

# Abigail Smith Adams

(1744-1818)

Abigail Smith Adams was born November 22, 1744 in Weymouth, Massachusetts. Like most girls during that time, Abigail received no formal education and was primarily educated in the home. Her father, William Smith, was an avid reader and encouraged his children to share in his passion for learning. He opened his library of books to his children; Abigail took advantage of this opportunity and devoted her time to the reading of poetry, drama, history, theology, and political science. She grew up to be one of the most well read women of her time, as well as one of the most influential.

She married John Adams on October 25, 1764 and within eight years had five children: Abigail (Nabby), John Quincy, Susanna, Charles, and Thomas. Due to John's obligations away from home, much of their married life was spent apart, once as long as ten years. During these times of separation, which were very difficult for Abigail, she and John grew closer together and remained in contact through letters.

Contained in these personal letters were thoughts and feelings that might not have been shared in person. In a letter to John, Abigail wrote, "My pen is always freer than my tongue. I have wrote many things to you that I suppose I never could have talk'd."\* Also contained in these letters were Abigail's opinions of the equality of men and women, their right to vote and right to be educated.

On the subject of equality, she felt that a woman's role should carry the same amount of importance and responsibility as a man's. She wrote, "Let each planet shine in their own orbit, God and nature designed it so. If man is Lord, woman is *Lordess*—that is what I contend for, and if a woman does not hold the Reigns of Government, I see no reason for her not judging how they are conducted."

In many of her letters, she addressed the subject of education for women. She felt that an educated woman would better be able to perform such duties as raising children, managing the household and "retaining the affections of a man of understanding." She wrote to her husband about this subject while he and others were drafting the Constitution in 1776, "If we mean to have Heroes, Statesmen, and philosophers, we should have learned women." John wrote back and was in agreement with her views.

In 1776, when John was in Philadelphia serving in Congress, Abigail again wrote about the rights of women. She wrote, "I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors...If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to forment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation."

Although Abigail's views brought no immediate change, she was among the first to advocate a woman's right to vote, to be educated and to be seen as an equal among men.

\*All quotes are written as in original text.