



Abigail Adams (1744-1818) lived through two major American conflicts - the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. The White House provides the following biographical information about her:

Inheriting New England's strongest traditions, Abigail Smith was born in 1744 at Weymouth, Massachusetts. On her mother's side she was descended from the Quincys, a family of great prestige in the colony; her father and other forebearers were Congregational ministers, leaders in a society that held its clergy in high esteem.

Like other women of the time, Abigail lacked formal education; but her curiosity spurred her keen intelligence, and she read avidly the books at hand. Reading created a bond between her and young John Adams, Harvard graduate launched on a career in law, and they were married in 1764. It was a marriage of the mind and of the heart, enduring for more than half a century, enriched by time.

The young couple lived on John's small farm at Braintree or in Boston as his practice expanded. In ten years she bore three sons and two daughters; she looked after family and home when he went traveling as circuit judge. "Alas!" she wrote in December 1773, "How many snow banks divide thee and me...."

Long separations kept Abigail from her husband while he served the country they loved, as delegate to the Continental Congress, envoy abroad, elected officer under the Constitution. Her letters--pungent, witty, and vivid, spelled just as she spoke--detail her life in times of revolution. They tell the story of the woman who stayed at home to struggle with wartime shortages and inflation; to run the farm with a minimum of help; to teach four children when formal education was interrupted. Most of all, they tell of her loneliness without her "dearest Friend." The "one single expression," she said, "dwelt upon my mind and played about my Heart...."

In 1784, she joined him at his diplomatic post in Paris, and observed with interest the manners of the French. After 1785, she filled the difficult role of wife of the first United States Minister to Great Britain, and did so with dignity and tact. They returned happily in 1788 to Massachusetts and the handsome house [known as "Peacefield"] they had just acquired in Braintree, later called Quincy, home for the rest of their lives.



As wife of the first Vice President, Abigail became a good friend to Mrs. Washington and a valued help in official entertaining, drawing on her experience of courts and society abroad. After 1791, however, poor health forced her to spend as much time as possible in Quincy. Illness or trouble found her resolute; as she once declared, she would "not forget the blessings which sweeten life."

When John Adams was elected President, she continued a formal pattern of entertaining--even in the primitive conditions she found at the new capital in November 1800. The city was wilderness, the President's House [which did not yet have its distinctive colonnades] far from completion.



Her private complaints to her family provide blunt accounts of both [the city and the house], but for her three months in Washington she duly held her dinners and receptions. [She used what is today known as the "East Room," of the White House, to hang her laundry.]



The Adamses retired to Quincy in 1801, and for 17 years enjoyed the companionship that public life had long denied them. Abigail died in 1818, and is buried beside her husband in United First Parish Church. She leaves her country a most remarkable record as patriot and First Lady, wife of one President and mother of another.

In many ways, Abigail Adams—who was 12 years younger than her husband—was ahead of her time. Beyond reminding her husband that he, and the other writers of America's Declaration of Independence should "remember the ladies," Abigail expressed her opinions about political issues. During her husband's tenure as America's second President, Abigail's critics referred to her as "Mrs. President."

This video clip, from Biography, helps us to investigate Abigail in more depth.

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"Abigail Adams Supervising the Hanging of the Wash in the East Room," by Gordon Phillips, 1966, online via White House.org

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Peacefield, Home of John and Abigail Adams

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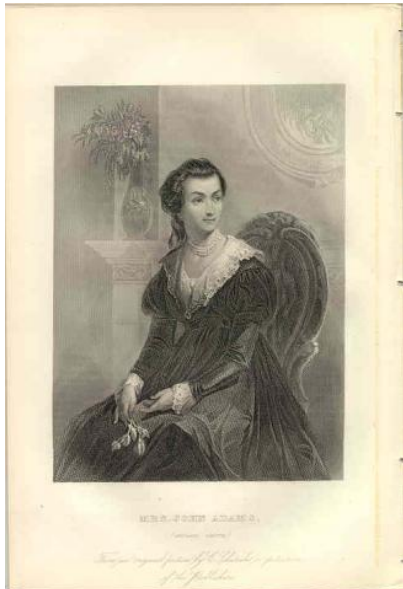
White House in 1800

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Abigail Adams and White House Laundry

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