

Kurume History Walks

No.4 Natural Monuments* 1 久留米市の天然記念物 1

* "Monument" is a collective term to refer to cultural properties, designated by the government, of a high historic (site of castle towns, forts, old houses), scientific (animals, plants, minerals), aesthetic (bridges, mountains, gardens) value.

The city of Kurume aims that the citizen can live in rich humanity in the environment with the pure water and the fresh greenery. It is nationally well-known as the production area of the garden plants, including Kurume azalea that is a flower of the city.

This number introduces the old trees designated Natural Monuments.

1. Ginkgo tree of Hakozaiki-Hachiman-gu Shrine

(Prefectural Natural Monument designated on August 28th, 1986)

The Hakozaiki-Hachiman-gu is located at the eastern edge of the Ninagawa community along the Chikugo River, the longest on Kyushu. The Kusano family had power over the Yamamoto District since the Kamakura period (1185 -1333). It should be them who had established the shrine. The enshrined Deity is the Emperor Ojin (his tenure: 270-310).

The trees such as ginkgo, zelkova Serrata, camphor laurel grow in the precinct which is a part of a City Forest. Among these trees, the Ginkgo, designated a Natural Monument of Fukuoka Prefecture, is large and with a height of 25 meters and 13 meters at the base.

The Ginkgo is a dioecious species that has distinct male and female individual organisms. It is native to China, and it may have been brought to Japan between about the 9th century to the early 14th century.

This tree is a male plant that does not bear fruit. In autumn, the leaves beautifully turn yellow.



2. Wax Trees Avenue at Yanakizaka-Sone

(Prefectural Natural Monument designated on May 7th, 1964)

Since the late eighteenth century, the wax trees (*haze*) were widely cultivated in Western Japan, and its berries became their regional specialty product. Also, in the Kurume Domain, in 1730 a headman of Kameo village (an area in the present-day Tanushimaru Town) cultivated the hazes for the first time, and during Horeki period (1751-64) he discovered a species "Matsuyama Haze" and it was widespread in other provinces.

Each domain encouraged new various industries and focused on selling the local products to improve their fragile financial condition.

The Kurume Domain installed a new post of financial and judicial audit (*Ginmiyaku*) of managing the wastelands and planting the *haze* trees. They distributed young plants to each village, and encouraged to cultivate them at vacant, wastelands or natural levees (*sone*). Then, the Domain made people pay one-third of the harvest of all berries. The production of the haze wax become a part of the promotion of industry. The sales as a local product in the Osaka region brought the Kurume Domain great profit.

Until the World War, there were various ways to use the wax: making candles, polishing woven fabrics or wooden products, and lubricating machinery. Recently, that application has become more varied: stationary (crayon, carbon paper), cosmetics (lipstick, pomade, hair oil for Sumo wrestlers).

At the northern foot of the Mino Mountains, along the natural levees, we can still find many wax trees from the Edo period. At Yanagizaka-Sone, the Wax Trees Avenue runs one kilometer from the north to south. The local supporters are maintaining them. Every autumn, when the leaves turn red, many visitors come from far and near.

In 1994, the avenue has been named one of the "New Japan best 100 roadside tree landscapes".



3. Camphor Trees of Zendoji Temple

(Prefectural Natural Monument designated on October 29th, 1958)

The Zendoji temple was founded in 1208 by Shokou Shonin (great master; also known as Chinzei-Shonin) with the support of the Kusano family, who was the provincial governor (*kokushi*) and government official in charge of policing and military affairs (*oryoshi*).

The temple has several stately buildings. Some are nationally designated Important Cultural Property. In the precinct, remarkably two large camphor trees stand out. It may be Shokou-Shonin who planted it over 800 years ago.

The camphor trees grow in warm areas. In Kyushu, we have a lot of this tall evergreen plant.

Both of the designated trees are over 10 meters of the trunk circumference and approximately 20 meters of the height. Each has a hollow of meters in the trunk, although they abundantly grow with vigor.



4. Tilia miqueliana of Zendoji Temple

(Prefectural Natural Monument designated on May 7th, 1964)

Another designated Nature Monument of the temple is a species of linden that is deciduous, usually becoming 15 meters high, with many branches and heart-shaped leaves of 6-10 cm long. It is native to China and is often planted in the garden of the temples. Its berries are almost spherical and small and could be used to make prayer beads.



5. Fern Palms of Bairin-ji Temple

(Municipal Natural Monument designated on September 21st, 2011)

Number of tree: 2 (A single plant has grown and became two.)

Height: 3.6 meters

Expanse of all trunks: 8.5 meters across

Numbers of trunk: 24 (Trunks that branched from roots.)

Sexes: female

The Kounanzan Baijinri-ji is an ancient Zen temple that had been originally located in the Fukuchiyama Domain of Tanba Province and called Zuigan-ji. In 1621, at the same time as his entry to the Kurume Castle, Arima Toyouji, the first Arima feudal lord, moved it to the present location and renamed Bairin-ji. His family members and descendants were buried at the temple, and today it is also the representative training hall of Kyushu.

The temple has various cultural properties designated even at national level.

In the garden, there are the old Fern Palms, which may be the biggest in the city and are valuable treasures that have followed the historical events.

The inscription on a stone monument standing at the tree's base tells the history: it was originally planted at a certain Watanabe family who had lived near the castle. In 1876, it was moved here by Motomura Shohei, a wholesale merchant of Kurume Kasuri fabric around the late 19th and the early 20th century.

By that, we estimate some facts:

- The tree easily exceeds 300 years old today.
- The reason for the transfer should have some political meanings, because the original owner, the Watanabe family was samurai of the higher class, and it was a rich merchant who transplanted during the revitalization of the temple since 1877 after the end of the feudal period.



▲ Stone monument

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