

Vories Memorial Hall

Vories Memorial Hall is a museum in central Omihachiman dedicated to the life, career, and legacy of William Merrell Vories (1880–1964), an American-born architect, evangelist, and businessman who lived and worked in the city for the greater part of his life. The two-story wooden building was designed by Vories himself, who originally intended it as a dormitory for teachers at a kindergarten established by his wife Makiko. The building was converted into a family home during construction, however, and served as the Vories's residence from its completion in 1931 until William Merrell's passing in 1964.

Simple in overall appearance, the building has a clapboard exterior, gabled roof, chimney, and double-glazed windows that give it a distinctively Western look. The interior is laid out in a Western style, but Vories also included Japanese-style rooms with tatami mats in consideration of his wife's comfort. The house's layout demonstrates Vories's emphasis on lifestyle concerns and functionality when designing private homes. Practical features that add to residents' convenience are inserted here and there, such as a comfortable bench by the entrance for people to sit on when taking off or putting on their shoes.

Items on display inside include photographs of Vories and Makiko, a piano he had brought over from the United States, and an example of Vories's own calligraphy. Vories Memorial Hall is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. but visits must be reserved in advance by telephone. The admission fee is 400 yen for adults, while entry is free for those aged 18 or under. The museum is closed on Mondays and public holidays and from December 1 to January 15, when the exhibits are changed. Vories Memorial Hall has been designated a Cultural Property of Shiga Prefecture.