

A Ribbon of Fill

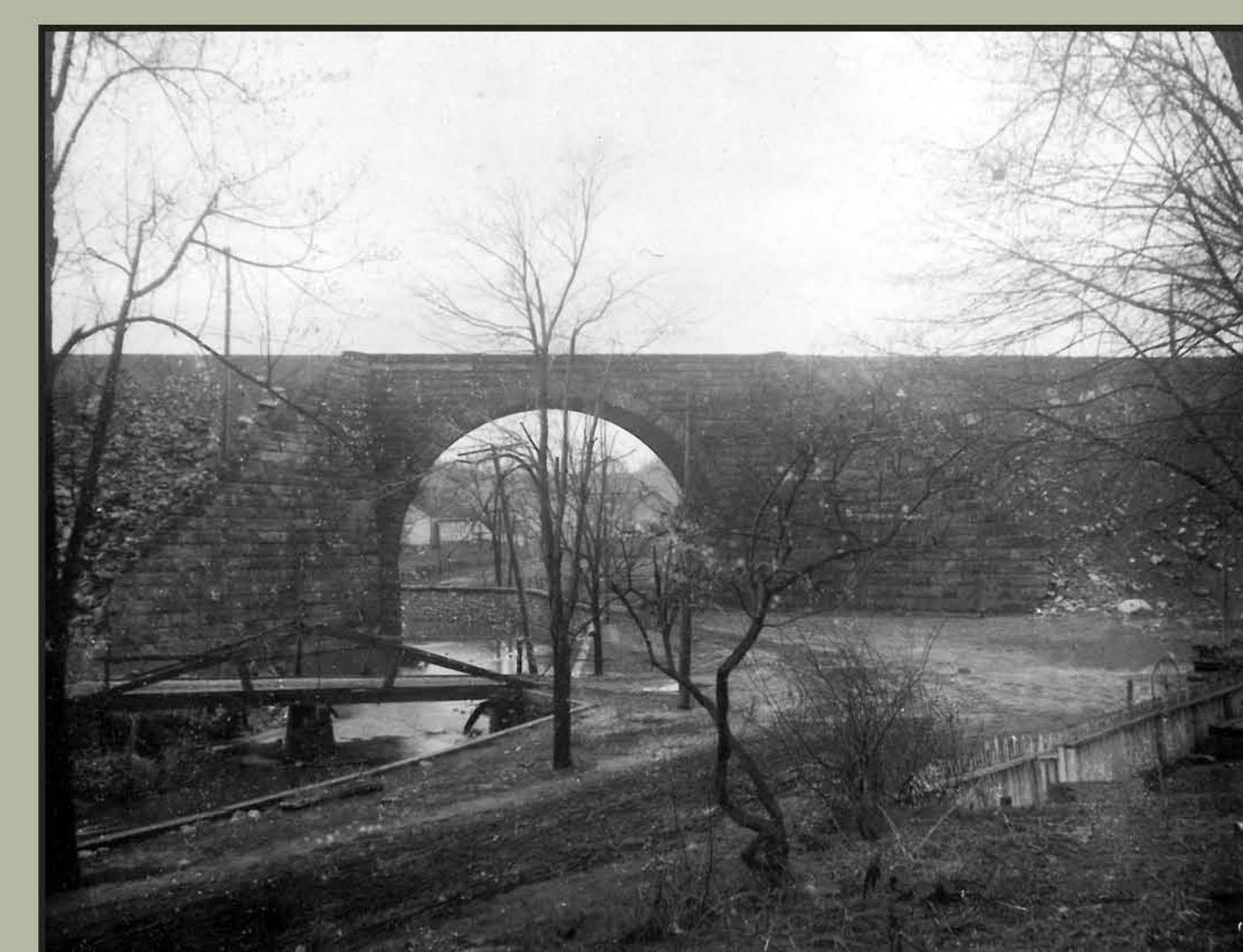
The Atglen & Susquehanna in Sadsbury Township



Moore's Memorial Library, Christiana, PA.

Early in 1903, Charles A. Sims & Co. (Philadelphia) was awarded the masonry and grading contract for Section 1 of the A&S—approximately 30,000 lineal feet extending from the Atglen signal tower (M.P. 3.3) to west of Lamparter Road (M.P. 9.0). By September of 1903, Sims reported 280 men and two steam shovels at work. Generating fill for the massive embankment of the A&S was achieved by blasting other PRR land holdings in the vicinity of North Bend (base of Zion Hill). Improvements on the main line track supplied fill to the A&S.

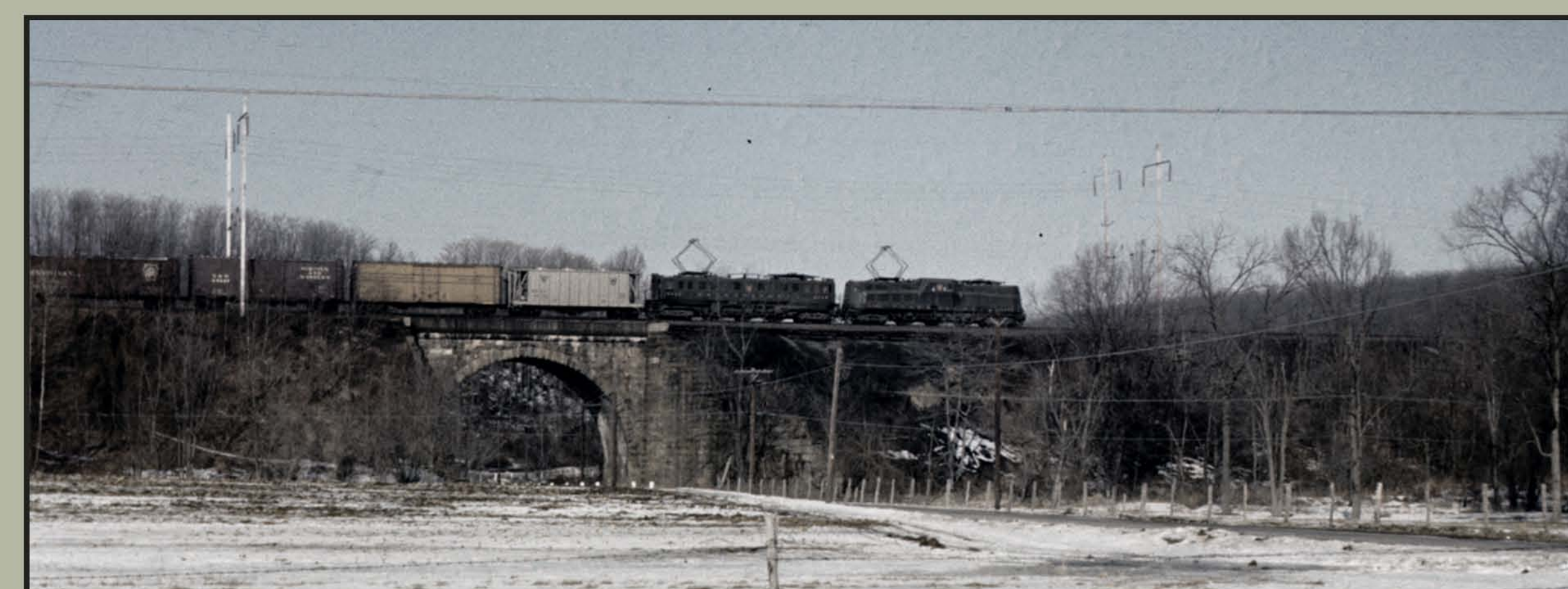
Dynamite use, standard for heavy contractors, was applied liberally throughout construction. On the morning of January 5, 1905, 40 cases (one ton) of dynamite exploded, destroying the Sims & Co. storage building in Christiana. Extensive property damage was reported throughout Christiana and as far as Atglen. Construction on the A&S continued in all but the most extreme of weather. Keeping dynamite ready (unfrozen and dry) in winter was particularly problematic, as it was often kept warm by poorly regulated steam heat.



Moore's Memorial Library, Christiana, PA.



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James P. Shuman photograph, Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, PHMC.

The A&S spanned historic Noble Road and the East Branch of Octoraro Creek on a single 60-foot-wide stone arch. As a dramatic survivor of the fill-type bridges, the Noble Road Bridge aptly demonstrates the tremendous volume of fill required to maintain a steady and easy grade on the eastern half of the route. Westward from Atglen, the A&S climbs an even ascent to Mars Hill Summit (Bart Township), the highest point on the entire Low Grade line.

To raise an earthen road on the valley floor, fill was removed from the base of Zion Hill, where the PRR's four-track main line curved northward to Christiana. A temporary wooden bridge (upper right image) spanned the busy main line tracks, arcing gently on a continuous wooden trestle toward the A&S. Elevated narrow-gauge track carried side-dumping cars pulled by "dinky" steam engines such as No. 49—*Christiana*. As the masonry wing walls of the bridge extended upward, they were efficiently backfilled from the still higher trestle.

For more than one hundred years, the Noble Road Bridge has framed an eloquent view of the boundary between Chester and Lancaster Counties. For all the earth moved, the road and stream, so critical to settlement in earlier centuries, continue their courses undaunted by the PRR's great freight road.



Columbia Historic Preservation Society, Columbia, PA.



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Panel courtesy of Amtrak®