Sam Chase, ‘bacon-face,’ spreading spirit of revolution

‘His face was broad and massive, his complexion a brownish red. ‘Bacon face’ was a nickname applied to him by the Maryland bar. His head was large, his brow wide and his hair thick and white.’
By HAL BURDETT
For the Evening Capital
Sampson "Sam" Chase, the former
enemies in Annapolis called lian "Bacon's arm," no doubt
became a hero in the national
complexion that suggested he
imbibed excessively.

His devotion to the patriot and signer of the Declaration of
Independence was called much worse.

In fact, the conservative
mayor and alderman of An-
napolis was known as a "basy, restless incendiary,
a ringleader of mobs, a foul
mouthed and inflaming son of
dishonor and a spirit of
disruptor of the public
tranquility, and a promotor of
the lawless excesses of the
multitudes."

The description had the
clear ring of truth. But Chase was not
one to shrink from such a challenge;
among the milder invective of his critics was that he
was "despicable tools of power,
evened in provoking the baying
baking in proprietary
shame."

Sam Chase did not limit his
rebelliousness to name-calling.
He was a vigorous activist who
did much to further the goals of the
American Revolution throughout Maryland.

Parliament
Tutored by his father, the
Rev. Thomas Chase, who was a
schoolmaster in Wiltshire, England,
before settling in Baltimore,
Samuel at 18 had the
education in the classics when he
arrived in Annapolis in 1799 to
study law at the offices of
John Hammond and John Hall.

Within five years, he became a
director of the Maryland
General Assembly, where he
promptly joined the opposition
to the royal governor and
supported such measures as
regulating clerical salaries,
which was his own father's
salary in half.

He also aligned himself
with the political philosophy of
one of whose violent
reaction to the
British Parliament's
Stamp Act of
1765. The stamp
on every legal
document and
who openly
the colonial
tax to the
colony was
the cost of
your houses, some of you
asserting the
parliamentary
right to tax
act as a beneficial
law. Others
you merely
grumbled in your
countrysides
to speak
your sentiments."

He continued to voice his
opinions about the country
in Great Britain and in 1774 he
became a member of the
Maryland House of
Correspondence and a
dependent of the
First Continental Congress. The
bark of Peter
was dissatisfied that
in August body decided to seek
peaceful solutions to the
rrections with England.

Before the war, many
Democrats decided to take up arms,
but was making fiery speeches in
the Congress in 1775.
that he "owed no allegiance
to the King of Great Britain."

Sam Chase, a man of
more conservative colleagues.

Supported Washington
As a delegate to the Federal
Constitutional Convention in 1774,
fighting had begun at Concord
with the British, which would
become a challenge.

There he urged a total
embargo on trade with Great
Britain, which would cut off
the supply of arms and
would quickly force the
oppressors into submission or
capitulation.

Drafting the Bill of
Rights of the Constitution
and he was a leading
part of securing the
appointment of
George Washington as its
in-chief.

Chase won the admiration of
the Constitutional Convention when he
for the floor to fearlessly
expose one of its members,
John Dickinson, a
tory. The Marylander
learned that Zabdy had been
writing to the royal governor of
Georgia about the Congress'
consideration of independence
for the colonies. Zabdy
managed to escape to Georgia
where he was protected by the
proprietary government.

In 1776, Chase accompanied
Charles Carroll, Benjamin
Franklin and John Adams on an
unsuccessful mission aimed at
enlisting the support of
Great Britain, on the side of
the American colonists. When he
returned to Philadelphia in June, Chase discovered that
the instructions of Maryland
delegates to Congress had been
from them for voting for
independence.

Stumped for break
He hastened to Maryland
where he stumped extensively
before gatherings of farmers
of the Eastern Shore to
let the legislature know that
they wanted the instructions
aborted and for Congress to
vote. He was returned to
in time to sign the Declaration
of Independence on July 4th.

Chase continued to serve in
Congress until 1778 when it was
discovered that he used inside
information obtained as a
member of Congress to make a
profit on the sale of flour to the

He returned to Annapolis
where he continued to serve in
the Maryland Senate and as a
practice law. Once on a trip to
Baltimore, he attended a
parliament where he was
impressed with the oratorical
skills of a local retired
pharmacist. Learning that the
young man had no funds to pay
law school, Chase invited him to
brought him to Annapolis to study law under his
person, William Pinkey. Later served as
a diplomat, a United States District Judge and
General of the United States.
Chase, whose first wife, Anne Baldwin, of Annapolis, died in 1778 after 16 years of marriage, met and married Hannah Kitty Giles while on a mission to London in 1784. He failed, however, at the original purpose of the trip which was to recover some $800,000 owed to the colony of Maryland by the Bank of England. Thirteen years later William Pinkney, while serving as U.S. Commissioner to England, collected the debt.

Became conservative

As the years progressed, Chase, the onetime flaming revolutionist, became more and more conservative. By 1787, he was an active and outspoken Federalist. He was at the vanguard of the opposition to the proposed United States Constitution when it was brought before the Maryland Convention for consideration. However, he had lost much of his popularity and influence by that time and the state convention voted overwhelmingly to ratify the document in 1788.

That same year he was appointed judge of the newly established criminal court of Baltimore and later received an appointment as chief justice of the general court of Maryland. The General Assembly attempted to remove him from office and although the motion failed to get the necessary two-thirds vote, a majority of the Assembly felt that his holding two judgeships violated the state constitution.

President Washington submitted Chase's name as an associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States on January 27, 1796 and on the following day the nomination was confirmed.

Backed sedition laws

During the administration of his old friend John Adams, Chase was a firm advocate of the sedition laws, that forbade public expressions of opposition to the law and government of the United States. Adams had used these laws to stifle political opposition from Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party.

On May 2, 1803, Justice Chase, appearing before a Baltimore Grand Jury, denounced the adoption of manhood suffrage in Maryland, claiming that it would convert "our Republican Constitution...into a mobocracy." He was also reported to have assailed the new Jefferson Administration as "weak, pusillanimous, relaxed."
Through the efforts of President Johnson, impeachment proceedings were brought against Chase and got under way in February, 1865. The lawyer was now on the defense, claiming that the term "high crimes and misdemeanors" could not be found in Congress's interpretation of the Constitution. A majority of the Senate found him guilty on two of the charges, but because a two-thirds plurality was needed for conviction he was acquitted.

Chase remained a member of the Supreme Court until his death on the 30th of June on 19, 1861.

More than six feet tall and largely proportioned, Chase was described by A. J. Beveridge in his "Life of John Marshall" in this manner: "His face was broad and massive, his complexion a brownish tawny. Bacon face was a nickname applied to him by the Maryland bar; High flared his brow, his brow wide, and his hair thick and gray..."

Joseph Story, who filled Chase's vacancy on the Supreme Court after his death, described his predecessor as a man whose "manners are coarse, and in appearance harsh; but in reality he abounds with good humor...In person, in manners, in unwisely abstaining from drink, in over-work and under-rest, in real tenderness of heart, and above all in intellect, he is the living, I had almost said the exact, image of Samuel Johnson."

A strong mind

More than two decades after Chase died, Chief Justice John Marshall wrote of his former colleague: "He possessed a strong mind, great legal knowledge, and was a valuable judge, whose loss was a loss, and in appearance harsh; but in reality he abounds with good humor...In person, in manners, in unwisely abstaining from drink, in over-work and under-rest, in real tenderness of heart, and above all in intellect, he is the living, I had almost said the exact, image of Samuel Johnson."

In Annapolis, a reminder of this controversial patriot exists in the Chase-Lloyd House which stands on a plot of land at what is now the corner of King George Street and Maryland Avenue. The house was used by the property for 100 pounds sterling in 1867 and erected the three-story addition in 1870. The height of the first floor above the ground allows room for a huge wine cellar with a barrel vault, leading down to the full depth of the house.

It is uncertain whether Chase, who sold the property in 1771 to Edward Lloyd for 504 pounds sterling, ever occupied the house. But the building cut back into the Chase family in 1847 and it has borne the Chase name ever since.