

## **William Merrell Vories and Omihachiman**

William Merrell Vories (1880–1964) was an American-born architect, businessman, and Christian missionary who lived and worked in Omihachiman for the greater part of his life. He left a rich legacy that remains conspicuous in the city today.

Vories first came to Omihachiman in 1905 to work as a missionary while teaching English at Shiga Prefectural Commercial High School (now Hachiman Commercial High School). His popular Bible study classes and vigorous proselytizing led to protests from local residents concerned about the spread of a foreign religion, and Vories was dismissed from his teaching job after two years.

Undeterred, Vories decided to pursue a different career to fund his missionary activity, and he set up his own architectural office in 1908. Though he was largely self-taught as an architect, Vories went on to design some 1,600 buildings throughout his career, from schools and hospitals to hotels and department stores.

Vories was noted for his business acumen and engaged in a variety of enterprises besides architecture, including establishing a company to import and sell a medical ointment called Mentholatum, which was developed in his native United States. He was also an active contributor to local life in Omihachiman in fields including publishing and education, raising funds for new schools and medical facilities that he designed himself.

Vories considered Omihachiman the center of the world and dedicated his life to building a utopia there. His temperament and personal philosophy, which emphasized the importance of hard work, thrift, and public service, were compatible with the ideals that local residents treasured as central to Omihachiman's mercantile heritage. In 1958, Vories was made the first honorary citizen of Omihachiman in recognition of his contributions.

More than 20 buildings designed by Vories remain standing in Omihachiman, including the Old Hachiman Post Office and Vories Memorial Hall, his final home, which is now a museum. The company he established to market the Mentholatum ointment still operates under the name Omi Brotherhood Ltd. and sells Menturm, a similar product. A statue of Vories stands in front of the company's offices.