

JAPAN

Naomi Okawa

Four Houses

The Nakamura family residence

The Nakamura family residence stands on a narrow flatland in Miasa Village, Nagano prefecture, a mountain village in the central part of Japan. Built in 1698, the main house is the oldest existing folk house in the prefecture with a reliable construction date. The storehouse in front of the residence was built in 1780.

The buildings have been well preserved and are valuable artefacts of the past, from which we can experience traditional residential styles of a farming community in the northern region of Nagano Prefecture. The properties came into the hands of the municipality in 1995 and were restored for use as a historical museum in 1997. They were designated by the national government as important cultural properties in 1997.

The history of the Nakamura family can be found in the records owned by the family. The document ends with the following description:

"In 1614, Nakamura Shikibu came to this village from a region nearby Kyoto, and was renamed Nakamura Hikozaemon. He opened up fields for farming, and lived as a farmer and passed away in 1673."

The second family head, Shouzaemon, became an active member of the village as an assistant to the *shoya*, or the village headman. On 15 March 1698 he started constructing his residence on the site where the house stands now.

The structure of the main house represents a style of farmhouses common not only in the northern region of the prefecture but also in the north-eastern part of Japan. It has a large hipped roof covered with thatch. The roof is supported by *gassho*, or principal rafters, and posts under the ridgepole. In addition to the framework which employs the common wooden post-beam system, there are a few thick lintels, which are more frequently found in the later houses. Both in the interior and the exterior walls are filled with wattle and daub.

Inside the house, there is a large earthen floor, which was used for various farming chores, such as threshing, as well as for housing horses and cows. The spacious room with a wooden floor, beside the earthen floor, was used as a living room. Equipped with a sunken hearth and house shrines of Shinto and Buddhism, this was the centre of the household. The small room to the back of the living room was used for sleeping.

The two rooms floored with *tatami* mats were guest rooms. The northern room with an alcove for displaying pictures and decorative items was used for receiving important guests such as local governors. The guest rooms face a small Japanese-style garden. A gate building, including bathing facilities for guests, can be found at the entrance of the garden.

The roof of the storehouse is unique in that the thatched roof is supported by eave posts, not by the structure of the roof itself. The exterior walls daubed with thick mud are an effective fire protection.

Tamaya, a post town inn

Tamaya is located in the town of Seki, a former post town along the old Tokaido highway. A system of highways called *kaido* was established by the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1601. Connecting Kyoto and Edo (present Tokyo), the Tokaido was the most important highway. Post towns arranged along these highways provided conveniences such as accommodation for travellers, transportation, and postal service.

Of the 53 post towns on the Tokaido, Seki in Mie Prefecture was one of the largest, located at the foot of the Suzuka Pass, the most perilous pass on the highway. In 1843, the number of residential structures in Seki was 632, and the rows of houses lined on both sides of the highway extended for about 1.8 kilometres.

Tamaya is the name of an old inn in the centre of Seki. Its existence can be traced back to the year 1800. The main house of Tamaya which remains to this day was built in 1739. The introduction of railroads from the late 19th century to the early 20th century brought about the decline of post towns, and the function of Tamaya as an inn ended in the 1920s.

The restoration of historic buildings in Seki was begun after the designation of the old town of Seki by the national government as a preservation district in 1984. Tamaya's buildings came into the hands of the municipality in 1993, and restoration for use as a historical museum was conducted from 1994 to 1996.

The layout of the rooms as found in Tamaya's main house was commonly used for the old merchant houses in Japan. The space facing the street included on one side a room for displaying goods or receiving guests. An earthen floor on the other side served as the entrance and a corridor. The rear space housed other facilities. In the case of an inn, there were guest rooms, bathing facilities, a kitchen, and rooms for other purposes.

The interior of Tamaya's main house is made of high-quality woods and is very refined. This reflects the time of construction of the structure, at the end of the Edo period, when the Tokaido highway flourished most. In post towns of this time, two-storied inns like Tamaya, with large guest rooms on the second floor, began to appear, and the number of tile-roofed houses also increased, replacing those roofed with wood shingles or thatch.

The front view would be the most notable feature of this house. The outside wall of the second storey was first daubed with mud and then delicately plastered. A decoration in the shape of a *Tama*, or a jewellery ball, in the centre of the façade, symbolises the name of the inn, Tamaya. The front doors on the left side of the façade of the first floor are *Ageto*, or sliding doors, which move up and down.

The Tajima House

The Tajima House is located in the former retainers' quarters in Sakura City, Chiba Prefecture. The city was founded as a castle town in 1610 by Doi Toshikatsu, a *daimyo* or a feudal lord, who served the Tokugawa Shogunate.



The Baba Family Residence

The old town of Sakura, built on hills ranging from east to west, still preserves distinctive characteristics of a castle town in Japan, though few old buildings survive. The castle and the residence of the *daimyo* were located at the western end of the hills, overlooking a river. The areas near the castle were occupied by lots for houses of upper or middle class retainers, who were called *samurai*. A street which runs along the hilltops, was lined on both sides with homes of merchants and craftsmen.

A *daimyo* was transferred from one castle town to another under the orders of the shogun. Similarly, a *samurai* also moved from one house to another more suitable one for his new rank or duty. Accordingly, the houses of the *samurai* were not privately owned, but allotted to each *samurai* family by the *daimyo*.

The main building of the Tajima house is believed to have been built between 1821 and 1837, based on a study of historical city maps. After two *samurai* families occupied this house in turn, it was purchased by the Tajima family in 1875.

View of the interior



The lot of the house has a small gate along the street. From the gate, a pass leads through the front garden to the formal entrance called *genkan*. Gates and *genkans* were allowed only to houses of *samurai*, not to those of lower-class retainers. A guest room with alcoves for displaying pictures, armors, and decorative items and a study for the family head are located in the western part of the house, close to the formal entrance. The eastern part houses a living room, a dining room, a kitchen, a storeroom, a side entrance, a bathroom and toilets.

Because *samurai* families were banned by decree from a luxurious life, the appearance of the house is plain. The hipped roof with a T-shaped ridge is covered with thatch. The structure employs the common wooden post-beam system, which is still used in Japan. Both the interior and the exterior walls are filled with wattle and daub. The interiors follow the *shoin-zukuri* style, though they are much simpler than those used for the residence of the *daimyo*. However, the atmosphere of the house is very pleasant. One can enjoy a fine view of the garden from each room. Such attractive features of a *samurai's* house have survived in modern Japanese houses.

In 1990, the house came into the hands of the municipality and was restored for use as a historical museum and a meeting house for the neighbourhood. The dining room and the rooms to the south of it were reconstructed based on an old floor plan.

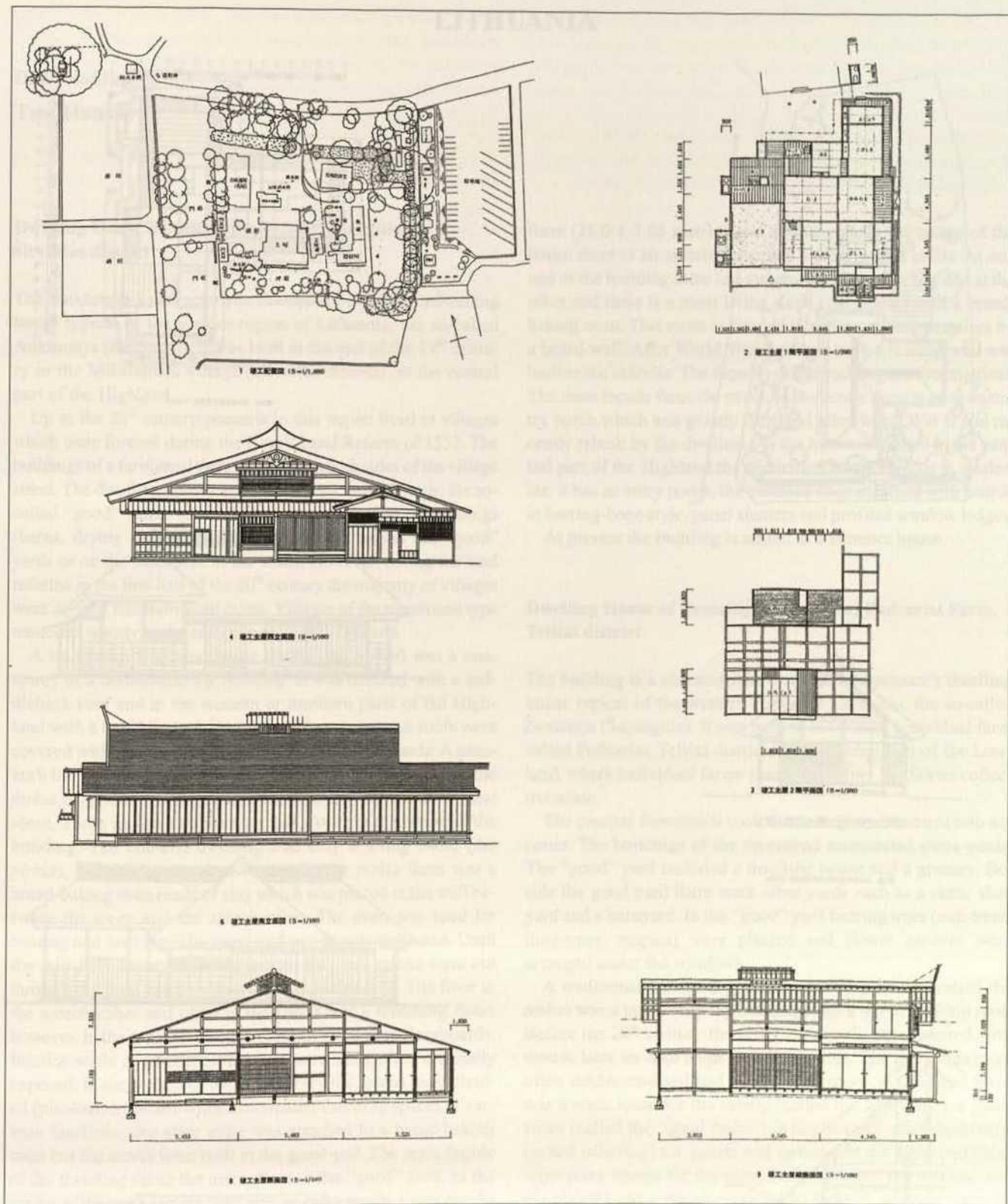
The Baba Family Residence

The grandiose premises of the Baba family residence cover an area of 10.400 square metres, including 10 buildings, a garden, a graveyard, and groves. Long walls and banks surround the entire property. They are located on a terrace in the eastern part of the Matsumoto Basin, in Nagano Prefecture, with the main entrance facing the lower-lying area.

A family tradition says that the family settled down at this site in the late 16th century and opened up fields for farming nearby. Inscriptions on an old gravestone show that the first family head, Baba Sukemasa, died in 1581 and his wife in 1585. Another tradition says they were the relatives of Baba Nobuharu, who commanded warriors in Matsumoto Castle, which was besieged and captured in 1582.

During the Edo period, the family kept a high social status, though they lived as farmers. The family was allowed to construct magnificent gate buildings, because it sometimes received the *daimyo* or the feudal lord, of this region. All the buildings on the premises were built after a fire in the mid-19th century. According to an inscription the main house was built in 1851. Reconstruction work came to an end in around 1890. A detailed plan of the premises dated 25 May 1895 shows the state of the site at that time. Of the 13 buildings seen on the plan, three buildings – a storehouse, a watermill, and a shed – are no longer extant.

A typical characteristic of the farmhouses in this region can be seen in the appearance of the main house. It has a gabled roof covered with wood shingles, with the gable ends facing the front and the back of the house. This style, called *Honmune-zukuri*, is one of the most distinctive styles of traditional farmhouses in Japan. Inside the main house there is a large living room in the centre. The guest rooms are located at the front, equipped with formal entrance, a bathroom, and toilets for the guests. At the rear, there are private rooms for the family head, a storeroom, and a kitchen. A narrow Japanese-style garden is laid out along



Drawings of the Baba Family Residence

the south side of the main house. A small house for tea-ceremonies stands at the eastern end of the garden.

Taken as a whole, this residence represents the typical lifestyle of upper-class farmers in the Edo period. The main

part of the premises was donated to the municipality in 1992 and is now used as a historical museum. It was designated by the national government as an important cultural property in 1997.

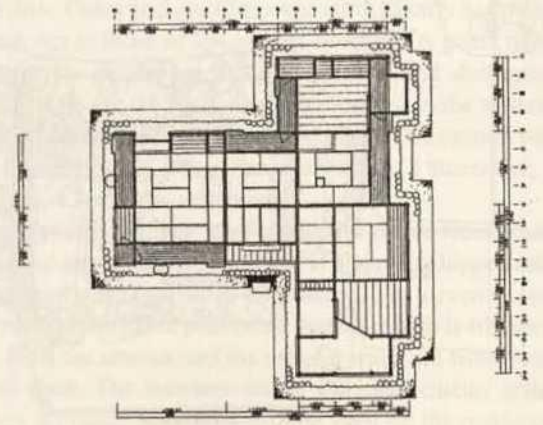
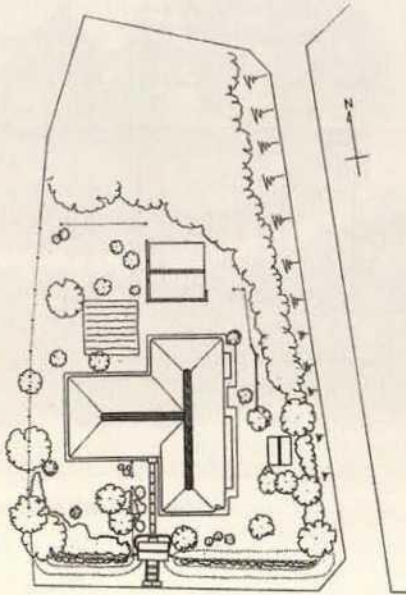


FIG. 104 (1/100)

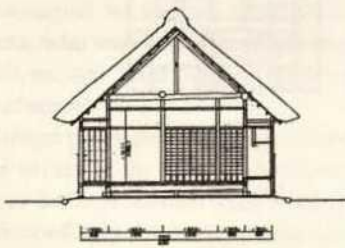


FIG. 105 (1/100)

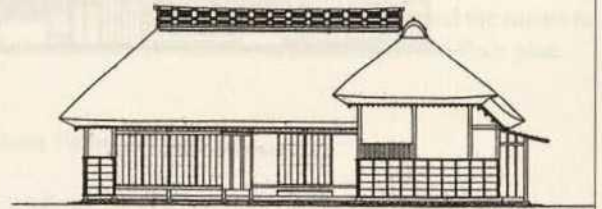


FIG. 106 (1/100)

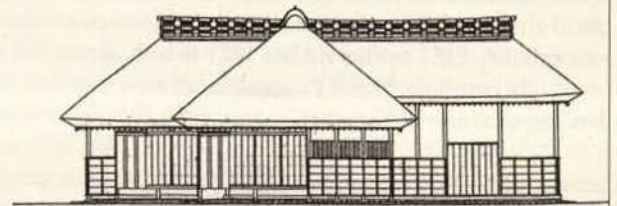


FIG. 107 (1/100)

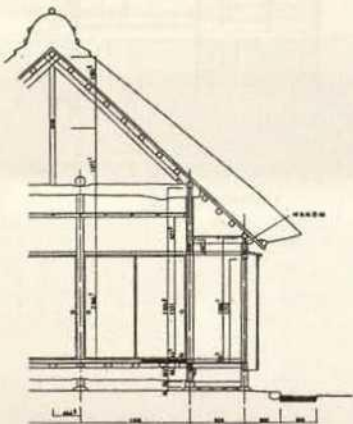


FIG. 108 (1/100)

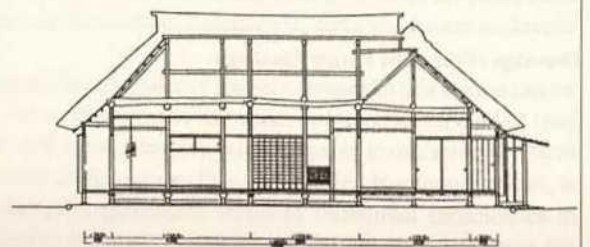


FIG. 109 (1/100)

Drawings of the Tajima House