

The Castle Town of Yokote

The view from Yokote Castle Observatory looks out toward Mt. Chōkai and over the city of Yokote. This observatory was constructed in 1965, but the original castle grounds date back to the late sixteenth century, when warring daimyo clashed for control of the country.

Yokote became a castle town under the control of the Onodera family, who governed the town from their residence at Yokote Castle. In the early seventeenth century, the Onodera family inadvertently made themselves enemies of the Tokugawa shoguns, and the Onodera family was subsequently exiled to western Japan. Afterward, Yokote Castle and the territory around it were awarded to the Satake family.

Although the Satake controlled the castle, the daimyo did not live there. Instead, they lived in nearby Kubota (now the city of Akita) and put Yokote Castle under the control of a high-ranking vassal, who acted as the castle keeper (*jōdai*). It was the *jōdai* who oversaw construction work around the Yokote River to make room for urban expansion. By the end of the seventeenth century, the city had expanded; only vassals lived below the castle, on one side of the Yokote River, while the merchants and artisans lived on the opposite side.

At the end of the Tokugawa period (1603–1867), Yokote Castle was destroyed in the Boshin War, and what remained was used to construct Akita-jinja Shrine, where the first and last of the Satake daimyo are enshrined. The castle grounds were made into a park in 1902.