

Life on the Pamlico

The Church Moved by the Hand of God

By Jamie Mills and Daniele Nixon



The Original Wooden Church "Moved By the Hand of God"

Introduction

By: Jamie C. Mills

The people of Swan Quarter know what kind of miracles God can perform. The people of this small town can sure tell you how God has touched their lives with His wonders and the mysterious ways He works.

On December 19, 1992, Dr. Roy Armstrong , Daniele Nixon, and I enjoyed a unique hour with Ms. Carolyn Harris, a neighbor and member of Providence United Methodist Church. A resident of Swan Quarter, N. C., and a native of Hyde County, Ms. Harris is a polite, funny, and exciting lady. She became a member of Providence United Methodist Church in 1941, when she married. She's a retired high school English teacher, and now she shares her knowledge of "The Church Moved by the Hand of God" with tourists and passersby, and she is a faithful member of Providence United Methodist Church.

The people of Swan Quarter will always remember the story of the moving of Providence United Methodist Church, which occurred during a hurricane in 1876 when the church literally floated down the street, made a 90 degree turn and stopped at its present location. The members, like Ms. Harris, keep the legend alive.

After a short wait, we were greeted by a waving and smiling Ms. Harris who was returning from an after-church luncheon.

Life: This wooden building is the original building?

Ms. Harris: Yes, the wooden building is. These steps have been put here. I don't know what kind of foundation they had back in 1876, probably brick.

Life: [We moved inside the old wooden building that had "moved."]

Ms. Harris: As I said, this is the main building.

Life: [Congregation in 1876 according to a plaque.]

Ms. Harris: When they [the Methodists] wanted to buy this lot, the man wouldn't sell it to them, so they built the church where the courthouse is, right down there about, I don't know, 300 to 400 yards. Somebody gave them a lot, and they put the church on that lot. Then that storm came in 1876, a few day before it [the church] was to be dedicated. The tide came up so high and washed it off the blocks and it made that right angle turn down there across from the courthouse, and it came and settled on this spot.

Life: Is that right?!

Ms. Harris: That's right!

Life: That's interesting! What was the man's name who wouldn't sell them the lot?

Ms. Harris: Sadler

Life: And that was this lot right here?

Ms. Harris: Basically this lot.

Life on the Pamlico

Life: Yes, ma'am, this lot. And so somebody else gave them a lot and they built the church. Then the storm came and moved the church around here to the lot where they originally wanted it?

Ms. Harris: That's where they wanted it.

Life: Do you know why he [Sadler] didn't want to sell the lot?

Ms. Harris: It was a prize; it was the highest spot in the town.

Life: Oh, and it was so valuable that he just more or less wanted to keep it for himself?

Ms. Harris: I don't know about that; I just know he wouldn't sell it to them.

Life: Do you know who gave them the lot that they built it on originally? Was that given, or did they buy it?

Ms. Harris: I'm not sure. I heard somebody let them have the lot. I don't know whether they gave it or not. I think his name was Hayes, but I don't know.

Life: How long have you been in the church?

Ms. Harris: [Laughing] Well, I wasn't raised in this church; I've been here since 1941. My church was Soule Church across from Mattamussett School.

Life on the Pamlico

Life: Has the church always been a pretty strong institution as far as you know?

Ms. Harris: Rather strong. Now, when they got ready to build this brick sanctuary, the man who lived over here, Mr. Spencer, bought the [original] building and used it for a barn for a number of years. My best friend, as a child, played in it as a barn.

Life: Oh, is that right!

Ms. Harris: Right, but we had a minister, Mr. Newton, in the '30's, who said anything with that kind of history should be kept restored. So these people right here [showing picture], Mr. Berry, bought the building and gave it to the church, so they began to restore it. I'm sure they had to put new windows in, but they were like the originals.

Life: Yes, ma'am.

Ms. Harris: And then, there's a window over the window, and that's the way the windows were all over the building. When they bought it back and started restoring it, they put in this partition here and we made Sunday school rooms out of it. But it was just one building with no partitions, just the four outside walls. Then this partition was put in, that partition was put in, all these walls were put in after it was bought back [walls separated the kitchen, bathrooms, and classrooms]. And we had folding doors here, so we made two classrooms here.

Life: Oh, yes, that's nice! Looks like you have some old tables?

Life on the Pamlico

Ms. Harris: Well, they just need painting [laughing]. They're about as old as this building is, I reckon, since it's been moved.

Life: Let me get this straight, now; the church moved in the storm.

Ms. Harris: That's right. The tide, "toid" as we say!

Life: Was that storm a hurricane?

Ms. Harris: Yes.

Life: And that was 1876?

Ms. Harris: Right.

Life: And then the church became a barn; it wasn't used for a while.

Ms. Harris: Oh, yes, the building was used after it moved here in 1876. It was used until 1913, when they built the sanctuary [larger brick church in front].

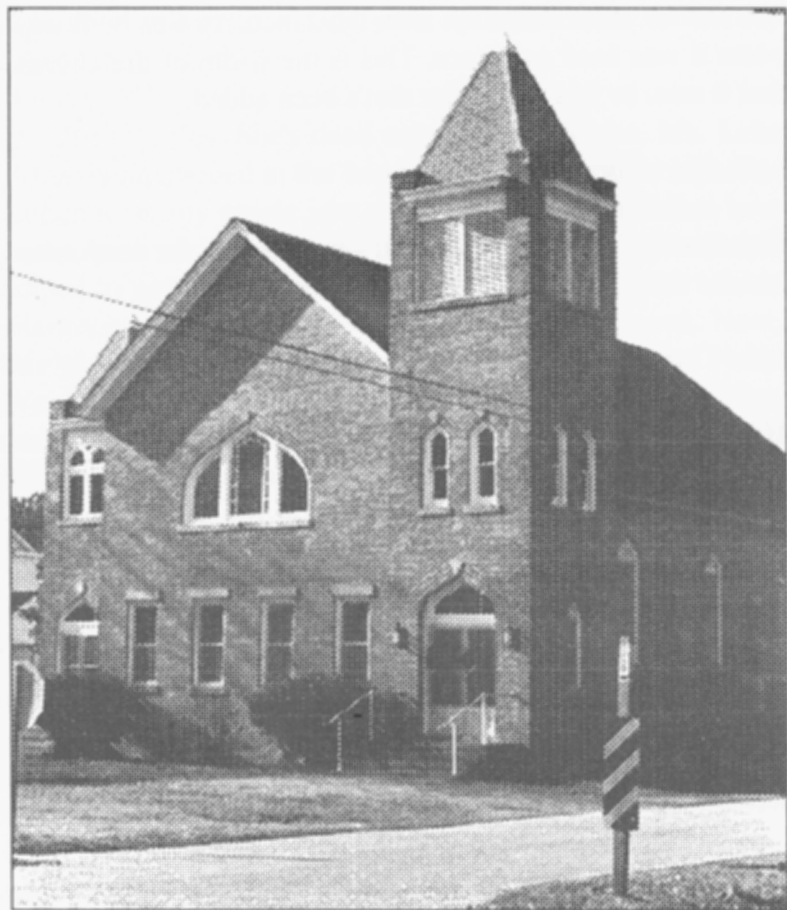
Life: Right. When was it used for a barn?

Ms. Harris: Between 1913 and 1939, I think.

Life: When was this front part built?

Ms. Harris: Circa 1912 and 1913.

Life on the Pamlico



Brick Church Built in 1912 or 1913; Older Wooden Church Attached in Rear

Life: So they were just using this as a barn, and then they realized the value of this building.

Life on the Pamlico

Ms. Harris: Yes. Actually, after the sanctuary was built was when it was used as a barn. This is the width of the church that it was, so this is the part that's been added.

Life: Oh, okay, I see.

Ms. Harris: This is the part that's been added for restrooms and for the kitchen.

Life: They really added right much. Yes, it's real nice.

Ms. Harris: So then they did restore it. You see over the window[plaques with names]. I don't know; they were some of the older people who were here in the church then. I don't think they gave the windows, but I think they just wanted to make a memorial.

Life: What are the original church and the wooden addition used as now?

Ms. Harris: A fellowship hall. These rooms are the classrooms. This is the seventh year that this church has sponsored preschool, and we have the young adults Sunday school class in here. They left the chairs in here today because preschool is out for the Christmas holidays.

Life: Did anyone see the church move in the storm?

Ms. Harris: You know, I really don't know about that. I have only known one person who was a little girl who saw it move, and she said she stood at her window and saw the church float down the street [laugh].

Life on the Pamlico

Life: You talked to a lady who as a child saw it actually move?

Ms. Harris: Yes. She's dead now. But her name, Ms. Lelia Brinn, is mentioned in the brochure. This brochure is just as authentic as any article you will read. This information here is the truth as we know it. I was on that committee that helped to get these brochures up. But the lady, who was in charge, our historian Ms. Marina Baum, is deceased. Now, this plaque over here in memory of Moses Jackson Hunt. We don't know just what year he was here; but from what we've been able to gather, about five years, after the church moved, he was the pastor.

Life: Is this his picture?

Ms. Harris: That's his picture. In 1976, we were getting ready to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the moving, and I was over here practicing for a wedding. This young couple came in up the front, so we got up and went out to see who it was. She was the great-great granddaughter of Moses Jackson Hunt. She and her husband were in service, but they were on furlow and had started to Nags Head. So she said she wanted to come to this church because she had been here as a child.

Life: Let me get a picture of y'all around that picture [of Moses Jackson Hunt].

Ms. Harris: You don't want me in it, do you?

Life: Oh, yes, certainly. Yes, ma'am [laughing].

Life on the Pamlico

Ms. Harris: So I told her that we were celebrating in September 1976--that's when it moved, and she said, "Well, I want you to invite my parents." So we invited her parents and her grandparents. This man right here, Lynn Ross Hunt, and this was the girl's mother [pointing at her picture]; that's her grandfather. So he and his wife and his couple came to the celebration [pointing at pictures] in 1976, and they were so impressed that they decided they wanted to come back. So Mr. Hunt, Lynn Ross, he was here; and, incidentally, he is the uncle of our governor, Jim Hunt. And this is Jim Hunt's father, right there [looking at his picture]. Well, anyway, they wanted to come back and bring this plaque. So, we had Hunt day in 1977. Fourteen of them came. This [pointing to picture] is the Hunt family, grandchildren of Moses Jackson Hunt. Those are cousins and spouses. So this is the Hunt family and this was our minister then, Nevin Synder. That is Mr. Lynn Ross Hunt, who was the instigator of it. And this is Carl Cahoon, who was the chairman of the board then and whose death we are still mourning. He died suddenly this fall, and it was such a shock. He was such a valuable person in all aspects of our life and Hyde County.

Life: Do you know who came up with this scripture that seems so appropriate, "The Place Which The Lord Thy God Hath Chosen" It really fit, doesn't it?

Ms. Harris: It may have been Mr. Berry's son, but I don't know who came up with this scripture. Morgan Harris, who is our superintendent of schools now, did this plaque in here and the one outside too.

Life on the Pamlico

Life: We were just impressed also with how beautiful the brick church is!

Ms. Harris: Have you been in it?

Life: No, ma'am.

Ms. Harris: The burned down candles were used in the Christmas program and also for the Sunday morning worship.

Life: [Inside the larger brick church built in 1912 and 1913] Wow! This is beautiful. I've never seen anything like this setup. This is nice. This is a beautiful church.

Ms. Harris: We had our Christmas program here last Sunday.

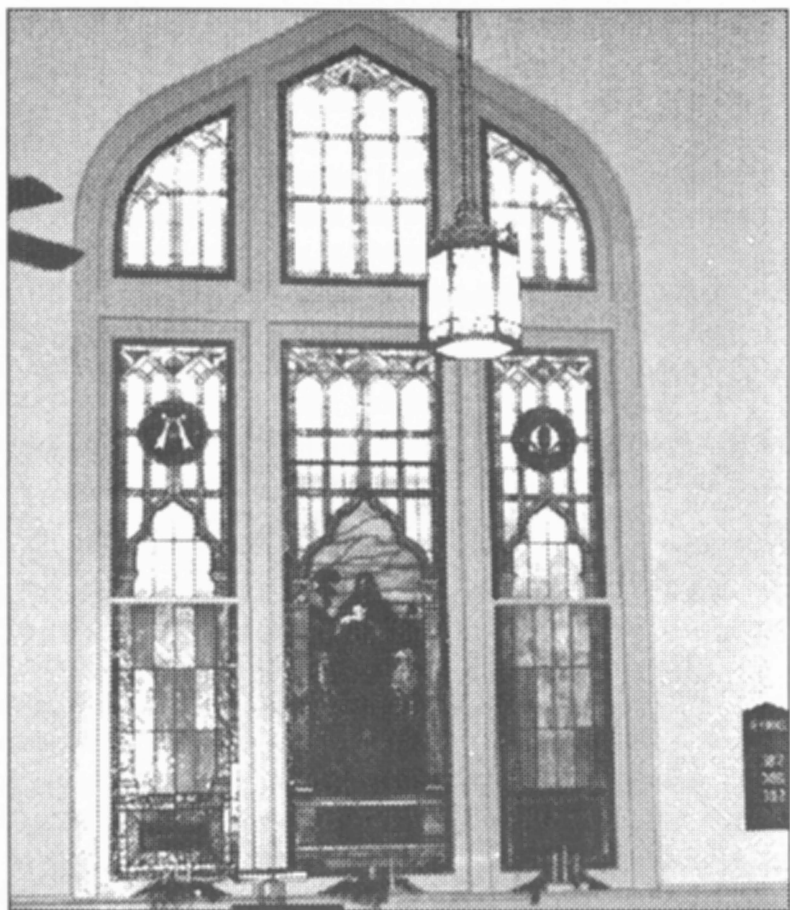
Life: Was this balcony built originally?

Ms. Harris: Yes, everything in here is original with this church. I don't know why they built a balcony then. It was in 1912-1913. Before they remodeled that old church, Sunday school classes were held in this sanctuary as well as worship services. Children's classes were held in the balcony and the adult class met in the room behind these fold-in doors. Today they are opened for weddings and funerals.

Life: This is a beautiful church!

Ms. Harris: I'll tell you, I've seen many stained-glass windows, but that one above the organ is the most beautiful one I've ever seen.

Life on the Pamlico



Stained-Glass in Newer Sanctuary

Life: Oh, yes!

Ms. Harris: The most meaningful, you know, with Jesus and the sheep and the shepherds.

Life on the Pamlico

Life: Do you have a lot of people that come to see the church or hear about the legend?

Ms. Harris: We have people coming by most all the time. I live right over there, so I come over here when I see some strangers [laughing].

Life: [Laughing] When we were standing outside, the people riding by were probably saying, "Look at these tourists taking pictures of this church!"

Ms. Harris: No, we're used to it!

Life: So there's a lot of people who enjoy coming to see this church?

Ms. Harris: Yes.

Life: I've never seen anything set up like this. It's beautiful [pastor seating].

Ms. Harris: There are not very many with the chancel/altar area in a corner. I tell you, sometimes it's not so pretty when you're trying to decorate for a wedding or something [laughing].

Life: The people in the church, are they close, like a family?

Ms. Harris: Fairly close, yes. We have a wonderful young adult class. See, Swan Quarter is a small place.

Life: Yes, ma'am.

Life on the Pamlico

Ms. Harris: But we have about eight couples in our young adult Sunday school class, and I think that is marvelous, with a Christian church, a Baptist church, a Holiness church, and we did have a Episcopal church, but it closed because they did have so few people.

Life: Do you know Ms. Mildred Gibbs?

Ms. Harris: Mildred Gibbs down to Gull Rock? Yes, I know her.

Life: She's associated with a very old Methodist church.

Ms. Harris: Oh, yes, the church down to Engelhard, Gull Rock, The Bethany Methodist church.

Life: Has this interior been changed much since 1913?

Ms. Harris: This has not been changed any; this is just how it was built. It has been painted, of course. The heating and cooling system has been added and even the chandeliers have been added. I don't know what kind of lights they had in here before.

Life: Are these the original pews?

Ms. Harris: As far as I know, they are.

Life: About how many members do you have?

Ms. Harris: We have about 60, now. There [pointing] is our enrollment in Sunday school, 59. It's a very small

Life on the Pamlico

membership but an active group of people, especially our young adult class.

Life: You are fortunate to have young people. A lot of these churches in smaller towns in the East are closing up.

Ms. Harris: We're, indeed, fortunate.

Life: It seems that many young people are moving out of the East.

Ms. Harris: If they can't make a living on the water and they don't farm, they have to go somewhere else.

Life: Do you see anything happening here to revitalize the area?

Ms. Harris: Maybe they are going to get a prison here. That might do something for our county.

Life: It looks like it could have a potential for tourism, for fishing, hunting, and that sort of thing.

Ms. Harris: The Chamber of Commerce is working on something to promote tourism.

Life: What about Lake Mattamuskeet?

Ms. Harris: They are redoing or reworking the old [Mattamuskeet] lodge and some of the other buildings that were built.

Life on the Pamlico

Life: We were commenting driving from Belhaven about how beautiful the land is.

Ms. Harris: It's rich land. See, the young people have come back from farm families. This Carl Cahoon I mentioned has three sons; they have acre after acre after acre. The Tunnel Farms, the Spencers over about two miles from here, are large farming operations. These young men were born on the farm and have inherited much of their land. Young people who were not born to be a farmer or a fisherman have to go elsewhere. Some of us who were teachers were able to stay home.

Life: You were a teacher?

Ms. Harris: Yes, 42 years.

Life: Oh, that's great! What area did you teach in?

Ms. Harris: I taught English.

Life: When did you retire?

Ms. Harris: In 75; I'm old! In fact, yesterday was my birthday.

Life: Happy Birthday!

Ms. Harris: I'm proud of my age; I'm glad I'm here.

Life: Has the church because of its history attracted other publications?

Life on the Pamlico

Ms. Harris: Even "Riply's Believe It or Not."

Life: The story of the church is pretty well known?

Ms. Harris: Yes.

Ms. Harris: [Reading from the brochure] The last paragraph here, the members think the old church moved by the hands of God is still moving and is sending out worthy citizens far and near.

Life: That's a wonderful thought!

Ms. Harris: We kind of believe that. We're so happy that we can sponsor this preschool; we feel that we are continuing to move on.

Life on the Pamlico

Conclusion

By: Daniele Nixon

Our brief visit to Providence United Methodist Church and talk with Ms. Carolyn Harris were exciting, enjoyable, and very interesting. The movement of the church in the storm has amazed many people. These people have different views about what really happened. Some say that the Providence Church moved by coincidence, but others, including us after talking to Ms. Harris, believe that the church was moved by the hand of God, according to the scripture, "The place which the Lord thy God hath chosen" Deut. XII. The members of the Providence United Methodist Church believe it is still moving and is sending out worthy Christians far and near.



Ms. Carolyn Harris, with Daniele Nixon and Jamie Mills