

Causeway Memorial Park

On New Year's Day 1963, warm temperatures and heavy rain caused an increase in water levels and rushing ice on Southwest River which led to the collapse of the Port Blandford causeway. Before residents could get to the scene and stop traffic, two vehicles fell into the swirling waters resulting in the deaths of two residents of Musgravetown and three residents of Port Blandford.

The bodies of **Gordon Burden** (46), **Doreen Burden** (17), and **Alice Maude Garrett** (53) were recovered on January 5. Funeral services were held at the Anglican Church in Port Blandford on January 6. The body of **Harry Skiffington** (20) washed ashore on March 23 and the body of **Robert Skiffington** (46) was found by causeway workers on March 26.

50
1963
2013
Years

5 Believed Drowned at Port Blandford

Five persons are believed to have drowned Tuesday night when two cars plunged into a 100-foot gap in Port Blandford causeway which was caused seconds before by raging currents and loose ice.

RCMP said Wednesday five persons—one from Musgravetown and four from Port Blandford—are missing, but it could not be confirmed that they were in the cars which went into the water, although they were expected to cross the causeway. Names were not released.

William Greening, a Port Blandford resident who lives about 150 yards from the causeway, said Wednesday he saw two cars plunge into the hole, where the bridge section had been.

Mr. Greening said he and his wife heard a noise "like wood breaking off" and decided it was the bridge going out. Then he saw a car coming toward the bridge across Port Blandford harbor.

"I put my hand to the window and watched. The car, to my estimate, was going about 12 miles per hour. She came in and she just simply turned over . . . She showed me her red light where

she turned bottom up and she disappeared."

Mr. Greening said he phoned the RCMP, got his coat and "went across the causeway. I was just two minutes too late to save the second car. I watched him. He went out and he disappeared. He never put on his breaks."

Dragging operations were carried out Wednesday, although hampered by strong tides and heavy rafting ice which caused the bridge to go out.

Mr. Greening, a 60-year-old war veteran who stopped three other cars from plunging into the waters, estimated the current running through the hole at about 20 knots. The RCMP said there was 18 to 20 feet of water.

A spokesman for the highways department here said engineers are at the scene surveying the damaged causeway and it is expected that the trans-island traffic will be stopped for a considerable time.

Last spring high tides and rafting ice washed out the bridge in the same place and the road was closed for about three weeks.

Dragging operations for the two cars will continue today.

Work on the bridge started January 7 and quick repairs were necessary as this was the only road connecting St. John's with Port aux Basques. Work crews reconstructed the bridge by working from both ends at the same time and it was officially opened on January 24, 1963.

The Department of Highways published a tender on March 14, 1963 for a reinforced concrete bridge to replace the wooden structure built in January. Premier Joey Smallwood announced on June 13, 1963 that all 1500 wooden bridges across Newfoundland would be replaced within the next eight to ten years.

