

John Adams and John Quincy Adams Birthplaces



**Adams National Historic Site
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior**

The birthplaces of John Adams and John Quincy Adams are unique to American history. South of Boston, the cradle of the American Revolution in a town of Braintree, (now Quincy) America's only father and son presidents were born in houses barely 50 yards apart. The early childhood influences on these two men would help mold two of America's greatest diplomats.

John Adams became an important figure in the American Revolution, and in securing the peace that established our independence. He would serve as our nation's first minister to England, our nation's first vice president, second president, and father to John Quincy Adams.

Learned well the lesson of public service, John Quincy would become one of our nation's greatest diplomats. Starting at age 14 as a translator, John Quincy would serve our nation's interests in several nations and in several capacities. His earliest lessons, however, were learned from his mother Abigail while growing up on the farm at Penn's Hill. It would be here that the values John Quincy cherished throughout life would be instilled.

Together, John Adams and John Quincy Adams represent two generations of a long tradition of public service to the nation. Today the National Park Service preserves these two homes in their original simplicity reflective of the times.

JOHN ADAMS BIRTHPLACE

The John Adams' farm at Penn's Hill has had a variety of owners. The property was first owned by William Needham as part of a grant dated 1640. Joseph Penniman purchased the Penn's Hill property in 1675 and built a house in 1681, now known as the John Adams Birthplace. In 1705 James Penniman, the son of Joseph Penniman, inherited the property including the house. After his marriage to Abigail Thayer, he sold the Penn's Hill property to Deacon John Adams. On May 11, 1720, the deed listed the property as follows: "6 acres of orchard and arable land adjoining the country road with a dwelling house, barn and well thereon."

Deacon John Adams with his wife Susanna (Boylston) Adams lived in this house until his death in 1761. During that time Susanna bore three children, the eldest being John Adams who later became the Second President of the United States. At the death of Deacon John Adams the house went to Peter Boylston Adams, the second son, who held title of deed until it was purchased by his brother John Adams in 1774.

During the Revolutionary War years John and Abigail Adams rented this house. Abigail often housed citizens fleeing inland from the British

occupation of Boston. John Quincy Adams in 1803 purchased from his father the Penn's Hill farm which included 140 acres with the two "cottages" and also about 150 acres of land which John Adams had acquired. From time to time various members of the Adams family occupied the John Adams birthplace. For instance, Thomas Boylston Adams, one of the sons of President John Adams, resided in his father's birthplace from 1810 to about 1820.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS BIRTHPLACE

The land on which the John Quincy Adams birthplace now stands was originally a part of a grant of 52 acres to Gregory Belcher in 1639. The son of Gregory Belcher, Samuel Belcher, built a house on this land at the time of his marriage to Mary Billings in 1663. Until 1742 the succeeding three generations of Belcher family continued to live in this house, now known as the John Quincy Adams Birthplace. The property was sold twice before it finally came into the hands of Deacon John Adams on April 13, 1744.

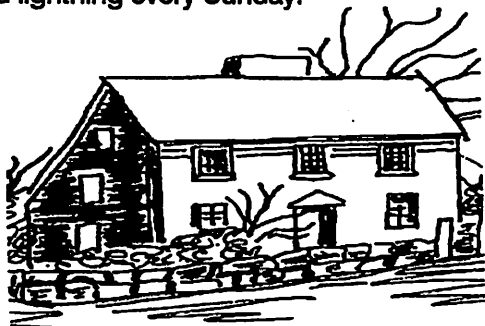
The John Quincy Adams Birthplace has, perhaps, more Adams history woven into it than the John Adams birthplace because it was here that Abigail Adams supervised the education of her children and from here she served as an inspiration to her husband during the critical years of the founding of independence for the new nation. By the warmth of the fire in her par-

lor Abigail Adams taught her children the religious concepts which she had been brought up with and encouraged their study of literature and French. A distant relative of Abigail's, Mr. Thaxter, was the teacher who undertook to formalize their education; but, it was Abigail who planted the fervor and the expectation that the new nation would one day call upon young John Quincy Adams to be a leader.

John Adams' law office was in the northeast corner room. The room was made famous, not only for his legal practice which quickly established him as one of the ablest attorneys in North America, but here, too, in 1779 John Adams worked as the principal author of the Massachusetts Constitution. It was such a masterpiece that it served as a model in writing the Constitution of the United States.

It was in the kitchen of this house that Abigail melted her pewter spoons for bullets using a bullet mold now exhibited at the Adams National Historic Site. Frequently, the militia was housed by Abigail in the John Adams birthplace and it was not uncommon for the enlisted men to be cooking over the open fire in the yard or training for the expected attack by the British. Abigail encouraged her son John Quincy to watch these maneuvers, and one day, much to his delight, he was given a musket and drilled along with the enlisted men.

During the days of the Continental Congress Abigail kept her husband informed of all the happenings at home and made inquiry of his accomplishments in Philadelphia. John Adams felt it was so important for Abigail to know all the details of the accomplishments of the Congress that when the Declaration of Independence was finalized by his friend Thomas Jefferson, John Adams penned a copy and sent it to Abigail for the benefit of the children. Abigail on her part wrote long letters to her husband in Philadelphia keeping him posted of the political climate at home. In answer to his query about the stand the clergy had taken, she wrote that the clergy was making their contribution, in fact, "they thunder and lightning every Sunday."



With the times moving very swiftly John Adams, perhaps, would have been the last to realize that when he was delegated to go to Europe to negotiate peace with Great Britain, he had passed his last days at the "cottage". It was five years before Abigail joined her husband in France. In the summer of 1784 when she and her daughter "Nabby" were ready to depart, her friends and relatives gathered in the "cottage" to wish them Godspeed. To those who had only known Abigail as a brave and stoic character, it must have been heartwarming to see her weeping unashamedly as she grasped the hands, hard and calloused from honest toil, of the farmers and laborers as they bid her farewell. One can only surmise that she, too, had no inkling that this occasion would be her last appearance at the "cottage," the scene of happiness with her husband and children. It is history now that upon her return to Braintree in 1788 she went to her new residence on Adams Street, now the Adams National Historic Site.

The last historically important event at the John Quincy Adams birthplace was in 1803 when John Quincy Adams purchased both of the houses, outbuildings and adjoining land from his father. For two summers while John Quincy Adams served in Washington as Senator from Massachusetts, he, his wife Louisa Catherine and their children lived in the house of his birth. After this association with the birthplace, neither of the Presidents ever occupied either of the "cottages."

With the trend of the times few people live but a short span of their lives in the same location. The birthplaces represent continuity of family residence where father and son, the second and sixth Presidents, were born in houses barely separated by 100 feet. These two houses are not only the birthplaces of two of America's most distinguished public figures, but also a relic of life as it extends back nearly 300 years in this country.

National Park Service personnel are on duty to welcome visitors to the John Adams and John Quincy Adams Birthplaces and to provide interpretive, guided tours relating to the early colonial lifestyles of the second and sixth presidents of the United States. The Adams Birthplaces join the Adams National Historic Site known as the "Old House" at 135 Adams Street in Quincy and are administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. All inquiries concerning the site may be made to the Superintendent, Adams National Historic Site, Post Office Box 531, Quincy, MA 02269-0531. Telephone: (617) 773-1177