

Ladies who became FIRST

Abigail Smith – the Fifth in a Series by Randall Priest



Figure 1

Abigail Smith Adams [Figure 1] was born in 1744 at Weymouth, Massachusetts, to William Smith and Elizabeth (nee Quincy) Smith. Abigail inherited some of New England's strongest traditions as her mother was descended from the Quincy family, a well-known political family in the colony. Her father and other forbearers were Congregational ministers, leaders in a society that held its clergy in high esteem.

Being delicate as a child she was kept out of school much of the time, and was home-schooled by her mother and encouraged to read. Between the reading and the listening to the long sermons of her father, she gained an intellectual and moral understanding that prepared her for a future with a young farmer-lawyer of Braintree, John Adams.

Abigail and John were well-matched, bright, outspoken and stubborn. After a two-year courtship, they were married by her father on October 25, 1764. Abigail was 20 and John [Figure 2] was 29. They moved to a farm cottage in Braintree (now Quincy), Massachusetts, where John's law practice became very successful.

In the first seven years of marriage six children were born to the family; four of whom survived infancy. One son, John Quincy [Figure 3], would become our sixth president. Abigail was the first woman to be the wife of one President and the mother of another. (Barbara Bush repeated the event.)



Figure 2



Figure 3

While John was serving his country in various capacities, Abigail raised and educated her surviving children and managed the farm in Quincy that John had inherited from his father. While John was away, Abigail and John stayed in touch through correspondence. In fact, her life is one of the most documented of the First Ladies because of the abundance of letters written to John throughout their separations.

In 1784 Abigail was able to join her husband in France, and was the mistress of a Paris mansion and a figure in French society. The following year, Adams was appointed Minister to the Court of St. James, and the couple moved to London. English society thought it only proper to snub the first Minister from the United States. However Abigail enjoyed observing English society and making an impression. After three years in London, the Adams returned to Quincy, but not to the little farmhouse. They moved to the best mansion that could be found, and Abigail set about making their new location a home.

In 1791 George Washington became our first President, and Martha was the first "First Lady." Our first Vice-President was John Adams and his wife Abigail the first "Second Lady."

Unlike Martha Washington, Abigail had a great taste for public life. She was involved in many social functions as 'Second Lady' and made many friends. While the Federal Government was in New York, she played the social role of Vice President's wife brilliantly; but when the government moved to Philadelphia in 1790, she feared the city with its dirty streets and recurrence of yellow-fever epidemics and stayed home in

Quincy. John Adams became President in 1797. For Abigail, the job of 'First Lady' came easy because of her experiences as 'Second Lady' and her natural aptitude.

John and Abigail were two people who were able to share with each other and valued each other's input on different subjects. Abigail would often include her views on various topics of the day in her letters to John. In fact, he was known to ask for her opinions. However, some saw that John consulting his wife as a problem. Abigail was sometimes called "Mrs. President" or "Her Majesty" by those who thought her remarks too outspoken for a woman. She even attended meetings of the House of Representatives. Abigail Adams loved the business of politics and government, but the truth she could not escape was that, in



American society, her involvement in these things was dependent upon her husband. During the last year of Adams' presidency, the first family moved into the new presidential mansion in Washington, then known as the President's House, now known as The White House. For the short time they were there, Abigail took on the job of getting the new 'house' ready for the needs of the First Families.

After John's term was over, Abigail and John returned to Quincy, Massachusetts, where Abigail [Figure 4] reigned over her family until 1818 when she suffered a stroke and died. [Editor's Note: There are conflicting historical reports concerning Abigail's death; sources also report she perished from typhoid fever.] She died three

Figure 4

months after John and they are buried in a crypt in the United First Parish Church in Quincy. Her last words were, "Do not grieve, my friend, my dearest friend. I am ready to go. And John, it will not be long."

Reference: Postal Commemorative Society

First Ladies of the White House by Nancy J. Skarmas // The Presidents of the U.S. of A. by Frank Freidel
www.whitehouse.gov/1600/first-ladies

Contest Time!

The first commemorative series of U. S. stamps, the Columbian issue, is also one of the most popular for U. S. collectors. This set of 16 stamps was to be ready on January 1, 1893 to celebrate the Chicago Columbian Exposition. January 1 occurred on a Sunday when most post offices were closed, so stamps were generally available on Monday January 2, 1893.



Most of the set -- that is. Fifteen stamps were on hand at post offices, but one was not ready until March of that year. Which one, and why?

The answer can be submitted to the Editor via email or in writing no later than 8:15pm on August 6th. In the event of duplicate winning answers there shall be a drawing. The winner will receive a \$10 CFSC door prize.

[Thank you to Josh Furman for providing this quiz.]