

Omori: Kumagai House

For centuries, the Kumagai family was the richest and most influential in Omori. They began expanding their authority in the early 1600s, after the silver mine and the lands surrounding it were seized by the Tokugawa shogunate, which was to rule Japan until 1867. The family made its fortune in mining but later diversified to include financial and contracting services for the magistrate's office, which represented the central government in the region. At least since 1718, the official title of *akeya* was always held by a member of the Kumagai family. The *akeya* was the official tasked with weighing silver to determine its purity and collecting payments from miners whose product was found lacking in quality. This function was a crucial part of the government's taxation activities, so the Kumagai family were well compensated for performing it.

The head of the family also sat on the local council of elders, which oversaw the Omori area and functioned as an intermediary between the magistrate and local residents. This council often met in the Kumagai House, a two-story mansion rebuilt in 1801 after a fire destroyed much of the town the year before. Used as a residence until the end of the twentieth century and then restored to resemble its appearance in 1868, when the final annex buildings were completed, the Kumagai House gives visitors a sense of how an affluent merchant family lived when Iwami Ginza was at the height of its prosperity. Most of its rooms, including the ornate chambers for receiving important guests, are open to visitors.