

CHAPTERS IN TRINITY'S HISTORY
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CHAPTER V - GROWING PAINS: 1815-1833

After an initial flurry of success, including hosting the first diocesan convention held outside Charleston, the young congregation faced a series of difficulties. First of all, the lottery did not yield anywhere near the participation that the vestry had anticipated. And there was a nasty public dispute in which the lottery winner, whose prize the vestry denied on a technicality, sued the congregation. She not only won her case and her prize, but the court ordered Trinity to pay her interest on her winnings! There was also a severe economic downturn in the aftermath of the War of 1812.

Despite financial problems, Trinity called the Rev'd Christian Hanckel, Professor of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the South Carolina College, as its rector. The vestry hoped that his faculty salary, supplemented by a stipend from Trinity, would be a satisfactory arrangement. However, the College's Board of Trustees announced that faculty could not simultaneously hold a parochial position. Thanks to the assistance of the Society for the Advancement of Christianity (S.A.C.), Hanckel's salary was guaranteed for three years, so he resigned from the faculty and assumed full-time duties as rector.

One of the successes of Hanckel's ministry in Columbia was the establishment of a Sunday School program designed for all children in the area, not just the children of parishioners. In the nineteenth century, a Sunday School was just that. There was some religious instruction, but the primary effort was teaching the 3R's to children who had no other opportunity for an education.

By 1819 the school had some two hundred young scholars, sixty of whom were black. Unfortunately, the intrusion of national affairs, specifically the debate over slavery and the admission of Missouri to the Union, led to the closing of the school for the religious instruction of black children. Bishop Nathaniel Bowen lauded Trinity's efforts and encouraged other congregations in the diocese to follow its lead.

Mr. Hanckel resigned in 1821 and was immediately succeeded by the Rev'd Patrick H. Folker. He expanded the Sunday School and attracted a number of new members to the church. In addition, a large proportion of young ladies and gentlemen connected with the Female Academy and the South Carolina College regularly attended services.

The increasing size of the congregation necessitated enlarging the church. Eighteen pews were added, bringing the total to sixty-one. It is probable that with this enlargement, the original wooden structure assumed the cruciform shape that it would have until demolished for the present sanctuary. As Trinity prospered, it did not forget those who had assisted its founding and come to its rescue after the War of 1812. Although one of the smaller congregations in the Diocese of South Carolina, Trinity was one of only four congregations that regularly contributed to the S.A.C.

By the end of the 1820s, however, the congregation certainly felt the collapse of the first cotton boom. As Carolinians began to trek southwestward to better lands, the population of the area began to decline, and so did membership in Columbia's churches, notably Washington Street Methodist and Trinity. The congregation was in arrears with its diocesan convention contribution (an earlier version of the diocesan quota). Other than special offering collections authorized by the vestry, the operations of the church were solely dependent on pew rentals.

The Rev. Mr. Folker resigned as rector in 1829 and it would be four years before there would be a permanent replacement. In the interim, the Rev'd Edward Phillips of Grace Church, Camden, visited on occasion, but most services were conducted by lay readers. Edward Fisher, M.D., and Robert Stark alternated Sundays. At the 1833 Convention of the Diocese, Bishop Bowen lamented that the important and interesting station of Trinity Church, Columbia, still remained unoccupied, although many efforts had been made to procure for it a suitable clergyman.