

First Ladies of America



Abigail Adams greatly influenced the political career of her husband, one of America's Founding Fathers, John Adams. The couple exchanged hundreds of letters while he was serving in Philadelphia as a member of the Continental Congress and later as a diplomat abroad. Today, their letters remain fascinating eyewitness accounts of how the early government operated during a key era of American history.

Mrs. Adams was born in Weymouth, Mass., to Reverend William Smith and Elizabeth Quincy Smith. Her mother taught her and her sisters how to read and write, and under her mother's tutelage, the young Abigail flourished intellectually. She studied philosophy, Latin, literature and history, and by the time she was a young woman, she was as well-read as any college-trained man.

The Adams had five children – three sons and two daughters - including future United States President John Quincy Adams.

As the American Revolution heated up, Mrs. Adams was too close to the action at times for her husband's comfort. Taking her young boys with her, she climbed to the top of a hill where she saw the Minutemen's defense of Breed's and Bunker Hill in Charlestown.

Later, when battle refugees poured down the road from Boston, Mrs. Adams opened her home to them.

At such time, it was difficult being completely responsible for her family, and many of her letters to her husband expressed the deep loneliness she felt. Still, she pressed the argument that the

creation of a new form of government was an opportunity to make the legal status of women equal to that of men, and her letters became some of the earliest known writings calling for women's equal rights.

By the time she became first lady, Mrs. Adams was well acquainted with politics, but she found serving as the president's wife difficult and constraining. She worried that with her outspoken temperament she might say the wrong thing, and to some degree, she was right. Knowing full well that Adams consulted his wife on important decisions, some people mockingly referred to her as "Mrs. President." She ignored them, continued to advise her husband and continued to attend meetings of the House of Representatives.

She also saw her role as that of hostess, and she received visitors seated like a royal figure, etiquette she had observed in Buckingham Palace. Although her husband was defeated in the next election by his old friend and associate Thomas Jefferson, the first couple traveled to the new capital city, Washington, to finish the last few months of Adams' term. The huge, unfinished White House was hardly homey at that point, but Mrs. Adams made the best of it, famously hanging her family's laundry in the East Room to dry.

After President Adams left office, his wife was relieved to go home and focus her energy on her family, which now included many grandchildren. Mrs. Adams died in 1818 of typhoid fever, and John Adams died eight years later. They are buried beside one another in Quincy, Massachusetts.

John Adam's Administration 1797-1801

Abigail Quincy Smith Adams

Born: November 11, 1744, in Weymouth, Massachusetts

Education: No formal education; homeschooled

Marriage: 1764 to John Adams

Children: Abigail "Nabby" Amelia (1765-1813); John Quincy (1767-1848);

Susanna (1768-1770); Charles (1770-1800); Thomas Boylston (1772-1832)

Died: October 28, 1818, in Quincy, Massachusetts

