

Towada Shrine

Towada Shrine is one of the most famous shrines in the northern Tohoku region. There are two historical accounts of how the shrine was founded.

In the first version, the shrine was built in 807 by the military commander Sakanoue no Tamuramaro to enshrine Yamato Takeru no Mikoto, son of the legendary 12th Emperor of Japan, Emperor Keiko (71–130).

In the second version, a Buddhist priest named Nansonobo, a devotee of the Kumano Sanzan Three Grand Shrines of Kumano, received a gift of sandals and a staff from the gods, with the instruction to travel until the sandals fell apart, at which spot he should make his home. His sandals broke on the shores of Lake Towada and he started to make preparations to settle here. However, he encountered a monstrous eight-headed serpent that was threatening the guardian goddess of the lake, and after miraculously transforming into a nine-headed dragon himself, vanquished it in a battle that lasted for seven days and nights. Nansonobo then became one of the guardians of the lake, watching over the many pilgrims who came from afar to worship at this sacred power spot.

Shinto and Buddhism were fused until the Meiji Period (1868–1912), when the government ordered the separation of temples and shrines. As a result, Nansonobo's remains were moved to a separate small shrine in the grounds of the Towada Shrine.