

Introduction of Hongo family's buildings

There are some brief explanations about Hongo family buildings that we would like to share before visiting there.

Hongo family buildings are the biggest houses, "Kominka" among this village. Kominka is the direct translation of "Old House", in Japanese that usually indicate houses built with Japanese traditional style. Hongo family has four buildings built in different period.

"Uchikura" was built at the beginning of Meiji period (late 1860th), "Omoya," the main building in medieval Meiji (1900). "Misogura," the storage of miso (Japanese cooking ingredient made by soybeans), was built in Taisho period (1921), and "Yokan," the western style building was created at the beginning of Showa (1928.)

Those are culturally quite valuable because they use plenty of dearness timbers such as Keyaki and Kurogaki.

Families like Hongo were evidence of how Kakumagawa and its neighborhood prospered. Back then, Kakumagawa was flourished as one of the stopovers of Omonogawa river, the vital canal of the region. Some families along Kakumagawa became affluent and built some gorgeous buildings. Hongo family is one of them.

Hongo family hosted Meiji emperor when he visited Tohoku, the northeast region of

Japan including Akita in 1881. It shows how Kakumagawa and Hongo family thrived at that time.

Hongo family became one of the strongest landlords of Akita in Meiji and Taisho period, after handing down their family tradition and authority for 9 generations since the 17th, Edo period. A poet Takashi Hongo is the 3rd child of the 7th generation of Hongo family, who worked as director of one of the Japanese famous magazines and also succeeded in the Japanese poet community.

Many landlords lost their primary income after World War 2 by land reform. Hongo family also had some issues; however, they are still preserving their buildings and land with tradition. Today, the wife of the current owner (9th head of the family, Mr. Gen), uses one of the buildings for teaching tea ceremony.

Abstraction of Hongo family's buildings

Uchigura: 1867, 5th Kichiemon (Started)

: 1869 (Done)

Omoya: 1900, 6th Kichiemon

Misogura: 1921, 7th Kichiemon

Yokan and surrounding: 1928, 7th Kichiemon

These buildings show changes and characteristics of each period from Edo to Showa. Boshin war at the end of Edo, the prosperity of canals in Meiji, brightness of Taisho and early Showa. These buildings are valuable heritages to tell about history and prosperity of this town to current days.

Architectural style

These buildings are “modern Japanese architectures” that built basically with traditional style. (Some of the western style buildings were constructed with the combination of Japanese and Western design.) Those are evaluated as rich cultural heritages because of abundant use of premium timbers like Zelkova (Keyaki) and persimmon wood with highly sophisticated techniques.

Three Japanese style rooms on the east side of main building called as “Oku.” One located on the north side is “Zashiki” (Living room). Those rooms are separated into the bed room, library, and drawing room. A mirror as big as one Tanami is placed on the high ceiling and the mirror is surrounded by using some technique with molding and premium timbers.

These buildings are designed simply to enrich the quality of good timbers, but also adding more flavor by using lacquer and gold leaf. Each part of the buildings is valuable that can represent pre-modern Japanese style architecture of this region.

Round shaped window in the room of south side and some equipment for tea ceremony owned by the 6th head of the family indicate that these room had been used for the tea ceremony and flower arrangement. (A traditional style oven “Irori” was set by the head of family at that time.)

Outside wall of Uchigura was used to be a beautiful white wall covered by plaster. However, it was rebuilt and covered by slate plate after some parts of them fell by the earthquake (Akita-senboku earthquake M7.1) in 1914 and remain so until today.

The Garden

There is a blueprint of the garden by Anpei Nagaoka, a man called as the father of pre-modern architectural design. His design contributed a lot of famous and highly sophisticated gardens and parks all over Japan including Shiba Park in Tokyo and Sensyu Park in Akita. He also designed Old-Ikeda garden, which is designated as national great

view site.

For the presses of designing the garden of Hongo family, the work of Nagaoka is not clear by historical documents remain today. However, the design of crack in the ground (which is one of the styles of Japanese garden's design) and allocation of stone sculptures have a lot in common with Nagaoka's blueprint.

According to a book which records the history of Hongo family for seven generations, (written by the 8th head of family Taro Hongo), there was a man "Shobe," the ancestor of the family in Notoya at the beginning of 18th century. He came from "Hongo" region to work at Ichiemon in Noto, which located along Kakumagawa. He succeeded the business of Notoya and got independent after his diligence for several years.

Their surname "Hongo" took from their land of origin. Shobe was the first person to claiming himself "Kichiemon" that the name has been handed down to the 7th generation.

Hongo family was just a small merchant at the beginning, however, they gradually expanded their business and took a part of shipping business at Omonogawa River.

From Edo period to medieval Meiji, shipping business prospered along Omonogawa River. Kakumagawa located at the stopover of Omonogawa River that there was a river port. There were many ships in that area transferring their carriage between bigger ships and smaller ships because the depth and width of the river change the neighborhood, which fostered the prosperity of the port.

There were several families who succeeded along this region, and Hongo family was one of them. They expand their business to many areas of the shipping industry and also engaging agriculture that made the family became quite wealthy.

Kakumagawa area was chosen as accommodation for Meiji emperor when he took a tour around Tohoku region in September 1881. Hongo family provided Anzaisho (temporary housing) which shows how Kakumagawa and Hongo family flourished at that time. A memorial stone remains at where Meiji emperor seated even though the building its self was taken down immediately after that. The memorial stone shows that there was a building used for Anzaisho near there.

Hongo family kept in power by owning huge land for agriculture even after shipping disused because Ou railway opened in that area and replaced shipping. However, in the late life of the 7th head of the family Kichiemon, the family lost their great wealth by land reform after the World War 2.

In the postwar era, Kakumagawa left from a part of Hiraga-province with 1000 years history, and then became a part of Omagari city. The 8th head of the family Taro Hongo contributed a lot not only to Kakumagawa but also Omagari and Senboku region. He became the head of the family after the World War two and also worked for Congress in Omagari city. (The poet Takashi Omagari is the 3rd son of the 7th head of the family.)

Tohoku tour of Meiji emperor

Meiji restoration changed Japanese governance system drastically. Emperor became in power instead of shogunate (Bakufu.) in 1868, the era of Meiji emperor begun.

To cut the path of the new epoch, Meiji emperor traveled all over Japan which is called Gojunkou in Japanese. In 1881, he came to Hokkaido and Tohoku region.

After leaving Hokkaido, he came to Akita by passing Aomori and went through southern Akita to the way of Yamagata by mountain pass of Innai. Usually, Emperor uses national highways when he travels. The road from Omagari town, Oiwake, and to Rokugo used to be a national highway which means Kakumagawa located a little far from the road he supposed to go through.

However, he intentionally came to Kakumagawa from Oiwake on 19th September and stayed for a night at Anzaisho of Hongo family.

After staying in Kakumagawa, he went back to Oiwake then to Yokote, continued his way. This plan provoked some antipathy from people in Rokugo. Despite some complains, he choose to stay in Kakumagawa, that indicate how the town was rich and prospered at that time.

Hongo family constructed a new building for Anzaisho at the period of 6th head of the family. The expense for construction including some readjustments told by the municipality was around 5000 yen, which is about 10million yen (955 thousand U.S. dollar) at today's exchange rate. However, that building was dismantled after a while that only small stone memorial remain which shows the point where emperor seated.

At the day when Emperor stayed, everyone is the family who lived there left their house and stayed at other relatives to provide accommodations for the emperor and his servants. Around 350 people was allocated into 30 homes and stayed in the town which was a magnificent event for all over the town.

(Note) This document is from an explanation for elementary school students with a little amendment.

7th Hongo Kichiemon “Okina”

A person who established the golden age of Kakumagawa and Hongo family

(1879 to 1950)

He was born in November 1880 as a first son of 6th head of the family Kichiemon and his wife Matsu. His childhood name was Kichijiro.

He entered to secondary school in Akita in 1898 and graduated in 1901 as a first person to do so from Kakumagawa area. When he was on his way to home in Akita city afternoon of 31st August 1900 after his summer holiday, he experienced Rokugo earthquake (Ouu earthquake, M7.2.) His rickshaw driver said, “I feel dizzy”. Kichijiro firstly though the driver was sick, however, he realized that it was an earthquake, he said later.

In 1903, the same year with when the abstract framework of the main building was done, he married with his wide Jun, a girl at the age of 14. She is the second daughter of Teinoshuke Kimita, who was a descendant of samurai in Kakunodate, a town in central Akita.

He convened as a service person when the relationship between Japan and Russia became worse. He went to the front line as a second lieutenant when Japan-Russia war begun in 1904.

The platoon marched firstly to **Genzan** in northern part of Korea, then to Hoeryŏng which is located near the boundary of Korea and Manchuria. Finally they came back with record on stone of **Unen** memorial statue. It still preserved as a hanging scroll. Later, he named his self as **Unen** and worked hard for Japanese calligraphy.

In 1905, he came back to Japan as a first lieutenant. He said that “I could come back because Mr., Togo’s victory”. A letter from marshal Togo is still preserved, which tells how much he respected and honored Togo.

In 1905, the year he came back he became 7th generation of Kichiemon after the 6th retired. Since then, he kept in power and contributed to family’s successes until beginning of Showa period (around 1930th) at the age of 50.

(He abandoned most of his art collection because of bankruptcy in a part of his business at 1930th.)

Poet Takashi Hongo

A poet of the land (1922-1978)

Takashi Hongo was born as the third son of 7th Kichiemon and his wife Jun. He had older brothers Taro (8th head of the family) and Mitsuo, who was two years older than him. Sadly, Mitsuo died when he was in Okinawa, taking a part of the air force in October 1944. He also had two younger sisters.

Takashi graduated Kakumagawa elementary school and entered Akita secondary school in 1935. He was a brilliant student not only for his studies but also good at Kendo. He was a great reader and even performed his talents for painting and music too.

He went on to high school in Kanazawa. The Kendo practice field of the school he went to now relocated in Meiji village in Aichi prefecture, however, the field still lists the name of Takashi Hongo as a contributor.

He enrolled in former Tokyo University as a psychology major in 1943; however, he entered Army in fall of the year as a student because there was a shortage of soldiers at the last few years of the war.

It is said that he came back home during summer holiday of his college years and visited Kotaro Takamura, a one of the most famous poet in Japan in Hanamaki, Iwaki Prefecture. A letter which said “Shi to wa Hukahi nari” (Poet is something that inevitable) remain.

He wanted to be a poet. However, in 1949, he started working at Chuo-Koronsha, a Japanese publisher. He was chosen only a candidate among approximately 2000 people when he took interview after he told his older brother that it is too hard to make his life only as a poet. He devoted his passion toward poet and creation interacting with some other famous poet like Shinpei Kusano while he belonged to revising section of the publisher (he became a manager of the department later.)

His deep affection toward his homeland created some school songs with Chotaro Sato, who was a composer and a president of the school. He wrote lines for school song of Kakumagawa elementally school and some other schools mainly in Daisen City. A school song is Omagari secondary school “Yoku ikikyo wakamono yo” (youth, be ambitious) is a famous one among many.