

Gasshozukuri Minkaen Outdoor Museum: Former Nakano Chojiro House

The Former Nakano Chojiro House is one of the three *gassho*-style farmhouses that were relocated to the Gasshozukuri Minkaen Outdoor Museum from the remote village of Kazura, at the northwestern end of Shirakawa. The house was built after the Nakano Chojiro family's former home burned down in 1885. It is somewhat larger than the average farmhouse in the area, and its structure suggests it was built at considerable expense. The relatively wealthy Nakano Chojiro family was descended from the Nakano Yoshimori family, whose members held the hereditary position of village headman in Kazura until the village was abandoned in 1967.

As is typical in traditional Japanese farmhouses, the front gate opens onto an earthen-floored area where farm animals were kept. The large sliding door was opened all the way only for horses; people would come and go using the smaller door cut into it. Inside, the living room is notably spacious, as is common in prominent Shirakawa families' houses built in the late 1800s.

The inner rooms are separated from the living room and each other with sliding doors set into the heavy lintels that also support the structure as a whole—another architectural solution incorporated locally in the latter half of the 1800s. The walls of the tatami-mat rooms beyond these doors are painted a purplish-red color using an iron oxide-based pigment called *bengara*. Painting the walls of tatami-mat rooms in this manner was customary in Kazura, where the pigment is thought to have been introduced by lacquer merchants from the Sea of Japan coast who visited the village in search of trees from which to extract lacquer sap.