

Kiyomasa's Choice of Two Horses

This two-trunked weeping cherry tree is associated with a colorful legend from Matsumoto Castle's early days. Sometime around 1594, when the castle's core structures were completed, castle lord Ishikawa Yasunaga (1554–1642) hosted fellow daimyo Katō Kiyomasa (1562–1611). Kiyomasa was returning from Edo (now Tokyo) to his own castle in Kumamoto, far to the southwest.

At the end of Kiyomasa's stay, Yasunaga wished to present him with a gift. He had his grooms bring in two peerless horses, and he told Kiyomasa to take his pick. Instead of selecting one, Kiyomasa replied, "How could I possibly choose between two horses that a connoisseur like yourself has selected?" So saying, Kiyomasa left with both horses.

Those who heard the tale afterward were greatly impressed by the visiting daimyo's astute decision. If Kiyomasa had picked one horse over the other, it would have been an insult to the unchosen animal. If he had picked the lesser of the two, people would have mocked him as a poor judge of horses. By taking both animals, Kiyomasa cleverly avoided this problem and showed his sensitivity even to the feelings of a horse.

It is said that before Kiyomasa departed, he tied his fine new steeds to a cherry tree, the predecessor of the tree that stands here today.