

Former Kimura Warehouse

The Kimura family built their warehouse in 1894 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. It is the only remaining warehouse of nine that belonged to the family and is one of the largest warehouses on Sakaimachi Street, which was the trade and retail center of the city until the mid-twentieth century. The building was renovated in 1983 by Kitaichi Glass 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.

Built to last

Sakaimachi Street was built on reclaimed land, and the warehouses on the port side of the street were close to the water's edge. Fertilizer was unloaded from ships in front of the Kimura warehouse and transported by wheeled handcarts, guided on rails. A stone corridor with cart rails still divides the warehouse building into two parts. After the herring industry collapsed in the mid-twentieth century due to overfishing, the warehouse was used to store dry goods. When Otaru's position as a major seaport diminished in the 1960s, it was left empty, along with many other warehouses on the street. The Kimura Warehouse was built of volcanic stone on a frame of Sakhalin fir and Ezo spruce, with cypress floors. The building has remained in good condition for over a century.

Otaru's glass heritage

Kitaichi Glass has deep roots in Otaru, opening in 1901 as Asahara Glass. The company made hand-blown glass oil lamps at a time when electricity was not yet common and oil lamps were a necessity of daily life. Asahara Glass later manufactured glass floats for herring fishing nets. By the 1920s, the company had around 400 employees, and was one of the largest glass makers in Hokkaido. As electricity and plastics became widespread, the demand for glass lamps and floats diminished, and by 1960, Asahara Glass was the only remaining glass manufacturer in Otaru.

In 1971, the sales department was renamed Kitaichi Glass, and the company began manufacturing and selling lamps as nostalgic mementos, alongside other glass products. The lamps remain a popular souvenir of Otaru. The entrance hall of Otaru Station is lit with glass lamps from Kitaichi Glass, using electric bulbs in place of oil. The Kitaichi Hall restaurant occupies half the former warehouse and is illuminated by 167 glass oil lamps that are lit by hand each morning.