

# The Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway History Preservation Group – Current Projects

February 15, 2011

## The Potlatch Depot Project

The Washington, Idaho & Montana (WIM) Railway Depot was designed by C. Ferris White of Spokane, WA. It was the first commercial building erected in Potlatch, Idaho and was completed in June, 1906. This impressive structure measures 24' x 100' on the platform level, 28' x 100' on the second floor, and features a bank-type vault on both floors.

Designed to house three sets of offices—for the WI&M Railway, Potlatch Lumber Company (PLCo), and the company town of Potlatch—it was quickly apparent the depot's substantial 5,200 square feet was still of insufficient size for administration of all three operations. Within months, a hastily constructed office near the mill became the PLCo office. After ten profitable years, a new PLCo office (now the Potlatch City Hall) was constructed in 1917.

As business declined in the 1930's, the second-floor depot office spaces were remodeled into apartments. However, the Depot's first floor, and the adjoining Annex building, was used exclusively by the railroads operating the line: The WI&M, 1906-1963; the Milwaukee Road (Milw), 1963-1981; the Burlington Northern (BN), 1981-1996; the Palouse River & Coulee City (PCC), 1996-2006; and, the Washington & Idaho Railway, 2006 to the present.



The WI&M Depot at Potlatch, along with 3-acres of line side property, was purchased by the HPG, in July, 2001, from the PCC, a subsidiary company of Watco, Inc. of Pittsburg, KS. Donations for purchase of the depot were raised from HPG members, local residents, and other individuals across the country. Dubbed the "Founding Fifty", their contribution to saving this historic building cannot be overemphasized. Without their support, this National Historic Structure would have been lost to time and the elements.

Five months earlier, in February of 2001, and armed with only Watco's letter of intent to sell, the HPG's then vice-president Jack Coyner applied for a \$500,000 Transportation Enhancement restoration of historic transportation structures grant through the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD). The HPG was awarded the grant in October 2001, although the design was not funded until 2006.

The restoration contract work bid April, 2007 and completed November, 2007. The structure was raised to its historic elevation, the foundation and roof were replaced, and the exterior walls were restored.

Interior restoration of the north end of the first floor was accomplished by HPG volunteers in the spring of 2010. The former ticket office and men's waiting room were restored as built. The women's waiting area and rear hallway were renovated into an office space, kitchenette, ADA restroom, and janitorial closet. Two doors saved from the 1906 Genesee School were installed adjacent to the second floor stairwell, allowing inside access to both the stairs, and to the 950 sq ft former freight room. The freight room will eventually house the HPG's office and the WI&M/PLCo interpretive center.



Installation of the first floor HVAC system is now a priority. Razing of the second floor plaster lath will be accomplished, with the assistance of US Bank employee volunteers, in the spring of 2011. The HPG is working with local professionals to determine the best utilization for the second floor. The HPG's current goal is to contract with a commercial property management company to contract and retain tenants in adequate numbers to pay the depot's future maintenance needs. The HPG membership will then focus on establishing the museum, and other history preservation projects.

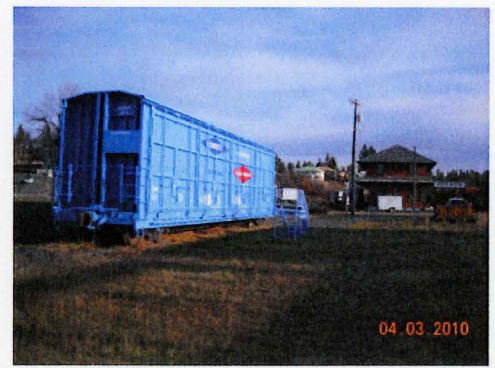
To see what we've done and to track our progress, please go online to: <http://potlatchdepot.blogspot.com/> restore

## The BENX 182 Thrall-Door Boxcar Stage

In 2000, the last Bennett Lumber Products, Inc. (BLPI) Thrall-built, All-Door box car was donated by its namesake company to the Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway History Preservation Group (WI&M Ry HPG or HPG), a 501c3 nonprofit historical society, for use as a mobile, all-weather stage, on their depot property in Potlatch, Idaho. The car has been used to stage free concerts during the Potlatch Depot History Day and Speeder Ride event, held annually the first Saturday following the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend.

BLPI donated \$5,000 so the car could be restored to its original “as-built” livery in 2008. Nathan Vowels Painting of Princeton, ID donated the pressure washing. Additional prep work and stencils were applied by HPG volunteers, Don Somers, Jack Coyner, and Jim West. The car was painted at cost by Rez Painting of Moscow, ID. Theater carpeting was obtained from the Coeur d’Alene Showboat Theater and the navy blue draperies came from the Troy High School auditorium.

When completed, the HPG will make the BENX 182 Stage available for use by the community, especially young people developing their performing art talents. As donations and funding allow, the BENX 182 will be renovated into a self-contained working stage, complete with generator, electrical panel, lighting, and a sound system.



## The X5 WI&M Wood Caboose



The X5 is a wood-sided caboose typical of early 20<sup>th</sup> century railroads. The X5 was built in 1907 for the Northern Pacific Railroad, and later became part of the rolling stock of the Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway, a short-line railroad which served the white pine lumber industry in northern Idaho.

The Milwaukee Road sold the X5 in the late 1960's to the mother of Connie Rambo, of Farmington, WA. Connie's husband, Gene, moved the X5 onto their property. The caboose remained essentially intact, except for Gene's addition of an electrical panel to power AC lighting and his mother-in-law's ceramics oven.

Gene Rambo first learned of the WI&M History Preservation Group (HPG) by attending a presentation of WI&M history given by HPG founder Jim West at the Center for Art & History in Lewiston ID on February 2, 2001. Gene approached Jim after the presentation to say he enjoyed learning about the WI&M because “Every day when I go out my back door I look at a caboose that says Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway and I’ve always wondered what the heck was the Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway!”

Founding member and WI&M historian, Tom Burg, knew the WI&M had owned two “shorty” wood-side cabooses. The X4 had been made into a summer cabin on Coeur d’Alene Lake, but the whereabouts of the X5 had been unknown up to April of 2001. That is when Tom and Jim visited the Rambo's property, fully expecting to find a dilapidated X5. They were amazed by what they found.

The X5 was in excellent shape. The Rambos had allowed their children to play in the caboose on the condition they painted the exterior every other year. Gene had put roofing over the long roof and cupola to shed the rain and winter. Inside, the original brass gauges, caboose valve, framed operating instructions, ice box—everything but the toilet—remained intact.

In 2003, Connie Rambo offered the X5 to the HPG, provided it was moved to Potlatch. The X5 was covered with visqueen to winterize it, but it would be many more winters before the X5 was retrieved. Gene Rambo delivered a set of freight trucks and a section of display track from Farmington to Potlatch in 2008. After receiving an Idaho Heritage Trust Grant for expenses, the X5 was moved to Potlatch by Wasankari Construction of Moscow, ID, on December 3, 2009 and placed on the trucks behind the depot.

The X5 caboose is finally back on its home rails, an achievement greeted with enthusiasm by the public during the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Depot History Day & Speeder Rides on July 10, 2010. Many who toured the X5 remembered when a caboose had brought up the rear of every train. Most had “always wondered what was inside of there” and were entertained to see this original mobile home.

HPG Vice President Brian Magelky, who is also a professional wood worker and cabinet maker, has volunteered to lead the X5's restoration. The rot in the short roof and wood siding are the first items slated for replacement. He would appreciate a volunteer or three to help with this exciting and fun historic railroad preservation project.