

CHAPTERS IN TRINITY'S HISTORY
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CHAPTER II - AN EPISCOPAL OUTPOST IN THE BACKCOUNTRY

Columbia at the turn of the nineteenth century was little more than a country crossroads despite its being the state capital. Slowly, it began to acquire the institutions of the more settled portions of the state. Communications with the coast were sporadic until 1804 when a regular weekly mail service was established between the capital city and Charleston.

The following year the little village was incorporated, but incorporation did not bring with it any appearance of permanence. Thomas Hooker, a visiting clergyman, commented on its temporary appearance: "Everything has a shackling, flimsy look: joints are parting, boards are coming off, and plastering is full of cracks and breaks." The absence of brick structures gave Columbia a typical frontier town look. There was no shortage of clay for bricks, but there was no limestone for mortar. The early inhabitants used clay as a substitute for mortar in chimneys, but hesitated to use it for buildings. Limestone had to be imported and, during the first twenty-five years of Columbia's existence, was a particularly expensive building material. With the abundance of pine, poplar, and oak timber in the immediate vicinity, early residents saw no need for brick structures.

Among the first brick buildings in town were those of the South Carolina College which opened its doors to students in January 1805. The opening of the college coupled with the spread of cotton production into the backcountry added some stature to the village. So, too, did the organization of religious bodies and the erection of churches. The first houses of worship were constructed of the same materials as the inhabitants' dwellings. Hooker described the Methodist Church as a very neat, pretty building, but inside the walls were not plastered and the seats were merely movable benches placed promiscuously on the floor.

Although the Methodists were the first denomination to have a permanent sanctuary, their organization in 1804 had been preceded by the Presbyterians a decade earlier. The Baptists had been active in the area for a number of years but did not organize a congregation in Columbia until 1807. Thus, by the time the Reverend Theodore Dehon arrived in South Carolina, there were already three Protestant churches in Columbia. The Episcopal Church was notable by its absence.

The formation of the Protestant Episcopal Society for the Advancement of Christianity in South Carolina (known as the S.A.C.) in July 1810 resulted from the dynamic leadership that Dehon brought to the Episcopal Church in the state. During the first two years of the organization's existence, it distributed prayerbooks, Bibles, and tracts. Early in the summer of 1812, the S.A.C. elected the Reverend Andrew Fowler, rector of St. Bartholomew's Parish in Colleton County, as its first paid missionary.

The organization appropriated \$500 for Fowler to spend six months in Columbia. The choice of Columbia as the site of the group's initial outreach effort was due in no small part to Bishop Dehon's keen awareness of the importance of establishing an Episcopal presence in the town that was both the seat of state government and the location of the South Carolina College. When the Bishop and the S.A.C. sent Fowler to Columbia, little did they realize that they were embarking on the largest mission (in terms of funds eventually committed) that the society would ever undertake.

Andrew Fowler, a native of Connecticut, was fifty-one years old when he became the S.A.C.'s missionary in the Carolina backcountry. He arrived in Columbia in July 1812. Within a month, on 8 August 1812, he had gathered eleven very respectable members of the community to form the nucleus of an Episcopal congregation. The group gathered in the Senate Chamber of the old State House which had served as an initial meeting place for other denominations. The eleven founding members of what would later become Trinity Church, Columbia, were William Branthwaite, Warren Ransome Davis, Edward Fisher, Theodore Gaillard, James Sanders Guignard, John Gabriel Guignard, William Harper, William Marshall, Samuel Percival, Robert Stark, and Benjamin Waring.