

3. MODESTO ARCH 9TH & I Streets (1911-12)



Landmark Preservation Commission Resolution: August 21, 1989
Designated by City Council: December 5, 1989

Description: The arch spanning “I” Street consists of an elliptical, steel-truss arch supported on stucco-clad solid piers. Above the arch is the word "MODESTO," while upon the arch itself is the slogan "WATER WEALTH CONTENTMENT HEALTH." The words are illuminated at night. The piers are Baroque-inspired and include engaged Doric columns, volutes, and arched pediment terminations. Alterations include the removal of the flagpoles that originally topped each pier, and the relocation of the entire structure 37 feet for the widening of 9th Street. The arch is 25 feet tall, 75 feet wide, and contains 668 lights.

Historic Significance: In 1911, the Modesto Businessmens’ Association proposed the idea of an "Ornamental and Electric Arch." Stretching across I Street at the intersection of Ninth Street, the arch would signify and attract attention to Modesto’s expanding economy. A slogan contest was held, and the second-prize slogan – Water, Wealth, Contentment, Health – submitted by S.R. Harbaugh, became the "war cry" and appears on the arch. Bernard Joseph, a Modesto architect, submitted the winning arch design along with his slogan: "Attractive by day and illuminated by night." Funds for the arch were raised by public subscription. The arch was dedicated on March 9, 1912. When the arch was first constructed, there were only 85 automobiles in the entire town. By the 1930s, many more cars were on the scene and the location of the arch was causing visibility problems for the drivers wishing to make turns at the intersection of 9th and I streets. In the mid-1930s, to remedy the problem, the Arch was moved several feet to the west. Known as "Prosperity Arch," the arch today is the oldest slogan arch in the United States and is one of the few remaining "Booster Era" arches – an example of civic pride and vehicle for "City Boosterism." The first prize slogan was "Nobody's Got Modesto’s Goat.”