

# Fukushima Dreams - a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — January 2018

Thanks for picking up this “Fukushima Dreams - a quarterly publication of Fukushima City.”

Through this issue, we hope that you will learn more about, and be moved by the various charms that Fukushima city has to offer.

Fukushima is a city of around 290,000 people, surrounded by the beauty of nature. Due to its location, the city has a characteristic basin climate, and is famous as a fruit-producing area, producing many varieties throughout the seasons, including cherries, peaches, Asian pears, grapes, and apples.

We hope that through this edition, you'll come to appreciate even a little what Fukushima City has to offer.



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① Special Feature - The Thatched Roofs of Fukushima - they will touch your heart

② The history of a town as told by its age-old homes

Why is it that we feel solace when we gaze upon a stately thatched roof? Is it a sense of nostalgia for the distant past? These thatched roofs, inviting those of us living today to experience a time gone by, are special buildings that tell the story of Fukushima's history throughout the Meiji, Taisho, and even Edo periods. At the same time, changes in people's lifestyles and the maintenance required have resulted in a dramatic decline in thatched roofs. Amidst these circumstances, in February 2017 the Fukushima City Kayabuki (thatching) Culture Preservation Society was launched to teach volunteers who participate in a How to Thatch Roofs Workshop (held by the municipal board of education) so that they may help the effort to preserve as many thatched roofs as possible. In this issue, we introduce thatched roofs around the city from the Edo Period through Heisei whose charms will touch your heart.



③ Nationally registered tangible cultural property

Sato-ke jutaku(Sato family residence)

Built 140 years ago, its unique weight and breadth give it its charm

If you are looking for a thatched roof so beautiful it will take your breath away, look no further than the Sato Family residence. The 10th generation owner built this wooden home to commemorate the birth of his son in a style common to the silk farmers of the time. However, its enormous size is overwhelming. The building, perfectly suited to its sprawling front lawn has maintained a unique dignity and breadth as it still stands proudly after 140 years.

The 13th generation owner, Toshio Sato and his wife, began living here in 1973. The many layers of thatching carry rainwater all the way to the eaves so none leaks into the house. It absorbs noise as well making it very quiet, and it is well ventilated making it cool in summer, however winters are cold so the couple currently lives in an annex on the premises and now uses the building for guests. Maintaining a thatched roof is extremely costly, but Mr. Sato has undertaken major repairs three times thus far. The smoke from the hearth lengthens the life of the thatching so in winter a fire is lit almost daily. In addition, the home is occasionally featured on tours. Elderly people recall the past when they see the thatched roof and feel reenergized, which Mr. Sato claims helps him envision its use in the future. He says, “Thatched roofs have the power to energize people. I’m working on making this a place where the elders in the neighborhood can gather and relax.” What a wonderful plan. We are looking forward to watching it develop further.

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① Daifukuji Temple Kannon-do Hall

Daifukuji Temple Kannon-do Hall, located on the west side of Fukushima City along the Fruit Line, is an ancient temple praying for the peace of the local people since the Edo period.

② Daifukuji Temple Kannon-do Hall, the 9th temple of the Shintatsu 33 Kannon, familiarly known as Koi-gaeri Kannon, is said to have been built in the mid-Edo period. Kannon-do halls are typically independently standing buildings. However this temple's worship hall, offertory hall, and sanctuary construction are reminiscent of the amalgamated Buddhism and Shinto structures of yore. It seems that even within the prefecture, the rare shape of the thatched roof with gables positioned on three sides (the front and sides of the Raido hall) can only be found here. The snow that gathers on the roof falls to the left or right of the façade's Karahafu gable, which also serves to protect the visitors. The chief priest, Yuko Kumasaka, hopes to maintain the roof for many years to come, however he also worries about the future as the craftsman who was charged with its maintenance passed away the year before last. “The community has long entrusted its prayers for bountiful harvests, protection from fire, and blissful marriages here and I want to maintain that for as long as possible,” says Kumasaka. We hope he finds the help he needs.

③ Choshuin Natural Garden

Gazebo Choshotei

A Japanese-style gazebo with a brand-new pyramid-shaped thatched roof

One of the efforts undertaken by the members of the Fukushima City Tazawa Regional Revitalization Promotion Council was the completion of this azumaya, or Japanese-style gazebo in the region's central area. With the desire to give the azumaya, the symbol of the natural garden, a traditional thatched roof, the people of Tazawa came together as one to complete the project from the harvesting of the thatching, reviving the spirit of “being tied together” and mutual cooperation in the community which was once a part of everyday life in farming villages. “It took four years from start to finish. We had a lot of trouble harvesting the thatching and then thatching the roof. I hope the spirit of this connection we've made in the roots of our community can be passed onto the next generation,” said Shoei Tanji, council chairman. The number of people coming out to enjoy the flowers has increased since the completion of the azumaya. Why don't you try taking a break under the thatched roof surrounded by the flora of the season?



④Preserving historical buildings through citizens' efforts

⑤Fukushima City Kayabuki (thatching) Culture Preservation Society  
Chairman Tsukasa Watanabe

⑥I will never forget the time I heard a child say, "It's cute. It looks like a hedgehog" upon seeing the thatched roof at the Fukushima Minkaen. Old buildings have a way of returning a kind of purity to people's hearts. In order to preserve them certain skills are required so last year I launched the society. There is a special way to harvest the thatching and tie it that I find fascinating. I hope we can deepen our learning within the society and grow into an organization that can help with repairing and maintaining the thatched roofs in the city.

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①I have dedicated my life to preserving tradition, even as times change.

②Known as lucky charms, dharma dolls, or daruma, have a certain delightfulness the smaller they are. Fukushima dharma dolls are lucky charms that drive off evil trying to enter a home with their brilliant red coloring and eyes open wide. Ms. Hiroko Watanabe was born and raised in Kamikawasaki in Nihonmatsu city, which is known for its handmade washi paper, and moved to Fukushima City when she married. Since then, she has worked as an artisan making Fukushima dharma dolls as a side job in the farming off-season. We visited her at home and asked about the history and charm of the dharma dolls, as well as her artisan lifestyle.

③Tracing the transition of the Fukushima Daruma from the end of the Edo period into Taisho and Showa.

In the past, daruma bearing the names of the regions where they were made, such as "Iizaka Daruma" or "Senoue Daruma," were sold at year-end markets in and around the city. However, year-by-year the numbers decreased leaving only the Watanabe family's "Yanome Daruma" and the Murata family's "Mariko Daruma." The Watanabe family began making their dharma dolls in 1845. "The generations before carved the molds out of wood. If you line up the wooden dharma molds from the Edo period through the Showa period you can see how they have changed little by little over the years," explains Ms. Watanabe. When she shows me, I can see the Edo period wooden mold is a slender sitting in Zen meditation form with a fierce expression like that of the Bodhidharma. As time progresses into the Taisho and Showa era the body gets gradually rounder and the expression loses some of its ferocity. Ms. Watanabe continues, "Now, portly and happy-looking shapes are preferred so we no longer use the wooden forms from the Edo period. But we do have customers who prefer more slender dharma dolls so I use both Taisho and Showa wooden molds."



The end of the year is extremely busy as one might expect when one person makes 500 dolls all at once

Ms. Watanabe's dharma doll making starts at the beginning of December. ①Washi paper is glued together and affixed to the wooden mold. ②It is dried in the sun. ③The wooden mold is removed and the seam is closed with Nikawa(glue). ④The foundation of Gofun(white powder) is applied. ⑤ The image is painted on, which Ms. Watanabe currently does all by herself. She makes 400 - 500 all at once in time for the end-of-year markets so the end of the year is an extremely busy time. "The eyes are the most difficult part of the process, but mixing the pigment is also difficult," Ms. Watanabe explains. "How much red pigment do I add to the pot of glue? I have to try and recall what my husband and his father did when they prepared the pigment." There are materials that are becoming harder to find as the years pass, such as glue and dyes, however Ms. Watanabe remains faithful in replicating the method of production passed down for generations. "Recently, there are a lot of cute dharma doll goods available. But the Yanome Daruma is as the Yanome Daruma has always been, and I plan on continuing to make in the same unchanging style." Ms. Watanabe has chosen a life of preserving tradition. Each one of the hand-drawn dharma dolls Ms. Watanabe creates is as dignified as the fierce winter and as refreshing as the winter's blue skies.

④Features of the Yanome Daruma

A lucky charm that drives off evil spirits and welcomes prosperity. The body is red, a color said to ward off evil, and the face has the features of a crane and turtle along with pine, bamboo, and plum, all of which are auspicious omens in Japan. The greatest distinction is its eyes, which are drawn in from the start, as they serve to stare down and dispel evil and bring luck. It shares many features with the Miharu Daruma, such as the slightly elongated body and flat head. In 1997, the Watanabe family and the Murata family became designated Fukushima Prefecture traditional crafts, "Fukushima Daruma".

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①Shinobu Sanzan Akatsuki Mairi(Mt. Shinobu Dawn procession)

Japan's largest waraji (straw sandal), measuring 12 m in length and weighing 2 tons, is carried throughout the city and offered at Haguro-jinja Shrine on Mt. Shinobu. The children at the seven local elementary schools along the procession route also carry 2.5 m long child-size waraji participating in the Shinobu Sanzan Akatsuki Mairi. This traditional Fukushima event thrills the crowd with the giant waraji and the exuberant calls from those carrying it.

②Winter illuminations in Fukushima

③Shiki no Sato Illuminations 2018

④On the cover

Fukushima dharma dolls warding off evil with their fierce expressions.

These Fukushima dharma dolls are distinguished by their eyes, which come already filled in as they are lucky charms bringing good fortune by dispelling evil with their stares. Each one is hand painted by an artisan.

