

Fujiwara no Shunzei and Shunzeien

A statue of the courtier and poet Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114–1204) watches over the waterfront garden of Shunzeien and the island of Takeshima in the distance. The prominent location of the monument reflects his importance in the early history of Gamagori and the Takeshima area. Shunzei is considered the founder of Gamagori and was also responsible for establishing Yaotomi Shrine on Takeshima.

What is now the city of Gamagori was historically part of Mikawa Province, which corresponds to the eastern half of today's Aichi Prefecture. Shunzei was born into an influential aristocratic family that held a number of hereditary administrative posts. He governed Mikawa from 1145 to 1149, during which time he was instrumental in developing the settlement that became Gamagori.

According to legend, Shunzei was enamored by the landscape of Takeshima, which he thought resembled a sacred island in Lake Biwa near Kyoto that he had often visited. This association inspired Shunzei to

establish a shrine on Takeshima to Benzaiten, a deity of the arts who was also worshiped on the island in Lake Biwa. Benzaiten is still honored on Takeshima, as is Shunzei, who is now enshrined as a deity at the Chitose sub-shrine.

Shunzei's achievements as a poet are commemorated in the Shunzeien garden, where signs display selections from his considerable oeuvre of *waka* poetry. Many of Shunzei's older relatives were notable poets, and he began writing his own poetry at a young age. He became a well-regarded practitioner of *waka*, a poetic form in which each poem has 31 syllables grouped into five units of 5-7-5-7-7. Later in life, he was commissioned to compile a court anthology of poetry, one of the highest honors for a poet.

Shunzei completed his anthology, the twenty-volume *Senzai wakashu* (Collection of a Thousand Years), in 1188. He lived until the age of 90 and

saw his son, Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241), grow up to become a celebrated poet in his own right. Teika eventually surpassed his father in artistic influence and is traditionally considered one of the greatest masters of *waka*.