

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

A Civics In Real Life Series

FEMALE FIRSTS

Abigail Adams

"Remember the ladies..." Abigail Adams wrote in a [letter](#) to husband, John, on March 31, 1776. An early advocate for women's rights, Abigail's efforts to persuade her husband, and his fellow congressmen, to recognize women as equals in the advancement of liberty was so prolific, that while first lady of the United States, political opponents of her husband, then [President John Adams](#), referred to her as "[Mrs. President](#)."

The first "First Lady" to occupy the White House in 1800, Abigail Adams not only advocated for women's suffrage, but also for the property rights of married women, and the formal education of young girls. Her concern over the legal protections of women and her willingness to express those concerns firmly places Abigail as one of America's first feminists. Even after leaving the White House, she continued correspondence with Presidents [Thomas Jefferson](#) and [James Madison](#).

Born on November 22, 1744 to a prominent religious family, Abigail Smith was self-taught, reading books from her father's library on topics most women of her time did not consider. She was especially close to her grandfather, Colonel John Quincy, and learned from him the importance of civic virtue and engagement. Her intellectual curiosity and civic mindedness drew the attention of a young John Adams. He and Abigail were married in October of 1764.

A strong and determined woman, Abigail spent a great deal of her married life away from her husband. As a lawyer, congressman, and diplomat, John was away more often than not. Consequently, Abigail single-handedly raised her children to be successful, ran the family farm, kept the household finances, and engaged in her community's affairs. It was only during his years spent as the nation's first vice president and second president that they spent a majority of their time together. Given their close relationship, John relied on Abigail's advice, even if he did not heed it. Upon assuming the presidency in 1797, John Adams wrote to his wife, "[I never wanted your advice and assistance more in my life.](#)"

As first lady, Abigail served the nation with dignity and grace in support of her husband's administration. When John was defeated for re-election in 1800, the Adams' retired to Braintree, Massachusetts, where Abigail spent the rest of her days supporting the career of her son, John Quincy. Abigail died from typhoid fever on October 28, 1818.

Perhaps the most [prolific letter writing couple](#) in American history, the correspondence between John and Abigail Adams is reflective of what life was like in the 18th Century. Through their hand, historians better understand the social, economic, and political conditions that existed during their lifetime, which has become a gift of history.

Civics Challenge: Search & Learn

First First Lady to Live in the Governor's Mansion of Your State:	
Years Served:	
Public Policy or Program They Supported:	



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