

PHILANDER CHASE (1775-1852)

18th Bishop of the Episcopal Church



Philander Chase was born December 14, 1775, in New Hampshire. His father was a farmer, and Chase grew up tending the farm – the skills learned would accompany him throughout his life.

He prepared himself to enter Dartmouth College in 1791. In the following year, he found the Book of Common Prayer, and after much study and use of it he became a member of the Episcopal Church. He persuaded his family, staunch Congregationalists, to join him.

Chase took his BA in 1795, and in 1796 married Mary Fay. Having served for years as a lay reader, he determined to seek holy orders. He moved to Albany NY and prevailed on an English priest, Thomas Ellison, to prepare him for ordination. This he accomplished in two years. He supported himself by teaching. In 1797 his first son was born.

On May 10, 1798, Chase was ordained deacon by Bishop Provoost. He began missionary work in Central New York. He met with some success during his missionary work, but in order to become a priest he accepted the settled positions that involved Poughkeepsie and Fishkill congregations. He was ordained priest on Nov 10, 1799.

Mary Chase developed tuberculosis. In 1805, Bp. Moore of NY asked Chase to accept a call to New Orleans. He went there alone, the first Protestant in the area, established a vestry and Christ Church, and opened an academy for Protestant children. He returned to Poughkeepsie to place his sons in school in Vermont, then brought his wife with him back to New Orleans. He spent six years there.

In 1811, Chase returned to the north to become rector of Christ Church, Hartford. During this period, especially after the war with England, numbers of people began to head west. Chase decided to go with them. He landed in Ohio and in March 1817 preached his first sermon. He traveled widely, planting new congregations as far as Columbus. He bought a large farm in Worthington and became minister of a congregation there. He also opened an academy there. He wanted to bring his wife to be with him, but unfortunately she died.

In January 1818, the Diocese of Ohio was organized and in June, Chase was elected bishop. He was consecrated in Philadelphia on Feb 11, 1819. Late in 1819 Chase married Sophia May Ingraham, whom he had met in Poughkeepsie. Chase received no salary as bishop. He made his living by tending his congregations and the academy, and from farming. Despite this, he was always traveling, preaching, and confirming. He accepted the presidency of the College of Cincinnati to help out, and moved there in the fall.

Chase's primary concern was with growing the Church in Ohio. In 1823, he heard of an English journalist's praise of what he was doing, and determined to go to England to raise money for his mission. He was thoroughly opposed in this by Bishop Hobart – who actively tried to undermine his effort – and Bishop White, who thought that this amounted to begging for money. Chase was undeterred. He boldly spoke to as many people as he could in England over nearly 9 months, and eventually raised some \$30,000 to bring back to his Diocese.

On November 3, 1824, Chase made a report to his Convention. His dream had been to found a seminary to train clergy, and this he was able to do. But he also realized that he needed to have a college and a grammar school in order to prepare students at the most basic levels. In time the schools were located in the open country and a community sprang up, named Gambier in honor of one of the English benefactors. The college became known as Kenyon College, after another benefactor; and the seminary known as Bexley Hall after yet another.

Chase, 6 foot 4 inches in height, was as domineering as he was tall. A dispute between himself and the students and faculty resulted in a larger confrontation with the Diocese. Chase believed that he should rule the schools and the Diocese with a strong and independent hand. The Diocesan Convention determined otherwise. In 1831, the Convention passed a report that called for changes at the college, and Chase immediately resigned. (Charles P. McIlvaine succeeded him.)

Chase moved to Illinois. Within three years he had a new and prosperous estate. In March 1835, 3 clergymen and a handful of laymen met in Peoria and formed a Diocese. They elected Chase to be their bishop. Toward the end of the year, nearing the age of 60, he traveled to England for a second time to raise money for his new Diocese. In 1836 he returned home with \$10,000 for his efforts. Once again, he established a school, this one known as Jubilee College, near Peoria. It continued into the 1870s.

Chase was welcomed back to the House of Bishops in 1835 with the words of Bishop Doane: "A veteran soldier, a bishop of the Cross, whom hardships never have discouraged, whom no

difficulties seem to daunt.”