

The Matsushiro Literary and Military Arts School

The Edo period (1603–1867) was marked by a proliferation of schools established by domain (*han*) rulers to educate the children of samurai. Over 250 of these domain schools were established from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. While some buildings from other domain schools still exist, the Matsushiro Literary and Military Arts School (Matsushiro Bunbu Gakko) is the only one that has survived with nearly all its original buildings from the Edo period.

Origins

Matsushiro's eighth Sanada daimyo (Feudal lord), Yukitsura, began work on the Matsushiro Literary and Military Arts School in 1851. After a delay caused by a fire in nearby Matsushiro Castle, the school opened in 1855 under the ninth Sanada daimyo, Yukinori. Students took classes in reading, writing, and various martial arts, usually attending the school from the age of eight.

Buildings

Opposite the school's main entrance, on the far side of the courtyard, is the Bungakusho. As the largest building on the campus, the Bungakusho has classrooms, kitchen facilities, administrative offices, and a room reserved for special guests. The small building behind the Bungakusho is a storehouse, used to keep textbooks and other important books and documents safe from, among other things, fire.

The smaller buildings on the east and west sides of the courtyard held additional classrooms. Literary classes were held here, and in the west building, Western and Chinese medicine were also taught.

While classes were held in rooms with straw tatami mat floors, training in martial arts like *kenjutsu* took place in larger wood-floored rooms. From the raised tatami mat floor to the sides, officials could watch students practice. The school's weapons and martial arts training classrooms have high, open ceilings, with exposed red pine beams and rafters showing the construction techniques of the time.

The Kenjutsusho and Jujutsusho

Located immediately to the right of the entrance gate, the Kenjutsusho was used for kendo (*kenjutsu*) training. *Kenjutsu* was heavily emphasized at the time, and in 1863 the space for training was expanded for a time by connecting the Kenjutsusho to the classroom

building to its north. The Jujutsusho is situated in the corner to the left of the entrance gate, and is where students trained in *jujutsu*.

The Sojutsusho

In the Sojutsusho building, in the school's largest martial arts training room, students learned techniques using *yari* (spears) and, later, guns. This room is still used today for martial arts tournaments.

The Kyujutsusho

The Kyujutsusho was built specifically for training in Japanese archery. Similar to the Sojutsusho in other respects, the west wall of the Kyujutsusho opens onto the archery range. Students would stand inside the main room and shoot at targets placed outside.

Changes

Toward the end of the Edo period, with the growing influence of foreign ideas and technology, Western military science gained prominence in the school's curriculum. To accommodate this change students were given instruction in military science and Western artillery.

Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the Matsushiro Literary and Military Arts School continued to be used as a school under the new [government education system](#) until its closing in the 1960s. In 1978 the school was opened to the public as a museum.

The Matsushiro Literary and Military Arts School was designated a [National Historic Site of Japan](#) in 1953.