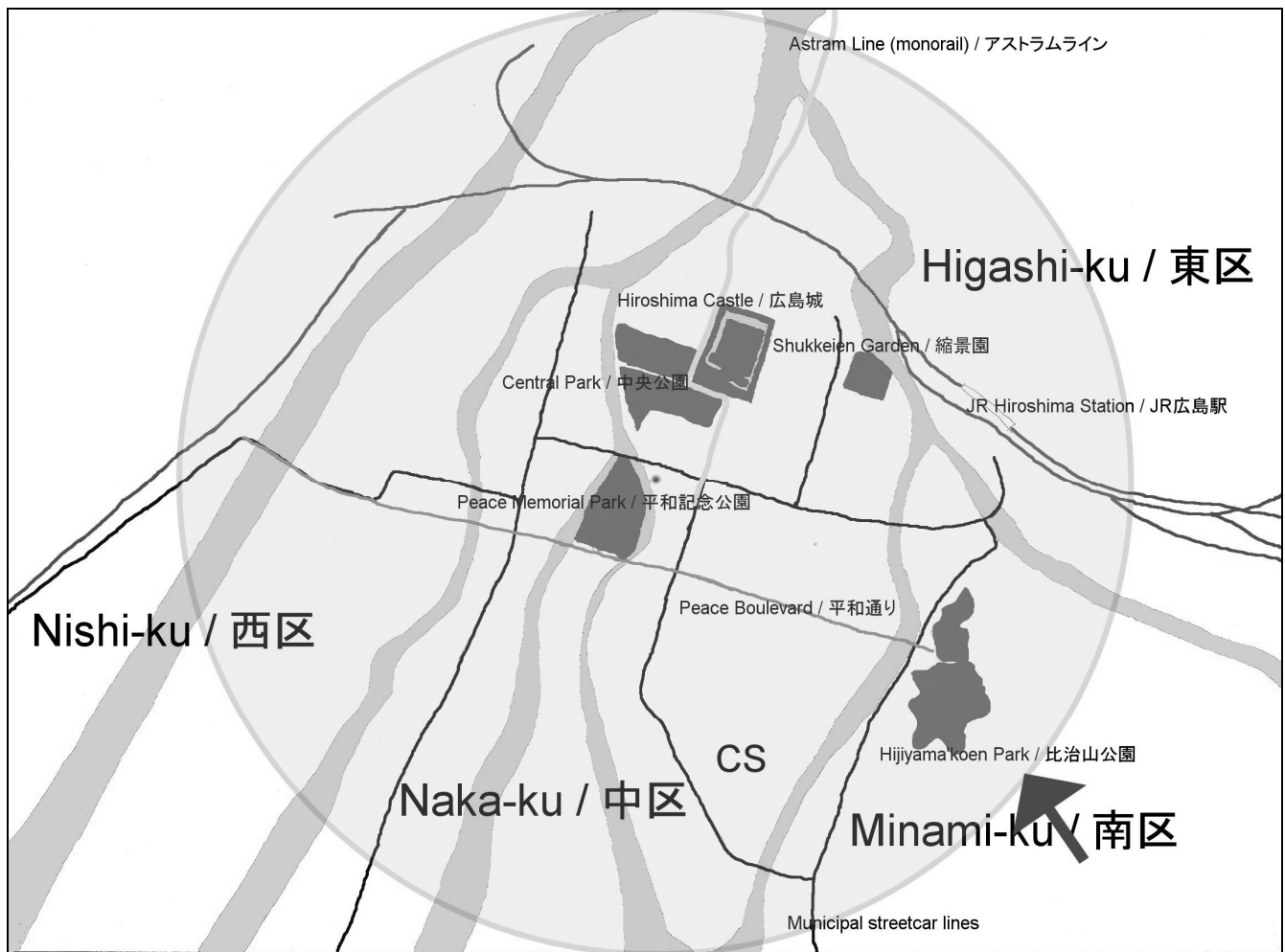




View of the A-bomb Dome through the Cenotaph for the Atomic Bomb Victims, Peace Memorial Park

I. Senda Municipal Elementary School
Original Site: Hiroshima University Hospital
2,800 Meters from the Hypocenter



A-bombed Fern Palms

Address:

Current Site ("CS" on the map): Senda Municipal Elementary School (Municipal Senda Elementary School in Hiroshima) / 広島市立千田小学校

2-1-34 Higashi-senda-machi, Naka-ku / 中区東千田町 2-1-34

Original Site (arrow on the map): Hiroshima University Hospital / 広島大学病院

1-2-3 Kasumi, Minami-ku / 南区霞 1-2-3

Plant: Fern palms / ソテツ



Fern palm grouping near west entrance, Senda Elementary School

Location

Senda Municipal Elementary is situated a few kilometers south of the downtown core, not far from Miyuki'bashi, the bridge immortalized in the famous photograph showing survivors fleeing the firestorm

towards the sea. The school (marked “CS” for current site) can be reached by taking the municipal streetcar to Hiroden’honsha’moe stop and walking northeast, or getting off at Hiroshima’daigaku’moe stop and walking southeast.

Opened in 1926 as Senda Municipal Ordinary Elementary/High School (広島市立千田尋常高等小学校), the institution boasted an initial enrolment of over 700 students across twelve grades. The buildings on the grounds were obliterated in August 1945 by the atomic blast, which claimed the lives of at least three teachers and 41 children onsite. The only surviving structure was the steel frame of the auditorium, which was eventually recycled to become an aviary. Remarkably, classes resumed in September of 1945 and have continued ever since.



Palm fronds at Senda Elementary (detail)

The impressive cluster of Fern palms dominates the greenery just inside the west entrance to the school grounds. According to research by the children at Senda, these plants were originally situated on the

grounds of Military Armories #1 and #11, at 2.80 km and 2.75 km respectively from the hypocenter. This area, now home to the Hiroshima University Hospital complex, was converted into prefectural office space shortly after the war, at which time the Ferns were moved to this school.



Senda Fern (detail)

In the section on the Fern palms in an information packet prepared by the school, the children draw attention to the arbitrary way in which some trees (and people) managed to escape annihilation while others did not - a fitting reminder of the cruelty of war.

A-bomb Reminiscences by Tamiki Hara

My father built our first home forty years ago. But he had a nervous disposition, and when small cracks would appear in walls and pillars after the occasional earthquake, he would immediately have the home torn down, and construct an unusually sturdy new one, scrupulously overseeing the whole process from the foundations up. It was a two-story house, and although there were a number of rooms on the first floor, the upper story wasn't just a simple affair. Rather, it sat demurely above the first roof, and could be seen from a great distance away. When I was a kid, whenever I asked my mother about this, I always felt as if my dead father's gaze was still lingering in the corners of the house.

But it was my dead father's meticulousness that was to save my life forty years later. My younger sister and I sustained only light injuries because we were inside the house on the morning of August sixth. All of the neighboring houses were destroyed, and ours was the only one with the floors intact and no second story collapse.

I'd always been terrified of air raids, and had worried that at the instant of an explosion, I would faint or fly into a panic, but as it turns out, the blast came at a most unexpected moment. As I was using the bathroom that morning, I was suddenly enveloped in darkness. Before long, the darkness began to lift, and when I could see what was going on, I understood what had happened immediately. The walls had collapsed, and as I slowly made my way across the floor with its bamboo mats all awry, my little sister came running in. While fairly upset, she was in pretty good shape, and when I saw that she was alright, I felt a weight lift from my shoulders.

I smiled wryly when I realized that I was completely naked. Is there nothing to put on?" I asked. My sister had a look around, found some pants in the dishevelled closet and passed them over to me. With a look of industriousness, she also pulled out a pair of scissors and some rags, and I later heard that she'd used those rags to attend to the injuries of some store clerks.

I went poking around here and there, checking the absurd confusion for items precious to me that I could take with me when I fled the scene. I found a jacket and hat and a canteen, but I couldn't find any pants. I picked up a pair of lady's wooden clogs, but threw them back down. I also found some documents I'd been reading the night before, but didn't worry about those either. I picked up a floor cushion and carried it under my arm. It turned out to be useful that day – I eventually soaked it in river water, and put it around my head to fight off the heat from the flames.

I had a look under the veranda mats, and shouted involuntarily, for I'd found a bag I could use for carrying everything away. All of a sudden I felt happy, as if I'd been blessed with good fortune. It was a multipurpose shoulder bag, and I deftly crammed all of the emergency items in. I was already well familiar with evacuation drills at that time, but my careful preparations were no doubt due to my deceased wife of one year and the impact of her unceasing scrupulousness.

If I were to list everything I packed into that bag, there were bandages, absorbent cotton, menthol, some methamphetamine, a can of oatmeal, fried rice, a fountain pen, a small knife, a pencil, a notebook, a summer shirt, a hand towel, some sewing thread, a needle, bathroom tissues, cigarettes, matches, my savings passbook, postcards, and my writing seal – all of which I managed to pack away. And anticipating that I would be jumping into the water, I sealed the cigarettes in a small spice can so that they wouldn't get wet, and put the matches in with them.

As the neighboring houses burst into flames, I fled towards the river. When I got to the riverbank behind the Izumi residence, I caught up with my elder brother and younger sister. I could also see the familiar faces of others from around the neighborhood. I took out a cigarette, and offered it to the chairman of the neighborhood block committee, who was standing there looking forlorn. He had just returned from identifying the dead body of his eldest brother. On the opposite bank, the flames continued to burn strongly. I sat down on the riverbank and took five grains of the methamphetamine.

A box of onions came floating down the river towards us. It had fallen out of a freight train which lay overturned on the railway bridge. I approached the water, retrieved the box, and handed out the onions to the people on the riverbank. As dusk fell, our side of the riverbank was beginning to catch fire, and so we all moved to the sandy plain on the opposite side where the fires had subsided. Here, we found rice that someone had boiled for dinner over an open fire. We

ate the onions I'd retrieved, roasting them on top of a roof tile. The things I'd brought with me in the duffel bag again came in handy. I took out the mentholated ointment and bandages, and helped an old neighbor with an injury on his arm. The maid from my brother's house had a terrible burn on her face, which made me regret not having put a bottle of olive oil into the duffel bag. I had always carried a small bottle of olive oil with me in my jacket pocket - it must have fallen out when I'd picked up my jacket that morning.

The next morning, I fled to the grounds of Toshogu Shrine. My younger sister knew that I had the sulpha drug with me, and repeatedly asked me if this wasn't a good time to take it. So I took some, just to be on the safe side. Thinking back, this probably helped me avoid succumbing to the effects of the radiation exposure

By that evening I had done everything that I could, and I was exhausted. I opened the can of oatmeal, my sister cooked it over an open fire, and we gave out a little to each person. After receiving his portion, my elder brother said with a long sigh, "I had no idea anything could taste this good!" The can of oatmeal with milk and sugar was a prized ration that my late wife was careful to buy and kept for emergencies. This treasure provided our six weary soles with a moment of respite.



Either war is obsolete or men are.

R. Buckminster Fuller