Winters Road Bridge
(Railroad Avenue Bridge)
Spanning Putah Creek
Yolo and Solano Counties
California

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FINAL
May 2010

WINTERS ROAD BRIDGE
(Railroad Avenue Bridge)

Location:	Southernmost edge of the City of Winters on Railroad Avenue spanning Putah Creek. South of State Highway 128, Yolo and Solano Counties, California USGS 7.5-minute Winters, California Quadrangle Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 10.589935E 4264025N
Present Owner:	Solano/Yolo County
Present Use:	Vehicular bridge To be demolished circa 2012
Significance:	The Winters Bridge served as a major economic and communications link between Yolo and Solano counties and Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area in the early twentieth century. The bridge is the earliest large example of reinforced concrete in the region and its 123-foot-long spans were the longest concrete arch spans in California until Humboldt County's Fern Bridge (196 feet) was constructed in 1911.
Report Prepared by:	Madeline Bowen, MA Historian ICF International 630 K Street, Suite 400 Sacramento, CA 95814
Date:	February 2010
Project Information:	This documentation has been prepared at the request of Solano County, which proposes to demolish the structure and replace it with a new concrete bridge in the same location that meets current structural and geometric standards. The existing bridge is structurally deficient. After consultation with the Federal Highway Administration and the State of California's Office of Historic Preservation, a memorandum of agreement was reached stipulating the completion of this Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) document to address the effects of the undertaking.

Madeline Bowen of ICF International served as project manager and principal investigator. Robert A. Hicks of Field Documentation Service, Rancho Cordova, California, conducted all photography. The documentation is based on the *Historic Property Survey Report for the Winters Road (Railroad Avenue) Bridge Replacement Project, Yolo and Solano Counties, California* (Jones & Stokes 2007).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of Construction:** 1907–08 **(**City of Winters April 1908)

2. **Engineer:** P. N. Ashley (Yolo County engineer) and F.A. Steiger (Solano County engineer) served as engineers for the Winters Bridge.

   P.N. Ashley: Pallas Neal (P.N.) Ashley was born near Nashville, Tennessee in 1864 and was the son of N.J. and Prudence P. Ashley. He attended New Middleton Institute in Tennessee and graduated from the collegiate department of Gordonville academy. Upon graduation, Ashley worked as principal of a school in Galena, Missouri for a short while. In 1885 he arrived in Yolo County, California. Unable to find a teaching position, Ashley worked in the agricultural industry and then as a realtor, eventually securing a teaching post at the Occidental school district in Capay Valley. During this period, he acquired an interest in surveying and mathematics. In 1890, he joined the engineering department of the Southern Pacific Railroad Company and later the California-Oregon Railroad Company where he worked on a variety of projects including landslide surveys and tunnel preparation. Ashley eventually settled in the town of Woodland in Yolo County where he received an engineering license from the State Board of Examining Surveyors and was appointed deputy surveyor for Yolo County. Ashley also served as Woodland city engineer, and as such he oversaw plans and construction of the city's sewer system. Ultimately Ashley assumed the position of surveyor for Yolo County, a position he held for 24 years. As county surveyor, Ashley was involved with the construction of several new bridges and roads throughout the county and also became an expert in irrigation and flood control issues, allowing him to work as an engineer for many local reclamation districts. In 1894, he married Mary Cornelia Chapman. Upon his retirement, Ashley followed agricultural pursuits in Yolo and Butte Counties, including planting orchards and nut trees. He passed away in 1962 (Woodland Daily Democrat 1962:1–2).

   F.A. Steiger: Frank A. Steiger was born in San Francisco on September 29, 1864. One of four children, his parents were Alexander Steiger (also an engineer) and Mary Abbie Steiger. Upon completing studies in San Francisco, Steiger entered the machinist trade. The vocation did not appeal to him, however, and he enrolled at the University of Michigan to study civil engineering. Upon completing his degree, Steiger settled in Vacaville where he practiced his profession and eventually assumed the position of Solano County engineer as well as town engineer for Vacaville, where he designed the Vacaville Town Hall. He also

worked as the city engineer of Benicia. In July of 1892 he married Kate Saxton in Vacaville and had two daughters, Margaret and Katherine (Gregory 1912: 263).

3. **Builder:** W.N. Concanon

4. **Original plans:** When designed, the Winters Bridge measured 461 feet long and 22 feet wide with a four-foot-wide pedestrian path on the up-river side. It featured a three arch span and included four-foot-high solid reinforced concrete railings with an average thickness of 6 inches. The center of the main arch was 36 feet from the water level (as existed in the winter of 1907) and the top of the bridge rail was eight feet higher making it 42 feet from the bottom of the stream. At the time of its construction, Winters Bridge was the longest bridge of its kind west of the Mississippi River (*Winters Express* 1907a p.1:1).

   When the design plans for the bridge became public, the local paper stated that:

   > …the structure will be a landmark; it will be a monument to the good judgment of the officials of the two counties that will be pointed to with pride and satisfaction after they have gone where bridges have not. It will also mark a new era in construction that means permanency and economy as well as convenience and safety" (*Winters Express* 1907b p. 2:1).

   As the bridge neared completion, the paper commented on the stateliness of the bridge and wrote "splendid arches stand out in bold relief showing lines of beauty that will always make this a notable structure" (Winters Express 1908a 2:1).

5. **Alterations:** The bridge railing was modified in 1930. At some point the pedestrian sidewalks were removed to widen the roadway (JRP Historical Consulting 2004).

B. Historical Context:

1. Solano and Yolo Counties:

The Winters Bridge stretches from the City of Winters in Yolo County across Putah Creek, which serves as a boundary between the two counties, into Solano County. The area was once part of Rancho Rio de Los Putos, 17,754 acres of land surrounding Putah Creek. The area in the vicinity of the rancho was quickly settled (Kyle et al 1990: 534; Hart 1978:489; Larkey and Walters 1987:19, 23). In 1858, most of the rancho was subdivided into 21 lots, ranging in size from 93 to 378 acres. In 1865, Theodore Winters, the City of Winters' namesake, purchased the remaining portion of the rancho. Mr. Winters was a nationally recognized

horse breeder and entrepreneur (Larkey 1991:20; Perez 1996:87). The area was slowly populated with small farmsteads or ranches set on vast acreage.

The California Gold Rush of the 1850s transformed Yolo and Solano counties from isolated farming communities into booming agricultural regions as disenchanted miners realized they could make a greater fortune through farming and ranching. The region enjoyed enormously rich agricultural and horticultural holdings. Initially most of Solano and Yolo County was devoted to grain and wheat crops with additional land used for grazing of cattle, horses, and sheep (Solano County Board of Supervisors 1905:10). In time the region turned to the cultivation of fruits and nuts and became known nationwide for the quality of crops produced there. By the turn of the twentieth century, acres of fruit trees were planted on non-irrigated and irrigated lands, which led to the development of several fruit packing establishments and canneries throughout the region. Fruit packing centered in the Vacaville and Suisun areas as well as the community of Winters. During the fruit season, which typically began as early as April and continued through Fall, thousands of individuals labored in the fields and packing houses, preparing tons of fruit for transportation to markets throughout the United States. Cherries, figs, lemons, olives, oranges, peaches, pears, prunes, almonds, walnuts, and other fresh and dried fruit and nuts were shipped or canned (Solano County Board of Supervisors 1905:10).

2. City of Winters:

The demand for faster transportation routes to transport agricultural products resulted in the construction of several railroad lines throughout the Yolo and Solano county region. Farmers in the southwestern portion of Yolo County were faced with poor transportation options because there were no rail lines near enough to serve their needs. A lack of adequate transit routes forced growers to haul their goods by horse and wagon to market in Sacramento and beyond, which often took as long as 5 days (Larkey 1991:23).

The owners of the Vaca Valley Railroad Company recognized this problem, and, with a desire to share in the trade that could be brought to the county, embarked on plans to extend a rail line through the southern portion of Yolo County. Backed by businessmen and landowners who promised to fund construction of a bridge over Putah Creek, the railroad decided to establish a line in Yolo County. Theodore Winters, along with another prominent landowner, D.P. Edwards, offered 40 acres of land for construction of a railroad depot and the bridge. With this land made available in 1875, the southern leg of the Vaca Valley Railroad commenced construction and included a bridge across Putah Creek. The extension of this line resulted in the permanent establishment of the town of Winters, located at the northern terminus of the rail line. In 1877, the Vaca Valley and

Clear Lake Railroad Company incorporated and the line extended north from Winters to Cache Creek (Larkey and Walters 1987:49–51; Olney 1902:171; Larkey 1991:21; Historic Environment Consultants 1985:11).

In 1875, the Winters town plat recorded a 23-block town site. The town limits extended from Putah Creek to Grant Street and from present-day Elliot Street to Third Street. By 1880, 523 residents inhabited the budding agricultural and commercial center. Initially recognized as an important grain shipping center, Winters gradually gained renown as a major fruit-growing district in California. By the 1890s, the area surrounding the town was commonly called the "Winters Fruit Belt." Crops grown in the region included apricots, plums, peaches, pears, olives, grapes, almonds, walnuts, figs, prunes, lemons, pomegranates, and oranges (Olney 1902:171–173; Larkey 1991:66; De Pue & Company 1879a:72).

Winters' agricultural base allowed the town to continue to grow, albeit slowly, over the next century. In 1898, the town incorporated. In 1906, officials completed a new railroad bridge, and just two years later, at a cost of $50,000, the Winters Bridge over Putah Creek was constructed. This later bridge was officially dedicated on April 1, 1908. Subsequently, the town's first library was established in 1910, the First National Bank arrived the same year, and a new City Hall and school building were erected in 1916. Between 1955 and 1957, the construction of the Monticello Dam at Devil's Gate on Putah Creek brought an influx of construction workers to the town. In subsequent decades, however, the town continued its slow growth. It celebrated its centennial in 1975, the same year that the Southern Pacific Railroad ceased operations of the railroad line through Winters (Winters Express 1975).

3. Winters Bridge:

Plans for a county road (present-day Winters Road and Railroad Avenue in Winters) were made as early as 1862 when a road petition was adopted for County Road 72. The original road was 66 feet wide and extended 12 miles from Vacaville to the Southern Pacific Railroad Bridge over Putah Creek to Winters. Total cost of constructing the road was roughly $3,400. At the time the railroad bridge was a dual-purpose bridge serving both wagon and railroad traffic. In 1890, the road was realigned, and reconfigured again in December 1907 for construction of the new bridge. Property owner William Baker deeded a portion of his parcel for the bridge right-of-way and to widen the bridge approach to its current 92 feet (Solano County Department of Resource Management 2006).

Prior to construction of the Winters Bridge, a pile bridge built in 1875 spanned Putah Creek. The unsubstantial wooden bridge was swept away twice during the winter of 1877. A combination railroad and wagon bridge replaced the pile bridge

until the new bridge was constructed in 1908 (City of Winters April 1908). Until the completion of the separate concrete road bridge, the earlier combination bridge served as the major connector between the Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area. The surrounding region became more populated, and the bridge became unsuitable for conveying the increased traffic. The burgeoning fruit industry that gained hold in the early twentieth century added to the strain on the bridge's capacity and safety. Concerned citizens soon demanded that the old bridge be replaced.

In February 1907, officials from Solano and Yolo County met to plan for a replacement bridge. Details to be discussed included location of the new bridge, whether a steel and wood bridge or a concrete bridge would be more appropriate, and when such a project could be started. On February 8, the board of supervisors, surveyors (Ashley and Steiger) and the district attorneys of both counties as well as leaders of the community assembled on the existing bridge to determine the exact location of the new bridge. Options included sites upstream and downstream of the existing bridge. It was concluded that, if the bridge was built downstream, the cost of construction would be less because the stream was narrower at the identified point. However, securing right-of-way at either end of the structure presented the greatest challenge. Property would need to be acquired at both sites. However, the downstream location would also require condemnation of a street through a parcel owned by an absentee landlord who would likely request a high price to sell—perhaps equal to what it would cost to build a bridge on the upper side. Ashley and Steiger estimated the cost of the bridge at the upstream location would be $30,000–$35,000, and the cost of building at the downstream site would be nearly one third less (*Winters Express* 1907c pp. 3:3–4).

Discussions among the group also included whether the bridge should be comprised of steel and timber or concrete. A steel bridge with a wooden floor would cost less initially, but there was concern that continual repair and replacement of timbers would increase cost over time. A concrete bridge, while more costly upfront, would prove to be more durable and less expensive in the long run.

The parties eventually agreed to build a bridge of reinforced concrete that would align with Railroad Avenue just upstream from and as close to the existing bridge site as possible. The width was to be 22 feet with a clearing to one side for pedestrians. The consensus was to construct a bridge for generations to come, and by doing so to justify the extra up-front cost for a concrete bridge. Funds would be secured by a tax levy shared by both counties (*Winters Express* 1907c pp. 3:3–4). The Winters Bridge (originally known as the Yolo-Solano Concrete Bridge) was the first exclusive wagon and foot bridge constructed across Putah Creek. The bridge was to be in place by August 1907, meaning the existing bridge would

be out of commission most of June and July, the height of the fruit packing and shipping season ((*Winters Express* 1907c pp.8:2–3).

On July 7, 1907, the Boards of Supervisors of Yolo and Solano counties met in a joint session in Fairfield to pass a resolution to construct a reinforced concrete bridge over Putah Creek. The counties placed a call for bids for the project and in August accepted the proposal from W. N. Concanon in the amount of $46,902.55 to construct a concrete bridge to be completed in 180 working days (Yolo County Board of Supervisors July 1907a). Yolo and Solano County determined that county engineers, Pallas Neal (P.N.) Ashley (Yolo County Engineer) and Frank A. Steiger (Solano County Engineer) would serve as the project engineers and C.F. Morest would be superintendent of construction. The two counties reviewed three other bids ranging from nearly $40,000 to just over $54,000, but rejected them due to cost or improper filing of paperwork (Yolo County Board of Supervisors 1907a; 1907b; City of Winters April 1908).

Before work actually began on the project, however, the two counties once again became embroiled in discussions of construction options and schedule. Although the locals were eager to have a new bridge, they were apprehensive about the construction schedule interfering with the peak of the fruit season. And the preference for a concrete structure became a concern after Ashley and Steiger, upon conducting preliminary work, determined that the gravel at Putah Creek contained too much earthy sediment to form safe concrete for the bridge superstructure. One alternative, though a costly one, was to bring in several carloads of crushed rock as the Southern Pacific Railroad had done for its bridge nearby. A more financially feasible option was to wash the gravel and transport sand from Sweeney Creek in Vacaville. Use of granite blocks or other comparable stone would be another choice, though this would push cost of the bridge up to $50,000. Discussion went back to possibly building a steel and wood bridge instead of a concrete bridge. A combination steel and wood bridge could be built cheaper and completed before the rainy season started (*Winters Express* 1907d pp. 3:4–5).

The Yolo County Board of Supervisors met in June to weigh in on the matter. They determined a bridge could not be built before the rainy season and the bridge, when built, would be of steel and wood construction, a more economically prudent option. The floor of the bridge would be of blocks and covered with asphalt material. The bridge was to be constructed immediately without further delay. Meanwhile, Solano County Board of Supervisors remained committed to a concrete bridge (Yolo County Board of Supervisors 1907c; *Winters Express* 1907d pp. 3:4–5). Overall, the community including local newspapers sided with Solano County and supported the long term durability and stability of a concrete bridge despite the initial greater cost and longer construction period.

In early July, the Solano County and Yolo County boards held another joint meeting where it was eventually decided to follow the original plans to build a concrete structure. Solano County was able to convince Yolo County that a concrete bridge, despite the costs involved, represented the future of bridge construction whereas wooden bridges would soon become vestiges of the past. This was the counties' opportunity to be at the forefront of such innovation. Further, on a more practical level, the bridge was part of a heavily traveled route, not just by locals, but those traveling through the state and increasingly for fruit shipment. The bridge provided the main access between the upper parts of the Sacramento Valley to the Bay Area, and thus it was important that it be a substantial and durable structure reflecting the importance of the two counties. The preference for concrete may also have been influenced by the San Francisco earthquake of April 1906 where buildings constructed of reinforced concrete suffered little damage. This fact prompted engineers throughout the state to revisit the use of reinforced concrete in construction projects.

During the meeting it was further acknowledged that utilizing the existing gravel at Putah Creek for the concrete would be unsafe and impractical and therefore it was decided to use granite blocks or other suitable stone instead. The granite or stone would cost roughly $3,000 and bring the entire cost of the bridge construction to an estimated $50,000. Both counties were anxious to move the project forward and approved the additional cost, although they recognized it was not possible to avoid construction interfering with the transportation of agricultural goods and the bridge would not be in place before the start of the rainy season (*Winters Express* 1907d pp. 3: 4–5).

Work began in September 1907 and the bridge was ultimately constructed in six months at a cost of $50,000 paid by Yolo and Solano Counties. Lights and additional fixtures were added in April of 1908 just before the bridge dedication. As part of the dedication ceremonies, Yolo and Solano counties hosted a celebration honoring the bridge opening. Three thousand local citizens attended the event, which included public addresses, games, music, and a barbeque (*Winters Express* 1908b p. 1:1; New Concrete Bridge Celebration and Barbeque: 1908 3, 4).

In 1911, the California Highway Commission incorporated the bridge into the State Highway System (City of Winters April 1908).

PART II. STRUCTURAL/DESIGN INFORMATION

A. General Description: The Winters Bridge is a reinforced concrete earth-filled elliptical bridge featuring three arch spans and concrete gravity abutments. Each span is 123 feet long and is supported by reinforced concrete piers. The 447-foot-long bridge has two lanes and is 24 feet wide with a flush roadway. It also features reinforced railings and pedestrian turnouts (JRP Historical Consulting 2004).

1. **Character:** The multi-span reinforced concrete structure was the first of its kind in the region, the three 123-foot concrete spans being the longest in the state until 1911. Unique features of the bridge include its three arches supported by reinforced concrete piers and concrete abutments (California Department of Transportation 2006: 34).

2. **Condition of fabric:** The bridge is in an advanced state of deterioration and is structurally deficient.

B. Construction: During construction of the bridge more than 4,500 cubic yards of concrete was used, and 70 tons of iron was used for reinforcement. Abutments of the bridge measured 30 square feet at the base and rose 22 feet. For the bridge piers, excavation was 7 feet deep and 60 to 70 piles were driven underground for support. The piles were sawed off near the ground and the holes were filled with concrete. Forms were erected for the solid concrete piers which were reinforced with iron rods. False woodwork composed of more than 495,000 feet of lumber was used as a mold to hold the concrete in place until it set and hardened. Iron rods 0.75-inch thick served as reinforcement. The arch rings were also reinforced by iron rods and were comprised of crushed rock, sand, and cement and the piers and abutments were of six parts gravel to one part cement. The center arch was constructed first, followed by the pier block at either end of the arch. Once those sections had hardened sufficiently, the remaining sections of the bridge were built (*Winters Express* 1908b).

C. Site: The bridge is located in the agricultural flatlands of Southern Yolo and Northern Solano counties, and stretches from the City of Winters in Yolo County across Putah Creek, which serves as a boundary between the two counties, into Solano County. Bordering it on the east and west are orchards and fields. Two commercial establishments, a community building and park, and engineering structures are located in close vicinity to the bridge.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Research was undertaken at the California State Library; the City of Winters; and at the ICF International cultural staff library (known then as ICF Jones & Stokes). ICF conducted property-specific research at the Yolo and Solano County Assessor's and Recorder's Offices, the Solano County Main Library (Fairfield), the Yolo County Archives (Woodland), the City of Winters Planning Department and City Clerk's Office, and the headquarters of the California Department of Transportation, located in Sacramento.

A. Engineering Drawings:

Engineering drawings for Winters Bridge include a reproduction of an as-built drawing (ca. 1907). No original drawings were located. Drawing reproduction courtesy of the Yolo County Archives, Woodland California.

B. Early Views:

Photograph 1: Winters Bridge, looking southeast from northwest corner of bridge, date unknown (ca. 1908). Photograph courtesy of the Yolo County Archives, Woodland, California.

Photograph 2: Winters Bridge, looking southeast from northwest corner of bridge, date unknown (ca. 1908). Photograph courtesy of the Yolo County Archives, Woodland, California.

Photograph 3: Winters Bridge, looking southwest from northeast corner of bridge, date unknown (ca. 1908). Photograph courtesy of the Yolo County Archives, Woodland, California.

C. Bibliography:

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1907c. February 8. On file at the California State Library, Sacramento, California.

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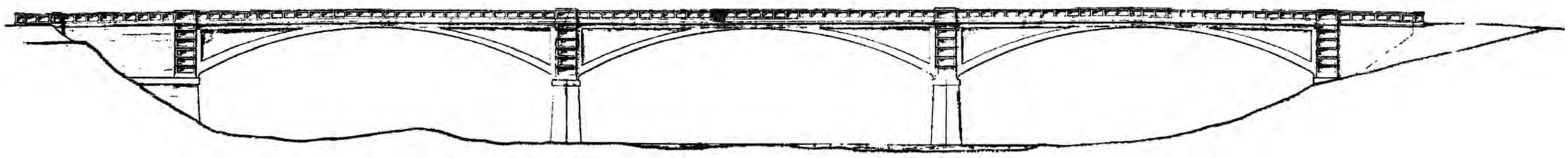
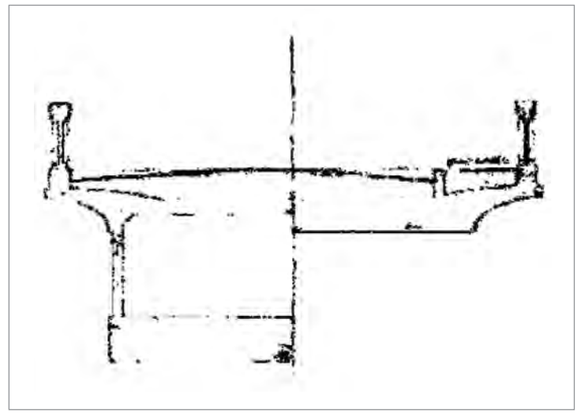
1907c. June 8 Board Meeting Minutes. On file at the Yolo County Archives, Woodland, California.



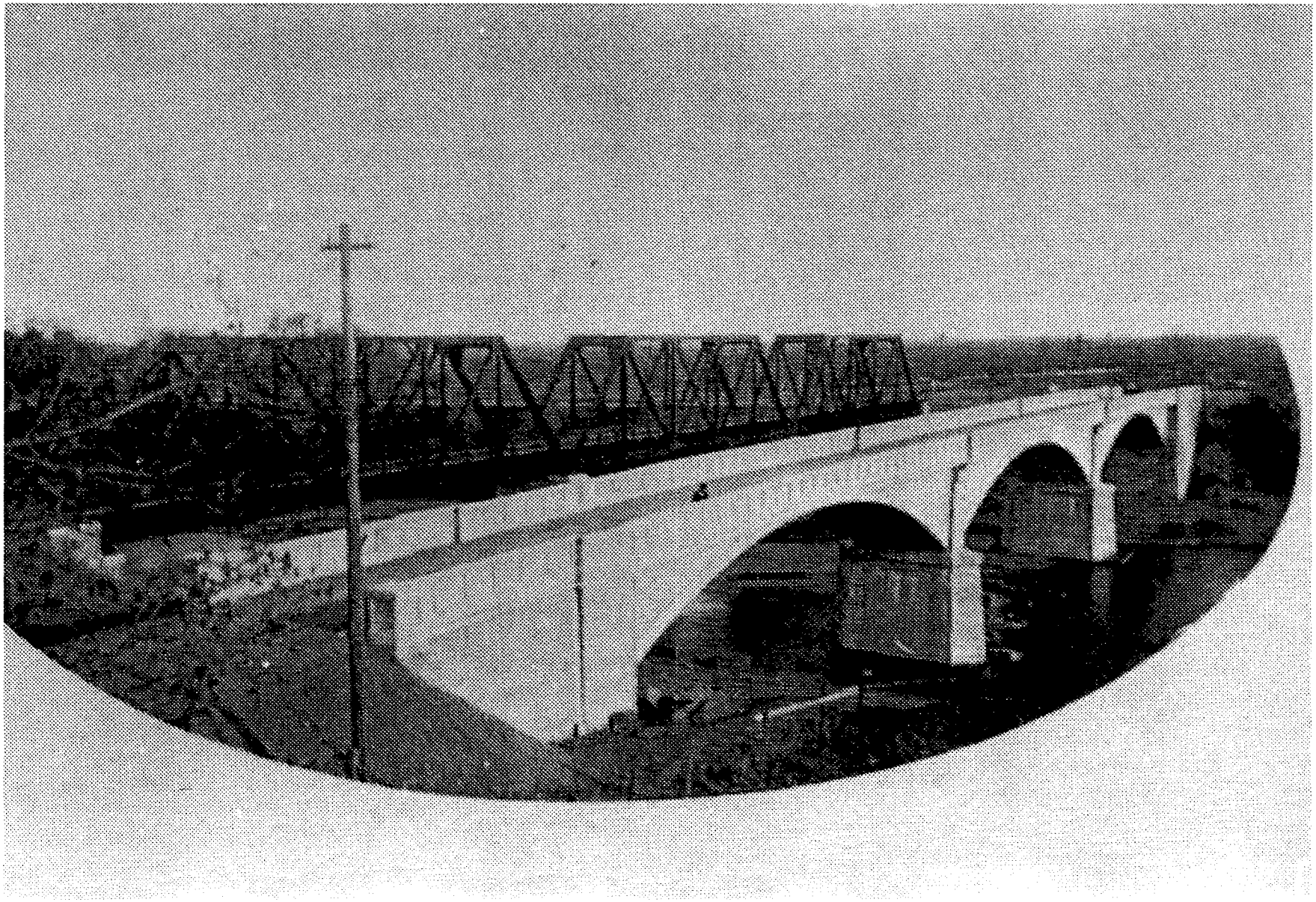
GENERAL ELEVATION

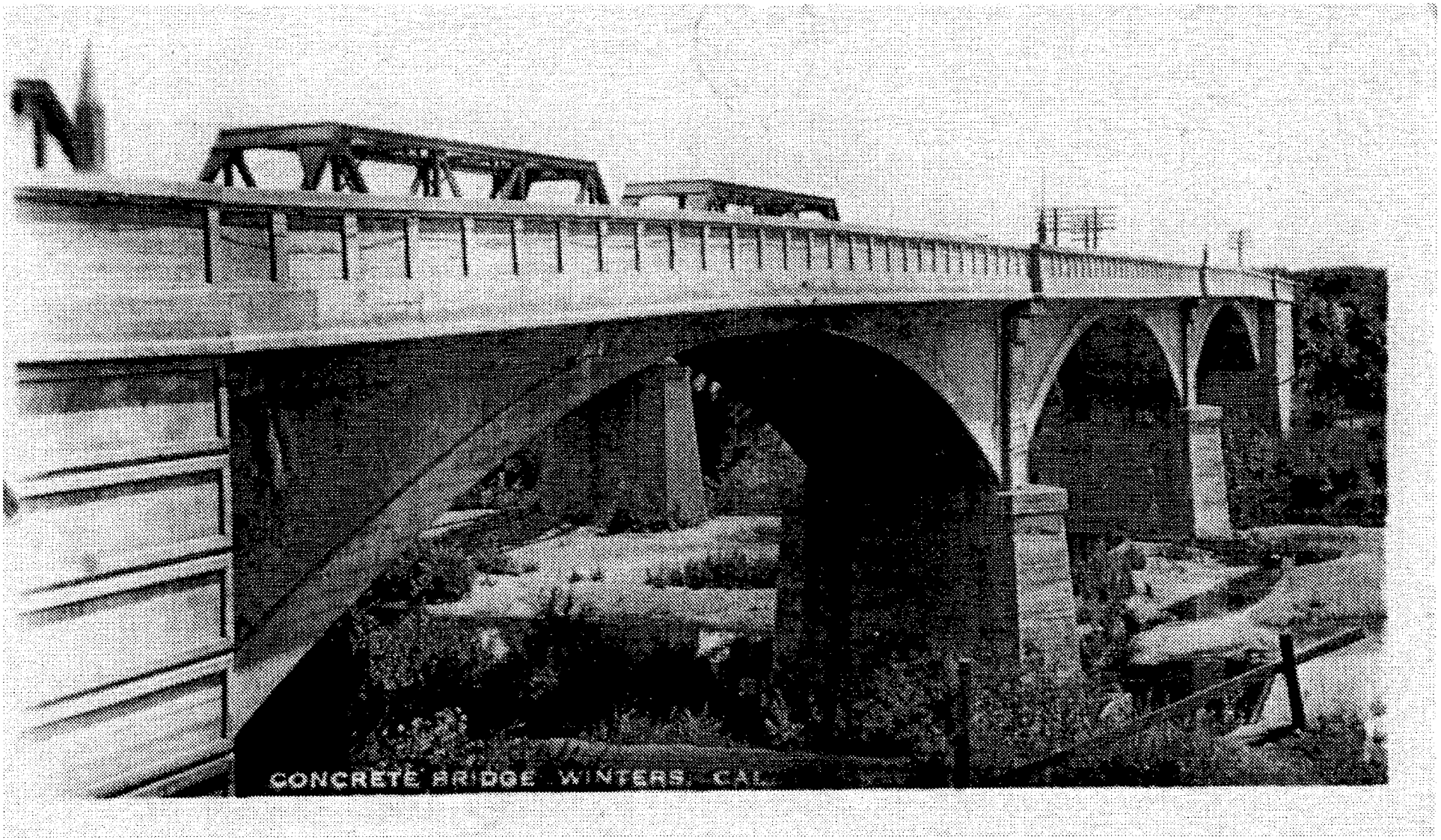
REINFORCED CONCRETE BRIDGE
PUTAH CREEK
at
WINTERS, CA

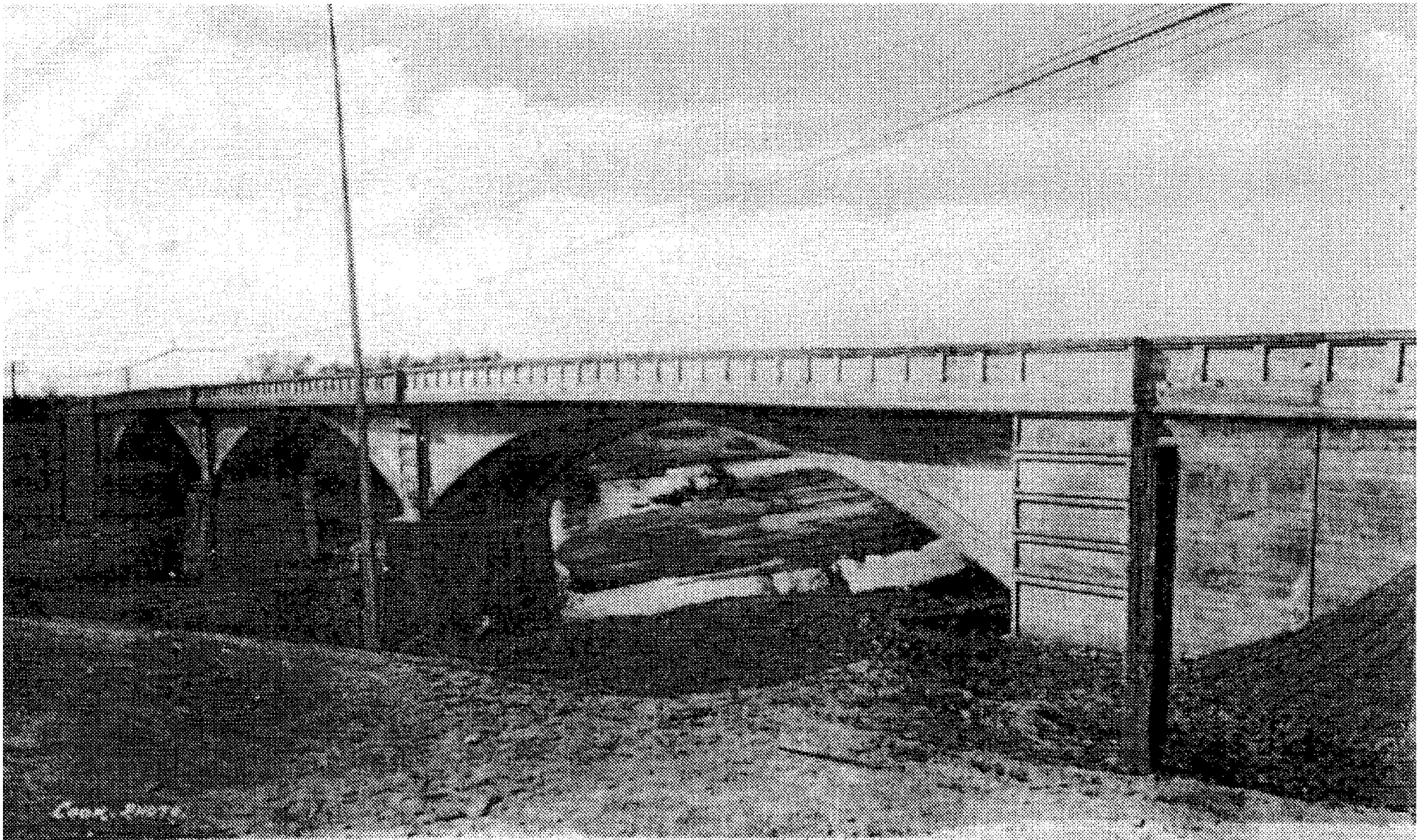


CROSS SECTION

Winters Bridge, No. 23C-0243
Elevation and Cross Section




CONCRETE BRIDGE WINTERS CAL.



BRIDGE ACROSS PUTAH CREEK, WINTERS, CALIFORNIA.

INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS

Winters Road Bridge
(Railroad Avenue Bridge)
Spanning Putah Creek
Yolo and Solano Counties
California

Robert A. Hicks (Field Documentation Service), Photographer

Note: All photographs are 8”x10” photographic enlargement from 4”x5” negative. All photographic views are keyed to sketch map of site.

Photographs taken October 11 and 12th, 2009

1	Contextual view of Winters Bridge from the Intersection of Wolfskill Street and Railroad Avenue (note paralleling historic 1906 SPRR bridge on the extreme left of photograph). View to south.
2	Contextual view of Winters Bridge’s central span crossing Putah Creek with historic SPRR Bridge in background. View to southeast.
3	Contextual view of Winters Bridge from the intersection of Putah Creek Road and Winters Road. View to north.
4	Contextual view of Winters Bridge from southerly top of bank. View to northeast.
5	Oblique view of southerly bridge approach at the intersection of Putah Creek Road (on right). Note concrete parapet detail and asphaltic concrete bridge deck. View to northwest.
6	Oblique view of southerly bin type concrete abutment and connecting arch barrel. View to southeast.
7	Oblique view of southerly pier, arch barrel (with closed spandrel wall) and abutment. Note decorative concrete details on spandrel wall, abutment and parapet. View to northeast.
8	Oblique view of southerly pier and connecting arch barrels. Note construction road and sediment fence in foreground. View to northeast.

9 Oblique view of southerly abutment, arch barrel and southerly pier. View to northwest.

10 Detail of southerly pier. Note flared arch barrel beneath road deck and parapet. View to north-northwest.

11 Easterly elevation of southerly closed spandrel wall arch barrel. Note dirt construction road in foreground. View to west.

12 Easterly elevation of the central arch barrel (over Putah Creek). Showing the northerly pier and a portion of the bridge's northern arch barrel. View to west.

13 Oblique view of the central arch barrel (over Putah Creek) and the northern pier. View to northwest.

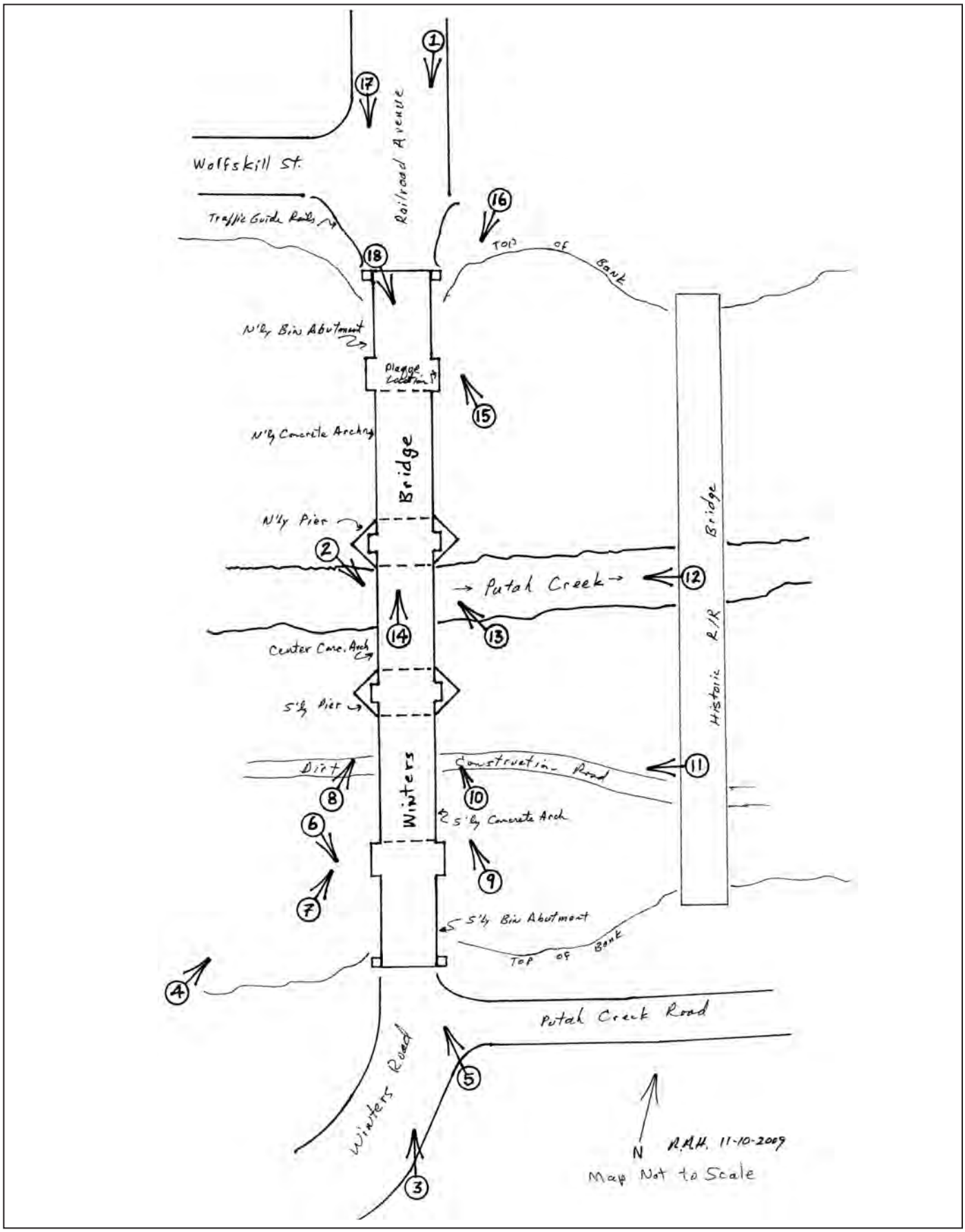
14 View over Putah Creek of the central arch and the northerly pier. View to north.

15 Oblique view to the northerly abutment and connecting arch barrel. View to northwest.

16 Oblique view of northerly abutment and northerly arch barrel from top of bank. Note parapet concrete detail and position of guard rail at bridge approach. View to southwest.

17 Northerly bridge approach at intersection of Railroad Avenue and Wolfsill Street. View to south-southeast.

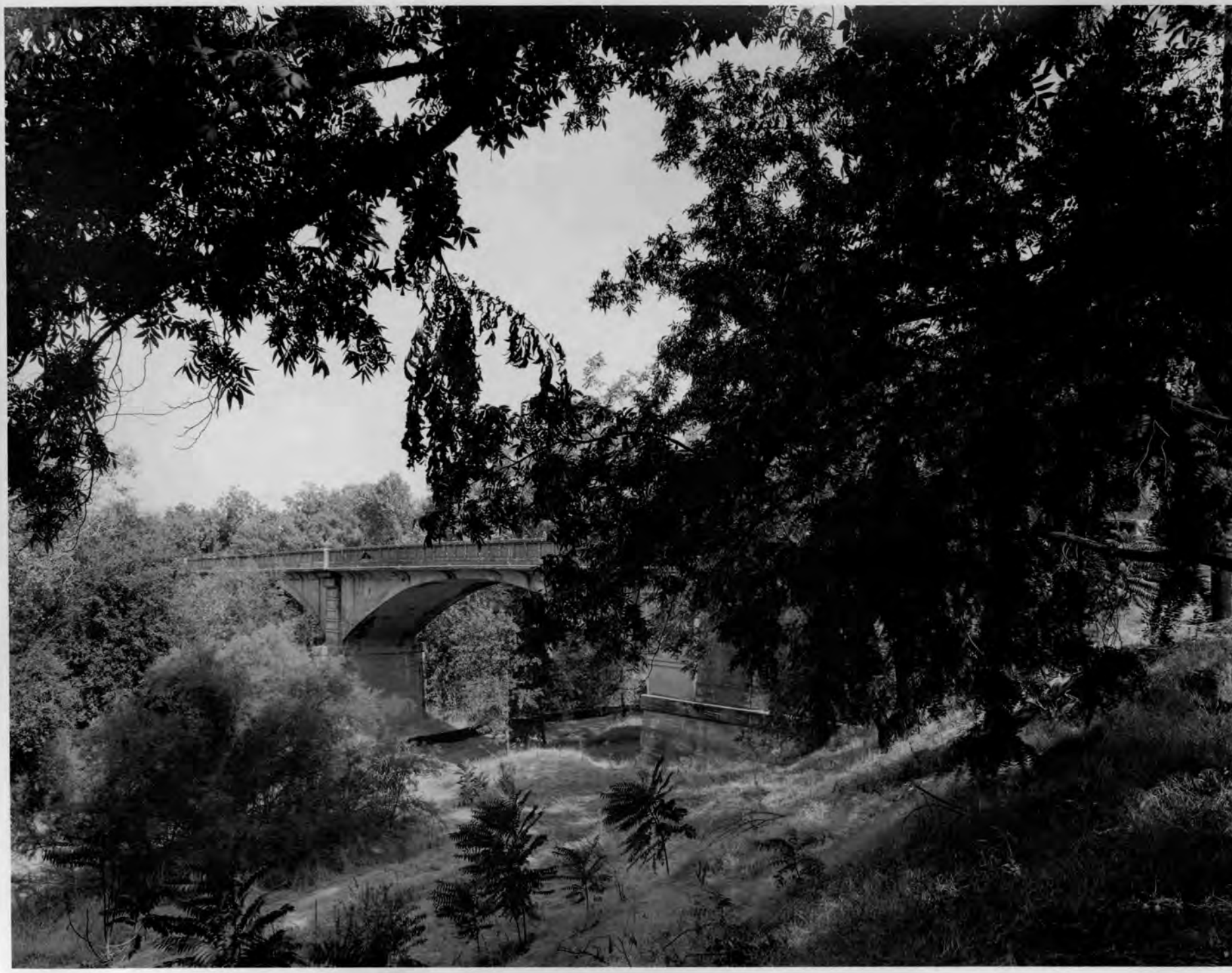
18 Detail of bridge parapet and dedication plaque dated 1907. View to southwest.



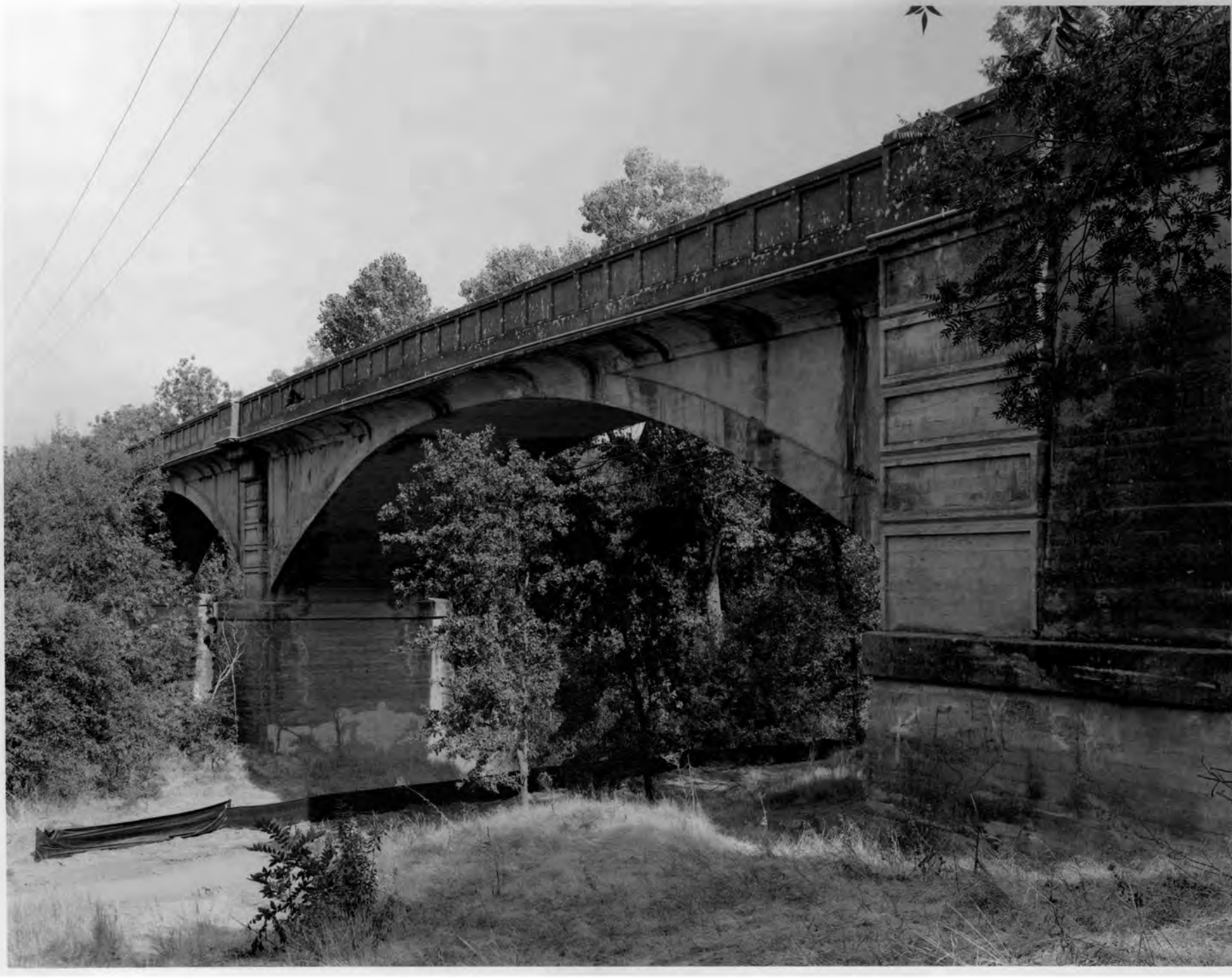
Winters Bridge, No. 23C-0243
Photograph View Locations

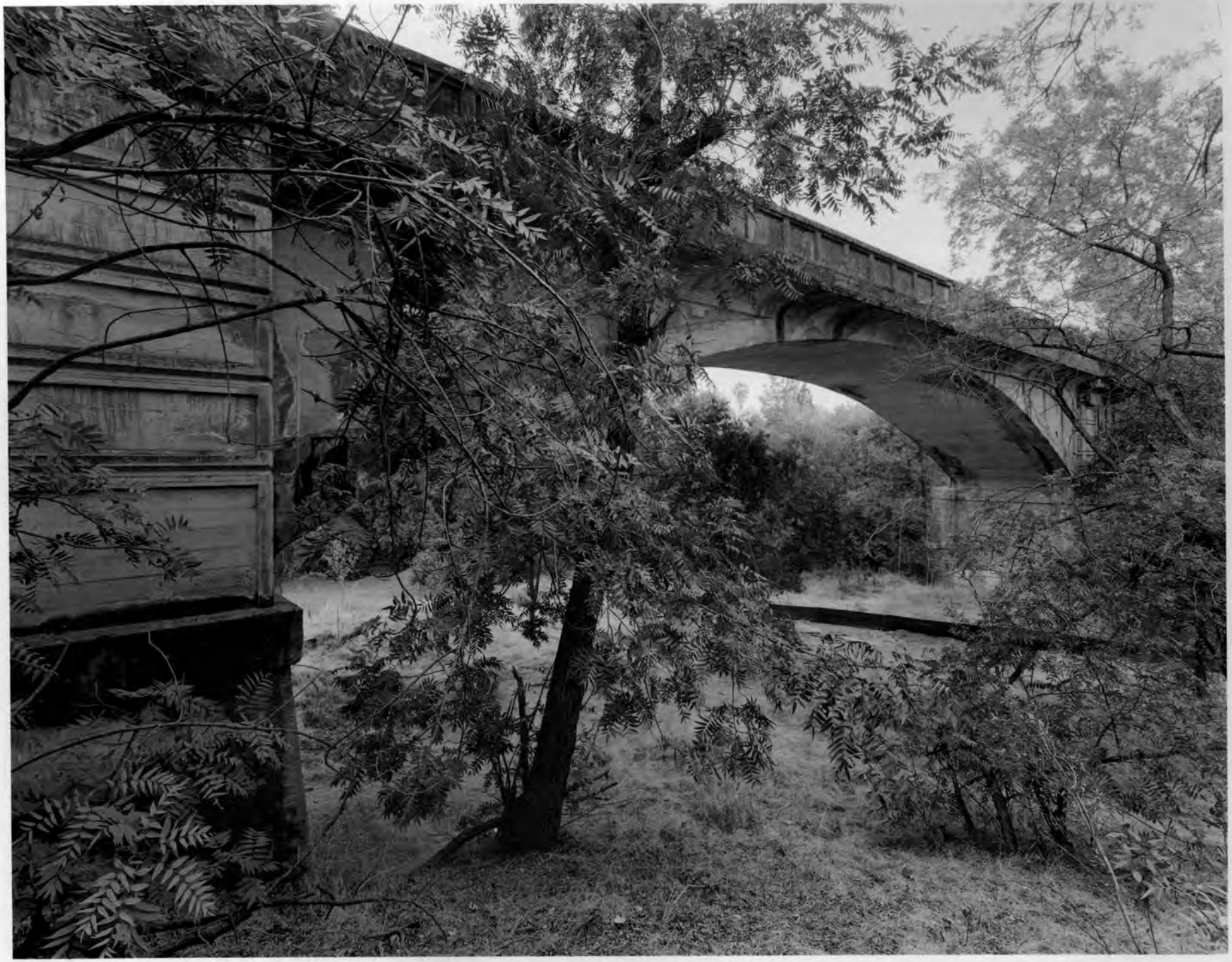

SPEED LIMIT
25

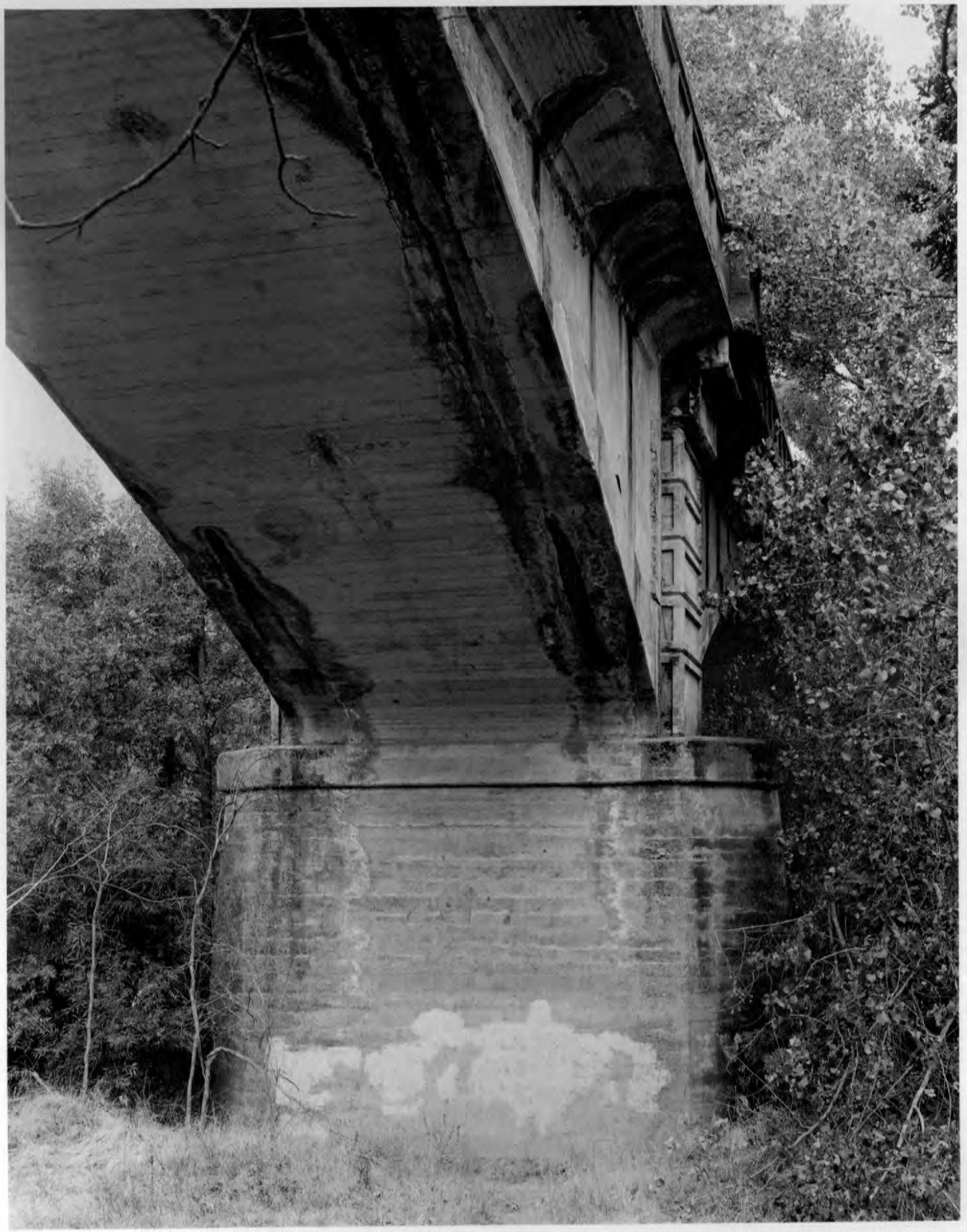

25

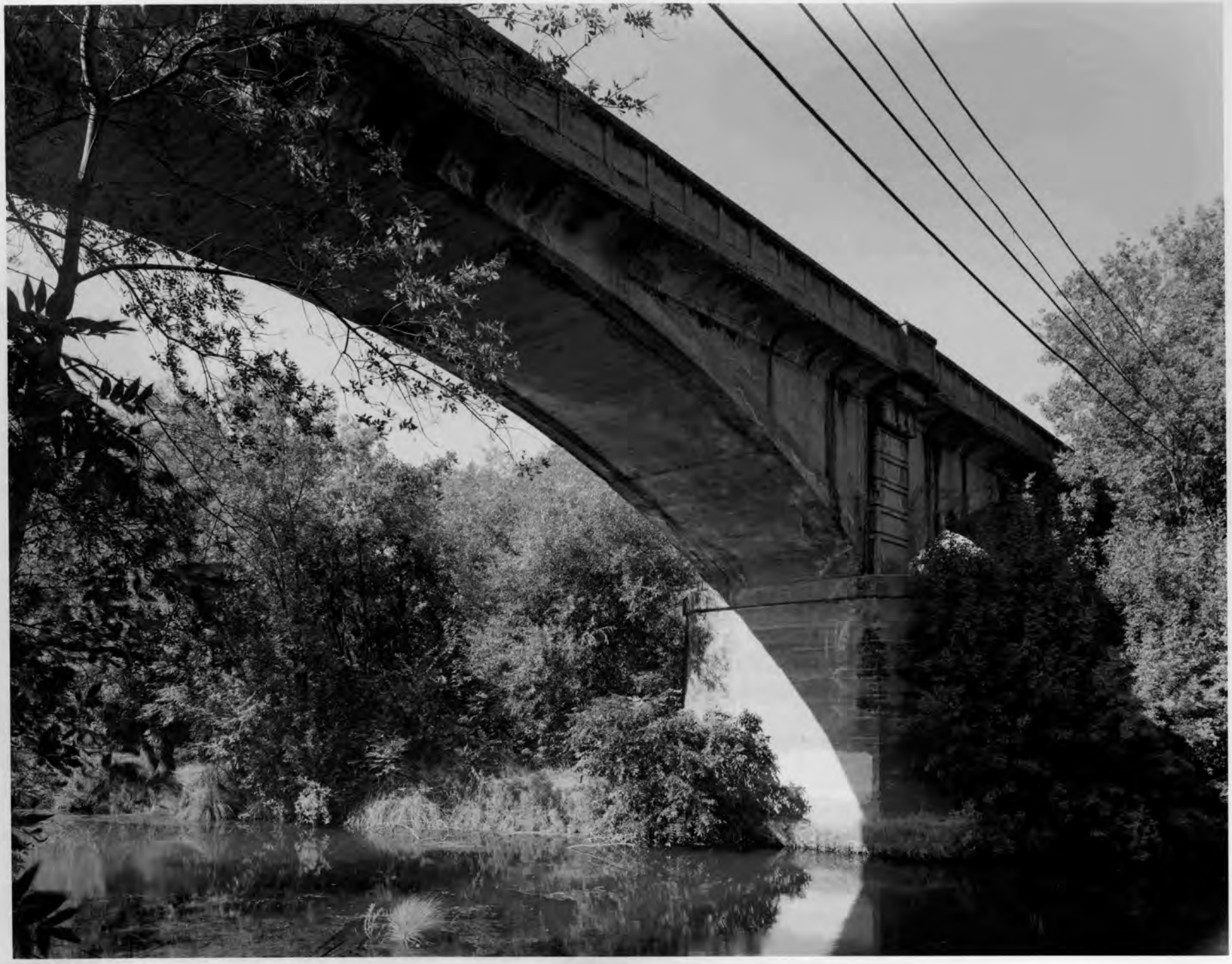


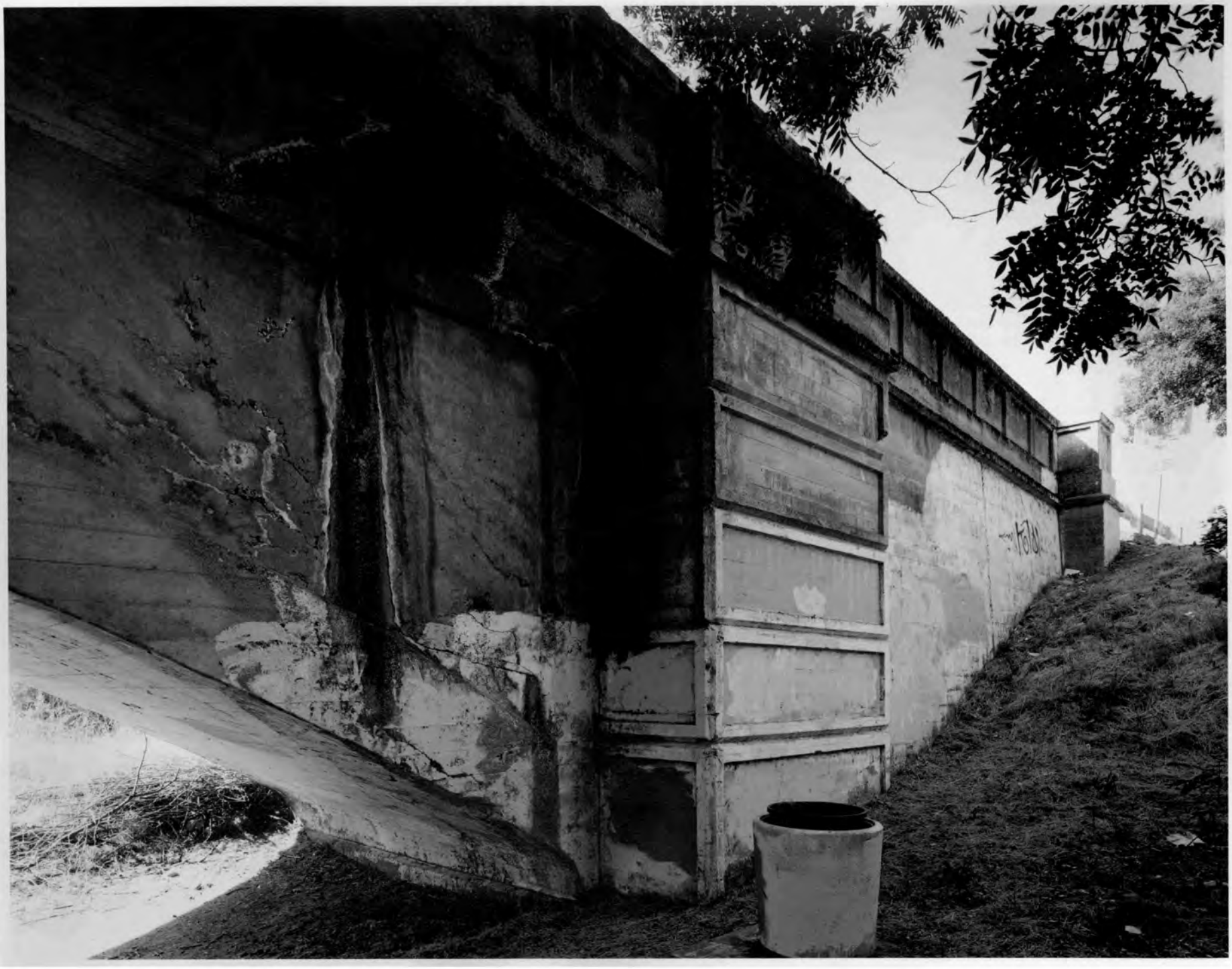

25
ZONE
AHEAD
23C-243












SPEED
LIMIT
25
ONE WAY
Winters Jr.
Warriors


1907
BUILT IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE
SUPERVISORS OF SOLANO COUNTY.
C.H. HOFFIN
T.J. VAUGHN
E. SNYDER
F.B. EDSON
E. FALM
SUPERVISORS
OF
YOLO COUNTY.
F.N. ASHLEY
COUNTY ENGR.
W.N. CONCANON
BUILDER.