

## **Asahikawa in the Pioneering Period**

In 1868, the Meiji government was established. A year later, the government renamed Ezo to Hokkaido, and began to develop this northern frontier. Officials sent to the Kamikawa Basin reported that the area would be suitable for farming, and the villages of Asahikawa, Nagayama, and Kamui were established in the Kamikawa Basin in 1890.

Farmer-soldiers known as *tondenhei* were employed by the government to clear forestland for agriculture while also protecting Japan's northern border. Initially open exclusively to former samurai, *tondenhei* later included farmers from Honshu, the main island of Japan. *Tondenhei* families arrived in Nagayama in 1891, Asahikawa in 1892, and Toma (then part of Nagayama) in 1893. The *tondenhei* and civilian farmers grew crops suited to the cold climate, such as beans, wheat, and potatoes. After some experimentation, they established rice cultivation in the area.

The village of Asahikawa gradually developed as the transportation and communications hub of northern Hokkaido. A post and telegraph office opened in 1893, and the Kamikawa Line railway opened in 1898 connecting Asahikawa and Takikawa. Asahikawa was incorporated as a town in 1900, and the following year, the Imperial Japanese Army's 7th Division moved to Asahikawa from Sapporo. Around 10,000 troops were stationed in the town, drawn from the *tondenhei* community in Hokkaido and military reserves in northern Honshu. This military presence spurred commercial and industrial development in the region, as skilled workers moved to Asahikawa to support the base with construction, food production, and other services.