

Frederick Ringer's Asphalt Path

Frederick Ringer (1838–1907), owner of the Former Ringer House, had this asphalt path installed in 1906. Ringer suffered from heart disease, and in the final years of his life, it was difficult for him to climb the steep hill. The path allowed him to travel to and from his house by rickshaw.

In the nineteenth century, most roads were paved with stone or gravel, but gravel roads were exceptionally dusty, and stone pavements were bumpy and uneven. By the 1900s, engineers in Europe began adding asphalt or tar to the gravel mixture to trap dust and increase the lifespan of the road. Gravel-based macadam roads had been introduced to Japan in the 1870s, but asphalt paving was rare in Japan until the 1920s.

The rickshaw, a two-wheeled carriage pulled by a single driver, was invented in Japan in the late nineteenth century. The word “rickshaw” comes from the Japanese *jin-riki-sha*, meaning “human-powered-cart.” Rickshaw were used widely in cities throughout Japan until the 1920s, when they were largely replaced by automobiles, trains, and trams.