

Griffis Museum Tour Outline

William Elliot Griffis was a graduate of Rutgers University, located in the City of New Brunswick, New Jersey. Established in 1766, Rutgers is one of nine so called “Colonial Colleges” along with colleges such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. From its founding and onward through the time of Griffis, Rutgers had close ties with the Dutch Reformed Church. This would be the impetus for Kusakabe Taro and other young Japanese samurai to attend what was then Rutgers College in the late Edo and early Meiji period. As a result of these connections, Matsudaira Shungaku, lord of the Echizen-Fukui Domain, would hire Griffis, a recent Rutgers graduate, to teach modern science in present day Fukui City.

Though Griffis only spent ten months working in Fukui, he was able to achieve much in education, including the establishment of a modern scientific laboratory and of course, teaching a number of young pupils who would go on to contribute much to the development of Japan. After returning to the USA, Griffis became America’s foremost expert on Japan until the early 1900s, publishing many works on Japan including his most famous, the Mikado’s Empire.

The connection between New Jersey and Fukui faded for a time after Griffis’s final visit in 1928; however, interest in Kusakabe Taro and William Elliott Griffis was reignited in the 1970s, after which Fukui City and the City of New Brunswick would establish a sister city relationship in 1982, which also led to a sister state relationship between Fukui Prefecture and the State of New Jersey. This connection has led to numerous educational exchanges between New Brunswick and Fukui City, including my own position as a Cultural Ambassador.

My interest in coming to Fukui is tied to this long historical relationship, and I am honored to give a tour of the Griffis Museum. I look forward to discussing this unique history with the residents of Fukui so that we can together explore a bit of what it was like in the 1870s and see how it is still having an impact on our societies 150 years later. Please do not hesitate to stop by!