

## **Shirakawa-mura Ogimachi Natural Environment Preservation Society**

The village of Ogimachi became a World Heritage Site in 1995, when it was added to the UNESCO catalogue as part of the “Historic Villages of Shirakawa-go and Gokayama – Traditional Houses in the Gassho Style” designation. This decision marked the culmination of decades of local efforts to preserve the traditional character of the village. In the years after World War II, when more and more electricity was needed to power the rapidly growing Japanese economy, several dams were constructed along the Sho River. These projects brought prosperity to Shirakawa-go, but were also seen as a threat to the local landscape and established lifestyles. By 1971, the number of gassho-style houses in Ogimachi had been reduced by half.

In the same year, the residents of Ogimachi founded the Shirakawa-mura Ogimachi Natural Environment Preservation Society to protect the gassho-style houses and the local community. The Society adopted guidelines that prohibited the sale, renting, and demolishing of gassho-style houses, which were declared a valuable historic and tourism resource. These efforts paid off, first in the form of Ogimachi’s designation as a Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings in 1976 and, two decades later, in the World Heritage inscription. All residents of Ogimachi are members of the Society, which holds monthly meetings to consider applications for changes to gassho-style houses or their surroundings. The Society’s opinion informs the municipal government’s decision to approve or decline such applications.