

# Highlights of The Yamagata City Local History Museum

## What is the Former Saiseikan Hospital Main Building?

Constructed in 1878, the Former Saiseikan Hospital Main Building is a hospital built in the *Giyo-fu* architectural style. Mishima Michitsune, the first governor of Yamagata Prefecture, promoted modernization by constructing modern-style buildings throughout the city, and Saiseikan Hospital was one of these projects. During the planning stage, staff members were sent to inspect hospitals in Tokyo and Yokohama. Grand Minister of State Sanjo Sanetomi was commissioned to write the hospital's name plaque. His calligraphy read "Saiseikan", which ultimately inspired the institution's official name, Yamagata Prefectural Hospital Saiseikan. In addition to providing medical treatment, the hospital also included a medical school. The Austrian physician Erwin von Bälz's German student, Dr. Roretz, was invited to serve both as a physician and instructor, making the institution a center of medicine in Yamagata.

In 1888, the hospital temporarily became privately operated, and the medical school was abolished. In 1904, it became a municipal hospital operated by Yamagata City. About 90 years after its construction, plans for a complete rebuilding arose due to aging facilities, sparking debate over whether the building should be demolished or preserved. Because of its rarity and historical value as an early Meiji *Giyo-fu* structure, it was designated an Important Cultural Property of Japan in 1966. The building was later relocated and restored at its present site and reopened in 1971 as the Yamagata City Local History Museum (Kyodokan).

※ Currently, only the first and second floors are open to the public.

## What Is Giyo-fu Architecture?

*Giyo-fu* architecture refers to a style of building created from the late Edo period through the early Meiji period, where Japanese carpenters imitated Western architecture using traditional Japanese construction techniques. Although these buildings appear Western at first glance, the details of the structures reveal a mixture of Western, Japanese, and sometimes even Chinese architectural elements.

After the 1880s, as knowledge of authentic Western construction methods spread throughout Japan and architects became able to reproduce Western styles more accurately, pseudo-Western architecture gradually declined. In Yamagata Prefecture, many *Giyo-fu* buildings were constructed under Governor Mishima Michitsune, who served from 1876 to 1882. Before becoming governor of Yamagata, Mishima served in Tsuruoka Prefecture and played a major role in suppressing uprisings by former Shonai samurai. In addition to military force, he promoted modernization by constructing numerous *Giyo-fu* buildings to visibly demonstrate the authority of the Meiji government and symbolize the arrival of a new era. After becoming governor of Yamagata Prefecture, he continued this approach in Yamagata City, which he designated as the prefectural capital. He promoted modernization by constructing many *Giyo-fu* buildings, including Saiseikan Hospital, the prefectural office, district offices, and the Yamagata Prefectural Teachers' College. Because Yamagata City later suffered several major fires, most of the buildings constructed under Governor Mishima no longer survive. The former Saiseikan Hospital Main Building is the only remaining structure from Mishima's prefectural office era.

## Explanation of Each Section

### 1 Three-Story Tower

The three-story tower is the most symbolic feature of the former Saiseikan Hospital Main Building. The first level is octagonal and features an open stone-paved veranda at the front. The second level is a sixteen-sided hall covered by a large dome-shaped roof. The third level is a smaller octagonal room surrounded by a wide veranda.

Although the exterior appears to have only three stories, the building actually contains four levels, as indicated by the four veranda tiers. The level between the second and third floors is known as the intermediate floor or stair hall. This complex structure was supported primarily by advanced traditional Japanese wooden construction techniques, while incorporating certain elements of Western roof-framing technology.



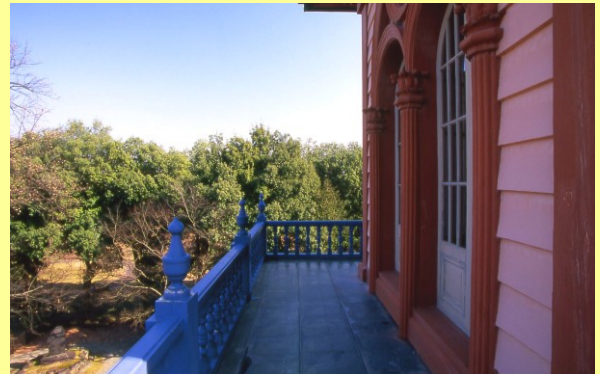
Verandas were actively adopted in Giyo-fu architecture in Japan as well. However, because Japan's winters are cold, many verandas were later enclosed to create interior rooms. The verandas of the Saiseikan Hospital Main Building, however, remained open throughout its history.

### 2 Verandas – Detailed breakdowns

The first-floor veranda is an open structure with independent columns and a stone-paved floor. The second- and third-floor verandas feature glass doors fitted with double shutters.

The intermediate-floor veranda (stairwell) has paired glass doors on both sides.

Verandas are believed to have originated in colonial India during the British period. Since enclosed European stone buildings were poorly suited to India's tropical climate, open transitional spaces were created to provide shade and ventilation while incorporating local architectural ideas.



Intermediate-floor veranda (Not open to the public)



First-floor veranda



Three-floor veranda (Not open to the public)

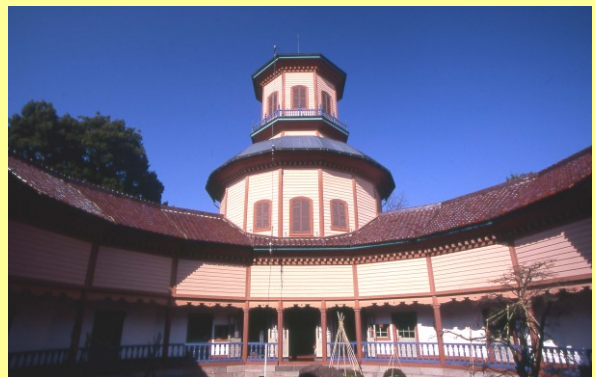
### **3 Corridor**

The building features a 14-sided circular corridor shaped like a donut. Eight rooms were arranged around the corridor and used as examination and treatment rooms. The roof is covered with traditional tiles. This highly original architectural form is said to have been inspired by a British naval hospital in Yokohama. Although the architect remains unknown, Governor Mishima is believed to have been closely involved in the design process.



### **4 Roof**

The first-floor roof is covered with traditional Japanese interlocking tiles known as sangawara. Unlike older methods that used distinct flat and convex tiles, the sangawara tile combined both forms into one lighter, cohesive piece. The tiles used on the Saiseikan Hospital Main Building are coated with a red glaze. The roofs above the first floor are covered with zinc sheets, which have developed a greenish color over time. The contrast between the red tiled roof and the green metal roofing creates one of the building's most distinctive visual features.



### **5 Eaves Ceiling and Dentils**

The layered board construction beneath the eaves is called nokijabara. The square decorative blocks arranged at regular intervals beneath the eaves are known as dentils because they resemble rows of teeth. Compared with traditional Japanese residential architecture, Western-style buildings often feature more elaborate decorative details around the eaves.



### **6 Clapboard Siding**

Clapboard siding is an architectural style that originated in Europe. Horizontal wooden boards are overlapped with their lower edges angled downward to prevent rainwater from entering the building. Producing these boards required mechanically powered sawmills driven by water or steam power, making clapboard siding a symbol of modern industrial technology at the time.



## 7 Plastered Walls

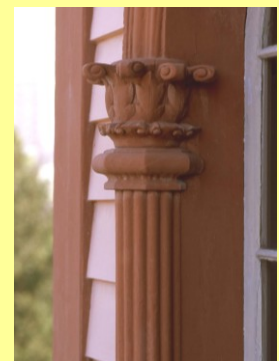
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## 8 Pillar

In Western classical architecture, pillar styles follow established formal rules. During the Meiji period, Japanese builders learned not only Western construction techniques but also Western decorative styles and began incorporating them into architecture. In Giyo-fu architecture, however, builders and carpenters often mixed styles freely, resulting in less visual consistency.

At the Saiseikan Hospital Main Building, the independent columns of the first-floor veranda use the relatively simple Doric style. In contrast, the columns supporting the intermediate-floor veranda doors use the more elaborate Corinthian style with ornate capitals. Different pillar styles can therefore be seen throughout the building.



First-floor veranda pillars  
(Doric-style)

Intermediate-floor veranda pillars  
(Corinthian-style)

(Not open to the public)

## 9 Shutters

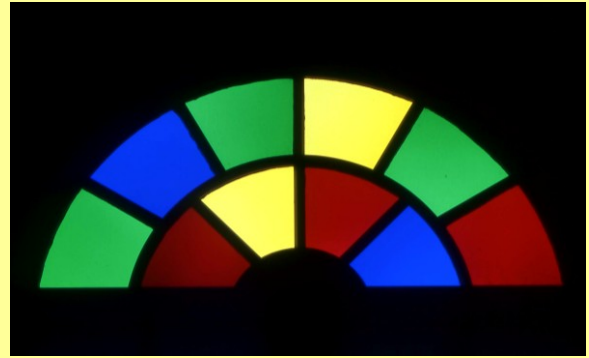
Shutters also originated in colonial India and Southeast Asia. They are made from many narrow slats set at an angle to provide ventilation, natural light, and protection from rain while still allowing air to pass through gaps between the boards. In this building, vertically sliding sash windows are installed behind the shutters.



## 10 Arched Stained-Glass

Glass began to be widely used in Japanese buildings during the Meiji period. However, domestically produced plate glass did not become widely available until the late Meiji era, and imported glass was expensive and difficult to obtain in large sizes.

As a result, small pieces of glass were commonly combined to create decorative stained-glass windows.



## 11 Spiral Staircase

This staircase connects the second floor with the intermediate floor (stairwell). It is made of zelkova wood and decorated with carved arabesque patterns along its sides. Similar carvings can also be seen on the brackets supporting the second-floor veranda.

Giyo-fu architecture often incorporated traditional Japanese decorative motifs in this way.



Second-floor veranda supports

## 12 Linoleum Flooring

The corridors and rooms throughout the building are finished with linoleum flooring. Linoleum is made by oxidizing linseed oil, mixing it with cork powder and other materials, and applying the mixture to cloth before hardening it. Because of its durability, elasticity, and resistance to wear, linoleum became a widely used flooring material.

