

WV's third-oldest covered bridge burns in Barbour County

- Rick Steelhammer
- Aug 11, 2017 Updated Nov 21, 2017

The fate of the 161-year-old Carrollton Covered Bridge, over the Buckhannon River in Barbour County, was uncertain Friday, after the bridge was severely damaged by fire late Thursday.

West Virginia Department of Transportation personnel began to assess damage as investigators from the State Fire Marshal's Office searched for clues to determine the cause of the blaze.

Completed during fall 1856, the bridge was a key component in the newly constructed Middle Fork Turnpike, which connected the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike near the Randolph-Upshur county line with an existing road in Barbour County that led to Clarksburg.

Before the fire, the bridge carried W.Va. 36 traffic across the river, providing a link between U.S. 119 and Audra State Park. It is the third-oldest and second-longest covered bridge in West Virginia, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"Right now, we don't know what's going to happen with the bridge," said DOT spokeswoman Carrie Jones. "We'll have to remove all the fire damage, to see how structurally sound it is, and we can't do that while there's an investigation in progress."

At best, she said, the bridge will remain closed for several weeks while engineering assessments and repairs take place, and the span — without its distinctive superstructure — would be able to reopen.

The possible restoration of the covered bridge, which lost its roof and most of its walls during the fire, is a matter that could take years.

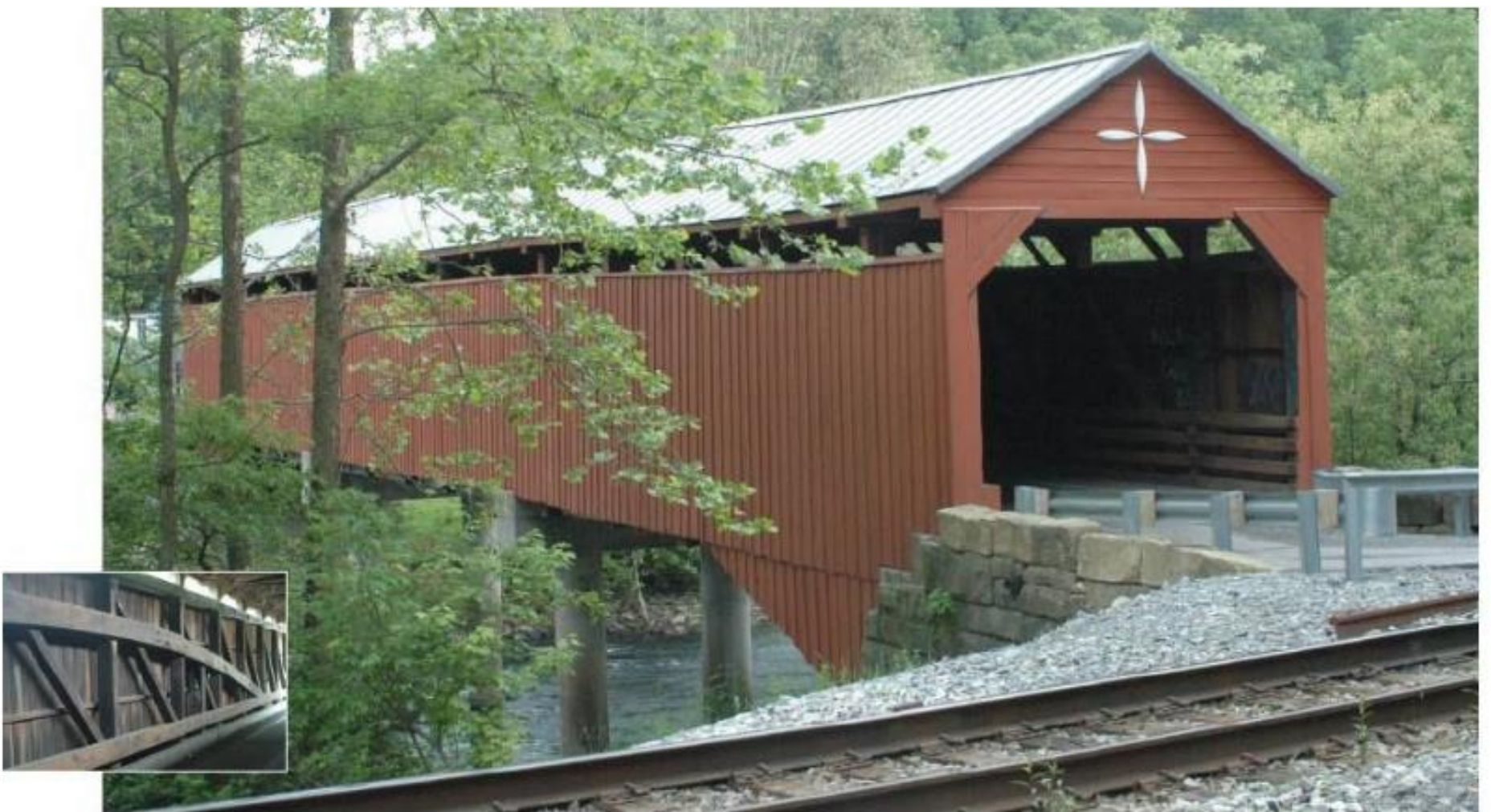
The fire was reported shortly after 11 p.m. Thursday and fought by firefighters from several area volunteer fire departments.

"We had one of our safety officers, who lives in the area, on the scene overnight," Jones said. "She said that a number of people in the community came by to see the bridge, which has been such an important landmark in the area. A lot of them were sad and teary-eyed."

Brothers Emmett and Daniel O'Brien were the contractors for the 140-foot-long, 16-foot-wide bridge, built for \$4,819. Emmett O'Brien had served as the masonry contractor for the larger and better-known Philippi Covered Bridge, completed years earlier.

The Carrollton bridge carried traffic for more than 100 years, until safety inspectors determined that repairs were needed. According to the National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the bridge, "local community efforts helped to save the bridge and bring about the bridge's subsequent renovation."

In 1963, the span's timber deck was replaced with a 150-foot, three-span concrete deck with a 12-foot roadway and 3-foot sidewalk, and two concrete support piers were added. Less extensive repairs took place again in 1987 and 2002.



CARROLLTON

Another Philippi-area span that once served as part of the Middle Fork Turnpike, the covered bridge at Carrollton is a 16-foot-wide, 140.75-foot-long multiple-kingpost Burr arch truss bridge built in 1856 by Emmett O'Brien, who had served as a stonemason on the Philippi bridge under Chenoweth, and his brother Daniel.

Limited work was done in 1987 on the structure, which continues to carry vehicles on Barbour County 36 over the Buckhannon River. Late in 2002, Hoke Brothers Contracting of Union was awarded a \$389,609 renovation contract that included replacement of some timber truss members and some wooden siding, along with cleaning, treating and painting all siding and other wood surfaces and replacement of existing concrete beams.

(Above) The Carrollton Covered Bridge, as it appeared before Thursday night's fire, carried traffic on WV Rt 36 across the Buckhannon River in Barbour County.



Most of the roof and walls of the 161-year-old Carrollton Covered Bridge went up in smoke during a fire Thursday night.
Photos courtesy W.Va. Dept. of Transportation



A view from the interior of the bridge shows charred wood atop its concrete deck, added in 1963.

The Carrollton covered bridge in July 2020:



The Inter-Mountain

Carrollton Covered Bridge's restoration could begin soon



Submitted photo - The historic Carrollton Covered Bridge in Barbour County may soon undergo restoration work, after being damaged by fire in August 2017

Jul 1, 2021

Brad Johnson Executive Editor

CARROLLTON — Restoration work is almost ready to begin on the historic Carrollton Covered Bridge in Barbour County, state officials announced Wednesday.

“We’re committed to getting this bridge rebuilt,” said West Virginia Division of Highways District 7 Engineer Brian Cooper. “We appreciate the public being patient as we’ve worked out the plans to get it done.”

An Aug. 10, 2017, fire — which was later determined to be arson — destroyed much of the outer covering of the bridge but left the basic structure mostly intact.

After making minor repairs to the deck and structure to ensure the bridge was safe, the DOH reopened it to traffic in September 2017. DOH then hired a consultant to best determine how to restore the historic bridge.

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“Initial plans were for a consultant to do the restoration work, but in November 2020 it was decided to leave the work to DOH work crews, who could restore the bridge more economically,” a Wednesday DOH press release states. “DOH has since been securing bids for materials necessary to restore the span.”

Upshur County’s Tiger Diversified LLC was awarded a contract in late May to provide the timber for the restoration project.

On June 24, DOH received a bid of \$400,000 to provide the scaffolding and rigging system necessary to do the work. If the bid is accepted, restoration work on the bridge could begin quickly, Cooper said.

The bridge is the third-oldest surviving covered bridge in West Virginia,

The bridge was built in 1856 by Emmett and Daniel O’Brien, and crosses the Buckhannon River near the town of Carrollton. At 140 feet long, it is the second-longest surviving covered bridge in West Virginia.

The bridge was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1981.

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