

Matsumoto Castle in the Meiji Era (1868–1912)

After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the new government established a modern military that employed Western-style equipment and tactics. Wooden fortifications were deemed obsolete, and many castles were demolished.

Matsumoto Castle was spared this fate, due in part to the efforts of a local activist named Ichikawa Ryōzō (1844–1908). Ichikawa petitioned the prefectural government for permission to delay the demolition and host an exhibition at the castle. Ichikawa's request was approved, and five exhibitions were held in and around the Great Keep. Once these events concluded, the castle's main bailey was used by a local agricultural association, and in 1900 it became the athletic field for the local middle school.

Meanwhile, the Great Keep and other structures fell into disrepair. The middle school's principal, Kobayashi Unari (1855–1914), felt it was important to protect the castle for future generations. To this end, in 1901 he helped establish the Matsumoto Castle Preservation Society (Matsumoto Tenshukaku Hozonkai). With this organization at the helm, renovations began in 1903. The project was paused during the Russo–Japanese War (1904–1905) but was finally completed in 1913. Remarkably, 870 percent of the renovation costs were met by donations from society members.

Most of the repairs functioned to prevent the castle from dilapidating further. Warping pillars were straightened and reinforced with metal bolts, broken roof tiles were replaced, and an additional layer of plaster was applied to the exterior and interior walls. The castle's structural issues were not addressed until the 1950s, when the Great Keep was completely disassembled, repaired, and then reassembled.