

The Leaning Castle

By the turn of the twentieth century, Matsumoto Castle had gone unused and neglected for decades. Its roofs had begun to crumble, and its exterior was badly worn. To make matters worse, the castle foundation had begun to decay, causing the Great Keep to tilt noticeably. This situation gave rise to one of the castle's most dramatic legends.

In 1686, a town headman named Tada Kasuke (1639–1686) led a protest of some 10,000 villagers demanding tax relief from the officials at Matsumoto Castle. Farmers in the area had recently suffered crop failures, and because taxes were paid in rice, many farmers could not pay their taxes without risking starvation.

The officials feared the protest might become a full-scale revolt, so they quickly acceded to Tada's demands and presented him with documents guaranteeing the repeal of the higher tax rate. Soon afterward, however, the officials seized and imprisoned Tada, members of his family, and around 20 of his followers. The documents, too, were confiscated.

On the day Tada was scheduled to be publicly crucified, a large crowd gathered and chanted prayers. Tada spoke to them, saying that he would still achieve the tax reduction they needed. With his final breaths, Tada repeatedly shouted the promised tax rate. According to legend, he turned his rage-filled, bloodshot eyes toward the castle one last time as he died, and the Great Keep tilted to the west with a terrifying rumbling of the earth.