

Sumiyoshi Jinja Shrine

Sumiyoshi Jinja Shrine was built in 1830 as a guardian shrine for the Chisago Breakwater. It enshrines three deities known as the Sumiyoshi Sanjin who are associated with sailing and the sea. According to legend, the Sumiyoshi Sanjin are the three main stars of the constellation Orion, and their connection to sailing possibly originates from the importance of those stars in maritime navigation.

To build the shrine, the Hiroshima domain's magistrate solicited funding from Kōnoike Zen'emon (1806–1851). Zen'emon was the ninth-generation head of a wealthy Osaka merchant family that would later establish what is now United Financial Holdings of Japan (UFJ), one of the country's largest banks. The magistrate did not seriously expect Zen'emon to contribute to the construction of the shrine, but Zen'emon happened to be at the unlucky age of 25. Per Japanese tradition, disaster is thought more likely to strike during certain inauspicious years of a person's life (*yakudoshi*), but catastrophe can be averted by performing meritorious acts, such as visiting shrines or temples. It is said that Zen'emon donated the funds for building Sumiyoshi Jinja with the hope of counteracting the effects of his *yakudoshi*.

Sumiyoshi Jinja's main sanctuary (*honden*) is an exact half-scale replica of the *honden* of Sumiyoshi Taisha Shrine in Osaka, the main shrine for all Sumiyoshi shrines across Japan. The component parts of the *honden* were built in Osaka and later assembled in Mitarai. Both the *honden* in Osaka and the one in Mitarai are constructed in a unique style called *sumiyoshi-zukuri*, characterized by a flat roofline and surrounding stone fence.

The fence around the shrine precincts is inscribed with the names of merchants from around the country who made donations toward the shrine's construction, a sign of Mitarai's nationwide renown. Other donors recognized here include high-ranking courtesans (*oiran*) who worked at the local teahouses.

In 1991, Typhoon Mireille completely destroyed Sumiyoshi Jinja's worship hall, but it has since been rebuilt. The *honden*, however, remained nearly untouched by the typhoon, and in 1996 it was designated an Important Cultural Property of Hiroshima Prefecture.