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DREIBELBIS BRIDGE

SPANNING HISTORY

Framers restoring 1869 covered bridge

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Lester Miller couldn't stop smiling from excitement and pride as he was treated to a preview of the restoration of the historic Dreibelbis Station Covered Bridge that his ancestors built.

"It's fantastic," the 85-year-old Miller said during an open house last week hosted by Lancaster County Timber Frames Inc. in Lower Windsor Township, York County, the contractor restoring the wooden frame of the 171-foot span built in 1869.

The covered bridge over Maiden Creek connects Greenwich and Windsor townships. It provides a shortcut between Lenhartsville and Virginville.

Miller said his ancestors farmed the land.

"They built this bridge," he said, watching the old and new wooden parts being fitted together. "This is so exciting. The bridge has a lot of history. It was a cider mill. They made apple butter. It survived flooding from (Tropical Storm) Agnes in the '70s.

"It looks good. Now, they are going to put up steel beams and make it stronger."

Miller organized a bus trip for 40 members of the Virginville Grange fraternal group and friends to view the progress being made on restoring the wooden frame. They were among more than 100 guests attending a recent open house.

In September, the bridge was lifted by a crane and placed on the Maiden Creek bank. Contractors then transported the frame to Timber Frames for restoration.

'We saved it'

The plan is to install a steel span across the creek within the next several weeks. The restored wooden frame then will be attached to the steel span.

The bridge is expected to open by May, said Josh Wolf, project



Timber framers Jake Kern, left, and Will Johnson work on the restoration of the Dreibelbis Station Covered Bridge at Lancaster County Timber Frames Inc. in York County.

LAUREN A. LITTLE - READING EAGLE

manager with Lobar Site Development Corp., Dillsburg, York County, the lead contractor for the project.

In the last several months, the old wood from white oak trees was taken apart. The lumber that was not rotted was connected to new lumber from yellow southern pine trees.

During the process, workers found a skull and crossbones impression stamped on a small piece of wood.

Tony Zaya, owner of Timber Frames, said the skull and crossbones stamp was to indicate that the wood was treated with poisonous chemicals to prevent it from rotting.

Apparently, the plan did not work.

"The skull and crossbones had to be replaced," Zaya said. "The

wood with the skull and crossbones is rotted and will not be part of the restored bridge."

The \$4.3 million restoration project is funded through the National Historic Covered Bridge Preservation Program.

Zaya said the original wood had to be saved, comparing it to tearing down the Parthenon, an ancient Greek temple dedicated to the goddess Athena.

"You can see the marks made by the craftsman," he said. "We saved it. For students of history, this is a very exciting moment. There is a lot of passion for this bridge."

Wide interest

Bridge aficionados from near and far attended the open house.

More than two dozen members of the Theodore Burr Covered Bridge Society of Pennsyl-

vania, based in Manheim, Lancaster County, were among the spectators.

Tina Chandler, 51, of Oxford, Chester County, said she joined the group because she loves covered bridges.

"It's an amazing piece of history," she said. "We have four covered bridges in Oxford. I love to see the covered bridges."

Lester Miller's cousin, Ernie Miller, 84, of Hamburg, made the bus trip with the Grange group.

"A lot of people are very interested to see how they took this bridge apart," said Ernie Miller, who was a Berks County commissioner from 1992 to 1996. "It's quite something. I live a few minutes from the bridge."

Berks transportation planners Alan D. Piper and Michael D. Golembiewski complimented the

contractor.

"This is so cool," Golembiewski said, viewing the restored frame. "It's interesting to see all of the craft work that went into this."

Eric P. Dreibelbis, president of the Dreibelbis Cousins of America, a local group devoted to preserving the family history, said the bridge means a great deal to his family.

He recalled his great-grandfather hauling lumber from Schuylkill County to build the bridge.

George Rothlingshofer, 53, of York said it's unusual to get an opportunity to see a covered bridge restoration.

"I travel on a motorcycle all over the country to see bridges," he said. "I've never been in a shop where they are actually doing the work."