

In 1657, a conflagration known as the Great Fire of Meireki broke out and inflicted massive damage to Edo. To address the frequent occurrence of fires and the expansion of urbanization up to the Kan'ei period, the Tokugawa government undertook the renewal of Edo.

As a fire prevention measure for Edo Castle, the estates of the three Tokugawa branch families were relocated outside the castle grounds (the Owari and Kii estates were relocated to Kojimachi, and the Mito estate to Koishikawa), and empty lots to stop the spread of fire were established within the castle. In addition, the temples and shrine grounds within the outer wall of the castle were relocated outside the wall and spread around the area beyond the outer moat.

In the city center as well, along with establishing open lots mainly in the northern and northwestern areas of Edo Castle to keep fire from spreading, wide streets to serve as fire breaks were newly established, including Ueno Hirokoji (Shitaya

Hirokoji) and Nakabashi Hirokoji (Yaesu-dori Avenue). In addition, plans concerning matters such as road width in commercial town land were also formulated, resulting in the 18.18-meter width of the main street, Nihombashi-dori Avenue, and 13.79-meter width of Honcho-dori Avenue. This relocation of samurai residences, temples and shrine land, and town land, led to the formation of newly built-up areas in the surrounding areas, including partial reclamation of the reservoir in Akasaka, development of Tsukiji, and construction of the Ryogoku Bridge. Built-up areas also spread on the east side of Sumida River. In this way, the urban space of Edo changed significantly as a result of measures to prevent fires. This urban makeover completed the general outline of Edo, which will continue to develop while carrying on the legacy of these town plans and city structure.



**Great Fire of Meireki** "Picture Scroll of Fires in Edo" from the collection of the Edo-Tokyo Museum.

At the time of the Great Fire of Meireki, from January 18 to 19, 1657, strong northwestern winds were blowing, spreading the fire from Hongo to Koishikawa, Kojimachi, Tsukudajima, and Ishikawajima. Meanwhile, the fire spreading from Surugadai toward Asakusa crossed the Sumida River, and by the time it was completely extinguished on the morning of the 20th, it had engulfed all of the built-up area of Edo. Even the main tower of Edo Castle had collapsed. It is said that over 100,000 people died in this conflagration.



#### Relocation of temple and shrines

*Toto meisho Tsukijinishimido no zu* (Famous Places of the Eastern Capital: Tsukiji Nishi Temple) From the special collection of the Tokyo Metropolitan Central Library. The current Tsukiji Hongwanji Temple was originally located in Yokoyamacho, south of Asakusa gate (currently Nihombashi-Yokoyamacho and Higashi-Nihombashi), as the branch temple of Nishi Hongwanji Temple, but the main hall was lost in the Great Fire of Meireki. It was later rebuilt at its present location.



#### Establishment of empty lots to prevent the spread of fire

After the Great Fire of Meireki, empty lots were established throughout Edo to prevent the spread of fire.

Prepared from "The Fluctuation and its Influence of Edo-Hiyokechi: Fire Prevention Square in Edo" by Masaki Chiba.



#### Ueno Hirokoji Ueno Nio-mon no zu (Ueno Nio-mon gate)

From the collection of the National Diet Library. In the Edo period, large temple and shrine grounds and wide roads were lined with show tents, and were bustling with people.



#### Ryogoku Bridge Ryogoku-bashi yusuzumi zenu (Evening cooling at Ryogoku Bridge)

From the collection of the National Diet Library. With the construction of the bridge, urbanization expanded to the east side of Sumida River. A wide street was built at the base of the bridge to prevent fire from spreading.



#### Meisho Edo Hyakkei: Sujikai-uchi Yatsukoji (One Hundred Famous Views of Edo: Yatsukoji Square Inside Sujikai Gateway)

From the special collection of the Tokyo Metropolitan Central Library. In front of Sujikaigomon gate was an open space to prevent fire from spreading. Gatekeepers were positioned near the castle gate of the outer compound of Edo Castle for security.