

Bashō's Family Home

Often referred to as Matsuo Bashō's (1644–1694) birthplace, this building was home to members of the Matsuo family before and after the poet's birth. By the time Bashō was an adult, his older brother had established his own household on the property. Bashō stayed here with family members whenever he returned to Iga. A small cottage for the poet, called the Chōgetsuken, was added to the original building. That name, which can be translated as “fishing moon house,” comes from the first collection of poetry that Bashō wrote while living here in 1672, called the *Kai-ōi* (*Seashell Game*). Outside the Chōgetsuken, a banana tree—*bashō* in Japanese—was later planted in his memory.

A poem stone sits outside of the Matsuo residence bearing the following poem:

furusato ya
heso no o ni naku
toshi no kure

My native home—
weeping over this bit of umbilical cord
at the year's end

This refers to the Japanese custom of saving a small piece of child's umbilical cord to ward off evil and ensure their health into adulthood; parents traditionally keep the cord safe until the child marries or moves out. During his travels, Bashō learned that his mother had died. He arrived home to find that piece of the umbilical cord his mother had kept—a memento that both figuratively and literally linked them together—was the only remaining possession by which to remember her. The final line, “*toshi no kure*,” refers to the gathering dusk at the end of the year.