

Wada House

The Wada House is the largest traditional *gassho*-style farmhouse in Shirakawa-go. Built late in the Edo period (1603–1867), the house reflects the wealth and status of the Wada family, which for centuries was the largest landowner in the village of Ogimachi and whose members held the hereditary position of village headman (*nanushi*). The family made its fortune in the production and trading of saltpeter (potassium nitrate, an essential ingredient in gunpowder) and, from the latter half of the 1800s, in silk production. From the late 1700s to the end of the Edo period, the Wada were tasked with overseeing a government checkpoint that regulated the flow of people and goods into and out of Shirakawa-go.

Several architectural details of the Wada House set it apart from other *gassho*-style farmhouses in the area and reflect the family's connections beyond the village community. A typical building of this kind has only one front entrance that leads into an earthen-floored area where farm animals were kept, but the Wada House also features a pair of large doors that open up into two tatami-mat rooms. These doors were for the exclusive use of important guests such as government officials, who occasionally visited the Wada House in connection with the family's duties. Also of note are the house's plastered earthen walls, which are more fire-resistant than wooden walls, and the comparatively well-appointed tatami rooms, built in a style that indicates knowledge of architectural trends in major cities at the time.

The garden on the north side of the house is a rarity in Shirakawa-go, where frequent heavy snow in winter makes traditional-style gardens difficult to maintain. Lining the garden are stone walls and a grove of trees planted to protect the house from the strong winds that often blow through the Sho River valley.