Chapter IV - The Protestant Episcopal Church in Columbia

The Rev'd Mr. Fowler's mission in Columbia lasted but six months before he moved on to Trinity Church, Edisto. However, the men he had gathered together to organize the church were quite capable of seeing the endeavor through to fruition. The lay members of the congregation - with financial support from lowcountry Episcopalians - continued to meet and in 1813 obtained a charter from the General Assembly as The Protestant Episcopal Church in Columbia. The Assembly also donated four town lots on Marion street that were to be appraised and the land divided with Columbia's Presbyterian congregation. According to tradition, neither church was excited about being located next to the other and straws were drawn. First Church won and bought out Trinity's share and the Episcopalians then purchased property on Sumter Street across from the State House.

At the 1814 diocesan convention in Charleston, Bishop Theodore Dehon reported: "It is with pleasure I mention, that the congregation of Episcopalians in Columbia ... have, with the aid of donations for work, from many zealous and benevolent individuals of our community, finished arrangement for the erection, in that place, of a building for the purpose of Christian worship, according to the usages of our Church. This success of exertions, in a place where three years ago the Liturgy of our Church was scarcely known, affords encouragement to similar efforts in other places ..."

In March 1814, the cornerstone was laid for a neat wooden building that could seat 250-300 persons. All pews were enclosed and some were square which resulted in members sitting with their backs to the altar and pulpit. General Wade Hampton donated the organ; several lowcountry ladies provided appropriate hangings; and Elias Horry of Charleston gave the church its communion silver. In December of the same year Bishop Theodore Dehon traveled to Columbia to consecrate the sanctuary for the congregation that was now beginning to use the name of Trinity Church, Columbia. His consecration sermon, with its text of I Kings 8:66, was reprinted and widely circulated in this country and in England.

The joy surrounding the consecration service was overshadowed by the vestry's knowledge that the young congregation was in financial difficulties. The cost of the church was somewhere in the neighborhood of $4,500 to $5,000 ($44,000 to $49,000 in today's dollars). Some $2,500 had been raised and expended. There were outstanding pledges from Columbian and lowcountry Episcopalians. However, the disruption of trade and commerce caused by the British fleet during the War of 1812 caused an economic downturn. According to one of the wardens, Dr. Edward Fisher, the workers were owed a considerable balance.

In order to raise the necessary $2,000, Dr. Fisher, on behalf of the congregation, presented a petition to the General Assembly asking for permission to conduct a lottery. During the early nineteenth century, lotteries were considered an acceptable means for churches, fraternal organizations, and charities to raise money. Among the other churches which were authorized to hold lotteries were Prince George Winyah Episcopal Church in Georgetown, Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston, and St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church and First Presbyterian Church in Columbia.

Despite the relatively small sum (for example, Second Presbyterian in Charleston was trying to raise $60,000 and St. Peter's in Columbia would attempt to raise $20,000), the wardens and vestry went about creating an elaborate plan for the lottery. In early February 1815 they sent notices to newspapers in Charleston and Columbia and by mid-February announcements of the Trinity Lottery began to appear regularly.