



### Akarenga Yuki-daruma (Red Brick Snowman)

Santa. Rudolph. Frosty. From fantastic figurines to catchy Christmas carols and ornate ornaments to decorative deserts, these and other classic characters are inherently bound up in every part of the festive winter season. That said, I would like to propose the addition of one more: *Akarenga Yuki-daruma*. Translated literally as “Red Brick Snowman”, this jolly character has become a charming symbol of Hokkaido’s lively winter season.

Akarenga Yuki-daruma has been made by Hokkaido Government public servants for the past 23 years, and I had the privilege of joining in this annual custom last month. Coinciding with

Hokkaido’s most famous winter event, the Sapporo Snow Festival, volunteers work very hard every year to ensure that Akarenga Yuki-daruma is ready by early February.

Serving as an impressive prop in visitors’ photos or simply making them laugh due to its sheer size, Akarenga Yuki-daruma has brought smiles to the faces of countless visitors from both inside and outside of Japan. I recall having a friend take a picture of me taking delight in helplessly trying to wrap my arms around its bulging belly when I first visited Hokkaido 5 years ago!

While *yuki-daruma* means “snowman”, people

familiar with the aptly named Frosty may be puzzled why *akarenga*, which means “red brick,” was used to name a snowman. As shown by the photos taken during the two day project, Akarenga Yuki-daruma is made of snow – not red bricks! Indeed, the name is not derived from its materials but from its location in front of the former main Hokkaido Government Building, familiarly referred to by locals as *Akarenga*.

At the surface this is it. However, I believe that the annual act of rebuilding Akarenga Yuki-daruma, from foundation to modifications to finishing touches, also reflects the long and fascinating history of Akarenga.



### Akarenga (Red Brick)

When asked to consider Japanese architecture, one often visualizes primarily wooden structures such as traditional Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples and pagodas, or rather modern steel skyscrapers in big cities. Rarely, if ever, does red brick architecture come to mind. However, the most famous building in Hokkaido is nicknamed *Akarenga* (Red Brick) and comprised of over 2.5 million red bricks laid in the French style. Not only is it rare in Japan due to its materials, it also has a unique design and is central to Hokkaido’s history.

Akarenga is a two floor American neo-baroque building with a height equivalent to ten stories. Among its double-paned windows, vents which

resemble chimneys, and decorative lightning rods, Akarenga’s most striking feature is its octagonal dome designed by American advisor Horace Capron. While the American state capitols of Massachusetts and Maryland were used as models, the final building was realized using local materials and architects.

In the 1870s and 80s, the Meiji Government expressed a clear interest in establishing its northern frontiers and developing Hokkaido by creating the Hokkaido Development Commission. Hokkaido was divided into three prefectures at that time and the prominence of Sapporo was becoming increasingly evident. The Sapporo Development Office Building was

built in 1873 but burnt down in 1879. In 1886, the prefecture of Hokkaido was established and in 1888, the construction of Akarenga was completed next to the former site of the Sapporo Development Office Building.

Undergoing the removal of the octagonal dome and vents in 1896 and their restoration in 1968, a fire in 1909 and repairs completed in 1911, Akarenga served as the main Hokkaido Government Building until 1968. Its conference rooms are still used regularly, but Akarenga now houses an array of archives and exhibitions. Designated as important cultural property in 1969, the 122 year old Akarenga remains one of Hokkaido’s most popular attractions.



Sapporo is a gem of a city. Big city conveniences, mountains in the horizon, a bustling night life, and thriving arts and culture scenes are just some of the many reasons why the capital of Hokkaido is a popular destination for locals and visitors alike. Most recently, Odori Park hosted the 62<sup>nd</sup> annual Sapporo Snow Festival, warming the hearts of people from all over the world.



Photo above: View of Odori Park from Sapporo TV Tower (147 m)

Like the names of many of Hokkaido's municipalities, the name, *Sapporo*, is derived from the language of Hokkaido's indigenous Ainu people and means "vast, dry river." Sapporo now has the fifth largest population in Japan with roughly 1.9 million people, including over nine thousand



Lion King snow sculpture



Letting loose at Odori Park (Sapporo TV Tower Observation Deck)

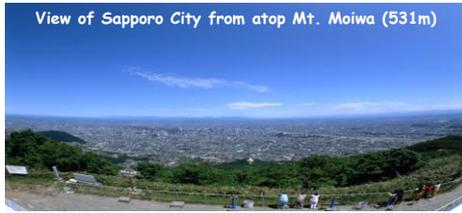
**A City Close to Home – Sapporo**



Map of Hokkaido

Sapporo

residents from 120 different countries. Nearing the end of the Edo period in 1866, Sapporo began to replace Hakodate in the south as the island's main center of expansion. Sapporo's location in the Ishikari Plain was deemed better for advancing development and defense. Construction of a canal increased migration and Sapporo soon began to transform into the political, economic and cultural hub of Hokkaido during the latter half



View of Sapporo City from atop Mt. Moiwa (531m)



Downtown Nighttime  
Downtown Daytime

of the 19<sup>th</sup> century following a series of Meiji Government policies. Sapporo's wide grid-pattern roads and its critical role in establishing Hokkaido's thriving livestock and dairy farming industries reflect Sapporo's long history of interchange with other countries, beginning with the USA. In addition to hosting international events such as the 1972 Winter Olympics and 2002 World Cup matches, Sapporo has also undertaken a wide range of initiatives to establish relationships with cities in countries both near and far: Portland, USA (1959); Munich, Germany (1972); Shenyang, China (1980); Novosibirsk, Russia (1990); Daejeon, South Korea (2010). With unchanging natural beauty, yet an increasingly diverse population and important role in Hokkaido's and Japan's economies, Sapporo is sure to continue to be at the core of Hokkaido's future growth and development.

**Canadians**

**Having arrived 20 years ago and started his own English teaching business 10 years ago, Gerry Petrash could share anecdotes for days. Raised in the**



small town of Truro, Nova Scotia, Gerry majored in French and minored in German at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. With a passion for language and curious about culture, the then 24 year-old Gerry headed for Japan in February 1991.

While Tokyo beckons most people, Gerry had no interest in its crowds. His destination was Sapporo, Hokkaido. Gerry had heard that Sapporo was not too big and not too small, the climate was similar to Canada, and the people of Hokkaido were distinctively open-minded and characterized by a pioneering spirit.

As he disembarked the ferry in the port city of Tomakomai and boarded the train bound for Sapporo, he believed he had made a big mistake. For the ominous welcome he received was a blizzard so terrible that he could see absolutely nothing from the seat of his train!

However, it was not long before Gerry had settled down and encountered **Hokkaido charm**. He recalls his first visit to *Sapporo International*

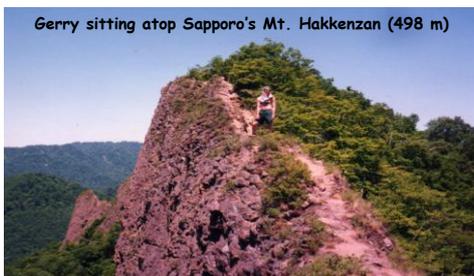


*Plaza* where Japanese staff proficient in English invited him to information seminars and discussions. After all, obtaining information in English was Gerry's biggest challenge at the time. While the internet has become ubiquitous in Hokkaido during the past decade, Gerry was left with scarce affordable news and information resources 20 years ago.

**"sincere, open-minded, peace loving, and passionate about learning"**

Through his work, Gerry has found Hokkaido's people to be sincere, open-minded, peace loving, and passionate about learning. Perhaps this is why he found a wife here with whom he has settled down and had two children. While balancing his family life between Nova Scotia and Hokkaido is increasingly difficult due to aging parents, he has continued to enjoy living in Hokkaido.

While his wife's home cooking such as short



Gerry sitting atop Sapporo's Mt. Hakkenzan (498 m)

**Hokkaido**

grain white rice, miso soup, pickled radish, and vinegar ginger are his favourites, Gerry occasionally enjoys kakuni-don (braised pork belly and rice) and Hokkaido's signature dish of ramen noodles in miso-flavoured pork broth.

Not only are the people and food fabulous, but so is the scenery. Gerry tells me about the commute he has made to a client in a town called Naie every Tuesday for the past 20 years; how he has vicariously experienced the rice harvest in the Sorachi Plain. When snow has almost all but melted away, farmers begin cultivating the paddies and continue through spring. In the summer, seedlings are planted mostly by machines but occasionally by hand, and the paddies are completely flooded. Sunrises and sunsets paint the glistening surface for a couple weeks before beautifully straight rows of green seedlings begin to sprout. The green seedlings become taller and thicker until the paddies turn a golden hue in the late summer and early fall when farmers harvest rice using miniature combine harvesters. Sometimes, the old way of drying cut sheaves of rice on wooden frames can be seen. The remaining stubble awaits its white blanket to keep warm in the winter and the cycle repeats.

Gerry looks forward to next Tuesday...