

Former Omori Courthouse

The town of Omori grew into the administrative and commercial hub of Iwami Ginzan from the early 1600s onward. It developed around the magistrate's office, from which the magistrate—the representative of the Tokugawa shogunate (central government) in Edo (present-day Tokyo)—supervised the silver mine and the surrounding area. The Tokugawa regime came to an end in 1867, when revolutionary forces loyal to the emperor overthrew the government and installed Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) as the head of state. The defeat of the Tokugawa brought great change to Omori, which under the new order lost its special status and became a regional administrative center like any other. The town came to host a police station, tax and post offices, and in 1890—the year in which constitutional government was established in Japan—a courthouse.

Inspired by Western architectural designs introduced to Japan in the late nineteenth century, the Omori courthouse was completed in 1888. It held jurisdiction over the town and 49 nearby villages, operating until the end of World War II. The building then became a community center until the late 1980s, when the value of the historic Omori townscape began to be recognized and the former courthouse was converted into a museum to showcase the preservation effort. Its displays include scale models of restored houses in Omori and documents describing the restoration process, while a reconstructed Meiji-era (1868–1912) courtroom complete with mannequins reminds visitors of the building's past. The character sitting in the center behind the bench is the judge, flanked by a scrivener. The empty seat on the judge's right is for the prosecutor, and at the empty desk below would sit the defendant and defense attorney. This arrangement, in which the judge and prosecutor sit next to each other as virtual equals, looking down at the defendant, was the norm at trials in Japan until the end of World War II. The third mannequin in the room represents a court official.