

## **Kimimachizaka**

In 1881, Emperor Meiji embarked on a tour of northern Japan. Samurai rule had ended in 1868, and Japan was well on its way to modernity. This tour was the first of its kind ever made by the emperor. In preparation for his visit, the people of Akita created new roads and lodgings specifically for the emperor and his retinue. Boulders were split open by hand to create a new road on Kimimachizaka, and a bridge was built across the Fujikoto River.

While traveling on the newly made road, the emperor stopped with his retinue to observe Mt. Nanakura on the other side of the river. A large stone marks the place where he is believed to have sat and read a letter that his consort sent him. She wrote of her desire to see him and included in the letter was the following poem.

*Ōmiya no uchi ni  
aritemo atsukihi wo  
ikanaru yamaka  
kimi wa koyuramu*

While within the palace the days are hot,  
I wonder in which mountains you are climbing.

The Meiji Emperor received the poem and the letter here on the hill and ordered the Imperial Household Agency to name the hill *kimi machi zaka* or “Yearning-for-You Slope” the next year in 1882. Since then, the village of Futatsui has been known as the “love-letter village.” Today, references to the imperial love story are replete throughout Kimimachizaka, and it has become a place for lovers to spend time together. The modern legend goes that mailing a love letter from the park’s mailbox will ensure success in romance. Local residents come to the park to view the cherry blossoms in the spring and the trees that fill the park with red and orange in the autumn.