

## Historical Architecture of the National Crafts Museum

The building that houses the National Crafts Museum is an amalgamation of two wooden structures from the Meiji era (1868–1912) that were relocated, reconstructed, and renovated. One of the two is the former command headquarters for the Ninth Division of the Japanese Imperial Army; the other is a former officers' club. Both structures were registered Tangible Cultural Properties in 1997 as valuable examples of late nineteenth-century Western-style architecture.

### Historical Context

Western influence is a defining characteristic of Meiji-era buildings. After more than two centuries of isolation, Japan's borders were forcibly opened to trade in 1854 following the arrival of a United States Navy squadron possessing far superior firepower. Newly aware of a power imbalance with Western countries, Japan kicked off a period of rapid modernization. At the time, many Japanese leaders felt the fastest route to closing the gap was adopting elements of Western culture—including architecture. Foreign architects were sometimes invited to design buildings, but in other cases, domestic architects worked independently to replicate the appearance of Western buildings.

### Old Ninth Division Command Headquarters

The structure to the left of the museum's main entrance was once the headquarters for the Ninth Division of the Japanese Imperial Army. The division was established in 1898 and a command center was constructed in the second bailey (*ninomaru*) of Kanazawa Castle. After World War II, the building was repurposed, renovated, and relocated several times, serving at various points as offices for Kanazawa University, a public health corporation, and museum storage. A project to move the building to its current location and restore the original exterior began in 2017 and was completed in 2020.

This structure's bilateral symmetry, double rows of windows, and use of pilasters and a pediment on the exterior are common elements in late nineteenth-century architecture. Inside, the spacious central entrance hall leads to a solid zelkova-wood staircase. The pair of pillars flanking the stairs are topped with stucco acanthus leaves, a common ornamentation on Greek and Roman columns. The windows of the building also slide open vertically rather than horizontally (as was typical in traditional Japanese

architecture).

### Old Army Generals' Club

To the right of the museum's main entrance is the Old Army Generals' Club, a building originally constructed near this location in 1909 as a place for high-ranking commissioned officers to gather and socialize. After World War II, it was a city tax office before becoming the dressing rooms for an adjoining noh theater, a storage facility for the neighboring Ishikawa Prefectural History Museum, and then office space for several prefectural agencies. Like the Old Ninth Division Command Headquarters, it was also moved to the current location and restored over the period from 2017 to 2020.

The central section of the roof of the Generals' Club has the four-way double slope characteristic of a mansard roof, steeper near the top and flaring more gently just above the eaves. Mansard roofs are particularly associated with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France. The building's design also incorporates baroque elements like Corinthian pilasters on the façade and dormer windows on the roof, which demonstrate the technical accomplishments of the unknown architect.

One incongruous point on the exterior is the presence of five-pointed stars on the ventilation grates along the base of the building. This auspicious symbol was also embroidered on Imperial Army uniforms. Its origin and the reason it became a symbol for the army are debated, but the star was called a *tamayoke*, meaning “ward against many evils” (多魔除け). The word also means “bullet-averting” if written with different characters (弾除け).