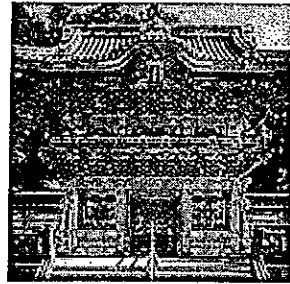
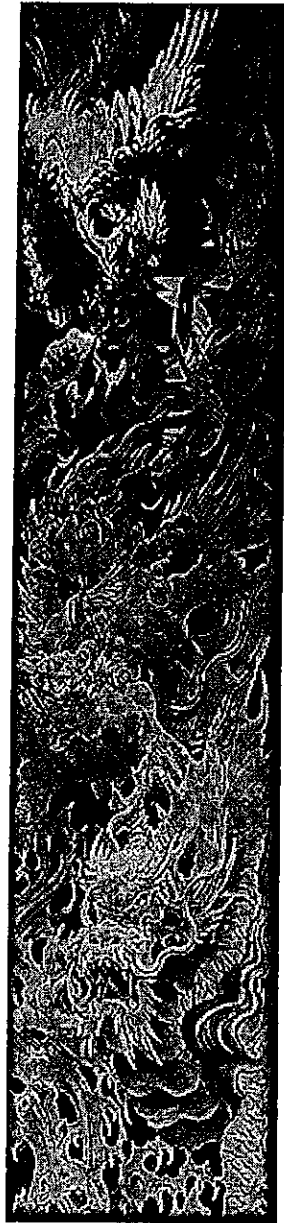


# KANUMA YATAI FLOAT CENTER Kanuma City, Tochigi Prefecture, Japan



## HISTORY

Just after the age of civil wars, in the late 17th century, Kanuma became a significant town. When Saint Shodo founded Nikko as a place of Buddhist worship, Kanuma became an important place for followers going to and from Nikko. During the Edo period it developed into a post town along the Reiheishi-kaido (road). When the Nikko-Toshogu Shrine was built, the town enjoyed prosperity as a trading center between Edo (present-day Tokyo) and Nikko.

The Yatai (ornately carved wooden floats), cultural assets unique to Kanuma, were also made during this period. Many of the woodworkers who constructed the famous Toshogu shrine in Nikko (pictured above) were Kanuma citizens. These woodworkers had to be highly skilled craftsmen in order to complete the intricate details of the shrine. More than four million, five hundred thousand craftsmen were involved in the construction of the shrine. After completing Toshogu Shrine in Nikko, many master craftsmen settled in Kanuma. Today's master woodcrafters in Kanuma are actually descendants of those artisans who settled in Kanuma more than 100 years ago.

## GREAT FALL FESTIVAL

Kanuma's Great Fall Festival, called Aki-Matsuri or O-Matsuri in Japanese, occurs every year in mid-October. Presently, there are 29 carved (yatai) floats in Kanuma, which are stored or are on display in museums. These floats (representing districts of Kanuma) are pulled into the grounds of Imamiya Shrine on the morning of October 9th, where an opening ceremony is held. After this, the floats are paraded from dawn to dusk, up and down the main streets of Kanuma. Taiko drum groups play music from inside the floats' interior and at road intersections districts compete to see who can play the loudest, thus showing which of Kanuma's districts has the most pride.

## YATAI FLOAT CENTER

One of this center's centerpieces of craftsmanship is the huge 16-foot carved column of three mythical creatures; a dragon, a Chinese lion and a phoenix, that is located in its lobby. These three animals have much mysticism associated with them and are common subjects of carvings in shrines and temples throughout Japan.



## DRAGONS(Ryuu)

The first images of dragons came to Japan from China in the 8th century. They are described as having the horns of a deer, a head like a camel, eyes of a demon and the body of a snake, that is often poised in a form that represents the Big Dipper constellation. According to legends, they live deep under the water of lakes, seas and oceans. They are the protector of the East and have the power to fly, call the clouds, and cause it to rain. It is said that dragons fly up into the sky on the first day of spring in March and go down into the earth on the first day of autumn in September. This schedule relates to the Big Dipper's movements through the sky.

Dragons have very short legs and clawed fingers with thick padded palms like lions or tigers. The Japanese thought that the number of claws that a dragon had was symbolic of a country's prestige. Chinese dragons were known to have 5 claws, Korean dragons had 4 claws; so the Japanese, feeling a bit inferior, believed that their dragons had to have only three claws.

The ears of a dragon are long but they are said to be completely deaf. In Japanese the Chinese (Kanji) character for the word "deaf" actually is made up of 2 smaller characters meaning "dragon" and "ear". Dragons are often carved with clouds or waves around them because of their life in the sea and the ability to travel between Earth and Heaven.

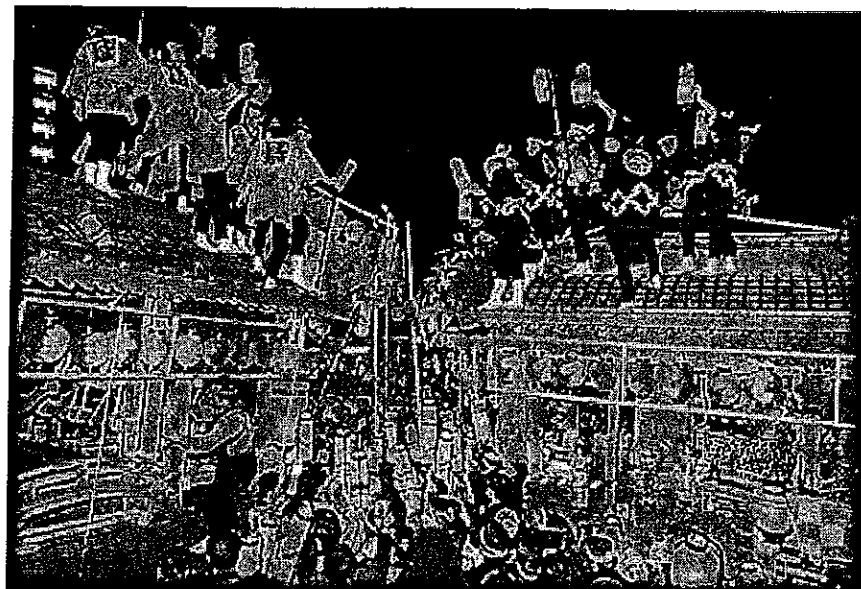
## SACRED CHINESE LIONS (Kara-Jishi)

The Kara-jishi is a sacred animal like the dragon. An old Chinese story tells that the tiger used to be the king of the animals, but when the lion came to China from Europe it became the king of all animals and replaced the tiger, thus they are called Kara-jishi or sacred Chinese lions. They are often portrayed in Japanese paintings and sculptures. Lions, symbols of political strength and military might, were very popular in late 16th century Japanese art. They are carved in great abundance at Nikko's Toshogu Shrine representing Ieyasu Tokugawa's political and military prowess.



## Phoenixes(Hou)

In China, the phoenix is known as the king of all winged creatures. It is symbolic of resilience because of its coming back from the fire and ashes to soar once again in great splendor. The presence of the phoenix is associated with peace and prosperity. The Chinese consider the phoenix as being a very lucky omen and to receive this luck it's image is often put in the southern part of a dwelling. Phoenixes have crests on their heads and are usually carved with paulownia tree branches in the background. The image of a phoenix and a dragon represents the balanced forces of Yin & Yang, respectively. This balanced couple of serpent and bird is analogous to the pair of Buddhist deities - Garuda (half bird/human, often stylized in the image of a fire) and the Naga (half serpent/human, referred to as the bearer of rain and controller of weather).



## THEATER

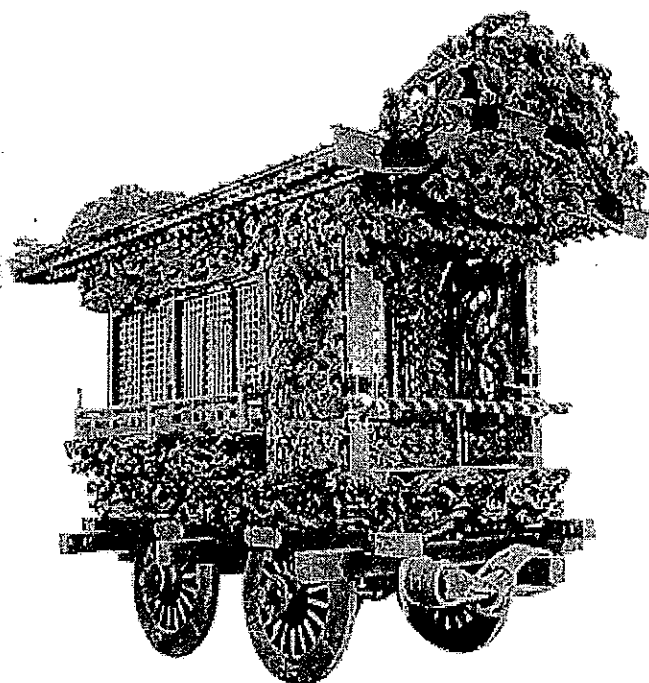
Behind the center's carved column is a mini-theater where visitors can watch video footage of the Annual Kanuma Fall Festival. Two shows are available (1) Kanuma Fall Festival & (2) The Festival, Carvings and People. Along

the right wall are photos and descriptions of various types of floats throughout Japan and a selection of photos of the more elaborately and culturally significant floats of Kanuma. Along the other wall is a display describing the Fall Festival's main events: Meeting at Imamiya Shrine, Float team members receiving a blessing from the head priest, a flute player, girls in traditional dress, lifting a float up so it can be turned, night competition.

## YATAI FLOAT VIEWING HALL

Adjacent to the mini-theater is the Viewing Hall. In this room are three Yatai floats on display and many hands-on interactive displays explaining the numerous processes that go into the making of a Yatai float.

## DISPLAY FLOATS



## GINZA 1 CHOME FLOAT

The float closest to the entrance is the Ginza 1 Chome Float. Made around 1814 this float is unique in that it is a mixture of different float styles. This black-lacquered float was originally decorated with colored carvings but they were subsequently replaced in 1855 by unvarnished woodcarvings.

The headboard of this float is decorated with an unvarnished carved panel depicting three dragons that have red flames

streaming from their sides. The lintel below this headboard carving is richly decorated with intricate carvings of squirrels playing, if examined closely there is also a baby squirrel with its mother hidden amongst the grape vines. The beam above the front door has a pair of Chinese lions with three cubs playing in peony flowers carved on it. Within the front mini-stage/porch there are chrysanthemums carved around front door frame and below the stage are two carvings of winged-water dragons.

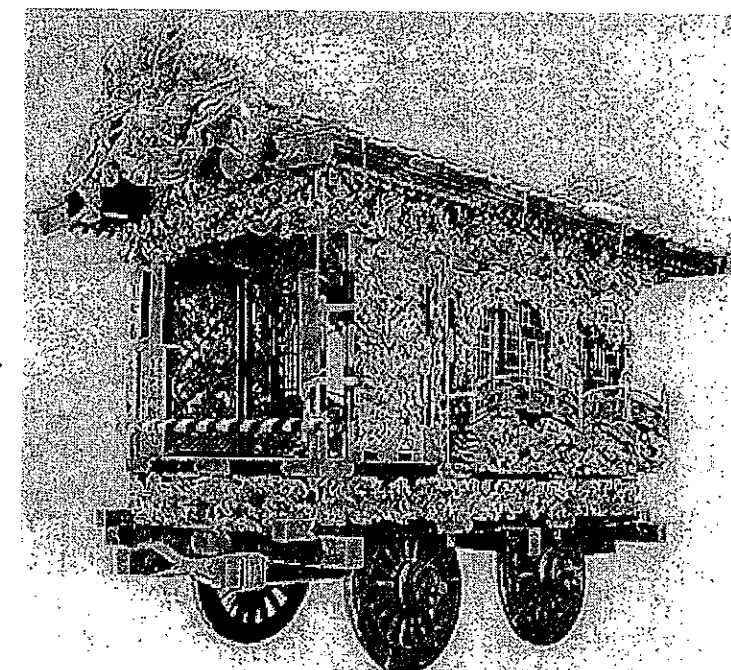
The sidewalls of the stage have three carved panels. The small upper panel has more squirrels and grape vines on it, the large middle panel depicts the drama of an eagle perched upon a plum tree, hunting a monkey. The monkey is hiding in the bottom panel, hidden from the eagle by a waterfall. Along the side of the float is a small carving of a dragon that fills the space between the stage and the back chamber where the musicians play. A pair of Chinese lions decorates the beam over the side windows. The lion with its mouth open is saying "Ah" and lion on the right with its mouth closed is saying "Un". "Ah" is the first letter of the Japanese alphabet and "Un" is the last, but this "Ah/Un" pairing in Buddhism is also representative of the beginning of the world and life while "Un" is symbolic of the end of the world and death. Along the bottom of the float below the red lacquer railing are large unvarnished carvings of three dragons swimming in a churning ocean of waves. The back of this float has similar ornamentation to that of its front, the only differences are golden pheasant carvings on both sides of its doorway and turtles carved into the lower baseboard. Turtles are considered to be symbolic of longevity because of their long lifespan and are often depicted with cranes.

## KUBO-CHO FLOAT

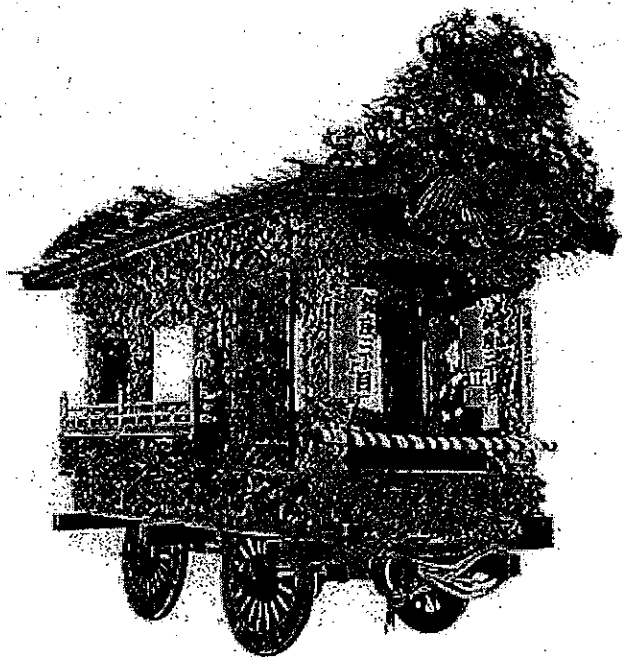
This float was made in two phases, the first between 1812 and 1814 and then again in 1848. One of the oldest among the existing Kanuma floats, this particular float belonged to Kobu District, where many rich merchants resided during the Edo era. Its extravagance with even its interior elaborately decorated reflects the district's affluence.

Both headboards of this float have a pair of dragons facing each other. They are elaborately gilded gold scales and horns with red flames that dance and stream from their sides.

The panel behind the headboard has a painted carving of a golden pheasant pair sitting in a pine tree with a few peony flowers as accents. The beam over the stage is decorated with a pair of magpie jays flying through the branches of a plum tree in full bloom. Other birds like red-throated grosbeaks, sparrows and shrikes are also carved amongst the tangled branches. On the stage's baseboard is carved a third dragon that looks up at



the other two. The panel above the front windows of the stage has a family of peacocks in a canopy of cherry blossoms, complimented by lions playing in peony flowers on the panels below the windows. Bluebirds and an owl in a plum tree are carved above the main sidewall of the stage. The right side panel of the stage has the Chinese lion - "Ah" carved on it and the left has "Un". Many small birds, parrots, golden pheasants, magpie jays, and grosbeaks fly and perch within the branches of the pomegranate trees caved along the side and between the windows of this float. Above the side windows is a panel that has a family of dragons and below the red lacquer bridge structures is a scene of the "Ah" and "Un" pair of lions playing with their cubs. The father (green) plays with two of his cubs while the mother (blue) licks a third pup's ears clean. At the back of this float two dragons and a phoenix fly above the entrance and the Chinese lion pair with their cubs stand guard at the sides of the doorway.

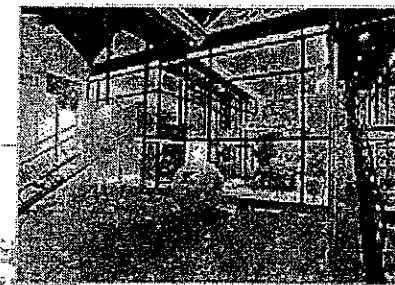


### GINZA 2 CHOME FLOAT

Production of this float began in 1850 and continued until 1857. The entire float - including the body and carvings - is made of unvarnished wood, reflecting the style predominant at that time. Especially noteworthy are its highly decorative carvings combining boldness and subtlety.

The headboard of this float has two phoenixes and smaller parrots flying through the branches of a paulownia tree. The front beam above the stage

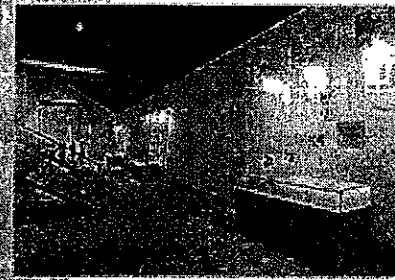
is decorated with a pair of bee eaters and an eagle in a background of cherry blossoms and pine bows. The panel above the stage entrance depicts more bee eaters flying through blooming plum trees. An exquisitely carved scene of a pair of Chinese lions with two pups is carved on one of the back panels of the stage, surrounding the stage window are another five pups playing in peony flowers. Peonies are considered by the Chinese and Japanese to be the King of the Flowers, so they are often carved or painted along with lions, the King of the Beasts. All four baseboards of this float have a pair of dragons carved on them. The panels that decorate the sides of the stage have a pair of dragons playing with a turtle that is carved on the bottom panel. Bee eaters, jays, and other small song birds fly within the clusters of cherry blossoms that ornament the window frames of the musician chamber. A pair of peacocks decorates both the panels that flank the sides of the backdoor and cherry blossoms, pine bows and bee eaters are caved into the beam above it.



### INTERACTIVE DISPLAYS

#### Computer Display

This computer has a touch sensitive screen and gives interesting facts about the floats in a game format. It presents information about the float's headboards, cart frame, bridge/fence structure, base, carvings, lintel carvings, stage panels, and wheels. This computer program also gives interesting information about various animals such as the phoenix (hou), dragon (ryu), monkey (saru), eagle (washi), lion (karajishi), and golden pheasant (kinkeichou).



#### Lacquering and Painting Display

This display shows the powders and ingredients that are used to make paints as well as the process by which the paint and gold leaf is applied to the carvings. Samples of lacquer resin and the rocks from which various paints are made can also be viewed here along with the stages of gold bracket making.



#### Carvings Display

In this display, the process of carving a dragon's head from a block of wood is illustrated.

#### Types of Wood Display

In this display the visitor can examine various types of wood that are used in making Yatai floats.

#### Scroll Display

This display shows many of the historical documents, blueprints and instructions relating to the assembly of the floats.

#### History Display

A huge wood ball has a small shadow play in it that presents Kanuma's history.

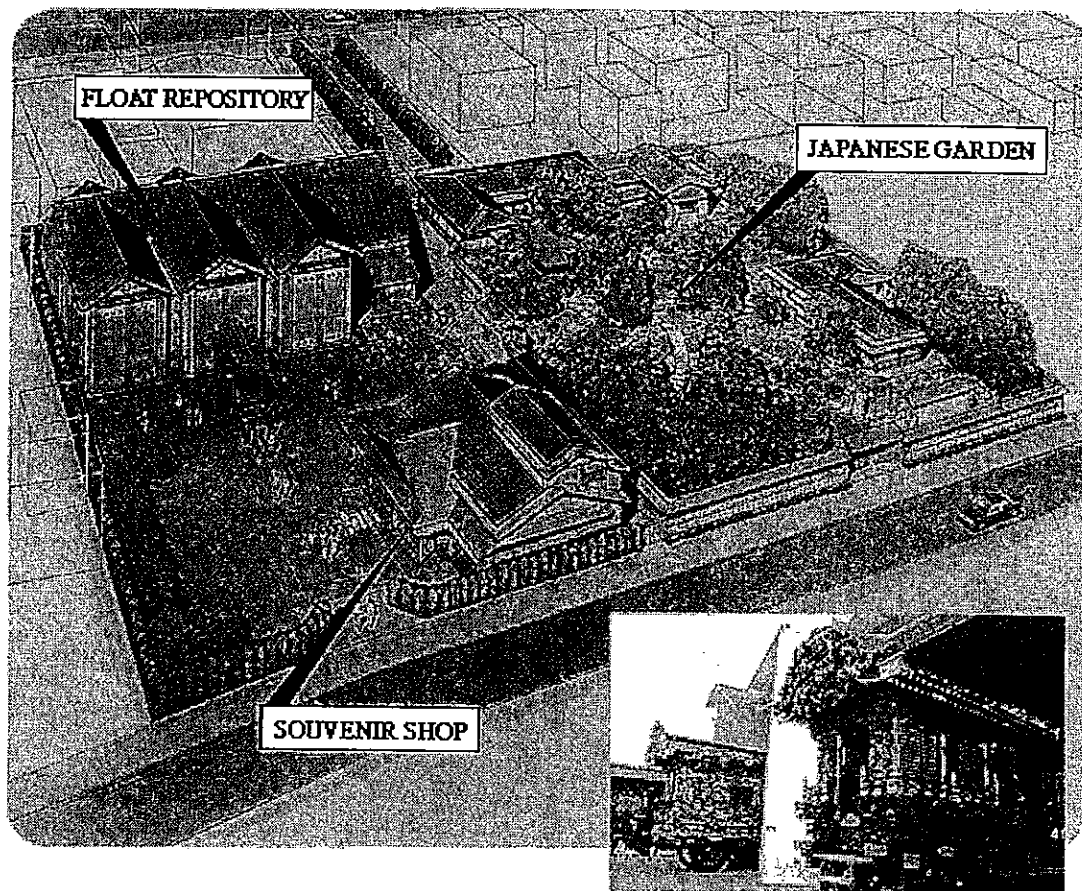
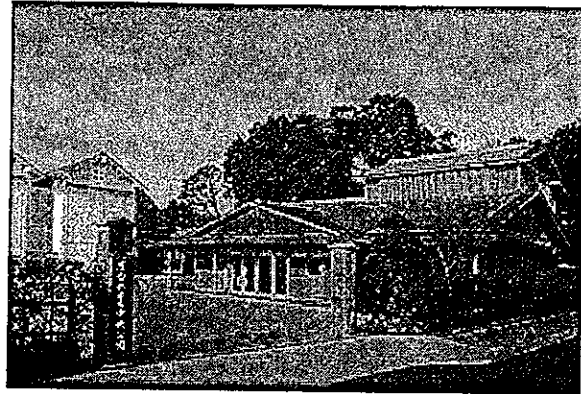
### JAPANESE TEA HOUSE & GARDEN

The Yatai Float Center has a Japanese garden where visitors can enjoy its natural beauty year round. At special times throughout the year, tea ceremonies are held in its teahouse.



### **SOUVENIR SHOP**

Many traditional works of art, festival videos, books and various products of Kanuma can be purchased in the center's souvenir shop.



Open 9AM - 5 PM  
(Closed Mondays & the day after national holidays)  
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