

Lafcadio Hearn House

Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904), a British writer of Greek-Irish descent, lived in this house in 1891, during his first year as an English teacher at the Fifth Middle School, the precursor of Kumamoto University. Kumamoto was the second Japanese castle town Hearn was to live in, having spent his first 15 months in Japan in Matsue, in Shimane Prefecture.

The Fifth Middle School had staff accommodations, but Hearn rejected these upon discovering that tatami rooms were unavailable. He rented this house for 11 yen a month, a small fraction of his lavish 200-yen-per-month salary. (Multiply that by 10,000 to get the rough equivalent in today's currency.)

The house, which has seven large tatami rooms, belonged to Akahoshi Shinsaku, a low-ranking samurai. Inside is a household altar that Hearn persuaded his landlord to make for him. Hearn prayed here every morning; his *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894) includes a chapter called “The Household Shrine.” There is a desk in the back room where it is thought Hearn worked. He did not produce any books while living here, though Kumamoto did provide subject matter for *Out of the East: Reveries and Studies in New Japan* (1895) and *Kokoro: Hints and Echoes of Japanese Inner Life* (1896).

While Hearn was famous to the outside world as an interpreter of Japanese culture during his lifetime, he became famous in Japan only after his collections of ghost stories, or *kaidan*, were translated into Japanese in the 1920s.