

Ready PREP Go!

Great Women in History

I was the 2nd
First Lady of the
United States!

Abigail Adams

Meet Abigail Adams

Abigail Adams lived and helped shape an exciting time in world history: the founding of the United States of America.

In 1764, while the American colonies were still under British rule, Abigail married John Adams, a politically active Harvard-educated lawyer. He would go on to be a leader of the American Revolution and serve as the first Vice President under George Washington, our first President. In 1796 when John was elected the second President, Abigail became the second First Lady of the United States!

Abigail had strong opinions about education, women's rights, and the abolition of slavery. She served as an unofficial advisor to her husband throughout their marriage. John was often away on business, so Abigail took charge at home. She managed the family's farm and finances while raising their children.

Interesting Facts

- ★ Born November 11 or 22, 1744 in Weymouth, Massachusetts (the calendar changed after she was born!)
- ★ Wife of John Adams (2nd U.S. president) and mother of John Quincy Adams (6th U.S. president)
- ★ First Lady of the United States (1797-1801)
- ★ **Advocate** for women's rights, education for all, and the **abolition** of slavery
- ★ Died October 28, 1818 in Quincy, Massachusetts



Young Abigail

Abigail was the second of four children, born to Reverend William Smith and Elizabeth Quincy Smith. She was raised on her family's farm in Massachusetts. Abigail often accompanied her mother to visit sick families in their community, bringing them food, clothing and firewood.

During colonial times, girls could rarely attend school. So Abigail's mother taught her math, reading, sewing, and cooking at home.

Abigail was very curious and loved reading the books in her father's large library. Her favorite subjects were philosophy, theology, ancient

history, government, and law. As she grew older, Abigail and her friends discussed books they had read and exchanged letters about what they had learned.

Abigail's family hosted many well-educated guests, including her grandfather, Colonel John Quincy, who taught her about the importance of freedom and the value of public service. Abigail listened carefully and asked many questions to learn as much as she could about the world.



A New Life

When Abigail was 17, she met John Adams, a lawyer from the neighboring community of Braintree. During their two-year courtship, they wrote letters to each other to keep in touch. She began every letter with "Dearest Friend." John appreciated Abigail's intellect and perspective.

John and Abigail married in October 1764. They had six children, two of whom died young, which was very common in those days.

The family moved to Boston to be closer to John's work. There, they became friendly with many patriots including Samuel Adams and John Hancock.

John quickly became a leader in what would later become the American Revolution, and he was selected to attend the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1774.



Life in Boston in the 1770s

As tensions mounted between the American colonies and Great Britain, Boston became the center of growing unrest. During the Boston Massacre (1770), protesters insulted and threatened British soldiers in the streets of the city. The soldiers fired their muskets, killing several colonists.

*During the Boston Tea Party (1773), American colonists dumped 342 chests of tea imported by the British East India Company into Boston Harbor. They were angry that the British Parliament had imposed a tax on tea, despite the fact that the American colonists had no **representation** in it. This was an example of the rallying cries of the American Revolution, "no taxation without representation."*

The Revolutionary War

On April 19, 1775, British soldiers who were trying to destroy the colonists' military supplies were confronted by the Massachusetts militia. The fight was later known as the Battle of Lexington and Concord. While the colonists and the British tried to avoid a full-scale war, the battle turned out to be the opening shots of the American Revolutionary War.

Two months later, while John was away at the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, Abigail awoke to shaking and loud booms – the sound of cannon fire. She and her young son, John Quincy, climbed the hill behind their house to get a better view. They saw Boston Harbor full of smoke and flames as British warships **besieged** the city of Boston in what came to be known as the Battle of Bunker Hill. Abigail wrote about what she saw and sent the letters to her husband, who shared them with George Washington.

She wrote, "The constant roar of the cannon is so distressing that we cannot eat, drink or sleep."

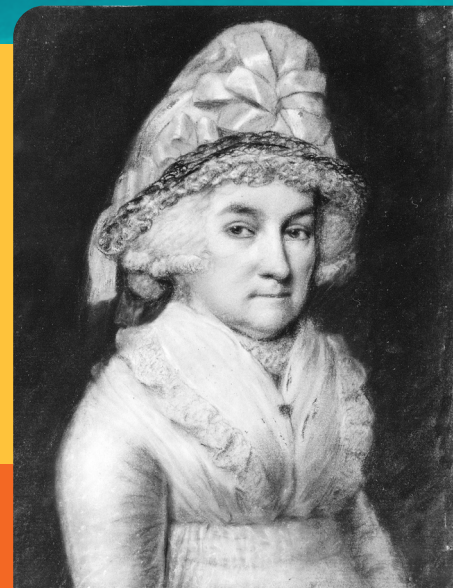
During the war, Abigail helped by hiding soldiers in her house and allowing them to train on her property. Money and goods were scarce, so she made her own soap and ink, spun cloth, and even melted pewter spoons to make **musket balls** for the soldiers.

Abigail managed the household and family finances while John was away, at a time when financial matters were considered a male responsibility.

Throughout their marriage, she and John continued to write letters to stay in touch. The letters comforted Abigail during John's long absences. They also help us understand what life was like in early America.

*"Learning is not attained by chance,
it must be sought for with ardor
and attended to with diligence."*

From Abigail Adams to her son John Quincy Adams (March 20, 1780)





Living Overseas

When the war ended in 1781, John moved to England to serve as the United States' ambassador to Great Britain. John missed Abigail's political advice and support.

Finally, in 1784, Abigail and her daughter Nabby set sail for the month-long journey to Europe to join John and their son, John Quincy. Abigail met Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and the King of England! Although Abigail enjoyed her time in England and France, she longed to be home. The family returned to America in 1788, and John was elected the first Vice President under George Washington.



Being First Lady

In 1796, when John Adams was elected President, Abigail became First Lady. She continued to advise her husband and played an active role in the discussion around America's early political parties. She defended John and his policies in letters to family and friend. In 1800, Abigail oversaw the family's move from Philadelphia to the new presidential mansion in Washington, D.C., which would later be known as the White House. They lived there for only four months.

DID YOU KNOW?

Abigail Adams wrote over 1,200 letters during her life, often sharing her opinions on life and politics, including her belief that women should have a voice in the government.

When John was meeting with his colleagues to draft the Declaration of Independence, Abigail asked him to:

"Remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors."

Throughout her life, Abigail supported education for girls.

Retirement & Later Life



After John left office in 1801, he and Abigail returned to their home in Quincy, Massachusetts. Abigail spent time with family, supported her son John's political career, and continued writing letters to many people, including Thomas Jefferson.

She died in 1818 of **typhoid fever** and did not live to see her son, John Quincy Adams, become president.





Fascinating Facts about Abigail

- Abigail was very devoted to her family. She missed her husband's presidential **inauguration** of 1797 in order to care for his sick mother!
- During a smallpox epidemic that threatened the early colonists, Abigail and her children tried a risky new treatment to prevent the disease: scraping a smallpox-infected serum into the skin. They survived, but many others did not.
- Abigail was one of the few First Ladies to be politically active prior to the 20th century. Some people called her "Mrs. President" because she had so much influence over John.
- Abigail spoke up for the fair treatment of government leaders by the press when she and her husband were attacked in the newspapers.
- After she became First Lady, Abigail defended the right of an African-American boy named James to go to school. He was mistreated for having black skin, but Abigail declared that this violated "the Christian principle of doing to others, as we should have others to us," and the head of the school apologized.
- Abigail and Barbara Bush are the only women to have both a husband and a son serve as an American President.

True or False?

Abigail learned how to read and write at school.

TRUE

FALSE

We can learn a lot about life in the Revolutionary era through Abigail's many letters.

TRUE

FALSE

John Adams married Abigail Smith in 1764.

TRUE

FALSE

Abigail and her son John Quincy watched the Boston Tea Party from the hill behind their house.

TRUE

FALSE

Abigail helped hide Revolutionary War soldiers.

TRUE

FALSE

Abigail and her family were the first family to live in the White House in Washington, D.C.

TRUE

FALSE

Word Search

ABIGAIL ADAMS
LETTERS
FIRST LADY
COLONISTS
EDUCATION
BOSTON
REVOLUTIONARY WAR
SOLDIERS
SMALLPOX
READING
ADVISOR
BUNKER HILL

C	A	C	S	M	A	L	L	P	O	X	M	O	J	M	V	P
B	J	U	R	N	I	R	R	F	C	E	E	F	B	J	E	A
S	O	A	A	M	I	B	R	E	A	D	I	N	G	J	O	G
U	E	S	A	N	C	O	N	B	I	U	R	A	O	O	I	Y
X	E	M	T	E	U	M	V	N	A	C	G	I	D	B	S	W
W	M	I	H	O	V	U	I	I	P	A	K	N	E	V	O	B
I	Q	O	Q	S	N	O	P	C	X	T	T	A	Q	K	P	U
S	F	I	R	S	T	L	A	D	Y	I	A	M	U	A	B	N
O	E	U	A	D	V	I	S	O	R	O	A	H	G	O	P	K
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D	R	E	V	O	L	U	T	I	O	N	A	R	Y	W	A	R
I	M	T	B	Z	L	E	T	T	E	R	S	J	H	P	E	H
E	T	N	L	B	Y	M	W	X	F	R	Y	G	S	D	M	I
R	A	B	I	G	A	I	L	A	D	A	M	S	N	T	V	L
S	G	P	U	I	O	O	C	M	O	W	U	A	D	S	T	L

"Dearest Friend" Creative Writing Exercises

1. Write a letter to a friend or family member that you haven't seen in a long time.

Describe a recent event in your school or neighborhood. Write about something you learned or someone who inspired you. Share your opinions! Ask an adult for help to address and mail your letter.

2. Imagine that you could contact Abigail Adams.

Write her a letter and share something you learned about her life. What do you think might surprise Abigail about life in America in the 21st century? What question would you most like to ask her?



TRUE & FALSE KEY: 1. False, 2. True, 3. True, 4. False, 5. True, 6. True

Glossary

- **Abolition:** The act of doing away with or the state of being done away with, as in the ending of slavery.
- **Advocate:** One who argues for a cause; a supporter or defender.
- **Besieged:** To surround and attack.
- **Inauguration:** A formal ceremony that marks the beginning of service in public office.
- **Musket balls:** One of the earliest forms of bullets that are fired from muskets and rifles.
- **Representation:** The right of having a spokesperson for your interests in a governing body.
- **Typhoid fever:** A highly infectious disease that's characterized by high fever, headache, coughing, and reddish spots on the skin.



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