

Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	BOS.9047
Historic Name:	Charlestown Bridge
Common Name:	North Washington Street Bridge over Charles River
Address:	
City/Town:	Boston
Village/Neighborhood:	Charlestown; North End - Waterfront; Charles River Basin
Local No:	OL-BO 8
Year Constructed:	
Architect(s):	Jackson, William
Architectural Style(s):	
Use(s):	Other Transportation
Significance:	Engineering; Transportation
Area(s):	
Designation(s):	



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

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Friday, March 07, 2014 at 1:26: AM

FORM F - STRUCTURE

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, State House, Boston

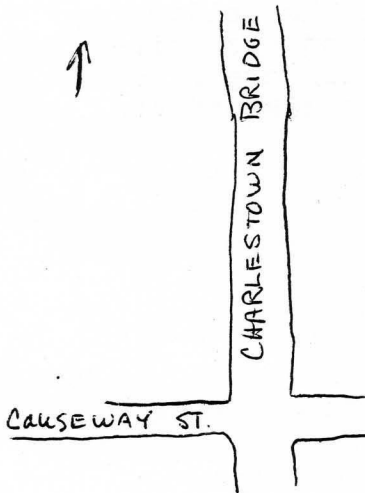
In Area no.	Form no.
OL-B0	8

Town BostonAddress over Charles RiverName Charlestown BridgePresent use bridgePresent owner City of Boston

Type of structure (check one)

bridge	<u>x</u>	pound	_____
canal	_____	powder house	_____
dam	_____	street	_____
fort	_____	tower	_____
gate	_____	tunnel	_____
kiln	_____	wall	_____
lighthouse	_____	windmill	_____
other	_____		

4. Map. Draw sketch of structure location in relation to nearest cross streets, buildings, other structures, natural features. Indicate north.



5. Description

Date 1898-1900Source Co-operation, March, 1923.Construction material steelDimensions 240' long x 73' wideSetting runs north-southCondition good6. Recorded by Architectural PreservationOrganization Associates MBTADate April, 1984

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE
USGS Quadrant _____

MHC Photo no. _____

OL-BO 8

7. Original owner City of Boston

Original use bridge

Subsequent uses _____

8. Historical significance.

The Charlestown Bridge was built by the Boston Transit Commission between 1898 and 1900. Its construction was required by the Legislature in 1894 in the act which set up the Boston Elevated Railway and the Boston Transit Commission. The bridge was correctly seen as an important structure in the eventual layout of the north-south lines of the system. Consequently, the bridge was planned and constructed before the Main Line Elevated which opened the following year in 1901.

The Pennsylvania Steel Company was the contractor for the bridge. It is a swing drawbridge approached by viaducts on each shore. The drawbridge portion is 240'6" long and 73' wide. It spans two clear draw openings in the Charles River.

An elevated structure was built on the center lane of the bridge for cars from the Main Line elevated while surface tracks on each side served the streetcars. The elevated and surface tracks were removed from the bridge when their service over the bridge was discontinued, and it is used only by road vehicles at the present.

9. Bibliography

BERy. Co-operation, March, 1923,

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

BOS.9047

Supplementary information provided from Peter H. Stott, A Guide to the Industrial Archeology of Eastern Massachusetts (draft), 1985.

Boston Transit Commission: Charlestown Bridge

The first bridge connecting Boston to the northern shore of the Charles River was not built until 1786. Until that date all road traffic from the north had to make the long, circuitous trek over Galen Bridge in Watertown (WAT.906), through the Roxbury Highlands, and then over the long neck of land connecting the Shawmut Peninsula with the mainland. The Charles River Bridge, which took thirteen months to build, was considered at the time "the greatest enterprise which had been undertaken in the county." Its length, including a 30-foot draw span, was 1503 feet, and its width, 43 feet. The bridge was supported on 75 oak piers; every fourth pier extended above the handrail and held an oil lamp. The builder was Major Samuel Sewall (1724-1815) of York, Maine. A 1790 account in *The Massachusetts Magazine* credits the success of Sewall's earlier 1761 bridge over the York River as being an important influence in the proposal to erect the Charles River Bridge. Its subsequent financial success was instrumental in creating other toll bridge corporations.

The bridge was maintained as a toll bridge until 1841, when it was purchased by the Commonwealth, which in turn transferred it to the City of Boston in 1887. It was demolished after the completion of the present steel swing bridge in 1900.

The same legislation which established the Boston Elevated Railway and the Boston Transit Commission also directed the Transit Commission to build a suitable structure over which the Elevated could cross the Charles River. Engineer in charge was the Boston Transit Commission's Chief Engineer, William Jackson (1848-1910). Completed in 1900, the new bridge was particularly remarkable for its 100-foot width and for being a double-decked structure throughout. The lower deck was designed for two 28-foot carriageways on either side of a 22-foot right-of-way for electric streetcars. The overhead steelwork carried the Elevated's mainline tracks.

The draw span, weighing 1200 tons, is 240 feet in length. Like the longer Northern Avenue swing span over Fort Point Channel (BOS.9000), the draw's superstructure consists of four pin-connected trusses. When open, the entire dead load of the draw is concentrated on four tower posts of the inside trusses, the outside trusses being hung to them. The weight on the four tower posts is carried down to eight equidistant points on the turntable drum by a system of heavy plate girders. The drum, 54 feet in diameter, in turn is carried by 70 steel wheels. Unlike the pneumatically operated Northern Avenue Bridge, the turntable motors of the Charlestown Bridge were electrically operated, taking little more than two minutes to open or close the span. The draw was last operated in 1956, and its motors have since been removed.

The Elevated route (later the MBTA's Orange Line) was discontinued in 1975, replaced by a subsurface route a few yards upstream, and much of the structural steel supporting the El tracks has since been removed. The bridge is today the oldest of the three steel swing spans remaining in Boston.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Massachusetts Magazine (March 1790), p. 143, quoted in Joseph Stancliffe Davis, *Essays in the Earlier History of American Corporations* (2 vols., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), 2: 187-189

"greatest enterprize" quote and description in Josiah Bartlett, "A Historical Sketch of Charlestown," *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 2nd ser., 2 (1814), p. 472

Boston Transit Commission, *Sixth Annual Report for the Year Ending August 15, 1900* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1900), pp. 35-56

"The Charles River Bridge, Boston, Mass.," *Engineering News* 45 (24 January 1901), pp. 61-63

"The Charlestown Bridge, Boston," *Engineering Record* 43 (9 February 1901), pp. 122-124.

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I-93 Interchange Charlestown Ma.
Cont. # 918-SC-001
G.C. Perini Corporation
Abbott-Boyle, Inc. Photographers
April 27, 1989
Desc. Granite Stone Wall-Item 989.3



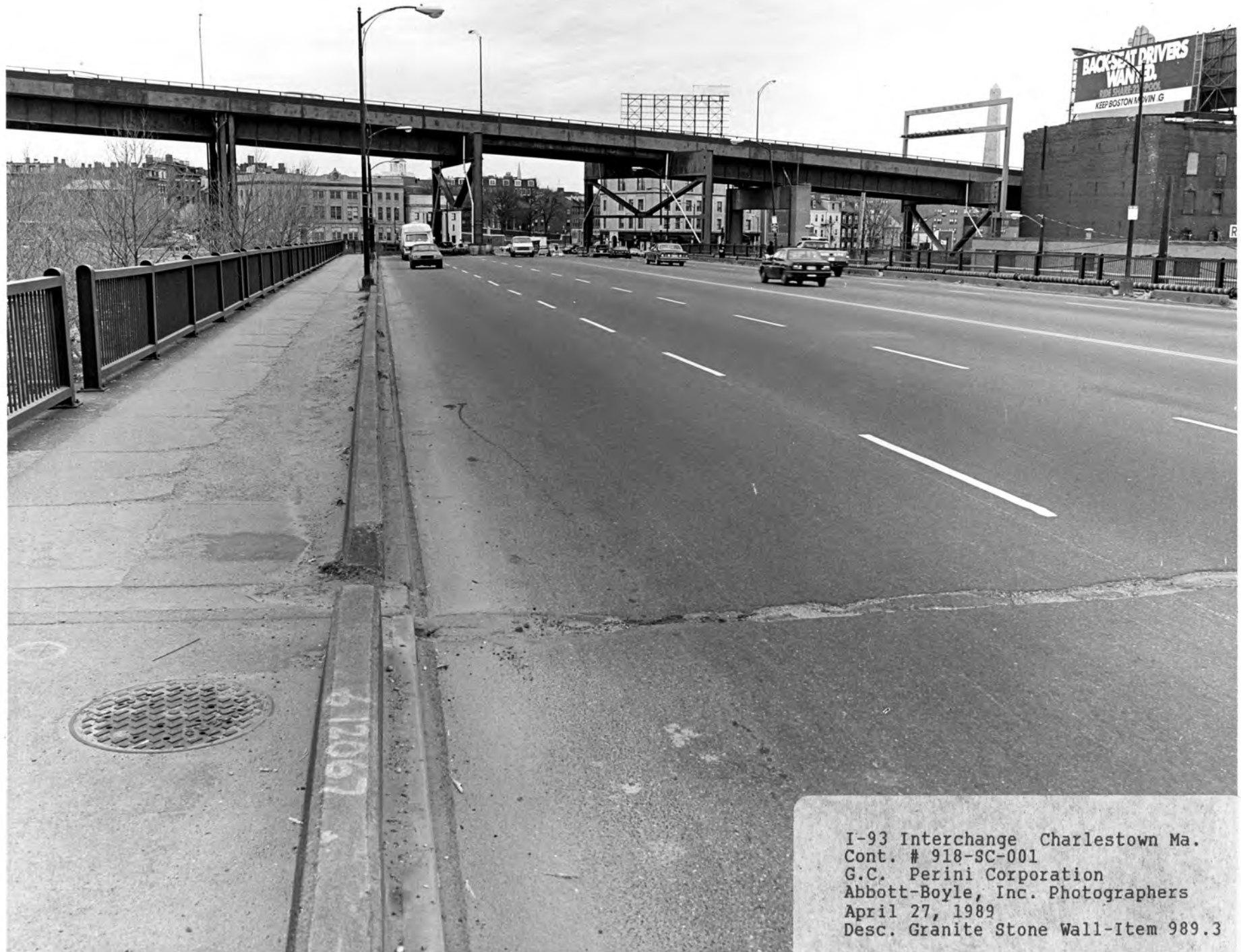
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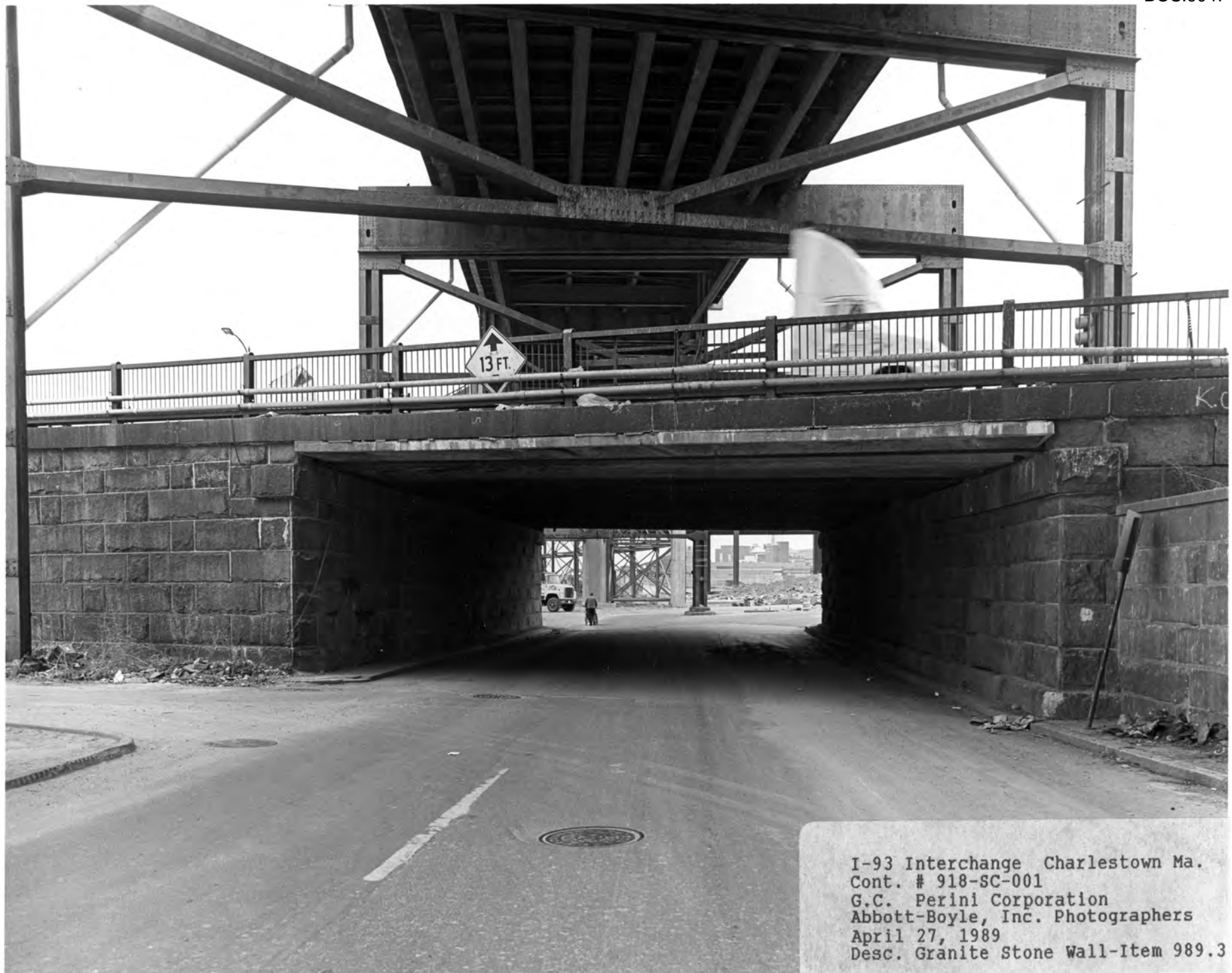
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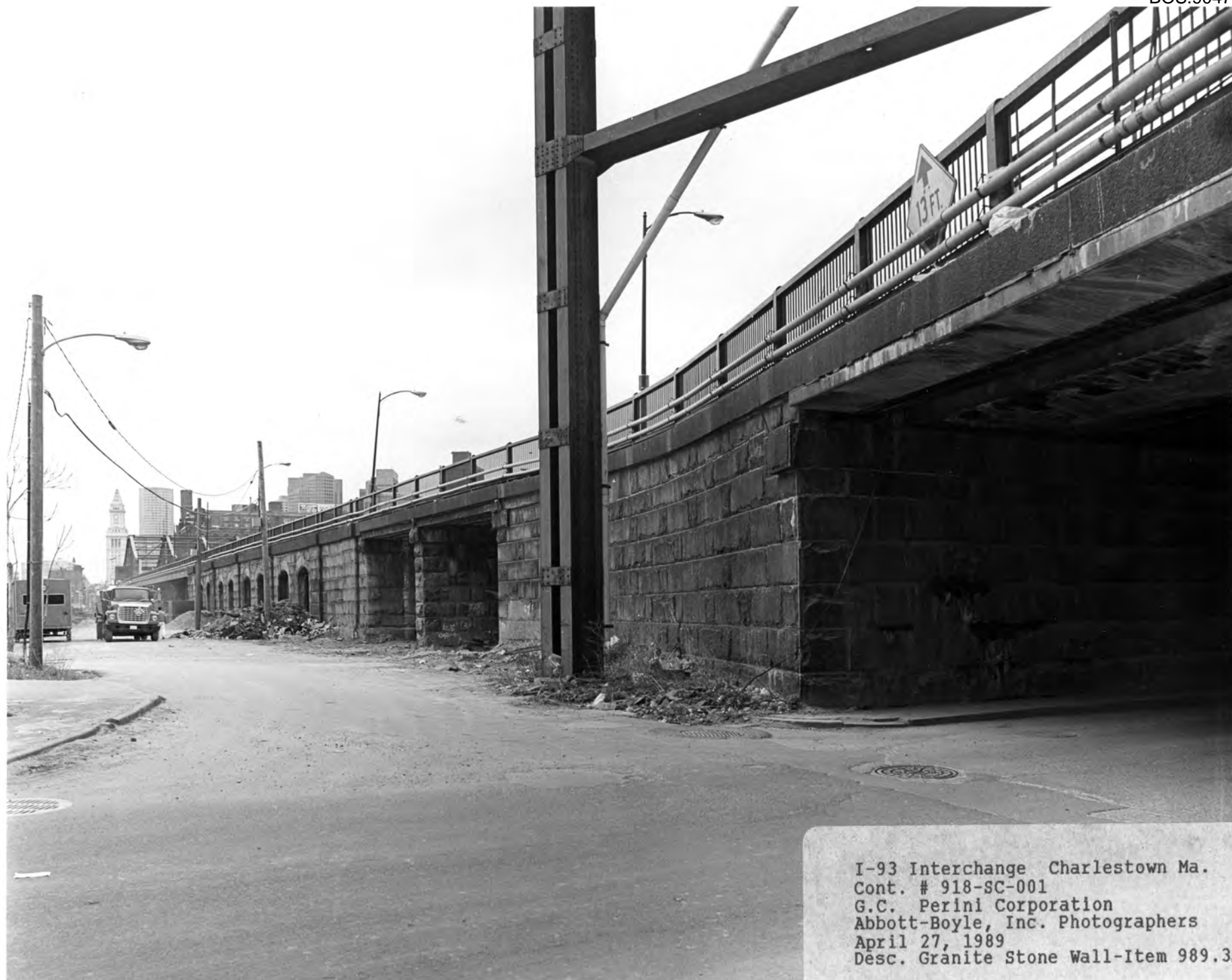
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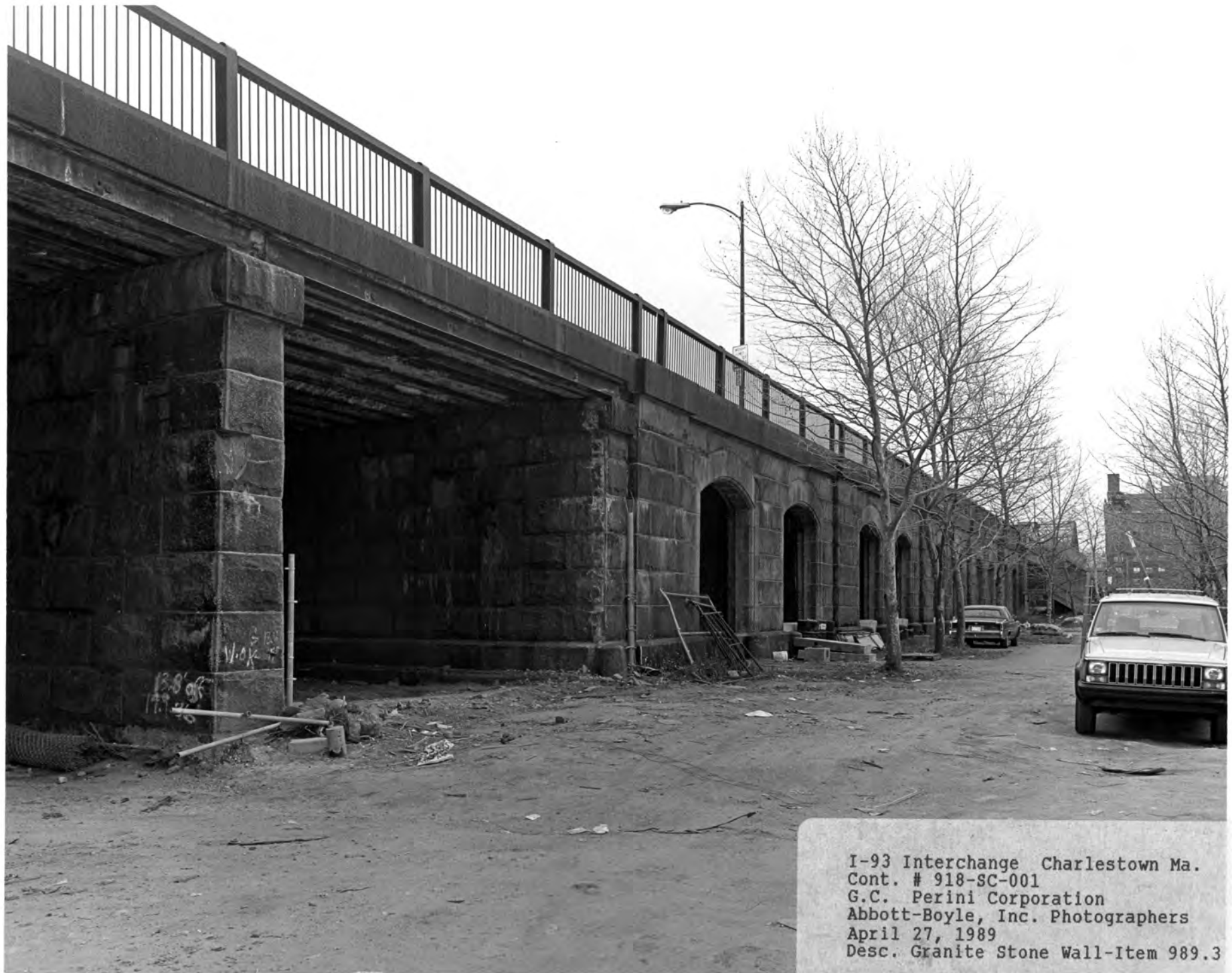
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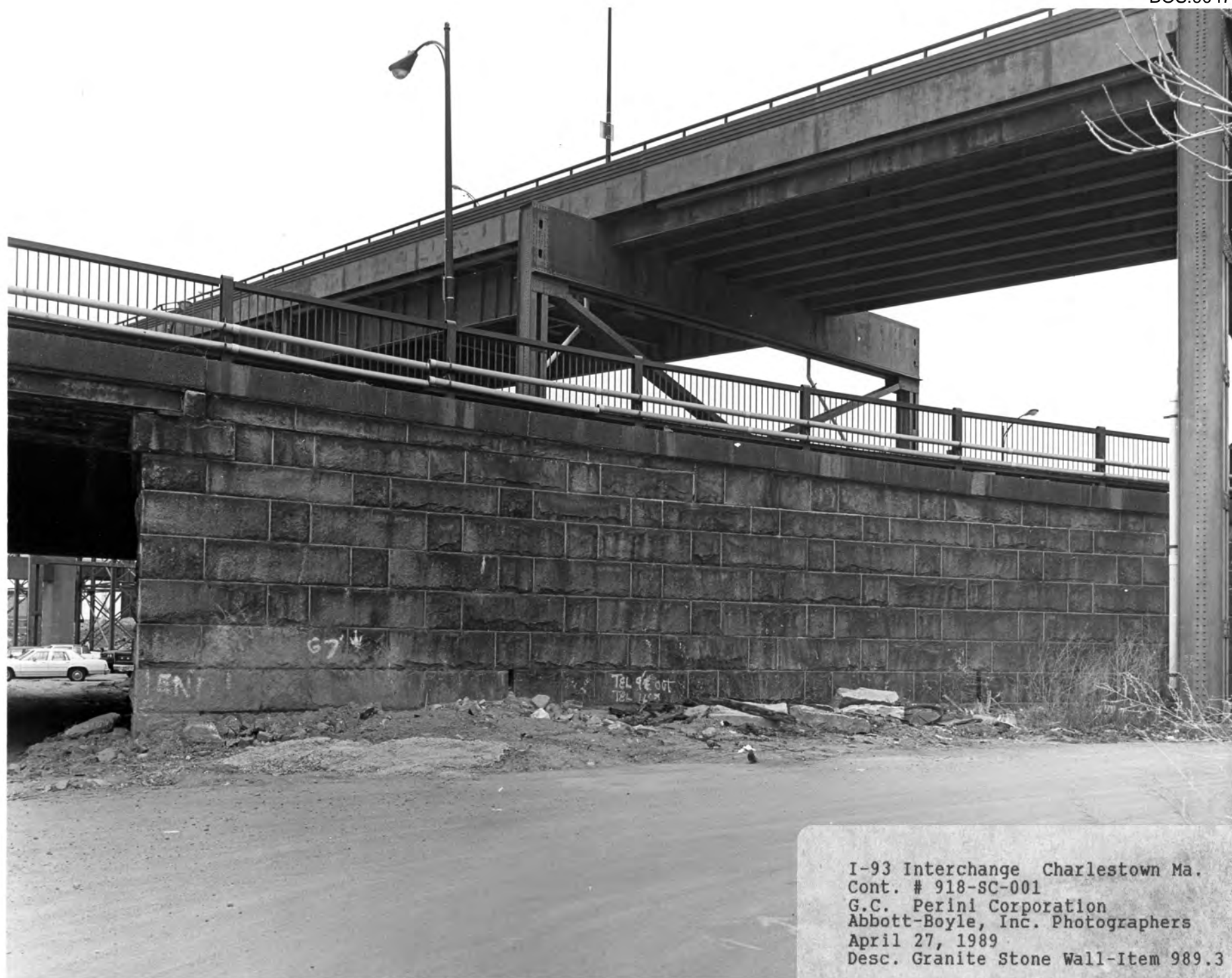
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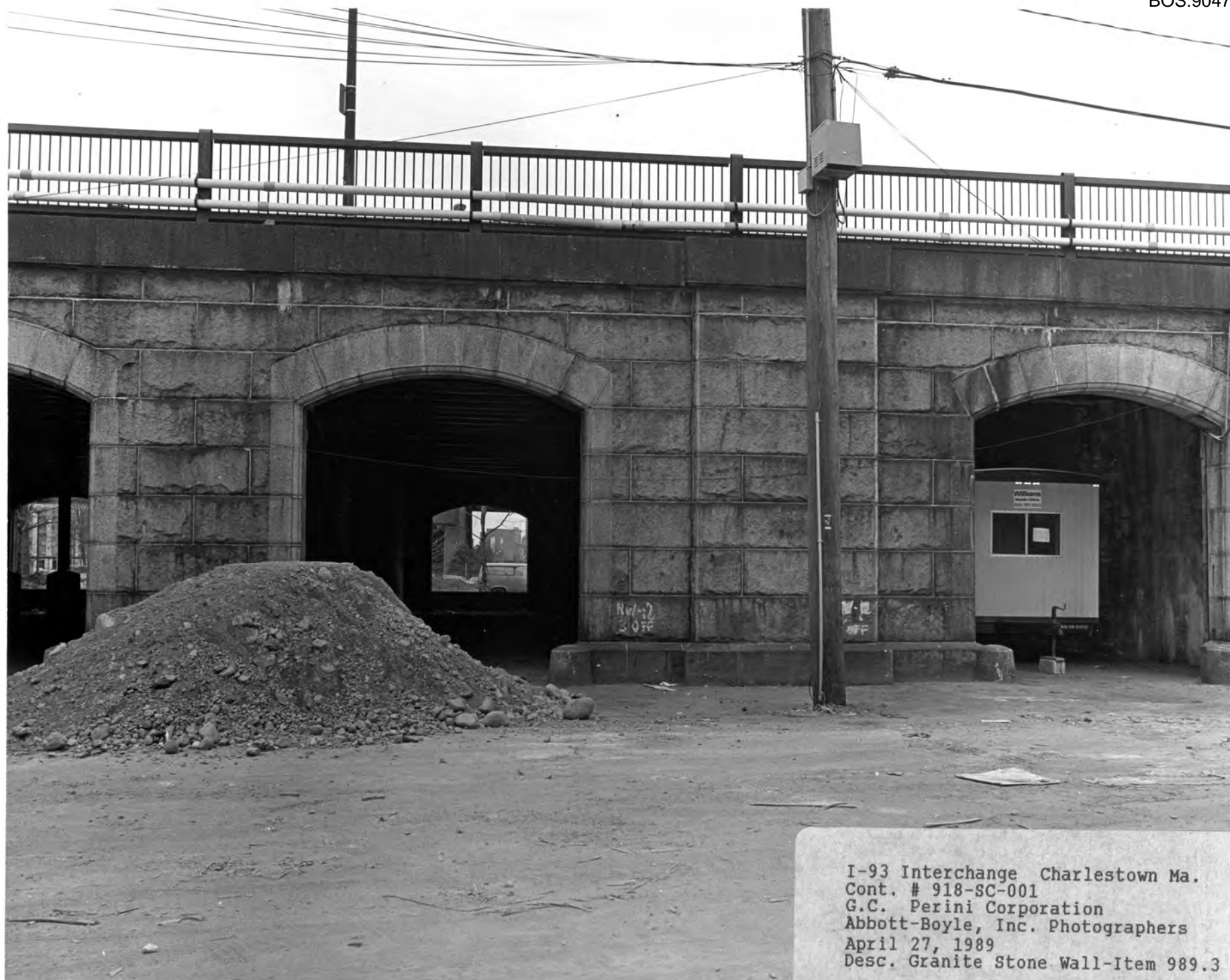
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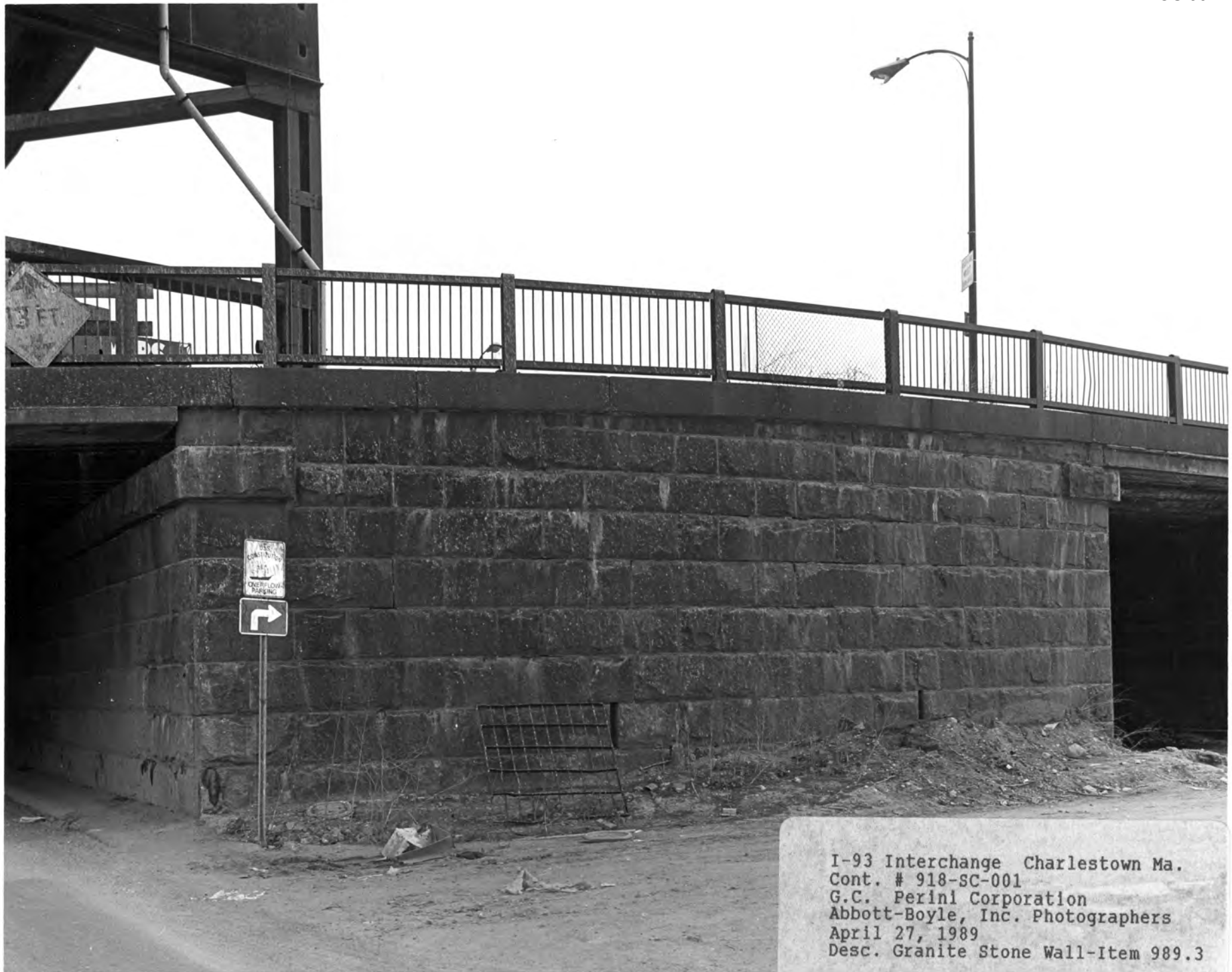
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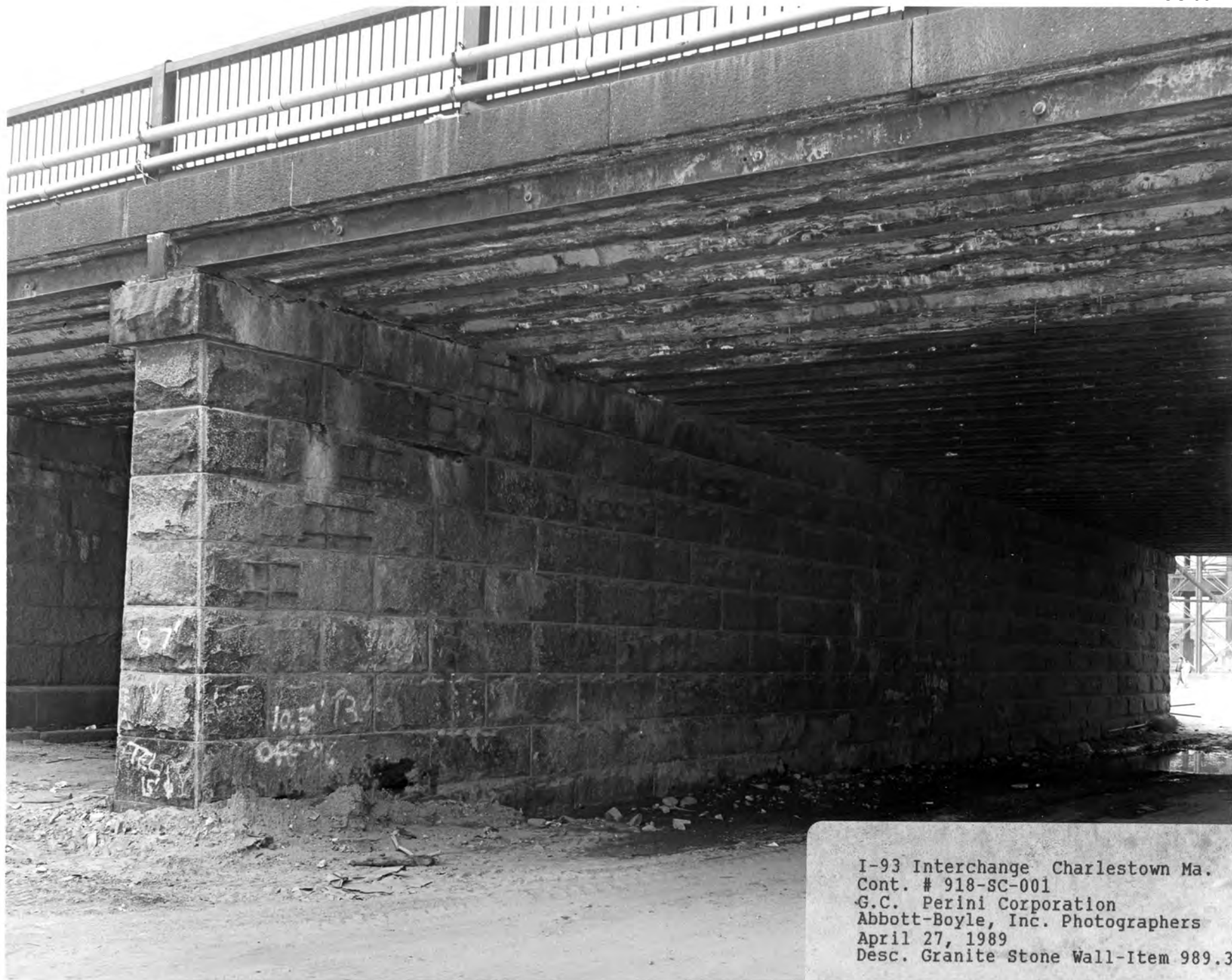
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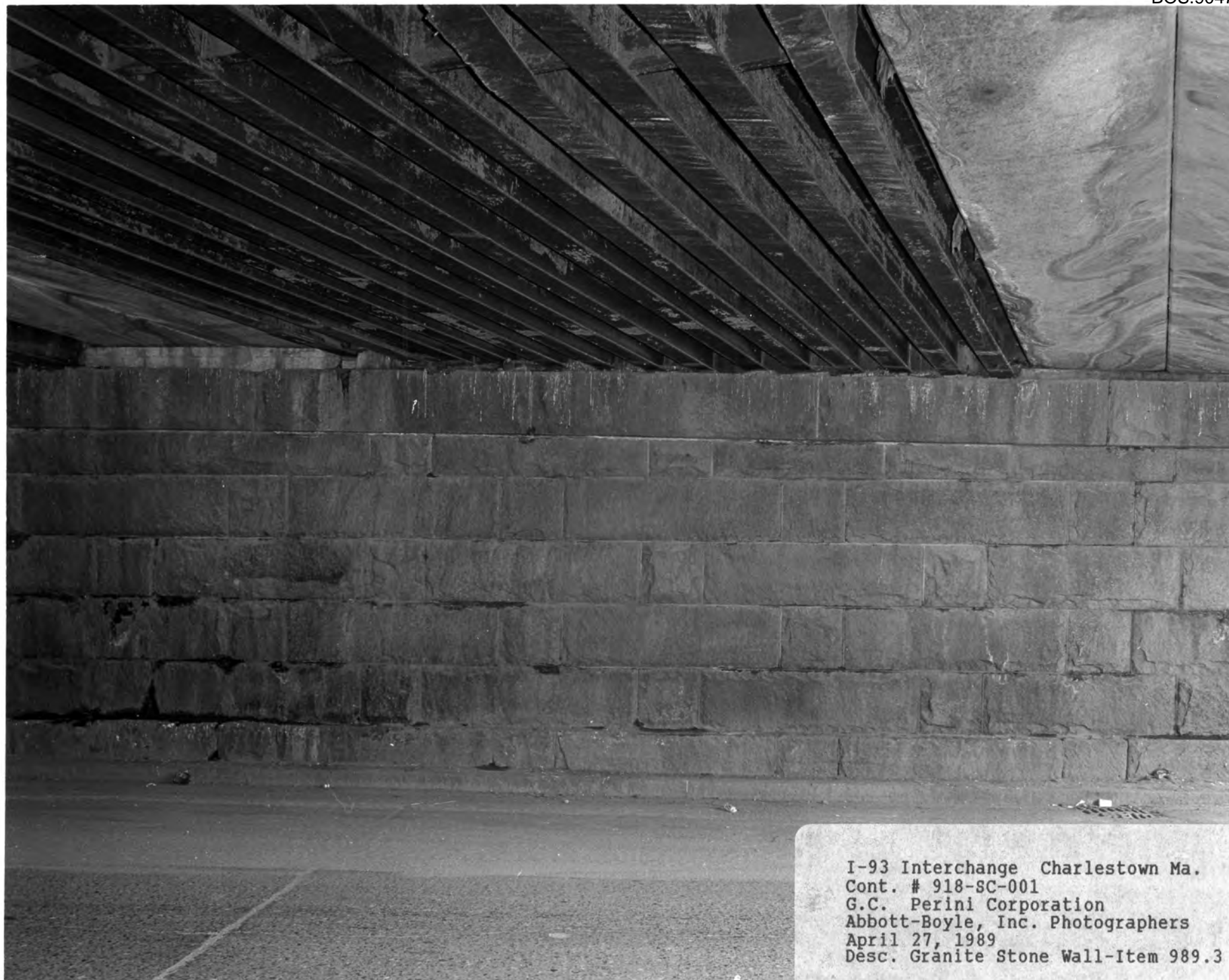
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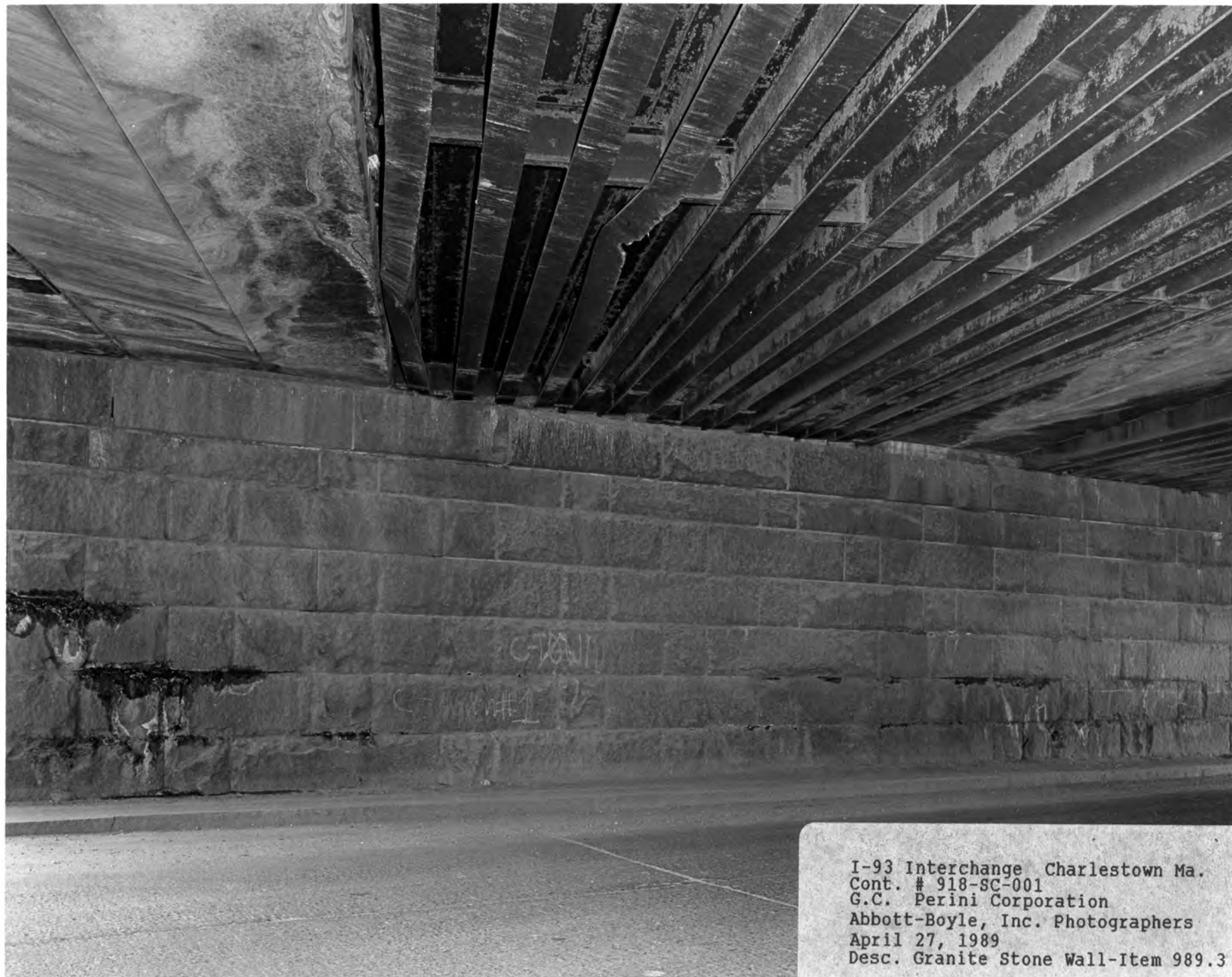
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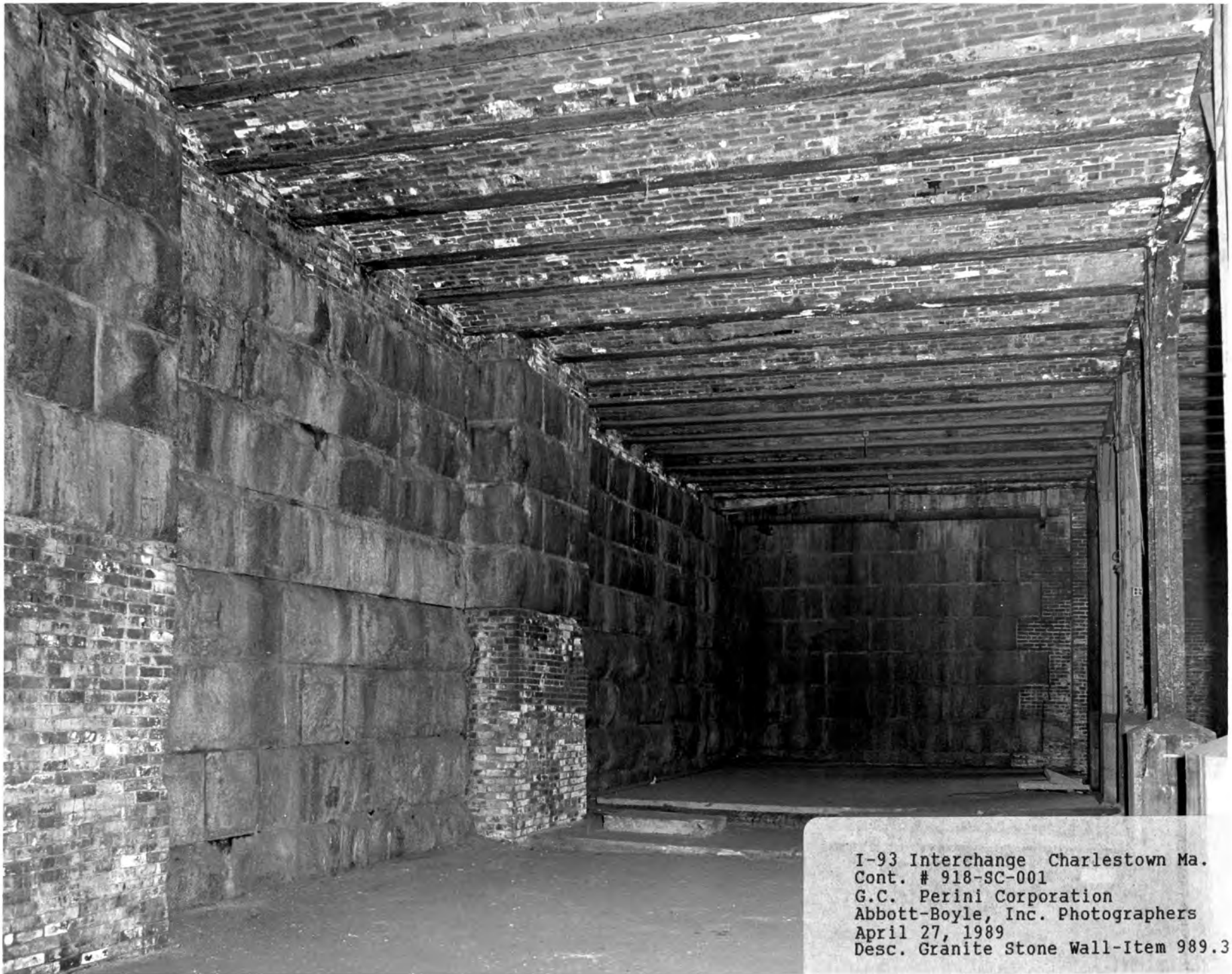
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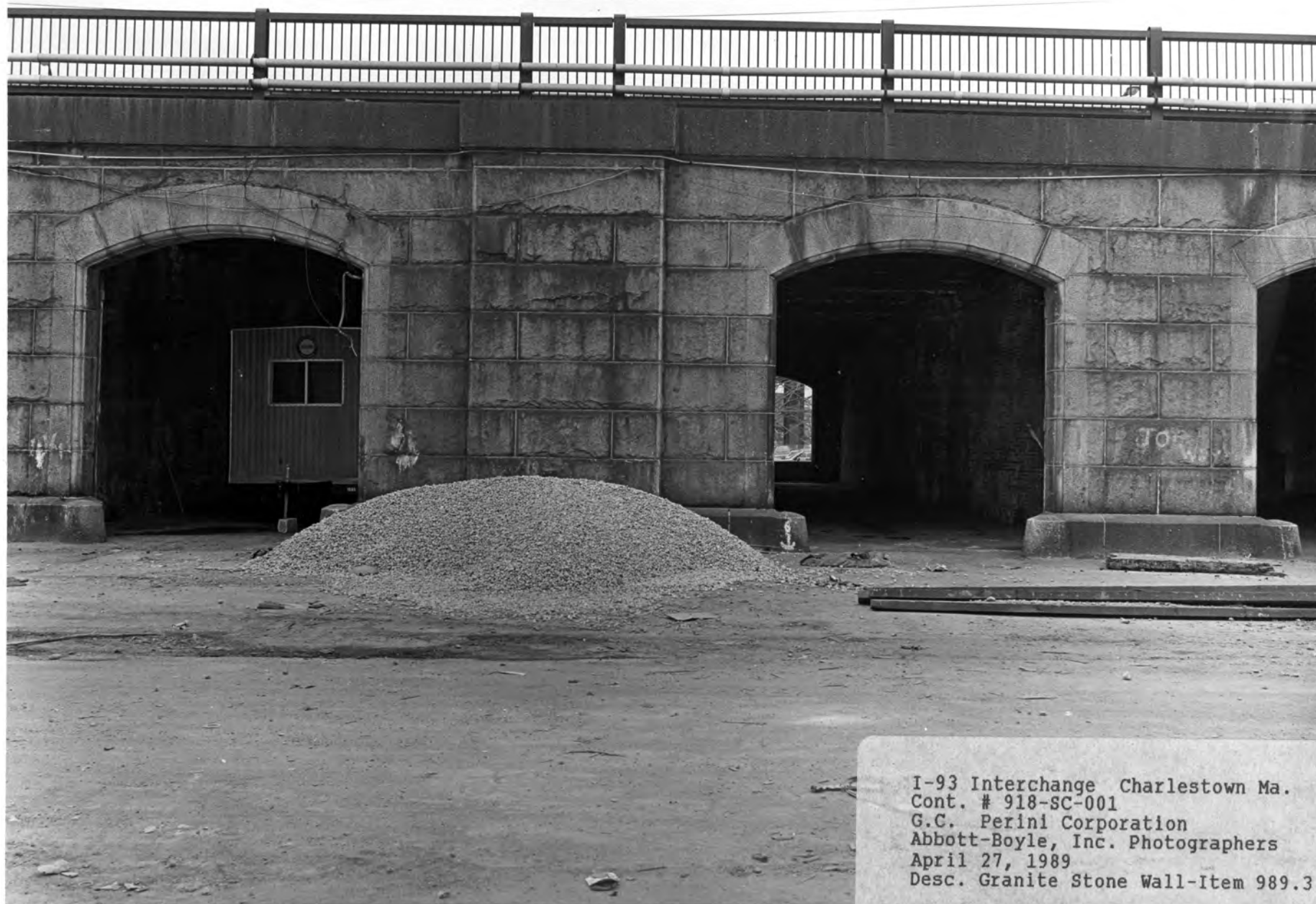
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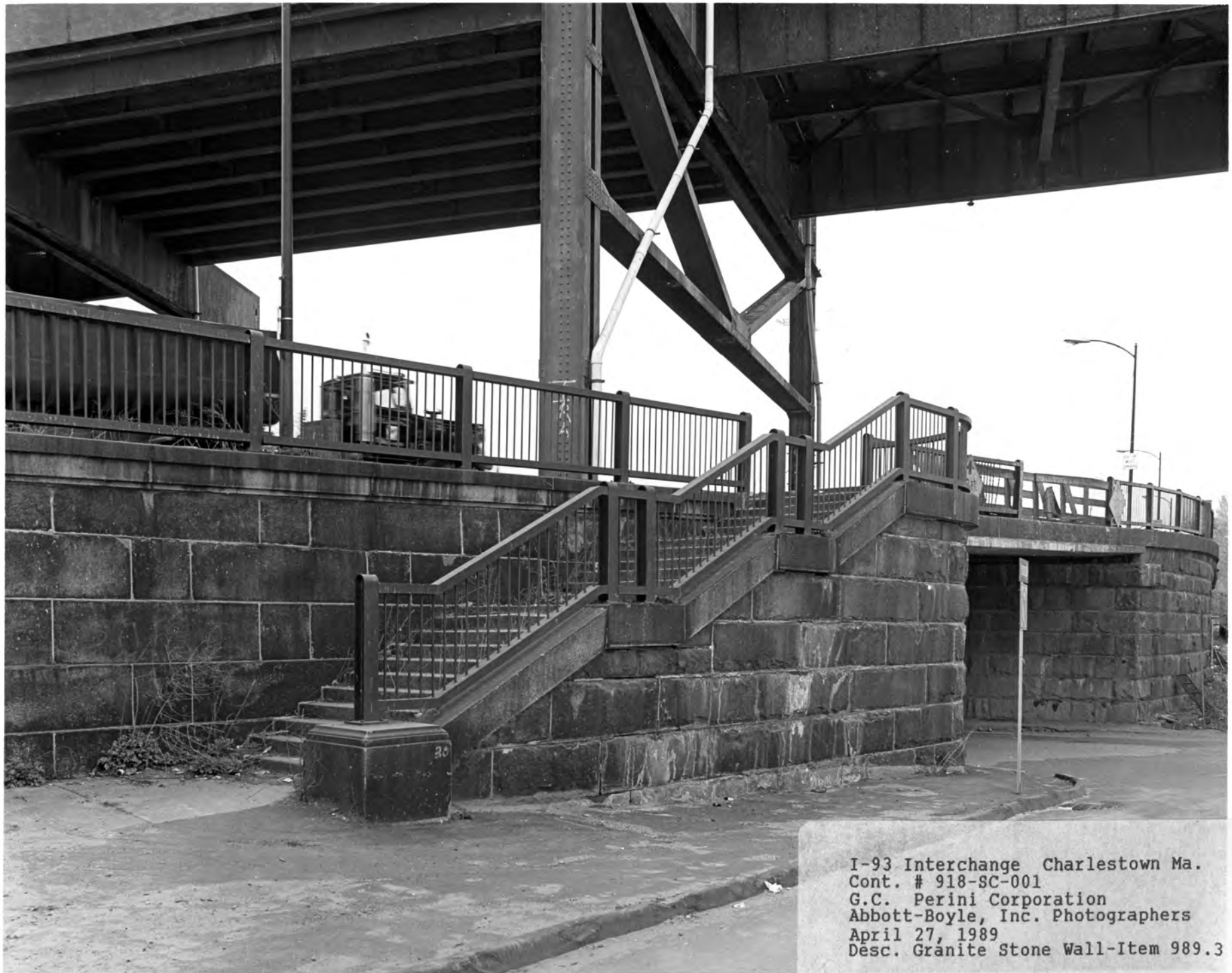
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