**Part 1: Before Shimazu**

To understand the story of Miyakonojō City, we must go back many years, to when the area in which the city now stands was once just a lake. Part of this area known as Kinkōwan, which is now known as Kagoshima Bay, erupted, causing white ash known as Shirasu to cover the lake. After, but still some 13,000 years before the common era, Japan’s Jōmon era began, and the people of Japan made their way to this new area. 14,000 years passed, and during the Manju era from 1024 to 1028, an official for the Dazaifu known as Taira-no-Suemoto began building what would become Miyakonojō, starting with an area near to modern-day Kōrimotochō known as Shimazu.

Suemoto would hand this land over to Fujiwara-no-Yorimichi, a politician of the time. This land would come to be one of Japan’s first great manors, the Shimazu-no-shō.

**Part 2: Birthplace of the Shimazu Family during the Middle Ages**

Miyakonojō is well known as “The Birthplace of the Shimazu Family”, but when people hear of the ‘Shimazu’, they might think of Kagoshima instead! During March of the 1st year of the Bunji era in 1185, Minamoto-no-Yoritomo and his younger brother Yoshitsune fought in the battle of Dan-no-ura, eventually defeating the Hei family and taking control of the area. As a result, in August, Yoritomo made Koremune Tadahisa the Shimazu Estate’s “Gesushiki”, or estate manager. Tadahisa would eventually become the lord of the estate, or Jitō, as well as the military governor or Shugo of 3 ‘kuni’: Hyūga, Ōsumi, and Satsuma.

Tadahisa would later take the name of the estate as his own, becoming Shimazu Tadahisa; this is where Miyakonojō’s “The Birthplace of the Shimazu Family” phrase comes from. After becoming lord of the estate, Tadahisa is said to have built a hall in the area of Miyakonojō now known as Iwayoshi, and moved there to live. A monument has since been built on this location.

**Part 3: How Miyakonojō came to be Miyakonojō**

More than two hundred years later, we arrive at the naming of our city. Hongō Yoshihisa the second, during the first year of the Eiwa era in 1375, built a castle where the Miyakonojō History Museum now stands. The area around the castle was known as Miyakojima, which means ‘the island of the capital’. Taking the first half of that name, the castle became known as Miyako-no-jō, written using three kanji. It would be some time yet before the region would take on the two kanji form of Miyakonojō.

**Part 4: Hongō, the ‘Shimazu’ name, and the start of the Miyakonojō Shimazu**

About 300 years later, we come to the start of the Miyakonojō Shimazu. During the 2nd year of the Kanbun era in 1662, the second son of the clan head, Mitsuhisa, along with the lord of the Miyakonojō estate, Hongō Hisasada, died at 19 years of age. This led to trouble with the estate’s successor for the Satsuma Clan and Miyakonojō.

The clan stated that they would have the current clan head’s 3rd son, Ki’ire Settsu-kami-Tadanaga, marry Hisasada’s partner, lady Chiyomatsu, and have them become the new lord of Miyakonojō. To do so, Tadanaga was told to take the Shimazu name.

Mitsuhisa also sent Hisatsune. While he was from the same family line as Tadayoshi of the Hongō family, he was sent as Mitsuhisa’s son to become lord. Worrying that Hisatsune may be dissatisfied with the Hongō family, Mitsuhisa sent them a number of items from the Hongō household, as well as 300 koku of rice. Note that a ‘koku’ is equal to about 180.4 litres, making the 300 koku offered about 54117 litres of rice.

Hisatsune said to the clan that either themselves or their child upon turning 8 years old, were to be made the Sōryōshiki, or lord of the estate. Otherwise, he would reject the items and rice from Mitsuhisa.

The clan responded by taking back their offer to Hisatsune, and telling them that Tadanaga had been made lord of the estate and would take the Shimazu name.

Later, the clan decided that the Hongō family could use the Shimazu name again as they were direct descendants of the original Shimazu family. As a result, a new ‘Miyakonojō Shimazu Family’ was made.

**Part 5: The Family Crest of the Miyakonojō Shimazu**

A part of each family in Japan is their family crest. The family crest is a symbol which represents a family through its shape. The family crest for the Miyakonojō Shimazu is similar to that of the Shimazu family main branch, with the main difference being that there is a gap between the circle and the cross.

It is not known when the Miyakonojō Shimazu’s family crest took this shape. However, we do know that by the 18th century, rules about the crest’s shape and usage had been made by the Satsuma clan.

During November of the 2nd year of the Hōei era in 1705, the clan sent the following message to the Miyakonojō Shimazu family: ‘As the gap between the cross and the circle of the Miyakonojō Shimazu family crest is small, you must change your crest and make the gap clearer’.

In other words, due to the similarity between the clan head’s family crest and the Miyakonojō Shimazu family crest, they were told by the clan to make the difference clear.

You may wonder why the clan decided, here and now, to make rules about the family crest in this way. It is thought that this was mainly due to the fact that the Bakufu, or Shogunate at the time had begun making rules about the use of crests that were similar to that of Tokugawa Aoi, including the ban of similar crests. The clan decided to ensure people could tell the difference between their many families’ crests to increase their value. As a result, the Miyakonojō Shimazu family crest became more unique, which made it gain recognition throughout society.

**Part 6: Shimazu Hisanaga and their Jinbaori**

Have you heard of the Jinbaori, or battle surcoat, known as the Hirashaji-marunijūjimon-jinbaori?

The lord of Miyakonojō, Shimazu Hisanaga, used to wear this surcoat, which translates to ‘Crimson felt backed cross-in-circle emblem Battle Surcoat’. Even amongst the Daimyō of the time, this surcoat was considered very costly, which made it difficult to make. Hisanaga wore this at the very beginning of the Meiji Restoration period.

During the 2nd year of the Bunkyū era in 1862, on March 16th, Shimazu Hisamitsu led a group of around 1,000 soldiers to the old capital of Kyōto. At the time, a number of rebel warriors made their way to Kyōto, causing public safety to worsen. In the end, the Imperial Court told Hisamitsu to protect the Imperial Palace.

As Shimazu Hisanaga’s wife was the daughter of Hisamitsu, Hisamitsu was well trusted. When Hisamitsu left Kyōto and headed for Edo, he gave the task of protecting the Imperial Palace to Hisanaga.

The message from Hisamitsu to Hisanaga telling him to go to the capital was given to him on the 25th of April, during the fourth year of the Bunkyū era in 1864. Hisanaga was recovering at an onsen in Kirishima, and headed directly to Kagoshima after he got better. On May 4th, he made a group of 200 soldiers, headed to the capital, and arrived on May 19th. The next day, at the Daimyō’s home in Kyōto, he had a meeting with Hisamitsu, where he was officially told to protect the capital and the Imperial Court. It is believed that it was at this time that the Jinbaori was worn.

However, perhaps due to stress or illness, Hisanaga passed away just 1 week after arriving at the capital. As knowledge of his death could lead to unrest throughout the city, his death was kept a secret, and those that came with him continued to protect the capital and the Imperial Court.

**Part 7: The birth of Miyakonojō Prefecture**

Just a few short years later, Miyakonojō went through a major change. At the start of the Meiji era, Miyakonojō was, for a short time, ‘Miyakonojō Prefecture’!

The new government, during the 2nd year of the Meiji era in 1869, with the emperor’s permission, put into place the Hansekihōkan, which meant that all feudal lords had to return the lands and people they ruled over to the emperor. This happened on the 17th of June, and was followed by the Haihanchikenin 1871, replacing feudal areas with prefectures. As this was just a change of name, there was about 305 prefectures to begin with!

For the Hyuga area, the Nobeoka, Takanabe, Sadowara, Obi, Hitoyoshi and Kagoshima prefectures were made.

The Haihanchiken did not completely remove or replace feudal lords and groups. Next, the Kaichifukenwas passed by the government around October to November of the same year, bringing Japan to 75 prefectures by the end of the year, and later, to the number of prefectures we have today. With this, the 6 prefectures around the Hyuga area were changed into the Yatsushiro, Mimitsu, Miyakonojō & Kagoshima prefectures. This is how the prefecture of Miyakonojō started.

Miyakonojō’s Sanji, which is similar to a prefectural governor, was Katsura Hisatake, an important person from the Kagoshima clan. The next day after arriving in Miyakonojō, Katsura started their work at the prefectural office, or today’s Miyakonojō City Hall. They told the people of Miyakonojō to honour the morning, study hard & respect civil affairs, and began their work for Miyakonojō Prefecture.

Miyakonojō began to separate itself from the Kagoshima clan, and continued to grow on its own. However, during the 6th year of the Meiji era in 1873, there was another change to prefectures, and Miyakonojō became a part of Miyazaki prefecture.

**Part 8: The Meiji Restoration and Miyakonojō**

The Meiji Restoration brought about many changes to the area. As stated before, the government, during the 2nd year of the Meiji era in 1869, put into place the Hansekihōkan, requiring all feudal lords to return the lands and people they ruled over to the emperor. Miyakonojō’s lord Shimazu Hisahiro gave his area to the emperor, and moved to Kagoshima where his mansion was located.

The government selected Mishima Michitsune, a warrior from the Kagoshima Clan, to manage the Miyakonojō estate.

The city’s warriors rebelled when Mishima went to Miyakonojō, and Miyakonojō’s government and goals needed to be changed. Feudal clans were removed through the Haihanchiken during November of the 4th year of the Meiji era in 1871, and the land all the way to Ōsumihantō south of Ōyodogawa became a part of Miyakonojō Prefecture.

The Miyakonojō Shimazu, who had moved to Kagoshima, returned to Miyakonojō in the 12th year of the Meiji era in 1879, and the shrine known as Hayasuzudaimyōjin was rebuilt as the Shimazu household. This household still stands on the same location to this day.