

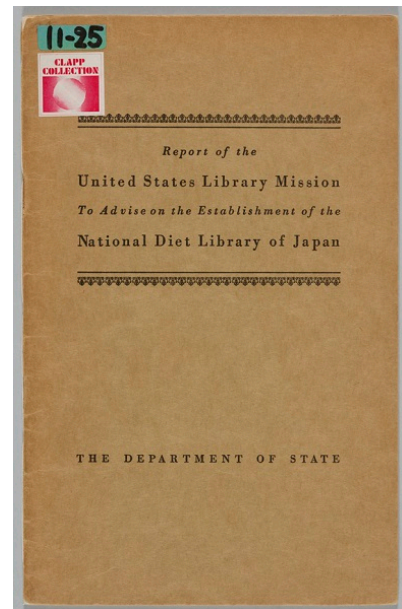
Articles by NDL staff

## Memories of Verner W. Clapp: An interview with Rebecca Roe



At the 70-anniversary Commemorative Exhibition.  
From right to left: Ms. Roe, her husband Dr. Peter Michael, and his brother Mr. Paul Michael.

Verner W. Clapp (1901 - 1972) is a former Chief Assistant Librarian of Congress and Chairman of the U.S. Library Mission to Japan, who is remembered in Japan for his significant contributions to the founding of the National Diet Library (NDL). Rebecca Roe is Mr. Clapp's granddaughter, who together with her family visited the Tokyo Main Library on November 5, 2018. After meeting with Dr. Sawako Hanyu, Director General of the NDL, Ms. Roe viewed materials related to her grandfather in both the Humanities Room and the 70-anniversary Commemorative Exhibition: A Treasure Box of Books — The 70-year History of the National Diet Library and Its Collections. We were fortunate to be able to interview Ms. Roe and ask about her memories of Mr. Clapp.



The front cover of the Report of the United States library mission to advise on the establishment of the national diet library of Japan / submitted to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers February 8, 1948. NDL Call No. 021.01-UI69r

NDL (N): Thank you for coming to our library and this interview.

Ms. Rebecca Roe (R): Thank you for having us.

N: First, we would like to ask how you felt about coming to the NDL today, and your impressions of seeing the exhibitions.

R: I am honored to be here, to see the library, and to see what came out of all of the work that my grandfather did with the Japanese librarians. To allow the library to fulfill its mission to share information with everyone who wants it—that was the goal, I think, to build the library for all. I am overwhelmed.

Dr. Peter Michael (P): I think you have a sense of fulfillment also.

R: Yes. It was a surprise to come here, to discover the exhibition. So it's been a very satisfying visit. It's wonderful.

P: I think you felt a special bond with Japanese libraries because of your grandfather. And this has been a chance for you to see that.

R: Yes. And I know I am representing my whole family. My mother, my aunt, and my uncle have all shared the excitement of me getting to come here. They have taken this visit as an opportunity to learn more about your library and about my grandfather's work here. So they are all excited, too.

P: When we go back, we will have our own exhibition—a family exhibition of what we have learned. We'll also have your library card.



A family photo taken at a Christmas gathering in 1962. Mr. Clapp is at the far left of the front row, Mrs. Clapp at the center in front of the tree, and Ms. Roe in front of her.

N: We would also like to hear your memories with Mr. Clapp when you were a child. What age were you when Mr. Clapp passed away, and have you ever lived together with Mr. Clapp?

R: My parents lived with my mother's parents when I was just a baby, and we lived nearby in Maryland and Virginia.

We had a cherry tree in the backyard, it was a big beautiful house we loved visiting.

P: You would go to his house for dinner on Sundays?

R: Sundays and everyone's birthdays. But he died in 1972, so I was 13 when he passed away. So I only knew him as a young child, and I never understood my grandfather's job. He was always just my grandfather who was funny, kind, and made us laugh. He would flip us up in the air over his head. He'd say "Bump-a-di-yump-pump-bump-bump!" and lift us up, and over we go. He was just very playful. A great grandfather. My mother and her sister and brother told me lots of stories of him. Some of the writings talks about how he excavated the basement, one shovel at a time. He dug out the basement of their house. He would do everything around the house. He would go to work, and then he would work around the house. He had lots of hobbies. He enjoyed woodworking and carving wood with a pocket-knife. He could take one block of wood and carve it in such a way that you'd have links together.

N: Without breaking the wood?

R: Yes. He just figured out how to do those kinds of things. He also loved learning. He loved learning about everything. He had an interest in sciences, histories,—and I think the library was very important to him. They called him a "librarian's librarian." But I did not know that part of him.



Another family photo from Christmas 1966. Mr. Clapp is at the far right of the back row, Mrs. Clapp at his left, and Ms. Roe in the middle with two pony tails.

N: Did you conduct a kind of a research before coming to the NDL?

R: Yes. I read the letters, looked at some articles, and your article in the NDL Newsletter. And then my aunt and mother helped with the research, and actually read his diaries. He kept diaries since he was 13 years old, and he wrote every day about what happened. He wrote daily records of his work here, and then he'd write letters to his family, to his colleagues at the Library of Congress and update them on the progress. And those diaries are now

at the Library of Congress.<sup>1</sup> So that's what my aunt has been reading.

N: We would also like to ask about his trip to Japan. We read that he had a quite severe trip from California to Japan, and the first hotel he stayed didn't have any towels. Had he shared those kind of stories with you?

R: He wrote letters to his wife and family, almost every day. I think he was such a good writer, because he described all these little details of his day, so you felt like you could picture him there. But he didn't complain. He just said he had cold water, and it was very "invigorating."

P: He was very positive.

R: He had a very positive attitude.

N: And a sense of humor.

R: Yes. And even when my grandmother came to Japan in 1968, you know, they weren't used to sitting on the ground, and eating in a seated position. He did that, and my grandmother, when she came with her broken hip, tried to do it. I think they gave her a little table. They just wanted to experience the culture, and I think he really was friends with the Japanese librarians.



Ms. Roe showing letters from Mr. Clapp to Dr. Hanyu.

N: Did Mr. Clapp tell you stories about Japan and his Japanese colleagues?

R: I don't specifically remember, but he told a lot of stories. We knew he was an adventurer. We knew he liked to experience other cultures. But I don't remember specifically his Japanese experience, because he went to other places, too.

N: Were you surprised to know about the relationships and connections between Mr. Clapp and Japanese librarians through his letters and diaries?

R: Yes. They give so many details that you can tell that it was important to him. And he was really positive about the work they were doing and the progress they were making. He expressed that in the letters.

N: We, NDL employees, are not always aware of how the NDL was established 70 years ago, and do not remember what happened at that time. But in this occasion of our 70th anniversary, we are very fortunate and glad that we could learn about the significance of Mr. Clapp's work, and have you with us today.

R: It made it much more real for me, also, to be here and to learn about it. And I think it's been a really exciting thing to learn about.

N: You also pretty resemble Mr. Clapp.

R: Thank you.

P: I think he would be really excited that his granddaughter has a card from your library.

R: Yes, he would be. I think my mother, my aunt, and my uncle will want a card, too!



Thank you, Ms. Roe, for visiting us and becoming a registered user of the NDL!

### Related articles from the National Diet Library Newsletter:

- [70-anniversary Commemorative Exhibition: A Treasure Box of Books — The 70-year History of the National Diet Library and Its Collections II](#) (No. 221, December 2018)
- [70-anniversary Commemorative Exhibition: A Treasure Box of Books — The 70-year History of the National Diet Library and Its Collections](#) (No. 220, October 2018)
- [Clapp Collection](#) (No. 138, August 2004)

<sup>1</sup> Verner W. Clapp papers <https://www.loc.gov/item/mm79049916/>