



Wall Street of the North. Economics

The flourishing of economics in Otaru dates back to the Kitamae ships during the Edo Period. The Kitamae ships were small wooden vessels with sails, that made their fortune by trading with nearby ports. During the peak of their golden age, ships would set sail from Osaka, travel through the Setonai Straits to Shimonoseki, and travel along the coast of the Japan Sea all the way up to the Ezo land(modern day Hokkaido). Not only were they involved in trade, but because they were able to tap into information from each area instantaneously, the more prominent Kitamae ship owners were successful in gaining great wealth. As the nation entered into the Meiji Period, Westernization was promoted, and as a result of this the comings and goings of the wooden ships were limited by the new government, the Kitamae ships managed to stay quite active until the end of the Meiji Period. The architecture of these stone warehouses convey the story of just how active the Kitamae ships were. Some of the Kitamae ship owners who built and owned warehouses are Magozaemon NishiNishidede and Shohachi Nishitani who owned the Otaru Warehouse. Shichibei Oie,owned the Oie Warehouses and Nisaburo Hiroumi. owned the Hiroumi Warehouse. The warehouses were not built with typical gable roofs, but had decorations of killer whales, gargoyles, logos carved onto the gable walls, lantern roofs and arches that express the power of which the Kitamae ship owners possessed during their time.

Another thing that conveys the economic condition of Otaru back then is the architecture of the banks. Not to miss out on the booming economy of Otaru at that time, banks owned in Honshu(mainland Japan) set up branches in Otaru even before they did in Sapporo, where the Hokkaido Government Building was. From an architectural stand point, the solidity of these buildings that were earthquake-proof were highly recognized, especially following the Great Kanto Earthquake which took place in 1923(Taisho 12), and eventually reinforced concrete became the norm for building. The banks of Otaru were included in this change, and many architects and organizations based in Honshu designed and implemented the newest technology.

text Tomonori Hara Phd, Architectural History (Engineering)

photo Makoto Iwanami, photographer

Copyright © 2015 NPO Otaru Works All Rights reserved.

No. 19

Yasuda Bank Otaru Branch



Location:11-1 Ironai 2-chome, Otaru
Built:1930(Showa 5)
Structure: 2 story reinforced concrete building

Branches of the Yasuda Bank that were built throughout the nation from the late Taisho Period to the early years of the Showa Period had similar exterior characteristics as the Otaru Branch, and of these, the Otaru, Kobe and Yokohama branches were especially similar. The four main cylinder pillars located at the center of the exterior wall were inspired by Greek architecture, and were used in many bank buildings in the nation throughout the later part of the Meiji Period. The Yasuda Bank branches had an oblong window between the pillars with walls on either side of the exterior. In contrast to the powerful pillars, the arches on the second floor were rhythmical, and the corbels that support the eaves, as well as the decorative masonry under the eaves are all details which add to the characteristics of the buildings. The bank's location on Chuo Avenue, which runs from Otaru Station toward the sea intersecting with Ironai Avenue, was ideal. The building, relocated to the edge of Chuo Avenue, is an important part of the historical scenery of the Ironai District today.

Present Day Hanagokoro

No. 6 Hokkaido Bank Main Branch



Location:8-6 Ironai 1-chome, Otaru

Built:1912(Meiji 45)

Structure: 2 story stone building with basement

Like other banks that existed in Otaru, the Hokkaido Bank also underwent the elimination and consolidation process, that began in 1894 with the opening of the Yoichi Bank. Three years later the main branch was moved to Otaru, and the name was changed to the Otaru Bank. In 1906 the bank merged with the Hokkaido Bank of Commerce and became the Hokkaido Bank. In 1928 it merged with the Hyakujusan Bank, though in the same year it was merged with the Hokkaido Takushoku Bank, ending the existence of Hokkaido Bank. There is no connection to the present day Hokkaido Bank.

The exterior of the bank, with its repeated arches, entrances, and the stone design around the window sills, is influenced by Italian Renaissance architecture. It not only conforms to the typical architectural style, but also provides an impression of modernism. Details are not limited to only the openly visible areas, but even to areas of the building that are out of sight. Concrete was used for the primer for the roof, to prevent fire. This aspect of construction is the same as the Otaru Branch of the Bank of Japan. The building is designed by Uheji Nagano(1867-1937)who studied under Kingo Tatsuno, and who assisted in the designing of the many branches of the Bank of Japan. Nagano who was acting as chief engineer for the construction of the Otaru Branch of the Bank of Japan, designed the Hokkaido Bank Main Branch at home.

Present Day Otaru Bine Hokkaido Chuo Bus Co., Main Office

text Tomonori Hara Phd, Architectural History (Engineering)

photo Makoto Iwanami, photographer

Copyright © 2015 NPO Otaru Works All Rights reserved.

No. 16

Etchuya Hote



Location:8-25 Ironai 1-chome, Otaru
Built:1931(Showa 6)
Structure: 3 story reinforced concrete building

Etchuya Hotel established in 1877(Meiji10), was a Japanese inn that made its way into travel brochures of the United Kingdom during the 30' s of the Meiji Period. This particular wing was added on to accommodate foreign guests. The hotel, which was occupied during the war and after the war by both the Japanese Army and the U.S. military, was returned to Etchuya in 1950(Showa 25), but was let go due to inheritance taxes. It then changed hands over and over until today. The two rows of bay windows located in the center of the building are an example of the typical verticality of reinforced concrete buildings that were built in the city. The Art Deco design which was the worldwide rage during the 1920s is evident in the construction.

No. 5 Hyakujusan Bank Otaru Branch(113th Bank)



Location:1-25 Sakaimachi, Otaru

Built 1908(Meiji 41)

Structure: Timber framed 2 story stone building

The second branch of the Hyakujusan Bank, which has its main branch in Hakodate, that was built in Otaru. The urban styled bank with a bevelled edge stone entrance, was built on a corner lot, with soft stone exterior, and though the face of the building is different from what it is now, you can see that soft stone was used on the sides of the building as well. Presently it is being renovated into a shop, but the inspiration of Greek architecture used for the pillars in front and the pediment are still in tact after 100 years, preserving the vestiges of the original architecture of the bank.

text Tomonori Hara Phd, Architectural History (Engineering)

photo Makoto Iwanami, photographer

Copyright © 2015 NPO Otaru Works All Rights reserved.

No.9

Dai Hyakujusan National Bank Otaru Branch(113th National Bank



Location:1-19 Sakaimachi, Otaru

Built:1893(Meiji 26)

Structure: Timber framed 1-story stone building

At first glance, the one-story building with a hip roof and roof decorations would not appear to be a bank. However, the key stones that make the archway, the decorative eaves and corbel, and the arabesque design of the Dai Hyakujusan National Bank emblem underneath the eaves all indicate that there definitely was once a bank which stood here. In 1897(Meiji 30), the bank underwent organizational restructuring and management, and later relocated in 1908, when the new timber framed 2 story stone branch was built(Hyakujusan Bank Otaru Branch).

Present Day Music Box Store Kaimeiro

text Tomonori Hara Phd, Architectural History (Engineering)

photo Makoto Iwanami, photographer

Copyright © 2015 NPO Otaru Works All Rights reserved.

No.18

Mitsubishi Bank Otaru Branch



Location:1-12 Ironai 1-chome, Otaru
Built:1922(Taisho11)
Structure: 4 story reinforced concrete building

A change in the exterior architecture of office buildings and banks came over the nation, and was evident even in the Ironai District. This was owed to the fact that the structure of buildings was shifting from the ancient Greco-Roman styled architecture, adopted between the Meiji and Taisho Period to the straight and refined lines of reinforced concrete structures, that were becoming more prominent in the later part of the Taisho Period. Although this building falls under the latter category, there are pillars on the first floor and tooth pattered designs above that indicate the transition in architectural style which took place.

Present Day Otaru Canal Terminal Hokkaido Chuo Bus Co., Daini Bldg.

No.24 Daiichi Bank Otaru Branch(1st Bank)



Location:10-21 Ironai 1-chome, Otaru
Built:1924(Taisho13)
Structure: 4 story reinforced concrete building

The exterior of the Daiichi Bank Otaru Branch is designed with straight lines, and rounded corners to give a more modern appearance. However, the original building was glamorous looking bank with two pillars at the entrance and detailed wall carvings. The building was designed by Junkichi Tanabe(1879 - 1926) who resigned from his job as chief architect at the Shimizu Construction Group, became independent and went to Europe to observe architecture which then he applied to the designing of this building. Unfortunately, five years after becoming an independent architect, Tanabe passed away, making this building a very valuable display of his works.

Present Day Top Gent Fashion Core Co., Ltd.

No.25 Dai Yonjunana Bank Otaru Branch(47th Bank)



Location:6-25 Ironai 1-chome, Otaru
Built:Early Showa Period
Structure: 2 story wood building

In 1898, the Dai Yonjunana Bank underwent organizational restructuring and became a private bank with its main branch in Toyama, after which it continued in operation until 1939. Hokkaido Paper Company who presently owns the building obtained the building from the Hokuriku Bank which took over the original bank. Although the building is a small 2 story structure, judging by the 4 pillars that support both stories, the egg and dart carvings and tooth patterns in the molding under the eaves near the entrance suggest that the style of the bank architecture was common for its time. During its time, there were large vaulted ceilings and it possessed the typical prestige of a pre-war bank.

No.30

Mitsui Trade Company Otaru Branch



Location:9-1 Ironai 1-chome, Otaru

Built:1937(Showa 12)

Structure: 5 story reinforced concrete building

The Mitsui Trade Company Otaru Branch was constructed with straight lines, contrary to the architecture of the Bank of Japan Otaru Branch across the street which was designed by Kingo Tatsuno(1854-1919). It was designed by the chief designer of Yokogawa Engineering Company, Kitaro Matsui. Yokogawa Engineering Company was established by architect Tamisuke Yokogawa(1864-1945), who became the pioneer of logical American style architecture and construction of office buildings. The marble floors in the entrance halls and lighting on either side of the front are remnants of history.

Present Day Matsuda Building

text Tomonori Hara Phd, Architectural History (Engineering)

photo Makoto Iwanami, photographer

Copyright © 2015 NPO Otaru Works All Rights reserved.

No.31

Hokkaido Takushoku Bank Otaru Branch



Location:3-1 Ironai 1-chome, Otaru
Built:1923(Taisho 12)
Structure: 4 story reinforced concrete building

In ancient Greek architecture, the exterior was divided into three sections; the top, middle and base, and designed accordingly. This three-layered design method was adopted into the design of American office buildings toward the end of the nineteenth Century, and was also incorporated into the construction of the Hokkaido Takushoku Bank Otaru Branch. Windows that open vertically were placed in two places between the columns. Eaves wrap around the top of the building, with chapters and windows in three places.

Present Day Hotel Vibrant Otaru

No.38 Chuetsu Bank Otaru Branch



Location:1-2 Irifune 1-chome, Otaru

Built:1924(Taisho 13)

Structure: 2 story reinforced concrete building

This building is the first Hokkaido branch of the Chuetsu Bank which was established in Toyama prefecture in 1894(Meiji 27). After the merger with Hokuriku Bank in 1943, the bank became the Otaru Branch of the Hokuriku Bank in 1963. The first thing that catches the eye is the exterior of the second floor, the brown tiles that encase the windows, and the Greek key design that makes a line. The mortar between the tiles adds to the design giving the impression that the entire building consists of horizontal lines.

Present Day Silver Bell

text Tomonori Hara Phd, Architectural History (Engineering)

photo Makoto Iwanami, photographer

Copyright © 2015 NPO Otaru Works All Rights reserved.

No.69

Otaru Mujin Co., Main Branch



Location:1-1 Hanazono 4-chome, Otaru
Built:1935(Showa 10)
Structure: 3 story reinforced concrete

Mujin is a type of mutual loan, where a certain amount of money is set as a grant, and then by bid or lottery, is paid out. Before the war, especially when global depression set in, here in Japan such financial agencies for the peasants became popular. This building was officially a Mujin office, but can be considered has having a type of bank architecture. This is due to the symmetrical exterior of the building facing the road,the column and stigma, and the egg and tongue pattern carved into the eaves of the building, which expresses Greek architectural influence.

Present Day Otaru Mujin Building

No.17

Kyosei Company



Location:4-1 Sumiyoshi-cho, Otaru
Built:1912(Meiji 45)
Structure: 2 story timber framed brick building

Kyosei Company, established in 1891 (Meiji 24), was one of the many companies that dealt in the refining and selling of rice and grain. The building faces the Otaru Nanasashi Road and what used to be the entrance to the Arihoro Warehouses. Copper Mansard roofing crowns the office building, while arch windows formed by layers of stones appear in a rhythmic line along the walls. The front entrance was recreated from an image of an old photograph of the building. The windows are triple layered opening vertically on the outside, with iron sliding doors in the middle and windows that open into the room on the inside. Such windows were possibly fireproof and were installed as a preventative measure. The warehouse complex is timber framed with stone exterior and was originally two stories.

Present Day Otaru Music Box Museum Co.

text Tomonori Hara Phd, Architectural History (Engineering)

photo Makoto Iwanami, photographer

Copyright © 2015 NPO Otaru Works All Rights reserved.

No.40

Tsushin Densetsu Hama Building



Location:2-18 Ironai 1-chome, Otaru
Built:1933(Showa 8)
Structure: 4 story reinforced concrete building

The noble characteristics of the architecture of this warehouse stand out amongst the rows of other warehouses along the canal. While many of the banks and offices built around the same time feature arch-like window casings, this building is simply and beautifully symmetrical on the exterior, with oblong windows that reach to the fourth story. The granite eaves and columns with embedded lighting, not to mention the designs on the doors and transoms around the entrance, are quite stunning.

Present Day Kyowa Hama Building