



Historic Bridge Foundation Facebook Archives

Focus Bridges: The Great 1913 Flood

September 2016

The Great Flood of 1913 occurred between March 23 and March 26 following several days of rainfall. Focusing primarily on states in the central and eastern United States, the number of deaths over eleven states was estimated at approximately 650. Ohio was hit particularly hard, with the death toll for Ohio alone being between 422 and 470. This death toll ranks the flood second to the Johnstown Flood of 1889 as one of the deadliest floods in American history, and it remains Ohio's largest weather disaster.

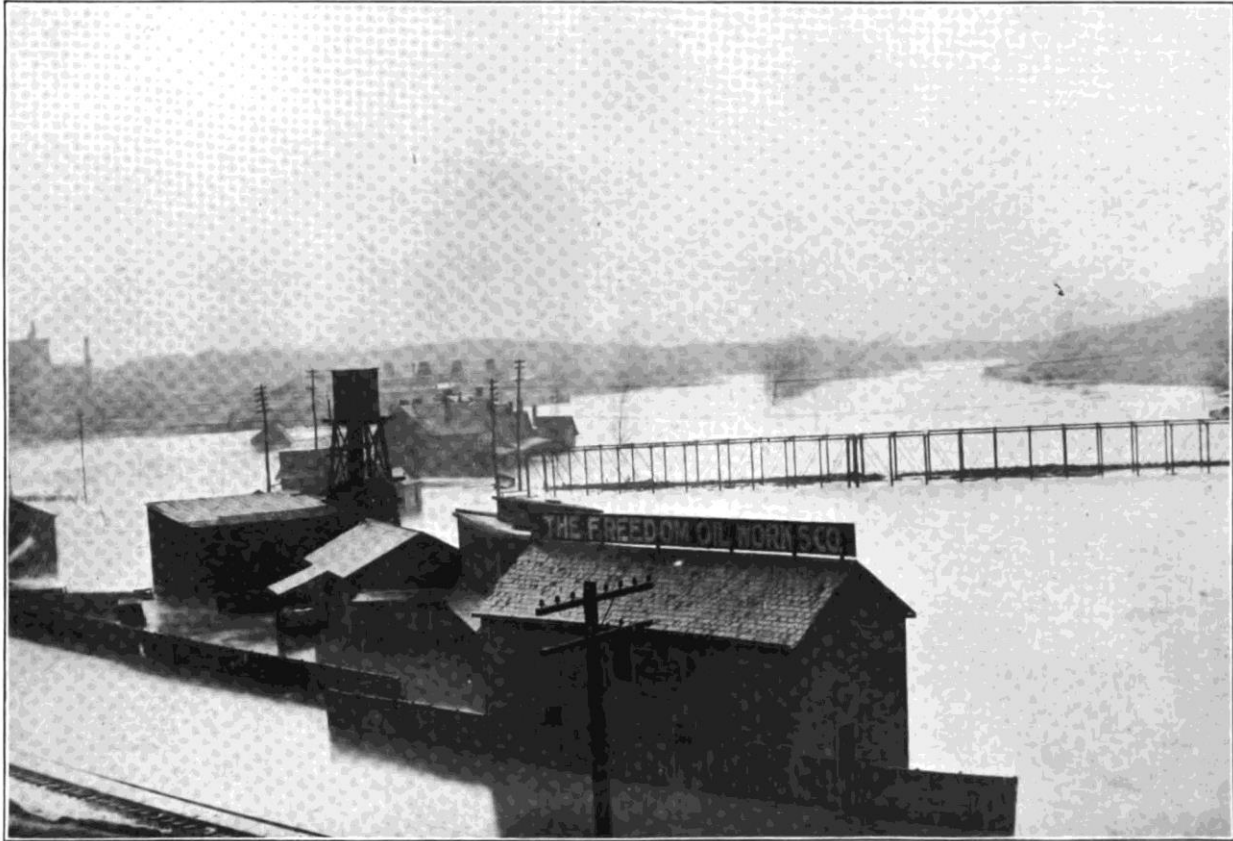
The Pennsylvania Railroad suffered major damage to its railroad lines and bridges west of Pittsburgh, mainly in Ohio. A special report was prepared to document the damage sustained on the Pennsylvania Railroad west of Pittsburgh. The report also documented the initial recovery efforts, which included emergency construction of temporary bridges. The introduction to this report describes devastation so extensive that it shattered communications in the area, leaving each division of the railroad in this region isolated and unsure of what had happened to other divisions. Immediate efforts focused on rescuing people in the affected area; the report mentions efforts ranging from ensuring the safety of railroad passengers, to company employees manning bridges and rescuing people from the rivers below. Once victims had been rescued efforts to rebuild the damaged infrastructure began almost immediately.

The report was photo-intensive and as a result it offers an unparalleled look at the incredible damage caused by this flood. Through these photos, you can also get a sense of the types of railroad bridges in use by the railroad at the time of the flood. Some of the photos also show highway bridges or bridges owned by other railroads as well. Most of the bridges pictured were replaced soon after. Moreover, many of the bridges were in rural locations, or were small bridges of (then) common types that otherwise may have escaped the attention of period photographers. As such, the report's photos show images of bridges that otherwise might not be pictured often.

Shown here is a collection of some of the more interesting bridge-related photos found in the report.



47 and 122 – Lucas, Ohio. Bridge over Rocky Fork.



48 – Grant Street Bridge over Shenango River in New Castle, Pennsylvania. This bridge was "later swept away." Based on the photo, the bridge was an unusual iron truss bridge with vertical end posts. This bridge was replaced in 1914 by a Pennsylvania through truss that remained standing until 2009 when it was demolished and replaced.



52 – Market Street Bridge over Mahoning River in Youngstown, Ohio.



55 – B&O SW bridge weighted down. Loveland, Ohio (near Cincinnati).



60 – C. & P. Division Bridge over Beaver River in Rochester, PA. The enormous Beaver Bridge over Ohio River is in the background. The Ohio River Bridge remains standing today. As for the Beaver River Bridge, the bridge standing today is a through truss reportedly built in 1913, suggesting the bridge pictured here was damaged or destroyed in the flood.



60 – Big Four Bridge over Olentangy River in Delaware, Ohio. One of the spans was destroyed. The caption reads "The only means of getting from the east side to the west side of the town was by means of a basket pulled across this cableway, and used for several days continuously."



62 – Gnadenhutten, Ohio. Bridge 92, Pittsburgh Division over Tuscarawas River. The bridge in the background is captioned as the "county bridge" and noted to be washed away.



145 - Gnadenhutten, Ohio. Bridge 92, Pittsburgh Division over Tuscarawas River.



64 – New Castle, Pennsylvania. A covered bridge captioned as the "Black Bridge" is shown after it had been swept off its substructure and floated into the Pennsylvania Lines "Franklin" Bridge No. 68 over the Shenango River. The railroad bridge later "went down." Another photo showing the river mentions that the "city bridge" at Grant Street has been destroyed as well. This bridge was replaced in 1914 by a Pennsylvania through truss that remained standing until 2009 when it was demolished and replaced.



72 – Bridge 83, Akron Division over the Kokosing River in Gambier, Ohio is shown destroyed here.





84 and 157 and 164 – Bridge 100, Pittsburgh Division over Muskingum River in Coshocton, Ohio. This bridge was only partially damaged, and so the substructure and approaches were repaired after the flood.



90 and 195 – Dayton, Union Bridge over Miami River in Dayton, Ohio. A temporary bridge was already under construction by the time the first photo was taken.



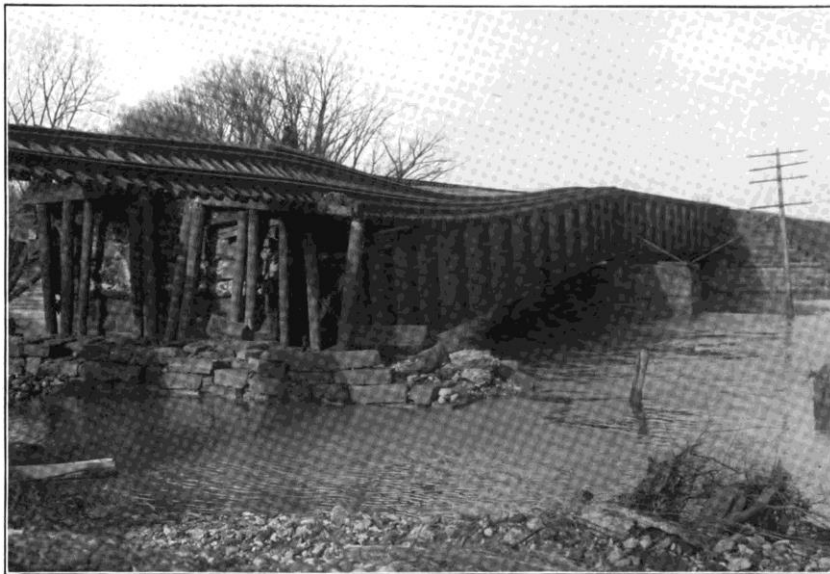
91 – The 5th Street Bridge in Zanesville, Ohio is shown in the distance in this photo.



97 – West Columbus, Ohio – The caption reads "Replacing Central Avenue viaduct, which was destroyed, with temporary fill from cribbed trestle."



102 – Dayton, Ohio. This gruesome photo shows the ruins of the 5th Street Bridge, and a dead horse tangled in the trusses as well. The caption notes that 1,400 horses were drowned in Dayton alone. The bridge was a product of the Dayton-based Columbia Bridge Works; enough of the company's unusual design details are visible in this photo to confirm this.



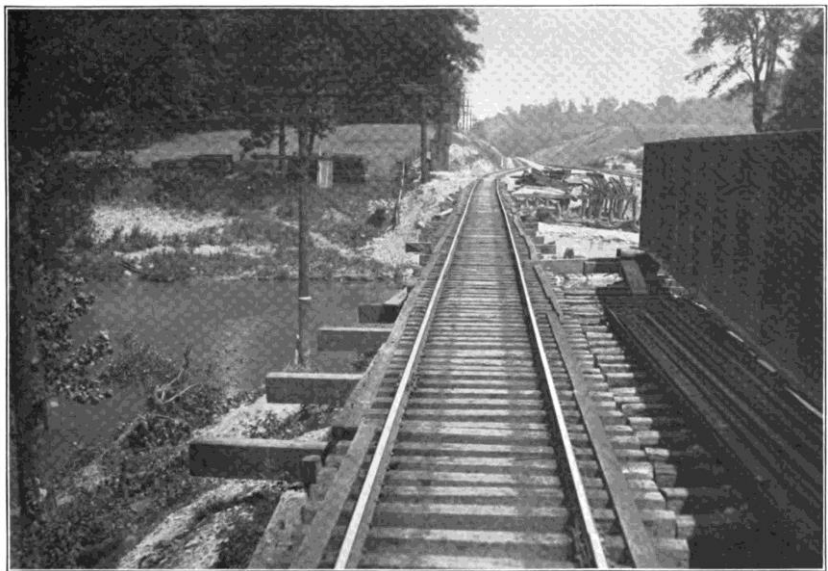
130 – Bridge 141 over Black Fork in Perrysville, Ohio.



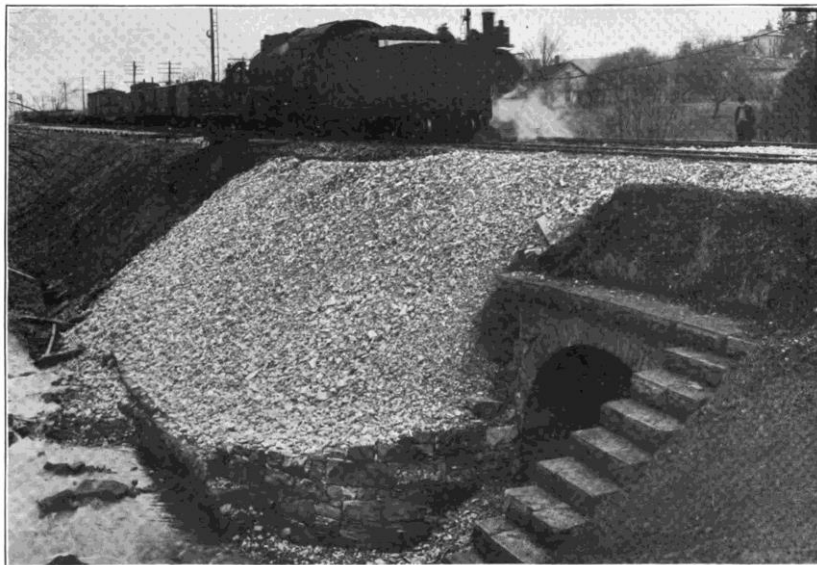
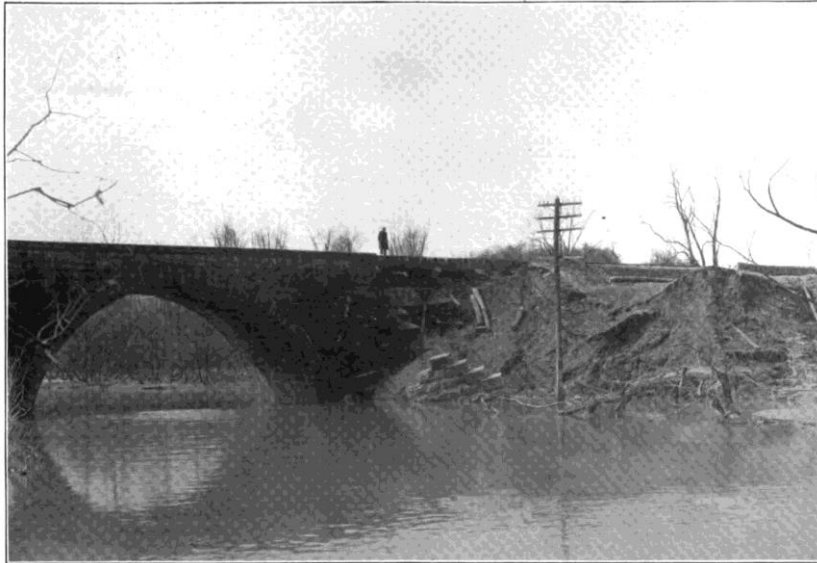
131 – Bridge 143 over Black Fork in Perrysville, Ohio. The caption notes that (apparently before the flood) a new bridge abutment was already under construction, but the new bridge abutment was destroyed.



131 – Bridge 144 over Black Fork in Coulter, Ohio. The approach span was washed out.



132 and 133 - Bridge 145 over Black Fork east of Lucas, Ohio. A temporary bypass was installed while a replacement bridge was built.



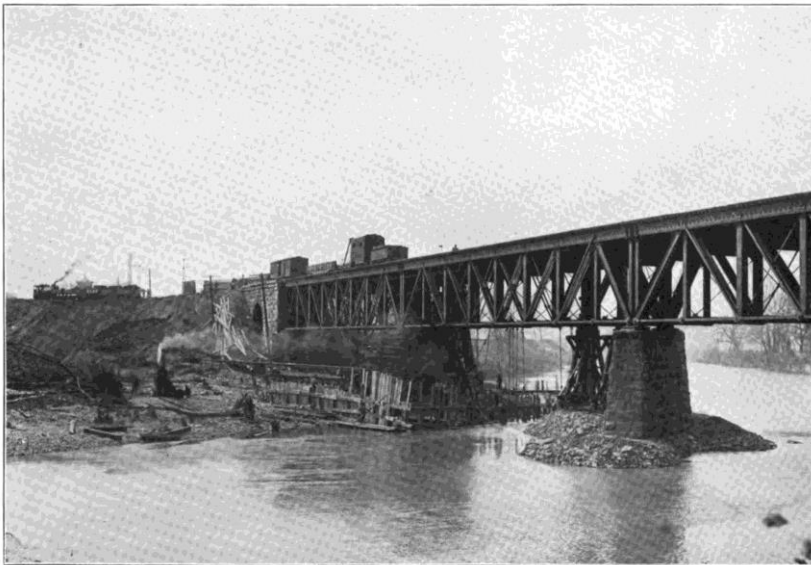
135 (2 photos) – Bridge 147 over Rocky Fork and Bridge 148, both near Lucas, Ohio. Only the wingwalls were destroyed on these stone arch bridges.



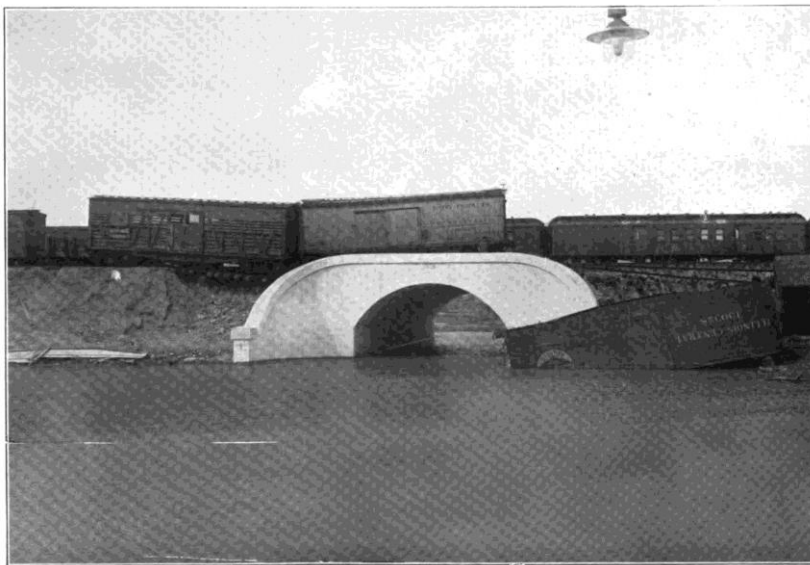
New Castle. Pa.

March 29. 1913.

141 – "Franklin" Bridge Number 68 over Shenango River in New Castle, PA.



171 (2 photos). Marble Cliff, Ohio (near Columbus). Bridge 3 over Scioto River. This bridge survived and remains today.



172 and 173 – Rodgers Avenue and Sandusky Street overpasses in Columbus after the flood.



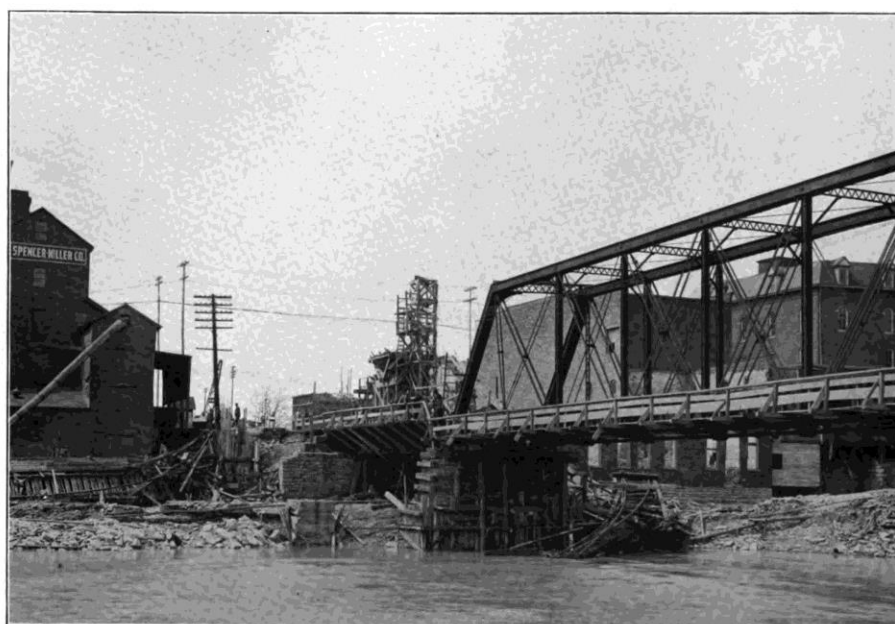
Piqua, Ohio. Bridge 50 over Miami River. The approach was washed away. The through truss spans required temporary supports to be added, while a totally new replacement bridge was built. Note the ornate builder plaque on the portal bracing of the bridge.



Piqua, Ohio.

Looking east from Bridge 50, showing ruins of contractor's outfit engaged in track elevation work.

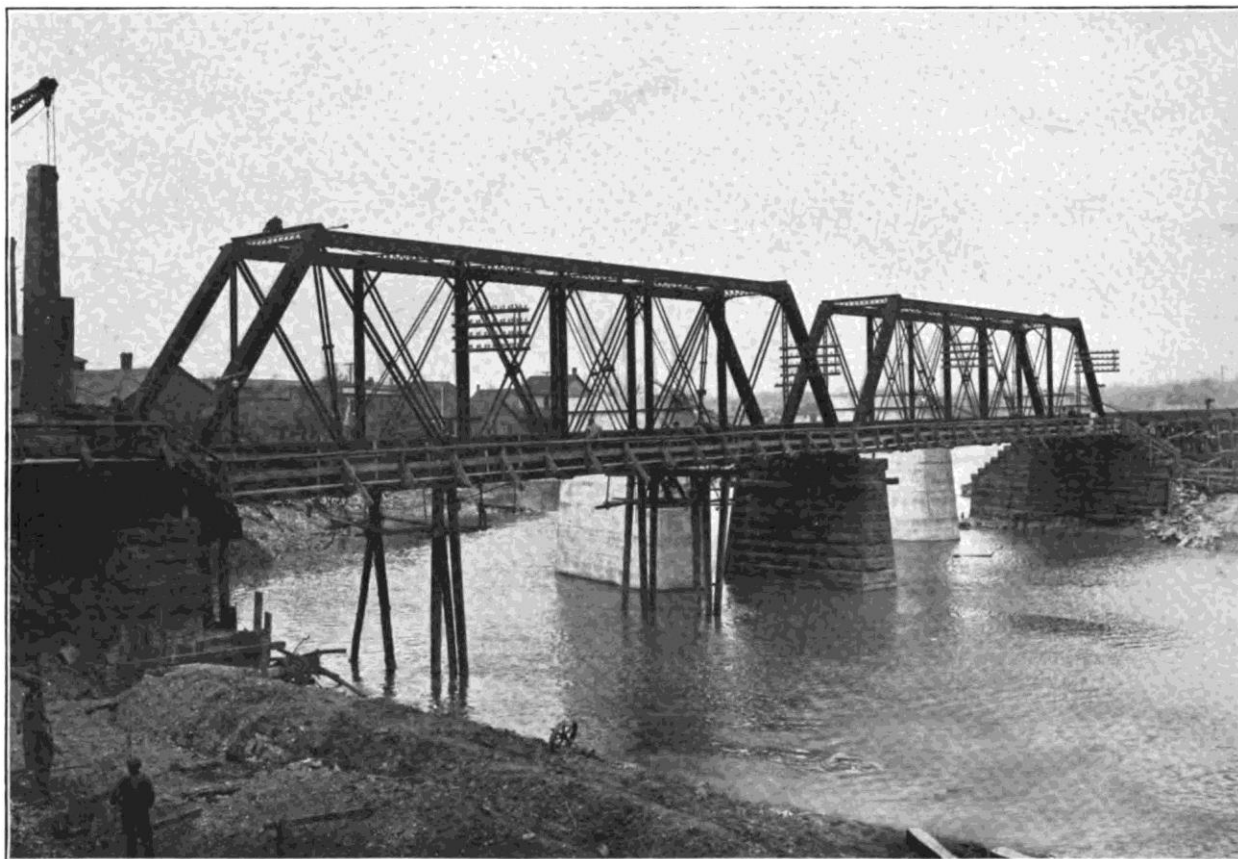
April 2, 1913.



Piqua, Ohio.

South side of west pier of Bridge 50, over Miami River and Canal. Bridge itself intact.

April 2, 1913.



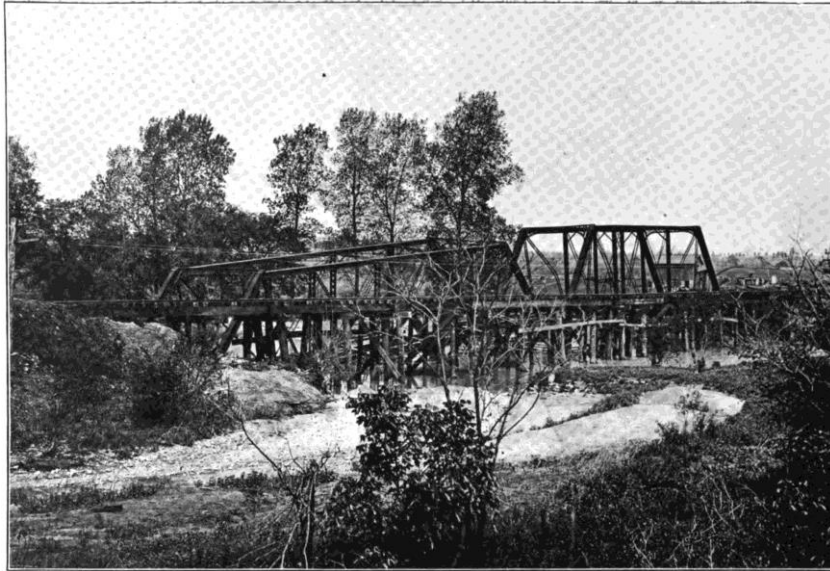
181 (2 photos) and 182 and 185 Piqua, Ohio. Bridge 50 over Miami River. The approach was washed away. The through truss spans required temporary supports to be added, while a totally new replacement bridge was built. Note the ornate builder plaque on the portal bracing of the bridge.



189 – Miami City, Ohio. Bridge 221, over Wolf Creek



197 and 198 – Somerville, Ohio. Bridge 57 over Seven Mile Creek.

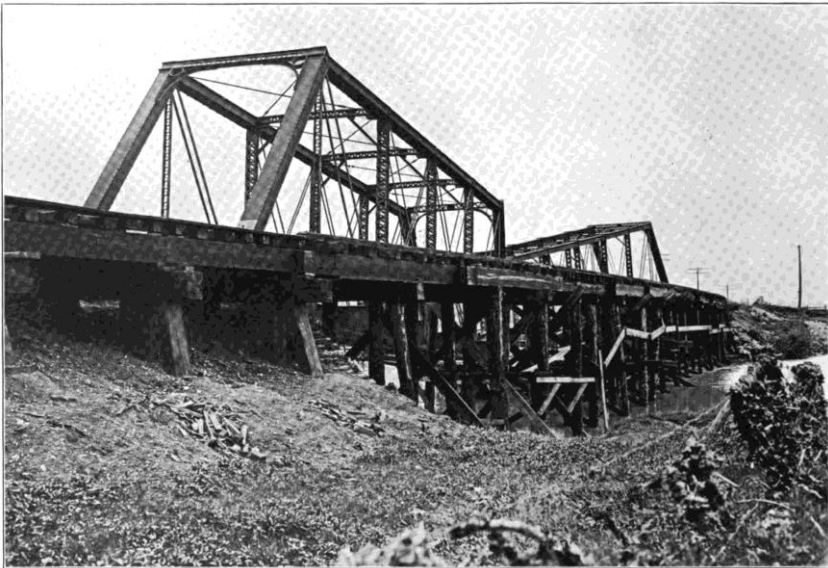


202 – Somerville, Ohio. Bridge 57 over Seven Mile Creek.





198b and 199 - Somerville, Ohio. Bridge 48 over Seven Mile Creek. This interesting bridge had two different designs of pin-connected Pratt trusses: one with a pedimented portal bracing, the other with a latticed portal bracing with numbers (likely the construction date, possibly 81 for 1881) on them. One or both of the spans had likely been relocated and reused in this location.



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199B - Collinsville, Ohio. Bridge 44 over Seven Mile Creek.





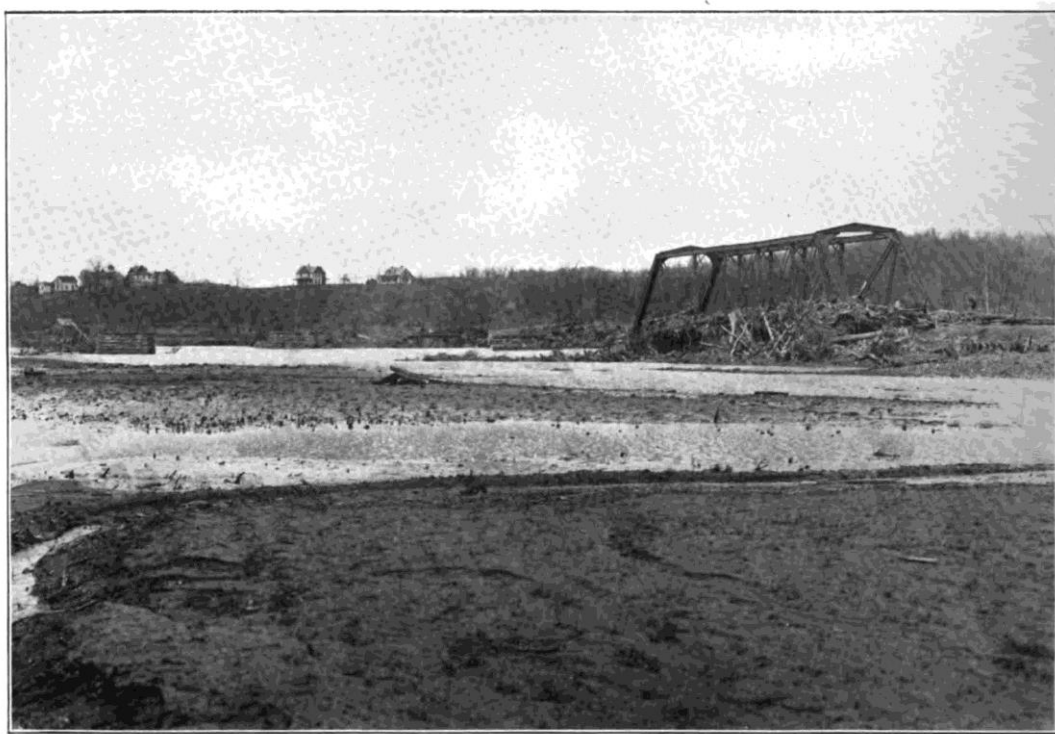
200, 203 – Collinsville, Ohio. Bridge 44 over Seven Mile Creek.



206 – White River Bridge in Muncie, Indiana



215 – Rockford, Indiana – Bridge 37 over Boardley's Hole



229 – Near Walhonding, Ohio - Bridge 16 over Walhonding River. Two spans were carried away. A covered highway bridge stood on the masonry to the left. The covered bridge was swept away and carried with it two spans of the railroad bridge.



230 – Near Edlam, Ohio Bridge 26 over Mohican River.



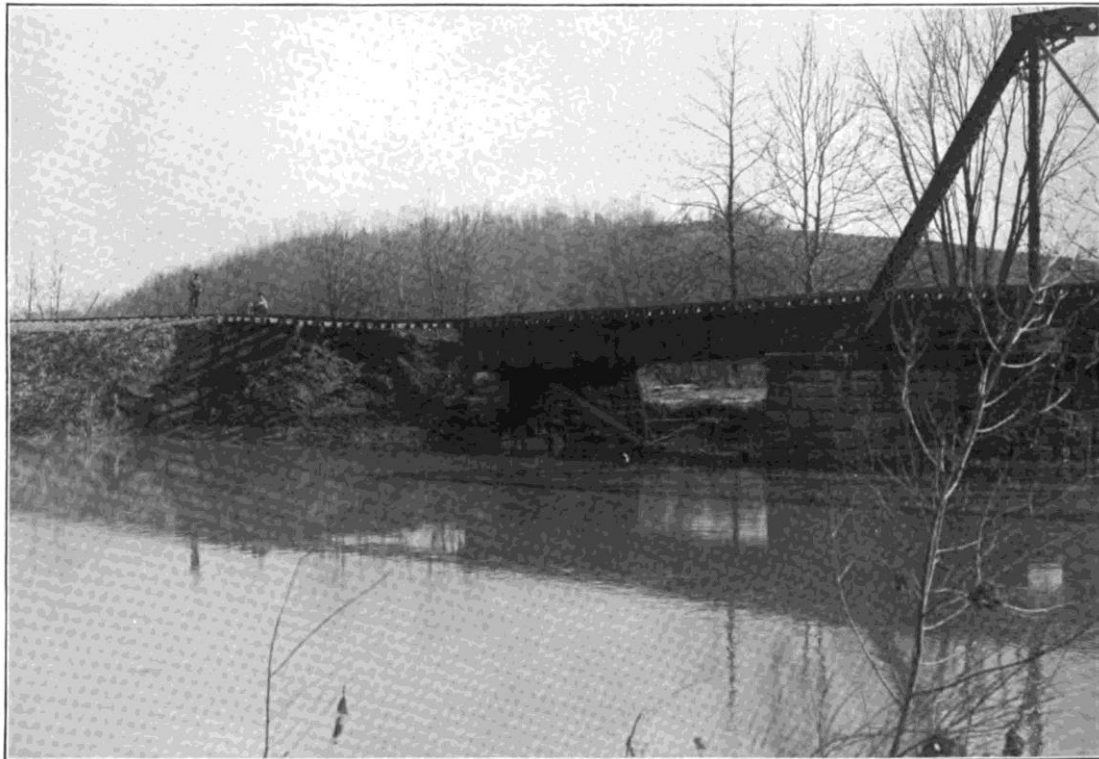
232 - Near Edlam, Ohio Bridge 28 over Mohican River.



232b 233 – Spellacy, Ohio Bridge 29 over Little Mohican River



237 – Brink Haven, Ohio. Bridge 68 with a building carried away by the flood lodged against it. This bridge was an unusual structure with three short through truss spans and laced end posts.



241 – Metham, Ohio – Bridge 123 over Killbuck Creek



242 – Warsaw Junction, Ohio – Dresden Branch Bridge 126 over Walhonding River



249 – Zanesville, Ohio – Bridge 20 over Muskingum River.



250 - Zanesville, Ohio – Temporary Bridge after flood for Bridge 20 over Muskingum River.



251 – If the houses and bridges that were washed down the river were not enough evidence of the power of the flood waters, this section of track over the Scioto River in Ohio was literally wrapped around a tree!



257 – Indianapolis, Indiana. Vincennes Division Bridge 1 over White River.



258 - Indianapolis, Indiana. St. Louis Division Bridge over White River.