

Warehouses at the Former Imai Family Residence

Four warehouses stand behind the Former Imai Family Residence, each clad in a thick layer of plaster for protection against fire. The Imai family were wealthy paper merchants in the Edo period (1603–1867) and into the early twentieth century who also served as the *shoya* or headmen of Mino (similar to a mayor). The warehouses (*kura*) were used for storing the family's merchandise and most precious possessions. Three of the warehouses now hold collections of artifacts and documents related to the history and architecture of the Mino area.

One warehouse displays photographs and reproductions of the raised fireproof walls (*udatsu*) that protect many merchant houses in the Udatsu Preservation District. Fireproof walls extend above the roofline and were designed to prevent the spread of fire across rooftops. Each *udatsu* is capped with roof tiles, and the front is decorated with a family crest or a demon-like talisman called *oni-gawara*. Building a house with *udatsu* was expensive, and over time they became a symbol of wealth.

Another warehouse holds an exhibition about Mino Nagashi Niwaka, a traditional form of entertainment that combines humorous stories and music, and is performed in the streets on evenings during Mino's spring festival. The display includes a full-sized replica of the musicians' drum cart decorated with glowing paper lanterns and mannequins dressed as musicians. The largest warehouse holds a collection of historical photographs and documents. Photographs capture historic scenes, including the first train to run between Nagoya and Mino in 1911 and the first suspension bridge across the Nagara River, completed in 1916.