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Abstract

The study of history, by its nature, is constantly evolving, as contemporary society reestablishes values and examines history under a new scope of social priorities. During this process of historical evolution, it is not events alone that take on new importance, but also the portrayal of historical figures themselves, personalities and influences changing from biography to biography over the years. Such has been the case with the historical Abigail Adams, best known for her well-preserved and archived correspondence with her husband, the Revolutionary Founding Father John Adams, among many other acquaintances. Abigail Adams has been portrayed in a number of lights over the years, from that of ideal New England matron, to republican mother to wife, and flirtatious, insidious manipulator. Each portrayal was motivated by the historian's personal agenda, social background, or contemporary context. The true Abigail can hardly be described in a single cliché.

Keywords

Abigail Adams, women, Mercy Warren

ABIGAIL AND MERCY

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The study of history, by its nature, is constantly evolving, as contemporary society reestablishes values and examines history under a new scope of social priorities. During this process of historical evolution, it is not events alone that take on new importance, but also the portrayal of historical figures themselves, personalities and influences changing from biography to biography over the years. Such has been the case with the historical Abigail Adams, best known for her well-preserved and archived correspondence with her husband, the Revolutionary Founding Father John Adams, among many other acquaintances. Abigail Adams has been portrayed in a number of lights over the years, from that of ideal New England matron, to republican mother to wife, and flirtatious, insidious manipulator. Each portrayal was motivated by the historian's personal agenda, social background, or contemporary context. The true Abigail can hardly be described in a single cliché.

One of Adams's primary correspondents was her dear friend Mercy Otis Warren. Warren was a mother of five sons, wife of politician, pamphleteer, poet, and author James Warren. In short, she was a successful wife and mother, while also taking on responsibilities which were not traditionally practiced by women. Some historians consider her a politician, though more realistically she was a historian and a moral philosopher. While Abigail's thoughts and actions are known because of her letter writing, Mercy Warren's prolific correspondence is not as well preserved. The character of the former has been quite complete and attainable through the reading of her letters, and thus Abigail has become somewhat of a mythical heroine of American history. Warren, on the other hand, regardless of her many accomplishments, has been forgotten by popular history.

One way to measure the radicalness of these historical women is to study their actions and thoughts in the context of the contemporary paradigm of ideal womanhood. The purpose of this paper is to explore the lives of Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Adams with regard to their work within and without their gender sphere. Was either woman particularly revolutionary for her time? These women are clearly not simple, uneducated farm wives or toiling servants, but why have they, especially Abigail, been remembered as outstanding women? What sets them apart from the other women of their era?

The most reasonable interpretations of Abigail's character and her influence slate her as being a very intelligent, well-read woman who illustrated a loving relationship with her husband through their letters, and who appeared to be interested in, if not politics per se, at least the realm of current events outside of the female domestic sphere. Her letters indicate that her family and home were of primary importance to her, over the

founding of a nation and details of a war fought to maintain it. She corresponded with John during their twenty-seven year sporadic separation, as well as with other men who knew him, and whom she hoped might give her some word regarding his well being when his writing was lax.¹ Mercy Warren was the only woman, save her daughter, with whom Abigail maintained frequent correspondence. In their letters, the women wrote regarding all aspects of their lives, from feelings for their spouses to child rearing, to politics and philosophy.

In addition, during her life, Warren wrote periodicals for the Revolution, illustrated a pointed political interest in writing satire, and wrote a history of the American Revolution. It is also rumored that she held significant sway over her husband, persuading him to remain at home with her rather than fill political appointments abroad.² Abigail, on the other hand, performed the role of republican wife and supported her husband stoically, if not enthusiastically, in his founding of the new nation. Abigail had an open correspondence with John, and theirs is often interpreted as an equal relationship. Upon closer study, it is clear that their relationship was not equal, but that Abigail viewed herself as a traditional mother and wife, and took on those duties with great energy. Though the Adamses loved each other, and though Abigail had a well-developed mind, John remained the patriarch of the family, and as much as it might aggravate feminist historians, she appears to have truly wished for the constant help, guidance, and instruction of her husband.

Abigail Adams was a very intelligent and high-minded individual, but she was not actively stretching the boundaries of gender. Adams was the ideal republican wife and mother. She did not personally seek out profundity or greatness for herself, or for the greater good of her sex, but rather for her family. Of these two great founding women, Mercy Otis Warren is the figure who truly went above and beyond the expectations of womanhood, to twist and break her gender sphere. The field of history owes it as a service to her, to reintroduce Mercy Otis Warren to popular history as the most active American proponent of equal gender rights in the new era, and as proof of its legitimacy.

Abigail Adams was born Abigail Smith in 1744, in Weymouth, Massachusetts. Her father was the local pastor of the North Parish Congregational Church, and though neither Abigail nor her sister Mary went to formal school, they received a well-rounded education from their parents and grandparents. As was normal throughout New England, Abigail was instructed in housekeeping and decorative female activities like piano playing, singing, and speaking French. Her family was well-off financially, but the girls were raised to take after their father, who reputedly put his own hands into the work of the farm and

1 Edith B. Gelles, *Portia: The World of Abigail Adams* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 116.

2 Edith B. Gelles, *First Thoughts: Life and Letters of Abigail Adams* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 34.

the sheep flock which he owned.³ They were not above gardening or cooking, regardless of their social status, and they gained their domestic knowledge and identity as women from their mother, Elizabeth. She was a stern woman, the stereotypical pastor's wife, who served her community with tender piety, and lived her life with great religiosity and obedience to the expectations of her station. Biographer Charles Akers claims that she gave her daughters a "patient submission to their duty in whatever life brought them."⁴ The girls grew up to be essentially Puritans like their parents, unlike their brother who ultimately turned his back on religion and shamed the family, and Abigail became a full member of her church just before her fifteenth birthday. Abigail concurrently broadened her literary knowledge by reading the books in her father's library, supplemented during her teens (perhaps as early as age eleven) by the friendly instruction of Richard Cranch, later to be her sister Mary's husband, in British poetry and literature.⁵

Abigail probably met John Adams when she was a young teenager, as he was brought into repeated contact with the Smiths through mutual friends such as Cranch and Cotton Tufts, and by way of the Massachusetts political scene. The two began courting in 1761, and the relationship immediately held a unique note of mutuality, love, and passion. In one of the first letters to Abigail, John wrote:

Miss Adorable, By the same Token that the Bearer hereof sat up with you last night I hereby order you to give him, as many Kisses, and as many Hours of your Company after 9 O'Clock as he shall please to Demand . . . I presume I have good Right to draw upon you for the Kisses as I have given two or three Millions at least, when one has been received, and of Consequence the Account between us is immensely in favour of yours, John Adams.⁶

They were wed in 1764, and moved to the house in Braintree, Massachusetts, which John had inherited from his father. Immediately after their marriage, Abigail became pregnant and bore her first and only living daughter, Abigail Junior, in July of the following year. John Quincy was born two years following that, succeeded by Charles and Thomas in the 1770s. This six-person family unit was the center of Abigail's concerns throughout the rest of her life. When her husband was called off to facilitate the birth of the new nation beginning in 1774, Abigail's life and her love were transformed and thenceforth were expressed primarily through letters to first her husband, then friends, and finally children far from home. The Adams letters illustrate a relationship based on love and mutual interests, as well as fidelity and devotion over the miles and through

3 Charles Akers, *Abigail Adams: An American Woman* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 6.

4 Akers, *Abigail Adams*, 5.

5 *Ibid.*, 9.

6 L. H. Butterfield, *Adams Family Correspondence* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1963), 2.

the years.

What must not be overlooked is that John Adams was the patriarch of this revolutionary relationship. Though he was quite liberal in his allowance of Abigail's speaking her own mind and expressing her thoughts to him, John was always the decision maker, wise giver of advice, and emotional support. Their correspondence, especially through their first years of separation, show that Abigail nearly buckled under the strain of running their farm (albeit with the help of farm hands), their family, and their finances. During one of John's absences, Abigail had difficulty coercing a farm hand to do his work around the property. She wrote to John for advice, and he promptly urged her to remind the man that she was the mistress of the house in his absence, apparently to no avail. Abigail eventually had to pay the man to leave his lodgings on the grounds. She was very flustered by this confrontation, and commented on it repeatedly during the belligerent man's stay, wishing that John could return to settle the issue.⁷

Though later in her life, when John was abroad in Europe, Abigail was able to take some initiative with the family economy, selling gifts that John sent her to tinkers, to supplement the irregular pay which John received, Abigail did not enjoy financial and administrative responsibilities. No matter the training in self-sufficiency she had obtained from her father, Abigail fully intended to be an aid, not a substitute, for her husband. In late August of 1775, Abigail wrote not to John, but to Mercy Otis Warren about her fear and sadness at having to part with John again. "I find I am obliged to summons all my patriotism to feel willing to part with him again. You will readily believe me when I say that I make no small sacrifice to the publick."⁸ The ideal, courageous, and yet tried and burdened republican wife wrote to her female friend, not her husband, about her grief at his leaving. She sacrificed her energy and emotion for the patriots' cause.

At certain points in their correspondence, John took on a tone of chastisement, when Abigail overstepped her bounds as his wife, in making major decisions for the family, or raising undesirable issues. After a number of years, when Abigail had taken up trading gifts from Europe to add to her domestic economy, she had a real estate venture, and decided to buy a plot of land in the empty recesses of Vermont. She did not wait for John's approval to purchase this land, and after having signed his name to the deed, she wrote to him of her action, explaining her hope that after his retirement they might move north to settle in the New England wilderness. John's response was a mixture of humor and chastisement when he wrote, "dont meddle any more with Vermont." Though Abigail had written first of her dream of the wilderness refuge, John had not responded in either support or denial.⁹ Though Abigail took the initiative, it came to naught in the

7 Gelles, Portia, 78.

8 Butterfield, AFC, 276.

9 Butterfield, *The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of the Adams Family, 1762-1784* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 331.

end, with a taciturn refusal from her husband.

The most well known and perhaps the least understood of all of the Adams' letters is the letter which Abigail wrote to John to "remember the ladies" while writing the new code of laws in the spring of 1776. Her letter is often read as one of the first feminist, equal rights movement actions. Abigail was not, though, attempting to gain gender equality through her letter, or even through legislation created because of it. She asked that they "put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity. . . . Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in imitation of the Supreme Being make use of that power only for our happiness." In essence, Abigail was asking for reasonable treatment of women, and the acknowledgement of women as human beings. Abigail wrote the first letter of that exchange; John responded by calling his wife "saucy" and her letter laughable. Abigail reminded him once more about the tyrannical nature of men, and then a number of weeks later, she wrote to Mercy Otis Warren about their exchange saying that she might ask Mercy to join her in petitioning Congress for redress of the grievances of women against men, as detailed in her letter to John.¹⁰ Interestingly, there is no record of Mercy Otis Warren's ever having responded to that letter or the request for a petitioning aid. Whether the letter was simply lost, Mercy thought Abigail's request unnecessary, or whether the older and sometimes aloof Warren thought Abigail's letter insignificant or humorous, cannot be determined.

Throughout their thirty-year correspondence, Mercy Warren's attitude toward her younger friend ran the gauntlet from amicable, to maternal, to scrutinizing, to condescending. At the start of their friendship, Abigail set herself up as a pupil, willing to learn from the older and wiser Warren. Edith B. Gelles argues that this was a ploy by which to attract Warren's attention, and that it worked.¹¹ Regardless, though, of whether it was a trick or a sincere wish for a mentor in Warren, Abigail did not seek at first an equal friendship, but one based upon respect for age. Warren's attitude was often pedagogical while writing to Abigail. Given the former's public interests and persona, it is no wonder that she appears to have more admiration and respect for John Adams, and valued his correspondence more highly than she did his wife's. He was, after all, already working successfully within the political arena which Mercy Otis Warren frequented through her authorship.

Warren was born to the merchant Otis family of Barnstable, Massachusetts, and was fortunate enough to be tutored along with her two brothers as they prepared for collegiate life at Harvard. While the extent of Abigail's formal training had been in literature

¹⁰ The correspondence of Abigail and John is found in Butterfield, *Book of Abigail and John*, 121-124. The citation of the letter to Mercy Otis Warren can be found in Butterfield, *AFC*, 397.

¹¹ Gelles, *First Thoughts*, 38.

and poetry, Warren's was in history and philosophy. Mercy Otis married James Warren and they had five sons in the course of ten years. During her sons' youths, Warren took up the pen and began to write poetry about her surroundings.¹² The genre interested her, and from that point in the early 1760s, through her life, she considered herself an author.

Warren's first publication was a play called *The Adulateur*, followed by others, most famous of which were *The Defeat* and *The Group* in the middle 1770s. The topics of these works were responses to the Governor Thomas Hutchinson administration in the Massachusetts Bay Colony at that time. In 1790 she published *Poems: Dramatic and Miscellaneous*, carrying over the genre of her first writing later, when she had already gained acclaim and had an audience of readers. Her career was brought to a dramatic finale, though, by her publication of a three volume history of the American Revolution entitled *The History of the American Revolution: Interspersed with Biographical, Philosophical, and Moral Observations*.¹³ This was more than a military history text; it contained interspersed observations and judgments based on Mercy's strict religiosity and staunch republicanism.

Mercy Otis Warren's first introduction to the Adamses was to John in 1772, when James Warren, John, and Sam Adams met at the Warren home to discuss plans for the committees of correspondence.¹⁴ It is of dire importance to remember that Mercy Warren's original intent was to begin corresponding with the politician and fire-brand John Adams, not his wife. Her children were all self-sufficient, she had been writing her first play, and Warren sought a political-minded pen pal. Warren was able to look up to John and to seek out advice from him, while Abigail did not pose such an asset, but was rather just a friend and a confidant. Ironically, the pinnacle of her career, her *History*, caused a rift between herself and her mentor, John. Among other things, she insinuated that he had despotic tendencies, a charge which did not work to charm a staunch revolutionary and American federalist. Adams wrote a series of eight scathing letters defending himself against Warren's attacks, and then discontinued their correspondence. Abigail, too, did not write to Mercy for some time, though she was eventually the reconciler of differences between the two parties.¹⁵

The conflict stemmed from the Warrens' political agenda. They were some of the stalwart anti-federalists in Massachusetts and fell out of favor with the majority of their friends and acquaintances with whom they had previously worked so arduously for liberty from the tyranny of the crown.¹⁶ She and her husband were true republicans and believed that the country had fought to be independent with the goal being a confederation of states into a republic. Any centralized government for the North American

12 Carla Mulford, *American Women Prose Writers to 1820* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1999), 386.

13 Theresa Boos Dykeman, *American Women Philosophers, 1650-1930* (Lewiston: the Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 69.

14 Lester H. Cohen, "Explaining the Revolution: Ideology and Ethics in Mercy Otis Warren's *Historical Theory*," *William and Mary Quarterly* 37 (April 1980): 210.

15 Butterfield, *AFC* vols. 5-6.

16 Mulford, *American Women Writers*, 393.

continental republic was contrary to the Enlightenment principles for which the patriots fought. A strong executive and a strong central government, they believed, swung too close to monarchy or oligarchy by placing responsibility and power in the hands of the few rather than the many loyal Americans who shed their blood for that liberty. Mercy Otis Warren's History sketches were admittedly moral examinations. Thus, the attack on John Adams appeared to be a direct insult rather than simply a misrepresentation of his attitude. He was characterized as a fallen patriot: the unfortunate whose lack of moral rectitude caused his fall. If John Adams could fall from the lofty Enlightenment principles which the Founding Fathers used, Warren argued, any citizen could do the same.¹⁷ The friend who had urged Warren to write the history, and to continue writing it over the years, she had slandered for her own political gain. The bond that the two had was irretrievably torn asunder.

The two women eventually fell back into good stead with one another, and continued writing less intensely until Warren's death. Their writing is filled with gems of personal, political, religious, and philosophical advice, in the context of a friendship based on respect and admiration on the part of Abigail, and an interest to have an informal pupil and a pen-pal with a concordant education and ability to grasp her cultivated cultural literacy, on the part of Warren. The elder woman's sensing her superior stance in the relationship caused the aloof attitude eluded to earlier to be a central theme in many of the letters from Warren to Adams. There was a perpetual catty battle over whom last wrote, which woman owed a letter, and whom cared more about the feelings of the other, running through a great deal of the letters. During April 1776, the women were discussing, amid the political reality of war and their husbands' absence, the issue of a worthy letter. After a handful of attempts to describe such a letter, Mercy Otis Warren wrote to Abigail:

If my dear friend Required only a very Long Letter to make it agreeable I could Easily Gratify her but I know There must be many more Requisites to make it pleasing to her taste. . . . But as Curiosity seems to be awake with Regard to the Company I keep and the Manner of spending of my time I will Endeavour to Gratify you.¹⁸

She then continued to write a two or three page letter about her daily tasks. This was not intended to be an instructional letter, but rather one half of a pointless letter-writing argument.

Mercy often wrote to Abigail inquiring as to a letter she had sent to John, or a response she might have been awaiting. Historian Charles Akers and Edith B. Gelles argue

¹⁷ Gelles, *First Thoughts*, 60.

¹⁸ Butterfield, *AFC* vol. 1, 385.

in their respective works, that Mercy Otis Warren undoubtedly valued John's epistolary friendship more than she did Abigail's.¹⁹ Though this might be an overstatement of Warren's view, as she wrote innumerable letters to Abigail and indicated a real affection for the younger woman, she did make it a point to write to John when she was in need of advice. For Abigail, her Dear John and Mercy Warren were her sources of strength and advice. Warren chose John Adams to fill that role for her. Though Warren, herself, was a woman interested in politics, current events, and the traditional male sphere of interest, she did not view her close lady friend as a similarly inclined woman. When doing as the men did, Warren thought it advisable to seek guidance from one who knew through experience.

What, then, was the extent of Mercy Otis Warren's transcendence of her domestic sphere? She was in a field of almost exclusively men, but she certainly did not consider herself to be a man. In fact, she did not even view her success and her public works as sojourns into the realm of men. She wrote of her attitude in the introduction to her *History*, "stimulated to observation a mind that had not yielded to the assertion, that all political attentions lay out of the road of female life."²⁰ She considered her work as simply new steps taken within the woman's sphere.

There were aspects of Mercy Otis Warren's *History* which were uncharacteristic of works done by men in the same genre. The most prominent of these is her moral foundation. Warren did not by any means write social history, but rather military history. She wrote dutifully of the battles and great influential people of the Revolution, showed no propensity to women's contributions, and generally followed the standard for historical writing at the time. However, she approached the same events and biographies from a different angle. She wrote a disclaimer in her book, apologizing for the observations of personal character in her book. She argued that her digressions on "the moral conduct of man, on religious opinion or persecutions, and the motives by which mankind are actuated in their various pursuits . . . are more congenial to the taste, inclination, and sex of the writer, than a detail of the rough and terrific scenes of war."²¹ Warren would argue that she was taking a female perspective on the war. She did not wish to place herself outside of her gender sphere, and so molded her interests and works around activities which did, and thus, if nothing else, stretched the domestic sphere of the time to allow for political aims.

All of these endeavors, it must be remembered, were personally thought through and executed by Mercy Otis Warren, for Mercy Otis Warren. She did not see herself as a beacon of female political activity and indeed did not even invite Abigail, one of the most intellectual and worldly women of the early republic, to join her in politics. Warren

19 Gelles, *Portia*, 166 (mentions Akers' claim).

20 Nina Baym, "Between Enlightenment and Victorian: toward a narrative of American women writers writing history," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Autumn 1991): 32.

21 Baym, "Between Enlightenment and Victorian," 33.

was well aware that Abigail wrote often to her husband about the affairs of the day, as well as to other politicians, most notably Thomas Jefferson, with a remarkably amiability considering the traditional style of writing between a woman and a prominent male figure. Abigail maintained a composed, well-organized, and proprietous letter writing friendship with Jefferson, even after the years of his and John Adams' falling out over federalism and presidential administration.²² Aside from commenting on the affairs at hand, which she did with a great deal of detail and interest, the only truly political letter which Abigail ever wrote to a man was the "remember the ladies" letter to her husband, most likely half in jest, but with the safety of knowing that the letter was not to be taken before Congress, but simply read and responded to in private.

Mercy Otis Warren realized that she was stepping beyond a woman's traditional role as wife and mother, and she realized that in order to be successful in that endeavor, she would have to correspond with men, ask the advice of men, and learn to do as the men did in their public realm. Warren was a strong and intelligent enough individual to alter the genre to fit her personal wishes, as she did with her *History* and its moral rather than physical basis. Because of their friendship, though, Mercy Otis Warren certainly expressed many of her thoughts and theories to Abigail. She valued the feelings and suggestions of her friend, in as much as they were not professional, and posterity has subsequently been blessed with a detailed correspondence of the two women, in which the ideals and goals of each are expressed. Their letters allow us a window into the minds of both Mercy and Abigail, their views of gender, and their placement within those gendered realms, with which we can construct a fuller picture of their attitudes, revolutionary bents, and radicalisms.

In one instance in 1775, Mercy Warren wrote to Abigail about the woman's traditional domestic sphere.

However I may fall short of Mrs. Adams in many female accomplishments, I believe we are on an Equal footing with Regard to the one quality which the other sex . . . Consigns over to us. . . . We have one advantage peculiar to ourselves. If the Mental Faculties of the Female are not improved it may be Concealed in the Obscure Retreats of the Bed Chamber or the kitchen which she is not often necessitated to leave.²³

While she makes offhanded comments and jokes about a woman's role, while she is in a way complimenting, in a way condescending to her friend, the realities of Warren's accomplishments must have been on the minds of both the writer and the reader of the

²² Frank Shuffelton, "In Different Voices: Gender in the American Republic of Letters," *Early American Literature* 25 (1990): 297.
²³ Butterfield, *AFC* vol. 1, 182.

letter. Abigail would have been well aware of the fact that though Mercy praised her for her “female accomplishments,” she had also disregarded such female roles as unimportant, and had taken up the pen to write her way into the world of men’s accomplishments.

Mercy Otis Warren often referred to republican virtues and republican womanhood, though in some instances she played down the affects of sacrifice for the cause, and raises herself to a tier above common women. In a letter of 11 December 1775, Warren wrote to Abigail that “it is Less painful to me to be Alone than to many others of my sex Though at the same time none takes Greater pleasure in the Entertainment and Converse of Real Friends.”²⁴ She claims her stoicism above other women and certainly does not include Abigail among her ranks. This is understandable in that the previous year and a half of Abigail’s letters to Mercy were filled with lamentations on the absence of her Dearest Friend. “How hard it is,” she wrote in July of 1775, “to devest the Humane mind of all private ambition, and to sacrifice ourselves and all we possess to the publick Emolement.” Though Mercy, too, felt the absence of her husband, it did not throw her life into complete tumult as it did for Abigail. “I find myself dear Marcia,” Abigail wrote in April of 1776, “multiplied in cares to which I know myself uneaquel, in the education of my little flock I stand in need of the constant assistance of my Better half.”²⁵

The Adamses were very much in love, and thus any absence for them might be that much more trying than for a couple brought together for less romantic reasons. Regardless, the above passage illustrates the differences between Adams and Warren. Mercy Otis Warren was writing poetry while her children grew up. She abdicated some responsibility for her children’s upbringing to seek out her own interests and fulfillment. Though during the war the Adamses never had the money for, for instance, skilled tutors for their young children (though they did go away for formal schooling),²⁶ Abigail did not even voice a wish for such aid. Her life was the republican upbringing of her children to be good citizens, and the only help she sought was that of her husband. Abigail’s writings time and again showed devotion to her children, her husband, and the work which took up so much of his time and stole him away from her.

While Abigail Adams is completely deserving of her legacy as a great woman for her eloquence, grace, and perseverance, historians must not misconstrue republican womanhood with feminism. Abigail was the ultimate republican woman. She was intelligent, schooled in Enlightenment principles, supportive of her husband and knowledgeable about his work, devoted wholeheartedly to the raising of patriot children, and composed with the initiative to maintain and foster her wits through constant reading and correspondence with friends and acquaintances at home and abroad. She had compassion and zeal, and should reside in the minds of Americans as an individual who attempted to embody in all things the cause of American independence and its security.

24 *Ibid.*, 339.

25 The two previous quotations are found in Butterfield, *AFC*, 255 and 377.

26 Gelles, *Portia*, 46.

Mercy Otis Warren was a republican mother in her own right, but she was a thoroughly educated woman for whom the social realm held no insurmountable obstacles. Whether stretching the domestic sphere to fit her needs, or vaulting the wall to edge her way into a public sphere which was at the time reserved for males, but which she knew would not always, and should not always be so, Mercy Warren was ahead of her time. Temperamental and aloof, she does not offer posterity as admirable a character as Abigail Adams, and her relationship with James Warren offers nothing of the sentimental love affair that the Adams story does, but Mercy was an extraordinary woman during her lifetime. She used the resources and talents that she had to do things of which other women at that time did not even think to dream. While Abigail and John can become like friends to a reader of their letters, and thus understandably loved, Mercy Otis Warren must be given credit, for credit is due.