

## COVERED BRIDGES

Good day, everyone--it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

If you're a covered bridge buff, then your thing for vacation-time is here in Pennsylvania. And those of you who haven't been out into the rural byways of Pennsylvania and haven't crossed a wooden-tressed covered bridge lately, or fished under one, have missed another beautiful Pennsylvania experience. You know, too often the tide of progress destroys many of our beautiful landmarks, or for that matter the memory of lovely experiences of the past--and the covered bridges of Pennsylvania breathe the air of the past and speak softly the way of the past. Pennsylvania has some 4400 streams draining from its major river basins, so it has always needed thousands of bridges...there are more than 20,000 of them along the byways, and some 300 or more are wooden covered bridges. Once the state had almost 1000 of them. Actually the bridges weren't covered to save people from wind or rain, but actually to save the woodwork of the bridges themselves from the weather. The first one in the nation was the Market Street covered bridge over the Schuylkill in Philadelphia which was built in 1805. And Pennsylvania holds a lot of records in that field. The longest covered bridge in the world was the old Columbia-Wrightsville bridge over the Susquehanna--the Yankees burned it down with the onslaught of southern troops coming up to Gettysburg a century ago....Harrisburg's old Camelback Bridge was a famous one--a legendary landmark--and so were many others. Theodore Burr was the great designer of such bridges, and the Covered Bridge

Society of Pennsylvania--formed a decade ago--is named in his honor. Here in Pennsylvania, the highways department is restoring some of the covered bridges for posterity--one such restoration was dedicated a few months ago at Hummelstown. It takes about six weeks to do the job which preserves the tradition of a way of life in Pennsylvania--that's not too time-consuming nor too expensive. Reinforced steel arches and flooring are added and sometimes sheet roofing. A weight limit is usually about two tons--and these bridges are generally set aside for one-way traffic. Actually high vehicles generally are to blame for knocking the old bridges to pieces. Of course, the major foe of covered bridges remain fire and flood. The old hemlock and white pine the ancient bridge-builders used have had amazing longevities, but timber just doesn't last forever. There is beauty in wood and that beauty is still there in the more than 300 covered bridges in the state. The old-timers preferred that beauty--and they left us a nostalgia which still remains today in the Pennsylvania countryside. No matter where you are in Pennsylvania--you're not far from a couple of covered bridges. Make that ride--there is the thrill of echoing voices under the rafters which children will hear when they shout as you drive across. What children can appreciate is worth preserving.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.