

# ●Shinagawa Historical Museum Explanatory Sheet

## The Omori Shell Mounds

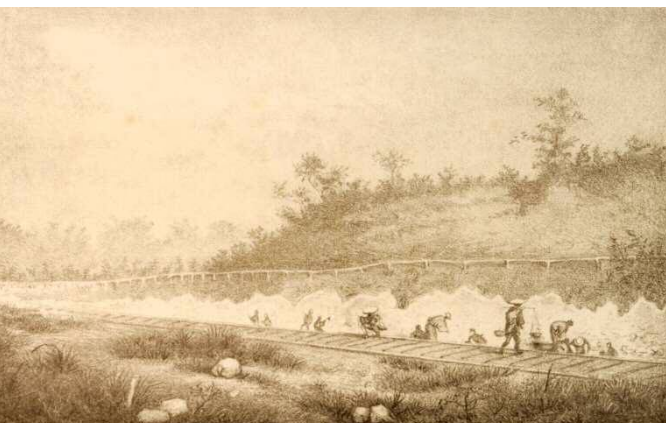
### The Birthplace of Japanese Archaeology

The Omori Shell Mounds are considered the birthplace of Japanese archaeology as they are the first place a scientific archeological survey was conducted in 1877. The site covers a time period primarily from the late to final Jomon Period (about 2,300 to 4,400 years ago), and a variety of artifacts have been discovered at the site including bones and remains of shellfish, fish and animals, earthenware pottery, stone tools, and human bones. The Omori Shell Mounds were designated a National Historic Landmark in 1955.

### The Omori Shell Mounds Excavations by Morse

The Omori Shell Mounds were discovered by Edward S. Morse from Portland, Maine in the United States (1838–1925). After graduating from junior high, Morse worked as a mechanical draftsman while he carried out his own self-taught research of shellfish. Morse then went on to become an assistant university professor, museum curator, and then a university professor. In 1877 he travelled to Japan, and became the first zoology professor at the University of Tokyo. On June 19, 1877, Morse caught sight of mounds of shells while travelling by steam locomotive from Yokohama to Shimbashi.

Morse thereafter carried out two preliminary surveys



▲ The excavation of the Omori Shell Mounds in October 1877  
(From "The Shell Mounds of Omori")

and began a full-fledged excavation of the mounds on October 9, 1877, just four months after his initial discovery.

Morse's excavation unearthed 214 earthenware artifacts, 6 stone monuments, 23 tools made of bones, 9 stoneware artifacts, and 9 shells. Of the 261 total artifacts discovered, 165 were later designated as Important Cultural Properties. The Omori Shell Mounds became known as the birthplace of Japanese archeology as they were the first location to be excavated for the purpose of scientific discovery, and Japan's first archeological survey research report, "The Shell Mounds of Omori" was published two years later by Morse, originally in English and with a Japanese translation in the same year. "The Shell Mounds of Omori" was a standout survey report at the time, featuring a large catalogue of discoveries. Morse personally drew the shell drawings of the report, and the Japanese artist Kimura Seizan provided the other careful illustrations.



◀ Earthenware pottery excavated by Morse  
(The University Museum, The University of Tokyo Collection)

### Later Excavations

In 1885, the natural historian Minakata Kumagusu collected earthenware pottery and bones from the Omori Shell Mounds. Later, in 1908, the author Emi Suiin carried out an amateur excavation, and recorded his experiences in his book, "Secrets of the Earth".

An academic excavation was carried out by Keio University in 1941 led by Oyama Kashiwa, but the records and excavated artifacts were lost in World War II.

In 1955 the Omori Shell Mounds were designated as a National Historic Landmark. In the 1950s and 1960s, approaching the area was forbidden and it fell into disrepair. In response to concern of losing this important site, volunteers of the area formed a preservation group, and activities to preserve this archeological site increased.

Shinagawa City later carried out two excavations at the Omori Shell Mounds. In the 1984 excavation, an expansive shell layer was discovered, and many artifacts were unearthed such as stone arrowheads and shell ornaments, which were unidentified by Morse. In the 1993 excavation, the remains of 6 residences were discovered in addition to the shell layer.

### Two Monuments to the Omori Shell Mound

Two stone monuments have been erected to commemorate the Omori Shell Mound excavations. One is inscribed with the words, “Omori Shell Mounds” (Oi 6, Shinagawa City, Tokyo), and the other is inscribed with “Omori Kaikyo” (Sanno 1, Ota City, Tokyo). The Omori Shell Mounds Monument was erected in 1929 by Motoyama Hikoichi, the president of the Osaka Mainichi Shimbun newspaper and an archaeologist, in agreement with Sasaki Chujiro and Ishikawa Chiyomatsu, students of Morse. The Omori Kaikyo Monument was erected by Sasaki Chujiro himself in 1930s, as part of activities to commemorate Morse at the University of Tokyo.



▲ Section of the Omori Shell Mound (Excavated 1984)

When the stone monuments were originally erected, the exact locations of Morse’s excavations were not known as they were not recorded in his archeological survey report, and due to changes in the surroundings.

In 1977, however, based on financial guarantee documents exchanged between Morse and Sakurai Jinemon, one of the landlords, an address and a map of the area surrounding the Omori Shell Mounds were ascertained. Archaeological surveys also uncovered a shell layer and residences from the late Jomon Period. The area excavated by Morse was same as the Omori Shell Mounds Monument area.

### The Omori Shell Mounds Today—The Omori Shell Mounds Park

In 1984, Shinagawa City formed a sister city relationship with Portland, Maine of the United States, the birthplace of Morse. In 1985, in commemoration of this bond, the area surrounding the Omori Shell Mounds Monument was opened as the Omori Shell Mounds Park. The grounds were further expanded in 1996. The park contains a plaza featuring the Monument, a statue of Morse, a commemorative monument of the sister-city relationship between Shinagawa City and Portland, and a specimen of the shell mound. The peaceful park receives many visitors throughout the year, also serving as a place to contemplate the origins of Japanese archeology.



◀ The Omori Shell Mound Monument



The Omori Kaikyo Monument ▶