

Living History of the Kanmon Strait

Moji and the surrounding region underwent a period of rapid, trade-driven growth in the first decades of the 1900s. During that time, different architectural techniques and materials were adopted from the West and applied to both private and public architecture. The buildings that remain from that period are collectively part of Japan's national cultural heritage. Although many such historic structures have been converted into museums or publicly owned spaces, others have been adapted to serve the needs of the community.

Former Miyazaki Trading Building

At the turn of the twentieth century, Shimonoseki was an important refueling stop for coal-fired steamships. Both domestic and international coal trading companies opened depots here, including Mitsubishi and Samuel Samuel & Co. The Former Miyazaki Trading Building was built by coal dealer Miyazaki Giichi (b. 1855) in 1907 to house his company headquarters after he moved his operations from Kobe to Shimonoseki. The brickwork, arched veranda, and dentil cornices resemble those of the Former British Consulate, but the building was probably modeled on the now-destroyed Shimonoseki branch office of the British trading company Jardine, Matheson & Co. After World War II (1939–1945), the building housed an insurance agency, then a hair salon, and it now contains a health clinic.

JP Mojikō Building (Former Moji Yūsen Building)

The Moji Yūsen Building, across the street from Mojikō Station, is a reinforced concrete structure built in 1927 as offices for Nippon Yūsen Kaisha (NYK). This shipping company ran mail-carrying steamships out of Moji and had been operating even before Moji's transformation into a busy port of trade. The company was later able to take advantage of the port's prosperity, as this location gave it easy access to both the water and the railway station. The building's entryway is decorated with ceramic tile and leads to a small lobby with one of the oldest elevators in Kyushu. Though still an office building, it is now occupied by several different companies attracted by the prime station-front location that encouraged NYK to build here almost a century ago.

Moji Ward Office

The Moji Ward Office is another historic building that still plays an active role in the city. Built in 1930, this three-story reinforced concrete structure was Moji's municipal

office until the city merged to become part of Kitakyushu in 1963. Though not especially large by modern standards, the building's scale gives some idea of Moji's prosperity in the early 1900s. It was designed by architect Kurata Ken (1881–1940) during his time as the head of the architecture department at Kyushu University (formerly Kyushu Imperial University), a point in his career characterized by a shift away from established traditional designs and toward originality and freedom of expression. The ward office's relatively unornamented exterior and muted colors are characteristic of early internationalist architecture. The exterior was originally clad in tile to create variance in color and shadow as the sun moved across the sky, but the tilework has since been replaced.