

The Sanada Family Mausoleums

The Sanada were the ruling family of Matsushiro for close to 250 years, from the early seventeenth century to the end of the Edo period (1603–1867). Their rule in Matsushiro began in 1622 when Sanada Nobuyuki (1566–1658), a relatively powerful daimyo from the Ueda and Numata regions, was transferred to Matsushiro by the Tokugawa shogunate. That same year the Zen Buddhist temple of Chokokuji was established in Matsushiro as the new Sanada family temple.

Chokokuji Temple

Five Sanada mausoleums were built on the grounds of Chokokuji. Three of them still stand today.

Behind Chokokuji Temple's main hall (*hondo*) stands the black-lacquered mausoleum of Nobuyuki. Built in 1660, its exterior is adorned with gold leaf and intricate, painted-wood carvings, including a pair of cranes. High above the door, under the curved eave, is the Sanada family crest, depicting two rows of three coins. These coins, called the *rokumonsen*, were believed necessary as payment for crossing the river dividing the worlds of the living and the dead. Inside Nobuyuki's mausoleum are more elaborate and colorful carvings, along with a ceiling consisting of a series of gold leaf paintings. The mausoleum has been designated a National Important Cultural Property.

To the right of Nobuyuki's mausoleum stands another, constructed for Nobuhiro (1671–1737), the fourth Sanada daimyo. Dating from 1736, this Important Cultural Property of Nagano Prefecture is noted for its interior ceiling, decorated with a painting of a dragon.

Between Chokokuji's main hall and Nobuyuki's mausoleum stands the Kaizando. Originally built in 1727 as the mausoleum of the third Sanada daimyo of Matsushiro, Yukimichi (1657–1727), it was moved from the north side of Nobuyuki's mausoleum to its present location in 1886, when Chokokuji's main hall was reconstructed after a fire.

The mausoleum of Matsushiro's second daimyo, Sanada Nobumasa (1597–1658), once stood to the left of Nobuyuki's mausoleum, but is now located at Rinshoji Temple. A fifth mausoleum once stood behind Chokokuji, built for Sanada Yukimichi's mother. Later relocated to Koyoji Temple, it was destroyed by fire in 1891.

The Sanada family graveyard is also at Chokokuji, containing the graves and memorial

stones of ten generations of the Sanada family, including Nobuyuki's brother Yukimura (1570–1615) (whose given name was Nobushige) and Yukimura's son Yukimasa.

Associated Temples of the Sanada Family

Sairakuji, like Nobuyuki's mausoleum, is a National Important Cultural Property. Dating from 1574, Sairakuji is a temple of the Jodo Pure Land school of Buddhism. It was rebuilt in 1648 after being destroyed by fire. Sairakuji is also the site of the mausoleum of Sanada Nobushige, third son of Nobuyuki.

Rinshoji was established in 1550. The main hall of the temple dates from 1660, serving as the mausoleum for Nobumasa, Nobuyuki's second son and the second Sanada daimyo of the Matsushiro Domain.

Daieiiji was built in 1624 by Nobuyuki for his wife, Princess Komatsu-hime. Within the temple grounds stands Komatsu-hime's mausoleum, the largest and oldest of the Sanada clan mausoleums.