

Support from Local Residents

Saving Matsumoto Castle: Ichikawa Ryōzō and Kobayashi Unari

(1) Ichikawa Ryōzō (1844–1908)

After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Matsumoto Castle faced two major threats: demolition and disrepair. It was able to survive only thanks to the large-scale efforts of Matsumoto residents.

With the widespread adoption of Western culture and institutions that began in the Meiji era (1868–1912), towering wooden castles quickly came to be seen as outdated relics. In 1871, control of Matsumoto Castle and its main bailey was transferred to the Ministry of War. The following year, it was reported in a local newspaper that the castle had been auctioned off and was scheduled to be torn down. As a branch of the Nagoya Army Garrison, Matsumoto Castle had been left standing while other castles were demolished, but it seemed as though it would finally be destroyed.

Fearing the loss of the castle, a local activist named Ichikawa Ryōzō petitioned the prefectural governor to delay the sale for at least 10 years. He also proposed that the grounds could be used to hold a public exhibition. His request was granted, and five exhibitions were held at the castle between 1873 and 1876.

The exhibitions proved to be popular. A local newspaper reported that the first exhibition received upwards of 5,000 visitors each day it was open. A wide variety of objects were displayed, ranging from fine art and handicrafts to fossils, tools, and weapons. For many visitors, the exhibitions may have been the first time they had ever entered the castle, where previously only samurai and special guests had been allowed. The exhibitions, which were made possible through the cooperation of both public and private organizations, helped generate widespread interest in Matsumoto Castle.

(2) Kobayashi Unari (1855–1914)

Once the exhibitions had concluded, the prefectural government became occupied by other priorities, and the castle slowly fell into disrepair. Roof tiles cracked, the black-lacquered siding faded, and the wooden posts in the foundation continued to rot.

These rotting posts were a particularly serious problem for Matsumoto Castle. With the foundation no longer able to support the weight of the 1,000-ton Great Keep, the structure began to lean. A well-known photograph from the early 1890s shows the castle leaning at a significant angle. In actuality, distortion from the camera lens made the angle appear more severe, but the castle's foundation was nonetheless beginning to fail, resulting in a tilt. Some locals even said the tilt was caused by the curse of Tada Kasuke (1639–1686), a peasant who had been executed for leading a large protest in the seventeenth century.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the castle's second bailey was occupied by Matsumoto Middle School, and its principal was a man named Kobayashi Unari. Witnessing the state of the castle worsening on a daily basis, Kobayashi launched a

repair effort. He established the Matsumoto Castle Preservation Society and began a fundraising campaign to cover the cost of the repairs. Repairs were completed in 1913, and Kobayashi passed away the following year.

Preserving Matsumoto Castle: Citizen Involvement

Since the castle grounds were first opened to the public in the 1870s, residents have continued to play a vital role in preserving Matsumoto Castle. Today, the castle is a frequent fieldtrip destination for local elementary schools, and its grounds and floors are cleaned annually by volunteers. As the number of tourists has increased, volunteer groups have formed to offer tours of the castle so that more visitors can learn about Matsumoto Castle's history.

An organization called the Matsumoto Kojō ("old castle") Association was established to help support annual events, conduct research on the castle, and find ways to increase tourism and improve the local economy. As a result of this group's activities, a committee was formed to work toward the goal of having Matsumoto Castle designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

市川量造	Ichikawa Ryōzō
小林有也	Kobayashi Unari
子どもたちによる床磨き	Children polishing the floor of the Great Keep