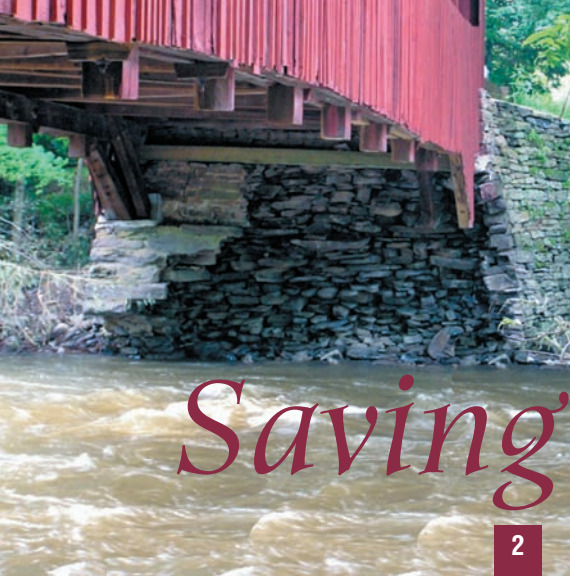


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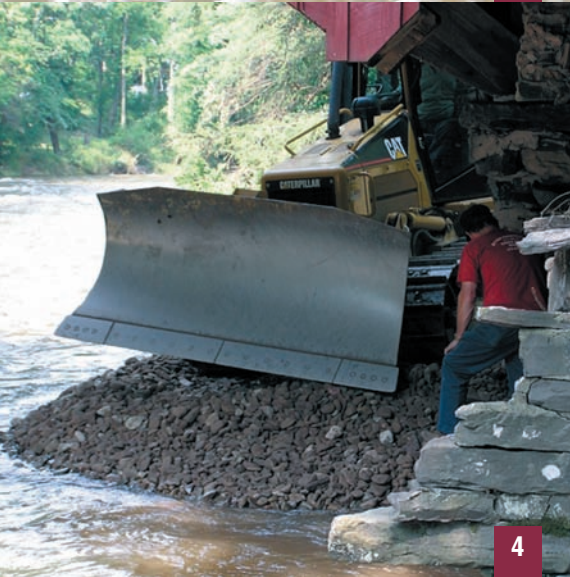


Saving

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Josiah Hess Covered Bridge the Past

Article by Robert Parks and Jim Hahn

Photos by Robert Parks and Linda Sones

One of the most significantly historical qualities of Columbia and Montour counties are the area's twenty-five covered bridges. Visitors from all over the world come to see the antiquated craftsmanship used to construct these spans. No two bridges are exactly alike as workers incorporated the surrounding landscape into the construction of each bridge.

The Burr Arch constructed Josiah Hess Covered Bridge is in Fishing Creek Township, located between the villages of Forks and Jonestown. The bridge was built in 1875 by Joseph Redline at a cost of \$1,349.50 and named after the Hess family that owned a sawmill and farm nearby. In June of 2006, torrential rains and swelling streams tested the banks and bridges in Columbia and surrounding counties (see picture #1). The "No-Name Flood of 2006" caused unprecedented damage throughout the area and the Josiah Hess Bridge was in danger of being washed away. Rushing floodwater had swept away parts of the stone abutment supporting the bridge (see picture #2). When the water levels in Huntington Creek returned to normal, the bridge literally hung on a single stone. Had that stone been washed away with the rest of the abutment, the bridge would have collapsed and floated downstream.

Amish contractor John Lapp was called to assess the situation. A temporary fix was devised using heavy logs and stacks of cribbing

(see picture #3). Truckloads of rock and stone were bulldozed under the bridge to provide a base for the cribbing (see pictures #4 and #5). As a precautionary measure against future floods, it was decided that the new abutment would have to be built of concrete.

By August, fundraising efforts along with donations and grants raised several thousand dollars for the repairs, but not the full monies needed. Since repairs needed to be completed by winter to avoid the threat of snow and ice, Mr. Lapp agreed to begin reconstruction of the abutment, even though the remainder of the money was not yet available. With the dedicated work of the Amish construction company and volunteers, concrete was poured and the stonework was completed by Thanksgiving of 2006 (see picture #6), just five short months after the bridge hung on by a single stone. Future visitors would be none the wiser as to the effort and expense of restoring this historic bridge.

Driving and biking tour maps of all the covered bridges of Columbia and Montour counties are available for those that would like to take a day meandering through the many covered bridges and rolling farmlands of the area. A historical and educational journey through covered bridges built with hard work, craftsmanship and determination.

Did you know . . .

- Covered Bridges are often referred to as "Kissing Bridges?"
- Despite various theories, Covered Bridges were covered to protect the main timber trusses from the detrimental effects of rain/snow?
- Our counties are home to one of the largest concentrations of Covered Bridges in PA, with twenty-four 19th century bridges and one 20th century bridge?
- Columbia County is home to one of only two sets of Twin Covered Bridges in the United States.
- At our Visitors Centers, you can pick-up our "Covered Bridges of Columbia and Montour Counties" detailed driving map?
- We host an Annual Covered Bridge and Arts Festival in October and offer bike tours and guided bus tours to select Covered Bridges?