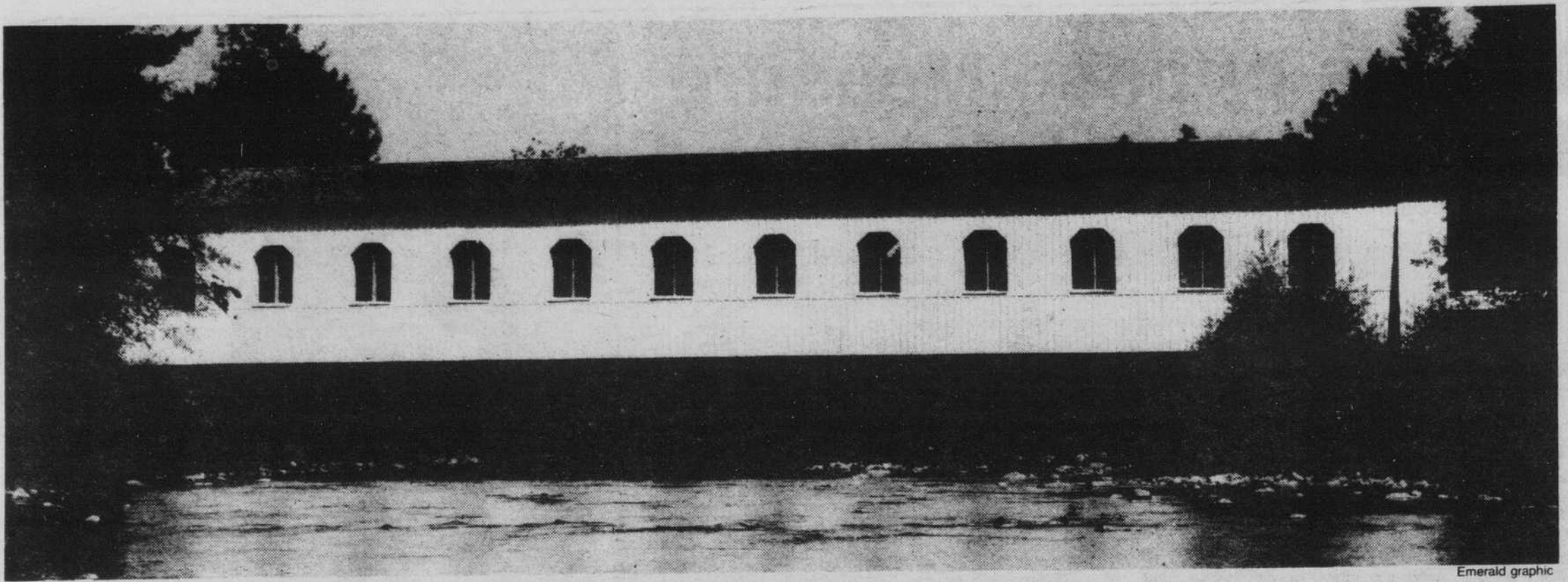




Emerald graphic

Restoration of bridges still undecided

By KEVIN HARDEN
Of the Emerald

Time may be running out for covered bridges in Lane County, but the County Commissioners think two more weeks won't hurt.

The Commissioners voted 2-0

during their regular Wednesday meeting to table a motion to nominate 19 county covered bridges to the National Historic Register. Their action came minutes after an hour-long public hearing on why the bridges should be nominated for federal restoration funds.

The bridges, which are already considered historic landmarks by several area citizen groups, were to be nominated for the Historic Register following a report by the Lane County Historic Task Force.

During the public hearing, however, one covered bridge to be nominated drew heavy criticism

from Florence and West Lane County residents.

The Meadows covered bridge on North Fork Road over the Siuslaw River in West Lane County, which has been the focus of a public controversy for the past few months, was condemned by area residents because it was considered too dangerous to remain in its present location.

According to Vern Meadows, whose home has been near the bridge since 1925, the bridge is a "time bomb" ready to collapse at any time. The bridge would be best preserved if it were dismantled and moved to another location, he said.

Other Siuslaw River area residents agreed. The bridge, Linda Meadows told the Commissioners, should not be considered safe enough to be put in the National Historic Register. The Commissioners may have made a mistake by considering the Meadows covered bridge for any historic purposes, she said.

"I would like to believe that the rights of individuals are more important than the fact that we once built covered bridges in the West," she said.

Most residents who live near the Meadows bridge testified that the bridge has been a source of trouble for the past few years.

Vandalism to homes around the bridge is common, the residents said, and it would increase if the bridge were considered a tourist attraction.

According to Mike Nagler, head of the Historic Task Force, if the bridges nominated are accepted by the National Historic Register, federal funds would be available to maintain and restore the structures on their present sites.

Although many of the residents complained that the county shouldn't use tax dollars to restore relics of a past era, Commissioner Jerry Rust pointed out that money to repair the bridges would come from county timber receipts and not property tax revenue.

One offer to the county that would solve the Meadows bridge problem and the question of maintenance funding was presented to the Commissioners by an Illinois woman who owns land near Florence on Highway 101.

Martha Clemeneff, of Countryside, Ill., offered to buy the bridge, move it to another site and restore it as a museum. The Commissioners decided to study the offer and postpone further action on the bridges until additional reports can be made on the location, condition and restoration costs of the other 18 county bridges.

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