

Memories and Footprints of Tomioka

Journalism
School
– 2025, Team 5

“The Life of Materials Is Infinite”

Passing Down the Spirit of Home to the Future

The Historical Archive Museum of Tomioka

Fourteen years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake. *The Historical Archive Museum of Tomioka*, located in Tomioka Town, Fukushima Prefecture, preserves and exhibits the lives of people, the appearance of the town before the disaster, which drastically changed its destiny. Through exhibitions and workshops, it connects these memories to the future. The museum conveys Tomioka’s long history and the deep human bonds, forged through many hardships. Its quiet yet powerful atmosphere resonates deeply in the hearts of visitors. As revitalization progresses, a sense of ease emerges, strengthening the ties within the community.

Through interviews and hands-on experiences, we felt firsthand that “revitalization of the heart” is steadily spreading among the people of Tomioka, becoming a source of hope for the future. (Written by Yako Akaishizawa)



A police car damaged by the tsunami

The Museum is not a memorial museum for the disaster, but a history museum that conveys the story of Tomioka from the Paleolithic era.” Deputy Director Mr. Hidefumi Sanpei and curators Mr. Takamitsu Yoshino and Ms. Harune Sonoda explained:



Interview with (from left) Mr. Sanpei, Mr. Yoshino, and Ms. Sonoda

“Our lifespans are finite, but the life of materials and records is infinite. That’s why we want to weave Tomioka’s history into the future through the power of these materials.”

They added with conviction:

“For those who temporarily return to Tomioka, we want this place to help them rediscover their hometown. For current residents, we hope it helps them reflect on both the past and their present lives. And for evacuees, we want this museum to help them view themselves more positively.

We also hope that children’s curiosity will be sparked by our exhibits, inspiring some of them to become curators one day.”

As a town-operated facility, the museum was founded with the intention of “promoting culture” — and the staff expressed their strong wish to continue it far into the future. (Written by Chihiro Mihara)

Museum Information

- ▷Address: 760-1 Otsuka, Moto-oka, Tomioka Town
- ▷Hours: 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
- ▷Closed: Mondays and year-end/New Year holidays
- ▷Admission: Free
- ▷Contact: Phone: 0240-25-8644

Heart-Stirring Disaster Artifacts

Artifacts from the disaster are displayed as valuable heritage, each accompanied by its own story and background. They convey the tragedy of the disaster and deeply move the viewer.

One damaged police car immediately caught attention. Most of the car’s body was crushed and twisted. The trunk lid had come off, and the roof was completely gone. At the time, the police car carried two officers who were guiding nearby residents to evacuate. The officers dedicated their lives, continuing to direct people in an effort to save as many as possible. While they successfully helped many res-

idents, the car was swept away by the massive tsunami and later found near the mouth of the Tomioka River.

It was initially retrieved and scheduled for removal. However, thanks to the efforts of local volunteers, the patrol car is now on display at the museum. Curators maintain it with great care, and it now serves as a powerful reminder of the disaster’s impact. It has become a vital piece of disaster heritage.

Another display features multiple stopped clocks — each frozen at a different time, reflecting the exact moments when the quake or tsunami struck in various locations.

Also exhibited is a large banner reading “*Tomioka wa maken*” (“Tomioka Will Not Be Defeated”). It was hung by residents on a pedestrian bridge during a brief return home after the disaster. Though it was installed without permission, it was spared removal thanks to the strong wishes of townspeople and has been carefully preserved ever since. The version on display is a replica; the original is kept in storage.

(Written by Haruto Ishii & Chiharu Nakatsugawa)

Salt-Making from Seawater – Reaffirming Safety

We experienced traditional salt-making, a practice deeply connected to Tomioka’s history. Artifacts over a thousand years old show evidence of ancient salt production, and in the Edo period (1603–1868), salt was even paid as tax. The museum includes salt-making workshops to teach this heritage.

Seawater from Tomioka was boiled in a salt pan for two to three hours. The crystallized salt was transferred to a frying pan and dried carefully to prevent burning. A faint sulfur smell appeared during the process. The finished salt was as fine and smooth as powdered sugar, with a subtle sweetness —and delicious.



Workshop on making salt from seawater

Afterward, the salt was tested for radiation using a large lime-green machine valued at about 60 million yen. The device can detect 65 types of radiation if measured over time. It is also used for testing food safety. Our hand-made salt contained no detectable radioactive substances and met the safety standards for consumption. (Written by Aisa Tomiyama)

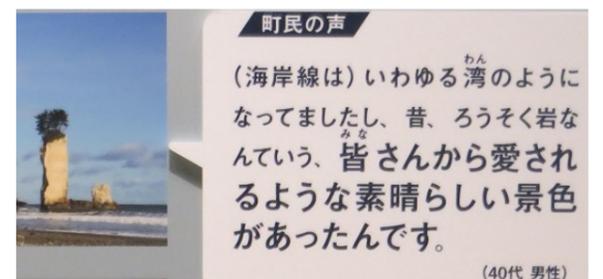


Voices of the Townspeople

Panels titled “Voices of the Townspeople” appear throughout the exhibits, based on interviews conducted by the museum staff. They express what Tomioka meant to its residents.

The first half of the exhibition looks back on Tomioka’s history before the disaster. Archaeological findings show that people lived here as long as 25,000 years ago. Tomioka’s position in southern Tohoku influenced its culture, reflected for example in its pottery — which features unique patterns blending both Kanto and Tohoku styles.

(Written by Nori Shoji)



“Voices of the Townspeople” panels displayed alongside exhibits

Editor's Note

Inside the exhibition, there were partial reconstructions of Yonomori Station and Tomioka Station, complete with the original timetables and ticket gates used at the time. Among the passengers who once passed through these stations were surely high school students like myself. Because these were part of ordinary, everyday life, I felt deeply shaken by how the disaster had taken away something so normal and precious. I couldn’t help but wonder—what would happen if a similar compound disaster struck my own hometown? Have I truly imagined it as if it were my own experience? We must sometimes learn from painful and tragic history and use that knowledge to shape the future. As someone living in Fukushima after the earthquake, this is a mission I must fulfill. (Nori Shoji)

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