

Guidance Facility

Next to the Irwin villa is the Guidance Facility, a small museum explaining the Kanyaku Imin program and exhibiting Irwin family artifacts and sister-city memorabilia from Hawai'i. Open 9 a.m.–4:30 p.m., closed Tue.

Admission fee:

	Single	Group (20 persons or more)
Adults	200yen	160yen
Elementary Junior high High school	100yen	80yen

Children under elementary school age : Free

People in possession of a disability certificate and one accompanying person: Free



Irwin Monument

Near the Irwin villa is a replica of the Irwin monument at Aoyama Cemetery in Tokyo where the Irwin family is buried. Inscribed with a short biography of Robert Walker Irwin.



"Auntie Dottie" Thompson Memorial Tree

Behind the Guidance Facility is a Japanese maple tree planted in August 2013 in memory of Dorothy S. Thompson (1921–2010). She was the co-founder and Executive Director of the Merrie Monarch Festival in Hilo, Hawai'i, the world's most prestigious hula competition.



Ikaho Hawaiian Festival

Because of its Hawai'i connection through Irwin, Ikaho (now part of Shibukawa) established a sister-city relationship with the island of Hawai'i and started holding the annual Ikaho Hawaiian Festival in 1997 officially sanctioned by the Merrie Monarch Festival. The four-day festival held in late July or early August features over 5,000 hula dancers from all over Japan and a top hālau (hula school) from Hawai'i performing nightly in Ikaho.



Directions to Ikaho



By bus from Tokyo: At JR Shinjuku Station (South Exit), Buster Shinjuku bus terminal has JR buses for Ikaho/Kusatsu Onsen. It takes about 2 hr. 40 min. Get off at the "Ikaho Ishidan-gai" bus stop at the foot of the Ikaho Stone Steps (Ishidan). Lockers are available near the bus stop. Go slightly up the Stone Steps and Irwin's villa will be on the right.

By train: JR Takasaki Station (Hokuriku or Joetsu Shinkansen) is the nearest shinkansen station. Transfer to the JR Joetsu Line and get off at JR Shibukawa Station, the closest train station to Ikaho. Then take a bus bound for "Ikaho Harunaguchi" and get off at "Ishidangai-guchi" bus stop (takes 20–30 min.). (From Tokyo, taking the JR bus is easier than the train.)

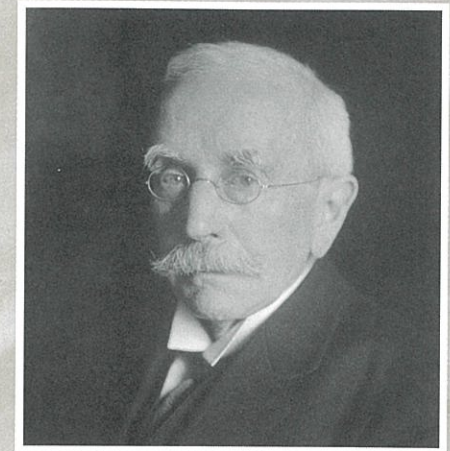


For more information:

Cultural Property Preservation Department
Shibukawa Board of Education
Makabe 2372-1, Hokkitsu-machi
Shibukawa, Gunma Prefecture, Japan 377-8502
Phone: 0279-52-2102

Hawaiian Minister's Ikaho Villa

Shibukawa, Gunma Prefecture



Robert Walker Irwin (1844-1925)

Hawaiian Minister to Japan
Father of Kanyaku Imin Japanese Immigration to Hawai'i



Symbol of Japan-Hawaii Friendship Shibukawa Historic Site

Address: Ikaho 32, Ikaho-machi, Shibukawa, Gunma, Japan
Phone: 0279-20-3033 (Guidance Facility)
Hours: 9:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m. (Free admission)
Closed: Tuesdays (open if a national holiday), the day after a national holiday, & Dec. 28–Jan. 4

Robert Walker Irwin (1844-1925)

Robert Walker Irwin was the Hawaiian Minister to Japan appointed by King David Kalakaua in 1881 to help bring Japanese immigrants to work on Hawai'i's sugar plantations. While based in Tokyo, Irwin successfully concluded the Kanyaku Imin immigration treaty that brought 29,000 government-contracted Japanese immigrants to Hawai'i during 1885-1894.

Originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Irwin was a fifth-generation direct descendant of Benjamin Franklin. Irwin came to Japan in 1866 to head the Yokohama office of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. The company was to start trans-Pacific steamship service between San Francisco, Yokohama, and Hong Kong, and it would later transport Japanese immigrants to Hawai'i.

It was a pivotal and turbulent time as Japan was transforming into a modern, Westernized nation. Irwin soon worked in the booming import-export business and helped establish the trading company that would become Mitsui Bussan, the core company of the Mitsui Zaibatsu conglomerate. Irwin met many prominent Japanese business and political figures, including Kaoru Inouye who became a close family friend and Japan's Foreign Minister during 1879-1885 in charge of Kanyaku Imin negotiations for Japan.

Irwin's connection with Hawai'i started in 1880 when he was appointed as Hawai'i's interim Consul-General in Japan. Being well-connected in business and government in Japan, Irwin was soon promoted to Hawaiian Minister to Japan in 1881 and later Special Agent and Special Commissioner of Hawai'i's Board of Immigration.

In 1882, Irwin and his Japanese wife Iki Takechi (1852-1940) became the first legal, international marriage between an American and Japanese citizen. They had four daughters, two sons, and four grandchildren all born in Japan.

Irwin was decorated by Japan and the Hawaiian Kingdom multiple times including The Order of the

Rising Sun and Royal Order of Kamehameha I, Knights Grand Cross Star. He lived in Japan for the rest of his life until 1925 when he died of a stroke at age 81. He is buried with his wife and four of his children at Aoyama Cemetery in Tokyo.



Iki and Robert Walker Irwin at the Imperial Palace for the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in Feb. 1889.

Kanyaku Imin Immigration Program

Kanyaku Imin was a government-contract immigration program that brought Japanese laborers to work on Hawai'i's sugar plantations during the late 19th century. Representing the Hawaiian Kingdom, Robert Walker Irwin successfully negotiated and concluded the Kanyaku Imin treaty with Japan. From February 1885 to June 1894, Kanyaku Imin brought 26 shiploads totaling over 29,000 Japanese immigrants. It was the start of the mass immigration of Japanese to Hawai'i.

Kanyaku Imin was preceded by 153 Japanese immigrants called "Gannen-mono" who came to Hawai'i on June 19, 1868 as private contract laborers. They were sent by American businessman Eugene Van Reed. They were hardworking, but since they were treated poorly by the sugar planters, the Japanese government became concerned and blocked further emigration.

By the early 1880s, the Hawaiian Kingdom was desperate for plantation laborers and wanted Japan to allow emigration to Hawai'i. In March 1881 when Hawai'i's King David Kalakaua visited Japan during his world tour, he pleaded for Japanese immigrants and promoted Irwin to Hawaiian Minister to Japan.

Irwin continued negotiations with Japan mainly through his counterpart and friend Kaoru Inouye, Japan's Foreign Minister. In 1884, Irwin finally received Japan's informal approval to send Japanese laborers to Hawai'i and sent two shiploads of Japanese emigrants to Hawai'i in 1885. The Kanyaku Imin treaty was officially signed in 1886.

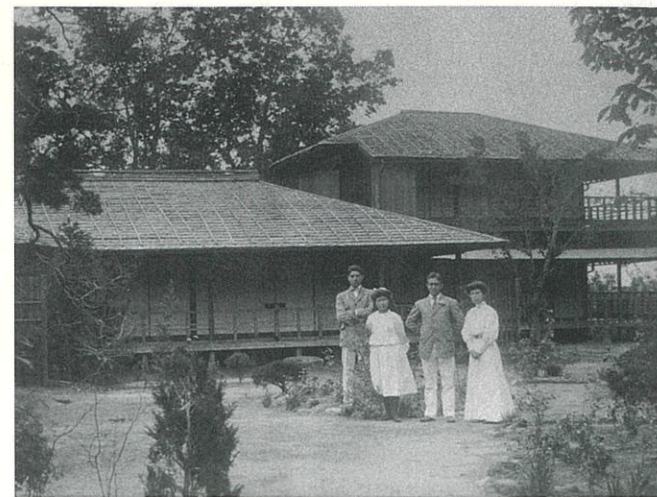
Irwin was with the first group of 943 Japanese immigrants aboard the Pacific Mail Steamship Company's *City of Tokio* arriving in Honolulu on February 8, 1885 amid great celebration. They had a three-year contract with the Hawaiian government.

Kanyaku Imin ended in 1894 soon after the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom. However, Japanese immigration to Hawai'i continued through the private sector that brought the bulk of the 200,000 Japanese immigrants to Hawai'i until 1924 when U.S. Congress prohibited further immigration from Japan until 1952. The Japanese immigrants and their descendants made major contributions to Hawai'i's population, economy, culture, education, and government.



L-R: Robert Jr., Bella, fourth daughter Agnes, Iki, second son Richard, Robert Walker, third daughter Marian, and second daughter Mary.

Hawaiian Minister's Ikaho Villa



The Irwins lived in Tokyo and had homes in Kojimachi and Tamagawa. To escape the hot summers of Tokyo, Irwin also purchased a summer villa in 1891 here in the famous hot spring town of Ikaho. Since Ikaho was on the cool slope of Mt. Haruna, it was a favored summer retreat for many VIPs.

Irwin's spacious villa slightly above the bottom of the Stone Steps also served as the Kingdom of Hawai'i's secondary legation and was used by Irwin's Tokyo staff and guests from Hawai'i. The Irwins spent every summer in Ikaho until Irwin's death in 1925.

Eldest daughter Sophia Arabella "Bella" Irwin (1883-1957) loved Ikaho and was popular among the local children. She eventually started a Christian Sunday School at the Irwin villa in Ikaho in 1904. It became popular even among adults. After studying preschool education in the US and Europe, she opened a Christian preschool and preschool teacher-training school in 1916 in Kojimachi, Tokyo. This school still exists as the Irwin Gakuen in Suginami, Tokyo.

In 1927, the Irwin villa was sold to a major publishing company that used it for employee training. The facility was acquired by Gunma Prefecture in 1944, and finally given to Ikaho (now part of Shibukawa) in 1985.

In October 1985, to mark the 100th anniversary of Kanyaku Imin, Ikaho designated Irwin's former villa as a Historic Site and preserved the remaining part of the villa opened to the public. In return, Hawai'i's Governor George Ariyoshi, America's first Japanese-American governor, sent a letter of appreciation to the people of Ikaho.

Today, only a small part of the villa remains. It is a two-story Japanese-style building overlooking a garden.