

The Hiregasaki Sanbonmatsu Kofun Stone Monument

(The Burial Mound Monument of Hiregasaki Village, Shimosa Province)

The area that is now Hiregasaki Park #4 was once a *kofun* – an ancient tomb with an earthen mound. Kofun were actively constructed in the Japanese archipelago from the middle of the 3rd century to the early 7th century. The kofun in Hiregasaki was known as the Hiregasaki Sanbonmatsu Kofun. Built in the middle of the 6th century, it had a keyhole-shaped burial mound and was the largest kofun of its kind in Nagareyama City.

At the peak of the kofun was a stone monument engraved with its title: “The Burial Mound Monument of Hiregasaki Village, Shimosa Province.” This monument was built in 1828, during the late Edo period, by the head of Hiregasaki Village, Mutsu Watanabe.

The monument’s inscription describes why it was built: During the Great Tenmei Famine, which lasted between 1782 and 1788 and claimed more than 900,000 lives across Japan, starving villagers sought to dig up the kofun for valuable items that they could sell for food. Mutsu Watanabe’s grandfather Mitsufusa and his father Tora devoted their own wealth to help those in need, saving many lives and persuading the villagers not to dig up the kofun. Later, Mutsu built the monument to indicate the presence of divine spirits residing within the kofun and express the people’s intent to protect the kofun in accordance with the gods’ will.

The monument’s creation involved the finest craftsmen of the era. The contents of the inscription were written by Chikuzan Narushima, a Confucian scholar of the shogunate, and calligraphed by Beian Ichikawa, who was among the three greatest calligraphers of his time. The monument’s heading was calligraphed by Ankei Togawa, a government official of the shogunate. Finally, the calligraphy was engraved into the monument by master stone monument craftsman Sho Kuboyo.

The Hiregasaki Sanbonmatsu Kofun was unfortunately removed in 2017 as part of town planning and excavation work in the Hiregasaki and Omoi regions, but the stone monument remains, telling future generations about the will of the people of the past to protect their cultural properties.

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