**Yamakose Mulberry Trees**

Mulberry leaves are the primary food of silkworms, the cultivation of which was the main source of income for the people of Shirakawa from the middle of the Edo period (1603–1867) into the Meiji era (1868–1912). Sericulture was also the main reason for the popularity of *gassho*-style houses, which have spacious multilevel attics beneath their slanted roofs. Windows on the gable ends let in sunlight and air, making the attics well-lit and well-ventilated spaces kept warm and dry by the warmth rising through the lattice ceiling from the house’s *irori* sunken fireplace. Together, these factors made the attics ideal for growing silkworms, which are sensitive to cold and moisture.

The four mulberry trees next to the Hakusan-so hot spring inn were planted by the Yamakose family, the former residents of the traditional *gassho*-style farmhouse now occupied by the inn. The trees were planted in the mid-nineteenth century, when the house was built.

The scarcity of arable land in the Sho River valley meant mulberries usually had to be grown on the mountainsides, often on multiple small plots spaced far apart from each other. As this made harvesting the leaves laborious, families with sufficient means sought to breed trees that produced more leaves and plant them down in the valley. The Yamakose trees are thought to be a result of such efforts.