

The Turntable

Back when steam locomotives were in regular use, the railroads had to develop a way to position the locomotives at the lead of the train. Unlike diesel locomotives which operate in both directions, steam locomotives could only run one way.

The turntable was developed as a way to position locomotives on the lead of a train without having to take the locomotive and tender out and find a wye to turn them.

Turntables were also used to switch engines into and out of the Roundhouse when space was often at a premium.

The Janesville Turntable, which was completely rebuilt in Yr. 2004 is still in use today.



There are very few turntables in use anymore today. At the Janesville facility, the turntable proves to be very useful. There is very little space on the property to switch locomotives and position them into one of 8 service bays in the roundhouse.

The Janesville turntable is electric with a control hut located on the outer edge. This enables locomotives to be turned with ease and precision.

In Use Today

The Janesville Roundhouse and Turntable are very much in use today as servicing facilities for the WSOR. Below are just some of the activities that occur at the Roundhouse on a daily basis:

- Routine Servicing of Locomotives. Facilities include service pits, wheel lathe, engine hoists, exhaust ventilation, and state of the art welding equipment.
- Freight Car and Locomotive inspections, including refueling.
- Janesville Terminal Dispatch offices and Southern Division Trainmaster office.
- Southern Division Roadmaster and Maintenance of Way offices.
- Southern Division store rooms.
- Passenger Equipment Storage



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WSOR JANESVILLE ROUNDHOUSE



Wisconsin & Southern
Railroad Co.

The Janesville Roundhouse is rich with railroad history. Built in 1905, the roundhouse remains in active service today, serving as a critical terminal on the WSOR system.

The following pages tell the story of this very unique building.



Janesville Roundhouse, 203 S. Pearl Street
Janesville, Wisconsin



The Janesville Roundhouse was built in 1905 by the Milwaukee Road. During the turn of the century, Janesville, WI was quickly becoming a major railroad hub and the Milwaukee Road soon realized it needed a facility to service its growing fleet of locomotives. Steam locomotives were serviced in the roundhouse until the first diesels appeared in the mid 1950's. At that time, the facility was upgraded and converted to accommodate the newer locomotives.

The Janesville Roundhouse has been used in later years by Central Wisconsin Railroad, the Wisconsin & Calumet Railroad, and finally the Wisconsin & Southern Railroad.

The year 2005 marks the 100th anniversary of the Janesville Roundhouse.

Primary Use

Roundhouses were primarily a North American invention, not as common in the rest of the railroad world.

The term signifies that the building had a central point around which it was constructed. The building front is curved to allow locomotives to enter by means of a turntable.



Roundhouses were essentially used for servicing and basic maintenance of steam locomotives. These locomotives required heavier oil and greasing that needed to be done along with some minor adjustments to the steam engine running gear.

Where possible, steam engines were kept inside, particularly in the winter months to make it easier to keep heated steam in the boilers. In larger roundhouses there were stationary steam boilers which were attached through piping to the steam engine boiler so the fire could be dropped from the locomotive firebox.

Once the steam locomotive was fired up, steam was kept up continuously in the boiler until it needed an inspection and pressure-test as regulated by the federal government. The heating and cooling of a boiler was considered something to be avoided as the expansion and contraction of the boiler tubes weakened all of the joints and seals. Each time the fire was drawn and the boiler cooled was considered to be equivalent to one month's continuous steaming.

Improvements

The Janesville Roundhouse has received many improvements during the last few years. There were all new larger windows, weather tight doors and modern roof installed.

Outside, along with the rebuilt turntable, there was a new sand tower, fueling facilities and an engine water closet were added.



New windows installed.



New doors installed.



New fueling and water stations.



New Sand Tower for adding sand to locomotives.