

Kumamoto Western School

The Kumamoto Western School was established by the domain's government in 1871 through the efforts of Yokoi Daihei, and L.L. Janes, a teacher at the American Army Military Academy, was invited to teach there. The students of the Western School were a collection of the best and brightest who were able to pass the entrance exam and even included people from outside the Kumamoto Domain.

Not only were the classes at the school taught by Janes entirely in English instead of Japanese, but the Kumamoto Western School was also Japan's first modern public co-ed school. The Emperor Meiji even came to observe Janes' class when he visited Kumamoto in 1872.

Janes' goal as a teacher was to polish his students' knowledge and virtue through learning to enrich the nation's future. Janes considered education indispensable to Japan's success and focused his teaching on practical sciences like agriculture and industry.

Outside of the classroom, Janes also held Christian bible study. In January 1876, a group of students from Janes' bible study who had taken to Christianity (later known as the Kumamoto Band, one of the driving forces of Meiji-era Protestantism) climbed Mt. Hanaoka and signed the Profession of Faith in Christ. This became a big problem, and when Janes' contract came to an end, the Western School was closed.

Ultimately, Kumamoto Western School produced many educators, ministers, public servants, and politicians such as Kozaki Hiromichi and Yokoi Tokiyoshi who became formative figures for contemporary Kumamoto and Japan.



A commemorative photo of students of the Western School (personal archive)

Furushiro Medical School

Amid Japan's political transition away from the feudal system in 1869, the Kumamoto domain's governor, Hosokawa Morihisa, closed the domain's medical education organization known as Saishunkan Medical School in July 1870 and opened a Western-style medical institution (a domainal hospital) in October of the same year. A medical training center was later set up inside the hospital in April 1871 that would become the Furushiro Medical School.

Furushiro Medical School invited Dr. Constant Mansveldt from Holland to become a professor and taught students according to Dutch medical practice. The teaching staff also included Japanese professors, including Okuyama Seijaku, Takahashi Teizo, and Tashiro Bunki who learned western medicine in Edo (now Tokyo), Osaka, and Nagasaki. As Dr. Mansveldt could not speak Japanese, Takahashi Teizo translated and Tashiro Bunki took notes. In the fall of 1871, the first human autopsy was conducted in accordance with the laws in Kumamoto.

However, in that same year, the Furushiro Medical School lost its legal foundation when Japan abolished the feudal domain system. Then in 1874, Dr. Mansveldt left Kumamoto after his contract expired. Finally, the historic medical school closed in 1875 when the prefecture stopped its funding.

Although Furushiro Medical School was only open for four years and Dr. Mansveldt taught for only three of them, the school produced many doctors who would greatly contribute to the field of medicine in Japan, including world famous bacteriologist Dr. Kitasato Shibasaburo and Dr. Ogata Masanori who established the study of hygienics at Tokyo University.



Dr. Mansveldt surrounded by medical students (Nagasaki University affiliated library archive)

Kumamoto Western School (Former Residence of L.L. Janes)

The Kumamoto Western School (the Former Residence of L. L. Janes) is a Prefectural Important Cultural Property that stands in Suizenji-Ezuko Park, but it was first built in the Furushiro area.

Originally located where Kumamoto Prefecture Daiichi High School's gym currently is, the storied history of this building began when it was built where as an official residence in 1871 to align with the opening of Kumamoto Western School. Nowadays, it is also known as the Former Residence of L.L. Janes, after the name of the Western School teacher who lived here. However, this building's role as a residence for teachers came to an end when Kumamoto Western School was closed in 1876.

During the Satsuma Rebellion in 1877, Prince Arisugawa Taruhito stayed here, and it was also here that the establishment of the Hakuaisha, the predecessor to the Japanese Red Cross, was approved. In 1894, the structure was moved to Minami-sendambata near the prefectural office at the time, and it was used as a prefectural facility for a variety of purposes, including as a temporary school building for the Kumamoto School for Girls and product exhibit hall annex.

Then in 1932, the building was sold to the Kumamoto branch of the Japanese Red Cross, moved to the current-day Suidocho area, and opened as a museum for the Japanese Red Cross. After it was donated to Kumamoto City in 1970, it was again moved to the east side of Suizenji Jojuen Garden and became a museum dedicated to the city. In 1971, Kumamoto Prefecture designated it as an Important Cultural Property.

During the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake, the walls cracked and peeled in the foreshock and then completely collapsed in the main shock. The pieces were moved here, right next to the tram line, and the structure was rebuilt in 2022.



The Former Residence of L.L. Janes in the early Meiji Period (Nagasaki University affiliated library archive)