

THE HUGUENOT CHURCH OF CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

c. 1844 - 1845

Southeast Corner of Church and Queen Streets

The Third Edifice on This Site

"On April 30, 1680, the ship, Richmond, from London, dropped anchor off Oyster Point, in the new Province of Carolina. The Richmond brought orders from King Charles II that the settlement be renamed Charlestown. It also brought forty five Huguenots-French Protestant refugees, etc."

"Like the Scottish Presbyterians, however, the French Huguenots were followers of John Calvin (1509-1564), brilliant Swiss religious reformer," A Short History of the French Protestant Huguenot Church of Charleston, South Carolina, by Marguerite Couturier Steedman. As the Huguenots were few in number and yet to retrieve their fortunes, they worshipped together with Presbyterians and Congregationalists in the White Meeting House, that haven of Non-conformists.

"By 1687, the first Huguenot Church in Carolina was built." This church survived until 1796, when it was blown up to prevent the spread of a raging fire that swept the neighborhood.

A second Huguenot Church was built on the same site in 1800, but closed in 1823. The second church was torn down in 1844, and by May of 1845, the present edifice designed by Edward Brickell White (1806-1882) was completed.

Though White was probably at his best in the design of buildings in the Classic manner, the Huguenot Church appears to have been his first essay in Gothic. When we consider that Pugin was a contemporary of White, it is interesting to note how soon this expression of romantic eclecticism appeared in Charleston. No doubt Pugin would have been unhappy that the vaulted ceiling was simulated in lath and plaster and that the flamboyant crestings of the buttresses, the gable end and the windows of the westfront were of cast iron and not of carved stone. However, such fidelity to precedent was impossible at that time and in this place. The proportions and the composition are well studied. The windows of clear glass have never been replaced and the interior presents an atmosphere of austere grace not inappropriate to the French Protestant spirit.