

The Morrissy Bridge



The Morrissy Bridge

Written by Phyllis Johnstone

Illustrated by Dawn Maclean

Written and produced by Miramichi Literacy Writers, a Project of the Literacy Corps Program, Employment and Immigration, Canada, sponsored by Miramichi Literacy Council, New Brunswick

Readability Level 3.9

Copyright, Miramichi Literacy Writers, 1985

ISBN-0-920709-08-7

Miramichi Literacy Council - Miramichi Literacy Writers series

This series of booklets are available to anyone who wishes to order them. A single copy is \$3.00, any 3 books would be \$8.00 and a complete set of 24 would be \$60.00. Shipping and handling are extra.

Judy Arnold
President
Miramichi Literacy Council Inc.
P.O. Box 534
Miramichi, NB
E1N 3A8
(506) 773-6734
judy960@hotmail.com

Acknowledgements: We wish to acknowledge support funding from the Governments of Canada and the Province of New Brunswick, especially the Departments of Education and Continuing Education.



THE MORRISSY BRIDGE

CHAPTER I

Morrissy Bridge hit again!! The people of the Miramichi couldn't believe it. The bridge which spans the downtown area of Newcastle to Chatham Head had been hit again. This was the fifth time. Who would believe it? This was the headline in the morning paper on June 14, 1984.

The Morrissy Bridge was opened for the first time on November 12, 1914, by the Honourable John Morrissy. This was to be the first of five such openings.

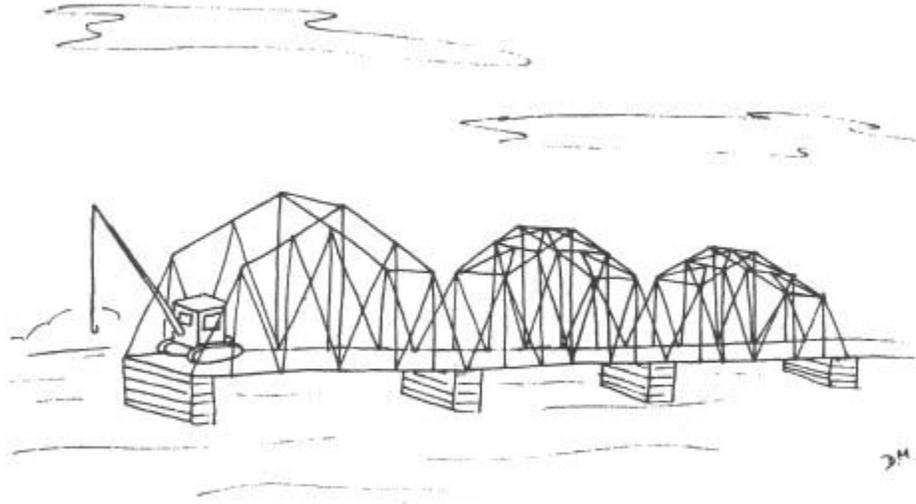
Mr. Morrissy was the Minister of Public Works. He wanted to do something for the people who voted for him. A bridge was needed at Newcastle. Mr. Morrissy built the bridge as an answer to both problems.

The Foundation Company of Canada was given a contract. They started the bridge. A contract was also given to Dominion Bridge. They were to build the steel parts of the bridge. A bridge built of steel would last a long time.

Many people from the area were given jobs. On November 12, 1914, Newcastle had a new steel bridge. Many came from miles around for the opening. The people could now easily cross the river.

CHAPTER II

All went well for almost eight years. In 1922, the Steamer Canadian Squatter hit the bridge damaging the draw span. The draw span is that part of the bridge that opens. The ship was not damaged. The bridge was closed. People had to cross the river by boat. The bridge would not be open for a long time. It would take three months to repair the draw span.



The Morrissy Bridge being built.

Repairs were made and the bridge was opened again. Then, in late summer of 1923, the Norwegian ship 'Woldingham' came to the Miramichi. Above the bridge at a mill, she took on half a load of wood. Her next stop would be down the river at Douglastown. On August 10, she left the Burchill Mill.

While passing through the open bridge, she hit the pier. The pier was badly damaged. The bridge had to be closed. The pier had to be repaired. It would cost a lot of money.

Repairs were made to the broken pier. They cost \$3,773. Who would pay for the repairs? Because of the Navigable Water Protection Act, the ship's owners did not have to pay for the damage. The Navigable Water Protection Act said the bridge was not legal. The broken pier was paid for by the Government of Canada.

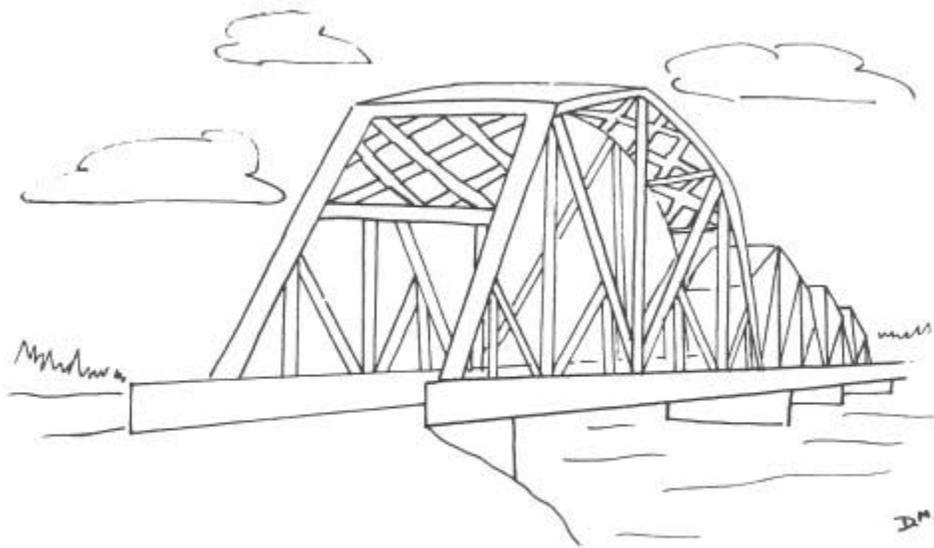
The bridge was not legal because Mr. Morrissy did not get the orders he needed. He had to make the bridge legal. Plans had to be agreed to by the Governor-in-Council. They could make the bridge legal by stating the river was part of a harbor. The harbor was formed by the river mouth.

They described the bridge and how it was placed on the river. Eight feet around the bridge was also described. They called these Water Lots. Because the bridge crossed the Miramichi River which was part of a harbor, it was now legal. If the river had not been part of a harbor, the bridge would not be legal today.

CHAPTER III

The Morrissy Bridge was not hit again until the summer of 1967. On a warm Sunday in June, the ship 'Liquilassie' hit the south span of the bridge. The draw span was not damaged this time. The damage to the south span was \$150,000. It was thought the span would not hold and it would fall into the river.

The 'Liquilassie' was coming from the Fraser Company Limited. It was heading for the Bathurst Power and Paper Company. It was also damaged in the accident. The ship had to pull itself free from the bridge. The Captain had taken his ship through the bridge four times before this accident happened. He said that the fast-moving waters had pulled his ship into the bridge.



The Morrissy Bridge.

Businesses on the Newcastle side of the river were hurt by the accident. A meeting was at the Uptown theatre. Six hundred people showed up for it. They discussed the loss of business. They talked about building a new bridge. They were told a new bridge could not be built. They did not have enough money for it.

For weeks men worked on the bridge from daylight until dark. It was ready to be re-opened by the end of July.

At the opening, Jack Morrissy, the son of the Honourable John Morrissy, cut the ribbon. Kathleen Morrissy, the granddaughter of John Morrissy, gave a speech. She called the bridge a 'Grand Old Lady.'



CHAPTER IV

On November 5, 1971, the 'Grand Old Lady' was hit again. The 'Grand Valor' of Panama, hit the bridge after leaving Acadia Pulp and Paper Mill. She was loaded with wood. The 'Grand Valor' was turning when the dangerous waters caught her. It drove her into the bridge. The ship knocked the second span six feet out of place. The 'Grand Valor' had to stay in Chatham for several days. The owners, Sea King Lines of New York, had to pay \$25,000. The ship was then allowed to leave.

The bridge was closed for three weeks. During those three weeks, people used the Centennial Bridge. The Centennial Bridge crosses the Miramichi River between Chatham and the village of Douglstown. On November 25, 1971, shortly before five o'clock, the bridge reopened. This was the fourth opening since 1914.

The Morrissy Bridge served the people of the Miramichi for many years without any more problems. Then on June 14, 1984, it was hit again.

While turning, the 'John M' of Hamburg got caught in the dangerous waters. It hit the bridge in two places. One of the piers was badly damaged. Three spans were pushed out of place. The bridge was closed and would not be opened until the fall.

People were called in to see what repairs would cost. They said the damage to the bridge was from \$1,000,000 to \$ 2,000,000. Most of the damage was to the piers under the water. The people of Newcastle wanted a new bridge. The 'Grand Old Lady' was now seventy-one years old. She had been hit five times. This time she was badly hurt.

Once more a boat was used to get people across the river. It was called the SS Dawson City Express. It was called after the Honourable Paul Dawson, Minister of Commerce and Development. He got the boat for the people. Small vans were also used. Businesses were badly hurt by the accident. Some had to close their doors. It would take the Miramichi a long time to recover from the accident.

The men worked on the bridge all summer and fall. Dominion Bridge and Diamond Construction were given contracts. They were to repair the bridge. They worked long hours.

At last on December 19, 1984, the bridge was once again reopened. Hopefully this will be for the last time. Relatives of the Morrissy Family were present for the opening. Speeches were made and the ribbon cut. Thanks went out to Dominion Bridge and Diamond Construction for a job well done.

The Morrissy Bridge was first opened as a horse bridge. That law has not changed to this day. The bridge is now used for trucks and cars. The Morrissy Bridge had had its share of problems. The 'Grand Old Lady' had served us well. We hope that she will continue to do so for many years.

WORD LIST

draw

harbor

legal

piers

spans

steel

Acknowledgements:

The information for this book was taken from newspaper articles found at the Old Manse Library in Newcastle.