

18 JQA vs. AJ



John Quincy Adams aged 16. He was already an experienced diplomat.

John Quincy Adams wanted to be president ...and so did Andrew Jackson. Their election battle in 1824 was hot-tempered. When Adams won and became our sixth president, Jackson's supporters were very angry. They believed Jackson had been cheated out of the presidency. (He wasn't.) They weren't interested in extending the era of good feelings. Now there was an era of political grouchiness.

John Quincy Adams was a lot like his Puritan ancestors: honest, intelligent, virtuous, and hardworking. He was as learned as any

In this 1824 cartoon the betting on the race for the White House is hot and heavy. Balding John Quincy Adams is just ahead of his opponents, William H. Crawford of Georgia (left), and skinny, uniformed Andrew Jackson (right).

Dear Sir

When he was nine, John Quincy Adams wrote this letter to his father:

Dear Sir:

I love to receive letters very well, much better than I love to write them. I make but a poor figure at composition. My head is much too fickle. My thoughts are running after bird's eggs, play and trifles, till I get vexed with myself. Mamma has a troublesome task to keep me a studying....I wish, sir, you would give me in writing some instructions with regard to the use of my time, and advise me how to proportion my studies and play, and I will keep them by me, and endeavor to follow them.

With the present determination of the present bettor, I am, dear sir, your son,
JOHN QUINCY ADAMS



A 20th-century president, John F. Kennedy, wrote a book about heroes. He thought John Quincy Adams was an American hero because he always did what was right, not what was popular. It was a family habit. At the time of the Boston Massacre (during the American Revolution), lawyer John Adams defended the British soldiers. That was the right thing to do—but it made him very unpopular.

John Quincy Adams
PRESIDENT, 1825–1829

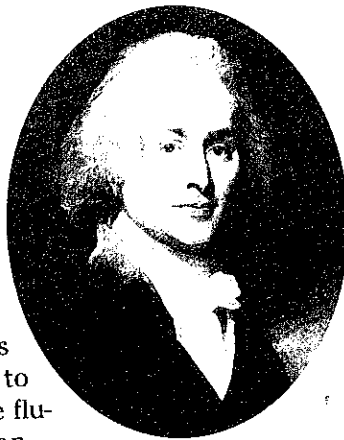


man who ever sat in the White House. It was said that he could write in English with one hand while he was translating Greek with the other. But he wasn't much fun to have around. He was just too serious.

John and Abigail Adams had made sure their brilliant son was well educated and trained to serve his country. When he was 14 years old he went to Russia as secretary to the U.S. ambassador. (Young Adams spoke fluent French, the language of the Russian court; the American ambassador could hardly sputter a word of that language.) After that, John Quincy was always studying or serving his country. He had some of the best ideas any president has ever had, but he didn't know how to deal with people. His braininess made him seem aloof. In addition, many Southerners feared that Adams wanted to end slavery—and they were right. So there were many who opposed him. But John Quincy Adams was a very capable president. It was shyness that kept him from relating well to people. He wasn't pompous or stuck up. He just didn't know how to chat.

Newspaper reporter Anne Royall found a way to get him to talk. She discovered President Adams swimming in the Potomac River and sat on his clothes, which were on the riverbank. There wasn't much the president could do but answer her questions.

J. Q. Adams may have been the best prepared president ever, but some found him tiresome. President John Adams hadn't been able to get himself reelected for a second term, and neither could his son.



JQA wrote: "My life has been...marked by great and signal successes which I neither aimed at nor anticipated."

The Bride Wore Blush

John Quincy Adams was a difficult husband as well as a difficult president. His wife Louisa once complained that "hanging and marriage were strongly assimilated." On one occasion Louisa was given some rouge by the queen of Prussia, who thought she looked pale. When Louisa decided to wear the rouge to an opera performance, she found that it "relieved the dullness of my homemade dress and made me look quite beautiful." When JQA saw it, he got angry, grabbed a towel—and wiped it off. Louisa was very upset. A few months later she put the rouge on for another party and this time refused to take it off.

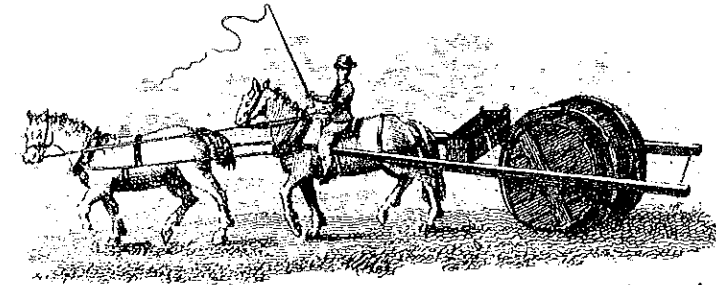
A Virginia Visit

In 1810, 21-year-old Elijah Fletcher got on a small horse and left his home in Ludlow, Vermont. He was heading south, to Virginia, to teach school. Elijah, the sixth of 15 children, wanted to keep his family informed of his adventures. Here are his words (and spelling) from letters he wrote home:

I have seen more log houses since I left home than I ever saw in Vermont. I find it is the principal manner of building in these parts, especially in New Jersey and Maryland. In Pennsylvania there are many, and in fact most all, stone houses and barns....I found N.J. as little inhabited as the wilds of Siberia. Two miles from Baltimore the land is covered with shrub-oaks and uninhabited....There is no country, I believe, where property is more unequally distributed than in Virginia. We can see here and there a stately palace or mansion house: while all around for many miles we behold no other than little smoaky huts and log cabins of poor, laborious tenants.

After teaching for a year in Alexandria, Virginia, Elijah (who had sold his small mare) got in a stagecoach and headed west. Now he was going to teach at a school near Charlottesville.

We passed through Orange County, within 4 miles of Montpelier, President Madison's seat: saw the manner of teamsters travelling by carrying their own and their horses' provision and at night kindling up



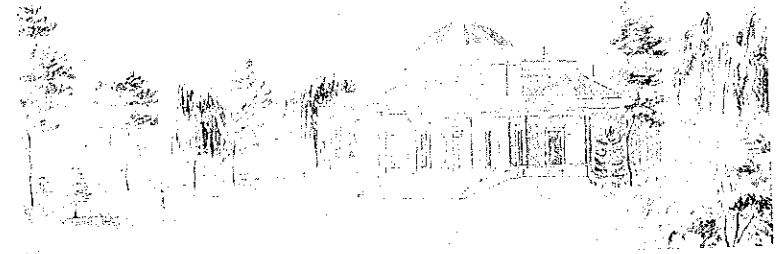
When there was no convenient waterway, tobacco barrels were rolled to market.

a fire beside the road and making the open air the house of entertainment: saw also the manner of rolling tobacco by putting a pole for an axletree through the middle of the hogshead...putting in horses and so rolling it upon its hoops 2 or 3 hundred miles to market....

About 7 o'clock in the morning we hove in sight of the famous Monticello....We arrived... at Char., a village of about 400 houses, courthouse, and good taverns. [Elijah had a letter of introduction to Esquire Garland.] I gave him my letter: found him a plain, jovial, unceremonious planter, his wife friendly and agreeable, and his children, some large, some small, 10 or 11—dressed in farmer style—and appeared more like robust, hearty Green Mountain boys than any I had yet seen in Va.

Monday 6th, I rode back to Charlottesville with Esquire G. on the purpose of visiting Mon-

ticello...but the hard and constant rain frustrated our intention....Wednesday 8th I started again for Monticello. Mr. Kelly, when I got to Char., went with me. When we arrived at the foot of the hill, we wound a side way, circuitous course to avoid the steepness in getting to the house which was immediately upon the top of the mountain. We rode up to the front gate of the dooryard, a servant took our horses. Mr. Jefferson appeared at the door. I was introduced to him and shook hands with him very cordially. We went into the drawing room. Wines and liquers were soon handed us by the servant. He conversed with me very familiarly, he gratified my curiosity in showing me his Library, Museum of curiosities, Philosophical apparatus &c. Mr. Jefferson is tall, spare, straight in body, his face not handsome but savage.



Monticello—Italian for "little mountain"—was named for the hill it stood on.