

Former Residence of Kuraku Matsuemon

This structure is typical of merchant houses built in the Takasago area during the late part of the Edo period (1603–1867). This was the home of generations of descendants of Takasago-born businessman and inventor Kuraku Matsuemon (1743–1812). Matsuemon pioneered several items chiefly related to shipping, harbor improvement, and nautical navigation. His best-known invention is Matsuemon canvas, a strong yet flexible woven-cotton sailcloth. Sails made with Matsuemon canvas were much more durable than the sails used previously, vastly improving the shipping of goods in Japanese waters during the Edo period.

The house, which is almost 200 years old, was built by Matsuemon's descendants as a family home, as well as a shop and warehouse for the family business. It is believed that three or four generations of the family lived here before they relocated to another area.

The building was restored to its original appearance in 2018, an undertaking of more than 16 months. Looking up from inside the high-ceilinged hallway in the house, one can see the impressive framework of the roof. The walls are painted with the white plaster that would have been used originally, while the roof has a skylight to allow light into the building and to let out smoke from fires for cooking.

The first floor has rooms for daily use, business, and entertaining guests. The hallway leads to a kitchen, which has a *kamado* (wood-fired cooking stove). The house contains several pieces of period furniture, as well as signs and documents related to the family business, spread across its two floors.

The staircase to the upper floor is steep, so caution is advised. The second floor includes a Western-style drawing room and a children's study. In the rooms are a number of maps and sketches, many of which date back to the Edo period, together with a few model boats. These are replicas of vessels that Matsuemon designed and built to help ship locally quarried stone to Hokkaido. There is also a palanquin that is thought to have been used by the family.

The walled garden at the rear of the property has a well and a food preparation area, as was common at the time. The wood for the external wall of the house is recycled from old boats.

Today a number of events are held at the house and garden, such as an exhibit of photographs and paintings of the town by local photographers and artists. The garden often hosts a market that draws together local artisans and producers who sell their wares there. After the family donated the property to the city, it was designated a Prefectural Cultural Property.