

JOHN ADAMS

John Adams is certainly one of the Founders of the United States. He was a member of the First Continental Congress, signed the Declaration of Independence, and proposed that George Washington serve as general of the Continental Army. Before he did all of these things, he was a respected lawyer in Boston. When the British soldiers went to court for their part in the Boston Massacre, Adams represented them, and won. He developed a reputation for being fair, no matter what was popular. Yet he was a member in good standing of the Sons of Liberty, and probably attended some meetings of the Long Room Club, where Esther Forbes places him in Johnny Tremain just before he goes to Philadelphia to take part in the First Continental Congress.

Besides being a successful lawyer and an outstanding patriot, Adams was an incurable writer. He always kept a diary, and he recorded many incidents in glowing detail there. He was often away from his beloved wife, Abigail, and they wrote to each other almost every day. We also have the many books, articles, and other documents he wrote for publication.

John Adams, Diary, 27 October 1772 [excerpt]

You have already read part of John Adams's diary for December 17, 1773, describing the Boston Tea Party. In the following excerpt, while not recording his membership in a secret organization, Adams lets us know something of what went on among its members.

At the Printing Office this Morning. Mr. Otis came in, with his eyes, fishy and fiery, looking and acting as wildly as ever he did.—“You Mr. Edes, You John Gill, and you Paul Revere, can you stand there Three Minutes.”--Yes.—“Well do. Brother Adams go along with me.”--Up Chamber we went. He locks the Door and takes out the Kee. Sit down Tete a Tete.—“You are going to Cambridge to day”--Yes.—“So am I, if I please. I want to know, if I was to come into Court, and ask the Court if they were at Leisure to hear a Motion”—and they should say Yes—And I should say “May it please your Honours.”

“I have heard a Report and read an Account that your Honours are to be paid your Salaries for the future by the Crown, out of Revenue raised from Us, without our Consent [...].”

In the Course of this curious Conversation it oozed out that Cushing, [Samuel] Adams, and He, had been in Consultation but Yesterday, in the same Chamber upon that Subject.

In this Chamber, Otis was very chatty [...]

After We came down Stairs, something was said about military Matters.—Says Otis to me, Youl never learn military Exercises.—Ay why not?—That You have an Head for it needs no Commentary, but not an Heart.—Ay how do you know—you never searched my Heart.—[...]

This is the Rant of Mr. Otis concerning me, and I suppose of a thirds of the Town.— But be it known to Mr. Otis, I have been in the public Cause as long as he, ‘tho I was never in the General Court but one Year. I have sacrificed as much to it as he. I have never got [my] Father chosen Speaker and Councillor by it, my Brother in Law chosen into the House and chosen Speaker by it, nor a Brother in Laws Brother in Law into the House and Council by it. Nor did I ever turn about in the House, betray my Friends and rant on the Side of Prerogative, for a whole Year, to get a father into a Probate Office, and a first justice of a Court of Common Pleas, and a Brother into a Clerks Office.

There is a complication of Malice, Envy and jealousy in this Man, in the present disordered State of his Mind that is quite shocking.

I thank God my mind is prepared, for whatever can be said of me. The Storm will blow over me in Silence [. .]

John Adams diary 16, 10 January 1771 - 28 [i.e. 27] November 1772 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

John Adams, *Novanglus* article, January 1775

John Adams wrote articles in various newspapers using pen names, as was the style of the time. Below is an excerpt from one of his “Novanglus” articles, written in response to loyalist Judge Daniel Leonard, writing as “Massachusettensis.” This article appeared in January 1775.

‘If, then, we are a part of the British Empire, we must be subject to the supreme power of the state, which is vested in the estates of Parliament.’ [Leonard]

Here, again, we are to be conjured out of our senses by the magic of the words ‘British Empire’, and ‘supreme power of the state’. But, however it may sound, I say we are not a part of the British Empire; because the British Government is not an empire. The governments of France, Spain, &c., are not empires, but monarchies, supposed to be governed by fixed fundamental laws, though not really. The British Government is still less entitled to the style of an ‘empire’. It is a limited monarchy. [. . .] [T]he British Constitution is much more like a republic than an empire. They define a republic to be a government of laws, and not of men. If this definition be just, the British Constitution is nothing more nor less than a republic, in which the King is first magistrate. This office being hereditary, and being possessed of such ample and splendid prerogatives, is no

objection to the government's being a republic, as long as it is bound by fixed laws which the people have a voice in making, and a right to defend. [. . .]

John Adams, "Novanglus", No. VII, January 1775, *Sources and Documents illustrating the American Revolution 1764-1788 and the formation of the Federal Constitution*, 2nd. edition, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 131.

Letter from John Adams to Joseph Warren, 22 April 1776 [excerpt]

Here is an excerpt from a letter written by John Adams, who is attending the First Continental Congress as a delegate from Massachusetts, to Dr. Joseph Warren, who is among the leaders in the provisional government in Massachusetts, dated April 22, 1776:

After all, my friend, I do not at all wonder that so much reluctance has been shewn to the measure of independency. All great changes are irksome to the human mind, especially those which are attended with great dangers and uncertain effects. No man living can foresee the consequences of such a measure, and therefore I think it ought not to have been undertaken until the design of Providence by a series of great events had so plainly marked out the necessity of it, that he who runs might read.

We may feel a sanguine confidence of our strength! Yet in a few years it may be put to the trial.

We may please ourselves with the prospect of free and popular governments, but there is great danger that these governments will not make us happy. God grant they may! But I fear that in every Assembly members will obtain an influence by noise, not sense; by meanness, not greatness; by ignorance, not learning; by contracted hearts, not large souls. I fear, too, that it will be impossible to convince and persuade people to establish wise regulations.

There is one thing, my dear sir, that must be attempted and sacredly observed, or we are all undone. There must be decency and respect and veneration introduced for persons in authority, of every rank, or we are undone. In a popular government this is the only way of supporting order, and in our circumstances, as our people have been so long without any government at all, it is more necessary than in any other. The United Provinces [of the Netherlands] were so sensible of this that they carried it to a burlesque extrem. [. . .]

John Adams to James Warren, 22 April 1776, *Sources and Documents illustrating the American Revolution 1764-1788 and the formation of the Federal Constitution*, 2nd edition, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 146.