



Culture

Contributions to the Community. Culture

Economic stability cultivates a rich culture. Otaru is no exception. In order to be recognized as a fully qualified financier, cultural grounding cannot be eliminated, which also means having famous architects and skilled carpenters build your home and office.

Such buildings still remain, and have become an important resource in tourism that affects the economy of Otaru today. When speaking of culture in Otaru, it is easiest to focus on the flourishing world of Ironai Avenue and the canal district, as far as architecture is concerned. On the other hand, there are many pieces of architecture that have been an important part of the community for years, which still remain today. The most important of these are the religious facilities, which through religious ceremony, celebrations, and funerals are a significant part of daily life. Regardless of religion, whether it be Shinto, Buddhism, or Christianity, each and every religious establishment, though small and simple, are built in a manner that expresses the sincerity of the craftsmen. Such architecture speaks of the history and appeal of Otaru.

When speaking of architects who were highly regarded and appreciated, one cannot forget Tadagoro Kato (1856-1930) of the Otoru Construction Company from Otaru. His work, which led the architectural culture of Otaru until today, can be seen in everything from religious architecture to bank buildings, some of which are the Otaru Public Hall(1911), Iwanaga Clock Store (1896), Hyakujusan Bank Otaru Branch (1908), Hokkaido Bank Main Branch (1912), Itaya Residence (1926 - 1927), and the Sumiyoshi Shrine Office(1934). He also undertook the responsibility of building not only in Otaru, but in Sapporo and Karafuto (modern day Sakhalin), and has a significant presence in the pre-war architectural world of Hokkaido.

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photo Makoto Iwanami, photographer

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No. 60

Ryutokuji Temple Main Hall



Location:3-8 Shinei 1-chome, Otaru

Built:1876(Meiji 9)

Structure: One-story timber structure building

One of the most representative buildings of temple architecture in Otaru built in 1857 (Ansei 4), Ryutokuji dates back to the 18th Buddhist priest of Koryuji in Hakodate. The temple was relocated in 1875 (Meiji 7) to its current location, and two years later the present main hall was constructed. It is the oldest main hall of any existing temples here in Otaru. The surface of the building is comprised of the inner temple in the back, with rooms on either side, the outer temple with three rooms in line with the front veranda, and very similar to the Ryuunin Temple Main Hall (1842; Tenpo 13), and the Ryugenji Main Hall (approximately 1874). The structure and elements of authentic temple architecture is evident in the carved transoms and entablature on the interior, especially in the outer temple.

The middle part of the ceiling of the outer temple is coffered, and the two rooms on each side have ceilings with decorative lattice work. The master carpenter for the job was Yaozo Kitami from Sashu (Sado), and his journeyman was Ninzaburo Furuyama from Usuhara, Echigo (present day Niigata). Another famous aspect of the temple is the giant wooden fish (1.35 meters in diameter and weighing 330 kilograms), which was donated to the temple in 1933. The konpira (guardian deity of seafaring) enshrinement connected by a hallway to the Main Hall on the left was built in 1889 (Meiji 22). The master carpenter for this was Tadagoro Kato, an architect who built many of the major buildings in Otaru during the Meiji Period.

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No. 12

Otaru Civic Hall



Location:2-1 Hanazono 5-chome, Otaru

Built:1911(Meiji 44)

Structure: One-story timber structure building

The Otaru Civic Hall was built with the help of donations from Yokichi Fujiyama, a businessman in Otaru, especially as an inn for the Crown Prince (later the Taisho Emperor) when he visited Otaru. Upon Fujiyama's request, Tadagoro Kato undertook the task, after which he went to the Imperial Office in Tokyo to receive instruction from architect Kosaburo Kigo. The building was first on the present premises of the Otaru Civic Hall, with the main building facing the street, and the palace in the back. The main building consisted of a tiled gambrel roof, with a houndstooth pattern bargeboard in the center, and cusped gable with Porte cochere.* The building surface is symmetrical with hallways leading in three directions toward the periphery of the building, with two large rooms on either side of the central hallway. The palace itself had a gambrel roof with three connecting rooms, which were comprised of hard wood floors and tatami mat floors, and a double veranda which wrapped around the periphery of the rooms. The gambrel roof originally had cedar thatching, which was later re-thatched with copper plates. In light of construction for the citizens civic hall in 1960(Showa 35), the building was relocated to its current location 50 meters away from the original location;the foundation and position of the main building and palace changed, and the Okazaki Noh Stage was installed.

*Tr. note: Porte Cochere is French for a covered driveway where passengers are let out at the entrance of a building.

Present Day Otaru Civic Hall

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photo Makoto Iwanami, photographer

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No. 12

Okazaki Residence Noh Stage



Location:2-1 Hanazono 5-chome, Otaru

Built:1926(Taisho 15)

Structure: one-story timber structure building

The Noh stage originally built inside of businessman Ken Okazaki' s residence in Irifune, is of typical authentic Japanese architecture complete with decorative beam support and structural decorations. The roof is a double gambrel roof (two layered rafters that extend in alternate directions), covered with galvanized steel sheets. The gargoyle on the building was originally made of carved wood, and is now preserved at the Otaru Civic Hall. Although it cannot be seen from the outside, metal bindings have been attached to uphold the weight of snow.

Present Day Otaru Civic Hall Noh Stage

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No. 29

Otaru Congregational Church



Location:20-18 Hanazono 4-chome, Otaru
Built:1926(Taisho 15)
Structure: 2 story timber structure building

The Otaru Congregational Church is located on a corner lot of Koen-dori Avenue on the way to Otaru Park, where both the Otaru Civic Hall and Okazaki Noh Stage are located. The church has a stairwell tower that leads to the sanctuary on the second floor, with large gable roofs with a window in the center of the gable, and has become a landmark of the community. The decorative eaves of the tower, the large arched windows are all unified in Gothic architectural style. The church was designed by Koichiro Narita, the Director of the Architecture and Engineering Department of Otaru, and construction was carried out by Kenji Takahashi, a local carpenter. The church originally went by the name of the Congregational Church, but joined the United Church of Christ in Japan in 1941 (Showa 16), changing the name to the Otaru Koen-dori Church.

Present Day Otaru Koen-dori Church

No. 61

Sumiyoshi Shrine Office



Location:5-1 Suminoe 2-chome, Otaru

Built:1934(Showa 9)

Structure: one-story timber structure building

The Sumiyoshi Shrine in Otaru was first established back in 1868(Meiji 1), when a part of the spirit of the deity worshiped in the Osaka Sumiyoshi Shrine was divided and given to the Otarunai and Takashima unjoya*trading posts and enshrined at each location. In 1899, the shrine was moved to its current location. The shrine office was the largest timber structured office of all others in Hokkaido during the Showa Period. The Porte cochere* had a cusped gable, and the main gable roof was decorated with a bargeboard. The shape was very similar in appearance to that of the Otaru Civic Hall(1911), and both were constructed by Takagoro Kato, who worked for Otoro Construction Company.

* Tr. note: Porte Cochere is French for a covered driveway where passengers are let out at the entrance of a building.

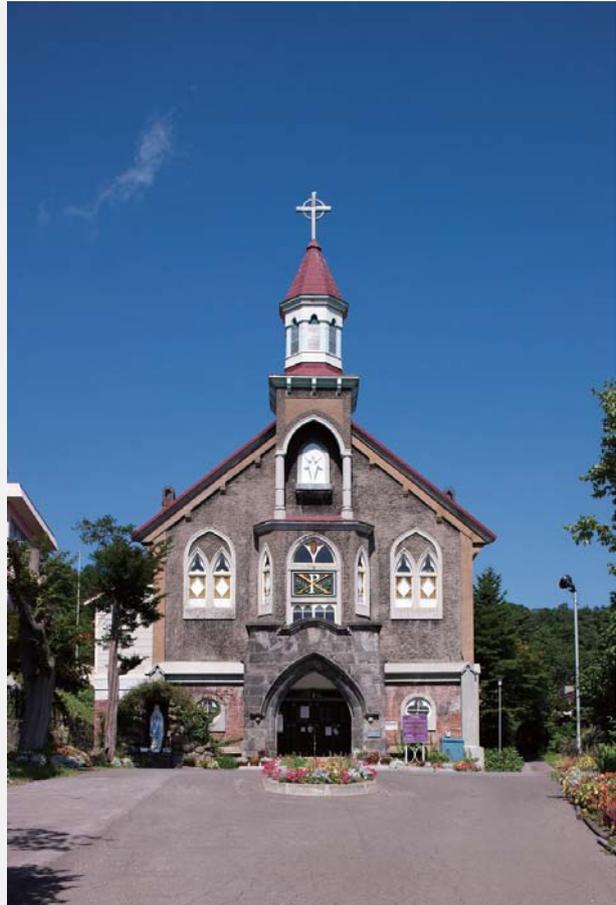
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No. 70

Tomioka Catholic Church



Location:21-25 Tomioka1-chome, Otaru
Built:1929(Showa 4)

Structure: 3 story timber framed partial reinforced concrete building

The steep red gable roof and octagonal bell tower create an impressive ridge typical of a church building. Small Gothic style arches are placed all around the building. The soft stone and brick on the first floor where the meeting place is, and the stucco walls of the second floor where the sanctuary is located, blend well together. Design and construction were carried out by Saizo Miura (Miura Building Company), who also worked for architect Max Hindel, who designed and constructed the Hokusei Gakuen Centennial Building(1926).

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No. 46

Hanazono Town Community Hall



Location: 3-8 Hanazono 4-chome, Otaru

Built: 1927 (Showa 2)

Structure: 2 story timber framed structure building

Although this building is small, it features high verticality in the front with a symmetrical design that catches the eye. If you take a closer look you will see details the architect was intent on adding in the decorative pattern at the top of the building, and the corrugated surface of the exterior walls, and bent gable fashioned above the entrance. The building was designed by local architect Yonejiro Hagiwara. The community hall is managed by a company which the six neighboring communities co-pay into, a unique fact, and is used to hold town meetings, funerals, community get-togethers and more.

Present Day Hanazono Town Community Hall

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No. 28

Otaru Anglican Church



Location:10-5 Toun-cho, Otaru
Built:1907(Meiji 40)
Structure: one-story timber structure house

The Anglican Church is a church affiliated with the Church of England. The Otaru Anglican Church began its ministry in 1880 (Meiji 13), and in 1895 (Meiji 28) built its church building and sanctuary in Temiya. The church burnt down, and was relocated and rebuilt in 1907 (Meiji 40) in its current location. The church, nestled along the cobble stoned stairs to the Suitengu Shrine, has an impressive symmetrical face. Three steep gables make up the roofs (entrance, roof and tower), and even the windows on the either side of the entrance add to they symmetry of the building. The lace-like pattern of the eaves is the typical American style of carpenter' s Gothic architecture.

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No. 49

Tenjoji Main Hall



Location:32-1 Irifune 4-chome

Built:1890(Meiji 23)

Structure: One-story timber structure building

The beginning of Tenjoji dates back to 1880 (Meiji 13), when a branch of the Jodo Buddhism Hakodate Chukyoin Otaru Branch opened in Kaiun-cho (the present day Okusawa Intersection area). The exterior of the temple is made to resemble Zenkoji in Nagano Prefecture. The gambrel roof has an entrance in the gable (a flat form type of architecture with an entrance placed on the gable sides of the building), an unusual feature in a temple, and a wrap around cuff story (pent roof which hangs under the eaves of the story above). The study on the left of the main hall is said to be the Nakayama Banya (guardhouse) which was relocated from Shioya to its current location.

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No. 50

Suitengu Shrine Main Shrine and Front Shrine(prayer room)



Location:3-1 Aioi-cho, Otaru

Built:1919(Taisho 8)

Structure: One-story timber structure building

Suitengu, located on a hill in the city, boasts a commanding view of the Otaru Port and city, and is perfect for determining where you want to explore. The Front Shrine has a gambrel roof with three hound's tooth bargeboards and lattice shutters. The main shrine in the back has the typical streamline roof style with ornamental crossbeams on the gable and five wooden billets(carved ornaments). The building was constructed by Harusaburo Iku, an excellent master carpenter who helped build the present Hokkaido Jingu Shrine in 1913 (Taisho 2).

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No.59

Tokugenji Temple Main Hall



Location:25-1 Shioya 2-chome, Otaru

Built:1897(Meiji 30)

Structure: One-story timber structure building

Tokugenji Temple established in 1862 (Bunroku 2) possesses an architectural style that includes a main hall and a ryujindo (house for the dragon god), a typical style adopted by the Zen Temples of Hokkaido. The main hall has a gambrel roof with an entrance on the side of the building(opposed to a gable entrance), with a type of a cusped gable on the face of the temple. The temple was built by master carpenter Harusaburo Iku, a prominent architect who was active in Otaru between the Meiji and Taisho periods, and who helped to build the Suitengu Shrine Main Shrine and Front Shrine (prayer room), not to mention the Jououji Temple. Judging by the similarities in style, it is speculated that the construction of the ryujindo occurred around the same time as the main shrine.

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No.58

Ebisu Shrine Main Shrine



Location:161 Shukuzu 3-chome, Otaru

Built:1863(Bunroku 3)

Structure: One-story timber structure building

The main shrine of the Ebisu Shrine, along with the Tsukotan Inani Shrine Main Shrine which is located in Oshoro (built in 1849; Kaei 2), is one of the two heritage buildings from the Edo Period that remain in Otaru even today (the other Soenji Temple built during the Edo Period was relocated between 1909 and 1911, and was torn down in the year 2000). The shrine dates back to seven years before the main shrine was built in 1856 (Ansei 3). The main shrine is built in the streamline style with one room and is presently placed inside a sheath building. The haiden, front shrine (prayer room), heiden (offering room), and sakudou (sheath building) were constructed between 1928 (Showa 3) and 1930 (Showa 5).

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