

Trials and Tribulations of a Historic Pair of Covered Bridges

By Robert Parks

The West Paden Covered Bridge, a 100 ft. long Burr Truss and its twin known as East Paden, a 79 ft. long Queen Truss bridge, were built in 1884, by W. C. Pennington and named for John Paden, a nearby sawmill operator. The two bridges stood in single file, both vital links in the crossing of Huntington Creek.

The Padens were retired from public service on a Sunday afternoon in 1963. Both West and East Paden, or as they are more commonly know - the Twin Bridges, were then newly refurbished; glistening in their new red paint, their metal roofing reflecting sunshine, and the surrounding grounds became a picnic area. In its entirety, this became the county owned Twin Bridges Park.

Then came the constant pummeling of Mother Nature.

In 1994, a roof beam snapped under the weight of winter snows, causing \$10,000 in repairs.

Life was good for East Paden until November 13, 2003 when a devastating wind ripped through the valley, blowing down an 18" diameter tree onto its roof, causing extensive damage to both the roof and sides. Before it could be repaired, on April 21, 2004, fire of suspicious origin also damaged the East Paden. Leaves blown beside the bridge apparently caught fire. A year later, the East Paden was completely repaired and the park revamped for \$230,000 and a rededicating ceremony was held on May 25, 2006.

One month later on June 28, 2006, a "No Name Storm" hit the area, flooded Huntington Creek, and reaching flood stage, lifted the West Paden off her abutments and washed her downstream.



Having applied for and received a FEMA grant, the county asked for bids to rebuild an exact replica of the West Paden. Only one contractor agreed to rebuild it for that amount. They would donate their own time and equipment to complete the

bridge (A true lover of covered bridges). It was determined that the recovered older material was not usable.

Reconstruction began about mid-June 2008. First on the list was the reconstruction of the stone abutments. Since the cost of collecting and laying stone was prohibitive, the contractors used concrete forms/molds which made them appear in the shape of stones. While this was being done a crew cleared a level spot to build the trusses on the ground and when completed, would use a 20 ton crane to put them in place.

The wooden trusses and various beams came from Oregon as the sizes of the needed arch trusses weren't available locally. These were then cut to specifications by very talented craftsmen using modern hand tools. Every cut and hole was measured and remeasured. As the trusses were completed they were primed and received a first coat of paint.

On Sept. 11, 2008, it was time to place the trusses. A small crowd gathered to watch this critical step. Would they fall into place? As they were slowly lowered, they did! Within an inch! Within the next 35 days the bridge would receive its many floor beams, lateral bracing, floor joists, finished deck, roofing and siding. Painting and backfilling followed along with protective fencing leading to the bridge.



On October 15, 2008, the Twin Bridge Park was again ready for use. Thanks to a FEMA grant and generous work of a contractor, the West Paden, along with her sister East Paden, have once again come to life.

***Conveniently located near Interstate 80,
and State Routes 11, 15, 487, 54 and 42, the Columbia-
Montour County region in East-Central PA is easily
accessible from any direction.***

***There are 208 Covered Bridges still standing in
Pennsylvania, and you can find 25 of them in Columbia
and Montour Counties. For a detailed Covered Bridges
driving map, please contact the Columbia-Montour
Visitors Bureau.***

1-800-847-4810 • iTourColumbiaMontour.com

***You can view pictures of the reconstruction at
<http://coveredbridges.org/padenconst.html>***