

Paul Brunat (1840–1908) grew up in France, in a town called Bourg-de-Péage where silk was the major industry. He worked as a quality inspector at a French silk trading house and was sent to their Yokohama branch in 1866. Although steam engines were invented in Europe during the Industrial Revolution in the 1700s, the technology did not arrive in Japan until the 1800s, when Japan first opened its ports to foreign trade. The Japanese government was keen to utilize steam power for their Tomioka Silk Mill project, but they needed Westerners to show them how to operate a steam-powered factory. Paul Brunat was an ideal choice, having already lived in Japan for several years and having worked in the silk industry for even longer. In 1870, the Japanese Government commissioned Brunat to find the ideal location for the mill. Tomioka was selected for its three major advantages: first, the region already had a large and successful silkworm egg and cocoon industry, including Tajima Yahei's (1822–1898) sericulture farm. Second, there were two nearby coal-mining towns, Takasaki and Yoshii, that could supply coal. Third, and perhaps most importantly, their plans were accepted by the local community. Construction of the mill was completed in 1872, and Brunat moved his family into a house built for him on the site. They were initially joined by two French engineers and four French silk-reeling women whose job it was to train the Japanese staff. Brunat's home at the mill, including his personal wine cellar, still stands today.