

The Adams Chronicles

The Adams Chronicles is a series of thirteen one-hour dramas spanning the 150 years from 1750 to 1900, detailing how four generations of one family helped determine America's shape and direction. Based on the Adams Papers, which contain 300,000 pages of letters, diaries and journals written by various members of the family, the series weaves together events that shaped the history of the emerging nation with the history and legacy of the Adams family.

Episode 1 – John Adams: Lawyer

The pressure of living under British occupation intrudes upon the glowing love story of John Adams and Abigail Smith. After their marriage and during the growth of their family, Adams finds himself increasingly involved in the liberty movement-despite his former strong loyalty to England. After the Boston Massacre, in which British soldiers fire on an angry mob out of self-defense, Adams agrees to defend the troops to insure justice, but his actions lead many in Boston to question his motives and loyalty to the colonies.

Episode 2 – John Adams: Revolutionary

John Adams' national reputation grows during America's struggle for independence. Because of his now firm commitment to liberty, Abigail is left alone with the young children to tend to the family farm in Braintree, Massachusetts, while Adams serves as a delegate to the Philadelphia's Continental congress which leads to the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Episode 3 – John Adams: Diplomat

Persuaded by Congress to represent America abroad, John Adams leaves for France accompanied by his eldest son, John Quincy, age 11. Adams soon grows frustrated with Benjamin Franklin's machinations within the French court. Adams then travels to Holland where, after some difficulty, he secures a large loan and political support from the Dutch. Over a two-year period, 1782-1783, peace treaties which Adams helped negotiate are signed with Great Britain.

Episode 4 – John Adams: Minister to Great Britain

Abigail Adams with young Abigail (Nabby) joins John and John Quincy in Europe. After Adams renews his old friendship with Thomas Jefferson, Nabby marries Colonel William Stephens Smith, secretary to the American legation in London. The satisfaction which is felt at the successful outcome of the Revolution and its aftermath is weakened by news of dissension in the United States and by the European view that the new nation is a pawn to be manipulated.

Episode 5 – John Adams: Vice-President

John Adams becomes the nation's first Vice-President under George Washington, and suffers eight years of frustration in the role. Caught between the ideologies of Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, Adams is frequently at odds with his colleagues about what kind of government the country should have.

Episode 6 – John Adams: President

John Adams comes to disagree with Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson and most of his cabinet about the country's government. England and France are at war, and the young United States is on the brink of war with France. Adams keeps America away from war, suggesting his own epitaph, "He kept the peace with France." He could have added, "at the expense of his Presidency," for he loses his bid for re-election to Jefferson. His son, Charles, dies at the age of 30, leaving Adams to reassess the values and pressures of leadership and public life.

Episode 7 – John Quincy Adams: Diplomat

John Quincy Adams and his wife, Louisa Catherine, live in St. Petersburg where Adams is Minister to Russia and later heads the peace commission in Ghent ending the War of 1812. In addition to suffering the difficulties of maintaining an embassy on a small budget at a wealthy court, a daughter born to them in St. Petersburg dies. John Quincy becomes the second Adams to serve as the Minister to Great Britain.

Episode 8 – John Quincy Adams: Secretary of State

The John Quincy Adams family is recalled from Europe as Adams is appointed President Monroe's Secretary of State. Extra-ordinarily successful in this position, Adams drafts the Transcontinental Treaty with Spain and the Monroe Doctrine. His European experience drives Adams to work for a consolidated nation able to stand against European pressures and intrigues.

Episode 9 – John Quincy Adams: President

John Quincy Adams' single term as President is marked by frustration; his call for national interests frightens states' rightists. His appointment of Henry Clay as Secretary of State provokes further difficulties, causing rumors of political "deal" for the Presidency. His wife, Louisa Catherine, suffering in the Washington political scene, blames Adams' political preoccupations for the death of their eldest son, George. Adams' moves for a powerful central government anticipate the widening dissension between North and South and alienate support for his re-election.

Episode 10 – John Quincy Adams: Congressman

John Quincy Adams runs for and wins a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives despite objections from his wife, Louisa Catherine, and his son, Charles Francis. Another son, John Adams II, dies from overwork trying to pay off an enormous family debt. Freed from what he calls "the worm of ambition" by his defeat for re-election of the Presidency, Adams considers himself free in his position as a U.S. Representative to operate above politics and act as the "conscience of Congress". He begins to win overdue public attention for his introduction of anti-slavery legislation. After 17 years of faithful service, he suffers a heart attack and dies in the House of Representatives in 1848.

Episode 11 – Charles Francis Adams: Minister to Great Britain

As the Civil War rages in America, Charles Francis Adams, son of John Quincy, is appointed Minister to Great Britain. He travels to England with his wife, Abigail Brooks and three children. Two other sons, Charles Francis II and John Quincy II, remain behind in the Union army. Charles Francis, now the third Adams to serve as Minister to Great Britain, insures the achievements of his father and grandfather when he is able to keep the British from recognizing the Confederacy.

Episode 12 – Henry Adams: Historian

The sons of Charles Francis Adams, Henry and Charles Francis II, pursue separate and different careers to fulfill their wartime vision of a reunited and revitalized America. After careers as journalist and professor, Henry turns to the past as a historian in an effort to explain the present. His wife, Marian Hooper, despondent over the death of her father, commits suicide. Charles Francis II turns to railroad reform and management of the Union Pacific Railroad. Henry and Charles Francis begin to examine the difficulties of being sons, grandsons and great-grandsons of national figures and the dilemmas of translating Adams standards into late 19th Century America.

Episode 13 – Charles Francis Adams II: Industrialist

Charles Francis Adams II ultimately loses the battle for control of the Union Pacific Railroad to Jay Gould. Now both Henry and Charles Francis II turn to the past to understand better what the country and the world have become. The Adams consciously withdraw from public life and the political leadership of a nation that has turned to values other than those inherent in the Adams philosophy.

A Study Guide, Discussion Leader's Guide, Home-Viewer Guide and Teacher's Guide are available.

Production Organization: WNET/13

Executive Producer: Jac Venza

Series Producer: Virginia Kassell

Coordinating Producer: Robert Costello

Producers: James Cellan Jones, Fred Coe, Robert Costello, Jac Venza and Paul Bogart

Directors: Paul Bogart, James Cellan Jones, Fred Coe, Barry Davis, Bill Glenn and Anthony Page

Writers: Jerome Coopersmith, Ian Hunter, Tad Mosel, Jacqueline Babbin, Sherman Yellen, Allan Sloane, Anne Howard Bailey, Sam Hall, Roger Hirson, Corinne Jacker, Millard Lampell, and Philip Reisman Jr.

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