The Three-Story Tower
Memory and Structure

4F

Located at the very top of the three-story tower, the fourth floor is an octagonal chamber, a unique space whose original function remains unknown. During the war it was temporarily removed to prevent the building from becoming a target for air raids, but it was rebuilt during the relocation and restoration of the building. Its original purpose remains uncertain. However, in Professor Ogata' s The Phantom Medical School, this room is described as a "guest observation room" .
The basis for this interpretation, however, requires careful consideration.
At the center of the room, octagonal floorboards made from a variety of fine wood is laid in a decorative pattern. According to reports, Governor Mishima gathered renowned wood from different regions for their construction. Because of this elaborate design, it has been suggested that the room may have served to receive distinguished guests and display the building' s grandeur, functioning as a symbol of authority and modernization.

Architectural features

"The third floor consists of an octagonal chamber surrounded by a veranda, with a balcony likewise provided at the front."
——Kyodokan No.52, "Mid-Nineteenth Century Western-Style Architecture and Saiseikan Hospital" ,
Kato Yoshio(Yamagata City Cultural Heritage Protection Committee)

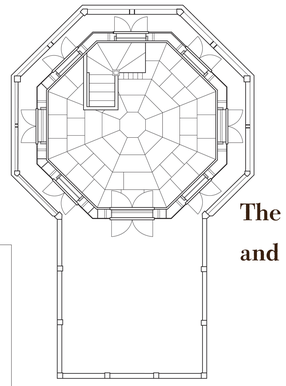
The revival of an icon

"During the war, half of the third floor was dismantled because it was thought to serve as a target for enemy aircraft, leaving the building looking as though it had only two and a half stories."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No.58, "Memories of Saiseikan Hospital" Nakamura Akiko

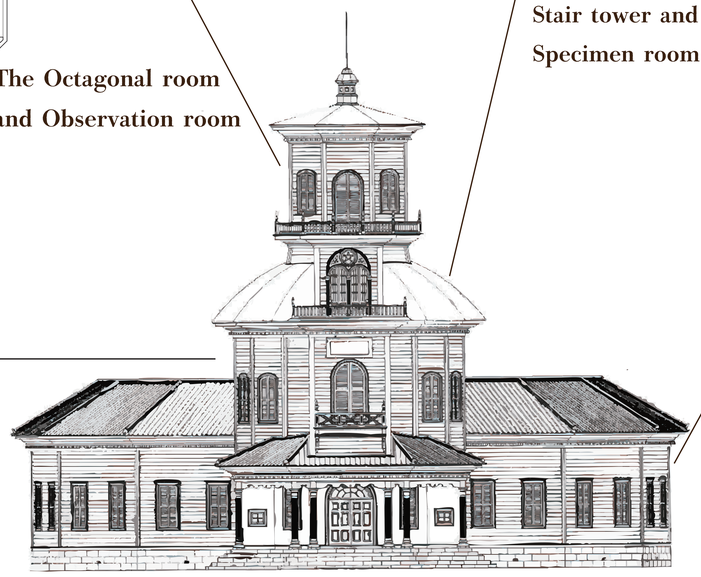
"Shortly before the end of the war, the uppermost spire of the three-story tower was remained valued as the nation' s only designated cultural property representing a midnineteenth century Western-style hospital."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No.53, "Memories Series (3)" , Noda Tamotsu

"I believe it was in 1945. They began demolishing the upper portion because tall buildings were considered targets for enemy aircraft."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No.54, "Memories Series" , Sato Fuyoe

"I heard that during the war, because it stood out as the only three-story building in the city and would become a target for aerial attacks, the military ordered the third floor to be removed.
It was something that is unimaginable today.
——Kyodokan Newsletter No. 51, "Saiseikan Hospital Memories Series (1)" , Murakami Tetsu



The Octagonal room and Observation room



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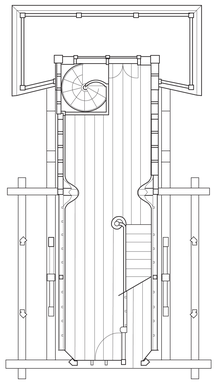
Stair tower and Specimen room



The third floor served as a specimen room, which also incorporated the stair tower. Pathological and medical specimens used for medical education and research were kept here. People referred to this floor by various names—the third floor, the mezzanine, the upper mezzanine, and so on.
Although it was a place of learning, it was also a floor associated with intense feelings of tension andfear, making it one of the most distinctive spaces in the three-story tower. It is also the place where one can enter the attic and directly observe the building' s internal structure.

"Upon climbing the mysterious spiral staircase and entering the third floor, you would find yourself in the specimen room. There were jars containing fetuses from zero to ten months and alcohol-preserved organs of every kind. Even though we were studying nursing, the shock was far too great, and none of us could bring ourselves to go up there alone."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No.54, "Memories Series" , Sato Fuyoe (Former Head Nurse,Saiseikan Hospital)

"The third floor was the specimen room, and I remember it as a creepy place, packed with bottles of formalin and glass jars containing tissues and specimens wherever you looked.
...I was so frightened that I worked there with tears in my eyes and cold sweat runningdown my face."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No.58, "Memories of Saiseikan Hospital" , Nakamura Akiko(Former Deputy Head Nurse, Saiseikan Hospital)

「"The third floor was the specimen room, and although few people went in and out of it,there should still be several specimens there that I myself removed and prepared."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No. 52, "Saiseikan Hospital and I (2)" , Kishi Yoichi (Former Deputy Director, Saiseikan Hospital; Former President, Yamagata Prefectural MedicalAssociation)

A test of courage at night

At night, the three-story tower also became the perfect setting for tests of courage among the young doctors.
"Our nighttime test of courage in the three-story tower meant feeling our way up the staircase to the third floor as it creaked in the darkness, only to have our courage fail at the sight of the pathology specimens preserved in formalin that were temporarily stored there. Then we would bow our heads in repentance before Lord Sanjo Sanetomi' s calligraphy reading "Saiseikan" .
——Kyodokan Newsletter No. 67, "The Mischievous Boys of the Three-Story Tower" , Onuma Hiroshi (Former Chief of Internal Medicine, Saiseikan Hospital)

"On the mezzanine? There were medical specimens—organs preserved in formalin inside specimen jars, some of them quite unpleasant to look at. Yet, strangely enough, we would
go to see them from time to time."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No. 56, "Memories of the Three-Story Tower" , Kobayashi Tadashi (Former Chief Pharmacist, Yamagata Municipal Hospital Saiseikan)

2F

The second-floor auditorium was a place for both education and ceremonies. It served as a multipurpose space where staff socialized, enjoyed recreation, and learned together. It was the heart of the three-story tower' s lively atmosphere, where formality and relaxation could coexist.

Architectural structure

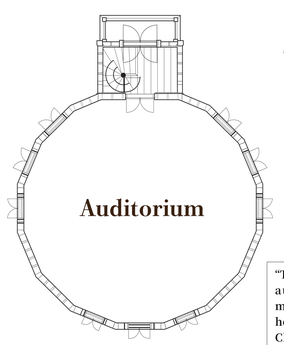
"The second floor consists of a sixteen-sided great hall, with a stair tower at the front and a balcony attached."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No. 52,
Kato Yoshio (Yamagata City Cultural Heritage Protection Committee)

"Setting serious matters aside, we brought dreams of the Rokumeikan* era to the threestory tower and held dance parties and Christmas gatherings in the large hall on the second floor. We asked Dr. Onuma, Dr. Abe Tatsushi, and Dr. Kanaya—once quite the playboys, if you' ll pardon the expression—to teach dancing. Beginning with the physicians' office,many nurses, pharmacy staff, and laboratory personnel joined in. Though everyone stumbled over the unfamiliar steps, friendships blossomed. We troublemakers also took up guitars, ukuleles, marimbas, and brass instruments, pretending to be the Mahina Stars**, but our rhythm often fell apart and we were loudly heckled more than once."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No. 67, "The Mischievous Boys of the Three-Story Tower" ,
Onuma Hiroshi (Former Chief of Internal Medicine, Saiseikan Hospital)

*Rokumeikan: a two-story Western-style building in Tokyo built to entertain foreign dignitaries.
**Mahina Stars: a Japanese band known for "mood pop" and "Hawaiian-sound" music, popular in mid- to late-1950s Japan.

「"At last, the long-awaited graduation day arrived. The ceremony was held in the large hall on the second floor of the three-story tower. 104 students gathered; their cheeks flushed with excitement. After Director Katsube Chikayoshi' s solemn address and the presentation
for diplomas came the awards for outstanding achievement. As the names were called in order, I was astonished by who was called next. "Number seven, Sugai Sueno." . An impoverished student wearing patchwork trousers had been counted among the eleven students whose average exceeded 95 points. Tears came to my eyes. The prize was a Yokoyama single-ear stethoscope."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No.73, "Memories of the Saiseikan Hospital Midwifery Training School" , Naruse Sueno

"There was no room officially called the library. In one corner of the second-floor auditorium there were only three or four monthly medical journals for each department. There was no way to search through the materials, so we bought books and journals ourselves using our meager salaries. For this reason, physicians who were serious about studying tended to resign after only a year or two."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No. 60 "Saiseikan Hospital and I" ,
Okazaki Koichi (Former Deputy Chief of Internal Medicine, Saiseikan Hospital)



"The floor of the nearly circular sixteen-sided auditorium was covered with linoleum, making it ideal for ballroom dancing. Every holiday season we used it to practice for the Christmas party, and even inpatients joined us in enjoying classical concerts.
——Kyodokan Newsletter No. 53, "Memories Series (3)" ,
Noda Tamotsu (FormerDirector, Central Radiology Department, Saiseikan Hospital)

A place for fellowship and learning

"In the circular auditorium on the second floor, the plaque bearing Lord Sanjo' s calligraphy reading "Saiseikan" hung at the front. There was also an organ, a ping-pong table, and folding chairs lined around the walls. It was used for the capping ceremony of the affiliated nursing school, entrance and graduation ceremonies, dance parties, labor union meetings, and other events."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No.51, "Saiseikan Hospital Memories Series (1)" , Murakami Tetsu (Former Deputy Director, Saiseikan Hospital) "

"The second-floor hall (a symmetrical 16-sided room) was used for many purposes. It was called the auditorium and served as a place for education and meetings, and earlier it had been the center for training nurses and midwives. There was a ping-pong table, and everyone competed to use it during lunch breaks or after work. The auditorium was also used for plays and dances, and when rain forced the cancellation of an outdoor imoni (taro soup) picnic by the river, it became the alternate venue for the gathering. It was the center of staff social life. Many romances also seem to have begun there."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No.56, "Memories of the Three-Story Tower" ,
Kobayashi Tadashi (Former Chief Pharmacist, Yamagata Municipal Hospital Saiseikan)

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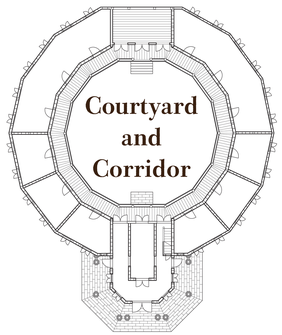

The courtyard and corridor served as the center of the hospital' s architecture, providing both natural light and circulation. At the same time, they were shared spaces where the daily lives of staff and patients intersected. Although they were part of a medical facility, they are also the places where people' s emotions and memories remain most vividly.

Architectural structure

"In the latter half of the first floor behind the tower, there is a series of small rooms arranged along a fourteen-sided circular corridor surrounding the courtyard, with eight symmetrically-spaced rooms. The inner connecting passage is an open corridor with a railing."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No. 52,
Kato Yoshio (Yamagata City Cultural Heritage Protection Committee)

Bon odori dance after the war—the courtyard and the corridors as the stage

Not long after the war, the courtyard and corridors became the setting for a bon odori dance held by the staff. Forming a circle around the garden stones and peony bushes, staff members and patients who were able danced together in costume.

"In the courtyard, the staff held a bon odori dance, joined by patients who were able. All were in costume, and their dance circled the garden stones, peonies, and trees. I am fondly reminded of the fun atmosphere at that time."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No.51, Murakami Tetsu (Former Deputy Director, Yamagata

"Doctors, nurses, and staff from every department made their way around the corridor with a bon odori dance. Some were in costume, while the nurses wore stylish yukata. Some people had been drinking alcohol as well. It is something I cannot imagine happening today.
——Kyodokan Newsletter No.56, "Memories of the three-story tower" , Kobayashi Tadashi (Former Chief Pharmacist, Yamagata Municipal Hospital Saiseikan)

Notification of the end of the war in the courtyard

August 15, 1945. In the courtyard of the three-story tower, staff members gathered around a radio.
However, the reception was poor, and they could not clearly understand what was being broadcast.

"I heard the emperor' s broadcast announcing the end of the war there in the courtyard of the three-story tower, but the radio reception was so poor that I could not make out what was being said."
——Kyodokan Newsletter No.54, "Memories Series" , Sato Fuyoe (Former Head Nurse,Saiseikan Hospital)