

CHAPTERS IN TRINITY'S HISTORY
BY WALTER EDGAR

CHAPTER VIII - THE WAR YEARS: 1860-1865

The renovation of Trinity's sanctuary, begun in August 1860, was not complete by the spring of 1862. On the exterior, transepts were added and the chancel extended to transform a rectangular edifice into a cruciform one. The chancel was extended at the same level as the nave. Apparently, at this time, the pews were reconfigured and a central aisle was added. Wartime shortages resulted in certain makeshift interior alterations that would not be replaced until the 1880s.

There was great rejoicing when the congregation learned that services would be held in the sanctuary on June 14 - Trinity Sunday. Mary Boykin Chesnut confided in her diary: "Glory be to God, as my Irish Margaret said as an opening discourse - Glory be to Him now - because they are washing the windows of Trinity Church. Hitherto Mr. Shand has used the college chapel . . . But we are going back to a real church." And no sooner had the congregation vacated the chapel than Confederate military authorities took over the entire college campus for a hospital.

During the war, Columbia's population doubled and Trinity's congregation grew by nearly one-third. Trinity, like churches of all denominations, was crowded during services, but seldom were there any men present. The number of funerals and weddings increased dramatically. The Barnwell family funeral (husband, wife, and child - all victims of typhoid) was "one of the saddest of the many sad scenes witnessed in Old Trinity Church in those dark days." Weddings were perhaps the only service that provided spots of cheer in wartime Columbia. Between 1843 and 1861, on average, there had been four weddings a year. In 1861, there were but two. In 1863 there were twenty-six. In September 1864, Mary Cantey Preston married Dr. John Darby. The bride wore diamonds, pearls, and a veil of blonde lace, but there was no reception following the ceremony. The Prestons were in mourning for the death of their son the previous July.

Inflation, crowding, and scarcity caused distress to many in the city. The Rev. Peter Shand kept a meticulous record of how he distributed alms to the needy of the parish (the parish being much of the city, not just members of Trinity). Since the 1840s, he had regularly distributed foodstuffs to those in need. During the war, the church's rector not only distributed food as he had in the past, but also clothing, medicine, shoes, and firewood. Nurses were employed to help tend the sick. A coffin was purchased for a child's burial. Travel expenses were given "to assist a poor woman to go home," "a poor woman to go see her son," and "a refugee to assist in going home."

Parish elections were held in 1864 - as they always were - on Easter Monday. Eleven men were elected, but six were away in uniform.

On February 1, 1865, General William Tecumseh Sherman began his march into South Carolina. Two weeks later his troops entered Columbia. During the night of February 17, fires raged throughout most of the downtown area. Most of the business district was destroyed. The parish rectory, less than a block from the church, was destroyed. As he fled the rectory, Peter Shand was accosted by Union troops who pistol-whipped him and stole a trunk containing the communion silver, the Alms Book, and a collection of his sermons. During the night that many Columbians compared to Dante's Inferno, the Sunday School building on Gervais Street was lost, but miraculously, the sanctuary itself was spared.