

Kumagawa before the Post-Town Era

Before Kumagawa developed into a post town (*shukuba*) in the late sixteenth century, it was just a small village near the border of Wakasa Province and Omi Province (present-day Fukui Prefecture and Shiga Prefecture, respectively). Travelers along the Wakasa Kaido road who took the Hozaka Pass just southeast of Kumagawa crossed into Omi Province and could continue east toward Imazu and Lake Biwa or go south to Kutsuki, Ohara, and Kyoto (then the capital of Japan). Records suggest that a facility for inspecting people and goods existed near Kumagawa in the early fifteenth century, showing that the Wakasa Kaido road was already an important route connecting the capital and the Sea of Japan.

The Numata Family

In the sixteenth century, the Kumagawa area was ruled by the Numata family. Jako (1544–1618), the daughter of Numata Mitsukane, the lord of Kumagawa Castle, was chosen to marry into the powerful Hosokawa family. Her husband Hosokawa Fujitaka (also known as Hosokawa Yusai, 1534–1610), a prominent general and an accomplished writer, later became lord of Tango Province (present-day northern Kyoto Prefecture). Jako herself was recognized for her role as one of the defenders of Tanabe Castle during a siege in 1600. Following her conversion to Christianity, she also became known as Hosokawa Maria.

Wakasa Kaido Road

The Wakasa Kaido road running through Kumagawa was primarily a trade route, but was sometimes also used for military purposes. According to a biography of the powerful warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), he and his commanders stayed overnight in Kumagawa during a campaign against the lord of the neighboring Echizen Province (present-day northern Fukui Prefecture) in 1570.