SPOKANE INTERNATIONAL RAILWAY

Spokane International Railroad

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **Spokane International Railroad** (reporting mark
SI) was a short line railroad between Spokane,
Washington and the Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) at
Kingsgate, British Columbia. The line became an
important one for the CP with its connections to the
Union Pacific Railroad and Portland, Oregon.

The line, originally named the **Spokane International
Railway**, was built by local businessman and railroader
Daniel Chase Corbin following an agreement between
him and the CP, with CP agreeing to fund much of the
line's construction and to secure the loan by holding the
new line's bonds.

Spokane International Railroad	
Reporting mark	SI
Locale	Washington, Idaho, British Columbia
Dates of operation	1887–1958
Predecessor	Union Pacific Railroad
Track gauge	4 ft 8½ in (1,435 mm)

Especially significant was the fact that the CP controlled the Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie
Railway (Soo Line) and its connections to Minneapolis, Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota and Chicago,
Illinois. Completion of the Spokane International now meant that the CP could compete with the Northern
Pacific Railway and Great Northern Railway lines for transportation between the midwest and the Puget
Sound area (in conjunction with the Union Pacific Railroad subsidiary Oregon-Washington Railroad and
Navigation Company west of Spokane). Express passenger service was soon introduced on the line via the
Soo-Spokane Train De Luxe.

The SI was reorganized October 1, 1941 following financial difficulties and receivership during the Great
Depression. The line was renamed the **Spokane International Railroad** as part of the restructuring
agreement until the 1950s.

On October 6, 1958 the Union Pacific Railroad (UP) took control of Spokane International Railroad. In
1962 UP leased SI's 11 ALCO RS-1 locomotives for operation. The locomotives were later repainted to
UP's yellow and gray paint scheme, but retained their SI lettering. Also in 1962, UP sold four of its older
steel cabooses to SI. These were also painted in UP's yellow scheme, but received SI lettering and numbers.
After UP's 1958 control of SI, Union Pacific continued to lease SI for operation. On December 31, 1987,
Union Pacific formally merged SI into its corporate structure.

At the end of 1960 SI operated 150 miles of road on 190 miles of track; that year it reported 141 million net
ton-miles of revenue freight and zero passengers.

The line remains in operation as an important UP connection between southern British Columbia and the
northwest United States.

References

- UP control and merger dates from Union Pacific law department records
- Brief history of the SI (http://www.crowsnest.bc.ca/branchlines03.html)
- Roster of SI diesel locomotives (http://utahrails.net/all-time/all-time-21.php#rs1-1211)

- Roster listing of SI wooden and steel cabooses (http://utahrails.net/caboose/cabooses-si.php)

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title=Spokane_International_Railroad&oldid=705250485"

Categories: Predecessors of the Union Pacific Railroad | Former Class I railroads in the United States | Railway companies established in 1941 | Railway companies disestablished in 1987 | Defunct Washington (state) railroads | Defunct Idaho railroads

Spokane International Railway

The Spokane International Railway, the "SI," was built between Spokane, Washington, and a connection with the Canadian Pacific southwest of Cranbrook near the border crossing town of Kingsgate. The SI, which is now part of the Union Pacific Railroad, proved to be a key link in the CPR system and gave the Canadian Pacific access to the Inland Empire centre of Spokane and its many railroads including the Union Pacific which in turn gave direct connections to Portland, Oregon. This became the route of the _Soo-Spokane Train DeLuxe_.

The SI was built by Daniel Chase Corbin, a businessman and railroad builder from Spokane. In the 1890s, he had built railroads from Spokane to Nelson and Rossland in British Columbia and in 1898, these lines were acquired by the Great Northern. The SI, was completed in 1906 to the Canadian/American border at the towns of Eastport, Idaho and Kingsgate, British Columbia. From there, a short branch line connected with the CPR's Crowsnest Route at Curzon and later at Yahk. See Map.

The railway was built following an agreement between Corbin and the Canadian Pacific. In the agreement, the CPR funded much of the construction and held the railways bonds as security. The agreement also gave the CPR the option to acquire a majority of the stocks of the SI by January 1917. This the Canadian Pacific did but later a half interest in the line was acquired by the Union Pacific.

The significance of the SI was based on several considerations. The Canadian Pacific controlled the Soo Line (the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Sainte Marie Railway) in the mid-west states which gave the Canadian railway access to Minneapolis, St. Paul and Chicago. These cites and the surrounding industrial and agricultural areas were key sources of traffic for the American transcontinentals built across the northern states to Puget Sound: the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern which connected eastwards with the Burlington. All three railroads were controlled by James J. Hill of the Great Northern. With the completion of the SI and its access to the Union Pacific controlled by the Harriman interests, the CPR was able to compete with the Hill railroads for traffic between the American mid-west and the Pacific coast. The CPR was quick to capitalize on this situation and soon introduced express passenger service over the route. This was the Soo-Spokane Train De Luxe.

In 1941, the SI was reorganized following financial difficulties and a period of receivership during the Depression years. As a part of this restructuring, the line was renamed the Spokane International Railroad. In the 1950s, the SI was taken over by the Union Pacific and it is still in operation as an important
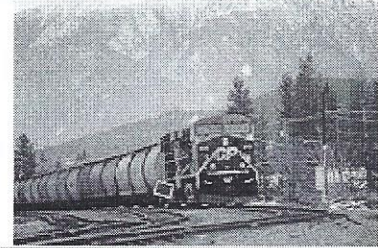
connection between southern British Columbia and the Northwest States.

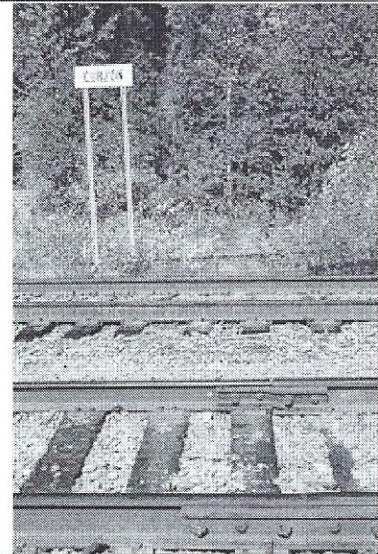## The Spokane International Today (Photos)
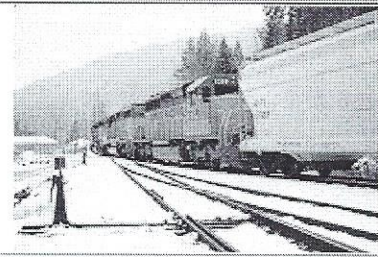
Union Pacific diesels prepare to leave Kingsgate with a train of grain cars destined for Portland in November 1992.
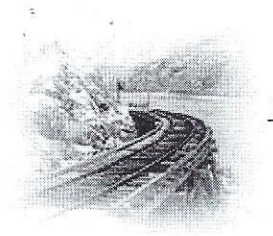

Canadian Pacific train with grain cars at Cranbrook about to leave for the Spokane International connection with the United States at Kingsgate, B.C. and Eastport, Idaho.

Curzon, the junction of the old Spokane International with the CPR's tracks west of Yahk.
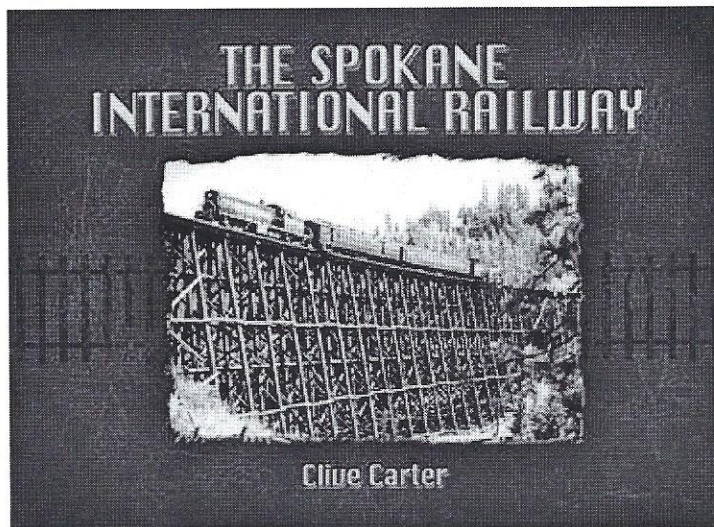

Curzon junction sign.

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Description: The 141-mile branch line between Spokane, Washington and the International Border with Canada provides a rare success story. The line that was once the Spokane International now carries close to ten times more tonnage annually than it did fifty years ago. From an enthusiast's viewpoint, the line has provided a catholic selection of motive power, together with passenger train service during its first half-century, and a variety of freight traffic operating over a demanding route. A thorough history of this century-old system and its modernization are presented herein, filling a gap in railroad writing.

Review: The Spokane International Railway was a unique operation organized by one of the smallest of the late 19th Century railroad builders, Daniel Chase Corbin. Like the other empire builders, Corbin believed that his company was solely his business and he kept everyone in the dark, including the government and his backer in the project, Canadian Pacific.

Few records existed before CP opted to take control in the Teens, but what was obvious was that the SIRR had its own way of doing things during each of its operating periods. This drew attention to the little north-south line as it moved from CP control to independent and then to Union Pacific.

Fortunately for us, Clive Carter loves to do research and he unearthed a mass of records that outlines the twists and turns of the Spokane International's history. I think that without Clive's efforts, much of this information would have been lost.

Mike Denuty
Spokane WA

Author: Clive Carter

Clive Carter was born in York, England, a major railroad center, and now the home of the National Railway Museum. With a father employed by the railway, it is not surprising that he became a railroad enthusiast at an early age. He immigrated to the USA in 1966 to work for the Boeing Company in Renton WA. He spent the next thirty years there, becoming a manager in the Engineering Department. Mr. Carter has authored two railway books in the U.K. and a number of magazine articles. His major

interests are companies that served the Pacific Northwest. His wife Ann is a physician and they make their home in Bellevue, Washington and Dunoon, Scotland.

▲

Contents:

Table of Contents

▲

Excerpt:

Introduction

The Spokane International Railway was built to provide a connection between Spokane, Washington and Canada. After several owners the 140-mile line developed into a significant carrier of trans-border traffic. Close to fifteen million tons are now carried annually, much of the traffic heading to Pacific Coast ports. The line has received limited attention in railroad publications. History of the century-old system and its modernization are described herein.

At the start of the twentieth century, Spokane, with a population of 20,000, had established itself as the preeminent city in the eastern half of Washington state. The city was already served by three trans-continental railroads. The Northern Pacific Railway main line between St. Paul and Tacoma had opened in 1887. Several years later, Great Northern Railway's construction crews arrived in Spokane on their way from St. Paul to Seattle. Oregon Railway & Navigation, a Union Pacific Railroad ancillary company, entered Spokane in 1889, giving connection to the UP Overland main line, albeit over a somewhat convoluted route.

Despite the apparent benefit of having competitive railroads in Spokane, the freight rate structure was of ongoing concern to shopkeepers and businesses. The basic problem was that it was generally cheaper to ship from the eastern half of the USA to Seattle, or Portland, than over the shorter distance to Spokane and Inland Empire towns. Competition from shipping lines had driven the rates down at the Pacific ports.

Consequently, a potential railroad from Spokane to connect with the Canadian Pacific Railway raised hopes for lower rates - Canadian railways were not subject to control by the Interstate Commerce Commission which dictated the US tariffs. A Canadian Pacific subsidiary, the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie Railroad (the Soo Line), served U.S. cities through its border connection with the CP at Portal ND. Such a newcomer would give the Oregon Railway & Navigation and the projected electric Spokane & Inland Empire system direct access to Canada and to U.S. cities already reached by their competitors. Distance from Spokane to the twin cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul over such a route was close to 1500 miles, essentially the same as offered by the existing railroads. This "bridge" function of a connecting line was the primary attraction for investors to fund its construction.

In addition, there was some potential for generating on-road traffic. Fruit growing was expanding near Spokane and the lumber industry developing rapidly in the Idaho Panhandle. Population between Spokane and the International Border was sparse, but the towns of Sandpoint and Bonners Ferry were growing with the lumber industry and the benefit of Great Northern and Northern Pacific main lines services. On the southern

British Columbia side of the border, local activity by a US railroad was generally welcomed there as it usually precipitated action by the CP.

While the above were pragmatic factors at the local level, class 1 railroads and their leaders naturally became influential in any commitment to a go-ahead for the new line. Railroads already serving Spokane did not want a new competitor. Over the border, the Canadian Pacific Railway had built the transcontinental line from Toronto to Vancouver BC. To serve southern British Columbia and the expanding mining area in the Kootenay region of the Rock Mountains the CP had completed a line over Crows Nest Pass in 1898 to Kootenay Landing (some 30 miles east of Nelson). This was the nearest Canadian owned line to Spokane that gave access to the eastern half of North America. Canadian Pacific, already burdened by the cost of constructing the main line, had managed to persuade the Canadian parliament to subsidize this second line. The resulting Crows Nest Agreement gave CP a generous per mile subsidy, while in return the company was required to reduce certain freight rates and to grant running rights over its new line to other railroads. Eventual extension of the southern line to Vancouver BC was planned by the CP.

James J. Hill, president of the Great Northern, had become one of the directors of the Canadian Pacific during the early 1880s. After failing to persuade the CP board to modify the path of its planned main line, to assist his own expansion to the west, Hill resigned his directorship and fell out with the company. He continued to bear a grudge against the Canadian railway as demonstrated by his later, aggressive, actions in western Canada:

- Hill vied with the CP in 1889 to acquire the Soo Line and a partner cross-border railroad. He failed.
- By 1898, Hill had organized a route between Seattle and Vancouver BC.
- He acquired control of the Spokane Falls and Northern Railway in 1898 and its extensions into British Columbia. Branches to the Rossland and Grand Forks smelters in the province competed directly with the CP. Hill publicly announced that the latter branch would be extended to the Pacific Coast and thus in conflict with CP's plans for a similar route.
- The CP was upset when Hill and his associates purchased 30% of the stock in the Crow's Nest Coal Company in 1901, acquiring a controlling interest a few years later. Canadian Pacific had previously arranged land transfer to the coal company and established it as a significant source of traffic. At Hill's instigation, the coal company immediately arranged for a new line from its mine and coke ovens at Morrissey to meet a GN extension from Montana to the border.

Thus, by 1905 Hill had gained control of much of the coal and coke traffic from the East Kootenays in the Canadian Rocky Mountains as well as the ore traffic in BC. Canadian Pacific, while incensed by Hill's activities, had not retaliated by building south over the border. Instead, the CP had lobbied the BC and Canadian parliaments to try to stem such activities. Now, the company was running out of patience and ready to take direct action.
Building a connecting line to Spokane, in Hill's territory, was one way.

The catalyst was Daniel C. Corbin, a Spokane based entrepreneur. He had developed rail lines from Spokane during the previous twenty years, as described in John Fahey's biography, including the Spokane Falls & Northern Railway system, now owned by Hill. In addition to his primary goal of making money by building a connection from Spokane to the CP, Corbin had reason to seek retribution against Hill who had surreptitiously gained control of the SF&N. Past relations between the CP and Corbin had not been the best. The CP had blocked Corbin's attempts to enter the town of Nelson BC and organized parliamentary action to prevent him from extending westward. Nevertheless, by 1905 he needed the CP as a partner if he was going to build to the border again. Similarly, the CP decided that despite Corbin's previous abstraction of "their" traffic in British Columbia, he was an appropriate choice to build a connecting line to Spokane in response to Hill's invasion.

SPO Loco - 101 at Trent & Napa St. Spokane. Cars are maroon. 8-49.jpg
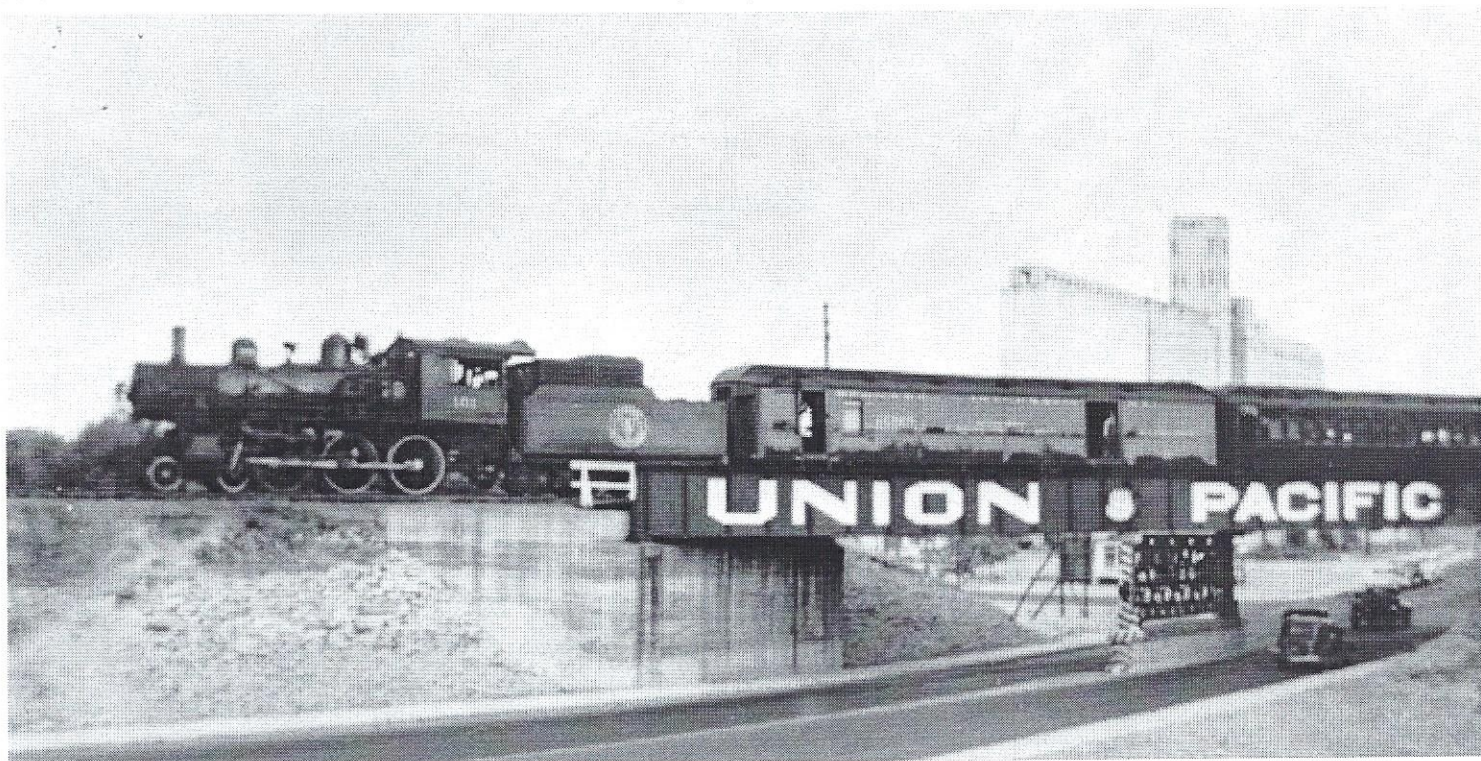
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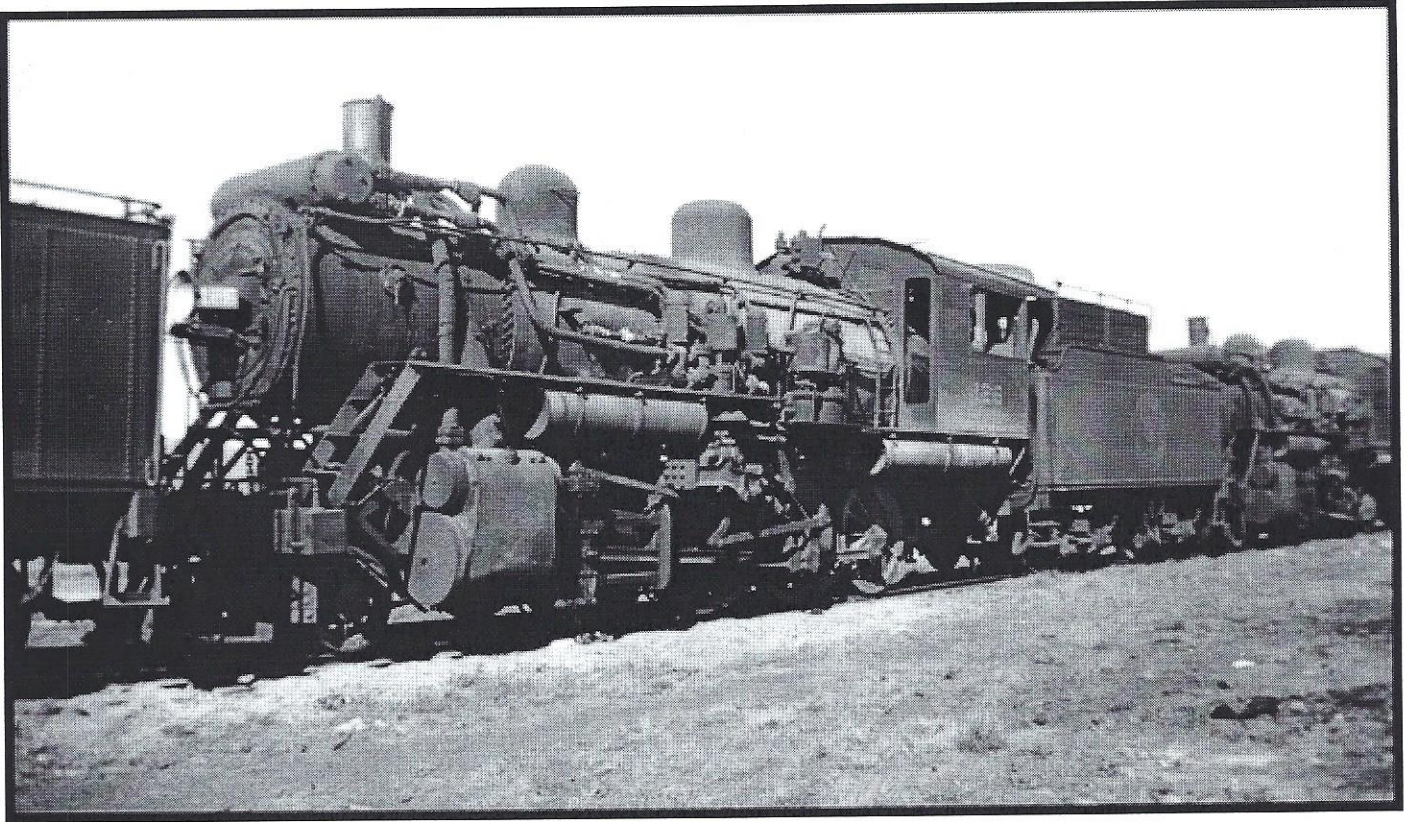
Caption: "Another displaced locomotive, an Alco 2-8-0, waits for sale or higher scrap prices, in a cornmer of the Spokane yard. Some engines spent many years in dead storage in the Fifties."

Date: April 23, 1950   **Location:** Spokane, WA   **Photographer:** Wallace Abbey
Railroad: Spokane International Railroad

Subjects: Locomotive-Steam |

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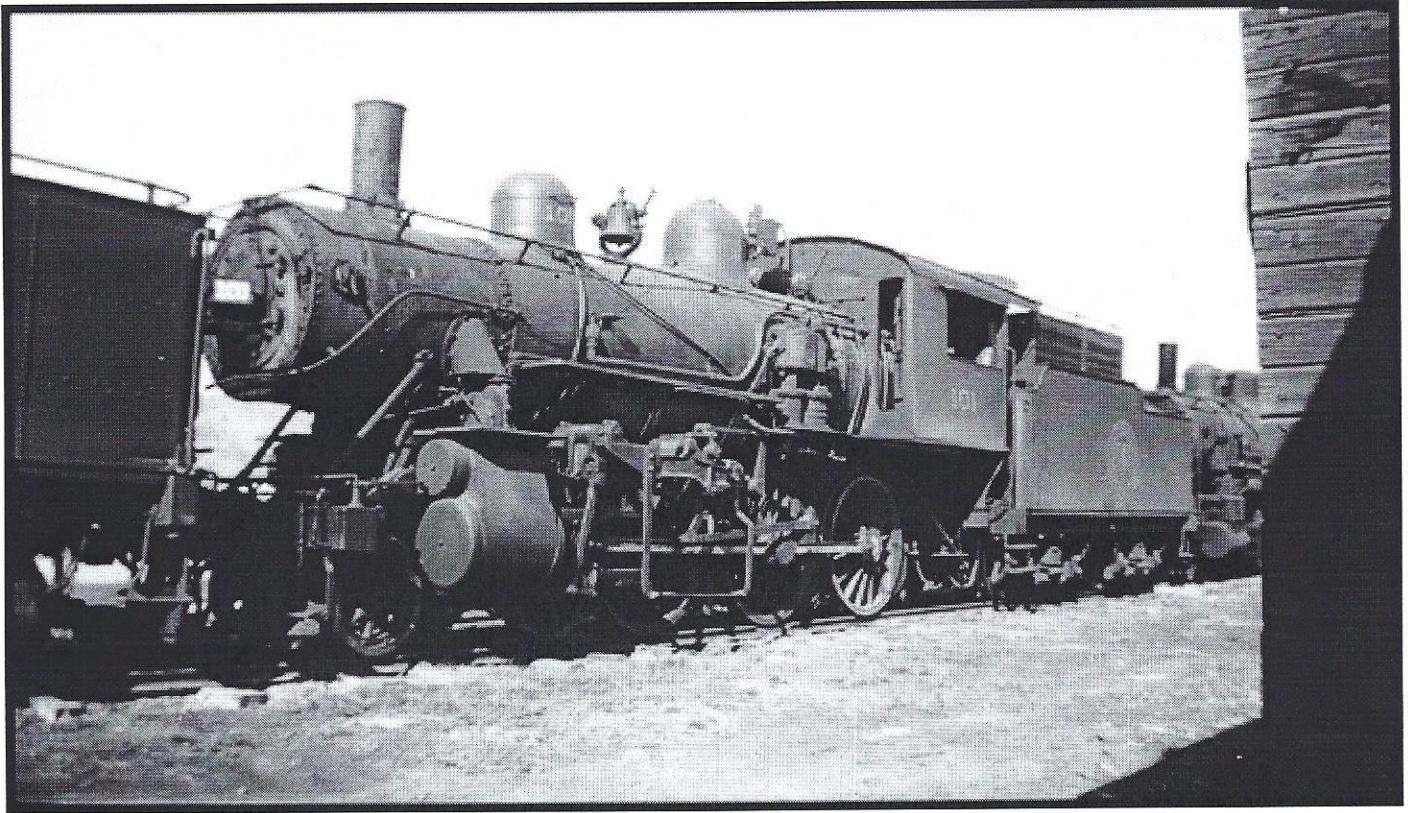
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Caption: "Spokane International, a regional railroad from Spokane north to Canada, dieselized earlier with a dozen Alco RS-1's. Among the power displaced by diesels and by passenger service cutbacks was this Alco 4-6-0 built in 1907"

Date: April 23, 1950 **Location:** Spokane, WA **Photographer:** Wallace Abbey
Railroad: Spokane International Railroad

Subjects: Locomotive-Steam |

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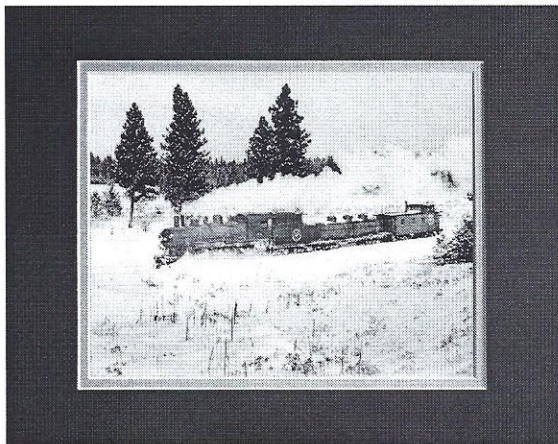Back | Print Window | Print Order Form | Digital Scan Order Form

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Consolidation 21's pilot scatters newly fallen snow as the short train nears Coeur d' Alene, Idaho on a cold January day.
Photo date - January 25, 1949

Limited Edition Railroad Photography by Philip C. Johnson, 1906-1981.

Family Collection restored by Leo F. Seitlinger, L Francis Photography.

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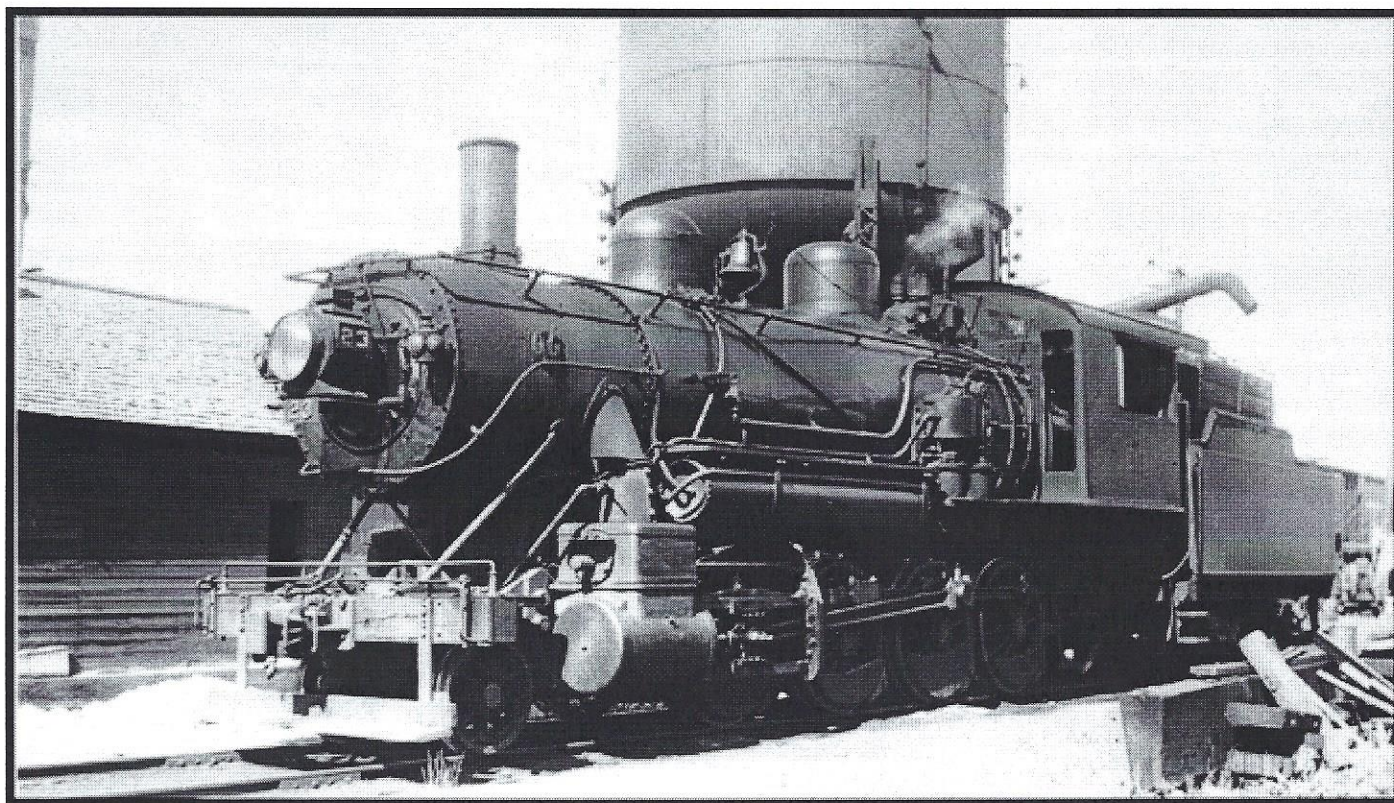
Caption: "SI 23 steam locomotive at Spokane International service facility in Spokane, WA."

Date: July 1937   **Location:** Spokane, WA   **Photographer:** Ron V. Nixon
Railroad: Spokane International

Subjects: Locomotive-Steam | Structure | Tank-Water |

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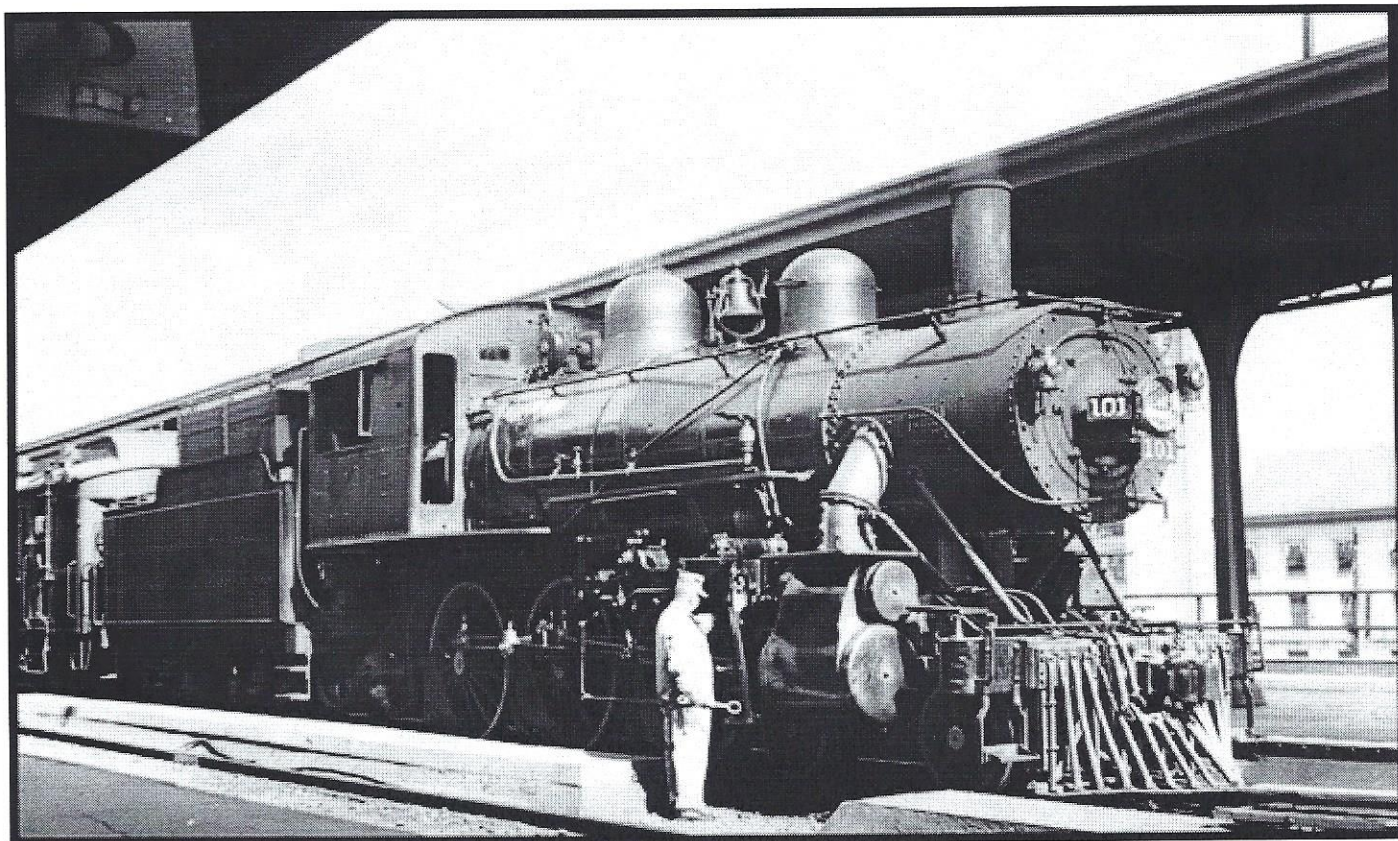
Caption: "SI 101, 2-8-0 with engineman tightening wedge bolts, at Spokane, WA before departing Spokane Union Station with a northbound passenger train."

Date: April 1931   **Location:** Spokane, WA   **Photographer:** Ron V. Nixon
Railroad: Spokane International Railroad

Subjects: Depot-Passenger | Locomotive-Steam | People-Railroad Crew |
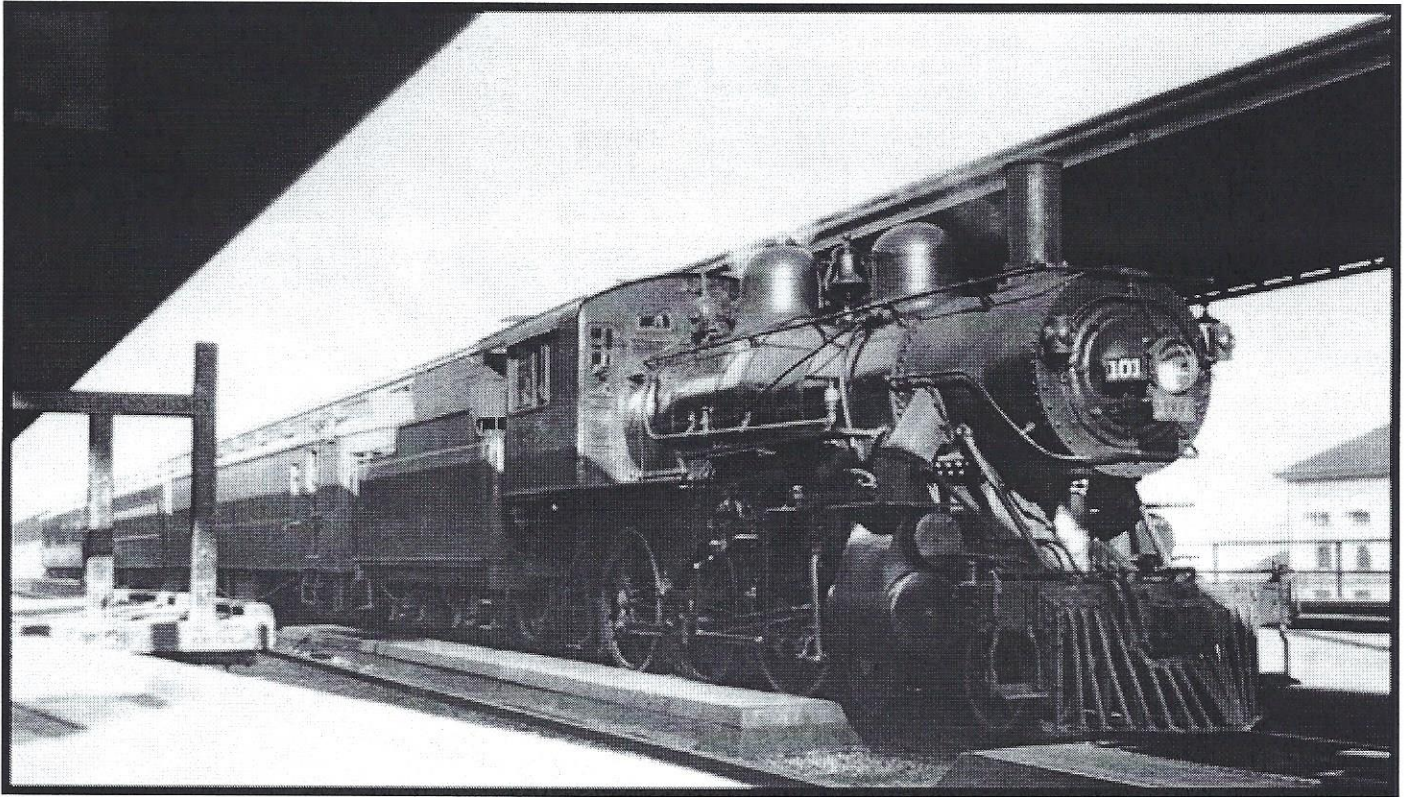
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Ron V. Nixon Collection Image Record - RVN33691

Caption: SI 101 on passenger train in Spokane Depot.

Date: April 1932   **Location:** Spokane, WA   **Photographer:** Ron V. Nixon
Railroad: Spokane International

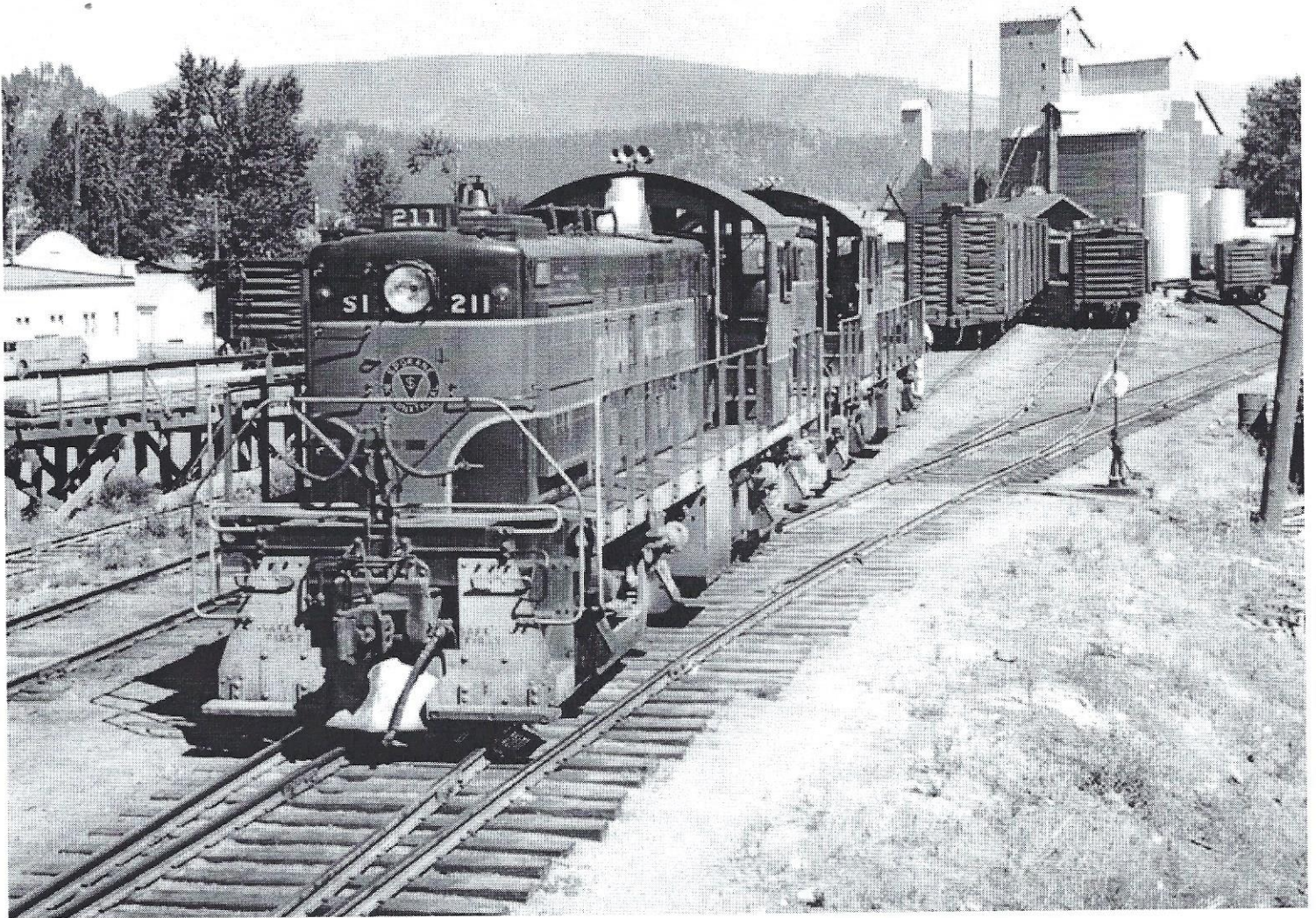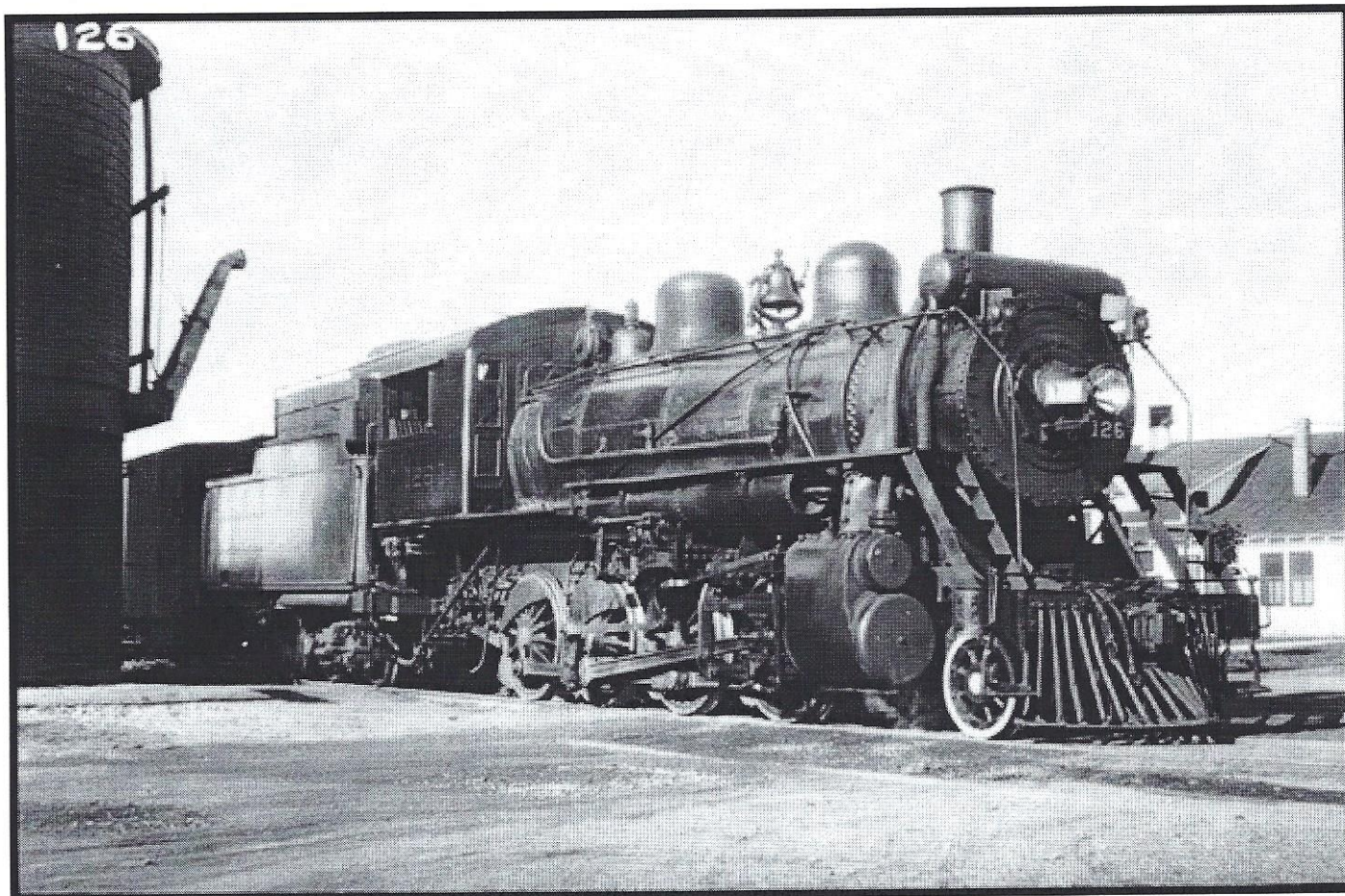**Subjects:** Car-Mail & Express | Locomotive-Steam | Train-Passenger |

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Ron V. Nixon Collection Image Record - RVN24791

Caption: "Neat, Elesco-browed SI 2-8-0 no. 126 takes water at Sandpoint, ID"

Date: May 1930   **Location:** Sandpoint, ID   **Photographer:** Unknown
Railroad: Spokane International Railroad

Subjects: Locomotive-Steam |

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YADKIN; Yakima Valley Transportation; York Utilities; Yosemite Valley; Youngstown & Northern; Yreka Western.

WATER STOP. The engine is No. 23 of the Spokane International, a 152-mile line which does not belong to the ASLRA
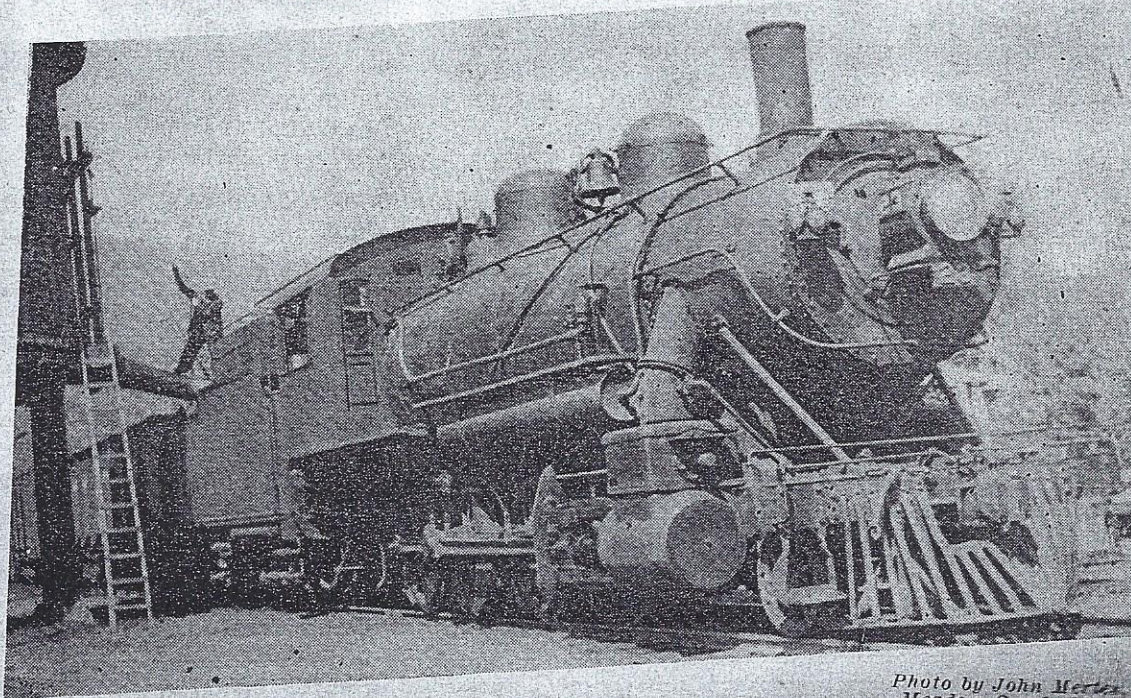

Photo by John Merkel
Meadow Creek, Idaho