

"Remember the ladies, do not put such unlimited power into the hands of husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could..." Abigail to John Adams

In the years following the revolution there was a great deal of rhetoric concerning the education of women. In 1787 the Young Ladies Academy opened in Philadelphia. As the name suggests, "young ladies" were given the opportunity to study grammar, geography, arithmetic and the formerly all male art of oratory. The school was under the leadership of the city's most influential men, who founded it and taught in it. They still believed that a woman's place was in the home and that by educating herself she would be better able to aid her husband in his quest for success. They were to serve as "stewards and guardians of their husband's property." The first student rolls show that the "ladies" were mostly from the wealthiest families in the city. Most families could not afford to even educate a son, let alone waste the money on a daughter. A son could probably earn his tuition back many times over but a daughter who would get married and stay in the home could not. Students like Priscella Mason, however orated upon the opportunities that an education could present for her sex. She called on her sisters to use their new found knowledge to participate more fully to "qualify ourselves for those high departments they (men) will open for us." In her naive way Priscilla Mason expected an eon of suppression to be eliminated because she was educated.

As the wealth of the young nation grew, a generation of women emerged who believed all that was required of them was ornamental duties and they tried as best as possible to emulate the idle life of wealthy European women. The majority of the female populace however was far too poor to attend a ladies academy or any other kind of school. The opportunities for an education were limited to the privileged few and it would be a century before all women would be extended this right.

Abigail Adams is said to have told her son, John Quincy, when he was looking for a bride that "girls were frivolous because men liked them that way." They were like clay in the hands of the artist to be "molded to whatever form (men) please." That Abigail was less than pleased with the status of women after the revolution is evident. She and others like her, famous or anonymous, were unaware that they were laying the foundation for the social movements that would rise up in the next century. Meanwhile, women continued to push westward alongside their husbands, fathers, or masters, carving a country out of the wilderness with the indomitable spirit unique to women.

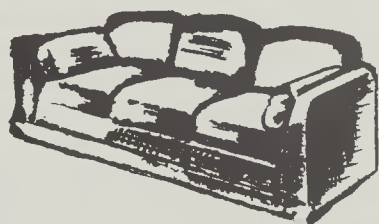


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