

●Shinagawa Historical Museum Explanatory Sheet

The Shinagawa Irrigation Canal

The Construction of the Shinagawa Irrigation Canal

While Shinagawa was primarily an agricultural area during the Edo Period, it always struggled with a lack of water. This led to calls for an irrigation canal, and in 1667, permission was received for the construction of the irrigation canal. The shogunate government assumed the construction expenses, and it was decided the Shinagawa Irrigation Canal would draw water from the already constructed Tamagawa River Canal. The construction presented a major challenge, though, as the land through which the canal would pass was owned by a variety of parties, such as the shogunate government, samurai, and temples.

In 1669, the efforts of everyone involved in the project came to fruition, and the Shinagawa Irrigation Canal was completed. The 30-kilometer canal began in what is today Musashino City, and passed through Mitaka, Chofu, Setagaya and Meguro Cities to finally reach Shinagawa, supplying water to a total of 140

hectares of farmland. Organizations were formed in the various towns and villages to manage the use of the irrigation water.

The Impact of the Shinagawa Irrigation Canal

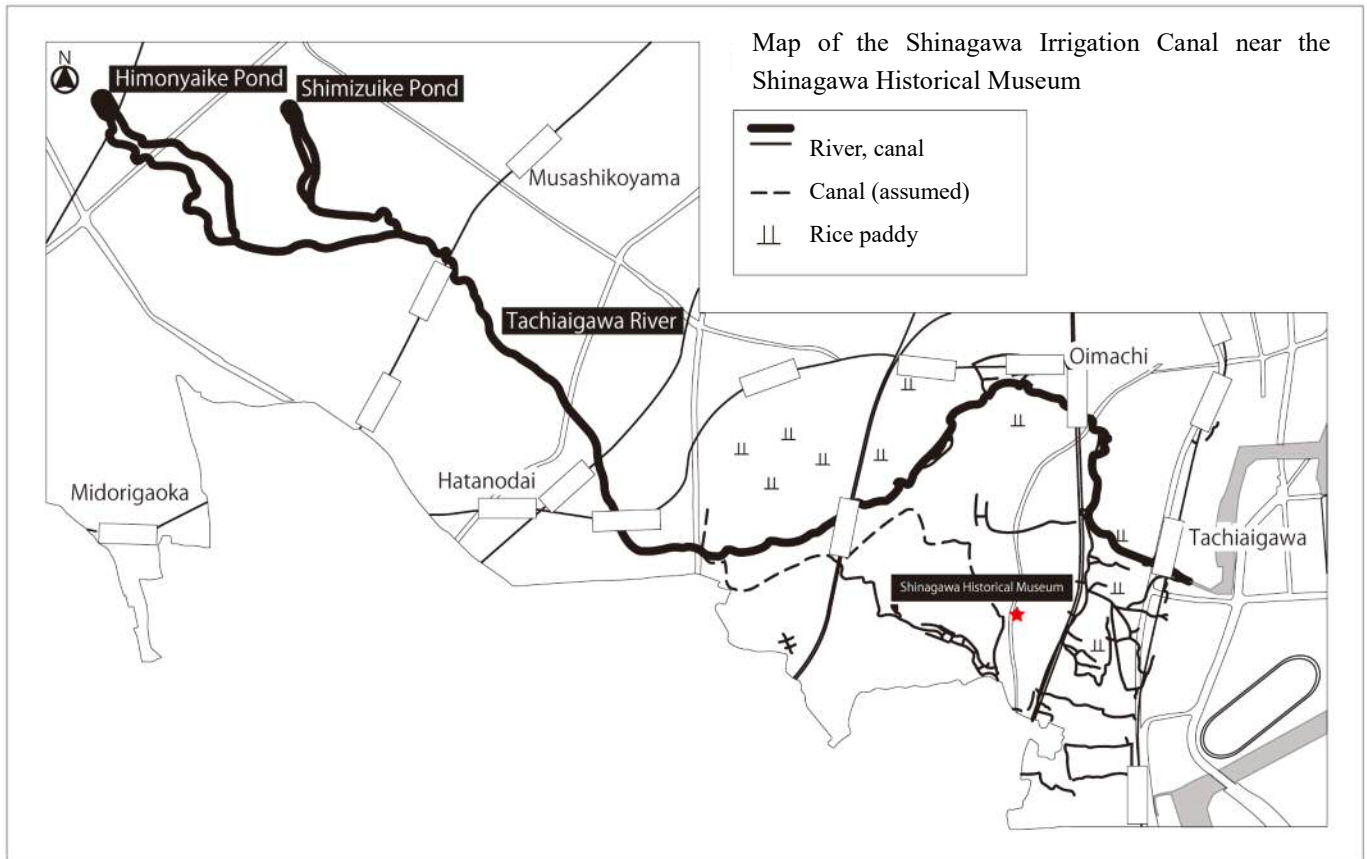
The completion of the canal released the area from its struggles with water shortages, relying on rain and spring water. The Canal, however, brought challenges as well as benefits. As use of the water directly impacted the volume of agricultural production, many disputes and troubles arose over its use, such as water theft and damage to the canal. When the shogunate government performed large-scale maintenance on the Canal in 1691, it simultaneously established the rules for its management, seeking to prevent further disputes, but even then, conflicts continued to occur frequently. The villages along the canal were also required to provide the labor and funds for its maintenance.



▲ A memorial commemorating where the Shinagawa Irrigation Canal split between the Meguro River and the Tachiai River directions



▲ A memorial stone engraved with the history of the Shinagawa Irrigation Canal, at Kashima Shrine
Erected in 1932



The Epilogue of the Shinagawa Irrigation Canal

With the start of the Meiji Period, the conversion of agricultural areas into residential areas began, and the water of the Shinagawa Irrigation Canal started being used for manufacturing and fire-fighting purposes. As the population increased, people also started draining their sewage into the canal, making the water polluted. Records in 1941 states that “foul water has accumulated along the waterway, and it is rife with putrid bubbles and odors.”

The canal was thereafter covered, and the majority of the canal disappeared from the surface of the ground.



▲ Construction to cover the Shinagawa Irrigation Canal (1954)



▲ The same street after construction finished (1954)