

## **The Nagata Family and Their Storehouses**

The Nagata family were merchants and sake brewers in Takayama during the Edo period (1603–1867). At the time, only members of the samurai class were allowed to use family names, and the Nagata family was known instead by the tradename “Ōsaka-ya.” In 1854, the Tokugawa shogunate allowed the family to use the name “Nagata” in recognition of their large donation to the construction of the Shinagawa Battery (now Odaiba) in Tokyo Bay.

After the fall of the shogunate in 1868, the new Meiji government abolished the domain system and reorganized Japan into prefectures and municipalities. The Nagata family entered the world of politics in 1889, when Nagata Kichiuemon Masatoshi (1848–1901) became the first mayor of the new town of Takayama. Five years later, he was elected to the House of Representatives in the Imperial Diet. Masatoshi led the family’s involvement in banking, silk production, logging, and many other local industries. Masatoshi’s son, Nagata Kichiuemon Naotsugu (1873–1918), followed in his footsteps, becoming mayor of Takayama in 1904 and winning a seat in the House of Representatives in 1917. The family became so wealthy that in 1932, they were recorded as having paid the most taxes of any family in Takayama.

The wealth of the Nagata family is further evidenced by the arrangement of their six storehouses. Disastrous fires were common in Japan until the mid-twentieth century, and in 1875 a major fire swept through Takayama, destroying over 1,300 homes. The Nagata family’s first storehouse was built six months later to protect their possessions from future fires. In 1914, five more thick-walled storehouses were built around the family home. Together, the storehouses created a firewall around the entire house.

The largest of the Nagata family’s storehouses was used as a sake brewery. The other storehouses were used to store rice, business documents, clothing, and furniture. The small building next to the brewery was used to store *kōji* rice (rice inoculated with *Aspergillus oryzae* that is used for sake brewing). In 1953, the buildings and storehouses of the Nagata estate were repurposed to create the museum that would later become the Takayama Museum of History and Art.