

Blairsville's Covered Bridge

INDIANA COUNTY PARKS & TRAILS

INDIANA COUNTY'S FIRST COVERED TOLL BRIDGE ESTABLISHED IN 1821

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- First covered toll bridge in Indiana County; first bridge to cross the Conemaugh River.
- Operated as a toll bridge.
- 300 feet in length.
- A yearly pedestrian pass cost \$1.50
- Bridge collapsed at 10 p.m. on January 22, 1874.
- The first covered bridge in Indiana County was the Campbell's Mill Bridge in Burrell Township, constructed in 1804. In 1804 Indiana County was still legally part of Westmoreland County.

In 1820 the PA General Assembly authorized the Conemaugh Bridge Company to begin selling stock at \$50 per share for the purpose of erecting a covered bridge in Blairsville. The bridge operated as a toll-bridge.

Notices were published in newspapers in Indiana and Westmoreland Counties; a \$2 fee was payable immediately as each

share of stock was sold with the balance to be paid in installments. A total of 300 shares were sold with 100 shares of stock being purchased on behalf of the Commonwealth.

Construction of the covered bridge began in Blairsville in 1821. The bridge was passable for wagons in 1822 and fully opened in 1823.

James Moore was the bridge contractor. The covered bridge was a 300 foot span which utilized a Wernwag truss.

The Conemaugh Bridge Company officers included:

Andrew Brown, President
John Doty, Treasurer
Managers: James Moore, Samuel Baird, Nathaniel Doty, John Bingham, John Anderson, R.K. Simpson

BLAIRSVILLE COVERED BRIDGE

Photo at right: from the Fred Yenerall Collection.

The Bairdstown Bridge is located in the same location today.



WERNWAG TRUSS

WERNWAG, Lewis, civil engineer, born in Alteburg, Wtirtemberg, Germany, 4 December, 1769; died in Harper's Ferry, Virginia, 12 August, 1843.

On leaving school, in order to evade military service, Wernwag lived with a shepherd in the mountains, who directed his attention to the study of astronomy, natural history, and other scientific subjects.

In 1786 he made his way to Amsterdam and then to Philadelphia. His earliest venture in this country was the building of a machine for making whetstones. Soon afterward he began to build power-mills and bridges.

His covered bridge built across the Schuylkill river in 1812 at Philadelphia was known as the "Colossus of Fairmount," . The bridge

consisted of a single arch, the span of which was 340 feet. Because of its length of span (being the longest ever erected at the time), solidity, and strength, the bridge was regarded as one of the wonders of the world. From 1812-1834 he built twenty-nine additional bridges (including Blairsville's bridge).

The Wernwag truss (illustrated below) was used in the construction of the Blairsville Bridge.



“The bridge had two wagon tracks separated by timbers and small windows at intervals, painted white and yellow.”

BLAIRSVILLE BRIDGE TOLLS

The Blairsville bridge was a toll bridge. Here is a summary of the tolls required to cross:

Foot pedestrian—2 cents

Six horses and four wheeled wagon—75 cents

Five horses, and four wheel wagon—62 cents

Four horses and four wheeled wagon—50 cents

Three horses and four wheeled wagon—44 cents

Two horses and four wheeled wagon—37 cents

One horse and four wheeled wagon—31 cents

Sleighs of sleds with four horses- 37 1/2 cents

Single horses with or without riders- 6 cents

Sheep or swine- 2 cents per head

Cattle- 4 cents

Pig and one horse- 18 cents

One-year pedestrian pass-\$1.50

The toll house was located on the Westmoreland side of the bridge. William Clark was the first tollgate-keeper

CENSUS OF BLAIRSVILLE BRIDGE TRAFFIC IN 1829

*Bridge traffic in 1829:

Pedestrians on foot—12,527

One horse wagons- 374

Two horse wagons-245

Four horse wagons-781

Five horse wagons-1,566

Six horse wagons-1,438

Cattle-497

Sheep-98

Swine- 475

Statgecoaches-730 times

Yearly subscribers-325

Estimated tolls collected in 1829: \$3,417 (not accounting for stagecoaches whose

toll fare is not known). School children and funerals were not charged tolls.

Tolls collected from Nov. 1822—Sept. 1823: \$1,569

In Dec. 1831 a 14% yearly dividend was declared.

*From: Thomas F. Gordon, A Gazetteer of the State of PA, T Belknap, Philadelphia, 1833