

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Organizers work to raise funds to restore Barrackville's historic covered bridge

By Lori L. Riley | Times West Virginian Aug 18, 2021



A group of Barrackville area residents are working to raise money to restore the town's historic covered bridge.

Photo by Eric Cravey

BARRACKVILLE — The historic Barrackville covered bridge is ready for a face lift. Or, a bridge lift to be more precise.

To repair the bridge and return it to its somewhat original condition, the bridge will have to be lifted off its foundation so the rotting foundation boards can be replaced.

“There are two main boards on both sides, on the bottom of the bridge — good sized boards called seals — they need to be replaced,” said Guy Ward, Del., R-Marion County, who has been in conversation with other citizens who have expressed an interest in the bridge’s repair.

The bridge, which spans 145 feet across Buffalo Creek, is important to Marion County’s history, say residents who are trying to raise money for the bridge’s restoration.

“It’s a civil war landmark,” said Diana Marple, a proponent of the bridge’s restoration. During the Civil War, Gen. William E. Jones of the Confederate Army seized and burned bridges throughout the Northeast, including parts of West Virginia. “The Confederates were coming to burn the bridge,” Marple said. “Jones came to Barrackville to burn the bridge, and the Ice family talked them out of it – they saved the bridge.”

Built in 1853 at a cost of \$1,852, the Barrackville bridge is one of only two covered bridges in the state built by West Virginia bridge architect Lemuel Chenoweth. It was used for transporting commercial goods and was in use for 130 years without modern reinforcement.

In the 1990s, some restoration work was done to the bridge, but that work is already succumbing to the elements. “I was told they messed up [the restoration] last time — they didn’t preserve the boards properly,” Ward said. “They will do it differently this time.”

Bridge advocates are looking at ways to raise money for the bridge’s repair.

“We had a real exciting meeting about a week ago,” Marple said. “A gentleman from Ohio, Jon Smith, came and looked at the bridge. He has handled restorations all over the country.”

Rough estimates are coming in at around \$300,000 for the restoration, but there aren’t any confirmed quotes yet.

“The biggest cost,” Ward said, “is to raise it up. We’ll need heavy equipment to lift the bridge. It will have to be lifted to replace those boards — the foundation boards are probably 20 feet long.”

“If we were building it today, it would be done differently,” Ward said, adding that it’s important to use building techniques of the past to restore historic landmarks. The Barrackville covered bridge was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1981.

“We might be able to get \$20,000 to get started,” Marple said. “Guy Ward suggested that we do the paperwork to get designated as a 501©(4) so we can raise money.”

“I’m working some angles,” Ward said. “I think we might be able to get a grant from the West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture and History. I talked to the commissioner, Randall Reid-Smith, and he has shown an interest in helping. He invited the [Barrackville] festival committee to apply for a \$20,000 grant next spring. So, it’s likely that we’ll get that since he’s the one who approves the grants. It’s not a done deal, but it’s promising.”

If bridge restoration costs come in at \$300,000, organizers will have to find other sources of funding.

“We’ll be checking with everybody, hitting up everybody,” Ward said. “There are less than two dozen [covered bridges] left in the state. And Barrackville is the second largest. It is important.”

“Commissioner Reid-Smith is really behind it,” Ward continued. “I think he wants to do everything he can. But we’ll probably talk to some corporations, and maybe start a GoFundMe page.”

One factor that was not considered when the bridge was repaired 30 years ago was the need for regular maintenance. “Last time, no one created a maintenance fund,” Ward said. “So once the bridge is restored, maintenance will be minimal.”

An annual festival is being planned to raise money for the bridge’s maintenance. “We’re planning on having a covered bridge festival,” Marple said. “It will bring attention to the project.” Once the bridge is restored, money raised at the annual festival can be used for general maintenance.

“The bridge was built 170 years ago,” said Bob Pirner, a member of the Barrackville planning commission. “It’s withstood the test of time, and we certainly ought to do what we can to give it another 170 years.”