

Kan'eiji Temple: Old *Honbo* Front Gate

The abbot's residence (*honbo*) of Kan'eiji Temple used to be located where the Tokyo National Museum stands today. The residence was first completed in 1625, the year Kan'eiji is considered to have been founded, and was rebuilt and repaired several times over the centuries, always remaining a central element of the temple complex. Kan'eiji had close ties to the ruling Tokugawa shogunate, making it one of the most prosperous and influential temples in Edo (present-day Tokyo) from the latter half of the 1600s onward. Its grounds encompassed all of modern-day Ueno Park and were dotted with various sub-temples, shrines, and monuments. After the fall of the Tokugawa in 1867, Kan'eiji lost its privileged position, and most of the temple's buildings were burned down in July 1868 after the new government of Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) had defeated a group of shogunate loyalists who held out at Kan'eiji.

Although bullet holes from the 1868 battle are still clearly visible, the front gate of the abbot's residence was one of the few structures to escape the flames. Also known as the Black Gate, and thought to date back to the 1650s, it was preserved to serve as the front gate of the National Museum after its opening in 1882. It was moved to its current location in 1937, when the government returned ownership of the structure to Kan'eiji. It now stands in front of Kaisando Hall, which is dedicated to Tenkai (1536?–1643), the influential Buddhist priest who founded Kan'eiji and served as its first abbot.