

Meiji-Era Public Water Tap

Water taps like this one were introduced in 1891 to help prevent the rampant spread of cholera. The disease had reentered the country through Nagasaki in 1858 and swept through the population multiple times over the following decades. The disease was terrifyingly deadly, dubbed “drop dead in three days” (*mikka korori*) in Japanese.

Cholera is a waterborne disease, and public water sources were easily contaminated. Frederick Ringer (1838–1907), a business leader in the Nagasaki Foreign Settlement, lobbied the government of Nagasaki to build a public waterworks to help prevent the spread of cholera and other diseases. In 1886, Ringer and others invited a British man named John W. Hart (1832–1900) to Nagasaki. Hart was the engineer who had designed the Shanghai waterworks, and he submitted a proposal for a similar waterworks to the Nagasaki government. Five years later, the waterworks was completed, and Nagasaki became the third city in Japan with running water. Until water was supplied to every household, a city employee would walk around the city, opening the public taps in the morning and closing them in the evening. The tap at Glover Garden has been retrofitted with a button that opens the tap when pressed.