Kanazawa’s history begins in 1546, when a temple town formed around Kanazawa Miko, a branch temple of the Osaka Honganji temple. The ceiling-like structure was finally overridden in 1580 by Sakuma Moritomo, a member of the warring Shibata Katsuto, and a castle was built on the temple site, turning the former temple town into a castle town. Shibata Katsuto clashed with Toyotomi Hideyoshi at Osato in 1583, following Oda Nobunaga’s death. Moritomo, Katsuto’s nephew, also joined the battle on a commando on Katsuto’s side, but after his defeat at the Battle of Shigetsuka, he was executed by Kyoya’s infamous Muko-tome execution site. Hideyoshi then granted his vassal Matsu Toshiki Kanazawa as reward for bringing the Hara family under his domination. Toshiki moved to Kanazawa Castle in April 1583. For the 286 years from that date right up until 1868, the castle was home to the Maeda family, while Kanazawa prospered as the “Kago Million-Bushels” castle town.

Kanazawa experienced a construction boom from the end of the 16th to the first half of the 17th century. The residences of higher-ranked retainers were moved within the innermost area, or what was created in 1593, and houses which had been built before the 1611 formal allocation of land were re-measured and re-allowed under the new regulations, moving them out from the innermost area.

Also in 1611, a pig-rumpled path was constructed to Nodayama, where Matsu Toshiki was buried. The road running along the Sotogawa brook was planted in chestnut and persimmon trees. At the same time, the Buddhist temples that had been scattered throughout the city were also relocated. All temples, other than Ikko sect ones, were moved south to Fumoto or north to the western foot of Mt. Utsu. Those relocated temples, in addition to a group of temples already on the Kanazawa ridge, created major groups of temples, forming a strategically crucial boundary at the base of the hills surrounding the castle town. This relocation of temples was carried out up to around 1660. The main purpose of this relocation effort was to delineate from external enemies, as was often the case in other castle towns. At the same time, the like-like temples were brought within the castle town, and the surrounding non-liko temple sites were tinkered with keeping a watch on them. This was designed to prevent any further uprisings by the like sect, which had relied on the area for nearly a hundred years before the downfall in 1580.

In 1616, the main road out to the town of Miyakoshi (present-day Kanazawa, Kanazawa City) was strengthened. This was a measure to cope with the increasing numbers of samurai and townspeople, and to improve transportation for goods and resources. In 1625, improvements were done on the Asano River in a bid to encourage the transportation of timber and other goods by boat between Miyakoshi and Kanazawa.

Major fires in 1635 and 1635 provided a chance to promote more modern urban planning. Following these two fires, excepting changes made to the entire layout, with districts like Minami-cho and Tanetsumi-machi being relocated further west, beyond the innermost area. The expansion of the castle town was almost complete by the latter half of the 17th century. Some of the stony residences occupied roughly three-quarters of Kanazawa, while the townsmen housed covering the remaining quarter.

This old map shows Kanazawa circa 1585. Thanks to not being burned during World War II nor having suffered any major natural disasters, the old town layout is still seen today. The large blank area in the middle is Kanazawa Castle. The size of the castle and Kanazawa remains almost unchanged. The white areas with names written in Japanese show individual samurai residences. The red dot on some of these depict houses belonging to middle-ranking samurai of high enough rank to have their own castles. The red line are private roads in residential areas for locals. For higher-ranked samurai, those who would command in battle. The orange areas show Buddhist temples or Shinto shrines. Those connected with the Maeda family are located northeast from the castle. The dark brown areas are where the townspeople (merchants and artisans) lived. The gray-black areas are residential areas for lower-ranked samurai, who lived collected into groups. The green areas show the rice and vegetable shipyard and the earth embankments that run alongside the rivers and waterways, shown in blue. Today, these green zones have largely been converted into housing and shops.
Houses,” the highest-ranking retainers of the Maedas, served as senior advisors.

With an income of 16,500 koku, the Murai family, one of the “Eight Retainers,” lived in one of the ashigaru residences at the foot of the castle. These two houses used to belong to ashigaru, or foot-soldier, families, and were passed down through the generations since the days of the shogun. The “46,000 Days” event, when a pilgrimage to Mount Koya was undertaken to pray for the repose of those executed men. Even today, the domain opened its granaries to feed the people, and these Jizo statues still offer the rice they were denied in life.

As punishment for defying the law, the seven ringleaders were killed, but their spirit daimyo were marked with the conviction that they had died in the service of their lord. As punishment for defying the law, the seven ringleaders were killed, but the daimyo now revives the spirit of the second Maeda lord and rides again on his horse in the castle moat.

The main residence of the Murai family was not preserved, so we may imagine it as it was by looking at the house of the Hashiba family in Osaka. It was a large house that was passed down through the generations since the Edo period. The house was originally built in the 18th century, but it was later expanded and renovated in the 19th century. The house was a three-story structure that was joined to the main residence. It had a large garden in front of it, and there was a large gate at the front of the house.

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