

# WREN'S NEST BRIDGE

**Built in 1993**

**Commissioned by Richard & Eloise Davison  
Constructed by Frederick V. McCracken  
Blacksmith work by Cameron Tool**

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# New covered bridge f

## Wind Ridge man patterns creation after historic loc

**BY GEOFF CAMPHIRE**  
THE OBSERVER-REPORTER

**RYERSON STATION** — With many of the area's traditional covered bridges deteriorating from age, restoration is one way to preserve this feature of Pennsylvania's architectural heritage.

Another is to build a brand new covered bridge — according to the old tradition.

That's just what Fred McCracken of Wind Ridge hopes he has done in Aleppo Township.

The 50-year-old Greene County native recently built an old-fashioned covered bridge across South Wheeling Creek, connecting a private drive to Aleppo Road between Routes 18 and 21 near Ryerson Station.

McCracken said there are 200 covered bridges scattered throughout Pennsylvania. The one he just constructed brings Greene County's tally up to ten, he estimated.

His endeavor to preserve local history began with the couple who commissioned him to do the work.

In 1988 Richard and Eloise Davison bought a log house and farm in Aleppo Township, which were previously owned by Harry Lough. The house was built around 1870 with Oak and Chestnut wood and dovetail joints, McCracken said.

The Davisons hail from Atlanta, Ga. Richard is an attorney and co-owner of Cameron Gas Co. of Cameron, W.Va. Eloise works as a

computer consultant. McCracken met Davison while performing construction work for Cameron Gas Co.

With the carpenter's help, the Davisons also have initiated restoration of the house. McCracken has been working on renovation of the house, off and on, for about four years, he said.

Considering the pattern established on the property by the log house, a traditional covered bridge seemed to be a natural choice for the creek. "They always have character. They are a part of rural Greene County history," McCracken said.

Except for a foot bridge, no structure has permitted traffic to cross the creek to the house until now.

Preparations for construction of the bridge began in early 1990, and McCracken drafted his own plans for the covered bridge.

Construction started in October 1990 but was halted immediately by the state Department of Environmental Resources. Only after the Davisons obtained a permanent bridge permit — two years later — could work resume.

McCracken said he performed virtually all engineering and construction. He credits Paul Matthews of Cameron R.D.3, W.Va., with excavation.

McCracken used 5,000 board feet of lumber to build the bridge. The wood used for the house and the bridge has been collected from

woodlands within five miles of the house.

The Kingpost trusses are the type commonly found in short-span wooden bridges, McCracken said. The two reinforced concrete abutments stand 9 feet high, 16 feet wide and 29 feet apart.

All framing is made of Oak beams. The siding and rafters are constructed from Poplar which was cut and sawed locally by Marlin Geho of Garrison.

The main sills of the trusses are square-foot beams with 10-square-inch Red Oak stress beams.

When McCracken could not find a mill that would saw 30-foot planks like the ones used in traditional bridges, he had Geho chop down two White Oak trees nearby.

Then McCracken used a chainsaw to hand-cut two main sills for the Kingpost trusses, the main lengths of wood upon which the rest of the structure sits.

The structure is held together with wooden pins, commonly known as "tree nails" or "trunnels," McCracken said.

"It takes time, putting this stuff back. Everybody's in a hurry today," he lamented.

McCracken said he constructed the bridge, almost single-handedly, in about four months. When he found himself in a tight spot or was having trouble with a heavy plan, he said, neighbors pitched in and helped.

"I'll tell you one thing — I'll

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Fred McCracken completed his covered bridge in February.

never build another one of these all by myself," he said, smiling.

Finished in February, the bridge has a length of 30 feet and an inside height and width of 12 square feet.

"The bridge is built exactly like they were in the 1820s in Greene and Washington counties," he said.

Yet McCracken believes the

bridge has been constructed as economically and soundly as any comparably sized bridge made of steel and concrete.

McCracken said he learned a great deal about carpentry and construction while growing up in the Aleppo area, where he spent years helping his father working in the oil fields.

While he currently is involved

in the renovation of a covered bridge in Hundred, W.Va., McCracken said he is interested in restoring original covered bridges in Greene and Washington counties.

"These covered bridges are falling down here and there," he said in a dour tone. "You're losing Norman Rockwell's life — that's the way I feel about it."