

Virginia Avenue Tunnel (1906 - 2015)

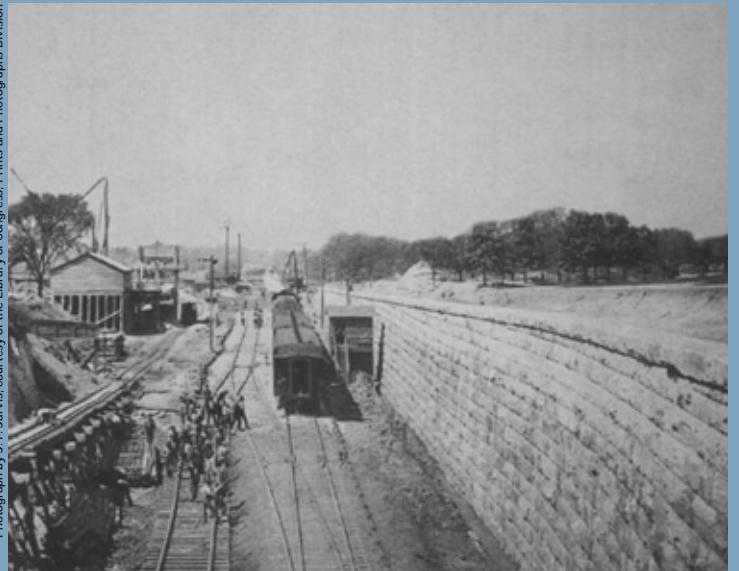
Virginia Avenue Tunnel

As automobile and streetcar use increased during the early 20th century, at-grade railroad crossings created safety hazards throughout the city. To address this issue, the newly formed Philadelphia, Baltimore & Washington Railroad extended the tunnel to just west of 2nd Street SE during the early 1900s. Like the earlier section, a cut-and-cover construction technique was used and materials included ashlar granite, red and buff brick, and concrete. The new section of the tunnel connected with the existing Navy Yard Tunnel at 8th Street SE. A segment of the 1872 tunnel, located between 7th and 8th Streets SE, was removed and infilled. The west portal from this 1906 extension featured an elliptical-arch opening. The original 1872 and 1906 sections of the tunnel were together renamed the Virginia Avenue Tunnel.

In 2015, CSX Transportation, Inc. initiated reconstruction of the Virginia Avenue Tunnel to accommodate increased rail traffic and train capacity. A second track was added and the tracks were lowered to create sufficient vertical clearance to allow the rail cars to carry double-stacked intermodal containers. The reconstructed tunnel was completed in 2018.

During reconstruction, the 1906 portal stones were salvaged and donated to the Friends of Garfield Park. The portal stones will be incorporated into future landscaping projects in Garfield Park.

Photograph by J. F. Jarvis, courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division



A complex system, with an on-site power station, boilers, storehouses and a narrow gauge rail line used to remove the excavated materials, was established for the tunnel construction process in 1904-1906. (1904)

Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division



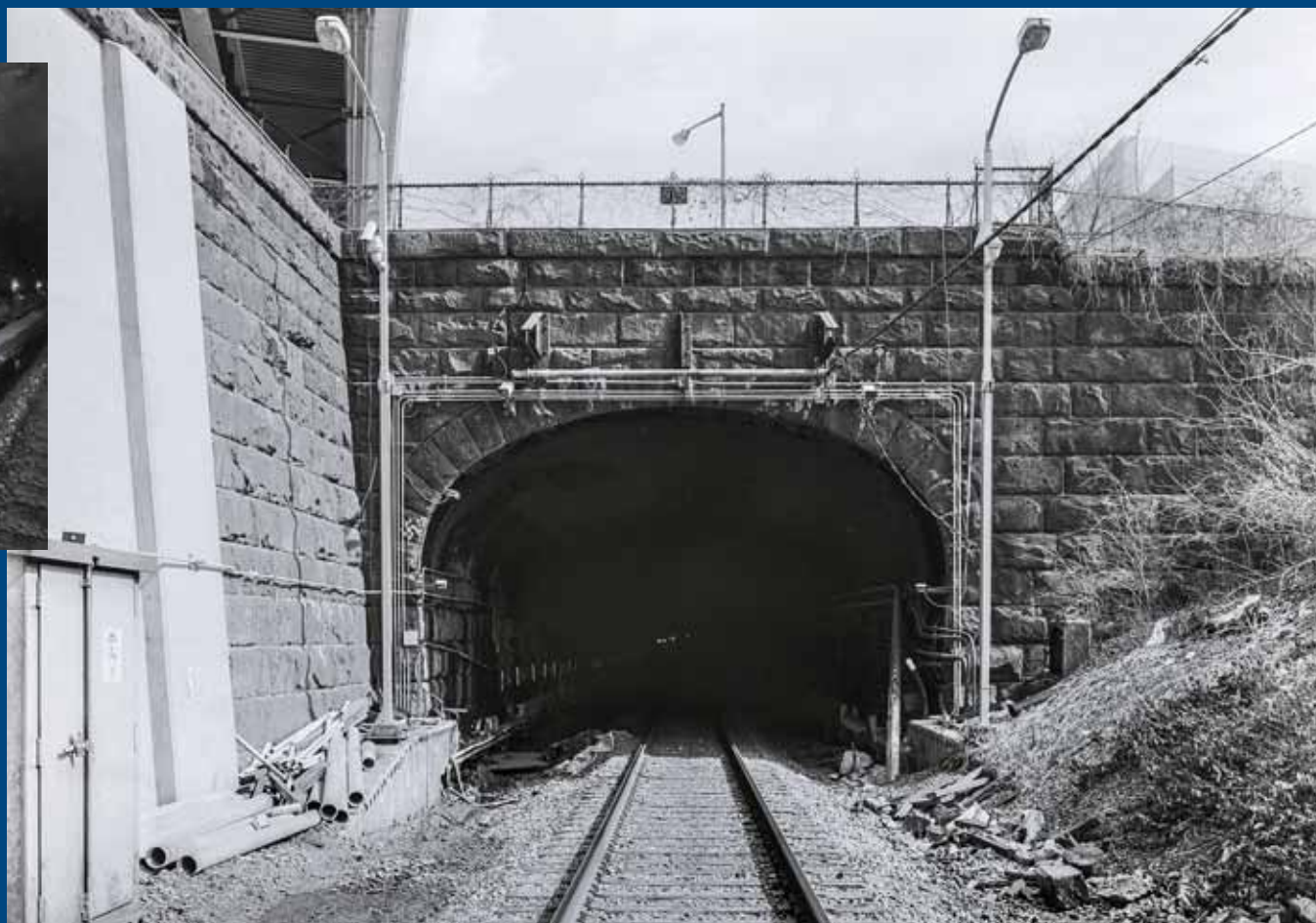
Timber cribbing for the brick arch of the 1904-1906 construction. (1904)

Photograph by Brian Grogan, courtesy of CSX Transportation, Inc.



Ashlar granite walls and the overhead brick arch of the tunnel extension built between 1903 and 1906, and the electrification cables installed in the 1930s characterized the tunnel interior in the late 20th century. One of the round-arch worker safety niches is shown in the north wall which provided workers a safe location to wait while trains passed. (2014)

The 1906 portal and retaining walls prior to tunnel reconstruction. (2014)



Photograph by Brian Grogan, courtesy of CSX Transportation, Inc.