

## **Warehouses in Minamihama District**

After Hokkaido's first railway opened in 1882 to carry coal from inland mines to Otaru for shipping, the economy and population of the city grew rapidly. Land reclamation efforts created additional areas along the coast to accommodate the needs of the expanding port. The new districts of Sakaimachi, Ironai, Kitahama, and Minamihama were established on reclaimed land in 1889, forming the city's commercial center. Wholesalers built warehouses and stores on Sakaimachi Street in the Minamihama district in the early twentieth century, many of which remain.

Some wholesalers made their fortunes by speculating on commodities such as beans grown in Hokkaido. They bought them cheaply in bulk, then stored them until prices rose. The former Kimura, Shimatani, and Takahashi Warehouses in the Minamihama district are reminders of Otaru's past prosperity and symbols of the city's recent economic revival.

### *Former Kimura Warehouse*

The Kimura Warehouse was built in 1894 and is the only remaining warehouse of nine owned by the Kimura family. It was first used to store fertilizer made from herring caught in the waters off Otaru. The fertilizer was then shipped to the indigo and cotton fields of southwestern Honshu. The warehouse retains many of its original features, including a stone corridor with rails for guiding hand carts from the port into the warehouse. After the herring industry collapsed in the mid-twentieth century due to overfishing, the warehouse was used to store dry goods. Otaru's position as a major port gradually diminished and by the 1960s the Kimura Warehouse, like many other warehouses and stores in the area, was left empty. The warehouse was renovated by Kitaichi Glass in 1983 to serve as a retail store and restaurant. After the successful restoration and repurposing of the historical building, other businesses opened in former warehouses along Sakaimachi Street and around the canal, creating an attractive shopping area.

### *Former Shimatani Warehouse*

The Shimatani Warehouse was built in 1892 for steamship company Shimatani Kisen. It is built of volcanic tuff fixed to a wooden frame. The stone is around 15 centimeters thick and, along with the metal door and metal shutters on the small upper windows, it protected the contents from fire. Between 1880 and 1910, there were 16 large fires in Otaru. These devastated the wooden buildings but caused minimal damage to the Shimatani Warehouse and the other stone-clad warehouses around the city. The warehouse is now open to the public as a café.

### *Former Takahashi Warehouse*

The Takahashi Warehouse was built in 1923 by the Takahashi family, who sold rice and seafood and produced miso and soy sauce. The family became wealthy through commodity speculation in the early twentieth century, buying up adzuki beans and storing them until the price rose to sell for a profit. In 1989, the warehouse was renovated and opened as a stained glass museum, exhibiting stained glass windows recovered from churches in England and Europe.