

CHAPTERS IN TRINITY'S HISTORY
BY WALTER EDGAR

CHAPTER IX - AFTER SHERMAN

More than one-third of Columbia was destroyed the night of February 17, 1865, including the old State House, the central business district, a portion of downtown residences, and four churches: St. Peter's Roman Catholic, Ebenezer Lutheran, Washington Street Methodist, and Christ Episcopal. Much of downtown was a forest of broken chimneys standing watch over mounds of rubble. Breaking the plane of the desolate landscape were the granite hulk of the unfinished State House, the Gothic spire of the First Presbyterian Church, and the twin towers of Trinity.

Fortunately for the homeless the weather was unseasonably balmy. For several days the citizenry was in a state of shock, seemingly unable to comprehend what had happened. Very few dared to venture on the streets which were jammed with Union soldiers. Soldiers camped in the churchyard, but did little damage. Perhaps it was the presence of armed soldiers or simply the dazed condition of the populace, but there were no church services in Columbia the Sunday following the fire. Instead of pealing bells, there was an eerie silence broken only by the noise of soldiers preparing to depart - which they did on the 20th.

One of the first church services of which there is a record was a eucharist at Trinity - probably on March 5, the first Sunday of the month. Dr. Toomer Porter of Charleston recorded the scene: "We thanked God that so many could go to that feast, and sobs were heard from many of the women, and tears ran down the cheeks of the men. Reader, you would have had to be placed in like condition with us, to understand the full meaning of the first communion after that dreadful night."

When Sherman's forces departed they left behind five hundred cattle, medical supplies, and salt which were turned over to civilian authorities. These meager supplies staved off starvation, but they were not adequate to support the homeless and refugee population in town. Neighboring towns - Augusta, Charlotte, Greenville, and Sumter - sent wagonloads of food and clothing. Acting mayor James G. Gibbes appointed a committee to distribute the supplies. City officials launched a public relief campaign to which, in April, Trinity contributed \$200 in Confederate currency.

For Columbia - and much of South Carolina - the war was over, although it didn't officially end until Lee surrendered in Virginia on April 9 and Johnston surrendered in North Carolina on April 26. There were other commands in the west but most Columbians were either with Lee or Johnston. And, the men began returning home. Nowhere was their presence noted more than in the churches. As one observer noted: "Congregations once almost strictly feminine are now mingled with returned soldiers." In many churches, however, there was many a vacant seat in family pews.

South Carolina suffered a horrific death rate of between 31 and 35 percent of men in uniform - more than double the rate of Europeans who lost a generation of young men in World War I. Although it is difficult to estimate the number of men from Trinity who served in the war, there are ninety-eight Confederate veterans buried in the churchyard.

Eighteen young men from Trinity died during the war. There were eighty-six families in the congregation in 1860, one in six lost a relative. Four families suffered more than one loss: the Goodwyns, Hamptons, McCammons, and Trezevants. The impact of these losses would be felt for more than a generation. In later years when the parochial reports were broken down by gender, women outnumbered men by a ratio of 4:1.

Trinity parishioner Henry Timrod's stirring ode, "Carolina," concluded with the verse:

*Fling down thy gauntlet to the Huns,
And roar the challenge of thy guns,
Then leave the future to thy sons,
- Carolina!*