

Moriminashi Hachiman Shrine

Moriminashi Hachiman Shrine is believed to have been founded during the reign of Emperor Nintoku in the fourth century CE. It enshrines Hachiman, a deity of archery and war. The shrine has several cultural treasures including a set of carved wood statuettes from the twelfth century. Numerous old-growth cedars grow on the grounds as symbols of the shrine's long history.

Cultural traditions and treasures

The shrine is the main venue of the Tanokami Festival, an annual citywide celebration of thanks to the deities of the fields (*tanokami*). Every February 14, dancers, devotees, and spectators gather at the shrine to pay homage to the traditions of Gero's agricultural past through dances and rituals.

One of the most treasured possessions held by the shrine is a set of wooden figurines that were carved by artisans from Hida Province (present-day Gifu Prefecture) in the twelfth century. These ten statuettes depict various deities and range from 30 to 60 centimeters in height. They are only displayed during festivals and on New Year's Eve. The statuettes are designated an Important Cultural Property.

A *mikoshi*, or sacred palanquin used for Shinto festivals, is stored near the main hall of the shrine. The *mikoshi* was transported from Kyoto during the Edo period (1603–1867). It weighs around 600 kilograms, and 16 people are needed to carry it.

Near the main hall is a smaller shrine dedicated to Konpira Gongen, the deity of merchant sailors. This shrine is constructed in the *azekura* architectural style and is said to be modeled on the Shosoin Repository in Nara. *Azekura* is a traditional Japanese construction style characterized by chamfered logs stacked log-cabin style to form walls. In this method of construction, the wood expands and contracts in response to humidity, helping to better preserve the building's contents.

Cedar trees past and present

A pair of *meoto sugi*, or “husband and wife” cedar trees, once stood on the shrine grounds, but only one of the trees remains. It has a 6.34-meter circumference and is believed to be several hundred years old.

The shrine once had another famous cedar tree that was more than 2,000 years old. This ancient cedar measured 13 meters in circumference and was considered one of the six sights of Gero that inspired the name of Mutsumi Bridge (literally “six-view bridge”) to the south. Unfortunately, the tree was partially destroyed by a fire in 1952 and eventually toppled in 1990. A young tree was planted in its stead, and a plaque memorializes the original cedar.