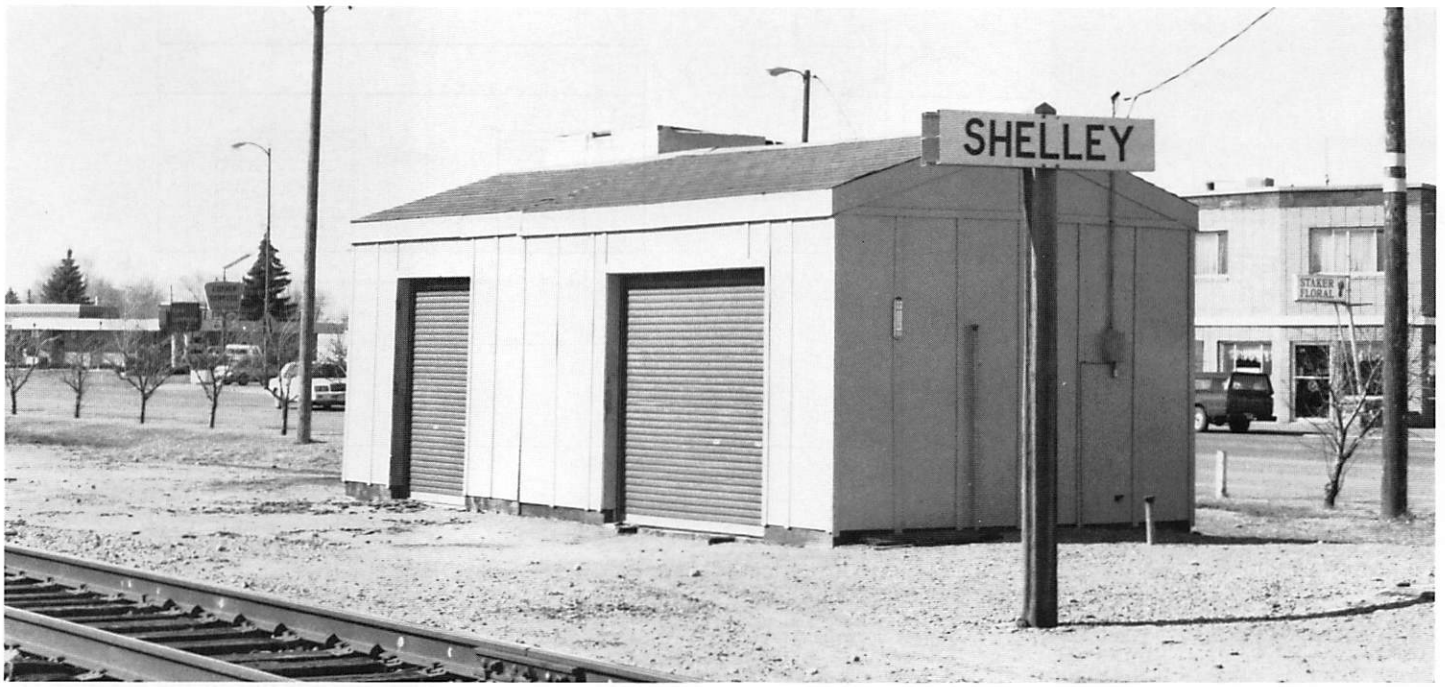


The Shelley, Idaho, section house is typical of the modern modular structures used by UP; note the splice line in the center of the building where the two modules have been connected. This particular section house does not have the usual rails and timbers to ease transfer of a section car.

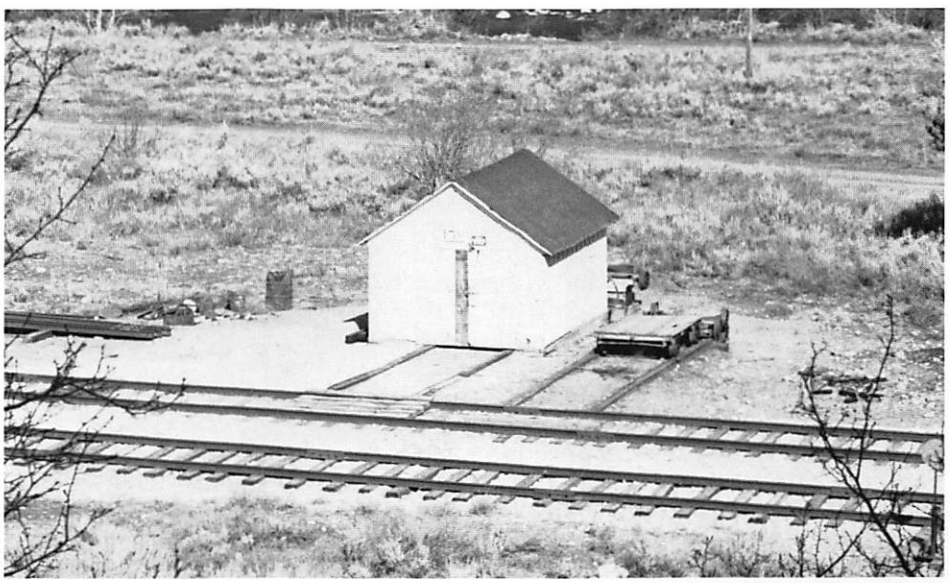
SECTION HOUSES

These nondescript structures have an important role in railroad maintenance-of-way activities

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY THORNTON WAITE

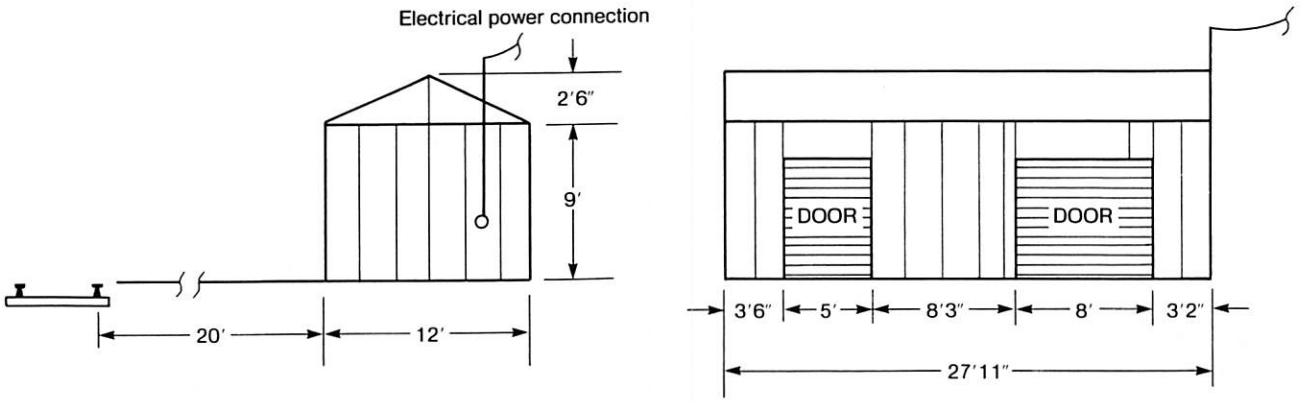
Section houses have been around since railroads were first constructed. They are necessary to store tools and equipment used for maintenance-of-way activities. Many towns along railroad right-of-ways owe their existence to the construction of a section house. Railroad employees often settled nearby when one was built and, before long, a village would grow. Pocatello, Idaho, a major junction on today's Union Pacific and the second largest city in the state, was originally a section house on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation.

Section houses are noteworthy not for their appearance, but rather for their utility. My "hometown" railroad, UP, has section houses which probably look a lot like section houses seen on railroads around the country. Section house buildings started out as simple,

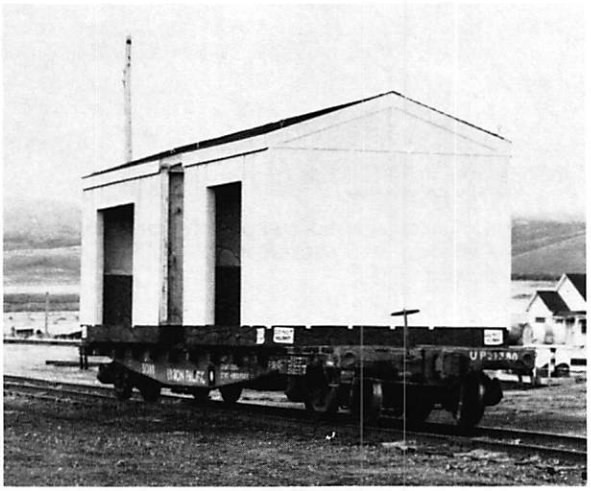


Warm River section house, on the now-abandoned Yellowstone Branch, is typical of the "classic," wooden-framed houses once used by UP. Note that the doors swing open on side hinges and that there is space for an additional car next to the building.

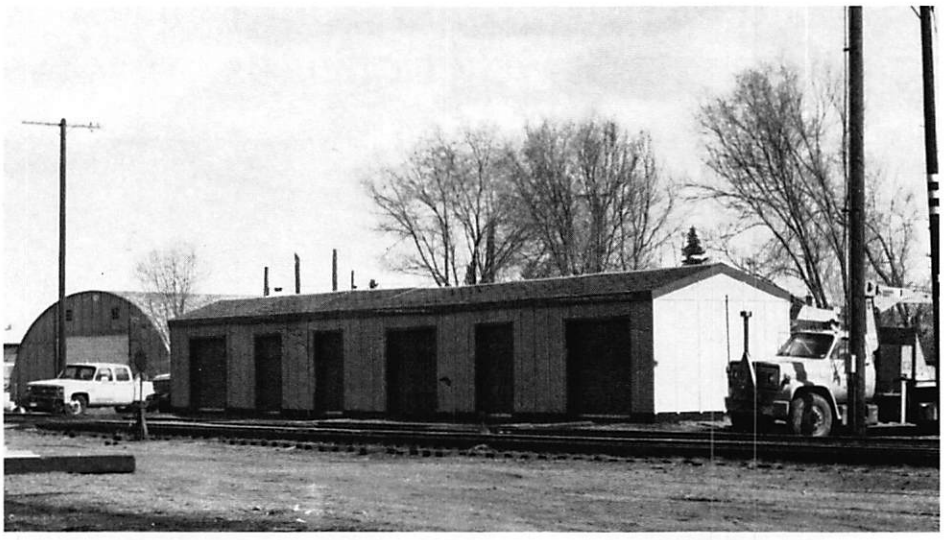
Fig. 1/Union Pacific modular section house at Shelley, Idaho.



NOT TO SCALE



Right: One nice thing about the modern section houses is that they are modular and easily transported to any location. Here, a new section house awaits set-up in Lima, Mont., after transport by flatcar. **Below:** Any size of section house can be built by simply joining together a variety of modules. This section house in Idaho Falls, Idaho, combines six modules to create one large structure.



wooden-framed structures, built on-location, which featured a window and a door. The door was large enough to move all equipment in and out. Equipment usually included a section car; a track running perpendicular from the section house (which sat at railhead level) was used to transfer the section car to the rail line. Ties or other heavy timbers were placed between the rails and around the transfer track to make the job easier.

As the original section houses aged and deteriorated, they were replaced with modern buildings, which predominate on today's rail lines. Union Pacific has been using standardized modular buildings for several years. These new section houses are rather nondescript—they're simply boxes with doors—but they are functional. The buildings have been used throughout the UP system, varying only slightly in their configuration. The color, a light beige, is always the same, but the size of the building can be modified to fit local needs. The advantages of these new section houses is that they're easier to install, since they can be shipped to any location by flatcar and simply lowered in place, and they are virtually maintenance-free due to a special coating on the wood.

The photos and diagram of the Shelley, Idaho, section house show a typical arrangement of the UP modular buildings. The Shelley depot was razed in early 1977 and replaced with a modular freight building for the station agent. When the agency was closed, a section house replaced the modular freight station. You'll notice the structure is simply a combination of two common sizes of UP modular buildings used in section houses; on the left, a smaller structure with a narrower door and, on the right, a larger structure with a wider door. Various combinations of these two types of modules can be used to match the size of the section house to local storage needs.

A modern UP modular section house would be a simple scratchbuilding project. In modeling a section house scene, a number of details will add realism. Add the rails and timbers used for moving the section car to the tracks (notice that the Shelley section house does not have this feature). An electrical power connection, routed from a nearby overhead line, is used on the prototype for interior lighting and operating small power tools. A final touch is a station sign, like the one in front of the Shelley section house, which is appropriate in small towns which may not have a freight station.