

Swans Quarter – Church Moved by the Hand of God

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

In 1876 a phenomenon of biblical proportions happened in a very small coastal community in North Carolina. Today, the townsfolk of the Village of Swan Quarter still convey the story of the “Church Moved by the Hand of God”.

Back in 1876, the Methodists of Swan Quarter were keenly aware of flooding issues from heavy rain and high tides due to storm events. As a result, they sought property to build their new church that was less prone to typical flooding. Their efforts to purchase a specific vacant lot were unsuccessful, so the church was built near the heart of the town on Oyster Creek Road.

On September 19, 1876, just three days after a church dedication for the completed sanctuary, a vicious storm ravaged North Carolina’s coast. As in storm events in the past, the Village of Swan Quarter was flooded once again. The day after the storm, the still flooded community began surveying the homes that were damaged or destroyed. In the destruction, something truly astonishing was happening. The Methodist church had floated off its foundation and was gingerly sailing down Oyster Creek Road. Residents tried roping the church to tether it from floating off, but the church proved to be too strong. As the church meandered in the waters through the town, it miraculously took a right turn down a different road. It continued for two or more blocks before taking a change of course and settling neatly in a vacant lot – the same lot that the church had unsuccessfully sought to purchase once before. The land was deeded to the church shortly after its maiden and only voyage.

Today, the church continues to stand not only as a vestige of a miracle, but also as a sign of the Village of Swan Quarter’s long history of flooding. In 2010, the Village of Swan Quarter’s lowland geography is no different than it was in 1876 – with one exception, ocean tides are higher.

To address flooding issues that have become more frequent due to wind tides and rain events, the Swan Quarter Watershed Work Plan began in 1965. The project would provide a way to help protect Swan Quarter from wind tides from the Pamlico Sound, and would help impede saltwater intrusion, which damages immensely valuable cropland in Hyde County. Originally, the plan called for 17.7 miles of dikes, 2.9 miles of channel improvements, three pumping plants and 16 tide gates.

In 2002 a supplement to the original work plan was created through a cooperative conservation partnership effort between Hyde County Commissioners, Hyde Soil and Water Conservation District, North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the US Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The supplement planned for the remaining 33,194 linear feet of dike, 4,606 linear feet of polyvinyl chloride sheet piling, 10 pipes and 28 tide gates. The supplement not only supports the original purpose of the project (a buffer from growing wind tides and saltwater intrusion), but will have added benefits to wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, and agricultural economy.

Due to insufficient funding, the project is being implemented in phases. In total, the complete project consists of 13 phases. Phases one through 11 have been completed and phase 12 is nearing completion. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, phase 13 has the funding support, at total of \$5,280,858,

needed to complete a project 45 years in the making. Through Recovery Act funds, not only will this immensely important project come to a long awaited end for the Village of Swan Quarter, but with completion comes a more stabilized agricultural economy and governmental infrastructure. Furthermore, it will provide over \$707,000 of annual benefit by reducing damages to residential properties, roads, bridges and cropland.

With funding in place, the more than 2,000 people that reside in the Swan Quarter Watershed will feel more secure in their economic stability when they drive by, work near and live close to a finished Swan Quarter Watershed Project – but the “Church Moved by the Hand of God” will continue to be a testament of the extraordinary journey they have navigated.