

KIMONOS – CONNECTIONS WITH PERRY AND MACARTHUR FAMILIES

by Matthew C. Perry

Kimonos in Japan have a long tradition going back more than one thousand years with Korean and Chinese influence. Commodore Perry's Narrative of the Expedition to Japan has an illustration of two young women dressed in kimonos and officers who visited the towns at that time reported about the types of kimonos worn by Japanese.

A good friend gave me two kimonos she had inherited from Mrs. Laura Barkley MacArthur, the wife of Ambassador Douglas MacArthur II, US Ambassador to Japan (1957-61). The couple's one daughter, Laura "Mimi" MacArthur performed the traditional "Kurodabushi" and "Sakura Odori" dances in Tokyo in 1958, while dressed in colorful kimonos. Although they were not the ones given to me, owning kimonos and wearing them in public during the Ambassador's tenure reflect an interest the MacArthur family had in the Japanese culture.



Mrs. Laura MacArthur's kimono in Japan, 1957-61.



Mimi MacArthur performing dance in Tokyo.

The two kimonos were given to me knowing of my interest in Japan and hopes that I could find a suitable place in the United States or Japan that would accept the kimonos as a donation. I was always aware of the connections with Japan shared by our ancestors. My great, great, great, uncle, Commodore Matthew C. Perry, had used the combination of power and diplomacy to negotiate peace and amity between our two countries. General Douglas MacArthur had also used power and diplomacy to negotiate a peace agreement and supervise reconstruction of Japan following World War II. The historian, Samuel Eliot Morrison stated in his book "Old Bruin" that "*Perry and MacArthur are the two most respected foreigners in Japanese history.*" The wearing of kimonos by Americans reflects the acceptance of another culture and epitomizes the friendship among people of our two great countries.