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AMERICA'S FOUNDERS

**ABIGAIL ADAMS**

*An American Heroine*

JOHN P. KAMINSKI



A P A R A L L E L P R E S S C H A P B O O K





A M E R I C A ' S F O U N D E R S

**ABIGAIL ADAMS**

*An American Heroine*

JOHN P. KAMINSKI



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FIRST EDITION

The America's Founders series is dedicated to the several hundred Mentor Teachers who are the heart and soul of the Center for Civic Education's program "We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution."

This chapbook is dedicated to

KENNETH BOESCH  
Westminster Academy  
St. Louis, Missouri

and

MELANI WINTER  
Hmong American Peace Academy  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin



## PREFACE

THIS CHAPBOOK IS DEDICATED TO TWO OUTSTANDING teachers—one a seasoned veteran; the other just past the threshold of her career. Both have Wisconsin backgrounds. Ken Boesch is an unabashed Badger. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin–Madison twenty-five years ago and still follows the Badgers in football, basketball, and hockey. Also an avid Packer backer, he occasionally dons his cheesehead hat and has been photographed in it for school pictures. Ken taught for three years at Heritage Christian High School in West Allis, Wisconsin, a suburb of Milwaukee, where he started the “We the People” program before assuming his current position at Westminster Academy in St. Louis. Ken, who received his master’s degree from Webster University, perennially takes his class to the Center for Civic Education (CCE) national finals in Washington, where they have won unit and regional awards. He and his son enjoy drumming. Kenny’s favorite drink is Sam Adams—the patriot brewer. He’ll argue incessantly about judicial review and he is enthralled with the “real Constitution story” which, as a mentor teacher, he has repeatedly asked me to explain to the uninitiated. All aspects of his teaching (his humor, the content of his courses, his knowledge, and his encouraging feedback) inspire his students.

Melani, one of Ken’s students at Heritage Christian and an alum of the “We the People” program, received her baccalaureate from Cornerstone College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. From a teaching family, Melani quite naturally became a teacher—her father Dave teaches math and her mother Carol teaches third grade at Heritage Christian. Her brother also teaches in Michigan. After teaching four years at Heritage Christian, where she won the teacher of the year award in 2001-2002, she was hired by Keswick Christian School in Saint Petersburg, Florida. In 2005 she took her class to the CCE national finals in Washington.

Melani received a James Madison Memorial Fellowship in 2006 and has received her master's degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison—thus joining Ken, her mentor, as a Badger. Melani is now employed developing the curriculum for the Hmong American Peace Academy in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Melani has two great passions—to learn more herself and to be able to use that knowledge to instill a passion in her students to attain more knowledge and to become better citizens. She uses debates, role playing, and cooperative learning in her teaching. Out of the classroom, she enjoys sports—she played on her college softball and soccer teams—and afterwards helped coached a girls' soccer team. She dotes on her nephew and loves to do karaoke when conferencing with her fellow CCE mentor teachers. She's good at it, especially when teamed up with Todd singing "Let's Give 'em Something to Talk About" or with Tim singing "I Got You Babe."

These two teachers are what we would wish for in all of our teachers. Their dedication is inspiring; their enthusiasm is infectious. Their students, colleagues, and administrators appreciate what they accomplish every day in the classroom and in the institutes sponsored by the Center for Civic Education. They are at the heart of the CCE mentor network nationwide.

## INTRODUCTION

Abigail Adams was an extraordinary person. In many respects she was the quintessential woman of the American Revolutionary era, but in virtually every facet of life she excelled her contemporaries. Through her unique partnership with her husband, John, Abigail Adams became one of the most influential women in all of American history. Through her voluminous correspondence, this fascinating personality reveals the hardships women confronted during the years of America's founding.

To truly understand Abigail Adams, we must dismiss the myths about her. She was not the lone pioneer farm wife who planted the crops, milked the cows, slopped the hogs, and cooked over the hearth. She was the manager of a household—a rather strong-willed manager at that. Abigail Adams never lived a day without slaves or servants: slaves in her parents home, and servants—black and white, women and men, free and indentured—after she married John Adams. While at home in Braintree or Quincy, Massachusetts, she usually had two indoor household servants (a cook and a maid) and two or three hired hands who planted, weeded, and harvested the crop, cared for the livestock, ran the household dairy, pressed the cider, brewed the beer, repaired the buildings, and participated in the never-ending New England activity of building stone fences. While abroad she managed eight to ten servants; while her husband was vice president or president, she supervised a dozen servants—a cook, a laundress, several maids, a major domo, a stable hand, and a driver. While alone in Massachusetts, she bought household necessities, invested money, paid taxes, bought land, rented out real estate in Boston and Braintree, invested in public securities, became a *de facto* merchant by selling goods sent her by her husband from Philadelphia and Europe, cared for the sick in the family (including servants), contributed to the needy, educated the children herself and later placed them



with others for their continuing education, read widely, maintained an extensive correspondence, and performed her proper role socially. When home and abroad she served as the most important adviser to her husband who was one of the most prominent advocates of American independence, an important diplomat, and the first vice president and second president of the United States.

Abigail Adams had many loves in her life—her parents and grandparents, her two sisters, her children and grandchildren. This book, however, focuses on her two most passionate loves—her husband and her country. She loved her husband with both her heart and her body. When she and her husband were apart, both her heart and her body ached. The love for her husband was so strong that she did everything possible to allow him to achieve the fame he so ardently sought,<sup>1</sup> even if that meant long periods of separation from his family. She sought to improve herself through widespread reading, not merely to become a better person, but also to become a wiser counselor and better partner for her husband. Abigail's love of country was so strong that she had no hesitation in sacrificing the family when John was called to public service not only in America at the provincial and continental levels, but also to tours of duty in far off Europe which added the danger of trans-Atlantic voyages, capture by the British, and protracted periods of separation.

No other family—no other person—made these kinds of sacrifices for so long during the Revolutionary era. Benjamin Franklin happily left his wife behind when he served in Europe. Thomas Jefferson was a widower when he brought his daughters to Europe. John Jay's wife accompanied him to Europe, and when he returned to America he accepted the position of Secretary for Foreign Affairs on

1. I refer here not to some vainglorious fame that is better called popularity, but to the everlasting fame that was a manifestation of good citizenship. See Douglas Adair, "Fame and the Founding Fathers," in Trevor Colburn, ed., *Fame and the Founding Fathers: Essays by Douglas Adair* (Indianapolis, no date, first ed. Chapel Hill, N.C., 1974), 3–36.

the condition that the Confederation capital be moved to New York City so that he would not have to be separated from his family. Arthur Lee, Elbridge Gerry, and James Madison were all bachelors during much of their public service. Martha Washington only reluctantly acquiesced in her husband's public service and she joined him in the winter encampments and naturally when he served as president of the United States. Madam Lafayette and her entire family strongly objected to Lafayette's coming to fight in America. Abigail's dear friend, Mercy Otis Warren, would not allow her husband to leave Milton, Massachusetts, to attend Congress. She readily admitted selfishness. Abigail Adams knew that she could easily convince her husband to forego public service in Congress or in Europe and stay home with the family. "The Duty you owe your Country [was the] consideration alone [that] prevaild with me to consent to your departure."<sup>2</sup> She knew, however, that he would be unhappy out of public service and that the country would suffer without his able services. She was truly an American heroine.

One of the products of the separation of Abigail and John is their correspondence. Well over eleven hundred letters between them have survived and are now posted (both manuscript image and transcription) on the Massachusetts Historical Society's Web site.<sup>3</sup>

Many of these letters were printed in *The Book of Abigail and John*, which published selected letters between the couple until Abigail joined John in Europe in mid-1784. A new book edition of the correspondence taking it through 1801 is now being prepared by Margaret A. Hogan

2. Abigail Adams (hereafter AA) to John Adams (hereafter JA), Weymouth, June 16, 1775, L.H. Butterfield, and Marc Friedlander and Mary-Jo Kline, eds. *The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of the Adams Family, 1762-1784* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), 86. Hereafter cited as *BAJ*.

3. The site is <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams>. Cited as *EAJ*.

and C. James Taylor. Naturally the Adams Papers Project continues to publish the couple's correspondence in the *Adams Family Papers*, which to date appears in eight volumes ending in December 1789.

On several occasions Abigail asked John to destroy her correspondence. She saw her poor grammar and spelling as an embarrassment. She felt that her hopping around from family matters, to agricultural concerns, to micro and macro economic problems, to fashion, to literature, to religion, to education, and to politics—local, state, national, and international—as disjointed. “What a Jumble are my Letters. Politicks, Domestick occurrences, Farming anecdotes. Pray light Your Segars [i.e., cigars] with them. Leave them not to the inspection of futurity, for they will never have any other value than that of giving information for the present moment upon those subjects which interest you and Your affectionate A Adams.”<sup>4</sup> John responded: “You call your Letters a Jumble but they are my Delight and mine are not half as good as Yours.”<sup>5</sup> She knew that her expressions of love that sometimes approached eroticism would embarrass her prudish husband if read by anyone else. On those occasions when she asked John to destroy her letters, he always responded similarly. Her letters were more than a mere communication between two people separated geographically by many miles. They were a way for him “to hear you think, or to see your Thoughts.” Her letters, he wrote, make “my Heart throb, more than a Cannonade would. You bid me burn your Letters. But I must forget you first.”<sup>6</sup> John, on the other hand, advised Abigail to save all of their correspondence—show it to a select few family and friends—but keep it for posterity to show them the difficult struggles endured for the sake of liberty. The correspondence of Abigail and John is one of the great treasures in America's literary heritage.

4. AA to JA, Quincy, April 10, 1796, *EAJ*.

5. JA to AA, Philadelphia, April 21, 1796, *EAJ*.

6. JA to AA, Philadelphia, April 28, 1776, *BAJ*, 125.



## EARLY LIFE

Abigail Adams was born on November 11, 1744, in Weymouth, Massachusetts, about fourteen miles south-east of Boston. Her father, William Smith, was a prominent Congregational minister;<sup>7</sup> her mother, Elizabeth Quincy, was the daughter of John Quincy and granddaughter of the Reverend John Norton. John Quincy, regularly elected speaker of the colonial Massachusetts House of Representatives, came from a prominent family that had been public officials, landowners, and merchants throughout Massachusetts history. Abigail had two sisters and a brother—Mary three years older, William two years younger, and Elizabeth nine years younger.

Because of Abigail's recurring illnesses, she was kept from school. Her parents, her older sister, and grandparents, resident at Mount Woolaston four miles from Weymouth, provided her education. Abigail was always surrounded by books that she was encouraged to read. When in 1762 Mary Smith married Richard Cranch, a watch-maker fifteen years her senior, he directed Abigail's reading. Abigail remembered: "To our dear and venerable Brother Cranch do I attribute my early taste for letters; and for the nurture and cultivation of those qualities which have since afforded me much pleasure and satisfaction. He it was who put proper Bookes into my hands, who taught me to love the Poets and to distinguish their Merits."<sup>8</sup> Abigail read widely in

7. Adams later described William Smith as "the richest clergyman in the province, as his brother clergymen used to say." JA to Benjamin Rush, Quincy, August 25, 1811, John A. Schurz and Douglas Adair, eds., *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805–1813* (Indianapolis, n.d.; first printed, San Marino, Calif., 1966), 204.

8. Quoted in Charles W. Akers, *Abigail Adams: A Revolutionary American Woman* (New York, 3rd ed., 2007), 10.

the works of Shakespeare, John Milton, Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope, and James Thomson. She regularly quoted these poets—far more than the Bible—which was the usual source of quotations for most New Englanders. She also read the novels of Samuel Richardson, particularly the seven volumes of *Sir Charles Grandison*, in which Richardson lauded the importance of female education and the intellectual role women brought to their marriage. It is likely that by keeping her out of formal schools, her childhood illnesses contributed to a broader education than was typical for most New England girls.

As she reached seventeen, Abigail wondered about her marital prospects. In most New England towns, widows and unmarried women far outnumbered bachelors. Wars and dangerous seafaring occupations killed off a disproportionate number of men.<sup>9</sup> Well-educated and opinionated young women were not the favorite choice of most men of the time. In responding to a recently-married cousin, Abigail wrote:

You bid me tell *one* of my sparks [i.e., boyfriends] to bring me to see you. Why! I believe you think they are as plenty as herrings, when, alas! there is as great a scarcity of them as there is of justice, prudence, and many other virtues. . . . I should really rejoice to come and see you, but if I wait till I get a (what did you call 'em?) I fear you'll be blind with age.<sup>10</sup>

9. Elaine Forman Crane, *Ebb Tide in New England: Women, Seaports, and Social Change, 1630–1800* (Boston, 1998).

10. AA to Hannah Quincy Lincoln, October 5, 1761, Charles Francis Adams, ed. *Letters of Mrs. Adams, Wife of John Adams* (2 vols. Boston, 2nd ed., 1840), I, 6.

## A RELIGIOUS FOUNDATION

As the daughter of a Congregational minister, Abigail had strongly held religious beliefs. By the mid-seventeenth century, most Congregational ministers had abandoned the harsh, rigid predestination doctrine of John Calvin for something more amenable to their congregations. Abigail adhered to the liberal interpretation of Congregationalism espoused by her father that avoided the distant God of the deists and the fire and brimstone of the evangelical enthusiasts spawned by the Great Awakening. “I do not believe that a people are ever made better by always hearing of the terrors of the Lord. Gloom is no part of my Religion.”<sup>11</sup> Abigail believed that each individual should have a personal relationship with God. “True religion is from the Heart, between Man and his creator, and not the imposition of Man or Creeds and tests.”<sup>12</sup> Believers who practiced good deeds could expect to be rewarded in this life and in the hereafter. Those who were evil would be punished here and later as well. “To maintain a conscience void of offence, as far as is consistant with the imperfect State we are in, both towards God and Man, is one article of my Faith, and to do good as I have opportunity, and according to my means I would wish to make the Rule of my practise. Do justly, walk Humbly and to Love mercy—are duties enjoined upon every Christian, and if we can attain to those graces, we may cheerfully look for our recompence and reward, where it is promised to us.”<sup>13</sup> Knowing that we all have fallen short, “We all have much to be forgiven, and as we hope for mercy, so may we extend it to others.”<sup>14</sup>

11. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, November 26, 1799, *New Letters*, 216.

12. AA to Louisa Catherine Adams, Quincy, January 3, 1818, Adams Papers, MHi.

13. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, November 26, 1799, *New Letters*, 216.

14. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, May 3, 1800, *New Letters*, 250.

Because God's divine plan was impenetrable by man, believers must be resigned to the will of God. Death, illness, and other trials and tribulations were to be borne stoically because they all were part of the Creator's plan. "Any calamity inflicted by the hand of Providence, it would become me in silence to submit to," although Abigail admitted that when she beheld "misery and distress, disgrace and poverty, brought upon a Family by intemperance, my heart bleeds at every pore."<sup>15</sup> As the divine word of God, the Bible was to be studied and used to cultivate a moral conscience. As both Abigail and John grew older, they drifted toward Unitarianism. Abigail wrote to John Quincy that "There is not any reasoning which can convince me, contrary to my senses, that three, is one, and one three." Though admitting that mankind was "permitted to see but through a glass darkly," she confidently acknowledged that she was a Unitarian, "believing that the Father alone, is the supreme God, and that Jesus Christ, derived his Being, and all his powers and honours from the Father."<sup>16</sup>

Throughout her life, Abigail stuck to a Christian fatalism.

Where is the situation in Life which exempts us from trouble? Who of us pass through the world with our path strewn with flowers, without encountering the thorns? In what ever state we are, we shall find a mixture of good and evil, and we must learn to receive these vicissitudes of life, so as not to be unduly exalted by the one, or depressed by the other. No cup so bitter, but what some cordial drops are mingled by a kind Providence.<sup>17</sup>

15. AA to Mary Cranch, East Chester, N.Y., October 31, 1799, *New Letters*, 211.

16. AA to JQA, Quincy, May 5, 1815, October 12, 1815, Adams Papers, MHi.

17. AA to Mary Cranch, East Chester, N.Y., October 31, 1799, *New Letters*, 212.

A sense of calm pervaded Abigail as the years passed by. "When I look in my Glass I see that I am not what I was. I scarcely know a feature of my face. But I believe that this Mortal Body shall one day put on immortality and be renovated in the World of Spirits. Having enjoyed a large portion of the good things of this life and a few of its miseries, I ought to rise satisfied from the feast, and be gratefull to the Giver."<sup>18</sup>

### COURTSHIP & MARRIAGE

John Adams was born in Braintree, Massachusetts, in 1735. He had graduated from Harvard, but disappointed his father (a farmer, shoemaker, and local official) by abandoning the ministry in favor of the law, a profession not too admired in New England. John had met the Smith family in about 1759 and felt that the Reverend Mr. Smith was a "crafty designing Man" who tried to hide his wealth from his parishioners. The two elder daughters were obviously witty but perhaps also lacked the "Tenderness" and "fondness" that he desired in a wife and mother.<sup>19</sup> Far more intriguing was Hannah Quincy, Abigail's cousin. John, however, realized that a young lawyer must defer marriage in order to establish his career otherwise he would forever struggle to make a living. While procrastinating, another suitor proposed and Hannah was snatched away. Later, John felt relieved from the "very dangerous shackles" that such a marriage might have brought. Contentedly he resided in Braintree with his recently widowed mother.

As John increasingly came in contact with the Smith family—especially after his friend Richard Cranch began courting Abigail's older sister Mary—his attitude toward Abigail changed. The young lawyer became completely enamored of Abigail. In his eyes she was "a constant feast. Tender feel-

18. AA to John Quincy Adams, Quincy, May 10, 1817, Adams Papers, MHi.

19. *BAJ*, 17.



ing, sensible, friendly. A friend. Not an imprudent, not an indelicate, not a disagreeable Word or Action. Prudent, modest, delicate, soft, sensible, obliging, active,” and physically passionate.<sup>20</sup> He vicariously kissed her two or three million times. She was greatly in his debt in that tender species and felt passionately about him. Years later she remembered what a thrill she got when their hands touched, causing what she referred to as “a universal Blush.”<sup>21</sup> When a snow storm kept them apart, John wrote his sweetheart:

Cruel, Yet perhaps blessed storm!—Cruel for detaining me from so much friendly, social Company, and perhaps blessed to you, or me or both, for keeping me at *my Distance*. . . . the steel and the Magnet or the Glass and feather will not fly together with more Celerity, than somebody And somebody, when brought within striking Distance—and, Itches, Aches, Agues, and Repentance might be the Consequences of a Contact in present Circumstances.<sup>22</sup>

Initially, because of his more humble origins, the Smith family thought John was not the best suitor for Abigail. Soon, however, John’s abilities convinced the Smiths that the match was acceptable. As John approached his thirtieth birthday, he realized that it was time to marry. They traveled alone together on a trip for several days and decided that they would marry. The marriage was delayed, however, when a smallpox epidemic raged in Boston. Having to travel the judicial circuit for work, John was continually in danger of contracting the dreaded disease and perhaps passing it along to his future wife and their children. Thus he decided to get inoculated before the wedding.

20. JA Diary, L. H. Butterfield et al., eds., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams* (4 vols., Cambridge, 1962), I, 234.

21. AA to JA, Braintree, ca July 15, 1778, *BAJ*, 220.

22. JA to Abigail Smith, Braintree, February 14, 1763, *BAJ*, 18.

For five weeks he isolated himself from Abigail as he went through the unpleasant and dangerous ordeal of inoculation. After fasting and purging himself at home for two weeks, he and his brother went to Boston for the last three weeks of inoculation. Abigail wrote of the ordinary fears one human being had for another, but for those in love, “their Misfortunes, Sorrows and afflictions [are] our own.” She was not ashamed to admit that she was bound to him by “a threefold cord” of love.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the ordeal, they kept up their correspondence. “Next to Conversation,” John wrote, “Correspondence, with you is the greatest Pleasure in the World.”<sup>24</sup> He signed his letters “your Admirer and Friend, and Lover.”<sup>25</sup> He could only think of her—her “Excellencies and Defects.”<sup>26</sup> She wrote to him “alone in my Chamber, a mere Nun,” but she confessed “that my thoughts are often employ’d about Lysander, ‘out of the abundance of the Heart, the mouth speaketh,’ and why Not the Mind thinketh.” She worried that he “sometimes view[ed] the dark side of your Diana, and there no doubt you discover many Spots—which I rather wish were erased, than conceal’d from you.”<sup>27</sup>

Because Abigail wrote John every day “with so little restraint,” she feared he might be critical of her. “I fear you more than any other person on Earth, and tis the only character, in which I ever did, or ever will fear you.”<sup>28</sup> She told him she would tell him something secret in her next letter. He accused her of being a tease. He would write to her a “minute Detail of the many Faults I have observed in you.”<sup>29</sup> Good naturedly she responded that he had “the

23. Abigail Smith to JA, Weymouth, August 11, 1763, *BAJ*, 18–19.

24. JA to Abigail Smith, Braintree, April 9, 1764, *BAJ*, 25.

25. JA to Abigail Smith, Braintree, April 11, 1764, *BAJ*, 26.

26. JA to Abigail Smith, April 12, 1764, *BAJ*, 28.

27. Abigail Smith to JA, Weymouth, April 12, 1765, *BAJ*, 28. Often John and Abigail referred to themselves with the names of mythological figures they admired.

28. Abigail Smith to JA, Weymouth, April 16, 1764, *BAJ*, 33.

29. JA to Abigail Smith, Boston, April 17, 1764, *BAJ*, 36.

curiosity of a Girl.”<sup>30</sup> Badgered by her for the list of criticisms, he made up a list of faults which he hoped she might improve upon. First, she did not know how to play cards well. Second, she had about her “a certain Modesty, sensibility, Bashfulness” that limits her “freedom of Behaviour” in company. Perhaps her most serious flaw was her inability to sing. He criticized her posture. She hung her head “like a Bulrush, . . . by which means, it happens that you appear too short for a Beauty, and the Company looses the sweet smiles of that Countenance and the bright sparkles of those Eyes.” Perhaps this hung head came about from her “Habit of Reading, Writing and Thinking”—habits that were “inexcusable in a Lady.” Another of Abigail’s faults was her habit “of sitting with the Leggs across. This ruins the figure and the Air, this injures the Health.” It also probably originated because of “too much Thinking.” Finally he criticized her walking “with the Toes bending inward.” He did not know the reason for this quirk, but suspected that it was to give “an Idea, the reverse of a bold and noble Air, the Reverse of the stately strutt, and the sublime Deportment.”<sup>31</sup>

Abigail readily admitted her “neglect of Singing” which was caused by “a voice harsh as the screech of a peacock.” She would in the future attempt to keep her head erect although with little hope that she would then be considered a beauty. As for his fifth objection, “a gentleman has no business to concern himself about the Leggs of a Lady.” Although she knew no ill effect from crossing one’s legs, she would attempt a reform to please him. Only, she thought, a dancing school could correct her “parrott-toed” walking. She failed to justify or change any of those habits accustomed by reading or thinking, hoping that John would understand.<sup>32</sup>

With the ordeal of inoculation over, the young lovers set their wedding date for the fall. A month before the wed-

30. Abigail Smith to JA, Weymouth, April 19, 1764, *BAJ*, 37.

31. JA to Abigail Smith, Boston, May 7, 1764, *BAJ*, 41–42.

32. Abigail Smith to JA, Weymouth, May 9, 1764, *BAJ*, 43.

ding, John wrote Abigail predicting what kind of a mate she would be. "You have always softened and warmed my Heart, shall restore my Benevolence as well as my Health and Tranquility of mind. You shall polish and refine my sentiments of Life and Manners, banish all the unsocial and ill natured Particles in my Composition, and form me to that happy Temper, that can reconcile a quick Discernment with a perfect Candour."<sup>33</sup> He knew she would provide the stability he needed in his life. "Ballast," he had written, "is what I want. I totter, with every Breeze. My motions are unsteady."<sup>34</sup> She would steady him; she would be his ballast:

In early October John sent a cart to Weymouth to transport some of her things to Braintree. One more cart-load would be necessary, and then she wrote "if you please you may take me."<sup>35</sup> They were married October 25, 1764, in the Weymouth parsonage in a ceremony officiated by Abigail's father. They left Weymouth for their home in Braintree.

### NEWLYWEDS

The Adamses took up residence in the 100-year-old, salt-box-style cottage at the base of Penn's Hill that John had inherited from his father. Kitty-corner from the cottage was a similar cottage in which John had been born and in which his widowed mother now lived. The cottages faced the main road running through Braintree and were situated but two miles from the ocean. The two-story cottage had four rooms on each floor. A large room downstairs had been converted into John's law office by replacing one of the windows with a door. A parlor and a kitchen with a gigantic fireplace occupied the first floor along with a bed-

33. JA to Abigail Smith, September 30, 1764, *BAJ*, 45.

34. JA Diary, 1758, L. H. Butterfield et al., eds., *The Earliest Diary of John Adams* (Cambridge, 1966), 73.

35. Abigail Smith to JA, Boston, October 4, 1764, *BAJ*, 46.

room for a servant. The upstairs had two large bedrooms and two tiny rooms.

Along with the cottage, John had also inherited ten acres of adjacent farmland and another somewhat detached thirty acres of orchards, pasture, and timber. Periodic purchases of parcels of land added to their holdings. The produce raised on the farm, generally used for home consumption rather than sold for cash, consisted of seasonal fruits, vegetables, and animal feed. Soon three cows were milked, and butter and cheese were made. Chickens and sheep were added. Apples were pressed into cider, one of the Adamses' favorite drinks. Since Braintree and the surrounding towns had no stores, cornmeal, meat, and rye were purchased from neighboring farms, while coffee, tea, spices, and sugar were obtained from Boston merchants. Fish were bountiful and inexpensive and could be obtained locally or from Boston. By 1766, the Adamses had two horses and two yearlings.

When John was home, he and a hired farmhand did the planting, weeding, and harvesting of the crops and the pruning of the orchards. When John was gone, Abigail hired farmhands or rented out the land to other farmers.

Throughout their marriage Abigail always had servants. At first only one—a black woman named Judah—who was on loan to them from John's mother. By 1767 Abigail had four servants. She regularly depended on servants, but always complained about their cost, inebriety, untrustworthiness, laziness, and their repeated illnesses. When she became attached to one or another servant, she did everything possible to retain their services.

Marriage did not change Abigail's voracious appetite to read. She avidly read the books in her husband's library while he continued reading in the law. They regularly walked up and down and around Penn's Hill, which afforded a spectacular panorama of the countryside and the sea. When newspapers arrived, the newlyweds read them together and discussed the important political issues of the day. They frequently visited relatives. Abigail's parents and

younger sister, Betsy, were only five miles away; her grandparents, only four. Her sister Mary Cranch lived in an area of Braintree called Germantown. And John's mother, who developed a loving relationship with her daughter-in-law, was just across the lane.

Immediately after the wedding, Abigail became pregnant. Within three months, her husband left for the January session of the superior court in Boston—the first of many separations the couple would endure. Throughout the first decade of their marriage, John was gone a week to a week and a half every month, riding the circuit in Massachusetts and neighboring colonies. On July 14, 1765, their first child was born—a girl they named Abigail, but who was always called Nabby. John was not home for the birth; he was again off attending court. Abigail's mother and sister were there to assist. Two years later, on July 11, 1767, a boy was born. He was named after his dying great-grandfather, John Quincy.

In April 1768 the family moved to Boston to be closer to John's law clients and to the unfolding political developments dividing the colonies from the mother country. Abigail now read four weekly newspapers as they were printed from Boston presses. She daily witnessed British soldiers recently stationed in Boston as they drilled past the Adams home on Brattle Street. She regularly hosted the colony's opposition leadership—men like Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Joseph Warren, and James Otis. John successfully represented some of them in court cases. Here another daughter—Susanna (Suky)—was born in late 1768, but lived only fourteen months. A second boy named Charles was born in May 1770.

With a lull in the political conflict with Parliament and with John exhausted from his efforts to calm the mob activities from prematurely provoking a powerful imperial response, John and Abigail moved back to Braintree in April 1771. The law office, however, remained in Boston. John would leave early in the morning to arrive at the office

between six and nine o'clock and often not return home until after nine in the evening. He could in this way devote more time to his growing practice and to the unfolding political activities, but it left Abigail with far more responsibility for raising the children and supervising the farm.

A week after returning to Braintree, Abigail wrote to one of her favorite cousins who had only recently traveled to London. Knowing her responsibilities as a woman, a wife, and now as the mother of growing children, she wrote of some of her fantasies. "From my Infancy I have always felt a great inclination to visit the Mother Country as tis call'd and had nature formed me of the other Sex, I should certainly have been a rover." The desire to visit Britain, however, had lessened partly due to her maturity and her domestic responsibilities, but also partly due to "the unnatural treatment which this our poor America has received from" Britain.<sup>36</sup>

Abigail continued to lament the limitations placed upon women.

Women you know Sir are considered as Domestick Beings, and altho they inherit an Eaquel Share of curiosity with the other Sex, yet but few are hardy eno' to venture abroad, and explore the amaizing variety of distant Lands. The Natural tenderness and Delicacy of our Constitutions, added to the many Dangers we are subject to from your Sex, renders it almost impossible for a Single Lady to travel without injury to her character. And those who have a protector in an Husband, have generally speaking obstacles sufficient to prevent their Roving, and instead of visiting other Countries; are obliged to content themselves with seeing but a very small part of their own. To your Sex we are most of us indebted for all the knowledg we acquire of Distant lands.<sup>37</sup>

36. AA to Isaac Smith, Jr., Braintree, April 20, 1771, *BAJ*, 50.

37. *Ibid.*

For years Abigail would be dependent upon her husband for descriptions of distant places, but the time would come when she too would become a “rover.”

In September 1772, a third son—Thomas Boylston—was born. Four youngsters were enough for Abigail to handle even with the aid of servants. No more pregnancies would occur for five years. After nineteen months in Braintree, the family returned to Boston in November 1772, residing in a substantial brick house purchased by John, located on South Queen Street opposite the courthouse and near his law office. Although he committed himself to avoiding “Temperance, Exercise and Peace of Mind. . . [and] Above all Things I must avoid Politicks, Political Clubbs, Town Meetings, General Court, &c. &c. &c., his life was filled with revolution. Abigail, on the other hand, had to attend to the children. The older ones were now ready to begin reading. Abigail started their lessons each day reading a chapter from the Bible. As political events heated up, the family again moved back to Braintree in early 1774. John purchased his father’s “homestead” and the large farm that accompanied it from his brother who had inherited the property. “A fine addition . . . of arable, and Meadow,” he wrote in his diary.<sup>38</sup>

## A REVOLUTIONARY MENTALITY

The year 1765 gave birth not only to the Adamses’ first child, but also a Revolutionary mentality. Throughout colonial American history, the English Parliament enacted measures that threatened American liberties. These sporadic measures were either ignored, acquiesced in, objected to, or died because of lack of support in England.<sup>39</sup> For instance, Americans objected to the Navigation Acts but acquiesced when they remained in effect because American merchants, customs collectors, and jurors found ways to avoid the

38. *BAJ*, 55.

39. Thomas Jefferson, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* (Williamsburg, Va., 1774), 11.



import duties and trade restrictions to the point where smuggling was recognized as the way to conduct everyday business. In another case, when the Duke of York attempted to centralize his control over the colonies in the 1680s in the Dominion of New England, Connecticut refused to surrender its colonial charter and the measure eventually died when, after the duke assumed the throne as James II, he was forced to abdicate.

Starting in 1761 and then escalating after the end of the French and Indian War in 1763, Parliament and the king's ministers pursued a new imperial policy toward colonial America. The colonies were now to be administered as a conquered people in the same manner as Ireland was administered. At first the "policy" was indecipherable. The writs of assistance (general search warrants) issued by Massachusetts' governor to combat the wide-scale smuggling by merchants were denounced in the famous Paxton's Case. John Adams praised James Otis, Jr. for his forceful arguments against the writs, and later asserted that "Then and there, the child Independence was born."<sup>40</sup> Such a birth, however, was far from apparent at the time.

The Proclamation Line of 1763 that forbade Americans from settling beyond the crest of the Appalachian Mountains was ignored. The Sugar Act of 1764, with its tax on molasses and its establishment of a vice admiralty court in Halifax, was condemned and unimplemented. But then in 1765, the Stamp Act was passed, the stamps were sent to America, and stamp agents were appointed. The new pattern was now becoming clear and intra- and inter-colonial opposition mounted. John Adams and his cousin Samuel Adams became the leaders of the opposition in Boston. John and Abigail read about these British acts and the opposition measures in the newspapers. Abigail was soon enlisted in the revolutionary cause. In fact Samuel, John, and Abigail Adams were among the very few who

40. Quoted in Page Smith, *John Adams* (2 vols., New York, 1962), I, 55.

early in the 1760s secretly advocated independence instead of a reconciliation with the mother country. In May 1770 John Adams was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives. Years later he told a friend what happened when he informed Abigail of the news.

I said to my wife, "I have accepted a seat in the House of Representatives, and thereby have consented to my own ruin, to your ruin, and the ruin of our children. I give you this warning that you may prepare your mind for your fate." She burst into tears, but instantly cried out in a transport of magnanimity, "Well, I am willing in this cause to run all risks with you and to be ruined with you if you are ruined." These were times, my friend, in Boston which tried women's souls as well as men's.<sup>41</sup>

With the passage of the Tea Act in 1773 tension between the colonies and Parliament mounted. Although the act actually lowered the price of tea on the open market, colonists objected to the act on two grounds: it would establish Parliament's right to tax Americans in principle and it would give the financially-strapped East Indies Company a monopoly to sell its huge inventory of tea. When ships loaded with tea arrived in Boston Harbor, tensions rose. Abigail wrote that

the Tea that bainfull weed is arrived. Great and I hope Effectual opposition has been made to the landing of it. . . . The flame is kindled and like Lightning it catches from Soul to Soul. Great will be the devastation if not timely quenched or allayed by some more Lenient Measures.

41. JA to Benjamin Rush, Quincy, April 12, 1809, *Spur of Fame*, 156.

Abigail worried that some act of violence would escalate into “a civil War,” which was the worst of all wars.<sup>42</sup> Less than two weeks later, angry Bostonians dumped the tea into the sea. Parliament responded swiftly by closing the Port of Boston, dissolving the colonial legislature, and appointing a military governor. John wrote Abigail later, “We live my dear Soul, in an Age of Tryal.”<sup>43</sup>

### ABANDONED FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

Parliament’s harsh response to the Boston Tea Party spread alarm throughout the colonies. A Continental Congress was called to meet in Philadelphia in September 1774 to respond. The Massachusetts legislature appointed John Adams one of five delegates to represent the colony. “Great Things,” John wrote Abigail while riding the circuit in Maine, “are wanted to be done, and little Things only I fear can be done. I dread the Thought of the Congress’s falling short of the Expectations of the Continent, but especially of the People of this Province.”<sup>44</sup> John asked his wife, “his dear Partner in all the Joys and Sorrows, Prosperity and Adversity of my Life, to take Part with me in the Struggle.” She would have to care for things at home. “I pray God for your Health—intreat you to rouse your whole Attention to the Family, the stock, the Farm, the Dairy. Let every Article of Expençe which can possibly be spared be retranch’d. Keep the Hands attentive to their Business, and [let] the most prudent Measures of every kind be adopted and pursued with Alacrity and Spirit.”<sup>45</sup>

On August 10, John Adams left on his “Agreeable Jaunt” to Philadelphia. Abigail would not hear from him for five

42. AA to Mercy Otis Warren, December 5, 1773, L.H. Butterfield et al., eds., *Adams Family Correspondence* (8 vols. to date, Cambridge, 1963), I, 88. Hereafter cited as *AFC*.

43. JA to AA, Boston, May 12, 1774, *BAJ*, 54.

44. JA to AA, Falmouth, July 6, 1774, *BAJ*, 60–61.

45. JA to AA, York, Maine, July 1, 1774, *BAJ*, 59.

weeks. After nine days she wrote saying that it seemed a month since he had left. No one could tell what Congress would do—that was “all wrapt in the Bosom of futurity.” Abigail rhetorically asked “Did ever any Kingdom or State regain their Liberty, when once it was invaded without Bloodshed? I cannot think of it without horror.”<sup>46</sup> She advised her husband to be strong.

We are told that all the Misfortunes of Sparta were occasioned by their too great Sollicitude for present tranquility, and by an excessive love of peace they neglected the means of making it sure and lasting. They ought to have reflected says Polibius that as there is nothing more desirable, or advantage[ou]s than peace, when founded in justice and honour, so there is nothing more shameful and at the same time more pernicious when attained by bad measures, and purchased at the price of liberty.

She delighted that he was “upon the Stage of action.”<sup>47</sup> Later she wrote, I do not “wish to see you an inactive Spectator.”<sup>48</sup>

Abigail told John that since he left she was reading Charles Rollin’s ancient history. She had convinced John Quincy to read her a page or two each day for her entertainment. In that way she taught him both reading and history. John wrote back

charmed with your Amusement with our little Johnny. . . . The education of our Children is never out of my Mind. Train them to Virtue, habituate them to industry, activity, and Spirit. Make them consider every Vice, as shamefull and

46. AA to JA, Braintree, August 19, 1774, *BAJ*, 67.

47. *Ibid.*

48. AA to JA, Braintree, October 16, 1774, *BAJ*, 80.

unmanly: fire them with Ambition to be usefull—make them disdain to be destitute of any usefull, or ornamental Knowledge or Accomplishment. Fix their Ambition upon great and solid Objects, and their Contempt upon little, frivolous, and useless ones. It is Time, my dear, for you to begin to teach them French. Every Decency, Grace, and Honesty should be inculcated upon them.<sup>49</sup>

Five and then ten weeks passed. Abigail missed John dearly. She told him that without him she needed to have her bed warmed. She “ardently” longed for his return. Once he returned, she would not share him an hour with the town until he had spent twelve alone with her.

The Idea plays about my Heart, unnerves my hand whilst I write, awakens all the tender sentiments that years have encreased and matured, and which when with me were every day dispensing to you. The whole collected stock of ten weeks absence knows not how to brook any longer restraint, but will break forth and flow thro my pen. May the like sensation enter thy breast, and (in spite of all the weighty cares of State) Mingle themselves with those I wish to communicate, for in giving them utterance I have felt more sincere pleasure than I have known since the 10 of August.<sup>50</sup>

She asked John to burn her letters “least they should fall from your pocket and thus expose your most affectionate

49. JA to AA, Prince Town, New Jersey, August 28, 1774, *BAJ*, 69–70. A year and a half later, John emphasized the teaching of French. “I wish I understood French as well as you. . . . I pray My dear, that you would not suffer your Sons or your Daughter, ever to feel a similar Pain. It is in your Power to teach them French, and I every day see more and more that it will become a necessary Accomplishment of an American Gentleman and Lady.” JA to AA, Philadelphia, February 18, 1776, *BAJ*, 116–17.

50. AA to JA, Braintree, October 16, 1774, *BAJ*, 79–80.

Friend.”<sup>51</sup> She would repeat this request several more times—he would never oblige.

John returned from Philadelphia in late October 1774 and for the next six months remained active in Massachusetts politics in Cambridge when the provincial congress met and in Boston otherwise. Usually he would spend the evenings in Braintree. But in May 1775 John again traveled to Philadelphia for the Second Continental Congress and a much longer absence from home during a period of war. While en route to Philadelphia, John wrote Abigail about his expectations of the colonies being bound together in “indissoluble Bands . . . at this great Crisis in the Affairs of Mankind.” He advised her not to fear “imaginary Dangers,” but “in Case of real Danger,” she was to “fly to the Woods with our Children.”<sup>52</sup> Knowing the dangers that her husband faced, Abigail wrote of her fear and her loneliness. “I felt very anxious about you tho I endeavoured to be very insensible and heroick, yet my heart felt like a heart of Lead.”<sup>53</sup>

When actual fighting started with the battles at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, no one rested secure with the British army but a few miles away. Regularly the alarm bells from neighboring communities could be heard. Young American soldiers came through Braintree and lodged and dined with the family. “Tired and fatigued” refugees from Boston sought “an assilum for a Day or Night, a week.” Their world was turned upside down. “We know not what a day will bring forth, nor what distress one hour may throw us into. Heitherto I have been able to maintain a calmness and presence of Mind, and hope I shall, let the Exigency of the time be what they will.”<sup>54</sup> But people feared what the British might do. “Necessity will oblige [Governor] Gage to take some desperate steps. We

51. AA to JA, Braintree, September 16, 1774, *BAJ*, 74.

52. JA to AA, Hartford, May 2, 1775, *BAJ*, 82–83.

53. AA to JA, Braintree, May 4, 1775, *BAJ*, 83.

54. AA to JA, Braintree, May 24, 1775, *BAJ*, 85.

are told for Truth, that he is now Eight thousand strong. We live in continual expectation of allarms.”<sup>55</sup>

With no letters from John, Abigail worried about his unstable health. She begged him to write. “Every line is like a precious Relict of the Saints.” But she also reminded him of the ordinary needs of life that the war had caused. She pleaded with him to “purchase me a bundle of pins. . . . The cry for pins is so great that what we used to Buy for 7.6 [seven and a half shillings] are now 20 Shillings, and not to be had for that.”<sup>56</sup>

On June 17 John wrote Abigail from Congress announcing that George Washington had been appointed commander in chief of all American forces. The general was “modest and virtuous, amiable, generous and brave.” He had been sent to Boston to take command, and ten companies of riflemen from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia would also be forthcoming. The sentiment in Congress, John wrote, was favorable toward Massachusetts, but things moved slowly. “America is a great, unwieldy Body. Its Progress must be slow. It is like a large Fleet sailing under Convoy. The fleetest Sailors must wait for the dullest and slowest. Like a Coach and six—the swiftest Horses must be slackened and the slowest quickened, that all may keep an even Pace.”<sup>57</sup> On that same day, Abigail wrote John of the dreadful news of the Battle of Bunker Hill and the burning of the town of Charlestown by naval incendiary bombs. The cannon started to roar at 3:00 AM on Saturday and continued as she wrote at 3:00 PM on Sunday. “The constant roar of the cannon is so distressing that we can not Eat, Drink or Sleep.” A week later she wrote that “We live in continual Expectation of Hostilities,” but she would stay in Braintree until it became too “unsafe.”<sup>58</sup>

The British attacks bound the American communities together. She had become somewhat of a celebrity because

55. AA to JA, Weymouth, June [16?], 1775, *BAJ*, 86.

56. *Ibid.*, 88.

57. JA to AA, Philadelphia, June 17, 1775, *BAJ*, 89.

58. AA to JA, Braintree, June 18 and 25, 1775, *BAJ*, 90, 93.

of the prominence of her husband. Everyone awaited news from Philadelphia. Even the children were anxious to hear from their papa. “You would laugh to see them all run upon the sight of a Letter—like chickens for a crum, when the Hen clucks.”<sup>59</sup>

John was proud of Abigail. “It gives me more Pleasure than I can express to learn that you sustain with so much Fortitude, the Shocks and Terrors of the Times. You are really brave, my dear, you are an Heroine.” He informed her that he had acquired “two great Heaps of Pins” and would bring them home when he returned in a month.<sup>60</sup>

Abigail was equally as proud of her husband. When he told her that the American generals were coming to take command of the army outside of Boston, he lamented that he was not a soldier. They would get all the glory. “Such is the Pride and Pomp of War. I, poor Creature, worn out with scribbling, for my Bread and my Liberty, low in Spirits and weak in Health, must leave others to wear the Lawrells which I have sown; others, to eat the Bread which I have earned.”<sup>61</sup> She wrote to him as his “Bosome Friend,” knowing “your feelings, your anxieties, your exertions, &c. more than those before whom you are obliged to wear the face of chearfulness.” She understood

How difficult the task to quench out the fire and the pride of private ambition, and to sacrifice ourselves and all our hopes and expectations to the publick weal. How few have souls capable of so noble an undertaking—how often are the lawrells worn by those who have had no share in earning them, but there is a future recompence of reward to which the upright man looks, and which he will most assuredly obtain provided he perseveres unto the end.<sup>62</sup>

59. AA to JA, Braintree, June 25, 1775, *BAJ*, 94.

60. JA to AA, Philadelphia, July 7, 1775, *BAJ*, 96.

61. JA to AA, Philadelphia, June 23, 1775, *BAJ*, 91–92.

62. AA to JA, Braintree, July 16, 1775, *BAJ*, 99–100.



Abigail told John that the generals and their aides had arrived and made a good impression. She was particularly impressed with the commander in chief. "I was struck with General Washington. You had prepared me to entertain a favorable opinion of him, but I thought the one half was not told me. Dignity with ease, and complacency, the Gentleman and Soldier look agreeably blended in him. Modesty marks every line and feature of his face."<sup>63</sup>

She wished, however, that John would write especially on Sundays when he had free time from the work of Congress. She told him of the scarcity of goods that were only a year ago so plentiful. This was particularly true, she reiterated, of pins. "Not one pin is to be purchased for love nor money. I wish you could convey me a thousand by any Friend travelling this way. 'Tis very provoking to have such a plenty so near us, but tantulus like not able to touch."<sup>64</sup>

The Second Continental Congress recessed during August and September 1775. John came home to Massachusetts but immediately attended the provincial congress that was then meeting in Watertown. He was, however, able to go home on weekends, and Abigail finally received her pins.

She visited him during the final three days of the session before he returned to Philadelphia and Congress, only to leave Abigail to fight a more personal and deadly foe. A virulent dysentery epidemic broke out that killed many, including Abigail's mother and John's brother Elihu and his child. Abigail brought Elihu's orphaned daughter Susanna into her home.<sup>65</sup> The desolation of War is not so distressing

63. *Ibid.*, 100.

64. *Ibid.*, 103. In Greek mythology, Tantalus, the son of Zeus, had so angered the gods by sharing their nectar with his friends, that they punished him by setting him thirsty and hungry in a pool of water which always receded when he tried to drink from it, and under fruit trees whose branches the wind tossed aside whenever he tried to pick the fruit. His plight inspired the word "tantalize."

65. AA to JA, Braintree, November 27, 1775, *BAJ*, 113-14. Susanna never married and would be part of the Adams family beyond Abigail's death in 1818.

as the Havock made by the pestilence. Some poor parents are mourning the loss of 3, 4 and 5 children, and some families are wholly striped of every Member.”<sup>66</sup> On October 1 she told him of the death of her own mother. “Sickness and death are in almost every family.”<sup>67</sup> John tried to console Abigail. “It is not uncommon for a Train of Calamities to come together. Fire, Sword, Pestilence, Famine, often keep Company, and visit a Country in a Flock.” He was sorry he could offer no help at such a distance, but was “charmed with that Admirable Fortitude, and that divine Spirit of Resignation which appears in your Letters. I cannot express the Satisfaction it gives me, nor how much it contributes to support me.”<sup>68</sup> He hoped her grief would ease. He wished he could be there with her. “It would be a Joy to me to fly home, even to share with you your Burdens and Misfortunes. Surely, if I were with you, it would be my Study to allay your Grievs, to mitigate your Pains and to divert your melancholly Thoughts.”<sup>69</sup> But alas, the work of Congress was slow. “We must learn Patience.”<sup>70</sup>

For two weeks, Abigail was very sick. Physically she recovered but she worried about what was happening in Congress. A form of government would have to be established, but what should be devised? She was more convinced than ever

that Man is a dangerous creature, and that power whether vested in many or a few is ever grasping, and like the grave cries give, give. The great fish swallow up the small, and he who is most strenuous for the Rights of the people, when vested with power, is as eager after the perogatives of Government. You tell me of degrees of perfection

66. AA to JA, Braintree, September 25, 1775, *BAJ*, 107.

67. AA to JA, Weymouth, October 1, 1775, *BAJ*, 108.

68. JA to AA, Philadelphia, October 1, 1775, *BAJ*, 109.

69. JA to AA, Philadelphia, October 19, 1775, *BAJ*, 110.

70. *Ibid.*

to which Humane Nature is capable of arriving, and I believe it, but at the same time lament that our admiration should arise from the scarcity of the instances. . . . I fear the people will not quietly submit to those restraints which are necessary for the peace, and security, of the community; if we separate from Britain, what Code of Laws will be established. How shall we be governed so as to retain our Liberties? . . . but whatever occurs, may justice and righteousness be the Stability of our times, and order arise out of confusion. Great difficulties may be surmounted, by patience and perseverance.<sup>71</sup>

One man that Abigail met she venerated. Benjamin Franklin was traveling through New England on congressional business when he stopped to pay his respects to his colleague's wife. John had spoken highly of Franklin. "There is no abler or better American, that I know of."<sup>72</sup> He wrote to Abigail saying that Franklin was not one of the leaders striving for independence in Congress. "He has had but little share farther than to co operate and assist. He is however a great and good Man."<sup>73</sup> Abigail had dinner with Franklin

whose character from my Infancy I had been taught to venerate. I found him social, but not talkative, and when he spoke something usefull droped from his Tongue; he was grave, yet pleasant, and affable.—You know I make some pretensions to physiognomy and I thought I could read in his countenance the Virtues of his Heart, among which patriotism shined in its full Lusture—and

71. AA to JA, Braintree, November 27, 1775, *BAJ*, 113.

72. JA to James Warren, Philadelphia, September 30, 1775, *Papers of John Adams*, III, 172.

73. JA to AA, Philadelphia, July 23, 1775, *BAJ*, 105.

with that is blended every virtue of a christian, for a true patriot must be a religious Man.<sup>74</sup>

Five years later, both Abigail and John would have a far different attitude toward the venerable Dr. Franklin.

The Massachusetts provincial congress surprisingly appointed John Adams both a delegate to Congress and the state's new chief justice. John decided to come home to reconcile the appointments. He arrived in Braintree on December 21, 1775, and remained a month before returning to Philadelphia.

On March 17 the British evacuated Boston. "They have carried off[f] every thing they could possibly take, and what they could not they burnt, broke, hove into the water." The Adamses' house in Boston had been occupied by a British regimental physician and left "very dirty, but no other damage has been done to it. The few things which were left in it are all gone."<sup>75</sup> "Many people are elated with their quitting Boston. I confess I do not feel so, tis only lifting the burden from one shoulder to the other which perhaps is less able or less willing to support it." Abigail had concluded that only a decisive war would settle the conflict with Britain. "It is come to that pass now that the longest sword must decide the contest—and the sword is less dreaded here than the [British peace] commissioners."<sup>76</sup>

Abigail also worried about other Americans fighting the British. The Virginia riflemen "have shewn themselves very savage and even Blood thirsty; are not a specimen of the Generality of the people." She questioned whether "the passion for Liberty" could "be Eaquelly Strong in the Breasts of those who have been accustomed to deprive their fellow Creatures of theirs."<sup>77</sup> But, on the whole, Abigail felt optimistic. Spring had come, planting was about to begin,

74. AA to JA, Braintree, November 5, 1775, *AFC*, I, 320–21.

75. AA to JA, Braintree, 16 and 17 March 1776, *BAJ*, 118, 120.

76. AA to JA, Braintree, March 16, 1776, *BAJ*, 118, 119.

77. AA to JA, Braintree, March 31, 1776, *BAJ*, 120.

and the British had left. No longer did they have to worry about being “driven from the sea coasts to seek shelter in the wilderness, but now we feel as if we might sit under our own vine and eat the good of the land. I feel a gaiety de Coar [a gaiety of the heart] in which I was a stranger. I think the Sun looks brighter, the Birds sing more melodiously, and Nature puts on a more chearfull countenance. We feel a temporary peace, and the poor fugitives [refugees] are returning to their deserted habitations.”<sup>78</sup>

With this new-found optimism, Abigail longed “to hear that you have declared an independancy.” Accompanying that new American independence, she hoped would be a new station in society for women with a new code of laws.

Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.

That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity. Men of Sense in all Ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex. Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in imitation of the

78. *Ibid.*, 121.

Suprem Being make use of that power only for our happiness.<sup>79</sup>

Abigail was not seeking equality for women with men. She believed that men and women were equal, but had different roles assigned to them by nature. Women were destined to be wives and mothers and express their uniqueness in these areas. No man could achieve his full potential without the support of a loving and encouraging wife. Abigail did not argue for the right of women to vote and hold office. Not that she felt women incapable of such political expression. She sought only what she felt was immediately pressing and what in fact might be accomplished. She wanted property and judicial rights for women. She wanted protection from physical abuse from tyrannical husbands.

Delighted with Abigail's "Gaiety de Coeur," John nonchalantly brushed aside her serious appeal for the relief of women.

As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government every where. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient—that schools and Colledges were grown turbulent—that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters. But your Letter was the first Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerfull than all the rest were grown discontented.—This is rather too coarse a Compliment but you are so saucy, I wont blot it out.

Depend upon it, We know better than to repeal our Masculine systems. Altho they are in full Force, you know they are little more than Theory. We

79. *Ibid.*, 121.

dare not exert our Power in its full Latitude. We are obliged to go fair, and softly, and in Practice you know We are the subjects. We have only the Name of Masters, and rather than give up this, which would compleatly subject Us to the Despotism of the Peticoat, I hope General Washington, and all our brave Heroes would fight. I am sure every good Politician would plot, as long as he would against Despotism, Empire, Monarchy, Aristocracy, Oligarchy, of Ochlocracy.—A fine Story indeed. I begin to think the Ministry as deep as they are wicked. After stirring up Tories, Landjobbers, Trimmers, Bigots, Canadians, Indians, Negroes, Hanoverians, Hessians, Russians, Irish Roman Catholicks, Scotch Renegades, at last they have stimulated the \_\_\_\_\_ to demand new Priviledges and threaten to rebell.<sup>80</sup>

Disappointed with John's reply, Abigail responded in a serious though nonthreatening, and light-hearted manner.

I can not say that I think you very generous to the Ladies, for whilst you are proclaiming peace and good will to Men, Emancipating all Nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over Wives. But you must remember that Arbitrary power is like most other things which are very hard, very liable to be broken—and notwithstanding all your wise Laws and Maxims we have it in our power not only to free ourselves but to subdue our Masters, and without violence throw both your natural and legal authority at our feet—

Charmed by accepting, by submitting sway  
Yet have our Humour most when we obey.<sup>81</sup>

80. JA to AA, Philadelphia, April 14, 1776, *BAJ*, 122–23.

81. AA to JA, Braintree, May 7, 1776, *BAJ*, 127. The couplet is taken from Alexander Pope's *Epistle II: To a Lady: On the Character of Women* (1735), lines 263–64.

Abigail would not give up the struggle. She shifted from alleviating the condition of wives to improving the education of young girls. "If you complain of neglect of Education in sons, What shall I say with regard to daughters, who every day experience the want of it. With regard to the Education of my own children, I find myself soon out of my depth, and destitute and deficient in every part of Education." She hoped the new constitution would provide a more liberal education for the rising generation. "If we mean to have Heroes, Statesmen and philosophers, we should have learned women." She hoped John was broad-minded enough to appreciate the need. "If much depends as is allowed upon the early Education of youth and the first principles which are instilled take the deepest root, great benefit must arise from literary accomplishments in women."<sup>82</sup>

Although unhappy with John's response to obtaining more rights for women, Abigail was still supportive of what he was doing for the country. "How many are the solitary hours I spend, ruminating upon the past, and anticipating the future, whilst you overwhelmed with the cares of State, have but few moments you can devote to any individual. All domestick pleasures and enjoyments are absorbed in the great and important duty you owe your Country." She confided in him that "our Country is as it were a secondary God, and the First and greatest parent. It is to be preferred to Parents, Wives, Children, Friends and all things the Gods only excepted. For if our Country perishes it is as impossible to save an individual, as to preserve one of the fingers of a Mortified Hand. Thus," she wrote, "do I suppress every wish, and silence every Murmur, acquiescing in a painfull Separation from the companion of my youth, and the Friend of my Heart."<sup>83</sup>

82. AA to JA, Boston, August 14, 1776, *BAJ*, 153. For Abigail's ideas on female education, see Elaine Forman Crane's seminal article "Political Dialogue and the Spring of Abigail's Discontent," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, LVI, No. 4 (October 1999), 745-74.

83. AA to JA, Braintree, May 7, 1776, *BAJ*, 126.



She wanted to hear that Congress had acted—that it had declared independence. “’Tis a Maxim of state that power and Liberty are like Heat and moisture; where they are well mixt every thing prospers, where they are single, they are destructive.” With independence she prayed for a properly balanced government. “A Government of more Stability is much wanted in this colony, and they are ready to receive it from the Hands of the Congress, and since I have begun with Maxims of State, I will add another, viz. that a people may let a king fall, yet still remain a people, but if a king lets his people slip from him, he is no longer a king. And this is most certainly our case, why not proclaim to the World in decisive terms your own importance?”<sup>84</sup>

In her next letter Abigail returned to more mundane matters. Although desperately needing help to run the farm, she let Isaac Copeland go when he demanded more money than Abigail felt he was worth. “I wanted somebody of Spirit who was wiser than myself, to conduct my Business.” After hiring two men, she felt optimistic about the upcoming season. She paid off all their expenses, “supported the family,” and still had some cash left. She knew that this news would ease John’s mind, “which amid all other cares which surround you, will some times advert to your own Little Farm, and to your Family.” “I have done the best I could. . . . I shall be quite a Farmeriss.”<sup>85</sup> At least, she wrote, “I hope in time to have the Reputation of being as good a *Farmeress* as my partner has of being a good Statesman.”<sup>86</sup> The information relieved John “from many Anxieties.” Her “wise and prudent Management” made him “jealous, that our Neighbours will think Affairs more discretely conducted in my Absence than at any other Time.”<sup>87</sup> James Warren, the Revolutionary leader and close

84. *Ibid.*, 127.

85. AA to JA, May 14, 1776, *BAJ*, 128–29.

86. AA to JA, Braintree, April 11, 1776, *AFC*, I, 375.

87. JA to AA, Philadelphia, May 27, 1776, *BAJ*, 130.

friend of the Adamses, confirmed John's apprehensions. "After all our Study, I don't know but Mrs. Adams' Native Genius will Excel us all in Husbandry. She was much Engaged when I came along, and the Farm at Braintree Appeared to be Under Excellent Management."<sup>88</sup> John responded to Abigail: "Gen. Warren writes me, that my Farm never looked better, than when he last saw it, and that Mrs. ——— was like to outshine all the Farmers.—I wish I could see it.—But I can make Allowances. He knows the Weakness of his Friend's Heart and that nothing flatters it more than praises bestowed upon a certain Lady."<sup>89</sup>

Sometimes Abigail wished she were rich so that she could be with her husband, "but as it is, I think it my duty to attend with frugality and economy to our own private affairs, and if I cannot add to our Little Substance yet see that it is not diminished." She would be unhappy "in a state of Idleness and uselessness. Here I can serve my partner, my family and myself, and enjoy the Satisfaction of your serving your Country."<sup>90</sup> John appreciated the letters from his wife in which he could obtain "clearer and fuller Intelligence, than I can get from a whole Committee of Gentlemen."<sup>91</sup>

John was delighted to inform Abigail about Congress's move toward independence. First, the resolution of May 10 with its preamble adopted five days later, both written by John Adams, called upon the people to throw off their royal governments and establish new governments amenable to the people. This "to all Intents and Purposes," was a declaration of independence in that it extinguished "all Authority, under the Crown, Parliament and Nation" of Great Britain. It necessitated a "Confederation . . . for our internal Concord, and Alliances may be so for our external

88. James Warren to JA, Boston, April 27, 1777, Robert J. Taylor et al., eds., *Papers of John Adams* (Cambridge, 1983), V, 165.

89. JA to AA, Philadelphia, May 15, 1777, *AFC*, II, 238.

90. AA to JA, Braintree, June 3, 1776, *BAJ*, 136.

91. JA to Mary Palmer, Philadelphia, July 5, 1776, *Adams Family Papers*, II, 34.

Defence.”<sup>92</sup> On July 3, he wrote of the momentous action of Congress yesterday in declaring independence “without one dissenting Colony.”<sup>93</sup> “The Second Day of July 1776,” he predicted,

will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America.—I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more.<sup>94</sup>

Two days after the vote on independence Congress approved a formal Declaration of Independence submitted by a committee of five. John Adams was on the committee, but the poetic declaration was written by Thomas Jefferson, the thirty-three-year-old delegate from Virginia. Years later John would write enviously that “I always considered [the Declaration] as a theatrical show. Jefferson ran away with all the stage effect of that . . . and all the glory of it.”<sup>95</sup>

Abigail thanked John for the wonderful news. “Your Letters,” she wrote, “never fail to give me Pleasure, be the subject what it will, yet it was greatly heightened by the prospect of the future happiness and glory of our Country; nor am I a little Gratified when I reflect that a person so nearly connected with me has had the Honour of being a principal actor, in laying a foundation for its future Greatness.” She hoped that “the foundation of our new constitution, be justice, Truth and Righteousness. Like the

92. JA to AA, Philadelphia, May, 17, 1776, *BAJ*, 129.

93. JA to AA, Philadelphia, July 3, 1776, *BAJ*, 139.

94. JA to AA, Philadelphia, July 3, 1776, *BAJ*, 142.

95. JA to Benjamin Rush, June 21, 1811, *The Spur of Fame*, 197.

wise Man's house may it be founded upon those Rocks and then neither storms or tempests will overthrow it."<sup>96</sup>

Abigail wrote this last letter from Boston where she and the children had gone to be inoculated for smallpox. John had wanted the family inoculated but Abigail hadn't consulted with him about the timing. Abigail's inoculation went well—only three pock marks nicely formed. The children "stood the operation Manfully." John Quincy and Thomas had mild reactions. Charles had to be re-inoculated before having it take. But poor Nabby reacted violently with between 600 and 700 painful boils all over her body. "She is as patient as one can expect, but they are a very soar sort." Many in Boston contracted the deadly disease naturally—some of whom felt they had been inoculated.<sup>97</sup>

During her last week in Boston at her aunt's house, she sequestered herself for three days in a one-windowed closet overlooking a flower garden.

Here I say I have amused myself in reading and thinking of my absent Friend, sometimes with a mixture of paine, sometimes with pleasure, sometimes anticipating a joyfull and happy meeting, whilst my Heart would bound and palpitate with the pleasing Idea, and with the purest affection I have held you to my Bosom till my whole Soul has dissolved in Tenderness and my pen fallen from my Hand.

How often do I reflect with pleasure that I hold in possession a Heart Equally warm with my own, and full as Susceptable of the Tenderest impressions, and Who even now whilst he is reading here, feels all I discribe.

Forgive this Revere, this Delusion, and since I am debared real, suffer me, to enjoy, and indulge

96. AA to JA, Boston, July 14, 1776, *BAJ*, 145. For the reference to the wise man building his house upon the rock, see Matthew 7:24–25.

97. AA to JA, August 14, 1776, *BAJ*, 152.

in Ideal pleasures—and tell me they are not inconsistent with the stern virtue of a senator and a Patriot.<sup>98</sup>

As the war continued with one humiliating retreat after another out of New York City and across New Jersey, General Washington's army dwindled to only a couple thousand. Abigail refused to become dispirited. New England women remained strong. "We possess a spirit that will not be conquered. If our Men are all drawn of[f] and we should be attacked, you would find a Race of Amazons in America."<sup>99</sup>

In mid-October 1776 Congress approved a leave of absence and John returned home. He was again elected a delegate to Congress but with six colleagues, it seemed apparent he would not be expected to stay away from home long. He left Braintree on January 9, 1777, for what would be his last congressional tour of duty. Abigail felt especially vulnerable when John left because she was pregnant for the sixth time. This time neither her husband nor her mother would be present for the delivery.

Abigail started having strange forebodings. "What cannot be help'd," she wrote, "must be endured." She easily overcame the fear of her own death, but she fretted for her children. "How anxious the Heart of a parent who looks round upon a family of young and helpless children and thinks of leaving them to a World full of snares and temptations which they have neither discretion to foresee, nor prudence to avoid." She told John how much she missed him and how his frequent letters were "a consolation to me, tho a cold comfort in a winter's Night."<sup>100</sup> Despite her anxieties, she felt better than she had in a long while, despite a complexion that "very near resembled a whited wall." She gained so much weight, that nine-year-

98. AA to JA, Boston, August 29, 1776, *BAJ*, 159–60.

99. AA to JA, Braintree, September 20, 1776, *BAJ*, 164.

100. AA to JA, Braintree, April 17, 1777, *BAJ*, 171.

old John Quincy said to her, “Mar, I never saw any body grow so fat as you do.”<sup>101</sup>

Abigail worried about the pregnancy. “I wish the day passt, yet dread its arrival.”<sup>102</sup> She started feeling badly and then on the evening of July 8, 1777, she suffered a “shaking fit” that caused her to feel that the baby had died.<sup>103</sup> Three days later Abigail gave birth to a stillborn baby girl. John was informed of the death and that Abigail was in no danger herself. On July 11, Abigail briefly explained what had happened. She had so wanted to have another daughter. Poor Nabby was most distressed as she “mournd in tears for Hours” for the sister that she would never have. Despite her deep sorrow, Abigail was thankful that her life was spared so that she could continue to raise her other four children. “So short sighted and so little a way can we look into futurity that we ought patiently to submit to the dispensation of Heaven.”<sup>104</sup> As their fourteenth anniversary approached Abigail reflected on their many absences from each other.

’Tis almost 14 years since we were united, but not more than half that time have we had the happiness of living together,. The unfealing world may consider it in what light they please, I consider it as a sacrifice to my Country and one of my greatest misfortunes [for my husband] to be separated from my children at a time of life when the joint instructions and admonition of parents sink deeper than in maturer years.<sup>105</sup>

To John Lowell, John Adams’s fellow delegate to Congress, Abigail wrote. “It has been my Lot in Life to be called repeatedly to the painfull task of seperating from the dearest

101. *Ibid.*, 172.

102. AA to JA, Braintree, June 23, 1777, *BAJ*, 178.

103. AA to JA, Braintree, July 9, 1777, *BAJ*, 178.

104. AA to JA, Braintree, July 16, 1777, *BAJ*, 182.

105. AA to JA, Braintree, August 5, 1777, *BAJ*, 186.

connection in Life, Honour and Fame of which the world talk, weigh but lightly against the Domestick happiness I resign, and the pain and anxiety I suffer.—One only consideration preponderates the scale, The hope of rendering Essential service to a distressed and Bleeding Country”<sup>106</sup> Others saw the sacrifice that Abigail was making. Her good friend Mercy Otis Warren said

I Really think it a Great tryal of patience and philosophy to be so Long seperated from the Companion of Your Heart and from the Father of your Little Flock. But the High Enthusiasm of a truly patriotic Lady will Carry Her through Every Difficulty, and Lead Her to Every Exertion. Patience, Fortitude, Public Spirit, Magnanimity and self Denial are the Virtues she Boasts. I wish I Could put in my Claim to those sublime qualities.<sup>107</sup>

Warren readily and sorrowfully confessed that she could not make such a sacrifice. Warren would not consent that her husband leave Massachusetts to serve in Congress. “I own my weakness and stand Corrected yet Cannot Rise superior to Those Attachments which sweeten Life and Without which the Dregs of this Terestial Existence Would not be Worth preserving.”<sup>108</sup>

The second year of the war was difficult for Abigail on the home front. Hired farm hands were hard to come by because of the high demand of the state militia and Continental Line both of which offered attractive bounties to enlistees. Abigail’s black farm hand left her “in the midst of our Hay.” Inflation became rampant as Continental currency, which had initially served its purpose, now depreciated precipitously as Congress’s printing presses poured out endless streams of the worthless paper currency. The price

106. AA to John Lowell, Braintree, November 29, 1779, *AFC*, III, 240.

107. Mercy Otis Warren to AA, October 15, 1776, *AFC*, II, 142.

108. *Ibid.*

of everything skyrocketed while some consumer goods were just not available.

But things were not all bad. "Heaven has blessed us with fine crops. I hope to have 200 hundred bushels of corn and a hundred & 50 weight of flax. English Hay we have more than we had last year. . . . We are like to have plenty of sause. I shall fat Beaf and pork enough, make butter and cheese enough." There was, however, no sugar, molasses, coffee, or tea, but Abigail felt "no right to complain. I can live without any of them." As to clothing, Abigail had "procured materials sufficient to cloath my children and servants which I have done wholly in Home Spun." Most important "I have contracted no debts that I have not discharg'd." All the proper repairs had been made on the farm and Abigail had "set up a cider press" as well.<sup>109</sup> The news of the American victory over General Burgoyne at Saratoga also contributed to the hopefulness of next year.

#### DIVORCED BY AN OCEAN

In early November 1777 Congress gave John and Samuel Adams leave of absence to visit their families. By the end of the month they were home. Immediately John set about to restore his law practice, taking on a lucrative admiralty law case in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Unbeknownst to Abigail and John, this would be his last appearance in a courtroom as a practicing attorney.

While off in Portsmouth, a letter arrived from Congress appointing John a commissioner at Versailles to join Benjamin Franklin and Arthur Lee in negotiating alliances and commercial treaties with European and North African countries. Abigail was distressed. Congress again "contrive[d] to rob me of all my happiness. . . . The deputing my Friend upon so important an Embassy is a grateful proof to me of the esteem of his Country. Tho I would not wish him to be less deserving I am sometimes almost

109. AA to JA, Boston, August 22, 1777, *BAJ*, 190–91.



selfish enough to wish his abilities confined to private life, and the more so for that wish is according with his own inclinations." She knew John could not refuse the appointment and she could not stand in the way. She used the time when John was in Portsmouth "to bring my mind to bear the Event with fortitude and resignation."<sup>110</sup>

John accepted the commission. He worried little about "the dangers of the Seas and the Sufferings of a Winter passage." What concerned him was the British Navy. Capture assuredly meant imprisonment and execution for treason. The absence from "a dearly beloved Wife and four young Children, excited Sentiments of tenderness, which a Father and a Lover only can conceive, and which no language can express." But his country's distress overrode all personal concerns. Abigail understood. "My Wife who had always encouraged and animated me, in all antecedent dangers and perplexities, did not fail me on this Occasion."<sup>111</sup> Abigail, however, did suggest that John might take the boys along with him. In the end, it was felt too dangerous for the younger boys. Only ten-year-old John Quincy would accompany his father overseas. In mid-February 1778, father and son were on their way to France aboard the *Boston*, a 24-gun Continental frigate. The frigid ordeal of thunderstorms, a hurricane, and close encounters with British men-of-war lasted a month and a half before they arrived safely in France.

John greatly enjoyed getting reacquainted with Benjamin Franklin.

Dr. Franklin with whom I had served the best part of two Years in Congress in great Harmony and Civility, and there had grown up between Us that kind of Friendship, which is commonly felt between two members of the same public

110. AA to James Lovell, Braintree, ca December 15, 1777, *BAJ*, 203–4.

111. JA Autobiography, December 1777, *BAJ*, 204–5.

Assembly, who meet each other every day not only in public deliberations, but at private Breakfasts, dinners and Suppers, and especially in secret confidential Consultations, and who always agreed in their Opinions and Sentiments of public affairs. This had been the History of my Acquaintance with Franklin and he received me accordingly with great apparent Cordiality.<sup>112</sup>

John fell in love with France. “The Reception I have met, in this Kingdom, has been as friendly, as polite, and as respectfull as was possible. . . . The Delights of France are innumerable. The Politeness, the Elegance, the Softness, the Delicacy, is extreme.”<sup>113</sup> “It is one great Garden. Nature and Art have conspired to render every Thing here delightful. . . . there is no People in the World, who take so much Pains to please, nor any whose Endeavours in this Way, have more success. Their Arts, Manners, Taste and Language are more respected in Europe than those of any other Nation.”<sup>114</sup> “Every Thing that can sooth, charm and bewitch is here.”<sup>115</sup> He teasingly confided in Abigail that “I admire the Ladies here. Dont be jealous. They are handsome, and very well educated. Their Accomplishments are exceedingly brilliant. And their Knowledge of Letters and Arts, exceeds that of the English Ladies much, I believe.” Franklin, “my venerable Colleague enjoys a Priviledge here, that is much to be envyd. Being seventy Years of Age, the Ladies not only allow him to embrace them as often as he pleases, but they are perpetually embracing him.”<sup>116</sup> In December, John would lament that he was too young for French women to embrace, but that when he returned home, American women would find him too old for such things.<sup>117</sup>

112. JA Diary, April 9, 1778, *BAJ*, 209.

113. JA to AA, Passy, France, April 12, 1778, *BAJ*, 209–10.

114. JA to AA, Passy, June 3, 1778, *BAJ*, 216.

115. JA to AA, Passy, July 26, 1778, *BAJ*, 222.

116. JA to AA, Passy, April 25, 1778, *BAJ*, 211.

117. JA to Mercy Otis Warren, Passy, December 18, 1778, *Papers of John Adams*, VII, 282.

Abigail waited patiently for word from John. Nothing arrived for almost five months. Her imagination ran wild. "I have lived a life of fear and anxiety ever since you left me." Her mind was "agitated like a troubled sea."<sup>118</sup> Rumors spread that Franklin had been assassinated; that the *Boston* had been sunk or captured. Where was her husband; what was he doing? What about little Johnny? Were they safe? But still she took comfort.

Difficult as the Day is, cruel as this War has been, seperated as I am on account of it from the dearest connexion in life, I would not exchange my Country for the Wealth of the Indies, or be any other than an American tho I might be Queen or Empress of any Nation upon the Globe. My Soul is unambitious of pomp or power, Beneath my Humble roof, Bless'd with the Society and tenderest affection of my dear partner, I have enjoyed as much felicity, and as exquisite happiness as falls to the share of mortals; and tho I have been call'd to sacrifice to my Country, I can glory in my Sacrifice, and derive pleasure from my intimate connexion with one who is esteemed worthy of the important trust devolved upon him.<sup>119</sup>

Finally, on June 30, "tears of joy filled" her eyes as she saw the handwriting of her long absent husband. Now that she knew he was safe, "I wish myself with you." In her absence, he would have to give "a Recital of all your adventures, tho methinks I would not have them in all respects too similar to those of your venerable Colleague." Two men recently arrived from France visited Abigail and told her how John and Johnny were doing. They described the "Freedom and fondness of the [ladies] for the venerable Doctor," but also described how the "grave American

118. AA to JA, Braintree, June 30, 1778, *BAJ*, 217.

119. AA to JA, Braintree, May 18, 1777, *BAJ*, 212.

republican [from Massachusetts] was so embarrassed by the show of affection. In her next letter, she confidently allowed him to be embraced by the French ladies because she held “possession of what I think they cannot rob me of. Tis mine by a free gift, mine by exchange, mine by a long possession, mine by merrit and mine by every law humane and divine.”<sup>120</sup> She apologized for being so bold. She felt “myself embarrassed whilst my Heart overflows, and longs to give utterance to my pen.”<sup>121</sup>

Abigail seized upon John’s description of educated French women to revisit the necessity of female education in America.

I can hear of the Brilliant accomplishments of any of my Sex with pleasure and rejoyce in that Liberality of Sentiment which acknowledges them. At the same time I regret the trifling narrow contracted Education of the Females of my own country. I have entertained a superiour opinion of the accomplishments of the French Ladies ever since I read the Letters of Dr. Sherbear, who professes that he had rather take the opinion of an accomplished Lady in matters of polite writing than the first wits of Italy and should think himself safer with her approbation than of a long List of Literari, and he gives this reason for it that Women have in general more delicate Sensations than Men what touches them is for the most part true in Nature, whereas men warpt by Education, judge amiss from previous prejudice and referring all things to the model of the antients, condemn that by comparison where no true Similitud ought to be expected. But in this country you need not be told how much female Education is neglected, nor how fashionable it has been to ridicule Female

120. AA to JA, Braintree, ca July 15, 1778, *BAJ*, 220.

121. *Ibid.*

learning, tho I acknowledge it my happiness to be connected with a person of a more generous mind and liberal Sentiments.<sup>122</sup>

Abigail then filled a page with a quotation by an unnamed advocate of female education. Coincidentally, Nabby was now gone to school in Boston to receive a better education than was available at home.<sup>123</sup>

Although now at ease about her husband's safety, "alass I find a craveing void left aching in my Breast, and I find myself some days especially more unhappy than I would even wish an Enemy to be." She never recollected "the cruel hour of [their] seperation but with tears."<sup>124</sup> "I have scarcely ever taken my pen to write but the tears have flowed faster than the ink."<sup>125</sup> In nine months, she received only three letters from John. She had written many more—one packet of letters never arrived as the ship was captured and her letters were thrown overboard before the captors could seize them. Her depression deepened. The seemingly endless separation

cast a Gloom over my solitary hours, and bereaves me of all domestick felicity. In vain do I strive to throw off in the company of my Friends some of the anxiety of my Heart, it increases in proportion to my endeavours to conceal it; the only alleviation I know of would be a frequent intercourse by Letters unrestrained by the apprehension of their becoming food for our Enemies. The affection I feel for my Friend is of the tenderest kind, matured by years, sanctified by choice and approved by Heaven. Angels can witness to its purity, what care I then for the Ridicule of Britains should this testimony of it fall into their Hands, nor can I

122. AA to JA, Braintree, June 30, 1778, *BAJ*, 218.

123. AA to JA, Braintree, ca July 15, 1778, *BAJ*, 221.

124. *Ibid.*, 219.

125. AA to JA, Braintree, October 21, 1778, *BAJ*, 224.

endure that so much caution and circumspection on your part should deprive me of the only consolor of your absence—a consolation that our Enemies enjoy in a much higher degree than I do, Many of them having received 3 or 4 Letters from their Friends in England to one that I have received from France.<sup>126</sup>

Why had he not written? Had he “changed hearts with some frozen Laplander or made a voyage to a region that has chilled every Drop of your Blood.” What would he do if she did not write to him; how would he feel. Perhaps she was “too rash” in writing these things, but she greatly “suffered from this appearance of—inattention.”<sup>127</sup>

John was not pleased with Abigail’s complaints. They gave him more pain than he could express. He wrote several answers, “but upon a review, they appear’d to be such I could not send. One was angry, another was full of Grief, and the third with Melancholy, so that I burnt them all.” If she continued complaining, he would stop writing altogether even though that would kill him. He asked,

Can Professions of Esteem be Wanting from me to you? Can Protestation of affection be necessary? can tokens of Remembrance be desir’d? The very Idea of this sickens me. Am I not wretched Enough, in this Banishment, without this. What Course shall I take to convince you that my Heart is warm? you doubt it, it seems.—shall I declare it? shall I swear it?—Would you doubt it the less?—And is it possible you should doubt it? I know it is not?—If I could once believe it possible, I cannot answer for the Consequence.—But I beg you would never more write to me in such a strain for it really makes me unhappy.

126. AA to JA, Braintree, November 12–13, 1778, *BAJ*, 228–29.

127. AA to JA, Braintree, October 25, 1778, *BAJ*, 226.

Be assured that no time nor place, can change my heart: but that I think so often & so much, of the Blessings from which I am seperated as to be too unmindful of those who accompany me, & that I write to you so often as my Duty will permit.<sup>128</sup>

With complaints aired in a few letters, the separated lovers reconciled. We “wanted no mediating power to adjust the difference, we no sooner understood each other properly, but as the poet says, ‘The falling out of Lovers is the renewal of Love.’ Be to my faults a little Blind. Be to my virtues ever kind.”<sup>129</sup> Virtue and principle would secure “the indissoluble Bond which affection first began and my security depends not upon your passion, which other objects might more easily excite, but upon the sober and settled dictates of Religion and Honour. It is these that cement, at the same time that they ensure the affection.”<sup>130</sup>

On Sunday evening, December 27, 1778, she wrote “How lonely are my days? How solitary are my Nights? Secluded from all Society but my two Little Boys, and my domesticks, by the Mountains of snow which surround me I could almost fancy myself in Greenland.” (Nabby was away visiting friends in Plymouth for a month.) Abigail asked John if he realized that in the fourteen years of their marriage, this would be her first “whole winter alone.” Previous separations had never lasted throughout the “Dismal Season.” She felt, however, that they were separated only physically by a vast ocean of three thousand miles, because “the Heart of my Friend is in the Bosom of his partner. More than half a score years has so rivetted it there, that the Fabrick which contains it must crumble into Dust, e’er the particles can be seperated.”<sup>131</sup>

128. JA to AA, Passy, December 18, 1777, *BAJ*, 232–33.

129. AA to JA, Braintree, November 13, 1780, *BAJ*, 276. The couplet is quoted from Matthew Prior’s “An English Padlock,” lines 79 and 81.

130. *Ibid.*, 277.

131. AA to JA, December 27, 1778, *BAJ*, 233.

Abigail seductively told him about a Scotch song recently sung to her by a young lady to ease her melancholy. Charles learned the song “and consoles his Mamma by singing it to her. . . . It has Beauties in it to me, which an indifferent person would not feel perhaps.

His very foot has Musick in’t,  
As he comes up the stairs.

How oft has my Heart danced to the sound of that Musick?

And shall I see his face again?  
And shall I hear him speak?

Gracious Heaven hear and answer my daily petition, by banishing all my Grief.”<sup>132</sup> When John read the Scottish song, he found it charming and wrote, “Oh my leaping Heart.”<sup>133</sup>

It took little time for John to see the disunity among the American commissioners in France. John confided in his autobiography that

The first moment Dr. Franklin and I happened to be alone, he began to complain to me of the Coolness as he very coolly called it, between the American Ministers. He said there had been disputes between Mr. [Silas] Deane and Mr. [Arthur] Lee. That Mr. Lee was a Man of an anxious uneasy temper which made it disagreeable to do business with him: that he seemed to be one of those Men of whom he had known many in his day, who went on through Life quarrelling with one Person or another till they commonly ended in the loss of their reason.<sup>134</sup>

Adams also became disillusioned with Benjamin Franklin

132. *Ibid.*, 234.

133. JA to AA, Passy, February 13, 1779, *BAJ*, 237.

134. JA Autobiography, April 10, 1778, IV, 43. Deane had been recalled and replaced by Adams.



whose Love of Ease, and Dissipation, will prevent any thorough Reformation of any Thing—and his Cunning and Silence and Reserve, render it very difficult to do any Thing with him. . . .

On Dr. F. the Eyes of all Europe are fixed, as the most important Character, in American Affairs in Europe. Neither L[ee] nor myself, are looked upon of much Consequence. The Attention of the Court seems most to F. and no Wonder. His long and great Reputation to which L's and mine are in their infancy, are enough to Account for this. His Age, and real Character render it impossible for him to search every Thing to the Bottom, and L. with his privy Council, are evermore, contriving. The Results of their Contrivances, render many Measures more difficult.<sup>135</sup>

Adams felt uneasy about putting his feelings about his fellow commissioners in writing lest they be captured and printed by the British. "This much I can say with perfect sincerity, that I have found nothing to disgust me, discontent me, or in any manner disturb me, in the French Nation. My Evils here arise altogether from Americans." He tried to be impartial between Lee and Franklin. Adams "hoped that Animosities might be softened, and the still small Voice of Reason heard more, and the boisterous Roar of Passions and Prejudices less."<sup>136</sup> Such was not the case. Soon after his arrival in France, Adams was doing the lion's share of the commission's work. To get Lee and Franklin together was difficult. It was obvious the tripartite commission was not working well. To correct the situation, Congress appointed Franklin America's sole minister plenipotentiary to France. Adams was delighted. He knew that Franklin would need assistance from consuls, secretaries, and aides to do his job well. But Franklin's appointment "reduced [Adams] to a

135. JA Diary, February 9, 1779, *ibid.*, II, 346, 347.

136. JA to AA, Passy, February 9, 1779, *BAJ*, 235.

private Citizen.” Although rumors persisted that he might be appointed minister to The Hague or to Madrid, no such official word came from Congress. John wrote Abigail: “I shall therefore soon present before you, your own good Man.—Happy—happy indeed shall I be, once more to see our Fireside.”<sup>137</sup>

On March 9, 1779, John and his son left Paris for Nantes expecting to return to America on the American frigate *Alliance*. A variety of “Embarassments and Disappointments” caused a month’s delay on the coast of France.<sup>138</sup> John let Abigail know that their son was fine. He had “a great Opportunity to see this Country. . . . He has enjoyed perfect Health from first to last and is respected wherever he goes for his Vigour and Vivacity both of Mind and Body, for his constant good Humour and for his rapid Progress in French, as well as his general Knowledge which for his Age is uncommon.”<sup>139</sup> Finally on June 17 they set sail for the seven-week voyage to America aboard the French frigate *La Sensible*.

## A BRIEF REUNION

John and John Quincy reached Braintree on August 2, 1779. For two months the family was happy. John and Abigail did many of the things they had done as newlyweds, but now with four children in tow. In August Braintree elected John as its representative to the state constitutional convention to meet on September 1, 1779, in Cambridge. John found himself elected “a Sub Sub Committee” of one to draft the newly proposed constitution. He worked diligently during the week and came home for weekends. The constitution would be submitted to the towns and was ratified in 1780. It remains the longest-lived written constitution still in effect.

While off at Cambridge, word arrived in Braintree that

137. JA to AA, Passy, February 13, 1779, *BAJ*, 237.

138. JA to AA, L’Orient, May 14, 1779, *BAJ*, 242.

139. *Ibid.*

Congress had appointed John as minister plenipotentiary to draft a treaty of peace with Great Britain, to draft a commercial treaty with the former mother country, and to serve as minister plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James after hostilities ended. What an honor! The man who above all others had led the way toward declaring independence was now “honoured as the instrument of restoring *peace* to the united States of America.”<sup>140</sup>

John accepted the appointment and it was decided that John Quincy, now twelve, and Charles, now nine, would accompany their father. It was felt too dangerous for Abigail and Nabby to join them. Francis Dana, a young lawyer, joined the travelers as secretary to the legation; and John Thaxter, John’s former law student and teacher of John Quincy, came along as John’s private secretary and as the boys’ tutor. The five Americans booked passage aboard *La Sensible*, still docked in Boston harbor.

#### A PROLONGED ABSENCE

The Atlantic crossing was far less treacherous than the previous one two years earlier. Only toward the end of the voyage was there danger when the old warship began taking on water. By the time they reached the Spanish coast, the ship had seven feet of water in its hold and was dangerously close to sinking. Because they could not risk traveling on it to France, they would have to wait for another French ship to arrive or trek across the Pyrenees on mules during the winter. John decided on the mountainous journey, which proved to be arduous, uncomfortable, and dangerous. The travelers arrived in Paris on February 9, 1780.

Immediately Abigail felt the anguish of the empty house.

My habituation, how disconsolate it looks! My table I set down to it but cannot swallow my food.

140. Benjamin Rush to JA, Philadelphia, April 28, 1780, *Papers of John Adams*, IX, 248.

O Why was I born with so much Sensibility and why possessing it have I so often been call'd to struggle with it? . . . My hopes and fears rise alternately. I cannot resign more than I do, unless life itself was called for.—My dear sons I can not think of them without a tear, little do they know the feelings of a Mother's Heart!<sup>141</sup>

She counseled her son John with advice that she lived by herself.

These are the times in which a Genius would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station, that great characters are formed. . . . The Habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties. All History will convince you of this, and that wisdom and penetration are the fruits of experience, not the Lessons of retirement and leisure. Great necessities call out great virtues.<sup>142</sup>

It was at this time that John started sending Abigail a variety of goods that she could either use herself, barter, or sell to consumers in the community. With inflation rampant and the worth of paper money diminishing daily, the transmittal of European goods was financially better than any kind of paper currency. Soon Abigail had a thriving little business that she greatly enjoyed managing. She informed John that “Small articles have the best profit. Gauze, ribbons, feathers and flowers to make the Ladies Gay, have the best advance.”<sup>143</sup>

With the new state constitution adopted, elections were held for state and local offices. Abigail reported on a variety of political matters. She wished that her husband were at home because he would be elected governor. As it

141. AA to JA, Braintree, November 13, 1779, *BAJ*, 245.

142. AA to JQA, Braintree, January 19, 1780, *BAJ*, 253.

143. AA to JA, Braintree, December 9, 1781, *BAJ*, 304.

happened, the conservatives' choice of James Bowdoin was expected to lose to the demagogic John Hancock, whom Abigail described as "the tinkeling cymball." "What a politician you have made me?" she wrote John. "If I cannot be a voter upon this occasion, I will be a writer of votes."<sup>144</sup> She also raised for the first time the possibility of her traveling to Europe to be with John. It probably would not happen. She felt destined to visit only a small part of her country.

If John Adams felt frustrated by his first diplomatic tour of duty, he felt even more so during his second. He worked hard to do his duty and to obtain the favor of the French court, particularly Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Comte de Vergennes. On the other hand, American Minister Franklin worked little and was almost deified by the French people and was held in high esteem by all of the French ministers and even by King Louis XVI. Adams and Franklin had an austere relationship. Franklin wrote to Vergennes: "I live upon Terms of Civility with him, not of Intimacy."<sup>145</sup>

Adams's patience was soon exhausted. He abandoned cooperative efforts with Franklin and dealt directly with Vergennes. Two problems arose. Adams wanted to announce his mission; Vergennes, a wily old diplomat, wanted Adams to play the game of diplomacy. It was premature to announce that the United States had appointed a peace commissioner who would also negotiate a commercial treaty and then become minister plenipotentiary to Britain. The second point of disagreement was over how to manage the war. Adams felt that the French needed America more than America needed France. He also thought that the correct way to fight the British was to devote a large French naval fleet to the American theater. Vergennes did not like being told how to conduct diplomacy and the war by an

144. AA to JA, Braintree, July 5, 1780, *BAJ*, 264.

145. Passy, August 3, 1780, Mary A. Giunta et al., eds., *The Emerging Nation: A Documentary History of the Foreign Relations of the United States under the Articles of Confederation, 1780-1789* (3 vols., Washington, D.C., 1996), I, 96.

inexperienced agent of an adolescent nation. Vergennes told Franklin and French minister to the United States la Luzerne to inform Congress that Adams was not “appropriate to the important task with which Congress has charged him. As for myself, I anticipate that this plenipotentiary will only incite difficulties and vexations, because he has an inflexibility, a pedantry, an arrogance, and a conceit that renders him incapable of dealing with political subjects, and especially of handling them with the representatives of great powers, who assuredly will not yield either to the tone or to the logic of Mr. Adams.”<sup>146</sup> Franklin wrote to Congress that

Mr. Adams has given Offence to the Court here by some Sentiments and Expressions contained in several of his Letters written to the Count de Vergennes. I mention this with Reluctance, tho’ perhaps it would have been my Duty to acquaint you with such a Circumstance, even were it not required of me by the Minister himself. He has sent me Copies of the Correspondence, desiring I would communicate them to Congress; and I send them herewith. Mr. Adams did not show me his Letters before he sent them. I have in a former Letter to Mr. Lovell, mentioned some of the Inconveniencies, that attend the having more than one Minister at the same Court, one of which Inconveniencies is, that they do not always hold the same Language, and that the Impressions made by one and intended for the Service of his Constituents, may be effaced by the Discourse of the other. It is true, that Mr. Adams’s proper Business is elsewhere; but the Time not being come for that Business, and having nothing else here wherewith to employ himself, he seems to have endeavour’d to supplying what he may sup-

146. Comte de Vergennes to Chevalier de la Luzerne, Versailles, August 7, 1780, *ibid.*, I, 98–99.

pose my Negotiations defective in. He thinks as he tells me himself, that America has been too free in Expressions of Gratitude to France; for that she is more obliged to us than we to her; and that we should shew Spirit in our Applications. I apprehend, that he mistakes his Ground, and that this Court is to be treated with Decency & Delicacy. The King, a young and virtuous Prince, has, I am persuaded, a Pleasure in reflecting on the generous Benevolence of the Action, in assisting an oppress'd People, and proposes it as a Part of the Glory of his Reign. I think it right to encrease this Pleasure by our thankful Acknowledgments; and that such an Expression of Gratitude is not only our Duty, but our Interest. A different Conduct seems to me what is not only improper and unbecoming, but what may be hurtful to us. Mr. Adams, on the other hand, who, at the same time means our Welfare and Interest as much as I, or any Man can do, seems to think a little apparent Stoutness and greater air of Independence & Boldness in our Demands, will procure us more ample Assistance. It is for Congress to judge and regulate their Affairs accordingly.<sup>147</sup>

John lamented to Abigail: "I shall lose all Opportunity of being a man of Importance in the World by being away from home, as well as all the Pleasures of Life: for I never shall enjoy any, any where except at the Foot of Pens hill—When Oh When shall I see the Beauties of that rugged Mountain!"<sup>148</sup> Abigail attempted to reassure her husband.

You observe in a late Letter that your absence from your Native State will deprive you of an opportunity of being a man of importance in it. I hope

147. Benjamin Franklin to President of Congress, Henry Laurens, Passy, August 9, 1780, *ibid.*, I, 99–100.

148. JA to AA, Amsterdam, September 25, 1780, *BAJ*, 272.

you are doing your country more extensive Service abroad than you could have done, had you been confined to one State only, and whilst you continue in the same Estimation amongst your fellow citizens, which you now hold, you will not fail of being of importance to them: at home or abroad.<sup>149</sup>

With little to do in Paris, and with Vergennes refusing to deal directly with him, Adams left Paris on July 27, 1780, with his two sons for The Hague hoping to accomplish something there that would make the United States less dependent upon France. In mid-September Adams received Congress's commission to serve as minister plenipotentiary to The Netherlands. Again, ignoring the advice of French diplomats, Adams announced his formal position well before the Dutch government was willing to receive him officially. Adams was thus either ignored or ridiculed for almost a year. Finally, after Washington's victory at Yorktown, the British surprise attack and capture of the Dutch island of St. Eustatius in the West Indies, as well as Franklin obtaining the French government's backing of a Dutch loan to America, Adams was recognized and successfully negotiated a substantial loan from a conglomerate of Dutch bankers. Exhausted, Adams wrote to Abigail: "Mine has been a hard lot in life, so hard that nothing would have rendered it supportable, especially for the last eight years, but the uninterrupted series of good fortune which has attended my feeble exertions for the public. If I have been unfortunate and unhappy in private life, I thank God I have been uniformly happy and successful as a public man."<sup>150</sup> John realized the important role played by Washington in the negotiations. "Some Folks will think your Husband, a Negotiator, but it is not he, it is General Washington at York Town who did the substance of the Work, the form

149. AA to JA, Braintree, January 28, 1781, *AFC*, IV, 72.

150. JA to AA, The Hague, October 16, 1782, *ibid.*, V, 17.



only belongs to me.”<sup>151</sup> Little did he or Abigail realize that without Franklin’s help, the loan never would have been made.<sup>152</sup>

With his success in The Netherlands completed, John prepared to return to Paris. Francis Dana had been named minister to Russia and convinced John that the trip would be fruitful for John Quincy. Before long, the fourteen-year-old boy was more than a sightseer. Dana named him his secretary. Charles did not fare so well. After a serious feverish illness, the homesick eleven-year-old convinced his father to send him home. Delay followed delay and Charles finally arrived home safe and healthy after a five-month journey on January 21, 1782.

During Adams’s stay in The Netherlands, Vergennes, with the assistance of Benjamin Franklin and France’s popular minister to the United States, the Chevalier de La Luzerne, worked to diminish Adams’s authority. First, word arrived that Adams would no longer be the sole peace commissioner. He would be joined by four others—John Jay, Benjamin Franklin, Henry Laurens, and Thomas Jefferson—and they were ordered by Congress “ultimately to govern” themselves by the “advice and opinion” of their French allies. Soon after, word came that Adams’s commissions to negotiate a commercial treaty and to serve as minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain, had been revoked.

Abigail received word of these humiliating events from Massachusetts delegates in Congress. She blamed Franklin for his “most unkind and stabbing” letter. John continued to work with Franklin, but Abigail would never forgive “the Intrigues and malicious aspersions” of “this unprincipled Man.” “My Indignation is too big for utterance” against “this low, this Infamous, this diabolical peice of envy and malice.”<sup>153</sup> She explained what motivated Franklin.

151. JA to AA, Amsterdam, March 22, 1782, *BAJ*, 311.

152. Many biographers of Adams omit this important factor in obtaining the Dutch loan.

153. AA to JA, Braintree, August 1, 1781, *BAJ*, 295.

The Independent Spirit of your Friend, abroad, does not coincide with the selfish views and inordinate ambition of your Minister, who in consequence of it, is determined upon his destruction. Stung with envy of losing the Honour of some Brilliant action; and is using his endeavours that every enterprize shall miscarry, in which he has not the command. To Effect this purpose he has insinuated into the minds of those in power the falsest prejudices against your Friend, and they have so far influenced the united Counsels of these States, as to induce them to join this unprincipled Man, in Commission with him for future [peace] Negotiations.<sup>154</sup>

John wrote Abigail not to be concerned “about any malicious Attempts to injure me in the Estimation of my Countrymen. Let them take their Course and go the Length of their Tether. They will never hurt your Husband, whose Character is fortified with a shield of Innocence and Honour ten thousandfold stronger than brass or Iron.”<sup>155</sup> But John’s attempts to defend himself generally failed in Congress. James Madison, a young Virginia delegate to Congress, wrote to his mentor Thomas Jefferson that “Congress yesterday received from Mr. Adams several letters dated September not remarkable for any thing unless it be a display of his vanity, his prejudice against the French Court & his venom against Doctor Franklin.”<sup>156</sup>

During his stay in Amsterdam, John bought a house for the American legation. He wrote to Abigail:

I am keeping House, but I want an Housekeeper.

154. AA to Elbridge Gerry, Braintree, July 20, 1781, *BAJ*, 292, 293.

155. JA to AA, Amsterdam, December 2, 1781, *BAJ*, 299.

156. Madison to Jefferson, Philadelphia, February 11, 1783, William T. Hutchinson et al., eds., *The Papers of James Madison* (Chicago and Charlottesville, Va., 1962–), VI, 221.

What a fine Affair it would be if We could flit across the Atlantic as they say the Angels do from Planet to Planet. I would dart to Pens Hill and bring you over on my Wings. But alas We must keep house seperately for some time.”<sup>157</sup>

He told Abigail that he was determined when once he returned, never again to leave home “without your Ladyship’s Company.” He hoped to win election to Congress and bring Abigail to Philadelphia.<sup>158</sup>

Abigail told John of her postwar plans. She hoped to purchase “a retreat in the woods of Vermont and retire with you from the vexations, toils and hazards of publick Life. Do you not sometimes sigh for such a Seclusion—publick peace and domestick happiness.”<sup>159</sup> Abigail had no ambition for him to serve “in a conspicuous point of view in your own State.” She had learned that “the voice of Fame” was “a mere weathercock, unstable as Water and fleeting as a Shadow.” She admitted, however, that she had pride. “I know I have a large portion of it.”<sup>160</sup> The “sequestered Life, the shades of Vermont, the uncultivated Heath are preferable in her mind to the servility of a court.”<sup>161</sup> After not hearing from her husband and sons for a year, she wrote that she was “much afflicted with a disorder call’d the *Heartach*,” which could only be cured by the return of the three travelers.<sup>162</sup> By April

157. JA to AA, Amsterdam, December 2, 1781, *BAJ*, 300.

158. *Ibid.*, 300.

159. AA to JA, Braintree, December 9, 1781, *BAJ*, 303. In July 1782 Abigail purchased 1,620 acres of wild land in Vermont as a speculative venture and perhaps a refuge. She also thought about purchasing 300 acres of Vermont land for each of their children. The idea did not go over well with John, who wrote Abigail, “Dont meddle any more with Vermont.” She responded: “you laugh at me with regard to my Vermont purchase. I still value it, and do not doubt of its becoming so.” AA to JA, Braintree, March 25, 1782, *BAJ*, 308; JA to AA, The Hague, October 12, 1782, *BAJ*, 331; AA to JA, Braintree, November 11, 1783, *BAJ*, 369–70.

160. AA to JA, Braintree, December 9, 1781, *BAJ*, 304.

161. AA to JA, Braintree, March 17, 1782, *BAJ*, 306.

162. AA to JA, Braintree, December 9, 1781, *BAJ*, 302.

Abigail realized how wrong she had been in anticipating a quiet retirement from public affairs.

Why should I indulge an Idea, that whilst the active powers of my Friend remain, they will not be devoted to the Service of his country? Can I believe that the Man who fears neither poverty or dangers, who sees not charms sufficient either in Riches, power or place to tempt him in the least to swerve from the purest Sentiments of Honour and Delicacy; will retire, unnoticed, Fameless to a Rustick cottage there by dint of Labour to earn his Bread. I need not much examination of my Heart to say I would not willingly consent to it.<sup>163</sup>

On October 8, 1782, Adams signed a treaty of amity and commerce with The Netherlands. He then left to join John Jay who had already begun negotiating with British commissioners for several months. Franklin had been too ill with the gout and kidney stones to attend these opening sessions. For the next year negotiations continued with Jay and Adams carrying the load. Adams came to greatly admire his New York colleague.

Mr. Jay has been my only Consolation. In him I have found a Friend to his Country, without Alloy. I shall never forget him, nor cease to love him, while I live. He has been happier than I, having his Family with him, no Anxiety for his Children, and his Lady with him, to keep Up his Spirits. His Happiness in this particular, has made me more unhappy for what I know under the Separation from mine.<sup>164</sup>

“Mr. Jay has been my Comforter. We have compared

163. AA to JA, Braintree, April 10, 1782, *BAJ*, 314.

164. JA to AA, Paris, April 16, 1783, *AFC*, V, 124.

Notes, and they agree. I love him so well that I know not what I should do in Europe without him.”<sup>165</sup>

Franklin participated little in the negotiations, but consented not to let the French know in detail what the American commissioners were doing. Adams still viewed Franklin as a tool of the French, who wanted to delay peace in order to win more military victories that would strengthen them in their peace negotiations. Abigail referred to Franklin as “the old Deceiver,” while John believed that Franklin’s “Philosophy and his Politicks have been infinitely exaggerated.”<sup>166</sup> Adams went so far as to accuse Franklin of being a traitor—a spy for the French government. Vergennes, however, saw Franklin’s “calmness and prudence” as qualities that “inspired us with confidence.”<sup>167</sup>

Franklin felt compelled to report Adams’s hostility to the French in a long letter to the American Secretary for Foreign Affairs Robert R. Livingston. Franklin concluded with the devastating statement that “I am persuaded, however, that he means well for his Country, is always an honest Man, often a wise one, but sometimes, and in some things, absolutely out of his senses.”<sup>168</sup> Livingston had the letter read in Congress, where Adams’s friends had it copied and sent to Abigail, who in turn, sent copies to John and to some of their closest friends. A few months later, Franklin suggested that Adams’s anti-French actions stemmed from a physiological ailment—“a Disorder in the Brain, which, though not constant, has its Fits too frequent.”<sup>169</sup> Abigail told John not to take Franklin too seriously. We should

165. JA to AA, Paris, September 4, 1783, *ibid.*, 234.

166. AA to JA, October 21, 1781, *AFC*, IV, 230; and JA to James Warren, Paris, April 13, 1783, *Warren-Adams Letters* (2 vols., Boston, 1917 & 1923), II, 210.

167. Comte de Vergennes to Chevalier de la Lucerne, Versailles, February 15, 1784, *The Emerging Nation*, II, 302.

168. Benjamin Franklin to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Robert R. Livingston, Passy, July 22, 1783, *The Emerging Nation*, I, 894–96.

169. Benjamin Franklin to Robert Morris, Passy, December 25, 1783, E. James Ferguson et al., eds., *The Papers of Robert Morris* (9 vols., Pittsburgh, 1973–1999), VIII, 838–39.

have “a certain respect for the follies of Mankind. For there are so many fools whom the opinion of the world entitles to regard, whom accident has placed in heights of which they are unworthy, that he who cannot restrain his contempt or indignation at the sight, will be too often Quarrelling with the disposal of things to relish that share, which is allotted to himself.”<sup>170</sup>

After the preliminary peace treaty between Britain and the United States had been signed, Adams’s official work in Europe was over. He waited for both countries to ratify the treaty and for Congress to decide who to appoint as minister to Britain. At times John wanted the position; at times he didn’t. At times he felt that his enemies back home would oppose his appointment; at other times he felt that they would gladly see him mired in a foreign assignment with little hope of success rather than come home where he would be more troublesome.

For over a year both John and Abigail talked about Abigail joining him in Europe. She felt it was her duty to be with her husband, to “soften your Cares,” to “add to your Happiness,” and to “prolong your most valuable Life.”<sup>171</sup> Abigail longed “for the day when Heaven will again bless us in the Society of each other—whether upon European or American ground is yet in the Book of uncertainty.”<sup>172</sup> By June 1783 Abigail was fed up with Congress’s procrastination. John should come home. “The day is now arrived, when with honour and well earned Fame, you may return to your native land—When I cannot any longer consider it as my duty to submit to a further Separation, and when it appears necessary that those abilities which have crowned you with Laurels abroad, should be exerted at home for the publick Safety.”<sup>173</sup> She told John, “I do not wish you to accept an embassy in England, should you be appointed.

170. AA to JA, Braintree, December 15, 1783, *BAJ*, 373.

171. AA to JA, Braintree, October 8, 1782, *BAJ*, 328.

172. AA to JA, Braintree, April 28, 1783, *BAJ*, 348.

173. AA to JA, Braintree, June 20, 1783, *BAJ*, 354.

This little Cottage has more Heart felt satisfaction for you than the most Brilliant Court can afford.”<sup>174</sup> John agreed that he could no longer live without his wife. But he said, “You know your Man. He will never be a Slave. He will never cringe. He will never accommodate his Principles, Sentiments or Systems, to keep a Place, or to get a Place, no nor to please his Daughter, or his Wife. He will never depart from his Honour, his Duty.”<sup>175</sup> He thanked Abigail for the news from home, especially the politics. “I always learn more of Politicks from your Letters, than any others.” But he pleaded with her not to seek the governorship for him. “You speak of a high Office. In God’s Name, banish every Idea of such a Thing. It is the Place of the greatest slavery and Drudgery, and expose me to eternal obloquy and Envy.” He wished “that all Parties would unite in the present one [John Hancock] who has the Hearts of that People and will keep them. . . . I beg that neither you nor yours would ever encourage in yourselves or others such a Thought.”<sup>176</sup>

He begged her to come to Europe. She would meet friends there. The moment he heard that she arrived, he would get the fastest horses to receive her, “and if the [hot air] Ballon should be carried to such Perfection in the mean time as to give Mankind the Safe navigation of the Air, I will fly in one of them at the Rate of thirty Knots an hour.” He was “determined to be with you in America or have you with me in Europe, as soon as it can be accomplished consistent with private Prudence and the publick Good.”<sup>177</sup>

Abigail worried about John’s health. He had contracted “a nervous Fever” in Amsterdam, during which he “was lost” for five or six days.<sup>178</sup> Periodically, the fever returned. Abigail expressed her concern.

174. Ibid.

175. JA to AA, Paris, July 17, 1783, *BAJ*, 357.

176. JA to AA, Paris, August 14, 1783, *BAJ*, 360, 361.

177. JA to AA, Paris, September 7, 1783, *BAJ*, 363.

178. JA to AA, Amsterdam, October 9, 1781, *BAJ*, 298.

If Congress should think proper to make you an other appointment, I beg you not to accept it. Call me not to any further trials of the kind! Reflect upon your long absence from your family, and upon the necessity there is, of your returning in order to recover that Health which you have unhappily impaired and lost abroad. Your Children have a demand upon you, they want your care, your advice and instruction.<sup>179</sup>

Abigail understood John's thirst for fame and praise, but his health was more important.

Conscious Rectitude is a grand Support, but it will not ward off the attacks of envy, or secure from the assaults of jealousy. Both ancient and Modern history furnish us with repeated proofs, that virtue must look beyond this shifting theatre for its reward; but the Love of praise is a passion deeply rooted in the mind, and in this we resemble the Supreme Being who is most Gratiſied with thanksgiving and praise. Those who are most affected with it, partake most of that particle of divinity which distinguishes mankind from the inferior Creation; no one who deserves commendation can despise it, but we too frequently see it refused where it is due, and bestowed upon very undeserving characters.<sup>180</sup>

Abigail begged John to make up his mind. She needed to know when he would be home. "One month of daily expectation, is more tedious than a year of certainty."<sup>181</sup> She told John how she felt when Francis Dana returned from Europe. "The Tears involuntary flowed from my eyes. Tho God is my witness, I envied not the felicity of others, yet

179. AA to JA, Braintree, October 19, 1783, *BAJ*, 365.

180. *Ibid.*, 366.

181. AA to JA, Braintree, November 11, 1783, *BAJ*, 367.



my Heart swelled with Grief, and the Idea that I, I only, was left alone, recall'd all the tender Scenes of seperation, and overcame all my fortitude."<sup>182</sup>

Abigail gave more thought to traveling to Europe. A winter's voyage seemed out of the question. In principle she wanted to go; in practice she had grave doubts. "Theory and practice are two very different things; and the object magnifies, as I approach nearer to it." She would be less reluctant to travel abroad if John were "in a private Character." As "a mere American as I am, unacquainted with the Etiquette of courts, taught to say the thing I mean, and to wear my Heart in my countenance, I am sure I should make an awkward figure, and then it would mortify my pride if I should be thought to disgrace you." In America, she avoided "publick invitations," preferring to be "sequestered myself in this Humble cottage, content with rural Life and my domestick employments."<sup>183</sup> How would she handle the role of a public figure in a foreign country?

Congress by now had appointed Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams to two-year commissions to negotiate commercial treaties with European and North African countries. It seemed as if John would stay in Europe for another two years. For months Abigail wrestled with the problem.

You invite me to you, you call me to follow you, the most earnest wish of my Soul is to be with you—but you can scarcely form an Idea of the conflict of my mind. It appears to me such an enterprize, the Ocean so formidable, the quitting my habitation and my Country, leaving my Children, my Friends, with the Idea that perhaps I may never see them again, without my Husband to console and comfort me when I feel unequal to the trial. But on the other hand I console myself with the Idea of being joyfully and tenderly received by the

182. AA to JA, Braintree, December 15, 1783, *BAJ*, 371–72.

183. AA to JA, Braintree, December 15, 1783, *BAJ*, 372.

best of Husbands and Friends, and of meeting a dear and long absent Son. But the difference is, my fears, and anxieties are present; my hopes, and expectations, distant.

Finally, the answer seemed obvious. “The desires and requests of my Friend are a Law to me. I will Sacrifice my present feelings and hope for a blessing in pursuit of my duty.”<sup>184</sup>

Abigail started preparing for the trip. Abigail’s uncle, Cotton Tufts, was given power of attorney over all of their property. The garden, the house, and its furnishings would be left in the care of Pheobe Abdee and her husband. Pheobe, the slave of Abigail’s father, had been freed by the Reverend Mr. Smith’s will when he died in September 1783. The Braintree farm continued to be rented to Matthew Pratt, and the Medford farm, jointly inherited by Abigail and her sister Elizabeth from their father, was rented by Benjamin Teal. Abigail’s share of the rent paid for the board and schooling of Charles and Thomas. John had suggested that Abigail bring along two servants. She decided upon John Brisler, “a virtuous, steady, frugal fellow, with a mind above the vulgar, very handy and attentive.” For a maid servant, she chose Brisler’s sister. “On many accounts a Brother and Sister are to be preferred” to a husband and wife. Unfortunately, Brisler’s sister got married and Abigail chose instead Esther Field, the daughter of one of their neighbors. Charles and Thomas would stay in Haverhill where they lived with Abigail’s younger sister Elizabeth while being tutored by her husband, the Reverend John Shaw. Nabby, seventeen and just seemingly over her first romantic infatuation with a young Braintree lawyer, would accompany her mother. They would leave in the middle of June on the ship *Active*, “a good vessel, copper Bottom and an able Captain”—Nathaniel Byfield Lyde. It would not be inexpensive—between £20 and £25 per person.

184. AA to JA, Braintree, February 11, 1784, *BAJ*, 375.

The travelers left Braintree on Friday, June 18, 1784. It seemed “like a funeral procession, all come to wish me well and to pray for a speedy return.” She shook hands with friends and family and mingled her tears with theirs. She knocked on her mother-in-law’s door to say good bye. Abigail had not told her of the exact date of departure “knowing the agony she would be in.” But now “the good old Lady beheld me, the tears rolled down her aged cheek, and she cried out O! why did you not tell me you was going so soon? Fatal day! I take my last leave; I shall never see you again. Carry my last blessing to my son.—I was obliged to leave her in an agony of distress, myself in no less.”<sup>185</sup>

#### A MONTH AT SEA

On Saturday, the baggage was loaded; by around noon the next day the eleven passengers boarded. With favorable winds, the *Active* set sail on its month-long voyage. By two o’clock they passed the warning light when the captain “sent word to the Ladies to put on their Sea cloths and prepare for sickness. We had only time to follow his directions before we found ourselves all sick. To those who have never been at Sea or experienced this disspiriting malady tis impossible to discribe it, the Nausia arising from the smell of the Ship, the continual rolling, tossing and tumbling contribute to keep up this Disorder, and once it seazeis a person it levels Sex and condition.” For ten days—to a greater or lesser extent—they were seasick and often confined to their bunks. When the sickness abated, they came out on deck and “beheld the vast and boundless ocean before us with astonishment, and wonder. How great, how Excellent, how stupendous He who formed, governs, and directs it.”<sup>186</sup> To her sister, Abigail wrote:

There is not an object in Nature, better calculated  
to raise in our minds sublime Ideas of the Deity

185. AA Diary, June 20, 1784, *BAJ*, 378, 380.

186. *Ibid.*, *BAJ*, 381.

than the boundless ocean. Who can contemplate it, without admiration and wonder. . . . I have contemplated it in its various appearances since I came to Sea, smooth as a Glass, then Gently agitated with a light Breeze, then lifting wave upon wave, moveing on with rapidity, then rising to the Skyes, and in majestick force tossing our Ship to and fro, alternately riseing and sinking; in the Night I have behold it Blaizing and Sparkling with ten thousand Gems—untill with the devoute psalmist I have exclaimed, Great and Marvellous are thy Works, Lord God Almighty, In Wisdom hast thou made them all.<sup>187</sup>

Abigail and her maid shared one of two small state rooms each about eight-foot square. The room had two beds and one chair between the beds. With a board on her lap, Abigail sat in the chair to write, resting her elbow on one bed and her hand on the other. The door of her state room opened to the “Great Cabbin,” where the passengers sat, dined, and the men slept. Nabby slept in the second small state room with a female passenger. The state rooms were so stuffy that, unless they were dressing or undressing, the doors had to remain open so that the occupants could breathe.

Once the seasickness passed, Abigail instructed Mr. Brisler with all the young crew available, to scrape and mop the decks and state-room planking. She took charge of the galley teaching the cook how “to dress his victuals” and even made puddings on various occasions. Abigail greatly admired Captain Lyde—“the very Man, one would wish to go to Sea with, always upon deck at nights, never sleeps but 6 hours in the 24, attentive to the clouds, to the wind and weather; anxious for his Ship, constantly watchful of his Sails and his rigging, humane and kind to his Men, who

187. AA to Elizabeth Smith Shaw, On Board the Ship *Active*, Latitude 34, Long. 15, July 10?, 1784, *BAJ*, 382. For the references in Psalms, see 139:14 and 104:24.

are all quiet and still as a private family.” He swore only once. When at sea, another ship approached to speak with them “and by imprudent conduct were in danger of running on Board of us.” In recommending him to a friend, she said that he “has the Character of a man of Honour and integrity. Tho a perfect stranger untill a few Weeks before I embarked on board his ship, he treated me with great kindness and attention. And altho a rough son of Neptune in his outward appearance he really possesses a native Benevolence and goodness of heart, and is one of the most attentive and carefull seamen that perhaps ever traversed the ocean having made 43 voyages without ever having met with any dangerous accident.”<sup>188</sup> The passengers were all pleasant enough especially Dr. John Clark who assisted the seasick passengers, tended to Abigail when she had a severe attack of rheumatism for several days, and was soothing and tender to Nabby, who “behaved with a Dignity and Decorum worthy of her.”<sup>189</sup>

Only once at sea did Abigail feel endangered. Upon the Banks of Newfoundland they fell into a nor’easterner.

The Sailors say it was only a Brieze. We could not however sit without being held into our chairs, and every thing that was moveable was in motion, plates Mugs bottles all crashing to pieces: the Sea roaring and lashing the Ship, and when worn down with the fatigue of the violent, and incessant motion, we were assisted into our Cabbins; we were obliged to hold ourselves in, with our utmost Strength, without once thinking of closing our Eyes, every thing wet, dirty and cold, ourselves sick; you will not envy our situation. Yet the returning sone [sun], a smooth sea and a mild Sky dispelld our fears, and raised our languid heads.<sup>190</sup>

188. AA to Anna Quincy, Paris, September 4, 1784, *AFC*, V, 426.

189. AA to Elizabeth Smith Shaw, on board the ship *Active*, July 1784, *BAJ*, 382–83.

190. AA to Elizabeth Smith Shaw, on board the ship *Active*, July 11, 1784, *AFC*, V, 393.

After a month at sea they spotted Plymouth, the western-most port of entry, but the winds were so strong that they were forced to enter the English Channel. After two days of rough sailing, they passed the cliffs of Dover and anchored the ship near the town of Deals, seventy-two miles from London. After a harrowing landing in the ship's jolly boat in six-foot surf that swamped them at the shore, Abigail felt land beneath her feet—albeit the shifting beach sand gave way under her as she was drenched by successive waves. Safely ashore they spent the night at a public house before the carriage ride to London the next day. John Quincy, who had been waiting for them to arrive on an earlier ship, had returned to The Hague to await word from his mother.

Six months later she thought about her trans-Atlantic adventure. “Those only, who have crossed the ocean, can realize the pleasure which is felt at the sight of land. The inexperienced traveller is more sensible of this, than those who frequently traverse the ocean. I could scarcely realize that thirty days had removed me so far distant from my native shore.”<sup>191</sup>

## REUNITED

On July 23 Abigail wrote John that they had arrived. She would forget “What is past, and what we suffered by sickness and fatigue. . . . It is all done away in the joyfull hope of soon holding to my Bosom the dearest best of Friends.” John's secretary, Colonel William Stephens Smith, had met them and assisted in arranging hotel accommodations. Smith had written John and it was expected that John Quincy would soon be arriving to take his mother and sister to The Hague. Abigail told John that she often remembered on the voyage what he had once said, “that no object in Nature was more disagreeable than a Lady at

191. AA to Hannah Quincy Lincoln Storer, Auteuil, January 20, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 64.

sea.” She now understood what he meant. “In no situation would I be willing to appear thus to you.” She added one more observation of her own. “I think no inducement less than that of coming to the tenderest of Friends could ever prevail with me to cross the ocean, nor do I ever wish to try it but once more.” “Every hour,” she wrote, “I am impatient to be with you. Heaven give us a happy meeting.”<sup>192</sup>

Three days later, John wrote that her letter of the 23rd announcing her arrival in London “has made me the happiest Man upon Earth. I am twenty Years younger than I was Yesterday.”<sup>193</sup> Unfortunately he was unable to meet her in London but would send their son, “who is the greatest Traveller of his age,” to meet them. John Quincy would purchase a carriage and they would then cross the channel and join John at The Hague. From there, they would travel to Paris. “Every hour,” he wrote “to me will be a Day.”

On Friday, July 30, while Abigail was writing to her sister Mary, a servant came running in saying that Master John had arrived. He had stopped next door to freshen up. Abigail impatiently went to the hotel lobby, “yet when he entered (we have so many Strangers) that I drew back not really believing my Eyes—till he cried out, Oh my Mamma! and my Dear Sister. Nothing but the Eyes at first sight appeared what he once was. His appearance is that of a Man, and in his countenance the most perfect good humour. His conversation by no means denies his Stature.”<sup>194</sup>

It would take about a week to purchase the carriage and be ready for the trip to the Continent. In the meantime, Abigail and her children would do some sightseeing. She confessed, unlike her spouse who felt twenty years younger, she felt herself “exceedingly Matronly with a grown up Son on one hand, and a Daughter upon the other.”<sup>195</sup> Later that day, Abigail wrote John. She had no doubt that she would

192. AA to JA, London, July 23, 1784, *BAJ*, 388–90.

193. JA to AA, The Hague, July 26, 1784, *BAJ*, 391.

194. AA to Mary Cranch, London, July 30, 1784, *BAJ*, 395.

195. *Ibid.*

instantly recognize her son, “but I might have set with him for some time without knowing him.” She anxiously awaited their departure. “The sooner we meet the more agreeable it will be to me, for I cannot patiently bear any circumstance which detains me from the most desirable object in my estimation that hope has in store for me.”<sup>196</sup> Two days later, John wrote telling Abigail that his plans had changed. “Stay where you are, and amuse yourself, by seeing what you can, untill you see me. I will be with you in Eight Days at farthest, and sooner, if possible.”<sup>197</sup> A week later, on August 7, John and Abigail were reunited in London. Neither one wrote their feelings on paper. Five months later, however, Abigail sent her travel “journal uncooth as I know it was” to her sister to share with friends. “You will chide me I suppose for not relating to you” the events of her meeting with John. “But you know my dear sister, that poets and painters wisely draw a veil over those Scenes which surpass the pen of the one and the pencil of the other. We were indeed a very very happy family once more met together after a Separation of 4 years.”<sup>198</sup>

### EIGHT MONTHS IN FRANCE

The day after John arrived in London, the family, riding in their second-hand carriage, left for Dover. The two servants rode in a post chaise. The crossing to Calais took twelve hours, but once across the narrow channel, the countryside totally changed.

The family rented a “large commodious, and agreeably situated” house that had been constructed fourteen years earlier by an eccentric and extravagant count who had recently married a wealthy, young widow. Located in the village of Auteuil, four miles from Paris and one mile from Passy (where Benjamin Franklin lived), the third floor of the house had been allowed to deteriorate, but the

196. AA to JA, London, July 30, 1784, *BAJ*, 396.

197. JA to AA, The Hague, August 1, 1784, *BAJ*, 397.

198. AA to Mary Cranch, Auteuil, December 11, 1784, *AFC*, VI, 18.



Adamses “were assured that every necessary repair should be made to our satisfaction, but from week to week the promises failed.”<sup>199</sup> “This once elegant Building” was filled with ornate furniture with mirrors four feet wide and five feet long “fixed into the walls.” It was said that the “looking glasses” alone had cost the count an astounding 300,000 livres—the equivalent of £133,000. In a small, octagonal room next to Abigail’s writing room, all eight walls had floor-to-ceiling mirrors. Abigail abhorred it! “For being rather clumsy and by no means an elegant figure, I hate to have it so often repeated to me.”<sup>200</sup> Abigail readily admitted that the house was “much larger than we have need of, upon occasion 40 beds may be made in it.” But the gardens and the trees were spectacular, with breathtaking panoramas from each bedroom. Situated near the tree-lined pathways and fountains of the Bois de Boulogne, the king’s park, John would walk through what he called “his park . . . an hour or two every day.” Unlike most French chateaus, this house had its salon where company was received on the first floor. The house had no carpeting. Abigail hated the red-tile flooring throughout the building. The tile could not be cleaned with water. Instead, the floors were waxed and then a male servant, called a *frotteurer*, with brushes attached to his feet would go about “your room dancing here and there.”

The Adamses had eight servants: a coachman, a gardener, a cook, a *maitre de hotel* whose business it was to purchase articles for the family, a *valet de chambre* (John Brisler), a *femme de chambre* (Esther Field), a *coiffeur de chambre* (i.e., a hair dresser), and a *frotteurer*. A chore woman was also hired for specific occasions.<sup>201</sup> “Each Servant has a certain Etiquet, and one will by no means

199. AA to Charles Storer, Auteuil, January 3, 1784, *AFC*, VI, 40.

200. *Ibid.*; AA to Elizabeth Cranch, Auteuil, September 5 and December 3, 1784, *AFC*, V, 433–35, VI, 6–7.

201. AA to Mary Cranch, Auteuil, September 5, 1784, *AFC*, V, 439–44.

intrude upon the department of an other. . . . Your cook will dress your victuals, but she will not wash a dish, or perform any other kind of business.”<sup>202</sup> Abigail was forced to “become Steward and Bookkeeper” frugally managing the family budget on the meager allowance provided by Congress. Jefferson later wrote that when Adams served abroad, “his pecuniary affairs were under the direction of Mrs. Adams, one of the most estimable characters on earth, and the most attentive & honorable economists.”<sup>203</sup> She was also forced to manage their American affairs in her correspondence with her uncle Cotton Tufts.

Mr. A has been so long a statesman that I cannot get him to think enough upon his domestick affairs, He loves to have every thing as it should be, but does not wish to be troubled about them. He chuses I should write and think about them and give directions. This I am very willing to relieve him from every care in my power, Yet I think it has too much the appearance of weilding instead of sharing the Scepter.<sup>204</sup>

It took time for Abigail to warm up to France in general and Paris in particular. Her lack of conversational French inhibited her from socializing. Initially, she spent much of her time at home reading and sewing. “Nothing,” she wrote, “can be more disagreeable than living in a Country, the language of which you cannot speak.”<sup>205</sup> To become more proficient in the language, armed with a dictionary, she read one French play a day. “We spend no evening abroad, make no suppers, attend very few publick entertainments or spectacles as they are called, and avoid every

202. AA to Cotton Tufts, Auteuil, September 8, 1784, *AFC*, V, 456.

203. Jefferson to James Madison, Paris, May 25, 1788, *Madison Papers*, XI, 55.

204. AA to Cotton Tufts, Auteuil, March 8, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 77.

205. AA to Mary Cranch, Auteuil, April 15, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 83.

expenditure which is not held indispensable.”<sup>206</sup> When asked by her American correspondents to describe Paris, she wrote

One thing I know, and that is, that I have smelt it. . . . It is the very dirtiest place I ever saw. There are some Buildings and some Squares which are tolerable, but in general the streets are narrow, the shops, the houses inelegant, and dirty, the Streets full of Lumber and Stone with which they Build. Boston cannot Boast so elegant publick Buildings, but in every other respect, it [is] as much Superiour in my Eyes to Paris, as London is to Boston.<sup>207</sup>

Abigail was not particularly taken with the French people. “Fashion is the Deity every one worships in this country and from the highest to the lowest you must submit. . . . To be out of fashion is more criminal than to be seen in a state of Nature to which the Parisians are not averse.” She was horrified to discover that Paris had 52,000 “licensed unmarried women”; she could not bring herself to use the word “prostitutes.”<sup>208</sup> Was it better in England “where vice . . . is suffered to walk at large soliciting the unwary, and unguarded as it is to a most astonishing height in the Streets of London and where virtuous females are frequently subject to insult.” “In one Country, vice is like a ferocious Beast, seeking whom it may devour: in the other like a subtle Poison secretly penetrating and working destruction.” In England, “you cannot travel a mile without danger to your person and Property yet Publick executions abound”; in France “your person and property are safe; executions are Rare. But in *a Lawful way, Beware* for with whomever you have to deal, you may rely upon an attempt to over reach [i.e., overcharge] you.”<sup>209</sup>

206. AA to Mary Cranch, Auteuil, September 5, 1784, *AFC*, V, 442.

207. AA to Lucy Cranch, Auteuil, September 5, 1784, *AFC*, V, 436.

208. AA to Mary Cranch, Auteuil, September 5, 1784, *AFC*, V, 443.

209. AA to Mercy Otis Warren, Auteuil, September 5, 1784, *AFC*, V, 447–48.

Europe, Abigail wrote, “has no charms to attach me to it.” She admired the education and the conversation of French women, but not their manners, and “It is manner more than conversation which distinguishes a fine woman in my Eye.”<sup>210</sup> She described French women’s dress similar to their manners—

light, airy, and genteel. They are easy in their deportment, eloquent in their speech, their voices soft and musical, and their attitude pleasing. Habituated to frequent the theatres from their earliest age, they become perfect mistresses of the art of insinuation and the powers of persuasion. Intelligence is communicated to every feature of the face, and to every limb of the body; so that it may with truth be said, every man of this nation is an actor, and every woman an actress.<sup>211</sup>

After five months’ residency, “habititude” had made these same manners less “disagreeable.”<sup>212</sup> “I have seen many of the Beauties and some of the Deformities of this old World. I have been more than ever convinced that there is no Summit of virtue, and no Depth of vice which Humane Nature is not Capable of rising to, on the one hand, or sinking into on the other. I have felt the force of an observation which I have read, ‘that example is the most subtle of poisons.’ I have found my taste reconciling itself to habits customs and fashions, which at first disgusted me.”<sup>213</sup> She now enjoyed attending the theater and the opera.

Before leaving France, Abigail was able to satisfy one of

210. AA to Royall Tyler, Auteuil, September 5, 1784, *AFC*, V, 445.

211. AA to Hannah Quincy Lincoln Storer, Auteuil, January 20, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 65.

212. AA to Royall Tyler, Auteuil, January 4, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 47.

213. AA to Mary Cranch, Auteuil, February 20, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 67. The quotation on “example” is taken from Charles Rollin, *The Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians . . .* (London, 1739–50).

her secret fantasies—she met John Paul Jones, the renowned American naval hero. She gave her niece a remarkable word portrait of the fearless sailor.

Chevalier Jones you have heard much of. He is a most uncommon Character. I dare Say you would be as much disappointed in him as I was. From the intrepid Character he justly Supported in the American Navy, I expected to have seen a Rough, Stout, warlike Roman. Instead of that, I should sooner think of wrapping him up in cotton wool and putting him into my pocket, than sending him to contend with Cannon Ball.

He is small of stature, well proportioned, soft in his Speech, easy in his address, polite in his manners, vastly civil, understands all the Etiquette of a Lady's Toilette as perfectly as he does the Masts, Sails and rigging of a Ship. Under all this appearance of softness, he is Bold, enterprising, ambitious and active.

He has been here often, and dined with us several times. He is said to be a Man of Gallantry and a favorite amongst the French Ladies whom he is frequently commending for the neatness of their persons, their easy manners and their taste in dress. He knows how often the Ladies use the Baths, what colour best suits a Lady's complexion, what Cosmeticks are most favourable to the skin. We do not often See the Warrior and the *Abigail* thus united.<sup>214</sup>

By the end of April 1785 two important events became clear. First it was decided that John Quincy Adams had to go back to America and finish his education and then study

214. AA to Elizabeth Cranch, Auteuil, December 3, 1784, *AFC*, VI, 5–6. “Abigail” was the name of a maid in Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Scornful* (1616), thus the name “Abigail” refers to a lady’s maid.

the law. Staying longer in Europe might divorce young John from his American roots. On May 12, 1785, John Quincy left Paris to attend Harvard College. Abigail and John would miss their son. Word had also finally arrived that Congress had appointed Adams as minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain. Abigail knew that because of John's vast experience, "he would be more likely to succeed in England than a New Hand." Consequently she felt unable to oppose the appointment.<sup>215</sup>

As the day approached for their departure to England, Abigail wrote that "I mourn more and more leaving this place, for it is daily more Beautifull, and I find too that six months more would make me tolerably expert in the Language. But all things must Yeald to Business."<sup>216</sup> On her last day in Paris, she left saddened, "but without tears. Yet the thought that I might never visit it again gave me some pain, for it is as we say a dieing leave when we quit a place with that Idea."<sup>217</sup> She remembered an "observation that nobody ever leaves Paris but with a degree of tristness."<sup>218</sup> After only three months in England, she reminisced about the "ease and grace" of Paris convinced that she "should like to visit France once a year during my residence in Europe."<sup>219</sup>

The family left Auteuil on May 20 and six days later arrived in London. Abigail left behind her pet bird and her beautiful garden. She was also saddened to depart from Thomas Jefferson, "one of the choice ones of the Earth."<sup>220</sup> She had come to love Mr. Jefferson and felt that he was "the only person whom my Companion could associate; with perfect freedom, and unreserve."<sup>221</sup>

215. AA to Cotton Tufts, Auteuil, April 26, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 105.

216. AA to Elizabeth Smith Shaw, Auteuil, May 10, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 134.

217. AA to Charles Storer, Auteuil, May 18, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 151.

218. AA to Thomas Jefferson, London, June 6, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 169.

219. AA to Thomas Jefferson, London, August 12, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 263.

220. AA to Mary Cranch, Auteuil, May 8, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 119.

221. AA to Thomas Jefferson, London, June 6, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 169.

## AMID ENGLISH INCIVILITY

For their first month in London the Adamsons resided in the Bath Hotel Westminster Picadilly. The finer hotels were all booked because of Parliament's session, the king's birthday, and a five-day Handel musical celebration at Westminster Abbey. But Abigail soon spotted a house for rent on Grosvenor Square, "one of the finest squares in London. The air is as pure as it can be so near a Great city."<sup>222</sup> Lord North lived on the opposite side of the square and the Marquis of Carmarthen, Britain's secretary of state for foreign affairs, became "a near neighbour." In the middle of the spacious square was a large circular park with hedges, small trees, and gravel walks enclosed "with a neat grated fence; around which are lighted every night about sixty Lamps." An equestrian statue of George III stood in the very center of the square. Only residents of the square with keys and their guests could enjoy the park.<sup>223</sup>

Abigail wrote how she came by the house. "After much inspection and searching not for the Grandure of the Building but for an airy situation, I very fortunately lit of[f] one in the most reputable and prettyest Squares in London. If I could feel myself elated by my vicinity to Nobility I might boast the greatest share of it, of my square in London, but I am too much of a republican to be charmed with titles alone."<sup>224</sup> Although Abigail was pleased with the house, John was not. "We have a very good House, in as good an Air as this fat greasy Metropolis, can afford: But neither the House nor its furniture nor the manner of living in it, are Sufficiently Showy for the Honour and Interest of that Country, which is represented by it."<sup>225</sup>

As soon as the furniture arrived from The Hague, the

222. AA to Elizabeth Smith Shaw, ca August 15, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 280.

223. AA to Mary Cranch, London, ca July–August and August 15, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 240–42, 277.

224. AA to Thomas Welsh, London, August 25, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 297.

225. JA to Richard Cranch, Grosvenor Square, August 22, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 294.

family moved in. Abigail was then faced with the daunting task of hiring servants. Oh how she missed her son, for it was young John Quincy, not his father, who dealt with such household matters. Abigail confided to her sister that “I cannot bear to trouble Mr. Adams with any thing of a domestick kind, who from morning untill Evening has sufficient to occupy all his time.”<sup>226</sup> Abigail hired eight servants. Esther Field served as her lady’s maid doing Abigail’s and Nabby’s hair, caring for all the linen, and filling the rest of her time with needlework. A butler took care of the wine, did the family marketing, kept the weekly accounts, saw to the dinner table and sideboards, took care of the plate, and supervised the lower servants. He was always referred to as “Mr.” The house maid made the beds and cleaned the house from the top of the kitchen stairs upward. Two footmen rode on the back of the carriage, waited on the table, polished the table and chairs, and answered the front door, which was always locked for security. The cook prepared all meals and the kitchen maid cleaned the kitchen, kitchen pantries, housekeepers’ rooms, butler’s room, and the servants’ hall. The coachman took care of the carriage and horses.<sup>227</sup>

John had been cordially received in separate formal ceremonies by both the king and the queen in their private closets. Wives of diplomats were obliged to attend the queen’s formal circles held in the drawing room on Thursday afternoon every other week during the summer and weekly the rest of the year. It was an expensive proposition, because “you cannot go twice the same Season in the same dress, and a Court dress you cannot make use any where else.” Abigail asked her dressmaker “to let my dress be elegant but plain.”

At two o’clock on June 25 Abigail and Nabby entered the palace. They passed through several departments lined as usual with spectators. As they entered the antecham-

226. AA to Mary Cranch, London, June 24, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 187.

227. AA to Mary Cranch, London, ca July–August 1785, *AFC*, VI, 241.



ber, they were greeted by a couple diplomats Abigail had met in France. As Abigail and Nabby entered the drawing room Lord Carmarthen and the official palace master of ceremonies were presented to them. The whole assembly—over 200 people—was placed in a large circle around the room. The king entered the room and moved to the right; the queen then entered and with the two royal princesses moved to the left. In hushed whispers the royal couple made small talk with their guests. The lord in waiting presented each guest to the king and the lady in waiting did the same for the queen. After a two-hour wait, the lord in waiting presented Abigail to the king. She removed her right hand from her glove and the king kissed her left cheek, and asked her if she “had taken a walk to day. I could have told his Majesty that I had been all the morning preparing to wait upon him, but I replied, no Sire. Why, dont you love walking says he? I answerd that I was rather indolent in that respect. He then Bow’d and past on.” Another two hours passed before the queen came by. She asked Abigail if she was well situated in her house. Nineteen-year-old Princess Charlotte Augusta sympathized with Abigail for the long wait, saying that it was an unusually large circle. Princess Augusta Sophia, two years younger than her sister, asked Nabby if she had been in England previously. Abigail wrote her sister that the princesses

are pretty rather than Beautifull, well shaped with fair complexions and a tincture of the kings countenance. The two sisters look much alike. They were both drest in lilack and silver silk with a silver netting upon the coat, and their heads full of diamond pins. The Queen was in purple and silver. She is not well shaped or handsome. As [to] the Ladies of the Court, Rank and title may compensate for want of personal Charms, but they are in general very plain ill shaped and ugly, but dont you tell any body that I say so.<sup>228</sup>

228. AA to Mary Cranch, London, June 26, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 188–92.

Abigail left the circle tired but elated. Those at the court were, “like the rest of Mankind, mere Men and Women.” She would no longer be intimidated by British nobility. “I will not strike my colours to many of them.”<sup>229</sup>

Abigail had plenty of time to compare English with French society. British husbandry and manufactures “can boast a superiority” over the French. “But when you come to consider the Man, and the social affections; ease, civility, and politeness of Manners this people suffer by the comparison. They are more contracted and narrow in their sentiments notwithstanding their boasted liberality and will not allow their Neighbours half the Merit, they really deserve.”<sup>230</sup> “As to civility of behaviour, politeness of Manners, true Hospitality and Benevolence, this Country have much more need of going to America to learn them, than our Country has of any establishment this can bestow.”<sup>231</sup> The English despise the French and they “Hate the Americans. . . . So great is their pride that they cannot endure to view us as independent, and they fear our growing greatness.”<sup>232</sup> Abigail particularly despised the American refugees in England, who throughout the war, offered the British political leadership terrible advice and who now filled the newspapers with scurrility against Americans. “In this Country,” Abigail wrote, “there is a great want of many French commodities. Good sense, Good Nature, Political Wisdom and benevolence.” King George should allow King Louis to “permit Cargoes of this kind to be exported into this Kingdom.”<sup>233</sup>

One English experience left a lasting impression on Abigail. The five-day Handel musical celebration that occurred when the Adamses first moved to London was

229. AA to John Quincy Adams, London, Bath Hotel, June 26, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 196.

230. AA to Thomas Jefferson, August 12, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 262–63.

231. AA to Elizabeth Storer Smith, London, August 29, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 315.

232. *Ibid.*, 263.

233. AA to Thomas Jefferson, Grosnevor Square, November 24, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 467.

repeated the next year. Abigail obtained a ticket costing £1. It was a performance that profoundly affected her.

The practise of Musick to those who have a taste and ear for it, must be one of the most agreeable of Amusements. It tends to soften and harmonize the passions, to elevate the mind, to raise it from earth to Heaven. The most powerfull effects of Musick which I ever experienced was at Westminster Abbey. The place itself is well calculated to excite solemnity, not only from its ancient and venerable appearance, but from the dignified Dust, Marble and Monuments it contains. Last year it was fitted up with seats and an organ loft sufficiently large to contain six hundred Musicians, which were collected from this and other Countries. This Year the Musick was repeated. It is call'd the celebration of Handles Musick. The sums collected are deposited, and the income is appropriated to the support of decayed Musicians. There were 5 days set apart for the different performances. I was at the peice call'd the Messiah, and tho a Guinea a ticket, I am sure I never spent one with more satisfaction. It is impossible to describe to you the Solemnity and dignity of the Scene. When it came to that part, the Hallelujah, the whole assembly rose and all the Musicians, every person uncovered.<sup>234</sup> Only conceive six hundred voices and instruments perfectly chording in one word and one sound! I could scarcely believe myself an inhabitant of Earth. I was one continued shudder from the beginning to the end of the performance. Nine thousand pounds was collected, by which you may judge of the rage which prevaild for the entertainment.<sup>235</sup>

234. "Uncovered" referred to the removal of one's hat as a sign of respect.

235. AA to Elizabeth Cranch, London, September 2, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 329–30.

After a cordial presentation to the king on June 1, John felt some hope that he might succeed in negotiating a commercial treaty. Three months later, however, that optimism had dissipated. John saw “no present Prospect of doing much material Service for the Publick. There are Prejudices in the Way, too Strong to be easily overcome. I hope our Countrymen will learn Wisdom, be frugal, encourage their own Navigation and Manufactures and search the whole Globe for a Substitute for British Commerce.”<sup>236</sup> Abigail felt that the only hope of her husband’s obtaining a commercial treaty rested with events in America “If the States empower Congress to regulate their commerce it will have happy consequences for at present, there are those who have the ear of the ministry and persuade them that there is not union sufficient in the States to accomplish any thing jointly.<sup>237</sup> Every little petty disturbance is represented as a dissolution of all government.”<sup>238</sup>

Many “little petty disturbances” occurred throughout America in 1786 and 1787 to pressure state legislatures to provide legislative relief for distressed debtors. The largest of these disturbances occurred in western Massachusetts where angry farmers, who were unable to pay their debts and taxes, shut the county civil courts to prevent them from foreclosing on their farms. Abigail was livid.

With regard to the Tumults in my Native state . . . I wish I could say that report had exaggerated them. It is too true Sir that they have been carried to so alarming a Height as to stop the Courts of Justice in several Counties. Ignorant, wrestless desperadoes, without conscience or principals, have led a deluded multitude to follow their standard, under pretence of grievances which have no existance but

236. JA to John Quincy Adams, Grosvenor Square, September 9, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 355.

237. See especially Lord Sheffield’s *Observations on the Commerce of the American States* (London, 1783).

238. AA to Cotton Tufts, London, August 18, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 283.

in their immaginations. Some of them were crying out for a paper currency, some for an equal distribution of property, some were for annihilating all debts. . . . By this list you will see, the materials which compose this Rebellion, and the necessity there is of the wisest and most vigorous measures to quell and suppress it.<sup>239</sup>

Jefferson responded “The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions, that I wish it to be always kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all. I like a little rebellion now and then. It is like a storm in the Atmosphere.”<sup>240</sup> For the first time, but certainly not the last, Abigail saw her friend was far more radical than she had ever expected.

To her sister Abigail questioned: “What have we been contending against the tyranny of Britain, to become the Sacrifice of a lawless Banditti? Must our glory be thus shorn and our Laurels thus blasted?”<sup>241</sup>

Partly due to Shays, to the radicalism of unchecked state assemblies succumbing to the demands of their constituents, and to the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, the country’s first constitution, a general convention of the states met in Philadelphia in May 1787. Instead of following their instructions to amend the Articles to strengthen Congress, the delegates proposed a completely new constitution with a powerful central government. With a few qualms, both John and Abigail endorsed the new Constitution and advocated its adoption.

239. AA to Thomas Jefferson, London, January 29, 1787, *AFC*, VII, 455.

240. Jefferson to AA, Paris, February 22, 1787, *AFC*, VII, 468.

241. AA to Mary Cranch, London, February 25, 1787, *AFC*, VII, 470.

## RETURNING HOME

With little hope of successfully negotiating a commercial treaty, John Adams asked and received permission from Congress to return home. After two years abroad, Abigail was anxious to return home.

In Europe every being is estimated, and every country valued, in proportion to their show and splendor. In a private station I have not a wish for expensive living, but, whatever my fair countrywomen may think, and I hear they envy my situation, I will most joyfully exchange Europe for America, and my public for a private life. I am really surfeited with Europe, and most heartily long for the rural cottage, the purer and honester manners of my native land, where domestic happiness reigns unrivalled, and virtue and honor go hand in hand. I hope one season more will give us an opportunity of making our escape. At present we are in the situation of Sterne's starling.<sup>242</sup>

To her sister, Abigail wrote:

What a tasteless insipid life do I lead here in comparison with what I used to in Braintree, looking after my children and family—seeing my Friends in a Social way, loving and being beloved by them. Believe me I am not in the least altered, except that I wear my Hair dressed and powdered, and am two years older, and somewhat fatter which you may be sure is no addition to my looks. But the Heart and the mind are the Same.<sup>243</sup>

242. AA to Thomas Jefferson, London, February 11, 1786, *AFC*, VII, 51. In Laurance Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, a starling in a cage cries out to each passerby "I can't get out." The hero, Yorick, cannot release the bird and reflects on the condition of slavery and the blessings of liberty.

243. AA to Mary Cranch, London, May 25, 1786, *AFC*, VII, 198.

With the excellent dining available in both France and England and with their reduced physical activity, both Abigail and John had gained some weight. Although Abigail enjoyed good health, she confessed to her sister Mary that I “am larger than both my sisters compounded. Mr. Adams too keeps pace with me, and if one Horse had to carry us, I should pity the poor Beast.” Nabby, on the other hand, “is moulded into a shape as Slender as a *Grey hound*, and is not be sure more than half as large as she was when she first left America The Spring is advancing and I begin to walk so that I hope exercise will be of service to me.”<sup>244</sup>

Almost a year later and Abigail looked forward to their imminent departure for home.

I shall quit Europe with more pleasure than I came to it, uncontaminated I hope with its Manners and vices. I have learnt to know the World, and its value. I have seen high Life, I have Witnessed the Luxury and pomp of State, the Power of riches and the influence of titles, and have beheld all Ranks bow before them, as the only shrine worthy of worship. Notwithstanding this, I feel that I can return to my little cottage and be happier than here, and if we have not wealth, we have what is better, Integrity.<sup>245</sup>

The Adamses left London for Portsmouth on March 30, 1788. Nabby, who on June 11, 1786, had married William Stephens Smith, the secretary to the American legation, had left London a week earlier to take up residence on Long Island, New York. John and Abigail went from Portsmouth to the Isle of Wight, where tediously they waited for their vessel. Abigail had brought along “only a few books, and a little sewing, all of which were exhausted in one week”

244. AA to Mary Cranch, London, April 24, 1786, *AFC*, VII, 147.

245. AA to Mary Cranch, London, February 25, 1787, *AFC*, VII, 471.

before even boarding the ship.<sup>246</sup> Finally the *Lucretia* arrived and the seven-week voyage began on April 20. The passengers were agreeable, the captain clever, and the ship clean. Abigail was less seasick than on her maiden crossing, but she slept less. John was well throughout. Two events marked the voyage. "Tis agreed by all the hands, that they never knew so blustering a May. They had a hard time getting out of the English Channel, and in fact, they put up at Portland, England, where they stayed for a week. Finally the winds picked up, but "alternately we have had a violent blow, squalls, and then calms." They stopped asea to assist a de-masted vessel and then were engulfed in mountainous waves themselves. The other significant event occurred when Abigail's maid Esther Field (now married to John Brisler) gave birth to a baby girl. Not too happily, Abigail assisted in the delivery. A week out of Boston, Abigail vowed "never again [to] be left to go to sea."<sup>247</sup>

## A NEW HOME

After an exhausting seven-week voyage, the Adamses landed at Boston on June 17, 1788, to a tumultuous reception. Cannon roared, church bells pealed, thousands cheered, and all three of the Adams boys arrived for the welcome. Governor Hancock greeted them at the dock and entertained them at his mansion, which he offered for their comfort until they could move into their new house. Knowing that the old family cottage was going to be too small for the family with three grown boys, the Adamses had had Cotton Tufts purchase an attractive old, two-story building that Abigail had long admired. Abigail had instructed her uncle on the repairs to be made and how to finish the house.

First John, and then the next day Abigail, quietly

246. AA to Abigail Adams Smith, Isle of Wight, April 9, 1788, *AFC*, VIII, 255.

247. AA to Abigail Adams Smith, on board the ship *Lucretia*, May 29, 1788, *AFC*, VIII, 266–69.



slipped out of Boston and traveled to Mary and Richard Cranch's house in Milton where they stayed a week until their furniture arrived. For three weeks Abigail wrote no letters. She had five painful whitlows on her thumb and two fingers of her right hand and on two fingers of her left hand. In "exquisite pain," she "could not do the least thing" for herself.<sup>248</sup>

Abigail was "sadly disappointed" when they reached their new house, which John called "Peacefield." It was in great disrepair, the garden was a wilderness and the farm unmanaged. While John labored outdoors digging ditches and building an extensive stone fence, an army of carpenters and masons worked indoors. After living in splendid mansions in Auteuil and Grosvenor Square, the large house of Abigail's memory now seemed tiny. "In height and breadth, it feels like a wren's house." She warned Nabby that her husband would have to "come without heels to his shoes, or he will not be able to walk upright."<sup>249</sup> Within a month Abigail had gotten "more reconciled to the spot than I was at first,"<sup>250</sup> but in the spring they needed to build a new kitchen, a dairy room for their six cows, and a library.

On November 9, 1788, Nabby gave birth to her second child, a boy named John Adams Smith. Three days later Abigail set off by stage to assist her daughter. She would stay in New York until late January 1789 when Nabby and her family would join Abigail on the trip back to Braintree to visit friends and family. John Adams did not travel with his wife to Long Island. He made the "great sacrifice, in consenting" to the trip, but politics kept him tremendously busy—"as long as this political squall shall last, I can scarcely lie asleep, or sit still, without censure, much less ride journeys on visits to my friends."<sup>251</sup> On

248. AA to Abigail Adams Smith, Braintree, July 7, 1788, *AFC*, VIII, 277. A whitlow is a suppurative inflammation on the finger or toe near the end or by the nail.

249. *Ibid.*, 278.

250. AA to Abigail Adams Smith, August 6, 1788, *AFC*, VIII, 284.

251. JA to Abigail Adams Smith, Braintree, November 11, 1788, *AFC*, VIII, 305.

the way to Long Island, Abigail was a celebrity. At every inn along the way, her arrival was announced in advance. She kept her eyes and ears open. Typically, she wanted to learn new things, like a new way to preserve pumpkins, but she also wanted “to know a little of politicks.” She assured John that she would “be vastly prudent, . . . hear all, & say little.”<sup>252</sup>

### THE VICE PRESIDENCY

Even before the Adamses returned from Europe, John worried about his future, especially after the adoption of the new Constitution. He wrote to his daughter:

You may be anxious, too, to know what is to become of me. At my age [56 years old], this ought not to be a question; but it is. I will tell you, my dear child, in strict confidence, that it appears to me that your father does not stand very high in the esteem, admiration, or respect of his country, or any part of it. In the course of a long absence his character has been lost, and he has got quite out of circulation. The public judgment, the public heart, and the public voice, seem to have decreed to others every public office that he can accept of with consistency, or honor, or reputation; and no other alternative is left for him, but private life at home, or to go again abroad. The latter is the worst of the two; but you may depend upon it, you will hear of him on a trading voyage to the East Indies, or to Surrinam, or Essequibo, before you will hear of his descending as a public man beneath himself.<sup>253</sup>

Nabby hoped that her “Father may again be called to

252. AA to JA, Hartford, November 16, 1788, *AFC*, VIII, 306–7.

253. JA to Abigail Adams Smith, Braintree, July 16, 1788, *AFC*, VIII, 279–80.

act upon the Publick Theatre—such Men are much wanted.”<sup>254</sup>

Federalists also worried about what to do with John Adams. He would certainly accept the presidency, but that position would assuredly be filled by George Washington. It was doubtful that Adams would agree to serve as one of many members of Congress. As the second largest state in the Union, Massachusetts, it was presumed, would provide the country’s vice president. John Hancock, in exchange for his support in ratifying the Constitution, had been promised the backing of Massachusetts Federalists, his natural political opponents. When Hancock showed signs that he was going to challenge Washington for the presidency, Hancock’s Federalist support vanished. Massachusetts Federalists like Benjamin Lincoln and Theodore Sedgwick assured George Washington and Alexander Hamilton (who was attempting to orchestrate the presidential election from New York City in an effort to defeat the vice presidential aspirations of New York’s Antifederalist Governor George Clinton) that Adams greatly admired Washington and was willing to serve amicably as a second to him.<sup>255</sup> Some Federalists feared that Adams was at heart an Antifederalist, “but one of a very different turn from the general Cast. A mark may be missed as well above as below, and he is an high flyer.” Because Adams would probably be disgruntled if not elected, it was thought best “to keep him quiet” by electing him vice president.<sup>256</sup>

On the eve of the presidential election, Adams was calm. “My Mind,” he told Abigail, “has ballanced all

254. Abigail Adams Smith to John Quincy Adams, Jamaica, Long Island, September 28, 1788, *AFC*, VIII, 299.

255. See for instance, Benjamin Lincoln to George Washington, Hingham, Mass., September 24, 1789; Theodore Sedgwick to Alexander Hamilton, Boston, November 2, 1788; and Alexander Hamilton to James Madison, New York, November 23, 1788, Merrill Jensen et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the First Federal Elections, 1788–1790* (4 vols., Madison, Wis., 1976–1989), IV, 70, 85, 95.

256. William Maclay Diary, May 28, 1789, Kenneth R. Bowling and Helen E. Veit, eds., *The Diary of William Maclay . . .* (Baltimore, 1988), 56.

Circumstances, and all are reducible to two Articles, Vanity and comfort—I have the Alternative in my own Power. If they mortify my Vanity [that is, if someone else were elected], they give me Comfort.—They cannot deprive me of Comfort without gratifying my Vanity.”<sup>257</sup> Surprisingly, however, neither John’s vanity nor his comfort was served. While Washington received the unanimous number of cast votes, Adams received only 34 of the 69 cast votes. John and Abigail never forgave Hamilton for the intrigue that caused John so much embarrassment.

On April 13, 1789, John Adams left Braintree for New York City to assume his new office. He and Washington were sworn in on April 30. Abigail was again left at home to tend to domestic affairs. Both John and Abigail faced difficulties. Although John was now vice president, Congress had yet to provide for the office. Would there be a house attached to the office and what would the salary be? What would they do for furniture? Until these matters were settled, John resided with his close friends John and Sarah Jay while Abigail stayed in Braintree. While John attended to “weighty National objects,” Abigail faced “the petty concerns of domestick Life.”<sup>258</sup> John’s brother, Peter Boylston Adams, who had agreed to take over the farm in his brother’s absence, now backed out of the arrangement. Abigail wrote John that when Peter heard “that a Tax Bill was coming out this month, he got quite discouraged & came to tell me that he should never get sufficient of[f] from it, to pay the Taxes.”<sup>259</sup> She offered him some of the sheep with half the profits from the lambs and wool, but to no avail. Strangely, John had purchased fifteen heifers in December (adding to their previous six cows) determined to “cover his Farms with living creatures if he does not have some other employment soon.”<sup>260</sup> Now, Abigail found

257. JA to AA, Braintree, December 2, 1788, *AFC*, VIII, 312.

258. AA to JA, Braintree, May 1, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 339.

259. AA to JA, Braintree, May 5, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 345.

260. Mary Cranch to AA, Braintree, December 14, 1788, *AFC*, VIII, 317.

it difficult “to dispose of the stock . . . [as] no purchaser appears.” Other matters beleaguered her. “The weather is cold, the spring backward, and the stock expensive. You will not wonder that I am puzzled what to do, because I am in a situation which I never was before.”<sup>261</sup> John was desperate. His brother should be allowed to “plough and plant” what he wanted. “If no one will take the Place leave it to the Birds of the Air and Beasts of the Field.” The important thing was that Abigail must come to New York.<sup>262</sup> Soon all was reconciled. Peter Adams changed his mind once more and agreed to rent the farm. Abigail sold some of the cows, the crop was planted, and the garden began to look “charmingly.”<sup>263</sup> Congress finally enacted a salary bill. Unfortunately, as John had suspected, Congress was to be parsimonious. Although the president received a generous \$25,000 annually for salary and expenses, the vice president was allotted only \$5,000. To serve the public, John and Abigail would again be forced to live “in a Style much below our Rank and station.”<sup>264</sup>

In mid-May, John rented “a large and handsome house” called Richmond Hill on a thirty-acre tract of land, about two miles outside of New York City.<sup>265</sup> Abigail sent “more than an hundred packages” including some of their furniture to their new home,<sup>266</sup> and then left herself. Nabby and her family had already taken up residence at Richmond Hill when Abigail arrived on June 25 with her niece Louissa, two servants, and Charles, who was newly graduated from Harvard. He would soon begin studying law with Alexander Hamilton. William Stephens Smith, Nabby’s husband, soon revealed himself as an adventurer who frequently abandoned Nabby in pursuit of one unsuccessful speculative venture after another.

261. AA to JA, Braintree, May 1, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 339.

262. JA to AA, New York, May 14, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 353.

263. AA to JA, Braintree, May 31, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 366.

264. JA to AA, New York, May 30, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 364.

265. JA to AA, New York, May 24, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 357.

266. AA to JA, Braintree, June 14, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 370.

Although she missed her friends, Abigail was delighted with their new situation. Richmond Hill was “Beautiful in the highest degree, it is a mixture of the sublime & Beautifull”; it was “one of the most delightfull spots I have seen in this Country,”<sup>267</sup> and it was made more pleasant because Nabby and the two grandchildren lived there. Abigail told her sister that “a Grandchild is almost as near to your Heart as your own children; my little Boys delight me and I should feel quite melancholy without them.”<sup>268</sup> The house overlooked the North River with commanding views of New York City, Long Island, and New Jersey. An extra servant or two were necessary to make the trip to the city four to six times daily. The lofty rooms had eleven-foot ceilings, but the house needed repairs. In the winter, at least six fireplaces were kept ablaze to keep the house warm. With firewood costing \$7 per cord and forty to fifty cords needed, heating was far more expensive than in Braintree. With a family of eighteen (ten family members and eight servants), the occupants were a bit crowded. “I have a pretty good Housekeeper, a tolerable footman, a midling cook, an indifferent steward, and a vixen of a House maid.” Their coachman was “not to be trusted with the keys of a cellar.” He slept in the stable and was in the house only to eat or when he served as “a porter at the door.”<sup>269</sup> John and Esther Brisler, homesick for Braintree, left for a while but soon returned when offered a large increase in salary. Abigail regularly complained about the difficulty of getting honest, hard-working, sober servants. She was grateful that Esther and John Brisler decided to stay with them to supervise the servants. “I cannot find a cook in the whole city but what will get drunk, and as to the Negroes—I am most sincerely sick of them, and I can no more do without Mr. Brisler,

267. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, October 11 and July 12, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 421, 388.

268. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, September 1, 1789, *New Letters*, 23.

269. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, November 3, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 436.

than a coach could go without wheels or Horses to draw it.”<sup>270</sup> Later she wrote that “The chief of the servants here who are good for any thing are Negroes who are slaves. The white ones are all Foreigners & chiefly vagabonds.”<sup>271</sup> After moving to Philadelphia, she still preferred black to white servants. She particularly liked “a very clever black Boy of 15,” who was in his second year of a seven-year indenture with the Adamses.<sup>272</sup>

Soon Abigail became accustomed to New York’s frenetic social life. Although she came to love Richmond Hill, it exposed her to an avalanche of visitors. “I find myself much more exposed to company than in any situation which I have ever before been in. The morning is a time when strangers who come to N. York expect to find Mr. Adams at home. This brings us Breakfast company besides it is a sweet morning retreat for fresh air & a cool Breize.”<sup>273</sup> Within two weeks of her arrival, Abigail had been visited by the President and Mrs. Washington; the president’s private secretaries (David Humphreys and Tobias Lear); Cornelia Clinton, the wife of New York’s Governor George Clinton; Madam de Brehan, the mistress of the French Minister de Moustier; Lady Temple, the wife of the British minister; Lucy Knox, the wife of Secretary of War Henry Knox; and twenty-five other ladies, many of the senators and their wives, all of the foreign ministers, and many U.S. representatives. She received no guests on Sundays, a day that was reserved for the family. Return visits were required. Within five weeks Abigail returned more than sixty visits between 3:00 and 4:00 in the afternoon. She soon learned that if she visited after 6:00 PM,

270. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, August 9, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 399.

271. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, April 28, 1790, Stewart Mitchell, ed., *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788–1801* (Boston, 1947), 47–48.

272. AA to Mary Cranch, Bush Hill, March 12, 1791, *New Letters*, 70.

273. AA to Cotton Tufts, Richmond Hill, September 1, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 406.

when most women were not at home, she could fulfill her social obligation by repaying many visits in a short period of time. Each week she hosted a dinner for twenty-four, first for senators with their wives, then single senators, representatives, and public ministers.<sup>274</sup>

#### ABIGAIL ADAMS AND MARTHA WASHINGTON

The day after arriving at Richmond Hill, Abigail and Nabby paid their respects to Martha Washington. It was the beginning of a long and respectful friendship. Abigail described the president's wife, who received her "with great ease & politeness, as plain in her dress, but that plainness is the best of every article. . . . Her Hair is white, her teeth Beautifull, her person rather short than otherways . . . her manners are modest and unassuming, dignified and femenine, but not the Tincture of ha'ture about her."<sup>275</sup> Two weeks later, after a couple more visits, she wrote that

Mrs. Washington is one of those unassuming characters which creates Love & Esteem. A most becoming pleasantness sits upon her countenance & an unaffected deportment which renders her the object of veneration and Respect. With all these feelings and Sensations I found myself much more deeply impressed than I ever did before their Majesties of Britain.<sup>276</sup>

Abigail knew that she would have to establish a levee day (a day for formal receptions), but she deferred to Martha Washington who chose Friday evenings at eight o'clock for

274. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, June 28 and August 9, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 379, 399.

275. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, June 28, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 379.

276. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, July 12, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 389.



her formal receptions. Attending every other week, Abigail described how Martha Washington's levees operated.

I found it quite a crowded Room. The form of Reception is this, the servants announce—& Col. Humphries or Mr. Lear—receives every Lady at the door, & Hands her up to Mrs. Washington to whom she makes a most Respectfull curtzey and then is seated without noticing any of the rest of the company. The President then comes up and speaks to the Lady, which he does with a grace dignity & ease, that leaves Royal George far behind him. The company are entertained with Ice cremes, [tea, coffee], & Lemonade, and retire at their pleasure performing the same ceremony when they quit the Room.<sup>277</sup>

Martha Washington was seated on a raised dais with a chair to her right. Whenever she arrived, Abigail sat next to Mrs. Washington. If another woman had already occupied that chair, the president would engage her in conversation and then escort her away so that Abigail could sit in her rightful place.<sup>278</sup> Abigail greatly admired Washington. "Our August President is a singular example of modesty and diffidence. He has a dignity which forbids Familiarity mixed with an easy affability which creates Love and Reverence."<sup>279</sup>

When John visited home and the President went on a tour throughout New England during October and November 1789, Martha and Abigail often visited each other "upon terms of much sociability." Abigail again described Martha as "a most friendly, good Lady, always pleasant and easy, doatingly fond of her Grandchildren, to whom she is quite the Grandmamma."<sup>280</sup> When Martha left to visit

277. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, August 9, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 397.

278. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, January 5, 1790, *New Letters*, 35.

279. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, July 12, *AFC*, VIII, 388.

280. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, October 11, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 421.

Mount Vernon, Abigail parted “with her, tho I hope only for a short time, with much Regret. No Lady can be more deservedly beloved & esteemed than she is, and we have lived in habits of intimacy and Friendship. In short the Removal of the principal connections I have here serves to render the place, delightful as it is, much less pleasant than it has been.”<sup>281</sup> Abigail particularly admired Martha for “a prudence, which I know I do not possess. I could not keep silence as She does.”<sup>282</sup> When Martha prepared to returned to Virginia after her husband’s retirement, Abigail wrote John that “I shall think myself the most fortunate among women if I can glide on for four Years with as spotless a Reputation, beloved and esteemed by all as that Good and amiable Lady has done. My endeavors shall not be wanting.”<sup>283</sup>

### **POLITICKING**

Almost from the beginning of her residency in New York, Abigail felt uneasy about corresponding with friends about politics. They wanted to know what was happening with the new government. “I know that I stand in a delicate situation, I am fearfull of touching upon political subjects yet perhaps there is no person who feels more interested in them.” She applauded President Washington’s judicial appointments, which she characterized as “an assemblage of the greatest talents and abilities are united.”<sup>284</sup> She praised her husband in the tedious and onerous job of presiding over the U.S. Senate and breaking many tie votes. A lesser man would have either wavered in his opinions or “sought the popular applause of the multitude.” She lauded Congress as “composed of many men of great abilities,”

281. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, August 29, 1790, Adams Family Papers, MHi.

282. AA to JA, Quincy, January 12, 1794, *EAJ*.

283. AA to JA, Quincy, January 29, 1797, *EAJ*.

284. AA to Elizabeth Smith Shaw, Richmond Hill, September 27, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 411.

although some members of both houses were as wild as “Bedlammites, but hush—I am speaking treason.”<sup>285</sup> She condemned “News writers [who] fib so,” and “newspapers that were filled with sedition & evil speaking.”<sup>286</sup> She defended the daily levees—hosted by her on Mondays, and Martha Washington on Fridays, Sarah Jay on Thursdays, Lucy Knox on Wednesdays, and Lady Temple on Tuesdays—against charges of having the tapestry of aristocracy. “Pray is not this better than resorting to Taverns, or even having supper parties? Some amusement from the Business of the day is necessary and can there be a more Innocent one than that of meeting at Gentlemen’s Houses and conversing together? But faction and Antifederalism may turn every Innocent action to evil.”<sup>287</sup> She greatly enjoyed hosting the Creek chiefs who came to New York from Georgia to negotiate the first treaty with the new government. After signing the treaty “they had a great Bonfire dancing around it like so many spirits hooping, singing, yelling, and expressing their pleasure and satisfaction in the true savage stile.” After dining with the Adamses, Chief Mico Maco conferred upon Abigail the name Mamma. She did not know what it meant translated, but she liked the honor and the sound.<sup>288</sup>

Abigail was fearful on those occasions when the president was sick and near death.

He has been in a most dangerous state, and for two or three days I assure you I was most unhappy. I dreaded his death from a cause that few persons, and only those who know me best, would believe.

285. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, October 4 and July 12, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 416, 389.

286. AA to JA, Richmond Hill, October 20, 1789, and AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, August 9, 1789, *AFC*, VIII, 427, 400.

287. AA to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, January 24, July 27, 1790, *New Letters*, 8, 55.

288. AA to Mary Cranch, New York, August 8, 1790, *New Letters*, 56.

It appears to me that the union of the states, and consequently the permanency of the Government depend under Providence upon his Life. At this early day when neither our Finances are arranged nor our Government sufficiently cemented to promise duration, His death would I fear have had most disastrous consequences. I feared a thousand things which I pray I never may be called to experience. Most assuredly I do not wish for the highest Post.<sup>289</sup>

When the capital was moved to Philadelphia in the fall of 1790, Abigail did not relish the idea. She hated boxing-up all of their belongings once again. She dreaded the idea of establishing “another new set of company, to form new acquaintances, to make and receive a hundred ceremonious visits, not one of ten from which I shall derive any pleasure or satisfaction.” She had become comfortable at Richmond Hill, and the thought of leaving Nabby and the grandchildren was “painfull.”<sup>290</sup> The ninety-mile journey seemed “like a mountain & three Ferries to cross.”<sup>291</sup>

The trip to Philadelphia occurred at a bad time when Abigail was very sick. They traveled fewer than twenty miles a day and arrived in five days. The brick house at Bush Hill two and a half miles outside of Philadelphia had been unoccupied for four years. It needed a thorough cleaning and airing, but soon became comfortable. Abigail was told that for eight months of the year “this place is delicious,” but the roads were bad in the winter.<sup>292</sup> Within a few months, however, the inconvenience of Bush Hill became apparent

289. AA to Mary Cranch, New York, May 30, 1790, *New Letters*, 49.

290. AA to Mary Cranch, New York, October 3 and 10, 1790, *New Letters*, 59, 60.

291. AA to Mary Cranch, New York, October 25, 1790, *New Letters*, 63.

292. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, January 9, 1791, *New Letters*, 67.

and the family moved into a city house that rented for the enormous amount of \$1,000 annually.

Abigail readily assumed her social responsibilities. "On Monday Evenings our House is open to all who please to visit me." On Tuesdays she prepared "for the Wednesdays dinners which we give every week to the amount of sixteen & 18 persons which are as many as we can accommodate at once in our Thousand Dollars House. On Thursday the replacing & restoring to order occupies my attention. The occasional intercourse of dinning abroad, returning visits &c. leaves me very few hours to myself." She looked forward to the happy day when she would only be responsible for entertaining her family.<sup>293</sup> Politics "warm[ed]," but Abigail's "everlasting fever" persisted and she was bedridden for six weeks, during which time she was bled three times and had blisters applied to her wrists eight times.<sup>294</sup> Furthermore, she wrote her sister, "a critical period of Life Augments my complaints."<sup>295</sup> She felt obliged to return home. In April 1792, after Congress adjourned, John and Abigail traveled home to Quincy, the north precinct of Braintree that became a separate town named after Abigail's grandfather. Still feeling unwell, Abigail remained home when John returned to Philadelphia in November. Again she would feel the loneliness of a house without her family. John and Abigail would resort again to their correspondence for their "political Tittle tattle."<sup>296</sup>

With the country bitterly divided by the politics of Secretary of the Treasury Hamilton's economic program and the dramatic events occurring in Europe as the out-

293. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, December 18, 1791, *New Letters*, 75.

294. The theory behind bleeding was to remove tainted blood that caused the fever. In blistering, an irritant was applied to a sensitive area of skin causing first- and second-degree burns, which, when healed, would release pus, the body's natural poison.

295. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, March 29, April 20, 1792, *New Letters*, 80, 81.

296. JA to AA, Hartford, November 24, 1792, *EAJ*.

growth of the French Revolution, Americans readied for their second presidential election. George Washington still enjoyed almost universal popularity. The new Republican opposition, led by Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and Congressman James Madison, supported New York Governor George Clinton for vice president. Abigail felt that the election would determine whether the federal government “will stand four Years longer.”<sup>297</sup> John viewed the election more personally. “This Day decides whether I shall be a Farmer or a Statesman after next March.” No matter what the election result, John was prepared. “It cannot go amiss for me, because I am prepared for every Event. Indeed I am of the Cat kind and fall upon my feet, throw me as they will.” One thing was true, John wrote Abigail, “All lament that Mrs. Adams is not here.”<sup>298</sup>

Adams easily won reelection but it did not seem to satisfy him. “I can See no Tryumph in obtaining more votes than Mr. Clinton.” Without “the Smallest degree of Vanity,” John knew that he was the better man and deserved the position. The mere fact that Clinton challenged him, made John feel that “it is high time to quit Such a service.”<sup>299</sup> Abigail agreed, Clinton’s “comparative merits . . . were lighter than a feather when weighed against Yours.”<sup>300</sup> Abigail took the election as “proof not only of the wisdom and integrity of the people but of their Satisfaction and content with the administration of the Government and their Resolution to Support it.”<sup>301</sup> She was delighted that John won reelection, not because she had “a fondness for the Station, but because I think much of the tranquility and happiness of the Government depends upon having in that Station, an established Character for firmness, integrity and independence.”<sup>302</sup> John confided in Abigail that “Four

297. AA to JA, Quincy, December 4, 1792, *EAJ*.

298. JA to AA, Philadelphia, December 5, 7, 1792, *EAJ*.

299. JA to AA, Philadelphia, December 19, 1792, *EAJ*.

300. AA to JA, Quincy, January 2, 1793, *EAJ*.

301. AA to JA, Quincy, December 23, 1792, *EAJ*.

302. AA to JA, Quincy, December 29, 1792, *EAJ*.

years more will be as long as I shall have a Taste for public Life or Journeys to Philadelphia.”<sup>303</sup> He placed all the blame on Jefferson for “the blind Spirit of Party” that so divided the country.

John also decided to abandon the Philadelphia house and live in rented quarters and cut back on entertaining. The Adamses had lost over \$2,000 during the first vice presidential term. John was “determined . . . to be no longer the Dupe, and run into Debt to Support a vain Post which has answered no other End than to make me unpopular.”<sup>304</sup> In the future he would live “within my income nay within my salary.”<sup>305</sup>

John told Abigail that he missed her as much now as when they separated twenty years ago. Abigail agreed. “Years Subdue the ardour of passion but in lieu thereof a Friendship and affection Deep Rooted Subsists which defies the Ravages of Time, and will Survive whilst the vital Flame exists. Our attachment to Character Reputation and Fame increase I believe with our Years.”<sup>306</sup> John agreed. His desire for fame continued, but it was “never so strong as my Love of honesty” and his devotion to “Principles or Duty.” He hoped that Abigail felt well enough to join him in either his rented quarters or in a house that he could rent for six months. Her friends always inquired about her health, and Egbert Benson of New York confidentially told John that “he is for making Mrs. Adams Autocratix of the United States.” This, John said, “must be kept Secret because it is a sort of Treason.”<sup>307</sup>

Largely because of her health, Abigail spent all of John’s second term as vice president in Quincy. John, himself, spent half of his four-year term at home as well. Concern for Abigail’s health, the family’s economy, virulent parti-

303. JA to AA, Philadelphia, December 28, 1792, *EAJ*.

304. *Ibid*.

305. JA to AA, Philadelphia, January 24, 1793, *EAJ*.

306. AA to JA, Quincy, January 7, 1783, *EAJ*.

307. JA to AA, Philadelphia, January 24, 1793, *EAJ*.

san politics, and fear of the disease-ridden conditions in Philadelphia all made Quincy a more palatable residence.<sup>308</sup>

When apart, John and Abigail wrote to each other weekly—sometimes by each post twice a week. John lamented his “Punishments to be seperated both when We were too young and when We are too old.”<sup>309</sup> Unlike her letters to John when he was in Europe, she wrote less about domestic affairs and more about politics. Abigail leased the farms to tenants and thus had less personal involvement in them. The children were all gone. State and national politics intrigued her, and she knew that her husband appreciated her counsel. After writing about how successful women had been as queens, she stated clearly what her role should be. “Some were made for Rule, others for Submission. . . . My ambition will extend no further than Reigning in the Heart of my Husband. That is my throne and there I aspire to be absolute.”<sup>310</sup> John acknowledged that her letters contained “more good Thoughts, fine strokes and Mother Wit . . . than I hear in the whole Week.”<sup>311</sup> She criticized the demagoguery of the aged Samuel Adams in seeking election as Massachusetts governor, the continued Antifederalism of James Warren, the ineptitude and treasonousness of Secretary of State Edmund Randolph, the partisanship of opponents of the Jay Treaty, the brief chief justiceship of the insane John Rutledge, the appointment of the unethical Samuel Chase as an associate justice of the Supreme Court, the ambitiousness of Thomas Jefferson to become president, the viciousness of the French Revolution, the despicableness of Thomas Paine, the warmongers who sought war with Britain or France, the rise in party spirit that so divided the country, the stockjobbing and speculation that was accentu-

308. The great yellow-fever epidemic of 1793 killed more than 5,000 people in Philadelphia.

309. JA to AA, Philadelphia, February 8, 1794, *EAJ*.

310. AA to JA, Quincy, February 26, 1794, *EAJ*.

311. JA to AA, Philadelphia, February 4, 1794, *EAJ*.



ated by the economic policies of Alexander Hamilton, the increasing immigration of foreigners who were “gaining too great an assendency in our Country,”<sup>312</sup> and Virginia’s attempt to dominate national politics.

On January 3, 1796, Abigail wished John a happy new year and congratulated him “that we are one Year nearer the End of our Journey,” while lamenting that as our years decline, they seem to “speed rapidly away.”<sup>313</sup> John responded that “time will be soon gone and We shall be surprized to know what is become of it. How soon Will my Sands be all run out of the Glass. After sixty, the Days and Hours have additional Wings.”<sup>314</sup> Abigail lamented that

No Man if he is sixty Years of Age ought to have more than three Months at a Time from his Family, and our Country is a very hard hearted tyrannical niggardly Country. It has committed more Robberies upon me, and obliged me to more sacrifices than any other woman in the Country and this I will maintain against any one who will venture to come forward and dispute it with me. As there never can be a compensation for me, I must sit down with this consolation that it might have been worse.<sup>315</sup>

With John and the children gone and most of the farm management taken on by tenants, Abigail became bored. “I detest still life, and had rather be jostled, than inanimate.”<sup>316</sup>

312. AA to JA, Quincy, January 16, 1795, *EAJ*. Two years later, Abigail worried that the fires that occurred in Savannah, Baltimore, and New York might have been started by aliens. She feared “America will be the harbour and assilum of the dissolute and abandoned of the Nations of Europe unless more vigilance is adopted with respect to foreigners.” AA to JA, Quincy, December 31, 1796, *EAJ*. Abigail’s attitude about immigration presaged the Alien acts of 1798.

313. AA to JA, Quincy, January 3, 1796, *EAJ*.

314. JA to, Philadelphia, February 13, 1796, *EAJ*.

315. AA to JA, Quincy, March 2, 1796, *EAJ*.

316. AA to JA, Quincy, March 28, 1796, *EAJ*.

John responded that “The Ennui is as bad as a Calm at sea, and when the storms come they are as tedious. But Patience must have its perfect Work.”<sup>317</sup> John was equally bored. “I am so fatigued and disgusted with the Insipidity of this dull Life that I am half a Mind to vow that if W[ashington] dont Resign I will.”<sup>318</sup> “I think a Man had better wear than rust.”<sup>319</sup>

### THE PRESIDENCY—TO BE OR NOT TO BE

On January 5, 1796, John wrote with important news that had to remain secret. A cabinet member told him, and Martha Washington implied the same, that President Washington intended to retire at the end of his second term. “You know the Consequences of this, to me and to yourself. Either We must enter upon Arduous more trying [times] than any ever yet experienced, or retire to Quincy Farmers for Life.” One thing was certain—he would not serve as vice president under Jefferson.<sup>320</sup> For weeks John anguished over what he should do, and Abigail readily served as a sounding board while encouraging him to fulfill his duty to his country and resign himself to the will of God. As far as she was concerned, “My ambition leads me not to be first in Rome. . . . There is not a beam of Light, nor a shadow of comfort or pleasure in the contemplation of the object. If personal considerations were to weigh, I should immediately say retire.” But, she added, “circumstances must Govern you. In a matter of such Momentous concern I dare not influence you. I must pray you may have superiour Direction.” As she turned the page of her letter, however, she added another thought. “As to holding the office of v.p. there I will give my opinion. Resign, retire, I wont be second under no Man but Washington.”<sup>321</sup> On the

317. JA to AA, Philadelphia, April 7, 1796, *EAJ*.

318. JA to AA, Philadelphia, April 9, 1796, *EAJ*.

319. JA to AA, Philadelphia, December 30, 1796, *EAJ*.

320. JA to AA, Philadelphia, January 5, 1796, *EAJ*.

321. Here it can be seen that Abigail has in her mind merged with her husband. They were a unified team of one.

third page of her letter, another thought came to mind.

When we see the intrigues, the Ambition, the Envy, the malice and ingratitude of the World, who would not rather retire and live unnoticed in a country village, than stand the Broad Mark for all those arrows to be shot at placed upon a pin[n]icle. But I have done. Upon my pillow I shall reflect, fear and tremble, and pray that the President of the United States may long long continue to hold the Reigns of Government, and that his valuable Life may be prolonged for that purpose.<sup>322</sup>

John responded, telling Abigail not to worry. He would not resist the will of God to serve as president. But “If his Will is that any other should be president I know his Will also is that I should be a Farmer, for he has given me an understanding and a heart, which ought not and cannot and will not bow under Jefferson nor Jay nor Hamilton. It would be wicked in me. It would be countenancing Tyranny, Corruption and Villany in the People.”<sup>323</sup> “If the Fates destine one to attempt it, it would be dastardly to shrink if it were in one’s Power.”<sup>324</sup> Soon, John had made up his mind. “I am determind to be a Silent Spectator of the silly and the wicked Game and to enjoy it as a Comedy, a Farce or a Gymnastic Exhibition. . . . I will laugh let them say what they will, and I will laugh let it go as it will.” But, on the second page of his letter, John admitted “I am weary of the Game. Yet I don’t know how I could live out of it. I don’t love Slight, neglect, Contempt, disgrace nor Insult more than others. Yet I believe I have firmness of Mind enough to bear it like a Man, a Hero and a Philosopher.”<sup>325</sup> By the same token, John wrote, “I have not the Smallest dread of private Life, nor of public—if private Life is to be

322. AA to JA, Quincy, January 21, 1796, *EAJ*.

323. JA to AA, Philadelphia, February 2, 1796, *EAJ*.

324. JA to AA, Philadelphia, February 6, 1796, *EAJ*.

325. JA to AA, Philadelphia, February 10, 1796, *EAJ*.

my Portion, my farm and my Mare shall employ the rest of my days.”<sup>326</sup>

If John became president, Abigail worried whether she would be appropriate as the president’s wife.

I am anxious for the proper discharge of that share [of work] which will devolve upon me. Whether I have patience, prudence, discretion sufficient to fill a Station so unexceptionably as the Worthy Lady who now holds it. I fear I have not. As Second I have had the happiness of steering clear of censure as far as I know. If the contemplation did not make me feel very serious I should say that I have been so used to a freedom of sentiment that I know not how to plane so many guards about me, as will be indispensable, to look at every word before I utter it, and to impose a silence upon myself, when I long to talk.<sup>327</sup>

John responded “I have no concern on your Account but for your health. A Woman *can* be silent, when she will.”<sup>328</sup>

When Congress adjourned, John traveled to Quincy in May. He returned to Philadelphia in November. Washington publicly announced his retirement in mid-September 1796, and the political campaign began in earnest. Because John Jay, once thought to be a viable candidate, had lost public support due to his unpopular treaty, Federalists supported Adams. Republicans supported Jefferson. When it appeared that Adams would win, Alexander Hamilton again began intriguing. The person who received the second highest number of electoral votes was to be elected vice president. Hamilton started a secret national campaign to elect Thomas Pinckney of South Carolina as vice president. Pinckney had successfully negotiated a very popular treaty

326. JA to AA, Philadelphia, February 15, 1796, *EAJ*.

327. AA to JA, Quincy, February 20, 1796, *EAJ*.

328. JA to AA, Philadelphia, March 1, 1796, *EAJ*.

with Spain two years earlier. Soon Hamilton hoped that he could garner enough electoral support to make Pinckney president, while Adams would receive the second highest number of votes. Abigail condemned Hamilton as “ambitious as Julius Caesar. A subtle intriguer, his abilities would make him dangerous. . . . His thirst for Fame is insatiable. I have ever kept my Eye upon him.”<sup>329</sup> John felt the same disgust for Hamilton. “I know [him] to be a proud Spirited, conceited, aspiring Mortal always pretending to Morality, with as debauched Morals as old Franklin who is more his Model than any one I know. As great an Hypocrite as any in the U.S.”<sup>330</sup>

Abigail hoped that Jefferson would become vice president. “I believe the Government would be more conciliated, and the bitterness of party allayed. The former Friendship which subsisted between you would tend to harmonize, and moderation, coolness and temperament would reconcile the present, jaring interests to concord. This is my hope.”<sup>331</sup> When the ballots were opened by Vice President Adams on the floor of the U.S. Senate, Adams had 71 votes, Jefferson 68, and Pinckney 59. The two old friends would be united again, but this time at the head of conflicting parties.

## THE PRESIDENCY

John Adams was inaugurated president on March 4, 1797. Neither Abigail nor any of the Adams children attended the inauguration. Although her health had improved, it was still fragile enough that she did not want to risk traveling during the winter. She also needed to arrange for tenants to lease their property and to hire servants to accompany her

329. AA to JA, Quincy, December 31, 1796, *EAJ*.

330. JA to AA, Philadelphia, January 9, 1797, *EAJ*.

331. AA to JA, Quincy, December 31, 1796, *EAJ*. Two weeks later, Abigail wrote of Jefferson that “tho frequently mistaken in Men and Measures, I do not think him an insincere or a corruptable Man. My Friendship for him has ever been unshaken.” AA to JA, Quincy, January 15, 1797, *EAJ*.

to Philadelphia. Because of inflation, the Adamses hoped that Congress would increase the president's salary and provide a housing allowance. John wrote Abigail that the house that Washington rented cost £500 a year; it would now cost £1,000 to rent. Horses now cost three to five times what they did seven years earlier, and carriages were now three times as expensive. Other prices had risen similarly. Furthermore, Washington had purchased all of his furniture, linen, stemware, etc., and had taken these items back to Mount Vernon. Consequently, "the whole salary for the Year will be taken up in an out fit."<sup>332</sup> Unfortunately for the Adamses, Congress did not increase the president's compensation, and John knew that they again would have to be frugal if they wished to live within their means.

Abigail wrote to John that she hoped to be a partner in the presidency. "I am my dearest Friend always willing to be a fellow Labourer with you in all those Relations and departments to which my abilities are competent, and I hope to acquire every requisite degree of Taciturnity which my station calls for, tho Cabot says truly that it will be putting a force upon nature."<sup>333</sup> Abigail had already started advising her husband by suggesting that he support an increase in property taxes as opposed to other kinds of taxes to compensate for the loss of tariff revenue caused by the British and French deprivations upon American merchantmen.<sup>334</sup> "My mind," Abigail wrote, "has ever been interested in publick affairs. I now find, that my Heart and Soul are, for all that I hold dearest on Earth is embarked on the wide ocean, and in a hazardous voyage. May the experience, wisdom and prudence of the helmsman conduct the vessel in Safety. I am as ever a fellow passenger."<sup>335</sup> John responded, "I never wanted your Advice and assistance

332. JA to AA, Philadelphia, January 28, 1797, *EAJ*.

333. AA to JA, Quincy, February 19, 1797, *EAJ*. Cabot was probably George Cabot, a prominent Essex County merchant who served in the U.S. Senate from 1791 to 1796 when he moved to Boston.

334. AA to JA, Quincy, February 6, 1797, *EAJ*.

335. AA to JA, Quincy, March 12, 1797, *EAJ*.

more in my Life.”<sup>336</sup> Soon, every letter beseeched her to hurry to Philadelphia. “The Times are critical and dangerous, and I must have you here to assist me.”<sup>337</sup> “I want Physick and I want Exercise: but I want your Assistance more than either. You must come and leave the Place to the mercy of Winds.”<sup>338</sup> “I must intreat you, to loose not a moments time in preparing to come on that you may take off from me every Care of Life but that of my public Duty, assist me with your Councils, and console me with your Conversation. Every Thing relating to the Farms must be left to our friends.” “I can do nothing without you.”<sup>339</sup> Abigail continued to postpone her departure.

Late in April, Abigail and “a family” of twelve left Quincy. She spent a day and a half with Nabby and the grandchildren in East Chester, N.Y., but was disspirited by her son-in-law’s absence in pursuit of another speculative scheme. Traveling on she spent two days with their son Charles and his family in New York City where they lived “pretty but frugally.”<sup>340</sup> Abigail set out from New York City on the morning of May 8. Two days later, about twenty-five miles north of Philadelphia, she met John, “who was claimeing his own.” Abigail left her carriage and joined the president in his. They dined in Bristol, and arrived in Philadelphia at sunset. The servants had arrived four days earlier.<sup>341</sup>

Abigail took two days to recover from the aches and pains of traveling before assuming her social duties. On Monday, May 15, she hosted “32 Ladies and near as many Gentlemen” from noon to two-thirty. The same number would pass through the next day. Without drawing-room furniture, she decided not to have a formal levee until

336. JA to AA, Philadelphia, March 22, 1797, *EAJ*.

337. JA to AA, Philadelphia, April 6, 1797, *EAJ*.

338. JA to AA, Philadelphia, April 7, 1797, *EAJ*.

339. JA to AA, Philadelphia, April 11, 1797, *EAJ*.

340. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, May 16, 1797, *New Letters*, 89. Charles had married William Stephens Smith’s sister Sarah.

341. *Ibid*.

after the summer, especially since her health was “precarious.” She remembered that Mrs. Cotton Tufts had once described Abigail’s duties as “splendid misery. She was not far from Truth.”<sup>342</sup> After two weeks in Philadelphia, Abigail described her daily routine.

I keep up my old Habit of rising at an early hour. If I did not I should have little command of my Time. At 5 I rise. From that time till 8 I have a few leisure hours. At 8 I breakfast, after which untill Eleven I attend to my Family arrangements. At that hour I dress for the day. From 12 until two I receive company, sometimes untill 3. We dine at that hour unless on company [i.e., formal dinner] days which are Tuesdays & Thursdays. After dinner I usually ride out untill seven. I begin to feel a little more at Home, and less anxiety about the ceremonious part of my duty, tho by not having a drawing Room for the summer I am obliged every day, to devote two Hours for the purpose of seeing company.<sup>343</sup>

When she awoke before the rest of the family, she found the president’s room most conducive to writing. It had three large windows facing south and “the sun visits it with his earliest beams at the East window, and Cheers it the whole day in winter. All my keeping Rooms are North, but my forenoons are generally spent in my own Chambers tho a dark one, and I often think of my sun shine Cottage at Quincy.”<sup>344</sup> Evenings were often spent with close friends. Dr. Benjamin Rush recollected the joys of conversing with President Adams. “The pleasures of these evenings was

342. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, May 16, 1797, *New Letters*, 90.

343. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, May 24, 1797, *New Letters*, 91.

344. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, March 15, 1800, *New Letters*, 238–39.



much enhanced by the society of Mrs. Adams, who in point of talent, knowledge, virtue, and female accomplishments was in every respect fitted to be the friend and companion of her husband in all his different and successive stations, of private citizen, member of Congress, foreign minister, Vice President and President of the United States.”<sup>345</sup> A young Polish nobleman visiting America came to see John. As he passed the opposite room, he “found there the true counterpart of Mr. Adams. It was his wife. Small, short and squat, she is accused of a horrible crime. It is said she puts on rouge”—a habit acquired while in France. “What is certain is that if her manner is not the most affable, her mind is well balanced and cultivated.”<sup>346</sup>

Abigail hated the partisan politics, the vicious press, and the high cost of living. They rented the old Robert Morris mansion—the house that Washington occupied—at double the cost—£1,000 per year. All other costs had at least doubled. They held two “great dinners” weekly with about “36 Gentlemen.” With the Fourth of July approaching, the president was expected to continue Washington’s traditional backyard celebration. The public would be invited to attend the festivities at which cake, punch, and wine would be provided. Unlike previous years, Congress remained in session, adding another 150 guests.<sup>347</sup> Fortunately, it was a cool day, but after the patrons paid their respects to the president, they paraded to the drawing room where they visited with Abigail from noon until four o’clock.<sup>348</sup>

345. Benjamin Rush’s Sketches, George W. Corner, ed., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush: His “Travels Through Life” with his Commonplace Book on 1789–1813* (Princeton, 1948).

346. For the travels of Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, see Metchie J. E. Budka, ed., *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree: Travels through America in 1797–1799, 1805, with Some Further Account of Life in New Jersey* (Elizabeth, N.J., 1965), November 8, 1797.

347. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, June 23, 1797, *New Letters*, 98–99.

348. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, July 6, 1797, *New Letters*, 100.

When Congress adjourned, the Adamses left Philadelphia on July 19, fearful of the capital's sickly season, an approaching war with France, and/or a civil war at home. After stopping at Nabby's for a few days, they left for Quincy, where they remained until the first week of October 1797.

Abigail became increasingly disillusioned with national partisan politics. Not only did the Republicans attack the president, his administration, and Congress, but also her son. John Quincy Adams had been appointed U.S. minister resident to Portugal. As he prepared to assume that post, he was reassigned to be minister plenipotentiary to Germany. The opposition press attacked John Quincy for double-dipping—getting two salaries and two diplomatic outfits. In reality he received one salary and diplomatic outfit, and, in fact, lost some of his own money in preparing the embassy in Portugal. Abigail's ire reached new heights. She had said that whenever her husband was wounded, she bled. She understood that although she did not deserve the lies “inflicted upon me by the tongues of falshood—I must share in what is said reproachfull or malicious of my better half,” even if John's policies were for the good of the country.<sup>349</sup> But now it was the mother who came to the defense of her son. Something had to be done.

There is no end to their audaciousness, and you will see that French emissaries are in every corner of the union sowing and spreading their Sedition. We have *renewed information* that their System is, to calumniate the President, his family, his administration, until they oblige him to resign, and then they will Reign triumphant, *headed by the Man of the People*. It beho[oves] every pen and press to counteract them, but our Countrymen in general

349. AA to Mary Cranch, Norwalk, Conn., May 26, 1800, *New Letters*, 253. The salary for a minister resident was \$4,500 annually; for a minister plenipotentiary, \$9,000.

are not awake to their danger. We are come now to a crissis too important to be languid, too dangerous to slumber—unless we are determined to submit to the fraternal embrace, which is sure and certain destruction.<sup>350</sup>

As the newspaper barrage heightened, so too did Abigail's anger. The press was filled with "the malice & falsehood of Satan. . . . The wretched will provoke to measures which will silence them e're long. In short they are so criminal that they ought to be Presented by the grand jurors." Abigail realized how ardent she had become, but she could not stop herself. The continued attack on her husband and her son drove her into a frenzy. "Forgive me," she wrote her sister, "if I have been Rash. My Indignation is excited at these Hypocrites."<sup>351</sup> Soon she advocated that Congress pass a sedition act. "The wrath of the public ought to fall upon their devoted Heads."<sup>352</sup> As the country moved ever closer to war with France, the president's popularity skyrocketed, but still the minority press continued its assault. They called "the President old, querilous, Bald, blind, crippled, Toothless Adams."<sup>353</sup> Abigail ridiculed the Congress for delay. "In any other Country" the seditious newspapers "would have been seazd and ought to be here, but congress are dilly dallying about passing a Bill enabling the President to seize suspicious persons, and their papers."<sup>354</sup> In June and July 1798 Congress finally enacted the infamous Alien and Sedition Laws. The president, thicker skinned than his wife, reluc-

350. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, March 20, 1798, *New Letters*, 147.

351. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, April 21, 1798, *New Letters*, 159, 160.

352. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, April 26, 1798, *New Letters*, 165.

353. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, April 28, 1798, *New Letters*, 167.

354. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, June 19, 1798, *New Letters*, 193.

tantly signed the bills, and the federal district attorneys and courts avidly prosecuted Republican printers and one Republican congressman for their seditious libel. No one was prosecuted under the alien acts. In trying to protect her husband and her son, Abigail contributed to the most substantial blemish on her husband's illustrious career—a blemish that contributed to his defeat for reelection.

Despite the nationwide clamor for war, President Adams tirelessly worked for peace. Against his own party's wishes, but with the wise counsel of Abigail, the president sent one peace commissioner after another to France to try to avoid war. Finally, the French realized that war with the United States would be foolish and the two former allies agreed to settle their differences peacefully. It was perhaps the greatest act of statesmanship in Adams's long career, and it probably cost him the opportunity to be reelected in 1800.

After the adjournment of Congress, John and Abigail returned to Quincy in July 1798. While in Quincy, Abigail became seriously ill with what was diagnosed as dysentery, intermittent fever, and diabetes. Weak and fighting for her life, Abigail was bedridden for eleven weeks. John stayed until November 1798 before returning alone to Philadelphia. Abigail would not return to the capital for another year, in November 1799, when she resumed her social responsibilities. As the time neared for the capital to be moved from Philadelphia to Washington, Abigail felt regrets similar to when she left Paris. "There is something always melancholy, in the Idea of leaving a place for the last time. It is like burying a Friend." She wished the presidential election would take place when they were still in Philadelphia rather than moving "to a place so little at present, and probably for years to come, so ill calculated for the residence of such a Body as Congress. The houses which are built are so distant, the streets so miry, and the markets so ill supplied."<sup>355</sup>

355. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, February 27, 1800, *New Letters*, 234.

Abigail held her last levee on May 2, 1800, with more than two hundred visitors. The Adamses held a dinner for twenty-eight young unmarried ladies and gentlemen who were friends of the Adams's children. Just before the dinner ended, Thomas whispered in his mother's ear asking if she had any objections to a dance. Not at all, Abigail replied, "provided it comes thus accidental." The guests adjourned to the drawing room for tea. Abigail happily recounted that within an hour "the tables were removed, the lights lit & the Room all in order. At 8 the dancing commenced. At 12, it finished. More pleasure, ease and enjoyment I have rarely witnessed. The President went down about an hour & then retired. I tarried it out." The next night, however, Abigail had to retire early to compensate for the previous night's festivities. "Several of the company declared that they should always remember the Evening as one of the pleasantest of their lives." Abigail remembered one of the young beauties whose "uncovered bosom should display, what ought to have been veiled, or that the well turned, and finely proportioned form, should not have been less conspicuous in the dance, from the thin drapery which covered it. I wishd that more had been left to the imagination, and less to the Eye."<sup>356</sup> Abigail was feeling her fifty-six years, but as the president's wife, she felt "privileged to set a fashion."<sup>357</sup>

For the last year of Adams's presidency, the campaign against John's reelection was relentless. The vitriolic attacks from the Jeffersonians were understandable, but Adams also felt the sting of his own party. Federalists were divided between those loyal to him sometimes called Adamites and those who followed the beat of Alexander Hamilton's drum often referred to as High Federalists. The "little gen-

356. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, April 26, 1800, *New Letters*, 247–48. Abigail had earlier complained of women's fashions that "are as various as the Changes of the moon." AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, March 14, 1798, *New Letters*, 145.

357. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, December 4, 1799, *New Letters*, 218.

eral,” as Abigail called Hamilton, again intrigued to be the king-maker,<sup>358</sup> by urging the presidential electors to vote for Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a South Carolina lawyer and Revolutionary war hero who had recently served as an American diplomatic envoy to France. Hamilton publicly joined the assault on Adams with a fifty-four-page pamphlet attacking the president’s “great intrinsic defects of character,” his “disgusting egotism,” and his “eccentric tendencies” all of which made him unsuitable for the job. Both Adams and Hamilton were discredited. The presidential election of 1800 was probably the most virulent in American history. Both Jefferson and Adams stayed aloof personally as they were constantly attacked. “The President had frequently contemplated resigning,” but Abigail “thought it would be best for him to leave to the people to act for themselves, and take no responsibility upon himself.”<sup>359</sup> In the end, Jefferson and Aaron Burr received 73 electoral votes, Adams 65, and 64 for Pinckney. After thirty-six ballots, the House of Representatives broke the tie and elected Jefferson president.

## RETIREMENT AND DEATH

In many respects, John’s failure to be reelected president was a relief to both Abigail and John. Abigail especially looked forward to living without ceremony at home with family and friends. She wrote to her son Thomas that “Neither my habits, or my education or inclinations have led me to an expensive style of living. . . . If I did not rise with dignity, I can at least fall with ease, which is the more difficult task.”<sup>360</sup> Abigail left for home the beginning of February 1801; John followed a month later, leaving Washington at 5:00 AM

358. AA to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, November 10, 1800, *New Letters*, 255.

359. AA to Mary Cranch, Washington, January 15, 1801, *New Letters*, 263.

360. AA to Thomas Boylston Adams, November 13, 1800, Adams Papers, MHi.

on March 4, seven hours before Jefferson's inauguration. Abigail, who had high praise for Washington for assisting in the transfer of power by attending John's inauguration, saw no inconsistency in John's snubbing his successor.

Life at Peacefield had its pleasures. John worked in the fields supervising his hired hands and kept up a voluminous correspondence. Abigail delighted in resuming her domestic chores. Now, at 5:00 in the morning she skimmed milk as a dairywoman rather than writing letters. Although frugally managed, the family farm barely turned a profit. More important was the savings that Abigail had squirreled away over the years and the investments she made in government securities. Unlike John, who preferred to put all of his cash into real estate, land was useful to Abigail only if "we could have lived upon it." When not living on their land, they still had to pay taxes on it and contract with someone to live on it or work it. Abigail felt that public securities were a wiser investment,<sup>361</sup> an astute investment that provided the financial cushion needed in retirement.

Increasingly, however, retirement brought sadness. Abigail wrote that "Trials of various kinds seem to be reserved for our gray Hairs, for our declining years. Shall I receive good and not evil?"<sup>362</sup> Charles, the middle Adams son, had died in New York City in November 1800, an alcoholic and in desperate financial straits. Abigail took little Susan, Charles's daughter, to live at Quincy. Thomas, the youngest Adams son, recently returned from Europe, at first resided in Philadelphia where he had a modest law practice. In 1803 Abigail convinced him to move to Quincy, where in 1805 he married and lived at Peacefield until 1810, when he and his family moved into the original Adams family cottage. He later became a county judge.

John Quincy Adams had been abroad on diplomatic

361. AA to Mary Cranch, New York, October 10, 1790, *New Letters*, 61.

362. AA to Mary Cranch, Norwalk, Conn., May 26, 1800, *New Letters*, 253.

service for seven years before returning in late 1801 with a wife and a five-month-old son, George Washington Adams. After visiting Peacefield, he practiced law in Boston and taught at Harvard. Soon, however, he was back in public service, first as a state senator and then in 1803 as a U.S. senator from Massachusetts. Although saddened when John Quincy and his family left for Washington, it was through her son's career that Abigail was reborn to politics. She regularly corresponded and advised him and his wife Louisa Catherine. Abigail was also able to develop a warm relationship with Louisa through their correspondence—a relationship that seemed tense in person. In 1805 the two Adams boys stayed with their grandparents when their parents traveled to Washington.

Abigail, like John Quincy, supported James Madison as president in the election of 1808. In 1809 President Madison appointed John Quincy as U.S. minister to Russia. Abigail was devastated, fearing she might never see her son again. In August 1809 John Quincy, his wife, and their infant son Charles Francis left for St. Petersburg. The two older boys again stayed with their grandparents. In 1810 Abigail wrote President Madison asking that her son be recalled. Madison allowed John Quincy to return home if he so chose, and even nominated him as an associate justice to the U.S. Supreme Court. Now, however, after a long absence from the law (which he never really cared for as a career), John Quincy turned down the judicial appointment and stayed in Russia. In 1813, paralleling his father's career, he was appointed one of three commissioners to meet in Ghent, Belgium, to negotiate a peace between Great Britain and the United States to end the War of 1812. Three years later he was named U.S. minister to Great Britain. The two younger boys, who after two years at Peacefield were sent to school in New Hampshire, were now sent to England to be with their parents. John Quincy finally returned to America in August 1817 to be secretary of state under President James Monroe.



The saddest part of Abigail's retirement was being apart from Nabby and the Smith grandchildren. Nabby's husband continued his cavalier financial ventures that often left Nabby at home alone. In 1808 Nabby, who with her daughter had been living at Peacefield, joined her husband on a small farm in the isolated village of Lebanon in upstate New York, just south of Lake Oneida. Abigail was devastated. In 1811, Nabby found a lump in her breast, which was diagnosed as malignant. After second opinions confirmed the diagnosis as cancerous, Nabby had one breast surgically removed with only the benefit of opium. She suffered a painful recovery. When the cancer reappeared, Nabby made a painful journey to Peacefield where she died in mid-August 1813. Responding to a consolatory letter from Thomas Jefferson, Abigail wrote

Your kind and Friendly letter found me in great affliction for the loss of my dear and only daughter, Mrs. Smith. She had been with me only three weeks having undertaken a journey from the State of N. York, desirous once more to see her parents, and to close her days under the paternal roof.

She was accompanied by her son and daughter, who made every exertion to get her there; and gratify which seemed the only remaining wish she had, so helpless and feeble a state as she was in. It is wonderfull how they accomplished it. Two years since, she had an opperation performed for a cancer in her breast. This she supported, with wonderfull fortitude, and we flattered ourselves that the cure was effectual, but it proved otherwise. It soom communicated itself through the whole mass of the blood, and after severe sufferings, terminated her existance.

You, sir, who have been called to separations of a similar kind, can sympathize with your bereaved Friend. I have the consolation of knowing that the Life of my dear daughter was pure, her conduct in

prosperity and adversity, exemplary, her patience and resignation becoming her religion. You will pardon my being so minute, the full Heart loves to pour out its sorrows, into the Bosom of sympathizing Friendship.<sup>363</sup>

Within days of Nabby's surgery in 1811, Abigail's brother-in-law Richard Cranch died, followed the next day by his wife, Mary, Abigail's older sister, who had been terminally ill for months. In 1812 infant daughters of John Quincy and Thomas both died. In 1815 Abigail's younger sister Elizabeth died, followed by the deaths of Abigail's uncle Cotton Tufts and son-in-law William Stephens Smith. This stream of deaths, along with a worsening case of arthritis and rheumatism, made life almost unbearable for Abigail who wrote that "old Age is dark & unlovely."<sup>364</sup> In October 1818, a month shy of the age of seventy-four, Abigail contracted typhoid fever. Sapped of strength, she died in her sleep on October 28. John wrote Jefferson about Abigail's imminent death.<sup>365</sup> "Now Sir, for my Griefs! The dear Partner of my Life for fifty four Years as a Wife and for many Years more as a Lover, now lyes in extremis, forbidden to speak or be spoken to." After reading about Abigail's death in the newspapers, the old friend responded with tearful condolences.

Tried myself, in the school of affliction, by the loss of every form of connection which can rive the human heart, I know well, and feel what you have lost, what you have suffered, are suffering, and have yet to endure. The same trials have taught me

363. AA to Jefferson, Quincy, September 20, 1818, Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1959), 327.

364. Quoted in John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (New York, 1992), 437.

365. JA to Jefferson, Quincy, October 20, 1818, Cappon, 528.

that, for ills so immeasurable, time and silence are the only medicines. I will not therefore, by useless condolences, open afresh the sluices of your grief nor, altho' mingling sincerely my tears with yours, will I say a word more, where words are vain, but that it is of some comfort to us both that the term is not very distant at which we are to deposit, in the same cerement, our sorrows and suffering bodies, and to ascend in essence to an ecstatic meeting with the friends we have loved and lost and whom we shall still love and never lose again. God bless you and support you under your heavy affliction.<sup>366</sup>

John Quincy grieved his mother. Although it was his lot to be separated from her more often than not, he wrote that "she has been a spirit from above watching over me for good, and contributing by my consciousness of her existence to the comfort of my life."<sup>367</sup> He wrote his brother that their mother's "life gave the lie to every libel on her sex that was ever written." John Quincy's wife captured the essence of Abigail Adams, describing her as the "guiding planet around which all revolved, performing their separate duties only by the impulse of her magnetic power."<sup>368</sup>

Had she lived to the age of the patriarchs, every day of her life would have been filled with clouds of goodness and love. There is not a virtue that can abide in the female heart but it was an ornament of hers. She had been fifty-four years the delight of my father's heart, the sweetness of his toils, the comforter of all his sorrows, the sharer and heightener of all his joys. It was but the last time I saw

366. Jefferson to JA, Monticello, November 13, 1818, *ibid.*, 529.

367. Quoted in Lynn Hudson Parsons, *John Quincy Adams* (Madison, Wis., 1998), 145.

368. Quoted in Natalie S. Bober, *Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution* (New York, 1995), 221.

my father that he told me, with an ejaculation of gratitude to the Giver of every good and every perfect gift, that in all the vicissitudes of his fortunes, through all the good report and evil report of the world, in all his struggle and in all his sorrows, the affectionate participation and cheering encouragement of his wife, had been his never-failing support, without which he was sure he should never have lived through them.<sup>369</sup>

369. *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, ed. by Charles Francis Adams (Philadelphia, 1875), IV, 157.

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The five biographies listed in this bibliography are all excellent. No biography, however, can match the in-depth personal experience felt by reading the sixty years of letters written by and to Abigail Adams. The modern edition of the *Adams Papers*, started under the editorship of Lyman H. Butterfield and now continued under the direction of C. James Taylor, is a literary and historical masterpiece that grows in significance with each new volume now published annually. The microfilm published fifty years ago broke new ground as does today's Web site for the Adams Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society. Through these voluminous manuscripts, the lives of Abigail and John Adams are more opened to scrutiny than any other married couple in American history.

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