**Minamoto no Yorimasa Grave**

This is the grave of the poet, statesman, and warrior Minamoto no Yorimasa (1106–1180), who died in the first major battle of the Genpei War (1180–1185). The war was waged between two rival clans, the Minamoto (also known as Genji) and the Taira (also known as Heike), competing for control of the imperial court.

When the Taira placed Emperor Antoku on the throne in 1180, Yorimasa issued a call to arms to defend the rights of his clan’s favored heir, Prince Mochihito (d. 1180). Following the resulting Battle of Uji, which took place near Byodoin, the Taira forces overwhelmed the Minamoto. Unwilling to suffer the humiliation of capture or death at the hands of his enemies, Yorimasa performed suicide by seppuku on what later became Byodoin’s Fan Lawn (Ogi no Shiba). Scholars believe Yorimasa’s death was the first instance of seppuku in Japanese history, and it was to become the model of ritual suicide among samurai for centuries thereafter. Before he died, Yorimasa composed the following poem.

*Umoregi no*

*hana saku koto mo*

*nakarishi ni*

*mi no naru hate zo*

*kanashikarikeru*)

My life that was like

a rotten branch

sinking into the earth,

fated to bear no fruit,

now comes to this sad end.

Yorimasa’s grave is relatively small for such a prominent historical figure. On May 26 every year, the anniversary of his death, priests of Byodoin hold a memorial service and chant sutras here and on the Fan Lawn. Visitors are welcome to observe the ceremony.