

21613

National Register #79002075

Wimer Bridge

East Evans Creek Road

Wimer, Oregon

Built 1892

Rebuilt 1927

Collapsed 2003

Rebuilt 2008



National Register #79002075: Wimer Covered Bridge

The Wimer Bridge collapsed into Evans Creek on 6 July 2003. The following was written shortly before the collapse:

“The Wimer Bridge was saved from destruction when local residents battled to initiate a rebuilding of the weakened structure in 1962.

Community members insist that the original bridge was built in 1892, and a sign posted on the bridge claims title to that date. The Hartman brothers, bridge builders of Jacksonville, replaced the Wimer Bridge in 1927.

Features of the Wimer covered span include a shingle roof, the usual daylighting narrow windows above the trusses, wooden flooring, and a Queenpost truss design. The bridge appears not unlike a barn from downstream and only the flying buttresses indicate it to be a covered bridge and not a barn over water.

Although refurbished in 1962, the bridge had a load limit of 8 tons placed on it by the mid-1970s and deterioration soon closed it to vehicular traffic. In 1985, the wooden bridge was rehabilitated and the 8 ton load limit restored.

However, the span of 85 feet is too long for the Queenpost truss, and the buttresses do not adequately support the top chord. Now, the east truss has

severe bowing and sweep, and the bridge exhibits large movements when cars pass, so the bridge currently has a 3 ton load limit and is slated for rehabilitation using National Historic Covered Bridge funds.”

On a hot summer afternoon, in the quiet community of Wimer, Oregon, local residents were startled to hear a giant crashing sound coming from the vicinity of their covered bridge. Customers at the Wimer Market, only a dozen paces away, rushed out to witness the unthinkable. The historic Wimer Covered Bridge in Southern Oregon had spontaneously collapsed into Evans Creek. Those who were the closest also heard shouts for help coming from inside the rubble and scampered down the bank, over the shattered shingled roof and lifted broken wooden beams to rescue a man and his two young grandsons. They were the last persons to stroll through the old covered bridge on that fateful Sunday.

Oregon once boasted a collection of over 400 covered bridges, the highest count for any state in the country, but now there are barely over 50. The crash of the Wimer Bridge has reduced that number by one more. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the covered bridge was part of our heritage, a treasure to be discovered, off the beaten path and away from the busy, high-tech world.

The original Wimer Covered Bridge was built in 1892 by J. W. Osbourne but, in 1927, was totally replaced by Jason Hartman, then Jackson County bridge superintendent. Over the years the Evans Creek crossing received numerous repairs, but time and use took its toll on the aging span. In 1962 attentive residents saved the bridge from destruction when a citizens effort rebuilt the weakening structure. Load limits were set at 3 tons with no heavy truck traffic allowed.

The Wimer Bridge was the only covered bridge in Jackson County open to vehicle traffic. The coveted landmark was the focal point of a community, a destination for travelers, an attraction for history buffs, a hangout for kids and a storehouse of memories for many local residents. Now, with help from a federal grant, county funds and donations, the community wants to rebuild. Funding for a replacement is now the focus of a grassroots effort to construct an exact replica.

Source: Dennis Rasmussen in a quarterly newsletter of the *Preservation of Covered Bridges and the Oregon Covered Bridge Society*

The rebuilt bridge was dedicated on July 6, 2008.