

## CHAPTERS IN TRINITY'S HISTORY

BY WALTER EDGAR

### CHAPTER XIV - HOSTING DIOCESAN CONVENTIONS

On October 15, Trinity will host the 88<sup>th</sup> convention of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina. This will be the latest in a series of conventions Trinity has hosted that dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. On December 7, 1815, delegates from the Diocese of South Carolina convened in Columbia; it was the first time the diocese had met anywhere other than Charleston. During his annual address, Bishop Theodore Dehon highlighted the visible success of his promotion of the expansion of the Episcopal Church into the backcountry: "It is pleasant to find the convention assembled this year in a place where but a few years ago the worship of our church had been unheard, and her character in a great measure unknown." Unfortunately there were not that many delegates - especially lay delegates - present to hear his remarks. Only about one-half the usual number of laymen were in attendance. Perhaps the fact that the convention coincided with the legislative session kept some delegates away; or, more likely, it was the rampant lowcountry parochialism which centered its world on Charleston. Of the fourteen lay delegates attending, four were from Trinity.

Prior to the convention, the lay delegates from St. Michael's were upset that the meeting was not occurring in Charleston - it had always been held in their church. By resolution, they informed the diocese that they intended to "use their utmost efforts to prevent, henceforward, any meeting of the Convention at any other place than Charleston." That location, they asserted would best serve the "general interest" of the Episcopal Church in South Carolina. Although the convention was well aware of the sentiments of the laymen from St. Michael's, no delegate from that parish attended the convention to speak for their cause. However, it would be twenty-two years before the convention would again meet outside Charleston. And when it did, it met at Trinity, in Columbia.

The occasion for the convention's meeting at Trinity in 1837 was to celebrate the congregation's twenty-fifth anniversary. It was a joyous occasion for the bishop and others who had promoted missionary work in the upcountry. Trinity had been through some lean years in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Then, in 1834, the Rev. Peter J. Shand had begun his ministry. By the time the convention met, a dwindling congregation of only five or six families now numbered forty-eight families. In its new prosperity, the congregation remembered its own struggles and contributed \$4200 [in 2009 dollars] toward the building of Trinity in Edgefield and \$23,400 to help defray the costs of the rebuilding St. Philip's in Charleston.

Despite the congregation's diocesan outlook and outreach, the 1837 convention suffered from the same lack of participation as that of 1815. There were only seven lay delegates present, two of whom represented the host parish. Lowcountry churchmen might want to have an Episcopal presence in the backcountry - a presence they were willing to support financially - but they were not willing to journey inland to see the results of their labors.

Since 1837, there have been numerous conventions of both the Diocese of South Carolina and the Diocese of Upper South Carolina held in Trinity. Most were rather routine affairs, but several literally made history. The 1876 convention voted not to admit St. Mark's Church, Charleston (a predominantly black congregation) into council with the convention. This decision caused a major rift between the laity and the clergy of the diocese that took years to heal. Following the division of the Diocese of South Carolina, the first convention of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina met in Trinity on October 10, 1922.