



# Railroad Depot Museum





# THE RITZVILLE Railway Depot Museum

Built in 1910 by the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, this depot was the second for Ritzville. The original wooden depot, built in 1881, was located directly across the tracks.

During the early 20th century, Ritzville was the largest and heaviest grain shipping railroad station in the world which is why the Northern Pacific built such a large depot in such a small town.

At one time 8 to 10 passenger trains arrived each day in Ritzville. Rail travel continued to be popular for many years after the turn of the century. Ritzville residents could ride the train to Spokane early in the morning and return that same evening. Passenger service to Ritzville was discontinued in 1972 after which the depot was used by railroad maintenance crews.

In 1988, Burlington Northern deeded the depot to the City of Ritzville. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989 and is part of Ritzville's National Historic District.

The depot has changed very little. It is constructed of red brick in a classic mission style with overhanging eaves. The men and ladies waiting rooms have ceramic tile walls and terrazzo floors and are home to a large collection of Ritzville commercial memorabilia.

The ticket office has restored working telegraph equipment complete with local telegrapher. The freight office holds a collection of Ritzville and Adams County school memorabilia. The baggage room has the original scale and a vintage horse drawn hearse.

Outside the depot, you will find a wide vision cupola caboose built for Burlington Northern circa 1970. It has been restored to a color scheme utilized by Northern Pacific prior to the merger. Northern Pacific only painted twenty-five cabooses in the yellow and green colors; therefore, the caboose has been given NP #10425 and will be, to the best of our knowledge, the only caboose painted in this unique color scheme.





## Turn of the Century Railway Depots

Railway stations were constructed in every city along the railroad tracks throughout the world. Their designs closely resembled the particular architectural style of the country or according to the preference of a particular railroad. They came in various sizes from small to majestic.

Factors taken into consideration for their construction were the size of the community served, growth potential, and the particular railway facility to be placed there. Occasionally, when the need arose, they could be temporarily built with whatever materials were available.

For example, old unused boxcars were placed in service as stations and equipped with just the basic elements needed for operation. On the other hand, large ornate union stations were built in metropolitan areas such as Chicago and New York.

At major locations, terminal or divisional offices were constructed to house the great number of employees necessary for the operation of the railway. Railroad employees responsible for the storage, sorting, classifications, and the making up of freight trains worked at facilities called yard offices.

Other buildings operated by railways included downtown freight, traffic and passenger ticket sales bureaus. There were also a large number of interlocking towers or stations staffed by telegraphers

whose job was to manipulate switches, locks, and signals in a definite pattern for the safe movement of trains.

The employee in charge of what are called "line" stations, which were in towns between terminal points, was the Agent-Morse Telegrapher. The first and most important requirement of this appointed position was the requirement for complete competency in the use and operation of the Morse telegraph system. The agent also managed unmanned sidings and stations in their jurisdiction.

The agent's duties included many non-railroad related functions. They issued marriage licenses and served as notary publics. Often times, the waiting rooms served important civic purposes such as polling places during elections, social activities, and church services.

The busier stations were open twenty-four hours a day. Besides the agent, there may be other telegraphers and one or more clerks assigned to perform various duties. It was "the" most important building in town.







# While You're In Town Don't Miss...



## **The Burroughs Home**

The ancestral home  
of Dr. Frank R. Burroughs.



## **The Carnegie Library**

Visit our Heritage Research  
Center to discover your  
Adams County family history.

### **MUSEUM HOURS**

Open from 11:00am - 3:00pm · Tuesday through Saturday,  
Memorial Day through Labor Day, or by appointment.

### **RITZVILLE MUSEUM VOLUNTEERS**

Box 524 · Ritzville, Washington 99169 · **(509) 659-1656**

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