

Minomushi Sanjin and His Illustrated Diary

Minomushi Sanjin (1836–1900) was a traveling artist who left his home in Mino Province (modern Gifu Prefecture) at age 14 and wandered around Japan for 48 years. Born Toki Gengo, he came to be known as Minomushi Sanjin, “bagworm mountain man,” due to his nomadic lifestyle and distinctive straw cape resembling the protective cases that bagworms build on their backs. Sanjin was a man of diverse interests who pursued studies in archaeology, folklore, and garden design, and even served as a soldier for a time. However, he is best remembered for the art he created during his journeys. In particular, Sanjin’s illustrations depicting the natural scenery, architecture, daily life, and religious events in the Usa area have proven to be of great value to historians.

Sanjin came to Usa in 1864 and spent three months exploring the region. It is said that while in the area, he erected a memorial for old comrades who lost their lives in battle. Sanjin kept an illustrated diary where he drew vast landscapes, famous landmarks, and people who lived and worked in and around Usa. Many of the sketches provide important insight into the scenery and layout of the area at the time. For example, an illustration of [Usa Jingu Shrine](#) as seen from north of the [Kurehashi Bridge](#) features [Mirokuji Temple](#) and its Niomon Gate, both of which no longer exist.

The diary includes rare depictions of a late-nineteenth-century procession of a *chokushi* (imperial messenger) heading to Usa Jingu to pray and make offerings on behalf of the emperor. Such a visit now occurs every 10 years and is celebrated as the [Rinji Hobeisai](#) ritual, but in Sanjin’s time it took place only once every 60 years, making the visual record all the more valuable. One sketch shows the large procession stretching along the road that leads to Usa Jingu, while another portrays people competing to purify themselves at a shrine water font used by the *chokushi*.

Sanjin gave two books of sketches to a local family before leaving Usa. The books contain about 80 pages of illustrations done in Usa and other areas around Oita Prefecture, including the Yabakei Gorge and towns such as Innai, Ajimu, and Nakatsu. A compilation of the sketches was published by the Usa Board of Education as *Minomushi Sanjin Enikki* (*The Illustrated Diary of Minomushi Sanjin*). A signboard near the Kurehashi Bridge reproduces one of Sanjin’s sketches, providing an image of what Usa Jingu and the surrounding area looked like over 150 years ago.