

## “Fast Feet” (*Hikyaku*) of Hayamichi Town

During the Edo period (1603–1867), when *ashigaru* (foot soldiers) were not absorbed in military exercises, they were often employed in public service work such as patrolling samurai residences or acting as gate guards. They also found employment as couriers for the Kaga domain (feudal-era Ishikawa centered on Kanazawa City), delivering letters, official documents, money orders, and packages to Edo (now Tokyo) in the east, or to the Osaka-Kyoto area in the west. Those who did this type of courier work were called “fast feet” (*hikyaku*). Many *ashigaru* took up this occupation. The former Hayamichi Town, where the Takanishi Family House and Shimizu Family House were previously located, was a residential district for *ashigaru* who served as *hikyaku*.

*Hikyaku* were known for their speed and unique running style. They did leg-training drills regularly, and upon receiving word would rush immediately to the castle. It is said that it took a skilled *hikyaku* only five days in the summer and six in the winter to cover the distance from Kanazawa to Edo. If *hikyaku* delivered their goods more quickly than expected, sometimes they were handsomely rewarded. If they were late, however, their pay was often reduced. *Hikyaku* used the highways for their deliveries, but in order to avoid passing through parts of other domains that might give them trouble, they also grew familiar with byroads and mountain paths.

In the late seventeenth century, under the fifth domain lord Maeda Tsunanori (1643–1724), *hikyaku* work was gradually given over to commoners not of *ashigaru* rank.