

Roberts Bridge: A Historic Landmark Of National Importance



Roberts Bridge

Preble County is very fortunate to have eight covered bridges still standing and the oldest covered bridge in Ohio. Throughout the 19th Century, from 1829 until 1896, 29 covered bridges were built in Preble County, Ohio. Some were built for turnpikes, one for the railroad, one by a private enterprise, and some to replace original bridges destroyed by a devastating storm in May, 1886.

The Robert's Bridge was built in 1829 and is Ohio's oldest covered bridge. It is one of six double barreled or dual wagon-way bridges still remaining in the United States. The Roberts Bridge is the oldest of these and is the second oldest covered bridge of any type in the nation.

Built just over a quarter century after settlement began in the area, the Roberts Bridge is among the earliest non-domestic structures standing in Preble County.



Having obtained a contract from the U.S. government, Orlistus Roberts began building a covered bridge about two and one-half miles south of the village of Eaton. With the help of his

apprentice, James Campbell, Roberts built the bridge of local poplar, beech and oak resting it on abutments of limestone quarried from nearby Rocky Run. All bolts, nuts and nails were hand forged by the builders. Unfortunately, Roberts died before completion of the bridge that bears his name and it was finished by James Campbell.

For nearly 160 years, Roberts Bridge was in use at its original location. In 1962, the bridge was restored and in 1974, important structural repairs were made. By the 1980's nearly all of the protective structure and some framing were no longer original. However, the actual load bearing bridge was intact. On August 5, 1986, the bridge was vandalized and heavily damaged by fire. On the day following the fire, a group of concerned citizens joined in their resolve to restore Roberts Bridge. Relocation of the bridge to a more accessible and secure site was considered necessary. The site in Eaton was prepared and plans were made for moving the trusses. The move took place on September 20, 1990.

On June 23, 2012, over 100 years since the last covered bridge was built, the all-new Hueston Woods Covered Bridge was dedicated. This bridge is a Burr Arch truss construction similar to the Roberts Bridge, and it has a span of 108 feet over Four Mile Creek in Hueston Woods State Park.

Additional information about Preble County covered bridges can be found in the book, Covered Bridges of Preble County by Seth Schlotterbeck and may be purchased through the Preble County Historical Society



Burr Arch Truss On Roberts Bridge



Burr Arch Truss On The Hueston Woods Bridge



Hueston Woods State Park Covered Bridge

Covered Bridge History

Over the past century and a half over 12,000 covered bridges once served as a means of traversing ravines and rivers throughout the US. Over time, concrete and steel replaced many of these bridges to where today these landscape icons are considered an "endangered species." Ohio once boasted of approximately 3,500 covered bridges at its peak, second only to Pennsylvania. Today, only 148 covered bridges remain throughout Ohio with Preble County proudly having 8 wooden bridges remaining, six of these still in operation.



Originally, many of the bridges were built with just transportation in mind. Later, engineers took into consideration the aesthetics of the bridge in their serene tranquil settings adding more design elegance to the structure. Unfortunately, as the use of the automobile increased, the need for covered bridges decreased.

Today, discovering a covered bridge hidden on a rural back country road in Preble County spanning a placid creek, surrounded only by natural beauty instills a grand appreciation for the craftsmanship of over a century ago. It quietly takes us back to a time and place where horses and their riders found refuge from inclement weather, where couples rendezvoused for a romantic evening, a place for a Saturday night social dance, and a great spot to hang a fishing pole over the side. Go back in time as you discover the historic covered bridges of Preble County.



The Christman Bridge