

The Yajima Family

The Yajima family was one of the most powerful families in Takayama from the moment they arrived. They moved to Takayama from Ōmi Province (now Shiga Prefecture) at the request of Kanamori Nagachika (1524–1608), head of the Kanamori family. Nagachika had spent part of his childhood in Ōmi, and his family is thought to have been close with the Yajima family. When Nagachika took control of Takayama in 1585, he invited the Yajimas to join him in creating a new castle town.

Yajima Moemon (d. 1673) became the first town headman of Takayama, and the family was given special license to manage the vast forests controlled by the Kanamori family. The Yajima family's position gave them significant influence in the quickly growing town, but eventually the merchant district of Takayama was split into three sections with three separate headmen. The Yajimas retained leadership of the Ichinomachi ("first town") area, but Ninomachi ("second town") was led by the Kawakami family, and Sannomachi ("third town") was led by the Yagai family.

The Yajima family's connection to the Kanamori family was more than social. The Yajimas were responsible for ensuring the Kanamori lord's laws were followed by the people in Ichinomachi. However, when the Kanamori family was forced by the Tokugawa shogunate to leave Takayama in 1692, the Yajimas did not join them. Instead, they continued to run Ichinomachi as deputies for the shogunate-appointed governor of Takayama.

The Yajima family continued to manage the region's forests, which were now controlled by the shogunate. They diversified into the salt trade in 1804, and by 1840, salt had overtaken timber as their primary business. Most of the salt they sold was sea salt from Toyama and Mino Provinces (now southern Gifu Prefecture). Exhibition Room 3 is in the storehouse that they used to store salt. It was built in 1783 and underwent large-scale repairs in 1878.

The Yajima family lost their hereditary headship and other privileges with the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1868. Over time, they became involved in other forms of trade, and eventually they left Takayama. In the early Showa era (1926–1989), the family sold their property to a trading company. Many decades later, the land was acquired by the city of Takayama, and the surviving storehouses were restored and repurposed as part of the Takayama Museum of History and Art.