

Professors who became novelists

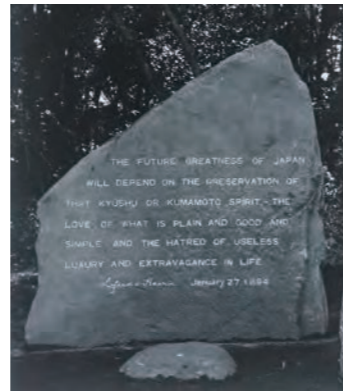


Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904)

Though he was of Irish extraction, he was born in a Greek island Lefkada, of which his name was derived. Later he lived in the US and worked as a journalist, then came to Japan in 1891 as a newspaper correspondent. In 1892, he took up his new post at The Fifth High School as an English teacher. "Kwaidan" (Ghost Stories), one of his famous novels, introduces Japan's mysterious tradition in English, and is widely known to the western world.

"The future of greatness of Japan will depend on the preservation of that Kyushu or Kumamoto spirit, the love of what is plain and good and simple, and the hatred of useless luxury and extravagance in life."

(from "The Future of the Far East", January 27, 1894)



Natsume Soseki (1867-1916)

He is one of the most popular and respected novelist even today. After he graduated from the Tokyo Imperial University, he started to teach English in Matsuyama Mid High School, then came to Kumamoto to take up his new post as an English lecturer at The Fifth High School in 1897. He was residing in Kumamoto during the time he went on the trip to a neighboring hot spring that appears in his famous novel "Kusamakura" (short story of a trip).



"Education is the foundation upon which our nation is built, and the root of this foundation is the bond between teachers and students."

(October 10, 1897)

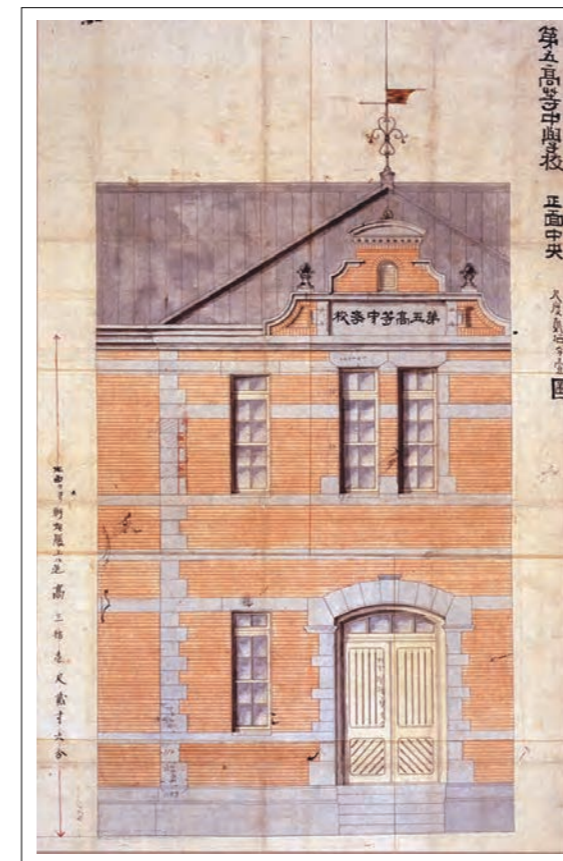
This is the word of 30-year old Natsume Soseki, spoken in celebration of the 10th anniversary of The Fifth High School.

Memorial Museum of The Fifth High School Kumamoto University



Juko Ito, Director

The Fifth High School was founded in 1887 and continued for 60 years until the educational system reform of 1949. It made a great contribution to higher education in early modern Japan. With the new educational system, it was unified with other schools into Kumamoto University, and the site and building became part of Kumamoto University. Since then, the red brick gate and main building have been loved as symbols of Kumamoto University by students, faculty and staff. The building and its exhibits have been open to the general public on weekends since 1993, but, triggered by the privatization of the national university system in 2006, it was decided to open the University Museum on weekdays as well to work towards contribution to society in earnest.



Original drawing of central part of the main building

The Kumamoto University Fifth High School Memorial Museum exhibits documents about higher education in early modern Japan, especially concerning the history of The Fifth High School; its education, graduates and student life. It includes official documents such as written appointments, old photographs, copies of Meiji era entrance examinations and student written entrance oaths, framed pictures of noted professors and celebrities, school life, etc. The breadth of preserved documentation concerning a high school under the old system of education cannot be found anywhere else in Japan. In addition, the main classroom building (the present museum building) was built in 1890 and is now itself a valuable building which has been designated a 'national important cultural property'. This building and surrounding structures, now preserved and used by the university, represent the only example of the old High School system red brick architecture in existence today.



History of high school system before 1949

In 1872 (the 5th year of the Meiji era), the Meiji Government created a new, modern education system through the Fundamental Code of Education. This system was modeled on the French education system and lasted until the Meiji Government's Education Order was enacted in 1879.

Under the National School Establishment Law in 1886 (the 19th year of the Meiji era), school districts were created nationwide. One result of this law was that five high schools were established in five regions of Japan. The aim of the system was to prepare boys over a period of three years to enter one of the seven Imperial Universities.

The five high schools initially created for this purpose were:

- 1886 - **The First High School** (Tokyo University)
- 1887 - **The Second High School** (Tohoku University)
- 1886 - **The Third High School** (Kyoto University)
- 1887 - **The Fourth High School** (Kanazawa University)
- 1887 - **The Fifth High School** (Kumamoto University)

After 1900, three more high schools were added to accommodate the increased number of students who wanted to enter higher education, as well as to satisfy the demands of other areas in the country that wanted young people in their region to have the opportunity.

The next three high schools established were:

- 1900 - **The Sixth High School** (Okayama University)
- 1901 - **The Seventh High School** (Kagoshima University)
- 1908 - **The Eighth High School** (Nagoya University)

These eight high schools formed the historically famous “number school” system. However, after the eight high schools were formed, many other regions competed to have elite schools. When the numbering system was stopped, names were used like Niigata High School and Matsumoto High School. Thirty-one of these so-called “name schools” were created in Japan.

Graduates of the original eight high schools normally entered one of the seven Imperial Universities. After graduation, many of them achieved high status positions such as prime minister, cabinet ministers, scientists, novelists, or medical doctors and took on many important roles in Japan.

With the educational system reform which was forced by GHQ (General Head Quarter of occupying American army) in 1949 after the World War II, most these high schools were reorganized into new universities (ex. those in the parentheses) as faculties of general education, literature, law, science and so fourth.



Originally Tokyo University was established in 1877 as the sole higher education academy in Japan. It was modeled on European university curricula. Courses were mainly taught in English, German or French by foreign faculty. Faculty were given a high status equal to the rank of cabinet minister. All students were required to attain very high proficiency of language skills.

The Fifth High School was established in 1887 (the 19th year of the Meiji period). In total 81 students entered in the first year (24 students for the preparatory course and 57 students for the supplementary course). The classes were mainly taught in English and examinations were given in English as well as German, and many foreign teachers were invited to teach. This school operated until 1950. In 1949, through the amalgamation of Kumamoto Teachers College, Kumamoto Pharmaceutical College, Kumamoto Medical College, Kumamoto Technical College and The Fifth High School, Kumamoto University was formed.

Four of the five original high schools were constructed using bricks. The most modern construction techniques of the period had to be imported from the west. In 1969, the red brick buildings of The Fifth High School were designated as cultural assets of national importance. The Fourth and Fifth High School are the only ones that have been restored to near their original condition.



Prominent Principal



Jigoro Kano
(1860-1938)

The third principal of The Fifth High School was Jigoro Kano, the founder of Japanese Judo as well as the second principal of The First High School. He invited Lafcadio Hearn to teach at Kumamoto. Hearn learned the meaning of martial arts from Principal Kano and this led him to write the introduction to a book on Japanese Judo. He also wrote his famous book of “Ghost stories” (Kwaidan) which introduce some of Japan's mysterious traditions and folk tales. Furthermore, the fact that the famous novelist Soseki Natsume taught here remains a source of great pride.



In this museum you will find extensive exhibits from The Fifth High School and Meiji Japan, including calligraphy and letters from that period. Please enjoy our display but remember that photograph is not allowed inside of the building.