

ABIGAIL ADAMS

1744-1818

Born in Weymouth, Mass. (November 11) to William Smith, a Congregational minister, and Elizabeth Quincy, daughter of the prominent John Quincy. Because of poor health, she did not attend school, but learned from her parents, grandparents, her older brother-in-law (Richard Cranch), and her future husband. She was surrounded by books and was an insatiable reader. She met John Adams in 1759 when she was fifteen years old and he twenty-four. They married five years later in October 1764. Over the next ten years she gave birth to four children—first a daughter and then three sons (the oldest son being John Quincy Adams). She gave birth to a stillborn daughter in 1777 and then had no more children. Her lawyer husband was absent a great deal riding the judicial circuit throughout Massachusetts and Maine. As the Revolutionary movement developed, John Adams was increasingly away from home serving in the colonial legislature, the Continental congresses, and on diplomatic missions abroad. During his absences, Abigail raised the children, supervised the farm, and administered the family finances. She believed in the concept of the republican motherhood. Men and women had separate roles to play. A woman's role was different from a man's but fully as important. No man could achieve his maximum potential without the assistance and cooperation of his wife. She was a sounding board for his ideas—a defender of his reputation—a soul mate—an inspiration. She advocated the expansion of rights (not necessarily voting rights) for women to protect them from the arbitrary and oppressive rule of their husbands.

She and her daughter left Braintree for London in June 1784 and arrived on July 20. She subsequently lived in The Hague (The Netherlands), Paris, and London. She and John returned to Massachusetts in June 1788. When her husband became vice president of the United States, she lived in New York City and then in Philadelphia. She continued shortly in Philadelphia after her husband became President and briefly resided in Washington, D.C., the new federal capital. During

most of Adams's presidency, however, Abigail, not in good health, resided in Quincy. When separated, they regularly corresponded about all matters, including politics. She was her husband's most trusted adviser. She died of typhoid fever October 28, 1818.