Yanagita Kunio in His Youth Described in Tayama Katai’s Works
—Including Ethnological Considerations on the Folklore
in the Areas around the lower Tone River—

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This is the study of Yanagita Kunio’s youth through such works as “Waga Fune (My Sail),” “Kata Ho (Reefed Sail),” and “No no Hana (Wild Flowers)” by Tayama Katai featuring on the youthful days of Yanagita as well as the topographical and ethnological studies of Fukawa-machi, Kitasoma-gun in Ibaraki Prefecture and Fusa-machi, Minamisoma-gun in Chiba Prefecture along the lower Tone river.

Yanagita Kunio was born on July 31, 1875 in Tsujikawa, Tabara-mura, Kanzaki-gun in Hyogo Prefecture, and in September in 1887 he moved to Fukawa-machi where his eldest brother was a practicing doctor. This move from the Kansai to the Kanto made Yanagita aware of various ethnological differences between the west and the east of Japan. An important thing to note here is that Fukawa-machi in Ibaraki Prefecture which was to become Yanagita’s second hometown was at the crossroads connecting the town with the outside world in every direction. The same conditions applied to Fusa-machi, a town in Chiba Prefecture across the Tone river. As his brother moved to Fusa in February in 1893 after Yanagita moved to Tokyo to attend an advanced school in 1890, Yanagita often returned to the town for the holidays. Fukawa and Fusa were both landing places for the Tonegawa Water Transport ships and were easy of access from various places. People just moved in and out of the towns all the time, and Yanagita’s brother was accepted as such and was successfully able to practice medicine. Yanagita’s parents and the other brothers as well as Yanagita settled themselves down with the doctor brother.

Yanagita had a variety of experiences through his childhood to youth in Fukawa and Fusa, including his first love. Some of his new-style poems he composed at the time suggest some of his love experiences. Descriptions of Yanagita in Katai’s aforementioned works, however, seem to reveal that Yanagita was in love with more than one woman. The complex love problems made Yanagita move out of Fukawa or Fusa for a certain period while he attended the Tokyo Teikoku university. His marriage into the Yanagita family signified the end to his youthful days.