

## **Belfry Gate**

Like the auxiliary worship hall (p. XX), this faded wooden gate from 1318 is a reminder of the formerly deep connection between Buddhism and Shinto. It is a belfry gate of the type often found at Buddhist temples, where the large bells are used to keep time and call the priests to meals or prayer. The gate's location in the middle of a Shinto shrine is a reminder of the period in which Shinto and Buddhism existed together on the same grounds.

In 1868, Buddhism and Shinto were officially separated, and the bell was removed and sold. Though now lacking a bell, the belfry gate is still a fine example of a “four-legged gate” (*shikyakumon*) with intricate, two-stepped wooden bracketing beneath the eaves and a roof shingled with cypress.

A wooden plaque on the upper level is inscribed with four Chinese kanji characters that together mean “immeasurably old, but ever new.” These four characters were handwritten by former prime minister Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922). They capture Isonokami Jingū's identity as one of

the oldest shrines in Japan and a place of restoration and renewal.