government, they soon fell victim to racial prejudice, persecution, and eventually outright exclusion from the new country. The Japanese took their place, coming as ambitious students and businessmen or impoverished peasants and fishermen seeking to better their lives. In 1897, at the time of Hawaii’s annexation, the Japanese already constituted the largest ethnic group in the islands, and in 1900 they numbered 65,000 in Hawaii and 40,000 in the continental United States. Together, these Japanese immigrants totaled about two-thirds of all Japanese living abroad. Many more dreamed of emigrating to the land of opportunity, and in Japan guidebooks for would-be emigrants were published in profusion.

This situation led to interracial strife in Hawaii that spread to the West Coast, where residents were beginning to evince the same hostility toward the Japanese that they had earlier shown the Chinese. The whole Occident was being swept with racial propaganda, epitomized by the hysteria about the “yellow peril,” which had first appeared in Germany around 1902. Japanese on the West Coast increasingly encountered acts of discrimination, and some of the state governments in the area moved toward openly discriminatory legislation.

In May 1905, the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League was launched in California. During the wave of lawlessness and disorder following the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906, attacks on Japanese were particularly reprehensible in view of the fact that the Japanese government and Red Cross had contributed $246,000 for relief, more than the gifts of all other foreign nations combined. Then, on October 11, 1906, the San Francisco school board triggered the first serious crisis in Japanese-American relations when it extended the segregation of Chinese children in public schools to include Japanese and Korean children.

President Theodore Roosevelt was unhappy about the anti-Japanese hysteria on the West Coast, which threatened America’s relations with Japan. Privately, he referred to the “idiots of the California legislature” and the “absurdity” of the action of the San Francisco school board. But he realized that the sentiments of the residents of the West Coast were a political reality and should somehow be balanced against the sensitivities of the Japanese. The government in Tokyo also was aware that the immigration issue must not be allowed to damage broader national interests. After two months of intensive bargaining between the United States and Japan and also between Washington and California, the first so-called Gentlemen’s Agreement was concluded in February 1907. It contained three vital components: first, agreement by the San Francisco authorities to rescind the discriminatory school order; second, agreement by Tokyo to withhold passports for ordinary laborers bound for mainland America; and third, agreement by Washington to close through legislation the channels of immigration through Canada, Mexico, and Hawaii.

Immigration as an issue quieted down during the months following the repeal of the school segregation order. Moreover, relations between Washington and Tokyo had been elevated to a higher plane. Ambassadors rather than ministers were exchanged for the first time.

Thus, at the time of the founding of Japan Society in 1907, Japanese-American relations were recognized as being far more important than they had been even a few years earlier. But they contained a decided element of ambivalence between the warm feelings and rapidly swelling trade of earlier decades and the various sources of friction and distrust that had developed more recently. Under these circumstances, the establishment of the Society at this time was a natural outgrowth of a significant international relationship of rapidly increasing importance.
Beginnings: 1907

In 1907, Tokyo selected General Tamesada Kuroki and Vice-Admiral Goro Ijuin, heroes of the Russo-Japanese War, to represent Japan at the Jamestown Exposition that spring. The delegation dined with President Roosevelt, who wrote of them, “They are a formidable outfit.” Their subsequent visit to New York was used as the occasion for the founding of Japan Society.

Admiral Ijuin’s flagship, the Tsukuba, and another cruiser, the Chitose, sailed into New York harbor on Wednesday, May 15, greeted by a twenty-one-gun salute off Governor’s Island and a flotilla of harbor tugs packed with proud members of the Japanese community in New York. For nearly a week their visit was front-page news.

A welcome banquet was held for the two Japanese visitors on Friday evening, May 17. The decorations were peach and cherry blossoms, and electric fans kept large Japanese and American flags fluttering above the speakers’ table. The toastmaster was John H. Finley, president of City College, which had been founded by Townsend Harris, the first American consul in Japan. Above the table where Finley presided flew a faded American flag, which he explained had been made in Japan and had been the first flag to fly over an American mission in that country.

Admiral George Dewey, the hero of Manila Bay in the Spanish-American War, presided at the banquet, and among the speakers were Oscar Straus, the secretary of commerce and labor, and Viscount Shuzo Aoki, the Japanese ambassador. A large number of prominent New Yorkers were present, including Cornelius N. Bliss, August Belmont, Seth Low, E. S. A. de Lima, William Jay Schieffelin, and Lindsay Russell. Most were to play an important role in Japan Society. Although no formal action was taken that evening, the proposal for an organization “to promote and strengthen friendship between the Yankees of the East and West” was made and enthusiastically received. The headlines in The New York Times the next day read “Nations Join Hands at Kuroki Dinner.”

While Russell, a prominent New York attorney, and other interested Americans immediately set about putting the proposal for an organization into concrete form, General Kuroki continued his sightseeing. All during his trip, he consistently outran his staff, his American army hosts, and the reporters.

On Sunday, May 19, Admiral Ijuin and his ships departed, but General Kuroki gave a luncheon for about seventy-five people to return the hospitality he had received. The eighth floor of the Hotel Astor, where Kuroki was staying, had been turned into a Japanese garden for the occasion. Among the New Yorkers who attended were Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Schiff, E. J. Harriman, August Belmont, Admiral and Mrs. George Dewey, Seth Low, and Lindsay Russell. At this luncheon Russell rose and announced the formation of Japan Society in the following words:

On behalf of the committee we have the honor to announce that as one of the results of your visit to America, and in order that we may renew from time to time the international courtesies which it has prompted, there has been formed a Japan Society of New York, having for its object the cultivation of friendly relations between this country and yours. We shall always cherish the memory of your visit to the United States which will, no doubt, become part of our history even as the visit of Commodore Perry is memorable in Japan.

But not all New Yorkers were as enthusiastic as Russell. The New York Times, in an editorial on Tuesday, May 21, expressed doubts. What, it wanted to know, was the point in forming a society “for the purpose of vaguely ‘whooping it up’ with Japan and entwining the Rising Sun with the Star Spangled Banner.” There were no such “friendship associations” with nations with which Americans had much more understanding and cultural ties.

In a way, the Times was right. International relations in those days did not seem important enough for associations of this sort. American contacts with the countries of Western Europe were already close enough not to require them, and with non-Western lands too distant and amorphous to merit them. The relationship between Japan and the United States, however, had by this time become a unique one for Americans. Japan, it was true, was a little-known
ABOVE: General Baron Tamesada Kuroki and his wife on a New York ferry landing during their historic 1907 visit. Museum of the City of New York. The Byron Collection. 93.11.9049.

LEFT: Lindsay Russell, president of Japan Society from 1910–19, in a studio portrait dated 1907.

FAR LEFT: Japan Society founding member August Belmont, in a portrait taken in 1904, before the Society was born. Photograph by Pach Bros., PR-084, Box 1, folder 5, negative number 63640. Collection of The New York Historical Society.
land with an unfamiliar cultural background, but relations with the island nation had become important for a number of reasons. Commerce had prospered, making Japan America’s largest trans-Pacific trading partner. On the other hand, Japan was starting to loom as America’s chief rival in the Pacific. Thus, there were growing opportunities for a mutually beneficial relationship, but also increasing causes for friction. At the same time, very little understanding existed on either side. As it turned out, the birth of Japan Society, like that of similar organizations in Boston, San Francisco, and London at much the same time, was a sign of the dawning of a new age and of a new concept of international relations.

A Cautious Start in Troubled Times: 1907–10

Japan Society was formed by a group of prominent New York businessmen and professionals. Most had business ties with Japan, primarily through banking and finance and trade in silk, which was then Japan’s major export. They were joined by some of the leading Japanese residents of the city, who were eager for stronger ties between the two countries. Most of the founding group remained active in the Society for many years, shaping the policies that guided it until its temporary suspension during World War II.

Among the Americans, Lindsay Russell, who was the leading force and served as president of the Society from 1910 until 1919, was an international customs lawyer with clients in Japan. Hamilton Holt was the owner and editor of the Independent magazine. August Belmont, the famous banker, was a grandson of Commodore Perry. Jacob Schiff, another well-known financier, had raised a $200 million loan for the Japanese government to help finance its war with Russia. Alexander Tison was a lawyer who had taught law from 1889 to 1894 at Japan’s major educational institution, Tokyo Imperial University.

The leader among the Japanese group was Dr. Jokichi Takamine, one of the organizers in 1905 of the Nippon Club for Japanese in New York and a renowned scientist who had been the first to isolate adrenalin. There was also Ryoichiro Arai, who had arrived in New York as a young man in 1876 and had done much to build up the direct silk trade between Japan and the United States; Chozo Koike, the consul general; Kikusaburo Fukui, the New York head of the great zaibatsu Mitsui firm; Reitaro Ichinomiya, the director of the Yokohama Specie Bank’s New York branch; and Eijiro Ono, the executive auditor of the New York branch of the Bank of Japan.

The first list of officers included appropriate honorary posts. The honorary president was Ambassador Shuzo Aoki. Ever since it has been customary
to have the Japanese ambassador and the consul general in New York occupy honorary positions. There were two honorary vice presidents, General Fred D. Grant, the son of the former president of the United States, and Dr. Takamine. The first president of the Society was John H. Finley of City College. Although he seems not to have been very active, he was re-elected at the first annual meeting in February 1908. Russell as vice president took on most of the functions of leadership, a situation that was formalized by his election as president in 1910.

The Executive Committee was a roster of distinguished names. On the American side were Belmont, Schiff, Russell, Holt, and E. S. A. de Lima among the founders, as well as Seth Low, a former mayor of New York; Cornelius N. Bliss, a banker; General Steward L. Woodford; and John L. McCook. On the Japanese side there were Takamine, Arai, Koike, Ono, Ichinomiya, and Fukui among the founders, as well as Yasukata Murai and Okura, both of the Morimura Company, which was the chief importer of Noritake china.

The officers and Executive Committee immediately set about establishing a program. An Executive Committee meeting, chaired by Woodford, with Schiff, Russell, Holt, and others in attendance, was held at the Lawyer’s Club as early as June 12, 1907, and a set of rules was adopted on November 12. The purpose of the Society was set forth as “the promotion of friendly relations between the United States and Japan and the diffusion among the American people of a more accurate knowledge of the people of Japan, their aims, ideals, arts, sciences, industries, and economic conditions.” Officers were to be elected annually, and they, together with twenty other members, were to constitute the Executive Committee, defined more precisely as “Japanese and Americans, and those prominent in public or social life, science, art, or literature,” in which the management of the Society was vested. An annual meeting was to be held in February.

Membership in the Society was open to both men and women, who were to be elected by the Executive Committee. Annual dues were $5. The initial membership was said to have been over 100, and by the end of the year it stood at about 250. It continued to climb rapidly and was almost 800 by 1912. The Society proposed to arrange for a headquarters but not a clubhouse.

During these early years, the activities of the Society were largely social. A luncheon was held on July 11, 1907, in honor of the former vice chief of staff and future prime minister, Admiral Baron Gombei Yamamoto. There was a farewell dinner in December for Consul General Koike, who was being transferred to a new post.

But even such light social activity had to be mounted in the face of a revival of American-Japanese friction. On May 20, the day after Lindsay Russell had announced in New York the founding of Japan Society, a San Francisco mob got out of hand and attacked a Japanese restaurant and a Japanese-operated bathhouse across the street. Journals on both sides of the Pacific whipped up a veritable war scare. Such attitudes served to inflame the more parochial immigration dispute on the West Coast and cause many Americans to assume irrationally that peaceful Japanese immigrants were in fact a vanguard of military conquest. In Japan, expansionists similarly attacked relations with the United States, issuing warlike utterances.

A further complicating factor was President Theodore Roosevelt’s announcement in June 1907 that the United States battleship fleet would be sent in 1908 on a “practice cruise” to the Pacific. Roosevelt himself later wrote to Hugo Munsterberg, a prominent German-American psychologist: “You, of course, know that the voyage of the battle fleet was really an answer to the very ugly war talk that had begun to spring up in Japan; and it was the best example that I know of, ‘of speaking softly and carrying a big stick.’” There is no doubt that Roosevelt’s decision was made in partial response to the persistent talk of war not only in the American Hearst papers, but also in Europe and Japan. On the other hand, it was also the president’s peculiar way of impressing upon the Japanese that he had nothing but the friendliest intentions; that he was not afraid and that “the United States will no more submit to bullying than it will bully.” Tokyo for its part handled the American fleet...
exercise with skill and tact, officially inviting the American ships to visit Japan, where a massive friendly public reception spontaneously occurred on their arrival in October 1908.

Japan Society’s program, however, was not affected by the delicacy of the political situation, and the Society maintained its role as a venue for the elites of both countries to meet and forge social and professional relationships. In March 1908, there was a dinner in honor of Ambassador Kogo Takahira, and in August a luncheon for the new American ambassador to Japan, Thomas J. O’Brien. In June 1909, there was a dinner for a hero of the Russo-Japanese War, Admiral Baron Sotokichi Uriu and Baroness Uriu and also for Rear Admiral Sperry, returned from the naval visit to Japan, and Mrs. Sperry. In September, a formal dinner honored Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Kunī, and in October a luncheon for the commercial commissioners of Japan was held. In February 1910, the Society gave a dinner for Ambassador Baron Uchida and his wife; in May a luncheon for Prince Iesato Tokugawa, the heir of the last Tokugawa shogun; and in June a luncheon for Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Fushimi. In October 1910, a dinner was held for Yukio Ozaki, the mayor of Tokyo, and his wife. Ozaki was a noted member of the Japanese Diet, or Parliament, from 1890 to 1952 and is remembered in the United States as the donor, on behalf of the city of Tokyo, of the famous Washington, D.C., cherry trees.

Although social occasions of this sort were important for giving Japan Society visibility in New York and establishing it as an influence in Japanese-American relations, there had been a realization from the start that the Society should do more. Already at the first meeting of the Executive Committee in June 1907, Hamilton Holt and E. S. A. de Lima had been appointed to visit the Japan Society of London, which had been organized in 1890 with the help of Viscount Aoki and published a very creditable journal. It was hoped that a close cooperative relationship with this organization would result. Holt made a report on the trip that autumn, but no close ties with the London organization developed.

At the first annual meeting, the possibility of forming a lecture bureau was discussed, and in that year the Society issued its first publication, a yearbook. The yearbooks, some beautifully bound in Japanese style, continued to be published almost annually until the 1930s. They contained the names of the officers and members, a list of the Society’s activities, information about Japan and the Japanese, pictures of the emperor, the text of the Japanese national anthem, and travel tips for those who wished to visit Japan.

**Setting the Course: 1910-14**

Japanese-American friction and suspicions did not disappear after 1910, but they became somewhat muted.
The expansionist trends of the two countries continued to press against each other on the Asian mainland, and to the American public, the United States increasingly appeared to be the champion of a downtrodden China and therefore the opponent of foreign aggressors, particularly Japan, the newest and most vigorous of China’s would-be exploiters. The imagined tie with China was strengthened when the Manchu rulers of the country were thrown out in the revolution of 1911, and the world’s oldest empire ostensibly became a sister republic of the United States.

Trouble also continued to brew on the West Coast over Japanese immigrants. In 1909, the California Assembly attempted to pass a law, aimed specifically at the Japanese, to bar all aliens from the ownership of land. President Theodore Roosevelt was furious, particularly since the outflow of Japanese had in late 1908 started to exceed the inflow, and he was able to block this legislation. Nevada, however, had started to follow California’s lead, and finally in 1913 California succeeded in a move, followed by a number of western states, to bar Japanese citizens from owning land on the grounds that they were ineligible for American citizenship. As early as 1894, a West Coast Japanese had been denied citizenship on the basis of race, and this ruling was subsequently confirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court. In fact, it was not until 1952 that it was overturned; only then were Japanese not born in the United States at last eligible for American citizenship.

Despite the apparent collision course in Japanese-American relations during the years preceding World War I, the crisis was more in people’s minds than in reality. Despite persistent dreams of a huge China market, U.S. trade with Japan was double the size of that with China. During the three-year period of 1909–11, total American exports to Japan amounted to about $85 million, about 15 percent of Japan’s total imports, while exports to China were only about $55 million.

The years just before World War I thus saw Japan and America achieving a new relationship. Trade was growing to major proportions. Contacts of all sorts were multiplying and together with the increase in trade were producing a mounting interest about Japan in the United States. A new commercial treaty was concluded in 1911 between Washington and Tokyo, providing complete tariff autonomy for Japan and giving the United States the right to regulate immigration. This pact was to remain the framework for economic relations between the two countries until shortly before the outbreak of World War II.

Though frictions and suspicion continued, American-Japanese relations had reached a level of major significance and a certain degree of stability.

It was a good time for Japan Society to consolidate its position and set its course for the future. With Lindsay Russell’s election to the presidency in 1910, the organization became more soundly established, and its work took on a more serious tone. A life membership costing $100 had been created in 1907, and money from this source was invested, usually in Japanese bonds, to provide some income in addition to the annual dues. Among the life members listed in 1912–13 were such distinguished individuals as August Belmont, railroad mogul E. H. Harriman, banker Felix A. Warburg, C. A. Coffin, president of General Electric, and Admiral Baron Yamamoto. The 1910–11 yearbook also announced the raising of a fund of $30,000, half to be subscribed by Japanese and half by Americans. Among the first major contributors were Jacob Schiff ($1,500), C. A. Coffin ($1,000), and Dr. Jokichi Takamine ($500).

In November 1910, a Committee on Arts and Literature, led for many years by Alexander Tison, was created. Over the years it sponsored a variety of lectures and art exhibitions. It also began a publications program that included books, pamphlets, and other educational materials. An annual lecture series was started in the winter of 1911, with four or five lectures given each year by scholars, missionaries, and Japanese visitors to the United States. These were usually held at the Hotel Astor or The Metropolitan Museum of Art and would draw several hundred people. In the first year, Toyokichi Ienaga spoke on “The Positions of the United States and Japan in the Far East” and Frederick W. Gookin on “Japanese Colour Prints.”

There was great interest at the time in ukiyo-e prints, and they were the subject of the Society’s
Books published through Japan Society during the prewar years.  
first art exhibition in April–May 1911 and its first book, *Japanese Colour Prints*, by Frederick W. Gookin. The prints for the exhibit were borrowed by Gookin from private collections in and near New York and were mounted in rooms in the Fifth Avenue Building at 200 Fifth Avenue. Gookin’s lecture was given on April 18 at the Aldine Club and was followed by a reception for the Japanese ambassador and his wife, who had come from Washington for the occasion. The exhibition was a great success—in fact, it was kept open for two extra weeks—and about 8,000 people saw it. Expenses, however, were a problem. The budget was $500, but the minutes record that a total of $1,536.39 was actually spent. The Society had a similar problem with Gookin’s book. It was printed by the DeVinne Press on special paper with beautiful color plates in a limited edition of 1,000 copies and was made available to members for only $10 a copy. When the Society could not dispose of all the copies, arrangements were made with Scribner’s to sell some of the remainder.

Art exhibitions, lectures, and publications, although sporadic in the beginning, set a pattern for the future of the Society. Educating Americans about Japan and presenting a realistic image of that country to as wide an audience as possible became a permanent part of its program. The Society’s first newsletter was begun in 1912 to replace the *Oriental Review*, which the members had hitherto received but which had ceased publication. The next year, the Society started publishing a *Japan Society Bulletin*. On the masthead was the statement: “The Society’s Bulletin is in a way a finger board to Far Eastern affairs, summarizing current events and opinion and pointing to sources of information.” The *Bulletin* carried news of political and economic events in Japan, as well as notices of Society events and other items of interest to the membership.

In March 1912, the Society undertook an ambitious project. It had a Japanese garden, complete with teahouse, constructed on the roof of the Hotel Astor under the supervision of D. J. R. Ushikubo of the art firm of Yamanaka and Company. From March 14–31, tea ceremonies were held there daily, lectures were given on Japanese gardens and flower arrange-

[Advertisement for Japan Society-sponsored trips to Japan, c. 1913. Sixty-five to ninety-day trips were offered to the public, with “luxurious railway, steamship, and hotel accommodations all the way.”]
The esteem in which the Society was held there was attested to by the fact that Russell and Holt were granted an audience with the Meiji emperor, an honor bestowed on very few Westerners and even fewer Japanese. The trip was a honeymoon for the recently married Russells, but Holt gave lectures while in Japan. On his return, he persuaded the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace to underwrite annual exchanges of lecturers with Japan. A precedent had already been established in 1911 when Dr. Inazo Nitobe, the noted Christian educator and future Japanese delegate to the League of Nations, had been brought by the Carnegie Endowment to lecture in the United States. The first Society-sponsored lecturers under the new program were Hamilton Wright Mabie, editor of the *Outlook*, who went to Japan in 1912, and a certain Dr. Sato, who came to the United States in 1914.

During the 1911 trip, Russell set another pattern of activity for the Society—the encouragement of the founding of similar associations. The Japan Society of Boston had already been formed in 1904. Like the New York Society, the Boston group had resulted from interest in Japan caused by the Russo-Japanese War, but it had soon gravitated to a major focus on artistic activities centering around Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts. In 1911, Russell inspired the formation of advisory committees in San Francisco and Tokyo. The San Francisco group did not do much, but the organization in Tokyo developed in 1917 into the America-Japan Society, which is still in existence. Its activities, however, are largely limited to luncheon and dinner meetings, at which the guest of honor delivers a speech, later printed in the Society’s publication. Russell, who was in Japan at the time of the formation of the America-Japan Society in Tokyo, tried unsuccessfully on his return to have the name of the New York Society changed to the Japan-America Society, in order to parallel the Tokyo organization.

In 1913, the Society was established on a more formal basis. With a membership of more than 800, it was incorporated under the laws of the state of New York and acquired a headquarters at 165 Broadway—which, not surprisingly, was the building where Russell had his own offices. A member of the Society, Edward McMillen, subsidized the rent with $1,500 a year for three years. August Belmont, Jacob Schiff, and Henry Clews, all prominent members, contributed toward the furnishings. The Society’s sixth annual meeting was held in the new quarters on February 11, 1913.

The Society also began at this point to show a prophetic interest in the problem of education about Japan in American schools. Samuel T. Dutton, a member of the faculty at Teachers College of Columbia University, raised the question of the portrayal of Japan in American textbooks. A report was prepared and sent to the Office of Education in Washington. Efforts to improve academic teaching
about Japan in the United States, later an important part of the Society’s program, were somewhat premature at this early date, judging from the failure of American textbook materials on Japan to improve significantly in quantity or quality during the next few decades. The development of programs in Japanese language and studies at Columbia during these same years, however, showed encouraging progress at the university level and served to strengthen academic backing for the Society’s activities.

The Society’s educational effort was more immediately successful in the publication of books and pamphlets. The Bulletin had begun publication in 1913. In 1914, the Society published the American edition of a book entitled Japan to America, edited by Naohi Masaoka. This was described as “a symposium of papers by political leaders and representative citizens of Japan on conditions in Japan and on the relations between Japan and the United States.” The next year, the Society published a companion volume, America to Japan, edited by Lindsay Russell and including among its contributors Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University; President Theodore Roosevelt, whose essay on “Good Will” was only one page long; William Jennings Bryan; Elihu Root; and other political, academic, business, and journalistic leaders. The only Japanese contributor was the Society’s first lecturer, Toyokichi Ienaga, whose essay was called “Experiences of a Japanese in America.”

Copies of these volumes were sent to government officials, educators, and newspapers. A thousand copies of a pamphlet entitled “The Japanese Problem and the United States” were also distributed. Such publications and other Japan Society activities during this period were often supported by grants from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. In distributing publications, special attention was paid to covering the West Coast, where feelings about Japanese immigrants were still running high.

The growing interest in trade with Japan induced the Society to take several further steps during the years that followed. It set up within its offices an information service, which by 1916 had a staff of five, headed by Douglas Dunbar, who also edited the Bulletin, and Eugene Worden, who was a close associate of Lindsay Russell and the Society secretary. On January 26, 1916, the Society published the first issue of its Trade Bulletin, which included commercial statistics and notes on Japanese economic activities. By the end of the year, circulation had risen to 750.

Taken all in all, the Society established during these formative years a basic pattern that was to serve it well in the future. In addition to social activities that were meant to underscore bonds of friendship between the United States and Japan, it developed programs in cultural activities, intellectual discourse, and the dissemination of business and other information, which were well designed to further knowledge, foster understanding, and deepen relations of friendship and cooperation. These four areas of activity—educational, cultural, intellectual, and social—were to remain the chief work of Japan Society. By the beginning of World War I, it had already become in embryo the institution it is today, a major force in sponsoring goodwill toward Japan and knowledge, appreciation, and understanding of the nation and its people throughout the United States.

World War I: 1914-19

Since the United States and Japan were allied against Germany in World War I, it might be supposed that the war served to strengthen their ties. Instead, it led them further away from each other in policy. While U.S. President Woodrow Wilson talked about national self-determination and the end of imperialism, Tokyo worked to expand Japan’s influence over China, particularly through the Twenty-One Demands, and throughout the Pacific. An open clash between an expansionist Japan and a moralistic America was drawing closer, and conflicting claims of Japanese spheres of influence in China and America’s open-door policy there were becoming an obvious focus for this confrontation.

The Versailles Peace Conference, concluded in June 1919, brought further troubles. The United States opposed the Japanese demands for the German Pacific islands and concessions in Shantung,
but found its hands bound by secret treaties the Japanese had earlier negotiated with the European powers. Japan, for its part, was enraged by the short shift given its entirely reasonable demand for a clause recognizing racial equality as part of the Covenant of the planned League of Nations.

The immigration issue was also heating up once again. In California, the old Exclusion League, which had remained dormant since 1909, was revived in September 1919, aiming at the cancellation of the Gentlemen’s Agreement, rigorous exclusion of all Japanese immigrants, and even an amendment to the Constitution providing that no child born in the United States would be given rights of citizenship unless both parents “were of a race eligible for citizenship.” The Hearst papers provided widespread publicity for the campaign.

Despite these increased strains in Japanese-American relations, there were leaders on both sides of the Pacific who felt the need for close friendship between the two countries. The Society’s Bulletin of May 22, 1919, carried a message to the American people from the former Prime Minister, Marquis Shigenobu Okuma:

I have often expressed my view of the absurdity of talking of a conflict between Japan and America, as I firmly believe there is no serious reason for such a conflict, while there is every need for the cooperation of the two nations.

Both governments were eager to patch up their differences. On November 2, 1917, American Secretary of State Robert Lansing and former Japanese Foreign Minister Kikujiro Ishii signed the so-called Lansing-Ishii Agreement, which stated that neither nation intended to infringe upon the territorial integrity or independence of China and that both would adhere to the principle of the “open door.” The agreement, however, included dangerous contradictions, because the United States also expressed its recognition that “territorial propinquity” gave Japan “special interests” in China.

During the war years, the program of Japan Society remained little changed. There was, however, one problem which sooner or later had to be faced. The impression grew that the Society was permitting some of its educational work to shade off into political advocacy and even propaganda. Because both Lindsay Russell and Hamilton Holt, for example, were strong opponents of discriminatory legislation against Japanese immigrants, it happened that the Society offices were used for a while by the Anti-Alien Legislation Committee, an openly political pressure group.

On another front, Russell and Holt were on still shakier ground. They tended to be supporters of Japan’s policy in East Asia. Holt, in the Independent and in articles carried in newspapers all over the United States, championed the Japanese cause and preached the wrong-headedness of considering Japan an aggressor whose militarism threatened the

U.S. Senator Duncan Upshaw Fletcher and Hamilton Holt, one of Japan Society’s “founding fathers,” after calling on President Calvin Coolidge, November 19, 1927. Photo © United Press International.
United States. The Society’s *Bulletin* was filled with articles explaining and defending Japan’s actions. The source of the money supporting the *Bulletin*, about $3,000 a year, was not clear; nor was the real role of Dr. Toyokichi Ienaga, who was chosen as an advisor to the president of the Society in May 1914, worked on the *Bulletin*, and went on frequent lecture tours on behalf of the Society. Ienaga had received a Ph.D. from the Johns Hopkins University in 1890 and on his return to Japan worked in the Foreign Ministry. After he came back to the United States in 1900, he was affiliated with the University of Chicago, but he also apparently served the Japanese government by attempting to improve the image of Japan in the United States. It appears that no one in the Japan Society knew of Ienaga’s official ties.

Russell’s involvement in politics led him to a second semi-official trip to Japan in 1917. Provided with a letter of introduction from Secretary of State Robert Lansing, he attempted to ensure further Japanese cooperation with the Allies in World War I. In September of that year, the Society held a reception for the commission headed by former Foreign Minister Kikujirō Ishii, who was in the United States to negotiate the Lansing-Ishii Agreement with the secretary of state. The following December another reception was held for the Special Financial Commission from Japan, but in 1918 Russell failed to persuade the American government to send a special commission to Japan to reciprocate the visit of the Ishii Commission.

By the end of World War I, criticism had developed about the Society’s role as a biased and therefore not believable advocate of the Japanese point of view in foreign policy. Friction between Japan and the United States had become more severe, anti-Japanese feeling on the West Coast was growing stronger, a clash of national interests over China was becoming more apparent, and Japanese-American naval rivalry was mounting steadily. The Society’s membership now numbered over 1,000, but under the circumstances it was difficult to attract new members or expand its programs into new fields. An era of rapid growth and development for the Society was coming to an end. In 1919, Russell relinquished the presidency, and leadership passed to new hands.

Consolidation and Growth: 1919-31

During the relatively short period of peace between the end of World War I and the Manchurian Incident in 1931, Japan Society’s program was consolidated and amplified. Relations between Japan and America remained relatively stable during these years. Attitudes of suspicion and resentment, however, prevented them from becoming truly cordial, thus limiting somewhat the popular appeal of the Society in the United States. The two countries emerged from the war as open naval rivals engaged in a financially disastrous naval race; immigration issues continued to smolder on the West Coast; and the popular imagination on both sides of the Pacific ran to thoughts of a Japanese-American war. Both governments, however, made a determined effort to reconcile their respective policies through negotiations and succeeded in this effort to some extent.

At the Washington Conference, which was concluded in 1922, the British and Japanese were persuaded to give up their alliance for a rather meaningless Four Power Pact in which the United States, Great Britain, Japan, and France guaranteed the status quo in the Pacific. In the more important Five Power Naval Treaty, the United States and Britain were assigned ratios in capital ships of 5 each versus 3 for Japan and 1.67 each for France and Italy. This left Japan’s fleet inferior in size to those of the United States and Great Britain, but since the United States also agreed not to build naval fortifications west of Hawaii and Great Britain east of Singapore, Japan was left with clear naval supremacy in the western Pacific. In the final Nine Power Treaty, Great Britain and France proved no more willing to relinquish their spheres of interest in China than was Japan, but the United States did get general agreement from the other powers to respect the territorial integrity of China, maintain the “open door” to trade, and refrain from seeking “special rights or privileges” in China that would impair the rights of friendly states.

Economic troubles in Japan stemming from the end of the World War I boom were exacerbated by the great Kanto earthquake and fire of September 1, 1923, which destroyed about two-thirds of Tokyo,
virtually wiped out Yokohama, and killed an estimated 157,000 people. Americans were generous with gifts and relief funds, but massive sums were needed for reconstruction. In 1924, for example, the Japanese government floated a loan in the United States, which was underwritten by a Wall Street syndicate including J. P. Morgan, Kuhn Loeb, and the National City Bank. Economic relations were also being fostered by combinations of Japanese and American capital, especially in the electrical industry. General Electric cooperated with Shibaura Electric; Western Electric with Nippon Electric and the Tokyo Electric Light Company. American firms such as the Ford Motor Company, RCA, Libby-Owens Glass, Standard Oil, and the Aluminum Company of America began to establish subsidiaries in Japan. Japanese businessmen, of course, were also increasing their activities in America, especially in New York.

Despite these developments, the immigration problem flared up again in the form of new legislation in Washington which lumped Japanese immigrants together with those from many other foreign countries as being permanently barred from the United States on the grounds of race. After the long and successful operation of the Gentlemen’s Agreement, the Japanese were incensed at this needless insult. Nevertheless, the so-called Exclusion Act was passed on April 24, 1924, despite the best efforts of Secretary of State Charles Hughes to modify it. Remembering its unhappy wartime experience, Japan Society stayed carefully away from these controversial issues. Dr. Ienaga, who had been the Society’s star lecturer, was no longer invited to speak, and when he appeared before the Executive Committee in 1919 to discuss the then hotly debated Shantung problem, a resolution was passed not to involve the Society in publicizing his statements because of their political nature. Dr. Ienaga, who had been the Society’s star lecturer, was no longer invited to speak, and when he appeared before the Executive Committee in 1919 to discuss the then hotly debated Shantung problem, a resolution was passed not to involve the Society in publicizing his statements because of their political nature. Repeated plans for the Society to take a public stand against anti-Japanese legislation in California were also turned down on the grounds that this would do no good and might prove counterproductive. When, at a directors’ meeting in March 1924, several leaders suggested that the Society should be active in working for the defeat of the exclusion clause in the immigration bill, the proposal was voted down. As the annual report stated, “After considerable discussion it was the sense of the directors that, as the Society had always in the past avoided taking part in political matters, it would be best for the Society in the long run to continue that policy.” The only action taken was to send a recent pamphlet on the immigration question to the members of the Society.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Society carefully eschewed all political advocacy and stuck to its chosen social, intellectual, educational, cultural, and business fields. Each year its annual report emphasized that the Society “has carefully avoided taking any part in political discussions” and that its focus was on business and cultural matters. The closest the Society came to the political realm was devoting a great deal of time in executive meetings to discussing appropriate messages and gifts to be sent on the occasions of the wedding and coronation of the new Emperor, Hirohito, who succeeded to the throne on December 25, 1926.

When Lindsay Russell stepped down from the presidency of the Society in 1919, the position was assumed first by Gerald M. Dahl, vice president of the First National City Bank, and a year later by Frank H. Vanderlip, the president of that institution. In April 1920, the offices of the Society were moved to a mid-town location at 25 West 43rd Street. In 1922, Henry W. Taft, brother of the former president of the United States, took on the Society’s presidency and served in that capacity until 1929, and then again from 1934 to 1941. Russell remained active in the Society, as did Alexander Tison, another of the founding group. Tison was vice president for a number of years in the 1920s and president from 1929 to 1931.

In the early 1920s, the Society had started to accept commercial memberships, which had been proposed earlier by Russell but had been turned down as leading in a direction that might unfavorably affect its “tone and character.” Dues for commercial members were set at $100 a year. A Japanese Advisory Committee was formed in the spring of 1920. It was made up of prominent local Japanese business leaders, and Masanao Kobayashi, the New York manager of Mitsui, became its chairman.
Kobayashi also served as a leader in securing funds for what became the Townsend Harris Endowment Fund. This idea had been promoted by Lindsay Russell and was set up in 1920 with contributions of $74,000 in securities from Japanese sources. The income from the fund was to be used “for educational work along the broadest lines among Americans to disseminate knowledge about Japan and the Japanese.” Kobayashi’s letter of transmittal concluded with the wish that “this contribution will be of some service to the common cause dear to our hearts by helping promote better understanding and closer friendship between America and Japan.”

On June 8, 1921, the Society adopted the “Rules of the Japan Society, Inc.,” which set up a more formal governing apparatus. A president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer were to be elected by ballot at each annual meeting. Thirty directors (including the officers) were to make up the Board, which was responsible for the general direction of the programs and the property of the Society. There were no mandatory Board meetings except for one within thirty days after the annual meeting, but there were provisions for the appointment of an Executive Committee by the president, with the Board’s approval. It was to consist of a Board member from each of the five standing committees, plus the president and the secretary.

The committees were Finance, Membership, Publications and Information, Literature and Art, and the Townsend Harris Fund. The rules of June 1921, amended only slightly in the next two decades, governed the Society until after World War II.

During the 1920s, the Society continued its traditional emphasis on social events. A garden party given in May 1920 by Frank H. Vanderlip, the new president of the Society, at the Vanderlip home, Beechwood, at Scarborough-on-the-Hudson, epitomized this aspect of its activities. There were special trains to and from Scarborough for the guests. The Vanderlips, dressed in kimono, greeted their guests. Members of the Japanese community in New York arranged the entertainment, which consisted of judo and kendo exhibitions, a concert of Japanese music, and a play, Urashima, put on by Columbia University students. After the program, there was dancing for the more than 600 people who attended.

The great Kanto earthquake called forth a response from the Society of more lasting impact. The Society itself collected no less than $117,476.50 of relief funds. Of this sum, $100,000 was assigned to general relief purposes and $10,000 to the rebuilding of Tsuda College, a Christian institution for girls. The college had been founded by Umeko Tsuda, who had come to study in the United States at the age of eight as one of the official students accompanying the famous Iwakura Mission of 1872. The remainder of the money collected by the Society was given to help in the reconstruction of St. Luke’s International Hospital, a medical institution in Tokyo founded by the Episcopal Church.

Social affairs and gestures of international friendship remained important throughout the 1920s, but the serious work of the Society concentrated increasingly on educational activities. The annual report of 1920 speaks of the “very considerable task” of acting as a source of information on Japan for Americans and refers to the “thousands of inquiries.”
The Society also sponsored a variety of lectures. Professor Frederick Starr delivered an illustrated lecture on Mt. Fuji to about 600 people, and there was a lecture at the Plaza on "Journalism of the East and West," followed by a performance of Crimson Camellia in Japanese by the Japanese Literary Society of New York. The audience was provided with a synopsis of the story in English.

Thanks to the Townsend Harris Fund, the Society's publication program expanded considerably. Its major publication in 1921 was The Awakening of Japan by Kakuzo Okakura, a noted Japanese art historian. In that same year, the Fund engaged Kenneth Scott Latourette of Yale, a well-known historian of the Christian missionary movement and of China, to prepare a syllabus on Japan. The Syllabus, which eventually went to eight editions, was distributed free to members, schools, educators, and public libraries. Books on Japan were also purchased by the Fund for distribution to members.

In 1922, the Townsend Harris Fund supported a showing of a four-reel documentary film on the visit to Europe the previous spring and summer of Hirohito, then the Crown Prince. This was the first trip abroad ever made by an incumbent of the Japanese throne. Not until long after World War II did a reigning emperor—again it was Hirohito—venture forth from his native land. The 1922 film showing drew an audience of close to 600.

In 1923, the Townsend Harris Fund issued a pamphlet entitled Japan: A Comparison. This booklet contained two articles, the first of which was "Japan at the Time of Townsend Harris" by Dr. William Elliot Griffis, the author in 1876 of The Mikado's Empire, who had been a lecturer for the Society. The Society also published an essay by Dr. Griffis entitled Proverbs of Japan: A Little Picture of the Japanese Philosophy of Life as Mirrored in Their Proverbs, which would "bring out the Japanese philosophy of life and their natural wit and wisdom."

In 1925, the Society undertook publication of a pamphlet containing "twenty-five questions commonly asked about Japan with adequate answers to same…. The answers to the questions would be authoritative and informative, and it was hoped that a broad distribution would be a helpful factor in the educational work of the Society." No less than 3,000 copies of this pamphlet were distributed the first year. Meanwhile, the Society continued to publish the monthly Bulletin as well as its Trade Bulletin. The Bulletin listed new books, magazine articles, and pamphlets about Japan or the Orient in general and called attention to exhibitions of Japanese art, presentations of plays and concerts, and other cultural events of interest.

A new standard of excellence in the Society's publications was set by the appearance in 1927 of The Art of Japan by Louis V. Ledoux, a well-known collector and connoisseur of Japanese prints, who had become a moving force in the Society through his service on the Townsend Harris Committee.

The educational activities of the Society were also expanded during these years by the assembling of a traveling exhibition of characteristic Japanese

Japan Society president Frank A. Vanderlip and his wife in Japanese dress at a garden party held on May 26, 1920 at their Scarborough estate. Photo © United Press International.

Left, Top: Yale historian Kenneth Scott Latourette’s Syllabus on Japan: Suggested Outlines for a Discussion of Japan, Her History, Culture, Problems, and Relations with the United States, published by Japan Society in August 1921.

Left, Bottom: About Japan reprinted remarks by Japan Society’s April 1937 Annual Dinner speakers, including Hiroshi Saito, Imperial Japanese Ambassador to the United States; General James G. Harbord; and Society president Henry W. Taft.
artifacts and the compilation of a set of slides to be lent on request, together with accompanying lectures. These activities were the precursors of what were to become permanent features of the Society’s program, developing after World War II into a permanent gallery for art exhibitions and a film center.

In the late 1920s, the membership of the Society reached its highest prewar number of more than 1,300. The Annual Dinners continued to be gala events, each drawing over 1,000 persons in 1926, 1927, and 1928, and often attracting the Japanese ambassador to the United States. The decade of the 1920s had seen the Society establish for itself a stable and important role in helping make Japan and its culture better known to Americans. But in the background there lurked the uneasy ambivalence in Japanese-American relations. On the one hand, great goodwill and respect remained from earlier days, and economic relations had assumed a place of major importance. On the other hand, each country harbored suspicions and fears regarding the motives and future actions of the other. In the 1930s, the worldwide depression and the resumption by Japan of military aggression soon brought this darker side to the fore, with disastrous consequences for the Society.

**Decline: 1931–42**

The great financial crash of October 1929 and, even more significantly, the resurgence of Japanese aggression in Manchuria in September 1931, marked the beginning of a period of tragic confrontation in Japanese-American relations and serious decline in the fortunes of Japan Society. Financial difficulties made some people drop out of the Society, and rising American disapproval of Japan’s seizure of Manchuria in 1931 and its continuing acts of aggression in North China made many more decide to sever their connections. The situation worsened with the outbreak of war between Japan and China in 1937. From that point on, Japanese-American relations deteriorated rapidly, until finally on December 7, 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor plunged the two countries into war.

The events of the late 1920s and early 1930s naturally had an adverse effect on Japan Society. Although the Annual Dinner held on December 11, 1929, had attracted about 1,000 people, the directors soon began to worry about the number of resignations they were receiving and considered campaigns to try to hold the membership. After the Manchurian Incident in 1931, they discussed the possibility of dropping the Annual Dinner for that year. Eventually it was decided to hold it on February 3, 1932, but the day before the dinner was to take place the guest of honor, Ambassador Katsuji Debuchi, telegraphed that because of the international situation he would be unable to leave Washington. The dinner was postponed and finally canceled. By March 1932, the directors had set up a committee on resignations, and by June they were considering dispensing with the services of Eugene Worden, who had been the Society’s salaried secretary almost from its founding.

Meanwhile, the Society continued sedulously to avoid controversial political issues. A prominent Japanese government official did appear at a directors’ meeting in 1932 to explain Japan’s policies, but no action was taken, nor were members apprised. At a directors’ meeting on March 31, 1932, it was suggested that an address made before the World Affairs Institute on the situation in Manchuria and in Shanghai should be distributed by the Townsend Harris Committee to its members, but the response was negative.

The Society’s annual report for 1933, submitted to the annual meeting held on January 10, 1934, with Louis Ledoux presiding, gave a good picture of the situation. The report stated that, despite the disturbed conditions, the Society had “come through this period fairly well.” It noted that the total membership was close to 850, but the gain of twenty-five new members in 1933 had been more than offset by the loss of 114. It also noted that Annual Dinners had not been held since 1930, stating that “it was not fitting to hold a festive event which would be overshadowed by the clouds of economic depression and unsettlement.” The report did point out that a dinner had been held at the Waldorf-Astoria on May 31, 1933, in honor of Viscount Ishii and Eigo Fukai, who with
Ishii was a delegate to the London Economic Conference of June 1933. It went on to express the hope that "with more stabilized and settled conditions," the Annual Dinners could be resumed.

The 1933 report, while making the customary disclaimer that "Japan Society takes no part in political controversy nor does it engage in political activities," set forth strongly the need for better understanding of Japan and the strengthening of the educational work of the Society. Some of this report still sounds very timely:

Understanding between the peoples of Japan and the United States can profitably and effectively be promoted by concentrating on the dissemination of a broader knowledge of cultural relationships... In this field the Japan Society has made definite and valuable contributions that have helped to create an understanding of those phases of Japanese life that endure, and it has thereby helped to develop a sympathetic attitude on the part of the United States towards that country....

The need of a better understanding of Japan is only too apparent. But the facilities available for that understanding are woefully lacking... When it comes to Japan, many Americans think only of cherry blossoms, color prints, tea and silk.

The work of the Japan Society is not at all spectacular. Often the results of its efforts are difficult or impossible of measurement. But as the years have passed its influence has grown and spread....

Members of the Society have over the years supported a work of importance in the field of international relations and good understanding. By their support they have made possible the extension of the Society's work far beyond its own membership.

The same report went on to list some of the Society's recent activities. There was a constant demand for the "colored lantern slides, with accompanying lectures," Kenneth Latourette's Syllabus on Japan, and the pamphlet entitled "About Japan," which was the one with twenty-five questions and their answers. Among the books distributed by the Society, A Daughter of the Narikin, by Etsu Inagaki Sugimoto (1932), was most in demand. Art, Life, and Nature in Japan, by the famous scholar of Buddhism, Masaharu Anesaki, which had been published with the assistance of the Society in 1933 to commemorate its twenty-fifth anniversary, had been very well received. The Society took special pride in the publication in 1930 of The Complete Journal of Townsend Harris. As the annual report pointed out, a book of this sort "probably never would have been published except by an organization such as ours."

The 1933 annual report shows the courage, wisdom, and devoted efforts with which the leadership of the Society attempted to continue its work despite the difficult political situation. Conditions, however, continued to deteriorate, entering a new stage of tension and hostility in 1937, with the outbreak of fighting in China and later Japan's deliberate sinking of the American gunboat, the U.S.S. Panay, on the Yangtse River at the time of the seizure and pillage of Nanking. By the autumn of 1940, Tokyo had entered into a Tripartite Alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy and then occupied northern French Indochina (now known as Vietnam) in an effort to cut off supplies to China. The United States responded with economic sanctions and, in the summer of 1941, a virtual embargo on all oil imports into Japan. Facing economic ruin and an end to supplies for its military, the Japanese government acquiesced in the decision for war and approved the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The minutes of Japan Society after 1933 are a sad repetition of decreasing membership, declining activity, and increasing financial problems. The directors were well aware of what was happening and even more aware that there was nothing much they or the Society could do to reverse the trend. By October 1941, the Society had only 517 members, of whom ninety were life members. The Board of Directors no longer met regularly. At a joint meeting of the Executive and Finance Committees, it was decided that, "in view of the political situation now existing in Japan it would be well to postpone any action at this time and wait for a month or so until affairs might be more settled and a clearer view could be obtained as a basis for arriving at a suitable course for the Society to pursue."
By the outbreak of war on December 7, 1941, the Society no longer had a full complement of directors, and the next day it lost its president. Upon hearing the news of Pearl Harbor, Henry W. Taft wrote on December 8: “I hereby resign as president of the Japan Society and as a member of its Board of Directors, my resignation to take place at once.” During the next few weeks there was a flood of similar resignations, most of them quite curtly worded. Even Lindsay Russell, the leader among the founders of the Society, felt forced to write: “Please accept my resignation as a director of the Japan Society. There are many reasons why I am unable to serve or be of the slightest use.”

Louis V. Ledoux courageously took up the reins of leadership from Taft, and with a faithful few arranged for the preservation of the corporate existence of the Society, despite the suspension of its activities during the war. He, George Betts, Jr., the counsel for the Society, and Douglas Dunbar, its executive director, coped with the legal problems of changing the incorporation papers and bylaws, closing the office, retiring the staff, preserving the records, and securing the funds for the duration of the war. Because of an insufficiency of directors, they had to ask a few persons in January 1942 to serve for a thirty-day period as temporary directors in order to have a quorum to amend the bylaws and select a skeleton board to supervise the Society’s affairs during its period of hibernation. Among those approached for this purpose were two old friends, E. W. Frazier and Harold G. Henderson, as well as Edward C. Carter of the Institute of Pacific Relations. The slate of officers elected by the temporary Board on February 27, 1942, was Louis V. Ledoux, president; Harold G. Henderson, vice president; Douglas L. Dunbar, secretary; and Richard F. Warner, treasurer.

Subsequently, Ledoux persuaded Betts to serve also as a director, though Betts had at first demurred because of the impropriety of his being both counsel and a director. A total of ten directors were appointed. When Ledoux took the chair after his election, he announced that all that was left to be done was for the directors to decide upon the notice to be sent to members and the date of the members’ meeting, to choose gifts for the staff on the closing of the office, and “to consider the advisability of discontinuing until further action of the Board all activities of the Society other than such as may be necessary to maintain the Society’s corporate existence, preserve its assets and meet its obligations.” The final legal details on the corporate changes were completed by April 1942, and the Society was ready for mothballs.

Japan Society, of course, remained inactive while the war lasted, but thanks to the efforts of Ledoux and his small group of associates, it did not die. When hostilities came to an end and conditions became propitious, it was still legally in existence, ready to resume its traditional role in building knowledge and understanding between the United States and Japan.
Program cover for a dinner given by Japan Society in honor of Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Takamatsu, held at the Park Lane on April 14, 1931.
PART II:
POSTWAR RECOVERY
Early Postwar Stirrings: 1945–51

For four years, Japan and the United States fought a furious and unrelenting war, but the end came quite suddenly and unexpectedly, sparing both the Japanese people and American soldiers from the bloodbath that would have accompanied an invasion of the main islands of Japan. On August 6 and 9, 1945, the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, obliterating these cities and their inhabitants; on August 8, the Soviet army came crashing into Manchuria. These combined shocks enabled a group of civilian leaders around the emperor to persuade the military to accept surrender. On August 15, Emperor Hirohito broadcast to his people in his own voice his acceptance of the terms of the Potsdam Proclamation, calling on his subjects “to endure the unendurable.”

Following the formal surrender on September 2, American troops started to flood Japan, and attitudes on both sides soon began to change. The Japanese quickly discovered that the Americans were not the ogres of wartime propaganda, and the Americans became engrossed in the task of trying to reform Japan and in the process developed strong admiration for Japanese traits of hard work, perseverance, and efficiency. Many more Americans than ever before became intimately acquainted with Japan through participation in the Occupation, and following the outbreak of the Korean conflict in 1950, a new generation of American soldiers came to think of Japan as a pleasant haven for “rest and recreation” from the horrors of the nearby war. Japan became known and liked by whole new categories of Americans, greatly broadening the potential base for Japan Society once it was able to resume its activities.

Another significant difference between prewar and postwar Japanese-American relations was the great multiplication of ties of all sorts between the two countries during the military occupation of Japan. The Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (commonly called SCAP) was General Douglas MacArthur of the American army, and he ran the country in high-handed fashion, with scant heed to the American government, let alone international bodies. His staff was almost purely American, and the policies he pursued were those approved by the American government. This situation created a close relationship between Japan and the United States that was unique in the annals of modern history. Many serious frictions did develop, but on the whole both Japanese and Americans found the experience much less painful and more gratifying than either had expected.

Conditions were obviously propitious for the reactivation of Japan Society, and moves were started in this direction as early as December 1946 when Yoneo Arai, the son of Ryoichiro Arai, one of the Society’s founders, obtained from George Betts the names of the officers and directors and the bylaws as of February 1942. He did this on behalf of Louis Ledoux, who was recovering from a stroke. A meeting of the Board was held on April 10, 1947, at his home. Those present were Ledoux, Warner, Arai, Dunbar, Henderson, and Clarke. Paolino Gerli, a silk merchant, and Everett Frazier Warner were elected to take the places of Hart, who had died, and Coe, who had resigned because of illness, thus restoring the number of directors to ten. Finances were a major concern at the meeting. The Society had $133,400 face value of Japanese government and corporation bonds, on which, of course, no interest had been paid since 1941. The proper American authorities had been notified of these holdings, and now the directors moved to begin finding out what should be done about them. The directors also discussed communicating with the members of the Society as of 1942 to find out what interest there was in reviving the Society’s activities, but decided to postpone this action for a few months.

At a second meeting on December 9, 1947, the complex financial situation was again discussed, and it was also decided that Ledoux, as president, should send letters to the membership announcing the Society’s intention of resuming activities and calling a members’ meeting for January 23, 1948, to which members should send proxies if they could not attend in person. In a draft of this letter dated December 27, Ledoux wrote with reference to the breaking off of the Society’s activities in 1942:
Since then the Japan Society has done little or nothing except watch for the turning of the tide and wait for the time when the storms of hatred had passed, and the minds of men could turn again from destruction to construction, and could try once more to build a future of peace, understanding and friendship. In the opinion of the directors that time now has come and we should take our part in the building of the future.

Ledoux died on February 25, 1948, and his letter was never sent, but his prediction proved accurate. The full restoration of the Society, however, took longer than he had anticipated. On February 19, 1948, a special meeting of the Board was held at which it was decided to go ahead with a notice for a membership meeting. A nominating committee was also appointed to search for officers. Joseph C. Grew, who had been the American ambassador to Japan during the decade before Pearl Harbor, was suggested for president. He subsequently declined, because he felt the Society’s new president should be someone not closely associated with the “old Japan.”

The notice for the membership meeting was sent out on March 25, 1948, to about 280 persons whose names were still on the rolls, and the meeting was held on April 15 under the chairmanship of Harold Henderson as vice president. It was decided to leave the office of president open and have Henderson serve as interim head. On June 30, a notice was sent out that annual dues would be reinstated, and that the Society would set up membership and planning committees. But these actions were not taken. So long as there was no peace treaty, Japan remained a nation under military occupation. Under these conditions, resumption of the Society’s activities seemed inappropriate. As it turned out, it would be several more years before the Society could be fully revived.

In the meantime, the officers and directors waited and worked for the day when the organization could resume its activities. Since its endowment funds were all in Japanese bonds and thus were not accessible before the treaty was signed, the Society had to rely on its officers and directors for office space and facilities. Contact with members was maintained through interim reports, and annual membership meetings were held. Eventually, Washington decided to go ahead with a peace treaty with or without Soviet or Chinese participation. In April 1950, John Foster Dulles, later the secretary of state, was appointed to begin negotiations. The treaty was signed in San Francisco on September 8, 1951, by forty-eight nations and went into effect on April 28, 1952. Neither Chinese government attended the peace conference, and the Soviet Union refused to sign the resulting document. Despite its “normalization” of diplomatic relations with Japan in 1956, the Soviet Union never signed a formal treaty of peace with Japan before its collapse in 1991.

At the same time that the peace treaty was concluded, the United States and Japan signed a separate United States-Japan Security Treaty. It provided for the continuation of the presence of American bases and forces in Japan. The so-called one-sided peace settlement and the continuation of the American base structure gave rise to embittered political conflict within Japan and constant friction between Japanese and Americans, but both treaties were considered necessary by Tokyo as well as Washington. The post-treaty period thus did not dawn with cloudless skies between Japan and the United States, but the way was now open for the formal reactivation of Japan Society.

Rebirth: 1951–53

As the time for signing the peace treaty neared, the officers and directors of Japan Society made plans to go into speedy action, electing Harold Henderson president in January 1950.

The Society held its first social event on October 5, 1951—a luncheon in honor of Takashi Komatsu, president of the America-Japan Society of Tokyo. But its first and most urgent need was for a new and more vigorous leadership. It had lost Ledoux and several of its directors, and Henderson had already given many years of service. To get the Society going again would require much time and energy. At the annual meeting in January 1952, Raymond C. Kramer, chairman of La-France Industries, was elected a director. He knew of the deep interest
in Japan of John D. Rockefeller 3rd. Kramer had been a wartime colonel who had served as the first chief of the economic and scientific section of SCAP headquarters in Tokyo, while Rockefeller had just completed his work as consultant on cultural matters with the Dulles Peace Settlement Mission. It was decided to invite Rockefeller to become president, and the approach was made through Kramer and Paolino Gerli, then the treasurer of the Society.

It was a case of serendipity. The Society was in need of a president of Rockefeller’s stature, energy, and broad vision. He, in turn, had been looking for a medium whereby he could contribute more fully to understanding between America and Japan. His participation in the Dulles Mission had been a continuation of an interest in Japan begun long before the war. He had, in fact, first visited Japan after graduating from Princeton in 1929.

On March 4, 1952, a special meeting of the Board of Directors elected Rockefeller a director, and at another directors’ meeting, following a special meeting of members on March 24, he was elected president of the Society. In a press release two days later, Rockefeller stated:

The Society’s long range objective is to help bring the people of the United States and of Japan closer together in their appreciation and understanding of each other and each other’s way of life. It is our hope that a vigorous Japan Society can be of real benefit by functioning as a private, non-political organization interested in serving as a medium through which both our peoples can learn from the experiences and the accomplishments of the other.

Under its vigorous new leadership, the Society sprang quickly into action. At the invitation of Harold Henderson, Raymond Kramer, and Paolino Gerli, two of the members of Rockefeller’s personal staff, Edgar Young and Donald McLean, went to work on amending the certificate of incorporation and bylaws of the Society to make its organizational structure smoother and sounder. Power was vested in the Board of Directors and, when it was not in session, in its Executive Committee. The Board was to have between five and thirty members, and the Executive Committee between five and nine.

At the March 24 meeting, John Foster Dulles had been elected chairman of the Board. Rockefeller himself assumed the chairmanship of the Executive Committee, whose other members were Yoneo Arai, Dulles, Gerli, Henderson, Kramer, and Ken R. Dyke, an advertising executive, who had held a prominent position in the Occupation. Several other committees were also established: Henderson chaired the Arts and Literature Committee; Dyke, the Membership Committee; Harold L. Bache, the Hospitality Committee; and Kramer, the Finance Committee. Arai agreed to serve as acting executive secretary “at the pleasure of the Board of Directors, without compensation but with reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses.” A temporary headquarters was established in the offices of Kramer and Gerli at 119 West 40th Street.

Rockefeller wanted to have a large and strong Board of Directors that included notable persons in business, academia, the arts, and society. Eleven new members were elected on March 24 to join the fourteen existing directors, about half of whom dated from the prewar Society. The new members were Winthrop Aldrich, Arthur Dean, Joseph C. Grew, W. R. Herod, Mrs. Douglas Horton, Mrs. Louis Ledoux, Roland L. Redmond, Edwin O. Reischauer, Sir George Sansom, Howard C. Shepard, and Hideki Yukawa. The Board now had the kind of broad representation it needed for sustained activity on a new scale.

At the annual membership meeting on March 3, 1952, memberships had been divided into five categories: resident members living or working within forty miles of New York City paid $15 annual dues and nonresident members, $10; life members paid $250; honorary members paid no dues; sustaining members, who could be individuals, corporations, or partnerships, paid $150 annually but had only one vote.

At the second meeting of the Executive Committee on June 12, the question of a salaried executive director was settled by the selection of Douglas Overton, who readily accepted. Overton had taught briefly before the war at St. Paul’s University (Rikkyo Daigaku) in Tokyo and during the war had been an officer in the Army Signal Corps,
supervising work on the translation of intercepted Japanese messages. After the war he had become a Foreign Service officer, stationed first in Yokohama and then in Tokyo from 1946 to 1950. In 1952, he was in the State Department’s Office of Northeast Asian Affairs in Washington. He brought to the Society a great breadth of expert knowledge and the drive of a full-time, vigorous worker.

The first meeting of the new Executive Committee, on May 26, 1952, was devoted to plans for the revived Society’s first major function—a dinner at the Plaza Hotel on June 17 for Japan’s first postwar ambassador to Washington, Eikichi Araki. June 17 was only four days after the ambassador had presented his credentials to President Harry Truman, and the speech he gave that night was his first public address in the United States. The Japanese flag flying outside the Plaza that evening was also a postwar first. John Foster Dulles, the new chairman of the Society’s Board of Directors, presided, and in addition to Araki, the Society’s new president, John D. Rockefeller 3rd, also spoke.

Some 750 guests sat down at tables decorated with paper lanterns. Among the distinguished guests were Trygve Lie, the secretary-general of the United Nations; U. Alexis Johnson, assistant secretary of state for the Far East; Spyros F. Skouras, president of 20th Century Fox; and the labor leaders Jacob Potofsky of the CIO and Matthew Wollof the AFL. So many members of the diplomatic community were present that the Society had to check with the State Department on protocol regarding seating.

Ambassador Araki’s speech emphasized the new identity of interests between Japan and the United States, and Japan’s need for foreign trade and reindustrialization. Rockefeller responded with an address that stressed the importance of cultural interchange for economic relations and the importance of international trade and of Japan as a trading partner for the United States. The press gave the occasion and the speeches good coverage. The Japanese were greatly pleased. On June 23, 1952, Ambassador Araki wrote to thank Rockefeller: “As for your address, not only myself, but all the Japanese present were grateful for your deep understanding of the position of my country and for your eloquent expression of it.”

The occasion had been a smashing success, a good indication of the reborn Japan Society’s vigorous future. It signaled the resumption of full and cordial relations and the reemergence of Japan Society as an active participant in helping to make and keep those relations truly full and cordial.

The conclusion of the peace treaty and the revival of Japan Society may have been auspicious events, but many problems remained. There were still serious frictions in Japanese-American relations through which the Society had to thread its way with caution. The Japanese people were badly divided on a number of key political issues, and large numbers of them were dissatisfied not only with the “one-sided” nature of the peace treaty the United States had engineered, but also with many other aspects of the continuing relationship between the two countries. On May Day 1953, a mere three days after the treaty went into effect, these feelings manifested themselves in massive demonstrations in Tokyo, in which American vehicles and other property were damaged.

Japan Society carefully avoided involvement in controversial matters such as the military alliance, and instead pushed ahead with getting its program back into operation. It faced two important tasks: rebuilding its membership and establishing a sound financial base for its programs. At the dinner held on June 17, 1952, application forms had been placed in the foyer of the banquet hall, and letters of solicitation were sent to those who had attended. By the time of the Executive Committee meeting on September 4, the Society had grown from seventy-nine to 360 members; by November 12, when the full Board of Directors met, the number had risen to 427. Meanwhile, the Society had established quarters of its own in room 368–9 at the Savoy-Plaza at Fifth Avenue and 58th Street, where it was to remain for the next five years.

At the September 4 meeting, Raymond Kramer joined Arai as vice president, and Edgar Young became secretary. A Student Committee for Japanese studying in the United States was established under the chairmanship of Arai. The June banquet had proved a financial as well as an organizational success, producing a surplus of almost $1,500. With
funds from dues and the restoration of income from prewar investment holdings, the Society approved in September a budget of $10,690 for the remainder of the calendar year.

By the fall Board of Directors meeting on November 12, it was clear that the Society was getting into full swing. It was decided to restore the Annual Dinners but to try to have them coincide with the visit of an important person from Japan. The Student Committee reported that it had scheduled for November 25 the first of a series of teas to be held at the Society’s office to introduce Japanese students to members interested in entertaining them. It was estimated that there were already about 150 Japanese students in the New York area. The Committee on Arts and Literature announced that it was considering its first postwar publication, a book on Japanese handicrafts. A Committee on Cultural Interchange had been formed under the chairmanship of Hugh Borton, a distinguished professor of Japanese history at Columbia University, who had played an important role first as an officer in the State Department working on postwar policy for Japan and later as chairman of the Subcommittee on the Far East preparing for the peace treaty. The Committee on Cultural Interchange had the duty of generating ideas for the Society’s own interchange program and evaluating ideas from others. At the suggestion of Douglas Overton, the new executive director, an associate membership was created for students and academics, with dues of only $3. One important policy question surfaced at this meeting: whether the Society should focus exclusively on interpreting Japan for Americans, or whether it should function as mediator in a two-way exchange. The decision was that the primary emphasis should be on interpreting Japan for Americans, but that opportunities to do the reverse would be evaluated as they might arise.

Much of the program of the Society was like what it had been before the war. But there were many new activities as well, such as the work with Japanese students, and the scale was vastly expanded. Relations between Japan and America, once restored, had grown at an astonishing pace, and many of the increasing number of Americans who went to Japan sought information and advice from the Society. The return flow of Japanese was much greater, and these visitors to the United States often made Japan Society their first point of contact.

During the first six months of 1953, just after the peace treaty had gone into effect, some 6,900 American tourists visited Japan. International air service revolutionized travel between the United States and Japan. Pan American’s trans-Pacific service at first followed the path of the wartime amphibious campaigns. Northwest Orient pioneered the “great circle” route via Alaska. Beginning in 1954, Japan Air Lines joined the American carriers in providing regular flights between Tokyo’s Haneda International Airport, Honolulu, and the U.S. West Coast.

Although immigration from Japan to the United States had been stopped after 1924, some 2,000 to 3,000 Japanese continued to come each year until the war. These were mostly students, government personnel, businessmen, and tourists. After the war, the flow was reduced to a trickle, as SCAP sharply limited Japanese travel abroad. But in 1952–53, despite continued strict Japanese controls over foreign exchange, almost 5,500 Japanese came to the United States. This was soon followed by a human tidal wave of Japanese tourists. By 1970, loaded with the luggage of affluence, Japanese traveling abroad numbered 640,000, and of these 203,000 visited America.

This flow of people was far outdistanced by the increase in Japanese-American trade. By 1954, the United States was taking 17 percent of Japan’s exports and providing 25 percent of its imports. In another decade, these percentages had risen to 32 and 27 percent, respectively, and had become gigantic in absolute terms, as Japan and the United States developed the largest bilateral transoceanic trade the world had ever seen.

Increased trade, the interchange of people, and all the activities that accompanied them naturally had a profound effect on the program of Japan Society. It held more receptions, luncheons, and lectures and sponsored more publications than ever before. It encouraged exhibitions concerned with
Japan. It provided home visits for Japanese students. It performed a great variety of services involving Japanese-American relations. There was also the beginning of what would become the Performing Arts Program, and the Society planted the seeds of what would eventually blossom into organized programs for the exchange of views between Japanese and American businessmen, government leaders, scholars, and other experts.

The increased flow of Japanese to America brought people of all types seeking the aid of the Society. There were Japanese students and scholars, trade and technical missions eager to tap American know-how to rebuild Japanese industry, representatives of the Japanese government, and architects, artists, and musicians, to say nothing of a growing number of businessmen engaged in international trade. For the scholars in particular, Japan Society provided a forum for the exchange of ideas, and for artists and musicians, a place to share their skills with appreciative audiences. The Society not only welcomed and rendered assistance to these visitors, but made the members of the Society accessible to them, and their skills and talents accessible to the members.

Some hint of the Society’s greatly expanded program appeared in the first report Douglas Overton submitted to the Board of Directors in November 1952. In a final paragraph, headed “Miscellaneous Activities,” he wrote:

In addition to the regular activities of the Society, there have been increasing demands on the Executive Director for advice and assistance in connection with the activities of other individuals and groups interested in Japan…. During the month of October he briefed the newly appointed director of the Fulbright program in Japan… aided the Museum of Modern Art in locating Japanese architectural photographs for an exhibition; discussed in detail with interested Japanese and American theatrical groups a pending plan to bring the Kabuki to New York; obtained on loan for the municipal radio station the recordings of a new Japanese opera; entertained…a group of visiting Ryukyuan officials and an official Japanese Aeronautical Technical Survey Mission; assisted the visiting director of a prominent orphanage in Japan to establish contact with... American agencies and individuals interested in child welfare; and, at the request of the National Gallery, undertook to explore the possibility of bringing an exhibit of Japanese modern art to the United States.

For a significantly expanded program, the Society needed a financial base beyond the restored income from its prewar investment holdings and current membership dues. It began to seek support from corporate contributors, and much of the effort of its executive officers was devoted to building a solid list of donors who would make contributions of sufficient size to finance the growth of the Society’s activities. Rockefeller was anxious that the Society become a self-sustaining organization with its own independent and secure support. Generous always with his own contributions, at the same time he saw these gifts as “seed money” to get the organization and its projects started. It was then up to the Society to seek other sources of funding and to continue on its own. Overton too felt strongly that there was no point in an organization like Japan Society if its major support did not come from the “users” of its services and the “consumers” of its activities—that is, individual and corporate members and the organizations and foundations with which it could carry out joint projects.

Because the Society’s resources were limited and likely to remain so, while its goals and projects were ambitious and growing, it adopted the policy of attempting to double and triple the effectiveness of any endeavor by using its own resources to get a project started and then expanding it with the aid of other individuals, institutions, and organizations, both public and private. The result was an impressive array of accomplishments on the basis of what Overton described as a “shoestring operation.”

At a meeting of the Executive Committee on January 29, 1953, the main focus of discussion was the problem of setting priorities among the many possibilities opening up. There were proposals for publications and meetings, a project in conjunction with the Ford Foundation to bring kabuki to New York and another with The Metropolitan Museum of Art to mount an exhibition of Japanese painting and
sculpture, service as a conduit for bank loans to needy Japanese students in the United States, and the plan to hold a dinner in September in honor of the Japanese Crown Prince during his visit to the United States.

In addition to social events, cultural and educational programs and publications held the interest and support of the members. In September 1953, the Society started to publish the *Forum* as a newsletter for its membership. A Japanese art exhibition opened on March 27, 1953, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, with the support of the Society, and a preview for members was held on March 26. Frank Gibney, then a *Time-Life* correspondent, gave a lecture that same month, and a kabuki demonstration was held uptown at Columbia University in April. Later there was a touring exhibition by the woodblock artist Toshi Yoshida; a display of Japanese utilitarian arts at the East River Savings Bank in July and August; an evening of Japanese dance co-sponsored by International House at Columbia in July; a performance of *Madama Butterfly* by the Fujiwara Opera Company in the autumn; a lecture on “A Woman’s Life in the New Japan” in November; and an evening discussion meeting on current Japanese-American relations in December.

Social events, of course, continued to be a major focus, as they had been before the war. In June 1953, a luncheon was held for Renzo Sawada, Permanent Observer of Japan to the United Nations. In October, a luncheon was held for Hayato Ikeda, then the special representative of Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, and later a very successful prime minister himself between 1960 and 1964. The big social event of the year, however, was the dinner held at the Waldorf on September 17 in honor of the nineteen-year-old Crown Prince of Japan, on his way home after representing his country at the coronation of Elizabeth II of England in June.

Society president John D. Rockefeller 3rd opened negotiations with Ambassador Eikichi Araki concerning this event as early as January. He made several proposals concerning the prince’s month-long stay in the United States, some of which, in
addition to the Japan Society dinner, were incorpo-
rated into the final itinerary. The dinner was attend-
ed by some 1,500 persons, and addresses were given
by Crown Prince Akihito, Secretary of State John
Foster Dulles, and Ambassador Araki. Entertainment
was provided by the Columbia University Glee Club
and the violinist Kenji Kobayashi, who was then a
student at Juilliard holding one of the newly estab-
lished Japan Society fellowships. CBS taped the
proceedings for broadcast later that night, and the
whole event was well covered in the newspapers.

The dinner guests were an impressive group.
They included Dag Hammarskjold, secretary general
of the UN; Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., the American rep-
resentative to the UN; Japan’s Minister of Finance,
Sankuro Ogasawara; the Grand Chamberlain of the
Japanese Imperial Household, Takanobu Mitani, who
was traveling with the Crown Prince; Francis Cardinal
Spellman of New York; Bishop Martin of the National
Council of Churches; Dr. Louis Finkelstein, president
of the Jewish Theological Seminary; Grayson Kirk,
president of Columbia University; Henry Heald, chan-
celloir of New York University; Lawrence McGinley,
S.J., president of Fordham University; Roland Redmond,
president of The Metropolitan Museum of Art;
the Crown Prince’s senior tutor, Professor Shinzo
Koizumi; and Elizabeth Gray Vining, whose Windows
for the Crown Prince, an account of her experience as
one of the Prince’s tutors in the early postwar years,
had become something of a minor classic in the lit-

erature on Japan. Arrangements were also made for
Japanese students in the area to attend the dinner
as guests of the Society.

Conspicuously absent was General Douglas
MacArthur, who lived in the Waldorf Towers but
consistently refused to attend any of the Society’s
functions. The absence of the former Supreme
Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan seemed,
however, a relief rather than a disappointment.
Raymond C. Kramer wrote to Rockefeller: “You can
breathe more easily. The General has declined for
September 17th.” The inability of Eleanor Roosevelt
to attend was genuinely regretted, but she enter-
tained the Crown Prince at lunch the next day, and
she also became a member of the Society.

The secretary of state took the occasion to
make a major policy statement in support of Japan’s
economic development and in favor of the American
commitment to “collective security” in the Pacific.
In his speech, Dulles, who had himself served for a
while as chairman of the Board of Directors of Japan
Society, stated:

I have some personal knowledge of the Japan
Society and of the private efforts which it stimu-
lates and I register here my conviction that this
type of activity can do more to create interna-
tional friendship and goodwill than any activities
of government.

Eleanor Roosevelt is
greeted upon her arrival
in Japan at the beginning
of a trip sponsored
through the Intellectual
Interchange Program
in 1953. Photo courtesy
of Franklin D. Roosevelt
Library.
The program for 1953 was a full one and showed that the Society was now back in action under vigorous new leadership. The Executive Committee met monthly, and its members, especially Rockefeller, gave freely of their time and energy. Their efforts were rewarded. The Society was beginning to gain an even more solid position than it had held before the war in its chosen role as a major center for private and informal cultural and intellectual contacts between Japan and America.

**Setting the Postwar Pattern: 1953–58**

Although many of the Society's activities during its busy 1953 season were quite familiar to the prewar membership, there were also important new undertakings. The decision was made that for the next several years the Society would focus a major portion of its energy and resources in three specific areas: Japanese students in America, cultural exchange, and improving education about Japan in the United States and the teaching of English in Japan. Rockefeller had a special interest in cultural exchange, and Douglas Overton, as a former teacher, was especially concerned with educational matters.

The plight of Japanese students in the United States was a particularly serious and obvious problem, since most of them came on inadequate grants limited to one year and had no way of getting supplementary money from Japan because of the Japanese government's tight currency controls. They could not supplement their finances by working, because this was not allowed under the terms of the student visas on which they had entered the country. The slightest unforeseen event—even a visit to the dentist—was often enough to spell disaster. Limited command of colloquial English and cultural differences often exacerbated their money problems and led to isolation and loneliness. A further frustration was that while most grants were for one year, most degree programs required two. In the case of Japanese students, a one-year program was often of little value because of the initial language barrier they faced.

Aware of these difficulties, the officers and staff of the Society entered the field with a view to investigating and publicizing the problems and trying to get other organizations interested, while at the same time operating a small Society program to take care of emergency cases. In January 1953 a Student Emergency Fund totaling $1,000 was set up to be used at the discretion of the executive director and to be administered by him in conjunction with the Student Committee. In May, $5,000 was made available for scholarships for an additional year's study for outstanding students already in the United States. The recipients were to be selected by the executive director and the Student Committee, who would also look for additional sources of funding. A sum of $1,500 was made available to send one or more outstanding American students to the revived annual Japan-America Student Conference, which was held in Japan in the summer of 1953. Applicants were screened by the executive director and the chairman of the Cultural Interchange Committee, Hugh Borton. The work of the Student Committee under Yoneo Arai and that of the Cultural Interchange Committee under Borton began to overlap, and gradually the latter took over responsibility for the whole of the student program.

At an Executive Committee meeting on December 10, 1953, it was decided to set up a program of grants-in-aid for Japanese students to begin in the academic year 1954–55. A maximum of $15,000 of Society funds was to be used for outstanding Japanese students who wanted to continue their studies in the United States and who needed only small sums to close the gap between income and expenses. The Society decided to concentrate on potential leaders in two areas: future government officials and teachers. The project was a great success and lasted until prosperity was restored in Japan and the Japanese were able to support their overseas students. Douglas Overton later recalled that the first year's program, partly funded by a gift from John D. Rockefeller 3rd and three special grants from the New York Community Chest, covered twenty-five students chosen from among 200 applicants from all over the country. Individual grants ranged from $500 to $1,500.
Besides the grants, the Society also engaged in a program of receptions and home visits for Japanese students. In 1953, the first full year of this program, twenty members and friends provided hospitality to sixty-six students in the New York area, ninety-eight students attended receptions at the Society, and seventy-five took advantage of the counseling service set up at the Society offices to give advice on money, budgets, and everyday living problems. By mid-1954, thirty graduate students enrolled at twenty-three universities across the country were receiving grants-in-aid. About 100 students in the New York area were receiving personal hospitality, and about 140 came for counseling.

Among the members who participated in the hospitality program were Rockefeller himself and George Betts, the lawyer who had been one of those who had helped preserve the Society during the war years.

At a meeting of the Board of Directors in December 1953, Hugh Borton had proposed a thorough investigation of the condition of Japanese students in the United States. As a result Wilton Dillon, formerly an instructor at Hobart College, carried out a “Survey of Japanese Student Problems,” and the Society renewed its efforts to attract more official government attention to the problem. Overton discussed with members of the American Embassy in Tokyo ways to screen students more carefully so that they would not find themselves without responsible sponsors for their trip, run out of funds, or be unable to pay for passage home. Rockefeller also visited Eisaku Sato, by then minister of finance, who arranged for a relaxation of exchange regulations to permit students to receive money from home. In a letter to Rockefeller dated December 16, 1958, Sato referred to this and the government’s new policy of keeping close watch on the financial condition of students going abroad “as a modest gift for Merry Christmas.”

Help also came from the Japanese community in New York. In 1958, a group of women, led by Madame Mitsuo Tanaka, wife of the Japanese consul general, formed the Oasis-kai, a society whose focus was the welfare of Japanese students in the United States. By the end of the year, there were 2,000 Japanese students in the United States, half of whom seemed to be in financial trouble, and perhaps 200 in serious difficulties. Overton suggested that the Oasis-kai concentrate on finding part-time jobs among Japanese companies in New York to help the students help themselves.

Between 1953 and 1959, the Society spent a great deal of time and effort and perhaps a fourth of its resources on these student programs, but the results justified the investment. Overton’s report to the Board on October 30, 1957, entitled “The Japanese Student in America,” presented a profile of the students, a summary of their financial problems, and proposals for how the two governments might help them. The next year, Overton produced a five-year summary report on the Fellowship Program. Over this period, 143 grantees had been helped with amounts that had averaged less than $900 per person. Among them were two members of the Hiroshima Doctors Group, who were able to observe the final stages of plastic surgery for the Hiroshima Maidens, a group of girls disfigured by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945. Slightly more than half of the $103,000 that had been spent had come from the Society’s Cultural Interchange Fund; the rest had come from the Ford Foundation and other sources. For the students, the money had often made the difference between finishing a course of study or having to give up and go home midway.

The selection committee had emphasized leadership qualities, specific and attainable career goals, and a secure future in Japan. The follow-up after grantees had returned home showed that the choices had been well made, and Overton recommended continuing the program for as long as was necessary—particularly since “no other organization of comparable resources is specifically interested in Japanese student problems in the United States.”

The Cultural Interchange Committee under Hugh Borton had not only taken over the work of the Student Committee, but had come to engage in a much broader area of activity. In a structural reorganization of the Society in 1954, the Arts and Literature Committee was dissolved, and its work was absorbed by the Cultural Interchange Committee.
Although a Distinguished Guests Committee and a Membership Activities Committee were formed, the Cultural Interchange Committee became the focus for most of the Society’s ongoing programs during the next several years.

The Townsend Harris Fund, which until after the end of the war had constituted about 95 percent of the Society’s endowment, had been established in 1920 with the understanding that it would be used for special projects and not for the operating expenses of the Society. A special committee had always administered the fund, and although during the 1930s, when the Society’s finances became precarious, it had been called on to furnish its share of overhead expenses, the fund had remained separate from the rest of the Society’s finances. After the revival of the Society following the war, the distinction between projects supported by the fund and similar programs sponsored by the Society was largely lost. After discussions within the Society and consultation with other interested persons and groups, the fund was eventually merged with the rest of the Society’s endowment, and the special committee to administer it was dissolved.

In 1954, the staff included, in addition to Douglas Overt on as executive director, Eugene Langston, in charge of research, information, and student activities; a bookkeeper, Eiko Kubo; two secretaries, Suzanne Scott and Tomie Mochizuki; a part-time escort interpreter, Beate Gordon; and a part-time student assistant. At the meeting of the Board of Directors in January 1953, Borton had suggested that, in addition to the proposed book on handicrafts, there should be a new syllabus on Japan to replace the very successful one written by Kenneth Latourette in 1921.

By October 1953, the Cultural Interchange Committee was arranging meetings to study the potential for the Society’s work in four fields: academic and research activities; secondary schools and clubs; mass media; and Japanese students in America. Hugh Borton also reported at this time that the committee was being organized to include Overt on and himself and various ad hoc groups set up for special projects. Ken Dyke, a member of the Executive Committee, proposed a Gallup poll on American knowledge of and attitudes toward Japan. (Several polls were eventually carried out during the 1950s.)

The first major educational undertaking of the Cultural Interchange Committee was a one-year experimental program of summer school lectureships, in which young Japanese teachers gave a series of lectures in the general area of Japanese civilization. These, it was felt, could have a broad impact for a relatively small expenditure of funds. Another new project was a one-year experiment with courses on Japan in colleges in the New York area. The Society started these in the hope that they would prove popular and become part of the colleges’ regular offerings. By January 1954, Borton reported that the first draft of the new syllabus was done; that a commitment for summer lectureships had been made with Duke University and negotiations were under way with Syracuse, Cornell, Boston University, and the University of Delaware; and that negotiations for courses on Japan in New York area colleges were being conducted with Columbia, Barnard, New York University, and Hunter. Summer school projects on Japan were to prove very popular, and by the early 1960s there were over 100 such programs in the United States, most of them operating quite independently of Japan Society.

English-language teaching in Japan had been designated as a particular interest of the Society. The Executive Committee approved a plan presented by Borton to send an American expert to Japan to investigate and report back on what the Society and others might do to help most effectively in this area. Dr. William Cullen Bryant II, head of the American Language Center at Columbia, was sent to Japan in 1954–55 to investigate the problem. The analysis and report he made led in the early 1960s to the formation in Japan of the English Language Educational Council (ELEC).

The Cultural Interchange Committee also wanted a translation program. Edward Seidensticker, then in Tokyo on a Ford grant, agreed to set up a program to be carried out under a bi-national committee in Tokyo in cooperation with The International House of Japan, which, as a result of his work on the Dulles Mission, John D. Rockefeller 3rd had helped found to further
cultural and educational exchange. Seidensticker was to prepare partial translations of six books, which Japan Society would circulate to American publishers. Any publisher agreeing to take a project would reimburse the Society for the amount it had spent and pay for the rest of the translation. The Society was instrumental in generating and partly sponsoring some projects with the advice of Harold Strauss of Knopf. Eventually, Strauss himself established and developed an excellent translation list at Knopf, publishing such authors as Junichiro Tanizaki and Yukio Mishima in translations by Seidensticker, Donald Keene, and other gifted American scholars.

In May 1954, Borton submitted to the Board of Directors a formal plan and budget for the Cultural Interchange Committee for 1954–55. It covered the areas of membership programs, student programs, general assistance, materials on Japan, a project to present an accurate picture of American life to Japanese, and books for Japan. Under “Membership Programs,” which overlapped with the activities of the Membership Committee, were the *Forum*, lectures, meetings, concerts, exhibitions, and small receptions for visiting Japanese. “General Assistance”
covered small grants of around $250 to help distinguished visitors extend their stays or carry out some specific project. Two visitors aided in this way were drama critic and playwright Tsuneari Fukuda and Hidekazu Yoshida, Japan’s leading music critic.

The section headed “Materials on Japan” contained proposals for traveling exhibitions of Japanese art and artifacts for circulation among regional and small museums and libraries all over the United States. Another proposal was for a collection of documentary films and slides for use in American schools. A study made for the Society had shown that there were four acceptable documentaries available and a “pressing need” for two more—one on economic life and one on culture. Although the Society was not itself in a position to make the films, which cost $25,000 to $40,000 each, Hugh Borton proposed that it buy as many prints as possible from the nonprofit International Film Foundation and send them out on indefinite loan to school systems, withdrawing them only when the prints wore out or showings fell below a certain minimum a year. The committee estimated that by investing $150 per print, it could reach 5,000 children in a school system in one year. Both the traveling exhibitions and the film projects were undertaken and grew eventually into the Society’s Gallery, Performing Arts, and Film Center programs.

In September 1954, the Society sponsored the American premiere of the famous Japanese film Ugetsu and in December, of Jigokumon (Gate of Hell). In September 1955, it held a reception at the Columbia Faculty Club for the famed actress Machiko Kyō. Since a good documentary was still needed, the Society, backed by a generous grant from Rockefeller and with the cooperation of the International Film Foundation, sent Julien Bryan to Japan to make a film on the modern Japanese economy. The result, called simply Japan, was an instant success and had a long life in American schools, selling about 250 copies a year into the 1960s.

Another program sponsored by the Cultural Interchange Committee was the so-called Tsunoda project. Ryusaku Tsunoda, who had been a central figure in the development of Japanese studies in the United States and had only recently retired after thirty years as curator of Columbia’s East Asian Library, proposed giving twelve lectures on American thought for university groups in Japan, which subsequently would be published in Japanese. Since Tsunoda needed no stipend, and The International House of Japan also sponsored the project, all that was required of the Society was money for Tsunoda’s travel and living expenses in Japan. The project was a start toward the Society’s broad exchange of scholars program.

The committee also began to send American books to Japan, where libraries had been deprived of recent publications because of wartime restrictions and postwar poverty. The Society collected books contributed by members and other people or institutions and shipped them to Japan for distribution.

In 1955–56, the Society sponsored two important books, Herschel Webb’s An Introduction to Japan and Donald Keene’s Anthology of Japanese Literature,
both of which sold very well. It also began preparing packets of materials on Japan for high school teachers in the United States. A teacher in New Jersey, Phyllis Elling, prepared a syllabus, and with it a map of Japan and whatever free pamphlets could be gotten were included in the packets. An arrangement was made with the New York City Department of Education for high school teachers who wanted to cover Japan in social studies classes to attend an in-service course of fifteen weekly lectures by scholars such as Theodore de Bary and Donald Keene of Columbia and Hyman Kublin of City College, for which the students received credit from the Board of Education. In 1957, the course drew 147 teachers, double the number anticipated.

The extent of the activities of the Cultural Interchange Committee is demonstrated by the list of programs included in its 1956–57 budget of $62,000. Since the Society was running at a deficit of about $5,000 a year, a rein had to be placed on the committee’s activities. But its various programs were by this time successfully launched, and other institutions took up the activities and kept them going long after the Society itself had withdrawn from active involvement in order to move on to new ventures.

In addition to the extraordinary work of the Cultural Interchange Committee during these years, the Society had maintained its other programs and had branched into new fields. It continued to serve as a major source of information on Japan and as a catalyst for all sorts of cultural and intellectual interchange between Japan and the United States.

On the social side, there were two or three small luncheons, dinners, or receptions a year for new Japanese ambassadors, consuls general, United Nations representatives, and distinguished visitors from Japan. For example, such occasions were held for Foreign Ministers Mamoru Shigemitsu in 1955 and Aiichiro Fujiyama in 1958. A particularly large event was the banquet for Shigeru Yoshida in the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf on November 5, 1954, a month before Yoshida relinquished the prime ministership after a record-breaking tenure of more than seven years. Rockefeller presided, and the speakers included Yoshida, Senator Alexander Wiley of Wisconsin, chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and Senator William J. Fulbright, then also an American delegate to the General Assembly of the United Nations. This was Yoshida’s only public speech in the United States as prime minister. Another major event was the dinner for Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi on June 24, 1957. Present also was Takeo Fukuda, who was to become prime minister in 1976. The other speaker in addition to Kishi was Eugene Holman, chairman of the board of Standard Oil of New Jersey.

Art exhibitions, which the Society sponsored or helped to set up, were also beginning to become a major part of its program. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, for example, in 1956 mounted a major exhibition of kimono from the Nomura Robe Collection. Douglas Overtont and the staff were involved at almost every step, even borrowing a child’s kimono from a staff member.

The potter Kitaoji Rosanjin’s visit in 1954 was one of a series of visits by Japanese artists and artisans who traveled about the country giving lectures and demonstrations. Rosanjin stood out not only because of the quality of his work, but because of his irrepressible personality.

The first of what was to become Japan Society’s Annual Dinners was held at the Waldorf-Astoria on November 5, 1954 in honor of Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida. LEFT TO RIGHT: Ralph Bunche (UN Undersecretary for Special Political Affairs), Japan Society chairman John D. Rockefeller 3rd, Robert Murphy (the first postwar U.S. ambassador to Japan), Prime Minister Yoshida, Sadao Iguchi (Ambassador of Japan), and John Allison (second postwar U.S. ambassador to Japan).
Under the leadership of its first director, Beate Gordon, the Performing Arts Program also started around 1957 to present Japanese musicians and artists in both the traditional and contemporary fields. The Society organized small concerts for musicians. These were well received, and Roberta Dewey, the widow of the famous philosopher, suggested that the concerts be used as educational tools for school assembly programs. The Japanese Consulate General provided a small grant, and the program was launched. The Society also began trying to place performing artists in schools in the metropolitan area. The idea was an immediate success. A school would pay what it could afford toward a performer’s fee, and the rest would be subsidized by the Society. Requests began to come in from museums, churches, and colleges as well, and people began to turn to the Society whenever they needed a Japanese performer. This program was the forerunner of the “package performances” the Society arranged for schools and other organizations in the New York area. A typical “package” consisted of three performers who would demonstrate three different Japanese arts in a forty-minute program. The performers were singers, musicians, dancers, and masters of the tea ceremony, calligraphy, ink painting, and origami. In one academic year, these programs reached 12,000 students in the New York area, many of whom had never before been exposed to Japan or Japanese culture.

The Society sponsored concerts in New York at Carnegie Hall, Town Hall, the YMHA, and Philharmonic Hall as showcases for young artists such as koto player Kimio Eto, violinist Kenji Kobayashi, and classical dancer Suzushi Hanayagi. In addition to programs produced by the Society, it followed its basic policy of cooperating with other organizations in bringing such traditional arts as gagaku, kabuki, and noh to the United States. As Japan Society developed its programs and came to be better known, it became the focus of a bewildering variety of inquiries and proposed projects. For example, in 1954 the executors of the estate of Japanese soprano Tamaki Miura, who had sung before King George V and Queen Mary at

Albert Hall in 1914 and had played the title role of Cio-Cio San in the first performance of Madama Butterfly in London, asked the Society to carry out Miura’s wish in having the elaborately embroidered robe she had worn in 300 performances of Puccini’s opera given to the people of the United States. This was eventually accomplished in March 1955 at a small ceremony of presentation to the Metropolitan Opera Company, attended by Renzo Sawada, Japanese ambassador to the United Nations, and Rudolf Bing, general manager of the Metropolitan Opera. In 1956, at the request of Joseph Grew, the last prewar American ambassador to Japan, the Society helped arrange the final year of study for the grandson of Count Aisuke Kabayama at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania. Kabayama had long been prominent in Japanese-American relations. The staff of the Society was also active in helping Grew set up in Japan the Grew Foundation for Japanese students coming to the United States. The foundation was financed in part by the royalties from the Japanese
translation of Grew’s book, *Ten Years in Japan*. (The Grew Foundation is currently administered by The International House of Japan.)

In 1956–57 the Society also worked closely with the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo in arranging for an industrial arts exhibition in Japan called *20th Century Design in Europe and America*. The exhibition, which was visited by Her Majesty the Empress of Japan, drew nearly 37,000 persons in Tokyo and was shown in other cities as well.

The Society was also a catalyst in getting projects started, without using Society funds or much staff time. For example, it helped bring together Martha Graham’s dance company, ANTA, and a major Japanese newspaper to organize a highly successful tour of the Far East by the Graham troupe. It also helped bring together the Grand Kabuki company, the American impresario Lincoln Kirsten, City Center, and the Japanese government to bring kabuki to New York.

Activities of this sort rose to staggering proportions in the course of the 1950s. In his report to the Board of Directors in 1958, Douglas Overton called them “Japan Society’s Program of Public Services,” which he defined as “general information services… library and film programs… traveling exhibits, and the expert guidance and advice we give to outside organizations and individuals.” In 1958, during a single week, the Society answered 139 requests for general information, booked fifty films and recordings, and arranged twenty-one appearances of speakers and performers. At the same time, exhibitions prepared by the Society were on view in Memphis, Youngstown, Zanesville, and New York City, and on the Smithsonian exhibition circuit. In addition, there was a special reception and briefing for a group of visiting Japanese officials, two receptions for a delegation of Japanese movie stars, and conferences with ten organizations on aspects of their programs that dealt with Japan. To Overton, this was the heart of Japan Society’s work for improving and smoothing Japanese-American relations.

One reason why the Society had gained the confidence of both the Japanese and American governments and public and was able to function so effectively as a catalyst for programs between the two countries was the repeated trips John D. Rockefeller 3rd and Overton took to Japan during these years. When Overton visited Japan, he would have a full schedule of conferences and visits with officials, scholars, and organization leaders to gather all the information he could about who was doing what and about which programs would have the most beneficial influence on relations between America and Japan. Rockefeller and he maintained close cooperation with The International House of Japan, and much care was taken not to duplicate programs already being carried out by other groups or institutions.

In the three weeks Overton spent in Japan in 1956, for example, he had 125 appointments, gave three speeches, held two lunches for twenty former Japan Society Fellows, interviewed twelve prospective students, took the time to untangle the visa problems of six students so they could get off to the United States on schedule, collected materials for the Society’s teachers’ packets, picked up tapes for use on American radio, worked out final plans for an industrial design show, initiated a request from the Guggenheim Museum for a *haniwa* show, helped the Bridgestone Museum in Tokyo draft a request to the Guggenheim for the loan of some of its paintings, and arranged for the Society to accept American contributions for the symphony youth concerts in Tokyo, a group that brought music to Japanese high schools.

By 1958, the Society had had seven years of unprecedented growth for its various activities. But it had paid a price for this success. It had shouldered programs and undertakings that exceeded the capacities of its staff, its membership, and its resources. The time had come to reassess the Society’s programs and to choose among the possible lines of development that lay ahead.

**Growing Pains: 1958–65**

Early in 1958, the question of the future of Japan Society came to a head. There was again a deficit in general operations, and a discouraged Douglas Overton wrote to John D. Rockefeller 3rd: “There is

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a very real problem about this... I know you have doubts about the Japan Society's future... and so far as I am concerned, it is definitely on trial.” The budget continued to grow and in 1959–60 topped $100,000. Overton recommended a policy review to discover if there were some ways to cut costs by setting guidelines for choosing between projects, by getting the two governments more involved, and by turning over projects to other organizations when they became too successful and large for the Society's own modest staff and resources. From this review came the decision to have the Society continue to act as an innovator and pioneer in setting up various kinds of projects but to transfer to other organizations those programs that could better be carried on or expanded by them. Distribution of films to schools, reassessment of the Society’s program on the preparation of educational materials, and the summer school program were among the projects the Society passed on to other hands at this time.

Membership, money, staff, and housing were perennial concerns. By September 1957, membership had once again reached 1,000, close to the high point of 1,300 of the prewar Society. An analysis showed some 500 members primarily interested in business, 300 in academic matters, and 200 in Japanese art and culture. The campaign for corporate donations had continued during this period, conducted personally by Rockefeller and the members of the Board, but it still fell short of meeting the Society’s needs. Because of the Society's many diverse activities, it found it necessary to increase its overworked staff. In 1954 it had only five full-time staff, but by early 1957 Overton had been forced to recommend the addition of temporary help, and there was constant pressure to expand the permanent staff as well.

The leadership of the Society was essentially the same as it had been since Rockefeller had assumed the presidency, although a few significant changes had occurred. Raymond Kramer, who had been a wise and stalwart leader, had died early in 1957, but Paolino Gerli was still the treasurer and as enthusiastic and effective a supporter of the Society as he had been since before the war. By 1958–59, there were three vice presidents: Yoneo Arai, Hugh Borton, and W. F. Bramstedt; Edward H. Auchincloss had replaced Edgar Young as secretary. There was a full complement of thirty directors, representing business, academic, and cultural interests in about equal proportions. The committees for 1959–60 were the Executive Committee, chaired by Rockefeller, with ten members; the Finance Committee, chaired by Howard Sheperd; the Membership and Activities Committee, chaired by Tristan E. Beplat of Manufacturers Hanover, who had been with the Occupation in Japan; the Student Committee, chaired by Arai; the Arts and Exhibits Committee, chaired by Mrs. Louis Ledoux; the Cultural Interchange Committee, chaired by Borton; and a Nominating Committee, chaired by Harold Bache of Bache and Company.

In 1957, the Savoy-Plaza had reclaimed Japan Society’s rooms, and by late that year the Society had moved into temporary quarters at 18 East 50th Street. Arai had raised the question of a permanent home for the Society as early as 1953, but the issue had been put aside until the Society’s program had been fully restored. In 1957, it was decided to solve the problem by sharing space with the Asia Society, which Rockefeller had founded in 1956. Rockefeller had resolved to build an Asia House for the two societies at 112 East 64th Street, and on November 1, 1959, Japan Society moved to Asia House, beautifully designed by Philip Johnson, which contained meeting rooms and gallery space, as well as office space and a place for a library.

Settled in its new quarters, the Society found it possible to continue and even expand most of its regular programs and also to take on some new activities. One was the Nichibei Fujinkai, the Japanese-American Women’s Club, which was founded in 1958 under the sponsorship of the Society and within a year had 215 members in five chapters. The Fujinkai promoted group activities designed to bring together American and Japanese women in the New York area. Another new activity was a Print Artists Program, which was supported by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and brought woodblock artists, such as the renowned Shiko Munakata, for lecture-demonstration tours throughout the United States. By 1959, the plan was expanded to the sending of American artists to Japan.
A major new function of the Society was the administration of the Intellectual Interchange Program begun during the Occupation in 1951 by Rockefeller and Shigeharu Matsumoto, who acted as the chief Japanese collaborator with Rockefeller in the creation of The International House of Japan and also served as its chairman, and by Yasaka Takagi, the greatly respected first holder of the chair of American constitutional history at the University of Tokyo before the war. The program had been run on the American side by Columbia University, under the chairmanship of president Grayson Kirk. The idea, which originated on the Japanese side, was to have respected American and European leaders come to Japan when the peace treaty went into effect to help smooth the transition.

The first list the Japanese committee submitted included Ralph Bunche, Reinhold Niebuhr, Robert Oppenheimer, Eleanor Roosevelt, Paul Tillich, and Arnold Toynbee. The program proved so successful that it was continued, and a category of longer visits by professors was added. On the Western side, in 1953 alone the president of Amherst College, Charles W. Cole; Martin C. D'Arcy, professor of philosophy at Oxford; George B. Ford, a counselor to Catholic students at Columbia; Eleanor Roosevelt; and Norman Cousins went to Japan. In later years, Japanese delegates included Fusae Ichikawa, the grande dame of the women’s suffrage movement in Japan and until her death a distinguished member of the House of Councillors; Hitoshi Kihara, professor of genetics at Kyoto University; Yoshio Nagayo, the well-known novelist; Ichiro Nakayama and Seiichi Tobata, two of Japan’s most distinguished economists; the famous essayist Nyozekan Hasegawa; Tani Jodai, the president of Japan Women’s University (Nihon Joshi Daigaku); and Shigeto Tsuru, an economist and president of Hitotsubashi University.

When the Society assumed responsibility for the Intellectual Interchange Program, it was planned to continue only a little longer. But after Yasaka Takagi’s summary report in 1960 covering its eight years of activity, the decision was made to go on for at least another five years. The Japanese asked for a visit by the Oppenheimer’s, which proved to be a
great success, and the program itself became one of the Society’s permanent “special programs;” sending to Japan such Americans as professor Garry Wills, novelist Saul Bellow, and the founder of Common Cause, John Gardner. Such Japanese as scholar-writer Jun Eto, educator and sociologist Michio Nagai, novelist Shusaku Endo, and poet Makoto Ooka came to the United States from Japan.

English-language teaching in Japan was another special project in which the Society took increasing interest. The Society undertook to administer the funds provided from other sources to set up training programs for teachers, to develop materials, and to send American experts in language teaching to help the Japanese. A measure of the success of this endeavor can be seen in the fact that in October 1960 Yasaka Takagi reported that the Ministry of Education had accepted for use in Japanese schools the textbooks developed by ELEC (the English Language Education Council), which the Society had helped to get started.

While the work of the Society was progressing in seeming tranquility and Japanese-American trade was growing by leaps and bounds, the political contacts between the two countries erupted suddenly in the “crisis of 1960,” putting the whole post-treaty relationship between Japan and the United States under severe strain. Popular Japanese dissatisfaction with the treaty settlement of 1951 and the presence of American bases and troops on Japanese soil had continued, and an unfortunate convergence of events brought these feelings to the boiling point in 1960, when massive demonstrations rocked the Japanese Diet over the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. For a while the whole future of Japanese-American relations and even the fate of democracy in Japan seemed in doubt, as Prime Minister Kishi was forced to resign.

Nevertheless, within a year of the blowup of 1960, Japanese-American relations were warmer and more solid than ever before. During this greatest postwar crisis in relations between the two countries, Japan Society stayed on course. Many Americans had been bewildered and irritated by what had gone on in Japan, and at least one member of the Society felt that the organization should take a stand on the issues involved in treaty renewal. But the Society held to its principle of not taking sides on controversial political questions.

By continuing its regular activities as if nothing untoward had happened, the Society contributed to the rapid defusing of the situation. In May 1960, it
held a dinner for former Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida and other members of the Centennial Goodwill Mission to the United States. The anniversary was that of the first Japanese diplomatic mission sent abroad in modern times, which, as noted earlier, was dispatched to the United States in 1860 to exchange ratifications of Japan’s first trade treaty. Yoshida was decidedly Japan’s senior statesman, a leader who had worked closely with General Douglas MacArthur during the Occupation and who had been a strong prime minister for seven years between 1946 and 1954. An effort was again made to persuade General MacArthur to revise his policy of not attending public functions having to do with Japan, but he excused himself because of his health. He did, however, privately see Yoshida, whom he described as one of his “best friends.”

Another festive occasion in 1960 was the dinner given on September 30 in honor of Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince Akihito and Princess Michiko, who had been married the year before and were on a goodwill tour of the United States. The dinner was held at the Waldorf. Robert D. Murphy, the first postwar American ambassador to Japan in 1952 and the president of Corning Glass International, presided, and John D. Rockefeller 3rd was the principal speaker. An outstanding event the next year was a luncheon held in June 1961 in honor of Hayato Ikeda during his first visit to the United States as prime minister. On this occasion, jointly sponsored by the Society, the Far East-America Council of Commerce and Industry, and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of New York, Ikeda delivered a major policy speech.

Through work on the American committee for the centennial celebration as well as through liaison activities connection with the imperial visit, Douglas Overton had come into contact with the other Japan Societies in the United States. He suggested that the centennial committee should continue its liaison work at least until the end of the year so that ties among the various societies could be strengthened. Out of this grew a conference of Japan Societies, which was held at Asia House in New York from April 7-10, 1961. The other participating societies and their memberships were: The Japan Society of Boston (229 members); Japan America Society of Chicago, Inc. (270 members); The Japan Society of New Orleans, Inc. (65 members); Japan Society of Oregon (at Portland) (175 members); The Japan Society of San Francisco (450 members); Japan-America Society of Seattle (335 members); Japan-America Society of Southern California (at Los Angeles) (470 members); and The Japan-America Society of Washington, D.C. (561 members).

In addition to these eight societies, others were being formed in Houston, Honolulu, and Minneapolis. Nana Gaddis Hall, who served as the executive secretary of the American committee for the centennial celebration, was a moving spirit behind the conference, together with Overton. He and five other staff members of the New York Japan Society attended the meetings. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, who underwrote the conference, gave encouragement and occasional financial help to many of the other societies, some of which were quite new and none of which compared to the New York organization in size of membership, number of staff, or breadth of activities. The New York Japan Society by this time had close to 1,700 members and a budget of around $100,000 a year.

Cooperation was to remain sporadic and informal until the late 1970s, when another national program effort led to the formation of an umbrella organization.
A related undertaking was an annual subvention of $1,000 to a newly founded association of teachers of Japanese, the first such organization in the United States. The grant first appeared in the Society’s budget for 1963–64, when the language teachers’ association already had a membership of more than 100.

While the programs of Japan Society continued to expand, some of its activities were curtailed or abandoned. The student program, once a major focus because of the obvious need, began to wind down, since the Japanese economy was booming and Japan was well able to take care of the students it sent abroad. The fellowship program was ended in the 1960–61 budget, although the emergency fund remained for use in the case of medical necessity. The budget for grants-in-aid to Japanese visitors in the United States was also cut. The Society, however, continued to be a source of general aid and counsel to Japanese students and visitors.

One area in which the Society increased its activities was that of films. With John D. Rockefeller 3rd’s support, the Society had sponsored two documentaries during the 1950s: Julien Bryan’s Japan and a film on Japanese prints, Ukiyo-e, made by the Chicago Art Institute. In the early 1960s, it embarked on a more ambitious project—a series of films on Japan to be done jointly with the National Educational Television and Radio Center and the University of Michigan. The result was a series of ten half-hour programs on contemporary Japanese life and culture. Called Japan: People and Society, it was very successful. So was the series of twelve shows on the performing arts produced in the early 1960s for the Public Broadcasting System’s New York Channel 13, written and narrated by Beate Gordon of the Society. Videotapes of these twelve programs were made available to educational institutions across the United States and were shown on Japanese television as well.

The Society branched out further into the field of films through agreements with distributors to make available to schools and educators full-length Japanese feature films for which the rental fees would be largely subsidized by the Society. In 1961,
the Society assisted the Museum of Modern Art in acquiring a collection of outstanding Japanese films, such as Rashomon and Ugetsu.

Another area of expanded activity was as impresario in cultural exchanges of contemporary and traditional arts and the interchange of ideas and talents among leaders in Japan and America. In 1959, the Society helped bring to the United States the early Japanese court music and drama of the eighth and ninth centuries known as gagaku. In 1960, it helped bring the Grand Kabuki troupe and a major exhibition of haniwa, the pottery figures found on ancient Japanese burial mounds. In the 1963-64 budget, $3,000 was allocated to extend the tour of a group of performers of kyogen, the comic interludes in noh performances. The troupe was sponsored by the University of Washington in Seattle, and the Society’s subsidy made it possible for it to put on performances in New York and Washington, D.C., and at the University of Michigan, Yale, and Princeton. The Society also sponsored a tour and performances by several members of a noh group, with the expectation that this would pave the way for a visit by the entire troupe in the near future. In 1964, the Society helped bring two major Japanese orchestras to the United States—the Toho Gakuen String Orchestra and the Japan Philharmonic. It also was in the midst of negotiations with the Ford Foundation and the JDR 3rd Fund for the creation of an exchange program for artists and intellectuals, which was set up in 1965 as the Japan Society Fellowships.

The Society also continued its activities in the field of publications. One notable project was a grant to assist in the preparation of a book on calligraphy. The reasons for supporting a project on what might be considered an esoteric subject were typical of Japan Society policy: calligraphy was a highly esteemed aspect of the culture, and interest in it was growing; the book filled a real need, since there was no good, comprehensive work available in English; and it was a Society tradition to support publication of fine books on Japan that might not be commercially possible.

In 1964, the Society returned to a prewar activity, sponsoring travel, but in a new form. Before the war it had organized the “grand tour” style of trip to Japan and China. Now the pressing need was for student charter flights. Proposals for group flights to Japan for members were temporarily shelved because of the concern for legal liabilities, but student charter flights were successfully inaugurated in the summer of 1964 in cooperation with the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE); the student charter program continued until the mid-1970s.

By the mid-1960s, the Japanese economy had grown so phenomenally that it was commonly referred to as a “miracle.” In the decade after the peace treaty was signed, both total national income and per capita income more than doubled, and in the next six years, 1962-68, national income doubled again. Put another way, after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Japan’s economy showed a continued 9 percent annual average increase in gross national product. This meant a tripling of production every twelve years. The trend soon led to Japan’s emerging as the third greatest industrial power in the world.

As the Japanese economy doubled in size twice during the 1960s, and as trade with the United States had soared, private business had become strong enough to play a significant supportive role in Japan Society’s activities. In 1961, Japanese firms in the United States contributed $13,000 toward the general operations budget and had begun to form a substantial portion of the sustaining membership. Their support continued to grow over the years. The Japanese Consulate General in New York also offered assistance to the Society on projects such as materials for use in American schools and the distribution of films. It also cooperated on the visits of distinguished Japanese. By 1961, the Society and the Consulate General had established a joint film library of sixty films for distribution through a professional film distributor. The Society looked to the Consulate General for help in obtaining and purchasing additional prints of films, for assistance with traveling art exhibitions and performers, for speaker programs, and for books for American universities and the Society’s own growing library. Expanding trade and increased support from the Japanese side gave the Society new opportunities for growth as well as increased responsibilities.
Reappraisal: 1962–66

The success of the Society’s programs, rather than any particular problems, occasioned a general review in 1962 to assess its accomplishments and plan the future. The report of the review committee was divided into sections entitled “Public Service,” “Nichibei Fujinkai,” “Students and Visitors,” “Promotion and Administration,” “Budget and Priorities,” and “Toward a Larger Program.” Two of the recommendations were that there should be a fuller program for the handling of visitors and that more resources and attention should be devoted to the exchange of leaders in many fields. Another recommendation was that a performing arts program should be established jointly with the Asia Society to bring performers to the United States and provide them with a showcase in this country.

One important question raised at the Board of Directors meeting in December 1962 was the possibility of expanding into programs related to political and economic affairs. The Board agreed that this issue should be explored and appointed a committee to investigate. In March 1963 the committee recommended that the Society not take a public position on economic and political matters, but that such topics might naturally arise as part of the discussions at small dinners or study groups organized for the consideration of social and cultural issues. It was a wise decision to continue the policy of avoiding advocacy of any specific position on political or economic relations. This nonpartisan stance has kept the Society free from political or economic controversy, while permitting it to serve to the full as an instrument of cultural and intellectual interchange and also as a meeting ground for dispassionate discussion of issues of broad concern in U.S.-Japan relations.

On the other hand, with Japan’s rapid economic progress, interest in commercial problems continued to increase. It became apparent that the Society should expand programs of particular import to the growing number of business members. Japan’s reintegration into the world economy had also meant a dramatic shift in the pattern of its foreign trade. The United States alone absorbed about 28 percent of Japan’s exports in 1964 and provided 30 percent of its imports. Parallel with trade there was, of course, a greatly increased exchange of people. In the mid-1960s, the Society began to invite visiting Japanese and well-informed recent American returnees from Japan as speakers at small meetings or seminars on business conditions and current developments in Japan. This was the beginning of what would grow into a major area of activity in the 1970s.

Japan Society began to experience the first of a series of changes in leadership in 1963, as some of those who had worked so staunchly on the postwar revival began to retire. First Paolino Gerli, who had been active since before World War I, asked not to be renominated as treasurer. He was succeeded by another able and faithful friend of the Society, banker Tristan Beplat. Edward H. Auchincloss, who had been secretary for five years, also resigned and was replaced by Isaac Shapiro, a lawyer who had grown up in Japan and was to play a major role in the Society for the next decade. Of the committee chairmen, only Yoneo Arai and Mrs. Louis Ledoux were left of the prewar leaders.

The Society’s activities had become so extensive that they required additional funds, which could best be raised by seeking more private contributions and expanding the membership. Staff salaries and the provision of a regular benefits program to permanent staff members also became a matter of concern. A personnel policy was devised to cover such items as vacations, sick days, and severance pay, and a medical insurance program was adopted. The Society, though still led by a volunteer board and officers, was evolving a permanent infrastructure that would enable it to have its own staff specialists in addition to continuing to utilize the expertise and talents of its membership.

Japan Society at this point had around 1,700 members, a general operations budget of $106,000, and a full- and part-time staff of about ten people. A support association of Japanese firms in New York had been formed (the Koenkai), which was contributing about $10,000 a year. American firms and some individuals and foundations were providing another $40,000, roughly the same amount individual dues
Douglas W. Overton (left), executive director, Japan Society, with Otho S. Shaw (right), president, the Parsons Alumni Association, at Asia House in April 1963. The Society received an award from the Alumni Association for “outstanding accomplishments in the arts.” Photo © Gene Heil.

Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd at the Japan Art Festival, held in New York City March 21-April 23, 1966, with the help of Japan Society and the Japanese government. Photo © Laura Beaujon.

John D. Rockefeller 3rd with Prime Minister Eisaku Sato during his visit to the Society in 1967. Photo © Larry Norwalk.
brought in. But the Cultural Interchange budget alone was $30,000, with $7,000 for the materials program, which produced teachers’ packets, reprints for schools, and pamphlets; $5,000 for the summer schools programs; and $3,000 for the lecture program.

By 1965, it also was evident that space was again becoming a serious problem. Asia House simply was not big enough for the growing programs of two organizations. Japan Society clearly could not expand its activities while it remained there. Although it could continue to use the public facilities there, it required more office space. It was tentatively decided, therefore, that Japan Society should have a building of its own, and a committee was set up under James Voss, chairman of Caltex Petroleum, to make recommendations. The problem of providing permanent housing for the Society, as well as the funds required to meet this need, became a major focus of concern during the next few years. A temporary home was found at 250 Park Avenue between 46th and 47th Streets, and the move to the new quarters was made in January 1966.

On the basis of an investigation commissioned by the Space Committee, at a special meeting on January 26, 1966, the Board decided to build a permanent home for the Society. John D. Rockefeller 3rd had made a generous pledge toward this new undertaking, and plans to raise additional funds were immediately made, but it was decided that solicitation would not begin until the current recession in Japan was over. By the summer of 1966, the location for the new Japan House had been chosen at 333 East 47th Street, a site near the United Nations, the Ford Foundation, and the Carnegie Endowment and one convenient to public transportation. In October 1966, it was decided to build a three- or four-story building for the exclusive use of the Society, to create a special fundraising committee under Voss to conduct the building fund drive, and to have Junzo Yoshimura of Tokyo make a preliminary design presentation. In February 1967, the directors officially chose Yoshimura as the architect of the new Japan House.

At the same Board meeting in February 1967, two other momentous decisions were made. The first was announced by Douglas Overton, who stated that he and Rockefeller had been giving serious thought to the future leadership of the Society and that both felt it was time for a change, since both had been in office for fifteen years. The Board was stunned by this announcement, but bowed gracefully to the inevitable. Overton’s resignation was accepted with regret and with an official expression of gratitude for all that he had done for the Society. The suggestion was made to have Rockefeller become chairman of the Board of Directors and for the new president to be either a distinguished volunteer or a paid professional. Overton’s function as the executive director would then be taken over by the new president or by a member of the staff. The final decision, however, was to leave the structure of the Society as it was. Rockefeller agreed to continue as president for one more year, and it was decided to find a new executive director to replace Overton. James L. Stewart was chosen in May, and the turnover took place on July 1, 1967.

The other decision made in February 1967 was to form a special Program Study Committee under the chairmanship of Charles E. Allen to look over the Society’s current programs and to recommend their maintenance, expansion, or abandonment; to recommend new areas of activity; to advise on priorities for the development of current and new programs; and to consider whether and under what conditions the facilities of the new Japan House should be extended to outside groups.