

Yokohama Historic Monuments in Naka Ward: A Guide Map

Special Edition on the Influx of Western Sports

Following the opening of Yokohama's port in 1859, Naka Ward saw an influx of Western sports culture as well. We invite you to visit historic sites associated with this influx.

● Birthplace of Rugby in Japan

The first rugby club in Japan and Asia as a whole was founded in 1866. British troops stationed in Yokohama established the Yokohama Football Club in Yamashita-cho. Although the sport of football in those days had not yet split into rugby and modern football (soccer), it can be seen from contemporary illustrations and accounts that the matches were close to today's rugby.

In 1901, Yokohama Park was the site of a rugby match between Keio University and the Yokohama Cricket & Athletic Club (YC&AC). The Keio University students had been instructed in rugby by the English teacher E.B. Clarke and Ginnosuke Tanaka, both of whom had studied in Great Britain. This is thought to be the first time that a Japanese team took part in a rugby match.



◀ The picture is the same as the one above. An illustration of a match played in Yokohama, from the April 18, 1874 edition of The Graphic (Yokohama Archives of History).



Map
Birthplace of
Rugby in Japan

● Yokohama Park cricket ground

The construction of Higa Park was completed in 1876 on the site of the former Miyozaki pleasure quarter, which was lost in the conflagration of 1866. The name, meaning "them" (hi, meaning foreigners) and "us" (ga, meaning Japanese residents), indicates that the park was open for use by both Japanese and foreign residents. The cricket ground built in the center of the park was planted with turf that had been brought from Great Britain. The ground was the first grassy athletic field in Japan, and was the origin of today's Yokohama Stadium.

The first international competitions were held on this ground for various sports, including baseball (1896), rugby (1901), football (1904), and field hockey (1907).



Map
Yokohama Park



▲ Yokohama Park and the cricket ground around 1880 (Yokohama Archives of History)

The marvelous strength displayed by sumo wrestlers to Commodore Perry's delegation

In 1854, during the negotiations for conclusion of the Treaty of Kanagawa, sumo wrestlers from the capital of Edo were recruited to haul 200 straw bags of rice to the Americans and give them a display of sumo wrestling.

The wrestler Shiramayumi Hidaemon in particular greatly surprised the Americans by making the most of his huge size and incredible strength to carry eight bags, each holding up to five to (1 to = about 15 kilograms) of rice, at once.

When some of the American sailors asked to try their hand at sumo wrestling, they fought a match with Koyanagi Tsuneyoshi. Koyanagi took on three of the sailors at the same time and stunned the crowd by overwhelming them.



▲ Commodore Perry's delegation watching a sumo match from Perry's Narrative of the Expedition an American Squadron to China Sea and Japan (Yokohama Archives of History)

● Start of modern horse racing in Japan

The first Western-style horse race in Japan was held in 1860 at an informal horseshoe-shaped track whose construction was completed by foreign residents in Honmura (the present-day Motomachi shopping district).

The first genuine Western-style horse race was held two years later. The foreign residents built a provisional ring-shaped track in Yokohama's Nitta district (the present-day Chinatown area), prepared an official program, and held the race. This track was closed in the following year, and a move was made to a section of the training ground for British troops in the Yamate settlement (the present-day Suwa-cho area). Japanese military officers first took part in a fully-fledged horse race at this track in 1865.

The year 1866 saw the shogunate complete the Negishi Horse Racing Track, Japan's first full-scale horse race track (located in what is now the Negishidai-Minosawa district). Construction of the grandstand, which still stands on the site, began in 1929 based on a design by J.H. Morgan, and was completed in 1930.



◀ The Negishi Horse Racing Track in the early Meiji era from the November 16, 1870 edition of Far East (Yokohama Archives of History)



Map

First-class grandstand of the former Negishi Horse Racing Track

● Yamato-cho Dori, once called a teppojo ("gun place")

In response to a request made by the British minister, a shooting range was constructed in the Tateno section (present-day Yamato-cho Dori) of Negishi Village in 1865. The British side, which borrowed this land at no charge, did not restrict its use to its own soldiers; it opened up the range to settlement residents from other countries and even to Japanese nationals. In the same year, the Swiss Rifle Club (SST) founded by a Swiss resident of the Yokohama settlement held Japan's first rifle shooting competition. The contest was won by Tsuneyoshi Murata, who went on to score victories in various subsequent competitions.

Until the Negishi Horse Racing Track was opened, the British military also used this land for horse racing as well as a shooting range. It is known that ice skating and track and field events were also held in this area.



◀ The Swiss rifle shooting competition from the June 1, 1871 edition of Far East (Yokohama Archives of History)



Map

Yamato-cho Dori

● Birthplace of tennis in Japan

Lawn tennis was invented in Great Britain in 1874. Two years later, the Ladies Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (LLTCC), Japan's first lawn tennis club, was founded by female residents of the foreign settlement.

In 1878, this club leased land measuring 6,718 tsubo (1 tsubo = about 3.3 square meters) in the precincts of Myokoji Temple from the Kanagawa prefectural government and built five tennis courts within Yamate Park at its own expense. This was the birthplace of modern tennis in Japan.



◀ Tennis courts in Yamate Park in the 1890s (from the Yokohama Archives of History)



Map

Birthplace of tennis in Japan