

The Former Bank of Japan, Hiroshima Branch

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On 6 August, 1945 at 8:15AM, an atomic bomb was detonated approximately 600 metres above the city of Hiroshima, destroying virtually everything on the ground below within a radius of 2 kilometres from the hypocenter. However, a few structures remained standing including the now famous A-bomb dome, formerly known as the Hiroshima Prefectural Products Exhibition Hall. Several other structures survived total destruction, but the most well-preserved building to withstand the atomic blast was the Hiroshima Branch Building of the Bank of Japan.

At the time, the bank was relatively new, having only been built in 1936. Japan is situated above four tectonic plates, and is therefore very prone to earthquakes. For



The interior of the Bank of Japan prior to the atomic bomb.

example, in 1923, prior to the construction of the bank, a magnitude 8.3 earthquake devastated Tokyo and its surrounding area, killing more than 140,000 people. With this in mind, the bank was built with an anti-earthquake design made out of ferro-concrete and stonework, with a steel-reinforced frame. Additionally, the windows were equipped with armoured shutters. The resulting three-storey building was able to withstand more structural stress than most others at the time.

Forty-two people were inside the bank at the time of the nuclear detonation. Although everyone inside did not survive the atomic bomb, the bank itself remained standing, despite being located a mere 380 metres from the hypocenter. The armoured window shutters on the first and second storey were closed on the morning of 6 August, 1945, which largely protected the interior of the bank. However, the shutters on the third floor remained open and the top floor was therefore burned out.



The third floor of the Bank of Japan following the atomic bomb.

Despite the near-complete destruction of Hiroshima, the Bank of Japan was reopened only two days later, on 8 August, 1945. It continued to function as a bank until March, 1992. In March of 1993, Hiroshima announced their intention to preserve remaining artifacts and buildings that survived the atomic bomb. As a result, the city named the former Bank of Japan building as an important cultural site in July, 1999. A year later, the Bank of Japan donated its former Hiroshima branch building to the city in perpetuity.



The former Bank of Japan building as it looks today.

Today, the former Bank of Japan building is open to the public and serves as a reminder of the devastation caused by the bomb. The first and second floors remain largely empty with a few displays and photographs to show the appearance of the bank both before and after the atomic bombing. The bank hosts a number of temporary exhibits throughout the year, including several displays of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) during the 30th Hiroshima Flower Festival. Evidence of the damage is still

visible in the form of imbedded glass shards in some of the wood paneling of the walls. During the blast, windows were broken under extreme pressure and fragments of glass were sent flying across rooms.

A crack in the wood paneling of a second-storey wall caused by a glass shard.



The third storey houses millions of folded paper cranes donated to the city of Hiroshima from people all over the world. There are literally huge mounds of these paper cranes that fill entire rooms. The paper crane has become a symbol of hope and peace due largely to the inspiring true story of the cancer-stricken Sadako Sasaki. Sadako was exposed to the atomic bomb at the age of two, and diagnosed with leukemia at the age of eleven. In the hopes of surviving such a horrible disease, she started making one thousand paper cranes. An ancient Japanese legend states that if a person folds one thousand cranes, their wish will come true. Sadly, Sadako's wish was not granted, and she did not survive leukemia. However, her indestructible spirit inspired her classmates and millions of others around the world.



A mountain of folded paper cranes in the former Bank of Japan.

Additional before and after photographs of the former Bank of Japan, Hiroshima Bank:



Additional photographs of the bank under restoration, and as it appears today, respectively:

