

# The Perquimans Weekly

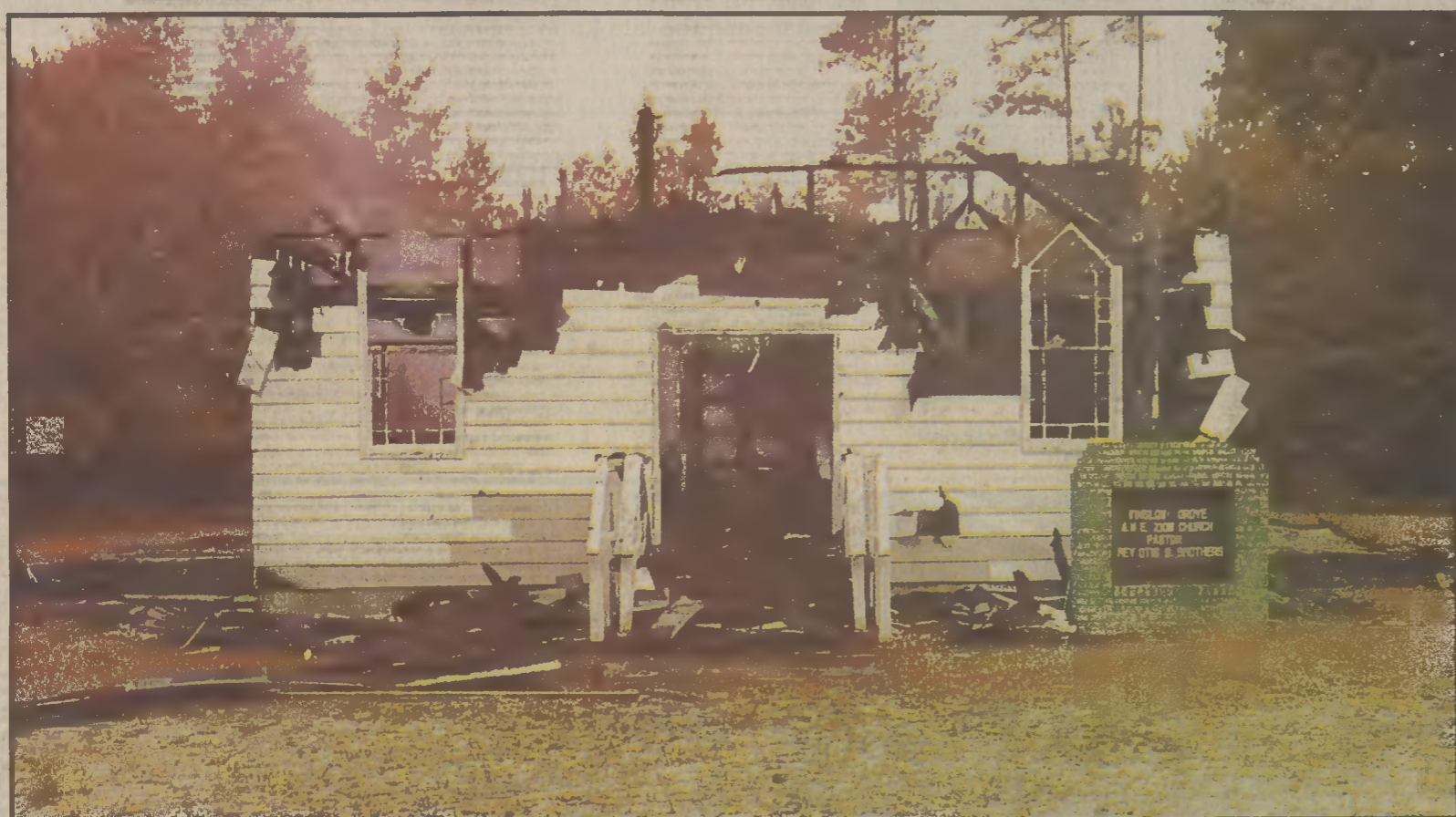
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Hertford, North Carolina 27944

## NATURE'S FURY/LIGHTNING STRIKES



PHOTOS BY SUSAN R. HARRIS

Lightning struck Winslow Grove A.M.E. Zion Church in Belvidere Monday night, sparking a blaze that completely

destroyed the historic structure. Five fire departments responded to the fire at the 111-year-old structure.

## Fire destroys local church

### Blaze blamed on lightning striking steeple

By SUSAN R. HARRIS  
Editor

The steeple bell that had called a community to worship for many years may have attracted the lightning that destroyed a Belvidere church Monday night.

Winslow Grove A.M.E. Zion Church lay smoldering Tuesday morning after an apparent lightning strike to the church steeple sparked a blaze late Monday night. All that remained standing were the front and back walls of the structure. A lone pew, its end broken, lay in front of church, one of the only remnants of the historic structure that escaped the blaze.

Firefighters were dispatched to the church just before 11 p.m. Monday. Sheriff David Lane said Belvidere-Chappell Hill firefighters Bernie Winslow, Jimmy Chappell and Kenneth Winslow were first on the scene. They arrived to find the steeple fully engulfed, according to fellow

firefighter Jennifer Layden. The flames soon swept through the 111-year-old wood frame building.

Aside from the bench, only the collection plates and a certificate were salvaged from the building. The church Bible was recovered, but sustained significant damage, Layden said.

Fire personnel were called back to the scene Tuesday morning around 7:25 when the blaze rekindled.

In addition to firefighters from Belvidere-Chappell Hill, Hertford, Winfall, Hobbsville and Crossroads, also on the scene were Lane and deputy Ersal Overton. Lane said he interviewed the first responders as well as the motorist who spotted the blaze. Firefighters reported that they arrived to find both entry doors to the church locked and all windows down and secured. Fire personnel had to break the doors to gain entry to fight the fire, Lane said. The windows broke when the water used to fight the flames hit the hot glass.

The sheriff said he was on the scene within a minute of receiving the call. The fire was reported by a



A lone pew lays on the ground at the Winslow Grove A.M.E. Zion Church site. The bench, a certificate and offering plates were all that escaped the fire unscathed. The church Bible was recovered, but sustained significant damage.

Perquimans County resident who was notified by a passing motorist that the steeple was on fire. Lane said the motorist reported seeing lightning hitting "all around the area" when he passed the church.

Based on his investigation and the fact that there was a heavy metal bell housed in the steeple, Lane said he suspects no foul play.

Several of the church's 29 members and its pastor, Rev. Otis Brothers, gathered at the site while firefighters battled the blaze. Brothers said he was notified of the fire at his home in Woodville by one of the church members.

The minister said he expects to meet with church members this week to begin making plans for a location

in which to worship and to raise funds to rebuild the church. A small fellowship building on the church grounds was unharmed, but Brothers said it is too small for services.

Church treasurer Annie Gordon opened a building fund at Centura Bank, Hertford, Tuesday morning. Anyone wishing to donate to the fund may send a check to Winslow Grove A.M.E. Zion Church Building Fund, C/O Centura Bank, P.O. Box 219, Hertford, N.C. 27944.

The fire call was the third received by the Hertford unit Monday night. Firefighters responded to Perquimans County High School twice earlier in the evening when the school's alarm self-activated.



PHOTO BY SUSAN HARRIS

Perquimans County Forest Ranger Clarence Watson (left) and Cooperative Extension Agent Lewis Smith measure a forest stewardship tract.

## Forestry Service activities varied

By SUSAN R. HARRIS  
Editor

There's a lot more to the N.C. Forestry Service than putting water on forest fires and dressing up as Smokey Bear.

Perquimans County Ranger Clarence Watson counted among his department's projects over the past year forest management, reforestation and cost-share, fire control, sedimentation and stream obstruction, pest control and urban assistance, and information and education activities.

The forest stewardship program is "one of the best to come down through the state from the federal level," according to Watson. This year, two stewardship forests were certified. The projects encompassed 125 acres of land. The plans were prepared by the Forest Service with technical and professional assistance from other county agencies.

A stewardship plan is constructed according to goals of individual landowners. A landowner must own a minimum of 10 acres of woodland to qualify for the program. Plans which include the landowners' ideas are drawn up under at least two of four categories: forestry, wildlife, soil and water, and recreation. Generally, plans have a working schedule of 10 years. Perquimans has 28 tracts of land in the program.

Examples of uses of the land incorporated into stewardship plans vary because of the individual wants and needs of landowners. One landowner opted to clear a trail through the woods upon which to ride horses. Another sought to protect wildlife and fowl by providing a habitat including food and shelter.

The agencies whose personnel work together to plan the forest management projects form the Perquimans County Stewardship Committee. Members are Watson; Herb Crase, N.C. Forest Service; Tommy Riddick, Farm Services Agency; Lewis Smith, Cooperative Extension; Dwayne Hinsen, Natural Resources Conservation Service; and Dale Davis, N.C. Wildlife.

Forestry personnel also assisted in re-establishing 477 acres into productive forest land. Through the Reforestation and Cost-Share Program, over \$17,246 of state and federal money was distributed to landowners.

In addition, 10 forestry plans were prepared on a total of 304 acres. The plans assisted landowners in the management of their standing timber. Thirty-six forest regeneration plans were prepared on a total of 1,548 acres.

One of the Forestry Service's growing problems is outbreaks of southern pine beetles. The varmints can wipe out a stand of timber. Last year, 85 landowners were assisted with outbreaks of southern pine beetles existing on 563 acres of forest land. Outbreaks were controlled by cutting the spot and a 100-foot buffer zone to stop the insect's movement. Although some areas are now beetle-free, Watson said the insects continue to destroy timber here.

Watson said many people are not aware of the varied services offered by the N.C. Forestry Service. County residents interested in finding out more about any of the programs offered by the service may contact Watson at 426-5551.

## Yates on task force

From staff reports

Gov. Jim Hunt announced the 21 members of a new task force designed to find ways to protect churches around the state from racially-motivated fires and other acts of racial and religious violence. Winfall Mayor Fred Yates is among those appointed.

The task force includes state Attorney General Mike Easley, who will serve as chairman, Sec. of Crime Control and Public Safety Richard Moore, SBI Director Jim Coman, state Sen. Jeanne Lucas of Durham, state Rep. William Wainwright of Havelock, Skip Alston of Greensboro, acting state president of the NAACP, and sever-

al law enforcement officials, citizens and ministers.

Recently, Hunt traveled to Washington, D.C. with other southern governors to meet with President Bill Clinton, Vice-President Al Gore, Attorney General Janet Reno and other members of Clinton's cabinet to discuss the federal government's response and other measures to fight the rash of church fires.

Hunt created the task force to develop strategies to protect religious freedom for all North Carolina citizens.

Hunt and the legislative Black Caucus are developing legislation to stiffen penalties for burning churches.

## Fireworks fund is short on donations

The 4th of July may lose some of its planned sparkle and boom if last-minute donations are not received to help pay for the fireworks show.

According to Diane Stallings, coordinator of the event, donations are still \$1,500 under the cost of the fireworks.

Not only does the lack of funds jeopardize the fireworks show, but other activities for the day. With no money, there will not be

the street dance that traditionally accompanies the local Independence Day celebration.

Stallings would like to offer the street dance as well as other entertainment for the evening, but said that donations are necessary in order to provide additional activities.

Donations to the fireworks fund may be made to Fireworks Fund, C/O NationsBank, P.O. Box 46, Hertford, N.C. 27944.

## Outside

THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
High: 80s Low: 70s PARTLY SUNNY	High: 80s Low: 70s PARTLY SUNNY	High: 80s Low: 70s PARTLY SUNNY