

Muneoka House

Members of the Muneoka samurai family played many important roles at Iwami Ginzan throughout the silver mine's history. The family's most renowned representative was Yaemon, a native of Iwami and an expert on mining matters. He served under the warlord Mohri Terumoto (1553–1625) until the Mohri family lost control of the silver mine to the Tokugawa clan, which in 1603 unified Japan and established a government that was to rule the country until 1867. The first Tokugawa-appointed magistrate overseeing the mine, Okubo Nagayasu (1545–1613), hired Yaemon and assigned him to several of the realm's most plentiful sources of precious metals. Among these were the gold and silver mines on Sado Island (off the coast of present-day Niigata Prefecture), where Yaemon—by that time known by the honorary name Muneoka Sado—died in 1613.

Yaemon's descendants continued his work at Iwami Ginzan, performing mainly tax collection and administrative duties for the magistrate's office until the family lost its position in a disagreement of some sort in 1790. The Muneoka returned to Iwami Ginzan in 1823, when the head of the family was hired as a *doshin*—a low-ranking official roughly equivalent to a modern-day police inspector. Soon after, they were provided a home by their distant relatives, the Abe family. That building, constructed in the 1830s, is the current Muneoka House, a stately samurai residence fronted by a garden and accompanied by a storehouse and a detached cottage previously used as a teahouse. The walls and gate have been lost, but the shed in the back has been reconstructed according to the original blueprints. The Muneoka House is not open to visitors but can be rented for overnight stays.