



MEADOWCROFT

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Rehabilitating the Pine Bank Covered Bridge

The Pine Bank Covered Bridge, after spanning Tom's Run for nearly a century in the Greene County village of Pine Bank, was slated for demolition in 1962, to be replaced by a concrete span. Meadowcroft founder Albert Miller, believing the historic bridge would be a perfect addition to his emerging outdoor museum, secured permission from PennDOT to disassemble the timber-framed structure and move it from its namesake village to Meadowcroft.

The history of this bridge began in April 1871 when residents petitioned the county commissioners to construct a bridge at Pine Bank saying "a bridge is much needed" and that "the erection thereof will be too expensive for one or two adjoining townships."¹ "Viewers" were appointed by the commissioners to investigate the need and, on June 17, the committee reported back to the commissioners in favor of the project. Based on the timeline of similar bridge projects at the time, the Pine Bank Bridge was most likely completed before the end of 1871.

At the time of its construction,

well over 10,000 covered bridges existed in America.² Today the Pine Bank Bridge is one of only 672 original covered bridges surviving.³ Even more remarkable is that the Pine Bank Bridge is one of only about 20 of the kingpost truss type covered bridges remaining in the nation.⁴ The kingpost truss is the simplest of the truss types and was used for short span bridges.

Covered bridges disappear from the landscape for two primary reasons: either they have reached the end of their useful life and are being replaced with a larger, more durable type of bridge, or they have been damaged beyond repair. Between two and five covered bridges are lost each year due to arson.⁵ The Wilson Covered Bridge, which was located

less than 10 miles from Meadowcroft, was severely damaged by arsonists in 2002 and subsequently removed. Flooding is another significant source of damage. Many covered bridges have been swept off their abutments and reduced to ruins by raging floods. We know the Pine Bank Bridge survived at least one flooding event in the early 1890s as a local resident recalled that the floor of the bridge was two feet under water.⁶

So in 2016, after 145 years, with decay threatening to compromise its load-bearing capacity, the Pine Bank Bridge was ready for rehabilitation. Funding for the project was provided by the Washington County Local Share Grant Program, the Washington County Tourism Grant Program, and the Keystone

The Pine Bank Covered Bridge photographed by Albert Miller in 1961 at its original location.

Meadowcroft collection, photo by Albert Miller.



The dismantling of the Pine Bank Covered Bridge in 1962. The triangular truss is evident with the central "kingpost."

Meadowcroft collection, photo by Albert Miller.

The rehabilitated Pine Bank Covered Bridge at Meadowcroft.

Photo by Dave Scofield



Historic Preservation Grant Program.

Timber-frame specialists from Fitzgerald's Heavy Timber Construction, Inc., dismantled the truss, spliced in new timber where decay was present, and then reassembled the bridge. In addition to repairing the truss, the project included several changes which would return the bridge more closely to its 19th century appearance. Support braces, which had been installed under the bridge in the 1980s, were removed. The roof was replaced with a period-appropriate standing-seam metal roof and the roof line was extended by four feet on both ends of the bridge. This was done to accommodate new vestibules since the originals had been removed when the bridge was relocated in 1962. Vestibules are walls that extend the length of the bridge beyond the trusses. They are designed to provide the trusses with additional protection from the weather. Finally, the oak board and batten

siding will remain unpainted as it was on most covered bridges in the 19th century. Now the newly rehabilitated bridge not only looks more like it did when it was originally built in 1871 but it is ready for another 145 years. ⚙️

For a more comprehensive history of the Pine Bank Bridge, see "The Pine Bank Bridge and its Changing Meaning Through the Years" by Louis Martin that appeared in the Summer 2006 issue of *Western Pennsylvania History*; visit <https://journals.psu.edu/wph/article/view/7668/7441> to read that article online.

¹ *Road Docket No. 2*, Greene County Courthouse, Waynesburg, Pa., 427.

² *Covered Bridges and the Birth of American Engineering*, Justine Christianson and Christopher H. Marston, eds. Washington, D.C.: Historic American Engineering Record, 2015, 49.

³ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁶ "Pine Bank Covered Bridge", handwritten notes of Albert Miller.

Timber frame specialists from Fitzgerald's Heavy Timber Construction, Inc. work on repairing the 145-year-old kingpost truss.

Photo by Dave Scofield



The reassembled truss system after splicing and repairs.

Photo by Dave Scofield

