

# Nasunogahara, the agricultural frontier of the Meiji era

Nasunogahara is a vast plateau in the Nasu region. While it was one of the largest wildland areas of Honshu, agriculture was not introduced here until the Meiji era. The region lacked the water necessary for agriculture, but it developed as people worked hard to reclaim the wildlands.

## What kind of place is Nasunogahara?

Nasunogahara lies in northern Tochigi Prefecture. According to Japan Heritage, the area consists of four cities and towns in the Nasu region: Nasushiobara, Ohtawara, Yaita, and Nasu. The Sabi and Kuma Rivers flow through the center of Nasunogahara, while the Naka River runs to the northeast and the Houki River runs to the southwest.



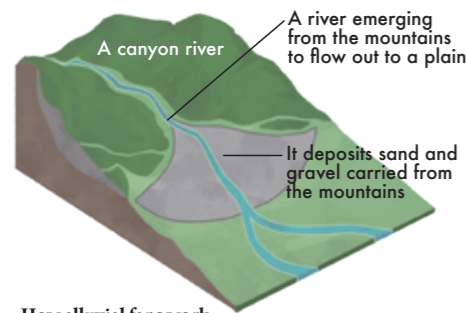
The Nasu region is shown in green, and the brown area inside it is Nasunogahara.



▲ Duke Matsukata's Villa in Nasunogahara

### 1 One of Japan's largest alluvial fans

An alluvial fan is terrain created by triangle-shaped deposits of sand and gravel that is carried down from mountains by rivers. Composite alluvial fans are formed when multiple alluvial fans combine, and Nasunogahara is one of the largest in Japan.



**How alluvial fans work**  
The sand and gravel deposits are thickest at the entrance to the canyon, and gradually thin out the further they get from the canyon.

### 2 The once vast wildlands

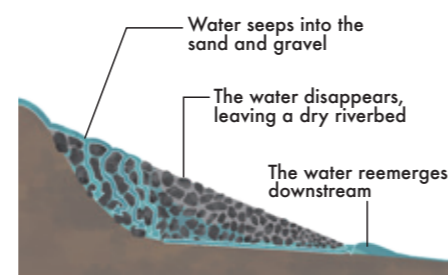
The Nasunogahara region was once covered by two vast wildland plains called Nasunishihara and Nasuhigashihara. The wild grasses and reeds that flourished in the wildlands were an important source of thatching for roofs and feed for horses.



Wild grasses and reeds reminiscent of the wildlands of the Meiji era. Places where these grasses and reeds (known as *kaya*) were harvested are called *kayaba*.

### 3 A river without water—the Sabi River

Despite its name, no water can be seen along the Sabi River, making it one of the characteristic sights of the Nasunogahara area. The water seeps underground, leaving the riverbed full of dry rocks. Water flows in the river only after heavy rains, etc.



Water seeps into the thick sand and gravel deposits in the upper part of the Sabi River, and no water flows along the riverbed. There is less sand and gravel downstream, so the water emerges to flow along the surface.

### The Sabi River with no water



### The Sabi River with water



## One of the largest wildland reclamation projects in Japan and the Meiji Aristocrats

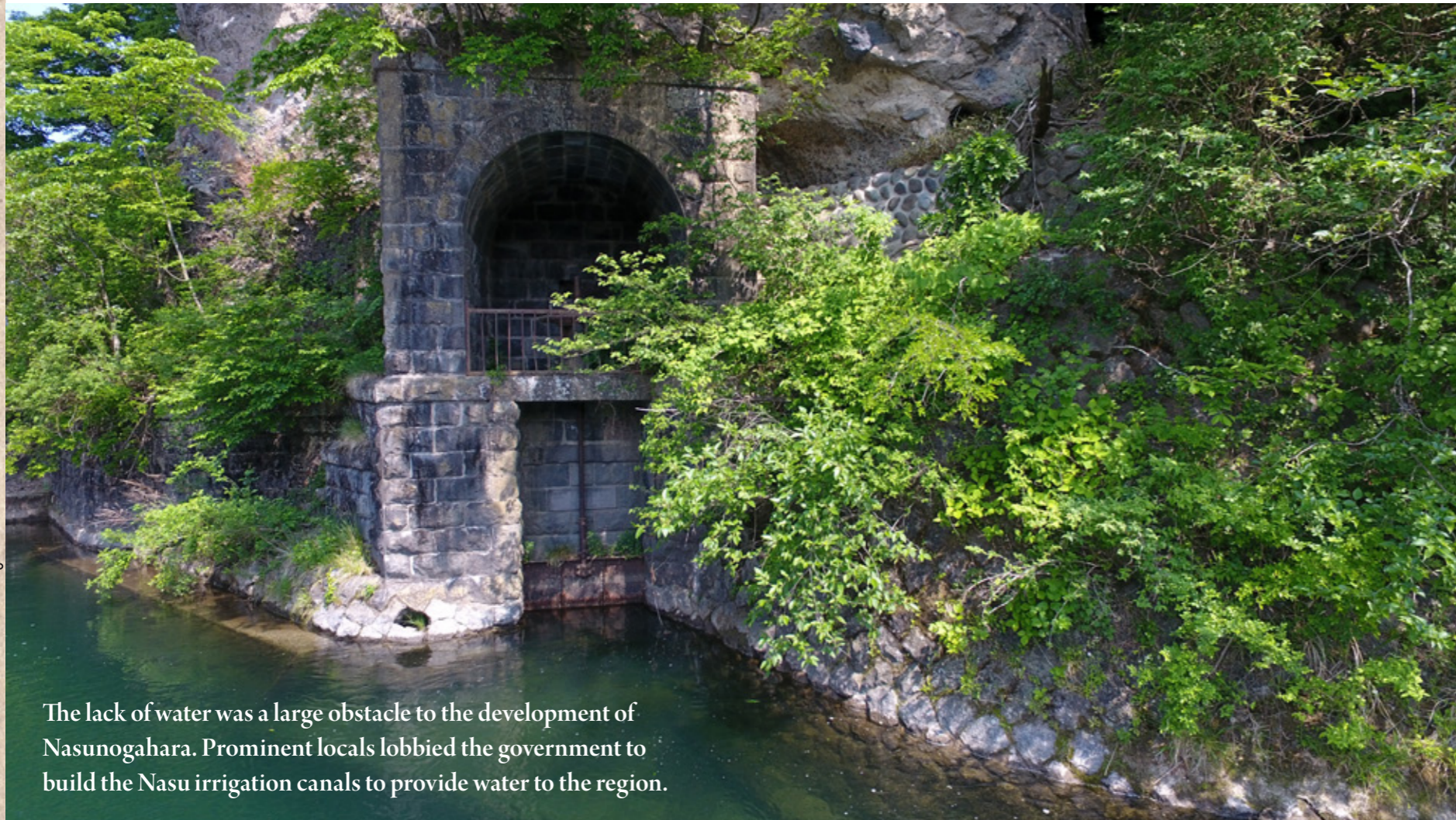
The Meiji era saw an influx of Western culture as the country sought to accelerate its development. Various industries thrived amid efforts toward national prosperity. It was against this backdrop that Nasunogahara, with some of the largest wildlands in Japan, became the focus of efforts to develop it for agricultural use and reclamation began at the hands of the Meiji aristocratic class as well as prominent locals.

▶▶ One of the driving forces behind the nobles involved in developing Nasunogahara was a desire to emulate Western nobles who had vast lands at their disposal.



# The Nasu irrigation canals provide water to Nasunogahara

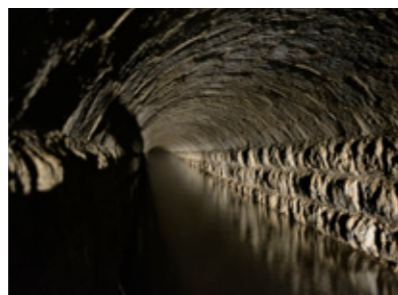
▼ The old water pump for the Nasu irrigation canals was built by tunneling through a steep cliff along the Naka River. A newer facility built nearby is currently being used.



The lack of water was a large obstacle to the development of Nasunogahara. Prominent locals lobbied the government to build the Nasu irrigation canals to provide water to the region.

## History of the Nasu irrigation canals

People gathered from around the country to reclaim Nasunogahara during the Meiji era. But the area lacked water, and there wasn't enough drinking water to support a large population. Prominent locals such as Jousaku Innami and Takeshi Yaita lobbied the government, and a canal was built in 1882 to draw drinking water from the Naka River that flows to the northeast of Nasunogahara. But an even larger canal was necessary to bring enough water for agriculture. After further lobbying, the Nasu irrigation canals were built in 1885.



**Jousaku Innami**

Born in 1831 in what is now the city of Nikko. Served in various positions such as village head, and founded the Nasukaikonsha farm and became its first president in 1880.



**Takeshi Yaita**

Born in 1849 in what is now the city of Yaita. Served as village head and prefectural legislator before becoming the second president of Nasukaikonsha in 1888 and founding what would later become Yaita Farm.

◀ The tunnel inside the old water pump  
The east tunnel (above) and west tunnel (below)

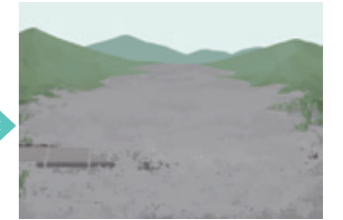


## How were waterways built underground?

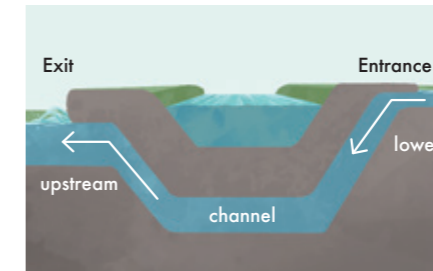
To draw water from the Nasu irrigation canals to each farm, it was necessary to build underground waterways across the Sabi River. This was done by taking advantage of the dry river. Rather than digging underground, riverbed rocks were moved, rocks were arranged in a pentagonal shape to create a tunnel, and then covered with the riverbed rocks. This created one single long, underground waterway.



1 Stack rocks in a pentagonal shape to create a hollow tunnel.



2 Cover the rock tunnel with sand and gravel from the riverbed.



◀ A waterway passing under the Sabi River. The water is delivered by diverting the water through a U-shaped waterway where the water emerges in a vertical direction. (fusekoshi / siphon waterway).



3 Water flows through the completed underground tunnel.

## The Nasu irrigation canals today

While the location of the water pump has changed a number of times, the Nasu irrigation canals are still in use today. Water carried by the waterways throughout the Nasunogahara region are still used for agriculture, industry, and hydroelectric power.



▲ The water pump for the Nasu irrigation canals that draws water from the Naka River. The former pump is on the cliffs on the right, and the facilities currently in use on the left were completed in 1976.



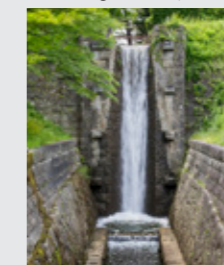
◀ A siphon exit where water emerges after passing through an underground waterway under the Sabi River. The water then flows along an aboveground waterway once more.

Canal map



## The big three canals of Japan

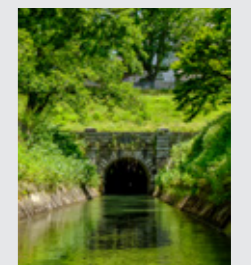
A canal is a waterway built to draw water from its source. The Nasu irrigation canals are known as one of the big three canals of Japan, together with Asaka Canal in Fukushima Prefecture and the Lake Biwa Canal that links Shiga and Kyoto Prefectures.



Asaka Canal



Nasu Irrigation Canal

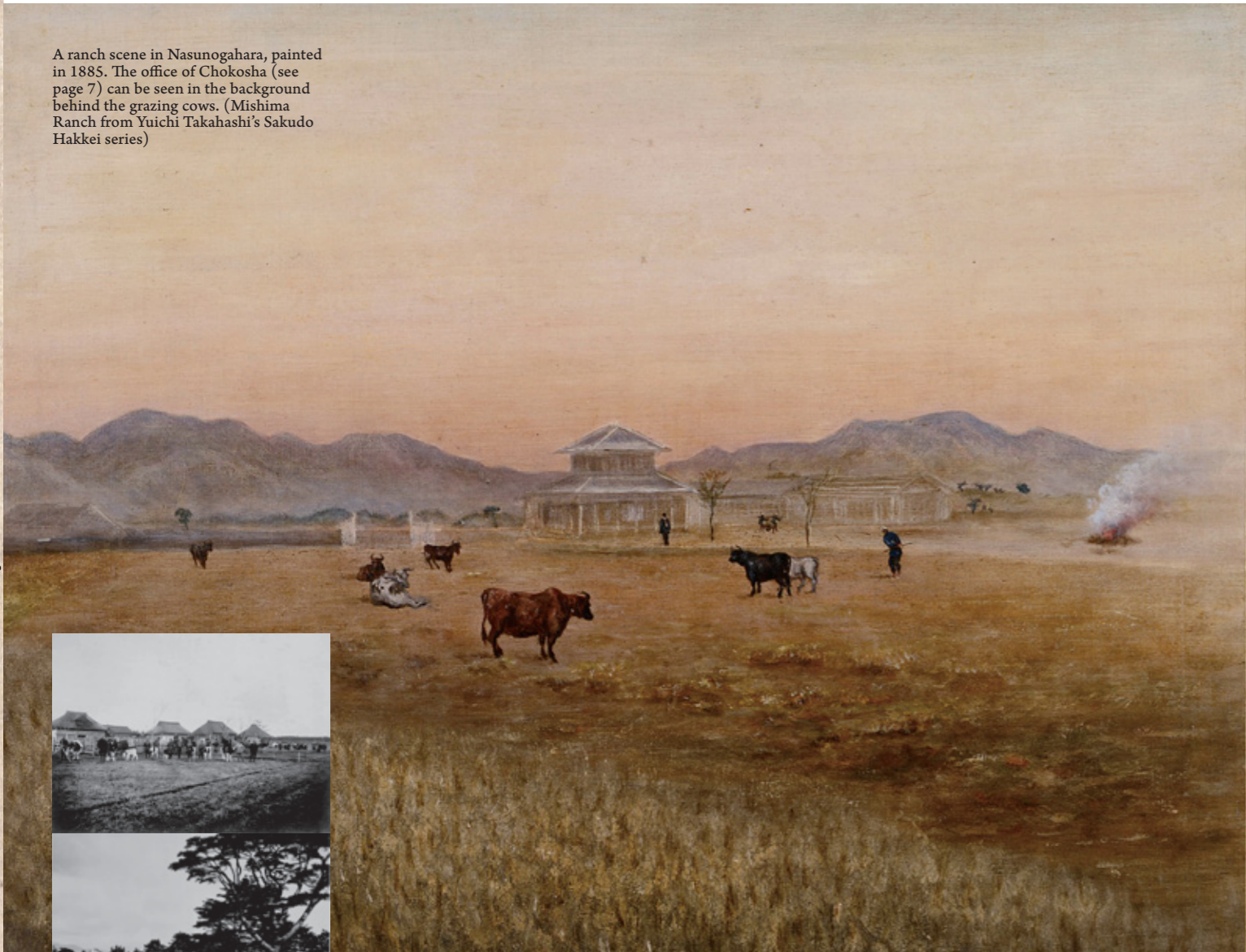


Lake Biwa Canal

# Reclamation and farming

It was about 140 years ago that farms were first established in Nasunogahara after reclaiming barren wildlands filled with grasses, reeds, and rocks. As many as 40 farms were established, including 19 operated by nobles.

A ranch scene in Nasunogahara, painted in 1885. The office of Chokosha (see page 7) can be seen in the background behind the grazing cows. (Mishima Ranch from Yuichi Takahashi's Sakudo Hakkei series)



▲ Top: cows, ranch hands, and livestock barns on Oyama Farm (early Showa era). Middle: grazing sheep and Duke Matsukata's Villa on Senbonmatsu Farm (photo from a private collection, early Showa era). Bottom: a tractor on Senbonmatsu Farm (photo circa 1931).

## Scenes from the nobles' farms of yesteryear

As agricultural development of Nasunogahara began, the prefecture-run Nasu Ranch was the first to be established in 1878. Association farms and individual farms founded by prominent locals followed. Cows and sheep were raised and grapes were grown as western agricultural products were produced. Many nobles also came to the region to operate farms, in part because of its proximity to Tokyo.

### Agricultural equipment of the Meiji era



Agricultural tools produced by Tokyo Mita Agricultural Tool Manufacturing, diagram 1

## Scenes from today's farms, 140 years after reclamation

### Senbonmatsu Farm

This farm was once the Senbonmatsu Farm founded by Masayoshi Matsukata (see page 7). (It is currently operated by Horai Co., Ltd.) It began dairy farming and raising cows in 1946, and is popular today as a tourist destination as well. There are now multiple farms in Nasunogahara that retain vestiges of the ranches of the Meiji era.



▲ Spring scenery: soil conditioning



▲ Summer scenery: harvesting crops



▲ Fall scenery: mowing grass

### Minamigaoka Farm

A tourist farm focused on dairy farming. Founded in 1948, it shifted to its current focus on dairy farming around 1964.



### Nasu Communal Farm

A communal farm that aims to raise dairy cows efficiently. It was completed in 1968.



### Grazing Farm of Oya in Ohtawara city



A city-run grazing farm. State-owned wildlands were developed in 1965 to create the pastures.

# The nobles who developed Nasunogahara

Aristocrats of the Meiji era flocked to Nasunogahara to establish farms and develop agricultural land. These nobles, or *kazoku*, included many notable figures from the Meiji Restoration and the Meiji government.



▲ Ladies' Charity Party at Rokumeikan  
A picture of a charity bazaar held at Rokumeikan by wives of high-ranking officials.

▶ Hanna Aoki, daughter of Shuzo Aoki. Shuzo married Elisabeth, the daughter of a German aristocrat, while in Germany as a diplomat. Hanna was their only child.



## Nobles with ties to Nasunogahara

Perhaps driven by dreams of owning land near Tokyo like a Western noble's estate, many nobles built farms and villas in Nasunogahara. Here are some of the nobles with close ties to Nasunogahara.



**Shuzo Aoki**  
(1844-1914)  
Diplomat and politician. Viscount. Established Aoki Farm in 1881.



**Iwao Oyama**  
(1842-1916)  
Military officer and politician. Duke. Established Kajiyakaikonjo in 1881 and Oyama Farm in 1901.



**Judo Saigo**  
(1843-1902)  
Military officer and politician. Marquis. Established Kajiyakaikonjo in 1881 and Saigo Farm in 1901.



**Yajiro Shinagawa**  
(1843-1900)  
Diplomat and politician. Viscount. Established Shinagawa Farm in 1883.



**Maresuke Nogii**  
(1849-1912)  
Military officer and educator. Count. Built a villa in Ishibayashi, Karino Village in 1891.

Photo from Nogi Shrine's collection.



**Tosuke Hirata**  
(1849-1925)  
Government official and politician. Count. Took over Shinagawa Kaikon (later Kasamatsu Farm) and established the Shinagawa Credit Union.



**Masayoshi Matsukata**  
(1835-1924)  
Politician. Duke. Established Senbonmatsu Farm in 1893.



**Michitsune Mishima**  
(1835-1888)  
Government official. Viscount. Established Chokosha in 1880 and Mishima Farm in 1886.



**Aritomo Yamagata**  
(1838-1922)  
Military officer and politician. Duke. Established Yamagata Farm in 1884.

Photo from General Yamagata Memorial Museum's collection.

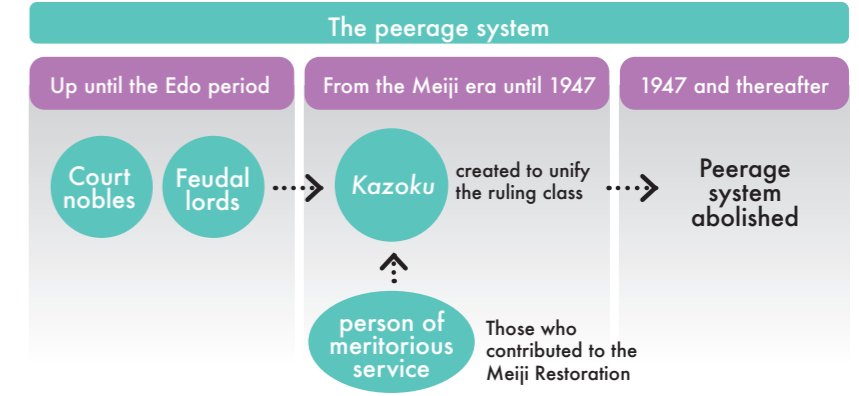


**Akiyoshi Yamada**  
(1844-1892)  
Military officer and politician. Count. Established Yamada Farm in 1888.

Photo from Yamada Museum's collection.

## The Meiji era's peerage system

Until the Edo period, Japanese aristocracy consisted of nobles who served the emperor. In contrast, the *kazoku* were a new aristocratic class created in the Meiji era. As the Meiji government changed the governmental system, the domains ruled by feudal lords were replaced by prefectures, and the lords no longer ruled their domains. To maintain their high societal positions, nobles of the imperial court, feudal lords, and those who contributed to the Meiji Restoration were included in the new peerage system. The five ranks in increasing order of importance were baron, viscount, count, marquis, and duke, with privileges and duties established for each. The peerage system continued until the new constitution was enacted in 1947.



▲ The House of Peers  
During the Meiji era, the Imperial Diet consisted of the House of Representatives and the House of Peers. Only those from privileged classes such as imperial family members and nobles could become members of the House of Peers.

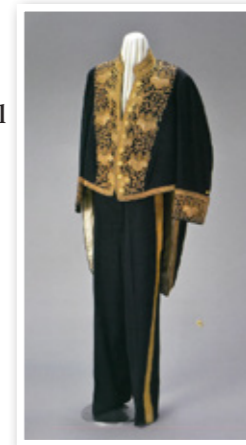
## Life of the nobles

Many nobles led lives of luxury by investing the stipend they received from the government, for example. Many also adopted Western influences, mingling with foreigners and dancing at social spaces such as Rokumeikan as part of an elegant lifestyle.



◀ Rokumeikan a Western-style venue built for social events for foreign diplomats, etc. as part of a national policy of modernization through the adoption of Western systems and culture.

Photo from Kasumi Kaikan.



▲ Western wear of the nobles  
Left: court uniform of civil officials (1925). Right: court uniform of civil officials and women's robe decollete (replica).



◀ Western tableware tableware used by the Masayoshi Matsukata household, bearing his family crest. The dishes were made in England, and the knives, forks, spoons, etc. were made in France.

# Remnants of the dreams of Meiji aristocrats

Western-style villas featuring the best of modern architecture can be found in Nasunogahara. Built as part of their own farms by nobles who strove to emulate the West, they still stand today as proof of those nobles' dreams.



## Viscount Aoki's Country Villa in Nasu

National important cultural properties

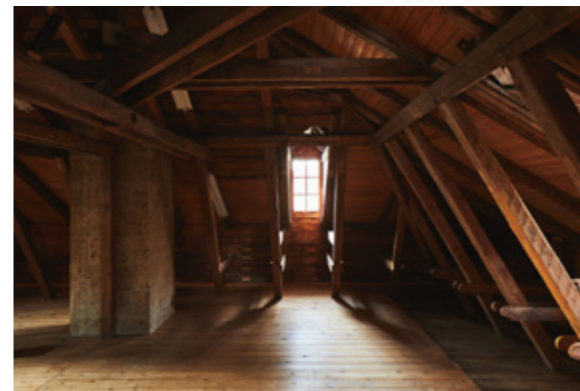
A Western-style villa built by Shuzo Aoki (viscount) on the Aoki Farm in 1888. Having served as ambassador to Germany and being married to Elisabeth, the daughter of a German aristocrat, Shuzo was known as an authority on Germany. Designed by Tsumunaga Matsugasaki, who studied architecture at the Technical University of Berlin, the villa incorporates German architectural techniques such as wooden framework for the attic on the third floor of the central building.



▲ Elevation drawing of the Aoki villa before relocation.



▲ A second-floor bedroom with an elegant ambience.



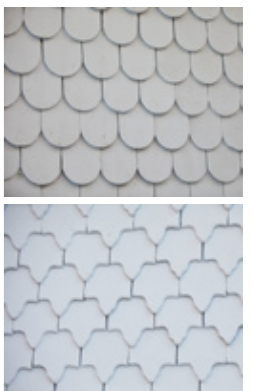
▲ An attic featuring German-style architecture



▲ A carriage said to have been used at the time



▲ The original entrance is still in use today.

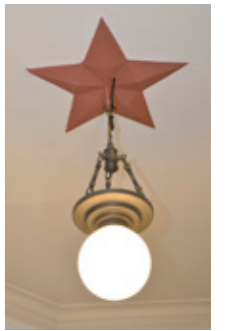


▲ Two different shapes of shingles adorn the exterior walls.

## Duke Oyama's Villa

Solid, red-brick construction

Iwao Oyama (duke and field marshal) built this villa on Oyama Farm in two parts—a Japanese-style villa called the “Japan Building” and the Western-style building. It was initially only the Japanese-style villa, but the solid Western-style building was added around 1905 using red bricks produced on the farm. The villa features an entrance with a gable roof and brick arch on the southern side.

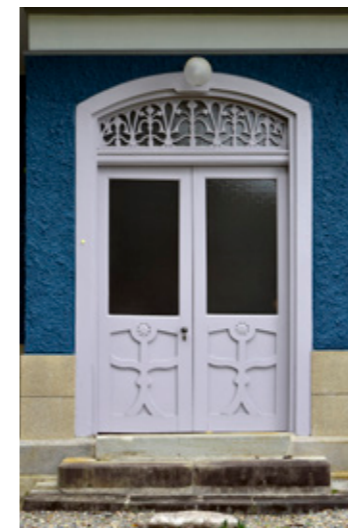


▲ Duke Oyama's Villa currently stands on the farm of Tochigi Prefectural Nasu Takuyo High School. The Western and Japanese buildings are connected by a roofed passageway. The star-shaped relief on the entrance lights was modeled on the army's star symbol.

## General Yamagata Memorial Museum

The YA designs on the building

One of the Western-style buildings from Kokian, a villa in Odawara where Aritomo Yamagata (duke and prime minister) spent his final years. It collapsed in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 after Aritomo's death, but was moved to its current location on Yamagata Farm and rebuilt the following year. The “YA” design (based on Aritomo Yamagata's initials) can be found in various places such as the exterior walls of the sunroom and the doors.



▲ A clean, navy blue Western building. While komainu statues are usually placed in pairs, a solitary komainu stands in the garden. It is said that its counterpart is in the imperial palace.

# Examining the essence of the Meiji era in Duke Matsukata's Villa

Duke Matsukata's Villa stands quietly in a corner of the Senbonmatsu Farm, surrounded by trees. Lingering vestiges of the Meiji era can still be found in the building.

## Duke Matsukata's Villa

An intriguing space where Japanese and Western influences mix

Masayoshi Matsukata (duke and prime minister) built a two-story wooden villa on his Senbonmatsu Farm in 1903. The first story is built with stone (or brick with stone facing) and the second story is a wooden structure with plank siding. Still cared for by the Matsukata family, the stylish building has been preserved with its original appearance intact. The building's interior is not open to the public, but we have special permission to show it here.



▲ **Living room:** while the walls are the same color as those in the kitchen, the relaxing colors of the furnishings give the room a warm feel.



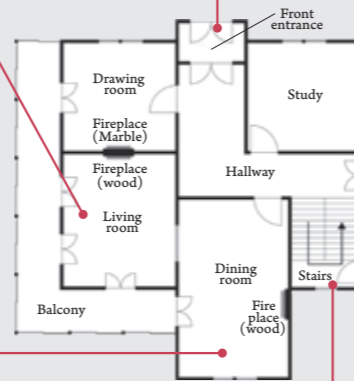
▲ **Front entrance:** the entry porch extends outward, covered by a tiled roof.



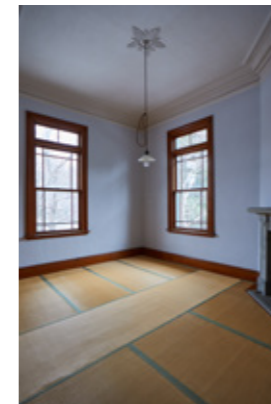
▲ **Dining room:** red carpeting, orange lighting, and blue-gray walls combine for a stately ambience and lively colors.

### 1F

Upon entering the front door, a drawing room and living room are on the right side of the hallway and a study is on the left. The dining room lies straight ahead. All are Western-style rooms with eye-catching and precious décor, including reliefs on the ceiling, lighting, window designs, and furnishings.



▲ A historical Japanese-style room where Emperor Taisho and Emperor Showa stayed before assuming the throne.



◀ A room enjoyed by Edwin Reischauer, the American ambassador to Japan. It features tatami mats and a fireplace.

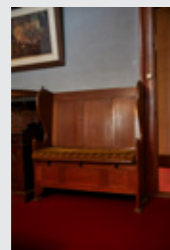
◀ **Ceiling light relief:** a delicate relief reminiscent of a snowflake. The designs vary slightly from room to room.



▲ **Attic:** it uses a traditional Japanese roof framing technique called wagoya.

### The original furnishings still retain their beauty

Many of the original furnishings still remain in Duke Matsukata's Villa. Much of the furniture's beautiful color and luster has deepened over the years, and all feature designs and forms that can rarely be seen today.



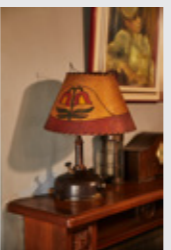
▲ A wooden bench placed along the wall in the dining room. It features a compact and appealing design.



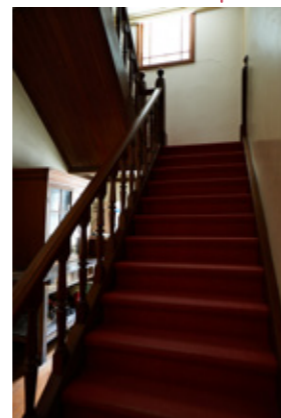
▲ A coat rack in the entryway. It performs multiple functions with its mirror and umbrella rack.



▲ An armchair in the living room. Its quiet texture blends well with the other furnishings.



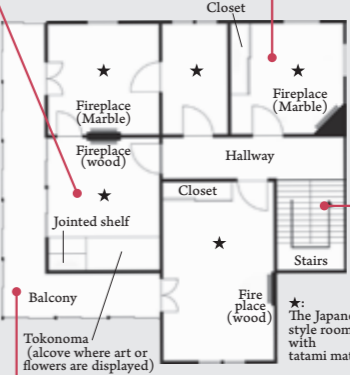
▲ An oil lamp on the living room mantle. Oil is added to the bottom of the lamp.



▲ The stairs to the second floor.

### 2F

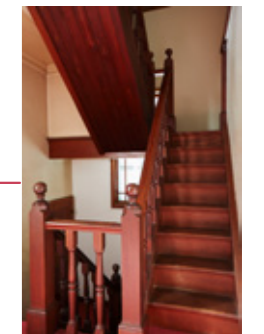
The second floor features décor that mixes Japanese and Western elements. The Japanese-style rooms with tatami mats have high ceilings and fireplaces of marble or wood that vary in design for each room. The sunroom-like glass-enclosed balcony still remains in its original condition.



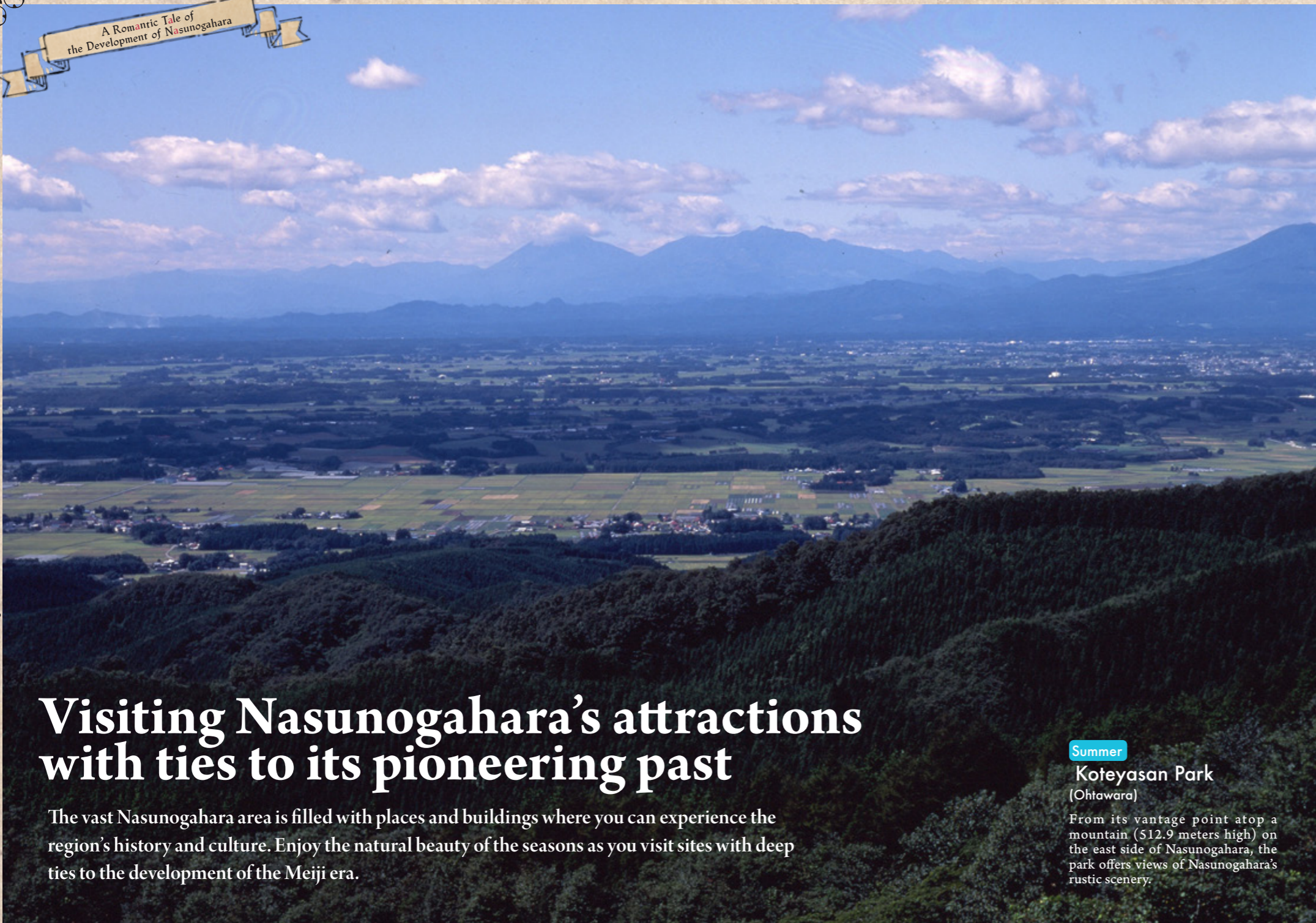
▲ **Fireplace:** features decorative tile that portrays farm scenes of cows and sheep.



▲ **Balcony:** a long, sun-filled balcony enclosed in glass.



▲ The stairs to the attic.



# Visiting Nasunogahara's attractions with ties to its pioneering past

The vast Nasunogahara area is filled with places and buildings where you can experience the region's history and culture. Enjoy the natural beauty of the seasons as you visit sites with deep ties to the development of the Meiji era.

## The seasons of Nasunogahara

Spring

### Karasugamori Hill (Nasushiobara)

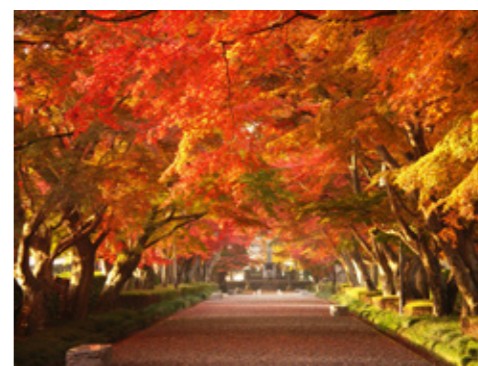
Well-known since the Meiji era as a place to enjoy the cherry blossoms. The groundbreaking ceremony for the Nasu irrigation canals was held here in 1885.



Summer

### Koteyasan Park (Ohtawara)

From its vantage point atop a mountain (512.9 meters high) on the east side of Nasunogahara, the park offers views of Nasunogahara's rustic scenery.



Fall

### Oyama Street (Nasushiobara)

The path leading to the tomb of Iwao Oyama, founder of Oyama Farm. The maple trees that line the way put on a magnificent display of color in the fall, bringing many to enjoy the autumn leaves.

Winter

### Saigo Shrine (Ohtawara)

A shrine for Judo Saigo (marquis and marshal-admiral), younger brother of Takamori Saigo and owner of the Saigo Farm. The stone building adorned with sculptures is rare for a Japanese shrine.



## Getting to know Nasunogahara

### Nasunogahara Museum (Nasushiobara)



A museum with a wide-ranging collection showing Nasunogahara's development, nature, and culture. It stands on the site of the farm office building built by Michitsune Mishima (viscount and superintendent general of the metropolitan police).

### Yaita Takeshi Memorial Museum (Yaita)

The former residence of Takeshi Yaita, who had close ties to Aritomo Yamagata and other elder statesmen of the time and built the foundation for the modernization of the city of Yaita. The museum also displays materials related to the reclamation of Nasunogahara.



### The Museum of History and Culture of Ohtawara City (Ohtawara)



A museum of the region's culture of everyday life with a focus on folklore materials. Its collection includes materials related to agricultural development such as diagrams of the Kasamatsu Farm office, and reproductions are on display.

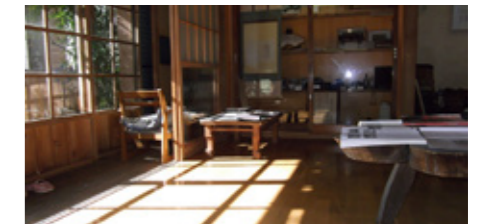
### Nasu History Museum (Nasu)

A museum showing an overview and highlights of the history of the town of Nasu, dating back to the Paleolithic era. In addition to permanent exhibits, it puts on rotating exhibits and special exhibits to display historical materials and art with ties to the town.



### The Old Office of Yamada Farm (Yamada Museum) (Nasu)

A museum on the site of the office building for the farm built by Akiyoshi Yamada (count and minister of justice), one of the leaders of the Meiji Restoration. It displays materials related to Yamada Farm and the Yamada family.



Kokosil Japan Heritage  
The Future Envisioned  
by Meiji Aristocrats



# Nasunogahara Japan Heritage cultural assets map

Nasunogahara has 31 cultural assets related to its agricultural development and the kazoku, such as villas of historical figures, many farms, and museums showing the region's past. Each is a valuable asset to Nasunogahara.



- 1 Viscount Aoki's Country Villa in Nasu ▶ p.9
- 2 Duke Oyama's Villa ▶ p.10
- 3 Duke Matsukata's Villa ▶ p.11
- 4 General Yamagata Memorial Museum ▶ p.11

5 Old Imperial Villa in Shiobara  
The predecessor of the villa built by Michitsune Mishima. In 1903, it was presented to the Imperial Household. The Imperial Villa was built.



- Municipal boundary
- River
- National highway
- Expressway
- Shinkansen line
- JR line

## 6 The Nasuno Mansion of Maresuke Nogi

A farmhouse-style villa designed by Maresuke Nogi (count and general) in 1892.



## 7 The Mansion of Takeshi Yaita (Takeshi Yaita Memorial Museum) ▶ p.13

## 8 The Old Office of Yamada Farm (Yamada Museum) ▶ p.14

## 9 10 The Old Office of Mishima Farm (Nasunogahara Museum) ▶ p.13

## 11 Yamagata Farm

Site of the farm developed by Aritomo Yamagata (duke and prime minister) in 1884.



## 12 Saigo Shrine ▶ p.14

## 13 Oyama Street ▶ p.14

## 14 Karasugamori Hill ▶ p.14

## 15 Grave of Tosuke Hirata

Gravestone of Tosuke Hirata (count and home minister) who operated Kasamatsu Farm after taking it over from Yajiro Shinagawa (viscount and privy counselor).



## 16 Koteyasan Park ▶ p.13

## 17 Nasunogahara Park

A large-scale prefectural park that includes the lands of the former Senbonmatsu and Mishima farms and still has some old-growth forests dating back to that time.



## 18 Sabi River ▶ p.2

## 19 Old Water Pump of Nasu Irrigation Canals ▶ p.3

## 20 Nasu Base Line (Viewpoint)

The northern and southern ends of a surveying base line established in 1878.



## 21 Roofing tiles of the old Kurodahara Station (Nasu Historical Museum) ▶ p.14

The aging station building was dismantled, and its roofing tiles are on display at the Nasu Historical Museum.



## 22 Monument (as a token of gratitude)

A monument expressing gratitude to Akiyoshi Yamada and the Yamada family.



## 23 Reclamation monument

Describes the hardships of former soldiers and people who returned from Manchuria who settled in Nasunogahara after the Second World War and worked to develop the land.



## 24 Monument (Spirit of the Pioneer)

A monument bearing the history of the post-war reclamation of Kanemaru-hara and the names of the first generation of settlers.



## 25 The Museum of History and Culture of Ohtawara City ▶ p.14

## 26 Grazing Farm of Oya in Ohtawara city ▶ p.6

## 27 Nasu Communal Farm ▶ p.6

## 28 Minamigaoka Farm ▶ p.6

## 29 Senbonmatsu Farm ▶ p.6

## 30 Nasu Wine

Watanabe Vineyard is one of Japan's oldest wineries, dating back to the Meiji era. It makes its wines using its own grapes.



## 31 Yaita Apples

It is said that apple growing began in Yaita in 1914 when Aritomo Yamagata invited experts from Aomori to plant seedlings.

