

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name United States Highway 61 Arch

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number South of the Arkansas-Missouri border on United States Highway 61 not for publication

city or town Blytheville vicinity

state Arkansas code AR county Mississippi County code 093 zip code 72316

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination
request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic
Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets
does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant
 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Cathie Maddaus 9/05/01
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet	Signature of the Keeper _____	Date of Action _____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:)	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
1	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

"Arkansas Highway and Transportation Era Architecture, 1910-1945"

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Boundary Marker

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Boundary Marker

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Horseshoe Arch

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls N/A

N/A

roof N/A

other CONCRETE

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

State

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Transportation

Period of Significance

1922-1951

Significant Dates

1922

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

N/A

Architect/Builder

H.H. Hall Construction Company

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
Previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State Agency
Federal Agency
Local Government
University
Other

Name of repository:

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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SUMMARY

Spanning United States Highway 61, only inches from the Arkansas-Missouri State line in Mississippi County, Arkansas, is the only known arch that spans a United States Highway in Arkansas. The United States Highway 61 Arch has stretched across the roadway in the same location since it was erected in 1924. The structure is constructed of concrete and is approximately fifteen feet in height and twenty feet in width.

ELABORATION

Spanning United States Highway 61, only feet from the Arkansas-Missouri state line in Mississippi County, Arkansas, is the only known arch that spans a United States Highway in Arkansas. The United States Highway 61 Arch has stretched across the roadway in the same location since it was erected in 1924. Originally there was also an arch that spanned the highway at the Mississippi-Crittenden County line, but when the highway was widened in the late 1950s the arch was demolished.

The structure is constructed of concrete and has decorative grooves that are molded into the arch on all four sides. "ENTERING ARKANSAS" is inscribed at the crest of the arch on the Missouri side of the arch and "ENTERING MISSOURI" is inscribed on the side facing Arkansas. The arch is approximately fifteen feet in height and twenty feet in width. The base of the arch is a four feet square and sits along the edge of the road. The arch is built so closely to the road that further widening of the road would be impossible.

United States Highway 61 has been designated as part of the "Great River Road". The arch is considered by many as one of the most distinguishing landmarks in Arkansas along the named road. Since the construction of nearby Interstate 55 in the late 1940s, traffic through the arch has steadily declined. If not for the construction of the Interstate 55 the arch would have most certainly fell victim to the same fate as the other arch.

Bronze plaques are located on both the Arkansas and Missouri sides of the arch with the following information: F.A.P. No.100/R.I.D. No. 1 Mississippi Co./Directors/R.E. Lee Wilson President/R.C. Rose Secretary/W.M. Taylor/G. Hunter Sykes Engineer/ H.R. Wilson State Highway Commissioner/R.C. Limerick State Highway Engineer/Contractor/ H.H. Hall Construction Co./Materials/Fischer Lime & Cement Co.

Integrity

The only repairs that have been made to the structure are a few small areas on the bases of the arch that has had a very small amount of cement applied during a minor repair. The damage is a direct result of its proximity to the highway. The base originally joined the ground in an angular fashion, but road

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improvements have covered a small part at the bottom of the base giving it a flat appearance. The arch is beginning to show age with some cracks forming where the narrower upper portion of the arch meets its wider base area. Despite these few repairs and cracks, the arch maintains integrity of design, workmanship, and materials. The location and setting of the arch remain pristine. The arch also retains in association with the development of Arkansas Highways as it still spans the highway welcoming motorists, who have chosen to travel the "old highway" instead of the nearby Interstate 55, into Arkansas.

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SUMMARY

Erected in 1924 to mark the boundaries of the Mississippi County Road Improvement District upon completion of the hard surfacing of the first stretch of highway through Mississippi County, Arkansas, the U.S. Highway 61 Arch is the only known concrete arch that spans a United States Highway in Arkansas. Originally one of two arches located at each end of Mississippi County, the arch on the Crittenden County border was demolished in the late 1950s. The arch spans across the highway just inches from the Arkansas-Missouri state line. The U.S. Highway 61 arch is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **state significance** under **Criterion C** as the only known example of a concrete archway spanning a section of U.S. Highway in Arkansas. It is also being nominated under **Criterion A** as part of the multiple property listing "**Arkansas Highway and Transportation Era Architecture, 1910-1965**" in conjunction with the historic context "**Arkansas Highway History and Architecture, 1910-1965.**"

ELABORATION

The automobile craze of the early Twentieth Century swept through Arkansas much the same way it did the rest of the country. By 1915 there were 8,010 vehicles registered to Arkansas residents, but hard surfaced roads were still almost unheard of. A State Highway Commission was established in 1913 consisting of a three-person committee with the Commissioner of State Lands serving as chairman. Reuben G. Dye of Forrest City became the first chairman with C.W. Highfill of Jonesboro and A.S. Kilgore of Magnolia serving as committee members. Even though the commission was established in 1913 it would be ten years before they could convince the general assembly that a system of state highways were needed.

Operating on a miniscule budget whose only funding was from a ten-dollar registration fee on motor vehicles, it became evident that a new system of funding public roads was much needed. In 1915 the general assembly passed Act 338, known as the Alexander Road Law. The act established clearly specified procedures to be followed in the establishment of road improvement districts. It also fixed the amount of money that could be raised against real property as 30% of the total assessed value of the property within the district. This meant that people along a particular route could form a road improvement district, contract out for construction, borrow the money to finance the project, and in effect, mortgage their property as a debt guarantee. The fixed rate of 30% of assessed value often did not provide sufficient funds for road construction, especially in rural areas. There was no unified plan for the roads resulting in a patchwork of roads with sections of unimproved roads in between sections of new roads.

Between 1915 and 1916 the amount of vehicles registered in Arkansas rose from 8,010 to 15,123. With the growing need for roads throughout the country, the federal government became involved in road improvement. The Federal Aid Act of 1916 was passed to help fund the building of roads throughout the country. The act was amended in 1919 increasing the amount of funds available to the states. In 1921 Arkansas was appropriated \$1,685,178 to be used for road improvement. With the post war economic boom

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and newly apportioned money over 300 new road districts covering over 9,000 miles was formed in 1919 and 1920 alone.

It was during this time that Mississippi County Road Improvement District No.1 was formed along present day U.S. Highway 61 in Mississippi County. R. E. Lee Wilson, a wealthy plantation owner in the county, headed up the district. Shortly after the district was formed The Federal Aid Road Act of 1921 was passed. The Act originally was only for fiscal year 1922, but it was amended to extend through fiscal year 1925. Along with additional funds the act imposed new requirements on the states to be eligible for the funds. The state had to establish a system of connected highways that did not exceed 7% of the total public mileage of the state. The roads also had to be a minimum of 18 feet wide, and for the first time provisions were made requiring the state to maintain the constructed roads. To comply with the federal act a system of such highways had to be developed in Arkansas. Since present day Highway 61 was one of the principle routes from St. Louis to Memphis it was a natural choice to receive funding.

At that time Highway 61 was a dirt path known simply as the North-South Road. At times conditions along the road were so bad it could take a full days drive to go only fifteen miles. The local Road Improvement District pooled money from the sale of bonds and county taxes, as well as, securing funding from both the state government and the Federal Aid Road Act, to pay for the application of concrete on the North-South Road. When the road was completed in 1924 there was only 443 miles of paved road in the entire Arkansas State Highway System. The road was the first paved highway in the county and was a source of much pride for citizens that lived along the road and residents of the county as a whole. To note the completion of the highway concrete archways were placed at the north end of the county on the Arkansas-Missouri border and on the south end of the county at the Crittenden County line. Bronze plaques were placed on the arches with the project number, the names of the project leaders, and State Highway officials. With the arches spanning across the roadway, it was easily distinguishable when a motorist entered Mississippi County, Arkansas.

Although the road was a great improvement to the dirt road that it replaced, much ill planning went into both the road and the arches. The road was poured as a continuous ribbon of concrete without expansion joints. When the road expanded in the heat of summer chunks of concrete would break and pile up resulting in many injuries and a large amount of property damage. The arches were nicely designed, but were constructed so closely to the edge of the road that future widening of the road would be almost impossible.

In 1925, a joint committee from the American Association of State Highway Officials and the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads worked out a plan for a National System of Highways. Each road in the system would carry the same route number through every state it passed. At this time the North-South Road was officially designated United States Highway 61.

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The location of the arch on the directly south of the Arkansas-Missouri state lines had a somewhat strange economic effect. Highway 61 runs primarily north to south, but at the state line the road runs east to west for a distance of approximately one-half of a mile. The state line is located directly north of the section of highway. A lower gasoline and cigarette tax in Missouri led to a concentration of businesses on the north side of the highway. At one time there were as many as fourteen service stations lined up along the "line". Along with the service stations came several nightclubs and small gambling houses. The area around the arch became known as "Little Chicago" because of the type of activity that went on there. A long time resident of nearby Yarbo, Arkansas once said of the arch, "It was a good place to go while the wife and kids were in church." However, many people were proud of the arch's notoriety.

In 1938 the Department of the Interior proposed the idea for the Great River Road. It was to be the third major national parkway in the U.S., complementing the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Natchez Trace Parkway. The road was originally conceived as part of a grand linkage of North and South America. The Great River road was to be part of a system that would extend from Canada to Chile via the Pan American Highway.

Although the Great River Road was established in 1938, Congress did not approve funding for a feasibility study until 1949. It was determined the road would benefit the entire country. It was also decided that instead of constructing a new road, the system should be designated a scenic route using preexisting federal, state, and local highways. United States Highway 61 was chosen as part of the system. Beginnings in the late 1950s signs with a green and white pilot's wheel were placed along the route. It was around this same time period that sections of U.S. 61 were widened. It was decided that the arch at the state line would be left standing, but the one going into Crittenden County would have to be demolished to make way for the highway expansion.

By 1968 the Interstate Highway System was well on its way to being completed. The first complete section of interstate in Arkansas was Interstate 55. With its completion it became the primary route from St. Louis to Memphis. This led to a drastic decrease in traffic along nearby U.S. 61. With the reduced flow of traffic along the highway, businesses along the line began closing. The last business on the "line" closed in 1989. Although Interstate 55 killed business on the line, it saved the arch. Without the interstate it would have undoubtedly been destroyed to expand the highway.

The arch still stands today where it has stood for over seventy-five years. The Arkansas highway and Transportation Department continues to maintain and upkeep the arch. It is beginning to show signs of age, but stands as a monument to the effort and success of the early years of road construction in Arkansas.

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Significance

The United States Highway 61 Arch located in Mississippi County, Arkansas inches from the Arkansas-Missouri state line is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion C** with **state significance** as the only extant concrete archway that spans a United States Highway in Arkansas. It is also being nominated under **Criterion A** as part of the multiple property listing "**Arkansas Highway and Transportation Era Architecture, 1910-1965**" in conjunction with the historic context "**Arkansas Highway History and Architecture, 1910-1965.**" The arch continues to serve as not only a boundary marker, but also as a tribute to the early days of road construction and improvement throughout the state.

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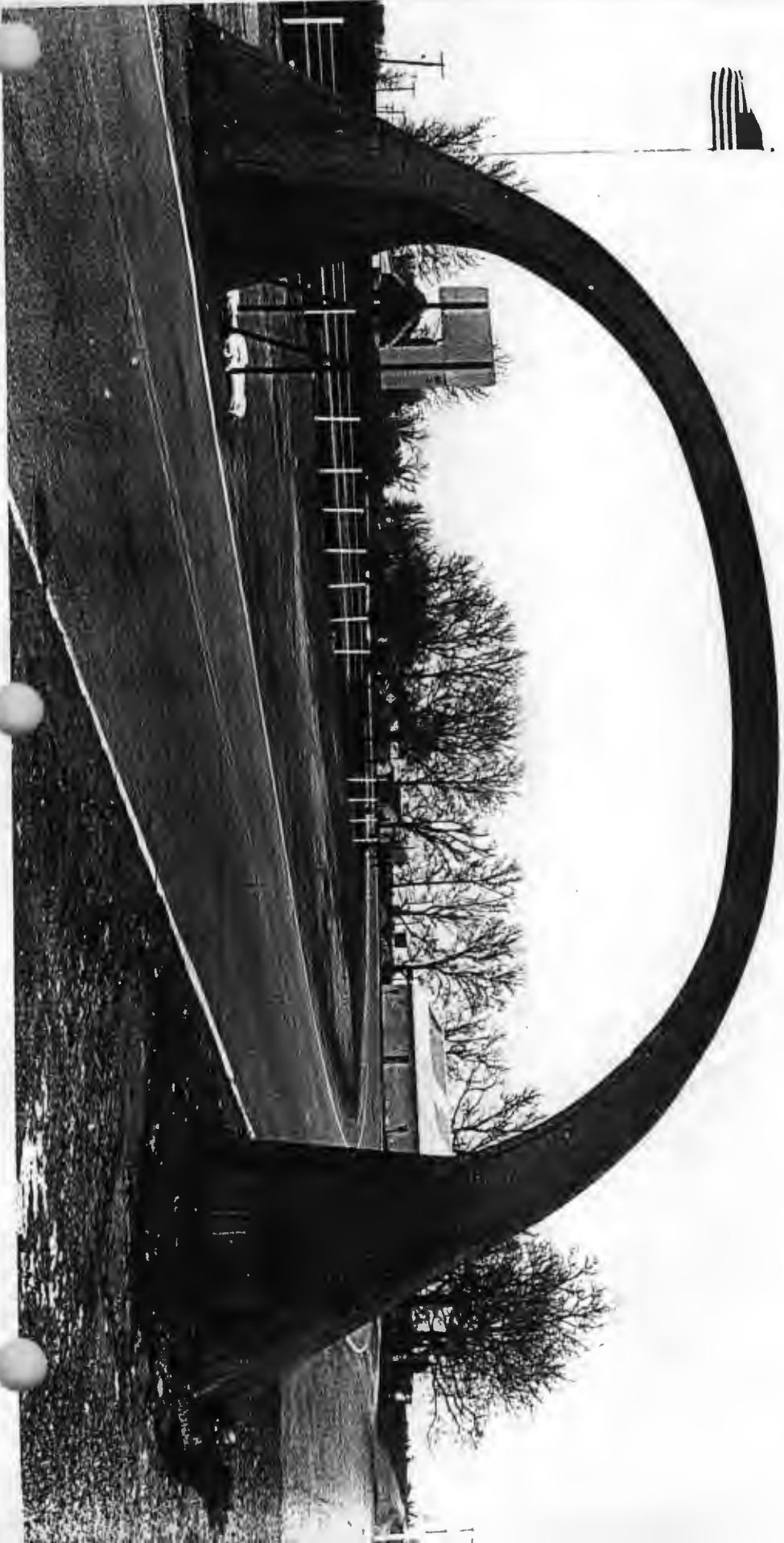
BIBLIOGRAPHY

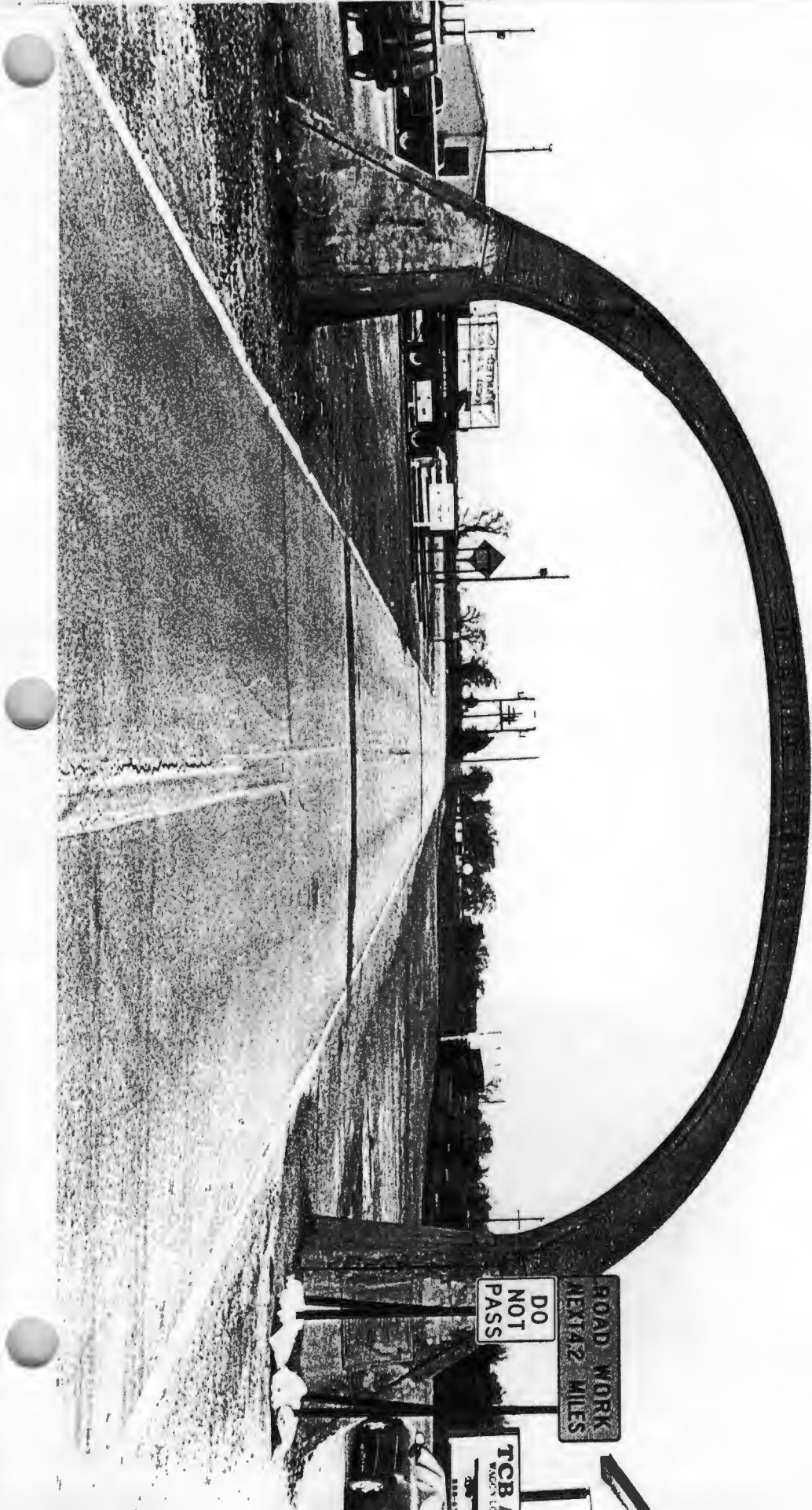
Historical Review: Arkansas State Highway Commission and Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department 1913-1992, Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department, Little Rock, 1992 pp. 19-38.

Mississippi River Parkway Planning Commission web page: www.mississippi-river.com.

Thompson, Robert. "An Arch In Time." The Delta Historical Review: vol. 1 no.2 (Winter 1990) pp. 51-53.







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