

### **Flight of the Seven Nobles (*Shichikyō-ochi Iseki*)**

The Takehara residence is known for its connection with the so-called “flight of the seven nobles” (*shichikyō-ochi*), an incident that occurred during the final years of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868). The name refers to seven officials who fled the imperial court in Kyoto to seek political asylum in the Chōshū domain (now Yamaguchi Prefecture). The mansion had originally belonged to the Tada family, who were influential merchants and served as town headmen of Mitarai during the nineteenth century.

The political turmoil of this period was sparked when U.S. Navy Commodore Matthew C. Perry (1794–1858) sailed a fleet of warships into Edo Bay in 1853. The United States government had sent Perry to force Japanese ports to open to American trade, and this demand was backed by the threat of the clearly superior U.S. Navy. The responses to Perry’s arrival differed among the various factions of the Japanese government. Some supported opening the country, while others preferred to risk war. Although the shogun was the *de facto* ruler of the country, many daimyo instead supported Emperor Kōmei (1831–1866), who favored a strict policy of maintaining the country’s autonomy. Realizing that war with the Americans would invite an uprising, the shogunate decided to engage in diplomatic negotiations with Perry and the other American envoys while building a Japanese navy. These negotiations led to the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce on July 29, 1858, which effectively ended the national policy of seclusion and split the shogunate along lines of loyalty.

As a result of this policy change, the political elite split into two factions: the “Union of the Imperial Court and the Shogunate” faction (*kōbu gattai*), who sought to bond the shogunate to the authority of the imperial court, and the “Honor the Emperor and Expel the Foreign Barbarians” faction (*sonnō jōi*), who demanded abolition of the shogunate, restoration of the emperor’s power, and preservation of Japan’s seclusion, through war if necessary. The events that led to the “Flight of the Seven Nobles” unfolded against this backdrop of a splintered government.

On September 30, 1863, the pro-shogunate *kōbu gattai* faction expelled seven nobles from the imperial court in Kyoto. The seven, led by Sanjō Sanetomi (1837–1891), together composed a radical sub-group of the *sonnō jōi* faction, which was loyal to the emperor. These nobles fled Kyoto to seek protection from the daimyo of the Chōshū domain, another strong supporter of the *sonnō jōi* movement. During their escape, five of the seven noblemen passed through Mitarai, where they took shelter for two nights at the

Takehara Residence before continuing on their journey to Chōshū. Ultimately, the *sonnō jōi* group was victorious, the shogunate was overthrown, and the emperor was restored to power.

It is recorded that, after the residence was vacated by the Takehara family, it once again became the site of political intrigue. A Dutchman by the name of Thielemann lived there while smuggling shipments of weapons to the Satsuma domain.