

# Guides Gazette

## December 2021

**Abigail Adams**  
**By Julia Bloom**

While John Adams is hailed as a prominent revolutionary leader, diplomat, and second president of the United States, his wife Abigail Adams is also important. She was an extremely smart woman who influenced her husband and witnessed the early years of the United States.

Abigail Smith was born on November 11th, 1744 in Weymouth Massachusetts to Congregational minister Reverend William Smith and his wife Elizabeth Quincy Smith. Although, like many women at the time, she had no formal education, Abigail read voraciously, poring over her father's, uncle's, and grandfather's libraries. In 1759 Abigail met John Adams, who had just started a legal career after graduating from Harvard College. During their courtship, Abigail and John began a now-famous correspondence that continued from the beginnings of the revolutionary movement to the early years of the United States. She married him in 1764, and the two moved to John's farm in Braintree. They had five children, three of whom lived to adulthood, including future U.S. President John Quincy Adams. John's legal career soon improved, and he spent more time away from home, leaving Abigail in charge of running the household. In 1768 John moved the family to Boston to be nearer to his legal practice, and Abigail became acquainted with important future patriots, including John's cousin Samuel Adams, Joseph Warren, John Hancock, and James Otis. Abigail and her husband were devoted readers of the Boston Gazette, and Abigail sent John regular news from the papers and that she learned from friends and statesmen while he was away.



On March 5th 1770 the Boston Massacre occurred, killing five Bostonians in a protest against British troops in the city. John Adams took the legal case of the soldiers, believing that every man deserved a fair trial, and won acquittals for them despite criticism of his actions. In 1774 John travelled to the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia, leaving Abigail and the children at their Braintree farm. She kept in touch with her husband while living through the harrowing early years of the Revolutionary War. She also took a young John Quincy to view the Battle of Bunker Hill from the top of Penn's Hill on June 17th, 1775. John also attended the Second Continental Congress in 1776, and was appointed one of five men in charge of writing the Declaration of Independence.

Abigail asked him in her letters to include rights of African slaves in the document, reflecting her opposition to slavery in the United States. She also urged him to "remember the ladies" and grant them greater legal rights under the new system of government. Although John did not take her suggestions seriously, Abigail pushed for women to have greater legal protections and access to education. Abigail also supported the prominent essayist Judith Sargent Murray, who argued for women to be educated so they could teach their sons, who would become the future voters of the United States. John sought Abigail's advice while he worked on the Board of War, and again when he and John Quincy went abroad in 1778 to negotiate an alliance with France. Abigail maintained the farm and cared for her other children during his long absence, while writing extensive letters to her husband and son.

During her husband's long absences from home, Abigail began investing in government bonds and securities, using money made from selling gifts her son John Quincy sent her during his diplomatic career. She purchased her first bond in 1777, and continued to invest in cheap state and federal bonds and securities through the 1790's, purchasing them through her uncle Cotton Tufts. Abigail also purchased over 1,000 acres of land in Salem, Vermont in 1782, and used the profits from her investments to supplant John's small government salary and provide charity to needy friends and family. Although under the laws of coverture in place at the time, Abigail could not own property, she valued her right to make financial decisions and considered the profits of investments she

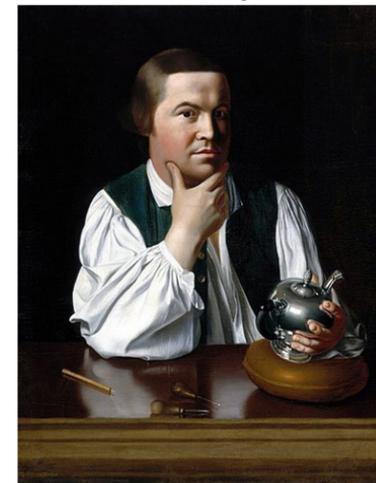
made hers. Although John disagreed with his wife's actions, Abigail continued her investing, sometimes keeping details of investments and purchases secret from him.

Abigail joined John and John Quincy in Paris in 1784 while John worked as a diplomat, and enjoyed her time in the city and meeting members of high society. The following year John moved his post to Great Britain, where Abigail found few friends, but she became the temporary guardian of Thomas Jefferson's daughter Polly, whom Abigail became fond of. In 1788 the family returned to Braintree, and the following year John was elected the first Vice President of the United States under George Washington. Abigail joined him in the capitals of the United States, New York City and Philadelphia, but often had to return to Massachusetts due to ill health or to care for family members. When John was elected US President in 1796, Abigail became the second First Lady in US history. She supported her husband's political positions during his Presidency, and was known for hosting entertainments and being politically active, writing numerous letters to friends and family detailing the political situation and her own opinions. Abigail was a key person in an informal diplomatic network of close family members and friends, who shared sensitive and recent political news with each other. Abigail and John used this network to determine the best actions to take during the "Quasi-War" with France between 1797 and 1798, when diplomatic issues led to French ships raiding American vessels. She also sent letters and excerpts from out of state newspapers with information she believed was true to local newspapers in an effort to counter rumors and attacks on the administration.

John faced numerous political and diplomatic hurdles during his term, including a war between France and Britain, a Vice President (Thomas Jefferson,) in the opposition party, and the emergence of party politics. John refused to go to war with France, an unpopular stance that led to popular outrage against him. Rumors circulated that Abigail was influencing her husband's decisions, and John's political opponents referred to her as "Mrs. President" despite Abigail's disagreements with her husband. In 1798 President Adams signed the Alien and Sedition Acts, which aimed partly to weaken newspapers that opposed the President. These acts were highly unpopular, caused a personal break between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, and contributed to John's loss in the next election. In 1800 Abigail moved with John into the newly built Executive Mansion (now the White House) in the new US capital of Washington DC. The Adams family was the first to occupy the building. Abigail also took in the children of her brother, brother-in-law, son-in-law, and son, when their fathers struggled to raise them due to their alcoholism.

Although John Quincy distinguished himself abroad as the US ambassador to Prussia from 1797 to 1801, the Adams family faced tragedy in 1800 when their son Charles died and after John lost the election to Thomas Jefferson. In March 1801 the Adams' returned to Massachusetts, where Abigail worked to promote John Quincy's political career. She also maintained correspondence with prominent political figures, including Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Dolley Madison. In 1816 Abigail wrote her will in which she disposed of property with John's consent, subverting the legal practice of coverture that gave married women's property to their husbands. Abigail Adams died on October 28th, 1818 in her home in Quincy. Abigail and John, as well as their son John Quincy Adams and his wife Louisa Catherine Adams, are all interred at the United First Parish Church in Quincy, Massachusetts. Abigail's famous letters and important life make her an inspiring revolutionary figure today.

### The Myth of Paul Revere's Ride Vincent Msumanje



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem written in 1860, which recounts the events of Paul Revere's ride on the night of April 18, 1775, is a fixture of American education. If you went to elementary school in the United States it is likely that you heard the story in one way or another. However, what if I were to tell you that Wadsworth's poem is actually an inaccurate account of the events of that night? While the basic facts are indeed true, Paul Revere an American Revolutionary did alert Massachusetts citizens of the British troops' arrival, much of the details of that poem are actually products of the political atmosphere in the years leading up to the Civil War.

First and foremost, Paul Revere was one of many who participated in the famous midnight ride. He and as many as 40 other riders carried out the warning through Northern and Eastern Massachusetts. The British army, or the regular army as they were referred to by Massachusetts colonists at the time, captured Paul Revere and a couple of other riders at a roadblock in Lincoln. They eventually were released and Paul Revere managed to get to Lexington although contrary to the poem he actually never got all the way to Concord. Paul Revere was just one person in an elaborate plan, albeit an important one, to warn colonists of the arrival of the British army. Notably, Wadsworth changed the story of the warning lan-

terms which hung in Christ Church tower. In the poem Revere was in Charlestown awaiting the signal lanterns to know whether the “British” were coming by land or sea. In reality however, Paul Revere was still in Boston, and the warnings were not for Revere but from Revere. He was warning the Sons of Liberty, the clandestine movement fighting for the rights of colonists, who were in fact the ones who were in Charlestown.

Prior to Wadsworth’s poem Paul Revere was somewhat of an obscure historical figure. At the time his poem was written the political landscape was extremely polarized especially on the topic of slavery. Wadsworth, who was an abolitionist, was extremely worried about the United States becoming divided along ideological lines, and the South potentially seceding from the Union. Wadsworth encountered the story of Paul Revere and immediately saw its potential in helping unite the populace. The story was greatly embellished and altered by Wadsworth in order to create a narrative that was more conducive to Longfellow’s goal, of warning the American populace that the Union was in danger of fragmenting, and to drum up patriotic feelings in his audience. Although Wadsworth’s poem is not necessarily the most accurate depiction of the life of Paul Revere, and the events surrounding his midnight ride, the poem itself is a good primary source to understand the political history of the United States, especially when looking at the circumstances which led to this poem being written the way it was at the time it was.

## **Boston’s West End** **By Peter Koutoujian**

Boston’s West End went through many stages of development. What was once a diverse residential neighborhood was later demolished in the name of eminent domain; hundreds of years of history and growth, simply gone. Boston, being one of the oldest cities in the country, has a very rich history when it comes to the cultivation of neighborhoods and communities. The vast majority of tourists and residents hear about the well-known North and South Ends, but what isn’t talked of enough is the interesting history of Boston’s historic West End. Mostly built on the original Shawmut Peninsula, it was settled by the Puritans in the 1600’s on relatively flat land, a stark contrast between the rest of the city and its hilly terrain. Fast forward to the West End in the 1700’s when it really started to take shape as a residential neighborhood for the wealthy. Here, Charles Bulfinch was born. He was a prominent architect in his time, and was commissioned by several wealthy individuals, such as Harrison Gray Otis, to design and build their houses. The houses he built were actually very similar in design to his other projects, such as the front of the Massachusetts Statehouse.

Progressing into the mid 1800’s, what was once a relatively quiet part of the city became more tightly knit as the population grew and more buildings were built. There were several markets in the area, including S.S. Pierce & Company and Brigham’s Market. Along with the new influx of buildings and residents came hotels such as the Revere House and the Charles Street Jail, which held over 200 cells. The West End had a wide array of diverse cultures and ethnicities residing in it. What was once a predominantly “Yankee,” or “American white” part of town became home to one of the most dense Irish populations in the United States by the 1880’s. With the new influx of immigrants, the population in the early 20th century skyrocketed to 35,000, changing its reputation as a quiet, isolated part of town to a thriving, vibrant one filled with different cultures and ethnicities. The West End also has a very rich history of hospitals and medical advancements. Founded in 1799, Massachusetts General Hospital was designed by Charles Bulfinch and was expanded upon greatly in the years to come. Within this hospital great strides were made in medical practice and technology, including William Thomas Green Morton and his use of anesthesia on patients, which gave him the reputation as the “revealer of the painless surgery.” The hospital also pioneered new medical techniques. During the Spanish-American War tents were erected on the hospital grounds outside because hospital staff believed fresh air would help the soldiers and speed their recovery.

The West End held a variety of houses of worship, including Synagogues and churches built by Jewish, Irish, and Italian immigrants. These buildings played an extremely important part of day to day life for residents. Not only were they used as places to pray, but also as community gathering spaces, holding daycares, classes, events, and religious ceremonies, and giving shelter to those in need. Most of all they built community, and made everybody that much closer to one another. People settled around the churches and synagogues to be closer to their religious communities, and some of these buildings, including the Vilna Shul and the African American Meeting House, still stand today.

The West End also held recreation facilities, including the Union Boat Club, the Charles River Embankment, and the Charlesbank Gymnasium. The Boat Club offered boating trips on the Charles River for as little as 5 cents for children and 10 cents for adults. The Gymnasium served as an outdoor playground, and local community gardens were tended to by residents and grew food for the community. Theatres were an especially big part of West End life, with plays performed at the Elizabeth Peabody House, a

community organization with the proceeds of ticket sales going to help residents. The EPH also held yearly summer camps, and organized sporting events for children. Some very prominent people were born in the West End, including Norman Berk, founder of the Berkeley College of Music, Leonard Nemoy, the actor who played “Spock” from “Star Trek,” and Hyman Bloom, a renowned Jewish artist who took inspiration from his heritage.

Sadly, all of this culture and time spent building this neighborhood was suddenly put to an end. In 1958 the Boston Redevelopment Authority demolished the West End. The destruction of this incredibly diverse and populous neighborhood, built up over centuries, sparked widespread protest among its 11,000 residents and is an infamous example of one of the largest uses of Eminent Domain in US history. Eminent Domain, established through a clause in the 5th amendment of the Constitution, allowed the West End and numerous other pieces of private land to be acquired by state governments for public, or state, use. The clause also requires that state governments fully compensate residents for the full value of the property they acquire. This practice has traditionally been used to take private land in order to facilitate state projects, such as building roads and train tracks, constructing public buildings, and creating pipelines to supply water to local residents. In some cases, though, public officials have used the term “blight” to justify the destruction of certain neighborhoods in order to revitalize them and replace old housing with newer buildings. This practice is often used as an excuse for gentrification, when poorer residents are removed from an area in order to resell the land to wealthier individuals. This practice has been used in parts of many major cities including New York and Washington DC, targeting areas that are not always “blighted”, but are usually home to minority and immigrant communities.

The people responsible for the redevelopment of the West End were the Boston Redevelopment Authority, led by a man named Jerry Rapaport. Rapaport disregarded the West End neighborhood, seeing it simply as an opportunity to bring in new residents, buildings, and most of all, new money. The location was worth the destruction in BRA’s eyes, as it was touching central Boston, with access to Cambridge only a walk away. This was simply just a way to attract wealthy individuals and store owners, and to revitalize and expand Boston’s center. When the West End was destroyed, residents who were displaced from their homes expected to move into newer apartments in the same area that was promised to them by the state government. Unfortunately, 32% of these residents were moved into far-worse housing elsewhere in the city and lacked the means to move into better quality areas. Even Mayor Raymond Flynn, elected 30 years after the West End’s destruction, said that the area was just a “typical neighborhood” and “not blighted.”

Today a wide array of large-scale apartments, as well as landmarks like TD Garden and City Hall, sit where the West End once was. The only remnants of the neighborhood are Mass General Hospital, and the Last Tenement, a brick apartment building that predates 1958. It’s a thin building, stretching only 3 floors above the ground level. While the West End’s destruction was a tragedy, its history is preserved through institutions like the West End Museum, (<https://thewestendmuseum.org>) surviving buildings, and the famous figures who lived in the neighborhood.



**The West End, Boston**  
**Courtesy Boston City Archives**