

Trinity Episcopal Church dates from 1842, a year prior to the construction of a clapboard building to accommodate Anglican worship in Abbeville. By 1858, an emergent congregation desired a finer structure. The architect, George E. Walker of Columbia, found inspiration in the magnificent Gothic cathedrals in Europe; his design seemed appropriate, as John de la Howe had asked that Abbeville be named after his native home in France. The cornerstone of the present building was laid on June 27, 1859, and thick masonry walls were assembled of handmade bricks to support a soaring spire. The church was consecrated by Bishop Thomas F. Davis on November 4, 1860, just two days before Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States.

Trinity Church houses a collection of rare, 19th-century American stained glass. According to a popular legend, the large chancel window was of English origin and survived the Union blockade of Charleston during the Civil War. Intended for a Northern congregation, so the lore was told, the vestry chose to keep the window and adapt it to the existing space. Current research, however, reveals the valuable window is likely the one originally conceived for the church.

Art historians attribute the chancel window to the studio of William Gibson, the “father of stained glass painting in America.” Stylistic similarities point to Gibson as the source of the “Suffer the Little Children” window and the iconic medallions adorning others. The Epiphany window depicting the Holy Family is the church’s only 20th-century stained glass. Crafted by J&R Lamb Studios, it is deftly situated to capture rays of sunlight throughout the day.

The church bell was a gift of J. Foster Marshall, a churchman and colonel who died in the Battle of Second Manassas. During the war, a Confederate officer allegedly proposed that it be melted to manufacture a cannon, but it was found that the bell was not constructed of the proper metal for munitions. J. D. Chalmers of Abbeville donated the marble baptismal font and communion table in 1860, the same year that the boxwood gardens were established outdoors. Wooden furnishings were made by a local craftsman, with grained pews consisting of single planks. A tracker organ was built by John Baker of Charleston from parts imported from England. The electric chandelier and lighting were presented by the Ladies’ Guild and installed in 1907.

The Rev. William Porcher Dubose, a veteran of the Battle of Second Manassas, served as rector from 1868 to 1871. A renowned theologian, he left Abbeville to become Chaplain at The University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. Trinity Episcopal Church and Cemetery has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places since 1971. Today the congregation aspires to preserve its legacy and extend God’s mission for generations to come.

Trinity Episcopal Church

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