

CHAPTERS IN TRINITY'S HISTORY
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CHAPTER I - PROLOGUE

In the aftermath of the American Revolution, all segments of South Carolina society were in disarray. The lowcountry had been devastated by the British during their occupation and the backcountry riven by a bloody civil war between patriots and Tories.

The church of England was established as the official church in South Carolina in 1706. For three-quarters of a century, a minority of the population had enjoyed having their basic religious expenses (buildings, clergy, and occasionally schools) paid for by all of the taxpayers of the colony. The South Carolina Constitution of 1778 dis-established the church, but permitted the former Anglican parishes to retain title to all parish property.

Being able to retain churches, parsonages, and glebe lands did help keep the denomination viable, but there were very few clergy remaining in the state. In 1776 there had been twenty-two parishes ministered to by twenty clergy. After the Revolution, the number of clergy was reduced to a handful. The property that remained in church hands was in disrepair. Outside Charleston, the fledgling Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina was virtually dormant.

Although many Anglicans had fought for South Carolina during the Revolution and the state's founding fathers to a man were Anglicans/Episcopalians, the taint of treason lingered around the church like the smell of Charleston's plough mud at low tide. Settlers in the backcountry viewed the church with hostility as an agent of the state's ruling political elite centered in Charleston. Anything that smacked of the lowcountry or more especially the city was distrusted, even despised.

One concession that the backcountry wrung from a reluctant lowcountry was the removal of the state capital from Charleston to the interior. Although the General Assembly voted in 1786 to move the capital from Charleston to the banks of the Congaree River, it was not until the Constitution Convention of 1790 that the new village of Columbia was confirmed forever as the state's capital.

When the Constitutional Convention met in the newly-constructed cluster of buildings on the Congaree, the place could hardly have been dignified by the term village. It was little more than a clearing in the wilderness. There were no churches or schools. Methodist circuit riders visited the area regularly and had a somewhat organized congregation. The Presbyterians formed a congregation and called a minister in 1794. Both denominations used the State House for their services into the early years of the nineteenth century.

Columbia grew slowly, but the chartering of the South Carolina College in 1801 gave the town a big boost. The College was one of a series of political hush puppies that the lowcountry tossed to the backcountry to stifle moves for equal legislative representation. The lowcountry elite was well aware of being a minority within the white population and realized that sooner or later the more populous backcountry would gain the upper hand. If that were to be the case, then at least the backcountry's leaders should be well-educated men, or at least well-educated enough to start thinking like lowcountrymen. In proposing the new college, Governor John Drayton said, "The friendships of young men would thence be promoted and strengthened throughout the state, and our political union much advanced thereby."

The impulse which led lowcountrymen to mold backcountry youth into their image occurred in other spheres as well. The Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina entered the nineteenth century more or less as a diocese. In 1809, the Reverend Theodore Dehon of Boston accepted the call of St. Michael's Church in Charleston. The very next year he spearheaded the formation of the Society for the Advancement of Christianity in South Carolina (often referred to as the S.A.C.), modeled after the English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. In 1812, Dehon was elected Bishop of South Carolina. He then proceeded to use the S.A.C. as the instrument for expanding the Episcopal Church into the backcountry. Trinity, Columbia, was the first fruit of the seeds Dehon planted in 1810.