

Former Bank of Japan Hiroshima Branch: Outline

Like the Atomic Bomb Dome, the former Bank of Japan Hiroshima Branch is a classical European-style building, and one of the few structures in the area that remained standing after the August 6, 1945, atomic bombing. Located a mere 380 meters from the hypocenter of the explosion, the bank would have been destroyed if not for its sturdy construction—and a bit of luck.

The three-story bank was one of the most modern buildings in the city when it was completed in 1936. It featured a steel frame with reinforced concrete walls, marble interiors, and a large skylight over the main hall. Its facade was designed to look like natural stone, and the entrance was raised as a precaution against flooding—a common problem in Hiroshima at the time. A second-floor catwalk allowed the bank director to easily keep an eye on employees, and the building even had electrically operated metal shutters on the windows.

The 5-centimeter-thick shutters on the first two floors were still closed on the morning of the bombing, which lessened the impact of the shockwave and protected these floors from fire. Unfortunately, employees had already begun working in the financial office that occupied the third floor, so the shutters there were open. The explosion and resulting fire killed 8 of the 18 employees. The fire began to spread downstairs but was quickly contained. Although the skylight was destroyed, the roof remained intact thanks to a meter of sand the manager had added to protect the building from bombs and fire. The bank vault, and the money inside, also escaped harm, so the bank was able to resume its functions just two days later.

In 2000, the building was designated an Important Cultural Property and is maintained by the city of Hiroshima. The third floor has been partially reconstructed, and volunteer guides offer tours of the bank. Additionally, rooms can be leased by local citizens for exhibitions and meetings.