

BATTERED BRIDGE



State's second-longest covered bridge prepped for restoration

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VOLGA— After surviving the Civil War and 16 decades of sporadic battering by ice chunks and flood debris, the Carrollton Covered Bridge's closest brush with oblivion came on a hot summer night nearly five years ago.

On Aug. 10, 2017, an arsonist torched the 166-year-old Barbour County structure along with two nearby fishing camps. To date, no arrests

have been made.

Last week, the restoration process for the state's third-oldest surviving covered bridge got underway when a crew from Span 1 LLC of Scott Depot began rigging the span with scaffolding to accommodate the next phase of work — replacing the wooden siding and repairing the upper superstructure. That project will be done in-house, using personnel from

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ABOVE: As workers from Span 1 LLC of Scott Depot take stock of the covered bridge's interior, traffic on Carrollton Road is temporarily blocked. **RIGHT:** While the 2017 fire destroyed the span's vertical board and batten walls, most larger support timbers, though singed, remained structurally sound and will be used in the covered bridge's restoration.

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The Carrollton Covered Bridge is seen before being damaged by fire in 2017.

WV DOT courtesy photo

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the Division of Highways' District 7 bridge department.

Although the restoration work has "been a long time coming for community members, it's been a top priority for the Division of Highways since day one," said District 7 Engineer Brian Cooper.

While the fire sent the historic span's roof and distinctive barn-red board-and-batten siding up in smoke, most of its larger wooden support beams and arches, though charred, were salvageable, thanks in large part to heroic efforts by area firefighters.

In the weeks following the fire, consultants from the Mead & Hunt engineering firm determined which portions of the wooden superstructure could be saved, then installed temporary bracing to support what remained of the roof. Following minor repairs to the modern bridge superstructure — a concrete deck and support piers installed during a 1963 rehabilitation project — the bridge reopened to traffic in September 2017.

Lumber needed for the restoration work will be provided by Tiger Diversified LLC of Buckhannon, under a contract awarded last May. Once Bridge 1 completes its scaffolding work and a series of days with above-freezing temperatures arrives to make power-washing possible, "reconstruction begins in earnest" by the District 7 bridge crew, according to state Department of Transportation spokeswoman Jennifer Dooley.

The project is expected to be complete by fall, she said.

Completed in the fall of 1856, the Carrollton Covered Bridge, was built to serve traffic on the planned Middle Fork Road, construction of which recently had been authorized by the Virginia



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Span 1 LLC workers secure angle iron to the Carrollton Covered Bridge in preparation for restoration work.



Beams used to support scaffolding are being installed at the 166-year-old Carrollton Covered Bridge. Once the scaffolding is in place, a team from the Division of Highways' District 7 bridge section will begin restoration work on the arson-charred span.

Board of Public Works.

Emmett O'Brien, masonry contractor for the Philippi Covered Bridge completed four years earlier, and his

brother Daniel were awarded the contract to build the Carrollton bridge, along with a second bridge that was to cross the Middle Fork

River near present-day Audra State Park.

It took only one year's work and \$4,819.26 for the O'Briens to complete the

142-foot-long span, despite a delay to widen the bridge by 2 feet to add structural stability in light of a slide-prone river bank. Though just half the length of the Philippi bridge, the O'Briens' span at Carrollton is the state's second-longest surviving covered bridge.

The O'Brien brothers did not fare as well with construction of the second covered bridge. In September 1859, days after the bridge was raised, "there came a sudden rise in the (Middle Fork) river and swept it all off," according to a report filed the following month with the Virginia Board of Public Works.

The brothers planned to secure the timber needed to replace the span with the intention of completing the project "without delay," Barbour County road commissioner S. Mason reported. "But it is up to you gentle-

men to say what is to be done," Mason said, since "there is not money enough to build the bridge and make the (Middle Fork) road."

A covered bridge was eventually completed over the Middle fork near what is now Audra State Park, but it was destroyed by fire during the 1940s.

The Carrollton Covered Bridge spans the Buckhannon River and carries traffic on State Secondary Route 36, or Carrollton Road, between its junction with U.S. 119 about five miles west of Philippi and Audra State Park, five miles to the south.

Of more than 100 covered bridges once in service in West Virginia, 17 remain.

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