

Former Residence of Kido Takayoshi (1833–1877)

From the street, the childhood home of nineteenth-century statesman Kido Takayoshi (also known as Katsura Kogorō), appears to be a typical single-floor townhouse. Stepping into the courtyard reveals a second story, a piece of visual trickery that is no accident, as having a second story was generally forbidden during the Edo period (1603–1867). The second floor allowed the residents to look down on passersby (in particular, passing samurai), which was considered improper. The wealthy family could afford the second story, but as a matter of political expediency and personal wellbeing, they had it built hidden from the street.

Born in this house as Wada Kogorō, Kido was adopted into the elite Katsura family at the age of seven. In 1849, he joined the Meirinkan, the domain school where Yoshida Shōin (1830–1859) taught military science. Shōin promoted Western technologies and loyalty to the emperor. Kido moved to Edo (now Tokyo) in 1852, but he returned to Hagi in 1856 to support the construction of Chōshū domain's first Western-style warship. He was well connected to the growing resistance to the Tokugawa shogunate and, following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Kido played a major role in the creation of the new imperial state. In 1871, he joined the statesmen and scholars of the Iwakura Mission, whose purpose was to tour the West and gain recognition for the new Meiji state, renegotiate the unequal treaties that had been signed in the 1850s and 1860s, and study Western institutions.

Today, Kido's former home is open to the public and has on display photographs from his life and examples of his artwork and calligraphy. It is a Nationally Designated Historic Site.